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***POLITICS, DIPLOMACY, AND PROPAGANDA.***  
***QUEEN MARIE OF ROMANIA IN THE GREAT WAR***

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**= Thesis Summary =**

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***POLITICS, DIPLOMACY, AND PROPAGANDA.***  
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**Keywords:** Queen Marie of Romania; royalty and diplomacy; royal diplomacy; European monarchies; the Great War; World War One; war politics; war propaganda.

In recent years, in the context of the centennial commemorations of the Great War, historians across Europe have revisited, challenged, and often reassessed the conventional narratives surrounding this pivotal moment in world history. It is in the spirit of this new wave of scholar scrutiny that the present research was conducted, centring on the role played by Queen Marie, consort queen of Romania, in her country's war progress. Due to the exceptional symbolism woven around the 1918 unification of all Romanians within the bounds of one state, in the Romanian national consciousness, the myth of the Great War grew to overshadow the reality of it — and for the better part of the last century, whenever the regime permitted it, Queen Marie was an integral element of this myth.

In spite of the persisting historiographical interest in the life and activity of Romania's second royal consort, the subject of how Queen Marie built her legend during the first world conflagration has not yet been approached from a modern critical perspective devoid of ideological clichés or rose-tainted eulogies. Thus, the novelty of the present thesis is twofold: to begin with, the research is largely based on the in-depth analysis of previously unknown sources, such as foreign accounts, correspondence, and international press, as well as overlooked materials identified in various Romanian archives. Secondly, Queen Marie's wartime involvement was assessed, above all, from the vantage point of her being a high-ranking member of the intricate network of European royalty, whose cardinal source of influence was the "*bluest of blue bloods*"<sup>1</sup> which, in 1892, had recommended her as consort to a future monarch. The overarching purpose of the proposed thesis is to offer a comprehensive and detailed account of Queen Marie's activity during the most crucial stages of Romania's involvement in the Great War, namely: the 1914-1916 neutrality period; the military autumn campaign of 1916; 1917, the year of exile; and the first months of 1918, up until the moment when Romania was coerced to leave the war by signing a

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<sup>1</sup> A.N.R., Bucharest, fonds *Regina Maria*, file III/100-I, p. 191.

separate peace with the Central Powers. The wide range of factors which have contributed to Queen Marie assuming and maintaining a resolute interventionist stance were investigated so as to ascertain how her activity evolved according to each stage of the war. Ultimately, the aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how Queen Marie's legacy — also dubbed as 'Queen Marie's legend' — was established through an astute wartime mentality and an energetic involvement.

The arguments proposed in the present research were developed by following the trail of five main research questions:

- 1) What was Queen Marie's much celebrated wartime activity and how did it evolve between July 1914 and the end of 1917, when Romania's active war participation ended?
- 2) In what ways did royal networking, royal sentiment, and/or royal diplomacy affected Romania's Great War entry and progress?
- 3) To what extent did Queen Marie's character and mentality influence her actions and how does this compare with the examples of other European royal consorts?
- 4) To what extent was Queen Marie limited in her actions by gender-specific roles and/or restrictions and what national/foreign actors helped her circumvent these limitations?
- 5) Is there a national myth and/or legend of Queen Marie and to what extent did the Queen herself cultivate its creation?

The research followed Marie's progress chronologically and identified three main stages of involvement, each corresponding to a specific timeframe in Romania's war. Thus, as emphasised in **Chapter I**, during the period of neutrality Queen Marie acted on the side-lines, collaborating behind the scenes with Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, mimicking his equidistant if not duplicitous stance in what concerned the two political-military blocks. In the meantime, she also strove to protect King Ferdinand's public image, all while carefully preparing him for the moment of Romania's anticipated intervention against the monarch's native Germany. **Chapter II** approaches the second stage of Romania's Great War history, namely the intervention and the autumn campaign of 1916, which saw Queen Marie ascending to a position of progressively heightened influence and power. This position was owed, on one hand, to Marie's prompt and energetic responses to the country's military misfortunes, as well as to the disintegration of societal

norms and gender expectations during the exceptional warfare circumstances. The third stage of Queen Marie's involvement, examined in **Chapter III**, is defined by her assuming a pivotal role at the epicentre of events. 1917 saw Queen Marie at the zenith of her strength, being the year when she concentrated in her hands tangible political and financial power, as well as a substantial media influence. Given her undeniable prestige and determination, once 1918 dawned and Romania was forced by external circumstances into an armistice and, ultimately, separate peace, Queen Marie saw herself suddenly shackled. The Queen described 1918 as having been her year of silence, when she was actively prohibited from reaching out to her people and was pushed into living a life of exile within exile.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that the scope of the present dissertation resolved to focus solely on the three years of Queen Marie's 'active' involvement, leaving the subject matters of her 1918 silent resistance and her 1919 reclaimed glory as foundations for future research.

Following the thorough assessment of the source material, it can be affirmed that the argument proposed and presented in the present thesis is that Queen Marie of Romania, the proactive and politically inclined granddaughter of Queen Victoria and Tsar Alexander II, assumed an active and significant role in her country's participation in the Great War. Perfectly in keeping with her impulsive and dynamic nature, Marie approached the war with little to no strategy, her efforts being in constant, expanding evolution, while the intensity of her involvement and variety of actions grew proportionally with the hardships that befell Romania and its population. Aware that the scarce and problematic education she had received equipped her with no method, Marie embraced her shortcomings, weaponised them to her own advantage, and resolved to face the struggles of life and war guiding herself by instinct and sheer force of will. Ultimately, Queen Marie was Romania's wild card in the Great War — and it proved to be a winning card.

## **CHAPTER I. THE QUEEN IN NEUTRALITY, 1914-1916**

At the time of the Sarajevo assassination, Romania found itself in the process of shifting its direction in international politics. By 1914, the three-decades long alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary was no longer perceived as serving the country's interests and ambitions, reason why the younger generation of Romanian politicians were turning their attention towards the Entente Cordiale. In this political climate, when a Crown Council was called on August 3<sup>rd</sup> to

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<sup>2</sup> A.N.R., Bucharest, fonds *Regina Maria*, file III/6, p. 59.

decide on Romania's position with regards to the recently unfurled European conflagration, the country opted for expectant neutrality.

During the dynastic crisis which defined the last months of King Carol's reign, Crown Princess Marie emerged as a figure apart within the royal family: while King, Queen, and Crown Prince were derided for their German roots, Marie was hailed as the country's hope and her British-Russian ancestry was celebrated. Having spent most of her youth in a state of maddening inertia due to King Carol's strict control over the members of his family, the Crown Princess matured rapidly in the aftermath of the 1907 peasant revolt when, discreetly, she found herself drawn into the political entourage of liberal leader Ion I. C. Brătianu. Under his guidance, Romania's future Queen developed her understanding of and interest in matters of internal and external politics, growing in tune with and passionately invested in the Romanians' dream of national unification.

After two months of heated tension, Romania awoke on the morning of October 10<sup>th</sup> to the news of King Carol's passing and the beginning of a new reign, that of King Ferdinand. In spite of "*loathing neutrality*," for it obliged her to be twofold "*careful of every word one said and every opinion one expressed*,"<sup>3</sup> the new Queen of Romania behaved during the two preparatory years much more prudently than is generally believed. Hindsight offers a distorted view of Marie's neutrality attitude as it invites the assumption that the overt and overly zealous pro-Allied stance that characterised her wartime behaviour invariably applies to the years 1915 and 1916. However, historical sources reveal this was not the case. Far from implying that Queen Marie's sentiments were at any point during the conflagration of a different nature than staunchly pro-English, what needs to be underlined is the fact that, for the better part of the neutrality period, the Queen succeeded in presenting herself as a genuine supporter of Romania's non-interventionist stance.

A crucial matter that had to be settled during the preparatory time before Romania could throw in her lot with the Allies was the political stance of King Ferdinand. Queen Marie was well-aware that it fell in her jurisdiction to ensure that her German-born husband would be ready to accept the inevitable and support the Entente at the right moment. Therefore, with care and dedication, Marie strove to persuade the King that the loyalty of a sovereign was foremost to the country he ruled and not to his caste or the land of his birth. Moreover, fiercely protective, Queen Marie was greatly aggravated by any negative publicity directed against the King. Therefore,

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<sup>3</sup> Marie of Romania, *Ordeal...*, p. 22.

energetically, she did her utmost to try and curb the negative trend and to uphold her husband's good reputation with the Romanian people.

As consort of the monarch, the Queen enjoyed no constitutional prerogatives of her own and could impact the situation only in as much as she was invited to by those in positions of power. During the years of neutrality, Queen Marie's source of political empowerment was, almost exclusively, Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu. At his advice, the Queen designed appropriate interactions with the representatives of the Central Powers and the Entente, as well as the other Romanian political leaders. Queen Marie's most notable intervention between 1914 and 1916 was the initiation of a diplomatic communication with the monarchs of Great Britain and Russia. Thus, in addition to ensuring that King Ferdinand was morally prepared for intervention and that his image within Romania and the Allied states remained without stain, Queen Marie also helped pave the path towards the official alliance negotiations between Brătianu's government and those of the Allied powers. A week apart, on May 22<sup>nd</sup> and May 29<sup>th</sup>, Marie penned down over ten handwritten pages for each of her first cousins, King George V of the United Kingdom and Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. Instructed by Prime Minister Brătianu, Queen Marie employed the most compelling historical, geographical, and demographic arguments to demonstrate Romania's right to the provinces of Transylvania, the Banat and Bukovina. The two letters were not different in substance, yet they were different in tonality — each perfectly suited for the personality, knowledge and involvement of the addressed sovereign. In spite of receiving encouraging replies from the two monarchs, Nevertheless, Romania maintained its neutrality for another year.

It was not until August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1916, that the alliance between Romania and the Entente was sealed through the signing of two conventions, one political and one military. On August 27<sup>th</sup>, King Ferdinand convoked a Crown Council during which he informed the country's leading statesmen that Romania was abandoning its neutrality.

## **CHAPTER II. THE QUEEN IN ASCENSION, 1916**

On August 28<sup>th</sup> 1916, after two years of neutrality, Romania joined the Entente in the European conflagration. The three months that followed, dubbed as the autumn campaign of 1916, was the most dynamic period of Romania's Great War participation. Albeit having started its military feat favourably, Romania registered its first defeat after only ten days of combat. Strategically, the capture of the bridgehead at Turtucaia was of little consequence, however, the swift defeat

psychologically impacted the Romanian leadership to such an extent that the entire course of war was derailed. Ultimately, the fall of Turtucaia on September 6<sup>th</sup> set in motion a disastrous domino effect which led, three months later, to the fall of Bucharest.

In the immediate aftermath of intervention, Queen Marie focused on organising a hospital within the Royal Palace and worked towards the equipping and establishing an ambulance network. Like other royal consorts across Europe, the Romanian Queen donned a white sister of charity uniform and, although she was involved in no medical work, she spent her time in hospitals, offering words of support and encouragement to the wounded soldiers, thus seeking to foster a closer bond between herself and them. Ever vigilant in matters of presentation, the Queen popularised her image as sister of charity both in Romania and abroad. Therefore, a fruitful collaboration ensued between the Queen and the representatives of the press, both national and the foreign journalists who operated in Romania.

As the country's military situation further deteriorated, Queen Marie responded to the fast-paced military developments with an optimism and determined attitude that was lacking in other Romanian leaders. Albeit to little avail, the Queen tried to impart her positive outlook and unwavering belief in the final victory on a depressed Prime Minister and a passive King. Finding ever fewer resources in the man who had previously upheld her efforts, Marie sought to develop other avenues of influence, thus insisting upon constant interactions with military, diplomatic and press representatives.

According to Romania's needs, Queen Marie's activity expanded. She corresponded frequently with her relatives in Russia, taking note of their two years' worth of war experience so as to organise her work most efficiently in a short period of time. Moreover, she made repeated appeals to Tsar Nicholas II to help facilitate a better communication and cooperation between the Russian troops sent in the region and their Romanian counterparts. As the war worsened for Romania, the Queen appealed to her Russian autocratic cousin for ever more Russian reinforcements. Unfortunately, in spite of the royal cousins' best efforts, the Romanian and Russian soldiers remained reluctant, if not bitter allies.

Towards the end of October, the Queen was forced to turn her focus towards personal issues, as her youngest son fell ill with typhoid fever. Amidst a constant influx of terrible military news, Queen Marie was also faced with the sudden illness and death of her three years old child. Prince Mircea's passing on November 2<sup>nd</sup> impacted Queen Marie's wartime psychology and,

implicitly, activity like nothing else: her son's death was the moment when, as a trauma response, Queen Marie began constructing her image as the mother of the people — Mama Regina, the legend that would outlive the war. Time and again, through different letters, diary entries, and even press articles, Marie tried to cope with her loss and to make sense of it by creating a narrative of divine intervention, of predestination and other such symbols of faith in the power of destiny which ultimately helped her maintain a positive attitude and a forceful response to the development of events. The occupation of Bucharest, the abandoning of the freshly dug grave into enemy hands and subsequent exile in Iasi did nothing but cement and exacerbate this narrative, heightening Queen Marie's fighting spirit.

### **CHAPTER III. THE QUEEN IN POWER, 1917**

Romania experienced the Great War significantly differently in 1917 than it had in 1916. Entrenched along the Siret River, the Russian-Romanian forces saw little combat. The struggles of 1917 were of an internal nature: overcoming the tragedy and terror of having half the country under foreign occupation, managing the devastating effects of the black typhus epidemic, all while navigating the alliance with Russia during the precarious and dangerous period spanning between the March and October Revolutions. Throughout 1917, Queen Marie worked tirelessly, her wartime activity reaching its pinnacle by the beginning of summer. Thus, in spite of all challenges, 1917 was Queen Marie's year in power, the year when her influence became primordial.

During the winter and spring of 1917, Queen Marie became deeply involved in political and military matters. As she began her exile after the occupation of Bucharest, the Queen strove to tackle the issues of corruption and nepotism, which she perceived as responsible in the greatest degree for Romania's misfortunes. Having unsuccessfully pleaded with her political collaborator, Prime Minister Brătianu, in regards to forming of a government of national unity, Marie influenced the change by pressuring the King to take things into his own hand. Thus, the governmental reshuffling came about in the last days of December. Moreover, the Queen made pressures towards the appointment of General Prezan as Chief of Staff, being thus responsible for the dismissal of General Iliescu, Brătianu's right hand man at the top of the military. Queen Marie's reasoning for the change was that a lesser interference of the political in military matters would greatly benefit the Army. Nevertheless, the Queen's interventions in the political and military fields led to a significant rift between her and the liberal leader. Thus, the relationship and communication

between Queen Marie and an irate Prime Minister Brătianu were strained for the better part of the following three months. The two forces resolved their differences solely due to the dangers that the fall of the Tsarist Empire posed to Romania's survival.

In the meantime, due to the overpopulation of Moldova, the scarcity of resources and a difficult winter, a violent black typhus epidemic spread like wildfire across the province. In response to this new hardship and the steady demoralisation of the population, Queen Marie expanded her area of activity by embarking on a journalistic venture, publishing inspirational, nostalgic, and highly heart-warming articles in the country's two leading newspapers. Above all, the Queen wished to show the Romanian people that she was not indifferent to their struggles, but on the contrary, she lived through the same days of uncertainty with them. By publishing articles with great frequency, Queen Marie succeeded in binding herself to the heart of the Romanian people.

At the same time, tirelessly, the Queen travelled from hospital to hospital, visiting the sick and the wounded soldiers in order to offer them words of comfort, encouragement and gratitude. By June, Queen Marie had three hospitals in her jurisdiction, all managed by Jean Chrissoveloni, the wealthy banker who was one of her strongest advocates and a steady source of financial aid. Numerous other medical establishments worked under the Queen's patronage or bore her name, while the ambulances that carried the wounded from the battlefield to safety of medical wards were those of her organisation. Thus, Queen Marie's name appeared wherever the population looked and the Queen herself acquired the reputation of an omnipresent being among the soldiers in particular and the Romanian people in general. By the coming of summer, when the activity on the battlefield was resumed, Queen Marie was universally beloved in Moldova.

Undoubtedly, in 1917, Queen Marie was no longer dependent on Prime Minister Brătianu alone as a source of empowerment. Having carefully consolidated her relationship with military leaders, foreign diplomats, and journalists, Queen Marie's efforts were henceforth upheld by a plethora of supporters, which helped her act with a substantial degree of independence.

In the context of Russia's turmoil, Queen Marie used the immense popularity she had acquired so as to counter the threats of revolution in Moldova. Unfortunately, although the Romanian people remained loyal to their King and Queen and the Romanian army was victorious in battle, the spread of bolshevism in Petrograd led to the country being forced to withdraw from the war in December 1917. Perceived as a chief enemy by the Central Powers, Queen Marie was

restricted from playing a public role for the better part of 1918 — nevertheless, 1917 had consolidated her legend.

The fall of the Russian Empire affected Romania's war progress more than anything else in 1917, eventually rendering the military victories of Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz utterly inconsequential. Romania was forced to leave the Great War due to its Ally's deflection. Queen Marie was at the height of her power and popularity when the armistice and subsequent separate peace imposed upon the country brought an abrupt end to her activity. Within a few short weeks, the omnipresent Queen was reduced to silence. However, Marie had been so thoroughly successful in creating a heroic narrative around her image and wartime efforts, that her 1918 silent resistance did nothing but further increase her prestige and her stand with the people.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Marie, the captivating granddaughter of Queen Victoria and Tsar Alexander II, became Queen of Romania upon her husband's accession to the throne in October 1914. In spite of being strong-willed and determined to play a part in her country's destiny, Queen Marie had to take into account the disadvantages of her gender. As consort of the sovereign, Marie enjoyed no constitutional prerogatives. However, the extraordinary conditions of war allowed the Queen to significantly expand her area of activity in what was traditionally perceived as the male sphere. Nonetheless, the influence of Queen Marie on political and military matters remained dependent on the men who supported her views. Ultimately, it was the sovereign, the politicians and military men in Romania, as well as the foreign representatives and journalists who magnified Queen Marie's abilities by lending her their own levers of power — and, when these levers were withdrawn, the Queen's loss of authority was immediate.

Having failed to prevent Romania's withdrawal from the war, Queen Marie retired to the countryside. For the better part of 1918 she led a life of exile within exile, focusing on helping the local population with rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of war. When the tide of battle turned in the favour of the Entente and Romania re-declared war on Germany in November 1918, the Queen returned to Iasi and resumed her role at the heart of events. Marie received a grandiose welcome back to her exile capital, a long due acknowledgment of her formidable struggles to hold the resistance.

Queen Marie did not win the Great War when at the height of her power; on the contrary, she won the war when she was at her weakest, at a time when her collaborators had abandoned her, deeming her stubborn stance of resistance a danger to Romania and akin to a suicidal mission. When Germany eventually succumbed to the wounds of her war of attrition, Marie was hailed as a heroine, both in Romania and the Allied states. Ultimately, Queen Marie's long and consistent fight throughout the Great War had gained her enough notoriety to enable the continuation of her activity on Parisian stages. In the spring of 1919, Queen Marie descended at the Peace Conference wishing to give Romania a face — her face — and thus help her country achieve its wartime goal: the unification of all Romanians under one crown.

The present dissertation strove to create a detailed account of Queen Marie's evolving actions and mentality during the years of the first world conflagration. It has been observed that Marie had a very dynamic approach to war, being always quick to adapt her responses in perfect accordance with the necessities of evolving events. During the years of neutrality, the Queen cultivated the diplomatic side of her character, in more ways than one. Albeit an avid supporter of Romania's intervention on the side of the Entente, the Queen maintained a convincing neutral stance, effortlessly misleading the representatives of Germany and Austrian-Hungary in regards to her and the government's political-military leanings. Behind the scenes, however, Marie was employed by Prime Minister Brătianu as an impromptu diplomat who aptly capitalised on her familial relations in the benefit of the country. Once Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary, the Queen switched gears, shed the diplomat and embraced the fighting essence of her nature. For a short while, she attempted to remain within the bounds of the traditional role of a royal consort at war: she donned a white nurse uniform, organised a hospital and established an auxiliary medical unit. The country's disastrous war progress, incited the Queen to push and break those traditional bounds and expand her area of activity and influence. Having tried and failed to impress upon her husband and eldest son her philosophy of royal duty in times of war, Queen Marie resolved to assuming the central royal role for herself: "*Let them have the feeling that you are everywhere,*"<sup>4</sup> Marie had advised Crown Prince Carol; "*be a reality, not a name*"<sup>5</sup> amongst the soldiers, she had urged King Ferdinand. When the response from both men was unsatisfactory, the Queen brazenly

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<sup>4</sup> A.N.R., Bucharest, fonds *Regina Maria*, file III/104, pp. 111-113.

<sup>5</sup> A.N.R., Bucharest, fonds *Regina Maria*, file III/103, pp. 69-70

embraced her own preaches, indifferent to gender norms and even constitutional boundaries. In doing so, Marie also identified the opportunity to seal herself to the soul of her people.

A Spanish Princess who published in 1925 a personal account about the various courts of Europe in the aftermath of the Great War, wrote the following about her Aunt Missy:

*“Queen Marie is the most striking figure in the Romania of today — and I had almost written ‘the most important’, but only those cognisant of the inner workings of Romanian history can rightly estimate her influence.”*<sup>6</sup>

The present dissertation aimed to do just that: to assess Queen Marie’s influence in Romania’s Great War participation. While no one is ‘the most important’ person in a country all throughout their lives, there are specific moments in time when certain people do play that role. Due to her involvement in guiding Romania’s path during the two years of neutrality and her assiduous efforts in the aftermath of intervention, Queen Marie was the most important person in Romania in 1917. Likewise, Queen Marie was the most important person in Romania while dazzling Paris during the Peace Conference of 1919. And most definitely, Queen Marie was the most important person in Romania on October 15<sup>th</sup> 1922, when she was crowned “Empress” of all Romanians. Thus, the summarised conclusion of this research is that Romania’s Great War history cannot be divorced from Queen Marie, nor can Queen Marie’s story be told without the Great War.

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<sup>6</sup> Eulalia of Spain, *Courts and Countries after the War*, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925, p. 229.

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