DORU LIXANDRU
Carol al II-lea, carlismul și carliștii în România anilor 1930
(Bucharest: Corint, 2023), 640 pp.

Among the various national projects that emerged in Romania throughout the twentieth century, invariably sharing a politically charged posthumous reception, the case of Carol II's regime appears particularly contentious regarding both historiography and memory. Following decades of idiosyncratic representations, it is only fitting that a period of such consequence is revisited from a proper critical angle, precisely the undertaking of Doru Lixandru in the reviewed book. As a historian of Romania's political modernity, the author has a solid background in intellectual history, including a PhD in social sciences obtained at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris) and the University of Bucharest.

His latest work, *Carol al II-lea, carlismul și carliștii în România anilor 1930* [Carol II, Carlism, and the Carlists in 1930's Romania], sheds light on a political, ideological, and social phenomenon so far lacking comprehensive scrutiny and addresses the historiographical blind spot concerning the Carlist regime of the 1930s, doing away with the numerous cliches which have surrounded it for almost a century. By dismissing the deterministic constructions anchoring monarchic authoritarianism on the singular will of its protagonist, Lixandru's examination descends, without prior constraints, into the nexus of modernity and nationalism that was the essence of Carlism. His analysis is endowed with further conceptual and methodological legitimacy by appropriating valuable notions from the field of fascist studies. It is a natural research course when one considers the reciprocal right-wing contaminations explored over the past several years by scholars of fascism – from Stanley G. Payne's canonical typology distinguishing between fascism, the radical right, and the conservative right to Constantin Iordachi's hybridization theory employing a model of

dictatorship continuity, which traces the succession of several antagonistic but interwoven national projects.[1]

On this background of intricate socio-political configurations, Lixandru diligently traces how the "Carlism model of modernity" ensued (7). His nuanced approach is reflected in the thorough definition of Carlism, encompassing its modern political aspirations, nationalism, monarchism, anti-parliamentarism, and anti-liberalism as foundational pillars, an authoritarian understanding of the body politic, a palingenetic ideological essence, and an emulative stance towards Italian and German fascism (11). It is undoubtedly the most rigorous conceptual definition of the phenomenon to date, followed by a painstakingly documented history of the notion as it earned its place into the broad category of twentieth century -isms.

The constitutive elements of the "ideological matrix of Carlism" (23) are detected in the 1920s metamorphoses by mapping out the early political and ideological landscape of Greater Romania while also registering continental synchronicities. Considering the author's francophone background, the parallel between Carlism's pioneers and the impact of the *Action Française* is illuminating. Set on explaining the endemic origins of an emerging ideological corpus in an age of profound discontent, the historical narrative revisits the tumultuous post-war years, marked by a national(ist) cultural offensive advocating for an ethnic authoritarian state. The pervasive cultural influence of the *Action Française*, with its monarchic, anti-parliamentarian, and anti-republican core, exhibiting massive social influence in 1920s France, is shown to have inspired a particular strand of Romanian nationalism. This was modelled on the ideological oeuvre of Charles Maurras, seeking national consensus through the imposition of order, stability, and continuity, and requiring the dissolution of the parliamentary republic. The Maurrassian link thus provides a perceptive genealogical take on Carlism.

The amplification of Carol's image is shown to have gained broad appeal during his years of exile, with several authoritative political thinkers backed by major press platforms (Mihail Manoilescu, Nichifor

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[1]   Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); Constantin Iordachi, *A Continuum of Dictatorships: Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937-1944*, in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Crainic, Nae Ionescu, Pamfil Şeicaru) constructing the salvific persona of the future king and articulating an anticipatory "Restoration ideology" (60). When the Restoration occurred, it brought a dialectic of constructed ideology and political praxis, subsequently analyzed at length. The newly instated political order could never ease the tense relations between the returning king and the entrenched political forces, ominously shaping the national scene for the coming decade. Historically, the Restoration was framed as a momentous temporal break, a virtual palingenesis, with Carol instated as the providential savior who dispelled the anarchic remnants of political anomie (79-80). The genuine enthusiasm of the masses notwithstanding, Carol was confronted from the onset of his rule with significant challenges, labelled by Lixandru as "centrifugal forces," a recurring notion referring to vectors ranging from the far-right and far-left political radicalism to the regionalist tendencies of the newly integrated provinces. Another perturbing force embedded in the Carlist national project was the camarilla, a fountainhead of prerogative power and an alternative decision mechanism counterposed to the established political forces, permanently fueling their hostility and inspiring a nefarious "political mythology surrounding the monarch's entourage" (94).

In the long term, the new order would be tremendously influenced by the chimera of the cultural state, involving the ideological and political nationalization of the masses, reshaped into a holistic edifice (102). In no small part due to the theoretical input of various "actors of Carlism," a visceral antidemocratic sentiment unveiled a gradual shift towards authoritarianism perceptible throughout the 1930s. Moreover, the personalization of power gained ground against a political climate of radical polarization, where unstable political forces sought frail alliances against the king or the camarilla, *ipso facto* sharpening the coercive instruments of authoritarianism (censorship, propaganda, repression). In this context, the social engineering paradigm is viewed as a proper theoretical prism for the interpretation of monarchical action, given the nature of Carlist state planning and intervention into the collective and individual spheres, the regime's permeation into the social fiber of the countryside, its integration of youth segments and its prodigious intellectual network. The narrative thus provides a compelling examination of the monarchical institutional edifice, alluding to a dynamic nationalist

competition against native fascism (the Legion of the Archangel Michael) thoroughly explored by other authors in recent years (particularly Dragoș Sdrobiș), which reinforced a social engineering model resting on three pillars: nationalism, monarchism and anti-legionarism (161).[2]

These intertwined factors anticipated the "Carlist Greater Romania" of 1938-1940, which replaced the democratic establishment with authoritarian rule, taking advantage of the antidemocratic sentiment flourishing within the body politic. The author rejects the contingent nature of the February 10, 1938 act, his documentation of the authoritarian regime navigating coherently through its various facets and providing a well-balanced perspective of this final phase of Carlist political construction. The culmination of the anti-parliamentarian ethos found its most striking expression in the creation of the single party, coupled with the ideological ascent of centralized corporatism, viewed in the broader synchronic context of continental shifts, but also observed diachronically in its far-reaching "totalitarian transformation." However, as it is pertinently noticed, Carlism always "lacked the instruments, political culture and human resources required to practice the totalitarianism it proclaimed" (195). Nevertheless, the authoritarian regime's coercive arsenal relentlessly confronted presumed inner and outer threats (legionnaires, communists, ethnic minorities, and particular religious denominations) in waves of political repression.

From an imagological standpoint, the analysis distinguishes between three dominant projections of the authoritarian monarch: firstly, the "watchman king," the shield against external revisionism and internal radicalism, coordinating the militarization of society and the persecution of alterity, stimulating a historically charged "Latinity cult" (216-217); secondly, the "peasant king," catering to the "premodern demographic and social specificity of Greater Romania" (220), a paternalistic representation of the authentic ruler commanding a nation of peasants; thirdly, the "voivode," the purported successor of medieval rule, connected by his modern-day chroniclers to the feudal order, with his military vocation

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[2] Dragoș Sdrobiș, *Limitele meritocrației într-o societate agrară. Șomaj intelectual și radicalizare politică a tineretului în România interbelică* [The Limits of Meritocracy in an Agrarian Society. The Intellectual Unemployment and Political Radicalization of the Youth in Inter-war Romania] (2015: Iași, Editura Polirom).

akin to medieval monarchs, his embodiment of the Romanian spirit reminiscent of the Wallachian prince or the Byzantine basileus (226), and his status as head of the Church, proximal to the power structures of the Patriarchy. As the author aptly describes, these are all ideological representations of a presumed "national thaumaturge" (228).

Significant space is granted to the integration of the youth into the structures of the regime, an indispensable component as far as its anti-fascist offensive was concerned. *Straja Țării* [The Country's Watchers] is depicted as espousing a militaristic ethos, formally opposed to anarchic violence, animated by a conservative axiology employed in the forging anew of the national community. Particular attention is also devoted to authoritarianism's orthodox(ist) component, illustrating the relation of the regime with the Romanian Orthodox Church. Wisely cautious, the analysis avoids outright embracing the political religion paradigm developed by Emilio Gentile and other scholars of fascism, instead evoking a more grounded "fusion between the sphere of politics and a particular type of ecclesiastic sacralization" (248). This strenuous alliance of church and state is further corelated to the collision of "national centripetal forces" with centrifugal entities often alluded to throughout the narrative (251), the harmonious synchronization of temporal and ecclesiastical structures remaining more of an aspiration than a functional reality.

A distinct portion of the book is allocated to the history of the *Romanianization* concept, revealing yet another red thread of Carlism, a doctrinal ethnicism fueling discriminatory policies. The escalation of the latter would take its most horrendous turn with the legal persecution of the native Jewish community, building upon an antisemitic modern culture as well as on the synchronization with foreign "racial legislation" initiatives. The malignant logic of the "inner enemy," the prevalence of the stereotypical Jewish-Bolshevik construct, the vicious public rhetoric, and dehumanizing judicial measures provide a vivid depiction of Carlism's downward spiral. Heuristically useful for the narrative's overarching goals remains the center-hinterland dichotomy, a processual dynamic informing the fluid, protean understanding of Carlism in the long run. Here, Lixandru appeals to an extensive historiographical field (Irina Livezeanu, Maria Bucur, and others) that has examined the

convoluted tensions between the Old Kingdom and the incorporated provinces, nurturing the mutual hostility between centralism and regionalism.[3]

Regarding the collapse of the regime, its tragic denouement is not perceived teleologically as a historical inevitability despite all structural vulnerabilities. Territorial losses are acknowledged as insurmountable blows, accelerating the fall of a monarch widely regarded as incapable of holding the country together, a perspective that subsided through posterity. However, the author observes the shared responsibility of other institutional ensembles, such as the Royal Council, involved in the same fateful decisions. Moreover, the tumultuous unravelling of the 1940 national catastrophe reveals the regime's blatant incapacity to instill the orderly bureaucracy it had always claimed or the functional legal framework it had merely created the veneer of, with the administration's exploitative nature displaying Carlism's ineluctable limits.

The book's final three chapters are arguably the richest and the most concerned with substantial ideological issues. Among others, they dissect the external influences of Germany and Italy, which were increasingly present through the 1930s and discernible in the functionality of the authoritarian state. To that extent, Lixandru acknowledges the existence of a "fascization process of the regime" (327), a brand of Carlist mimetism linked to the "Italophilia" (328) manifest in the regime's fervent ideological production in the anti-Bolshevism it adjudicated as an existential stance, in the emulative cult of the charismatic leader, in similitudes with *romanità* as the pervasive myth of the ancient nation born anew.

In addition, several structural components of the authoritarian order are associated with this overshadowing externality, from the single party to corporatist economics, from the leadership principle to the proclamation of the "totalitarian state," from the "aestheticization of politics to the hygienist discourse or societal militarization" (332), from regime organizations collaborating with their Italian or German counterparts to the instrumentality of filo fascism in the violent suppression of

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[3]   Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2002).

genuine native fascism. Germanophilia also played a part in Carlism's fascist inclinations, as illustrated by relevant episodes such as Leni Riefenstahl's visit to Romania or the pervasive influence of National-Socialist racial legislation on the authoritarian regime's policies. The author demonstrates a solid command of fascist historiography when discussing Carlism in the continental far-right landscape, for instance, referring to Roger Griffin's para-fascism model or Aristotle Kallis and António Costa Pinto's hybridization explanation.[4] The latter's aestheticization mechanisms are further correlated to the Mossean thesis of the nationalization of the masses, with the ritualistic surrounding the monarch and the sacralization endeavors interwoven with it in the administration of symbolic resources, as well as with the poignant "visual culture" borrowed in fascist manner by the Carlist regime (following Payne): uniforms, Roman salutes, public oaths of fealty, public expositions, sporting events and a sui-generis choreography.[5]

Finally, the account delves deeper into the issue of national palingenesis by isolating a distinctive strand of "modernist nationalism of monarchic variety" (375), which is very much akin to fascism in its outer manifestations. Griffin's interpretation of fascism yet again inspires the framework, although his model had only allocated Carlism to a marginal "conservative formula of social-political modernism" (376). For his part, Lixandru avoids labelling Carlism as proper modernism, instead insisting on its self-projection in those terms (376), as illustrated by various tropes: the myth of the new state, vehiculated ideologically throughout the 1930s, then purportedly materialized after 1938; the anthropological revolution aspiring to craft a new man; biopolitical concerns for national health and communitarian degeneration, on a background of proliferating eugenics and racial currents etc.

Overall, Lixandru's remarkable book breaks with the stereotypical interpretations of Carol II and his age that historiography had perpetuated

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[4] Roger Griffin, „Foreword. Il ventennio parafascista? The Past and Future of a Neologism in Comparative Fascist Studies", in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[5] George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2023).

for decades. First and foremost, it has the noteworthy merit of acknowledging the authentic ideological substance of Carlism as a nationalist, monarchist, authoritarian worldview. Subsequently, it allows a fresh examination of the king's personality as the central figure of the Carlist phenomenon. Additionally, it provides a successful diachronic exploration of Carlism coupled with valuable synchronic, corelative insights. Last but not least, perhaps the most outstanding heuristic merit of the research resides in the appropriation of indispensable concepts, methods, and paradigmatic components critically adapted from fascist studies, thus advancing the understanding of the subject matter and turning Lixandru's work into an authoritative take on the subject of Carlism.

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