

“Resurrection through Death”

Francis Ferdinand’s Assassination and the Memory of Joseph II among the Romanians in Transylvania

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Utranian Goga

IN AN empire with a multinational character, the monarch had, to some extent, the role of moderator, being the connection between the sacred and the profane, the heavenly and the earthly sublime, even though he represented divinity in the minds of his subjects. Throughout history there were a multitude of opinions regarding the purpose and the role of emperors or kings, and these opinions shaped the characteristics and conceptions lying at the foundation of great state entities. Considered to be one of the powerful empires of Europe, the Austrian Empire had been the main actor on the continent for several centuries, but it was consigned to oblivion with the fall of the curtain in 1918, after a long and traumatic war.

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Echoing the words of Romanian poet Alexandru Macedonski, “Only through death can you become the master of the world,” the Sarajevo event projected inside the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as the lost savior of monarchy, not one person, as it would have been normal, but two: the heir to the throne, Francis Ferdinand, and the “father of the country,” the immortal Joseph II. The news that the last hope Romanians had for a ruler had died came as a shock, therefore the collective mentality sorrowfully projected the image of the possible reformer in comparison to the first highly noticeable reformer, Joseph II. The hyperbolization of the enlightened emperor by the Romanian nation during the 19th century will bring him in the limelight of the events of the beginning of the 20th century, when he was granted the same attention he had received throughout his life. Nobody believed in the war, as Sextil Pușcariu recounts in his memoirs: “People stopped believing in the war. I did not believe at all. Austria had missed so many moments, so many unanswered challenges, that it was certain that the agenda will pass over Princip’s bullets.”¹ But the 28 June 1914 assassination was not overlooked by Austria, who declared war on Serbia, closely followed by all the other states which, one by one, entered the conflict.

By the time of his death, Francis Ferdinand had already become an idol for the Romanians, adopted as a foster parent, because their confidence in Francis Joseph, the actual father of the country, was almost inexistent. Belief in the old monarch had begun to fade with the signing of the dualist pact (1867) and, after the arrival of the archduke, Francis Joseph had been almost erased from the conscience of the people and especially the of elites, who carried out a strong campaign to promote the heir to the throne. However, the loyalty of the Romanians towards Francis Joseph can be discussed but not denied. This is also confirmed by the unveiling of the monarch’s bust, in the garden of the cadets school of Sibiu, on a Sunday in 1914, with great pomp and in the presence of Bishop Ioan Mețianu.²

German sympathies were manifest with the group associated to the archduke’s Chancellery at Belvedere, which had Alexandru Vaida-Voevod at its center and relied on the ideas of A. C. Popovici, the author of the book *The United States of Greater Austria* (1906), known for his pro-German views.³ Pro-German attitudes had their foundation in Joseph’s reforms, which had raised the Romanian elite of the 18th century from the peasant and petty noble state⁴ and which altered both ecclesiastic life and the development of the following events.⁵ What followed was the birth of the principle of nationalities, due to Joseph II’s tendencies of Germanization, which gave a strong impetus in this regard.⁶ Nicolae Iorga himself mentions, in his obituary of Aurel C. Popovici, that “the monstrous thesis of Huston Stewart Chamberlain: that whatever is good in mankind must be German, that Raphael, Michelangelo, the whole world of Italian creative geniuses are of German race, as proven by a lock of blond hair, a glimpse of azure in

the eye, or a Teutonic mother or grandmother's poetical name, found in Aurel C. Popovici not a supporter, but a fanatic."⁷ An ardent supporter of the monarchy, he ceased to share Francis Joseph's outdated principles, which caused him to turn to the archduke, who shared the same ideas on the new organization of the empire. Francis Ferdinand presented his federalist conception to General Margutti in 1895: "If we want the central government to comprise the parts and include them in the desired mass, it is compulsory for them to be small, minuscule. To this end, I will divide Hungary in four parts, Bohemia in two; and other countries in as many as necessary."⁸ The archduke envisioned a federation of Austrian countries similar the United States of America, the difference being that the Austrian federation would have been more homogeneous than the American one.⁹ This idea was shared by the Transylvanian youth, which explains the love and trust that all Romanians felt towards Archduke Francis Ferdinand up to the moment of his assassination, which left a huge void in the "honest but gullible and dreamy souls of the Romanians living beyond the Carpathians."¹⁰

Given the statements made by the heir with respect to the Hungarians, from whom he expected resistance—"One day Hungary will be conquered by sword" and "I'll find that eraser to wipe the Hungarians off the map of the monarchy"¹¹—Romanians shifted their loyalty towards the archduke to the detriment of his uncle who had committed, in their eyes, the ultimate sin of dualism which could not be overlooked. Looking backward in history, many remembered Joseph II as the emperor who had refused the Hungarian Crown and tried as best as he could to keep the balance of nations in the monarchy, which made Alexandru Vaida-Voevod state, after the first audience with the archduke, "during the entire audience I had this clear sensation: this is what Joseph II must have been like."¹² Francis Ferdinand's dedication can be inferred from his desire to keep his nations together, just like Joseph, who travelled through the whole monarchy, conscious of the importance of nations in a multinational empire. Similarly to the great love he nurtured for a single woman, for whom he was even willing to risk the throne, there was a possibility for the most beloved of nations to be for him the Romanian one.¹³ Analyzing the succession to the throne of both Joseph II and Francis Ferdinand, there is at least one similarity. After the long reigns of Maria Theresa and of Francis Joseph, the archduke designated as heir was forced to live in the shadow of the old monarch of Europe, just as Joseph had lived in the shadow of his mother. The trial period before the actual accession to the throne shaped dynastic loyalty, as the faults and failures of the "anointed" monarch were to be compensated for by the heir, making him the savior. Both Joseph and Ferdinand follow the same pattern of pre-monarchic preparation. During the arrangements for the heir's accession to the throne took place an episode similar to the one of the enlightened emperor's reign, namely, the "cold

war” with the papacy. The pope’s visit to Vienna in the summer of 1782 in order to persuade Joseph to renounce his plans to subordinate the church to the state is a well-known fact. Francis Ferdinand reacted in a similar way on the issue of establishing the Hungarian Greek-Catholic diocese of Hajdúdorogh (1912), a decision which was considered antinational by Vaida-Voevod and the Transylvanian elites. The archduke declared: “I am a devout son of the Roman Church, but when the problem concerns the most elementary rights of peoples whose destinies one day, with God’s help, I will lead, I will not refrain from cutting the ties with my Holy Father, if he should exercise his powers in a direction contrary to my intentions towards my future subjects.”¹⁴

Seen by many, regardless of nationality, as the monarch possessing the features most close to perfection, Joseph II was remembered and recalled during most of the turning points that the empire experienced throughout history. The Romanians in Transylvania repeatedly mentioned him in the pledges addressed to Vienna, they recalled him in 1848 during the revolution, as did the Viennese. The Czechs depicted him in engravings holding the horns of a plough, in the majority of territories he visited the locals erected statues of him, and with the assassination of the heir to the throne of Austria, the Romanians at least brought him to life and demonstrated that the symbol of Joseph II in Transylvania had not fallen into oblivion, although more than half a century had passed. During the Revolution of 1848–1849, Simion Bărnuțiu commemorated Joseph in his speech at Blaj Cathedral and the Viennese used the birthday of the enlightened emperor, March 13, to take to the streets and protest against Metternich’s regime.¹⁵ The residents of Vienna gathered in front of the equestrian statue of Joseph, decorated it and placed the revolutionary flag in the monarch’s hand, and the pedestal was strewn with flowers to show their appreciation of the emperor who loved and esteemed his people, as the lyrics of a poem created in the early days of the revolution reported.¹⁶

By 1914 and the moment of the assassination, a perfect picture of Francis Ferdinand had emerged, assimilated into the personality of Joseph II, and therefore the shock of the archduke’s death was even greater. One of the greatest admirers and supporters of the heir to the throne, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, described the moment when he learned about his passing away: “I stopped breathing, felt a sensation of dizziness taking hold of me and the world spinning around me. I spent that night and the following days in an indescribable state of mind.”¹⁷ From that moment on the loyalty crisis visibly deepened, as nearly a decade of Romanian planning and all their hard work meant to gain the sympathy of the heir to the detriment of the Hungarians, who had enjoyed the emperor’s attention for 40 years, were shattered in a matter of minutes. Attending the funeral of the archduke, Vaida-Voevod and Teodor Mihali were indeed depressed, given

the situation, but A. C. Popovici, the author of the project regarding the federalization of Austria, stated that “the nature of things is greater than the will of a man. The monarchy will be organized on a new basis, offering rights to all the peoples. A man is a man. He dies, he withers away. The peoples live on.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, the contrary happened, and a year into the conflict Vaida-Voevod and Popovici were confronted with the obtuse clique of the new heir, Charles, declaring that “we have lost all hope; the conspirators surrounding the kings cannot be defeated,”¹⁹ a sign that the policy of the Romanians in Transylvania had to change direction and that the prediction made years before by Ioan Slavici had been fulfilled: the new hope was coming from Bucharest and not from Vienna.

If until the moment of the assassination this similarity between the archduke and Joseph II had been transparent at the level of the pro-Francis Ferdinand elites, the moment the former died Joseph was revived for the entire Romanian society, as so often in the course of the 19th century. This revival of the enlightened emperor, also made possible by the promotion in the Transylvanian press of the correlation between the two, marked the culmination of the last attempt at dynastic loyalty, undermined by the attitude of the new heir, Charles, and after 1916 by Romania entry in the war alongside the Entente. For the Romanians, loyalty to the Court in Vienna increased during the time of Joseph and ceased with the death of Francis Ferdinand, which was “another Joseph II.” Therefore, it might be stated that dynastic loyalties began with the advent of the enlightened monarch and ended with him, turning loyalty into a transcendent reality.

THE FIRST thing that came to the Romanians’ minds after learning the news from Sarajevo was that “all the beautiful hopes we were nurturing in relation to the accession to the throne of the successor in the prime of his manhood—these hopes are shattered now like a morning dream, like a cloud that is falling apart...”²⁰ The message “May our crown prince, with whom our hopes are buried, rest in peace” was a reminder of the moment when, on 28 January 1790, Joseph had written and signed the resolution that shattered the hopes of Romanians, in which he stated that “in a terrible state of affairs, half measures do no good. So it is my decision, in order to satisfy every conceivable and remotely plausible complaint from Hungary and Transylvania, that all orders and laws issued at the beginning of my reign are to be repealed, and everything shall be the same as during Her Majesty the Empress’s reign, with three exceptions: the Edict of toleration, the measures regarding the establishment of parishes, and the patent relating to serfdom. I wish with all my heart that through this decree Hungary will enjoy as much happiness and well-being as I have always wanted to offer through my legislation.”²¹ The last moments in the life of this philosopher monarch are similar to those of a saint, a martyr

who sacrificed his life for the state and his people: “The object of his last concerns were the most urgent state affairs. Then he prayed: God, Thou are the only one who knows my heart, I call Thee as witness that all I have undertaken I have not done without a purpose, but only for the well-being of my subjects. Thy will be done! Finally Joseph said: I feel close to death. Lord, I put my soul into Thy hands!”²² The correlation between the emperor’s and Jesus’s last words on the cross sets Joseph in the category of sole saviors, a messiah of the nations within the empire who sacrificed his life for the good of his subjects. In the same vein, Francis Ferdinand’s death triggered the expectations of the Romanians who saw him “as a true Messiah.” The blow was so hard that “for a moment it seemed like we lost all judgment.”²³

This image that Romanians came to have of the “reformer of Austria” was widespread in the Transylvania of 1914: “We Romanians grieve for the sudden death of our Crown Prince, who showed great sympathy for the Romanian people and without doubt all Romanians will pray to the Almighty to give peace to the soul of the one who was meant to rule with rare wisdom the destinies of the peoples of this monarchy.”²⁴ The period during which a part of the political class promoted the figure of the archduke among the Romanians amplified the Serbian tragedy in the dynastic conscience of the former. “We notice more clearly his rare and beautiful attributes, which destined him to become, at the moment of his accession to the throne, an exemplary ruler, worthy of standing beside Matthias the Righteous, king of Hungary, and Joseph II, the emperor of the poor and the oppressed. His opinions and views resemble particularly those of the latter, his conviction being that it is the duty of the governing power and of the rulers to care, despite everything else, about the fate of the poor people.”²⁵ The first part of Joseph’s renowned phrase “Everything for the people, but nothing through the people” started to become a reality in Ferdinand’s time. The attitude he had towards his uncle’s outdated policy at the moment he was designated Crown Prince and his new ideas of building the empire in keeping with the opinions of the peoples he ruled over quickly put him on a pedestal from which only death could bring him down. The idea of equality between nations promoted by the enlightened emperor was a certainty for Francis Ferdinand, under whose tutelage “the difference between classes and races, so contrary to the interests of the monarchy, would have ceased to exist, as his ideal was a powerful and feared monarchy, built on the solid foundation of the contentment of its peoples, themselves powerful in regard to their culture and well-being.”²⁶

The divine side attributed to all monarchs and kings, namely heavenly wisdom, was equated in his case with that of “Emperor Solomon”; moreover, further attributes were added to it, such as the ability to read people and appoint suitable candidates to key positions. The attachment showed for the oppressed

people, just like that of “Joseph II with his energy, his strong will born from the purest love for justice,” transformed the archduke into the last bastion of the monarchy. For this reason “the peoples who knelt by the future emperor’s head, which was surrounded by torches, felt the very foundations of the monarchy shaking and the Habsburg crown worn by the old emperor threatened by storms, which were to pluck many feathers off the two-headed eagle.”²⁷

The puzzle pieces consisting of hope, solidarity and the Romanians’ appreciation of the archduke, shaped by the attention given to the nations, along with his federalization plan, formed a harmonious unity. For the Romanians in Transylvania it was clear that “Francis Ferdinand became one with us, he was the soul of our souls, our blood flew through his veins. He sympathetically listened to our complaints, he agreed with us, he was against all persecution, he was driven by the courage and faith of the Romanian soldier, he knew how to be grateful for the devoted services of the Romanian people. He was the friend and devoted protector of the Romanians. Another Joseph II lived in this man.”²⁸ The adoption of the heir by the Transylvanians denotes the “deep mourning that pierces our souls from one end of the Monarchy to the other” and which was “more than mourning, a truly profound patriotic and national concern induced by the uncertainty of tomorrow.”²⁹ In this context “the image of this man, our most loved, will always remain in our hearts and we will treasure it as a precious icon. He will glisten in the light of our eyes just like the legendary figure of Joseph II,”³⁰ who literally appears in various religious scenes painted on the walls of the wooden church at Ticu-Colonie, in Cluj county. The iconography of the church nave includes, in the foreground, a scene with a figure surrounded by a bright halo, having enormous wings and a sword in its right hand. It is Michael, the leader of the celestial hierarchy of the archangels. Joseph II appears right next to him, under the auspices of the high hierarchy of the sacred, in the company of the angel whose mission is to watch over justice in heaven and on earth. Given the rights gained through Joseph’s reforms, the painter transfers, through visual juxtaposition, the attributes of the long-awaited divine justiciar³¹ to the emperor who had envisaged a new idea of running the state. Moreover, Francis Ferdinand’s assassination “came as a blow” in 1914 because “the bullet from Sarajevo did not only kill a future emperor, but also an idea.”³² The Romanians’ hope that “the monarchy, glorious throughout time, now burying the one who could have restored its former splendor, does not only bury his bones”³³ was to remain just hope and nothing more, because Charles, the successor, did not show openness towards the problem of the Romanian people, the way Ferdinand had done.

Henry Wickham Steed, the editor of *The Times*, was of the opinion that “the Josephine tradition, despite its Germanizing and centralizing tendencies,

produced much of what was best in the Austrian administration,”³⁴ a fact that the Romanians in Transylvania also realized and which made them state that “this enlightened and just man, the protective spirit of our peasant people of good Christians and good soldiers, will never walk along the arcades of the Belvedere palace. He will move into the crypt, along with the shadow of the great tormented man who was for a moment aware of our just cause, Joseph II.”³⁵

The importance given by Francis Ferdinand and Joseph to their subjects propelled the two to the top of the category of “good emperors” in the perception of the Romanians in Transylvania. Transformed into a legend, Maria Theresa’s son lingered into the minds of the Romanians of 1914, in the context of the Sarajevo assassination, as a fairytale character: “There once was in our country a great and enlightened king, as only once in an era peoples were destined to have. His ears were deaf to lies and flattery.”³⁶ After a century, a similar representation began to be associated with the archduke, for whom “God decided his path, to carry out the great work unfinished by Joseph II.” But, as not all fairytales have a happy ending, the story of the Romanians in Transylvania a century ago began with “There once was a prince who, if a cursed hand had not put an end to his life ahead of his time, would have been a great emperor and merciful toward our plight. There once was one, but he is not anymore!”³⁷

The rumors coming to Transylvania from imperial Vienna, that “an emperor’s nephew was called upon to accede to the throne of Joseph II”³⁸ to replace the old monarch of Europe, generated among the Romanians the feeling of having returned in the sights of the imperial Court after the absolutist abandonment of 1867. The melancholy Romanian folk song which resounded throughout the Carpathians, “Ferdinand is not far away/He comes to bring us justice,” acquired from the moment of the assassination a symbolic tone, as it announced the end of dynastic loyalty.

All the sympathy that Romanians felt for Joseph II during more than a century was due primarily to the visits made by the enlightened emperor and to the reforms from which the Romanians in Transylvania benefited the most. A century later, the Romanian elite group at Belvedere, which was in the orbit of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, saw in the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary the same reformatory zeal and the personality traits of the Enlightenment monarch. The assassination of the archduke, the pretext for the First World War, meant the cessation of the loyalty shown by the Romanians, although in the months following the events of Sarajevo and after the outbreak of the conflict they went to war in an atmosphere of both joy and fear. The feeling of joy was rooted in the attachment towards Francis Ferdinand, whose death they were called upon to avenge. After Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente, the loyalty crisis deepened and the desertions of the soldiers in the Austro-

Hungarian army increased in number, as they defected to the Romanian army. From this moment on, national loyalty began to emerge among the Romanians in Transylvania and dynastic loyalty lived its last moments, just like the empire towards which it was manifested.



Notes

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3. Liviu Maior, *Habsburgi și români: De la loialitatea dinastică la identitate națională* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2006), 65–66.
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5. Petre Nemoianu, *Amintiri* (Lugoj: Art Press, 1928), 40.
6. Aurel C. Popovici, *Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari*, trans. (Bucharest: Albatros, 1997), 202.
7. Constantin Graur, *Cu privire la Franz Ferdinand* (Bucharest: Adevărul, 1935), 209.
8. *Ibid.*, 223.
9. *Ibid.*, 224.
10. Ion Rusu Abrudeanu, *Îndmăgostirea unui Habsburg de o româncă frumoasă din Ardeal* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1928), 169.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Liviu Maior, *Alexandru Văida-Voevod între Belvedere și Versailles* (Cluj-Napoca: Sincron, 1993), 111.
13. Graur, 364–365.
14. Leo Valiani, *The End of Austria-Hungary* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), 26, quoted in Maior, *Alexandru Văida-Voevod*, 61.
15. Rusu Abrudeanu, 59.
16. Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flags Wars and Stone Saints* (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.
17. Maior, *Alexandru Văida-Voevod*, 62.
18. *Ibid.*, 223.
19. *Ibid.*, 73.
20. *Unirea* (Blaj), no. 65, 1914: 1.
21. Derek Beals, *Joseph II: Against the World 1780–1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 629.
22. Zaharia Boiu, *Elemente de istoria patriei* (Sibiu: Ed. Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1872), 117–118.
23. *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (Brașov), no. 148, 1914: 1.
24. *Telegraful român* (Sibiu), no. 62, 1914: 253.
25. *Ibid.*, no. 63: 257.

26. Ibid.
27. Octavian C. Tăslăuanu, *Trei luni pe câmpul de război* (Bucharest: Librăria Stănciulescu, 1915), 6.
28. *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 131, 1914: 1.
29. *Drapelul* (Lugoj), no. 68, 1914: 1.
30. *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 131, 1914: 1.
31. Silvia Marin-Barutcieff, “Între arhanghelul Mihail și tatăl pământesc: o declarație de loialitate și atașament față de împăratul Iosif al II-lea în pictura religioasă din Transilvania,” *Apulum* (Alba Iulia) 48 (2011): 33.
32. Octavian Goga, “O catastrofă națională,” *Românul* (Arad), no. 134, 1914: 1.
33. *Românul*, no. 131, 1914: 1.
34. Henry Wickham Steed, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, 4th edition (London: Constable and Company, 1919), XXXII.
35. Goga, 2.
36. Valer Moldovan, “A fost odată...,” *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 138, 1914: 1.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.

Abstract

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The Sarajevo event projected inside the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as the lost savior of monarchy, not one person, as it would have been normal, but two: the heir to the throne, Francis Ferdinand, and the “father of the country,” the immortal Joseph II. The news that the last hope Romanians had for a ruler had died came as a shock, and therefore the collective mentality sorrowfully projected the image of the possible reformer in comparison to that of the first truly noticeable reformer, Joseph II. Dynastic loyalty had gradually degraded due to the long reign of Francis Joseph, who described himself as the last old-school monarch, as well as due to his dualist compromise (1867), forgiven for a while but not forgotten. In this sense, Francis Ferdinand was adopted as heir, the Romanians seeing in him the breath of fresh air that they needed, another Joseph, the vigor of youth being assimilated with the reformist spirit of the enlightened emperor. This rebirth of Josephinism began gradually with the appointment of Francis Ferdinand as heir to the throne, it developed with the help of the Transylvanian elites associated with the Archduke’s Chancellery, and died in the moment of the Sarajevo murder, leaving just the emotional impact of the ruin of the Romanians’ hopes.

Keywords

Joseph II, Francis Ferdinand, dynastic loyalty, First World War