

The Visits of the Romanian Royal Family to the University of Cluj in the Interwar Period

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Abstract: Shortly after the creation of Greater Romania, an ample process of administrative-territorial integration of the new provinces began, which became part of the Romanian state during 1918. As part of this process, higher education received an important role. The present article analyses the way in which the University of Cluj evolved, after the Romanian takeover of the Hungarian institution, focusing at the same time on the way in which the Royal House supported its development. Primary sources from the interwar period were used for the analysis, such as the “Universul” and the “Gazeta Transilvaniei” newspapers, respectively the yearbooks of the University of Cluj. The objective of the study is to reconstruct the visits paid by the Royal House to the University of Cluj, highlighting, through a quantitative analysis of the press releases, the development of festivities, the significance of the speeches and the evolution of the relations between the university and the monarchy. For the analysed period, i.e., 1918-1939, three visits of the Royal Family dedicated exclusively to university festivities were identified, the first one in 1920, when the inauguration celebrations took place, a second one in 1930, when the tenth anniversary of that event was celebrated, and a third one in 1937, when new spaces were opened for carrying out university activities.

Keywords: monarchy, University of Cluj, Romania, interwar period, higher education

The efforts to reunite Romania, which began during the First World War, reached their peak on December 1, 1918, following the adoption of the Alba Iulia Resolution, which marked the union of Transylvania with the other Romanian provinces. Given the multi-ethnic character of the territory, that was under Ottoman, Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian rule successively, the Romanian Royal Family paid special attention to it, as it marked the need for metamorphoses to reflect the new course of the Romanian administration and the integration from an administrative, economic and cultural point of view into Greater Romania. In this process, the city of Cluj played a central role, justified, on the one hand, by the status obtained in previous centuries as the administrative centre of Transylvania, and on the other hand, as a “cultural capital”, due to the numerous cultural institutions it brought together. Most of the Royal Family's visits to Cluj were focussed on these aspects of the city, supporting the founding of institutions, such as the Institute for the Study of Romanian History, or the development of other already existing institutions.

The first visit of the Royal Family to Cluj took place in 1919, where, according to the *Universul* newspaper, they were greeted by two hundred thousand people, as part of a tour organised by King Ferdinand and Queen Marie in Transylvania. The tour was meant to build bridges between Romanian regions that were significantly different from each other, providing a symbol of unity through the monarchical institution. King Ferdinand motivated choosing Cluj as a place to stop by considering the city as a “historic fortress of Greater Romania, because from here started all the pains and torments to which our tried nation was subjected.” (*Călătoria suveranilor*, 1919, p. 1) The editorial staff of the *Universul* newspaper presented the meeting of the Royal Family, “to whom we owe so much of the Romania that we are proud of today”, with the population of Transylvania, “Romanians that our nation is proud of”, as being epochal, on a territory where sovereigns saw “the Romanian people in the fullness of their material and spiritual strengths and treasures.” (*Suveranii și Ardealul*, 1919, p. 1)

After 1918, the process of administrative-territorial unification of Romania was doubled by one related to the modernisation of the educational system. As such, intellectuals and politicians were interested in creating a strategy that included the integration of the universities in

Cluj and Chernivtsi into the Romanian higher education system (Sălăgean, 2019, p. 19). Despite the ever-changing international situation, as the Paris Peace Conference was in full swing at the time, and tensions with Hungary were still a reality, the Governing Council decided to take over the University of Cluj (Sălăgean, 2019). The entire operation was supervised by Onisifor Ghibu, delegated by Valeriu Braniște, the head of the Resort of Cults and Public Instruction. Thus, June 12, 1919 marks the incident-free takeover of the “Francisc Iosif” University, while the process of founding the Upper Dacia University has just began, being completed on the occasion of the Official Inauguration Celebrations between January 31 and February 2, 1920, an event that members of the Romanian Royal Family also attended (Stan, 2019, p. 154-155).

The visit began on January 31, when the Royal Family arrived at Cluj by train, to patronize the inauguration of the university, after a journey of almost 18 hours. They were greeted in the beautifully decorated train station by Prince Carol, Heir to the Throne, as well as members of the Council of Ministers and the Governing Council, the presidents of the two parliamentary chambers, representatives of local and military authorities, and a large crowd. The solemn festivity took place on Sunday, February 1, in the Hall of the University of Cluj, where the members of the Royal Family were greeted with “endless cries of “Hooray” and very warmly applauded by all those present.” (Mureșan, 2018, p. 19-30).

The word of welcome was delivered by professor Sextil Pușcariu, the rector of the University at the time, who evoked the history of the institution starting from 1872, emphasising that under the Hungarian administration the university was almost forbidden to young Romanians, dedicated to “serving foreign purposes” and to the “Hungarisation through the university” (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universității, 1920, p. 20-21). For this reason, he reiterated the commitment of the teaching staff, initially made up of teachers from other university centres from Romania, to cultivate the Romanian spirit among young people, keeping a certain specificity, so as to avoid making the educational system follow a predefined model. In the same spirit, through the rector's voice, it was shown that the University recognised its responsibility to offer young people the opportunity to “gain knowledge, maturity of thought, and a longing for disciplined work” (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universității, 1920, p. 27), to be useful in all areas of public life, instead of preparing

them only for professions of immediate need. Of equal importance was for the University not to distance itself from society, but to cultivate a natural bond with it, with graduates being the main promoters of this coexistence (Mureşan, 2018, p. 10). Sextil Puşcariu gave a modern, visionary speech, in which he underlined the importance of not involving political factors in the university's activities, whose autonomy must be ensured by the University Senate, an entity aware of the real needs of the institution, and one that can make decisions through an elected body of representatives from the faculties, and not by a politically appointed official, who, in the eyes of the well-known philologist, "however benevolent might be, is bound by the ordinances and forms of his office, and who, for material reasons is often compelled to prevent the rise of the scholar seeking to defeat matter, by pouring lead into his wings of conquest" (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universităţii, 1920, p. 27). To the same extent, Puşcariu made reference to the university's autonomy in relation to the state by obtaining financial independence, following the model set by the Romanian Academy.

Addressing the audience, King Ferdinand referred to the moment as a national holiday that transcended Romania's borders by the presence of "messengers" of European universities, but also by the commitment to cultivate science, called by the king "the eternal daughter of light" (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universităţii, 1920, p. 66), and Latin culture, as a link between Romanians from all over the country. The monarch criticised the cause of the Hungarian university, which, "founded in large part with Romanian money, [...] soon became the focus of exclusive thinking against any national sentiment." (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universităţii, 1920, p. 15) To cultivate the Romanian past, King Ferdinand offered a donation of 400,000 lei for the establishment of an institute for the study of Romanian history. Regarding the purpose of the university, starting from the Latin phrase *Omnia scientiarum universitas*, the monarch emphasised in clear terms the importance of quality, not the number of graduates, because beyond the number of graduates, it is more important to train generations of people useful to society. Last but not least, the "young university" was marked by two guiding principles: truth and justice (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universităţii, 1920, p. 16-17).

The day of February 1 continued with a gala performance at the National Theatre of Cluj, where Romania's National Anthem and the

anthems of the allied countries were sung, poems were read and a programme of national songs and games was organised. This was followed by a torchlight procession, watched by the Royal Family from the 6th Army Corps Command (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universității, 1920, p. 10). On the last day, the university, its museums, the student dormitory and the library were visited. At the same time, King Ferdinand granted an audience to the representatives of the “Petru Maior” student circle, to whom he said that “The country trusts in your selfless hearts and sees in you the worthy leaders of tomorrow.” (Serbările pentru inaugurarea Universității, 1920, p. 67)

The year 1927 marks the strengthening of relations between the University of Cluj and the monarchy, since after the death of King Ferdinand, the institution changed its name to “King Ferdinand I” University of Cluj. The role of Queen Marie in supporting the Romanian university and promoting its aspirations was not forgotten either, since during the jubilee celebrations in 1930, she was awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa, the first such title awarded by the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. During its first ten years of activity, the university maintained good relations with European universities that sent professors to Cluj, changes were made to the laboratories, clinics and libraries, and the number of Romanian students increased considerably. The festivities were organised on the occasion of the beginning of the academic year in October, 1930, while on behalf of the Royal House of Romania, King Carol II, Queen Marie and Prince Nicolae participated. The officials were greeted with enthusiasm by the people of Cluj and by people coming from all over Transylvania, who led them along the road from the train station to the university, cheering them on and placing flowers in their path (Mureșan, 2018, p. 10-11). In the University Hall, representatives of the Government were also present, including Prime Minister George Mironescu, representatives of other Romanian universities, leaders of cultural institutions, such as Ion Bianu, President of the Romanian Academy, and Vasile Goldiș, President of ASTRA, members of the parliament, church leaders, former dignitaries, guests from abroad, such as Emmanuel de Martonne, Professor Bertoli, Abbot Zavoral, René Paux, Minister of France in Bucharest, and Chales Michael Palairret, Minister of Great Britain in Bucharest. During the opening speech of the solemn meeting, then-rector Emil Racoviță, mentioned the support offered by the Royal Family to the university during its first

decade of activity, under the auspices of whom the respective celebrations were also organised. King Carol II spoke about the care that his father, King Ferdinand, showed towards the University of Cluj, claiming that “there was no man happier than him, when he saw the phalanx of teachers from all over the country gathering here in the heart of Transcarpathian Romania.” (Sărbătorirea a 10 ani de la înființarea Universității, 1930, p. 3) Recalling the role of some Romanian scholars in the development of education in the Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian Empires, Carol II saw the establishment of the Romanian university as a redress for a historical injustice. Following the example set by his predecessors, he decided to set up a scientific foundation in Cluj, to be named “King Carol II Institute for Scientific Research.”

The last part of the festivity was dedicated to the awarding of the titles of Doctor Honoris Causa. The speech dedicated to Queen Marie was given by Sextil Pușcariu, rapporteur of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, who placed it in a chronology of Romanian writers, who were also crowned heads, and who included Neagoe Basarab, Dimitrie Cantemir and Carmen Sylva. Pușcariu appreciated the writings of Queen Marie and the sensitivity with which she captured fragments of the daily life of the Romanian peasants, the messages of encouragement dedicated to the soldiers on the front, and her praise in her writings to the beauty of Romania, arguing, rhetorically, as follows: “To whom could it have more right to offer, in this country, the highest distinction that a university can give, than to Your Majesty, who through word, deed and writing have contributed so much to Romania's entrance with the defendants of justice in the holy war of liberation and bring it to fruition?” (Sărbătorirea a 10 ani de la înființarea Universității, 1930, p. 3)

A new visit of King Carol II, dedicated to supporting the university environment of Cluj, took place in 1937, on the occasion of the inauguration of the “King Carol II” Academic College. The idea of constructing the college was put forward in 1926, and was later supported by government funds. This construction was necessary for the university, as it brought together the teaching staff and rooms for university guests, performance hall and foyer, buffet and banquet hall, but also spaces for the activities of student organisations. These allowed for the development of university activities and international exchanges, as the university had a partnership with the Sorbonne University of Paris since the previous decade. The cost of the construction amounted to 30

million lei, while the leader of the project was an architect from Bucharest, George Cristinel, known for the design of the Mausoleum from Mărășești the Orthodox Cathedral of Cluj, but also the headquarters of the “Prima Ardeleană” Society or the Normal Romanian Orthodox School, both from Sibiu. In the interwar period, he was known especially for his style that relied on a synergy between classicist modernism and Art Deco (Mureșan, 2018, p. 12). In his speech delivered at the inauguration ceremony on June 13, 1937, King Carol II praised the university for assuming the role of “a beacon to spread the light of Romanian culture as far as possible,” as it represents “the top of the pyramid of the national culture.” (Anuarul Universității, 1938, p. 78-79) In the same year, due to the support given to the educational system of Cluj, King Carol II received, in his turn, the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of the “King Ferdinand I” University. The solemn meeting was opened by the rector Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, while the words of appreciation were formulated by Gheorghe Tătărescu, President of the Council of Ministers, Metropolitan Niculescu of Blaj, on behalf of the Greek Catholic Church, and Iuliu Moldovan, President of ASTRA (Maj. Sa Regele Carol II, 1937, p. 1). In his speech, professor Silviu Dragomir, rapporteur from the Faculty of Letters, invoked the King's support for the arts and sciences, his attention towards young people, and the king's early concern for supporting the establishment of cultural institutions to promote Romanian values, then the participation in the Royal Foundations and the financial support of cultural projects.

During the interwar period, the University of Cluj became the centre of Romanian higher education and an important player in the European one, largely due to the support it enjoyed from the Royal House of Romania. The two monarchs of this period, King Ferdinand I and King Carol II, supported the university both financially and by promoting its cause and goals among the states allied with Romania. The Royal House of Romania understood, from the very beginning, the importance of a Romanian higher education institution in the centre of the province reunited with Romania in December 1918: the Romanian University affirmed a national identity, and – at the same time – contributed to the construction of that national identity on a cultural, scientific and spiritual level. All the gestures of the members of the Royal House were intended to support that construction, and the University – for its part – understood to respond to them to the same extent.

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