



Book Review

Sorin Liviu Damean, Carol I al României. Un monarh devotat (Carol I of Romania. A Devoted Monarch), Editura Cetatea de Scaun, ISBN 978-606-537-358-7, 390 pages

**Anca Parmena Olimid*,
Cătălina Maria Georgescu**,**

One hundred and fifty years since the establishment of the Dynasty of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen to the Romanian Throne, the latest book of the professor and historian Sorin Liviu Damean offers the image of the “moving history” during the modern times praising for a professional and objective engagement to narrative history.

The book explores the momentous monarchy of Carol I of Romania through a collection of historical, social, political and cultural references as a “living portrait” of the Romanian modern times hypothesizing two focal questions:

(Question 1) Can a historical figure enable the flourishing of a society at the mixture of the Occident and Orient ambitions?

(Question 2) Whether an equilibrate policy-making device can become the pivotal facet of the new internal institutional establishment?

(Question 3) What were the main inputs and outputs of the internal and external policy of modern Romania?

The researches of professor Sorin Liviu Damean acknowledge a history quiz of the forty-eight years of reign of a Latin country drawing a time and space journey and a societal story of the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century.

* Associate Professor, PhD, University of Craiova, Faculty of Social Sciences, Political Sciences specialization, Center of Post-Communist Political Studies (CEPOS), Editor in Chief of the *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, Phone: 0040251418515, Email: parmena2002@yahoo.com

** Lecturer, PhD, University of Craiova, Faculty of Social Sciences, Political Sciences specialization, Center of Post-Communist Political Studies (CEPOS), Deputy Editor in Chief of the *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, Phone: 0040251418515, Email: cata.georgescu@yahoo.com

The architecture of the book is designed as “le juste milieu” among the political and diplomatic advances challenging both the confrontation to the governmental instability and the overture to the two-party system.

A remarkable scene of facts, events, figures, decisions and characters is keeping the reader in front of the adventure of its exclusive hero, Carol I of Romania.

Each page of the story becomes a unique witness of devotion, involvement, self-sacrifice, loyalty and personal attachment.

The book covers seven chapters (Chapter I to Chapter VII) enabling an architectural disposal based upon seven main pylons as follows:

(1) the historical data and facts chronology (Chapter I and II);

(2) the executive power and the political arena (Chapter III);

(3) the Romanian Army disposal and placement (Chapter IV);

(4) the external policy: strategy and encounters (Chapter V);

(5) the process of modernizing the Romanian society: statement and development (Chapter VI);

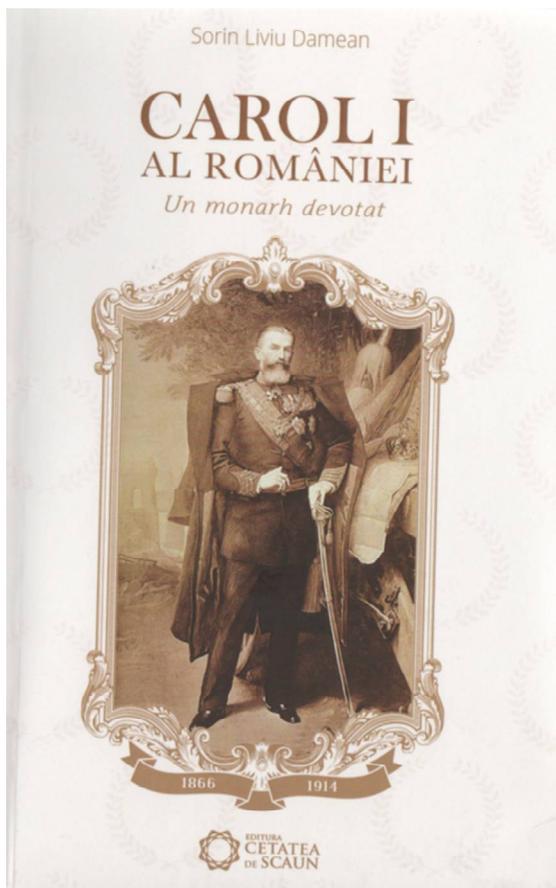
(6) the end of the époque: ongoing testimonials (Chapter VII).

The pattern of the book is excellent at heading the inputs and outputs of the internal and external policies and strategies balancing the political decision processes in the midst of the institutional establishment and the ongoing process of modernizing the Romanian society.

The state independence, the peace maintenance and the borders guarantee become the vectors of the external policy driven by Carol I of Romania tracing a triangle of actions, events and actors of the nation state producing fascinating pictures of the modern world.

The research of professor Sorin Liviu Damean also gathers and develops a fundamental-to-elaborate analysis of the culture, education and church appointments. Nevertheless, the author argues that the Romanian modern society empowers: (1) the scrutiny of the economic, social and political establishments; (2) the educational system; (3) the urbanization commitments; (4) the public investments; (5) the Romanian language reinforcement; (6) the Orthodox Church institutional support etc.

Further, the book discovers the milestone of the modernizing processes of Romania and the correspondence to the Europeanization indicators of the country.



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The reader instantly becomes fascinated by the the historical events and also by the hero's qualifications as a defining leader during the modern times.

The first chapter describes the chances and occurrences in the process of Prince Carol of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen becoming the Prince of Romania. The chapter presents the faultless childhood and youth of young Prince Carol, his embracing a military career and impressions from his young formation within a European princely family. Also, it reviews the national political elite's projects and prospects in order to choose the state's future ruler and the selection of Carol I under „France's support and warrant” (p. 32), the Prince's journey to take power in the capital city of the United Principalities of Valachia and Moldavia and the negotiation with the Ottoman Empire Port for *official* recognition. Throughout his work, the author depicts the future King's reactions, emotions and notes, obviously under the close lecture, analysis and profound knowledge of published correspondence, diaries, memoirs, personal notes, official or personal biography, the Royal House's archives etc. of the Royal Family and its entourage.

The second chapter contributes to the understanding of the rich historical heritage of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen Princely House and the competition and concurrence in the establishment of a new Princely Family in Romania, describing the national matrimonial projects for Prince Carol I under the quest of connubial-diplomatic alliances, the sorrowful loss of the princely couple's only child and the pursuits in ensuring a male succession to the throne as well as the relations with the inheritants, the tensions and challenges surrounding the royal family „tormented and oftentimes exposed to the severe judgement of contemporaries” (p. 130). The portrait of Carol I is thus mirrored not only through His making of history, but through the eyes, impressions and words of family, close collaborators, statesmen and historians.

The third chapter brings forward the political role of the monarch as observing the liberal constitutional prerogatives of the executive function. The historical institutionalism approach sheds light on the evolution of political institutions in the modern Romanian state within the dynamics of the state's organization and functioning under „the perpetuation of home political instability” (p. 141), the relations between power and opposition, personal vanities, political crises and compromises between the monarch and the political parties and political elite.

A special attention is rendered to the actions of declaring and gaining state independence, the work completing the picture of the army endowments, the fleet and military service organization in the midst of diplomatic protests from foreign cabinets (presented mostly throughout the fourth chapter).

The fifth chapter brings continuity to modern Romania home and foreign policy-making by picturing the „*secrete or dynastic* diplomacy...interweaving the role of the monarch as the main decisional factor and warrant of continuity within the state's foreign affairs with that of governmental policy” (p. 230). The paper paints the constitutional monarch's strong hold as regards policy-making, sketching the King as „coordinating the Romanian foreign policy” (p. 231) „ensuring stability and continuity at decisional level” (p. 305).

The sixth chapter images the monarch's projects and actions to trigger the modernization of the Romanian society and integration in Europe (p. 306). The paper highlights the challenges associated to policy-making, arguing that in some respects the administration and exploitation of national assets enticing „tensions and diplomatic pressures” (p. 320).

Finally, the seventh chapter eulogizes the reign and epoque of Carol I, proving to represent the constitutive monarch's testimonial in accordance to the sovereign's and other contemporaries daily memoirs and/or correspondence as „a methodic, orderly spirit, and extremely meticulous” (p. 346). Besides, throughout his work, Professor Damean struggled to cement the Prince and future King's image as “a true statesman, of an unimpeachable morality, endowed with wisdom and infinite patience, showing prudence, moderation, equilibrium, and temperance. His public image was that of the first servant of the state, devoted to the country and the nation” (Argument, p. 17). Actually, with each phrase the author and the work throb to encapsulate Carol I within a symbol of devotion – the “devoted monarch” “to the policy of national interest” (p. 353) being the archetypal image of the entire work. The conclusive part of the book is dedicated to the depiction of the pressures both home and foreign tantalizing the sovereign as regards the country's entrance in the World War.

As regards the literary style, the work intertwines modern narrative history to encapsulate personal depictions, anecdotic events in a supportive role of social history in contrast to the more rigid chronology of traditional narrative styles combining historical institutionalism with a more personal, close study of the central historical figure of Carol I.

All in all, it proves to be a complex analytical work and an enjoyable reading both for the specialized audience and for the interested reader in acquiring inedited information about the life and rule of the sovereign who shaped Romania's modern history, its modernization through his efforts, vision and rule.

Book review Info

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