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A Black Sea *Belle Epoque* Tale. Queen Elisabeta at Evksinograd: The Last Journey to Bulgaria of a Sovereign of Romania (13–16 May 1911)

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A legend quite familiar to the Bulgarian public was broadcast again on the airwaves of the national radio station in Sofia¹ in the middle of a hot summer day of the year 2009. According to it, on the shores of the Black Sea, right on the high and rocky coast near Varna, in 1821 a famous ship’s captain, the Greek Dimitrios, built a monastery dedicated to Saint Demetrius. This was a tribute paid after a terrible storm, in which the ship managed to safely reach the shore. The monastery and the surrounding land, the legend retold on the radio continued, remained in the possession of the important Greek community in Varna until Alexander of Battenberg, the first prince of Bulgaria (1879–1886), ascended to the throne. The prince, who was spending the hot summer of the year 1880 at the solitary monastery by the sea, was handed these properties a year later and the small settlement was named Sandrovo (after Battenberg’s name).

After Battenberg was forced to abdicate, the vast monastic settlement came into the possession of the new Prince (then Tsar) of Bulgaria, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1887–1918). His first wife, Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma,² fell in love with

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- 1 Elena Karkalanova, “Euxinograd, the favorite summer residence of Bulgarian statesmen,” *Bulgarian National Radio*, 10.08.2009, accessed 30.11.2023, [www.https://bnr.bg/en/post/100096260/euxinograd-the-favorite-summer-residence-of-bulgarian-statesmen](https://bnr.bg/en/post/100096260/euxinograd-the-favorite-summer-residence-of-bulgarian-statesmen).
 - 2 Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma (1870–1899), the daughter of Robert, the last Duke of Parma (1854–1859), was the first wife of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and the mother of the couple’s four children: Princes Boris (the future Tsar), Kiril (b.1895), Evdoksia (b.1898) and Nadezhda (b.1899). The marriage took place in 1893, at the insistence of Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary. The princess was the total opposite of Ferdinand’s nature, contemporaries noting the fact that she was quiet, shy, very intelligent, a fervent Catholic and completely devoid of ostentation, including in terms of clothing. Duncan M. Perry, *Stefan Stambolov and the Emergence of Modern Bulgaria*,

this wild place and renamed it Evksinograd, combining the ancient Greek notion of the Black Sea (*Pontus Euxinus*) with the Bulgarian designation of the term “town/city” (*grad*). Around the old monastery, Ferdinand built a palace in the *Renaissance* style of the 18th century, surrounded by a splendid park stretching over almost 100 hectares. From the last years of the 19th century, Evksinograd became one of the most beloved Bulgarian royal residences, a kind of Peleş in Sinaia (Romanian mountain royal residence) of the neighbouring country.

Queen Elisabeta of Romania spent between 13 and 16 May 1911 the last visit to the territory of Bulgaria which a sovereign of Romania would undertake. She was invited by *Tsaritsa* (Queen) Eleonore at a strictly private meeting and her presence was sanctioned by Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria, who demonstratively left the country. The Tsar³ accused his consort, in an angry telegram sent to his son Boris, of “taking advantage” of his absence in order to “invent this business,”⁴ i.e., the presence in Evksinograd of an unwanted guest.

In 1908, Bulgaria proclaimed itself a sovereign empire, intent to incorporating major parts of Macedonia and Thrace since the decisive victory over the Ottoman Empire.⁵ Just after this, the Romanian–Bulgarian relations had begun the long process of deterioration, which would last three decades, and which had several moments of decisive degradation, including the intervention of the Romanian army in Bulgaria, in the Second Balkan War (1913) and the occupation of Dobrudja and some areas of Wallachia by the Bulgarian troops in the First World War (1916–1918).

Only King Carol I, and just once, at the end of October 1902, had been on the territory of the neighbouring country as the sovereign of Romania, on an official visit. Then, accompanied by Prime Minister Dimitrie A. Sturdza and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion I.C. Brătianu, he spent three days in Ruse, Poradim, Pleven, Grivitsa and in several other places where 25 years ago the Russian–Romanian–Ottoman war of 1877–1878

1870–1895 (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 1993), 192; Dobrinka Parusheva, “Maria Luisa in Bulgaria. The Image of the Princess in Contemporary Memoirs,” *Etudes balkaniques* 2–3 (2012): 97–111. Her Bulgarian teacher, Dobri Ganchev, who taught history at the Sofia Military School, found her to be “modest, natural, sweet and beautiful.” *Ibidem*, 104–105.

3 Twenty years after he had abdicated (1918), being in exile in Coburg (Germany), Ferdinand wanted to specify in an interview given to the French press in 1938 (and also picked up by Romanian publications) that he saw himself as belonging “rather to the 18th century, and if, by chance, my character resembles someone else’s, Louis XV, Voltaire, or Frederick the Great will have to be researched.” “Cu 25 de ani în urmă, Ferdinand al Bulgariei era cât p’aci să devină împăratul Bizanţului,” *Realitatea ilustrată* (10/08/1938): 4–5.

4 Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns. The Reign of King Boris III of Bulgaria, 1918–1943* (Lanham–New York–Toronto–Plymouth, UK: Madison Books, 1998), 19.

5 Elżbieta Znamierowska-Rakk, “Romanian claims against Bulgaria during the period of the Balkan Wars,” *Balcania Posnaniensia, Acta et studia* 19 (2012): 287–295.

had taken place.⁶ Natively Germans, Romanian sovereigns Carol and Elisabeta very often went to the West and not to the Balkans or to Russia after the Independence War of Romania, in 1877–1878. At the Congress of Berlin (1878) Russia went back on its promise and demanded Southern Bessarabia as a further price for recognising Romania independence, offering the Danube Delta and Dobrogea as compensation. Romania's fear about Russia's intervention outstripped Bucharest's anger at the Dual Monarchy over Magyarisation. Romania signed the treaty that associated it with the Triple Alliance (October 1883) and that treaty formed the cornerstone of Romanian foreign policy for the next thirty years.⁷

Queen Elisabeta did not have access to political or diplomatic decision-making during her reign. At the end of the 19th century and until the outbreak of the First World War, sovereigns had rather aesthetic and matrimonial roles, and very rarely were their talents highlighted. "The job of a sovereign – wrote Queen Elisabeta – requires only three qualities: beauty, kindness and fecundity."⁸ The wife of King Carol,⁹ a German woman, cultured, childless, a smoker, broke all the traditional patterns of the society in which she lived and became one of the most prolific scholars/authors of the country that she ruled, a patron of the arts and music, founder of institutions and charity services. Debuting in literature in the year 1880, under the pseudonym *Carmen Sylva*, Elisabeta was the most prolific queen in Europe in the literary field, with more than 1,000 poems published, 90 novellas, 30 dramatic works and 4 novels.¹⁰

Although far from politics, Queen Elisabeta can be assumed to have performed in this area whenever her husband, the King, asked her to. One major influence of the sovereign can be attributed with certainty, towards the end of her life and reign, when, in 1914, she persuaded King Carol I (and, implicitly, the European powers) to accept one of her

6 Daniel Cain, *Diplomați și diplomație în Sud Estul european: relațiile româno-bulgare la 1900* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2012), 194–95. About the visit, in the accounts of the time, see: "România și Bulgaria," *Universul*, 31.10.1902, 1; *Universul*, 1.11.1902, 3.

7 Joseph D. Prestia, "«Civilized States» and Situational Sovereignty: The Dilemmas of Romanian Neutrality, 1914–1916," *European History Quarterly* 51 (2021), 1: 57. Keith Hitchens, *România 1866–1947* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1996), 155.

8 Silvia Irina Zimmermann, *Carmen Sylva-Regina poetă. Literatură în serviciul Coroanei* (București: Editura ALL, 2013), 14.

9 Gabriel Badea-Păun, *Carmen Sylva. Uimitoarea regină Elisabeta a României* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2003); Romanița Constantinescu, and Silvia Irina Zimmermann, eds., "Cu iubire tandră, Elisabeta." "Mereu al tău credincios, Carol." *Correspondența perechii regale*, vol. I: 1869–1888 (București: Editura Humanitas, 2020).

10 Elisabeth Bouleanu, "Un secol de la moartea primei regine a României. Elisabeta a fost mama răniților și poeta Carmen Sylva," *Adevărul*, 18.02.2016, accessed 6.12.2023, <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/alexandria/un-secol-de-la-moartea-primei-regine-a-romaniei-1688581.html>.

nephews, Wilhelm de Wied, on the throne of the new Kingdom of Albania, a short and tumultuous reign, of only half a year, between March and September of the year 1914.¹¹

The visit to Evksinograd, of May 1911, can be considered rather devoid of political and diplomatic value with regard to a high-level agenda that would bring into discussion aspects of the Romanian – Bulgarian relations. The presence of Queen Elisabeta in Evksinograd is the last journey of a Romanian sovereign to the territory of Bulgaria and, in general, of a Romanian head of state to the South of the Danube for the next half century, when Prime Minister Petru Groza was invited, in 1947, by the communist leader of the new People’s Republic, Georgi Dimitrov.¹²

Research on Queen Elisabeta’s high-level state prerogatives in terms of foreign policy, and the analyses of the diplomatic and political relations in South-Eastern Europe and, in particular between Romania and Bulgaria, have paid minimal and fleeting attention to this episode. It is rarely mentioned, and there is no generous account of this stay at Evksinograd. This text particularly accessed Romanian public sources, especially journals, to present a general atmosphere from the public opinion and a free media on the Royal Families’ relations (Romanian and Bulgarian) and on the general links between the two neighbours. We did not access diplomatic archive sources or foreign reports of the time because the private visit of Queen Elisabeta was a particular journey and a possible mediation attempt with the nervous Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria.¹³

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- 11 Florin Anghel, “Influențe românești în Albania prințului Wilhelm de Wied, 7 martie – 3 septembrie 1914,” *Revista Istorică* 5–6 (1994): 487–494. Queen Elisabeta of Romania published, in 1914, an article in Albanian language entitled “Cili eshte ay?” (“Who is he?”), concerning the origins and personality of Wilhelm de Wied (1876–1945), with the aim of familiarising the Albanians with their king. “The young man – the august aunt wrote about her nephew – has been a lover of books from an early age. It is hard to see him without a book in his hand, and a finger lodged between its pages. Also at that time, he enjoyed full physical strength: while studying at the Jena High School, he was a practicing gymnast, and his colleagues tell stories about many funny incidents, when he, as a young officer, lifted a comrade from the ground with a single hand, to then put him down in the same way; his deeds were wise and valiant.” Marius Dobrescu, “Regina Elisabeta a României își recomandă nepotul opiniei publice albaneze,” in: *Momente din istoria Albaniei. Culegere de studii și articole*, ed. Idem (București: Editura Privirea, 2011), 147–49.
- 12 Florin Anghel, “Proletkult Diplomacy. What About Romania in the Last Minutes of Tsardom and the First of People’s Republic of Bulgaria (1945–1947) Foreign Affairs,” *Acta Marisiensis. Seria Historica* (2021): 69–83.
- 13 At least one credible official testimony claims that the Bulgarian Tsar was showing his negative reactions openly whenever he travelled through Romania and met with its sovereigns. Hristofor Hesapciev heard, during a journey by train, from Sinaia to the border with Austria–Hungary, in Predeal, on 4 June 1907, that “King Carol is a very interesting man. In him, the enterprising spirit of a merchant from Marseille is intertwined with the harshness of a Prussian lieutenant, with the atavism of the Hohenzollern dynasty.” “I always travel through Romania emotionally drained when I see at every step what great progress has been made in all respects – Ferdinand also said to the same interlocutor in the same conversation. When it will be too late, after my death, the Bulgarians will understand how valuable I was to them, but they did not know how to use me. King Carol did not spend anything on Romania, and all the time he has worked for his own enrichment, and today he is the richest man in his state. I spent 16 million for the upliftment of Bulgaria and, instead of gratitude, they constantly attack and curse

Romania and Bulgaria, a relationship not exactly taken from the stories about friends

Some perceptions regarding the other from the proclamation of Bulgarian Independence (1908) to the Evksinograd sea journey (1911). When did the reservations regarding the qualities of his neighbour's friendship begin to appear?

Blagovest Njagulov explained that it can assume that these differentiation tendencies became apparent after the establishment of the Bulgarian autonomy in 1878, a year which also marked the start of the Dobrudja issue and the national rivalries in the bilateral relations. This trend was already dominant before the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and World War I.¹⁴ In addition to this dissatisfaction came, of course, the entry of Southern Dobrudja within the Romanian borders, in 1913,¹⁵ following the “punitive treaty from Bucharest,” as defined by Prime Minister Aleksandar Tsankov,¹⁶ a fact which literally froze bilateral relations until 1940. Daniel Cain noted that bilateral relations began to change around 1900, when a generational change occurred in Bulgarian politics: the newcomers were no longer sentimentally connected to Romania.¹⁷

The pressure of Southern Dobrudja on the good neighbourly traditions, frequently amicable until the end of the 19th century,¹⁸ was major up to the point where it triggered a broad political, diplomatic, and intellectual insurgency in Bucharest and, especially, in Sofia. Alberto Basciani insisted on calling this bone of contention a “Balkan conflict.”¹⁹ “The strongest hatred in Romania towards Bulgaria,” explained Gheorghii Kalinkov,

me and throw mud and shit at me.” Hristofor Hesapciiev, *Amintirile unui diplomat bulgar în România (1905–1910)*, translation and notes by Daniel Cain (București: Editura Fundației Pro, 2003), 175.

- 14 Blagovest Njagulov, “Les images de «l'autre» chez les Bulgares et les Roumains (1878–1944),” *Études balkaniques* 2 (1995): 3; Lidya Mihova, “L'image de la Roumanie et des Roumains dans la littérature bulgare (fin du XIXe siècle),” *Recherches. Culture et histoire dans l'espace roman* 3 (2009): 87–96.
- 15 Constantin Iordachi, “Diplomacy and the Making of a Geopolitical Question: The Romanian–Bulgarian Conflict Over Dobrudja, 1878–1947,” in: *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. IV, *Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-) Representations*, eds. Roumen Dontchev Daskalov, Diana Mishkova, Tchavdar Marinov, and Alexander Vezenkov (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 291–393; Florin Anghel, “Borderland's Country: South Dobruja. Imperial Nostalgias on the Edge of the National Ideal,” in: *The Empire. Between Dispute and Nostalgia*, eds. Emanuel Plopeanu, Gabriel Stelian Manea, and Metin Omer (Berlin: Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag Wissenschaften, 2021), 173–191.
- 16 Constantin Iordan, *Dobrogea (1878–1940) în istoriografia bulgară postcomunistă* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2013), 181.
- 17 Vladimir Mitev, “Dintre toate popoarele din regiune, românii și bulgarii sunt cei mai apropiați,” *Podul Prieteniei*, 02.06.2020, accessed 29.12.2023, <https://www.friendshipbridge.eu/ro/2020/06/02/cain-interview-ro/>.
- 18 Constantin Velichi, *România și Renașterea bulgară* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980); Aleka Strezova, “Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Romania and First Bulgarian Diplomatic Agents in Bucharest (1879–1886),” *Bulgarian Historical Review/Revue Bulgare d'Histoire* 1–2 (2016): 3–22.
- 19 Alberto Basciani, *Un conflitto balcanico. La contesa fra Bulgaria e Romania in Dobrogea del Sud, 1918–1940* (Cosenza: Periferia, 2001).

a minister in Bucharest from the end of the year 1910 until 1913, “appeared when our Russophilia was the strongest, and the weakest, when Russophobia was strong.”²⁰

King Carol I, despite many devastating assessments of the Romanians’ political and social habits, was above criticism. Minister Hristofor Hesapciev remembered the Romanian King as a “crystallized character, without whims and bouts of nervousness,”²¹ “and by the way in which he led his existence modestly, sparingly, without special brilliance, without any excesses or exaggerations, the king gave an instructive example to the wasteful landlords,” Hesapciev continued to write in his memoirs about his stay in Romania.²² Following Romania’s military and diplomatic victory over Bulgaria, in 1913, the newly appointed minister Simeon Radev²³ noticed that “in terms of intellectual qualities, Carol I was not an extraordinary man. Nevertheless, he had a sense of duty, a sense of measure, diligence in terms of fulfilling his duties as a sovereign, a sound judgment, a quiet firmness.”²⁴

The trip which lasted several days, albeit a private one of Queen Elisabeta of Romania to Evksinograd, at the invitation of Queen Eleonore, was the last window of opportunity in terms of unblocking the relations and calming suspicions and hostile intentions. In fact, in 1911, the sovereign from Bucharest brought to Bulgaria the last peaceful initiative from Romania for more than two decades to come.

Queen Elisabeta had designed and built, according to her own instructions, a pavilion on the main pier of Constanța port,²⁵ near “Carol I” Lighthouse.²⁶ The residence dates from 1910 and was completed in two weeks according to the plans of engineer Anghel Saligny. A few days before leaving for Evksinograd, the Queen officially inaugurated the residence, on 2 May 1911, in the presence of King Carol I, conservative Prime Minister Petre P. Carp, ministers Alexandru Marghiloman and Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea,

20 Daniel Cain, “Un diplomat bulgar la București: Gheorghi Kalinkov (1911–1913),” *Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană* 27 (2014): 78.

21 Daniel Cain, “România lui Carol I în memorialistica diplomatică bulgară,” in: *Diplomație și destine diplomatice în lumea românească*, eds. Paul Nistor, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2011), 94.

22 Hesapciev, *Amintirile unui*, 22.

23 Simeon Radev (1879–1967) was a member of the Bulgarian delegation to the peace negotiations of 1913, then a minister in Bucharest between 1913 and 1916. Daniel Cain, “Început de carieră diplomatică: misiunea lui Simeon Radev la București (1913–1916),” in: *Diplomați, societate și mondenități. Sfârșit de “Belle Epoque” în lumea românească*, eds. Claudiu Lucian Topor, Alexandru Istrate, and Daniel Cain (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2015), 201–208.

24 Daniel Cain, “România lui Carol I,” 94.

25 Doina Păuleanu, *Regalitatea și marea. Dobrogea, 1878–1914* (București: Editura Monitorul Oficial, 2015).

26 Florin Anghel, Cristian Andrei Leonte, “Fantoma Farului Carol I. Regele, feldmareșalul Mackensen și salvarea statuii lui Ovidiu din Constanța Veche,” *Info Sud-Est*, Constanța, 22.07.2015, accessed 28.12.2023, <https://www.info-sud-est.ro/fantoma-farului-carol-i-regele-feldmaresalul-mackensen-si-salvarea-statuii-lui-ovidiu-din-constanta-veche>.

engineer Anghel Saligny and 45 other guests.²⁷ The Royal Family had previously also built in Constanța a small Royal Palace,²⁸ which was meant to host it during the summer months spent here.

King Carol remained in Constanța, and did not agree to reinforce relationship also with Tsar Ferdinand and with Bulgaria. After the end of Stefan Stambulov's regime, in 1894, political and military Russophile factions in Bulgaria were resurrected, the aim of Russia being to make a wall against the German or Austria-Hungarian penetration into the Balkans.²⁹ Romania was afraid of this Russian opportunity and, together with German direction sustained by the King and a strong Francophile one of the politics and society, rejected such a project.

On 13 May 1911, the ship "România" left, at 11 o'clock, from the main quay of the port of Constanța, with Queen Elisabeta of Romania on board. "Romania" was a very new passenger ship, which had been built in the shipyards of Saint-Nazaire. The ship arrived in Constanța on 1 April 1905, entering the custody of the Romanian Maritime Service on the lines to Constantinople-Smyrna (Izmir) and Piraeus.³⁰ Also present were her two oldest Queen's ladies-in-waiting, Zoe Bengescu³¹ and Maria Poenaru,³² commander Nicolae Gracoski, the commander of the Military Household of the Royal Court, the private secretary of the sovereign, Italian Edgar Dall'Orso, the director of the Romanian Maritime Service (SMR), Pavel Popovăț,³³ several officers, including the police chief of the city of Constanța.³⁴

It was raining heavily when the passengers boarded and showers accompanied them throughout the journey, for six hours, until, at 5 p.m., the ship docked in front of the Evksinograd palace. When entering the port of Varna, located less than eight kilometres

27 Delia Roxana Cornea, *Reședințele regale de la Marea Neagră. Casele de vis ale Reginelor României* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2021), 67–68.

28 Ibidem, 59.

29 Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements 1806–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 221.

30 Carmen Atanasiu, "Contribuții la o posibilă istorie a marinei comerciale române," *Revista Istorică* 1(1990), 11–12: 1021.

31 Zoe Bengescu, born Rosetti, was the Queen's lady-in-waiting in 1873 and she remained so until her death, in November 1913. Codruța Șoroagă, "Structura și organizarea Curtii Regale în perioada domniei lui Carol I: Casa Reginei Elisabeta," *Philohistoriss*, Cluj-Napoca, 7 (January 2021), 10: 65–83.

32 Maria Poenaru (née Văleanu, married to General Constantin Poenaru) was the Queen's lady-in-waiting from 1900 until the sovereign's death, in 1916.

33 Marian Moșneagu, "Cu patima științei. Comandorul Pavel Popovăț," *Ziua de Constanța*, 29.04.2022, accessed 2.12.2023, <https://ziuaconstanta.ro/in-constanta/lumea-marinarilor/lumea-marinarilor-cu-patima-stiintei-comandorul-pavel-popovat-galerie-foto-781613.html>.

34 "Vizita M.S. Reginei la Euxinograd," *Universul*, 15.05.1911, 1; "Regina României în Bulgaria," *Dimineața*, 15.05.1911, 1; "Sosirea Reginei Elisabeta la Varna," *Adevărul*, 15/05/1911, 2; "Vizita M.S. Reginei la Euxinograd," *Conservatorul Constanței*, 15.05.1911, 1; "Plecarea M.S. Reginei la Euxinograd," *Minerva*, 15.05.1911, 4; "Plecarea M.S. Reginei la Euxinograd," *Seara*, 15.05.1911, 2; "Plecarea M.S. Reginei României la Euxinograd," *Românul*, Arad, 17/30/05/1911, 1.

from the royal residence, “România” was greeted with cannon salvos fired from the small Bulgarian cruiser “Nadejda.” During the same torrential rain from which she had parted on the Constanța quay, Queen Elisabeta was greeted at the official wharf by a crowd of people, most of them curious, to the sounds of the Royal Anthem sung by the brass band of the Bulgarian Navy.³⁵

The Romanian newspapers commented on the lack of official ceremony associated with welcoming a sovereign, the explanation being the absence of Tsar Ferdinand³⁶ from this visit. The main Bucharest daily newspapers thought they knew that the sovereign had arrived in Vienna on the morning of 14 May 1911, after having travelled for three days “in the strictest incognito.” In the Austro-Hungarian capital, the Bucharest newspapers also wrote, there were many rumours according to which “the king of Bulgaria had left the country unexpectedly when the Queen of Romania announced her arrival at the palace in Euxinograd.”³⁷

The journalists were right.

Ferdinand was extremely angry with his wife, Eleonore, for inviting Queen Elisabeta to Bulgaria. A telegram sent from the road to his son Boris most assuredly expresses his deep contempt for his consort and her guest. “Two half-mad royal women,”³⁸ Tsar Ferdinand described Tsaritsa Eleonora and Queen Elisabeta to Boris. Both were guilty, in the rich imagination of the sovereign, of “plotting” a “business” against him.³⁹ Most certainly, the impetuous Ferdinand could have suspected that Eleonore and Elisabeta were going to discuss at least one topic that directly concerned the future of the Bulgarian Crown: a marriage of the young Crown Prince Boris, now 18 years old, who needed to be found a royal wife.

The rudeness with which the Tsar had treated Queen Elisabeta’s visit was also adopted by certain central and local authorities. No member of the government came to greet the sovereign of Romania and the mayor of the city of Varna, Ivan Tserov,⁴⁰ refused to participate in any official ceremony throughout Queen Elisabeta’s stay.⁴¹

On the wharf where “Romania” was docked, Queen Elisabeta was greeted by Tsaritsa Eleonore in the late afternoon of 13 May 1911, and a welcome speech was given by the prefect of the Varna region (*oblast*), Jeku Jekov. Then, together with their small entourages,

35 “Escursiunea M.S. Reginei la Varna,” *Universul*, 19.05.1911, 1.

36 *Universul*, 19.05.1911, 1.

37 *Adevărul*, 16.05.1911, 3.

38 Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 19.

39 Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*.

40 Ivan Tserov (1857–1938) was mayor of Varna between 1909 and 1912. He was a teacher and a publicist, and he had important projects aimed to modernise the city’s infrastructure. A bronze statue, alongside a memorial plaque, the work of the Bulgarian sculptor Plamen Bratanov, were inaugurated on 15 April 2019 in the central pedestrian area of the city.

41 “Regina Elisabeta la Euxinograd. De la corespondentul nostru particular,” *Adevărul*, 19.05.1911, 2.

the two sovereigns headed, in automobiles, to the royal residence in Evksinograd, where they arrived in time for a small dinner.⁴²

The Queens of Bulgaria and Romania lacked power in terms of political and administrative decision-making. Nevertheless, through their interests regarding institutionalised charity activities, the two queens shared a formidable reputation among public opinion, Queen Elisabeta being a true legend in her country. The Queens, both born and educated in the old German Empire, also shared a passion for the sea, for households in its immediate vicinity and for spending time outdoors by the sea. While Queen Elisabeta had in Constanța a pavilion erected right on the pier of the port and a Royal Palace built on the high cliff of the city, Queen Eleonore, for her part, made Evksinograd the main official royal residence outside Sofia.

In Evksinograd, with Queen Elisabeta of Romania and Tsaritsa Eleonore of Bulgaria

Tsaritsa Eleonore of Bulgaria, born in 1860, into the German Reuss-Köstritz family, married Ferdinand I on 15/28 February 1908, after the latter had lost his first wife, Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma in 1899, after the birth of his last daughter, Nadezhda. A few days after the wedding, between 6 and 8 March 1908, the Bulgarian princely couple stayed in Romania, coming from Vienna, and had meetings with King Carol and Queen Elisabeta. The Romanian sovereign wanted to tell Hristofor Hesapciev that she was immediately emotionally attached to the new princess of Sofia, who had told her “very interesting things from her experience as a volunteer, head of a medical train during the Manchurian war.” We gave our word – Elisabeta continued – to meet more often, given the fact that the two peoples have very good interests, and every opportunity must be used in order to create more friendly ties.⁴³

The Queen kept her word, and, between 24 and 29 October 1909, the new Tsaritsa was her personal guest in Peleş castle, in Sinaia. Eleonore also had the chance, immediately noticed and diplomatically capitalised on by the Bulgarian minister in Bucharest, to have made a very favourable impression on the Romanian political environment, mainly by comparison with the capricious Tsar Ferdinand. “All those who had the opportunity to see her or to talk to her were charmed by the naturalness of her relationships and by her obvious kindness and cordiality,” Hesapciev⁴⁴ recounted with delight after the Bulgarian princely couple’s visit to Romania in March 1908.

Even though the weather was fickle on the day of the trip, on 14 May 1911, the sun appeared at the seaside and the queens were able to create a program with many

42 “Sosirea Reginei Elisabeta la Varna,” *Adevărul*, 15.05.1911, 2.

43 Hesapciev, *Amintirile unui*, 184.

44 Hesapciev, *Amintirile unui*, 189.

outdoor activities. They took a tour of the palace's park by car, followed by a visit to the Tsaritsa's foundation, the marine sanatorium for children with tuberculosis, located in the immediate vicinity.⁴⁵

It is easy to assume, the only special envoy of the Romanian press wrote from the scene, for the daily newspapers «Adevărul» and «Dimineața,» what closeness of the soul must have determined, between the sovereigns of the two neighbouring countries, this matching of charitable ideas, which dominates them to the same extent. The mother of the «wounded» of the war of 1877–1878 found in Queen Eleonore the volunteer who, at the risk of her life, led the Red Cross service in the Russo-Japanese war.⁴⁶

After the extended stay in the salons of the establishment, the queens returned to the residence in Evksinograd for a gala lunch with their entourages and the local Bulgarian officials, such as Prefect Jeku Jekov, the Commander of the Bulgarian Navy, the Chief Engineer of the new port of Varna, and the Chief of the city's police inspectorate.⁴⁷

In the afternoon, the queens chose to remain in the palace's elegant reading room,⁴⁸ so as to further discuss their interests. Queen Elisabeta, at that moment 68 years old, explained to the host that she was feeling the fatigue of the trip. The conversation, held in German, most certainly included both life experiences, in terms of royal and state duties, and personal memories or immediate projects. During this time, the Queen's entourage was invited on a trip, on the royal motorboat "Chaika," in order to visit the new port of Varna, inaugurated in 1906,⁴⁹ and the navigable channel which connected the Black Sea, in front of Varna, to Lake Devnya,⁵⁰ a long construction of approximately three kilometres.⁵¹ The guests admired the scenery from the picturesque shores of the lake.⁵²

For the next day, 15 May 1911, Tsaritsa Eleonore offered Queen Elisabeta two possible ways of spending the entire day together. Either a trip, by sea, from Evksinograd to the picturesque town of Balchik (at that time, completely unknown to the Romanians), almost 20 kilometres away, or a journey, by rail, to Pleven (about 300 kilometres away),

45 "Regina Elisabeta la Euxinograd," 2; "Escursiunea M.S. Reginei la Varna," *Universul*, 19.05.1911, 1.

46 "Regina Elisabeta la Euxinograd," 2.

47 Ibidem.

48 Ibidem.

49 Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria, 1878–1918. A History* (New York: East European Monographs, Boulder, Columbia University Press, 1983), 386.

50 Lake Devnya was originally a harbour at the mouth of the Provadiya River, with a depth of about 9 metres, and it was separated from the sea by a 2-3-kilometre-long strip of sand. In 1906–1909, after the construction of the new port of Varna, the canal connecting the Black Sea to Lake Devnya, a lake supplied with fresh water by the rivers Provadiya and Devnya, was also excavated. Sergei R. Grinevetsky, Igor S. Zonn, Sergei S. Zhiltsov, Aleksey N. Kosarev, Andrey G. Kostianoy, *The Black Sea Encyclopedia* (Berlin–Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2015), 791–92.

51 "Vizita portului Varna și canalului maritim," *Adevărul*, 18.05.1911, 2.

52 Ibidem.

in order to see the field of the battle of 1877, the monuments built there, and also the house in the village of Poradim, which the villager Varban Iliev had given to King Carol, who lived and had his headquarters here during the War of Independence.⁵³

It was the first time, on May 14, 1911, that a Bulgarian sovereign invited a Romanian counterpart to visit Balchik, and Queen Elisabeta got the opportunity to reach the small town on the Black Sea coast a few years before it was discovered by Queen Maria. At that time, the locality counted 6,641 souls, of which around 3,000 were Bulgarians, just over 2,000 Turks and Tatars, around 1,000 Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Gypsies and only 17 Romanians.⁵⁴ Moreover, so far there are no direct testimonies of the visit of a Romanian official to Balchik until 1913.

Queen Elisabeta did not arrive in Balchik for a very trivial reason. On the morning of 15 May 1911, a Sunday, torrential rain engulfed the Bulgarian coast of the Northern Black Sea, and the sovereign felt a physical weakness, which she blamed on the weather.⁵⁵ Therefore, Elisabeta missed the chance to discover, the first among the Romanians, what Lucian Boia designated as the “paradise” of Greater Romania (1918–1940).⁵⁶

The lost opportunity to discover Balchik, the first among the Romanians, on 15 May 1911, was replaced by Tsaritsa Eleonore with an *ad hoc* program, in the context of the continuous spring rain and of the physical indisposition of Queen Elisabeta. Immediately after breakfast, the sovereigns entered the church of the monastery of Saint Demetrius, located in the palace’s park, in order to attend the Sunday service, after which they stayed for a short official photo shoot.⁵⁷ The other members of the Romanian delegation were invited to an official banquet organised at the municipal casino in Varna, on the seashore, hosted by prefect Jeku Jekov.⁵⁸ For the ordinary residents of Varna, Sunday was a Doors Open Day on the ship “Romania,” which was moored in the port. Most of them wanted to see and convince themselves regarding a technology which dumbfounded and delighted them: wireless telegraphy.⁵⁹ Extremely attentive and invested in their role, the Romanian telegraph operators kept, for the public, the connection between the shipboard and the port of Constanța, but also with the other ships operated by the Romanian Maritime Service.

53 “Vizita portului Varna și canalului maritim,” *Adevărul*, 18.05.1911, 2; George Capceff, *Casa-Muzeu “Carol I.” Regele României în satul Poradim*, translated from Bulgarian by St. Nicolaescu (București: Atelierele Grafice Socec, 1910); Ioana Cristache-Panait, “Monumente comemorative ale Războiului de Independență (1877–1878),” *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor* 46 (1977): 78.

54 Lucian Boia, *Balcic. Micul paradis al României Mari* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2014), 19.

55 “Regina Elisabeta la Euxinograd,” 2.

56 Doina Păuleanu, *Balcicul în pictura românească* (București: Editura Arc, 2003).

57 “Regina Elisabeta la Euxinograd,” 2.

58 *Ibidem*.

59 *Ibidem*.

On the last day of her stay in Evksinograd, both the weather and, above all, the condition of Queen Elisabeta changed noticeably, although she began to move around in a mobile chair with wheels, on the instructions of the attending medical specialist.⁶⁰ Already on the morning of Monday 16 May 1911, the two sovereigns left for Varna, in automobiles, in order to visit the city's very rich and interesting Museum of Antiquities.⁶¹ Open for several years, on 11 June 1906, on the former Girls' High School, the Museum was designed and run by the Czech brothers Hermenegild and Karel Škorpil (the latter also being the founder of the Bulgarian School of Medieval Archaeology⁶²), and it housed extremely valuable and interesting artefacts, discovered on the shore of the Black Sea and near the city. Karel Škorpil led the two sovereigns through the exhibits and provided answers to their questions.

Returning to Evksinograd, Queen Elisabeta and Tsaritsa Eleonore granted an audience to a delegation of the leaders and representatives of charity societies from Varna.

Tsaritsa Eleonore made sure to be present at all the moments of the official separation from her guest: they both arrived in the port of Varna at half past six in the evening, and the Bulgarian sovereign accompanied Queen Elisabeta from the board of the royal motorboat "Ceaika" to the exit of the ship "Romania" from the waters of the quay where it had been moored.⁶³ A large audience, along with local Bulgarian officials, witnessed the Queen's official boarding ceremony.⁶⁴ Late at midnight, the modern Romanian ship docked in front of the Royal Pavilion on the main quay of Constanța port, following what would be the last visit to Bulgaria of a Romanian sovereign.

Conclusions

Queen Elisabeta of Romania visited Evksinograd in May 1911 without bringing a political or diplomatic message to Tsaritsa Eleonore of Bulgaria. The reasons for this meeting are the personal relationships established between the two sovereigns, women with very distinct personalities from their husbands. Previous private talks between the two, in 1908 and in 1909, had fuelled a sympathy that neither of them shared with any other royal consort.

60 "Regina Elisabeta la Euxinograd," 2.

61 *Ibidem*.

62 Florin Curta, "With Brotherly Love: The Czech Beginnings of Medieval Archaeology in Bulgaria and Ukraine," in: *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-century Europe*, eds. Patrick J. Geary, Gábor Klaniczay (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2013), 379.

63 *Ibidem*.

64 "Plecarea M.S. Reginei Elisabeta din Varna," *Minerva*, 18.05.1911, 1; "Plecarea M.S. Reginei Elisabeta din Varna," *Seara*, 17.05.1911, 3; "Plecarea M.S. Reginei Elisabeta din Varna," *Minerva*, 19.05.1911, 1; "Întoarcerea M.S. Reginei," *Conservatorul Constanței*, 22.05.1911, 2.

The discussions held in the residence located on the shore of the Black Sea between Elisabeta and Eleonore were not a political dialogue and did not, in essence, aim to repair bilateral relations. Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria did not approve of the organisation and agenda of this visit, in fact he wanted to openly express this disapproval through his untimely departure from the country on the day of Queen Elisabeta's arrival in Evksinograd and through the lack of ceremonies and governmental or local decision-makers from both Sofia and Varna.

This was rather a trip full of a certain gallant value, Queen Elisabeta's, which marked, nonetheless, a stimulation of the ties between the Royal Houses, a channel of discussion that would remain essential in the troubled period between 1913 and 1916. Although traditionally considered to be historically good, the relations between the Romanian and the Bulgarian heads of state, during the periods of the constitutional monarchy, were reserved and practically nothing was narrated about the visits of the Romanians (King Carol I in 1902, Queen Elisabeta in 1911, and no other travel was recorded until December 1947).

The last visit to Bulgaria of a Romanian sovereign, in May 1911, in Evksinograd, in a residence that was situated only a few kilometres from the future border between the two countries, i.e. the one in 1913, was also a clear sign of the level of degradation of the bilateral relations, a process which began in the early years of the 20th century and which would extend for a period of over three decades, practically until the occupation of the two states by the Red Army (in 1944) and the installation of communist regimes in both Bucharest and Sofia.

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SUMMARY

Between 13 and 16 May 1911, the last visit that a sovereign of Romania made to the territory of Bulgaria took place. Queen Elisabeta of Romania was invited by Tsaritsa Eleonore of Bulgaria to Evksinograd, the royal residence near Varna, on the shore of the Black Sea. The presence of Queen Elisabeta was not approved by Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria, who demonstratively left the country. The visit to Evksinograd, in May 1911, can be considered without political and diplomatic value in the context of Romanian – Bulgarian relations. The presence of Queen Elisabeta in Evksinograd is the last journey of a Romanian sovereign to the territory of Bulgaria and, in general of a Romanian head of state to the South of the Danube for the following half century, when Prime Minister Petru Groza was invited, in 1947, by the communist leader of the new People's Republic, Georgi Dimitrov. Research on Queen Elisabeta's high-level state activities, analyses of the diplomatic and political relations in Southeast Europe and, in particular, between Romania and Bulgaria have given fleeting attention to this episode. It is rarely mentioned, and a more generous account of this stay at Evksinograd was not found.

Bałkańska Opowieść z Czasów Belle Époque nad Morzem Czarnym. Królowa Elżbieta w Ewksinogradzie: Ostatnia Podróż do Bułgarii Monarchini Rumunii (13–16 maja 1911)

Słowa kluczowe: Królowa Rumunii Elżbieta, Eleonora Bułgarska, Ewksinograd, Rumunia, Bułgaria, maj 1911

STRESZCZENIE

W dniach 13–16 maja 1911 roku miała miejsce ostatnia wizyta monarchy Rumunii na terytorium Bułgarii. Królowa Rumunii Elżbieta została zaproszona przez carycę Eleonorę Bułgarii do Ewksinogradu, królewskiej rezydencji niedaleko Warny, nad brzegiem Morza Czarnego. Obecność królowej Elżbiety nie została zaakceptowana przez cara Ferdynanda Bułgarskiego, który demonstracyjnie opuścił kraj. Wizytę w Ewksinogradzie w maju 1911 roku można uznać za pozbawioną wartości politycznej i dyplomatycznej w kontekście relacji rumuńsko-bułgarskich. Pobyt królowej Elżbiety w Ewksinogradzie stanowi ostatnią podróż monarchy rumuńskiego na terytorium Bułgarii, a w ogóle głowy państwa rumuńskiego na południe od Dunaju przez kolejne pół wieku, aż do zaproszenia premiera Petru Grozy w 1947 roku przez komunistycznego przywódcę nowej Ludowej Republiki Bułgarii, Georgi Dymitrowa. Badania

dotyczące działalności państwowej królowej Elżbiety, analizy stosunków dyplomatycznych i politycznych w Europie Południowo-Wschodniej, a w szczególności między Rumunią a Bułgarią, poświęcają tej wizycie jedynie przelotną uwagę. Rzadko się o niej wspomina, a bardziej szczegółowy opis tego pobytu w Ewksinogradzie nie został odnaleziony.

Citation

Anghel, Florin. "A Black Sea *Belle Époque* Tale. Queen Elisabeta at Evksinograd: The Last Journey to Bulgaria of a Sovereign of Romania (13–16 May 1911)." *Studia Maritima* 37 (2024): 43–60. DOI: 10.18276/sm.2024.37-03.