

The Puppet and the Puppeteer: Deconstructing the Historiography on King Carol II and Miron Cristea, the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch

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Abstract

Miron Cristea was one of the most important and influential political actors in interwar Romania. He became the first patriarch of the Orthodox Church (1925), a member of the Regency (1927-1930), and was prime minister of Romania from February 1938 until his passing on 6 March 1939. Most historiography on that era overlooks Cristea's power and influence, being focused primarily on the Iron Guard and on several political players, such as King Carol II, Armand Călinescu, Corneliu Codreanu, or Iuliu Maniu. This article traces the origins of this minimisation, unearthing evidence of a process started in the 1970s. It deconstructs the various layers of history writing about Carol II's regime, examining communist and post-communist motivations behind the focus on some players (such as the king, his mistress – Elena Lupescu, or the royal camarilla) and the deliberate forgetting of others, including Miron Cristea. Historiography on Carol II and the royal dictatorship has seen some changes since communist times, some of them analysed here, but the writing on Miron Cristea has remained, for several reasons, largely unchallenged.

Keywords: communist/post-communist historiography, Orthodox Church, interwar politics, royal regime.

Introduction¹

Holocaust historiography has focused, for a long period, on political and military actors. In the case of Romania that was necessary, at least in the 1990s, to clarify the state's involvement in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews. Many studies looked at the role of Ion Antonescu and his political-military apparatus in the implementation of various policies of marginalization, exclusion, persecution, and destruction. In parallel, an important corpus of secondary literature, some of it dating back to the communist era, has examined the role of the Iron Guard in interwar politics and the Holocaust.²

¹ Most research for this article was done while I was a fellow at the Institute of Research, University of Bucharest (ICUB). I am grateful to Professor Dana Jalobeanu, ICUB Humanities Director, the ICUB Humanities administrators, and to my fellow colleagues for their support and feedback. I am also grateful to Gerda Henkel Stiftung, whose scholarship allowed me to finish this article.

² See for example, Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970).

As a result, we have today much more clarity on the role played by these personalities and/or organizations in the destruction of the Jewish community. However, historiography needs to widen research and to expand its focus to other actors who were equally, if not even more important, in the facilitation and implementation of policies that led to the Holocaust.

In the last two decades more research has come to light showing the heavy role played by Churches in interwar politics across Europe. Emma Fattorini, Gerhard Besier, Giuliana Chamedes, Peter Kent, Robert Ventresca, Paul Hanebrink, Todd Weir, or Michael Phayer have examined Catholic and Protestant actions aiming to reverse secularism and advocating return to a type of totalitarian society where Churches regained lost positions of power and strength.³ They argued that in countries such as Hungary, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Austria, or Poland, Christian denominations used anti-modernism, anti-communism, and antisemitism as tools of political mobilization. In some cases, Churches became directly involved in creating antisemitic legislation.⁴ Seen in light of this new research on interwar European extremism, Romania was no exception. Moreover, in comparison to other countries where lower ranked clergy held political office (the leader of the Centre Party in Germany, for example, was, from 1928 to 1933, Catholic prelate Ludwig Kaas, a friend of Eugenio Pacelli, Papal Nuncio/Vatican Secretary of State/future Pope Pius XII),⁵ in Romania the head of the main Christian denomination acted as prime minister from February 1939 to his passing in March 1939.

Miron Cristea was an essential player in Transylvania's decision to unite with Romania after the First World War, became the first Orthodox

³ Emma Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini, and the Vatican. Pope Pius XI and the Speech that Was Never Made* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Gerdard Besier with the collaboration of Francesca Piombo, *The Holy See and Hitler's Germany*, trans. W.R. Ward (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Giuliana Chamedes, "The Vatican, Nazi-Fascism, and the Making of Transnational Anti-communism in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 2016), pp. 261-290; Peter Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII. The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943-1950* (Montreal, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Robert Ventresca, *Soldier of Christ: The Life of Pope Pius XII* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary. Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Michael Phayer, "'Helping the Jews is not an easy thing to do.' Vatican Holocaust Policy: Continuity or Change?" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol 21, No 3 (Winter 2007), 426-427.

⁴ Moshe Hertzl, *Christianity and the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), 85-140. Hertzl shows the decisive role played by both Catholic and Protestant Churches in the creation and wording of anti-Jewish laws of 1938-1939 and 1941.

⁵ Besier, *The Holy See and Hitler's Germany*, 70.



primate of Greater Romania (1919-1925), the first patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (1925-1939), and a member of the Regency (1927-1930). In February 1938, when King Carol II instituted a personal regime, Miron Cristea became prime minister of Romania. Current historiography, both the general one analyzing Carol II and the events leading to the Holocaust, and the more specialized one looking particularly at Miron Cristea, is largely uninterested or dismiss his political role. Researchers such as Mirel Bănică,⁶ Rebecca Haynes,⁷ Leon Volovici,⁸ Bela Vago,⁹ Roland Clark,¹⁰ Lucian Leuştean,¹¹ Armin Heinen,¹² William Oldson,¹³ and Zigu Ornea¹⁴ have highlighted the important role played by the Romanian Orthodox Church in the antisemitism of interwar Greater Romania. However, most often the focus was on how the Church legitimated (or not) the activity and ideology of the Iron Guard and other extreme right-wing organisations. Historians, such as Carol Iancu,¹⁵ Radu Ioanid,¹⁶ Nicola Nagy-Talavera,¹⁷ Paul Shapiro,¹⁸

⁶ Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română: stat și societate în anii '30* (Iași, Romania: Polirom, 2007).

⁷ Rebecca Haynes, "The Romanian Legionary Movement, Popular Orthodoxy and the Cult of Death," in Mioara Anton, Florin Anghel, Cosmin Popa (eds.) *Hegemoniile trecutului. Evoluții românești și europene. Profesorului Ioan Chiper la 70 de ani* (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2006), 32-55.

⁸ Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă și „problema evreiască”: eseu despre formele antisemitismului intelectual în România anilor '30* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995).

⁹ Bela Vago, *In the Shadow of Swastika: The Rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin, 1936–1939* (Farnborough, UK: Saxon House, 1975).

¹⁰ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

¹¹ Lucian Leuştean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹² Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail - o contribuție la problema fascismului internațional* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 314-319.

¹³ William Oldson, "Alibi for Prejudice: Eastern Orthodoxy, the Holocaust, and Romanian Nationalism," *East European Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3 (Fall 2002), 301-311.

¹⁴ Zigu Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right: The Nineteen Thirties* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1999).

¹⁵ Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România, 1866-1919. De la excludere la emancipare* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), 295-303.

¹⁶ Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel. Fascist Ideology in Romania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1990).

¹⁷ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970), 328-329.

¹⁸ Paul A. Shapiro, "Prelude to Dictatorship in Romania: The National Christian Party in Power, December 1937 - February 1938," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* (Pittsburgh), vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1974), 45-88.

Jean Ancel,¹⁹ Constantin Iordachi,²⁰ and Ilarion Țiu,²¹ who analysed the Goga-Cuza government and Carol II's authoritarian regime, have mentioned, often passingly, the role of Miron Cristea. However, they did not explore the power and influence of the Orthodox patriarch in the life of the Romanian interwar political system. Most recently Oliver Jens Schmitt argued in one of his books that, as prime minister, "Cristea was the man of straws the king and the minister of the interior had looked for."²² This article argues that such views stem from a pattern of historiography which minimized Cristea's contribution to interwar politics.

Since the beginning of my MA and later PhD studies, I have been puzzled by the lack of interest in the actions of Patriarch Miron Cristea. One of my first articles on this topic, published in *Yad Vashem Studies* in 2012, argued that, during his premiership, Cristea was far from being a man of straws/puppet; on the contrary, he initiated and defended in public speeches various policies against Jews, such as expulsion from the country, their marginalization in culture, economy and finance, incipient programs of Romanianization, and their stripping of Romanian citizenship.²³ Some of those findings were explored further in *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (2017), a book which resulted from my doctoral research.²⁴ In a 2019 article, published in the *Stefan Odobleja New Europe College Yearbook*, I explored the increase of the patriarch's political-religious influence during 1930s via relations with the Anglican Church. Those relations were used by both Miron Cristea and the Romanian state. For the Romanian state, they were an avenue to improve relations with the United Kingdom in a context of German advances towards Eastern Europe. For Cristea, they were a platform to showcase his political ability. It is not by chance that he became more vocal in Romanian politics after the 1935 Anglican Romanian

¹⁹ Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască, 1933-1944* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2001), vol. 1, part 1, 30-33.

²⁰ Constantin Iordachi, "Aristocracy, Fascism, and the Social Origins of Mass Politics in Romania," in Karina Urbach, ed., *European Aristocracies and the Radical Right 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 201-232.

²¹ Ilarion Țiu, *Miscarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu. Vol 1 Dictatura Regală (februarie 1938-septembrie 1940)* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2007).

²² Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea „Căpitanului”* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), 288.

²³ Ion Popa, "Miron Cristea, The Romanian Orthodox Patriarch: His Political and Religious Influence in Deciding the Fate of the Romanian Jews (February 1938-March 1939)," *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2012), 11-34.

²⁴ Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington IN.: Indiana University Press), 23-24 and 31-33.



Orthodox Conference in Bucharest and the June 1936 visit to London, where he was received by King Edward VIII, the Archbishop of Canterbury and by other British ecclesiastical, political, and intellectual elites.²⁵

As Roland Clark shows, Patriarch Cristea used political links already during 1920s to further his ecclesiastical goals. He closed ties with the Liberal Party, which led to his nomination as Regent in 1927.²⁶ I argue that his role as Regent (1927-1930) was a turning point, as he realized that being at the centre of political power could secure more easily the implementation of his political-religious agenda. However, his involvement in politics grew to another level only after 1934, when he became close to Stelian Popescu, media mogul, owner of one of the most circulated Romanian daily newspapers *Universul*.²⁷ Together they created the Antirevisionist League, with Popescu as president and the patriarch as honorary president. The League became soon the catalyst for a political program that openly advocated the demise of democracy and a new type of authoritarian society, centered around the king and reliant on the Orthodox Church. By 1937, the organization numbered thousands of members across Romania.²⁸ Although Cristea's relations with many members of the Holy Synod were not always harmonious, as their political and religious plans often differed, including on how best to deal with the Iron Guard, almost all Orthodox metropolitans and many bishops were members of the Antirevisionist League. Moreover, as Liviu Lazăr shows, the League's committee comprised of Miron Cristea, Nicolae Bălan, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Transylvania, Nectarie, the Metropolitan of Bukovina, Pimen, the Metropolitan of Moldova, Gurie, the Metropolitan of Bessarabia, Professors Ion Lupaș, Silviu Dragomir, G. Marinescu, and Gheorghe Țițeica, as well as the president of ASTRA, Iuliu Moldovan.²⁹

²⁵ Ion Popa, "The British Connection. Jews and Judaism in the Anglican-Romanian Orthodox Interfaith Relations," *New Europe College Ștefan Odobleja Yearbook 2018-2019*, pp. 225-250.

²⁶ See Roland Clark, *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 51-74.

²⁷ About the friendship with Popescu see, for example, "Cuvântarea I.P.S. Patriarh Miron Cristea la sfințirea bisericii din comuna 'Stelian Popescu' Prahova, 6 Iunie 1937," *Apostolul* 14, no. 12 (15 June 1937), in The Romanian National Archives (ANIC), Miron Cristea 1662/10, 54-55.

²⁸ For details on the Antirevisionist League see ANIC, Liga Antirevizionistă Română 1020/2186, pp. 11-20. Unlike many political parties, which were narrow in their definition, beliefs, and practice, the Antirevisionist League was wide-ranging. Amongst its members were influent and diverse politicians (such as Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, or Octavian Goga), clerics (most Orthodox and a significant number of Greek Catholic metropolitans), intellectuals, and media personalities.

²⁹ See also Liviu Lazăr, *Mișcarea antirevizionistă din Transilvania în perioada interbelică* (București: Călăuza, 2003), 251-290.

After the publication of the 2019 article in *Stefan Odobleja New Europe College Yearbook*, I wanted to understand how and why Cristea's political influence was minimized for so long. The current piece is a result of that research. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of historiography on Miron Cristea, but rather to show a process of marginalization that started during 1970s and continued largely unaffected after the fall of communism. Historical writing on Cristea has been, for a long time, almost exclusively linked to writing about King Carol II. Hence, to understand why the political impact of the Orthodox patriarch has been overlooked, we must understand the ways in which historians wrote about the former king. Therefore, the first two sections of this article examine how the historiography on Carol II and his regime was built in communist and post-communist Romania. Section three looks at how these writings, including those dedicated exclusively to the life and activity of the Orthodox patriarch, reflected his contribution to the events leading to February 1938 and the year he was prime minister of Romania.

The selection of books included here was driven by their use and influence in contemporary Romanian historical writing. All of them, except for the book by Oliver Jens Schmitt, are works exclusively dedicated to either Carol II or Miron Cristea. They come up as main works when searching for these names in Romanian libraries' catalogues. The selection is not comprehensive. It does not include interwar literature on Miron Cristea, such as those by Vasile Netea,³⁰ Ion Rusu Abrudean,³¹ or Romulus Căndea,³² most of them focussed on and glorifying his ecclesiastical activity. Such works are not providing insight into the process of deliberate forgetting of his political influence, which started during communism and continued after 1989. The same goes for articles published after 1989 and looking exclusively at Miron Cristea's ecclesiastical activity.³³ The inclusion of Schmitt's book, which gives the title of this piece, was driven by the argument that even well-written and respected recent historiography takes over sometimes, especially when it comes to Cristea, old myths which downplayed his political role.

³⁰ Vasile Netea, *Înalt Prea Sfinția Sa Patriarhul României Dr. Miron Cristea. La împlinirea vârstei de 70 de ani (1868-1938)* (Târgu Mureș: [n.a.], 1938).

³¹ Ion Rusu Abrudeanu, *Înalt Prea Sfinția Sa Patriarhul României Dr. Miron Cristea. Omul și faptele* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1929).

³² Romulus Căndea, "Patriarhul Miron Cristea," *Candela*, XXXVI, no. 3-7 (1925), p. 73-95.

³³ See for example, Gheorghe Vasilescu, "Patriarhul Miron Cristea - Un luptător pentru unitatea neamului," *Glasul Bisericii, revista oficiala a Sfintei Mitropolii a Munteniei și Dobrogei*, LIV, no. 5-8 (1998), pp. 127-130; See also a collection of articles published in Adrian Ardeț, Ioan Bolovan, eds., *Biserica și Națiune la Români din Banat și Transilvania. Episcopul Elie Miron Cristea și Marea Unire* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2018).



The First Layer of Historiography: Carol II as the Main Responsible for the Events Leading to February 1938

Historiography on King Carol II, and, through extension on Patriarch Cristea, has several layers of narratives promoted over time for various political reasons. The first academic writing focusing on the former king was an article published in 1967 by Alexandru Savu.³⁴ He quotes two other works, by Aurel Vijeli (1949)³⁵ and V. Anescu (1962),³⁶ which are not dealing directly with Carol, but rather with some of his economic policies. Savu's article is full of communist themes and imagery. The king is presented as the embodiment of the old bourgeoisie: corrupt, the head of a political system that had no regard for the masses, a dictator who dismantled with viciousness the Romanian political system, the head of a camarilla that was leading Romania in a conspiratorial way, behind the curtains. The first sentence is emblematic for the tone of the entire piece: "After Carol II's ascension to the throne of Romania on 8 June 1930, the reactionary aspect of the bourgeois-landlord state deepened. Carol promoted an internal and external policy that served the interests of the big landlords and bourgeoisie of the country, seeking at the same time to consolidate and increase the positions of the monarchy." Carol is described as someone who was smart "in plundering the public funds and enriching himself," as without scruple, as the one who "played cards with the country's riches and exploited with savagery the workers and the peasants from the factories and domains of the Crown." The author claims that the Crown "continued to be the largest landowner in the country [...] and remained the main factor in maintaining the semi-feudal relations of production." He argues that the king used his prerogatives to better the luxurious life of the royal family.

The focus is on the economic dimensions of Carol II's alleged nefarious activities, in order to emphasize even more the Marxist ideology of class struggle, where a capitalist secretive group, the camarilla, used the royal palace to advance its goals. The dictatorship, as the regime installed on 10 February 1938 is described, was the result of the king's and this group's machinations. In this first stage of the narrative, which will change significantly after 1989, the allegation was that Carol and the capitalist interests, "which were

³⁴ Alexandru Gheorghe Savu, "Carol al II-lea și partidele burghezo-moșierești (1930-1937)," in *Studii. Revista de Istorie*, tomul 20, no. 2 (1967), 325-340.

³⁵ Aurel Vijeli, "Cercetări asupra capitalului financiar în țara noastră," București, 1949, 40-70 (approx.). No other identification details offered.

³⁶ V. Anescu, "Rolul monarhiei în jefuirea și exploatarea poporului român, în aservirea economică a țării față de puterile imperialiste" in *Arhivele Institutului de istorie a partidului de pe lângă C.C. al P.M.R.*, 1962, nr. 6. (pages not clear).

dominated by the Anglo-French and American imperialists,” led the king, from the beginning of his reign, to seek “the installation of an overt (*fățișă*) dictatorship.”³⁷ Savu, and others after him, claims that Carol always wanted to impose dictatorship and that February 1938 was only a culmination of previous failed attempts. Although using many interesting primary sources and memoirs/diaries of interwar politicians, Alexandru Savu’s analysis is simplistic, completely eluding other factors (internal or external) that might have led to the king’s personal regime.

The 1967 article, and the narrative built around it, lacks several themes that would be added later. For example, Elena Lupescu, Carol’s mistress for whom he renounced the throne in 1925 and who was of Jewish origin, is mentioned only twice, and in those occasions, she is presented as one of the members of the royal camarilla. The reasons for this avoidance of her alleged influence in the life of the country, aspect that appears in interwar documents, is not entirely clear. However, it shows that, in this first phase, the communist narrative was deliberately focused on Carol as the main culprit, with almost complete lack of interest in Elena Lupescu. In fact, in comparison to post-1989 historiography, Savu is paying no attention to Carol’s private life. Although presenting him, as later historians would do, as allegedly morally degenerate, a man driven by vices, Savu is not interested in dwelling on these scandalous aspects. Last, but not least, he is not mentioning at all Miron Cristea, the Romanian Orthodox patriarch. Alexandru Savu developed his ideas even more in his 1970 book about the royal dictatorship (see the next sections).³⁸

In an article published in 1978, Ioan Scurtu borrowed many ideas from Savu.³⁹ As the latter, Scurtu builds his argument around the idea that Carol II had, even before his return to Romania in 1930, the intention to impose a personal dictatorship, and that after several failed attempts (he especially examines events in 1930, 1932, and 1934), the king finally succeeded in 1938.⁴⁰ He also emphasizes the role of the camarilla in these plans; he does it to such an extent that the king already becomes a rather secondary player. In one quotation, for example, he claims that the camarilla “was seeking to lead from the shadows the whole economic and socio-political life of Romania, to finish once and for all (*lichideze*) the constitutional-parliamentary regime

³⁷ Savu, “Carol al II-lea și partidele burghezo-moșierești,” 325, 326, 328.

³⁸ Alexandru Gh. Savu, *Dictatura regală (1938-1940)* (București: Editura Politică, 1970).

³⁹ Ioan Scurtu, “Acțiuni de opoziție ale unor partide și grupări politice burgheze față de tendințele dictatoriale ale regelui Carol al II-lea (Iunie 1930-Februarie 1938),” in *Revista de Istorie*, tom. 31, no. 3 (1978), 387-414.

⁴⁰ See for example the way in which Savu supports these ideas in Savu, *Dictatura regală*, 25.



and to install Carol II's dictatorship.⁴¹ Apart from this, there are some other significant differences with Savu's article. For example, Scurtu starts to build the second stage of the narrative, where the role of Elena Lupescu is much more highlighted. Scurtu is bolder in accusing the king's mistress; even from the first mention, the author suggests that the camarilla took shape and started to function only when Elena Lupescu returned to Romania on 12 August 1930. While in Savu's article she was mentioned somewhere in the middle of a group of names, here she is at the top of the list, center stage.⁴²

These tendencies to split responsibility, or even to entirely exonerate Carol II for decisions taken during his regime, will become even more obvious in post-communist historiographical writing. However, for this section it is worth mentioning the way in which Paul Quinlan deals with the topic in *The Playboy King: Carol II of Romania*. Quinlan's 1995 book is focused more than others, as the title itself suggests, on the scandalous aspects of the king's private life. He is discussing at large the role of the royal camarilla, or that of Elena Lupescu, who is presented in a blatantly misogynistic way. Nonetheless, Carol himself is described as such a morally corrupt individual, that ultimately, he alone should be blamed for his actions. In one of the first sentences of the book, the author gives vent to a simplistic viewpoint when he writes:

“It seems that he (i.e. Carol) is the only king in history to have renounced his throne twice for the women he loved! For years, his scandalous relationship with Elena Lupescu was the delight of the millions of tabloid readers across the Western world, fueling more and more the frustration and anger of millions of Romanians living in poverty and servitude, until Carol and his entourage were forced to flee in order to escape alive.”⁴³

Quinlan takes over here communist historiography that saw the king and the peasants or the workers as living in an irreconcilable class fight, where the latter drove the former victoriously away through the emergence of communism. His view, especially of Elena Lupescu and the camarilla, is more complex and I will return to this aspect later.

Oliver Jens Schmitt in his 2016 book about Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Iron Guard, also focusses his attention on Carol II as the one at fault for the events leading to February 1938. Although his description of the Captain and of the Legion is often excellent, bringing forward many interesting and

⁴¹ Scurtu, “Acțiuni de opoziție,” 391.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁴³ Paul D. Quinlan, *Regele Playboy. Carol al II-lea al României* (București: Humanitas, 2008), 5.

unknown details, there are parts where he takes over communist historiography without critique and without bringing forward new sources. For example, he claims that the king used the Iron Guard in his favor and that in February 1937 he proposed Codreanu to form the cabinet under several conditions that the head of the Legion did not accept.⁴⁴ The idea of such a meeting appears in Savu and Scurtu too, but they are building the entire argument on only one source: the unpublished (at the time) memoir of Zaharia Boilă, who was during the interwar period a member of the National Peasants Party, later a dissident. It is surprising that Schmitt takes over this argument without questioning the fact that 1) it was based on only one source and 2) the source/memoir was written during the communist period under unclear circumstances. Schmitt is not backing explicitly the idea that Carol wanted from the beginning of his reign to establish a dictatorship, but he strongly supports the argument that he “sought to instrumentalize the Legion in order to install a dictatorship.” His focus on the Legion leads him to miss some other important players, such as Miron Cristea, Stelian Popescu, or the Antirevisionist League. Cristea is mentioned only three times, rather conjecturally (more details later). There is no insight into his political role before or after February 1938. Stelian Popescu, the media mogul, owner of widely circulated daily newspaper *Universul*, head of the Antirevisionist League and one of the most influential personalities of the interwar period is mentioned only once, as a “journalist.”⁴⁵ The Antirevisionist League is not mentioned at all in the book.

A Shift in Emphasis:

The Focus on the Royal Camarilla and Elena Lupescu

Already in the first articles and books published in the 1960s and 1970s, the narrative about the responsibility for events leading to February 1938 expanded to include the group around Carol II. Although the word camarilla was used during the interwar period, the communist historiography transformed it into an almost mythical group, bent on destroying Romania. While this mythology was utilized before 1989 to present Carol and the camarilla as the embodiment of everything that was bad with capitalism, post-communist historiography generally failed to deconstruct this narrative. There are two things that need to be mentioned here. First, in their analysis, most historians considered in this article forget to explain that any modern royal house operates, largely,

⁴⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”* (București: Humanitas, 2016; first edition, in German was published in 2016), 265.

⁴⁵ Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu*, 262, 284.



using the same methods. Kings, queens, princes are brokers of power attracting economic, political, social players seeking to advance their interests. Second, most of the time the sources, which in most cases are diaries and memoirs of those involved in the events, are not critically assessed. As in various moments these people felt left out of the king's inner circle, it was natural that, most often out of envy, they wrote badly about this group and created an entire aura of conspiracy around it.

Savu, in his 1970 book, and Scurtu in the 1978 article (and in a university course published in 1980), already emphasized the role of the camarilla in the events leading to February 1938.⁴⁶ As noted above, this went hand in hand with increasing focus on Elena Lupescu. However, before 1989 her portrayal was rather balanced. For example, in 1970, Savu describes Lupescu as “the one that would influence so much in the next period his (i.e. the king's) life and actions [...] beautiful, ambitious, perverse, and a smart intriguer [...] she became the Messalina and Rasputin of Carol II, accompanying him as a shadow until the end of his life.”⁴⁷ Her Jewishness is completely concealed, although the fact that the name of her father was Wolf is mentioned.

In 2004 Ioan Scurtu published a book on Carol II, which largely maintains the ideas promoted during communism. For example, he uses again the argument of the king's continuous plan to establish a dictatorship, seeing February 1938 as the culmination of previous failed attempts. In a quest to adapt to new post-communist ideas, he is not anymore keen on naming that regime a dictatorship, although in essence the way he describes it is unchanged. This is most clearly visible when he declares: “in the night of 10/11 February a coup d'état took place, which in essence meant the change from a constitutional-parliamentary regime, based on political parties, to a regime of monarchic authority, in which the governing (*conducerea*) of the country was taken over by the King.”⁴⁸ Scurtu continues his communist approach blaming not only Carol, but the camarilla, and presenting political parties as victims. An entire chapter is dedicated to “The increasing role of the royal camarilla in political life,” with a first subtitle: “The occult forces and the changing of governments.”⁴⁹ The way in which he portrays Elena Lupescu, although not as scandalous as Quinlan, or Marcou (see below), is giving vent to the idea that

⁴⁶ Ioan Scurtu, Iulian Cârțână, *Curs de istoria contemporană a României. Dictatura Regală (1938-1940)* (București: Universitatea din București, 1980).

⁴⁷ Savu, *Dictatura regală*, 34.

⁴⁸ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*, vol. 3, *Carol al II-lea* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 230-231.

⁴⁹ Scurtu, *Carol al II-lea*, 145.

Carol was dependent on or led by Lupescu. For example, referring to events before Carol's return to Romania in 1930, but casting this characterization on the entire period of his reign, he says that Elena was the head of the group working in favor of the king, controlling all of Carol II's correspondence, and being involved in all his political meetings.⁵⁰

While communist historiography presented Carol II as corrupt, rapacious, evil, having no regard for the masses, destroying Romanian economy and political parties, it generally kept away from the scandalous aspects of his private life; these aspects came into focus after 1989. Paul Quinlan's *The Playboy King*, translated in Romanian in 2008, but published in English in 1995, was heavily focused on these details. He sometimes loses balance presenting the king in the worst light possible, often without quoting the sources in support of his statements. For example, in one instance the author claims that "one historian described him as 'the most corrupt royal of 20th century Europe,'"⁵¹ but there is no indication as to what historian said that. And this is only one example of poor referencing, with other cases of missing or incomplete sources throughout the book.⁵² However, the most problematic aspect of Paul Quinlan's approach is his description of Elena Lupescu. When describing her physique, Quinlan says: "she had a curvy body, with pleasant forms, and when she was walking, she was swinging her hips provocatively, with an exaggerated movement." He describes her as a prostitute, although does not bring any evidence to support such claim, and then adds: "However, she was not a normal prostitute."⁵³ Quinlan takes interwar gossip about Elena Lupescu, which was fueled by misogynism and antisemitism, and presents it as the valid historical truth.

While Paul Quinlan is rather interested in the scandalous aspects of Carol II's private life, Lilly Marcou, a historian of Romanian origin who worked in France, wants to offer a more substantial analysis of his reign. In a quest to balance the communist narrative, she presents the king in a more positive light, and the title of her work is suggestive of this endeavor: *Carol II of Romania. The Betrayed King*.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, in order to shift the balance of responsibility

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹ Quinlan, *Regele Playboy*, 5.

⁵² See for example page 102, where Quinlan quotes a letter of Queen Mary of Romania to King George V of Great Britain about Carol's affair with Elena Lupescu. The footnote offers the date of the letter, 5 January 1926, then it says "Hoover" (probably a collection), but nothing else about folder, page, etc.

⁵³ Quinlan, *Regele Playboy*, 100.

⁵⁴ Lilly Marcou, *Carol al II-lea al României. Regele trădat* (București: Corint Books, 2015). The first edition, in French (*Le Roi Trahi. Carol II de Roumanie*) was published in 2002 by Edition Pygmalion, Paris.



away from Carol II, she ends up demonizing Elena Lupescu. As Quinlan before, in describing Lupescu, Marcou either lets her fantasy run wild, or she reproduces interwar gossip without any critique: “She had red titian hair, green eyes full of life and skin as white as milk, which concealed her big mouth with meaty lips, horse teeth and elongated nose; her undulated walk and lofty posture were seducing men, and her curvy, not to say vulgar, womanliness was provocative.” Examining their relationship, the author finds hidden explanations behind Carol’s numerous (although there is no quantitative explanation of such claim) mentions of Lupescu in his diary. She concludes that such entries were a sign that their relationship was pathological, or that the king was mysteriously dependent on her. Carol is described as “the man in the hollow of a hysterical woman [...] the man foolishly in love with a more than common person, evidently haunted by caprices.” Although trying sometimes to balance the portrayal of Lupescu, towards the end of the book Marcou blames Carol’s political shortcomings entirely on his mistress: “This presence in the king’s life (i.e. Elena Lupescu) – invisible at the beginning, but becoming more and more burdensome – and the fact that their relationship was exacerbating the passions, led to Carol loosing many of the good intentions he had at the beginning of his reign.”⁵⁵

Despite these rather problematic aspects, Lilly Marcou is one of the first historians to change the narrative and highlight positive aspects about Carol II. Another major achievement is the fact that, more than before, political parties are not presented as victims anymore. The author rightfully argues that they were to a large extent responsible for the events leading to February 1938, through their quarrels and continuous inability to find common ground, and that most politicians expected, advocated, and saluted the installation of the royal regime. She also questions the definition of the regime as a dictatorship. Others who wrote on Miron Cristea did that before, in a quest to excuse the patriarch’s participation as prime minister,⁵⁶ but she is one of the first more prominent historians to do so. She argues that Carol’s reign after February 1938 “had nothing to do with the dictatorships flourishing in Europe at the time. Some wanted to see it as a copy of totalitarian regimes in Germany and Italy; the comparison was not exact.” She considers that Carol was rather a “democratic autocrat,” promoting personal style populism,

⁵⁵ Marcou, *Carol al II-lea al României*, 168, 219, 263.

⁵⁶ Ilie Șandru, Valentin Borda, *Un nume pentru istorie - Patriarhul Miron Cristea* (Târgu-Mureș: Petru Maior, 1998), 180. The authors argue that Carol’s post 10 February regime was not a dictatorship, “as it was defined by the historians of the communist regime, but ‘a monarchic authoritarian regime’ as it was described by the well-known politician Armand Călinescu.”

attached to Western values, “impermeable to extremist nationalism, ambient xenophobia and intolerance.”⁵⁷

The Role of Miron Cristea: from Deliberate Forgetting to Careless Historical Writing

In the article published in 1967, Alexandru Savu completely ignores Miron Cristea. However, in his 1970 book, looking at events from 1938 to 1940, he brings up the patriarch several times. While some of these mentions are only tangential, in a few cases he refers to him in a more meaningful way. Moreover, he explains some of the reasons that might have led Carol II to choose Cristea as premier. The first reason mentioned has been at the basis of “Miron Cristea, the puppet” historiography until today. Savu argues that “the nomination of the patriarch in this high political office was not accidental; it expressed, first, the king’s determination to lead unhindered and personally the activity of the cabinet.”⁵⁸ He, and others after him, failed to analyze whether Cristea was as decorative as they claimed. Later in the book, the author quotes the famous diatribe of the patriarch against democracy, uttered on 27 February 1938 during a speech celebrating the new constitution, where he compared parliamentary democracy based on political parties with a hydra with 29 heads.⁵⁹ This episode alone, showing Cristea’s outspoken support for political authoritarianism, should have been an indication that the patriarch was not a puppet after all. Savu touches upon other reasons that might have led Carol II to nominate Cristea, amongst them his links to extremist movements, through his nomination the king wanting to quash the dissenting voices of Iron Guard sympathizers, or the king’s desire to co-opt the Church and the clergy to his personal regime. The author also emphasizes that the patriarch’s nomination avoided quarrels between personalities of different political parties, if one of them had been chosen instead.

In Ioan Scurtu’s 1978 article, Miron Cristea is not mentioned at all. In his 1980 history course for the University of Bucharest his name appears only once, tangentially, as the person called to be prime minister in February 1938.⁶⁰ There is no explanation as to why Carol II chose him, or on his activity as premier. The fact that in late 1970s Miron Cristea was completely forgotten is not accidental. 1978, when Scurtu published his first article on Carol II, was

⁵⁷ Marcou, *Carol al II-lea al României*, 312.

⁵⁸ Savu, *Dictatura regală*, 151-152.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁰ Scurtu, Cârțână, *Curs de istoria contemporană a României*, 10.



also the year when Aurel Karetski and Maria Covaci published the work on the Iași pogrom, minimizing the number of victims and denying any Romanian involvement in the Holocaust.⁶¹ In an era when the Church was heavily used to legitimize this new type of national communism, investigation into Miron Cristea's role was deliberately avoided. Moreover, towards the end of the 1980s, the first book directly focused on the former patriarch's life and activity, written by a Church personality with the backing of the regime, minimized his role as prime minister, focusing instead on his ecclesiastical activity.⁶² The national communism of the late Ceausescu era revised considerably interwar history, culminating in rehabilitation of controversial, anti-Semitic personalities, Antonie Plămădeală's book being a clear example of that process.

As with the historiography regarding Carol II, post-1989 historical writing about the former Orthodox patriarch followed for a long time the pattern conceived during communism. General writing about Carol's regime portrayed Cristea as an insignificant figure; more particular writing examining the patriarch's life, focused on his ecclesiastical activity and minimized his role as prime minister. When discussing the Regency (1927-1930), Paul Quinlan notes briefly that Miron Cristea "was adding prestige to the Regency," but was ultimately inefficient and interested only in making money.⁶³ In his analysis of what he calls "the royal dictatorship," there is no mention of the leader of the Orthodox Church, not even as a puppet. Instead, following the communist pattern, he examines in detail the personality and activity of Armand Călinescu, the minister of the interior, as if from February 1938 he was the head of the government, not the patriarch.⁶⁴ The same pattern, with focus on Călinescu and complete ignorance of Cristea appears in Oliver Jens Schmitt. He mentions the patriarch in only three instances. The first one is just noting that he was one of the members of the Regency. The second is about the nomination as prime minister, Schmitt considering, as noted above, that "Cristea was the man of straws the king and the minister of the interior had looked for." There is no serious analysis of his political activity before or after his nomination, not even his relationship with the Legion. The last mention is again very brief, the author arguing that, when the death penalty law was adopted in May 1938,

⁶¹ Aurel Karețki and Maria Covaci, *Zile însingerate la Iași: 28–30 iunie 1941 [Bloody Days in Iași: 28-30 June 1941]* (București: Editura Politică, 1978).

⁶² Antonie Plămădeală, *Contribuții istorice privind perioada 1918-1939. Elie Miron Cristea: documente, însemnări și corespondențe* (Sibiu: Tipografia Eparhială, 1987).

⁶³ Quinlan, *Regele Playboy*, 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 257-263.

the patriarch/prime minister chose masterfully to be away from the country.⁶⁵ As Quinlan, Lilly Marcou completely fails to mention that Miron Cristea was prime minister from 11 February 1938 to 6 March 1939. Instead, she focuses on Armand Călinescu, as the true leader of the cabinet. This is visible in other writings that were not included in this analysis. Ilarion Țiu, for example, in his book on the fate of the Iron Guard after the murder of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in November 1938, mentions the patriarch only twice, once as the person called to head the government in February 1938, and again to announce his death and the nomination of Călinescu as prime minister. There is no examination of Cristea's role, activity, or relation with the Legion.⁶⁶

The myth of "Călinescu the strong man/Cristea the puppet," probably originated in Ioan Scurtu's writings. In his 2004 book, Scurtu declared that "The main collaborator of Carol II was Armand Călinescu, a true 'wire puller' (*eminență cenușie*) of the regime and the most active and energetic member of the cabinet. Patriarch Miron Cristea, old and sick, was rather decorative. After Miron Cristea's death, Armand Călinescu was nominated to lead the cabinet on 6 March 1939."⁶⁷ Scurtu fails to mention that until January 1939 the patriarch's health did not impede in his active participation in most matters of governance. As I showed in my article for *Yad Vashem Studies*, Cristea gave at the end of 1938-beginning of 1939, as head of the cabinet, several virulently antisemitic speeches, including some proposing incipient Romanianization policies.⁶⁸ Although in the rest of the book Scurtu is looking at Miron Cristea more than any historian mentioned in this article, including a quotation of the famous speech where he compared party politics with a hydra with 29 heads, the general emphasis is on the conclusion noted above.⁶⁹ He downplays the patriarch's role and is completely uninterested in his political and ecclesiastical activity. By saying that Cristea was only decorative, Scurtu and other historians who took over this narrative, mask the lack of proper research into the actions of the leader of the Romanian Orthodox Church before and after he was nominated as prime minister.

The situation is even more interesting in books entirely dedicated to Miron Cristea. Published in 1998 under the blessing of the Harghita and Covasna Orthodox Archbishopric *Un nume pentru istorie - Patriarhul Miron Cristea* (A Name for Posterity – Patriarch Miron Cristea), by Ilie Șandru and Valentin

⁶⁵ Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu*, 98, 288, 302.

⁶⁶ Țiu, *Mișcarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu*, vol. 1, 29 and 141.

⁶⁷ Scurtu, *Carol al II-lea*, 262.

⁶⁸ Popa, "Miron Cristea, The Romanian Orthodox Patriarch," 11-34.

⁶⁹ Scurtu, *Carol al II-lea*, 239.



Borda, is, as the title suggests, a biased account of his life. The book is often propagandistic and deals mostly with events prior to 1927. It presents Carol II as rather a victim of Elena Lupescu and of the camarilla. The authors express often anti-Semitic views, although they try, sometimes childishly, to avoid direct mention of Jews. For example, they avoid clarifying that Lupescu was Jewish, but in almost all cases they spell her name “Elena Lupescu (Wolf),” or “Elena Wolf (Lupescu)” making sure that her father’s former Jewish name is noted. As Scurtu and others, they fail to examine Miron Cristea’s activity from June 1930 to February 1938. While the authors downplay the patriarch’s activity as prime minister, claiming that he had a rather neutral role, sometimes they are bolder in defending some of his policies. For example, Cristea’s program against foreigners (most people during the interwar equated foreigners with Jews) is defended in the book on the ground that the fight between political parties created “disorder in all the spheres of society, an anti-Romanian game of the aliens, and an inflation of strange foreigners (*venetici străini*), who, in the name of European liberalism, immediately after the first war, hurried to enter Romania and to assume the role of ticks (*căpușe*), rubbing elbows with the older non-Romanians, first and foremost the Greeks and the Jews.”⁷⁰ The authors also provide a brief analysis of the reasons why Carol might have chosen Cristea as premier, noting the close personal relations between the patriarch and the royal house, his friendship with political personalities of that era, and the fact that he was the leader of the Romanian Orthodox Church. However, they do not elaborate on these elements.

Despite its limitations, the book of Ilie Șandru and Valentin Borda is still relevant in at least one specific aspect: it, more than other works, presents the close personal relations between Cristea and Carol II and the moral ascendancy the patriarch had over the king. Carol saw Cristea as an authoritative, fatherly, figure, whose opinion mattered not only politically, but personally. For example, in January 1926, a few weeks after he renounced the throne for Elena Lupescu, Carol wrote to Miron Cristea who replied, in an exchange of letters which was rather intimate. In one instance, Carol told Averescu that he cared very much for the patriarch, and the patriarch noted this with gladness in his diary (*ține la mine*). The authors quote Patriarch Cristea who believed that “Carol is not bad. If he will normalize the relations with his wife and choose sensible, wise, and experienced advisers and not jaded, bohemian, starry-eyed suitors, etc. etc., he can become a good king...” The crux of their argument, which is meant also to exonerate the leader of the Church, is that Carol’s regime was not a dictatorship,

⁷⁰ Șandru, Borda, *Un nume pentru istorie*, 173.

“but a regime of monarchic authority,” and that “the Patriarch, on the other hand, surely was sickened of interminable quarrels and disputes for power of political parties, which brought Romanian economy to collapse.”⁷¹ Hence, Carol’s move to end parliamentary democracy is seen as necessary and justified.

Cristian Vasile Petcu, in his 2009 book *Guvernarea Miron Cristea* (The Miron Cristea Government), follows to a large extent the patterns set out previously, often repeating ideas of other historians and basing his arguments exclusively on secondary sources or on memoirs and/or diaries.⁷² The forward of the book is written by Ioan Scurtu. The author dedicates ample space to political developments before February 1938 (100 pages), and to events in Miron Cristea’s life unrelated to his role as prime minister (approx. 125 pages). Although the book was a result of a PhD, the writing often lacks academic rigor. In one instance, the author considers that “Patriarch Elie Miron Cristea is in that select group of enlightened Church men who are not given by God to many peoples.” In another place he argues that Cristea was “a personality of high and strong theological and general culture, who knew always, with dignity, to fulfil his high and hard tasks bestowed on him, driven by strong will to put into practice what he knew was truly useful for the Holy Orthodox Church, for his people and his country. Patriarch Miron Cristea must be a ‘model and an example’ (*pildă*) worthy to be known and followed.”⁷³

The most astonishing aspect of the book is the fact that the Miron Cristea cabinets are very superficially examined. The author downplays even more the patriarch’s role as premier and avoids any serious analysis of some of the controversial policies passed or implemented during his tenure. For example, Cristian Petcu claims that the revision of citizenship law, aimed at Jews and passed on 22 January 1938, was annulled once the Goga-Cuza government was replaced in February 1938, aspect which is historically inaccurate. As many historians have already explained, during the Cristea premiership approximately 225,000 Jews lost their Romanian citizenship.⁷⁴ The book lacks any detail on what the patriarch did, politically, in the years preceding his nomination, and is even scarcer than Savu, Șandru/Borda, and others in examining the reasons why Carol II chose him. The decision to hide some of

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 165, 178-181.

⁷² Cristian Vasile Petcu, *Guvernarea Miron Cristea* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2009). There is no evidence that the author consulted any archival material, including the 50 volumes of documents in the Cristea collection, found at the Romanian National Archives.

⁷³ Petcu, *Guvernarea Miron Cristea*, 102, 103.

⁷⁴ Carol Iancu, *Les juifs en Roumanie (1919-1938): de l’émancipation à la marginalisation* (Paris and Leuven, 1996), 312.



the most controversial aspects of Cristea's life and activity is evident; although quoting the 27 February speech against democracy, the author fails to examine it in any way. Following Scurtu's model, Cristian Petcu focuses more on Armand Călinescu and claims that "As a man of balance in the state (*om de echilibru în stat*), the Patriarch would have been in discordance if he refused to be part in a government of national unity in which all political forces, even the Church, were called to participate." Quoting the book of Antonie Plămădeală, he concludes by saying: "Let us notice, at the same time, that he (i.e. the patriarch) was called only in moments of political crisis, as a neutral, as a technician of reconciliation, to pacify the nation disturbed (*tulburată*) by the politicians, by the vices of princes and the embroilments of kings ..."⁷⁵

In his 2009 book *Patriarhul Miron Cristea. O viață, un destin* (Patriarch Miron Cristea. A Life, A Destiny), Constantin Stan downplays the political role of Miron Cristea too. The book is much better written academically, using many primary sources from both religious and public archives. In comparison to other historians, Stan also pays attention to the period 1930-1937. He is describing, often without critique, some of the patriarch's activities during this period, including efforts to build Orthodox churches in regions of Transylvania inhabited by the Szekelys, who were in majority Catholic or Protestant. He also mentions briefly Cristea's ecumenical activity, including relations with the Anglican Church, but there is no analysis as to how they increased his political role. The patriarch's political links are also missed when the author mentions, without examination, the 1934 inauguration of the church in the Stelian Popescu locality (which got the name after the name of the owner of *Universul*). The activity of the Antirevisionist League is also alluded to a few times, but without critical analysis. When discussing the period of his premiership, Stan provides details of Cristea's participation in government, including his role in antisemitic legislation. However, the overall conclusion is similar to those mentioned previously: "The new prime minister had rather a decorative role; the real chief of the cabinet was Armand Călinescu, who was the minister of the interior." Later, as he was bringing more evidence of the patriarch's cabinet activity, the author felt the need to downplay his political role yet again: "Miron Cristea subscribed to this political program, and fully and solemnly engaged in making it a reality as prime minister. Still, his role was not decisional, but rather decorative."⁷⁶ The patriarch's antisemitism is mentioned a few times, but

⁷⁵ Petcu, *Guvernarea Miron Cristea*, 265-266, 268.

⁷⁶ Constantin Stan, *Patriarhul Miron Cristea. O viață, un destin* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2009), 370 and 375.

in other occasions there is a deliberate decision to avoid it. For example, the author refers to Cristea's 1939 New Year speech; while analysing some of the economic or social policies proposed, the patriarch's many hateful references to Jews are overlooked.

Last, but not least, the 2011 book of Lucian Dindiriță, *Miron Cristea. Patriarh, Regent și Prim Ministru* (Miron Cristea. Patriarch, Regent, and Prime Minister), is more neutral, avoiding a clear conclusion as to the significance of Cristea's political role. The Foreword to the book is written by Gheorghe Buzatu, a controversial nationalist historian. Dindiriță's analysis of the premiership is short; out of 403 pages, the critical last year in the patriarch's life is examined in the last chapter, which is only 30 pages long. The period 1930-1937 is alluded to only a few times in other chapters, often focusing on aspects similar to those described by Constantin Stan; however, the latter's analysis of that period is more detailed. When discussing the reasons why Cristea was chosen as prime minister, the author says: "Considering the patriarch's popularity and his experience gained as a Regent, at which we should add some affinities between Cristea's and Carol II's vision regarding incapacity of political parties to manage the country's affairs, the high hierarch was called to lead the country's destiny."⁷⁷ Although alluding here to the patriarch's anti-democratic ideology, this is not further examined. The author discusses in detail the various configurations of the cabinets led by Cristea in 1938-1939, the real-time opinions on the patriarch's nomination, or his role in the new authoritarian 27 February 1938 constitution. He briefly mentions that Cristea subscribed to the cabinet's program, which was overtly nationalistic, or that he wrote to the Orthodox Church membership to support his political role, but these are again not carefully analysed. On the 27 February speech, where the patriarch compared parliamentary democracy with a hydra with 29 heads, the author explains: "Interpreted by some contemporaries as proof of the prime minister's servility, in fact, if we consider the patriarch's view of Romanian political life, that discourse was nothing else than a political credo that the new regime will establish an atmosphere of stability and harmony, bringing about material and spiritual gains."⁷⁸ In the chapter, Jews are mentioned only once; the patriarch's antisemitism and his role in anti-Jewish policies is almost completely avoided. As Stan, Dindiriță

⁷⁷ Lucian Dindiriță, *Miron Cristea. Patriarh, Regent și Prim Ministru* (Iași; Typo Moldova, 2011), 314-315.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 324.



mentions the 1939 New Year speech, but entirely fails to pay attention to the heavy antisemitic tone and the antisemitic policies promoted in that address. The author is not spelling out a clear conclusion about the alleged decorative political role of the patriarch; from this point of view, his analysis is more balanced than others. However, his examination of Cristea's premiership is brief and entirely avoids many controversial aspects.

Conclusion

If it could be grossly summarized, the communist historiography about Carol II and his regime was built on a narrative comprising of several layers: 1) it demonized the king and argued that he always wanted a personal dictatorship; 2) it displayed growing emphasis on a mythical camarilla, seen, alongside Carol, as the anti-thesis of communist values; 3) it presented political parties as victims of the king and his camarilla; 4) it defined the regime installed on 11 February 1938 as a dictatorship; 5) it had very little interest in Elena Lupescu, or in the scandalous aspects of the king's private life; 6) it mentioned Miron Cristea, but as a decorative figure, or as a puppet.

Post-communist writing on Carol II was trapped in this paradigm where the emphasis has been on the political players set out in the 1970s, as if historical writing was caught in a cauldron, with little tentative to escape. Even when the need for balance was felt, it was rather inside the same paradigm, shifting the blame from one actor to another, but unable to find new players, to focus on other institutions. And the clearest example of this inability is the way in which the political role of Miron Cristea was largely forgotten. This is also visible in the case of other influential interwar personalities, such as Stelian Popescu, or organizations, such as the Antirevisionist League. The League and Stelian Popescu are only mentioned occasionally, and even then, most authors miss their social and political role.

The king, the camarilla, Elena Lupescu, all had their contribution to the events leading to the February 1938 change of regime. However, far from being a puppet, Miron Cristea and the group surrounding him were some of the masterminds of the movement that led to Carol II's dismantling of Romanian democratic system. The patriarch's nomination as prime minister was not accidental. During his premiership the leader of the Orthodox Church was the most outspoken promoter of anti-Semitic, anti-immigration, Romanianization and other exclusionary policies, in many of his speeches, articles and interviews defending the government's stand against Jews and other minorities. The patriarch took often center stage at public events where he explained and legitimated

his cabinet's policies.⁷⁹ Moreover, the Antirevisionist League, with Miron Cristea as honorary president, included in its ranks many politicians that would be part of various Romanian governments from December 1937 to August 1944, amongst them Octavian Goga, A.C. Cuza, Ioan Lupaș, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Alexandru Lapedatu, and Pimen (the Orthodox metropolitan of Moldova, who would be the minister of education in the first Cristea cabinet).⁸⁰ All these aspects raise the question, which should be hopefully better explored by future historiography, of how influential this group was in preparing the ground for Carol II and Ion Antonescu regimes, and in the creation and implementation of anti-Semitic policies that would lead to the Holocaust in Romania.

Rezumat:

Miron Cristea a fost unul dintre cei mai importanți și influenți actori politici ai perioadei interbelice. A devenit primul patriarh al Bisericii Ortodoxe (1925), membru al Regenței (1927-1930) și prim-ministru al României din Februarie 1938 până la decesul survenit pe 6 martie 1939. Cea mai mare parte a istoriografiei dedicată acestei epoci trece cu vederea puterea și influența sa politică, concentrându-se mai mult pe Garda de Fier și pe câteva figuri politice precum Regele Carol II, Armand Călinescu, Corneliu Codreanu sau Iuliu Maniu. Acest articol urmărește sursele acestei minimizări, evidențiind un proces care a început în anii 1970. Articolul deconstruiește diferite straturi ale scrisului istoric și examinează motivațiile comuniste și post-comuniste din spatele concentrării pe anumite figuri istorice (precum regele, amanta sa – Elena Lupescu, sau camarila regală) și uitarea deliberată a altora, inclusiv Miron Cristea. După perioada comunistă, istoriografia despre Carol II și dictatura regală a suferit mici modificări, unele dintre ele analizate aici, însă cea despre Miron Cristea a rămas, din diferite motive, în mare parte neschimbată.

Cuvinte-cheie: istoriografie comunistă/post-comunistă, Biserica Ortodoxă, politica interbelică, regimul regal.

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⁷⁹ Popa, "Miron Cristea, The Romanian Orthodox Patriarch," pp. 11-34; Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 23-24 and 31-33.

⁸⁰ Lazăr, *Mișcarea Antirevizionistă din Transilvania*, 253 and 256.