

BOOK REVIEWS

OLIVER JENS SCHMITT, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”* (Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: the rise and fall of the “Captain”), Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017.

An accomplished scholar whose broad academic interests have focused on various aspects of the history of South-Eastern Europe ranging from the Late Middle Ages to the 20th century, Oliver Jens Schmitt is one of the most valuable contributors to the study of Romanian fascism in recent years. His diverse research on the Legionary Movement has so far approached topics such as its grass-roots following, its particular appeal to certain social segments, its specific means of mobilization etc., all analyzed through extensively documented case studies. His latest addition to the dynamic field of fascist studies, a compelling biography of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, provides a vivid depiction of the spectacular rise and dramatic downfall of the controversial charismatic leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Furthermore, it offers a much needed instrument for a deeper understanding of Romanian fascism, one which the historiographical field has been missing for decades.

The achievements of the reviewed book are manifold, with a significant portion of the insights it provides into the public and private, social and political, intellectual and spiritual life of Codreanu relying on previously unexplored archival sources, thus making its content as innovative as it is relevant. While it engages in the chronological display of events typical to the genre it belongs to, the biographical account does not limit itself to an orderly presentation of successive episodes. Instead, aside from its expected aim to recompose various life fragments and integrate them into a cohesive historical narrative, the book is also very much preoccupied with uncovering the profound origins, convoluted course and far reaching impact of the intricate *Weltanschauung* of Romanian fascism, certainly acknowledged as a permutation of a larger continental phenomenon, but at the same time rightly understood as deeply rooted in its native background. The structure of the book is particularly suitable to that extent, as the option for short, concise chapters successfully reconciles the diachronic presentation with an indispensable thematic focus, a strong methodological asset allowing a fluid presentation of facts as well as delivering a comprehensive view of their underpinnings.

In tracing the early sources of Codreanu's worldview, considerable attention is devoted to his upbringing, Schmitt being the first author to analyze the significant influence of the ideological mindset of Codreanu's father on the future political thought and social activism of the founding figure of the Legionary Movement. Moreover, proving a remarkable inclination towards proper contextualization, the radical conceptions that would become the main tenets of Romanian fascists, entrenched into the deeper layers of society in the decades preceding the First World War, are properly integrated into a broader picture, that of a predominantly rural country confronted with major economic setbacks and political dysfunctions, constantly fuelling severe social and ethnic antagonisms. Young Codreanu's coming of age in a radical climate is meticulously followed, the image of his formative years being carefully assembled from such elements as his military education, brief contact with war, early activist period as an anticommunist strikebreaker and substantial political involvement during his years as a student in Iași, under the close guidance of the exponential figure of Romanian anti-Semitism at the time, A.C. Cuza. Codreanu's rise to the status of leader of the endemic student movements emerging throughout the 1920s is gradually unveiled by exploring the manner in which he managed to become the unifying force of previously disparate nationalist and anti-Semitic nuclei. From the brief journeys abroad which, as Schmitt correctly outlines, only reinforced his existing prejudices, to the more dramatic developments on the homefront, culminating with a defused plot, a carried-through assassination, as well as several subsequent incarcerations and public trials, the cumulative impact of Codreanu's experiences and infamous actions throughout his youth rapidly turned him into a notorious public presence. Naturally, his charisma decisively came into play at key moments, as the author keenly observes when he describes the evolution of his ever increasing personal magnetism, expanding from a narrow circle of close collaborators into the wider masses whose expectations of a providential leader were yet unfulfilled.

It is on this background that Codreanu established the epitome of Romanian fascism, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, whose modest beginnings and initial lack of resources only allowed it a limited influence, on a regional scale, in its first phase of existence. However, as the text very well illustrates, it was in this early stage that the organization perfected its specific means of mobilization and steadily developed its ideological core. As the movement continuously expanded and successfully appealed to various social categories united by a common resentment towards the establishment, Codreanu and his devotees speculated the flaws of a system they denounced as unfit for the national community. Starting with the early 1930s, the Legion came to directly antagonize the state, through a wide array of strategies devised or endorsed by Codreanu himself, from its engagement in the parliamentary race to the physical annihilation of its perceived opponents, predictably attracting equally violent responses from the authorities. Schmitt's approach of these developments is all the more adequate as he operates some necessary distinctions between the evolution of the movement

in general and the path of its leader in particular (e.g. from a certain point onwards Codreanu is portrayed as assuming a more reclusive stance, with rarer public appearances and less direct involvement in the public sphere). As Romanian fascism navigated its meandering course, Codreanu's charisma seemingly followed its own, reaching mythical proportions in its final years, as the numerous relevant episodes invoked throughout the book illustrate it. To that extent, the author regards as particularly noteworthy the manner in which the Legion's propaganda evolved, shifting from the written material of the late 1920s to an "iconization process" throughout the 1930s, in which the image of Codreanu became central not only to the public self-representation of the movement, but also to its underlying palingenetic thrust and revolutionary aspirations.

The final stage of his life found Codreanu at the height of his popularity, an uncanny figure having seduced substantial portions of the masses by promising them the restoration of the nation's dignity, the reinstatement of its defining spiritual values and the eternal salvation of the national community, with the powerful appeal of these prospects finding a faithful reflection in the spectacular electoral success of the Legion in the final democratic elections of interwar Romania. At the same time, as Schmitt perceptively outlines, Codreanu remained innerly tormented throughout these tumultuous times, caught between the worldly responsibilities on which his national project depended upon (such as maintaining the inner discipline of his movement, handling personal conflicts within his ever fluctuating entourage while keeping the reigns of his own authority, confronting his numerous rivals, from the traditional democratic parties to King Carol II and his camarilla) and his intimate spiritual concerns (pertaining to the prospects of national redemption and the sacred mission of preparing the nation its higher calling, understood in eschatological terms, by bringing it closer to God). Under the relentless pressure of the establishment, unable to make effective use of the genuine support gained by his movement, Codreanu eventually fell victim to the political schemes he had let himself become a part of, being arrested, convicted after a mock trial (which turned into a national scandal whose public impact is admirably described) and eventually assassinated at the king's orders.

However, as Schmitt rightly points out, the history of Codreanu's life did not end with his death and it is significant that two of the most substantial chapters of the book are dedicated, respectively, to an account of the posthumous implications of his cult as it evolved from its extreme exacerbations under the National Legionary State to the *damnatio memoriae* of the Communist era, and to a lengthy interpretation of Codreanu's thought from his millenarian expectations to his fascist political credo. Out of all his eloquent conclusive remarks, arguably one of the most noteworthy refers to the fact that the charismatic leader, his controversial movement and its elaborate ideology cannot be comprehended as monolithic units, as each contained numerous facets and strands, contradictions and fluctuations within them.

All in all, by offering a nuanced account of a historical figure affirmed, with justifiable certainty, to have been a product of his time as well as an embodiment of certain realities of his country, Oliver Jens Schmitt provides a fascinating biography that fills an important gap in the historiography of the Legionary movement and contributes in large measure to a more profound comprehension of such a complex phenomenon as Romanian fascism.

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MIRCEA MARTIN, CHRISTIAN MORARU, AND ANDREI TERIAN, eds. *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018)

Romanian Literature as World Literature was published as part of a series that contains works such as *American Literature as World Literature*, *German Literature as World Literature*, *Danish Literature as World Literature*, among others. It integrates and validates Romanian literature as a literature of the world, part of a vast, global network. It was edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian and it is, in fact, the product of the teamwork carried out by critics and literary historians of different generations who are already well known in the field of Romanian literature and literary criticism. I believe this volume has a double purpose. On the one hand, in the theoretical field, it reconceptualises the idea of world literature by proving, through remarkable and refined analyses, the necessity of integrating the minor literatures, as is the case of Romanian literature, into the global literary and cultural phenomenon. On the other hand, it outlines the conceptual bases for reassessing, in new terms, the Romanian literary canon that was established through the prestige held by certain literary critics and cemented by the academic and cultural institutions, but that today must be readdressed from a fresh analytical viewpoint. However, the purpose of this reassessment is not to destroy the canon; by redefining the Romanian literature in the fresh terms of territorial de-spatialisation and reconfiguration of national literatures in the wider context of the relations between cultural phenomena that thus become trans-national, the purpose of these analyses proves to be both polemical and, implicitly, constructive. Therefore, the hegemony of

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