

## QUEEN MARY OF ROMANIA, NURSE IN WORLD WAR I: TWO NOVEL PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

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### Abstract:

In the observation of the Centennial of the founding of the unified Romanian Kingdom, we present two press photographs that were recently uncovered in a private collection. Both are documents of the period cropped from the French journal *Excelsior*. Given the fact that this journal was distributed in France during the World War I, when transportation was difficult, and that the number of copies as reduced, many of them being destroyed, these pictures remained unknown to historians of the period. The pictures document the very well-known commitment of the Romanian Queen in offering healthcare support to the wounded soldiers of the World War I.

**Key-words:** *medicine of war, nursing, Queen Mary, royalty, World War I*

### Introduction

One hundred years ago the World War I was finishing and many national states could be founded in Central and East Europe. Therefore we celebrate in 2018-2019 the end of the large conflagration and the Centennial of several new states which found more or less their present political configuration and presence on the map. Romania was one of these countries succeeding to find its natural borders, after the Union of Transylvania, Bukovina (both previous Austrian-Hungarian territories) and Bessarabia (previous Russian territory) with Moldavia and Wallachia, into a unified entity. In order to achieve this, Romania (including only Moldavia and Wallachia) entered in the World War I in 1916 and fought against the Central Powers. This was a bloody war and produced much causality (1, 2). The King Ferdinand was the formal leader of the army and his wife, Queen Mary, was implicated in the medical assistance of the injured military. This participation of the queen as nurse on the front increased a lot her popularity. Her activity in field hospitals is documented on many war photographs issued in the journals of the period, 1916-1918. She used to encourage and care the wounded soldiers and frequently offered them as souvenirs and token of empathy, autographed postcards with her image dressed as nurse, sometimes with the logo of

Red Cross on her dress. In Fig. 1 we display one of these hand signed postcards (from a private collection).

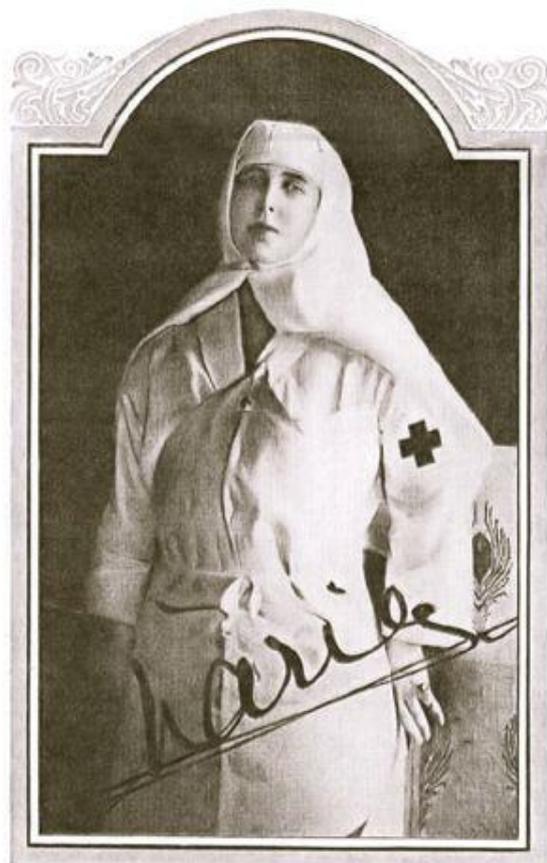


Fig. 1: Postcard with Queen Mary as nurse, autographed. This kind of postcards was distributed personally by the queen to the injured soldiers.

### The new documents

There are many photographs depicting Queen Mary of Romania, dressed in a white nun-like nurse uniform, with the head covered, visiting hospitals, wounded rooms, talking to injured soldiers or taking care of their wounds. These war press photographs were distributed to journals from Romania or from allied countries and were published in their issues. The pictures were also a part of war propaganda and were designated to encourage the combatants. During the World War I many other queens had the same supporting activity and are displayed on the pictures of the time i.e. the queens of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Italy etc.

We present here two photographs that to our knowledge were not displayed in this country. Both of them were uncovered in a private collection and were cropped from the French periodical *Excelsior*.

In *Excelsior* number 2192 from Wednesday 15 November 1916, having on the cover the supertitle: "Prince Arthur of Connaught decorates Frenchmen", in the core of the journal, on double page (size larger than A3) is a giant black and white photograph under the title: "Queen Mary and her two daughters at the head of Romanian wounded" (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Large photo from the core of *Excelsior* 15 November 1916. Queen Mary and two daughters visiting casualties of the war

In the picture we see a huge room for wounded soldiers in a main hospital in Bucharest. One can observe several dozens of beds occupied by wounded soldiers and a group of working nurses visited by the queen and her daughters, Elisabeth and Marie. In a pathetic manner, the legend of the photo mentions: "...the national recognition of the Romanians is directed toward this sovereign and her two

charitable auxiliaries. The brave nation rejecting its aggressors greet the ladies with admirable hearts who zealously participate to the pain of their motherland, and convey to them the veneration of the whole people"

The second photograph was found also in the French newspaper *Excelsior*, several months later: Monday 18 June 1917, in the issue No. 2407 (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Cover of *Excelsior* 18 June 1917: Queen Mary visiting a barrack for typhus patients

Here the cover bears the title “The queen of Romania nurse on the front”. The large photo under this title shows the queen accompanied by nurses beside an impressive car. The legend says: “Queen Mary dressed as nurse and bearing boots is going to visit an isolated barrack for people with typhus”. The continuation of the text says: “While King Ferdinand is frequently visiting the soldiers on the front, not discouraged by their first defeats, the Queen Mary, a model of devotion and abnegation, continues to offer care to the wounded and ill behind the front.

Recently the wonderful sovereign went to the fire line to console and encourages the soldiers with typhus exantematicus”. The same pathetic style for the legend, as in the previous case, is explained by the fact that France was allied of Romania in the war, but does not diminish the importance of the action of the queen.

### Discussion

The World War I finished in 1918 but fights were given also in 1919, thus 100 years ago. It was a bloody event with a high death toll (3). Romania entered in the war relatively later, on 27 August 1916. Thus, the picture from Fig. 2 from 15 November 1916 is relatively early. It depicts one of the activities of Queen Mary, well known for her involvement in the care of wounded soldiers. This is a large and very descriptive photo displaying a large room in a Bucharest hospital transformed into a war hospital. The second novel photo, from 18 June 2017 is also very important because it shows the consequence of typhus epidemic. Typhus was indeed the cause of many victims during the war (4). One can also see the vehicle used by the queen to visit a barrack for isolation of typhus patients. For her volunteer and brave activity, she got the surname of “Mother of the Wounded People”.

Queen Mary (1875-1938) was a personality very much beloved by her citizens. During the World War 1 she spent a lot of time to provide care to the casualties of war. Both photographs demonstrate this activity of the queen. Queen Mary and King Ferdinand had five children: King Charles 2, Princess Elisabeth and Princess Mary (Mignon)-both illustrated in Fig. 2, and two others.

Excelsior was a French newspaper (subtitled "illustrated daily") issued between 1910-1940 (ceased publication because of the German occupation) by the well-known newspaperman Pierre Laffite. It was a journal of average size and importance but with photographs of good quality.

### **Conclusions**

As other sovereigns of the time, Queen Mary undertook an impressive work of nurse during the World War 1, to relief the pain and

sufferance of belligerents. Her activity is presented on many photographs of the period. We display here two photographs not previously known by the historians of medicine.

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