

**BEATRICE BEDNARIK and ALEXANDRU DAVIDIAN**  
**Familia Bednarik în arta românească**  
 (The Bednarik family in Romanian art)  
 Bucharest: Editura Vellant, 2020

**T**HIS WORK is an excellent reconstruction of the life and activity of a Romanian family of artists who are not well known among the general public, but who made significant contributions to Romanian and world culture. It brings into focus three important personalities of the Bednarik family, Ignat, Elena, and Beatrice, shining a light on their remarkable artistic contributions and lifting them out of unjust anonymity.

The work dedicated to these extraordinary artists is a comprehensive four-volume set, accompanied by a chronology of the most important events in the life of the Bednarik family and two appendices. The first appendix contains excerpts from catalogues of exhibitions signed by Ignat Bednarik, from home and abroad, while the second features a series of photographs capturing the three artists in various moments throughout their lives. Additionally, the publication successfully reconstructs the individual, family and artistic life cycles of the three characters, placing each important event in the context of the epoch and of the circumstances in which they lived, enriched with their personal emotions and reflections.

The most substantial part of the work, Book I, brings Ignat Bednarik to the foreground, detailing his childhood and formative years. It provides insights into his early life in Turnu Severin, his precocious artistic talent and his introspective and contemplative character. The book recounts a devastating local fire and the

tragic fate of his blind friend, who lost his life in the blaze. This death abruptly ended the potential literary career of a promising talent, and it is striking that years later, the painter Ignat Bednarik would suffer from the same disability as his childhood friend. We then follow him through his early school years, at high school and at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, where he created a series of artistic works that attracted the attention and appreciation of his teachers. However, life in Bucharest brought challenges for the young artist, as he faced hunger, misery and shortages, which he described in his memoirs.

But life in the Romanian capital also brought moments of happiness, such as meeting Elena Alexandrina Barabas, who would later become his wife. In terms of his artistic career, during this period, he created a series of drawings inspired by nature, based on the time he spent at his parents' home in Turnu Severin and later on in Rahova. He also produced a series of illustrations for newspapers, which provided him with the necessary income to cover his daily expenses.

Between 1901 and 1905, Ignat Bednarik was an auditing student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where he was deeply influenced by the artistic and cultural effervescence of the city, as well as by the museums and collections he visited. However, he faced numerous physical challenges that affected his health, forcing him to spend an extended period of time in hospital. To make a living, he had to work as a painter's laborer.

An important moment in Ignat Bednarik's life was his marriage to Elena in 1908. The following year, the couple enrolled at the Royal School of Decorative Arts in Munich, where they spent approximately two years. This period in the Ger-

man city had a major impact on their artistic development. In 1912, they returned permanently to Romania and settled in Bucharest, where they founded the Free Academy of Decorative Arts, thus contributing to the formation and development of the artistic sensibility of the capital's inhabitants. This period also marked the artistic maturity of Ignat Bednarik, who also began to collaborate with Queen Marie of Romania.

The year 1916 brought another important event in the life of the Bednarik family, with the birth of their first child. That same year, Romania joined the Triple Entente and entered the First World War, an event that the artist immortalized in a series of compositions. In the early interwar years, Ignat Bednarik was the protagonist of several exhibitions, held in 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1927 and 1928, with the last one taking place in New York. An additional significant moment in his family life occurred in 1922 with the birth of his daughter, Beatrice Ioana.

The economic crisis of the late 1920s marked the beginning of the artistic decline for Ignat Bednarik, who also suffered from failing eyesight. The year 1939 brought a series of difficult trials, including the death of his wife and the outbreak of World War II. The artist's health continued to deteriorate after the war, leading to the complete loss of his vision and the ability to create, despite him having much more to offer culturally. His life came to an end in Bucharest in 1963.

Book III of the work is dedicated to Elena Bednarik, an artist as remarkable as her husband, who had major achievements in painting and graphic arts. She was born in 1883 in Bucharest, where she attended the School of Fine Arts between

1900 and 1908. She continued to hone her skills in Munich and applied and perfected her knowledge in the studio opened in Bucharest together with her husband. The difficult period of the First World War, involving the occupation of Bucharest by the German army, found her living alongside her son and mother, but with her thoughts and heart with her husband, who had been drafted into the army. After the end of the conflict, she and her husband enjoyed two decades of personal and artistic fulfilment, including the birth of their daughter Beatrice Ioana in 1922. However, this period of success was followed by one of decline marked by her husband's blindness, Elena's own health problems and, ultimately, the end of her life in 1939.

Book IV is dedicated to Beatrice Ioana Bednarik, a painter and graphic artist, and the daughter of Ignat Bednarik. Throughout her artistic life, several key moments stand out: her studies at St. Mary's Institute in Bucharest between 1936 and 1941, followed by a period of studies at the Faculty of Law in Bucharest between 1944 and 1949. From 1955 to 1959, she continued her artistic training at the Nicolae Grigorescu Institute of Fine Arts in the capital of Romania.

Beatrice Bednarik would become her father's main support after he began experiencing vision problems and following her mother's death. In addition, she dedicated the topic of her doctoral thesis, drawn up between 1964 and 1975, to her father, in a work suggestively entitled "Contributions to the Study of the Evolution of Romanian Art in the First Decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Life and Work of the Watercolourist Ignat Bednarik."

The present publication follows the same line, describing the life and work of

the three members of the Bednarik family, as well as their contribution to the development of Romanian art in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It can be stated without hesitation that it thoroughly covers in detail all the relevant aspects concerning the three artists, drawing on a wealth of sources and deeply exploring their thoughts, feelings and emotions through their memoirs and journals. The abundance of reproductions of the Bednarik family's photographs and documents, combined with the excellent graphic and editorial design, makes this book a remarkable achievement that invites both reading and reflection, as a delight for both the eyes and the soul.



ELENA CRINELA HOLOM

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TRAIAN SANDU

**Ceaușescu: Le dictateur ambigu**

Paris: Perrin, 2023

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**T**RAIAN SANDU is a historian who teaches at Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris and specializes in Romanian history, especially the interwar and the communist periods. His recent monograph is a well-documented biography, even if rather conventional in its approach and a bit too *French*—wearingly bombastic—in its style.

Its conventionalism is quite straightforwardly accepted by its author, and manifests itself at multiple levels: not only the conventional form of the biography as a genre, whose fetishism of subjective self-determination and all-roundedness might seem obsolete in an age of intersectionality, multicausality and combined and unequal developments. But also the rather conven-

tional conceptual tools that are put to use in the reconstruction of Ceaușescu's trajectory—namely, the concept of totalitarianism (even in the culturally infused more recent articulation), and the consequent emphasis on discourse and ideology, both aspects (totalitarianism + ideology) that constitute the pillars of the official condemnation of the Romanian communist regime established in Tismăneanu's Presidential Commission Final Report from 2006. Where Sandu's approach differs from Tismăneanu's is in its lesser interest in the mechanisms of terror and coercion, and in his emphasis instead on the popular support of the regime—a social grounding that Sandu explains (and evades) through the category of charisma, as the mysterious elucidation of Ceaușescu's discourse and ideology's hold on the population. In this articulation, the concept of 'charisma' reveals all its Weberian utility and aporias: it subjectivizes and thus turns into a mystery the mechanisms of power, de-socializing and de-historicizing the question of the efficacy and legitimacy of the political regime, the link between its discourse, ideology and performance, and the population's tacit or explicit support.

As problematic as this concept of 'charisma' is, it is nevertheless quite structurally indispensable for Sandu's approach. This is because, on the one hand, both in its conceptual design and in its main sources, the book focuses mostly on Ceaușescu's *discourse*, his various allocutions, whether in the Politburo's meetings, international gatherings, informal settings, or public speeches. On the other hand, however, Sandu rarely credits these discourses with any credibility. On the contrary, the book mostly consists in Sandu's acid comments on Ceaușescu's predicaments—in