

Book Reviews

Andrei Dălălău, **New books on the History of the Legionary Movement**

Tatiana Niculescu, *Mistica revolverului și a rugăciunii. Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2017, 240 p.

Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "căpitanului"*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2017, 456 p.

Roland Clark, *Sfântă tinerețe legionară: activismul fascist în România interbelică*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2015, 288 p.

Traian Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier. Un fascism românesc*, Ed. Cartier, Chișinău, 2019, 479 p.

Abstract: In recent years, many works dealing with the phenomenon of the Legionary Movement came to the attention of the Romanian scholars, who tried to understand the Iron Guard from a synchronous historiographical perspective called the "new consensus", theorized by Roger Griffin. In this context, the present article aims to analyze the works of Oliver Jens Schmitt, Tatiana Niculescu, Roland Clark, and Traian Sandu. In their work, the writers adopt a broader understanding of the legionary phenomenon as an indigenous version of European fascism, reconfiguring Captain Codreanu's image in two provocative biographies, one concerning the local and regional activities of the Iron Guard (Clark) and one work oriented towards sociology (Sandu). The first part aims to compare the authors' interest in researching the subject, as well as the methodological similarities and differences between their books. Each paper is analyzed separately, seeking to observe traits of their specificity and originality. The second part focuses on the common elements of each author, followed by a section on a comparative perspective, where we observe how the *student activity* and the *religious spirit* (two support pillars of the Iron Guard) may involve multiple valences of historiographical interpretation. Moreover, a listing of the sources seems essential.

Key words: fascism, comparative historiography, The Legionary Movement, biography, religion

Rezumat: În contextul apariției în ultimii ani a unor lucrări de specialitate și de popularizare care tratează fenomenul Mișcării Legionare dintr-o perspectivă istoriografică sincronică numită a “noului consens”, eseul de față își propune să analizeze istoriografic lucrările lui Oliver Jens Schmitt, Tatiana Niculescu, Roland Clark și Traian Sandu. Cercetătorii au adoptat o viziune mai largă de înțelegere a fenomenului legionar ca variantă autohtonă a fascismului european, astfel încât analizele lor reconfigurează imaginea Căpitanului Codreanu în cadrul a două biografii, trec dinspre istorie politică spre istorie locală la Clark și sondează sociologic substratul mișcării la Sandu. Sunt comparate motivațiile autorilor de a scrie pe această temă, asemănările și deosebirile metodologice între lucrări, elemente accentuate sau trecute intenționat cu vederea din viața Legiunii, urmate de o secțiune a perspectivelor comparate, unde observăm cum *studentii și religia*, doi stâlpi de susținere ai Gărzii de Fier, pot implica valențe multiple de interpretare istoriografică. Mai mult, o trecere în revistă a surselor ni se pare indispensabilă.

Cuvinte-cheie: fascism, comparatism istoriografic, Mișcarea Legionară, biografie, religie

Introduction

The Legionary Movement represents a controversial episode of the Romanian interwar period, being a socio-political party with nationalist, anti-Semitic, mystical, Orthodox and authoritarian values that was to be discovered as accurately as possible after the disappearance of the national communist monopoly on Romanian historiography. After 1989, Romanian historiography treated the subject of legionaries under the tension of the relationship between the subjective recovery of the past and the methods of scientific rigor according to European academic standards. The rediscovery of the interwar period as an archetypal spatial and temporal sequence, which could provide a model for the new post-December democracy, has favoured the recurrence of the extremist political “models” founded in Greater Romania. The liberalization of historiography has made it possible to rediscover the Legionary Movement on the basis of archives, journals, memoirs, and the press, leaving aside the party ideology based on predetermined clichés. After the fall of communism in 1989, a new phase of scholarship dealing with Romanian

fascism emerged. Romanian fascism was then discussed without any political inhibition or restrictions, and the assimilation of new methodologies and tackling of new types of sources was possible as well. We want to mention Irina Livezeanu, Constantin Iordachi, Radu Ioanid, and Valentin Săndulescu for producing some of the 'most interesting late studies on the history of the Legionary Movement in Romania', as Marius Turda pointed out in 2005¹. On the other hand, certain groups of legionary supporters have had the opportunity to gather around these symbols and identities, mainly using the rhetoric of the anti-communist resistance in the mountains and the argument of the persecuted legionnaires in prisons to legitimize themselves in the public space.

In the case of the Legionary Movement, in the early years of post-communism, Western historiography has taken into consideration *the concepts* that the legionaries used in their actions rather than *the processes* that were unfolded in the interwar years. Concepts such as anti-Semitic, anti-democratic, anti-European, political radicalism, cult of death, etc. are not self-sufficient to describe the dynamic internal operating system of the Iron Guard. A number of works refer to the Legion as an ecstatic, religious, terrorist movement, oriented towards political assassinations, the Romanian case being considered illustrative 'only insofar as it can help the historian to highlight the substantial differences between marginal fascisms and the central cases'². During the 1980s, attention was paid to the Legion's internal dynamics and its political trajectory, as well as its relations with other Eastern European instances of fascism. The most noticeable analysis of the Legionary Movement was Armin Heinen's *Die Legion 'Erzengel' in Rumänien*, which succeeded to cross the barrier of the 'Romanian exceptionalism' of the Iron Guard. Some other historians also understood the Legion's ideology as a form of 'clerical fascism'³, a fact that determined Eugen Weber to describe this movement as essentially a reaction to the modernity specific to a backward society⁴. Historiography also noticed the fact that except for Italy and Germany, the Iron Guard was the only European fascist movement that came to power without foreign aid. As Constantin Iordachi shows, the Iron Guard professed a form of 'sacralisation of politics pertaining to a Romanian

¹ Marius Turda, 2005

² Mihai Chioveanu (coord.), *Țara, Legiunea, Căpitanul: Mișcarea Legionară în documente de istorie orală*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), p. 7.

³ Roger Eatwell, 'Reflections on Fascism and Religion', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4 (2003): 146-66.

⁴ Cosmin Sebastian Cercel, 'The Right Side of the Law. State of Siege and the Rise of Fascism in Interwar Romania', *Fascism* 2 (2013): 205-233.

version of modern palingenesis'⁵. We will now analyse the recent historiography – mainly the works published between 2015 and 2019 on the subject.

Recent historiography

The recent historiography that deals with the subject of the Legionary Movement is diverse at the epistemological level and methodology: interviews with former legionnaires, psychological insights, theology, political doctrine, and biographies of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Others tend to describe the Legionary Movement from the perspective of a relatively separate and isolated political group, others claim that it was a fully socially integrated group. The ideology of the movement and its relationship with the masses and the establishment have given birth to a historiographical debate that continues until today. Nor is the relationship of the Iron Guard with the Orthodox Church definitively solved: some historians place the religious manifestation of the legionaries in direct connection with the mystical orthodoxy of the “young generation”, others claim that the religious impetuses of (neo) Protestant inspiration under the influx of the Young Man Christian Association and the practices of evangelization undertaken by young westerners; others adopt the argument of “originality” according to which the legionary religious element is the result of an indigenous process in which syncretism played a major role, impossible to transplant in another cultural context, being a creation specific to the Romanian space.

The post-December historiography of the Legionary Movement can be divided into at least two coordinates of analysis: the first axis contains works that exclusively dealt with the Iron Guard as a form of a *diachronic* history divided chronologically into specific ‘historical ages’, in the writings of Oliver Jens Schmitt, Tatiana Niculescu, Armin Heinen, Roland Clark, Francesco Veiga. The second axis contains works of *synchronic* history, which do not focus exclusively on the analysis of the Legion, but also on the characterization of the whole nationalist, religious, mystical, and cultural ensemble of the interwar period, integrating the Legionary Movement into a specific context in which it manifests. We mention here the contributions of Irina Livezeanu, of Lucian Boia, Leon Volovici, Mihai Chioveanu and Zigu Ornea. It is necessary to mention here that neither of these two axes is exclusively *diachronic* or *synchronic*. They are interdependent and complement each other organically.

⁵ Constantin Iordachi, ‘God’s Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis’, in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 320.

Moreover, in the recent historiography we observe an analytical evolution in the sense of broadening the causal explanations, more precisely by identifying the component elements of the Legion on a social basis. Scholars analysed the Guard's internal tendencies, dissidences, regional differences, and its relation with different categories of people, associations, unions, and parties. Gradually, recent sources and interpretations come to show that the Legionary Movement hasn't always had a precise ideology, a perfect organization, and an indestructible unity, so that the probing of popular mindsets, the need for belonging, the opportunism of individuals and the integration of the marginal become vital elements in the new research. We are witnessing the transition from the classical *event-oriented history* to the *social and cultural history*.

In recent years, in the historiography of the legionary phenomenon has been a transition from presenting the overall history of the Movement to a biographical form of the history of 'Captain' Codreanu, taking into consideration the work of Oliver Jens Schmitt (*Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"*) and Tatiana Niculescu's *Mistica rugăciunii și a revolverului. Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu*, published in 2017, which deals with the profile of the legionary leader by probing his intimate psychology and the 'philosophy of silence', alongside the eventual history of the Legion to illustrate as authentic as possible the leader's position in the key moments of the interwar historical period.

However, the two biographies both differ in the writing technique and in the purpose of argumentation: Oliver Jens Schmitt tries to understand Captain 'from within', to establish the veracity of its integration into the fascist current theorized as 'palingenetic ultranationalism' by Roger Griffin, to show how the European fascist reality is combined with the nationalist religious reality in the Romanian space; the historian structurally questions the activity of the Captain as an integral part of the society but also as an autonomous creative force. The work of Tatiana Niculescu aims to offer the general public portrait of Corneliu Codreanu in an accessible manner, often impregnated by 'literary fireworks', facilitating the understanding of the interwar atmosphere even by an unspecialized reader. Moreover, in the *Author's note*, Niculescu states that the text is 'an attempt to unravel the image of time that mixes politics with religion, ended in blood and barbarism' (p. 7), with the desire to render Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's life 'as I understood it, trying to betray the character's truths and contradictions as little as possible'. Schmitt, on the other hand, addresses also the general public, but the vast composition, methodology and historical rigor of the

concepts made his text accessible more on the academic level. He tries to open new interpretive paths through an approach that is meant to be exhaustive. The two works differ even quantitatively: the 454 pages of Schmitt's work cover a wider area of research compared to the 239 pages of Tatiana Niculescu's book. The Swiss author exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of the biographical method, among which we mention: the risk of the biographer to identify with the object of his research, the risk of making psychological assumptions, the lack of historical contextualization concerning the socio-political interdependencies, but there is also the epistemological danger to instrumentalize the text for revisionist purposes.

The works of Francisco Veiga (*History of the Iron Guard: 1919-1941: the mysticism of ultranationalism*, Humanitas, 1993) and Armin Heinen (*Die Legion "Erzengel Michael"; The Legion "Arhanghelul Mihail"*, 1986, published in Romanian translation by Humanitas Publishing House in 1999) have inaugurated the method of the diachronic history of the Legionary Movement, followed by the work of Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist activism in interwar Romania*, published in 2015 by the Polirom Publishing House. These works present the historical events of the Iron Guard, following a clearly determined chronological line and largely avoiding the personal introspections encountered in the biographies. However, the shift towards microhistory starting with Clark's work and its tendency to 'descend' to the level of individual destinies and to the level of local 'legionary nests' marks the transition from social history to the historiography of the Legionary Movement. The strengths of these diachronic works combined with multiple microhistory episodes are the multitude of local and regional examples, the joining of an impressive number of 'small' events that are integrated within the general image of the era and which are symptoms of the 'interwar spirit'. Unlike biographies, chronological historical works don't focus particularly on the family education of, for example, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, but seek to showcase how the daily violence of the era can be explained through the student protests and through nationalist and notorious anti-Semitic activities. We can say that the two types of historiography are intertwined, offering the reader the historical picture necessary to understand the interwar 'code' in which the activities of the legionaries can be read.

The work of Traian Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier. Un fascism românesc*, is included in this historiographical category. Published in 2019 by the Cartier Publishing House in Chişinău, the Romanian version of the work was originally published in French under the title *Un fascism*

roumain. Histoire de la Garde de fer, in 2014 at Perrin Publishing House. If the work of Schmitt and Tatiana Niculescu analyses the portrait of Codreanu within the social, cultural, and political context, Traian Sandu's work is to be placed in the continuation of the current of the *new consensus* that emerged in the 1990s under the theorization of Roger Griffin. The analytical approach proposed by Sandu aims to overcome the simple descriptive method that stops at a series of legionary personalities "following their prolongation in matters of political socialization" (p. 17) and contributing to the completion of the image of the Legionary Movement through consistent archival research. The work capitalizes the funds of the Central National Historical Archive, of the National Council for the Study of Security Archives, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie and the Regional Police. The archival sources are important for bringing forward the documents of the informants infiltrated among legionaries, the politicians' decisions regarding the activity of the Legion, the statistical data regarding the penetration of the new political formation in different areas of the country and the social structure of the voters. From a methodological point of view, Sandu's work brings an element of novelty by exposing and analyzing some archival sources that have not been used before. The limits of archival sources can be exceeded by cross-comparing them with other sources - journals, memoirs, correspondence, legionary speeches and writings, press, etc. All of these come to support Traian Sandu's thesis that the Legionary Movement was a manifestation of a fascist current synchronous with other European fascisms, in the spirit of the historiography of the *new consensus*.

Oliver Jens Schmitt. Codreanu: between introspection and contradiction

Oliver Jens Schmitt offers a new dynamic of the historical events, he introduces qualitative analyses and personal considerations into the chronology of the Legionary Movement, so that the reading of the work 'leaps' from period to period to best explain the decision-making processes in the Iron Guard leadership, nonetheless, this is done without prior notice. For example, chapter 30 covers the events of 1936, while chapter 31 deals with the issues of 1934-1935 events. This transforms the analysis of the Swiss author into a description that is new and challenging. He shapes geography of the movement from Cuzist, Moldova, to Legionary Muntenia, to which he even adds the less well-known connection of the legionaries with Poland, overlooked by historians. Schmitt builds the history of the Legion in its distinct periods and time segments in the natural evolution of an adaptive process that

coincides with the “massification” of the movement –the strategies, plans, sympathies, underground or public struggles differ radically from year to year which makes it difficult to accurately frame the legionary actions. He deconstructs the idea of legionary consistency and its unity of action throughout its course as communist historiography constructed it from the ideological considerations of Marxism-Leninism. Schmitt probes Codreanu's psychological motivations, his hesitations, internal struggles, the legionary strategy of the Captain's image, the desire for violence in the 1920s, the passivism and militancy of regional groups, all in the dialectic between “center” and “periphery”. In this reading, key decisions of the legionary leadership were constantly altered by the deviations of the members, by the political risks of some forced actions, by the temptation of the response, and by the frustration of refraining from responding to the Carlist violence.

The history of the Legionary Movement is for Oliver Jens Schmitt, the history of the circumstantial interwar developments of the Romanian society, of the relationship between the electorate (with its expectations, mentalities, aspirations and ideals) and establishment: one of inclusion and rejection, of enthusiasm and revolt in specific political ages. Schmitt's analysis develops in two different directions: first, a fascist direction, where Codreanu is regarded as a leader of the legionary fascist movement; secondly, a direction concerning the history of religion, where religious mysticism is highlighted in concepts such as ‘collective salvation’ or ‘resurrection’. The Swiss researcher's method is part of the quantitative socio-historical approach used in the classic research of European Nazism and Fascism, but it is complemented by field research in Vâlcea County or in the Sub-Carpathians area. Archival documents, newspapers, and magazines of the era are used. As he himself states, the paper tends to transcend the debate centered on Bucharest or that of the history of the ideology, focusing on the psychological questions of the Captain. The novelty lies in its archival basis in the research of police and security reports, but especially in the reinterpretation of Codreanu's diary of 1934.

Tatiana Niculescu. Literary Portrait

The method used by Tatiana Niculescu Bran is similar to Schmitt's, being a biographical research of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. However, the rationale behind the approach is different: while Schmitt tries to present convincing arguments in favour of new theses and hypotheses about the Captain's personality, Tatiana starts the research with the need to explain to herself how the political and religious leader

from the interwar period was able to gather so much emotion and hatred around him. The writing style focuses on deduction, counterfactual assumptions, intentionally left blank spaces, uncertainties, and clear certainties, so that the whole work is a well-constructed narrative, sprinkled with literary fingerprints to facilitate the understanding of the interwar era. The author analyzes the reports, newspapers, magazines, newspapers, Codreanu's books, and the publicity of the time, but, unlike Schmitt or Sandu, she does not use archival sources.

An interesting note of the author shows how her philo-Semitic inclination transforms the historical reproduction of an anti-Semite like Codreanu into an 'interesting experience'. While Schmitt claimed that historians overestimated Codreanu's education at Dealu Monastery, Tatiana argues that the military training offered there has had significant effects. She makes a comparison of Dealu Monastery military training with that of European scout groups, such as those of Baden-Powell, Czech *sokolists* or Prussians from *Turnverein*. Tatiana also highlights some readings of the young Codreanu that Schmitt did not mention: *Semănătoru* and *Neamul românesc*, whose reading strengthened the national and traditional feeling of Corneliu Codreanu. The deductive writing style can, however, leave certain aspects uncertain, the reader not knowing whether the information presented is authentic or not. The use of counterfactual images such as 'if they were' or of deductive ones such as 'may have been', 'will have been imagined', 'will have been dreaming' are meant to render clear images of some sugar-coated and humanized events from Codreanu's existence - his readings, his actions, his beliefs, the impact of the war - they cannot be proved exactly, but they can be at least intuited.

Another aspect that Tatiana emphasizes and that Schmitt seems to overlook is the contribution of the nationalist officers grouped around Gheorghe Bădulescu in the assassination of the prefect Manciu. The first one supported anti-Semitic students' breaks in the newsrooms of the Jewish newspapers. The agitations within the army did not stop. Tatiana also recalls the plot of 8 active officers and 5 civilians, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Victor Precup against King Carol II, on the night of April 6-7, 1934. She emphasizes the impact of speech, *The duty of our life* of Vasile Pârvan from Cluj on the national ideal imagined by the young generation, analyzing it in detail, as opposed to Schmitt. Moreover, the author recalls the carving of the corpse of Mihai Stelescu assassinated by Decemviri and the following ritual dance around him, which was supposed to have happened after the assassination. Schmitt seems more circumspect and he

only illustrates how Stelescu was shot with dozens of bullets, without launching the idea of any subsequent ritual "dance".

At a glance we can say that Tatiana illustrates very suggestively how, as the state fails to integrate certain groups in favour of the legionaries, a transition from student revolutionary to legalism and a diminution of violence occurs. The ethnic group that was active in the Guard were the Aromanians - presented in sufficient detail in all specialized works - which represent an example of integrative failure promoted by the Romanian state in relation to its own colonization program in the Quadrilateral. The Aromanians will gradually radicalize and form a violent nucleus in the Legionary Movement. Tatiana Niculescu emphasizes the testimonies of Constantin Argetoianu and Alexandru Vaida Voevod of Armand Călinescu, but also the ones of Carol II's. It captures neither the activity of the `nests` in the country, nor the ascension of Horia Sima. For quantitative reasons, she does not focus on the struggles between the different groups within the Iron Guard. However, her work manages to highlight very well the failure of the institutional apparatus and to capture the expectations and frustrations of the population generated by a politically subordinated justice.

Roland Clark. The microhistory of the Iron Guard

Roland Clark's work, *Sfântă tinerețele gionară*, is placed in the continuation of the method of Armin Heinen and Francisco Veiga. From the beginning, Clark were trying to integrate the Legionary Movement into the definition of European fascism, as opposed to Schmitt and Tatiana Niculescu, who rather emphasize the 'native' elements of the Guard. The researcher makes an incursion into the Romanian anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century and tries to identify the nucleus of anti-Jewish sentiment since the time of Carol I. Clark uses the term 'ultranationalist' to differentiate the legionaries from 'the nationalist' politicians (the liberals were also nationalists). Although he often uses Marxist concepts such 'rural proletariat' or 'neo-serfdom' borrowed from Alexandru Dobrogeanu Gherea, it is only to emphasize the social element of the Legion in its regional diversity. The information comprising individual destinies, life stories, personal actions and regional elements occupies more than half of the book, his intention being to highlight the ramifications of the legionary supporters and to shift the attention from the main figure (Codreanu) towards simple members. The abundance of events often considered 'minor' are meant to build a complete picture of the Legionary Movement affirmation and activity, but also to show the social extent of its support 'from below' and the sacrificial spirit of the

members. Another difference in Clark's method is the emphasis on the 'normative' character of student protests on the Captain's personality, as opposed to the importance given to family education by Schmitt or to the military training in Dealu Monastery by Tatiana Niculescu. Roland Clark's argument is built around the student core and their claim of the legitimacy of university protests once the relations between LANC and Legion broke up.

We cannot overlook the "outlaw" (*haiduc*) tradition which is less common in other works. Clark argues that among the rural population the Legion created the image of an outlaw band (*bandă haiducească*) that shares justice among villagers. However, the 'outlaw' justice was an arbitrary one, being parallel to the justice of the law. The image of the *haiduci*/legionnaires was meant to develop a social practice that became an instrument of power concurrent to the state power. This form of altered justice offers a partial and subjective justice according to a Manichean view of the world: the 'good' is represented by the legionaries and the "evil" is represented by the Jews and the Romanians who made compromises with the Jews. The legionary integration of marginality through popular symbols which were familiar to the peasants, shows again the integrative failure of the state apparatus and the electoral tactics of the legionaries. Another detail omitted by Schmitt, Tatiana, or Chioveanu is the fate of the lawyer Istrate Micescu, who used legionaries to intimidate his opponents in the bar. As soon as he obtained the presidency of the bar, Micescu turned against the legionary students. This example is very suggestive to illustrate the difference in approach between Clark and Schmitt: the Swiss researcher shows how the Captain was manipulated by the interests of influential political personalities in the general context of the establishment (Codreanu as an intermediary between the "deep state" of the chamber and masses), without giving concrete examples, Roland Clark brings the explanation to details, presenting particular events from which the reader must construct an overview for himself.

The structure that summarizes the difference in method between the two is that Clark starts from *particular* to *general*, from numerous examples apparently 'thrown' into the narrative without a concrete connection between them, while Oliver Schmitt creates a narrative whose puzzle pieces are all well placed from the very beginning, where no socio-political and economic element remains outside. Using Roger Griffin's explanations, Clark analyzes the press structures such as *Axa*, *Calendarul* or *Cuvântul* and the intellectual elites who supported the Legionary

Movement (Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Mihai Polihroniade), interpreting their fascist message.

The multitude of examples offered is explained by Clark as the need to place practical activity above abstract ideology, thus exceeding the classical horizon of ideological interpretation of the Iron Guard. Political activism shapes the trajectories of individual destinies, which gives the author a unique writing perspective. The individual members of the Legion embodied, in one way or another, the ideal of the “new man” imagined and Clark's intention was to identify in many examples a ‘the collective archetype’. These hundreds of testimonies, examples and short biographies provide a consistent area of documentation from archives to journals, biographies, press, periodicals, books, private fund materials, oral sources, etc. Just as an iconostasis with numerous images of the important or less important members of the Legionary Movement, Clark analyses the processes of transformation and conversion that each and every member of the Legion was required to perform from an ontological and historical view.

Traian Sandu. History and sociology

Traian Sandu addresses the genesis of the Legionary Movement in the context of the aftermath of the First World War in an agrarian society dominated by the communist threat, as well as the internal struggles of the leadership. The daily violence and the radicalization of university students crowned the genesis of Archangel Michael's Legion in 1927. It then proceeds to the organization of the Iron Guard; a unique aspect brought into discussion was the relationship of dependence or independence between Iron Guard and Nazi Germany. The evolution of this relation has been analyzed in detail. The tension between the legionaries and King Carol II is also addressed, but there is a certain level of complicity between these two parts of the establishment, as well as the inability of public authorities to respond to the legionary violence which was targeted either against the Jews or against the parliamentary system. Despite documenting the abuses, they were guilty of the Legion were often acquitted and transformed into heroes acclaimed by the masses with leniency and even the support of the authorities. Moreover, the attitude of the authorities towards the movement was inconsistent, the repression phase interspersed with the moments when it was allowed to manifest relatively unsteadily. That is why legionary violence was ‘deliberately tolerated’ (p. 82). Although often arrested, Codreanu and other legionaries were acquitted under the pretext that - since they did not attack the monarchy, but ‘corrupt’ parliamentary system - their actions and

propaganda did not represent an attack against the security of the state. Even after the assassination of I.G. Duca in 1933, the King has continued to monitor the Iron Guard's actions against political parties, and the acquittal of the legionaries in the process that followed the assassination of Duca (only three assassins received convictions) raises question marks.

Traian Sandu approaches the problem with a question that many researchers have tried to answer, but only a few succeeded: what caused the peasants and workers to lean towards the Legion? The role of intellectuals, mentors, academics, students, theologians, and philosophers was studied after 1990, but 'the penetration of the working environment takes place only in the mid-1930s' (p. 11). The author tried to analyze the role of ritual, symbols, uniforms, flags, decorations, the songs, and marches which are 'gathering instruments' for illiterate people. In the rural world, the ritual enchants and offers safety. From a methodological point of view, Sandu's work comes to complement the overall image of the Legion created by previous writings that did not have access to archives or did not cross the intellectual elite barrier. Studies on legionary ideology either concentrate on some famous intellectual personalities or remain stuck in the doctrine and are unable to probe its prolongations in terms of political socialization. The relationship between religion and politics is also very interesting. Sandu states that legionarism was a transcendental fascism, unlike the Italian atheist fascism and the German pagan Nazism. Because of this, Codreanu was forced to instrumentalize the religion and at the same time to get rid of it, just as he openly revered the monarchy but fought against the unworthy king Carol II. The probing of Codreanu's inner dialectic is part of the new historiographical current and is a common thing among the works discussed here. The interest of this political religion lies precisely in its massification and not in its elitist isolation.

Probably the most significant element of novelty brought by *Istoria Gărzii de Fier. Un fascism românesc* lies in the detailed presentation of the movement's structural constituency, in the calculation of 'militant profitability', as well as in the study of the social and regional composition of the Legion - the legionary leadership itself distinguished between the mass movement and the political party, acting accordingly. Observing 'the weak capacity of electoral mobilization 'outside its militant body' (p. 345), Sandu shows that 'the best scores of the *Totul pentru Țară* party are registered in the most urbanized provinces' (p. 353). In conclusion, the paper proposes both a political history of the movement and a sociological analysis of it, enriching the historiography of the problem with new interpretive paradigms. The author's thesis is that 'the legionary movement was the only Romanian fascist

organization' (p. 360) and that Romanian fascism had 'two defining characteristics: weak electoral irradiation outside the militants of an anti-system party, on the one hand, and poor development of political communication in certain regions caused by mediocre acculturation due to their backwardness and isolation, on the other hand' (p. 353). Noting the 'full Euro-synchronous enrolment' of Romanian fascism between European fascisms, Traian Sandu observes that Romanian legionarism has developed in a socially, economically, and politically backward society - 'a big fascism in a small country'.

Comparative perspectives

The uniting the idea that crosses through the historiography regarding the Legionary Movement of the last decade seems to be the orientation towards the *social* research, with a stress on the Iron Guard's capacity of integrating the masses engaged as a consequence of adopting the universal voting system in 1918, of establishing a dialectic of proximity and remoteness in the institutions of the state during specific ages of the Romanian interwar period and of enveloping in its structure individuals of all social categories. Oliver Jens Schmitt claims that research has underestimated the importance of the legionary workers' program, imagined as part of an organic and harmonious community and as a counter-model to the Marxist social class struggle. At the same time, historians have overrated the military training at Dealu Monastery, where Schmitt claims, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu perfected, from a military and organizational perspective, the training received from his father, Ion Zelea Codreanu. Schmitt's method can be characterized by his differentiating between the leader and the movement, more precisely between the revolutionarism of the movement and the mysticism of the ruling nucleus. The historian captures the internal struggles within the movement by illustrating the 'western' dissidence of the radical terrorist faction led by Horia Sima, which continued to provoke the authorities by disobeying Codreanu, who ordered a total lack of fight-back, especially during his imprisonment in 1938.

This appended the image of an overburdened leader, one in the position of maintaining the unity of his movement and inclined towards contradictory actions. Moreover, Schmitt discovers a scission within the Movement between pro-carlists and anti-carlists, mirrored by a resembling a chasm inside the establishment between those who supported the Legion (Vaida Voievod, Inculeț, Tilea, Titeanu, Iuliu Maniu, joined by manufacturers, aristocrats, clerics) and the ones who wished it silenced (Carol al II-lea, Nicolae Titulescu, I.G. Duca, Armand Călinescu, the royal

camarilla, the famous case of Istrate Micescu etc.) For a more suggestive analysis of the rise and fall of the Iron Guard, we shall analyze the perspective of the conflict between the movement and the establishment.

Schmitt uses analysis concepts such as `nationalist-conservative` to illustrate the mentality of the elites, a fact that allows us to infer that the Legionary Movement could be categorized as `nationalist-revolutionary`. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu had been an outsider from the beginning, a marginal looking for ways to climb the social ladder in the very establishment that would ultimately have him meet his end. First, King Carol the 2nd sought to draw the sympathy of the public opinion through intermediaries who resonated ideatically and behaviourally with the peasants, workers, as well as with groups of intellectuals, the reason for which some historians believe that Carol offers Codreanu the position of Prime Minister with the condition of renouncing the leadership of the Movement. Codreanu declines, and this leads to the disruption of any connection between the two, creating, at the same time, two cores of power in a permanent conflict. Indirectly, the common grounds of the Legion and Carol were the spite and the fight against democracy to obtain the power. The actions of defiance of the parliamentary order, student violence, assassinations, royal decrees, and the change of the Constitution in 1938 rendered the state of law out of order.

The new political reality, in Jens Schmitt's opinion, looks as follows: on the one hand, the royal camarilla led by Carol 2nd overtook the establishment in the form of a `deep state`, where the secret services, army, businessmen, masonic lodges and intellectuals had a greater influence than the Parliament and democratic institutions. The mentality of the `deep state` was rooted in the epoch before 1941, being elitist, masculine, founded on favouritism and which didn't have any authentic contact with mass society; on the other hand, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the Legionary Movement had developed a direct contact with the masses, the elite, the army, intellectuals, the peasants and the workers, the Church throughout the years, thing which determined Carol II to attract Codreanu as an intermediary. Because of his lack of political experience, the Captain could have been a good instrument for intimidating the opponents, whereas through his influence Carol could have acquired a base of mass without changing his authoritarian vision of power. The failure of intermediation and total rupture made the two power nuclei in society impossible to coexist. The victory of one meant the annihilation of the other a thing which occurred. In Schmitt's words, `it was Romania's tragedy that the Legion wasn't crushed by a democracy able to defend by means of the

rule of law, but by an authoritarian regime, permeated by legionary ideas, without any actual support in society`.

Students

Tatiana Niculescu and Oliver Jens Schmitt paint a portrait of the student social circumstances in an almost exhaustive manner. Both evoke the activity of Codreanu as a 'strike wrecker' for communist manifestations, as a member of the Guard of National Conscience of Constantin Panou and as a fighter against the actions of communist students; nonetheless, in our research, the German historic lowers his gaze upon the shortcomings of daily life. Besides having a striking political conscience and displaying fear regarding the infiltration of Russian Jews from the East, students were faced with a harsh reality: universities were overwhelmed with the great number of students, the number of scholarships was low, the canteens couldn't feed them all and the accommodation was insufficient. Jewish students coming from an urban environment and living with their parents' were doing a better things, which sparked the envy of Romanian students. Schmitt introduces here the psychological factor of `socio-cultural alienation that students from a rural environment confronted with in an unfamiliar urban universe`.

This aspect is strengthened with the help of an oral history by an ex-legionary interviewed in *Țara, legiunea și Căpitanul* of Mihai Chioveanu, where it is stated that peasant students found in the cities an environment that didn't match the rural spiritual background, where cosmopolitanism inhibited and alienated the mental structure of the young man raised in the countryside with certain automatisms, habits and religious activities. The enthusiasm and adherence of students to the Legionary Movement came from the fact that it cultivated `what they had left at home`. Chioveanu remarks the natural need of the individual of being part of a community in an environment that was alien to him, in which his integrations were difficult. The Legionary Movement used the *catch party* tactics, offering students and later his members certainty, involvement, integration, and representation within a hierarchical structure that cultivated socializing in a controlled environment (in canteens and guest houses), that offered distinction, decoration, work camps, departments and whose rationale was that of being an `educational institution`, nu a stereotypical party. Thus, Chioveanu underlines that the Legionary Movement came to offer nationalist solutions to a rural(`-izing`) horizon of the peasants that came to the cities and felt marginal, distant from the reality of urban cosmopolitanism.

Tatiana Niculescu evokes rather literally that the cosmopolitan Iasi, with a Jewish population of 34%, according to the 1930 census, and with 'paved streets, shops belonging to French, Viennese or Swiss merchants', with parfumeries, cake shops, 'bragagerii', with salons of the nobility, in trend with the the European fashions, was 'disturbed' by the student body coming from all corners of Great Romania. Tatiana's initiative has the merit of underlining, despite the general opinion, that the anti-Semitic nationalists had actually lost the 'academics' war. The excesses of A.C. Cuza were a symptom of a crisis rather than those of a normal manifestation. Tatiana highlights the fact that very few professors embraced nationalism, leftist professors, Bessarabian students, and Jewish socialists, along with thousands of workers that organized manifestations of protest singing 'International' and chanting slogans against the king being the majority. Schmitt claims that nationalist professors were in conflict with their more numerous socialist colleagues about the way of organizing the state of Great Romania. The ideological left and right influences transformed courses in education about the nation. A complete radiography of political orientation among the professors is offered by Lucian Boia in *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930-1950*. Boia argues that the Liberals are, by far the most numerous (129), almost twice as many as Peasants (with 71 specialists/academics). Then the next one was The National Christian Party with 21 university professors, The People's Party with 14, and the last ones on the list were the Legionnaires, with 8 declared professors, followed by Grigore Iunian's Radical Peasant Party, with 5 professors.

The University of Iași was dominated by the Peasant Party, especially by those in the left of the party. The political climate in Iași dominated not only by Constantin Stere's tradition, by Poporanism, and by 'Viața românească', but also by the conflict with A.C. Cuza's nationalists had gone to a more accentuated polarization of students. Furthermore, Schmitt shows in a unique way how student violence came from the lack of efficiency in applying the law, which was replaced with the common law, with the traditional honour code. A first trait of Codreanu could be the fact that he used to put his own knightly code of Medieval-Romantic origin above the Civil Law, considering his entire behaviour as a legitimate defence.

Regarding the student movement, Roland Clark claims that in 1920 many of the Romanian students were the first of their families that were pursuing higher education. Their secondary education was defective, the complaints of the professors being suggestive in this sense. Only 10% of the students enrolled between 1929-1938 obtained a

graduation diploma, a sign of their lack of success, and the slim chances of building a career. The first mass, the student generation didn't have the rationale of education itself/on its own, substituting it for political imperatives and personal vendettas. Clark considers that poorly prepared students, with barely education capable of understanding and believing A.C. Cuza found a solution for their shortcomings in anti-Semitic violence and in activating in the student congresses. The students didn't seem to have, in Clark's opinion, some well-shaped political objectives. They would serve justice on their own, imitating the procedures of legitimate authority, the violence coming from anarchy, not from a fight truly serious. Clark considers that these manifestations as 'distractions' for the young students, a way of socializing and group integration, comparing them to the Italian *squadrists* and German *Strumtruppen*.

Religion. Mystical orthodoxy and emergent neoprottestantism

A significant historiographical difference is the religious influence on the members of Legionary Movements. Oliver Jens Schmitt shows that, in contrast with the uncertain spirituality of the '27s young generation', which had a cultural fight with the 'national ideals' generation, the Legionary Movement incorporated both young and old men in favour of healthy national community ideals. Corneliu's father, Ion Zelea Codreanu, professor A.C. Cuza, Moța's father, general Cantacuzino-Grănicerul assured social prestige to the Legion, financial support and, also, the clergy's support. Their religious influence on legionnaires was a reality and, seeing this fact, Schmitt offers to the reader an incursion in Cuza's theology, which was the base of LANC doctrine under the slogan: 'Christ, King, Nation – Romanians' Romania', an ideology of the 'anti-Semitism of the deed'. Nevertheless, A.C. Cuza had his own representation of Christianity, interpreting the Old Testament as a Judaic text which had to be eliminated from Christianity because, in his words, it was abolished by Jesus. For the professor from Iași, Jesus has fought against Judaism and Jews who are 'the people of Satan' and 'the reign of darkness'. A.C. Cuza's remarks have led to indignation among the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, but the support of the priests from countryside and the help of some hierarchs could indicate the fact that Legionary Movement was blessed with the Church's official support, it was not a support or a unitarian rejection in a specific Catholic way, but more like a fragmented and individual one, from the bosom of the Church.

Scholars often ask themselves why the Orthodox Church has not firmly delimited itself from the Iron Guard. In contrast to the Catholic West

where there are numerous monk orders, Schmitt argues that the legionary movement has been an ambiguous political organization, but not a heretical one in particular. More precisely, the orthodox tradition does not have an excommunication instrument compared to the Catholic Church, which implies that the boundaries of the groups that benefit or not benefit from the support of the church remain vague. The church did not proceed to prompt exclusion. Priests, monks, nuns, hierarchs like Nicolae Bălan or Grigore Cristescu supported the Iron Guard, others like Miron Cristea and Popescu-Mălăești condemned it, and, considering this situation, it was never officially condemned *in toto*. Codreanu delimited the legionary education from the Orthodox preaching, considering that the mission of the church is much nobler than the legionary one. The Guardists believed that the human nature is corrupted by the original sin so that violence, excesses, and crimes may occur in exceptional circumstances.

Schmitt asserts that Captain's writings address mysticism not from a religious perspective, but from a nationalist perspective. The messianism of Corneliu Codreanu was a political one, but he used the repertoire of religious images and symbols both from personal belief and to offer the peasants familiar elements, with which they identified themselves. For Codreanu, the Romanians had an important historical mission- the widely used concept of 'Resurrection' was actually the victory of the legionary Romanians. Fascist 'palingenetic nationalism' was, the expression of a national revival but also of a transcendent one as Christianity promises. Schmitt tries to show that the Church and the Legion differed doctrinally, but they resembled rituals and traditions: requiem, cult of the dead, fasting, prayer 'ascetic struggle', mysticism in times of crisis, sacrifice, the Way of the Cross were all politically understood. Codreanu made the religion the core of his 'creed' - his own intransigent, steady moral behaviour, the poverty in which he lived, and the fanatical orthodox faith indicated him as a model in a 'corrupt' political world, which contributed to the creation of the personality cult. In addition, the late reading of the Bible in 1938 confirms to the German researcher the hypothesis that Codreanu's Christianity was predominantly determined by orthodox popular religious rituals and practices, which distances him from the Protestant understanding of the faith that Tatiana Niculescu considers a determinant in the Legion's every day practice.

Tatiana Niculescu breaks the thread of research that attributes the doctrinal influence of the Legionary Movement to the Orthodox Church and dedicates a chapter (*Christian Travel*) of her work in researching the neo-Protestant religious background of the legionary activity. The author

claims that the translation of the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* books by Dumitru Cornilescu, an Orthodox theologian later becoming neo-Protestant, were two important elements in the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) activity. This group combined physical exercise, religious instruction, and evangelism within the masses, adapting to the confessions of the countries where it was active. Tatiana Niculescu claims that the YMCA was inspired by the scouts the principles published by Lord Baden-Powell, which will later be put into practice by the Legionary Movement, and the main collaborator of this association in Romania was Virgil Bădulescu, former professor of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu at the military school Mănăstirea Dealu. Sports camps, youth evangelisms, Bible readings, and community volunteering campaigns are organized according to the European main trend at that time.

The author draws a parallel between the leader of a YMCA cell and the head of a legionary 'nest': he had to be an elite student, a good organizer, a Christian, an athlete, and a volunteer. He had to support the church for the moral revival of the country. From these premises, although she acknowledges that there is no evidence of Codreanu's activity in the YMCA, Tatiana considers that he participated in the camps organized by Virgil Bădulescu at Carmen Sylva, the site of the future legionary camp. The author explains how the religious reorganization after the First World War would have favoured a kind of ecumenism among the religions of the soldiers on the front. This quasi-military advance of the confessional barrier-breaking process manifested itself in Romania through the works of Dumitru Cornilescu and the priest Teodor Popescu, who held sermons, popularized books, offered brochures and spread new ideas in cities through conferences. Following criticism of the Orthodox Church, Cornilescu was forced to leave the country, and Teodor Popescu was forbidden to preach. Later, Cornilescu will be claimed by the Pentecostal cult while Popescu continued his apostolate through conferences, the 'Christian Group after Scripture' being later assimilated by the Baptist cult.

During this time, another religious movement of neo-Protestant inspiration, *Oastea Domnului*, appeared in Transylvania as a reform within the Orthodox Church. Tatiana Niculescu argues that the community spirit and the organization of the *ostași* attracted the Orthodox youth, and the common passages from *Cărticica șefului de cuib* and *Călătoria creștinului* would be the symptoms of this new religious spirit. Although the author's incursion is daring, at the end of the chapter,

Niculescu offers the verdict of the rather fragile argument of the no Protestant influence on the Legion: 'their voluntarism (of C.Z. Codreanu and his friends) kept nothing from the spirit of the YMCA, failing to overcome the hooligan spirit of the group'. The bullying, beating, fear, and humiliation of the Jewish students did not have much to do with the activity of 'Christian-athletics' association, whose activities had no political but strictly moral religious objectives. Tatiana shows, however, that Zelea Codreanu and his Văcărești colleagues rarely mentioned the Orthodox Church, using instead terms such as 'Christian Church', 'Christianity'. The explanation could be the desire of the legionnaires to acquire an extended representation among both Orthodox and Greek Catholics and Protestants, with whom they often shared the quality of colleagues within nationalist associations. The author's conclusion is that the Legionary Movement used a magic-religious syncretism of Christian symbolism familiar to the Romanian space, easily recognizable by all social categories, to gain influence among the society.

Roland Clark shows with the help of percentages, statistics, and numbers that the legionnaires promoted traditional orthodox themes, a police report from 1937 estimates that 1,2% of legionnaires were ordained priests. Taking the conclusions of Francisco Veiga, approximately 2000 of the 10000 priests in the country were legionnaires. The adhesion of the clergy is explained by Clark by the fact that they found a political platform to represent their religious views. The priests blessed flags, took part in funerals, offered the members access to the church, whereas some theologians such as Nichifor Crainic and Nae Ionescu wrote in favour of the Guard. Some other laics like A.C. Cuza and Nicolae Paulescu were atheists for a while, after which they embraced 'religious anti-Semitism', as Clark named it, rejecting the Old Testament. The method used by Roland Clark consists of evoking the insignificant destinies of individuals with the purpose of making the order part by part, to build the grand image of the Legion. In his paper, he supports his arguments presenting the destinies and ideas of some persons such as Teodosie Popescu, Paraschiv Anghelescu, Nicolae Georgesc-Ediniti, George Racoveanu, Vasile Boldeanu etc. Clark recalls that legionary ideas regarding national society were similar to the ones of orthodoxy at that time, mixing it up with the ideas of Christian communities. The idea of an organic community that ties the past, present, and future generations that can be found in Codreanu's thinking was similar to the orthodox theology that claims that the church unites the believers, dead and alive, in a unique

community – the body of Christ. The commemoration of the dead was practiced with thorough use of the anaphora and requiem as well as by building triptychs, rituals that the legionnaires practiced to show their availability for sacrificing themselves in the service of the national ideal, as well as to offer examples of heroism to other legionnaires. Roland Clark ties the doctrine and practice of the Orthodox Church to the legionary ideology, the latter manifesting some particular rituals coming from the creed of the Iron Guard and of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the recent historiography on the Legionary Movement and the Iron Guard is diverse for both methodological and quantitative reasons. It can be analyzed based on two axes: *diachronic*, divided chronologically into specific ‘historical ages’, and *synchronic*, which focuses on the whole nationalist, religious, mystical and cultural ensemble of the interwar period. The historiography leaned towards a biographical form of the history of ‘Captain’ Codreanu, taking into consideration the work of Oliver Jens Schmitt (*Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”*) and Tatiana Niculescu’s *Misticarugăciunii și a revolverului. Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu* both published in 2017. These works deal with the profile of the legionary leader by probing his intimate psychology. Oliver Jens Schmitt tries to understand Captain ‘from within’ while Tatiana Niculescu aims to offer the general public portrait of Corneliu Codreanu in an accessible manner. Roland Clark’s work shifts towards microhistory and its tendency is to ‘descend’ to the level of individual destinies and to the level of local ‘legionary nests’, marking the socialization of the historiography of the Legionary Movement. Traian Sandu’s consistent paper proposes both a political history of the movement and a sociological analysis, enriching the historiography of the problem with new interpretive paradigms. The author tried to analyze the role of the ritual symbols, uniforms, flags, decorations, songs, and the marches which are ‘gathering instruments’ for illiterate people. Sandu’s work comes to complement the overall image of the Legion created by previous writings that did not have access to archives or did not cross the intellectual elite barrier.

The debates around student radicalization and the role that religion have played in the legionary ideology continue to this day, but new archival sources and new perspectives for analysis will generate other specialized papers on Iron Guard in the near future. Until then, we

can observe that elements of novelty are brought into the books analyzed above: neoprotestantism, psychology, institutional conflicts, etc. Historiography follows its natural course of development. For the Romanian society, the Iron Guard theme will continue to be a sensitive one, but mature historical analysis can shed light on the history of interwar Romania without provoking negative or positive emotions from society. A nonbiased analysis has the role of a historical catharsis.

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