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Legionary Dreams, Visions, and Divine Apparitions in the Communist Prisons: Designing a Fascist Carceral Theophany in Contemporary Romania

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The paper discusses the forging of a carceral legionary theophany based on oneiric experience and the apparitions of saints to imprisoned members of the Iron Guard in contemporary Romania. It also approaches the post-Communist instrumentalization of the legionaries' prison experience (dreams, visions of the Virgin and saints, "dreams of terror") in supporting their claim of canonizing fascists martyrs as saints of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Keywords: *Fascism, Iron Guard, Theophany, Underground Religion, Saints of the Communist Prisons, Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, Alternative elRigiosity, Romanian Orthodox Church.*

> More often than anywhere else in the world in prison, the dream was the most precious nourishment of the soul. Only in dreams did we fell the radiant touch of freedom. More than anywhere else, in prison, I realized that truth of Shakespeare's statement mentioned in some place, in the words of one of his characters: 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of.'[1]

The statements of Ion Cârja (1922-1977), a former political prisoner during the Communist regime in post-World War Two Romania, depict the brutal reality that described most of the self-reflective narratives about imprisonment by the political prisoners irrespective of their views.[1] Under the pressure of violent repression exercised by the Communist authorities the members of various ideological groups, religious communities, or ethnic communities, various religious expressions and hybridizations of official religions occurred. The article addresses the importance of the oneiric experience, of dreams, "terror-dreams" (nightmares), and apparitions of saints or legionary martyrs for the fascist carceral religiosity as

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[1] Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească* (Iași: Polirom, 20052).

preserved in the memoirs and diaries of those former Iron Guard members who survived the Communist prisons.[2]

As a form of alternative religiosity to the official Orthodoxy, the legionary carceral religiosity with its emphasis on dreams, visions, miracles, performance of rituals ascribed only to the clergy, and martyrology, responded to the legionaries' need of adapting lived religion to a carceral context. Starting from the interwar years, the prison experience became one of the privileged *topoi* of the religious underground, where, under the pressure and tortures exerted by a totalitarian and repressive political system, traditional religion was re-interpreted and re-shaped according to the limitations imposed by authorities and the absence of clergy in prisons. Carceral religious experiences often crossed the thin border between Orthodoxy and heterodoxy, leading the in-house theologians of the Romanian Orthodox Church to question its canonicity.[3]

The adaptation of traditional religious tenets and rituals to the carceral context had as consequence the fact that dreams went hand in hand with visions, and apparitions of the saints. Both as a sign of God's benevolence towards the imprisoned community and a return to a primordial type of Christianity based strictly on the teachings of the Scriptures, these visions and dreams bolstered brotherly love among detainees and the charismatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit. As several historians have already emphasized, from the interwar years onwards, legionary dreams and omens played a significant role in the Iron Guard's history, validating its claims of permanent contact with the "unknown spirits in the heavens" and transcendence.[4] Moreover, the early accounts of the imprisoned Văcărești group claimed that the future Legionary Movement met its divine protector in the person of Archangel Michael through a vision

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[2] For an overview of the legionary memoirs and diaries, see: Ionuț Biliuță, "Constructing Fascist Hagiographies: The Genealogy of the Prison Saints Movement in Contemporary Romania," *Contemporary European History* (November 2021): 1–21.

[3] Zuzanna Bogumił, *Gulag Memories: The Rediscovery and Commemoration of Russia's Repressive Past*, trans. Philip Palmer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 23–95; Jeffrey S. Hardy, "Religious Identity, Practice, and Hierarchy at the Solovetskii Camp of Forced Labor of Special Significance," in *Rethinking the Gulag: Identities, Sources, Legacies*, eds. Alan Barenberg and Emily D. Johnson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 27–8.

[4] Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ascensiunea și căderea "Căpitanului"* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), 38.

that Corneliu Codreanu (1899-1938) had while imprisoned in Văcărești prison, near Bucharest.[5]

The article argues that dreams, nightmares, omens, visions, and the apparition of saints played a significant role in initially shaping a legionary communitarian religion as experienced in prisons that led to the apparition of the legionary hagiography. Subordinated after 1964 to the literary productions of legionary hagiographies and the initiative to obtain the official acknowledgement of the legionary martyrs' sainthood by the Romanian Orthodox Church, the oneiric legionary experience was re-interpreted by the neo-legionary hagiographers. Dreams and visions of the legionary martyrs during their imprisonment constituted clear proof of their sanctity. The post-communist hagiographers linked the oneiric experience of the imprisoned legionary martyrs with the unearthing of their alleged relics, as a relevant and integral component of their emerging hagiographic profiles.[6]

Born out of a heterodox religiosity that embraced both fascist and Orthodox tenants, and in the wake of the epidemics of theophanies taking place in interwar and post-war Romania, legionary carceral oneirology underwent several permutations in its quest of sacralising legionary martyrdom according to Orthodox Christian principles.[7] As a religiosity fostered in the underground milieu (that of the prisons), and after 1964, in a clandestine format constantly surveilled by the Securitate, the reliance on dreams, omens, and apparitions of saints bolstered the legionaries' confidence that their sufferings had meaning, that they fought for a cause and eventually prevailed in their trials with visible and invisible enemies.[8]

The sources for such research can be found in the recollections of former legionary inmates preserved in the pages of memoirs, diaries, letters, and interviews. Apart from the subjectivity of these personal writings, the

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[5] Un viitor legionar din închisoarea de la Cluj, "MINUNEA CEREASCĂ petrecută zilele trecute în închisoarea Clujului. Cu cine e Isus!," *Pământul strămoşesc* 2, no. 3 (1 February 1928): 1–2.

[6] Ciprian Voicilă, ed., *Mărturisitorii. Minuni. Mărturii. Repere* (Bucharest: Lucman, 2010).

[7] "Programul campaniei «Din temnițe spre sinaxare»," in *Din temnițe spre sinaxare*, ed. Danion Vasile (Galați: Egumeniţa, 2007), 168; Claudiu Târziu, "Şi morți vom izbândi!," *Rost. Revistă de cultură creștină și politică* 6, no. 70 (December 2008): 3, 7; idem, *Sfinții închisorilor* (Petru-Vodă: Petru Vodă Monastery/Paltin Monastery, 2019).

[8] Dumitru Bordeianu, *Mărturisiri din mlaștina disperării* (Bucharest: Scara, 2000), 6–7.

authors engaged in a hagiographical re-writing of other legionaries' prison experience.[9] The whitewashing of their political biographies and their subsequent heroization went hand in hand with a deliberate literary process of moulding hagiographical profiles according to the legionary rules and the canonization requirements of the Orthodox Church.[10] With some relevant exceptions, the oneiric experience can hardly be found in archival documents. Legionary dreams during imprisonment should be perceived as myths of the

> past that may be activated in the present employing affective images and symbols. Affective resonance rather than chronology holds various events together. Whereas archives and chronologies objectivize the past in the cases [of dreams] the feeling tone of the past, its mythic power may be mobilized and reexperienced in the present.[11]

The study of the oneiric historizing and prophesizing as present in the legionary memoirs would also allow the researcher unmitigated access to the legionary subjectivity and its unconscious manifestations. As Michel Foucault said in his preface to Ludwig Binswanger's essay entitled "Dreams and Existence," "In dreams, he [a person] encounters what he is and what he will be, what he has done and what he is going to do,

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[9] "Introduction. The Rhythm of the Saints," in *The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment*, ed. Erdozain (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017), 7.

[10] Cathy Caridi, *Making Martyrs East and West: Canonizations in the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016); Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 12; Elisabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 168; Evelyne Patlagean, "Sainteté et Pouvoir," in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Press, 2001), 92; Christian Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Re-writing and Canonization* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 61–88; Laura Franco, "Psychological Introspection and the Image of Sanctity in the Metaphrastic *Menologion*," in *Metaphrasis: A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and Its Hagiographical Products*, eds. Stavroula Constantinou and Christian Høgel (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 249–70. For the politicization of saints, see: Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 107–43. For the legionary rules of canonization established in the case of Codreanu and other legionary martyrs, see: Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Capitan Codreanu: Aufstieg und Fall des rumänischen Faschistenführers* (Wien: Paul Zsolnay, 2016), 279–87.

[11] Charles Stewart, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017[2]). For an interesting counter-perspective, see: Bernard Lahire, *L'interprétation sociologique des rêves* (Montreal: La Découverte, 2021); Patrick McNamara, *Dreams and Visions: How Religious Ideas Emerge in Sleep and Dreams* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio/Praeger, 2016).

discovering there the knot that ties his freedom to the necessity of the world."[12]

1. An Apocalyptic Landscape of Visions, Miracles, and Divine Apparitions in modern Romania?

The religious landscape in the interwar and post-war years was marked by diversity and heterodoxy.[13] In the 1920s, the Lord's Army and the dissidence from the Stork Nest's church in Bucharest, coupled with the advent and the territorial and numerical expansion of Evangelical communities, questioned the role of the predominant Orthodox Church in Romanian society from within.[14] The emphasis placed by bishops and some layers of the clergy on spiritual renewal, theological renovation, the return of the clergy to its apostolic ideals, and the reshaping of the monastic order according to the tenets of Eastern ascetism, ecumenism, as well as the troubled relations with Romanian Roman- and Greek-Catholics determined a rapid change of pace in the spiritual management of the Orthodox church.[15]

Furthermore, dreams and visions represented an integral part of Orthodox spirituality from Byzantine times.[16] An apparition of an

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[12] "Dream, Imagination and Existence," in *Dreams and Existence: Michel Foucault and Ludwig Binswanger*, ed. Keith Hoeller (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), 54. See also: Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London: Routledge, 1999), 181.

[13] For heterodoxy in interwar Romania, see: Iemima Ploscariu, "The Word Read, Spoken, and Sung: Neo-Protestants and Modernity in Interwar Romania," *Central Europe* 18, no. 2 (2020): 105–21.

[14] Clark, *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

[15] Ioan I. Ică jr., "Teologia Ortodoxă modernă și contemporană – momente, figuri, parcurs, interpretare," in *Teologia Ortodoxă* în *secolul al XX-lea* și *la* începutul *secolului al XXI-lea*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Bucharest: Basilica, 2011), 58–9; Chris Davies, *Hungarian Religion, Romanian Blood: A Minority's Struggle for National Belonging, 1920-1944* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 2019), 36–65; James Kapalo, *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (London: Routledge, 2019); Ioan Moga, *Orthodoxe Selbst- und Fremdbilder: Identitätskurse der rumänischen orthodoxen Theologie des 20. Jh. im Verhältnis zur Römisch-Katholischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht / V&R unipress, 2020), 117–24.

[16] Jesse Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 24–76; Catia Galatariotou, "Psychoanalysis and Byzantine Oneirographia," in *Dreaming in Byzantium and Beyond*, eds. Christine Angelidi and George T. Calofonos (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 221–33.

Orthodox saint or Virgin Mary, an omen or a dream that a monk or a nun might have had could announce rapid changes of power, forestalling or incoming natural or historical catastrophes, the revealing of new relics or saints, the displeasure of the heavens with someone's behaviour, a call for personal or general penitence, or a spiritual change of pace and life for someone else.[17] From late Antiquity onwards, and especially in the traditional popular religion of the Romanian villages, dreams, omens, and rarely divine apparitions of God, Christ, the Virgin, or the saints marked consciously or unconsciously the rhythms and practices of the peasant spiritual life.[18] These manifestations of the sacred and the proximity of the person with saints through his dreams and visions signalled the proximity of the sacred even in inauspicious milieu such as prison.[19]

The emergence of the Maglavit theophany in the mid 1930s and the return of monastics such as Fr. Arsenie Boca (1910-1989) to Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery and Fr. Evlogie Oța (1909-1979) to Râmeț Monastery following visions of the Virgin in 1940 signalled a change of pace in the spiritual practices of lived Orthodoxy.[20] By extension, the massively popular impact of the Vladimirești Monastery eucharistic pilgrimage preached by abbes Veronica Gurău's revelations had tectonic consequences in the life and experience of Orthodox spirituality.[21] These are but a few examples of spiritual phenomena, "heterodox" manifestations. These religious events entailed choreographed public rituals, the focus on visions,

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[17] Guy G. Stroumsa, "Dreams and Visions in Early Christian Discourse," in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, eds. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 189–213.

[18] Éva Pócs, "We, too, Have Seen a Great Miracle: Conversations and Narratives on the Supranatural among Hungarian-speaking Catholics in a Romanian Village," in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, eds. Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk (London: Routledge, 2012), 259.

[19] Oksana Kis, *Survival as Victory: Ukrainian Women in the Gulag* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 231–32; Judith Pallot and Elena Katz, *Waiting at the Prison Gates: Women, Identity and the Russian Penal System* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 33–4; Irene Becci, *Imprisoned Religion: Transformations of Religion during and after Imprisonment in Eastern Germany* (London: Routledge, 2016), 81.

[20] Evoghie Oța, *Jurnal/Memorii*, manuscript. For a shortened version of his travels see his correspondence with the Communist authorities in ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 161963, vol. 1, 17.

[21] *Minunile din comuna Tudor Vladimirescu. Noi Vedenii, Semne și Vindecări* (Neamț: Tipografia Mănăstirii Neamțului, 1940); *Minunile din comuna Tudor Vladimirescu, ju d. Tecuci. Noi vedenii, semne si vindecari* (Galați: Tipografia Cultura Poporului, 1940[2]).

miracles, and prophecies, and the importance placed on a foundational person, who functioned both as a prophet and spiritual leader.[22]

While the Maglavit phenomenon focused entirely on the visions of the shepherd Petrache Lupu (1907-1994) and was discarded by most Orthodox theologians by the end of 1930s as unauthentic, its impact on the legionaries and other kindred monastical movements like Vladimirești Monastery took inspiration from previous alleged theophany propagated by Petrache Lupu among monastics and simple Orthodox believers.[23] The Securitate officers acknowledged in their recollections of the Eucharistic rituals performed at Vladimirești that the nuns depicted themselves and that monastic topography as a place of constant divine revelation, as "a new Maglavit."[24] As "theophanic" places, both Maglavit and Vladimirești Monastery enjoyed an important role in the mind of Orthodox believers, as places where God has revealed to Lupu and Gurău, respectively in the form of the Eucharist.[25]

The revelations, divine apparitions of God, the Virgin, or the saints to monastics and dreams were appealing to the wider public and, thus, passed from the monastic and Orthodox spiritual underground into the legionary imaginary.[26] Religious members of the Iron Guard envisaged their commitment to the fascist cause through a religious lens which imagined the movement both as a political party and a messianic religious movement with the sole purpose of redeeming the Nation's sins.[27]

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[22] Ștefan Cazan, *Reconvertirea de la Maglavit a unui fost sectant* (Râmnicu-Vâlcea: Editura Episcopiei Râmnicului Noului Severin, 1935), 12; Petru Rezuș, "Criteriologia falselor teofanii," *Studii Teologice* 1, no. 3–4 (1949): 226–37; Fr. Petru Rezuș, "Criteriile revelațiunii divine și combaterea falselor teofanii," *Studii Teologice* 1, no. 5–6 (1949): 345–64; Mihai Urzică, *Minuni și false minuni* (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993[2]), 167–219; 220–37.

[23] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 234104, 36; idem, file no. 236666, vol. 2, 23; idem, file no. 160128, vol. 4, 71. For Maglavit and the Legionary movement, see: ANR, Ministerul de Interne, Fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, vol. 42/1935, 7, 9, 39; ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 236684, 95, 108; Schmitt, "Approaching the Social History of Romanian Fascism: The Legionaries of Vâlcea County in Interwar Period," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 3, no. 2 (2014): 130–31.

[24] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 234104, 50, 70–1.

[25] Nil Dorobanțu, *Petru de la Maglavit. Teofoanie* (Bacău: Floarea de april, 2017).

[26] Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 210; Radu Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5 (2004): 419–53.

[27] Ilie Imbrescu, *Biserica și Mișcarea legionară* (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1940), 45.

Born out of the emboldened theophanies and visionaries of the late 1930s and 1940s, a new legionary "carceral" theophany emerged.[28] Based on the commandments of the Legion, the revelations from Maglavit, Vladimirești, Sâmbăta, Antim monasteries, and the Church Fathers, but also a direct product of the prison experience accumulated throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the legionary carceral "theophany" had several cornerstones.[29] Buttressed upon the sacralization of the legionary martyrdom, among the key-tenets of the legionary carceral "theophany" were the emphasis placed upon experiencing dreams, inmates acting as seers or visionaries, or disseminating visions of the saints throughout incarcerated legionaries.[30]

After the war, with the advent of the communist regime, one can witness an outspread of such religious manifestation based on a previous ideological construction where opposing atheistic Communism was described as a religious war by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu:

> If the Russian troops will enter in the Devil's name in our country and they will be victorious, who can believe, who has the mind to argue that they will leave before they will satanize us, meaning that they will make us all Bolsheviks? The consequences? Useless to discuss.[31]

A similar position was adopted by Codreanu's successor, Horia Sima. In one of his books, Sima stated that Communism had a "satanic origin" and that:

> Communists have a religion; they are Lucifer's disciples, and they practice a satanic cult. They destroy everything which is Christian because this is the price of the power they enjoy. They have been helped

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[28] Ilie Tudor, *Un an lângă Căpitan* (Bucharest: Sânziana, 2010), 52.

[29] I use "theophany" in commas because legionaries never claimed that God revealed Himself directly to them. Nevertheless, the imprisoned legionary members acted upon this apophatic divine revelation as it actually took place.

[30] Nichifor Crainic, "10 Decembrie," *Calendarul* 1, no. 244 (11 December 1932): 1; Aurel Vântu, "Note din închisoare. Însemnările unui student," *Calendarul* 1, no. 29 (20 February 1932), 2; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Însemnări de la Jilava* (Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1995), 19; Biliuță, "Constructing Fascist Hagiographies," 12.

[31] Codreanu, *Pentru legionari* (Timișoara: Gordian, 1994), 79; Nicolae Paulescu, *Tălmăcirea Apocalipsului. Soarta viitoare a jidănimii* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Oltenia, 1911); Dorin-Liviu Bîtfoi, *Petru Groza, ultimul burghez. O biografie* (Bucharest: Compania, 2004); Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State in Romania, 1948-1964* (London: Hurst, 1999), 53–74; Deletant, *Romania under Communism: Paradox and Degeneration* (London: Routledge, 2018), 49–89.

> by Lucifer to extend their dominion over so many nations, they were given so many political and material satisfactions because, when the time comes, to become tools of the Antichrist.[32]

In the context of envisaging the communist ideology as the "religion of Satan", the emphasis placed on dreams, visions, and apparitions of the Virgin, saints, and legionary martyrs in the fascist religiosity could be read as a form religious hybridization taking place in the context for the new regime in the late 1940s and the 1950s.[33] As in other cases in the region, instead of rooting out all forms of religiosity, the official atheist propaganda promoted by the communist authorities succeeded in bolstering apocalyptical awareness and the proliferation of hetero-orthodox religious movements and practices all across Bolshevik Russia and Eastern Europe.[34]

All these movements of spiritual renewal, including the legionary carceral religion, had to do with the apocalyptical disposition nurtured by Orthodox monastics and legionaries, following the disastrous outcome of World War Two and the advent of the Communist regime.[35] For most religious legionaries and Orthodox monks and nuns the instauration of a Communist atheist government meant the coming of the final age of humankind and a war between the forces of good and those of evil.[36] Taking refuge in apocalyptical thought that prophesized the end of days as near and the need for resistance to the advent of evil on earth determined monastics and legionaries alike to act: some joined the armed resistance, others, putting their trust in God's mercy, increased their fasting, prayers,

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[32] Horia Sima, *Ce este Comunismul?* (Timişoara: Gordian, 19942), 58.

[33] Bordeianu, *Mărturisiri*, 8.

[34] Catherine Wanner, "Introduction," in *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, ed. idem, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–2; Anca Maria Şincan, "În clandestinitate: minorități religioase nerecunoscute de lege în arhivele Securității," *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane 'Gheorghe Şincai' al Academiei Române*, 22 (2019): 218–31; James A. Kapaló, "Performing Clandestinity: The Religious Underground, the Secret Police and the Media in Communist Eastern Europe," *Journal Of The British Association For The Study Of Religion*, 22 (2020):16–43; Kapaló and Kinga Povedák, "Introduction: reframing the religious underground," in *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, eds. Idem (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 1–36. See also: Laura Wittman, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 247–58.

[35] Cârja, *Canalul morții*, 139

[36] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 160128, vol. 2, 97.

and their predisposition for visions, dreams, divine revelations, hoping to constitute through self-sacrifice a spiritual barrier against the advance of the Communist evil in the world.[37] The legionary theophany described by apocalyptical fears and visions/apparitions should be read as vivid expression of this hybridization.[38]

Furthermore, these records of dreams, apparitions of the saints, and visions should be considered an integral part of the emerging legionary hagiography.[39] The intention behind collecting these records or mentioning them in post-imprisonment testimonies has to do with the fascist fixation of using the time spent behind bars to engender a new and saintly man. The time spent in prison by any legionary was considered a formative period, where, together with the Legion/the nest and the working camp, every member regardless of age and gender bonded with other legionaries, had the time to learn religious and political commandments, integrated in the legionary communitarian life, and engaged in the legionary carceral religiosity.[40] Most of those who survived imprisonment considered the time spent for crimes committed against the state as a rite of passage, as an important stage in their self-development as men and legionaries.[41]

Dreams, especially premonitory dreams and the night apparitions of saints or legionary martyrs, ensured continuity between various legionary

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[37] *Ibidem*, vol. 1, 249; *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 116.

[38] For Irina Paert, "Martyrdom, Massacre Narratives and Entangled Memory: The Commemoration of the Orthodox Victims of the 1918-1919 Communist Terror in Estonia," *History & Memory* 34, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2022): 24 the legionary martyrdom experiment should be considered as part of the Legion's secular religion.

[39] For the idea of fascist hagiography, please see: Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, "On Storytellers and Master Narratives: Modernity, Memory, and History in Fascist Italy," *Social Science History*, 22, no. 4 (1998): 432; Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 87; Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Vierow: SH-Verlag, 1996), 241–45; Daniel Siemens, *The Making of a Nazi Hero: The Murder and Myth of Horst Wessel* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), xiv; Alessio Ponzio, *Shaping the New Man: Youth Training Regimes in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2015), 87; Adriano Sofri, *Il martire fascista: Una storia equivoca e terribile* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2019), 193–94.

[40] Victor Puiu Gârcineanu, "Omul nou," *Cuvântul Argeșului* 1, no. 3 (1935): 2; Gârcineanu, *Din lumea legionară* (Bucharest: Sânziana, 2011[5]), 13.

[41] Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain: Codreanu, Cioran, Eliade…et les autres* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 36.

generations.[42] Sharing the same dreams, embracing the same divine apparitions bridged the generational gaps and, besides the continuity of the legionary imaginary and political agenda, reinforced among the imprisoned legionaries the sense they represented a community of the elect in touch with the supernatural.[43] The night dreams also served as remedies against despair, as incentives to preserve the legionary creed unsullied even in dire conditions of imprisonment by giving hope to the inmates that God did not turn his face from them, but also as a team-building strategy that bolstered the cohesion and legionary unity around the same leadership and values.

2. Dreams, Visions, Divine Apparitions. Manipulation, Distortion, and Instrumentalization in the Legionary Hagiography

2.1. Premonitory Dreams

After the 1964 general amnesty granted by the Romanian state to political prisoners, the recollection of legionary prison experience (dreams, visions, apparitions of saints) emerged in samizdat format. The shared legionary oneiric experience ensured the survivors that the tortures inflicted upon the legionaries proved unable to dislodge their ingrained belief in God and their unity. In the absence of regular liturgical life and direct links with outside monasticism, the legionaries had to come up with their own ascetical experience with what they had at their disposal: fragmentary readings of Church Fathers and theology books, oral knowledge passed from the clergymen to the laity or from more advanced legionaries when sharing the same cell, communitarian life, Jesus prayer, legionary help re-envisaged as Christians misericordia, dreams, omens, and visions/apparitions of saints.[44]

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[42] For "1948 generation," see: Gabriel Stănescu, *Dumnezeu m-a salvat din Iad! O mărturie cutremurătoare: reeducarea prin tortură Piteşti, Gherla, Canal. Convorbiri cu Traian Popescu* (Bucharest: Criterion Publishing, 2008), 182; Nicolae Purcărea, *Urlă haita... Piteşti, Canal, Gherla, Jilava, Aiud* (Bucharest: Fundaţia Sfinţii Închisorilor, 2012), 12, 33.

[43] Ion I. Moţa, "La icoană!," *Pământul strămoşesc* 1, no. 1 (1 August 1927), 9; Paul A. Shapiro, "Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Orthodox Church," in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, ed. Kevin P. Spicer (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007), 137.

[44] ACNSAS, fond Penal, file no. 000327, vol. 1, 12.

While performing liturgical acts in public carried huge risks and punishments if participants were caught by the guards (e.g., isolation, hunger, beatings), the legionaries focused on the personal aspect of living religion through the carceral space, a private spiritual experience that privileged Jesus' prayer, self-repentance, transformative ascetical efforts (i.e., fasting, abstaining from political activism or struggling with their moral shortcomings), and unconscious dreams and visions.[45] In this stage, dreaming, experiencing visions and apparitions of saints constituted a fundamental part of legionary carceral religiosity as a direct proof of God's preference for the legionaries. After their 1964 release, the surviving prisoners rememorated and incorporated their or the legionary martyrs' oneiric experience into the legionary hagiography. Legionaries read in their experiences of dreams, omens or the apparition of saints interpreted as nothing else than God's showing his benevolence towards legionary sufferings behind bars.[46]

One of the most common oneiric experiences encountered in the legionary memoirs is that of the premonitory dream infused with religious undertones. For most Christians such dreams occur out of a religious necessity and come directly from God, with the mention that most of these dreams should be perceived as a-temporal and experiences that, by breaking the tides of time, spawn religious narratives that prove the historical consciousness among their subjects.[47]

Before the start of the so-called Pitești experiment of re-education through torture (December 1949), the inmates from that prison recorded in their post-1964 memoirs the premonitory dreams of their fellow-inmates about the grim future awaiting them. In mid-March 1950, just before the start of the violent re-education from Pitești prison, one of the residents of cell no. 18 from Pitești, Mihai Iosub, dreamt for several nights the students from his room (Oprișan and Bordeianu) covered in blood, in the guise of demons and angels killing among themselves,

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[45] *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 36–9; Nicu Iancu, *Sub steagul lui Codreanu* (Madrid: Dacia, 1973), 93; Radu Budișteanu, *În secolul luminilor stinse* (Madrid: Carpații, 1986), 121.

[46] Ioan Ianolide, *Deținutul profet* (Bucharest: Bonifaciu, 2009), 37.

[47] Patricia M. Davies, "Discerning the Voice of God: Case Studies in Christian History," in *Dreaming in Christianity and Islam: Culture, Conflict, and Creativity*, eds. Kelley Bulkley, Kate Adams and Patricia M. Davis (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 43-57; Otto Rheinschmiedt, *The Fiction of Dreams: Dreams, Literature, and Writing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 56.

running away from each other, or reluctant to know one another.[48] Every morning before the start of the violent re-education, Iosub advised his co-inmates to exercise caution towards the guards and repent their sins through incessant prayer and fasting because something terrible was about to happen. Bordeianu even mentions in post-detention recollections the fact that Iosub's mother had a peremptory dream about the fact that her son would never become a doctor due to his demise during the Pitești violent re-education.[49]

Another premonitory dream experienced by imprisoned legionaries had as main actor Fr. Ioan Negruțiu (1915-2003), a celibatarian Orthodox priest who, because of the intense life of prayer experienced in prison, later became hieromonk.[50] While working as an inmate at the Canal, just before his release, the priest dreamt that he climbed the mountain of Golgotha before the scene of the crucifixion, where Christ was alone on his cross, and the thieves were missing. In a dialogue with the Saviour, Fr. Negruțiu asked permission from Christ to be crucified with him, and he was able to choose his own cross. He gently stroked Jesus' bloody ankle by mistake and woke up.[51] The second day, he was released from prison. While in Aiud, during his second imprisonment, Fr. Negruțiu recounted this dream to his fellow-detainees both as a warning of his impending release from prison, as a sign of the fact that Christ found his self-sacrifice unworthy and incomplete, and as prediction from Christ of the fact that his trials in prison would continue even after this release.[52]

Negruțiu's dream is found in Virgil Maxim's recollection, who at that time lived in the same cell. This proves that, even before his liberation, Fr. Negruțiu shared his dream with his cell mates. It was meant to be envisaged and interpreted both as an omen, but also as a divine apparition of Christ to a legionary priest. Such a revelation boosted the legionaries' spiritual resistance behind bars and was used to show that

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[48] For Mihail Iosub and the fact that he revealed to the *Siguranța* informant secrets that led to the arrest of the Iași Medicine students, see: Bordeianu, *Mărturisiri*, 54. For his peremptory dreams, see: *Ibidem*, 119.

[49] *Ibidem*, 120.

[50] For Fr. Ioan Negruțiu, please see: Ioan Negruțiu, *Accesul la memorial* (Bucharest: Sfântul Gheorghe-Vechi, 1999), 35; Teofil Bradea, *Negruțiu S. Ioan, preot cu închisoarea satisfăcută* (Oradea: Piatra Seacă, 2017), 101.

[51] Virgil Maxim, *Imn pentru Crucea purtată. Abecedar duhovnicesc pentru un frate de Cruce* (Bucharest: Antim, 2002[2]), 354–5.

[52] Maxim, *Imn*, 355. See: ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 160164, vol. 2, 23.

God was on their side.[53] It also highlighted the fact that most of the legionaries believed in their sacrosanct mission of self-sacrificing themselves as Christ did to redeem humanity from sin and to stem the tide of atheist Bolsheviks engulfing Romania. Furthermore, such *imitatio Christi* dreams led legionaries to reconsider much of their political activism after their release from prison through a religious lens.[54] According to an archival document, the legionaries perceived the sufferings experienced during imprisonment as similar to those of Christ and through such trials all imprisoned legionaries would gain their eternal salvation.[55]

Valeriu Gafencu (1921-1952), the Brotherhoods of the Cross leader from Bessarabia, had a prophetic dream about the look of Communist Romania that would be experienced by the returning legionaries after their liberation prison.[56] While on his deathbed, a few months before his earthly demise, Gafencu confided his vision to his best friend, Ion Ianolide. He saw an open field where nourishment grew and was cared for by workers not allowed to taste the fruits of the land.[57] When the bell announced lunch hour, the workers (both female and male) were divided into nine groups. The first represented by the guardians ate a lot of fat and food, next the workers ate something that was bitter, and so on up to the last group that was represented by degenerate forms of being, unable to call themselves human. After the end of the meal, the workers returned to their toils.[58]

Highly imbued with the biblical myth of the paradise lost, the dream of Valeriu Gafencu foretold what awaited the legionary survivors in the Communist world, where most of these legionaries would be reduced to mere actors in the fulfilment of the Stakhanovist eschatology preached by Bolshevik Marxism.[59] The dehumanisation, the primacy of manual labour, the emancipation of the women through production, and the

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[53] Maxim, *Imn*, 355.

[54] Popescu-Vorkuta, *Un legionar dincolo de Cercul Polar*, 132.

[55] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 160164, vol. 2, 23.

[56] Radu Costandache, "Despre Valeriu Gafencu," in *Studentul Valeriu Gafencu. "Sfântul închisorilor din România"*, ed. Nicolae Trifoiu (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star, 2002), 132.

[57] Ianolide, *Întoarcerea la Hristos: document pentru o lume nouă* (Bucharest: Bonifaciu, 2007), 183.

[58] *Ibidem*, 183.

[59] Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 42; David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization: Ideas, Power, and Terror in Inter-war Russia* (Oxford:

prominent role of the guardians (party activists, secret police apparatus, army, regular police) painted an grotesque caricature of the kingdom of heavens and Communist society.[60]

In his memoirs, published after 1989, recollecting his time spent with Gafencu in Târgu Ocna Prison sanatorium, Ion Ianolide pondered upon Gafencu's apocalyptical vision that unmasked the Communist utopia and heeded Gafencu's call for the necessity of re-Christianizing Romanian society as the sole antidote of spiritual regeneration for both the Orthodox Church and nation. As Gafencu's voice, Ianolide also stressed the need for a new religious order made of men engaged in pastoral work, un-consecrated by the Orthodox Church's hierarchy, living as monastics without tonsure, toiling alongside the Orthodox clergy in spreading the Gospel in the Romanian society and beyond.[61]

This "new apostolate" preached by the FDC members in the beginning of the 1950s stood as a direct continuation of the legionary religiosity produced at Aiud Prison in the mid 1940s at the instigation of legionary commanders Traian Trifan and Traian Marian.[62] In the absence of any contact with outside Orthodox hierarchy, the imprisoned legionaries developed gradually their own brand of underground Orthodoxy, one that accommodated legionary precepts, Christian and ascetical commandments, and newly emerging religious ideas from various splintering and renewal spiritual groups in the Orthodox Church (e.g., the Burning Bush movement from Antim Monastery, the Vladimirești Monastery phenomenon, the Sâmbăta Monastery and Fr. Arsenie Boca's movement of monastic renewal).[63]

Oxford University Press, 2007), 15; Mark Edele, *Debates on Stalinism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 32.

[60] Peter Lambert, "Heroisation and Demonisation in the Third Reich: The Consensus-building Value of a Nazi Pantheon of Heroes," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 8*, no. 3–4 (2007): 529.

[61] Ianolide, *Întoarcerea*, 184–85. ACNSAS, fond Penal, file no. 000327, vol. 1, 6; Traian Trifan, Testament (Petru Vodă: Petru Vodă monastery, 2019), 310–11.

[62] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 160164, vol. 3, 10–1; Constantin Pascu, "Traian Trifan," in *Mărturisesc... Robul 1036*, ed. Virgil Maxim (Bucharest: Scara, 1998), 69. For a contemporary reading of the monastic order and its founding principles: Bogdan Munteanu, *Valeriu Gafencu și Ioan Ianolide – Despre duhul "Sfinților închisorilor"* (Bucharest: Evdokimos, 2016), 54–5.

[63] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 234104, 50, 70–1; *Ibidem*, 138; *Ibidem*, file no. 236666, vol. 1, 316; ACNSAS, fond Penal, file no. 000202, Vol. 2, 80–1; Ioana

In the absence of clergy, it was the sharing of religious dreams, the clandestine (*momentul prieteniei*) confession of sins to a legionary superior, the chains of prayer, conversions of atheists, Jews, or other denominations to the legionary religiosity that constituted the alternative form of living Orthodox religion in the underground.[64]

2.2. "Dreams of terror" or the terror as a dream?

The "dreams of terror," a term coined by Reinhardt Koselleck, building upon the analysis of dreams in the Third Reich by Charlotte Beradt, should be read as unconscious indicators of the everyday violence inflicted upon the legionary detainees in Communist prisons.[65] In these nightmares, legionary prisoners revisited their daily torments and preserved at the level of unconscious experience what they could put into writing after their release from prison.[66] The experience of the nightmare was retold to other fellow inmates or remembered in memoirs written after their release from prison or after the fall of the communist regime. It made a profound impact on those with long-standing legionary allegiances, acting both as a warning that something terrible might happen, or as a sign of God's displeasure, meaning that legionaries had to do more penance to alleviate their sins.[67]

In this last capacity, terror dreams showed another facet of the detention, re-symbolizing the time spent in prison as a form of a personal rite of passage.[68] For example, Nicolae Popescu, a well-known member of the Iron Guard from mid 1930s and a former war prisoner in Soviet Russia, experienced such a dream in anticipation of the lengthy and violent interviews with the Securitate officers. Already aware of the tortures

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Iancovescu, ed., *Părintele Voicescu, un duhovnic al cetății* (Bucharest: Bizantină, 2002), 124.

[64] Gheorghe Istrate, *Frăția de cruce* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale "Buna-Vestire", 2005[2]), 38; Îndreptarul *Frăților de Cruce* (Bucharest: n.a., 1935), 37–8.

[65] Charlotte Beradt, *The Third Reich of Dreams: The Nightmares of a Nation, 1933-1945* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1986); Reinhardt Koselleck, *Future's Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 218. For "terror-dreams" in Bolshevik Russia, see: Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 161–66.

[66] Budișteanu, *În secolul*, 204–5.

[67] Liviu Brânzaș, *Raza din catacombă: Jurnal de* închisoare (Bucharest: Scara, 2001), 230.

[68] For the idea of the prison as ritual of passage, see: Filotheu Bălan, *Mărturisirea unui creștin. Părintele Marcu de la Sihăstria* (Petru Vodă: n. a.), 28.

the inmates had to suffer during interrogation, he was afraid of being constrained to give away some of his fellow-legionaries and divulge some aspects of his previous activity.

> Out of fear, three nights in a roll, I had the same dream. My cousin Miorica baptized Maria held an icon of the Virgin painted by me while in the prison camp of Vaslui in 1939, after the assassination of Armand Călinescu. It was the icon that I gave my mother after my release from Vaslui labor camp and where she usually prayed. Have faith, why don't you have faith in God? my cousin asked me every time. These dreams ensured me that God listened to my prayers and that I was on the right path.[69]

For Popescu, the dream of the icon of the Virgin he painted during his previous imprisonment when he feared for his life and the admonition to have faith in God, lifted his spirit and quelled his anxiety. It also emboldened his religious devotion towards God and enabled his religious practice of the usual prayers.[70]

Dumitru Bordeianu, one of the legionary students in Medicine from Iași, had such a dream when before the confrontation with his leader Moisiu, saw him covered in blood, tortured, and looking back in anger.[71] The next day, Bordeianu met Moisiu who looked exactly as in his dream during a police confrontation, and received the advice to give in to the pressure and torture exerted by the police or act according to his own will.[72]

2.3. When saints visit fascists in prison: Legionary Carceral Hagiography in Action

Apparitions of saints (Virgin Mary, St. Paraschevi, angels, etc.), or the apparition of Captain Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, fell in line with the interwar experiences of legionaries imprisoned at various stages during the 1920s and 1930s. Taking Codreanu's statements from his memoirs at face value, the idea of forming a new political movement under the banner of the Archangel Michael came after a divine vision Codreanu had during his time in the Văcărești prison, near Bucharest. The Archangel

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[69] Popescu-Vorkuta, *Un legionar dincolo de cercul polar*, 82–3.

[70] Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy, and Traditions* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2013), 233.

[71] Bordeianu, *Mărturisiri*, 51.

[72] *Ibidem*.

Michael himself revealed their traitor to those imprisoned following a terrorist plot to kill several members of the government and the Jewish business community.[73] Moreover, young nationalist students imprisoned in Cluj in 1929 and acting in favour of the Iron Guard had a vision of the Archangel looking over them and keeping them safe of any affliction or turmoil.[74]

In the late 1940s, the spiritual movements at Vladimirești Monastery, Sâmbăta Monastery, or the "Burning Bush" circle at Antim Monastery in Bucharest disseminated among the Orthodox believers the idea of an impending apocalyptic conflict in the world following the rise of the atheist Communist regime to power.[75] In these case-studies, the apocalytic experience entailed prophetic dreams, the idea of punishment by the Communists if the Orthodox believers failed to repent for their sins, and the apparitions of the Virgin and other saints offering their protection in front of the torments befalling on Orthodox communities.[76] The apparitions of Christ, the Virgin, or other saints travelled from the outside world inside the prisons and exacerbated the importance of dreaming, omens, and visions among believers and clergymen alike.[77] The year 1948 was regarded as the climax of these apocalyptical movements inside Orthodox and Greek-Catholic communities, the statement that "in 1948 religious unrest happened everywhere across the Carpathians" being nothing more than a brief description of the Romanian tormented religious landscape.[78]

The legionaries imprisoned in 1950s Romania echoed these apocalyptic developments, especially among those who renounced violent political activism instead of a more spiritual inclination. No wonder that

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[73] Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 72.

[74] Nichifor Crainic, "Tineretul și creștinismul," *Gândirea* 13, no. 3 (1934): 68.

[75] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 234104, 36; *Ibidem*, file no. 160128, vol. 4, 71; Dan Lucincescu, *Jertfa* (Bucharest: Siaj, 2008), 23, 33; Aspazia Oțel-Petrescu, *Doamne strigat-am!* (Bucharest: Platytera, 2008), 56.

[76] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 234104, 138.

[77] ACNSAS, fond Informativ, file no. 236666, vol. 2, 23.

[78] Cârja, *Canalul*, 126. See also: Agnieszka Halemba, *Negotiating Marian Apparitions: The Politics of Religion in Transcarpathian Ukraine* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), 50–7; Daniel Maria Klimek, *Medjugorje and the Supernatural: Science, Mysticism, and Extraordinary Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 34; David G. Bromley, Rachel S. Bobbitt, "The Organizational Development of Marian Apparitional Movements," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 3 (2011): 11–14.

during that time, divine light, the apparition of the Virgin, or even the presence of Jesus among the cells as clear signs that God and his saints watched over the legionaries, even behind the Communist bars.[79]

One of these mystic legionaries was Valeriu Gafencu (1921-1951).[80] According to one of his biographers, Valeriu Gafencu experienced one such apparition of the Virgin Mary on Christmas Eve, 1951:

> When I raised my eyes, I saw the Virgin, dressed in white, standing in front of my bed, alive, real. She was without her Son. Her presence almost felt real. The Mother of God was near me. I was so happy that I forgot everything. Then she told me: "I am your love! Do not be afraid! Have no doubt! My Son will win the final victory! He sanctified this place now for the future. The forces of darkness are on the rise, and they frighten the world still, but they will be eventually shattered. My Son awaits that all should return to faith. Today the sons of darkness have more courage than those of light. Even when you will think there is no faith on earth, you should know that relief is on the way through fire and disaster. The world still must suffer. There is much faith in this place, and I come to encourage you. Behold, the world belongs to Christ!" Then, the Mother of God disappeared, and I felt overwhelmed by happiness.[81]

Following his vision of the Virgin, according to his biographer Ion Ianolide, Gafencu experienced a dematerialization of the body and, as the Byzantine hesychasts, led everyone to believe that his expiation of sins has been received by God and his end was near.[82] According to the schol-

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[79] Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1991), 94–5; Radu Șuțu, *Carmen Silva – Aiud via Brașov* (Bucharest: Majadahonda, 1996), 32.

[80] For the legionary hagiography enmeshed in Gafencu's profile, see: *Viața Părintelui Gheorghe Calciu după mărturiile sale sau ale altora* (Bucharest: Bonifaciu, 2007), 33; Monk Moise Iorgovan, *Sfântul închisorilor. Mărturii despre Valeriu Gafencu, adunate și adnotate de monahul Moise* (Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2007), 33; Ionuț Țene, *Valeriu Gafencu. O biografie teologică a Sfântului închisorilor* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2018), 182.

[81] Ianolide, *Întoacerea*, 180. Later, while imprisoned in Aiud, Nicolae (Nicu) Popescu-Vorkuta experienced the same apparition of the Virgin. See: Nicolae Popescu-Vorkuta, *Un legionar dincolo de Cercul Polar* (Timișoara: Gordian, 1995), 110. For other apparitions of the Virgin to imprisoned legionaries, see: Eugen Dimitriu, "De aici a pornit renașterea spirituală," in *Studentul Valeriu Gafencu*, ed. Nicolae Trifoiu (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star, 2002), 113.

[82] Ianolide, *Întoarcerea*, 181. For the hesychast dematerialization of the body see: "Life of Maximos the Hutburner by Niphon," in: *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, ed. and trans. by Richard P. H. Greenfield and Alice-Mary Talbot (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 549.

arship, some of these dreams and visions could have also been caused by Gafencu's religious fervour, as such oneiric experiences occurred seldomly in the case of religious detainees.[83] Furthermore, the Orthodox mystic sees in his dreams what he already expects or has already noticed in the iconography already noticed previously.[84]

3. The Post-Communist Reconceptualization and Instrumentalization of Legionary Dreams

The post-Communist advocates of the canonization of former legionaries deceased in prison as martyrs of the Romanian Orthodox Church refrained from proclaiming their past legionary affiliation.[85] The "saints of the Communist prisons" movement brought together legionary survivors from the prisons, their younger disciplines, and a number of Orthodox intellectuals displeased with the consequences of the democratization process in post-Communist Romania.[86]

To present the biographies of legionary martyrs as palatable with the official hagiography of the Orthodox Church, legionary hagiographers focused on the miracles performed by the "martyrs", the actual

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[83] Patricia Bulkley, "Dreams and Visions of the Dying," in *Dreaming in Christianity and Islam: Culture, Conflict, and Creativity*, eds. Kelly Bulkeley, Kate Adams and Patricia M. Davis (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 71–81. See also: David Kahn, "From Chaos to Self-Organization: The Brain, Dreaming, and Religious Experience," in *Soul, Psyche, Brain: New Directions in the Study of Religion and Brain-Mind Science*, ed. Bulkeley (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 138–45. For comparative religious visions, see: Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 167; Andreas Kalkun, "Menstruating Mother of God, Ritual Impurity, and Fieldwork among Seto Women in Estonia and Russia," in *Orthodox Christianity and Gender: Dynamics of Tradition, Culture, and Lived Practice*, eds. Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola (London: Routledge, 2020), 99. For a contemporary analysis, see: Pavel Chirilă, *Nevoia de adevăr. Experimentul Pitești și fenomenul Târgu Ocna. Morți martirice* (Bucharest: Christiana, 2022), 22.

[84] Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31; Timothy S. Miller, "Hospital Dreams in Byzantium," in *Dreams, Healing and Medicine in Greece: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Steven P. Oberhelman (London: Ashgate, 2013), 212.

[85] Vasile, "Criteriile canonizării sfinților din închisori," in *Din temnițe spre sinaxare: despre mucenicii prigoanei comuniste*, ed. Idem (Bucharest: Egumenița, 2007), 47.

[86] Răzvan Codrescu, În *căutarea Legiunii pierdute* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2001), 121–42; Fabian Seiche, "Creştinismul Mişcării Legionare: Cadru de formare a viitorilor Sfinţi ai închisorilor comuniste," in *Martiri* şi *mărturisitori români din secolul XX.* Închisorile *comuniste din România*, ed. Fabian Seiche (Făgăraş: Agnos, 2010), 28–50; Târziu, *Rostul generației noastre. O perspectivă conservatoare asupra României postcomuniste* (Bucharest: Rost, 2019), 170–4; 243–45.

exceptional details of their lives, and their asceticism.[87] Aware of the heterodox religiosity experienced by the legionaries in prison, the post-Communist hagiographers needed to present the religious manifestations of the legionaries within the limits of accepted orthodoxy and, therefore, they left aside the contentious details of the biographies (e.g., sexual encounters, divorces, crimes, erratic behaviour) destined for canonization.[88]

The apparent departure from the legionary omens, dreams, and visions, and the reluctance of the second-generation hagiographers to address the imprisoned oneiric experience through the lens of Christian martyrdom has to do with the traditional distrust of dreams and the emphasis on doubting the validity of a divine apparition originated in the traditional conceptions of Orthodox asceticism.[89] Divine apparitions, dreams, and visions stood as integral parts of the fascist hagiography in the making.[90] As secondary sources of legitimacy for the spiritual experience from prisons and, therefore, an argument for the sanctity of lives proposed for canonization, the oneiric legionary experience also provided valuable arguments against those who argued that the legionary movement was a fascist, antisemitic political party.

The importance of dreams in revealing the sacral nature of the legionary martyrs extended to those returning from prisons. This is the case of Fr. Constantin Sârbu († 1975), the priest of Sapienţa church in

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[87] Karin Hyldal Christensen, *The Making of the New Martyrs of Russia: Soviet Repression in Orthodox Memory* (Routledge, 2017), 190–215; Sergio Luzzatto, *Il corpo del duce. Un cadavere tra immaginazione, storia e memoria* (Torino: Einaudi, 2019), 46–73; Zuzanna Bogumił and Marta Lukaszewicz, "Between History and Religion: The New Russian Martyrdom as an Invented Tradition," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 20, no. 10 (2018): 4–8; Silvia Cavicchioli, "The Remains of the Vanquished: Bodies and Martyrs of the Roman Republic from the Risorgimento to Fascism," in *Public Uses of Human Remains and Relics in History*, eds. Silvia Cavicchioli and Luigi Provero (London: Routledge, 2020), 221–2.

[88] Eugenia Roussou, *Orthodox Christianity, New Age Spirituality and Vernacular Religion: The Evil Eye in Greece* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 144–5.

[89] Urzică, *Minuni*, 117–18; Patricia Cox Miller, "«A Dubious Twilight»: Reflections on Dreams in Patristic Literature," *Church History* 55, no. 2 (1986): 153–64; Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 47.

[90] Anca Bujoreanu, *Sfinţi martiri şi mărturisitori în epoca contemporană* (Galaţi: Fotini, 2007), 45; Pavel Chirilă, Ilie Bădescu and Andreea Băndoiu, *Principiile cercetării martirologice* (Bucharest: Christiana, 2010), 170–72.

Bucharest.[91] A former collaborator, Tatiana Corțun remembered that because of the frequent quarrels in her parish church between the priest and his congregation, and the unrelenting prayers addressed to the Virgin for spiritual guidance, she had a dream:

> One night I dreamt a young man, dressed in a white, long shirt who asked me: Do you want to be spiritually strong? Get up and follow me! I left and took the tram 20 that reached Izvor Bridge station. From there we went on foot up to Sapienței church. When we arrived at the church's gate, the young man disappeared, and I woke up.[92]

The next day, while taking the same route as with the young man she found Fr. Sârbu near the ruined church who knew already her name and why she was there. Father Constantin Sârbu was but one of the returning legionaries imprisoned during Communism, who's prison experience included the carceral underground religiosity.

In terms of using dreams, omens, and divine apparitions as important and incontestable proofs of the legionary martyrs' sainthood, an important development occurred. While most of the prison survivors recounted their dreams, their cellmates, or their disciples' dreams, contemporary hagiographers focused on the miracles, dreams, and divine apparitions caused by the newly revealed relics of the deceased legionary martyrs.[93] Since religion could be performed publicly and freely after 1989, the Orthodox Church tightened its grip on the performance of liturgical rituals. The post-Communist hagiographers subordinated at a narrative level the oneiric experience of the believers and the apparitions of the legionary saints in dreams as an ancillary tool for claiming the sanctity of the legionary martyrs and the authenticity of their relics.[94]

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[91] For his personality, see: Vasile Manea, *Preoți ortodocși în închisorile comuniste* (Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea, 1994), 231; Mihail Rădulescu, *Rugul Aprins* (Bucharest: Ramida, 1993), 53; Voicilă, *Mărturisitorii*, 177–206.

[92] *Un mare mărturisitor creștin – Preotul Constantin Sârbu* (Bucharest: Bonifaciu, 2002), 85.

[93] "Când oasele vorbesc: Minuni ale sfinților martiri din Aiud," *Atitudini* 1, no. 3 (2008): 20–3; Augustin Vărvăruc, "Noi minuni ale sfinților martiri de la Aiud," *Atitudini* 1, no. 6 (June 2009): 32–5; Alexandra Corbu, "Oasele sfinților închisorilor izvorăsc mir," *Presa Ortodoxă*, 3 (2009), 55; Fr. Dimitrie Ardelean, "Atunci când sfinții își cer drepturile," *Presa Ortodoxă*, 4 (2009), 53.

[94] Țene, *Valeriu Gafencu*, 172–73. For dreams and relics in Byzantium, see: Bronwen Neil, *Dreams and Divinization from Byzantium to Baghdad, 400-1000 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 136; Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 33–69.

Most of the surviving legionaries acting as hagiographers for their deceased comrades saw themselves as internal opposition to official Orthodox hierarchy and publicly addressed the bishops' reluctance to canonize their martyrs as Orthodox saints.[95] Dissatisfied with the bishops' obedience towards the state and their lack of enthusiasm towards fascists saints, the members of the movement in favour of canonization of legionaries opted to stay in the underground, as a religious and fundamentalist sub-culture of the Romanian Orthodox Church.[96]

Hoping to attract new supporters to the legionary cause, the legionary hagiographers spoke to the younger generations about legionary self-sacrifice, and legitimized claims of being the true, anti-Communist Orthodox Church of the fascist splinter group inside the Romanian Orthodoxy.[97] As proof of their claims of being the representatives of the true anti-Communist Orthodoxy and of the validity of legionary hagiography, the unearthed human remains from Aiud, Târgu Ocna, and other places of detention were presented liturgically and ritually by neo-legionary Orthodox clergy as sacred.[98] Dreams, visions, the apparitions of saints as experienced by young neofascists gravitated around the discovery of the fascist relics, with concerted efforts to convince both the Orthodox communities and the hierarchy of the legionary martyrs' sainthood. Most of the surviving legionaries and their younger disciples continued to function as during the Communist regime: as an underground religious group within the Orthodox Church, defiant of the central administration and any kind of over institutionalization of religion imposed by the state or the Romanian Patriarchate, with its own rituals, liturgical services, clergy, icons, relics, and fundamentalist agenda (i.e., anti-Western, anti-gay, xenophobic, autarchic, and anti-ecumenic).[99]

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[95] "Sfinții din Aiud. Glasul care strigă în pustia lumii de azi," *Atitudini*, 6 (2008): 16.

[96] Corneliu Simuț, "Ideological Attempts to Build a Sustainable Program of Ecodomical Decommunistization in post-1989 Romania by Promoting the Notion of National Identity," *Expository Times* 130, no. 4 (2018): 146–47.

[97] Vasile, "Programul campaniei 'Din temnițe spre sinaxare'," in *Din temnițe spre sinaxare. Despre mucenicii prigoanei comuniste*, ed. idem Vasile (Galați: Egumenița, 2008), 167–70; Târziu, "Și morții!," 7.

[98] *Dezgroparea Părintelui Calciu. Dosarul unui abuz* (Bucharest: Christiana, 2014), 64; Monica Grigore, "The Aiud « Prison Saints:» History, Religion, and Lived Religion," *Eurostudia* 10, no. 1 (2015): 33–49.

[99] Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 180; Adrian Velicu, *The Orthodox Church and National Identity in Post-Communist Romania* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020), 27;

The spiritual power displayed by the relics of the prison saints proved both the narratives penned by the former legionary inmates but also the fact that most of those who died in prison received the gift of saint-hood from God.[100] One of these dreams has been recollected by the Fr. Augustin Vărvăruc from Aiud Monastery, one of the places where the relics of the legionary saints have been unearthed and exposed for public devotion.[101] Most of these dreams accompany the translation of the relics. The main purpose of these dreams has to do with the hagiographers' need to prove the bishops that legionary martyrs *are* saints. Also, the hagiographers meant to arouse popular devotion among the Orthodox communities towards these saints through their constant appeal to the oneiric experience and the miracles performed by the legionary martyrs through their relics.[102]

According to this dream, the hieromonk gave a femur to a priest in Cluj-Napoca who had a judiciary problem regarding a parcel of land that belonged to his parish. After displaying the relic of the anonymous saint in church for public veneration, long and sustained prayers with his co-parishioners for the saint to intercede for their problems and reveal his name, the saint appeared in their dreams, telling the priest and other parishioners that his name was Gheorghe.[103]

Another priest received as relics a clavicle and a rib from Aiud ossuary to keep them in the altar of his church at a military unit. At a certain point in time, the church's sexton told the priest that he dreamt that two

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Monica Ciobanu, *Repression, Resistance and Collaboration in Stalinist Romania 1944-1964* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[100] Răzvan Codrescu, "Jertfelnicia ortodoxă în anii comunismului," in *Din temnițe spre sinaxare*, ed. Vasile, 29; Vărvăruc, "Noi minuni ale sfinţilor martiri de la Aiud" *Atitudini* 6 (2009), 32–5. The testimonies collected by Fr. Augustin (Vărvăruc) were re-published in: Voicilă, *Mărturisitorii*, 13–38. Please see footnote 111.

[101] See: Monica Grigore-Dovlete, *À la recherche de miracles: Pèlerines, religion vécue et la Roumanie postcommuniste* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020), 123.

[102] For relics translation and dreams, see: Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Relics of New Saints: Deposition, Translation, and Veneration in Middle and Late Byzantium," in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Saints in Byzantium and Beyond*, eds. Cynthia Hahn and Holger A. Klein (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Library, 2015), 215–31. For Aiud pilgrimage and the relics, see: Monica Grigore, "The Aiud 'Prison Saints': History, Religion, and Lived Religion," *Eurostudia* 10, no. 1 (2015): 33–49.

[103] Voicilă, *Mărturisitorii*, 13–4; Cezarina Condurache, *Chipuri ale demnității românești: Eroi ai neamului și sfinți ai închisorilor* (Bucharest: Evdokimos, 2015); Condurache, *Sfinții închisorilor: 28 de biografii exemplare* (Bucharest: Evdokimos, 2015); *Sfinții închisorilor* (Petru Vodă: Petru Vodă, 2019).

young men dressed in white cloaks told him that their reliquary for public display should be made of silver not gold, because only the pagan idols are made of gold. Also, they revealed to the sexton the dimensions of the reliquary, the way in which the relics should be displayed, what icons should be depicted on the reliquary, and how the velvet tapestry inside the reliquary should look like.[104] Unknown to the sexton, the priest had already the discussion regarding manufacturing the reliquary with the military unit's commanding officer, who offered to pay himself for the reliquary as long as it was carved in gold.

All these oneiric experiences informed a large range of rituals and hagiographical manipulations and, by discarding the everyday lives' details and applying a hagiographical pattern, supported the overall campaign carried by the post-Communist survivors of altering the lives of the legionary martyrs during Communism according to a fascist pattern of the martyr as the embodiment of the new man stemming from the interwar years. It also signalled the formation of an alternative religiosity to that of the official Orthodox Church, that continued and developed the prison experience of the imprisoned fascists and relegated visions and apparitions of saints as mere proof the legionary sanctity behind bars.

4. As an epilogue:

During the post-communist years, and in the context of the prison saints' movement and claims of sanctification of legionary martyrs deceased in Communist prisons, new visions emerged. A nun from Pasărea Nunnery near Bucharest dreamt in 2012 three young men, dressed in white vestments that told her to have devotion towards the legionary martyrs. One of the young men presented himself as Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and told the nun that a terrible fate awaited Romanian nation if his sacrifice and that of his followers will not be officially acknowledged by the Romanian Orthodox Church. The other two then reinforced Codreanu's words and claimed they were Valeriu Gafencu and Ion I. Moța. Altough the cult of imprisoned legionaries deceased during Communism continues to thrive in the Orthodox fundamentalist milieus and even became one of the ideological cornerstones of the neo-legionary Alliance for the Union of all Romanians, the epidemics of dreams, visions, and apparitions of saints continues to persist.

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[104] Voicilă, *Mărturisitorii*, 37.

As a proof in support of the collective effort to obtain the official acknowledgement from the Romanian Orthodox Church of the legionary martyrs as saints, the legionary experience of the Legionary movement as associated with religious it underwent transformations and adaptations to the historical context on the move. During the interwar years visions and dreams helped the founding fathers of the Legion to legitimize their political claim that their movement was under the protection of the Archangel Michael who revealed himself to them behind bars. During the 1930s incarcerations, the legionary membership explored further the oneiric experience that become an integral part of their prison habitus. During the early years of Communism, in late 1940s and early 1950s, the legionaries circumscribed their oneiric experience to the apocalyptical experience suggesting that the end of the world was near. These dreams, visions and saintly apparitions signalled for those imprisoned and their fellow-legionaries outside that the legionary penitence for the sins of the Nation as experienced in prisons paid rich dividends in from of God. Based on a vast and heterogenous array of theological sources, legionaries envisaged these dreams as signs of God's benevolence towards the legionaries.

During the post-Communist years, the legionaries relegated their contemporary and Communist oneiric experience inside or outside prisons to a secondary role. While in the Communist prisons, having a dream infused with religious meaning meant that God showed his preference for the Romanian fascists. During the post-1989 years, dreams served as means to prove the authenticity and canonicity according to Orthodox Christian requirements of the legionary claim of canonizing legionary martyrs as saints. Across all these time frames, the legionary religiosity that associated oneiric with a carefully choreographed ritualization, and hagiographical re-writing of biographies, the legionary religiosity self-proposed as an alternative option to that of the official Orthodox Church.