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When Absence Comes to Matter: The Old Calendarist Church's Strive for Survival in 20th Century Romania

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Absence is made present through objects, images, texts, or thoughts and, through various practices, absence also has agency. Absence was often a reality which Old Calendarists had to endure due to the intrusive character of the secret police: their churches were destroyed, they were deprived of their religious books, photographs, icons, and even religious leaders. These actions created an absence which, in turn, I argue in this article, inspired the Old Calendarist's strive for survival. Today, the secret police archives in Romania store many of these absences, be they objects, images or life stories, that could become presences and continue, complete, or simply end some chapters in the histories of the Old Calendarist Church. In this study I will offer examples that convey the manners in which the Old Calendarist Church managed to navigate through and make use of these absences in order to survive persecution, highlighting the value of the secret police archives as sites or spaces of recovery from absence and loss.

Keywords: *Absence, Archives, Church, Materiality, Secret Police, Old Calendarism.*

1. Introduction

After the First World War and the unification of the Romanian state in 1918, the newly formed state was challenged with a series of hitherto unknown problems, such as a growing population whose needs it had to satisfy, and a religious diversity that it had never encountered before. In the face of extraordinary social, political, cultural, even industrial change, interwar Romania became the ideal environment for religious innovation and many religious movements emerged during this period of time.[1] In a country where the Orthodox Church gained its monopoly on the religious scene and where religious discourse mingled with the national and political one, these movements were faced with non-acceptance from the moment they first appeared on the religious scene. One of these

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[1] Roland Clark, *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building* (Bloomsbury UK, 2021), 77.

religious movements that emerged during the 1920s Romania was Old Calendarism. Born in 1924 as a reaction to the Romanian Orthodox Church's decision to change the liturgical calendar, Old Calendarism soon developed into a spiritual mass movement, mostly comprised of peasants, that spread rapidly in the western part of Moldavia and in Bessarabia, both of which were regions with strong monastic traditions.[2] The group went on to organize its own rules of worship and devotion, as the calendar change was seen as a heresy and an attempt at ecumenism on the part of the patriarchate of Constantinople. The Romanian state and the Orthodox Church considered the movement to be the result of an internal crisis, of a rupture with tradition, and it soon turned into the greatest enemy of Orthodoxy from the Church's perspective. Both state and Orthodox Church institutions reacted to the Old Calendarist movement with a combination of repression and compromise, and the movement, out of necessity, formed a "parallel society"[3] that came to challenge the project of national integration and homogenization.[4] Bloody conflicts between the Old Calendarists and the gendarmes took place in numerous villages in Moldavia and Bessarabia, such as Vânători, Brusturi, Cucova and Albineț to name but a few. Because of this, in 1936 the authorities decided to take decisive and more violent measures against the Old Calendarist communities in order to definitively solve the issue. The community continued to be persecuted and marginalized during communism, as well. The Old Calendarists serve as examples of what James Kapaló calls "liminal Orthodoxy."[5] According to Kapaló, "liminal Orthodoxy" can be used to describe the forms of Orthodoxy that are "seemingly permanently suspended on the borders, both literally and metaphorically, between Orthodoxy and heresy […] and between critique and dependency on Orthodox Christianity in its institutional form."[6]

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[2] James Kapaló, "Wise Virgins and Mothers of God: Women, Possession and Sexuality in the Early Inochentist Movement," in *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews,* eds. Lidia Guzy and James Kapaló (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2017), 142.

[3] Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, eds., Politics and Peasants in *Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda,* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017), 17.

[4] Andreea Petruescu, "Mișcarea stilistă în Basarabia, 1935–1936. Cauze și soluții. Perspective locale," Caietele CNSAS IX, no. 1–2 (2016): 63.

[5] Kapaló, *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity. Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), x.

[6] *Ibidem.*

Drawing on visual materials and documents collected from both the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives and the Romanian National Archives, this article aims to explore significant notions, such as absence, materiality, and secret police archives. The title of the present article has a dual meaning: it refers to the fact that absence is important as it can prompt people to act in a certain manner that, such as in the case of the Old Calendarist community, might ensure their survival, but it also refers to the fact that absence is evoked through materialities, in the form of objects, pictures, texts, and so on. According to Severin Fowles, absences have agency, they prompt people into action and have their material consequences and effects on the world.[7] Absence was often a reality that Old Calendarists had to endure due to the intrusive character of the secret police: their churches were destroyed, they were deprived of their religious books, photographs, icons, and even religious leaders and members. These actions created an absence which, in turn, I argue in this article, inspired the Old Calendarist's strive for survival.

2. The Meaning of Absence

Even though it is defined as the state of not existing, absence has spatiality, it has materiality, and it has agency,[8] meaning that it acts, or does something, or it prompts individuals to act in a certain way. Absence also leaves a marker, an idea that was first developed by Jacques Derrida in "Of Grammatology." He believed that absence always leaves a trace, that nothing can be truly absent.[9] Absence comes in various forms: pain, deceased people, destroyed buildings, silences and all of these absences can have effects on people's lives because they matter. Sometimes, they are even turned into matter in the form of objects, texts, pictures and so on.[10] Absence is also something we often engage with, something we do

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[7] Severin Fowles, "People without things," in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, eds. Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup and Tim Flohr Soerensen (New York: Springer Science + Business Media, LLC, 2010), 25–28.

[8] Morgan Meyer and Kate Woodthorpe, "The Material Presence of Absence: A Dialogue between Museum and Cemeteries," *Sociological Research Online* 13, no. 5 (September 2008): 132, https://www.socresonline.org.uk/13/5/1.html, accessed March 12, 2021.

[9] Jessica Baker, "The Agency of Absence. A Contextual Understanding," http://fetliu.net/abemagazine/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/10/Jessica-Baker-ACS-Essay.pdf, accessed March 13, 2021.

[10] Morgan Meyer, "Placing and tracing absence: A material culture of the immaterial," *Journal of Material Culture* 17, no. 1 (March 2012): 103.

something to. For example, Frida Hastrup talks about the so-called scarred objects which are defined as missing, broken or unfinished artefacts which are both absent and present.[11] They served as common materializations of loss and function as a means for the victims or survivors of traumas to reclaim their everyday life in the aftermath of the disaster.[12] Some absences can cause pain or regret, especially if they are "desired things in one's mind, but not in one's grasp."[13] Even though strictly speaking absence is a thing without matter, it is remembered and evoked through materialities. Though absence escapes, and it can only be impermanently contained in certain places, it is within these places and through the traces that it leaves behind that absence truly comes to matter.

In the late 20th century and early 21st century social theory experienced a turn towards things which was interpreted as a critical response to the so called "textual turn" of the 1970s which, in general, favored discourse.[14] In his 1986 collective work entitled "The Social Life of Things," the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai makes the case that even though people are the ones that invest meaning to things, only by analysing their trajectory through space and time, through what he calls "methodological fetishism,"[15] can one really see what they accomplish on their own. He, thus, encourages scholars to look at things in the same way that they would look at individuals, as if they have biographies and life stories.[16] Igor Kopytoff advances a so-called biographical approach in which one would ask questions about a thing in the same way as they would ask about people: "Where does this thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things?"[17] An object, thus, draws its meaning from its

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[11] Frida Hastrup, "Materialization of disaster: Recovering Lost Plots in a Tsunami-Affected Village in South India," in *An Anthropology of Absence*, 107.

[12] Meyer, "Placing and tracing absence," 105.

[13] Fowles and Kaet Heupel, "Absence," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, eds. Paul Graves-Brown et al. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 189.

[14] Fowles, "People without things," 23–24.

[15] *Ibidem*. A position which states that things are self-standing presences in the world, that they should not be reduced to human discourse about them.

[16] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5

[17] Igor Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," in *The Social Life of Things*, 66.

circulation, use, or local adaptation, from its so called "social careers,"[18] and not only from within itself.

Bill Brown's essay "Thing theory," published in 2001, generated a new fascination with materiality across the academy; supporting the idea that things and people "inform the existence of each other,"[19] Brown's theory, known as "thing theory,"[20] focuses on human and object interactions in literature and culture and has been used in the study of modernism due to modernist poets' rather materialist preoccupations. The idea that things are of value resulted in a massive interdisciplinary effort to examine things themselves. What Brown argues is that the meaning of an object is dependent on the context in which it is found. In order to support his claim, Brown employs Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper." He draws attention to the fact that the same object, namely the king's official seal, was invested with two different meanings depending on the individual who was handling it. For the real prince, the seal was the mark of the true prince, whereas for the pauper, the imposter prince, the seal was just a nutcracker. One can see how the same object was invested with different meanings by different people.[21] His theory has been criticized by Severin Fowles, who claims that the major fault of Brown's theory is that it relies too much on the idea of presence linked to tangibility, and fails to recognize the idea of absence and how it can also impact on one's life once granted its presence:

> One might say, for instance, that a set of keys jangling about in one's pocket has its own autonomous steely quality that permits it to have an effect upon the actions of key-users. But consider the keys that have

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[18] Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine and S. Brent Plate, "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," *Religion,* 40 (February 2010): 209.

[19] Catherine Button, "Whales, Legs, Harpoons, and Other Things: Methodological Fetishism and the Human-Object Relationship in Moby-Dick" (Master thesis, Salem State University, May 2014), 1.

[20] The "thing theory" relies on Heidegger's contrast between things and objects, stating that an object becomes a thing only when it ceases to serve its common function. In his essay "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry Journal*, 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 4, Bill Brown states the following: "As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture, above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things […]. A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy […]."

[21] Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 38.

> been misplaced and so are present only as an absence. These absent keys also impinge upon us in a strongly sensuous fashion: one registers the absence of keys with distress, gropes about the emptiness in one's pocket and, defeated, is left standing in the cold outside one's apartment. Both the keys and the absence of the keys have material effect on the world.[22]

Fowles also offers a suggestive example in order to demonstrate that absences can be shifted from negative to positive in order to become political objects that can be used in the struggle for accountability. According to him, some Argentinian families opposed the attempt of forensic archaeologists to exhume the individuals that were buried in military mass graves, not because they did not want the violence of the 1976 so-called "dirty war" to be publicly acknowledged, but because it was the absence that fueled these families' motivation to protest, it was the absence that had to be protected in order to avoid a premature closure of the political struggle for accountability.[23] For this reason, Fowles argues for a new way of looking at things, with as much emphasis to be placed on absence and the "absent" things, as it is placed on the "present" things.

During her ethnographic fieldwork in the autonomous Republic of Marij El in Russia's Volga region, Sonja Luehrmann noticed that most houses in Mari villages had curtained icon corners. The curtain was only lifted during family gatherings, or feast days, and the icons were shielded from view with all the other occasions. However, she noticed that some houses had sacred corners that worked in the same way in the absence of any icon or image.[24] The curtain was lifted with every special occasion, only to reveal an empty corner; in this case, the absence of the icon functioned in the same manner as its presence, mainly because its placement in the corner was what made it powerful: "The invisible forces that make the corner a powerful place in the house add a dimension to the icon that goes beyond the visual image depicted, but also beyond its material qualities as a picture."[25]

The former secret police not only wrote things about religious communities, but it also confiscated their creative materials, art creations, diaries,

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[22] Fowles, "People without things," 25.

[23] *Ibidem*, 27.

[24] Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), 154–55.

[25] *Ibidem*, 155.

journals, icons, songbooks and other important elements which they highly valued. More than that, the secret police equated these "absences" with the dissolution of the religious groups which it sought to destroy, unknowingly empowering them with even more creative potential and will to endure the repressive strategies targeting them. Today, the secret police archives in Romania store many of these "absences," be they objects, images or life stories, that could become presences and continue, complete, or simply end some chapters in the histories of the Old Calendarist Church. Eric Ketelaar highlights the connection between the archives and human rights stating that "the archives have a twofold power: being evidence of oppression and containing evidence required to gain freedom, evidence of wrongdoing and evidence for undoing the wrong."[26] In the case of the secret police archives, due to the misleading character of the files, it is not what is was written that might "undo the wrong." These materials and objects, on the other hand, that have been largely confiscated from various religious communities, such as the Old Calendarists, are the evidence of the wrongdoings of the totalitarian regime, be it fascist or communist, and can constitute a valuable resource in order to prove its intrusive character. In the following paragraphs, I will offer examples, in the form of visual materials found in the secret police archives, that convey the manners in which the Old Calendarist Church managed to navigate through and make us of these absences in order to survive persecution, highlighting, at the same time, the value of the secret police archives as sites or spaces of recovery from absence and loss.

3. Absence Occupies a Space: The Destruction of the Old Calendarist Church in Cucova (1935)

On May 27, 1935 a confrontation broke out between the Romanian Gendarmerie and the Old Calendarists in the village of Cucova, Putna county. Against the background of the villagers' complaints in relation to the so-called aggressive attitude on the part of the Old Calendarists in the village, 20 gendarmes surrounded their house of prayer; the Old Calendarists, however, had barricaded themselves inside the church,

[26] Eric Ketelaar, "The Panoptical Archive," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory. Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, eds. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 146.

armed with forks, axes, and some even with revolvers.[27] Given this situation, 50 more gendarmes were called for backup and with the help of the infuriated villagers they broke the two meter high wooden fence and arrested the believers. Six individuals were hurt, as well as a gendarme, two Old Calendarists were killed (without a given cause of death), and 66 believers were arrested.[28] The church, the surrounding sketes and the wooden fence were destroyed.[29] During the search, the gendarmes found the Old Calendarist priest, Ioanichie Dudescu, hiding
in a pit,[30] dressed in women's clothes and armed with a hatchet.[31] This is the manner in which the reports produced by the gendarmes in the aftermath of the event describe, by and large, the unfolding of the confrontation.

The events that happened in Cucova function as a landmark in the history of the community. They are described as a massacre in various narratives of the Old Calendarists, while the archival documents portray the event in a different light, making the Old Calendarists appear as rebels and troublemakers. The photos that the police had taken on occasion of the confrontation seem to tell a different story. Not only do they point to the contradictions and exaggerations of the police reports of the time, but they now open new layers of the past despite the fact that they were meant to capture a totally different version of reality.[32] Some of these photos depict the arrested members of the community, barefoot and surrounded by gendarmes and members of the authorities (Fig. 1); looking directly into the camera, the believers seem to want to speak, to tell their version of the story.

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[27] Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (henceforth ANIC), Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei (henceforth IGJ), Dosar 15/1935, 53.

[28] *Ibidem*, 54.

[29] Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (henceforth CNSAS), Dosar 15305, 158.

[30] Another report mentions the fact that he was found in the kitchen, hiding under the table. It also mentions that he was dressed in women's clothes, CNSAS, D 0012388, vol. 4, 168.

[31] ANIC, IGJ, Dosar 15/1935, 64.

[32] Kinga Povedák, "Photographs of the Religious Underground: tracing images between archives and communities," in *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe,* eds. Kapaló and Kinga Povedák (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 234.



Fig. 1: The arrested Old Calendarist community in Cucova, together with the gendarmes and members of the authorities. © Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS), D 0015305.

Other images show the church on the verge of being destroyed (Fig. 2), as well as the intrusive gaze of the gendarmes into the sacred space (Fig. 3), a metaphor for the violent interventions of the state in the lives of the marginalized religious communities. These photos are particularly affecting because, as we look at them, we know that soon these people would be arrested, some of them would even die. We are also aware that their church and sacred environment will be destroyed, that they will soon become an element of the past and that our only access to them is through these pictures, pictures that were absent for such a long time, buried in a yellowed secret police file, never meant to see the light of day. Because these photographs were taken by the authorities, they also have a point of view[33] and they also speak of what is absent: we do not get to see the victims of the gendarmes, only a large X marking the place, we do not get to see the church in its destroyed state, and we do not get to see many other individuals that both the archive and the narratives of the community mention as having been there, such as the new calendarist priest, the villagers that wanted to attack the community, and other members of the authorities.

[33] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 22.



Fig. 2: The wooden church on the verge of being destroyed. © Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS), D 0015305.



Fig. 3: Gendarmes looking inside the wooden church. We can see the way the icons were originally displayed; the random character of the small lithograph objects suggests that they were donated by members of the community. © Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS), D 0015305.

The event in Cucova is an instance where presence is turned into absence – as it usually happens when buildings are destroyed, or people die – and then into presence again. This absence still has an enduring presence within the community and it has led to the creation of a memorializing narrative that is triggered even in the absence of any specific knowledge about what actually happened in Cucova. Twenty years after the event, Hieromonk Pahomie Morar made efforts to purchase the same land where the former church used to be – which, in the meantime, had been turned into an orchard – in order to rebuild it. Today, a monastery stands on the approximately same place where the former church used to stand. Even though this monastery is nowadays present, it is also a marker for an absence, for what was destroyed and is nowadays missing. It, however, stands as proof that what the secret police thought it could make disappear by destroying its tangible forms, only generated an absence that instead empowered the community's determination to survive. The nowadays monastery creates a sense of permanence that reflects agency rather than victimhood. By taking a tragic space and making it sacred,[34] the Old Calendarists gained agency; they gave order to the chaos of a painful memory. Constructing the site and choosing to visit it while also knowing that doing so might evoke a painful memory are acts that gain agency, and this is how healing might eventually begin.

4. Absence Generates Agency: Monastic Incarceration of Old Calendarist Women

Following events such as Cucova, many Old Calendarist believers, both men and women, were arrested and sent to detention in Orthodox Monasteries. There were, however, some who managed to escape detention by hiding in caves or improvised huts in the woods. Amongst the arrested there were numerous nuns, and one of the monasteries where Old Calendarist nuns were sent in order to correct their behaviour and, presumably, accept the new calendar, was Vărzărești Monastery. Even though there is little to no information regarding the issue of monastic incarceration in interwar Romania, a perusal of the archival documents suggests that Vărzărești Monastery functioned as a prison for at least three

[34] Una MacConville and Regina McQuillan, "Potent Reminders: An Examination of Responses to Roadside Memorials in Ireland," in *The Matter of Death: Space, Place and Materiality*, eds. Jenny Hockey, Carol Komaromy and Kate Woodthorpe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 199.

years, between 1936 and 1939. Situated in Urechești, Vrancea county, the Monastery became the main place where Old Calendarist nuns were sent to detention. Even though the official historical record fails to mention its function during the interwar period, the archival documents reveal that it was, indeed, used for the incarceration of religious dissenters, namely Old Calendarist nuns. The incarceration was meant to make them change their minds and ways of thinking towards the new calendar, but it paradoxically became the place that, though in absence of their freedom, made it possible for their words and names to be preserved, mainly due to a rather strict control of its inmates' correspondence. Thus, the many postcards that these women wrote from, or received while in detention become valuable resources that offer us an insight into their sufferings, experiences, and personal struggles.

The arrest of many of these women created a gap, an absence within the community which, in turn, generated a strong sense of admiration for their sufferings and trials, especially on the part of those who had managed to hide and avoid detention. Freedom had paradoxically become a prison for some of them because they equated it with renouncing their faith. The messages that they wrote to their imprisoned sisters convey a conscience which was burdened to the point of self-denunciation. An archival document related to Vărzărești Monastery reveals an extraordinary event that demonstrates the self-sacrifice some of these women were capable of, as well as the strength of their belief. The report states as follows:

> To the Holy Synod
>
> We have the honour to report that on July 7th 1937, four women turned themselves in to the gendarmes in Urechești, R. Sărat.
>
> Margareta Ciontu from Lieşti, Tecuci, 24 years of age
>
> Ştefana Lefter from Furceni – Noi – Tecuci, 19 years of age
>
> Ştefana Zaharia from Ciuşlea – Tecuci, 24 years of age
>
> Ecaterina Zaharia from Ciuşlea – Putna, 20 years of age.
>
> These nuns declared that they are Stilist nuns and that they know the Stilist nuns from Vărzărești [...]. Until now they hid in their houses, but they are fanatics and now they know that that they will never give up on their religion and want to be imprisoned together with the rest

> of the nuns [...]. Please let us know if they should be incarcerated at Vărzărești.[35]
>
> These four young girls have freely chosen to surrender themselves to imprisonment. The reason they wanted to join their sisters in suffering was because they refused to accept the idea of giving up their faith. Thus, despite the resulting possible incarceration, they exercised personal agency regarding their fate.[36]

It was the absence of their sisters that triggered a sense of admiration that eventually materialized in an act of self-denunciation, that pushed them to make such a difficult choice as they equated freedom with betrayal and lack of faith. Even though detention was meant to weaken their belief, it somehow managed to generate a higher commitment to their faith: the act of self-denunciation was meant to highlight a stronger belief, and not their recognition of the fact that they needed to be "brought on the right path," as the Romanian Orthodox Church and state often maintained.

5. Absence Turns into Presence: The Mugshot of Glicherie Tănase

In June 1952, just a few months after the arrest of 13 Old Calendarist leaders, among whom was Glicherie Tănase, the spiritual leader of the Old Calendarist community, the Securitate noticed a strange activity among the believers in Neamț county and Slătioara Monastery, Suceava county. With respect to this activity the culprit seemed to be a young monk by the name of Onofrei V. Onofrei. Born in 1924 in Rădășeni, Suceava county, Onofrei was the secretary of the Associaton of the Orthodox Christians in Târgu Neamț (Asociația Creștinilor Pravoslavnici). Active and extremely determined to learn where his brothers in faith had been taken to, Onofrei set about finding a way to encourage the Old Calendarist community in the process. Thus, what the Securitate would discover once they investigated the issue was that young Onofrei had come up with a creative way of reminding the community of its imprisoned spiritual leader, transforming his absence into a very tangible presence by the means of a postcard that was meant to serve as a devotional image. The postcard, however, was not entirely produced by him, but was simply an old mugshot of Glicherie Tănase whose significance Onofrei

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[35] ANIC, Inspectoratul Județean al Jandarmeriei, Dosar 23/1937, 228, my translation.
[36] Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy, "«... as the young girl told them so»: Women and Old Calendarism in Interwar Romania," *Religion and Gender,* 11, no. 1 (2021): 15–38.

attempted to shift from a symbol of criminality and imprisonment to one of suffering, hope, and continuity.

By 1952 the Old Calendarist community had divided into two major factions: the Traditionalist Christian Denomination, led by Ion Movileanu, which had its headquarters in Putna county and the Religious Associations of Eastern Traditionalist Christians, that in 1948 changed its name to Eastern Orthodox Christian Denomination from Târgu Neamț, led by Gheorghe Iacobaș and having Glicherie Tănase as its spiritual leader.[37] In the summer of 1947 a number of Old Calendarist monks began submitting petitions in which they asked the Ministry to approve the building of a prayer house[38] on land donated to them by "some believers from around Slătioara."[39] The Ministry allowed its construction and Slătioara Monastery soon became the most important religious centre of the community led by Tănase. In 1948, however, the Law on Religious Denominations did not offer recognition to any of the two Old Calendarist factions,[40] thus forcing them underground.

After the Second World War, Glicherie Tănase attempted to create a hierarchy within the Old Calendarist Church. To this end, in 1947 a delegation of Old Calendarists from Slătioara Monastery contacted Galaction Cordun, the secretary of the Holy Synod[41] and former confessor of the royal family, who was on the verge of retirement, in order to ask him to become the Metropolitan of the Old Calendarists. After much negotiation, in April 1955 Cordun made public his intention to become the Primate of the Eastern Traditionalist Orthodox Church.[42] During the following months, he secretly ordained Glicherie Tănase a bishop,[43] as

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[37] Radu Petre Mureșan claims that there was a strong rivalry between the two factions, each one attempting to attract state institutions on their side. Ion Movileanu, the leader of the Putna group, considered the second one a dissidence, a group that broke away from the Old Calendarist church altogether, Radu Petre Mureșan, *Stilismul în România (1924-2011)* (Sibiu: Agnos, 2012), 68.

[38] ANIC, Inspectoratul Regional al Jandarmeriei, Dosar 219/ 1946-1947, vol. 1, 88.

[39] *Sfântul Ierarh Glicherie Mărturisitorul. O viață pentru Hristos. Viața, patimile și minunile Sfântului Ierarh Glicherie Mărturisitorul*, Ediția a II-a (Mitropolia Slătioara: Editura "Schimbarea la Față", 2012), 164.

[40] Mureșan, *Stilismul în România*, 71.

[41] Florian Bichir, "Statutul juridico-canonic al Bisericii Ortodoxe de stil vechi din România" (PhD diss., Ovidius University of Constanța, 2012), 66.

[42] *Ibidem*.

[43] In August 1955 Cordun and Tănase were arrested and they were both placed under house arrest. Cordun was sent to Cernica Monastery, situated close to Bucharest, and

well as archimandrite Evloghie Oța[44] and Meftodie Marinache, thus creating a church hierarchy within the faction led by Tănase. All of these actions, however, were carried out clandestinely; for this reason, this period of time was marked by numerous and repeated arrests of the leaders of the Old Calendarist community. It was following one of these arrests that the community contributed to the creative "production" and distribution of an item that stands as proof that the community made use of a tool of state security meant to incriminate, namely a mugshot, in order to motivate and ensure the community's continuation.

In June 1952, Onofrei had smuggled with the help of a Militiaman from Târgu Neamț two mugshots of Glicherie Tănase (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). These photos had been in the archives of the Târgu Neamț police since approximately 1936, when he was arrested after the numerous confrontations between the Old Calendarists and the gendarmes that took place in Neamț county.[45] He later made copies of these mugshots at a photo studio in Târgu Neamț; he kept 8 copies for himself, gave 25 copies to a certain Paslaru Maria from Oglinzi village, and 10 more copies were given to monk Alexandru Alexandrut from Slătioara Monastery.[46] A police informer would later report that he had met Onofrei on June 3rd and the latter showed him the copies of Glicherie's mugshots.[47] After the investigation, the Securitate draws the conclusion that the young monk had made a total of 45 copies of these photos with the sole purpose of distributing them among Old Calendarist believers so that they would not lose their faith and remember their spiritual leader, Glicherie Tănase. Out of all the copies, the police managed to confiscate only four; all of them were attached to Onofrei's penal files after his arrest in July 1952.

Tănase was sent to the village of Răchitoasa in Bărăgan Plain, see: Mureșan, *Stilismul în România*, 93. Cordun passed away in 1959, soon after he escaped detention, mainly due to the his failling health.

[44] For more information about Evloghie Oța see Anca Șincan, "Bishop Evloghie and His Prayer Beads," and "The Typewriter," and "Underground Monastery in Bucharest," in: *Hidden Galleries. Material Religion in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. James Kapaló and Tatiana Vagramenko (Zürich: LIT, 2020), as well as: Anca Șincan, "Ethical Questions in Researching the Religious Underground in Romania's Secret Police Archives", published in two parts, https://jordanrussiacenter.org/news/our-story-ethical-questions-on-researching-the-religious-underground-in-the-secret-police-archives-part-i/#.YsNU9uxByRs, accessed on December 20, 2021.

[45] CNSAS, P 0022247, 2.

[46] *Ibidem*, 5.

[47] *Ibidem*.



Fig. 4 and Figure 5: The mugshot postcards of Glicherie Tănase that were confiscated from Onofrei V. Onofrei. © Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS), P 022247.

Celia Lury defines images as "absent presences."[48] They live from the absence of the body that they depict, an absence that can be temporary or, in the case of death, final. The absence does not make the absent body return, but it replaces it with a different kind of presence.[49] Onofrei made copies of the mugshot in an attempt to encourage the community to remember their imprisoned spiritual leader who, even though was physically absent, was still alive. He chose to use an old mugshot which he obtained with great effort in order to remind the community that the monk had been absent before, but he was set free. The photo, which was turned into a postcard, was a symbol of the fact that he had been imprisoned before, and survived, he managed to overcome the hardships of detention

[48] Dominik Bartmanski and Jeffrey Alexander, "Introduction: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life: Toward an Iconic Turn in Cultural Sociology," in *Iconic Power. Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Dominik Bartmanski and Bernhard Giesen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

[49] Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 312.

and he was able to do it again. He was alive and the community had to hope for his return.

Archival documents mention the fact that Onofrei wanted to get hold of the mugshots of other arrested members.[50] It is not clear if he wanted to reproduce them for the same reason. He decided to make copies of the mugshots because "he wanted to show his brothers that father Glicherie is still alive and we will have him among us very soon."[51] His intention was to mark the absence of Glicherie Tănase with a physical presence in the form of a photography, and not just any photography, but a mugshot. A symbol of criminality and imprisonment, the mugshot becomes, in this case, the symbol of freedom, hope, suffering and the injustice of the regime. Even though he was absent, the postcards could work to powerfully evoke his presence. These postcards were meant to serve as mementos[52] and, even though the police managed to confiscate some of them, the community still has copies of them to this day, holding true to Onofrei's intentions. The photo of their absent leader was meant to remind them of the sufferings the community has endured and to inspire a communal sense of continuity. The meaning of the photo, thus, became similar to an icon, as it had material force, but also symbolic power implying that father Glicherie was absent, but still present, just as he had always been.

6. Conclusion

The Old Calendarist community was marked by numerous absences during the interwar period, as well as during communism. Starting from their lack of churches which prompted them to improvise their places of worship by hiding in woods, caves, cellars, or by building wooden churches, to their worship places being destroyed, their religious objects being confiscated, their leaders and community members being imprisoned, their voices being silenced and, last but not least, their lack of representation

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[50] CNSAS, P 0068482, 20.

[51] *Ibidem*.

[52] This was not the first time the community had chosen to use a postcard as a means to encourage its members, or even to draw attention to itself, as a community. One such an example comes from the Old Calendarist community in Albineț, Bessarabia. It seems that some time during the 1930s the church in Albineț had produced a postcard that was distributed among the Old Calendarist believers in the region, most probably in order to bring encouragment and reassurance in times of severe persecution (ANIC, IGJ, Dosar 25/1935, 19).

on the religious field after the fall of communism, all of these instances are examples of how absence was part of the Old Calendarist Church's life. The community, however, managed to function despite all of these absences by finding new and creative ways to survive persecution and create an identity.

All of the examples presented in this study come from the reasearch I have conducted in the secret police archives, which store many of these "absences," be they objects, images or life stories, that could become presences and continue, complete, or simply end some chapters in the histories of the Old Calendarist Church sites. The archives can, thus, be seen as spaces of recovery from absence and loss. In the case of the secret police archives, due to the misleading character of the files, it is not what is was written that might "undo the wrong;" these materials and objects, on the other hand, that have been largely confiscated from various religious communities are the evidence of the wrongdoings of the regime and can constitute a valuable resource in order to prove its intrusive character. They can also provide the healing that many religious communites need. In the case of the Old Calendarists, the above mentioned examples prove that these absences shifted from negative to positive the moment they became objects or actions around which the community united and created an identity. Proving what Fowles states, namely that absences push back and resist, and that they prompt us into action, the Old Calendarists strived for survival despite the repressive strategies that specifically targeted them. They gained agency and created an identity by choosing to work against the absences, to confront them in creative manners that ensured their survival to this day, when they are no longer absent from the religious scene and can finally tell their stories.