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**Political assassination in  
Romanian interwar society**  
**Case Study: The Legionary Movement**

**– SYNOPSIS –**

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Cluj-Napoca  
2018

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## II. General Context

### 1. Topic of the doctoral thesis

The passion for collective mentalities, social imaginary, myths and modern political mythology, and the desire to understand the motivations behind political violence - these are the factors which steered our course towards long readings related to this topic, as well as specific historical research, all of which led to us choosing this topic for the doctoral thesis.

We first dove into this topic a decade ago, during our bachelor's thesis, titled "*The mentality of Romania's political class (1848-1947)*"<sup>1</sup> (a rather complex topic to be tackled in a bachelor's thesis). Within this thesis, we spoke about the ways in which political elites viewed themselves. The use of instruments such as the analysis of primary sources - the memorial writings of the protagonists - laid the groundwork for how we were to approach such a complex topic.

Our master's degree in historical social anthropology and the resulting thesis had us familiarize ourselves with the topic of political violence in interwar Romania. The case study presented within the graduation thesis: "*Caught between ideology and sin. Florian Ștefănescu Goangă, defeated by 20th century messianism*"<sup>2</sup>, features a lesser-known local event, but an event which is relevant in understanding the grinding conflict between legionaries and Carlists (supporters of King Carol). We have analyzed the murder of university rector Ștefănescu-Goangă, who was murdered in broad daylight by legionaries in Cluj-Napoca, in 1938. We analyzed the following factors: the motivation of the attackers - which varies between ideological arguments and personal vendettas - the sins of the university rector, the judicial inquiry, the involvement of high-ranking members of the Legion, the revenge of the Carlists and the communist imprisonment of the university rector following this revenge. We documented the case using primary sources: memoirs,

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<sup>1</sup> Cristian Manolachi, *Tipologii ale politicianului de succes din perspectivă memorialistică - câteva modele ale unui secol de activitate politică (1850 – 1950)*, în *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică*, anul X, nr. 1 (18), Cluj-Napoca, 2011, editura Accent, pp. 279 – 293.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, *Între ideologie și alcov, asasinarea morală a unui rector. Fl. Ștefănescu – Goangă învins de mesianismele secolului XX*, în *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică*, anul X, nr. 2 (19), Cluj-Napoca, 2011, editura Accent, pp. 74 – 96.

Idem, *Rectorul Universității din Cluj între atentatul Legionar și temnița comunistă*, în "Miturii și legende din tradiția multimilenară a Clujului", coordonator: Ioan Silviu Nistor, editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, pp. 262 – 265.



newspapers of the time, document collections, archives. This research process allowed us to have all the required tools which would help us approach the topic of the present doctoral thesis: "*Political assassination in Romanian interwar society. Case Study: The Legionary Movement*".

Within this thesis, our goal was to overcome the limitations of Romanian historiography, which either abound in bias, simply provide a description of how the events unfolded, or only shallowly approach the topic of the assassinations. We do not want to simply describe how the political assassinations in interwar Romania unfolded (albeit the tales are rather spectacular), but aim to understand the mechanisms of Romanian society which led to their occurrence. Our goal is to understand the mechanisms which have generated, motivated and ultimately legitimized political violence during the legionary era. To do this, we have used demythization techniques and applied them to the existing and recurring political myths in interwar Romania.

Within this thesis, we will analyze the shift from student assassin to the embodiment of the modern heroic outlaw, as well as the idealization of the assassins by the Legionary Movement (*Văcăreștenii, Nicadorii, Decemvirii*). Does the ideology of the Legion go hand in hand with religion and violence? How is treason demonized in a paramilitary organization? What are the frustrations of government officials, and why do they ultimately choose to resort to the extreme solution of state terrorism? Can an extremist organization rise again after its head has been cut off? How did unknown legionary Horia Sima become the faction's leader and how did this rise to power affect the Legion? What are the effects of the obvious discrepancy between Ion the peasant and *Jean*, citizen of *Le Petit Paris*? Is King Carol a toxic leader, or does his way of ruling justify his decisions? What explanation is there for the transition between brutally executing 250 legionaries during September 1939 and the Carlist spring of calm which occurred only a few months later? The frustrations of middle-class citizens, the shortcomings in the daily lives of the peasants, the lack of success of popular political leaders (the myth of the savior), the toxic influence of the King's circle of advisors, the failure of the hybrid political solution offered by the regime of King Carol, the lack of grip on Europe on the part of France and England and the effect it had on internal events, the influence of fascism in Europe - we have researched all of these aspects to understand the full historical context of the topic presented in this thesis.

Was the coup of September 1940 a mere act of social unrest, a simple riot or an outright revolution? Why does the trivialization of robbery during National Legionary State

lead to the fall from grace of the *always-fair-legionary*? What reasons did the *one-man-hero* have for resorting to state terrorism, despite the Legion having full control of the judicial system? What explanation is there for the countless funeral marches, reburials and commemorations which all occurred in less than four months of Iron Guard governance? We aim to understand the generalized terror within Romanian society, the creation of an eternal enemy and its exploitation by the Legion, the twilight of terror - defined by the assassinations within the Jilava penitentiary and the violent moment of the Rebellion - the bloodthirsty members of the Iron Guard and their passion for violence, the feelings of impending death experienced by Carlist elites, the general with colossal ego who views himself as the nation's hero and role-model, how the European war affected Romania, Nazi influences in internal politics, the consequences of *Romanianizing* the economy, internal policies within the Legion etc.

## **2. Brief historiographical essay**

\*Details and examples can be found in the full text of the essay, present within the doctoral thesis.

Romanian historiography is, apparently, extremely generous towards the Legionary Movement and, in extenso, with the political violence during the interwar period, featuring many vulgarized approaches which simply list all the events that took place, with the exceptions being either biased or offering shallow commentaries.

Many of the legionaries directly involved in the events of the time have later tried their own hand at summarizing the history of the Legionary Movement, but, from a historian's point of view, the writings are relevant only in the sense that they show us how far along the authors were on the ideological pathway, and how they justify and mythicize the various stages in the evolution of the Legion. Equally biased and destructive, but serving a different ideology, communist historical records try, obviously, to discredit the fascists. Other, more recent interpretations of the political assassinations of the time, made by retired colonels, focus only on the technical details. The historical interpretation found in such works casually gallivants down the path of nationalism and event history. On the other hand, the works of present day Iron Guard sympathizers are downright hilarious – visibly biased, ecstatic, nationalistic and anti-Semite, they present the same arguments belonging to the legionaries of old.

A clearer picture of Romanian interwar history appears during the '60s, '80s and '90, with several western historians publishing their doctoral theses. Nicolas Nagy-Talavera, Francisco Veiga, Armin Heinen and, tangentially, Paul D. Quinlan dare to approach the all-too-sensitive topic of the Legionary Movement. The formerly mentioned works are highly important, especially given the lack of historiographical coherence. Using sources from German, Spanish and American archives, as well as conducting interviews with some of the legionaries, these historians manage to make an original contribution to the understanding of the topic, clearing a path for an honest and professional debate.

In the book titled *Romanian Intellectual Elites Between 1930 and 1950* (ro. *Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950*), Lucian Boia partially tackles the subject. In a chapter of this book titled *The Legionaries* (ro. *Legionarii*), he presents the struggle of university staff being persecuted by the “revolution” of the educational system led by the Iron Guard during the National Legionary State. This chapter also tells of aggressive legionary students which drive teachers to their limits.

The unquestionable origins of The Legion of St. Michael the Archangel can be identified within the powerful anti-Semite student movement which took place during the 1920s in Romania. A unique collection of documents concerning this phenomenon was edited in 2011 by researcher Lucian Nastasă and released in a volume which lifts the veil on the struggles of Jewish students, the anti-Semite feeling in society and public institutions, and which contributes to deciphering the causes that have led to the rise of the Legion.

Interviews with legionaries which played an active role during the interwar period, a project initiated during the '90s by a team of historians from the *Oral History Centre of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Corporation* (ro. *Centrul de istorie orală a Societății Române de Radiodifuziune*) are critical in understanding the events, first off due to the generous perspective they offer on them. Legionaries from all ranks of power – from lesser legionaries to the top-ranking officials of the Iron Guard – give their thoughts on subjects which are, most of the time, in direct relation to political violence. Second off, the volume titled *Nation, Legion, Captain* (ro. *Țara, Legiunea, Căpitanul*) manages to recover in extremis historical records which, at present, are irrecoverable due to natural causes – the deaths of those involved in the events.

### 3. Brief bibliographic essay

\*\* For a more detailed perspective, please consult the text of the doctoral thesis, sections *Bibliographic Essay (I)*, *Bibliographic Essay (II)* and *Bibliographic Essay (III)*. Please also consult the section titled *References*, which can be found within the present summary.

\*\*\* Bibliographic references which indicate the author(s) between brackets can be found in the section titled *References*.

The doctoral thesis features over 2.300 footnotes. The vast majority of these footnotes reference primary sources. The documentation used in proving our hypotheses mostly consists of memorial records from people who lived during the interwar period, as well as document collections, archives and publications from that period.

The sheer volume and diversity of the records from that period provide both a great opportunity for the making of the present thesis, as well as a great challenge. Initially, in the case of the 1920s and, partially, the 1930s, records provided by the legionaries are in line with the line of thought of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (for reference, see Horia Sima, Ion Banea, Neculai Totu, legionary publications from that period, propaganda leaflets). Following the arrest of *The Captain* in 1938, the opinions of the legionaries suddenly break unanimity. In fact, the effect is quite opposite, as each member of the Iron Guard now constructs their own imaginary of the legionary “truth”, all trying to justify the failure of the Legionary Movement to themselves, trying to convince their fellow legionaries that their cause was and is just and, of course, to stand the test of time and the judgment of history. Their stake in this was twofold – supporting the cause of fascism and, especially, representing the interests of the Iron Guard. Notes from the Sima loyalists (Horia Sima, Mihail Sturdza, Viorel Trifa) are heavily disputed by notes from the Codreanu loyalists (Constantin Papanace, Virgil Ionescu, Ion Dumitrescu Borșa, Ștefan Pălăghiță). The conflicts that followed the Iron Guard government and the implications of the assassinations in Jilava combine to create a third version of the events (Dumitru Groza). Reasonable in their approach (Virgil Ionescu, Viorel Trifa, Constantin Papanace), more ecstatic (Ștefan Pălăghiță, Mihail Sturdza), or with a clear intention to manipulate their readers (Horia Sima, Ion Dumitrescu Borșa), when compared to one another and double-checked using information from primary sources, the notes of the legionaries help us better understand the historical context of Romanian interwar society.

To fully grasp the context of the topic, we have also analyzed sources coming from the side opposing the Legion. There are notes from the ruling elites of the time which prove how nervous, afraid, swollen with ego, or enthralled by myths (Carol II, Armand Călinescu, Ion Antonescu they were – speeches in the Council of Ministers and official schedule – Constantin Argetoianu, Grigore Gafencu, Elena Lupescu – as well as interviews in the American press – general Constantin Sănătescu). We have also deciphered the official statements of the time based on press releases, propaganda leaflets (*Pe marginea prăpastiei, Asasinatele de la Jilava..., Snagov și Strejnicul*), press releases of the Police and Gendarmerie (*Fondul de Poliției și Fondul de Jandarmi*, from the State Archives in Cluj), reports by intelligence agencies (document collections) etc. The positioning of European governments has also not been neglected. The opinions of plenipotents and attachés of European embassies in Bucharest have been extracted from the reports they frequently handed out to their superiors (collection of documents – *The German military archive*).

In our attempt to better understand the topic of the thesis, we also rely on exploring the unchronicled history of the anonymous majority and all their little stories, without which we would remain the prisoners of the abstract event history which only references important political events. Thus, we have analyzed tales of low-rank legionaries of the Iron Guard: students of the sworn brotherhoods, nest leaders, legionary mayors, legionary prefects, legionary commissaires, commissaries responsible for the economic Romanianization, assistant inspectors for education or day-to-day peasants (Ion Fleșeriu, Nicolae Ciolacu, Aurel Popa, Gheorghe Ungureanu, Dumitru Funda, Matei Constantin, Dumitru Lungu, Constantin Teja, Alexandru Serafim, Nicolae Crăcea, Ion Constantinescu, Constantin Matei, Titi Dobre, Olimpiu Borzea, Victor Moise, Nae Tudorică). Supporters of Sima or supporters of Codreanu, proud or disappointed, sometimes sugar-coating the events, other times excited, all of them prove, above all else, that dishonesty is not their intention. Descriptive rather than analytical, their testimonials tell a vivid tale street violence during the *mise en scene* of the legionary dystopia. On the other end of the political compass, Ion Antonescu's version of the history of the National Legionary State or the assassination of Armand Călinescu is animated by officers or employees of the Bucharest Public Radio (Vasile Ionescu, Gheorghe Barbul – the general's Head of Cabinet – gendarme Mihai Baron, Dinu C. Giurescu – who, as a child, is traumatized by the Rebellion). The Jews, the legionaries' number one target for robbery and murder, also present their case for history to judge (Iacob Gutstein, Matatias Carp, statistics in the *Final Report on the Holocaust from the*

*International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania*, statements and protest notes from Jewish students, in the document collection titled *University anti-Semitism in Roumania*).

Whether biased or impartial, general or specific in nature, ecclesiastical, scholastic or economical, free or censored, passionate or antagonistic, and mostly overflowing with nationalism, newspapers of the time help consolidate the overall context of the political violence. To document our thesis, we went through the pages of twenty regional Transylvanian newspapers ("Revista Economică", "Unirea Poporului", "Vieța Creștină", "Unirea", "Biserica și Școala", "Societatea de Mâine", "Foaia Diecezană", "Acțiunea Românească" - "Înfrățirea Românească", "Clujul", "Țara Noastră", "Renașterea", "Chemarea Tinerimei Române", "Românul", "Dumineca", "Cele Trei Crișuri", "Curierul Creștin", "Țara de mâine", "Școala Noastră", "Buletin Eugenic și Biopolitic").

### III. Key terms

The goal of our research of political violence in Romanian interwar society can be summarized by use of the following key terms: assassination-redemption-glory, the myth of the heroic outlaw, the myth of the *Văcăreșteni*, the myth of the savior, the myth of the *Nicadori*, the myth of *Moța-Marin*, the myth of *Decemviri*, the myth of *the Captain's* immortality, the iron bars, the new-age man, the one-man-hero, the righteous man, the apostles of Romanian justice, demonization of treason, the Prime Minister of revenge, psychosis of taking back control, trivialization of robbery, trivialization of violence, trivialization of death, the all-too-familiar revolver, the eternal enemy, generalized anxiety, the relativization of power, state terrorism, institutionalized terror, the psychosis of fear, the psychosis of terror, twilight of terror, imminent death, passion for violence, the pogrom of the *Rebellion*, long live death, parallel history.

## IV. Chapter summary

\* In this summary we indicated the reference exclusively for the quotes. The full bibliographic resources can be identified in the text of the doctoral thesis and within *References* section, which you can also find in the final part of this *Synopsis*.

A brief analysis of the political violence which occurred during the (only!) 115 days of Iron Guard rule reveals a desolating outcome. Generalized robbery, Legionary Police roaming the streets and terrorizing citizens, regular house searches, inquiry committees that would put the Catholic Inquisition to shame, medieval torture sessions in the police basement, the Legionary government's pathological craving for memorial services, reburials, marches and commemorations, all of these elements are warranted by the idea that the Legion of St. Michael the Archangel is rightfully instating (their own brand of!) vengeful justice. Two key moments that best describe the political violence rampaging throughout Romania serve to confirm this theory. The assassinations of Jilava, Snagov, Strejnicul, Bucharest and Ploiești all have in common the fact that many Carlist leaders fell like flies within only 24 hours, executed by the Iron Guard, which definitely meets all conditions for **state terrorism**. The legionary rebellion confirms the utopic nature of the failed project titled *The country of the Holy Sun in the sky* (ro. *Țara soarelui sfânt de pe cer*). The generalized *Delirium* (Marin Preda) spreading throughout Romania during the 21st – 23rd of January 1941 results in grim displays of anti-Semitic violence. Concurrently, collective violence conquers the streets of Bucharest – shops, houses, synagogues, all put to the torch, barricaded streets and public institutions, robberies, murders. As such, the main objective of the present thesis is explaining the societal factors which have enabled this violent experiment.

### 1. The Manciu, Duca and Stelescu cases (I-III)

The optimism given by Romania emerging victorious from the war in 1919 – obtained at Versailles, rather than on the battlefield – is quickly set aside, while the new generation of Romanians, untouched by the horrors of war, march towards repeating its atrocities nonetheless. **The trivialization of violence and death**, as well as the **all-too-**



**familiar revolver** become parts of citizens' daily lives. The ideal of Greater Romania doesn't manage to balance out the countless frustrations and shortcomings faced by the country: poverty of peasants, low education, lack of civic education, poverty amidst the young middle class, the prosperity of Jews in certain urban environments, the illusory danger of approaching communism, as well as students lacking basic necessities – all of these frustrations coagulate together into a student movement which is particularly active in politics amidst the general confusion characterizing the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead of being in class, students can be found protesting, marching in strikes, organizing street demonstrations and dispensing violence. The violent faction seizes leadership of the student movement, planning to move on from small-scale violence to attacking the government of Romania. In 1924, when Corneliu Zelea Codreanu executes the prefect of the Police in Iași in broad daylight, the legionary faction had already been plotting to assassinate key political actors on Romania's political and economic scene for a while, as well as having an assassination of a fellow legionary (traitor) under their belts. The interwar jury courts (ro. *Curți cu Juri*), with the jury consisting of Romanian citizens, members of the dwindling middle class, will unanimously acquit the students which own up to the murders, but not to the blame. Downright paradoxical and uniquely staggering, especially given the arguments the students used to justify their crimes, which the jurors embraced with open arms. The young students craft their message pandering specifically to the nationalistic, anti-Semitic and religious nature of Romanian society. The corruption of government elected officials is also squeezed in, as well as the disproportionate amount of force brutal police officers use to punish "innocent" students. In fact, the disproportionate reaction coming from public safety institutions becomes a central theme of the self-victimization campaign led by supporters of Codreanu's movement. The way in which students are being trialed can be compared to electoral campaigning. Romanians are persuaded on the spot of the just nature of the students' cause, and the verdicts of acquittal are celebrated by thousands and tens of thousands of Romanians. Following the patenting of this model – **assassination, redemption, glory** – the next decade will see it being replicated by any young man which seeks justice with the revolver in hand. The present thesis contains documentations of a few relevant cases: Grunspan, Falik, Tischler, Angelescu, Socor. Donning the mantle of Romanian spirit, *Christian students* will preach anti-Semitism and anti-system message far and wide, seeking final victory at all costs, with zero compromise.

The *Christian students* – the name taken on by the violent faction of the student movement – are an excellent embodiment of the **myth of the heroic outlaw**. In fact, the faction also promotes the model of hermitry established by Zelea Codreanu. It is he who decides that members of the government need to be punished, like in the case of the prefect of the Police Department in Iași, when Codreanu publicly announced the decision for having him assassinated in front of crowds gathered on Mount Rarău, a symbol of Romanian identity. Whether on the streets of cities harboring university centers, or in the dock facing judgement, the students wear traditional Romanian outfits, a gesture meant to showcase the authenticity of the cause. The murders they commit, they always commit for the justice of Romanian people, never for personal reasons (they say). It is not a cold-blooded killer that presses the trigger on the revolver, but an honest-to-God Romanian aiming to restore justice in society by means of heroic sacrifice. Hermitry, the mountain, the forest, the traditional Romanian outfit, as well as bringing an end to injustice, all aiming to legitimize violence.

These modern-day outlaws cohere within the walls of Văcărești prison, which transforms into a spawning pool for radical students. Their leaders – Codreanu, Moța, Gârneață, Georgescu or Mironovici – are given the distinct name of *Văcăreșteni*. United by the **myth of the Văcăreșteni**, and inspired by the icon of the vengeful Archangel Michael found in the prison of Văcărești, in 1927, the Legion of St. Michael the Archangel is born. Moreover, the iron bars on the cell windows will become the symbol of Codreanu's organization. **The iron bars** become their electoral symbol, and the adepts of their movement receive appreciation based on the months or years they have spent behind bars for their cause.

The first political successes of the Legion (partial elections) and the lack of a government solution that combats the Legion's violence (unanimous acquittals) lead to an uninspired decision. The liberal government, led by I. G. Duca, bans the political movement led by Codreanu, just before the elections. The Legion does not falter, but counterattacks by assassinating the acting prime minister. The hit on him is sudden, and happens right on the platform of Sinaia's train station, in December of 1933. After a decade littered with political violence, an unprecedented sentence comes: the three assassins are condemned by a military court – and, thus, we can observe how cautious the authorities were, as they eliminated jury courts from the decision. This sentence is meant as a warning to **“the apostles of Romanian justice”**. But even so, authorities cannot combat the myth which was born out of the “heroic” deed carried out by the three legionaries. The latter have ascended to the Legion's pantheon,

embodying the sword of St. Michael the Archangel. **The myth of the *Nicadori*** will continue to inspire legionaries who seek to follow the example set by the three.

Shortly after this event, another crucial myth tied to the Legionary Movement is born – **the myth of Moța-Marin**. The Legion decides to support the heroic fight for nationalism in the Spanish civil war. A small group of legionaries are symbolically dispatched to Spain to join the fight against communists on the side of General Franco. Although Romania has no stake in this conflict, the fiercely nationalist legionaries justify it by stating that the fight *for faith, morality and God*<sup>3</sup> knows no boundaries (that’s a new one!). Ionel Moța and Vasile Marin are killed in the crossfire. Their funeral: a grandiose spectacle. The train that carries their bodies stops in Berlin, where Italian, German and Spanish fascist troops receive them with military honors. In Romania, hundreds of thousands of Iron Guard members attend the funeral – according to Legion sources. The two bodies are then put to rest at the Mausoleum erected by order of *the Captain*. This is also the point of origin for *Apelul morților* (*the roll call of the dead*), a legionary procedure which consists of calling the names of those who died for the Legion at the start of every official gathering. At the same time, *the hymn of Moța-Marin* becomes an integral part of legionary songs, while their sacrifice becomes a model worth following. Codreanu even identifies a few reasons for sanctifying Ionel Moța and Vasile Marin.

The shocking assassination of Duca ensures the notoriety of the Iron Guard. With a brief resurgence in 1934, the legionaries win over the fragile consciences of the Romanian people. The messianic nature of Codreanu’s political message wins the people over. Motifs such as the Iron Guard’s reinterpretation of the ten commandments, giving martyr status to the assassins, the *Captain* as a father figure, they all echo the hopes of the people. Romanian society’s predisposition towards mysticism prevents any sort of rational political intention. Abstract political concepts such as **the new-age-man, the one-man-hero or the righteous man** begin to emerge, while the people grow ever more disappointed with their rulers. The perverse effects of the global economic crisis – which, in Romania, takes the shape of a consistent agricultural crisis – deepens the divide between *Ion the peasant* and *Jean, citizen of Le Petit Paris*. Popular scandals involving corruption – such as the Škoda scandal – further serve to fuel the disappointment of the Romanian people. Meanwhile, King Carol II tries to identify possible solutions to counteract the popularity of the Iron Guard. He tries to redirect

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<sup>3</sup> Neculai Totu, *Însemnări de pe front: note din expediția legionară în Spania, noiembrie 1936-ianuarie 1937*, editura Criterion Publishing, București, 2010, p. 12. *Însemnările* legionarului Neculai Totu au fost publicate inițial în 1937.

his subjects' nationalism towards tamer political actors. As such, surrogate political organizations coordinated by popular political leaders, begin to emerge (ex. Alexandru Vaida Voevod, Octavian Goga, A. C. Cuza). However, this does not stop the Legion from taking part in the election and from gaining a remarkable political score in 1937. Although the Iron Guard promotes dictatorship and final victory, it follows the Nazi model and takes part in democratic elections.

The constant wave of new recruits during the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century attracts greater challenges for the Legion. Internal order and discipline are crucial to a structure which holds these values at its core. Codreanu tries to impose a hermit-like behavior to his legionaries: applying personal example, self-punishment, *examples of common living* given by high-ranking leaders of the Legion. However, *the Captain* sees that misbehavior within the ranks will not solve itself, and decides to implement a barrack-like regime of strictness, rules and rituals within the Legion. This resulted in the creation of special laws which outline various ways meant to solve internal conflicts or help new recruits gain member status. An internal control institution, suggestively titled *Controlul Legionar (ro. Legionary Control)*, is established to evaluate *the fairness, skill and moral character* of the legionaries. In case of serious misconduct, a *legionary judgment service* is to solve delicate situations. Internal opposition is not tolerated, and is considered treason. **The demonization of treason** occurs ever since the student movement first started. A student named Vernichescu, who his colleagues suspected of cutting a deal with the prosecutors investigating the student plot of 1924, is assassinated in prison, by Ionel Moța. One decade after that, the first serious dissidence occurs within the Iron Guard. The young and ambitious Mihai Stelescu – promoted to deputy at only 25 years old, and by *the Captain* himself, no less – publicly criticizes Codreanu. Furthermore, there are rumors that Stelescu is plotting to assassinate *the Captain* (hah!). *The perfect unity* of the Iron Guard, much idealized by Codreanu, is ripped to shreds. The brutal assassination of Mihail Stelescu in 1936, who was shot with revolvers and chopped apart with axes by a team of ten legionaries, shocks public opinion. The message the Iron Guard puts forward is crystal clear, and no further dissent haunts its ranks. Moreover, the ten assassins are idealized and nicknamed *Decemviri*.

## 2. The Codreanu-Călinescu case (IV)

Following the failure of the Government to win the 1937 election, it becomes obvious that the Carlist project has failed, being nothing more than a superficial, inconsistent construction. Pressed against the wall, the King's Government turns to desperate solutions, ordering the arrest of Zelea Codreanu, which is condemned following a series of show trials. *The Captain* is not the only one being hunted, but everyone who is a member of the Guard. The persecution generates a counterattack: the hit on Cluj university rector Florian Ștefănescu Goangă. Meanwhile, King Carol being granted an audience by the *Führer* himself gives the king a direct line of communication with *the Reich*. The trust showed upon King Carol during the audience – a trust which was later abused – as well as the acts of violence committed by the legionaries in the fall of 1938 lay the groundwork for the most radical of all measures. A new show trial claiming that Codreanu has escaped while under escort is used by the Government to justify the assassination of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. Public opinion cries unanimously: this is **state terrorism**. Along with Codreanu, the *Nicadori* and *Decemviri* are also put to death, in an attempt to dismantle the mythical figures of the Iron Guard.

In the next ten months, Romania becomes a miniature theater of war. The divide between the Iron Guard and the supporters of King Carol deepens. Authorities arrest countless people, and kill some of the notorious leaders of the Legion. Nicoleta Nicolescu, Vasile Cristescu, Petre Andrei, students or admirers of the Iron Guard, they are all shot down in the streets or in the basements of the police. **The psychosis of taking back control** on the part of the authorities affects the entire fabric of society. In their hunt for the Iron Guard, authorities search the homes of the entire population, introduce *excessive check-ups* into the Army and conducts searches on priests. On the other side of the barricade, the Iron Guard maintains constant pressure on the political elite. Plots and attempts on the king's or Armand Călinescu's life are discovered and stopped in time. However, they fail in stopping all attempts. In September of 1939, prime minister Armand Călinescu is assassinated, marking a peak in interwar acts of violence. Considered to be directly responsible for the murder of *the Captain*, he is shot down by *20 bullets*. This expertly-executed murder involved ambushing the prime minister's car on the streets of Bucharest. The assassins confess their crime live on the national radio station, then surrender to the authorities – in accordance with

Iron Guard protocol. Their surrender, like in the case of the *Nicadori* or the *Decemviri*, puts a mystical, legionary spin on the murder. Political assassination, albeit heroic and necessary in the material world, is a sin under the eyes of God, and one must pay for one's sins. The Carlist reaction marks a new moment of **interwar state terrorism**, as it brings forward unprecedented levels of violence, even by the standards of the time. **The prime minister of revenge**, General Gheorghe Argeșanu, leads the counterattack on legionaries, imprisoning them without any due trial. The legionaries who assassinated the prime minister are shot down in the street, in the exact spot in which Călinescu was murdered. The bodies are left there on the pavement, the pavement becoming a "museum" for the macabre, and curious eyes are met with a note: "*From this day forth, this will be the fate met by those who betray this country!*"<sup>4</sup> But the Government isn't satisfied with just eliminating the murderers of the prime minister. The show of terror reaches its next act: the assassination of Iron Guard leaders imprisoned in work camps, as well as – "indiscriminately" – murdering *3 legionaries from each territorial district*. By the end, 250 legionaries were murdered. In short, the Iron Guard elites were eliminated in less than 24 hours following the assassination of Armand Călinescu. The falling of the Iron Guard elites can only be interpreted as a sociological disaster for the organization. Political commentators of the time have divergent opinions. Argetoianu states: "*The massacre they [AN. the authorities] committed is on the same scale as what one sees in a civil war.*"<sup>5</sup> Grigore Gafencu adds to this: "[...] *we slide down the path of bloodshed between Romanians*"<sup>6</sup>.

Although it might seem impossible, the regime and the Iron Guard make peace only six months after the massacre of September 1939. The king's spring of calm offers us a vision of a regime heading for imminent collapse. There are many explanations for this: the course of war, Romania becoming isolated on the international stage, dependency on Nazi Germany, the imminence of territorial losses, the illusory solution offered by the pompously-named *Frontul Salvării Naționale* (ro. *National Salvation Front*) and the opposition of traditional political parties. This regime needs the legitimacy that only the public support of the Legion can offer. Even though the relationship between the Nazis and the legionaries of *the General Command* in Berlin is overestimated, the compromise of the king's regime provides a good opportunity to stroke the *Reich's* ego. The effect of entering this new

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<sup>4</sup> Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări Zilnice*, ediție de Stelian Neagoe, vol. VII, 1 iulie-22 noiembrie 1939, editura Machiavelli, București, 2003, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Grigore Gafencu, *Însemnări politice, 1929-1939*, ediție și postfață de Stelian Neagoe, editura Humanitas, București, 1991, p. 338.

political relationship is, however, weakened by the lack of consistency on the part of the authorities. Horia Sima is captured, incarcerated, then shortly released from prison and promoted to minister. The king's original solution seems to be taking legionaries *from jail straight to the Palace*. Despite the king's offer, Horia Sima only partially agrees to play this game. Shortly thereafter, he quits the Gigurtu Cabinet – an unnatural mix mash of elected officials – offering the Carlists the perspective of collaborating with surrogate leaders of the Iron Guard: Noveanu, Bidianu, Budişteanu.

All those years in which Codreanu served as a paternal figure for the Guard has resulted in the current leadership lacking political vision. The rise of Horia Sima – an unknown teacher from Timișoara – starts in 1938, when *the captain* is arrested. Without Codreanu's powerful presence, a power vacuum grows within the Legion. Not only that, but the arrest campaign triggered by the Carlists leads to many of the Legion's political vectors being imprisoned. The few Legion leaders which have remained on the outside are very cautious, which can also be explained by the need to protect legionaries on the inside. That, and the feeling of insecurity caused by the regime taking decisive (euphemism!) action against the Legion. In charge of the violent faction within the Legion, Horia Sima is considered to be responsible for the actions which have led to Codreanu's assassination. Guard leaders of a similar profile, i.e. Alexandru Cantacuzino and Vasile Cristescu, have been taken out by authorities. The structural nature of the Legion involves combat and violence. This is Constantin Papanace explaining the recipe behind the Legion's success: "*The law of natural selection through combat is intensely at work within the Legion. [...] Elements who no longer manifest their instinct for combat are being left behind [...].*"<sup>7</sup> The theme of the revolution and the final victory is rehashed and obsessively repeated by Horia Sima. His tales of revolution and the prospect of revenge feed the juvenile egos of his underlings. They craft their own revolutionary aura, previous exiles become mythical expeditions, while their protagonists lie under the roof of *international conspiracy actors*.

The stories told by the Iron Guard leaders which were exiled to Berlin confirm that their resources are being oriented towards the internal struggle for power. The collective leadership proves inefficient in an organization which traditionally relies on a firm pyramid structure, with a supreme leader at the very top. Horia Sima exploits this tradition, along with the indecision, uncertainty, vanity and inconsistency of his colleagues in the *General*

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<sup>7</sup> Mugur Vasiliu (editor, director), *Destinul unei generații*, colecție de lucrări legionare, editura Scara - Asociația Română pentru Cultură și Ortodoxie, București, 2002; Vezi secțiunea Constantin Papanace, *Destinul unei generații*, p. 97.

*Command*. He is also the sole member of the *General Command* which illegally crosses the border, returning to Romania to carry out various missions. The legionary network developed by Sima offers him the opportunity to control the events happening in Romania and empower disoriented members of the Guard. In this context, this early 1940 quote by Ion Fleşeriu – lawyer, old legionary from Sibiu – is also relevant: “*The brothers which were free told me what they were up to while we were in the work camps at Ciuc and Vaslui. I found that all of them followed H. Sima, a man with whose vision I also align with.*”<sup>8</sup>

The indecision of the Berlinese “exiles” concerning the assassination of the king and the head of his government, as well as the murder of the prime minister not being claimed by Sima, offers an uncertain perspective as far as knowing who was behind the assassination. However, sources of the time indicate the probability that the attack was coordinated by Horia Sima. Miti Dumitrescu, the leader of the legionary team which executes Călinescu manifests visible signs of fanaticism. He is convinced that Zelea Codreanu wasn’t murdered in 1938, but that he lives on, in exile. The messianism, the paternal hand-holding, the mythification process, and the illusory world promised by Codreanu render the explanation of his death impossible. **The myth of the Captain’s immortality** persuades many legionaries not to accept the hypothesis of his assassination. “*How can you resist the fantasy [...]?*”<sup>9</sup>, writes Virgil Ionescu, legionary. By digging around for more information, Miti Dumitrescu finds out, while in Berlin, that the rumor of immortality is a mere myth, and decides to avenge *the Captain*, even at the cost of his own death.

### 3. The Iorga-Madgearu-Argeşanu case (V)

The revolution which was constantly mentioned by Horia Sima, exploited as propaganda during the National Legionary State, refers only to a series of acts of public disorder caused by the legionaries between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 1940. The – already compromised – king’s abdication is the result of General Antonescu’s careful political orchestrating of the entire situation. Investigation on the possible causes of the coup also dwells on the king overestimating the actions carried out by legionaries in the streets.

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<sup>8</sup> Ion Fleşeriu, *Amintiri*, Colecția Generația 1922, Madrid, 1977, p. 119.

<sup>9</sup> Virgil Ionescu, *Memorii*, note marginale de Dumitru Găzdaru, în *Pământul Strămoşesc*, serie nouă, nr. 5, 1979, p. 176.



In the late '30s and early '40s, the Romanian people's passion for **the myth of the savior** is revitalized. One by one, the political stage welcomes General Averescu, Iuliu Maniu, Iorga and Goga, all of which go on to predictably (for us) disappoint the people's hopes, their time in office coinciding with the destructive impact of the powerful agricultural crisis. As such, King Carol II finds enough legitimacy to establish his much-desired authoritarian regime, while King Carol abdicates, obligated by the inconsistency of his rule, the nefarious influence of his court advisors and, most of all, the territorial losses. Yet another **mythical savior** denied his place in history, but not before the Legion orchestrates a so-called revolution. The power vacuum is filled by General Ion Antonescu, supported by the Iron Guard led by its newly-instated *commander*, Horia Sima. The General's cohabitation with the legionaries – brief, brutal, baneful – proves to be a glorious failure. The General, rash and ambitious alike, gives off the impression that there's nothing he isn't good at. Solutions offered to the various challenges the country was facing are offered in the form of ad-hoc measures and truisms. He excessively regulates Romania's political and economic life, dominated by the need for control which defines his personality. As for the legionaries, he aims to dilute their craving for violence and theft – a mere declaratory scheme, as his political instinct guides him to give them the chance to compromise themselves. And they do. It all goes as planned, so much so that the new sheriff in town – the Nazis – offers Romania on a silver platter to the general in January of 1941, an offer not lacking in economic and military compromises.

The aftermath of the National-Legionary government demystifies and refutes any and all idealized visions of the legionary future promised by Codreanu's philosophy. "*Be fair to the bone*"<sup>10</sup>, tried *the Captain* to teach his cohorts. Well, in the little over 100 days of the Iron Guard governing over Romania, **generalized theft** comes in many forms. The main targets of robberies are mostly Jews, but not exclusively. Using intimidation tactics or the legal pretext of Romanians taking back control of the economy, old and new legionaries alike come to possess automobiles, houses and mansions, shops, factories or various lands and properties in rural areas. Inside Legion headquarters, sources show that there were even standardized forms which Jews could use to "willingly" sell their shops for laughable amounts. *Romanianization Commissaries* emerge all throughout the largest factories managed by Jews in order to prevent, according to them, the sabotage of the national

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<sup>10</sup> *Adresă, Porunci*, 7 octombrie 1937, în Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu, *Circulări și Manifeste, 1927-1938*, editor: Faust Brădescu, ediția 5-a, reimprimare după ediția a II-a, corectată și întregită, Colecția "Europa" München, München, 1981, pp. 193-195.

economy. Lacking any formal training in economics, but compensating with their ability to perform violence and abuse, *the commissaries* do great damage to the country's macroeconomic climate. The representative of the Vichy Government notices the effect of *Romanianization*: “[...] about one hundred factories completely disorganized by the legionaries”<sup>11</sup>. The minister of economy shows his disappointment: “*There has been lots of thieving and it puts a plague on our regime.*”<sup>12</sup> Statistics presented by the general secretary of the Union of Jewish Communities from the Old Kingdom (the regions of Muntenia and Moldova) show that over two billion lei has been stolen from the Jewish community. A report by the government shows that the forced sales of goods and property alone – carried out under legionary intimidation – are estimated at about one billion lei. These amounts are impressive for the time, as the cost of a medium-sized factory was of about 50.000 lei back then. Another form of robbery was the embezzlement of legionary institutions. *Ajutorul Legionar (The Legionary Aid)* – a charity fund (can you imagine?) – was embezzled, alongside *Straja Țării (The Sentinel of the Motherland)* – a former youth organization which operated during Carol's rule. *Romania's fairness* is substituted by **the trivialization of robbery**.

The Legion doesn't have the required human resources to implement their so-called revolutions in education, health, administration, economy, public order or diplomacy. Dumitru Groza, Head of the Legionary Workers' Corps, honestly admits, six decades after the events unfolded: “*Neither I, nor the others, all of us, starting with Horia Sima, weren't experienced enough to hold state functions and rule a country! [...] It was an anarchist government, truth be told!*”<sup>13</sup> No procedures have been set regarding the granting of leadership roles in the second and third echelons of the Legion. Positions are granted either at random, either depending on the personal interests of those who hold the power of decisions. To explain the chaos in the administration, the legionaries blame Bolshevik infiltrators which entered the legion following the victory of September 1940. The regime constantly sketches the portrait of the enemy – the communists, the illuminati, the Jews,

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<sup>11</sup> Arhive, Franța, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, *Guerre, 1939-1945*, Vichy, România, dosar 681, fila 191, în Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, Ion Pătroi, Gheorghe Nicolescu, Iulian Boțoghină, Vasile Ciuhan, Vasilica Manea, Lenuța Matei, Lenuța Nicolescu, Constandina Stoianovici, *Relații militare româno-germane, 1939-1944, documente*, Arhivele Militare Române – Centru de Cercetare și Păstrare a Arhivelor Militare Istorice, editura Europa Nova, București, 2000, p. 115.

<sup>12</sup> *Pe marginea prăpastiei: 21-23 ianuarie 1941*, lucrare editată și publicată de Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri în 1941, vol. I, editura Scripta, București, 1992, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Interviu cu legionarul Dumitru Groza, în *Țara, Legiunea, Căpitanul: mișcarea legionară în documente de istorie orală*, Mariana Conovici, Silvia Iliescu, Octavian Silivestru, studiu introductiv de Mihai Chioveanu, editura Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 210.

everyone who doesn't embrace the cause is branded as an enemy. **The eternal enemy** is reinvented and hyperbolized by an ideology struggling to legitimize its regime.

Legionaries justify the use of political violence during the interwar period as “*a painful necessity*”<sup>14</sup>. Once the legionaries come to power, it makes no sense to resort to violence anymore. In theory. In practice, legionary terror came in all shapes and sizes, as most of the country's elites – businessmen, liberals, supporters of the Peasants' Party, Carlists, university figures, journalists, policemen, gendarmes, prosecutors, judges, Jews, supporters of nationalist leader A.C. Cuza, some old-timey legionaries (the so-called *codreniști*, i.e. *Codreanu loyalists*), the former king, as well as many more – are to be targeted by the Legion's wrath. **The relativization of power**, by the simple act of wearing green shirts or the mere invoking of one's legionary status, contributes to the randomness of the measures taken against the aforementioned groups. Investigation committees are created, which **institutionalizes terror** and makes it legal. And these measures work. Elites feel the terror. Albeit he is not targeted directly by the Legion, Argetoianu feels **the psychosis of terror**: “*I didn't want to feel afraid, but felt so nonetheless.*”<sup>15</sup> The timing of completing the legal procedures or the protests of certain influential people, combined with the fanatic nature of the Legionary Police, as well as the glory promised unto them – comparable to that of the *Nicadori* and *Decemviri* – grants us a sneak peek into **the twilight of legionary terror**. To this end, the Carlist elites imprisoned at Jilava awaiting official investigations are all assassinated in November of 1940. Former prime minister Argeșanu, former ministers Marinescu and Iamandi, former heads of *Siguranța* (Romania's national intelligence agency at the time), Moruzov and Ștefănescu, along with several other representatives of top Carlist institutions, all of them are executed. Only a few hours after that, teams of legionaries make house visits to a couple of former dignitaries, who are invited to leave their homes for their safety (as if!). Four former prime ministers – Iorga, Argetoianu, Tătărescu and Gigurtu – three former ministers – Madgearu, Ghelmegeanu and Dr. Marinescu – as well as two high-ranked officers – General Ilașievici and Colonel Marinescu – are, therefore, arrested. Professors Iorga and Madgearu meet their end in the forests surrounding Bucharest, while the other arrestees were lucky enough to be saved at the last minute by the vigilance of state secretary Alexandru Rioșianu. **The psychosis of fear** felt by the political elites is

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<sup>14</sup> Ștefan Pălăghiță, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare scrisă de un legionar - Garda de Fier spre Reînvierea României*, editura Roza Vânturilor, București, 1993, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări Zilnice*, ediție de Stelian Neagoe, vol. VIII, 1 ianuarie-21 iulie și 25 octombrie-31 decembrie 1940, editura Machiavelli, București, 2007, p. 469.

reconfirmed. Argetoianu, affected by **the imminence of his death**, writes down the following during Christmas, in 1940: “*I have not been able to write even a single line since then. I lived in fear, not being able to understand why I was sentenced to death by people I had only tried to do good by...*”<sup>16</sup> This perpetual uncertainty transforms the houses of former dignitaries into outright fortresses, with Argetoianu’s house being guarded day and night by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which placed around 40 gendarmes on the premises.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prefecture of the Bucharest Police Department become sources of chaos and disorder. Within the ministry, power is divided between two groups: career policemen, loyal to state secretary Rioşianu – given office by General Antonescu – on one side, and, on the other side, the Legion Police, loyal to Petrovicescu, Biriş, Zăvoianu, Mironovici and other high-ranking legionaries in office. Among the legionary police commissaries, personal quarrels and the sense of instituting personal justice are a common occurrence. Their distinct outfits – short, black leather jacket – inspire fear on the streets of Romania’s urban centers. Even though the Legionary Police was disbanded following the assassinations at Jilava, its members are then enrolled into the State Police Force. The feeling of uncertainty is perpetuated, especially given the fact that, within the Legion, paramilitary organizations continue to emerge: *Corpul Răzleţi (Răzleţi Corps)*, *Gărzile Legionare (Legionary Guards)*, *Gărzile Încazarmate (Military Guards)*, *Corpurile Muncitoreşti Legionare (Legionary Workers’ Corps)*.

Meanwhile, Romania is teeming with funeral marches, reburials, commemorations and memorial services. Making the ultimate sacrifice for the Legion becomes part of *Imnul Tinereţii Legionare (the Anthem of the Holy Legionary Youth)*. Sung obsessively throughout the almost four months of legionary government, the anthem idealizes death: “*Death, only legionary death, / Is the sweetest marriage for us all.*” The Iron Guard even find it necessary to establish a Legion graveyard in Predeal. The wide majority of those who died for the cause get a cross and a grave within the Legion’s cemetery. **Long live death** becomes the motto of the legionary regime.

The division between General Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard is predictable. *The Führer* invites both Sima and Antonescu to Berlin, in an attempt to mediate the internal conflict. *The Commander’s* inexplicable refusal of the audience grants Antonescu more leverage. Although Hitler’s decision is not set in stone, the general gains the means of taking over and re-establishing order internally. The conferences the legionaries held following this

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 531.

meeting, aimed at reaffirming their loyalty towards the Nazis and Mussolini's fascists are pitiable. High-ranking legionaries within the Ministry of Internal Affairs are sacked. This measure, although warranted, is also meant to provoke the Legion. Once the Legion has been provoked, scenes of civil war come to the streets of Bucharest. Although disproportionate in nature, the conflict is artificially fueled by the attitude of General Antonescu. Troops within Bucharest act defensively, so that the chaos on the streets affects the credibility of the Legion. Ultimately, Germany chooses to back the order represented in the person of the general, rather than the ideology of the Iron Guard. Once this backing becomes clear, the army quickly ends all civil disobedience. During the Rebellion, streets were barricaded, public institutions were taken over, theft ran rampant, alongside devastation, fire, murder, gunshots and the ever-present night marches of the Legion. The various manipulation and diversion tactics used by the Legion only serve to amplify the people's **feelings of insecurity**. **The pogrom of the Rebellion** is a natural, easily predictable consequence of the legionary government. Approximately 120 Jews are brutally murdered: *"The bodies of those killed in the slaughterhouse were hanged by the back of their heads, using the hooks butchers use to hang meat."*<sup>17</sup> The psychosis of terror, the psychosis of murder and the reign of theft instilled by the Iron Guard aggravate, while the space between these events compresses, as many acts of violence happen within a short period of time, this being the only identifiable characteristic of the Rebellion.

The terror instituted by members of the Legion's paramilitary units has many sides, all of which denote **a passion for violence**, and by this we refer to that kind of sadistic political violence which doesn't serve a clear goal, but is perpetrated just for the fun of it. As we've previously managed to observe, the legionaries frequently use violence during the interwar era. Instituting a psychosis of terror is, normally, effective from a political standpoint, but during the National Legionary State, the sadism of the leaders of the Iron Guard increases exponentially. Examples of this increase come in the person of legionary commissary Gheorghe Crețu, who kills 17 people with a thirsty passion, most of them during the Jilava assassinations. The mass murdering of Jews between January 21-23, 1941 represents another landmark moment. Matatias Carp documents the technique used by the slaughterhouse assassins: *"[...] they used a butcher's knife for this purpose [...], removing*

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<sup>17</sup> Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele evreilor din România, 1940-1944.*, vol. 1, *Legionarii și Rebeliunea*, Atelierele grafice SOCEC & CO., S. A. R., București, 1946, pp. 231-232.

*the intestines from the bodies of their victims and tying them around the victims' necks to serve as ties.*"<sup>18</sup>

The era following the death of Codreanu is marked by endless internal power struggles, which end up giving us the Legion's **parallel histories**. Every faction, every leader and most memorialists write and rewrite the history of the Movement, motivated by short-term political interests. Later on, as decades pass, these theories delegate responsibility for the Legion's failures between one another. Sima loyalists – serving *the Commander* – and Codreanu loyalists – old legionary leaders which were marginalized – each with their subsequent factions, debate on which holds the “truth”. The communist *Securitate* further alters the history of the Legion, brainwashing legionary leaders who were incarcerated during the ‘50s and ‘60s. Some of these leaders (re)write their memoirs after being released from communist prisons. The widespread political violence between 1938 and 1940 becomes the subject of parallel histories. One such example is the case of the Jilava assassinations. Although there exists identifiable evidence that the murders were premeditated, it is not stated who they were claimed by. The official press release of the Council of Ministers, a document without any credibility, states that the murders are the result of the emotions felt by those participating at the reburial of *the Captain, the Decemviri* and *the Nicadori*. Later on, legionary history also disputes on who was behind the assassinations, a dispute raging between the Sima-Biriş duo on one side and Dumitru Groza on the other. Although Horia Sima does not assume responsibility for the acts of violence caused by the Legion – the cases of Florian Ştefănescu-Goangă, Armand Călinescu, the Jilava assassinations, the Rebellion – he does offer a generous solution to our conundrum. In relation to the Jilava assassinations, he states the following: “*I laid the political groundwork, created conditions which allowed for the assassins to be punished [...]*.”<sup>19</sup>

The unchronicled history of the anonymous majority and all their little stories, which is oftentimes ignored, helps us complete and enrich the context of the Romanian interwar period. Memoirs of legionaries who were in the second or third echelons of the Iron Guard allow us to understand the causes of the violent acts. Lacking political scope and devoid of any small-time interests relating to ego, their notes are, oftentimes, honest and detached. Nationalist sentiments, anti-Semitism, effects of poverty, frustrations amongst peasants or

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> Sima, Horia, *Era Libertăţii. Statul Naţional-Legionar*, vol. II, format digital după lucrarea apărută la editura Mişcării Legionare, Madrid, 1980, p. 90; <https://archive.org/download/EraLibertatii-StatulNational-legionarVol.2> (09.10.2016).

middle-class citizens, justifications for violence, myths within the Legion, sugar-coating the anti-Semitic acts of violence, all can be identified between the lines they have written. We documented a large number of cases using memoirs, official documents of the time and excerpts from interviews during judicial investigations. Legionary member Nicolae Ciolacu explains why the peasants supported the cause of the Legion, as well as the frustrations of Romanians living in the Southern Dobrogea region. Ciolacu also offers some insight into the key moments of the Legion, coming with a local perspective on the events that happened after Armand Călinescu was assassinated, on the “legionary revolution” or on the Rebellion. Ion Fleşeriu – born in a family of peasants, student, lawyer and, later on, legionary prefect of the district of Sibiu – writes of the lack of basic necessities faced by students of the 1920s, as well as of the key moments of the Carlist persecution, the legionary government and the Rebellion. Ion Banea uses simple words to describe the messianic nature of *the Captain* and the causes of the Legion’s rise to power during the 1930s – the trials, the election campaigns, the acts of violence. The psychosis of taking back control instituted by Carlist authorities following the assassination of Armand Călinescu can also be found in the archives. The anonymous sympathizer of the Legion, Budulică the soldier, is a symbol of the authorities’ hunt for legionaries. Mardarie Popinciuc – old legionary without any political capital – spends the better part of his life in Carlist prisons. He offers us the perspective of a low-ranking member of the legion concerning *the Captain*’s political primacy. Later on, in his memoirs, one can indirectly identify the causes of Horia Sima’s rise to power. After September 1940, Popinciuc is made legionary commissary at the Prefecture of the Bucharest Police Department. During this period, Popinciuc gives us relevant details on the myth of the Legion falling under Bolshevik influences, or the vengeful activities of the Legionary Police. Legionary commissary Gheorghe Creţu casually admits on his passion for violence in front of the prosecutors investigating the Jilava assassinations. Last but not least, we can identify how interwar society worked from a legionary perspective in the interviews offered by those directly involved in the events. The interviews, which were conducted during the 1990s, don’t solely focus on the leaders of the Movement, but permeate through all social blankets. Compiled in the work *Țara, Legiunea, Căpitanul, (Nation, Legion, Captain.)*, they are the missing piece which completes the puzzle of interwar political violence.

The political myths exploited by the Legionary Movement continue to influence the course of history. Even the results of *reeducation* campaigns within communist prisons remain questionable. Despite the physical and psychological terror, some imprisoned

legionaries stubbornly manage to persevere in reaffirming their legionary beliefs. For example, Victor Biriş triumphantly embraces the cause of socialism, after two decades of hard imprisonment. The former General Secretary of the legionary government's Ministry of Internal Affairs is released from prison and reintegrated into *the socialist motherland*. However, he can't come to terms with betraying his conscience, and later commits suicide. The anti-communist resistance, which fled to the mountains and was comprised mostly out of legionaries, continues to impress by having the persistence and tenacity to openly oppose the mammoth of the communist regime. The fanaticism of Iron Guard members who have fled to exile is meticulously exploited by Western secret service agencies, which enroll them in suicide missions. Today, we can't even conceive of the fact that exiled legionaries were parachuted into communist Romania during the 1950s. Most of the time, these missions ended tragically, as the intrepid exiles were caught and executed. Communism also uses the theme of the eternal enemy, inverting it and using it against the Legion, used to justify the existence of *The People's Republic* and the repressive actions taken against its enemies. The budding Romanian democracy of 1990 continues the tradition of using the eternal enemy. As such, during the *Mineriad* of 13-15 June, 1990, certain theories stating that "*gangs of legionaries devastate the city of Bucharest*" or that "*there are forces trying to bring back fascist dictatorship*" flood the public space – through publications such as issue no. 16 of *Gazeta Noastră*. More recent events show that there are shy attempts of reactivating the cause of the Legionary Movement in politics. The internet abounds with videos containing rehashings of legionary nest gatherings. These meetings respect the original legionary procedures: vows, Nazi salutes, uniforms, *the roll call of the dead* etc. Although there are, obviously, unexploited political opportunities – for example, the three million signatures of the petition concerning modifying the constitution to redefine *traditional family* – specific organizations such as *Noua Dreaptă (The New Right)* do not gain the electoral capital they desire. However, the Western world provides, yet again, a counterexample. Western far-right organization manage, at present, to obtain impressive election scores and, in some cases, to be involved in the governing process...



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<http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis>

[www.dexonline.ro](http://www.dexonline.ro)

[www.google.books.ro](http://www.google.books.ro)

[www.historia.ro](http://www.historia.ro)

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#### **b. Other digital sources (magazines, academic websites, nationalist-leaning websites etc.)**

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