# "BABEŞ-BOLYAI" UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY DOCTORAL SCHOOL "HISTORY. CIVILIZATION.

**CULTURE**"

## Hypostases of Legionary Ideology in Interwar Romania (1927-1938) DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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An academic endeavor centered on the ideology of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, projecting a critical perspective upon a highly charged subject, one that has been greatly influenced by persistent intellectual controversies, as demonstrated by its historiographical reception in the course of several decades, enjoys nowadays more than ever a favorable context. Spectacular recent developments in the field of fascist studies, certainly influential for the historiography of the Legionary Movement, have created a dynamically expansive research field, a scientific sphere within which constructive and impartial contributions have become the norm, while biased, teleological accounts, either demonizing or apologetic in nature, have been gradually pushed towards the fringes. Consequently, the recalibration of the historiographical focus has opened a steady path for the intellectual undertakings that seek to fathom a phenomenon representing both a meaningful part of the Romanian national past and one of the most relevant permutations of a historical force that has shaped the first half of the 20th century.

The course of the remarkable theoretical advance of fascist studies has reinforced the axiomatic principle according to which radical worldviews, regardless of their particular historical context, can only be accurately understood by thoroughly investigating their ideological layers, a firm conviction that has guided this research throughout its entire course. By acknowledging the primacy of the idea as the ultimate determining factor of radical action, the present doctoral thesis sets to examine the main components of the Legionary doctrine that were developed during the interwar era, not with the intent of assembling a definitive ideological profile of the movement (that would hardly be possible given the magnitude of its intellectual production), but for the purpose of delineating its defining ideas as formulated in their own time, by having them critically inspected, heuristically ordered and carefully inserted into a cohesive historical narrative. In that regard, the Legion of the Archangel Michael will be recognized as an integral part of the wider phenomenological context of

continental fascism (hence its denomination as the epitome of "Romanian fascism") and the analysis will include numerous comparative references to correspondent fascist versions in other national environments. However, as the argument will show at length, the inclusion of the movement into an overarching historical framework does not contradict its integration into the broad ideological, political and cultural patterns of Romanian history.

From a chronological standpoint, framing the research within a clearly defined yet flexible interval, namely between 1927, the foundational point of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, with frequent references to the previous years when its preceding radical nationalist nuclei coalesced, and 1938, the closing chapter of Romanian democracy in the interwar era, is well justified given the thematic focus of the work. Essentially, the fundamental components of the volatile theoretical corpus of the Legionary Movement were defined between the two world wars, as the later course of the movement, from the clandestine years of monarchical authoritarianism, through the meteoric and short lived rise to government, following with the return to illegality in the course of the military dictatorship and finishing with the definitive suppression brought on by the instatement of Communism, put a certain end to the ideological advance of the phenomenon. Therefore, exploring its main intellectual coordinates within the confines of the interwar era appears as a natural choice for an accurate representation of Romanian fascism.

A noteworthy aspect to be highlighted in drawing the premises of the thesis refers to its firm theoretical grounding into the paradigmatic "new consensus" emerging in fascist studies over the last two decades, a theoretical model determinately influential for the manner in which the Legionary Movement has come to be perceived in academia. Placing the ideal of palingenesis, namely the myth of national rebirth, at the core of fascist ideology, the new consensus has inspired the thematic directions followed in the course of this analysis and it has played a major role in the process of bibliographical selection. Therefore, in consulting a wide array of secondary sources, special attention was granted to monographs, comparative studies, articles or chapters operating within the methodological and epistemological framework of this paradigm, even though such an option did not lead to alternative, complementary or contradictory views being ignored.

In gathering and covering a sizeable cluster of primary sources, adequate selection offered a significant challenge, the chosen documentary material gaining a rather

heterogeneous aspect, as pertaining to the ultimate purposes of the thesis. The wide array of collected sources, belonging to the pre-set chronological interval but frequently extended into the years that preceded the proper formation of the studied phenomenon in order to trace its far-reaching intellectual strands, incorporated: a variety of periodicals, ranging from the ephemeral radical publications that proliferated in the aftermath of the First World War to the notorious platforms of the far right, frequently intertwined with the fascist press and counting the main ideologues of the Legion of the Archangel Michael among their most active contributors, from the most representative papers of the movement itself to the publications network developed within Romanian fascism comprising national and regional journals, addressing particular social, professional and intellectual categories as well as the public at large; the programmatic theoretical writings of thinkers who assumed the task of providing the Legionary Movement with an autonomous ideological identity; memoirs presenting an underlying ideological content; letters or public addresses of noteworthy propagandistic impact; private or public correspondences of some of the most prominent members of the Legion; electoral documents, such as brochures, manifestos or party programs; parliamentary interventions of some of the Legionaries elected as representatives into the Romanian legislative branch; clandestine writings or testamentary notes, either disseminated in the interwar years or posthumously edited; political interviews granted by Legionaries to different publications; circulars, addresses or notices with an organizational character, meant for internal use within the movement; last but not least, relevant archival material consulted in the archive of the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate, sporadically referred to in the course of the argument.

Given the overall quantity of Legionary intellectual production, a holistic perspective was avoided as an unviable choice, since it presented the risk of derailing the endeavor from its particular goals, therefore a more selective approach being preferred, one that operated with a limited echelon of ideological representatives, whose contributions were examined *in extenso*. Bringing up biographical elements only insofar as they were relevant in the contextualization of ideological projections, this cast of characters was selected based on a series of relevant factors indicating their status as figures with an essential contribution for the development of the Legionary theoretical corpus, the criteria varying from their hierarchical position within the internal ranking system of the organization to the quality of their

ideological input. Among those selected are early representatives and late adherents to the movement, members of the central structures and influential territorial leaders, politically and socially active militants and intellectuals assuming a prevalent theoretical role, moderates or radicals depending on the topics under scrutiny etc.

As far as the structure of the thesis is concerned, it comprises three main segments, successively explored, incorporating various ideological elements regarded as defining the Legionary worldview. Preceding the proper examination of the doctrine of Romanian fascism, the first chapter consists of a historiographical study, highlighting the landmarks of a protean intellectual field and clarifying the theoretical framework, from the conceptual inventory to the methodological options employed. Firstly, this historiographical section provides a systematic retrospective of the various critical projections on fascism as the phenomenon came under scrutiny along several decades, beginning with its own time and ending with contemporary research. Secondly, significant attention is awarded to the inclusion of the historiography of the Legionary Movement into the sphere of fascist studies, tracing its course from the lasting challenges of totalitarian domination under half a century of Communist rule, following with the intellectual transformations inherent to the democratic transition and culminating with the firm connection to the paradigmatic "new consensus" structured in Western academia.

Opening the proper ideological analysis, the first thematic section of the thesis, comprising the second chapter, expounds the defining negations of Legionary ideology, distinguishing between the dominant stances of antagonism structured in the development of a radical worldview whose core palingenetic ideal implied an uncompromising hostility towards various expressions of alterity perceived as situated outside the national body. The argument follows three main leads, corresponding to the most important negative references denounced by the Legionary Movement, namely: the ideological level, represented by anti-Communism, an orientation that fluctuated from the militant activism galvanized by the specter of pandemic Bolshevist revolution in the aftermath of the First World War, going through the fierce ideological offensive aiming to delegitimize Communism on theoretical grounds, then culminating in the final interwar years with the eschatological infusion of Legionary anti-Communism, that drew from the polarization of a continent headed towards the next global conflagration and interpreted the rise of the extremes through fascist apocalyptic lenses; the

political level, equated with the anti-democratic ethos that determined the uncompromising repudiation of the Enlightenment intellectual tradition through polemical campaigns targeting the various historical manifestations of democracy, the focus of the intransigent anti-pluralist spirit of the Legion on the autochthonous political class, as well as the structuring of a totalitarian national project advanced as an alternative to the democratic order depicted as condemned to violent destruction; finally, the ethnic level, identified with the epitome of the xenophobic and annihilationist stance of the Legionary Movement, particularly its visceral anti-Semitism, whose facets included the programmatic dissemination of the myth of the universal Jewish plot, defined in the Manichean fascist worldview in terms of a millenarian conflict fought in the realm of immanence and transcendence alike, the transposition of this phantasmagoric conspiracy to the particular case of interwar Romania through the description of a complex set of punitive mechanisms, with clear genocidal overtones, projected as mobilizing instruments against the obsessive "Jewish threat" represented as a foreign invasion, and the creation, in the same theoretical progression of ethnic cleansing moving from social persecution to physical suppression, of a discriminatory regime assigned to all minorities based on their ethnical affiliation.

Following an analytical segment exclusively dedicated to negative formulations, the second part of the thesis, comprising the third chapter, will tackle the positive self-definition of the studied phenomenon through the constant reinforcement of the generational marker, since the Legionary Movement represented itself, like all fascist permutations, as a juvenile force carrying the mission of regenerating the national body. The significance of the generational component will be compartmentalized into several autonomous, yet interdependent facets, namely: the theme of generational divide, fostered by the ideological antithesis between an "old" world belonging to a stagnant gerontocracy and a new order assigned to the innovative force of radical youth, a stark contrast amplified through theoretical interventions dedicated to the various layers of the denounced generational separation, to the adaptation of the conflict between generations to proximal ideological and political circumstances in order to reaffirm the role of the Legion in the internal context, and to the juxtaposition of intergenerational and intragenerational tensions, meant to consolidate this exclusive delimitation of the new fascist generation; the self-perception of the latter as the predestined elite corps of the Romanian nation, an avant-garde of the national community

invested with the sacred mission of remaking the collective historical destiny by taking advantage of its own purportedly exceptional attributes, varying from its constructive zeal to its call for unlimited rule; the projection of the messianic savior, rising from the ranks of the radical generational elite, portrayed, in accordance with the main tenets of fascist charismatic authority, as a providential figure of national history, a character embodied by the "Captain" of the Legionary Movement, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, whose mythical portrait was assembled through his self-referential interventions, through the hagiographical contributions belonging to the main ideologues of his movement, as well as through the theoretical works that integrated his image into the Legionary corpus; finally, the material transposition of the generational theme, examined through a case study dedicated to the manner in which the Legion of the Archangel Michael subordinated the National Union of Christian Students in Romania to its own devices in the mid-1930s, thus turning it into a mobilization instrument serving the cause of fascism.

The last of the central ideological themes explored throughout the thesis, scrutinized in the course of the fourth chapter, outlines the manner in which the Legionary Movement reframed historical temporality through the lens of its original Weltanschauung. In approaching such a revealing theme for the scope of the transformative goals embedded into the palingenetic aspirations of Romanian fascism, the argument implements a sequential theoretical instrument, devised for the heuristic purpose of unveiling the main stages of the chronological projection developed by the Legion, with the resulting scheme consisting of five intertwined phases: the mythical past, described as the idyllic primordial state of national genesis and early evolution, containing within itself the original identity markers of the nation, such as its sacred ancestral territory or its foundational historical experiences that determined the ascendant trajectory of a national community regarded as possessing an exceptional destiny, as well as a divine mandate, a missionary calling claimed by the Legionary Movement in the name of the entire nation; the disruptive modernity, ideologically concocted as antagonistic to the previous stage, an epoch of abyssal decadence, a sharp decline allegedly reflected in the framework of generic modernity founded on the pillars of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, both blamed for the universal imposition of a deeply dysfunctional Western modern canon, as well as in the various autochthonous structures of modernity perceived as fateful counterfeits of the national substance, mimetic transfers of allogeneic components, irreconcilably foreign to the destiny of the Romanian nation; the anomic present, interpreted as a historical interstice undermined by its provisional nature, isolated between an already collapsed old world and a not yet built new order, observed through the prism of the crisis archetype identified in symptomatic instances in the internal context of interwar Romania, yet simultaneously understood as a timely period on account of a grandiose fascist temporal shift, inaugurating the foundations of a new era; the utopian future, a virtual stretch imagined as definitively surmounting the previous degenerative condition, an age where all regenerative metamorphoses conceived in revolutionary terms, involving the radical reconstruction of the collective national body as well as the total remaking of individual anthropological units into a new human type, would eventually be fulfilled; finally, the redemptive transcendence, marking a definitive break with the diachronic order of history and the continuation of collective national life in the superior realm of transcendence, a momentous point of communal salvation coming as a denouement of Legionary eschatology, brought on by a strive towards martyrdom that profoundly illustrated the thanatophilia of Romanian fascism, a providential expiation ideologically framed as compatible with the infallible dogma of Christianity.

Conclusively, within the thematic alignments sketched above, the radical plans elaborated by the Legion of the Archangel Michael for the Romanian nation will be explored by emphasizing the solely destructive purposes of the phenomenon, concentrated in the hostility shown towards those categories labeled as undesirable and projected outside the holistically defined national monolith, by highlighting the positive self-representations of the movement as the creative source of novel, revitalizing and regenerative identity structures, and finally, by highlighting the restructuring aspirations driving the reconfiguration of historical time itself, culminating with the projection of the palingenetic myth beyond the realm of immanent historical reality.

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