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**Under the Aegis of the Archangel: Fascism and Divine Kingship in
Interwar Romania**

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Abstract

Under the Aegis of the Archangel: Fascism and Divine Kingship in Interwar Romania

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This report aims to take a decisive first step towards an analysis of fascism as a resuscitated form of that archaic political figuration known to religious studies scholars as divine kingship. I take this aspirational first step through a case study of The Legion of the Archangel Michael and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Romania's interwar fascist movement and its founder. The report first situates itself within the 'new consensus' of fascist studies as represented by the theories of Roger Griffin and Emilio Gentile before delving into a history of the Legion of the Archangel Michael and C.Z. Codreanu. With this historical data in hand, I turn to an exegesis and application of some key theories on divine kingship from Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* (1957) and David Graeber & Marshall Sahlins' *On Kings* (2017) to the Legion. What emerges is a distinct vision of the necessarily modern political phenomenon of fascism as in fact a kind of *reboot* of divine kingship for an era of mass, electoral politics.

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I. Introduction

This report aims to take a decisive first step towards an analysis of fascism as a resuscitated form of that archaic political figuration known to religious studies scholars as divine kingship. This aspirational first step will be taken through a case study of The Legion of the Archangel Michael and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Romania's interwar fascist movement and its founder. I begin with a brief account of the historical and social context out of which Romanian fascism emerged after the First World War before then launching upon a narrative that outlines key moments in the development of the Legion. This historical narrative largely occurs in conversation with Bruce Lincoln's recent book¹ on the (ostensibly) hidden Romanian fascist past of Lincoln's *Doktorvater*, the famed scholar of comparative religions Mircea Eliade, who was himself an active participant in the same history this report and Lincoln's book both address. Lincoln's book provides a valuable and concise telling of the history of the Legion, further opening up this history to the field of religious studies and to the Anglophone world writ large. In order to expand upon Lincoln's admirable account where needed, I rely chiefly on Romanian historian Traian Sandu's comprehensive history and social analysis of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier: Un Fascism Românesc*.²

After having established the historical contours of the movement and its supreme leader, this report turns briefly to historian Robert Paxton's 2005 work *The Anatomy of*

¹ Bruce Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences: A Great Scholar's Hidden Past and his Protégé's Unsolved Murder* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2024).

² Traian Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier: Un fascism românesc* (București: Cartier, 2020).

Fascism for a description of some key characteristics and emotional elements of fascism. The latter half of the report will then see us turn to Ernst Kantorowicz's well-known analysis of medieval political theology, *The King's Two Bodies*,³ as well as the late David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins's expansive dialogical study on kingship aptly titled *On Kings*⁴ for the theoretical apparatus that will then be applied to the case of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and his Legion. What ultimately emerges is, I believe, a compelling case for understanding the distinctly modern, mass political phenomenon of fascism as a kind of *reboot* of archaic divine kingship for a new age and a new audience.

Any such aspirational project must begin by situating itself within what is called the "new consensus" in fascist studies, a post-1990s consensus that is largely represented by the works of English political theorist Roger Griffin and Italian historian Emilio Gentile. Griffin's major contribution here is his articulation of a baseline definition for the phenomenon in question: "[f]ascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism."⁵ Deriving its etymology from *palin* (again or anew) and *genesis* (creation), the palingenetic myth that Griffin argues to be at the heart of fascism is effectively a myth of collective renewal and rebirth.⁶ As Griffin explains of the *mythic* dimension to this definition, "[w]e propose to use 'mythic' to refer to the inspirational, revolutionary power

³ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2016).

⁴ David Graeber & Marshall Sahlins, *On Kings* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017).

⁵ Roger Griffin, *Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 26.

⁶ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 32-33.

which an ideology can exert whatever its apparent rationality or practicality.”⁷ This mythic core, then, is in part a way to refer to “the underlying emotions, the music” of fascism—or, as Robert Paxton has it, the “mobilizing passions” and the “emotional lava” of fascism, which Paxton calls “an affair more of the gut than of the brain.”⁸

This business of emotions, passions, and lava is implicitly tied to the more often overlooked second side of this new consensus in fascist studies, namely Emilio Gentile’s approach to fascism as a *political religion* that operates within a sacralized political sphere.⁹ Indeed, phrases like “emotional lava” and “the underlying emotions, the music of fascism” would seem to point strongly and distinctively towards some kind of religiosity being at work. The opening lines of Gentile’s 1990 article on fascism as political religion are worth quoting in their entirety here at the outset, for they touch upon a number of elements that will prove to be salient throughout our analysis:

[i]n modern society, secularization has not produced a definitive separation between the spheres of religion and politics. With the development of *mass politics*, the boundaries between these two spheres have often become confused, and on these occasions politics has assumed its own religious dimension. At the same time as this process of secularization within both the state and society, there has also been a ‘sacralization of politics’, which reached its highest point in the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century.¹⁰

As will become clear over the course of this report, the approach to analyzing fascism that I am presenting, namely as a form of *divine* kingship, relies more on the Gentile side

⁷ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 28.

⁸ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 28; Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 41.

⁹ Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion,” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, No. 2/3 (May-Jun., 1990), pp. 229-251, 229.

¹⁰ Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion,” 229 (emphasis added).

of the new consensus than it does on the Griffin side. Since much of this report's historical narrative relies on the work of Traian Sandu, it is worthwhile to point out here that Sandu's own theoretical approach to the issue of fascism similarly straddles both sides of this 'new consensus.' As Sandu explains in his methodological introduction to the book, fascist ideology is in large part "a syncreticism unified through the promises of national rebirth—*palingenesis* according to the Greek expression chosen by Roger Griffin—and of individual regeneration or an 'anthropological revolution' through the collective, sacralized practices and rituals that Emilio Gentile analyzes."¹¹

Although his definition of fascism has been massively influential and inspirational, Griffin strangely goes to great lengths to safeguard his deeply secularized notion of "political ideology" (which is his basic characterization of fascism) from the ostensibly nefarious influence of religion or religiosity such that, I argue, his definition and the kind of analysis it leads to fail to capture the heart, as it were, of fascist ideation. Indeed, for example, Griffin tells us that political ideology "does not allow for the possibility that suprahuman powers can permanently or periodically intervene in human affairs or that the present dispensation of history can give way to one governed by different laws in accordance with a preordained divine or metaphysical scheme of things."¹² One does not even need to go as far as explicitly mystical Romanian fascism—which strongly emphasized the agency of suprahuman powers—to find Griffin's demarcation problematized by fascist self-understanding. We can read, for example, in

¹¹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 21.

¹² Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 29.

Mussolini's 1932 *The Doctrine of Fascism* that "the Fascist conception of life is a religious one, in which man is viewed in his immanent relation to a higher law, endowed with an objective will transcending the individual and raising him to conscious membership of a spiritual society."¹³ Griffin's insistence on the radical demarcation between political ideologies and religious ideologies is the inverse to Gentile's assertion above that secularization has not produced such a separation and that, moreover, it is precisely the coming to the scene of *mass politics* (a precondition for fascism) that has *further* confused these alleged boundaries. This position of Gentile's would, indeed, seem to align much better with Mussolini's thinking than that of Griffin's. Thus, while Griffin's distinctly secular approach to theorizing fascism is no doubt both useful and compelling, Gentile's religiously inflected analytic goes deeper, namely to an understanding of fascism as, in a very real sense, an instantiation of religious ideation. The hope here is to take a yet further step, broadening and enriching our understanding of what fascism is through kingship theory, and with the aim of pointing to where its appeal truly lies beyond merely resorting to affective language. With these preliminary considerations having been laid out, we may now turn to providing a historical narrative of the Legion of the Archangel Michael and its *Căpitan*, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.

¹³ Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932), 2. Accessed via San Jose State University: <https://www.sjsu.edu/people/cynthia.rostankowski/courses/HUM2BS14/s0/The-Doctrine-of-Fascism.pdf>.

II. Interwar Romanian Historical Context

A. *World War I & The Emergence of Greater Romania*

Despite having suffered casualties to the order of 340,000 subjects, the Kingdom of Romania emerged from World War I in an extremely fortunate position, especially considering the rather tumultuous nature of its involvement in the Great War.¹⁴ Romania had begun as a neutral country from 1914-1916 before joining the fight on the side of the Entente from August 1916 to December 1917. After the Russian Empire unilaterally withdrew from the war as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, Romania found itself surrounded by the Central Powers, with whom it was forced to declare an armistice that lasted from December 1917 to May 1918. Starting with the May 1918 ratification of the humiliating Treaty of Bucharest, which saw Romania forced to make major territorial concessions to the Central Powers,¹⁵ the Romanian Kingdom reverted to the status of a non-combatant country. Yet with the increasingly evident faltering of the Central Powers' Balkan Front, as finally represented by the capitulation of Bulgaria in September, Romania re-joined the Entente on November 10, 1918—that is, on the penultimate day of the war in Europe.

This last minute “theatrical re-entry,” which was only begrudgingly accepted by the Entente, proved to be an inspired maneuver of Romanian foreign policy, for the terms that had been agreed to with the Central Powers in the Treaty of Bucharest were annulled

¹⁴ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 35.

¹⁵ A notable exception here is that of Bessarabia, which the Germans even encouraged Romania to annex given the perceived threat of the Bolshevik Revolution.

as part of the general armistice of November 11, 1918.¹⁶ In a dramatic reversal of what had seemed to be its decided post-war fate, then, the Romanian state achieved one of its most critical and long-standing goals on December 1, 1918: the unification of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania. Led by the veteran politician and activist Iuliu Maniu—who had long been agitating on behalf of Transylvanian Romanians and who would also go on to play a crucial role in Romanian interwar history as the democratically-inclined head of the National Peasants’ Party—on December 1, 1918, “the representatives of Transylvania Rumanians met in the historic capital of Transylvania, Alba-Iulia, and the Governing Council, under the chairmanship of Iuliu Maniu, proclaimed the union of Transylvania with the other Rumanian lands.”¹⁷

Yet the end of the Great War meant the beginning of a new one, namely the Hungarian-Romanian War of 1918-1919, a conflict that saw the Kingdom of Romania invade and dismantle the short-lived state of Béla Kun’s Soviet Hungary. Although Romania’s demands at Versailles had initially seemed unreasonably ambitious to the victors, “when Béla Kun established the Hungarian Soviet Republic, there was no time to scrutinize Romanian performance during the war or how well her claims were founded.”¹⁸ Instead, the Entente saw in Romania a potentially effective bulwark against the new Bolshevik menace from the East.¹⁹ As Hungarian-American historian Nicholas Nagy-Talavera has explained, “[d]espite the fact that Rumania was encircled by leftist

¹⁶ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), 27.

¹⁷ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts*, 28.

¹⁸ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts*, 29.

¹⁹ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 8.

disorder or communism on all sides—in Russia, Bulgaria, and Hungary—she remained stable, thanks to the promise of land reform and to national aggrandizement [...] Not only did the Rumanian peasant-soldier not revolt, he could be used successfully to crush the Hungarian Soviet Republic,” which is precisely what happened.²⁰

After Romania’s defeat of Soviet Hungary in 1920 and the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, so-called Greater Romania entered the world stage for the first time. This was a Greater Romania that went “beyond the wildest hopes and dreams of the decade before it had been established” and that had now added Transylvania, North Bukovina, and Dobrogea to the old *Regat* that had been composed of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.²¹ With this territorial annexation, though, came drastic shifts in the overall population and demographic make-up of the country. What had been a small, 137,000 square kilometer kingdom in the corner of Europe with a population of 7,000,000 million exploded virtually overnight into a state spanning 294,000 square kilometers and whose population also more than doubled to now include 15.5 million people.²²

Critically, the number of Jews living in Romania had tripled from 230,000 to 767,000, representing approximately five percent of the total population and making them the third-largest national minority after Hungarians and Germans.²³ By 1930, 68.2% of Jews in Romania lived in urban centers while the remaining 31.8% who lived in rural

²⁰ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts*, 29.

²¹ Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1991), 21; Nagy-Talavara, *The Green Shirts*, 30.

²² Nagy-Talavara, *The Green Shirts*, 30.

²³ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology*, 21.

villages were “rarely engaged in agriculture,” representing thus significant geographical and social fissures between the country’s Jews and its so-called ethnic Romanians, 75% of whom lived in rural villages.²⁴ Indeed, according to Romanian historian Leon Volovici, for the country’s “new” Jews, these fissures were doubly as deep, for “[t]he newly annexed Jewish communities really were strangers to the Romanian environment as far as culture and language were concerned,” while at the same time “a high proportion of [the Jewish] bourgeoisie was, however, integrated into economic life.”²⁵ Moreover, the fact that both the Bolshevik Revolution and Béla Kun’s Soviet Hungary had prominently featured several Jews in leading and public-facing positions “strengthened the negative image of the Jew as a revolutionary, anarchist, and ‘Bolshevik.’”²⁶ Indeed, anti-Semitism was already widespread in the old *Regat* following Romanian independence in 1878.²⁷ Thus, the scene was set for the fateful announcement and enactment of the 1923 Romanian Constitution, which, as a distinctly modern and liberal constitution, would incite a pre-existing nativist Romanian anti-Semitism “to unprecedented intensity and scope.”²⁸

²⁴ Nagy-Talavara, *The Green Shirts*, 30.

²⁵ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology*, 21.

²⁶ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology*, 21.

²⁷ Raul Cârstocea, “Students Don the Green Shirt. The Roots of Romanian Fascism in the Anti-Semitic Student Movements of the 1920s,” in *Alma Mater Antisemitica. Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, eds. Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, and Jana Starek (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016), 40.

²⁸ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology*, 21.

B. *The 1923 Constitution*

Considering the historical importance accorded to the 1923 Romanian Constitution as the major catalyst for the inflammation of anti-Semitic and hyper-nationalist sentiment throughout the country over the course of the interwar period, it would be worthwhile to spend time discussing some of its specific contents before turning to the figure of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Without question, the most important element of the constitution was Article VII, which granted full citizenship to all Jews born on Romanian territory as well as to all those Jews who had fought under the Romanian banner during World War I.²⁹ The 1923 Romanian Constitution seemed to contain and to confirm virtually all contemporary far-right anxieties within a single document. In addition to Article VII, which explicitly proclaimed that one's religious confession could not be a legal obstacle towards the exercise of one's accorded rights, Article V similarly established that all Romanians regardless of ethnic origin, language, or—again—religion have the equal right to enjoy all of the various rights and liberties accorded by the law.³⁰

From the perspective of anti-Semitic agitators, by allowing the category of “Romanian”—a category that had entered the 20th century already deeply sacralized and mythologized by the Romantic writers of the 19th century, including most notably Vasile

²⁹ https://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=1517, Art. VII; Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 8.

³⁰ https://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=1517, Art. V.

Alecsandri and George Coșbuc³¹—to include anybody who has by whatever means achieved the proper legal relationship with the state (we could say contemporary, perhaps secularized, citizenship), this liberal constitution had established a definition of “Romanian” shorn of ethnic origin and religion confession. That is, the Constitution turned “Romanian” into a secular, modern legal category like any other. As Lincoln explains, these constitutional provisions were “resented and resisted by a great many ethnic Romanians. Those involved in several potent right-wing parties accused the country’s political class of having surrendered to foreign pressure or, worse yet, having been corrupted by Jewish money.”³² Thus, we can see here the beginnings of a radical and violent reaction against a distinctly modernizing constitution that in a very real way *disenchanted* the category of “Romanian” in the eyes of proto-fascist agitators; it would be the allegedly *properly* enchanted category of Romanian that the Legion would style itself as defending and uplifting.

For the anti-Semitic student movements out of which the Legion of the Archangel Michael would eventually be born, the most critical implication of the 1923 Constitution’s extension of citizenship rights to minorities was the fact that Romania’s Jewish population (and the other national minorities) could now attend university without legal limitations. Indeed, while anti-Semitic student violence had already been rampant in Romanian universities since 1919, the 1923 Constitution (and its official announcement

³¹ See, e.g., Mihai Stelian Rusu, “The Sacralization of Martyric Death in Romanian Legionary Movement: Self-sacrificial Patriotism, Vicarious Atonement, and Thanatic Nationalism” in *Politics, Religion & Ideology* Vol. 17, No. 2-3, pp. 249-273 (Routledge 2016), 249-250.

³² Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 8.

in 1922), sent the anti-Semitic student movements into a furor, especially given the lack of a constitutional *numerus clausus* for minority university students.³³ Historian Roland Clark identifies the student protests of December 10th, 1922 as the incipient moment for the kind of anti-Semitic action that would serve as the “crucible in which legionary repertoires and relationships were forged.”³⁴ As Clark reports, on that day three- to four-thousand students gathered at the University of Bucharest from all over the country where they declared a general strike and where, “at the top of their list of demands was a *numerus clausus*, meaning that they wanted the number of Romanian, Hungarian, and Jewish students enrolled at university to correspond to the size of their ethnic groups as a percentage of the general population.”³⁵

³³ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 28.

³⁴ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 28.

³⁵ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 28.

III. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu & the Legion of the Archangel Michael

A. *The National Christian Defense League (LANC)*

Having established this basic historical and social context for interwar Romania, we may now turn to the figure of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the ever-only-inchoate king of Romanian interwar fascism. Codreanu, a law student at the University of Iași, began his political career in 1919 as the leader of an anti-Semitic gang of students before founding *Liga Apărării Naționale Creștine* (LANC), the National Christian Defense League, together with his mentor, the veteran anti-Semite and law professor Alexandru C. Cuza, in 1923.³⁶ Codreanu would eventually split from LANC over a number of fundamental disagreements with Cuza, which Romanian historian Traian Sandu summarizes as Codreanu's "certainty in national transfiguration, belief in a leader, the ideology of the *fapt întâmplat* [occurred fact or propaganda of the deed], the importance of the organization and of radical violence."³⁷ One can thus basically understand, with Lincoln, that Codreanu "found the older man's tactics too restrained."³⁸

There is, though, a bit more to be gleaned from the nature of Codreanu's disagreements with Cuza. This emphasis on a "national transfiguration" that was to be achieved at least in part through exemplary radical violence, for example, indicates that Codreanu was not content with the kind of measured reform associated with electoral politics (although his movement would ultimately participate in electoral politics quite

³⁶ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 27.

³⁷ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 27.

³⁸ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 16.

fervently), but was rather committed to a revolutionary spiritual rebirth of the nation through violent struggle: in Roger Griffin’s terms, this is the *palingenetic* element. The ideology of the *fapt întâmplat*—that concrete action is rhetorically and, indeed, somehow metaphysically superior to any words or speeches—is a critical one for understanding the development of the Legion and Codreanu’s model of heroic kingship, for the “occurred fact” usually took the form of public-facing, political violence that would help galvanize supporters and further enhance the mystical aura surrounding the Legion and its leader. As Codreanu wrote in *Pentru Legionari*, his 1936 political manifesto modeled after *Mein Kampf*, “our soul flees from words and seeks the direction of *facts*. We also want to build: from a broken bridge to a street [...] from the construction of a new peasant community to that of a new Romanian village, of a new city, of a new Romanian state.”³⁹ From the fields to the cities, then, the Romanian nation was to be spiritually transfigured through dramatic, violent actions organized by the supreme leader of a mass nativist movement.

B. The Beginnings of the Legion of the Archangel Michael

In 1927, Codreanu led a splinter group out of LANC and founded his own organization, The Legion of the Archangel Michael, declaring himself *Căpitan* and supreme leader.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the first of Codreanu’s Ten Commandments for the Legion explicitly proclaims that the Legionnaire “does not believe in anything besides the

³⁹ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari* (București: Editura Scara, 1999), 365.

⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 15.

order and the word of his Chief.”⁴¹ The Legion would prove itself quite distinct from the other far-right movements not just in Romania but also in Europe more broadly, for, as Lincoln aptly explains, the Legion’s members “consciously constructed themselves not as a political party, but a martial religious order sworn to protect the faithful”: that is, to guard the sacred community from the nefarious effects of modernity as represented by the figures of the Jew and the corrupted Romanian politician.⁴²

Lincoln’s summary of Legionary ideology and self-understanding serves admirably in getting across the main tenets of Codreanu’s mystical fascism. Drawing on the two critical themes that form the “new consensus” in fascist studies with which this report began, Lincoln identifies at the heart of Legionary ideology first “the sacralization of politics” (Gentile) and second “a mythology embodying the conviction that a nation must return to its original, authentic nature in order to achieve its destined greatness” (Griffin’s palingenetic myth).⁴³ As already mentioned above, the sacralization of “Romanianness” had already been well underway since the time of the Romantic poets in the latter half of the 19th century, yet was perceived to be under existential threat in the interwar period. Thus, Codreanu would have a great deal of raw cultural material and expected popular horizons to mobilize in his own political (re-)sacralization schemes. Again, in the eyes of the proto-fascist, anti-Semitic student agitator, this sacred Romanianness had been violated by the liberal 1923 Constitution. Relatedly, the

⁴¹ *Cele Zece Porunci* (included as an attachment to the 1999 Editura Scara edition of *Pentru Legionari*).

⁴² Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 17.

⁴³ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 17.

“authentic nature” of the Romanian state had been allegedly disfigured by the pernicious influence of international Jewry and the treasonous Romanian politicians who were said to have betrayed the country’s interests.

Lincoln correctly diagnoses, then, Codreanu’s own spin on this sacralization of politics. According to Lincoln’s analysis, Codreanu “took the Romanian nation (*neam*) and homeland (*țară*) to be a sacred entity, whose spiritual identity was grounded in and defined by its Orthodox faith.”⁴⁴ The necessary, Schmittian list of this holy polity’s enemies is long and ranges from Habsburgs to Phanariots, from communists to corrupt politicians, but ultimately to “Jews (above all).”⁴⁵ Most important here is Lincoln’s insight into the nature of Codreanu’s “distinctive blend of religion and nationalism,” which “included a mystic bond to the land itself, eagerness to sacrifice oneself for the nation, a sense of ongoing communion with heroic ancestors, and militance in the salvific mission of rescuing an afflicted people from religio-ethnic others.”⁴⁶ Here Lincoln is echoing Emilio Gentile’s basic position regarding fascism as a form of sacralized politics. Indeed, if a political movement operates with a deeply sacralized view of politics and with a self-understanding that it fights on behalf of a clearly demarcated sacred people, then it truly makes little sense to conceive of the leader of such a movement in the terminological trappings of modern, secular politics—notwithstanding the fact that

⁴⁴ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 17. It’s worth pointing out here that “neam” is in fact more closely related to “people” (as in “the Romanian people”) or to the idea of *kinship* than it is to “nation” (for which the Legion and its ideologues generally used the Romanian word *națiune*). Further, translating *țară*, which directly means “country,” as “homeland” is a bit of a poetic embellishment, although not necessarily an inappropriate one.

⁴⁵ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 17.

⁴⁶ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 17.

Codreanu's Legion *was* operating precisely in an arena of modern, disenchanted, electoral politics. According to the autobiography of famed historian of religions and intimate Legionary participant Mircea Eliade, the Legion should not be understood to have been primarily a political movement at all:

For [Codreanu], the legionary movement did not constitute a political phenomenon but was, in its essence, ethical and religious. He repeated time and again that he was not interested in the acquisition of power but in the creation of a 'new man' [...] Codreanu believed in the necessity of sacrifice; he considered that every new persecution could only purify and strengthen the legionary movement, and he believed, furthermore, in his own destiny and in the protection of the Archangel Michael.⁴⁷

What Eliade describes here is, indeed, a far cry from a typical image of a leader of a modern political movement. Instead, we see here the outline of an inchoate, divinely inspired king who believed not just in his own divine mission, but in the redemptive, mystical power of sacrifice towards the creation of the new Romanian and thus a new Romania. Again, though, all of this would be taking place within the context of electoral politics and a liberal Constitution. It might begin to seem, then, that a fascist movement like the Legion of the Archangel Michael is really a sort of *reboot* of the older political model of kingship for a new era of mass electoral politics.

Quite relatedly, it is also worth discussing at this point Codreanu's intense anti-democratic vitriol, for central to Codreanu's diagnosis of the Romanian nation's spiritual corruption was the figure of the politician and what Codreanu routinely referred to as *politicianism* writ large. For Codreanu, *politicianism* "infects our national life," and one

⁴⁷ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 44 (quoting Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, p. 65).

of the key objectives of the movement must be to inoculate the youth from the threat of politicianism, for if the infection were to descend upon the Romanian youth, it would mean “our destruction and the complete victory of Israel.”⁴⁸ In his account of interwar Romanian fascism, Lincoln includes another important comment of Codreanu’s on politicianism: after claiming the mortal seriousness of the “Jewish problem,” Codreanu explains that “this politicianism, through its conception of life, through its morality, *through the democratic system from which it derives its being*, constitutes a true curse fallen on the head of the country,” for the politicians and the political parties “increasingly become a plaything in the hands of Judaic power.”⁴⁹ Thus, if Jews are the source of all the nation’s woes, democratic politicians are the traitorous vehicles through which Jewish influence makes itself manifest. The solution Codreanu and the Legion offered is a kind of messianism. We may, with Lincoln, again turn to the way in which Mircea Eliade understood these dynamics: in a 1935 article ominously entitled “A People without a Mission,” Eliade points out that “[a] political leader of the youth says that the goal of his movement ‘is to reconcile Romania with God.’ Here is a messianic formula. Here is a formula that does not appeal to class struggle, political interests, economic instincts, or the bestial instincts in man.”⁵⁰ It would seem, then, that Eliade did not consider rabid anti-Semitism to have been particularly bestial.

⁴⁸ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 145-46.

⁴⁹ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 26 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 27.

The founding myth of the Legion is key to any eventual analysis of Codreanu as a kind of divine (or heroic) fascist king. In 1923, while still attached to LANC, Codreanu hatched a plot together with several other far-right, anti-Semitic student agitators—who would all later enter Legionary lore as the *Văcăreșteni* after the Văcărești prison where they were subsequently incarcerated—in which they planned to assassinate six cabinet ministers whom these proto-fascists deemed to have betrayed the nation by having sided with the Jews and by having outlawed extremist political parties.⁵¹ According to *Pentru Legionari*, the decisive conversation that set things in motion occurred between Codreanu and his chief lieutenant, Ion Moța, in October of 1923. Codreanu relays Moța’s plan for revenge against these politicians in a passage worth quoting in its entirety, for it contains many conceptual kernels that form Codreanu’s own Legionary ideology:

The students can no longer keep it up in autumn [referring to student strikes] and, rather than the shameful capitulation of all of us after a year of fighting, it’s better to get the students to register for classes; but for us, who led them, we should conclude our movement beautifully by sacrificing ourselves, while taking down with us all of those who we find guilty of betraying Romanian interests. Let us procure revolvers and shoot them, thereby giving a horrifying example that will endure in Romanian history for all time. What we choose to do after this, whether we die or remain in prison for life, does not interest me.⁵²

Codreanu found himself in agreement with Moța’s martyric logic and the conspiracy to assassinate the ministers was put into motion. The plotters, however, were betrayed, charged with attempting to cause a revolution, and incarcerated at Văcărești.⁵³ By the

⁵¹ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 20.

⁵² Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 129.

⁵³ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 48.

time that the day of the trial arrived, the Văcăreșteni were already national celebrities, and “thousands filled the streets around the courthouse dressed in national costumes.”⁵⁴ What’s more, notwithstanding the fact that the accused students admitted to planning out the murders, they were found legally innocent of attempting to cause a revolution: the Văcăreșteni were “released to a cheering crowd” and “returned home as heroes.”⁵⁵ Later, in something of a mythical retelling of this time in prison, Codreanu would allege that a mystical revelation had occurred in the Văcărești prison, one that would form the mythic core of the Legion of the Archangel Michael.

According to Codreanu’s telling, he had spent much of his time incarcerated “working on a plan for a youth organization directed towards the national fight” that was originally supposed to have been a component organization to LANC, thereby having laid out the theoretical and organizational groundwork for the Legion of the Archangel Michael.⁵⁶ On November 8th, 1923, after about a month of incarceration, Codreanu, Moța, and the other Văcăreșteni set about coming up with a name for this new organization. Presumably given that November 8th is the Orthodox feast day of the Holy Archangels Michael & Gabriel, Codreanu suggested the name “the Archangel Michael.” Codreanu’s father, himself a wild anti-Semitic mystic who had also been incarcerated with the others, responded to this suggestion by leading the group to the prison chapel,

⁵⁴ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 48.

⁵⁵ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 48.

⁵⁶ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 138.

where he knew there to be an icon of the Archangel Michael. Codreanu describes this event in *Pentru Legionari* as nothing short of a revelation, and with a tinge of *election*:

We looked and remained truly astounded. The icon revealed itself to us with an incomparable beauty. I had never been attracted to the beauty of any icon. Now, though, I felt tied to this one with my entire soul and it gave me the impression that the Holy Archangel is alive. Since then I began to love the icon. Every time we saw that the church was open, we would go in and prostrate before the icon. Our soul would be filled with peace and joy.⁵⁷

Important to note here is specifically the *agency* that Codreanu accords to the icon, itself. The icon revealed *itself* and in such a way that it effectively accomplished a kind of conversion of Codreanu, who claimed to have never been particularly drawn to icons previously, but whose very soul became tied to this icon of the “dragon-slaying archangel” and “commander of the heavenly forces, defender of the faith, and protector of Christian nations.”⁵⁸ It should also be noted here that this revelation occurred specifically under conditions of self-sacrifice for the nation: the prison experience seems to have been a necessary condition for this divine revelation to occur, and, if we believe Codreanu’s narrative, for the very founding of the Legion. From the beginning, then, the experience of self-sacrifice on behalf of the *true* interests of the *true* nation was mingled with mystical revelation. It is as if, in an irruption of the sacred, the icon of the Archangel *chose* Codreanu in the prison: accordingly, the official Legionary symbol would combine the Christian cross with stylized prison bars, as seen below in figure one.

⁵⁷ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 138. In his account, Lincoln provides the same quotation from *Pentru Legionari*, albeit differently translated such that, I believe, the statement loses some important nuance.

⁵⁸ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 17.

Although this 1923 conspiracy to assassinate perceived traitorous cabinet ministers was thwarted by the Romanian police, the following year would see Codreanu successfully commit a highly public murder that further catapulted him to the fore of Romanian national consciousness and marked what can be called the true beginning of his rise as the charismatic, divine king of a transcendent Romanian nation. Codreanu's victim in this case was the Iași police prefect Constantin Manciu. Incredibly, this assassination took place in an open courtroom where Codreanu was even serving as the attorney on record in a case against Manciu for the prefect's having previously tortured an anti-Semitic student agitator while in custody. In other words, the young attorney Codreanu outright killed the defendant in open court. What's more, in the wake of this nationally publicized killing, nearly 19,000 Romanian attorneys offered their services to defend Codreanu.⁵⁹ Such, then, was the rhetorical power of the *fapt întâmplat*, or, as Lincoln has it, "the propaganda of the deed."⁶⁰ Defending himself "as having taken proper vengeance on an enemy of the people," Codreanu was dubiously acquitted on the grounds of self-defense, signaling another very early public relations victory and a dramatic increase in his popularity through norm-shattering violence.⁶¹

Through this assassination, Codreanu was able to demonstrate already from an early point that he was capable of violating even the most important laws without consequence, and that his violence did not serve to make him *immoral* but rather to

⁵⁹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 57.

⁶⁰ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 20.

⁶¹ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 20.

render him as being *above* morality. The brazen murder of Manciu—when coupled with elements of the Văcăreșteni’s 1923 conspiracy—would serve as the template for later targeted Legionary murders. As Lincoln explains, the Legion eventually created punishment squads who “were trained to await the police after dispatching a victim, thereby offering themselves as a sacrifice on behalf of the nation.”⁶² Over the course of its founding by Codreanu in 1927 to Codreanu’s execution at the hands of the king in 1938, the Legion would go on to assassinate three prime ministers, two heads of the secret service, two leaders of opposition parties, as well as various Legionary traitors and “scores of others,” usually Jews and other national minorities.⁶³

C. *Legionary Electoralism*

Yet the history of the Legion is not only one of anti-Semitic violence, domestic terrorism, and political assassinations. Indeed, notwithstanding their intense anti-modernity and ideological opposition to electoral politics and representative democracy as such, Codreanu’s mystico-fascists participated heavily in electoralism over the course of the 1930s. Historian Traian Sandu accordingly identifies the period of 1929-1930 as the point when the Legion began its “massification” process and its entry into the field of Romanian electoral politics.⁶⁴ It must absolutely be noted too that it was in June 1930 that King Carol II von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was restored to the Romanian throne after many years of a deeply unstable regency council for his son.

⁶² Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 20.

⁶³ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 20

⁶⁴ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 75.

On April 13, 1930, Codreanu created the Iron Guard to serve as the political face of the Legion, a move which the *Căpitan* attributed to “the need to equip himself with a more ‘presentable’ organization than the Legion.”⁶⁵ A 1933 informative report from the General Police Directorate explains the relationship between the Iron Guard and the Legion this way: “[t]hrough this distancing of the ‘Iron Guard’ from the ‘Legion of the Archangel Michael,’ the former organization is directly considered to be the political expression of the movement; yet the latter is the instrument through which the political ideal of the first will be brought to fulfilment.”⁶⁶ From this police informant’s perspective, then, the Legionary movement is a single, unified movement but with two manifestations: one to play the political game demanded by modern electoralism and the other to serve as the actual spiritual (and substantive) heart of the movement. In Sandu’s general reading of events, “the dynamic of charismatic legitimation was consubstantial with the popular sanction of massification if the movement wished to win legitimacy in the face of the eventual restoration of [King] Carol.”⁶⁷ Thus, both sides of the equation were necessary, for it was through the instrument of the Legion that Codreanu so successfully achieved his own charismatic legitimation, while the Iron Guard (and, starting in 1934, also the official Legionary political party *Totul Pentru Țară*—“Everything for the Country”) afforded the movement the political façade required to massify itself. As a final comment on Legionary electoralism, although the Legion had

⁶⁵ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 75 (quoting *Pentru Legionari*).

⁶⁶ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 318.

⁶⁷ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 74.

entered national electoral politics vis-à-vis the Iron Guard and *Totul Pentru Țară*, the importance of strategic, exemplary anti-Semitic and political violence remained the same, although now “the violence was articulated with an electoral tactic tied to massification.”⁶⁸ The 1930s, with the King back on the throne, would see the Legion banned more than once for some of the high-profile assassinations mentioned above, most notably the 1933 killing of liberal Prime Minister Ion Duca in retaliation for Duca’s attempts to crush the Legion during the elections of the same year.⁶⁹

D. Moța și Marin

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 led to one of the most critical and interesting episodes in the Legion’s history, as Codreanu and his fellow militants saw in Franco’s war an unprecedented propagandizing opportunity, both for their domestic audiences and for the watching eyes of Hitler and other potential international allies. In November of 1936, Codreanu decided to send seven high-ranking Legionnaires to the front in Spain, a group which notably included Ion Moța, one of the original Văcăreșteni and the translator of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* into Romanian who had also in the meantime become Codreanu’s brother-in-law, and Vasile Marin, one of the Legion’s other leading intellectual figures.⁷⁰ Originally, the Legionnaires were sent with the very limited objective of presenting one General Moscardó with a ceremonial sword on behalf of the Romanian general and president of *Totul Pentru Țară*, Gheorghe Cantacuzino-

⁶⁸ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 74.

⁶⁹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 97.

⁷⁰ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 28; Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 136.

Grănicerul.⁷¹ However, since “the Legion wanted to be a formation of men of concrete action,” Codreanu felt obligated to ask his Legionary delegation to join the actual fighting for around a month.⁷²

Before departing for the battlefield that would witness his death, Ion Moța left behind a couple of letters that now serve as his final testament and that significantly illustrate Legionary self-perception. These letters have been preserved and Sandu reproduces key passages, having found them in a German volume edited by one Ion Mării. In the first letter, addressed to his family, Moța laments bitterly that “they are shooting Christ in the face with machine guns! The Christian arrangement of the world is shaking! Could we stand by indifferently?”⁷³ With these lines, Moța makes the obvious religio-political connection and adopts for himself and the other Legionary volunteers the rhetorical trappings of veritable crusaders who went off to war “against what they took to be the anti-Christian barbarism of the Spanish republic and the Left in general.”⁷⁴ Moța was clearly very aware of the mass rhetorical opportunity represented by his and the others’ departure for Spain, for, as Sandu notes, “the transparent reference to the Christian crusade against infidels in Spain and its resonance with the Legionary troops’ own internal political crusade fully served the cause of the Legion in Romania.”⁷⁵

Moța’s second letter was for Codreanu, and its dramatic farewell would go on to enter Legionary lore: “And may you make out of our country, oh Corneliu, a country as

⁷¹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 136.

⁷² Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 136.

⁷³ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 136.

⁷⁴ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 28.

⁷⁵ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 137.

beautiful as a sun and strong and obedient to God.”⁷⁶ As is the case in other instances of Legionary propaganda, Moța very clearly appeals here to two Romanias: the one that in fact exists on Earth (“our country”) and what could be described as the fascist *telos* of this corrupt yet actually-existing Romania, that is, a spiritually reborn one that shines like the sun and listens to God. Notwithstanding Moța’s rhetorical and poetic talent, both he and Vasile Marin were slain in the fighting at Mahadajonda on January 13, 1937.⁷⁷

Sandu, echoing other commentators on the matter, unambiguously asserts that “the greatest moment in Codreanu’s public life, if not also his political life, was certainly represented by the ceremonies surrounding the repatriations, burials, and evocations of the two dead. He could thus combine his taste for heroic, sorrowful, redemptive kingship with the aggressive intimidation of the political world.”⁷⁸ To be sure, 1937 was a critical election year, and Codreanu knew well not to waste the enormous propaganda opportunity afforded to him by the fallen Legionary martyrs Moța and Marin, who were naturally styled as having died defending Christianity from Communist barbarians, not unlike the Archangel Michael himself, who slew dragons to protect the faithful. For Sandu, the repatriation and funeral rituals surrounding Moța and Marin “made evident the ultranationalist, militarist, sacrificial, and palingenetic specificities of the Legion, making it thus both attractive and worthy of fear at the same time.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 137. Since much of the genuinely poetic flow is lost in English, I reproduce here the original Romanian: “Și să faci, măi Corneliu, din țara noastră o țară frumoasă ca un soare și puternică și ascultătoare de Dumnezeu.”

⁷⁷ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 28; Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 137.

⁷⁸ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 138.

⁷⁹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 138.

Three days after the deaths of Moța and Marin, Codreanu and the Legion set to work and “organized their funeral as a religio-political ritual of unprecedented scale and spectacle.”⁸⁰ This religio-political ritual remains to this day one of the largest public gatherings in Romanian history. A train—that symbol of modernity *par excellence*—transported the martyrs’ bodies across the country for several days, stopping at different cities and churches on its way to Bucharest, its final destination. At each stop, massive crowds gathered as Legionnaires and priests presided over ritual ceremonies that would culminate in communal recitations of the “Moța-Marin Oath.” In the words of Horia Sima, a high-ranking Legionnaire who would controversially succeed Codreanu as *Căpitan* after the latter’s 1938 execution at the hands of royal gendarmes, “the loss of Moța and Marin was irreparable [...] yet Moța and Marin did not need to die spiritually. The meaning of their sacrifice was fixed in the form of an oath and was passed down to future Legionary generations.”⁸¹ The fallen martyrs would continue to *live* spiritually through this oath and its ritual enactment: “I swear before God/ And before your holy sacrifices for/ Christ and for the Legion/ To banish all worldly pleasures/ To tear myself away from human love/ And, for the resurrection of my people/ To be ready for death/ I swear!”⁸²

The crescendo of this nationwide funerary ritual was marked by the arrival of the martyrs’ train into Bucharest’s main train station, Gara de Nord, on February 11, 1937,

⁸⁰ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 28.

⁸¹ Horia Sima, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare* (1967), 201.

⁸² Ștefan Palaghiță, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare: Scrisă de un Legionar* (București: Editura Roza Vânturilor, 1993), 91. (Slightly different variations of the oath appear in different Legionary documents.)

which began a scrupulously orchestrated three-day ceremony in the nation's capital. Based off of informative reports from the General Police Directorate, Sandu relates that the crowd that had gathered in Bucharest amounted to approximately 15,000-20,000 participants, about 11,000 of whom were *bona fide* members of the Legion.⁸³ In addition to these uniformed Legionnaires, “hundreds of Romanian priests, politicians, professors, and other luminaries stood in rapt attendance.”⁸⁴ Indeed, Sandu also reports that a number of professors and school-teachers participated in the convoy that helped to transport the martyrs' bodies from the train station to the so-called Legionary church of St. Ilias-Gorgani.⁸⁵ We also know that the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church himself granted permission to Orthodox priests nationwide to participate in the proceedings across the country; in Bucharest, 180 priests led by four bishops greeted the martyric train with Roman (fascist) salutes at the Gară de Nord.⁸⁶

As Lincoln neatly explains of the final celebration, itself, “massive outpourings of grief and militant displays of force built to the emotional climax of a roll call in which the crowd thundered ‘Prezent!’ when the names of Moța and Marin were called, signaling the unbreakable solidarity of the living and the dead.”⁸⁷ Sandu notes for us that the participants in this perverse call-and-response included not just the Legionnaires, but also “a large part of the civilians” present in the mass.⁸⁸ According to an internal document

⁸³ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 140.

⁸⁴ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 29.

⁸⁵ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 140.

⁸⁶ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 140.

⁸⁷ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 29.

⁸⁸ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 141.

distributed amongst Legionary cells in preparation for the funeral, Codreanu sought specifically to create great a religious ritual for the martyrs, “with Legionary commandants occupying the ecclesiastical space.”⁸⁹ For his part, according to an informative note by an agent of King Carol II’s General Police Directorate, Codreanu appeared together with the representatives from the Spanish and German legations and “accompanied by his personal guard” to oversee the final ceremony in Bucharest.⁹⁰

The parliamentary elections held later in 1937 would see the Legion claim its greatest victory in terms of electoral politics, with Codreanu’s *Totul Pentru Ţară* party having officially won 478,368 votes (16%), although highly credible claims were later made in post-war legal testimony that the Legion had been deprived of an additional 300,000 votes by the machinations of the King’s Ministry of the Interior.⁹¹ While the path to the 1937 elections was a multifaceted and complex one, this Legionary electoral victory—which shook the foundations of Romanian sovereignty and created a parliamentary crisis—was due in no small part to the fact that Codreanu was afforded the opportunity to begin the election year with “an enormous capital of sympathy and with a great manifestation of propaganda” through Moța and Marin’s deaths in Spain.⁹²

For the purposes of this report, my historical narrative will end here, with the funerals of Moța and Marin in 1937. The following year would see the political situation

⁸⁹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 138.

⁹⁰ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 139.

⁹¹ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 162.

⁹² Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 138.

in the country explode into a full-blown crisis of sovereignty, with King Carol II having declared a royal dictatorship in February of 1938, which saw the banning of all political parties. In November, Codreanu and a number of Legionnaires were arrested and once again brought to trial, this time for attempting to foment revolution with the aid of foreign capital. Codreanu would meet his end when, under the auspices of an alleged escape attempt, the King ordered Codreanu's execution at the hands of his royal gendarmes on November 30, 1938. The subsequent story of the largely abortive transfer of charismatic, divine kingship to Codreanu's successor as Captain of the Legion, Horia Sima, and later to the marshal Ion Antonescu, is a tale for another day.

IV. Fascist Passions: Elements from Robert Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism*

The bridge that will lead from the history of the Legion to an exploration of it through the prism of divine kingship is that of Robert Paxton's general study, *The Anatomy of Fascism*. It is perhaps approaching a commonplace observation to point out that the distinctly modern political phenomenon of fascism bears a strong resemblance to the archaic institution of divinely ordained or inspired kingship. Both political figurations tend to conjure a mental image of a single supreme ruler who stands uniquely at the head of his polity, able to issue orders of any kind to anyone as the fancy may strike him. Immediately, though, an issue presents itself in this comparison: namely, the existence of mass electoral politics in the modern period. As Paxton accordingly describes it, "fascism was the major political innovation of the twentieth century, and the source of much of its pain."⁹³ Further, Paxton identifies in fascism a "new invention created fresh for the era of mass politics."⁹⁴ Thus, while fascism differs significantly from kingship in the literal manner of its ascent to actual political power (all fascist movements actually relied on electoral politics, as we also saw in the case of the Legion), it shares strong similarities with certain articulations of kingship in the *rhetoric* it deploys to the public as it takes root in a society and in its own self-understanding. An analysis of fascism under the rubric of kingship theory, then, can serve to elucidate fascism's curious position with regards to modernity: it is a *necessarily* modern political phenomenon that at the same time strives to enact a *premodern* political and societal figuration that is rooted in what is

⁹³ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 3.

⁹⁴ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 16.

basically religious ideation having to do with the nature of leadership and community. It is, then, no coincidence that traditional kingship theory can map onto fascist movements so neatly.

For Paxton, one of the most important aspects of fascism is its deployment of a set of “mobilizing passions” on the masses that form the “emotional lava” of fascism’s foundations, for, according to Paxton, “fascism was an affair of the gut more than of the brain.”⁹⁵ Amongst the various passions that Paxton presents, two key ones stand out for the purposes of this analysis: (1) “the need for authority by *natural leaders* (always male), culminating in a national chief who alone is capable of *incarnating the group’s destiny*” and (2) “the superiority of the leader’s instincts over abstract and universal reason.”⁹⁶ As we will have occasion to see later on, it is precisely these two “passions” that lie at the heart of much of kingship theory.

According to Paxton, it was through *charisma* that the fascist chief achieved his ability to incarnate the community’s destiny. Indeed, Paxton explains to his readers that “fascist leaders enjoyed a kind of supremacy that was not quite like leadership in other kinds of regime. The *Führer* and the *Duce* could claim legitimacy neither by election nor conquest. It rested on *charisma*, a mysterious direct communication with the *Volk* or *razza* that needs no mediation.”⁹⁷ I argue, though, that this direct communication with the people starts to become less mysterious and more comprehensible when one first

⁹⁵ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 41.

⁹⁶ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 41 (emphasis added).

⁹⁷ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 126.

approaches the issue from a position like that of Emilio Gentile's, which sees in fascism an instance of religious ideation collectively mobilized in and for the sphere of a sacred politics. Further, there exists a historical and globally ubiquitous precedent for this kind of political figuration in which a "natural" male leader incarnates and bears a privileged and mystical relationship with the collective fate and the very being of the people: kingship. The reason, then, that the fascist chief's supremacy was for Paxton vaguely "not quite like leadership in other kinds of regimes" is because fascism operates on the plane of communal religious ideation rooted in archaic notions of leadership and authority: a strictly secular approach, then, can only get one so far. Despite its status as a necessarily modern political phenomenon, fascism did not and does not play according to the implicit (or, to use a phrase from secularism studies, *unmarked*) rulebook of disenchanted electoralism. Instead, the fascist chief looks to operate in a political sphere that he has provisionally re-enchanted for a large segment of the population through kingly rhetorical claims and charisma-producing violent kingly actions.

What's more here is Paxton's astute observation that this charisma of the chief was raised to a yet higher power through "its say over war and death."⁹⁸ Unlike stories told of kings of old, the fascist chief did not really threaten to rain destruction down on anyone at any time, and—contrary perhaps to popular imagination—society in fascist regimes was not in a state of generalized, paralyzing fear. Instead, fascist regimes *specifically targeted* their violence to maximize rhetorical efficacy. Indeed, as Paxton

⁹⁸ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 126.

states, “the terror model has prevailed partly because it serves as an alibi for the people concerned.”⁹⁹ Further, while it is absolutely true that “neither regime [Nazi Germany or Mussolini’s Italy] was conceivable without terror” and that “Nazi violence was omnipresent and highly visible after 1933,” it is no less true that “the publicity of Nazi violence does not mean that support for the regime was coerced.”¹⁰⁰ Paxton goes on to explain that “since the violence was directed at Jews, Marxists, and ‘asocial’ outsiders [...] Germans often felt more gratified than threatened by it.”¹⁰¹ Accordingly, he provides a fascinating statistic that itself shows how German society did not need to be coerced through terror to accept Hitler as sovereign: “The Gestapo was so well supplied with denunciations from zealous (or jealous) citizens that it could get along with a ratio of about one police officer for ten thousand to fifteen thousand citizens.”¹⁰² Far from being random or indiscriminate, fascist violence represented a “well-calculated set of coded messages” that would heighten society’s fears over things like communist violence or the weakness of liberal democracy to protect itself from such threats.

This is precisely what the Legionary violence we explored in the previous section looked like: each assassination or act of domestic terror against Jews and other minorities was carefully rhetorically constructed by Codreanu and his Legionnaires to galvanize ethnic Romanians while simultaneously presenting the Legionary movement as the sole spiritual curative to the nation’s woes. As we saw in the case of Codreanu’s 1924

⁹⁹ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 135.

¹⁰⁰ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 135.

¹⁰¹ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 135.

¹⁰² Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 136.

shooting of Manciu, where nearly 20,000 Romanian lawyers offered their services to defend Codreanu *pro bono*, a significant segment of the Romanian population did, indeed, feel gratified by Legionary violence. This same dynamic can of course also be observed in the earlier episode of the *Văcăreșteni*'s 1923 incarceration on the basis of conspiring to murder various cabinet ministers, which caused the *Văcăreșteni* to become national celebrities and even heroes—not pariahs.

As we shall see further developed through an application of kingship theory, fascist chiefs used selective violence against minorities and, in the case of the Legion, allegedly traitorous politicians, to *rally* their subjects (defined through ethnic and religious purity) around the supposed historical mission of the people that the fascist chief himself represented through his split nature. In terms of religiosity and potential kingship, this galvanization through charismatic violence amounts to a mobilization of the sacred community of Orthodox ethnic Romanians under the banner of the natural leader and supreme *Căpitan*, C.Z. Codreanu.

The second mobilizing passion listed above, the leader's instinctual superiority to reason, is effectively a way to refer to what has been called the "leadership principle," or "*Führerprinzip*," the doctrine infamously used as a legal defense at Nuremberg that the *Führer's* word was immediately law. As will see shortly, this bears an uncanny resemblance to Kantorowicz's medieval, law-centered king's role with relation to Justice: just as the law-centered king himself acted as the very instrument of divinized *Iustitia*, so too in actually existent fascism does the fascist chief—almost through his very body—carry the law (and justice itself) within him. To manifest this law, under the leadership

principle, the fascist chief must simply speak. This is perhaps the clearest articulation of the concept of *lex animata*—the animated, or living, law—in an actually existent political regime. The leader becomes the very law, itself, which can change based on his whims. Here, too, is the fascist chief’s nature split, for by virtue of being such an instrument of justice above “abstract and universal reason,” he stands very clearly outside the legal order and, as such, he can spontaneously *create* the legal order anew every moment. As Paxton explains, for example, “Hitler never formally abolished the constitution drafted in 1919 for the Weimar Republic, and never totally dismantled the normative state in Germany, *though he himself refused to be bound by it.*”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 121.

V. Kingship and the Legion of the Archangel Michael

Armed now with a great deal of historical material and also with certain theoretical introductions in the forms of Griffin, Gentile, and Paxton, we may now finally turn to an application of kingship theory to the case of Codreanu and the Legion of the Archangel Michael. The basic intent here is to try to get at an explanation of Paxton's contemporary and modern fascist passions vis-à-vis these more archaic models of kingship. This final section will operate by first presenting concise exegeses of key elements of kingship theory as contained in the works of Kantorowicz and Graeber & Sahlins before then directly applying each of those elements, respectively, to some of the critical moments we have identified in the history of Romanian interwar fascism and the life of C.Z. Codreanu. We will first look at three stages of kingship from *The King's Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz's magisterial study of medieval political theology in which he seeks to provide a kind of genealogy for the Elizabethan legal doctrine of the king's split nature. We will then turn to Graeber and Sahlins' *On Kings*, a wide-ranging anthropological work with a global scope, for more general theories of kingship that can be applied to the case of Codreanu.

A. *The King's Two Bodies*

Of the various models and elements of medieval and early modern European kingship that Kantorowicz presents over the course of his monumental study, I will focus on the three central ones: (1) Christ-centered, liturgical kingship, (2) law-centered kingship, where the king takes on the character of *lex animata*, and (3) polity-centered

kingship, where the state (through the king) takes on the sempiternality of the church as a political *corpus mysticum*.

Before delving into the details of each of these three facets of kingship for Kantorowicz, it would be useful to keep in mind the ultimate statement that he devotes his monograph to explaining, namely the actual Elizabethan doctrine of the King's Two Bodies. This statement is found in the reports of a 1608 English civil law case called *Calvin's Case*. As the jurists involved explained, "the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic [...] his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People [...] and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to."¹⁰⁴

1. *The King's Two Bodies*: Christ-Centered Kingship

The first model of medieval European kingship that Ernst Kantorowicz presents in *The King's Two Bodies* is that of what he calls "Christ-centered," or liturgical kingship. In this version of kingship (largely as reported by the Norman Anonymous, writing circa 1100 CE), "the king is the perfect impersonator of Christ on earth" insofar as he "is a twinned being, human and divine, just like the God-man."¹⁰⁵ This initial moment in Kantorowicz's theoretico-legal development of European kingship is of utmost importance, as it is in this Christ-centered model of kingship that the duality of the

¹⁰⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 49, 58.

king's nature—which will take on different forms throughout and culminates in the above-quoted passage from Plowden's reports—is first articulated in his analysis. As Kantorowicz explains of this model, “the king a *gemina persona*, human by nature and divine by grace: this was the high-mediaeval equivalent of the later vision of the King's Two Bodies, and also its foreshadowing.”¹⁰⁶ What's more, Kantorowicz identifies this status of *gemina persona* as “paralleling the two natures of the human-divine” which is itself precisely “the prototype of all earthly kingship.”¹⁰⁷ Importantly, though, this is not yet a case of sovereignty by divine right, but rather by grace: “the king is two-natured and geminate by grace only and within Time [...] the terrestrial king *is not*, he *becomes* a twin personality through his anointment and consecration.”¹⁰⁸ In contrast to this terrestrial king, who achieved his divinization through the grace of Christ and through rituals of anointment and consecration, the celestial king (Christ) “was king and *Christus* by his very nature.”¹⁰⁹

We can observe just such an election through grace in the case of Codreanu and the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Indeed, the founding myth of the Legion, where Codreanu experienced a mystical revelation through the icon of the Archangel Michael at the Văcărești prison, operates as a foundational story describing a bestowal of divine grace. As already alluded to in our historical narrative, the description that Codreanu later gives of this experience in *Pentru Legionari* is one where the icon, itself, is active: it

¹⁰⁶ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 87.

¹⁰⁷ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 89. This point finds strong echoes in Sahlins' work in *On Kings*, where he makes the case that “[k]ings are human imitations of gods, rather than gods of kings” (p. 23).

¹⁰⁸ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 47.

revealed *itself* to Codreanu and company in such a way that Codreanu claims he felt spiritually tied to the Archangel Michael, himself, who Codreanu also felt to *still be alive*. This founding myth, then, should be interpreted as Codreanu's framing of himself as having been *chosen* by the Archangel Michael through the icon. Considering the immense public attention (and approval) that the original group of *Văcăreșteni* attracted through their arrest and prosecution, the story of the group's encounter with the icon would have circulated amongst the various proto-fascist cells throughout the country as well as with the general population.

Yet it would seem that this narrative of a bestowal of divine grace behind bars was not quite enough. In 1935, a year before the publication of *Pentru Legionari*, Codreanu shared with some of his close friends and commandants a dream he had allegedly recently experienced. In this dream, the thirty-six-year-old Codreanu was once again a child, finding himself at the Franciscan monastery in Banat, Romania, a site of yearly pilgrimage for thousands that also featured enormous processions carrying a wonder-working icon of Mary. Codreanu was alone in the dream, yet before long a woman clad all in white descended from the heavens like a shining light, in her hands a golden crown. Approaching Codreanu, this angelic figure placed the crown on the young Corneliu's head, declaring "a ta să fie!"—may it be yours!¹¹⁰ Corneliu Zelea's father, Ion Zelea Codreanu, a man who had long been even more impassioned by the dark flames of political mysticism than his son, had no trouble understanding this as a prophetic vision.

¹¹⁰ *Cruciada Românișmului*, anul I, nr. 34 (1 August 1935), 4.

Indeed, Codreanu the elder's reaction to hearing of this dream was to promptly swear fealty to his son by kissing his hand.¹¹¹ Not long after, Ion Zelea would name his son "God the Captain."¹¹² As Codreanu's most recent biographer, Tatiana Niculescu, opines, "the coronation in the dream [...] contained the suggestions of a politico-religious project in which, at least symbolically, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was distinguished as a divine king."¹¹³ This process by which Codreanu was said to have taken on divine grace, moreover, was communicated to the masses through right-wing newspapers such as *Cruciada Româanismului* (The Crusade of Romanianism) and word of mouth.

While the Christ-centered king is a person ontologically twinned by grace for the Norman Anonymous, he is also, "as an effluence of a sacramental and liturgical action performed at the altar," *liturgical*.¹¹⁴ This liturgical element, based on rituals tied specifically "to the altar," allows the Norman Anonymous to also argue that "the bishop, too, is a *gemina persona* so that, in this respect, there is no difference between king and bishop" besides one of rank.¹¹⁵ In these terms, then, the liturgical king can also be understood as a kind of king-priest. In fact, Kantorowicz emphasizes this priestly quality of the liturgical king by presenting the liturgical king as a mediator between heaven and earth. According to the Norman Anonymous, both kings and bishops "are consecrated and sanctified for the purpose that [...] they be saints; that is, outside the earth and

¹¹¹ Tatiana Niculescu, *Mistica rugăciunii și a revolverului: Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu* (București: Humanitas, 2017), 153.

¹¹² Ion Zelea Codreanu, *O mărturie*, (Iași: Tipografia P.B., 1941), 17-24.

¹¹³ Niculescu, *Mistica rugăciunii*, 153.

¹¹⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 55.

outside the world be they set apart as mediators between God and the people, having communion in heaven and moderating their subjects on earth.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, this is the first clear hint one receives from Kantorowicz that the king stands somehow *outside* of his kingdom while still being sufficiently *inside* of it to be able to actually moderate it. Indeed, as Kantorowicz also observes, such a mediating role seems to *necessitate* a conception of the king as twinned in nature, for how could he mediate between the heavens and the earth without partaking somehow in the nature of both? This mediating role, as we saw through Paxton, is crucial for the fascist chief, with Paxton repeatedly emphasizing the importance of the fascist leader’s “*mystical union* with the historic destiny of his people.”¹¹⁷

It is clear that Codreanu operated as a kind of priest-king, human by nature but bestowed with grace by the divine such that he could become “God the Captain,” and with a mission of spiritual and moral rejuvenation. Recall Eliade’s 1935 characterization of Codreanu’s mission: to reconcile Romania with God through a messianic formula.¹¹⁸ We also had occasion to read from Eliade’s autobiography that Codreanu’s mission was in essence *ethical and religious*, and was thus not a political phenomenon.¹¹⁹ These statements of Eliade’s are descriptions of a basically *priestly* and, indeed, *liturgical* figure that is more suited for the altar than to the parliamentary podium. As the ninth of Codreanu’s Ten Legionary Commandments states, “do not become afraid if you do not

¹¹⁶ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 88.

¹¹⁷ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 17 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁸ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 27.

¹¹⁹ Lincoln, *Secrets, Lies, and Consequences*, 44.

receive orders, news, answers, and letters, or if the fight seems to have stagnated. Do not be alarmed, do not take things tragically, *for God is above us, and your leaders know the right path.*”¹²⁰ To be able to interpret the right path vis-à-vis the divine is an unambiguously priestly trait, which in the case of Codreanu is accompanied (or twinned) by the political element. Indeed, such a split is almost logically necessitated by the very way in which Codreanu and the Legion articulated their mission: national spiritual rejuvenation. The chief of such a movement must be split, for a part of him must be able to address the “national” and thus political element while at the same time embodying the priestly, almost shepherd-like role of the ecclesiastical leader (thus accounting for the *spiritual* element). We can see this on display in Codreanu’s careful arrangement of Moța and Marin’s funeral, where Codreanu simultaneously occupied something like the role of chief priest for purposes of the funerary rituals—with himself and the highest-ranking Legionnaires occupying the ecclesiastical space—and that of the political leader whose every move is calculated with an eye towards the next elections. This is an extremely concrete crystallization in actual history of the very notion of *political theology*.

Another key facet to Kantorowicz’s analysis of liturgical kingship, and one that forms the bridge leading to the next form of kingship, is the *halo of perpetuity*. As Kantorowicz wryly describes it, “whenever we capitalize a notion and, in the English language, even change the gender from neuter to feminine, we actually are ‘haloing’ the word or notion *and are indicating its sempiternity as an idea or power.*”¹²¹ Antiquity is

¹²⁰ Codreanu, *Cele Zece Porunci* (emphasis added).

¹²¹ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 79 (emphasis added).

full of such haloings, as can be seen, for example, in Roman references to *Gallia* or *Hispania*, which highlighted the “*Genius*” of each province as well as the notion that they were “something permanent and sempiternal beyond the contingencies of time and corruption.”¹²² Another example of this haloing *par excellence*, and one that will form an integral part of Kantorowicz’s analysis of law-centered kingship, is that of *Iustitia*, which, along with *Prudentia*, “were meant to represent *forces perpetually effective or forms of Being perpetually valid*.”¹²³ As follows, anything—be it person, place, object, or idea—that has been “haloed” has a unique relationship with time “which was different from the one determining the natural life on earth.”¹²⁴

2. *The King’s Two Bodies*: Law-Centered Kingship

The second key moment in Kantorowicz’s analysis for our purposes is that of law-centered kingship, the form that follows the Christ-centered, liturgical model of the Norman Anonymous. In this form of kingship, as Kantorowicz’s name for it clearly indicates, not only does the king’s relationship to Law become paramount, but the legitimacy of the king is now actually articulated in terms of *divine right* as opposed to mere grace. Thus, the earlier notion of *rex imago/vicarius Christi* gives way to *rex imago/vicarius Dei*. In this way, European political conceptualization followed the post-Saint Francis theological shift from an object-centered (and therefore liturgical) “realism” to an “inner haze of subject-centered mysticism” whereby the God-man, Christ, seemed

¹²² Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 79.

¹²³ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 79.

¹²⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 84.

to largely melt into the God the Father.¹²⁵ In other words, in the political sphere, the Christological model was replaced by a “theocratic-juristical” notion of government in which the manhood of both deity and king begins to slip away, together with the “quasi-priestly and sacramental” essence of liturgical kingship.¹²⁶

Far and away the most important aspect of this next model of kingship for the purposes of an application to fascism is that of the king as *lex animata*, the animated law. With the concept of justice itself having taken on a “halo” of its own to become the pseudo-goddess *Iustitia*, the king in this model becomes “the very idea of Justice which itself is bound to Law and yet above the Law because it is the end of all Law. Not the Prince rules, but Justice rules through or in a Prince who is the instrument of Justice and [...] is at the same time the *lex animata*.”¹²⁷ For all intents and purposes, this is a description of the *Führerprinzip*—the pseudo-legal Nazi doctrine that the *Führer’s* words were immediately law—*avant la lettre*. However, it is important to note that the king, even if he is the incarnation of the immortal idea of Justice and her *pontifex maximus* on Earth, is not yet “the exponent of the immortal nation.”¹²⁸ In order for this to occur, the “halo” that had already descended upon Justice would also have to descend upon the state as a whole, rendering it, too, a participant in sempiternal time, and creating yet another role for the king that served as its head.

¹²⁵ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 93.

¹²⁶ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 93.

¹²⁷ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 96-97.

¹²⁸ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 143.

Codreanu's status as the undisputed, supreme leader of this mass religio-political movement unambiguously points to him, too, being an instrument of mystico-fascist Justice and thus of being the *lex animata* itself. As we already know from the first and the ninth of the ten Legionary commandments respectively, "the Legionnaire believes in nothing but the order and the word of his Chief" and the chief knows the right path for the people vis-à-vis God.¹²⁹ For some further elucidation here, we may turn to some of Codreanu's own reflections on monarchy. As he writes in *Pentru Legionari*, "a monarch does not do whatever he wants. A monarch is small when he does whatever he wants and is great when he does what is necessary. There exists a trajectory of the life of a people. A monarch is great and good when he maintains this trajectory. He is small or bad when he departs from this trajectory of the life of the people or opposes himself to it."¹³⁰ The monarch who properly understands his privileged relationship to the mystical destiny of the people, then, *cannot* do injustice, for whatever the good monarch does derives itself not from his own mortal desires, but from his privileged connection to the mystical entity—the *ecclesia*—that is the people, themselves: for Codreanu, if the monarch maintains this line, his every action must logically be just vis-à-vis the people and their progress along their metaphysical trajectory towards, presumably, a national spiritual rebirth. The righteous fascist monarch, as a natural expression of the people, definitionally cannot do wrong by the people.

¹²⁹ Codreanu, *Cele Zece Porunci*.

¹³⁰ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 337.

3. *The King's Two Bodies*: Polity-Centered Kingship

Curiously, the process by which the state took on the churchly characteristic of an immortal mystical body—a *corpus mysticum*—occurred through the rather profane *fisc*, or the material assets of the crown that were of interest to all: that is, the *quasi sacrae* or public. With regard to these pseudo-sacred things (the *fisc*), the king was “unaffected by Time and its prescriptive power [...] he was beyond Time and therewith perpetual or sempiternal.”¹³¹ It is through this sempiternality of the king with regard to the *fisc* that Kantorowicz develops the notion of polity-centered kingship. Kantorowicz argues that for a king to be a *gemina persona* with regard to time in the same way as he is with regard to the law (standing both outside and inside out of it) inheres to rulership, itself. It is even precisely the *fisc*, as an “extra-feudal realm within the realm, an ‘eminent domain’ the continuity of which, beyond the life of an individual king, had become a matter of common and public interest” that causes this new gemination of the king’s nature into one part that is subject to time and another that was beyond time.¹³² Following this, an image of the king as “king feudal” and “king fiscal” emerges which neatly maps onto the ultimate model of King Body Natural (feudal, personal, immanent) and King Body Politic (fiscal, collective, transcendent).

With this notion of the *fisc* in place, it became possible for the state to begin taking on ontological elements of the Church for itself. Kantorowicz explains that a theological shift occurred in European Christendom at the time where the Eucharist

¹³¹ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 171.

¹³² Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 172.

became the *natural body* of Christ while the Church as an institution became Christ's *corpus mysticum*. Christ, though, unambiguously remains the "head" of this sempiternal *corpus mysticum*. Indeed, the formula for this relationship that Kantorowicz provides describes the Church as *corpus mysticum cuius caput Christus*: the mystical body of which Christ is the head.¹³³ As happens frequently in Kantorowicz's analysis, these theological conceptualizations become analogized to the state in a very real way, with Lucas de Penna having made the argument that "[j]ust as men are joined together spiritually in the spiritual body, the head of which is Christ [...] so are men joined together morally and politically in the *respublica*, which is a body the head of which is the Prince."¹³⁴ Moreover, according to German philosopher-mystic Nicholas of Cusa (writing in the first half of the 1400s), the king in this polity-centered model "was both above and below the body politic of the realm, just as the thirteenth-century king was both above and under the law."¹³⁵

As we have already seen, Codreanu styled himself as the mediator *par excellence* between the Romanian people and their destiny, in a manner very similar to the various mediating roles that the king is given throughout Kantorowicz's study. Echoing his previously quoted comments on the nature of monarchy, Codreanu also wrote in *Pentru Legionari* that

national consciousness is a state of internal illumination [...] this state could be directly called a state of national ecumenism [...] In this case, the chief is no longer a "Lord" or "dictator" who does whatever he wants, who leads

¹³³ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 207.

¹³⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 216.

¹³⁵ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 231.

however he pleases. He is the expression of this invisible state of spirit. He no longer does whatever he wants, but rather what needs to be done. And he is led not by personal interests, nor by collective ones, but rather by *the interests of the eternal nation*.¹³⁶

Here, Codreanu has not only directly connects himself personally with the *eternal nation*—the haloed *patria* of Kantorowicz’s polity-centered kings—but he has also claimed himself to be the *instrument* of these interests: elements of all three of Kantorowicz’s kingship models are present in this quote. The chief does not lead arbitrarily, but rather he leads as the instrument of national destiny. This also further reinforces the notion that the king *is* the law, as we saw in the previous section: existing directly as “the expression of this invisible state of spirit,” the fascist chief *is* the *lex animata* for his subjects.

Clearly, then, Codreanu was also of “two bodies” insofar as there was the physical body that could be locked up in a prison cell awaiting trial but also another body which was claimed to be directly “an expression of this invisible state of spirit [national consciousness].” Sandu also straightforwardly points out that Codreanu styled himself as “the only mediator between the love for the country that was built in the previous century and the masses that erupted onto the political scene after the Great War.”¹³⁷ Furthermore, Sandu refers to this mediating role as a twinned one that combines “the charisma of the chief” with role of “great priest of the national religion,” namely Legionary fanaticism.¹³⁸ Thus, Codreanu can truly be understood as a kind of split king insofar as he occupied this

¹³⁶ Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari*, 262.

¹³⁷ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 294.

¹³⁸ Sandu, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier*, 294.

double role, and in the same way that Kantorowicz described the liturgical king, for example, to share in elements characteristic to the bishop.

Another important consideration with regard to Kantorowicz's work is that of one's ability to martyr oneself for a state now conceived of as a *corpus mysticum* with the king as its organicist head. While the ancient conception of the *patria*—the “haloed” polity—had largely died out by the feudal period in Europe, it was unsurprisingly preserved by the church, from whence it would eventually come to be grafted onto the ontological edifice of the state. Indeed, the Churchly conception of the *patria*, where one's true *patria* was the Kingdom of God, an invisible polity, would serve as the exact model for the state. As the result of a complex process by which these theological conceptions were manipulated by the jurists of the early Renaissance, “the mystical body of the Church the head of which is Christ has been replaced [...] by the mystical body of the *respublica* the head of which is the Prince.”¹³⁹ Before the state reacquired this haloed element of *patria*, the only “political” self-sacrifice available was for the realm's Lord himself, that is, *pro fide* or *pro domino*.

Yet as “the crown of martyrdom began to descend on the war victims of the secular state,” aided as this process was by the political borrowing of churchly notions of *patria*, it became possible for one to die for the state, itself, and not just for the king or lord: *pro patria mori*. This occurred partially thanks to the king's having been conceived of as the saintly instrument of Justice. As Kantorowicz explains of early-Renaissance

¹³⁹ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 261.

France, “to fight for the body politic of France meant, at the same time, to fight for the cause of justice as represented by the holy king,” which would grant the same spiritual benefits as those claimed by a crusader.¹⁴⁰ In these terms, then, self-sacrifice for the state as *patria* with the king as its *caput* came to equal “the self-sacrifice of the canonized martyrs for the *corpus mysticum* of the Church, the head of which was Christ.”¹⁴¹

In our historical narrative, we encountered a major episode of explicit crusading martyrdom in the case of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin’s deaths in Spain. We have also established, as we saw in Moța’s farewell letter to Codreanu, that at play throughout Legionary ideology were two Romanias: the corrupted one that actually existed on Earth with King Carol II as its head of state, and the transcendental, sempiternal *corpus mysticum* towards the realization of which the Legion claimed to be fighting. According to the Legionary propaganda surrounding the repatriation and funerals of Moța and Marin—most notably the so-called Moța and Marin Oath—the two Legionary martyrs of course died not for King Carol’s Romania, but for Codreanu’s *corpus mysticum*, which was (perhaps paradoxically) awaiting *resurrection* from the beyond. Interestingly, given the inchoateness of Codreanu’s only ever aspirational kingship, Moța and Marin’s deaths in Spain can be said to have occurred both *pro patria* and *pro domine*, for Codreanu—almost in his very body—*was himself* the concrete representative and perhaps instantiation—or guarantor—of the *corpus mysticum*, which was the true, Legionary Romania that needed to be ‘resurrected’ through battle against the diabolical enemy and

¹⁴⁰ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 256.

¹⁴¹ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 256.

the necessary sacrifice such crusading entails. Recall that the main thrust of the Moța and Marin oath was to be ready for death particularly “for the resurrection of my people.”¹⁴² The “people” that needed resurrecting is precisely the *corpus mysticum* represented and embodied by the split, aspirational king Codreanu. As we have shown, then, Codreanu simultaneously embodied critical aspects of all three of Kantorowicz’s models of medieval kingship: he was at once the priestly king, the just king, and the polity-centered king. He merely lacked a throne.

B. *On Kings*

We will now turn to David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins’ *On Kings*, a collection of essays individually written by the two authors on assorted elements of kingship in world history, to identify some key elements of kingship for the purposes of better understanding the nature of fascism. It should be noted at the outset that Graeber and Sahlins’ book differs radically from *The King’s Two Bodies* in both scope and subject matter. While Kantorowicz’s monograph is a sweeping theologico-juridical account of European monarchy’s development over the course of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the essays in *On Kings* are much more circumscribed yet varied anthropological analyses of kingship in specific societies, none of which are European. Nonetheless, the insights on kingship—especially *divine* kingship—that can be gleaned from Graeber and Sahlins’ case studies are of great potential value to an analysis of interwar European fascism. We will present three crucial elements of kingship as put

¹⁴² Palaghiță, *Istoria Mișcării Legionare*, 91.

forth in *On Kings* which we will use to analyze key moments in Codreanu's and the Legion's history: (1) the dynamics distinguishing divine kingship from sacred kingship, which includes the very basis of sovereignty; and (2) stranger-kingship; (3) myth.

1. *On Kings*: Divine Kingship, Sacred Kingship, and Sovereignty

In their co-written introductory essay to the volume, Graeber & Sahlins unambiguously declare from the outset that “a privileged relation to the metapersonal rulers of the human fate is the *raison d'être* of earthly social power” before going on to identify this privileged relation as charisma “in the original, god-infused sense.”¹⁴³ We have already encountered something like this notion of the ruler as fundamentally a *mediator*—in this case between humanity and the otherworldly forces dictating human fate—in Kantorowicz, where the liturgical king mediated affairs between the heavens and the earth, just as the law-centered king was the mediator of Justice, itself. We also recall that, according to Paxton's analysis of fascism's “passions,” this ability on the part of the leader to incarnate the mystical destiny of the people as a whole is critical to the creation of the “emotional lava” undergirding fascism's always potentially mass appeal.

Graeber and Sahlins also dedicate a portion of this introductory essay to the all-important distinction between *divine* kingship and *sacred* kingship, a distinction that is in one way or another operative throughout their book. Divine kingship is directly defined as the essence of sovereignty and is thus intimately connected to the above-mentioned idea regarding the king's privileged position vis-à-vis metapersonal powers. For Graeber

¹⁴³ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 3.

and Sahlins, divine kingship is “the ability to act as if one were a god; to step outside the confines of the human, and return to rain favor, or destruction, with arbitrariness and impunity.”¹⁴⁴ While this power can be justified by a claim of the king’s that he is a literal embodiment of a god, “it could easily be that by acting in this way, the king himself becomes a metahuman being.”¹⁴⁵ In this way, Graeber and Sahlins’ divine king differs from Kantorowicz’s mediating, Christ-like king, who became divine only through the grace afforded by ritual consecration: the divine king can achieve this status simply by *doing*. Sacred kingship, then, represents the other side of this equation, an attempt on the part of the king’s subjects at “confining, controlling, and limiting” unaccountable divine power through systems of taboo whereby the king is increasingly set apart (that is, made sacred). This process of sacralizing the king and limiting his arbitrary sovereign power is accordingly called “adverse sacralization,” which has regicide as its ultimate form.¹⁴⁶

C.Z. Codreanu in effect combined both of the approaches to achieving divine kingship: through propaganda of the word, Codreanu was bestowed with grace by the Archangel Michael and his heavenly emissaries as Kantorowicz’s liturgical king was, while through violent propaganda of the deed, or *fapt întâmplat*, he created a kingly, charismatic aura simply “by acting in this way,” or by *doing*. It should be recalled at this juncture that the fundamental rupture at National Christian Defense League between Codreanu and his mentor Cuza was a disagreement over the efficacy of *violent direct*

¹⁴⁴ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁶ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 8.

action and the accompanying ideology of the *fapt întâmplat*. Notably, for Codreanu, the propaganda of the deed almost always precedes the propaganda of the word: for example, the founding myth involving finding the icon in Văcărești was a retrospective tale that was only possible because the group was put in prison for plotting violent retribution against government officials in the first place. Action always comes first, and with it the dangerous charisma of the aspirational divine king; as we shall see in the next section, that Codreanu's propaganda of the deed invariably manifested itself in violence can be directly mapped onto certain key facets of kingship according to Graeber and Sahlins.

David Graeber's essay on divine kingship in the Nilotic Shilluk tribe also offers a comprehensive description of the relationship between divine and sacred kingship as well as of sovereignty, itself. Graeber argues that, seeing as sovereignty is the ability to arbitrarily commit violence with impunity, something like divine kingship is a constitutive moment of society. This is because "in order to become a constitutive principle of society, a sovereign must stand outside of it."¹⁴⁷ Thus, the divine king establishes himself as above the conventional morality of the given society precisely by wantonly violating moral and ethical norms. In this way, "he can be treated as the constituent principle of a system of justice or morality" since "no creature capable of creating a system of justice can itself be already bound by the system it creates."¹⁴⁸ This is in effect the same position Kantorowicz described in which the king is capable of mediating and, indeed, establishing Justice by virtue of simultaneously existing both

¹⁴⁷ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 74.

¹⁴⁸ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 74.

beyond and within its strictures. However, the main thrust of Graeber's essay on the Shilluk is that the violent power of divine kingship must be limited by the taboos and abstractions of adverse sacralization. In the case of the Shilluk, the reduction of Dak (the divine Shilluk representation of arbitrary divine violence) back into Nyikang (the sacralized metapersonal fetish king) at the end of the elaborate installation ritual signals the bottling up of divinity and its arbitrarily violent power.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, in his role as sacred mediator, the Shilluk king's very body becomes a magical charm for the continued prosperous existence of the realm and "any danger to the king's bodily integrity is thus a threat to the safety and prosperity of the kingdom as a whole."¹⁵⁰ The obverse of this is, of course, that if the king's physical health begins to decay, the health and equilibrium of the entire realm is threatened. It is for this reason that the Shilluk king "was surrounded by executioners whose role was eventually to kill him" in the case of his displaying any mortal infirmities that could threaten the prosperity of the entire kingdom, itself.¹⁵¹

2. *On Kings*: Stranger Kingship & Myth

Marshall Sahlins' analysis of the phenomenon of stranger-kingship in the book's third chapter also helps shed light on interwar European fascism. In particular, stranger-kingship is relevant for these purposes insofar as it helps to further illuminate the notion of the king establishing his sovereign legitimacy through "exploits," as Luc de Heusch called them, which is of course a clear corollary to divine kingship writ large. These

¹⁴⁹ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 122.

¹⁵⁰ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 131.

¹⁵¹ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 134.

exploits are effectively crimes that the hero-king commits against kin or against the moral status quo of the society in question. As Sahlins quotes from Georges Balandier,

the defiance of the fundamental principles of society is the mark of an exceptional being [...] He has denied the ancient order; he has acquired an autonomy which can only be explained by the possession of extraordinary powers [...] It is on the basis of these powers that he will construct *outside* the prevailing form a new society subject to his law only.¹⁵²

After he establishes his privileged relationship to common morality—and thus his legitimacy—through these crimes, the king must be “captured,” which is to say that his powers must be domesticated, thereby “demonstrating his capacity to rule people.”¹⁵³ We should note here that this process is mirrored exactly in Codreanu’s organizational efforts in the 1930s, specifically the creation of the Iron Guard and *Totul Pentru Țară*, to serve as the respectable, political face of the movement. Not only does this conceptualization clearly mirror the previously discussed dynamics between unbridled divine kingship and “bottled up” sacred kingship, but it also closely tracks onto Max Weber’s formula for charisma, according to which the warrior-hero-leader’s charisma becomes routinized through the deeply bureaucratic reality of actually running a state. The stranger-king, then, need not necessarily be from a literal foreign land: under my reading, he can just as well be a “stranger” insofar as he is a stranger to the political and moral status quo of the society in question. He proves his metaphysical superiority to the status quo by his exploits (or crimes) that come from *outside* the established political realm, thereby also

¹⁵² Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 156.

¹⁵³ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 153.

achieving a privileged status from which to claim (and found) a new politico-moral reality.

The highly public and carefully targeted violence with which the Legion began its existence and which continued to sustain it over the course of a decade represents precisely such norm-shattering “exploits.” Not only does Codreanu’s originary “charismatic” act of violence—the 1924 killing of Manciu in open court—clearly map onto this model of divine kingship as achieved through *doing*, but it also maps onto this notion of stranger-kingship insofar as it represents an utter disregard for established morality. In a very real way, it shocks the conscience to imagine a lawyer assassinating a defendant in open court, not to mention that lawyer’s subsequent acquittal! Again, though, notwithstanding—or precisely because of—the “shock value” of such an act, Codreanu garnered for himself unparalleled public support and sympathy: for nearly 20,000 lawyers to offer to defend him *pro bono* after such a brazen act is no small thing. It is in fact the brazenness and the total disregard for the moral status quo that is perhaps most important, and by *getting away with it*, Codreanu demonstrated from the beginning that he could violate even the most important laws without consequence, and that his violence did not serve to make him *immoral* but rather to render him as being *above* morality, and therefore potentially able to constitute a new moral order—for, according to Legionary rhetoric, such violence was in defense of the true Romania that had been captured and disfigured by international Jewry.

For our final consideration, we will look at how Sahlins discusses myth in this chapter, which, as we saw in our exploration of Roger Griffin’s thought, is a crucial

component of any fascist ideology. At issue in particular here is the quality of myth as *paradigmatically* real. That is, we are less concerned with the historical facticity of the myth as we are with the myth's subsequent *history-making* power. Referring to legendary stories of the Yombe people about the founding of their society through kin-killings, Sahlins explains that “[i]t is unlikely that these killings actually occurred; it is more likely they indicate that events which never happened can continue to have historic effects. *Traditions need not have actually happened in order to then actually happen.*”¹⁵⁴ For Sahlins, this is encapsulated in the distinction between a historical event and a *happening*, a distinction that itself points to the notion that “nothing happens except as it is meaningfully appropriated and disseminated” by a culture.¹⁵⁵ Myths, then, are “paradigmatic precedents” for a culture insofar as they *make* history by virtue of serving as a model for future generations to follow or imitate—this is all, of course, regardless of the historical facticity of these myths. Additionally, the instrumentalization of “paligenetic” myth, as we recall from Roger Griffin, is one of the fundamental elements of fascism according to the new consensus.

With the greatest respect to Romania and to Romanians everywhere, it is not particularly controversial to point out that neither the Romanian nation nor its predecessor states, the principalities, ever experienced anything that could conventionally be referred to as a golden age: at least not in terms of *historical facticity*. In fact, in a retrospectively very ironic historiographical turn, it is precisely the interwar period of

¹⁵⁴ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 157 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁵ Graeber & Sahlins, *On Kings*, 187.

Romanian history—the period which we’ve spent the last 50 pages observing Codreanu and the Legion bemoan as completely corrupted and disfigured, and so on—that has since been looked back on as a brief golden period (if one closes one’s eyes to widespread anti-Semitic violence, nationwide general strikes, political assassinations, royal dictatorships, and similar troubles), with Bucharest having been admiringly referred to as “the little Paris.”

Regardless, notwithstanding this dearth of historically factual mythical golden periods, Romanian fascists rooted themselves firmly in myth as “paradigmatic precedent.” Interestingly, the kind of paradigmatic mythic precedent that Codreanu and his fascists seemed to have in fact been using was really one of *noble resistance*. Indeed, a fairly compelling analogy can be drawn between historical Romanian resistance to the Ottoman Empire and interwar fascist self-perception as similarly “resisting” the allegedly nefarious influence of the Jewry, cast as a kind of foreign invading force.¹⁵⁶ Further, as we recall from Romania’s immediate post-WWI context, the newly emerged Greater Romania styled itself as a bulwark against the encroaching threat of Bolshevism from the East. This Bolshevism, as we saw towards the beginning of this report vis-à-vis the Romanian army’s destruction of Soviet Hungary, was almost immediately associated with Jews, hence the ubiquity of the phrase “Judeo-Bolshevik” in fascist ideology and rhetoric. In Sahlins’ terms, then, Codreanu took the paradigmatic, mythic precedent of Romanian resistance and, by adopting for himself the grace of the distinctly mythical

¹⁵⁶ This anti-Ottoman resistance is perhaps most famously crystallized in the folkloric figure of the *haiduc*, Robin Hood-style bandits who would raid Ottoman encampments and distribute the plunder to the Romanian peasantry.

figure of the Archangel Michael (the warrior-angel who militantly defended the faithful) through both word and (violent) deed, succeeded in casting himself as the mythically-charged, kingly vehicle for the spiritual rejuvenation of the sacred Romanian nation.

VI. Conclutory Remarks

This report has attempted to lay out the preliminary scholarly groundwork towards an analysis of European fascism as a form of divine kingship for the modern era. This has been done through a case study of a fascism that admittedly lends itself particularly well to such an analysis considering the very explicit rhetorical and ideological appeals that Codreanu and the Legion made to sacralized politics, organic and kingly leadership, the immortal nation, and the Christian faith. It is, however, my position that while the Legion of the Archangel Michael may be the example *par excellence* of fascism-as-kingship, a similarly fruitful analysis can be performed of fascism writ large. Indeed, the kind of emotional lava that Robert Paxton and others correctly identify as undergirding fascism's attractiveness is, I ultimately argue, a vestige of divine kingship. A future project could work towards conceptualizing this further by exploring the dynamics of Karl Jasper's Axial Shift in terms of political figurations: the strange yet seemingly persistent historical tension at play throughout this report of the archaic versus the distinctly modern could be further explained in terms of the fascist chief attempting to *put back together* something that was torn asunder during the Axial Age. As such, I accordingly conclude this report with the same quotation from Hegel that Robert Bellah uses to begin his seismic study of the history of human religiosity, *Religion in Human Evolution*: "[t]hose moments which the spirit appears to have outgrown still belong to it

in the depths of its present. Just as it has passed through all its moments in history, so also it must pass through them again in the present.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), ix.

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