

SRS - Panel 1

Organiser: James Kapalo

Hidden Chapels, Hidden Bodies: Underground Religious life in Central and Eastern Europe

This panel explores the phenomenon of underground or hidden places of worship in Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. During communism, numerous churches and religious groups operated underground, creating alternative spaces in which to conduct liturgical practices, hold prayer meetings and hide pastors and priests. In some countries, these subterranean chapels were the product of earlier waves of repression instigated for example by Tsarist authorities and the Antonescu regime in Romania . Although the religious underground has been the subject of research both during communism and in the post-communist era, little attention has been paid to the significance of the spatial and material dimension of the relocation of religious practice and the redistribution of material religion this produced. The papers in this panel explore aspects of religious authority, cosmology and charisma associated with the transformation of religious lifeworlds brought about by repressive regimes. Each of the papers draws on the visual and textual “evidence” of places of worship collated and curated by secret police agents and informers and today held in the archives of the state security services and related archival collections.

The papers in this panel form part of the ERC project *Religious Minorities and Creative Agency: Hidden Galleries in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe* (ERC Project no. 677355).

Paper 1. Anca Şincan

The afterlife of Bishop Evloghie Oța’s dead body and its disputed ownership

In 1979, in a house in the outskirts of Bucharest that served as a hidden monastery for the outlawed Old Calendarist Orthodox Church, unbeknown to all but a few close followers, Bishop Evloghie Oța died. He was interred quickly and in complete secrecy by his followers under the altar of the hidden church in his religious garments sitting on the bishop’s throne. A few days later, when the religious service for his death was performed the neighbors found out and the community’s Orthodox priest let the Patriarchate know about the Bishop’s death. In turn, the Department for Religious Denominations and the Secret Police were informed about the interment and proceeded to request the body. Sometime after, the Secret Police came and destroyed the church, disinterred the body and took the remains away.

Based on archival research in the Secret Police and the Secretary for Religious Affairs Archives the paper discusses the symbolism that was placed over Evloghie Oța’s body by external factors. A theological understanding of the body clashed with a secular one, (the body of a bishop graces the cathedral he served), the interment of the body of an outlawed priest had to be controlled by the state to prevent future uses of the body and the hidden church that concealed it, not to mention the possible public health issues. The presentation will also account for the role Oța’s body had in legitimizing the sacrality of the hidden monastery and the way in which new meanings are forced upon the house by state authorities and its inhabitants.

Paper 2

James Kapaló

Incense and Alcohol: Inochentist Subterranean Communities in Interwar Romania

From the 1920s onwards, news stories and features on Inochentism, a Romanian home-grown religious movement, appeared frequently in the press. These pieces were often sensationalist with shocking reports of underground orgies, dead bodies and the entrapment of innocent young virgins. The truth of these stories, however, was rarely, if ever, verifiable. Inochentism in Interwar Romania appeared both mysterious and dangerous, fascinating and repugnant. Considerable scholarly attention has been dedicated to the experience of neo-protestant groups during this period, who due to their pacifism and refusal to participate in political and public life and their international connections, were the target of state security agencies. Inochentism, on the other hand, which emerged from within the ethnic and religious majority Romanian Orthodox community, was the cause of “moral panic” and the inspiration for a “self-orientalising” fascination with the Bessarabian peasantry on the part of intellectuals. In this paper, I bring together popular media, literary and secret police accounts of the subterranean practices and life of Inochentists in interwar Romania in order to inform an understanding of the symbolism and power of the phenomena of the religious underground in twentieth century Eastern Europe.

Paper 3

Dumitru Lisnic

Religious millennialism and “anti-Soviet conspiracy” in Inochentist underground chapels in post-war Moldavian SSR

After the establishment of Moldavian SSR (Bessarabia), the Soviet regime proved to be incapable in eliminating some of the elements of peasant culture that were perceived by the Communist Party as being at the root of countryside’s “backwardness”. From the point of view of the Communist regime, alongside neo-Protestant Christian groups, Inochentism, an indigenous version of Eastern Christianity, was one of the most *dangerous enemies of the village’s progress*. Soviet repressive policies against Protestant “sectarians” and their culture have been researched both by Western academia and by scholars from Eastern Europe, while the case of Inochentism remains almost unknown. Likewise, the material dimension of religious minorities’ culture in Soviet society has been ignored by researchers, despite the fact that without it a complete understanding of many aspects of underground religious networks is impossible. The data collected by Soviet secret police about Inochentist religious life and their religious objects that were confiscated and added to the KGB files as incriminating evidence, represent important sources for research on the Inochentist underground chapels. In addition, KGB officers produced their own visual “religious” material including the reconstruction of Inochentist religious rituals.

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the image of the Inochentist underground network and spaces in Soviet propaganda materials in the 1950s and the KGB records from the time in order to inform our understanding of the state mechanisms that worked toward the marginalisation of religious minorities and how religious minorities responded creatively through the construction of their alternative religious spaces.

SRS – Panel 2

Religious Minorities and Secret Police Archives

This panel explores the significance of the secret police archives of for the study of religious minorities and religious dissent movements. In Romania, the archives of the Siguranța and the Securitate have been used extensively by researchers to trace the history of persecution and collaboration of mainstream and majority Churches during the twentieth century in the search for “the historical truth.” This panel explores alternative methodological approaches to the archives when approaching the history of minority religious groups whose experience of state repression differed from that of the majority Churches.

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Paper 1.

Iuliana Cindrea

Gender relations within the Stilist community as reflected in the documents of the Romanian Secret Police Archives.

The Stilists, or Old Calendarists, are a religious group that emerged in 1924 as a response to the calendar reform conducted by the Romanian Orthodox Church. Stilism became very popular especially amongst peasants in Romanian Moldavia and Bessarabia. Hounded by both the state and the Orthodox Church, leaders and members of Stilist groups found shelter inside caves or woods. Largely overlooked by scholars in Romania, the history of this religious group represents one of the most interesting cases of the preservation of religious identity in the context of two successive totalitarian regimes.

The archives of the former Romanian Secret Police reveal important information about the community, including its so-called rebellious activities and its active advocates, many of whom were women. This paper will discuss the importance of women within the Stilist community, not only in terms of membership, but also in relation to the impact they had on the creation of various narratives surrounding the life of the community, as well as in the production of materials, such as icons or hand-written prayer books, most of which were later confiscated or destroyed by the police.

Paper 2.

Aleksandra Djuric-Milovanovic

Researching the Nazarene community in the Yugoslav archives

The Nazarenes were the first and largest neo-Protestant group in Yugoslavia. They were founded in Switzerland in 1832 by the former Calvinist minister Samuel Heinrich Fröhlich and rapidly expanded to areas of Southeastern Europe during late 19th century. After World War I, the spread of the Nazarenes in the newly-formed Yugoslav state occupied much political and ecclesiastic attention. This emerging religious community emphasized pacifism, the forbearance of oaths and child baptism, and the need to separate themselves from the world. From the very beginning, the Nazarenes were in constant conflict with authorities and often severely persecuted. The paper presents archival research results on the Nazarene community in communist Yugoslavia, including documents of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs and the Secret Police Archives in Belgrade. Available documents reveal important information about this community during communist years, attitude of the state towards religious minorities, state control and models of repression.

Dr. Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović is a research fellow at the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade, Serbia. Her research has been primarily focused on the anthropology of religion and church history, especially with regards to neo-Protestant movements and Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe. From 2008, she has conducted extensive ethnographic and archival research on religious minorities in Serbia, Romania, and the United States. Her book *Double Minorities in Serbia. Distinctive Aspects of the Religion and Ethnicity of the Romanians in Vojvodina* was published in 2015 by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In 2017 she published co-edited volume *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York).

Paper 3.

Agnes Hesz

Vernacular religion in secret police archives – methodological concerns

As an analytical concept, vernacular religion refers to “religion as it is lived” (Primiano 1995). It understands religiosity as an interactive process, an ongoing intersubjective negotiation and interpretation of religious ideas and practices. Vernacular religion is thus an ongoing creative process during which individual believers and the local religious groups they are part of mould their ways of religiosity – often in the face of, and in interaction with church or state authorities. Researchers mostly access vernacular religion through fieldwork methods sensitive enough to capture its complexity. This paper, however, will focus on a special type of archival material, the documents of the Hungarian and Romanian state security archives, and explores the ways in which this rich and versatile material could be read as source for the vernacular religiosity of minority religious groups under dictatorships, along with the methodological concerns of this endeavour.