

Conflict and Everyday Life at the Legionary Cultural Centre in Iași (1924-1938)

Roland CLARK

The Legion of the Archangel Michael was one of the largest and longest lived fascist movements in interwar Europe. Established by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899-1938) in 1927, the Legion could boast roughly 272.000 members a decade later¹. Fascinated by the movement's use of religious rituals, folk costumes, political assassination, and its cult of the dead, early historians characterized the Legion as a "religious revival" and a "terrorist organization," sometimes concluding that it should not even be classified as fascist but as a curiosity of Europe's "periphery"². Scholarly attitudes towards the Legion shifted in 1984, after Armin Heinen demonstrated persuasively that it was a fascist social movement comparable to German Nazism or Italian Fascism, with a mass following and clear political goals³. More recently, historians influenced by the growing interest in the "mythological core" of European fascisms have looked more closely at how legionaries transformed their ideology into a movement. Constantin Iordachi argues that messianic ideas about national regeneration found in nineteenth century Romanian nationalism gathered legionaries around Codreanu as a leader endowed with unique charismatic qualities⁴. Valentin Săndulescu's recent work points to a coherent ideology focused around creating a "new man" and a "new order".⁵

¹ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail"*. *Mișcare socială și organizație politică*, traducere [in Romanian] Cornelia și Delia Eșianu, București, Editura Humanitas, 2006, p. 357.

² Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi*, București, Editura 100+1 Grammar, 1996; Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, *Garda de Fier: Organizație teroristă de tip fascist*, București, Editura Politică, 1980; Eugen Weber, *Romania*, in *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, eds. Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965, p. 501-574; Emanuel Turczynski, *The Background of Romanian Fascism*, in *Native Fascism in the Successor States 1918-1945*, ed. Peter F. Sugar, Santa Barbara, ABC-Clio, 1971, p. 101-111.

³ Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*

⁴ Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the "Archangel Michael" in Inter-war Romania*, Trondheim, Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004; idem, *God's Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania*, in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 316-357.

⁵ Valentin Săndulescu, *Fascism and its Quest for the 'New Man': The Case of the Romanian Legionary Movement*, in "Studia Hebraica", 4, 2004, p. 349-361; Valentin Săndulescu,

The leader-cult and the ideology of regeneration were certainly central elements of the Legion's thought-world, but Iordachi's and Săndulescu's research also suggests that there was more to legionary activism than ideology. This article explores the everyday lives of Romanian fascism by following legionary activities at one particular building in Iași. The *Cămin Cultural Creștin* (Christian Cultural Centre) in Iași was built by fascist volunteers with donated and hand-made materials, in a project which began in 1924 and ended in 1928. It was renovated several times over the next decade because of makeshift elements in the original construction and following major damage done during battles with the police in November 1933. This building served as a residence, office, printing press, meeting hall, and battle-ground for the Legion, and became a symbol through which the fascist community in Iași defined itself. Life at the *Cămin* shows moments of conflict amongst fascists, and between fascists and the police. It reveals a lively community based on shared resources, privation, and conviviality. The *Cămin* was a place where Legionaries met to discuss what they believed, to encourage one another, and to plan strategy. Its story illuminates fragments of life as a Legionary which are all too often forgotten when one scholars focus on ideology or organizational structure.

The history of everyday life, or *Alltagsgeschichte* as it is known in Germany, emerged as a distinct historical methodology in the mid-1970s, pioneered by historians such as Alf Lüdtke and Hans Medick. Disillusioned with the structuralism of German social history, the practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* hoped that "by exploring social history in its experiential or subjective dimensions, conventional distinctions between the "public" and the "private" might be transcended, and a way of making the elusive connection between the political and cultural realms finally be found."⁶ Alf Lüdtke presented *Alltagsgeschichte* as a form of history from below that pays a great deal of attention to where and amongst whom something happened, was thought, or believed.⁷ This article exploits Lüdtke's approach to contextualize the Legion's early growth within the city of Iași and in one particular building where many key events in the movement's history took place. Understanding the social and symbolic meaning of this building is crucial for explaining how legionaries could claim to be the legitimate successors of the student movement of the 1920s. It also shows that constant violence surrounded the Legion, drawing activists closer together and alienating them from the authorities and from other ultra-nationalist groups.

Revolutionizing Romania from the Right: The Regenerative Project of the Romanian Legionary Movement and its Failure (1927-1937), PhD Dissertation, Budapest, Central European University, 2011, p. 1-3.

⁶ Geoff Eley, *Labor History, Social History, "Alltagsgeschichte": Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday – a New Direction for German Social History?*, in "The Journal of Modern History", 61/2, 1989, p. 315.

⁷ Alf Lüdtke, *Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?*, in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke, trans. William Templer, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 3-40.

This article focuses primarily on the period 1927 to 1938, when the Legion was a fascist social movement led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Anti-Semitic organizing had been taking place in Romania since the late nineteenth century and many early legionaries had been active in other ultra-nationalist organizations such as A. C. Cuza's National Christian Defence League (*Liga Apărării Național Creștine*, LANC) prior to 1927. Many who survived the purges of 1938 also remained in the Legion when it became an underground terrorist organization and then a ruling party, but the dynamics of mobilization and everyday life in the Legion differed so much from those of the earlier period that they Legion require a separate study. My research relies on a varied collection of sources, each of which has its own benefits and drawbacks. Police reports held at the National Historical Archives of Romania (ANIC) and reproduced at the United States Holocaust Museum (USHMM) are my most important sources.⁸ They were collected by *Siguranța* (secret police) agents attending fascist gatherings, from anonymous informers who had access even to Codreanu's most intimate circles, and by local policemen making enquiries around their villages about anyone suspected of being a Legionary sympathizer.⁹ Police reports are also found at the Archives of the National Council for the Securitate Archives (ACNSAS), but here they are most frequently part of personal files compiled by *Securitate* (communist-era secret police) officers using *Siguranța* investigations. These files were used in court cases or else to provide background checks on suspect individuals being kept under surveillance. They contain informers' reports, surveillance transcripts, and *Securitate* interrogations, as well as documents from before 1948. Police reports can be valuable first-hand accounts of Legionary activities, but they can also contain unsubstantiated rumors about things that never happened. Sometimes the report indicates whether the information was verified or not, but usually one has to make an educated guess about how reliable the informant was.¹⁰ The sheer quantity of the material – hundreds of thousands of pages – means that there is a lot of repetition, and often two policemen will report on the same event so it is usually possible to cross-reference information when in doubt. I also draw heavily on the fascist press of the day, using legionary or pro-legionary newspapers such as “Pământul strămoșesc” (The Ancestral Land, 1927-1933), “Axa” (The Axis, 1932-1933), “Calendarul” (The Calendar, 1932-1933), and

⁸ The collections at USHMM in Washington D.C. are microfilm reproductions of original files held at ANIC in Bucharest, but the original collections have been reorganized since they were microfilmed so a file listed as dosar nr. 4/1929 at USHMM may not still be catalogued in this way at ANIC. For this reason I give only the reference as it appears at USHMM.

⁹ The Romanian secret police was established in 1907 and was known as the *Siguranța* until 1948 when it was reorganized as the *Securitate*. For the history and structure of the *Siguranța* during the interwar period, see Alin Spănu, *Istoria serviciilor de informații/contrainformații românești în perioada 1919-1945*, Iași, Demiurg, 2010.

¹⁰ This aspect of the historian's craft is eloquently discussed in Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 96-125.

“13 Jilava” (1940). As with memoir accounts and fascist literature produced by the 1930s, it is important to keep in mind that these sources report only certain types of information and occasionally misrepresent what happened. They are nonetheless frequently the only sources available and can be used both for reconstructing certain events and for analyzing fascist understandings of those events.

Ultra-Nationalist Organizing in Iași

The city of Iași was home to 102,595 people in 1930, including 37,634 Jews¹¹. A contemporary tourist guide described it as a “modern city, with imposing buildings, beautiful gardens, electric lighting, a tramway, and all sorts of transportation.”¹² The major agricultural products of the region were wheat, oats, rice, and rye, and almost all of the fertile land was owned by ethnic Romanians, who also dominated the trades guilds¹³. Most of the city’s money came from the import-export trade, and wholesalers used it as a centre for shipping foodstuffs and industrial goods throughout Moldova. It was also the region’s administrative hub, with a growing financial and banking sector.¹⁴ Iași had a thriving Jewish community which organized hospitals and charities as well as boasting its own schools, theatres, literary and cultural life.¹⁵ Jews controlled many of the city’s financial institutions, creating friction between the Romanian businessmen and the Jewish bankers who loaned them money. Iași had also been a stronghold of the National Liberal Party prior to the First World War, and the city’s politics remained in the hands of wealthy elites throughout the interwar period. As the former capital of the Moldavian Principality, Iași had a strong tradition of Liberal and Conservative politics and during the interwar period it generally reflected national politics in microcosm¹⁶.

The combination of Jewish and Liberal dominance in the city meant that it became a flash point for ultra-nationalists who felt marginalized politically and economically in the Romanian nation-state. In 1892 retired army officer named Ion Manolescu-Mladian launched *Strigătul* (*The Cry*, 1892) in Iași to publicize his entry into politics¹⁷. His first move was to invite the presidents of fifteen

¹¹ Sabin Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populației României din decembrie 1930*, vol. 2, București, Institutul Central de Statistică, 1938, p. 246.

¹² N. A. Bogdan and C. I. Eremia, *Cel mai nou ghid al Iașului*, Iași, Editura Damaschin, 1932, p. 2.

¹³ Adrian I. Mironescu, *Structura economică a orașului și județului Iași, 1932-1938*, Câmpulung-Moldova, Tipografia Societății Școala Română, 1939, p. 30-34, 84.

¹⁴ N. A. Bogdan and C. I. Eremia, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Dumitru Gusti (ed.), *Enciclopedia României*, vol. 2, București, Asociațiunea Științifică pentru Enciclopedia României, 1936-1940, p. 633-640.

¹⁵ H. Gherner and Beno Wachtel, *Evreii ieșeni în documente și fapte*, Iași, Tipografia Opinia, 1939.

¹⁶ Ovidiu Buruiană, *Tendințe și evoluții în viața politică*, in Gheorghe Iacob (ed.), *Iași. Memoria unei capitale*, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2008, p. 272-296.

¹⁷ I. Manolescu Mladian, *Nu facem reclamă electorală*, in “Strigătul,” an. I, nr. 1, 19 ianuarie 1892, p. 1-2.

guilds and community groups to a meeting where he hoped they would agree to collaborate with his project to promote *Românism* by fighting Jewish commerce in the city¹⁸. Subsequent issues of the newspaper do not mention whether anyone came to his meeting, and the newspaper soon disappeared from the stands. Other publications gradually introduced anti-Semitic agendas over time. *Meseriașul român* (*The Romanian Tradesman*, 1887-1888), for example, avoided anti-Semitism entirely during its first eight months and only started attacking Jews after the peasants' revolt of 1888¹⁹. Similarly, Em. Al. Manoliu's *Ecoul Moldovei* (*The Echo of Moldavia*, 1890-1918) was one of Romania's most successful anti-Semitic newspapers of the early twentieth century, but in its first issue it defended a Jewish businessman against libel and did not begin printing anti-Semitic articles until its third year of publication²⁰. The result of these sorts of publications was that a vibrant anti-Semitic and ultra-nationalist community emerged in Iași during the early twentieth century and began mobilizing aggressively after the First World War.

Iași became a regional centre for the railways in 1919, resulting in a sudden influx of new workers for whom there was not sufficient accommodation or funds for salaries. 25,809 people, or 25.1% of the active population of Iași, worked in industry by the time of the 1930 census, although that was at the end of a decade of intense industrialization²¹. Dissatisfaction with poor working conditions created a sizeable protest movement led by socialist workers that eventually brought the country's railways to a halt²². Refusing to participate in a major strike at the railway factories in 1920, a crowd of 2,000 ultra-nationalists led by Constantin Pancu's Guard of the National Conscience (*Garda Conștiinței Naționale*) marched through Iași and planted two Romanian flags on the factory walls in order to demonstrate their control of the premises and the weakness of the socialist unions.²³ Clashes such as this reveal a self-conscious, activist group of ultra-nationalists who could be relied upon to support protests against socialist organizing and potentially also complaints against the country's governing elites.

The University of Iași was one of the most prestigious tertiary institutions in the country, but it had been plagued by ultra-nationalist student violence

¹⁸ Idem, *Invitare cordială frățească*, in "Strigătul," an. I, nr. 1, 19 ianuarie 1892, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Emigrația ovreilor*, in "Meseriașul român," an. I, nr. 2, 1 mai 1888, p. 1. Earlier articles about the revolt did not mention Jews as a cause of peasant dissatisfaction. *O privire asupra situațiunei țerei noastre*, in "Meseriașul român," an. I, nr. 17, 14 aprilie 1888, p. 1.

²⁰ *Asimilanții din Iași*, in "Ecoul Moldovei," an. I, nr. 1, 15 septembrie 1890, p. 3. The first anti-Semitic article was Sc. P., *Antisemitismul*, in "Ecoul Moldovei," an. I, nr. 60, 7 ianuarie 1893, p. 2.

²¹ Sabin Manuilă, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 789.

²² Ion Mitican, *Un veac prin gara Iași*, Galați, Editura Sport-Turism, 1983, p. 128-136.

²³ Rep., *Marea mișcare națională din Iași*, "Conștiința," an. II, nr. 26, 3 mai 1920, p. 1; *Reluarea lucrului în atelierele Statului*, "Conștiința," 2/29-30, 14 iunie 1920, 3; C. Pancu, *Banditismele dela Atelierele C.F.R. Frumoasa*, "Conștiința," an. II, nr. 31, 21 iunie 1920, p. 1; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari*, București, Editura Scara, 1999, p. 20-22.

since 1919. Small groups of ultra-nationalist students scuffled with communists and stole their distinctive buttons or hats, disrupted lectures by shouting anti-Semitic slogans, tried to prevent Jewish students from attending courses, and hindered the university's opening ceremony²⁴. They also quarrelled with the press, assaulting journalists and newspaper salesmen, vandalizing newspaper stands, and burning newspapers which criticized them.²⁵ One of the leaders of the student gangs was Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the future leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. He had been involved in Pancu's Guard of the National Conscience and was expelled from the university in June 1921 for assault and vandalism, but he continued to play an active role in student politics. His expulsion did little to curb the radicalism of the ultra-nationalist students²⁶. Codreanu was protected by the Dean of the Faculty of Law, A. C. Cuza (1857-1947), a xenophobe who had been active in anti-Semitic politics since the late nineteenth century. Cuza refused to recognize Codreanu's expulsion from his faculty and he defended student violence before the university Senate and the Ministry of Education. Cuza used the belligerent students in his struggle with left-wing professors for control of the university, but the students were also willing accomplices with their own agendas²⁷.

Ultra-nationalist students wanted a greater say in the running of the university, and protested whenever the authorities interfered in things that they considered student matters. Student violence escalated throughout the country in early December 1922, and over the next few years ultra-nationalist students continually disrupted classes, assaulted Jewish students and threatened professors. The authorities closed the university several times and brought the army in to curb the violence. Students demanded that the university recognize their ultra-nationalist "Christian Students Association" (*Asociația Studenților Creștini*, ASC) and they liaised with extremist students elsewhere in the country to create a strong and coordinated student movement on a national scale.²⁸ Six leaders of this movement gained celebrity after they plotted "to spark a civil war" by assassinating government ministers and Jewish bankers in October 1923. They received overwhelming support from ultra-nationalists all over the country, and their trial earned them national fame. The six conspirators, Codreanu among them, admitted their guilt but on March 29, 1924 the jury found them innocent

²⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 41-45, 68-69; Stelian Neagoe, *Triumful rațiunii împotriva violenței: viața universitară ieșană interbelică*, Iași, Junimea, 1977, p. 78, 83, 90-99.

²⁵ Stelian Neagoe, *op. cit.*, p. 99-100; Ioan Scurtu et al. (eds.), *Totalitarismul de dreapta în România: origini, manifestări, evoluție, 1919-1927*, București, Institutul Național pentru Studii Totalitarismului, 1996, p. 200-202, 250-253.

²⁶ Stelian Neagoe, *op. cit.*, p. 90-91.

²⁷ Cătălin Botoșineanu, *Politica din spatele "capetelor sparte", la Universitatea din Iași. Alegerile pentru funcția de rector din 1923*, in ArchM, I, 2009, p. 54-78.

²⁸ Stelian Neagoe, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 211-296.

of having tried to spark a revolution because none of the intended victims were heads of state²⁹.

Building the Christian Cultural Centre

According to Codreanu's memoirs, just over a month after his release, on May 6, 1924, he gathered university and high school students together in a garden near the university which a noblewoman named Constanța Ghica made available to them specifically for this purpose. Here he spoke to them about the need for a place where students could meet together without being under the authority of the university³⁰. Ultra-nationalist students had tried organizing within the dormitories and bullied outsiders who tried to enter, but the chancellor dismissed student leaders who used their authority to promote political groups within subsidized student accommodation.³¹ Students had been protesting since 1922 against the overcrowded and under-resourced conditions in the state-funded dormitories (*cămine*), but it was an uneven battle because the university authorities could revoke scholarships and deny students the right to live in the dormitories, measures which they regularly used to limit student activism.³² The university Senate also contested elections of ASC office-holders and forbade it to function as a legitimate student society.³³ One of Codreanu's goals was that the students build their own *cămin*, which they could not be thrown out of and that the university had no right to interfere in, and he dedicated most of the next six months to collecting money for this project.³⁴

The Romanian word *cămin* refers first and foremost to one's parental home. It evokes the image of a warm, welcoming cottage where one can raise a family. During the nineteenth century the meaning of the word expanded to include *cămine de copii* (boarding schools for pre-school children), *cămine școli* (schools inside orphanages), *cămine de bătrâni* (nursing homes), and *cămine studențești* (university dormitories). In 1922 the Prince Carol Cultural Foundation began an ambitious project of building *cămine culturale* (cultural centres) in villages across the country.³⁵ The Royal Foundation intended its Cultural Centres to promote literate and "modern" Romanian culture within villages. According to the Foundation, each Cultural Centre was to house a ballroom, a library, an office, a medical dispensary, and a bathroom, as well as being surrounded by a garden full of fruit trees. It was to be raised through

²⁹ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 129-140; Irina Livezeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 280-282; ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 013.207, vol. 2 and 3.

³⁰ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³¹ Stelian Neagoe, *op. cit.*, p. 175-176; AN-Iași, fond Universitatea A. I. Cuza, Rectorat, dosar nr. 1021/1922, f. 263-264.

³² AN-Iași, fond Universitatea A. I. Cuza, Rectorat, rola #121, dosar nr. 1025/1923, f. 2-3; dosar 1051/1924-1925, f. 68-71.

³³ *Ibidem*, rola #121, dosar nr. 1025/1923 f. 49-50; dosar nr. 1051/1924, f. 54-55.

³⁴ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 013207, vol. 1, f. 162.

³⁵ ANIC, fond Fundațiile Culturale Regale Centrale, dosar nr. 13/1924, f. 1-6.

donations from the villagers, but the Foundation could also provide financial support if necessary. The vision was that “a Cultural Centre is every villager’s second home. When it is ready, it should be the pride of the village, its ornament, a nest, a house of books.”³⁶ By 1938 the Royal Foundation had established over two thousand cultural centres, 36 of them in Iași county³⁷. Alongside these, the Ministry of Education ran another 61 cultural centres in the county³⁸. Iași was home to a wide variety of cultural organizations – including the Jewish Macabees Society and the Buci-Brith Jewish Cultural Centre, – many of which also had their own meeting places and performance spaces³⁹. The University of Iași ran its own state-funded *cămine studențești* where students received both food and lodging. Codreanu named his building a *Cămin Cultural Creștin* (Christian Cultural Centre), but this was a “second home” for the ultra-nationalist students, not a means for the Royal Foundation or the Ministry of Education to spread their versions of national culture. By emphasizing that this was a “Christian” *cămin*, he identified it with the Romanian student movement which used the epithet “Christian” to contrast its program with Jewish and “judaized” Romanian culture.

Although the students did the work, the new *Cămin* was a project of the whole ultra-nationalist community, young and old. By this time most right-wing students were members of A. C. Cuza’s LANC, and together with other ultra-nationalists they used the Hotel Bejan to socialize and to plan their activities. The hotel served as a de facto LANC headquarters in Iași. Members met here to relax together and students gathered on the veranda before moving off to commit acts of vandalism or assault.⁴⁰ By suggesting they build a *Cămin Cultural Creștin*, Codreanu sought a more independent venue where the student wing of the LANC could gather independently of its elders. Nonetheless, the whole enterprise was subsidized by wealthy LANC supporters, as well as from donations from student groups in other cities.⁴¹ Several leading LANC members, including A. C. Cuza and the wealthy engineer Grigore Bejan, had already built a similar centre in 1919. Anachronistically describing the Popular Athenaeum they established in the suburb of Tătărași as a cultural centre similar to those built by the Royal Foundation, Bejan later wrote that “I, Ifrim, Cuza, and Father Mihăilescu, thought that it would be good to erect a *cămin cultural*

³⁶ Gh. D. Mugur, *Căminul cultural: îndreptar pentru conducătorii culturii la sate*, București, Fundația Culturală “Principele Carol”, 1922, p. 18.

³⁷ Dimitrie Gusti, *Cuvânt la congresul general al căminelor culturale, 1938*, in *Opere*, ed. Ovidiu Bădina și Octavian Neamțu, București, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1970, p. 291-294.

³⁸ Dumitru Gusti (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 636.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 636; Ovidiu Buruiană, *Incursiune în cotidianul Iașului interbelic*, in Gheorghe Iacob (ed.), *Iași. Memoria unei capitale*, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2008, p. 300-305.

⁴⁰ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 013207, vol. 1, f. 244-246, vol. 2, f. 269-271, vol. 3, f. 206-207.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, f. 153.

in a part of the town where there are not so many Yids.”⁴² In the early 1920s ultra-nationalists in Iași also regularly met at the Hotel Bejan on Elizabeth Boulevard at Râpa Galbenă. The hotel served as a de facto LANC headquarters in Iași. Members met here to relax together and students gathered on the veranda before moving off to commit acts of vandalism or assault.⁴³ In 1924, the hotel’s owner, Grigore Bejan, donated some land next to his hotel for Codreanu and his colleagues to build on, and the students approached businesses asking them to provide the construction materials free of charge. Some responded positively. The Moruzzi family from Dorohoi gave 100.000 lei, General Cantacuzino provided three wagons of cement, and Romanians living in America sent 400.000 lei, not to mention smaller donations from peasants scattered throughout the country⁴⁴. No sources exist showing exactly how much the *Cămin* cost to build, and the fact that the work was done in stages over a number of years and often with donated materials makes the final cost impossible to estimate.⁴⁵ The most important thing about the financing of the *Cămin* is that it was a cooperative project to which a diverse group of ultra-nationalists felt committed.

Once plans for the *Cămin Cultural Creștin* had been drawn up, Codreanu led roughly twenty six students to a property in the village of Ungheni which had been offered to them by the businessman Olimpiu Lascăr, where they began making bricks.⁴⁶ An LANC branch had existed in Ungheni since September 1923, but it was remarkably small. The leadership committee had only two members, compared with LANC committees in similar villages whose committees usually had between five and ten members.⁴⁷ The students borrowed tools from the locals and the village priest blessed the opening of the brickworks. The rest of the community soon began to mix with Codreanu and his followers, and students, graduates, tradesmen, workers, and peasants all worked side by side. A convivial atmosphere developed, and Codreanu records that the volunteers ended each day in the tavern “singing happy songs.”⁴⁸ Codreanu’s involvement in the brickworks was temporarily disrupted when he shot the police prefect of Iași, Constantin Manciu, in front of a number of witnesses on 25 October 1924. The jury at his murder trial in May 1925 acquitted him once again, and he returned to Iași to a hero’s welcome⁴⁹.

⁴² Gabriel Asandului, *A. C. Cuza: politică și cultură*, Iași, Editura Fides, 2007, p. 85.

⁴³ CNSAS, fond Codreanu Corneliu, P.013207, vol. 1, f. 244-246, vol. 2, f. 269-271, vol. 3, f. 206-207; USHMM, fond SRI Files, Reel #105, dosar 1151, f. 4323, 4514.

⁴⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁴⁵ On discrepancies in Codreanu’s figures, see note 53.

⁴⁶ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Lăscar Olimpiu*, in “Pământul strămoșesc”, an. II, nr. 24, 25 decembrie 1928, p. 6-7.

⁴⁷ ANIC, fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar 16/1923, f. 13; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (Henceforth: USHMM), fond SRI Files, Reel #105, dosar nr. 1151, f. 200-272.

⁴⁸ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 157; Mihail Polihroniade, *Tabăra de muncă*, București, Tipografia Ziarului Universul, 1936, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 166-194; Irina Livezeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 282-287.

Codreanu's success and his movement's anti-Semitic violence worried the local Jewish population who apparently took measures to protect themselves. That August, the local gendarmerie reported an incident at the brickworks during which eighteen students, tradesmen, and shopkeepers from Iași held an anti-Semitic meeting at Ungheni, where they were joined by 150 local peasants. Others tried to come from the surrounding villages, but were prevented by gendarmes. The report states that the five students assaulted several Jews at the station as they were leaving, and that in response "the Jewish population of Ungheni armed with clubs and pitchforks forced their way onto the platform of the train station trying to hit the students and others involved in the meeting; [but] they were stopped by gendarmes. During the day a large number of Jews from the Macabees Society were observed to have entered Ungheni from the nearby villages of Pereval and Parhisvi, which are inhabited only by Jews. Their goal was to help the local Jewish population in the event of any disorders."⁵⁰ Such stories alert us to the likelihood that the brickworks generated closer ties between anti-Semites in Iași and those in this particular village, and that worksites staffed by ultra-nationalist volunteers gave rise to violence as anti-Semites came and left the brickworks.

Contesting Ownership

The construction of the *Cămin* also became a bone of contention within the LANC itself. The walls had been raised in Autumn 1926, but there was still no roof on the building when arguments arose over who owned the building.⁵¹ Open conflict simmered amongst the LANC leadership from 1926 onwards, as A. C. Cuza attempted to wrest control of the organization away from other senior figures, including Codreanu's father, Ion Zelea Codreanu, and Paul Iliescu. Grigore Bejan allied himself with Cuza, and when Cuza began expelling his rivals from the organization in August 1927, Bejan made several attempts to ensure his ownership of the *Cămin*. He had donated the building site and helped plan the construction in 1924, and now he asserted that this made him the proprietor of anything built there.⁵² Codreanu retorted that one of his colleagues, Ion Moța (1902-1937), had supplied over half of the building expenses (123.000 lei) and that therefore the *Cămin* should remain under the exclusive administration of the students.⁵³ By this he meant that it should become the property of the Legion of

⁵⁰ ANIC, fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr. 16/1923, f. 148.

⁵¹ *De vorbă cu satele*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 2, 15 august 1927, p. 11-12.

⁵² Vera Totu, *Jilava*, in "13 Jilava", an. VII, nr. 1, 29 noiembrie 1940, p. 5.

⁵³ ANIC, fond Direcția Generală a Poliției, dosar nr. 79/1927, f. 9; USHMM, fond SRI Files, Reel #106, dosar nr. 1151, f. 330. Note the discrepancy here regarding how much the *Cămin* cost to build. If Codreanu's assertion in 1927 that Moța's donation of 123.000 constituted "over half" of the building costs is true, then it is unclear what happened to the 500.000 lei that Codreanu claimed in 1936 was donated by the Moruzzi family and Romanians living in the United States (see note 44).

the Archangel Michael (*Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*), a new fascist organization which he, Moța, and other LANC dissidents established the following month.⁵⁴

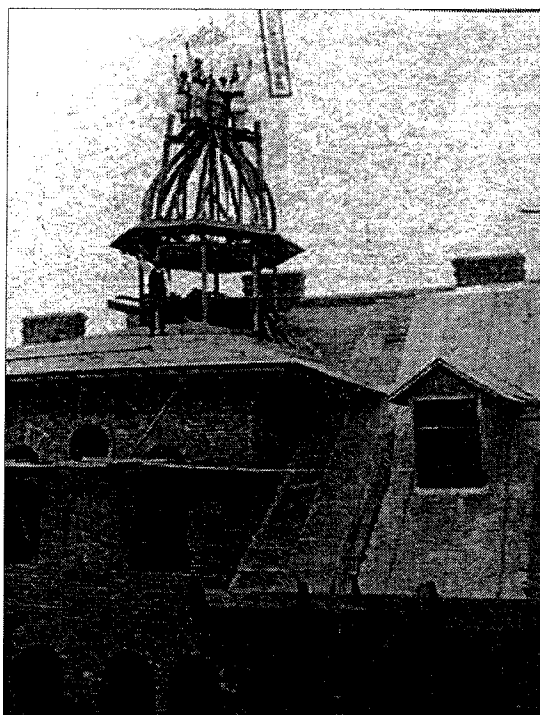


Fig. 1. *Cămin Cultural Creștin*, in September 1927
("Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 5, 1 octombrie 1927, p. 9)

Legionaries managed to complete two thirds of the roof and added a chapel on the third floor by September 1927, and they moved into two of the three rooms which were finished. The other rooms in the *Cămin* still lacked both doors and windows.⁵⁵ Unmarried legionary women were entrusted with "decorating" the building.⁵⁶ The Legion held its first ball on 8 November 1927, to celebrate the saint's day of the Archangel Michael, selling 512 tickets and raising almost 9,000 lei, a quarter of which they put into the continued construction of the *Cămin*.⁵⁷ That day the Legionaries held a requiem at St. Spiridon Church for Moldavian heroes such as Stephen the Great and Michael the Brave, after which they marched back to their *Cămin* singing "The Hymn of the Legion" (*Imnul Legiunii*). Back at the *Cămin* they solemnly mixed soil which they had ordered from the graves and battlefields of those heroes whose souls they had just prayed for, and placed it in small sacks which all Legionaries were to wear around their necks.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *op. cit.*, p. 229-231.

⁵⁵ *Căminul Cultural Creștin*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 2, 15 august 1927, p. 11-12; *Informațiuni*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 5, 1 octombrie 1927, p. 15.

⁵⁶ *Organizarea Legiunii Arhanghelul Mihail*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 5, 1 octombrie 1927, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *Informațiuni*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 7, 1 noiembrie 1927, p. 14; *Informațiuni*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 8, 15 noiembrie 1927, p. 15.

⁵⁸ *Ziua legiunii la Iași*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 8, 15 noiembrie 1927, p. 3-7.

On November 14, 1927 Bejan used his position as "official administrator" of the property to post an eviction order issued by the Tribunal of Iași and he began court proceedings to officially expel the legionaries from the *Cămin*.⁵⁹ Over the next 18 months Teodor Mociulski, a law student and an ardent Cuza supporter, wrote violent articles against Codreanu in the ultra-nationalist student newspaper *Cuvântul studentesc* and threatened him with a revolver as the two sides quarrelled over the building.⁶⁰ Bejan accused the legionaries of stealing tools from the *Cămin* to use at Constanța Ghica's garden, and on 10 April 1928 Codreanu and six legionaries broke into his house at 7:30am in the morning. They beat him, split his head open, and disfigured his face.⁶¹ Eventually the legionaries decided that the battle was not worth fighting, and in June 1928 they began work on "Saint Michael's Castle," which they dubbed "the first anti-Semitic university in Romania," because working on it was supposed to help "educate" legionaries.⁶² New members were expected to prove their worth by directing activities at the brickworks and by undergoing a "theoretical" exam covering anti-Semitic doctrine and legionary ideology. Individuals sent financial donations to pay for building supplies, and a number of so-called "musketeers" in the Legion's youth section helped with the brick making, which began at 5am each morning, one boy riding his bicycle 300 kilometres from Galați to Ungheni so he could take part.⁶³ Conflict began again in September 1928 when legionaries forcefully evicted several cuzists who were living in the *Cămin*, and cuzists began preparations to do the same to the legionaries who had taken their place.⁶⁴ Legionaries finally secured possession of it when a judge overturned Bejan's claims to legal ownership of the *Cămin* in July 1929, but cuzist students continued to forcefully challenge legionary occupancy for the next twelve months.⁶⁵ More and more legionary students were gradually elected to the ASC, and in March 1930 legionaries made another attempt at persuading the ASC to join the Legion by offering them *Cămin* as a meeting place where the two sides could discuss further collaboration.⁶⁶ Many of the ultra-nationalist students in Iași were still loyal to Cuza, and occupying

⁵⁹ *O nedreptate strigătoare la cer*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. I, nr. 9, 1 decembrie 1927, p. 3-5; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Răutatea omenească*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. II, nr. 18, 15 septembrie 1928, p. 4-5.

⁶⁰ CNSAS, fond Robu Nichifor, P.000324, vol. 8, f. 134-138; Ion Banea, *Un sfârșit de an*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. IV, nr. 8, 1 ianuarie 1931, p. 1.

⁶¹ CNSAS, fond Codreanu Corneliu, P.011784, vol. 14, f. 130; *Atentatul contra d-lui ing. Gr. Bejan*, in "Apărarea națională", an. VI, nr. 9, 22 aprilie 1928, p. 2.

⁶² *Situația la cărămidărie*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. II, nr. 14, 15 iulie 1928, p. 3.

⁶³ *Vești dela cărămidărie*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. II, nr. 15, 1 august 1928, p. 3; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Situația la cărămidărie*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. II, nr. 16, 15 august 1928, p. 1; idem, *Dare de seamă rezumativă*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. II, nr. 21, 1 noiembrie 1928, p. 1-5.

⁶⁴ USHMM, fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Reel #137, dosar nr. 4/1929, f. 10.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, Reel #137, dosar nr. 4/1929, f. 17.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, Reel #138, dosar nr. 2/1930, f. 18-20, 42.

the *Cămin* was a way for the legionaries to claim that they were the legitimate successors of the student movement which had originally built the *Cămin*.

In addition to its symbolic importance to the student movement, the *Cămin* situated legionaries in a prominent position within the city's symbolic geography. Ovidiu Buruiană notes that Ieșenii complained that the modernist buildings being erected in interwar Iași were "ugly," and the urbanization of a park at the base of Râpa Galbenă at the turn of the twentieth century is also likely to have torn at the heartstrings of the city's population.⁶⁷ The legionary *Cămin* sat at the top of a large flight of stairs known as Râpa Galbenă, which was a popular location for leisure and relaxation during the interwar period. Until 1898, the park had been quite extensive but erosion problems destabilized the soil and at the turn of the century the national railway company (CFR) built several offices and a student dormitory on the property. Unlike the rectangular, functional architecture of the CFR buildings, the legionary *Cămin* was designed in an older, quintessentially Moldavian style that celebrated local culture and history. The *Cămin*'s design mattered because not only did it sit on a major nodal junction, but located at it was at the top of a hill, it marked a boundary between the old city and newer districts around the railway station.⁶⁸ Its visibility reinforced the character of Râpa Galbenă as a landmark, and the legionaries' architectural choices had the power to emphasize either the city's Moldavian heritage or the modernism of the age. In addition to dominating the park at Râpa Galbenă, its location on the main thoroughfare between the railway station and the city centre, close to the university and Iași's historic churches, gave legionaries quick access to the city's key *lieux de mémoire*.⁶⁹ Student gatherings on campus moved easily down the hill to the *Cămin* and the building became a meeting place for groups planning marches or protests to the council chambers, the city centre, or to one of the city's many historic churches where legionaries regularly held religious services.⁷⁰

The *Cămin* fell into a state of disrepair during the three years that Bejan and Codreanu fought over it, but it was restored and occupied by Legionaries during 1930 at a cost of 200.000 lei.⁷¹ The Legion had an office in Bucharest as of November 1929, but Iași remained the hub of the movement until Codreanu himself moved to Bucharest in 1933. In June 1932 they brought an icon of the Archangel Michael which they had deposited at the St. Spiridon Church eight years earlier, and set it up in the *Cămin*. When Codreanu and his colleagues were in Văcărești prison in 1923, Codreanu's father had directed them towards an icon of the Archangel Michael and the students remained impressed by its

⁶⁷ Ovidiu Buruiană, *Incursiune în cotidianul Iașului interbelic*, p. 305.

⁶⁸ On the importance of nodal junctions and boundaries within a city, see Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1960, p. 72-78.

⁶⁹ On the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, see Pierra Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, in "Representations", 26 (1989) p. 7-24.

⁷⁰ Ovidiu Buruiană, *Incursiune în cotidianul Iașului interbelic*, p. 304-306.

⁷¹ *Cămin Cultural Creștin*, in "Pământul strămoșesc", an. IV, nr. 8, 1 ianuarie 1931, p. 3.

beauty. Codreanu made several copies of the icon, depositing one at the church in Iași and giving another one to his mother, which he then “borrowed” to use in the legionary offices in Bucharest.⁷²

Everyday life at the *Cămin*

In his memoirs the legionary Dumitru Banea writes about the building as “our *cămin*,” though he himself was not one of the twenty legionaries who lived there in 1931. He says,

We were so poor it was unbelievable. There was no heater (*sobă*), and the inhabitants put several electrical wires on a tile and stuck them into a power socket to get some heat. They put one tile at their heads and another at their feet. We washed our clothes there. ... When my brother could not pay his rent any more we made a room for him in the garage where we kept our truck, which we’d named ‘Deer’ (*Căprioară*). We found some planks in the attic and we laid floorboards down, we made him a table, a bookshelf, – I don’t remember if we made him a bed – and we set them up like on a tower. Not having enough money to put blue paper on the bookshelf, we decorated it with newspapers. He no longer had to worry about rent. Once we bought ourselves, on credit, a small hand-operated printing press, we all set about learning the art of printing. We made ourselves business cards, but not knowing what titles to give ourselves we wrote things like “Mitu Banea, musketeer.”⁷³

The poverty which Banea describes was a serious problem for the Legion between 1927 and 1933. As Christmas approached in 1927, legionaries everywhere were asked to hold their own balls or literary evenings, to organize choirs, sell embroidery, or to go caroling with *plugușor* songs to raise money for the Legion.⁷⁴ In April 1928, only 836 of the 2,586 subscribers to “Pământul strămoșesc” paid their dues.⁷⁵ That October, Codreanu borrowed 82,000 lei to fund the Legion but he did not manage to repay the loan until 1933.⁷⁶ The legionaries had to find money wherever they could, selling vegetables they had grown in Constanța Ghica’s garden and eventually selling the tiles they had put aside for a future building project. They asked supporters to sacrifice 100 lei per month to help fund the Legion and they gratefully publicized all donations in “Pământul strămoșesc”⁷⁷. In August 1928 eight legionaries decided to give up smoking and to donate the money they saved to the Legion.⁷⁸ Others donated

⁷² ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 011784, vol. 13, f. 124.

⁷³ Dumitru Banea, *Acuzat, martor, apărător în procesul vieții mele*, Sibiu, Editura Puncte Cardinale, 1995, p. 10.

⁷⁴ *Ce trebuie să știe și să facă*, in “Pământul strămoșesc”, an. I, nr. 10, 15 decembrie 1927, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁷⁶ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 011784, vol. 1, f. 139, 143.

⁷⁷ Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*, p. 133; *Comitetul de 100*, in “Pământul strămoșesc”, an. II, nr. 14, 15 iulie 1928, p. 8; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Dare de seamă rezumativă*, in “Pământul strămoșesc”, an. II, nr. 21, 1 noiembrie 1928, p. 1-5.

⁷⁸ *O hotărâre a Legiunii care se va întinde*, in “Pământul strămoșesc”, an. II, nr. 16, 15 august 1928, p. 3.

shares they owned in the LANC bank to fund legionary building projects.⁷⁹ Women's work was particularly useful in this regard. Ecaterina Constantinescu, a young lady from Cahul, managed to send 3.000 lei in July 1928 after selling embroidery she had done for the Legion.⁸⁰ Others sent their handiwork directly to the Legion so that it could be displayed as part of an exhibition in Iași, and this too was sold once the financial crisis struck in 1929.⁸¹

Banea makes the point that the legionaries bought the printing press themselves, without support from wealthy LANC benefactors like Bejan, although he does not mention that they had bought it through their connections in Focșani, where support for the Legion was relatively strong.⁸² Even though it required three people to run it, the legionaries used their new press for more than just printing business cards.⁸³ Most of their pamphlets were printed here for the next few years, as was "Pământul strămoșesc".⁸⁴ The legionaries were proud of their press, and when the ultra-nationalist publicist Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) visited Iași in March 1932, they surrounded him after his lecture at the university and led him down the hill to show him their press. Later that day Crainic gave another speech at the *Cămin*, praising the Legion and throwing the support of his Bucharest daily *Calendarul* (*The Calendar*, 1932-1933) behind the struggling movement.⁸⁵

Perhaps to spite the legionaries, the president of the cuzist-dominated ASC spent 300.000 lei of student contributions that year to buy his organization its own press.⁸⁶ Located in Hotel Bejan, the ASC headquarters was only 200 metres away from the legionary *Cămin*, and violence between the two groups escalated once LANC youth organized *Batalioane de Asalt* (Assault Battalions) in March 1933.⁸⁷ Both legionaries and cuzists wanted control of the ASC in Iași, and when elections for office-holders took place later that month the cuzists changed the date at the last minute in order to prevent legionaries from voting. Legionaries challenged the cuzists over this issue on 26 March, and after they agreed to meet a week later to hold new elections, the ASC president, Teodor Mociulski, advised his followers to come armed with knives and pieces of wood.⁸⁸ Following a cuzist meeting on the evening of the 28 March, one cuzist student shouted "Long live our Assault Battalions" while passing the legionary *Cămin* on the way to the ASC headquarters. A Legionary by the name of

⁷⁹ Spiru Peceli, *Alte acțiuni*, in "Pământul strămoșesc," an. II, nr. 20, 15 octombrie 1928, p. 3.

⁸⁰ *Dela surorile noastre*, "Pământul strămoșesc," an. II, nr. 14, 15 iulie 1928, p. 6.

⁸¹ *Dela surorile legiunii*, "Pământul strămoșesc," an. II, nr. 24, 25 decembrie 1928, p. 5; *Criza financiară, legiunea*, "Pământul strămoșesc," an. III, nr. 1, 15 iunie 1929, p. 14-15.

⁸² ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 011784, vol. 2, f. 99.

⁸³ Idem, fond Informativ, dosar nr. 259143, vol. 1, f. 119.

⁸⁴ AN-Iași, fond Chestura de poliție Iași, dosar nr. 52/1933, f. 50; ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar nr. 211932, vol. 2, f. 22.

⁸⁵ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 013206, vol. 2, f. 346, 362, 364.

⁸⁶ ACNSAS, fond documentar, dosar nr. 012694, vol. 3, f. 66.

⁸⁷ USHMM, fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, reel #1, dosar 25.023M, vol. 2, f. 30.

⁸⁸ AN-Iași, fond Chestura de poliție Iași, dosar nr. 52/1933, f. 106.

N. Arnăutu heard him and called back "Where are your Assault Battalions?" Arnăutu whistled, and fifteen legionary students immediately appeared, armed and ready to fight. Only the presence of policemen prevented bloodshed.⁸⁹ The conflict continued into April, when eight Legionaries and seven cuzists were arrested after the two groups clashed once again.⁹⁰ Sometimes the fighting revolved around organizational symbols rather than property or territory. Legionaries stole an ASC flag when the building was evacuated by the police later that year, but then it went missing from a Legionary's room where it was being held. Accusations of treachery immediately flew back and forth between legionaries, and Ion Banea promised to shoot any legionary who was found to have allowed their rivals' flag to be stolen.⁹¹ The cuzists responded by stealing a legionary flag from the *Cămin*, and an open battle ensued. Both sides were armed with clubs and knives, and three of the combatants ended up in hospital with serious injuries. Banea replaced Mociulski as ASC president later in 1933, and promptly announced "the student movement has begun anew. It is led by the legionaries."⁹²



Fig. 2. *Cămin Cultural Creștin*
("Pământul strămoșesc", an. IV, nr. 8, 1 ianuarie 1931, p. 3)

⁸⁹ ACNSAS, fond documentar, dosar nr. 012694, vol. 4, f. 310-312.

⁹⁰ USHMM, fond SRI Files, reel #97, dosar nr. 566, f. 332-334.

⁹¹ AN-Iași, fond Chestura de poliție Iași, dosar nr. 52/1933, f. 123.

⁹² AN-Iași, fond Universitatea Al. I. Cuza, Rectorat, rola #335, dosar nr. 1722/1937, f. 49; *Congresul studenților moldoveni*, in "Calendarul", an. I, nr. 473, 16 septembrie 1933, p. 3.

Despite the hardships associated with living there, the inhabitants remembered the *Cămin* as a hub of legionary social life. Vera Totu and her husband Nicolae shared one of the upper stories with three other students during 1933, and seven years later she wrote,

In the basement there was a canteen where for seven lei you'd receive a portion of food in a clay bowl and a spoonful of polenta which could satisfy a fully grown man. There was a large hall on the first floor which was whitewashed clean, swept and cared for with love. That was where the first legionary lectures were held, that was where student gatherings took unflinching decisions. On Sunday evenings the happiest and friendliest parties took place there, with young people coming in simple clothes, with nothing in their pockets, wanting only to meet with those they were close to, to dance a big *horă* and a crazy *sârbă*, to listen to the judicious words of Ionică Banea and to cool off letting loose a lively song. Days passed this way at the *Cămin*, a week of work and studying and an evening of good times.⁹³

Ion Banea was not the only one whose "judicious words" filled the hall at the *Cămin*. Most legionary leaders lectured here at one time or another on topics which they thought it important for Legionaries to be conversant with.⁹⁴ Lectures were a normal part of weekly meetings of legionaries in small groups known as "nests", but they were also often used as an excuse for large numbers of Legionaries to gather together for an inspection or celebration.⁹⁵ Several hundred legionaries managed to fit in the room for these lectures, which sometimes ended with marches through the streets, the taking of oaths, or the singing of legionary songs.⁹⁶ In addition to speeches and dancing, they also held religious commemorations (*parastase*) here for Legionaries who had been shot by the police, inviting curious students who were not Legionaries to take part and to honour individuals they considered to be martyrs of the student movement.⁹⁷

Expansion and Rebuilding

The success of the *Cămin* in Iași encouraged legionaries to erect similar buildings elsewhere. In April 1933 legionaries in Chișinău proposed building their own *Cămin* in imitation of the one in Iași, and activists in Cluj began a similar project there in August 1935.⁹⁸ The Legion launched its first volunteer work camps in 1933, the most famous of which was the building of a "House for Wounded Legionaries" (*Casa Legionarilor Răniți*) in Bucharest, which

⁹³ Vera Totu, *Jilava*, in "13 Jilava", an. VII, nr. 1, 29 noiembrie 1940, p. 5.

⁹⁴ ACNSAS, fond Informativ, dosar nr. 211932, vol. 1, f. 791-792.

⁹⁵ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Cărticica șefului de cuib. Manual al Gărzii de Fier*, in "Obiectiv legionar", an. I, nr. 4, 2003, p. 6-8.

⁹⁶ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 013206, vol. 2, f. 461; *O vizită în Iașiul naționalist*, in "Calendarul", an. II, nr. 489, 25 octombrie 1933, p. 5.

⁹⁷ AN-Iași, fond Universitatea Al. I. Cuza, Rectorat, rola #266, dosar 1480/1934, f. 358-359.

⁹⁸ *Căminul "Gărzii de Fer" din Chișinău*, in "Garda de Fer", an. I, nr. 3, 9 aprilie 1933, p. 3; *Știrile depe fronturile de afirmare legionară*, in "Brațul de Fier", an. I, nr. 3, 1 august 1935, p. 4.

eventually came to be known as the “Green House” (*Casa Verde*)⁹⁹. When it officially opened in September 1937, the Green House became the hub for legionary life in Bucharest. It housed a cooperative store as well as offices, an auditorium, workshops, and living areas for the Legion’s full-time staff.¹⁰⁰ Construction work began on the Green House in August 1933, and as they had done in Iași, legionaries made the bricks themselves but borrowed cement and other building supplies from sympathetic businesses.¹⁰¹ Legionaries heavily publicized their work, and invited ultra-nationalist figures from Romania and Italy to visit the worksite, which they heralded as creating “a new work ethic” and “a truly religious exercise.”¹⁰² Working on such building sites proved to be an effective way of integrating sympathizers into the community, as well as allowing Legionaries from outside of Bucharest to socialise with their colleagues in the capital.¹⁰³ In July 1934 roughly one hundred legionaries began work on a summer house for legionaries in the Rarău Mountains. Together with a busy work schedule, participants at the camp also attended lectures and promotions ceremonies, sang together, and hiked barefoot through the mountains once a week. They spoke about the camp as being a “school” as much as it was a building site.¹⁰⁴

One activity at the *Cămin Cultural Creștin* in Iași which Vera Totu did not mention were the “secret meetings” which the *Siguranța* (secret police) claimed her husband held in their room in the summer of 1933, when he began forming “death squads” of Legionaries willing to undertake dangerous propaganda missions. Nicolae Totu denied any knowledge of such activities when he was interrogated about these death squads.¹⁰⁵ Conflict between Legionaries and the authorities increased during the election campaign that Autumn, and a student named Virgil Teodorescu was shot by a gendarme on 22 November 1933 while putting up propaganda posters in Constanța. Legionaries in Iași immediately gathered at the *Cămin* before moving to the city centre to stage a protest. Further scuffles with police ensued and one of the Legionaries shot a gendarme. The police raided the *Cămin* after the shooting and the students held out for several days before they finally capitulated on 27 November. Their friends outside supported them during the siege and a young worker named Nița was shot by the police when he tried throwing bread up to them.¹⁰⁶ The *Cămin* was

⁹⁹ Valentin Săndulescu, “*Taming the Body*”: Preliminary Considerations Concerning the Legionary Work Camps System (1933-1937), in “Historical Yearbook”, 5, 2008, p. 85-94; Rebecca Haynes, *Work Camps, Commerce, and the Education of the ‘New Man’ in the Romanian Legionary Movement*, in “Historical Journal”, An. LI, Nr. 4, 2008, p. 947-960.

¹⁰⁰ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 011784, vol. 11, f. 50.

¹⁰¹ Mihail Polihroniade, *Construim!*, in “Axa”, an. I, nr. 17, 6 septembrie 1933, p. 3.

¹⁰² Idem, *O nouă etică a muncii*, in “Calendarul”, an. I, nr. 459, 31 august 1933, p. 2; *Patronul Gărzii de Fier*, in “Calendarul”, an. II, nr. 520, 10 noiembrie 1933, p. 5.

¹⁰³ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 014005, vol. 4, f. 102-116.

¹⁰⁴ Valentin Săndulescu, *op. cit.*, p. 153-158.

¹⁰⁵ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 015671, vol. 1, f. 6-9, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Vera Totu, *Jilava*, in “13 Jilava”, an. VII, nr. 1, 29 noiembrie 1940, p. 5; Dumitru Banea, *Acuzat, martor, apărător în procesul vieții mele*, Sibiu, Editura Puncte Cardinale, 1995, p. 35-36.

badly damaged during the siege, with some rooms containing little more than piles of rubble, and the police sealed up the building after evacuating the inhabitants and searching for weapons that might have been hidden there.¹⁰⁷ The Legion's fortunes went from bad to worse after the *Cămin* was placed under military guard. The government dissolved the Legion on 9 December, arresting thousands of Legionaries prior to the elections of 20 December. Nine days after his mandate was confirmed, three Legionaries shot the Liberal Prime Minister Ion G. Duca at the train station in Sinaia. Even more legionaries were arrested in the wake of Duca's assassination, and the *Cămin* remained empty with most of the Legion's leadership in prison.¹⁰⁸

The Legion's popularity amongst students increased after Duca's assassination, and several key Cuzists in Iași joined their ranks. In October 1934, the legionary Traian Cotigă was elected president of the student's national organization, the National Union of Christian Students in Romania (*Uniunea Națională a Studenților Creștini din România*, UNSCR), finally handing titular control of the national student movement over to the Legion.¹⁰⁹ Announcing a new beginning for the student movement, legionaries invited student activists in Iași to their *Cămin* where they promised to explain their plans for the following year, making it clear that student politics would now be run from the legionary *Cămin* instead of from the ASC headquarters.¹¹⁰

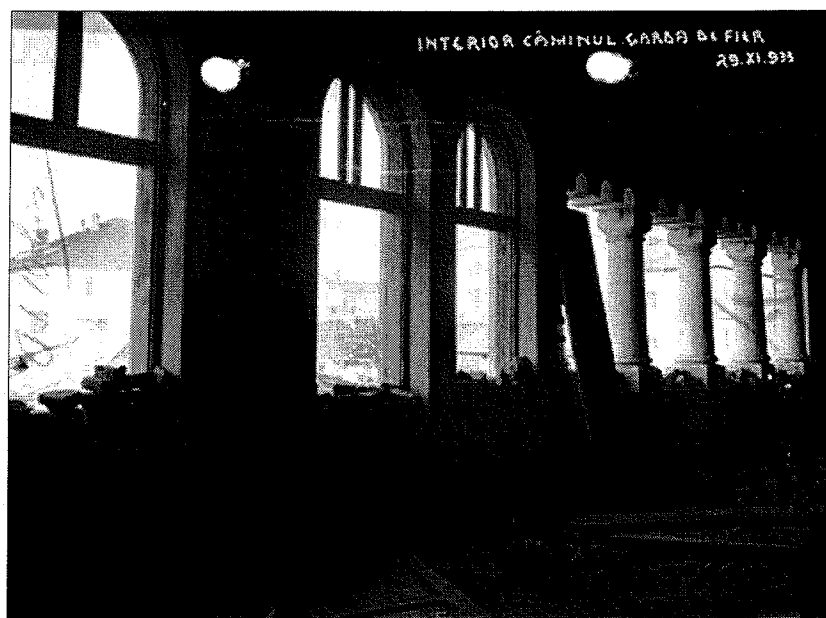


Fig. 3. Inside the *Cămin*, 29 November, 1933
(ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 011784, vol. 9, f. 376)

¹⁰⁷ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 015671, vol. 3, f. 176-177; ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 011784, vol. 9, f. 375-377; AN-Iași, fond Chestura de poliție Iași, dosar nr. 52/1933, f. 250.

¹⁰⁸ Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*, p. 233-236.

¹⁰⁹ CNSAS, fond documentar D.012694, vol. 3, f. 54.

¹¹⁰ AN-Iași, fond Universitatea Al. I. Cuza, Rectorat, rola #335, dosar nr. 1722/1937, f. 49.

Heating continued to be a serious problem now that the *Cămin* was back in use. Up to 100 students broke into one of the university's dormitories in January 1936, stealing thirty cubic meters of firewood and carrying it back to the legionary *Cămin*. Teodor Tudor, who was president of the ASC at this time, admitted to the theft but told university authorities that they did it because "it is unjust for some students to stay where it is warm and to benefit from all the advantages of the central dormitories while others are dying of cold and hunger in the *Cămin Cultural*."¹¹¹ Legionaries set about repairing the *Cămin* that summer, once again canvassing local businessmen to raise money to pay for the repairs.¹¹² The legionary work camps system reached its peak in 1936, and repairs to the *Cămin* were but a minor project alongside hundreds of more ambitious legionary worksites functioning across the country.

Disbanding the Legion as a social movement

The end of the *Cămin* as a hub of the legionary movement came in March 1937, in the wake of an assassination attempt on the chancellor of the University of Iași, Traian Bratu (1875-1940). Three unknown individuals attacked the chancellor with knives on his way home from work, wounding him and cutting off his ear.¹¹³ Codreanu announced that "the Legionary Movement has no connection to the terrible incident," but also reminded the authorities that university professors such as Bratu had acted unjustly towards their students and that "every political movement ... has its share of unbalanced people, who do not understand philosophy and who react in whatever way they like."¹¹⁴ One article censored out of the right-wing newspaper *Buna Vestire* (*The Good News*, 1937-1938, 1940-1941) claimed that the attackers had actually been former servants of Bratu's who were upset about overdue wages.¹¹⁵ On 3 March, two days after the attack, 400 policemen and gendarmes surrounded the *Cămin* at Râpa Galbenă and evacuated the building, arresting 46 people in the process.¹¹⁶ The authorities eventually charged five Legionaries with the attack but they were acquitted due to lack of evidence.¹¹⁷ The legionary *Cămin* was not the only dormitory to be closed down. Over the next week the government evacuated all student dormitories in the country, closed the universities, banned secret societies and political uniforms, and warned priests to stay out of politics.¹¹⁸ Government ministers had discussed reorganizing the dormitories a week before Bratu was stabbed, and that day General Gavrilă Marinescu (1886-1940), who

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, rola #304, dosar nr. 1595/1935, f. 65.

¹¹² AN-Iași, fond Chestura de poliție Iași, dosar nr. 93/1936, f. 130.

¹¹³ Stelian Neagoe, *op. cit.*, 468.

¹¹⁴ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări...*, p. 125-126.

¹¹⁵ ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar nr. 012694, vol. 1, f. 88.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, fond Documentar, dosar nr. 012694, vol. 1, f. 93.

¹¹⁷ AN-Iași, fond Chestura de poliție Iași, dosar nr. 91/1938, f. 234.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, dosar nr. 7/1937, f. 60-61; ACNSAS, fond Documentar, dosar nr. 012694, vol. 1, f. 99.

King Carol had just appointed Minister of Public Order, had drawn up a list of thirty legionaries, including Codreanu, who he wanted assassinated.¹¹⁹ Regardless of whether the Legion had actually orchestrated the attack on Bratu, its reputation for assassination and violence made it the ideal scapegoat. The government made very effective use of this attack to curtail legionary influence on university premises and to demand that the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church prevent its clergy from participating in ultra-nationalist politics.

Despite the closing of the *Cămin*, the Legion grew rapidly during 1937, and won 15.58% of the votes during the elections of December 1937.¹²⁰ These elections produced no clear winner, and the king appointed the anti-Semitic National Christian Party (*Partidul Național Creștin*, PNC) led by Octavian Goga and A. C. Cuza to form a government. The PNC needed a parliamentary majority to govern, so Goga announced a new round of elections which were scheduled for 3 March, 1938. Violent clashes erupted between Legionaries, Cuzists, and police as soon as the electoral campaign began, and with escalating violence, relations with Romania's pro-French allies at breaking point, and attempts at reconciliation amongst the major political parties meeting with repeated failure, King Carol II abolished the parliamentary system on 10 February 1938.¹²¹ Codreanu was arrested for slandering the king's counsellor, Nicolae Iorga, in April, and the following month a Military Tribunal condemned him to ten years hard labor for treason and for inciting rebellion. On the night of 30 November 1938, gendarmes drove Codreanu and thirteen other legionaries into a field on the outskirts of Bucharest where they strangled and then shot them.¹²² Police arrested or killed hundreds of other legionaries over the following months, and the career of the Legion of the Archangel Michael as a social movement came to an end. The Legion's leadership fled into exile after Codreanu's death and those rank and file legionaries who remained loyal to the movement resisted Carol's royal dictatorship through clandestine meetings and terrorist activities.¹²³ Now led by a former teacher named Horia Sima, the Legion came to power together with General Ion Antonescu for a brief five months in 1940-1941, only to be effectively wiped out after a legionary rebellion against Antonescu failed in January 1941.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Rebecca Haynes, *Reluctant Allies? Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu Against King Carol II of Romania*, in SEER, vol. 85, nr. 1, 2007, p. 113.

¹²⁰ C. Enescu, *Semnificația alegerilor din Decembrie 1937 în evoluția politică a neamului românesc*, in "Sociologie românească", vol. 2, nr. 11-12, 1937, p. 521.

¹²¹ Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*, p. 335-339; Paul A. Shapiro, *Prelude to Dictatorship in Romania: The National Christian Party in Power, December 1937 – February 1938*, in "Canadian-American Slavic Studies", vol. 8, nr. 1, 1974, p. 82-85.

¹²² Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919-1941: mistica ultranaționalismului*, traducere [in Romanian] Marian Ștefănescu, București, Editura Humanitas, 1993, p. 257.

¹²³ Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu*, București, Editura Vremea, 2007.

¹²⁴ Aurică Simion, *Regimul politic din România în perioada septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1976.

Conclusion

Focusing on the *Cămin Cultural Creștin* in Iași reveals important aspects of everyday life in the Legion of the Archangel Michael. The initial building project, for example, shows that an entire community of ultra-nationalists in Iași was implicated in student politics, which was not the exclusive domain of enrolled students and professors. The clashes with local Jews in Ungheni reminds us inter-ethnic violence occurred when anti-Semites attempted to establish dominance over localities such as the village of Ungheni, or even just its train station. Violent contests between legionaries and cuzists over ownership of the *Cămin* helps explain the enmity between the two groups which continued throughout the 1930s, and the Legion's ultimate victory in this dispute suggests one reason why students might have believed that Codreanu, and not Cuza, was the legitimate heir of the anti-Semitic student politics of the 1920s. But this focus also hides as much as it reveals. While showing how the Legion operated in one major urban centre it ignores legionary activities in villages and factories, and it disguises the fact that places such as churches, cemeteries, and private homes were also important meeting places and symbolic sites for legionaries. It also fails to explain the Legion's meteoric rise to national prominence in the mid-1930s and its eventual seizure of power in September 1940. That story needs to be told in terms of national politics and the role that political corruption and regional geo-politics played in the decline of Romanian democracy.

Stories about sociability, conviviality, and violence at the *Cămin* also remind us that people are often attracted as much by the social benefits of belonging to an extremist social movement as by its ideology. But as with most histories of everyday life, the sources are sparse and often unreliable. Relying on police reports emphasizes occasional violence over mundane everyday activities, and the legionary memoirs and newspaper sources describing happy gatherings and friendship romanticize what must have been an unusual and difficult place to live. If one takes these problems seriously, it becomes apparent that we really know almost nothing about the day-to-day atmosphere at the *Cămin* or how the various groups who used the site (residents/legionary leaders/occasional visitors) related to one another. With constant visitors, no heating, the bare minimum of household items, and the regular threat of violence from cuzists or police, most of the *Cămin's* inhabitants probably lived there from necessity rather than choice. What these sources do show is the role that buildings play in generating community within social movements, in sparking inter-movement conflict, and the way that such sites become symbolic for the movement as a whole as examples of teamwork, ingenuity, perseverance in suffering, persecution, and victory. The *Cămin* in Iași was only one of a number of important legionary sites, but its story is crucial to understanding what it was like to be a member of the Legion of the Archangel Michael in interwar Romania.

**Conflict și viață cotidiană la Căminul Cultural Creștin (Legionar) din Iași
(1924-1938)
(Rezumat)**

Cuvinte-cheie: Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Legiunea „Arhanghelul Mihail”, Garda de Fier, fascism, Iași, viața cotidiană, Cămin Cultural Creștin

Activiștii fasciști care au fost asociați cu Legiunea „Arhanghelul Mihail” din România au proiectat și construit un Cămin Cultural Creștin în Iași între 1924 și 1928. Clădirea a devenit centrul acțiunilor mișcării din oraș în perioada interbelică și a constituit un loc unde legionarii se puteau întâlni, relaxa, munci și socializa. A devenit, de asemenea, un motiv de discordie între legionari și opozanții lor, inclusiv adepți ai partidului lui A.C. Cuza, Liga Apărării Național-Creștine, și diverse grupuri de poliști români. Acest articol prezintă din perspectiva vieții cotidiene (Alltagsgeschichte) modul în care conflictul și buna dispoziție au conturat viețile legionarilor în această clădire. Este subliniată importanța spațiului geografic pentru mișcările sociale, modul în care proiectele practice au modelat, articulat și încorporat ideologia legionară și cum disputele violente asupra teritoriului au divizat activiștii și au consolidat noile grupuri care s-au format.

