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The Appearance of Saints: Photographic Evidence and Religious Minorities in the Secret Police Archives in Eastern Europe

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The Appearance of Saints: Photographic Evidence and Religious Minorities in the Secret Police Archives in Eastern Europe

I present here examples of the photographic presence of a religious minority community in the secret police archives in ex-communist Eastern Europe. The use of secret police archives by researchers to trace the history of repression and collaboration and to understand the methods employed by totalitarian regimes to control their populations is well established. The significance of these archives for the study of material religion, however, has been largely overlooked by scholars. The Secret Police archives in Romania and the Republic of Moldova constitute a hidden repository of confiscated religious materials and photographs which often sit alongside photographic images created by the secret police in the course of their investigations into *criminal* religious activities. These archives, therefore, represent an important resource for understanding both how religious groups chose to represent themselves and how the totalitarian system created images of religious *others* in order to incriminate and produce anti-religious propaganda. In this paper, through the presentation of example cases from state security files, I discuss the dual character of the photographic traces of communities in the archives as both religious justification and incrimination, and suggest ways of approaching these images through their materiality in the context of contemporary post-communist society.

Key words: secret police, photography, religion, religious minorities, archives, Romania, Moldova

Introduction

The study of religions in East and Central Europe has undergone dramatic change since the fall of communism. The opening of the secret police archives in several countries in the region from the 1990s on has given scholars important new sources which have been used to catalogue the history of victimization of religious groups and trace the history of state policy towards religions. Whilst the texts contained within the secret police files have received a great deal of scholarly attention, neither the presence of material religion within the archives nor the material religious practices of the secret

police have been explored to any degree. This article highlights the significance of one aspect of the material religious dimension of the archives, the photographic materials produced, collected and collated by the secret police. Following an introduction to the context of research on religions in the secret police archives and the significance of the materiality of the archives and the religious items they enclose, I present a categorisation of the photographic materials illustrated with examples relating to one new religious movement that was present in both Romania and the Soviet Union. Inochentists were targeted as one of the most "dangerous" religious sects by the communist era secret police as well as by the right-wing dictatorship that preceded communism in Romania. The examples I have chosen illustrate both "insider" photographic practices of the religious community as well as the uses the secret police made of photography in their anti-religious operations. Often pasted or stitched side by side in the secret police files that frame them materially and textually, the dual character of the photographic materials as both religious "justification" and "incrimination" comes into sharp relief. I suggest ways of approaching these images through an attentiveness to the performative practices of selectively hiding and revealing them at different times to public audiences. The ambivalent role that secret police archives have played in the multiple "crises of truth" experienced since the end of communism demonstrates the need for new perspectives and approaches to the archives. The heretofore neglected photographic corpus relating to religious minority groups that the archives enclose has the potential to challenge the power of the "textual truths" pursued so vigorously by researchers, politicians and various publics.

This article is largely based on research carried out in 2014 in Romania at the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives (CNSAS) in Bucharest and at the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova in Chișinău (known as Kishinev in

Russian), which both hold materials generated by the secret police in the interwar and Soviet periods. In 2017, I also had the opportunity explore the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security in Budapest (ÁBTL) which has facilitated some of the general observations I make regarding communist-era secret police archival and photographic practices. I use the generic term "secret police" to describe the state security services of Romania (the *Siguranţa* pre-1944 and the *Securitate* from 1944 onwards), of Soviet Moldova - including Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic which existed from 1924 to 1940 (Soviet security agencies had a succession of names between 1917 and 1991: Cheka (ЧК), NKVD, MGB and KGB) and of Hungary (the information services of the *Magyar Államrendőrség, Honvédelmi Minisztérium* and *Magyar Királyi Csendőrség* pre-1945 and the *Államvédelmi Hatóság* or ÁVH from 1945 to 1956).

The photographic practices of the secret police in all three countries I have looked at are remarkably similar and are all based on models and principles devised and taught by KGB officers. In this article, I refer to internal training manuals and journals of the Romania *Securitate* and the Hungarian ÁVH from the 1960s, in which agents are instructed on how to take and utilize the technology of photography in the pursuit of their targets. Rather than exploring a single file, this article presents a selection of material from Romania and Moldova, in order to illustrate the diversity of both the photographic materials within the archives and the ways in which they are assembled, encased within files and juxtaposed with texts and other materials. This article is intentionally wide-ranging as one of my principal aims is to encourage a broadening of methodological approaches to the study of religions in the secret police archives to embrace questions of materiality. This article also "keeps theory close to the ground" in

order to focus on the specific object/image relationship we are presented with in the secret police archives (see Edwards and Hart 2004, p. 3).

Materiality and the Secret Police Archives

The opening of the secret police archives took place as part of a broad movement for transitional justice aimed at overcoming the legacy of repressive regimes and working towards justice and reconciliation in society (Stan 2004, 2014, Verdery 2014). The process of opening the archives unfolded in different ways, and to different timescales, in each country in the region (in Romania and Hungary the process began in the 1990s), but their use for the cited aim of "de-communisation" has continued up until 2014, when the most recent countries, Ukraine and Albania, introduced their own new "de-communisation" laws, giving access for the first time to victims and researchers to secret police files in the name of openness and democratisation.

This process has, however, proved highly contentious. The archives were used extensively to vet individuals to prove they had not been informers or collaborators with the regime, a process referred to as "lustration", as well as giving citizens the opportunity to view their individual files. While the personal files, which recorded not just one crime but the entire biography of the individual, became during Soviet times "the most authoritative account of an individual life" (Vatulescu 2010, 13), in postsocialism they have also become the primary object of interest and research in the search for "truth". The underlying assumption is that there is a "referential relationship" between the file and person/s represented within them which also determines how the files are read in postsocialism (Verdery 2014, 61-62). The use of files in this way is highly problematic and has led on the public level to numerous cases of political manipulation and blackmail. The failure of policies and practices of transitional justice

have been charted across the region (Appel 2005, Kiss 2006, Stan 2004, 2014) and the "truth-value" of the archives have been questioned on many levels, not least due to the fabricated crimes, false testimonies, made up conversations, and "silences" they contain (Vatulescu 2010, Verdery 2014).

Neither the secret police, nor their archives, however, were ever truly "secret" as everyone knew of their existence during communism; they presented a visible "spectacle of secrecy" (Vatulescu 2010, 4-5). With the end of communism, this "spectacle" was transformed into the performance of a different drama; the drama of revealing what had been secret but yet known. In this sense, the secret police and their archives were embedded in the cultural consciousness of the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and became part of a literary, media and cinematic culture. During communism, films were produced that gave tantalising glimpses of secret police files (see Vatulescu 2010, 4-5) or, as in the case of the Romanian film *Reconstruction* (*Reconstituirea* 1960), the secret police provided the case, the agents and even the criminals (who acted in the film) on which a film dramatization was based (Vatulescu 2010, 187). In the case of religious communities, film footage of house searches and raids showing how evidence was gathered were regularly used in Soviet anti-religious propaganda films (a practice that has returned and was most recently seen with the filming of police raids against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia). In postsocialism, copies of pages and images from secret police files appear in numerous popular and scholarly publications – and in direct contravention of existing laws designed to protect privacy of individuals these publications sometimes present names and personal details. Therefore, both during the communist and post-communist periods, the use of secret police files creates a palpable atmosphere of drama and intrigue associated with the act of uncovering materials that contain "the truth".

A paradox, therefore, lies at the heart of the secret police archives. While the personal files represent the fullest and most detailed biography of individuals, and in postsocialism they have also become the primary object of research as a site of "truth", at the same time the files are discredited as "the immoral documents of an immoral regime" as Bence Rétvari, Hungary's one-time Justice Minister described them. Both the societal and academic focus has, to date, been on questions of truth, the failures of transitional justice and the political uses (and abuses) of the archives.

Diana Taylor, in exploring the character of "archival memory", points to two important myths in relation to archives; firstly "that it is unmediated, that objects located there might mean something outside the framing of the archival impetus itself" and the second is that "the archive resists change, corruptibility, and political manipulation. Individual things – books, DNA evidence, photo IDS – might mysteriously appear in or disappear from the archive" (Taylor 2003, 19). Both of these points are particularly salient in relation to the secret police archives in Eastern Europe. In much the same way that colonial powers were able, through archaeological and ethnographic collections, to produce an entirely alien and arbitrary authoritative frame through which to view indigenous colonised peoples that came to represent an indelible "truth", the secret police in Eastern Europe archived materials that, despite the highly suspect relationship to "truth", nevertheless achieved a paradoxical "enduring belief in the authority of their holdings" (Vatulescu 2010, 12), transforming the mechanisms for the production and assertion of truth and the social basis of trust.

Besides the informer and surveillance reports, interrogations and confessions, the secret police archives also contain a rich gallery of confiscated items such as photographs, artworks and pamphlets, as well as diaries, poetry, letters and postcards. Files compiled on members of religious organisations often contain the miscellaneous

ephemera of religious life such as handwritten prayers and hymns, holy cards and leaflets as well as photographs, letters and brochures. The archives, therefore, offer us glimpses of the communities who, through their use of various media, strove to maintain, sustain and grow their religious congregations. This material is embedded within files compiled, curated and edited by the secret police agents, who engaged in their own creative practices of visually representing, for the purposes of investigations, criminal cases and propaganda, those that they were charged with destroying or discrediting. Secret police agents also dedicated considerable energy to documenting through photographs, films and written descriptions, the material, spatial and visual worlds of religious communities.

The question of how to read the various texts within the files has received a great deal of scholarly attention (on interpreting Romanian secret police documents see for example Chivu and Albu 2007, Albu 2008,) and there is an emerging awareness of the significance of the material dimension of communist era files (Verdery 2014, 60-76, Luehrmann 2015, 3-5). Vatulescu points to the way in which the assembled materials produced "strange new configurations" (2010, 6) and Luehrmann explores the route materiality offers into complex sets of social relations (Luehrmann 2015, 3-5). In approaching the materiality of religious groups through the archives, we encounter a multi-layered assemblage of items and images that produce visual and material narratives embedded within and co-dependent on an "authoritative" textual narrative that encases them. These assemblages are the result of various agentive forces; the secret police agents and informers, members of religious communities themselves and the public media. The "truths" and meanings of the archives are therefore bound up with their materiality, the physical presence within them of material cultures and the periodic and selective drama of revealing their presence.

By viewing the archive as a "hidden gallery" and shifting our gaze to the confiscated images and the creative products of communities and agents, the researcher sidesteps some of the problematic questions associated with the narrative or historical "truth" of the texts contained within the files. However, other problems move the fore. Just as Cristina Vatulescu points out, the literary critic "reader" of the archives may be in danger of "aestheticizing" the files (2010, 16); likewise, when one focuses solely on the material and visual cultural component there is the danger of divorcing the cultural products *in* and *off* the archive from the political and ideological system that created and compiled them. The image content of the visual materials in the archive I explore later in this article may obscure our view of what these images *are* in a material sense; what the images visually depict is the reason for their presence in secret police files, however, they are imbued with meaning and qualities that are the result of their physical presence as constituent parts of case files. Their "truths" are not solely dependent on their visual message therefore (see Hazard and Hart 2004, 2); the images are complicit in the construction of the textual "truths".

In addition, the "hidden galleries" enclosed within the secret police archives acquired meaning in relation to the way in which they were purposefully constructed as secret or hidden by the secret services and in their ongoing spectacle of disclosure. The material religious holdings of the archives have a decidedly dual character, simultaneously constituting the stolen cultural patrimony of religious groups and as well as their ideological construction as illegal, hidden, dangerous or secret things. Confiscated religious materials may also carry other layers of meaning determined by the "secrecy" practices of the religious groups themselves. As Teeuwen reminds us "Secrecy is an essential part of most, if not all, religious Traditions" (2006, 2); during communism restricting access or hiding certain materials, both from their own members

who were perhaps not trusted with esoteric or advanced knowledge, and from potential informers or secret police agents. The present study, aims to open the secret police archives to more holistic approaches that tackle the problems associated with "truths", both visual and textual, and their complex intertwining in the material basis of the "secret" archive.

Photography, Power and the Secret Police

In his study of photographs of the 1956 Revolution in the Archives of the Hungarian State Security, Rolf Müller observes that "in any given historical context the function of the photograph can change, new layers of meaning build up, which are able to influence human lives" (2006, 296). The photographic materials in secret police files, just like the texts amongst which they sit, were placed there with the intention of producing knowledge about the groups represented in order to incriminate them and exercise power over them. As Susan Sontag famously asserted, the camera record both "incriminates" and "justifies" (Sontag 1977) and as such photographic images have a dual identity. The images in the secret police files that were created, presented and preserved as evidence of criminality exemplify this point; whilst they stand testimony to the agency of religious communities to engage in powerful self-representations; they also constitute a means of control.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the rapid advancement of photographic technology making it cheaper and more accessible (Tagg 1998, 66), photography was very quickly adopted as a means to "provide pictorial evidence to substantiate written observations" (Emaliantseva 2009, 190). As Emaliantseva notes, it became the "ultimate evidence" but "simultaneously, it also had the potential to allow for a certain agency" (2009, 190) – people were captured as they wished to look, they

created their own formalised presentation of themselves, their values were visible, whether bourgeois, religious, or political and they actively materialised communal memory. The photograph became a democratic medium in the sense that it was affordable to most people.

Religious communities also embraced the medium as a way to "self-represent" their religious traditions and their place within the social order (Emaliantseva 2009, 190). They had photographs taken in their homes where they could display their religious images and identity more freely, in studios where, in contrast, they posed with bourgeois artefacts and décor, at important events such as pilgrimages, and they took and shared photographs of their spiritual leaders. In this way, "Images not only documented the life of individuals and communities, but also legitimised their existence and their way of life" (Emaliantseva 2009, 190) and importantly, visualised their beliefs, values and religious identities.

The most direct way in which power "accrued" to photography was through its use by institutions of the state (Tagg 1988, 66). Photography early on became a tool of the police and state security, with photographs becoming invested with the status of "proof." In this sense it was transformed into an "anti-democratic" medium in its ability to incriminate and capture enemies of the state. Photography was considered one of the most important means by which the secret police could track their targets and gather convincing evidence of the activities and networks of those under surveillance.

Through their internal magazines and work manuals, the Romanian *Securitate* described both the necessary technical requirements of the photographic operation, such as the equipment to be used in surveillance operations (Mulesiu 1969, 87-88), as well as the legal framework within which photographic evidence could be used (Anghelescu 1971). As well as taking their own photographs, the secret police recognised the value

of confiscated photographs that could incriminate individuals by indisputably associating them with a particular community, with a locality or performing illegal religious activities, such as holding communal prayer meetings in a private home.

Inochentism and Visual Media

The photographs in this article all relate to Inochentism, a movement named after its founder, the Moldovan Orthodox monk Inochentie Levizor. This new religious movement emerged on the borderlands between Russia and Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century shortly before the Russian Revolution. Inochentism has received little scholarly attention from researchers outside of Moldova (see Clay 1999, Kapaló 2014, 2018) despite having been considered one of the most "dangerous" sects by both the right-wing and communist totalitarian regimes. The persecution of Inochentists reached its apogee in the 1940s when, as part of a general cleansing of undesirables from wartime Romania, Marshall Antonescu, Romania's wartime dictator, ordered the deportation of 2000 Inochentists, alongside hundreds of thousands of Jews and Roma, to the concentration camps in Romanian occupied Transnistria (Achim 2013, 542-544). In the Soviet Union, from the 1940s through to the 1980s, there were intermittent campaigns waged against Inochentism that resulted in trials, imprisonment in labour camps and deportation to the Gulag.

Inochentism has a very rich visual and material dimension that is central to the Inochentist worldview (see Bortă 2007, Kapaló 2014, 2018). Images played such a significant role in Inochentist communities partly because of low literacy rates but also because images could convey more powerfully the new cosmological order that Inochentie, as the Holy Spirit on earth, embodied (see Kapaló 2018). Inochentism emerged from a Christian Orthodox context in which "icons and their use belong to a

visual paradigm of 'seeing into being,' where what one puts before one's eyes has profound effects on the kind of person one becomes and the reality one lives in" (Kivelson and Neuberger cited in Luehrmann 2016, 238). This power of "seeing into being" generated a new ordering of reality for Inochentists with photo icons, photographs and montages able to decentre existing religious monopolies through the suggestion and materialization of alternative divine and worldly realities. The agency of these religious images ultimately worked both for and against the movement as with the production of their images Inochentists first broke Orthodox canonical rules and later, from the 1930s, they also broke state law. In the case of Inochentism, the images we find in the secret police archives give us a unique insight into a religious world that emerged and was transmitted through a number of generations during periods of extreme repression by both right and left-wing totalitarian regimes.

Photographic Categories, Inochentist Realities

My categorisation of photographs is based on images from KGB, *Securitate*, *Siguranța* and Hungarian ÁVH files in the archives in Romania, Moldova and Hungary. My observations were also informed by Rolf Müller's account of the various categories of photographs required for investigative and crime scene work as described in criminology textbooks from the 1960s and 1970s used by the Hungarian state security (Müller 2006, 7-10) and by articles in the Romanian internal secret police journal *Securitatea* form the 1960s and 70s that describe the technical, operational and legal parameters for the use of photography during surveillance operations.

Unlike standard photographic archives, the images in the secret police archives are not catalogued or indexed separately to the case files that contain them and neither do the secret police use categorisations for the images they include, regardless of

whether they sit in relation to a text that defines their place and purpose in the file or not. The selection of examples to illustrate my categories, which all relate to Inochentism, are intended to elucidate the range of intentions, uses and implications of images found in the archives and their agency beyond the archives.

(1) Photographs produced by the State Security Agents

Crime scene

Crime scene photographs recorded "the state, situation and circumstances" of the crime in order to "present data for the investigation and prove facts as well as recall reality in court" (Müller 2011, 7) – they were not considered as a suitable replacement by the secret police to a written description but rather they presented a richer representation of "reality" visually. These were broken down into the following subcategories by the Hungarian criminology manuals and as the examples below illustrate, they are mirrored closely in the actual practices of the KGB and other state security agencies:

i. Environment Photo – presents the general scene and background in order to understand how the perpetrators might have moved around the scene
ii. Overview Photo – "the direct place of the given act" showing how items and traces relate to one another
iii. Central Photo – "the heart of the event, key feature of the crime"
iv. Detail Photo – small and important details including the "damage done", the incriminating object or vital clues ((Müller 2011, 7)

Figures 1 and 2, which are photographs taken from a KGB file on Inochentist networks compiled in 1952-53, show examples of crime scene photographs. The four images here come from a series of twelve photographs from the crime scene that show clearly how visual evidence was recorded in order to trace a route to incriminating evidence. In

these images we see the exterior of a house, a ladder used to access a hiding place in the roof (other photographs showed open and concealed hatches), a ladder leading down into an underground chapel and the interior of the chapel itself. The series of images culminates with photographs of religious rituals in progress (see category d. below).

These crime scene photographs record a space and a material world hidden from public view. Inochentists developed an extensive network of underground chapels and safe hiding places across Moldova where the total separation from Church authority and clerical oversight produced a new lifeworld for the production and use of the image. These new spaces became alternative galleries, replacing the liturgy and iconostasis, where images acted to decentre "authority normally concentrated in jurisdictional hierarchies" (Weaver 2011, 395). Studies of underground religious networks in the Soviet Union have yet to explore the material and physical reality of life in the religious underground. The photographs taken by the secret police represent a valuable resource for such studies, however, they provoke important ethical questions that are best addressed with the involvement communities themselves, when possible. The images, we should not forget, are of sacred spaces "violated" by agents who captured the scene and then curated the photographs in order to incriminate. The images I have chosen to publish here are free from the kind of controversial or shocking content that were used by the propaganda organs of the Soviet media to defame Inochentism. Images of bodies and dead babies, for example, were "revealed" on the pages of Soviet newspapers from the 1950s and served the interests of Soviet atheist propaganda. The photographic "evidence" and assertions associated with the case file cited in this article, were all discounted as insufficient and inconclusive when the cases were re-examined by Supreme Court of the Republic of Moldova after the end of the Soviet system in 1993 (ASISRM-KGB –023262, 563-575).

Undercover photographs

The purpose of a stake-out or spy operation was "to observe and document" from as close a proximity as possible the activity of the object of investigation using various "conspiratorial means" (Kovacs 1968, 64). This could be done "from inside a building or means of transport or from an exterior locality depending on where the action takes place" (Mulesiu 1969, 87). In an article from the *Securitate*'s internal journal, Colonel Milesiu presents photographs of cameras mounted inside a handbag and inside a coffee flask and explains how this kind of set up "allows as many photos or frames as possible without the need to re-load the film too frequently of the respective equipment" (1969, 88). Such undercover photographs could be taken from a concealed position or from within the group under surveillance.

Undercover photographs included capturing the targets whilst they "exchange materials; visit addresses; illegally photograph objects; hide materials or distribute documents the contents of which are hostile to the social order and to our state" (Mulesiu 1969, 87). Agents also photographed individuals at gatherings or in public places whom they might later need to identify. Photographs taken in the course of surveillance operations, according to Romanian secret police guidelines, "could be used as documents in prosecution cases, and also as a means of proof before the courts, according to the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code" (Mulesiu 1969, 87).

Where this kind of surveillance photography could not be achieved, either for practical reasons or perhaps due to lack of resources, secret police operations resorted to other techniques to gather the necessary evidence. None of the Inochentist files I have had the opportunity to see from either Romania or Soviet Moldova contain "true" surveillance photographs, however, in the case of at least two Inochentist cases from 1950s Moldova, the secret police produced photographs of rituals and gatherings "as if"

they were taken during surveillance operations but are in fact re-enactments or re-stagings created after the fact (see category d. and figure 5. below).

Photographs of arrested individuals

Photographs of individuals arrested or detained by the police generally take the form of the classic "head shot" or "mug shot" in which the individual is instantiated as the "criminal", with head and shoulders photographed face on and to the side for identification purposes. In the archives, these images are routinely accompanied by finger prints on a sheet together with personal identification data that further pins down how the image is to be read.

The image I present to illustrate this category was brought to my attention by a colleague Igor Cașu, a Moldovan historian who published a short account of the case of Gheorghe Zgherea, (see figure 3.) in the online edition of the Romanian newspaper *Adevărul* (Cașu 2014). Gheorghe Zgherea was arrested and sent to the Gulag in 1953. At this point, the height of the Stalinist terror was already over but individuals and small groups who were considered to be especially dangerous continued to be arrested and receive severe sentences (Cașu 2014). 21 years old when he was arrested together with six other Inochentists, according to his KGB file he had become the local preacher of the Inochentists in 1949. He was accused of "using religious prejudice and promoting anti-Soviet agitation, he convinced citizens to not participate in social and political life, not to take part in elections, he urged the youth not to join the Union of Communist Youth, and called on the people of the village not to work on Sundays" (Cașu 2014). He was sentenced to 25 years Correctional Labour in a work camp and was sent to the dreaded Kolima Gulag, in the Russian Far East. He was rehabilitated on 19th December 2005 by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Moldova, which declared that on the

basis of the evidence in his file "he was not a counter revolutionary as the principal aspects of this offence are missing as he did not undermine the military potential, the independence or the inviolability of the territory of the state" (Cașu 2014).

In Zgherea's case file we encounter two contrasting images, the first shows us an individual stripped of personal agency and dignity, head-shaven, pensive and nervous. This type of mugshot represents, in the words of John Tagg, "the body made object; divided and studied; enclosed in a cellular structure of space whose architecture is the file-index; made docile and forced to yield up its truth; separated and individuated; subjected and made subject" (1988, 76). The inclusion of an alternative image of Gheorghe Zgherea in the case file, in stark contrast to the first, however, invites the viewer to witness the "criminal" in another guise. The intention of the KGB in including this confiscated image of Gheorghe Zgherea (see figure 4.) was to incriminate him and prove his identity as an Inochentist leader, which this image surely helped achieve. Here, however, we can glimpse a young man seated in the place of honour between two women, each of them wearing a cross around his or her neck, Zgherea wears two. One woman holds an Icon in her hand, the other a wooden cross in the right hand, the symbol of a martyr in Orthodox Iconography and a direct infringement of Orthodox canonical norms regarding visual representations of people who are not saints. We see here a visual confirmation and "justification" of Gheorge's identity. The image is valuable for research on Inochentist beliefs and practices as it allows us to see how Inochentists chose to represent themselves at a time when they were subject to intensive persecution at the hands of the state. Because the secret police were meticulous in collecting such images, a large corpus of these photographs can be found in files dating from the 1930s through the 196s making it is possible to trace the

emergence of new visual, dress and symbolic conventions that evolved within the community.

Significantly, and perhaps more importantly in terms of the agency of the photograph in post-socialism, in his article on Gheorghe Zgherea, Igor Cașu was able to select an image from the archives that was previously unavailable and unseen. Hidden in the archive by the secret police, the image was prevented from "acting" between 1953 and 2014 until the unforeseen circumstances of the collapse of communism and its repressive institutions. Revealed in a new time and a new context - online in an article that exonerates Zgherea - the image serves now not to incriminate but to vindicate. The image has a new public life never intended by either Gheorge Zgherea or his persecutors.

Staged representations of religious rituals and religious gatherings

In some situations, the secret police staged religious rituals and gatherings and captured them in photographs and film for later use in anti-religious propaganda campaigns and publications. In the absence of surveillance photographs, arrested individuals were forced to re-enact rituals "as if" the secret police had been filming or photographing from within the group. The photographs presented here (see figure 5.), show two Inochentist leaders, Arteni Mihail Georgievich, the man on the right in the images, and Petraș Maria Ivanovna, on the left, in the midst of what appears to be a liturgical ritual. Images from the same secret police photo shoot appeared in the Moldovan newspapers (see figure 6) alongside a dramatized account of the dangerous and subversive activities of Inochentists. In this way the performative re-stagings of religious ritual became a propaganda tool. Despite the methods and ideology of the secret services having been discredited, the paradoxical "belief in the authority of their holdings" (Vatulescu 2010,

12) ensures that the "false" photographic evidence continues to possess agency.

The protagonists in these images were found guilty of crimes against the state and were deported to the Altai region of Siberia where they probably perished. Similarly to Gheorge Zgherea, they were posthumously pardoned of their crimes in 1993.

(2) Confiscated Photographs

The most common type of images found in the secret police files are confiscated photographs. With the increased availability of photographic equipment and the ease with which photographs could be reproduced, the mass reproduction and distribution of images was in some ways easier and less traceable than that of the printed word. Typewriters had to be registered with the local police in the Soviet Union and in communist Romania and sample pages of text were kept on record for each machine so that the origin of texts could be traced.

Photographs of religious leaders

By the end of the 19th century many religious communities had begun to produce and distribute photographs of their leaders as a mark of respect or as supports for devotion. In the Orthodox world of Eastern Europe, the practice of producing photographic images of this kind became controversial because of the important role that icons play in Orthodox devotional practice and the underlying theological assumptions which invest visual images with the power to transmit divine energies (see Hanganu 2004) and to mediate "a mystical meeting" between Christ, or the saints, and the faithful (Bulgakov 1988, 141). As Gabriel Hanganu asserts in his study of Romanian Orthodox photographs, we can only understand a photograph's "capability of physically embodying the sanctity of icons" if we take into account the "particular role ascribed to

matter in the Orthodox icon veneration" (Hanganu 2004, 148).

The problems associated with the production of unauthorised sacred photographs first arose in the Russian Orthodox context around the cult of Father John of Kronstadt (Kizenko 2000, 158). As his reputation and sanctity grew, an industry arose producing affordable postcards and momentos for pilgims to Kronstadt. In these photographs and prints, Father John was usually shown in poses designed not to confuse the faithful – he was not shown holding the cross in his right hand - as we see in the case of one of the women pictured with Gheorghe Zgherea - as this was the sign of a martyr, nor was he shown in vestments, as only canonised priests and bishops were depicted in icons in their "ordained state", and the photographs and engravings also avoided the subject standing or cut off at the waist and full-face to the camera "to avoid any possible confusion with icons" (Kizenko 2000, 158-159).

The images of Inochentie that we find in the secret police archives, however, broke all of these rules and conventions. Photographs, montages, lithographs and paintings routinely portrayed Inochentie holding a cross in his right hand, facing full on the camera, in liturgical vestments and sometimes with angelic or divine attributes such as wings or a dove at his heart. During his lifetime Inochentie was considered a holy man by many thousands of rural Moldovans but his close followers regarded him to be the Holy Spirit incarnate at the End of Time. One of the leaders that came after him, Alexandru Culeac, declared himself to be the Holy Spirit of the Archangel Michael and formed his own branch of the movement, Archangelism. Alexandru Culeac, like Inochentie before him, grasped the power of images and of new photographic techniques to "produce" divine identities and materialise miraculous attributes.

The photograph shown here (figure 7.), taken from a Military Court file that contained several other confiscated photographs (ANRM-TMC3A 738-1-6864, pp. 7-

15), is a double image on the same print sheet with Inochentie (on the left) and Alexandru Culeac (on the right), both images include painted "interventions" in the photographs. The two leaders appear with doves at their heart, symbolising their status as incarnations of the Holy Spirit, whilst Alexandru Culeac is shown with angelic wings, a sword and shield indicating his identification with the Archangel Michael. This image of Alexandru Culeac was published in 1924 as the frontispiece of a booklet that records a series of visions in which he takes on his archangelic identity (*O vedenie* 1924).

Much later following his arrest by the Soviet secret police in 1947, an account of his career was published in a teaching manual for the instruction of atheism under the title "Repentance of a Sinner". In his confession – which may have been given under extreme duress - Culeac explains how central the production of this icon that he declared "looked just like me", was for the promotion of his divine status at the beginning of his career and for the later success of the movement.

> I decided then to make an icon with my image. I commissioned it from a painter who painted the *Day of Judgement* and the *Ascension of the Archangel Michael*, as well as my ascension to heaven. The Icon was a success. And the Archangel Michael looked just like me. I declared this icon holy. And it started here. People threw themselves down on their knees in front of the Icon. They kissed it and prayed to it to heal them from illness. I don't know if the icon cured anyone but in exchange we received a handsome income. They brought us cereals, money, carpets and cattle. (Karpunina and Sibiriakov 1959)

As we learn from this account, which despite the circumstances of its provenance seems to be a genuine reflection on the power of the icon photographs Culeac produced and distributed, the image was used as an object of devotion and also helped the movement accrue considerable wealth. The photographs derived from the original photo-painted icon hybrid image were portable, easily replicable and cheap to

produce and these material qualities aided the emergence of a distinctive Inochentist material and visual culture. During the 1930s and 40s, there are reports of them being sold on markets from suitcases, hidden under officially sanctioned religious icons and booklets; they were sold to knowing customers "on-request" (ANIC-IGJ, 154/1941, 22). The Romanian Orthodox Holy Synod took very seriously the danger posed by these subversive and heretical images produced by religious dissenters, not only Inochentists but also other newly emerging groups, and passed a ruling in 1936 to be enforced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs through the Gendarmerie, requiring all religious icons, crosses and religious publications to be approved by the Church (ANIC-IGJ, 22/1941, 82). Arrests were frequently made based on the possession of illegal icons, which were interpreted as acts of propaganda (ANRM-TMC3A 738-2-164, 50), and Inochentists were, by the 1940s, routinely sent to the military courts where they received anything between a small fine to 6 months hard labour (ANIC-IGJ 22/1941, 43).

Inochentists, like other religious actors that challenged the political order at the time, successfully refashioned the "local visual system" (see Hanganu 2004, 149) usurping the canonical authority of the Orthodox Church through the mass production of photo-icons. The image of Alexandru Culeac was initially distributed quite openly until the Church and state authorities recognised its "subversive" power. Later, through the 1940s and 50s, following periods of intense persecution by the Antonescu dictatorship and Soviet authorities, it was hidden and closely guarded by members of the community. The material form of this image, which was easily reproducible and concealable, allowed it to move from public to private, selectively hidden and revealed during different stages of its lifetime.

Photographs of members of religious communities

Group and community photographs feature heavily amongst the corpus of confiscated images. These images were often taken at pilgrimages, religious festivals and special gatherings and were a means for the community of materialising communal memory and presenting their values and beliefs in visual form. For the secret police, on the other hand, they were a convenient means of tracing networks and personal relationships.

My final example (figure 8.) comes from the reports of a Romanian *Securitate* informer who heard about the "appearance of some saints" in January 1965 amongst a group of Inochentists in Bucharest. In February of that year, the members of the "sisterhood" of Inochentist women were being investigated by the Securitate because of their links to C. A., a "Saint" referred to by his flock as the prophet "Elisha". An informer, "Dan Gheorghe" (not his real name), who had either infiltrated the group or been recruited from within it, after a conversation with the "sisters" reported the following:

> She [one of the leaders of the group] told me that the militia man [who lived next door to her] got hold of a photograph of her with C. A. and M. and that if she is asked by the militia if she knows C. A., that she won't say no because the militia have the photograph, but if she is asked about other "brothers" in the group she will say nothing even if they cut her into pieces. I asked her how the photograph reached the militia and she told me that she was photographed together with those I mentioned above, then she sent the photograph to C. A. through the post and in this way the militia had made a copy of the photograph. (CNSAS I 237454, vol. 3, 57.)

This short extract from the Informers Report tells us a lot about the "career" of a particular photograph that was taken by the followers of C. A. as a record of their meeting with him. Three copies of a photograph, together with a number of others, appear on one page of a secret police file (see figure 7.) described as "photographs of

the elements [meaning the individuals under surveillance] from the operation of group no. 70." The informer tells us of the image produced by members of the community, how it was shared, how it was intercepted by the secret police and finally how it was transformed into incriminating evidence that could be used to identify members of the underground community. This example serves to illustrate the text/image relationship as the Informers Report engages the photograph as evidence of the meeting with C.A. The image, however, is in stark contrast to the text that describes it; the text incriminates and implicates the image in a conspiratorial narrative, whereas the intention of the producers of the image was to commemorate a significant act of devotion to the group's spiritual leader.

In this article, I have referred to the drama of selective hiding and revealing of files and images; this extract from an informers report reveals the seriousness of what was at stake in the game of hide and seek of photographic images of religious communities. In Romania in the 1960s, many religious leaders were subjected to imprisonment under brutal conditions including beatings, hard labour and public humiliation (see Hanganu 2004). The case files relating to C. A. run to many thousands of pages that involved the work of several agents and at least three informers over several years. Visiting C. A. invited the attention of the *Securitate* and risked arrest and imprisonment. I have masked the faces of the two women in the photograph presented here for two reasons, firstly when researching individuals who may still be alive their identity is protected by law, in addition, association with Inochentism has been and in some instances continues to be stigmatising.

Written comments by the producers of the images are rare, photographs in the secret police archives do not complement a biography, in the way they might in some other archives (Emaliantseva 2009, 195). Instead, the account we have here is through

the filter of the informer, who reveals a narrative of the photo-object and the production of a "doppelganger" by the secret services.

Conclusion

Between the covers of a single secret police file we may encounter a complex "scenario" informed by multiple images. The distinctive assemblage of photographic materials in the archives folders I have explored, reflect the agency, uses and meanings of multiple producers and a context in which viewing and consuming were, and continue to be, restricted. They also offer an opportunity to explore the way that new meanings accumulate around an image as it moves between different spatial, historical and cultural contexts. The photographs in the archive speak to us first and foremost about the institutional use of photography to exert power over communities but also how photographic practices are harnessed for "resistance and struggle" (Tagg 1988, 67). As Craig Campbell observes, photographs are of course "qualitatively different things than are words sentences, essays and monographs. They communicate in unique ways, and their appearance in proximity to exposition and argument is deeply problematic" (2014, xiv). In the secret police archives, the photograph is inserted into a "textual milieu" that not only defines and constricts how it is to be understood (see Edkins 3013, 141) but also encloses and hides its content.

A recurring theme when exploring the lives of these images is the selective hiding and revealing materials at different point in time. The physical location of the images between the covers of a secret police file situates them within an ongoing social and political discourse on post-socialist justice and historical "truth" that has troubled the societies in the region for the past twenty-five years. The paradox of the archives, whether one searchers for historical truth, personal closure or societal justice, is bound up with the ongoing drama of revealing their hidden "truths", which despite the

widespread recognition that their contents are hopelessly compromised by the immorality of the system that produced erroneous documents to support the goals of an illegitimate system – still offer the (false) promise of answers. The potential of the photographs in the archives, which like the documents they sit amongst can also be seen as a kind of "perversion of the empirical event" (Campbell 2014, x.), to contribute to our understanding the history of religions during this period is yet to be realised. As integral elements of the archival evidence, however, the photographs have a role to play, whether as incriminating evidence as the secret police intended or as religious justification, as some of their produces intended. I suggest here that the photographs in the archive have the potential to destabilise the unequivocal nature of the textual truths in unforeseen ways.

As Edwards and Hart assert, "an object cannot be fully understood at any single point in its existence but should be understood as belonging to a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning" (2004, 4). In the case of the photographic corpus of religious images created, collected and curated by the secret police, the drama of the hiding and revealing of images throughout their lives produced dramatic changes in the values and meanings associated with them. Craig Campbell in his work on photography in Soviet ethnographic archives, sums up the unique power of the photographic image as "a future-oriented object, for it is always establishing connections beyond itself and being re-interpreted in each photo-encounter. (Campbell 2014, xix).

In the case of secret police archives, there are still many "photo-encounters" waiting to happen. The most consequential future encounter must surely involve the religious communities that produced the images, sanctified the spaces or appear in the rituals that are captured by the secret police. Inochentist communities generally have no

idea that their devotional and personal photographs have been preserved in state security archives. The status of these things as part of their cultural or sacred patrimony is yet to enter the discourse. An increased awareness of the presence of photographs and materials enclosed in the archives will open up possibilities for communities seeking to understand their difficult past and overcome lingering negative societal attitudes that were moulded by state propaganda over decades of totalitarian rule.

I have not attempted here to draw conclusions or challenge truths with the images I have selected, or to predict how the "lives" of these images may unfold in the future, instead it is my aim for this article to join the ongoing social performance of revealing glimpses of the hidden "truths" that haunt post-communist Eastern Europe in the conviction that openness and discussion can contribute a new chapter in the troubled lives of the secret police archives.

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Figure 1. Crime scene photographs **(**ASISRM-KGB, personal file 023262, p.192).

Figure 2. Crime scene photographs **(**ASISRM-KGB, personal file 023262, p. 194)

Figure 3. Photograph of Gheorghe Zgherea whilst under arrest **(**ASISRM-KGB, personal file 023262, p. 8/9).

Figure 4. Confiscated image of Gheorghe Zgherea with two women Inochentists **(**ASISRM-KGB, personal file 023262, p. 8/9).

Figure 5. Ritual re-enactment as evidence of criminal activity **(**ASISRM-KGB – personal file 023262, p. 197).

Figure 6. Staged photograph of arrested Inochentists leaders published in a Soviet youth newspaper (Ţopa & Sibiriac 1958, 4).

Figure 7. Photo-icon print sheet with images of Inochentie (left) and the Archangel Michael, Alexandru Culeac (left) (ANRM-TMC3A 738-1-6864, p. 7).

Figure 8. “Photographs of the elements from the operation of group no. 70.” (CNSAS, I 237 454 vol. 1, p. 4). Faces blanked out by the author.