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Echoes of Cucova
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Iuliana Cindrea

It was January 2018, more than a year after the start of my archival research with the Hidden Galleries project, when I first caught sight of the photographs of Cucova in the secret police archives in Romania (see entry 1). Since then, these images that were taken as evidence of the so-called Old Calendarist rebellion of 1935 have become very important for my research, and I have spent long hours looking at them closely, exploring every detail to try and understand the event they depict.

Two years later, in November 2019, as part of the exhibition *Hidden Galleries: Clandestine Religion in the Secret Police Archives* at the Museum of Art in Cluj-Napoca, the story of Cucova greeted visitors with large reproductions of these photos covering the walls of the first room of the exhibition. Many of our research participants from the Old Calendarist church visited the exhibition for the opening and one of them began to tell me the stories that his grandfather had told him about Cucova and about the priest, Ioanică Dudescu. "Cucova was not his first encounter with the authorities," he said, "they once beat him and he lost a finger. Look, there, can you see it?" He pointed to one of the men in the photograph on the wall that showed arrested Old Calendarists lined up, sitting on chairs. There he was, with his hands on his knees, barefooted, dressed in civilian clothes, with nothing to set him apart from the other members except for a large "X" that the authorities had drawn next to him in order to identify him. The priest Ioanică Dudescu was, indeed, missing a finger.

Another detail about Dudescu from the images of Cucova was also affirmed for me by a member of the community. There is one photo that shows the exact place where he was reported by the authorities to have been found hiding, "dressed in women's clothes." At first I had thought this detail may have been made up by the police, but one member of the community told me that it was not uncommon: "No one cared about the women, so priests would sometimes dress in women's clothes to be able to slip past the authorities."

I had spent so much time staring at these photos and wondering about the relationship between the words of the police reports and the visual images they took to support the official version of the story. Reflecting back on these details, I would never have placed so much value on them as I did at that moment when all the elements converged in one place: the archive, the community, and a story that tied everything together.

Source
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Exhibition *Hidden Galleries: Clandestine Religion in the Secret Police Archives* at the Museum of Art in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. © Hidden Galleries project. Photo by Roland Vaczi.