

BEYOND THE SACRED: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF MOSHE IDEL'S *MIRCEA ELIADE: FROM MAGIC TO MYTH*

■ Alin Constantin
■ College of Jewish Studies, Heidelberg
■ Germany

ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the study of Moshe Idel on the Romanian dimension of Mircea Eliade's writings, parts of which I magnify at the expense of others. While largely in agreement with Idel's claims, I find his critical apparatus lacking, insofar as he only takes into account methodological criticism of Eliade from a phenomenological perspective. By making reference to critiques outside this orientation, I seek to supplement Idel's remarks. I also take distance from the biographical and scholarly portrait drawn up by Idel of Eliade's disciple, I. P. Culianu, and offer a more accurate view. Idel presents us with a different way of reading Eliade in his Romanian context, without fully developing such a tendency. I will briefly sketch out how such a new perspective might look like, one tries to embed cultural developments in their specific socio-cultural context. In the end, I point out the lasting significance of taking into account politics within the field of religious studies as outlined by Idel. By drawing out these diverse strands, I am aware that I preclude the possibility of attaining homogeneity. Yet this characteristic is also not present in the book under discussion, and to try to tie up the loose ends would do a disservice to its form.

KEYWORDS

Eliade, Kabbalah, Judaism, anthropology, fascism

INTRODUCTION

At the start of his groundbreaking 1988 book on Kabbalah, Moshe Idel outlined his methodology: 'Instead of presenting a historical sequence of Kabbalists or of ideas, I adopt an essentialist attitude to the contents of

Kabbalistic material that places greater emphasis upon their religious countenance than on their precise location in place and time' (Idel, 1988, XII). One can recognize in this passage's trust on phenomenological analysis an affinity with Eliade's overall attitude to what he termed 'the history of religions', namely the use of hermeneutics in order to grasp the inner working of a religious system at the expense of the socio-historical context in which they develop. But as this present book makes clear, while Idel remains an adept of the phenomenological approach, he is by no means an advocate of the ahistorical, normative attitude which stands at the basis of Eliade's works (Strenski, 1987: 106-109; Allen, 1988: 564; McCutcheon, 1997: 38).¹

While the political dimensions of Eliade's life provoked passionate discussions in the West, they have become largely accepted (Rennie, 2005: 2757-2763). By contrast, in Romania the 'revelations' regarding Eliade's past led to much fiercer discussions.² While the state of the debate has advanced considerably since the early nineties, when disgruntled nationalists responded to a critical essay written by Norman Manea's on Eliade and fascism by repeatedly setting on fire the mail box of Manea's mother-in-law (Manea, 2013: 31-32)³, the gravity of the facts has yet to be fully accepted.¹ Research

¹ An important early critique along of this tendency was offered by Croce (1949: 100-102). One commentator observed that 'in Eliade's case, the construction of an universal *axis mundi* lent meaning to his own subjective vision of what the world *ought* to be and how *homo religiosus ought* to act, rather than how the world really *is* and how *homo religiosus* actually *does* act' (Korom, 1992: 116).

² For the evolution of attitudes towards Eliade in Romania, see Keul (2008: 398-416).

³ For the essay in question, see Manea (1991: 27-36). A slightly different version of this text is available in Manea (1993: 91-124). Attacking Manea for his article against Eliade became a point of pride for many Romanian ex-Cold Warriors. Monica Lovinescu (1923-2008), a journalist who had worked for Radio Free Europe, for example, complained in her diary that she did not get the recognition she deserved, that is of having been Manea's prime detractor in the media (Lovinescu, 2014: 35). One can see in the outrage with which she responded to Victor Farias' *Heidegger et le nazisme* (1987) a prefiguration of such an attitude (Lovinescu, 2003: 248). Such a double-bind mentality, which insisted for cultural freedom for Nazis but not for communists, was typical for many other Cold War liberals (Saunders, 226-228, 250-251). For her trivialization of the Holocaust, see International Commission of the Holocaust (2005: 375-379). In view of such attitudes, the interview granted to Valerian Trifa, Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church of Romania and former Iron Guardist, by Radio Free Europe in the late seventies (Puddington, 2000: 251-252) seems to be less of a 'mistake' than is usually argued by the network's supporters. Nae Ionescu (1890-1940), the professor of philosophy at the University of Bucharest who mentored Eliade during and his studies, became popular among Romania's educated classes after programs on this radio station, sidelining his commitment to fascism and lack of regard for academic discipline, built up his image as an important figure of interwar Romanian thought (Voicu, 2009: 118).

on Romanian fascism was an activity to be frowned upon by Romanian intellectuals after the fall of communism, a feature which persists to a certain extent up to the present day². One popular intellectual who is an advocate of Orthodox ‘spirituality’ declared that investigating the fascist engagements of the likes of Eliade was simply not worth the effort, as it was not vital for the times (Laignel-Lavastine, 1999: 61).³ His valorization of the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and Romanian history, specifically its unique ‘cosmic’ character, that of a blend between traditionally peasant beliefs and Christian dogma, came to be much appreciated in a time in which the Church was facing competition of the marketplace of belief from various branches of American Protestant denominations (Verdery, 1999: 72-88). Recently, Dorian David wrote that the attempt to identify in Eliade’s exile writings legionary elements seems to him exaggerated, useless, and non-productive (David, 2014: 19-20). Such attitude is not restricted to treatments of Eliade. In a hagiographic study of the Orthodox wiseman, who acted as a fascist propagandist during the interwar years⁴ Petre Țuțea (1902-1991), Alexandru D. Popescu refrains from mentioning violent acts perpetrated *by* the Iron Guard, preferring instead to focus on the violence perpetrated *upon* them by the state, citing uncritically at one point as a source for the number of victims a book written by a former adherent of the organization (Popescu, 2004: 273-274).⁵

¹ See, for example, the apology offered by Eliade’s nephew and self-styled celebrity-intellectual (Alexandrescu, 1998: 234). For a critique of Alexandrescu’s writings, see Livezeanu (2006: 8-12). The rejection of Eliade’s political stances is sometimes concomitant with a tendency to de-politicize the Iron Guard and portray it as a purely ‘Christian’ organization.

² Consider the attacks on the historian Zigu Ornea (1930-2001) for critically discussing the fascist leanings of Eliade and Cioran by authors such as Zarifopol-Johnston (2009: 188, 196) or Ștefănescu (2005: 723-726).

³ For an overview of the debates unleashed by the discovery of the Fascist past of the leading interwar intellectuals, see Livezeanu (2006). Consider also the reactions to the criticism of Eliade and Constantin Noica (1909-1987) by the Romanian-born Hungarian dissident Gáspár Miklós Tamás (Vasilescu, 2002) as well as the scandal ignited and re-ignited by appearance in 2002, and the subsequent 2004 Romanian-language translation, of Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine’s study of the lives of Cioran, Eliade, and Ionesco. For a balanced evaluation of the book’s strong and weak points, see Frank (2012: 136-154).

⁴ Țuțea continued to profess admiration for the Iron Guard until the end of his life. He also considered antisemitism to be caused by the Jews (Țuțea, 1997: 19), held democracy in low regards (*ibid*, 39) and declared his support for Mussolini, Hitler, Franco and Salazar (Țuțea, 1992: 319).

⁵ The same premises inform a study of the philosopher Constantin Noica (Lavric, 2007). Not only does the author of this book systematically downplay the lifelong aversion to democracy of his subject, but he also purposefully distorts the history of Romanian fascism, its crimes against the Jews, and the Holocaust in Romania (Alexandru, 2007: 414-432; *ibid*, 2009: 85-99). The book was lauded by two of the most prominent members of the Group

Works on religion in Communist Romania were done in the shadow of Eliade's figure, to the extent that his Romanian biographer speaks about the development of a 'myth of Eliade' during the seventies (Țurcanu, 2003: 470).¹ His influence remains overwhelming to this day (Ricketts, 2002: 78-85).² To take only one example, a study regarding the 'religious' meaning of death, for example, is characterized by a *sui generis* interpretation of religion, passion for Dacian rites, criticism of modernity, and fascination with 'primitive' lifestyles (Toplean, 2006: 136-137, 287-288). Written mostly by people who do not possess the adequate and sufficient philological, theological, or anthropological training, a considerable of studies uphold Eliade's methodology and the soundness for his research.³

for Social Dialogue (Grupul pentru dialog social), liberal NGO, namely Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleșu, and was awarded the prestigious 'Titu Maiorescu' prize of the Romanian Academy. The lauding of a work which whitewashes such acts of violence stands in stark contrast with the group's proclaimed values of democracy and human rights.

¹ In turn, Eliade also kept up with developments in Romanian academic culture, showing interest, for example, in the nationalist theories of literary critic Edgar Papu (Verdery, 1991: 349 note 48). In contrast to phenomenological approaches, structuralist approaches have received little attention. The most valuable addition, sadly overlooked, is Marcus (1975). Autochtonists complained that the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss were available in translation while those of Eliade were not (Verdery, 1991: 2). One can interpret Adrian Marino's book on Eliade as a bitter attack against structuralism, considering that the thinkers singled out for criticism in it are the same that he attacks (and blames) in his autobiography for not enabling his entry into French academic life, namely Roland Barthes and Tzevan Todorov. See Marino (2010: 159-160, p. 166). Unfortunately, there is no entry on Romania in Bubík & Hoffmann's (2015) otherwise thorough volume on the study of religion in the former Eastern bloc. Scholars working on Eliade in communist Romania were very much aware of his ties to the Iron Guard. See, for example, Marino (Marino, 2000: 84; *ibid*, 2010: 241).

² Eliade continues to be credited in Romania with the invention of the discipline of 'the history of religions' although it long predated him (Masuzawa, 2001: 430).

³ Among the figures one can name are: Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, Andrei Oișteanu, and H. R. Patapievici. These authors are not equipped to make to make authoritative claims regarding the validity of Eliade's research. Consider the following sweeping statement: 'Eliade became a point of reference for today's humanities, for his ability to recompose the structure of human depth based on the entirety of man's spiritual history from the period of the Neolithic until that of the present' (Liiceanu & Pleșu, 1991: 5). The problem with such a totalizing is not so much that it neglects to emphasize the importance of specialized knowledge, rather it abolishes it completely: it is hard to conceive of a single person who can live up to those standards. In asking us to believe that Eliade did, such authors endow Eliade with aura of greatness that aims to prevent criticism. While knowledge of a certain subject is not dependent on an academic degree in a certain field, someone who does make a claim to knowledge in a specific domain necessitates proving his qualifications. Objecting to the critique of Eliade's depiction of Dacian religion and his use of Greek sources by historian Dan Dana (see Dana, 2008: 268-287) Andrei Oișteanu considers such criticism to be politically motivated 'attacks' on Eliade's persona (Oișteanu, 2014: 43-44). As Oișteanu lacks

Considering this situation, Moshe Idel's work is an important contribution to the ongoing debate regarding Eliade's legacy. While studies of Eliade's formative period have been written before¹, Idel masterly manages to weave a new narrative based on his reading of Eliade's writings and the secondary literature. Unlike former accounts by Adrian Marino and I. P. Culianu, which are deeply apologetic to the point that they become hagiographical², Idel maintains an ambivalent attitude towards Eliade's work.

Idel's thesis is that Eliade's work can be split into two periods, characterized by a shift from active practice to narrative: from ritual to myth, technique to symbol. He concentrates not only on the academic work, but also on his fiction, journals, correspondence and autobiographical writings, as they are interlocked by a series of themes and motifs, and also by Eliade's tendency to insert his own life experiences within his publications. One can say the same of him that Steven Wasserstrom said apropos of Ernst Jünger (1895-1998),

the relevant skillset to evaluate the historiography of Antiquity (as shown by Dana 2011: 129-137), his objections, can be at best qualified as misguided. The lacking scholarly quality of studies relating to Eliade or done in his style was predicted by Zwi Werblowsky since the eighties (Werblowsky, 1989: 129-136).

¹ Among the studies on Eliade's Romanian period that are accessible to Western audiences, one can consult the following: Doeing (1975), Culianu (1978), Marino (1981), Strenski (1982, 391-404), *ibid* (1987, 70-103), Ricketts (1988), Țurcanu (2003), Müller (2004), Skarżyńska (2010: 19-25), Dana (2012), and Halk (2013, 169-184). Cristina Cristina Bejan, executive director of the Washington located culture and arts collective 'Bucharest Inside the Beltway', is currently preparing a book about the Criterion Association, based on her PhD. dissertation at Oxford, which contains valuable information about Eliade's years spent in Romania (2009, esp. 37-59, 168-177, 193-199). I would like to thank Mrs. Bejan for kindly sharing her manuscript with me. Adriana Berger, Eliade's research in his last years at Chicago assistant planned to write an intellectual biography of Eliade for the New York based publishing house Hill & Wang (Berger, 1994: 72 note 1) but was stopped on account of the threat of legal action on the side of Eliade's widow (Junginger, 2008: 32 note 31).

² The problem with Marino's book was best summarized by the anthropologist Lawrence E. Sullivan: 'Nowhere does Marino point to faults or fissures in Eliade's project. Marino is deliberate about this; he writes 'faithful to the spirit of Eliade', with whom he claims 'common orientation in thought' in order to 'assist' in the establishment of a modern systematic hermeneutics [...] Indeed, Marino straightforwardly advocates Eliade's positions with a 'militant hermeneutic' geared to invite criticism rather than provide it. The book is meant to form an organic part of Eliade's corpus' (Sullivan, 1982: 326). Unfortunately, this tendency continues to affect the work of the people most familiar with Eliade's Romanian period, such as his biographer, bibliographer and editor, Mircea Handoca. Although he characterizes Handoca's contributions as 'quite obvious and extremely useful', Idel nonetheless warns against his tendency to reject criticism leveled against Eliade as invalid (Idel, 2014: 3). For a critique of Handoca's approach, see Rizescu (2012: 281-284).

that is that he 'deployed paragraphs between letter, essay, and fiction more or less without differences accountable to genre' (Wasserstrom, 2010: 348).¹

The key to Eliade's success was his promise to reveal completely the hidden meanings of the subject matter he investigated. This approach lacked the ambiguities and cautiousness characteristic of academic writing – a medium with which Eliade kept an uneasy relationship all through his life² – but made him wildly popular among the wide public. As Wasserstrom noted with regard to Eliade's oeuvre: 'The paperback, like the museum, made that experience accessible to anyone who could afford its minimal charge [...] Anyone who could afford to buy the book, so to speak, could have a look at the ancient secrets [...] For Eliade, the author was active and the audience passive' (Wasserstrom, 1999: 110).

But if the mass readership was prepared to take Eliade's claims at face value, the same was not true of scholars working in the domains he claimed to have an expertise. Idel's is part of what one could call the revisionist history of the 'history of religions', a movement which could claim as its manifesto Edmund Leach's biting review of Eliade's English language works. Leach brought to attention to Eliade's recycling of his writings, the theological underpinnings of his analyses, critically read his bibliographies, measured his claims against their source material, illuminated the detachment and outright irreverence his studies had towards consistency, and criticized the lack of contact with the subject matter of his writings, which existed for Eliade inside only library walls (Leach, 1966: 28-31).³ Insofar as Idel's work is a part of this broader corpus of study, the criticism brought forth by him and other

¹ The two authors knew and admired each other's work, and even collaborated at one point (Eliade, 1988: 205-206; Neaman 1999, 189-190; Țurcanu, 2003: 458-461). Compare Eliade's conviction with Jünger's views on the metaphysical drives of society (Herf, 1984: 101-102) as well as their shared passion for morphological classification and archetypes (Nevin, 1996: 82-83, 215-218).

² 'Eliade's work – even though it seduced many in the university – wisely kept itself a good distance from any serious or difficult epistemological debate' (Dubuisson, 2010: 141). For Eliade's perception of his need to subvert academic knowledge from within, see Eliade (2010: 104). Arvidsson points out that Eliade's phenomenological approach had a reactionary character, insofar as it sought to protect religion from the onslaughts of modernity (1999, 344). See in this sense Lincoln (2012: 15-30).

³ Barth wrongly asserts that is a review of only one book (2013: 66 note 8). For the reaction of Eliade to this article, or better said lack of, see Țurcanu (2003: 463-464). It must be said that critical attitudes to Eliade's work during the period were by no means confined to this article: a review by Saler (1967: 262-263) echoes many of the observations made by Leach. Furthermore, Henri H. Stahl (1901-1991), one of 20th century Romania's greatest sociologists, seemingly without any contact with Leach's critique, also denounced Eliade as a library scholar (Stahl, 1983: 151-155, 167-168).

researchers is similar. However, as a phenomenologist, Idel is largely in agreement with Eliade's methodology, and his critique ultimately provides a model of how this model could be improved. However, not all critics of Eliade accept the validity of phenomenological analysis, and Idel does not take into account this factor, which leaves a gap in his critical apparatus. I shall provide some references for this type of critique in order to suggest interested readers point for further reference.

In his critique of Eliade's writings on Kabbalah, Idel's evidence is damning: Eliade had no contact with the relevant source material and based his interpretations of works of popularization written by figures associated with nineteenth century esotericism.¹ Eliade read such books as a teenager and continued to rely on interpretations found in them for the rest of his mature life (Idel, 2014: 62-67; 159-161).² Even his contact with Gershom Scholem did not change things: Eliade simply picked and chose out of Scholem's works the concepts that suited his pre-existing idea of Jewish 'mysticism' (Idel, 2014: 162-166).³ The dichotomy he establishes between a life-affirming, liberating, 'spiritual' Kabbalah and a rigorous, rigid, and ultimately sterile Rabbinic Judaism is reflective of the Christian bias against Judaism⁴, and as such tells us more about the persistence of Christian prejudices towards Judaism (seen as: lived religion versus legalism) than it does about Kabbalah.⁵

¹ Though he later came to frown upon the figure of Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and her Theosophical Society (Eliade, 1976: 51-52, 65-66), he was fascinated in his youth by works such as Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877), which he read in French translation (Țurcanu, 2003: 39-40).

² Eliade did not quote these texts later in life, but the conceptualization he got from them was grafted upon whatever new relevant material in terms of subject matter he encountered. The treatment of Kabalistic and Zoharic literature is not the only instance of such an approach. When analyzing Eliade's texts referring to Babylonia and other ancient Middle Eastern cultures from which he draws his idea of the axis mundi, one can find an identical approach of reusing the same sources from his youth, even though later research published during his lifetime had debunked the basis on which they were drawn (Korom, 1992: 106). Smith concludes that 'there is no pattern of the 'Center' in the sense that the Pan-Babylonians and Eliade described it in the ancient Near Eastern materials' (1987: 16). The same linguistic mistakes in Sanskrit and Pali that Eliade made in the first edition of his book on Yoga, based on his doctoral dissertation, which appeared in 1936, were present in the 1969 second, revised English edition of the study (Gombrich, 1974: 227).

³ 'Eliade's unspecified method is not rigorous enough; it deals with religious matters which lie beyond empirical verification; and it is mainly deductive, based on adhered to metaphysical assumptions' (Saliba, 1976: 116).

⁴ Idel does not mention that one of the sources that informs Eliade's treatise on the history of religions is Johann Andreas Eisenmenger's (1654-1704) anti-Jewish hackwork, *Entdecktes Judenthum* (Eliade, 1958: 166). On Eisenmenger, see Boettcher (2005: 209-210).

⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith observes that at Eliade's method in *Patterns* (Eliade, 1958) 'consists of encompassing morphology in a metaphysical hierarchy' (Smith, 346). For the Christian bias

Such a distinction would have been alien to the Kabbalist, who by no means abandoned Halakhic practice. Equally problematic is the monolithic view of religions based on the manner in which they interpret time: Christianity and Judaism view it in a linear manner, while Hinduism in a cyclical way. Idel points out that straightjacketing Judaism as horizontally minded excludes multiple phenomenologies of time. Cyclical interpretations can also be found in Kabbalistic literature (Idel, 2014: 145-149).¹

Considering the brevity of the study, the amount of information covered is breathtaking. In chapter three, for example, Idel deals with the representation of death throughout the corpus of Eliade's writings. Considering the vastity of the subject, which could be treated in a monograph of its own, the author nonetheless manages to cover the essential topics and themes to which Eliade relates death: sacrifice, sexuality, and meaning. Especially important are the references to Eliade's analysis of two folkloric texts, namely the ballads *Miorița* and *Meșterul Manole* (Idel, 2014: 118-127).² Without going into details, Idel rejects the characterization of these myths as exemplary of Romanian culture and calls forth for a historicization of the theme of death in nineteenth and early twentieth century Romanian literature, one that also takes into account narratives in which death is not fetishized.³ Eliade's

inherent in this method, see *ibid* (334). In this sense, see also Saliba (1976: 103) and Schopen (1991: 18-19).

¹ A valuable discussion about Eliade's misconstruction of the Biblical perception of time is to be found in Segal (1978: 165-168).

² The genesis of Eliade's study on Romanian folklore is described in Eliade (1988: 204). An American anthropologist who studied funeral laments in the Maramureș region observed that in his study on Romanian folklore (Eliade, 1972) he 'constructs his own vision of the peasant community that extensive fieldwork cannot corroborate' (Kligman, 1988: 358 note 47). For a similar critique, see Stahl (1983: 151-219). Stahl concluded that no matter how interesting and erudite Eliade's study of mythology might be, it was in no way reflective of the practices of the Romanian peasantry. It is amazing how supporters of Eliade manage to overlook such criticism. After mentioning Eliade's reading of the *Miorița* as a manifestation of the 'terror of history', Adrian Marino sends readers to Kligman's book to find a common point of view (Marino, 1998: 212)

³ Idel closes his discussion on the subject by calling attention to the fact that 'neither was the Orthodox in its entirety necessarily antisemitic' (Idel, 2014: 127). While this certainly the case, the authority on which he rests this assertion is by no means an adequate one: Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu (1916-1992). Before becoming a priest, Gheorghiu worked for the Ion Antonescu government and wrote glorifying accounts of the Romanian army's invasion of Bessarabia and its subsequent persecution of the region's Jewish population. After fleeing from Romania after 1945, he became famous in France after publishing the novel *La vingt-cinquième heure* (1949). His success dwindled after in the early fifties revelations of his antisemitic past reached the French press (Astalos, 2001: 339-342; Laignel-Lavastine, 2002: 414-415; Djuvara, 2012: 164-167).

writings about ‘traditional’¹ Romanian rites and customs are also put in the context of the early twentieth century wave of enthusiasm for peasant spirituality (Idel, 2014, 226-237), found in the works of authors such as poet-cum-philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) and archeologist Vasile Pârvan (1882-1927).² This was always a bookish interest, for Eliade had no interest in dealing with really existing peasants.³ While accepting the gist of Idel’s critique, one should have reservations about what Idel holds Eliade would have discovered had he actually undertaken direct research amongst the peasantry: shamanism. Idel holds that ‘shamanism was found in the Carpathians’, and draws a comparison between Hassidic mysticism and shamanic experiences (Idel, 2014: 170-171), a position which replicates Eliade’s ahistorical approach.⁴

It is also amazing to note how freely Eliade could speak about ‘primitives’, taking into view that his career spanned the Boasian revolution,

¹ In view of the work by Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983), I consider we ought to be skeptical of the facile and automatic associations of the word *tradition* with concepts such as ‘Geist’, ‘character’, ‘rootedness’, ‘timelessness’ and ‘authenticity’.

² A brief summary of the period, along with the relevant bibliography, is to be found in Verdery (1991: 46-70). Although he never denied coming into contact with the works of these authors, Eliade always took pains to point out that no influence upon him can be ascertained. Thus, when discussing Blaga’s philosophical œuvre, he wrote that he was interested by the similarity of his optimistic views on culture with the latter’s, though he arrived at it from different premises (Eliade, 2008: 196). Lucian Blaga also professed a belief in the survival of pagan vestiges in ‘traditional’ Romanian culture (Blaga, 1973: 131-132), which Eliade also shared (Eliade, 1943: 7-9; *ibid*, 1987: 164; *ibid*, 1980: 1-26). For Blaga’s influence on Eliade, see Strenski (1987: 122-128) and Doeing (1975: 26-27).

³ He preferred to impose his own views on the peasants. For example: ‘The peasant mentality is by excellence an ontological one’ (Eliade, 2006: 381). Henri H. Stahl invited him, without success, during the 1930’s to assist the sociological expeditions headed by Dimitrie Gusti in the Romanian countryside (Stahl, 1983: 168). Ultimately Eliade believed that a historian of religion can have a much better grasp of such material compared to a folklorist (Eliade, 1985: 117-118). This did not prevent the author of one of the most important histories of the study of folklore in Romania to list Eliade as a folklorist (Birlea, 1974: 540-542).

⁴ If anything, Eliade *too often* found traces of shamanism in the cultures he was studying. When it comes to shamanism, Richard Gombrich observed that in order to formulate a connection between yogic and shamanic practices, Eliade doctored his source material (1974: 225-227). Caroline Humphrey wrote that Eliade turned ‘the inspirational religious practices of North Asia into a timeless mystery’, and that he presented it as though it ‘were some metaphysical entity making its presence felt despite history and societies’ (Humphrey, 1996: 191). For a critique of the metaphysical assumptions that underlie such a comparative approach, see Huss (2014: 3-19; *ibid*, 2016). Pertinent to the discussion are also the contributions of Taussig (1986), Lewis (1989: 181-188), Francfort et al (2001), Harvey (2005: 139-152), Znamenski (2007), and Hutton (2007).

functionalism, structural anthropology, and the decolonization movement.¹ Considering Eliade's endless recycling of studies from his youth, coupled with his disinterest in doing any type of field work, one cannot but agree with some of critique of Eurocentric modes of thought by intellectuals from former colonies and the Third World.² Was this a case of unfortunate use of language, or a misguided persistent dependence on nineteenth-century terminology? No, because for Eliade there was a clear line leading from 'archaic' religious systems to more developed one, one that led 'from primitives to Zen' (Eliade, 1977). It is therefore not a neutral term. This is seen more clearly one takes in consideration the fact that Eliade aligned his scholarly efforts with the strategic aims of American Cold War foreign

¹ Consider Eliade's disparaging comments about anthropologists (Eliade, 1973: XVII; *ibid*, 1984: 65). For his rejection of structuralism, see Eliade (1985: 162-163). Steven Wasserstrom notes that 'although he borrowed heavily from the 'data' provided by working anthropologists, he was otherwise ardently opposed to almost all forms of conventional anthropological explanation' (Wasserstrom, 1999: 263 note 5). This has not stopped some of his Romanian followers from labeling him an 'anthropologist' (see, for example, Zub, 1981: 301-310). Characterizing Eliade's knowledge of the history of anthropology 'abysmal', Edmund Leach concluded that the last theoretical development with which he was familiar with was the Viennese Kulturkreis School (Leach, 1966: 29-31). Carlo Ginzburg raises the question of the extent to which Eliade de projected his own beliefs about when dealing with peasants or non-Western societies, arguing that he 'preferred to impose his own irresistible categories on a vast amount of (mostly secondhand) evidence' (Ginzburg, 2010: 323), an argument also raised by Benedetto Croce (1949: 101-102). Along this direction, see Murphy (2001: 35-47) and Saliba (1976: 99-141). For Clifford Geertz's criticism of Eliade, who taught in the same period as Eliade at Chicago, see Girardot (2010: 149). As such, Boia's claim that "Eliade ranks among the handful of scholars who have extended the field of human sciences considerably during the past century" is erroneous beyond a doubt (Boia 2001: 253). An exception is represented by Beata Skarżyńska, who in her study of the Polish reception of Eliade is positive towards Eliade, focusing on Eliade's integration of Bronislaw Malinowski's and Waclaw Sieroszewski's research in his studies, in the context of his wider acquaintance with the writings of Polish scholars such as W. Jabłoński, J. Przyłuski, R. Ranożek, S. Scheyer, and A. Smieszka (Skarżyńska, 2010: 36). I would like to thank my friend Magdalena Dziaczkowska for helping me out with this last reference.

² Notwithstanding the justified criticism towards Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, when dealing with the ardent textualism of Eliade's oeuvre I cannot but find a consonance with his observation that that for the Orientalist, the prime contact with his subject matter is not a direct one. He does not go 'first to Oriental sources for correction and verification, but rather to other Orientalist works' (Said, 1995: 67). Orientalism is also defined as 'a system for citing works and authors' (*ibid*, 23). Consider also Said's observation that H. A. R. Gibb uses the notion of 'religion' in order to reduce the complexity of social life for people in the Middle East (*ibid*, 279) in the context of Eliade's *sui generis* approach to religion. Unlike Said, I would be more casuistic and argue that this practice of *some*, but not *all* Orientalists. On the connection between European imperialist projects and 'religion' as a universal notion, see Chidester (1996), Fitzgerald (2000), Dubuisson (2003), Masuzawa (2005), Josephson (2012).

policy: of ‘In time, the study of ‘primitive’ religions of Africa and South America began to be encouraged by universities [...] when Asia has reentered history and when ‘primitive’ societies are on the way to achieving independence, the study and correct understanding of the religious concepts that structure these exotic civilizations constitute a necessity in the political realm. Diplomats, economists, and technologists sent on missions in Asian countries, especially former colonies, must be initiated beforehand, and not only by missionaries and anthropologists’ (Eliade, 1988: 194, 208).¹

Ultimately, as Idel points out, when approaching works of the Romanian historian of religions, the reader ‘is impressed by the certainty with which he presents his ideas, and even more so by his repetition of his main concepts when applied in different contexts, without significant qualifications’ (Idel, 2014: 252).²

The figure of I. P. Culianu (1950-1991), one of Eliade’s most faithful disciples – one could even say apprentice, looms large in the book. Having as his main goal the achievement of academic recognition and success³, Cuiianu – or Couliano, as he later presented himself, probably in order to obscure his Romanian origins⁴ – found in Eliade the figure who could help him achieve his professional ambitions.⁵ His vast knowledge and tragic unresolved

¹ On the Cold War background of the flourishing of religious studies in the US, see McCutcheon (2004: 41-69). In the book under discussion there is only a brief reference to the Cold War context of Eliade’s American career (Idel, 2014: 258).

² For the rhetorical devices by which Eliade imposes the reception of his works and the manner in which he interprets his material, see Dubuisson (2010: 141-145); for the adepts of the *sui generis* approach to the study of religion in general, see McCutcheon (1997: 65-71)

³ A red line that runs through Cuiianu’s and Eliade’s correspondence consists of the former asking the latter to help find a study and later a job position in an American university. See in this sense the letters from 5 February 1973 (Cuiianu, 2004: 49-50), 1st of June 1976 (*ibid*, 82-83). Notwithstanding Cuiianu’s impressive qualifications, one is left wondering whether he would have gotten his position at the Chicago Divinity School had it not been for Eliade’s efforts, in view of his rejections from Fordham (*ibid*, 99) and Harvard (*ibid*, 270) Cuiianu’s Doktorvater Michel Meslin characterized him as ‘a go-getter with the instincts of an *arriviste*’ (cited in Anton, 1996: 155, emphasis in the original). Ultimately, it was a case of *tant d’arrivisme pour si peu d’arrivage*.

⁴ Consider his remarks in a letter to Eliade from the 3rd of August 1979 in which he specifies that for ‘obvious reasons’, his name should appear in print as Couliano (Eliade & Cuiianu), According to this letter Cuiianu had no intention to change his name, as he wanted his name to remain the same in all binding legal documents (*ibid*). In view of this, it is hard not to speculate on what those ‘obvious reasons’ were.

⁵ Consider the following passage from a letter to his friend Gianpaolo Romanato from the 9th of November 1978: ‘[...] I understood how much I depend on him [Eliade] ultimately (from all points of view), as a result of which I adopted a more respectful and prudent attitude’ (Romanato, 2003: 135). Take into account the manner in which Cuiianu used Eliade’s reputation in order to advance his own views (Anton, 1996: 227-228).

murder led to a broad interest on with his figure in Romania. However, with few exceptions (Dana, 2008: 373-374; Moagă, 2010: 75) writings on his life and work tend to gravitate toward the hagiographical, written by people with no expertise in the academic study of religion.¹ There is thus a risk that the reputation of Culianu as outstanding scholar of religion will preclude any future criticism of his work. Idel's work presents us with an idealized version of Culianu's scholarly endeavors.

He hints that his death could have been caused by his critical attitude towards the Iron Guard and Eliade's past. Yet there isn't any basis for such speculation, more worthy of a thriller than of an academic study. Insofar as it is made by Idel, one must try to determine whether it is any way justified. A former Legionary living in Chicago area, Eugen Vâlsan, area quoted by Idel quickly dispels any notion of rancor between the Guard's former members – which were by that time in old age, hardly capable of performing stealth assassinations – by stating that Culianu was considered part of the 'family' and his desire to marry a Jewish woman was his own business (Idel, 2014: 215-216).² Culianu's own knowledge about the Iron Guard was hardly

¹ The above mentioned studies evaluate Culianu's writings dealing with certain specific topics. Among more general evaluations of his oeuvre, which also deal with methodological issues, I would single out Iricinschi (2006: 191- 235) and Dumbravă (2013: 103-124) as valuable contributions. Yet even such a learned account as Iricinschi's postscript to Culianu's published MA dissertation, in which his writings on Gnosticism are placed in the context of contemporary research, is overly positive towards Culianu. Iricinschi mentions that Culianu is referenced in Williams' revisionist account of the study of Gnosticism (1996). He informs readers that Williams praises Culianu (Iricinschi, 2006: 192 note 1), but not that Williams ultimately faults Culianu for his 'traditional grouping' of Gnosticism and for treating his data in a monolithic fashion (Williams, 1996: 50). While Culianu still accepts a typology of Gnosticism, Williams rejects it. Iricinschi also fails to mention the other most important evaluations of Culianu's final study on Gnosticism, namely the reviews by Pearson (1993: 468), Desjardins (1993: 75-82), Tite (1993: 496) and Segal (1994: 67-71) of Culianu's final book on Gnosticism. I would like to thank Prof. Tite and Prof. Segal for kindly sharing with me the aforementioned articles.

² For the beginning of the Legionary exile, see Veiga (1989: 218-219). It is beyond a doubt today that Eliade kept in touch with such figures (Wasserstrom, 1999: 132; Laignel-Lavastine, 2002: 485). Vintilă Horia (1915-1992) was one of them. Horia was a rabid antisemite, fascist propagandist and former press attaché in Rome, who was sentenced to death *in absentia* by the post-1945 government in the war crimes trial (International Commission of the Holocaust in Romania, 2004: 319) and who continued for the rest of his life to support fascist, authoritarian and racist regimes (Djuvara, 2012: 164; International Commission of the Holocaust in Romania, 2004: 48). After 1945, Horia became well known as a novelist in France and Spain (Astalos, 2001: 379-385). As in the case of Gheorghiu, revelations about his fascist past affected his literary success: the Prix Goncourt which he received for his *Dieu est né en exil* (1960) was not annulled, but neither was it handed to him. Horia corresponded with Eliade (Eliade, 1999: 434-484) and wrote a chapter about Eliade's

formed by a detached study of its history, as the place where he learnt most of what he knew – and it should be pointed out that Culianu’s musings on Romanian history, at least as how they appear in print, were not of high scholarly quality: – consider, for example, his statement that Romania’s interwar economy was better than that of the countries which were on the losing side of the First World War (Culianu 2006: 348).¹ Culianu never systematically studied the history of Romania, and what he did know about Romania’s fascist past was based on hearsay from other émigrés and from reading Guardist histories in the library of Iosif Constantin Drăgan in Milano, a figure with fascist sympathies and ties to the Romanian communist regime (Anton, 1996: 87).² Culianu never truly denounced Eliade’s embrace of fascism and his antisemitism, if anything he tried to minimize it as much as possible until the very end of his life³, and there is no evidence to suggest he would have done otherwise had he lived.⁴ His review of Eliade’s memoirs and of the first volume of Mac Linscott Ricketts’ biography of Eliade is an exercise in understatement. The only people denounced in the essay are by no means Legionaries, but rather contemporary Western and Indian scholars of religion, who fail to rise up to the standards of Eliade’s youth (Culianu,

fiction in a volume dedicated to him (Horia, 1969: 387-395). For his account of the relationship, see Horia (1986: 23-24). Since 1989, there have been various attempts to ‘rehabilitate’ Horia, supported by a considerable number of Romanian intellectuals (Alexandru, 2009: 91-100). Monica Lovinescu and her husband Virgil Ierunca (1920-2006), continued propagating Horia’s ‘innocence’ in spite of the insurmountable evidence to the contrary (Rotaru, 2002: 222, 226).

¹ On the state of Romania’s economy during the time, see Heinen (1986: 40-54). Nonetheless, Andrei Oișteanu references him as an economic authority on the rise of capitalism in the Romanian states (Oișteanu, 2009: 142).

² This research was done at a time when Culianu professed admiration of the regimes of Salazar and Mussolini. Liviu Bordaș refers rather euphemistically to the fact that in this time Culianu’s opposition to the extreme-right did not manifest itself too clearly in this period of his life (Bordaș, 2014: 86). To state matters correctly, it did not manifest itself *at all*.

³ In a posthumously published review of a series of books dealing with Eliade’s life, Culianu placed the blame for Eliade’s turn to the Iron Guard not on Eliade himself but on Nae Ionescu, Eliade’s mentor: ‘especially in 1937, he got carried away for a while by Ionescu’s contagious delirium’ (Culianu, 1992: 160). He denied the veracity of Eliade’s antisemitism – ‘Did Eliade ever embrace the antisemitic tenets of the movement? According to both himself and Ricketts, he never did’ (*ibid*) – and further minimalized it as ‘relatively short episode in a long life’ (*ibid*). Moreover, he insisted that after this ‘painful slip in youth’ (*ibid*, 161), Eliade became an apolitical scholar (*ibidem*), something which is not empirically true. The review ends with a superlative assessment of Eliade as a champion of democratic values and multiculturalism: ‘Notwithstanding the 1937 episode, Eliade as a scholar still remains one of the most lucid fighters for the cause of the Other, those many who were neglected, oppressed and misunderstood during the long history of Western civilization’ (*ibid*, 161). The interpretation of Eliade’s American biographer regarding his antisemitic journalism has been contested by later researchers. See Volovici (1991: 126-127 note 85).

⁴ Consider also his mawkish eulogy to Eliade (Culianu, 1986: 2-3).

1992: 157-161).¹ Moreover, Culianu bestowed upon his mentor the honor of being a precursor to postmodernism.²

Idel writes that when he spoke with Culianu in 1988, the latter 'stated that he had no idea about Eliade's rightist past, a contention about which I am convinced' (Idel, 2014: 214). However, existing evidence points to the contrary.³ As one critical commentator noted, Culianu's desire to protect his former idol 'cannot fully explain the discrepancy between his public apologia and his private view that Eliade had been a supporter of the Legionary Movement' (Junginger, 2008: 41-42). As such, Culianu consciously lied about his knowledge about Eliade's past, and purposefully distorted and obfuscated details of his life and work.⁴ Furthermore, I find Idel's contention that Culianu 'was a cosmopolitan figure who did not privilege one form of religion over the other, especially in the last phase of his thought about religion' (Idel, 2014: 227) equally untenable in light of his attacks on the Reformation and Protestantism in general in his *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*⁵, fueled by

¹ See also his attacks on the anthropological critics of Eliade, and anthropology in general (Culianu, 2006: 381).

² Such an approach would later be taken by Bryan Rennie (1996). For critique of this tendency, see Olson (1999: 357-385). The fact that Culianu never truly contested his master's legacy undoubtedly played an important role in his overwhelmingly positive reception in Romania. It is important in this sense to note the virtual non-reception of two other figures that Eliade regarded as his most gifted students: Jonathan Z. Smith and Bruce Lincoln (Culianu, 2004: 97), who later rejected his methodology. Compare the moving portrait of Eliade in Lincoln (1999: 146) with Culianu's distortions.

³ A letter written by Culianu to Gianpaolo Romanato in 1978 clearly proves that he knew about Eliade's past long before the date of this conversation (Romanato, 2003: 134-135). The omission to take account of this fact is aggravated by the fact that the study in which this account is available is listed in Idel's bibliography. Furthermore, Adrian Marino mentions in his memoirs that after discovering Eliade's pro-fascist and antisemitic during the late seventies he immediately informed Culianu about them (Marino, 2010: 241; Marino, 2000: 83-84).

⁴ Valuable material which could lead a light on what produced this doublethink, such as Culianu's diary and portions of Eliade's postwar journal, still awaits publication. Moreover, these documents could also throw light upon the Horia Stamatu affair. Stamatu (1989-1912) was a former ideologue of the Iron Guard who began a successful career as a literary critic and poet after evading Romania (Astaos, 2001: 632-635). Irked by an article of Culianu's in which he sensed allusions to his political past, Stamatu denounced him to his friends, including Eliade. Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, who were friends with Stamatu, mediated the conflict. Ierunca politely asked Culianu to make peace with Stamatu, a request that was duly noted, as he immediately backed off (Culianu-Petrescu, 2006). Culianu had the courage to take up arms against Stamatu after the latter died. Idel makes no mention of this episode. See Anton (1996: 115-116)

⁵ For an analysis of his biased and distorted presentation of the Renaissance and the Reformation, as well as the normative undertones of his critique of modernity, see the

what can only be described as a visceral hatred of Germany and all things German. Roughly, Culianu presents in this book a radical variant of the Sonderweg thesis regarding German history, according to which the seeds of Nazism were planted at the time of the Reformation. But Culianu goes beyond this and finds the Germans to fault not only for their own 20th century dictatorship, but for ‘totalitarianism’ in general, which resulted from the disenchantment of the world and the suppression of Renaissance imagination. As a result of the Reformation a large number of women were killed on the accusation of witchcraft, and the German lands are singled out as an especially vicious site from Northern Europe (Culianu, 1999: 153-154).¹ Moreover, Culianu finds Germans guilty not only for developing the Third Reich, but also the Soviet Union, as the German authorities allowed Lenin to return from his Swiss exile to Russia, therefore setting in motion the October Revolution. The later spread of communism in Eastern Europe ultimately led to Culianu’s American exile. He openly gloated at the thought of Germany’s financial troubles following the 1990 unification (*ibid*, 97-98). Each and every German had to suffer in atonement for the ills they brought upon the world (‘De ce mă bucur de câte ori Germania are de înfruntat mari probleme? Din mai multe motive [...] dar, pe scurt: fiindcă Germania a creat toate nenorocirile acestui secol [...] Pentru asta, și pentru multe altele, lasă-i să plătească. Pe toți ‘echte Deutscher’). Apart from being unabashedly xenophobic, this account (*ibid*, 95-98) presents us with a highly predetermined view of history, which can ultimately be qualified as paranoid (in the sense used in Hofstadter, 1996: 3-40). It is as if history were akin to a set of dominoes who are set up by forces upon which the individual has no control over. In this instance, the one who tipped the pieces of was German, therefore all the faults of modernity are placed upon their shoulders. Therefore, I would argue *pace* Idel that his observation that Eliade’s academic writings ‘turned more and more prescriptive rather than descriptive with the passage of time’ (Idel, 2014: 16) applies equally well to Culianu.

Idel makes clear in the beginning that Eliade’s thought is marred by incoherence, and suggests that this type of inconsistency was characteristic of figures such as Mihail Sebastian (1907-1945) and Eugène Ionesco (1909-

reviews of the book by Bornstein (1989: 228-230), Peters (1989: 359-361) Winkler (1989: 300-301), Gosselin (1990: 806-807), Webster (1990: 640-641), Copenhaver (1992: 544-548), and Osheim (1993: 136-137). By contrast, in Romania, due to Culianu’s prestige, his statements about the Renaissance are taken as definitive. See, for example, Braga (2010: 17).

¹ Roberts and Naphy note when looking at the statistics concerning executions for infanticide and sodomy in during the entire period when witch-hunting was carried out throughout on a wide scale throughout Western Europe, it becomes apparent that in comparison to witchcraft, both infanticide and sodomy – which had higher rates of execution – were considered much more serious offenses (1997: 5, 8 note 27).

1994), citing pertinent examples (Idel, 2014: 21). Without going into detail, I would suggest that this type of attitude was a characteristic of Romanian intellectual life of the interwar period, which would explain how successful careers were maintained across the ever changing political situation.¹ Such decisions came to have tragic results for a certain part of the country's population. The historian Leon Volovici observed that:

‘Antonescu’s dictatorial regime increased the degree of duplicity and brought it into the open. Having accepted important cultural or political functions, intellectuals with a democratic tradition who had so far been proud of their ‘pro-Jewish’ reputation now found themselves in a situation in which they had to sign decrees excluding Jews from Romanian cultural life and had to supervise and police their strict supervision [...] While accepting the dictator’s overall policy, these intellectuals also participated in, or tacitly approved, the severe anti-Jewish measures, even though the measures contradicted their former democratic beliefs’ (Volovici, 1991: 179-180).

¹ We lack an adequate sociological study of the political shifts undergone by Romanian intellectuals of the period which would show how changing political allegiances corresponded to claims of authority within a certain field, desires of political influence, or the yearning for economic security (and in some cases all three at once). Ideological changes need not account only for the will to improve one’s situation, they may also serve to protect one from paying the price for his beliefs in a situation which no longer condones those beliefs. Public acts of renunciation are guarantess of one’s safety. As far as case studies go, analysis of the careers of the philosopher Nae Ionescu (Bejan, 2009: 26-34) or the sociologist Traian Herseni (Momoc, 2012: 270-282) confer a useful illustration the above mentioned model. Katherine Verdery’s functionalist description of how intellectuals held up their disciplines as the most suitable ones for defining national identity in the aftermath of Romania’s unification is also valuable in this regard (Verdery, 1991: 41-71). A future analysis should have as its goal the combination of micro- and macro- analysis to provide a complete picture of the political life of the interwar Romanian intellectual. This is not to say that one can point to a strict determinism between one’s inner convictions and external reality. It may so happen that is certain cases it was the result of the whim of the moment or haphazardness. While keeping this in mind, one should not abandon analysis in favor of delegating the inner self as unknowable. By upholding the impenetrability of subjectivity, one risks discarding the very concrete results that decisions have in the world. I draw here attention to Susan Neiman’s conceptualization of intentionality and judgment, based on Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Notwithstanding the lack of clarity of Arendt’s definition of intention and her ‘embryonic’ account of judgment, Neiman finds in her work a basis on which to argue against the privileging of intention when it comes to making moral claims. Intention is internal and subjective, while judgment is external and objective. It is impossible to fully understand someone’s intentions, even one’s own, because they defy scrutiny. The proper domain of moral accounting is then that of acts, which belong to the public sphere. (Neiman, 2001: esp. 79-85). Thus, ‘there is no room behind a judgment that needs to be evaluated or explored – a judgment is constituted by the act of judging itself’ (*ibid*, 81).

To mark the celebration of Romania's successful invasion of the USSR, *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* marked its 8-9th issue from August-September 1941 as an open homage to Ion Antonescu. Among the figures who contributed with pieces adorning the festive mood were: Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Dumitru Caracostea, Constantin C. Giurescu, Tudor Arghezi, Gala Galaction, Ion Minulescu, Petru Comarnescu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Sextil Pușcariu, Nichifor Crainic and Ion Pillat. The philosopher C. Rădulescu-Motru (1868-1957) praised the Third Reich's war effort as the liberation of Europe from 'pagan Bolshevism' (Rădulescu Motru, 1941: 244-245). Ion Minulescu (1881-1944) sang the lyric praises of the 'Christians' who retook Bessarabia (Minulescu, 1941: 381-382). Ion Pillat (1891-1945) similarly entitled his celebratory poem *Prayer* (Rugăciune), but he hinted more at the peasant's eternal communion with the earth and at the previous Dacian mastery of the province and less to Christian symbolism (Pillat, 1941: 7). In a closing statement, the literary critic and folklorist Dumitru Caracostea (1879-1964) stated that starting with the number in question, authors who showed sympathy to 'esthetic' or 'liberal' orientations, as well those favorable to 'Semitic ideology and literature' had no place in the magazine's future. To the extent that authors who made themselves guilty in the past of such tendencies showed that they have recanted and ready to offer their services to the Romanian nation, the magazine will once again accept contributions from them (Caracostea, 711).¹ Reading the list of contributors ready to sing hosannas to Romania's alliance with the Third Reich² is disquieting into itself, to know that many of the authors had previously professed liberal, leftist or even apolitical positions is even more so. The inconsistency of Romanian intellectuals to which I previously alluded to was best captured by one of the leading Social-Democratic journalists of the time: 'today, the abandonment of the convictions one previously fanatically upheld, and in which others were advised to believe in, is something normal which no one thinks about criticizing. To switch one's allegiances from one party to another, to take of a uniform in order to put on another, to go from being a

¹ For the submission of magazines and newspapers of the time to the goals of Ion Antonescu regime, see International Commission of the Holocaust in Romania (2004: 91-102).

² It can be argued that these authors were merely praising the reconquest of territories which had unjustly been taken by the Soviet Union as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. But Antonescu's war effort was not an opportunistic alliance with the Nazis made merely to secure Romania's former borders, it was an ideological commitment to which Antonescu held unto until his death. It would have impossible to find Jewish soldiers in the Romanian troops fighting alongside the Germans as in the case of Finland: Antonescu's war was concomitantly one of reconquest and one aimed at solving the 'Jewish question' in Romania. As antisemitism became a state policy during 1940 and 1944, one cannot claim that the above mentioned authors did not know to what they were signing unto.

democrat to being a reactionary and from left to right or vice-versa is interpreted as a sign of intelligence, which merits applause and requires admiration' (Kalustian, 1976: 300-301).¹

CONCLUSION

The most important merit of Idel's study is to remind us once again of the manner in which for such a long time the discipline of religious studies has successfully managed to posit itself outside political considerations:

"It seems that the study of religion has dimensions that are hardly purely academic, and they include not only the scholar's biography, but also the political circumstances that framed his scholarly activity" (Idel, 2014: 258).

Idel states that he will not go into the issue of Eliade's scholarly reception into the US and Western Europe, but he does point out that one must take into account that many positive reviews came from scholars who had similar right-wing political sympathies (Idel, 2014: 258). This deserves some elaboration. Ultimately, the question of politics within the framework of religious studies needs to be extended beyond its Romanian context. Considering the ambiguous relation to fascism had by various scholars as Georges Dumézil (Lincoln, 1991: 231-238; *ibid.*, 1998: 187-208; Arvidsson, 2006: 240-253) Giuseppe Tucci (Benavides, 1995: 161-182, Garzilli, 2012), Jan de Vries (Hofstee, 2008: 543-551, Stig Wikander (Lincoln, 1991: 147-149; Arvidsson, 2006: 232-235; Timuş, 2008: 205-225; Åkerlund, 2010), Raffaele Pettazzoni (Strausberg, 2007: 365-392)², Wilhelm Schmidt (Brandewie, 1990: 200-242; Arvidsson, 2006: 253-282) or Otto Höfler (Ginzburg, 1989: 135-140; Arvidsson, 2006: 180-238) – whom Eliade either knew personally or referenced in his writings throughout his life – one is no longer as shocked by his adherence to the Legionary movement. Idel's book is an important contribution for the understanding of Eliade in his national context. Future studies should try to look in the international context which made possible

¹ Leon Kalustian (1908-1990) is an unjustly forgotten figure today, but he represents a rare type: an intellectual who, more or less, upheld his ideals and tried to maintain his dignity irrespective of the political regime he found himself in, and always paid the price for it.). In view of Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine account of Ionesco's association with the Antonescu regime, for which he served as cultural attaché in France, one should be more careful in lionizing him as *the* example of ethical behaviour during the thirties – at least until further research adequately explores Ionesco's Vichy period. See, for example, Lupas (2014: 74-91), in which Ionesco's choice to stop publishing articles in a magazine that shifted to the far right is taken as sign of resistance to fascism. Thus non-collaboration (a passive act) is confused with opposition (an active one).

² Hans Thomas Halk observes that Strausberg left out mention of Pettazzoni's signing of the 1938 Manifesto della Razza (Halk, 2013: 188).

the construction of an apolitical discourse relating to the study of religion of which he belonged. The question becomes not one of how such scholars hid their political pasts – while not flaunted in the open, the matter was more or less well known during their lifetimes – but rather what was the context in which such a past was made irrelevant. Norman Manea observed that Eliade’s humanism ‘does not diminish but rather aggravates the question of his involvement with fascism’ (Manea, 1994: 111).¹ No easy separation delineates Eliade’s politics from his scholarly project of the ‘history of religions’. After the skeletons in the closet have been exposed, one can no longer revert to the old positions.

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