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made significant concessions to Yugoslavia – regarding both the Croatian and the Albanian question, but with Stojadinović's fall from power Rome returned to an aggressive anti-Yugoslav policy on both issues. Simić's article deals with the same topic, but from the Yugoslav perspective. He puts a stronger emphasis on a general overview of Yugoslav foreign policy, such as its relations with Great Britain. The Serbian author adds a well-argued and articulated emphasis on the close personal relationship between Ciano and Stojadinović, an aspect of big influence on the bilateral relations. Finally, Dragan Bakić analyses the ideological aspect of Stojadinović's relationship with Rome as the Yugoslav politician was often accused of being fascist, at first by his political opponents and then by historiography in communist Yugoslavia. Bakić shows that Stojadinović's alleged fascist leanings were predominantly a foreign policy trick, a pragmatic *mise-en-scène* aimed at obtaining support from the

Axis. He also examines Stojadinović's party policies and, using António Costa Pinto's and Aristotle Kallis' theoretical approach to the relationship between conservatives and fascists, places Stojadinović in the camp of the conservative right.

In his introductory article, the editor Stefano Santoro remarks that the historiographical production on the topic is quite ample and that therefore the aim of the volume has been to pay attention to some neglected or under-researched issues. It seems, however, that this first attempt to provide a synthesis of the results of Italian and post-Yugoslav historiography on this topic in a single publication has exceeded the editor's expectations. This special issue of *Quaestoria* not only offers fresh analyses and contributions but also reaffirms and reinterprets the earlier historiographical production on the topic, which makes it an inevitable read for interested scholars.

*HIDDEN GALLERIES: MATERIAL RELIGION IN THE SECRET POLICE ARCHIVES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE*, eds. James Kapaló and Tatiana Vagramenko. Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2020, 104 p.

Reviewed by Danilo Pupavac\*

The turbulent twentieth century was for the most part socially and historically marked by socialist regimes, mainly in Eastern European countries. From the present point of view and having in mind significant theoretical and empirical considerations, we can conclude that socialist societies were far from a theoretically ideal type, and that the ideological view of the world was dominant in establishing social relations.<sup>1</sup>

\* MA student, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

<sup>1</sup> We emphasize this mainly because we find it important to draw a distinction from Marx's and Engels's original view of socialism as a transitional phase in historical progression

The dominant interpretation of the socialist system and ideological narrative includes the aspiration for removing religious groups and religious content – texts, sacred scriptures, paintings, religious objects, photographs etc. from the public eye, in order to atheize the population and society as a whole. It is exactly this undisclosed

towards communism as its final goal. "Real socialism" as existed in the Eastern Bloc resembled a one-party system with strong government institutions much more than it resembled a transitional social structure which would lead to classless egalitarian society, as viewed from the perspective of anthropological optimism.

question that the study reviewed here deals with. The editors James Kapalo and Tatiana Vagramenko gathered scholars and researchers concerned with this topic, all experts in their respective fields and spheres of interest – Iuliana Cindrea, Ágnes Hesz, Dumitru Lisnic, Gabriela Nicolescu Kinga and Anca Maria Şincan. The study is organized into four thematic sections with a total of fifty-four chapters.

The study covers several Eastern European countries – Romania, Hungary, Moldova and Ukraine, which at once were part of the Eastern Bloc and abounded in different confessions, religious minority groups and their factions. The material objects of the religious communities which were seized as criminal evidence and buried within the systems of former secret services are the very proof of the existence of that parallel universe under the veil of secrecy. They bring to light a completely different real life of people which was not in the public eye. Ethnographically, anthropologically and historically oriented texts of the authors of the study, accompanied by the photographs of a great number of seized possessions of religious communities, capture the zeitgeist and the reality of life of these underground religious communities vividly and astoundingly.

At the very beginning the authors give us an insight into ethical and epistemological difficulties of their endeavour. The question of objectivity of the research results seems to be the most important. The immanent difficulty of reaching complete objectivity lies in the nature of the subject of research on religion and religious communities. The scarce available historical evidence (perhaps, also the one that has yet to be discovered) was noted by witnesses of historical and social events who cannot be guaranteed to have tried to distance themselves from their subjective background. It is unlikely that they tried to use the principle of methodological agnosticism in an attempt to make a permanent record

of ongoing events. On the other hand, it seems to us that the study partly “falls into the hands” of double hermeneutics which, in turn, affects the objectivity of the conclusions. In this case, it is difficult to avoid “interpretation of interpretation”, at least for now.

The focus of this study is the creation (both metaphorical and literal) of a religious underground of newly-formed small religious communities, monastic orders, sisterhoods, groups of believers seeking to observe their religious practices and preach their religion under the circumstances unfavourable to religious communities.<sup>2</sup>

Under a combination of different historical, political and social circumstances, the believers and clergy of different denominations returned to the original, former forms of practising their faith in a socio-historical context marked by a completely different but rigid worldview. We cannot fail to notice similarities between the religious groups described in these studies and Jewish catacombs or early Christian movements which literally gathered underground.

The archival photographs show us the appearance of places of the religious underground from which one can easily draw a conclusion about the physical characteristics of these facilities. Churches and houses of worship were modestly made of wood and decorated with a few icons. Iuliana Cindrea gives us an ethnographic note of one such photograph, from the village of Cucova in present-day Romania inhabited and operated by an Orthodox community that broke away from the Romanian Orthodox Church over the calendar issue – the Old Calendarist community.<sup>3</sup> This combination of textual description,

<sup>2</sup> J. Kapalo and T. Vagramenko, eds., *Hidden Galleries*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> I. Cindrea, “Destruction of a Romanian Old Calendarist Church”, in *Hidden Galleries*, 14.

historical analysis, ethnographic and anthropological facts and photographic material is the main and fascinating feature of this study.

An even more vivid depiction of the reality of life of the religious underground is provided by the co-editor of this publication Tatiana Vagramenko in her description of monastic communities which after the October revolution gathered and worshipped in private rooms and homes, but also underground. At that time the secret service discovered a community of more than 2000 monks, nuns and believers in the territory of present-day Ukraine. Its leader, priest and monk Serafim, was arrested, as well as many members of the community. In a collapse of the underground structure, several people died and were buried in those very catacombs.<sup>4</sup>

It is a very interesting discovery that in addition to religious rituals, these religious groups pursued many other activities. Thus, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in western Ukraine operated a printing house in rooms under a local village. The leader of this community, Bohdan Terletsky, was arrested as a well-known (political!) threat in the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

Anca Maria Şincan conveys to us a text that betrays the spirit of the time and a very turbulent social history. We can learn a lot about the struggle of dignitaries of the Romanian Orthodox Church as well as the Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania with the then dominant social and political actors (e.g., the Ministry of Religious Denominations). In addition to the commitment of priests to their congregations, documented by photographs of religious rites and rituals in private rooms and apartments, we can also see their commitment to

the interests of citizens and prevention of the persecution of believers. Using text and image, we can be certain of old, brittle and yellowed notes with handwritten messages and notices of various contents. This material was discovered in the dusty archives of the secret services.

Great attention in this study is paid to the forms of communication amongst the underground religious communities. It was key to the survival of secret religious groups and the gathering of believers. Thus, Ágnes Hesz and Tatiana Vagramenko convey to us the meticulous data of "deciphered" letters that circulated within the religious community. When the Hungarian authorities allowed catechism to be taught in schools, intimidated parents very rarely enrolled their children in catechism classes. For the same reason, the teachers did not want to accept larger groups of students. Overcoming this risk was, among other things, conducted by sending letters of seemingly benign content. They contained an invitation and a description of the gathering place (usually in a private apartment) where catechism would be studied more widely.<sup>6</sup> A vivid example is the letters of a group of Jehovah's Witnesses that were coded in the form of everyday words: "fresh food" or "white bread" meant important religious writings, while the word "wine" referred to "preaching the word of God." The term "Mamma" meant the group Watch Tower Society, and "kolkhoz", a religious community.<sup>7</sup> If we know that, it is much clearer what the letter actually means: "Our family is healthy, we all are working in kolkhoz and our work is going very well... We receive everything from our office. *Once mamma baked white bread, and the wine was very tasty. It was brother Yuri*

<sup>4</sup> T. Vagramenko, "True Orthodox Underground Monastery", in *Hidden Galleries*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> T. Vagramenko, "Underground Monastery in Bucharest", in *Hidden Galleries*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Á. Hesz, "Clandestine Catechism Classes", in *Hidden Galleries*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> T. Vagramenko, "Fresh Bread from Mama: Jehovah's Witness Code", in *Hidden Galleries*, 30.

who poured out the wine. The brigadier of the kolkhoz invited all the group leaders for the party and they were telling about the work in their units. As we were drinking wine, we're getting merry and started singing then..."<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, the significant discoveries presented by the authors are accompanied, as everything else in this study, by archival recordings, photographs and notes. Undoubtedly, it gives us a deeper insight, captures the zeitgeist, and allows us to relate to the written word. We believe, therefore, that it cannot leave anyone indifferent.

The second part of the study, suggestively titled "Police aesthetics", specifies the ways in which the secret services "battled" against religious groups and movements. Namely, at that time the police made very detailed schemes of religious underground communities, which then helped them plan police operations.<sup>9</sup> Even though the intelligence services' goal was very pragmatic, their schematic representations have helped researchers and scientists understand the logistics of movement and communication of these groups.

The main form of networking of religious communities (i.e. the form of schemes) implied a hierarchical structure where all local cells of religious groups, located in smaller towns and villages, were networked, and all roads led to the centre of the entire network. It was usually located in a larger political and administrative seat.<sup>10</sup>

The work of the police department was not always aimed at the destruction of entire religious networks. Oftentimes they would resort to breaking the "bonds" between a cell and the centre or taking control over a cell. If we metaphorically imagine this type of networking of religious communities as

a system of communication and action, the removal of a single "gear" from the "engine" could cause great difficulties and problems for the whole system.

Tatiana Vagramenko and Ágnes Hesz provide examples of the networking of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution, as well as during the Stalinist regime,<sup>11</sup> and the case of the religious network of Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>12</sup> These descriptions are supported by archival photographs of hand-drawn plans of the networks compiled by the secret services.

After the discovery of these religious communities, the police would photograph the "crime scenes", and we can be definite about the amount and type of seized items: icons, scriptures, books and other religious objects, as well as several typewriters and some money.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the secret services and the police would make photo albums with pictures of believers and priests and their lives. They inadvertently made researchers "indebted" by providing them with well-preserved "first-hand" sources. Based on them, they were able to reconstruct the life and practices of religious communities and organizations far more precisely.

With the development of photographic techniques and the possibilities that arose with the development of technology, a kind

<sup>11</sup> T. Vagramenko, "Model Network Schemes of the True Orthodox Church", in *Hidden Galleries*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Á. Hesz, "Jehovah's Witness Network Scheme", in *Hidden Galleries*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> T. Vagramenko, "Photo-Collage of Members of the True Orthodox Church", in *Hidden Galleries*, 38–39; T. Vagramenko, "Hieromonk Seraphim at the Scene of the Crime", in *Hidden Galleries*, 43; I. Cindrea, "Smuggling Books", in *Hidden Galleries*, 46–47; K. Povedák, "Evidence against the Catholic Underground", in *Hidden Galleries*, 48–49; J. Kapaló and D. Lisnic, "Re-staging Ritual", in *Hidden Galleries*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. (emphasis D. P.).

<sup>9</sup> *Hidden Galleries*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

of cultural rebellion against repressive regimes also emerged. Religious groups began taking interesting and unusual photos of their religious leaders and arrested supporters. Judging by the archival material, this is very similar to what we would call the collage technique, which is becoming more widespread in providing (*non-violent – D.P.*) resistance.<sup>14</sup> Thus, James Kapaló conveys to us the iconographic production of a photograph of the leader of a religious movement in Bessarabia, Alexandru Culeac. Culeac was portrayed like the archangel Michael holding a sword and shield with a dove on his chest. This was one of the ways religious communities resisted. This is a really valuable account of one of the ways in which religious communities resisted.<sup>15</sup> Also, a very interesting but, primarily, important feature of these movements is the depiction of the characters of women saints. Elena Culeac was depicted as the Mother of God.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, the militaristic formations managed to turn this situation in favour of repressive state apparatuses. The photographs and collages made it easier to identify religious leaders, and still easier to reach them.<sup>17</sup> In the continuation of the paper, one can see very extensive and detailed presentations of the confiscated religious material of a large number of underground religious groups in Eastern Europe.

We will use a touching conclusion by Gabriela Nicolescu, who gave an overview of this study the exhibition *Hidden Galleries: Clandestine Religion in the Secret Police Archives at the Museum of Art in Cluj-Napoca, Romania*. The exhibition was visited by many who could both see

and come to terms with an entire universe which had long been hidden. Some of the visitors had been members of the described religious communities. Nicolescu also quoted Derrida<sup>18</sup> to describe two ideas that were the themes of this exhibition – love and death.<sup>19</sup> We would argue that the themes are life and death – communities that lived a reality almost inconceivable to the modern observer, and death which constantly hovered over them were all recorded and archived.

However, it was precisely this material and this insightful study that revived the religious underground, dispelled the enchanted, and portrayed the invisible.

This study is quite ambitious as it deals with a very broad and multi-layered topic. The topic certainly requires a lot of time and a multidisciplinary approach. However, in our opinion, it is very successful in creating a clear overview of the hitherto largely neglected but no less important topics. The authors of the texts interpret, re-examine and re-actualize the key elements, events, and historical and religious material based on unpublished archival material. The revealed secret archives tell us a lot, and they are also available to the public. It is not unlikely that similar but as yet undiscovered material exists in the former Yugoslavia. Therefore, this collection provides an excellent starting point and explanatory framework for potential future studies on religious groups and socialist regimes. It would be important to see such an initiative in our region as well.

<sup>14</sup> *Hidden Galleries*, 66.

<sup>15</sup> J. Kapaló, "The Archangel Michael Looked Just like Me", in *Hidden Galleries*, 70.

<sup>16</sup> D. Lisnic, "Archangelist Women", in *Hidden Galleries*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> *Hidden Galleries*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> J. Derrida 1998 after G. Nicolescu, "Exhibitions as Tools to Think With: On Impact and Process", in *Hidden Galleries*, 104.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

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