



Repositioning Russia:

Romanian Orthodoxy's Appropriation of the Silver Age

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This essay is about an appropriation that did not happen, of an as yet unformed Russian tradition, by men who did not read Russian. The cultural movement known as Romanian Orthodoxy exhibited many of the trademarks of Russian symbolism and of the religious, Slavophile disciples of Vladimir Solov'ev.¹ It emerged in the early 1920s and continued to grow in popularity until the end of the Second World War. Although strong similarities existed between Romanian Orthodoxists and some Silver Age Russian intellectuals, the former were diffident about acknowledging any debt to the Russians, even while they eagerly recognized intellectual debts from elsewhere in the world. They were so diffident, in fact, that it is not even clear whether we are dealing with a case of cultural diffusion or convergent evolution. If Romanian Orthodoxy developed completely independently of Russian Silver Age influences, the case should cause us to pay attention to transnational trends when constructing Russian intellectual genealogies, rather than contenting ourselves with the indigenous Russian traditions that Silver Age writers themselves acknowledged. It is possible that similar Europe-wide conditions catalyzed both movements, and that Russia's chronological precedence simply reflects the fact that these conditions emerged earlier in Russia than in Romania.

Romanian Orthodoxists were well informed about the Russian Silver Age, however, and so the question becomes one of why they did not wholeheartedly appropriate the Russian tradition, and why they were hesitant to acknowledge those ideas that they did find in Russia. The story of Romanian Orthodoxy's relationship to the Russian Silver Age is one of an attempt to re-position Orthodox Russia in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution as an irrelevant and anachronistic force in the Eastern Orthodox world. The Romanians' intransigent attitude towards the Silver Age stemmed from their conviction that Russian Orthodoxy was a spent force, their lack of confidence in the theological orthodoxy of Russian ideas such as sophiology, and their desire to promote Romania as a leader in Eastern Orthodox life and culture. By marginalizing Russian influences on their own movement, Romanian Orthodoxists could emphasize the originality of their ideas and present themselves as the bearers of an "Oriental" culture that could revitalize Europe. Orthodoxy's founder, Nichifor Crainic, declared in 1924 that "tied to the Occident through the Latin idea, we are tied to the Orient through faith. Latinity is the path through which we receive. ... Orthodoxy is the path through which we give" ("Pacea balcanului" 21). Crainic believed that Romania's position at the meeting point between East and West gave it the unique opportunity to create a "new" culture by combining the best of both worlds. Admitting that this culture had already appeared in Russia would obviously weaken these grand claims.

Even amongst Russians, the Silver Age has had an ambiguous reception at best. Frequently celebrated, it has rarely if ever been embraced on its own terms. Galina Rylkova's recent book, *The Archaeology of Anxiety* (2007), argues that like most traditions, this one was invented post facto by Russian writers and artists of the 1920s and 1930s. "The Silver Age was created," Rylkova argues, "as a result of the collective appropriation of the historical experience

that befell the Russian people in the first third of the twentieth century" (Rylkova 7). Russian literati both inside and outside Russia presented the Silver Age from the perspective of the 1920s as something that had finished, as a heritage that could either be reacted against, or appropriated and built upon. Moreover, it was a *Russian* heritage, and anyone who professed to create Russian culture had to take a stance vis-à-vis the Silver Age.

For non-Russians, the story was more complex. Not only did their nationality not oblige them to position themselves in regards to the Silver Age, but for them it was not even clear that the Silver Age existed. As Rylkova shows, the notion of the Russian Silver Age as a hermetic tradition developed slowly, and was far from fully formed even in Russia when Romanian Orthodoxists began to define their own movement in the mid-1920s. Moreover, European nationalism owed a significant debt to Herder's notion that culture flows from language, and that each language group has its own national culture (378). Crainic, for example, argued that "every culture stands in a deeply symbolic and almost mystical rapport with territory, with the space in which, through which, it wants to realize itself" ("Parsifal" 181). Once one accepts this as an axiom, and is convinced that culture flows not from ideology but from nationality, it becomes difficult to separate the culture of tsarist Russia from Bolshevik culture. Whereas Nikolai Berdiaev argued that "Bolshevism was an unnatural, inverted realization of the Russian idea" (176), in the eyes of Romanian nationalists the Bolshevik revolution rendered all Russian culture suspect, and therefore of questionable value.

Similar Orthodoxisms

Through his prolific journalism and editorial work, the poet, journalist and theologian Nichifor Crainic established himself as the leading representative of what he called

“Orthodoxism.” A number of similarities exist between Crainic’s movement and early twentieth century Russian religious philosophy, but few direct links can be established between the two traditions. The very word “Orthodoxism” (*pravoslavnichan'e*) was first coined by Vladimir Solov'ev, although he used it to contrast Eastern Orthodox Christianity from the religious musings of the early Slavophiles, whose ideas, he said, had “little in common with the true faith of the Russian people” (5).² Crainic never mentioned Solov'ev’s use of the word, and given Crainic’s penchant for coining “-isms,” it is quite likely that he arrived at this term independently of Solov'ev. A diverse group of religious, nationalist intellectuals held together by friendship ties and shared values, Romanian Orthodoxism championed the village, celebrated tradition, mysticism, and folklore. It was highly critical of secular modernity, which they characterized as culture without soul, dominated by *techne*, technology, freemasons, and Jews.³ Although it did promote a nationalist agenda at a time when Romanian politics was moving rapidly towards the extreme right, Romanian Orthodoxism was not a fascist movement. Some of its leading figures, in particular Crainic, were heavily involved in fascist and ultra-nationalist politics, but not all, or even most, Orthodoxists were fascist.

The main organ of Orthodoxist thought was *Gândirea: literară – artistică – socială* (*Thought: Literary, Artistic, Social*), a literary journal dedicated to discussions of philosophy, art, politics, and culture, which Crainic edited from 1926 onwards. When *Gândirea* was established in 1921, a journal dedicated to Russian religious philosophy already existed in Moscow, with a remarkably similar title—*Russkaia mysl': zhurnal nauchnyi, literaturnyi i politicheskii* (*Russian Thought: Scientific, Literary and Political Journal*).⁴ *Gândirea* was not founded as an Orthodoxist journal, however, which casts doubt on whether the Romanians had looked to Russia for their inspiration. *Gândirea* emerged from nightly gatherings of young intellectuals in

a Cluj restaurant called the “New York.” Many of the collaborators had worked together before, and financed by various newspapermen and university professors from Transylvania, they established *Gândirea* as a journal without an ideology (Vrabie 58-65). The poet Lucian Blaga described it as “an atmosphere primarily of collectivity based on friendship” (225). Cezar Petrescu, one of the founding editors, wrote in the first issue that, “Today the doctrines are in a crystallizing phase. The same for the literary currents. A dogma ... would close our horizon from the beginning” (qtd. Ornea, *Traditionalism* 124). The type of religious philosophy found in *Russkaia mysl'* was only one of the many currents that interested early Gândirists, and the fact that they never mentioned the Russian periodical suggests that no direct connections between the two existed.

A number of articles on Russian Slavophilism appeared in *Gândirea*’s pages during its first three years, but all were very general surveys. *Gândirea* was not an Orthodoxist publication at this time, and its assessments of the Russian movement were not unreservedly positive. Ion Darie argued that in Russia, “all of the problems long resolved ... by Western literature and philosophy, are taken back up with naivety and passion, revised and turned upside down. The Russian people are religious, not scientific,” said Darie, and if Latin writers were “minimalists,” then the Russians were “maximalists, in everything that they think, feel and want” (201). Vasile Gherasim then questioned exactly how practical Russian religious thought really was. Boiling Russian intellectual debates down to a contest between Ivan Kireevskii’s “Byzantine mysticism” and Vissarion Belinskii’s “progressive Westernization,” Gherasim characterized the debate as one between religion and action, and the former was not necessarily superior to the latter. “Humility and burying oneself in Biblical truths,” according to Gherasim, was equivalent to inactivity (261).⁵

The historiography on Romanian Orthodoxy correctly allies it with the Slavophile tradition, but pays little attention to possible links between the two. Keith Hitchins describes the “great debate over the nature of Romanian ethnicity and culture” as a debate between “Europeanists,” who were the functional equivalents of the Russian “Westernizers,” and the “Traditionalists” (or “Orthodoxists”), who modeled themselves on the Slavophiles.⁶ The clearest manifestation of this divide within the Romanian intelligentsia was the polemic that took place during the early 1930s between Crainic and the prominent Westernizer, Eugen Lovinescu. Crainic and Lovenescu disagreed about whether to situate “Romanianess” in the village or the city, in the East or the West; whether to celebrate rural traditions or urban civilization (Enache 468-473). Interestingly, however, when Crainic described the Russian debate in his course on “Dostoevskii and Russian Christianity,” he never compared it to the Romanian situation, and only dealt with Russian Westernization and Slavophilism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, refraining from continuing the story into the early twentieth century (*Dostoievski* 71-84).

In addition to opposing “Westernization,” both Russian and Romanian Orthodoxy demanded that Cartesian rationalism be subordinated to their versions of Christian doctrine. Ivan Kireevskii, one of the founding fathers of Slavophilism, opposed the “self-propelling scalpel of reason” with his idea of “integral reason,” subordinating autonomous reason to Orthodox Christianity (qtd. Raeff 177-181). Guy Planty-Bonjour writes that “for the Slavophile, reason is not simply subordinated to faith, but fundamentally depends upon it” (93-94). Romanian Orthodoxy demanded the same relationship. According to Crainic, Christianity is paradigmatic because it structures the means of inquiry, and “shows us the measure of all things and of all values in this world” (“Ortodoxie” 1). Moreover, whereas human knowledge was

irremediably distorted by the Fall, true knowledge can be obtained through the Church, which “is itself the order in which are sketched facts that have been freed from sin and re-established in harmony with God” (Crainic, “Ortodoxie” 2). In a similar vein, *Gândirea*’s frequent contributor Mihai Nița celebrated Paul Conard’s attempt to create a “Christian sociology,” because only a sociology that is alert to religious worldviews can fully describe reality.

In fact, both groups were so skeptical of modernity that they declared it to be in crisis, and demanded radical changes. Solov'ev wrote to E. V. Romanova in 1873 that “the existing order (primarily the social and civic order ...) is not what it should be. ... The present condition of mankind ... must be changed, reformed” (qtd. Zenkovsky II 481, n. 3). Solov'ev took part in efforts at church reforms attempted by intellectuals in the 1860s and 1870s, trying to make religion more acceptable to an educated elite, and his importance for Russian philosophy lies in his ability to syncretize its secular and religious streams into a systematic philosophy, uniting rational thought and mystical experiences because they both reflected the Absolute, the “all unity” (*vseedinstvo*), in different ways. Solov'ev believed individualism to be the cause of the West’s spiritual crisis, and he argued that socialism, which was based on individualism, was hurdling Russia towards disaster.⁷ Solov'ev contrasted individuation with *sobornost'* (collective unity in the Church), which he described as “free submission to the truly real” (qtd. Chambers 224). According to Solov'ev, the Absolute is a pan-unity that radiates out of two poles: the *Ain-Soph*, positive being (God), and its opposite, *prima material, hyle*, or the world-soul. Solov'ev believed that “by a free act of the world-soul the world, which had been united by it, fell away from Deity and broke up into a multitude of warring elements” (qtd. Zenkovsky II 506). Similar formulations of the Fall as fragmentation of reality, and as a falling away from a primordial unity

with God can be found in Christian theology since its very inception, but with Solov'ev it became a major theme for Orthodox theologians in the early twentieth century.

Without mentioning Solov'ev, Crainic's lectures on German mysticism compared the Fall with the manner in which the earth broke away from the sun. From an original unity between God and humanity, the Fall created two entities alienated from, but still attracted to, one another. "The earth is not identical with the sun that it broke away from," he taught, "for in this case it would be the sun and not the earth, but in its size and its different aspect it is related to the sun, with which an endless magnetic attraction exists" ("Curs" 81). The connection between God and humans functions in the same way. We are drawn to God "by an attraction much deeper, more spontaneous, and more alive than the physical attraction between planets and stars" (81). Breaking away from God meant rejecting this attractive force. The result was the damnation of human activity to futility and meaninglessness. Crainic's presentation of the Fall almost directly mirrored Solov'ev's account of the disintegration of *vseedinstvo*, but he never suggested that this formulation owed anything to the latter.

Solov'ev's critique of modernity, and particularly his conviction that social problems required metaphysical solutions, inspired a group of religious intellectuals whose position was made famous through a 1909 symposium entitled *Vekhi* (*Signposts*).⁸ According to Mikhail Gershenzon, who edited the symposium, *Vekhi*'s common platform was "the recognition of the theoretical and practical primacy of spiritual life over the external forms of community" (xxvii). *Vekhi* contained articles by Gershenzon, Petr Struve, Aleksandr Izgoev, Simon Frank, Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Bogdan Kistiakovskii. Many of these men were neo-Kantian ex-Marxists who had participated in the religio-philosophical societies that emerged between 1901 and 1903 as part of a general turn towards religion (Copleston 203f), and had contributed to

the 1902 symposium entitled *Problemy idealizma* (*Problems of Idealism*), which was a critique of positivism and Marxism in favor of “spiritual” values (Brooks 22-23). Most were also contributors to *Novy put'* (*The New Way*), *Poliarnaia zvezda* (*Polar Star*), and *Svoboda i kul'tura* (*Freedom and Culture*) (Lowrie 104, 115). These journals sought to unite metaphysics with politics and revive neglected Slavophile works, as well as reasserting “culture,” which they defined as “the totality of absolute values creating and being created by humanity and composing its social and spiritual life” (Brooks 24). Selling over 23,000 copies in five editions over the first year, *Vekhi* sparked critical debate from all sections of the Russian intelligentsia (Read 7, 141).

Following Solov'ev, the contributors to *Vekhi* saw religion as an Absolute upon which their systems could be built, and this idea also lay at the heart of Romanian Orthodoxism. Explicitly appropriating Nikolai Berdiaev's dream of a “new Middle Ages,” in *Nostalgia paradișului* (*The Nostalgia of Paradise*, 1940) Crainic explained what he believed was wrong with modern culture in terms that were highly reminiscent of the *Vekhi* symposium.

Modern culture is suffering a process of *secularization*. . . . If the font and the ideal of Christian culture is God, secularization means that man becomes the single font and ideal. This anthropocentrism is called, in other words, individualism. *Man* does not exist except as an abstract notion. . . . Starting from an inexhaustible creative thirst, modern culture represents a phase of decadence. (79-80)

Crainic argued that modern philosophy, art, politics, and society were all insubstantial because they are based on the autonomous individual, and hence are arbitrary and ephemeral. Years earlier, and in Russia, the contributors to *Vekhi* had argued almost exactly the same thing:

Its own temperament renders the intelligentsia itself an anti-communal, anti-collective force, since it bears within itself the divisive principle of heroic self-affirmation. (Bulgakov 29)

Nihilistic moralism is the most profound and basic feature of the Russian *intelligent*'s spiritual physiognomy. Denial of objective values leads to deification of the subjective interests of his fellow man ("the people"). (Frank 138)

Despite clear similarities between the two movements, the fact remains that with the exception of Berdiaev, Romanian Orthodoxists did not refer to the *Vekhi* contributors, or to any Silver Age Russians, when creating a genealogy for their movement. The Romanians acknowledged only minor, incidental borrowings from the Russians, and preferred to look further west for support for their central ideas.

Incidental Borrowings

A brief look at Nichifor Crainic's account of his intellectual development shows something of the way that Romanian Orthodoxists constructed their identity vis-à-vis foreign intellectual currents. Crainic traveled to Vienna in 1921 and he recorded in his memoirs that "so as to learn the [German] language more quickly, I translated several essays of D. Merezhkovskii, Tagore's *Sadhana*, Rilke's *Stories of God*, and half of *Maya the Bee* by Waldemar Bonsels" (Zile albe 161). The moral lessons of Bonsels' children's story resonated well with Crainic's nationalism, but he never pursued it further. The other three writers, however, became central to Crainic's Orthodoxist program. Crainic published his translation of Rilke's stories in 1922,

saying that they “give the impression that they were taken out of Romanian life” (qtd. Șoimaru 2). Rabindranath Tagore visited Romania in 1922, and Crainic used the Indian mystic’s writings throughout his career.⁹ Exactly what he took from Merezhkovskii, however, is difficult to ascertain. Crainic wrote to his friend in 1921 that he was reading Merezhkovskii’s *Vechnye sputniki* (*Eternal Companions*, 1897) in a German translation, and was planning to write a study on it (“Correspondența” 102). The style of *Vechnye sputniki* is similar to that of Crainic’s literary criticism, and it may have influenced his penchant for emphasizing the impact of cultural and geographic (urban or pastoral) settings on a given writer, but it is highly unlikely that this was the only book of Merezhkovskii’s that he read.¹⁰

In 1923 he attempted to organize a conference on the works of Merezhkovskii, Oswald Spengler, and Hermann von Keyserling called “The Third Empire” or “Neo-Chiliasm” but the conference did not materialize, and Crainic rarely mentioned Merezhkovskii again (“Correspondența” 119). Spengler and Keyserling, on the other hand, became heroes of Romanian Orthodoxy. Spengler’s predictions about the demise of Western civilization closely corresponded to their own, and the Orthodoxists frequently quoted him to support their arguments.¹¹ Keyserling visited Romania in 1927 and was a friend of Lucian Blaga, who, although not himself an Orthodoxist, was a frequent contributor to *Gândirea* and a close friend of Crainic’s. Keyserling argued that “only in Romania can the Byzantine element experience a new revival in the religious sphere,” and thus articulated one of the key elements of the Orthodoxist agenda (Marineasa 62).

Crainic’s attraction to both Rilke and Merezhkovskii appears to have been first and foremost because of their theurgical understanding of the artistic process, in which the artist believes himself or herself to be drawing upon a supernatural reality when creating their art. In

“The Emblematics of Meaning,” Andrei Belyi argued that “creation leads us to an epiphany, or actual manifestation of the deity. The World Logos takes on the Image of Man” (Hutchings 142). Paperno characterizes the entire Symbolist movement as an attempt to “merge the antitheses of art and life into a unity. Art was proclaimed to be a force capable of, and destined for, the “creation of life” (*tvorchestvo zhizni*), while “life” was viewed as an object of artistic creation or as a creative act (Paterno 1). Merezhkovskii was no exception, and for him the “writer of genius” was someone who could transfer “to the stage of the world a drama which is being played out in their own souls. They transfer that drama in order to show us that the struggle which is now going on in us is eternal” (qtd. Pyman 125).

In his poetry, Crainic blended religious motifs into a celebration of the Romanian countryside, uniting modernist forms with traditional patriotic themes. The language that he used to describe how the Romanian peasantry inspired poetry was very similar to his accounts of religious inspiration (“Țăranul în artă” 1). His interpreter, Laura Bădescu, writes that “for Crainic, art becomes a fundamentally religious space in which lyrics direct us towards the revelation of the mystery” (27). He described art as “theandric,” and Christ and culture were so deeply inter-related for him that the two were almost—though not entirely—interchangeable. Crainic believed that art makes present the transcendent realm on earth, and “the artist becomes a commentator of Jesus Christ” (*Nostalgia* 279, 283).

Crainic claimed that he discovered “mysticism” in Vienna, but credited only French and German authors such as Edvard Lehmann, Henri Delacroix, and Hugo Ball, who wrote general introductions to mystical theology. Through these general surveys, he discovered early writings on mysticism by Church Fathers such as St. Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Maximus the Confessor, and St. John Damascene (Crainic, *Zile albe* 176). By going directly to patristic

sources, Crainic apparently bypassed the Russians altogether. His course on “Dostoevskii and Russian Christianity,” which he taught at various theological seminaries from 1926 onwards, involved taking individual characters from Dostoevskii’s novels and showing how they represented various metaphysical choices, each with its attendant consequences. In these readings, Crainic followed early Russian interpreters such as Vladimir Solov’ev, Nikolai Arsen’ev, Sergei Perskii, and Nikolai Berdiaev, each of whom he acknowledged briefly early on in his course (*Dostoievski* 43-54).

Few other scholars were interested in Russian mysticism in interwar Romania, and although the theologian Dumitru Stăniloae learned Russian as a student in the 1920s, he rarely interacted with Russian theology until the early 1940s, when he engaged primarily with the émigré writings of Sergei Bulgakov and Vladimir Losskii (Miller 13).¹² Another young theologian at Sibiu, Nicolae Terchilă, published the book *Idei de filosofie religioasă la Vladimir Soloviev* (*Vladimir Solov’ev’s Religious Philosophy*) in 1936. Outside of official church journals, the book went almost unnoticed amongst Romanian intellectuals. Terchilă’s work emphasized the transformative power of Christianity to give the world “a new and more perfect form” once it has conquered the spiritual maladies that keep the world in a state of decay and alienation (403). This message was a central concern of Romanian Orthodoxy, which repeatedly emphasized the need to subordinate the Romanian state to Christian leadership.¹³

Considering the strong similarities between the two movements, it is curious that the Romanians did not concern themselves with the Russian writers more than they did. Even when an idea receives its clearest expression in a Russian writer, such as Solov’ev’s notion of the divine-human rupture, Orthodoxists such as Crainic preferred to find it somewhere else, in this case in medieval German mysticism. The language barrier would certainly have prevented some

from appreciating Russian literature, but a large number of translations into Western languages were available—Crainic, for example, read Russian writers mostly in German—and Romanian intellectuals were generally multi-lingual. To understand the Romanian recalcitrance to appropriate Russian sources, one must understand how Russia, and the Russian Silver Age in particular, was perceived in Romania.

A Problematic Heritage Meets Anti-Bolshevism

Romanian Orthodoxy's biggest quarrel with Solov'ev's disciples was with the "sophiological" tradition based on Solov'ev's religious experiences involving three dreams of "Sophia" (Wisdom), personified as a woman. This tradition treated Sophia as the "divine idea" and skeptics were afraid that Solov'ev was introducing a fourth person (*hypostasis*) into the Trinity (Lossky 102-104). Russian Orthodox hierarchs were convinced that this had happened in the writings of Solov'ev's disciple, the sophiologist Sergei Bulgakov, who was excommunicated in 1923 (Raeff 118-120). Such heterodoxy unsettled the Romanians too, and while more adventurous thinkers—such as Lucian Blaga—did sometimes embrace sophiology because of its emphasis on "mysticism," it worried the more conservative writers who comprised what Hitchins calls the "right wing" of *Gândirea* ("Gândirea" 236). In 1940, Stăniloae characterized this error as part of "the Slavic tendency of exaggerating to the point of unbelievability," and distanced both himself and Crainic from the heretical Russians ("Opera teologică" 26-27).

Even while they appreciated some aspects of the Russian Silver Age, the nationalism of many Romanian Orthodoxists clashed with the anti-establishment and a-national tendencies of those Russians whom the Romanians admired. Berdiaev, for example, was very popular amongst Romanian Orthodoxists because of his notion of a "new Middle Ages." Berdiaev

argued that the First World War heralded the end of the modern era, with its individualism and secularism, and the beginning of a new Middle Ages. This new age would preserve all of the achievements of liberalism and humanism, but would recognize the “true God” and make Him the basis of culture and society. Berdiaev was a passionate opponent of communism, and like the Romanian Orthodoxists, he labeled it “satanic” (*Un Nouveau Moyen Age* 288). But Berdiaev also condemned fascism, arguing that it was illegitimate, “a manifestation of biological force and not of law” (121). Whereas Crainic promoted the forceful, top-down creation of an ethnically-based theocracy in Romania,¹⁴ Berdiaev warned that “it is impossible to restore the old theocratic state,” and that a spiritual revolution has to involve a free, popular submission of every individual to God, not a violent overthrow of power (274, 283). Crainic, who was a vehement supporter of fascism, dismissed these criticisms on the grounds that Berdiaev could not think outside Marx’s theory of class hierarchies because he had been a Marxist in his youth.¹⁵

The émigré theologian Boris Vysheslavev was critical of the temporal exercise of power by any state, whether it be Bolshevik or fascist. He argued in Berdiaev’s Parisian journal *Put’* (*The Way*) that “even the more open state working in theocratic service has something diabolic in it: it is the sword, compulsion, the degradation of the human citizen to the status of an instrument of a foreign will” (qtd. Stăniloae, “Cele două Împărații” 26). Dumitru Stăniloae responded that “if the state is in the service of order and from this point of view is a necessary instrument of God against evil, how does it come about that in order to maintain the order of God something evil is necessary, the sword and compulsion?” (26). The violence associated with the administration of justice is sanctified because it serves a public rather than an individual good, and hence is not sinful. Unlike Crainic, Stăniloae was not a fascist, but as an Orthodoxist he supported strong government, and the revolutionary tendencies associated with the *Vekhi* group

and their sympathizers, many of whom were living in exile, did not translate well into the Romanian situation, where the political star of Orthodoxy was on the rise.

Even more problematically, Romanian Orthodoxists were violently anti-Communist, and in their eagerness to reduce everything to a “national essence” they were not always good at distinguishing between political ideology (Bolshevism) and ethnicity (Russian). In his political writings, Crainic described communists as “parasites,” and claimed that they were destroying Romania “under the protection of the international bureau from Geneva” (*Programul* 43). Communists were “invading” Europe and had to be stopped before they conquered the world. According to Crainic, one of Adolf Hitler’s great merits was the “war of extermination” that he was carrying out against Bolshevik Russia, because only extreme measures could overcome such a grave danger (“Hitler” 1; “Prefața,” *Comunismul* 9). Always thinking in Manichean terms, Crainic saw the fight against communism as a holy battle against demonic forces. He wrote in 1934 that “in Karl Marx all the Pharisees and old teachers of the law have been reincarnated in order to crucify the Savior of the world once again” (“Titanii ateismului” 261).

Another Orthodoxist theologian, Ioan Savin, argued that because of the infiltration of Freemasonry, “if we are not yet in the fullness of Bolshevik anarchy, we are in the final phases of its preparation” (55). According to Savin, both Bolsheviks and Freemasons wanted to “Europeanize” the country and both were “international,” thus they were working together (55). Later, Franz Shuttack demonstrated that fears of invasion were far from baseless. In a 1941 book he recorded how communists tried to take over the country in two invasion attempts from Russia during 1919. They were apparently stopped by the Romanian army both times.¹⁶

Most of the Silver Age writers with whom we are concerned here—Symbolists and religious Slavophiles—were neither communist nor resident in Russia at this time. But Russia

had long had imperialist goals in the Balkan region, and uneasy diplomatic relations existed between the two countries throughout the period under discussion.¹⁷ Nineteenth-century Slavophilism did have pan-Slavic associations, especially in the works of men like Mikhail Skobelev and Mikhail Katkov. This was well known in Romania, particularly because the very creation of the Romanian state only took place when the Western European powers created Moldavia and Wallachia as a way of denying the territories to Russia after the Crimean War (Hitchins, *Rumania* 6). Even if the émigrés in Paris and Berlin were not themselves pan-Slavists, associating oneself with Russians of any stripe was not an obvious move for a Romanian nationalist.

Alternative Solidarities

Perhaps the biggest reason why Romanian Orthodoxists did not look to Russia for inspiration lies in the fact that they were attempting to establish *themselves* as the point of reference for Orthodox Christians in south-eastern Europe. Just as nineteenth-century pan-Slavism had presented Russia as the “protector” of the Orthodox peoples, Romanian Orthodoxists attempted to draw their neighbors into political, cultural and religious alliances based on Eastern Orthodox notions of autocephaly. Roman Iakobson argued that literary evolution “is not so much a question of the disappearance of certain elements and the emergence of others as it is a question of shifts in the mutual relationship among the diverse components of the system, in other words, a question of a shifting dominant” (qtd. Rylkova 49). As much as they denied it, it is clear that in their literary borrowings, Romanian Orthodoxists wished to maintain the basic framework of Russian messianism, while translating it into the Romanian cultural situation. Nikolai Danilevskii’s *Rossiia i Evropa* (*Russia and Europe*, 1869) argued that Eastern Orthodoxy provided Russian culture with a spirituality lacking in Western Europe, and

that the decline of the West would be remedied by the “Byzantine” element in Russian culture. This was exactly the same argument made by the Romanian Orthodoxists, with the exception that they believed that it would be *Romania*, not Russia, who saved Europe.

In February 1934, Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey signed a treaty in which they agreed to put aside any territorial disputes that had been simmering between them since the First World War. Recent historians see the “Balkan Pact” as essentially a defensive measure aimed at preventing Bulgarian revisionism and at disarming expansionist goals that the Great Powers may or may not have had in the region (Hitchins, *Rumania* 433; Miloiu 141-152). Orthodoxist reactions to the Balkan Pact were mixed. Savin advised rejecting it altogether on the grounds that it was created by Masons (Stăniloae, *Națiune și creștinism* 36). Stăniloae was much more positive. He imagined that it would lead the states of south-eastern Europe into “a unity which will continually deepen,” and argued that “the Balkan Pact has a common spiritual base as its lasting foundation” (30). All four countries were Orthodox, he noted, and so they shared common traits that endeared them to one another but not to Germans or Hungarians. Moreover, Orthodoxy should have had a sanctifying influence on these countries. (70).

Stăniloae proposed using the peaceful arrangements established by the 1934 treaty for furthering a pan-Orthodox block centered in the Balkans. He suggested that the four autocephalous churches work together, supply material and spiritual aid to one another, and create a pan-Orthodox theological school. Each “people” (*neam*) was to send ten to fifteen students to Constantinople, where “they would come to know all three Orthodox languages, being able to stay in contact their whole lives . . . and would create an ambiance of practical Orthodox solidarity [by] feeling closer to Orthodox Christians from other peoples” (*Națiune și creștinism* 32). The choice of Constantinople was significant because even though they had by

far the largest church in the region, the Romanians, Stăniloae said, were not attempting to overwhelm the other churches. They simply wanted to cooperate as independent, self-governing bodies.

The practical possibilities of the Orthodoxist model of autocephalous nation-states showed themselves when they helped draw Romania and Bulgaria closer together in 1941. Under pressure from Hitler, in August 1940 the dictator-King Carol II was forced to cede a third of Romania's territory to Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Soviet claims. This humiliation was severe enough that it brought Carol's regime down and replaced it with a "Legionary state" in which General Antonescu ruled with the support of the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael (Hitchins, *Rumania* 447-453). The Romanians soon realized that they could ill afford to alienate both the Hungarians and the Bulgarians, and Antonescu's regime quickly moved to sign an accord with Bulgaria in September (Solcan 276). Crainic had been Carol's Minister of Propaganda, and after assisting in Antonescu's coup he became president of the radio broadcasting station until he quarreled with Antonescu and resigned at the end of May 1941 (Crainic, *Zile albe* 314-328). Just before they parted ways, Crainic organized a conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, entitled "Our Ecumenical Country" (27 May 1941). Crainic had no official power to make foreign policy decisions, but he had long conversations with the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III, the Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, and the Foreign Minister Ivan Popoff about important disputed territories. In his memoirs, Crainic presents the appropriation with Bulgaria as his own idea, and claims this conference as a pivotal moment of understanding between the two countries (*Zile albe* 342-344). The fact that a treaty had already existed for nine months by the time that Crainic held his conference makes these pretensions seem somewhat inflated.

Crainic's argument—delivered before a Bulgarian audience in German—was that “we Orthodox have two fatherlands (*patrii*): one of our blood, the other the communal patria of the Eastern Orthodox Church” (Zissulescu 568-569). Their common bond as Orthodox nations, Crainic argued, should be enough to base a close friendship on. To cement this bond, Crainic resurrected Stăniloae's suggestion of “a central international synod” based in Constantinople, which would draw all the Orthodox nations in the region together. In order to guarantee his listeners' sympathy, Crainic played up their common fate as victims of a double colonization. For centuries both countries had lived under Turkish imperial rule, and now the Western countries were attempting to impose their form of secular modernization upon them (*Zile albe* 344). According to Crainic, Romania and Bulgaria should build on their common heritage to create something new that would reinvigorate Europe. But they would not be infringing on each other's territory in doing so. When understood in a spirit of brotherly love, even those things that appeared to separate them would actually draw them together (“*Glasuri din balcani*” 282). Ștefan Zissulescu later described Crainic's argument in terms of a symphony: “Every man is like an instrument in an orchestra, and nations are groups of instruments, all with a mission to make the Christian symphony of the love of one's neighbor resound” (568).

Claims about the role of Eastern Orthodoxy in securing continuity for the Bulgarian “state” under Ottoman rule were central to Bulgarian state-making, so Crainic's celebration of an ethnic-Orthodox identity was warmly received by his audience (Riis 129-134). Several months later, he dedicated an issue of *Gândirea* to contributions by Bulgarian poets and writers in an attempt to introduce Romanian audiences to culture from the other side of the Danube River.¹⁸ When Tsar Boris died in 1943, Crainic gave him a warm eulogy, hailing him as a prophet of pan-Orthodox cooperation.¹⁹

The key to transnational cooperation, according to Crainic, was Eastern Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy drew on a rich Byzantine heritage and was therefore always associated with “the Orient” in Crainic’s symbolic geography. Crainic thought that Romania was situated halfway between the East and the West, and that its interests could not be properly identified with either. He rejected Russian Slavophilism on the grounds that it identified Orthodoxy with Russia and believed that “the messianic role of Russia is to subjugate the Occident with the sword in order to regenerate it, Christianizing it after a Pravoslavnic [*sic*] model” (“Ortodoxia” 5). Whereas Slavophiles were Russians first and Christians second, Crainic’s vision was of a Romania already subordinated to theocratic rule. Romania, argued Crainic, would only be able to save Europe once it had itself been saved by the Orthodoxist program laid out in his *Ethnocratic State* (*Programul statului etnocratic*, 1938).

Conclusion

Interwar Romanian Orthodoxy displayed many similarities with various elements of the Russian Silver Age. Like Russian Symbolism, Romanian Orthodoxy argued that artistic creation, particularly poetic creation, had to flow from the artist’s own experience of the divine. Both movements found God in nature, and celebrated life as a place where God revealed Himself. Like Vladimir Solov’ev and the contributors to the *Vekhi* symposium, Romanian Orthodoxy was highly critical of socialism, and of modernity in general. Both rejected secularism, individualism, and Cartesian rationalism, arguing that a genuine transformation of society could only happen once humans again submitted themselves to God. They differed in that even though they both agreed that radical change was necessary, the Russians advocated persuasion while the Romanians demanded state-led change.

Religious philosophers had always been a powerless minority in Russia and proudly belonged to a long revolutionary tradition dating back to the 1825 Decembrist revolt. Never comfortable with the Russian state, they became even less so once the Bolsheviks took power and many of them had to flee the country. These experiences meant that the social activism that they promoted relied less on coercion and more on prophetic warnings to the rest of society. Although they too often presented themselves as outsiders vis-à-vis the state power structure, Romanian Orthodoxists had good political connections and the halting support of the official Church. Orthodoxists occasionally received important government posts and they became more and more influential as successive Romanian governments moved towards the extreme right in the late 1930s. In an environment where they were gaining, not losing, power, Romanian Orthodoxists naturally looked to the state to realize their dreams. Uncomfortable with the anti-statist rhetoric of Russian religious philosophy, it was more natural for Romanian Orthodoxists to look westward for their inspiration, to voices like Oswald Spengler and Hermann von Keyserling.

Romanian Orthodoxy was also a nationalist movement, and was firmly committed to defending Romanian influences against foreign competitors. The imperialistic stance that Russia had historically adopted towards Romania did not endear Russian culture to Romanian hearts, and the rise of Bolshevism gave this threat an ever greater urgency. One of Orthodoxy's goals was to promote Romanian interests in the region, and to do so while embracing ideas taken from their competitors would have seemed somewhat ridiculous. If Orthodoxists were to transform the pan-Slavic vision into a pan-Romanian one, their first order of business clearly had to be the transformation of Slavophilism into an autochthonously Romanian idea.

Notes

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¹ By the “Russian Symbolists” I am primarily referring here to those whom James West labels “second generation” Symbolists: i.e., to those betraying a significant debt to Vladimir Solov'ev. West divides Symbolism “into an earlier, ‘decadent’ group, headed by Briusov and Bal'mont, in which the influence of French and Belgian symbolism is paramount, and a second generation, whose leading representatives were Ivanov, Belyi, and Blok, characterized by a more religious and philosophical bent” (2).

² Trans. by Alyssa DeBlasio

³ The best discussions of Romanian Orthodoxy can be found in Dumitru Micu’s “*Gândirea*” și *Gândirismul* (55-187); Zigu Ornea’s *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească* (71-87; 221-265) and *Traditionalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea* (268-361); Keith Hitchins’ “*Gândirea*: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise”; and Viorel Marineasa’s *Tradiție supralicitată, modernitate diortosită: Publicistica lui Nichifor Crainic și a lui Nae Ionescu*.

⁴ I am grateful to Gregor Thum for bringing this to my attention. For a brief history of Eurasianism, the particular brand of religious philosophy that *Russkaia mysl'* was dedicated to, see Laruelle.

⁵ The other two early *Gândirea* articles on Russian Slavophilism are Lucian Blaga’s “*Siligrismul Slav*” and G. M. Ivanov’s “*Slavofilii Rusi*.”

⁶ See Hitchins, “*Gândirea*: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise.”

⁷ See Chambers, pp. 113, 156-7, 162, 225-7.

⁸ See Read.

⁹ See Crainic's "Prefața" in *Naționalismul*, "Parsifal," "Rabindranath Tagore," and Tagore's *Sădhană*.

¹⁰ Compare Merezhkovskii's *Ewige Gefährten* with Crainic's *Spiritualitatea poeziei românești*.

¹¹ See Crainic's "Parsifal" and "Sensul tradiției," and Bucur.

¹² See Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*.

¹³ See Crainic, *Programul statului etnocratic*.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*

¹⁵ See Crainic, "Creștinismul și fascismul."

¹⁶ Orthodoxists were not renowned for rigorously verifying their information, and it is not impossible that these invasions were completely fictitious.

¹⁷ See Oprea.

¹⁸ See Crainic, "Glasuri din balcani."

¹⁹ See Crainic, "Moartea regelui Boris III al Bulgariei."

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