

Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania

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*Perceptions, Mentalities,
Propaganda*

Edited by

Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt

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INTRODUCTION

SORIN RADU AND OLIVER JENS SCHMITT

Like most countries in East Central and Southeast Europe, until the Communist take-over Romania was a predominantly peasant society. As in most countries of this region, the Romanian elites were almost obsessed with the “peasant question”.¹ Intellectuals and politicians alike saw in the peasant population both the cultural and social backbone of the nation and a source of backwardness preventing modernization and occidentalization, major goals of the nation-building processes in the area. The Romanian debate in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century does not constitute a regional exception. In a society characterized by a deep gap between the rural and the urban sphere, social and national thinkers were convinced that only bridging this divide would make major social change possible. Free trade, the economic pressure to export grain as a cash crop, and the rationalization of the administration of large estates by huge (often foreign) trusts shook traditional ties between landlords and tenants, created a new class of land leasers and managers and put traditional

¹ Stephen Fischer-Galati, “Peasantism in Interwar Eastern Europe,” *Balkan Studies* 1-2 (1967), 103-114; *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert*, edited by Heinz Gollwitzer (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1977); *Agrarismus und Agrarreliten in Ostmitteleuropa*, edited by Eduard Kubú et al. (Berlin-Prague: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013); *Bauerngesellschaften auf dem Weg in die Moderne*, edited by Helga Schultz and Angelika Harre (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2010); *Agrarian Property and Agrarianism in East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Dietmar Müller and Angelika Harre (Innsbruck, Vienna, Bozen: Studienverlag, 2011); Liviu Neagoe, *The “Third Way”. Agrarianism and Intellectual Debates in Interwar Romania* (Budapest: CEU Press 2008); *Property in East Central Europe. Notions, Institutions and Practices of Landownership in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Hannes Siegrist, Dietmar Müller (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2015). For the general perspective on the Romanian economic backwardness and social questions, see: Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)* [Romania and Europe. The Accumulation of Economic Gaps (1500-2010)] (Iași: Polirom, 2010).

society as a whole under enormous stress. The crisis of the pre-modern village society was all too visible and provoked reactions by the political and intellectual elites. This social crisis in the rural area coincided with the creation of strong national identities built upon an idealized rural space and peasants as the incarnation of national virtues. The decline of this social group frightened national activists, such as the historian Nicolae Iorga, who propagated an image of the peasant world which tended to conserve features he considered traditional and typically Romanian. Leading writers and poets fused national and social aspects of the rural crisis and directed their critique against what they called a superposed intermediary class which had allegedly disrupted traditional social networks; since many estate managers were Jews, especially in Eastern Romania (Moldova), anti-Semitism was fuelled in this context by writers such as Mihai Eminescu, Bogdan Petriceicu-Hasdeu or Iorga's party comrade Alexandru Constantin Cuza, professor at the University of Iași.² Under the influence of Russian agrarian socialism, left-wing theoreticians like Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea developed the theory of "neo-serfdom", or, like Constantin Stere, propagated ideas resembling those of

² Lothar Maier, *Rumänien auf dem Weg zur Unabhängigkeitserklärung 1866-1877* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1989); Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: A Biography* (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1996); Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română. Studiu de imagologie în context est-central european* [The Image of the Jew in Romanian Culture. Imagology Study in East-Central Europe] (Humanitas: Bucharest, 2001, 2004; third edition, Polirom, 2012); Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew. Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romanian & Other Central-East European Cultures* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009); Lucian T. Butaru, *Rasism românesc. Componenta rasială a discursului antisemit din România, până la Al Doilea Război Mondial* [Romanian Racism. Racial Component of Anti-Semitic Discourse in Romania, until WWII] (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2010); Marta Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica. Studii de cultură românească* [From Junimea to Noica. Romanian Culture Studies] (Iași: Polirom, 2011); Marius Turda, "The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania," *Slavic Review* 66/3 (2007), 413-441; Marius Turda, "Conservative Palingenesis and Cultural Modernism in Early Twentieth-century Romania," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9/4 (2008), 437-453; Horia Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A.C. Cuza în politica românească* [A.C. Cuza's Anti-semitism in Romanian Politics] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012); Bogdan C. Iacob, "Nicolae Iorga as New Man. Functions of a Teacher Cult," *Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană* 13 (2014), 178-192.

the Russian Narodniki and Social Revolutionaries.³ The peasant uprising of 1907 marked a deep caesura in Romanian political life.⁴ Mass unrest provoked by intensified rural capitalism gained a dimension which threatened the very existence of state and society. The brutality of its suppression shocked important sections of the Romanian establishment, and the reform discourse which had existed since the unification of Moldova and Wallachia intensified. Still, its principal promoters were not peasants, but urban intellectuals and members of the “village intelligentsia”, i.e. teachers and priests. In both cases, peasants remained the objects of a major political debate which idealized them or portrayed their lifeworld with grim images of decline, social disruption, widespread diseases like tuberculosis or pellagra and alcoholism.⁵ In the latter view, peasants constituted the converse of modernity, which was linked to the urban space. Peasants were considered a major obstacle to social change, an analysis shared by Russian Bolsheviks. The idea of such a cleavage was expressed by the theory of “Two Romanias”, which portrayed an occidentalized urban sphere inhabited by a minority of Romanian society – and, especially in Moldova, a majority of minority groups such as Jews – and a backward rural space which was disconnected from the pace of development in the towns.

The First World War proved to be the decisive stress test for such a divided society. Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente with the declared aim of annexing Austro-Hungarian territories with a strong

³ Jochen Schmidt, *Populismus oder Marxismus? Zur Ideengeschichte der radikalen Intelligenz Rumäniens 1875-1915* (Tübingen: Verlag der Tübinger Gesellschaft, 1992); Cristian Preda, *Staulul și sirena. Dilemele unui marxist român* [Fold and Siren. Dilemmas of a Romanian Marxist] (Bucharest: Nemira, 2002); Zigu Ornea, *Viața lui C. Stere* [C. Stere's Life], vol. I-II (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1989, 1990).

⁴ Philipp G. Eidelberg, *The Great Rumanian Peasant Revolt of 1907: Origins of a Modern Jacquerie* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974); Karl Scheerer, *Die rumänischen Bauernaufstände vom Frühjahr 1907* (Berne: Peter Lang 1974); Ion Popescu-Puțuri, *Marea răscoală a țăranilor din 1907* [The Great Rumanian Peasant Revolt of 1907] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1987). For a critical perspective on the way Romanian historiography treated this theme, see: Alin Ciupală, “Cauzele răscoalei din 1907 – între surse și interpretare istoriografică,” in *Schimbare și devenire în istoria României* [Changing and Making in Romanian History], edited by Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2008), 13-23.

⁵ Constantin Bărbulescu, *România medicilor. Medici, țărani și igienă rurală în România de la 1860 la 1910* [Doctors of Romania. Doctors, Peasants and Rural Hygiene in Romania, 1860-1910] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015).

Romanian population (the Banat, Transylvania, Bucovina). Even among the elites, enthusiasm for such a step was far from unanimous.⁶ Peasants had to bear the burden of warfare, which quickly developed into an utter disaster for the Romanian army, which had entered the war badly trained and for the larger part poorly equipped. In December 1916, the capital Bucharest fell, and only important defensive successes in the Southeastern part of the Carpathian Mountains saved Romania from a complete collapse. In 1917, the Russian Revolution also involved the Romanian population in Bessarabia. Since massive contingents of Russian troops supported the Romanian army, there was a clear danger of the Bolshevik revolution spilling over to Romania. Defeat and socio-political stress explain why the Romanian political elite decided to placate peasants by offering them both universal suffrage and a radical land reform. For the first time in Romanian history, the socio-political integration of the peasant population became a political reality.⁷

In late 1918, Romania seemed to be one of the biggest benefactors of the Entente victory. The country almost doubled in size and population and gained not only the aforementioned former Austro-Hungarian territories, but also Bessarabia, whose integration into what was now called the Kingdom of Greater Romania was never acknowledged by the Soviet Union. The Romanian elites had to cope with regional cleavages and a national and confessional heterogeneity that had hitherto been unknown to the leaders of the Regat.⁸

⁶ Lucian Boia, *“Germanofilii”. Elita intelectuală românească în anii Primului Război Mondial* [*Germanofilii. Romanian Intellectuals Elite in Years of the First World War*] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009).

⁷ Sorin Radu, *Electoratul din România în anii democrației parlamentare (1919-1937)* [Romanian Electorate during Parliamentary Democracy (1919-1937)] (Iași: Institutul European, 2004), 52-73.

⁸ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Hans-Christian Maner, *Multikonfessionalität und neue Staatlichkeit. Orthodoxe, griechisch-katholische und römisch-katholische Kirche in Siebenbürgen und Altrumänien zwischen den Weltkriegen (1918-1940)* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007); Andrej Kuško, Viktor Taki, *Bessarabija v sostave Rossiskoj Imperii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2012); Emanuel Turczynski, *Geschichte der Bukowina in der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993); Kurt Scharr, *Die Landschaft Bukowina. Das Werden einer Region an der Peripherie 1774-1918* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010); Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukowina 1918-1944* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2001); Florian Kühner-Wielach, *Siebenbürgen ohne Siebenbürger? Zentralstaatliche Integration und politischer Regionalismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014).

The social and political emancipation of peasants in “Old Romania” (the Regat, i.e. Moldova and Wallachia) coincided with a major national and social revolution in the newly acquired territories in the West (and to a lesser degree in the East), where social, economic, national and confessional cleavages had marked the relations between Romanians and mostly Hungarians since the 18th century. In the Regat, the deep change did not have such a national dimension, its society being ethnically very homogenous – the socio-cultural divide ran along the rural/urban gap.

The implementation of the radical reform agenda took place in a geopolitical constellation marked by enormous upheaval: civil war in Russia, Communist revolution in Hungary, eventually put down by Romanian troops occupying Budapest (August 1919), and a radical Peasantist government in Bulgaria: in the early 1920s, Romania was surrounded by unstable neighbors. But its internal political life too was marked by instability – the enormous difficulties in homogenizing the currency, the administration, the legal system, transport, and education in a post-imperial state like Greater Romania have often been somewhat overlooked by historians focusing on the teleological narrative of the “Great Unification”.⁹ The very fact that the crucial question of the integration of ca. 80% of the population, peasants, into the Romanian political system has never been systematically addressed is telling in this respect.

The reasons for this astonishing lacuna in a country whose elite cultivated sophisticated discourses on peasants are manifold: in the interwar period, a genuine interest and knowledge in peasant society, beyond superficial political rhetoric, was already slowly emerging, eventually crystallizing in the sociological school of peasant studies led by Dimitrie Gusti. This village sociology stood very much in the service of state interests, and Gusti himself cultivated close relations with the royal dynasty and leading political circles.¹⁰ His and his colleagues’ findings

⁹ Constantin Iordachi, “Faschismus, Charisma und Politik. Die Legion «Erzengel Michael» im Zwischenkriegsrumänien 1927-1941,” in *Inszenierte Gegenmacht von rechts. Die “Legion Erzengel Michael” in Rumänien 1918-1938*, edited by Armin Heinen and Oliver Jens Schmitt (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), 20-68 (26-32).

¹⁰ *Școala sociologică de la București*, edited by Sanda Golopenția special issue of *Secolul 21* 1-6 (2012); Zoltan Rostás, *O istorie orală a Școlii Sociologice de la București* [An Oral History of the Bucharest Sociological School] (București: Printech, 2001); Zoltan Rostás, *Atelierul gustian: o abordare organizațională* [Gustian Workshop: an Organisational Approach] (București: Tritonic, 2005); Zoltan Rostás, *Parcurs întrerupt. Discipoli din anii 30 ai Școlii gustiene* [Interrupted Journey. Disciples of the Gustian School in the 30s] (Bucharest:

troubled all those who took acceptance of the new political system for granted. To this day, historians overlook rural mass movements such as the “Stylists” (old calendarists, followers of the “old-style calendar”) in Bessarabia, numbering over one million, mainly ethnic Romanians who distanced themselves from the very idea of the Romanian nation state.¹¹

Village sociology and historical research have seldom been interconnected for the interwar period. This is in striking contrast to the highly sophisticated interdisciplinary studies on forced collectivization of agriculture in the 1950s and early 1960s and the impact of Communist rule in rural areas: social anthropologists and historians have joined forces and produced a series of monographs and collective studies which could serve as theoretical and methodological models for similar incursions into interwar rural society.¹² This approach provides important inferences for interwar studies which so far have not produced a firm foundation for peasant studies focusing on the Communist period. In fact, research on Communist rural society still has to extrapolate its findings for the period 1918–1940.

Studies on Romanian interwar history flourished immediately after 1989, when intellectuals and historians tried to bridge the gap between the post-revolutionary system and the 1920s and 1930s, which were perceived as a golden age of Romanian democracy. However, until 2007, rather restricted access to archives prevented many historians from making full use of the enormous wealth of documentary evidence. When the archives eventually opened fully, the interest of most contemporary historians had shifted to the Communist period. Those working on the period 1918–1940 mostly followed a Bucharest-centered perspective and concentrated on topics like the institutional history of parties or national minorities. Historians interested in social conditions in interwar rural Romania still have to rely mainly on evidence produced by Gusti’s school.

Paideia, 2006]; Zoltan Rostás, *Strada Latină nr. 8. Monografiști și echipieri gustieni la Fundația Regală Principele Carol* [Latin Street Number 8. Gustian Monographists and Team Workers to the Royal Foundation Prince Carol] (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2009). Antonio Momoc, *Capcanele politice ale sociologiei interbelice. Școala gustiană între carlism și legionarism* [The Political Snares of Interwar Sociology: The Gusti School between Carlism and Legionarism] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012).

¹¹ The Stylists are currently the focus of a PhD thesis by Andreea Petruescu, University of Vienna, supported by a Grant of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

¹² Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege. The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture 1949-1962* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011); *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power. The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962*, edited by Constantin Iordachi, Dorin Dobrinu (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2009).

It is against this background that the idea of the present volume was born. It aims to structure this field of research, its main goal being to bring together historians working on the political and social history of the Kingdom of Greater Romania in the period 1918–1940. The contributors and their contributions represent different approaches and strands of the scholarly debate. Contrary to research developments in recent years, this volume does not concentrate on agrarianism as a third-way path to modernity. Agrarianism was interpreted in post-1945 historiography primarily as a source of extreme right-wing radicalism and an obstacle to modernization processes; especially after 1989, it was rehabilitated as ideological and social potential for democratization.¹³ It was of great import to the contemporary Romanian political discourse and thus attracted the interest of scholars.¹⁴

We decided however to focus on the social and political dimension of peasants and their integration into a national and social project of state- and nation-building in a single state, Greater Romania. While many comparable approaches are characterized by their comparative framework, we deliberately limit our endeavor to a single national case. This is explained by the astonishing lack of relevant detailed studies on rural Romania. This volume advocates an approach with a clear focus on social and cultural practices in the process of the national and social integration of peasants in Greater Romania. Moreover, in the context of modern Romanian history, it advocates a clear shift from a multiple top-down perspective (capital–province, urban political elites–rural voters) to an analysis focusing on regionally diverse rural societies with a special focus on the predominantly ethnic Romanian population. The latter element is explained by our interest in mechanisms of the social and national integration of peasants into the Romanian nation- and state-building project. It is evident that peasants belonging to one of the many national minorities were mostly excluded from this endeavor by the Romanian political elites. They are however quite prominent in this volume. This reflects the state of the art in interwar minority studies, and the readiness of colleagues working in this field to react to our call for papers.

Social and ethnic categories of identification prove to be much less clear than one might assume. A police report from the 1930s on the

¹³ Uwe Müller, Eduard Kubù, Jiří Šouša, Torsten Lorenz, “Agrarismus und Agrarreliten im östlichen Mitteleuropa. Forschungsstand, Kontextualisierung, Thesen,” in Kubù et al., *Agrarismus und Agrarreliten in Ostmitteleuropa*, 22-24.

¹⁴ Dietmar Müller, *Agrarpopulismus in Rumänien. Programmatik und Regierungspraxis der Bauernpartei und der Nationalbäuerlichen Partei Rumäniens in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (St. Augustin: Gardez, 2001).

emerging fascist Legionary movement pointed to the fact that its activists adapted their message to urban and rural voters; while the former were receptive to nationalist messages with anti-Semitic undertones, the latter did not show much interest in national slogans, but were very receptive to anti-Semitic ones. The anti-Semitic League of the National Christian Defence (LNCD) led by A.C. Cuza did not hesitate to address voters in Bessarabia with bilingual (Romanian and Russian) election posters. Cuza appealed to the “Christian (Orthodox)” identity of his voters and adapted his anti-Semitic nationalisms to the regional peculiarities of his electoral stronghold. These examples demonstrate that nation and social class had a very different meaning and importance in the “Two Romanias”. While urban elites focused on establishing a homogenous national body, the objects of this strategy often pursued very different goals: redistribution of land resources, local self-administration, and regional and especially confessional identities.¹⁵ Historians therefore have to be careful when adopting a top-down perspective that is dominant in our written sources, newspapers, propaganda pamphlets and police reports, which privilege a national over a social reading of political processes.

This volume has to reckon with a state of the art which does not really favor a bottom-up perspective, ideally operating with local and regional case studies linking institutional party history, the analysis of social and cultural practices in political life, and concrete social environments on a local level, combining reflections on state and elite actors and agencies and on peasants as a new political subject in a changed constitutional and political environment. At the present stage of the research however, the volume rather reflects a mixture of traditional approaches and first attempts to combine the dimensions we have referred to. The integration of peasants into a new constitutional system with universal male suffrage was implemented by state institutions and political parties.

In his chapter, Sorin Radu outlines an image of the impact of the universal suffrage on the countryside after the Great War and analyzes the way democracy was understood and applied by the peasants. In the new political world in which the peasants represented more than two thirds, political elites introduced to their political discourse the concept of “rural democracy”. The author argues that the enactment of the electoral reform had the impact of a true revolution that generated radical changes both in the electors’ behaviour and in the practices and the political discourse of the political parties. As sociologist Mattei Dogan argues, universal

¹⁵ *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România, 1927-1931* [Ideology and Right Wing Political Parties in Romania, 1927-1931], edited by Ioan Scurtu (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000), 209.

suffrage transformed the peasants from subjects into citizens.¹⁶ Largely illiterate and uninterested in public business, the peasant suddenly found himself armed with political power. The peasants, at least in the first elections, were enthusiastic and quite often happy to participate in electoral campaigns, but they perceived the political actors, the political parties, with reservations and mistrust and thus hesitated to become members of the party organizations. The information concerning the party political organizations in villages is extremely poor and does not provide a coherent image of political activity on this level. At the end of campaign seasons, peasants returned to a kind of political lethargy until the next elections. The few local party organizations that existed in the countryside lacked vitality. Unlike the urban working classes, which were predisposed to socio-political change and at least partially followed social-democratic political organisations, the rural world was withdrawn, appeared not to see the point of political parties and was uninterested in administration and politics on the local and central levels. Sorin Radu concludes that the land reform seems to have demobilized the peasants, persuading them to mostly concentrate on the soil and social problems generated by reform, and that the peasants did not successfully learn to play the role offered to them by universal suffrage.

Party politicians and state representatives aimed to integrate the peasants into the political life of Greater Romania. They viewed them as voters, taxpayers and recruits. In this perspective, peasants remain objects, and studies on rural society should avoid reproducing this approach. They should rather ask how peasants can be analyzed as political subjects. How did the (Romanian) peasants react to the great reforms, how did they respond to the messages and promises of political parties? To what degree were they integrated into party structures? Which factors influenced political life on the village level?¹⁷ Despite its declared intention to change perspectives on peasants in Romanian interwar politics, at the present

¹⁶ Mattei Dogan, *Comparații și explicații în știința politică și în sociologie* [Comparison and Explanations in Political Science and Sociology] (Iași: Institutul European, 2010), 281.

¹⁷ Cornel Micu, *From Peasants to Farmers? Agrarian Reforms and Modernisation in Twentieth Century Romania* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012); Müller, *Agrarpopulismus in Rumänien ...*; Dietmar Müller, "Landreformen, Property rights und ethnische Minderheiten. Ideen- und Institutionen-geschichte nachholender Modernisierung und Staatsbildung in Rumänien und Jugoslawien 1918-1948," in *Agrarreformen und ethnodemographische Veränderungen. Südosteuropa vom ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*, edited by Karl-Peter Krauss (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009), 207-234.

stage of research this volume can offer only some clues which will hopefully serve as a point of departure for more detailed studies. Stelu Șerban's chapter on two villages in the Northern region of Maramureș comes closest to what a bottom-up perspective might achieve in terms of new insights: there was no compact rural block in Romania, but even in micro-regions the socio-economic and political situation could vary from village to village. There was, as he demonstrates, resistance to state-induced change, but it cannot be associated exclusively with extreme right-wing movements such as the Legionaries or with anti-modernist utopian ideas. He is equally reluctant to adopt mechanically powerful concepts such as "civil society and "parochial society" for studying social and political mechanisms on the level of villages. He is interested in "communal villages" characterized by kinship ties, a set of shared values, and local patterns of political life which are however not isolated from external developments, but closely linked to the failed modernization which the state tried to enforce. His two case studies illustrate the importance of local patterns of dependence, both economic (credit, debts) and socio-cultural (ritual kinship). But there were perceptible differences between the neighboring villages of Dănești, where moderate parties prevailed, and Cetățele, which tended to the extreme right. While in the latter parochial and political society overlapped, both spheres were far less interlinked and competition for local power was less fierce. The dominance of the anti-Semitic National Christian Party in Cetățele is interpreted, due to the lack of documented conflicts between ethnic Romanians and Jews, rather as opposition to the central state authorities. Legionaries were compared to Communists because of their propaganda aiming at improving rural living standards. The high degree of politicization in Cetățele is explained by the fact that local politicians made full use of local fiscal autonomy granted by the state. In Dănești, on the contrary, less developed institutions, stronger traditional kinship ties, traditional forms of sociability, and a much higher rate of alphabetization (74.4% compared to only 41.8% in Cetățele) are responsible for a minor degree of modern political activism and polarization. The Church remained important, and established peasants voted for the National Peasant Party. Only youngsters were attracted by the violent party life of the National Christian Party of A.C. Cuza and Octavian Goga. While there is ample evidence of political radicalization in rural Romania¹⁸, Șerban

¹⁸ Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Approaching the Social History of Romanian Fascism. The Legionaries of Vâlcea County in the Interwar Period," *Fascism* 3 (2014), 117-151; Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Wer waren die rumänischen Legionäre? Eine Fallstudie

convincingly shows that sweeping generalizations are not only impossible, but even theoretically dangerous: they might cement the idea of a backward society open to extremisms from the right and later from the left. We still need many more studies like Șerban's before we can really consider the weight of Legionary and Cuzist extremism in rural Romania. Dănești is not the only example of a village with high potential for developing a democratic political life.

Party history plays an important role in Romanian historiography. But often monographs remain rather descriptive, and most of them focus on party leaders and party politics in the Bucharest parliament. Very few party histories, such as Ovidiu Buruiană's thorough two-volume monograph on the National Liberal Party in the years 1927–1933 take up major currents in international research.¹⁹ Even scarcer are studies on the regional or even local level of party life. We still do not possess monographs on all the important political parties in interwar Romania, not to mention more recent foci such as social and cultural practices. Against this background, chapters in this volume address the integration of peasants into the parliamentary system, and this means essentially party life, from different angles: party history as institutional history in a perspective from above, party history as part of the political self-organization of ethnic minorities, and first attempts to link party institutions, party activists and local contexts (see the chapter by Stelu Șerban).

An institutional approach can thus be found in several contributions. They make clear how little we know about party structures and activists on a local level. We have only vague ideas about the number of party members, the social structure of candidates in regional and national elections, or the socio-professional profile of regional and local party leaders.

The collective biography of leading party politicians is a helpful approach in these circumstances. It fits well into an important bibliography

zu faschistischen Kadern im ruralen Umland von Bukarest (1927-1941)," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 64/3 (2016), 419-448.

¹⁹ Ovidiu Buruiană, *Liberalii. Structuri și sociabilități politice liberale în România interbelică* [The Liberals. Political Structures and Liberal Socialibilities in Interwar Romania] (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2013); Ovidiu Buruiană, *Construind opoziția. Istoria politică a Partidului Național Liberal între anii 1927 și 1933* [Building the Opposition. The Political History of the National Liberal Party between 1927 and 1933] (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2013).

on parliamentary life in interwar Romania.²⁰ The case of ethnic Romanian Transylvanian leaders reveals the importance of a small group of large estate holders who combined ownership of real estate with key positions in banking and cultural sociability.²¹ The Transylvanian case also makes it quite clear that regional case studies cannot be extrapolated to a national level; the cleavage between the historical regions was simply too deep. The National Liberal Party with its stronghold in the Regat had difficulties in really penetrating power structures in the former Hungarian regions, where prior to 1918 the Romanian National Party had built up a tight system of political, economic and cultural control and where Romanian politicians had been trained in the stiff wind of the Budapest parliament. Whereas in the pre-1918 Regat parliamentary and generally political opposition had been the privilege of a small social, mostly urban elite, national mass mobilization against Hungarian dominance had reached a high level of organization in Transylvania. However, despite the lack of aristocratic Romanian elites in Transylvania and the Banat, the Romanian MPs in the Budapest parliament clearly came from elite families and did not represent the predominantly rural society. This did not change in the interwar period, as Florin-Răzvan Mihai's chapter demonstrates. Lawyers clearly dominated parliamentary life (constituting 35-46% of MPs in the various parliaments elected between 1919 and 1937), followed by university professors (ca. 6.5%), high school teachers (6.2%), primary school teachers

²⁰ Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismus in Rumänien (1930-1940). Demokratie im autoritären Umfeld* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag) 1997; Radu, *Electoratul din România în anii democrației parlamentare (1919-1937)*; Sorin Radu, *Modernizarea sistemului electoral din România (1866-1937)* [Modernization of the Electoral System in Romania (1866-1937)] (Iași: Institutul European, 2005); *Cultură politică și comportament electoral în România în perioada democrației parlamentare (1866-1937) – între modelele europene și specificul național* [Political Culture and Electoral Behavior in Romania in the Years of Parliamentary Democracy 1866-1937 – between the National Specific and European Models], edited by Sorin Radu (Sibiu: Editura Universității “Lucian Blaga”, 2006); *Parliamentarism and political structures in Eastcentral and Southeastern Europe in the Interwar Period*, edited by Sorin Radu, Hans-Christian Maner, special issue of “Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica” 9 (2012); *Elite parlamentare și dinamică electorală (1919-1937)* [Parliament Elites and Electoral Dynamics (1919-1937)], edited by Florin Müller (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2009).

²¹ *Elites and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe (1848-1918)*, edited by Judit Pál, Vlad Popovici (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2014); Vlad Popovici, *Studies on the Romanian Political Elite in Transylvania and Hungary (1861-1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2012).

(5%), priests (4.5%) and members of the higher clergy (4.2%). The “village intellectuals”, teachers and priests, were thus certainly a strong group, but numerically much smaller than lawyers. Peasants and estate holders represented between 8% and 16% of MPs, but among them small landowners constituted only a modest group. An analysis of peasants among candidates in national elections reveals that even those parties which advocated a peasantist discourse were over-whelmingly dominated by elite professions. Even in the case of the National Peasant Party, no more than 2.79% of its candidates were peasants when it achieved a landslide victory in the 1928 national election. Among the candidates of the National Liberal Party, traditionally considered as the party of urban elites in the Regat, only 0.58% and 3% of its candidates in the elections of 1926 and 1928 were actually peasants. The People’s Party, a mass movement rallying around General Alexandru Averescu, a war hero venerated by mainly peasant voters, was far removed from its rural voters, despite its political rhetoric.²² In 1924, at a party meeting, only 63 out of 1,050 participants were registered as peasants. The highest percentage of candidates with an agricultural profession can be found in the radical anti-Semitic League of the National Christian Defense (LNCD) (6.87% of candidates running in the 1928 election). LNCD had its stronghold in Bessarabia, the most backward region of rural Romania. In 1928, it did not benefit from the slightly higher number of peasant candidates, but was literally crushed by the National Peasant Party. In conclusion, in interwar Romania peasants constituted no more than 10% of the candidates nominated by any of the political parties. Although peasants dominated much of the political discourse, they did so merely as objects, not as subjects of parliamentary political life.

These findings have to be nuanced by studies of the kind Ovidiu Buruiană provides for the National Liberal Party. He makes it clear that Liberals had a differentiated perspective on rural communities and deliberately chose their cadres among village elites and opinion-makers as mayors, notaries, teachers, priests, large and medium estate holders, innkeepers and civil servants. Since Romanian party politics were mainly centered on leading figures, personal ties played an increasingly important role within Liberal power structures, allowing significant space for village elites in an enlarged party organization. These elites served as a transmission belt between the central party institutions in Bucharest and the village level of power. However, as in the case of state institutions (see

²² See the rather uncritical biography by Petre Otu, *Mareşalul Alexandru Averescu: militarul, omul politic, legenda* [Marshal Alexandru Averescu: the Soldier, the Politician, the Legend] (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2009).

below), the extreme centralization of Romanian politics and of the constitutional system gradually transformed local power brokers into mere proxies of the national party leadership. Daniel Brett's study also takes political science as its point of departure; using theoretical frameworks developed by Maurice Duverger and Angelo Panebianco it attempts to deconstruct the National Peasant Party as a political organization. It argues that internal division which had its roots in ideological conflict concerning the status of the peasantry prevented organizational reform of the party. The failure to reform in turn denied the peasantry active agency within the party and hence hampered the effectiveness of the latter in representing peasant interests. Brett argues that the National Peasant Party was not exceptional in suffering from these problems, comparing and contrasting it with examples from Ireland and Scandinavia. He argues that the post-1918 period needs to be contextualised by a deeper analysis of founding moments and decisions made during the early developmental stages of the parties. Doing so will deepen our understanding of peasant politics in Romania but also situate the Romanian case within the wider family of rural/agrarian parties that were emerging across Europe during this period.

The same theme of agrarianism is present in Svetlana Suveica's study, which reconstructs the beginnings of the Peasant Party in the political scene in Bessarabia during the transitional period when the territory passed from the Russian to the Romanian regime, marked by the activity of Vladimir Țîganco, the president of the Peasantry Faction of the Country Council (Sfatul Țării). His activities have long gone ignored, due to the fact that they were not intended to support the perspective Bessarabia developed when it belonged to Romania after the Great War. Suveica argues that not only public opinion supported Țîganco, but his thoughts on the destiny of Bessarabia also reflect the hesitation of the representatives of the local elite during the transition from the Russian imperial to the Romanian national regime, a period of brief regional autonomy in the Federative Russia before an era of illusory, merely ostensible independence. The latter ended with the vote of the Country' Council (Sfatul Țării) for the status of a Romanian province, intensifying the oscillations of the Bessarabians "between Russians and Romanians", characterized not only by expectations and failures, but also by the construction of an alternative perspective on the status of the region, the active involvement in negotiations, and in controversies in the international media, which became propaganda instruments.

If we turn to state institutions such as prefects, the security forces (in the rural areas the gendarmerie), representatives of the justice system, local stakeholders such as mayors, and the local "intelligentsia" (teachers

and priests), the evidence derived from newspapers mainly concerns discourse and offers much less hard data on their social profile. There is an ongoing debate as to whether the Romanian state was a strong or a weak institution in the rural areas. Cornel Micu argues in his contribution that the state authorities failed in collecting basic data on the village population. Since there are hardly any studies on major state institutions, we can hardly answer questions concerning professional training, payment, public morale and the efficiency of civil servants.²³ Questions about the methods used for collecting taxes or enforcing public security in rural Romania have only rarely been asked, and evidence available on individual local cases should not be generalized in such a regionally heterogeneous country as interwar Romania.²⁴ In his chapter on the village of Bordei Verde in Brăila County (Regat), Cornel Micu observes that due to the subordination of village mayors to county prefects appointed by the governments and the transformation of the heads of local communities into pure representatives of the central state, peasants were simply excluded from direct relations with the state.

The study by Valer Moga shows the way in which the Transylvanian farmers integrated into the political life of Greater Romania. In this context, the term 'farmer', as defined by the documents of the time, meant landowners who belonged to the rural middle class and had some income with which to sustain themselves and their access to education and cultural goods. The author begins with the hypothesis that the farmers did not have a conservative attitude towards joining a political party. Indeed, it appears that they were eager to sign up. Moga's research undertakes quantitative analysis of a sample of delegates who took part in the Great Assembly of 1 December 1918. Out of 1,633 participants, the farmers numbered 372 and were the best-represented category, with 22.78%. Most of them were members of the Romanian National Party. After the unification of

²³ Andrei-Florin Sora, *Servir l'État roumain. Le corps préfectoral 1866-1940* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2011) is to date one of the few attempts to study provincial administrative elites; Alin Spănu, *Istoria serviciilor de informații/contrainformații românești în perioada 1919-1945* [History of Romanian Intelligence / Counterintelligence Services during 1919-1945] (Iași: Demiurg 2010) contains a lot of poorly arranged evidence; for the Communist period, see Dietmar Müller and Andrei-Florin Sora, "Notarul comunal în România: Cadrul normativ al unei instituții moderne (1864-1940)," [The Communal Notary (Communal Secretary): Normative Framework of a Modern Institution (1864-1940)] *Arhivele Olteniei* 25 (2011), 369-385.

²⁴ In the Romanian Central State Archive in Bucharest, the archival fond Inspectoratul general al Jandarmeriei provides ample evidence.

Transylvania and Romania, monolithic membership disintegrated and the farmers, like the other social categories, split into the most important political parties.

The main goal of Vlad Popovici's study is to offer a complete set of prosopographic analyses of party membership, accompanied by an image of the Romanian National Party in the reorganization process that took place in Alba County in August 1919. Such analyses seek to reveal through sampling the socio-professional composition, educational background and denominational distribution of the local party leadership and identify the main characteristics of the body of peasant members (level of literacy, denominational distribution and relation to the demographic structure of the area, ratio of the local electorate, blood- and kinship-related patterns of political behaviour). Popovici concludes that the backbone of the local organization was constituted by priests, regardless of denomination, supported by the rural intellectual elite (primary school teachers, notaries) and members of the liberal or technical professions. Peasants were represented in leading local committees as secretaries and (more infrequently) as cashiers or (commonly) as committee members. They formed the great mass of members, over 90%, of which approximately 50% were illiterate.

Gábor Egry's chapter points to the cultural gap between Romanian gendarmes and the Hungarian population in Transylvania, but it also shows how ethnicity was mobilized as a political resource in petty everyday conflicts. Archival evidence from different regions illustrates how gendarmes interfered in election campaigns by favoring government candidates and impeding the political activities of their opponents. Existing research equally shows that governments tended to manipulate elections in rural areas e.g. by imposing quarantine law during election periods. In the years of the Great Depression, which severely hit rural Romania, the fiscal system collected taxes ruthlessly and provoked small-scale local uprisings which have yet to be the focus of historical research. State repression similarly contributed to the emergence of the Stylists (supporters of the Julian calendar, which was replaced by the Gregorian calendar in 1924) in Eastern Romania, mainly in Bessarabia. In the mid-1930s, the rural mass movement numbered over one million and according to recent research by Andreea Petruescu even organized a territorialized parallel administration on a local level in Northern Bessarabia. State and Church institutions failed to explain the calendar reform to peasants, who followed a traditional religious time system. What was considered by elites to be a symbolical shift towards the West was seen by peasants as a Western, "popish" conspiracy against their most sacred religious traditions. Since state and Church institutions reacted with a mixture of repression

and provisory compromise, ethnic Romanian peasants were virtually driven into a parallel society which severely challenged the project of national integration and homogenization. It was not until 1936 that the state forcefully dissolved the Stylist parallel state.²⁵

Political parties had to address and attract millions of men who before 1918 had never participated in parliamentary elections and, especially in Southern and Eastern Romania (Wallachia, Moldova, Bessarabia), had never actively taken part in political life. In Bucovina, which had the Austrian system of general male suffrage (since 1907), and in a much more limited way in Hungary with its census system, ethnic Romanian peasants had either been voters or at least could consider themselves part of a well-organized national entity. Especially in the Banat, cultural associations such as choirs essentially contributed to a politicized Romanian sociability in a multiethnic environment characterized by a high degree of institutionalized self-organization. Once again, observations on peasants and rural society in Greater Romania must not be generalized, but should be adapted to regional specificities.

Political sociability and cultural practices in political life were far from homogenous. This aspect constituted a considerable obstacle for political parties which claimed a nation-wide political mission. Political expectations, but also capacities for receiving and understanding political messages differed widely from the Banat to Bessarabia. Most parties and party activists applied traditional methods of political mobilization such as speeches, printed brochures and election posters. Written propaganda material was distributed among peasant voters, but it is not known how these messages were actually received on the ground; most probably, bearing in mind the high degree of illiteracy in Southern and Eastern Romania in particular, these propaganda texts were read out. Most parties tried to adapt to rural lifeworlds by using not only prose, but also verses which took up elements of popular culture, especially folk songs.²⁶ Images, photos of

²⁵ This paragraph is based on research by Andreea Petruescu, University of Vienna, especially a paper presented in November 2016, and her forthcoming article in *Revista istorică*.

²⁶ The Legionary movement was by far the most successful political force to use songs for rural mass mobilisation; Oliver Jens Schmitt, “‘Heilige Jugend der Nation’. Das Lied als Mittel und Essenz rechtsextremer politischer Mobilisierung im Rumänien der Zwischenkriegszeit,” in *Das politische Lied in Ost- und Südosteuropa*, edited by Stefan Michael Newerkla, Fedor B. Poljakov and Oliver Jens Schmitt (Vienna: LIT, 2011), 87-112; Roland Clark, “Collective Singing in Romanian Fascism,” *Cultural and Social History* 10/2 (2013), 251-271.

party leaders, caricatures denigrating political opponents²⁷ or, mostly in the case of anti-Semitic parties, minority groups such as Jews, slowly emerged. But until the early 1930s, when parties such as the fascist Legionary movement developed an expressive and deliberately modernist and almost futurist visual language, parties rather underestimated the impact of visual propaganda.

Although national homogenization was one of the main goals of interwar Romania, one has to ask to what degree political parties really converted this intention into practical politics. In this respect, a case study by Wolfram Nieß on the Legionary movement in Bessarabia in 1930 offers important insights: while traditional anti-Semites targeted their voters using bilingual propaganda material, the Legionaries aimed to construct a homogenous ethnic body in an endangered frontier area.²⁸

Party rallies played an essential role in rural political life. Again, government parties were favored and supported by state institutions, while opposition groups often encountered serious obstacles. In the 1930s, the radical Legionary opposition waged a small-scale war on the gendarmerie forces, which traditionally enforced government policies in rural Romania. Especially establishment parties such as the National Liberal Party or the People's Party recruited election agents who distributed alcohol and small gifts among rural voters, but very often they also intimidated voters and contributed to a high degree of violence in election periods. The 1926 election was one of the most violent events in Romanian interwar political life. As in other countries, paramilitary groups connected to political parties emerged; the Iron Guard, founded in 1930 as the armed branch of the Legionary movement, is by far the best known; but other paramilitary formations such as the Peasant Guards of the National Peasant Party, the Blueshirts (a kind of Romanian SA, part of the anti-Semitic National Christian Party) or the Stylist guards in Bessarabia have barely attracted the interest of scholars. However, research on interwar elections provides us with an initial idea of political violence in rural Romania. Election days were characterized by clashes between the gendarmerie, party activists and

²⁷ Alexandru Nicolaescu, Sorin Radu, "Caricatura electorală – formă a discursului electoral al Partidului Țărănesc în alegerile parlamentare din mai 1926. Studiu de caz," [Electoral Caricature – the Form of Electoral Discourse of the Peasant Party in the Parliamentary Elections of 1926. A Case Study] *Transilvania 2* (2011), 1-10

²⁸ Wolfram Nieß, "Hai să dăm mână cu mână cei cu inima română – Der geplante Propagandazug der Legion durch Bessarabien vom Sommer 1930", in *Insenierte Gegenmacht von rechts. Die Legion Erzengel Michael in Rumänien 1918-1938*, edited by Armin Heinen and Oliver Jens Schmitt (Munich: Oldenbourg 2013), 217-276.

dissatisfied voters (e.g. when they were illegally excluded from elections) and conflicts between party activists, often with firearms. They still call for detailed study.²⁹

Party propaganda was very much a phenomenon of election campaigns. There are many sources pointing to peasant voters' rapid disillusionment with political life in interwar Romania. They soon felt manipulated by party activists during election campaigns and immediately forgotten afterwards. Frustration grew, and it was alimented even further by the poor performance of state institutions in the rural area. "Politicianismul", a term describing corrupt practices of the political elites, became a key slogan not only of radical opposition forces, but also of more moderate political parties. While it is evident that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the political system of parliamentary democracy, we still do not know much about the realities of "politicianism" in rural Romania. The violent discourse about the shortcomings of the system is sometimes repeated in modern scholarship, which rarely goes beyond the discourse level. This level however has to be linked with a more down-to-earth approach of social history.

Political practices on a local level still need to be studied in more detail: they have hitherto been examined primarily on the discourse level of newspapers and party propaganda. We know the tools party activists used in order to convince rural voters. There is however little data concerning which political messages really reached their addressees and how the latter understood them. Studies on the concrete interaction between party activists and rural voters are scarce. The same holds true for mechanisms of opinion-building in villages, the role of opinion leaders such as teachers, priests, notaries and doctors. Gabriel Moisa's chapter offers first glimpses of an answer. What can be deduced from an analysis of the existing source evidence is deep disenchantment on the part of rural voters, mainly after the failure of the National Peasant Government. In fact, founded in 1926, this Party had embodied the alternative to the authoritarian political model of the National Liberal Party: a decentralized, democratized society. Newspapers in Bihor County, studied by Moisa, reveal that peasant voters were disgusted by the aggressive language during election campaigns and repulsed by the general lack of interest in rural areas once the elections were over. They felt that party competition divided village communities, and sometimes even attacked unwelcome political activists from outside. The failure of political parties to win the confidence of their rural voters led to a political apathy and general

²⁹ Cf. the studies by Radu, Maner, and Florin Müller cited above.

disinterest in parliamentary democracy which considerably facilitated the instauration of an authoritarian royal dictatorship in March 1938.

The role of the local elite, priests, on the political education of the peasants in rural Transylvania is examined by Valeria Soroștineanu, who argues that the Orthodox Church in Transylvania had to continue the religious and cultural effort of educating the Romanian village. It was indeed a continuation of an older practice, after which the priest continued to be an advisor in the political sphere. The peculiar Transylvanian political culture was focused on supporting a type of party with an ethnic component, which saw many transformations and confrontation with other possible political models. The Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan established the idea that a party with a clerical basis could not find its place in the Romanian space, but he was reticent to grant priests permission to enter politics. Bălan later developed a short political handbook for priests so that they could serve as advisors to their communities. Institutionally speaking, the Orthodox Church and the Romanian state shared common causes, the most significant being the lessons of religion as a means of promoting sincere patriotism, promoting a cult of royalty in Romania and opposing Bolshevik propaganda. Another interesting aspect concerning the relationship between priests and political culture is the intervention of intellectuals in the dialogue between the Church and the state during the interwar period. As the prominent intellectuals were genuinely interested in Romanian society's evolution towards modernity, predominantly in rural areas, they had to choose between the model of exaggerated modernity and the maintenance of traditional structures, closer to the concept both Nichifor Crainic and Dumitru Stăniloae called a "Romanian Christian state".

When the reform promise of the National Peasant Party broke down under the weight of the Great Depression, internal strife and corruption, many peasants severely hit by widespread poverty, in extreme cases even famine, considered the revolutionary fascist Legionary movement as a political way out. The Legionary working camps tried to fuse rural populations and party activists into a single national and political community; they also demonstrated the inability of state institutions to guarantee adequate infrastructure in rural areas.³⁰ As in the case of the

³⁰ Rebecca Haynes, "Work Camps, Commerce, and the Education of the «New Man» in the Romanian Legionary Movement," *Historical Journal* 54 (2008), 943-967; Valentin Săndulescu, "«Taming the spirit». Notes on the shaping of the Legionary 'New Man'," in *Vers un profil convergent des fascismes?* edited by Traian Sandu (Paris: Harmattan, 2010), 207-216; Oliver Jens Schmitt, "«Eine mächtige Bewegung auf den Dörfern.» Mechanismen der politischen Mobilisi-

Stylists, an often overlooked parallel society emerged in the rural area, under the guidance of social and ideological forces which openly rejected the existing political order. When discussing capacities to receive political messages, one also has to reckon with the cultural and mental consequences of the economic crises in rural Romania. The Stylists were not the only spiritual mass movement in interwar peasant Romania. In 1935, the so-called miracle of Maglavit (a shepherd who pretended to have received messages directly from the Lord) shook all of Romanian society and mobilized hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who flocked to the new shrine on the shore of the Danube.³¹ This mass hysteria was interpreted by contemporaries as a direct reaction to a general socio-economic and cultural depression and the need and hope for immediate miraculous salvation and collective resurrection. While the state authorities succeeded in channeling this movement, they failed to contain the Legionary movement, which obtained ca. 25% (officially 15.5%) of the vote in the election of December 1937. The success of an openly anti-system party which unlike the established party did not offer resources and jobs was a clear indicator of the failure of the traditional party system controlled by Liberals and National Peasantists.

An important part of the volume is dedicated to the peasants belonging to the national minorities in Romania. The way in which the Hungarian minority from the countryside was mobilized politically by the Hungarian Party is shown – besides the study by Gábor Egry – by Tóth Szilard. The author analyzes the electoral campaigns organized by the Hungarian Party, the methods of electoral propaganda used by its candidates and the efficiency of these efforts, and he observes the national solidarity of the Hungarian peasants and their political discipline. Vasile Ciobanu investigates the degree to which the German peasants in interwar Romania took part in political life, examining their active presence in political parties and national organisations, but also their participation in local and

erung der rumänischen Legionärsbewegung im ländlichen Raum (1933-1937) – Vorskizze zu einer Sozialgeschichte der «Eisernen Garde», in *Nation, Nationalitäten und Nationalismus im östlichen Europa. Festschrift für Arnold Suppan zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Marija Wakounig, Wolfgang Mueller, Michael Portmann (Münster, Vienna, Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 389-418.

³¹ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Căpitan Codreanu. Aufstieg und Fall des rumänischen Faschistenführers* (Vienna: Paul Zsolny, 2016), 163-168; Oliver Jens Schmitt, “Das «rumänische Lourdes»,” in *Festschrift für Ludwig Steindorff* (in print), edited by Martina Thomsen; Florin Müller, “Das Wunder von Maglavit,” in *Wessel Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen*, Hans-Christian Maner, Martin Schulze (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002), 189-198.

parliamentary elections. Ciobanu observes that the introduction of universal suffrage was not a subject of great importance for the German peasants. The rural elite was more interested in participation in the local leadership than in parliamentary elections. The peasants made up the majority of the national-political organizations: the national communities (*Volksgemeinschaften*) organized in provinces and led by a National Council. These were the major decision-making bodies and were autonomous from the leadership of the Union of Germans in Romania. The national structure also had local organizations. These helped the peasants to participate in the national-political life of the German minority in Romania. The nationally renowned solidarity was destroyed in the interwar period due to some dissatisfaction, which led to the formation of some groups taking the shape of political parties. The peasants were also involved in these parties. The German parties formed a distinct social group within the German minority itself. After the Great War and the creation of a new state, following the Electoral and Agrarian Reforms, these peasants behaved the same as other peasants, retaining some specific elements of participation in national-political life and in elections. This peasantry had practised selection for centuries due to the fact that the priests, the chiefs of the neighbourhoods (*Nachbarschaften*) and the teachers were all elected. Another difference was the fact that the Germans attended primary school more than other people. They were members of some professional associations, particularly relating to agriculture, and also had access to the newspapers of these associations. The emergence of Nazism in the rural world is analyzed by Corneliu Pintilescu, who researches its rise in the press. The Transylvanian Saxons were a main target of Nazi-inspired or controlled political organizations such as the *Nationale Arbeitsfront* and the *Deutsche Volkspartei Rumäniens* during the 1930s or the *Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien* after 1940. Due to the fact that the majority of the Saxon population lived in rural areas, the propaganda of these organizations adjusted its message in order to gain support among the Transylvanian Saxon peasants. Also, these organizations, being inspired by the Nazi mass propaganda from Germany, radically modernized the methods and the instruments of political propaganda within the rural areas. This radical change attracted especially, but not only, the young population. Pintilescu argues that the success of the Nazi propaganda within the Transylvanian Saxon rural area could be explained partially by this revolution of propaganda methods, but also by ingrained prejudices among the local Saxon population concerning the other people living in Transylvania. These prejudices had been partially caused by the privileged status granted to the Transylvanian Saxons by the