

Romanian Physicians and the Issues of Cremation: the Case of Minovici Brothers¹

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Abstract: This article attempts to shed light on the complex relation between cremation and Romanian forensic medicine, from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of World War Two. In order to achieve this goal I analyze the case of Nicolae and Mina Minovici and their connection with the issues of cremation, revealing, in the end, the perception of this case in the eyes of the public opinion of those times. The analysis reveals the fact that even if Nicolae and Mina Minovici sustained the ideas of cremation in Romania due to its utilitarian purposes, they were not actual cremationists. Despite this, they were accused and stigmatized by voices around the Romanian Orthodox Church, being regarded as among the main promoters of cremation in Romania.

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Introduction

The relationship between cremation and forensic medicine are not solely based on their object of study, namely the body: from the point of view of cremation the body is seen in terms of its disposal while for forensic medicine it is seen as an object of study and a source that allows the identification of the cause of death.² A close connection between these two may be documented back in time as early as the second half of the 19th century, in the dispute on the subject of cremation, when those against it claimed the legal argument that cremation, if introduced on a broad scale, would provide a good opportunity to conceal crimes by burning the body. This idea was active throughout Europe³ and in Romania⁴ and was consequently adopted at one point even by the

¹ This work was supported by the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research CNCS-UEFISCDI, grant number 54/04.11. 2011 – PNII TE.

² For a more recent discussion on this topic see S.T. Fairgrieve, *Forensic Cremation: Recovery and Analysis*, (CRC Press, 2008); *The Analysis of Burned Human Remains*, ed. Christopher W. Schimdt and Stevan A Symes (London: Elsevier, 2008).

³ Stephan White, “Crime”, in *Encyclopaedia of Cremation*, eds. Davies D, Mates L. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 153-156; Simone Ameskamp, *On Fire – Cremation in Germany 1870s-1934*, (Georgetown University, 2006); Douglas J. Davies, “Cremation”, in *Encyclopedia of Death and Human Experience*, eds. Clifton L. Bryant CL and D.L. Peck DL (London: Sage Publishing, 2006): 235-240.

⁴ “Arderea și înmormântarea morților” (Incineration and burial of the dead), *Foaie Bisericească* 2 (1884): 28-29; Badea Mangăru, “Cremațiunea” (The Cremation), *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 4 (1913): 354-361.

Christian churches that were consistently rejecting the incineration practice in those days. The contribution brought forward by Nicolae and Mina Minovici on the development of forensic medicine in Romania was often mentioned in the scientific literature. It was underlined, with good cause, that their works were ones of pioneers and had many echoes in the broad context of this scientific discipline, throughout the entire world¹. Mina Minovici, for example, is the founder of the Romanian school of forensic medicine, since, in 1892, he set up one of the world's first forensic institutes in Bucharest (Mina Minovici's inaugural speech at the Bucharest Morgue in 1892 remarkably lacked any reference to cremation². Minovici, 1893). He was elected dean of the Bucharest Medical School four times between 1919 and 1930. His brother, Nicolae Minovici, was professor at Cluj Napoca and Bucharest University, noted for his system of post-mortem photography which received of a gold medal at the 1912 International Social Hygiene Exhibition in Rome. Nicolae Minovici was also the founder of the “Salvarea” (Romanian for “rescue” or “redemption”, as the word for the ambulance service) Society (1906) and the Emergency Hospital (1934) in Bucharest³.

Despite this, there was no information of their actual connection with cremation as a theme or the Romanian cremationist movement. As a result, this article aims to shed light on the relation between cremation as an option of disposing the body and the practice of forensic medicine in Romania, between the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the Second World War, exemplifying through the Minovici brothers' case.

The early age of modern cremation

The cremationist ideas were brought to Romania around the second half of the 19th Century, with the efforts of an elite that included, in its majority, important names from the field of medicine. Influenced by the transposition in reality of the modern concept of cremation and by the appearance and development of a movement that sustains this practice, both in Europe and North America, some members of this Romanian medical elite sustained the introduction of body cremation, mostly on grounds of public necessity. They had in mind considerations related to hygiene and the dangers of body decomposition for the public health and, as a result, the miasmatic theories could be found within various medical writings of those times. The medical degree thesis of Dr. Constantin I. Istrati, published in 1877,⁴ the public conferences held by Athanasie Economu in 1876 (at that time a PhD student in medicine),⁵ the contributions of the

¹ Gheorghe Brătescu, “Afirmarea științei medicale românești” (The strengthening of Romanian medical science), V.L. Bologa VL, G. Brătescu, B. Duțescu B, Șt Milcu, *Istoria medicinei românești* (History of Romanian medicine) (Bucharest: Ed. Medicală, 1972): 242-263.

² Mina Minovici, *Discurs ținut cu ocaziunea deschiderii morgei la ziua de 20 Decembrie 1892* (A discourse held on the opening of the morgue on 20 December 1892) (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1893).

³ Bogdan Duțescu, Nicolae Marcu, “Medicina în perioada dintre cele două războaie” (Medicine between the two World Wars), V.L. Bologa VL, G. Brătescu, B. Duțescu B, Șt Milcu, *Istoria medicinei românești*, 405-407.

⁴ Constatin I. Istrati, *Despre Depărtarea Cadavrelor. Studiu de Hygienă Publică* (On the removal of corpses. A study in public hygiene) (Bucharest: tip. Al. A Grecescu, 1877): 122-155.

⁵ Athanasie Economu, *Cremațiunea sau arderea morților. Conferințe publice ținute în amfiteatrul de chimie din Spitalul Colțea la 24 Mai și 13 Iunie 1876* (Cremation or the burning of the dead.) (Bucharest: Tip. Alessandro A. Grecescu, 1876).

Transylvanian Gheorghe Vuia, PhD in medicine at the University of Viena (1874)¹, Emanoil Reigler (1884)² or the writings on the issues of “sanitary police” of the famous hygienist Iacob Felix³ as well as the medical scientific literature from Romania, all have sustained the development and necessity of cremation as a common practice throughout Europe, and stated the need for its introduction in Romania. Despite these efforts we cannot argue for the existence of a proper cremationist movement in Romania, nor a true propaganda in this respect until after the First World War and up until the beginning of the second one.⁴ The involvement of Romanian doctors of the time to support cremation is also questionable, especially if it was a product of artificial situation. Dr. Iacob Felix’s case is relevant in this regard, as Felix confessed in 1884. In a report on the Hygiene Congress in The Hague, Felix confessed that the cremation issues were not of interest for him. Felix remembered that he had been appointed by the Congress as a member of the International Commission for cremation at congresses organized in Turin and Geneva, but he declined to participate, considering that the Romanian Kingdom felt no need for such reforms.

Otherwise the connections between the European medical elites and cremation for the second half of the 19th century are obvious, from organized discussions on the subject at various conferences on hygiene and through actual involvement of first rank public figures in developing a cremationist movement, the most famous case being that of Queen Victoria’s famous surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson, the founder, in 1874, of the Cremation Society of Great Britain.⁵ Perhaps the most relevant example is that of Dr James Edward Nield, a lecturer in forensic medicine at the University of Melbourne Medical School, who approached the Royal Society of Victoria in 1873 to call their attention to the advantages of incinerating dead bodies.⁶

The big change that occurred in the second half of the 19th century was the acceptance of the germ theory (through the contributions of Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch and Joseph Lister). This theory directly influenced the medical discourse upon cremation⁷ and first and foremost the medical practice, even in Romania.⁸ The first

¹ Gheorghe Vuia, “Diferite datine pentru asiederea mortilor cu privire la arderea cadavrelor” (Various traditions for the burning of corpses), *Transilvania* 21-22 (1874): 258-264.

² Emanoil Reigler, “Despre înmormântarea și cremațiunea sau arderea cadavrelor” (On the burial and cremation or burning of corpses) *Gazeta Medicală* 4 (1885).

³ Iacob Felix, *Tractat de Hygiēna Publică și poliție sanitarie* (Treatise on public hygiene and sanitary police) (Bucharest: Tip. I. Weiss, 1870): 313-321.

⁴ Iacob Felix, “Congresul Internaț. de igienă de la Haga. Raportul d-lui doctor I. Felix. Adresat d-lui ministru de interne” (The international hygiene congress at The Hague. Report of dr. I. Felix to the Minister of the Interior), *Telegraphu de Bucharest* 371 (1884): 2.

⁵ Peter C. Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes. Cremation and the British Way of Death* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 47-49, 58-61.

⁶ J.L. Lewis, *Medicine and the Care of Dying: A Modern History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 78.; Simon Cooke, “Death, body and soul: The Cremation Debate in New South Wales, 1863-1925”, *Australian History* 96 (1991): 323-39.

⁷ Robert W. Habenstein, “USA”, in *Encyclopaedia of Cremation*, eds. Davies D, Mates L. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 403.

⁸ Gheorghe Brătescu, “Știința medicală după Unirea Principatelor ” (Medical science after the union of the Principalities), in V.L. Bologa VL, G. Brătescu, B. Duțescu B, Șt Milcu, *Istoria medicinei românești*, 211-212.

contacts of Nicolae and Mina Minovici with the theme of cremation are documented at the end of the 19th century. In a paper, published in 1899 and dedicated to the analysis of decay from a forensic medicine and hygiene point of view, Mina Minovici focused on the subject of cremation.¹ As an introduction he dismissed the miasmatic theories, considered to be of little truth, from a scientific point of view and states that the infestation of air and water from decaying corpses in the cemeteries is not a valid theory. On the subject of cremation, he considers it acceptable and recommended in three situations: during wars, plagues and as a necessary practice of disposing of body parts resulting from autopsies. He also held cremation to be a personal choice that should not be restricted through State laws but regulated by precise dispositions meant to stop any abuses from being committed.

Nicolae Minovici displayed a much closer affinity for the cremationist ideas during his time. In a manual of forensic medicine published in 1904 he argues for the importance of cremation and stated its development in Europe. He exaggerates by stating that cremation as a practice was widely used in Italy, France and Germany.² His involvement in a pro-cremation movement, before the beginning of the First World War, is also proven from a presentation that sustained cremation, presented at a conference held in 1908 at the Romanian Athenaeum.³ This presentation was later referenced by the *Flacăra Sacră* ("Sacred Flame") magazine, the Romanian cremationists' publication that functioned in between the two World Wars. According to this publication Nicolae Minovici was held as one of the first adepts of cremation practices in Romania but at the same time he was considered to be an idealist on the subject.⁴

Moreover, a 1938 report by Mihai Popovici, an engineer and secretary of the Cenușa Society, cited Dr Mina Minovici as the forefather of the cremationist movement in Romania.⁵

Cremation in interwar Romania

Much clearer is the connection of these two specialists with the topic of cremation in between the two World Wars. This is probably due to the fact that cremation was already transposed into reality with the inauguration of the *Cenușa* ("The Ashes") Crematorium in Bucharest, on January 25th, 1928⁶. Romania thus became the first

¹ Mina Minovici, *Putrefacția din punct de vedere Medico-Legal și Hygienic* (Putrefaction from a forensic and hygienic point of view) (Bucharest: I.V. Socecu, 1899): 107-108.

² Nicolae Minovici, *Manual tehnic de medicina legală* (Handbook of Forensic Medicine), (Bucharest: I.V. Socecu, 1904): 613.

³ Radu D. Rosetti, "Pentru Cremațiune," (For cremation) *Universul* 80 (1913): 1.

⁴ "Un alt sprijinitor" (Another supporter) *Flacăra Sacră* 5 (1935): 5.

⁵ Administration of Cemeteries and Crematoria archives (hereafter ACCUa), not inventoried, 1938, file 1.

⁶ All the historical information regarding the cremation in interwar Romania (the foundation of Cenușa Society, the opening of Cenușa Crematorium, the cremation statistics, the reactions upon cremation of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the legal regulation upon cremation) were taken from Marius Rotar, *Eternitate prin cenușă. O istorie a crematoriilor și incinerărilor umane în România secolelor XIX-XXI*, (Eternity through ashes. A history of crematoriums and human incineration in 19th-21st century Romania) (Iași: Institutul European, 2011): 109-359.

Orthodox Christian country that opened such an establishment and the achievement can be traced to impulses coming from within the society itself. A Soviet example is out of the discussion, as the first crematorium was inaugurated in Moscow in 1927 mainly as an attempt of the Soviet powers to dislocate some of the traditional structures from the guardianship of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The crucial moment for transposing cremation into a social reality during these times was the foundation of the *Cenușa* (“The Ashes”) Society on March 7th, 1923. This society was dedicated to sustain and promote the idea of human cremation in Romania. Initially it had been named “Nirvana” but, as accusations of promoting a pagan / Franc-Masonic practice in Romania began to surface, a decision to change the name was taken. In reality the *Cenușa* crematorium was created with the efforts of this society, who held the ownership of the crematorium until 1948, when it was dissolved, according to the Communist law of Nationalization. The mayor’s institution in Bucharest was supportive in the construction of the crematorium with both logistics and finances, having a precise purpose: the cremation of a means of disposing of the bodies unclaimed by families thus saving expenses associated with burial, a practice previously in the administration of local authorities. Four Mayors have sustained the *Cenușa* Society during this period: Dr. Gheorghe Gheorghian, Alexandru Donescu, Dr. Ion Costinescu and Lucian Skupieski. The last two were actually cremated at this facility.¹

1923	1925	1928	1931	1933	1935	1937
14	92	210	386	520	800	911

Table 1 with the number of the members of *Cenușa* Society during the interwar period (selection)².

1928	1930	1933	1935	1937	1938
262	297	602	468	518	230

Table 2 with the number of cremation in Romania during the interwar period (selection)³.

The Minovici brothers and the issue of cremation

The involvement of the Minovici brothers in the Romanian cremationist movement can also be documented for this period based on a foreword written by Nicolae Minovici for a book about cremation signed by a journalist named Mihail Theodorescu, already at its second edition in 1931.⁴ According to this, Mina Minovici was actually one of the

¹ Marius Rotar, *Eternitate*, 254.

² “A XVII dare de seamă a consiliului Soc. „Cenușa” către Adunarea Generală, privind activitatea în cursul anului 1939” (The 17th report of the Council of Cenușa society to the General Assembly regarding its activity in 1939) *Flacăra Sacră* 4A (1940): 1-9.

³ “A XVI-a dare de seamă 1 ianuarie - 31 decembrie 1938, prezentată Adunării Generale Ordinare de la 22 mai 1939” (The 16th report for 1 January–31 December 1938, presented to the General Ordinary Assembly on 22 May 1939), *Flacăra Sacră* 4 (1939): 9.

⁴ Nicolae Minovici, ‘Prefata’ (Preface), In Mihail A. Theodorescu, *Crematoriul. Ce este Cremațiunea. Procesul Cremațiunii în fața Științei, Religiei și a tradițiilor strămoșești*.

founding members of “Cenușa” Society, while Nicolae Minovici was among the supporters that made possible its creation. The same source stipulates though that the two were not actual cremationists in the true sense of the word but personalities militating for the construction of a crematorium as a public and scientific necessity. Nicolae Minovici thus stated that

*“we have not constructed it to be useful to ourselves but to help dispose of human bodies with unknown identity or unclaimed / unrecognized bodies from the morgue, as well as to dispose of remains from dissections and so on”*¹.

On the other side, Nicoale Minovici stated that even if the original intent was to build the crematorium for these purposes alone, things evolved to serve also the wishes (sometimes stipulated in the last wills) of those who wanted to be cremated after death. He mentioned that this situation was similar to that of the Ambulance Services of Bucharest, initially created to only respond to accidents and later demanded by the population for transporting the ill, allowing it to develop and diversify accordingly. A clear delimitation from cremationists was made when Nicolae Minovici stated that even though he and his brother helped implementing cremation in Romania, they also expressed the wish to be buried and not cremated after death, as it eventually happened.²

His brother, Mina Minovici, was also involved. For example, we find him among the founders of the Cenușa Society. His affiliation was cited in a 1923 call for subscriptions in order to build a crematorium in Bucharest. Mina Minovici, as a physician and university professor, endorsed the appeal, along with C. Dissescu, a former cabinet minister, I. Costinescu, the mayor of Bucharest, Gh. Gheorghian, a former mayor of Bucharest, Grigore Trancu Iași, M. Berceanu, a lawyer and deputy mayor of Bucharest, L. Skupiewski, a physician and former deputy mayor of Bucharest, I. Roban, the secretary general of the Mayor's Office of Bucharest, and the engineer Mihai Popovici. They regarded the rearing of the crematorium as an accomplishment of great social relevance, and they wanted the edifice to be “a work of art as well, an adornment” for Bucharest.³

The opening of Cenușa Crematorium in 1928 brought about one of the most vivid scandals of Romania in between the two World Wars. The essence of this scandal was the firm opposition to the practice manifested by the Romanian Orthodox Church. Soon after inauguration the Orthodox oriented press as well as some of the personalities of the Church started a violent campaign against the crematorium and its supporters throughout Romania. In their opinion cremation represented a foreign practice for the Romanians, of pagan / Franc- Mason origin, a misfortunate implantation or even a clear attempt to undermine the Romanian Orthodox Church, the keeper of all traditions and the pillar of our national being. On the other side, the local Bucharest authorities were directly accused that they supported the apparition and development of cremationist

Crematoriul din Capitală. Cum se face arderea cadavrelor. Un spectacol de groază și poezie (The crematorium. What is cremation? The process of cremation in relation to science, religion and ancient traditions. The crematorium in the capital. How are corpses burnt? A spectacle or terror and poetry) (Bucharest: Editura Graiul Romanesc, 1933): 5-7.

¹ Minovici, “Prefata,” 7.

² Minovici, “Prefata,” 7.

³ ACCUa 1938, files 1.

beliefs, with the sole purpose of material gain, neglecting the fundamental issues and real problems of our country's capital city.

Biserica Ortodoxă Română ("The Romanian Orthodox Church"), *Cuvânt Bun* ("The Good Word") or *Glasul Monahilor* ("The Monk's Voice") orthodox magazines, the voices of Archbishop Iuliu Scriban and priests Marin C. Ionescu and Dionisie Lungu all rejected the practice of cremation in those times. As a result of all these campaigns the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1928 and then again in 1933 outlawed the religious service for a deceased that opted for cremation, a practice that is still valid to this day. Despite this and despite successive regulations, culminating with the Penal Code adopted in the time of Carol II in 1936, cremation still obtained an equal status, from a legal perspective, with burial,¹ a situation also valid to this day.

This scandal also brought forward a number of serious accusations aimed at the Minovici brothers, given their affiliation with the subject. This episode, detailed in the following lines, has a particular significance as it displays not only the negative perception of the Christian Orthodox world and of the Romanian society but also the actual ways used to stigmatize those that were connected in whatever manner to the practice of cremation.

The stigmatization of Mina Minovici started via an article published within the *Glasul Monahilor* by the priest Marin C. Ionescu, with an accusation that, as the manager of the Bucharest morgue, Dr. Minovici consented to cremating the bodies of unknown identity without any legal right to do so. Another accusation was that Mina Minovici asked for money from the families of the deceased in order to stop sending the bodies to be cremated at *Cenușa Crematorium*.² These accusations relied on the fact that the bodies incinerated at the opening of the *Cenușa Crematorium* had been brought from the Bucharest Institute of Forensic Medicine, headed by Mina Minovici. Specifically, "the experimental incineration of six bodies" occurred between the 21st and the 24th of January, in order to test the Manoschek Company's incinerator used by the *Cenușa Crematorium*. The last experimental incineration occurred on the 25th of January, but, since it was open to the public; it was considered the official opening of the crematorium.³

Of course these first two accusations were false and in consequence Mina Minovici filed a lawsuit for calumny. The trial took about two years, and in the end it did not reach a notable verdict, but it revealed, on the topic of this article, the ways in which it was carried and the echoes that it had in the Romanian society of those days.

¹ "Codul Penal Carol II din 18 martie 1936," in *Codul general al României (Codurile, Legile și Regulamentele în vigoare. 1856-1937)*, founder C. Hamangiu, continued by G. Alexianu, C. St. Stoicescu, vol. XXIV, *Coduri, Legi, Regulamente cuprinzând prima parte din legislațiunea anului 1936*, Part I, (henceforth *Codul Hamangiu*), (Bucharest M.O. și Imprimeriile Statului, Bucharest 1937): 64; *Codul Penal "Carol II"* annotated by Const. G. Rătescu, I. Ionescu-Dolj, I. Gr. Periețeanu, Vintilă Dongoroz, H. Asnovarian, Traian Pop, Mihail. I Papadapol, N. Pavelescu, Foreword by Mircea Djuvara, Preface by Valeriu Pop, vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Socec S.A., 1937): 264-265.

² Ionescu M.C., "Primul cadavru încenușat" (First cremation), *Glasul Monahilor* 116/5 (1928), 1-2

³ ACCUa, 1928, files 1-4.

There were two main directions of perceiving the scandal within the public opinion:

1. an attitude of condemning and laying blame on Dr. Mina Minovici, essentially through the Orthodox prone newspapers or the media under the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church;
2. a favourable attitude for Dr. Mina Minovici, of undoing the accusations formulated against him by the religious circles.

The first approach, against Dr. Minovici in particular and cremation as a practice in general, was mainly voiced through the Orthodox magazine *Glasul Monahilor*. Of importance in this perspective are the various calls launched by this magazine to the people so that they attend in high numbers the trial between Dr. Mina Minovici and priest Marin C. Ionescu. The subject was thus generalized and was seen as a fight carried by the magazine with the entire cremation prone community from Romania, thus defending the Romanian Orthodox Church and nonetheless our national being. As an example we have the call published on the occasion of the fifth trial appearance:

*“Christian brothers, Monday, February 11th of the current year, at the Justice Court we have the trial between Our Church and the Crematorium! We ask you to come in high numbers, if not to defend your holy rights, at least to see the antichrists of the Century, those mentioned in the Holy Scripture, those that ask you all to burn your parents and loved ones.”*¹

Dr. Mina Minovici was referred to as a little person/dwarf (“*a pygmy*”), as he was the one facilitating the introduction of cremation as a practice in Romania.²

Nichifor Crainic was also involved in the arduous discussion around this scandal. In an article published in May 1928³, he took pity on the faith of the monk Dionisie Lungu (the editor chief of *Glasul Monahilor*) and of the priest Marin C. Ionescu, the main prosecutor of Mina Minovici, when the Bucharest Orthodox Archbishopric took several punitive measures against them. In fact Crainic saw this chance to criticise the Mayor’s office from Bucharest as he believed they chose to build this human crematorium instead of constructing bread ovens for Bucharest. The newspaper, *Cuvântul* (“The Word”) lead by Crainic, has since constantly adopted a position against cremation. Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) was a very important Romanian writer, editor, philosopher, poet and orthodox theologian, too. He was famed for his traditionalist and anti-Semitic actions.

On the other hand, probably the most coherent support for Dr. Minovici rose from the poet Tudor Arghezi (one of the most important Romanian poet but also an important journalist of those times, too), who considered that in this dispute, priest Marin C. Ionescu “*has left his arguments at home and was debating with the scientist only from imagination*”⁴. This newspaper, *Universul* (“The Universe”) had always

¹ *Glasul Monahilor*, 160/6 (1929): 1.

² Z.S. Mirmillo, “Iarăși d-l doctor Minovici,” (Dr. Minovici again) *Glasul Monahilor*, 122, 5 (1928): 3.

³ Nichifor Crainic, “Ziua Domnului” (The day of the Lord), *Curentul* 119/1 (1928): 1.

⁴ Tudor Arghezi, “Mitropolia și Poliția” (The Metropolis and the Police) *Bilete de Papagal* 1/87 (1928): 2-3.

showed a balanced view on the scandal. In fact, also given his social status, Dr. Mina Minovici himself had a balanced opinion on the subject of cremation as it can be seen in his *Tratat de Medicină Legală* (Treatise of Forensic Medicine), published in 1929 and 1930¹. As he had done a few decades before, Mina Minovici rejected again the miasmatic theory and considered that cremation should stand equal to burial and should not be outlawed, as it represented a personal choice. From a technical point of view he stood by the concept that cremation was to be allowed only by the following of some strict rules: it was forbidden to cremate the remains of an unknown individual and any cremation should require two separate medical examinations, one from the practicing doctor and another from the doctor who observed and recorded the death; he also stated as imperative that an autopsy should be performed. On the other side he rejected the idea that by cremation the traces of any foul play (murder or suicide) go unseen, stating that some of the most common poisons (arsenic, phosphorus, mercury salts) could be traced even in the human ashes resulted after cremation.²

It must be noted that, for a short period of time in 1929, the cremations have been suspended at *Cenușa* Crematory by the Ministry of Justice. The reason for this situation was the insufficient clarification of cremation procedures related to those that had died of violent cause. Among those that required such a clarification was also Dr. Mina Minovici. This entitled Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban³ to identify this attitude as a retraction of the scientist's affiliation to the cremationist ideas, as the spread of this practice in Romania bothered him in his work as a forensic medical doctor. On a broad scale Scriban saw 1929 as the year that provided the hardest blow yet to hit the cremationist movement in Romania.

The death of Dr. Mina Minovici in 1933 was the last occasion for a reaction towards the scientist from *Glasul Monahilor*. Ștefan N. Matache⁴ considered Dr. Minovici's wish to be buried also a detraction from his cremationist ideas; his death symbolized, in the opinion of the author, a powerful blow to the cremationist movement and the end of the Crematorium as an institution. He predicted that in the future the crematorium would serve only to burn those who had committed suicide as well as animal remains and trash, a prediction that never came true. Anyway the author of this paper used a pseudonym in expressing his reaction to Mina Minovici's death. But what is more, this pseudonym was used in irony directed to Mina Minovici, Matache being one of the most famous butchers of Bucharest at the beginning of 20th century. In the same direction a notice about his death and preference for burial was inserted into the *Foaie Diecezană* orthodox journal. This was considered an act of Mina Minovici's Christian belief and a possible pattern for those "Christians" preferring cremation.

¹Mina Minovici, *Tratat complet de Medicină Legală cu legislația și Jurisprudența românească și străină* (Complete treatise of forensic medicine with Romanian and foreign legislation and jurisprudence) vol. I-II, (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice Socec & Co (1929-1930): 980-989.

²Minovici, *Tratatul*, 980-987.

³Iuliu Scriban, "Li s-a înfundat cenușarilor" (The cremationists are over), *Glasul Monahilor*, VI, 185-186 (1929): 2.

⁴Ștefan N. Matache, "La moartea unui savant. Constatări și concluzii" (For the death of a savant. Remarks and conclusions), *Glasul Monahilor*, 355, 11 (1933): 4.

The death of Stefan Minovici in 1935, the third brother of the Minovici family and a well-known chemist of those times, determined a favorable attitude towards him expressed in the Orthodox media. It was relevant that before his death Stefan Minovici had expressed his orthodox Christian belief that he had drafted in his will in 1933, clearly stating the desire to be buried. Therefore, at this event, the Orthodox media reminded that his brother Mina Minovici had a similar belief: "A man (Mina Minovici) who all his life has enlightened justice researching through autopsy, the real cause of death, and respecting his belief in the supernatural powers of the savant of God"¹.

The appearance of the Romanian cremationist's magazine *Flacăra Sacră* (The Sacred Flame) in December 1934 was the symbol of evolution for those who sustained the cremation practices in Romania between the two World Wars. With its eight pages and reaching in 1936 a circulation of 3000 copies, it became the main tribune to promote cremation in Romania.

In 1938, when engineer Mihai Popovici, the editor-in-chief of the magazine and secretary of the *Cenușa* Society, published the summary of the last five years of the publication² we can see that none of these articles were written in respect to or even cited from the writings of brothers Nicolae and Mina Minovici. This demonstrates once again that even if the two scientists supported the idea of cremation in Romania they have done so in a calculated manner, never assuming a militant position; references to their writings are seldom found within the magazine, another argument in favour of their moderate position. Nicolae Minovici is referred to several times in discussions on his conference that debated cremation back in 1908³; the Minovici brothers are also mentioned briefly as being among those who made possible the foundation of *Cenușa* Society in 1923. Nevertheless, in general, they are rarely referred to and this is most likely due to their scientific view on cremation;⁴ it is obvious that, had they been truly among the cremationists, the scientific arguments would have made an excellent propaganda and this aspect would have been more thoroughly treated in the magazine.

The affinity of Nicolae Minovici to the subject of cremation in Romania clearly existed. The magazine noted that in the "Golden Book" of *Cenușa* Society, Dr. Nicolae Minovici expressed his admiration toward the activity of the Society, after a visit on March 30th, 1938, as follows: "*I went and I saw [the Cenușa Crematorium] and I admired this beautiful and humanitarian endeavour that I long would like to see accomplished*"⁵.

On the other side, within the pages of the *Flacăra Sacră* a series of articles were published stating the agreement of cremation with the practices of forensic and legal medicine. Some of these were translations or adaptations from the cremationist literature of those times while others were interventions from various followers in Romania. In the

¹ Nicolae Roșu, "Dumnezeu în altarul științei" (God on the altar of science), Apud. *Foaie diecezană*, LI, 2 (1936): 2.

² Mihai Popovici, "Cinci ani" (Five years), *Flacăra Sacră* 11/ 6 (1939): 1-3.

³ Alex F. Mihail, "Morminte profanate" (Desecrated graves), *Flacăra Sacră* 2/9 (1935): 4-5.

⁴ Mihai Popovici, "Importanța Cremațiunei în uriașa dezvoltare a capitalei românești" (The importance of cremation in the great development of the Romanian capital), *Flacăra Sacră* 10/ 3 (1936): 1-3.

⁵ "Din Cartea de Aur a Soc. Cenușa". *Flacăra Sacră*, 10 , 5.

first category we find translations from the writings of Dr. C. Barrier, the chairman of the Medical Academy of France¹ or those of L. Gissenar². From Romania we note the interventions of engineer Mihai Popovici³, V. I. Zorca⁴, dr. Silviu Carozea⁵.

On the other side of the barricade, the detractors of cremation in interwar Romania remain strongly active in their arguments against this practice even issuing generalisations by which they blame the modern spirit of the times and the misunderstanding of the role of science and medicine which were considered to act against the very being of our nation. Here we have a relevant article, written by priest Marin C. Ionescu:

*“Science can be international in a tube and in the laboratory! In its practical achievements we cannot conceive for it to step over the people’s concept upon life, the cosmic, moral and religious environment of our nation; it should, instead, slowly prepare the conditions of a social symbiosis.”*⁶

Beyond these situations, Mina Minovici’s belief, as a scientist but also as an ordinary citizen of Romania in those times, can be drawn from a letter which he published in January 1923 in the *Contimporanul* journal. This was a reply of Mina Minovici in the context of the disputes concerning the autopsy issues that took place between Christian and Jewish medical students of the Faculty of Medicine in Iași and Cluj-Napoca. Mina Minovici replied to an article signed by Bogdan Varvara, recalling the words he spoke at the opening address of the academic year at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest in 1920 (Mina Minovici being dean of this Faculty then). His ideas were a warm plea for tolerance and understanding and thus deserve to be quoted: “As man of science and as priest of the charity, the doctor must rise above all prejudices, whether social or religious. In God’s eyes there should be only a humanity composed of particular nations, each with its qualities and flaws, but all being represented by God. For those nothing grieves me more than that I view students erecting the separating walls between them: on one side are the Christian students and on the other side the Jewish students. For God’s sake, open your eyes and put your minds together realizing that this line is regarded by the civilized western world as a stigma of inferiority. Today, especially after the dream of Michael the Brave was done through blood sacrifice of all the children of the our country, regardless of religious belief, to hit and to ostracize the Jews students, by the absurdity and unfairness, means [...] no longer must live outside

¹ Charles Barrier, “Cauzele care stânenesc dezvoltarea cremațiunii în Franța” (The causes that hinder the development of cremation in France), *Flacăra Sacră* 4/2 (1935): 4.

² L. Gissenar, “Cremațiunea față de justiția represivă” (Cremation against repressive justice), *Flacăra Sacră* 10 /1-2 (1938): 1-2.

³ Mihai Popovici, „Cremațiunea din punct de vedere juridic” (Cremation from a legal point of View), *Flacăra Sacră* 11/2 (1935): 1-2.

⁴ Vasile I. Zorca, “Considerațiuni chimice pledând pentru cremațiune” (Chemical considerations pleading for cremation), *Flacăra Sacră* 3/6 (1938): 4; Vasile I. Zorca, “Discuții asupra cremațiunii. Cremațiunea față de medicina-legală” (Debates on Cremation. Cremation and Forensic Medicine), *Flacăra Sacră*, 8/3 (1936): 5-7.

⁵ Silviu Carozea, “Unele dintre avantajele incinerării pentru decoperirea crimelor” (Some advantages of incineration for the discovery or murders), *Flacăra Sacră* 8/ 6 (1938): 3.

⁶ Marin C. Ionescu, “Sfântul Pavel și Crematoriul” (Saint Paul and the Crematorium), *Glasul Monahilor* 5/122 (1926): 2.

the realm of science imputation that - which is neutral, so for all - an exclusivity states that every heart to feel clean and any brain minds condemn it "¹.

Conclusions

Our analysis can be seen as an effort to reveal an important episode about the way in which forensic medicine and legal practices were perceived in this period, via the personalities of Nicolae and Mina Minovici. It accentuates the way in which the imposition of a new model – that of cremation as a funerary practice – generated a series of trepidations and scandals in the Romanian society before the Second World War, scandals that unjustly reverberated on the public lives of brothers Nicolae and Mina Minovici. It can be seen that these scandals were originating within the deeply traditional rhetoric and in the power of the Romanian Orthodox Church, whose reaction of vehement rejection of cremation practices can be witnessed even to this day. This powerful opponent of cremation has used outdated medical literature as arguments and chose to stigmatize, with no remorse, all those that stood against their belief and were consequently on the other side of the barricades. Nothing was revered in this feud: neither the Minovici brothers' scientific work, their accomplishments as medical professionals, nor the international recognition they enjoyed. The Romanian Orthodox Church regarded them both as mere proselytisers for cremation – a practice that was reckoned to undermine Romanian traditions and national identity. This approach stigmatised not only two of Romania's most prominent medical figures, but also medical science as a whole. The stakes were complex, since, at that particular moment, the Romanian Orthodox Church was seeking to generate a groundswell of anti-cremation sentiment in interwar Romania at any cost.

¹ “Dintr-o scrisoare a d-lui prof. dr Mina Minovici” (From a letter of Prof. Mina Minovici), *Contimporanul* II/26 (1923): 4.