

ARCHBISHOP RAYMUND NETZHAMMER, A PIONEER OF RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY IN ROMANIA

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The distinguished scholar and priest, who will be known later as the catholic archbishop of Bucharest, Raymund Netzhammer¹ came to the country in the fall of 1900 in a third-class train cart, as he latter recalled in his memoirs *Aus Rumänien*, published in Einsiedeln-Waldshut Köln in 1909². As a virtue of gratuity, modesty can bring sometimes unexpected benefits: the knowledge of the common people, the most accurate image of a country. It was without any doubt, in his own words “an exploration in a different world”, which he wanted to know and understand. His curiosity was the sign of his vivid and mobile intelligence, of a positive and well organized spirit. During the first two years that he spent as a professor at the archdiocesan seminary, Raymund Netzhammer wandered by carriage, ship, train, raft and on foot all through the young kingdom of Romania: from Bucharest to the monasteries in Oltenia, from the Danube Delta to the antiques place of Tropeum Trajani, from Iassy to the Neamț mountains, or the Bistrița Valley.

The Benedictine’s first major study was a monograph dedicated to the famous renaissance scholar Theophrastus Paracellus, born in 1493 near the abbey of Einsiedeln, where Netzhammer entered his order. The founder of chemotherapy, doctor, philosopher, and lay theologian Paracellus, was an adversary of the equally famous Zwingli, who came from the same abbey. The monograph Theophrastus Paracellus. *Das Wissenwerteste uber dessen Leben, Lehre und Schriften. Nach seinem Schriften und den neuesten Paracellus Forschungen* (Einsiedeln, 1901) represented the validation of the didactical experience of the author – a professor of chemistry and mathematics during those times, but also the beginning of his work of erudition. The study brought to light new manuscripts of the founder of social medicine³.

Eventually, Renaissance and Reformation will not be the favorite periods of the scholar Netzhammer. He preferred Antiquity and Early Christianity, fields of

¹ Nikolaus Netzhammer, *In Verbo tuo. Raymund Netzhammer OSB. Arhiepiscop de București. 1905–1924*, București, 2003; Raymund Netzhammer, *Episcop în România într-o epocă a conflictelor naționale și religioase*, ed. by Nikolaus Netzhammer with Krista Zach, vol. I–II, București, 2005.

² R. Netzhammer, *Aus Rumänien*, ed. cit., p. 27.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

research he would charter as a pioneer. The first contact *de visu* with the land filled of antique traces of Dobrogea was in 1901, when he visited for the first time the vestiges of Adamclissi, Tropeum Traiani, on the archeological site started by Grigore Tocilescu in 1895⁴. The contact continued until 1909, with the discovery of the four basilicas, the main gates of the fortress, the *forensis* basilica, and the main street. When Raymund Netzhammer visited the site, soldiers were doing the digging under the supervision of the archeologist von Tube from München. The emotional impression left by the trip to this “Pompei”⁵ on the Scythian territory, and the first attempt to identify the names of the martyrs whose relics were buried in the crypts by using as sources the martyrologies can be found in the study *Die christlichen Märtyrer am Isten*⁶. The next stage of this wondering was the fortress Tomis, whose archeological vestiges were discovered in the initial diggings by Tocilescu in 1890. Raymund Netzhammer was familiar with these evidences, as he had visited the rich collections of the National Museum of Antiquities opened in Bucharest. In the resulting study *Das altchristliche Tomi. Einkirchengeschichtliche Studie* published in Salzburg in 1903 and translated into Romanian a year later (Baia Mare 1904), Netzhammer tried for the first time to draw the chronological list of the bishops of Tomis by using historical Byzantine sources, martyrologies, and archeological evidence.

Bishop Netzhammer’s passion for archeology was vested also in the care and patience he took to put up a personal collection of coins, Roman, Greek and Byzantine, mounting to over one hundred pieces, most of them collected in Tomis⁷ and currently kept in the museum of the abbey of Einsiedeln. A scientific description of a part of this collection was done by its possessor in the study *Dioscurii in Tomis*, published in the bulletin of the Romanian Numismatic Society in 1913.

The religious anthropology, which is a field of study legitimately hosted by the humanities, was born and consolidated exactly between the time when the Benedictine monk Raymund Netzhammer was stepping for the first time in Romania full of

⁴ Gr. Tocilescu, O. Benndorf, G. Niemann, *Monumentul de la Adamclissi Tropaeum Trajani*, roum. and german ed., Wien, 1895.

⁵ R. Netzhammer, *Nach Adamclissi. Ein Sommerausflug in das Pompeji der Dobrogea*, in „Katholische Kirchenzeitung”, Salzburg, 1906; Raymund Netzhammer, *Die christliche Altertümer der Dobrudscha*, Bukarest, 1918; Raymund Netzhammer, *Antichitățile creștine din Dobrogea*, ed. by Alexandru Barnea, transl. by George Guțu, București, 2005, p. XVII; from all of Netzhammer’s archeological studies, *Die christliche Altertümer der Dobrogea* is the most quoted one by scholars. This study appeared for the first time in a shorter form in 1906. We have to mention that after the province Dobrogea was annexed to the young kingdom of Romania in 1878, the area came to the attention of the scholarly world as “one of the most famous and important provinces of the roman empire”.

⁶ Published in Grigore Antipa. *Hommage à son oeuvre*, București, 1938, p. 379–392; Raymund Netzhammer, *Antichitățile creștine*, ed. cit., p. 12–17.

⁷ Raymund Netzhammer, *Ce-mi povestesc monedele mele din Tomis*, in „Revista Catolică”, I, 1912, IV, p. 487–503; idem, *Eine Münze aus Istros barbarischen Ursprungs*, in „Euletinul Societății Numismatice Române”, XXII, 1927, p. 16–19; idem, *Stadtswappen auf Münzen pontischer Städte*, Zürich, 1937.

enthusiasm and curiosity, and the time when he reached the height of his career as the Bishop of the Roman-Catholic diocese of Bucharest. Between the last ten years of the 19th century and the beginning of World War One⁸, everything that was needed for a field of study to affirm itself had already been achieved (the School of Conceptual Thought, journals, European debates, University departments). In Europe, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Herbert Hubert and Max Weber had already published their fundamental contributions. In 1896 Mauss publishes *La religion et les origines du droit pénale*, then, in 1899, together with Herbert Hubert *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice*, followed in 1902–1903 by *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*⁹, Emile Durkheim joins Marcel Mauss as author of *De quelques formes primitives de classification. Contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives* (1906), then authors alone *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912)¹⁰ fundamental study that outlined the theoretical perspectives taken up several decades on by the school of the *Annales*. In 1916 and, respectively in 1922 Max Weber's reflection of religious sociology will be published in the two volumes of *Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*.

In the USA, in the same time, three outstanding scholars are conventionally mentioned as the founding fathers of modern anthropology: Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowsky and A.R. Radcliff-Brown¹¹. Professor at Columbia University, Franz Boas was instrumental in establishing American cultural anthropology. We shall associated him with two particular important and typical concepts: *cultural relativism* and *historical particularism*. In *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) and *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1928), his emphasis on research first, followed by generalizations, stood in marked contrast to the British school of anthropology which emphasized the creation of grand theories (which were only after tested through field work). In his field methodology, Bronislaw Malinowski strongly emphasized the need to learn the native language and recommended that the main method should be one of the *participant observation*: the ethnographer should live with the people he studied (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922). The third leading anthropologist during the crucial first decades of the twentieth century was A.R. Radcliff-Brown. Unlike Boas and to some extent Malinowski, A.R. Radcliff-Brown's interest was not in culture and meaning, but in the way society functioned (*Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, 1924).

Over this period, religious anthropology developed an interdisciplinary approach, methodologically close to sociology and ethnography. It is only in the

⁸ Jerry Moore, *Visions of Culture. An Introduction in Anthropology Theories and Theorists*, Walnut Creek, 1997, p. 14–29; Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *What is Anthropology*, London-Ann Arbor, 2004, p. 14–42.

⁹ Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, 2004.

¹⁰ Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, 2005.

¹¹ Alan Barnard, *History and Anthropology*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 29–67; Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 13–18.

1970 that, due to the work of Alphonse Dupront¹², religious anthropology would emulate the methods of historical anthropology.

In the Romanian context, Raymund Netzhammer was one of the many foreign Catholic missionaries and priests, whose testimonies regarding the Romanians' religious life have constituted a valuable source for the study of the history of mentalities during the modern times. Starting with the four volumes *Diplomatarium Italicum*, published between the two World Wars by the Romanian Academy in Rome, and continuing after 1960 with the collection *Călători străini în țările române* (*Foreign Travelers in Romanian Countries*), now at its 10th volume, the editing of these sources kept busy many Romanian specialists. These sources consist of missionary reports, canonic visitations of Bishops, memoirs, and travel accounts¹³. They form together an exegesis of "otherness": the local Catholic of a different ethnic origin, the Orthodox local, twice a stranger because of his language and faith. The correspondence of Catholic missionaries, who filled the Christian territories under ottoman rule after the establishment of the De Propaganda Fide Congregation in 1622, is likely to provide valuable evidence for those interested in charting the religious choices of these populations, the typology of their religious experiences, the stability of their churches and religious communities¹⁴. Be it as it may, the Bishop's studies of religious anthropologies do not fit into this pattern. They are neither reports sent to Rome, nor results of his visitation of the Catholic communities in his dioceses. His view is unique. What makes it so different from everything that his predecessors saw and accounted for? First, there is the systematic, almost scientific character of his inquiry. He went places, took heed to rituals, and examined religious objects. He conducted interviews with seemingly informed people and went through statistics and reports. Secondly, his attitude is different with respect to the type of religious experiences he encounters and describes. If his predecessors had a qualified, denominational perspective, and were inclined to be highly critical of what seemed to them to be superstitions, abuses, and oriental formalisms, Raymund Netzhammer has a sympathetic, curious, and somehow candid approach to the religious life of the Romanian majority. The deeper he goes into the matter, the more he likes it. The clearer he sees the ancient, post-apostolic roots of this brand of religiosity, the closer he grasps the common origin of the two churches, the occidental and the oriental.

The Catholic Bishop Netzhammer undertook the first inquiry of religious anthropology in the Romanian setting, an inquiry into the Orthodox devotion to the

¹² Alphonse Dupront, *Du Sacré. Croisades et pèlerinages. Images et langages*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997, p. 58–81.

¹³ Mihaela Grancea, *Călători străini despre aspecte ale vieții cotidiene. Relații interetnice și interconfesionale în spațiul românesc*, în vol. *Spiritualitate transilvăneană și istorie europeană*, Alba-Iulia, 1999, p. 225–234; eadem, *Călători străini prin Principatele Dunărene, Transilvania și Banat. Identitate și alteritate*, Sibiu, 2002.

¹⁴ Violeta Barbu, *Purgatoriul misionarilor. Contrareforma în țările române în secolul al XVII-lea*, București, 2008, p. 22–38.

Virgin Mary. This inquiry was truly the result of the combination between the two methods that are recommended later on by Alphonse Dupront: the direct contact with the object of study through the direct research of ethnographic nature, and the historic exploration with the help of documents. The study was named *Über religiöse Verhältnisse in Rumänien. Die Muttergottes-Verehrung in der rumänisch-orthodoxen Kirche* was published in Salzburg in 1902, in the newspaper “Katholische Kirchezeitung”.

During those times its author was the head of the seminary founded by the Bishop in Bucharest. The expression “Verhältnisse” draws attention, because it emphasizes the phenomenon that the author wants to describe: the behavior, the attitudes, and the religious representations sedimented in time, all characteristics of a long period, diffused among the people, and shaped by the authority of the church as an institution. Raymund Netzhammer regards the devotion to the Virgin Mary, as a complex system of religious practices and piety, whose progressive crystallization can be followed over the time¹⁵. The devotion to the Virgin Mary can be thus described by making the inventory of popular practices (the pilgrimage to icons representing the Virgin Mary, the lighting of candles, the massive attendance of mass, the multiplication of beggars), or by analyzing from a comparative perspective the liturgical practices and the type of religious celebrations from the Orthodox and the Catholic calendar. The author insists on three celebrations specific to the Orient, which have a fixed date and are profoundly tied to the Byzantine history. These religious celebrations are the translation of Virgin Mary’s vestments into the Vlacherne church from Constantinople (July 2nd), the translation of Virgin Mary’s belt into the church built by the Queen Pulcheria (August 31st), and the translation of Virgin Mary’s coat, celebrated on October 1st. In addition to these celebrations, there are two more with mobile dates: one related again to the Vlacherne church, which is the celebration of the *Acatismos Hymn* (mobile celebration during lent), and another one called the Spring of Healing, reminding of a miracle done by the Virgin Mary in the church the Source of Healing of Constantinople. The Source of Healing is celebrated on the Friday of the first week after Easter.

The worship of the Virgin Mary though the dedication of the parochial churches and the monasteries all throughout the kingdom, gives Raymund

¹⁵ Dragomir Demetrescu, *Obiceiuri vechi bisericești*, „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, XXXI, 1907–1908, p. 1163–1171. Dimitrie Stănescu, *Cultul Maicii Domnului*, București, 1932, și idem, *Minunile Maicii Domnului*, București, 1925; Doru Radosav, *Sentimentul religios la români*, Cluj, 1997; Ene Branîște, *Cultul Maicii Domnului*, teză de doctorat (inedită); Violeta Barbu, *Imago Virginis. Essai d’anthropologie religieuse sur les représentations miraculeuses de la Vierge aux pays roumains*, „Studii și materiale de istorie medie”, XIX, 2001, p. 39–60. Matei Cazacu, *Minuni, vedenii și vise premonitorii în trecutul românesc*, București, 2003; Sorin Ifîimi, *Ceremoniile Curții domnești. La Crăciun, Anul Nou și Bobotează (secolele XVII–XIX)*, în vol. *Spectacolul public între tradiție și modernitate*, ed. Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu și Maria Pakucs Willcocks, București, 2007, p. 43–78.

Netzhammer the opportunity to use scientific statistics. In the shadows of these statistics lie the collective devotions, which he witnessed at the monasteries Sinaia and Constanța. The future catholic Bishop is amazed and touched by what he sees: the afflux of believers who came by train or carriage, their piety and pure happiness, the collective feast with wine, bread, and cheese, and the attachment and respect shown by the royal house towards the celebration of the Virgin Mary, a celebration so much loved by the people.

Enriched with a superior experience, nurtured by all the years he spent in Romania and by the systematic trips taken throughout the country in 1922, the Bishop Raymund Netzhammer published the work *Die Verehrung des heiligen Menas bei den Rumanen. Eine Skizze* after a year of field study. This is a sketch, as the author calls it, which appeared this time in the country, at the famous Socec publishing house. Why was Raymund Netzhammer attracted to Saint Mina? As nothing was decided by chance by the Bishop, but was rather thought carefully according to a rational, efficient, and significant plan, the 60-page study dedicated to this saint is not lacking scientific motivation. Between 1905 and 1908, monsignor Karl Maria Kaufmann from Frankfurt, a famous archeology professor and specialist in Egyptology, discovered a city in the Libyan Desert, where the devotion for Saint Mina was shown by all archeological elements that he could retrieve¹⁶. The old city, where the ruins of an imperial garrison and the signs of pilgrimages to the burial ground of the saint could still be seen, was named Mineapolis by the German scholar. Starting with this amazing discovery, the Bishop Raymund Netzhammer sets himself the task to document the devotion to the saint in his adoptive country. He visits all the churches in Bucharest dedicated to St. Minas, he describes the icons and frescoes that depict him. He pursues his investigations in museums and private collections, interviews the superior of all monasteries of Wallachia in order to find out if the devotion to Minas is an urban and parochial cult, or a practice taken in also by the convents. In order to undertake an extensive inquiry, Bishop Netzhammer pays visits to Bârlad, Focșani și Camena, where churches are consecrated in honor of St Minas. He establishes on first hand data that parishioners honor Minas as a healer and finder of lost things also in Craiova, Pitești, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Iași, Galați, and Brăila. He writes down meticulously the day and hour of his stopover, how many people he actually saw practicing devotions to Minas, the ritual accomplished by the priests, the preservation state of the icons, and collects historical data on the founders of the churches he observed.

This is why the two works presented here are preserving entirely a pioneering character and an unexpectedly modern view. It is a sign of modernity to choose

¹⁶ C.M. Kaufmann, *Die Ausgrabung der Menasheiligtümer in der Mareotiswüste*, Cairo, 1906; idem, *Zweiter Berichte über die Ausgrabung der Menasheiligtümer in der Mareotiswüste*, (Sommercampagne, Juni–November 1906), Cairo, 1907.

from the churches' thesaurus of faith, exactly those devotions and practices, which reunite the elites and the masses through a direct experience, and which carry the same gestures, rituals, and representations throughout the centuries; and in spite of that not to forget that these signs of modernity are always reshaped through time. It is a sign of modernity to recognize the syncretic, complex, and multi-disciplinary dimension of the collective religious practices¹⁷, by putting together art history, ethnography, theology, history, archeology, and to use all of them together in order to understand and describe. It is a sign of modernity to give a comparative dimension to these devotional practices, without diminishing their value and authenticity. It is a sign of modernity to always keep at the center of attention "l'homme, le gibier de l'histoire", as Marc Bloch said, and to show a respectful tolerance, a never-tired curiosity, and a delicate courtesy towards the different shapes, which faith has chosen to take, so it could root itself into cultures. It is a sign of modernity to attempt to trace the collective ethos that has traversed history completely unaffected by the positivism and the materialism specific to the time between the 19th and the 20th centuries.

Pages of religious anthropology can also be read, of course, in the work, *Aus Rumänien. Streifzüge durch das Land und seine Geschichte*¹⁸ only that these pages are similar to journal notations. As he was discovering a new, different, fascinating, and even exotic world in Olt valley, Dobrogea, Valcea, Neamt, and in the monasteries of Moldavia and Oltenia¹⁹, Netzhammer's writings were gaining a generous familiarity with everything he was seeing, an enthusiastic goodwill full of elegance, which was transforming every corner, gesture, or person into a positive revelation. Romania, as seen by Bishop Netzhammer, is not a poor, backwards country that lacks any future; its people, with their limitations, defects, and weaknesses, do not obtain negative feedback. The popular faith does not appear full of superstitions and complicated rituals that cannot be understood by the catholic rationale. In front of a reality that has been his for almost 20 years, the Bishop has not stopped loving, being moved, and hoping, even sometimes against all hope.

Aus Rumänien is not a travel book, is not a propaganda book, but an anthropological research. For some good reasons. First, it is through the method of

¹⁷ R. Muchembled, *Culture populaire, culture des élites dans la France moderne (XV^e-XVII^e siècle)*, Paris, Flammarion², 1991; R.W. Scribner, *Volks Glaube und Volksfrömmigkeit. Begriffe und Historiographie*, in *Volksfrömmigkeit in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. H. Molitor și H. Smolinsky, Münster, 1994, p. 121-138; Wolfgang Brückner, *Die Neuorganisation von Volksfrömmigkeit des Kirchenvolkes im nachtridentinischen Konfessionstaat*, in *Das Konzil von Trient und die Moderne*, ed. By Paolo Prodi and Wolfgang Reinhard, Berlin, 2001, p. 147-168, p. 147; in Roumania, see Alexandru Duțu, *Carte și oralitate în cultura română, în Valori bibliofile din patrimoniul cultural național*, II, București, 1983, p. 233-238; *Culture commune et culture populaire: l'exemple du Sud-Est européen*, Rapport au Congrès des historiens de Stuttgart, Rapports, II, Stuttgart, 1992, p. 500-502.

¹⁸ Band I-II, Einsiedeln-Waldshut-Köln-New York, 1919.

¹⁹ Razmund Netzhammer, *Nach den grossen rumänischen Klöstern. Reiseeindrücke* in „Alte und Neue Welt”, XXXVII, 1902-1903, nr. 9, p. 264-270; Nikolaus Netzhammer, *In verbo tuo*, p. 65-70.

fieldwork that Raymund Netzhammer got most of its primary data. But it is impossible to study everything and it is professionally uninteresting to travel somewhere just in order to find out “how they live out there”. Netzhammer was convinced that the researcher must have some ideas about the issues at hand before embarking in the exploration of his research field. That is why he read a lot about Romanian history (Nicoale Iorga, Alexandru D. Xenopol, Vasile Pârvan, Grigore Tocilescu, Constantin Giurescu), including old books such as the *Codex Bandini* (1646) published in 1895 by V.A. Urechia²⁰, *Istorie delle moderne rivoluzioni* (1710) of Anton Maria del Chiaro²¹, or the travel reminiscences of general Kisseleff etc. Preliminary historical research, choosing literature according to assumed relevance was one of the key issues of his travels. A good orientation was the second: Netzhammer never started a travel without topographic maps from the Head Quarter of the Romanian Army.

The most important single research method in Netzhammer’s fieldwork was the “participant observation”, very close to what American anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski will later theorize when strongly recommending that the anthropologist should share in the life of the people he is studying. The term conceals a variety of precise strategies of data collection, ranging from structured interviews to lengthy periods of hanging around on the corner. The main goal of the participant observation consists in extracting information from everyday contexts. Rather than pulling people into artificial or experimental situations, Raymund Netzhammer observed them and speaks to them in their ordinary situations. He visited his informants at home, he took part in religious ceremonies and popular festivities.

Another important tool in the Bishop Netzhammer’s fieldwork consists in aiming to understand the world of natives as far as possible in the way they themselves understand it. That explained the positive look he kept during his travels. This methodological requirement is non-negotiable, because ethnocentrism²² may be construed as a general source of distortion. It is difficult to avoid entirely and it consists of the tendency to see other peoples from the perspective of one’s own cultural categories.

²⁰ *Codex Bandinus. Memoriu asupra scrierei lui Bandinus de la 1646* de V.A. Urechia, București, 1895.

²¹ Anton Maria Del Chiaro, *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni della Valachia, Venezia*, 1718, ed. de Nicolae Iorga, București, 1914

²² See Marc Augé, *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains*, Paris, 1994, p. 16–23; Carol Delaney, *Investigating Culture: an Experiential Introduction to the Anthropology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004.