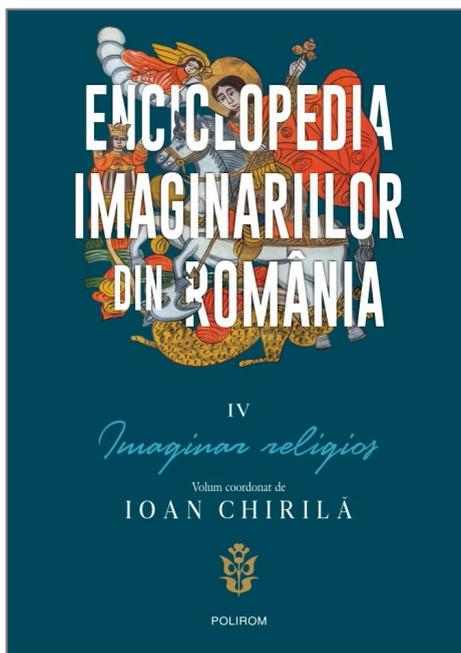


BOOKS

Ioan Chirilă (coord.), *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România. Volumul IV: Imaginar religios/The Encyclopaedia of the Imaginary from Romanian Space. Volume IV: Religious Imaginary.* Iași: Polirom, 2020, 383 p.

Man, as a being created for and out of communion, cannot define himself outside his relationship with God The Creator, with otherness and with the whole universe. However heavy the layer of dust that lies between the human person and these three aspects of the alter ego, and however fierce the struggle against this origin, the whole of man's being betrays, consciously or unconsciously, his origin beyond matter. At the same time, man is not only defined by reason, and this is not the only trait that distinguishes him from other creatures, but, beyond relating to the world through sensations and feelings, the human being has been given the capacity to create symbols for realities that transcend the tangible. Interestingly, these representations become specific to a smaller or larger collectivity



or even to a certain period of time, forming a true collective imaginary.

Trying to break through the first-hand reality and reach the intangible of the phantasm, more than a hundred specialists from Babeş-Bolyai University and the Cluj branch of the Romanian Academy have come together to create, for the first time in the Romanian cultural space, an Encyclopaedia of Imaginaries in Romania (2020). Bringing together five volumes, under the general coordination of Professor Corin Braga, one of the founders of the Phantasma Imaginary Research Centre (2002), the series of volumes proposes an incursion into the literary, linguistic, historical, religious and artistic worlds alike.

Entering through the gate that the Religious Imaginary opens in its pages,

we distance ourselves from the phantasms behind language, literature, history or art, to discover the dynamics of the Romanian religious imaginary, as it is perceived at home and abroad. Thus, the fourth volume of the series brings together twenty studies of the most diverse themes, but which have at their centre the same pillar: the sacred.

The deepest depths of the sacred in Romania conceal an essential chapter in our evolution. The presentiment of an all-powerful and all-knowing Demiurge and the need to "contract" Him (p. 43) have accompanied man throughout his existence here. Whether it is a personified version of the cult of the sun or of other deities, as in the Bronze Age (see Florin Gogâltan), or whether we raise the cult of Zamolxis in its various forms of manifestation on the pedestal of archaeology (see Daniela-Luminița Ivanovici), the step-by-step approach to Christianity occurred naturally on the territory of ancient Dacia, in the so-called Paleochristian stage. For example, in the study of Pr. Cosmin Cosmuta, we can find, since the first centuries, a series of evidence confirming the spread of Christianity on the territory of ancient Dacia, starting from the first centuries: "The first contacts that the inhabitants of the current territory of Romania had with Christian teaching can be identified in Scythia Minor (Dobrogea) since the apostolic era [...]. Christianity had already become an irreversible process, which would take a long time" (p. 79).

Once adopted by our ancestors, Christianity became a coagulating factor of Christians and the community living in the same geographical area: 'A religious symbol that is assumed by a group of people has a much stronger impact in terms of achieving unity/communion among those

people than a symbol that has no religious connotation' (Resane 2019, 4895). Pr. Stelian Pașca-Tușa (p. 80-95) comes to complete this hypothesis, by presenting in detail various Christian symbols (the fish, the dove, the peacock, the rooster, the dolphin, the pelican, the pilgrim's plosque with the image of St. Mina). The presentation of the symbols is supplemented by scriptural symbols (the Tree of Life, the prophet Jonah, the cross, the cryptographic monogram of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ) and Gnostic religious symbols (abraxas, gryllos-type fantasy animals).

Reading and rereading places of worship as a book of Christian symbolism and understanding it as such (see Sorin Marțian, Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan), icons on glass, stained-glass windows, symbols and texts accompanying liturgical life can only be pages and chapters of this book. Closely linked to religious manifestations, all these symbols have written the specificity of Christianity on the territory of our country (cf. Elena Dana Prioteasa, Marcel-Gheorghe Muntean, Elena Onețiu, Ioana Alexandra Orlich, Teodora-Ilinca Mureșanu, Dávid Diósi, Olga Lukács). Without these visual manifestations, the religious content would have lost its form of expression: "Religious behaviour cannot be fully understood without an in-depth study of the universe of visual artistic expressions of each era. The place of worship, with all that it entails in architectural, symbolic, historical and cultural terms, is a true mirror in which one can see the evolution of religious beliefs and sensibilities over time" (p. 110).

It is worth mentioning the distinction that Ioan Popa-Bota wishes to emphasise in the pages of his study, namely the existence of three related but irreplaceable concepts: imaginary, imaginal and imagination (pp. 145-159):

The mutual influence between religion and society in different times and places is undeniable, the chronology of the one often being dictated by the successes or failures of the other (see Sarolta Püsök, László Holló, Ioan Vik, József Marton). A diachronic map of the evolution of the religious factor in present-day Romania cannot, of course, be made without social or political information.

Not departing from the already outlined contours of the symbolism of religion, but bringing together all of the above, Cristian Barta concludes the series of studies with a wide-ranging plea on eschatology and the various forms in which it has been represented in the Christian imagination.

The desire of all these specialists to cast the net deeper is seen in the skill with which the studies are anchored both in diachrony and synchrony, making a virtual tour through the entire Romanian area, collecting images of the religious from the four confessional directions at the level of studies at the University of Babeş-Bolyai: Orthodox, Greek-Catholic and two others, on the Hungarian line, Roman-Catholic and Reformed Theology, in a true "symphony of identities" (p. 15).

Far from falling prey to the imagination, a trap that Pr. Ioan Chirilă makes us aware of it right from the first paragraphs of the introductory study (p. 16), the encyclopaedia of the religious imagination transgresses that "quicksand" of fantasy: "Imagination represents a danger to the spiritual life, being often consi-

dered one of the means by which temptation creeps into the mind. [...] The imaginary transcends the realm of illusion, of himeres, of ontological emptiness" (p. 16). One of the criteria that outweighs the imaginary over the imagination is, first of all, the reality of the representations, as stated in the introductory word: "Although the elements designated by the imaginary have an external presence, they can be said to have a psychological reality, a reality supported by images and representations" (p. 16).

Through the boldness with which the coordinator of the volume, Fr. Ioan Chirilă, has guided the whole work, the present anthology was based on the coagulation of authors of different training, with specific areas of interest. It is precisely this plurality of perspectives that made it possible to polish as many facets of the symbolism of the religious imaginary as possible, whose common denominator was the so-called "homo religiosus", under the ages.

Regardless of the face through which man has made God visible to himself, religiosity has remained one of the most striking features of man since ancient times, a fact which has been amply described from various angles in the pages of the fourth volume of the encyclopaedic series: *The Religious Imaginary*.

To whom are these almost 400 pages addressed? To all those who, driven by an impulse to search for their own self or their own origins, want to delve into this "imaginary basin" of religion.

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