

Vrienden In Flanders Fields Museum

Remembrance

Soldatenfriedhof Langemark

16/11/2017



Adolf REINACH

° Mainz 23/12/1883
† Klerken 16/11/1917

Adolf Bernhard Philipp Reinach (° 23/12/1883, Mainz) kwam uit een prominente Joodse familie. Hij was het tweede kind van drie: zijn zus Pauline werd in 1879 geboren, zijn broer Heinrich in 1888. Adolf raakte reeds op jonge leeftijd begeesterd door Plato. Zijn keuze voor filosofie lag dan ook voor de hand, al volgde hij aan de Universiteit van München een waaier aan vakken, gaande van psychologie tot kunstgeschiedenis en recht. Na München vertrekt Reinach naar Göttingen om verder te studeren bij Edmund Husserl, die algemeen beschouwd wordt als de grondlegger van de fenomenologie, de filosofische stroming die vertrekt van hoe de dingen en de wereld aan de mens verschijnen. Reinach bleek een natuur-talent te zijn en werd in 1909 reeds aangesteld als docent. Hij was een van de toonzetters van de nieuwe generatie fenomenologen, die een veelbelovende carrière wachtte. Maar toen brak de oorlog uit.

Net zoals veel andere Duitse intellectuelen en studenten, nam Reinach enthousiast dienst. Samen met zijn broer Heinrich diende hij bij het 21. Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment, aan het front in Frankrijk. Tijdens zijn frontdienst onderhield hij een bloeiende briefwisseling met verschillende vrienden. Hij verwonderde zich over hoe snel een mens zich gaat aanpassen aan nieuwe, extreme omstandigheden. Zo schreef hij eind 1914 al aan zijn vrienden-fenomenologen, Theodor en Hedwig Conrad: *'Gisteren knutselde ik eigenhandig een latrine in elkaar; je moest me bezig zien, zou je de vredesvolle docent uit Göttingen herkennen in die vuile, afgeleefde gast met zijn ruige zwarte baard?'* Of, in diezelfde periode: *'De artilleriebeschieting kwam vervaarlijk dichtbij, we kregen letterlijk een douche van aarde over ons, en de shrapnel floot ons om de oren—maar het is verbazend hoe snel je aan die dingen gewend raakt.'*

Ook met zijn mentor Edmund Husserl hield hij contact, zoals op 1 december 1915, kort na het najaarsoffensief in de Champagne: *'Zoals een zware, donkere nacht, ligt de tijd van dat Grote Offensief nu achter mij. Ik krimp al in elkaar, als ik de beelden van tijdens die strijd nog maar in mijn herinnering toelaat. En tegelijk ben ik ontzettend blij en oneindig dankbaar dat ik deze ervaring mag meemaken en mag overleven.'* In april 1916 werd Reinach overgeplaatst naar het 12. Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment, met wie hij aan de Slag bij de Somme zou deelnemen. Het geweld van die slag liet een zeer sterke indruk na op Reinach. Eind juli 1916 schreef hij in zijn schuilhol het tekstfragment 'Over de fenomenologie van het voorvoelen' (de tekst is opgenomen in *De Geschreven Oorlog*, Manteau, 2016). De oorlog zette hem echter niet alleen aan het denken over leven en dood, maar ook over het geloof. Geïnspireerd door zijn oorlogservaringen, bekeerde hij zich samen met zijn vrouw Anna Stettenheimer van het jodendom tot de protestantse kerk.

Zijn laatste filosofische teksten zouden ook over religie handelen. Dat was een jaar later, toen hij al aan het front in Vlaanderen zat. Eind oktober 1916 was hij nogmaals overgeplaatst, ditmaal naar de 9^{de} batterij van het 185. Feldartillerie-Regiment, *'een nieuw samengestelde eenheid uit componenten die de slag bij Verdun en de slag bij de Somme overleefd hebben'*. Reinach was de commandant van de batterij. Van die eenheid zijn helaas weinig sporen terug te vinden. Enkel via de postkaartjes van Reinach en de slachtoffers die de eenheid achterliet, weten we dat hij tussen de winter van 1916-1917 en april 1917, en vervolgens op het einde van de Derde Slag bij Ieper aan het front in Vlaanderen moet gezeten hebben.

Zijn laatste schrijven dateerde van 12 november 1917: een postkaart met daarop een groepje mannen, met als enige notitie van Reinach: *'Ik ben de man met de buik, beste groeten, uw Reinach'*. Zijn eenheid zat op dat moment bij Klerken, slechts een paar kilometer van het Houthulstbos. Op 16 november sloeg een fatale granaat in en maakte een einde aan het leven van Adolf Reinach. Hij was 33 jaar.

De naam van Reinach staat gebeiteld in een van de stenen bij het Kameraden-grab op Soldatenfriedhof Langemark; dus is hij een van de 17.342 niet-geïdentificeerden waarvan men op basis van archiefonderzoek quasi zeker is dat ze in dit massagraf bijgezet werden. Maar hoe zeker is dat? Eind december 1917 bestond immers al een graf voor Reinach op het Stadtfriedhof in Göttingen, een graf gemaakt door de bekende beeldhouwer Adolf von Hildebrand. Was het lichaam van Reinach op vraag van zijn echtgenote gerepatrieerd? Met de hulp van het netwerk van Edmund Husserl?

Reinach's carrière als filosoof bleek te kort te zijn om een eigen fenomenologisch programma uit te werken, laat staan een eigen omvattend, filosofisch corpus. En toch hadden velen in hem een grootse carrière gezien, die mogelijk zelfs het niveau van Husserl gehaald zou kunnen hebben. Hij had een handvol artikels en losse geschriften gepubliceerd, die gekenmerkt werden door helderheid, idealisme en perfectionisme. Reinach had zijn vrouw meermaals te kennen gegeven zijn geschriften te verbranden als hij de oorlog niet zou overleven. De gedachte iets 'onvoltooid' achter te laten scheen hem ondraaglijk toe. Gelukkig heeft zijn vrouw deze 'opdracht' genegeerd. Het waren zijn collega's, vrienden en studenten (zoals o.a. Wilhelm Schapp, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Alexander Koyré, Edith Stein, Hedwig Conrat-Martius, etc.) die achteraf zijn geschriften verzamelden en uitgaven. Zij verwezen in de eerste plaats naar Reinach als 'hun meester', in plaats van naar Husserl. Het is via hen dat de ideeën van Reinach in fenomenologische kringen zijn blijven verder leven, tot vandaag.

Adolf Bernhard Philipp Reinach was born in Mainz, Germany, on 23 December 1883, to a prominent Jewish family. He was one of three children. His brother, Heinrich, born in 1888, studied and practiced law. Adolf and Heinrich served together during WWI. His sister, Pauline, was born in 1879. She entered the Benedictine convent in Belgium at Wépion in 1924 (later it moved to Ermeton-sur-Biert) and became known as Sister Augustina.

After Germany's declaration of war on France in the summer of 1914, Reinach, like many German intellectuals, immediately volunteered for the army with great enthusiasm, attempting to exercise pressure to be admitted as quickly as possible. He was recruited in his hometown of Mainz in mid-August, posted in Gonsenheim. After two weeks of training he was assigned to the reserve battery of the Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment 21 under the command of his younger brother, Heinrich, and transferred to France.

During his time at the front, Reinach wrote several postcards to his best friends, Theodor and Hedwig Conrad. They are often very telling of his frame of mind as well as the experience of being a soldier.

Field Postcard; no postmark

Sender: Gunner Reinach 18. Reserve Army Corps., 21st Reserve Division, Reserve Field artillery, Regiment 21 1. Battery

Dear Friends,

To date it's been 10 days on the firing line and shooting bravely at the French around us. We live in caves, we are deeply entrenched in the earth and lying there on the ground — for three weeks I have not changed my clothes and only once have I been able to take my boots off at night. Today is Sunday and to celebrate the day I washed myself — of course only the face and hands. Despite all of this, I am very well, only the nagging hunger is bad. Coffee, some soup and a little bread — that's all we get in a day — and sometimes we run out. Today, for example, we have had nothing. If only the packages from home would reach us first, then things would be different. We do a lot of groundwork (Erd-Arbeiten). Yesterday I single-handedly built a latrine; I wished you could have seen me, but would you have recognized this filthy fellow with the shaggy black beard as the peaceful Göttingen private lecturer?

Kindest regards,

Your Reinach

Field Postcard; postmarked 24.11. (1914)

Dear Friends,

How much joy you have given me with your dear letter and your dear words! The cigars arrived impeccably and taste well beyond all conception. We're all still splendid. Admittedly, yesterday we were sitting through heavy enemy fire. Artillery quite alarmingly close, we were literally showered with earth and flying shrapnel and blowing whistles around us — but you get accustomed to some things incredibly quick. The region we are in right now is wonderful, I can now observe through the telescope and that gives me great pleasure. It is already well cold, but we have a small stove in our hole, and even though he jokes and smokes, it nevertheless warms up.

With warmest regards,

Yours truly,

Reinach

In a field postcard marked 17. 10. 1915, two things are of importance: first, Reinach has a new title, the sender information reads 'Vice-Wachtmeister Reinach 18 Res 21 Res Res F Art 21 Batt.' and second, he ends the correspondence by saying he has received the Iron Cross. Later, in a letter dated 5. 11. 1915, he offers a brief retelling of the story:

Dear friends!

I'm doing terribly good. I'm so blithely, as if there were no French people and no heavy French artillery. We are still in our former military position, that means with the battery. Before, my brother and I were with 2 heavy field guns on Hill 191. We lost both the hill and the artillery. But we left the guns only when our infantry was already behind us and we were in danger of being shot at by our own artillery. When we went back to the battery we came across another German battery that was already abandoned by the gunners and we mounted the field guns and shot at the advancing Frenchmen until night fell. There were often terrible hours, in which one settled one's accounts with life. But this was nevertheless the proudest time in my life. And that's the reason why my Iron Cross, which I received exactly for days like these, means so much to me...

Farewell and from time to time think of

Your Reinach

With the 21st, Reinach takes part in the 'Big Offensive', also known as the Second Battle of Champagne (22 September - 6 November 1915). In a letter Reinach wrote to his mentor, colleague and friend, Edmund Husserl, dated 1. 12. 1915, he says: "For a long time I wanted to write you, and how much has happened since I last wrote you! Like a heavy, dark night, the time of the Great Offensive lies behind me. I almost shy away from letting the pictures of that time appear only in the memory. And yet I am filled with happiness and infinite gratitude that I could experience and survive this time."

Reinach was transferred to Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment 12 on 16th April 1916. In the middle of May 1916, this regiment was withdrawn from the Verdun front after suffering heavy losses (71% of its infantry), and on 2 July it took part in the battle of the Somme (sector of Montauban-Hardecourt). It was around the beginning of August that Reinach would first arrive in Flanders, the 12th occupied a sector north of Lys, and once again suffered heavy losses. At the end of September, this regiment returned to the Somme front. By October 1916, Reinach was transferred yet again, this time to the 185th Field Artillery Regiment and with a promotion: platoon commander. In a letter to Hedwig Conrad, he writes:

Letter dated 24. 10. 1916

Dear Mrs. Conrad,

You are quite right; I am not longer in the platoon. Since February 1916 I wanted to leave. Finally, I succeeded. On the first of October, I left with that part of the unit of the regiment (consisting of two field guns) and came to a new-formation. How much nicer it is to be the unit leader in an active regiment, instead of the section leader in a platoon of the Reserve Regiment. I belong now to the 9th battery of the 185th field artillery regiment. Because all the components of the new-formation come from the Battle of the Somme, partly from the Battle of Verdun, and so at the moment we have calm, a large, nice, quiet town on a wooded hill with a wonderful view at our feet. (s....s) I have very pleasant comrades, tolerable superiors and capable subordinates, and feel very comfortable. With the French we have tacit but strictly followed agreements.

To shoot in the mornings is considered impolite. Shooting time for respectable people is from 3 - 6. During nighttime you have to be quiet. Calibers larger than 9 or at most 12cm are frowned upon - it is delightful! Also the trenches

are so peaceful that you believe that you have been relocated to the base...
Will the war end sometime?
Warmest regards to you and your husband from your
Adolf Reinach

With the 185th he returned to the Flanders region. During Christmas 1916, Reinach went on furlough, returning to Göttingen, and was baptized as Protestant along with his wife, Anna. He returned to the Belgian front in January 1917. While the records of the 185th are scarce, it is known that this regiment took part in the Third Battle of Ypres, which came to an end at Passchendaele, 10 November 1917. The last correspondence written to his friends was a photo postcard of him in uniform, sent two days after Passchendaele ended. It contained one line, a slightly humorous reference to how military service had changed his once very slender body:

Field Postcard
Dated 12. 11. 1917
To Mr and Mrs Dr Conrad, Bergzabern (Pfalz) Villa Johanna
From: Vice Sergeant R. FAR 185th 9th. Battery

I am the man with the belly.
Warmest regards,
Your Reinach

Reinach was killed just a few days after this letter was sent, on 16 November 1917, at the age of 33. Most accounts say he fell near Diksmuide, however it seems more likely that it was closer to Klerken, since the field artillery was positioned about a mile behind the Houthulst Forest.

His name appears on the 'Nachtrag' stone at Langemarck German Military Cemetery, and his body is said to lie in the Comrades Grave. There is also a grave-stone for him in the Göttingen City Cemetery, carved by the famous sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand. This was where his friends and family gathered on 31 December 1917 for a quiet, small service to honor his life and passing. Reinach never developed a comprehensive philosophical system or a detailed programmatic statement of his own phenomenology. During his brief academic life, he published a handful of articles. This pace was set by his perfectionism more than anything else, that same perfectionism was the reason why he told

his wife to burn his unfinished work should he die at war. However, this isn't to say his work failed to contain important ideas or any impact. What we can gather when looking through the rough notes and lectures was that his work in phenomenology, always along formal and material ontological lines, would have included social philosophy, jurisprudence, religious experience, and a theory of objective value. Each of these holds a vast amount of possibility for novel research and brilliant insights that rest on phenomenological foundations. Husserl said in his obituary that Reinach's work on law, published in one article, that no one working in that field would be able to overlook it: "For me, it is beyond doubt that it will give the name of its author a lasting place in the history of legal philosophy." While this level of notoriety didn't happen after his death, Reinach's work in jurisprudence is gaining recognition and much deserved attention today by a handful of devoted scholars.

Reinach's influence on the students he taught was immense and lasting. Independently of each other, the phenomenology students at Göttingen (e.g., Wilhelm Schapp, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Alexander Koyré, Edith Stein, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, and Roman Ingarden) referred to Reinach, not Husserl, as their true teacher. Conrad-Martius even described Reinach as the phenomenologist *par excellence*. Most of these students remained firmly phenomenological realists, furthering Reinach's ideas long after his death and even after Husserl's focus shifted to idealism. They all recognized that Reinach was in the process of developing a phenomenological realism that was simpler and clearer in form, more concrete and suggestive in content than that of the "Master". It was Reinach's death in 1917, rather than Husserl's departure for the University of Freiburg that ended the Göttingen Circle. The clearest and greatest sign of his philosophical legacy can be seen through his students.

Kimberly Baltzer-Jaray en Pieter Trogh

