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THE MODERN HISTORY OF ROMANIA IN FIVE POSTAGE STAMPS (OR KEY TURNING POINTS IN MODERN ROMANIAN HISTORY)

I. Introduction

A recent phenomenon (indeed, something of a fad) has been the publishing of books giving snapshot presentations of various subjects using objects. Among examples of this curiously engaging didactic technique are Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in 12 Maps*;¹ Richard Kurin, *The Smithsonian's History of America in 101 Objects*;² two books by Chris West, *A History of Britain in Thirty-Six Postage Stamps*³ and *A History of America in Thirty-Six Postage Stamps*;⁴ two – count them, two – collections on the Great War: John Hughes-Wilson, *The First World War in 100 Objects*⁵ and Peter Doyle, *World War I in 100 Objects*;⁶ and Josh Leventhal, *A History of Baseball in 100 Objects*.⁷ The authors are in effect using objects as a kind of “time-travel machine” that not only give us a tangible link to the past,⁸ but enhance dry facts by connecting them with a story, and perhaps giving us a different perspective on historical events that have become too familiar.

The premise of a panel at the 2018 Society for Romanian Studies International Congress in București, where parts of this paper were originally presented, was that it would concentrate our thoughts by asking three panelists⁹ to come up with a list of five or so key turning points in three broad areas of the Romanian past: Early Modern Romania to 1821; Modern Romania, 1821–1989; and Contemporary Romania since 1989. As expected this proved to be very entertaining as the audience challenged the panelists' choices and arguments on everything from how one might define such events to the choices made by the individual panelists to whether there even were such things. It was great fun. At the same time, it called on those present to think and re-think the processes of Romanian history. And – who knows? – this might also prove to be an

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¹ London, Penguin Books, 2012.

² New York, Penguin, 2013.

³ New York, Picador, 2013.

⁴ New York, Picador, 2014.

⁵ New York, Firefly Books, 2014.

⁶ New York, Plume, 2014.

⁷ New York, Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2015.

⁸ Chris West, *A History of America in Thirty-Six Postage Stamps*, p. ix.

⁹ My fellow panelists were Andrei Pippidi (for early modern history), Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (for post-1989 era), and Dennis Deletant (who served as chair and commentator).

interesting and amusing parlor game to play when hanging around with history professors, students, and other idlers.

What follows is my take on key turning points in modern Romanian history between 1821 and 1989. My paper starts with some generic thoughts about turning points as such. This is followed by an explanation of how I developed my original list and how the final five emerged. The paper concludes with a brief – possibly anti-climatic – discussion of these choices.

II. What is a Turning Point? Toward an Informal Definition

We begin with a few words about the idea of a turning point, which, of course, is obviously a rather subjective phrase.¹⁰ At one extreme, there is the idea of a turning point as a “crisis,” which comes from a Greek word for “turning point” or sudden shift. These would be traumatic and stressful events, or unstable situations leading to drastic change.¹¹ This approach also would give precedence to events rather than processes, but as will be seen below, there is no reason why a turning point can’t be a process.

From another perspective, a turning point could be a point at which change occurs to a greater or lesser degree, ranging from a simple change in ruler to noteworthy – but perhaps even unnoticed at the time – social or economic changes. The word “metamorphosis” might apply here, suggesting a kind of natural process, just as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. At the same time, change as such is an inevitable part of history. It is obvious that things change. There has been no end of debate among historians about the degree to which societies are influenced by change and which are the product of continuity.¹²

Then there are – perhaps paradoxically – turning points at which things didn’t turn. As the *bon mot* of G. M. Trevelyan had it, “1848 was the turning point at which modern history failed to turn.”¹³ In Trevelyan’s view, things didn’t seem much different after 1848 than from before, but seeds had been planted that would bear fruit much later and in surprising forms.¹⁴

Turning points are interesting because they frequently raise the problem of developing a “new normal,” issues of “Now what?” and “*Quo vadis?*” They also raise questions about opportunities seized, fumbled, or lost, which seem inherently interesting.

Lastly, my choices below might blur at least some things that might seem like obvious turning points. For example, what happened in 1989 is an obvious turning point, but because it is also the demarcation line between modern and contemporary history it seemed beyond the purview of the modern period, and, thus, didn’t make the cut. In addition, some turning points (such as 1859) turn out to be important not only in themselves, but also because they precipitated a chain of other events which followed from this starting point. Put otherwise, 1859 began a sequence that subsequently led to 1866, which in turn led to 1878, which culminated in 1881. Thus, the arrival of Carol I in Romania was significant, but is treated here as part of a sequence set off in 1859.

¹⁰ No attempt was made to impose on the panelists a definition of “turning point,” and each was free to set forth his or her own parameters. This in itself produced some entertaining results.

¹¹ Cp. Ben Simmer, *Plots, Politics, and 'Crisis Actions'*, in “Wall Street Journal”, March 3–4, 2018, p. C 4.

¹² It should be noted that this approach leaves out other factors, such as influences, which might be significant. Turning points are just one dimension of history.

¹³ Quoted in Melvin Kranzberg (ed.), *1848. A Turning Point?*, Boston, D. C. Heath, 1959, p. ix.

¹⁴ For further discussion, see *ibidem*, p. ix f.

This paper approached its subject in two ways. First, I scanned what various classic historians – including Xenopol,¹⁵ Iorga,¹⁶ Lupaș,¹⁷ Giurescu,¹⁸ and Brătianu¹⁹ – had to say in their surveys of Romanian history (typically text books).²⁰ What did they think were important or critical moments in the Romanian past? It should be no surprise that their turning points generally were focussed on rulers (though not exclusively, since most include chapters or sections on cultural and other not strictly political events). There was also some tension between external events, say the World War, and internal developments as such.

After compiling a list of a dozen or so turning points, I narrowed it down to five by combining some events into larger trends and by trying to choose those that stood out in comparison with the rest. This was followed by an impressionistic assessment of what seemed to emerge as five principal turning points in 19th and 20th century Romanian history.²¹

With these deliberately vague preliminary remarks, let's turn to five turning points that emerged in my view as key for the modern period in Romania. These were as follows:

- 1) The Process of Westernization/Modernization: 18th–19th Centuries;
- 2) The Double Election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza... and after: 1859–1881;
- 3) The Creation of Greater Romania: 1918–1929;
- 4) The Return of King Carol II: 1930–1940;
- 5) The Process of Sovietization and Russification: 1944–1953.

III. Turning Points

III.1. The Process of Westernization/Modernization: 18th–19th Centuries



Gheorghe Șincai
The Școala Ardeleană
1943
Scott No. B 212

¹⁵ A. D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, ediția populară, Iași, Editura Librăriei Școalelor Frații Șaraga, 1896, 12 volumes.

¹⁶ N. Iorga, *Istoria poporului românesc*, București, Editura Casei Școalelor, 1922–1928, 4 volumes, translated from German.

¹⁷ I. Lupaș, *Istoria unirii românilor*, București, Fundația Culturală Regală Principele Carol, 1937.

¹⁸ Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până la moartea Regelui Ferdinand I*, București, Editura Cugetarea – Georgescu Delafras, 1943.

¹⁹ Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Origines et formation de l'unité roumaine*, București, Editura Institutului de Istorie Universală, 1943.

²⁰ For my own surveys of the period, see Paul E. Michelson, *The Modern Age*, in Kurt W. Treptow (ed.), *A History of Romania*, third edition, Iași, The Center for Romanian Studies, 1997, p. 227–329, 351–389; and Paul E. Michelson, *Romania (History)*, in Richard Frucht (ed.), *Encyclopedia of East Europe: From the Congress of Vienna to the Fall of Communism*, New York, Garland Publishing, 2000, p. 667–690.

²¹ These impressions, not surprisingly, often correlate with issues that have been the focus of my research. This research will be referenced in the notes below to more or less back up my assertions and to demonstrate that they are not quite as eccentric as might be suspected.

This stamp commemorating the 18th–19th century historian and polymath Gheorghe Șincai (1754–1816), which appeared in 1943 as part of a series celebrating Transylvanian cultural figures, symbolizes the key turn in Romanian history toward the West and Modernity. Șincai's rather dour visage reflects his difficult life, and the motto (“to death, faithful to the history of the nation”) reflects the militant tone of the Transylvanian Enlightenment and the consequent Romanian national awakening that began the process of Westernization and Modernization in the Romanian lands. (He was probably also the best historian of the Școala Ardeleană.) Thus, we begin by shamelessly abandoning the prescribed chronological limits of our period.

It is, however, not our fault that the first turn in modern Romanian history actually began prior to 1821, which, thanks to the political history approach, is usually seen as the beginning of the modern era in Romania. This is only so if we disregard Transylvania, and if we only consider politics.

This is not the occasion to debate the periodization of the Romanian past or, indeed, periodization itself (though obviously it is being called into question here). Periodization is an organizational convenience and pedagogical device. Lord Acton emphasized that one of the “shining precepts” of the historian was to “study problems in preference to periods,”²² and C. S. Lewis remarked, “Would that we could dispense with them [periods] altogether!”²³ Lewis goes on to cite G. M. Trevelyan:

Unlike dates, periods are not facts. They are retrospective conceptions that we form about past events, useful to focus discussion, but very often leading historical thought astray [...]. But unhappily we cannot as historians dispense with periods [...]. We cannot hold together huge masses of particulars without putting them into some kind of structure [...]. Thus we are driven back upon periods. All divisions will falsify our material to some extent; the best one can hope is to choose those which falsify it least.²⁴

Lewis's inaugural lecture was an endeavor to identify the “Great Divide,” the watershed between modern and whatever it was that came before it. His key insight was that such dividing lines or frontiers will vary depending on whether one is discussing politics, philosophy, the history of science, theology, economic development, or the history of history. Thus, 1821 is a traditional divide for Romanian *political* development, the era in which the Romanian lands of Moldova and Muntenia began their transition from Ottoman domination to eventual independence.

On the other hand, the penetration of the Enlightenment into Transylvania marks a somewhat earlier philosophical and historical divide.²⁵ This movement was created by

²² Lord Acton, *The Study of History*, in his 1895 Cambridge inaugural, reprinted in Lord Acton, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, Vol. II, *Essays in the Study and Writing of History*, edited by J. Rufus Fears, Indianapolis IN, LibertyClassics, 1985, p. 545.

²³ C. S. Lewis, *De Descriptione Temporum*, Lewis's 1954 Cambridge inaugural, reprinted in C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 2.

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *De Descriptione Temporum*, 1969, p. 2.

²⁵ See, inter alia, D. Popovici, *La Littérature roumaine à l'Époque des Lumières*, Sibiu, Centrul de Studii și Cercetări privitoare la Transilvania, 1945; Alexandru Dușu, *European Intellectual Movements and Modernization of Romanian Culture*, București, Editura Academiei, 1981; Pompiliu Teodor, *Interferențe iluministe europene*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1980; Pompiliu Teodor, *Sub semnul luminilor: Samuil Micu*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000; and Paul E. Michelson, *Pompiliu Teodor și iluminismul românesc: o apreciere istoriografică americană*, in Nicolae Bocșan, Nicolae Edroiu, and Aurel Raduțiu (eds.), *Cultură și societate în epoca modernă*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1990, p. 284–291.

Uniate Bishop Ioan Inocenție Micu (1692–1768), and subsequently driven by Samuil Micu (1745–1806), Gheorghe Șincai (1754–1816), Petru Maior (1756–1821), and Ion Budai-Deleanu (1760–1820).²⁶ Thereafter, Enlightenment ideas and ideals crossed from Transylvania into Muntenia (Gh. Lăzar at Sfântul Sava 1816) and from Vienna and Poland into Moldova (Gh. Asachi around 1812).

All of this was a key part of what Robert Anchor has labelled “the Triple Revolution.”²⁷ In the 18th and 19th centuries, Western development experienced a series of dramatic changes that began with the Industrial Revolution in England in the 1760s, was followed by the political upheaval of the French Revolution of the 1790s championing “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité”; and culminating with an intellectual and cultural revolution that took wing in the German lands in the early 19th century.²⁸

This sequence also varied chronologically. In the Romanian lands, the West European sequence was reversed, with the cultural revolution occurring first, followed by political change, and, finally, showing movement in the economic sphere.²⁹ The change was dramatic. As Alecu Russo wrote in *Studie Moldovană* in 1851–1852: “In the sixteen years from 1835 to 1851, Moldova has lived more than it did in the five hundred years since the descent of Dragoș in 1359 [...]”³⁰

This “rationalization process” moved Romanian culture relatively late into the European mainstream.³¹ As Tudor Vianu observed, Romanian

[...] culture found itself in an interesting process of rational adaptation [...]. Centuries old traditional forces weakened, at a certain moment [...]. It was then that this preoccupation appeared in our literature with questions about who we are, about Romanian culture, and about what its purposes were.³²

The cultural differences between Western and Eastern Europe significantly affected Romanian modernization.³³ This led to furious debates over the next two

²⁶ For an overview, see Keith Hitchins, *The Enlightened*, in Keith Hitchins, *The Idea of Nation. The Romanians of Transylvania, 1691–1849*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1985, p. 94–140; and Keith Hitchins, *Iluminismul românesc în Transilvania*, in idem, *Mit și realitate în istoriografia românească*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1997, p. 33–47. For the writings of the Școala Ardeleană, much of which was unpublished during their lifetimes, see the massive anthology *Școala Ardeleană*, edited with notes, bibliography, and glossary by Florea Fugariu, with an introduction by Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, București, Editura Minerva, 1983, two volumes. The introduction, p. v–xlvi, is worth the price of admission.

²⁷ Robert Anchor, *A Triple Revolution*, in idem, *The Modern Western Experience*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1978, p. 1. See my *The Triple Revolution and the Birth of Modern Times*, in Sorin Mitu, et al. (eds.), *Biserică, societate, identitate. În onorarea Nicolae Bocușan*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007, p. 639–648.

²⁸ See Alexandru Zub, *Reflections on the Impact of the French Revolution. 1789, de Tocqueville, and Romanian Culture*, translated with a preface by Paul E. Michelson, Iași, The Center for Romanian Studies, 2000.

²⁹ Sorin Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român*, București, Editura Univers, 1998, p. 31 f. See Paul E. Michelson, Sorin Alexandrescu, *Romania, Romanian Studies, and 'Paradoxul Român'*, forthcoming.

³⁰ See Paul E. Michelson, *That Was Then, Then is Now: Animadversions on Alecu Russo's 'Studie Moldovană'*, in Donald Dyer (ed.), *Studies in Moldovan*, Boulder, East European Monographs, 1996, p. 118–127.

³¹ On the Western connection, see Paul E. Michelson, *Romanians and the West*, in Kurt Treptow (ed.), *Romania and Western Civilization*, Iași, The Center for Romanian Studies, 1997, p. 11–24.

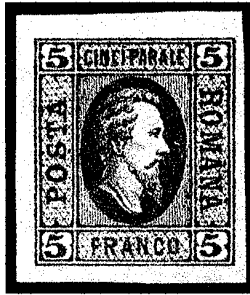
³² Tudor Vianu, *Filosofia culturii*, second edition, București, Editura Publicom, 1945, p. 287.

³³ Though these are not developed here, mention should be made of the important work done on mentalities issues in Romanian historiography. See the work of Alexandru Dușu, such as his *Livres de sagesse dans la culture roumaine; introduction à l'histoire des mentalités sud-est européennes*, București, Editura Academiei, 1971; of Simona Nicoară and Toader Nicoară, such as *Mentalități colective și imaginar social: istoria și noile paradigme ale cunoașterii*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană/Mesagerul, 1996, and Simona Nicoară,

centuries,³⁴ including the “forma fără fond” debate launched by Titu Maiorescu and Junimea,³⁵ E. Lovinescu’s synchronization theory,³⁶ national Communism’s “protochronism,”³⁷ and the current “de ce este România altfel” controversy sparked by Lucian Boia.³⁸

More could be said here about political modernization (after 1821) or economic modernization (which slowly occurred in the 19th century), but this makes the point.

III.2. The Double Election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza... and after: 1859–1881



Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza
21 January 1865
Scott No. 23

This postage stamp of 1865 illustrates the second of our Romanian modern history turning points: the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as Prince of the United Danubian Principalities of Moldova and Muntenia in 1859.³⁹ In addition to

Mitologiile revoluției pașoptiste române. Istorie și imaginar, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1999; and the varied and provocative writings of Daniel Barbu. Also relevant is the rapidly expanding field of studies of the “imaginarul” such as Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania*, Budapest, Central European University, 2001; and Lucian Boia, *Pour une Histoire de l’Imaginaire*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1998, and *Jocul cu trecutul. Istoria între adevăr și ficțiune*, second edition, București, Editura Humanitas, 2002.

³⁴ See Paul E. Michelson, *Romanian Perspectives on Romanian National Development*, in “Balkanistica”, Vol. 7, 1981–1982, p. 92–120; idem, *Myth and Reality in Romanian National Development*, in “International Journal of Rumanian Studies”, Vol. 5, 1987, No. 2, p. 5–33; idem, *Procesul dezvoltării naționale române. Contribuția lui Ștefan Zeletin*, in *ALIAI*, Vol. 24, 1987, No. 1, p. 365–374; idem, *Themes in Modern and Contemporary Romanian Historiography*, in S. J. Kirschbaum (ed.), *East European History*, Columbus, Slavica Publishers, 1988, p. 27–40.

³⁵ Adrian Marino, *Din istoria teoriei ‘formă fără fond’*, in *ALIAI*, Vol. 19 (1968), p. 185–188; and Constantin Schifoneț, *Formele fără fond, un brand românesc*, București, Editura Comunicare.ro, 2007.

³⁶ E. Lovinescu, *Istoria civilizației române moderne*, București, Editura Ancora, 1924–1925, three volumes.

³⁷ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania*, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1991.

³⁸ Lucian Boia, *De ce este România altfel?*, expanded second edition, București, Editura Humanitas, 2013; and Vintilă Mihăilescu (ed.), *De ce este România astfel. Avaturile excepționalismului românesc*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2017. For further discussion, see Paul E. Michelson, *Identitatea națională românească și specificul național. A fi sau a nu fi: mai este această întrebarea?*, in Vasile Boari (ed.), *Cine sunt românii? Perspective asupra identității naționale*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2019, p. 95–101; and, more broadly, the materials in Boari, *Cine sunt românii*, 2019.

³⁹ For details, see Paul E. Michelson, *Conflict and Crisis: Romanian Political Development, 1861–1871*, New York, Garland Press, 1987, for a developmental approach; idem, *Romanian Politics, 1859–1871: From Prince Cuza to Prince Carol*, Iași, The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998, for a more political approach and for an extensive bibliography; Keith Hitchins’s superb *The Romanians 1774–1866*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 273–317, for a general survey; and Gheorghe Cliveti’s massive *România modernă și “apogeul Europei” 1815–1914*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2018, p. 279–348, for the diplomatic aspects and bibliography.

showing Cuza as the first individual to appear on a Romanian stamp, it was also the first stamp to give the country name as "Romania." Frustrated by Russian occupation in the 1830s, disheartened and dis-unified by the fiasco of the revolutionary year 1848, and seemingly a helpless pawn in Great Power diplomatic games, the Romanians seized their fate in their own hands in the 1850s, aided by the ascension of Napoléon III to diplomatic preeminence with the Crimean War.⁴⁰ The Romanians "made themselves" by employing a strategy of *fait accompli* and *coup d'état*, taking the initiative instead of waiting for the beck and call of the Powers, taking advantage of unforeseen loop holes in discussions, treaties, and agreements.⁴¹

Prohibited from unifying by the powers, the Romanian principalities of Muntenia and Moldova simply elected the same man as Prince in January of 1859, an eventuality that the Powers had overlooked. Later, in 1862, after demonstrating that the ineffectiveness of having dual, separate administrations, legislatures, and so forth, the Romanians simply went ahead and merged them. This approach remained a staple of Romanian politicians throughout the modern period.

With Prince Cuza, it may be said that modern Romania began to truly emerge from a multiplicity of entities.⁴² A plethora of reforms (agrarian, legal, educational, military, economic, and so forth) were introduced, though not always well thought out.⁴³ For example, there was Cuza's agrarian reform. This was a remarkably well-intentioned reform for its time and place, but was ill-conceived and hastily executed. This allowed for considerable evasion and fraud to occur in implementation. The fiscal provisions turned out to be harmful to the peasant and the problems created by further fragmentation of already marginally viable small plots seems to have been ignored. The long run impact of this reform on the modernization of agriculture and the well-being of the Romanian peasantry was on the negative side of the ledger.

And the pattern of electoral problems, fraud, and abuses that emerged under Cuza and Carol in this period unfortunately would persist throughout the modern period along with a stunted party system dominated by tribal-like, quasi-kinship, patronage relationships. The outcomes of elections depended on who was governing rather than determining who would govern. And, while in true parliamentary systems, a vote of no confidence usually means the fall of the government, in modern Romania such a vote usually meant the fall of the assembly and new elections to replace obstreperous legislators. Unfortunately, Caragiale seems more and more like a straightforward and sane observer, and less and less like a social satirist.

The election of Cuza is also a significant turning point because it led to the emergence of the Romanian Kingdom via the union of the Romanian Principalities in 1861, the coming of a foreign prince in 1866, the war of independence in 1877, and the proclamation of the Romanian Kingdom in 1881. 1859 was a turning point from which

⁴⁰ See Paul E. Michelson, *Rumanian Unity*, in William E. Echard (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of the French Second Empire, 1852-1870*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 582-584.

⁴¹ Xenopol gives examples of this in his *Domnia lui Cuza-Vodă*, Vol. I, Iași, Tipografia Editore Dacia P. Iliescu & D. Grossu, 1903, p. 331 f.; Gheorghe Cliveti, *România modernă...*, p. 305, uses the phrase "Sub zodia faptului împlinit" as a chapter heading.

⁴² On why Muntenia and Moldova were separate, see P. P. Panaitescu, *De ce au fost Țara Românească și Moldova țări separate?*, in idem, *Interpretări românești. Studii de istorie economică și socială*, București, Editura Universul, 1947, p. 131-148.

⁴³ See Paul E. Michelson, *Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 1859-1866: A Developmental Assessment*, forthcoming.

other important turning points followed. Fortunately, the historical literature on Cuza and Carol I is reasonably rich and growing, and little more needs to be said here.⁴⁴

III.3. The Creation of Greater Romania: 1918



Coronation of King Ferdinand, Alba Iulia
15 October 1922
Scott No. 283

Interestingly, the philatelic iconography for the Union of 1918 prior to 1989 is fairly sparse. We need not dwell on the reasons for this here (which perhaps include the priorities of the Carolist regime of 1930–1940, and the perennial dilemma for subsequent Romanian Communist regimes of how to interpret the events of 1914–1918). This stamp celebrates the Coronation at Alba Iulia of Ferdinand and Marie as the sovereigns of the Greater Romania that emerged from the War.⁴⁵

The vista that opened before Romanians and Greater Romania was unprecedented and, seemingly, unlimited. The noted historian Vasile Pârvan (1882–1927) wrote in 1919: “The war which we carried out with such sacrifice for national union has led, in the end, after so much suffering, to the desired result. The material and spiritual crisis through which we have passed should be an impetus for our activity [...]”⁴⁶. Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), from the next generation, wrote that this was

⁴⁴ For overview of Carol I, see Keith Hitchins, *Rumania*, 1994, p. 11 f., and Paul E. Michelson, *Carol I of Romania, 1866–1914: A Developmental Assessment*, in *SAI*, Vol. 31, 2014, p. 59–78. For the period under consideration, see Lothar Maier, *Rumänien auf den Weg zur Unabhängigkeitserklärung 1866–1877. Schein und Wirklichkeit liberaler Verfassung und staatlicher Souveränität*, München, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1989; Frederick Kellogg, *The Road to Romanian Independence*, West Lafayette IN, Purdue University Press, 1995; Edda Binder-Iijima, *Die Institutionalisierung der rumänischen Monarchie unter Carol I. 1866–1881*, München, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003; Gheorghe Cliveti, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Ionuț Nistor (eds.), *Cultură, politică și societate în timpul domniei lui Carol I. 130 de ani de la proclamarea Regatului României*, Iași, Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2011; Edda Binder-Iijima, Heinz-Dietrich Lowe, and Gerald Volkmer (eds.), *Die Hohenzollern in Rumänien 1866–1947. Eine monarchische Herrschaftsordnung im europäischen Kontext*, Köln, Bohlau Verlag, 2010; and Liviu Brătescu and Ștefania Ciubotaru (eds.), *Monarhia în România – o evaluare: politică, memorie și patrimoniu*, with a preface by Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2012; and for the diplomacy of the era, Gheorghe Cliveti, *România modernă...*, p. 279–348.

⁴⁵ I have dealt extensively with this period in Paul E. Michelson, *Greater Romania and the Post-World War New Normal*, in Victor Voicu (ed.), *Lucrările conferinței internaționale “România și evenimentele istorice din perioada 1914–1920. Desăvârșirea Marii Uniri și întregirea României”*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2018, p. 83–124. See also my forthcoming paper *România și consecințele Marelui Război. Spre o nouă normalitate*. For World War I, see Paul E. Michelson, *Romania and World War I, 1914–1918: An Introductory Survey*, in “Revue Roumaine d’Histoire”, Vol. 55, 2016, Nos. 1–4, p. 61 f.

⁴⁶ Vasile Pârvan, *Preambul la statutul Societății prietenilor trecutului daco-român*, 1919, in idem, *Correspondență și acte. Studii și documente*, edited with an introduction, notes, and index by Alexandru Zub, București, Editura Minerva, 1973, p. 375.

[...] the most fortunate generation Romanian history has ever known. Neither before nor after our generation has Romania had the freedom, abundance, and opportunity we enjoyed [...]. The generation of Nicolaie [sic] Iorga had been almost entirely given over to the national and cultural propheticism which was necessary to prepare for the war for the integration of the nation. The generation of the front had been sacrificed that we might find a Greater Romania, free and rich. When we began [...]. there was no 'national cause' demanding our immediate attention [...]. We enjoyed a freedom won with much blood and renunciation [...]. We were the first to harvest the fruits of all those generations more or less sacrificed.⁴⁷

The British historian Hugh Seton-Watson (1916–1984) agreed: “the new period in the Danubian lands was greeted with tremendous optimism.”⁴⁸ Romanians were, thus, once again sanguine “oamenii începutului de drum,” as they had been in the 19th century.⁴⁹ The Greater Romania which emerged at the start of the interwar era and its concomitant effort to build a “New Normal” following 1918 surely constituted a major turning point in modern Romanian history.⁵⁰

The birth of Greater Romania had opened broad new horizons, but the disorder and destruction of the war coupled with all the changes that needed to be implemented in the significantly expanded state made for difficult material and financial conditions. The presence in the new Romania of substantial national minorities (more than 28% of the population) also presented difficulties that were never resolved.⁵¹ These minorities were a badly-handled source of distress to interwar governments, being viewed at best as a national weakness and at worst as targets for retribution for prewar humiliations and repression and scapegoats for unresolved problems.

Escalating change, hard times, and national insecurities also fostered a continuation of the highly centralized administrative methods of the old Romanian kingdom, which was in keeping with the autocratic style of the dominant National Liberal Party and its leader for most of the period, Ion I. C. Brătianu.⁵² Promises of local autonomy made to the Transilvanians and Basarabians quickly went by the wayside. An almost pathological fixation on national unity swamped common sense. The result was that those who benefited from the imposition of a București-dominated state bureaucratic mechanism were able to maintain control of the system by constantly playing the

⁴⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiographical Fragment*, in Norman Girardot and Mac Linscott Ricketts (eds.), *Imagination and Meaning: The Scholarly and Literary Worlds of Mircea Eliade*, New York, Seabury Press, 1981, p. 125–126.

⁴⁸ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Interlude of Small States*, in his *The “Sick Heart” of Modern Europe. The Problem of the Danubian Lands*, Seattle WA, University of Washington Press, 1975, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Paul Cornea, *Oamenii începutului de drum. Studii și cercetări asupra epocii pașoptiste*, București, Editura Cartea Românească, 1974, referring to 19th century Romanian development. For a comparison of 1859, 1918, and 1989, see Paul E. Michelson, *Romanian Unity, 1859, 1918, 1989: Beginnings, Opportunities... And Illusions*, in Kurt Treptow (ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in Romanian Culture and Civilization, 1600–2000*, Iași, Center for Romanian Studies, 2001, p. 47–64.

⁵⁰ Of course, 2018 brought a veritable tidal wave of commemorative sessions dealing with 1918 and a corresponding volume of publications. For an excellent summary look at 1918, related documentation, and bibliography, see Vasile Pușcaș, *Marea Unire 1918 România Mare. Acte și documente*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Studia, 2018. For Ferdinand, see Paul E. Michelson, *Ferdinand I of Romania, 1914–1927: An Assessment*, forthcoming.

⁵¹ See Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1995.

⁵² For a fair, recent assessment of Brătianu, see Keith Hitchins, *Makers of the Modern World: Ionel Brătianu. Romania*, London, Haus Publishing, 2011.

national card. This insecurity led to an enormous mis-allocation of national income to military and police matters, more on a per capita basis than any of the major powers.

The creation of a Greater Romania in 1918 had come as a rather unexpected surprise. It owed to a striking conjuncture of unforeseen good fortune, unanticipated events, and clever and determined human action by the Romanians in the face of wartime disaster. Unfortunately, this tremendous turn in the fortunes of the Romanian people was wasted. All proved to be for naught when the World Crisis struck and the incompetent and duplicitous Carol II took over in 1930.

III.4. The Return of King Carol II: 1930



King Carol II: Ten Years of Rule
8 June 1940
Scott No. SP87

On June 8, 1940, Carol II (1893–1953) celebrated the first decade of his rule as King of Romania, an event marked by the issuance of a series of stamps including this one. Ironically, the handwriting was already on the wall as Carol's Romania was headed straight into the buzzsaw of World War II. Between June 26 and September 7, 1940, Romania lost Basarabia, Bucovina, and Herța to the Soviet Union (spoils of the Nazi-Soviet Pact),⁵³ Southern Dobrogea to the Bulgarians, and a goodly chunk of Transilvania to the Hungarians.⁵⁴ On 6 September, Carol relinquished the throne to his son Mihai (though he did not “abdicate”) and on the following day, fled the country with a trainload of valuables that was greeted with a hail of bullets at the border as the train sped through without stopping.

How did Romania go from the optimism expressed by Pârvan, Eliade, and Seton-Watson to the catastrophes of 1940? My thesis is simple: while the attempt to build a “new normal” between 1919 and 1930 was unsuccessful (in building an honest political system, in coping with the national question, in dealing with the philosophical Modern Predicament) or only partially successful (recuperating from the war; carrying out agrarian reform, developing the economy), there might have still been hope for better.

The return of Carol II was the key event of the interwar period, leading, in hindsight, inexorably to long-term disaster resulting in authoritarian rule and then a fascist/military takeover. Because of the King's lack of character and his penchant for devious machinations that were too clever by half, by 1940, Romania was in a completely untenable

⁵³ See Paul E. Michelson, *The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Outbreak of World War II*, in “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire”, Vol. 31, 1992, p. 65–102.

⁵⁴ Romania lost 1/3rd of its territories (nearly 100,000 km²) and population (nearly 7 million). See Lucian Boia, *Cum s-a românizat România*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2015; and Dorel Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu*, București, Editura Eminescu, 2000, p. 62 f.

political, diplomatic, philosophical, and moral predicament as a World War unfolded.⁵⁵ Though Carol fancied himself as the leader of a “Romanian Renaissance,” his band of crooked cronies, the infamous and venal “Camarilla,” came to dominate Romanian political and economic life between 1930 and 1940 mostly behind the scenes, despoiling the country, and forfeiting any chances Romania had of developing a stable and free economic and political order. *Après Carol II le déluge.*⁵⁶

III.5. The Sovietization and Russification of Romania after World War II: 1944–1953



Stalin's 70th Birthday
10 December 1949
Scott No. 710

“Glory to the Great Stalin” proclaims this 1949 stamp issued to mark the 70th birthday of the all-wise and all-knowing Stalin. It followed two other 1949 stamps toadying to the USSR: one celebrating the entry of the Red Army into Romania on 23 August 1944 (Scott No. 708) and the other praising Soviet-Romanian Friendship (Scott No. 709), a friendship described in an underground joke defining Romanian-Russian “trade”: “We give them our wheat and in exchange they take our oil.” The appearance of these three stamps unambiguously signalled the transformation of Romania into a Stalinized reflection of the Soviet “Older Brother.”

Another contender for this role was Scott No. B 326, issued on 6 March 1946, depicting an avuncular Petre Groza handing out land certificates during the Agrarian Reform of 1946. Given the basically agrarian nature of Romania, the study of the peasantry under Stalinism and so-called Communist agrarian reform makes an important contribution to understanding the whole process.⁵⁷ Romania's traditional peasant society was

⁵⁵ On Carol II, see Paul D. Quinlan, *The Playboy King. Carol II of Romania*, Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1995; Maria Bucur, *Carol II of Romania*, in Bernd J. Fischer (ed.), *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of South Eastern Europe*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2007, p. 87–117; and Hans-Christian Maner, *Regele Carol al II-lea. Monarhia în declin?*, in Liviu Brătescu and Ștefania Ciubotaru (eds.), *Monarhia în România*, 2012, p. 339–350.

⁵⁶ Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1951, and the relevant sections of Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars 1918–1941*, third edition, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1967, remain the more interesting overviews.

⁵⁷ For a treatment of this story that is a fine model, see the case studies published by Dorin Dobrinu and Constantin Iordache (eds.), *Țărănimea și puterea. Procesul de colectivizare a agriculturii în România (1949–1962)*, with a foreword by Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2005, which included an extensive bibliography. This was followed by an English edition, with some omissions: Dorin Dobrinu and Constantin Iordache (eds.), *Transforming Peasants. The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949–1962*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2009; by another Dobrinu & Iordache collection of articles on various aspects related to the building of socialism and collectivization in Romania, *Edificarea orânduirii socialiste. Violența politică și lupta de clasă în colectivizarea agriculturii din România, 1949–1962*, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2017; and two massive volumes of documents: Dorin Dobrinu, Alexandru-Dumitru Aioanei, Dumitru Liznic, and Dumitru Lăcătușu (eds.), *Colectivizarea*

transformed morally, spiritually, and psychologically by two waves of forced collectivization (1948–1953, 1958–1962). Some 80,000 people died in the implementation. The Stalinist experience in the Soviet Union had demonstrated how this could and should be done.

1944 began a period of transition that brought an end to the Europeanizing process which had begun in the 18th century. The Communists began to Stalinize Romanian culture and civilization under the leadership of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901–1965). The *Final Report of the Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii din România* (AKA the Tismăneanu Report)⁵⁸ discusses in detail the Sovietization of Romania in every respect: cultural regimentation; social, political, and economic Russification of Romania; destruction, marginalization, and ouster of the intellectual elite, liquidation of pre-war economic and educational personnel, and so forth. The Soviet Union assumed a stranglehold over Romanian economic life, the Communist Party took control of the broadcast media and the trade unions, and split non-Communist political groups by co-opting less principled members of these groups with official appointments.

The use of show trials, the establishment of a Romanian Gulag, and the forced labor Danube canal project designed more to humiliate and destroy human life than produce economic benefits were also critical. This process was essentially complete by 1953. The Romania of the 1950s and subsequently was radically different from that of the preceding century or more.⁵⁹

Initially, it was generally sufficient to ape the Soviet model. A few examples suffice to illustrate the point: a journal for Romanian librarians in the early 1950s consisted by and large of translations from Soviet writers and sources; personnel in the military and security forces were generally sent to the USSR for training and forms of organization of these bodies were adopted wholesale from Bolshevik models; academic staff were sent to Russian institutions for advanced degrees; the Russian language was made compulsory in schools; Romanian intellectuals professed to seek and receive guidance from the genial writings of Stalin; even architecture followed the Soviet pattern, with the huge Scânteia publishing complex in București rising out of the ground in massive Stalinist gothic style.

Later, once the totalitarian model had been installed, and, more importantly, Stalin had died and the Soviet leadership began to pursue its so-called “new course,” as more “Romanian” forms of Marxism/Leninism developed, culminating in the infamous “national Communism” of the Ceaușescu era whose perverse effects are still felt today.⁶⁰

agriculturii din România. Inginerie socială, violență politică, reacția țărănimii. Documente, Vol. I, 1949–1950, Vol. II, 1951–1962, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2017.

⁵⁸ A copy of Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii din România, *Raport final*, București, 2006, can be found at www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf (last accessed 15.X.2019). For a critique of the *Raport*, see Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozeanu, Ciprian Siulea, and Ovidiu Tichindeleanu (eds.), *Iluzia anticomunismului. Lecturi critice ale Raportului Tismăneanu*, Chișinău, Editura Cartier, 2008.

⁵⁹ For an overview, see Paul E. Michelson, *The East European Revolution Revisited (La révolution de l'Europe de l'Est revisitée)*, in “Revue Roumaine d'Études Internationales”, Vol. 27, 1993, No. 1–2, p. 49–64.

⁶⁰ For assessments of the post-Communist project in Romania, see Paul and Jean Michelson, *Post-Communist Romania: A Dysfunctional Society in Transition*, in Adrian-Paul Iliescu (ed.), *Mentalități și instituții. Carențe de mentalitate și inapoiere instituțională în România modernă*, București, Ars Docendi, 2002, p. 61–97; Paul E. Michelson, *Despre viitorul trecutului recent al României*, in “Anuarul Institutului Român de Istorie Recentă”, Vol. 2, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2003, *Politica externă comunistă și exil anticomunist*, p. 13–39; Paul E. Michelson, *Collected Memories, Collective Amnesia, and Post-Communism*, in “Interstitio”, Vol. 1, 2007, No. 2, p. 137–158; and Paul E. Michelson, *Overcoming Communism's Dysfunctional Legacy: The Romanian Case*, in “Journal of Global Initiatives”, Vol. 6, 2011, No. 2, p. 109–125.

IV. Conclusion

Why is such an exercise useful? What can we learn from it? Turning points in modern Romanian history seem to have come rather too frequently prior to 1944, but, paradoxically and given the degree of change needed in Romania, perhaps they didn't come often enough. In the first four of our five, hopes were raised and then dashed, though why this happened differed from case to case.

The first turning point, the turn toward modernization and Westernization, was the most successful. Westernization did bring the Romanian lands hundreds of years into the future and certainly unleashed a flood of literature and movements trying to explain it, combat it, or co-opt it. At least, it put the "modern" into modern Romanian history.

The second turning point, Cuza's 1859 election, was also arguably a success. A Romania appeared where multiple separate entities dominated by empires had existed previously. It also set in motion a series of *fait accomplis* that resulted by 1881 in an independent Romanian Kingdom.

The third turning point, the union of 1918, was recently marked by a year-long celebration in Romania, where much lesser pretexts suffice for historical celebrations. The nationalist dream of the union of virtually all Romanians was achieved. The fact that this did not resolve the Romanian people's problems but rather seemed to lead to new, even more intractable ones has been sometimes overlooked.

The fourth turning point, the return of Carol II, was in retrospect both the starting point of the interwar Romanian *dégringolade* and the unfurling of the modern Romanian "Golden Age," especially in scholarship (historiography, sociology, research institutes, and so forth). Those who look nostalgically back to the interwar period need to be more conscious of the defects present in the successes, and ask how many of the qualities and characteristics of the Golden Age contributed to Romania's eventual collapse.

The final turning point, the Communist takeover, is less controversial: the legacy of Communism, of the dysfunctional society it created (or at least extended and solidified), are visible everywhere today, thirty years after the collapse of the Socialist Republic of Romania, and over seven decades after the Iron Curtain fell across Eastern Europe with Romania on the wrong side. Have enough people in Romania realized that dysfunction can be healed only by developing a society in which truth is valued and important? It still is too early to tell.

THE MODERN HISTORY OF ROMANIA IN FIVE POSTAGE STAMPS
(OR KEY TURNING POINTS IN MODERN ROMANIAN HISTORY)
(Summary)

Keywords: modern history, turning point, periodization, Romanian historiography, westernization.

From another perspective, a turning point could be a point at which change occurs to a greater or lesser degree, ranging from a simple change in ruler to noteworthy – but perhaps even unnoticed at the time – social or economic changes. The word "metamorphosis" might apply here, suggesting a kind of natural process, just as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. At the same time, change as such is an inevitable part of history. It is obvious that things change. There has been no end of debate among historians about the degree to which societies are influenced by change and which are the product of continuity.

Turning points are interesting because they frequently raise the problem of developing a "new normal," issues of "Now what?" and "*Quo vadis?*" They also raise questions about opportunities seized, fumbled, or lost, which seem inherently interesting.