

Romania: 1952 monetary reform a surprise

By Dinu G. Matei

The months following Romania's January 1952 monetary reform represent a most interesting chapter of modern postal history.

The 1952 monetary reform was carried out by the relatively new communist regime (installed with a little help from the Red Army in 1947). The purpose of the reform was to pauperize the remaining rich Romanians. Under reform, 20 old lei

Many were taken by surprise, as was the intention, and they lost all their savings.

Under a communist regime, only high-ranking members of the party have the right to be rich. All others should be poor by definition, not able to think too much and only spend their free time struggling for their basic needs, such as food, medicine, housing and transportation.

The monetary reform was such a big secret that appar-

tween 1948 and 1951 were overprinted in 1952 with new values in the days and weeks following the monetary reform. They are all described and priced in catalogs worldwide.

In the Scott *Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue* they are 817-72, C32-44, J107-14.

What makes these overprinted stamps scarce and desirable is that only few survive in mint condition, having been completely sold out to the public at post offices throughout Romania.

Some overprinted stamps were issued in large quantities (1.9 million for Scott 820) and some in smaller ones (98,000 for Scott C40-41), depending on the amount of stamps available in stock at the printing house in Bucharest, Fabrica de Timbre.

Because of the monetary reform, collectors and entrepreneurs (dealers officially ceased to exist in Romania during 1948-89) could not afford to stock these issues. Until they were completely sold out, the stamps were used on commercial and private correspondence.

Because collectors badly wanted these stamps, even postally used, most covers and postcards franked with them were destroyed when the stamps were removed.

In the 1950s, the fashion of collecting modern stamps on cover did not exist. Few such

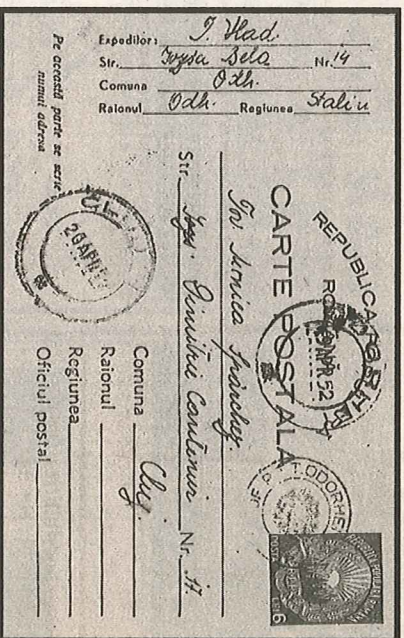


Figure 2. A 6-lei postal card sold for 0.30 lei (30b). The official seal of the post office cancels the old value.

modern postal history items survive today. They are scarce or rare.

Some errors on the overprinted stamps exist but in relatively small numbers, surprisingly, considering the rush surrounding the release of the overprints.

The purpose of this article is to present some scarce and rare postal history items that originated from the 1952 monetary reform, specifically postal cards and postcards.

In 1952, the new postal rate for a postcard sent within Romania was changed from 6 lei to 0.30 lei (or 30 bani). The old 6-lei postal cards were overprinted with the new value at post offices where franking (meter) machines existed.

Sometimes the meter overprint shows the adjacent post-

mark, sometimes it does not. Figure 1 pictures a 6-lei postal card overprinted with the new 0.30-lei rate with such a postmark.

Smaller post offices where franking machines did not exist merely announced that the old 6-lei postal cards were on sale for 0.30 lei. The new value was authorized by a round administrative cancel showing the name of the post office and Romania's coat of arms from 1948-53. Such a postcard is illustrated in Figure 2.

These items are scarce. Because of their generally unattractive appearance, collectors did not keep them.

Soldiers enrolled in the Romanian Army were allowed to mail postcards at a special postal rate, 0.10 lei (10b). Old 2-lei military postal cards were overprinted with the new value.

If civilians correctly af-

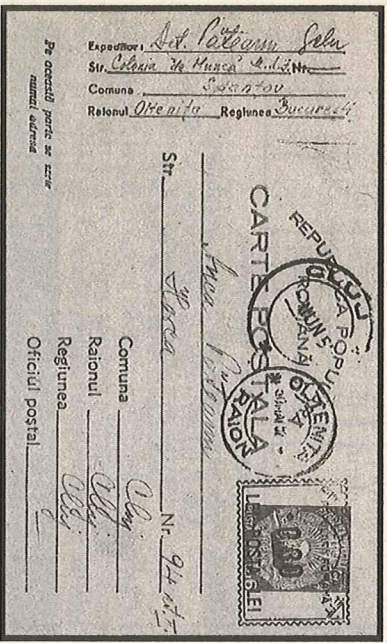


Figure 1. A 6-lei postal card overprinted with the new value 0.30 lei (or 30 bani) following the 1952 monetary reform.

(pronounced LAY) could be exchanged for one new leu (pronounced LEH-oo, as in "foot").

The official currency of Romania is leu (plural: lei). Its subdivision is ban (plural: bani). One hundred bani make 1 leu.

People were allowed to exchange only a limited amount of old money for new money.

ently even the Romanian Post was taken by surprise and was not very well prepared for such a sudden change.

Obviously, there were new postal rates, but post offices had available mostly only the old stamps and postal stationery.

More than 70 different definitive, commemorative and postage due stamps issued be-



Figure 3. A 2-lei military postcard overprinted with the 0.10 lei (10b) new value and sent by a civilian. For civilian use, an additional 3b overprinted stamp, a 7b stamp and a 10b stamp make up the correct 0.30-lei postal rate.



Figure 4. Four different franking possibilities for the 38b rate for picture postcards sent within Romania.

fixed the postage on military postal cards, an additional franking of 20b, they were allowed to mail such items too. These postal cards are rare because they were sold only

to soldiers and only at outlets, not necessarily postal, inside military units.

Figure 3 depicts such an item: an overprinted military postal card with a beautiful



Figure 5. This insufficiently franked picture postcard mailed within Romania in 1955 was wrongfully charged 20b instead of 4b to make up double the shortage. An overprinted 1952 postage due stamp also was affixed.

additional multicolor franking. The card bears one 3b stamp overprinted following the monetary reform and two others from later definitive issues, a 7b and a 10b, affixed to make the 30b postal rate.

Immediately following the monetary reform, in April 1952, new stamps were prepared for use. The overprinted stamps were circulated until they were sold out, all during the same time that the new ones circulated, making desirable franking combinations.

The new postal rate for sending a picture postcard within Romania became 38b (0.38 lei), later changed to 40b.

These items are not as scarce because people tended to keep the picture postcards they received. However, postcards franked with overprinted stamps are still desirable and difficult to find.

Figure 4 illustrates parts of four items showing four different franking possibilities to make the 38b rate.

None of the 25 different types of overprints bear the 38b or the 40b value, so most picture postcards were franked with one of the seven different stamps overprinted "35 bani" and an additional "3 bani" stamp (10 different stamps overprinted with this value).

Combinations with stamps issued after April 1952 also exist. Figure 5 depicts a picture postcard sent from the Tusnad resort to Iasi (Jassy) in October 1955. At that time

the postal rate for a picture postcard was already 40b.

The sender affixed only 38b worth of stamps, thus the recipient would have been charged double for the difference of 2b missing.

Apparently, there were no 4b postage due (porto) stamps available at Iasi, so the recipient was finally and wrongfully charged 20b (five times more than necessary). He paid that amount, and a 20b overprinted porto stamp was affixed on the picture postcard.

This is not a late use for an overprinted postage due stamp because new ones were issued only in 1957.

This picture postcard also presents an example of wrong usage of a Romanian postage due stamp. The left stamp from the two-stamp postage due pair should have been removed and returned to the post office as proof of payment.

This is characteristic for the use of Romanian postage due stamps. Apparently, the postal worker who handled this item ignored the postal instructions.

Dimu G. Matei is a researcher and collector of Romanian modern postal history. He has published more than 100 articles on this subject in Romania and Canada. In a second article, he will discuss interesting covers and summations bearing unusual frankings as a result of the 1952 monetary reform in Romania. ■

Clarification

California stamp dealer Darrell L. Brown is being asked by the American Philatelic Society to show cause why he should not be expelled because he pleaded guilty to a felony, according to the APS.

A story that appeared on page 10 of *Linn's* issue of Jan. 8, 2001, said incorrectly that the board of vice presidents, the society's disciplinary arm, had expelled Brown on Dec. 2, 2000.

On Dec. 28, Robert Lamb, executive director of the APS, clarified the vice presidents' action.

He said the vice presidents had decided to give Brown 20 days to respond to a show-cause request, citing APS by-law 2.11.5, which authorizes the board to expel any member convicted of "a crime involving philatelic material or of any felony."

Brown was arrested July 8, 1998, in connection with the attempted theft of stamps from the 69-year-old widow of a packet maker in Aurora, Colo.

Originally charged with theft and theft from an at-risk adult, Brown negotiated with the Adams County district attorney's office and pleaded guilty in June 1999 to felony criminal trespass, according to Assistant District Attorney Steve Bernard.

Brown was sentenced Aug. 12, 1999, to a one-year term of supervised probation, Bernard said. No fine was imposed, and Brown paid standard court costs.

The APS suspended Brown in March 1999 pending disposition of his case and reinstated him in September 2000. The vice presidents said they were unaware of the felony plea.

RPO car retired once again

The restored railway post office car that was part of the Celebrate the Century train has become an exhibit at the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer, N.C.

The RPO car was loaned to Amtrak and the United States Postal Service by rail historian James A. Bistline, of Alexandria, Va. Between March 1999 and November 2000, the *Celebrate the Century Express* traveled 24,741 miles and visited 68 cities in 35 states. The train attracted approximately 287,500 visitors, including 16,186 school children.

Built by the Pullman firm in 1926, the RPO car operated until the 1970s when railroads ceased to transport first-class mail.

Romania: 1952 monetary reform and covers

By Dinu G. Matei

A previous article (*Linn's*, Jan. 15, 2001, page 8) introduced *Linn's* readers to the atmosphere surrounding the 1952 monetary reform in Romania and presented some postal aspects of that period.

That article presented postcards, military postcards, partly illustrated postcards and picture postcards mailed in the weeks and months following the monetary reform and showing scarce, desirable frankings.

This second article focuses on covers (envelopes), registered covers, express (priority mail) covers, registered express covers and airmail covers from the same tumultuous period, all bearing, again, unusual and desirable frankings. Following the monetary re-

form, the postage rate for a letter weighing up to 20 grams and sent within Romania was changed from the old 11 lei to the new 0.55 lei (55 bani).

Under reform, 20 old lei (pronounced LAY) could be exchanged for one new lei (pronounced LEH-oo, as in "foot").

The official currency of Romania is lei (plural: lei). Its subdivision is ban (plural: bani). One hundred bani make 1 lei.

People were allowed to exchange only a limited amount of old money for new money. The reform took many people by surprise, as was the intention, and they lost all their savings.

Overprinted stamps denominated 55b were generally available because there were



Figure 2. Five 20b overprinted stamps and an additional 55b overprinted stamp were affixed to this registered cover mailed by a government-owned company, to make the correct 1.55-leu discounted postage rate.

22 different stamps overprinted with this value. But where they were sold out, other overprinted stamps (with 3b, 5b, 10b or 20b values) were used

resulting in some really beautiful franking combinations. Moreover, many combinations resulted after April 1952 when new stamps were issued. Figure 1 depicts an unusual franking combination of stamps with small face values to make the 55b rate.

The cover bears five 3b overprinted stamps and two 20b stamps from a later issue. The postage rate for a registered letter weighing up to 20 grams and sent within Romania was changed from the old 35 lei to the new 1.75 lei. Institutions and government-owned companies were

value, nice franking combinations again resulted.

Figure 3 illustrates such a desirable cover. It is franked with three 55b overprinted stamps, one 1-leu overprinted stamp and three 20b stamps from a later issue.

Summonses and other judiciary notes also were sent by mail. The postage rate for such items was 2.35 lei. Again, there were no stamps overprinted with a 2.35-leu value, therefore only combinations of other overprinted stamps can be found affixed

Figure 4 depicts a judiciary note (a proof of summons or confirmation notice) bearing a spectacular franking of overprinted stamps because of the monetary reform. It is franked with 20 10b overprinted stamps and one 35b overprinted stamp. The item illustrated bears seven of these overprinted stamps on the back (not shown).

Definitive stamps for the values 1.55 lei, 1.75 lei, 2.35 lei and 3.25 lei were issued later. During the communist

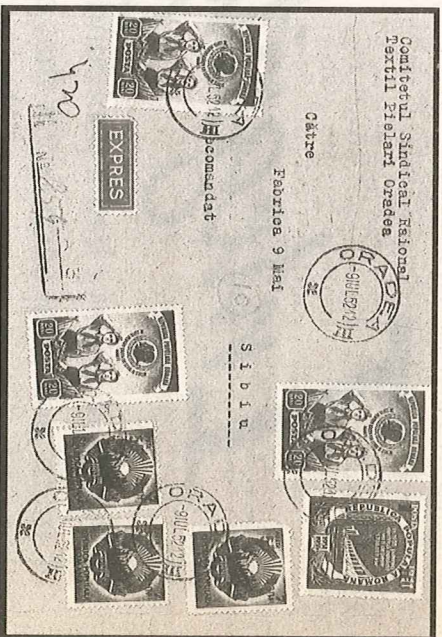


Figure 3. This registered and express letter was mailed in 1952, following the monetary reform. Three 55b overprinted stamps, one 1-leu overprinted stamp affixed on the cover along with three 20b stamps (from later issue) make up the correct 3.25-leu postage rate.

to such items.

These judicial items are quite rare because most were destroyed or filed in archives, not made available to collectors.

regime, Romanians were not encouraged to have contact with people abroad. In fact, they were expressly discouraged from having such contact.

During the 1950s, most of

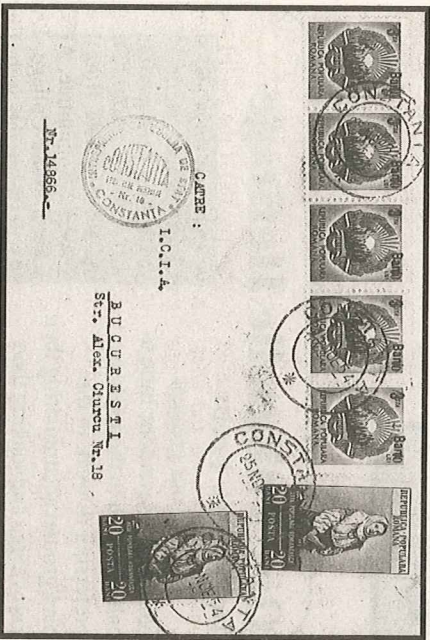


Figure 1. Cover mailed within Romania franked with five 3-bani overprinted stamps issued following the monetary reform plus two additional 20b stamps from a later issue to make the correct 55b postage rate.



Figure 4. Proof of summons delivery franked with no less than 20 10b and one 35b overprinted stamps to make the correct 2.35-leu rate. Only one side is shown.

the correspondence sent from Romania, especially to Western countries, was seized and destroyed, making the items that survived extremely desirable.

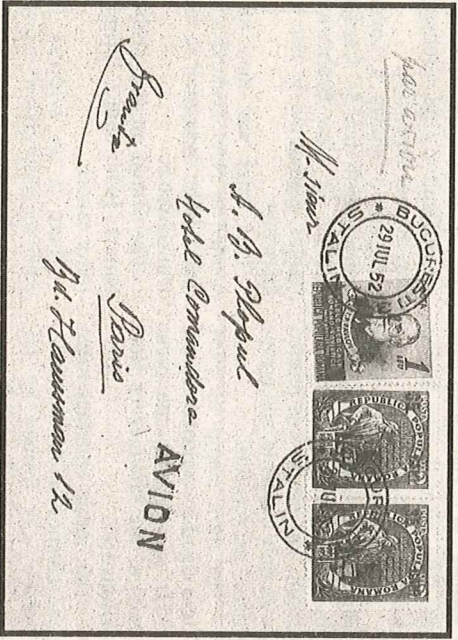


Figure 5. This 1952 airmail cover to France is franked with a horizontal pair of 35b overprinted stamps and an additional 1-leu stamp from a later stamp issue.

issued after the monetary reform.

All stamps issued in Romania following the 1952 monetary reform were valid for postage until 1990.

However, the latest correct usage of a 1952 overprinted stamp found by the author is in 1957.

It is surprising that no philatelic (collector-created) covers bearing overprinted stamps are known.

In 1952, the government overprinted not only postage stamps and postal stationery but also revenue stamps.

Obviously, such stamps were intended for purposes other than postage. However, Figure 6 depicts an exception, a use for postage.

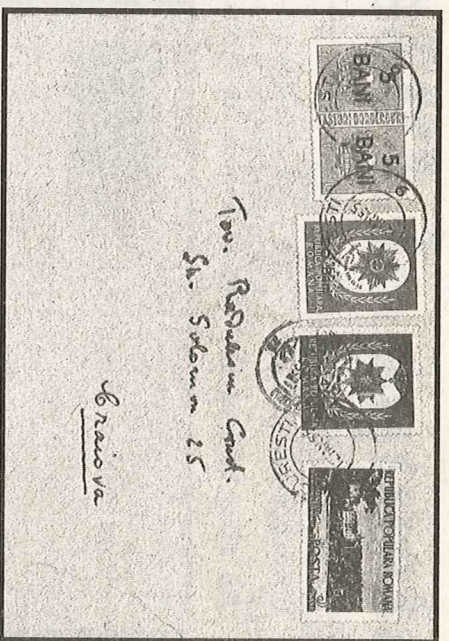


Figure 6. Two 5b overprinted revenue stamps (not valid for postage) on a cover mailed within Romania.

This unusual cover is franked with 0.55 lei worth of stamps, the postage rate for a letter up to 20 grams mailed

United We Stand coils not sent to Brentwood

Coil rolls of 100 of the 34¢ United We Stand stamp were not processed through the anthrax-contaminated Brentwood post office in Washington, D.C., according to Don Smeraldi, a United States Postal Service community relations specialist.

The 34¢ United We Stand coil rolls of 100 stamps had not been reported known in areas where the booklet pane version of the stamp was issued Oct. 24.

A story on page 12 about the 10,000-stamp coil format and a story by Robert Rabinowitz on page 38 of the Nov. 19 *Linn's* speculated that the absence of the coil version probably being sent to the Brent-

wood post office for distribution before the anthrax contamination was discovered. Smeraldi stated, "The 100-stamp United We Stand coils

never went through Brentwood." In the Washington, D.C. area, the rolls of 100 "have been shipped out of our Dulles (Va.) facility to post

2002 Luff award nominations open

The American Philatelic Society is accepting nominations for the 2002 Luff awards.

Nominations may be made to the Luff awards committee chaired by Gordon C. Morrison of Maryland.

Other members of the committee are Bernard A. Hennig of Illinois, Barbara R. Mueller of Wisconsin and Richard F. Winter of North Carolina.

The committee will submit its recommendations to the

APS board of directors at the annual winter meeting.

Awards will be presented during Stampshow, the society's annual convention and exhibition Aug. 15-18 in Atlantic City, N.J.

The Luff awards are named for John N. Luff, APS president during 1907-09.

They have been presented annually since 1940 to living philatelists for distinguished philatelic research, exceptional contributions to philately

Normally, this cover should have been returned to the sender for additional franking or been marked postage due for insufficient franking.

Somehow, it escaped the attention of the postal workers and reached its destination, resulting in an extremely beautiful item of Romanian postal history.

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offices since Oct. 29.

"Others going to Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York were likely being shipped around the same time." ■

and outstanding service to the APS.

Recipients of the award receive engraved rings and sign the Luff awards scroll displayed at APS headquarters.

Luff award nominating forms are available from the Luff Award Committee, APS, Box 8068, State College, PA 16803 or from the web site www.stamps.org.

Nominations must be received at the above address no later than Jan. 7, 2002. ■

1952 Romanian Monetary Reform produced errors

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An overview of the fascinating postal items originating in Romania following the 1952 monetary reform would not be complete without a presentation of some errors that occurred during the overprinting process.

As mentioned in a previous article (*Linn's* Jan. 15, 2001; a second one appeared in *Linn's*

from the Five Year Plan set (Scott 863a).

Romanian catalogs and price lists consider this stamp (863a) to be an error. It is scarce, especially on cover or postcard, because only 60,000 stamps were overprinted.

The 1974 *Romanian Postage Stamps Catalog* mentions the existence of several errors and flaws on the overprinted

Monetary Reform, the 11-lei stamps were never put on sale without overprints.

They were overprinted with new values and put on sale Jan. 28, 1952 (Scott 817-19).

The 1-lei stamp was put on sale the same day, according to Romanian stamp catalogs.

Stamps with identical designs, no overprints and bearing new 55-bani face values (Scott 813-14) were issued April 6, 1952.

In the Scott catalog, this set should be placed before Scott 873 because it was issued later than Scott 817-19, and it is considered to be the first definitive set issued following the Monetary Reform overprinted issues.

Very few examples of the 11-lei deep green and 11-lei scarlet without overprint are known to exist.

Other errors in this area exist — some not previously mentioned in literature.

Among the most spectacular overprints are always the inverted ones.

The "55 bani"-on-7-lei National Arms (Scott 837) exists with inverted overprint.

Examples of inverted overprints are also known for Scott 860, 863-64, 866-69 and C35, from the Five Year Plan set.

A very rare registered cover, franked with the "75 bani"-on-11-lei stamp in the I.L. Caragiale issue (Scott 819) and the "1 lei"-on-7-lei stamp in the Five Year Plan issue (Scott 866) with inverted overprint, is shown in Figure 1.

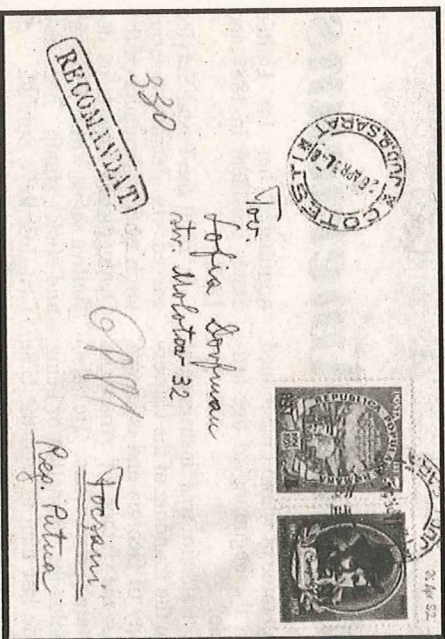


Figure 1. This registered cover bears an inverted "1 lei"-on-7-lei stamp from the 1952 Five Year Plan issue.

Nov. 26, 2001, issue) such errors are scarce or very rare.

The Scott *Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue* does not mention the existence of any errors of the 1952 overprinted stamps, while the Michel catalog mentions only the inverted "1 lei" overprint on 11-lei Five Year Plan stamp (Scott 868) without listing a value.

Both catalogs list the "35 bani" red instead of black overprint on the 4-lei stamp



Figure 2. The back of this registered letter bears an inverted "1 lei" overprint on an 11-lei Five Year Plan stamp, with additional franking to make the correct rate.



Figure 3. This pair of postage-due stamps bears reverse images of the overprints on the backs.

The back of another very rare registered cover is shown in Figure 2. It is franked with one 55-bani Romanian Pioners stamp (Scott 882), two 10-bani National Arms stamps (950) and one "1-lei"-on-11-lei Five Year Plan stamp (Scott 868) with inverted overprint.

On each cover, there are stamps totaling 1.75 lei affixed, which is the correct rate for a registered letter up to 20 grams sent within Romania at that time.

Two more somewhat bizarre

"1-lei" instead of "1 lei." Another interesting freak is shown in Figure 3. It depicts a pair of "20 bani"-on-5-lei postage due stamps (Scott J109) with a nice and clear reverse image of the overprint on the backs of the stamps.

Very little has been published about the extremely interesting items that developed following Romania's 1952 Monetary Reform, and the three articles in *Linn's* have offered an overview on this interesting chapter of Romania's modern postal history.

The story is far from complete. Spectacular postal items always emerge following inflation periods and monetary reforms, and the ones originating in Romania in 1952 are no exception.

Moreover, in this case all the overprinted stamps and postal stationery issued following the 1952 Monetary Reform were sold at post offices across the country until sold out, and no special sets for stamp collectors or dignitaries were made.

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errors are known. These overprints, "55 bani" on 3 lei (Scott 835) and "55 bani" on 31 lei (840) of the National Arms issue, both have a backward "a" in the word "bani."

Shifted overprints are spectacular too. I have a nice used "35 bani"-on-5-lei stamp (Scott 864) from the Five Year Plan issue with a shifted overprint that reads "ni 35 ba" instead of "35 bani."

Another shifted overprint from the same issue, the "35 bani" on 2 lei (Scott 861), has the overprint reading "bani 35" instead of "35 bani."

I have also a nice example (not shown) of the "1 leu"-on-11-lei from the Five Year Plan issue (Scott 868) with a shifted overprint that reads "leu 1" instead of "1 leu."

A wonderful double error that occurred on Scott C35 is a shifted and inverted overprint with the new value that reads

"leu 1" instead of "1 leu."

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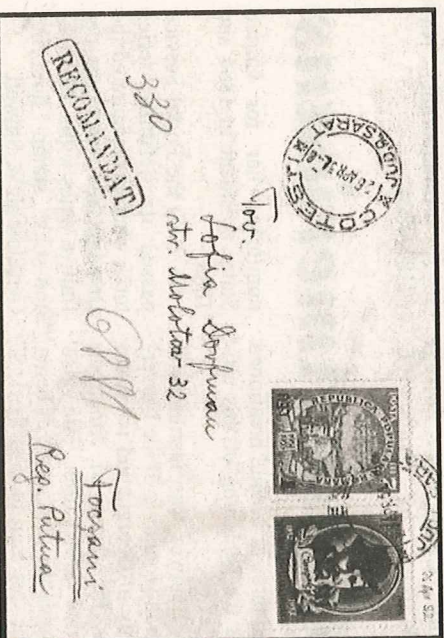


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stamps issued following the 1952 Monetary Reform.

The rarest are the 11-lei scarlet (Scott 817) and the 11-lei deep green (818) with missing overprints. Actually, these two stamps should be listed as unissued stamps.

Three different 11-lei stamps and one 1-leu stamp (Scott 816) commemorating Romanian writer I.L. Caragiale were prepared for use in early January 1952. But because of the