

post office.

Now we know that the Ottoman army advanced at least as far north as Braila, but a mystery still lingers - how did the card get from the Bulgarian post office in Bucharest to a Turkish soldier in eastern Romania? The Bulgarian post office in Bucharest handled mail incoming and outgoing from and to Bulgaria and Bucharest, and exchanged mail with the other central powers' offices, but there is no record that it dispatched mail along other routes. Mail from Bulgaria to Braila normally would have passed through Constanta. Did the Bulgarians somehow carry this from Bucharest to their own office in Braila? Was the card handed over to the Germans in Bucharest for normal civilian transport to Braila? Was the card handed over to the Turks in Bucharest? (Actually we doubt this). The answer may forever remain a mystery.

A final note may be made regarding the addressee. Although the sender uses the family name Shaban, the addressee is using the name Shabanov, a Bulgarian form of the name. It is known that the Bulgarians allowed the Ottoman army to recruit ethnic Turks from at least newly acquired Bulgarian territories, and it is possible that Shabanov the younger may have been a Turk from Skopie, Thrace, or even Bulgaria itself.

TRANSITION FROM CAPITALISM TO COMMUNISM REFLECTED IN ROMANIAN POSTAL HISTORY BETWEEN 1948-1950

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The change in the political system in Romania following the end of WWII has been strongly reflected in postal history. The era between 1945 and 1950 has been left aside by most postal history researchers and very little has been published on this subject yet, despite the fact that it offers a tremendous potent research area with quite a number of scarce and rare items originating during these years.

After the end of WWII Romania entered Moscow's sphere of influence. With a little help from the Red Army a "democratic" government was imposed on the Romanians in March 1945 and finally King Mihai Ist was forced to abdicate on December 30, 1947. The communists were now ruling the country.

The old postal items depicting King's portrait and Romania's coat of arms were not immediately removed since new ones to reflect the political changes had not yet been produced. However, the definitive stamps in use known as King Mihai-Views (Scott#666-676) were overprinted in January 1948 with "R.P.R." (People's Republic of Romania) letters covering the King's portrait (Scott #684-694). Apparently only the stamps available in stock at the Fabrica de Timbre (Stamp Printing House) in Bucharest were overprinted, the ones remained at post offices throughout the country being used for franking until sold-out. Beautiful franking combinations resulted.



Fig. 1 (all images reduced 50%)



Fig. 2

In rare cases overprinted definitive stamps were used for postage as late as 1950 as shown in Figure 1, which depicts an airmail cover sent in August 1950 from Timisoara to Vancouver, Canada. Figure 2 depicts a nice post card mailed in March 1948 from Bucharest to Bern, Switzerland, franked with both non-overprinted and overprinted stamps from the King Mihai-Views issue. Overprinted stamps with private perfins are not common since the overprinted stamps were intended by the communists as a transitional issue only and moreover, they forbade private ownership.

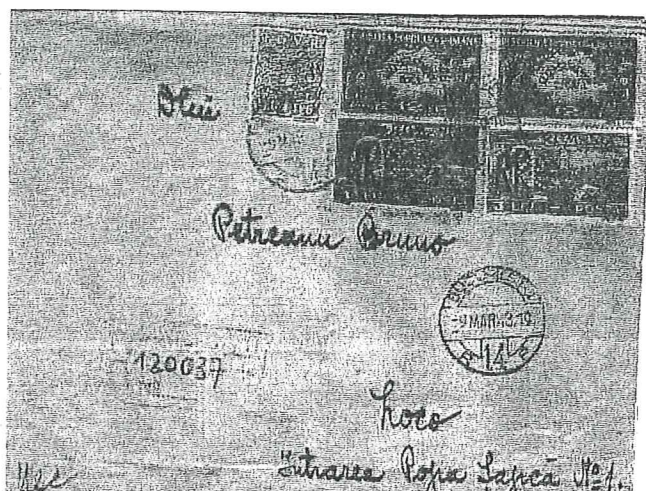


Fig. 3

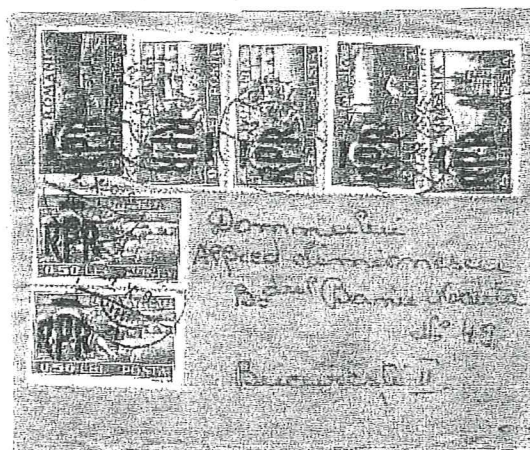


Fig. 4

Figure 3 depicts a rare cover, locally sent in Bucharest in March 1948 from a branch of the Romanian Bank of Commerce (nationalized in June 1948) franked with a horizontal pair of the first issue of the People's Republic of Romania (1948 Census, Scott #678) along with 1 Leu and 3 Lei stamps from the King Mihai-Views overprinted issue, all bearing the bank's perfins (mandatory I.O.V.R. stamp also affixed).

The sender of the cover illustrated in Figure 4, which is probably a unique item, risked a lot (including his freedom and probably his life) since he dared to affix on this cover mailed in October 1949 from Craiova to Bucharest no less than 7 stamps from the King Mihai-Views issue with forged overprints. Note the very crude overprints! However, the 11 Lei postal rate is correct. No other forgeries of these stamps are known to date.

A very few number of inverted "R.P.R." overprints were reported in the literature. However, it is not clear yet if they are genuine or not.

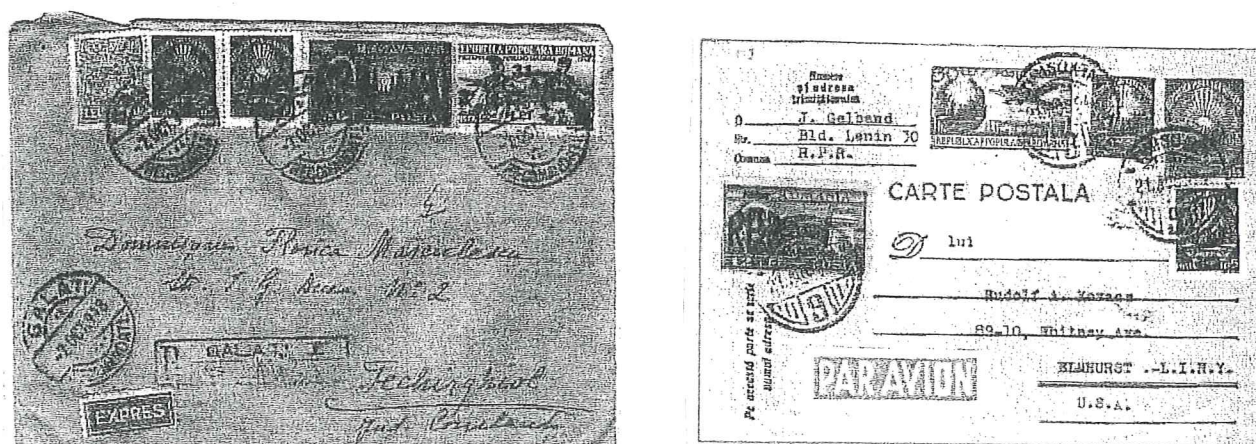


Fig. 5

A new set of definitive stamps depicting Romania's new coat of arms was issued in July 1948 (Scott #698A-698H), followed by a second one issued between 1949 and 1950 (Scott #712-717). For almost two years three different definitive issues were available at post offices throughout Romania. Very nice franking combinations resulted including ones with commemorative stamps issued in Romania between 1948-1949, that are difficult to find on commercial mail since they were printed in limited edition and most of them were bearing high surcharges. Figure 5 depicts two items showing nice franking combinations.

The first is a registered and express cover mailed in October 1948 from Galati to Techirghiol. It is franked with 2 x 5 lei stamps from the new People's Republic of Romania coat of arms definitive issue, 31 lei Romanian-Bulgarian friendship overprinted stamp (Scott #696), 20 lei "RPR" overprinted stamp from the King Mihai-Views issue. This is a total of 61 lei, the correct postal rate for a registered + express letter mailed within Romania with the mandatory I.O.V.R. stamp.

The second is a 6 lei imprinted stamp post card from 1948 mailed in August 1948 from Timisoara to Elmhurst, IL USA, franked with additional 1 Leu and 5 Lei stamps from the new coat of arms definitive issue and 12 lei "RPR" overprinted stamp from the King Mihai-Views issue. The postal rate for a post card sent from Romania at that time was 6 Lei and the airmail surcharge for Canada was 48 Lei (total: 54 Lei).

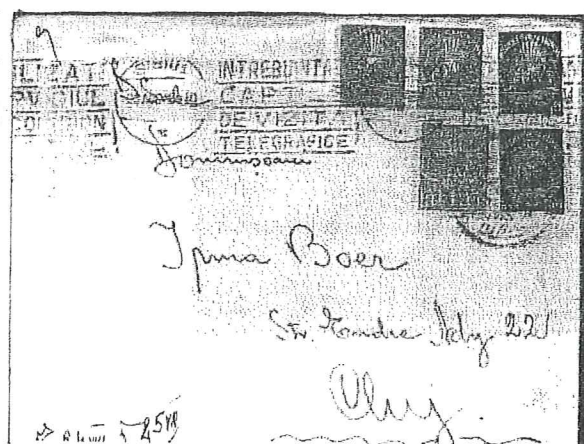


Fig. 6

One of the stamps from the 1948 new definitive issue, Scott #698H, was withdrawn from sale after only 3 months since it was discovered it is inscribed "Bani 0.50" instead of "Lei 0.50" (100 bani make 1 leu). Error stamps in mint condition are quite common, however affixed on covers and/or post cards mailed between July and September 1948 they are quite scarce. Figure 6 depicts a horizontal pair of the "Bani 0.50" error stamps affixed on a cover sent from Sibiu to Cluj in August 1948.



Fig. 7

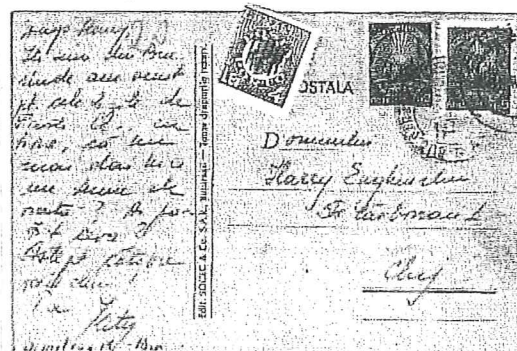


Fig 7a

Postage due (porto) stamps, Scott #J98A-J98D, were also overprinted with "R.P.R." letters, following the King's abdication, Scott #J98E-J98H. A new set of postage due stamps were issued only in 1950. However, old postage due stamps without overprints were still used following the King's abdication as shown in the post card from Figure 7. Mailed from Tinca village, Bihor county, to Sibiu in June 1948, it was franked with only 5 Lei worth of stamps instead of 6 Lei as would have been correct for a post card sent within Romania. Somewhere along its route to its destination a postal employee wrote in red pencil "Porto 2 lei" (To Pay 2 lei) on the front, and the addressee paid that amount (double the amount missing) as shown by the 2 lei postage due stamp. The left stamp from the two-stamp postage due pair has been removed by the postman and returned to the post office as proof of payment. This is characteristic for the use of Romanian postage due stamps.

A wrong usage of the King Mihai 4 Lei overprinted postage due stamp is shown in Figure 7a on a 1950 picture post card sent from Bucharest to Cluj franked with only 7 Lei worth of stamps. The postal rate for a picture post card mailed within Romania was 7,50 lei at that time, thus the addressee should have been charged correctly only 1 leu.

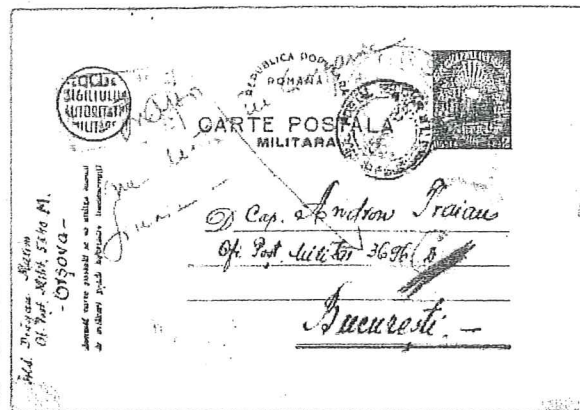


Fig. 8

It must be said that between December 1947 and December 1948 IOVR stamps (issued with the declared purpose of raising money to help the Invalides, Orphanes, and Widows of War and with no postal value) were mandatory on all correspondence sent abroad and within Romania. Only small values were used on mail, the larger denominations known were intended for fiscal purposes only. The two different types of IOVR stamps commonly used on mail are visible on the items illustrated in Figures 2,3,5,6, and 7 respectively.

Post cards with imprinted stamps bearing King Mihai's portrait are known used following his abdication, however the imprinted stamp was covered with adhesive stamps most of the times. New post cards with Romania's new coat of arms imprinted stamps were issued in 1948 for both civilian's (see Figure 5) and soldier's use (see Figure 8). The post card illustrated in Figure 8 was sent in March 1950 by a soldier from a Frontier Guard unit in Orsova (on the Romanian-Yugoslav Danube border) from the Military Post Office #514 (belonging to the Ministry of Interior) to a soldier friend whose address is Military Post Office #3696 in Bucharest. Note the arrival postmark "Oficiul Postal Militar Bucuresti" (Bucharest Military Post Office).

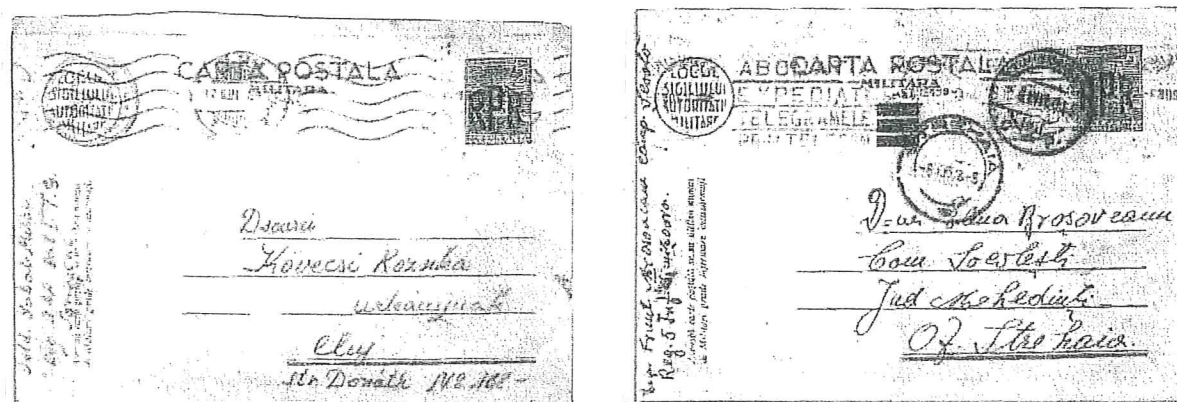


Fig.9

Starting in 1950 this type of postmark ceased to be used, with soldier's mail being canceled with civilian postmarks. Moreover, since the addressee was not in the unit indicated by the sender (see inscription in pencil), the post card was returned to Orsova. Until these new military post cards were issued old military post cards were overprinted with the "R.P.R." letters covering the King's portrait. Military post cards having Kingdom of Romania coat of arms printed under the word Romania were overprinted with a second overprint consisting of three horizontal bars that covers the coat of arms. These overprinted military post cards, both types shown in Figure 9, are very rare.

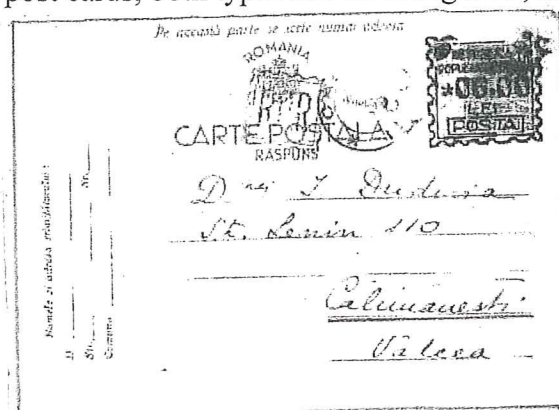


Fig. 10

Another known type of overprinted post card following the change from capitalism to the communist regime in Romania is the so-called “with reply paid post card” issued for civilian use only. The old coat of arms is covered by the “R.P.R.” initials in a frame and the King’s portrait is covered by a stamp-like overprint inscribed “Republica Populara Romana 06.00 lei Posta.” The reply paid post cards were used in Romania between 1882 and 1948 and they consist of two post cards attached together, one being for the sender’s use, while the other one (detached by the addressee) being used to reply, post paid (the sender having paid for postage both ways). These overprinted post cards are very rare too. Such an item depicting the reply side of such a post card is illustrated in Figure 10.



Fig. 11

Another difficult to find post card is the one issued for the use of “volunteers” (mostly students) forced to work in working colonies across the country to build-up railways, roads, dams, etc. in the late 1940’s. A mint example is illustrated in Figure 11. It shows on the lower left corner a propaganda printed slogan that reads “Traiasca Partidul Muncitoresc Roman avangarda clasei muncitoare si forta conducatoare in Republica Populara Romana” (Long Live the Romanian Workers Party the Advanced Detachment of the Workers Class and the Driving Force in People’s Republic of Romania). Below the “carte postala de pe santierele nationale” inscription (post card from the national construction sites) a “volunteer” badge is also shown. The “volunteers” on the so-called national construction sites were officially known as “brigadiers,” as named by the communist authorities. As a “favor,” the “volunteers” paid only 2 lei to mail such a post card instead of 6 lei. Very few such post cards survived.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

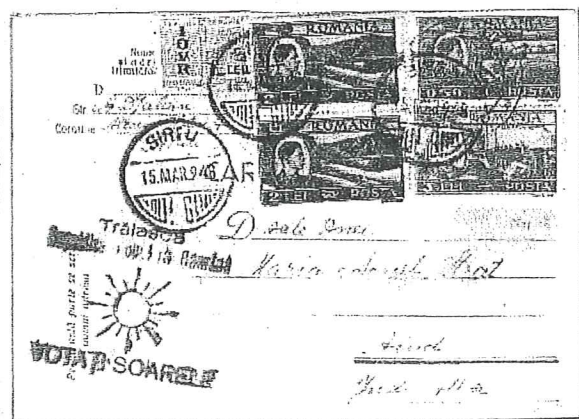


Fig. 14



Fig. 15

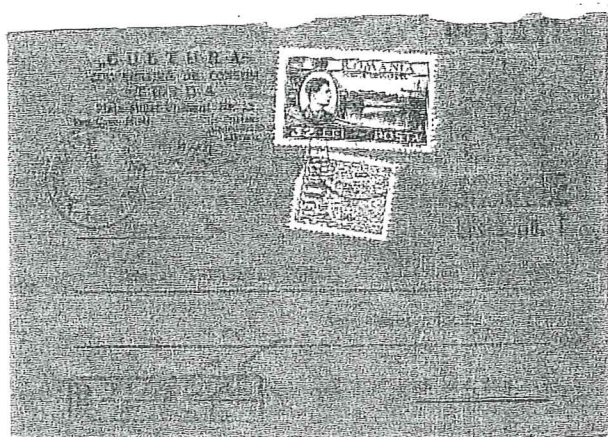


Fig. 16

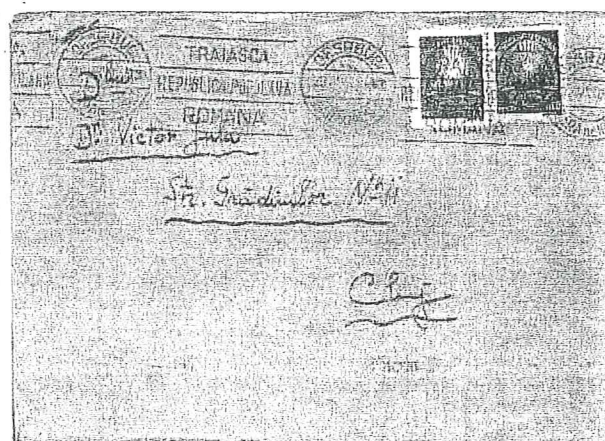


Fig. 17

The change of the political regime in Romania was reflected not only in stamps and post cards but also on propaganda cancellations applied on mail in the early 1948. There are several different types of such propaganda cancellations known, and apparently they were applied in larger cities only (county capitals probably). Several different cancellations are shown in Figures 12-16 and read: “Traiasca Republica Populara Romana” (Long Live People’s Republic of Romania), “Traiasca FDP/Votati Soarele” (Long Live Popular Democratic Front/Vote the Sun), “Votati Soarele/Lista No.1” (Vote the Sun/List number 1), and “Traiasca RPR/Votati Soarele” (Long Live RPR/Vote the Sun). The sun was the emblem chosen by the communists during the 1948 elections. A late communist propaganda cancel that reads “Traiasca Republica Populara Romana” is illustrated in Figure 17. It was used in 1950 in Bucharest. Other types are known to exist.

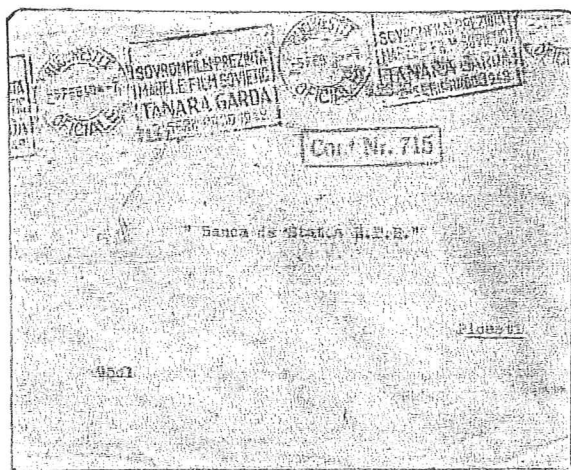


Fig. 18

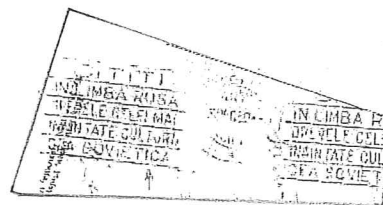


Fig. 19

Pro-Soviet propaganda cancels were also applied on the mail in Romania in 1948. Figure 18 depicts a type that reads “Sovromfilm Prezinta Marele Film Sovietic Tinara Garda, 2 serii, productie 1948” (Sovromfilm Presents the Great Soviet Movie The Young Guard, 2 series, production 1948). Figure 19 reads “Cititi in limba rusa operele celei mai inaintate culturi, cea sovietica” (Read in the Russian Language the Works of the Most Advanced Culture, the Soviet One). Most of the propaganda cancellations and postmarks from the early days of the communist regime in Romania are scarce and difficult to find nowadays. Communism was never popular in Romania and collectors did not keep these items.

References:

1. K. Dragomir, A. Surpateanu: Catalogul marciilor postale romanesti, Bucharest, Romania, 1974.
 2. C. Marinescu: Evolutia tarifelor postale si a taxelor pentru obiectele de corespondenta in Romania 1852-1992, Bucharest, Romania, 1993.
- ***: Scott, Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue, Vol.5, 1999.

Fig. 2 is a late use of a Folded Business Card. Edt.

PRINTED MATTER IN ROMANIA DURING RECENT YEARS (after 1990)

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Printed matter mail is very interesting. It consists of: books, magazines, newspapers, catalogues, almanacs, calendars, and geographic maps, etc.

The postal tariffs are less than letters. It is not permitted to include letters inside the envelope or parcel with the printed matter. Each Romanian post office can accept for overseas transmittal printed matter up to 2 Kg. Printed matter mailings weighing over 2 Kg and up to 5 Kg can be sent only from post