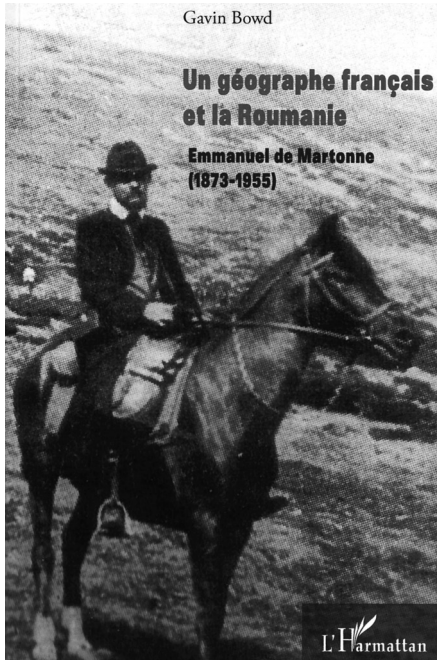


Memento, People and Deeds

ALEXANDRU PĂCURAR



The symbolism of GAVIN BOWD'S book cover: EMMANUEL DE MARTONNE on Mount Cucurbăta Mare in the Bihor range of the Western Carpathians, during the geographic excursions in Romania, in the summer of 1921.

The photo was taken by ROMULUS VUIA from the Institute of Geography belonging to the University of Cluj.

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THE PRESENT analysis shall focus on two exceptional editorial events concerning our country, published by the Parisian publisher L'Harmattan, within the span of a decade. They are the *Journal de Guerre 1916–1917: Front sud de la Roumanie* by Yvonne Blondel (2001) and *Un géographe français et la Roumanie: Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955)*, published in 2012 under the signature of Gavin Bowd. Written with honesty and with a strong passion and dedication to objectivity, they should not be missing from the compulsory bibliography of students in “identitarian” sciences, that is, in history, letters, geography, as well as of those attending military schools. Both volumes reveal new, sometimes uncomfortable aspects, which are nonetheless explicable in a particular political context.

The *Journal* of Yvonne Blondel was published in the collection “Culture et diplomatie françaises” coordinated by the late Professor Norbert Dodille, who was responsible for editing it. The manuscript was sent to him courtesy of Mrs. Nicole Georgescu. The French professor carried out a rich cultural activity in Romania between 1990 and

1996 as director of the French Institute in Bucharest. Thanks to him and his collaborators, the cultural and spiritual ties between France and Romania, brutally interrupted at the beginning of the Proletkult period of communism, were resumed, reviving the tradition of the French Institute in Bucharest. In the spirit of this tradition, he established numerous connections with Romanian intellectuals such as Alexandru Duțu, Gabriel Liiceanu, Marie-France Ionesco, Basarab Nicolescu and so on, active protagonists of the difficult beginnings from the 1990s.

In the foreword to the edition, the editor highlights some of its great features, considering Yvonne Blondel's journal *un document historique* providing us with an *image des peuples* because, as Norbert Dodille says, "une situation de guerre, et de guerre cruelle comme celle que connaît Yvonne Blondel est une situation dans laquelle les images culturelles des peuples, ce qu'on appelle souvent les clichés, sont requises et décrites avec des traits d'autant plus forcés qu'il s'agit de consolider des réflexes identitaires" (p. 13). The fact that the text of the journal is littered with numerous Romanian words suggests to Dodille that we are dealing with "contacts de langue dans le journal intime d'Yvonne Blondel" (p. 18), with astoundingly interesting illustrations. Moreover, the book includes a glossary of Romanian words and phrases at the end, as well as two maps, of Romania and the Quadrilateral.

Then comes the actual journal of the one who, French by birth, daughter of Camille Blondel, the French ambassador in Bucharest between 1907 and 1916, considers herself Romanian by adoption: "depuis que je suis devenue roumaine" (p. 264), as she wrote on 23 February/8 March 1917, a woman who was married to Jean Cămărășescu, the prefect of Caliacra, and later, as of 1922, to Jean Postelnicu.

The journal is divided according to the stages of her refuge, which closely followed the Romanian army and encapsulated, in nuce, the ordeal of an entire country: Silistra (August 1916), Călărași (September 1916), Medgidia (September 1916), Brăila (October 1916), Galați (December 1916) and Iași (January 1917). The journal begins with a description of Silistra, where the author returns after "de bonnes vacances passés à Constantza" (p. 27), of the Romanian seaside at Mamaia, with her daily activities there. In Silistra, her father recounted to her his meeting with Ionel I. C. Brătianu, after the Declaration of War that Romania had addressed to Austria-Hungary, when the Romanian liberal politician allegedly told him: "voilà le premier acte du drame auquel vous avez contribué, Blondel, qui est joué. Le second, va commencer et j'espère dans le succès" (p. 29).

On Tuesday 16/29 August 1916, the diarist writes: "ce matin le passage des Carpates a été confirmé. Tout le monde est heureux de ce début encourageant" (p. 32), noting, at the same time, that "les Bulgares, avec lesquels nous ne som-



JEANNE and YVONNE BLONDEL, mother and daughter,
dressed in Romanian folk costumes, in the period preceding World War I
SOURCE: Yvonne Blondel, *Journal de Guerre* (1916–1917):
Front sud de la Roumanie (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), III and V.

mes pas encore officiellement en guerre, ont bombardé Giurgiu” (ibid.), and that it was a mere forty years since the Romanian soldiers had sacrificed themselves for the liberation of their neighbors from under Ottoman rule.

The situation on the Dobruja front degraded rapidly: “à Turtucaia, les combats ont lieu aux portes de la ville” (p. 50), despite the appeal launched by King Ferdinand “de résister jusqu’à l’extrême limite” (p. 49), the Romanians retreating north of the Danube, to Călărași. As a nurse, Yvonne Blondel ran a field hospital with numerous injured patients, which closely accompanied the Romanian army. Following the example of Queen Mary, the author was impressed with her tireless work, evoking her in the following words: “la reine Marie nous donne l’exemple à toutes” (p. 79), for “Marie, comme la précédente reine Elisabeta, qui fut aussi mère des blessés de la guerre de 1877, a fait aligner de nombreux lits pour nos pauvres et héroïques soldats” (ibid.). She described the villages and farms in the Quadrilateral, the withdrawal of the Romanian administration in Dobruja, the passivity of the Russian allies, and the brutality of the Bulgarians, noting that “le Bulgare est d’une race trop cruelle...” (p. 37), while “les Serbes ont été endurcis par les luttes que leur race a endurées pour se maintenir en vie” (p. 148).

During the retreat towards Brăila, she said: “me voici installée à Brăila, arrêtée sur une nouvelle marche de notre retraite” (p. 185), the author identifying



YVONNE BLONDEL (seated, last on the right), a medical nurse with a group of doctors and caregivers during World War I in Romania

SOURCE: Yvonne Blondel, *Journal de Guerre (1916–1917): Front sud de la Roumanie* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), XI.

with the plight of the Romanians who experienced the ordeal of the superhuman efforts made during the period 1916–1918. Yvonne Blondel noted in her journal the message of resilience and confidence that Queen Mary had inspired in them all, at a time when our chances appeared to be close to nil: “Ne regardez point en arrière et ne dispersez pas vos forces en larmes vaines. Ce qui fut est passé; il vous reste à triompher de demain” (p. XIII).

Forced to withdraw from the enemy, along with the Romanian army, the author wrote: “Nous étions tous attristés par la tournure prise par les événements, mais surtout Flers [Robert de Flers (1872–1927, writer, disciple of Marcel Proust)] et moi, les Russes prenant les choses avec plus de désinvolture et il est vrai que ce n’est pas leur sol que l’on ravage et que l’on piétine. Le nôtre

non plus, à proprement parler, mais voilà où l'affinité latine se fait sentir” (p. 165), noting the detached attitude of the Russians because “au fond, les Russes aiment les Bulgares. Ils ont des affinités religieuses, de langage et autres, plus qu’avec tout autre peuple des Balkans” (p. 195).

In Brăila, the author recorded the arrival of the French military mission led by General Henri Berthelot: “le général Berthelot est bien arrivé à Bucarest à la tête de sa nombreuse mission d’officiers de tous grades et de toutes spécialités” (p. 194), especially pilots and medical staff, who were to suffer big losses on the battlefield. Slowly, “la retraite de Dobroudja est tout à fait consommée” (p. 204), followed shortly by Bucharest, after which there took place the dramatic escape to Iași in Moldavia.

Yvonne Blondel was impressed by the heroism of the Romanian soldiers, by their spirit of sacrifice, observed with deep admiration during the work she carried out in the field hospital she led. She recorded, with pain, that: “un autre soldat, moldave, a le pied écrasé par un obus . . . Chaque fois que je frôle son lit il me tire mon tablier en me demandant s’il arrive bientôt à Bârlad. Il doit se croire encore en train et il ajoute en criant presque: ‘j’ai *dor* de mes deux fils et je sais, ils m’attendent en gare” (pp. 219–220). As can be seen, she frequently used Romanian words, which were more expressive for rendering the local context. She perfectly understood the Romanian peasants: “ces paysans roumains que j’avais si peu approchés jusqu’à ce jour m’intéressent et je sens que je m’y attache. Ce n’est pas sans émotion que je considère l’argile de la race. Presque tous ont une dignité qui me frappe et parfois frise la grandeur. Il faut avancer plus profondément dans la connaissance de leur nature dans le bon, comme dans le mauvais, pour bien les juger” (p. 220).

In another stage of the refuge, in Galați, she felt “alourdie par les mauvaises nouvelles de toutes parts” (p. 229), the refuge in Iași following a few days later: “à Iassy, la gare était noire du monde” (p. 243).

The *Journal* of Yvonne Blondel is a historical document, a fresco of Romania in 1916–1918, for, as Norbert Dodille states, “ce qu’elle raconte, c’est la mort et la souffrance quotidiennes des simples soldats et des civils, errant sur les routes, et pour lesquels elle doit lutter âprement, avec son caractère opiniâtre, afin de les ramener dans des hôpitaux de fortune. Quelques rencontres inattendues sur le front des Balkans, avec par exemple l’écrivain Robert de Flers, des souvenirs de la vie de cour et des visites du roi en province au temps de la paix qu’elle se remémore, ajoutent d’intéressants contrepoints au caractère dramatique de son témoignage” (back cover).

Towards the end of the journal, the author asked herself: “révolutions, troupes révoltées, l’anarchie partout. Toutes ces nouvelles nous semblent bien graves pour nous. Pauvre petit triangle roumain, que v-as-tu devenir dans cette tourmente?” (p. 267).



YVONNE BLONDEL'S field hospital in Romania, during World War I
 Source: Yvonne Blondel, *Journal de Guerre (1916–1917): Front sud de la Roumanie*
 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), XIV.

Besides the description of daily events—this is, still, a diary—the geographical aspects abound, as the author describes places, people and events in the context of Romania's entry into World War I. What is commendable is Norbert Dodille's effort to provide contemporary readers with access to the spiritual states of a Frenchwoman who chose to stay close to the Romanians, as one of their own, to hope alongside them and believe in their lucky star. The book is useful to a wide range of specialists, especially young professionals, including geographers and historians, who are less familiar with memoir literature.

IN 2012, at the same publisher L'Harmattan, there saw the light of print the book *Un géographe français et la Roumanie: Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955)*, authored by Professor Gavin Bowd from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. A passionate connoisseur of modern history and of the contemporary realities of our country, the recent works of this author include *Paul Morand et la Roumanie* (2002), as well as *La France et la Roumanie communiste* (2009). His book emphasizes the crucial role of the scholar Emmanuel de Martonne in supporting, promoting and defending the claims of Romania in its efforts towards state unification after World War I. The French geographer dedicated a large part of his scientific activity to researching and understanding the Romanian realities, in the sphere of both physical geography and anthropogeography, as he came to know the Romanian geographical space and the Romanians' soul.

The book impresses through the thoroughness with which the author approaches its central theme, namely, the evolution of Romania during the last century, more specifically, its completion as a state following the Great Union of 1918, after the tribulations of World War I, the building of the system of alliances during the interwar period and the efforts to counteract the revisionist actions, World War II and Romania's entry into the sphere of Soviet influence, the stages in the communization of the country—from Stalinism to the apparent openness of the late 1960s and, finally, the period after 1990. A vast archival material is explored: documents, journals, memoirs, correspondence, travel impressions, press articles, many of them unpublished, unknown to the Romanian public, everything from the perspective of Emmanuel de Martonne and his disciples.

Gavin Bowd's writing is captivating, the text being a sequence of statements, facts, commentaries, conclusions, all corroborated and supported by the numerous quotations the author has selected from various sources: memoirs, documents, correspondence, travelogues, the press of the time, with reference to domains such as geography, international relations, geopolitics, history, the academic milieu, the administration, interpersonal relationships, etc. Therefore, the author moves between the past, a temporal space in the context of which he explains and accounts for the actions undertaken by Romania and its friends, and the present, through the comments he makes and the conclusions he draws about past events. All these concern Romania and its progress over about a century (the time span between the end of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries), through the eyes of the French geographer and his disciples, of both French and Romanian extraction. The very structure of the book demonstrates this, its main chapters being "Vers la Grande Roumanie," "D'une guerre à une autre," and "Ruptures et retrouvailles." Preceded by two shorter chapters: "Sources et remerciements" and "Introduction," the book ends with the "Conclusion." Among those to whom Gavin Bowd expresses his thanks are Ana-Maria Stan, a historian by training, a generous and passionate researcher, curator at the Museum of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

In the first chapter, "Vers la Grande Roumanie," Gavin Bowd manages to present, on the one hand, the professional fulfillment of de Martonne as a geographer (how he came to know the Romanians and the geographic area they inhabit directly, in a cause-effect relation of causality and geographical determinism, as seen and perceived by a series of Romanian personalities) and, on this basis, the passion with which he committed himself to supporting the cause of Romania; and, on the other hand, the unification of the Romanian state thanks to its sacrifices during World War I and its legitimate claims. With substantial talent, based on documents, the author presents de Martonne's actions and role

in supporting the Romanian claims, in the light of scientific evidence. Reading through this chapter, one is astounded and persuaded, at the same time, of the huge role the French geographer played during and after the Peace Conference in supporting and then consolidating the Romanian state, which had doubled its surface area and population.

His correspondence with a number of Romanian personalities such as Nicolae Iorga, Ioan Bianu, Simion Mehedinți, and especially with Emil Racoviță and George Vâlsan, who were among the founders of the Romanian University of Cluj in 1919, is quite special. We now know for sure that Vâlsan was his favorite disciple, that he was appreciated for his professional training and the high civic spirit he had demonstrated. We are also convinced that, thanks to Vâlsan's appointment at the helm of the Institute of Geography belonging to the University of Cluj and to his laying the foundations of geographical higher education in the Romanian language, de Martonne agreed to hold a series of conferences in Cluj and to undertake the scientific excursions of the years 1921–1922, in fact setting the foundations of modern Romanian geography. Moreover, de Martonne brought compelling and irrefutable arguments to justify the fact that the geographical-historical provinces belonged to the Kingdom of Romania, more specifically: Transylvania, Maramureș, Crișana, Banat, Bukovina and the land between the Pruth and the Dniester (the latter's name of Bessarabia, so well entrenched, is improper!), the author referring to it as "traceur de frontières." Referring to Bessarabia, which in 1919 he had crossed by car, from north to south, after the Romanian Royal Army had cleansed it of the anarchic Bolshevik elements, de Martonne wrote: "À condition d'être muni de permis de circulation exigés partout dans la zone des armées, il est facile de circuler en Bessarabie. La tranquillité y est complète, l'ordre parfait . . . L'assurance contre le bolchevisme est le bienfait le plus évident de l'occupation roumaine et celui qui fait le plus d'impression sur la classe moyenne. Du Nord au Sud, le pays est admirablement cultivé: dans les steppes du Budgeac aux immenses horizons les épis ondulent à perte de vue, le maïs, retardés par les pluies, s'étalent en bandes d'un vert clair, alternent avec les bandes noirs des labours frais" (p. 74), recognizing the justness of the study authored by the scholar George Murgoci, who had brought historical arguments to prove that this was "an ancient Bessarabian, hence Romanian land."

Gavin Bowd proves to be a lucid and fine connoisseur of Romania's modern history, his arguments and conclusions being of unquestionable relevance. Three examples are telling: the first concerns the entry of the Romanian Royal Army in Hungary, justified by the magnitude of Béla Kun's revolution, about which he writes that "les grands journaux français de ce matin [4 August] s'occupent de la chute de Béla Kun et l'attribuent unanimement à l'avance victorieuse sur Budapest de l'armée roumaine . . . La presse française est unanime en éloges

pour l'entrée à Budapest et reconnaît le grand service rendu par la Roumanie aux Alliés et à la civilisation" (p. 76). Secondly, in the chapter "D'une guerre à une autre," the author lays the right emphasis on the rejection of revisionist ideas by the cultural and political elite of Romania and its French friends, invoking the argument of the blind, vengeful action (a less known case) involving one of the largest monetary counterfeiting actions in the modern history of mankind, undertaken by Hungary, when at the stamp factory in Budapest they printed fake French francs worth about 29 million, in retaliation "à tous azimuts," meaning at all levels, for the attitude of France at the Peace Conference. Thirdly, the action of Romania's Institute of Statistics, which, under the leadership of Anton Golopenția, conducted research on the Romanian population and settlements in the territories between the Dniester and the Bug, in Crimea and in the Don Basin (p. 152). This event was attended by geographers such as Nicolae and Mara Popp, Nicolae Al. Rădulescu, who suffered the horrors of the communist prisons and were then marginalized. Today, when we have the freedom to speak openly, we can say that the census mentioned above, demanded by the country's leadership at the time, was justified.

Chapter two outlines the tireless actions of de Martonne and other French and Romanian geographers with a view to countering, with scientific arguments, the revisionist policies of some European countries like Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the USSR. Also, the author demonstrates how the French geographic current influenced the training of geographers in the "spirit of the Versailles Peace" of 1919, by affirming the right of peoples, including Romania, to self-determination. In the spring of 1937, at the invitation of the Romanian Anti-Revisionist League, de Martonne undertook a working visit to Romania—which would be his last—on which occasion he held a series of conferences in Bucharest, Iași, and Cluj and organized scientific tours in the Getic Subcarpathians and in the Western Carpathians. Among his most loyal disciples were the Romanians George Vâlsan, Victor Tufescu, Nicolae Orghidan, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Tiberiu Morariu, and his countrymen Robert Ficheux and Jacques Ancel. The latter, who had visited us before, in 1928, 1933 and 1935, as a fierce opponent of revisionism, was to end up in the Nazi extermination camps.

During World War II, to the extent that the situation allowed him, de Martonne kept in touch with the Cluj professors, especially with Emil Racoviță, but also with Romanian geographers who had adhered to the spirit of Versailles, at a time when Romania was within the German sphere of influence, and some of them had been won over by its geopolitical school, as was the case of Simion Mehedinți, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ion Conea, and the sociologist Anton Golopenția.

The chapter "Ruptures et retrouvailles" describes Romania's entry into the Soviet sphere of influence and, with it, the disappearance of "Greater Romania,"

Transylvania's incorporation in its entirety within the Kingdom of Romania, the forced abdication of King Michael I and the abusive change of the constitutional order. Located behind the Iron Curtain instated by the Soviets, Romania became a captive state, experiencing an oppressive communist regime, which was not representative for the country, and broke off its traditional relations with the Western European nations, including France. After a terrible decade (1945–1955), there began a period of thaw, marked by the timid resumption of the ties with the West. De Martonne's role was symbolic because Europe, in whose construction he had participated, had collapsed, and the communist ideology was alien to him. However, in the years of hope for Romania, 1945–1947, the scholar participated in debates and conferences, where he supported the cause of Romania, but before the Soviet Moloch any scientific logic and common sense would have been hazardous, doomed to failure. Gavin Bowd describes the tragic fate of intellectuals such as Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Victor Tufescu, Simion Mehedinți, Ion Conea, Anton Golopenția and many others, who were to suffer the Stalinist purges, some of them paying with their lives, because they had faithfully served their homeland. After the dark decade of 1945–1954, an apparent period of calm started, with a restoration of the ties between Romania and France, including between the Romanian and the French geographers. Tiberiu Morariu had an overwhelming role in this regard, as under his authority the personality and merits of Emmanuel de Martonne, who had passed away in 1955, were recognized. The author devotes numerous pages (pp. 180–196) to a description of the steps taken in resuming the ties with the French geographers, and to the fulminating evolution of Tiberiu Morariu's career, who had become the director of the Cluj Institute of Geography and the only doctoral supervisor: “Entre 1958–1974, il [Tiberiu Morariu] occupe la position clé de rédacteur en chef des *Studii și cercetări de geologie, geofizică și geografie*. Ses travaux prodigieux sur les problèmes de géographie appliquée, aménagement du territoire, géomorphologie, processus de versant, urbanisme et périglaciaires, produiront près de 400 publications. Pendant la plus grande partie de la période communiste Morariu sera le seul directeur de thèses de doctorat, et formera donc des générations de géographes roumains” (p. 196). Without disputing the role of Tiberiu Morariu, the fact remains that he was the man of the regime—“il reçoit les honneurs du régime” (p. 195)—and the only member of the Institute of Geography belonging to the University of Cluj who was kept in office under communism, while all the others were removed.

Above all, the stature of de Martonne's personality and activity in reference to Romania remain intangible, as regards his geographical research, the geographical education system, or his support, with scientific arguments, of the boundaries of Greater Romania. When, on 23 May 2005, the Romanian Academy and

the French Institute in Bucharest jointly commemorated the 50th anniversary of the scholar's death, Professor Violette Rey highlighted, in an arc over time, the endurance of de Martonne's ideas, this "traceur de frontière de Versailles," even in the contemporary context of globalization and European integration, in a world of migrations and multiple identities (p. 216).



Abstract

Memento, People and Deeds

The study highlights the main ideas that can be drawn from two notable works that focus on Romania's contemporary history, which saw the light of print at the Parisian publisher L'Harmattan. Yvonne Blondel's *Journal de Guerre 1916–1917* (2001) is a genuine historical document, which describes the tribulations of the Romanian Army on the southern front, culminating in the abandonment of Bucharest and the withdrawal to Moldavia, seen through the eyes of a woman who belonged to the French aristocracy and diplomatic service. She brought her contribution in a field hospital that permanently accompanied the Romanian army. In his book, *Un géographe français et la Roumanie: Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955)* (2012) Gavin Bowd skillfully highlights the support brought by the French geographer Emmanuel de Martonne to the knowledge, understanding and support of Romania's claims to territorial unity. Romania and its century-long course (from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth) are described through the eyes of the French geographer and his French and Romanian disciples, with the entire corollary of episodes regarding the moments when the French-Romanian relations tightened or cooled off, the latter being caused by Romania's entry into the Soviet sphere of influence.

Keywords

World War I, Yvonne Bondel, Emmanuel de Martonne, geography and geographers