



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROMANIAN LEU

Bancnote și bancnote emise din 1980
coins and banknotes issued



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROMANIAN LEU

The thaler was a very popular coin which came in many different shapes and enjoyed a wide circulation throughout Europe. The *Leeuwendaalder* (the lion-thaler or simply the lion) had an overwhelming influence on the money circulation in the Romanian provinces. Minted in the United Provinces of the Netherlands, the coin featured a rampant lion, standing on its back feet, on the reverse. The first issue of this type was minted in 1575 in the province of Holland.

In the 17th century, the lion-thaler became the most frequently used high-value silver coin not only in the Romanian principalities, but also throughout the Balkan Peninsula. Greatly appreciated by the people and being circulated in vast amounts, the lion-thaler was even exhibited as merchandise in fairs across the Ottoman Empire.

Before the minting of the lion-thaler was discontinued around the mid-18th century, the population in the Romanian principalities had come to identify the lion (*leu* in Romanian) with money. This is the most illustrative evidence of the influence that the coin had on the Romanian monetary economy. The leu had become the unit of account both in Moldavia and Wallachia, subdivided into 40 *parale*. Consequently, calculations were made in lei and parale, whereas the payments were made in real currency, of different origins and denominations, at a pre-established exchange rate.

1774

The Peace Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca is signed, ending the Russian-Turkish War of 1768–1774

1775

Bukovina is annexed to the Habsburg Empire

1812

The Treaty of Bucharest is signed between the Ottoman and the Russian Empires. Bessarabia is ceded to Russia

1821

The rebellion led by Tudor Vladimirescu in Wallachia



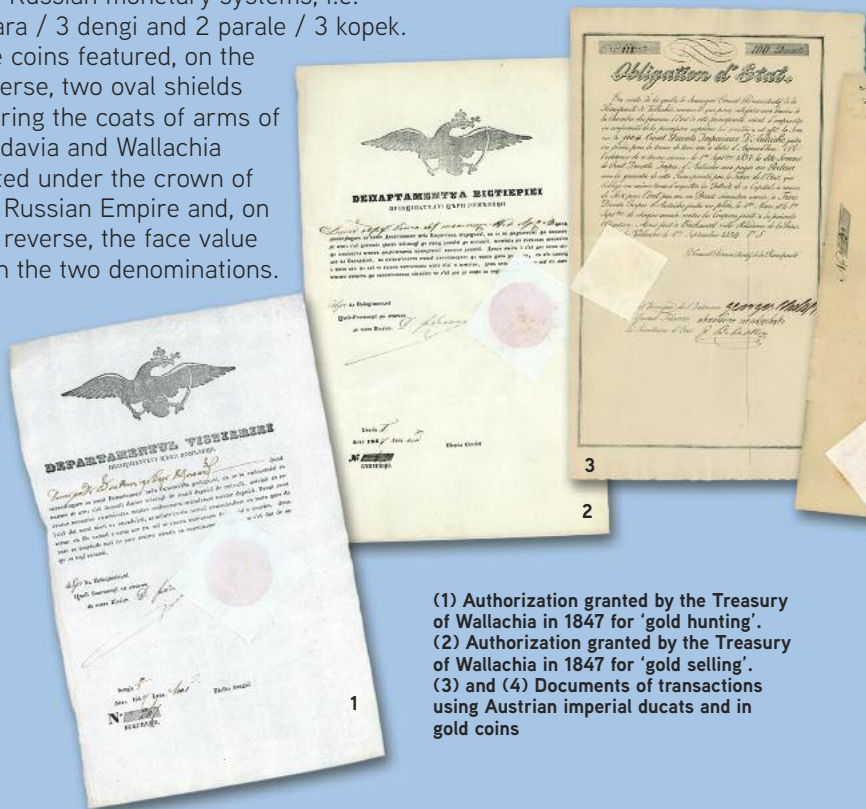
Coin of 2 parale / 3 kopek minted in 1772 in Sadagura

1768–1774

During the Russian-Turkish War (1768–1774), the Russian occupation army issued several bronze coins in Wallachia and Moldavia. The coins minted in Sadagura (near Cernăuți) had dual denomination, valid in both Turkish and Russian monetary systems, i.e. 1 para / 3 dengi and 2 parale / 3 kopek. The coins featured, on the obverse, two oval shields bearing the coats of arms of Moldavia and Wallachia united under the crown of the Russian Empire and, on the reverse, the face value with the two denominations.

1831–1832

The Organic Regulations promulgated in 1831–1832 attempted, for the first time, to unify the exchange rates in Wallachia and Moldavia by introducing two benchmarks linked to the leu as unit of account, divided into 40 parale. The gold benchmark was the Dutch ducat worth 31 lei and 20 parale, whereas the silver benchmark was the Austrian 20 kreutzer coin which was worth 2 lei and 10 parale.



- (1) Authorization granted by the Treasury of Wallachia in 1847 for 'gold hunting'.
- (2) Authorization granted by the Treasury of Wallachia in 1847 for 'gold selling'.
- (3) and (4) Documents of transactions using Austrian imperial ducats and in gold coins

1860

A draft of national currency issue dates back to the ruling of Alexandru Ioan Cuza. The suggested name for the currency was *român* (meaning Romanian), after the French model of the franc currency. Negotiations were conducted for financing an issue with the support of several banks in Paris. Another name, *romanat*, was also proposed, divided into 10 *decime* or *bani*, which in turn were each divided into 10 *centime* or *bănișori*. However, the intentions of the Romanian government failed to materialize in the absence of a firm support from Emperor Napoleon III who sought to avoid any diplomatic conflicts with the Ottoman Empire. Only the designs made by Adrien Prévost de Longpérier, *conservateur des Antiques* at the Louvre Museum, for the 5 sutimi, 10 centime, 5 români and 20 români coins were preserved.

1848

The Wallachian Revolution (1848–1849)

1859

Alexandru Ioan Cuza is elected ruler of Wallachia and Moldavia. The Union of the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia takes place

1862

1 FF = 1 leu
Bread (1 kg): 0.11 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 0.81 lei
Pork (1 kg): 0.33 lei
Wine (1 liter): 0.36 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 0.06 lei

1866

Carol I is elected ruling prince of Romania (1866–1881)

Moneychangers (Zarafi) – avant la lettre bankers

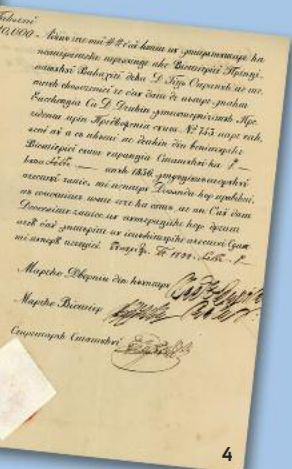
In the early 19th century, Wallachia and Moldavia did not have any real banks. Instead of banks, there were moneychangers who established the rates between the various denominations circulating on the territory of the two Romanian principalities in the absence of an official currency. The documents of the time show that clients used to complain to the authorities, accusing the moneychangers of either giving short weight or giving lighter or damaged coins in exchange, or even putting counterfeited coins into circulation. The moneychangers saw their business flourish particularly after the signing of the 1829 Adrianople Treaty, stipulating the freedom of grains trade for the Romanian Principalities. Thus, the need for credits increased and the moneychangers' activity became gradually more similar to that carried out by banks. Having more capital, some moneychangers left the street trade and established real institutions dealing with grains exports and luxury goods imports.

Exchange rate dating back to 1882. Exchange slip released in 1889 by a moneychanger in Bucharest



CHANGES	
Londre din ...	24.8 7/8 2/8
Paris din ...	24.5/8 1/8
Vienna din ...	99.5/8 1/8
Berlin din ...	117 5/8
St. Petersburg din ...	2.1/8 1/2

PENSII	
London din ...	21.7/8 1/2
Paris din ...	21.5/8 1/2
Vienna din ...	99.5/8 1/2
Berlin din ...	117 5/8
St. Petersburg din ...	2.1/8 1/2



Designs of 5 sutimi, 10 centime, 5 romani and 20 romani made by A. de Longprier

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The speech delivered by ruler A.I. Cuza before the Chamber of Deputies on 29 February 1860, during the opening of the debates on the need to modernize the country, according to the Paris Convention

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Alexandru Ioan Cuza, ruling prince of Romania (1859–1866)

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Napoleon III, Emperor of the French Empire (1852–1870)

1 FF = 1 leu
 Bread (1 kg): 0.11 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.24 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 0.34 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 0.40 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.05 lei

1867

The establishment of the national monetary system

1 FF = 1 leu
 Bread (1 kg): 0.24 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.25 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 0.55 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 0.47 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.07 lei

1877

The Romanian War of Independence

1 FF = 1 leu
 Bread (1 kg): 0.35 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.83 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 0.75 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 0.59 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.23 lei

1878

The Berlin Treaty acknowledges Romania's independence

1 FF = 1 leu
 Bread (1 kg): 0.31 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.30 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 0.83 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 0.37 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.12 lei

1880

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1867

The Monetary Act of 4 May 1867 stipulated the issue of gold coins (5, 10 and 20 lei), silver coins (1 leu, 2 lei and 50 bani), as well as bronze coins (1 ban, 2, 5 and 10 bani). The definition of Romania's currency unit resembled that of the French franc, being described as weighing 'five grams of silver, out of which 835‰ were fine silver and 165‰ alloy'. According to the bimetallic gold-silver system of the Latin Monetary Union, the leu was divided into 100 bani, which put an end to the former subdivision in 40 parale. Article 11 stated that the national gold and silver coins minted by France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland 'shall be accepted by all exchange offices, the same as the country's official currency'.



The location of the Mint on Kisseleff Street, late 19th century

1868

The initiative to put the first Romanian gold coins into circulation failed due to the resistance of the Ottoman Empire which interpreted it as Romania's attempt to proclaim its independence. Because of the Turkish opposition to the mintage of gold and silver coins, the first Romanian coins were made of bronze. The first coins were issued in 1868 on the premises of Watt & Co. and Heaton in Birmingham.

1870

The State Mint was established in Bucharest. The first Romanian gold coins of 20 lei and silver coins of 1 leu minted in Romania were put into circulation. Until 1880, other coins with face values of 50 bani, 1 leu, 2 lei and 5 lei were issued.

1877

The first Romanian paper money (promissory notes) was issued by the Ministry of Finance in order to cover the expenses sustained during Romania's War of Independence. The design was realised by the French artists Bramtot and Duval, based on the watercolours made by Romanian painter Nicolae Grigorescu.



1 FF = 1 leu

Bread (1 kg): 0.23 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.60 lei
Pork (1 kg): 0.75 lei
Wine (1 liter): 0.25 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 0.12 lei

1881

Carol I, King of Romania (1881–1914). The Parliament proclaims the Kingdom of Romania

1 FF = 1 leu

Bread (1 kg): 0.20 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.32 lei
Pork (1 kg): 0.70 lei
Wine (1 liter): 0.60 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 0.10 lei

1890

1 FF = 1 leu

Bread (1 kg): 0.27 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 1.80 lei
Pork (1 kg): 1.33 lei
Wine (1 liter): 0.95 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 0.13 lei

1911

The Balkan Wars (1911–1913)

1 FF = 1 leu

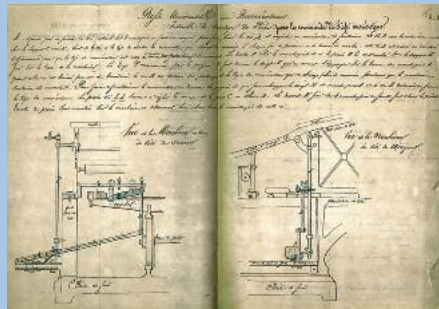
Bread (1 kg): 0.28 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 2.32 lei
Pork (1 kg): 1.31 lei
Wine (1 liter): 0.90 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 0.16 lei

1913

The Bucharest Peace Conference. The Southern Dobruja area becomes part of Romania

1880

The law on the establishment of a 'discount and circulation bank' ascertains the creation of the National Bank of Romania (NBR), which held subscribed capital (of which one third was accounted for by the Romanian government and two thirds by individuals) and had 'the exclusive right to issue notes payable to bearer'. The first paper money issued by the NBR was the existing promissory notes that were stamped with the central bank's logo. These notes were kept in circulation from 1880 until the NBR printed new banknotes in Bucharest with the support of the Bank of France.



Drawing of a banknote printing machine sent by Eugeniu Carada from Paris in 1880

1881

The first NBR banknote issue consisted of 20 lei notes. They were printed in the NBR workshops in Bucharest on stereotyped plate and using watermark paper. Both the plate and the paper had been provided by the Bank of France. The same year, the BNR also issued banknotes with face value of 100 lei and of 1,000 lei. Until World War I, the Romanian banknotes were designed by French artists and printed only on watermark paper. The paper was manufactured in France and initially came in one colour only, namely cobalt blue. Starting with 1896, the watermark paper came in two colours.



Detail of the NBR overlay stamped on the promissory note of 20 lei

1883

The year 1883 saw the first counterfeiting of a NBR banknote. In Varna, Vasilache Țucală, together with two accomplices, counterfeited 20 lei banknotes amounting to 21,720 lei.

1890

The law of 29 March 1890 maintained the definition of the currency unit as stipulated in the 1867 monetary law, but revoked the silver definition of the leu. The silver coins thus became sub-fractional coins. The new law provided that the foreign gold coins issued in the system of the Latin Monetary Union could be exchanged at public offices. Until the establishment of the new mint on the Filaret Hill, in the interwar period, Romanian coins were minted abroad in France, England and Belgium.

1901

The Romanian government is no longer shareholder of the NBR.



1 FF = 1 leu

Bread (1 kg): 0.27 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 2.18 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 1.25 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 0.90 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.16 lei

1914

King Carol I passes away. Ferdinand is crowned king (1914–1927). World War I breaks out (28 July 1914). Romania declares its neutrality

1 FF = 1 leu

Bread (1 kg): 0.32 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 2.40 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 1.49 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 1.12 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.18 lei

1915

Romania enters World War I (28 August 1916). The Romanian army is defeated on the fronts in Oltenia and Dobruđa. The government and the Royal family take refuge in Iași. The German army occupies Bucharest (6 December 1916)

1 FF = 1 leu

Bread (1 kg): 0.32 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 3.35 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 1.98 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 1.17 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.16 lei

1916

After the outbreak of World War I, the coin circulation slowed down due to increasing inflation, hoarding and the impossibility of minting new issues abroad. The solution was to print paper money to replace metal coins. Thus, notes with face values of 1 leu, 2 lei and 5 lei were issued in 1915-1916 and 10, 25 and 50 bani were issued in 1917.



1916–1917

Given the defeats of the Romanian army and the imminent occupation of the entire national territory, the government decided to send Romania's treasury, worth about 2 billion lei, to Moscow, divided into two shipments. The treasury was subsequently seized by the Bolshevik regime. The loss of the NBR metallic stock would negatively influence the stability and convertibility of the leu in the immediate post-war period.



Table with the reception of the NBR treasury by the Russian authorities in 1917

Table with the reception of the NBR treasury by the Russian authorities in 1917									
No.	Descrierea	Cantitate	Valoarea	Observații
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

Protocol about the shipment of the NBR treasury to Moscow in 1917



FF was not quoted

Bread (1 kg): 0.51 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 9.00 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 3.93 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 2.70 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 0.45 lei

1917

FF was not quoted

Bread (1 kg): 0.46 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 17.30 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 14.00 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 9.41 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 3.08 lei

1918

1 FF = 2.50 lei

Bread (1 kg): 0.83 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 26.83 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 14.33 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 10.10 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 1.87 lei

1919

1 FF = 4.59 lei

Bread (1 kg): 1.05 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 29.88 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 13.20 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 11.45 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 1.41 lei

1920

The Peace Treaty is signed in Bucharest by Romania and the Central Powers (7 May 1918). The Central Powers surrender (29 September – 11 November)

The peace treaties signed in Paris in 1919 and 1920 ascertain the creation of Greater Romania

1917

25 April 1917 saw the discontinuation of banknote convertibility, marking the end of the monometallic gold system in Romania.

1917–1918

The Romanian General Bank issue. The representatives of the Central Powers decided in Berlin to print paper money valid in the occupied Romanian territory. They nominated the Romanian General Bank (RGB) as the issuing institution, a German-owned bank established in 1895. The issue volume was entirely covered by the funds existing in a special deposit set up at the Reichsbank, at the rate of 80 RM per 100 lei, which would have had to be paid back by the Romanian government at the end of the war. The RGB money was printed in Berlin with the following denominations: 25 and 50 bani, 1, 5, 20, 100 and 1,000 lei. The circulation of the lei issued by the NBR was not forbidden, but the German Military Administration imposed a lower exchange rate than the BGR lei (1 NBR lei = 75 RM).

1919–1920

The leu saw a fast depreciation in the first years after the end of World War I due to the massive issues of banknotes needed not only to cover the budget deficit, but also to replace the foreign currencies still circulating on the Romanian territory. Furthermore, the terrible fall in output following the war-induced damages contributed to the depreciation of the national currency. Thus, in 1919, the Paris Stock Exchange came to quote the leu, on average, at 37.26 FF per 100 lei, compared to an average exchange rate of 100 FF per 98.21 lei five years earlier.



1 FF = 2.64 lei

Bread (1 kg): 2.06 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 26.79 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 613.91 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 13.50 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 1.48 lei

1921

The agrarian reform

1 FF = 13.44 lei

Bread (1 kg): 4.25 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 53.40 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 37.91 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 14.95 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 3.90 lei

1923

The Parliament ratifies a new Constitution of Romania

1 FF = 7.56 lei

Bread (1 kg): 9.37 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 79.79 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 53.83 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 25.25 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 4.75 lei

1927

King Ferdinand I passes away. The regency is formed on behalf of young king Mihai I (1927–1930)

1 FF = 6.56 lei

Bread (1 kg): 10.00 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 78.00 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 61.25 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 26.50 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 5.00 lei

1929

1920

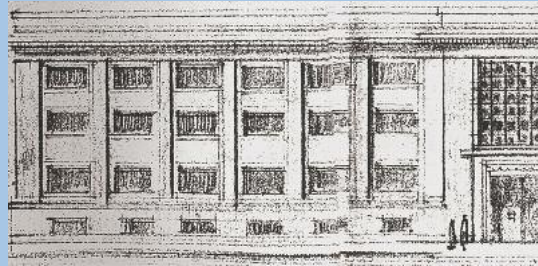
Monetary unification was achieved by exchanging into NBR-issued lei all the currencies that had circulated in the Romanian provinces in 1918 (the Austro-Hungarian krone, the Romanoff and Lvov rubles and the RGB-issued lei).



Gold shipment at the National Bank of Romania in the interwar period

1925

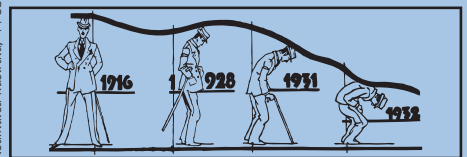
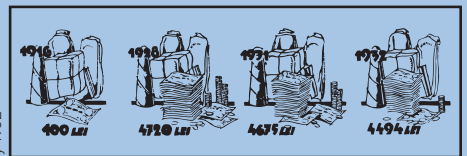
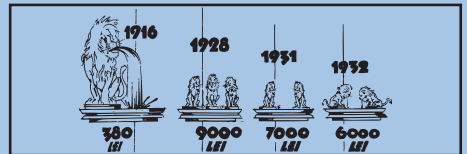
The State is again one of the NBR shareholders. This was the beginning of a period of monetary stability, which would constitute the bases for the return to the convertibility of the domestic currency.



The design of the NBR Printing House done by architect Radu Dudescu

1929

The Monetary Act of 7 February 1929 defines the leu as 10 mg of gold with a fineness of 900‰. The banknotes issued by the BNR were once again convertible into gold coins and gold bars or into gold-convertible currencies.



Realitatea Ilustrată, 4 February 1932

An evocative depiction in a magazine reflecting the consequences of the Great Depression on Romanians' living conditions

1929-1933

The Great Depression ruined the 1929 monetary stability. At this time the NBR established a monopoly on foreign currency trade.



1 FF = 6.60 lei

Bread (1 kg): 7.50 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 72.00 lei
Pork (1 kg): 46.75 lei
Wine (1 liter): 25.00 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 2.90 lei

1930

King Carol II
(1930–1940)



King Carol II

1 FF = 8.62 lei

Bread (1 kg): 6.75 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 56.90 lei
Pork (1 kg): 29.02 lei
Wine (1 liter): 20.00 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 3.70 lei

1937



The Old Palace of the NBR during the interwar period

1 FF = 7.05 lei

Bread (1 kg): 7.30 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 62.60 lei
Pork (1 kg): 34.23 lei
Wine (1 liter): 20.36 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 3.60 lei

1938

King Carol II institutes a regime of monarchic authority (10 February 1938)

1 FF = 9.64 lei

Bread (1 kg): 7.98 lei
Chicken (1 pcs.): 66.70 lei
Pork (1 kg): 38.27 lei
Wine (1 liter): 32.50 lei
Potatoes (1 kg): 4.00 lei

1939

World War II breaks out. Romania proclaims its neutrality

1935

The establishment of the National Mint. All minting costs for the production of the metal coins were covered by the Ministry of Finance.

1936

A new official devaluation of the leu took place by re-evaluating the NBR's gold stock from 111,111.11 lei per kilo of fine gold (set in 1929) to 153,333.33 lei per kilo of fine gold.

1937

The 1,000 lei type IV banknote was put into circulation. The watercolours made by painter Nicolae Grigorescu in 1877 were used for this issue and also over the next decade to issue three more types of banknotes.

1930

According to the 1929 Monetary Act, the 5 and 20 lei banknotes issued by the NBR were replaced by metal coins with the same face value.



1932

The first banknote produced using the *intaglio* printing process was put into circulation (5,000 lei type I).



1 FF = 11.97 lei
 Bread (1 kg): 10.98 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 106.66 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 35.56 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 32.50 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 6.55 lei

1 FF = 4.40 lei
 Bread (1 kg): 14.90 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 220.83 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 96.16 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 68.25 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 10.10 lei

1 FF = 4.69 lei
 Bread (1 kg): 24.82 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 265.00 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 152.67 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 120.00 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 16.68 lei

1 FF = 4.07 lei
 Bread (1 kg): 32.72 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 472.00 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 181.00 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 144.50 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 16.00 lei

1940

Romania surrenders Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR (26–29 June 1940), Northern Transylvania to Hungary (30 August 1940) and the Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria (7 September 1940). King Carol II abdicates (6 September 1940). Mihai I is crowned as King of Romania (1940–1947). Romania joins the war against the USSR (22 June 1941)

1941

1942

1943



Detail of the overprint applied on the 5,000 lei banknote, type I

1940

Following the changes of the political regime on 6 September 1940 when King Carol II abdicated and the National Legionary State was proclaimed, no new banknotes were issued to reflect the latest developments. Instead, it was decided to use overprinting on the old notes.

1941

The 50 and 100 lei coins were withdrawn from circulation due to the fact that they were made of nickel, which was considered a strategic metal since it was used in the armament industry.

1941–1944

The exchange rate of the leu fluctuated during 1941–1944. Thus, the domestic currency varied differently in relation to domestic prices, other currencies and the price of gold. An important factor was the developments on the eastern front where the Romanian army was also mobilised. The exchange rates between the leu and the US dollar increased significantly from 1 USD per 1,500 lei on 19 June 1944 to 1 USD per 11,400 on 1 October 1944. To accommodate the growing demand for banknotes and safeguard production against potential damages caused by air raids, the NBR opened note-printing units outside Bucharest, in Sinaia (1940), Govora (1942) and Rășinari (1944).

The Red Army Lei

In Romania, like in all the territories occupied during World War II, the Red Army issued occupation currency in the form of banknotes with the name of the local currency. The Armistice Convention signed by Romania and the Allied Powers on 12 September 1944 stated the Romanian government's obligation to withdraw from circulation and redeem the lei issued by the Red Army High Command. These banknotes had been legal tender only while the Soviet troops crossed the Romanian territory. Therefore, the Soviet lei ceased to be legal tender on 1 October 1944 and were withdrawn from circulation at the exchange rate of 1 Soviet lei per 5 lei issued by the NBR.



1 FF = 24.60 lei

Bread (1 kg): 45.55 lei
 Chicken (1 pcs.): 633.33 lei
 Pork (1 kg): 187.17 lei
 Wine (1 liter): 160.00 lei
 Potatoes (1 kg): 255.45 lei

1944

Romania breaks the alliance with Germany (23 August 1944).
 Romania signs the armistice with the Allied Powers (12 September 1944)

1 FF = 30.61 lei

December 26th

1945

World War II is over in Europe (9 May 1945). The first communist government headed by prime-minister Petru Groza comes to power under foreign pressure (6 March 1945)

1 FF = 255.59 lei

November 4th

1946

The Paris Peace Treaty (10 February 1947) recognizes Romania's rights over Transylvania. The USSR maintains control over Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, while the Southern Dobrudja stays with Bulgaria

1 FF = 1.26 lei

August 15th

1947

1944-1945

The *Ardealul nostru* (*Our Transylvania*) medal, also known as the *cocoşel* (*little rooster*). Starting with December 1944, the Ministry of Finance launched the so-called 'National Revival Loan', a domestic loan worth 50,000 lei meant to cover the war compensations. This commemorative gold medal resembled the French napoleon, yet it did not have face value and was slightly heavier than the French coin (6.55 g instead of 6.45 g). Minted in 1 million pieces, the medal circulated unofficially and was used as a means of payment in various transactions.



King Mihai I visiting the State Mint during the production of the *Ardealul nostru* medal



Rationalised items	Current expensiveness index. Base 1 Aug. 1939 = 100				
	1 Aug. 1939. Base 1916 = 100	Aug. 1939	Nov. 1945	Dec. 1945	Jan. 1946
Sugar	3 200	100	1 312	13 437	13 437
Edible oil	3 200	100	11 042	11 042	16 666
Bread	3 600	100	2 000	2 000	2 000
Flour	2 200	100	1 555	1 555	1 555
Corn flour	3 800	100	3 083	3 666	3 666
Meat	2 600	100	9 524	14 285	14 285
Salt	4 200	100	1 450	2 875	2 875
Potatoes	4 100	100	10 769	10 769	10 769
Not rationalised items					
Rice	5 000	100	18 518	25 925	33 333
Bean	3 500	100	9 166	16 666	16 666
Milk	2 300	100	8 000	10 000	13 000
Fresh butter	3 700	100	15 463	25 773	20 610
Cheese	3 350	100	17 021	25 532	29 787
Wine	2 600	100	9 524	9 524	14 285
Plum brandy	3 100	100	10 000	10 000	10 000
Beer	4 600	100	1 625	1 625	1 625
Apparel					
Clothes	5 300	100	13 333	16 000	20 000
Shirts	5 000	100	13 750	16 250	18 750
Shoes	4 350	100	17 143	21 428	25 000
Hats	4 000	100	10 417	12 500	12 500

1947

The first half of 1947 was the highpoint of economic hardship in the aftermath of World War II. Despite the successive pay rises granted by the authorities, the wages could not keep up with the daily upsurges of the prices. It was then that the 5,000,000 lei banknote – the highest face value in Romania's monetary history – was put in circulation.

Evolution of the prices according to the statistics of the time, as published in the *Argus* newspaper, 10 February 1946

1947

King Mihai I abdicates (30 December 1947). The People's Republic of Romania is proclaimed

1948

Nationalisation of means of production (11 June 1948)

1949

Establishment of the Comecon (24 January 1949), with Romania among the founding members of the Eastern bloc' economic organisation

1950

1947

The monetary reform of 15 August 1947 introduced new NBR banknotes and new fractional coins issued by the Ministry of Finance, at a rate of 1 new leu per 20,000 old lei. The exchange of the old currency was restricted based on occupation. Thus, farmers were allowed to exchange up to 5 million old lei, employees and pensioners up to 3 million old lei and the unemployed could only exchange 1.5 million old lei. Private companies were allowed to exchange the value of July salaries, while commercial enterprises were forbidden to exchange any amount whatsoever, to be forced to sell their exiting stocks of goods.

1950

A new printing system, the *taille-douce*, was introduced in 1950 and the necessary equipment was imported from Hungary. Although it was technically superior to older systems, it had very high production costs and therefore it was used only until the 1952 monetary reform. The new banknotes put into circulation as a result of the reform, were printed using the *offset* technique, initially in the USSR and then in Bucharest.



After Eugen Iaru, Scânteia, 5 February 1952

Cartoon depicting the competition between the leu and the US dollar, published in Scânteia newspaper, 1952

1952

The new Monetary Act of 26 January 1952 stipulated the following legal tender: the banknotes issued by the State Bank of the People's Republic of Romania, the State Treasury notes issued by the Ministry of Finance and the fractional coins. The exchange rate was of 20 old lei per 1 new leu. There were no restrictions in terms of value, yet lower amounts could be exchanged at a better rate. Thus, individuals and private companies exchanged the first thousand old lei at a rate of 100:1, the second and third thousand old lei at a rate of 200:1 and the rest of the amount at a rate of 400:1. Cooperatives, state-owned enterprises and community organisations used an exchange rate of 200:1. The funds in the private companies' accounts that were intended for paying salaries were calculated at a 20:1 rate, whereas the remaining amounts in the accounts were subject to a 200:1 rate.



The State Mint's manufacturing units – snapshots (1956)



1955

Signing of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, Romania is one of the original members. Romania joins the United Nations

1965

The new constitution proclaims the country's new name: the Socialist Republic of Romania

1974

The position of President of the Socialist Republic of Romania is created. Nicolae Ceaușescu is elected president

1989

The December 1989 Revolution marks the end of the communist regime

1948–1957

The establishment of the NBR Printing House

- 1948 – reorganisation of the NBR; creation of the Issue Department that included the Note Manufacturing Section.
- 1951 – reorganisation of the Bank of the People's Republic of Romania - State Bank, whose activity was coordinated by the Ministry of Finance; on this occasion, the Note Printing Unit was created by merging the Note Manufacturing Section with the Note Accounting Section.
- 1 August 1953 – establishment of the Banknotes and Stamps Enterprise following the merger of the Note Printing Unit with the stamps and postal stationery unit that has been separated from the State Mint and the Stamps Factory.
- 1 October 1956 – the Stamps Factory merged with the Ministry of Finance's Polygraph Enterprise to form the Print House of the Ministry of Finance.
- 17 March 1957 – the banknotes and stamps printing units were transferred from the authority of the Ministry of Finance to the State Bank of the People's Republic of Romania. This marked the birth of the Printing House of the State Bank, under the coordination of the General Directorate for Enterprises.

1966

New banknotes and coins were issued to reflect the latest changes on the political scene as a result of the change in the country's name.

1982–1983

After the communists came to power, the tradition of the National Bank of Romania to issue commemorative coins was interrupted. The only exceptions were the 1948 silver medal dedicated to the centennial of the 1848 Revolution, as well as the 1982 and 1983 gold and silver coins marking a historically debatable anniversary, '2050 years since the establishment of the centralised and independent Dacian state'.



1990

1990

The NBR was reorganised and resumed the functions of a central bank. The State Mint and the NBR Printing House became autonomous agencies reporting to the NBR.

1991

In January 1991, the NBR launched its first banknote issue after December 1989 Revolution, with a face value of 500 lei.

1992-1994

The coins and banknotes issued during communist years were replaced.

1996

Starting with 1996, all commemorative coins struck at the State Mint have been manufactured using exclusively the *proof* technique, creating the matt/shiny contrast between the raised elements and the background of the coin. The 100 lei banknotes of the 1966 issue were withdrawn from circulation.

1999

For the first time in Romania, the NBR put into circulation a polymer banknote, the 2,000 lei celebrating the total solar eclipse of 11 August 1999.

Romania joins the Council of Europe

Romania starts accession negotiations with the European Union

2002



2004

Romania joins NATO

2007

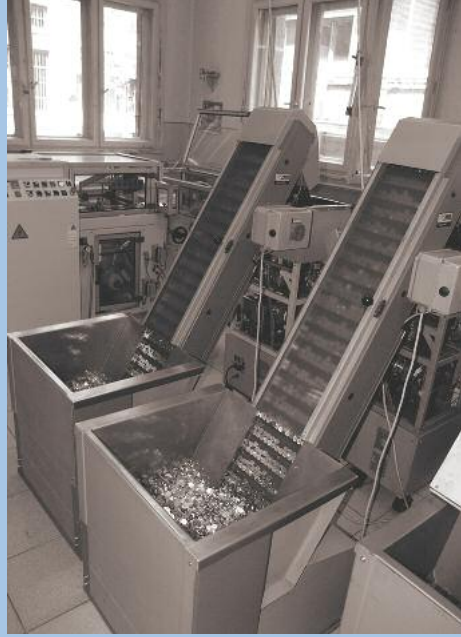
Romania becomes a member state of the European Union

2008

2014

2005

Redenomination of the leu at an exchange rate of 10,000 old lei per 1 new lei. This was the first banknote issue printed entirely on polymer.



2008

The 10 lei polymer banknote was issued without *intaglio*. The Romanian painter Nicolae Grigorescu was depicted on the banknote, his work having influenced significantly the production of Romanian paper money from the first promissory notes of 1877 to the 1947 banknote issue.



Present-day pictures from the State Mint



the design of Romanian money

The images on Romanian money depicted not only the metamorphoses of the national identity, but also the political developments that had influenced official ideology over time.

These images were meant to express confidence in the issuing institution, the economy and the nation. Since money is present in all aspects of public and private life, it became a genuine 'daily mechanism' for building up national identity.



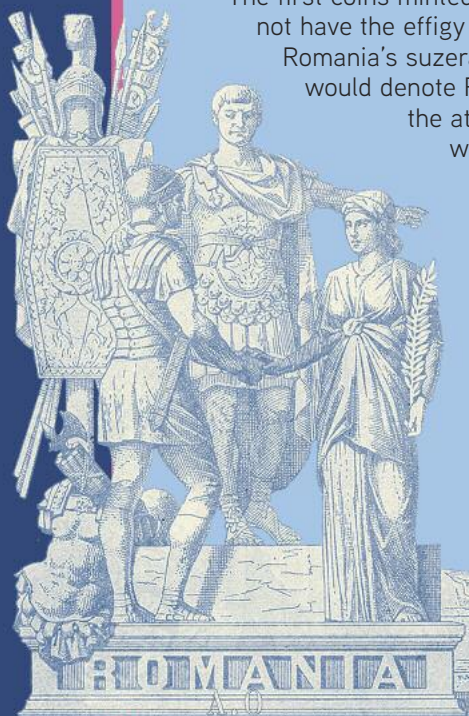
The first coins minted in compliance with the 1867 Monetary Act did not have the effigy of Prince Carol because the Ottoman Empire, as Romania's suzerain power, considered that such a representation would denote Romania's assertion of its independence. In 1868,

the attempt to put into circulation a 20 lei gold coin with the effigy of Prince Carol and the legend

'CAROL I DOMNULU ROMÂNILORU' (*Carol I, the Prince of Romanians*) on the obverse stirred diplomatic protests from both the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. The latter

labelled this an irredentist gesture because it considered that the coin referred also to the Romanians living in Transylvania, which at the time was incorporated in Austria-Hungary.

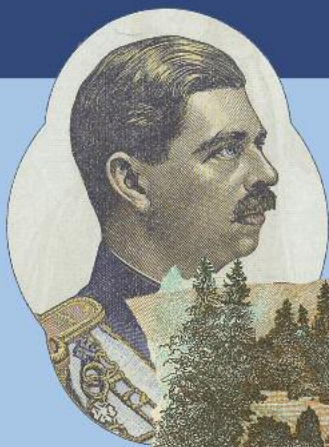
A new 20 lei gold coin was minted in 1870, with the effigy of Prince Carol on the obverse and the legend reading 'CAROL I DOMNUL ROMÂNIEI' (*Carol I, the Prince of Romania*).



The promissory notes and the first banknote issues printed by the National Bank of Romania were designed by French artists as instructed by the Romanian authorities. The iconography of the notes focused on the Latin roots of the Romanian people by depicting an allegory of the formation of Dacia as a Latin province. This subject was not chosen at random, especially because starting with the 1867 Monetary Act until World War I, Romania followed the model of the Latin Monetary Union.

The allegories of Homeland, Prosperity, as well as of different economic sectors were recurrent themes on the first banknote issues. Depicted in a monumental classicising style, the allegories were an adaptation of the traditional design of French banknotes to the Romanian specifics.





Images related to the royal family were frequently depicted in the interwar period and during the Second World War.

The portraits of Kings Carol II and Mihai I were represented both on currency and on medals. In line with the allegories of the country's prosperity or of Romanians' Latin origin, the portraits highlighted the importance of the dynasty to the Romanian society.

The depictions on the NBR banknotes reflected the new realities in 'Greater Romania' after the 1918 unification. Although still present, the important themes used prior to World War I were no longer illustrated as prominently. A new theme referring to national unity was depicted, namely the entrance of ruler Michael the Brave in the city of Alba Iulia, marking the first unification of the three Romanian principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.



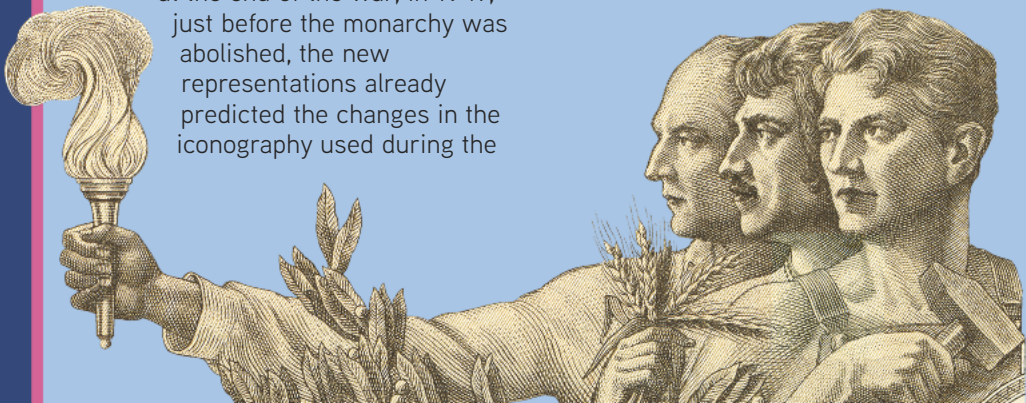
Other representations were the allegories of different economic sectors (industrial and agricultural landscapes) and of culture (books, theatre masks, musical instruments) in compositions that express national prosperity. The monumental depiction typical of earlier years was replaced by idealistic images of peasants.

Detail on the 2,000 lei banknote, issued on 18 November 1941, showing a group of peasant women bearing farming tools. The drawing by C. Serveau is a reinterpretation of the original drawing in cobalt blue by A. Bramtot and G. Duval, based on the design done by Nicolae Grigorescu for the reverse of the 20 lei promissory note of 1877. The subject was reproduced several times on the NBR banknotes until 1946 and it became a genuine leitmotif of the Romanian money design.

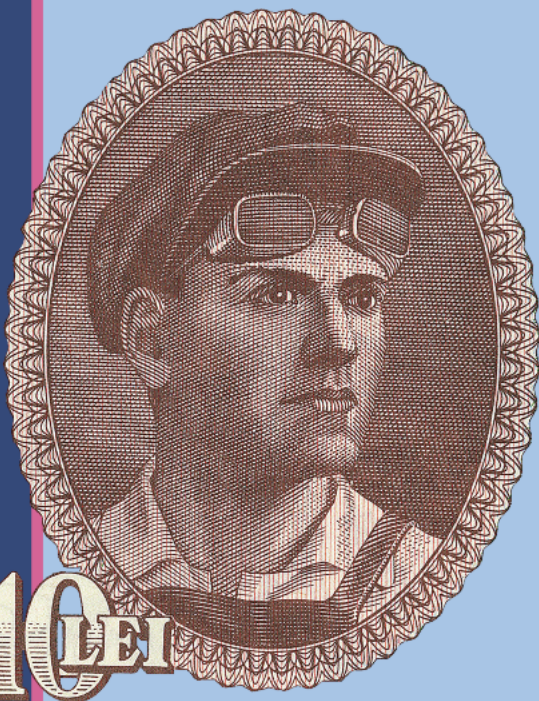


The radical transformations that the Romanian society had witnessed after 1945 were present in money design as well. Although the symbols of the interwar period were still depicted on the coins and banknotes issued at the end of the war, in 1947, just before the monarchy was abolished, the new representations already predicted the changes in the iconography used during the

years of the people's democracy. The country's coat of arms symbolising the monarchy was still illustrated on the coins even after the 1947 monetary reform. However, it could only be found on the 1,000 lei banknote.



The 100 lei banknote issued on 25 June 1947 is significant for the rise of communism to power. The central theme is the victory of communism, with a special emphasis on 'the brotherhood of all walks of life'

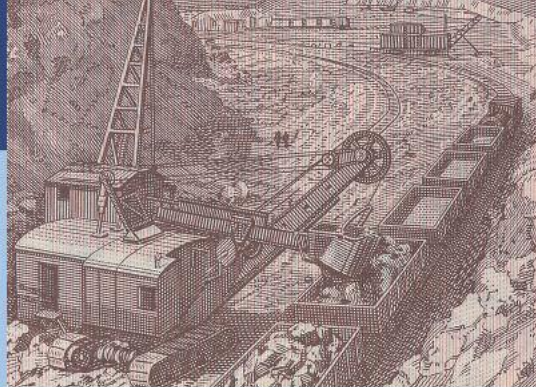


The trends in the design of the Romanian money issued in 1947 were later confirmed by the 1952 issue. The patriarchal images of peasants from the interwar period were replaced by characters typical of proletarian culture: prototypes of the working class reflecting its fighter psychology, the determination and courage accompanying its 'struggle for building up socialism'.

Part of the official art was also the depiction of *Casa Scânteii* in Bucharest (the present-day *Casa Presei Libere* – House of the Free Press). The Romanian replica of the Lomonosov University in Moscow was represented on the reverse of the 100 lei banknote.



The achievements of industrialisation were the outcome of the struggle for building up socialism and were illustrated on the 5, 10 and 25 lei banknotes issued in 1952. Significant for this theme was the representation of the construction works of the Danube-Black Sea Channel. The official ideology described the building site as a 'school' for educating the young generation in the spirit of triumphant socialism. At the same time however, not a word was said about the fact that the site was one of the most notorious extermination labour camps for suppressing the intellectual elite of the interwar period.



According to the official ideology of the 1950s, any hint at the Latin origin of the Romanian people was abandoned. The only references to the national history were the portraits of Tudor Vladimirescu and Nicolae Bălcescu. The activity of the two revolutionaries was reinterpreted by official communist ideology and converted into 'prehistory' of the working class movement in Romania.

The recovery of the national history in the early 1960s was illustrated on high value denominations through representations of Romanian cultural symbols, such as the Palace of Culture in Iași on the reverse of the 50 lei banknote or the Romanian Atheneum in Bucharest on the reverse of the 100 lei banknote. In addition to the historical characters depicted on the 1952 issue, ruler Alexandru I. Cuza was represented on the obverse of the 50 lei banknote.



The design of the last issue in the communist era, namely the 1966 issue, reflected the key changes in the official ideology. The well-known themes of the triumph of industrialisation and the mechanisation of agriculture were still represented on the reverse of the 5 and 25 lei banknotes, as well as on the reverse of the 10 lei banknote.



after 1990

The change of the political regime in 1989 had determined the replacement of the country's banknotes and coins. In January 1991, the National Bank of Romania launched the first banknote issue (500 lei) depicting sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. Over the following years, the NBR continued issuing banknotes representing important figures of the Romanian culture:

- Biologist Grigore Antipa (200 lei banknote of 1992);
- Writer Mihai Eminescu (1,000 lei banknotes of 1991, 1993, 1998; 500 lei banknote of 2005);
- Philosopher Lucian Blaga (5,000 lei banknote of 1998; 200 lei banknote of 2006);
- Historian Nicolae Iorga (10,000 lei banknotes of 1994, 1999, 2000; 1 leu banknote of 2005);
- Composer George Enescu (50,000 lei banknotes of 1996, 2000, 2001; 5 lei banknote 2005);
- Painter Nicolae Grigorescu (100,000 lei banknotes of 1998, 2001; 10 lei banknotes of 2005, 2008);
- Airplane engineer Aurel Vlaicu (500,000 lei banknote of 2000; 50 lei banknote of 2005);
- Playwright I.L. Caragiale (1,000,000 lei banknote of 2003; 100 lei banknote of 2005).





BANCA NAȚIONALĂ A ROMÂNIEI

100



ION LUCA CARAGIALE 1852-1912

Caragiale

CASIER CENTRAL

UNA SUTĂ

BANCA NAȚIONALĂ A ROMÂNIEI



500



Ștefan cel Mare

200

1 decembrie 2006

LEI



