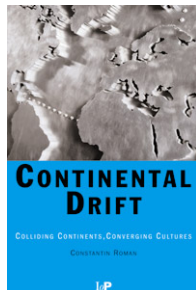


CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Colliding continents, converging cultures

Constantin Roman

Chapter 4



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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0 7503 0686 6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Roman, Constantin.

Continental drift : colliding continents, converging cultures / Constantin Roman.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-7503-0686-6 (alk. paper)

1. Roman, Constantin. 2. Geophysicists--Romania--Biography. 3. Plate tectonics. I. Title.

QE22.R66 R66 2000

551'.092--dc21

[B]

99-049926

Production Editor: Elizabeth Martin
Production Control: Sarah Plenty and Jenny Troyano
Commissioning Editor: Gillian Lindsey
Editorial Assistant: Victoria Le Billon
Cover Design: Jeremy Stephens
Marketing Executive: Colin Fenton

Published by Institute of Physics Publishing, wholly owned by
The Institute of Physics, London

Institute of Physics Publishing, Dirac House, Temple Back, Bristol BS1 6BE,
UK

US Office: Institute of Physics Publishing, The Public Ledger Building, Suite
1035, 150 South Independence Mall West, Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

Typeset in T_EX using the IOP Bookmaker Macros
Printed in the UK by Bookcraft, Midsomer Norton, Somerset

CHAPTER 4

PET ON ONE POUND A DAY

“All Science is either Physics, or stamp collecting”

(Lord Rutherford)

NEWCASTLE ON ONE POUND A DAY

My return to the fold gave an impression of *déjà vu*. This time Dr David Collinson met me at the airport.

“How nice to have you back”, said Collinson. “How was Paris?”

“Horrible”, I said, “It’s only now regaining some normality: just lots of riots and tear gas. Glad to be back in England.”

“Welcome!”

I was taken to the same beautiful penthouse, designed by Sir Basil Spence, with panoramic views over the university and the civic centre. This prestigious abode was intended for important visiting academics, rather than research students such as myself. However, Keith Runcorn, head of the School, was a practical man: he realized that it was infinitely cheaper for the School to put the odd visiting Professor in a hotel in town and keep this Romanian in the Penthouse for the whole summer, rather than the other way round. This view, as I was soon to discover, was not very popular amongst the School’s academic staff.

My fellow students in Newcastle were a very cheerful, hard-working, hard-drinking, enthusiastic crowd. For me it was relatively easy to blend in, as I was somewhat on ‘home ground’, having my abode on the top of the School of Physics. The penthouse was only one level above the Common Room. The palaeomagnetic laboratories were on the ground floor and basement, with easy access to the nearby Student’s Union. On the dot of 10 pm, a group of postgraduates, which would include Derek Fairhead (now a Professor at Leeds) and Bill Sowerbutts (now teaching at Edinburgh University), would adjourn for a quick pint of Newcastle brown ale, before closing time at 10.30 pm. Afterwards, some of us would return to the lab to do some more work before midnight. It was an extraordinary

atmosphere, poles apart from the Department of Geophysics in Romania: the staff–student relationship was informal and inspiring, the students were devoted to their research, the equipment facilities were generous and a great innovative spirit prevailed.

My £1 daily allowance proved ample for my needs, as the accommodation, heating, water and electricity were provided for and I had no expenses other than food. I found the Union refectory sufficient for my needs and soon got used to the steak and kidney pies, the toad in the hole, the Yorkshire pudding and the apple crumble with hot custard sauce. Two shillings and sixpence were spent on lunch and occasionally I would go to town for a treat of real steak and chips for five shillings. The remaining fifteen shillings a day I could save to send food parcels to my parents in Romania. They were quite worried about my well being in a foreign land and tried to galvanize me into rejoining the Romanian fold. I told them that I was happy and should the Bucharest authorities grant my re-entry visa to Romania I would be home by September, when my visiting Research Studentship in Newcastle would expire. The School of Physics applied to the Romanian Embassy in London to acknowledge my student status in England and, in parallel, my poor old father in Bucharest was desperately trying to enlist the help of the Communist bureaucracy. It was an uphill struggle and an unfair one for someone of his age and dignity.

FISH ‘N’ CHIPS

Newcastle was not just hard work, but hard play as well. My various colleagues tried in turn to acquaint me with the realities of contemporary England, into which I plunged myself with great enthusiasm. I was out and about several times a week and all weekends, discovering the city and its surroundings or going deep into Northumberland.

One of the ‘musts’ in my educational programme was a visit to a ‘fish ‘n’ chips’ shop: I remember distinctly the greasy cod covered in batter and presented in a paper napkin, which would serve both as plate and napkin;

“Where are the knives and forks?” I enquired.

“There are *no* knives and forks!” my mate answered gleefully, happy to hammer another nail into what he must have understood to be my Communist insularity.

I contemplated for several minutes the chunk of oily fish, pondering over means and ways of eating it, then I had to do what I was told, eat it with my fingers, in the best populist tradition and contrary to my upbringing in a Marxist country. The bemused gaze of my young tormentor enhanced the humiliation even further. I could not wipe my fingers on the already soiled paper napkin, so I asked for another napkin:

“What a waste!” snapped back my self-appointed mentor who proceeded to lick his fingers by way of an initiation, although by that time I felt that he put on an act.

“Surely England was more civilized than that!” I repeated to myself.

CLOSE HOUSE

Close House was the Palaeomagnetic Laboratory that the School of Physics had built in the country, away from all geomagnetic interference inherent to the humdrum of cities. The University of Newcastle was left a huge estate by a generous benefactor, in the shape of a Georgian house in its park-like grounds, landscaped by Capability Brown. A Northumbrian man himself, Capability Brown's ideas of landscape came straight from the superb countryside in which he was born. Close House was situated some distance from the main house, unobtrusively tucked away in a glade of birch trees. The building was specially constructed of non-magnetic materials, meant not to interfere with the very fine measurements of the remanent magnetism of rock specimens. Such specially selected materials in this construction included non-magnetic nails, wires, doorknobs, kitchen sinks, pipes etc. The labs were open plan, with adjacent kitchen and bedrooms, intended for the researchers, who stayed over for several days or even weeks. I went on several expeditions to Close House Laboratory. Once I was taught how to manipulate the equipment, I was left to my own devices. Sometimes I was on my own for days on end, with enough tins of food and biscuits, Nescafe and powder milk to suffice basic needs. Such research spells were a magnificent experience of tranquil concentration, which led to the first palaeomagnetic results from the Cheviot Hills in Northumberland.

BEATLE MANIA

During the late sixties London was in full swing and this mood was very much alive and well in Newcastle. A great *joie de vivre* was pervasive, with endless impromptu parties, some of which took place in the Common Room of the School of Physics. Beatle mania was the rage and the top of the pops chart closely watched. After the strictures of the Romanian Marxist régime, I felt a great sense of liberation, which was both invigorating and inspiring. I soon got to recognize the hit songs of the bands in the top of the pops and I danced like mad: so did lecturers, professors and secretaries—we were all 'pals', or rather, shall I say 'pets', to use a Geordie expression.

"How are you pet?"

"Whom do you mean? Me, 'pet'? Forget it—I have an MA from the University of Bucharest!"

"Who cares?"

Still, my fellow geophysicists did not know the Romanian kissing dance: I had to introduce them to this novel Balkan jinx. So I gave a party where the whole School came to be initiated to panpipe music and the handkerchief dance. Anglo-Saxon caution was thrown to the wind and for once we kissed kneeling on the floor, rather than embracing illicitly in shoe shop doorways, as was the custom in town. Runcorn, too, kissed his secretary.

NO LIQUOR ON SUNDAY!

My pal, Nick Gant, with ginger hair and freckles, was the son of a doctor from North London. He had a Morris van with no side windows, 'to pay less tax', and he offered to take me sightseeing at weekends to visit new places, before I returned to Romania in September. One weekend we crossed the border into Scotland and stopped in Edinburgh.

By comparison to Newcastle, where the Georgian buildings were still covered in a coat of black soot from the Industrial revolution, in Edinburgh, by contrast, the stone was mellow, of a pale cream colour. The streets of the Scottish capital were wide, on the scale of Paris boulevards, with huge vistas: Edinburgh had the reassuring air of a European city. It was only when negotiating the hill towards the castle of the medieval town that a certain Anglo-Saxon character showed itself. Here the architecture was very different from that of England and although less elaborate had a charm reminiscent of the castles I imagined in Walter Scott's novels. On a sunny day Edinburgh looked glorious and lively. Being Sunday and quite hot for a Scottish summer, I entered a newsagent cum grocery shop and noticed on the shelves some bottles of beer.

"Ah, how about comparing the Scottish ale to the Newcastle brown?"

No sooner had I reached for a bottle, than I was rudely stopped:

"Sorry sir, you can't buy this!", said a voice in a strong brogue, rolling its 'r' almost to the point of guttural.

"Why not?" I asked, in my Romanian accent with open vowels, which made it sound almost like Latin.

He must have thought that I was some Italian ice-cream vendor from Edinburgh, so he retorted in a matter-of-fact way: "Because, you see sir, today is Sunday!"

"Ah", I said, "But what has it got to do with not selling beer on a Sunday?"

"This is the law of the land, sir".

So much for that, but my Romanian experience taught me that the rules were there to be circumvented. I would not give up easily, as my boot-legging spirit came to the fore. After all, nobody was witness to our illicit transaction: there was nobody else in the shop, other than the shopkeeper and myself.

"You see?" I said, trying to shame him, "Even in Algeria, where Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol, if you show your foreign passport, they would sell you a bottle! Surely you can do the same for a foreigner."

To prove my point I flashed my Romanian passport.

"No way!"

As the shopkeeper started to look aggressive, I knew from Walter Scott's novels that these gillies could be fierce, so I made a hasty retreat. I left the shop empty handed, thirsty and frustrated. As the Scots appeared to be such law-abiding citizens, they would make good material in a Communist country, where dogma was never questioned, just followed blindly.

Latin spirit and Communism never meshed together very well: given time Marxism in Romania would soon be watered down. At this wonderful prospect my face lit with a smile, as I proceeded with the rest of my lazy afternoon stroll.

ROMANIAN OR HUNGARIAN?

The School of Physics Library was very well endowed with specialist books and journals. The librarian was very kind, efficient and knowledgeable and I knew her from my days in Romania, as she had sent so many reprints which stimulated my interest in palaeomagnetism. It was an immeasurable satisfaction to immerse myself in using this library, as I had the feeling that, once I returned home, I would not be able to see a single scientific journal from the West for years to come. Back in Bucharest, only the Head of Department had a subscription to a couple of journals, which he would keep under lock and key until they became obsolete. This restrictive practice would convey the Professor a clear advantage over his peers and turned the whole exercise into a power game, which was our scientific Nemesis.

When I had a moment free from my research lab, I went to the main library: this was looked after by a plump, middle aged lady with a kind smile and motherly demeanour.

On learning that I was Romanian she asked: "Tell me, what language do you speak in Romania, Hungarian?" Quite a shocking question, so I had to pinch myself to believe my ears.

I rationalized: "Did she mean to say that we spoke Hungarian as a foreign language or as a national language? Or, did she conversely mean that in Hungary they spoke Romanian, or simply that the Romanian language did not exist?"

She kept on smiling, whilst waiting for my answer, which took ages to materialize.

"No, would you believe it, or not? We speak Romanian in Romania!"

"So", she said, "You have a language of your own!"

Obviously, she must have thought of the poor Scots, across the border from Newcastle, who were relegated to speaking English, but the Romanians were far more resilient than the Scots: they would not give up their language after a few border skirmishes. They fought for two thousand years to preserve their Latin identity, after the Roman withdrawal from Dacia. The invading hordes of Asians (the Goths, the Hungarians, Gaepidae, Avars, Slavs, Bulgarians, Huns, Petchenegues, Coumans, Tartars and finally Turks), they all tried to impose their foreign tongue on the Romanians, but we stubbornly stuck to speaking Latin, keeping our Romance links, as a kind of 'survival kit', a life raft to the civilized West. For most Romanians of Transylvania, Hungarian was the language of Attila the Hun—the 'Scourge of Christianity'. Wasn't Mr Hitler likened to 'the Hun', by the Brits, during the Second World War? Suddenly, it occurred

to me that starting a cultural crusade in Newcastle had a great purpose for Romania and an instant appeal to me.

'ROMANIA COMES TO NEWCASTLE' FESTIVAL

This is how the idea of a 'one-man festival' came to my mind: I called it: 'Romania comes to Newcastle'. A ten-day event which 'should clear the air and put the record straight', for everybody to see that we *had* an identity, we *were* on the map and we *did* make a contribution to that much maligned world 'culture'.

I had to start from scratch, but where would I start? Everything had to be done and had to be done quickly at that, as I was going to leave Newcastle within two months. I wrote to several institutions in Romania: the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Museum of Archaeology in Bucharest, the School of Architecture, asking them to send photographs for an exhibition in Newcastle, the Romanian Academy to send books, to my parents to send my collection of slides. Within three weeks I had enough material for my exhibition: books and photographs, films and slides to make presentations. All these had to be advertised and structured in a programme, a venue had to be found. I advertised for help in the Student Union and soon Peter Micklethwaite, an MSc student in Biology came to offer his time and initiative to help organize various events. We went to the head of the School of Architecture and got on loan a screen of several large panels to hold our photographs in the foyer of the Student Union. These panels were strategically placed on the way down to the canteen, where everybody would have a chance to 'bump' into my exhibition, whether they wanted to or not. Ken Hale, a lecturer in landscape architecture, also came to give a hand with mounting the exhibition, which was organized by themes: architecture, archaeology, Orthodox church etc, not forgetting female beauty in Romania from the Palaeolithic (a goddess of fertility) to modern times (my sister Alexandra Veronica, wearing a Romanian blouse, which reminded me of Henri Matisse's *La Blouse Roumaine*). The Lecture Theatre was hired for films and talks with slides. The bookstand adjoined the photo exhibition. A poster made in a hurry with lino engraving blocks and a roneotyped sheet with information about the ten-day long venue completed the effort. *Courier*, the student union rag, covered the event and published a Romanian recipe. I had no time to sit back and measure the success of the venture. If I were to do so by numbers, I was certainly disappointed as the attendance of the lectures was slim and as to the exhibition, why should the brown ale drinking enthusiasts care about Roman remains of the Danube, or the Neolithic beauties? Those who did care were partly inhibited by what they must have mistakenly taken for Communist propaganda, not, in effect, a private venture born out of outrage against ignorance. However, it was not the numbers that mattered in the end, but the point which I made and the impression it made on people that mat-

tered, not only within the University but outside it: the most extraordinary chain reaction occurred with unexpected benefits and satisfaction.

CULTURAL ATTACHÉ

The Romanian Embassy's cultural attaché, Ștefan Năstăsescu, came from London to see the exhibition. A carefully orchestrated meeting of unlikely minds, between Comrade Năstăsescu and W F Mavor, the retired British Army Major who was the School of Physics' Administrative Assistant, caused my request for a Romanian re-entry visa to be expedited. I needed official blessing for the *fait accompli* of studying in England and this was difficult to obtain in retrospect. Here the 'Romania comes to Newcastle' Festival did the trick, even though it was not meant to do it: it was interpreted that I was 'a good boy', who was best patted on the shoulder, rather than given stick.

However, without my dear father's relentless efforts to liaise with the bureaucracy in Bucharest and cajole them the best he could, my papers would not have been in order. It was important not just for myself, but for my family back home as well, to have my status clarified in order to avoid any unpleasantness or retribution.

What also ensued from this encounter with the Embassy Official were endless invitations to come to the Embassy in London to attend official functions. This I was not very keen on, partly because I was not one of the nomenklatura, partly because the experience with the Romanian Embassy in Paris and Lipatti left me with a bitter taste. Furthermore, as a free man, which I thought I was, I would have been entitled to make a choice and *not* go.

TYNE TEES TV

One morning, during the festival, the School Secretary rushed to me terribly excited: "Will you please call the Tyne Tees television studios as they want to talk to you!". There was a certain look in her eyes which I had never noticed before, but I did not assign it any significance at the time.

In Romania we had television, but at home we had no TV set for three good reasons. Firstly, we were too tired trying to survive and preferred to be more selective by going to a specific film or theatre play or concert or reading a book, rather than see the official tosh on the box. Secondly, the programmes on Romanian TV were full of the most boring, relentless and unsophisticated propaganda, of which we were sick, as we had more than our fair share in the newspapers, the radio, at work, not forgetting the slogans in the street. Thirdly, buying a TV set would have cost a bomb, something like six months of my father's salary, when we hardly had enough money to survive on: the whole idea of television was obscene to me.

Continental Drift

I did not get too excited about the telephone call from Tyne Tees TV studios. This was not the case for Marion, the Secretary of the School of Physics: she kept badgering me:

“Did you return that call?”

I did, eventually, because from the few TV programmes I watched on the set provided in the penthouse, I had decided that British TV was rather different, to say the least, from that which I knew in Romania. I still was not terribly hooked on watching TV; besides, at the beginning of my stay in England I could hardly follow what they were saying on TV, as they were talking too quickly.

NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED!

The TV studios wanted to give me ‘prime time’ on the local news in a live programme: would I come to be interviewed? Yes I would. I was told to come well in advance of my appearance. I was given tea ‘to relax’, although I was not nervous at all and I could not understand where they got the idea from—maybe other people who were interviewed had butterflies, not me. The interviewer told me that they heard about my one-man show, and as a result, they took to the streets of Newcastle with a cameraman, to ask the good denizens two *key* questions:

“What do you know of Romania?” and “What is the capital city of Romania?”

“Would I wish to comment on the answers they received?”

“Sure”, I said, “No problem!”

So we went into the studio, which was now transmitting ‘live’ and heard the commentator introduce me and what I was up to, which had prompted his little investigation in the streets of Newcastle. Then we saw the clips of the goodly citizens scratching their Northumbrian heads and saying:

“Capital of Romania? Is it Zagreb? No, Budapest? No? I do not know!”

Quite a few said “Budapest”, which tied up remarkably well with the gem of the University librarian (bless her), who thought that we spoke Hungarian in Romania!

“How right she was, see? Everybody says the same, so she must be right!”

I watched in disbelief, until a man who had fought in the Second World War, said: “I do not know much about Romania. All I know is that it is a Communist country and not a free country”.

“How sensible of him—he did not know much, but he knew the essentials”, I thought

“Now”, asked the Interviewer, “Would I please comment about what the last man had just said?”

How could I, the idiot? As I had to return to Romania how could I say that it was not a free country? It would have been suicidal if I agreed.

I had to think quickly:

“Well”, I answered, “The first visit to England by a Romanian was that of Petru Cercel, Prince of Moldavia, during the time of Elizabeth I. As I can see, under the reign of Elizabeth II, the knowledge on Romania does not seem to have improved very much”.

At this particular point, the television chap who was running the show made a robust sign to the cameras, using his left arm to hit the right arm with a clenched fist and in a split second I was off the air. That was all the air time I was allocated and the interviewer accompanied me back to the little coffee table nearby, where we had had our first discussion over tea:

“Thank you very much, it was good of you to come. Would £25 do for your fees?”

I was numb: I did not know that one was paid for such things. I said “Yes”: £25 represented my allowance for nearly one month at Newcastle. For £19 I could buy myself a two-piece suit at Burton’s, as my Romanian three-piece was starting to look a bit tired.

Before I was out of the studio, the telephone calls flooded in. Would I please take them? There was this couple who went to Romania on holidays and said how lovely it was—I said I was delighted, I agreed and so it went on very much in this vein, for some time. Rather more exciting sounded this young girl who wanted to see me afterwards.

“What have I done to deserve this attention, all of a sudden?”

More was to come on my return to the School of Physics. Overnight I was somebody else, although I did not think of myself of being different from the day before: what on earth hit them? As I entered the Common Room for coffee, everybody shuffled and was over-friendly, trying to talk to me, even the driest members of the staff (and there were a few in the solid physics section of the School, little wonder that it was called ‘solids’) started to acknowledge me. Only the day before, they were ignoring me, as some irksome foreigner who was ‘squatting’ in the penthouse. Now, my continuing stay in these luxurious lodgings started to gain some legitimacy:

“After all, he was interviewed on TV and only came to this country yesterday, so he must be good!”

ROMANIAN FOR BUSINESSMEN

The University of Newcastle Linguistics Laboratory rang the Department; they had seen me on television and they wanted to know if I would agree to record for their phonetic library a course in the Romanian language: they ‘had one in Hungarian, but not in Romanian’.

I ‘must come to put this omission right’!

Quite!

Continental Drift

I was handed over a text of 'Linguaphone' called *French for the Businessman*: would I please adapt it to Romanian and record it in their laboratory? Before I knew how much hard work it would entail, I agreed. These were some twenty or more step-by-step lessons, which I studiously translated and adapted to Romanian in manuscript form, lesson by lesson. As I gradually prepared the new text, I would go to the lab and record it. I was paid 30 shillings per hour and was very grateful for it. I was able to send parcels of food to Romania more often, as my daily income suddenly increased by 150% .

Soon the complete set of lessons, which later became *Romanian for the Businessman*, was finished and I sent the manuscript by post to Father in Bucharest, to have it typed and returned. Father was the most reliable partner in any of my new enterprises: he was as good as his word and soon the typescript came back: this contained, to my great surprise, as many as 200 pages of double spaced manuscript. I looked at the amount of work in complete disbelief, not thinking that I could have been capable of cramming in so much work in the space of less than a month. I could not let the laborious effort end here: I had to publish the book.

I told the Head of the Linguistics Department of my intention and, very much to my surprise, he said that they thought that the copyright belonged to them, so I could not publish the text. He had to consult his lawyer about it. I knew nothing of lawyers. I had quite a few lawyers in my family and a great uncle who was a judge, so I was not impressed, neither did I think for a minute that I was meant to be impressed. Why should my friendly linguist wish to use a lawyer? I told him that so far as I was concerned he paid me for the actual recording session and *not* for editing and translating the work and that if anybody had the copyright, that would be Linguaphone in London. His lawyer agreed to my contention. See how enthusiasm could have got me into trouble? But I thought that the question of spreading the good name of Romania and putting the country on the map was far more important than a lawyerish opinion.

London was some six hours away and eight pounds return by second class carriage from Newcastle. I took my Romanian manuscript under my arm and headed straight for St Martin's Lane where the Linguaphone offices were, near Trafalgar Square. In typical Romanian fashion, I did not think of the precautionary measure of making an appointment and I arrived unannounced, about lunchtime, in the editor's office.

"Whom shall I say it is?" asked the secretary:

"Mr Constantin Roman from the Universities of Newcastle and Bucharest".

Sir John Marling, Bt, was the founder and owner of Linguaphone. I was ushered into his small office, full of publishing paraphernalia. He was a Sandhurst-trained army chap, now retired, running this London business as well as his country estates in Berkshire and Gloucestershire. He spoke fluent French, which made our contact very easy, and had a great

interest in European culture and history. He did not seem to mind that we had no previous appointment: as it was lunchtime, we started our business discussions straight away over some Italian food around the corner from his offices. He was quite excited about my sudden appearance and although I suspect now that he had no immediate need for my manuscript, he offered to buy it straight away, for two hundred pounds, on condition that I created an index. He gave me an advance of one hundred pounds, saying that the remainder would be paid on completion of the index. I was bouncing with joy. As I was going to find out later, what proved to be far more valuable than the fees paid by John Marling was not the money, but his unfettered friendship over the years and that of Jorie, his wife. They became stalwart allies and substitute parents in the difficult, if exciting, times to come.

THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Keith Runcorn appeared to take only a detached interest in his students: as his foreign tours multiplied, the staff who stood in for him began to grumble. But, in spite of his absences, he took care to encourage students to attend the Royal Astronomical Society meetings in London. These meetings were infinitely more illuminating than the formal lectures at the University.

There were always several MSc and PhD students from the School of Physics taking the train to London to attend regular meetings at the Royal Astronomical Society and I often joined the small group. I presume not many of us fully understood the contents of the highly convoluted lectures, but it helped us tremendously to structure our thinking, learn how to present an idea to a wider public, maintain a high level of research. The Society's premises at Burlington House in Piccadilly, next door to the Royal Academy, were originally intended as a London home for Lord George Cavendish. Its elaborately decorated interior and sumptuous staircase were only matched by the high thinking of its scientific ethos. The Piccadilly location was convenient for journeys to other points of interest in London and at that time I never anticipated that, one day, I would make a contribution to its *Geophysical Journal*, published here, but more of this later.

THE ROYAL SOCIETY

Keith Runcorn also encouraged us to attend meetings of the Royal Society, which were more accessible for me to understand. In 1968, volcanoes and earthquakes were topical subjects, as plate tectonics was shaping up and establishing its tenets as a theory which could explain the processes which deformed the Earth's crust. All the big names in geology and geophysics were taking part in those meetings, from Cambridge, Newcastle and other British Universities, but also from research establishments in the United States, France and elsewhere. The speakers included Edward Bullard, fa-

mous for 'Bullard's Fit', Vine and Matthews of ocean-floor spreading fame, Newcastle's Runcorn and Creer with palaeomagnetic studies, Xavier Le Pichon, a young and promising French seismologist working at Lamont, the American-educated seismologist Father Augustin Udias Vallina, a Spanish Jesuit from Madrid, now head of the Geophysics Department at the Complutense University, and the volcanologist Haroun Tazieff. The latter's books (*Les cratères en feu* and *Les volcans*) were bestsellers in Romania, where they sold out within hours, like hot cakes.

During one of the breaks of a Royal Society meeting, I approached Tazieff, who was a world authority on volcanoes, the founder of the Royal Belgian Centre for Volcanology and co-founder of the International Institute for Volcanological Research.

I introduced myself as a Romanian geophysicist from Newcastle University, but informed him that it was not about geology that I wanted to talk to him, but about poetry, his father's poetry. Quite an unusual venue for such an admission, I said, then added that I knew and admired his father's translations of Romanian poetry into French and proceeded to recite one of the French translations of the 19th century poet Mihail Eminescu.

Scientists were roaming everywhere around us talking geology and here I was reciting an abstruse 19th century romantic poem. I admired Tazieff's writings and documentaries on volcanology, but admired even more his father's work, a distinguished member of the Royal Belgian Academy, who had rendered this Romanian verse so well in French. The eyes of Tazieff lit instantly and I knew that I had focused his attention:

"You must come to Paris to meet my parents: here is my address and telephone number in l'île St Louis".

I was familiar with this enchanted corner of the Seine behind Nôtre Dame: here had lived Georges Sand, Chopin's greatest love. It was on this very enchanting corner of Paris, full of historic links, that Chopin played for the Czartorisky family, at the Hôtel Lambert.

Tazieff was as good as his word: during my next visit to Paris he arranged to meet me at his parents' home on the outskirts of Paris. His mother was an impetuous Russian lady, whose name was passed to the volcanologist: she was formidable in every respect and larger than life. At the age of 70 she had just come back from riding in the forest nearby. She painted in strongly chromatic touches and her canvasses covered the whole house. She would not stop talking, whilst truly I was far more interested in discussing poetry with her mild mannered husband, a man as self-effacing as he was a truly outstanding academic.

HOME OFFICE INTERVIEW

Travelling to London from Newcastle was not always for fun or science: bureaucracy was catching up with me and the perennial visa problem meant that I had also to see the Home Office in 'Petty' France. Whilst in

Paris, I had gone to the *Préfecture de Police* by appointment of the Governor of the Banque de France: here I had to queue like everybody else. In Romania I used to queue for hours, so I did not mind very much waiting for my turn to come, if anything it was instructive to hear the conversations within earshot. One such occasion occurred in August 1968, after the Russian invasion of Czecho-Slovakia, when hundreds of young Czech students were stranded in England and wanted to ask for political asylum. The media reports were full of horror stories of the invasion and the sympathy of the British public was firmly on the side of the victims of this wanton aggression. In the circumstances I would have expected the Czech visitors seeking asylum in Britain to be treated with the same sympathy as expressed by the press and public. Not so at the Home Office:

“Why do you want to stay in this country?”

“Because I love England.”

“How can you say that when you have barely been here two weeks, in a holiday camp.”

“Yes, but I love England”, the youth kept insisting in a quivering, uncertain voice, yet with a disarming honesty.

“But how can you say that when you hardly speak English?”

“Do you speak German?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Have you been to Germany?”

“Yes.”

“Then, why don’t you seek asylum there?”

Did I hear the dialogue correctly? Was it possible? How was it possible? How dare they be so heartless? It smacked of the callousness of Communist satraps, surely it couldn’t happen in England! Yes, this dialogue was unfolding in front of me and I was pained to realize it: to say that it had a sobering effect on my ideals would have been an understatement—it was, in fact, shattering. Thank God, it did not happen to me: I had the University of Newcastle behind me and a British friend sponsoring my visit, so I was all right, but those wretched Czech students were most certainly not all right and nobody was there to come to their rescue. In Romania we commonly used the expression ‘lying like a newspaper’, because of the shameless propaganda of double standards. Yet here was a blatant case of double standards in showing all the sympathy in the press, whilst behind the scenes, the opposite was practised. I decided that, regardless of the political hue, all bureaucrats were the same: ‘not to be trusted, not to be trusted at all!’ I repeated to myself in dismay.

TOVARITCH BELOUSSOV

The Romanian Government had amazed the whole world by condemning the Russian invasion of Czecho-Slovakia and refusing to send token troops under the aegis of the Warsaw Pact. I was rather proud of our stance, even

though I did not trust the régime and its motives. In a way, I felt I was the beneficiary of the Prague Spring, as the Cold War had somehow receded and the rules about granting travel documents became more relaxed.

I knew Prague well, having been there four times on the way to and from Poland, and I loved the city, which I considered a jewel of European civilization. When my friends in the lab in Newcastle told me about the news headlines and I learned that Prague was under the Russian boot I could not stop repeating loudly:

“The pigs, the pigs...” Yes, it was all to be foreseen and yet we were hoping that it might not happen.

Runcorn, our roving ambassador, had just arranged, after some arduous behind the scenes work, for the University of Newcastle to award an honorary degree to a Soviet scientist, Professor Belousov of the Soviet Academy of Science. The degree ceremony was scheduled in August 1968, just as the Russian troops marched in to Czecho-Slovakia: what a contretemps and Belousov had just arrived in Newcastle ready to take his degree.

Runcorn was embarrassed, but had to go through the motions as sponsor, so was the University Chancellor, Professor Bosanquet, who had to confer the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa on Belousov. The University academic staff were on the warpath and voted with their feet in boycotting the ceremony. Hardly anybody was in sight, so, the resourceful Runcorn had to ask all the students, secretaries and cleaning ladies in the University to fill the public gallery in order to furnish the hall. It was rather like Catherine the Great’s Siberian villages, except that on this occasion, instead of bogus villages, we had a bogus audience. All rather low key, with poor Belousov bearing the brunt of the invasion, but he was rather thick-skinned, so he could take it.

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST

Runcorn’s initiative in proposing Belousov for an honorary degree was a reflection of his political philosophy. He wanted to encourage contacts at all levels between East and West and even prophesied, some 27 years before the fall of the Iron Curtain, that ‘East and West will come together in some huge melting pot’. I did not share his views, which I dismissed as politically naive. Rather more cynically, I thought that Runcorn referred instead to a nuclear melting pot, some sort of meltdown, like at Nagasaki.

In Runcorn’s scheme, I was a smaller cog than Belousov, but nevertheless I too was part of this same philosophical drive, this idea of East and West having a meeting of minds. Or maybe the ‘Romania comes to Newcastle’ festival had its impact on Runcorn to such an extent that he asked me if I wanted to start a PhD in September, once my visitor’s status had ended. I answered in the affirmative, without any hesitation, and added that I was delighted, but that I could see some difficulties regarding

the financial backing of such a scheme, as the Romanians would not give a single penny towards my studies.

"Never mind", said Runcorn, "Talk to Mavor, our admin chap, he will know what to do", and after this elliptic statement, he left on a new international tour. I went to see Mavor, but he knew nothing of Runcorn's intentions, so I had to wait a few more days until he could catch him on the phone, in Alaska:

"What are your intentions regarding Roman's studies here?"

"Send him to the British Council?"

I did go to see the British Council representative in Newcastle, but nothing could have been more ineffectual than this specimen of minor administrator out of his depth: as I was 'not officially sent to England by the Romanian Government', there was no hope there. How could I possibly be '*persona grata*' with the Communist establishment back home, when my father was *not* a Party apparatchik? Any such suggestion of seeking 'official blessing' from Romania was quite absurd and out of the question: this was the routine intended for the sons of Communist Party hacks and I was not included in this privileged class. I felt that the British Council should have known better! So, I went back to poor Mavor.

My tenure as a visiting research student was soon coming to an end and in the absence of any financial backing I would have had to go.

"Ask Runcorn again, he has just come back for a few days."

"Ah, another idea, there is a 'Wilfred Hall' Scholarship offered to science postgraduate students of Newcastle, let us apply."

I applied and was soon short-listed. In spite of this early hope, I did not get the scholarship, which was keenly contested by many good and deserving candidates, all natives of Northumberland.

"What shall we do? What can one do?"

"Let us have him start his PhD", Runcorn said, "and we shall find money later."

"But in the meantime Roman has to survive."

"Well, carry on giving him one pound a day until we find a solution."

I did not complain, how could I? After all, beggars could not be choosers! I started my research in earnest on rock samples from the Cheviot Hills. Brian Embledon took me to the site and we collected a lot of sample rocks. In the middle of all these arrangements, one detail appeared clear: I could no longer stay as a guest in the penthouse once my status changed to that of research student. Quite clearly this accommodation had to revert to its original purpose, to be available for visiting professors, rather than the School's own graduate students. I had to move into a student hostel in Leazes Terrace, a nice Georgian terrace house, only minutes away from the School. I enjoyed the move very much as I was less isolated: I could share the kitchen facilities with other students and I proceeded, for the first time in my life, to experiment with cooking. Romanian males never entered the kitchen for any reason other than asking their wives or mothers if the

Continental Drift

dinner was ready. In England I had to do like any other student in digs, cook for myself, and I enjoyed every bit of it, reinventing Romanian recipes which I remembered my mother preparing back home. It was cheaper and better than the stews and pies at the Students Union of which I had started to get a little bit bored.

FAIT ACCOMPLI

Earlier in the summer, I realized that I could enhance my chances of success if I filed more than one application to several universities, in order to improve my statistical odds. Such application procedures were completely new to me, as I found them rather tedious with form filling, updating my CV, lining up references. In the Communist establishment there was no need for referees, as we had instead an effective system of informers. The sole employer in Romania was the State and every citizen had a file with the Personnel Department, which we took with us wherever we went. We had no need to say who we were. The employers knew automatically who we were, where we were coming from, or what was our social and political provenance. There were no scholarships and therefore no need for references to be asked or be given. Places at Universities in Romania were awarded on the basis of tests for which a political and social mark was very much part of the equation: indeed it had the greatest weight. Those very few Romanian students who had the good fortune of being sent to study abroad, were always the sons of nomenklatura and the geographical choice was Moscow. Back home, my former Professors at the University of Bucharest would not even dream of being asked for a reference, as such practice in Romania was not necessary. There was instead in operation a system of portable personal files, like a 'convict file'. We were all, I presume, 'social convicts': still, in England, I had no other option but to ask for a reference. I pondered for a split second—after all, my supervisor in Bucharest took for granted the hospitality he received from his colleagues in the West: how could he be seen again on his next trip to Newcastle if he had not bothered to respond? The answer to Runcorn's request to my Romanian supervisor Liviu Constantinescu, for a reference, took ages to materialize. Doubtless, in the process, the Communist Party apparatchiks had to be consulted before a reference could be sent.

"Yes, I was his student, yes I got my MA degree"—as for encouraging me to do further studies my professor could not condone it, as he 'disapproved of a *fait accompli*, even if it was a very good one'.

In other words he could not approve of my initiative of sailing under my own steam without an official blessing. My supervisor in Bucharest knew and I myself knew all too well, that I could not obtain such official blessing, as my family was not one of the privileged few who formed the inner circle of the Communist Party nomenklaturists. As it happened, my Romanian supervisor's letter was going to serve me well, as an illustration

of the obtuse and obstructive system I was coming from: it made a good case for me asking my supervisors in Newcastle to provide me instead with fresh references. In Newcastle I had already made my mark as a serious, no-nonsense researcher, a good organizer and team worker with a good potential. By contrast, what a poor sport Constantinescu was to have produced such a pathetic letter, pandering to the Communist order. Thinking of Runcorn's liberal vision, I decided that many more gallons of water would have to flow down the river Tyne, before East and West might come closer together.

In the midst of these gloomy thoughts, a pleasant surprise came from the unexpected quarter of the Romanian Academy: Sabba Ștefănescu knew me less well than Constantinescu, but he sent a warm recommendation. Good old Sabba! He did not flinch and said what he thought, cautiously but simply:

"Mr Roman did not distinguish himself during his undergraduate studies, but to the surprise of the teaching staff he managed to work out a very interesting and original diploma paper, in Palaeomagnetism, for which he was congratulated by his examiners".

This was a cock-a-snook to the Communist hierarchy, of which Ștefănescu had little to fear.

CANADIAN VISA

Amongst the PhD scholarships advertised on the notice board at the School of Physics was one at Toronto with Professor Tuzo Wilson. I applied and, having gone through the preliminary motions, was advised to make an early application for a Canadian visa. I knew that my Romanian citizenship rather complicated things, but nevertheless I had to try. During one of my regular meetings at the Royal Society in London, I took the opportunity to visit Canada House, which was around the corner in Trafalgar Square.

Tuzo Wilson was one of the best names in geophysics, which made the Canadian route to a PhD very attractive. More to the point, for me Canada also had a romantic ring about it, as at the age of 24, when still a student at the University of Bucharest, I published a review of a travel book on Canada. With the fee from this contribution I bought myself a much-needed second pair of shoes. Now these same shoes were going to take me to the very country I wrote about, like a magic carpet, the magic shoes. This very thought filled me with juvenile expectation, as I entered Canada House in London.

Another link with the country was my translations of Canadian poetry into Romanian. By a quirk of politics Romania had in 1966 established diplomatic relations with Canada, as she was interested in acquiring a nuclear reactor. As a result of these new diplomatic links, anything Canadian suddenly became topical and I happened to be the only available 'expert' in the country with some scant knowledge of its literature. My sudden

publication represented a major coup, as I was allocated a quarter page for my feature article, with several translations of Canadian poems, accompanied by a review of Canadian verse. This literary weekly was very popular and had many a distinguished contributor. As an 'unknown illustrious' and a scientist at that, it was unheard of to be given such an accolade. The fee received from the article on Canadian poetry paid for my first three-piece suit, with which I was attired in Newcastle, but by far the greatest satisfaction was the secret political mischief and joy I experienced at the publication in Romanian of a particular poem by Jean-Guy Pilon: *L'Etranger d'ici*.

In the Romania of the mid 1960s this poem was political dynamite. It could not have been published had the poem been written by a Romanian, because of the political innuendoes, which were sufficient to send the poet to jail. Personally, I identified myself with the Canadian poet and the country it described as that of Romania. The excuse of presenting this in a Canadian guise was unique: I tried and I succeeded and let the public read between the lines, in a country 'where we could not shout our rage and where one was barely allowed to die'.

Fired by these vivid memories of my Canadian experience, I went in high spirits to the Canadian High Commissioner's visa section. I explained that I needed a visa to be allowed to read geophysics at Toronto University. To this end, I presented Professor Tuzo Wilson's letters, offering a place as a PhD research student. The Canadian girl at the immigration desk must have been in her early twenties, younger than me, but she certainly knew her line. She was interested neither in the letters from the University, nor in the fact that a PhD student must have acquired, in the process, such prerequisites as O-levels, A-levels, BA, MA and so forth. She recited instead chapter and verse from the immigration book:

"You see, we can't allow just *everybody* into Canada: there is too much pressure. We need educated people: what kind of O-levels have you got?"

"Forget my O-levels. I am here to study for a PhD, can't you see from this letter?"

She pushed it aside.

"Fill in this form with all your O-levels and A-levels and attach to it all the original test results."

Of course I did not come to England with my MSc diploma, let alone with my original documents showing O- and A-level results. How absurd. How dare she, this 'nincompoop' insist on such trivia, when she could see perfectly well that I was wanted for bigger and better things!

"Listen", I went on the offensive, "You say that in Canada you allow only educated people, yes?"

"Yes."

"Very well. According to your own constitution you should be perfectly bilingual, speak both national languages, English and French, yes?"

"Yes."

"Now", I asked with a flourish, "Do *you* happen to speak any French?"

"No", she admitted, "I don't."

"All right then, it follows that I should be on the other side of the desk asking you questions to allow you into Canada: I have the right to be there, you don't." I stormed out of the grand buildings, being unable to contain my disgust at the petty bureaucracy.

Out on the pavement, in Trafalgar Square, of course I realized I was the loser; but was I? Did I actually need or want to put up with such crass idiocy, such moronic bureaucracy, which I thought was confined only to Communist countries? Surely, I concluded reluctantly, the realm of 'nimbecils' had no boundaries. There must be some international mafia of stupids, who perch in such jobs all over the world.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

I wrote to Tuzo in Toronto, saying that my visit to Canada House in London was not a success, as they wanted proof of my O-levels, which I could not produce. He understood my predicament in the hands of bureaucracy, and wrote a very nice letter, stating that he was going to initiate the request for a visa in Toronto to make things easier. In the meantime, would I please fill in some forms for the University Registrar? Amongst the routine requirements I noticed that all students from non-English speaking countries had to pass the Oxford and Cambridge English Proficiency test. Why 'proficiency'? Wasn't I proficient enough? Hadn't I translated from English? Published in English? Given lectures in English to the WI in Sunderland? Well, maybe, but I had to prove it. No I could not. I would have to pass the blessed test and this meant going through a routine and I hated the routines. Also paying a fee for the test. Besides, as I did not have enough money, I simply could not do it, or better still, could not bring myself to do it. Surely the Geordies in Newcastle understood me perfectly well, even the 'nincompoop' at the immigration desk at Canada House understood me perfectly well when I told her off; that meant that I was proficient in English, why should I prove it? I could not.

I wrote to Professor Tuzo Wilson, saying that, reluctantly I had to abandon the idea of a PhD in Toronto.

HELP FROM CHICAGO

A sense of deep frustration started to get hold of me. I needed some advice, advice from a good friend who cared and who knew something about Academia in the West, but I knew nobody. Whom should I ask? I scanned my memory and for a long time could not think of anybody with close connections with Romania and if possible with my family, somebody in a position to give sensible advice about the direction of my studies for a higher degree in the free world. I remembered, all of a sudden, my father's

great friendship with a Romanian literatus, now a professor of history of religions at Chicago. This was Mircea Eliade, who in his youth was my father's contemporary at the Liceul 'Spiru Haret' in Bucharest, where they were together in the same Boy Scout movement. As my paternal grandfather was closely involved with and was a leader of the boy scouts (the *Cohorta Buzau* in pre-war Romania), Mircea often spent time at my family's home in Buzau, where he had many a happy holiday. Later on, as students, Mircea, my father, uncle Victor and a group of friends built a sailing boat, called 'Hai hui' (The Wanderer) which was launched at Tulcea, on the Danube. This was the beginning of an eventful cruise down the Danube to the Black Sea, where they had been caught in a storm and nearly drowned. This momentous episode of their lives, related so vividly by Eliade in his memoirs, *Les promesses de l'équinoxe* (Paris, Gallimard), further cemented the group's friendship. Soon after, Mircea won a scholarship to read history of religions in India, where he sent regular correspondence to father. However, the two friends grew apart, with Father taking on a profession in industry and Mircea becoming a journalist and writer and getting involved in politics. This caused him to remain as an exile in Paris, where he taught history of religions at the Sorbonne and later on at Chicago. When the Communists came to power in Romania, Father remained with his young family in Bucharest, thinking that the Russian-imposed régime would not last and that the Allies would come to our rescue—a calculated risk which proved terribly wrong and for which he paid dearly. By contrast, Mircea's career abroad evolved to become something of a myth in his home country, although he would be referred to only in a hushed voice, as the conspiracy of silence waged by Communists required one not to mention any of the exiles, even those who made Romania proud. Mircea Eliade fell into this latter category.

I wrote to Professor Eliade in Chicago explaining who I was, saying that I 'felt a little adrift' and asking if he had some advice as to what I should do next. I knew he was a busy man, who travelled a lot and did not put much hope in an immediate answer, or in any answer at all, especially since I conjured up in his mind memories of times past, going back some 40 years. After all why should he care?

He answered promptly, with great sympathy and compassion, and directed me to a Romanian exile contact in London, whom he said would help. This was a gentleman I had never heard of before, as I was not frequenting the Romanian diaspora. His name was Ion Rațiu, a former diplomat at the Romanian Legation in London, when Romania was a Kingdom, not a Socialist Republic. Rațiu was a successful businessman with interests in shipping and offices in Regent Street. I rung and said that Eliade suggested that I should see him and he received me immediately. I told him my story and he smiled; he must have heard it repeated so many times before:

"Ask for political asylum", he said.

"I do not want to. I have family back in Romania and I intend to go back. All I want is to be able to study for a doctorate."

Politics did not enter into it. Not so in other people's minds. Like Lipatti's mind in Paris, it was obvious to Rațiu that I had crossed the divide, the Maginot Line and that I had to make a stand. I could not. He did not help, or rather he felt that he could not assist in any way, just harboured a broad smile, at my youthful inexperience.

A LION IN WONDERLAND

Come September and six months to the day when I set foot in Newcastle, my English visa was soon to expire and I would have to renew it. Once in the Home Office building in Holborn I did not know where to go to, but when I explained that I needed a visa I was pointed in the direction of 'Aliens'. I thought that 'Aliens' were people from other planets. *Maybe I came from another planet.* Actually I felt as if I came from another planet. Apart from this strange foreboding, I did not know exactly what 'alien' meant, except that I was put in that particular category, for what obscure reason I could not tell. I did not feel easy about it, as I thought it a derogatory, or discriminatory term. To make things worse, I did not even know how to pronounce the word 'alien': I thought it was pronounced 'alion' as in 'a lion', so I felt rather feline about it and ready to pounce.

Whilst I was waiting I could not help remembering the scene from only a few weeks past, when Czech teenagers stranded in Britain after the Russian invasion of their country were treated so badly by the Home Office:

"Why do you want to stay over here, in this country? You do not even speak English properly." Another English proficiency test, I thought, this time by the Home Office.

When my number was called a middle-aged man met me. He was, I was told later, 'quite a senior officer'. By this I understood that he was in the military, rather than a high-ranking civil servant, although he was in civvies. Unlike the police at the passport office in Bucharest, who wore uniforms, here at the Passport Office in London the civil servants were called 'officers'. I reckoned because they worked in offices, so they had the right to be in civvies to blend more easily with the rest of the crowd.

The situation was quickly summarized: I had arrived in April for one week's conference and I stayed one month in Britain. I then reappeared in July and obtained a three-month visa as a visiting research student. Now I wanted to study for a PhD.

"Well, well, it sounds as if you like it here, you want to stay."

"No", I protested, "I definitely do not wish to stay, I only want to study for a PhD."

"Yes, you would rather stay indefinitely, wouldn't you?"

"No, I wouldn't!" and so on it went for some time, until I shouted:

“Well, you would like to have in this country ‘a lion’ (sic—meaning an alien) like myself, but I simply do not intend to settle here, all I want is to take my doctorate and go home.”

“We will let you know.”

So, I returned to Newcastle empty-handed and we played the waiting game. Poor Mavor had to deal with this ‘hot potato’ and I eventually got a one-year visa until September 1969.

HELLO, KRUSCHEV!

Winter was coming, so Father had sent me an astrakhan hat: he went to the market in Bucharest and asked a peasant producer selling potatoes: “How much is it?”

“Five lei a kilo”, the farmer answered.

“No, I mean your fur hat, how much is it?”

“It is not for sale.”

“I give you one hundred lei for it.”—This was more than the potatoes the farmer had on sale so he took his hat off and handed it over to Father, who promptly sent it to me in Newcastle, to face the rigours of Northumbrian winter.

I took my new fancy fur hat to London. It was made of lamb skin, a lamb of a specific breed, which was called ‘astrakhan’, as I presumed it originally came from that particular region. In central Europe it was very fashionable and in Romania it was used for men’s hats and jacket linings. At a Sunday market in Petticoat Lane my hat caused quite a stir to say the least: the stallholders all waved at me and yelled:

“Kruschev, Kruschev”.

They were right: Kruschev also came to London wearing an astrakhan hat, so, I acknowledged the crowds in Petticoat Lane, waving back in a stately manner, except that I had no limousine and no bodyguards.

A NEW SENSE FOR A ‘NUISANCE’?

At the end of my first term at Newcastle I received a huge bill for my student lodgings in Leazes Terrace. What should I do? I was living, somehow, from hand to mouth. The financial arrangements were fine for a short period of time over the summer, but not long term, when I had to see to my other needs in the absence of a family who I could fall back on. I had come to England with only a suitcase and in lodgings I had to buy my own sheets and pillowcases, cutlery, plates and winter clothes. I became very worried at the prospect of not being able to pay the bill, so I mentioned it to David Collinson. He was ‘the man on the ground’, who was always there to lend a sympathetic ear, in Runcorn’s absence and would do something about it as he was a sensible and practical man, who would understand. The School had to face up to its responsibility: they could not possibly, on the one hand, encourage me to stay and, on the other, not see to the

financial side of it. True, they tried the British Council, the Royal Society, and the local scholarship, then they split the proceeds of a Demonstratorship between several research students including myself, but the latter was more of a stopgap, a palliative rather than a long-term solution. The topic caused some embarrassment, as I put the finger on a rather delicate, but pressing subject. Runcorn had bigger and better things on his mind than the pedestrian question of money for his Romanian student: he thought that by doing nothing the problem would go away. In fairness to him, he must have thought that he had done enough: but this was only a beginning and I had at least three years ahead of me: I had to put the matter on a more solid footing if I were to complete my studies.

“You are a nuisance”, I heard Runcorn say, one day: I did not know the meaning of the word, which I had never heard or used before. I thought he meant somehow a ‘new sense’ in two words. What ‘new sense’ the old man was talking about, I did not know and said nothing, but carried on being a real nuisance.

WHAT ON EARTH IS PETERHOUSE?

I consulted again with Dr David Collinson, who had encouraged me to apply for scholarships elsewhere and also agreed to act as a referee. Professor Creer also had agreed to provide references, so I regularly scanned the advertisements on the School’s notice board, in *Nature* and other journals and newspapers.

Professor Du Bois, from the University of Norman, Oklahoma, was carrying out archaeomagnetic measurements on Mexican artefacts from archaeological sites and I was quite excited about it. I sent him my CV and references, together with a letter asking about the availability of funds.

One day, on the School’s notice board, I saw a rather odd invitation for a research scholarship at Peterhouse, Cambridge. I say ‘odd’ because to date all scholarships were linked with some institution calling itself either University or College, but not Peterhouse, on its own, without the name ‘College’ or ‘University’ attached to it. What on earth is Peterhouse? Never mind, I applied for the scholarship, not thinking much, or taking it too seriously.

COMPLETE THAT FORM!

Miss Norman, the Peterhouse Secretary, sent the application forms for the Scholarship: apart from the scientific referees required I noticed also a ‘character referee’. I asked Michael Conolly in Paris to write. As a Cambridge man, he was quite suitable and he knew me from Romania and Paris *and*, I dare say, the Sorbonne of May 1968. Michael was as good as his word: he wrote on the BOLSA (Bank of London and South America) headed paper a nice character reference and sent me a copy. I did not think that I actually had much chance of getting into Cambridge: it was too eli-

tist and somehow I didn't feel up to it. Cambridge was too remote and beyond my wildest expectations. It was better to plod on with the other applications to Oklahoma and Sydney.

I did not proceed with the rest of the information required by Peterhouse: all they had in hand was my character reference and the fact that I wanted to read for a PhD in the Department of Geophysics, but they had no academic references which were crucial. This was not Miss Norman's idea of getting on with her duty: she kept pestering me with reminders:

"Do you still intend to apply for the scholarship"?

What did she care? After all she knew nothing of me other than what Michael said, but she wanted to 'close the file'. Well, in despair I completed the forms and posted them to Peterhouse, but did not think much of it anymore.

Dan McKenzie, from Cambridge, came to deliver a lecture on plate tectonics to an audience at the School of Physics in Newcastle. He was a shy man, younger than me, with a nervous tick that made him more human and approachable. His talk was fired with enthusiasm: one could see that he liked his subject and he managed to electrify the audience. I did not know much about plate tectonics, which had no currency in Eastern Europe, because science was considered to be an ideological domain. As such it was open to the diktat of a handful of political dinosaurs, such as Belousov: all the best science achievements had to be initiated in the Soviet Union—they were by definition the *crème de la crème*. As Belousov did not 'invent' plate tectonics, he was against it, so the new theory was not heard of in Eastern Europe, by simple 'diktat'. Now, for the first time, listening to McKenzie I could see for myself that there were other new ideas around and, far more to the point, these ideas were expressed by researchers of my age and younger. I thought there was no need to become a crusty dinosaur in the West before one could make oneself heard: such was not the case in Romania. I told McKenzie about my application for a scholarship at Peterhouse. He said,

"If you are successful, you could come and work with me." I answered that I knew nothing of the subject.

He said, "It doesn't matter, you will learn".

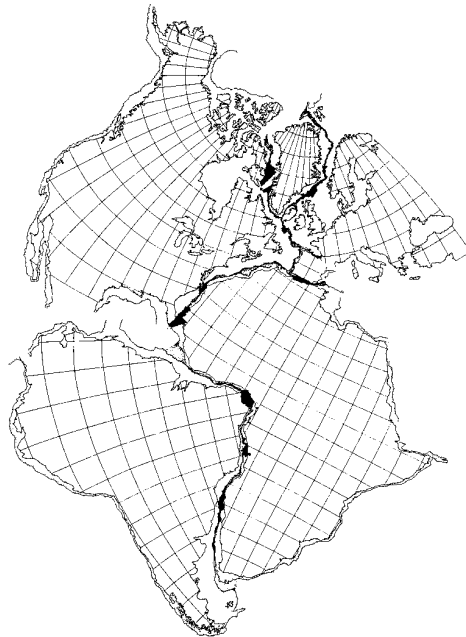
CAMBRIDGE SHORT LIST

Come the Spring of 1969, several scholarship applications were in the pipeline: in the States, Canada, Australia and England, all of which were going to be decided by Easter. Robert ('Bob') Cotton, a Liberal Senator from Australia and Minister of Aviation, tried to encourage me to settle in Oz:

"Don't stay with the Poms, it's not good for you, come here instead" and he agreed to act as a character referee, even though I am not sure that his politics carried any favours with the Aussie academics. One of them

came to Newcastle to interview Brian Embledon and me. I don't think there was much empathy there.

News came from Peterhouse: I was shortlisted and would I please come to be interviewed by Professor Sir Edward Bullard, head of the Department of Geodesy and Geophysics at Cambridge. I knew of Bullard's towering reputation in geophysics from his early dynamo theory for the origin of the Earth's magnetic field, in which the field is generated by a liquid iron core undergoing convection. But most importantly I anticipated with some trepidation meeting the scientist who had given acceptability to continental drift by producing the mathematical computer software for modelling the fit of the continents around the Atlantic (see diagram). The outcome—a best fit between Africa and South America at the 500 fathom (approximately 1000 metre) water-depth—was important evidence for continental drift.



*Computer-generated best fit of the continents at the 500 fathom (2000 m) isobath. This contour marks the edges of the underwater continental shelves rather than the coastlines (which change through erosion). Bullard's map demonstrated just how closely the two landmasses fit together and provided important evidence for the theory that the continents had moved. (Reproduced with permission from the Royal Society, from Bullard, Everett and Smith 1965, *The fit of the continents around the Atlantic*, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London A* 258 41–51.)*

Continental Drift

For this Romanian, the forthcoming interview was like a thunderbolt coming out of the blue: it meant that chances at Cambridge were unexpectedly good, whilst I had put my strong bets on the other horses. I did not think, though, that I would be successful, but I had at least to go through the motions. Allison Clwyd, in Newcastle, had a school friend in Cambridge with whom I could stay. I rang and this was OK, so I was welcome to stay at Richard and Lucy Adrian's home, in Adam's Road.

Lucy's maiden name was Caroe, a family from the West Country, and her grandfather, William Douglas Caroe, was an ecclesiastical architect who designed several bishop's palaces in Canterbury and elsewhere. She was a fellow of Newnham and she lectured at Cambridge in the Department of Geography. Richard was a medical doctor educated at Westminster School and in the States during the war. He too was a typical 'Cambridge product' and stayed on the staff of the Department of Medicine, where he was a lecturer. Richard's father, Lord Adrian, was the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Medicine for his work on neurophysiology. He was a fellow of Trinity College Cambridge and Chancellor of the University. The Adrians were related to whoever was relevant in science, at Cambridge and Oxford, amongst whom were Keynes, Darwin, Bragg, Raverat. To sum it all up, nothing could have been more intrinsically Cambridge than the Adrians, which made my staying with them quite unusual. In spite of their particular status, the Adrians were of easy and uncomplicated manner. Perhaps, in the words of Asquith, a former Liberal Prime Minister, they were members of that inner circle who displayed 'tranquil leadership and effortless superiority'. Nevertheless, I was reminded by Lucy that:

"When the Normans came, the Crockers, the Caroes and the Copplesons were at home", as stated in the age-old verse, to which I added:

"The Romans came to England before that, with Emperor Hadrian."

Richard sensing danger in this game of one-upmanship intervened:

'The Adrians came to England much, much later than anybody else—they were Huguenots'.

A young Bragg nephew, who was an undergraduate at Trinity, was asked to join us for dinner. On learning about the purpose of my visit, he said that he couldn't understand why scholarships were offered to foreigners. I replied that it was a very good thing for this country, for propaganda reasons, as such foreign students were or would become Anglophiles and on returning to their native country they would become leaders and might favour England. He was not convinced of my reasoning. I was rather surprised as to the possibility of any Englishman being anti-foreign, when Britannia 'ruled the waves', had an Empire and the British colonized continents.

IN COMES SIR EDWARD CRISP BULLARD

The following morning, at 10 am, I was expected to be interviewed by Professor Sir Edward Bullard, Head of the Department of Geodesy and Geophysics in Madingley Rise, off Madingley Road.



Sir Edward Bullard's study on the ground floor (bay window) overlooking the croquet lawn and further afield the paddocks and open fields. The Common Room, where many novel ideas in plate tectonics were discussed over coffee and tea, was also on the same floor. Nearby buildings housed the conference room and laboratories, which after Teddy's retirement were called the Bullard Laboratories. (Photo by Constantin Roman 1970.)

The department was located in a Victorian house, complete with its lawns, paddock and gardens. Various laboratories were scattered unobtrusively in the nearby outhouses. It was a romantic setting, with daffodils flowering in profusion and horses grazing in the paddock, which lent the place the mystique of a Constable landscape. Sir Edward had a big smiling face, decorated by a large rounded nose, thin white hair going to baldness. He wore a short-sleeved shirt, with tie, whilst the jacket was hanging on a chair. His informality and constant smile indicated an easy disposition. I did not know what to expect from an interview, so I let him do the talking and ask the questions. We did not stay long in his study, as we soon

moved the venue of the interview to the Common Room, where all researchers congregated for coffee. We sat at a long refectory table, near the bay window. There were two other tables in the room, which were soon filled with young people chattering away in a relaxed atmosphere. There was no fixed set pattern and the students mingled with the staff, sitting wherever they chose to. This made for a great opportunity of exchanging news and views. In fact it was on such occasions, at coffee and tea breaks, that some of the most imaginative concepts of plate tectonics were sparked off, with one geophysicist 'bouncing' his ideas off another colleague.

As there were so many people around us, the conversation was not focused and I assumed that they only wanted to have a general idea as to what this Romanian looked like, to ensure that I had no fangs. McKenzie was asked to join us for coffee. I recognized him from his earlier stay in Newcastle and we exchanged pleasantries. We parted and I thought that the interview was over and did not know what to make of it, almost as if it was an anticlimax. McKenzie wanted to know where I was staying in Cambridge and asked me if I was free to join him for dinner in King's. I said that I was staying with friends and that I would let him know if they had any plans for me. On my return to Adam's Road I told Lucy about Dan's invitation to dinner and she agreed that it was important for me and that I should go.

GRILLED AT KING'S

King's, a foundation of Henry VI for the pupils of Eton, was one of the largest and most important of Cambridge colleges. Its importance for English architecture resided in its most resplendent chapel in Gothic perpendicular style, completed under Henry VIII. This was the most perfect example of fan vaulting in England, a feature unique to English architecture. The fan vaulting in King's College chapel was better than that of Windsor or Westminster Abbey. I entered through the neo-Gothic screen in King's Parade, the main college street in Cambridge, and asked the Porter for directions to Dan McKenzie's rooms. I had to take a turn to the left through the 19th century wing of the college, to reach a modern extension where Dan had his rooms. What I found so pleasantly surprising was the lack of inhibition English architects had at combining the contemporary with the old. I could not understand why McKenzie chose to live in a modern block, when he might have enjoyed the Georgian panelling of the Fellows' building across the lawn, but suddenly I realized the motive: Dan had the most pleasant vantage point from his bay window overlooking King's Parade.

I soon came to realize that the object of the invitation was to find out more about my ability and academic background. Romania was a great unknown. We went step by step and explained each of the sixty or so courses I had studied in Bucharest, from geology to geophysics, from

physics to maths and combustion engineering. It was more than English students had the opportunity to do in three years, for a BA, and also more comprehensive, in the sense that it covered both geology and geophysics. McKenzie was interested in the Romanian earthquakes and wanted me to work on these. He was definitely counting his chickens before they were hatched, because the scholarship came from Peterhouse, not from the University. We would have to wait and see. He asked where was I staying and I said in Adam's Road.

"Who are you staying with?"

"It's a family called Adrian."

He nearly fell off his chair.

THREE SCHOLARSHIPS IN A GO

On my return to Newcastle I understood that, for lack of money, my stay here had no long-term prospects. Besides, it was getting more and more difficult to solve the accommodation problem and I was increasingly worried about the state of my financial affairs, as the percentage salary from the Demonstratorship was not stretching far enough.

"Ah, you see", said Marion the department's secretary, "You should not have bought yourself a three-piece suit."

I replied, "I brought this with me, from Romania."

I wrote to François Baudelaire, in Paris, to ask if I could not take up a summer job with IBM in Paris. He said that he would let me know as soon as possible. In the meantime, knowing the outcome of the various scholarship applications was just a matter of weeks, I had to play a waiting game, as there was nothing more I could do.

I again explained the situation to David Collinson—and I said that I applied for a student training position with IBM: he understood, so when the positive answer came from Paris I was absolutely elated. There I could wait for the results of my scholarship applications, whilst at the same time I would learn something useful, with a good company and keep myself going.

Sooner than expected, and just before the Easter holidays, the answers from the universities started to filter through, one after another. From the four places I applied for I got three: one in Norman, Oklahoma, one in Toronto (as Tuzo still wanted me to come and kept the option open) and, quite unbelievably, the place at Cambridge.

Only the Aussies did not want me:

"They will be that much poorer for it, damn their desert island and the kangaroos", but I felt, nevertheless, sorry for my old friend, Senator Bob Cotton—somehow I thought that I let him down.

I decided to accept the three-year scholarship from Cambridge and decline the two other places in Canada and the United States, both of which had strings attached with teaching duties. Besides, I started to get tired

of all the immigration paperwork, which was complicated by the status of my Romanian citizenship. At least, the British visa was still valid until September 1969, when I could extend it without problems, because of my Peterhouse grant. By contrast, going to Canada or the States would have entailed fresh efforts, starting everything from scratch. I knew that my decision to go to Cambridge was the right one to take and I found the place so fascinating, for its architecture and setting, that I could not think of a more enchanting place on Earth to be.

Now I was ready to go to Paris, to take on my IBM assignment arranged by François, however, there were two or three further details to sort out: my accommodation in Paris, my French visa and my English re-entry visa. Some family friends in Paris, who lived in the 17^e arrondissement, near the Arc de Triomphe, learned that I was going to work in the IBM offices at Sablons. This was within walking distance from their flat and offered, free of charge, their servants quarters (*chambre de bonne*) on the top floor of the building. As a student I had always dreamt of living in an attic room. My re-entry visa in the UK was routinely given, as all my papers were in order and my student status clear. I had only one more thing to do: to obtain the French visa, for four months.

BUT I LIKE FRANCE!

Back again in London, I went to the French Consulate in Tavistock Square and presented my passport. I was immediately informed that

“Romanian nationals had to apply for a visa in their country of origin.”

“How very nice and helpful”, I thought: “I will go back to Romania and no sooner that I will set foot in the country, the passport will be taken away from me and the door firmly shut behind me. I could then dream of Cambridge and Paris and will not be able to get out of the Communist prison, all this because of the damn French red tape. Bureaucrats of the world unite!” I paraphrased Marx.

I had to do some quick thinking:

“You want me to apply for my French visa in Romania? Sure, but I have to get there first, therefore I would need a transit visa through France”, which I knew I was automatically entitled to get on the spot and without waiting. Furthermore, the visa would be ten-days long, which would be sufficient for me to put in position my Banque de France heavy artillery and have my transit visa changed to a visitors visa.

Ah, the French clerk was taken by surprise by my change of strategy. He looked in my passport and noticed that on a previous occasion I had got a transit visa (in May 1968) which I subsequently changed to a short stay, resident’s visa. He became suspicious of my nefarious intentions. There were stories of Romanian spies in Paris, of defectors, informers and the like and they could not be too careful. He looked at me with piercing,

menacing eyes, full of suspicion:

"Ah, you see, you have been to Paris before, in transit, and you stayed on", he said, full of reproach.

"Yes, I did, because of the train strikes: I could not walk to Romania! I had to take the train and France was on strike."

He did not want to know he had a short memory, especially with regard to such unpleasant details as the *événements*.

"Never mind the strikes", he conceded, "But you *did* stay."

"Yes, I had to regularize my stay and obtain a new visa in Paris. It was the Préfecture de Police which gave it to me, it was all above board."

The clerk changed his line of investigation, for a minute: "But *why*, tell me *why* do you want to go through France? Have you thought of Belgium instead?"

"No", I said, "I have not. Why should I? What is wrong with France? I like France."

"Yes, I can see that", answered the Frenchman, full of innuendoes.

"Now", he said, his face lit for a minute at his new line of attack, "Tell me where shall we send you the visa?"

"Why?" I said, "of course, to the School of Physics, Newcastle upon Tyne." He smiled broadly and handed back my unwanted Romanian passport.

"In that case, mon bon Monsieur, you have to apply for your French transit visa to our Consulate in Birmingham."

"Why Birmingham?"

"Because it is close to Newcastle."

"But I never ever go to Birmingham! I go instead to London, for Royal Society Meetings." He had never heard of the Royal Society, which was irrelevant to the problem.

"But now I am in London", I pleaded, "Can't you do it here"?

"No", he said, "Newcastle depends on Birmingham."

I was quite exhausted by this game of ping-pong and started to lose my temper: I thought it was an abuse of power, of a kind which I knew only in Communist countries. Surely it couldn't be right to be treated like this!

"Well, I would like to see the Consul about that and see what he says". *Eh bien, si c'est comme ça, je voudrais voir Monsieur le Consul.*

"Très bien, Monsieur", he displayed an even broader smirk, "The concière will show you the way."

I followed. I soon realized that I was being taken, not to the Consul, but to the front door. I was invited to leave. How humiliating!

"These are no frogs, these are toads, vulgar toads, with no respect for the human race", I muttered to myself in disbelief.

On the train to Newcastle, I thought:

"It was not my fault that I was Romanian and that all these silly restrictions came my way. It was all Yalta's fault, when we were sold

Continental Drift

down the river by Mr Churchill and the Iron Curtain was put in place." Yet, I had to live with it and somehow circumvent the red tape. At this thought I sighed: what a waste of energy, which could be used for better, more constructive things!

I returned to Newcastle in a dejected mood. I went to Mavor and kindly asked him to do me a last favour and send my passport to the French Consulate in Birmingham. He did. I presume by now he had had enough of writing letters on my behalf, which had become a full time job. He must have been happy in the knowledge that this would be my last fling and that I was going to leave for France. Soon I got my French transit visa, packed my belongings and headed across the Channel to Paris.

It was May 1969, exactly one year, on the dot, after I had first set foot at the Gare du Nord.

A second full circle was now complete.