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Romanian - American Negotiations

IN EDUCATION, SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND ARTS

Presă Universitară Clujeană



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Mircea Eliade's Interwar American Project

Liviu Bordaș

*Mistakes can be the shortest way to truth, just as
truths can be gateways to error. Columbus
discovered America starting from a false premise.*

M. Eliade¹

America before America

In the last three decades of his life, the significant academic career achieved by Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) in the United States of America made his previous attitude towards America a subject that deserves to be, and must be, known as soon as possible and more completely. And yet, it has been barely, fragmentarily, and only occasionally treated.

One of the most interesting episodes of this study – hitherto almost completely ignored – occurred in 1929, during Eliade's first year in India. Among his many unfulfilled projects, two target America. On the one hand, he was planning a long return trip to his homeland, which would pass through the United States. On the other hand, he was considering acquiring a teaching position in an American university, preferably at Harvard.

How did Eliade come to see his future in America at the age of twenty-two? One might think we should start from his first encounters with American culture. Mapping them is undoubtedly instructive but of no help in this matter. His extensive reading during high school – between the ages of eleven and eighteen – inevitably led him in this direction as well.

¹ Mircea Eliade, "Postile. Intelectualism și intelectualiști," *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) V, no. 1414, May 29, 1929, 1–2 (Dated 26 February).

But none of the American writers he knew particularly interested him. It would not be literature that drew him to America but the sciences.

It is equally unhelpful to find when the first direct, personal contacts with Americans occurred. He could have met them even in Bucharest or during his travels abroad: in Italy (April-May 1927, April-May 1928), in Geneva (August-September 1927), on his way to India (November-December 1929), and in India itself (December 1929 – November 1931).

Geneva, 1927

Undoubtedly, the first more consequential meetings occurred in the summer of 1927, during the summer courses organized by the School of International Studies (*Bureau d'Etudes Internationales*) attached to the League of Nations (*Société des Nations*). The fourth annual session of the summer school took place from July 11 to September 4 and was attended by 355 students from thirty-six countries, half of whom were Masters and Ph.D. students. About half of them were American: from Cornell University, Barnard College in New York, the Universities of Chicago and Missouri, etc. etc., Harvard included. And some teachers were Americans.

But neither in his newspaper reports nor in his correspondence did Eliade write anything about his participation in the school. He avoided even naming it; he spoke of “the courses of the University Group attached to the Society of Nations” (i.e. University Federation for the League of Nations), under whose auspices they had been initiated in 1924.² We only know he socialized with other international students, mainly at the international student dormitory restaurant and on field trips.³ In his memoirs, he stated that he had to attend “some courses about the structure and future of the League of Nations,” but instead, he was content to devour, in the University’s

² Idem, “Reportaje. Geneva. I. Le Foyer des étudiants,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) III, no. 850, August 30, 1927, 1–2.

³ A mention of an American female student he had met, in Mircea Handoca, ed, *Mircea Eliade și corespondenții săi* (hereafter *MECS*), vol. (I-V) III (Bucharest: Minerva, 1993, 1999; F.N.S.A., 2003; Criterion, 2006, 2007) 148 (September 27, 1927).

library, books inaccessible in Bucharest.⁴ He thus read some of the thirty-two volumes of Sanskrit or Pali translations published up to that time in “the redolent *Harvard Oriental Series*” (under Charles Rockwell Lanman’s editorship),⁵ alongside books by Henri Frédéric Amiel, Léon Bloy, Remy de Gourmont, Henri Massis and George Sarton. Except for the latter – a scientist, professor at Harvard – he criticized all of them.

During this period, Eliade wrote to several key scholars from the Anglophone world (Great Britain and the United States of America), such as George Foot Moore, James George Frazer, and John Woodroffe, expressing his desire to translate their works into Romanian. It was also a way of procuring books unavailable in the country. G. Foot Moore – professor of History of Religions at Harvard – obtained acceptance from his publishers for translating the volumes *History of Religions* (1913–1919) and *The Birth and Growth of Religion* (1923), which would be sent to Bucharest.⁶

Most likely, the *Harvard Oriental Series*, Sarton, and Foot Moore are at the root of Eliade’s Harvard project. The first volume of Sarton’s work, *Introduction to the History of Science* (1927), which he started reading at the University of Geneva Library,⁷ was actually the partial source of one of his essential ideas, that of a “new humanism.”⁸ For the Belgian-American scholar, the history of sciences represented a “new humanism” with strong leanings towards a philosophy of culture.⁹ This would comprise a series of methods aimed at researching and valorizing not the man of humanism based on

⁴ Eliade, *Autobiography* (hereafter *Autobiography*), vol (I-II) I, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990, 1988), 130–1.

⁵ Mentioned in Idem, “*Studi rumeni*,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) III, no. 907, October 26, 1927, 1–2.

⁶ His letter from August 18, 1927; MECS III, 198–9. Also Mircea Handoca, ed, *Europa, Asia, America... Corespondență* (hereafter *Corespondență*), vol. (I-III) I (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999, 2004) 263 (April 17, 1929).

⁷ *Corespondență* I, (December 9, 1927, October 23, 1928), 72, 76.

⁸ However, the term is not cited in the first review of Sarton’s book, but only the following year, after the writing of the bachelor’s thesis on the philosophy of the Renaissance. Eliade, “O carte de istoria științelor,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) III, no. 881, September 30, 1927, 4. Also see the letter to Valeriu Bologa, from December 9, 1927; *Corespondență* I, 72.

⁹ Eliade “Institutul de istorie a medicinei,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) IV, no. 1267, October 31, 1928, 1–2.

philology, but the human as evident from the evolution of science, in the broad sense of this notion: organized knowledge.¹⁰

Before leaving for India, Eliade wrote to George Sarton at Harvard again, also referring to the first volume (from Homer to Omar Khayyam) of his monumental history of the sciences. He replied, apologizing for the absence of India from the book, which was due, of course, only to the well-known difficulties of accurately dating Sanskrit works.¹¹

India, 1929

On board the Japanese ship “Hakone Maru,” on which he traveled from Port Said to Colombo, between December 1 and 12, 1928, Eliade met, in addition to several Japanese students (some returning from the United States), an anthropology professor, whom he left unnamed. Our research to identify him is still ongoing. Among the primary candidates – Ryūzō Torii (1870–1953), Kotondo Hasebe (1882–1969), and Nenzō Utsurikawa (1884–1947) – the latter was a disciple of Roland B. Dixon of Harvard University, appointed in 1928 professor at Taihoku (Taipei) Imperial University in Taiwan.

The second opportunity to interact more regularly with Americans was the combined conference of the Christian students’ movement in British India and the YMCA, held from December 24 to 31 at Poonamallee, a former military cantonment near Madras. International delegates at the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) annual congress, which took place between December 5–16 in Mysore, were also invited. Eliade was one of them, but he arrived too late to participate.

As with the Romanian Student Christian Association (ASCR), the Student Christian Movement in India was attached to the YMCA from its inception, and the Indian YMCA was practically a branch of the North

¹⁰ Idem, “Sarton și istoria științelor,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) IV, no. 1276, November 11, 1928, 1–2. He returned in the article “Istoria științelor și noul umanism,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) IX, no. 2980, August 12, 1933, 1–2, as well as in other articles.

¹¹ *George Sarton Additional Papers*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Box 8, bMS Am 1803 (506). His response letter from December 23, 1928, in *MECS* IV, 305–6.

American division. Most “fraternal secretaries” of the Indian subsidiaries were Americans or Canadians. As in the United States, the Indian YMCA, and especially the one in Madras, was a great promoter of sports and physical education, having an important role in shaping modern yoga under the influence of Western physical culture.

The students, around three hundred, came from India, Burma and Ceylon. The pastors were, in the majority, Westerners, but even among them, most came from Australia or from the colonies. Eliade referred – without naming them – to Max Yergan (1892–1975), an African-American Baptist minister YMCA missionary in South Africa, and Arnold Lomas Wylde (1880–1958), an Anglican priest from Great Britain, who emigrated to Australia. Also among them was a Romanian reverend, George D. Iosif (1892–1940), who emigrated as a young man to the United States, then, in 1919, was sent as a missionary to Burma, where he became head of the American Baptist mission in Rangoon.

As soon as he arrived in Calcutta, Eliade had the opportunity to meet other Americans. One of the first is Josephine MacLeod (1858–1949), a long-time disciple of Swami Vivekananda who lived in the Belur Math monastery.¹² It was also there that he met Swami Madhavananda (Nirmal Chandra Basu, 1888–1965), a former missionary in the United States, whom he would later accompany, in January 1930, to the Kumbha Melā in Allahabad. Among those he met at his mentor, Surendranath Dasgupta's house – where he went three times a week – was an unnamed American professor, whose identity remains to be discovered through ongoing research.¹³ In the fall of that first year, at Rabindranath Tagore's University in Shantiniketan, he would meet William Dangaix Allen (1904–1985), an American journalist with a significantly extensive career, today sunk in obscurity. Seeking to verify with other Westerners the transforming power of Shantiniketan's “decor,” Eliade would

¹² See her letter from January 20, 1929; *MECS* III, 49.

¹³ Letter to his mother, from March 4–5, 1929; *Correspondență* I, 257. In 1930, he was present at an American woman's visit. Eliade, “Jurnal,” *Vremea* (Bucharest) VI, no. 314, November 19, 1933, 6–7.

turn him into a character of a story in which he explored the encounter of a “white” with the world created by Tagore at Visva-Bharati.¹⁴

Another lead regarding Eliade’s American project that needs to be investigated is Dasgupta’s connections with North American academia and possibly even Harvard, where he had been delegated in 1926 to represent India (Bengal) at the sixth session of the International Philosophical Congress. In 1930, he was preparing for an extended trip to Europe and America. He wanted to go to Oxford from July to October and then to Northwestern University in Chicago until the end of March 1931. Because of this, Eliade also planned to leave the professor’s house – for Shrinagar and then to Shantiniketan – from May to November. The cancellation of Dasgupta’s project also changed Eliade’s plans.¹⁵

Harvard University

As the days passed and he immersed himself in his study of Indian philosophy, Eliade’s projections regarding his stay in India changed. After two to four years, he planned to go to Burma, Siam, and Indochina, where he made good friends (on the ship). Even to Australia. He also wanted to return home through Japan and America, countries that seemed “wonderful” to him, and possibly through Mexico. Other plans concerned the post-Indian period. After obtaining his doctorate in Bucharest, Eliade wished to go to Germany. That was only if he could not get to the United States of America, to Harvard University.¹⁶ To Raffaele Pettazzoni he wrote that, after the years spent in India and Germany, he would come to Rome to “learn” History of Religions.¹⁷

¹⁴ Eliade, “La Shantiniketan,” *Viața literară* (Bucharest) IX, no. 122, December 21, 1929, 3 (Dated October 1929).

¹⁵ See his letters to his family, from [March], April 10, May 1, and May 29, 1930; *Correspondență* I, 303, 304, 305, 307.

¹⁶ *MECS* III, 240–1 (March 9, 1929); *MECS* II, 311–312 (March 30, 1929); *Correspondență* I, 260 (March 20, 1929), 265 (April 17, 1929), 269 (June 6, 1929), 273 (July 24, 1929), 310 (August 22, 1929); *Correspondență* II, 164 (May 21, 1929), 165 (July 17, 1929).

¹⁷ Natale Spineto, ed, *Mircea Eliade, Raffaele Pettazzoni, L'histoire des religions a-t-elle un sens? Correspondance. 1926–1959* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 103 (February 29, 1929).

Germany, a constant on his map of future studies, was the country where all his favorite professors at the University of Bucharest (Nae Ionescu, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Dimitrie Gusti) had studied and, therefore, it became a necessity and a promise for their disciple. But what exactly drew Eliade to Harvard? He maintained very good relations with George Sarton (1884–1956), who had been teaching History of Science since 1920. A Romanian language course had recently been established, taught by an emigrant from Romania. But Harvard was one of the most important centers for both Indian philology and religious studies.¹⁸ If Eliade had no connection with the Sanskrit professor, Walter Eugene Clark (1881–1960) – future editor of the *Harvard Oriental Series* –, he had corresponded with the professor of History of Religions, George Foot Moore (1851–1931),¹⁹ whom he regarded as “one of the glories of Harvard University, and the one who made the Faculty of Theology an institute of original research, instead of the usual popular American theological schools.”²⁰ Foot Moore retired in 1928, and the chair had been advertised. This was what Eliade aimed for.²¹ However, it would be occupied in 1930 by the young classicist Arthur Darby Nock (1902–1963).

Mindful of his scientific future, Eliade believed that it would be a “crime” not to have the scholarship he had received from Bucharest extended after he “sacrificed himself” to start “new and revealing studies for Romanian culture.” He feared Nicolae Iorga, newly appointed rector of the University of Bucharest, would cause him difficulties. If, however, the Romanians were so senseless, if stupidity and politics suppressed his scholarship, he would apply for American citizenship and, in two years, he would leave to be a professor at Harvard.²² “All the scholars I talk to marvel at the breadth of

¹⁸ William James (1842–1910) taught at Harvard until 1907, however, it is unlikely that Eliade was influenced by reading his work.

¹⁹ See his letter from August 18, 1927, from which it can be deduced he had sent at least one more letter; *MECS* III, 198–99.

²⁰ Eliade, “Doi profesori morți. N. Söderblom și G. F. Moore,” *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) VIII, no. 2627, August 15, 1932, 3.

²¹ *Corespondență* I, 292–23 (December 15, 1929).

²² Letter to his mother, on June 12, 1929; *Corespondență* I, 270.

my knowledge and predict a formidable future for me.” “Besides, in Romania, no one can appreciate the discoveries I’m working on.”²³ We do not know what his certainty that he would be accepted at Harvard was based on, but it must be related to the belief that it is comparatively easy to become a professor in American universities.²⁴ However, if not the most prestigious, Harvard was high among the most prestigious American universities. But soon after, Eliade expressed the intention to become professor in a European university.²⁵

Concerned that his work should bear concrete and immediate fruit, he proposed to write studies in English and French, which he would publish starting that winter in European and American journals.²⁶ His future university situation in the country depended on them.²⁷ While in India, Eliade continued testing the ground for American academic journals,²⁸ but did not find an outlet.

When financial and family difficulties loomed on the horizon with the possibility of shortening his stay in India, Eliade wrote to his parents that, despite the intellectual efforts of which he was capable, two years would not be enough for all the projects he had planned. He thus renounced the project on Asian religions that would have brought him an American chair. The time was insufficient to complete the “*special research*,” i.e., “Tibetan, Pali language and Mahayanic Buddhist literature, Asian mysticism, and

²³ Letter to his father, on July 24, 1929; *Corespondență I*, 273.

²⁴ Letter to his mother, on August 5, 1929; *Corespondență I*, 275.

²⁵ *Ibid.* An anecdotal fact from this period that deserves to be mentioned: on August 10, 1929, at a “Venetian celebration” in Movilă-Techirgiol resort (currently Eforie Sud), Eliade’s parents attracted attention from high society by dancing “wonderful productions, including a successful dance of the Apache.” Ionel Tudosie, “Carmen Sylva,” *Rampa* (Bucharest) XIV, no. 3469, August 15, 1929, 3.

²⁶ Letters to the family on August 5 and 27, 1929; *Corespondență I*, 275, 309–10. On September 4, 1929, he wrote to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru that he would finish the first study by winter; *Corespondență III*, 7–8. On December 21, 1929, he stated he would publish an English article in February 1930; *Corespondență I*, 297.

²⁷ Letter to his father, from September 4, 1929; *Corespondență I*, 278.

²⁸ See for example the letter from March 15, 1931, to Vittorio Macchioro, who was at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (in the USA between 1929 and 1933). *Corespondență II*, 170–4 (173). And his reply, from April 19–May 3, 1931; *MECS III*, 103–6 (106).

Tantric works," required for the Harvard chair to which he intended to apply. However, he hoped to continue his research in Germany – where other perspectives could open up for him – and in Paris.²⁹ And to return to India later when the family situation and his financial condition would improve.³⁰ Although his family soon withdrew any conditions for his stay in India, Eliade no longer mentioned anything about the Harvard project in his correspondence – as far as it is known.

His father discussed this project with Professor Constantin Rădulescu-Motru (1868–1957), who said that it would be good to go for a year as a professor in America.³¹ Eliade himself had communicated this project to several friends and colleagues of his generation, some of whom were quick to disseminate it. In the Cluj newspaper *Patria* (*The Fatherland*) a news piece was published that Eliade, at only twenty-two, was invited as a professor at an American university.³² Reading it, professor Valeriu Bologa (1892–1971) wrote to him that it was something “extraordinary” but also a danger that Romania would “lose him for good.”³³ The “news” leaked from one of the letters sent to friends in the country and must have been thought up by Eliade precisely to “threaten” the Romanians if he did not receive the support he needed to continue his studies in India. He replied to Bologa that – obviously – he did not know anything for sure about America, but – even more obviously – he was determined to “sacrifice everything” for his research.³⁴

Although we learn nothing more about the project to occupy a chair at Harvard, the prestigious academic institution remained in other ways on

²⁹ Letter to his father, on December 15, 1929; *Corespondență* I, 292–3.

³⁰ Letter to his mother, on December 21, 1929; *Corespondență* I, 295.

³¹ Letters from Gh. Eliade, from July 11 and November 13, 1929; *MECS* V, 365; “Scrisori inedite adresate lui Mircea Eliade de la familie,” in M. Handoca, *Fost-a Eliade necredincios?* (Iași: Tipografia Moldova, 2011), 366–78 (372). He talked about his son's American project to other people as well. See for example George Angelescu's letter from June 22, 1929; *MECS* I, 44–46 (45).

³² V.I., “Răboj,” *Patria* (Cluj) XI, no. 261, November 27, 1929, 2. The author is, very likely, Victor Iancu (1908–1981), Eliade's younger colleague at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest.

³³ *MECS* I, 105–6 (January 20, 1930).

³⁴ Letter from February 16, 1930; *Corespondență* I, 77–80 (79).

the horizon of Eliade's scholarly career. At the beginning of 1931, the Bucharest newspaper *Cuvântul* (*The Word*) announced that he was working on a voluminous *Lexicon of Indian Philosophy* to be published in English by Harvard University.³⁵ The information originated, of course, from his letters, but it remains for future archival research to determine to what extent it was based on a genuine offer or opportunity and not on young Eliade's wishful thinking.

Several months after his return from India, on March 19, 1932, he gave an invited lecture entitled "Asia versus America," in which he criticized America in the name of Eastern spirituality.³⁶ And yet, in a very short time, he published the article "If I were in America," in which he referred to the "exodus of scholars to this blessed country" and concluded with the thought, "I would like to live in America [...]."³⁷ In the summer of 1933, he was asked by a reporter: "Between India and Europe, which do you prefer?." Eliade answered: "America!" seeing it as a "world where you can work and be encouraged in your work."³⁸ A few months later, he became an honorary assistant to Nae Ionescu (1890–1940) at the University of Bucharest, and references to a desired departure to the United States disappeared for a while.

It seems that in India, Eliade had externalized his hopes for the American project to such an extent that he would be embarrassed to admit to some of his acquaintances there that it failed. In 1934, he wrote to an Indian scholar that he had returned from the United States and was now teaching at the University of Bucharest.³⁹

³⁵ "Lumina ce se stinge. Câteva cuvinte despre Mircea Eliade și noul lui roman care va apare în *Cuvântul*," *Cuvântul* (Bucharest) VII, no. 2051, January 6, 1931, 2.

³⁶ *Autobiography* I, 236. In the symposium *Valorificarea spiritului american (Harnessing the American Spirit)*, organized by the "Romanian Annals" Circle, at the "Carol I" University Foundation.

³⁷ Eliade, "Dacă aş fi în America," *Cuvântul* (Bucureşti) VIII, no. 2523, April 30, 1932, 1.

³⁸ Al. Robot, "Cu Mircea Eliade despre el și despre alții," *Rampa* (Bucharest) XVI, no. 4615, June 5, 1933, 1, 3.

³⁹ See Narendra Nath Law's response from April 26, 1934 (to a letter from March 29); *MECS* III, 44.

Coda

This article does not aim to map all the threads – thinner or thicker – connected to Harvard in Eliade's biography and bibliography, both of which are rich in many other threads leading to multiple directions. Much less to give an account of all his intentions regarding America. Further research will bring to light different aspects of this symbolic link that runs through his academic career.

In the post-Indian years, he reviewed books published in various scientific series sponsored by Harvard and maintained relations with several scholars related, in one way or another, to it. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), who worked from 1917 at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, a stone's throw from Harvard, was among those connected to the venerable University through multiple relationships. Eliade had discovered him in Geneva, reading him since 1928, and initiated a correspondence in 1936 by sending him his book on yoga. The Anglo-Sinhalese scholar contributed to the first issue of *Zalmoxis* (1938) along with his friend Benjamin Rowland (1904–1972) from the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University.

In the same year, after his political arrest, Eliade lost his university position, together with Nae Ionescu. At the beginning of the war, in the fall of 1939, he returned to the old idea of finding a position as History of Religions professor in the United States.⁴⁰ He sounded out Coomaraswamy on this possibility, but although Coomaraswamy urged him to come, he informed him that, due to the large number of refugee scholars from Nazi Germany, there were almost no professorships left in American universities.⁴¹ Therefore, he accepted the diplomatic service as an alternative solution, and in April 1940, he was sent to London. However, he did not give up on the American dream and, in a short time, telegraphed Minister

⁴⁰ *Autobiography* II, 3, 4.

⁴¹ The letters have not survived, but Eliade refers to Coomaraswamy's reply in his memoirs; *Autobiography* II, 5, 13, 78–79.

Nichifor Crainic with the request to be sent to the United States.⁴² With no result.

After Romania entered the war, while he was in Lisbon, he could no longer conceive of his future except with his country. The thought of a possible disaster made him write the following lines: “In America, after three or four years, I’d acquire fame, a public, and a considerable amount of money if I were hard-hearted enough to renounce Romanianism for another culture. But I can’t do that. Without my nation, nothing in history matters to me any more.”⁴³ After Romania’s invasion by the Soviet army, returning to the country – a country that was becoming different day by day, even contrary to the one he had loved – ceased to be an option. His future was moving now to France or America.⁴⁴

He arrived in Paris in the fall of 1945, but continued to look across the Atlantic.⁴⁵ In September 1946, when he learned that Ananda K. Coomaraswamy was still alive, he put his hope in his help to get a job at an American university.⁴⁶ On receiving Eliade’s letter, Coomaraswamy extended an invitation to visit him the following year in Boston. Eliade asked him to find him some work in the United States. After an SOS in July 1947, Coomaraswamy wrote back that he had found him a position as a French teacher at a multicultural college – Verde Valley School in Sedona (Arizona) – which was to open in the autumn of the following year. Eliade accepted it on the spot and wrote to its founder,⁴⁷ Professor Hamilton Warren (1904–1972), a Harvard graduate who enjoyed the support of several scholars, including his former

⁴² *Correspondență* I, 325 (August 2, 1940); *Correspondență* III, 95, 96 (August 2, 17, 1940). He considered it “the best solution” for him.

⁴³ *Idem*, *The Portugal Journal*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 92 (August 10, 1943).

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 170 (January 27, 1945). His wife’s death, however, made him doubt the meaning of knowing these new lands without her; *Ibid*, 148 (December 31, 1944).

⁴⁵ See especially *Autobiography* II, 112; *Correspondență* I, 338 (June 19, 1946), 199 (November 21, 1946); *Journal*, *Mircea Eliade Papers*, University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center (hereafter *MEP*) 15.1, f. 97 (July 18, 1946).

⁴⁶ *Journal*, *MEP* 15.1, f. 149 (September 4, 1946).

⁴⁷ See Eliade’s letter to Coomaraswamy from August 26, 1947; *Correspondență* III, 449–50.

anthropology professor, Clyde Kluckhohn (1905–1960).⁴⁸ But Coomaraswamy's sudden death on September 9 curtailed this path to America.⁴⁹

In 1948, Eliade was still preoccupied with finding a position at Columbia University or Harvard University.⁵⁰ Various tracks and possibilities were pursued or awaited in the following years, which proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was entirely determined to pursue an academic career in America.⁵¹ The US had come to represent the possibility of making a living working in his favorite field of research: History of Religions. However, he hesitated to accept an offer as *fellow* at a provincial university like that of Ohio.⁵² After receiving the scholarship from the Bollingen Foundation – for the years 1951–1953, and then extended – he would become even more demanding about how he would get to America.

Of all those who tried to help him, the one who succeeded would be Joachim Wach (1898–1955), for the academic year 1956–1957. Although once again death overtook Wach shortly after making the proposition to Eliade, the project would succeed this time.⁵³ Eliade enthusiastically wrote to Emil Cioran from America: “I discovered with pleasure that the University of Chicago is considered the second most important in all of America; meaning

⁴⁸ “Hamilton Warren, founder of Prep School in Arizona,” *New York Times* (New York), 27 March 1972, 38.

⁴⁹ *Jurnal* (hereafter *Jurnal*), ed. Mircea Handoca, vols. I-II (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), I, 88–89, 115, 116 (October 12, 1946, July 25, August 9, 11, 1947); *Journal*, *MEP* 15.3, ff. 369, 383, 388, 398, 412, 413 (August 17, 29, September 1, 12, October 13, 14, 1947); *Autobiography* II, 118. There is no letter from H. Warren in *MEP*.

⁵⁰ *Corespondență* III, 466 (February 10, 1948).

⁵¹ *Autobiography* II, 147; *Journal*, *MEP* 15.3, ff. 446, 464, 501, 515 (February 3, March 31, August 20, September 26, 1948), 15.4, ff. 633–634, 677, 713 (July 27, December 23, 1950, June 29, 1951); *Jurnal* I, 172 (August 22, 1950); *Corespondență* I, 345 (September 9, 1948), 436 (August 15, 1950); *Corespondență* III, 468 (April 28, 1948), 498–9 (August 7, 1950), 500 (September 12, 1950), 503–4 (September 30, 1950), 506–8 (October 18, 1951), 511 (February 19, 1952); *MECS* V, 324–5, 328 (February 10, 1950). Also, several unpublished letters from the *MEP* and other archives, which we no longer cite.

⁵² *Corespondență* III, 484 (17 December 1949).

⁵³ The invitation was communicated on April 25, 1955; *Jurnal* I, 268–9; *Autobiography* II, 147, 173–4, 176. Also see *Corespondență* III, 105–6 (November 22, 1955); *MECS* IV, 494 (December 12, 1955).

it comes right after Harvard. It 'beat' Yale, Princeton, and – long ago – Columbia."⁵⁴

In 1960, he was invited to a symposium at Harvard, for which he strove to write an important study. But when, in January 1963, a week after the death of Arthur Darby Nock, professor Robert H.L. Slater (1896–1984) offered him to take over the vacant chair and direction of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Eliade declined, citing the freedom he enjoyed in Chicago.⁵⁵ In May, he was invited to be part of the committee that elected the successor, but the occasion became an instance of discreet pressure to accept the position himself. Eliade apologized again, adding other arguments: that he was not good at academic administration and did not want to disappoint Jerald C. Brauer (1921–1999), the dean of the Divinity School in Chicago, who had done so much for him.⁵⁶ It was not, of course, the only proposal that was made to him. It was preceded and followed respectively by others from universities such as Columbia and Fordham, which Eliade similarly declined.⁵⁷

This long history of near misses with Harvard is not without a touch of irony behind the Iron Curtain. In Romania, where Eliade was a banned author until the fall of 1967, he was believed to be a professor at the prestigious University. The fact was recorded in the article dedicated to him by the *Mic dicționar enciclopedic* (*Concise Encyclopedic Dictionary*).⁵⁸ In the files of the Securitate, he appeared a few years later as a “former professor at Harvard

⁵⁴ Letter from January 17, 1957, *Fonds Emil Cioran*, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, CRN C 122, Ms. Ms. 48410.

⁵⁵ *Journal*, MEP 16.3, ff. 2138–2139 (January 18, 1963). Eliade wrote that Nock had died the preceding day.

⁵⁶ *Jurnal* I, 453–4 (May 1, 2, 1963). Brauer confirmed the episode on several occasions. See especially, Jerald C. Brauer, “Mircea Eliade and the Divinity School,” *Criterion* (Chicago) 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1985), 25–26.

⁵⁷ *Correspondență* I, 479 (March 20, 1958); *Journal*, MEP 16.8, ff. 2943, 2966 (December 28, 1965, January 20, 1966).

⁵⁸ Aurora Chioreanu, Gheorghe Rădulescu, eds, *Mic dicționar enciclopedic* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1972), 1216. The mistake was corrected in the following editions of 1978 and 1986 (probably owing to Constantin Noica, who pointed it out immediately).

University.”⁵⁹ The association persisted until late, occurring even among some of his generational colleagues who managed to escape from Communist Romania.⁶⁰

Desired when unattainable, refused when offered, Harvard was erroneously assigned to him as his destiny. The origin and dissemination of this error remain mired in mysterious processes that perhaps cognitive sociology will one day reveal to us. For now, *corrigendum*.

⁵⁹ Note from June 1976, signed by Major Ștefan Ionescu, in Dora Mezdrea, ed, *Nae Ionescu și discipolii săi în arhiva Securității*, vol. 2. *Mircea Eliade* (Bucharest: Mica Valahie, 2008), 139–140 (139).

⁶⁰ Angelo Morretta, “Mircea Eliade and the new synthesis of the sacred,” in *Homo religiosus. To honour Mircea Eliade. Selected Papers from the 12th Congress of the American-Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Université de Paris – Sorbonne, June 24–27, 1987*, edited by L.M. Arcade, Ion Manea, Elena Stamatescu (Davis: The Mircea Eliade Research Institute, 1990), 114–118 (117). The author is writer and journalist Dan Petrașincu (1910–1997).



We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Introduction to The Constitution of the United States, 1789



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