

Title of the paper: Alf Lombard's diagnosis of Romanian orthography

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Abstract:

Writing systems are imperfect: an alphabet (*exempli gratia*) is recurrently not created specifically for the language that uses it, being borrowed and adjusted to match the phonetic inventory. The phoneme that lacks the proper grapheme requires a certain procedure: founding a completely new grapheme, or recycling an abandoned grapheme, or remodelling an old grapheme (just as Spurius Carvilius Ruga created the Latin *G* using the letter *C*).

Phonetic development of Romanian language altered some of the Latin vowels into new phonemes: “posterior *i*” replaced some previous *i*, *a*, *e*, *u* or *o*. A new grapheme was required. There was an intermediate stage of writing, with composite alphabet, both Latin and Cyrillic. Subsequently some diacritics improved the basic letters: *î*, *â*, *ê* and *û* were graphemes used etymologically for a single phoneme (“posterior *i*”). Four distinct orthographic reforms (in 1904, 1932, 1953, 1964) finally reduced the four graphemes to a single one (*î*). This approach, concerning the phonetic principle, was calibrated in 1965, admitting an etymological (and significant) exception: *român* (“Romanian”) and the connected words.

The beginning of the ‘90s became a wide-ranging field for change. Orthography turned out to be a target: the regular grapheme *î* was largely replaced by *â*, in a manner that combined different principles (phonetic and etymological) and position inside the word. Professor Alf Lombard was asked to offer a specialised opinion: he wrote a dense text regarding the history of modern Romanian orthography and concluded with a plea against the proposed reform. Nevertheless, this reform became official in 1993.

The analysis of Professor Alf Lombard deserves being re-enacted mostly in the light of the new Orthographic Dictionary (DOOM 2005): changing the rules of the syllable in composed words, *id est* accepting that phonetics prevails over etymology, might vividly attest the accuracy of Professor Alf Lombard's diagnosis.