

## Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bucharest, Braşov and Chişinău February/March 2018

by John Hamilton

### A last Adventure out of Sasashima

I would like to thank four people: first, there is Grandfather Ota... 太田泰道 ...graduate from Aichi University in the 1950's ...who lives in Okazaki near to the library .....who in the Sugihara Chiune 杉原千畝 tradition is a supporter of Israel....This trip came soon after President Trump had announced that America would be moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and one purpose in going there was to think about that.

Secondly I'd like to thank an Egyptian doctor Asser Saleh who a few years ago was staying at the JICA facility in Sasashima to learn about the health provision in Japanese schools. Because the Aidai campus is next door, I was fortunate to meet Asser at Café Crossroads. He came to the ' 蛸会 ', a party in 瀬戸上品野 to enjoy the fireflies. Also he joined a hike up to Yashagaike 夜叉ヶ池 on the Gifu/ Fukui border.....Later, I took advantage of him and spent three days in Zagazig, his home town in the Nile delta. He is now working in a beautiful part of Saudi Arabia just north of Yemen.....If I am writing about Israel I like to feel Asser reading what I write over my shoulder..... Egypt is a land with a history that goes further back than that of Israel. The Egyptians understand the Israelis .....Incidentally, to bring things up to date, President Morsi, now in prison, was a lecturer in the engineering faculty at Zagazig University. I felt this university in the Nile Delta

to be like Aichi University plus Gikadai in Toyohashi.....Nobody has heard of these places but they are important!

Thirdly, thank you very much to Sînziana Geanta, a music student in Bucharest. Her younger brother had been involved in a car accident. All the airbags had blown, but the car survived, and so did he....but he was not allowed to drive after that. I didn't meet him, but she told me that he lives south of Bucharest and that he catches fish in the Danube with his hands, even in winter. And the older brother is a full time beekeeper. I really look forward to meeting both her brothers. The important thing here was that she lent Horia Văcărescu and myself the car. So while I was there I was able to not only to deepen my understanding of Romanian art and literature in Bucharest but also to venture north into a corner of Transylvania.....Braşov, Făgăras, Râşnov and Cîmpulung .....and the snow did not stop us.....

And the fourth person is Dimitry Buzzani who welcomed me to Chişinău in Moldova, and who helped me to interview the haiku poet Vasile Spinei. Dimitry spoke Russian, Romanian and English. He introduced me to his friends and told me a great deal about Moldova over the course of a long weekend.

## TEL AVIV

I arrived in Ben Gurion Airport on February 22nd. Ben Gurion's real name was David Grün. Originally from Poland, he arrived in Ottoman Palestine on a ship from Odessa in 1906 . He took the name Ben-Gurion which was the name of one of Simon bar Kochba's lieutenants.....in the revolt against the Romans of 132BC ( according to Simon Sebag Montefiore. ) He was the first Prime Minister of modern Israel.

I have been to visit my son Mark and his wife Shimrit, and now

their four children ....Tamara, Raphael, Daphne and Mikhail....in Neve Tsedek every year for the last 5 years. Israelis are extraordinary people. Strangely they don't seem to realise how extraordinary they are. Shimrit's mother came from Fez in Morocco as a child, and is now a kindergarten head teacher in Jerusalem. It is quite clear that children respect her. ( She reminds me of the Kindergarten head teachers in Toyota, Japan ....very splendid people! ) Shimrit's father David Shimony is from Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan near the border with Turkey.....The grandfather, his father, Haham Shalom was a distinguished Rabbi there and there is a street named after him in the Jewish quarter of the old city in Jerusalem. Shimrit has two sisters.....Carmit, who is married to Matan ( family originally from Romania) and they live at the Kibbutz Deganiah Aleph, a beautiful place beside the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret in Hebrew) with their four children Liel (Luli), Sol, Noa, and Naom, the only boy. The eldest sister Efarat has 6 children ( I haven't met the children ) and they live near to Jerusalem. And there is a younger brother Amit. Family life is very important.....There was a calendar on the wall of their flat with photographs of all her family. Shimrit comes from a very big family.....What has my Mark got himself into? To me it seems like a well-wishing spider's web of Israeli women.....these days reinforced with mobile phones. The drama during my stay this visit ( there seems to be a drama every time ) was getting a piece of Lego out of Raphael's nose ( How do you do that? I can't remember. I think Mark blew into his mouth and it shot out of his nose.....Certainly there was lots of consultation on the telephone.)

I like Neve Tsedek , the area where they have been living. When Jews first started coming to Palestine at the end of the 19th century they settled on the sand dunes north of Jaffa. This was Neve Tsedek. Every time I visited, I went to the NAHUM GUTMAN Museum

near to their flat. Nahum Gutman was an Israeli artist originally from Telenești in Bessarabia ( now Moldova) where I was about to go.....Further up the hill there were photographic exhibitions of early Neve Tsedek in the Shalom Towers. The atmosphere of Neve Tsedek is a bit like Okinawa. There are good coffee shops with Wifi, sandy streets with palm trees, bougainvillea and famous icecream shops.....Tamara first....then Raphael and Daphne ...attended the Marc Chagall kindergarten ( French speaking ) ...which meant that the children started off with Hebrew as their first language and French as their second, the first Hamiltons to do this.....It would be good if they retained these languages. Mark lost his beautiful Japanese when he returned to England aged four.



Up behind Neve Tsedek stretching north from Allenby and Rothschild boulevards is White City Tel Aviv, a World Heritage site. It was designed by Bauhaus architects from Berlin who came to Palestine in the 1930's. I had wondered why Tel Aviv had such a nice atmosphere. I think it is partly thanks to these buildings and the trees which have grown up around them. It was Thomas Gross 先生 of Aichi University who introduced me to Bauhaus Tel Aviv. I would like to do some more research on the building of Tel Aviv. It is such a nice place.

Last year I took the bus from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Mark dropped me at the bus stop. There was a queue .....A Chinese couple who had come off a boat from Cyprus were trying to board the bus. The bus conductor was saying SHEKELS. The Chinese were saying VISA. The

conductor was saying SHEKELS. The Chinese were saying VISA....The conductor was not allowing them to get on.....I thought 'Well, I have some Israeli money, I can pay for them too. ' So I said to them ' I will give you your tickets.' 我能给你们你们的票 ....they understood my broken Chinese and accepted.....On the bus they wanted to pay me back with US dollars. I said 'That is quite unnecessary '.....But they persisted and pressed money into my hand...I thanked them and without looking at it, put it in my pocket. Afterwards in Jerusalem I found they had given me much more than the price of two tickets.....but by then they were on their way to the Dead Sea. So I had a happy day in Jerusalem thanks to them.

## JERUSALEM

This year I didn't go by bus. Mark drove me to Jerusalem...all the way to Yoel Solomon where Ruth lives. We first met Ruth Cohn in Kyoto in 1977 where she was studying calligraphy, writing big characters with a brush the size of a pony's tail on Japanese Washi. She was then living in a farmhouse in Nishi Muko near to Kyoto....I didn't see her again until about 2014.....I was about to leave Neve Tsedek and return to England when Shimrit insisted I took my wife a present. I went to the pottery shop down Shalom Shebazi and saw a nice cup which happened to have been made by the girl who was in charge of the gallery on that day. She told me that she was from Haifa. I asked her if she knew Ruth Cohn. "Yes" she said " She was my teacher". I said "Ein Hod, Hefhacarmel" That was the address written in my address book. "Yes," she said," I can telephone her". .....But that day we couldn't get through and I returned to England. The next year my wife, Audrey asked me for Ruth's number and telephoned her from England and caught her on a bus in Jerusalem.....

Ruth has a beautiful flat in West Jerusalem with geraniums in

window boxes on the balcony and full of her paintings. It has been an honour to stay there. She has a dog....Nakita ....and one or two cats. She is one of the world's great artists.

This year we went for a walk in Independence Park overlooking the



2. Ruth Cohn's "Face to Face" dedicated to philosopher

Emmanuel Levinas(1906-1995). One could say he was the philosopher of gentleness towards people you don't know.

The blobs in Ruth's picture are individuals who you don't know. (I think !)

There is a copy of this picture in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. (It is an etching acquatint print on zinc plates with zincolet.)

Old City. She let her dog go free which is not allowed - there is a 500 Shekel fine - but nobody saw it in the dark. The following day she was busy so I took Nakita for a walk in daylight, not letting her free, again through Independence Park, and also to the Mamilla pond in the middle of the Arab cemetery near to her flat. And in the evening we went out to a Jazz pub. She said that the Ashkenazi perception of the world is very different to the Sefardi perception because of the Holocaust.....she also told me of the Iași ( Yassy ) pogrom in Moldavia in 1941..... Dreadful things happened there. Until then I had heard only good things about Iași.....I want to go to Iași.

So, what do I think about moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Well, at the time of my visit, nothing much had happened, but now it has and just recently a lot of people have been killed on the border

with Gaza. Yes, trouble it has brought, but I think it is honest for the Americans to put their cards on the table. America does support Israel, and the Israelis live dangerously. The story really has been going on for three thousand years. Love them or hate them, the story is likely to continue, with its ups and its downs for them. I am not a member of the ' Chosen Race' ( I think ! Some people say that my grandmother's family the Gibbs look very Jewish!.....and have done very well) .....Many Israelis do try very hard to get along with their Arab neighbours.....but an awful lot don't try..... and it is the same in the Arab community....they don't try either.

A few years ago I visited the Eretz crossing into Gaza. I went there to get in closer to Israeli BEEKEEPING, and the centre of Israeli beekeeping is the Yad Mordechai Kibbutz in Ashkelon. Shimrit's uncle is Shuki Pollak ( originally from Cochin in South India )...and his youngest daughter's boyfriend's grandmother (!) lived on the Yad Mordechai Kibbutz and was a friend of Eitan Zion, the Israeli beekeeper.....and it was the Sabbath ( Shabat ) so he was there. It is difficult in any country to find migratory beekeepers at home. With Mark I spent an hour with him in his caravan. The Yad Mordechai Kibbutz is beautiful place. The bees from there collect the honey from the vegetable gardens in Gaza.....the Yad Mordechai kibbutz looks after bees all over Israel. I think it has more than 4000 hives. It would be great fun to work with them!

## BUCHAREST

On March 2nd I left the sunshine in Tel Aviv for the snow in Bucharest. There was a serious request to stay in Tel Aviv, but I had already made contact with Horia in Bucharest and Vasile Spinei in Chişinău. I knew it had snowed in Bucharest because Horia had sent me a photograph of their car in a snowdrift. There was also a serious

request not to go to Bucharest! But I wanted to stick to plan.....When I arrived at Henri Coanda airport, Carol and Elena were there to collect me...Carol at the wheel ! Elena in the back seat..It is wonderful being driven by Carol. As we drove in I spotted the Văcărescu church up on the right.....It was good to be in Europe.....but still in what had been the Ottoman Empire, like Palestine.

ION CODRESCU had had his exhibition of Haiku and Haiga at Aidai in Toyohashi in the autumn of 2016 and it had been a great success. Lots of people had come. I was very excited about it, and in the spring of 2017 I went to see Codrescu and his wife in Constanța beside the Black Sea. He works at the Ovidius University there teaching Art and Poetry. Ovidius is OVID to us, the Roman poet who was exiled there....and Constanța was called Tomis then. Much of Shakespeare's work is inspired by materials from Ovid. A long time ago I bought a book called Shakespeare's Ovid published by Jon Wynne Tyson who lives near Chichester. I brought it back to Japan for Aidai's Prof. Chiba.....

This time, snow was blocking the line to Constanța so I had to stay in Bucharest.

So while the snow was melting I explored Bucharest with Horia Văcărescu . We visited the Rotunda Scrutorilor at Parcul Cișmigiu....the rotunda of poets. And in the National Gallery ( Museul Național de Artă al României ) we found a fine portrait of Văcărescu Ienachița (1740 -1797), a distinguished Wallachian diplomat in Constantinople and Vienna who wrote a grammar of the Romanian language, also a history of the Ottoman emperors, and a book of poetry etc. He is known to some as the father of the Romanian language. And there was also a portrait of Alecu Văcărescu ( 1769-1798) . And in the cellar there was a collection of things taken from the Văcărești monastery destroyed by Ceaucescu in 1984. Since I now have two Văcărescu granddaughters, I





was interested in all this.

Romania is a very new country although of course it is very old. It was created in 1918 from the Ottoman provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia combined with Transylvania which was a province of Hungary, united by language. I visited the Art Collections Museum containing room by room collections of family treasures .....rugs, sculpture, icons, embroidery

3. Ienăchița Văcărescu (1740-1797) , Moroccan ceramics, swords and duelling pistols and of course paintings, probably taken by the Ceaucescu regime from private owners.( But basically the National Trust in UK has been doing the same thing.) I remember particularly 'The Mad King' by Corneiliu Baba and a portrait of George Enescu, and a picture of a cow by Nicholae Grigorescu. Also this time I visited the Muzeul Theodor Aman ( 1831-1899 ) founder of the National School of Fine Arts ( a kind of Yanagi Soetsu 柳宗悦 perhaps(!) in Romania) ...there was a very nice portrait of his father....Across the road was the Casa Cesianu which was lovely and is now an auction house like Bonhams in London ( without cars, I think ) . Lastly and also nearby I went to the Palatul Şuţu. The Şuţu were Phanariote (Greek) princes in Wallachia. This was indeed a palace with an interesting collection.

The following day I set off with Horia in Sînziana's car to Turgovişte, an old town north of Bucharest. Outside it is the Castelul Văcăreşti. There is not much to be seen there except fine oak trees, and a grassy



4. Moving a church on railway lines  
in Ceaucescu's Bucharest

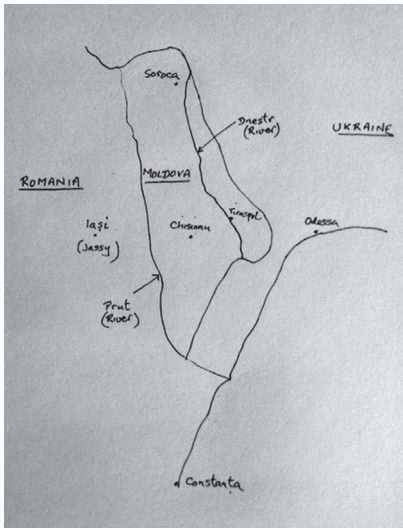
escarpment on the far side, but below ground there are the remains of large cellars..... It must have been quite a place three or four hundred years ago. After that we entered the Carpathians and set off on the wrong road over the mountains until the snow on the road was so deep that it would have been

unwise to continue. We were just able to turn around ( with a bit of pushing )and retrace our steps to a road that had been cleared. Just in time we reached the Cantacuzino palace on the Zamora estate at Bușteni with its fine view of the mountains, the house having been stripped of its furniture during Ceaucescu times. And we dined in Brașov on very good Ciorba Ardelenersca washed down with Purcari wine. Brașov is in the corner of Transylvania, at the centre of modern România. It is a Saxon town with a town hall in the middle of the square, and walls around it with square towers. Between 1950 and 1960 it was called ORAȘUL STALIN.....Stalin city, and there was an exhibition in the town hall with that title I don't remember much except the exhibition of cigarettes smoked at that time, among them Kent called 'the doctor's cigarette.' If you gave the doctor a packet, then you got good treatment.....After Brașov we headed for Făgăras, a very splendid castle, that had been a communist prison between 1948 and 1960, and is now a museum. Beside the castle was a magnificent brand new Cathedral painted gold wherever it could be painted gold. Could it have been funded somehow by the European Union? ( I think England's Private Eye could write a funny story about that church.) From Făgăras we went on to another Transylvanian castle called Râșnov on the top of a hill, and then we returned, Horia dodging the potholes,

across the Carpathians under snow via Câmpulung to Bucharest. The last thing I must mention is Mucenici Moldovenisti. These are cakes eaten around March 9th to commemorate the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste who died during the persecutions of Licinius, 320 AD. The martyrs were Roman soldiers ..Christians....who were exposed naked on the ice of a lake....it is quite a story and there are many versions...so during this week in Bucharest everybody eats Mucenici cakes. I had some too with the Văcărescus.

## MOLDOVA

I was welcomed by Dimitry and Vadim ( who had a car ) at Chişinău airport, and we drove into town past signs saying 'Unirea Basarabiei cu România' also ' Republica Moldova este Patria Mea'. In the centre of town was a statue of Ştefan Celmare ( the Great ) 1457-1504.....also statues of Caragiale and П у ш к и н у ..... The destination was Dimitry Buzzanu's family flat. He explained that they had been living



5. Map of MOLDOVA

in Moscow until 1992, and that his father had swapped their Moscow apartment for this one in Chişinău. It was a nice apartment, homely and pleasant. His father and mother now live in Braşov in Romania, his mother making very nice dolls ( I saw an example and it really was a work of art ) and his father is now involved in irrigation projects etc etc, and drives up and down to Chişinău by car. Dimitry goes down to Braşov on the bus.

Looking at the MAP of Moldova.....there are two rivers, the Dnistr and the Prut, which go down into the Black Sea. To the east of the Dnistr is Transnistria where there is a Russian military base.( There is an American military base near to Constanța, so the Russians feel they need one as well.) In 1991 a few shots were fired. Since then it has been a 'frozen military conflict' ( замороженный военный конфликт ). Other examples of this are Ossetia and Abkhasia parts of (or close to) Georgia ( depending on one's point of view ) and the Crimea etc, etc....At any rate, because of Transnistria, Moldova cannot unite with Romania and become a part of the European Union. It has to be 'independent' and 'the poorest country in Europe' with many Moldovans working abroad. That is the story anyway....but I am sure there are some advantages to this kind of independence. In the north of Moldova is Soroca, the Gypsy city. I was told that in Romania during the Ceausescu times, it was the policy of the government to integrate Gypsies with the population at large and spread them out. They didn't integrate very well, and now they are spreading out all over the European Union. In Moldova, all the Gypsies are concentrated in one place, Soroca. The cities, Chișinău ( in Moldova ), Odessa ( in Ukraine ), and Iași ( in Romania ) were all Jewish cities before 1941, when the Jews who were still there either moved to America or Israel or were massacred in one ghastly way or another. In the cellar of the Muzeul Ethnografie și Istorie Naturalia we met a granny. Dimitry described her as having an Odessa sense of humour. He was sure she was Jewish. At the restaurant La Taiffas, Marin Bunea the violonist, to whom I had been introduced, but didn't meet properly this time, was playing Odessa songs. So there are a mixture of peoples in Moldova, Romanians, Russians, also Jews, and in some parts Ukrainians and Turks. In the family, usually people speak Romanian and Russian.

My purpose in coming for a long weekend to Moldova was to meet VASILE SPINEI whose book of Haiku and Senryu 'Gardul de Măceşi' ( Eglantine Hedge ) I had been given in Toyohashi by Ito Isao 先生 and studied with Andrea Ifrim in the Café Pullman near to Aichi University, Toyohashi Campus! It is written in English and Romanian, and I think we made quite a good critical study of Ion Codrescu's translations ( pace Ion!) Dimitry came with me to the interview because Vasile does not speak much English. Vasile gave me two other books of haiku 'Fratele meu fluturele' ( My brother, my butterfly ) and 'Nimic despre iarnă' ( Nothing about winter ). The parcels containing these two books haven't yet arrived in England. They will soon. Vasile on first impressions seemed to me to be like Carol Văcărescu in Bucharest, the same generation anyway. He had been a journalist and for some time a politician, and now spent much of the year out at his dacha. His view on Brexit, the British exit from the European Union, was that this was setting a very bad example, especially in the Balkans, and the Balkans was where the First World War started. Vasile's children were in America, and he visited them two months of every year, but he was determined not to emigrate to the USA himself.

It seems that in Soviet days, the pattern was that people had apartments in town and a DACHA in the countryside...So to find out what Vasile was writing about in his haiku, I needed to get out to the dachas. Fortunately Dimitry could help me. He had a friend called Victor who was building a dacha in a village called Ivancea. So early in the morning we set off in Victor's car for Ivancea. On the way there was a small incident. Victor was stopped by a policeman for speeding. The question was, whether to accept the fine and points off his licence, or whether to pay a bribe....but trying to pay a bribe could result in double the fine and double the points. So Victor asked the policeman "What shall I do ?" The policeman said, " Bring me the papers from your

car ". Victor, I think, put about £20 ( I don't know) among his papers and handed them over.....The policeman handed them back....end of incident, I think.....We drove along avenues of walnut trees. Somebody has told me that the word Walnut comes from Wallachia nut. I am not sure this is correct. Certainly there were plenty of them in Moldova and they are good to eat. That morning we went past a lake where people were fishing through holes in the ice. Victor's dacha was exciting. He was building a Geodesic Dome from plans available on the Internet. It was not finished, but it was going well. It looked like a yurt, 7 meters in diameter , up in the air, or a kind of spaceship. And there it was set among the apricot trees. We spent the morning pruning a tree in the sunshine.

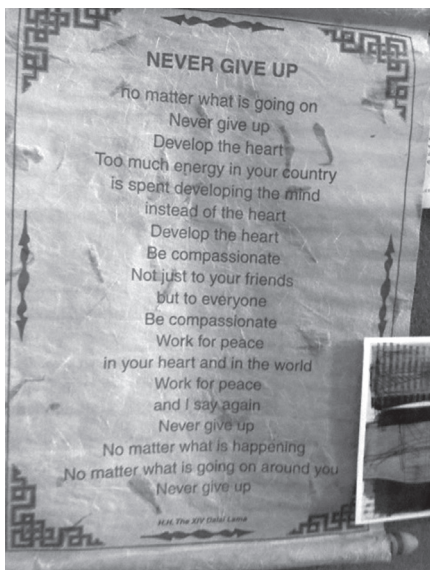


6. Victor's dacha among the apricot trees in the style of a Geodesic Dome

Later in the day we went to Dimitry's family dacha at Peresecina and pruned another apricot and I cut back the roses. Dimitry commented that Moldavians are very good at building and repairing houses. That is how so many of them are living in Western Europe and Russia. Russians are good at fighting heroically, but no good at building and repairing houses. The same day we went to Orhei ul Vechi, a monastery dramatically sited on a ridge, with a beautiful church deep underground in a limestone cave.

And the following day we visited the Oraşul Vinicol Subteran at Cricova ( the Underground Wine City of Cricova ) 120 kms of limestone passages 100 meters down containing barrels of Moldavian wine stored

at a constant temperature of 12C . The town of Cricova above is built out of the limestone quarried from below. And the Cricova wines were very good indeed. There was a wine tasting room painted blue with small aquaria set into the walls ( with fish) like Momotaro's palace under the sea, or the coral reefs in Okinawa. The best wines we tasted were Rosé de Cricova, the red Feteascu Neagră, and Viorica, a white wine which was turned green ( magic!) .....by the blue walls. The last morning of the weekend was spent in Chişinău market where I bought a good supply of Brînza cheese to carry back to England. It takes about a month to make it. There was a magnificent fish counter stocked from Odessa but I didn't buy any fish. We went on to the Art Museum. The Moldavian sense of what makes a good painting was much the same as mine, so I had a happy hour there. On the plane, Air Moldova's flight to Stansted, I read about people originally from Chişinău who had won or nearly won Nobel prizes: Pyotr Kapitsa ( physicist), Élie Mechnikov,(



Medicine), Saul Perlmutter ( Astrophysics), Randy Schekman ( Medicine), Boris Ephrussi ( Chemist) and Sergei Gershenzon ( Geneticist)...most of them in America.

## Conclusion

I think that the Dalai Lama has got it right when it comes to Israel in Palestine.

Steamrolling the Arab community by means fair or foul is not going to bring peace.

7. This was hanging on the wall of Ruth Cohn's flat in Jerusalem

The visit to Romania and Moldova was inspired by Ion Codrescu and his exhibition of Haiku and Haiga in Toyohashi. Vasile Spinei's books of Haiku have just arrived in England. I copy out two haiku:

în viziunea cârțiței	we are not in Egypt
piramide	pyramids made
egiptene.	by the mole

I like this because we have moles here in England.

pe vechiul năvod	the old net
covorul florilor	covered with
de castraveți.	cucumber flowers

And I like this because I grow vegetables here in England, and the most successful this summer have been Courgettes and Cucumbers and Pumpkins with yellow flowers.