

WEST MEETS EAST: THE 19TH CENTURY ROMANIAN URBAN SOCIETY AND ITS FASHIONS AS OBSERVED BY EUROPEAN TRAVELLERS

ADRIAN-SILVAN IONESCU

A strong urban society flourished at the turn of the 18th century in the Romanian Principalities. Merchants from Orient and Occident swarmed the streets of Bucharest and Jassy, the two capitals of Wallachia and Moldavia, as well as the province. They brought with them the articles of elegance of the two worlds which were melted here in a genuine fashion, unique and colourful. Captain Charles Colville-Frankland, R.N., who journeyed through Wallachia in 1827 noted: “The strange mixture of Oriental and European costumes and manners, which struck the stranger at every step in Bucharest, makes it a very interesting place to the picturesque traveller.”¹

All the foreign travellers of that epoch were fascinated by the luxury with which the *boyars* (i.e. noblemen) were clad. Due to their published memoirs a vanished world came now to life. Every nobleman was supposed to wear special colours and textures according to his rank. The differences between ranks were strictly regulated and strictly observed.

The boyars' clothes were stratified as onion's leaves. Their attire was composed of an *anteriu* (long and loose robe) of fine striped cotton, put upon the shirt. A precious shawl of cashmere was tightened around the waist. In this large belt was stuck a decorated dagger called *handjer*. Only the ruling prince and his courtiers and ministers wore that bejeweled weapon. The following item put on was a *fermenea* (short jacket) of velvet or fine cloth embroidered with silk or bullion thread. For wealthy ones it was bordered with precious furs. Next came the impressive *djubea* (greatcoat with collar and cuffs of sable, mink, otter or other precious pelts). As pants there were used large red *shalvars*. As footwear there were heelless boots of soft red leather called *meshi* or *mesti*. They were worn as mere stockings upon which were put slippers while walking. As headgear it was a huge *ishlic* or a much more informal and comfortable *tarabolos* or *tschalma* (turban) of cashmere. “On walking out”, noted William Wilkinson in 1818, “the first and most striking object that meets the eye of a stranger, is the enormous balloon-shaped Moldavian cap, or calpak, of an appearance so unwieldy, as to seem ready to annihilate the person who has the courage to move under such an oppressive burden. They are, however, not quite so formidable, being in reality

¹ Capt. Charles Colville Frankland, *Travels to and from Constantinople in the years 1827 and 1828*, London, 1829, p. 37.

very light, made of pasteboard, and covered with grey fur, which, I believe, is generally lambskin from the Crimea.”² The British traveller was quite right: the *ishlic* was covered with as much as eight pelts of unborn Caracül lamb, which made it a precious item. Lieutenant James Edward Alexander, H.M. 13th Light Dragoons, while visiting the Romanian Principalities in 1826, was amazed by this headgear: “The calpak, or large cap of grey lamb-skin, which the boyars wear, is a most singular article of dress. The size is restricted to so many Turkish inches in circumference: if it exceed the measure, the wearers are subject to decapitation; yet, they are so fond of large calpaks that each boyar has two, one of the authorized dimensions which he wears in the day, another with which they skulk about from house to house at night, and so preposterously large that they cannot come through a door without taking it off and passing it in sideways.”³

Along with his impressions of a ball he witnessed in Bucharest in 1820, the painter Sir Robert Ker Porter sketched some of the boyars from the audience. He was also stricken by the shape and ornaments of the *ishlic* : “The general costume was Turkish, and of every coloured brocade, embroidered and be-furred; so far all was well, till the huge Wallachian cap turned the whole to the ridiculous. It is of a pumpkin form, nearly three feet in circumference, and of an equally enormous height. The material, a grey silvery Bucharian lambskin, with a tassel at the top, to assist the wearer in taking it off when he means to salute an acquaintance. This little appendage is green with every person, excepting the royal family, and they have it white. The cap of the lower orders is of the same shape, but not quite so large; and a square cushion covered with dark cloth is its enormous crest; in fact all these people appear so top-heavy it is painful to look at them after the first risible impression of the absurd passes away.”⁴

The apparel was by then the mark that a certain boyar belonged to one of the three ranks of nobility common for Wallachia and Moldavia. The first rank – which included ministers and courtiers of the ruling prince – were the only ones allowed to wear long beards, various bright colours, precious furs and the unmistakable bulbous caps. Different forms, darker colours and coarser textures were prescribed to the other two ranks. For instance, the letter’s kaftan was either bordered with cat, dog and rabbit skins or had no be-furred borders at all. Their *ishlic* was not so large

² William Macmichael, *Journey from Moscow to Constantinople in the Years 1817, 1818*, London, 1819, p. 82.

³ James Edward Alexander, *Travels from India to England comprehending a Visit to the Burman Empire and a Journey Through Persia, Asia Minor, European Turkey, &c. in the Years 1825-26*, London, 1827, p. 252.

⁴ Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia & c. & c. During the Years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820*, vol. II, London, 1821, pp. 787-788.

and had shapes other than that of a pear, more often as a truncated cone with a cushion of dark blue or brown cloth on top. Beards were forbidden for those boyars of the second and third ranks but they were allowed to wear moustaches.

All these rules were strictly observed by the *hospodars* (i.e. ruling princes) of Wallachia and Moldavia. They belonged to the Greek gentry of Phanar, one of Constantinople's neighbourhoods. Consequently they were called *phanariotes*. Well educated in European universities, mostly Italian, and speaking many foreign languages they acted as dragomans of the Ottoman Empire. As a reward for their services as translators and diplomats they were selected by the Sultan as rulers of the Romanian Principalities. In a special investiture ceremony the Sultan bestowed upon them the signs of their high social status. They received the *cabanitza* (white cloak with golden braids and sable collar), the *gudjuman* or *calpak* (sable cap with white cloth on top and white feathers on the right-hand side stuck in a jewelled clip called *surgutschi*) and two poles with horse tails on top called *tui*. These poles were conferred as to a Turkish pasha for a Greek Orthodox prince was his equal in rank.

In order to stop the Moldo-Wallachian boyars' elegance which too often competed with theirs, the Phanariote princes stipulated, from time to time, various sumptuary laws forbidding the imports of luxury items such as carriages, gowns, jewels, precious pelts, brocade, silk, etc. As a rule, white was the colour reserved for the ruling prince and his family and nobody else was allowed to wear white clothes at any time.

While men's dress was not changed for centuries, women were much more interested in Western fashion and used any means to inform themselves about the garbs of their Western counterparts. When Lady Elizabeth Craven visited Bucharest in 1786, she was kindly received by Prince Nicolae Mavrogheny and his wife. The elegant visitor noted in her letters to a friend: "After the Princess had asked me all the simple questions generally asked by the Eastern females – she asked me if I was dressed in the French fashion."⁵ Eight years later the Oriental clothes still prevailed in the wardrobe of a lady from the province. On his way to Constantinople in 1794, John B.S. Morritt of Rokeby had the opportunity to admire the elegant attire of a Wallachian landlord's wife from a village nearby Curtea de Argeş, where he and his companions spent the night. In a letter to his sister he described the lady's dress as follows: "As this was the first specimen I saw of the Greek dress of which you have heard so much, I will describe you here. Her gown

⁵ [Lady Elizabeth Craven], *A Journey Through the Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters From the Right Honourable Elizabeth Lady Craven to His Serene Highness the Margrave of Brandenburg, Anspch and Bareith*, Dublin, MDCCLXXXIX, p. 392.

was long-sleeved, coming up before no higher than her cestus, which was tied *à la Campbell*. It was gathered round her ankles and legs like trousers, and was made of a spotted light muslin. On her hand she wore a flat-topped high cap with a gold tassel on the top, and a shawl handkerchief round her forehead, her hair hanging loose about her shoulders. Over her gown she wore a long light blue silk pelisse edged with fur, with half-sleeves; on her feet she had thin yellow-leather boots, with slippers, which she left at the side of a sofa to put up her feet, for they all sit cross-legged, *à la Turque*. Over her bosom she wore a thin fold of muslin which fastened under her cestus; and I assure you, though not of the *première jeunesse*, it is difficult to imagine a more elegant figure.”⁶

This is the only minute description of a province lady’s garb of the epoch. Most of the travellers were impressed by the luxury of the boyars’ wives seen in the two capitals of the Romanian Principalities who were much more influenced by the European fashion than their husbands. With the help of the Transylvanian merchants from Braşov and Sibiu, who mediated the so much prized fashion items of Vienna, Leipzig and Paris, the Romanian ladies succeeded to be up-to-date with all the finery and sophistication they could dream of. To their astonishing luxury contributed not only the exquisite taste with which the European gowns were selected but also the rich Oriental ornaments mixed in their attire such as cashmere shawls, embroidered handkerchiefs, brocade or silk slippers with pearls and opulence of jewelry. The British consul in the Romanian Principalities, William Wilkinson, noted in his memoirs: “The ladies dress entirely in the European style but they combine the fashions with Oriental richness and profusion of ornaments.”⁷ Although these ladies were clad according to European taste, their behavior was still an Oriental one. While he was in Bucharest, in 1818, the physician William Macmichael attended a performance given by some itinerant German actors. There he had seen some ladies sitting cross-legged in spite of their very elegant gowns of the latest journal: “In short, every thing was Eastern in the appearance of the men, though in the costume of the ladies, who were sitting cross-legged on sofas, there was an evident admixture of French and Oriental attire; their coiffures were richly ornamented with jewels, and they wore French silk dresses, probably made at Vienna, together with the Greek zone and Turkish slippers.”⁸ In this respect, the Moldo-Wallachian ladies were in advance of their husbands in manners and fashion with, at least, a generation, belonging to the modern times, even to the

⁶ G. E. Marindin (editor), *The Letters of John B. S. Morritt of Rokeby Descriptive of Journeys in Europe and Asia Minor in the Years 1794-1796*, London, 1914, p. 63.

⁷ William Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia Including Various Political Observations Relating to Them*, London, 1820, p. 135.

⁸ William Macmichael, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

vanguard. Sir Robert Ker Porter was quite enthusiastic in his description of the Wallachian ladies: “The women are extremely pretty, affable and lively; and having entirely laid aside their national costume, looked like an assembly of Parisian belles.”⁹

In the same time he was astonished by the luxury deployed by those Wallachian boyars which surpassed the richest noblemen in any part of the civilized world he knew: “The boyars of this city live in a degree of luxury and splendour hardly to be exceeded in any capital of Europe. Their balls and parties, with the jewelled dresses of the ladies, are beyond imagination; while the gaming which goes forward at the tables, in boston, whist, ombre, faro &c., keep up a constant interchanging of gold and debts of honour.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, the artist observed a little difference between the Wallachian and the Moldavian boyars’ wives in what concerns richness: “The [Moldavian] ladies, as fair as their sisters of Wallachia, were dressed in a similar Parisian mode; but the materials of shawls, pearls, diamonds, and other precious stones, for costliness and magnificence, could not have been equaled on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains.”¹¹

A young Russian diplomat, Nikolai Karlovich Giers, arrived in Jassy in late October 1841, and was amazed seeing the costly jewels worn by the Moldavian ladies at a ball: “All of Jassy’s upper and middle-class society was present at this ball. I was lost in admiration at the abundance of diamonds worn by the ladies, particularly the middle-aged ones. Many of them had diamonds which at the present time could not be purchased for less than thirty or forty thousand rubles, and some displayed even more expensive ones. All this was inherited wealth. As everywhere in the East, the passion for precious stones was at one time widely prevalent in the principalities. The clothing worn by the ladies was elegant and made in the latest fashion.”¹²

Due to their ranks and administrative functions, the boyars were still clinging to the outdated costume of Turkish influence. That was the only thing which still certified their status. Beside this, the conservativeness in what concerns clothes was also a matter of policy, as William Macmichael commented: “Under the jealous eye of the suspicious government of Turkey, the article of dress is a matter of no small importance; and the use of the costume of civilized Europe would be considered as dangerous an innovation as the adoption of the most

⁹ Sir Robert Ker Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 788.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 799.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *The Education of a Russian Statesman. The Memoirs of Nicholas Karlovich Giers*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962, p. 148.

enlightened views of modern policy.”¹³ The Oriental garb gave an imposing appearance to the wearers, mostly elder noblemen. Giers enthusiastically described the majestic stature and noble manners of the Wallachia’s highest ranking boyar: “In Wallachia as well as in Moldavia practically all the old boyars wore their national costume. The one among them who impressed me more than anyone else because of his handsome appearance and rich clothing was the *baş-boier* (the chief of the boyars – the highest distinction in the region), George Filipescu. The noble features of his face and his long, completely white beard distinguished him from the others. Moreover, he adhered to the former times in his mode of life too. He was always surrounded by his household, and all his friends were welcome at his table. Another table was set daily for the poor on the lower floor of his home. Several dozen people gathered there sometimes. This bountiful and truly manorial hospitality so shattered his affairs that he was forced to sell his large estates one by one. However, in spite of this, he would never consent to change his mode of life. With the death of George Filipescu this honourable example from the past disappeared, and it could not be otherwise under the present conditions of life.”¹⁴

Those loose and flowing garments obliged the boyars to slow movements and a laziness which became the mark of their epoch. They spent much of the day lying on their sofas, drinking as much as ten to twelve cups of strong coffee and incessantly smoking the hookah or the long pipe called *tchibouq*. They ate, they received visits, they gave orders to their servants or judged various trials of their serfs reclining on the sofa. On the same sofa they slept, more often sharing it with their guests. The sofa was seldom left. Only in the afternoon they went to a celebrated promenade of the city to have some fresh air (even though the way was dusty and filthy). They were seldom walking for they had as many carriages as they could chose one for every season. “In Bucharest”, wrote the American physician James O. Noyes in mid 1850s, “legs are a luxury, and carriages, on the contrary, a necessity. Everybody who can afford it, rides; your servant takes a carriage when he goes on an errand. The carriage is, in fact, a mark of respectability, for to go on foot in Bucharest, is the same as going barefoot elsewhere. The streets are always full of vehicles, dashing through the mud or dust at a furious rate.”¹⁵

The coachmen and the attendants were clad with much luxury, either according to the Oriental style or to the modern European taste. Captain Colville-Frankland was struck “observing many gaudy caleches and old fashioned-looking

¹³ William Macmichael, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁴ Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.

¹⁵ James O. Noyes, *Roumania: The Border Land of the Christian and the Turk, Comprising Adventures of Travel in Eastern Europe and Western Asia*, New York, MDCCCLVIII, p. 121.

chariots well-varnished and glittering with a profusion of gilded ornaments, driven by a most anomalous-looking animal of a coachman, half barbarian, half coxcomb; and containing some fat boyar in his immense bulbous-looking calpak of felt, or covered with staring red or green velvet, and shrouded in his rich pelisse trimmed with furs.”¹⁶

William Macmichael commented the same aspect as follows: “The boyars, dressed in loosely-flowing robes, some with beards, and others wearing only mustachios, are seen in the streets, walking, or riding *à la Turc*, with Tartar saddles and stirrups; or perhaps, more frequently, indolently lolling and looking very forlorn, in shabby caleches built at Vienna. These vehicles are driven by coachmen dressed in the uniform of hussars; behind them are mounted footmen, accoutered after the Oriental manner, with turbans on their heads, pistols, and yatagans in the sash round their waists, and usually carrying in their hands the long amber-mouthed Turkish pipes of their masters. The combination of Oriental and European manners and costume is irresistibly ludicrous.”¹⁷ Young Giers observed the same aspects while walking for the first time on the main streets of Jassy:

“I was amazed by the variety of costumes. Many of the older boyars and even some of the middle class still wore what was then the national costume. (...) This mode of attire was, of course, not too conducive to walking. Consequently, I encountered few of these people on foot. All of them sat pompously in carriages with a soldier (*arnaout*) in the coach box. When employed by the more prosperous owners, these soldiers, who were armed with daggers, were richly dressed in coats of red cloth, stitched all over in gold thread. An indispensable accessory of one of these lackeys, no matter what his attire, was a long chibouk with an amber mouth piece which he always carried in his hands, awaiting the order of his master to hand him the pipe. In those days the Moldavians were such avid smokers that frequently they would stop in the middle of a walk in order to smoke a pipe. I encountered also some dandies, dressed in the latest Paris fashion. They were people of the new generation who, for the most part, had received their education in Paris. There were few pedestrians among them.”¹⁸ The main promenade was the Copou: “A favourite place for walks for the inhabitants of Jassy was Copou, a plain leading in the direction of the road to Skuleny. There during certain hours the citizenry would gather to enjoy the fresh air. Everyone who owned a carriage (and who in Jassy did not own one?) felt it his duty to take a ride to Copou. A military band, surrounded by many carriages, played there almost daily. The boyars smoked their pipes with

¹⁶ Capt. Charles Colville Frankland, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁷ William Macmichael, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁸ Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 130.

an air of importance and the young men crowded around the ladies, who were elaborately dressed and for the most part rouged. I must say, however, that the young married and unmarried women of the upper classes did not resort to this form of embellishment.”¹⁹

In the evening the boyars and their ladies paid visits to each other. They talked, they smoked together, they attended concerts held in the house of one of the leading families of the country, but more often they gambled. Balls were also a new entertainment for the Romanian high society of the early 1800s. Along with these balls were adopted European dances. “This kind of dance (*hora*)”, wrote William Wilkinson, “has some years since been thrown out of fashion in the first circles of society, and English country-dances, waltzing, and the Polish mazurka, have been introduced. Most of the ladies dance them well, but the men very indifferently, their dress being a great obstacle to perfection in the accomplishment.”²⁰ Wilkinson’s statement in what concerns the dancing boyars is only partially correct. Ker Porter praised the elegant movements of the dancers after they put aside the embarrassing vestments: “The impatient dancers were on the floor in a moment. The huge caps of the boyars were thrown off; their splendid pelisses followed the same fate; and each former inhabitant of such a panoply of vast magnificence, appeared suddenly by the side of his intended partner, in a smart, tasty jacket of red, grey, or other colours, fancifully embroidered. This tighter vest gracefully fitting the shape, did not mingle ill with the more flowing drapery of the skirt below, which was bound round the middle by a splendid shawl; neither was any part of this easy dress discordant with the elastic movements of the dance. But the remainder was not quite in such youthful harmony. Every man had a shaven head, on which he wore a little red skull-cap, exposing much of the bald scalp behind and before, also his fair large ears; which, with the addition of mustachios and beards of every tint and bristle, give the whole group so odd an appearance, that when they capered in quadrilles and cotillons, or shuffled down the English country-dance, or whirled in all the dizzy velocity of the waltz, nothing could picture a more grotesque scene. Asiatic heads, Italian figurant bodies, Austrian, English, and other simply coated foreign residents, with the ladies all attired in Parisian or Russian modes, could not but present a constantly moving spectacle, so like the masquerade figures in a magic lantern, I can never recollect them without a smile.”²¹ Two decades later the upper classes were completely changed and resembled a high-level society from any European capital.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

²⁰ William Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.

²¹ Sir Robert Ker Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 789.

Giers was astonished by this remarkable adaptability: “It was a source of amazement to me how a population, barely emerged from the static oriental way of life, to which it was held by the Turkish domination, could adopt European manners so quickly. The cavaliers and ladies danced with dexterity.”²²

The musical style changed too, the old gipsy folk musicians, called *lautari*, being replaced, at fashionable parties, with either the military band or the European-style orchestras coordinated by foreign, mainly German or Austrian, conductors. Giers noticed this change in early 1840s: “Gypsy music was used for small parties, but for a large ball a military band was usually engaged, excellently organized by the Austrian conductor Hefner. The musicians were for the most part gypsies and Jews, both endowed with an extraordinary gift for music.”²³

In late 1820s the times had already changed and all men had to obey, willingly or not, the requirements of a new era and its fashions. But several ruling princes tried vainly to stop the new trends of fashion. For instance, Prince Grigore Ghika IV of Wallachia imposed, in 1827, a law which forbade the use of European clothes to any of his subjects. But this was useless because the new Western clothes were already in use since, at least, two decades. “During the occupation of the country by the Russians [between 1806 and 1812]”, stated Macmichael in his memoirs, “the boyars eagerly laid aside this loose attire, and wore the French dress; but on their return to Turkish authority, they were obliged to resume the robe and the calpak.”²⁴ Giers proudly stated that his country was instrumental for the important changes which took place in these countries:

“This changes in attire occurred no more than about ten years before my arrival, under the administration of General Kiselev – that true reformer of the principalities.”²⁵

The wars which so often broke between the Ottoman, the Russian and the Austrian Empires usually turned the Romanian Principalities either into a battlefield or kept them occupied as a token of good behavior for the conquered. The various foreign occupations – Russian in 1769, Austrian in 1787-1791, and again Russian in 1790-1791, 1806-1812 and finally 1828-1834 – accustomed the Romanian people with the new fashion and prepared them for its adoption. But not only the military men and their uniforms contributed to the great changes of garments; there were also the travellers, the foreign consuls, the merchants, the preceptors of the children of noble families, the itinerant painters and actors, the French refugees (who opposed either Napoleon I or Louis XVIII) and the few

²² Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 171.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 171-172.

²⁴ William Macmichael, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

²⁵ Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

young Romanians who studied abroad. All of them wore the tight frock coats or tails, high and stiff collared shirts, silk scarves, top hats, trousers and black boots or shoes. The youngsters were the most fashionable and up-to-date. But in comparison with their parents they looked frail and mournful in their black clothes. This was James Henry Skene's impression towards them while describing a dinner offered by the *ispravnik* (head of the county police) of Câmpulung Muscel in 1851: "The Ispravnik, in whose house we were accommodated, invited several of the boyars to meet us at dinner. They were dressed in the ancient costume of Wallachia, which consisted of loose and flowing external garments, with inner robes bound round their waists by shawls, and fur caps of stiff form, resembling the inverted cones with their apex truncated, while they all wore full beards; and in outward appearance they eclipsed their modernized sons, who rejoiced in broad-tailed, long-waist, Parisian evening coats, and cruel neck-cloths, their patent-leather boots looking pinched and uncomfortable beside the red-morocco buckets of their sires."²⁶

The reestablishment of the national army in 1830 offered the best and most convincing way for the adoption of the new costume not only for the elegant uniforms which resembled those of the contemporary troops of Western Europe, but also because the ranks were given at first according to the former boyar hierarchy. Besides, the shako, shaped as a truncated cone and covered with black lamb pelts, reminded the former *ishlic*.

In order to keep their status, the high ranking boyars put aside the Oriental garments for the military tunic of European cut and shaved their beards. But, in that period when almost everything was changing, from policy and culture to food and manners, indecision was something of a matter of fact. So, it was not unusual, although funny, to see a young officer wearing his glittering uniform underneath the outworn and outdated pelisse of Phanariote ancestry and his feet with spurred boots in Turkish slippers.²⁷ The dress uniforms were impressive in their elegance and Raoul Perrin, seeing them in 1835, wrote:

"The uniform, half French, half Russian, is richer than any uniform of these countries. Gold flows everywhere; silver galloons and glittering tassels cover the rims, cuffs and the officers' chest."²⁸ The young Moldavian officers seemed quite

²⁶ James Henry Skene, *The Frontier Lands of the Christian and the Turk; Comprising Travels in the Regions of the Lower Danube in 1850 and 1851 by a British Resident of Twenty Years in the East*, vol. II, London, 1853, p. 82.

²⁷ J. A. Vaillant, *La Roumanie ou histoire, langue, littérature, orographie, statistique des peuples de la langue d'or, ardaliens, vallaques, et moldaves, résumés sous le nom de romans*, t. III, Paris, 1844, p. 437.

²⁸ Raoul Perrin, *Coup d'oeil sur la Valachie et la Moldavie*, Paris, 1839, p. 25.

at ease in their new uniforms, as noticed by the Russian diplomat Nicholas Karlovich Giers: “It is particularly remarkable how the young men adopted the military full-dress coats which they wore with genuine elegance.”²⁹ He noticed very few differences in facings and piping colours between the uniforms worn in the two principalities: “The army in Wallachia wore the same uniform as that in Moldavia, the only difference being that the collars and cuffs were yellow instead of red. The cavalry, composed of uhlans, wore however, cuffs of white cloth. Our Russian military men used to say that the uniform of these cavalry men was exactly the same as that of our Kharkov Uhlan Regiment.”³⁰

The ruling princes wore military uniform as a sign of status even though none of them had military training. Their tunic was, of course, lavishly adorned with any conceivable ornament. Julia Pardoe saw Mihail Strudza and his suite while inspecting the Galați quarantine in 1836, and noticed the difference between the ruling prince and his aides-de-camp. She described him as “a little sandy-haired man, with huge whiskers and mustachioes perfectly matched in tint to the enormous pair of golden epaulettes that he wore on a plain blue frock coat”, while one of his high ranking officers wore a uniform “covered with a dozen ribbons, clasps, and medals.”³¹ As the prince approached the quarantine on boat, the British traveller was able to notice the strange sailors’ outfit which turned everything into ridiculous, for they resembled “a party of Tyrolean ballet dancers: they wore broad flapped hats, bound by a ribbon of red and blue, hanging in long ends upon their shoulders, and ornamented in front by a large M, worked in gold; their shirts and trousers were of white, with braces and garters of red and blue, while wide scarlet sashes, fringed at the extremities, completed their costume.”³² For official events, the ruling prince’s headgear was the former period *gudjuman* of sable, adorned with white plume fastened with a bejeweled pin, the *surgutch*. The white princely cloak had also a large sable collar. That was Gheorghe Bibescu’s attire at the installment ceremony as prince of Wallachia, on the 14th of February 1843. Thus clad he wanted to remind his subjects that he was the direct descendent, non in genealogical line but in aspirations and deeds, of Michael the Brave, the 16th century country’s hero.

In early 1850s, James Henry Skene was intrigued that the local army was so large: “I could not understand what Wallachia has to do with an army; surely a province of the Turkish empire would never be called upon to make war on its own account, and a corps on *gens d’armes* would suffice for police purposes; but on the

²⁹ Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

³¹ Julia Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, vol. I, London, 1837, p. 423.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 420-421.

contrary there are, besides the latter, three regiments of regular Infantry, and one of Lancers.”³³

After the Union of the Romanian Principalities, Alexandru Ioan I was the first ruling prince who put aside the outdated *gudjuman* for the modern cocked hat. The physician Eugène Léger was eyewitness to a military review in 1859 and he noticed the astonishment produced upon the prince’s subjects that he was not wearing the traditional fur cap: “Prince Cuza reviewed the troops today wearing a *chapeau à corne à la français*.

– So?

– That’s revolution! He is the first Moldavian who dared to show without cloak and national plumage in public.”³⁴

The military men were very fond of their glamorous uniforms and tried to give them individuality in the way they wore them. A special cut done by a foreign tailor, a finer cloth, fringes of gold bullion thread, accouterments and buttons ordered abroad, were only a few of the many ways to avoid the uniform regulations. James Creagh ironically noticed all these differences in the multitude of uniforms seen in 1867 at a ball in Bucharest: “The last of a series of bals masqués, for which the Wallachs think that Bucharest is so celebrated, was coming off this time; and no great military power except Roumania could produce such a show of uniforms of different kinds as appeared at the ball that night. No two men were dressed in the same way, and it was supposed – fortunately for the balance of power – that some of these determined looking chiefs belonged to regiments in which there were no soldiers. These brave men were dressed in every colour of coat and trousers that could be thought of. There were gaudy uniforms and plain uniforms, tight jackets with loose trousers, and tight trousers with loose coats, long tunics and short ones, jack-boots and Hessians; and though the French fashion generally predominated among these warriors, still there were gentlemen got up like Austrians or Prussians, and other gaudily decked out in costumes that resembled no uniforms that had ever been seen before.”³⁵

The radical changes of the first decades of the 19th century implied also new behavior along with the new way of clothing. Those bows and compliments with which every boyar was greeted by everybody were abolished. Instead of long visits and slow parties there were the already mentioned balls with swift waltzes and mazurkas. The high society replaced Greek language with French as a major mean of communication and almost everybody spoke it fluently. Books and newspapers

³³ James Henry Skene, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 217-218.

³⁴ Eugène Léger, *Trois mois de séjour en Moldavie*, Paris, 1861, p. 47.

³⁵ James Creagh, *A Scamper to Sebastopol and Jerusalem in 1867*, London, 1873, pp. 175-176.

came from abroad and were read with interest. The boyars, old and young alike, learned from Russian officers to play cards and other games of chance of which they became very fond staking much of their estates around the green tables. Clubs and casinos were established in the most important towns of the country. Even the furniture changed, the sofas being replaced by chairs and tables while the walls were covered with wallpaper and decorated with pictures. The easel paintings, mainly portraits, became fashionable in the early 1800s due to itinerant painters who offered their services to the Moldo-Wallachian high society.

New food, a new way of laying the table and a new way of cooking, according to the French style, was favored, replacing the national and Oriental traditions. Consequently, the gipsy cooks were replaced with foreign ones, mostly French, Hungarians and Germans (the last ones brought from Transylvania).

Little by little the old Phanariote costumes moved to the outskirts. Merchants and other townfolk of less importance were still fond of these clothes and they wore them with much dignity. They thought of themselves as the only true Romanians who kept the tradition of clothing and behaving as in the good old days of the Greek princes' rule. For them those Romanian subjects who wore European clothes were ironically labeled as "drunkard Germans" for, at first, only the Saxon craftsmen who settled in the Principalities were clad in such vestments of strange cut. The wealthy merchants were especially very proud of their costumes which resembled those of the former boyars. So, they asked painters or photographers to take their likeness in full regalia, with silk or cotton *anteriu*, cashmere sash, fur *djubea*, red fez on the head and amber worry beads in their hands. Some of them, a little bit more modern, replaced the fez with a peaked cap of Russian type and the slippers with Cossack boots. The merchants preserved this costume until late 1860s.

In the 1870s it was a revival of Oriental garb for fashionable ladies. They used the *tschepken* of the former *arnaouts*' wardrobe as an elegant jacket to suit the bustle. The only difference was that these new items had larger sleeves and were full embroidered with gold bullion thread. In the same period it was fashionable for the Romanian ladies to wear the traditional peasant costume during various parties. The ruling princes' wives gave their example in this respect. In 1840s, Marițica Bibescu, wife of Prince Gheorghe Bibescu, was the first one to take up peasant garments and posed in that colourful costume for such painters as Constantin Lecca and Carol Szathmari. Princess Elena Cuza, wife of Alexandru Ioan I, ruler of the United Romanian Principalities, sent folk costumes as gifts for Empress Eugenia, wife of Napoleon III of France. The favorite costume of Princess Elizabeth of Wied-Neuwied, wife of Prince, later King Carol I, was that worn by peasant women of Câmpulung Muscel, which she often sported as day by day attire. After

her coronation as queen of Romania in 1881 she encouraged the preservation of folk costume. At balls and charitable parties she asked her ladies-in-waiting to put on, as herself, the simple but elegant holiday peasant garb. Her portrait painted by the American artist George Peter Alexander Healy showed Queen Elizabeth wearing her fine peasant costume. She chose the same costume for posing for important photographers in Bucharest, such as Carol Szathmari, Franz Duschek, Franz Mandy, etc. Her niece, Queen Marie, in spite of her fondness for smart gowns and fabulous jewels, favored also the simple but refined folk costume and often wore it with grace. She even clad her offspring in peasant costumes: the little princes Carol and Nicolae were shepherds while princesses Elizabeth, Maria and Ileana were shy peasant girls spinning on their way to the well. Her two boys often wore tiny military uniforms, either of cavalry, infantry or navy. Even her elder daughter, Princess Elizabeth, used to appear in a cavalry uniform, as her mother, excellent rider and great horse-lover, was honorary colonel of the 4th Cavalry (*Roşiori*) Regiment whom she led in magnificent parades during Romania's National Day.

A colourful character which made a link between townsfolk and peasantry was the postillion. He rode the little horses of the post cart at an amazing speed. His shouts and the crack of his long whip kept horses at full gallop. Captain Charles Colville Frankland, R.N., travelling through Wallachia in 1827, was deeply impressed by the little post cart and its drivers: "We left Bucharest at 2.45, with four wagons (...) each drawn by four little savage-looking horses, and driven by as savage-looking a postillion (mounted upon the near wheeler), who keeps shouting out in a melancholy manner to his horses, and whose monotonous cries are re-echoed by his fellow drivers. (...) These little wagons are about a foot and a half from the ground, and are the rudest and most extraordinary vehicles I have ever yet seen or heard of. You are dragged along, with immense rapidity, through bogs and ruts, over brushwood and through ravines and streams, seated upon a truss of hay, and nearly shaken to death by the violence and rapidity of the motion. Nevertheless, in spite of all the inconvenience and even pain of your position you cannot avoid laughing most heartily at the grotesque and ridiculous appearance which you make, squatted cross-legged upon your truss of hay, or lying backwards at full length in your wagon, your feet protruding through the front, and your legs in danger of being broken by the heels of the galloping wheel-horses; the dust and mud flying into your eyes, nose, ears, cravat, hair, and every part of your body."³⁶ The rope harness was so poor that Giers was reluctant to get into the carriage. The horses look poor and savage too. But his complains were of no avail and he had to

³⁶ Capt. Charles Colville Frankland, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

obey in order to travel fast to his destination: “On my arrival everyone made haste to secure post horses for me as soon as possible. But great was my surprise when I saw the coachmen, or *surugiu* as they are known there, driving ahead of them great number of small and emaciated horses, running completely free in herd. After examining my carriage, the *surugiu* hitched the horses to it, or rather tied them to it, with thin ropes of poor quality – eight horses in pairs, and harnessed one pair behind the other. Two of them were saddled. The one to the left, near the axle, was mounted by a *surugiu* who seemed somehow older and who straightened out his rope-reigns in order to guide the first team of four horses, and the other *surugiu* handled the front team of four horses in a similar fashion. I protested against such needless harnessing, saying that I never in my life seen eight horses hitched to so light a carriage. (...) No sooner were Maxim and I seated in the carriage when the *surugi* began to shout in the most savage voices, ‘haide’ while cracking the usually long whips with short handles. We raced with such speed over the uneven road, which went uphill all the way, that I expected the coach to turn over or to be shattered into fragments any minute. In spite of all our efforts, it was absolutely impossible to moderate the fury of the *surugii*. Without paying the slightest attention to us, they continued their piercing, drawn-out cries, accompanied by a deafening cracking of whips.”³⁷

Actually, there was a difference between the post vehicles, as observed by Edmund Spencer in 1851: “In our excursions through the country we found the public vehicles undergone no alteration; we had only to choose between the great diligence, called the Keroutza, a sort of wagon, roofed with leather, and capacious enough to make it a home by day and night; or the Kerouchor, which the post-master furnishes to the traveller, a nondescript affair, resembling a long narrow box without a lid, poised upon four wheels, frequently of solid wood – not a single nail piece of iron being used in its construction, and entirely without springs. (...) In our excursion, we contented with the Kerouchor, a pair of horses, and a ragged postillion, clothed in a sheepskin jacket, with a towering lamb-skin cap.”³⁸ A few years later, the American physician James O. Noyes, who joined the Turkish army during the Crimean War and was stationed for a while in Wallachia was also intrigued by the appearance of the Romanian postillions: “Three long-haired Wallachs, of the color of Choctaw Indians, with slouched hats, and sheepskin jubas thrown over their shoulders, mounted as many of the horses, shouted at the top of their voices, and away we dashed through the wide streets of Giurgevo.”³⁹

³⁷ Charles and Barbara Jalevich (editors), *op. cit.*, p. 128.

³⁸ Capt. Spencer, *Turkey, Russia, the Black Sea, and Circassia*, London, 1854, p. 108.

³⁹ James O. Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

The postillion's costume was impressive anyway. It was composed of a short jacket and pants of coarse homespun richly embroidered with bright-coloured woolen thread. His hooded great coat, called *ipindja*, was adorned in the same way. Even his leggings were embroidered. During summer he had a broad-brimmed black hat with three coloured ribbons while in winter he sported a black lambskin cap. Xavier Hommaire de Hell compared them with "some musketeers with weapons at hand".⁴⁰ In 1859 this picturesque costume was turned into uniform for the postillions all over the country. It was used as long as stagecoaches survived, until late 1870s.

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Every foreign visitor observed and admired the elegance of the traditionalist boyars and their ladies deploring in the meantime the disappearance of their bright-coloured and richly-adorned garb when the European dark frock coat and the crinoline gown replaced them. The rapid changes in Romanian fashion replicated those changes in the country's history, in its social, political and cultural life. Nevertheless, the 19th century Romanian urban society and its fashions offered a colourful show worth to be studied.

⁴⁰ Xavier Hommaire de Hell et Jules Laurens, *Les côtes occidentales de la Mer Noire et la Moldavie*, in "L'Illustration", 17 Septembre 1853, n° 551, p. 187.