

From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress

From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress:
Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition
in the Balkans (XVIth-XXth Centuries)

Edited by

Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu

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P U B L I S H I N G

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ix

Introduction 1

Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu

Chapter I: People and their Clothes

Colour Garments: Tradition, Fashion or Social Mark? The Romanian Principalities in the 16th–17th Centuries..... 12
Maria Magdalena Székely

Across Three Empires: Balkan Costumes in XVI Century Europe 29
Giulia Calvi

Mapping Transylvania as a Multiethnic and Multiconfessional Region in Costume Books (17th-19th Centuries) 52
Robert Born

Regional Costumes and Textile Culture 83
Jean-Pierre Lethuillier

Chapter II: Dresses and the Construction of New Identities

Constructing a New Identity: Romanian Aristocrats between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780-1866)..... 104
Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu

From Oriental (Ottoman) to European (Frankish) Dress:
Dress as Key Indicator of the Lifestyle and the Role of the Elite of Cyprus during the 18th and 19th Centuries 129
Euphrosyne Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou

Women's Fashions in Transition: Ottoman Borderlands and the Anglo-Ottoman Exchange of Costumes..... 144
Onur Inal

From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic: Ottoman Turkish Women's Clothing between Tradition and Modernity	175
Anastasia Falierou	

Chapter III: Fashion and Modernity

Dress, Modernity and Theories of Biological Evolution in 19 th Century Greece	194
Artemis Yagou	

Influence of Ethnic Style on Croatian Fashion in Clothing in the Period of Art Nouveau	212
Katarina Nina Simončič	

Student Clothing in Serbia from the Mid-19 th Century to the 1980s	232
Ljiljana Stankov	

Migration and Changes in Traditional Attire	250
Petko Hristov	

Contributors	263
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Across Three Empires: Balkan Costumes in XVI Century Europe

- Figure 1 : Nicolas de Nicolay, *Fanciullo di tributo creato nel serraglio*, Nicolas de Nicolay, *Le navigationi et viaggi fatti nella Turchia* (in Venetia presso Francesco Ziletti 1580). Engraving (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 2 : Nicolas de Nicolay, *Delly*, Nicolas de Nicolay, *Le navigationi et viaggi fatti nella Turchia* (in Venetia presso Francesco Ziletti 1580). Engraving (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 3 : Nicolas de Nicolay, *Mercante raguseo*, Nicolas de Nicolay, *Le navigationi et viaggi fatti nella Turchia* (in Venetia presso Francesco Ziletti 1580). Engraving (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 4 : Nicolas de Nicolay, *Fante raguseo*, Nicolas de Nicolay, *Le navigationi et viaggi fatti nella Turchia* (in Venetia presso Francesco Ziletti 1580). Engraving (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 5 : Nicolas de Nicolay, *Donna di Macedonia*, Nicolas de Nicolay, *Le navigationi et viaggi fatti nella Turchia* (in Venetia presso Francesco Ziletti 1580). Engraving (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 6 : Jean Jacques Boissard, *Virgo Macedonica*, Jean Jacques Boissard, *Habitus variorum Orbis gentium* (Mechlin ? 1581). Engraving (Courtesy of the British Library, London)
- Figure 7: Cesare Vecellio, *Crovatto*, Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venezia, Sessa 1598). Woodcut (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 8: Cesare Vecellio, *Dalmatino o Schiavone*, Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venezia, Sessa 1598). Woodcut (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 9: Cesare Vecellio, *Dalmatina*, Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venezia, Sessa 1598) Woodcut (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 10: Cesare Vecellio, *Capo di Euscocchi*, Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venezia, Sessa 1598) Woodcut (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)
- Figure 11: Cesare Vecellio, *Giovanetta ragusea*, Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venezia, Sessa 1598) Woodcut (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)

Mapping Transylvania in Costume Books

- Illustration 1: *Principe di Transilvania* [Zsigmond (Sigismund) Báthory] from Vecellio 1598.
- Illustration 2: Egidius von der Rye after a sketch of Georg (Joris) Hoefnagel: *View of Claudiopolis* from Braun – Hogenberg “*Civitas orbis terrarium*”, vol VI.
- Illustration 3 H. Jakob Schallenberg: *Romanian woman and a Romanian shepherd*. Etchings in Johann Tröster *Das Alt- und Neue Teutsche Dacia* (Nuremberg 1666).
- Illustration 4: Coenrads Lauwrens (after paintings by Paul Feldmayr). Couple of Hungarian nobles. Illustration from Laurentius Toppeltinus (*Laurenz Töppelt*) *Origines et occasus Transylvanorum*, Lyon 1667.
- Illustration 5: Portraits of Johannes Haller and his wife Kata Kornis in the Haller Codex (around 1650).
- Illustration 6: Unknown Artist: Portrait of Prince György (Gerorg) Rákóczi II from the *Trachtencabinett von Siebenbürgen* (Codex Rosenfeld) (1720?).
- Illustration 7: Jeremias Stranover (?), Cover of the costume book, *The True and Exact Dresses and Fashions of all the Nations in Transylvania* (London, British Library).
- Illustration 8: Jeremias Stranover (?), “A Protestant Minister from Burtzland”, *The True and Exact Dresses and Fashions of all the Nations in Transylvania*, Ill 16 (London, British Library).
- Illustration 9: Effigy of Andreas Fleischer, *comes Saxorum* between 1662 and 1671 in Hermannstadt parish church (Detail).
- Illustration 10: Jeremias Stranover (?), “A Whore how she does Pennance before ey Congregation in ey Church”, *The True and Exact Dresses and Fashions of all the Nations in Transylvania*, Ill 66 (London, British Library).
- Illustration 11: “An old Transmigrant and a younger Transmigrant Woman” from Leonhard, 1816, 102.
- Illustration 12: Franz Neuhauser “Siebenbürger Jahrmarkt” [Transylvanian fair], lithography Vienna 1819.
- Illustration 13: Károly Kós: “Romanian costume“, linocut from *Erdély. Kultúrtörténeti vázlat* [Sketch of the cultural history of Transylvania] 1929.

Regional Costumes and Textile Culture

- Figure 1: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Finistère, Kerlouan », paper 123 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 2: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Cornu, laitière de Rennes », paper 90 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 3: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Homme de La Feuillée », paper 80 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 4: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Morbihan, Pluméliau », paper 36 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 5: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Finistère, costume de mariée Kerlouan », paper 125 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 6: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, no title, paper 100 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 7: Benoît Pécheux, « Cauchoise d'Yvetot », gravure de Gatine, 1827. (Museum of Norman Arts and Traditions, Martainville Castle).
- Figure 8: Commana (*département* of Finistère), parish church Saint-Derrien, altarpiece Sainte-Anne (1682). Photographer Jean-Pierre Lethuillier.
- Figure 9: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Elliant et Rosporden », paper 59 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).
- Figure 10: François-Hippolyte Lalaisse, « Environs de Chateaulin », paper 71 (detail) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations).

Constructing a New Identity: Romanian Aristocrats between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780-1866)

- Figure 1: Great Boyar, R.G.A.I. – (Courtesy of the Library of Romanian Academy, Bucharest)
- Figure 2: Merchants and lower-ranking boyars - Henikstein August von, *Costumes et portraits faits à un voyage par la Valachie et la Bulgarie à Constantinople dans les années 1825 par le chevalier Auguste de Henikstein*, 1825 - (Courtesy of the Library of Romanian Academy, Bucharest)
- Figure 3: A young boyar, R.G.A.I. – (Courtesy of the Library of Romanian Academy, Bucharest)
- Figure 4: Aga Nicolae Filipescu - Veress Andrei. 1930. „Pictorul Barabás și românii”, *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Literare*, série III, t. IV, Memoria 8. Photographer Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu
- Figure 5: A young noblewoman à la mode, 1830, R.G.A.I. – (Courtesy of the Library of Romanian Academy, Bucharest)
- Figure 6: L'illustration, 31 December 1854, n. 566 - Le bach boyard Georges Philipesco. Photographer Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu
- Figure 7: Illustrirte Zeitung, 4 August 1849, n. 318 – A public burning of the “Regulamentul organic”. Photographer Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu

- Figure 8: The great boyars and their barbs, Henikstein August von, *Costumes et portraits faits à un voyage par la Valachie et la Bulgarie à Constantinople dans les années 1825 par le chevalier Auguste de Henikstein*, 1825 - (Courtesy of the Library of Romanian Academy, Bucharest)
- Figure 9: The prince Mihai Suțu (1819 – 1821), Louis Dupré, *Voyage à Athènes et à Constantinople, ou collection de portraits, des vues et de costumes peints sur les lieux d'après nature, lithographiés et coloriés*, Paris, 1825 - (Courtesy of the Library of Romanian Academy, Bucharest)
- Figure 10: L'illustration, 26 August 1848, n. 287 - Une soirée chez le Prince regnant à Iassy. Photographer Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu

From Oriental (Ottoman) to European (Frankish) Dress: Dress as Key Indicator of the Lifestyle and the Role of the Elite of Cyprus during the 18th and 19th Centuries

- Figure 1: Cypriot townsman wearing *vrika* (baggy trousers). Photographic Archive of the National Historical Museum, Athens.
- Figure 2: View of Larnaca, Scala. *The Illustrated London News*, 24.8.1878.
- Figure 3: Portrait of the Dragoman Hadjigeorgakis Kornessios, 1796. He wears a fur coat and a two-pointed kalpak made of sable fur surrounding a leather cap. House of Hadjigeorgakis, Nicosia.
- Figure 4: Archbishop Kyprianos (1810-1821). Oil painting in the Monastery of Machairas.
- Figure 5: A Cypriot lady wearing oriental style garments, accompanied by a musician. Copper engraving by Noagles; *The Habitable World*, described by Dr John Trusler, London, 1793. Andreas Pitsillides Collection, Nicosia.
- Figure 6: Wall painting showing the Dragoman of Cyprus Christophakis and his family, depicted as donors of the Church of Saint George of Arpera, village of Tersefanou, Larnaca. It presents a full range of the clothing of the upper class in Cyprus by the mid-eighteenth century (1747).
- Figure 7: Icon depicting the Dragoman Hadjijoseph with his family, 1776. Church of Panagia Phaneromeni, Nicosia.
- Figure 8: Villagers assembled in front of the principal house in the mountain village of Trachypedoula, near Paphos, in the autumn of 1878. They are dressed in the typical Cypriot peasant costume with *vrika*. Thomson, John. *Through Cyprus with the Camera, in the Autumn of 1878. In Two Volumes. With Sixty Permanent Photographs*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searl, and Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188, Fleet Street, 1879, volume II, plate 38.
- Figure 9: "Amalia" type costume. National Historical Museum, Athens.
- Figure 10: "Personnel of the Ottoman Empire Bank in Larnaca, May 1895". Photo by J.P. Foscolo (1852-1927). Malecos Andreas (ed.). *J.P. Foscolo*. Nicosia: Cultural Centre Cyprus Popular Bank, 1992.

From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic: Ottoman Turkish Women's Clothing between Tradition and Modernity

Figure 1: Postcard depicting an Ottoman woman in *ferace* and *yaşamak*. Anastasia Falierou's private collection.

Figure 2: Women's fashion in late 19th century Ottoman press, *Hanınlar Mahsus Malumat*, no.22, (23 October 1895), p.1, Anastasia Falierou's private collection.

Figure 3 : Chic women of the Second Constitutional Period, İbnülhakki Mehmed Tahir, *Meşrutiyet Hanımları*, Istanbul, 1330 (1914), Anastasia Falierou's private collection.

Figure 4: The Russian style headgear, back page of *Yeni İnci*, no.2 , (July 1922), Anastasia Falierou's private collection.

Figure 5: Short hair models in fashion, back page of *İnci*, no. 8, (1 September 1919), Anastasia Falierou's private collection.

Figure 6: The new *çarşaf* models decorated with fur trimmings, *İnci*, no. 2 (1 March 1919), p.12, Anastasia Falierou's private collection.

Figure 7: Pyjamas for Ottoman women, back page of *İnci*, no. 6 (1 July 1919), back page, Anastasia Falierou's private collection

Fashion, Modernity and Theories of Biological Evolution in 19th Century Greece

Figure 1: Two men in Athens, one in traditional kilt (foustanella), one in "European" dress, 19th century. The Temple of Zeus and the Acropolis in the background, reproduced in *The Clerk (O Ipallilos)*, by Militadis Hourmouzis, theatre programme, National Theatre, Athens, 2006, 8.

Figure 2: Image of chimpanzee from the article "The chimpanzee and the orangutan", *Apothiki ton Ophelimon Gnoseon*, vol 4, no 43, July 1840, 98.

Figure 3: Comparison of human and chimpanzee skeletons, from the article "The Chimpanzee and the Orangutan", *Apothiki ton Ophelimon Gnoseon*, vol 4, no 43, July 1840, 100.

Figure 4: Fashionable couple in 19th century Greece. Image from the staging of *The Clerk*, written by Miltiadis Hourmouzis in 1836, National Theatre, Athens, 2006. Photo by Studio. Reproduced in *The Clerk (O Ipallilos)*, by Militadis Hourmouzis, theatre programme, National Theatre, Athens, 2006, 25.

Influence of Ethnic Style on Croatian Fashion in Clothing in the Period of Art Nouveau

- Figure 1-1: Dress for a model, Croatia 1905-1910, design by Bela Cikos Sesija, multicoloured embroidery on white linen, 175 cm (MUO 16926).
- Figure 1-2: Samples from Podravina, designs (Domaće ognjište 1907/1908).
- Figure 1-3: A lady from Zagreb wearing a shirt with traditional Croatian motifs, studio Mosinger, around 1905 (MUO 13345-046).
- Figure 2-1: Traditional costume from Podravina, present day.
- Figure 2-2: A portrait of a lady wearing Berger's decorative band on the neck line, studio: A. Brauner, Zagreb, 26th of January, 1907 (MZG/ 47574).
- Figure 2-3: A portrait of a lady wearing Berger's decorative band on the neck line, studio: A. Brauner, Zagreb, 26th of January, 1907 (MZG/ 47574).
- Figure 2-4: A fashion illustration—a blue clothing item decorated with Berger's bands, 1905. (EMZ 4/2).
- Figure 2-5: Technique „redina“on the fabric from the Industry of Salamon Berger. (EMZ 2/7776).
- Figure 2-6: Technique „vutlak“on the fabric from the Industry of Salamon Berger. (EMZ 2/7776).
- Figure 2-7: Technique „na zijev“on the fabric from the Industry of Salamon Berger. (EMZ 2/7777).
- Figure 2-8: A photograph of a dress produced in Maison Paquin fashion salon, Paris, 1909, made from fabric produced in the Industry of Salamon Berger (EMZ 4/3).

Student Clothing in Serbia from the Mid-19th Century to the 1980s

- Photo 1: Student of The Theological Seminary, Belgrade, 1901. (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)
- Photo 2: Jovan Miodragović, as graduated student of The Teachers' College in Kragujevac, Belgrade, 1874 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)
- Photo 3: Students of The Teachers' College in Jagodina, around 1900 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)
- Photo 4: Ljubica Tešanović as a student of The Second Female Grammar School "Queen Maria", Belgrade, around 1936 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)
- Photo 5: Students of The Grammar School "King Alexander I", Belgrade, 1940 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)
- Photo 6: Students of The Teachers' College "Queen Maria", Belgrade, around 1940 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)
- Photo 7: Formal suits in navy stile, Belgrade, 1921 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)

Photo 8. Sport Association, Kragujevac, 1906 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)

Photo 9: Grammar School, Pančevo, around 1935 (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade) Several female students wearing uniforms of the Junior Adriatic Guard

Photo 10: President Tito with Pioneers, Belgrade, in the 1970s (Photo collection of The Museum of Education, Belgrade)

Migration and Traditional Attire

Photo 1: Young men from Noevtsi village, Breznik region (Mid-Western Bulgaria), at the village feast (*sabor*) during the 1920s (Author's personal archive)

Photo 2: Young men from Graovo region at a celebration in Pernik (Mid-Western Bulgaria); end of the 1920s (Author's personal archive)

Photo 3: Family photo at the Mining feast in Pernik (Mid-Western Bulgaria); early 1930s (Author's personal archive)

Photo 4: Petko Beshevishki in his celebratory costume; end of the 1920s in Pernik, Mid-Western Bulgaria (Author's personal archive)

Photo 5: Petko Beshevishki in his celebratory costume; end of the 1920s in Pernik, Mid-Western Bulgaria (Author's personal archive)

Photo 6: Young women at the city celebration in Pernik (Mid-Western Bulgaria), early 1930s (Author's personal archive)

Photo 7: Family photo of Eleonora and Petko Beshevishki at the city celebration in Pernik (Mid-Western Bulgaria) in 1930 (Author's personal archive)

Photo 8: Celebratory family photo of Boginya and Kiril Shekerdzhiski and Eleonora and Petko Beshevishki at the capital Sofia; early 1930s (Author's personal archive)

Photo 9: Marriage photo from the early 1950s from Pernik, Mid-Western Bulgaria (Author's personal archive)

Photo 10: Photo of Violeta Shekerdzhiska at a school celebration in Sofia during the early 1950s (Author's personal archive)

INTRODUCTION

Clothes and fashion have a long and a fairly rich history. Specialized publications appeared already in the sixteenth century, ready to satisfy any taste or curiosity. Lou Taylor believes that four were the reasons behind the development of this “industry” of images of clothes and clothing that spread over the civilized world: the fascination with the barbarian and the “savage”, the thirst for information about new peoples, an European and romantic curiosity for all things exotic and oriental, an interest in the garments of all social categories in rural and urban Europe (Taylor 2004, 5). The essays in the present volume are built around these four motivations, adding scholarly rigour matched by skilful analyses. The reader shall discover a completely different history of clothes, varying across time and regions. Scholars from different backgrounds: sociology, anthropology, history, ethnography, visual arts and music have researched clothes and fashion. Clothes are analysed, measured, exposed, and they continue to open paths of investigation for several other disciplines¹.

For centuries, fashion history has stirred interest: clothes were “photographed” and their images were allowed to wander into the world in catalogues and in albums, or in travel journals. Heading towards 'exotic' lands, naturalists, doctors, historians, scholars have always accepted the companionship of painters, lithographs, illuminations, engravers, that is of the 'specialists' who expressed in colours the written image of the worlds they visited and of the people they encountered. Owing to the European fascination for the Orient, already manifest in the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire too became an area of interest, even though modern research has not yet invested as much interest in Levantine clothes as it has done, for instance, for French or English 'fashion'. And if one considers the Balkans, scholarly research remains still marginal, even though certain crucial primary sources are available. Ever since the

¹ This volume builds on a symposium I organized at the Institute for Advanced Studies “New Europe College”, Bucharest, 13-14 June, 2008. My special thanks for their support are addressed to Anca Oroveanu (Academic Director of New Europe College) and Marina Hasnaş (Economic Director of New Europe College). I would also like to thank Lelia Ciobotariu, Alina Hera and all the New Europe College staff for helping me with the preparation of the colloquium.

Renaissance, both visual information concerning the costumes of different nations, and histories of their 'wearers' have been printed in the great cities, and then circulated all across Europe. Through the mediation of these restless engravers, painters, observers or mere consuls, costumes originating in different regions of the Balkans or other parts of the Ottoman Empire became part of the international circuit. Several stereotypes were thus created (Thornton 1994a; Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994), while the curiosity of people who did not travel was also satisfied by the various images and prints. To whom were they of use? What were those writings good for? What reaction did they provoke?

The "discovery of the other" was at the heart of publishing such costume books, because the images offered the possibility to observe the 'stranger', the 'alien' other from up close. Thus one could also grasp costumes, tastes, and "a language of the body and the manners" behind the physical traits (Mentges 2007: 12). In many cases these prints and costume books are the only iconographic source concerning a specific piece of clothing, a jewel, or a fashionable colour from a certain Balkan region. We also believe that many of the questions relating to the history of the Balkans could find an answer in the analysis of the gestures, manners, and customs linked to garments. The recurrence of these Western sources, the passing of the images and even of the information from an author to another, the increasing numbers of travellers through the Balkans during the modern era, all prove that this part of the world was of interest not only to the diplomats but also to a larger public hungry for curiosities and diversity. Some images were better known than others, compiled, introduced, and adapted, in order to illustrate more and more costume books on the manners of the nations of the less known empires of the modern world.

Giulia Calvi writes about Nicolas de Nicolay's engravings, turned into "icons of the Balkans" while Robert Born investigates the role those costume books played in the Transylvanian games of power. Jean-Pierre Lethuillier shows how François Hippolyte Lalaisse's lithographs contributed decisively to the knowledge of a regional costume permeated by the economic and social characteristics of an epoch and of a region. Although it discusses a region remote from the Balkans, Lethuillier's study provides a bridgehead for all those costume books and albums on fashion and manners, as well as a comparative method of analysing and interpreting them, always taking into account their utility in a specific context. One should not neglect the political and educational role of these costume books: many regions were subject to different political regimes and their peoples had various religions. Not everybody could venture into

the turbulent Balkans where the Turks reigned, especially since they had been seen as enemies of Christian civilization for a long time. Some of these costume books were just illustrated reports on the social and political situation of those regions. By means of the images, the reader was offered the possibility to place a different region on the map, to visualize another way of life, to compare manners and attitudes in different cultural contexts. For example, costume books dealing with Transylvania, a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional region, were intensively used in order to address the issue of tolerance or to state the pre-eminence of an ethnic group in the detriment of another (Robert Born).

Some images illustrated the moderation of the foreigners in order to point to the profligacy of the viewer. However, the reverse moral lesson was also possible using the same image where the moderate and modest Christian tradition was opposed to the barbarian, whose opulence satisfies his vanity and lack of moral principles.

Sumptuary laws transcend the ages, aiming to put a hold to luxury, or to ensure the pre-eminence of a certain colour for a certain social class (Michel Pastoureau 2004: 179). In fact, they confer visibility to a specific social category and contribute to imposing a symbolic and specific power. Naturally, within a polychrome system some colours were more important than others, used by certain social categories to differentiate themselves. For example, the colour red used by the Moldavian boyars was considered most suited to deliver "the idea of pomp and power" (Maria-Magdalena Szekely). Red was used in all contexts, from clothes to the velvet in the throne hall, and to the red rugs of the metropolitan cathedrals.

The same red colour can be found among the preferences of the Transylvanian nobility, where the distribution of colours actually reflected the social hierarchy (Robert Born), but also in Hungary or Croatia, where all those at the top of the social pyramid chose red and ignored black (which had strict ritual uses). This choice of colours amazed Cesare Vecellio greatly, as he was a painter accustomed to the dusky clothes of Western Europe (Giulia Calvi). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought a certain 'tolerance' (Maria-Magdalena Szekely) toward the distribution of colours, even if the sumptuary laws kept haunting some societies, assigning colours, shapes, qualities to certain social categories or ranks, only to become obsolete and inoperable eventually. When a Wallachian prince tried to claim the exclusive use of white satin for himself and for his family, the law was in fact powerless. As soon as the interdiction was read out loud throughout the fairs and markets of Bucharest, Tarsița Filipescu, a member of an important and influential boyar family, put on the turban, the satin dress and the whitest *giubea* (a

very expensive long coat) and set out for a promenade in her carriage, directly under the windows of the princely palace. The reprimand followed immediately, yet it did not have the effect of yore. (Urechia 1902: 298, January 21st, 1817).

The discovery of the Orient and of the Oriental fashion through Charles Ferriol or Jean-Etienne Liotard prompted many others to make the voyage to Constantinople, with stops in Zagreb, Belgrade, Sofia, Iași, Bucharest, Edirne, Athens, Nicosia, Bursa. Travellers were keen to taste the cuisine of these peoples, akin to the Oriental tastes by then, to note on the run the exotic, to grasp the differences, to admire richness of local costumes, to wonder at the omnipresent luxury, to criticize their filth, to misunderstand their way of life, and then to travel onward. Once on the stalls of the shops in Vienna, Paris, London or Venice, depictions in images and words satisfied the avidity of a population eager to feed its imagination with miraculous tales from a so “far” world. For instance, Jean-Etienne Liotard returned from Constantinople wearing an oriental suit, which he then made known through Monsieur Levett or Mademoiselle Glavani (1738-1741) (Thornton 1994b: 10). Liotard's model was followed by Lady Elisabeth Craven, Lady Mary Montague, Sir Robert Ker Porter or Antonie Demidov, etc. They, and others like them, who chose to wear parts of the Oriental suit: *şalvâri* (Ottoman baggy pants), turban, slippers, or jewels (Jirousek 2005).

Starting with the 19th century, this fascination with the Orient was furthered also by political interests of the Western powers, just as the Ottoman Empire was growing weaker. A genuine cultural interest however should not be underestimated. The age of the nations left its clear mark on many Balkan peoples, and Paris, London or Vienna sent their emissaries to gather information from the Balkans. As a consequence, a number of magazines and journals offered periodically news of all sorts from these parts of the world. *L'Illustration*, *Illustrierte Zeitung*, *The Illustrated London News*, to mention just a few of the 'specialized' magazines, provided an illustrated chronicle of the peoples from the Balkans in everlasting turmoil, eager to free and emancipate themselves.

The use of the clothes in a social discourse highlights certain details in order to enhance the differences in dressing and to mark social differences. Nicole Pellegrin has argued that clothes are “le meilleurs ‘révélateur’ du fonctionnement social“, and shows how its three functions – a material possession, an investment, a language – have their own temporality and “pertinently” indicate change (Pellegrin 1993: 85). Thus, even if it belongs to Oriental apparel, present and “imposed” in this Balkan world, the garment became “individual”, always saying something about its owner.

For the Balkan political and social elite who did not have coats of arms and a heraldic or genealogical past, portraits were important means of social representation. The eighteenth-nineteenth centuries were the time of an important collection of portraits in which the elite, in search of an identity, accepted to be 'photographed' while always wearing the signs of a personal individualization within a social category: the dagger or the very expensive jewels, the ermine fur or the *calpac* (high hat), the *işlic* (high hat) or the caftan, the yellow *meşi* (slipper) or the red *ceacşiri* (baggy breeches).

Indeed, once included into the Ottoman political system, the subject and protégé was granted the (mandatory) right to wear yellow saffian slippers as those of the Turks (Euphrosyne Egoumenidou). That is why the clothes were the trademark of a political regime, but they also acquired symbolic connotations, as their colours, richness and quality signified one's belonging to the elite. This cultural attitude was specific to the Orient but the ideals of the French revolution were to bring about changes in the Balkans as well. The peoples who had silently accepted and worn the garments of submission took up arms and changed not only their attire but also their attitude. Such emancipation was first visible in appearances. Romanians, Greeks, Cypriots firstly abandoned their long coats and luxurious furs to take on coat tails and crinolines. The French, English and Prussian embassies and consulates – first those in Constantinople, then those in Nicosia and Larnaca, finally those in Bucharest, Iaşi, Athens or Belgrade – provided the earliest models that were sought and diligently copied.

Even when cherishing liberal ideas, some of the wearers of the Oriental vestments did not abandon them so easily, because of their particular important symbolic load. They felt they belonged to an elite, be it the boyar class of the Romanian lands, the merchant class of Cyprus or the Athenian notables. However, the road towards French or English fashion was to be considerably eased by the political developments in the Balkans and in Europe: that is by the independence wars of Greece, Serbia, the Romanian Principalities, then Bulgaria, the 1848 revolutions, the reforms within the Ottoman Empire, the change of political regimes. Such was the case of Cyprus, passing from the Ottoman Empire to the British Empire, and, inevitably, from a costume to another. The boundaries became significantly easier to cross, and the intercultural exchanges between "East" and "West" happened more easily (Onur Inal). Once a curiosity, the Oriental attire became fashionable. While gradually vanishing in the 'East', it re-emerged in the London salons, for example, although oriental

costumes were never meant to be street-wear but rather to hide faces under masks of pleasure.

This 'Europeanization' of appearances was not always welcomed or assimilated. In all these Balkan states, opposition to change manifested itself in one way or another. As argued above, the transition to a different costume was part of a complex modernization process, where the construction of states and nations represented the main goal for those young states. Therefore, adopting French or English fashion accompanied the implementation of a different system of values. Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the orientation towards the West was already clear and inevitable, a petty craftsman from Bucharest associated the girls' forelocks, the covering in iron of the houses, the reading of Voltaire and Napoleon's influence to the divine revenge manifested through the plague of 1813:

“Before, the houses were covered in wood, then we covered them in iron... And the terrible famine... And we still did not pay attention. Always frightened, the pagans almost enslaved us. Then what? Bare-headed and short-haired women, naked from the waste up. Men have abandoned their garb and taken over the foreign one, some French, some German or in other ways, like the pagans, they have begun to wear forelocks, like the women. Then we mingled with them and the wealthiest learned from their books, some in French, others in German, still others in Italian. And the teachings of Voltaire were appreciated, of that person hated by God, but considered God by the pagans. And we ignored the holy fasts. Always had meats at tables. At church we went as to a promenade, one with better clothes than the another, the women wearing all kind of devilish jewels, and we did not enter the church with fear of God, to pray for our sins.” (Corfus 1966, 341).

In the years to come, the word “imitation” became more and more uttered by the critics of the new forms. “Forms without content”, as the Romanian literary critic Titu Maiorescu wrote in 1868, in a phrase that was and still is widely used, especially in literature, and that caricatured to the grotesque (Maiorescu 1978). This blind imitation of Western couture was used as a definite example for the connection between the behaviour of humans and that of apes. In the Greek case, as Artemis Yagou shows, this comparison became central in order to sanction the fashion practices and especially “the sterile imitation of the social model imported from the West”. In the Turkish case, each adopted piece of attire raised lively controversies echoed in the contemporary press (Anastassia Falierou).

The creation of the nation had to link the past to the present, in order to ensure the continuity and especially the legitimacy needed by the new

states of the Balkans. The connection was not easily established, leading sometimes to an arbitrary dichotomy and to the creation of stereotypes such as the immoral urban world *versus* the pure, closer to tradition rural world. However, this tradition was skilfully reinvented and included by Salomon Berger, for example, in the Croat textile industry, so well connected to the Art Nouveau style (Katarina Nina Simončič). Just as in Bucharest or in Athens, the same debates on the advantages and disadvantages of the western imitation animate Zagreb in its search of identity. In fashion, the idea of using ethnic elements in order to construct a personal style and a “national” fashion was a success. It fitted into the European context of defining the state by returning to tradition, reinventing the past, and discovering the folk. In the same context, the modern Romanian feminine elite wore and adopted several elements of the peasant attire, especially the *ie* (a feminine blouse) and the embroideries, and used them on some political occasions to suggest a specific orientation or to grant a symbolic connotation to the event. Even the wife of the liberal politician C. A. Rosetti in the guise of Revolutionary Romania wore the clothes of the Romanian people². In spite of all these, elements of folk costume were never consistently and insistently taken over as to impose a new (fashion) style, as it happened in Croatia. Here, due to the need to preserve a national identity, unblemished by the German influences, the details of a folkloric art constituted the core of a “Croatian culture”.

The same state-building efforts transpire from the various regulations aimed at unifying all subjects and areas controlled by the state, from the military to schoolboys, from the administrative staff to prisoners, from social assistance to health care. This appropriation is also reflected in the need to distinguish individuals in the crowd. Elements of the “national costume” are then recognizable in the uniforms created for different social and professional categories of the modern state. For instance, the students' uniform followed its own fashion trend, albeit confined to a limited register (Ljiljana Stankov). Mandatory features stifle fantasy, the changes are by far fewer and prefer to target to the less visible details. It is now that uniforms beget national connotations, in Serbia, in Greece and in the Romanian Principalities, since authorities considered that they had “a great influence in 'rousing' national sentiment” (Ljiljana Stankov). Introducing these uniforms constituted the starting point for 'contaminating' the villages with city clothes. Thus, almost despite itself, the state had a direct

² See the painting “Revolutionary Romania” painted by Constantin Rosenthal in 1848.

influence in the transformation of the rural world. The soldiers, returning from the WWI front lines, were already wearing the clothing of the urban world, and only took up the rural clothes to participate in the rites of passing that remained specific to the rural world to which they belonged (Petko Hristov).

The innovations of the nineteenth century had a significant contribution to the changes that took place in the history of fashion. The essays in this volume discuss the visible elements, such as clothing, jewellery, the opulence of the elite, fashion and styles, but they also inform the reader about the manner in which these were connected to the political and social developments. The articles in this volume highlight important themes regarding the history of textiles, the shifting of trading and manufacturing centres, the professionalization of the various fields in the history of fashion, and the connection with the introduction and proliferation of steam-powered machines and later of electrical equipments.

Clothes and garments are also part of the social and political transformations brought about by the multiple modernisations of the various Balkan societies. Fabrics, colours, threads, barrels and buttons, lace and jewellery are marvellous documents that bring to life details of the remote worlds of our ancestors, helping us understand the complex meanings of sartorial appearances. The Balkans and the Orient are regions that offer promising avenues of multidisciplinary research concerning clothes and fashion as indicators of social status and political change.

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CHAPTER I:
PEOPLE AND THEIR CLOTHES

COLOUR GARMENTS:
TRADITION, FASHION OR SOCIAL MARK?
THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES
IN THE 16TH–17TH CENTURIES

MARIA MAGDALENA SZÉKELY

A true outpour of colour: this is the impression left on the reader by the inventory of goods of Maria, the daughter of the Moldavian prince Jeremiah Movilă, married to the Polish nobleman Stephen Potocki. Made in the second decade of the 17th century and used in a trial for wealth, the inventory dedicates many pages to the garments and cloths in the princess's chests (Corfus 2006: 297-302). One by one, the many clothes are seen in all their splendour: long cloaks, short cloaks, summer cloaks, capes, short clothes, dresses and girdles made of satin, brocade, velvet, damask or silk, in various colours, from black or dark brown, to white, red, orange, green and azure, decorated with pearls, rubies and emeralds, with linings and borders of sable fur, of satin with gold thread, of red satin, of green satin and velvet. Then, one can also see rolls of black and dark brown velvet, of white silk and white damask, of yellow satin, of silk, Persian silk, satin, satin of Venice, damask, Dutch velvet and cloth, all of them red, rolls of light rosy satin, of brick red *kitajka*, of velvet, of green *kitajka* and Dutch cloth.

This inventory reflects, in fact, a natural reality to which the Romanian historians do not pay much attention: in the past, the people's life was far from being dull, but really invaded by colour. Let us have just a few examples. Polychrome frescoes (Vasiliu 1998) and miniatures (Popescu-Vilcea 1981) could be seen on the church walls or on the pages of the religious manuscripts. The data in the financial registers of Bistrița city show that the Moldavian prince Peter Rareș, a refugee in Transylvania at the time, in 1538 and 1539, hired painters to do some work in his apartments in the city of Ciceu (Constantinescu 1978: 179-181). Scholar Johannes Sommer wrote that prince Jacob Heraclides Despot had commissioned the painting, in the residence in Jassy: battle scenes of the

fight of Verbia, which he had won in 1561 against his adversary, Alexander Lăpuşneanu (Sommer, Gratianus 1998: 30). In Wallachia, the princes' and boyars' houses in Mogoşoaia, Potlogi, Dobreni or Măgureni, built in the 17th century, had rich decoration in multicolour stucco, as well painted walls or ceilings (Nicolescu 1979: 84-85; Sinigalia 2000: 469-570). Even the most modest houses or the monks' cells in monasteries were sometimes conspicuous due to their coloured decorations. The stoves' tiles inside the houses (Batariuc 1999), the pavement tiles, the carpets, and bed covers were all coloured. The bedclothes were white, sometimes embroidered with floral motives, sewn in silk (Del Chiaro 1914: 42). The cradle of the babies – a sort of wooden chest wrapped in canvas – was lined with red cloth and hanged from the room ceiling with four strings wrapped in red cloth too (Del Chiaro 1914: 46). Transparent glass vases with bluish tinges could be seen on the tables of the well to do people (Del Chiaro 1914: 50). It is a well-known fact that the harness and the coaches were also painted. In 1543, the craftsmen of Bistriţa city made a coach for Peter Rareş lined with red cloth (Constantinescu 1978: 192). In 1545, the same prince received from Braşov a coach painted by *Gregorius pictor* (“painter Gregorius”) as a present (Quellen 1896: 253, 257, 258, 268; Nussbächer 1987: 88), and one year later, another painted coach was given from Bistriţa, covered with a canopy of green cloth (Constantinescu 1978: 200). The Moldavian boyars with high dignities used to wear staffs as insignia of their ranks: green and gold for the chancellor, blue and gold for the marshals, red and gold for the commander of the army and only silver for the chamberlain (Costin 1958: 238, 387). Certainly, the priests' vestments or the liturgical clothes were also coloured (Johnstone 1967; Musicescu 1969; Broderia 1985).

In such circumstances, it goes without saying that the clothes people used to wear every day or only at festive events had various colours. Some recent research enabled me to notice that in the 16th and 17th centuries, in the Romanian Principalities, the prevailing colour, both for female and for male costumes, seemed to be the red (Székely 2010). It is risky to give figures or percentages, because the specific sources do not allow for statistics in this field of research. However, one can see, in general, that red was followed, at great distance, by yellow, white, green, blue and black. Red was used for all types of clothes: head covers, veils, shirts, tunics, trousers, dresses, belts, coats, socks, and footwear. Yet, black was used especially for shawls, footwear, for fur coats or accessories, and rather seldom for a shirt, skirt, dress or coat. Women seemed to have preferred white, yellow, green, blue and black for their clothes, and men: yellow, green, blue, white and black. The babies' diapers were always

made of white cloth or silk, just like the adults' underwear and handkerchiefs; very often, these ones were embroidered with white or coloured thread (Del Chiaro 1914: 48, 55).

Then, one can see a certain match between clothes and colours. For example, I could not identify yet yellow head covers; however, the footwear of this colour appears rather often in sources. Women's hats, bonnets and veils are usually white and very seldom red; men's fur caps, hats, bonnets or caps were black, red, blue and green. Most of the shirts were red, white (sometimes with the collar and cuffs of a different colour) or blue. At the female costume, the girdles and belts were especially red, white, yellow or blue; at the male costume, the same articles were white, yellow, blue or red. The skirts, dresses or sleeveless dresses could be of any colour, just like the outer clothes, worn both by women and by men over all the other garments. Certainly, all these associations could not be casual, but expressed preferences and maybe influences or even fashion.

Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, used to wear coloured clothes, without observing any of the rules concerning the combinations of colours the fashion designers are concerned with today. The frescoes of the Moldavian or Wallachian churches present, for example, a woman wearing a green shawl, red shirt, yellow gown with black fur collar and red footwear, or a man in orange *anteriu*, red girdle, blue *kaftan*, brown and yellow footwear. So, what Michel Pastoureau noticed in Western Europe ("un individu qui porte une chemise blanche, une cotte verte, un surcot rouge et un manteau bleu n'est absolument pas revêtu d'un vêtement polychrome") is also valid for the Romanian territory (Pastoureau 1989: 214).

The fact that the same colours can be seen at all garments, no matter the wealth or rank of the person who was wearing them, does not mean that all the respective articles were all alike. A stable colour, lasting and especially bright was characteristic for the good cloths that only the rich people could afford. The simple fabrics – possible made in the rural households – that had the colour of the raw material (wool, flax, hemp) were dyed with essences which were influenced by the sunshine or which lost their lustre and got a rather tarnished tinge of grey or brown after repeated washing. In this case too, the state of things was very much like in Western Europe (Pastoureau 1999: 128).

The analysis I have recently made of the costume in the Romanian Principalities in the 16th and 17th centuries made me draw the conclusion that the Romanian society was very tolerant with the colours of their clothes (Székely 2010). None of the written, visual or archaeological sources taken into account offer any direct or collateral information to