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Fiddlers and Their Music in the Romanian Principalities from the Beginnings until the Nineteenth Century: Artistic Aspects

ABSTRACT

Fiddlers and their music were a very important component of the music of Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania. Mentioned in documents since the 16th century, fiddlers were indispensable at the princely court, where they participated in most of the ceremonies in which the ruler played the principal role. The fiddle music varied depending on the characteristic music of the regions in which they settled, as well as on various foreign influences, especially the Ottoman classical music practised in those areas bordering the two Romanian Principalities. Thus, it gradually became possible for the fiddle music to acquire an individual identity and a specific social profile. The present study by no means exhausts the documentary sources regarding general aspects of this category of 'fiddlers', nor of their music, but it should be said that comparable research is largely absent in Romanian scholarly literature. The main focus rather is on general aspects of the tradition, and less on the particular. This paper outlines the general framework in which fiddlers appeared, but also highlights their placement in Romanian musical culture. It also tries to promote some awareness of the foreign and domestic influences that have been imprinted on their music, as well as of the musical instruments they have used. One aspect of the study is represented by comparative analysis of different written sources to indicate how the fiddlers have been referenced over time. All these aspects captured in this first article represent a contextualization of the fiddlers' practice, and at the same time serve as a broad introduction to a second article, which is unprecedented in its scope, and adopts an original historical approach to the entire 'phenomenon' of fiddle music and fiddlers. Both parts of the study should be considered complementary, and together they constitute a seminal contribution to the subject.

KEYWORDS

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Musician Gypsies – General Aspects

The primary focus of this study is on clarifying the notion of fiddler music and its performers, the fiddlers. The aim is a more satisfactory systematization and clarification of everything that has been either confusing or insufficiently researched in existing Romanian and international scholarly literature. At the same time new information will be introduced from various categories of source that have not been properly researched up to now, including official documents and the testimonies of foreign travelers. On the other hand, it is also important to reposition some of the information that is already known but that has been neither contextualized nor fully understood.

Thus, I will explain the context in which the Gypsies appeared in the Romanian Principalities, always using the information provided by the official documents issued by the Chancelleries of the two countries. Afterwards I will analyze and comment on the earliest such documents to talk about fiddlers. Clarifying the terminology used in various historical sources and standardizing it so that it can be fully understood is another objective of this research, as is a presentation of the repertoire of the fiddlers, referring here not to the specific songs they have performed, but to the source of their musical specificity, and to the various influences acting on their music, whether from neighboring territories or from the local populations where Gypsy communities settled. Finally, I will refer to the musical instruments used by fiddlers, observing for each one of them the terminology that has been used over time in certain documents and clarifying aspects that have not been fully described so far.

The reason for choosing the theme of the fiddlers across the more than four centuries of their existence is that my literature review exposed the lack of a global perspective on this subject, and a general failure to present the fiddlers in a historically sound and coherent way. That is why it seems necessary to provide a historical perspective and to contextualize the fiddlers adequately, showing also their evolution. This research strategy has led me to ‘remove’ the fiddlers from the complex musical context of the princely court and to present them as a distinct entity, observing their history, their musical characteristics and the role they have played within Romanian society.

In the Romanian Principalities, between the 16th and 19th centuries (the period covered here), the fiddlers represented a category of musicians considered ‘good at everything’,

primarily because of their status as slaves, but also because of their musical versatility, so that they were able to approach a very wide repertoire comprising multiple musical genres. But as musicians they transformed these genres by often passing them through their own distinctive musical filter, resulting in the highly valued genre of fiddle music. One example of this occurred during the reign of Nicolae Mavrogheni (1786-1790), when the role of Gypsies in general – and of the fiddlers, in particular – was seen as a very important one. A certain Anastase the Greek states: “all the arts and crafts in the country are practised exclusively by the Gypsies, so that when they get on their carts and emigrate from the country, it is deprived of singers, dancers, musicians and craftsmen” (Urechiă, 1893: 79).

The importance of this music has several aspects. It was present mainly at the various public manifestations at the princely court, such as the princely feasts or walks, but it was also found in more official contexts such as the embassies, where the music bands (*taraf*) of the fiddlers formed part of the princely entourage.

The first documentary mention of the Gypsies in Wallachia dates back to 1385, when Dan I gave to the Tismana Monastery some estates, together with forty Gypsy dwellings. In Moldavia, their first mention appears in 1428, when Alexandru cel Bun (the Good) donated to the Bistrița Monastery thirty-one Gypsy dwellings (Achim, 2004: 13-14). The first references to this social category used the term Gypsy (*ațigan*, the oldest form of the term), a term coming from the Greek language – *αθίγγανος* (*athínganos*) or *ατσιγγανος* (*atsínganos*) and deriving from the name of a Christian sect dating back to the 7th century in Phrygia. Byzantine sources contain several references regarding this term, associating it with newcomers, and signalling the migration of the Gypsies (Dieaconu, 2009: 17-19). That they ended up as slaves in the Romanian Principalities is considered to be due to the Mongol invasions during which they have supposedly arrived in Europe. The Gypsies were already slaves of the Mongols and after the battles with the Romanians they were taken as prisoners of war and became slaves of the victors. Their slavery is mentioned across the Byzantine Empire and also in the Balkan states prior to any mentions in the Romanian Principalities. From this information we can safely conclude that these people were customarily in captivity, and that this extended to the Romanian Principalities which captured them and treated them as slaves (Achim, 2004: 28-29).

In the Romanian Principalities, depending on which owner they belonged to, there were three categories of Gypsies: those owned by the rulers, those belonging to the boyars and those employed in the monasteries; the last two categories were called hearth Gypsies because they were responsible only to their owners (Potra, 2001: 30). The Gypsies were used in a wide range of occupations, from work in the fields to the various crafts. Among the hearth Gypsies, who were divided into 'Gypsies of the house' and 'field Gypsies' were some of the best musicians of Moldavia and Wallachia, with no grasp of musical notation, but with an ability to reproduce very well any musical phrase even if they had only listened to it once (Kogălniceanu, 1946: 576; Potra, 2001: 62, 64; Zăloagă, 2015: 359, 364).

There is no objective data regarding the beginnings of the musical activity of the fiddlers. Romeo Ghircoiașiu (1963: 106) states something very interesting about their early appearance: "with social developments, the musical culture became diversified. Along with the village bagpipers appeared the Gypsy fiddlers, slaves of the estates, so musicians first and foremost of the boyar courts. While the common people continued to use their bagpipers, their own whistlers, the nobility had their fiddlers, even though they often also played at peasant horas and weddings". George Breazul (1966: 158-159) also states that the fiddlers were the direct descendants of mime artists, jugglers, minstrels, clowns and bagpipers, whom they successfully replaced at the princely courts, being always present at the important events.

One of the first documentary references (maybe even the first) about the fiddlers and their fate is found in the copy of a document issued by Alexandru IV Lăpușneanu of Moldavia in 1560. The document registers to Dinga the *vornic* (a political dignitary) the ownership of certain Gypsy dwellings. Among those mentioned are: Stoica the fiddler with his wife Neacșa and their children, Rusim the fiddler with his wife Alba and children, about whom the document mentions that they were given by Mircea Voivode, the ruler of Wallachia, when he was "in the diplomatic mission", as well as Tămna the fiddler (Caproșu, 2008: 502-503). In 1569, on 14 April, the ruler Bogdan IV Lăpușneanu of Moldavia registers to the same Dinga the Gypsy dwellings mentioned in the previous document, referencing the same fiddlers: Stoica with his wife Leneșa (probably his second wife) and their children; Rusim and his wife Anca (probably his second wife) with children. We need to keep in mind the fact that these fiddlers were mentioned in the

context of their participation in the embassy of Mircea Voivode. Also mentioned was Tâmpa the fiddler (*lăutar*), bought from Wallachia by Barcan the *comis* (political dignitary), certainly the same character mentioned before (Caproșu, 2008: 628-631; Ionașcu et al., 1951a: 223-226; Codrescu, 1888: 137-138). The embassy here refers to diplomatic exchanges between Alexandru IV Lăpușneanu and Mircea Ciobanu, ruler of Wallachia, through the *vornic* Dinga from Moldavia. In this context, Dinga received from the Wallachian ruler, probably as a gift, some Gypsies (Codrescu, 1892: 189), among whom were the same Stoica the fiddler, Rusim the fiddler and Tămna the fiddler, and he bought Tâmpa the fiddler, together with his family, from the Wallachian Barcan for the sum of 4000 *akçes* (Ottoman currency). All these donations and purchases were registered in Moldavia by Alexandru IV Lăpușneanu and Bogdan IV Lăpușneanu in the cited documents.

From a document issued in the same period, in 1568, by the ruler Peter the Younger, we find out that he gives to Dinga the *postelnic* (political dignitary) some Gypsy villages, along with Stoica the fiddler and his children and Vișan *highidișul*, or the fiddler (the Romanian term *highidiș* comes from the Hungarian *hegedű* meaning violin), with his family (Ionașcu et al., 1951b: 257-258; Ștefănescu and Diaconescu, 1985: 73). In these three cited documents, two issued in Moldavia and one in Wallachia, which state that the beneficiary is Dinga, *vornic* in Moldavia and *postelnic* in Wallachia, there is a common name present, that of Stoica the fiddler. The documents issued by the Chancellery of Moldavia refer to the same person; regarding the Wallachian one, we believe that it is just a coincidence of names, Stoica being one of the most common names of fiddlers mentioned in official documents.

The Names with which the Fiddlers Appear in Documents

In the Romanian language this category of musicians assigns names after the musician's primary instrument, namely the lute; hence the name of the profession, the player on lute, *lăutar* in Romanian. But in English, the term used to designate the Gypsy musicians is 'fiddler', a word that translates into Romanian as 'player on a *skripka* or violin', so in this paper, every time the terms 'fiddle' or 'fiddler' are used it refers to the players of the lute and to the instrument itself that is called 'lute'.

A very important issue that needs to be mentioned here is the terminology used in

Romanian to name these musicians. The category of “fiddlers” (or lute players) can be found in sources under multiple names such as: *balaur* (dragon), *carcalete* (sweetened wine), *muzicuș* (musician), *violar* (violinist), *zicaș* (sayinger) and others¹ (Ghenea, 1965: 95). When the fiddlers were mentioned in official documents issued by the Princely Chancellery, as well as in documents with legal value that were concluded between different persons, their names were always connected to the instrument they played. Thus, when the phrase “Gypsy fiddler” is encountered in this category of source, we must bear in mind that the phrase refers primarily to the instrument that the musician played, but also to his ethnicity. Later on the phrase was used to designate the entire category of these musicians, regardless of the instrument they played. It is a plausible explanation because the Chancellery documents kept a strict record of these musicians in order to capitalize on them and prevent confusions arising that might enable some of them to avoid their respective responsibilities. It is also important to add that the names of Gypsies in general and of the Gypsy fiddlers in particular may often be duplicated, so that a strict distinction depending on their occupation seems logical. Regarding this terminological aspect, C. Bobulescu (1940: 70) states: “our ancestors under the name of the lute – which remained common to fiddlers as well as to those who played wind instruments – understood also all those instruments which by plucking the strings with their fingers, gave chords, including the cimbalum, the *kobza* and the cittern (*cetera*)”.

In much the same sense, Viorel Cosma states: “the term *fiddler* (*author’s emphasis*) has had different meanings over the centuries. Derived from the word *lute* (*lăută* in the Romanian language), the term became entrenched with the penetration of the first Western influences in our country. [...] Much older than the term *lute* is one that expresses the same thing and seems to come from the Russian *skripka*. Therefore, in the terminology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both terms coexist: fiddler (*lăutar*) and violinist (*scripcar*). [...] At first, ‘fiddler’ meant any musician who played a stringed instrument. In the 18th century, its meaning expanded. All the musicians of a *taraf* (band) – regardless of the instrument practiced – began to bear the name *fiddlers*” (Cosma, 1970: 5-7). However, it should be emphasized that the first documentary record of fiddlers dates back to the first mention of the *skripka* in these territories. Therefore, I

¹ All these terms from the Romanian language are old terms that are very little used today, some of them being used in a pejorative sense.

believe that the *skripka*, in the broad sense of the term, was a musical instrument used by the original people from whom the practice was later taken over by Gypsy musicians. Moreover, Titus Cerne states in the *Romanian Encyclopedia* the following: “fiddler, [was] a name given of course at the beginning to the instrumentalists who accompanied travelling singers with the lute. The Turkish lute has long since disappeared from the Romanian Principalities, replaced by the Russian *kobza*; the name of fiddler still persisted, generalizing its meaning and applying to all itinerant musicians, either singers or instrumentalists with *kobza*, *skripka*, panpipes or any other instrument, always executing music without notation, relying on memory and listening. Thus, in this word we find concentrated all the professional music of our countries in the past centuries” (Cerne, 1904: 65). We can observe that the Gypsy musicians were generically called fiddlers (*lăutari*), although not all of them played the lute, and the differences that appeared in documentation were intended to differentiate the musicians from one another. An explanation for the differences between the official documents and the other categories of source is that the Gypsies are named in the documents strictly according to the instrument they played in order to have a stricter record of them, since they are mentioned, in most cases, in various categories of transactions. Being highly valued by their owners, the fiddlers had to be strictly supervised on an individual level, so as to not lose track of them.

In addition to the names already mentioned, there are other names used for fiddlers, depending on the instruments they played. From a document issued on 29 October 1634-1635 we find that Ionașco Tăbîrță exchanged some Gypsies with the abbot of Probota Monastery and that among those exchanged was *Ștefan țigan cimpoiaș* (‘Ștefan the Gypsy bagpiper’) (Cihodaru et al., 1974: 309). Another document is the one issued by Vasile Lupu on 14 January 1641, which registers to the wife and successor of the *vornic* Bucium the properties and Gypsy dwellings they had from Ieremia Movilă; included among the Gypsies is also Stoica the fiddler (Caproșu, 2003: 5). In 1774, Field Marshal P. A. Rumiantsev asked the ruler of Wallachia for two brothers named Ivăniță, who were both *kobzars*, but also for Stancu, a whistle player, to be taken to the court of Catherine II of Russia (Vianu, 1956: 242-243). The mention of fiddlers and *kobzars* in two distinct categories can also be seen in the *Census Register*² (Giurescu, 1962: 462, 464, 465-466);

²This document represents a census of the population of the city of Iași for the year 1808.

shortly after the episode of 1774 we have a new mention of kobzars in domestic official documents. Thus, Alexandru Ipsilanti issued a document on 13 December 1777, in which *Ivașco* the *kobza* player (Cronț et al., 1973: 496) was mentioned in the context of a trial concerning the right of dominion over some Gypsies, noting here that there were also Gypsies playing the *kobza*.

Statistical documents are other sources where there is a clear delimitation of the fiddlers according to the instrument they played. In the *Chart of the burg of Iași and the slums, 5 June 1774, from the population census of Moldavia from 1774* (Caproșu and Ungureanu, 1997a: 95, 106, 109, 122), we find the mention by name and occupation (the instruments they played: *skripka*, *kobza*, panpipes and sometimes lute) of many Gypsy musicians, and also name of the boyar to whom they belonged. It is notable that these musicians were not called fiddlers, but each one of them named according to the instrument he specialized in.

The same situation is to be found in the *Register of souls and families from the bottom of the social hierarchy of Iași burg, 5 July 1808* (Caproșu and Ungureanu, 1997b: 179, 269-274, 277), which constitutes further proof that these Gypsy musicians were named and identified in official documents by the instrument they played. An interesting aspect here is that these people were considered as part of the lower social hierarchy; hence we can safely conclude that they did not have a very good material situation.

The Repertoire

A very concise definition of fiddlers comes from Octavian Lazăr Cosma (1973: 96-97), who states that “fiddlers are great interpreters; and also creators. They show an enormous receptivity to everything new. They know how to comply with immediate requirements, so that they do not confine themselves to endless clichés, but adopt a flexible attitude. Despite imitating others, they are still consistent carriers of the tradition they follow, meaning that they adopt innovations only on the condition that these can be assimilated by the ancient tradition”.

With the growing tendency to migrate to the cities, where there were more possibilities for a better life, a gradual musical separation began, distinguishing ‘folk music’ from a new developing genre with different origins. This musical transition was made by

fiddlers, due to their ability to appropriate new sounds and enrich the repertoire, quickly integrating the new influences. In this connection, O.L. Cosma (1974: 28) states: “the fiddler excels in his ability to adopt the new, which has led to the (often covert) appropriation of various influences from the musical environment of the cities [...]. Through its interchange of divergent social layers, the city facilitates a strong and continuous syncretic culture based on circulating musical streams derived from, or mixed with, national traditions, and professionalizing in various ways the music brought in from the villages. Thus, urban music is based on a harmonious synthesis made from a contact between Romanian village music and Oriental as well as European music [...]. Through their talent and love for music, their devotion to the career of instrumentalist, albeit often shared with other occupations, the Gypsies identified themselves so much with the music of the natives that their takeover was total. Along with the Romanian folk musicians, instrumentalists and singers, Gypsy musicians contributed to the preservation of a folklore heritage, sometimes intervening in the profile of rhythmic or melodic characteristics drawn from traditional music”.

The importance of this category of musician is also emphasized by earlier authors, some of them contemporary with the ‘golden age’ of this music, the second part of the 18th century, such as Dionisie Fotino, who stated: “especially they [fiddlers] are very good at music and play the violin, *kobza* and *muskal* (panpipes, *author’s emphasis*); in these they surpass any other nation, including even the Persians [...]. They also sing excellently and without having any systematic teaching they also compose very beautiful songs that European musicians admire” (Fotino, 2008: 639).

Another very suggestive account of the importance of fiddlers was given by Daniel Philipide, who remarked that “the fiddlers in Wallachia and Moldavia are exclusively the Gypsies’. Very skilful in playing string instruments and flutes, it is they alone who delight people at feasts, weddings and parties, for ‘Gypsy is somewhat synonymous with musician’. And in Constantinople ‘the best *skripka* players are the Gypsies from Romania” (Bănescu, 1923: 164). Another important aspect of this account is that only the Gypsies were considered fiddlers, and not the Turks who performed Serai music, nor indeed performers from other traditions.

The fiddlers played an important role in preserving elements of Turkish music within

Romanian music (Garfias, 1981: 98). Gheorghe Ciobanu states that “fiddlers have always performed what was fashionable, what was asked of them” (Ciobanu, 1974a: 96), while George Potra says that Gypsies are intuitive/instinctive musicians (Potra, 2001: 36, 121).

Regarding the repertoire of fiddle music and the transformations at its heart, we find that it depended on the way of life of the Gypsies, which was quite volatile due to their separation into small groups, their economic dependence on the surrounding population, and the specificity of each region. Research on fiddle music has found that the basis of their repertoire has consisted of the songs of local people. By comparing the songs of fiddlers collected from a large group of Gypsies from the Danube plain with those from the Banat and Transylvania regions, it has been possible to show a number of characteristics common to Romanian folk songs, with the lyrics having the same meter, the same syllables of support or the same syllables of ‘completion’: *măi, mă, mo*. From a stylistic point of view, these characteristics are similar to those of folk music. It has also been established that there is no single special Gypsy musical territory, for their repertoire is composed of songs characteristic of the respective areas they inhabit, with major differences separating the songs of fiddlers from Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria or Russia. The Gypsy fiddlers have adapted to the way of life of the people with whom they lived, adopting their language, dress, customs and musical repertoire (Ciobanu, 1974a: 91). The same idea is advanced by Ion Chelcea, who stated that the Gypsies from Wallachia, Dobruja and Moldavia sing differently from those in Transylvania, who also differ in happily playing instrumental music on demand without using their voices like the others, intent on reaching deeper into the listener’s heart (Chelcea, 1944: 112). In this sense, we can see that the Transylvanian fiddlers focused on instrumental music due to the European rural environment they have embraced, where the focus was on instrumental and not vocal music, in contrast with Oriental tendencies. As they depended on their music for a living, Transylvanian fiddlers adopted this specificity because instrumental music was more sought after and, implicitly, better paid. Another possible cause may have been the wilful avoidance of vocal singing in order not to engage (through the lyrics of the songs) with the cultural disputes that characterized Transylvanian society, especially in the 19th century, since this could have risked limiting their audience (Zăloagă, 2015: 362-363).

Nicolae Filimon identifies two very important directions followed by fiddle music as it

evolved. The first refers to the influence of church music, which was a source of inspiration not least because influences from pastoral folklore and nature did not provide enough variety to the repertoire. It is worth mentioning that the fiddlers were inspired by religious folklore such as carols and sacred songs rather than by the liturgical repertoire. The second direction appears with the penetration of Ottoman music into the Romanian Principalities, providing a good source of inspiration for fiddlers. Thus, according to the same author, the music became more complex, changed its character and was even distorted or damaged (Filimon, 1978: 265-266; Bilciurescu, 1898: 982-983). An example suggesting that the popularity of Ottoman classical music, deeply rooted in the collective consciousness, reached saturation point, is a remark by the priest Isaia Teodorescu (*Popa Duhu*), who scolded his faithful in one of the sermons, reprimanding them for the hasty way they cross themselves: “it is as if we sing to the *kobza* in Iași or to the *tanbûr* in Constantinople, from where such a custom came to us” (Bobulescu, 1940: 30).

Ottoman rule left its mark on much of the folklore of the South-East European peoples, and, through an interpenetration with indigenous cultural elements, a common layer was formed of Turkish melodies that circulated among the Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbians and Greeks. Setting aside the circulation of some songs, the greatest influence was at the level of the modal (or *makam*) system, and especially the chromatic modes. In this sense, elements of Oriental music are most often found in the music of fiddlers, who took over most of these influences. They created a new category of repertoire, the so-called ‘Romanian folk song’ (*doine*³) or rather ‘songs of the world’, in which they adapted Romanian folk lyrics to Oriental modes (*makams*), creating strong similarities with the *peşrevs* and *taksıms* belonging to Oriental music (Ciobanu, 1974b: 57-58).

In our opinion, the ‘song of the world’ performed by fiddlers represents probably most closely the interpenetration of Romanian folk music and Oriental music. This musical genre is a historical phenomenon because it appeared under specific conditions and at a specific stage of social development. It evolved in parallel with the flourishing of cities and became a point of connection, but also a transition between different environments or from one type of thinking to another (Papadima, 2009: 31). The themes of these songs

³ It is a specific name given to a certain vocal Romanian musical genre, the correspondent of Turkish *beste*.

are the anacreontic praise of wine, the lamentations of unhappy love, the glorification of the beloved one and the dissatisfaction with her indifference. The circulation of these songs was through fiddlers and amateur singers, but also through manuscripts, and their period of maximum popularity was during the first decades of the 19th century (Papadima, 2009: 36-37). An important part of the lyrics of these songs belonged to the Văcărești poets (Boldea, 2009: 37-45) or to Costachi Conachi (Papadima, 2009: 41, *passim*), who represented the first generation of Romanian poets in the true meaning of the word.

Referring to the mixture of musical influences and styles that is characteristic of the art of fiddlers, but also indicates their technical abilities, Sulzer states that they “are remarkable in Turkish, Greek, Wallachian and Hungarian-style music; their skill in improvising a text on any song they play, no matter how ludicrous and clumsy these lyrics and their content may seem sometimes amazes everyone” (Zinveliu, 1995: 92). From another source we discover that when the peasants dance, the dance music is sung by fiddlers and most of the time it is copied from Turkish traditions (Holban et al., 1997: 68). The Gypsies mastered very well the technique of improvisation, singing and reciting spontaneously, mostly verses of a low intellectual level, and often quite obscene. The repertoire of the fiddlers generally included the folklore of traditions, instrumental pieces, ballads (*balade*), doinas (*doine*), party songs, lyrical songs and dancing songs (Brâncuși, 1969: 86). The specialization of the Gypsies in secular music seems to be due to the fact that, during the Middle Ages, the Church forbade the practice of non-religious music because it was seen as a tool of the devil; as the Gypsies were pagans, they did not fall under these canons and could therefore specialize in this music (Ghircoiașiu, 1963: 95). In fact, they could not easily pursue church music as they did not have contact with it, for such music was not made widely popular, and was heard in most cases within the church.

The Gypsies learned to play from one another using stringed or wind instruments, dressed in German or Hungarian clothes (those from Transylvania), and they performed in many different places to earn a living (Holban et al., 2000: 385). In general, the music of fiddlers consisted of dance music of different genres and for diverse occasions. When they performed this music, the Gypsies stood in the middle of the circle of dancers and “performed with strings and voices all kinds of lively songs, and they danced as usual, so

that the earth shook” (Holban et al., 1983: 360). The fiddle bands (*tarafuri*) initially consisted of three instruments: violin, panpipes and *kobza* (lute); later the cimbalum was included. Their music included a large number of dance pieces, such as *hora*, *sârba*, *țitura*⁴ with vocal music added later, including genres such as the *doina* (Garfias, 1981: 101).

Some foreign travellers did not have much appreciation for this music; “their music [the Moldavians] is as monotonous as the dance. The Gypsies are the ones who are meant to enchant their ears. The German violin and guitar, like the panpipe, with eight whistles in which one blows constantly moving them across the lips, are the musical instruments of this country. The profession of fiddler and actor is considered degrading in Moldavia and nothing could reproduce the astonishment shown by the locals when they saw Russian officers giving concerts or performing a tragic play themselves” (Holban et al., 2001: 938-939). Elsewhere it is said that “the music of the Gypsies has ruined our ears”; this is the impression left on a foreigner present in Bucharest who goes to visit the public baths of the city (Holban et al., 2000: 436).

Although the fiddlers took over the local music, according to Sulzer, there was also a ‘gypsy’ dance, known as the “Hungarian dance”, which no longer exists in the two extra-Carpathian countries, but only in Transylvania and Hungary (Zinveliu, 1995: 126). This is probably due to the influence of fiddle music that penetrated from the Romanian Principalities through the Gypsy musicians that crossed the mountains towards Transylvania and from there to Hungary, where this music is much developed and has influenced Hungarian folklore. The influence of Oriental music that crystallized in some Hungarian songs also penetrated Hungary through the Gypsies; either they travelled longer distances to practise their art or their specific musical tradition gradually spread orally until it reaching that region (Györy, 1902: 10-12). We note in this case the importance of the fiddlers in the process of cultural and musical development. If through the medium of Moldavia and Wallachia, Oriental musical influences penetrated Hungary, then through the medium of Transylvanian fiddlers, Western music arrived in the two extra-Carpathian countries.

Returning to dances, according to Mihail Kogălniceanu, the most famous dance of the

⁴ These are the names of specific Romanian dances.

Gypsies is called the *tanana*. It consists of jumps and lascivious gestures made with the arms and legs, as well as hitting of the buttocks with the heel (Kogălniceanu, 1946: 581). These dances are also common in the Transylvanian territory, and are a mark of the 'culture' of the Gypsies. They were performed by women and were defined as improper and immoral (Zăloagă, 2015: 535-536). The same name *tanana* is also used for the dance of the trained bears with which the bear trainers walked through villages and burgs entertaining the world to make a profit (Potra, 1936: 302). The whole repertoire of the Gypsy musicians was initially learned by heart, in the same manner as Ottoman music. Then, at the end of the Renaissance, the music of Romanian fiddlers was written down using the neumatic notation of Byzantine music (Cosma, 1977: 39)⁵. In modern times Western staff notation is used to notate this music.

Instruments

According to official documents the most frequently mentioned instruments used by fiddlers were the lute, the *kobza* and the *skripka* (violin). In addition to them, there are other instruments less often referenced, such as the bagpipe, drums of various shapes, whistles etc. Also from various narrative sources we find that the panpipe was one of the component instruments as well. The reason it does not appear in official documents until later, during the second half of the 18th century (Caproșu and Ungureanu, 1997b: 269-271), is not clear. Various accounts of panpipes and their use were given by Ion Neculce, who mentions it on various occasions in the context of the reign of Gregory II Ghica (Neculce, 1982: 695, 725), but also by Franz Joseph Sulzer and Dionisie Fotino. William Wilkinson also states that the instruments used by fiddlers were the violin, the panpipe and a country-specific guitar or lute species (Wilkinson, 1821: 122-123), namely the *kobza*. It should also be mentioned here that all the musicologists referenced in this chapter say that the panpipe was an instrument of the *taraf* of fiddlers, without necessarily providing documentary support for their statements. Most likely, the fiddlers started to use panpipes later than the other instruments, probably at the beginning of the 18th century, as the Oriental influence grew in the Romanian Principalities.

Other instruments said to have been used by fiddlers are the daire (a species of drums), the castanets (*geamparale*) and the *kobza* (Șaineanu, 1900a: CXVIII). According to a

⁵ This information however cannot be verified from other sources.

foreign traveller, the musical instruments of the fiddlers were rudimentary: ordinary drums, violins, whistles. The violin was made of half a pumpkin, covered with parchment paper, the drum was an ordinary sieve, also covered with parchment paper, and the whistles were made of wood (Holban et al., 1997: 68). As mentioned before, there were probably some cases in which the fiddlers also used drums, castanets or various whistles. However, the *taraf* of the fiddlers comprised three members and the main instruments they used were the *skripka* (violin), the lute (*kobza*) and the panpipe (Şaineanu, 1900a: CXVIII).

The lute was the most important musical instrument for the Arabs living on the wide territories separating the Atlantic Ocean and Persia, which later, in the pre-modern period, reached Iran, Central Asia and Muslim India. It was also a very important musical instrument for Europeans, being introduced before the 10th century by the Arabs and reaching its culmination in the Renaissance period when whole compositions were written for the lute. The Arabic term *'ūd* has become in European languages: *alaude*, *liuto*, *luth*, *lute*, *laute* (Farmer, 2000: 768). The lute is similar to another instrument used by the Persians and called *barbaṭ*. The Arabs did not differentiate between *barbaṭ* and *'ūd*, but it seems that there was a fundamental distinction. The *barbaṭ* had both the body, the resonator box, and the fingerboard built from a single piece of wood while the lute was built from two distinct parts, having thus different sonorities. Later the Persians had an instrument identical to the *barbaṭ* but with its resonant box covered with leather (Farmer, 2000: 768). Two other well-known instruments from the same family are: *pīpā*, used in China, and *ḳabūs*, about which Evliya Çelebi says it was invented by Ahmed Pasha Hersek Oglu, vizier of Sultan Mehmed II. Çelebi also describes it as a hollowed-out (wooden) instrument with three strings and Ibn Ghaybi says that it has five double strings. The *ḳabūs* was not used for a long time by the Turks and it survived under the name of *kobza* or *koboz* in Poland, Russia and the Balkans (certainly also in Romania), where it was considered a kind of lute and not a type of *barbaṭ* as it was perceived by the Turks (Farmer, 2000: 769). Most likely, the lute used in the Romanian territory did not come from the Ottoman Empire, but from the West, if we consider that the term 'German guitar' (Holban, et al., 2001: 938) refers to a larger lute used by the Germans (Ghenea, 1965: 99). This is also proven by the fresco paintings of some Romanian churches such as Pătrăuți, Arbore, Humor, Voroneț, Râșca, Probota and others; on their walls we can see

today lutes depicted during the 15th century.

With the growing Ottoman influence in Europe, the Romanian Gypsy musicians started to use the *kobza*, most likely taking it from Ukrainian musicians. At the beginning it was used simultaneously with the lute but after a while the *kobza* took its place. We must keep in mind that there are differences between these two instruments, both in terms of physical body and sound; the distinction made between them in official documents is correct and eloquent. However, lute representations in murals or illuminations are very often categorized as *kobzas*.

The *kobza* is an instrument with plucked strings integrated within the lute family, and has a pear-shaped form. It has a wide and short fingerboard, with a pegbox tilted towards the back. The Romanian version of the instrument is built out of sycamore or walnut wood and has various ornamentations and small perforations with an acoustic role. It has eight to twelve strings of gut and metal, grouped in twos or threes and attached by nails directly to the face of the instrument. Today in Romania there are several types of *kobza*, with different sonorities: soprano *kobza*, alto, tenor and bass, catalogued by analogy with the human voice (Bărbuceanu, 2014: 94-95; Demian, 1968: 322). An older definition of the *kobza* shows that it had ten strings, nine of which were made of cat gut and one of silk, covered with a thin layer of wire. A version of this *kobza*, but with eight strings, corresponds to an old Russian folk instrument, also used by the Poles who called it a *kobza* (Engel, 1874: 219).

About the *kobza*, N. Filimon notes: “it has ten strings, some of which are made of wire and others out of lamb gut. Four of these are the principal strings and are called Rast, Saba, Neva and again Rast, while the others are secondary and are designed only to give a more vigorous resonance to the tone of the principal ones. On this instrument, which is really only an altered guitar, the most complicated melodies can be performed, but the fiddlers use it to accompany the melody” (Filimon, 1978: 270).

Lazăr Şaineanu defines the *kobza* as “a kind of short guitar with neck and three strings (pear-shaped, *author’s emphasis*) that makes some melancholic sounds” (Şaineanu, 1900b: 140). It is also stated here that the term *kopuz* or *kobuz* (the Tatar version) defines a kind of pumpkin-shaped, single-string guitar. In Croatian, *kopuz* translates to ‘lute’, while the Hungarian *kohoz* means ‘bass violin’. *Kobuz*, *kobiza* and *kobza* are all terms used

by Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs and Poles (Şaineanu, 1900b: 140). There is no doubt that the Romanians acquired this same instrument either directly or through Slavic peoples who took it from the Ottomans or the Tatars.

The violin, in its current form, dates from the middle of the 16th century, and was first created in Italy. However, the origin of the instrument is very old, its first form being the *revaston* used in Asia and considered to be the first instrument with strings and a bow. It evolved over time in the form of various other instruments such as the *redab* in the Persian and Arab areas or later, the *keman* (Paşcanu, 1980: 13-14), but also the *vielle* and its variants used mainly in the West and it was from these latter that the first violins started to develop (Sachs, 1940: 274-278). From this general area, the instrument also penetrated the Romanian Principalities, most probably by way of the Hungarians and then the Transylvanians, because the term used in Romania is *highidea*, which relates to *hegedű* in Hungarian, translated as ‘violin’ (Falvy, 1987: 104; de Paula Bizonfy, 1886: 201). The first mention of this instrument using the term *highidiş* dates back to 1568 with a reference to Vişan *highidişul* (Ionaşcu et al., 1951b: 257-258). However, if both the name *Heghetiş* (Cihodaru et al., 1974a: 159) meaning ‘owner of a land’ is mentioned in a document dating from 1432-1433 and the toponym *Heghetişani* (Costăchescu, 1933: 72) appears in a document from 1468, implying that the two terms are part of the same semantic field, this means that the term and, by default, its significance date from before the 15th century.

The first modern violin was made in Brescia by Gasparo da Salo (1542-1609) and, in the same period Gio Paolo Maggnini finalized the instrument (Paşcanu, 1980: 14). This musical instrument began appear in the Romanian Principalities in the 17th century, being known under various and sometimes inaccurate names: ‘cittern’, ‘gusla’, ‘lute’, ‘*skripka*’ or ‘*dibla*’ (Bobulescu, 1922: 12-13). However, evidence of the *skripka* dates from much earlier than this period, which leads us to believe that variants of the violin were already known to Romanians. The first exact mention of a violin and not a *skripka* player in the two Romanian Principalities is that of Stan *viorarul* (the violinist), which appears in a Wallachian document from 1634 (Mioc et al., 1974: 382-385). At the same time, in Moldavia Niccoló Barsi states that the people of the country play their dance music on violins, bagpipes, drums and a lute with three strings (Holban et al., 1973: 76-77). According to another foreign traveller, the first variants of the violin were made “of a stick

with three strings and a dreadful board”, with the performers simultaneously playing that violin, singing and dancing (Holban et al., 1983: 359). The violin, with the German guitar and the panpipe, were the musical instruments of the country according to the 1790 testimony of another foreign traveller (Holban et al., 2001: 938-939).

The popularity of this instrument is also indicated by a number of patronyms. In a document of property issued by Stephen the Great in 1468, the boyar Pavel *Scripcă* (*skripka*) is mentioned (Costăchescu, 1933: 72). The same name appears in several other documents. We mention here only a few: two issued by the ruler Peter Rareș, one in 1531 in Vaslui, and the other in 1532 in Hârlău, where Peter Rareș is mentioned as a witness, along with some boyars, including boyar *Scripcă* (Székely and Gorovei, 1997: 509, 512); a third issued by Jeremiah Movilă on October 25, 1593, where Theodor Movilă, the brother of the ruler and the great-grandson of ‘Scripca’, is mentioned (Iorga, 1904: 414). The last document issued on February 20, 1709, mentions Alexei *Vioară* (violin) as a witness of a transaction (Sava, 1944: 163).

The panpipe (*nai*) is a musical instrument also known as *muskal*, ‘whistle’ or ‘the flute of Pan’. This is a wooden wind instrument, with a terminal abutment consisting of a number of wooden tubes of unequal lengths made of bamboo, cane, elder tree or beech (Bărbuceanu, 2014: 261). The oldest European name of the instrument is ‘Pan’s flute’ (Holban et al., 2001: 1208), but the name used most frequently in the Eastern part of Europe and in Asia is the Persian variant *nai*, after the name of the reed from which it was originally made (Babii, 2012: 89; Sinclair, 1908: 211-213), just as the *ney*. The panpipe is a very old musical instrument, with representations found in different ancient populations from the Middle East area (Can, 2004: 194-195; Sinclair, 1908: 212-213). It was also used by the Ottomans under the name of *miskal* in their classical (*Sanat*) music, especially associated with the Harem (Can, 2004: 194).

This instrument is mentioned in various chronicles or testimonies of foreign travellers, but it appears quite late in the official documents we have researched. It is believed that the panpipe started being used by fiddlers around the second half of the 18th century, being taken from the local peasants or, more likely, from the Balkan peoples. A certain influence has come through the Turks who also used this instrument. We have seen that it was the case with numerous other musical instruments used by the Romanians.

However, a terminological confusion continues between *miskal*, which is the Turkish panpipe, and *muskal*, the panpipe used by the Romanians.

Conclusions

The fiddlers and their music are the main subject of one of the most beautiful episodes in the musical field of medieval, modern and even contemporary times. Although of modest resources and status, they have imposed themselves over time through their art, gaining the sympathy of all social classes and even building a bridge between them. The fiddlers are the ones who massively contributed to the preservation of our folk repertoire and to the development of the Romanian musical specificity. They absorbed and then transformed those external Oriental and Western musical influences they found on the territory of the Romanian Principalities or in the surrounding areas. They created fiddle music that was defining for our musical history, which illustrates the eclectic combination of several different elements.

As announced at the beginning of this study, we were able to find out who these Gypsies were, how they arrived in the Romanian Principalities and what was their musical role. In order to highlight all these aspects, already existing historiography was used to form the main framework for the research. It was particularly interesting to use a category of sources that had not been previously explored by other researchers. The testimonies of foreign travellers to the Romanian Principalities were of particular interest, namely those records of various people who passed through this geographical area and wrote about what they saw. More than that, the information contained in the documents issued by the ruler's Chancellery, by the nobles and the monasteries, and even those attesting to different interactions between simple people (*hrisoave*, *zapise*, *urice* and others) were also used. Although this category of documents does not directly relate to fiddlers, the documents still contain valuable information for this subject and their careful research uncovers new and important aspects that offer a better understanding of the subject.

It was also important to follow the terminology related to this musical category, both in terms of the various names under which the fiddlers can be found in the sources that were consulted, as well as how the instruments they played were described. Thus, in the first documents dating from the 16th century they are called *lăutari*, namely lute players, but starting with the 17th century until the 18th century, the names became more and

more varied due to the growing importance of this category of musicians that more and more wanted to perform their art. This interest can also be observed in the frequency with which they are mentioned in different sources and especially in the diversification of their name; from the 17th century, names such as: *scripcar*, *cobzar*, *violar*, *fluierar*, *cimpoiaș*⁶ and others start to appear with the purpose of distinguishing the fiddlers as a whole by the instrument they played.

Following these aspects, some even more important ones were discovered, such as the relationship between the fiddler's name and the instrument he played. This differentiation was very strict in the official documents precisely because the Gypsy fiddlers were slaves and brought profit to their masters through their performances. Thus, their strict identification helped to better keep them under observation, especially since many names would coincide, creating the possibility for confusion and opportunities to evade certain responsibilities. This particular aspect emerges only from official documents; in all other categories of sources the generic term 'fiddler' includes all of them, without making any difference according to the instrument they played.

Closely related to this previous question is the attempt in this study to clarify the musical instruments the fiddlers used, explaining each one of them and highlighting something of their local as well as their universal 'history'.

This first part of the research on this category of musicians aimed to be firstly a clarification of the subject in a well-structured argument. Secondly, this study focused on enriching already existing information by adding and critically analysing previously unknown or less well-known facts about the fiddlers that have a very important role in the musical history of Romania and also of other countries where there was a similar 'phenomenon' and where there may even have been connections with Romanian music. This research has attempted to offer a more objective perspective, trying to get as close as possible to the reality of the timeframe between the 16th and the 18th centuries.

⁶ All these terms represent the names found in documents for the same musical category, the fiddlers.

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