

Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th–19th Centuries

Edited by

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“Curls and Forelocks”: Romanian Women’s Emancipation in Consumption and Fashion, 1780–1850

Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu

The history of the Romanian principalities in the 18th and early 19th centuries is fascinating in respect to the relationship between consumption, luxury, and the circulation of ideas. Under Ottoman rule, the regime in the Romanian principalities restricted travel to the rest of Europe. The establishment of the Phanariot regime, with rulers directly appointed by the sultan and selected from among the Greek elite of Phanar, noticeably limited access to Vienna, Paris, Geneva and even St. Petersburg for a certain part of the population. After 1711/1716, the boyars avoided travelling to that part of Europe for fear that they would be seen as traitors and that they and their families would incur the sultan’s wrath.

Whereas in 1719 a boyar could still hope that his sons might gain an education by attending the schools of Vienna and, above all, by learning the foreign languages that were part of assimilating a culture of governance, by the mid-18th century, fear of Ottoman reprisals ruled out foreign travel.¹ When prince Constantin Mavrocordat (1735–1741) sent fourteen young boyars to be educated in Venice, he was forced to recall them at the end of their third year. News of this “educative escapade” had reached the sultan’s ears, albeit in a somewhat truncated form: it was said that the prince had made use of the young men in order to send his fortune to Venice. It was an act that was to result in his deposition.² After this experience, the boyars ceased to venture any farther than Brașov or Sibiu, but even then, only to sit out the period of military occupation in exile.

1 In his will, dated 15 January 1719, Matei Crețulescu recounts the journey he made to Vienna, where he hoped to send his children to study. The will included the instruction that his two sons, Matei and Iordache, be “constrained” to learn foreign languages, chiefly Latin and Italian. Nicolae Iorga, *Documente privitoare la familia Cantacuzino* [Documents regarding the Cantacuzino Family] (Bucharest: 1902).

2 Mihai banul Cantacuzino, *Genealogia Cantacuzinilor* [Cantacuzino Genealogy], ed. Nicolae Iorga, (Bucharest: 1902), 120.

In such circumstances, the question naturally arises: how did they gain access to information? How did they gain access to luxuries and consumer goods? The boyars more often than not headed to Constantinople. They did not travel there often or for pleasure, but only on business, in the retinues of the various deposed rulers returning to Istanbul to await better times or on special missions, as envoys of the incumbent ruler. Women were even more disadvantaged in this respect: they could travel only in their husbands' retinues, accompanying them to Constantinople or in exile to Braşov or Sibiu. In this situation, the princely court became the model to be imitated in regard to both fashion and the consumption of luxury products. Between the princely court and the boyar class, a highly active mercantile class inserted itself, purveying luxury products, ideas, news, and fashions.³ After the Peace of Küçük Kaynarca and given increasing Russian influence in the region,⁴ the situation changed for the Romanian principalities, too. But even if they were able to enjoy freedom of movement, at least travelling to Russia, which was now the protector of all the Orthodox in the Balkans, the boyars were still fearful and it was not until the long Russian occupation of 1806–12 that they plucked up the courage to travel to Vienna, Paris, and Berlin.

Fashion and Epistolary Advice

If we read the accounts of foreign travellers to the Romanian principalities, we discover that the women followed certain norms of beauty, specific to a certain period of time. We find similar accounts in albums containing pictures of costumes in fashion in the various regions of the Ottoman Empire. To make themselves "beautiful" according to the standards of the time, women accessed information, as well as consumer products. In this respect, we shall draw upon correspondence written by women and their requests for luxury and consumer products. Sometimes, such letters merely request information about a certain style, a certain colour, or certain fabrics currently fashionable. Epistolary consultation about fashions and novelties in such fields was a reality encountered throughout the period. The Hagi Popp Company in Sibiu is a primary source

3 For information on the merchant class and its role in the development of luxury consumption in the period prior to our research, see Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt. Oriental Trade in Sixteenth-Century Transylvania* (Böhlau: 2007); Gheorghe Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Bucharest: 2007).

4 See: Barbara Jelavich, *Russia and the Formation of the Romanian National State* (Cambridge: 1984), 20.

for the study of the role played by correspondence in the distribution of luxury products and the dissemination of information in particular. Analysis of such correspondence leads us to the conclusion that the *gaze* was very important in every type of request. Romanian historiography has spoken widely about the hospitality of the Romanian boyars, which sometimes becomes a kind of national trait, but without entering into any interpretative detail. The purpose of this hospitality could not have been more practical: the gathering of information. Every foreigner who crossed the threshold of a house brought something new: a style of clothing, information about music and dances, or about wars and plagues, details of recipes, manners, and norms of behaviour. The foreigner was a spectacle in himself, a performance provided to a social category that was little-travelled and little-involved in the world of information. These were the “goods” that the Romanian boyars “purchased” by providing lavish hospitality. This was the meaning of boyar hospitality, offered to those who could provide, in return, information and models. In fact, Alex Drace-Francis captures very well this manner in which the East and the West get to know each other and exchange information, later to be found in print filtered through the specific literary tropes of travel literature.⁵

At the beginning of the 19th century, the correspondence between Catinca Știrbei and the company of Hagi Popp in Sibiu provides details about the role of women in keeping up consumption of luxuries. Both Catinca Știrbei and her husband, Barbu Știrbei, were part of the local Oltenian elite. With estates and manor houses in Craiova, the couple maintained an assiduous correspondence with the firm of Hagi Popp. The couple’s letters reveal preoccupations and interests that differed according to gender: whereas Barbu Știrbei was interested in newspapers, carriages, wines, lead shot, gunpowder and information about the political situation in Europe, Catinca Știrbei requested flower seeds, cosmetics, textiles, lace, “fine tea,” jewellery (pearls), medicaments, plates, dogs, silk stockings, white silk gloves and “shoes without spangles and with black or white leather or satin trim.” The correspondence quite obviously relates to models that had already been seen and recorded, and had been described as perceived. As we will show later, a dispute about a wig reflects the difficulty of understanding and imitating a model. Maxine Berg and Jan de Vries also talk about “the impacts of desires and wants for new commodities”,⁶ to be found

5 Alex Drace-Francis, *The Traditions of Invention: Romanian Ethnic and Social Stereotypes in Historical Context* (Leiden: 2013), 63–158.

6 Maxine Berg, “New Commodities, Luxuries and their Consumers in Eighteenth-Century England”, in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650–1850* (Manchester: 1999), 65 and Jan de Vries, “Between Purchasing Power

among women in particular. As such, it is not as much a case of imitating a model as the pleasure of including it among one's personal possessions. To return to the case of Catinca Știrbei, by experimenting with and trying out new products, such as "silk stockings", or by tasting "fine teas", she altered her own behaviour, gradually introducing new products into her everyday consumption.

During the 18th century, Romanian society was highly dependent on the oriental market for luxury goods. If we look at wills, dowry lists, and postmortem inventories, we find specifically oriental goods.⁷ Their inclusion is highlighted through the adoption of the terminology specific to them, with fabrics and cloths being listed by their oriental names, coffee and its paraphernalia preserving their Turkish names, jewellery and furs being given by their Turkish or Greek names, and tobacco being consumed in the Ottoman manner, by means of a *çubuk* (tobacco pipe) or *nargile* (hookah), served by a special official, the *çubukçu-başı*, at the princely court and by a servant, named the *çubuçu*, in the great boyar households. Through comparative analysis of dowry lists and wills we may observe the valorisation of each item: clothes, jewellery, furs, silver cutlery, tablecloths and carpets were preserved and passed down from one generation to another.⁸ The correspondence with the commercial companies in Sibiu reveals a curiosity regarding products from western Europe, as well as a desire to get to know the fashion in that part of the world. Whereas Western Europe was "fascinated" with goods from Asia,⁹ Southeastern Europe displayed the same kind of fascination for everything that was in the "French fashion". For almost a century, trade routes had linked the large cities of Wallachia to Epirus, Edirne, Constantinople, Damascus, Aleppo and Bursa. Even "European" produce (such as Venetian and English textiles) travelled by the same network, conveyed by "Greek" merchants and assimilated with "oriental" goods.

Much has been written about consumption and consumer society, with research concentrating in particular on western society's connection to Asiatic

and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe", in John Brewer and Robert Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: 1993), 85–113.

7 For the relation between dowries and women's consumption see Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, *Im Schalwar und mit Baschlik. Kirche, Sexualität, Ehe und Scheidung in der Walachei im 18. Jarhundert* (Berlin: 2013), 45–93.

8 See Maxine Berg, "Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal of Social History*, 30 (1996), 415–434.

9 Maxine Berg, "The Merest Shadows of a Commodity: Indian Muslins for European Markets 1750–1800", in Maxine Berg (ed.), *Goods from the East, 1600–1800. Trading Eurasia* (Palgrave: 2015), 120.

commerce via the great trading companies.¹⁰ Other studies have tried to unravel the meaning of such consumption, lending it a series of interpretations. Researchers have spoken of “conspicuous consumption,” of desire, prestige and emulation.¹¹ But very little has been written about consumption in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe. Here, it is no longer possible to speak of consumption enabled by the great trading companies, but only of commercial, social, and cultural consumer goods brought by caravans of mules along the known routes.¹² The 19th century is fundamental to the creation of national states separated from the old Ottoman Empire. The Greek, Serbian, and Romanian elites also distinguish themselves by imitating the consumption habits of northern and central Europe elites, which they considered both cultural and political models.¹³ Since the economic and the cultural realms converge,¹⁴ consumption and fashion are part of the transformations Christian elites from south-eastern Europe experience.

Thanks to dowry lists and wills we can observe how oriental products were gradually replaced with items from Vienna and Paris. Damask (Turkish: *şam alacasy*), an expensive fabric from Damascus, was replaced with dyed cotton; metal glass holders (Turkish: *zarf*), crafted in filigree (Turkish: *feligén*), which had been part of the coffee-serving ritual, were discarded in favour of porcelain from Saxony; Indian shawls were abandoned for felt hats and bonnets. Cambric or *batiste* replaced *çevre*, muslin or silk embroidered with gold thread and spangles. The different names reveal different uses: *çevre* (worn in wedding rituals) had an important role in public display, while *batiste* acquired uses to do with maintaining the hygiene of the body subject to the self-constraint required by the new norms of civility. Words are an important tool in analysing this society in transition towards a new “French” model, a model declared in

10 Maxine Berg, *Goods from the East*.

11 Jan DeVries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (London: 1984); John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: 1993); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650–1850* (Manchester: 1999).

12 See also Evguenia Davidova, *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States: Through the Eyes of Three Generations of Merchants (1780s–1890s)* (Leiden: 2013); Suraiya Faroqhi and Gilles Veinstein (eds.), *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* (Paris-Louvain-Dudley: 2008); Suraiya Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire: Employment and Mobility in the Early Modern Era* (London: 2014).

13 Varikas Éléni, “Subjectivité et identité de genre. L’univers de l’éducation féminine dans la Grèce du XIX^e siècle”, *Genèses*, 6 (1991), 29–51;

14 Beverly Lemire, Giorgio Riello, “East & West: Textiles and Fashion in Early Modern Europe”, *Journal of Social History* (2008), 887.

contemporary writings, but also blending with everyday practice. Words are all the more important in that they alter and shape not only behaviour, but also an entire social and political attitude.

The correspondence surrounding the everyday cosmetic wig reveals the avatars of this cultural transfer to other values and the manner in which these values were integrated into everyday life. The Romanian word *perucă* derives from the French *peruque*. There is little information about the wearing of wigs in the period and only the magnificently coiffed wig of historian and scholar Prince Dimitrie Cantemir bears visual witness to their use. The portrait dates from 1735 and adorns his *History of the Growth and Decay of the Ottoman Empire*, a work written when the former prince had already been in Russia for twenty years.¹⁵ Later, Ottoman fashion, which demanded that men shave their heads, discarded the wigs as being pointless. Rather, the catalogues of costumes present to us boyar ladies with covered heads. This style of headgear seemed to be important and was adorned with flowers, precious stones, or ribbons.

The fashion for curls and ringlets reached Romanian society with the arrival of the Russian army and the long occupation of the Romanian principalities between 1806 and 1812. Period portraits show us boyar ladies with bared shoulders and uncovered heads, the better to display this new feature of their freedom. The portrait of Smaranda Catargi, the wife of the grand logothete,¹⁶ clearly mirrors this new phase (Fig. 5.1). The presence in the public space and the display of sartorial freedom became so obvious that it could not pass unobserved. The Church harshly criticised this visible freedom through the voice of one of its servants:

In earlier times the houses were topped with wood, now we have them covered in iron ... Then a formidable drought came. And still we did not heed. Living forever in fear, we were almost enslaved by the heathen. And then lo and behold! The females with heads uncovered and hair cut short, naked down to their waist. The men had discarded their own dress and assumed foreign garments, like unbelievers, some German, others Sfrench [sic], and in other ways, some with close-cropped hair, others with curls like women. And some of us, the more gifted, would mix with them and read their books, some in Sfrench [sic], others in German, still others in

15 Ștefan Lemny, *Les Cantemir: l'aventure européenne d'une famille princière au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 2009), 181–182.

16 In the Romanian principalities, officials' wives were referred to by their husbands' titles. As such, Smaranda Catargi was called the High Logothete, since her husband, Constantin Catargi, held that office in Moldavia at the time when her portrait was painted.

Talian [sic]. And thus entered the teachings of that God-forsaken Volter [sic], whom the pagans hold in such esteem, like a God. And we would no longer observe the days of Lent. Always meats at table. At church, we went as to a promenade, to show off our best clothes, the females their devilish ornaments; instead of entering the church with fear of God and



FIGURE 5.1 Anonymous painter (1810–1820)—Smaranda Catargi, *The Chancellor's Wife*.
COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART, BUCUREȘTI.

pray for our sins. In brief, vanity had her throne in Bucharest. We no longer believed in God, but only in fine houses, and clothes, in cheating, and rich meals, in drunkenness, and especially in open whoring.¹⁷

In the context of changing tastes and fashions, Catinca Știrbei requested a wig from the company run by Hagi Popp in Sibiu (Fig. 5.2). After its success during the reign of Louis XIV, when wigs became taller and more varied, and after the introduction of male and professional wigs in the 18th century, in the 19th century the wig returned to its original purpose: the adornment of elderly aristocratic ladies. Catinca would have been one such lady, albeit one who wished to keep up with the fashion, displaying the ringlets of freedom. To make herself understood, Catinca Știrbei describes a model she has come across, the wig worn by "Lady Marghiolița", who was probably a friend: "I do beg you (Hagi Popp—*my note*) for the sake of my favour and my love to summon the wig-maker and order him to make me a wig and, as I show you, the hair shall be selected to match the hair I sent." This is followed by remarks about the model she has seen, Lady Marghiolița's wig:

The type of hair is the same as that of the wigs of Lady Marghiolița, let it be as dark, let the shape be the same, as large and as tall, like that one, and as is the form of that one, so too should be the form of this one, for it pleased me; although it pleased me not that the hair was not sewn strongly, but rather came loose wherever you pulled it.

And to make sure that the wig would be just right, Catinca sent a lock of hair, accompanied by precise instructions. As Colin Campbell would say, Catinca Știrbei made use of a model, but, as we have seen, she did not want the copy to look too much like the original.¹⁸ The master wigmaker hired to make such a *perruque* seems not to have wholly understood what was demanded of him. The result was not to the lady's liking:

17 "Cronica meșteșugarului Ioan Dobrescu (1802–1830)" [The chronicle written down by the craftsman Ioan Dobrescu], ed. Ilie Corfus, *Studii și articole de istorie*, VIII (1966), 341. See also Angela Jianu, "Women, Fashion, and Europeanization: the Romanian Principalities, 1750–1830", Amila Buturović and Irvin C. Schick (eds.), *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History* (London: 2007), 216.

18 Colin Campbell, *Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character—action approach*, John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: 1993), 41.

It was not in accordance with what I wrote, for you have crammed a great deal of hair ... it is too great a mockery ... it is a thing that I cannot wear, since there is too much hair and it makes the head look as small as a farthing and I am not accustomed to the like of this.



FIGURE 5.2 *Anonymous painter (1810–1820)—Zinca Samurcaș, The Majordom's Wife.*
COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART, BUCUREȘTI.

There followed further instructions, sent along with the wig:

You will see what I have selected to be removed, for I have tied a thread so that you might recognise it, as it is short and bunched [...]. Let the whole wig be 50 drams, bonnet and all, since this is the fashion we are wearing.¹⁹

Zinca Samurçaş, Smaranda Catargi, and Elena Miculescu appear in paintings with curls that tumble over their shoulders or poke boldly from their bonnets, making us wonder what kind of curling tong can have styled them. The curls then in fashion did not suit the faces of every lady: both Smaranda Catargi and Elena Miculescu seem only to have thought of what was in fashion, rather than the fact that such a hairstyle made their faces look longer. Curls and black hair were in fashion and every lady was eager to look like the other "great ladies", researching various kinds of wigs and striving by means of elderberries and various formulations to achieve the appropriate colour. This happened in a period when national identity was being reconceived, a process in which women were significant figures.

The Church, Clothing Laws, and Emancipation

In the 18th century, "clothing laws", as Claire Sponsler calls them, held an important place in the administration of luxury, laws whereby the boyar class and the princes attempted to arrogate to themselves various items of clothing in their struggle for power.²⁰ Clothes and accessories were highly important in socially identifying the local boyars. Thanks to their visibility, clothes became an important element for defining social status in a society riddled with hierarchies of every kind.²¹ The colour and quality of materials, furs, and

19 In the same period, Mărioara Rosetti wrote from Iaşi to merchant Hagi Popp in Sibiu that she wished him to make her two wigs rather than the one (27 September 1810). Nicolae Iorga, *Scrisori de boieri şi negustori olteni şi munteni către casa de negoţ sibiană Hagi Popp* [Letters of boyars and merchants addressed to the Commercial House Hagi Popp] (Bucharest: 1906), 50, 28 July 1810, 10 August 1810.

20 Claire Sponsler, "Narrating the Social Order: Medieval Clothing Laws", *Clio*, 21, 3 (1992), 265–283.

21 Constanţa Vintilă-Ghiţulescu, "Constructing a New Identity: Romanian Aristocrats between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780–1866)", in Constanţa Vintilă-Ghiţulescu (ed.), *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVIth–XXth Centuries)* (Newcastle: 2011), 102–127.

carriages fall within the category of this need for visibility in the process of social recognition.²² Rivalry for power between the local boyars and the Phanariot rulers also manifested itself via the sartorial code. Even if the local boyars accepted a ruler appointed by the sultan, this did not mean they were subservient once the prince arrived in Iași or Bucharest. The members of the local elite, who were rich and rather frustrated in their political ideals, displayed a certain amount of reticence towards the Phanariot princes. Since many of them believed that they themselves were entitled to be princes in their own right, the luxury they displayed was the most convenient form of opposition. Sometimes, the financial resources of the local elite far exceeded those of the princely court. Part of a “logic of prestige”, luxury became a widespread means of displaying social identity.²³ Sometimes, the form of display defied all submission. The princes tried to impose their will on the rebellious boyars through various forms of control. One such form was the imposition of clothing laws in order to ensure the princes’ *de facto* power. We may observe intense competition in which consumption of luxury goods regulated power plays. One example from the first half of the 19th century will help us better to understand this competition for power via luxury.

On 12 January 1817, prince Ioan Caragea passed a decree whereby he attempted to legitimate his own power by arrogating certain sartorial symbols, making them specific only to the princely house. He decreed that white satin and every other “white material” attached to the *biniș* (long boyar coat with flared, split sleeves), *cūppe* (long boyar coat), or any other fur-trimmed coat were to be worn only by the members of the princely family, “their majesties the *beyzades* (prince’s sons) and the princesses”. The justification for this was that white “is a colour permitted to be worn only by princes and rulers of the people”, in order that they might be distinguished “by their subjects”.²⁴ The decree was announced throughout Bucharest to the sound of drums. A few

22 In his memoirs (1826), boyar Dinicu Golescu writes of the visual impact of clothes on a population capable of immediately recognising an acting official and showing him submission, but not respect. See: Dinicu Golescu, *Însemnare a călătoriei mele, Costandin Radovici din Golești făcută în anul 1824, 1825, 1826* [Account of my Travel, Costandin Radovici from Golesti made in the year 1824, 1824, 1826], ed. M. Iorgulescu (Bucharest: 1977), 80–81. This was the Ottoman model, as researcher Christoph K. Neumann argues when answering the question of “How to recognise a vizier if you see him on the street” Faroqhi Suraiya, Christoph K. Neumann (eds.), *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity* (Istanbul: 2005), 191–192.

23 Norbert Elias, *La société de cour* (Paris: 1985), 107.

24 Vasile A. Urechia, *Istoria românilor [History of Romanians]* (Bucharest: 1900), 10/a, 297–298.

days later, the boyars showed their defiance of the prince's commandment. One of the boyar ladies, Tarsița Filipescu, decked herself in the whitest possible turban, satin dress and *cîppe* and ostentatiously rode beneath the windows of the princely court:

But Tarsița Filipescu the Dvornik (wife of a Dvornik) showed herself to be insolent, ignorant and heedless of our princely decree, in that she dared not only to wear a white satin dress, but also, wearing such clothes, to pass by our Princely Court without the slightest shame, wrote prince Caragea on 21 January 1817. Tarsița Filipescu thereby displayed not only her contempt for the prince's decree, but also her husband's opposition to the measures the prince had taken: Grigore Filipescu was part of a boyar political faction that openly opposed the reign of prince Caragea. The prince ordered the chief of police (the Grand Aga) to punish the lady by publicly tearing up her clothes if she dared to do the same thing again.²⁵ The lady was neither apprehended nor punished, for the simple reason that she was a member of a high boyar family far more important than the rabble of the prince's camarilla.²⁶

Women's Education and Sociability

The episode is very significant to women's road towards affirmation in the public space. French fashion supported them in this process of affirmation. However, French fashion should not be reduced merely to clothes and other accessories for keeping up appearances; the importance of the educative component should also be taken into account. In this period, access to education was still a luxury in itself. The cultural construct that was women's education demanded significant material resources. The cultural baggage of an educated young woman was constructed around the humanities: the French language, music, drawing, dance etc. Each of these required a private teacher and teaching materials. Well-off families could afford to play the educational game, contributing to the development of an educational market specifically for women. The emergence of demand brought with it the specific products to satisfy that demand. The piano, for example, was regarded as a luxury item at

²⁵ Ibid., 10/b, 298.

²⁶ We encounter her again much later, in the 1840s: the lady is by now elderly, but just as haughty, hectoring the prince and the members of the Assembly, who had refused to grant her a pension. Her perseverance and countless petitions to every possible high official finally caused the boyars to submit and grant her the pension. See *Analele Parlamentare ale României* [Romanian Parliamentary Annals] (Bucharest: 1899), x₁, 134–136.

the beginning of the 19th century, one found in only a few boyar houses. The development of local production of pianos would have been out of the question if demand had been limited. But the piano was gradually to become part of the “symbolic educational capital” proper to women’s education.²⁷ And so, within just ten years, pianos could be found in the pensions that sprang up in the major cities, as well as among the luxury goods purchased by boyars high and low. This is the only explanation for the presence of pianos in city shops and for extensive advertising for them in the press.²⁸ Had they been purchased only by the elite, there would not have been page after page in the newspapers filled with advertisements for them. The purchase of a piano may be regarded as part of a long process of socialisation and sociability.²⁹

However, symbolic educative capital became an absolutely indispensable part of self-display in the new world of the literary and political salon. The importance of purchasing such “luxury products” (ability to play the piano and speak French) must be placed in the context of changes in the period and the role they were to play in everyday life. Dance and music became a vital part of an education, particularly a young woman’s. In his study of music in the period, Dan Dumitru Iacob reveals music’s journey from rejection to being a compulsory part of the elite’s values. In the pensions for young women, French and the piano “were an expression of a good education”, “an additional opportunity to gain success in high society” and ultimately “an asset when making a

27 Maxine Berg, *New Commodities*, 64.

28 See the advertisements in the newspaper *Vestitorul Românesc*, [Romanian Herald] 1843.

29 Music becomes an important part of a woman’s education. Emergence from isolation within the house demands the shaping of comportment appropriate to a presence in society. Young women are encouraged to perfect their musical abilities. Any musical instrument might contribute to personal development. From an exchange of letters, we discover important details about the place occupied by the guitar in the development of a woman’s musical abilities. On 10 April 1841, Teodor Cerchez writes to a friend: “Your madam knows neither French nor the guitar, which is what we need. If you could find one that also knows the guitar, please let me know, and how much she would be content to charge for the year, but do send her because that is the kind of teacher of which I have need.” The father had asked for a “madam” to educate his daughter, but the one who arrived in Iași at the boyar’s house was unable to speak French or play the guitar, despite his wishes, thus prompting his letter. See Constantin Bobulescu, *Lăutarii noștri. Din trecutul lor. Schiță istorică asupra muzicii noastre naționale corale cum și altor feluri de muzici* [Our Musicians. From their Past. Historical Overview of Our Choral National Music and of Other Kinds of Music] (Bucharest: 1922), 38.

successful marriage". In the end, it came to be a form of legitimation and social prestige.³⁰

The piano and French were to define social distinction and membership of a group, which now expanded to include rich merchants in the towns. With the acquisition of such luxuries (the piano, the guitar, and even French) came a transfer of knowledge that also presupposed the adaption and construction of new skills and behaviours.

The importance women gained in public life is also seen in many textbooks beginning to circulate at that time, providing rules, tips, and guidance regarding the behaviour of the lady of the house. For example, a manual published in 1854 details the new trends in education. Mistress of her salon, the woman needs to model her behaviour according to social needs: "women should always and everywhere set the tone in society, especially master their salons".³¹ The author of this manual is Ioan Penescu (1808–1868) who translates and writes manuals for the education of young women. In another manual, young women are advised with regards to the "moral and material duties of the mistress of the house".³² Because there is a growing demand for this type of literature, professor Ioan Penescu opens his own printing house (1838) where he publishes books and the magazine *Mercur*, which he founded in 1839.

Cultural Consumption: French and the Art of Conversation

Just how important were French and the art of conversation is apparent from the account books of a petty boyar from Bucharest. For almost three decades, between 1804 and 1839, Dumitrache Piersiceanu kept a strict record of his household income, investments, and expenses. The greater part of his household expenses was spent on raising and educating his children, with education differing by sex. Intended for careers in the administration, the boys were

30 Dan Dumitru Iacob, "Elita socială și viața muzicală din Iași și București în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea" [Social Elite and Musical Life in Iași and Bucharest], *Historia Urbana*, xx (2012), 99.

31 *Catehismul bunei creșteri a fetelor sau al datorită lor morale și soțiale ca fete, ca soațe și ca mame de familie* [The Catechism of Girls' Good Breeding or Their Moral and Social Duties as Girls, as Wives and as Mothers of Families] (Bucharest: 1854), 30.

32 See Ioan Penescu, *Manual de economia casnică sau Datoriile morale și materiale ale stăpânelor de casă, de I. Penescu, Profesor în seminarul sf. Mitru. Cu voia cinst. Eforii a Școalelor. Pentru Învățătura fetelor* [Manual of Household Economy or The Moral and Material Duties of Mistresses of the House, by I. Penescu, Professor at the Seminary of the St. Mitru. Under the Will of School Board. For the Education of Girls] (Bucharest: 1846).



FIGURE 5.3 *Iosif August Schoefft, Portrait of woman, 1830.*

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART, BUCUREȘTI.

educated at home by private tutors and then placed as apprentices in the chancelleries of important officials. For Elencu, however, the father, influenced by his wife, was concerned with providing her with an education in keeping with the current fashion (Fig. 5.3). Between 1835 and 1839 we can trace his investments in his daughter's fashionable education. In the period, a number of

pensions opened in Bucharest, but Dumitrache Piersiceanu preferred to hire private teachers, *mademoiselles* and *modistes*, who taught Elencu step by step. It was not only a financial investment, but also an investment of time: the father tried mainly to hire teachers from abroad, from France or Germany (and sometimes even from Braşov, a city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time). For four years, Elencu was taught by "Mosiu Şarlă" (Monsieur Charles), Madame Janet, "Mosiu Şnel" (Monsieur Schnell), and "Matmozel Anica" (Mademoiselle Anne). The list is long because mastery of French or German did not also guarantee good behaviour or loyalty to one's employer.³³

At the beginning of the century, with Greek losing ground to French, there was a significant migration from Paris, Lyon, and Geneva to Bucharest and Iaşi. Throughout the 18th century, Greek had been the language of conversation for the elite, the language in which they read and corresponded. Greek language both had structured membership of an exclusive group, which had coalesced around political power, and offered the elite the vocabulary of romantic sensibility.³⁴ For this reason, women's access to the language had been restricted. French, on the other hand, quickly became a tool for women's affirmation, enabling them to participate in salon conversation. It was also an important vehicle for self-affirmation. Women's presence in the public space of cultural sociability guaranteed them a far greater visibility than fashions in clothes would have done.

By educating his daughter in French, Dumitrache Piersiceanu prepares her for new roles in society. At the beginning of the 19th century, society redefined itself by assigning new roles to social actors: women represent the family in the new public show-window offered by the salon sociability. In addition to the *savoir-faire* and *savoir-vivre* manuals, the market is flooded with French literature, including dictionaries and language acquisition primers..³⁵ Exploring

33 Constanţa Vintilă-Ghiţulescu, "Condica de toate pricinile şi trebuinţele casii mele" de pitarul Dumitru Piersiceanu de la Fundata (1804–1839)" [Account with all the affairs of my house], Dan-Dumitru Iacob (ed.), *Avere, prestigiu şi cultură materială în surse patrimoniale. Inventare de averi din secolele XVI–XIX* [Fortune, Prestige and Material Culture in the Patrimonial Sources] (Iaşi: 2015), 523–552.

34 Elena Hartulari's journal is a good example in this respect. The only surviving journal written by a woman, it still needs a good critical edition in order to enter the research circuit. See Angela Jianu, "Elena Hartulari's Story: the presentation of the emotional self", Bilici, Faruk, Ionel Căndea, and Anca Popescu (eds.), *Enjeux politiques, économiques et militaires en Mer Noire (XIV^e–XXI^e siècles): études à la mémoire de Mihail Guboglu* (Brăila: 2007), 429–44.

35 The manual published by Grigore Pleşoianu (1801–1857) seems to be the first published French language primer. See Grigore Pleşoianu, *Abetedar franco-românesc pentru tineri începători. Acum întâiu cules şi într-această chip cu rumâneşte întocmit de G. Pleşoianul*,

novel consumption among the Greek Christian elite from Izmir and Istanbul, Haris Exertzoglou argues that cultural production, which is part of the “process of social and cultural transformation”, is a key factor in shaping a new social category, labelled as “bourgeoisie”.³⁶ Imports of books, newspapers, and fashion albums (mostly in French) accompany imports of garments, furniture, musical instruments, or gourmet products. In the absence of indigenous literature, French literature becomes the coagulating element of a political and social ideology. This French literature also includes many ordinary novels, popular manuals, and calendars, full of ideas and information considered to be “immoral” or difficult to understand by women. However, romance novels are believed to pervert the souls of women who are yet unprepared to receive the same education as men.

In criticising the teaching of French to women, for instance, the Church was in fact condemning this visibility too, which “distances them from their original purpose, that of being mothers”, as *The Ecclesiastical Preacher* (Predicatorul Ecclésiastic) said in 1857. *The Ecclesiastical Preacher*, the official gazette of the Church, saw a series of impediments to the acceptance of “modern” education:

I now ask whether their education should entail only those things that are external, which is to say, making an impression, droning on in French or in German or in some other wise, or learning a little of what is useful in home economics and future childrearing and fulfilment of their sacred duties, and many other things to the liking of the many, which is to say: music, poetry, painting, operas, adornments, luxury and visits?

The aforementioned “enrichment” already existed, but without being of any great benefit to society, believed the Church. Rather, it was a perversion of the soul. Women ought to rear “patriotic men, courageous men, men of deep wisdom and political knowledge”, writes *The Ecclesiastical Preacher*. But spending “six hours a day” getting dressed, strolling in Cișmigiu Park and along the Chaussee, and sitting jaded by the window could not provide a solid education. What was to be done? “Women have need of more serious learning”, says the gazette, from which should be completely eliminated “the teaching of foreign

profesorul al școalelor naționale din Craiova [French-Romanian Primer for Young Learners. Now Printed First in Romanian by G. Pleșoianul, professor of the national schools in Craiova] (Craiova: 1829).

36 Haris Exertzoglou “The Cultural Uses of Consumption: Negotiating Class, Gender, and Nation in the Ottoman Urban Centers during the 19th Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003), 78.

languages", which is "of little benefit". In women's education, foreign languages should be reduced to a bare minimum, despite the important place they held in men's education: "In general it is beneficial that women should learn at an early age to respect religion, to treasure virtue, to prize cleanliness, to love wisdom, to submit to men, to despise in all sincerity vain expense ... above all to make sure that their children are worthy of love and good reputation." This summary form of education, given in church more than at school, can only be completed under the guidance and supervision of a "male moralist".³⁷

The active presence of women in the public space upsets part of the masculine society. Ten years before the above-cited article from *The Ecclesiastical Preacher*, another article in the *Albina Românească* [*Romanian Bee*], one of the most important magazines in Moldavia, ironically criticizes the "emancipation of women". The very use of the term shows this debate is part of a larger context during a time when arguments regarding individual freedoms are extremely important.³⁸ The author is intrigued by women's "pretence" to ask for more "rights" "against the stipulations of holy laws which make them obey men", ignoring the fact that in everyday practice women are the ones who "reign over men". Leaving the domestic space and giving up housework in order to embrace literary sociability seem a betrayal of the primordial goals of the society.

The article further outlines the dichotomy between *woman* and *madame* (in Romanian *damă*) or lady, and those who fight for their rights decidedly belong to another "kind": "not women, but *dames* go horseback riding, play billiards, smoke cigarettes, read newspapers and discuss world politics".³⁹ Real women remain devoted to "small children, spinning, weaving, vegetables and raising chickens", in other words, women are attached to the established values of the traditional family. However, the author believes that the female presence in the public and political arena has detrimental effects on family life. Emancipating themselves through knowledge, *dames* no longer know how to "naturally love their husbands" and, especially, how to be "totally obedient".⁴⁰ Ceasing to be "women", *dames* free themselves through consumption and enjoy their new

37 While foreign languages occupied an important place in a man's education, the same author diminishes their role (to the point of regarding them as dangerous) in a woman's education. See *Predicatorul Ecleziastic* [*The Ecclesiastical Preacher*], 1857.

38 For an analysis of debates regarding the emancipation of Gypsies, see Bogdan Mateescu, *Familia în timpul robiei. O perspectivă demografică. Studiu și liste de populație din arhive* [Family across the Slavery time. Demographical Approach] (Iași: 2015).

39 The term is used in a pejorative meaning here: *dama* is a Romanian translation of the French *madame*. *Madamă* or *damă* covered a large socio-professional category: a French woman teacher or only a woman teacher, a governess, a French maid, but also a courtesan.

40 *Albina Românească* [*Romanian Bee*], n. 49, Sunday, 22 June, 1841.

found liberties through conversation, socializing, and fashion. Consumption built around female sociability is blamed precisely because it brings women more freedom and visibility in the public space hitherto reserved only for men. Gender consumption structures a new lifestyle, responding to the needs of a social class fighting for self-assertion.⁴¹

Apart from these criticisms, the *dame* or the *lady* have the important role of socially representing the family, the people, and the nation. Contemporary with the birth of the modern Romanian state (1830–1860), women participate, through active consumption, in the creation of public spaces needed for political debate. Men equally participate in consumption in order to deal with the demands of a different lifestyle and of a new way of thinking about politics. Women's education, however, remains an entirely urban phenomenon, particular to the affluent social class. Even though the Organic Regulations introduce free and compulsory education both for boys and girls, the reforms are difficult to implement.

Education and Masculinity

Piano, dance, and French were also aimed at men. The passive society of the 18th century was replaced with an increasingly active society, open to the outdoors, to movement, to debate and analysis. The 19th century also brought changes to ideals of male appearance, bringing to the fore French elegance, as opposed to Turkish *zarıflık*. In *The History of Moldavia* (1851), Manolache Drăghici provides us with a portrait of Caliarhi the Postelnik, who married Ralu Moruz and was considered to be “the most gallant and *zarif* of the boyars of Phanar.” The adjective *zarif*, borrowed from Turkish, referred not only to beauty, but also to male elegance: “This boyar came to live in Petersburg [...] the monarch could not get enough of looking at the handsome and expensive garments he wore every day, so much so that many a time they say that on meeting him when out strolling he would stop him to admire his outfit for that day, including the handsome furs he wore.”⁴² For the notoriously conservative boyar chronicler, beauty could be reduced to the elegance and richness of one's clothes. Drăghici

41 Building a gender identity through consumption and social promotion strategies adds a negative connotation to the image women had in South-Eastern Europe. See Varikas Éléni, *Subjectivité*, 29–51.

42 Manolache Drăghici, *Istoriea Moldovei pe timp de 500 ani* [History of Moldavia for 500 years], (Iași: 1851), II, 46–47.

often dwells on beauty, using the terms *zarfir* and *zarifluk* to describe elegance full of *zarafiruri* and *zarpale*, i.e. adornments.

Constant competition with the Russian officer class also played a part in this necessary change, but above all, travel and study prompted men to choose comfortable French clothes rather than their previous long kaftans, to learn the art of dance, to join fencing clubs. Masculinity no longer had the harshness of the past, because the model was now different, and men's reading urged them to be attentive to their gestures, manners, and speech. Masculinity and honour now went hand in hand, providing young men with pretexts to prove their virility in duels.⁴³

Modernisation brought with it new masculine types. One such type was the professional dancer, who employed his legs and body as his sole means of gaining access to the salons of the high and mighty. Mihail Kogălniceanu gives us a portrait of a dancer, in whom the features of a period in transition can be found.⁴⁴ Meanwhile the gazette finds amusement in painting portraits of the *gallant* and the *philanderer*. The gallant is the counterpart of the coquette, of whom we talk below, since he dresses up in order to be pleasing to female company, taking advantage of social appearances. The "butterfly", as Dionisie Romanov describes him in a moralising story, flutters around "beautiful" women, promising them great things, but stopping short of a handsome dowry. The coquette and the gallant require artifice to improve a physiognomy, to enhance the beauty of a feature, to add charm to a glance, rosininess to a cheek, freshness to a pair of lips. The era's fashionable *dandy* penetrated Romanian society as well and ended up being caricatured in many writings of the period. Those who portray him are the dandy's contemporaries, meeting him in the salons of Paris or on the streets of London and then recognising him easily in Iași and Bucharest.⁴⁵

Inventing the Past and the Art of the Portrait

The houses and mansions of important families begin to be decorated with portraits of their members and women clearly stand out in this visual investment. Confiscated by the communist regime in the years 1950–1960, many of these portraits stayed hidden in the basements of various museums, with

43 See Mihai Chiper, *O societate în căutarea onoarei. Duel și masculinitate în România (1859–1914)* [Society Seeking Honor: Duel and Masculinity in Romania] (Iași: 2012).

44 Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Profesie de credință* [Profession of Faith] (Bucharest: 1962), 29–43.

45 Adriana Babeți, *Dandysmul. O istorie* [Dandyism. A History] (Iași: 2004), 76–77.

many being lost and many more remaining difficult to identify even today. Considered without much artistic value to be shown in galleries, these important documentary sources are still kept in museum warehouses or are cheaply auctioned one by one. However, these paintings were once part of a past.

National identity is created in an internal and international context conducive to a favourable development of group consciousness. Women participate in this political and social construction either by asserting the specific social pride of belonging to a nation or by initiating the process of manufacturing a past. This process goes hand in hand with the political activity promoted in the salon. The house turns slowly into a *place of memory* where ancestors are represented in the family portrait gallery. Alongside portraits, other art objects begin to be collected, thus leading to the emergence of the *cabinet* as a distinct part in the architecture of the house. However, not everyone could afford to purchase art objects. Beside the financial investment, collecting objects of art involves a certain degree of education, a taste for art, music, and literature. Similarly, one needs both financial means and taste to commission long series of family portraits to display the family's genealogy and past. (Fig. 5.4) During the 19th century, the *cabinet* and the salon become important parts of the culture of sociability. If men occupy the *cabinet* and collect objects of art, women populate the salon which they embellish and decorate both with artefacts and useful things. As such, women produce, purchase, and display "cultural things" considered "necessary for representing and constituting the family's social position".⁴⁶ By engaging in cultural sociability, women help strengthen the husband's and, implicitly, the family's political and economic relations.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, individual identity is constructed at the same time as the identity of the new modern state. The abandonment of Turkish clothes in favour of the frock coat and top hat is not only a matter of fashion, but also a political declaration on the part of the local Orthodox elite in their struggle for independence.

If the 18th century regulated luxury consumption through a series of sumptuary laws and many items of clothing (materials, jewellery, accessories, furs)

46 Leora Auslander, "The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France," in Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: 1996), 83.

47 See also Angela Jianu, *A Circle of Friends. Romanian Revolutionaries and Political Exile, 1840–1859* (Leiden: 2011).



FIGURE 5.4 *Ludovic Stawski—Bucur Family—1848.*

COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF ART, IAȘI (PHOTO BY SORIN IFTIMI).

came to acquire social meanings in the process of social identification, by the 19th century things had changed significantly. The opening up of a domestic consumer market and the accessibility of every type of product diminished the importance of such goods in defining social hierarchy. Luxury and fashion continued to separate people into classes, but not as starkly as it had done so before. The adoption of western consumption habits by imitating a mostly French model has often been interpreted as a form of “Europeanization” and modernization of Romanian society. Assimilating modernization to “Europeanization”

can also be seen in other countries from Southeastern Europe separated from the Ottoman Empire. For instance, the Ottoman Empire reforms made by Sultan Mahmud II are considered a form of “Europeanization”.⁴⁸ However, societies undergoing these reforms do not always attain the model towards which they aspire. Without a doubt, the Romanian elite expresses its commitment to Western cultural values by preferentially consuming goods coming from this direction. Yet, contemporaries share several discourses regarding “western culture”, which coincides with French values for some, with German values for others, and even with British values for others starting with the second half of the 19th century. In short, this discursive construct contains both positive and negative evaluations. Even if some of the contemporaries promote imitation as a form of catching up with the West, the proposed modernity must have the image and identity of the Romanian nation.⁴⁹ At the same time, others criticize what they consider as a loss of identity and tradition “in favour of forms without substance”.⁵⁰

During the 18th century, sumptuary laws controlled luxury consumption and many clothing products (fabrics, jewellery, accessories and furs) became important social signifiers. However, a century later, things significantly changed because the emergence of a domestic consumption market made goods more accessible and the availability of luxury goods drastically lowered their importance to social hierarchy. Luxury, fashion, and consumption still continue to classify individuals, but not to the extent they had done so before. The appropriation of “western consumption” removes many of the social and gender barriers, and offers women the chance of affirmation. Clothes, furniture, carriages and interior decorations as well as French, piano, and dance lessons are closely tied to reshaping new social frontiers and to redefining hierarchies. Women find themselves among the beneficiaries of the new consumption trends and consequently help shape national identity through the transfer of new ideas and models. The embodiment of modern Romania, as it appears in the

48 Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (New York: 1996), 37–43.

49 See the example of Eufrosin Poteca, assiduous promoter of modernizing efforts. Monk and philosophy professor, with studies in Pisa and Paris, Poteca delivers a series of sermons in favor of education, Gypsy emancipation, and, most importantly, state reformation following the model of “our European brethren.” See Eufrosin Poteca, *Scriseri filosofice* [Philosophical Writings] (Craiova: 2008), 179–180.

50 Ion Eliade Rădulescu, *Echilibrul între antiteze* [Equilibre between antithesis] (Bucharest: 1916), vol. 1, 10.



FIGURE 5.5 *Constantin Rosenthal—România Revoluționară, 1848.*
COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART, BUCUREȘTI.

vision of Forty-Eighter painter Constantin Rosenthal, could only be a woman (Fig. 5.5). The model, who posed for the artist, says a lot about the transformations which changed the Romanian countries in the first half of the century. Mary Grant, an Englishwoman who came to Bucharest to find a job as a governess and later married Constantin A. Rosetti, a descendant of an important boyar family, actively promoted, with her husband, the liberal ideals of the time and supported an incipient feminist movement.

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