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Fiddlers and Their Music in the Romanian Principalities from the Beginnings until the Nineteenth Century: Social Status

ABSTRACT

As a continuation of my exposition on the history of fiddlers in the Romanian Principalities, I propose to the readers' attention other interesting perspectives from which these artists can be viewed. One of these is the social status of fiddlers, especially their place within society, their importance, but also their differentiation into: gypsy fiddlers and slaves of their masters and fiddlers with a higher status, "landsmen", a generic term for land and houseowners. Then, another perspective from which I will present the fiddlers is through their institutionalization, a measure implemented by the State (the ruler). The institutionalization is the historical moment when fiddlers' guilds are organized, thus their activity becomes a legal one. Finally, my focus is on presenting how fiddlers were paid for their musical activities, the amounts they received and on the "consequences" resulting from this process. All these research approaches presented in this second part of the study dedicated to fiddlers in the Romanian Principalities aim to discover to the readers the primary literary sources related to this subject, such as the Chancellery documents, the chronicles and the testimonies of foreign travellers, but through a critically research them, an academic endeavour that has been done before from this perspective.

KEYWORDS

Fiddler
Fiddle music
Social status
Moldavia
Wallachia

Introduction

This second part of the study about the fiddlers in the Romanian Principalities is a natural continuation of the first part, where I talked about their origins in the Romanian territory, relying mainly on first-hand sources and trying to clarify the confusion that exists relating to this subject. Their repertoire, its historical source and its influence was also an interesting topic to explore there since it represents due to the position of the Romanian Principalities, located at the interference of the West with the East. At the end of that first part I talked about the instruments used by fiddlers in their music, insisting on clarifying the terminology with which they are found in the historical sources.

As a next stage of the research I turn, my attention to other important coordinates of this musical category members, such as their social status and the existing differences between the two categories of fiddlers. The first category, which was the most numerous and also well-known, was constituted by Gypsies, slaves of their masters; the second, was represented by 'earthly' fiddlers, i.e. a native population, musicians who had some privileges, such as the possibility to own land and houses. Another interesting aspect to bring up is this second part of the study regards their institutionalization, referring to the regulation of their activity by means of organizations, constituted by the type of guilds, and under the management of the State (the ruler), through its dignitaries. This stage in the history of fiddlers really represents their official recognition and the first attempt to establish and protect their work. The last stage of the research dedicated to the fiddlers and their music refers to a chapter that may not seem very important, but which turns out to be an interesting one, i.e. the payment of the fiddlers. The way in which they were paid, the amounts assigned to their performances and the context in which these things took place reflect an interesting picture of the fiddlers, placing them in a 'slavery' with some benefits.

The historical context in which the fiddlers are placed reflects the Romanian society in a generous timeframe, the 16th-19th centuries, a period in which the Romanian Principalities have had a tumultuous dynamic, with many political transformations, but also with many diverse cultural influences. The Princely Court, the main place where the fiddlers are encountered, represents a mosaic landscape from a musical point of view, with musical elements of both Western and Oriental origin, but also with a local

substratum. This whole soundscape has influenced the music of the fiddlers who transformed it and then play it through their own filter, making it their own. Also, their music is not only heard at the Princely Court, as is the case with the other musical categories present around the ruler, such as *mehterhane* (the Oriental classical music bands or military and city music, both influenced by the West), but also outside of the Court, even if less often, when they were called to various special occasions, such as weddings, baptisms or even funerals. All these opportunities when the fiddlers played outside the Princely Court and outside of the events centred on the sovereign, were also regulated by the State through those special directors called *vătafi*¹ and the conditions under which their performances are regulated through guilds, starting with the 18th century.

Regarding the scientific research concerning the fiddlers and their music, there are no known works so far that focus on clarifying the aspects debated during this research. There are no works that focus on detailing all these elements by using different sources, especially the documents issued by the Princely Chancellery, by presenting the data about this musical and social category. Therefore, the main target of this research is to reevaluate the existing information about fiddlers after adding new information issued from documents, chronicles and testimonies of foreign travellers in these Romanian territories. It is also of great importance to establish the place of these musicians in the historical and musical paradigm of the Romanian society during 16th-19th centuries. Thus, the findings of this research are relevant to musicology and ethnomusicology, as well as to history, and they can be useful to sociological research as well as they bring to light new information from sources not fully researched nor placed it in the right context.

¹ Leader of a certain group of courtiers, servants or soldiers of the reign.

The status of the fiddlers



Figure 1. The illustration of psalms 148-150², in the painting of the porch of the Aninoasa Monastery, Argeş County, Romania, painted in 1730. The instrumentalists playing the double-membrane drum, like the davul type, the “S”-shaped trumpet and the kobza are most likely Gypsy fiddlers, if we take into account the specifics of their clothing and physical features, which are different from those of the other musicians depicted in church paintings in Romania during this period.



Figure 2. Another image from the painting of the same scene of the Aninoasa Monastery. Here we can see a trumpet player playing the same "S" shaped trumpet and a violinist.

² I mention that the musical instruments that are painted in numerous churches in Romania, but also in other spaces, regardless of the period when the painting was made, reflect the musical instruments in use in the country at the time of painting the respective scenes. For details, see Rusu, 2024; Rusu, 2023: 149-162; Rusu, 2022a; 237-262 and Rusu, 2021: 64-84.



Figure 3: illustration of the “Wedding from Cana of Galilee” scene, the church in Urșani village, Vâlcea county, Romania, painted between 1801-1803. In this scene we can see a violinist, a trumpeter and a drummer.

The most reliable information regarding this category of musicians can be found in the official documents, i.e. the documents issued by the Princely Chancellery, where there are found details about their social status, the importance of owning such a musician, the obligations and sometimes the rights they benefited from, but also specific aspects concerning the instruments they played, their mobility etc. In general, they are being mentioned in the documents when the ruler grants to some boyars the right to own a specific property, when there is a confirmation of some properties or of some transactions between different persons that do not necessarily involve the rulers of the State. In these cases, the fiddlers were a valuable and profitable ‘merchandise’, which some also disputed (Chiseliță, 2017: 180). From this point of view, they could very much resemble the minstrels of the European monarchical courts because they sang only what their master commanded them. In his position as a valet, the minstrel belonged entirely to his senior, to whom he owed his labour. If his artistic works had been published, he would not have received any fees or personal financial benefits. He was also tasked with creating pieces that would serve the ideology of his master and that would glorify his owner. Therefore, the minstrel would have composed everything that was imposed on him. In short, the master owned both the musician and his music (Attali, 1985: 47).

In a document from January 4th, 1574, issued by Metropolitan Eftimie of Ungrovlahia (Wallachia), he mentions the purchase of Radu the fiddler, together with his dwelling, by the Cozia Monastery, for the price of 4500 *akçes* (Ottoman currency) (Ștefănescu and Diaconescu, 1988: 212-213). In 1636 Matei Basarab repays the loyalty of Radu the

*postelnic*³ by offering him from the ruler's Gypsy properties, a Gypsy dwelling, among which Albul Iarul, the son of Stoica the fiddler, and Marcea the Gypsy fiddler (Mioc et al., 1985: 377-382). Another document offers an information regarding the presence of fiddlers on some estates or their sale to other boyars: Stoica the fiddler (Sava, 1944: 28), Stan son of Stan the fiddler (Barbu, Lazăr and Constantinescu, 2010: 100), Oprea the fiddler (Barbu, Chiper and Lazăr, 1998: 386-387), Stan the fiddler (Barbu et al., 2013: 207-208), Tatul the fiddler and his son Stan the violinist (Mioc et al, 1974: 382-385). Also that Tincul, the Gypsy of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia, married to the daughter of Perți Viorarul (the violinist), who belonged to the family of Ștefani Rătundul, had two sons, Ioan Șchiupul the kobzar and Alicsandru *cheminger* (*kemençe* meaning *player*⁴), whom the family of Ștefani Rătundul shared with the Metropolitan Church (Caproșu, 2001: 200). Another possibility for trading Gypsy fiddlers was through the wedding dowry. On the occasion of the wedding of Bălașa's daughter, Elenco, with Doctor Constantin Darvari that took place in 1791 in Bucharest, there is the mention of dowries being given, which also included Gypsies. Among them was Dumitru the Gypsy fiddler, together with his wife Bălașa and their children (Potra, 1961: 559). There are also cases of issued documents strictly to certify the trading of such a musician. Thus, from a document dating March 17th, 1635, issued by ruler Matei Basarab, we find out that Tudor the fiddler was bought by Gheorghe the *vistier*⁵ from Radul Buzescu, the *ban*⁶, for 4000 *akçes*, during the reign of Leon Tomșa (Florea, 2005: 34). From another document, dated August 3, 1645, we learn that Gheorghe the *vistier* sells Tudor Viorarul (the violinist) to Apostolache the *comis*⁷ (Barbu, Chiper and Lazăr, 1998: 276). A similar document confirms the donation by Matei Basarab of a Gypsy fiddler to Udriște the *vornic*⁸ (Mioc et al, 1985: 449-452). Another fiddler sold together with his dwelling is Oprea the fiddler, in 1645 (Barbu et al, 1998: 387); Bîra the fiddler and Dumitru the fiddler were bought by Dumitru the great *vistier* in 1636, in Ialomița district (Mioc et al., 1985: 255-256). The

³ Title given to a great boyar, member of the Princely Council, who looked after the ruler's bedchamber and who, later, organized also the ruler's audiences.

⁴ It is an Oriental musical instrument. Oriental, Ottoman and Persian classical music was also present at the Court of the Romanian rulers. For more details, see Rusu, 2022: 161-180.

⁵ Title given to the great governor who was in charge of the country's treasury, the distribution and collection of taxes.

⁶ Title held by the governor delegated by the ruler to govern over Oltenia, a component territory of Wallachia.

⁷ High dignity in the Romanian Principalities who took care of the horses and stables at the Princely Court, as well as assuring the supply of fodder.

⁸ Grand boyar of the Princely Council having judiciar powers, charged also with the supervision of the Court and the management of the internal affairs of the country.

ruler Mihai Racoviță confirms through a document issued on February 7th, 1705, in Iași, that Gheorghie the *serdar*⁹ is the owner of Andronache Chemingiu the fiddler (Sava, 1944: 159).

A singular case regarding the instruments by which the Gypsy musicians were identified, but also referring to their social status, is to be found in a document issued by Matei Basarab confirming to the boyar Dumitrașco the *stolnic*¹⁰ and his son Pano the *logofăt*¹¹, the ownership of also Stanciul Godoi the *gusla*¹² player and Marin Guslar (gusla player), whom he bought from Dumitrașco the *comis*, son of Radu the *sluger*¹³ (Rizescu et al., 2009: 67-70). They being bought and having Romanian names is a proof that they were locals and not one of the guslars that came from the South of the Danube and roamed Europe. If we focus also on the instruments mentioned here, we discover that C. Ghenea puts a sign of equality between lute and *гусла* or between lute and *гуслаѣ* (Ghenea, 1965: 54), but the two instruments are different, the gusla being of Balkan origin, and in all the documents that have been consulted lute (lute player) appears in the Slavonic spelling in the form *алѣмар*, designating, even in this writing, two different terms.

Stan Gypsy bagpiper is being given with other Gypsies by the ruler Constantin Moruzi (1777-1782) to Iordache Balș, the great vistier (Caproșu, 2005: 489). In 1726 Pană gives to his nephew Matei, the possession of Iordache the *kobzar*¹⁴ (the kobza player) and his son, Iordache. Also, the document specifies here that if Matei is not able to hold them and he wants to sell them, Pană will be the one to buy them back (Georgescu, Cernovodeanu and Cristache Panait, 1960: 86). We also encounter isolated cases, as that of Radu the violinist from Balomirești, Teleorman, who sells himself and his two sons to Bunei the *vistier* for 4400 bani (Romanian currency) (Rizescu et al., 2013: 235-236). We believe that this Radu was a free man and not a Gypsy, who sold himself as serf because of his inability to pay his taxes and to support his family.

Apart from what has been said so far in connection with specific fiddler music, it should

⁹ Middle-ranking boyar. Commander of troops, especially of cavalry.

¹⁰ Dignitary who took care of the princely table, being the head of the cooks, fishermen and gardeners.

¹¹ Title of high dignitary in the hierarchy of Romanian boyars, member of the Princely Council and head of the Princely Chancellery.

¹² Stringed musical instrument, similar to *kemençe*, used to accompany the ballads.

¹³ Dignitary in the Romanian Principalities, in charge of supplying the Princely Court and the army with meat.

¹⁴ For details about this musical instrument, see the first part of the study.

be noted that Gypsies were sometimes recruited for official music, as trumpeters, as we learn from the account of the 1759 message led by Iosif Podoski (Holban et al., 1997: 416).

Another element in the life of a Gypsy slave emerges from a document dating January 25th, 1647, from which we find out that Ibrahim and Husul, '*surlars*¹⁵ Turkish Gypsies'¹⁶, sell to Pahomie, the abbot of Sadova Monastery, for the amount of 14 thalers, a Gypsy child called Husain, who is the son of Carali; the child's father drowned in the Danube and was left with debts that were settled by selling his son (Barbu et al., 2001: 40). In addition to the tragic situation of the sold son, it should be noted the declared reason the two '*surlars* Turkish Gypsies' gave up Christianity for Islam: they had to endure a very hard life, being frequently tortured by their masters. Thus, they went to Hotin and became Muslims; as they were *surlars*, they were most likely committed as members of the *mehterhane* of the pasha (Potra, 2001: 73).

Referring to the importance given to this category of musicians, we note that they were sometimes a reason of financial conflict between the boyars; some amounts of money were being borrowed and guaranteed with the fiddler himself (Codrescu, 1892: 383-385), which proves the importance of owning such a musician.

The aspect of the ruler as the sole person allowed to own music of any kind, as an attribute of his power, applies also to fiddler music. A document issued in Iași between 1634 and 1635 speaks of an exchange of Gypsies between the dignitary Ionașco Tăbîrță and the abbot of Probota Monastery. The dignitary gives the monastery two Gypsy women, Ileana and Vărvăra, and the abbot gives the dignitary Ion Giosea with his wife and his four sons, but also Ștefan Gypsy, the bagpiper (Cihodaru et al, 1974: 309). We notice that the abbot gave up that bagpiper, exchanging it with other Gypsies, precisely because he did not have any use of a musician within the monastery. Most likely, the bagpiper had come into the possession of the monastery after a donation or transaction, as it happened, for example, with Dumitrașco Doboș (the drummer) and Arsenie Cimpoș (the bagpiper), who were donated in 1792 by Alexandru Constantin Moruzi to the Dancu Monastery (Marinescu et al., 2005: 226). Another document issued on September 6th, 1710, specifies the following: "Mihail the abbot of the holy monastery of Todereni, in Suceava, announces through this

¹⁵ Surla player. Surla or zurna is a musical instrument made of wood, with a shrill sound and a wide spread.

¹⁶ They were not Turkish, but they were being labelled as Turkish after they converted to Islam, the religion associated with the Turks, a population with which the Romanian Principalities were continuously interacting.

letter, that the holy monastery, being in great poverty and having no other choice, but owning two *kobzar* Gypsies in Iași, namely Șărban and his brother, Dragomir, sons of Gligorie the fiddler, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Drăgan, I have the blessing of His Eminence Father Gideon, the metropolitan, and from our founder, Neculai Costin the *vornic*, to sell them because the holy monastery has no use of them; they do not work nor do they offer any other help, they just walk doing some crafts and stealing. For this reason, having reached great need, I sold them to Bejan Hudeci the *vornic* for one hundred lei (Romanian currency); and the payment was made in full” (Caproșu, 2000: 350). This document is an extremely important one, just as the previous one because it indicates, first of all, that the fiddlers, although owned by a monastery or a boyar, played their music only around the ruler, at the Princely Court in Iași, as it can be comprehended from this story. Most likely, they were ‘rented’ for their service at the Princely Court and, in return, the owners received certain amounts of money. The information in this document relates to others that will be presented in this research, which refer to the possibility of fiddlers being ‘rented’ for their art in exchange for money. Hence, the possession of fiddlers was profitable, because it is clear from this document that the monastery gave up the two, and not others, only as a last resort, when it had no other option. It is also clear how these fiddlers became the property of the monastery, they being, most likely, offered by Nicolae Costin, whose family owned the estate on which the monastery was built. At the same time, it seems that another idea is solidifying: even in the case of fiddle music (over which lingered numerous doubts), only the ruler had the right to own any form of music, to enjoy its sounds and to state his power through a way accessible solely to him.

Another example is that of Andronache Chemengiu the fiddler, which was already mentioned, and which is co-owned by the Humor Monastery and by Gheorghie the *serdar*. Since the monastery wants to give up its share of ownership over the Gypsy, “as our praying monks do not need a Gypsy fiddler as they showed us also in the document with the signature of Humor Monastery”, the value of the person in question is estimated by certain boyars charged with doing so, at the amount of 20 lei, of which Gheorghie the *serdar* pays the monastery the amount of 10 lei, and the fiddler remains solely his property (Sava, 1944: 159). We understand that this fiddler came to be co-owned probably as a result of donations or transactions. According to the canons, it was not appropriate for the monastery to have fiddle music. Therefore, Andronache Chemengiu

ends up being useless and unprofitable, which is why it is sold to the one who owned the other half of the property. It is another example that these Gypsy fiddlers did not practice their art in monasteries but were only owned by them and 'rented' for certain financial gains.

Staying on the same topic, the ruler Constantin Racoviță, during his second reign in Moldavia (1756-1757), issues a document by which he exempts the Gypsies of the Episcopacy of Roman, those 'who work with iron and are *kobzars* and fiddlers' and living outside of the burg, along with those exempted from taxes, to pay a tax collected for the expenses of the princely stable (Caproșu, 2004: 17). The same details are specified in two other subsequent documents, one issued by Scarlat Ghica (1757-1758) (Caproșu, 2004: 138) and the other by Teodor Callimachi (1758-1761) (Caproșu, 2004: 175). From all three of them it appears that the tax was mandatory only for the 'Gypsy craftsmen' who lived in burgs and not for those living outside of the burg, those who 'work with iron and are *kobzars* and fiddlers'. What interests us here is the fact that these Gypsies, although they were musicians, were also mainly blacksmiths, their connection with musical activity being more of a label; if we respect the hypothesis issued above, the Episcopacy of Roman used these Gypsies for blacksmithing activities and not for music. As we will see, only in certain cases would these fiddlers be allowed, through the *vătaf* who negotiated the fees, to attend a wedding, for which they paid a sort of 'tax' to their owner.

Another similar case is that of the inhabitants of Bădești village, serfs of Câmpulung Monastery. Through a note from February 23th, 1710, it is stated how many days they will work on behalf of the monastery and what kind of work will they perform. Among the serfs there are Albul the fiddler and Stanciul, son of Albul the fiddler, who were used by the monastery in agriculture and other similar activities, despite them being musicians (Mihodrea et al., 1961: 235-236). When not working for the monastery, those two people were fiddlers and earned their living by being musicians. In the same category, another document dated August 3rd, 1785, refers to an issue of Tismana Monastery, which had to pay to some locals certain amounts of money for them to work as the Gypsies refused to do so; among those Gypsies refusing to work was Radu Falcoe the fiddler, him being the only one of those listed for which is being mentioned the profession he practices (Mihodrea et al., 1961: 720).

For the Gypsies belonging to boyars, we have fewer examples so far to prove or at least to indicate our hypothesis. Joseph Sulzer, when speaking about the Gypsies of the boyars, tells us that “they are in much larger numbers and serve their master near the house as coachmen, cooks, maids, etc. or they work his land as serfs or, if the boyar allows them, they carol and practice any profession or even their music at the dances, paying to the boyar an annual amount of about 6 to 7 lei per person, more or less, according to their arrangement (Zinveliu, 1995: 92). This fragment seems to support our idea as these Gypsies were allowed to practice their art only with the boyar’s permission and not at his court, but wherever they were requested, the boyar benefiting financially from the activity of the Gypsies.

Another example which exceeds the time limit proposed here, but which also refers to our reference period, is a document addressed to the ruler Ioan Caragea on April 28th, 1818, by some important boyars of Wallachia, led by Metropolitan Nectarie of Ungrovlahia. This document specifies: “Your Highness, the Gypsies [belonging] to the monasteries and the boyars since the beginning of the country were never disturbed by the *Armășie*¹⁷; they have dealt only with their duties and the taxes of their master, knowing him as their ultimate master. With this act of the *Armășia*, invoking the tax of the guild of fiddlers, it cancels their master’s right over them, and the *Armășia* becomes their owner, for in order to collect the tax due to the *Armășie*, they abandon the work of their master and go to work elsewhere. And with what they earn they can barely pay the tax to the *Armășie*, and the master remains deprived of the benefits acquired historically from his servant, having nothing to take from him, nor leaving time for that Gypsy to work for the taxes due by his master; therefore we all pray to the mercy of thy Majesty, to issue an enlightened decision that only in the princely free cities to be administrators of fiddlers and to take from those fiddlers living in that city, the taxes for weddings and the fees, taxes and fees that were, in the old days, of a thaler for a wedding, and the another annual fee of 33 bani, as specified above in the princely act, which is recorded in the register of the Divan. Because all the prices have risen, let them be added to the other ones in order to take the tax of the wedding threefold, so 3 thalers, and the fees to be taken by the administrator from all members of the band of fiddlers who will be negotiating to play at that wedding, and not 3 thalers from each fiddler; [let the

¹⁷ Institution of the State, that subordinated the Gypsies.

administrators] take as well the tax of no more than one thaler per year from each fiddler, but that these taxes to be taken by the administrators only from the fiddlers who live in large, princely and free cities, and not from other fiddlers from small towns and villages, nor from the estates of monasteries, boyars or peasants or from nomads fiddlers, who walk from place to place, and [not even] from children who learn the trade of the fiddlers; [they must not] charge any fees for the wedding, nor tax, nor anything else, so that the Gypsies of monasteries and boyars may be able to obtain the money for the payment of their master's tax; or to do the needed work for their masters, as the slaves that they are, so the serf may know that he has a master, but also the master may know that he has a servant, and not for the serf to be pulled in two parts" (Urechiă, 1900: 425-426, 424-425).

This document is of particularly importance for the issue discussed here. First of all, we notice that 'from ancient times' the fiddlers of the boyars and monasteries sang in different places and at various occasions. Part of their gains went to their master, this representing for the masters the way of capitalizing from these fiddlers. With time and, most likely, with the growing need for money that the ruler had because of the political context and the financial decline of the Romanian Principalities, the ruler of the State extended its 'arm' also on fiddlers who did not belong to him, a social category that was considered profitable. Therefore, the *Armășia*, through its administrators, came to collect the tax from the fiddlers of the boyars and monasteries, who are thus forced to abandon the work for their masters, referring here perhaps even to physical work, which has nothing to do with music, and go working elsewhere so that they could pay their own taxes, leaving their masters deprived of the income from their slaves. Therefore, it is required that the administrators collect the tax only from the cities of the ruler, that is, from the fiddlers of the ruler, and to let those of the boyars and monasteries continue to work only for their master, as it used to be. Also, at the end of the document it is emphasized that the Gypsies who do not belong to the ruler must be allowed to earn their living by singing in order to be able to pay the specific tax, or to work in various other ways, depending on the needs of their master, so that he knows that he has a serf and the serf, a master. The intervention of the reign in this relationship disrupted the old order and changed the traditional relations.

From these examples, we see that the monasteries and boyars, although they owned fiddlers under different forms, did not benefit from their art directly, but only took

advantage either of their work in various non-musical fields or of the money obtained by providing them performing in other places, outside the monastery or the boyar's court. In fact, fiddlers playing music as a way of earning their keep is not specific only to the Romanian extra-Carpathian countries. The same situation can be encountered in Transylvania (Zăloagă, 2015: 353), Hungary (Warren, 2012: 28), the Ottoman Empire (Özateşler, 2014: 125, 129) or wherever they happened to live in larger communities.

The 'indigen' fiddlers (in rom. 'pământenii')

Using the expression of Dionisie Fotino (Fotino, 2008: 655, *passim*) to define this category of fiddlers, we notice that there are examples that offer us another dimension of the activity of fiddlers, opening new perspectives for us. There are a number of documents in which certain musicians (fiddlers) appear as witnesses to various transactions or even as owners, which make us wonder what was their social status, since they appear in this kind of situations. If the Gypsies were slaves and did not have properties such as land or houses, generally living in huts built on the land of their master or on the outskirts of the city, it means that those to whom we refer here were not Gypsy slaves, but free people. A first argument for this hypothesis is their name in the documents. For example, the fiddlers are almost always called 'Gypsy fiddlers', while those who appear as witnesses amongst the 'good people' or those who own properties are simply called by name and by the instrument they play, without any reference to the term of 'Gypsy'. A first example is Lupul the fiddler, which is being mentioned amongst the 'good people' as a witness of a land sale (Barbu et al., 2006: 79). We rather believe that the character in question was not a Gypsy, which is why he appears in such a role. Other witnesses of different transactions are: Vasile *kobzar* slumdweller, Neculai Muntean *kobzar* slumdweller and Toader *skripka*¹⁸ player, son of Avrămiei (Caproşu, 2007a: 206).

From the previous example, we can observe a clear terminological difference between the first two references and the last one: Toader fiddler, son of Avrămiei, seems to be an indigenous fiddler, while i.e. Toader the Gypsy fiddler of the *logofăt* Ioan Cantacuzino, who owns an earth hut (Caproşu, 2005: 624), is certainly, just as the document specifies, a Gypsy servant of the *logofăt*, who lives in a hut like everyone else from his social category. In the same idea we extract from a document since 1710 that a certain Ştefan

¹⁸ It is a musical instrument from the violin family; the term is also used sometimes as a synonym for violin.

kobzar gives a house to Sandu Crupenschi, a great *jitnicer*¹⁹, in exchange for 12 lei, the amount for which the house was built (Caproșu, 2000: 349). Another Ștefan the *kobzar* was a land and houseowner (Caproșu, 2006: 436, 449). Grigorii Gagea *kobzar* buys a house in the Frecău slum of Iași, paying 150 lei (Caproșu, 2007a: 206), a large amount for such transactions, and Ion Toporașu *kobzar* sells land (Caproșu, 2007b: 28). According to a document dated July 28th, 1704, Andrei the princely fiddler and his wife Titiana sell a house to Cîrstea for the amount of 15 lei (Caproșu, 2000: 227). Ariton, an Armenian *kobzar*, owned a shop on the Old Bridge (Podul Vechi in Romanian) street in Iași (Caproșu and Ungureanu, 1997: 289). These are examples showing the difference between the Gypsy fiddlers and the indigen ones.

A more complex example is that of Gligoraș the *kobzar* fiddler, to whom the officials set the borders for his inherited house plot (Caproșu, 2001: 528-529, 600-601). The same Gligoraș Moarte the *kobzar* fiddler sells a house with a shed to the merchant Lohan from Iasi for the amount of 60 lei (Caproșu, 2008: 3-37). From both these examples we can understand that this *kobzar* was one of the ruler, who played at the Court and who had the right to own and trade house or land in the vicinity of the Court (the house was located between the Old Bridge and the Armenian Street in Iași), probably so that he could always be close to the ruler and respond promptly to his requests. There are also documents that show that there were other Gypsies having different occupations, who owned properties near the Princely Court, probably for the same reason, to be close when they were needed.

These examples show us that there were also cases of Gypsy fiddlers who, although slaves or slaves at origin, managed to rise above their social status most likely through the music they frequently performed, which was supposed to be a high quality one and for which the fiddler was well paid. Similar situations can be found in Transylvania, where some Gypsies, virtuoso interpreters, were very well paid, acquiring thus a privileged social position (Zăloagă, 2015: 356-357).

Institutionalization

Starting with the Phanariote reigns, the great boyars gave up living on their estates in order to settle within the capital city, closer to the ruler and the atmosphere of the Court.

¹⁹ Dignitary who looked after the granaries of the Princely Court.

Thus, they began to adopt the city customs, to speak foreign languages and, following the princely fashion, Romeo Ghircoiașiu mentions (Ghircoiașiu, 1963: 178) that they began to form their own band of fiddlers who will always be at their disposal. We do not know to what extent the fiddler bands were available to the boyar (if they indeed existed) since the beginning of the Phanariote reigns because the music is still an attribute of the ruler. Perhaps the end of the Phanariote era has brought some changes into the power scale within the State, allowing somehow this privilege to the boyars as well.

The fact is that since the first half of the 18th century the first guilds of fiddlers begin to appear. This is also the time when the name 'fiddler' is being generalized and institutionalized, covering all the members of these guilds, regardless of the instrument they played, labelling, in fact, the newly established profession (Cosma, 1970: 7; Debie, 1970: 226). However, it should be highlighted that every reference to a particular fiddler in the documents of those times is still identifying him by his name and by the instrument he plays.

In 1723 the first guild of fiddlers was set up in Craiova and the document attesting to this fact specifies:

"The paper for Constantine the fiddler to be the leader of the fiddlers. We issued our document to Constantine the Gypsy fiddler for him to lead all the Gypsies who are now in the city of Craiova, either those of the boyars or of the monasteries or of any others, except for the Gypsies who belong to the treasury or to the merchants, or to any others here in Craiova, so the Gypsies do not go negotiate without the knowledge of their leader, and those who will be performing to weddings, to call the above mentioned leader or to send [people] to him to talk and to negotiate as many singers as needed for that wedding and for large feasts planned by boyars, merchants or others; likewise [the Gypsies] are to send [the people] to their leader and it is for him to provide as many singers as needed at that paid feast; and if one of the Gypsies was to make any foolishness and get into a fight at any wedding or at any feast, or [fight] between themselves, or disobeying their above mentioned leader, he is to reprimand each one of them, according to their individual fault, and any dispute they might have regarding their art, he is to judge them and to amend

their arguments, and they are to go to their leader when there is need of mending more serious quarrels between them and he is to collect 20 bani in one year from each Gypsy fiddler, according to custom” (Ghenea, 1965: 112).

This document is very important as it certifies the first institutionalized organization of the fiddlers, which regulates their status, attributions and limits within which they must carry out their activity. Here we also notice that a usual fee is charged to the Gypsies who performed at certain events (the fee for the performance of fiddlers was prior to the constitution of their first guild), the difference now is that the fee is to be collected through their leader. In 1785, ten years after the constitution of the guild of fiddlers from Bucharest (Urechiă, 1891: 95) and Focsani, the guild from Iași was formed, and in 1795, the one from Huși (Ghenea, 1965: 114; Brâncuși, 1969: 86).

About the duties of the leader of fiddlers (*vătaf* in Romanian), we discover from another document the following information: “the one that My Highness [Alexandru Ipsilanti] made him *vătaf* over all the fiddlers from the city of Focsani, over the Gypsies of the ruler, of the monasteries and of the boyars, so he may take care of all assignments and obey all commands that I will be giving to him through the great *armaș*²⁰ (i.e. the hierarchical superior of the *vătaf*); no one is to bespeak himself for any wedding without the *vătaf*'s knowledge and not until he goes to negotiate and to take the commission (*adet* in old Romanian) of 1 thaler from each wedding. And the one found out by the *vătaf* that he has negotiated without the *vătaf*'s knowledge, he is to be brought to the county officials in order to be punished by beating. Also, the appointed *vătaf* must collect the usual tax of 33 bani from each fiddler. My Highness also commands to you all fiddlers, those of the ruler, of the monasteries, and of the boyars, to submit to the *vătaf* who will carry my command, given through the great *armaș*, that those who will not obey, to be brought to the county officials and be punished by beating” (Cronț et al., 1973: 5).

This document is a very important one, mainly because it attests to the establishment of the fiddlers' guild from Focșani, then because it shows the mechanism through which the fiddlers functioned at an institutionalized level. Thus, the ruler gives a command to all fiddlers, even if not all of them were of his property. He also sends orders to all of them

²⁰ A princely dignitary, who, in Moldavia, was in charge of guarding dungeons and carrying out executions, and in Wallachia, he took care of the army's artillery and Princely Gypsies.

through the great *armaş*, who in turn transmits them to the *vătafs*. The *vătafs* were appointed by the ruler, a fact being later confirmed through an act issued by the Princely Chancellery (Urechiă, 1892: 213). We notice that he is the one who regulates and manages the artistic activity of all fiddlers, creating a mechanism through which he controls it. The other owners of the fiddlers, the boyars and the monasteries, benefit from the artistic performance of their 'property' through those amounts established by the *vătaf* as taxes to be paid. The income of the *vătaf* was also made from the fiddler's performances, that had to give 1 thaler for each wedding where he was called to sing, as well as the usual annual tax of 33 bani. The disobedience of the commands attracted physical punishment; practically, the fiddlers had little to no power over their own performances, them being mere performers who received nevertheless some payment for each event they attended to, just as we have seen with their artistic predecessors, the minstrels of the European noble courts.

In *The Synodal Act for donations, exchanges, and sales, and for Gypsies* issued by Alexandru II Mavrocordat, the ruler of Moldavia (1785-186), it is specified that:

“if the Gypsy man or the Gypsy woman will be found doing their craft without them being able to reach an accord with their masters regarding the craft, then they need to go to trial where it will be decided the price [the Gypsy] has to pay, to whom shall remain the revenue from the performance of the Gypsy man or the Gypsy woman, apart from the already established price for the person; but for the craft of the fiddlers, of the *kobzars* or of other singers, no additional price will be settled nor given” (Codrescu, 1889: 85-86).

This text is yet another very important example for establishing the condition of fiddlers in relation to the ruler of the State and for seeing the way their activity is organised. We note that, besides the price set for the Gypsy's person (the person is labelled as 'soul' in the Romanian text), the specific document mentioned that no higher price should be charged for their music, which leads us to believe that the tendency of those times was for fiddlers to be better paid than other Gypsies.

Another significant element that emerges from this text is the difference between the music of fiddlers, the music of *kobzars* and the music of singers (vocalists). There is also a classification in types of fiddlers, this short text confirming our hypothesis that there

were distinct categories of Gypsy musicians, named after the instrument they played. Until the 18th century, the documents show that the lute was the main instrument they used. Most likely, the fiddlers did not necessarily represent a distinct category, but were rather *lute/kobza* performers (Zinveliu, 1995: 131), who were also vocalists, accompanying themselves instrumentally. At the various events they participated, they used a certain repertoire, they sang or made a greeting, and then continued with their instrumental music. From some accounts we know that, when several fiddlers were present, they took turns in singing the vocal melodies they knew, while the others accompanied them instrumentally (Simonescu, 1939: 285; Fotino, 2008: 639). More precisely, according to Lazăr Şaineanu, the instrumental and vocal interpretation of these musicians was the following: “one holds the fiddle and executes the melody, the second one accompanies it with the *kobza* and marks the rhythm on the chords of the instrument, singing the words; and the third one, with the panpipes adds to the executed arias low or high flourishes” (Şaineanu, 1900: CXVIII).

Payment

The fiddlers performed in different places around the country and, initially, they were not obliged to justify their earnings to anyone, but later schools were created so that they could learn music and become profitable and bring profit to their masters (Ghenea, 1965: 113). Depending on his income, the boyar could have owned several Gypsies, with various occupations. When they did not have much work to do, they were allowed to go to other places to gain a financial supplement, from which they also gave part to the boyar. This was especially the case with fiddlers who could go perform, in general, at various taverns and village feasts for an annual amount paid to the boyar (Djuvara, 2013: 312). There are several examples of such payments, but it should be noted that in most cases the ruler's fiddlers were the ones being paid and not all three categories of fiddlers. The main income of the fiddlers belonging to the ruler were the tips received from the ruler himself on the occasion of various events at which they performed. On the occasion of the move of the princely residence of Constantin Brâncoveanu from Targoviste to Bucharest and back, large processions were organized in which all the court music participated, including the fiddlers, who were rewarded with various amount of money. In 1696, upon the arrival of Constantin Brâncoveanu from the war, 2 thalers were paid for the fiddlers who were part of the procession (Giurescu, 1962: 465). For the feast of Saint John, the fiddlers and the

kobzars were paid half a thaler (Giurescu, 1962: 465-466), probably for the carol performed for the ruler. Two years later, on the feasts of Saint Basil and the Epiphany, the fiddlers and kobzars received 1.5 thalers (Giurescu, 1962: 464), and in 1701, also on the feast of Saint Basil, the same musicians were paid a thaler (Giurescu, 1962: 462). In 1700, the kobzars and fiddlers received a thaler (Giurescu, 1962: 463), and the following year they received the same amount (Giurescu, 1962: 463). It should be noted that each time they are mentioned in the Register, the fiddlers are separated into two distinct groups, fiddlers and kobzars, which highlights that the difference between them depends solely on the instrument they played. According to a document from the Hurezu Monastery Archive, in 1701, at the wedding of a certain Badii, belonging to a boyar family, 8 thalers were paid for “Badea’s fiddlers” (Iorga, 1907: 258-259), specifically, for the musicians belonging to a boyar named Badea. In July 1797, 8 lei were paid for the Gypsy fiddlers on the occasion of the repair of the ship and 15 lei on the launching ceremony of the ship (Caproșu, 2003: 259).

Still relating to the payment of these musicians and their names in the documents, some information has been found in a register from Vrancea County, written in 1827 (Sava, 1934: 117-118). The register shows that a fiddler was paid with 4 paras (parale in Romanian, a Romanian currency) for performing in a tavern. It is mentioned that the fiddler wanted to leave, but those who paid him wanted him to stay longer, so the fiddler had ran away. In his run, he fell and broke its *skripka*. The vornic of Vrancea has made those who caused the fiddler to run away to pay 16 lei for the broken *skripka*, an amount that represented the price of the instrument, as well as payment of a fine for their action (Sava, 1934: 151-152). Here, we can see again that the documents specify the exact instrument played by the fiddler, although the content of the text refers to a generally labelled “fiddler”. It is also important to note that this incident has been recorded and that the *skripka* player has been compensated with a fairly large amount compared to his earnings.

Conclusions

The fiddlers were highly regarded at the Princely Court, but also outside of it, every important feast or event being accompanied by their music. Foreign travellers noticed their importance, but also the fact that, although they were an appreciated category, their

social and material situation was unfortunate, not being granted a comparable status with the art they performed. The tendencies to institutionalize them by creating the guilds of fiddlers aimed at a better recording and a stricter control, precisely because they were profitable to their owners, an aspect that should not be neglected. The fiddlers contributed to making the Court's atmosphere more entertaining. They even were quite indispensable to the ruler, accompanying him everywhere, as he was the only one who could use their music during the parades that followed him everywhere, but also during other events.

The various transactions of fiddlers for considerable amounts of money also reveal their importance, as well as the fact that the ruler pays special attention to this category of people. Looking from a general perspective, the fiddlers represent one of the defining elements of the Romanian culture, one of the pillars that have constituted it, but also one of the artistic (namely musical) ways through which a political representation of the ruler may be observed. The analysis of this category of musicians offers rich information about a multitude of aspects concerning the life of certain people living in the Romanian Principalities. Capitalizing on documents and testimonies less known in historiography, the first part of this study about the Gypsy fiddlers has tackle the elements that define the artistic side of this category of musicians, such as the origin of the Gypsies living in the Romanian Principalities, some of them having been mentioned as musicians. Each of the several terms used in documents for naming the fiddlers has its own importance, especially when wanting to highlight the fine details. The repertoire of the fiddlers was also important to analyse, but not necessarily from the perspective of the songs the fiddlers played, but rather because of the genres they covered and the musical influences compiled in their songs. One of the last elements that were covered during the first study about fiddlers emphasized the musical instruments used predominantly by these musicians, such as the lute, the kobza, the violin and the panpipes, giving some specific details about each one of them.

This second part of the research dedicated to fiddlers showed some very important aspects related, this time around, to their social status, the fiddlers being placed in different other artistic categories, and not only in the musical atmosphere of the Princely Court. This study also portrayed the social status of the fiddlers, placing them in the hierarchy of society of those times. Their status as slaves, a superior state of slavery to

that known on the American continent, for example, did not prevent them from developing their talent and art. Moreover, they knew how to become almost indispensable for certain events that took place at the Princely Court or outside of it. For these reasons, the aspects discussed here regarding their institutionalization and payment are of great importance.

In other words, the difference between Gypsy and indigen fiddlers should not be overlooked, as their social status differs, as well as their way of interacting with the ruler of the State. Most of the examples recorded in official documents or in various narrative sources refer to the Gypsy fiddlers and we must remember that they were more numerous and more financially profitable, their status as slaves limiting or even annulling their rights. On the other hand, indigen fiddlers were free people, living in cities or even near the ruler, getting involved in Court life and sometimes being part of the princely parades.

The limits in which all this research is carried out, between the 16th and the 19th centuries, represent the time when the first testimonies about fiddlers appear, testimonies from which the study of the 'phenomenon' could begin. The 19th century, the upper limit of this time frame, represents a benchmark around which conclusions can be drawn, without the after facts affecting, in a certain way, the understanding of the approach. The use of information from sources dating after the year 1800 was to complete the general framework around fiddlers.

It must also be said that, from a musical point of view, the 19th century is a century of transformations taking place within the Romanian Principalities. If in the first decades, the Western musical influence manifests itself gradually more, really changing the sound context by the middle of the 19th century, during all this time the fiddlers keep the characteristics of their music. Visible changes in the specifics of fiddler music appear particularly during the second half of the 19th century and during the 20th century, but these changes have to be tackled in a distinct research.

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