

**Modern History Sourcebook:
William MacMichael:
The Court at Bucharest, 1819**

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The inhabitants of Bucharest are as much addicted to the vice of gambling, and the love of dissipation in general, as those of the capital of Moldavia. There was, however, no theatre open, and their chief public amusement consisted in the jolting promenade along the streets, similar to that described at Jassy. But as we were here during the carnival, there were public balls two or three times a week at one of the principal inns, and we were present one evening at a sort of theatrical exhibition resembling the feats of horsemanship at Astley's; the entertainment, which was given by some itinerant Germans, in a public building called "The Club," began with a dance executed on stilts, and concluded with a ludicrous scene in imitation of our popular farce of the "Tailor riding to Brentford." The dialogue was in German, a language much spoken here; and it gave a laughable air of dignity to the representation, to listen to the calpaked courtiers of the Hospodar, translating into modern Greek parts of the ridiculous conversation of the players. When, for instance, the inexperienced rider asks the innkeeper in the farce, if he has any steady horse he can recommend to him, the Wallachian gentry thought it a very good joke to surround the officer of the Prince, who is at the head of the department of the post at Bucharest, and tease him with the question, "Have you good horses." Many of the tricks of the performers were of the coarsest description; but the Princess and her daughters who were present at the entertainment, seated on sofas at the upper end of the room, and dressed with a profusion of jewels, seemed highly delighted, and laughed immoderately at jests, not much distinguished by good breeding.

As a proof of the state of morals in the capital, the son of the Hospodar (dressed like a Turk, and wearing a turban, in which he would not have dared to be seen at Constantinople) entered the club, where sat his mother and sisters, having on his arm his mistress, a beautiful Wallachian lady, who had lately deserted her husband and six children; there appeared to be nothing extraordinary, or that was considered indelicate, in his conduct. The Prince himself was not at the club, but most of the officers of his court, and many of the principal nobles of Wallachia were assembled in the room; they were uniformly dressed in huge kalpaks, with long flowing robes, and many were smoking Turkish pipes; in short, every thing was Eastern in the appearance of the men, though in the costume of the ladies, who were sitting cross-legged on sofas, there was an evident admixture of French and Oriental attire; their coiffures were richly ornamented with jewels, and they wore French silk dresses, probably made at Vienna, together with the Greek zone and Turkish slippers. Under the jealous eye of the suspicious government of Turkey, the article of dress is a matter of no small importance; and the use of the costume of civilized Europe would be considered as dangerous an innovation, as the adoption of the most enlightened views of modern policy.

During the occupation of the country by the Russians, the boyars eagerly laid aside this loose attire, and wore the French dress; but on their return to Turkish authority, they were obliged to resume the robe and the kalplak. It was with reluctance they saw themselves revert to their former masters; and, it is said, they envy the lot of the inhabitants of that part of Moldavia, who are so happy as to enjoy the protection of the autocrat of all the Russias. When the imperial headquarters were at Bucharest, the army spent considerable sums of money in the town, a circumstance which makes the inhabitants regret still more their absence. It would seem, therefore, that the lapse of a century has made a great change in the political feelings of the natives of these countries, as may be inferred from their conduct in 1711, at the most critical

period of the war carried on by Peter the Great against the Turks. Cantemir, the Prince of Moldavia, who, in addition to his boasted descent from the great Tamerlane, was distinguished by talents worthy of the ancient Greeks, possessing alike a knowledge of letters and arms, had thrown off his allegiance to the Porte and joined the army of the Czar, which was encamped on the north bank of the Pruth. The tents of the Grand Vizier were on the opposite side of the river; and the fate of the campaign might depend, in a great measure, on the decision of the people, in the centre of whose territory the hostile troops were assembled. But neither the example, nor the entreaties, of the accomplished Prince of Moldavia were able to shake the former attachment of his subjects; and they, as well as their neighbours, the inhabitants of Wallachia, espoused the party of the Grand Vizier, and abundantly supplied the Turkish camp with provisions. "Tant," says Voltaire, "l'ancienne idée de la barbarie Muscovite avoit aliéné tous "les esprits." . . .

Source:

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