

Homo valachicus orientalis

(1716–1859)

BOGDAN BUCUR

IN A LETTER sent to Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg, in Vienna, on 1 October 1688, Count and Field Marshal Federico Veterani (1643–1695) presented some strategic information regarding the province of Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia), where the Austrian troops were billeted. The cities of Craiova, Câmpulung and Pitești resembled villages, as they consisted of nothing more than ramshackle huts and half-dugout shelters. The fields were wasted and barren, and therefore useless for agriculture. There were no bridges over the main rivers (Jiu, Olt, Argeș and Dâmbovița). There were a couple of sparse monasteries in the woods and other secluded places. The villages were extremely scattered. Generally speaking, Oltenia seemed almost deserted.¹ On 27 April 1702, in Bucharest, the vast majority of the population lived in half-dugout shelters, covered with straw and tree bark. The shabby dens in the capital city were even compared to the English cellars.² The city was poorly paved with wooden logs. Only around the palace there were a couple of houses made of stone, although modest in size, covered with shingle, their yards surrounded by oak trunks.³ Apart from a few, otherwise remarkable, cultural and architectural initiatives, this is what the Principality of Wallachia looked like during its best autochthonous government—under Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688–1714)—before the instauration of the Phanariot reign, in 1716.⁴ It can be easily understood that Wallachia had never been any different at any point in the past.

Wallachia belonged, wholly, to the Orient.⁵ It was doubly subordinated to Constantinople: religiously (to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, through its tradition of Eastern Christianity) and politically (to the Sublime Porte, due to the fact that it belonged, as an autonomous principality, to the Ottoman Empire). In a nutshell, the only main notable differences between the Wallachian lifestyle and the Ottoman one were those exclusively related to the religious norms. Apart from those, there were only similarities (in apparel, food, interior decorations). Conversely, until 1829, the only physical and spiritual traces of the West in Wallachia were—apart from the Latin origin of the Romanian language (which is not relevant from the civilizational point of view)—a single Wallachian with European academic studies (the great boyar Constantin Cantacuzino studied at the University of Padua from 1667 to 1668), a single public institute for humanist studies (the Princely Academy of Bucharest, where classes were held in Greek), a few hundreds of Catholics and Protestants (residents in the Wallachian urban areas), a few Europeans settled in Bucharest (which were part of the royal court), a couple of Western books (which circulated mostly in Greek translation), a few hundreds of great Wallachian boyars who

knew a widely-spoken foreign language, predominantly Greek or French, and who, at least once in their lives, while fleeing from foreign attacks, took refuge together with their families in Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó) or Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), where they were able to borrow a couple of elements from the Western material culture. However, all of the above had a minimal impact on the civilization of Wallachia. As a matter of fact, prior to 1829, we can affirm that less than 1% of the population had contact with at least one element of the Western civilization—not that those who did could be deemed Westernized. Until 1829, the geographical and scientific discoveries, the architectural styles, the musical genres, the artistic and literary movements of the time were completely unknown in Bucharest. Wallachia was, so to speak, not part of history. As was the case in the Orient, the Wallachian society was contemplative, fatalist and traditionalist, in contrast to the Western society, which had become dynamic, progressive and more advanced.⁶ Indisputably, *Homo valachicus* was a subspecies of *Homo orientalis*.

The chasm between the developments taking place in the Occident, as opposed to those in the Orient, had reached tremendous proportions. Until 1829, Wallachia had been completely absent from the international scientific exchanges. During that period of time no Wallachian concerned themselves with the study of formal science (logic and mathematics), natural science (biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy), or applied science (engineering, agronomy, medicine, and pharmacy). Until 1829, Wallachia wasn't able to offer the world a single astronomer, doctor, engineer, architect, mathematician, physicist, agronomist, pharmacist, painter, musician, etc. On the other hand, all of these professions—and their subsequent scientific disciplines—were well known in the West, since the Greco-Roman Antiquity, and following their rediscovery at the end of the Middle Ages. For instance, before the union of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which took place in 1859, Wallachia had an illiteracy rate of over 90%, similar to that of Western Europe in 1450, but also similar to that of the Roman Empire.⁷ In 1850, when the first Wallachian institution of higher education was created (the Faculty of Law, as part of Saint Sava Princely Academy, the high school in Bucharest)—the University of Bologna (1088) had been around for 762 years. Moreover, around 1500, there were already 71 universities in Europe, in all Catholic and Protestant states.⁸ The public library was a fundamental institution for the spreading of scientific works. The first Wallachian reading cabinet (which was at the same time a bookstore) was created in 1826, on Podul Mogoşoaiei, in Bucharest, at the private initiative of the great boyar Dinicu Golescu. However, the first Wallachian public library was established as late as 1836, as part of Saint Sava Princely Academy, 400 hundred years after the inauguration of the first European civic library, the Malatestiana Library from Cesena. If we choose to look at things from a different perspective, we discover that the first paved road in Wallachia was Podul Mogoşoaiei of Bucharest, first mentioned in 1841. In addition, in 1853, the existence of the first stone bridge was confirmed. It was built in Bucharest, over the Dâmboviţa River. At that time, 1750 years had passed since Apollodorus of Damascus had built Trajan's Bridge over the Danube, in order for the Roman armies to invade Dacia. While in Bucharest, in 1853, the first stone bridge was inaugurated, a year later, in 1854, one of the world's most important engineering projects came to fruition in Austria: the Semmering Railway, which crossed the Alps through 14 tunnels

dug in the mountains, across 16 viaducts and 100 curved stone bridges. If we were to talk about visual arts, the first modern painting from Wallachia might be *Urcarea lui Marrogheni pe tron* (The enthronement of Mavrogheni, 1786), by Iordache Venier, which is also known as *Divanul lui Nicolae Mavrogheni* (Nicolae Mavrogheni's divan). Iordache Venier, who was seemingly of Venetian origin, was the first arch-painter or headman of the painters' guild specialized in painting church interiors (*zugravi de subțire*), after their separation, in 1787, from the daubers' guild (*zugravi de gros*).⁹ This is the moment when the rigid frames of Byzantine church painting were abandoned for the first time in Wallachia. Thus, Wallachian art started to aim towards a more realistic approach in rendering the individual traits of its characters. *Autoportret* (Selfportrait) by Nicolae Polcovnicul (1788–1842) can be seen as the first modern painting of a Wallachian painter, specialized in interior painting for churches. This painting was completed around 1800, 500 years after Giotto's death.

And, as if these examples of severe gaps in evolution between East and West weren't enough, Wallachia was affected by several political, natural, and social catastrophes between 1716 and 1859. Therefore, the Romanian premodern era, both during the Phanariot (1716–1821) and the indigenous ruling (1822–1859) periods, can be best described in terms of social insecurity, seen as a permanent feature by both the rural and the urban population.¹⁰ Between 1716 and 1859, *Homo valachicus*, which is the focus of our study, was witness to and the victim of some extraordinary calamities, which permanently altered the peaceful cohabitation and durable growth in Wallachia. During this time (1716–1859), the armed confrontations between the neighboring empires,¹¹ the military invasions and abuses of the occupying armies,¹² the organized robbery by armed groups of thieves,¹³ the endemic corruption and fiscal abuses of the autochthonous administration,¹⁴ the territorial dismantlement,¹⁵ the plague and the cholera epidemics,¹⁶ the fires that ravaged the main cities,¹⁷ the earthquakes,¹⁸ the locust invasion,¹⁹ the devastating floods,²⁰ the prolonged draught,²¹ the rough winters with blizzards and heavy snowfall,²² they all followed one another with unprecedented speed and gravely altered, due to their atrocious consequences, the quality of life in Wallachia. The extreme political, natural and social phenomena recorded in Wallachia between 1716 and 1859 led to alarming rates of underdevelopment and famine,²³ mortality and morbidity.²⁴ During this entire era, *Homo valachicus* had to cope with a low life expectancy (under 40 years), with the lack of food or the lack of means to buy food, with the fear of death and disease, with huge physical and food deficiencies, all leading to lives lived on the brink of survival.²⁵ *Homo valachicus*—who lived in insalubrious half-dugout shelters or in huts made of wattle (daubed with clay and covered with reeds)—lived, indisputably, a miserable life, marked by extreme poverty.²⁶

From a political standpoint, *Homo valachicus* witnessed the corrupt practices employed during the Phanariot regime (1716–1821) throughout the entire country. This epoch was influenced by the tyrannical, arbitrary and abusive government of the foreigners who came from the Phanar, the main Greek quarter of Constantinople, in order to achieve wealth in Bucharest. Their main objective was the corrupt administration of Wallachia's public affairs, guided by their desire to seize and drain the natural and financial resources of the principality. In relation to the political authorities, *Homo vala-*

chicus was in a state of complete subservience; they could be abused and offended if any kind of suspicion would arise. To these administrative problems were added the social ones, such as the massive depopulation of Wallachia during the 18th century. Faced with relentless waves of violence, destruction, pillaging, arson, wars and killings, endured by the locals with stoicism, their only viable alternative was fleeing into the woods, to more secluded mountain areas, or over the border, to Transylvania, and even to the south of Danube, in the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ There are the multiple causes behind these social phenomena, of which the most important is the internal uncertainty caused by the horrendous natural calamities, meteorological and epidemiologic, and, mainly, by the terrific human losses (endless wars, armed invasions, robbery and pillage). *Homo valachicus* was the innocent victim of the successive occupations and military invasions of the Austrians, Russians, and Ottomans. During these times, the Wallachian cities, churches, monasteries, merchants' shops and even the princely court were pillaged, plundered, devastated and burnt down without mercy.²⁸ Most cultural assets—manuscripts and books, which were part of the collections held in the monasteries' libraries (in small numbers to begin with)—were forever lost because of the occupying armies' thefts and destruction. The lugubrious spectacle of the devastating fires, in cities particularly, was very impressive. They caused great damage to both private and public property. *Homo valachicus* lived in a country where the plague and cholera epidemics brought death to towns and their neighboring villages, while draught and catastrophic floods, locust invasions and rough winters, which came too early or lasted too long, ruined crops and caused famine. The travelers who passed through the principality, generally from Western Europe, even during the 19th century, were absolutely shocked by the fact that they were unable to receive housing or to be accommodated.²⁹ Frequently, they had to spend the night in an insalubrious hut, where the only food they received was polenta.³⁰ For all these reasons, Wallachia appeared ruined and deserted, as well as poor and undernourished in the eyes of the Western travelers.³¹ The paradox is that the fertile lands and the paradisiacal climate should have ensured the wellbeing of the population.³² An edifying example is the letter of the Italian abbot Lionardo Panzini (1 December 1776), in which the Catholic prelate talks about the Wallachian society, as it was immediately after the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774:

The most beautiful lands, the fertility of which is beyond imagination, remain abandoned for several generations because of the lack of workers who could bring them to fruition. Many towns, marked on ancient maps, are nowadays nothing more than small and poor villages, and many townlets and villages have vanished without a trace. Târgoviște, the old capital city of Wallachia, has become nothing more than a small village, inhabited by 20 or 30 families; Buzău, one of the two episcopal seats of the country, was turned to ashes by the Russians, so the bishop is forced to live in Bucharest. This entire part of the country, which stretches from the south of Bucharest to the Danube, is almost entirely deserted and the land is barren on account of the constant invasions, killings and devastations brought about in the past by the Turks from across the Danube, who freely passed through here [in Wallachia], meaning to take slaves and to steal, while destroying through fire and flames everything in their way.³³

THESE FACTS—concerning the extreme poverty of the population—remained unchanged even half a century later. In one of his journal entries, the Finnish Lieutenant Berndt Johan Rosenström, who travelled through Wallachia in 1828, confessed that, from Bucharest to Hârşova, he had passed solely through looted and barren lands, haunted by the plague and impoverished by war. As for the towns, Helmuth von Moltke observed, in 1835, that they were half in ruins and full of debris. Slobozia, for instance, is described as “a pile of ruins.”³⁴ Basically, towards the second half of the 19th century, *Homo valachicus* survived—in utter squalor—in a country in which public and private investments in common spaces and facilities were completely absent.³⁵ The explanation for this dire state is simple if we consider that, over a period of 40 years, the political elite of Wallachia fled abroad seven times.³⁶ That is why, in 1835, while going across Wallachia, from Banat or Transylvania to Bucharest, you would go through 200 kilometers of bad, unpaved roads,³⁷ through impoverished and dirty counties, in which hovels with a wooden structure were half dug into the ground and covered with twigs.³⁸ For the travelers who came down the Danube, from Vienna, heading towards Constantinople, passing through Romanian villages—in which people lived underground, like rabbits—was a truly shocking experience. This deplorable image of the rural area—reduced to a bunch of poor and insalubrious half-dugout shelters—is constant throughout the period we analyze.³⁹ The British traveler Charles Boileau Elliott gave us a picturesque description of the villages in Oltenia, situated on Danube’s shore, from that era:

*The village scene was highly amusing. All was bustle on a small scale. Fishermen were every now and then bringing in the trophies of their success. In one quarter, under a canopy of dried leaves, the only shelter from sun and rain except the miserable huts already described, might be seen the houseless host of travelers sitting on a board, which served likewise for a table, regaling themselves with slices of tonny or sturgeon fried on a skewer and eggs cooked in wood ashes; while, a little further off, a party of boatmen, squatting on the ground, sent round the black bread and acid wine with all the glee of health and appetite, nothing disturbed by the numerous dogs and pigs, each of the latter with a triangle round his neck, which surrounded them with beseeching looks and grunts. In another quarter, a half-naked girl was washing one of a dozen naked children in what resembled a hog tub, but proved to be the family utensil for all culinary and household purposes. Here, a woman might be seen slaughtering a fowl by bleeding it at the back of the neck; while, by her side, an old gipsy with grizzly hair was tossing about his legs in caricature of a dance, holding by the arm a female beggar capering with equal grace. The squalid filth, the poverty and degradation in which the people of this village vegetate can scarcely be exceeded; and, alas! it is but a specimen of Wallachian misery in general. The dress of such as are covered with anything more than rags partakes a good deal of the eastern character. . . . Others appear in a cap, trowsers, and long coat of white blanketing which is soon soiled, and, being never washed, becomes in time indescribably filthy.*⁴⁰

In spite of the persistent Oriental customs, after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), the political elites took part in an accelerated process of Westernization. Thus began the quick filling of the gaps between the Orient and the Occident.⁴¹ A good example is Brăi-

la Raya, a port on the Danube: during the reign of the Phanariots it was simply a Turkish fortress, with a small population of only a few hundred inhabitants, but after 1836 it turned into a prosperous trading center.⁴² Giurgiu Raya—which was almost completely destroyed during the Russo-Turkish War (1828–1829) and turned into a chaos of Oriental ruins—slowly began to achieve a Western look.⁴³ In 1838 one could find in Craiova beautiful houses, which were unfortunately surrounded by dirty half-dugout shelters and barren lands, covered in weeds. In 1835, in the capital of Oltenia, a high school was inaugurated, the second high school in Wallachia, after Saint Sava Princely Academy of Bucharest.⁴⁴ In 1838, in Râmnicu Sărat, one could admire the sumptuous mansion of boyar Niculescu, built in an Italian style, right next to a brick castle, built in Turkish fashion.⁴⁵ The town of Ploiești also made considerable progress: in 1844 new houses were being built, the streets were paved, and the public square was tidied up.⁴⁶ Overall, the capital of Wallachia was undergoing a fundamental change: everyone was building.⁴⁷ Between 1835 and 1836, in Bucharest several hospitals,⁴⁸ a museum,⁴⁹ a high school⁵⁰ and a public library⁵¹ were opened. There were several bookshops,⁵² “palaces, places for socializing, theaters,⁵³ seamstresses, newspapers⁵⁴ and luxury carriages; but as soon as you set foot outside the city, you fell right back into barbarism.”⁵⁵ The high society spoke French, and the Western customs were quickly borrowed. Inside the palaces of Bucharest’s elite—where, in 1838, the portrait of General Count Pavel Kiseleff could always be admired—the same elevated topics as in the drawing rooms in Paris, London and Vienna were being discussed. Only the old boyars and the lower classes kept their Oriental customs. Nevertheless, in the capital city, even in its center, the streets were poorly aligned and roughly paved. The Dâmbovița River, with its dirty and muddy shores, was so filthy that it seemed to be the main dumping site for all the trash from the riverside districts. On Podul Mogoșoaiei—the main avenue (later renamed Calea Victoriei)—the shabby, poorly made huts were right next to sumptuous palaces. The general aspect was that of a Turkish town, rather than a European one. As a matter of fact, in 1838, “the majority of the houses are nothing more than small wooden cottages eaten by termites, out of which only a few buildings with a more pretentious architecture stand out.”⁵⁶ The rough labyrinthine streets of Bucharest were covered with mud, which made carriages mandatory. In the center of the capital, town and village blended, and so did extreme poverty and absolute splendor, Eastern barbarism and Western greatness. There were no public squares and no pedestrian alleys. Even though Wallachia was going through an era of cultural and economic recovery, the physical progress was not (yet) visible in rural areas, and in the urban ones it was not (yet) dominant. We have an account from 1846 on the architectural changes of the world in which *Homo valachicus* lived their humble life, thanks to French Minister and Professor Saint-Marc Girardin:

From Galați to Bucharest, on a 70–80 leagues road, I saw five villages and three trees. Truth be told, I was on the main road. Because here things are different from the way they are in other countries. In other countries the villages are built on the side of the road; here the villages shy away from the roads, because they attract the robberies and plunders of the Turks. Thus, the villages are hidden in the land. In France, when talking about a village you think of a certain amount of houses. Here there are holes dug in the ground, a

*few shabby twigs mended with mud and manure, above a roof made of corn stalks—and there you have it: a home. After a year or two of peacefulness, the houses start raising from the ground. The walls are still made from planks and daub, but they are no longer underground. It's progress. Where we see houses made of wood we have a town, and if there are a couple of buildings made of brick, plastered and painted, then it's the capital of a district, maybe even a monastery or a diocese.*⁵⁷

With all these imperfections, after 1837 the Principality of Wallachia timidly began to gain its place on the fringes of the civilized world.⁵⁸ In parallel, the deep traces of the Orient, still dominant, slowly began to fade, especially in the central parts of the main cities. In 1846, the capital of Wallachia experimented equally, although in different proportions, the Eastern barbarism⁵⁹ and the Western refinement.⁶⁰ This strange juxtaposition between old Oriental customs and new European tastes was striking to a foreign traveler,⁶¹ even though such “discrepancies disappeared almost every day, due to the high number of new buildings that appeared almost miraculously.”⁶² Therefore, from 1841 onward, huts and half-dugout shelters were demolished so that in their place elegant European palaces could be built.⁶³ Nevertheless, in 1846, the streets were still nonlinear, bordered by walls made of wattle and planks. Still, for the first time in history, the main streets were covered with gravel. The public baths—once considered dirty places—had become, in just a few years, just like those in Constantinople, having met all the criteria of “luxurious Oriental finesse.”⁶⁴ The majority of the houses built during this time were, nevertheless, aesthetically inexpressive. In general, they only had the ground floor and they were surrounded by barren land or gardens. The hotels, inns, hospitals and palaces were a bit taller and they had one floor.⁶⁵ Abbey Domenico Zanelli, who visited the capital city in 1841, thought that “Bucharest is becoming more and more beautiful, therefore it won't be long until it turns into one of the most important cities of the Orient.”⁶⁶ Despite the indisputable progress Wallachia had made on its road to modernization, after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), for a Western intellectual, such as the Bavarian doctor who passed through the principality in 1846, the charm of the Orient is still its cultural and architectural mark, even in Bucharest. That is why, once you “cross the border to Transylvania, you find yourself in Asia and you have to give up the customs picked up in the West, so that you may manage, given the new circumstances.”⁶⁷ Therefore, except for a very small part of the population—urban and prosperous—which became rapidly Westernized, *Homo valachicus* kept, between 1843 and 1845, the main Oriental features of the previous epochs.⁶⁸

I've arrived in the Orient. Even though the country I am passing through right now is, geographically speaking, part of Europe, it has been tied for centuries, historically, to the Orient, through its rigid traditions. The fickle wars have marked it deeply, therefore it will be difficult for the Western culture to completely erase its memories, which still come alive. As a matter of fact: these huts, made of wood and mended with clay, that compile in most part the capital of Wallachia; these booths shaped as tents with pointy tops, leaning one against the other like a Caravanserai, which are its focal point; these small churches with a Byzantine shape, with their domes and thick bell towers; these narrow streets, labyrinthine, in

which the utter, most diverse blend of people and attires mingle, don't they offer, to a rushed onlooker, the image we have of the Oriental style? And, if among these we notice modern palaces, built in an eclectic style, in the pseudo-antique style of the 19th century, if we meet elegant carriages, their passengers wearing the finest Parisian and Viennese attires, if we see soldiers in uniforms, marching with European precision, instead of seeing the tall Phanariot hat or the Turkish turban we were accustomed to: aren't we rather surprised by such visions and inclined to consider them anomalies?⁶⁹

In the spring of 1848, Princess Aurélie Ghika, a writer born in France, spouse of the son of Gregory IV Ghika, Prince of Wallachia, used—in the title of a book published in Paris, in 1850—probably for the first time in history, the phrase *modern Wallachia*, which, however, should be taken *cum grano salis*. For instance, in a provincial town such as Giurgiu, which had nothing remarkable to give, the *modernity of Wallachia* meant the apparition of the first clock, embedded in the architecture of a public building, situated in the central square. The majority of the towns in Wallachia were, in 1850, far less developed even than the humblest townlets of the most underdeveloped province in the West.⁷⁰ Pitești and Râmnicu-Vâlcea had recently suffered at that time from devastating fires. Apparently, only a few towns were in a better shape after 1851.⁷¹ Nevertheless, towards 1859, the evolution and the accelerated development of Wallachia contributed to the clear modernization of even the most wretched Wallachian towns, such as Pitești and Giurgiu. In order to visit them, no matter the route, the road passed through a couple of small villages where one could see a few huts and half-dugout shelters.⁷² Outside the cities, only the old mansions of manorial estates had a somewhat pleasant look.⁷³ In general, the land hadn't been improved by engineers; the roads weren't paved.⁷⁴ Therefore, in 1850, a European going through the principality felt immersed in Oriental barbarity.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, truth be told, the Oriental charm sometimes seduced foreign travelers.⁷⁶ As for the capital of Wallachia, it didn't resemble any European town: the streets (dirty, narrow, serpentine) and the houses (unaligned, messy, rugged) didn't follow any architectural or urban norm. In spite of the differences in size, in general, the sumptuous palaces (from the center of the town) and the poor huts (from the outskirts) were equally unaesthetic (stylistically speaking) and flimsy (in regards to their construction). In 1853 a few residential buildings and a couple of beautiful shops could be admired in the center of the city.⁷⁷ There were almost no sidewalks—and that was the reason why all the rich citizens only traveled by carriage.⁷⁸ Even though, around 1851, accommodation in a Bucharest inn cost as much as a hotel in Paris, the differences in comfort were abysmal.⁷⁹ Given the size of the city, trade wasn't very developed, while the industry was almost completely lacking.⁸⁰ In 1848, except for a few European elements in architecture and urbanism,⁸¹ as seen in the center of the city, nothing else pointed to Bucharest's *Wallachian modernity*. As a matter of fact, the majority of the houses from the city's outskirts were in no way different from the rural hovels, made of wood and clay.⁸² Therefore, the concept of *Wallachian modernity* couldn't be applied outside the centers of the main cities—particularly Bucharest—and was valid only for a social and political elite (which was extremely limited in number). Only this minority—insignificant, statistically speaking, even for the urban population of the principality, without even taking into consideration

the peasants—was consuming Western products.⁸³ In 1848, the urban upper class—consisting of Wallachian boyars and foreign bourgeoisie—was the only part of the population to attend higher education and assimilate the European manners,⁸⁴ while the rest of the population was still anchored in the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy and plagued by illiteracy.⁸⁵ This flagrant contradiction between Oriental barbarism and Western civilization, which characterized the Wallachian society, was very well captured by the description of Bucharest in 1849, made by the German Theodor König:

In this country, where there are almost no schools, where the children of peasants live like animals, without teachers and schooling, where the priests belong to the lower, most despised layer of society, where the very bad roads are crippling and the state of the public carriages can't even be put into words—where thousands upon thousands of square miles of the most fertile land lay barren because the people are too lazy and torpid—, in this ragged country there is an Italian opera! This is where I was first acquainted to Italian music.⁸⁶

FOR THE first time in history, Bucharest had truly entered the European cultural circuit. In 1853, the opera *Luisa Miller* by Giuseppe Verdi—which had its premiere on 8 December 1849, at the Theater of San Carlo opera house in Naples—was presented, by an Italian company, at the Grand Theater of Bucharest.⁸⁷ Sir Patrick O'Brien, a member of British Parliament for King's County, who had attended the event both in Naples and in Wallachia, considered that the artistic performances of the company in Bucharest were, in some regards, superior to those of the interpretation he saw at the Theater of San Carlo.⁸⁸ In December 1853, a British prima donna brilliantly played Beatrice di Tenda, from the homonymous opera by Vincenzo Bellini.⁸⁹ According to the French socialist Ferdinand Lassalle, who attended one of the performances in 1857, the Grand Theater of Bucharest outshined the Berlin Opera. At the theater's exit and in its vicinity, in 1854, the elite of Bucharest's society had access to fine chocolateries, sweetshops that sold ice cream, coffee shops with pool tables, shops that had exotic fruits, booths with mineral water, the Viennese casino and the splendid French restaurants from Hôtel de Princes and Hôtel de France. Foreign travelers could spend the night at Hôtel de Londres or Hôtel d'Europe. The fine citizens strolled through Cișmigiu Gardens and watched, on the stage of the pavilion, a variety of musical performances. The garden was designed in the English landscape style, with great taste. Also, one could dine at the restaurant situated in the heart of the park. In the evening, in the Warenberg Garden, which was splendidly lit, classical music concerts were held regularly. At the same time, in another part of town, a play would be enacted. In 1857, on both sides of Kiseleff Road—the main avenue for promenades—military music was played, to the citizen's delight. All around, the urban furnishings and the French air reminded one of the cafés on Champs-Élysées. Bucharest had become a cosmopolitan city, filled with modern drawing rooms, furnished like those in Paris, with a rich social life; with shops and bookstores where one could find merchandise from all around the world, musical, optical and mechanical instruments included.⁹⁰

The overwhelming wellbeing, the grand luxury and sublime beauty seen in the center of the capital, collided with the extreme poverty, grotesque ugliness and abominable poverty of the outskirts. The sumptuous carriages pulled by gorgeous stallions, driven by festooned lackeys, dressed in quaint Hungarian costumes, passed alongside wagons filled with wood and hay, which belonged to the Wallachian peasants, dressed in sheep skins. Often, Viennese carriages were pulled by Wallachian nags, driven by a coachman in rags. Old boyars, in Turkish attire, stood beside ladies elegantly dressed according to the latest trends in Paris, while their servants wore sparkling Albanian costumes. At that time Bucharest had become an authentic carnival of human civilizations, where all the people of the Orient and the West blended. On the outskirts, the Dâmbovița River formed ponds, teeming with frogs and lizards, with the carcasses of dead dogs laying on the banks. In summer, in their dirty waters—where, most of the time, the town's garbage was dumped—children, women, men and their pets bathed together. The vacant lots in the capital city were covered by shanties and tents where the nomad population lived in utter squalor. No matter if the roads were paved with stone (in city center) or covered with logs (on the outskirts), the streets were dirty and roamed by feral dogs, hungry and aggressive. At night the streets were poorly lit. In summer they were covered in dust, in winter they were covered in mud.⁹¹ In 1855, the city achieved, somewhat without merit and somehow strangely, the undeserved label of *Little Paris*. From this perspective we have a thorough description of the capital of Wallachia, made in 1855 by the Austrian military physician Stefan Dietrich:

The cluster of buildings in the city center, the unkempt outskirts, the barren gardens and the dirty yards make out of Bucharest, which is rather large, a city that is not beautiful. The multitude of churches, monasteries, palaces and houses is useless, because there is no order, while the good and the bad mingle in great contrast. Because of a fire that took place a few years ago, part of the city is still in ruins; there are cellars caving like ravines on the busiest streets! A serpentine and rather large river, with muddy water, flows through the city, and its water is used both for drinking and cooking, although the sewers dump their waters in it as well. Its disgusting shores communicate through small, poorly made wooden bridges. The city is a true labyrinth of crooked, narrow streets, very dirty, and frequently long. In the most elegant part of the city the streets are poorly paved, as for the ones at the outskirts, such miracles are out of discussion. These streets are constantly filled with countless wagons, driving around without any regulation, bumping into each other and stopping traffic, being a constant threat for the pedestrians. Only here and there, there are sidewalks made for the protection of pedestrians, paved with blunt rocks, which, because of the rooftops that haven't got eaves, get covered by drained water, becoming thus unusable. The abundance of shiny church towers, seen from afar, builds your expectation for something poetic, all the more so because the Romanians proudly call Bucharest the Little Paris. Poor choice of words—after the disappointment of a closer look. The stranger from a civilized country prefers the modest village of his orderly homeland, to the city with mindlessly piled up riches. Indeed, there are many palaces that belong to the great boyars, laden with Oriental brilliance and western elegance; the stairs, even the halls, are covered in the most expensive carpets, adorned with gilded mirrors, bronze statues and even rare paintings. All day long, the most expensive

*suites and carriages, lined with red velvet, pass by surrounded by the sound of clinking bells, carrying the city's elegant citizens, dressed in the latest Parisian fashion. At the balls, the ladies shine, dressed in velvet and silk, adorned with diamonds: however, this elegance and brilliance cannot hide the gypsy physiognomy of the city of Bucharest, because the palace and the hut are next to each other.*⁹²

From the *Persian city*, as Bucharest was seen, from an Oriental perspective, in 1813, the dominant perception is fundamentally transformed, half a century later, so that the capital begins to be considered, in 1855, the *Little Paris*. However, depending on street and class, in 1857 *Little Paris* quickly transformed right back into *Little Baghdad*. In fact, Western Paris and Eastern Baghdad coexisted in a stark contradiction in Bucharest. By 1859, the Dâmbovița River had come to separate the city in two, not only geographically, but also from the point of view of its civilization. On the left bank we had *Little Paris*, rich, bright, healthy, with its palaces, restaurants and hotels, worthy of the capital of France, where the Wallachian high society, perfectly Westernized, enjoyed themselves. On the right bank we had *Little Baghdad*, poor, dirty, filled with diseases, with shabby huts and Turkish cafés, in which Bulgarians, Albanians and Tatars, dressed in Oriental clothes, sat Turkish style and smoked narghilehs or hookahs. In 1853, between *Little Paris* and *Little Baghdad*, a cobbled bridge was built over the Dâmbovița River. It was the first in the history of Wallachia., The first bridge over the Olt River, near Slatina, had been inaugurated not long before this, in 1847. In 1853, throughout the principality, there were, in total, about 40 kilometers of paved road put into use. These roads were used, in 1854, as always, by the classic Wallachian carriages, considered by the writer Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy to be worse than the Russian carts with which hay was transported. On the other hand, the Constantinople–Bucharest–Vienna telegraph line had just become operational in 1857. Throughout this period, the vast majority of the population was illiterate and lived in extreme squalor. In 1854, the best food at a provincial inn was a dry omelet, a crust of black bread, and vinegar wine. The same unpainted room served as a kitchen and living room. In a Wallachian post office, one would find only a hookah and Turkish coffee, eggs, salted Danube fish and polenta. The meal was eaten on primitive wooden benches, while sitting with your legs crossed, Turkish style. Sometimes the knife and fork were used. One also slept on a sofa covered with straw mats or blankets. One ate somewhat better in a German pub in the capital, but next to the hot meal, the wine was bad, the beer stale, and the tea bland. The villages were made up of the usual primitive huts. All the members of the family were sheltered in the same dugout room, sometimes alongside the livestock, especially in winter. Often, the only piece of furniture in a peasant house was a wooden kneading-trough, which had multiple functions: a swing for children, a container for storing supplies, a tub for washing dirty laundry, or a trough for kneading bread.⁹³



Notes

1. *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. 7, edited by Maria Holban (lead editor), M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980), 476–477.
2. The lack of crops, the precarious situation of both rural and urban houses (the half-dugout shelters), as well as the small number of inhabitants, were aspects noticed by the Anglican clergyman Edmund Chishull, between 18 April and 6 May 1702, when he passed through Wallachia, as part of the retinue of Lord William Paget, the British ambassador to Constantinople (1692–1701). *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. 8, edited by Maria Holban (lead editor), M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983), 195. The peasant houses were above the earth only in the mountain area. At the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, the houses were made of logs and covered with shingle (*ibid.*, 201).
3. *Ibid.*, 195–199.
4. In this context, we have to mention, of course, the “gorgeous and grand” palaces and the gardens of Târgoviște, Mogoșoaia and Potlogi (inferior in size, but resembling—through their architectural harmony and aesthetic elegance—the Western ones, superior to the Ottoman ones) in the Brâncovenian style, the churches “worthy to be seen” and the “big and beautiful” inns of Bucharest, the support offered to the printing press, the religious books published in Romanian and Greek, the generous donations for the holy places of the Christian Orient (fallen under the Ottoman rule), the monasteries that were built, the churches that were endowed, as well as the attention Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu paid to the autochthonous architectural style, which bears his name. Also, according to Antonmaria del Chiaro, the secretary of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, the Old Court was the only one to have, in 1714, an Italian garden, with the main stair made of marble, and surrounded by walls (*ibid.*, 372).
5. During this time, for a foreign traveler from the West, entering Wallachia through Transylvania and Banat meant entering the Oriental civilization. See Sorin Sipoș, “Foreign Travelers in the Romanian Lands and the Symbolism of the Borders (1710–1810),” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18, 54 (2019): 117.
6. For a nuanced discussion on this topic see Adrian Niculescu, *1848–1989: de la Primul la Noul '48: Trei cronologii comentate* (Bucharest: Editura IRDD '89, 2018), 9–23.
7. In order to establish the illiteracy rate in Antiquity, we took as reference the Roman Empire, for which we established the average between literacy in the Greco-Roman world (where the rate of literacy was approximately 20%) and the other provinces (including the western ones), less developed (where the rate of literacy was approximately 5%).
8. The European countries that had universities in 1500 are: Italy (17), France (12), Spain (12), Germany (11), England (3), Scotland (3), Ireland (1), Sweden (1), Denmark (1), Portugal (1), Belgium (1), Switzerland (1), Austria (1), Poland (1), Hungary (1), Albania (1), Croatia (1), Czechia (1), Slovakia (1).
9. Andrea Menna, “Alla ricerca del patrimonio immateriale e identitario nella pittura moderna rumena,” *Hermencia* 21 (2018): 92; Dan Rădulescu, “Premisele apariției artei moderne în România: Partea I: De la primitivi la pașoptiști,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “George Barițiu” din Cluj-Napoca, Series Historica* 55 (2016): 327.

10. Part of the ideas laid down concisely in this paper were presented and dealt with extensively in my first book: Bogdan Bucur, *Devălmășia valahă (1716–1828): O istorie anarhică a spațiului românesc*, foreword by Adrian Majuru (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008). In this article I wish to present the political, social and natural phenomena that marked Wallachia, for the chosen period of time, in a rather novel light, from the perspective of the impact felt by the regular person (*Homo valachicus*) of that era.
11. Between 1716 and 1859, no less than 7 armed confrontations took place between the belligerent powers around Wallachia (all openly manifesting imperial claims to control the North-Danube territory): 1716–1718 (the Austro-Turkish War), 1735–1739 (the Austro-Russian-Turkish War), 1768–1774 (the Russian-Turkish War), 1787–1792 (the Austro-Russian-Turkish War), 1806–1812 (the Russian-Turkish War), 1828–1829 (the Russian-Turkish War) and 1853–1856 (the Russian-Turkish War, with British, French and Sardinian participation). Almost all of these wars were fought (also) on Wallachian land, and had a negative impact on the long-term development of Wallachia. Moreover, as a suzerain power, the Sublime Porte asked Wallachia to pay considerable contributions for the war effort—by offering different types of resources (material, human or economic and financial)—, which weighed terribly on the inhabitants and ruined the Wallachian treasury.
12. Between 1716 and 1859, Wallachia was, partially or completely, occupied by the armed forces of the neighboring empires, during the periods of war between them, as follows: Austrian military occupation (1716–1718, 1737, 1787–1791, 1849, 1854–1856), Ottoman military occupation (1737, 1769, 1787–1789, 1806, 1821–1822, 1848–1851, 1854–1855), and Russian military occupation (1739, 1769–1775, 1806–1812, 1828–1834, 1848–1851, 1853–1854). Each time, foreign military occupations led to the requisitioning or confiscation of strategic assets and resources, which meant serious damage for the local Wallachian communities. Moreover, in the cities where an occupation army was stationed, it was often required that merchants pay additional taxes to meet the needs of the troops.
13. The reference is usually made to the Tatars from the Budjak steppe (who invaded Slam-Râmnic County in 1758) or to the Ottoman rebel soldiers from the south of Danube (who plundered Oltenia, between 1798 and 1802, and in 1808). Similar activities, but of smaller scope, were also carried out by the Ottoman troops stationed in the rayas of Brăila, Giurgiu and Turnu—in 1807, Brăila County was affected by the raids of the Turks stationed in the neighboring raya—, as well as by the Albanian mercenaries, Greeks volunteers and other South-Danube populations (in 1821, during the revolutionary movement of the Greek Philikí Etaireía) or the Oltenian pandours (in 1821, during the revolutionary movement led by Tudor Vladimirescu).
14. The period of the Phanariot rulers (1716–1821) came with a terrible increase in the financial obligations of the Wallachian taxpayers, brought about by the desire to rapidly enrich the Greek political elite, coming from Constantinople. Due to the increase in tribute, large-scale social movements took place throughout this period. For example, in 1764, the inhabitants of Mehedinți County—who fled to Muscel County to evade paying local taxes—complained to Prince Stephen Racoviță (1764–1765) that they were overcharged. In 1797, Prince Alexander Ypsilantis also increased local taxes. Between 1798 and 1799, Prince Constantin Hangerli doubled the taxes. Against this background, in 1801, social disorder engulfed Oltenia, as the periphery of Craiova rebelled.

15. In certain periods, a part of the territory of Wallachia was annexed by the neighboring empires, as follows: Oltenia was under Austrian rule between 1718 and 1739, while Dobruja (until 1878, when it was attached to Romania) and the rayas of Brăila, Giurgiu, Turnu (until 1829, when they were reintegrated into Wallachia) were part of the Ottoman Empire, starting from the 15th century (Dobruja along with Giurgiu Raya and Turnu Raya) or the 16th century (Brăila Raya).
16. The plague (1716–1717, 1719, 1730, 1738, 1756, 1758, 1765, 1792–1793, 1795–1796, 1812–1815, 1824, 1828–1829) and the cholera epidemics (1831, 1836, 1848, 1854) brought despair and death to Wallachia. In 1796, the fire caused by the incineration of the graves of the victims of the plague led to the burning of Craiova.
17. During this period, the great Wallachian cities are, completely or partially, plundered (Râmnicu-Vâlcea and Bucharest in 1802), and set on fire (Târgoviște in 1737, Craiova in 1796, Bucharest in 1718, 1804, 1823 and 1847, Pitești in 1848).
18. Large and devastating earthquakes, with the epicenter in Vrancea, were recorded in 1738, 1740, 1790, 1829, 1838 (over 7 degrees on the Richter scale) and in 1802 (over 8 degrees on the Richter scale). They caused collective fear, significant material damage and the loss of human lives.
19. Locust invasions negatively affected crop productivity in 1738, 1746, 1779–1782, 1824–1825, 1829–1829 and 1847–1848. Often, because of the locusts, famine and food shortages set in.
20. The lack of embankments and regularization of riverbeds led torrential rains to cause, on a regular basis, the outflow of water and the flooding of villages and towns. In such extreme weather conditions, material and human losses were significant, and the deterioration of crops and the death of livestock were resignedly awaited by the local population. Floods with significant effects on the Wallachian Principality were reported in 1775 (overflow of the Dâmbovița River over Bucharest), 1797, 1814 (overflow of the rivers Jiu, in April, and Vedea, in June), 1837 (overflow of the rivers from Ialomița, in June, Bucharest and Ilfov, in July) and 1848.
21. The periods of prolonged drought recorded in 1779, 1797, 1834, 1836 and 1851 in the Principality of Wallachia also had negative effects on the life and diet of humans and animals.
22. Winters that were terribly heavy and extremely frosty (in 1740, 1795, 1808, 1812, 1823, 1841 or 1848), excessively long (winters that lasted until the spring months) or early (when it snowed in autumn during the harvest) caused the population and the livestock to starve due to the compromised crops. In such times, fodder for the livestock and human food became non-existent or only available at prohibitive prices. Extreme meteorological phenomena—such as snow blizzards and heavy snowfall—were recorded in: the spring months (1814), March (1797, 1817, 1839, 1851–1852), April (1759, 1836, 1839, 1841, 1851–1852), May (in 1810, 1824, 1829, 1836, 1841), as well as in the autumn months, more precisely in September (in 1817), October (1768, 1804, 1805, 1835, 1856), November (in 1789). In 1835, in the mountainous and hilly area, it snowed in July.
23. Testimonies have been recorded in connection with periods of famine, especially in 1718, 1739, 1795, 1811, 1817, 1834–1835.

24. During this period, about 50% of the newborns died in the first few months of their life or in the first years of childhood. Thus, the average life expectancy at birth was, for the 18th century Wallachian, less than 40 years (Bucur, *Devălmășia valahă*, 102).
25. In this context, it was noted that *Homo valachicus* survived in a social environment marked, from an architectural point of view, on the one hand, by poor shelters built underground (in small, scattered villages), and on the other hand, by abandoned and ruined houses (in urban areas) due to wars, robberies or looting.
26. *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. 9, edited by Maria Holban (lead editor), M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1997); *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. 10, pt. 1, edited by Maria Holban, Maria M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2000); *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. 10, pt. 2, edited by Maria Holban, Maria M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2001); *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 1 (1801–1821), edited by Georgeta Filitti, Beatrice Marinescu, Șerban Rădulescu-Zoneț, Marian Stroia, and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2004); *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 2 (1822–1830), edited by Paul Cernovodeanu and Daniela Bușă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2005).
27. For the local population, the abandonment of towns and villages in the face of the invading hordes—who made them go through hell countless times during this period—was the only way to save lives and preserve some material goods.
28. For example, after the Austro-Turkish War (1716–1718), Oltenia was plundered and abandoned, Craiova destroyed, the monasteries Strehaia and Tismana burned, the royal palace at Brâncoveni (Olt County) devastated. The Old Court in Bucharest was set on fire in 1718. As a result of the Austro-Russian-Turkish War (1735–1739), Wallachia was looted, Târgoviște burned down, the Câmpulung monastery partially destroyed. During the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774), the library of the Văcărești monastery was looted and many villages were deserted. The Austro-Russian-Turkish War (1787–1792) caused significant damage to the towns of Craiova, Buzău and Râmnicu Sărat (which were devastated), as well as to the villages of Moeciu and Bolintin. During this period, the monasteries of Bistrița, Hurezi and Arnota were looted and burned, and the new royal palace in Dealul Spirii was destroyed by fire, in Bucharest. Between 1800 and 1801, Pazvantoglu's rebels set fire to Craiova and devastated Oltenia. During the Russo-Turkish War (1806–1812), Buzău was once again set on fire. The new royal palace in Bucharest—known as the Burnt Court—was set on fire in 1812. In 1815, the counties of Mehedinți and Gorj, together with Strehaia monastery, were looted by the Ottoman troops from south of the Danube. During the Revolution of 1821, there were recorded, throughout Wallachia, plunders committed by mercenaries from Oltenia, Albanian arnauts and Greek mavrophors. They looted and set fire to several villages and several mansions near Bucharest (including the Brâncoveanu palace in Mogoșoaia). During the Ottoman intervention against the Revolution of 1821, Gura Motrului monastery was looted and the religious books and ornaments were burned. The Russo-Turkish War (1828–1829) meant the destruction of villages and towns on the Romanian bank of the Danube (Bucur, *Devălmășia valahă*, 57–90). For example, in 1835, Giurgiu—which appeared to travelers, like many Wallachian towns, as a mixture of ruins and new construc-

- tions—“still bears the visible traces of the devastation of the last war.” *Calători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 3 (1831–1840), edited by Paul Cernovodeanu and Daniela Bușă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2006), 380. The Russian-Turkish battles, fought on Wallachian territory as well, from the Crimean War (1853–1856), had terrible consequences: decommissioning bridges, destroying crops and vineyards, devastating villages, burning houses. The population had to abandon entire regions.
29. Accommodation in Wallachia (Turkish inns built mainly in Bucharest and decorated in the Oriental style) was scarce and unsanitary, and post offices (stretched across the principality, looking like some poor huts) were rare and full of fleas. Everywhere, the only piece of furniture was a rudimentary bed made of wood, covered with a mat made of raffia or straws. For these reasons, people passing through Wallachia—often forced to take shelter at night in the open air or in private homes—rightly complained about the deplorable quality of Wallachian accommodation services. In all of Wallachia there was not a single hotel in 1835, while in Craiova (the second most important city in the principality), there was not even a Turkish inn that deserved this name (*ibid.*, 391, 549).
 30. According to the testimonies of foreign travelers who passed through the Romanian villages, during this period, in the peasant huts, often, “you can find no bread, no food, no pots or cauldrons and no household items” (*ibid.*, 378). For more information about the deficient diet in the Danubian Principalities—based, almost exclusively, on the consumption of polenta—, see the study published by Bogdan Bucur, “Prolegomena to the Romanian Sociology and Historiography of Food,” *International Review of Social Research* 7, 1 (2017): 57–68.
 31. Between 1716 and 1731, the Austrian military reports show Oltenia as depopulated, with ruined households (in urban and rural areas), and barren lands. The imperial occupation armies stationed in this province were in a deplorable state, as they couldn’t find any food at all, due to the fact that the peasants had abandoned their households and taken refuge in forests or mountains, for fear of being robbed by Tatars or Austrian hussars. In all the notes of foreign travelers, even from the first half of the 19th century, Wallachia is considered a massively depopulated country, haunted by plagues, impoverished by wars, with almost completely ruined towns and villages and poorly exploited fields. In general, less than a fifth of the tillable land of Wallachia was cultivated.
 32. Iosif Genilie, *Geografie istorică, astronomică, naturală și civilă, a continentelor în general și a României în parte* (in Cyrillic) (Bucharest: Tipografia lui Eliad, 1835), 220; G. I. Ionescu-Gion, *Istoria Bucureștilor* (Bucharest: Mavios-Clio, 1998), 583; Ulysse de Marsillac, *Bucureștiul în veacul al XIX-lea*, foreword and notes by Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, translated by Elena Rădulescu (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1999), 172; Gheorghe Parusi, *Cronologia Bucureștilor: 20 septembrie 1459–31 decembrie 1989: Zilele, săptele, oamenii Capitalei de-a lungul a 530 de ani* (Bucharest: Compania, 2007), 105, 110; Dimitrie Papazoglu, *Istoria fondării orașului București*, edited by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă (Bucharest: Minerva, 2000), 113, 273, 277, 480; George Potra, *Istoricul hanurilor bucureștene* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1985), 59; Pompei Gh. Samarian, *Din epidemiologia trecutului românesc: Ciurma* (Bucharest: Institut de Arte Grafice E. Marvan, 1932), 30, 70, 74; Mihai Țipău, *Domniii fanarioși în Țările Române 1711–1821: Mică enciclopedie*, foreword by Pashalis M. Kitromilides (Bucharest: Omonia, 2004), 19.
 33. Bucur, *Devălmășia valahă*, 2008, 34.

34. Ibid., 43–44; *Călători străini*, 3: 376.
35. While crossing Wallachia, foreign travelers were surprised by the fact that, until they arrived to Bucharest, they did not encounter any work of landscaping or beautification of the land, such as strengthening some banks or damming rivers, arranging pedestrian alleys, sowing decorative plantations, constructing bridges or public buildings, etc. The exceptions were boyar mansions, churches and monasteries (in rural areas), as well as the central areas of the main cities (Bucharest, in particular), which began to develop timidly during the Organic Regulations, after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829).
36. In this regard, we must also take into account the memoirs of the great enlightened boyar and scholar Dinicu Golescu, first published in Buda, in 1826, according to which, due to the wars fought on Wallachian territory, “for 24 years, 4 times we left our houses and all our belongings, fleeing abroad, and when we returned, we found everything destroyed”: Dinicu Golescu, *Însemnare a călătoriei mele*, Constantin Radovici din Golești, *făcută în anul 1824, 1825, 1826*, foreword and bibliography by Mircea Iorgulescu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1977), 164. In the context of the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, in addition to foreign military occupations, another reason for leaving the country were the looting raids ordered by the rebel governors of Turkish provinces—who dared to disregard even the sultan’s authority in Constantinople—such as Osman Pazvantoglu and Mustafa Bayraktar (governors of the Vidin and Ruschuk districts).
37. All the roads in Wallachia seemed deserted and unpaved. Even when the public road was paved with oak beams, they were always half-rotten and poorly laid, so that they made the crossing more difficult rather than easy. In general, the main roads for transportation—which crossed the mountains and connected the Wallachian capital with Habsburg Transylvania—and the bridges laid over the great rivers were very poorly maintained and had no protective fences, not even in extremely dangerous areas. Therefore, accidents were frequent, which is why many commemorative wooden crosses were erected on the side of public roads (especially in the Olt Valley).
38. *Călători străini*, 3: 310, 355–358, 376–377.
39. Ibid., 616, 701.
40. C. B. Elliott, *Travels in the Three Great Empires of Austria, Russia, and Turkey*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1838), 146–148.
41. The Oriental Wallachian landscapes started to be permeated by timid Western influences, after the Kuchuk-Kainarji Peace Treaty of 1774. Between 1774 and 1829, successive Russian military occupations of the Romanian Principalities meant the accommodation of the Wallachian political elite with European ways and manners, especially with regard to the Western frocks of the ladies of the royal court, the preparation of dishes and the European way of dining in the houses of the great boyars, the knowledge of the languages spoken in Europe (Italian, French, and Greek), as well as Western music, which the young boyars of the royal court began to listen to as early as the middle of the 18th century (towards the end of the century, they also began to dance to it at the balls in the capital). Given the large population of Wallachia, all these small developments were, however, statistically irrelevant.
42. The testimonies of foreign travelers are contradictory in regards to the town of Brăila. On the one hand, it is specified that, in 1836, Brăila was a completely metamorphosed city, with a European appearance, modern buildings, paved streets and 6,000 residents (*Călători străini*, 3: 528). On the same optimistic note, a writing from 1846 attests to

the good alignment of the buildings, along a wide street, as well as to the fact that the hotel was welcoming. *Calători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 4 (1841–1846), edited by Paul Cernovodeanu and Daniela Bușă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2007), 449. On the other hand, the French author Xavier Marmier confesses, in 1846, that he noticed, in the port of Brăila, only small wooden houses, scattered in complete disorder. The local population is estimated at 12,000 people (*ibid.*, 623). A similar testimony is given in 1852 by the Venetian Francesco Nardi and the British Warrington Wilkinson Smyth. The city was dusty during the warm season and muddy during the cold season. The low, humble houses were arranged along straight streets. In 1853, the best accommodation could be obtained in a Turkish wooden inn, full of insects, which had a single floor. One slept on a straw mattress and wrapped themselves in a blanket. Washing was done with the aid of a tin basin, full of water, hanging on the wall, placed in front of each room. *Calători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 6 (1852–1856), edited by Daniela Bușă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2010), 22, 46, 83.

43. We find out about the recent construction in 1838, in Giurgiu, of a district with modern houses on the banks of the Danube, a church, as well as a circular square, where shops and cafés were located. However, the inns were shabby, and the packs of stray dogs ubiquitous, as, in fact, in all the towns of Wallachia (*Calători străini*, 3: 613–615). Despite the urbanization process, which led to the old framework huts being demolished, on 31 March 1842, the Austrian Ida Laura Pfeiffer—in transit through Giurgiu—was disappointed by the “ugliness of this city”: “The streets and squares are full of potholes, the houses are built without the slightest care for taste or symmetry, one pushed halfway into the street, while the neighboring one is lost in the background” (*Calători străini*, 4: 207). In somewhat similar terms, Xavier Marmier talks about the city of Giurgiu, in 1846. Giurgiu is compared to a large village, where houses were spread unevenly. When it rained, all the streets became swamps. In the best local inn, the night is spent on a straw mat, in a large room with broken windows, through which swarms of mosquitoes entered (*ibid.*, 623).
44. *Calători străini*, 3: 718, 816.
45. *Ibid.*, 626.
46. *Calători străini*, 4: 416.
47. *Calători străini*, 3: 475.
48. Colțea, Sfântul Pantelimon, Brâncoveanu, Visarion, Cișmigiu and Mavrogheni (Filantropia) hospitals. However, “the most admirable order and perfect cleanliness reigns,” with the “most careful” medical care being provided to patients (*ibid.*, 475).
49. The Museum of Natural History and Antiquities in Bucharest, founded in 1834 by Prince Alexander Ghica, starting from the personal collection donated by the Great Ban Mihalache Ghica.
50. Saint Sava College of Bucharest, with teaching in Greek, until 1821, respectively in Romanian, after this date. Apart from this high school, there was only one more, in Craiova. Thus begins the interest in scientific researches (*Calători străini*, 4: 229, 233).
51. The Library of Saint Sava College in Bucharest, established in 1831. In 1836, the first organization and functioning regulation was drawn up. The Library of Saint Sava College thus becomes the first Wallachian public library. In 1843, the library had 7,000

- volumes (*ibid.*, 230). Also, the Library of Saint Sava College had a printing press and two lithographs (*ibid.*, 264).
52. In 1843, “the best bookstore in Bucharest is that of the Court’s bookseller, Mr. Friedrich Walbaum, who also has a reading room with German, French, English and Italian books, and is also the owner of a printing house with a lithographic institute” (*ibid.*, 230). In another note referring to the bookstores from 1843–1845, it is specified that “Winterhalder’s is the highest recommended, as it is very well endowed in German and French literature” (*ibid.*, 264). For books in Romanian, “the Romanow bookstore is known and, as an antique shop, Scarlat’s bookstore” (*ibid.*).
 53. The Small or Old Theater in Bucharest, installed in the houses of the great boyar Radu Slătineanu, on the street Podul Mogoșoaiei, in front of Sărindar monastery, which were rented or bought in 1828 by the Italian Geronimo Momolo, the former chef of Prince Gregory Ghica IV, after the burning of the Theater of Cișmeaua Roșie in 1825, which was founded in 1817 by Lady Ralu, the daughter of Prince John George Caradja.
 54. Between 1843 and 1845, *Curierul românesc* (The Romanian Courier) was printed in Bucharest (the first newspaper in Romanian, published in Wallachia, starting from 1829, under the direction of Ion Heliade Rădulescu), alongside *Vestitorul românesc* (The Romanian Herald), published by Zaharia Carcalechi, as well as a publication in German, published at Friedrich Walbaum’s typography by a Berliner named Schweder (*Călători străini*, 4: 264).
 55. *Călători străini*, 3: 379.
 56. *Ibid.*, 617.
 57. *Ibid.*, 531.
 58. In 1841, in Bucharest, there were elegant neighborhoods, in the central part of the city, with well-paved streets, “with spacious houses and shops that display, in beautifully embellished windows, all kinds of goods brought especially from Russia” (*Călători străini*, 4: 47). The existence, for the first time in Bucharest, of several sweetshops and cafés (outfitted according to the European fashion, but without being elegant, where you could find sweets and ice cream, newspapers and pool tables), as well as a hotel with clean and comfortable rooms (which also served as a casino, being run by a Frenchman) is confirmed. There were already two theaters: one for the French Comedy and another for the German Comedy. A marble statue was erected in honor of Count Pavel Kiseleff. All around, the people from good families spoke French. The houses of the elites were decorated in European fashion. There was also a bazaar where you could see well-placed shops, which were closed at night with iron shutters. Between 1843 and 1845, there were several important restaurants in Bucharest, where the dishes were served according to European cuisine (some of which also functioned as hotels or cultural establishments): *Momolo* (in the courtyard of the theater), *Condori*, *La Leul de Aur*, *La Cocoșul Roșu* and the *Hôtel de Valachie* (the former *Hanul Roșu*) (*ibid.*, 47, 240–262). In 1846, decorative trees were planted along the central alleys, and the first public garden—arranged in the style of an English park—had just been inaugurated. A 15-horsepower steam engine was to be installed by a German foreman in Bucharest in order to capture, transport and drain drinking water over a distance of about 6 kilometers through 10-inch cast iron pipes (*ibid.*, 575). In 1854, the entire system through which the city of Bucharest was supplied with drinking water was functional and in good order (*Călători străini*, 6: 195).

59. In general, the reference is made in regards to the poor and miserable consumption of the Wallachian peasantry, which meant lack of access to public education and the illiteracy of the vast majority of the rural population, poor nutrition, based mainly on excessive consumption of polenta (meat is almost non-existent in the local menu), unsanitary shelters built underground or above-ground huts made of daub and covered with straw or reeds (whose only inventory consists of a cauldron and a few pots). The lands were cultivated only to a very small extent (less than one-fifth of the arable land), agricultural tools were rudimentary, soil fertilization techniques unknown; plus: almost non-existent plowing, neglected or impractical gardening, underdeveloped industry, and the foreigners were the ones mainly working in construction (*Călători străini*, 4: 240–243, 276–277).
60. In general, we refer to the sumptuous consumption of the urban social elite, which required knowledge of international languages (especially French, which is why the printing and circulation of books progressed), recipes inspired by Turkish and French cuisine (stew, *çullama*, poultry and ram, rice, jam and coffee), and less often from the English one (the tasty beef), traveling in luxurious carriages and living in richly decorated palaces (built in European fashion, with floors covered in parquet from Vienna, and filled with Parisian furniture) (*ibid.*, 240–243).
61. Around 1844, Jean Alexandre Vaillant described the Wallachian capital as a huge village, with undefined boundaries, nameless streets, mysterious slums, swamps in which toads croak, barren fields where the nomadic population of the city raises its tents, with districts that the Dâmbovița floods every spring, with muddy cobblestones, with garbage that fills the streets, with carts of wood and hay, driven by peasants dressed in sheepskins or pushed by gypsies covered in rags. This image is in blatant contradiction with the beautiful palaces and pretty houses, recently built in European style, passed by the carriages driven by festooned lackeys and powdered coachmen, pulled by beautiful horses, in which chic women and elegant dandies strolled. The contrast between misery and luxury, the juxtaposition of huts and palaces, the closeness between the rich in their carriages and the poor walking through the mud, was striking. In 1846, along with elegant ladies (dressed by the latest Parisian fashion) and shallow dandies (dressed in Viennese attire), old boyars with caftans and calpacs, dressed in Greek costumes, or servants with Turkish fez and salwars could still be seen. The Wallachian capital continued to charm its visitors with the strange mixture of European elegance and Oriental luxury, or with its strange combination of Western comfort and Asian ostentation (*ibid.*, 415, 575).
62. *Ibid.*, 467–468.
63. *Ibid.*, 47, 467.
64. *Ibid.*, 467–468, 576.
65. *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 5 (1847–1851), edited by Daniela Bușă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2009), 30–31.
66. *Călători străini*, 4: 48.
67. *Ibid.*, 569.
68. Between 1843 and 1845, the influence of Turkish morals was still felt in Wallachia, despite the rapid Europeanization. In general, the condition of the streets in Bucharest remained unchanged from the previous period: most of them were, in 1841, muddy, dirty, poorly paved (with thick planks, which were however moldy due to the bad weather). Beneath the perishable street cover—built of thick, rotting wooden beams—the city's

sewer system was traced along ditches dug in the middle of the streets, causing, especially in summer, pestilential stench. No street was straight and regular, and the houses were unevenly built. On the streets full of potholes—where the carriages often broke down—the rivers of mud and dirt of the capital flowed, and the poor people, who had to walk, almost swam through them, as they went to their knees. Most of the accommodation—Turkish inn style—consists of unsanitary taverns, full of mosquitoes or bugs, with poor food and divans as furniture. There were also inns furnished according to European fashion, but they were considered bad and very expensive. Almost all the cafes are poor and in the Turkish style, with greasy tables and walls blackened by the thick, stifling smoke of the pipes (*ibid.*, 47–48, 240–241, 622). In 1846, about 30,000 stray dogs roamed Bucharest and posed a permanent threat (*Călători străini*, 5: 31).

69. *Călători străini*, 4: 563.

70. In Giurgiu, in 1850, there was no modern infrastructure or tourist attractions. Not even in 1854 were the streets paved. According to the Oriental style, the citizens of the city smoked their chibouks in peace, on the porch of the low white houses, which were surrounded by gardens. The timber-framed and wattle-and-daub huts were placed disorderly, as was the case everywhere, in fact, in Wallachia. As for the city of Calafat, it was, in 1851–1852, in a deplorable condition: all the houses were built absolutely chaotically, as one saw fit. Trade, however, was flourishing. Călărași, in 1854, is a dirty city of 5,000 inhabitants. In 1859, in Găești, next to some rich houses, many others could be seen abandoned by the owners and left in ruins. The city was, however, populated. *Călători străini*, 5: 563, 604; *Călători străini*, 6: 20, 207, 227; *Calatori străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, new ser., vol. 7 (1857–1861), edited by Daniela Bușă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2012), 324.

71. In 1851, Turnu-Severin—although very small—was considered very modern. In Slatina, there were already several European-looking houses and towering churches. Paradoxically, it seems that the inn in Craiova offered superior accommodation in comparison to the hotels in Bucharest. The streets in the capital of Oltenia, however, were poorly paved (or indeed covered with wooden logs), but lit with tallow candles. Instead, in Buzău, there were several modern avenues and a beautiful episcopal residence. The streets of Buzău and Târgoviște were paved with stone, and the churches and cathedrals were impressive. Târgu-Jiu is a conglomeration of countless shops and comfortable homes—including a few boyar mansions—, arranged along wide streets, which were, however, unpaved and dusty. Câmpulung had several good houses and several churches: in 1859, the streets were paved (*Călători străini*, 5: 602, 642, 647, 651–664; *Călători străini*, 6: 173; *Călători străini*, 7: 325).

72. In rural areas, villages remained, throughout this period, scattered and poor. The peasants' houses kept the characteristics known from antiquity. In general, the shelters—dug into the ground like lairs—were covered with straw or reeds and surrounded by gardens surrounded by wicker fences. However, after 1842, the peasants were encouraged to abandon their old huts and to build above-ground houses with a framework structure and adobe. But this initiative has been difficult to implement. The fields were deserted and uncultivated. As always, the food—mainly polenta—was miserable (*Călători străini*, 4: 571; *Călători străini*, 5: 150–151, 275–276; *Călători străini*, 7: 280).

73. By 1851, the boyar mansions from the countryside—surrounded by gardens and thick walls—had become as comfortable as the British residences they were inspired by (*Călă-*

- tori străini*, 5: 645). From an architectural point of view, the reference is made to the neo-Romanian style, consecrated during the revival period of Brâncoveanu's reign.
74. In particular, we should mention the beginning of the paving works on the first extra-urban road in Wallachia, between Bucharest and Craiova. In 1848, approximately 10 kilometers had been put into use. Otherwise, in 1850, in the whole of Wallachia, there was not a single stone bridge. All river crossings were still made on shaky wooden bridges, which were ruined by the first flood. Over large rivers, such as Argeș or Olt, the crossing was made on a bridge of vessels or by raft (*ibid.*, 246, 570, 601–603).
75. With the exception of a few hotels in the center of Bucharest, which came close to the idea of relatively civilized accommodation, crossing Wallachia in 1850 involved a series of shocking experiences for a Westerner, such as: lack of staples and unsatisfactory food, uncomfortable travelling on unpaved roads, using the Wallachian carts, without springs, equipped with a bale of straw as a pillow, accommodation in rudimentary Turkish inns or in unsanitary post offices, sleeping, many people together, in miserable rooms without furniture (*ibid.*, 562–570, 601). In fact, only the minority living in the center of large towns used beds in 1848: most of the population—rural and urban alike—still slept on a sofa or on a straw mat, which remained the only piece of furniture in most houses (*ibid.*, 169–173, 276). Even in the hospital in Giurgiu, where foreigners who were traveling on the Danube and intended to enter Wallachia were quarantined, the rooms had, in 1848, as furnishings: a mat, two chairs (one made of straw and the other made of wood), a basin and a kettle (*ibid.*, 251). As for Wallachian kitchen utensils, the vast majority of the population had only a pot, in which they boiled polenta (*ibid.*, 311). Even in the private provincial houses of the people, in which foreign travelers transiting the principality were housed, the spoons were sometimes made of wood, the forks rare, and the use of bottles unknown (*ibid.*, 276). Everywhere you were greeted with jam and cold water, and in the great palaces of the boyars living in the capital, fine porcelain was used. Above all, for *Homo valachicus* personal hygiene was a completely abstract notion. In 1851, when a woman from the village of Glogova was seen washing her face, the British James Henry Skene interpreted the gesture, with black humor, as such a rare occurrence that it was worth noting, especially in his travel diary (*ibid.*, 663).
76. In accordance with the Oriental splendor, one must understand also the ostentatious display of Western luxury products, such as Viennese carriages, expensive jewelry and the ladies' Parisian outfits, especially in Bucharest.
77. The central sector of Bucharest, where the most beautiful houses and the best shops were located, included, in 1854, Podul Mogoșoaiei (old name for Calea Victoriei), Lipscani, Podul Calicilor (old name for Calea Moșilor) and Târgul de Afară (the old name for Calea Moșilor) (*Calători străini*, 6: 195). Most palaces in Bucharest—in the central area—had a single floor and were richly decorated. For a Westerner, the stucco friezes, pilasters and balconies of the boyar houses were painted and arranged in a somewhat strident and unaesthetic manner. Despite the bright colors in which they were painted, many boyar mansions were shabby and almost ready to fall into ruin. Outside the main streets, the houses were small and modest. They had only a ground floor and were surrounded by gardens. At times, they looked picturesque. In fact, a third of Bucharest's surface was covered in gardens (*ibid.*, 93, 212).

78. Only the poor citizens walked, through dust and mud, constantly risking being injured by carts.
79. In 1851, in the Turkish inns of the Wallachian capital—which resembled oriental bazaars—you had no servants at your disposal, the furniture in the room was scarce, and what little furniture existed was of inferior quality. Outside of Bucharest, their condition was much worse: in 1853, the provincial inns offered nothing but a divan (to sleep on) and a piece of onion (for food). In winter, it was difficult to find firewood to heat the rooms. By 1859, in all the inns of Bucharest and in the provincial towns, one faced squalor (*Calători străini*, 5: 598; *Calători străini*, 6: 100–102; *Calători străini*, 7: 290).
80. *Calători străini*, 5: 289.
81. A reference to the stone pavement in front of the palaces erected along the main streets, to the lanterns installed exclusively in the central area for public lighting, to the good conditions offered by Bucharest's hospitals, as well as to some landscaping work, among which we mention: the inauguration, in 1852, of the Grand Theater on the Podul Mogoșoaiei, the partial reconstruction of the houses ruined by the fire of 1847, the erection of barracks for the Wallachian cavalry, the installation of artesian wells on Podul Mogoșoaiei, the design of a public garden, called Kiseleff, near the northern barrier of the city (*ibid.*, 246, 690). In 1853, the Kiseleff Garden—arranged in the English style—had become the main promenade for the people of Bucharest. It was considered, due to its size, one of the most beautiful in Europe (*Calători străini*, 6: 94). However, in relation to the needs of the capital, these works of public utility, although commendable, were insignificant. Among other things, foreign travelers stressed the need to dam the Dâmbovița River—described as dirty and small—, which crossed Bucharest, as, especially in summer, swamps appeared, and they were harmful to the health of the local population (*Calători străini*, 5: 288, 467). Also, the wooden bridges over the Dâmbovița—perishable and rudimentary—had to be rebuilt.
82. With the exception of some palaces and public buildings—erected, after 1829, in European style, in the central area of the city—, in general, the houses in Bucharest were, in 1849, very ugly and badly arranged along some streets covered with rotting logs, narrow, twisted, dirty and dusty (during the warm season) or muddy (during the cold season) (*ibid.*, 467). In fact, until you got near the central area, the Wallachian capital seemed, from an architectural and urban point of view, an extension of the neighboring villages. Thus, the slums of Bucharest consisted of huts separated by abandoned terrains (*ibid.*, 288).
83. Western literature, as well as the theater and opera troupes from France and Italy which performed in Bucharest during this period (*ibid.*, 468).
84. Along with the only two high schools, which already functioned in Bucharest and Craiova, the concept of higher education meant, in 1851, the existence, in the Wallachian capital, of the first two faculties (law and mathematics) (*ibid.*, 692–693). For the Wallachian nobility, schooling and cultural training, after 1829, were also acquired in European university centers, mainly in France and Germany. In fact, most of the craftsmen who practiced in Wallachia also came from these two European countries. In 1848, the intellectual level or the cultural and gastronomic consumption of the Wallachian social elite was at Western standards. For example, at the table of Prince Barbu Știrbei, in

- 1851, there were served: truffles from Paris, oysters from Constantinople, pheasant from Vienna, wine from Burgundy and champagne from Reims (*ibid.*, 173, 466, 606).
85. In 1851, elementary education was completely inaccessible to children from rural areas, as primary schools were extremely few in number: one in each county capital, two in Craiova and five in Bucharest (*ibid.*, 692).
86. *Ibid.*, 469.
87. The Grand Theater of Bucharest was inaugurated in 1852 and resembles, architecturally, La Scala, the opera house in Milan. The cultural building on Podul Mogoșoaiei street had almost 1,000 seats and, at the time of the inauguration, was the third largest performance hall in Europe. It also benefited from excellent acoustics. In the perception of Western travelers, the theater in Bucharest was a construction worthy of a great European capital (*Călători străini*, 7: 52).
88. *Călători străini*, 6: 93–94.
89. *Ibid.*, 101–102.
90. *Ibid.*, 195–199, 211–212; *Călători străini*, 7: 58, 109–110.
91. *Călători străini*, 6: 208–228; *Călători străini*, 7: 287.
92. *Călători străini*, 6: 655–656.
93. Bucur, *Devălmășia valahă*, 274; *Călători străini*, 6: 208–228, 255, 301, 602, 655; *Călători străini*, 7: 107–109, 115, 286–291.

Abstract

Homo valachicus orientalis (1716–1859)

By 1829, the development gap between West and East (to which Wallachia belonged) had become abysmal. The geographic and scientific discoveries, the architectural styles, the musical genres, the artistic and literary trends of the time were completely unknown in Bucharest. The country was wholly absent from the international scientific world. During that time no Wallachian concerned themselves with the study of formal science (logic and mathematics), natural science (biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy), or applied science (engineering, agronomy, medicine, and pharmacy). Until 1829, Wallachia wasn't able to offer the world a single astronomer, doctor, engineer, architect, mathematician, physicist, agronomist, pharmacist, painter, musician, etc. On the other hand, all of these professions—and their subsequent scientific disciplines—were well known in the West, since the Greco-Roman Antiquity, and following their rediscovery at the end of the Middle Ages. For instance, in 1850, the first Wallachian institution of higher education was created as part of Saint Sava Princely Academy (which was a high school; the University of Bucharest was founded much later, in 1864). Meanwhile, the University of Bologna (1088) had been around for 762 years. In 1836, when the first Wallachian public library was established, the Malatestiana Library of Cesena (1454) had been around for almost 400 years. Until 1859, Wallachia had an illiteracy rate of over 90%, similar to that of Western Europe in 1450, but also similar to that of the Roman Empire. Also, in 1841 we learn about the first paved road in Wallachia (in Bucharest), while in 1853, the existence of the first stone bridge over a stream was confirmed (built in Bucharest, over the Dâmbovița River). At that time, 1,750 years had passed since Apollodorus of Damascus had built Trajan's Bridge over the Danube, in order for the Roman armies to invade Dacia. While the first stone bridge was inaugurated in Bucharest in 1853, a year later, in 1854,

one of the world's most important engineering projects came to fruition in Austria: the Semmering Railway, which crossed the Alps through 14 tunnels dug in the mountains, and across 16 viaducts and 100 curved stone bridges. Looking at the visual arts, *Urcarca lui Mavrogheni pe tron* (The enthronement of Mavrogheni, 1786), by Iordache Venier (who was of Venetian origin), can be considered as the first modern painting in Wallachia. *Autoportret* (Selfportrait) by Nicolae Polcovnicul (1788–1842), a painting finished after 1800, can be seen as the first modern painting of a Wallachian painter. Meanwhile, 500 years had passed since Giotto's death. In actual fact, in 1829 Wallachia was outside history.

Keywords

foreign travelers, history of Wallachia, Danubian Principalities, Orient versus Occident, *Homo orientalis*, *Homo valachicus*, *Homo occidentalis*