

THE ENTRY OF THE BOYARS

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Abstract:

In 1893, the Norwegian composer Johan Halvorsen, who had just been appointed as musical director at the theatre Den Nationale Scene in Bergen, received an offer. An offer to become professor at the Conservatory of Music in Bucharest, and head of a quartet. The pay was much higher than the one he had just accepted in Bergen. He was intrigued and flattered. He eventually turned down the offer, but not before having found out more about this far, but still European country. What he found out inspired him to write a march, The Entry of the Boyars, which has become one of the most beloved and popular pieces of Norwegian classical music. This story is used as a point of departure for a survey of Romanian history in the 1800s, a time when society and private life underwent thorough changes. To quote the writer Radu Rosetti, "I do not think that there is any other country in which all public and private life changed so rapidly and thoroughly as with us, and even more all traces of a past so relatively recent disappeared some completely and quickly as by us."

Rezumat:

În 1893, compozitorul norvegian Johan Halvorsen, ce tocmai fusese numit director muzical la Den Nationale Scene în Bergen, a primit o ofertă. O ofertă de a deveni profesor la Conservatorul de Muzică din București și conducător al unui cvartet. Salariul era mult mai mare decât cel pe care tocmai îl acceptase la Bergen. A fost

44 | *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice/The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* 7(2) surprins și flatat. A respins în cele din urmă propunerea, dar nu înainte de a afla informații suplimentare despre această țară îndepărtată, dar totuși europeană. Ceea ce a aflat a servit ca sursă de inspirație pentru scrierea unui marș, Intrarea boierilor, care a devenit una dintre cele mai iubite și mai populare piese de muzică clasică norvegiană. Această poveste este folosită ca punct de plecare pentru un studiu asupra istoriei românești în anii 1800, perioadă în care societatea și viața privată au traversat schimbări substanțiale. Pentru a-l cita pe scriitorul Radu Rosetti, „Nu cred să fie altă țară în care toată viața publică și privată să se fi schimbat mai repede și mai desăvârșit decât la noi și mai ales în care orice urmă a unui trecut, relativ foarte apropiat, să se fi stins atât de complet și de repede ca la noi.”

Keywords: Norway cultural history; Romanian cultural history; Norwegian-Romanian connections

The Norwegian composer Johan Halvorsen was offered a job in Bucharest in 1893, was inspired to write a march, *The Entry of the Boyars*, but eventually declined the offer. But who were these Boyars, and what inspired him?

The Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg will be familiar to a lot of people. However, he was not alone: it is fair to say that he was part of a national awakening, including writers such as Ibsen, Bjørnson and Vinje, and several other composers. Among those, and of a slightly younger generation, was Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935). He is less known outside of Norway, but he had a long career, being employed by the national theatres both in Bergen – *Den Nationale Scene* – and in Oslo – *Nationaltheatret*. He was friends with Grieg, and was married to Grieg's niece, Anna, daughter of John Grieg.

And in a period of Norwegian inspired tunes and titles, it is a bit surprising that perhaps his most famous piece is a march called *The Entry of the Boyars*. It was composed in September 1893, and since January 1950 it has introduced the listeners' choice programme *Ønskekonserten* on Norwegian national radio. That is, for more than half the time it has existed.

But there are no Boyars in Norway. How comes he chose this as a title?

In 1893, Johan Halvorsen had just started working in Bergen, and then he received a letter – an offer of a job as a professor at the Conservatory and head of a quartet in Bucharest, Romania. At 7000 francs, which was twice his wage in Bergen. He was intrigued. He got hold of an encyclopedia, and

"...read about the art-loving queen Carmen Sylva, about the descendants of the rich and distinguished Boyars who so-and-so long ago made their entry into Bucharest. Donner Wetter! - I thought, - this would look good in the newspapers. And then the Queen! She would immediately invite me to the palace with my quartet. I had to have a discharge and then I wrote a march that I called *The Entry of the Boyars*, and as I had finished this the same afternoon, Edvard Grieg drops by. 'So - how are you doing! Already busy, I see.' - he saw the manuscript on the piano. He looked through it carefully, then he said: 'By Jove, that's a good one!'"

Carmen Sylva was actually the pen-name of the Queen, Elisabeth, born princess of Wied. She was also a writer - there is much to be said about her, but in another place. And the Boyars? We will come to that.

The music was played the next evening, between the acts of that evening's play. It was then elaborated some more, Grieg helped him with the ending, and arranged to have it published by Wilhelm Hansen in Copenhagen. This issue became an international breakthrough, for the composer and for the march.

I have seen the cover of what may have been the first edition. It shows a bearded, somewhat dishevelled man on a horse, followed by more horsemen. Now, a horse-rider is not a suitable illustration of a march. And he does not look like a Romanian Boyar as we see them in prints and paintings from the 1700s and onwards, with typical Oriental clothing and impressive, big hats - or headgear.

The Swedish dramatist August Strindberg did not like the music, he refers to it in *Dödsdansen - The Dance of Death* - as "den där hemska Bojarernas intåg" - "that horrible *Entry of the Boyars*". For most Norwegians, it means that *Ønskekonserten* is about to start.

There is not much Romanian about the music. The composer could have let himself be inspired by for instance Turkish marches - he must have known Mozart's *Alla turca*. But no. The Norwegian musicologist Øyvin Dybsand is writing a doctoral thesis about Halvorsen, parts of this were once put on the net. As far as I can find out, it has not yet been published. But I downloaded what was available five or six years ago, and I quote Dybsand, who compares it with Grieg's *Trolldtog (March of the Dwarfs)* from *Lyrical Pieces*, Book V, orchestrated in *Lyrical Suite*:

"That this one melody in itself should be better than the other to illustrate Norwegian trolls or Russian Boyars, seems illusory. It is the title of the pieces that leads the listeneres into the composers' world." So Dybsand too, falls into the trap and starts talking about Russians.¹

As when Rødovre Concert Band in Denmark, when it in 2004 performed the piece at a concert, and in the programme explains who the Russian Boyars were, and imagines: "It is as if the Boyars came marching from far away, approached and conquered one town after another."²

I have been intrigued by Halvorsen's own comment that he "got hold of" an encyclopedia, and what "entry" into Bucharest he describes in his march. From the Romanian history, I can remember no event when the Boyars made their entry into Bucharest. I have checked some of the standard German encyclopedias of the time, and they do not have much information. Nor do the two standard Scandinavian encyclopedias of that period, the Danish *Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon* and the Swedish *Nordisk familjebok* contain any more valuable information. Though Salmonsens mentions prince Carol's entry - "indtog" - in Bucharest.³ The occasion when the prince uttered the memorable words "Where's the palace?"⁴

The Boyars of this period were not big warriors - far from it, they were a bunch of oppressive, feudal, greedy, selfish noblemen. Their military exploits go back to the early Middle Ages, later, they were at the

¹ Quotes from Johan Halvorsen's notes are from Dybsand's manuscript, no longer on the net. They are also partially quoted by Bjarte Engeset, who conducts Islands Symfoniorkester in this and several other Norwegian favourites on the CD album NAXOS 8.557017-18N, 2002. A short article by Øyvind Dybsand: "Johan Halvorsens musikalske virksomhet i 1890-årenes Bergen" can be found at www.griegsociety.org/filer/1155.pdf (accessed 13.05.2015)

² «Bojarerne var den rige herskende adel i det gamle Rusland. Værket starter med et let, elegant melodisk tema helt svagt i klarinetterne, som igennem marchen breder sig og stiger i styrke til hele orkestret. Det er som om Bojarerne kommer marcherende i det fjerne og kommer nærmere og indtager by efter by." <http://www.concertband.dk/> (accessed 13.05.2015)

³ Older German encyclopedias are to be found at zeno.org. *Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon* is at runeberg.org/salmonsens/ and *Nordisk familjebok* is at runeberg.org/nf. I looked up the articles about *bojarer*, *Rumænien/Rumänien*, etc.

⁴ «Neben einem der Häuser, an denen der Zug vorbeikommt, ist eine Ehrenwache mit Fahne ausgestellt. Der Fürst fragt seine Begleiter: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans cette maison? General Goleescu erwidert etwas verlegen: «C'est le palais...

Fürst Karl glaubt ihn falsch verstanden zu haben und fragt ihn zweifelnd: Où est le palais? - was den General in noch grössere verlegenheit bringt, er deutet schweigend auf das einstöckige, schmucklose Haus." Mite Kremnitz: *Aus dem Leben König Karls von Rumänien. Aufzeichnung eines Augenzeugen*, Verlag der J.G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, Tübingen 1894, 51 (at archive.org, visited 13.05.2015)

most high-ranking civil servants, but usually sat in big houses in their country estates, or in Bucharest or Iași. On certain occasions, they would meet in the national assemblies of the respective principalities: The *Divan*.

It was not by accident that Johan Halvorsen was asked to come to Bucharest precisely at the end of the nineteenth century. Just as Norway had had its national awakening, so had the Romanian lands. But the Danubian principalities started from a much more backward position: they were still feudal. And with the Boyars at the top, themselves serving a prince appointed by the High Porte in Constantinople.

This prince had bribed himself to the position, and to get back his investment manyfold, and pay the taxes to the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman Empire), he had to exploit his principality as much as he could. And of course, the boyars also had to lead a decent life. So the dirt poor peasants remained so: dirt poor.

At the same time, Russia was on the rise. After a brief war, it seized half of the principality of Moldova (more or less today's independent Republic of Moldova) in 1812, later, between 1829 and 1834, the two principalities were occupied under count Pavel Kiseleff, who partly acted as a benevolent dictator. He built roads, for instance.

And he gave the principalities a constitution, the *Organic Regulation/Regulamentul Organic*. Which entrenched feudal principles... Karl Marx writes about this in the first volume of *The Capital*:

"In the Danubian Principalities the corvée was mixed up with rents in kind and other appurtenances of bondage, but it formed the most important tribute paid to the ruling class. Where this was the case, the corvée rarely arose from serfdom; serfdom much more frequently on the other hand took origin from the corvée. This is what took place in the Romanian provinces." "The code of the corvée, which the Russian General Kisseleff proclaimed in 1831, was of course dictated by the Boyards themselves. Thus Russia conquered with one blow the magnates of the Danubian provinces, and the applause of liberal cretins throughout Europe."

"The 12 corvée days of the 'Règlement organique' cried a Boyard drunk with victory, amount to 365 days in the year."⁵

⁵ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867c1/ch10.htm#12> Reproduces the first English edition of 1887 (4th German edition changes included as indicated) with some

Marx has a footnote: "Further details are to be found in E. Regnault's 'Histoire politique et sociale des Principautés Danubiennes,' Paris, 1855." Believe it or not - this book has been scanned and is on the net. The quotation is correct. By the way, it was also translated and published in Romanian in Iași in 1856.

But a feudal constitution is not feasible. Not in the long run, not in the early nineteenth century. Also, the Boyars were trying to be fashionable, hiring German and French teachers and governesses for their children, letting their daughters - reluctantly, perhaps - dress according to French fashion, and sending their sons off to study in Munich, Berlin or Paris. Which they did at their own peril: the sons came back with ideas. As the four young men, sons of Boyars, Iancu Filipescu, Iancu Vlădoianu, Barbu Știrbey and Gheorghe Bibescu, who in 1824 return from law studies in Paris, dressed in Western clothing. The two last ones later became ruling princes of Wallachia.⁶

The Romanian society - in the two principalities - in this century could be the subject of a book. Or several books, and several have been written. One of my favourite is Radu Rosetti's *Memories (Amintiri)*.⁷ Radu Rosetti was born in 1853 and died in 1926. As a child, he heard the news that Cuza-Vodă had been dethroned, as an adult, he saw the unification of the old kingdom with Transylvania and Basarabia into Greater Romania. He only finished three volumes of his memories, the second and third volume called "From Childhood" and "From Early Youth". His adult life is not covered. And the first volume has the delightful title "What I have heard from others". But he introduces his *Memories* in the following way:

"I do not believe there is another country where all public and private life changed more rapidly and more fundamentally as in ours, and in special, where any trace of the past, even fairly recent, were extinguished so completely and rapidly as by us."⁸

modernisation of spelling, later published by Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR; Translated: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels;(13.05.2015)

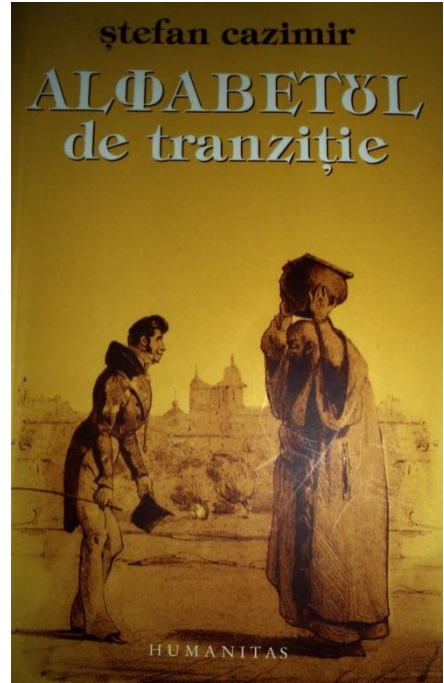
⁶ Gheorghe Crutzescu, *Podul Mogoșoaiei. Povestea unei străzi*. București: Humanitas, 2014, 278.

⁷ Radu Rosetti: *Amintiri*. Humanitas, București 2013.

⁸ Rosetti, 17.

Yes and no. But it is true that there was a tremendous change, and this is described in another of my favourite titles, *The Alphabet of Transition - Alfabetul de tranziție*, by Ștefan Cazimir.⁹ The cover is beautiful: The old Boyar raising his headgear (can I call it a hat?), *tombatera*, in a Western style greeting to some younger person in Western clothing. "German style", as a suit still can be referred to in Romanian: *haine nemțești*.

In *Curierul românesc* of 17 August 1830¹⁰, we can read that the Great Vornic Grigore Filipescu, "to prove the century that we live in and his civilised feelings, unhampered by prejudices, on the 15th of this [month] has laid off the clothes worn until then, shaved his beard and put on the clothes of civilised Europe." The Austrian consul Fleischhagl sends a report from Sibiu to Vienna on 4 September, to the same effect: "[...] ja, selbst einige alte Bojaren vom ersten Rang thun das nähmliche, und namentlich der Spathar und Gross Wornik Gregor Philipesko hat sich Bart und Schnurrbart rasieren lassen und erscheint in europäischen Kleidern im Divan."



And another one:

"Until the end of his life, Grigore Ghică Vodă remained true to the old princely dress, but Alexandru Vodă, as soon as he ascended the throne, shaved his beard, let his sideburns grow, to look like the tsar Nikolai, and went either dressed 'in German style' or in the uniform of head of the army, made after a Russian model and with a cape lined with white."¹¹

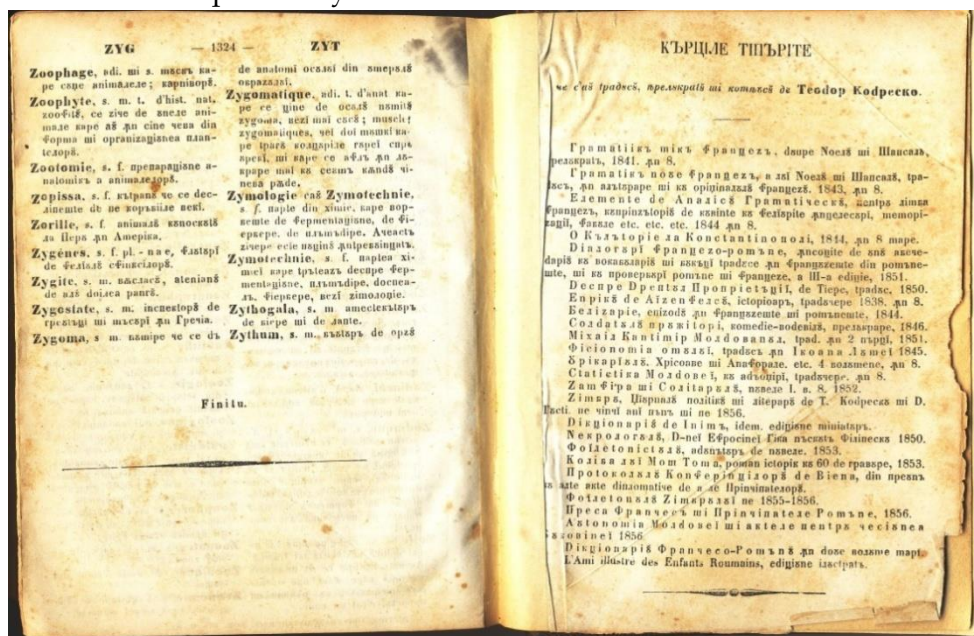
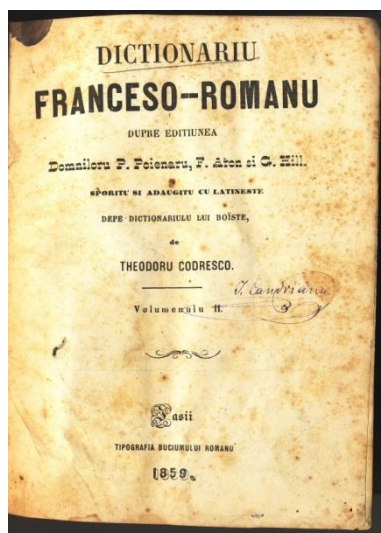
⁹ Ștefan Cazimir: *Alfabetul de tranziție*. Ediția a două, revăzută. Humanitas, București, 2006.

¹⁰ Cazimir, 30.

¹¹ Crutzescu, 246.

Romanian was written in the Cyrillic alphabet up to the 1860s, and then, gradually, changed to Latin letters. One letter at a time, one could say, or by "transitional alphabets". And as we can see from this beautiful French-Romanian dictionary printed in Iași in 1859, Latin letters were used for the titles, Cyrillics for the copy. Or text itself.

Theodor Codrescu was an active publisher. In his big French-Romanian dictionary, published in Iași in 1859¹², the final page of the second volume has a list of the other books printed by him.



¹² Theodor Codrescu, *Dictionariu Franceso-Romanu*. Iași: Tipografia Bucurului Romanu, 1859.

Михаил Кантимир Молдованъ, trad. дп 2 първи, 1851.
 Фізіonomia omълѣ, tradъсъ дп Ікоана Лѣмеї 1845.
 Дрікарїѣлѣ. Хрисоаве ши Анафорале. etc. 4 волъмене, дп 8.
 Statistica Молдовеї, кз адъопірі, tradъчере. дп 8.
 Запѣра ши Солитарълѣ, пъведе І. в. 8. 1852.
 Зімъръ, Цісруалѣ поліікѣ ши літерарѣ de Т. Кодрескѣ ши D.
 Гъсті. не чічї аш пъръ ши не 1856.
 Дікціонаріѣ de Інімъ, idem. edігізне мініатъръ.
 Некрологълѣ, D-неї Ефросінеї Гіка пъскътъ Філіпескѣ 1850.
 Фоїлетонїстълѣ, адъпътърѣ de пъведе. 1853.
 Колїва лѣї Мош Тома, роман історїк кз 60 де гравъре, 1853.
 Протоколълѣ Конферінцілорѣ de Віена, дп презнъ
 кз аде акте діпломатїче de аде Прінціпалелорѣ.
 Фоїлетонълѣ Зімърълѣї не 1855-1856.
 Преса Франчесъ ши Прінціпалеле Ромъне, 1856.
 Автономїа Молдовеї ши актеле пентръ чесїзнеа
 въковїнеї 1856.
 Дікціонаріѣ Франчесо-Ромънѣ дп дозе волъне марї.
 L'Ami illustre des Enfants Roumains, edігізне ілѣстратъ.

Now, what is this: *Koliba lui moș Toma*? Why, of all available books, would he print a translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

Because the gypsies in Romania at that time were still serfs. Or slaves, call it what you like. The book is in my personal collection, but there is an interesting article about the background by Mircea-Cristian Ghenghea¹³.

Eventually, the gypsies owned by Boyars were freed, then those owned by the Church, and finally, in 1856, those belonging to the Prince.

Indeed, the translation – from a French version – was published on the initiative of the First Minister Mihail Kogălniceanu, who also drafted the law to abolish serfdom. And who served as head of the government at several times, also after the unification of the principalities.

And he scolded the Boyars in the Moldovan Divan on 11 February 1861: "Gentlemen, 2000 Boyars do not make a nation."¹⁴ The two principalities at that time had about 4 million inhabitants.

So it was a society and a country between two lifestyles that invited Johan Halvorsen. I have no idea where the idea came from, except that the Romanian king and queen were both Germans. They, or someone of their

¹³. Mircea-Cristian Ghenghea: «Un eveniment editorial în Principatul Moldovei în anul 1853 – 'Coliba lui Moșu Tomă'» in *Studii și materiale de istorie modernă*, Vol. XXVI, 2013, 86 ff.

¹⁴. «Domnilor, 2000 de boieri nu fac o nație» in Rosetti, 382.

court with German connections, may have been involved. And of course, with young Boyar sons going to Berlin and Munich to study, they may have heard of him.

In the end, Halvorsen did not accept the offer. What we have is a beautiful piece of music, very Norwegian in its style, completely un-Norwegian in its title.

But I wonder what would have happened if he had accepted the offer. Sometimes I am tempted to write a contrafactual short-story, but I am afraid it would look too similar to Filip Florian's novel *The days of the King*, that tells the story of Karl von Hohenzollern's German dentist, who comes with the prince to Bucharest¹⁵.

And I still have not found out where the Boyars made their entry. I suspect there was a misunderstanding on Halvorsen's part. And to a Norwegian, the word *divan* means something else: It is a couch or a sofa. When the national assemblies in the two principalities met to vote for Alexandru Ioan Cuza as common prince, they had to call an *ad hoc divan*. Sounds extremely funny in Norwegian. And this, or these two, are actually a place where the Boyars would make a solemn entry. So perhaps the Entry of the Boyars is an entry into a – couch, or divan?

¹⁵. Filip Florian, *Zilele regelui*, Polirom, Iași and București, 2008.

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