Studies

Aspects of Translating Musical Instruments in Foreign Travellers Through the Romanian Principalities, I-X Series of Volumes

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Abstract: Whether we are talking about those written directly in Romanian, or whether we are referring to those translated into the same language, the narrative sources are the main source of documentation in the process of reconstructing any aspect related to our past. Regarding music and all the elements related to it, the category of sources we refer to is the most important source of information, even if, in relation to other aspects, music is relatively little "present" within these writings. Therefore, trying to correctly and accurately determine the described musical instruments, as well as the related terminology, is important, but also difficult. On the occasion of a more extensive work (i.e. doctoral thesis) I noticed, especially in the category of sources referred to here, a series of mistranslated musical instruments which makes it difficult or even far from understanding and creating a more accurate picture of the musical atmosphere of past centuries. All these aspects draw our attention first of all by resorting to comparing the translations with the original version after which they were made, but also by comparing the descriptions regarding music related to Romania with those referring to Romanians' neighbors or those with which we have come into consistent contact with throughout history. Therefore, in the following, we propose to analyze the main cases of mistranslations identified by us, a comparison with the original alternatives of the texts after which they were made, but also a framing of the historical context, without which the proper understanding risks would not be fully achieved.

Keywords: music, musical instruments, translation, literary sources, Romanian Principalities.

1. Introduction

The aim of this material is to bring forward some important aspects, from our point of view, regarding the translation of musical instruments from different foreign languages into Romanian, translations that also represent important testimonies belonging to several foreign travellers in the Romanian territory, over the centuries. Although several categories of sources translated or even written directly into Romanian could enter this analysis, we will refer here only to the first series of volumes which contain a great deal of such kind

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of testimonies, chronologically organized from the second half of the 14th century to the last years of the 18th century and included in the *Foreign Travellers Through the Romanian Principalities* collection, volumes I-X.

Despite the fact that the approach may seem somewhat reckless and less unfounded at first glance, we believe that those who want to find out as accurately as possible things about musical instruments and bands, but also about their use in the period covered here will find all the information included valuable.

The reason why we have come to question the correctness of the translations of certain musical terms lies at the basis of broader research (Rusu, 2020a) and consisted of drawing a comparison between the proper translations and the original variants after which they had been made – with the cases when this was possible – because, from a logical point of view, some instruments described in the mentioned texts were adapted neither to context nor to the musical ensemble referred to.

We will therefore proceed to expose the main cases of mistranslated musical instruments identified by us.

2. The trumpet

Probably, the most common issue refers to the reason why in the Romanian language sources, translated or not, we rarely find references to the musical instrument called "trumpet". We came to be in the position of wondering ourselves about this by consulting the bibliography on European military music, noting that there, in most cases, one talks about the "trumpet", in places where in our country people talk about the "trâmbiță". Starting from here, we compared the original sources to the translated ones and we concluded that in the Romanian language the term "trumpet" was mostly often translated as "trembita" (trâmbiță) (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 (Papană, 2019, p. 527) Trembita



Fig. 2 (Solcanu, 2002, p. 177, fig. 54) Trembita, *Herod's feast*, Sucevita Monastery

In order to try to give a proper explanation of this fact, firstly it is useful to see what exactly the "trembita" is and what its role was in the history and musical practice of the Romanian Principalities. From the chronicle's accounts regarding the first centuries of state existence of Moldavia and Wallachia one can see that in addition to drums, in the military music the "bucium" and sometimes the "trembita" are mentioned first, or they are sometimes taken one for the other. One of the first documentary testimonies of the presence of the "trembita", in sources whose written language is the Romanian language, refers to the account of the battle of Vaslui, in 1475, fought by Ştefan cel Mare against the Ottomans.

Recounting that event, Grigore Ureche (Ureche, 1958, p. 92) mentions the "buciume" and "trembitas", while admitting that there is a difference between the two musical instruments. Other testimonies of the presence of this instrument, belonging to almost the same period, are the vernacular *Psalters*, where the "trembita" appears as a distinct term to the "bucium" (see Toma, 1979). Although it is similar to the "bucium", the "trembita" emits sharper and clearer sounds (*Trembita* ...).

The "trembita" seems to be originated in the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains area, where it represents the specific traditional Hutsul instrument, used mainly in the pastoral environment. It was made of coniferous wood (Dallais, Weber, Briner & Liengme, 2002, pp. 22-24), and in other places one finds out that the "trembita" is an ancient "trumpet" used for sound signaling in the mountainous area of the Ukrainian Carpathians (Nestyev, 1950, p. 316). If the "ancient trumpet" refers to an instrument made of metal, because the trumpet is an instrument exclusively made of this material, we believe that there is a possibility of existence of a variant of this instrument, made of metal and most likely used in the military field.

Teodor Burada states that "in our country, as well as in other old countries, the trembita is made of metal and is in the hands of soldiers in order to signal war" (Burada, 1975, p. 230), and elsewhere, the same author says that the trembita is an instrument made of wood, which resembles the Roman "tuba" in terms of shape and sound (Burada, 1974a, p. 230). Burada, trying to tell the differences between the bucium and the trembita, also says that the Romans used an instrument called "buccinum" or "buccina" made of metal and which remained in the territory inhabited by Romanians for the use of shepherds, where it was used for calling animals or for long distance communication through emitting sound signals. He also adds that after analyzing the chronicles and old folk poems, it turned out that the "bucium" made a terrible sound, which makes him believe that this instrument was made not only of wood, but also of

metal, "a kind of military trumpet" (Burada, 1974*b*, pp. 98-100). Or, the "tuba", translated into Italian by "tromba", was made of metal or animal horns, being used by the Roman armies to transmit various signals (Scoditti, 2010, p. 181). Most likely, the instrument entered our territories at the same time with the presence of the Romans here and remained in the use of the locals, especially of those from the mountainous areas¹.

Another example refers to the moment after the anointing of Constantin Brâncoveanu as ruler, when all those present leave the church and go to the palace, where they are greeted with "zurnas" (surla), princely trembitas and Turkish trembitas (Mazilu, 2004, p. 677). The princely trembitas are mentioned, separately from the Turkish ones, precisely because there was a difference in meaning. Those Turkish trembitas are nothing but the "boru" trumpets from the mehterhane (Fig. 3, Fig. 4) — which we have talked about on other occasions (Rusu, 2020*b*, pp. 51-52; Rusu, 2020*c*, pp. 50-51) — the band that is often mentioned in the reports of the lord leaving the church, after he was anointed to the throne.

Apart from some sources in the Romanian language, no other source or specialized work consulted gives a name to the boru trumpet of the mehterhane and the trembita, because it was not in fact a trembita.

We believe that this example is very important to notice that in the Romanian language or in other Romanian language sources there is no difference in usage between the trumpet and the trembita, even if it was obvious. Therefore, there appears the idea suggesting that Romanians did not use the trumpet, which was a very popular instrument throughout Europe and not only here. The "princely and Turkish trumpeters" phrase confirms the hypothesis mentioned before and attests this widespread terminological confusion.

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¹ The synonymity of some terms, proposed by Zoltán Falvy for comparison, is very interesting as well. According to him, the Latin word "buccina" is translated into Hungarian as "síp, egyenes trombita busina", into English as "straight-trumpet busina", and the Romanian correspondent being most likely "trembitas" (Falvy, 1987, p. 104). Specifically, the Romanian "bucina" or "buccina" was a military musical instrument (translated into Italian by "military trumpet" (Altieri, 1749, p. 118)), made of an animal horn or bronze, the bronze one having a curved shape (Scoditti, 2010, pp. 32-33). As there was no instrument of a similar shape in the central-eastern part of Europe, the only logical variant which corresponds both in terms of the material of which it was made, the sound and the period of time in which it was used is the trembita, as the Hungarian and English terms specify, is indeed straight in shape.



Fig. 3 (Kastner, 1848, sketch VIII) Boru trumpet



Fig. 4 (Vural, 2016, p. 39, fig. 15) Mehterhane, detail

Turning thus to foreign travellers's testimonies, which refer to the trumpet (Fig. 5, Fig. 6), one can notice that they are translated into Romanian in most cases by the term "trembita" (trâmbiță). We will try to prove our hypothesis by giving some examples, one from each volume. The first chronological example is an account from the first volume of this series, where "trompettes" (Wavrin, 1859, p. 114, passim) is translated as "trembitas" (trâmbite) (Holban, 1968, p. 119, passim); in the second volume, the Latin "tuba" (Sommero, 1587, p. 42) is translated as "trembita" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1970, p. 265); in the third volume, the Italian term "trombe" (Pascu, 1944, p. 167) is translated as "trembitas" (trîmbe) (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru Cernovodeanu, 1971, p. 7); in the fourth volume, the French term "trompettes" (M.I.B.A. En P., 1620, pp. 66-67; Papiu Ilarianu, 1863, p. 35) is translated as "trembitas" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1972, p. 397); in the fifth volume, the Latin "tubae" (Cipariu, 1867, p. 13)² is translated by "the trembitas" (trâmbitele) (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1973, p. 65); in the seventh volume, "trompettes" (from Croix, 1684, p. 196) is translated as "trembitas" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1980, p. 263)³, and in the eighth volume,

² This source offers a bilingual version of the text, Latin and Romanian, and the term "tubae" has been translated as "timpanis" which is also a mistranslation, because the timpanis are in fact, drums.

³ It is somewhat strange that in the same account, translated from the same source, the same terms were translated correctly. See (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru & Cernovodeanu, 1980, pp. 258, 261; de la Croix, 1684, pp. 180, 189).

the Polish term 'trębaczów" (Panaitescu, 1930, p. 88)⁴ was translated as "trembita players" (trâmbiţaşi) (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1983, p. 166; Panaitescu, 1930, p. 101). Although the examples may go on, we limit ourselves to these.





Fig. 5 (Duţu, 1984, sketch V). Military trumpet, end of the 18th century, miniature of Nastase Negrule

Fig. 6 (Dima, 2014, p. 432). Trumpet, the novel Erotocrit, miniature by Chancellor (Logofăt) Petrache, 1787

In conclusion, we consider that such a trumpet really existed, it was used in Moldavia and Wallachia, and it came into use from the Western European part together with the statal development and implicitly with the army or court life, being very well known and becoming to be represented in several cases, but which was not necessarily imposed from a terminological point of view, getting lost among the names of the older instruments from the same large musical family, used by the Romanian people. In fact, the differences between the instruments discussed can be easily seen from the church painting, where the painters captured the everyday reality of those historical times.

The oldest evidence of the presence of the trumpet on the Romanian territory comes from Transylvania, during Borilā's time and it is captured by the Geoffroi de Villehardouin chronicler, who talks about the armed confrontation between Borilā and the crusading knights, in 1207, when the Wallachians used trumpets to give the battle signal (Cosma, 1973, p. 133).

3. The "Nagara" Drum

This term represents variants of the name of the same musical instrument, which belongs to the category of the percussion ones, of Arab-Persian origin; ancient tympanum with hemispherical or conical base, of small size, made of wood or bronze. The nagara drum was specific to the martial

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⁴ In Polish "trębacz" is translated as "trumpeter". Cf. (Swan, p. 359).

music of the Arabs and later of the Ottomans – in the well-known mehterhane (Rusu 2020b, pp. 46-48; Rusu 2020c, pp. 44-46) -, being made in the modern versions of terracotta, which has a membrane attached to it by some leather ties and it is used in pairs (Farmer 2000a, p. 35; Bărbuceanu, 2014, p. 178). The nagara drum (Fig. 7, Fig. 8) is considered to be the ancestor of the tympanum currently used in symphony musical orchestras (Demian, 1968, p. 39). The identification of this musical instrument in the indicated volumes was the most difficult because, depending on the language from which the text was translated, the nagara drum can be found under several names, each of them eventually leading to the same musical instrument. Thus, in French the term appears as: "caissettes" (d'Ohsson, 1824, p. 155), "petites timballes" (Hammer, 1839, p. 17; Dumont and de Rousset Missy, 1739, p. 497), "naré" (d'Ohsson, 1824, p. 23) or "timbales" (d'Ohsson, 1791, p. 416), a term most often used and translated into Romanian by "timbal/tambal" (dulcimer) (Suciu, 2010, pp. 533). "Kettle-drum" is the variant of the term in English (Farmer, 1929, pp. 224-225), which can be considered even a variant of the "tom-toms" similar instrument (Pascanu, 1980, pp. 155-156). The multitude of translation versions of this musical instrument has generated a lot of confusion, and an explanation for it is given by Henry George Farmer, who shows the source of the name and the transformations that this term undergoes. Until the establishment of a common, stable terminology, the nagara drum was called by multiple names, but later, after crystallizing under the name of "nakkāra", this instrument was known in Europe under several names such as "naker", "nacaire", and the synonymous Persian term "tinbal" becomes "timbale" or "tymbala" (Farmer, 2000*b*, p. 32).



Fig. 7 (mehter.com) Nagara drum



Fig. 8 (auburnsymphonyinschools.weebly.com)
Performer at nagara drum at the bottom of the image

As the terminological course of the nagara drum throughout time has been shown, we will proceed to bring forward some examples taken from the volumes of *Foreign Travellers Through the Romanian Principalities* collection, showing both the original term and the one given by the translators of these texts. A first example is the account of the Swedish peace envoy led by Clas Brorsson Ralamb, in 1657, who passes through Târgovişte on their way to Constantinople. It is described as the time of raising the toast glasses to honour the sultan and the rulers of the neighbouring countries, as usual, during the festive meal. Each glass was accompanied with music played at "skripkas", "buciume", drums, "ţimbale" and other Turkish instruments that played together making a lot of noise (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1973, p. 611). "Ţimbale" corresponds to the term "kettledrums" taken from the version after which the translation of this text was made (Rolamb, 1732, p. 677), referring to a mehterhane which includes the nagara drum as well.

De la Croix accurately captures the customs that are held at the Moldovian and Wallachian Courts on the occasion of celebrating Easter. According to him, the ruler followed by many members of the Court leave the palace in the sounds made by trembitas and drums and heads towards the Metropolitan Church, where he is greeted by the Metropolitan Bishop and where he attends the Resurrection service (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1980, p 263). After it, all those present, according to their rank, go and kiss the hands of the Metropolitan Bishop and the lady and probably the icon of the Resurrection, each greeting the others with the traditional words "Christ is Risen", while the drums, trumpets, "ţimbalele" (the nagara drums (De la Croix , 1695, p. 47)) and the oboes (the zurnas), meaning the mehterhane, play their own music, along with the cannon and rifle salute, but also with the cheers of the people (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1980, p. 267).

The Moldavian prince Nicolae Mavrocordat's music, played at the moment when he greeted the Polish peace envoy in 1712, is rendered as: "the Moldavian music [...] playing the whistles, zurnas, trembitas and drums and the janissaries beating the daraban drums; skripkas, "timbale", drymbas and discreet mandoras completed the concert given by the gypsies" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1983, p. 594). The term "timbale" in the version after which the text was taken from is "timbale" (Panaitescu, 1930, p. 136), which specifically refers to the nagara drums.

The procession of the ruler Matei Ghica, when greeting a Polish peace envoy, consisted of trembitas and "ţimbale" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1997, pp. 364-365). The term "ţimbal" in the quoted text refers to the same nagara drums, and in French (Iorga, 1899, p. 35), the version after which the translation was made, the term used is "timbal". In

another welcoming procession, that of the ruler known as Teodor Callimachi, the same musical instruments – trembitas and "ţimbale" – were mentioned (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1997, p. 426). The term "ţimbal" in the French version (Iorga, 1899, p. 44) after which the translation was made, is "tymballe" and it refers again to the same nagara drum, not to "ţimbal" or "ṭambal" (dulcimer).

Another account refers again to the Romanian lands. The description made in 1768 by Nicolaus Ernest Kleemann, a German commercial agent, travelling through Wallachia, Chilia and Crimea, captures the beauty of the musical atmosphere in the yard the Căusani khan, as follows: "I've never heard anything more sinful, more discordant as song and tone. Ten individuals blew in some instruments similar to an oboe [zurna], which was about half of it and with a very thick end. Three were beating on small dulcimers about which you could not know what they were made of, because of the mud on them. Ten men had large drums hanging from their necks to which patches of red cloth were tied; these beat tactfully with a large stick which was bent over the drum and with another one, smaller, beat very fast below the drum. This music was started by ten oboists who blew for a few minutes in the same tone; then one blew a solo and made cadences, fugues, triolets, musical ornaments until his face turned green, blue and black; then they all sang together, and a little later the dulcimers began their rattling, which was accompanied by drums. Everything was going andante, but to get a real song would have been a pure impossibility. When a piece was finished, the first oboe began again and the others followed it again according to the way described above. At the end, one of the musicians made a wish for the khan in a loud voice and all the others ended it with a loud shout" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1997, p. 638).

As in previous cases, one can find here another example of terminological inconsistency, this time translated from German. The term "tambal", which in the original version of the text is "Pauke" (Kleeman, 1773, p. 69) with the equivalent "paucă" into Romanian, translates as "timpan" (Bărbuceanu, 2014, pp. 198, 250), which is a kind of drums. In the text, these timpanis are described as being of a small size, certainly the author having the intention of referring to nagara drums, because the nagara drum is a type of small-sized timpani. Most likely, although it is specified in the ninth volume of the Foreign Travellers Through the Romanian Principalities collection, at the beginning of the text, that the translation was made after the German version (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu, 1997, p. 621), it was actually made after the French one. The biographical file dedicated to the author also specifies the languages in which the work was translated, among which, French. Comparing the French version to the Romanian one, we noticed that the translation of the Romanian text was made after the French version, not

after the German original, because as mentioned before, the type of nagara drums is translated as "timbal", having absolutely nothing to do with "Pauke", and in French the same term "timbal" appears (Kleeman, 1780, p. 59), mistranslated in so many cases. The translator could not derive "Pauke" to "tambal", while from "timbal" the possibility is more than obvious.

Following the same reason, all the terms "ţimbal" encountered in the volumes of *Turkish Chronicles* (Guboglu and Mehmet, 1966; Guboglu, 1974; Mehmet, 1980) also indisputably refer to the nagara drums.

A less common case is the account about Pasha of Hotin's Ottoman music with which he welcomes the peace envoy led by Iosif Podoski. It consisted of "trembitas and drums covered with red cloth and bagpipes", which produced a "loud noise, very unpleasant for the ears unaccustomed to such a thing" (Holban, Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru and Cernovodeanu. 1997, p. 410). Not only from the enumeration of the instruments, but also from the description of the unpleasant sonority often encountered in the stories of foreign travelers, can one infer that this kind of band was a mehterhane, especially since its members adorned their drums with red cloth. The bagpipe appears unnaturally listed among the instruments of the mehterhane, and in the version after which the translation used here was made - P. P. Panaitescu, Polish Travellers Through the Romanian Principalities the term "tulumbase" appears in between inverted comas (Panaitescu, 1930, p. 196), probably being taken as such by Panaitescu from the text after which he made the translation. "Tulumbase" or "litavră" (litavry) is a percussion instrument (drum) specific to the military music of Russia and Ukraine which is struck with a leather strap called a "boshchaga" (Katchanovski, Kohut, Nesebio and Yurkevich, 2013, p. 182; Bărbuceanu, 2014, p. 155). Most likely Adam Golarlowski, the author of the account, referred by this term to the nagara drums, associating them with a similar musical instrument, known to him, as one has noticed in other cases, too.

4. The Zurna

From the description of Auguste de Lagarde, a traveller through Wallachia, one can see that the Ottoman music played at ruler Caragea's court consisted of "fifty big drums, the same number of "tambale" (dulcimers), three bagpipes and six oboes" (Filitti, Marinescu, Rădulescu-Zoner and Stroia, 2004, pp. 568). There is to be noticed here the mentioning of the bagpipe, which is a unique one, as in the previous example. Indeed, the first meaning in the Romanian language of the French "musette" (de Lagarde, 1824, p. 336) is "bagpipe" but, the reason why one cannot believe that the bagpipe is a component part of the mehterhane is due to the fact that it is mentioned only in accounts about the Romanian Principalities, translated from other languages. We believe that Auguste de Lagarde tried to translate the instrument seen at

Caragea's court by an instrument endowed with a similar sonority or form, to those known to him, most probably referring to the "musette de Poitou" instrument, which, according to the Dictionnaire de la musique Larousse, is an instrument similar to a short oboe, emitting shrill sounds, totally different from "musette" (Vignal, 2005, p. 2490). Probably, the instrument seen by Legarde is a zurna or a species of zurna (Fig. 9., Fig. 10). In addition, in the Dictionary of Musical Instruments (Bărbuceanu, 2014, p. 173), "zurnas" appears as an equivalent term for bagpipes, and in the same dictionary, the second meaning of the term "musette" is a modern term for the type of keyless oboe or rustic bagpipes, found in France, similar in shape to the "musette de Poitou" instrument.



Fig. 9 (Dima, 2014, p. 433). *Zurna, the novel Erotocrit*, miniatured by Chancellor (Logofăt) Petrache, 1787



Fig. 10 (commons.wikimedia.org). *Zurna*, at the middle of the image, Topkapı Serail Museum

5. Conclusions

These few examples are intended to illustrate how a mistranslation can impede the reader's correct understanding or even change the outcome of a piece of research, thus depriving a possible attempt to reconstruct our Romanian musical past of some important elements.

These three instruments – the trembita, the nagara drum and the zurna – referred to in this short account represent the most obvious examples of erroneous or incomplete translations, which distort or even keep somebody away from a correct understanding of the texts or from the apprehension of the musical instruments used centuries ago.

Except for the examples included here, there are many others for the same musical instruments, all leading to the same result. But there are other instruments as well that have been mistranslated or incompletely translated, such as: the tanbûr, the cistra (cetera) (etc.), which can join those already displayed above.

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