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# *Proclaiming the Eucharist on Communist Stadiums? The Multiple Meanings of the Phoenix Concept-Album Cantafabule (An Experiment in Cultural History)*

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Philologists and medievalists rarely deal with the subject of contemporary Pop-Rock or Folk music. When they do it, they usually fall prey to a certain form of medievalism. The current section of *Museikon* follows a completely different approach. The pairing of interviews with memoirs and the introduction shaped in the form of an actual scientific study have the sole purpose of launching an experiment in the history of culture. The case study is a 1976 album of the Romanian Rock group Phoenix. The state-owned record company Electrecord made a mistake, releasing it as *Cantofabule*, even though its correct title was *Cantafabule* or *Bestiar*. It had traditional- and medieval-inspired lyrics, but most of all, it was the result of artistic synergy. A collective work of sorts, much in the manner of the medieval manuscripts of old.

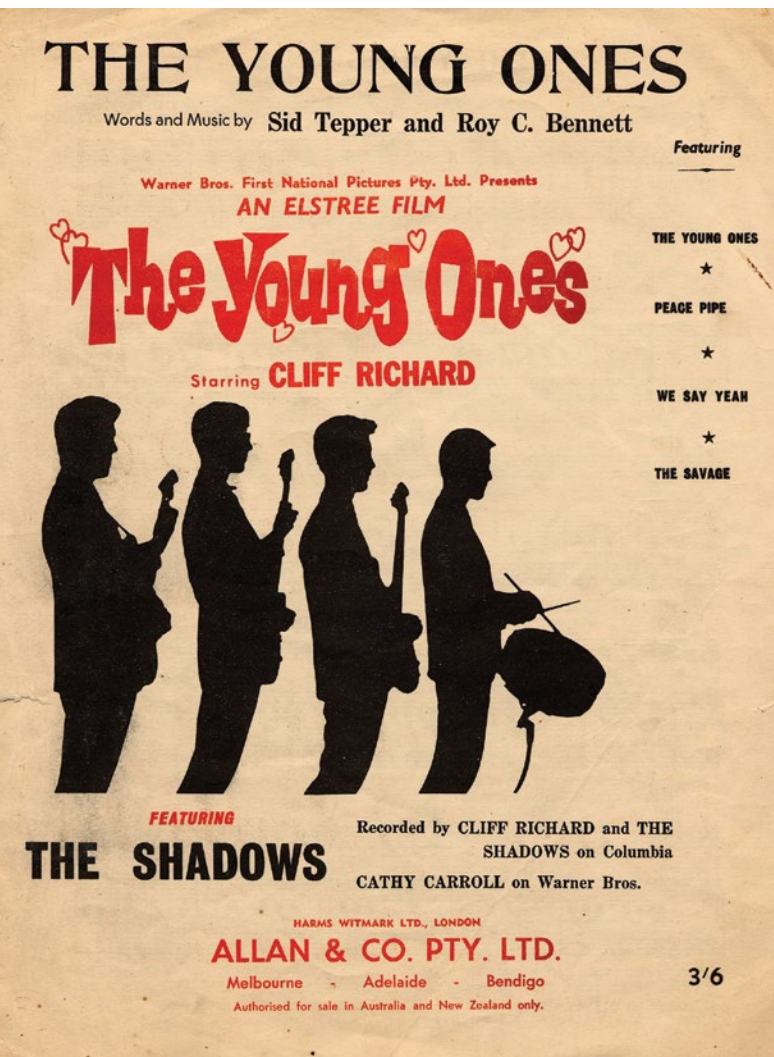
In many respects, the Folk, Pop, and Rock cultural phenomenon of the '60s and '70s can be compared to the vernacular culture of the Middle Ages. The dynamics between the commercial and Indie music scenes of the current 21<sup>st</sup> century can also be compared to what happened in medieval and early modern times. The history of Jazz presents several interesting terms of comparison as well (cf. Agrigoroaei 2011, p. 544-552). To sum up, all cultural phenomena springing from a low-prestige milieu can be compared in several (or different) aspects, since the dynamics of their evolution are more or less the same, but this does not automatically imply that they illustrate what came to be called popular culture. There are many definitions of popular culture and none of them provides a conceptual framework for identifying what popular culture is. Probably because the concept pre-exists and defies, on the one hand, these definitions. On the other hand, because there is no unadulterated example of a cultural act belonging exclusively to popular culture or to the high culture of its time. These ideal notions represent two opposite poles in between which cultural acts oscillate, as would be expected. The case of the Phoenix LP pressed in 1976 is rather similar. It presents us with a complex interplay between Pop-Rock (and popular) culture, all while maintaining strong links with contemporary cult literary experiments.

However, this inability to define what popular culture is presents a puzzling situation in which the contemporary researcher cannot create an adequate method of research, as she or he will always be more or less guessing (and stumbling in the dark). To fill the methodological gap, research tends to analyse cultural acts according to structures and patterns, characteristic of high culture, but these are artificial constructs. Popular culture is ideally characterised by organic unity and cannot be structured according to precise categories, even though traces of structures manifest themselves in cultural acts traditionally linked with popular culture. Similarly, since high culture is only a concept,

valid in an ideal world, its actual counterpart cannot be impeccably structured either. Organic chaos and imperfect structures coexist everywhere in the history of culture. In truth, the manner in which this method is deployed resembles the squaring the circle. Just as constructing a square with the same area as a given circle is impossible because of the difference between algebraic and transcendental numbers (such as  $\pi$ ), so is the identification of predetermined structures in the history of culture. Research methods tend to act in a Procrustean manner, creating artificial categories that never existed in the first place and overlooking that those structures are partly organic at the same time. This also happened with the Phoenix LP, which was seen, ever since its release, in a single interpretation key that suited the interests and mindset of its public.

This comes from a desire to understand the world in the form of algorithms, a temptation governing humanities and social sciences, based on the manner in which economics emulate mathematics. More often than not, culture is said to be a reflex of politics and society, in turn subject to changes originating from the world of economics. Yet this axiom was never proven. It may be equally argued that these coincidences are determined not by the dependence of culture upon politics and economics, but on the fact that each of these aspects manifest themselves in the history of a given human being. This would explain the chaotic nature of cultural phenomena, since they occur at the same time as social, political, and economic ones, but not all human beings experience the same things.

This means that the intellectualisation of Rock music in the late '60s and early '70s may not be necessarily linked with the social and political aspirations of the Hippie generation. That the *Jazz Age* of the '20s and '30s may not be a consequence of the *Roarin' '20s*. That they were different phenomena, overlapping only in certain aspects. Similarly, what came to be called the *Vernacular Theology* (or *Theologies*) of the Middle Ages may not be linked with the evolution of heterodoxy and heresy in the medieval world, but with another cultural phenomenon which influenced both the literary and social aspects of Western Christianity, a phenomenon defined by Colin Morris as the 'Discovery of the Individual' (cf. Agrigoroaei 2021). This is evident when the Vernacular Theology reached the Byzantine Commonwealth and broke free from the notion of heresy or heterodoxy. A similar situation occurs in the transfer of Pop, Rock, and Folk music from the United States and Western Europe to the countries of the Eastern Bloc. The Socialist undertones of the cultural phenomenon, which linked it to the aspirations of the Hippie generation, simply faded out or were replaced with a different type of rhetoric. Let us not forget that Frank Zappa was also a part of that cultural phenomenon, but he was always



▲ Australian / New Zealand poster for the British musical film *The Young Ones* (1961), starring Cliff Richard and the Shadows, the starting point of Romanian Rock bands.  
Source: <http://www.pickfordsbooks.com/>.

▼ Nicolae Covaci and Florin Bordeianu on the banks of the Timiș river at an unknown date in the early '60s. Phoenix in concert in the '60s: Béla Kamocsa, Nicolae Covaci, and Florin Bordeianu.  
Source: <https://www.vice.com/>.



critical of the Hippie generation and of their Leftist political aspirations.

It is safe to assume that individual human beings react differently to these variables in their lives. Some of them form groups, thus giving the impression that those variables can be identified with structures. Yet, in the history of culture, these groups are not always cohesive entities. It is not a question of internal fissures pointing to internal dissenters against the rest of the group. The Phoenix double LP *Cantafabule* represents the living proof that several cultural acts were mingled into one, but their strength and beauty does not rely on their cohesiveness. In this case, beauty comes from cultural poliphony. Just as poliphony is several lines of music being played simultaneously, so the collective cultural act is made up of several independent acts. *Cantafabule*, for instance, should be compared to a counterpoint, that is, the relationship between two or more musical lines which are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and melodic contour. The Phoenix double LP was made up of three interdependent yet independent 'cultural lines': lyrics, music, and art. And all of them shone brighter together, not alone.

Perhaps a collective cultural act is not the average but the sum of its individual parts, each of them being autonomously meaningful. A fair method of research must try to disentangle these individual stories behind a collective cultural act, in order to understand it better. *Cantafabule*, for instance, is very much alike to medieval manuscripts. It involved the creative energy of the musicians, of the lyricists, and of the artist who created the LP's sleeve, yet it was always seen in connection with the band, which represents a distortion of reality and a simplification of the cultural act to a monotone interpretation. The conflict between history and memory may be a false one. From this perspective, memory is equally entitled to reconstruct history.

The curious thing about *Cantafabule* is that its lyrics are mainly sung in Romanian, but there are other languages as well, such as Aromanian and even 12<sup>th</sup>-century Old French. The lyrics speak of esoteric animals with Christian meanings. There are also liturgical references in the texts of various songs, hagiographical ones, visionary literature, a bit of Avant-garde, Symbolism, etc. The musical structure gathers in a bunch a traditional folk melodies, medieval or Renaissance-inspired musical lines, Beat-Pop, Hard Rock, Progressive Rock experiments, Blues-Rock, a little bit of early Heavy Metal, Folk-Rock, and many others. There are quotations from bestiaries and fatrasies; the entire experiment was given the name of a literary genre which is represented by a single medieval text. *Cantafabule* is an odd fish for sure. Its cover was in-

tended to reflect this conscious omnium gatherum and structure it in the manner of a *roman à clef*.

How could a Romanian Rock band of the '70s, known for its passion for traditional folk music and living under the post-Stalinist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu, achieve such a bizarre concept-album in which Christian themes are paired with pagan ones and strive to reach an esoteric level? Perhaps this happened because of the poet who wrote the lyrics. But when one looks at what that poet had written for the same band before, one cannot fully grasp the complexity of the cultural act. This is where a reading in a social or political key, often deployed for the interpretation of recent history, fails to comprehend what had actually happened there. A different method of research is needed, one that could disentangle the interdependent lines of this cultural act.

If creators worked together, trying to achieve a common goal, then research must look at this from several perspectives, to separate the history of the band from that of the poet or that of the other agents who helped them achieve the cultural act. One needs to know how and why these people came in contact, what each of them strived to achieve, where each of them came from, and into which direction each of them was planning to go. It is perhaps much easier to start with the history of the band and work our way towards the story of the Șerban Foarță and Andrei Ujică, who gave them the much needed cultural impetus. The story of the band is well documented. It provides a stable basis for a possible interpretation.

\* \* \*

Perhaps it all started with the Ventures and the Shadows. In 1962, Romanian teenagers had seen what one could do with an electric guitar and were replicating the hits of those two bands in Bucharest and in the larger cities of the country. Timișoara was one of those cities, strategically placed in the vicinity of the border with Yugoslavia and Hungary, where the Rock'n'Roll phenomenon had started earlier. Nicolae Covaci, the future leader of the Phoenix band, described those days in his memoirs:

At that time, the sound of an electrically amplified guitar was a rare thing in our city, but I made sure that I compensated that want, playing all day long with the radio placed in the window, so that the sound can reach the park in front of the house. Creșneac had a Romanian guitar with an electromagnetic dose, but he also used a radio as an amplifier. We were both making a horrifying noise, but we were so happy upon hearing the new colour and intensity of the sound that we kept playing for hours without end. At that time, we were imitating some songs released by the Shadows and the Ventures. The idea of a Beat or Rock band had not crossed anybody's mind yet, [...].

*Pentru ora aceea, sunetul unei ghitare amplificate electric era o raritate în orașul nostru, dar eu aveam grijă să compensez această lipsă, cântând mai toată ziua cu radioul în geam, să sune spre parcul din fața casei. Creșneac avea o gitară românească cu doză electromagnetică, dar folosea ca amplificator tot un aparat de radio. Făceam un zgomot îngrozitor amândoi, dar eram atât de fericiți de culoarea și de intensitatea nouă a sunetului, încât nu ne opream ore în șir din cântat. La ora aceea, imitam niște piese lansate de Shadows și Ventures. Ideea de formație beat sau rock nu se formase încă în capul nimănui, [...]* (Covaci 1994, p. 37).

The incidental beginnings of most Romanian Pop and Rock groups of those years are more or less the same. It was a peer-pressure phenomenon and it led to similar results. The first groups formed out of a desire to emulate



- ▲ The first two Phoenix EP-s pressed by Electrecord: *Vremuri / Canarul / Lady Madonna / Friday On My Mind* (EDC 10.006, EP, mono, 1968). *Totuși sint ca voi / Floarea stincilor / Nebunul cu ochii închiși / Ar vrea un eschimos* (EDC 10.081, EP, mono, 1969).

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.

Western culture, which was still forbidden, but somehow gradually tolerated in the decade which followed the death of Stalin (1953). In the early '60s, Western films were also shown in Romanian cinemas. One of them in particular, *The Young Ones* (1961) created a national frenzy. Teenagers grouped in electric guitar bands.

Covaci's band was called 'The Saints' (*Sfinții*) and its leader was Moni (Florin) Bordeianu. Among its members were Béla Kamocsa, Claudiu Rotaru, Pilu (Ioan) Ștefanovici, and Șpitzi (Günther) Reininger. Musical trends changed and they soon played covers of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and many other famous bands of the '60s, until they became proficient enough and started composing their own songs. The original ironic name of the band did not please the local authorities, so they had to change it into something else, and they chose 'Phoenix'. At a national contest in Bucharest, they were discovered by a DJ, Cornel Chiriac, and they went on to record some of their songs. This brought them fame at a national level. Two EP-s were released in that period, the first one including not only Phoenix songs, but two covers of English songs as well. Then, in 1970, Florin Bordeianu, their vocalist, immigrated to the United States.

Phoenix were still playing ballads and cheerful Rock'n'Roll songs until 1970. Their approach to Rock music had nothing particular in nature. When Florin Bordeianu left, the band was banned from public performances on account of their vocalist being a traitor to the country, but they soon managed to find a way to get back on the national scene. By that time, a change had occurred in Western Rock music. As guitar-playing became rougher, Blues-Rock developed into new genres and Romanian bands emulated these new fashions as well. A change was needed in Romanian Rock, an answer to the Flower-Power fashion in the West, but nobody could have thought that Romanian Flower-Power would look into traditional folk music.



Nicolae Ceaușescu visited North Korea on June 15, 1971. He was impressed by the mixture of ultra-nationalist and communist ideologies. The *July Theses*, inspired by the *Juche* ideology, were presented to the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on July 6, 1971, and the decree promulgating the creation of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education (*Consiliul Culturii și Educației Socialiste*), headed by Dumitru Popescu, nicknamed 'God' (*Dumnezeu*), took place on September 21, 1971. A week or two earlier, drummer Costin Petrescu had been talked into joining Phoenix by Nicolae Covaci and Cornel Calboreanu (sound engineer for Phoenix). They attended one of Petrescu's performances in a Black Sea resort. The two of them had "huge woollen fleeces, riding boots, their hair tied behind their backs", being "the embodiment of two 'pseudo-outlaws' drawn from ancient fairy-tales" (*cu niște cojoace imense pe ei, cu cizme, părul legat la spate, întruchiparea a doi 'pseudo-haiduci' coborâți parcă atunci din nu știu ce poveste*; Petrescu 2018). By that time, Nicolae Covaci already "had the idea of an interesting LP" (*are în curs ideea unui LP interesant*) and Costin Petrescu effectively joined the band in October '71.

Covaci's plan looks rather obvious. Costin Petrescu was at that time the drummer of the band Olympic '64, whose leading member Picky (Dimitrie William) Inglessis would soon be leaving the country, leading to its disbandment. Olympic '64 was well known for its experimentations with folklore since 1969. Its vocalist, Chubby (Dorin Liviu) Zaharia was a poet and essayist, friend of Ioan Petru Culianu, the expert in gnosticism and Renaissance magic who later taught at the University of Chicago (cf. Oișteanu 2007). In his lyrics and music, Zaharia was toying with mysticism, religion, and folklore. He used this folkloric vein when he wrote the soundtrack of several films by Dan Pița, in which he also played. It is therefore no surprise that Covaci, dressed in 'folkloric' fleece, went after

▲ Nicolae Ceaușescu and Kim Il-sung during one of Ceaușescu's visits of North Korea.

Photo of unknown provenance; public domain.

the drummer of one of the bands who had already experimented with what he was about to experiment. Yet, Covaci lacked an interest in mysticism and religion, as he often professed in his memoirs. He was attracted by pagan pre-Christian rituals in a historicist approach, ignoring their actual symbolism. This could be due to two consecutive factors: the militant-atheist orientation of the school curriculum in Communist Romania and the fact that mysticism was officially forbidden.

Covaci arguably saw a silver lining in the oppressive new cultural policies. According to the Decree no. 301/1971 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education, the new institution had to "stimulate the development of popular artistic creation, of new folklore, ensuring the enhancement of [Romanian] popular artistic treasures" (*stimulează dezvoltarea creației artistice populare, a folclorului nou, asigură punerea în valoare a tezaurului nostru artistic popular*; Decree no. 301/1971, II, 3, e). Covaci states that the possibility of a countering backlash excited him. "Ceaușescu wanted folklore? Then let's give him folklore!" From that moment, Covaci immersed himself "in a study of authentic, traditional folklore, pre-Christian ritual music, music with functions that involved the whole life, at any level and at any time of the year and of time in general" (*Posibilitatea de a da o replică mă excita. 'Vrea folclor? Atunci va primi folclor!' Din acel moment m-am cufundat în acel studiu de folclor autentic, tradițional, de muzică rituală, precreștină, muzică cu funcțiuni care implicau întreaga viață, la orice nivel și în orice moment al anului și al timpului*; Covaci 1994, p. 219). At a time when Romania entered a new era, with huge stadium manifestations chant-

ing praises to the dictator in festive choreographies typical of East Asian totalitarian regimes, Phoenix planned to fill the same stadiums for different purposes.

Nevertheless, Covaci stated that the band worked for that album three quarters of an entire year, meaning that the creative process had begun long before Ceaușescu's visit to North Korea. When Covaci met Petrescu on the shores of the Black Sea, in September 1971, the work for the first Phoenix LP was roughly accomplished and probably needed only percussion arrangements. Phoenix had already performed it at a local gig in Timișoara sometime in 1971. It was presented as a 'collage-show' (*spectacol colaj*) with an interim drummer, Țulă (Cornel) Liuba, who had briefly joined the band after the departure of Baba (Dorel Vintilă) Zaharia. Victor Cârțu, writer and owner of a large up-to-date vinyl collection, whom the members of the band often visited for discussions and music auditions, had already written the texts for the original parts of the show, songs that were still reminiscent of the Phoenix hits of the '60s. Lelu (Diogene V.) Bihoi, future founder of the Student Theatre of Timișoara, was also deeply involved in the project, as he recited parts of those texts on stage. Yet, despite the elaborate artistic planning, Nicolae Covaci described how the members of the band were not convinced by this new folkloric approach. They feared that they would fall prey to the Communist Party line. This is when a miraculous event of a sentimental nature ensured the success of the endeavour:

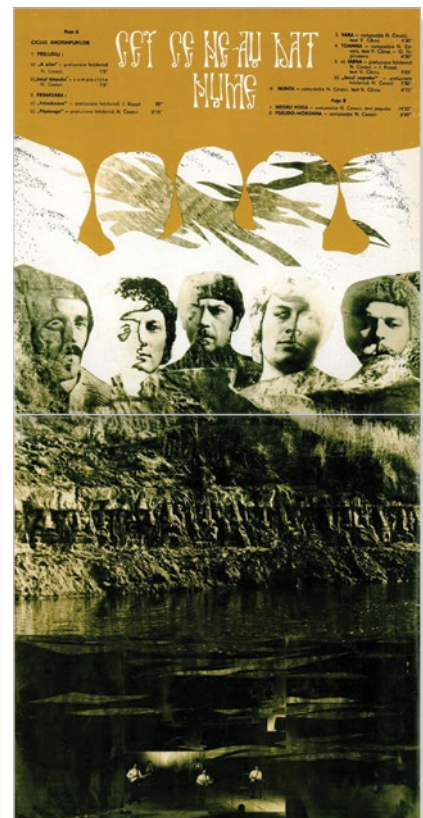
When an eleven-year-old girl appeared on the stage and performed in the most original and authentic way the song entitled 'The Rainmakers', an ancient tradition, amagical ritual performed by children, an unleashed break took over the hall, which confirmed my victory. By the time the little girl appeared on stage, people didn't quite understand what was going on, as they expected the old

Phoenix hits, but the sincerity and purity with which she presented herself and performed that song made known to the public that a new century had begun in the evolution of our band. Until the end, surprised from one song to another, the audience did not stop cheering and the success was so clear that even stubborn Țulă and Mircea threw themselves into my arms. Touched to tears, they carried the little girl in their arms and we returned to the stage several times, to the cheers of the public.

*Când pe scenă a apărut o fetiță de unsprezece ani și a interpretat la modul cel mai original și autentic melodia intitulată 'Paparudele', o datină străveche, un ritual magic efectuat de copii, în sală s-a produs aceea rupere dezlănțuită care mi-a confirmat victoria. Până în momentul în care a apărut fetița pe scenă, lumea nu înțelegea prea bine ce se întâmplă, dar sinceritatea și puritatea cu care ea s-a prezentat și a interpretat acea piesă au adus la cunoștința publicului, care se aștepta la vechile șlagăre Phoenix, că a început un veac nou în evoluția formației noastre. Până la sfârșit, din surpriză în surpriză, publicul nu a mai încetat ovațiile și succesul a fost atât de clar încât până și recalitrantul Țulă și Mircea mi s-au aruncat în brațe. Înduioșați până la lacrimi, au luat fetița în brațe și ne-am prezentat pe scenă de câteva ori, în aclamațiile spectatorilor (Covaci 1994, p. 223-224).*

The collaboration with Lelu Bihoi had started a little bit earlier, when he had convinced the band to take part in his

- ▶ Poster for the collage-show 'Those Who Gave Us Names' (Cei ce ne-au dat nume). Unknown design (probably Valeriu Sepi). Source: Unknown private collection; photo published on his Facebook account by Josef Kappl on November 16, 2020.
- ▼ Front cover, back cover, and inner sleeve of the first Phoenix LP: Cei ce ne-au dat nume (Electrecord - STM-EDE- 0754, LP, stereo / mono, gatefold, 1972). Design: Valeriu Sepi & Nicolae Covaci. Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.



theatrical production of Budai-Deleanu's heroic-comic poem known as the 'Gypsiad' (*Țiganiada*, 1800-1812). In doing so, Phoenix followed the path set by other Pop Rock bands from Bucharest, where musicians played an intricate game with theatre and cinema. There was a change in fashion. Pop Rock music had already started changing in the West, but Romania was late in assimilating the new trends. Ethnic clothes, furs (even 'fleeces'), and elaborate musical LP-s had already conquered the West by the late '60s. When Phoenix were preparing their collage-show, the concept album had become a desideratum in Folk, Pop, and Rock culture, leading to the gradual emergence of a plethora of Progressive bands out of the older Hippie scene. In Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Poland, those trends had been well assimilated by then. Yugoslavia had a much more open regime, therefore it was leading the way in the Communist Bloc. It is no wonder that in Bucharest, capital of Romania, Olympic '64 and other bands had already toyed with elaborate lyrics and long improvisational pieces. Even Phoenix had toyed with the idea as early as 1968, when they performed 'The Man 36/80' (*Omul 36/80*), now lost.

Nicolae Covaci stated that the folkloric anthology on vinyl that they used as a source for the collage-show 'Those Who Gave Us Names' had been provided by Octavian Ursulescu about the same time as Ceaușescu's *July Theses*, but human memory is slippery and the band listened to it as early as 1969. The previous drummer of Phoenix, Baba Zaharia, stated otherwise:

In Timișoara, we managed to find a box-set pressed by Electrecord, three LP-s, a collection of authentic Romanian folklore, ordered for Canada, in '68-'69. So we got hold of it in '69 and there we discovered old folk ballads [...]. When I listened to those records, I said to Nicu [Covaci]: Dude, that's the essence, that's the vein, that's the source. But he insulted me... [...] Yes, that's when I left.

*Noi am pus mâna, la Timișoara, pe o culegere scoasă de Electrecord, trei LP-uri, deci o culegere de folclor autentic românesc, comandat pentru Canada, prin '68-'69. Deci noi am pus mâna pe el în '69 și-acolo am descoperit balade populare vechi [...]. Și eu când am ascultat discurile alea, i-am spus lui Nicu: Băi, asta e esența, ăsta este filonul, ăsta e izvorul. Și el m-a... m-a jignit într-un fel [...] Da, atunci am plecat.*

(Dorel Vintilă Zaharia, interviewed by Andrei Partoș for the online radio show *Foc de P.A.E.*, May 16, 2019).

One should not prefer one account to the other, as there may be a little bit of truth in both of them. The first two box-sets of the 'Anthology of Romanian Folk Music' pressed by Electrecord date back to 1959 and 1961, while the third box-set dates to 1970. Since Phoenix drew their

sources from the second and the third one, the use of the singular in the account of Dorel Vintilă Zaharia refers to the second box-set, while the plural from the account of Covaci (*două volume a câte trei LP-uri fiecare*; Covaci 1994, p. 218) is probably an altered memory from a time when Ursulescu had indeed provided them the more recent box-set. This suggests that the idea had leavened for at least two years. It came to fruition when Covaci recruited Kappl, the new bass player of the band, who had been studying music at the Conservatory. The two of them listened to those records for months in a row.

According to the programme of the 1971 collage-show or to the LP recorded in 1972, when Costin Petrescu joined the band, Phoenix never used as folk music sources the first box-set of the 'Anthology', probably because this was impossible to find in the totalitarian world of Communist Romania, where books and records had the status of smuggled goods. They took only bits and parts from the second and third vinyl sets, weaving them together with original songs on lyrics by long-gone Romanian writers—Alexandru Macedonski (1854-1920), Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961), or George Topârceanu (1886-1937)—and filling in the remaining parts with lyrics written for the occasion by their friend and collaborator Victor Cârțu. Nevertheless, when time came to record the composition at the Electrecord studios, censorship blacked out many of those songs for absurd reasons. Inspired by what they had seen in the records of Western Rock bands, Phoenix had prepared a gatefold double LP, but more than half of the material had to be dumped in order to satisfy the minions of Dumitru Popescu 'God', then head of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education. Among those issues, one should note the mention of Tatars in the lyrics of a Rock ballad. The officials allegedly told Nicolae Covaci that they "couldn't speak ill of Mongols. They also lived in a Socialist state, they were friends; one could not speak ill of them" (*nu putem să dăm în mongoli. Azi trăiesc și ei într-un stat socialist, sunt prietenii noștri, nu putem să dăm în ei*; Covaci 1994, p. 225). Perhaps this explains why the lyrics of the long improvisational song *Negru*

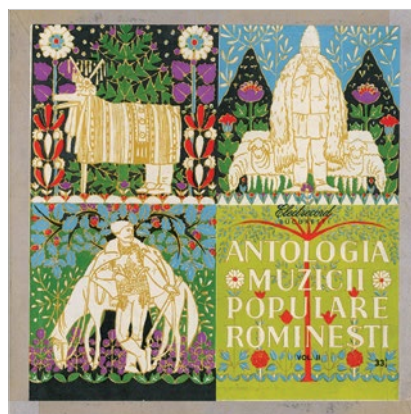
▼ *Front covers of the three box-sets of the 'Anthology of Romanian Folk Music':*

Antologia Muzicii Populare Românești vol. I / Anthology of Rumanian Folk Music vol. I (*Electrecord - EPD 78, EPD 81, EPD 86, 3 X LP, mono, box-set, 1959*);

Anthology Of Rumanian Folk Music vol. II (*Electrecord - EPD 1015, EPD 1016, EPD 1017, 3 X LP, mono, box-set, 1961*);

Antologia Muzicii Populare Românești vol. III : Obiceiul colindatului și colindele (*Electrecord - EPD 78, EPD 81, EPD 86, 2 X LP, mono, box-set, 1970*).

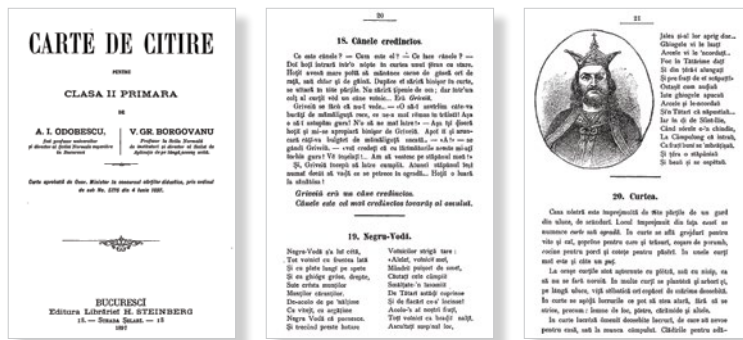
Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.



Vodă ('Black Prince') mention enemies (*dușmani*) instead of Tatars (*tătari*). Yet this song also provides us with an understanding of what Folk Lore meant to the authors of the collage-show.

The lyrics of the song actually come from an old second grade primer for 7- or 8-year-olds written by A. I. Odobescu and V. Gr. Borgovanu (1897). It had the appearance of a folk poem, but several words manifestly belong to a high-prestige linguistic level. It is probably a cult rewriting based on folk poems, in accord with what the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century academia knew about the history of the Romanians. This poem was reused in the second grade primer of Spulbereanu *et al.* (1927) and it slowly entered folk lore. For instance, on December 25, 1973, a year after the pressing of the first Phoenix LP, a folklorist recorded a peasant woman, Maria Istrate, 82-years-old, from the village of Colibași, Argeș county. She recited a variant of the old poem, attributing it to the oral tradition of her ancestors, yet she had never been schooled. The version of the old lady also contained high-prestige references which were added to the original poem, such as the mention of Câmpulung as capital of the Black Prince (*Suie creasta munților*; | *Munților cărunților*, | *D'acolo, după-nălțiime*, | *Cu viteji, cu haiducime*, | *Negru-Vodă că pornește* | *La Câmpulung se oprește* | *În ăst loc eu mă opresc*, | *Capitală să clădesc*). This suggests that local teachers expanded upon the primer's material and adapted it to the local context. Perhaps this explains why the old lady insisted that she had learned the poem from her ancestors (cf. Enescu 1976, p. 127).

The poem spoke about the foundation of Wallachia through the liberation of the Romanians (living under Tatar rule) by a legendary late 13<sup>th</sup>-c. Black Prince from Transylvania who led his braves across the Carpathian mountains and fought the Tatars. Perhaps the old lady's ancestors were among the soldiers who recited the poem during the First World War. Second lieutenant Iftimie Novac noted that the Romanian soldiers who crossed the Carpathians into Transylvania recited the poem about the Black Prince on their way to Brașov, on August 23-25, 1916. The poem was perhaps already evolving orally, since one of the recorded verses sounds a little bit different (*Suie creasta munților*| *Munților Carpaților*; cf. Gherasim 2016). It should be noted that the soldiers who marched in 1916 were men in their '20s. This suggests that they had learned to read on the 1897 primer and its subsequent editions. Folklore therefore had already absorbed the high-prestige poem and oral transmission was modifying it. Well before that date, V. Gr. Borgovanu published verbatim (with modernised orthography) the text from the Odobescu primer in a story about



▲ Title page and pages 20-21 from the second grade primer of Odobescu and Borgovanu, where the poem about the Black Prince (Negru Vodă) was first published in 1897.

Source: Wikimedia Commons.

▼ Philological comparison of the three different versions of the ballad of the Black Prince. The red marks the differences between the Phoenix song and the previous two variants.

Odobescu (1897)

Negru-Vodă ș'a lui cătă,  
Tot voinici cu fruntea lată  
Și cu plete lungi pe spete  
Și cu ghioge grose, drepte,  
Suie crêsta munților  
Munților cărunților.  
De-acolo de pe 'nălțiime  
Cu viteji, cu argățime  
Negru Vodă că pornesce.  
Și trecând preste hotare  
Voinicilor strigă tare:  
«Alelei, voinicii mei,  
Mândrii pușori de smei,  
Căutați cele câmpii  
Smălțate- 'n iasomii  
De Tătari astăzi cuprinse  
Și de flăcări ce-s 'ncinse!  
Acolo- 's ai noștri frați,  
Toți voinici ca brazii nălți.  
Ascultați suspinul lor,  
Jalea și-al lor aprig dor...  
Ghiogele vi le luați  
Arcele vi le 'ncordați...  
Foc în Tătărime dați  
Și din țără-i alungați  
Și pre frați de ei scăpați!»  
Ostașii cum aușiau  
Iute ghiogele apucau  
Arcele și le-ncordau  
Și 'n Tătari că năpustiau...

Iar în ți de Sfint-Ilie,  
Când soarele e- 'n chindie,  
La Câmpulung că intrau,  
Ca frați buni se'mbrățișau.  
Și țera o stăpâniau  
Și bea și se ospetau.

Spulbereanu (1927)

Negru-Vodă și-a lui ceată  
Toți voinici cu fruntea lată  
Și cu plete lungi pe spete,  
Și cu ghioage groase drepte,  
Suie coasta munților,  
Munților cărunților,  
Deacolo, de pe 'nălțiime  
Cu viteji, cu argățime,  
Negru-Vodă că pornește  
Și trecând peste hotare,  
Voinicilor strigă tare  
— 'Alelei, voinicii mei.  
Mândrii pușori de smei,  
Căutați cele câmpii  
Smălțate cu iasomii,  
De Tătari astăzi cuprinse  
Și de flăcări ce-s 'ncinse!  
Acolo-s ai noștri frați,  
Toți voinici ca brazii 'nălți.  
Ascultați suspinul lor,  
Jalea și-al lor aprig dor!  
Ghiogele vi le-apucați,  
Arcele vi le 'ncordați  
Foc în tătărime dați  
Și din țără-i alungați  
Și pe frați de ei scăpați!  
Ostașii, cum aușiau,

În Tătari se năpustiau;  
Ca pe-o pleavă-i vânturau  
Și din țără-i alungau.  
Iar în zi de Sfânt Ilie,  
Când soarele e 'n chindie  
La Câmpulung că intrau,  
Ca frați buni se'imbrățișeau  
Și țara o stăpâneau.

Phoenix song (1972)

Negru Vodă și-a lui ceată,  
Toți voinici cu fruntea lată,  
**Și cu ghioage groase, drepte**  
**Și cu plete lungi pe spete**  
Suie creasta munților  
Munților, cărunților,  
Și trecând peste hotare  
Voinicilor strigă tare:  
'Alelei, voinicii mei,  
Mândri pușori de zmei,  
**Ia vedeți cele câmpii**  
**Smălțate cu iasomii,**  
De **dușmani ce sunt** cuprinse  
Și de flăcări ce-s 'ncinse.  
Acolo-s ai **voștri** frați,  
Toți voinici ca brazii-nălți,  
Ascultați suspinul lor,  
Jalea și-a lor aprig dor.  
Ghiogele vi le-apucați,  
Arcele vi le-ncordați,  
Foc în **dușmănie** dați,  
Și din țără-i alungați,  
Și pe frați de ei scăpați'.  
Ostașii cum auzeau,  
**Ghiogele și le-apucau,**

În **dușmani** se năpusteau,  
**Ca pe pleavă-i vânturau...**  
Pe câmpii cu iasomie,  
Când **stă** soarele-n chindie,  
Ca frați buni se-mbrățișau,  
Și țara o stăpâneau....





the town of Câmpulung and attributed it to local folk lore (Borgovanu 1911, p. 2). When making a philological comparison of the Phoenix song with the two second grade primers, the Blues-Rock tale of the Black Prince is closer to Odobescu's primer than to the one published in 1927 by Spulbereanu *et al.* But other readings follow those of Spulbereanu. To a philologist, the situation is similar to Pasquali's *recensione aperta*, but one cannot ascribe the creation of the Phoenix lyrics to textual contamination. Given the nature of the text, there are two possible interpretations: the Unionist undertones of the poem from the school primer would be so popular that they could lead to the adaptation of the poem in folk environments, following more or less the same changes occurring in the 1927 primer. Yet this does not account for the presence of the verse "they blew [their enemies] off like chaff" (*ca pe pleavă-i vânturau*) in both the Spulbereanu primer and in the lyrics of Phoenix. It may well be that the Phoenix songs constitutes a missing link simply because it was drawn (either orally, or directly) from another primer, less known, since there is no current research on this topic. Nicolae Covaci did not speak about it and presented it as a folkloric text.

▲ *Front and back cover of the Sincron EP based on folk song material: Sincron (Electrecord – EDC 828, EP, 7", 33 1/3 RPM, mono, 1967). Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.*

▼ *Two books possibly read by Nicolae Covaci and Josef Kappl when they were documenting the collage-show:*

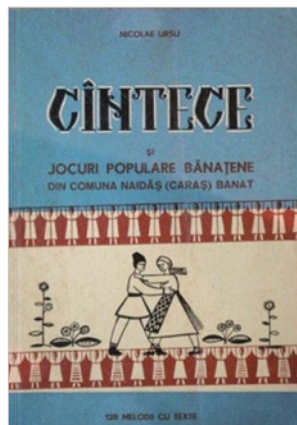
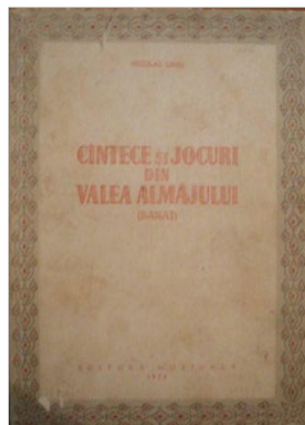
*Nicolae Ursu, Cîntece și jocuri populare românești din Valea Almăjului, Banat. 340 melodii cu texte, Bucharest, Editura Muzicală, 1958;*

*Nicolae Ursu, Cîntece și jocuri populare bănățene din comuna Naidăș (Caraș) Banat. 128 melodii cu texte, Reșița, Casa Creației Populare, 1969.*

Source: <https://www.abebooks.com/>.

▲ *Nicolae Covaci and Josef Kappl in 1971-1972.*

Source: <https://www.vice.com/>.



Leaving aside the need for a Lachmannian study of the text, this raises an interesting question concerning the approach to folklore and traditions by the members of the band. Their research seems to have been mainly limited to the vinyl 'Anthology' and to a series of musicology books by Nicolae Ursu found by Josef Kappl at the Timișoara Conservatory of Music (Covaci 1994, p. 219). The band were simply looking for old things, just as they did in the design of their second LP, according to a story told by Valeriu Sepi. But there is also the mention of the role played by Octavian Ursulescu, as it appears in Covaci's memoirs. An interesting thing is that Phoenix was not the only Romanian band who experimented with folklore in this way. Cornel Fugaru, a friend of Ursulescu, did a similar thing with traditional folk dances, adapting them to rock'n'roll rhythms sometime in the '60s, when he was playing with the band Sincron. As a matter of fact, the first chords from the Phoenix LP *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* compose an identical melody to the background chords opening the song *Jocul fetelor* recorded by Sincron in 1967. There may be more truth to the story told by Nicolae Covaci, but it was certainly distorted by memory. Perhaps the idea came to Nicolae Covaci when listening to Sincron. Or perhaps Octavian Ursulescu influenced both bands.

Nevertheless, there was something clearly unique about the Phoenix project of the early '70s. Their choice of pagan rituals was carefully crafted according to original and well-documented folkloric recordings, but they were tempted in the same time to present historical fictions. This eventually altered their traditionalist approach to music and brought them in contact with a species of folklore which they were trying to avoid in the first place: the interference of cult dogma into popular milieus. The only difference between that type of folklore and the 'motorised' type of Communist folklore described by Covaci (*Foaie verde și-un topor, | Bine-i, soro, pe tractor*; Covaci 1994, p. 215) was that the interwar one had been exclusively patriotic, with propagandistic undertones which had been related only to national unity (and / or purity). The propagandistic nature of the 'new' folklore during the early days of the Communist regime in Romania (after 1948) shifted in favour of class struggle and the edification process of a 'multilaterally developed Socialist society'. But the situation changed in 1971. The *July Theses* represented an odd marriage of sorts, grafting the old nationalistic ideology to a Marxist-Leninist roostock. This revived old dogmas from the time of the previous generation, which later grew into Protochronism (officially coined as such in a 1974 essay by Edgar Papu). Things went rather far. In the second part of the '70s, the Communist regime agreed to print even pseudo-historical writings of exiled fascists (such as Iosif Constantin Drăgan, *Noi,*





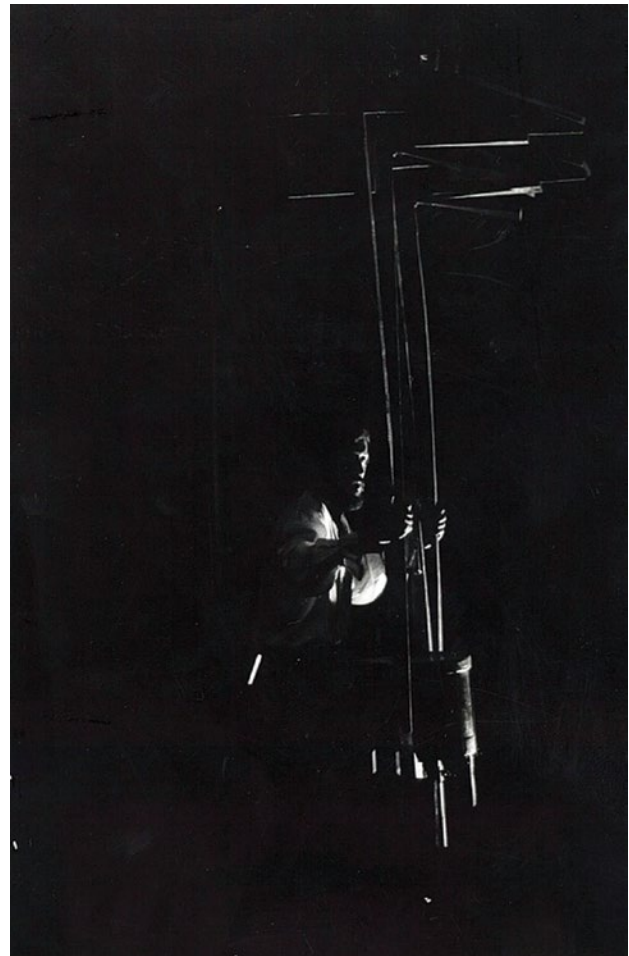
▲ Frieze carved by Nicolae Covaci with a pickaxe in a clay cliff of the Timiș riverbed. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

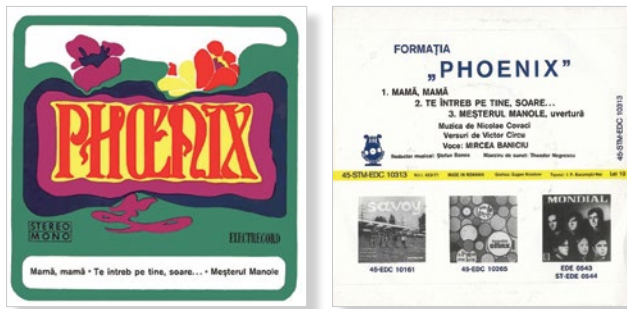
*tracii*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc, 1976). The patriotic feelings of Nicolae Covaci could be a genuine family heritage, revived under the new political climate, and the manner in which he interpreted folklore in a historical and patriotic key could be influenced by the fact that he “grew up in the countryside, for weeks or even months, every summer, in the bosom of his extended family. On his father’s side, the Covaci family had countless relatives in all the villages situated close to the border with Yugoslavia. He spent many years there and listened to a lot of folklore” (*crescusem la țară, aproape în fiecare vară avusem parte de câteva săptămâni, sau chiar de luni, în mijlocul marii familii pe care o aveam. Neamul Covaci, din partea tatălui, avea nenumărate rubedenii în toate satele de la granița cu Iugoslavia. Acolo mi-am petrecut mulți ani și am ascultat foarte mult folclor*; Covaci 1994, p. 214). The variant of the ‘Black Prince’ poem could also be known to Covaci from such a milieu or perhaps from his own father, who used to be a member of the Iron Guard and who had been a political prisoner, forced-labouring at the Danube-Black Sea Canal in the early years of Communist Romania.

In the first Phoenix LP, this interest in national-patriotic rhetoric was nonetheless subtler, probably because it was influenced by the multicultural climate of Timișoara. Unlike Wallachian or Moldavian towns and cities, the urban settlements of Transylvania and Banat had always been an ethnic melting pot. The first incarnation of Phoenix, in the ‘60s, was made up of friends of various ethnic backgrounds. The new incarnation, from the ‘70s, was evidently similar. Only Nicolae Covaci and Mircea Baniciu were of a purely Romanian stock. Josef Kappl was Hungarian, from the Jiu River Valley; Günther Reininger, who would later re-join the band, was German; Valeriu Sepi also had German relatives; Cornel Liuba, the interim drummer, was half-Serbian; and even the drummer Costin Petrescu, who had recently joined them from Bucharest, was partly Greek. One is tempted to believe that this multi-ethnic background dictated the subtler approach to patriotism and history. The blues-rock song about the Black Prince could be a personal choice of Covaci, but the manner in which the collage-show was conceived and the design of the 1972 LP’s sleeve tell a different story. Everything was carefully crafted artistically. For instance, the inner sleeve of the LP uses a photo of a frieze representing legendary forefathers, carved by Nicolae Covaci in a clay cliff of the Timiș River, in a place where the inhabitants of Timișoara came to bathe during summertime. He probably created it several years prior, since the frieze had lasted several years, until the riverbed was flooded, and it had been destroyed by the time Phoenix recorded its first LP. It was clearly part of Covaci’s identity construction process, but the manner in which it was presented on the inner

sleeve of the album and the Phoenix bird rising from the ashes represented on the front-cover have a lot in common with Western art from the ‘60s, meaning that they were conscious artistic choices made by the designers. According to Covaci’s memoirs (Covaci 1994, p. 226-227), the sleeve was designed by Valeriu Sepi and his future wife, Elisabeta (now Ochsenfeld). Both Sepi and Covaci were students at the Faculty of Arts and it is no surprise that the collage-show and the LP’s sleeve represented an artistic experiment (and a sort of happening, in accord with the early happenings of the ‘50s and ‘60s). One is left with the general impression that these art students played with concepts from their artistic training. A Rock LP sleeve was therefore used as a sort of public exhibition, since they could not find the resources to organise such exhibitions, while a Rock concert became an artistic happening. This explains why Sepi, who had no musical training, became a regular member of the band. By that time, Phoenix ceased to be a simple Rock’n’Roll band. In certain respects, it was more of an artist collective and it represented an aggregation of previously individual artistic projects. In order to strengthen Sepi’s role in the band, he was entrusted with the creation and use of additional percussion instruments, the ‘Goats’ (*Caprele*). These wooden ‘Goats’ were an old Romanian tradition, used during the pagan festivities of New Year’s Eve (the feast of saint Basil, known for its exorcism liturgy). Less interesting musically, they supplemented the rhythmic section and were used to enforce the happening stance of the concerts.

▼ Valeriu Sepi playing the ‘Goats’ at an unknown date. Source: personal site of the artist (<http://www.valeriussep.com/>).





- ▲ *The last Phoenix EP pressed by Electrecord: Mamă, mamă / Te întreb pe tine, soare... / Meșterul Manole (45-STM-EDC 10313, EP, stereo / mono, 1973).*

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.

The other two members of the band were architect students (Baniciu and Petrescu), less involved artistically, but well schooled in their own right, and they confirm the continuous involvement of architect students (and architects) in the Romanian Folk and Rock music scene since the '70s (see also Mircea Florian, Alexandru Andrieș, etc.). In those days, Communist authorities did not tolerate liberal professions and forcedly discouraged unemployment, forcing all young musicians to become university students, thus leading also to a gradual intellectualization of the music. By the time the first Phoenix LP was pressed by Electrecord, the state-owned (and only) record label in Romania, this mixture of art and music, with the occasional involvement of writers, had already defined the musical approach of the rebel-musician generation of the '70s.

Phoenix pursued its traditional music project, but tried to fashion a more coherent theme. Even though the members of the band never stated it, it is possible that the choice of their next show (and abandoned LP) was linked with the story of the Black Prince. The same legendary character appeared in a popular ballad adapted and published for the first time by the poet Vasile Alecsandri in 1852. This other story told the legend of Master Manole (*Meșterul Manole*) who had to ritually immure his wife in the walls of the Argeș Monastery in order to ensure the durability of the construction. It was a forced choice, as the walls of the monastery kept crumbling and the Black Prince threatened to kill Manole and his workers. Perhaps the members of band saw in this tale a possible continuation of their first LP and a perfect narrative bridge towards a future concept-album. By that time, their earlier Blues Rock ballad about the Black Prince had become

one of their registered hits and they used it for solo improvisations during concerts.

Victor Cârțu, who was then a regular member of the group, was asked to adapt the folk lyrics and to bind them to his own original poetic material for a future show about the foundation of Argeș Monastery. This time, few musical pieces were composed, as the attention focused on the creation of a coherent textual framework. When the text was ready, the dossier was submitted to the local authorities for validation, according to the compulsory procedures enforced by the totalitarian state, but it got stuck in the office of Ion Iliescu, then vice-president of the Timiș County Council (1971-1974). When the members of the band became worried about the delay, they were told that Ion Iliescu had simply lost their dossier. It was a deadly blow to their cultural experiment. The only thing left of it was a short introductory piece, already composed. It used the text of the folk poem published by Alecsandri and it was pressed on the back side on the last Phoenix EP by Electrecord, along with two cheerful rock'n'roll songs which had been written previously. Nicolae Covaci states that Mircea Baniciu showed him the 'Master Manole' dossier in 1992, but he had no idea as to how he had found it (Covaci 1994, p. 237, note 1). Josef Kappl tells the story of Victor Cârțu mysteriously receiving the dossier in Germany, after the Romanian Uprising of 1989. Kappl then composed new music for the lyrics and performed it as a symphonic Rock-opera in November 2013.

It is difficult to ascertain if the dossier was lost or was 'lost on purpose'. Its subject concerned the construction of a monastery, a thing which was not well-seen by the totalitarian apparatus, but at the same time there were no religious undertones, as the interest of the band continued to focus on pagan rituals, this time on the pagan immuring of a woman in a Christian monument. The band simply had to let go of this project, as they probably feared future opposition if they pursued it, and there were also more interesting matters to deal with. They had been invited to represent Romania in an Eastern-Bloc music festival in Poland, in the city of Sopot, a seaside resort. It was the second time they were allowed to leave the country. The first time, they had travelled to Czechoslovakia, where they had played and sung at the *Bratislavská lyra*.

- ▼ *Ion Iliescu (far left) accompanying Nicolae Ceaușescu on a 'working visit' (vizită de lucru) in 1974. A member of the high echelon of the Romanian Communist Party, he later became the first president of post-totalitarian Romania (1990).*

Source: <https://www.historia.ro/>.





It was a time of discovery and a fracture in the musical and cultural evolution of the band. By then, they had already discovered the albums of Jethro Tull and were attracted to a more Folksy approach to Rock music. At the Polish festival, they befriended the Hungarian band Locomotiv GT, with whom they made a jam-session at the hotel; they saw Polish bands such as Skaldowie; and Nicolae Covaci even made a trip to Gdansk, where he saw Marek Grechuta and the Anawa 'cabaret'.

The group appeared on stage bathed in darkness, under a faint green light. There were nine instrumentalists: a bass, a cello, two violins, a flute, a guitar, drums, a piano, and the vocalist Marek Grechuta. The soloist had a martial stance in front of the microphone, dressed in red, like a hero of the Middle Ages, and he gave the signal to start. The instrumental theme introduced by the violins increased in intensity, then followed the whole band with a controlled and elegant force, which overwhelmed me. I was electrified by their rich instrumentation. For the first time, Polish became a musical language, suitable for music as well as Italian and English. Until then, their language had scratched my ears. Their music featured a deep folkloric aspect, their intention was similar to ours, to endorse national music. My soul was filled with joy when I left the room. I had discovered in a foreign country a group of people who were similar in spirit to us. Back in Romania, Tavi Ursulescu got me two of their records, which I enjoyed for years and which I cherish as a holy memory.

*Grupul a apărut pe o scenă scaldată de întuneric, cu o uşoară lumină verzuie. Erau nouă instrumentiști: un bas, un cello, două violini, flaut, gitară, tobe, pian și vocalistul Marek Grechuta. Solistul, plasat cu o ținută marțială în fața microfonului, îmbrăcat în roșu, ca un erou din evul mediu, a dat semnalul de începere. Tema instrumentală introdusă de violini creștea în intensitate, urma apoi întreaga formație cu o forță stăpânită și elegantă, care m-a copleșit. M-a înflorat culoarea bogată a instrumentației, pentru prima oară poloneza devenea o limbă muzicală, potrivită pentru muzică la fel de bine ca italiana și engleza. Până la acea dată limba lor îmi zgâriase urechile. Muzica lor se caracteriza prin aspectul profund folcloric, intenția asemănându-se cu a noastră, de valorificare a muzicii naționale. Am părăsit sala cu bucurie în suflăt, descoperisem într-o țară străină un grup de oameni care gândeau la fel ca noi. În țară, Tavi Ursulescu mi-a făcut rost de două discuri de-ale lor, pe care le-am savurat ani de zile, le păstrez ca pe o sfântă amintire (Covaci 1994, p. 256-257).*

The two records were probably *Marek Grechuta / Anawa* (1970) and *Korowód* (1971). One does not feel their immediate influence in the Phoenix compositions of subse-

▲ Front covers of the LP-s of Marek Grechuta and the Anawa 'cabaret' (1970 and 1971), followed by that of a solo project of Grechuta, more Progressive- and Jazz-oriented (1974):

*Marek Grechuta & Anawa: Marek Grechuta Anawa (Polskie Nagrania Muza – XL 0601, LP, gatefold, mono, 1971).*

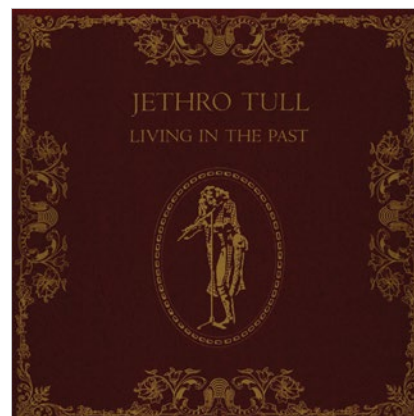
*Marek Grechuta & Anawa: Korowód (Polskie Nagrania Muza – XL 0752, LP, gatefold, mono, 1971).*

*Marek Grechuta: Magia Obłoków (Pronit – SXL 1077, LP, mono / stereo, 1974).*

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.

quent years, which were more influenced by the sound of the British band Jethro Tull. Moreover, the 'Sung Poetry' (*Poezja śpiewana*) of Marek Grechuta and other Polish artists was less influenced by folklore and more by classical chamber music and acoustic Jazz. This Polish trend had bypassed Rock music, drawing its sources of inspiration from Bob Dylan and trying to achieve a cohesive fusion of poetry and music, free from the barrier of musical genre. What Nicolae Covaci was describing had been actually done by the band No To Co, who had taken an interest in traditional music instruments, quite similar to what many other Folk Rock bands were doing in Western Europe (Fairport Convention, Ougenweide, etc; as well as the entire Celtic Revival). This wider perspective based on the history and evolution of Folk Rock bands was nevertheless unknown and impossible to comprehend by a Romanian artist visiting for the first time Poland in 1973. Phoenix interpreted these various experiments as a confirmation that they were heading in the right direction. Josef Kappl fell ill with meningitis, the band had to leave him in a Polish hospital, to recover, and this was to become their last visit outside Romania. In the next three years, they were forced to stay in the country and they were often forbidden to play in public.

When Kappl returned from Poland, he had already prepared several new compositions. The band were ready to experiment with new ideas and they tried to emulate folklore instead of imitating it. This is more or less the time when their second LP was born. The influence of Jethro Tull, one of their favourite bands, is evident throughout this album, and the sound became more Folk Rock-oriented, with an extensive use of acoustic guitars, twelve-string guitars, and recorder, called *blockflöte* (for the lack of Ian Anderson's proper classical flute). The Romanian public was already prepared for this change in musical taste. The regular *Metronom* show presented at *Radio Free Europe* in Munich by Cornel Chiriac (1969-1975), a friend of Phoenix during the first line-up of the band, had already nourished a generation of young Romanian rockers hungry for Hard Rock, PopRock, and Progressive Rock by then. This DJ had fled from Romania, where his radio show was under strict monitoring of the autho-



rities, in order to express himself freely. Jethro Tull was one of the bands that he often presented to the young public of Romania via longwave from the safety of the Federal Republic of Germany, reading the album sleeves for them and often playing entire albums during his show. The time was ripe, the Romanian public was well aware of what was happening in the West and Phoenix prepared for their next LP, *Mugur de fluier* ('Flute Bud', 1974).

They seemed to be more attracted to the acoustic short songs of Jethro Tull than to the ironic and more elaborate Progressive arrangements of the same band. Music lovers often noted that the title song (*Mugur de fluier*) borrowed a melody from "A Christmas Song" (Jethro Tull, *Living in the Past*, 1972). Yet the manner in which Nicolae Covaci related to this Western model was once again distorted by his passion for traditional music. He saw Jethro Tull as exponents of a similar folkloric culture, although Ian Anderson and his merry band were the exact opposite. The language barrier probably played a fundamental part in this misattribution of style and genre, just as it did in the case of Marek Grechuta and the Anawa 'cabaret'.

However, the new musical project lacked structure. Its planned subtitle - 'Introduction to a concert about early music of the Romanians' (*Introducere la un concert despre muzica veche la români*) - was fancy, but did not correspond to the actual contents of the 'Flute Bud'. Furthermore, their lyricist was then somehow estranged from the rest of the group. "He was showing signs of fatigue, he had longer introverted periods, contact with him became more and more difficult, he never left the house and we gradually grew apart, although his latest 'productions' had become very 'high quality'" (*incepuse să dea semne de oboseală, avea momente de introvertire tot mai lungi, contactul cu el era tot mai dificil, nu mai ieșea din casă și începuse să ne distanțăm, cu toate că ultimele*

*producții deveniseră foarte calitative*; Covaci 1994, p. 242). It could be due to personal reasons, depression, but also to a feeling of inadequacy between the earlier texts written by Cărcu for Phoenix and the new demands of an 'archaic' nature. The two texts he had written were lyrical enough, but they had nothing to do with a concert about early Romanian music. 'Flute Bud', the title song, carried its listeners across dreamy lands, while 'Dark Eyes, Gipsy Eyes' (*Ochii negri, ochi de țigan*), a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Russian song *Ōci čjornye*, was a fantasy love song to a Gipsy girl followed by suitors. The interesting choice for the title of the first song had probably given Valeriu Sepi an idea about what the inner sleeve of the gatefold should look like, thus explaining why the album was entitled 'Flute Bud', to fit the graphic design aspects, but there was also the old obsession with pure folklore, so the front and back covers of the new LP ended up depicting a shepherd dressed in 'fleece' and an old traditional house. Valeriu Sepi recently wrote that "chance had it that he had found the 1938 'Encyclopaedia of Romania' at the flea market, whence he took the pictures for the front and back of the record sleeve, thus creating the graphic design" (*mi-a fost dat să găsesc la piața de vechituri 'Enciclopedia României' din '38, de unde am folosit pozele pentru fața și spatele discului și am creat desenul de interior*; Facebook, January 19, 2021). Therefore, by that time, the entire project was well on its way, when it was halted by a writer's block. This is when Covaci approached Andrei Ujică for the first time and asked for his help with the lyrics. The then writer and future movie director described the scene in a recent text (Facebook post, 2020, later published in the Romanian press):

[...] Covaci, who, coming to my table, measured me from head to toe and said: 'I heard you're one of us'. That meant I had long hair. 'I also heard you are writing'. I nodded.

- ◀ Photo of Cornel Chiriac at his desk in Munich in 1970. It was sent to his mother in Romania, together with a letter, but the secret service (Securitate) confiscated it. From the ACNSAS, Informative Fonds, file 204265 vol. 4, f. 157.  
Source: <http://cultural-opposition.eu/>.



- ◀ Two covers of 1972 Jethro Tull albums: *Living in the Past* (with short songs, ballads, and live recordings) and *Thick as a Brick* (a mockery of Progressive Rock concept albums):

Jethro Tull: *Living in the Past* (Chrysalis – CJT1, 2 x LP, gatefold, stereo, July 1972);

Jethro Tull: *Thick as a Brick* (Chrysalis – CHR 1003, LP, album wrapped as newspaper, stereo, March 1972).

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.



- ▶ Front, back cover, and inner sleeve of the second Phoenix LP pressed by Electrecord: *Mugur de fluior* (STM-EDE 0968, LP, stereo / mono, gatefold, 1974). Design: Valeriu Sepi.  
Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.

'I have a problem', he says. In very short time, they were scheduled to record a new album at Electrecord, but Victor Cârțu, the band's lyricist at the time, had suffered a writer's block after having written only three songs. 'Drop by my place and I'll show you what it's all about', Covaci added. I knew, of course, where he lived, on Doja Street, near Maria, at the famous Tuși, his old aunt. His mother's house, where he had spent his school years, was at the outskirts of the city, in Freidorf. He knew me from Șpitzi Reininger, their pianist, with whom I was friends on music and football. I went to him that same afternoon, I think, and I found out that he needed lyrics for five ready-made songs. 'I can't do that', I told him, 'I write prose, I'm not used with rhymes, but I have a friend, Șerban Foarță, who is a master in metrics. I'll ask him. I'll try to convince him'. 'Okay', says Covaci, 'listen here', and he played his acoustic guitar. It was actually the song that was to become the 'Little Gypsyad'. 'Draw me the scheme', I told him. Covaci tore a piece of paper from a math notebook and wrote it down. I folded the sheet, put it in the chest pocket of my shirt, and headed out to meet Șerban..

[...] Covaci, care, venind spre masa mea, m-amăsurat din cap până-n picioare și mi-a spus: 'Am auzit că ești unul dintre noi'. Asta voia să însemne că am părul lung. 'Și-am auzit că scrii'. Am dat din cap că da. 'Am o problemă', zice. Peste puțin timp, erau programați să înregistreze la Electrecord un nou album, iar Victor Cârțu, textierul de atunci al formației, făcuse un blocaj la scris, după doartreipiese. 'Treci pe la mine, ca să-ți arăt despre ce e vorba', a mai zis Covaci. 'Știam, bineînțeles, unde locuiește, pe strada Doja, lângă Maria, la celebra Tuși, bătrâna lui mătușă. Casa mamei lui, în care își petrecuse anii de școală, era la periferie, în Freidorf. Informațiile despre mine le avea de la Șpitzi Reininger, pianistul lor, cu care eram amic pe teme de muzică și fotbal. M-am dus, în aceeași după-masă - cred -, la el, unde am aflat că are nevoie de cinci texte, pe o muzică gata compusă. 'Nu pot asta,

i-am zis, 'eu scriu proză, nu știu cu rime, dar am un prieten, Șerban Foarță, care e maestru în chestiuni de metrică. Am să-l întreb pe el. Să văd dacă-l conving'. 'Bine', zice Covaci, 'ascultă aici, și-mi cântă la chitară acustică ceea ce urma să fie 'Mica Țiganiadă'. 'Dă-mi schema', îi zic. Covaci a rupt o foaie dintr-un caiet de matematică și a notat-o. Am împăturit foaia, am pus-o în buzunarul de la piept al cămășii, și-am luat-o spre Șerban.

Chance played an essential part, once again, as it did in the case of the vinyl 'Anthology of Rumanian Folk Music'. The new literary approach of the Phoenix albums was determined by the physical proximity of a long-haired student. One does not say what type of text Covaci was asking for. He probably explained that he was a great fan of tradition, but folklore was unattractive to Șerban Foarță, who often referred to the cultural tastes of those times as a disease, as a sort of 'folkloritis', so Andrei Ujică had to approach him in a rather different manner:

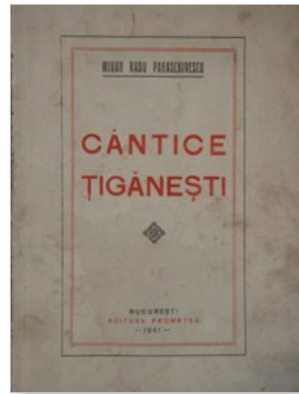
When I got to him, I found him ready to leave. 'There's a feast at the 'Horizon', he told me. [...] So we went there. On the way, I performed the tirade of mercy. 'Look,' says I, 'I'm friends with someone from Phoenix and they asked me to help them, because they reached a dead-end. Soon they will have to record a vinyl at Electrecord, but they're missing a text. The music is already composed. I have the prosodic structure here', and I pointed to my pocket. 'M'kay', replied Șerban, 'but did you listen to the song at least?' 'Yes', I replied. 'And what did it sound like?' Șerban and I were then working under the sway of Iordan Chimet's formidable 'Anthology of Innocence'. The unbridled emulating momentum made us plan an anthology about the circus. That's why we rummaged through libraries and our own memory, meeting on a daily basis, for almost a year by then, from afternoon till dawn. Well, by that time, we were both reading

Budai-Deleanu's 'Gypsyiad', in search of fairs, carnivals, and jugglers. So I answered Șerban in a muted voice: 'Covaci's song sounds like a little gypsyiad'.

*Când ajung la el, îl gădesc gata de plecare. 'Eo agapă la 'Orizont' (revista Uniunii Scriitorilor)', îmi zice. [...] Așa că am luat-o-ntr-acolo. Pe drum, am pus placa mizericordiei. 'Uite', i-am zis, 'eu sunt amic cu unul de la Phoenix și m-au rugat să-i ajut, că sunt într-un mare impas. Trebuie să înregistreze în curând o placă la Electrecord, dar le lipsește un text. Muzica e compusă deja. Am aici schema metrică și-am arătat spre buzunar. 'Aha', a răspuns Șerban, 'dar tu măcar ai ascultat melodia?'. 'Da', am zis. 'Și a ce fi-a sunat?'. Șerban și cu mine lucrăm pe vremea aceea, sub impresia formidabilei Antologii a inocenței a lui Iordan Chimet, la o antologie a circului, într-un elan emulator nestăvilît. Pentru asta ne scormoneam memoria și răscoleam bibliotecile, întâlnindu-ne de vreun an, în fiecare zi, de după amiază până-n zori. Ei bine, tocmai în perioada aceea citeam amândoi Țiganiada lui Budai-Deleanu, în căutare de bâlciuri, iarmaroace și saltimbanci. Așa că i-am răspuns, cu glas scăzut, lui Șerban 'cântecul lui Covaci e un fel de mică țiganiadă'.*

It is hard to tell if the comparison was spontaneous, solely dictated by Ujică's rhetorical antics. It could just as well be determined by the fact that the members of Phoenix had already taken part in the dramatization of the 'Gypsyiad' by Lelu Bihoi. Either way, Șerban Foarță had his own literary tastes and could not write custom-made lyrics on the spot. He wrote what he felt like writing:

In the meantime, we had reached the 'Horizon'. 'Is that a fact?', said Șerban, 'Gimme that paper'. Since the feast had a protocol part, we all took a seat at the long table in the meeting room of the writers' association. Amidst the praises sung to the evening's celebrated guest, Șerban began to write. 'The 'Gypsy songs' of Miron Radu Paraschivescu came to my mind', he suddenly whispered in my ear and pushed the paper with the first two verses before my eyes: 'Gypsies cross the road, / The road is full of smoke...'. I violently nodded my head as a sign of approval. I don't know how much was written there. All I remember is that the much-anticipated feast didn't last long, there wasn't much cognac to drink, and so we went back to Șerban's home and finished the text. There is a jubilant impulse in those verses, that one still feels to this day. And the congruence with the music, which I had heard only once, and Șerban never before, is really astonishing. I will never forget the twinkle in Covaci's eyes when I showed him the lyrics the next day. After



▲ First edition of Miron Radu Paraschivescu's 'Gypsy Songs' (Cântice țigânești), Bucharest, Prometeu, 1941.

Source: <https://www.galeriile-cismigiu.ro/>

Miron Radu Paraschivescu at a reading.

Source: tribute site to his wife, writer Sidonia Drăgușanu (<http://vechiul.sidonia.ro/>).

▲ Andrei Ujică and Șerban Foarță in the first half of the '70s. Source: <https://www.news.ro/>.

that, I returned to Șerban and I started to beat around the bush: 'These Phoenixes are good guys', I told him. 'They represent a subversive phenomenon, worth supporting'. I think I also told him that we had a chance to put words in the mouths of those who have an audience of hundreds of thousands. This would be especially profitable for people like us, who could not actually publish, since we were considered to be some sort of literary evasionists. The idea that superior cultural substance should be placed in maximum audience environments had already sprouted in my mind. It finally led me to cinema. And then I said: 'Now, you know, they actually need five texts'. Șerban belonged to a different generation, the last one before the birth of Pop. At that time, his favourite song was *L'uomo in frack* by Domenico Modugno (with a very beautiful text, similar to those written by Șerban, by the way). Sinking into deep thought, he took his time and then said to me: 'Look, I don't really like this music and I generally don't know what ideas rummage the minds of long-haired guys like you, but if you want, we can write the lyrics together, the way we already started.' The rest is history.

*Între timp, ajunsese la 'Orizont'. 'I-auzi, a zis Șerban, 'dă hârtia aia încoace'. Cum agapa a avut și o parte protocolară, am luat cu toții loc la lunga masă din sala de reuniuni a asociației scriitorilor și în timp ce se rosteau elogiile pentru sărbătoritul serii, Șerban a început să scrie. 'Mie mi-au venit în minte Cîntecele țigânești ale lui Miron Radu Paraschivescu', îmi șoptește la un moment dat la ureche și îmi împinge foaia cu primele două versuri: 'Trec țigani pe drum, / Drumu-i plin de fum...'. Am aprobat violent din cap. Nu mai știu cât s-a scris acolo. Tot ce țin minte e că mult râvnita agapă n-a durat mult, cognacul fiind pe sponci, așa că ne-am dus acasă la Șerban și am terminat textul. Există un impuls jubilat în versurile acelea, care se resimte și azi. Iar congruența cu muzica, pe care eu o auzisem doar o dată, iar Șerban deloc, e de-a dreptul surprinzătoare. N-am să uit sclipirea din ochii lui Covaci, când i le-am arătat a doua zi. După care, m-am dus din nou la Șerban și iar m-am dat pe după cireș. 'Phoenixiiăștia sunt băieți buni', i-am zis. 'Sunt un fenomen subversiv, deci merită sprijiniți'. Cred că i-am mai spus și că e o șansă să pui cuvinte în gura unora care au un public de ordinul sutelor de mii. Asta mai ales pentru unii ca noi, care nu*





▲ Front and back cover of Jordan Chimet's 'Anthology of Innocence' (Cele douăsprezece luni ale visului : Antologia inocenței), Bucharest, Editura Ion Creangă, 1972. Source: scanned copy of the book.

prea puteam să publicăm, fiind taxați drept evazionisti. Îmi încolțise încă de pe atunci ideea că substanța culturală superioară trebuie plasată în medii de maximă audiență. Ea m-a dus în cele din urmă la cinema. 'Ei au acum nevoie, de fapt, de cinci texte', am zis. Șerban, care face parte din ultima generație dinaintea celei pop și a cărui melodie preferată era pe atunci L'uomo in frack a lui Domenico Modugno (cu un foarte frumos text foartian, de altfel), a căzut scurt pe gânduri. După care mi-a spus: 'Uite ce e, eu nu prea gust muzica asta și în general nu știu ce aveți voi în cap, ăștia cu părul lung, dar dacă vrei, putem face textele împreună, așa cum am început'. Restul se știe.

Actually, the rest is not history. There are many unclear points in the future literary experiments of the band. The idea of a superior cultural substance placed in maximum audience environments could have been partly nourished by the one of the hits of the first line-up of Phoenix. 'The Canary' (*Canarul*, 1967), a song with lyrics by Victor Cărcu, referred to a bird who naively tried to escape, only to fall wounded behind the silver cage bars. It was a manifest political statement and it had pushed Phoenix to national fame. A reference to this song is made even in the novels of Herta Müller, a Nobel prize German writer who described her bleak daily fears living under the totalitarian regime in the same city of Timișoara. Andrei Ujică was a friend of such local German writers. He had translated into Romanian the manifest of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* ('Banat Action Group', created in 1972 and dissolved by Communist authorities in 1975). When Covaci contacted Ujică, Phoenix crossed paths with other cultural phenomena already happening in Timișoara, independently from them. Things were bound to change.

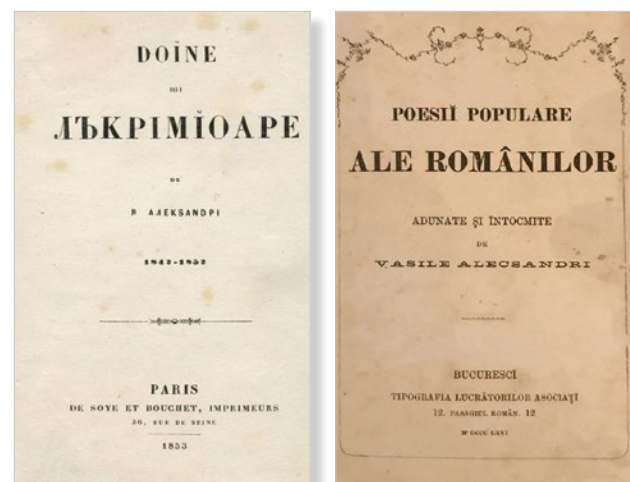
Nevertheless, they could not effectively change during the recording of that precise album. Phoenix had already set their minds on the project. Valeriu Sepi had probably started to work on the graphic design, most songs were already written, and Covaci certainly felt like pursuing his fascination with history. Most of the lyrics written by Șerban Foartă were based on hermetically self-sufficient wordplays which conveyed a certain sense of agedness, thus mimicking tradition, all while remaining playful and making subtle tongue-in-cheek allusions to various literary texts. Yet, they also had to write a song about Pál Kinizsi, a local medieval hero from the Banat region. The title made use of a dialectal Romanian rendering of the hero's name (*Pavel Chinezu, leat 1479*, in which *chinez* means 'kneze', 'leader of the people', not 'Chinese', the homonymous word from the official language). However,

Pál Kinizsi was famous in the tradition of local Hungarians, not in Romanian lore (cf. Curta 2005). Could this puzzling choice be determined by the historical obsessions of some members of the band? The lyrics oddly speak of precise historical circumstances. Wordplays do appear, confirming the actual involvement of Șerban Foartă, but the general aspect of the lyrics does not resemble his literary style.

It could be a situation of on-demand writing, as Covaci was certainly looking for history-related themes. Two more songs of the album, 'The Fold' (*Strunga*) and 'Andrew the Priest' (*Andrii Popa*) spoke about early 19<sup>th</sup>-century outlaws, the so-called 'hajduks'. Rumour has it (and Baniciu, composer of the second piece, confirmed it in private conversation) that the song telling the tale of Andrew the Priest was not supposed to be part of the album. Baniciu had written the melody, but Covaci and Kappl did not accept it on account of it being too naïve. This changed when Phoenix were already in the Electre-cord studios and found out that there were some more minutes available on one side of the future vinyl. Covaci allegedly gave Baniciu a book and asked him to check if a poem from it could be used in his song. Both 'The Fold' and 'Andrew the Priest' were published one after another as the second and third poems of the *Doine* (1842-1852), a series of poems written by Vasile Alecsandri in his formative years, when he listened to Moldavian folk songs and poems. In spite of their attribution to folklore (*text popular*) on the cover of the second Phoenix LP, these were not traditional poems; they were high-prestige simulations of folklore, written by Alecsandri himself. 'The Fold' glorified the hajduks who used to hide in a forest close to the village Strunga ('The Fold'), 20 km away from the poet's residence at Mircești, both settlements being situated in Iași County; while 'Andrew the Priest' invents the tale of a local hajduk killed by the poet's own uncle in 1818. The confusion could have originated in the fact that both the *Doine* and the *Poezii populare* ('Folk Poems') were later published in collective anthologies of poems by Alecsandri. Phoenix had previously used Alecsandri's version of the legend of 'Master Manole', which had been published in the *Poezii populare*. Perhaps the band considered that the *Doine* were folk poems as well. It would be a similar type of confusion to the one

▼ First editions of the two books of Vasile Alecsandri mentioned in the main text: *Doine și lăcrămioare* (Paris, De Soye et Bouchet, 1853) and *Poezii populare ale românilor* (Bucharest, Tipografia lucrătorilor asociați, 1866).

Source: Wikimedia Commons.







▲ Marga Barbu, Florin Piersic, Toma Caragiuz, and director Dinu Cocea on the set of the fourth 'hajduk' movie (*Haiducii lui Șaptecai*, 1971). Photo published in the *Cinema* magazine, the issue for the month of December 1969.

- ▼ *Olympic '64: Cîntic de haiduc / Ziua bradului de noapte* (Electrecord – EDC 10.137, EP, 7", 33 ½ RPM, mono, 1970); *Mircea Florian: Pădure de voie bună* (Electrecord – 45-STM-EDC 10413, EP, 7", 33 ½ RPM, stereo / mono, 1975); *Fîntîna* (Electrecord – 45 STM-EDC 10.553, EP, stereo / mono, 1977).

Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.



which occurred in the case of the 'Black Prince'.

These choices must have been a consequence of a historicist approach to folklore. At that time, every rocker wanted to be a hajduk. The young and rebellious generation had found its counterpart in Romanian history. At a national level, everything had started many years before, with a series of six 'hajduk' movies. The first one, *Haiducii* ('The Hajduks', 1966) was followed by *Răpirea fecioarelor* ('Kidnapping the Virgins', 1968), *Răzbunarea haiducilor* ('Hajduks' Vengeance', 1968), *Haiducii lui Șaptecai* ('The Hajduks of Captain Seven-Horses', 1971), *Zestrea domniței Ralu* ('The Dowry of Princess Ralu', 1971), and *Săptămîna nebunilor* ('The Fools' Week', 1971). Filled with shoot-outs and women who fell in love with early-19<sup>th</sup> century outlaws, as well as with class-struggle rhetoric and patriotic speeches, these movies provided a state-controlled outlet to the rebellious energy of the youth. They were all directed by Dinu Cocea on scripts written by Eugen Barbu, a well-known novelist who was then director of the newspaper *Săptămîna* (1970-1989). The movies featured Barbu's wife, Marga Barbu, presented as the ultimate female movie star, and a plethora of Romanian comedians, yet the success of these cinematographic tales was also ensured by the tyrannical influence of Barbu's newspaper upon Romanian cultural life. It is no surprise that a lot of young musicians who saw themselves as outlaws in the eyes of the authorities rapidly embraced the 'hajduk' discourse and fell prey to Barbu's rhetoric. This had already happened to the band *Olympic '64*, from whence Costin Petrescu had come to Phoenix. They had pressed an EP with hajduk songs in 1970, at the height of Hajduk-mania. But this happened even later, to Mircea Florian, for instance, who also recorded an EP about forests, glens, springs, and hajduks. Phoenix chose to disguise themselves as hajduks. Barely holding their laughs, dressed in 'fleeces', pretending to sneak up on rich merchants, and relentlessly climbing up and down the same ruined stairways, they made a short movie in the ruins of the Transylvanian fortified town of Râșnov. This was to be the first Romanian music video, with choreography. "Andrew the Priest" (the song accompanying the video) told a similar story to those from Barbu's movies.

Günther Reiningger, a former member from the first lineup of the band, had rejoined the group by then. He is credited as a collaborating musician on the 'Flute Bud' LP, but he soon became a full member. At that time, they posed for a photo shoot in the studios of Electrecord, handing a violin to the person in charge of radiator maintenance at the studio building, for the sake of a joke. The photo became the first poster ever to be published in a Romanian magazine. Gatefold LP-s, posters, and music videos... all these things were rather common in the West, but unseen in Romania. Phoenix strived to lead the way, but there were others who also imitated Western fashions, including Woodstock and Western music festivals in general.

The Phoenix poster was published in a magazine named *Flacăra* ('The Flame'). This publication had recently come under new management: Adrian Păunescu, a young poet, had been nominated as its director (1973-1985) following a personal discussion with Nicolae Ceaușescu. Păunescu also created a *Flacăra* Cenacle, a musical and literary set. He persuaded many others to join his "Flame Cenacle of the Revolutionary Youth" (*Cenacul Flacăra al Tineretului Revoluționar*), including Mircea Florian and his 'Melopoic Band'. Florian used to play the supporting act for the opening of Phoenix concerts, so it is no surprise that even Phoenix joined the Cenacle a little bit later, for

on-and-off performances. The entire Folk and Rock community soon started to depend on Păunescu's good favours. Even Phoenix, when they were forbidden to play after the summer of 1974. Their loud Marshall amplifiers had bothered the minister of tourism. However, Adrian Păunescu's fame had already grown to state proportions and he obtained a dispensation, allowing Phoenix to hold concerts.

In those days, Păunescu presented himself as one who had visited the United States of America and had seen Bob Dylan play at music festivals, thus attracting the respect of young musicians. He also feigned to make religious references, accepting the performance of Christmas carols at his Cenacle. Even though those carols were secular in nature, this was a rare event and it occurred after decades during which Christmas songs had been forbidden. Nevertheless, the situation gradually declined and the Cenacle's sole purpose became that of enrolling and controlling the subversive phenomenon of Folk. Even though they occasionally joined Păunescu, Phoenix put a certain distance between them and those manifestations. Speaking of religion, Covaci and most of the band never took an interest in Christian themes. The difference between Phoenix and other bands or songwriters of those times was the utter absence of the sacred in their music. The so-called pagan ritual musical pieces were used to support happenings. This lack of interest in sacred subjects translated itself into a pot-pourri of ideas, each of them going in completely different directions. To the musicians (and to the lyricists), the second Phoenix LP was certainly interesting (both musically and literarily), but from a outsider's point of view, 'Flute Bud' was an omnium gatherum: hajduks, medieval heroes, love songs, Romantic walks in the woods, and the literary experiments of Foarță and Ujică. There was a need for

structure. None of their previous attempts at achieving a concept album had truly worked for Phoenix. So the members of the band entrusted their new lyricists with the task of finding some logic for the next LP.

By then, Mircea Florian was already experimenting with the tale of the 'White Moor' (*Harap Alb*), even though the recordings came out much later. Many other Rock bands were in search of unifying ideas for concept-albums. The band must have been thrilled when Ujică and/or Foarță came up with the much needed concept for *Cantafabule*, which was to become their next LP. Covaci tells the tale of Andrei Ujică coming to him with an Old French poem about the unicorn, from the *Bestiary* of Philippe de Thaon (Covaci 1994, p. 294), but there are no further confirmations of this story. Șerban Foarță, on the other hand, tells the story of their meeting at the Central Hotel of Timișoara, which is partly confirmed by Covaci:

I asked Andrei the Intercessor to summon Covaci as soon as possible, whom I met on the top floor of a hotel in the

▼ *The Phoenix poster published in the Flacăra magazine. From left to right: Valeriu Sepi, Costin Petrescu in the arms of Cornel Calboreanu, Günther Reininger, Josef Kappl, the radiator maintenance worker of Electrecord, Nicolae Covaci, Mircea Baniciu, Victor Cârnu, and Eugen Gondi in front of the Marshall amplifiers of the band. Four years later, Covaci hid Kappl and two other future members of the band in the same amplifiers and took them through Yugoslavia to Austria and Germany. Copy of the poster from the private archive of Mihai Manea, a collector of Romanian Pop, Rock, and Folk material, with the autographs of Nicolae Covaci and Costin Petrescu.*

Source: <http://cultural-opposition.eu/>.



city, a rather new building. There were foreshadowed the *Cantafabule*, an almost dissident double LP. Not in a farcically political sense, but in an aesthetic and metaphysical one, if you wish. [...] I told him we had to think of some kind of opera—a Rock opera. Nicu was very receptive, despite his congenital autochthonism (he is half-Bessarabian). In *Cantafabule*, we combined his well-known obsession with hajduks with a kind of canonical archaism. A music on lyrics that aimed to be completely unlike everything else from its contemporary noisiness; texts with vocables that you could not even hear during Holy Mass. Terms from books, words from dictionaries of symbols, with esoteric, absconded, alchemical meanings (some of them coming from C. G. Jung). We didn't care if they were understood or not. Anyway, the public received / perceived the subliminal part of the message, at least in part.

*I-am cerut intercesorului Andrei să-l convoace cât mai repede pe Covaci, cu care m-am văzut la ultimul etaj al unui hotel din urbe, nu prea vechi. Acolo s-au prefigurat Cantafabulele, un dublu-LP aproape disident. Dar nu în sens curat-murdar politic. Ci într-unul, dacă vrei, estetic și metafizic. [...] I-am spus că trebuia să ne gândim la un fel de operă – o operă rock. Nicu era foarte receptiv, în ciuda autohtonismului congenital: pe jumătate, e basarabean. Am combinat, în Cantafabule, vasihauducismul cunoscut cu un soi de arhaism canonic. O muzică pe texte care-și propuneau să nu aducă, în nici un chip, cu nimic din zgomotul din jur; texte cu unele vocabule pe care nu le-auzeai nici barem la Sfânta Liturghie. Termeni din cărți, cuvinte din dicționare de simboluri, cu sensuri ezoterice, absconse, alchimice (provenind, unele, din C. G. Jung). Ce se înțelegea, bine; ce nu, nu. Subliminalul s-a priceput / s-a perceput, oricum, câte ceva (Șerban, Foartă 2013).*

It is highly unlikely that the idea of a Rock opera occurred in a spontaneous manner to Șerban Foartă, who was not at all familiar with Pop Rock musical trends. It is safe to assume that this could have come to Andrei Ujică in his frequent discussions with the members of the band. It is also unclear who had found the Old French connection or if Foartă and Ujică started directly from the Romanian versions of medieval bestiaries. The only certain thing is that Foartă already had an idea about an inventory of beasts that needed to be summoned:

I told him it that it would be about a series of fabulous and esoterically symbolic animals. First, the Phoenix bird in person. Which is not an ordinary term, like a 'lighter' for instance. (Which also burns, doesn't it?) But one full of connotations, thoughtful significances and meanings. He would summon the others: the Slavonic Inorog or Greek Monocer, Licorn(e), Leoncornus or Unicorn, and the rest. The Dolphus, which is the Dolphin, affine (and fraternal) to us. This is another a Christian symbol, since it carries us across the sea, the latter symbolizing in this case the sin understood as an abyss, a chasm, or a precipice. The Caladrius bird, which is un-therapeutic, but an infallible diagnostician: if it looks at you, you carry on living; if it turns its face from you, you will die soon. The House Snake, hopefully known to all and sundry. The Basilisk and the Asp, which are two beasts, two fiends, evil par excellence. And finally the well-known Siren. In *Cantafabule*, the Siren has two versions: a scenic and a bookish one, if you like—from the book...

*I-am spus că este vorba despre o serie de animale fabuloase, simbolice la modul ezoteric. În primul rând, Phoenixul în persoană. Care nu-i un termen oarecare, ca, între altele, 'brichetă'. (Care și ea arde, nu-i așa?) Ci unul plin de co-*

*notații, de noime grave și de tâlcuri. Acesta i-a chemat pe ceilalți: Inorog sau Monocer, Licorn / Licornă, Leoncorn sau Unicorn ș.c.l. Pe Dulf, care-i Delfinul afin (și fratern) nouă; și care este tot un simbol cristic, fiindcă el te poartă-n cârcă peste mare, simbolizând, în acest caz, păcatul ca abis, ca hău sau ca genune. Pe Pasărea Calandrinon, care, neterapeutică, să zicem, este o infailibilă diagnosticiană: dacă te privește, scapi cu viață; dacă-ți întoarce fața, mori curând. Pe Șarpele Casei, cunoscut, sper, de tot natul. Vasiliscul și Aspida, care sunt două gadini, două fiare, malefice prin excelență. Pe, în sfârșit, Sirenă, așijderi cunoscută. În Cantafabule, Sirena are două versiuni: una scenică, alta livrescă, dacă vrei – în carte... (Șerban, Foartă 2013).*

A great mystery surrounds the manner in which the lyrics were actually written. Everyone involved confirms that half of them were written to fit pre-arranged music, while the other half led to the composition of new songs. This meant that a sort of compositional compromise had been attained. Yet, there are countless differences between the lyrics of the third Phoenix LP and the poems published by Șerban Foartă in 1976. They could be due to a later rewriting by Foartă, who often mentions Ujică's help in assembling the 1976 volume. Some of the lyrics could have been already modified by Ujică himself, who took part in the band's rehearsals and often made alterations on the spot, in order to fit the music, later submitting them to Foartă for validation. And in certain cases, Foartă perhaps wrote something for the band and a completely different thing for himself. Last but not least, they also had to anticipate the ever-changing will of the minions who supervised all lyrics on behalf of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education. Both the writers and the members of the band certainly knew that some lyrics would be eventually cut.

The case of the verses which speak of the Phoenix bird are perhaps most relevant of this careful anticipation of this future censorship. It looks like all religiously relevant notions were purposely left aside. In the booklet that accompanied the 2008 reissue of *Cantafabule* on CD, Covaci stated that the origin of this song, the final anthem of the album, is to be found in the 'Popular Books' (*Cărțile populare*) of Nicolae Cartoian. This is particularly meaningful, as the ready-for-print of Cartoian's reprint had been given on February 23, 1974. This suggests that the writers were crafting their lyrics under the impression of a fresh reading. Or maybe this was just an accident and they used the 1929 edition of Cartoian's first volume. Indeed, when one reads Cartoian, one notices that the first volume was the source for several details and formulas: 'dispersing fragrance' (*înmiresmând*); 'from Lebanon' (*de la Livan*); 'this year, the ninth' (*într-acest an, al nouălea*); 'smoking' (*fumegând*); but also of formulas from a different song, the "Invocation", where there is talk of an 'emperor Phoenix' (*împăratul(ui) Finics*). There are very few words from Cartoian which do not find counterparts in the song:

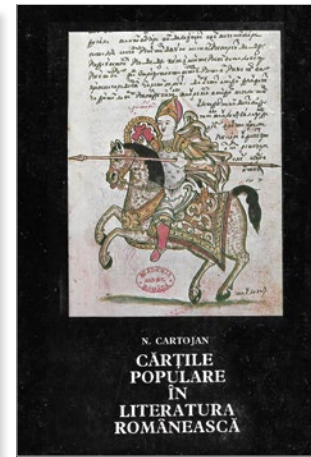
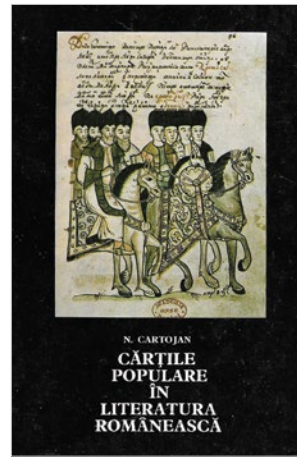
The cycle of animals described in the Physiologus also includes mythical animals, such as [...] the Phoenix, who lives near the city of Iliopol, sitting for nine years on the 'cedars of Lebanon, without food, as he is fed by the Holy Spirit'. After nine years, his wings are filled with fragrance and, when he hears the priest's semantron in the citadel, enters the church along him, sits on the altar-piece, immediately lights up and burns into ashes, so that the next day the priest may find him reborn and rejuvenated. These real or fantastic animals and birds are interpreted according to their natural or imagined peculiarities and habits, as types of

religious or moral ideas. Here is the description of the bird: 'This Phoenix is a bird more beautiful than all the other birds, even than the peacock. For the peacock has a head of gold and silver; while this Phoenix has the aspect of an emperor and precious stones, and he wears a crown on his head and boots on his feet like an emperor'.

*În ciclul animalelor descrise de Fiziolog intră și animale mitice, ca de pildă [...] finixul, care trăiește lângă cetatea Iliopol, stand nouă ani pe 'chedrii Livanului, fără hrană, că hrănit este de duhul sfânt', După nouă ani i se umple aripile de mireasmă și, auzind toaca preotului din cetate, intră cu el în biserică, se așează pe jertvelnic și îndată se aprinde și se face cenușe, pentru ca a doua zi preotul să îl aștepte reînviat și întinerit. Aceste animale și păsări, reale sau fantastice, sunt interpretate după particularitățile și obiceiurile lor firești sau închipuite, ca tipuri ale unor idei religioase sau morale. Iată și descrierea păsării: Acest 'finixu este pasăre pré frumoasă decât toate păsările și decât păunul. Că păunul are cap de aur și de argint; iar finixul acesta are chip de împărat și de pietre scumpe și este cu cunună în cap și cu încălțăminte în picioare ca împăratul'* (Cartoian 1974, vol. 1, p. 236).

The comparison works even better with the text from the book published in 1976, where words like 'altarpiece' (*jertfelnic*) and 'semantron' (*toacă*) have been preserved. They probably could not appear on the LP, because of stricter censorship policies, so 'pyre' (*rug*) was used instead. Similarly, the priest is absent from both versions, but the song recorded on the LP has a subtler reference which does not appear in the version published in the book. On the album, one notices the phrase 'dew-fed only' (*hrănit cu numai rouă*) in reference to the Phoenix bird, while the book version mentions 'ambrosia' in this segment. The dew then becomes a reference to the dew that covers the manna in Ex 16:13-15 and its meaning is manifestly Eucharistic. The bird retains its Christological value, all while referring to a 'new source' (*nou izvod*). It is no surprise that the last word (*izvod*) comes directly from the liturgical language, where it is used as a designation of the New Testament, a sort of comparison between the Old and the New Law. This means that the song(s) about the Phoenix bird was (or were) an actual proclamation of the Eucharist. One is tempted to believe that Șerban Foarță and Andrei Ujică took Covaci's historicist approach to folklore and the mixture of cult and folk elements from the music of the band back to their sources. Acknowledging the high-prestige roots of folklore, was the thing that needed to be done.

Cartoian explained in detail the manner in which the *Physiologus* passed from 2<sup>nd</sup>-century Egypt to Byzantium and later to Western Europe, influencing Old French literature, and then from Byzantium to the Serbian lands, where it had been translated into Old Church Slavonic. The early Romanian versions of that text were of a Serbian stock and had reached the Romanian lands in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cartoian 1974, vol. 1, p. 238-241). This means that Foarță and Ujică were perfectly aware of the high-prestige roots of those folk books. Since they knew that folklore did not sprang from the ground on its own, it is safe to infer that their plan was to draw Covaci and the other members of Phoenix out of their previous folkloric doldrums and throw them into the whirlpool of universal literature, where themes, motifs, and stories turned in a widening gyre. But this also meant that 'popular culture' would become a Christian culture, something that contradicted Covaci's passion for pagan rituals. It must have been a delicate situation. They had to tread carefully, not to awake the snake of auto-



▲ Front covers of the 1974 reprint of Nicolae Cartoian's *Cărțile populare în literatura românească* (vol. 1: Epoca influenței sud-slave; vol. 2: Epoca influenței grecești), cuvânt înainte de Dan Zamfirescu, postfață de Mihai Moraru, Bucharest, Editura enciclopedică, 1974. Source: scanned copies.

chtonism. Foarță later admitted that he had to persuade Covaci into accepting non-Romanian things: "Nicu even made some 'concessions' to me: he agreed to sing that song about Monocer in a French language from the time of the Hastings clash or from the First Crusades (*Nicu mi-a făcut chiar câteva 'concesii': a acceptat să cânte într-o franceză de pe vremea încăierării de la Hastings sau a Cruciadelor dintâi aceluși cântec despre Monocer*; Șerban, Foarță 2013). Several visionary minds had a clash at the end of that year. They had very different projects. For once, the lyrics were not subject anymore to the autochthonistic discourse of Covaci. He must have been placated into accepting the new direction when he would see the title of Cartoian's volumes. 'The Popular Books in Romanian Literature' assured him that this was Folk Lore.

In his memoirs, Nicolae Covaci does not mention anything related to this Christian key of interpretation of the *Cantafabule*, except for the comparison of the Phoenix bird with Christ, which must have been obvious to them during their talks with Foarță and Ujică. Mircea Baniciu confirmed this in a phone conversation, as did Josef Kappl when he was asked the same question. The Christian message was then known only those who created the concept, perhaps because assuming a religious subject was a risky thing in those times and this needed to remain hidden. Instead, Covaci and some other members of the band were great fans of folk pagan rituals. Convinced that the new approach was partly folkloric, Covaci probably made personal requests as well. After all, this was a compromise between the interests of the authors and those of the band. It is hard to tell which songs would be written at the demand of Covaci, but one of them could be 'House Snake' (*Știma casei*), since its lyrics have no Christian undertones whatsoever, being clearly drawn from pagan ritualism. Another one could be the song about the 'Little Owl' (*Cîntic-lu a cucuveauă-llei*). Its lyrics were sung in the Aromanian language, the one spoken by Balkan Vlachs, but the linguistic aspect posed some problem, as indicated in private conversation by Mircea Baniciu, who was often corrected by the Aromanians of Dobruđa when Phoenix had concerts in the town of Constanța. The odd thing is that there is a 'Song of Cole' (*Cînticlu al Colei*) in the second box of the 'Anthology of Romanian Folk Music',

the only song in Aromanian from the entire collection, used to represent the folk traditions of Dobruja. Could the song about the ‘Little Owl’ be a demand from Nicolae Covaci? Possibly so. On the other hand, songs like ‘Philip and the Stag’ (*Filip și cerbul*) could have nothing to do with Covaci’s projects. This other song speaks about a stag chased by the king of the French (or Franks; *regele frâncilor*), as he wishes to place it on his coat-of-arms (*vrea să te pună în herb*). This would be the story of Charles VI of France and the origin-story of modern kites (as winged stags). But it happens in a dream, which would be consistent with the story of another French king, Philip the Fair, who does not use the stag on his coat-of-arms. Finally, the stag is also described as ‘Sun-Stag’ (*cerbul soare*), which could be a reference to the legends of saints Eustace, Hubert, and Julian the Hospitaller. It looks like this mixtum-compositum was made on purpose and the name of the French king, which appears only in the title of the song (Philip) is probably a sobriquet for the French kings in general. Șerban Foarță admitted that he had used “words from dictionaries of symbols”. This particular case may be one of them.

Yet, all of this was done in perfect accordance with a deeper Christian meaning. In the song about the ‘Caladrius bird’ (*Pasărea Calandrinon*) there is a manifest reference to Christian hagiography, as the bird is compared with saints Cosmas and Damian, also known as ‘the silverless doctors’ (cf. *doctor fără de arginți* in the Phoenix song).

The Christian meaning is always hidden, but it pops up to the surface of the text through the use of words from the old liturgical language. In the ‘Killing of the Dragon’ (*Uciderea balaurului*), the unnamed hero who performs the deed is defined by the word *voievod* (‘voivod’, ‘prince’, synonym of the word *vodă* from the title of the Black Prince). Yet the action happens at *Virit*, an Old Romanian isogloss (borrowed from Greek) of the placename ‘Beirut’. This serves as an identification mark for the legend of saint George killing the dragon, who is not named, but who is manifest to a person familiar with the old language. There is a conscious, carefully calibrated use of these keys to the puzzle.

In the song entitled “The Basilisk and the Asp” (*Vasilicul și aspida*), the hexasyllabic and octosyllabic verses imitate traditional folk poetry, to the point that they speak about magic rituals against the evil eye. But they also create an odd love story between the asp and the basilisk, in which the latter changes its gender towards the end of the poem. One notices it even better in the longer and more elaborate version published by Șerban Foarță in 1976, but this also suggests that the many more sources were used and that one of those sources could be the libretto of an opera buffa. In Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, Ferrando addresses the following words to Fior-diligi, his lover’s sister, in recitativo: *Ah crudel, ti capisco! | L’aspide, l’idra, il basilisco, | E quanto i libici deserti han di più fiero | In me solo tu vedi* (act II, scene VI). This would

### Cantafabule lyrics (1976)

Cine ți-a auzit vreodată,  
Cine ți-a auzit vreodată,  
Galeșă doamnă înodată,  
vai,

Glasul cel de alean și miere,  
Glasul cel de alean și miere,  
El nu va mai iubi miere,  
vai!

Ființă de același sânge,  
Ființă de același sânge,  
Brațele lui nu vor mai strânge,  
vai.

#### Chorus:

Ce să fac cu tine goală, doamnă din adânc,  
Ce mă lași să zac de boală, de băiat nătâng?  
Ce să fac cu tine pântec, care nu legi rod?  
Că-ntre noi nu este punte și nu este pod.  
Și nu este pod...

Doamne, n-ar mai fi fost să fie,  
Sămânță de neam de stafie,  
Sămânță de neam de stafie,  
vai!

N-ar mai fi fost, Doamne, rusalcă,  
Verde la păr precum o algă,  
Verde la păr precum o algă,  
vai!

Cu glasu-i de alean și miere,  
Cine-l aude odată piere,  
Cine-l aude odată piere,  
vai!

Chorus again.

### Foarță, Texte... (1976)

– Sire, ne cheamă-n larg *sirena*,  
Sire, ne cheamă-n larg *sirena!*  
– O, Serenissime, de *Sena*,  
vai,

Să nu ne depărtăm! De *Sena*...  
– Sire, ne cheamă-n larg *sirena!*  
– Mai bine-i să plutim pe *Sena*,  
vai!

– Nu-i recunoașteți *cantilena?*  
Sire,-ascultați-i *cantilena!*  
– O, Serenissime, gheena,  
vai,  
nu-ntr-altfel murmură! Gheena...  
– Sire,-ascultați-i *cantilena!*  
– Tot astfel murmură gheena,  
vai!

– La nuntă, Sire,-am să-i duc trena;  
la nunta voastră,-am să-i duc trena!  
– Eu mi-aș împodobi trirema,  
vai,  
cu mincinosu-i bust! Trirema...  
– La nunta voastră,-am să-i duc trena!  
– Eu mi-aș împodobi trirema,  
vai!

– Asupra voastră anatema  
să cadă, Sire! Anatema...  
– O, Serenissime, gheena,  
vai,  
înghită-vă cum, astăzi, *Sena!*  
– Sire, ne cheamă-n larg *sirena!*  
– Nu, Serenissime, gheena,  
vai!

► Comparison of the four texts quoted in connection with the ‘Siren’ song from Cantafabule: the Phoenix song, the text published by Foarță in 1976, the Old French text of the *fatrasie* attributed to Philippe de Beaumanoir and Foarță’s translation of the same text in 2008.

### Old French text (Rus 2005)

*Li chan d’une raine  
Saine une balaine  
Ou fons de la mer,  
Et une seraine  
Si emportoit Saine  
Deseur Saint Omer.  
Uns muiau i vint chanter  
Sans mot dire a haute alaine.  
Se ne fust Warnaviler,  
Noié fuissent en le vaine  
D’une teste de sengler.*

### Foarță, *Fatrazii* (2008)

*Simte și balena  
Când aude-a n-a  
Broască, – în vomer,  
Un pumn; iar sirena  
Mai sus duce Sena  
De, hăt, Saint-Omer.  
Pe când mutului oier  
I se-aude cantilena:  
Fără de Warnaviler,  
Pre toți i-ar fi-necat vena  
Țestei de mistreț vier.*

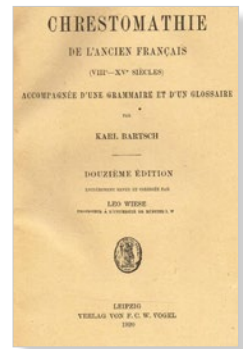
explain why two verses of the Phoenix song describe the ‘Basilisque’ (now a feminine character) as “not being the hydra entering the water” (*nu era nici hidră, | ‘-n-apă demi intra*). An additional compositional level may be metaphysical, as the legends concerning the basilisk were already linked to alchemy in the writings of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, thus ensuring its metaphysical meaning. Yet the main point of reference of the song, evident in its title, is Ps 91:13 (*Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis et conculcabis leonem et draconem*). In his 1976 book, Șerban Foarță quotes the Psalm verse as a motto, drawn from the metrical Psalter of Theodore Corbea (1700-1710): *Pre aspidă și pre vasiliscu | Vei încăleca și-i lovi în piscu!* In a recent interview for the magazine *Lumea Credenței* (“Psaltirea lui... Șerban Foarță”, July 17, 2008) Șerban Foarță acknowledged once again the reference to Corbea’s metrical Psalter, also stating that he reused those verses in his 2007 metrical adaptation of the Psalms. There are therefore traces of several compositional levels: pseudo-folkloric, ludic, metaphysical, and the last one in connection with Christianity. These four different levels do not appear in all *Cantafabule* poems, but when all (or several) of them are present, they seem to be similar to the *quatresens de l’Écriture* dear to medieval exegesis. The literal interpretation, with no underlying meaning, would be pseudo-folkloric, thus placating the band’s passion for folklore and an archaic ritualistic approach to music. The second, quasi-typological, is probably made up of the private jokes of Foarță and Ujică. The third one is not necessarily moral, but it retains the metaphysical values of the animals and their stories, as if it would put forth a tropological reading. And the fourth level of the composition (comparable to the anagogical one from medieval exegesis), is the ultimate Christian meaning of the text.

The non-systematic use of these overlapped readings may be due, on the one hand, to the gradual discovery of these levels (when the lyricists started to play with meanings, those significances would inevitably pile up). On the other hand, some songs would be simply meant to be playful, devoid of a precise metaphysical or Christian meaning. There are many ways to play a literary game and perfect structures are not always desirable. In *Cantafabule*, there are songs, for instance, where those sacred undertones are pushed to the background, bringing forth other compositional levels, with references to all sorts of texts. And there are cases in which the song and the poem have nothing in common. Such is the case of the poem ‘The Siren’, which has nothing to do with the homonymous song from the Phoenix LP. What Phoenix sang stops at a folkloric level. What Șerban Foarță published could be inspired by the Old French *fatrasies* that he would later adapt into Romanian verse (Foarță 2008). A basic comparison shows that several key-terms originate in Philippe de Beaumanoir’s 13<sup>th</sup> century poems (cf. Rus 2005, p. 15). This seriously puts into question the carnivalesque folkloric disguise of *Cantafabule* as a whole. Maybe the members of the band could not sing the lyrics of Foarță and they were rewritten by Foarță (or by Ujică, who was often entrusted with this task, according to an information shared by Mircea Baniciu in a private conversation with the author of this study). Or maybe Șerban Foarță completely rewrote the poem at a later date. Whichever of the two is true, Foarță was certainly aware of the poem attributed to Philippe de Beaumanoir in 1975-1976, when he prepared the publication of his first book (*Texte pentru Phoenix*, Cluj, Litera, 1976—hereafter Foarță 1976). I incline to believe the first option, as the prosodic structure of the two early poems is identical. This would explain Șerban Foarță’s statement that “in

▶ *Front-cover of Chrestomathie de l’ancien français (VIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles), accompagnée d’une grammaire et d’un glossaire, dir. Karl Bartsch, douzième édition entièrement revue et corrigée par Leo Wiese, Leipzig, F. C. W. Vogel, 1920.*

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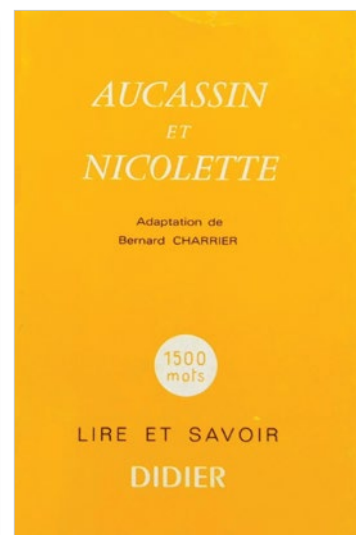
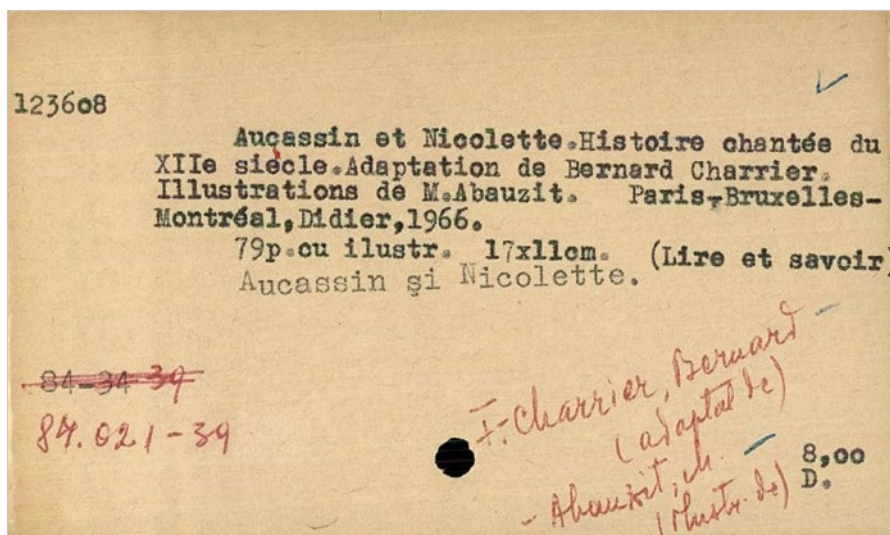
<https://www.abebooks.com/>.



*Cantafabule*, the Siren has two versions: a scenic and a bookish one, if you like—from the book”.

Further proof of this curious interest for Old French literature comes from the song ‘The Luck of the Unicorn’ (*Norocul inorogului*). Phoenix sang a half-Old-French and half-Romanian text, the Romanian segments representing an adaptation of the early 12<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Norman *Bestiary* of Philippe de Thaon. Several couplets of the medieval text were sung *sur le vif*, in the original language (without any linguistic training), meaning that Foarță and Ujică emulated in a way Covaci’s archaeological approach to tradition. Yet the manner in which they found and used this text is even more interesting. At that time, Philippe de Thaon’s *Bestiary* had only two editions: that of Emmanuel Walberg (1900, p. 15-16 for the unicorn) and the old text of Thomas Wright (1841, p. 81 for the unicorn). Wright’s edition cannot be the source of the song from *Cantafabule*, since two of the verses do not correspond to those sung on the LP (*Pur țeo ad si à nun, | de buc ad fașun*). The text comes from the edition of Walberg (cf. *Pur țeo issi at num, | De buket at fașun*). However, neither of those books were available in Romania. There existed a third book, a chrestomathy of bits and pieces of Old French literature initially published by Karl Bartsch (1872). It used to be the German manual for Romance Philology, it was often updated, and it included a very short segment from the *Bestiary* of Philippe de Thaon: only the verses about the unicorn and the panther. There was a copy of this chrestomathy in Romania. A review of Leo Wiese’s 12<sup>th</sup> revision of the chrestomathy (Bartsch, Wiese 1920, *pièce* 21, p. 66-68 for the unicorn of Philippe de Thaon) was published by George Giuglea, a philologist from Cluj who had defended his PhD in Paris. The review was printed in *Dacoromania*, 1, 1920-1921, p. 489-490, and the only Romanian copy of the book is to be found at the Central University Library in Cluj (BCU Cluj, Biblioteca de Litere Fr. 2173). In his revision of the chrestomathy, Wiese followed Walberg’s edition (*pur țeo issi at num, | de buket at fașun*) and there is a rich glossary at the end of the volume, to be used for translations. Since the book never left the collections of the Central University Library in Cluj, it is safe to assume that Foarță, Ujică, or a friend of theirs went to Cluj, found the text, worked out a translation with the help of the glossary and then used both the medieval text and that translation as a basis for the Phoenix song.

Perhaps all these sources were discovered out of their passion for anthologizing. When Covaci contacted Ujică in the summer of 1973, Foarță and Ujică had been already working on a possible ‘Anthology of Circus’, trying to collect as many interesting texts as they could, with a possible plan of arranging them according to their own desire. In a way, this was a type of collage, more or less the same collage that defined Ujică’s future career in cinema, after his flight to Western Germany in the ‘80s. But there



was also a genuine passion for medieval French texts, not because of some sort of medievalism, since *Cantafabule* does not resemble a medievalist project, but because of a different logic, very difficult to comprehend at a first glance. Perhaps this is best understood in light of Foarță's fascination with the odd forms of medieval French poetry. The double LP ended up being called *Cantafabule* (even though the initial plan must have been *Bestiar*) and Electrecord made an error, naming it *Cantofabule* when the cover was redesigned. Covaci always considered this to be the gravest error ever made, but he could not have understood what the word actually meant. The grave nature of the error could be pointed out to him only by Foarță and Ujică, who knew that behind the made-up plural *Cantafabule* lied the French word *chantefable*, in the singular.

There is only one *chantefable* in the entire history of literature (until Foarță and Ujică's *Cantafabule*) and this is the Old French tale of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. Similar to a prosimetrum, this text was intended to be sung, read, and performed, as a sort of ultimate embodiment of the crossover of genres. In a way, Phoenix's *Cantafabule* represent a very similar thing: the unique embodiment of a crossover between Rock music, ancient literature, collage, folklore, etc. Something that was never done before and would never be done again. Thus the choice of the word *cantafabulă* (in the singular) for each song of the album. It was not a copy of the early 13<sup>th</sup>-century *chantefable*; perhaps Foarță and Ujică did not even know what that the actual text of *Aucassin and Nicolette* was. A fragment of it appeared in the chrestomathy of Bartsch and Wiese, but with no explanation, so they must have learned about this from another source.

Only one public library in Romania would have a version of *Aucassin et Nicolette* in 1974-1975. It would be the Central University Library of Timișoara (*Depozit A1*, 123608), the city where the two authors lived. This would explain how they came across the concept, but the book from the University Library was not an edition of the original text; it was an adaptation made for the general public by Bernard Charrier (1966); and the medieval Old French text was rendered in contemporary French flat prose. This suggests that *cantafabulă* became a concept with a slightly different meaning, according to what it was imagined to be, that is, an imaginary reconstruction of what Old French literature could have been, made up of the very little material available behind the Iron Curtain. One of the two authors, or maybe one of

▲ Old library card of the adaptation of Bernard Charrier, available at the Central University Library of Timișoara. Source: <http://www.bcut.ro/>.

Front cover of *Aucassin et Nicolette: Histoire chantée du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, adaptation de Bernard Charrier, illustrations de M. Abauzit, Paris-Bruxelles-Montréal, Didier, 1966. Source: <https://www.abebooks.com/>.

► Old slide made after the original drawing of the design-art for the *Cantafabule* double LP, presente on the personal site of Elisabeth Öhsenfel. Source: <http://www.elisabeth-ochsenfeld.com/>.

Portrait of Dimitrie Cantemir from the first edition of his *'Description of Moldavia'* (*Descriptio Moldaviae*, 1716). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

their friends and colleagues, could have checked the fragment of the *chantefable* of *Aucassin et Nicolette* at p. 193-199 of the Bartsch and Wiese chrestomathy, where it was published as *pièce* 56. The alternation of verse and prose, often dear to Foarță in his future works, is well visible therein. And the idea of rhythmic prose, used in the 1976 volume, could also stem from these books.

Yet the Phoenix double LP was never seen as a tongue-in-cheek reference to medieval literature, nor was it described in precise Christian exegetical terms. It was often compared to the 'Hieroglyphic History' (*Istoriia ieroglifică*) of Dimitrie Cantemir (1705), even though there are no manifest links between the two of them. The connection with Cantemir's text is very shallow. Excerpts of the prefatory song 'Invocation' (*Invocație*) or from the penultimate one, 'Zoomachy' (*Zoomahia*—in the 1976 volume only, as the lyrics of this song have been blacked out by censors before the 1975 recording of the song) sound like Cantemir, but are never linked with the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century text in a direct way. The 'Hieroglyphic History', one of the earliest literary Romanian texts, was a *roman à clef* in which the history of Wallachian and Moldavian dynasties was presented in the guise of an animal tale, in which each animal played the part of a historical character. This means that the link with Cantemir (also represented on the planned cover of the double album) was meant to indicate that the *Cantafabule* was a *roman à clef* and nothing else. Cantemir's work drew its roots from the late-Byzantine tradition of political works such as the 'Bird Book' (*Πουλολόγος*) or the 'Tale of the Four-Legged Beasts' (*Διήγησις τῶν τετραπόδων ζώων*), where the political message prevailed. In *Cantafabule*, the political message is utterly absent.

This suggests that the deconstructed portrait of Cantemir represented on the front- and back-covers could be a precaution, diverting the attention of the censors and of the general public from the actual significance of the work. Or perhaps Cantemir was part of the initial concept of the album but it gradually became less interesting when other sources were identified. Both options are possible, as the composition process of *Cantafabule* was done in two parts. According to Șerban Foarță, the summoning of Covaci at the Central Hotel happened sometime in 1974, immediately after the pressing of the 'Flute Bud' LP. Writers and musicians then worked independently, with Andrei Ujică taking part in most of the musicians' rehearsals, acting as a transmission belt between the band and Șerban Foarță. When 1974 was drawing to a close, a lot of songs and lyrics had been written. Phoenix retired to a chalet in the Semenici Mountains where they brainstormed their musical ideas into songs for the rest of the lyrics. After more than three months of living in the mountains, the band descended 'upon' Timișoara, where the idea of a cover was first discussed. Phoenix next went to Bucharest, to the recording studios of Electrecord, while Elisabeth Ochsenfeld (then Sepi), started making preparatory sketches according to a concept by Valeriu Sepi and gradually worked out the design of the front and back covers, as well as the inner sleeve of the double LP, in ink. This fracture in the planning of the album may account for a change of ideas. Cantemir could be the first or the last to come.

Ochsenfeld's drawings present a reworking of the well-known portrait of Dimitrie Cantemir from the first edition of his *Descriptio Moldaviae* (1716), with a unicorn instead of Cantemir on the back. Cantemir then becomes the unicorn. This suggests that this animal was central to writing of the *Cantafabule*, or that it represented its symbolic core. Elisabeth Ochsenfeld already stated that some animals drawn on the inner sleeve had the aspect or the personality of various members of the band (*unele animale desenate aveau fie aspectul, fie caracterul unuia sau altuia din trupă*). One could easily argue that the same type of comparison may be applied to Cantemir himself, who could stand in for another real person, perhaps linked with the unicorn.

At this point on the study, one should take a step back and notice that when Costin Petrescu describes his talks with Andrei Ujică in 1974, before his departure from Phoenix (he was sacked by Covaci and replaced in between takes with another drummer, Ovidiu Lipan, in 1975, at Electrecord), he remembers three essential aspects: Marietta Poenaru (later Ujică); a common interest in religion; and Mihail Avramescu, a priest from Jimbolia—a borough near the border of with Yugoslavia:

Andrei often went to Jimbolia, where he met a special character, father and philosopher Mihail Avramescu, of Jewish origin, ordained Orthodox priest, like Nicolae Steinhardt. He was also a great avant-garde writer! They discussed philosophy and 'drew the battle lines' in those times of great hardship. Patzi [Marietta] often accompanied him. I went only once.

*Andrei mergea des la Jimbolia, acolo se vedeau cu un personaj deosebit, părintele și filozoful Mihail Avramescu, hirononist ortodox din evreu, ca și Nicolae Steinhardt. Era și scriitor de mare avangardă! Discutau filozofie și "puneau țara la cale", în vremurile acelea de mare restriște. Patzi îl acompania și ea des, eu nereușind să merg decât odată (Petrescu 2018).*

Șerban Foarță confirms the information as well:

Through Andrei, I had met at Jimbolia Father M. Avra-







mescu, alias Jonathan X Uranus, an ironic avant-garde and great symbolist poet, with whom we... made 'Jymbolisms' (all three of us), despite the actual risk of being mistaken for 'frontier escapists'. There were various inopportune and ignorant witnesses who informed on us to the authorities. *Cantafabule* was born out of those discussions.

*Prin Andrei, îl cunoscusem, la Jimbolia, pe părintele M. Avramescu, alias Jonathan X Uranus, avangardist ironic și mare simbolog, cu care... „jimbologizam”, în trei, – în po-fida riscului, real, de a fi luați drept niște „frontieriști” (și, uneori, a unor martori inoportuni și ignoranți, care știam că dau raportul). Cantafabule-le, din asta au ieșit (Foarță 2012).*

It happened in the time of those long conciliabula, in Jimbolia or Timișoara, with the esoteric Father Mihail, alias Jonathan X Uranus, whom I had met through Andrei.

*Era pe vremea conciliabulelor îndelungi, la Jimbolia sau la Timișoara, cu ezotericul Părinte Mihail, alias Jonathan X Uranus, pe care-l cunoscusem prin Andrei (Șerban, Foarță 2013).*

Mihail Avramescu is an undervalued and less-known avant-gardist writer from the Inter-War period who was much influenced by René Guénon, later becoming critical of Guénon, embracing Orthodoxy and joining the 'Burning Bush Group' (*Rugul Aprins* or *Grupul de la Mănăstirea Antim*) from Antim Monastery in Bucharest. André Scrima mentions him as the one who introduced him to the 'Burning Bush Group', a society of monks and learned laymen who used to read and interpret literary texts, scriptural, patristic, or philosophical readings, all while practising the hesychast way of life. The group was dissolved by Communist authorities and most of its members were imprisoned (cf. Ursu 2019). Later on, Mihail Avramescu became an Orthodox priest and went to Jimbolia in 1962. He used many pseudonyms in his literary works: Jonathan X. Uranus, Mark Abrams, Ștefan Adam, Adrian Omu, or Ierusalim X Unicornus. This is particularly interesting in the context of *Cantafabule*, as he could be the actual unicorn from the planned back cover of the LP and the real person behind Cantemir on the front cover. The 'Residual Fragments from the Burned Calendar of Jerusalem Unicornus,

a Lazy and Unskilled Aspiring Disciple of Holy Humility' (*Fragmente reziduale dispartate din Calendarul incendiat al lui Ierusalim Unicornus: trîndav si neiscusit aspirant uce-nic al Sfintei Smerenii*) were published posthumously in 1999. In 2004, Șerban Foarță himself signed one of the introductory texts to another posthumous volume: 'The Infra-Human Comedy: Excerpts from the Poliautobiographical Essay of Jerusalem X. Unicornus' (*Comedia Infra-Umană : fragmente din Eseul poliautobiografic a lui Ierusalim X. Unicornus*). Perhaps Avramescu was the one who suggested the use of a *roman à clef*. Or—even better—perhaps he was the one to whom the *roman à clef* was dedicated.

If Șerban Foarță, Andrei Ujică, and Marietta Ujică (then Poenaru) were 'Jymbologising' in Jimbolia with Mihail Avramescu, then *Cantafabule* would also be born out of an irrational esoteric overlapping of symbols, thus explaining why not all of them fit a perfect structure or a pattern of compositional levels. There would be one main target—that of dressing up Christian themes in absconded references, in order to pass them through the filter of atheist authorities and proclaim the holiness of the saints, of Christ, and (most of all) of the Holy Eucharist on stadiums. This avant-gardist mass would be performed through the cries of the young Rock generation, thus addressing their entire work to God, who would be the only one who could understand their symbolism, much in the same manner in which ancient Christians drew the ichthys symbol in times of religious persecution.

Avramescu's theatrical style may well correspond to the style of the medieval *chantefable*. That collage of genres was exactly what the *Cantafabule* had become in the end. And Avramescu's links with the Surrealists may also explain the choice of the *fatrasie* by Philippe de Beaumanoir. Georges Bataille had published his *fatrasies* translations in *La Révolution surréaliste* (2<sup>nd</sup> year, March 1, 1926, p. 2). Is it possible to assume that the double LP (or parts of it) were an homage of Foarță and Ujică to Avramescu? Or is this just a basic form of pareidolia that philologists and historians of old literature often fall prey to when they try to make sense of the very little material available to them? The method deployed in this article could be right or could be wrong. It could also be right only in part. The only persons who can actually provide

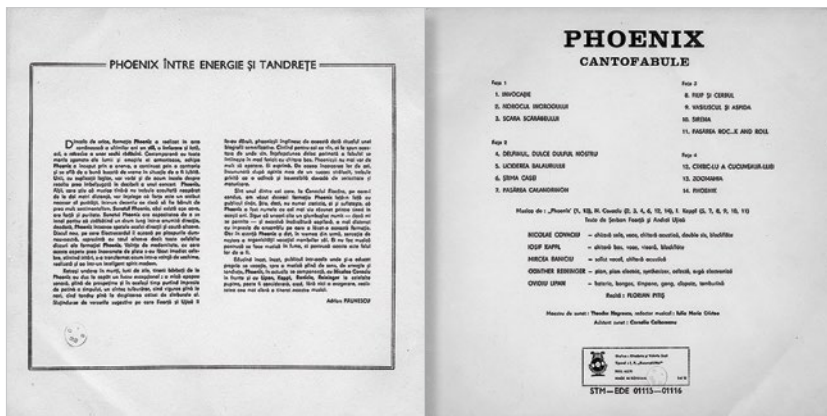
◀ Photo of young Mihail Avramescu in the Inter-War period published in an unidentified publication.  
Source: <https://cvlpress.ro/>.

Photo of Mihail Avramescu at a later date and another photo of Mihai Avramescu and Sidonia Drăgușanu, wife of Miron Radu Paraschivescu.  
Source: tribute site to Sidonia Drăgușanu (<http://vechiul.sidonia.ro/>).

▶ The third and last Phoenix LP pressed by Electrecord: Cantofabule (STM-EDE 01115-01116, 2 x LP, stereo / mono, gatefold, 1975). Design: Elisabeta Sepi and Valeriu Sepi.  
Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.



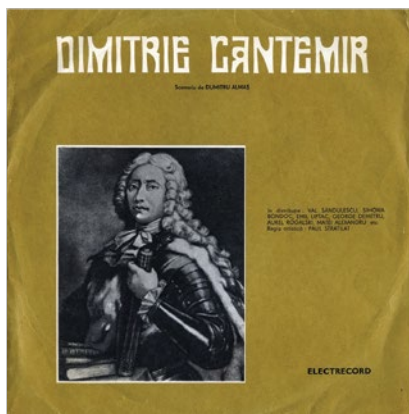
▲ Fig. Spoken-word (teatru radiofonic) vinyl pressed by Electrecord in 1974: 'Dumitru Almaș – Dimitrie Cantemir' (EXE 0975, LP, mono, 1974).  
Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.



an answer to these questions are the writers themselves and the artist who created the cover. When that cover was altered by Electrecord, it was a tragedy.

Elisabeth Ochsenfeld described how she worked during the entire summer of 1975 for that cover, how the members of the band and the writers came to visit and followed the evolution of the sketches into actual drawings and later into covers, hand-drawn in ink. For the background colour, of the front and back, a simple alternation of red and green had been chosen. One can also see on those covers parts of the *Cantafabule* which never made their way into the final double LP. A prominent figure of the inner-sleeve was supposed to be the stork, symbol of the *Avis pia* poem published by Șerban Foarță in the volume *Texte pentru Phoenix* (1976). It is therefore quite possible that the original cover could contain a part of the interpretation key as well. Perhaps this is why the creators suffered a huge shock when the entire thing was wrecked:

I finished the work in December 1975 and handed it to Electrecord, in original. The album had been designed to have an extra sheet of paper with drawings and texts, but the cover proposal was rejected by both Adrian Păunescu and the management of Electrecord, on the grounds that another LP had recently used Cantemir on its cover. It was a tragedy for us. What did the working men do? They took the image of the inner sleeve, which they printed in barely visible grey tones on the outer cover. Instead of *Phoenix Bestiar* or *Cantafabule*, they wrote *Cantofabule*, the confusion over the title still remaining to this day. The new cover could never have the impact that we had anticipated. I had worked on a 1/1 scale, in ink, with a pen. The original was lost in the halls of Electrecord. At least this is what we were told. I was extremely happy years later, after immigrating to Germany, when I found two slides



that I had made before sending the material to the record company. Its quality is not the best, but the documentary value is the one that matters.

*Am finalizat lucrarea în decembrie 1975 și am predat-o în original la Electrecord. Albumul fusese proiectat să aibă o foaie în plus cu desene și texte, dar propunerea de copertă a fost refuzată de tandemul format de Adrian Păunescu și conducerea Electrecord, pe motiv că apăruse cu puțin timp în urmă un LP cu Cantemir pe copertă. Pentru noi a fost o tragedie. Ce au făcut cei abilitați? Au luat imaginea de interior, pe care au tipărit-o pe un gri aproape invizibil pe coperta exterioară. În loc de Phoenix Bestiar sau Cantafabule au scris Cantofabule, confuzia privind titlul rămânând pînă astăzi. Noua copertă nu avea nici pe departe impactul pe care noi îl anticipasem. Realizaserăm lucrările pentru copertă la scară 1/1, în tuș, cu peniță. Originalul a fost pierdut pe holurile Electrecordului sau, cel puțin, acest lucru ni s-a spus. Am fost extrem de fericită cînd, după emigrarea în Germa-*

nia, am găsit două diapozitive pe care le făcusem înainte de trimiterea materialului la casa de discuri. Calitatea nu este cea mai bună, dar valoarea de document este cea care contează (Ochsenfeld 2012).

Adrian Păunescu, director of 'The Flame' magazine, founder and animator of 'The Flame Cenacle', had become extremely powerful by then. An informed assumption would be that he probably changed the covers in order to accommodate his own introductory text, in the manner of the texts written for the previous Phoenix LP-s by Octavian Ursulescu. Păunescu's prose lavishly occupies half of the inner-sleeve of the *Cantafabule* edition pressed by Electrecord in early 1976.

A different era had come. During the recording of the double album, Phoenix received news that their friend Cornel Chiriac had been assassinated in Munich. He had been stabbed to death near his car in a parking lot, close to midnight, on March 4, 1975, and rumour had it that this was the hand of the Romanian secret service. The band took the tapes of their *Cantafabule* recordings to the home of Nicu Alifantis, a Folk artist, and listened to them during the night. The Bucharest Folk and Rock intelligentsia was impressed. Even Nicu Alifantis, years later, would try a similar experiment on the basis of a book of poetry by Ion Barbu (*După melci*). For that project, Alifantis asked for the help of Costin Petrescu, the former drummer of Phoenix, who had also played with Mircea Florian in experimental happenings. Nicu Alifantis' record suffered a similar fate to the *Cantafabule*, as its gatefold sleeve had to accommodate another (unflattering) text signed by the same Adrian Păunescu. A year later, in 1978, Șerban Foartă defended a PhD about the poems of the same Ion Barbu. His 'Essay on Ion Barbu's Poetry' (*Eseu asupra poeziei lui Ion Barbu*, Timișoara, Facla) was published in 1980. All these coincidences are fortuitous, of course, but they testify to these people's community of spirit. Some of them probably understood *Cantafabule*; others probably did not.

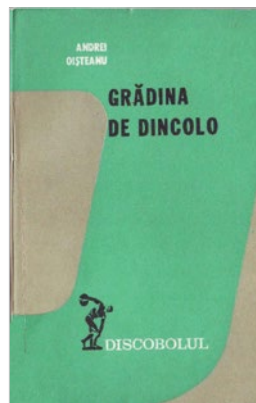
Șerban Foartă's lyrics were published as a volume of verse a little bit later in 1976. They sounded completely different. By that time, Günther Reininger was no longer part of the band. In his place, Covaci recruited Erlend Krauser as a violinist and guitar-player at the same time. Dan Chișu, a young director, had dressed up the band as fantastic beasts and Phoenix were touring the country. The entire show produced an overwhelming effect in the hearts and minds of the young generation. Florian Pittiș, who had recited parts of the 'Invocation' on the Phoenix double LP, (just as Lelu Bihoi recited during the collage-show 'Those Who Gave Us Names') invited a young PhD student to explain the hidden meanings of the mythical animals from *Cantafabule* on his radio show. Andrei Ois-

teanu did precisely that, but from the perspective of esoteric writings only, which were more familiar to him (and to Dorin Liviu Zaharia, the former 'hajduk' rocker) because of their friendship with Ioan Petru Culianu. Those radio-show lectures were to launch the academic career of Andrei Oisțeanu, who was soon invited to publish them at a publishing house from Cluj. Oisțeanu structured the book in two parts. The first one was dedicated to the folk tale of the 'White Moor' (*Harap Alb*) and explored themes and motifs from the songs about the 'White Moor' played by Mircea Florian, since Oisțeanu used to be a member of Florian's 'Melopoic Band'. It was entitled 'The Garden Beyond' (*Grădina de dincolo*). The second part was entitled 'Zoosophy' (*Zoosofia*) and it explored symbols from *Cantafabule*. For years, Mircea Florian and Phoenix had shared the stage. Now, their esoteric sources shared the pages of the same book. It happened in 1980.

This created an additional level of interpretation for the *Cantafabule*, at a national level. In this respect, it became an omnium gatherum, through the addition of layers and layers of new meanings. By that time, according to Ujică's plan, the higher substance had reached the stadiums. Romanians were shouting loud and clear the message of the Eucharist. Just as the common Orthodox priest is not the depositary but the vehicle of Divinity, becoming holy only at the time of mass, so the members of the band could lead their rebellious life all while becoming the vehicle of the Eucharist when they beat the semantron on stadiums, that is, when they summoned the 'dew-fed' bird to perform its miracle. Strangely enough, that semantron became a collective drumbeat when Phoenix, in search of new experiments, started playing with an actual folk music band, the Timpanists (*dubași*) from Brănești.

Șerban Foartă's verses were gathered in a volume and published amidst all that clatter. In that volume, a Latin poem entitled "Alcedonia" probably contains another clue to the interpretation of what a *cantafabulă* actually meant. The Latin verses read: *Magno ore nunc sonandum | permariosque donandum | Lares cantafabula*. The Lares and Penates of the band would be the animals, as expected. Their loudly played instruments and voices would resound on stadiums (*magno ore nunc sonandum*). And if the word *cantafabula* is in the Ablative, then those Lares and Penates would be given to the members of the band in the form of a collage of genres.

Foartă compared this poem with *Le Latin mystique* of Remy de Gourmont (1892): "There [in the 1976 volume], I also published my first Latinising poem (in, let's say, 'mys-tical Latin', in the words of Remy de Gourmont),— following the example of Baudelaire, who inserts, in a



◀ Texte pentru Phoenix, Editura Litera, București, 1976.

Șerban Foartă, *Eseu asupra poeziei lui Ion Barbu*, Timișoara, Facla, 1980.

Andrei Oisțeanu, *Grădina de dincolo. Zoosofia. Comentarii mitologice*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1980.

Source: <https://www.abebooks.com/>.

book in French, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, an (unusual) poem in Latin: *Franciscae meae Laudes...*” (*Acolo, am publicat și poezia mea dintâi pre lătinie (in, să zicem, le ‘latin mystique’, vorba lui Remy de Gourmont),—după modelul lui Baudelaire, ce inserează, într-o carte în franceză, Les Fleurs du Mal, o (insolită) poezie în latină: Franciscae meae Laudes...*) (commentary of the author published on July 21, 2014, to a joint post with Tudor Banuș, “Alchimie sau De Vera Rerum Natura”, *Observator cultural*, 731, July 17, 2014). Remy de Gourmont wrote an amateur book dealing with Latin poetry *de saint Augustin à Thomas A Kempis*. It is rarely quoted in academia, but it is one of the most influential studies of the Medieval Latin corpus, as he brought to the attention of modern authors a forgotten medieval poetry. Is it a coincidence that Remy de Gourmont’s *Latin mystique* was one of Georges Bataille’s favourite reading? Bataille translated medieval fatrasies in contemporary French, just as Foartă translated them into Romanian. Are we entitled to attribute meaning to this new coincidence, or is it just another form of pareidolia?

Later in 1976, Nicolae Covaci was forced to renounce Romanian citizenship. After a marriage of convenience with a Dutch citizen, he travelled to the Netherlands and later to Germany. In 1977, in the aftermath of the Vrancea Earthquake (March 4, 1977), he returned to Romania with a van filled with humanitarian aid. Phoenix went again on tour and played throughout the entire country, but things were far from being perfect.

When chased by princely posses, the hajduks of old hid in barrels or crossed mountains into foreign lands. So did Phoenix escape Ceaușescu’s Romania. Covaci hid Kappl, Lipan, Krauser, and a pregnant young woman in the frames of their four Marshall amplifiers, taking them out of the country through Yugoslavia and Austria into Western Germany. At first, they tried to write a new album, which was supposed to bear the title ‘Gouge Your Eyes Out’ (*Zgâriați-vă pe ochi*). Lack of money and the endless possibilities of the new (and free) country led to a split in the band. Kappl, Lipan, and Krauser formed a new band, Madhouse, and recorded the *From the East* LP in 1979. Covaci pursued on his own, changed the name of his band into Transsylvania Phoenix and recorded an album two years later, in 1981, with the help of Lipan.

Success never came, and could never come. On both albums, the members of the band tried to use previous songs and present them to the Western public in an international dress. Yet it did not work out. When Tom Buggie (Covaci’s new bass-player) and a certain Rolf Möntmann translated the ‘Little Gypsyad’ for the 1981 LP, all assonances were lost and the new song, entitled *Gypsy Storie*, operated a rather basic transfer of words from one language to another, keeping the untranslatable ones as they were, often in Romanian. They probably tried to render it faithfully and the end result is certainly interesting, but only a poet can translate a poet. The magic was gone.

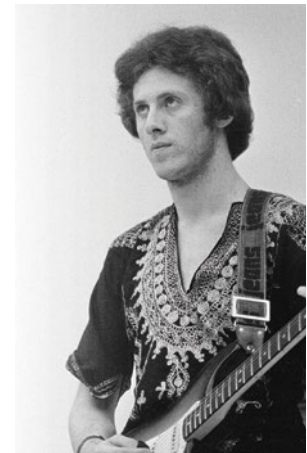
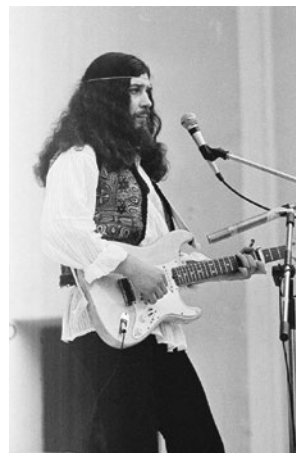
When Phoenix crossed the Iron Curtain, their rebelliousness faded away. From a Westerner point of view, the new rebels were the punk rockers of the day. Concept-albums were a little bit passé. Progressive Rock went into hyper-inflation and the New Wave rode the musical waves. When that fashionable rebel quality was taken away from them, Phoenix were left with one choice: to adapt their music to the new situation. They tried to adapt, but what had once made them famous (their links with intellectualism and the art world, or with the world of theatre and cinema) was now gone.



▲ Phoenix playing with the Brănești Timpanists at an unknown date, perhaps during the Sarmizegetusa concert.

Source: <http://transsylvania-phoenix.de/>.

▼ Phoenix on their last tour upon the return of Nicolae Covaci with humanitarian aid after the 1977 Vrancea Earthquake: Nicolae Covaci, Erlend Krauser, Mircea Baniciu, Josef Kappl, Ovidiu Lipan). The photos were taken on May 20, 1977 at a Phoenix venue in the open-air cinema of Craiova by photographer Victor Boldâr, who accompanied his 16-year-old son to the concert. They were presented in a local exhibition on January 12, 2012 at the Art Gallery of Craiova, and published alongside a short article by Cristina Irian («Victor Boldâr: Phoenix - Ultimul concert», *Mondorama*, June 1, 2017, online version at <https://mondorama.ro/>). A couple of weeks later, Nicolae Covaci crossed the Yugoslav border with three other members (Kappl, Lipan, and Krauser) hidden inside the band’s Marshall amplifiers.



Their success-story in Communist Romania was determined by a plethora of factors which were absent in the West, where everything was reduced to economic competition. When they were still in the old country, Phoenix lived with the impression that the West was the one they listened to on the records of the late '60s and early '70s. It had changed. In the '80s, Covaci still lived with the impression that their success depended on the adaptation of folklore; he still believes this to this day. Yet, their success depended on the fact that Romania was a closed universe, with different rules. Phoenix had experienced a sort of bubble effect.

The only contracts that they could sign were with record companies that had previously pressed LP-s of bands coming from the Eastern Bloc. The Kappl, Krauser, and Lipan LP was released by Antagon, the German counterpart of the French label Hexagone, where many Medieval and Celtic Folk artists released their music (Malicorne, Dan Ar Bras, La Bamboche, but also the Austrian band Schmetterlinge). Kolinda, a group of Hungarian students from the Institute of Folk Studies in Budapest who played ancient instruments, released their three LP-s at Hexagone in 1976, 1977, and 1979. They were produced by Hughes de Courson, a member of the French medieval-music band Malicorne. And the last Kolinda LP, entitled 1514 was jointly released by Hexagone in France and Antagon in Germany, in the exact same year when the three ex-members of Phoenix pressed their *Madhouse* LP.

Nicolae Covaci, on the other hand, released his *Transsylvania Phoenix* LP at Bacillus Records, a label known for

▼ *Madhouse: From the East (Antagon – ALP 3232, LP, stereo, 1979); Transsylvania Phoenix (Bacillus Records – 260-09-005, LP, stereo, 1981); and the first Romanian LP of Mircea Baniciu, released the same year (Electrecord – ST EDE-01836, LP, stereo, 1981). Source: <https://www.discogs.com/>.*

pressing Krautrock and Progressive Rock, not only German, but also from the Eastern Bloc. Omega, the Hungarian band, had a contract with Bacillus Records. But these were small record companies, distribution was not great, and the members of Phoenix did not adapt to the labels' profiles. Kappl and Krauser did not record anything in a medieval or Folk vein; Covaci didn't record any Progressive music either.

It looks like they secured those contracts when they presented their Jethro-Tullish songs from the 'Flute Bud' LP. In the West, Phoenix didn't try to translate any of the *Cantafabule* songs, perhaps because they knew they were untranslatable, as that music was born out of the lyrics, and not vice-versa. They suffered, because their fans did not fill any stadiums. Phoenix tried to have the cake and eat it too, unable to understand that the world that they admired from afar was fundamentally different from the one in which they had become the ultimate Rock band. This is, of course, a working hypothesis, constructed according to a scientific research method. This does not mean that the working hypothesis represents the truth. It is only an interpretation and it needs to be verified.

Instead of validating this study through peer-reviews, as it is customary in academia, the author chose a different path. Peer-reviewing would confront this hypothesis with other equally subjective hypotheses, leading it astray rather than objectifying it. It is infinitely more useful to verify how effective the research method is.

The current interpretation must be compared to the personal history of the painter, of the arranger, and to that of the writer. In the current experiment, those who could have been the peer-reviewers of the article are invited to compare their own hypotheses with the personal point of view of the creators. Historiography is confronted with memory. Yet, for once, memory has the upper hand.

