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## THE PROMOTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL AESTHETICS THROUGH THE USE OF CONTEMPORARY ADORNMENTS

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**Abstract.** This study accentuates the importance of the contemporary jewelry in the promotion of the national Bessarabian identity. Romanian jewelry and adornments can include traditional elements, materials and techniques for the purpose of creating a unique masterpiece, which reflect Romanian culture. The ways through which contemporary jewelry can help promote Romanian national and traditional identity include inspiring traditional motifs, exploring cultural symbols, education and awareness, collaborating with local designers, and promoting sustainability. This study highlights the vital role of contemporary jewelry in preserving and transmitting Romanian Cultural Values in Bessarabia to future generations and in creating deep connections between artists, designers and the local community. It also highlights the importance of national identity in the development of contemporary jewelry, which can contribute to the promotion of Romanian traditions and crafts in the contemporary global context.

**Keywords:** *Bessarabian fine jeweler, contemporary jewelry, national and cultural identity, sustainability, traditional motifs in jeweler*

**Rezumat.** Acest studiu evidențiază importanța bijuteriilor contemporane în promovarea identității naționale basarabene. Bijuteriile și podoabele românești pot încorpora elemente tradiționale, materiale și tehnici pentru a crea opere de artă, unice care să reflecte cultura românească. Modurile prin care bijuteriile contemporane pot contribui la promovarea identității naționale și tradiționale românești includ inspirarea din motive tradiționale, explorarea simbolurilor culturale, educație și conștientizare, colaborări cu designerii locali și promovarea sustenabilității. Acest studiu subliniază rolul vital al bijuteriilor contemporane în conservarea și transmiterea valorilor culturale românești din Basarabia către generațiile viitoare și în crearea unor conexiuni profunde între artiști, designeri și comunitatea locală. De asemenea, evidențiază importanța identității naționale în dezvoltarea bijuteriilor contemporane, care pot contribui la promovarea tradițiilor și meșteșugurilor românești în contextul global contemporan.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *bijuterie basarabeană, podoabă contemporană, identitatea națională și culturală, sustenabilitate, motive tradiționale în bijuterie.*

## **1. Introduction**

Contemporary clothing adornments can play a significant role in promoting national ideology and traditional Romanian stylistics. They can combine modern elements with traditional influences to create unique works of art that reflect the beauty and richness of Romanian culture. Jewelry is an inseparable part of the costume, often representing its particularities [1, p. 116]. Contemporary jewelry can be a powerful way of promoting national identity and traditional Romanian Stylistics reflected through creativity, innovation and respect for traditions. Contemporary jewelry can be a powerful way of promoting national identity and traditional Romanian Stylistics reflected through creativity, innovation and respect for traditions. They can contribute to the preservation and transmission of Romanian Cultural Values to future generations and to the growth of a deep connection between jewelers, designers and the local community.

The ethnic identity of a human community is manifested through the historical evolution, cultural influences and the transmission from one generation to another of the specific heritage, which illustrates the ethnic particularities of the Romanian people. The Moldavian folk costume preserved the lirico-thraco-Dacian substrate [2, p. 12]. This cultural heritage is visible in the aesthetic expression of contemporary jewelry and clothing adornments, thus contributing to the promotion of the cultural values of the Romanian people within the Republic of Moldova.

With the status of candidate country in the European Union obtained by the Republic of Moldova, it highlights the integration of our country into the experience and practices of other European states in terms of documentation, preservation and protection of national cultural heritage through scientific methods. This status implies a great responsibility through the academic community involved in research, including with regard to the identification, valorization and promotion of the cultural treasure.

The National Museum of History of Moldova (NMHM), the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History (NMENH), The National Museum of Art of Moldova and the National Library (NMAMNL) were the main scientific and cultural forums that organized many events during the years of independence of the Republic of Moldova, such as publications in magazines such as "Tyragetia" and "Buletin Stiintific", presentation sessions, exhibitions, etc. Recently, the topic of cultural heritage has entered the range of activity of the Museum of History of Chisinau, which also frequently organizes cultural and scientific events [3]. Throughout the historical evolution, we have witnessed the process of enriching the physical appearance and manner of wearing clothing of the Romanian people, including handmade jewelry and adornments, made of precious metals or textile materials, being decorated with various symbols [4]. Therefore, we have a valuable and representative cultural heritage, inherited from our ancestors, which is carefully cherished in families and the institutions of national museums.

The research of specialists in the field of jewelry and fashion design tries to reveal the morphological stylistics of jewelry and adornments, providing a deep understanding of the concept of style. It consists of a set of elements specific to a particular historical period [5, p.53-57], based on the evaluation principles that define a specific artistic and aesthetic language. Along with elements of impressive aesthetics, designers are engaged in a continuous search for innovation, combining functionality with beauty. This approach allows them to create remarkable collections and clothing accessories, capable of satisfying the most demanding standards of pragmatism and the most refined tastes.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

There are presented several research methods used for the study of contemporary clothing adornments and promotion of national identity and traditional Romanian Stylistics. These methods include historical, typological, formal-stylistic research and the analysis of cultural and ethnic influences.

The author explores the historical evolution of Romanian jewelry, identifying stylistic changes and cultural influences, and examines the types of traditional jewelry, highlighting their common and differential characteristics. It also analyzes the cultural and national symbols and motifs present in the jewelry and investigates the artistic styles and traditional aesthetics applied in their creation. In addition, it explores cultural and ethnic influences and strategies to promote national identity. These research methods are essential for the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and for the promotion of traditional Romanian aesthetics in the modern context.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### **Historical evolution and stylistic aspects**

The evolution and initial studies in the field of jewelery and adornment making marked a continuous development of the understanding of stylistic-morphological characteristics. These researches investigated aspects such as symmetry, proportion, use of materials and the design itself. These studies contributed to the development of a quantity of knowledge that provided craftsmen and designers with the necessary tools to create jewelry and adornments of great beauty being in constant evolution. Through this research, significant innovations were brought to the field and a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and functional aspects involved in the making of jewelry and clothing adornments was developed.

The review of the historical evolution and traditional stylistics in the specific Romanian context reveals a rustic aesthetic, characterized by the artisanal approach [6, p.136-137], which conveys a symbol related to nature, through the selection of colors, materials and symbols used. This continuous development of traditional crafts in Bessarabia, starting with the end of the 19th century and continuing into the 21st Century, gives a remarkable significance to the style specific to Romanian national adornments and jewelry, highlighting in particular the influence of folk art. This influence is particularly significant in the field of jewelry and adornments and has a profound impact on the development and promotion of a distinct style that masterfully combines tradition with innovation in contemporary creations. Thus, this collaboration between craftsmen and contemporary designers contributes to the preservation and enrichment of the cultural heritage and to the creation of works of art that reflect the national identity and Romanian folk art in a modern and innovative way.

The artisanal jewel works created by traditional craftsmen from various localities currently add value to the collections of museums, such as the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History and, the Museum of Archeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of SSRM until its absorption in 2006, by the National History Museum of Moldova being created the National Museum of Archeology and History of Moldova, etc., which constitutes the most imposing documentary source consisting of preserved archaeological and museum pieces. Through the museum collections one can use truthful information about the clothing adornments on the territory of Bessarabia. These

creations include jewelry and adornments such as bracelets, necklaces and beads from seeds and grains, as well as decorative ceramic objects, which vary according to the geographical characteristics of the different regions of the country, including the decor, shape and color palette used, Figures 1-4. All these Romanian artisanal artifacts not only represent a tradition and a historical imprint, but are also objects of interest for tourists exploring the country.



**Figure 1.** Metal pendants. Bulgarian and Gagauz women's adornment. Southern Basarabia, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, NMENH. Photo Matcan-Lisenco Inga from the personal archive, 2021.



**Figure 2.** Brass buckles, NMENH. Photo Matcan-Lisenco Inga from the personal archive, 2021.



**Figure 3.** Buckles, plaques and clothing accessories. (14<sup>th</sup> c. Costesti, Ialoveni District), NHMM. Photo Matcan-Lisenco Inga from the personal archive, 2023.



**Figure 4.** Enkolpions, bronze. (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Republic of Moldova). NNMM. Photo Matcan-Lisenco Inga from the personal archive, 2023.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, within the local communities, festive events are organized to promote folk costume, traditions and traditional customs. In addition, folk craftsmen and designers contribute to enriching clothing with traditional Romanian elements, including configurations and decorations for adornments, ornaments, etc.

### **Cultural and stylistic interactions between various ethnic groups**

When analyzing the history of Bessarabia, which included invasions, changes in statehood, military conflicts and developments in the forms of government and social organization, we can observe the interethnic cultural influences of the communications that inhabited this region [7, p.80-83]. From archival documents, we learn that Bessarabia was inhabited by Moldovans, Romanians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, Russians, Poles, Cossacks, Armenians and members of various religious sects who contributed

to leaving specific stylistic prints. The ornaments discovered in the treasures of migratory peoples (Huns, Scythians, Goths) also have a special significance Figures 5 and 6.



**Figure 5.** Gold earrings, scythian period (4-3<sup>th</sup> century. Gorgan near the village of Butor), NHMM [8].



**Figure 6.** Golden grivna for neck from the scythian period. (4-3<sup>th</sup> century. Gorgan near the village of Butor), NHMM. Photos from the Museum's heritage [8].

For example, the invasion of the Ottoman Empire on the territory of Bessarabia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century [9, p. 77-79] it had a significant influence on adornments and jewelry in the region during the following period. This influence was the result of the cultural interaction between the native inhabitants of Bessarabia and the Ottoman masters and had several aspects, Table 1.

Table 1

**The influence of the Ottoman invasion on the Bessarabian jewelry**

Use of Ottoman materials	Traditional materials used in traditional jewelry such as gold, silver, semi-precious stones, began to be used in the production of jewelry in Bessarabia and this contributed to the development of new styles and methods in the region.
Ottoman production styles and techniques.	Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the inhabitants of Bessarabia were exposed to specific styles and production techniques, this led to stylistic influences such as: characteristic geometric and floral motifs, the use of cloisonne enamel.
Incorporating local traditional elements.	Traditional Bessarabian elements, such as floral and geometric motifs specific to the region, were frequently combined with Ottoman influences, giving rise to unique and hybrid creations such as: earrings with beads of a large variety [10, p. 237-242], <i>temple pendants with the characteristics of kolt</i> , with one, three or more beads [11], made of silver, bronze, earrings with printed openwork beads, <i>smooth pendants</i> reminiscent of early Byzantine samples. Adornments with abundant decor, granulation, filigree wire.
Preservation of cultural identity.	Jewelry and adornments were, in a way, carriers of cultural identity. They remained important to the local community, preserving and promoting Bessarabia's cultural heritage despite Ottoman rule.

In Bessarabia, some of the ornaments and jewelry were brought from Transylvania and Italy [11, 12]. Therefore, in the region under consideration, a significant variety of beaded

jewelry was noted, with notable differences both in the shape of the bow and in the quantity, technique of execution and peculiarities of the beaded ornament. Overall, the invasion of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century introduced stylistic and technical influences in the production of jewelry and adornment from Bessarabia, however, these influences were harmoniously integrated into the cultural identity and local context.

The influence of German settlers in the late nineteenth century during the invasion of Bessarabia in World War II on adornments and jewelry in the region was a complex and often tense process. The distinct characteristics of this influence being evident, Table 2.

*Table 2*

**Influence of German settlers on Bessarabian jewel**

Impact on local production.	German troops brought with them a number of modifications and transformations in the local production of ornaments and jewelry. The raw materials and technologies, typical of German culture, were influenced by the context of the war and the limited resources available: semi-precious stones, colored glass, silver, brass, oxidized metal, enamel and engraved emblems, natural and organic materials (wood, bone, etc.).
Adaptation to German styles.	Simplicity and functionality, alternative materials, glass and enamel.
Military and patriotic elements.	Under the influence of Nazi ideology, jewelry and adornments were decorated with military and patriotic symbols, images that reflected patriotism and loyalty to German troops.
Limited materials and resources.	Due to the lack of precious materials, alternative materials such as copper and nickel were used, these being much more affordable. Glass and enamel allowed the creation of pieces with colorful ornaments that offered more variety in aesthetics and semiprecious stones – Amethyst, Garnet added value and strong sentimental and symbolic meaning to jewelry.
Social and political pressures.	Under the domination of German troops, the production of jewelry was often subordinated to social and political pressures. This influenced the theme and aesthetics of jewelry and adornments.

During World War II, German styles and aesthetic preferences, marked by austerity, functionality and patriotism, exerted a significant influence on jewelry and adornments in Bessarabia and other regions occupied by Nazi Germany. This influence was evident by the adaptation to German styles, the presence of military and patriotic symbols, the use of alternative materials creatively, and the subordination of the production of jewelry and adornments to social and political requirements imposed by the Nazi regime. Thus, the jewels and adornments from this area became reflections of the ideology and the specific context of the Second World War and the German occupation in the Bessarabia region. This process generated creations with elegant lines and refined shapes, thus contributing to the development of a distinct local style and influencing the cultural heritage of the region.

Bessarabia created a unique stylistic identity in the design and materials of adornments, incorporating various influences that contributed to the development of Bessarabian national identity, Figures 7a, b and 8 [2, 12 p. 10-21].



a)

**Figure 7.** Ritual objects for betrothal. Ungheni, 1940s, National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History (NMENH): a) crown; b) crowns, belt.

Photo Mațcan-Lîsenco Inga from the personal archive, 2023.



b)

**Figure 8.** Tamara

Yatsintkovskaya, opera singer.

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century, NHMM.

Photo Mațcan-Lîsenco Inga from the personal archive, 2021.

### **Adoption of environmentally friendly materials and technologies from cultural heritage for the creation of contemporary jewelry and adornments**

The incorporation of ecological materials and technologies from cultural heritage in the creation of contemporary jewelry and adornments in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century can be achieved through several strategies and approaches:

- The selection of sustainable and environmentally friendly materials;
- Recycling and reuse of old jewelry may include smelting metals for reuse or remodeling;
- The encouragement of hand-crafted craftsmanship and the use of traditional metalworking techniques. It can bring a unique and authentic element to contemporary creations;
- Education and awareness of the community and adornment wearers about environmentally friendly materials and their importance for the environment;
- Cooperation with local communities and artisans to obtain traditional natural materials sustainably and responsibly;
- The collaboration with local jewelers and designers can lead to the development of jewelry collections that reflect with innovation elements of traditional Romanian Stylistics in the fashion industry;
- design inspired by cultural heritage, the use of traditional cultural symbols to create jewelry and adornments with a connection to cultural heritage. This may include the use of traditional symbols or techniques in a modern and innovative way;
- Ethics and transparency through clear communication of the provenance of materials with commitment to compliance with ethical and environmental standards;
- sustainability awareness in design and marketing, highlighting how jewelry and adornments can and can be inherited and appreciated in the long run;

- the use of advanced technologies for processing and fixing environmentally friendly materials. Technologies such as 3D printing, laser processing can be applied to create complex and detailed models [13, p. 231-233].

Incorporating ecological materials and technologies from cultural heritage into contemporary jewelry and adornments in the 21st Century represents an innovative and responsible approach that can contribute to protecting the environment and preserving traditional cultural values.

Eco-friendly materials are a major challenge for jewelers, designers, craftsmen, but also for the customers of clothing adornment items. Traditional Bessarabian objects, such as *ie*, carpets, barks, towels, provide an unlimited source of inspiration for Romanian artists, due to the domination of vegetal motifs, transmitted in the form of a treasure of symbols. Traditional Bessarabian carpets, Romanian *ie* illustrate the distinctive approach to motifs such as flowers, leaves, birds, trees offering a variety of shapes and colors. These articles reflect the ability of the Romanian (Bessarabian) people to interpret stylized concrete contents, such as vines, cruciform symbols, tree of life, seasons. All these elements contribute to the diversity and richness of the cultural heritage of traditional Bessarabian crafts.

The promotion of national identity in contemporary jewelry and adornments can be approached through an interdisciplinary process, involving the integration of specific cultural and aesthetic elements [14] of a nation in current creations in the field of jewelry and decorative art. This strategy may include the use of national symbols, traditional materials, specific-cultural processing techniques, and collaboration with local artisans to convey and perpetuate elements of cultural identity in the context of contemporary jewelry. It also involves an educational and awareness approach to convey to the public the significance and importance of the gem as a means of expressing national identity. Specialized art exhibitions and fairs can be ideal platforms to showcase these creations and to encourage dialogue between artists and the public interested in a nation's cultural and aesthetic values.

Both worldwide and in the Republic of Moldova, there have been observed recent developments in the fields of jewelry, visual arts, in which new concepts and methodologies have been developed. They are oriented towards the promotion of national identity and are adapted to meet the needs of a profound transformation, with significant implications anchored in contemporary reality.

The style of contemporary jewelry in the Romanian space is characterized by the transcultural and transdisciplinary approach, based on the adaptation of techniques, materials and concepts [15, p. 153-157] from diverse cultural sources. It combines local traditions with global influences, highlighting interaction with the environment through the use of sustainable and recyclable materials.

In addition, jeweler aesthetics explores advanced tailoring techniques such as 3D printing and Computer Technology [16, p. 33-36], to create innovative forms and structures. Thus, jewelry becomes more than just accessories, but also means of communication and artistic expression.

Contemporary clothing adornments from Bessarabia and Romania represent an interdisciplinary field in development, which combines art, science of materials and sociocultural aspects, making a significant and innovative contribution to the evolution of contemporary jewelry, Figures 9-11.





**Figure 9.** Set of adornments, Autor Petru Turtureanu, 2017, From the Museum of Visual Arts of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Chisinau [17]. Photo Matcan-Lisenco Inga from the personal archive, 2021.



**Figure 10.** Ring *Spice fierbinți*, Autor Mațcan-Lîsenco Adrian, 2000 From the private collection Canada [15]. Foto Matcan Adrian from the personal archive, 2020.



**Figure 11.** Earrings, *Returning to the Origins*, Autor Tiron Olga, 1994 From the Museum of Visual Arts of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Chisinau [17]. Photo Tiron Olga from the personal archive, 2022.

Contemporary jewelry and accessories currently align on the principle of minimalism, while traditional ones continue to bring elements from the past to the present. This trend includes the use of rough textures, naturalistic configurations, surfaces with pronounced roughness, imitations and influences of traditional ornaments, among others, Table 3.

Table 3

**The influence of traditions and craft techniques in the design of Bessarabian clothing ornaments**

Materials and processing.	Romanian peasant communities meticulously made ornaments from natural materials such as wool, cotton, flax and hemp, which were grown and processed by hand.
Clothing items	Embroidery, straps and beads were elaborated with attention to detail and used traditional sewing and embroidery techniques passed down from generation to generation.
Cultural expressions	Adornments were expressions of cultural and social identity, used in important ceremonies and celebrations.
Rediscovery in design	Traditional traditions and techniques are rediscovered and harnessed in contemporary fashion, bringing authenticity and cultural roots.
Cultural heritage	The connection between the past and the present preserves and brings into contemporary light the cultural heritage, offering an innovative perspective on traditions and artisan techniques.

The findings of this study bring into attention a series of significant implications in the context of promoting Romanian national identity through clothing. These implications can be discussed in a broader context to emphasize their importance and serve as a starting point for future research. At the same time, it is important to highlight the limitations of this

study, as well as the potential research directions based on the results obtained: geographical limitation – the study focuses mainly on the Republic of Moldova, which may limit the generalization of the results to other regions or cultures; time limitation – the study is based on data and trends specific to a particular point in time, which may affect its long-term relevance. This study paves the way for a number of researches: exploring the similarities and differences between the promotion of national identity through jewelry in Bessarabia and other countries and cultures; further research can explore new technologies that can be integrated in the manufacture of jewelry, as well as how they can influence traditional aesthetics; the economic and social impact of the traditional jewelry industry in the development of local communities, etc. [5, p. 10].

## 5. Conclusions

The study emphasizes the importance of ethnic and cultural identity in promoting traditional Romanian aesthetics through clothing adornments, highlighting the stylistic evolution and cultural influences in traditional jewelry. It also discusses the need to adopt environmentally friendly materials and modern technologies in the production of contemporary jewelry and examines the cultural interactions between various ethnic groups in terms of integration and local tradition. The implications of these findings for the preservation and promotion of national identity through contemporary jewelry and adornments are significant, although the study of geographical and time limitations also opens prospects for further research, including cross-cultural comparisons and the evolving economic and social impact of the traditional jewelry industry.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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