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**WEDDING ATTIRE ENSEMBLE  
IN BESSARABIA AND THE MOLDAVIAN SSR:  
ETHNO-HISTORICAL ASPECTS**

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## CONCEPTUAL LANDMARKS OF THE RESEARCH

*“The Romanian wedding, as it is celebrated, constitutes an ethnographic and artistic manifestation imbued with profound symbols and bearing a well-defined role in the life of the community.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Relevance of the topic.** Clothing – both everyday and festive – viewed as a language of nonverbal communication provides valuable information about its wearer, revealing aspects such as ethnicity, age, gender, faith, etc. From an ethnological, historical, and artistic standpoint, the wedding attire ensemble, which evolved substantially particularly throughout the 20th century, holds a special place in the complex study of clothing. The wedding, as the cultural counterpart of marriage, stands between two major moments in a person’s life: arriving in the world at Birth and departing it at Death. Historians, ethnologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and theologians have been engaged in endless discussions on these core subjects of human existence on Earth. In this thesis, we aim to explore and highlight the attire ensemble of one of the most beautiful events in a person’s life – The Wedding – the most complex manifestation among family customs.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, our endeavor carries significant scholarly responsibility and focuses on a multidisciplinary study of the wedding attire ensemble life – a subject not previously examined in its full complexity, compared to the marital ceremony at large, which has typically been investigated as a separate research dimension.

Both civil and religious marriage represent a multifaceted nuptial system that comprises not only the marriage itself but also numerous aesthetic, psychological, social, and economic aspects; therefore, our intention to spotlight the wedding attire ensemble acquires a multidisciplinary character, seeking answers to various questions about the clothing items, event-specific accessories, and indispensable religious objects used in the wedding ceremony.

In this context, the wedding ceremony is a major milestone in a person’s development, positioning the individual in a network of roles and relationships within society. The attire ensemble worn during a particular period directly reflects economic conditions and social relationships, conveying a specific identity-related message. Over time, the wedding has evolved from ancestral customs into a well-directed performance between the sacred and the secular, displaying the socioeconomic status of the couple and their families.

Unquestionably, a people’s art and traditions have found special expression in their folk costume, which, in its festive form, was occasionally worn during the wedding ceremony. This observation is echoed by the ethnologist Varvara Buzilă, who notes that

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<sup>1</sup> POPESCU, Ion Apostol. *Studii de folclor și artă populară*. București: Editura Minerva, 1970, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> MUȘA, Cristian. Bradul și steagul în cadrul nunții românești. Descriere, funcționalitate și simbolistică, în trecut și în contemporaneitate. In: *Anuarul Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor „Constantin Brăiloiu”*, S.n., București: Editura Academiei Române, 2020, tom. 3, p. 103, [online] [citat 02.12.2024]. Disponibil: <https://academiaromana.ro/ief/docAnuar/Anuar-IEF-2020.pdf>

after the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire in 1812, “the prestige of these traditional clothes gradually declined under the impact of commercial products,” underscoring that the standout piece life – the blouse with ‘*altîță*’ (a traditional decorative shoulder embroidery) life – continued to be used only for the most important life rituals (weddings, communal dances, military send-offs), being handcrafted at home.<sup>3</sup> We also learn that “in the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, brides wore a traditional costume to weddings, featuring the most beautiful blouses with ‘*altîță*’. As a wedding gift for the groom’s parents and for the groom, the bride, together with her friends, would embroider shirts prior to the wedding.”<sup>4</sup> Notably, for Bessarabia in the interwar period, the most famous blouse with ‘*altîță*’ was worn by Elena Alistar, a deputy in the Council of the Country, and this blouse became a treasured heritage garment.<sup>5</sup>

Our interest in the wedding attire ensemble arises from today’s tendency to return to ancestral customs and traditions, which takes shape in efforts to preserve and promote heritage items. A historical, ethnological, and artistic study of the wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century is crucial for gaining insight into that era’s traditions, values, and cultural heritage.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, the wedding dress in the wedding attire ensemble becomes the centerpiece of utmost interest, incorporating multiple factors related to the bride’s (and her family’s) socioeconomic status, her chastity, and the influences of current fashion trends. A special place is also reserved for the traditional blouse with ‘*altîță*’ worn by the bride and groom, the godparents, and even guests at the wedding, underscoring the significance of the event.<sup>7</sup>

A noticeable trend in the Romanian cultural sphere is to preserve, during civil or religious marriages, a wedding dress of traditional style – embroidered with distinctive Romanian motifs – researched in detail for each region, effectively serving as an identifying marker in a local cultural code. We find that the items in the wedding attire ensemble hold particular weight in preserving cultural heritage thanks to their role in wedding ceremonies both in urban and rural settings. Part of our research aims to highlight this vital heritage segment. Furthermore, these items carry a strong educational role in fostering respect for family values and in promoting an appreciation of heri-

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<sup>3</sup> BUZILĂ, Varvara. Arta cămășii cu altîță – element de identitate culturală (propusă pentru înscriere în lista reprezentativă a patrimoniului cultural imaterial al umanității UNESCO). In: *Akados*, 2021, nr. 1, pp. 153-168.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 153-168

<sup>5</sup> VIERU-IȘAEV, Maria. Elena Alistar – deputat în Sfatul Țării, pedagog și promotoare a portului popular. In: *Buletin Științific. Revistă de Etnografie, Științele Naturii și Muzeologie, fascicula Etnografie și Muzeologie*, serie nouă, vol. 29 (42), Chișinău, 2018, pp. 6-21; CONDRAȚICOVA, Liliana; BUJOREAN, Tatiana; CERCAȘIN, Marina; TOCARCIUC, Alina; PINTILEI, Elena; ISCHIMJI, Ana. Actul Unirii Basarabiei cu România de la 1918 și patrimoniul cultural: impact, evoluție, perspective. In: *Dialogica*, 2023, nr. 1(S), supl. nr. 1, pp. 141-154.

<sup>6</sup> MIRON, Marina; NICOGLO, Diana. Patrimoniu și patrimonializare: experiența țărilor europene și a Republicii Moldova. In: *Akados*. 2019, nr. 2(53), pp. 154-160. ISSN 1857-0461.

<sup>7</sup> BUZILĂ, Varvara. Arta cămășii cu altîță – element de identitate culturală. In: *Akados*, 2021, nr. 1, pp. 153-168; *INVENTARUL național al elementelor vii de patrimoniu cultural imaterial* (National Inventory of Active Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements) [online] [citat 02.06.2023]. Disponibil: <https://www.patrimoniuimaterial.md/sites/default/files/Arta%20camasii%20cu%20altita-element%20de%20identitate%20culturala%20in%20Republica%20Moldova..pdf>.

tage and its legacy. Thus, wedding clothing and its accessories function as a means of nonverbal communication, visually transmitting valuable information about material and spiritual culture, as well as the wearer's socioeconomic status. Seen in this light, wedding clothing forms a rich research subject, considering the necessity of in-the-field identification, cataloging, description, preservation, and promotion of these items as an integral component of the country's cultural heritage.

In our research, we have elected to use several terms depending on context (explained more fully in the main body of the thesis): **Wedding dress**, the focal piece in the wedding ceremony worn by the bride on the day of the civil marriage and the religious ceremony; **Wedding costume**, comprising the key garments characteristic of either the bride or the groom; **Wedding attire ensemble**, denoting all clothing pieces, footwear, and accessories used during the wedding ceremony.

In this setting, the bride and groom's attire stands out as part of the festive outfit worn during both the calendar cycle of holidays and family events. Concerning the wearing of traditional folk costume in the wedding ceremony, we use the phrase "**Romanian folk costume**" for Bessarabia within Greater Romania, while noting that in the Soviet period a synthetic, stylized version came into use, designated by specialists as the "**Moldovan national costume**," supposedly worn by the "Moldovan people" perceived as distinct from the Romanian people, in accordance with Soviet state policies and ideology.<sup>8</sup>

Addressing the clothing items used in the wedding ceremony illustrates the relevance and importance of our selected research topic – one that requires clarifying the terminology as well as an in-depth examination of the garments and accessories used at weddings by Romanians in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR. This also entails looking at the wedding attire of local Bulgarians, Gagauz, and Ukrainians – whether rural or urban dwellers – who could become a separate line of inquiry.

Additionally, various beliefs that differ by region focus, in popular tradition, specifically on the wedding dress and its accessories. Concerning such beliefs (or superstitions), G.S. Ioneanu wrote "*Mica colecțiune de superstițiile poporului român*"<sup>9</sup> ("A Brief Collection of Romanian Folk Superstitions") in 1888. In 1915, Artur Gorovei covered Romanian beliefs and traditions – from birth to marriage – in a work later republished in 2012.<sup>10</sup> Numerous aspects of the wedding have been approached from ethnological and anthropological perspectives by Arnold Van Gennep, whose study on rites of passage is highly valuable for understanding the wedding phenomenon as a critical threshold in a person's life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> CONDRATICOVA, Liliana; BUJOREAN, Tatiana; CERCAȘIN, Marina; TOCARCIUC, Alina; PINTILEI, Elena. Expedițiile etnografice și importanța lor în dezvoltarea artizanatului din RSS Moldovenească. In: *Akademios*, 2020, nr. 2(57), pp. 144-154.

<sup>9</sup> *Mica colecțiune de superstițiile poporului român*, adunate de G.S. Ioneanu, Buzău: Editura Librăriei Modernă A. Davidescu, 1888, 90 p. [online] [citată 12.04.2021]. Disponibil: <https://ru.scribd.com/document/338443157/1888-George-S-Ioneanu-Mica-colecțiune-de-superstițiile-poporului-roman-pdf#>.

<sup>10</sup> GOROVEI, Artur. *Credințe și superstiții ale poporului român*. 1915. Colecția MITHOS, Editura Saeculum, 2012. 512 p.; GOROVEI, Artur. *Datinile noastre la naștere și la nuntă*. București: Paideia. 2002, 176 p.

<sup>11</sup> GENNEP, Arnold Van. *Les rites de passage*. Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard, 1981, 288 pp + 29 pp. [online] [citată 02.09.2024]. Disponibil: [https://www.berose.fr/IMG/pdf/les\\_rites\\_de\\_passage\\_1909.pdf](https://www.berose.fr/IMG/pdf/les_rites_de_passage_1909.pdf)

Given the contemporary focus on preserving traditions and promoting cultural heritage, as well as the historical, ethnological, anthropological, and artistic importance of the wedding attire ensemble and its evolution in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, and given the scarcity of multidisciplinary national historiographical research covering these dimensions, we are justified in our intention to conduct a comprehensive scientific study on the wedding attire ensemble during the years 1918–1991.

**Degree of research on the topic.** Although numerous studies have been devoted to the wedding ceremony, they have prioritized the wedding phenomenon in the Romanian space<sup>12</sup>, wedding traditions in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR<sup>13</sup>, music<sup>14</sup>, bread-making<sup>15</sup> for wedding customs<sup>16</sup> - at the expense of examining the wedding attire ensemble in detail. The available publications dealing specifically with wedding clothing<sup>17</sup> and related accessories<sup>18</sup> are few, creating obstacles that have led us to pursue this extensive and unique investigation to bring to light the items forming the wedding attire ensemble, assessed via our own research methodology encompassing historical, anthropological, and artistic perspectives.

Our work draws on archival materials from the National Archives Agency (ANA), the archives of the Chişinău City History Museum (MIOC), and the digitized ethnographic archives of the Institute of Cultural Heritage<sup>19</sup>, which provided us with unpublished and relevant data.

In describing the accessories and ecclesiastical objects used in the wedding ceremony, we found valuable references in historical photographs, as well as in pieces held by the National Museum of History of Moldova and the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History in Chişinău<sup>20</sup>. Local museum collections (from Beşalma in Comrat

<sup>12</sup> MARIAN, S.FI. *Nunta la români: studiu istorico-comparativ etnografic*. Bucureşti: Saeculum, 2000. 576 p.; EVSEEV, I. *Simbolica nunţii româneşti*. Bucureşti, 1993. 198 p.; DATCU, M. Obiceiuri de nuntă basarabene. In: *Datini*, 1994, nr. 3-4, 43 p.; NOICA C. *Nunta la români*. Antologie din poezia ceremonialului de nuntă. Bucureşti: 1997. 282 p.; CĂLĂRAŞU, C. *Obiceiuri româneşti de nuntă*. Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii, 1999. 284 p.; GOROVEI, A. *Datinile noastre la naştere şi la nuntă*. Bucureşti: Paideia, 2002. 149 p.; CIUBOTARU, Silvia. *Obiceiuri nupţiale din Moldova*. Iaşi: Editura Univ. „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2009. 782 p.

<sup>13</sup> ЗЕЛЕНЧУК, В.С. Очерки молдавской обрядности XIX – нач. XX век. Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1959; HÂNCU, A.S.; ZELENCIUC, V.S. *Folclorul obiceiurilor de familie*. Chişinău: Ştiinţa, 1979. 310 p.; GHIMPU, S. *Nunta şi alte obiceiuri moldoveneşti*. Chişinău: Cartea moldovenească, 1990. 118 p.

<sup>14</sup> BADRAJAN, Svetlana. *Muzica în ceremonialul nupţial din Basarabia. Cântecele miresei*. Chişinău: Epigraf, 2002. 220 p.

<sup>15</sup> BUZILĂ, Varvara. *Pâinea: aliment şi simbol: experienţa sacrului*. Chişinău: Ştiinţa, 1999. 373 p.; BUZILĂ, Varvara. *Pâinea, aliment şi simbol. Experienţa sacrului*. Bucureşti: Editura Gastroart, 2019. 352 p.

<sup>16</sup> ŞIŞCANU, Elena. Nunta ca rit de trecere. Studiu de caz. Nunta cehilor din Moldova. In: *Buletin Ştiinţific. Revista de Etnografie, Ştiinţele Naturii şi Muzeologie*. Ser. nouă. Etnografie şi Muzeologie. 2009, nr. 11, pp. 79-96; CIOCANU, Maria. Tradiţia nunţii în satele din raionul Rezina. In: *Revista de Etnografie, Ştiinţele Naturii şi Muzeologie*. Ser. nouă. Etnografie şi Muzeologie. 2010, nr. 13, pp. 73-85; COJOCARU, Ludmila. Tradiţia de nuntă în comunităţile de basarabeni deportaţi în Siberia şi Kazahstan. In: *Akados*, 2018, nr. 2, pp. 132-139; COJOCARU, Ludmila. Obiceiuri şi moravuri privind castitatea miresei în comunitatea tradiţională din Basarabia. In: *Revista de etnologie şi culturologie*, 2019, nr. XV, pp. 57-66.

<sup>17</sup> POSTOLACHI, Elena. Costumul de nuntă. In: *Femeia Moldovei*, 1994, nr. 1, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> CONDRATICOVA, Liliana; CERCAŞIN, Marina. Ceremonialul nupţial: accesorii laice şi de cult religios. In: *Dialogica*, 2020, nr. 1, pp. 69-75.

<sup>19</sup> Arhiva Etnografică Digitală [online] [citat 12.09.2024]. Disponibil <https://arhivaetnografica.ich.md/>.

<sup>20</sup> Expoziţia „Nunta nunţilor... (din patrimoniul MNEIN)” [online] [citat 12.04.2022]. Disponibil: <https://>

District; Stârcea in Glodeni District; “Casa părintească” in Palanca, Călărași District, etc.) also offered useful artifacts. In the quest for as complete a picture as possible, we examined items noted during field expeditions in localities across the north (Crișcăuți, Dondușeni District; Hlina, Briceni District), center (Bravicea, Orhei District; Cărbuna, Anenii Noi District; Rezina Town), and south of the Republic of Moldova (Sadaclia, Basarabeasca District; Văleni, Cahul District; Stoianovca, Cantemir District; Beșalma, Comrat District), as well as settlements on the left bank of the Dniester (Podoimița, Camenca District; Rîbnița Town; Slobozia Town, Grigoriopol Town), and so on. Overall, the available sources and relevant academic literature enabled us to produce a multi-disciplinary study of the wedding attire ensemble, a topic hitherto absent from national historiography – aside from isolated articles restricted to other geographic and chronological frames.

**The object of study** is primarily the wedding dress ensemble of the Romanian population from Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, researched from a historical, ethnographic, structural and memorialistic point of view. For the fullness of the picture, some aspects were examined with reference to wedding clothing attested in the localities populated by Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, and Lipovans.

**Geographically**, the research centers on the current territory of the Republic of Moldova.

**The temporal limits of the study** extend from 1918 to 1991, allowing a comparative look at the wedding attire ensemble during these two phases: Bessarabia as part of Greater Romania and the Moldavian SSR.

**Purpose of the work.** The aim is a transdisciplinary examination of the structural and compositional evolution of the wedding attire ensemble in the population of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR from 1918 to 1991, achieved by conceptualizing and substantiating the ensemble and situating it in the context of local wedding traditions from historical, ethnological, and cultural perspectives.

In order to complete this doctoral thesis in line with the stated purpose, we set forth the following **objectives** – our study’s research directions:

- 1) A diachronic examination of the wedding attire ensemble as portrayed in theoretical studies and in accessible sources;
- 2) Identification, cataloging, and description of wedding props, both religious and secular, found in the marital rite;
- 3) Determination of the most significant stages in the development and transformation of the wedding attire ensemble;
- 4) Establishment and description of the bride’s and groom’s costume pieces against the background of the social-economic, artistic, and fashion transformations of the 20th century;
- 5) Identification of the main characteristics of the wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR;
- 6) Determination of the influences on the wedding attire ensemble and tracking its structural, aesthetic, and symbolic evolution;



- 7) Proposing ways to reconstruct the wedding attire ensemble that is specific to the population of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR;
- 8) Patrimonialization of the wedding attire ensemble in view of opportunities for safeguarding the national cultural heritage.

Through this scientific endeavor, we intend to highlight Romanian (Moldovan) traditional values as manifested in wedding rituals and ceremonies – expressed through the wedding attire ensemble. Ultimately, the thesis will showcase the developmental features of the wedding attire ensemble worn by the population in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR from 1918 to 1991, putting forward ideas for reconstructing authentic items and thereby enhancing this vital segment of the national cultural heritage.

We believe the issue of preserving archival documents, as well as wedding attire items unearthed in various localities, is highly significant. Their restoration and the promotion of heritage pieces are of considerable importance. At present, returning to genuine traditions – including those associated with wedding ceremonies – has become a popular trend, and many brides and grooms, along with their godparents, choose attire with traditional decorative accents or even authentic folk garments to integrate into their wedding attire ensemble.

**Key scientific problem solved** in this thesis consists in developing a comprehensive, systematic view of the wedding attire ensemble as it evolved within local tradition. Consequently, our findings will illuminate the factors that shaped the wedding attire ensemble and help eliminate confusion that merges folk costume with wedding attire in different historical periods – particularly regarding the promotion of a “Moldovan national costume” in Soviet-era weddings, the misuse of terminology, and other issues that arise from a lack of case-specific research and the misinterpretation of information frequently disseminated by the media to promote local culture.

**Research hypothesis.** Between 1918 and 1991, a series of events of special historical, social, and cultural significance took place – industrialization, technological progress, media expansion, and globalization – which left their mark on the development of the wedding attire ensemble in the context of the marriage ceremony.

**Scientific novelty.** To date, the wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia (1918–1940 / 1941–1944) and the Moldavian SSR (1944–1991) has not been the subject of dedicated research. For the first time in a doctoral thesis, wedding clothing is studied and described in detail; and we examine the factors – industrialization, modernization of manufacturing technology, diversification of materials – that influenced the development of the wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, ultimately causing the expansion of garment variety and the formation of new imagery and fresh semantic content in wedding clothing.

**Scientific originality.** This derives from the multidisciplinary approach taken to the topic, correlating valuable data from history, ethnology, garment manufacturing, etc., to present an overall picture of how wedding attire in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR evolved and changed between 1918 and 1991.

**Theoretical value.** Its significance lies in the scientific substantiation of the role and structure of the wedding costume in Romanian culture in Bessarabia (1918–1940/1944)

and the Moldavian SSR (1944–1991). This thesis provides an in-depth, retrospective analysis of the typology and structure of the wedding attire ensemble, clarifies the context in which it developed, and explains the meaning it held at each identified stage. The information compiled here will be valuable for subsequent research, offering the theoretical basis needed for developing new scientific studies on Romanian culture, art, and traditions.

**Practical value.** This work’s practical value includes the identification and professional analysis of relevant sources, systematically presented in specialized language. The scientific results can be employed to reconstruct the wedding attire ensemble for preservation and promotion, as scientific support for completing didactic courses on the history of costume, in specialized courses for light-industry engineers, fashion designers, historians, theater costume designers, serve as a research basis for creating stage costumes, and for development in further research.

**Implementation of scientific results.** The thesis was developed within the Doctoral School “History. Cultural Heritage. Modernity,” discussed with and recommended by the Guidance Committee for public defense. Findings that capture the thesis’s core arguments have been published in scholarly journals and presented as papers at international conferences in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Some of the results were shown at the exhibition “Retrospective of Wedding Attire in Photographs,” opened on September 19, 2024, at the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, as part of the 10th edition of the international scientific conference “Yesterday’s Cultural Heritage – Implications for Tomorrow’s Society,” organized in conjunction with the European Heritage Days.<sup>21</sup>

**Validation of research findings.** Underlying this thesis are 18 scientific publications, including 1 article in a nationally recognized Category A journal (the journal *Arta*, included in the SCOPUS database), 4 articles in Category B scientific journals (*Akademios*; *Dialogica*), and 3 articles in foreign publications. The scientific findings were approved at 8 national and international scientific conferences. A set of these findings informed the “Romanian–English Illustrated Dictionary of Clothing Terminology” (authors: Natalia Procop, Livia Sirbu, Marina Cercașin, Valentina Negru, Chișinău: Gunivas, 2019, 140 pp.), developed under the independent youth research project “Clothing Terminology in Moldova: Tradition and Innovation,” no. 18.80012.06.23F (2018–2019). In 2020, the dictionary received the Moldovan Academy of Sciences award in the Arts category.

**Key words:** wedding attire ensemble, Bessarabia, Moldavian SSR, ethnology, history, culture, heritage, wedding ceremony, wedding costume, wedding dress, religious marriage, bride, groom, rite, tradition, custom, folk costume, ceremony, civil marriage, fashion, style, clothing, accessories, textiles, ornaments, jewelry.

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<sup>21</sup> CONDRAȚIOVA, Liliانا. O platformă de idei în contextul integrării europene: de Zilele Patrimoniului cultural la AȘM s-au întrunit experți în domeniu. In: *Akademios*, nr. 3, 2024, pp. 34-36.

## THE THESIS CONTENT

The thesis is composed of an Introduction, which sets out the argumentation of the topic, the degree of research conducted, the purpose and objectives, the chronological and geographical boundaries of the study, as well as its theoretical and practical value, originality, and novelty. The thesis is then divided into four chapters, each concluding with detailed findings, and ends with General Conclusions and Recommendations. The References list includes 245 titles in Romanian, English, and Russian, as well as electronic sources. The Appendices consist of the author's fieldwork materials, a list of informants, a list of museums visited, a list of localities where field research was conducted, and documents and photographs illustrating the wedding attire ensemble of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR.

**Chapter 1 “The Wedding Attire Ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR as an object of scientific research”** integrates four sections (*paragraphs*). Wedding clothing has become a form of nonverbal communication, visually conveying valuable information regarding material and spiritual culture. The wedding props bear special weight as actors in the entire wedding ceremony, whether set in an urban or rural environment. Yet, when we examine the specialized literature dedicated to wedding attire in the chronological span under analysis (1918–1991), we observe a lack of in-depth research and detailed publications on the topic. Certain aspects tied to the wedding ceremony are covered within other time frames or different geographical parameters.

Chronologically, the publications surveyed fall into distinct periods: a) statistical and descriptive works at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, needed to grasp the situation concerning wedding ceremonies during that period; b) interwar literature referring to wedding ceremonies, clothing, and complementary accessories; c) publications from the Soviet era; d) research initiated after the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Moldova. Each historical period has its own nuances in presenting and reporting events – through contemporary publications and press – even though, at first glance, wedding attire may appear less “politicized” than folk costume, fine art, sculpture.

A valuable aspect of this study is the research algorithm for the wedding costume, examining in particular the specialized literature on folk costume – works by Ada Zevin, M. Livșiț<sup>22</sup>, V. Zelenciuc, M. Dimitriu<sup>23</sup>, Emilia Pavel<sup>24</sup>, V. Zelenciuc<sup>25</sup>, Varvara Buzilă<sup>26</sup>, along with studies on the population of Bessarabia by N. Enciu<sup>27</sup>. Accessories linked to the wedding ceremony have been examined by Liliana Condraticova<sup>28</sup>, while

<sup>22</sup> Portul național moldovenesc. Sub red. Zevina A., Livșiț M. Chișinău: Cartea moldovenească, 1960. 29 p.

<sup>23</sup> ZELENCIUC, V.; DIMITRIU, M. Costumul național moldovenesc. Chișinău: Timpul, 1975. 61 p.

<sup>24</sup> PAVEL, Emilia. *Portul popular moldovenesc*. Iași: Junimea, 1976. 208 p.

<sup>25</sup> ЗЕЛЕНЧУК, В. Молдавский национальный костюм. Chișinău: Timpul, 1985. 143 p.

<sup>26</sup> BUZILĂ, Varvara. *Costumul popular din Republica Moldova*. Ghid practic. Chișinău, 2011. 170 p.

<sup>27</sup> ENCIU, N. Populația României interbelice în context general european: trăsături generale și specifice. In: *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie: Materialele sesiunii științifice anuale, 20 decembrie 2018*, 20 decembrie 2018, Chișinău. Chișinău: Editura „Lexon-Prim”, 2019, pp. 214-229.

<sup>28</sup> CONDRATICOVA, Liliana. *Arta bijuteriilor din Moldova*. Iași: Lumen, 2010. 286 p.; CONDRATICOVA,

wedding traditions among deported Moldovans and the bride's chastity are recounted by historian Ludmila Cojocaru<sup>29</sup>. Art critic Natalia Procop<sup>30</sup> investigated artistic trends in clothing during the second half of the 20th century. These works proved essential for the typological classification and in-depth description of the wedding attire ensemble; however, the coverage is minimal, which in turn prompted the selection of this research topic with the goal of offering a more comprehensive outlook on wedding clothing.

Some studies investigate the use of folk costumes in wedding ceremonies. Varvara Buzilă<sup>31</sup>, Maria Ciocanu<sup>32</sup>, and Silvia Șaranuță<sup>33</sup> have investigated the wedding costume from villages like Podoima and Podoimița in Camenca District, while Natalia Grădinaru delved into the wedding ceremony in villages along the Lower Prut Valley<sup>34</sup>. Alina Tocarciuc<sup>35</sup> explored wedding ceremonial items (the godparents' towel, the bride's handkerchief). Soviet-era weddings and associated bridal gown customs were studied by Lidia Prisac<sup>36</sup>. In the same framework, historian Valentina Ursu sheds light on Soviet state policies aimed at undermining and distorting traditional culture<sup>37</sup>. The role of cultural advancement – together with cultural associations – and the prestige of the 'șezători' (community gatherings) where items of folk costume were made (often worn in the interwar period as wedding attire, especially in rural areas), were explored by the historian Larisa Noroc<sup>38</sup>. The domain-specific terminology abounds in foreign borrowings and random adaptations. Hence, specialized dictionaries and other resources that

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Liliana. *Arta metalelor din Basarabia*. Chișinău, 2017. 384 p.; CONDRATICOVA, Liliana. *Arta metalelor. Portrete de creație ale bijuteriilor și meșterilor de artă decorativă în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea și începutul secolului al XXI-lea*. Iași: Doxologia, 2021. 320 p.

<sup>29</sup> COJOCARU, Ludmila. Tradiția de nuntă în comunitățile de basarabeni deportați în Siberia și Kazahstan. In: *Akademios*, 2018, nr. 2, pp. 132-139;

<sup>30</sup> PROCOP, Natalia. Vestimentația din RSSM reflectată în presa periodică din anii '50. In: *Arta*, 2017, nr. 1(AV), pp. 97-102; PROCOP, Natalia. Aspecte stilistice în vestimentația de la începutul anilor '60 ai sec. XX din RSSM. In: *Arta*, 2018, nr. 1(AV), pp. 68-75.

<sup>31</sup> BUZILĂ, Varvara. Complexitate și adaptabilitate în costumul de Podoima-Podoimița, Transnistria. In: *Buletin Științific. Revistă de Etnografie, Științele Naturii și Muzeologie*. Serie nouă. Fascicula Etnografie și Muzeologie, vol. 25(38), Chișinău, 2016, pp. 97-115.

<sup>32</sup> CIOCANU, Maria (coautor). Portul popular în raionul Camenca. In: *Folclor românesc de la est de Nistru, de Bug, din nordul Caucazului*. Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2009, vol. II, pp. 483-488.

<sup>33</sup> ȘĂRĂNUȚĂ, Silvia. *Cultura materială și spirituală a românilor din Basarabia (sec. XIX-XX)*. Schițe și studii etnografice. Chișinău, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> GRĂDINARU, Natalia. Ceremonialul nupțial în satele din valea Prutului de Jos: funcționalitate și inovații. In: *Valorificarea patrimoniului etnocultural: al Republicii Moldova în cercetare și educație*, 15 noiembrie 2018, Chișinău. Chișinău, Republica Moldova: Institutul Patrimoniului Cultural, 2018, Ediția 3, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> TOCARCIUC, Alina. Typology and specificity of traditional ceremonial textiles. In: *Conservation and restoration of cultural heritage*, Lucrările științifice de la cea XXII-a ediție a Simpozionului Internațional „Conservarea și restaurarea patrimoniului cultural / Conservation and restoration of cultural heritage”, Iași 22-23 septembrie 2021, Iași: Doxologia, 2021, vol. XXII, pp. 241-258.

<sup>36</sup> PRISAC, Lidia. „...Frumoase-s nunțile-n colhoz...” sau despre mariaj în mediul rural sovietic (1960–1980). In: *După 25 de ani. Evaluări și reevaluări istoriografice privind comunismul* /Cosmin Budeanca, Florentin Olteanu (coord.), Iași, Polirom, 2017, pp. 181-200.

<sup>37</sup> URSU, Valentina. Acțiunile autorităților din Moldova sovietică privind cultura tradițională (anii '40 ai sec. XX). In: *Revista de Etnologie și Culturologie*, 2022, nr. 31, pp. 84-91.

<sup>38</sup> NOROC, Larisa. *Cultura Basarabiei în perioada interbelică (1918–1940)*. Chișinău: UPS „Ion Creangă”, 2009. 192 p.

foster aesthetic education and the correct usage of terminology – particularly for the wedding attire ensemble – are extremely valuable.<sup>39</sup>

An extensive survey of periodicals from each era yielded relevant material, yet these have been critically examined and cross-checked with fieldwork data to exclude possible ambiguities or ideologically skewed misinformation.

Wedding attire pieces (the bride's gown, the groom's suit, accessories, etc.) were identified during field expeditions, including recent ones undertaken by the author in communities in the northern, central, and southern regions of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>40</sup> Several museum collections have been investigated, underscoring that these museum pieces and accessories need scientific scrutiny, cataloging, authentic restoration, and preservation to be subsequently showcased and promoted, including through specialized exhibits.

Historical photographs are an especially valuable source for examining the wedding attire ensemble. They offer insight into the garments typical of a given region at a specific period. The thesis mainly focuses on the clothing of the Romanian population in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, with brief references to the wedding garments of the Bulgarians, Gagauz, and Ukrainians who reside in the modern territory of the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, interviews with respondents from various localities in northern, central, and southern Moldova supplement the overall perspective on how wedding attire evolved over time.

In order to systematize all the collected data, a distinct research algorithm for wedding attire was approved. Priority was given to typologizing and describing the wedding attire ensemble according to gender (the bride's costume and the groom's costume) and their related accessories – headwear, jewelry, footwear, etc. The study also adopts a diachronic viewpoint on the wedding attire ensemble throughout 1918–1991<sup>41</sup>, tracking the evolution of all its components. The principal conclusions of Chapter 1 are as follows:

1) A review of written and physical sources, cross-checked with archival data, fieldwork findings, and specialist publications, confirms that the wedding attire ensemble remains an extensive, unexplored research topic.

2) The specialized literature reveals that most publications focus on the wedding ceremony, on the wedding phenomenon within the Romanian space, and on Bessarabian and Moldavian SSR wedding traditions, music, and bread-making customs, while the complex matter of wedding attire is addressed only superficially.

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<sup>39</sup> CERCAȘIN, Marina; CONDRATICOVA, Liliana. Dicționar de termeni în domeniul textilelor. Studiu de caz: procesele tehnologice de producere. In: *Patrimoniul cultural de ieri – implicații în dezvoltarea societății durabile de mâine, dedicată zilelor europene ale patrimoniului*. Ediția 1, 23-24 septembrie 2019, Chișinău: Biblioteca Națională a Republicii Moldova, 2019, p. 27; PROCOP, Natalia; NEGRU, Valentina; SÎRBU, Livia; CERCAȘIN, Marina. *Terminologie vestimentară. Dicționar ilustrat român-englez*. Chișinău: Gunivas, 2019. 144 p.

<sup>40</sup> CONDRATICOVA, Liliana; BUJOREAN, Tatiana; CERCAȘIN, Marina; TOCARCIUC, Alina; PINTELEI, Elena. Expedițiile etnografice și importanța lor în dezvoltarea artizanatului din RSS Moldovenească. In: *Akademos*, 2020, NR. 2(57), pp. 144-154.

<sup>41</sup> CERCAȘIN, Marina. Costumul nupțial ca subiect de cercetare. In: *Patrimoniul de ieri – implicații în dezvoltarea societății durabile de mâine*. Conferință științifică internațională, Chișinău, 11-12 februarie 2021. Iași-Chișinău, p. 25.

3) The study's multidisciplinary character allows the use of research methods typical of history, ethnology, anthropology, art studies, technology, etc., enabling a thorough investigation of the defining features of the wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR from 1918 to 1991.

4) Reviewing both specialized publications and wedding-related studies shows that the topic of wedding attire calls for meticulous data collection and careful validation of interviewees' statements and fieldwork findings, cross-referenced with scholarly literature and museum collections to form a comprehensive view of wedding attire throughout the current territory of the Republic of Moldova.

5) Ethnographic field expeditions are crucial, as they document items in their natural environment, enabling onsite study of the wedding ensemble in tandem with other local activities – although such expeditions have become rarer in the early 21st century due to limited funding. Over the years, members of the “Artizana” Association have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Moldavian SSR's rural areas, locating authentic garments in communities in the north, center, south, and even on the left bank of the Dniester River.

6) Documented items serve as major research sources regarding craftsmanship, decorative motifs used in garment embellishment, and their significance – key for accurate reconstructions. Without thorough documentation (written and photographic), valuable heritage pieces may be irretrievably lost, indicating the pressing need for renewed ethnographic expeditions and stronger state involvement in preserving this heritage sector.

7) In studying the wedding attire ensemble, photographs prove indispensable in identifying the costume's characteristic features at different periods and across geographic zones. These photos confirm that European fashion trends spread at roughly the same pace east of the Prut River. Photographs can be as illuminating as actual garments, but they endure time more easily and remain more accessible for research, becoming a precious source of information about items included in the wedding costume.

8) Wedding attire pieces (the bride's dress, the groom's costume, accessories, and ornaments) are part of the cultural heritage and thus require cataloging, study, restoration, and use for scientific, cultural, museum-based, and tourism-related purposes.

9) Some research on the bride's and groom's wedding attire has been conducted to piece together an overall view of how the ensemble evolved during the 20th century, following a specific research algorithm distinct from the one used by ethnologists and cultural researchers for folk costumes. In recent years, issues of preserving heritage items – particularly those tied to nuptial rituals – have grown more urgent. Many collectors now focus on acquiring the most prized pieces, thus making it harder for museums to acquire them and for specialists to study privately held items.

This research algorithm has enabled an analysis of how the wedding attire ensemble – the bride's dress, the groom's costume, footwear, headwear, and all wedding-related ornaments – has developed, spotlighting heritage items, their loss or omission at certain stages (such as the prohibition of religious weddings in the Soviet era), and the reconstruction of attire and customs through the meticulous staging of the wedding celebration, a milestone in human rites of passage.

**Chapter 2 “The Sacred–secular relationship in the Wedding Ceremony and the Wedding Attire Ensemble”** addresses canonical church regulations and secular wedding practices. For Romanians – deeply religious people – marriage has always been closely bound to a church ceremony. From a religious perspective, marriage unites the souls of two young lovers; the wedding (*cununie*) is thus one of the seven Holy Sacraments of the Church, one of the most important, strictly governed by church canons. These include fulfilling conditions related to the couple’s age, their free consent, respect for degrees of kinship, etc.<sup>42</sup> A retrospective of key wedding customs observed throughout Bessarabia – augmented over time by regional cultural intertwinings and local traditions – is essential for understanding the place and role of the bride’s and groom’s costumes and associated accessories in the comprehensive, multifaceted wedding ceremony. Without focusing too deeply on the wedding customs themselves (which could be the topic of a dedicated study), attention is given to how the wedding attire has developed in the period marked by social, economic, ideological changes.

Moreover, upon examining multiple fieldwork documents – especially Soviet-era ethnographic practice notebooks (digitized by experts at the Institute of Cultural Heritage) – it becomes evident that their contents warrant re-evaluation of the data and findings documented in earlier ethnographic expeditions. In this chapter, the wedding ceremony and the attire worn at weddings were also highlighted through the lens of folk traditions – those documented earlier by ethnographers as well as those gathered during interviews conducted in localities across the Republic of Moldova. Notably, these digitized notebooks are now openly accessible, offering efficient research opportunities.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the wedding, every ritual and custom carries symbolic meaning. Driven by a desire to impress their guests, couples have at times supplemented age-old traditions with novel customs – many borrowed from other cultures – such as the wedding cake and tossing the bridal bouquet, introduced from the West in the early 1980s. Garments worn by the bride and groom, in particular, strongly signify a shift in social status (from single man and woman to newlyweds) that is fully revealed during the wedding ceremony.

In concluding remarks for this chapter, the following points are emphasized:

1) Various traditions and customs in the wedding ceremony underwent substantial alterations in the first decades following World War II. The Soviet era was marked by swift changes in social life, especially concerning ideology and the erosion or replacement of authentic traditions.

2) The dramatic circumstances faced by the residents of the Moldavian SSR, particularly after the postwar annexation by the USSR, affected the region profoundly – socially, culturally, and economically. Summarizing wedding traditions is tricky, as each community adapted them based on general conditions, material means, and regional cultural influences.<sup>44</sup> Yet the wedding ceremony, in essence, always remained sacred

<sup>42</sup> MEYENDORFF, John. *Căsătoria. Perspectivă ortodoxă*. Traducere de Cezar Login. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Renașterea, 2012, pp. 61-64.

<sup>43</sup> Arhiva Etnografică Digitală [online] [citat 12.09.2024]. Disponibil <https://arhivaetnografica.ich.md/>.

<sup>44</sup> Obiceiurile și rânduielele nunții la moldovenii basarabeni [online] [citat 14.04.2021]. Disponibil: <https://prezi.com/ainsknhfwlsq/obiceiurile-si-randuielele-nuntii-la-moldovenii-basarabeni/>; CIOCANU, Maria. Tradiția nunții în satele din Raionul Rezina. In: *Buletin Științific. Revista de Etnografie, Științele Naturii și*

and canonical for people, who managed to celebrate it despite the rampant atheist frenzy and bans on religious marriages.

3) The main elements of the wedding ceremony continue to be the invitation to the wedding, dressing the bride, welcoming the groom's party and godparents by the bride's parents, displaying the dowry, the smaller meal (*masa mică*), the church wedding (*cununia*), the arrival of the guests, the main meal (*masa mare*), and the unveiling of the bride. Customs vary by locality or are borrowed from neighboring towns. At every stage, certain items from the wedding attire ensemble figure prominently, each fulfilling specific roles and functions.

4) The spiritual dimension of marriage was forcibly removed during the Soviet era. Ecclesiastical items, in particular wedding crowns, were prohibited under the prevailing atheist ideology.

In conclusion, wedding traditions as a functioning socio-cultural system have been in constant transformation, subject to structural and functional adaptations, influences, and reforms.

**Chapter 3 “Concepts, Traditions, and Symbols of the Wedding Attire Ensemble in the context of the wedding ceremony”** aims to shed light on the most significant accessories used at religious and civil wedding rites. Drawing on documentary sources and fieldwork, it examines the most important accessories – active participants in the wedding ceremony: crowns, head ornaments, necklaces and bracelets, the bride's bouquet, the wedding veil, etc. Within the larger range of props, these accessories occupy a special place, forging a link to both tradition and innovation, as well as contemporary design, craftsmanship, and industrial techniques.

Based on fieldwork, exhibition catalogs, and scholarly works, we categorized wedding accessories:

a) *Religious accessories*: engagement rings and wedding rings, and the church crowns used during the religious ceremony.

b) *Head, neck, and hand ornaments*: including necklaces or beads, hair clips, tiaras, the bridal veil, head coverings, gloves.

Wedding accessories stand out as markers of the couple's and their families' socio-economic status, as well as of the era's artistic trends and practical needs.<sup>45</sup> Typically, the bride's dress is white, highlighting the event's importance and symbolizing the bride's innocence. The rings are usually gold, less often silver, sometimes engraved on the inner side with the couple's names, symbols, or vows – another layer of custom within the wedding ceremony.

Ceremonial accessories, intended to commemorate a singular day in life, take on a variety of forms to convey, via a coded language, the splendor of the couple. Historically, such ornaments are believed to protect the wearer (*apotropaic* function).

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*Muzeologie (Serie Nouă)*, 2010, nr. 13(26), pp. 75-86.

<sup>45</sup> CONDRATICOVA, L.; CERCAȘIN, M. Locul și rolul accesoriilor în sistemul vestimentar nupțial. In: *ARTA*. 2019, Vol. XXVIII, nr. 1, pp. 146-150; CONDRATICOVA, Liliana; CERCAȘIN, Marina. Ceremonialul nupțial: accesoriile laice și de cult religioase. In: *Dialogica*. 2020, nr. 1, pp. 69-75.



For instance, church crowns (Latin: *corona*)<sup>46</sup> are indispensable elements of the bride's costume in many communities, differing in composition and materials (whether rural or urban), as well as in local tradition and cultural cross-influences.

**The bride's head covering** is mandatory; in some eras it has taken specific shapes and sizes. It typically consists of a crown (*coroniță*) and veil, both tied to very old customs. As a religious accessory within the wedding attire ensemble, the crown has varied in form, materials, and color patterns, in close relation to local traditions.

These **wedding crowns** represent the moment when a bride transitions to a married woman with family responsibilities. Crown usage has also been explored from different angles, including metal crafts in Bessarabia and the revaluation of heritage items<sup>47</sup>; our research, however, focuses primarily on their role in the wedding ceremony (*cununia*). The documented examples facilitated a twofold classification: a) *church crowns*, commonly made from inexpensive metals or occasionally silver, decorated with fabrics, colored glass, and stored in church treasuries for the religious ceremony; b) *secular crowns*, known as tiaras or wreaths, traditionally crafted from flowers, ribbons, and colored glass (imitating gemstones), later transforming into metal pieces adorned with gemstones. These were used more in civil ceremonies.<sup>48</sup>

**The veil** – a timeless accessory – remains essential in the bride's wedding attire. It is typically a fine piece of cloth covering the head and sometimes the face. Among wedding rites, “dressing the bride” is extremely emotional, marking the bride's passage from one life stage to another, a fusion of joy and sadness.

**Bridal gloves** also have a lengthy history and tradition. Their use in religious ceremonies (after hand-washing for purity) gave them relevance and symbolism in the wedding. In the absence of gloves, a fine, embroidered handkerchief could serve an apotropaic purpose.

The **bride's bouquet** is a time-honored adornment dating back centuries. Initially, plants used in the bouquet had a practical purpose – decoration or fragrance – and, per popular belief, protective properties. Certain flowers feature prominently in traditional culture, linked to fertility, abundance, love, health, and prosperity.

After exploring the symbolic components of the wedding attire ensemble – both ecclesiastical and secular – this chapter draws the following conclusions:

1) Wedding accessories, both religious and secular, hold a unique place in the wedding ceremony, showcasing a direct bond to tradition, alongside contemporary innovation, artistic trends, and design. Accessory fashions follow overall costume fashions. They can be organized by wedding stage (engagement, ceremony, post-wedding), material type, mode of wearing, and whether they are for the bride or the groom.

2) Accessories align with the design of the groom's suit and the bride's dress, reflecting the socioeconomic status of the couple's families. Opulent ornaments in fine materials highlight the significance of the event and the bride's purity.

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<sup>46</sup> Cununa [online] [citat 14.04.2021]. Disponibil: <https://www.dictionarroman.ro/?c=cunun%C4%83>

<sup>47</sup> CONDRATICOVA, L. *Arta metalelor din Basarabia*. Chișinău, 2017, pp. 175-176.

<sup>48</sup> CONDRATICOVA, Liliana; CERCAȘIN, Marina. Locul și rolul accesoriilor în sistemul vestimentar nupțial. In: *ARTA*, 2019, nr. 1(AV), pp. 146-150.

3) While local traditions affect the shape and style of key accessories (especially head ornaments) in the wedding attire ensemble, aesthetic and socioeconomic factors also play a role in how these items evolve.

4) From early 20th-century wax-based crowns to textile crowns embellished with beads and sequins, and ending the century with primarily metal tiaras encrusted with artificial crystals, crowns have undergone notable shifts.

Rich in symbolic meaning, ceremonial ornaments are genuine works of decorative art, reflecting their wearers' social and economic standing and fulfilling both aesthetic and practical functions.

**Chapter 4 “Ethno-historical aspects of the Wedding Attire Ensemble”** encompasses the most extensive discussion, tracing chronological developments in the wedding attire ensemble, identifying the core pieces in the bride's and groom's costumes, and describing each garment for both. Thus, it presents the wedding attire ensemble of Bessarabia during the interwar period and that of the Moldavian SSR, highlighting the evolution of Romanian wedding attire, supplemented where relevant by the wedding clothing of Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Gagauz inhabiting the current area of the Republic of Moldova. Drawing on documentary findings and on-site collections, it offers suggestions for reconstructing the authentic 20th-century wedding attire used by the population in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR.

Research on Moldovan wedding traditions has revealed close ties to folk costume. On the one hand, folk costume is an integral part of the nation's heritage, passed on faithfully and showcasing its creative spirit and cultural identity. On the other hand, in the 20th century, the Moldovan wedding costume retained elements of the folk costume. Based on available documentation, it is possible to clarify the connection between folk costume and wedding attire, analyzing the timeframe and format of the folk wedding costume's existence in the 20th century – without, however, delving into the folk costume per se, which is a separate research area.

During the interwar period, most urban couples in Bessarabia adopted a modern wedding costume shaped by Western influences via fashion magazines, film, and theater.

After World War II, circumstances changed as Bessarabia became part of the USSR, subject to new political, economic, cultural, ideological constraints. Drawing on historical photographs and interviews, the study examines the Soviet-era wedding ceremony, the bride and groom's attire and accessories, and the possibilities for celebrating traditional-style weddings versus the influence of Komsomol weddings. Special attention is given to how weddings were held in families deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan – particularly during the night of July 5–6, 1949 – illustrated through photos and testimonies from deportees describing weddings in Siberia's frigid conditions, where people strove to maintain their native customs.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> COJOCARU, Ludmila. Memoria remanentă a deportărilor staliniste: repere istoriografice și probleme de cercetare. In: *Drama basarabenilor: 75 de ani de la deportările staliniste din RSS Moldovenească în cadrul Operațiunii „Sud” (5-6 iulie 1949)*. Supliment al revistei științifice „Authentication and Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Research and Technique” (Iași, România), Iași–Chișinău. 2024, volumul VI, pp. 11-24.

The 1960s saw renewed interest in local traditions, focusing on cultural continuity and homegrown aesthetics. Folk costumes were adapted for holiday wear, stage performances, or special occasions. Presented under the banner of “national costumes,” such garments also appeared at rural weddings, sometimes in tandem with modern attire – stylistic choices enabling couples to preserve local culture, albeit typically in a stylized, theatrical manner. Craft cooperatives proposed new concepts for “Moldovan weddings”,<sup>50</sup> leading to substantial modifications in wedding costumes and accessories, while age-old traditions were eventually turned into scripted theater, performed by participants trained to reflect the prevailing ideology.

The fashion industry advanced gradually in the 1970s. Globally, multiple style directions emerged, some of these appealed to youth expressing individuality, with designers supporting experimentation. Regarding the general silhouette lines of the modern wedding suit, was notable the trend of tight clothes tailoring. Artistic and decorative expression in wedding garments peaked during the 1980s, with the bride’s dress embellished by layers of ruffles and rosettes, often accessorized with hats and gloves, while the classic men’s “troica” (three-piece suit) appeared in diverse color schemes. Over the entire period under study, we see a cyclical shift in wedding fashion roughly every decade.

Recreating an authentic wedding attire ensemble calls for collecting and restoring genuine garments as heritage items; reconstructing the outfits using descriptions and images so they can be displayed in thematic exhibitions for educational purposes; designing theatrical and artisanal costumes to recreate a certain era’s atmosphere; and drawing on historical designs for modern clothing.

Based on the research for this chapter, several observations merit emphasizing:

1) In the 20th century (1918–1991), wedding attire largely followed Western trends, while retaining folk traditions in wedding customs and accessories. Folk costume definitively diverged from everyday wear, gaining a new cultural value as performance attire.

2) Moldova’s geographical proximity to European nations that evolved more quickly facilitated an inflow of goods and fashion ideas, enabling locals to adapt and adopt new styles. Interviews mention that couples acquired wedding attire or materials from Western countries, ensuring a cutting-edge look for their big day.

3) Comparing Moldavian SSR wedding attire in the second half of the 20th century with Western examples, one notes a lag in embracing international trends and a visible simplicity in cut, technology, and decor, shaped by resource limitations and Soviet ideology concerning modest behavior and appearance.

4) In rural areas, wedding outfits typically showed greater simplicity than those in urban settings, with fewer embellishments and simpler tailoring.

5) Over the decades, the symbolic connotations and values communicated through wedding attire – between sacred and secular – also shifted. Political ideology, scientific and industrial development, urbanization, and globalization all affected the attire’s visual impact. Its moral and religious symbolism, paramount at the start of the century, was gradually replaced by social and aesthetic concerns by the century’s end.

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<sup>50</sup> CONDRATICOVA, Liliana; BUJOREAN, Tatiana; CERCAȘIN, Marina; TOCARCIUC, Alina. Ateliere de confecționare a pieselor textile și vestimentare din RSSM în anii 1945–1960. In: *Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis* Vol. 1, 2019, pp.

6) Efforts to reconstruct and preserve the wedding attire ensemble as a heritage item gain urgency. It reflects changes in time . The thesis therefore ends with proposals for how its theoretical and applied findings might be utilized: collecting and restoring genuine items, reassembling the costumes through historical descriptions, replicating historical costume with the purpose of creating an artistic image.

Hence, this chapter highlights a broad analysis of how the wedding attire ensemble evolved between 1918 and 1991, emphasizing shifts in the costume's silhouette, the bride's and groom's visual identity, and the accompanying accessories.

Invoking collective memory to recapture the past, this study contributes significantly to knowledge about festive clothing and the factors that molded its development.

By tracing changes in the appearance and structure of wedding attire over time, we gain a panoramic view of transformations in the wedding attire ensemble throughout 1918–1991.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The wedding attire in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR from 1918 to 1991 constitutes a multidisciplinary research topic, given the importance of identifying, describing, cataloging, preserving, and highlighting these items as integral components of the nation's cultural heritage. The need to study the wedding attire ensemble is justified by the limited specialized literature addressing this complex subject and the necessity of organizing the information gathered to date. In this thesis, our goal was to undertake a transdisciplinary examination of the wedding attire ensemble worn by the population of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR between 1918 and 1991, through its conceptualization and substantiation, while situating it within the local wedding ceremony tradition from historical, ethnological, and cultural perspectives. The established objectives guided us to fulfill the stated purpose; a comprehensive assessment of the informational and visual data related to the research object yielded the following general conclusions:

1) Given the lack of an in-depth study on the components of the wedding attire ensemble, we analyzed this ensemble from a diachronic viewpoint, tracing its development and consolidation throughout 1918–1991. Our investigative approach explored the bride's and groom's costumes and their accessories in different localities in the south, center, and north of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, highlighting specific regional or ethnic features shaped by socioeconomic conditions and cultural borrowing.

2) The principal research sources were museum collections, fieldwork findings (both our own and those of predecessors), authentic garments and accessories, and archival materials identified at the National Archives Agency, the fonds of the Chişinău City History Museum, as well as private archives.

3) Photographs proved crucial for studying the wedding attire ensemble, revealing that European fashion spread simultaneously east of the Prut River. These images also enabled comparative analysis and the identification of differences between urban and rural wedding costumes; variations by geographic regions (south, center, north) and coexisting ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians); changes over time in the proportions of the bride's and groom's costumes, their decoration, and the types of accessories used.

4) Based on field data gathered and specialized literature currently accessible, we identified, cataloged, and described the objects integral to the wedding rite, both religious and secular accessories, and the textiles used in the wedding ceremony (the godparents' towels and wedding gifts). We also developed typologies and descriptions of the wedding attire ensemble, distinguishing by gender (the bride's costume and the groom's costume) and accessories (headwear, footwear, jewelry, etc.). Ultimately, this produced a complete perspective on the wedding attire ensemble from the years 1918–1991.

5) A key role belongs to accessories and sacred objects of particular symbolic weight, such as engagement and wedding rings, the wedding icon, and the crowns worn by brides during the religious and civil ceremony. Secular accessories reflect both tradition and innovation, along with the artistic design and trends of their era. Ceremonial ornaments,

imbued with symbolic significance, evolved in terms of form, materials, and production methods. A notable example is the wax crown, followed by crowns made from textiles, sequins, and beads, culminating in metal coronets encrusted with artificial crystals.

6) In studying the wedding attire ensemble of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, we identified the evolutionary changes and fundamental pieces of the bride's and groom's costume between 1918 and 1991. The wedding attire ensemble developed under globally impactful events – industrialization, technological advancement, and media expansion – factors that triggered structural, aesthetic, and symbolic transformations in wedding fashion. By pinpointing the chronological stages of wedding attire evolution, we refined the typology and structure of the marital costume and its characteristic elements in retrospective analysis, clarifying the context in which it formed and the meaning it held in each identified stage. The author's experience in fashion design facilitated the technical specifications of the wedding ensemble pieces, describing in detail the bride's and groom's garments – their structural and decorative details.

7) The most fundamental difference between the two historical phases under review lies in the significance of the religious wedding (*cununia*) and the associated ceremony in Bessarabia during the interwar period – shaped by European fashion influences on the bride's dress – versus the Soviet ideological and political environment in the Moldavian SSR, which led to the prohibition of religious weddings and, consequently, the disappearance of wedding icons and wedding crowns from church ceremonies (often hidden away, only to reemerge after 1991).

8) Among the various changes observed, we note shifts in the symbolic meaning of the wedding dress color – no longer always a pure white – and in the structure and shape of the wedding dress itself, the central piece of the wedding attire ensemble, evolving in length, form, and cut in line with the trends, as well as the silhouette and the tailoring of the groom's suit.

9) The wedding ceremony stands as a major life event that, in turn, evolved from ancestral customs into a carefully orchestrated spectacle; its ceremonial clothing carries symbolic undertones conveyed visually and indirectly through symbols examined here to highlight the multifaceted nature of our study. Symbolism pervades every aspect of the wedding: traditions, customs, clothing, and accessories. Wedding customs differ by geographic area or even nearby localities. Variations are evident in the event's celebration – its order of ceremonies and rituals. Local traditions and customs have introduced modifications to wedding accessories, the groom's attire, and the bride's dress.

10) Owing to the research process and efforts to identify items forming the wedding attire ensemble – especially using credible period sources such as old photographs, confirmed or challenged in interviews – we conclude that, in interwar Bessarabia, the bride's and groom's costumes were modern in style, enhanced by traditional accessories that expressed folk culture and artistry. In the Soviet period, the bride and groom's costumes, conformed to contemporary standards, with only minimal use of traditional accessories and the exclusion of those with religious connotations.

11) A separate focus belongs to exploring traits of the national culture to better understand its values and local traditions, as well as to spot intersections with modern wedding attire.

12) Interviews with respondents from various areas of present-day Moldova yielded key information, particularly about the interwar period, confirming that people would custom-order their outfits or order them from abroad with help from relatives or friends so the couple could wear the most fashionable attire on their wedding day. We observe that in the 20th century, there was minimal difference between urban and rural wedding costumes in terms of overall type; rather, discrepancies appeared in the celebration protocol, certain accessories, and the complexity of the design and embellishments.

13) Preserving heritage items remains highly relevant, notably those tied to wedding rituals. We believe that cataloging the articles comprising the ensemble – groom's attire, bride's attire, secular and religious accessories, the entire range of wedding props – is indispensable for providing suggestions and strategies for safeguarding, promoting, and capitalizing on these objects as part of the country's cultural heritage. This creates tangible prospects for reconstructing the wedding attire ensemble specific to the population of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR.

We conclude that preserving traditions and promoting cultural heritage, the importance of historical, ethnological and cultural aspects in the development of wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR, are pressing concerns. By approaching the attire ensemble as a component of the wedding ceremony – touching on multiple determinant factors (social, spiritual, economic, functional, aesthetic) – we conducted a multidisciplinary inquiry that mapped not only the ensemble's evolution but also integrated the complete wedding attire ensemble into its context by correlating it with related aspects.

In the end, we validate our research hypothesis, demonstrating that between 1918 and 1991, key historical, social, and cultural phenomena – industrialization, technological advances, media expansion, and globalization – marked the development of the wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR in the years 1918–1991.

### **Recommendations:**

**1) On a theoretical and scholarly level,** further research is crucial into how the wedding attire ensemble developed within the wedding ceremony of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR. Extending the research beyond 1991, the year in which the Republic of Moldova gained independence, would open new possibilities for cataloging and documenting items included in the wedding attire.

Compiling a catalog in both Romanian and English, comprehensively presenting the wedding attire ensemble, would greatly aid in digitizing data, photographs, preserving memories, and fostering respect for authentic values.

Conducting transdisciplinary research has become both a priority and a challenge in our modern age. Forming an all-encompassing picture requires broad, integrative examination of wedding rites, garments, accessories, local customs and traditions.

Field expeditions must be organized to collect, document, digitize, and register items preserved in churches (wedding icons, crowns) and in local museums (wedding dresses, gloves, veils, photographs). Such an effort would bring added value to the heritage process for items comprising the wedding attire ensemble.

2) **On a practical level**, the information synthesized in this thesis should be employed in creating museum records for newly acquired objects in both national and local museum collections.

Accurate terminology must be used in this field to avert inappropriate translations from other languages for dress-related terms. This correct usage concerns specialists in primary and secondary education, university programs, craft centers, as well as tour guides and museum professionals.

We propose reconstructing the wedding attire ensemble so that it may be used in specialized training, thematic exhibitions, and as a foundational theoretical resource for creating stage costumes, as well as serving as a source of inspiration for new designs informed by a historic costume aesthetic.

We likewise affirm the importance of preserving and promoting the national culture. In this respect, the folk costume stands as a testament to remarkable skill and artistry – an aesthetic ideal communicating ancient traditions and bearing witness to a vibrant creative process, with singular and unrepeatably value. We see potential in fusing modern wedding attire with elements of traditional costume to promote local culture and folk traditions.

Fieldwork revealed that local museums actively promote traditions and folk dress, including aspects of local wedding customs. Building on this topic by featuring the wedding attire ensemble in museum exhibits can illustrate the evolutionary changes in both structure and concept.

In the context of the current subject of the Moldova's European integration, it is vital to align national legislation with European norms, including the cataloging, harnessing, and promotion of heritage items – particularly the wedding attire ensemble, distinctive in its concept, ancestral customs, and wedding traditions.



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**Articles in materials of scientific conferences (national/international):**

11. CERCAȘIN, Marina. *Fotografia ca sursă de studiere a costumului nupțial*. In: *Tendințe contemporane ale dezvoltării științei: viziuni ale tinerilor cercetători*. Ediția VII, 15 iunie 2018, Chișinău. Chișinău: Tipogr. „Biotehdesign”, 2018, Vol. 2, pp. 31-33. ISBN 978-9975-108-46-1.

12. CERCAȘIN, Marina. *Reminiscențe ale stilului victorian în moda contemporană*. In: *Buletin științific al tinerilor istorici: Materialele Conferinței științifice internaționale anuale a tinerilor cercetători*, Ed. 2(7), 25 aprilie 2013, Chișinău. Chișinău: 2013, Serie nouă 2 (7), pp. 177-180. ISSN 1857-4947.

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15. CERCAȘIN, Marina. *Rolul liniei în crearea formei și organizarea plastică compoziției costumului*. In: *Conferința tehnico-științifică a colaboratorilor, doctoranzilor și studenților*, Ed. 4, 15-23 noiembrie 2013, Chișinău. Chișinău: Editura „Tehnica-UTM”, 2014, Vol. 3, pp. 172-175. ISBN 978-9975-45-312-7.

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16. CERCAȘIN, Marina; CONDRATICOVA, Liliana. *Accesoriile din sistemul vestimentar nupțial. Considerații preliminare*. In: *Patrimoniul cultural de ieri – implicații în dezvoltarea societății durabile de mâine: dedicată zilelor europene ale patrimoniului*. 23-24 septembrie 2019, Chișinău. Chișinău: Biblioteca Națională a Republicii Moldova, 2019, Ediția 1, p. 26. ISBN 978-9975-3290-4-0.

17. CERCAȘIN, Marina. *Wedding costume as a research subject*. In: *Patrimoniul cultural de ieri – implicații în dezvoltarea societății durabile de mâine*, 11-12 februarie 2021, Chișinău. Chișinău, 2021, Ediția 3, pp. 51-52. ISSN 2558-894X.

18. CERCAȘIN, Marina; CONDRATICOVA, Liliana. *Dicționar de termeni în domeniul textilelor. Studiu de caz: procesele tehnologice de producere*. In: *Patrimoniul cultural de ieri – implicații în dezvoltarea societății durabile de mâine: dedicată zilelor europene ale patrimoniului*. 23-24 septembrie 2019, Chișinău. Chișinău: Biblioteca Națională a Republicii Moldova, 2019, Ediția 1, p. 27. ISBN 978-9975-3290-4-0.

## ADNOTARE

**CERCAȘIN Marina**, „Ansamblul vestimentar nupțial din Basarabia și RSS Moldovenească: aspecte etno-istorice”, teză de doctor în istorie, specialitatea 612.01 „Etnologie”. Teza are un volum de 232 de pagini, dintre care 162 de pagini text de bază; bibliografia include 245 de titluri în limba română, engleză, rusă. Aparatul ilustrativ inclus în textul de bază al tezei și anexe cuprinde cca 268 de materiale.

**Scopul tezei:** examinarea interdisciplinară a evoluției structurale și compoziționale a ansamblului vestimentar nupțial din Basarabia și RSS Moldovenească în perioada 1918–1991 prin conceptualizarea și fundamentarea acestuia, precum și încadrarea în contextul tradiției ceremoniei nupțiale locale din perspectivă istorică, etnologică și culturologică.

**Obiective:** examinarea în plan diacronic a ansamblului vestimentar de nuntă reflectat în studiile teoretice, precum și sursele accesibile; identificarea, repertorierea și descrierea recuzitei de nuntă, a accesoriilor de cult și laice prezente în ritul nupțial; determinarea celor mai importante etape de dezvoltare și transformare a ansamblului vestimentar nupțial; determinarea elementelor componente ale ansamblului vestimentar nupțial al mirelui și al miresei în contextul metamorfozelor social-economice, artistice și ale modei secolului al XX-lea; patrimonializarea ansamblului vestimentar nupțial în contextul oportunităților de valorificare a patrimoniului național cultural; stabilirea principalelor caracteristici ale ansamblului vestimentar de nuntă din Basarabia și RSS Moldovenească; determinarea influențelor asupra ansamblului vestimentar nupțial și urmărirea aspectelor de transformare structurală, estetică și simbolică a acestuia; proiecția oportunităților de reconstituire a ansamblului vestimentar nupțial specific populației din Basarabia și RSS Moldovenească.

**Ipoteza de cercetare:** în anii 1918–1991 au avut loc evenimente semnificative din punct de vedere istoric, social, cultural – industrializarea, tehnologizarea, mediatizarea, globalizarea, care au marcat dezvoltarea ansamblului vestimentar în contextul ceremonialului nupțial.

**Valoarea teoretică:** Informațiile concentrate în paginile tezei sunt uzuale pentru continuarea cercetărilor și dezvoltarea pe alte direcții, oferă suportul teoretic necesar pentru elaborare de noi lucrări științifice privind cultura, arta, tradițiile românilor.

**Valoarea aplicativă:** Rezultatele științifice obținute pot fi utilizate pentru reconstituirea ansamblului nupțial cu scop de conservare și valorificare, ca suport științific pentru crearea imaginilor scenice, pentru completarea cursurilor didactice de istorie a costumului în instruire specializată a inginerilor în industria ușoară, designerilor vestimentari, a istoricilor, scenariștilor, costumierilor, precum și pentru dezvoltare în cercetări ulterioare.

**Aprobarea rezultatelor cercetării.** Rezultatele cercetărilor au fost valorificate editorial în 18 publicații științifice; și aprobate la 8 conferințe științifice naționale și internaționale.

## ANNOTATION

**CERCAȘIN, Marina, “The Wedding Attire Ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR: ethno-historical aspects”** doctoral thesis in history, specialty 612.01 “Ethnology.” The thesis comprises 232 pages, of which 162 pages are core text. The bibliography lists 245 titles in Romanian, English, and Russian. The illustrative apparatus included in the main text of the thesis and appendices comprises apx 268 materials.

**Purpose of the thesis:** An interdisciplinary examination of the structural and compositional evolution of wedding attire ensemble in Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR from 1918 to 1991, by conceptualizing and substantiating it, as well as placing it in the context of local wedding ceremony traditions from a historical, ethnological, and culturological perspective.

**Objectives:** a diachronic examination of the wedding attire ensemble as reflected in theoretical studies and accessible sources; identification, cataloging, and description of wedding props, religious and secular accessories found in the wedding rite; determination of the most significant stages in the development and transformation of wedding attire; identification of the ensemble’s component elements for both bride’s and groom’s attire, in the context of the social-economic, artistic, and fashion transformations of the 20th century; patrimonialization of the wedding attire ensemble in the context of heritage conservation opportunities; establishing the main characteristics of the wedding attire ensemble from Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR; determining the influences on the wedding attire ensemble and tracking its structural, aesthetic, and symbolic transformations; outlining possibilities for reconstructing the wedding attire ensemble specific to the population of Bessarabia and the Moldavian SSR.

**Research hypothesis:** Between 1918 and 1991, significant historical, social, and cultural events – such as industrialization, technological advancement, media proliferation, and globalization – marked the development of the attire ensemble within the context of wedding ceremonies.

**Theoretical value:** The information consolidated in the thesis provides a useful basis for continued research and for development in other directions. It offers the theoretical support needed to develop new scientific works on the culture, art, and traditions of the Romanian people.

**Practical value:** The scientific results obtained can be utilized for the reconstruction of the wedding attire with a view toward conservation and appreciation, as a scholarly resource for creating stage costumes, for supplementing costume history courses in specialized training for light industry engineers, fashion designers, historians, scriptwriters, costume designers, and for further research development.

**Validation of research results:** The research findings have been published in 18 scientific papers and presented at 8 national and international scientific conferences.



## АННОТАЦИЯ

**ЧЕРКАШИН Марина, «Свадебный костюм Бессарабии и Молдавской ССР: этноисторические аспекты»**, докторская диссертация по истории, специальность 612.01 «Этнология». Объем диссертации составляет 232 страниц, из них 162 страниц – основной текст; библиография состоит из 245 названий на румынском, английском, русском языках. Иллюстративный аппарат, входящий в основной текст диссертации и приложения, насчитывает примерно 268 материалов.

**Цель дипломной работы:** представить междисциплинарное исследование структурного и композиционного развития свадебного костюма Бессарабии и Молдавской ССР в период 1918–1991 годов посредством его концептуализации, а также его оформления в контексте традиции местной свадебной церемонии в историческом, этнологическом и культурном аспектах.

**Задачи:** диахроническое рассмотрение свадебного костюма Бессарабии и Молдавской ССР, отраженное в теоретических исследованиях, а также доступных источниках; идентификация, интерпретация и описание свадебных религиозных и светских аксессуаров, присутствующих в свадебном обряде и в костюме; выявление важнейших этапов развития и трансформации свадебного костюма; определение составляющих элементов свадебного костюма жениха и невесты и установление основных характеристик в контексте социально-экономических, идеологических изменений и веяний моды XX века; отслеживание аспектов его структурной, эстетической и символической трансформации; патримонизация свадебного костюма в контексте возможностей дальнейшего сохранения и продвижения его как национального культурного наследия; рассмотрение возможностей реконструкции свадебного костюма Бессарабии и Молдавской ССР.

**Гипотеза исследования:** В период с 1918 по 1991 год произошли значимые с исторической, социальной и культурной точек зрения события – научно-технический прогресс, индустриализация, глобализация, которые повлияли на развитие свадебного костюма в контексте свадебной церемонии.

**Теоретическая ценность:** Информация, представленная на страницах диссертации, может быть предназначена для дальнейших научных изысканий и исследований в других направлениях, обеспечивая теоретическую основу для разработки новых научных исследований в области культуры, искусства и традиций румын.

**Прикладное значение:** Полученные научные результаты могут быть использованы при реконструкции свадебного костюма с целью сохранения и применения его в качестве аутентичного образца для создания сценических образов, для составления дидактических курсов по истории костюма в специализированных учебных заведениях, а также для работников легкой промышленности, дизайнеров одежды, историков, сценаристов, костюмеров, для осуществления дальнейших исследований.

**Утверждение результатов исследования:** Результаты исследования были представлены в 18 научных изданиях и утверждены на 8 национальных и международных научных конференциях.

**CERCAȘIN Marina**

**WEDDING ATTIRE ENSEMBLE IN BESSARABIA  
AND THE MOLDAVIAN SSR:  
ETHNO-HISTORICAL ASPECTS**

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