

TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN BLOUSE - MANIFESTATION SPACE OF ROMANIAN FOLK TRADITIONS

DAVID Rodica¹, CUMPĂNAȘU Vasile²

^{1,2}Constantin Brâncuși University of Târgu Jiu, România
e-mail: david.rodica.mba@gmail.com

Abstract: The Romanian blouse, also known as “ia”, is a traditional Romanian clothing that has become a symbol of Romanian cultural identity. The Romanian blouse is often seen as a symbol of cultural resistance to globalization. The Romanian blouse has a rich history dating back several centuries. It has become a symbol of Romanian culture and national identity. However, the growing popularity of the Romanian blouse has also raised concerns about cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation occurs when a cultural element of a marginalized community is adopted by another community without recognizing its origin. In the case of the Romanian blouse, some people have expressed concern that the Romanian blouse has become a global fashion trend without Romanians receiving the appropriate credit. In response to these concerns, some organizations have worked to raise public awareness of the history and meaning of the Romanian blouse. Ultimately, the Romanian blouse is a complex symbol that embodies both Romania’s history and identity. In the context of globalization, the popularity of the Romanian blouse raises important questions about cultural appropriation and the importance of recognition of cultural origin. Indeed, cultural appropriation is a complex and controversial subject that raises important questions about respect for and recognition of minority cultures. In the case of the Romanian blouse, the growing popularity of this piece of clothing can be seen as a tribute to Romanian culture, but it can also be seen as an exploitation of this culture regardless of its origin and history.

Key words: *identity, origin, global fashion, clothing, Romanian blouse*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Romanian blouse “ia” has a rich history dating back several centuries. It has become a symbol of Romanian culture and national identity. The first records of the Romanian blouse date back to the time of the Roman Empire, when Roman soldiers described the clothing worn by the inhabitants of the region of Dacia (present-day Romania).

During the 20th century, the Romanian blouse became a symbol of cultural resistance. However, the Romanian blouse remained popular among

the Romanians, who considered it a symbol of their national identity.

In recent decades, the Romanian blouse has begun to be adopted by the world popular culture. Fashion designers such as Yves Saint Laurent and Tom Ford have incorporated elements of the Romanian blouse into their collections. Celebrities such as Beyoncé and Kate Middleton were also photographed wearing Romanian *ia*. This phenomenon was amplified by the rise of social media, which allowed the Romanian blouse to become a part of global fashion.

The Romanian *ia* is therefore an example of the complexity of globalization and its effects on culture and identity. On the one hand, the growing popularity of the Romanian blouse can help preserve this traditional piece of clothing and make it known to a wider audience. On the other hand, this popularity raises important questions about cultural ownership and recognition of the cultural origin.

It is therefore crucial to find a balance between appreciation of the culture of others and respect for its origins, in order to maintain the diversity and richness of the world culture. It is important to recognize the history and significance of the Romanian blouse and respect its cultural origin, while celebrating its beauty and contribution to global fashion.

2. THE ROMANIAN "IA" – A ROMANIAN SYMBOL

The folk costume is the symbol of our people, and the *ia* is the main element of the traditional costume, in any region of our country, the Romanian *ia*, hand-sewn and decorated with traditional motifs.

In Transylvania and Moldova, thicker materials were used, and in Oltenia, Muntenia and Dobrogea, they were made of thinner materials, the white cloth being made, by weaving, at home.

It is decorated with embroidery on the sleeves, on the chest and on the neck, and all the figures symbolize the Romanians' magic, faith and love for beauty. Each *ia* is unique in its own way, the patterns differ from one region to another. In Transylvania the embroideries are in one color, usually black, in Maramureș they are white, and in Oltenia they are bright red, and depending on the time of wearing, they had different meanings specific to certain events.

The magic signs carefully sewn on the *ia*, with each pin prick aim to protect from bad spirits, from charms and from bad fate the person who wears it. The young girls inherited from their grandmothers or from their mothers not only the art of the popular craft, but also the right prayers that had to be told before starting wool spinning or weaving.

The Romanian *ia* is a product specific to the Romanian women, who, in the past, was made by themselves even if they worked for a half a year or a year or more. They worked in secret, so that the model will not be the same. This is the explanation for those very beautiful and loaded models. Looking to a beautiful *ia*, we discover things of great emotion. As simple tailoring, so profound the signification is. Also known as the embroidered shirt, the *ia* represent more than a garment reinvented by the current designers, it remained a symbol, a story, a history book.

Among the representative personalities of our history, Queen Maria was the one who continuously promoted the beauty of the Romanian port, wearing it to all important events, Nicolae Grigorescu in his paintings captured the Romanian peasant woman either spinning wool, walking barefoot or working in the fields. The Institute of Ethnography and Folklore has created an album that includes thousands of popular shirts from over 800 villages, an album that is part of the materials presented at the U.N.E.S.C.O, with the aim of including it in the world heritage.

The day of June 24, the "universal day of the *ia*" also called the day of "Sânziene", a celebration associated with the cult of the harvest of vegetation and fertility, but also of the sun. The legend says that the Sânziene fest (or Drăgăicile) are good fairies, who gather on the day when the sun reaches its apogee (the summer solstice), dressed in white shirts, wearing crowns of yellow flowers, gather in chorus and play, thus giving powers particular to flowers and weeds, transforming them into "medicinal plants". According to tradition, on this day there are regions of the country where young girls, always dressed in the beautiful traditional costume, go to the fields and weave crowns of yellow flowers.

3. THE ROMANIAN "IA" – A PERPETUAL LEAVING BEAUTY

The Romanian blouse is a traditional piece of clothing that has become increasingly popular over the years. In 2023, *ia* continues to stand out as a unique and elegant piece that can be worn by all, regardless of its cultural origin.

Young people in particular have embraced the Romanian blouse as a stylish and trendy fashion choice. The colorful motifs, delicate embroideries and modern cuts make the Romanian blouse a versatile piece that can be worn for all occasions, whether for a casual outing with friends or for a more formal event.

The fashion designers have also integrated the Romanian blouse in their

collections, proposing modern and innovative models that respect tradition while adding a touch of modernity. Vivid colors and bold motifs are combined with fitted cuts and light fabrics to create unique pieces of clothing that highlight the beauty of the Romanian blouse.

Influencers and celebrities have also contributed to the popularity of the Romanian blouse by wearing it at public events and sharing photos of their outfits on social networks. This media exposure helped make the Romanian blouse known to a larger public and made it accessible to all.

Ultimately, the Romanian blouse has become an iconic piece that symbolizes the beauty and diversity of Romanian culture. The young people of 2023 can celebrate the richness of this culture and contribute to the diffusion of its beauty across the world. The Romanian blouse is therefore a must-have piece for young people who want to express themselves in a unique and elegant way.

The Romanian *ia* is an ancestral model of social responsibility, because the cloth is not wasted, the cut of the Romanian *ia* is with a minimum of cut and discarded cloth.

When starting to sew a shirt, the woman promises herself that she will finish it, that she will wear it, that she will be proud of it. The idea is to sew shirts to wear, to reduce the amount of plastic clothes that fill our closets. We must propose a long-term relationship with the sewn shirt, which we will not get bored of overtime and which we will wear with the same pride and pleasure on the first day and in the following days, months, years!

3.1.Ia: a dowry, a logo, a Romanian national inscription

In Romania, the national costume (the female one) was imposed thanks to the Royal House of Romania. Wanting to integrate with the nation she led and promote its specific values, since 1885, Queen of Romania wore the folk costume, especially that of Argeș and Muscel, at various events, appreciating the richness and refinement of the embroideries, the elegance and the preciousness of the materials. Queen Maria adopted the traditional costume as the official outfit for the nation's holidays and, thus, under the patronage of the Royal House, a true popular costume fashion was launched among Romanian ladies, being adopted as an identity emblem at various receptions and national events. The establishment of the Royal Workshops for the creation of folk costumes and carpets, with women from the respective areas as workers, contributed to satisfying the increasingly numerous demands of the nobility, the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. Under the prestige of the Royal House, Muscel and Argeș costumes become

real emblems of Romanians, being also assumed by rural notables. Procuring these costumes was easy as there were merchants who sold them through the fairs frequented by the peasants. Today the Muscel women's costume continues to be called the national costume, simultaneously perpetuating in the Romanians' consciousness, the prestige of the Royal House and popular culture.

3.2. Most common patterns and signs sewn on ia

In addition to the artistic excellence, the top, always positioned at shoulder level, in the area of maximum visibility of the shirt, has important communication functions. Analyzing its functional-artistic structure, we discover precious information about the skill and talent of the working woman (the technological excellence of the embroidery points used – from 7-8 types to 10-12 – is a criterion for highlighting in the community; material condition and social position of the wearer (through the quality of the materials used to make the shirt - silk cloth, marquise - and the embroidery threads - wool, cotton or silk threads processed at home or purchased - the economic potential and prestige of the family, marital status and age are highlighted (the dimensions and the chromaticity of the top is done differently for little girls, brides, young wives and old women, and the colors respect the code of existential evolution: for little girls, the top is only marked in cheerful and bright colors, brides wear rich tops, with 5-7 rows, with red, young wives wear shirts in a dominant color, usually red, with polychrome accents, and older women prefer the monochrome of sober colors, ultramarine blue or black); the ceremonial status (bridal shirt, mother-in-law shirt, mourning shirt; each of these pieces respects the cut and type of composition specific to the areas but is individualized by the categories of motifs used.

The decorative variants of the sleeve upper part (*altiță*) shirt were born under the influence of the need to adapt the basic piece of the folk costume, not only to environmental and climatic conditions, but also to the customary and moral rigors imposed by the age and civil status of the wearers. The psychological need of each generation to impose its own artistic taste and to respond to the echoes of some fashions, which also reached the rural environment, were the main motivation for the evolution of the sleeve upper part (*altiță*). The desire to express, through clothes, the personality and sensitivity specific to the historical time they lived in, generated in the Romanian villages a very tight dialectic between what one need to wear and what one wants to wear. The relationship between canon and freedom experienced a special dynamic in most areas, contributing to the stimulation

of female creativity and the development of this important element of the Romanian cultural heritage. For decades and even centuries in a row, the competence and craftsmanship of thousands of women from Romania's villages have polished, generation after generation, the same jewel - *ia* - perfecting its cut, embroidery techniques and decorative repertoires. Beyond functionality and respect for the tradition of the place, when the zonal particularities appeared, feminine coquetry had a say, fueled by women's permanent need to be unique and, of course, beautiful. The art of the Romanian shirt with *altiță* is based on the manual execution of all operations and the ingenious combination of the main means of expression: materials, sewing/embroidery techniques, types of decorative compositions, categories of motifs and their stylization.



Figure 1: Most used sewn marks on *ia*
Source: Internet

By observing the basic principles of art – rhythm, symmetry, repetition, the balance of chromatic weights – the *ia* and, implicitly, the entire popular female costume acquired immense social prestige, being a garment with emblematic and fascinating status, a true visual witness of popular spirituality.

The main piece of the traditional Romanian costume, the high-waisted shirt has today become an emblematic object, with an important memorial-affective value, being a mark of the Romanian cultural identity. Passed down

from generation to generation (in the family, at the lodges, in plain view or "stolen" and worked in secret), the *ia* continues to be worn in the countryside on Sundays, at church, as well as during family, ceremonial and festive events.

The traditional motifs on the traditional Romanian port were inspired by life and nature. Here are the main inspirations of the traditional Romanian symbols: the stars, the sun, the cross, the bread, the spike, the flowers, the stars, the tools for working the earth, the eye, the geometric figures.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, if the Romanian *ia* could speak, in a sweet Romanian language, we could learn a fascinating story of a nation and a land in close communion. It could tell about beauty of life, about harmony and perfection, about heaven and earth, in a close connection about immortality.

The way in which the Romanian *ia* has lasted over time is a true proof of the steadfastness of the people who created it and who embellish it, making it unique among the peoples of the world.

The Romanian *ia* represents our cultural identity, part of our DNA, written with so much mastery, elegance and uniqueness, in the code of values of the Romanian people, it is part of the Romanian folk costume.

It was loved by royal personalities, painters, wishing to remind of its value, but also to perpetuate and honor the tradition, it was offered a day in the calendar, June 24.

This dedication is a mean of promoting our culture, as a symbol of Romanian identity.

5. REFERENCES

1. [ia românească, un mijloc de promovare a identității românilor \(ietraditionala.com\)](http://ia.romaneasca.unmijlocdepromovareaidentitatiiromanelor.com);
2. Boț, N. Șezătoarea în Zona Năsăudului. *Anuarul Muzeului Etnografic al Transilvaniei pe anii 1965-1967, 1969*;
3. Vlad, M. (II, 2002, Febr – Iunie). Șezătoarea în Sălișteea de Sus. *Memoria Etnologica* (2-3);
4. Bănățeanu, T. România – *Din tezaurul portului popular tradițional*, Editura Sport, Turism, 1977;
5. Gheorghe I. *Ocupații tradiționale pe teritoriul României*, Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1985;
6. Ișfănoni, D., Popoiu, P. *Costumul românesc de patrimoniu din Colecțiile Muzeului Național al Satului „Dimitrie Gusti”*, Editura Alcor, București, 2008.