

Romanian Heritage inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage



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National Commission
of Romania for UNESCO



ROMANIAN HERITAGE INSCRIBED ON UNESCO'S REPRESENTATIVE LIST of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

This booklet part of a series of three publications
of The National Commission of Romania for UNESCO illustrating the varieties
of national heritage inscribed in the UNESCO's Lists

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The Intangible Cultural Heritage

The *Immaterial* or *Intangible* Cultural Heritage are more recent concepts that became the object of a UNESCO Convention in 2003, after a number of debates that spread across a few decades. The difference between the two is related to their origin: English speakers prefer the term “intangible”, whereas French speakers talk about an “immaterial” heritage.

Although perhaps conveying different nuances, both concepts touch upon the constant preoccupation UNESCO has for understanding culture in an integrated way. Thus, the almost 1000 participants in the Mondiacult Conference of 1982, which took place in Mexico under the auspices of UNESCO, agreed that the cultural heritage also included the works through which the creativity of human communities finds expression, such as their languages, rites, beliefs or certain crafts.

This extended definition of culture gave rise to a number of new preoccupations for the UNESCO member states, which ultimately converged into a

new regulatory instrument. Firstly, there is now a greater focus on diffuse cultural expression in which a large part of the community participates and which carries on the identity values of that community. Secondly, this identity-related feature of cultural expression cannot be separated from the acknowledgement of the pluralistic character of such expression. Finally, a third element is that the intangible cultural heritage is passed on from one generation to the next. In the absence of such a transfer, the intangible heritage would risk disappearing forever.

Building on these three elements, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was established in 2003. The Convention defined its object as including the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”.



The „intangible cultural heritage” is a concept created and promoted by UNESCO due to the interest that several member states of that prestigious international organisation expressed towards protecting traditional culture. This type of heritage enjoyed the organisation’s attention as early as 1989, when UNESCO issued its Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, whereby it encouraged its member states to protect their oral literature, their handicrafts, their rituals etc. In order to provide this new heritage category with the same status that the UNESCO World Heritage enjoys worldwide, the “traditional culture and folklore” were renamed as “intangible cultural heritage” in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003. Romania ratified the said Convention in 2005.

Ioana Baskerville, Ph.D., National Focal Point for the UNESCO Convention of 2003

**According to the UNESCO Convention,
the intangible cultural heritage**

is manifested in the following domains:

- a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- b) performing arts;
- c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- e) traditional craftsmanship.





Wall-carpet craftsmanship | Photo: Tudorel Ilie

The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Symmetrically to the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage also operates with several lists. In order to ensure better visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and awareness of its significance, and to encourage a dialogue which respects cultural diversity, a *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* was established. At the time of writing these lines, this list includes 631 elements from 140 countries, reflecting diverse manifestations of human creativity, as illustrated by the following list: the porcelain of Limoges, the joking relationships in Niger, the Turkish art of marbling and the Estonian sauna, the lacemaking in Croatia, the tango of Argentina, the Vanuatu sand drawings, the Belgian shrimp fishing on horseback, alpinism or

the Mediterranean diet. However, the fragility of the intangible heritage made it necessary to also establish a *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*.

The process of inscribing an element on the Intangible Heritage List is a lengthy one and requires sustained research and documentation efforts. In order to be admitted by UNESCO for inclusion in the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, the nomination dossier of each element must comply fully with a number of requirements, namely:

- The proposed element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in the 2002 Convention;
- The inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to

encouraging intercultural dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide;

- The state submitting the nomination dossier has elaborated adequate safeguarding measures that may protect and promote the element;
- The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent;
- The element is already included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory of the submitting state.

In Romania, the activity of researching, preserving and promoting the intangible heritage is coordinated by the *National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, a dedicated scientific body operating under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. The same commission is responsible for preparing the nomination dossiers for the inclusion in the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.

România in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

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- Doina (2009)
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Wall-carpet ornamental theme | Photo: Tudorel Ilie



Group of *Călușari* | Photo: National Museum of the Romanian Peasant

Căluș Ritual

- **Year of inscription: 2008**
- **Domains: performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events**
- **Location: Oltenia**

The Dance of the *Căluș* is a traditional Romanian dance associated with miraculous feats, which is regularly performed before the Pentecost. Typical to the region of Oltenia, the *Căluș* ritual dance also belongs to the cultural inheritance of the Vlachs who live south of the Danube. Although the earliest

attestations date back from the 17th century, the ritual probably derived from old purification and fertility rites that used the symbol of the horse, which was worshipped as an embodiment of the Sun. The name of the ritual derives from “*căluș*”, which is the wooden part of a horse bridle. The *Căluș* ritual features a series of games, skits, songs and dances, and it is enacted by all-male *Călușari* dancers to the accompaniment of two violins and an accordion. Young men are initiated into the ritual by a “*vătaf*” (master), who has inherited the knowledge of magic charms and incantations and who shares some of his authority with The Mute, a character whose face is covered by a mask (usually made of goat skin) and who is armed with a sword and, at times, a whip.

Groups of *Călușari* dancers, sporting colourful hats, embroidered shirts and trousers adorned with

small jingling bells, perform complex dances that combine a varied choreography with leaps, rhythmic slaps and other elements.

The group uses specific instruments such as: a banner, the wooden sticks of the *Călușari* dancers, a sword (carried by the masked character), plants having prophylactic and healing powers such as garlic, wormwood and sometimes basil, as well as purifying substances: salt, incense, and water. They carry on a ceremonial act endowed with magical powers of healing and of fertility, meant to bring health and prosperity.

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The Căluș is a prophylactic and healing ritual meant to ensure the prosperity of the households where it is performed; it involves elements of choreography, sound, folk costumes and theatrical props, as well as a whole repertoire of beliefs. It is performed during the time of the Pentecost holiday, when the Călușari dancers (the main performers of the ritual, an odd-numbered group of men wearing a special costume) walk about the village and dance in the households that invite them in. The ritual is performed not only during the days of Pentecost, but also during the following week, and in many communities, it ends on the following Sunday, when ‘the căluș is broken’ and the group’s flag is destroyed. In recent years, the ritual has been frequently displayed on stage, being included in the heritage and thus becoming emblematic for the folk culture of Romania.

**Virgil Stefan NITULESCU, Ph.D., Manager of the
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant**



Photo: National Museum of the Romanian Peasant



Photo: Tudorel Ilie



Photo: Tudorel Ilie



Traditional singers of *Doina* | Photos: Tudorel Ilie

Doina

- **Year of inscription: 2009**
- **Domains: oral traditions and expressions; performing arts**
- **Location: counties of Maramureș, Năsăud, Gorj, Dolj, Teleorman, Mehedinți, Vâlcea, and Vrancea**

The *doina* is a lyrical and solemn chant in the form of a free, spontaneous improvisation. It can be sung in any context and is always performed solo, with or without instrumental accompaniment (which might traditionally include the wooden flute, bagpipes and even improvised instruments).

We can find the word *Doina* recorded in writing as

early as the 17th and 18th centuries, for instance in the memorial on Transylvania written by the Lutheran pastor Andreas Mathesius, in Franz Joseph Sulzer's monography on Transalpine Dacia or in *Descriptio Moldaviae*, written by the Moldavian ruler Dimitrie Cantemir, who believed that the *doina* originated from Dacian times, when it was mostly a war song.

The *doina* spans a wide-ranging and expressive thematic palette that ranges from joy, sadness, love, solitude, longing, sorrow of separation or regret to

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Doina seems to be the name that the Dacians gave to Mars or to Bellona, as it is uttered at the beginning of all the songs of war and it is the prelude of the common songs of the Moldovan people.

Dimitrie Cantemir

social conflicts and more. By expressing the personal qualities, emotions and virtuosity of the creator-performer, the *doina* also plays an important social role, as it strengthens solidarity in the community. Depending on its thematic register, the *doina* can be a longing chant, a mourning chant, a love song, a song of the outlaws, a shepherd's or a soldier's lament.

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Substantial, emotional and original, the doina enriches the spiritual heritage of mankind by a myriad songs of masterpiece level in whose creation man is confronted to the theme of his singing.

Sabina Ispas, member of the Romanian Academy and director of the “Constantin Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnography and Folklore

Today, the *doina* is sung mostly in the north of Oltenia, in Muntenia, in the north of Moldova and Transylvania and in parts of Banat and Maramureș.



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It is sadness in the midst of joy itself. This feeling is inspired by our valleys and hills, by the distinct colour of our skies, by the thoughts that lie heavy on the heart and at the same time give birth in us to a longing that cannot be fully explained. A foreigner who is my friend once told me, when listening to me playing one of my music pieces: ‘in this composition there seems to be something that cannot come to fulfilment’. That longing, I believe, is the only original characteristic of Romanian songs.

George Enescu





Craftsmanship of Horezu ceramics

- **Year of inscription: 2012**
- **Domains: traditional craftsmanship**
- **Location: village of Olari, Horezu**

At the beginning of the 20th century, pottery was widespread on the territory of today's Romania. According to the experts, the craft was being practiced in almost 400 centres. Clay pottery was used both for food and for decorating the guestrooms of

the peasants' houses. The origins of Horezu ceramics are lost in the mists of time, making it impossible to establish an exact chronology. Some legends tell that the Greek craftsmen who worked at the Hurezi Monastery of Horezu brought this pottery technique with them and taught it to the locals. Although this explanation is not supported by documents, it is however rather plausible.

Apart from the craft itself, another unique feature of the Horezu ceramics resides in the clay used for making the pottery, which is extracted from the Ulmet Hill.

According to the UNESCO nomination dossier, the making of Horezu ceramics in the village of Olari from Vâlcea County is a "unique traditional craft" that is practiced by both men and women in the northern part of Vâlcea County. Thus, according to the UNESCO description, "Men select and



extract the earth, which is then cleaned, cut, watered, kneaded, trampled and mixed - transforming it into a clay body from which the potters of Horezu produce a red pottery. (...) The women decorate the objects using specific techniques and tools to draw traditional motifs. Their skill in combining decoration and colour defines the personality and uniqueness of these ceramics. The colours are vivid shades of dark brown, red, green, blue and «Horezu ivory»."

The main symbols of the ornamentation are inspired by the neighbouring flora and fauna: the fir tree, the snake, the snowdrops, the leaf, the Sun, the star, the wheat spike, the double spiral, the tree of life or the peacock tail. However, the best-known depiction is that of the cock, a symbol that has ancient ritualistic connotations, as the cock heralds the beginning of a new day, the victory of light over darkness.





Photos: Tudorel Ilie

Men's group Colindat, Christmas- time ritual

- **Year of inscription: 2013**
- **Domain: social practices, rituals and festive events**
- **Location: throughout Romania**

The Men's group *Colindat*, Christmas-time ritual was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as a translational file prepared by Romania together with the Republic of Moldova, at the Eighth Session of the UNESCO In-

tergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which took place in December 2013.

The ritual of *Colindat* (singing of *colinde* songs), practiced throughout Romania and the Republic of Moldova, has assimilated a Christian message, that of announcing the winter holidays. However, the traditions point to pre-Christian elements.

The groups are formed of young men who are still unmarried, but intend to have a family, which proves that the ritual can be seen as an episode of the rite of passage for men in traditional Romanian societies. The groups begin to form a few weeks before Christmas, usually around Saint Andrew's Day (30th of November) or Saint Nicholas Day (6th of December), then choose a leader who can have different titles, according to the region: *Vătaf mare* (Great master), *Jude* (Judge), *Călfă* (Journeyman), *Păstor* (Shepherd) etc. Apart from the high authority leader, the group includes other roles as well, such as the

cook and the taverner who are responsible for the young men's food and drink, the donkey who carries the gifts they receive, and the *sameș* (tribute collector) who collects the money.

The traditional form of *Colindat* involves the participation of the whole community: some people play the role of *colindători* (performers of the *colinde*), and the others become the audience. Although religion-inspired messages are predominant, some *colinde* are also centred on the hosts – often called boyars. There are *colinde* which are performed depending of the hosts's role, especially if the latter is an important member of the community, such as the priest or the teacher.

In certain parts of the country, especially the

north of Moldavia, the group members dress up as different characters – related to either the Nativity scene or to the daily life in the community – and play little meaningful sketches that remind of rural theatre. A variant of this costumed ritual is the *goat dance*, a ritual for fertility and for the regeneration of nature.

The last stage of the *colindat* tradition happens after the New Year, starting on Saint Basil's Day, and involves a series of rituals related to the beginning of agricultural work, such as ploughing a furrow before the houses so that the villagers might enjoy an abundant harvest. The group usually meets for the last time on Saint John's Day, when the young men celebrate the last holiday of the winter season.





Photos: Tudorel Ilie

Lad's Dances in Romania

- ■ **Year of inscription: 2015**
- ■ **Domains: performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events**
- ■ **Location: Transylvania**

According to experts, these dances were born around the time of the Renaissance, but they were first documented in the 16th century. Known under a variety of names, such as *Haidău*, *Bărbunc* or *Târnavăană*, these dances belong to a choreographic family which is specific to Central Europe and which includes the lad's dances of Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Germany or Italy.

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Lad's Dances are great displays of virtuosity and harmonious combinations of plastic elements and rhythm. They all involve leaping, feet stomping, contretemps stomping and spur clicking, but the one feature that clearly sets them apart from other men's dances in our country is the leg slapping technique.

*Such movements are generally called **points** (an original choreographic idea). A **Lad's point** involves a series of well-defined dance moves that end in a final move – the conclusion (key). When the **points** are performed by groups, they alternate with so-called **walks**, which are simpler moves (usually performed as sequences of lateral steps). The **walks** are included because the dancers need some rest after the **points**, which take a lot of energy to perform. In all these dances, the dancers do not hold*

*hands with each other and can be arranged in a column, a semicircle, a circle or in free formation. The lack of physical contact between individual dancers allows them more freedom of movement than in any other men's dance of Romania. This kinetic content is complemented and underlined by exclamations, shouted mainly by the dancers' leader. Such exclamations, which are always present in the dances of Transylvania, are only heard during the **walks**, as the **points** are more difficult to perform and require all the dancers' energy. The Lad's Dances are a good occasion for social interaction, as all the members of the community are invited to participate. It is also an opportunity for young men to affirm themselves in society,*

as by tradition this dance is an anticipation of marriage. The Lad's Dances are markers of gender identity as well as of the social and local identity, but they also provide a vehicle for intercultural communication in a multi-ethnic region. The dances are transmitted both non-formally, as they can be learned by participating in festivities and observing the performers, and formally – in the framework of organised dance groups.

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Photos: Tudorel Ilie

Traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship

- **Year of inscription: 2016**
- **Domain: traditional craftsmanship**
- **Location: counties of Botoșani, Neamț, Bacău, Olt, Vâlcea, Dolj, Gorj, Maramureș, Prahova and Buzău**

This craft, which is well represented in the households of Maramureș County, as well as in the north and centre of the historical province of Moldavia (counties of Botoșani, Neamț, and Bacău), but also in the counties of Prahova and Buzău, as well as in the

region of Oltenia (counties of Olt, Vâlcea, Dolj, and Gorj), plays an important role in social communication and in enhancing and promoting a cultural identity. The wall carpets, basic traditional objects used for decorating the houses in rural areas, are also known as *scoarțe* (carpets), *păretare* (woven wall hangings), *lăicere* (wool rugs for covering benches), *velințe* (wool carpets), *chilimuri* (kilims), *lădare* (carpets for covering chests), *ungherare* (carpets for covering corner chests) or *cergi* (thick wool blankets).

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*In Romania, weaving wall carpets is an ancestral tradition. The name **scoarțe** is of Latin origin and its primary meaning (tree bark) recalls their basic function, one that is similar to the former use of spruce tree bark for insulating log houses. The originality, unity and artistic value of Romanian wall carpets are a tribute to the mastery of the women who have woven them for generations, as well as to*

their ingenuity in creating decorative compositions embedding motifs and symbols that are widespread across Europe and beyond. The carpets are made on vertical or horizontal looms by intertwining wool threads. The preparatory steps for weaving – manually sorting and processing the textile fibres, followed by warping and woofing – are basis of the subsequent woven fabric. Between 1850 and 1950, hemp was used as warp, later to be replaced by stranded cotton.

Narcisa Alexandra Știucă, Ph.D., Senior lecturer at the Department of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest

Doina Ișfănoni, Ph.D., ethnographic researcher at the “Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, Bucharest

The Romanian wall carpet evolved around two main ornamental themes: one where geometric patterns prevail, spanning a large area from Oltenia to Maramureș, and one featuring vegetal ornaments, although the symbolic motifs of the latter are spread over a more limited area.

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An important role in perpetuating and developing the ornamental repertoires of the wall carpets was played by carpet workshops organized in monasteries (Agapia, Văratec, Hurezi, Vorona) and the craft workshops of towns and cities (Târgu Jiu, Craiova, Câmpulung Muscel in Argeș County and Pietroșița in Dâmbovița County. In the early 20th century, the Royal House of Romania founded royal carpet workshops, which would promote the traditional wall-carpets as representative weavings outside of rural areas. The most valuable items made in those workshops were promoted as symbols of national identity in world exhibitions of Europe and America.

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Doina Ișfănoni, Ph.D., ethnographic researcher at the “Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, Bucharest





Wall-carpet craftsmanship in Botiza | Photo: Tudorel Ilie





Cultural practices associated to the 1st of March (Mărțișorul)

- **Year of inscription: 2017**
- **Domains: performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events**
- **Location: throughout Romania**

Today, the *Mărțișor* is one of the most popular Romanian customs. This traditional celebration, born from the beliefs and agrarian customs of our ancestors the Geto-Dacians and the Romans, heralds the

rebirth of nature and the beginning of a new agricultural year; it is closely related to the traditions of the New Year, which used to start on the 1st of March in ancient times. Researchers believe that the first *Mărțișoare* were amulets meant to protect their bearer from adverse forces at the turn of the season, when spring began.

For example, the first written account of the *Mărțișor* on the territory of Romania, in a work by the steward lordache Golescu, captured this two-fold role as a token of celebration for spring and as an amulet: “*Mărțișor* is the month of March, but it’s also what they call a twisted thread made of a white strand and another red one, which they tie around the neck, around the hands of children in the month of March, so that it may guard them, warding off all disease and the evil eye...”.

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*In the past, the **Mărțișoare** used to be worn around the neck or wrist. The twisted strands of the **Mărțișor** symbolise the unity of opposites: cold and warm, winter and*

summer, death and life, female and male, the never-ending regeneration of life. Over time, the **Mărțișor** adapted so as to keep up with the times; thus, step by step, it started to be pinned to the coat, in order to be displayed near the chest, at the level of the heart. In some regions of Romania, the thread that heralds the arrival of spring is attached to the door or the window in order to chase away the evil spirits, or even to the horns of cattle or the stable gate in order to protect the household.

The **Mărțișor** was initially a ritual object, but at present it has become an adornment to be worn near the chest or around the wrist. At one point in history, people would tie a silver coin to the thread so that the wearer might be protected from all evils and become clear as silver. Girls and young married women would also hope that, by wearing one, they would be beautiful, rosy-cheeked or sheltered from sunburn. Depending on the region, the **Mărțișor** can be worn until the 9th of March, until the Armindeni (May Day), until Pam Sunday or until the blooming of trees, of roses, of blackthorn or of rosehip, until the storks return or the cuckoo begins to sing again. In some parts of the country, people wear it until storks return to the area and then throw it after the birds, saying "Take your blacks/ And give me my whites" in order to have a beautiful white complexion all through the year. In other cases, the **Mărțișor** is thrown behind a cuckoo (a bird of prophecy, just as the stork) when the bird's first song of the year is heard. Researchers have noticed many similitudes between the mărțișor and the wayfarer cross. The wayfarer - or wayfaring tree - is a shrub that blooms with white flowers resembling those of the elder tree and which is endowed with magical powers according to popular belief. Thus, both the **mărțișor** and the wayfarer cross were initially ritual objects with protective and prophylactic functions, aimed at bringing abundance and preserving beauty. Moreover, both are specific to times of renewal, when the year changes or a new season begins. Both involve red tassels, as popular belief endows this colour with an important protective role against the evil eye or other malefic forces, but also because red is a symbol of the Sun and its warmth.

Monica Dușan,
Muzeul Civilizației Dacice și Romane, Deva



Photos: Tudorel Ilie





Photo: Tudorel Ilie



Black Lipizzan horse, Stud Farm in Sâmbăta de Jos | Photos: Mihail Lechkun

Lipizzan horse breeding traditions

On the 25th of March 2020, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary submitted to UNESCO a multinational dossier for the “Lipizzan horse breeding traditions” to be included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Lipizzan breed dates back to the aftermath of 1580, when the archduke Karl von Habsburg established a stud farm in Lipizza, south of the Habsburg Empire (today, Lipica in Slovenia). This gave birth to “bloodlines” such as Pluto, Conversano, Neapolitano, Maestoso and Favory. The Siglavy line, of Arabian origin, was introduced later, in the 19th century, and two new “bloodlines” were established around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century: the Tulipan and the Incitato.

In Romania, the tradition of breeding Lipizzan horses has its roots in the 18th century, being closely linked to the stud farms of the Habsburg Empire. The first documentary attestation of this practice on the current territory of Romania dates from 1874, when the Imperial stud farm was relocated from Mezőhegyes (Hungary) to Sâmbăta de Jos, which at that time was a state domain of Austria-Hungary.

The State Stud Farm in Sâmbăta de Jos was established in 1920, gathering specimens from farmers in the villages of Făgăraș Land, around the farm. The number of horses increased year by year so that, by the mid-1980s, the Sâmbăta de Jos stud farm be-



came the largest Lipizzan breeding unit in the world. Lipizzan horses born and raised in our country were exported to Sweden, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands and Austria. Moreover, a “bloodline” was created in Michigan, United States, that was called Maestoso-Romania.

Today, the stud farm in Sâmbăta de Jos breeds 7 of the 8 bloodlines of this race, which makes it one of the world’s most important farms. Over time, the popularity of Lipizzan horses has grown due to their elegant and imposing posture, their stamina, intelligence and loyalty.

The specificity of Lipizzan horse breeding resides in a set of knowledge, practices and skills related to training the specimens, that were transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Apart from these, the communities involved have developed a number of cultural and social practices as part of different rituals, events, equestrian competitions and specific traditional occupations: farrier, saddler, harness maker, stud farmer.



Transhumance in Năsăd | Photo: Dorin Circu

Transhumance

On March 30, 2022, ten European countries, including Romania, submitted to UNESCO the multi-national file **“Transhumance, the seasonal migration of herds”** for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The preparation of the file was coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Sport of Spain, in partnership with similar institutions from Albania, Andorra, Austria, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, and Romania. This nomination expands the element “Transhumance” inscribed in 2019 by Austria, Greece, and Italy, which referred to migratory routes in the Mediterranean and Alpine regions.

Romania made a significant contribution to this file, coordinated by experts from the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cul-

tural Heritage and the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, and Scientific Research. Field research highlighted active transhumance routes in areas such as Muscel, Bran-Moieciu, and other mountain regions, thus emphasizing the cultural and natural value of the practice within the context of the Romanian Carpathians.

Transhumance refers to the seasonal movement of people and herds, usually between mountain summer pastures and wintering areas in the lowlands, a practice with roots that go back to the Roman Empire. This age-old tradition reflects the pastoral adaptation specific to Romanian and European territories. Moreover, transhumance supports the conservation of mountain ecosystems and biodiversity, making this practice a true bridge between cultural and natural heritage. In this way, Romania is part of a global heritage that values the interdependencies between people, animals, and the environment.



Transhumance | Photo: Iulian Vlad



Altiță from Arbore, Suceava | Photo: Tudorel Ilie

The traditional blouse with embroidery on the shoulder (Alțiță)

The multinational file **“The art of the blouse with embroidery on the shoulder (altiță) - an element of cultural identity in Romania and the Republic of Moldova”** was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2023.

With a wide geographical spread and a tradition traced back as early as the 4th millennium BC, the blouse with altiță continues to represent an emblematic clothing tradition for the regions of Moldova, Bucovina, Muntenia, Oltenia, and southern Transylvania. The term “altiță” refers to the decorated portion located on the upper part of the ie (the traditional Romanian blouse).

Having become a traditional attire strongly promoted by the Romanian Royal House during the interwar period, the blouse with altiță inspired famous works by French painter Henri Matisse, as well as contemporary reinterpretations by designers such as Yves Saint Laurent, Kenzo, and Jean Paul Gaultier, who integrated the cut and ornamental motifs of the Romanian folk blouse into renowned collections.

For the completion of the nomination file, the Romanian side benefited from the contributions of experts from the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest, researchers from the “Constantin Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnography and Folklore - Romanian Academy, as well as specialists from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, the “Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, the Museum of Oltenia, the ASTRA National Museum Complex in Sibiu, and the Brașov Museum of Ethnography.

The Universal Day of the Ie, celebrated annually

on June 24, represents an important symbolic moment both in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova, where joint efforts to promote and safeguard intangible cultural heritage continue with a strong focus on educational projects and cultural initiatives at both national and international levels.



Romanian traditional blouse, Olt County | Photo: Doina Isfanoni

Looking Ahead

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Today, Romania has ten elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, after two new files were inscribed at the end of 2022: **“The art of the blouse with embroidery on the shoulder (altiță) - an element of cultural identity in Romania and the Republic of Moldova”** and **“Traditions of breeding the Lipizzan horses”** (a multinational file with Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary).

Also in 2022, the file **“Transhumance - the seasonal migration of herds”** (a multinational file with Albania, Andorra, Austria, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain) was submitted, with the inscription decision being made in 2023.

**Ioana Baskerville, Ph.D.,
National Focal Point for the
UNESCO Convention of 2003**





Women sewing the romanian traditional blouse | Photo: Tudorel Ilie

Cobza, traditional knowledge, skills and music

Romania and the Republic of Moldova submitted a joint dossier in 2024 for the inclusion of the cobza on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The dossier highlights both the craftsmanship involved in building this traditional musical instrument and the living cultural heritage associated with cobza performance in the Romanian-Moldovan cultural space.

The cobza most likely emerged in the 15th century as a local adaptation of the Oriental lute (the Persian barbat or Turkish oud), introduced into Romanian territory by itinerant musicians known as lăutari. Its name derives from the Turkish term “kopuz”, used in the Middle Ages for various stringed instruments of Turkic peoples.

Traditionally, cobzas were handcrafted in vari-

ous Romanian regions, with artisan workshops in Moldova (Iași, Botoșani, Suceava counties), Muntenia, Oltenia, as well as in modern factories such as “Hora” in Reghin and the former “Doina” factory in Bucharest. Folk models were made by hand in rural environments, while factory production standardized the shape and tuning during the 20th century.

The cobza was commonly used in traditional folk music ensembles in the historical provinces of Moldova and Wallachia, accompanying dances like hora, sârba, and bățuta. It also occasionally played a solo role of great value in popular music, being a key instrument in the tarafs of professional or semi-professional lăutari until the 20th century when it was gradually replaced by other instruments like the cimbalom and accordion.



Photo: Sașa-Liviu Stoianovici





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