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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

**“THE HAT IN MODERN HISTORY – A SOCIAL AND
ARTISTIC PHENOMENON (1848–1947)”**

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KEYWORDS: history of fashion, history of the hat, fashion, milliners, hatters, dress codes, 19th-century fashion, interwar fashion, La Belle Époque fashion, wartime fashion, fashion and ideology.

The Hat in Modern History – A Social and Artistic Phenomenon (1848–1947) analyzes the Western-style hat, both men's and women's, within the Romanian urban environment between 1848 and 1947, excluding Oriental style headwear, traditional/rural types, or uniforms. The wearing of hats is explored from both an international and national perspective, highlighting the decisive influence of Western fashion on Romanian urban style during the period 1848–1947, in which local creations were limited, and foreign imports and fashions consistently dominated. Thus, the succession of clothing styles was shaped by the complex interaction between international influences and local socio-economic particularities, between individual aspirations for elegance, social prestige and modernizing forces. The chronological delimitation corresponds to the era of most effervescent wearing of European hats in modern Romanian urban culture. The study of hats is integrated into the analysis of the entire outfit, emphasizing their importance in the aesthetic and social clothing discourse, closely connected with the evolution of fashion and the socio-cultural context of the era. The thesis analyzes the evolution of hats and wearing norms as a result of political, social, technological, and artistic influences, identifying the role of headgear as a barometer of historical and cultural changes in society. The research objectives were the creation of an archive of period head accessories and images; a stylistic chronology with detailed descriptions and a continuous comparison between the international and national phenomena; the establishment of a dating tool for hats/fashion from 1840 to 1950; the creation of an inventory of shops, brands, workshops, and factories operating in Romanian territory; a fashion vocabulary listing terms – old and contemporary – for various items/models; highlighting the complex (historical, social) meanings of hats and dress code etiquette; revealing the mechanisms – social, artistic, political – behind changes in hat fashion styles.

The functional purpose is not primary for many clothing items, including hats; social meanings prove to be more important. As a key element of the outfit, with strong symbolic and social connotations, the hat expressed status, identity and values, signaling community or age group and communicating through dress codes that functioned as a complex non-verbal language. From an artistic point of view, the hat represented the stylistic essence of the era's fashion. Fashion, as a complex semiotic system, offers infinite possibilities for expression and evocation, relying on a vast cultural memory of clothing, with each element referring to historical moments, moral norms and social symbols. The research highlights the profound role of fashion as a means of expressing identity and individual aspirations, actively

impacting behavior, self-perception, and societal evolution, being an active factor of cultural, technological and historical change closely linked to the process of democratization and personal assertion. A history of head accessories provides a revealing perspective on society and constitutes a relevant tool for historical research. The thesis seeks to demonstrate that hats and period clothing items represent fertile documentary sources for a better understanding of social, cultural, and political history.

A fundamental component of the documentation carried out within this research, and simultaneously one of the original contributions of the thesis, is the creation of a large archive of headwear objects dated between 1840 and 1950, comprising approximately 470 hats, most of them from the post-1900 period. A significant part of the inventory consists of pieces originating from private collections. Thus, the documentary sources used included historical garment collections – both museum collections (Bucharest Municipality Museum, Braşov Urban Civilization Museum, Banat National Museum, “Paul Păltănea” History Museum Galaţi, Goleşti Viticulture and Fruit Growing Museum) and private collections (Adina Nanu collection, Doina Levintza, the author’s collection, among others) – as well as images of hats (original photographs; illustrations from fashion magazines; works of art). Unpublished documents (store receipts/invoices, envelopes and advertisements, labels of hats and hat boxes) and published documents (press advertisements, trade and industry yearbooks, memoir literature) served to compile the inventory of Romanian shops and workshops specializing in hats. The thesis documentation also relies on numerous secondary sources (fashion articles from the press of the era; memoir notes; guides of good manners and dress codes; specialized literature). From a methodological point of view, the research uses formal-stylistic analysis and the comparative method as the main investigative tools, as well as the analytical method, the synthetic method, chronological and descriptive exposition.

The first chapter establishes a foundational body of information necessary for understanding the subject, beginning with the specialized literature. Reference is made to Romanian fashion historiography as well as the international historiography specializing in headwear accessories. The fashion historiography in Romania emerges as a relatively recent and still insufficiently consolidated field of research.

In the following subchapter, I provide a brief but necessary history of the hat — from its origins up to the 19th century. Through this chronological overview, I highlighted examples relevant to later fashion, which built the meanings of certain clothing items extensively discussed in the subsequent chapters. Headwear accessories are garments adopted since the

dawn of humanity, among the earliest items of adornment and protection created by humans. Their extraordinary antiquity and prominent position — on the head — have made this garment element a powerful symbolic communicator. The oldest evidence of head accessories dates back approximately 25,000 years, including the female figurines from Kostenki, Willendorf, and other „Venuses”, as well as the remains of the woman from Caviglione. Antiquity (Egyptian, Greco-Roman) offered numerous iconographic models, some of which have been preserved in similar forms up to today. Beginning in the Middle Ages, hats became extremely diverse and ingenious in form, holding special importance within the outfit and dress codes. Each era added “classic” hat shapes, which continue to be worn today, more or less altered. It is easy to observe a constancy in the basic forms of hats — simple shapes that successfully fulfilled their function throughout human history. The third part of the first chapter provides more technical information — the “How?” and “From what?” hats were made, and who made them, along with the significant historical milestones in the development of these techniques and trades. I considered it necessary to dedicate a subchapter to hat-making techniques as they evolved over time, since the history of production techniques is also part of the history of this object. Felt hats (made from beaver, rabbit, sheep) required a complex technological process with distinct stages carried out by different craftsmen. For a long period, mercury was used to treat the raw materials, which led to severe health problems within the hatters’ guild. The study of production techniques highlighted the contribution of traditional crafts to the development and preservation of clothing heritage. The making of hats for men and women involved, over time, the existence of distinct specializations, reflected both in the names of the professions and in their specific duties. Thus, makers of men’s hats were known as hatters, while creators of women’s head accessories were called milliners. These occupations evolved differently throughout history, both in terms of the time of their emergence and consolidation, and with regard to the legal regulations governing them and the social perceptions associated with each.

In the second chapter, I created an archive of producers (factories, hatters’ and milliners’ workshops, Romanian hat brands) and distributors (shops, ateliers) for the Romanian area. The list is a compilation of names and sometimes addresses gathered from press advertisements as well as from the labels of all the hats analyzed. A few examples were also collected from memoir literature. This archive is useful for the history of Bucharest and Romanian commerce, for the history of Romanian fashion, and serves as a starting point for future research to further explore the subject. In the Romanian area, the Western-style hat was

introduced alongside the political emancipation efforts of the Romanians, efforts materialized also through the process of acculturation, within which European clothing was adopted. The first merchants and producers were foreigners settled in the Romanian principalities. Indeed, imports have always held a significant share in the hat trade, since for the higher-quality product category, established European brands were preferred. Shops, stores, hatters' and milliners' ateliers, fashion and *nouveautés salons*, fashion merchants, *bazaars*, and department stores... all offered Romanians the desired head accessories, in accordance with the style that was in vogue at the time. Their number continuously grew, starting from a few names during the Biedermeier era and reaching thousands of firms during the interwar period, as part of a vibrant trade relevant to the economy. Important Romanian names in this field included: *Jobin, Lupan, Paul Martin, Blanche, Simionescu, Drăgănescu, Phillip's, Rubens, Au Bon Marché, Galeries Lafayette, Magasin du Louvre, La Vulturul de mare cu pește în ghiare, Spitzer, Sigmund Prager, Heinrich Prager, Aura, Fanchette, Monique, Bertheil, Olymp&Annie, Tischler, Periam/Paltin Factory*, among others.

In the third chapter, I created a chronology of women's hat styles, a useful tool for dating costume objects and images. This chapter also includes a specialized vocabulary, in which each model is correctly named (using both the modern term and the period term, when they differ), materials and adornments are described, and relevant press excerpts are cited to illustrate both the description of a hat type and the contemporary perspectives on these objects. The clothing styles were analyzed in their social, economic, and historical context to understand the mechanisms that shaped fashion evolution. For each historical stage, I reconstructed the complete clothing framework—the entire outfit, the international fashion context, and local examples. Thus, I correlated the phenomenon in our country within the framework of the major international fashion trends, demonstrating the relevance and synchronicity of Romanian fashion. International fashion styles were illustrated with Romanian examples to provide a broad overview of fashion. The detailed overview of all the hat styles worn during the selected period shows the variety, creativity of fashion, and the constant concern people had for their image, as well as the social and personal importance assigned to hats and clothing. The subchapter structure reflects the relevance of perspective on fashion evolution: in the case of women's fashion, emphasis is placed on the diversity of styles and the pace of fashion change, which ensured the individualization of the outfit (1848–1868: *Crinolines and bonnets*; 1890–1912: *The age of extravagance*; *The Roaring Twenties*; etc.). By the mid-19th century, a characteristic feature of women's fashion was the wearing of

bonnets rather than hats. The bonnet was the appropriate choice for married women, an elegant, formal option. Hats were informal accessories. The wearing of the crinoline was closely linked to the wearing of bonnets, which, in 1840–1850, still had a fairly large brim that limited the wearer's visibility. This attire created a feminine image centered on the value of virtue and modesty. Although Romanian collections have preserved few objects from this period, numerous iconographic sources prove the modernity of the Romanian nobility—from votive paintings in churches to photographs, from social oil portraits to fashion engravings. Numerous descriptions of hats appear in the fashion chronicles of Constanța Dunca in the publication *Amicul familiei*, the first periodical with a feminine theme. These chronicles offer us the chance to learn the fashion vocabulary and clothing mentalities of the time.

Empress Eugénie of France played a role in promoting the wearing of hats over bonnets, as she practiced horseback riding and wore hats herself. Equally important was a shift in fashion taste—a modernization of the feminine ideal of beauty. The transition moved away from the passive, romantic image toward a more dynamic and modern representation, in which the crinoline and bonnet became outdated and were replaced by more dramatic garments that conveyed a more active, assertive and sensual appearance—namely, the hat and the bustle. Romanian portraits reveal a fashion style in perfect harmony with Western trends, though marked by a certain sobriety in both design and color palette. Romanian society was more conservative and tended to avoid excessively extravagant clothing.

The *Belle Époque* period marked a golden age of hats, which reached impressive dimensions and exceptional decorative richness, including flowers, feathers and even taxidermied birds. These hats reflected fashion principles centered on opulence, prestige and maturity, as well as the theatrical impact of dress. Romanian museums and collections, along with an extensive archive of period photographs, confirm that although large hats were worn primarily by the elites, more accessible versions were available to women from modest social classes—the main differences lying in the quality of materials and the refinement of the decoration. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that fashion had reached a relative degree of democratization. Around 1910, wide-brimmed hats began to give way to smaller, more practical, sculptural models, adapted to a more active and mobile lifestyle for women, signaling a modernization in clothing concepts.

The major social and cultural transformations following the First World War were reflected in the avant-garde styles of the 1920s. The abandonment of the corset was not only a sartorial shift, but also a social and mental one. The cloche hat became the emblem of the

minimalist aesthetics of the time and of the ideal of the modern woman, who valued innovation over classical beauty. However, Romanian fashion remained modest compared to the Art Deco luxury of France or the United States, reflecting the country's postwar economic hardship and its limited degree of urbanization. During the Great Depression and throughout the Second World War, clothing sobriety was enlivened by hats of various shapes and sizes, full of inventiveness and imagination. In a world dominated by conservatism and gravity, hats became true bastions of creativity and even of a subtly rebellious spirit. The largest number of pieces preserved in the studied collections come from these last two decades, revealing the high quality of Romanian products and the talent of milliners—though truly exceptional, luxury examples remain scarce.

The structure of the fourth chapter highlights the specific nature of men's fashion—more stable, with established, standardized forms that speak clearly to the social categories they represent, governed by a stricter dress code. The male wardrobe consisted of a few basic garments (such as the frock coat, tailcoat, etc.), coordinated and worn according to precise rules that conferred respectability upon the wearer. Predictability and conformity were key principles in men's fashion, and breaking these rules or showing too much originality could be perceived as a lack of seriousness or even as ridiculous. Although it evolved more slowly, men's fashion also saw the emergence of new styles and forms during the period under study, with a clear trend toward comfort and informality: garments originally considered casual or intended for sports and labor gradually became elegant, formal wear over the course of a few decades of social change. In the final subchapter, I examined men's hats from a historical perspective, defining and describing the “classic” types of men's hats and their evolution over time (top hat, collapsible hat, bowler, etc.). Many men's hats have been preserved in Romanian collections, the vast majority dating from the interwar period. While the number of styles is far smaller and more enduring than in women's fashion, details such as crown height are relevant for dating. Therefore, small changes and variations did occur in men's hat fashion. Classic men's hat types proved highly durable, becoming widely recognized and symbolic of particular eras or historical/fictional figures. Their evocative power is strong precisely because of the consistent way they were worn.

Chapter Five – *Fashion, a Symbol of the Social Status* explores the various social meanings of hats and fashion more broadly. I examined one of the essential dimensions of headgear: its symbolic and societal role. I emphasized the social relevance of hats during the given period, demonstrating the deep significance of fashion as a tool of social

communication. Legal regulations—sumptuary laws—of earlier centuries expressed aristocratic rank and were part of the visual arsenal of power, jealously guarded by the elite. Visual elements and the codes that governed their meaning were in constant evolution, keeping pace with societal changes and the desire for novelty and upward appearance. The performance of power was inseparably linked to the evocative potential of clothing, which provided the necessary scenography. Hats always held a prominent role within these visual codes. In the 18th and 19th centuries, profound changes in the social structure—toward democratization—led to the elimination of sumptuary laws, though not of fashion’s unwritten rules. Even in a more egalitarian fashion landscape, symbols of prestige did not disappear. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, although legal restrictions on clothing were abolished, social status and wealth continued to be signaled—albeit more subtly—through the unwritten rules of elegance and sartorial rigor. The modern era ushered in more nuanced social codes, where refined dress became a marker of class. Fashion moved from the “loud” language of opulence to one of quiet luxury. Elitism was expressed through the voluntary adoption of a complex sartorial language and a set of rules that were often the subject of conduct manuals. The art of dressing with style and refinement became a distinguishing trait of the fashion *connoisseur*. I included examples of historical sumptuary laws (from the late Middle Ages to the 19th century), as well as fashion etiquette recommendations from the period under study.

In the following subchapter, I provided concrete examples of prestigious costume elements (including hats) that indicated socio-economic status. Through this chapter, I highlighted one of the primary roles of fashion and hats. Despite a discourse of subtlety, size still mattered—the height of the top hat, the diameter of the crinoline, and the size and richness of women’s hats. During the *Belle Époque* era, feathers used to adorn hats became one of the most significant symbols of prestige, contributing to the development of a global trade in exotic birds. This practice had disastrous consequences for the wildlife of certain regions.

The chapter *Fashion, an Artistic Expression* integrates the cultural phenomenon of clothing into the broader context of artistic movements. The relationship between visual arts and fashion can be explored from various perspectives, each enriching the possibilities of interpretation. During the period under study, fashion maintained a close relationship with the visual arts, marked by mutual influences. Fashion designers drew inspiration from visual art, while visual artists were equally receptive to the expressive potential of fashion, often paying great attention to clothing in portraiture or even venturing into creating garments

themselves—original proposals that were consistently avant-garde. Fashion also helped shape a vision of the human body—an ideal of beauty—that artists followed, even when portraying nudes. The two fields shared many similarities in terms of concept, dissemination and consumption. Nonetheless, the biases of the time often regarded fashion as a frivolous, ephemeral pursuit, while visual art was seen as serious and important. In reality, both disciplines placed a central value on novelty and originality, expressed through stylistic movements; yet, fashion's innovative efforts were long overlooked. It was only toward the end of the 20th century that fashion began to be recognized and treated as a branch of the visual arts, capable of producing enduring cultural value and not merely a commercial enterprise.

Fashion (including hat fashion) conformed to the major artistic movements and the dominant aesthetic principles of each era. The limitless expressive potential of clothing and hats is evident in their ability to incorporate elements from the visual arts into their structural, conceptual, or decorative vocabulary. Thus, fashion became part of neoclassicism, neo-Gothic, Romanticism/Biedermeier, Orientalism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, various avant-garde movements, Surrealism, and others. All these trends were also visible in Romanian fashion. An important aspect is that fashion served as an active medium for popularizing these movements. While the broader public often failed to understand the rebellions and experiments of the visual arts—sometimes reacting violently to new forms—fashion, being a more accessible language, helped to gradually familiarize audiences with these aesthetic innovations. This was particularly evident in a country like Romania, characterized by conservative tastes and limited cultural exposure. In the 1920s, for example, fashion embraced modernism, introducing the public to minimalism and abstract geometric decoration. By the following decade, modernism was widely accepted in architecture, interior design and product design. In essence, both fields—fashion and art—acted as agents of modernization within society, but fashion proved to be the more approachable of the two.

Chapter VII, *Fashion in the Context of Wars*, draws attention to aesthetically more modest periods, yet significant for the innovative potential inherent in times of crisis. I highlighted how the war economy and military actions impacted the fashion system, while also showing that during these dramatic contexts, fashion underwent modernization—not only in terms of techniques and materials, but also in terms of social norms and mentalities. The chapter emphasizes the optimistic, uplifting role of fashion, and the human aspiration toward beauty, even in the most difficult moral and economic circumstances. Fashion's adaptation to

wartime conditions demonstrates the extraordinary creative capacity of people, who found inspiration in military uniforms and in scarcity, proving their ability to adapt and reinvent themselves. It also illustrates how faithfully fashion reflects historical events—even those that seem contrary to its essence. The clothing principles adopted during these challenging periods were sobriety, comfort, ingenuity, the adaptation of masculine/military elements, and the use of national symbols. Romanian fashion responded sensitively to wartime trends. In the 19th century, for example, military garments were often adapted into women's fashion, and military figures' names enthusiastically entered the fashion vocabulary. During the Balkan Wars and World War I, hats inspired by historical military styles—such as the bicorne and tricorn— and upright feather plumes gained popularity. Romanian photographs and preserved hats clearly support these observations. For women's fashion, the Great War brought major changes and the abandonment of centuries-old principles. Corsets and the obligation to wear floor-length skirts were eliminated. People discovered that one could live more actively, more economically, and more comfortably without long skirts or constricting, voluminous undergarments. They also realized that women were fully capable of engaging in a wide range of activities, and that their virtue was not compromised by wearing simpler and more revealing clothing. Decency was redefined. World War II also created a context for fascinating fashion phenomena, especially through the institutionalization of economic production principles (imposed by wartime restrictions). There were also cases of fashion-based rebellion against restrictions or occupation policies: the *zazou/zoom* suit fashion from jazz clubs—known in Romania as „moda malagambistă”—is one such example. Another was in occupied Paris, where elegance became a form of resistance and affirmation of the French spirit. The *haute couture* sector faced the threat of total collapse, but negotiations between Lucien Lelong and the Germans ultimately saved this vital French industry. In women's fashion, I explored how a garment imposed by poverty was transformed into a stylish statement: the turban. Adopted due to harsh living conditions, it became, through the imagination and skill of Parisian modistes and their clients alike, a spectacular, seductive and defiant accessory—a source of national pride and optimism. The fact that fashion was able to evolve during wartime, that it was not fully stifled or redirected by ideological or material constraints, illustrates the autonomous nature of fashion and the enduring human desire to express individuality freely and spontaneously.

The final chapter, *The Political Significance of Fashion*, explores the relationship between political life and the evolution of fashion, showing that political changes often led to

transformations in fashion. A macro-level view of recent centuries reveals that during revolutionary periods, fashion tended to be innovative—political and social progressivism often found appropriate sartorial expressions. Conversely, during counter-revolutionary times, more conservative styles prevailed. Clothing—and hats in particular—carried political meaning not only as indicators of official roles within the political system but also for the general public, as visual emblems of ideologies and political aspirations. The first section of the chapter explores the aspirational political meaning behind the sartorial transformations that occurred in the Romanian Principalities between 1800 and 1850. Changing one's clothing was a political statement—an act of emancipation from the Ottoman Empire. Fashion was not merely a passive sign of social change but an active agent in that process. Even though women had no formal political responsibilities, their adoption of Western European fashion was a clear symptom of an increasing preoccupation with the West and a gradual alignment with European values. Of course, the most politically symbolic gesture was when Romanian men abandoned traditional Ottoman attire. This transition happened gradually, with hesitations and reversals, due to the delicate political situation: encouraged during Russian occupations and discouraged during times of Ottoman strength. These political fluctuations were visually reflected in the clothing choices of high-ranking boyars, and they resonated down the social hierarchy to the lesser nobility, eager to participate in visual performances of political positioning. The adoption of bourgeois-style hats in the Romanian space also brought with it Western etiquette and behavioral norms. The gesture of doffing one's hat replaced earlier Eastern-style greetings, turning the hat into a powerful symbolic object. Thus, the adoption of Western dress and manners in the Romanian Principalities was part of a broader political emancipation process, making the political implications of fashion particularly evident in this context. Trousers and the top hat (*joben*) became emblems of a political stance. Although the Western men's suit carries a strong social and democratic character—as the quintessential bourgeois uniform—in Romania its modernizing political function prevailed, aligning with the liberal character of 19th-century Romanian politics. In the subchapter dedicated to fashion during revolutionary movements, I demonstrated the immense symbolic weight that a fashion accessory like a hat can carry—the value it is imbued with, and its capacity to mobilize people around a symbol, a seemingly ordinary object. Hats have served as historical channels for communicating ideas, values, and aspirations. During the French Revolution, for example, the Phrygian cap became the symbol of republicanism. The instability and violent nature of revolutionary actions were reflected in the radical styles of the time. The wearing of the top hat (cylinder hat) is also associated with the events of 1789. In

women's fashion, the neoclassical/Empire style echoed the political ideals of the Revolution and the Napoleonic period. In 1848, the clothing of Romanian revolutionaries was an active part of their political discourse and militant actions. The bourgeois suit—including its associated hats—represented the social and political demands of the time: it was the sartorial expression of liberalism, constitutional regimes, and capitalism, as opposed to the sumptuous attire of dynastic power. The ultimate revolutionary symbol of 1848 was the so-called Kossuth hat—a soft felt hat adorned with feathers, adopted by Romanian *pașoptist* revolutionaries just as it was by revolutionaries across Europe. At the time, this hat was a universal symbol of democratic ideas. The mere appearance of a group of men wearing these hats could cause anxiety among the authorities.

The vocabulary of fashion has recorded major political personalities, demonstrating their influence on society as well as fashion's role in reflecting all historical aspects. Until World War I, crowned heads and political leaders were the most important promoters of fashion. Another subchapter is dedicated to the beret, showing that the history of this small object is the history of an entire social category and their acts of resistance, opposition, and social ascent. The beret is linked to revolutions and social uprisings and, during the 19th and 20th centuries, became the distinctive accessory of the working class, acquiring a strong leftist ideological component.

In the final section, I presented the perspective on gender roles within the policies of right-wing totalitarian regimes, focusing on the ideological program tied to the ideal of femininity as well as concrete measures related to the garment industry. Deeply conservative, these policies annulled the social progress made in the previous decade. Women's fashion reverted to traditional forms. In Germany, the ideology had a clear program regarding the role of women in Nazi society, exaggerating the image of the mother, although social reality contradicted ideological discourses, since the most visible female model in society was the coquettish, seductive woman (featured on the big screen and in fashion magazines), not the housewife dedicated to raising Aryan children. In Italy, the autarchic regime created the premises for the birth of the modern Italian textile industry. In Romania, even those with more liberal political views held conservative opinions regarding feminism, emancipation and modernization of women's roles (indeed, Romanian society was conservative overall, as seen in attitudes toward fashion). Most often, this issue was absent from public debates and even from the platforms of far-right extremist movements. During the National Legionary State, however, the official newspaper of the movement included a permanent column dedicated to

women, where the discourse on female representation was emphatic, anachronistic, manipulative, didactic, moralizing and hypocritical. Fiery exhortations, practical advice and moralizing critiques dominated—expressing a condescending, paternalistic attitude that was inherently insulting. Fashion, as an intimate creative process, rejected attempts at ideological instrumentalization, which is why the dress directives under authoritarian regimes had limited impact. Freedom of expression was essential in fashion. Clothing reflected political choices and personal values, a fact still valid today. Accessories, especially hats, acquired political significance, becoming symbols with mobilizing power. Thus, fashion is not merely appearance or passive communication but an active agent in society.

The fashion of Romanian hats was closely linked to the modernization of society and perfectly synchronized with international trends. Differences were manifested primarily between social classes rather than in relation to the European fashion centers. Romanian attire aligned with Western tendencies but also stood out through several specific elements, such as the integration of Oriental accessories and ethnic motifs, a more pronounced taste for opulence and embellishment compared to Western societies, and the incorporation of traditional dress into urban and formal women's wear. A marked conservative spirit and a tendency toward conformity were also observed, driven by the fear of compromising one's reputation. Thus, although fashion novelties were followed and adopted, they were filtered through a cautious mindset that rejected extravagance, with moralizing discourse remaining central to the validation of elegance—even during freer periods such as the 1920s. Due to the historical context, conservatism and the immaturity of the field, Romanian fashion failed to develop a strong identity or renowned designers. It was dominated by admiration for foreign fashion, especially Parisian, while the lack of supportive infrastructure and the generally modest cultural level hindered the emergence of notable figures or a national fashion system. The conservative attitude of Romanians toward fashion is linked to deeply rooted prejudices of a sexist and patriarchal nature, which obstructed public recognition of fashion's importance and of fashion creators' value as artists. The domain was often treated with superiority or disdain, using pejorative terms such as “rags” or “scraps,” in stark contrast to the respect shown by other cultures like the French or Italian.

The absence of higher education dedicated specifically to fashion is another factor that contributed to the lack of important Romanian designers; crafts schools produced skilled professionals but not artists. Even within art institutions—such as the Academy of Fine Arts—textile creation was subordinated to the national style and not oriented toward fashion

design. Prejudices against fashion have persisted to some extent even into the present day, including within artistic education.

The social and economic disparities in Romania during the studied century were reflected in fashion, which remained dominated by a narrow elite. Meanwhile, the absence of a solid middle class and the predominant presence of disadvantaged groups hindered the development of an extensive clothing system, within the context of an underdeveloped economy unable to sustain a fashion industry with artistic and institutional scope. Subsequently, the establishment of the communist regime dismantled the social segment that supported the culture of sartorial elegance by eliminating the elite and discouraging the essential values of fashion. This rupture led to the dispersal and degradation of the clothing heritage, resulting in the loss of a significant part of Romania's material fashion memory.

Comparing the heritage of Romanian hats with that of major European and North American fashion centers reveals a visible economic modesty in local creations. This is influenced by factors such as a lower economic level, conservatism and the lack of specialized infrastructure. Although some pieces stand out due to artisanal craftsmanship and decorative refinement, their spectacularity and innovation remain limited. This, along with the difficulty in identifying significant first-rate examples, supports the idea of a low representativeness in the international fashion landscape.

Compared to other countries, the Romanian hats studied show a higher degree of wear, having been extensively used, sometimes until complete exhaustion. Their fragile condition reflects prolonged wear caused by consumption habits in Romania. In comparison with Europe and especially the USA, Romanian pieces display evident degradation, such as torn veils, damaged feathers, absence of original accessories and deformation of shape. The fate of these objects, once out of fashion, was often marked by improper storage, inappropriate use in children costumes, celebrations, or plays, and extreme wear in theaters, all contributing to their deterioration. Despite this, there are still good prospects for conserving Romanian hats, which, although insufficiently appreciated, deserve reevaluation and protection through coherent actions aimed at preserving the historical vestimentary memory.

The mastery of artisanal craftsmanship, the exceptional quality of materials—especially the fine felt, rarely found today—and the ergonomic design of vintage hats, created to fit perfectly and comfortably on the head without complex fastenings, reflect vast experience and a daily necessity of the era. This stands in stark contrast to the current decline in quality,

where only a few traditional producers, such as Borsalino, uphold high standards, yet remain exceptions in an industry dominated by economical products.

The main methodological challenges of this research were related to the complexity of addressing stylistic, social, and cultural transformations over an extended chronological period, as well as the limited access to high-quality material sources necessary to formulate solid conclusions regarding the artistic and technical level of Romanian hats from the studied period.

Being aware that the topic may seem marginal within Romanian historiography, I have undertaken this research, supported by solid knowledge, with the aim of reshaping the perception of some neglected components of both tangible and intangible heritage. Despite the challenges posed by the poor condition of the pieces and the limited interest in Romanian research, hats represent valuable sources that reveal significant information about daily life, social norms, and individual identities from the period 1850–1950, thereby offering a novel perspective for social and cultural history.

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