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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF POPULATION STUDIES AND
MINORITY HISTORY**



SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Ethnic Relations through Music in Eastern Moldova.
*The Contribution of Roma Communities to the Promotion of Ethnographic Heritage
through Brass Band Music*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter I – Research Methodology.....	6
1.2. Research Objectives.....	11
1.3. Terminology of the researched phenomenon	12
Chapter II – History of the Roma	22
2.1. Migration of Roma Elements into Europe	22
2.1.1. Linguistic Origins and the Place of Proto-Roma in Medieval Society	23
2.1.2. Migration of Roma-Specific Groups toward Europe	25
2.1.3. Proto-Roma at the Gates of Europe	27
2.1.4. Genetic Localization of the Ancestors of European Roma	33
2.1.5. Roma in the European Space 13 th-14th Centuries	38
2.2. Appearance of Roma in the Romanian Space	41
2.2.1. Formation and Emergence of the Principality of Moldavia	44
2.2.2. First Mentions of Roma in Moldavia	47
2.2.3. The Slavery of Roma in Moldavia	50
2.2.4. Categories of Slaves in Moldavia	55
2.2.5. Roma Trades in Moldavia from the 15th to the 19th Century.....	62
2.3. Transition from Slavery to Emancipation.....	73
2.3.1. Romanian Peasants and Roma in the Romanian Principalities	74
2.3.2. Constraints Imposed on Roma in 18th Century Transylvania	81
2.3.3. The Prosperity of Roma in the Romanian Principalities	83
2.4. Liberation and Abolition of Roma Slavery.....	91
2.4.1 Liberation in Bukovina	93
2.4.2. Liberation of Roma in Moldavia and Wallachia.....	95
2.5. Roma Emancipation.....	104
2.5.1. Life of Roma after the Abolition of Slavery	104
2.5.2. Roma and Property in the Context of the 1864 Rural Law	106
2.5.3. First Forms of Modern Roma Organization during the Interwar Period...	110
2.5.4. The Demographic Situation of Roma in the Romanian Space until Deportation to Transnistria	120
Chapter III – Music as an Ethnographic Element.....	128
3.1. Information about the Musical Phenomenon in Human Communities	129
3.1.1. Forms of Musical Expression in Human Communities 14th–18th Centuries	131

3.2. Music in Moldavian Ethnographic Heritage	135
3.3. Musical Instruments.....	140
3.3.1. Chordophones / String Instruments Present in the Romanian Space	142
3.3.2. Aerophones / Wind Instruments Present in the Romanian Space.....	144
3.3.3. Membranophones / Percussion Instruments in the Romanian Space	145
3.3.4. Brass Band Instruments	146
3.4. Cultural Syncretism and Brass Band Music.....	150
3.4.1. Oriental Influence – The Mehterhane	154
3.4.2. Western Musical Influences.....	163
3.4.3. Local Influence – Lăutărească Music.....	170
3.4.4. Emergence of Romanian Military Music in the 19th Century	182
3.4.5. Conclusions.....	191
Chapter IV – Roma Communities and Brass Band Music.....	196
4.1. Bibliographic References on this Topic.....	198
4.2. Brass Band Communities in Eastern Romania	202
4.3. Information about Roma Communities and Brass Band Music up to 1945	205
4.4. Hypotheses on the Emergence of Brass Band Music in Roma Communities ..	212
Chapter V – Music in Roma Community Folklore	217
5.1. The Role of Brass Band Musicians in Community Life	222
5.2. Case Study: Popular Brass Bands and Their Promotion in Communist Romania..	227
5.2.1. Historical Context of the Cozmești Brass Band until 1949.....	229
5.2.2. Documentary Evidence of Brass Bands in Cozmești.....	230
5.2.3. Composition and Organization of Brass Bands in Fălciu County in 1949.	234
5.2.4. Disappearance of the Ethnic Factor from Political, Social and Cultural Discourse.	239
5.3. The Roma Community's Role in Promoting Romanian Ethnographic Traditional Music	241
5.3.1. Sounds from Two Worlds: Musical Rivalry – The Historic Vinyl of 1961 and the 1981 Dijon Festival	244
5.4. Identity, Music and Recognition: Roma Bands at Folk Culture Festivals	255
Chapter VI – Roma Community Members' Relation to the Brass Band Music Phenomenon	263
6.1. Aspects Regarding Ethnic Belonging vs. Social Prejudices.	264
6.2. Phylogenetic Elements and the Transmission of Brass Band Music in Communities.....	281
6.2.1. Oral and Informal Learning	281

6.2.2. Identification of Local Musical Style	285
6.2.3. Vernacular Terms	287
6.2.4. Migration, Industrial Employment and Cultural Reinvention of Roma Brass Bands in the Communist Period.....	289
6.2.4. The Festival of Musical Identity “Gypsies’ Easter”	292
6.2.5. Musical Style and Repertoire.....	293
6.2.6. Specificities of Musical Activity	296
6.3. Roma Community Brass Bands in Moldova: A Comparative Analysis Between Archival Sources and Participant Observation Data.....	299
6.4. The Brass Band as a Social and Cultural Engine in Moldovan Villages.....	309
6.5. Emerging Conclusions	310
Chapter VII – Conclusions and Interpretations	314
BIBLIOGRAPHY	329
APPENDICES	362

Introduction

This paper is exploratory in nature and aims, through a historical, ethnographic, and sociocultural approach, to continue the scholarly efforts initiated by Viorel Cosma, Teodor T. Burada, Tiberiu Alexandru, Ghizela Sulițeanu, Speranța Rădulescu, Dan Răvaru, Constantin Brăteanu, Lucian Valeriu Lefter, Ioan Frigură, Cezar Botez, Oana Burcea, Dumitru Șerban, Mădălin Văleanu, and Pavel Delion, in order to highlight the contribution of brass band music practiced in Roma communities in Eastern Romania—particularly in the counties of Iași, Vaslui, and Galați—to the formation and preservation of Romanian intangible cultural heritage.

The scientific endeavor is, first and foremost, an act of cultural and identity recovery, born from a deeply personal motivation. In a context where younger generations are increasingly detached from inherited traditions and academic research tends to focus less on these minority forms of expression, the mission of this work is to bring to the forefront a form of music deeply rooted in community life and collective memory.

Cicero's quote, "*Not to know what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child,*" is not merely a rhetorical prelude, but reflects the very essence of this research: to reconnect the past with the present and to give value to the lived experiences of those who have preserved and transmitted this music across generations.

The relevance of the topic is justified by the unique character of Roma brass band music, which—although ubiquitous in many festive or ritual moments of Romanian life, from weddings, baptisms, and funerals to public celebrations—has not yet been the subject of systematic research that acknowledges its role in shaping both the sonic identity of Roma communities and Romanian musical culture as a whole. Transmitted and preserved orally, this music has long been viewed marginally, despite functioning as a social binder and contributing to the development of a distinct interpretative style.

This research is exploratory and restorative in nature. It does not propose a musicological analysis, but rather a reevaluation of the social and cultural role of Roma brass bands within Romanian heritage. The originality of the work lies in its integrated approach to the phenomenon, combining archival analysis, historical documentation, fieldwork, unstructured interviews, and non-participant observation. The work benefits from the unique perspective of a researcher-practitioner who not only studies the phenomenon but lives it, understands it from within, and passes it on.

In this regard, the endeavor also fulfills a cultural safeguarding function, becoming a form of active preservation of the musical memory of the studied communities.

The research is structured into four parts and comprises seven chapters:

- **PART I:** Theoretical and Historical Foundations
- **PART II:** Music and Cultural Influences in Moldova
- **PART III:** The Birth and Development of Roma Brass Band Music
- **PART IV:** Contemporary Perceptions and Future Perspectives

Chapter I – Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological foundations of the scientific approach regarding the contribution of brass band music from Roma communities to Romanian intangible cultural heritage. It proposes an interpretation of lesser-explored historical sources in traditional research, focusing on the regions of the Iași, Vaslui, and Galați counties, where Roma brass musicians have sustained a particular type of secular music, organically integrated into everyday life.

The methodology employed is qualitative and interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating participatory observation, unstructured interviews, and a rigorous analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Archival documents, historical accounts, journals, interviews with community members, and contemporary press materials were consulted. These methods were complemented by tools such as comparative analysis, inductive and deductive reasoning, all framed within a modern interpretive framework inspired by recent historiographical trends (such as the New History and the Annales School).

The research combines perspectives from historiography, ethnography, folklore studies, sociology, and musicology to convey the complexity of the relationships between Roma and the majority population, mediated through brass band music.

The aim of the research is to demonstrate that brass band music has been—and continues to be—a mechanism of cohesion and cultural expression for the Roma, actively contributing to the preservation and transmission of traditional values in Moldova.

Research Objectives:

1. To document the historical presence and evolution of Roma communities in Moldova, with a focus on the periods of slavery, emancipation, and the interwar years.

2. Identifying cultural influences (military, Oriental, Western, and lăutărească [Roma folk musician traditions]) that have shaped Roma brass band music.
3. Analyzing how brass band music was adapted and personalized within Roma communities, becoming a form of identity and social expression.
4. Investigating the role of brass bands in social, ritual, and agricultural events in Moldovan village life.
5. Valorizing oral testimonies and interviews to reconstruct the cultural dynamics of these ensembles during both the pre-war and post-war periods.
6. Assessing the social and symbolic impact of brass band music on interethnic relations and the cultural recognition of Roma communities.

The primary sources originate from national and local archives, including highly significant documents such as local budgets, taxpayer lists, cultural reports, or audio-video recordings of brass bands.

Secondary and tertiary sources (academic papers, articles, encyclopedias, digital bibliographies) provided a broad contextual framework for interpretation.

The research relied on direct interviews with elderly musicians (lăutari) and specialists, supplemented by historical interviews. This approach offered an insider perspective on musical practices and transgenerational dynamics. The comparative methodology enabled the identification of the evolution of brass bands across different communities and historical periods, formulating hypotheses about the influence of military music, cultural mimicry, the sonic monopoly of villages, and the current decline of the phenomenon.

The limitations of the research relate to the difficult access to certain archives and the lack of complete written sources. Nevertheless, the work is built on a solid foundation, considering current methodological standards, and contributes to filling an important gap in the musical history of Roma communities in eastern Romania.

This research is not only an academic exploration but also a symbolic restitution of a neglected yet deeply valuable cultural heritage. The choice of a historical-ethnographic method, supported by direct engagement with the studied communities, reflects a commitment to a collective memory at risk of being forgotten. Thus, the stakes of this thesis are twofold: on one hand, the recovery of an intangible musical heritage deeply rooted in Roma and Romanian identity; on the other hand, a contribution to the reconfiguration of historical discourse about

minorities through an inclusive and empathetic perspective humanistic and inclusive. In a society often marked by stereotypes and marginalization, this research proposes a way to view and value Roma culture through legitimate recognition, supported by evidence and scientific rigor

Chapter II – The History of the Roma People

Chapter II provides a synthesis of the origins, migration, and positioning of the Roma within the European historical context. Starting from the hypothesis of Indian origin, the Roma are associated with the lower social classes of the Hindu caste system, particularly with the pariah group. Their migrations—triggered by conflicts, invasions, and social pressures—led to their spread across Asia, North Africa, and Europe. Linguistic studies from the 18th and 19th centuries, including those by Grellmann, Kogălniceanu, and Dimitrie Dan, confirmed the connection between the Romani language and North Indian dialects. Genetic research also supports the origin of European Roma in northwestern India, with subsequent influences from the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. Their DNA reflects a mixed heritage associated with migration and endogamous marriages. Nomadic populations from Persia, identified by trades such as musicians and blacksmiths, support the hypothesis of the Roma migration route into Europe. Although the presence of the Roma in Europe is not clearly documented in early periods, analogies with nomadic groups support the theory of their migration and lay the foundation for their appearance in the Romanian territories. After the formation of the Principality of Moldavia in the 14th century and the consolidation of the state, documentary mentions began to appear—starting in 1414, when the term “Țigănești” (Gypsies) is used to refer to community leaders or knezes. From the 15th century onward, the Roma are frequently mentioned as craftsmen, which reflects growing interest in their economic role. This is further evidenced by numerous references to the trade in Roma individuals who were held in slavery up until the 19th century.

Table 2.1. Occupations Practiced by Roma According to Documentary Mentions¹.

No.	Occupation Title	Century Mentioned
1.	sieve maker	XV
2.	traditional musician, basket maker, goldsmith, cook, shoemaker, locksmith, furrier, voivode	XVI

¹ The table was compiled based on a chronological framework that reflects the period in which mentions of these occupations first appear within Roma families..

3.	blacksmith, coin forger, coppersmith, chef, cobza player, shepherd, cobbler, locksmith, carpenter	XVII
4.	coachman, hired cleaning teams, craftspeople villages, cook, dishwasher	XVIII
	spoon maker, furrier, substitute mother, merchants, tailors,, bakers, masons, barbers, leatherworker	XIX

Source: Studies and articles addressing Roma occupations.

Even though not all slaves were included among taxpayers, in the capital of Moldavia, 6% of the taxes collected from craftsmen also included Roma artisans from Iași. Considering that budget planning involved increasing taxes, the crafts practiced by both Roma and Romanian peasants were often carried out informally, in ways that could not be monitored or taxed.

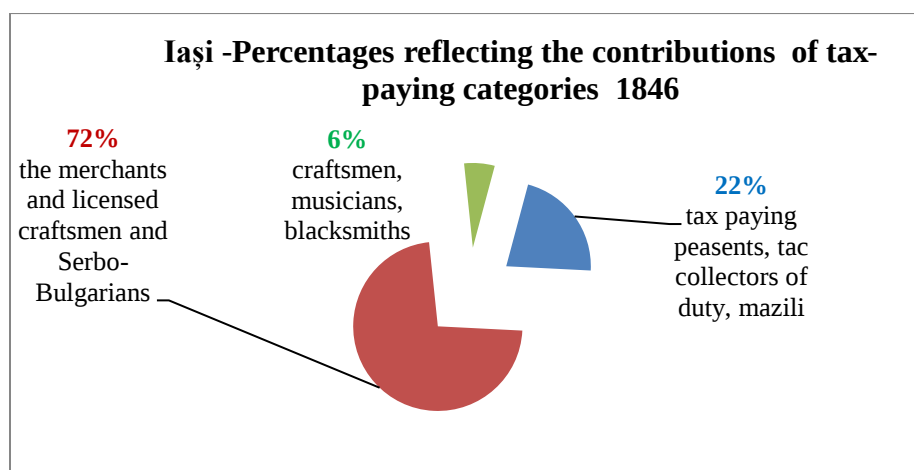


Fig.2.2. The percentage participation of Roma taxpayers from Iași in the national budget.

The percentage of Roma contributions becomes more significant after 1856, when the emancipation and liberation of Roma from all categories of bondage can be discussed.

The liberation of the Roma was a slow process, influenced by Enlightenment ideas and European reforms. It began in Bukovina at the end of the 18th century and continued in Moldavia and Wallachia during the 19th century, under the influence of Enlightenment thought and social pressure. Young intellectuals like Mihail Kogălniceanu and Eufrosin Poteca advocated for equality and the abolition of slavery, supported by reforms such as the Organic Regulations. The process was phased: first, state-owned Roma slaves were freed, followed by those owned by monasteries, and finally by private individuals, with compensation granted to former owners. In 1855 (Moldavia) and 1856 (Wallachia), slavery was officially abolished, and Roma became free citizens. After liberation, the Roma contributed to rural life through their traditional crafts, alongside Romanian peasants, but they often had to migrate to cities due to lack of access to

agricultural land. In rural areas, the absence of land and tools made them vulnerable, and they were frequently marginalized or expelled from the land they worked on, especially in the context of social restructuring following the abolition of boyar privileges.

The 1864 Rural Law, influenced by the Paris Convention, aimed to grant land ownership to former serfs, but its application was limited in the case of the Roma. Although included among taxpayers and former serfs, Roma were often excluded from land allotments due to prejudice, lack of agricultural resources, and landowner opposition. Many received only housing plots or had to reach direct agreements with landowners. The situation of those who did receive land was often precarious, and some ended up selling their properties. In the end, only a small proportion (approx. 7%) of emancipated Roma effectively benefited from the reform.

The modern organization of Roma during the interwar period emerged in the context of Romania's democratization, but integration remained marginal. Although some Roma achieved social prominence, the collective image was still shaped by stereotypes. Symbolic titles (judges, *bulibaşa*, king) were used for public recognition, and traditional structures gradually evolved into modern organizations. Access to education fostered the rise of Roma leaders who founded organizations like the General Union of Roma or the Musical Youth (*Junimea Muzicală*). These aimed at literacy, cultural preservation, social support, and legal representation. The interwar period also recorded internal disagreements among leading figures of the Roma movement, who stopped collaborating due to political and religious differences, as well as tragic episodes such as the deportations to Transnistria.

Internationally, the 1971 World Roma Congress established the identity of the Roma as a transnational people, adopting common symbols. Domestically, Nicolae Gheorghe relaunched the Roma movement during the communist era, promoting education, human rights, and ethnic identity, culminating in the founding of ROMANI CRISS in 1993. This period was marked by efforts for emancipation through culture, education, and socio-political organization, achieving notable progress. These initiatives laid the foundation for the modern assertion of Roma identity in the Romanian space. The chapter highlights how the absence of a "homeland" and the marginalized social condition of the Roma influenced their historical image and status within medieval European society.

CHAPTER III – Music as an Ethnographic Element

This chapter supports a complex and interdisciplinary investigation into Roma identity by integrating historical, social, and musical data. The study of instrumental music as an ethnographic element is complex, being part of the intangible cultural heritage. Music is analyzed both historically and ethnographically, as a form of collective and individual expression, linked to rituals, customs, and identity. From Herodotus and Strabo to Dimitrie Cantemir, the cognitive, spiritual, and communicative functions of music are highlighted. In the life of traditional communities, it accompanied rites of passage (birth, wedding, death), being present both in rural spaces and at princely courts.

In the medieval and modern periods, religious influences separated ecclesiastical from secular music, and troubadours and *lăutari* (traditional musicians) became bearers of the musical tradition. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, music in the Romanian space evolved slowly, influenced by contacts with other peoples. Roma *lăutari*, mentioned in documents since the 16th century, became essential in transmitting musical folklore. Princely ceremonies, such as the wedding of Ruxandra, daughter of Vasile Lupu, reflected multicultural presence through Turkish, Cossack, Moldavian, and Roma music. The 19th century brought Westernization to cultural life, marking the development of salon music, the emergence of brass bands, professional musicians, and the rise of prestigious *lăutari* (e.g., Barbu Lăutaru), who upheld national spirit and conveyed the folk musical heritage.

The role of music in shaping the cultural identity of Moldova emphasizes the traditions and customs passed down through oral musical forms. Music was an essential form of communication and spiritual expression, present in both rural environments and princely courts. The Moldovan musical repertoire includes ballads, *doinas*, carols, and *horas*, performed vocally and instrumentally, playing roles in rites of passage (weddings, funerals), holidays, and ceremonies. *Lăutari* had a central role in preserving and transmitting traditional music, which encountered influences from other cultures (Turkish, Polish, Greek, French, Italian, etc.), resulting in a musical syncretism specific to Moldova. Thus, Moldovan music was consolidated as part of Romania's intangible cultural heritage, incorporating multiple influences while retaining its local specificity.

The analysis of the evolution of brass band music (instrumental ensembles) within the context of cultural syncretism starts with Byzantine, Ottoman, and Western influences in courtly

rituals and ceremonies. After the fall of Constantinople (1453) and under Ottoman and Phanariot rule, military music (as a symbol of power and status) and ceremonial music became central to princely courts, influenced by both Eastern (mehterhâne) and Western formations.

The mehterhâne, an oriental musical form, was temporarily integrated into Romanian culture under Ottoman influence, significantly impacting the development of brass band music and local cultural syncretism. This Ottoman Imperial music ensemble of wind and percussion players symbolized power and opulence. It was offered to Romanian rulers as an official gift from the Sultan, marking subordination to the Ottoman Gate and being used in ceremonies, rituals, parades, and official receptions. Present daily at princely courts, the mehterhâne had a specific repertoire: marches, prayers, Turkish folk songs—performed in an imposing style, sometimes perceived by Westerners as noisy or discordant. This sonic model also influenced European military music in the 17th–19th centuries, being imitated in France, Russia, and Austria under the name “Janissary music.” In Romanian territories, Turkish music coexisted with local music and was sometimes adapted for boyar courts or princely parades that included lăutari formations. The mehterhâne was abolished at Romanian courts and in the Ottoman Empire in 1826, in favor of European-style military music.

Western music made its presence felt in Romanian lands starting in the 17th century, as Ottoman influence waned and ties with Central and Western Europe increased. Western music, marked by instrument modernization, professionalized artists, and harmonized styles, gradually entered Romanian society—first through princely and noble courts, then in urban settings. This phenomenon was supported by Russian and Austrian occupations, the organization of balls and concerts, and the founding of music schools and conservatories in centers like Iași and Bucharest. Dances such as the polka, waltz, and mazurka, as well as salon music repertoires, became part of Romanian cultural life. Princely courts began hiring foreign musicians (Italians, Germans, French), and the boyar class educated their children in the European style. Meanwhile, Roma musicians adopted and adapted Western repertoires, contributing to the formation of native music through individual initiatives. This process of musical Europeanization culminated in the late 19th century when Romania developed an academic musical tradition, and Western influences became dominant in urban culture.

Lăutărească music (native folk music) played a key role in shaping Romanian sonic identity. Lăutari, especially of Roma ethnicity, were the main performers of secular music,

carriers of folklore, and creators of repertoires adapted to various social contexts: from princely courts to markets and popular festivities. Initially enslaved or dependent, lăutari gradually earned professional status, organized in tarafs (bands). They absorbed influences from the East, West, and local folklore, adapting traditional instruments (cobza, violin, pan flute) and integrating modern ones (cimbalom, guitar, braci). In the 16th–18th centuries, lăutari were documented as performers at princely courts and in urban society, and by the 19th century, their cultural emancipation peaked through public participation (cafés, gardens, theaters) and the recognition of figures like Barbu Lăutaru. Lăutari were essential in transmitting oral musical tradition and in developing a living, adaptable repertoire that laid the foundation for modern folk music and contributed to shaping Romania's intangible heritage.

Romanian military music emerged in the 19th century as a Westernized form of artistic expression, structured in brass bands. The first military brass bands were established in 1830 in Iași and in 1832 in Bucharest, under the influence of the Organic Regulations and European models. These bands featured modern wind and percussion instruments. Military brass bands played an essential role in official ceremonies, parades, and social events, contributing to Romania's cultural Europeanization and national identity formation. Musicians were trained according to Western methods, and their repertoire included marches, waltzes, and orchestral works. The expansion of these bands to regional levels (Roman, Piatra Neamț, Galați) led to their integration into public life, becoming significant components of Romanian public and cultural life. Led initially by foreign and later by Romanian musicians, brass bands performed at official events, banquets, school festivities, promenades, and funerals. This music initially entered Transylvania and then spread to Moldova and Wallachia, where it began to incorporate Romanian folk tunes, contributing to the creation of a national cultural identity. Octavian Lazăr Cosma considered this development “the victory of modern national music.” Thus, the military brass band became a major vector for cultural and social modernization in 19th-century Romania.

CHAPTER IV – Roma Communities and Brass Band Music

This chapter captures the emergence of brass band music in Roma communities, shaped by major historical, political, and cultural factors of the 19th century such as: the modernization of European states, the emancipation of Roma people (abolition of slavery), the development of military music, and Western cultural influences. After 1856, Roma lăutari adapted to new socio-

cultural contexts, becoming involved in traveling theater and public musical life. The military brass band became a model for civilian ensembles, including Roma groups, particularly after the War of Independence. Roma recruits trained in military music, alongside non-Roma musicians, contributed to the formation of local brass bands, which evolved into tools of social integration and cultural affirmation. This process was accompanied by the gradual adaptation of repertoire and musical forms to the needs and realities of Roma communities in Moldova. In a rural and multiethnic state, challenged by issues in education and infrastructure, military brass bands included Roma instrumentalists enrolled in the Romanian army. Brass bands became regular presences at political and community events, especially in villages from the Iași and Vaslui counties.

Localities such as Cozmești, Zece Prăjini, Fâstâci, Valea Mare, and Toflea maintain this musical tradition, being inhabited by Roma lăutari. The appearance of brass band music in Roma communities in Moldova is the result of a complex interaction of military, social, and cultural influences. Researchers and experts confirm that Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman military bands strongly influenced the instrumental tradition of the Roma, introducing brass instruments into their repertoire. Following conscription into the Romanian army, many Roma with musical talent were assigned to military bands. There, they acquired advanced knowledge of performance and musical notation, which they later transferred to their communities by founding civilian brass bands. Examples such as Lazăr Jîiu (Vrancea), Iancu Bîzgă (Cozmești), or members of the Valea Mare community illustrate this trajectory—from military service to village brass bands.

Documents and oral testimonies reveal that this musical tradition has been passed down through generations, shaping a distinct cultural identity. Thus, the brass band becomes not merely a form of entertainment, but a vital element of cohesion and ethnic affirmation in Moldovan Roma communities.

CHAPTER V – Music in the Folklore of Roma Communities

This chapter presents the role of music in the folklore of Roma communities, analyzed through the lens of cultural identity and folklore, emphasizing the defining role of the brass band as a form of expression and social cohesion. Roma brass bands, developed through contact with military and Western music, adopted popular repertoires and adapted them into their own unique style. This did not create a distinct “Gypsy music,” but rather a communal music reflective of the community itself. Brass instruments became a bridge between tradition and modernity, with

repertoires influenced by external sources (radio, broadcast folk music) and local audience demands.

Archival documents from the post-1930 period reflect a sustained effort by the state authorities to activate mechanisms of identity construction. These were implemented through strategic use of the press and propaganda, functioning as the main channels for disseminating ideological and national messages. Additionally, public events such as parades, marches, congresses, and political gatherings played a key role in consolidating national belonging and legitimizing authority—an effort initiated in the interwar period. After August 23, 1944, Romania fell under the direct influence of the Soviet Union, leading to the forced restructuring of state institutions. This process, carried out between 1944 and 1948, included the purging of elements considered unreliable and the deportation of Roma people to Transnistria between 1942 and 1944, a decision taken by the Antonescu regime on the grounds that they represented a social threat. The return of these Roma to their communities after 1944 occurred in a context of radical change, where prejudice and social exclusion still persisted. Despite the communist regime's egalitarian rhetoric, Roma marginalization continued under different forms, including the neglect of their cultural specificity in official policies. This led Roma communities to adapt to existing norms and new political and cultural conditions.

In Eastern Moldova—specifically the regions of Iași, Vaslui, and Galați—brass bands began to emerge as a distinctive element of community cultural life prior to 1949. Interviewee accounts depict the atmosphere of the time, highlighting the archetypal image of the Romanian peasant and the significant influence of military institutions and schools in developing locals' musical skills. However, there is a noticeable absence of explicit references to the initial sources through which members of the community acquired the craft of musicianship, especially during the 1920s–1930s, when they were active in band formations commonly known as "bands of musicians."

Pre-communist archival information on musical activity in villages like Cozmești is reflected in official documents recording the presence of musicians such as Iancu Bâzgă and Gheorghe Leahu, listed in 1926 in the payment registers of the local guard. Political events provided promotion opportunities for these ensembles, many of which had been established prior to World War II, with their services being requested to provide music at public gatherings,

political party congresses, and national celebrations. These occasions often involved the unification of multiple bands, sometimes totaling 40–50 musicians.

Documentary evidence of brass bands from the villages examined in this research comes from local testimonies, documentary mentions, and period newspapers.

The popularization of Soviet-style socialism among the masses was implemented through activities that required participation in party initiatives. This included cultural intensification through the organization of local artistic performances by community members, the promotion of progressive and Russian-inspired music, as well as the collection of local folklore specific to each community. An analysis of the cultural situation in Fălciu County in 1949 highlights the existence of a vibrant artistic life, with a considerable number of choral, instrumental, and dance ensembles—among which brass bands were prominent. These bands were organized in a way that reflected the cultural structure of both urban and rural environments. Local and central institutions were responsible for regularly compiling monitoring reports on the implementation of the annual work plan, contributing to greater accountability among cultural actors and the improvement of artistic performance quality.

Table 5.1. The Status of Ensembles in Fălciu County as of January 1949².

No	Type of Ensemble	Ensembles Active in Fălciu County in 1949	County: Fălciu	Total
1.	Choir	Trade union choirs	2	75
		Choirs of urban cultural centers	2	
		Choirs of rural cultural centers	71	
		Various choirs	1	
2.	Brass Band	Trade union brass bands	1	30
		Peasant brass bands	23	
		Various brass bands	6	
3.	Orchestras	Trade union orchestras	1	4
		Peasant orchestras	-	
		Symphony orchestras	-	

² Vaslui County Directorate of the National Archives, Fund 784, d.110/1949, f.8.

		Various orchestras	3	
4.	Dance	Rural dance teams	7	50
	Teams	Urban dance teams	43	

Source: Vaslui County Directorate of the National Archives.

The evolution of the repertoire of these instrumental ensembles was influenced by the emergence of amplified radio stations and the progressive music promoted in cultural centers within communities.

The composition and organization of folk brass bands in the research area are documented in a statistical report from January 1949, compiled at the level of Fălciu County. This data resulted from work plan initiatives aimed at identifying and registering artistic groups in each village. According to this statistic, the county hosted several brass bands: 8 in Cozmești, 5 in Crețești, 3 in Hoceni, 4 in Dolhești-Petriș, and one each in Gugești, Tg. Fălciu, Răducăneni, Corni Albești, and 6 in Huși. These bands, primarily rural, were recorded with the leader's name and the number of members, typically ranging from 6 to 15, without specifying the ethnic composition.

Local testimonies reference musicians offering instrumental music education within the community and the use of music as a political communication tool, integrated into electoral events. Starting in 1956, musical events were taxed, and trade taxes became mandatory. Band leaders often signed informal contracts, and the taxes were not perceived as burdensome. Artistic activity was viewed as part of community life, contributing both to local identity and to state revenue.

Following World War II, the ethnic identity of Roma musicians faded from official discourse due to ethnic purges and assimilation pressures. In brass band communities, ethnicity was rarely explicitly acknowledged, and Roma affiliation was often minimized or denied for social protection. In Cozmești, for example, musicians were referred to as “Gypsies” due to their occupation, despite not speaking the Romani language. Meanwhile, Roma communities preserving the language and musical traditions were not officially identified as such.

Rural brass bands stood out for their performance quality, orally transmitted repertoires, and an ethnic identity subdued in the official discourse, which promoted a homogenized culture devoid of ethnic references. Key milestones in the evolution of brass music in representative communities include national final stages of competitions involving amateur ensembles, where

these groups often won top awards. These achievements are marked by the release of the first vinyl records featuring Roma brass band music and collaborations with musical figures from Iași and Vaslui counties.



Fig. 5.1. The Cozmești Brass Band, 1961 – Contest of Amateur Artistic Ensembles from Towns and Villages ³.

The brass band from Cozmești/Iași was supported by local instrumentalists knowledgeable in musical notation, as well as by university professor and musicologist Constantin Constantinescu. The brass band from Valea Mare/Vaslui, where the ethnic Roma element predominates, was organized and prepared for such competitions by local instrumentalists familiar with musical notation (some of whom also came from Cozmești/Iași), and by conductors Crețu from Iași and Bălan Nicolae from Vaslui.

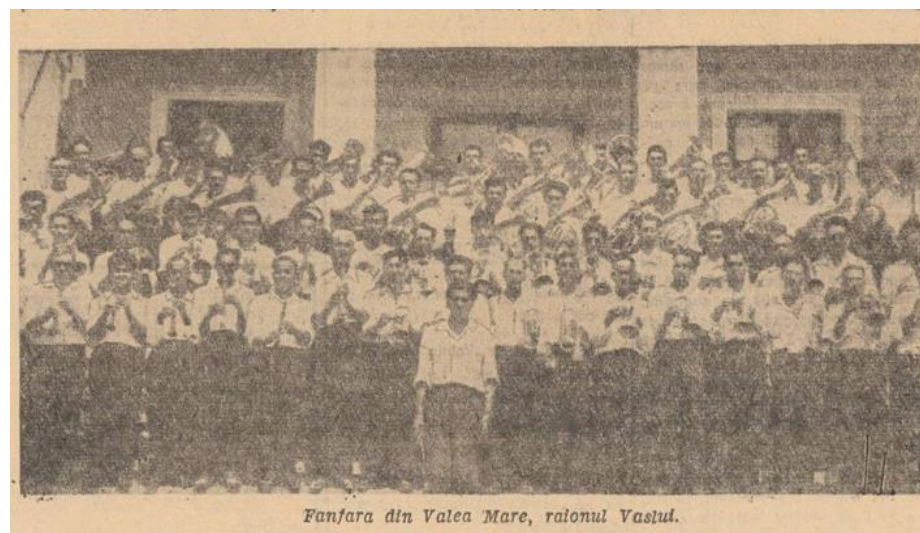


Fig. 5.2. The brass band from Valea Mare, 1963 – Competition in Iași ⁴.

³ The photograph, now part of my personal archive, was handed to me by Mr. Mădălin Văleanu, who received it from the late Lionea Bâzgă.

⁴ Flacăra Iașului, 11 august 1963, p.2. nr.5266.

The brass band from Cozmești/Iași was supported by local instrumentalists knowledgeable in musical notation, as well as by university professor and musicologist Constantin Constantinescu. The brass band from Valea Mare/Vaslui, where the ethnic Roma element predominates, was organized and prepared for such competitions by local instrumentalists familiar with musical notation (some of whom also came from Cozmești/Iași), and by conductors Crețu from Iași and Bălan Nicolae from Vaslui.

Nevertheless, the ethnicity of the brass band musicians from the village of Valea Mare only came to be more consciously acknowledged and respected over time—both by the local Romanian population, who invited their brass bands to perform during harvest festivities, and by the authorities, who increasingly recognized and credited brass music for its cultural value. This recognition was bolstered by the band's success in numerous music competitions, particularly at the Brass Band Festival in Vaslui County, which began in 1971. A key milestone came in 1981 during the “Cântarea României” festival, when the Valea Mare band, composed of 82 musicians, accompanied a choir for the first time under the baton of Professor Bălan.

Mr. Bălan's contribution and perseverance were acknowledged by Pavel Delion, who noted the band's repeated success at the national finals of “Cântarea României” in the editions of 1983, 1985, 1987, and 1989.

With the onset of the communist regime, many Roma musicians specializing in brass band music migrated from rural villages to industrial towns in Moldova, where state enterprises organized brass bands to promote working-class culture. Integrated into official cultural structures, these musicians received stable housing and employment, becoming a socially privileged group. However, this migration also contributed to the decline of local brass band traditions in rural areas.

State-run festivals such as “Cântarea României” provided a platform for artistic recognition—though within the constraints of official ideology. Brass bands affiliated with trade unions, often composed of Roma musicians, became instruments of propaganda, promoting traditions in a manner tightly controlled by the state. A key objective of these musical competitions was to include all social and ethnic groups in cultural life by offering opportunities for artistic expression. These festivals also served as spaces for socialization and collective affirmation, fostering community cohesion. Ideologically, they enforced an artistic repertoire centered on labor, patriotism, and a carefully curated valorization of local traditions.

CHAPTER VI – The Roma Community’s Relationship with the Brass Band Phenomenon

Historically, Roma communities formed around specific activities such as music, establishing stable social and cultural relationships within rural environments. Brass band music became not only an occupation but also a defining element of social and cultural identity for many Roma in Moldova (particularly in the counties of Iași, Vaslui, and Galați). Through participation in agricultural, political, and cultural activities, these communities organically integrated into local life, centering around their musical tradition.

However, the ethnic identity of Roma musicians is often defined externally through stereotypes, resulting in an ambivalent visibility: they are admired artistically but socially stigmatized. Between 1930 and 1966, the declared number of Roma individuals declined, a trend reflecting reluctance in self-identifying as Roma due to discrimination. Over time, however, this attitude began to shift, leading to an approximate 84% increase in self-declared Roma in 1977. This occurred despite the pressures of “Romanization,” which had previously encouraged Roma to renounce ethnic self-identification.

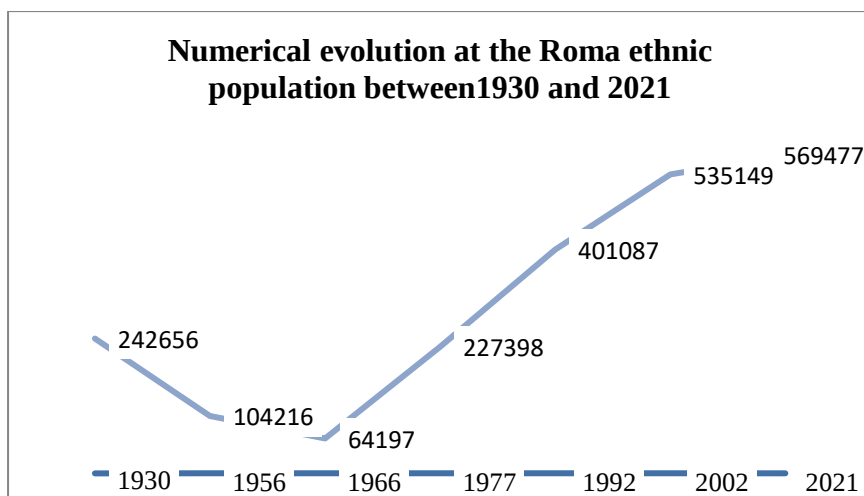


Fig.6.1. Numeric evolution at the Roma ethnic population from Romania ⁵.

Sabin Manuilă pointed out in 1937 that the 1930 census of the Roma population was conducted in the context of the prevailing meaning of the term “țigan” (Gypsy), which led many

⁵ <https://insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/vol4/tabele/t1.pdf> accessed on September 20, 2024. These data do not include the Roma population from Bessarabia.

Roma individuals to self-identify as Romanians in an effort to avoid being labeled and stigmatized.⁶

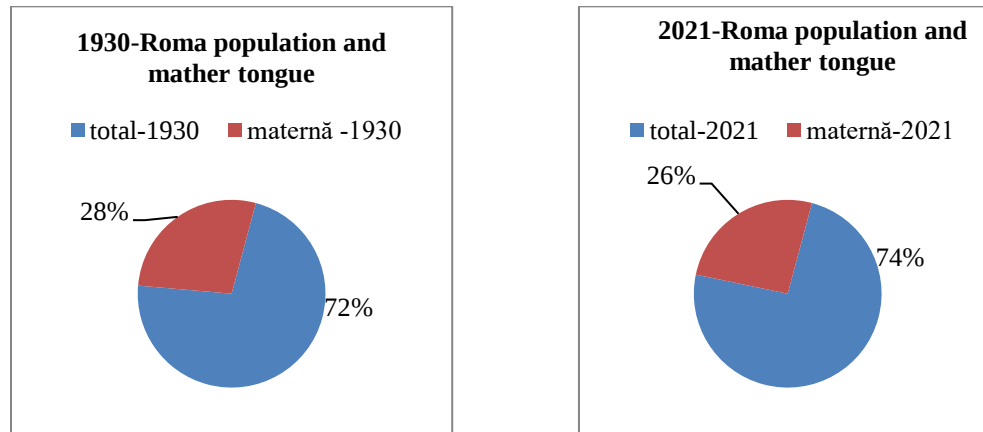


Fig.6.2.Roma poplation and mather tongue-1930⁷ Fig.6.4. Roma poplation and mather tongue -2021⁸.

In some cases, *lăutari* (traditional musicians) were labeled as "Gypsies" solely based on their musical occupation, while in others, ethnic identity was diluted by the desire for integration, in a process of "renouncing" the visible markers of Roma affiliation (language, traditional clothing). It is observed that the official percentage of Roma individuals recorded in the 2021 census is relatively close to that noted in 1930, with a slight downward trend. Historical prejudices, inherited from the period of slavery, persist in the relationships between Roma brass band musicians and the majority population, fueled by an ethnocentric perception that ties social status to ethnic origin. Music remains the primary vehicle through which Roma identity is preserved and expressed, but also a means of social adaptation. Censuses and ethnic identity reflect a complex social reality within Roma musician communities. Often, Roma ethnicity was not officially recorded, especially in localities where *lăutari* were respected and integrated, and their music had become a symbol of prestige. The desire to avoid stigmatization led many Roma to self-identify as Romanians— a phenomenon observed as early as 1937 by Sabin Manuilă— which resulted in an underestimation of the actual Roma population.

⁶ Sabin Manuilă, D.C.Geoergescu, *Populația României*, București, Imprimeria Națională, 1937, p.59.

⁷<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3d/Recensamant1930-II-XXIV.jpg> accessed on January 7, 2022. These data do not include the Roma population from Bessarabia.

⁸<https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice> accessed on 2 august 2023. In the 2021 census the Roma population from Basarabia is not included.

Tabel 6.4. The population from relevant brass band lăutari communities. ⁹.

2021 Moldova – Population in Communities of Brass Band Lăutari						
County	Commune	Village	Villages population	Mother tongue in commune		
				Romani-Gipsy	Romanian	Other
Iași	Cozmești	Cozmești	1176	0	2006	0
	Dolhești	Pietriș	821	4	1901	0
	Dagâța	Zece-Prăjini	433	47	3667	0
Vaslui	Gherghești	Manoiu	847	0	1735	0
	Ivănești	Valea-Mare	420	0	3550	0
Galați	Brăhășești	Toflea	5863	5312	1981	5

Sursa: National Institute of Statistics (România-2024).

Această abordare a contribuit la protejarea unor comunități rome de represiunile etnice și deportări, în special acolo unde romii erau meșteșugari sau muzicieni indispensabili. Având în vedere satele de muzicanți, constatăm că etnia membrilor acestor comunități este înregistrată într-un mod care conduce la prezența romilor în rândul populației majoritare în contextul în care diferențe culturale nu mai sunt vizibile.

This approach contributed to the protection of some Roma communities from ethnic repression and deportations, especially in places where the Roma were craftsmen or indispensable musicians. Considering the musician villages, we observe that the ethnicity of the members of these communities is recorded in a way that leads to the Roma being listed as part of the majority population, in a context where cultural differences are no longer visibly apparent.

The transmission of brass band music in Roma communities in Moldova was carried out almost exclusively orally and informally, within the family or community environment. Music learning began at an early age, through imitation and daily practice, without sheet music or

⁹<https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice> accesat la data de 15 august 2024.

formal education. Parents, grandparents, and other local musicians guided the youth, who learned “by ear,” and integration into the brass band marked the acquisition of the musician status. Music became not just a profession, but a way of life and a form of identity affiliation, passed down filogenetically from generation to generation.

In Roma brass band communities, musicians use a series of vernacular terms to designate roles within the band:

- *Secundist* (euphonium player)
- *Primaș* (soloist)
- *Figornist* (flugelhorn player)
- *Clanetist* (clarinet player)
- *Ifonar* (bass flugelhorn)
- *Heliconist* (B ♭ bass)
- *Efist* (F bass)

Distinctive aspects in the organization of these brass bands include:

- The specific tonality of the (modified) instruments, varying from region to region
- A hybrid repertoire, constantly updated based on events and audience preferences
- The structure of brass band pieces

Notable local composers:

- *Iași*: Constandachi Panciurel, Oprică Sânel
- *Vaslui*: Vasile Mandachi
- *Galați*: Mustafa the flugelhornist – known for his “listening” style

The preparation and performance of events are illustrated by specific elements such as pre-wedding rehearsals, the duration of weddings, how bands arrived and departed from events, and breath-maintenance techniques.

To assess the scale of Roma and non-Roma brass bands in the counties of Iași, Vaslui, and Galați, the research combined archival data, field accounts, press materials, and participatory observation. Families of lăutari (traditional musicians) were identified, organized by brass instrument groups, and adapted their repertoire to local demands.

- In 1949, records from mass cultural institutions in Fălciu County noted the presence of 300 Roma brass musicians at the time of establishing cultural propaganda departments.
- In 1973, 600 Roma brass musicians in Vaslui County took part in the national amateur brass band competition.
- Data from 2025, obtained through participatory observation and interviews across four counties, indicate 279 active Roma brass musicians.

CHAPTER VII – Conclusions and Interpretations

Throughout the research conducted through participatory observation and as an insider, the image of a musical tradition with a fundamental role in the life of Moldovan communities was outlined: brass band music, especially that practiced by Roma musicians.

Key Findings:

- The Roma brass band tradition historically functioned as a tool for **social cohesion**, identity assertion, and cultural continuity.
- Roma musicians, through their passion and dedication, significantly transformed brass music into a symbolic language of the community.
- This music has become a medium of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue.
- The brass band tradition still endures today, its significance transcending the artistic domain, touching upon collective memory and ethnic identity.

Roma music, whether performed by string ensembles (*tarafuri*) or brass bands, cannot be reduced to the label "Gypsy music," a term often used inappropriately and generically. **The** complexity of this musical genre lies in its social function, high degree of technical proficiency, and interpretive finesse, developed through intense practice in community contexts during extended traditional events lasting 48 to 72 hours.

Validated Research Hypotheses:

1. Brass band music emerged in Roma communities due to the direct influence of military music during Romania's modernization.
2. Roma adoption of brass band music occurred through active cultural mimicry, leading to artistic recreation and stylistic personalization.

3. Over time, brass bands in Iași, Vaslui, and Galați gained sonic monopoly over village life, becoming indispensable at social and ritual events.
4. The evolution of Roma brass band music followed an ascending trajectory in the first half of the 20th century, in response to increased demand at political events, contests, and public ceremonies.

Contributions of the Research:

- Explained and interpreted the cultural meanings generated by the musical phenomenon.
- Captured subjective experiences and collective memory.
- Highlighted the oral tradition passed between generations.
- Reconstructed local history based on written and oral sources, reviving forgotten elements.

Conclusions:

- The contribution of Roma to brass band music development in regiments, battalions, and even in representative military music **is** absent from scholarly works.
- Roma coexist through art with the majority population, with each side assuming well-defined roles within the social system.
- Roma brass musicians demonstrate remarkable aural skills, sensitivity, and are carriers of traditional artistic expressiveness, perpetuating an orally transmitted musical heritage.
- Former military band members significantly contributed to the musical proficiency and repertoire **in** Roma communities.
- Lack of formal music literacy led to oral teaching methods, notably by pointing to finger positions on instruments.
- Brass band music is a valuable component of intangible cultural heritage.

Education, Heritage, and Community Participation in Supporting the Brass Band Tradition

- ✓ Recovery of community memory through interviews with elders.
- ✓ Promotion of local memory in schools.
- ✓ Reviving artistic initiatives launched by professor Bălan.
- ✓ Collaborations with vocal soloists, choirs, and other local musical groups.
- ✓ Organizing educational and cultural initiatives for rural youth.

- ✓ Creating national and international brass band festivals as platforms for cultural exchange and intercultural dialogue.

Future Research Directions:

- ✓ Role of ethnicity in the development of military music.
- ✓ Brass band music and cultural conservatism in Roma communities.
- ✓ Inter-community relations through shared brass music traditions (e.g., with Saxons, Hungarians).
- ✓ Comparative study of Roma brass bands in Romania and abroad (Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria).
- ✓ Scientific-practical research on interpretive styles.
- ✓ Brass band music in Eastern Moldovan traditional communities: heritage, identity, and revitalization perspectives.
- ✓ Promotion of cultural tourism in villages that still maintain brass music traditions.
- ✓ Local authority involvement in promoting brass music in Valea Mare, Fâstâci, Zorleni, Vaslui, Toflea, Zece Prăjini, Pietriș.

Closing Statement:

We hope that the theories supported in this paper will contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolution of the brass music phenomenon, both in Roma communities and in majority Romanian communities in Iași, Vaslui, and Galați between 1900 and 1990. We are confident that further research will bring new insights into the brass band musician villages explored in this study, which may confirm or refute our conclusions.

The role of Roma musicians, mostly from the Ursari group (as documented since the 18th century), is essential in enriching Romanian music. As Bălan Nicolae noted:

“Like seasoning in food, in Romanian music there is no flavor without the Gypsies. They carry the Romanian folklore forward—changing it, yes—but that means they are enriching it.”

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