

Types and Variants of Garments and Textiles in the Highlands of Gjakova



Arts and Culture

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Abstract

At the onset of the paper, we are introduced to the traditional clothing and textiles which have an old origin, such as with the female *xhubletë* of Nikaj Mërturi; the white and dark brown *tirq*; the white cap (*plis*), one of the most characteristic symbols in Northern Albanian and Kosova, as well as in Albanian villages of Macedonia; the traditional vest for men (*xhamadan*), decorated with black stripes. We will also discuss various types of tight and loose fitting traditional female clothing. The traditional clothing will be divided into two major groups: female and male. Within each group we will discuss the various main forms, structures, and distributions of the specific types and varieties. In this paper we will also mention the considerable diversity that exists for traditional female clothing, namely where the main types include form-fitting and loose-fitting clothing which are "lidhce dhe merhame" that are used in the village of Zogaj and are similar to the traditional attire of Reka, as well as the with the "xhubletë" worn in Nikaj-Mërtur in the villages of Ragam and Valbonë. We will also focus on the similarities in these types of clothing that are found throughout the region of highland of northern Albania. Highland of Gjakova traditionally known for employing a wide variety of female popular folk clothing, and to the extent that it could be posited that all the types of Highland of northern Albania are represented. The decorative elements of the female traditional clothing is particularly noteworthy, such as in regards to the complexity of the patterns on the headscarves which are usually multi-colored, as well as the manner in which they are used on different parts of the body. In this paper we will also discuss various characteristics components of traditional male clothing, such as form-fitting *tirq* including their various colors and shades, shirts, vest, scarves, caps; traditional children's folk costumes which will be compared to those of their adult counterparts, but as simplified and practical versions given age-appropriateness, will also be mentioned. This paper will also present various traditions associated with such folk costumes, the decorative elements on the textiles, including the colors, the contrastive designs, and distinctive components, as well as regional similarities.

The highlands of Gjakova, which is located east of the Albanian Alps, are lands that belong to the Tropoje district and continue beyond the border of the Republic of Albania, in a few villages near Gjakova and Junik. They extend south to Lake of Fierza. The highlands of Gjakova encompass three ethnographic surroundings: Gashi in the north, Krasniqe in the central area and Bytyçi in the east. The highlands of Gjakova are bordered in the north and northeast with Kosova, Montenegro in the northwest, in the west with Nikaj-Merturi, the Puka district to the south, and the Has district to the east.

By the 1920-30s, most of the households within the villages were producing their own clothing, except for some parts on the surface that were made from lace, (*tehri*) wire, ornamental purl, and so forth. which were produced in the Gjakova Bazaar, according to traditional models inherited by generations and occasionally supplemented with new elements or additions, in accordance with the requirements and tastes of the relevant group. Due to these conditions textile and apparel were significantly improved, in particular in women's clothing (e.g. dresses) where many textiles and fashion elements of ancient origin were preserved.

Symbolic clothing of ancient origin include: *xhubleta* clothing for women from Nikaj-Mërtur; *tirq*, coarse woolen cloth with white and dark brown colors (*galan*); white hat (*plisi*), an identification symbol in northern Albania, Kosova, and the Albanian villages of Macedonia; Vest, a doublet for men decorated with black lace; Women's tight and wide clothing, etc. In the highlands of Gjakova, traditionally, popular variants of clothing have been, and continue to be used, especially for women. In a sense, the highlands of Gjakova include all the features of clothing from the highlands of North Albania. Men wore traditional clothing (*tirq*) and a white hemispherical hat (*plis*), which is symbolic for Kosovars. This was worn on the head even after traditional outfits were replaced with modern garments. This clothing is used in almost all regions of the highlands of Northern Albania.

There is a greater diversity for women's clothing. The main types are: "tight" clothing and also wide skirts "pështjellak të gjanë", which are prevalent, clothing with lace and scarves used in the village of Zogaj, which is similar to clothing of Reka, as well as clothing with *xhubleta* found in Nikaj-Mërturi and the villages of Valbona and Rragam.

Peice by peice we find these types of garments in all the highlands of northern Albania: we also find the tight clothing in Reka with minor changes; the clothing wide skirts is almost identical to the outfits of the women of Kabashi, in the district of Puka; women's clothing with *xhubleta* is dominant in the regions of Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjini.

Decorative ornaments on clothing for women in the Gjakova Highlands are less eye-catching than the ornamental details on textiles that are not worn. The appearance of clothing is especially striking when we see the complex ornamental headscarf (*rubat*), waist-scarfs (*qafshokat*) and two big red folded scarfs (*riza*) plased on both sides of the skirt.

The headscarfs are usually one-colored, but vary from one another. Women's aprons covering a woman's lap are traditionally decorated in Albania; however, aprons covering the front waist area for women typically in the Highlands of Gjakova are usually decorated in the corners, which the midriff scarf does not cover.

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We will consider folk clothing in two large groups, which include: **1.**garments for women and **2.**garments for men. Within each group we will briefly describe the shape, structure and spread of any particular type and its main variants.

1.WOMEN'S CLOTHING

Today in the Highlands of Gjakova we notice four different traditional outfits for women being worn: "*tight*" garments, "*wide skirts*" in the form of accordion folds which are prevalent, "*xhubleta*" in the villages of Lekbibaj and Rragam, and the clothing of *Reka* in the village of Zogaj and surrounding areas.



Photo 1. "Tight" garments, with "wide skirts" and "lace and scarves" of Reka from the Highlands of Gjakova.

a) *Tight Clothing*

In this outfit from the Mountains of Gjakova, women would wear a long shirt over woven fabrics, particular type of vest (*krahoçe, mitan pa krahë*) or a vest decorated with tehri wire, woven lumbar belt in the mid-area is colorfully decorated, The front apron (pështjellak) has the form of trapezoid and is made of wool braided on a loom, the back apron is smaller and made of wool, the headscarfs (*rubat*), the waist scarfs (*qafshokat*) and two big red folded scarfs (*riza*) placed on both sides of the skirt, wool socks, plastic shoes, jewelry etc. This outfit is also prevalent from the west of Peja to Rugova in Kosovo. (Photo 1, 5)

Shirts: are long and extend down to the knees, with over ten segments that extend from the waist down (the segments create an elegant silhouette and allow free movement for women). The chest area of the shirt is embroidered with colored thread, with beads and sparkles decorated mainly with floral patterns. Short sleeves to the elbow, wide, hand-made with embroidery covering the sleeves from the shoulders to elbows. Sleeved shirts at the wrist to the elbow where the first part near the wrist has black cloth and is embroidered with colored string and beads, the wrist with snaps or buttons.

The front apron (Pështjellaku i përparmë) A rare wool weave that is usually black or brown and made on a loom. It is decorated with colored string. It is placed at the front part of a woman below the waist. The corners of the front apron are embroidered with symbolic motifs using colored thread or floral patterns. Half of the side and the last part of it at the end are made with threads using a hook and various ornaments. It is held with two curly ropes at opposing ends at the top of the apron where it is tied at the middle.

The back apron (Pështjellaku i prapëm): It is smaller and has the form of a trapezoid also, placed at the bottom on the back. It is a piece made on a loom, surrounded by lacing and a black piece of cloth. Symbolic motifs are embroidered with beads, using gold and silver wires located in several small groups that look similar to stained glass. It is held with two curled threads that cross the body and are tied at the bottom the hips (*ijes*) with two ornamental tufts.

Belt: The belt (*Shoka*) is 3.5-5cm wide and is placed diagonally at the back over the hips (*krysa*) below the waist, fastened with buttons and hooks. These are made using a piece of black cloth (often green, blue, maroon), combined with other elements of dress, with socks, skirt, and so forth. It is embroidered with various ornaments, such as beads, tehri, sparkles, etc.

Vest: The vest (*Krahoçja*) is made using a black piece of cloth with purl sown 3-5 threads together. Two shoulders are gripped by it and are crossed in the back. This type of vest keeps the shoulders and chest straight. It is adorned with beads and appropriate décor using tehri, with thin thread of gold or silver (*klapedan*) where embroidery is simple. In the criss-crossing in the back is hung an old silver coin, the most commonly used vest is made by using hooks and wool thread in the form of lace doily patterns (*Ojme*).

Socks: Socks are made from wool by using hooks based on various models (variants in reliefs) for girls - with white threads, whereas for brides they include colored thread extending down to the ankles, and are tied with a string attached to the top of the socks. On the bottom part at the ankle, in the background there is no relief, the socks are decorated with simple motifs and colored threads, especially at the sides.

Undergarments: Initially these were made of wool woven on the loom, and later of cloth canvas and were not made tightly fit on the body. They are tied with thread at the waist. At the end, close to the knee there is an addition decorated with lace made of colored thread and beads, that is placed over the top of the socks.

Bootee: (*Meste*) are made by using hooks and wool thread and are decorated with embroidery with various types of lace and patterns. They are worn on top of socks mostly in the winter time.

Shoes: (*Opingat*, like moccasins) are made with cow leather and/or elastic/rubber. The leather is cut like twine. The upper part is embroidered with colored thread and different decorative patterns.

Hairstyles: Traditionally females part their hair in the middle, at the front of the head; later this separation was done sideways. Women always used a scarf to cover their head; girls' scarves were white whereas a bride's was red (often times vivid colors), a widow's headscarf would be brown (auburn or after a period of time could be white) and old women white.

Decorations: These garments were often adorned with three to four necklaces with silver coins (according to their economic standing), which were hooked at the neck and were worn on the chest over the shirt; neck sequence, earrings, hair strings, bracelets, bracelet with beads, hat with coins, rings on both hands, with at least six pieces, all of which were silver.

b) *Wide Clothing*

The clothing: "pleated skirt" (*pështjellak i gjanë*) was named so as to be distinguished from "tight" clothing. The pleated skirt was worn over a short braided fabric, which was different chest embroidery of the sleeves. Women for beauty would tie a large scarf made of yellow silk with fringe in the middle of the skirt. The head covering was a simple scarf (*rubat*); scarf that were worn at the waist (*qafshokat*), two big red scarves (*Rizat*) that were held at the sides; also at the mid-section the belt (*shoka*), vest, waistcoat, long woolen socks up to the knees and the shoes (*opingat*). The clothing with "*pështjellak të gjanë*" of the Gjakova Highlands is almost identical to that of the women of Kabashi from district of Puka. (Photo 1)

Shirt: Made from woven fabric, it was long down to the thighs. In the front the chest and arms are embroidered with ornaments, mostly floral, colored threads, beads and sparkles, with short, wide sleeves extending to the elbows.

The pleated skirt: (*Pështjellaku i gjanë*) made with wool thread on a loom, colored dark red, (dark) green and purple. With wrinkles (accordion shape pleats), the forms of the pleats were made with a technique that preserves this wavy pattern even when washed. It was decorated with various floral or geometric décor, beads and sparkles which when the pleats are opened create a fantastic view of them. Finally, for decoration is placed a white or yellow ribbon about 2 cm wide. At the top of the skirt, the tie made of woolen yarn, keep the skirt tied to the body above the hips. Along the body (below waist) is placed the wide belt (*shoka*) which is about 5cm wide, decorated with beads and embroidered with artistic taste. At the front starting from the bottom of the abdomen hangs a beautiful yellow scarf (*qafshokë*), with long fringe, where the two ends are grabbed with clips at the back side. On the back side are also hanged 2-3 colored scarves (*riza*) that are hanged down above the pleated skirt.

Vest: This is often called (*mitan pa mangë*). It is short to the waist, made of black or brown pieces, with bright colored threads on dark background with different drawings of stylized floral motifs, implemented with quilted *në formë* lines. It is placed on both sides, and does not have long sleeves grips. In the Wide Clothing we have also different variants (*jelek me tehri*) made of silk and often using gold and silver thread (*me kllapedan*) and another variant (*me krahoçe*). In this outfit we have also forearm sleeves, socks, *opinga*, *meste*, head scarf, whereas the hair style combined with ornaments are identical to the "tight clothing" style.

c) **Clothing with (*Xhubletë*):** dress of black felt, thick and strong, sleeveless with between close and wide as the bell end of corrugated. In the area of Nikaj-Mërtur, women's clothing style changes. They dressed in (*xhubletë*), shirt, waist coat (*krahol*), (*kërdhokull*), the front apron (*pështjellakët*), vest with fringe, silver belt, black wool socks, leather shoes, headscarf, handkerchief with fringe, and silver adornments. In this clothing style is noticeable the form of the (*xhubletë*), which is special and different from any other clothing, the way of composition, decoration with motifs and complete decorative colors. In the *xhubleta* of the Mountains of Gjakova in Nikaj-Mërtur, we have decoration with symbols of the sun and the moon, snakes, floral motifs, zoomorfe etc. Ornaments used in clothing with *xhubleta* are of interest for variety and diversity of motifs within a certain symbolism, for specific compositions, for stylistic conception, colorful and graphical, embroidery materials, masterly technique and execution. (Photo 3)

Regarding women's garments, the *xhubleta* is black, whereas for girls it is white and black. (*Xhubleta*) clothing for girls is more simple in the containing parts, which is from white felt with black (*iva*).

Girl's Clothing: Consists of: a white simple buckram (cloth) shirt with long sleeves closed to the wrist, cut straight or with 2-3 scarfs (*kinda*), long down to the knees and with no decorations. In the front of the chest and the sleeves there is a very light decoration with the same color as the shirt.

A white headscarf with hair parted down the middle, hanged in front in the shape of triangle always tied below the chin at the neck. White cloth *underwear* long down under the knees, which were put into the socks.

White wool socks with motifs with the model of (*ilastik*) every other, decorated with the same material in the form of a braided relief. At the ends of the ankles are made simple different motifs with black color, or embroidered after being made with hooks (*krrabza*).

The tie with a pom-pom holds the socks in place. *Meste* made with wool yarn or felt, colored black and white, with simple motifs and leather shoes (*opinga*) surrounded by curls and the top part simply crafted with white thread. In all the regions of Tropoja, the girl's clothing was different from women's clothing. In this clothing white was the dominant color, combined with black; other colors were not used for girls until they become brides. (Photo. 2)

Front apron (Pështjellaku): Piece of white wool woven on handloom and rarely worked with a simple decoration with black thread, with narrow lace 2-3 cm, on both ends of the surface were *ties with pom-pom* that would hold and be tied in the middle.

Back apron (Pështjellaku): Piece of woolen white woven or soutane surrounded by black lacing or, with a simple decoration. *Cloak*, soutane white or black are often the heap, or *shirt* (jersey) black sleeve, summer *shirt* or *vest* woolen free sleeve of working with decor (relief) white or black, or vest (*mitan*) of coarse woolen cloth or wool.

In the areas such as Padesh, Kamenica, Luguizi, Zherkë, and Zogaj, women's clothing had similar elements like women's clothing of *Reka* and *Rrafshi i Dukagjinit*.



Photo 2. Clothing of Çikave (girls). (Photo. Archives of the palace of culture "Dardania" B. Curri, Tropoje. 1980)



Photo.3 Clothing with *xhubleta* (Nikaj – Mërtur)



Photo.4 Clothing with lace and scarves (*of Reka*)



Photo.5 Wearing tight clothing

(Photos: Archives of the palace of culture "Dardania" B. Curri, Tropoje. 1980)

d) Clothing with "lace and scarves"(of Reka):

It is Bytyçi's clothing. It consists of a long shirt woven on the loom with stemming dyed beige or brown color (dyed with walnut or alder) also often white. It has a simple collar and slit by the end of the chest. On either side of the slit, the ornamental motives are numerous and their compositional form is asymmetrical. The motives of one side are not the same with the other side, in terms of form of their drawings and in colors.

For the two wool pështjellakët, the front apron is larger, whereas the back one is smaller. Generally the pështjellakët of this type of clothing are free surfaces. The motifs on dark backgrounds can be seen clearly, they have contrast in establishing strong colors and are framed with thick lines. They are composed on the side of the surface of *pështjellakë* that accompany the sides and on the lower part decorated elements with hooks (*shizë*) adding aesthetic and artistic qualities to the clothing. The velvet vest (*Mitani*) with the color of green, blue, brown, is decorated on the sides, sides, angles and sleeves with *tehri* and *klapedan* piping. The vest (*Jelevu*) decorated with lace with *klapedan* and *tehri* color on the entire surface; forearm sleeves on this variant of vest dress with alsoornated and embroidered with motifs composed asymmetrically; the cover head with "*lidhë e merhame*" it is characteristic part of this clothing, linking head part (*lidhca*) top down next to the chin, like a pillow (*vatinë*) which serves to shape a more beautiful form of the head, especially in profile; woolen long socks up to the knee, black with little decorations above leg joints; leather shoes decorated with colors in the upper part. (Photo.1, 4)

A different variant of this costume is the dress, women working in garment uses no vest or trimmed forearm sleeves, they remove them during their work. Sleeves that come from the shoulders to the elbow enter the work shirt and come out to the arms up to the elbows.

The "lace and scarf" (*lidhë e merhame*) clothing along with some other textiles from Bytyçi region appear with some different specification especially when in asymmetrical decorations. Traditional textiles are characteristic of this region in the manner of composition of motifs and colors, especially in the combination of yellow with black. These are found in holsters woolen pillow and mattresses, cradle coverings, carpets, rugs, tapestry etc.

2. MEN'S CLOTHING

The most characteristic element in this clothing were pants (*tirq*), tight fitting around the legs, of white felt and sometimes brown (*galana*) or black. They were accompanied with a vest (*jelek*), doublet (*xhamadanin*) of white felt and cloaks (*gujën*), which was made from white felt decorated with black braid, this added more beauty to men with *tirq*. (Foto.6,7,8,9.)

Pants (Tirq): They are white, brown and dark (*galana*), made with pieces of wool in the loom, they pass to the *valanicë* is pressed and taken back in the soutane zhgun. They are tied a little below the middle of the body (*kopaçë*) with a lace inserted to the hole in the top part. In the bottom front part of the (*kopaçve*) are two empty spaces called *shkekë*, cutted and sewn according to the body, on bow of legs of the legs, the cloth curves, starting from the lower empty spaces by sewing back, and in the bottom parts endowed with piping yarn, according to economic capabilities and hierarchy, from 3-12 piping thread.



Photo. 6. different outfits for men.

(Foto, archive of the palace of culture "Dardania" B. Curri, Tropoje. 1980)

Shirts: White shirts woven on a loom with in cloth woven on handloom, brick colored stripes, beige, brown, etc. (*gurra*), with long sleeves, simple collar of military form, open top and embroidered with a slight design using white thread (*white on white*), the same work would be done on the sleeves of the shirt at the end of the wrists.

Black vest (Mitan): long-sleeved, of black velvet accompanied on the sides of the collar and sleeves with lace ornaments made with brown, maroon or violet. It is gripped with (*kamcana*) or buttons on the front side.

Doublet (Xhamadani): Shtroja e xhamadanit with pieces of red, blue, brown, maroon, etc., with long and open sleeves, decorated around the collar in all its surface with piping, tehri and kllapedan (*gold and silver thread*).

Vest: The vest consisted of sheets with black cloth, neatly organized work on all the surface with grouped decoration and framed with tehri. It is short, with round buttons (*sumbulla*), made with braid, *tehri* and *kllapedan*.

Vest with other longer form: Layers with pieces of red, blue, brown, maroon, etc. Edges, Surfaces and angles are organized in groups of ornaments, made with tehri and other materials.

The belt and scarves (Shokë e shallë): Shoka is made of wool in the loom, decorated with dyed wool yarn, placed lengthwise are grouped resembling colors of the rainbow. It is long as it wraps several times around the middle, the scarves are long too, at the same size of shoka and are wrapped around each other from the mid-body down to the two empty spaces (*shtjeka* of *tirq*).

White hat (hood, coif) (Kapuç i bardhë) (Plisi): Is spherical and rounded above the head, it is a symbol of identification in Northern Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia to the Albanian villages. In the Highlands of Gjakova, around the plis is surrounded from handkerchief, black or white or with very simple decor, in the

region of Nikaj- Mërturi is mostly red. In the province of Rugova, Valbona and Çerem the white hat is wrapped with a cotton scarf (*merhamë*) made of white cotton which goes down to the chin.



Photo. 7,8,9. Men's clothing, tirq clothing variants of coarse woolen cloth and white cappuccino in the head (plisi).
(Photo, archive of the palace of culture "Dardania" B. Curri, Tropoje. 1980)

Shoes (Opingat): are made of leather, knitted above with white thread or leather thread twined with a decor chosen from the color of the material. Wool white *socks* were made with more finesse and *bootee (meste)* made with colored string with different symbolic motifs.

Ornaments (Stoli): in this outfit we have various ornaments used as the clock's sheath hanging on the neck that curves down beautifully in the men's chest, cigarette holder decorated with amber, and silver jewelry, decorated artisanal weapons around the waist.

Variants of clothing for men: some of these are: clothing with white *tirq*, - clothing with *tirq galana*, clothing for dashing, - clothing with white doublet, - clothing for work, - clothing for yang men, and many other variants with black *gujë*, mantle, *kapuran*, *goxhup* etc.

Youth Clothing: is similar to that of men but more simple, colorful decorations, is all white. The collar of the shirt is in military form, embroidered and decorated with light-colored motifs on the collar, sleeves and sleeve and joints. In the youth's clothing version is also used woolen shirt with long sleeves made of different models (*relief*), with natural color. White doublet of coarse woolen cloth-shirt, with simple decorations with lacing in the sides. White *tirq*, waist scarves, wool socks and *opinga*.

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With the changing demographic and economic conditions, the tradition of production and use of clothing and textiles as in all regions of Albania, in the Highlands of Gjakova, has undergone changes and distortions of artistic values in the preservation and development of their identity. In order to maintain this tradition inherited with all its functional and artistic values, have begun to rise some ethnographic museums. The originality of the towers (characteristic houses) with all elements of its heritage value has been put at the service of natural and cultural tourism.

Developments of revival and folk art through various concerts are helping the recovery, local and national festivals, visual arts exhibitions, etc, in one way or another, are serving to the recognition and preservation of traditional values in textiles and fashion in the highlands of Gjakova. Also some publications such as tourist-guide, postcards, leaflets, albums, catalogs with original ethnographic objects, have developed awareness for the protection and proper attention

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