

# Traditional Ukrainian Clothing

## XVIII — Early XX Centuries

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**Abstract.** The main principles, genesis and bases features of region complexes Ukrainian traditional male and female clothing are studied in the paper. Special attention is given to decorative features of removable and non-removable personal adornments in the complex of folk costume as well as artistic ways of organizing clothing in integral ensemble structure. Subject matter also related to the most important functions of the clothing in Ukrainian traditional domestic life and ritual culture.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, folk clothing, decor, tradition.

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The Ukrainian folk clothing was studied for a long time by researchers from different countries as an important part of Ukrainian traditional culture. The first to pay attention to this phenomenon were foreign travellers: Frenchman Guillaume Le Vasseur de Beauplan (in 1650), Syrian Pavel Aleppo (1654—1656), German diplomat Conrad Jakob Hildebrand (1656—1657), Dutchman Ulrich von Werdum (in 1640, 1641, 1672), Swedish Chief Weig (during 1708—1709), Danish diplomat Juel Just (in 1711), German doctor Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin (1770—1784) and other. Scientific study Ukrainian traditional costume as an ethnographic object was begun from the middle of XIX century [Holovatskyi 1868, 1877; Vovk 1928, 127—169; Kolberg 1976, 39—46], and from the middle of XIX century as an art phenomenon [Kulchytska 2018, 1—74; Hurlula 1966, 5—23; Mateiko 1977; — 1996; Kosmina 2008; Stelmashchuk 2000, — 2019; Ukraininets 2019]. Ukrainian traditional clothing was also the object of research for foreign scientists in the context of study the features of Slavic folk clothing [Tilke 1925, 52—53, 56—58; Bruhn, Tilke 1941, 366—367, 376—377; Wilcox 1965, 79, 82, 84—85] or as the part of European folk art [Bossert 1953]. The monographic study of the issue was published in Toronto [Ukrainian Folk Costume 1992]. Besides that, scientists have paid attention to Ukrainian folk textiles [Sydorovych 1979; Nykorak 2004], folk embroidery [Zakharchuk-

Chuhai 1988; Kara-Vasylieva 2008], folk jewelry [Vrochynska 2008], folk headwear [Stelmashchuk 2013], ornament [Selivachov 2013] as the necessary components of folk costume.

## **1. Materials for clothing**

Different materials used for Ukrainian folk clothing of the XVIII — early XX centuries have of great importance for the complex study the phenomenon. Basically there were various homespun materials: fabrics, woven cloth, leather, fur etc. For a long time, the main bast plants used for made fabrics were stayed flax and hemp. The flax is considered as the one of the oldest cultivated Indo-European plants, and the hemp could be borrowed by the Slavs from the Scythians [Niederle 1956, 223]. The ancient Scythian items researched by archaeologists confirmed that Scythians used flax, hemp and woven fabrics of plain and twill weaving [Nykorak 2004, 49]. The similar types of fabrics were used in the XVIII — at the beginning of the XX centuries throughout Ukraine. During ancient Slavic times for decoration flax and hemp fabrics have been used different types of weaving techniques and embroidery as well as fabric's print which was first used in Kyiv-Rus in the X — XI centuries [Rybakov 1953, 235].

Male and female overclothing and male waist clothing often by domestic coarse woolen cloth throughout Ukraine were made. The similar components of garment from the same material during the era of ancient Slavic were worn [Sedov 1986, 32] and in Kyiv-Rus times (XI century) [Stelmashchuk 2013, 17]. Leather and fur in ancient Slavs were very important because they lived in cold climates and needed warm clothing [Vovk 1928, 138]. In the XVIII — at the beginning of XX centuries from these materials were made sheepskin coat (*kozhuKh*), headwear, footwear, costume accessories (belts, bags etc.).

In addition to homespun materials, imported fabrics have long been used in Ukrainian folk costume, the most common of which were silk fabrics (the first items from silk fabrics were date by the VIII century). In the complex of folk costume of the XVIII — early XX centuries these fabrics some components have also been used for (for headwear, aprons, rarely shirts and skirts) [Holovatskyi 1868, 23—25].

## **2. The main components of Ukrainian traditional clothing**

Components of Ukrainian traditional male and female clothing have preserved and evolved the types of pattern cutting and decoration inherent the clothing of ancient Slavs and the inhabitants of Kyiv-Rus [Holovatskyi 1877, 4; Vovk 1928, 146; Sedov 1986, 33].

The shirt with linen or hemp cloth (*sorochka*) was the core of the male folk costume. It is known, the shirt worn all Slavic peoples near XI centuries, but archeological finds from the territory of Ukraine also allow for its earlier dating [Vovk 1928, 146, 165]. The most ancient cut of the shirt, widespread in almost all Ukrainian territories, looked like a *tunica* [Niederle 1956, 229; 33] with sleeves and elliptic neck-opening, which was buttoned by metal or bone button, cufflink or ribbon. In the garment complex of the XVIII — the first half of the XIX century the shirt was wear over pants and it reached below the knees. Later — in the second half of the XIX century in some regions of Ukraine the shirt was begun to tuck in pants.

Pants have been known in Ukraine since Scythian times (VI century BC). In Ukrainian folk costume were two types of them. The narrow pants by a cord were pulled. This form of male waist garment in Ukrainian folk clothing almost unchanged from Scythian tames was preserved. Another one form of pants (*sharovary*) much wider which the Ukrainians probably borrowed from the Caucasian peoples [Vovk 1928, 168], in Scythian-Sarmatian era was worn [Rikman 1986, 18]. This type of pants were become the part of Zaporizhzhian Kozak attire (XV — XVIII centuries).

The sleeveless sheepskin jacket (*keptar*) by the inhabitants of foothills and mountainous regions of Western Ukraine was worn. Materials from which it was made, the simple in cut, the absence of differences between the male and female items have testified for its ancient origin [Vovk 1928, 136]. The simple ancient pattern cutting in cloth sleeveless outerwear (*lejbyk, katanka, bruslyk, etc.*) was also preserved in the XVIII — early XX centuries.

The short male outerwear with sleeves had the same pattern cutting as sleeveless. Jacket with linen, hemp or woolen cloth (*serdak, polotnianka, etc.*) had a straight-backed with gussets under arms and straight sleeves. The long forms of outerwear were also used. They had different names (*svyta, sirak, opancha, kapota, etc.*) and type of décor by applique with cord, woolen cloth, embroidery with colored yarns. Some researchers have suggested the origin of their shape from the gradual complication of straight-backed form with the help of gussets giving fullness to the lower back [Vovk 1928, 163], and other have seen the development of their forms from Byzantine of Western European sources [Niederle 1956, 230]. In any event, depictions of outerwear looked like cloth coat of the XVIII — early XX centuries in the monuments of Kyiv-Rus were found<sup>1</sup>. They have not only the similar type in cut, but also principles of decoration.

The sheepskin coat called *kozhuikh* was the one of the most ancient form of garment in tradition clothes of Ukrainians, was fixed in close to modern form already in Scythian times [Rikman 1986, 27]. Some scientists have

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<sup>1</sup> In manuscript «Izbornyk Sviatoslava» (1073); in frescoes of St. Sophia Church(XI century).

suggested that its straight-backed form from sleeveless sheepskin jacket were come (*keptar*), which eventually began to sew sleeves [Vovk 1928, 140]. In addition, there were *kozuhkhs* with cut upper back and folded into small folds along the cut line. Preference was given to *kozuhkhs* with dark (black) fur throughout Ukraine [Mateiko 1977, 86].

Winter male headwear was made from wool and/or fur. Considered that fur (*kuchma*) and felt (*magerka*, *sholomok*, etc.) caps' forms were close for caps were worn during the era of Kyiv-Rus [Vovk 1928, 159]. Straw hats (*bryl*) were worn in summer and their height and width were varied on a region-to-region.

There were two types of boots mostly with cowhide, rarely — with pigskin: with low heels (“Hungary” pattern cutting) or without them (“Russian” pattern cutting) [Holoivatskyi 1877, 53]. Also the archaic form of footwear (*postoly*) made of different type of leather in the Carpathian foothill areas were used. For their crafted the rectangle of leather was turned up on all sides [Mateiko 1977, 134].

Ukrainian men in XVIII — early XX centuries also wore some accessories: woven or leather belts (*kraika* and *cheres*), small bags for money or tobacco (*tobivka* in Hutsul Region), big woven or weaved bags, some jewelry (crosses or rings for example) and even some kind of weapons in Hutsul Region: knives, guns (*pistol*) and gunpowder (*kubok*) to the end of XIX century, before weapons were was banned by the Austro-Hungarian government [Vovk 1928, 170]. After that Hutsul men continued to wear decorative walking sticks (*topirets`*, *kelef*, *bartka*) of hardwood, carved and inlaid with metal and beads with an edge similar to a hatchet.

Female complex of clothing of the XVIII — early XX centuries consisted with homespun shirt, waist clothing (skirt and apron), vest, outerwear (with linen or hemp fabrics, woolen cloth, fur or woolen cloth with fur), headwear, footwear, accessories: belts, jewelry, etc.

Long shirts from the era of Kyiv-Rus were known [Rybakov 1953, 235]. Then shirt-like tunic was with opening seams in the middle of the chest, right or left, with long sleeves, on which bracelets were worn [Sedov 1986, 32]. But in the XVIII — in the beginning of XX centuries the most common throughout Ukraine was the shirt with shoulder piece and folded into small folds along the neck and nape line, the line of joining of sleeves to the body of the shirt, around cuffs. It was sewn with a different size of collar or different kind of neckband. It also was different length: the long one (*dodilna*) or the short one (*do pidtychky*). In the latter case the top of the shirt (*stanok*) could be sewn with the better fabrics, and the lower part (*pidtychka*) with the worse cloth.

Female skirts were of tree main types: unsewn with one piece of fabrics (*plakhta*, *derha*, *obhortka*), unsewn with two pieces (*zapaska*) and different kind of skirts as sewn clothing. In the first two types were saved the oldest

types of garment [Mateiko 1977, 73], which were just one or two pieces of fabric tied around the waist and fixed by cords or belt (*kraika*) [Vovk 1928, 149]. On some Ukrainian regions this types of unsewn garment were gradually replaced by skirts [Vovk 1928, 151]. The skirts were sewn with several pieces of fabric, each of them were named *pilka*, which were most often from three to six. Thick gathers, tightly drawn with strong thread, formed the top of the skirt at the waist [Mateiko 1977, 80]. Apron (*zapaska*), other types of unsewn garment, was worn over the skirt. It was made from one or two sewn pieces of fabrics.

The sleeveless sheepskin jackets (*keptar*) were also worn by women. They were almost like male jackets, sometimes with different in decorations. The cut of other sleeveless female woolen cloth outerwear (*leibyky*, *katanka*, *bruslyk*) was very close to *keptar* with straight-backed. There were also used some sleeveless, fitted below-the-waist garment with domestic cloth or woolen store-bought fabrics, *kirsetka* and *horsyk* for example. Some scientists have supposed their provenance from gradual elongation straight-backed sleeveless forms of garment with necessary godets inserted below. [Vovk 1928, 141]. Other ones have noted the probable borrowing of such fitted below-the-waist cut from the clothing of Western Europe [Mateiko 1977, 87].

Female outerwear was sewn with homespun fabrics, woolen cloth, leather and fur. The most ancient and similar as the male was the cut and decoration of female fur outerwear (*kozhukh*) [Vovk 1928, 140]. Women worn *kozhukhs* of two types: with straight back and with cut upper back. Woolen cloth coats and their modifications in a cut and an adornment (*sirak*, *opancha*, *sukmana*, *kobeniak*) were worn throughout Ukraine in the XVIII — XIX centuries. Their lengths were below the knees, the back was straight with expanding the lower half of the coats.

The girls adorned their heads with colored ribbons, head wreaths from fresh or man-made flowers. Head wreath from fresh periwinkle was required and the most important part of the wedding headwear throughout Ukraine. The most common women's headwear in the XVIII — XIX centuries there were coif draped with long piece of the best homespun or store-bought fabrics looked like a long towel (*namitka*). The last one of headwear stems from the era of Kyiv-Rus [Vovk 1928, 133]. *Namitka* was made with always white fabrics sometimes with decorated edges. It was from 2 to 5 m long and 60—70 cm wide. The type of draped this headwear around the head varied on a region-to-region. Besides that, the girls and women often wore white domestic or colored silk or woolen industrial head kerchiefs.

The complex of female clothing was complemented by woven belts, different kind of head, ear, neck, chest and hand adornments made by precious or semiprecious metals, stones, glass, beads, etc. Female footwear for made material and cut was mostly the same as male but female boots were shorter

and their outer edge was slightly puckered. Moreover, female festive footwear was often colored (red, green or yellow).

### **3. Differences between regional complexes of clothing**

In Ukraine there are six ethnographic regions according to their local differences in the complexes of folk clothing: the Polissia Region; the Central Dnipro River Basin Area; the Southern (Black Sea) Area; the Podillia Region; the Carpathian Foothill Region; and the Carpathian Mountains Region [Mateiko 1977, 145].

The Polissia Region covers the northern regions of Ukraine. In the complex of Polissia's clothing the long forms of woolen cloth and fur outerwear were dominated. There were different kinds of coats (*chemerka*, *hun'ka*, *siriak*) as well as sheepskin coats (*kozhuikh*). In the décor of garment was used many woven red-colored adornment especially in shirts, skirts and aprons. In general, white color was dominated in the clothing components of this region.

The Central Dnipro River Basin Area included areas located on the left and the right banks of Dnipro river. For its female clothing typical was elongated outerwear (*iupka*) decorated with machine seams, combined with velvet or ribbons applique. In addition to homespun fabrics, factory-made materials were often used here to sew clothing from late of the XIX century. They enriched the color of the ensemble with nuances of red, blue, green, etc. The region was characterized by a bell-shaped silhouette of female clothing, a variety of embroidery adornment and significant difference in décor between local centers. The clothing of Ukrainian Southern Area was mostly the similar to the clothing of the Central Dnipro River Basin Area. The industrial materials prevailed here over homespun fabrics in the manufacture of garment.

The Podillia Region is located southwest of the Central Dnipro River Basin Area. Podillia's clothing complex had some ancient forms: unsewn skirt with one piece of fabrics (*obhortka*); sleeveless sheepskin jacket (*keptar*), woolen cloth straight-backed coat (*sirak*, *opancha*), headwear (*namitka*). Its coloration characterized by contrasting white backgrounds with red or black décor made with various counting techniques of embroidery with the use beads in some areas. For female clothing thanks to unsewn skirt, the columnar silhouette was characteristic.

On the territory of Carpathian Foothill Region and the Carpathian Mountains the largest numbers of ancient unique for Ukraine clothing forms were stayed. There were coarse woolen cloth outerwear (*hunia*, *huhlia*, *chuhania*), which was not found in other Ukrainian ethnographic regions; unsewn two pieces female skirt (*zapaska*); straight-backed fur or woolen cloth (*keptar*, *leibykh*,

*bruslyk, serdak*, etc.). All components of this region's clothing had the variety of color and technical execution of décor.

#### **4. Decorative features of traditional Ukrainian clothing**

The most components of folk clothing had non-removable décor applied by weaving, embroidery, applique, netting, knitting, crocheting, printing, etc. The domestic yarns (flax, hemp and woolen) were used as the materials for most of them. They had the natural shades or were colored by natural dyes in black, blue, red, orange, yellow or other colors. Besides that, woolen, cotton and silk yarns of industrial production also were used.

The most common of weaving techniques for décor folk clothing were diamond and reinforced twill, warp rib, overshot multi-harnesses, etc. Woven adornment was mostly used for decoration shirts, skirts and pants and was variety on a region-to-region.

The best-known and most popular in décor of Ukrainian folk clothing was embroidery. Many of both simple and more complicated stitches as well as variants to combine them with each other there were in Ukrainian embroidery. Counted-thread embroidery was decorated plain woven fabrics and items with them: male and female shirts, pants and headwear (head kerchief, coif, *namitka*). The pre-designed embroidery characterized by freely composed was used in decor of clothing from factory-made fabrics, coarse woolen cloth, leather and fur (mostly sleeveless garment and outerwear). The most widespread was geometrical ornaments from simple figures (rhombuses, rosettes, straight and oblique crosses, cruciform figures, etc.) stems from the ancient Slavic times. There were also used floral ornaments (flowers, leaves, shoots, branches, etc.) [Kara-Vasylieva 2005, 54].

Other one of décor technique was applique, which was used for adornment mostly outerwear. Netted and twisted cords, gimp, colored woolen cloth, factory-made fabrics, leather and fur were used for this technique combined them with embroidery by woolen and silk yarns.

For decoration skirts, pants, outerwear (*katanka*, jacket) of the XVIII — the end of XIX centuries often was used printing on fabrics. For stamped they used desired pattern forms (mostly from wood or wood and metal) and preferred black-blue rarely red-brown colors.

Diversity of décor techniques were added netting, knitting and crocheting. Die to these techniques it was possible to make single clothing components (belts, headwear, gloves, etc.) or elements of décor (lace and cord for example).

Removable personal adornments played a very important role in the decorative-aesthetic structure of traditional folk costume. For festive jewelry made semiprecious stones, the most popular among them there were coral,

pearls, pomegranate, amber, precious stones, and gold, silver, different metals were used. Necklaces of Venetian (Murano) glass beads were been widespread in Western Ukraine. They were brought by Jewish merchants from Italy. Moreover, girls and women had worn items of personal adornment from plants, textiles, feathers, wool and various threads for every day [Vrochynska 2008, 26—47].

Removable and non-removable personal adornments in Ukrainian folk costume were in forms of artistic combinations that harmoniously fitted in this ensemble with their own decorative and ornamental qualities. Each of their elements thanks to the rhythm, the color, the compositional principles formed harmonious concert with the costume's other integral components as well as commensurability with the environment, unity with nature [Vrochynska 2008, 140].

### **5. Functions of clothing in domestic life and ritual culture**

Traditional clothing reflected the worldview and aesthetic notions of its owners was closely related with domestic life and the most adapted for it. It was natural that through the clothing the social position of the person was demonstrated: the using better sewing materials; the presence of expensive fabrics (gold woven fabrics, silk and velvet for example); the sumptuous personal adornments; the having of some clothing components like footwear or fur outerwear. Thus, women from rich family had several festive shirts with expensive embroidery on them, skirts, aprons, different kind of outerwear (from flax, woolen cloth, leather and fur), several boots. They also worn necklaces made from coral, pearls, gold ducats or silver coins, often put in them at the same time.

The age of owner was demonstrated by removable and non-removable personal adornments, their color; the changing of the headwear; the combination of clothing components. Shirts for children often were sewn from coarser and less quality fabrics, while for adult boys or men — from better and thinner fabrics [Holovatskyi 1868, 43]. Girls worn head wreaths, brides changed them for coifs and *namitka* or head kerchiefs and after that never returned to head wreaths. Non-removable personal adornments in older women's clothing were usually in temperate dark colors and more modest than on young girls' garment.

The components of folk clothing and the way of the combining them with each other had an apotropaic and closely related to it ritual functions [Vovk 1928, 127]. The clothing which was worn straight on the body should be protected the person from possibly negative natural and/or magical effects. This clothing function was strengthened by woven and/or embroidery ornaments, removable adornments, etc. Components of clothing were embodied their



ritual function being the necessary attributes of wedding, maternity rites and funeral rituals. Thus, the making the bride wreaths and the changing it on the women headwear (coifs and *namitka* or head kerchiefs) as well as the making embroidery shirt for fiancé were important during the wedding. The sheepskin coat (*kozhukh*) fur turned outwards symbolized abundance especially when the fur of *kozhukh* was black [Zdoroveha 1974, 89; 93]. In maternity rites was used the *kryzhmo* — the piece of fabric intended to sew a shirt on a newborn. In funeral traditions to dress up the deceased in new clean clothing was important. The components of wedding clothing (shirt or head kerchief for example) could also been dressed up on the deceased [Nykorak 2004, 563].

Several groups of components are especially often used as attributes of various rituals. The first group consists of headwear. The essence of magic actions with it was reduced to dressing in or taking off it in a certain way or in a certain sequences (as the wreath, coifs and *namitka* or head kerchiefs during the wedding), as well as performing the action that would accompany the ritual. Girls let the river fresh flowers wreaths on the holiday night of Ivan Kupala (July 7), hoping that it would tell them where to wait for the bridegroom, or put under a pillow in the hope of seeing a dream of the fate [Kotsan 2016, 110; 111].

The second group consists of different kind of belts. Their apotropaic function was enhanced by color (often red), the shape of a circle as a model of universal amulet, and binding (a means of holding magical power). The belt as a symbol of fertility has participated in numerous rituals related to the conception or a child birth. For the treatment of infertility they advised to wear the belt of woman who having many children [Bosyi 2004, 35].

Clothing components sewn often from the plain fabrics are in the third group. The most used in rituals in the group were the shirt (*sorochka*), pants (*kholoshni*) and the apron (*zapaska*). They were endowed with preserving properties, backed by the traditional analogies of weaving with the process of world creation. According to folk beliefs, through the symbolic-magical acts of «covering» by garment, the transfer of positive (or protective) force has carried out, for example, from the mother to the child in the process of dressing the shirt [Bosyi 2004, 66; 68].

The clothing components of fourth group in Ukrainian rituals were associated with wealth and fertility. There were outerwear from leather and fur (*kozhukh*) and woolen cloth (*hunia*). For the rituals the *kozhukh*'s fur was turned outwards and the action persons have to stand or sit on it. After the wedding ceremony, young couple were greeted by the bridegroom's mother in the turned *kozhukh*. Sometimes young couple after the wedding had to sit down on the *kozhukh* [Zdoroveha 1974, 103]. In some cases fur outerwear was changed for woolen cloth garment. For example, in some Ukrainian areas during the

making Easter bread (*paska*) the housewife stood on the coat (*hunia*) [Kotsan 2016, 110].

Ukrainian traditional clothing of the XVIII — early XX centuries is the phenomenon of material and spiritual culture of the people, the embodiment of their worldviews, beliefs, customs and rituals. Varieties of regional costume ensembles were composed, functioned and developed in a single line of Ukrainian ethnic tradition and witnessed the subtle sense of beauty and expediency of Ukrainian people.

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**Fig. 1. Girls in traditional clothing and jewelry. Poltava region, Velyki Sorochentsi village. 1916. Ivan Honchar Museum. Inv. № KH-2246/29**



**Fig. 2. Olena Kryvko and unknown girl in traditional clothing and jewelry. Cherkasy region, Verymiivka village. 20's of the XXth century. Ivan Honchar Museum. Inv. № KB-2210/116**



**Fig. 3. Plaksii family in traditional clothing (fragment of the image).  
Vinnytsia region, Man'kivka village.1928. Ivan Honchar Museum.**



**Fig. 4. Young couple in traditional wedding costume. Ternopil region, Bil'che-Zolote village. Early XXth century. Ethnology Institute Library. Inv. № 17247**



**Fig. 5. Silkiewicz A. A group of villagers from Jasinia near Kosiv. 1887.  
Lanckoronsky Library of the Poland Academy of Sciences. Inv. № FL.2165.16**





**Fig. 6. Children on Easter. Ivano-Frankivsk region, Horodenka district, Tyshkivtsi village. End of XIXth century. Ethnology Institute Library. Inv. № 11279**

