

R.E.D. project

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EMBROIDERIES ON CLOTHES AND CLOTHING ACCESSORIES IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES

In the rural and agricultural parts of the entire Slovenian ethnic territory, only few pieces of women's ceremonial clothing were decorated with little hand-made embroidery, and even fewer pieces of men's ceremonial clothing. There are few pieces of women and men's clothing from the 19th and 20th centuries that have survived to the present and bear testimony to that.

EMBROIDERIES ON WOMEN'S CLOTHING

In the 19th century, both white blouses (*rokavci*) with moderate embroidery and skilfully made embroidered women's belts existed, the latter were commonly used by girls.

Already in the 19th century, embroideries were added to women's clothing accessories, such as hats, black mob-caps (*avbice*) and white-stitched headscarves (*peče*).

In the first quarter of the 20th century, when more contemporary and simpler clothing styles came to be used, moderately embroidered female underwear became popular in the rural areas. The embroidery was small and simple, often only as a monogram of the owner's initials.

BODICE (*životek*)

The bodice, which is stitched together with a short and finely-creased skirt (called *ras*), is nowadays still a constituent part of women's ceremonial clothing, worn by girls in the Zilja Valley (Austria) for the blessing of food on Easter, on the feast day of the local patron saint, and on an important Zilja Valley holiday, known as *štehvanje* (German *Kufenstechen*).



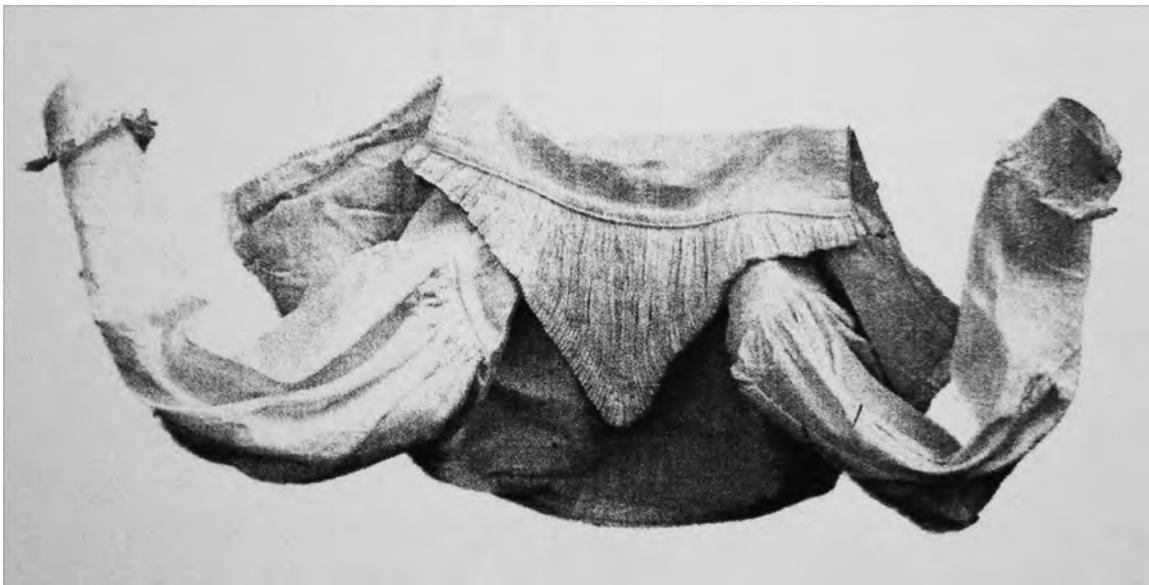
The bodice can be made of a different fabric as the skirt, and it can be decorated with floral motifs on the front side and especially on the back side.

The preserved bodices are generally made of black velvet with multi-coloured and mostly industrially stitched tiny flowers and fruits. Few bodices are hand-stitched, but these are also decorated by evenly distributed and stylised tiny flowers or floral bouquets, done by using several techniques, such as the stem stitch.

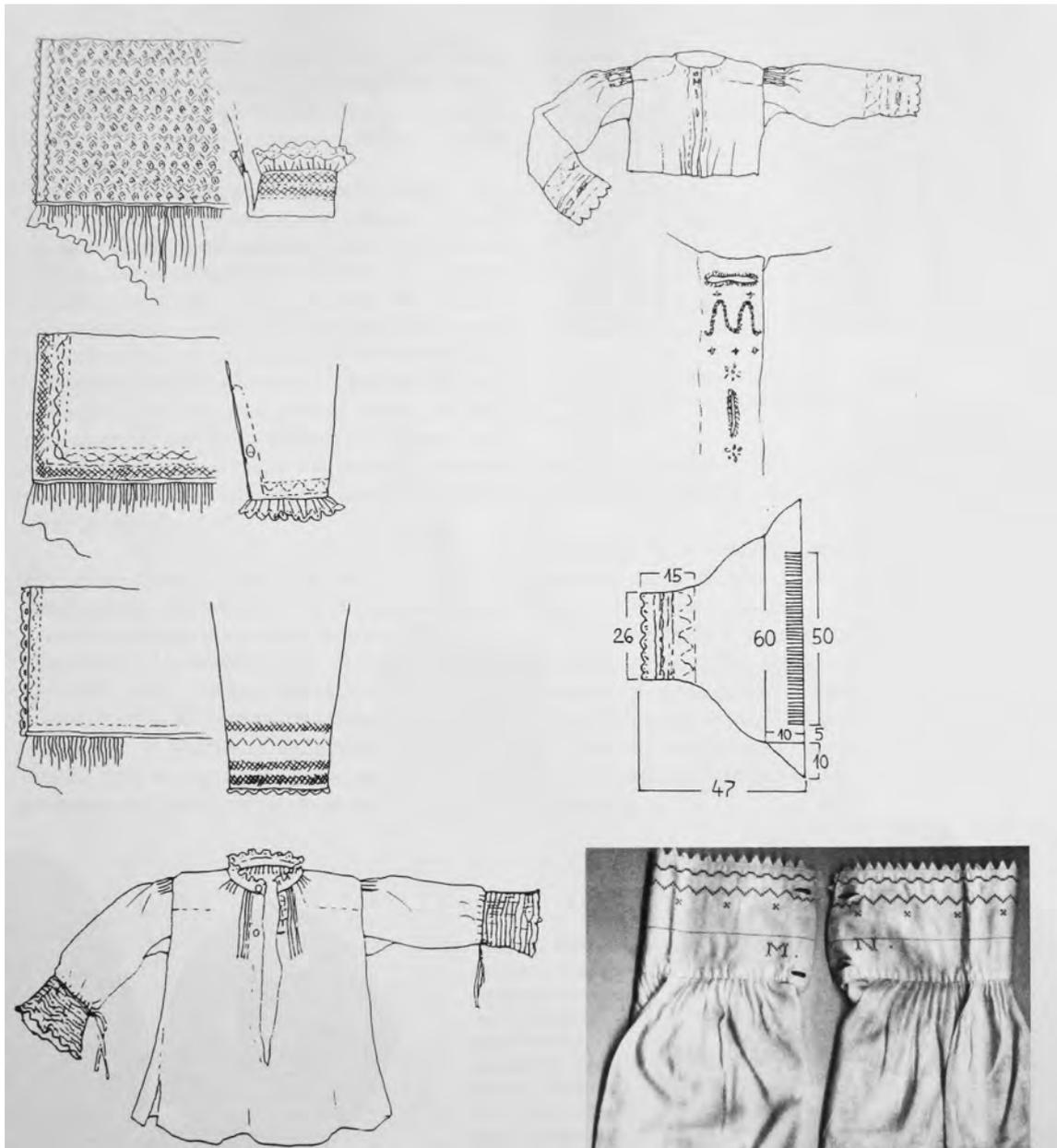
WHITE BLOUSE (*rokavci*)

Rokavci, a type of white blouse, is both an outer garment and an undergarment, worn by women in the Zilja, Roža and Podjuna valleys (Austria). These blouses were worn together with work and ceremonial skirt with bodice even in the second half of the 19th century. In general, they were decorated with creases and laces, only rarely with embroideries, and even if so, then the embroidery was stitched with straight or slanting stitches as a zigzag line.

The blouses could be decorated in two ways: the sleeves were cut slightly shorter and then a wide band of bought or home-made white laces was stitched to the sleeves, or the sleeves were stitched through a hole.



Such white blouses were probably done by more skilled village dressmakers, who, according to attestations, decorated the blouses with moderate embroidery in various techniques, such as stem, hole, and full stitches. Before the First World War, women who wanted to dress more attractively on Sundays put only the lower parts of sleeves under outer garment, the cuffs of which were hand-stitched with red cotton thread, e.g. in a cross pattern, as well as the initials of the owner. This clothing accessory, which was taken from urban fashion, was not very popular in the rural areas.



MOB-CAPS (*avbe* or *abvice*)

The mob-cap, known as *avba*, or as *Koroška cap*, *Koroška avba*, or *Bodenhäuberl*, as called by a known Austrian national costume expert, Viktor Germab, was a women's ceremonial and work hat. The mob-cap was tightly fit and made of black and tightly lined silk, with densely embroidered stitches. At the back of the mob-cap, there was a rectangular, half-round and occasionally pointy patch. Some mob-caps were decorated with moderate but neatly made embroideries on both sides of the skilfully stitched or, more often, weaved patch.

In attestations from the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, "black mob-caps" are mentioned several times as a head accessory.

According to descriptions of former national costumes, women used to wear a typical black mob-cap with a golden patch (in Vrba), a black mob-cap with ornamental gold-embroidered patch, or a golden mob-cap (in Otok).

The mob-caps, the crown of which is made of black taffeta, have a narrower or wider rectangular patch, which can reach up to 10 cm in height and 4 to 8 cm in width. The patch is always centred on the occipital part (back of the head), and it is always embroidered in only golden thread, or in golden and brocade thread. The golden-stitched patches generally have two rectangular motifs, with fan motifs filled web and a rosette motif.

HEADSCARVES (*peče*)

The *peča* was a type of headscarf, of various sizes and rectangular shape, and always made of white thin flaxen or cotton linen. The name came from the Italian word “*il pezzo*” (piece). The headscarf was part of both ceremonial and work clothing, and it was present almost everywhere in the Slovenian ethnic territory between the Late Middle

Ages and the beginning of the 20th century. Especially the ceremonial headscarves were stitched with a golden cotton thread on the corner that covered the occiput, or the back in case of larger headscarves. Once the headscarf was folded in a triangular shape, it was placed on the head in such a way that the stitched part was visible no matter how the headscarf was tied on the head.

Headscarves also had hemstitches. Before any hemstitches were made, the dressmaker had to remove as many threads as desired along the entire hem from the fabric, and the remaining threads were then stitched together in groups of two or three.



APRONS

It is hardly imaginable that in the 16th century, only richer women in cities had decorated aprons. However, by the end of the 17th century, aprons were adopted by women in the rural areas of Kranjska as well.

Aprons were used as both work and ceremonial clothing. Considering the types of fabric used it is clear that aprons were used as protective garment with work clothing and as decoration with ceremonial clothing. By the Second World War, however, aprons have almost disappeared as a decoration, but they are still used protective garment.

Younger women liked to wear white aprons, added to dresses with long skirts, which were fashioned according to the trends in cities. The aprons worn by girls and young women on a Sunday afternoon were generally long as well. The hems of some aprons were decorated by hand with white cotton stitch. Girls from rural areas seemed to have preferred white embroidery over coloured embroidery, even though the latter was available even before the First World War. Some aprons had such stitches on the bottom and side hems as well.





BELTS

A feature of the women's Zilja Valley costume with a short skirt and attached bodice is also a decorative belt made of three parts. It is embroidered with about one-millimetre-wide bands, cut from peacock or goose feathers.

A leather belt could be worn around the waist as well, intertwined with peacock feathers, often also with silver, and with a leather strap for a knife in front as well.

The majority of the preserved belts are made of three leather bands sewn on a metal ring. Both parts of the belt that tightened at waist had the same embroidery, while the third part of the belt that hung freely on the right side of the skirt had a different embroidery, usually adorned with thin red and yellow leather bands, or with yellow, green and red bands. The bands were sewn into the hems of the belt.

Embroidered belt bands were lined with rough linen or patterned cotton fabric. The bands were cut from red, dark-brown or black leather, taking into account the length of a woman's waist. The belts came in various lengths and their width varied as well, from the narrower ones at 5 cm to the widest ones at 11 cm.

The wider central band was the focus of the main embroidery, which was done in a meandering pattern with repeating stylised plant (mostly floral) and geometrical shapes, which were sometimes barely recognisable. With more or less imagination, various shapes could be recognised, such as tulips, daisies, pomegranates, rosehips, clovers, grapes, and maybe ears of wheat.

The year of production of the belt was always stitched on the more visible and front part of the belt. According to some attestations, a girl could be given such a belt when she was 18 or 20 years, i.e. when she was able to join the traditional dance called *rej*, which is connected to *štehvanje*. Alternatively, the year of marriage could be stitched as well. The embroidered belt was not only a visible decoration, but also a status symbol, because not every woman was able to afford such a belt.



