

The Belarusian Dress of the Baroque Epoch

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The baroque epoch with its frequent changes of fashion and values greatly influenced the history of the Belarusian dress. The Belarusian lands, at that time known as the Great Lithuanian Principality, entered Rzecz Pospolita. A great number of the nobility named "szlachta" was a distinctive feature of the state. Szlachta tried to emphasize its exclusive position and its origin from the ancient Sarmatian tribe. Several social layers: magnates, well-off and petty szlachta could be distinguished in the nobility circle of that time. All this reflects the economic and law heterogeneity of the state. The dress was one of the main means that helped the representatives of the lower layers to be similar to the upper ones.

In Europe Rzecz Pospolita was considered to be situated on the border between the East and the West in the way of life, traditions, customs and dress. The formation of the aristocratic dress was based on the Sarmatian idea of the leading role of the man as a warrior and knight. That's why the exotic and luxurious male dress was mainly preferred. At the same time the "Sarmatian"(szlacht, nobility) dress possesses some features common for the vast European territory. It includes the medieval system of a double dress, significant stylization of a human body, accent on the unique nature of the dress, abundant jewels and details.

The szlacht dress consisted of "kontuz" and "zupan" long, fitting the figure clothes, a little bit expanded at the bottom. The fastener was greatly emphasized by a number of buttons, their sizes and materials: gold, silver and jewels.

The sleeves were an expressive part of the dress. Their design could vary but sleeves cut up at the top with a contrasting lining were most frequently used.

The clothes were made of high-quality and expensive woolen, silk and semi-silk fabrics of diverse and rare colours, shades and ornaments.

The belt was an obligatory part of the dress. Usually there were two belts. The silk belt (Persian, Turkish, Indian, Armenian and later Slutsk) was the symbol of the rich, the leather one with a sambr the symbol of the nobility.

Yellow boots with silver heels, a headdress made of expensive sable fur completed the dress.

However the Belarusian dress was not an exact copy of the Eastern model. Szlachta perceived the achievements and discoveries of the West-European fashion. In the culture of numerous magnate courts and primarily the royal ones European fashion found its followers.

The Spanish dress and later the French court fashion of Louis XIV was followed by many young representatives of the Belarusian nobility.

The female aristocratic dress of the Renaissance was replaced by the incredibly rich Spanish one with its deformed silhouette and corsets, lacy collars and abundant pearls and jewels. Then it turned to the soft lines of the French fashion with its magnificent skirts, laces, ribbons, lacing bodice and décolleté.

And again passion for corsets when clothes seem to be still and motionless comes back.

The comparison of the fashionable European dress with the Belarusian aristocratic one shows the two directions of its development: the original Sarmatian cut and the West-European design. The way of life and economic opportunities of the Belarusian magnates gave the possibility to choose any of the variants. The coexistence of the two cardinaly different approaches, the naturalness of their perception made the situation on the territory of Belarus unique.

The lifestyle and the cultural needs of the numerous petty szlachta brought it closer to the peasantry. They introduced new fashion tendencies used in the magnate society such as belt clothes, collars (in the national dress of Kalinkovichi) and other fashionable elements. It is possible to assume that the stages of the dress cut development are reflected in various models dating up to the beginning of the XX century.

The development of the Belarusian lands on the East and West borders undoubtedly influenced the perception of their values and achievements, mingled with the Greek-Byzantine heritage and penetrated into our native culture. The history of the Belarusian dress is a vivid example of this process.