



PLATE I

MARRIED WOMAN, SKOPSKA ČRNA GORA, SOUTH SERBIA.

## SOME COSTUMES OF YUGOSLAVIA

by

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**Y**UGOSLAVIA is made up of many provinces: Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slovenia, Slavonia, Baranja, Bačka and part of the Banat. The cultural background of these states varies with their geographical location and the nature of the foreign domination to which most of them were subjected over centuries of time.

The Slavs, a people of Indo-European stock, were pushed westward into Central Europe during the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. The force driving them was one of the many waves of Mongolian invaders who terrorized the Near East during the early Christian period.

By the seventh century the Slavs were well established in their present locations. The greatest disturbance came with the invasion of the Magyars in the ninth century. They occupied what we know as Hungary and thus drove a wedge between the northern (Czech) and southern (Jugo) Slavs.

In the ninth century, also, came the Christianization of the Balkans and Central Europe, due to the efforts of Cyril and Method, two zealous missionaries from Mt. Athos. Cyril gave his name to the alphabet contrived to enable the converts to read the Bible and hear mass in their own language.

Serbia, the great state which includes the eastern and southern section of Yugoslavia, was in the immediate sphere of Byzantine culture. Though early in their religious history the Serbs were granted the unusual privilege of having their own patriarchate, they naturally turned to Constantinople for their art and architecture. The churches built from the ninth to the fourteenth century are veritable museums of Byzantine art. Their culture is essentially eastern; their religion, Greek Orthodox.

On the other hand, the northern states, Baranja, Slavonia, Slovenia, Croatia, and much of Dalmatia came under the domination of Austria and Hungary as early as the twelfth century. With the final schism in the church, these provinces automatically turned toward Rome as their religious center and to Vienna as their cultural capital. Coastal Dalmatia

was plundered by the Venetians during the Crusades, only Ragusa (Dubrovnik) holding out as an independent city state.

Bosnia, the geographical axis of Yugoslavia, has a more complex population. When the conquering Turks in the fourteenth century gave the Slavs the choice of religion or property (to oversimplify the terms), the Serbs held valiantly to their convictions. Many of the more prosperous Bosnians, however, thinking they could retain both, outwardly accepted Mohammedanism. But, within a few generations, their descendants had wholly accepted the Turkish way of life. A good portion held fast to their Orthodox heritage, while another section professed the Roman Catholic faith.

Montenegro, a mountain stronghold, never capitulated. Men and women alike participated in guerilla warfare against the Turks well into the present century. Over a long period the seat of the Orthodox patriarchate was located at Peč in the easternmost part of Montenegro and the Montenegrins never wavered in their religious affiliation.

For the purposes of this article the discussion will be limited to women's costumes in the provinces of Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Croatia. Those chosen are outstanding examples in their respective regions.

In Serbia, the most familiar and, historically, one of the most important, is that of Skopska Črna Gora (The Black Mountains of Skoplje). The costume with minor differences is common to a group of mountain villages about fifteen miles from Skoplje. Transportation has been such that the costume has changed little over a long period of time and it is my conviction that we have here a direct descendant of the old Roman *tunica*. "Skoplje" is the modern version of "Scupi," the name of a Roman town on the great highway from Durazzo on the Adriatic to Salonica and Constantinople. Impressive remains of the Roman aqueduct still stand near Skoplje. Constantine and his legions, as well as the Romans before and after him, must have left their imprint all along this historic road.

The Ravenna mosaics record the tunic of Justinian. In similar manner, the Serbian churches, built and decorated by Byzantine architects and artists, record the fashionable dress of Constantinople. The Serbian women, constantly exposed to these frescoes, used them as their guide and inspiration both as to cut and decoration. An outstanding feature of the Roman tunic from the Republican era was the *clavi*, narrow borders which originally extended from shoulder to hem, varying in width according to the rank of the wearer. Time robbed them of their social

significance and eventually they became discontinuous and were changed in form. However, their use was passed on to the Eastern Empire and to Egypt.

The *kosulja* (dress or tunic) of the lady from Skopska Črna Gora (Plate I) seems to me to be the living form of the Roman tunic, complete with *clavi*. The costume as a whole is admirable in its combination of textures and use of dark and light. The *kosulja* is made of hand-woven cotton with thread-count needlepoint in natural black wool. The sleeves have a solid panel of such work, the pattern of which is highlighted by the direction of the stitch, as in the silk embroideries of Naxos. The dress is girdled with a stiff red belting about three inches wide. The apron of hand-woven wool is striped in pattern, employing green, red, and slight amounts of yellow, against a black background.

The jacket in the illustration is worn on festival occasions. It is made of thick white homespun wool, trimmed with row above row of black silk fringe. Such jackets, when worn by the young maidens, have fringe from shoulder to hem. These represent a large cash investment and are comparable socially to our mink stoles.

The footwear is called *opanke*. These are typical of the primitive form of shoe, until recently prevalent throughout Yugoslavia. The design varies from province to province, but the common origin is easily recognizable.

Our lady's headdress is indicative of her village and her married state. It consists of two hand-woven cotton scarves, which are usually made by Muslim women in Skoplje. The one which proclaims her wifehood is folded crosswise eight inches or so from center. It is then placed on the head with the folded edge projecting over the forehead, forming an effective eye-shade. The fringed or embroidered ends hang down the back. It is held in place by her two braids which are brought up over the crown of the head, outside the scarf. In addition, a coin-and-bead-trimmed velvet band encircles her head, passing under the chin to frame her face. The outer scarf is then donned in the usual manner. The ends are twisted about each other and tucked under the edges to prevent slipping. Each woman has her own technique and she is proud and acutely aware of the effect.

The young girl wears only the second scarf plus the chin band. She brings her scarf much farther forward on the head and one richly decorated end is spread across her shoulders. The headdress has significance far beyond its functional nature. In village after village, province after



PLATE II

YOUNG GIRL OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE, SMILEVO, SOUTH SERBIA.

province, I found this to be true. The matron's headdress is arranged upon arising and is not laid aside until she retires. It required the earnest and urgent pleading of a museum curator, friend of the family involved, to persuade a mother to demonstrate the intricacies of a Croatian matron's hair and headdress. Husband and father were requested to leave the room. Doors were closed. It was as if I were witnessing a mystical rite. A comparable experience occurred in Bosnia. There the process was postponed until twilight and the menfolk again were excluded. Of all the details of costume, the headdress is the last to be changed. For that reason, vestiges of thirteenth to sixteenth century hair arrangement and headdress are to be found distributed throughout Yugoslavia. Much is to be learned there of the structure of the fantastic shapes of the past.

Another village in Serbia which has a truly notable costume is Smilevo, located in a mountainous region nearly forty miles from Monastir. Where the Skopska Črna Gora costume is decorated with black, this one is gay with softened but vibrant red that defies duplication with aniline dyes. The *kosulja* has the same cut, but lacks the decoration at hem line and the vertical borders. Emphasis is placed upon the sleeves and glowing red fringe swings from sleeve edges, girdle, and apron.

A young girl in her bridal finery poses in Plate II. Here, where bitterness toward Turkish oppression still rankles, there is nevertheless much evidence of Turkish influence upon the costume. The enormous belt buckle rivets attention. The chained ornaments on top of the head and across the chest are of Turkish origin. Moreover, the braided designs on the coat, girdle, and apron are from the same source.

The uniqueness of the coat is not visible in the photograph. It is made of heavy white wool, well cut as it tapers to the contour of the waist and flares toward the hem line. Arm-holes allow the emergence of the arms but the sleeves are strictly vestigial. They are attached to the upper back section of the armseye and are not more than six inches in circumference at that point. They are about thirty inches long, narrowing to a two-inch tip. These useless appendages are caught under the broad girdle which is wound many times around the body, outside the coat. Obviously, slenderness is not the cult of the Serbian woman.

The costume in Plate III, worn in the vicinity of Gostivar, attests to long Turkish association. The silver-topped cap (a jeweler's masterpiece), the rich gold braiding and the plaid silk girdle, which is identical with that worn by Turkish men and women, are all borrowed from the Moslems.



PLATE III

BACK VIEW OF COSTUME, GOSTIVAR, SOUTH SERBIA.

The spectacular part of this costume is the *doloma*, the long outer coat made of wine-red broadcloth, heavily encrusted with gold. The skirt of the coat consists of many narrow, slightly flared gores, the seam edges of which are turned to the outside and emphasized with red silk soutache braid. The resulting fluted effect is unusual and pleasing.

In Sarajevo, people of Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Moslem persuasion mingle in the markets and are recognizable, one from another, by their costumes. However, to find more sharply marked differences and costumes more ancient in origin, one needs to go to villages remote from such an important center.

Mrkonič Grad is such a Greek Orthodox community. Plate IV shows a back view of a woman wearing a costume quite unaffected by modern influences. In Bosnia and Dalmatia the women's coats are navy-blue usually, instead of white. The cloth is the same heavy, compactly felted wool as seen in Serbia. The decoration, other than purchased braids, is often done in fine silk thread, gayly colored but in small scale patterns, which produce a jewel-like effect. The small, sleeveless jacket, seen in this illustration, is, like the one at Skopska Črna Gora, worn more for the effect than for warmth. A deep vertical pleat is formed at each side of the back and caught in place permanently. This adjustment pulls the front edges well toward the under arm, thus providing no protection for the front of the body.

Dark blue wool is used for the embroidery on the sleeves and along the front opening of the *kosulja*, as well as for the cross-stitch and fringe of the head scarf. The designs which appear in great variety on each garment are still geometric in form and, as executed in navy-blue on white, have a crystalline quality that is peculiar to this region.

The apron is made of a relatively small tapestry-woven rectangle (Plate V) edged with extra wide fringe. The color again is predominantly blue with minor amounts of green, lighter blue, and purple.

The headdress begins with a tiny triangle of cloth, three to five inches wide at the base, which is secured on the crown of the head by cords tied under the chin. This triangle serves as a pincushion to which the large square scarf is fastened.

Dalmatia presents a sharp contrast between the costume of the mountain folk and that found in the coastal area. In Vrlika, which is inland far enough to be quite isolated, many old customs prevail. Plate VI is a photograph of a married woman. Her garments include a white *kosulja* embroidered in red wool cross-stitch on the collar and front. Over that





PLATE IV

BACK VIEW OF MATRON, MRKONIĆ GRAD, BOSNIA.



PLATE V

MATRON, MRKONIČ GRAD, BOSNIA.



PLATE VI

MARRIED WOMAN, VRLIKA, DALMATIA.

she wears a heavy blue homespun wool coat (*modrina*) with red wool borders and facings. The facings of the blouse portion are overlaid with cowrie shells, which Edith Durham<sup>1</sup> says are symbolic of fertility. The shells are highly prized and are handed down from mother to daughter.

The aprons of Vrlika are a delight, especially the old ones. Woven in tapestry technique, they are designed with horizontal borders in which the hook-pattern, one of the oldest of Slavic motifs, recurs again and again.

The striped wool belt, about three inches in width, is usually adorned with appliqué of chain-stitched felt, silver buttons, and cowrie shells.

The matron's picturesque headdress employs another mediaeval device. The braids of hair, brought forward and crossed in front as they encircle the head, cover the hair line. Then far back on the head is placed a tube of red calico, stuffed into a sausage shape two or more inches in diameter and constricted to form five sections. The central link produces the high arc of the headdress and the divisions make it break sharply into the angular effect at the sides. The white headscarf covers this form. First folded diagonally, it is then centrally creased at right angles to this first fold. The second crease creates a definite peak above the braids. Women arrange the side corners as they please, usually twisting them, crossing them under the chin and tucking the ends back under the ears.

The women and girls of Vrlika wear two pairs of hose: one long dark pair which disappears under the dress and a shorter pair with stiff cloth tops, variously embroidered and braided, which are fastened with hooks on the inside of the leg. *Opanke* form the correct footwear.

In warmer weather the *modrina* is discarded but the outer sleeveless jacket is retained. It boasts appliquéd bands of vari-colored felt, embroidered in minute chain-stitch, where again the hook motif predominates.

The costume of the young girl (Plate VII) is included because of her apron-like *djerdan*. It has a heavy wool foundation and is completely covered with coins and metal ornaments. It must be a most uncomfortable accessory, but it proclaims the economic status of the wearer and makes up a good share of her dowry. The coins on the cap have much the same purpose.

In Čilipi, located near Dubrovnik, we find one of the most sophisticated costumes in Yugoslavia (Plate VIII). Basically it consists of a white linen dress enhanced with incredibly fine silk and gold embroidery on

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<sup>1</sup> "Some Tribal Origins, Laws and Customs of the Balkans," Allen, England 1928.



PLATE VII

YOUNG GIRL, VRLIKA, DALMATIA.



PLATE VIII

YOUNG WOMAN, UNMARRIED, ČILIPI, DALMATIA.

collar and sleeve openings, and at center front; a silver- or gold-braided broadcloth waistcoat; a snow-white apron bordered in horizontal stripes; white hose; trim, well-crafted red slippers, and, if for a maiden, a red and gold pill box, or, if for a matron, a crisp, immaculate white head-dress. These girls and women really aspire to a small waist-line. The wide belt is prevented from crushing by the use of an inner cardboard support slightly narrower than the belt itself. They also have a winter coat-dress, skillfully fitted and made of black wool, closely resembling serge (Plate IX).

The logical explanation of the quality of refinement so characteristic of this costume is the proximity to Dubrovnik, one of the world's most charming cities. The citizens of Čilipi have been exposed to cosmopolitan influences for centuries. It is to their credit that they have retained the best of their native culture. The designs, colors and techniques employed in the decoration of their white linen blouses command respect by any standard. From the Turks they have borrowed the braiding of their jackets and caps. The fit, the cut, the trimness of line partake of urban concepts.

Croatia deserves a volume by itself, but this discussion will be limited to a young bride from Šestine, a village near Zagreb, and a costume from Sunja, farther away to the southwest.

The Croatian standard of living differs markedly from the hardships endured by the mountain-dwelling Slavs of Serbia, Bosnia, and Dalmatia. The Croatians live in the rich Sava river-valley and have more abundant food, much lighter clothing and more time to enjoy and care for both. The Croatian woman does not need the durable fabric and construction that the Serbian woman, toiling long hours in the field, or the Dalmatians in their rugged habitat, must have. Moreover, the Croatians have had an opportunity to see, admire, and covet the fashionable costumes inspired by Viennese models. Zagreb was the provincial capital from which the Austrians ruled Croatia.

The feminine costume of Šestine, winter and summer, is white, made festive with dashes of red in kerchief and decorative borders. Slaviča, a bride of two days (Plate X), wears a two-piece costume of hand-woven cotton. The blouse is distinguished by the woven border used as cuffs and the thread-count cross-stitch made on the ridges formed by shirring the very full sleeves. It should be seen in the hand to be justly appreciated. The jumper or over-dress is cut with a fitted yoke which reaches about to bust level. A wide border of red cross-stitch accents this line. The straight



PLATE IX

MATRON, ČILIP, DALMATIA.





PLATE X  
YOUNG BRIDE, ŠESTINE, CROATIA.

full skirt is mounted to the yoke.

Rather strangely, the stiffened wool belt is orange in color but not so intense as to offend. The gathered apron is also bordered and, traditionally, loops of red ribbon festoon from the waist-line across its surface. Similar ribbons are tied just below the knees and it is correct for them to show. Slaviča wears hand-knitted white hose of intricate pattern and *opanke* of higher cut than those previously illustrated.

The matron of Šestine wears her braids bound around the padded iron framework of a hollow rectangle. This holds the hair well off the neck and forms quite a projection from the back of the head. Over this foundation she places her carefully folded matron's coif. Such is the fresh, new headdress of Slaviča. This coif seems to be reserved for formal and festival occasions. Ordinarily a red bandana is folded and tied either under the chin or — a cooler version for summer — under the braids at the nape of the neck.

A little sleeveless bolero-length jacket made of snow-white sheepskin, elaborately embroidered, is a jewel of an accessory and is so treasured. For warmth in winter both men and women wear coats of brown homespun wool.

The costume from Sunja on Plate XI was purchased at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb from Mr. Berger, the founder and moving spirit of its fine collection.

The silhouette of the costume stems, in part, from the court costume of the eighteenth century. The pleated bouffant skirt is the country cousin of Marie Antoinette's ball gown, while the sleeveless jacket which was worn in Sunja had as its inspiration the nobleman's flared-skirted coat.

The Sunja dress consists of blouse, skirt, and apron; accessories include cap (for the matron), kerchief, wool belt, coral necklace, ribbons, and, in former days, red kid boots to match the jewelry.

The skirt in the illustration is mounted to a camisole top which helps to anchor the garment properly. Since the front of the skirt is plain, most of the weight is thrown to the sides and back. The back of the blouse, accordion-pleated as is the front, is of bolero length and is allowed to hang free at all times. The front is caught and held by the long felt girdle which is wound two or three times around the waist. Like the blouse, the apron, of ankle length and very wide, also has its fastening concealed by the belt. The fabric used for these three articles is semi-sheer, semi-bleached linen. The pattern is achieved by the Spanish lace weave.



PLATE XI

COSTUME FROM SUNJA, CROATIA.

The Sunja girl wears her hair in the customary two braids down her back. Upon marriage she is privileged and obliged to wind her braids around a heart-shaped form placed just above the nape of her neck. A clean white cloth tied over the braids protects her cap from the oil of the hair. The back of the cap, covered with embroidery, is so placed and secured that the decoration will show when the front portion is folded back and tied in position. Only the edge of the wide bobbin lace which adorns the cap can be seen from the front. This is the coif which is removed only upon retiring. The old caps are collectors' items. Some of them are in solid petit point; others, in thread-count satin-stitch which completely covers the background.

The model on Plate XI is wearing her kerchief in the manner which shows off the elaborate embroidery to the best advantage. For daily wear a simpler head scarf is tied under the chin.

Every well-dressed Sunja girl owns a multiple-strand coral necklace which glows against the background of ivory linen. Long ribbon streamers fall down the back from the neckline of the blouse.

When properly assembled and accessorized the costume has compelling beauty. The pleating of the bodice molds the fabric to the figure. The voluminous sleeves, gathered at the wrist and finished with wide bobbin lace, hang in cape-like folds, while the long flowing lines formed by the deep pleating of the skirt and apron produce a feeling of stateliness when the wearer is standing and a rhythmic grace in motion.

There are dozens of other villages where the costumes are worthy of study. Perhaps this selection will suffice to indicate the great variety of costumes in Yugoslavia and some of the influences which have produced those variations. From the standpoint of both design and technique, there is much to capture the interest of the student, the designer, and the craftsman.