

Estonian national costumes





“Look at ‘em - wearing nice cotton kerchiefs, but can’t tie ‘em proper!”

“Look at ‘em - wearing nice cotton kerchiefs, but can’t tie ‘em proper!” I cast a surprised look at the half smiling, half grumbling old Kihnu woman standing nearby on the dry July lawn. She was staring intently at a group of girls engaged in a lively dance in front of the stage. I saw nothing untoward: the girls were wearing pretty patterned short blouses, and their brisk twirls and spins revealed splendid designs on stockings glimpsed under the hems of their skirts or *kört*, as the islanders call this garment...

We were in Kihnu in the midst of celebrations. Our spirits, susceptible as ever to any manifestation of folk art, soared just as they would have done in 1869 when the period of national awakening brought about the first song festival in Tartu. To see ethnographic rarities - perhaps even more magnificent examples than those to be found on museum shelves - freely displayed at a real village feast, is a dream come true for any ethnologist. Young girls and women had kitted themselves out in skirts, jackets and all the necessary accessories from their grandmothers' clothes chests. They beamed with pride and pleasure, as people do when they know their clothes are a perfect fit and they feel good in them.

This was in 1986 when Kihnu celebrated the 600th anniversary of its first written record - a time when the whole of Estonia, with a trembling heart, was searching for its roots. Everything concerning the nation and its culture caused a sweet, slightly sinful, sense of belonging. Restless students and young people, let alone grandmothers whose memories of younger days belonged to the "blessed Estonian era" of the early 20th century, were all busy making national costumes.



Kihnu women wore a new skirt at first as a festive garment. When it became faded, the skirt was turned inside out. Finally, it was only suitable for working in the field.

clothes, found fault with? "What kind of person crumples a nice cotton kerchief under the chin like that?! Its corners should be arranged in neat folds."

It is fascinating to go through albums of folk art or admire the fine patterns and beautiful decorative designs of national costumes at an exhibition - though only when clothes are displayed together on a dummy is it possible to appreciate the effect of the complete ensemble.



Never before, or indeed since, has the Estonian National Museum been asked so many questions about national costumes, nor have these costumes been so extensively worn at school graduation ceremonies, weddings and every other kind of gathering as during that period. There were only a few years to go before the singing revolution, the Baltic chain and subsequent events would lead to the restoration of the Republic of Estonia. National costume had become allowed as a replacement for the forbidden blue-black-and-white flag. It had the effect of confirming the words of a popular song: "what joy and pride to be an Estonian".

So what was it that the old woman of Kihnu, a moment ago praising the good islanders for no longer being ashamed of their old coarse homespun

Sash

One of the main functions of a sash was to keep up the wrap-skirt. The custom of wrapping the sash tightly around the body survived even after the skirt was made with a waistband. The pattern system of a sash was believed to contain magical powers, especially to ward off disease. In the first decades of the 20th century some old women still wrapped their patterned sash around them at night too. A sash was tied around a young girl so she would grow up with a slender waist.



“When I finished the eighth class at school my grandmother gave me a national costume sash that had been knitted by her great-aunt. I thanked her as a good little girl should, though I did not exactly rejoice. But the sash has travelled with me through all the changes in my life and is now one of the few items without which I simply wouldn’t be me.” Signe Kivi, artist, one-time minister of culture.

In the general enthusiasm of explaining and reviving, the attire hitherto known as everyday, church or wedding clothes, now became national costume. In the ensuing years such costumes appeared in the most unexpected forms: for example, ladies of the 1930s swirling around a ballroom displaying ancient Estonian patterns embroidered on a silk hip-length blouse over a velvet skirt; propaganda paintings depicting girls dressed in national costume, complete with bridal coif and apron, taking flowers to a Soviet soldier; the entire casts of choirs and dance groups clothed in identically uniform national costumes; a little girl in bridal dress with a young wife’s coif on her head, watching the song festival procession from her father’s shoulders.

But the fact still remains that however devotedly the various antique garments are looked after in a museum, or examined with ever shrewder methods, they only offer us the palest shadow of what people in olden times really thought, felt, expected and hoped for when they made and wore these clothes.

In the 1980s, largely thanks to a new surge of national idealism, the clothes people chose to wear acquired, alongside practicality and visual appeal, a new meaning: the expression of a connection with earlier generations emphasising a sense of unity as a people. So it happened that the old coifs and shortcoats appeared once more in the light of day.

All this had happened elsewhere, and even earlier. About a century ago the Estonian intelligentsia, like the rest of Europe before it, suddenly noticed to its great consternation that treasured memories of olden times were quietly sinking into oblivion. All sorts of bygone memorabilia, including ancestral festive clothing, were therefore duly gathered and carefully preserved in order to store them properly. Thus the Estonian National Museum was established in 1909. It is a place where people can refresh their memory to this day.



National costumes on the ballet stage certainly seem grotesque today, although in the context of the 1930s they probably had a convincing and even sublime effect.



Apron

In earlier times an apron belonged exclusively to the wardrobe of a married woman, girls were not allowed to wear it. When a girl was observed to be with child she immediately had to put on an apron. A married woman never dared go to the village or to church or even leave her own home without an apron. The biggest fear was that a married woman without an apron could deprive a field of fertility. Even while harvesting the crop in summertime she still had to wear an apron. One corner of the apron was tucked to the waistband so the garment did not get in the way. An early 20th century record notes that "even today a woman will not go ploughing or harvesting without her apron".



There have nevertheless always been places like Kihnu island and the Setu area, however different they may be from each other, where at least some people still know how and by whom any particular garment should be worn, and whose hands remember the correct way of tying your kerchief. Elsewhere, national costume has mostly been produced according to popular demand.

A rule emerges: the greater the external political or ideological pressure, the greater the threat to national selfhood, the more urgent becomes the subject of roots and a nation's memory, both on an individual and an institutional level. This is how everything foreign has been resisted and our nation's resolve strengthened, either consciously or unconsciously.

No country stands alone... was one of the songs that led Estonians to freedom in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The new Estonian state has restored our natural understanding that we are one nation among the nations of the world. There is no longer a need for bitterly proud attempts to prove oneself, time after time. The Estonian land and its people are situated in a place beneath the sun with enduring experience of being under the feet of mighty neighbours. A myriad of people have arrived or passed through here - always leaving something behind or taking something with them. Thus Estonia and the culture of its people have evolved - submitting to constant changes and at the same time doggedly clinging to what is their own.

It is only too easy to assume that, compared with more important issues, clothing is only concerned with outward appearance and can therefore tell us very little about human life and nature. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it becomes clear how clothes, and visual appearance in general, embody many different aspects of life: place and time; status and circumstances; creativity and self-expression; the desire to look attractive - to others and to oneself. Some are signals and signs directed outward, some are for creating a sense of self.

The explanation as to why an Estonian peasant woman embroidered extra fine white patterns on a white cotton shirt could well lie precisely here. The more so that it was unheard of to go to church wearing just the shirt - custom required people to don a longcoat or a sweater on top of the shirt even in summer. Only then was a person properly dressed and able to present herself to others. It is not so very different today either. There is a subtle pleasure in knowing that a sober two-piece suit conceals expensive garments underneath.

**It was probably this same feeling,
at a time when there were yet no mirrors in
their homes, that made a young
woman's heart sing:**

when I tie a sash around my waist -
my hips will be red
and my back will be blue,
when I pull on my stockings -
my legs will sparkle,
when I tie the ribbons too -
my knees will burn like fire.
...
when I put on my gloves,
my hands will glow.
...
tufts like feathers of a dove,
ribbons like blood of a duck.
(Hanila)



For Estonians, red - the colour of blood - designated health, vitality and youth; it was the colour of festivities, holidays and weddings. The wedding was the pivotal event in an Estonian's life. For a woman especially it was a true rite of passage that led her from girlhood to womanhood, celebrating her future role as a mother and mistress of the house. Marriage afforded new rights and brought with it multiple duties. It deserved ceremonies and magic rituals, and compelled those who made the wedding garments to hide secret meanings and spells in their decorative patterns. Red patterns on wedding attire were redder than usual - the colour produced with madder tended to be somewhat brownish, the red from a certain foreign wood - *caesalpinia echinata* - was much brighter.

To have snake patterns and spirals of red saffian on a white coat – that was something to die for!

South-Estonian national costume tells another story about the fascination with the colour red. Russian peddlers, increasing the extent of their usual rounds in the early 19th century, introduced a new red yarn. Such a colour had never been achieved in this region before, either from madder root or from any other local plant. The bright red, fine and smooth factory-produced thread totally captivated the peddlers' female customers. Although not part of their own tradition, Estonians gradually accepted Eastern geometrically patterned motifs. Quite often the Slavonian-style cross is clearly recognisable.



A wedding was and still is a kind of connecting link with earlier generations. At a wedding party people often used items that had been long abandoned in everyday life and that had acquired a completely different meaning. Strangely enough - maybe due to those old inner urges that have such an impact on modern people today - Estonians are once again having weddings where old customs are revived, with national costumes being worn both by the bride and bridegroom and by the wedding guests. Never mind whether these are genuine garments passed on from one generation to the next, or whether they are modern clothes modelled on examples in museums.

The oblong kerchief of a married woman of the eastern part of Mulgimaa was put on so that one densely embroidered end covered the forehead and the other hung at her back. From the middle of the 19th century, the longer edges of a kerchief were also decorated. The alternate motifs of the cross and an octagonal star were embroidered using bright red woollen or cotton thread. This was later called a snowflake pattern.



In Mulgimaa in South Estonia, as late as the beginning of the 19th century weddings were held at which the design and patterns of the bride's clothes appeared to date from a few centuries earlier. The bride wore: "a shirt of fine linen with the neckline hemstitched with white thread in a pattern known as the semi-circle, and a red *sōuk*, skirt. The skirt had copper ornaments attached to the hem. When she walked it sounded like a small bell ringing. The hip-cloth was crocheted as well and worn on both sides, its woollen ends adorned with various colourful patterns."

Dyeing



Various plants and mushrooms were used in obtaining different dyes. The oldest method of producing black and brown was to use alder bark. An efficient dye plant is madder, the roots of which produce a good red colour. In the 17th century, green vitriol was bought for the fixing of colours. In the 18th century, at the latest, the older fixing stuff (salt, small beer, mead, etc.) was replaced by alum, bluestone and oil of vitriol; and dyeing by boiling the yarn gained ground alongside the traditional dyeing method of fermentation. In the late 18th century and especially in the early 19th century the bleach-proof indigo blue became a popular dye available over the counter. Since this dye was achieved by fermentation in urine it came to be called pot-blue. The second half of the 19th century witnessed a rapid spread of aniline dyes that slowly ousted the old dye plants. Today when people are tired of all that chemistry, and everything natural is fashionable once again, there are plenty of enthusiasts who experiment with various plants in dyeing their yarn.



The clothes described above are the simplest kind of ancient garments, probably used by all people at some time or another: a wrap-skirt made of a rectangular piece of fabric; a plaid that covered the bride and especially her face; narrow hip-cloths that were supposed to cover the open flap of the skirt. A married Mulgi woman always wore a simple white or elaborately embroidered kerchief tied in a special way. This type of clothing was widespread between the 13th and 17th centuries.



From the evidence of surviving items it would appear that the garments of Mulgi women, especially those from Halliste, were a cut above the rest. The same goes for the old Mulgi plant embroidery. Colour solutions and free composition are typical of that region alone.

Similar Mulgi patterns have been explained in many ways. The hemstitch pattern of circles and semi-circles is said to symbolise crescent and full moon (the moon's magical association with growth and development is still widely recognised in Estonia). On closer inspection, the "wheels, circles and branches" of hip-cloths, aprons and embroidered handkerchiefs, are strikingly similar to Roman and Gothic symbols on ecclesiastical textiles and in sacred art in general: variations of the cross that at first sight resemble a flower; various modifications

of the arbor vitae; colourful circles; a rose with open petals. By the time people started systematically gathering and preserving items of their ancestors, the meanings of ancient patterns were unfortunately largely forgotten, and thus any explanations we offer today are inevitably hypothetical.



The cross has the additional meaning of an arbor vitae: standing in the middle of the universe, it marks the relationship between heaven and earth. In Mulgi, Kihnu and Setu embroideries we often see a cross with the branches of the tree of life sprouting from its bars. The slanted cross, on the other hand, stands for death and sorrow.

Many wedding songs and descriptions of wedding clothes enthuse about the tinkling and jingling dress of the bride. Even the abundant metal decorations of ancient times, from bronze spirals to all kinds of brooches that fulfilled the function of the modern button, were fine achievements of handicraft. The later plentiful copper and tin items have practically disappeared apart from a few pieces in museums. In the 19th century, a fascination with metal and a belief in the magical powers of silver developed into a fondness for chains, brooches and other ornaments. An exception of this is seen in the Muhu island's wedding aprons to which pellet bells and coins, as well as buttons were attached.

This is how a young Hiiu wife would appear: all in white, with red edging on her skirt, her hair braided with red ribbons, the golden spangles of her headdress shining brightly on her back, copper chains with coins hanging from her belt and tinkling softly at every step, a knife and a needlecase tied to her belt in front, each in its patterned metal sheath. Whether a bystander perceives this apparel as erotic, or whether it brings to mind comparisons with Mordvinian back-aprons or perhaps oriental female decoration, the truth of the matter is all in the eye of the beholder.

Since the 13th century, the light entering through the windows of the Church has been an inseparable part of Estonian national culture - both in a direct and an indirect sense. The church mediated and spread culture based on the Christian understanding of the world, but also received its share of local traditions. The nave of Karja church, started in the 13th century, is adorned with ancient magical signs (the pentagram, octagonal star, looped quadrangle and tripod or triskelion that have been used on clothes and decorations by Estonians, as well as by other Finno-Ugric peoples, from ancient times to the 19th century. And stone sculptures in the same church quite clearly depict Estonians clad in garments of their time.



The high coif of a young married Muhu woman looks like a bishop's mitre: the embroidery running round the edge like a trimming displays the octagonal star - considered a lucky sign in the pictorial language of the early middle ages, alternating with the Muhu fir tree, *Muhu mänd* - a well-known motif of the same period.



Beads and metal chains

Estonian women have worn beads and metal chains since ancient times. Beads, arranged tightly around the neck, adorned a woman's throat from early youth to her death. Festive clothing required strings of beads or silver chains with pendant coins. Setu necklaces had various forms: twisted or lacy designs etc. Beads and silver necklaces were usually adorned with pendant coins, i.e. pieces of thaler and rouble with metal loops. Especially appreciated were coins with spokes, i.e. pendant coins with an edge resembling spokes cut out of silver leaf. These were sometimes imitation rather than real coins.

In the process of spreading and improving itself, each new ideology naturally erases something of the old. This holds true for the movement of the Moravian Brethren and its effect on festive clothing of that time. The pietist movement that gathered momentum in various parts of Estonia from the mid-18th century onwards was markedly scornful of worldly life. Records of 1913 concerning the collecting of ancient folk art in Juuru parish state: "The religious craze in Kuimetsa and Mahtra is quite remarkable. The most fervent period dates back to the time of the prophet Maltsvet. The fashion and decoration of garments suffered great damage. Beautiful colourful shirts and stockings, even sleeves, were regarded as frivolous and were all thrust into the dye pots from whence they emerged dismally black. People who gathered old artefacts often came across shirts and kerchiefs that were claimed to be a hundred years old, but which had been later dyed - the patterns no longer discernible. At times of such religious fervour everybody walked around in black or grey." The same thing happened during the second half of the 19th century in various places in Western Estonia and Vormsi island.

Fashion is conveyed by both objects and people. Throughout the ages, sea routes and ports have acted as mediators of goods, of skilled craftsmen and of innovative ideas. Via the ports of Tallinn and Narva and through trading, Estonians were introduced, amongst other things, to Indian printed cotton and fine woollen shiny factory-made kamlot fabric produced in the factories of England and the Netherlands: fabrics, which in the 18th century found their way even into peasant households. Changes in fashion during the 18th century had an even more significant influence on the design and decoration of North-Estonian clothes.

Women all over Europe were stressing, almost to the point of being grotesque, the width of hips and the slenderness of the waist. In Estonia, too, the relatively narrow skirt was replaced by voluminous skirts that were gathered to a waistband.

In the second half of the 18th century, largely thanks to the demands of the empire-style fashions, the whims of fashion brought to Estonia the first striped fabrics, which were imported from Lübeck through Tallinn in impressive quantities. Copying the examples of the skirts received as remuneration or as a gift from the manor houses, local weavers started to make striped woollen skirt fabrics. Peasant women soon followed suit. Low-stitch floral embroidery typical of the Baroque era appeared in Estonia in the mid-18th century. A number of sacramental cloths richly embroidered with brocade from various churches have survived to this day.

Brooch

The wide circular silver brooch with a slightly curved central part used in the 16-17th centuries, developed during the 18th and 19th century into the most festive chest ornament of Estonian peasant women— the large conical brooch, decorated with engraved surface ornamentation. North-Estonian conical brooches were relatively small (diameter not over 10 cm, depth 3 cm), but moving southwards they grew bigger. The size of the brooch in South Estonia became a sign of wealth and pride.

“The bigger the brooch, the wealthier the person.” Setu brooches acquired amazing proportions. Such enormous brooches were still worn in the early 20th century (one of the largest had a diameter of 38.5 cm and was 10 cm deep).

The brooch was fastened at breast level to hold together the split in the shirt. Even with a longcoat on and a kerchief round the neck, the brooch still had to be visible: it was then worn on the kerchief. In Saaremaa where brooches were smaller, women wore several at a time (2-4 one above the other), the larger brooch below the smaller.





Low-stitch floral embroidery typical of the Baroque era appeared in Estonia in the mid-18th century.

The first embroiderers were of German origin who used colourful silk threads, brocade and spangles. Brownish-black silk with a golden sheen was also much valued. This kind of embroidery originated in 17th century Catholic Spain from where, thanks to German merchants, it spread through Europe, and finally reached farming households in Estonia as well.

Items made of such valuable material were naturally affordable only to wealthier people. Farm women who had the new embroidery on their short blouses, tailed and other coifs, used colourful woollen and white and indigo blue cotton yarn. In different areas the baroque and later rococo embroidery acquired wildly diverse variations. Skirts striped with regional colours and rhythms combined with North-Estonian floral embroidery became a familiar and homely sight.

Besides the impact of fashion, the 18th century brought us much more. Even in the late 19th century the women of Mustjala parish in Saaremaa were still producing and wearing lavish bobbin lace collars that bore an unmistakable similarity to those in France during the times of Richelieu. But there was no chance that an Estonian man would ever wear anything so flashy!

In examining changes in national costume it is generally taken for granted that the clothes of men and women in olden times underwent largely similar modifications. The garments of both sexes altered slowly and almost unnoticed. However, in the late 18th century and during the 19th men's style of dressing became much more susceptible to innovation and urban fashions than did women's clothes.

And yet both were made by women. It is now impossible to find out what impact women had on the appearance of men's clothes, or to determine what part men played in that. Quite a few details in some sets of clothing - red woollen cord decorations, copper buttons that did not actually fasten anything, or other nuances in the look of the outfit in general refer to an officer's uniform. There is no knowing whether this revealed a woman's yearning for an unattainable nobleman or whether this was a man's desire to wear something faintly resembling a uniform...

We tend to imagine a true Estonian man of olden times as a sturdy lump of a man, rather like Hans from the Tarvastu manor: heelless peasant shoes firmly planted on the ground, longcoat and fur coat donned one on top of the other, but the hairy chest still visible and covered with hoarfrost, mittens stuck under his belt.



In the middle of the 19th century the appearance of peasants travelling along the roads of Estonia was still a reliable indication of where they came from. A man dressed in such an 'old-fashioned' way as Tarvastu Hans was a 'mulk', an inhabitant of southern Estonia's Mulgi-maa region.

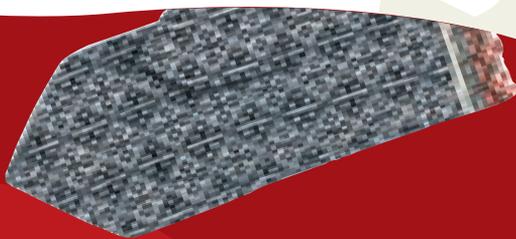
Several descriptions state that when a man set out for a long journey the wife always stuck a pair of woollen patterned mittens under his belt, even in summer. Was it a charm to ward off evil, a love token, or a straw at which the man could clutch to fortify his resolve in a difficult situation?

Men from North-Estonia, North Viljandimaa and Tartumaa often wore a costume that consisted of a shirt with frilled sleeves and a turned-down collar, breeches, shortcoat and the increasingly fashionable waistcoat. These were parts of a set that during the second half of the 17th century became the knightly style with a Persian flavour, supposedly emerging out of the court of Charles II to become all the rage. Estonian peasants of the time would probably show off the material of their waistcoat, which might well have been made of foreign Jacquard fabric with unusual decoration, and naturally their clinging chamois breeches too.

Patterns

In Estonian, the word 'kiri' means both pattern and writing. It is probable that the patterns adorning national costumes had another function as well, and a much more significant one. All those rhombuses, zigzags, loops, crosses and swastikas conveyed a message that we can no longer read today.

The main elements of Estonian patterns are already seen on the 12th-13th century metal leaf-shaped pendants; the patterns on the early 19th century sashes, mittens and plaid corners are of ancient origin as well. A cross was already an important sign in Estonian folk religion in the pre-Christian era. The previously widely used sign of the sun, the swastika, can mostly only be seen on 18th-19th century Setu sashes and hip-cloths. The triangle has been known as a sign of fire, or as a symbol of fertility (a simile of female pudendum). Triangles were also supposed to prevent misfortune. Zigzag and wavy lines were used particularly around the edges of garments (for example on shirts), standing for fertility, happiness and wealth. They also signified the snake as the guardian of the netherworld and protector of home. The placing of ornamental detail can sometimes also refer to the involvement of magical powers. Thus decorating the openings of shirts and sweaters (necklines, hem, sleeve opening) and the wrists of mittens is directly connected with a wish to provide a barrier against evil forces of the outside world.



Troi

A hundred years ago the sweater - troi - of Kihnu men was part of their work clothes. Today it has become one of the most popular national garments worn by both men and women at even the grandest occasions. The colourful troi is also a favourite with tourists. The Kihnu troi has either sheep-brown and white, or pot-blue and white patterns. It is knitted with fine woollen yarn with five needles like a mitten, i.e. the sweater has no seams at its sides. Sleeve openings are simply cut into it. Sleeves, too, are knitted like tubes. The decorative designs of a troi are supposedly taken from glove fingers that had especially fine patterns. Fine patterns were essential - they produced a dense texture and thus made the sweater warmer. The neckline, lower edge and sleeve ends usually sported decoration woven with madder red yarn, just like mittens worn in Kihnu. This red colour is now used for the sake of beauty and tradition rather than for the former belief in its healing power as the colour of blood. Magic was said to be especially potent at the openings of a sweater. A linen pocket was sewn to the troi's reverse side in front. The pocket contained a piece of flint and tinder, and later matches. Fire-lighting tools were kept dry in there, did not get lost and were always at hand.

"Got his kid breeches at last", was a recognition of quality clothes and especially of the wearer's wealth. The colourful braided garters were obviously meant to hold the breeches around the legs, though the vagaries of European fashion spring readily to mind.

In the course of the 19th century the cut, and hence the shape and outline, of men's jackets changed considerably. The curved cut of the back was influenced by both the tail coat and various manifestations of dandyish fashion in general. Classic cuts of the haut monde also reached the makers of the linen and coarse-cloth work clothes of Estonian peasants, i.e. their womenfolk. However, the frock coats that were in vogue in the last decades of the 19th century were more often than not sewn by itinerant tailors. The sash embroidered with beads, much valued among city coachmen, was still mostly the work of local village needlewomen.

Despite the apparent isolation of the peasants and their habit of clinging to traditions, Estonian peasant culture was not shaped without the influence of the outside world.

The form and decoration of Estonian national costume contain numerous manifestations of historic art styles and various influences dating from different periods of time - from both sacred art and the worldly culture of the manor and the town. Much has been exchanged with neighbouring nations and with foreigners who have come to live in these parts.

The familiar and the alien blend, each becoming the other. Many of us remember our mothers' contemptuous remarks: "Look at that man with his shirt hanging on his trousers like some awful Russian", or "Don't tie your kerchief like an old Russian hag", or "Deary me, she dresses like a Gypsy".

Visitors from far-away places who have taken part in our festivities may notice something surprising in our manner, the way we do things and the way we look, even today. This could easily be our still existing connection with our ancestors, however threadlike and fragile that may seem. It's the feeling that overwhelms us when, with belts firmly fastened and national costumes on, we group under the mighty curve of the choir stand together with thousands of other singers, and a much respected grey-haired man in a longcoat climbs up to the conductor's rostrum and raises his felt hat to greet the gathered audience.



Wealthier men of Mulgimaa were also known by their long black coats with a bright red strip of factory-produced woollen fabric inside the flaps. The latter probably increased the self-confidence of the felt hat wearing men even further, and evoked envy in others. The black 'mulk' coat is one of the most popular items of Estonian national costume worn today on festive occasions.

Costumes



North-Estonia

North-Estonians were generally receptive to new fashions. Various new types of garments were accepted there first, and then spread further, e.g. men's knee breeches, jacket, waistcoat, neckerchief, women's vertically-striped full skirt, indigo blue woollen clothes. The most typical woman's garment was a sleeveless shirt and on top of that an ample blouse, barely reaching below the breasts – called a short blouse. Floral patterns appeared in the late 18th century. Pleating the tip of the coif and the sleeves was also widely spread. From late 18th century onwards, women increasingly favoured pot-shaped caps, supported with cardboard, padded with tow and covered with colourful silk, and the fashion of coifs gradually vanished.

Juuru man

The cut of men's white linen shirts resembled that of a woman's shirt. A piece of linen cloth was folded into two, a T-shape opening for the head cut in the middle. The neck opening was fastened with a silver 'twig' brooch. Shoulder patches were sewn on the shoulders, with festive shirts adorned with simple white linen embroidery. On a festive occasion, the collar was set up with a kerchief. At the turn of the 18th-19th centuries pot-blue became the most widely spread colour of a festive woollen suit. Men started to wear fashionable knee breeches with flaps; the coat was short, with turned-down collar and lapels. Shiny copper buttons were used both as a fastening and for decoration. If possible, the waistcoat was sewn from factory-made cloth. The headgear was usually a black felt hat widening at the top.



To make it easier to pull on the breeches, they were provided with a split that was closed with bright copper buttons and a ribbon plaited with colourful woollen threads.



The sleeves of festive shirts were usually wide and pleated to the cuff. Some sleeves, however, were narrowed towards the end and embellished with a row of hemstitch.



Coif, a married woman's headgear, was adorned with floral embroidery that varied greatly in different regions. The embroidery of both the coifs and short blouses was supplemented with spangles and various kind of lace.



At the turn of the 18th-19th centuries, North-Estonian women grew increasingly fond of aprons made of factory-made cloth with sewn-on appliqué.

Kadrina woman

Alongside the earlier wrap-skirt or tight skirt, the early 18th century saw a gradual spread of the fashionable full skirt, arranged in dense freely falling folds at the waistband. The skirt was originally of one colour, and later with vertical stripes. Similarly to one-coloured full skirts, the hems of vertical skirts were also in some places decorated with galloons and colourful woollen ribbons.

Fashionable cap

Following the example of fashionable caps worn by women in 17th century Tallinn, rural womenfolk also started wearing them during the second half of the 18th century. The cap rests on strong cardboard, padded with cotton wadding or tow and shaped as a pot, hence the name. A narrow ribbon of lace was fastened to the edge of the cap so that it partly covered the forehead. This, however, was only sewn to the caps of married women, young girls and unmarried mothers had no right to do that. Wide silk ribbons, tied into a bow were attached to the back of the cap and reached the waistline. Widows in mourning did not adorn their caps with a silk ribbon.



A bead necklace with spoked coins, usually old silver coins. The coins here are currently used in the Republic of Estonia.



In the second half of the 19th century women generally wore patterned stockings made of fine linen or woollen thread. Especially typical were the azure patterns at the side of the stockings.



Kuusalu woman

A wide ruffled skirt sewn to a tightly fitting bodice became fashionable in North-Estonia in the 1860s, clearly following the example of urban vogue. This dress was made of checked woollen or linen fabric and was augmented with a cotton shoulder scarf. Married women also wore an apron and the then fashionable pot-shaped cap. The ornament usually consisted of a string of beads with pendant coins.

West-Estonia

Throughout the 19th century West-Estonian fashion underwent various changes as well. Brownish-red colour dominated in the stripes of skirts; with the appearance of chemical dyes the red became bright. The peculiarity of West-Estonian womens clothing was the usage of tied and dyed yarn woven into vertically striped and checked skirts, also pressed folds. In cooler weather the old-fashioned brown sweater was worn over the blouse even in the late 19th century. As the sweater's neckline was fairly low, the women often wore several brightly coloured kerchiefs under it. Women's headgear differed greatly, one parish usually stuck to one fashion.

Men wore a suit consisting of knee breeches and jacket. In Pärnu area, men preferred the old-fashioned brown woollen clothes and cuts. The flaps of the short jackets were adorned with red ribbons and copper buttons. The pot-blue more fashionable jackets of the men in Läänemaa were also embellished with bright copper buttons.



Two-three strings of beads were worn close around the neck, and on festive occasions another chain of beads with 1-3 pendant coins was added.



The favoured jewellery was conical brooch or a brooch with pieces of red glass, called brooch with 'eyes'.



During the last years of the 19th century, women in Western parts of Estonia started embroidering floral patterns with wool on red chequered skirts. Red thread, plant and bird motifs were used to adorn the shirts of both men and women.



Lihula maiden

Kihnu island

Kihnu island, with an area of only 16.4 sq km, is situated in the Gulf of Pärnu. Kihnu national costumes have more in common with those of West-Estonia than the costumes on other islands. The islanders' clothes have retained many ancient cuts and ways of decoration. Women often wore a short blouse on a sleeveless shirt. The earlier blouses were pleated and adorned with blue and red linen embroidery. In the 19th century the previous ancient motifs of a triangle and a branch or blossom from the tree of life were replaced by low-stitch floral embroidery.

The two ends of sashes on the Kihnu island had different patterns, so either one or the other could be displayed at different times. This made it look as if there were really many sashes. Kihnu women and girls wear their vertically striped national costume skirts to this day. During the Soviet period when children were required to wear school uniform, teachers in Kihnu turned a blind eye when girls sometimes turned up at school in their traditional skirts. The latter garment has retained its ancient features: it has fine bright stripes and is relatively short, reaching a bit below the knee. It was, after all, occasionally necessary to wade into the sea in order to get to the boat or back again, and it was certainly better if the skirt hem did not get soaked.

The earlier leggings and socks were replaced by knee-length stockings at the turn of the 19th-20th century that retained the pattern drawing, i.e. legging and sock were knitted as one piece, called *kapeta*.



Kihnu people clad their feet in seal skin shoes that in earlier times were made of seal flippers.



Shoulder shawls were worn on festive occasions.



In olden times, people did not take off their sash even in bed. It was supposed to offer support to the body both in direct and magical sense.



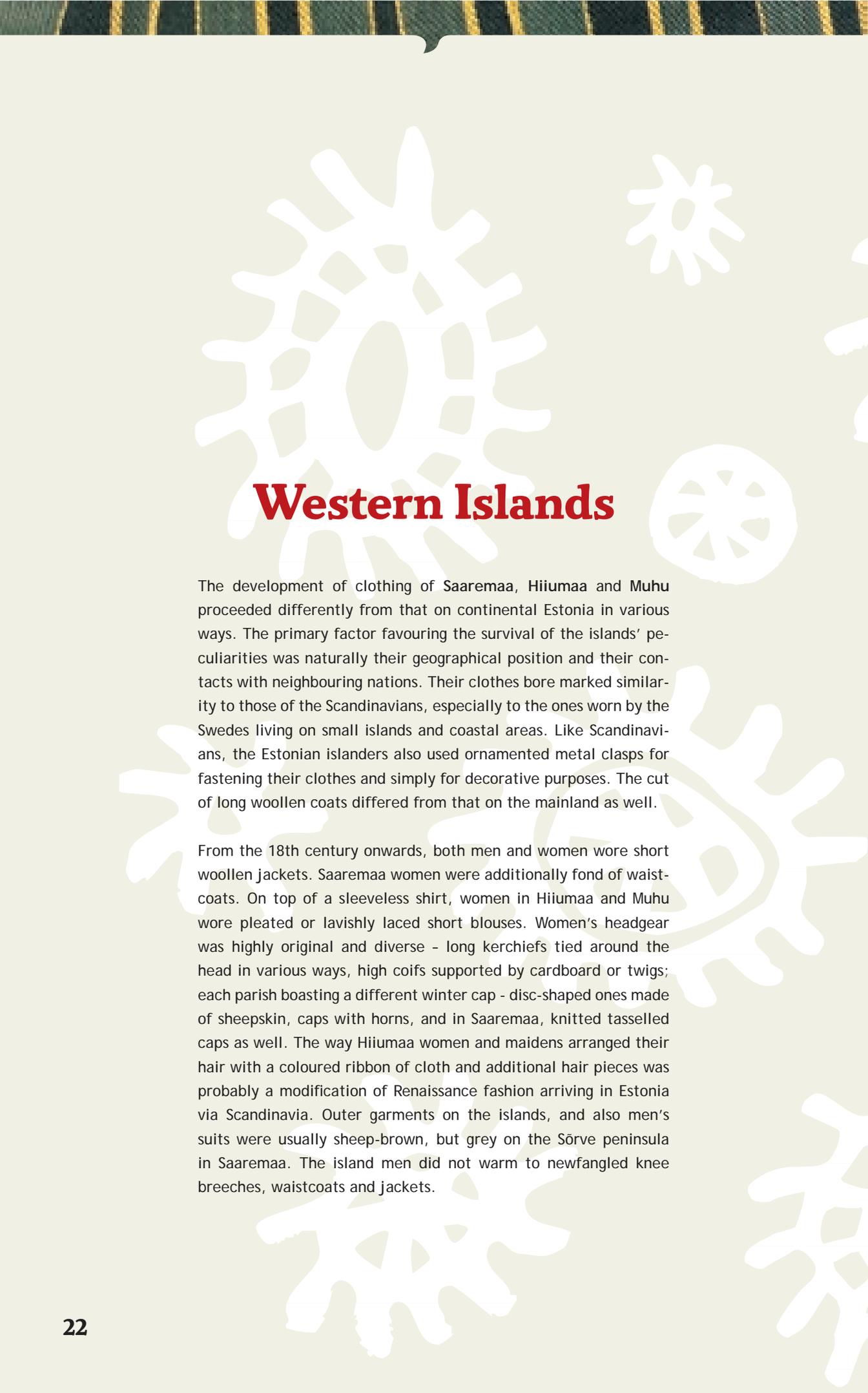
Kihnu women of the first half of the 19th century wore white linen aprons, in the mid-century they started donning printed cotton aprons on festive occasions.



The stripes of Kihnu skirts vary greatly whereas popular tradition has determined quite precisely on what occasions each skirt should be worn.

Kihnu woman

The striped skirt is today matched with all kinds of garments according to the wearer's age and whatever happens to be in fashion: young girls prefer cotton T-shirts and a fleece, older women wear various blouses and sweaters. The coif of a married Kihnu woman is high and decorated with a silk ribbon tied in front. The embroidery is an original geometricised floral pattern; decorations also include galloons and a ribbon of lace attached to the edge of the coif. A cotton kerchief was tied on top of the coif.



Western Islands

The development of clothing of Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Muhu proceeded differently from that on continental Estonia in various ways. The primary factor favouring the survival of the islands' peculiarities was naturally their geographical position and their contacts with neighbouring nations. Their clothes bore marked similarity to those of the Scandinavians, especially to the ones worn by the Swedes living on small islands and coastal areas. Like Scandinavians, the Estonian islanders also used ornamented metal clasps for fastening their clothes and simply for decorative purposes. The cut of long woollen coats differed from that on the mainland as well.

From the 18th century onwards, both men and women wore short woollen jackets. Saaremaa women were additionally fond of waistcoats. On top of a sleeveless shirt, women in Hiiumaa and Muhu wore pleated or lavishly laced short blouses. Women's headgear was highly original and diverse - long kerchiefs tied around the head in various ways, high coifs supported by cardboard or twigs; each parish boasting a different winter cap - disc-shaped ones made of sheepskin, caps with horns, and in Saaremaa, knitted tasselled caps as well. The way Hiiumaa women and maidens arranged their hair with a coloured ribbon of cloth and additional hair pieces was probably a modification of Renaissance fashion arriving in Estonia via Scandinavia. Outer garments on the islands, and also men's suits were usually sheep-brown, but grey on the Sörve peninsula in Saaremaa. The island men did not warm to newfangled knee breeches, waistcoats and jackets.



The neck of a shirt was fastened with several small conical brooches. The largest was placed on the chest, the smallest under the chin.

The waistcoats, *abu*, of Saaremaa women, had traditional decorative tin fastenings known as *mali*.



It was possible to measure the age of a skirt by the horizontal stripes woven into the hem - the higher the stripes reached, the later the fashion.

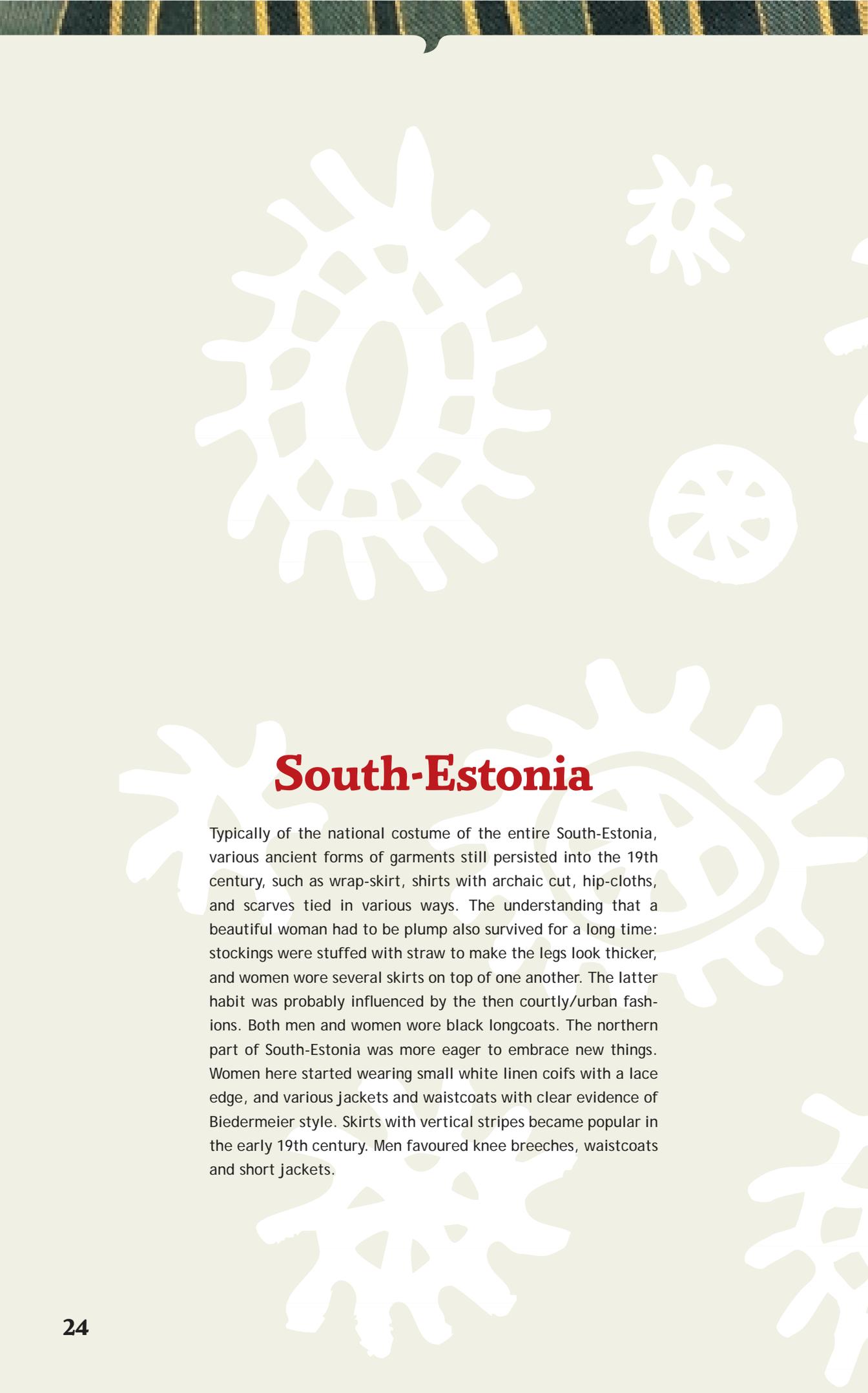


Aprons were decorated with sewn-on factory-made ribbons and strips of fabric.



Pöide woman

Saaremaa women wore black, brown or red pleated skirts. Waistcoat was a traditional part in Saaremaa women's outfit, which was sometimes sewn to the skirt, in other parishes worn separately. The coif made of linen cloth was supported with cardboard; in front it had the shape of a trapeze or a rectangle. In western parishes the coif is covered with a dense stylised plant ornamentation, whereas eastern parishes preferred individual geometric motifs. Besides coifs, various types of caps were worn, from sheepskin winter hats to knitted tasselled caps. The first record of leather shoes on the islands dates back to the 17th century.



South-Estonia

Typically of the national costume of the entire South-Estonia, various ancient forms of garments still persisted into the 19th century, such as wrap-skirt, shirts with archaic cut, hip-cloths, and scarves tied in various ways. The understanding that a beautiful woman had to be plump also survived for a long time: stockings were stuffed with straw to make the legs look thicker, and women wore several skirts on top of one another. The latter habit was probably influenced by the then courtly/urban fashions. Both men and women wore black longcoats. The northern part of South-Estonia was more eager to embrace new things. Women here started wearing small white linen coifs with a lace edge, and various jackets and waistcoats with clear evidence of Biedermeier style. Skirts with vertical stripes became popular in the early 19th century. Men favoured knee breeches, waistcoats and short jackets.



The white linen shirt has an archaic cut: a piece of linen cloth was folded into two, an opening for the head cut in the middle. The shirt with straight sleeves has thus no shoulder seams. Shirts of that type are characterised by hemstitch with motifs of semi-circles adorning the neckline.

The wrap-skirt split is covered with an ornamented hip apron embroidered with wool, dating from the Middle Ages.

The earlier ornamentation of bronze plaques and wire that ran along the skirt's hems, was replaced in recent centuries by a woollen cord woven with tablets. Metal decorations were replaced by the embroidered floral pattern.

Halliste woman

Against the background of the generally archaic southern Estonia, Halliste costumes were remarkably old-fashioned even in the mid-19th century. There were a number of items, which had become quite rare elsewhere in Estonia, but were still fairly common for the western Mulk people: white headscarves, woollen and linen wraps, loose carpet skirts, hip aprons with an archaic plant ornament, narrow geometric stocking patterns in the shape of belt pattern, soft heelless shoes made of animal skin, shirts with a very archaic cut and long-coats with a similar cut.

Setu man and woman

The little fragment of the Setu nation in the southeastern corner of Estonia has been culturally influenced by both their Russian neighbours and the fact of belonging to the Russian orthodox church. Due to being separated from the rest of Estonia, the Setu people have preserved various ancient elements in geometrical textile patterns and jewellery. Setu national costumes, folk songs and old customs are still going strong even today.



The man's shirt has a Russian-style stand-up collar, with a fastening on the left side, edged with ornamentation woven in with red cotton thread.



The shirt is worn over trousers and with a belt, again in the Russian fashion. Unmarried men tied their belt on the left, married men on the right.



The long trousers are of striped linen fabric, with a knotted waistband.



The preferred footwear was knitted wide-patterned stockings with unshaped heels and peasant shoes or Russian-style high boots.





On festive occasions, a folded shiny factory-made kerchief, a golden kerchief as it was called, was tied on top of the headband; four silk ribbons were tied to it at the back of the head so that eight ribbons streamed down the woman's back.



The full set of a woman's ornaments often weighed several kilos.



The sash resembles a South-Estonian figured belt, but was differently tied. The Setus tie their sash so that its ends remain hanging down in front.



The cuffs were adorned with colourful fabric, ribbons and tiny patches of cloth sewn densely on it.



The woman's shirt cut in the Slavonic style was first worn in the second half of the 19th century and had sleeves reaching up to the collar. The ample sleeves boast a wide red woollen pattern. Married women wrapped a long linen kerchief around their head. The edge on the forehead reached the eyebrows, the ends hanging at the back were tucked under the sash. The desired somewhat square shape of the head was achieved by a cloth plait twisted around the head under the kerchief. The latter was again covered by a headband plaited with woollen threads and then a bright kerchief purchased from a shop. A raised silver brooch weighing about half a kilo was fastened in the middle of chest, with various silver chains hanging above it; closest to the neck came a single string necklace with coins, then a heavy spiral silver necklace, a lacy necklace, a necklace with coins and beads, etc. Feet and legs were clad in white or grey woollen socks knitted in the Russian style, i.e. with unshaped heels, and half boots with laces.

Happy end

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Estonia



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