

National Costumes of Various Regions of Latvia. Early 19th – 2nd Half of the 19th Century

The national costumes developed as clothing of countryside people – peasants and fishermen. In the late 18th and early 19th century the regional national costume attained its classic form. The name ‘national costume’ refers to traditional dress worn in various situations and seasons, but mostly preserved is the festive costume. The course of historical development and the continuity of tradition determined the persistence of differences in national costumes between the various regions of Latvia. Groups of characteristic features serve to distinguish the national costumes of Kurzeme [19,20,26:2], Zemgale [21], Vidzeme [22, 26:1], Latgale [24] and Augšzeme [25]. The beginning of regional differences can be traced back to the differences between the Baltic peoples – the Semigallians, the Latgallians, the Selonians and the Couronians – and a Baltic-Finnic people – the Livs.

Traditional female dress consisted of a linen shirt, a woollen skirt, a belt, a jacket or bodice and a head covering. Maidens wore headband or crown, while married women had kerchief, headcloth or wife’s cap. The woollen shawl was a characteristic item of dress. Men wore a linen shirt, woollen trousers, a vest, a long, medium or short coat, a belt and a hat. Male attire was affected by change earlier than female dress. It is possible to notice traces of urban fashion and influence of military uniforms in men’s clothing.

The cycle of family celebrations encompassed the major events of the human lifetime: christening, wedding and funeral. The greatest wealth of traditions is associated with marriage [27]. The bride’s dowry had to include not only dress, but also various gifts, such as mittens.

Brooches [28–29] were used to fasten the costume. The small brooches were used to fasten shirts, the larger ones for fastening woollen shawls. Annular brooches came to dominate since 17th century. Heart-shaped brooches [28:15–17] occur from the 16th century onwards. Ornaments were made of bronze, silver, amber, sometimes decorated with coloured glass. Rings were worn with festive dress by both men and women. Glass, silver and amber beads were also worn as women’s jewellery. The quality and richness of ornaments on the dress served to show the wearer’s wealth.

** The numbers in square brackets indicate the relevant showcases.*