

The Role of Latvian Catholic Church Textiles in Perfecting People's Aesthetic Values

A i j a J A N S O N E

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Keywords: *liturgical textiles, materials, techniques, adornments, alb, surplice.*

For the first time in the history of Latvia, the identification of liturgical textiles has been launched on the scientific expeditions in Catholic Churches of Eastern Latvia. This leads to the creation of new written and original sources. The written sources (photographs and descriptions of objects) are placed in the University of Latvia, Institute of Latvian History, Ethnographic Materials Archive, while the liturgical textiles (articles) come to in the collection of the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia.

Under the National Research Program “Letonika”, the author has introduced a scientific topic “The Role of Latvian Catholic Church Textiles in Perfecting People's Aesthetic Values”, which has begun to identify the types of liturgics textiles, used raw materials, fabrics and handicraft techniques and an attempt to determine their impact on the development of peasant textiles.

The author takes the parallels of the cut and ornament of such types of liturgical clothing, such as *alb* and *surplice*, and folk costume shirts. The material identified makes it possible to think about their mutual effects, which resulted in the enrichment of the skills of peasants' craft and increase people's cultural standards.

The development of folk art for many centuries has been influenced by European and Eastern cultures that reached the territory of Latvia through cities, manors and church.

In recent years, there has been an in-depth interest in the history of Catholic liturgical textiles in the 17th–20th century. Researchers from different European countries, the specialist of the Serbian Museum of Applied Arts Draginja Maskareli (M a s k a r e l i 2017, 1–9), curator of the Athena Benaki Museum Xenia Politou, the researcher from Upsala University (Sweden) Lena Dahrén (D a h r é n 2013, 169–190), researcher from the National Museum in Krakow (Poland) Joanna Regina Kowalska (K o w a l s k a 2003, 1–13), Gieneke Arnolli (A r n o l l i 2017, 1–10), etc., have been interested in the history of liturgical costumes.

In Europe researchers work on a variety of scientific topics, for example:

- History of liturgical fabrics and objects, their origin (import, directions of trade routes);
- Variety of materials, decoration techniques;
- History of European textile manufactories;
- Origins and role of gifts given to the church;
- Liturgical clothing made of formerly secular textiles;
- Craftsmen's works for the church;
- The influence of liturgical textiles on peasant attire.

The scientists from University of Latvia Institute of Latvian History focused on the research of Catholic Church textiles only in 2012. In principle, it is the beginning of the research work on this topic. Due to this reason, under the National Research Program "Letonika", the author of the article has introduced a scientific topic "The Role of Latvian Catholic Church Textiles in Perfecting People's Aesthetic Values". Within the framework of which it is planned to identify the textiles in Catholic churches, paying special attention to the raw materials and handicraft techniques used in their making that had a special role in increasing people's cultural and living standards, namely:

- The perfection of dressing and decorating skills of the peasant attire and home textiles (19th–20th centuries), especially in the introduction of new decorative patterns and executing techniques in everyday life;
- The formation of understanding of "beauty" that was defined by the economics and the existing traditions of the time.

For the first time in the cultural history of Latvia, in ethnographic expeditions (field works) we have started to identify textiles in Catholic Churches of Latgale cultural and historical area, in Aglona, Baltinava, Balvi, Preiļi, Riebiņi, Vārkava, Viļaka municipalities. Usually, one expedition will take a week and during its time, there are approximately 400-500 items that are identified. The collected material shows different materials, techniques and adornments and represents different layers of culture which are datable by the 17th century to the end of the 20th century.

By functionality, Catholic liturgical vestments can be classified:

- In the liturgical clothing of priests (clergy attire) and parts thereof (soutane, alb, surplice, stole, maniple, chalice veil, burse, chasuble, cope, head covers, footwear, gloves, etc.);
- Interior textiles of the church (altar cover, flags, baldachin, etc.).

In the Latgale Catholic churches, the degree of preservation of church textiles is good; they are carefully stored in boxes, bureaus and wardrobes.

Habitually *cope*, *chasuble*, *stole*, *maniple*, *a chalice veil* and *burse* make up the liturgical clothing, made in a set of one fabric and decorated in the same style as the finishing materials available (brocade and metal thread lace). Often, only parts of the set have remained until now. They are usually the smallest components of the set: the stoles, maniples, a chalice veil and the bourses. We must be grateful for this, because it allows us to imagine an overview of all the liturgical clothing (material and ornament) and make reference to the time of its existence.

The church's interiors textile group includes altar covers, flags, baldachins, church bell tapes, etc. This textile group is relatively new, adorned with a variety of hand-working techniques known in the 20th century.

In the absence of any information on the maker and timing of the object, there is a problem with its date. For determining the origin of objects, it is appropriate to investigate:

- Time of the construction of the church, and a comparison with the clergy attire in Europe and liturgical textile fabric of that time: raw materials, finishing materials (tapes and laces), sewing technology and design;
- The history of the parish, city or manor in the territory of which the church is situated;
- The time of arrival of new raw materials (silk, velvet, cotton) and geography;
- Distribution of artwork materials (threads, tapes, pearls) and special literature (artwork albums);
- Embroidery in cross-stitches or other (fine) needlework (in the 18th and 19th centuries);
- White works – embroidery, crochet, network work, etc., works that come in fashion in Europe in the mid-19th century;
- Synthesizing of chemical dyes in Europe (1856), which developed fiber dyeing skills and influenced the adornment of liturgics textiles,
- Berlin wool works embroidery (2nd half of the 19th century);
- Embroidery and Richelieu embroidery techniques (in the turn of the 20th century).

According to the techniques of the material and performance applied, liturgics textile fabrics may be divided into:

- Colored liturgics textiles (surplice, stole, maniple, chalice veil, burse, chasuble, cope, church flags, bell tapes, etc.), made of damask, brocade, velvet, silk, cotton, etc., and encased in a variety of techniques (embroidered with silk, cotton, wool and metal thread in the case of pearls and flitters, lace and bands of metals and brocade, ornaments made in application techniques, etc.);
- White liturgics textiles: clothing of priests (alb and surplice) and interior objects of the church (altar covers, tablecloths, coverings, towels), which are adorned with white embroidery and lace (network, knitting, crocheted, etc.).

Observations in the Cut and Ornamentation of *Alb* and *Surplice*

With many years of research on traditional folk costume in the territory of Latvia, the author's attention in Catholic churches was directed to the cut of priest's clothing, especially *alb* and *surplice*. It should be noted that *alb* is simply the long, white linen tunic with long sleeves (Fig. 1.) and is usually girdled with a *cincture* (a type of belt); a *surplice* is a large-sleeved tunic of half-length, made of fine white linen or cotton (Fig. 2.), and worn by all the clergy.



Fig. 1. *Alb* at the Catholic Church in Krustpils. Photograph Aija Jansone



Fig. 2. *Surplice* at the Catholic Church in Krustpils. Photograph Aija Jansone

It is remarkable that the cut of *alb* is identical to the cut of peasants' shirts.

As we know, the design of Latvian peasant shirts was very simple: straight thread cut in long sleeves with straight ends, a collar and shoulder straps, under arm wedges. All details were cut along the lines of the thread (J a n s o n e 1999, 141) (Fig. 3. a–b). The only difference is that the *alb* is very large and long, because they were pulled on the priest's cassock (also known as a *soutane*). Its length ranged from 150 to 192 cm, width from 220 to 290 cm.

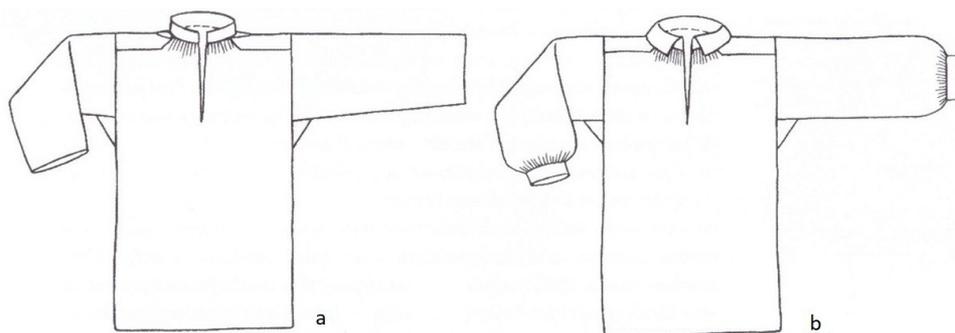


Fig. 3. a–b. The method for the construction of a peasant's tunic-style shirts: a – tunic shirt with shoulder straps outside; b – shirt with shoulder straps sewn on.

Like peasant's shirts, *alb* and *surplice* were sewn from white linen, but in second half of the 19th century, also of cotton fabric. In the past, peasant shirts,

albs and *surplices* were stitched by hands, but in the second half of the 19th century, with sewing machines.

Like peasant tunic shirts, two shoulder structures have been identified for *alb*:

- Alb, with shoulder straps outside (Fig. 4. a);
- Alb with shoulder straps sewn on (Fig. 4. b).



a



b

Fig. 4. a–b. Alb shoulder structures:

a – with shoulder straps outside (Catholic church, Preiļi);

b – shoulder straps sewn on (Catholic church, Riebiņi). Photograph Aija Jansone

Knowing the ancient origins of the cut of peasant shirts, the church's gowns seemed to take it away from the nation. Phenomenally, that worldwide straight thread cut and traditional crosscutting technology of the cut of *alb* and *surplice* has survived until now. However, among peasants this cut of shirts disappeared in the turn of the 20th century.

Albs and *surplice* have not been adorned in the past, but in the 17th century, their bottom and sleeves were also decorated with lace and embroidery, the width of which in the territory of Latvia varied from 10 to 55 cm.

In the 18th–20th centuries, *alb* and *surplice* decorations are temporal; it accumulates all the artwork techniques of a given time (Dillmont 1886, 1–809).

In Latgale (the Eastern part of Latvia), the material identified shows that *alb* and *surplice* are adorned with:

- Open working on linen (Fig. 5), that came in fashion in the middle of the 19th century under the influence of Bidermeyer's art style; also peasant's shirts are embroidered only in white thread during that time;
- Embroidered net is becoming popular in the turn of the 20th century (Fig. 6);
- In the 1880s, crochet laces are in fashion in Europe (Fig. 7, 8), which is used in the adornment not only in church textiles, but also in peasant's shirts, aprons and room textiles (towels, tablecloths, etc.);
- In the beginning of the 20th century, in fashion comes white works such as

Richelieu and English embroidery (Fig. 9, 10), with which the ordinary people willingly embroider their clothing and room textiles;

- When sewing machines enter into use (like Singer, Imperial, Grower, etc.), decorative stitching is richly sewn with them.



Fig. 5. Embroidered alb. White open work h – 7 cm. Šķilbēni. Photograph Aija Jansone



Fig. 6. Embroidered alb. Embroidered netting h – 35 cm. Vārkava. Photograph Aija Jansone

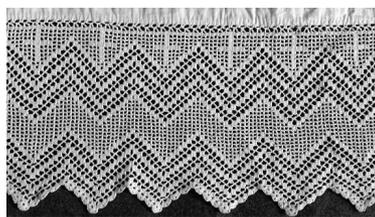


Fig. 7, 8. Albs adorned with crocheted lace h – 19.5 cm and h – 9 cm; 14 cm. Augustova, Vārkava. Photograph Aija Jansone

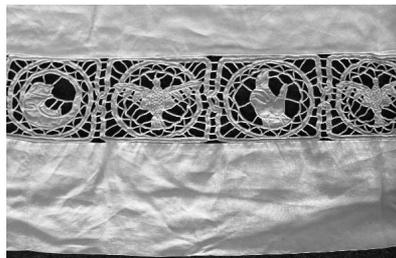


Fig. 9, 10. Embroidered alb. Richelieu technique h – 30 cm; 9 cm. Krustpils. Photograph Aija Jansone

We see great diversity in *alb* and *surplice* decorations. The most common ornaments are:

- Geometrical ornaments;
- Floral motives (roses, lilies);
- There are also topics of the church (christened monograms, crosses, grapes and wine), but they are not dominant.

Parts of the churches were requested by specialist workshops, but in rural areas of Latvia, local professionals were actively involved in the production of liturgical textiles. Therefore, often in white *albs*, *surplices* and altar covers “an ornament was not very proper for liturgical purpose and was much more suitable for women’s dress.” (K o w a l s k a 2017, 10) This is due to the fact that commonly the local masters made and decorated the most understandable objects of the people. As well as “The geometric essence of textiles – including embroidery – is determined by the materials and methods used. Individual elements of patterns depend on the form and purpose of the object, which is being embroidered” (J a n s o n e 1999, 142). The variety of designs of adorning patterns is likely to be determined by the tastes of performers and by the available artwork information, too. Every needle worker aimed to put in something from herself into her work, thereby introducing new methods of embroidery, whilst at the same time preserving the esthetic values of her ancestors.

Conclusion

In Latgale Catholic churches, the congregation (peasants) listened not only priest’s sermons, organs and chants, but also watched the architecture of the church and the liturgical textiles that were beautiful, sumptuous and admired.

Although there is a view that the Catholic Church is conservative, we see many of Europe’s latest century technological and artistic achievements in the making and adorning of liturgics textiles in the 17th–20th centuries.

In particular, they were:

- Less known raw materials (silk, cotton);
- The world’s achievements in the making of fabrics (brocade, damask, silk, jacquard, etc.);
- European modern needlework (white embroidery, covering embroidery – embroidered with colored wool yarn, crocheted laces, network embroidery, Richelieu and English embroidery);
- Adorning compositions (geometrical and floral patterns), which are scattered in the territory of Latvia through ornament books and the development of a network of artisanal shops;
- Color sets (post 1856).

In the 19th century, there is mutual influence in church and peasant textiles.

Namely, the church used local materials in the making of liturgics textiles (fine linen fabrics were in great respect) and traditional shirt cuts that have been

recognized for many generations, but the peasants (through the church) became aware of new raw materials, craft materials, artwork machinery and compositions. Perhaps the peasants of the church took advantage of techniques, such as open work, embroidered net, crochet laces, Richelieu and English embroidery, with which the ordinary people willingly embroider their clothing and room textiles.

The decorated church's textiles encouraged the peasants to learn new crafts, to make their clothing and interior designs more beautiful and timely. New knowledge improved the cultural level of the nation, raised awareness of the beauty and timeliness, and provided insight into art trends in Europe. At the same time, the pursuit of everything new, methodically led to a reduction in the specificity of traditional lifestyle.

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Aija Jansonė

Latvijos katalikų bažnyčios tekstilė ir jos vaidmuo formuojant žmonių estetines nuostatas

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *liturginiai tekstilės gaminiai, medžiagos, būdai, puošybos elementai, alba, kamža.*

Latvijos universiteto nacionalinė tyrimų programa „Letonika“ remia mokslinį tyrimą „Latvijos katalikų bažnyčios tekstilės vaidmuo tobulinant žmonių estetines vertybes“. Straipsnio autorės tikslas – aptarti tekstilės gaminius Latgalos katalikų bažnyčiose, atkreipti ypatingą dėmesį į medžiagas ir rankų darbo gaminių atlikimo techniką, padariusias didelę įtaką žmonių socialinio ir kultūrinio gyvenimo kokybei.

Bažnyčiose surinkti tekstilės pavyzdžiai yra labai įvairūs. Pagal funkcionalumą galima išskirti kunigų liturginę aprangą (dvasininkų drabužiai) ir bažnyčių interjero tekstilę (altorių danga, vėliavos, baldakimai ir kt.). Pagal naudojamos medžiagos ir atlikimo būdus liturginius tekstilės audinius galima skirstyti į spalvotus liturginius tekstilės audinius ir baltos spalvos liturginius audinius.

Ypatingą straipsnio autorės susidomėjimą sukėlė albų ir kamžų sukirpimo panašumas į valstiečių marškinių kirpimo stilių. Iki šiol išliko visame pasaulyje paplitęs tiesus drabužių kirpimas ir tradicinis albos ir kamžos skersinis kirpimas, nors būtent valstiečių marškiniams būdingas toks kirpimo stilius išnyko XIX a. pabaigoje.

XIX a. bažnytinė ir valstietiškoji tekstilė veikė viena kitą. Bažnyčia naudojo vietines medžiagas liturginiams tekstilės gaminiams siūti (itin vertinami buvo lininiai audiniai). Valstiečiai apie naujų medžiagų panaudojimą, siuvimo technikas (dekoratyvinį kiauraraštį, nėrinis, rišeljė, angliškąjį siuvinėjimą) sužinojo iš Bažnyčios.

Puošni bažnyčių tekstilė skatino valstiečius mokytis naujų amatų, darė jų drabužius ir interjerą gražesnius ir šiuolaikiškesnius. Drauge naujovių siekimas lėmė tradicinio gyvenimo būdo išskirtinumo mažėjimą.

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The material collected in churches is very diverse. It shows many layers of culture, different materials, techniques and adornments.

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