

Lithuanian Folk Skirts. Part I: Analysis of Fabric Pattern

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Abstract

Some of the most colourful parts of Lithuanian folk costume are skirts. In the past in Lithuanian tradition fabrics for skirts were woven from home-made yarns on a hand weaving loom. In these fabrics the esthetic taste, ethnocultural originality and character of Lithuanian women manifested themselves at a local and regional level. From a chronological point of view, folk fabrics show the artistic and technological evolution of the weaving tradition. In this two-part article the patterns, weaves, variety and prevalence of skirts, as well as the peculiarities of their colour combinations and weaves are investigated. The chronological and territorial distribution of pattern is also studied. The research sources are 285 exhibits from the textile collection of the Folk Art department of the National M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum. In the analysis, the weave and combination of colours as well as other data were identified. In the first part the classification of skirt fabrics according to the fabric pattern is presented, and the quantitative distribution of pattern is indicated. Also, the peculiarities of interrelation of fabric pattern as well as the weave and characteristic combinations of colour are established. Furthermore, distribution according to the weaving period and ethnographical regions of Lithuania is analysed, paying attention to the tendencies of chronological and territorial distribution of skirt patterns.

Key words: folk skirt, fabric pattern, fabric weave, colour.

In Lithuania both ethnologists and technologists have analysed folk fabrics. Ethnologists have investigated the patterns of traditional textile as a cultural element, which characterise various socio-cultural symbolic points tied to national consciousness, lifestyle and traditions. Textile technologists have investigated the laws of ornamentation structure, as well as creating software programs for pattern analysis, preservation and development. Ornaments of traditional Lithuanian woven sashes were studied by Tumėnas [1], who presented his ornament classification based on the complexity of initial element transformation. Savoniakaitė [2] classified geometric ornaments of Lithuanian overshot and rib spreads of circles, stripes, squares, stripes-squares, and rectangular patterns. Nėnienė [3] examined the ornaments and weaves of traditional Lithuanian shawls, as well as analysing their weave connection to colour ornament and fiber. She exposed the connection between the patterns and weaves of shawls woven by peasants, craftsmen, and factories. Pick-up and overshot folk fabrics were studied by Lithuanian technologists Kazlauskienė, Neverauskienė and Milašius [4]. Referring to the method suggested by Woods and developed by Hann, they also presented their own system of classification, which is applied to woven ornaments and based on various groups of symmetry and operations with matrixes. Katunskis, Milašius and Taylor [5] also designed software to create a basis for a database, which is adjusted to analyse folk fabric ornaments, presenting the ornament structure and methods of its creation.

Latvian researcher Kikule [6] examined Latvian bed spread distribution according to colours and patterns, classifying bedspreads into striped and checked patterns. Beikule, Kukle and Vilumšone [7] studied the use of Latvian folk fabrics of contemporary design. The Ornaments, patterns, and colours of folk fabrics can be used in contemporary fabrics, but the application of national motifs can cause some problems.

The ornaments of folk skirt fabrics were not extensively investigated. Broad-brush knowledge about skirts is usually given when describing a folk costume [8, 9]. It was established that skirts of two cuts were used in Lithuanian villages. Traditional early skirts were sewed from 3 - 7 rectangular wrinkled or pleated fabric pieces. A multicoloured checked pattern is most common for skirts of this cut. From the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the silhouette of skirts changed; over time pieces widened towards the bottom. In this period newly-cut skirts were sewn from woven fabric with fancy patterns in one or two colours. One of the widest researches of Lithuanian skirts is presented in historical-ethnographical atlas of Baltic countries [10], where patterns of Lithuanian skirts are presented and compared with Estonian and Latvian skirts. Data show the peculiarities of some patterns in large territories as well as trends in the spread of weaving innovations.

Lithuanian folk pick-up and overshot fabrics, shawls, as well as their ornaments

■ Introduction

Investigation of the fabric patterns of folk skirts is important from an interdisciplinary point of view. The identification and analysis of authentic weaving techniques of folk fabrics provides possibilities to compare and discover the historical-cultural evolution of fabric patterns in the context of neighbouring countries, textile art and technologies.

were extensively analysed. Lithuanian folk skirts have the same wide weave and pattern diversity, but they have not been studied in depth. Therefore the aim of this investigation is to show the peculiarities and evolution of home weaving traditions from the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, by establishing the peculiarities of fabric pattern and weave combinations, as well as by highlighting territorial and chronological distribution tendencies of skirt patterns.

Experimental results and discussions

The subject of the investigation was Lithuanian folk skirts from the textile collection of the department of Folk Art of the M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum, from all Lithuanian regions from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The patterns of 258 skirts were examined.

A collection of the folk skirts was started in the third decade of the 20th century/1930s. The exhibits come from various places in Lithuania and from different time periods. In Figure 1 we see

that the largest collection of skirts is from the region of South Lithuania Dzukija (59%), compared to those from other regions, which are far smaller – Sūduva (13%), Aukštaitija (11%), Žemaitija (8%), Klaipėda district (1%). Some skirts (8%) came to the museum without any data about region and place. From a chronological point of view, a rather large number of skirts do not have an exact date of their weaving. Because of this reason a more detailed investigation was conducted about the spread of pattern and change of tradition. Museum employees attributed 36% of such skirts to a longer period – from the 19th century to the third decade of the 20th century/ the 1930s (Figure 2). The other skirts have an approximate date and make up smaller quantities: the middle of the 19th century – 3%, the second half of the 19th century – 4%, the 7th decade of the 19th century/1870s – 1%, the 8th decade of the 19th century/1890s – 1%, the 9th decade of the 19th century/1880s – 1%, the end of the 19th century – 9%, from the end of the 19th century to the 2nd decade of the 20th century/1920 – 4%, the beginning of the 20th century – 14%, the first half of the 20th century – 6%, the 1st - 2nd

decades of the 20th century/1800 - 1820 – 8%, the 3rd - 4th decades of the 20th century/1920 - 1940 – 10%, and the 5th decade of the 20th century/1950s – 3%. Over half of the skirts are from union wool fabric (the warp is flax or cotton, the weft is wool), about 1/3 of the skirts are woolen, 1/10 of skirts – from flax or cotton with flax. The prosperous peasant-women started to use cotton for skirts from the end of the 19th century.

We separated 8 groups of fabrics according to woven pattern: checked, vertically striped, horizontally striped, plain, fancy, motley, overlaid and printed fabrics. Thread colours were mostly taken into consideration when defining fabric pattern. An even, repeated pattern is typical for the majority of skirts, and just a few skirts have an outskirt pattern. They make up 3.5% and are not analysed in this article.

Distribution of the fabrics according to their patterns is presented in Figure 3. It can be seen from the diagram that checked fabrics are most widespread, and make up 54% of all the fabrics investigated. A checked pattern is made by crossing ver-

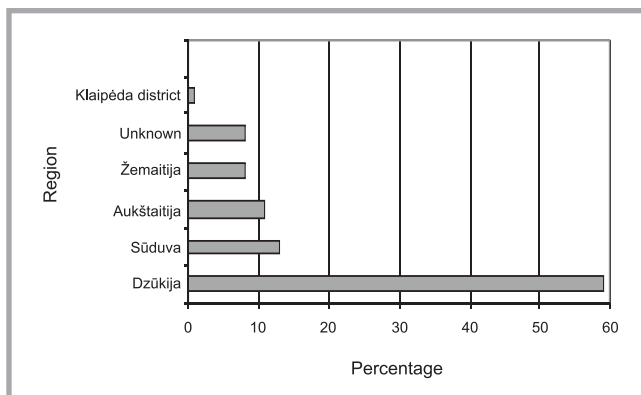


Figure 1. Distribution of NČDM skirts according to ethnographic region.

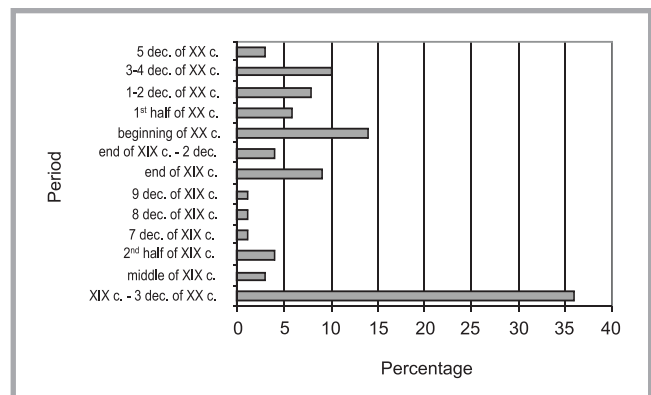


Figure 2. Chronological distribution of NČDM skirts.

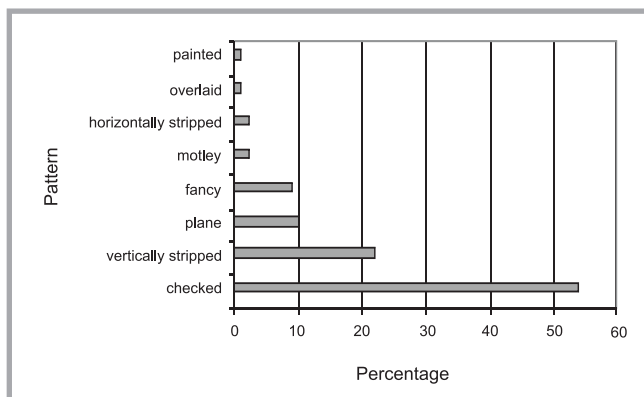


Figure 3. Distribution of Lithuanian folk skirts according to fabric pattern.

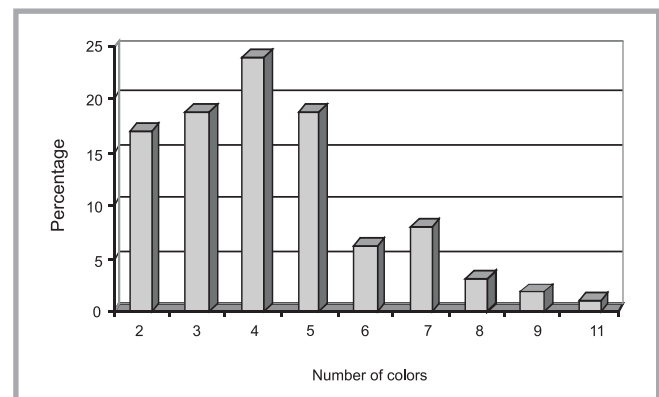


Figure 4. Distribution of the number of colours in fabrics with a checked pattern.



Figure 5. National skirt of checked fabric NČDM E2929 (Dzūkija): a) common view of the skirt; b) view of the fabric.

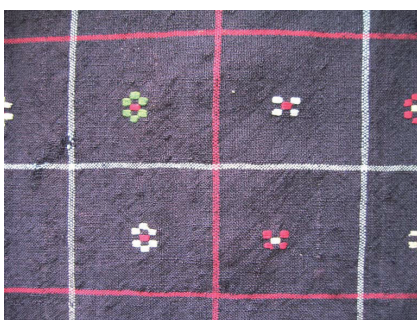


Figure 6. View of checked fabric with the pattern of the national skirt NČDM Žit36 (Sūduva).

tical and horizontal stripes. Combinations of 2 - 11 colours are used for checked skirt patterns. The most popular are combinations of 2 - 5 colours, much less popular are combinations of 6 - 11 colours. In two-colour combinations white-blue and white-black compositions are used most often; rarer are black-green, black-brown, blue-red combinations. In compositions of 3 - 5 colours (Figure 5) the most popular are red and green; such colours as violet, black, white, yellow, blue, greenish

and other colours are used in coordination. Checked patterns are usually woven in plain weave (85%), sometimes with elementary, reinforced, broken or diamond twills (7%), or with sateen, rib and combined plain with overshot (1 - 3%). A small part (10%) of check fabrics has an additional pattern, which is made by using the overlaid technique as well as by weaving overshot quadrangular or stylised plant ornaments (Figure 6) in the middle of checks and stripes.

Vertically striped fabrics are less widespread (Figure 7); they make up 22% of all the fabrics investigated. Plain weave (46%), different twills (25%), less sateen, rib, overshot, combined plain with overshot, sateen with overshot, sateen with Bedford cord (2 - 4%) are used for vertically striped fabrics. 11% of vertically striped fabrics have an outskirt pattern woven with combined weaves: plain with overlaid, plain with pick-up, and plain with overshot. It should be emphasised that they are not simple geometrical patterns, but rectangles of different sizes form horizontal lines or are connected by other forms at their angles. 2 - 12 colours are combined in vertically striped fabrics. More popular are compositions of 2 - 5 colours with white, black, green, red, blue, brown and other colours.

Fabrics with plain weave without a clear surface pattern are in third place regarding prevalence. These fabrics make up 10% of all the fabrics investigated. Fabrics of single colour and of two colours, when the warp and weft are of the same or different colours, were among them. Fabrics of two colours, when black threads were used for the warp, and green, blue, dark red and violet colours for the weft, dominate. Threads of one-colour fabric are of red, violet colour. In plane fabrics, twills (1/3, 3/1, 2/2) and plain weave are used.

Fancy fabrics, surface pattern of which is obtained thanks to fabric weave (Figure 8), make up 9%. In most cases this pattern is exposed by using different colours in warp and weft systems. These two-colour combinations are used in the skirts: black and white, dark red, grow, green or brown, brown with white or yellow, white with blue or grow, blue with yellow, dark red with distinct green; combinations of three colours: blue, violet with red, violet, green with crimson. Ornamental diamond twill, broken in warp or weft direction twill, compound diamond twill, diamond twill, twill 2/2



Figure 7. View of vertically striped fabric NČDM E1592 (Aukštaitija).

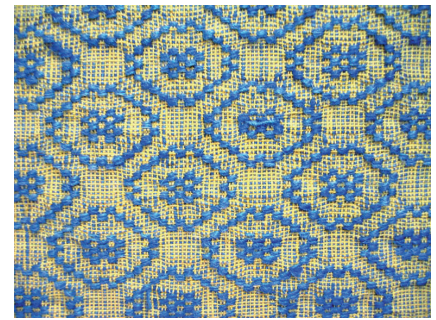


Figure 8. View of the fancy fabric of the skirt NČDM E2922 (Dzūkija).



Figure 9. View of the motley fabric of the skirt NČDM E2919 (Dzūkija).



Figure 10. View of the horizontally striped fabric of the skirt NČDM E 473 (Sūduva).



Figure 11. Skirt of overlaid fabric NČDM E3859 (Dzūkija).



Figure 12. A view of printed skirt fabric NČDM E 5919(Sūduva).

with fabric structure effect (thin out), combined: twill 3/1 with sateen, mock leno, broken twill, overshot weaves are used for these fancy fabrics.

Motley fabrics, with surface pattern made from a few dominant motifs of fancy patterns in different colours (Figure 9, see page 81), make up 2%. For example, from striped weft in various colours (white, violet, green, cyclamen, red) and overshot columns, rectangles of different sizes (inventory number NČDM E 2919); vertical stripes in three colours (grow, white, black) and diamond twills (NČDM E 3549); vertical stripes in 2 colours (white, black) and Bedford cord (NČDM E 3219); one colour (black) and two colour (white, mossy green) fancy dyed threads and twill weave (NČDM E 4307).

Horizontally striped fabrics (Figure 10, see page 81) make up 2% of all fabrics. They are woven in stripes of 4 - 5 colours in the entire skirt fabric or only on the edge of the skirt with distinct colour threads, for example, blue, red, green, white (NČDM E 3412). Plain, weft rib, twill and com-

bined twill with sateen weaves are used.

Overlaid (Figure 11) and printed (Figure 12) fabrics make up 1% of all fabrics. Pattern in overlaid fabrics is woven in dark colour plain weave background with separate distinct one colour or fancy dyed thread with overlaid of stylised plant motifs, which are evenly distributed in vertical and horizontal directions (NČDM E 1375, E 3859). Printed fabrics are woven in broken or diamond twill weaves and their pattern is created by printing small white plant motifs on a black colour background.

Analysis of the territorial prevalence of skirt fabric (Figure 13) shows, that checked, vertically striped and plain fabrics are widespread in all regions, but not evenly: check patterns dominate in Dzūkija and Aukštaitija, whereas vertically striped and plane patterns are less popular in these regions. Vertically striped fabrics dominate in Sūduva and Žemaitija, whereas checked and plane fabrics are less popular in these regions. Checked, vertically striped and fancy fabrics are typical for the Klaipėda district. Fancy patterns are spread in small quantities (up to 10%) in other regions, and no fancy patterns are found in Aukštaitija. A small quantity of horizontally striped fabrics is only found in Sūduva and Dzūkija. There is a small quantity of motley and painted fabrics in Aukštaitija, Žemaitija and Sūduva (up to 8%).

From a chronological point of view, checked and vertically striped skirts have old traditions. According to archeological data, Lithuanians started weaving these patterns in the 14th century, and the garment 'marginė', the name of which is derived from multicoloured checks and stripes, is often mentioned in historical references of the period between the 17th - 18th centuries. A lot of costume parts and interior fabrics were woven with these patterns from the beginning of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century [3]. However, these patterns did not dominate in equal measure in the different textile categories and locations. According to the data of ethnographers Miliuvienė and Kulikauskienė, checked skirts, vests and trousers became prevalent in the middle of the 19th century, but they started to diminish at the end of the 19th century [6]. The data also showed that checked skirts were worn in Dzūkija up to the 4th decade of the 20th century/1940s [7]. Aniline colours,

which appeared in the middle of the 19th century, reinforced the spread of checked and striped fabrics. As we can see from the results of this research (Figure 14), checked and striped skirts were produced in substantial quantities at different periods of the 19th century, but their quantities decreased at the beginning of the 20th century, when other fancy, plane, and painted fabrics became more widespread. The new patterns were mostly used in holiday clothing, and checked patterns remained popular in daily clothing for some time. In skirts, which were most often reconstructions and interpretations of folk costumes of the 3-5th decade of the 20th century (from the period between 1930 and 1950), traditional checked and vertically striped patterns were used, proving that these exact patterns were more traditional in folk art. The new patterns were being researched and designed parallel, overlaid, pick-up and overshot patterns, which normally were used in aprons, started to be adapted for use as skirt fabrics.

■ Summary

Analyses of 258 Lithuanian folk skirt fabrics from the M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum, and their patterns can be summarised by these conclusions:

1. Eight groups of fabric pattern were distinguished and their prevalence was established. Checked fabrics, which make up 54%, are the most widespread, whereas other types are found to be rarer (vertically striped fabrics - 22%, plane fabrics - 10%, fancy fabrics - 9%, motley - 2%, horizontally striped - 2%, overlaid - 1%, and printed - 1%).
2. Compositions of 2 - 5 colours are typical for linear patterns, whereas compositions of 2 colours are normal for geometrical, fancy patterns. White-blue, white-black, the rare black-green, black-brown, and blue-red compositions are the most popular in two colour checked and striped patterns. Red and green, in combination with violet, black, white, yellow, blue, greenish, purple, brown, light brown, grow and other colours are the most popular in compositions of 3 - 5 colours. Black with white, dark red, grow, green and brown, brown with white or yellow, white with blue or grow, blue with yellow, and dark red with light green are popular in geometric patterns.
3. It was established, that multicoloured checked and striped patterns were

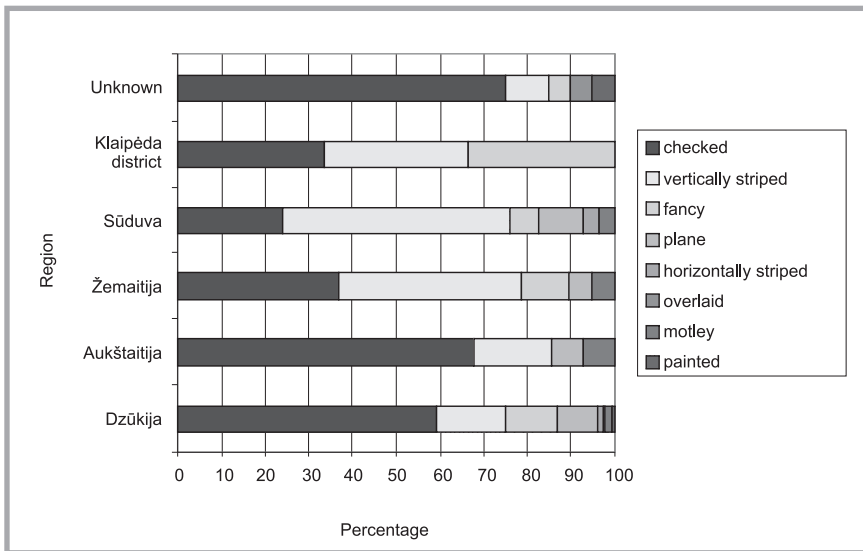


Figure 13. Distribution of skirt patterns in the regions of Lithuania, XIX century – the first half of XX century NČDM.

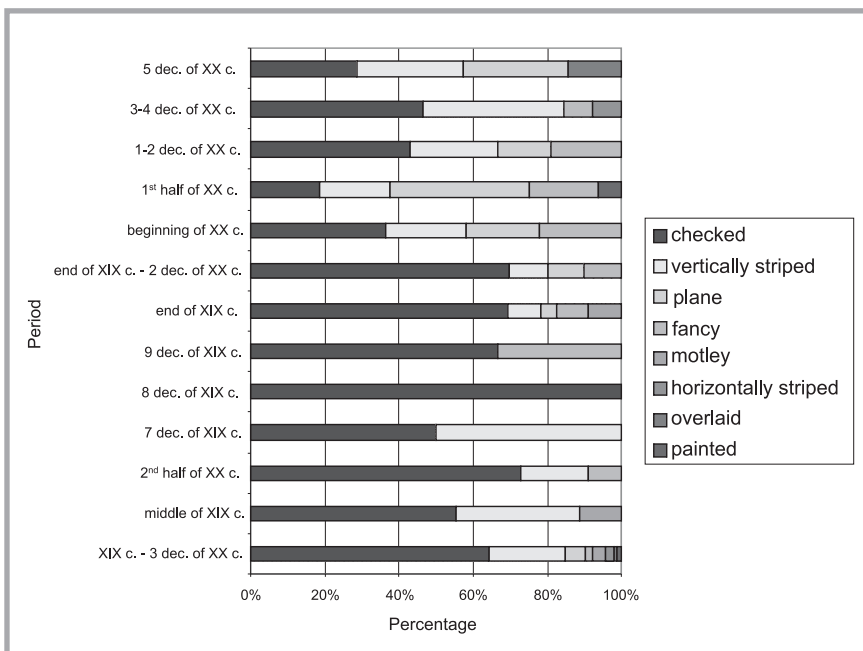


Figure 14. Chronological distribution of skirt patterns.

woven with plain or elementary twill weaves whereas geometrical, fancy patterns were woven with fancy, reinforced, combined, and compound weaves.

4. From a territorial point of view, striped and plain fabrics are prevalent in all Lithuania, but in uneven quantities. Whereas checked patterns dominate in Dzūkija and Aukštaitija, vertically striped are the most common in Sūduva and Žemaitija. Plane, fancy and other not very popular patterns were used in different places in Lithuania. A checked pattern is prevalent in large territories, including parts

of neighbouring countries (Latvia, Byelorussia, Poland), which border with Northern, Eastern and Southern Lithuania.

5. The results of chronological research show that checked and striped skirts were prevalent in big quantities at different periods of the 19th century, especially in the second half of the 19th century. Their quantity decreased from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Fancy, plane, and printed fabrics of compound and derived weaves of darker colour are more widespread. Skirts for reconstructions of folk costumes

of the period between 1930 to 1950/ the 3 - 5th decade of the 20th century were woven with traditional checked patterns, and new methods of pattern composition were found by using combined weave.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation for supporting this investigation.

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Received 14.06.2007 Reviewed 23.01.2008