

## **Between *justaucorps*, *żupan* and *kontusz*. Exchange of information on styles of garments based on drawings in Polish tailor's books.**

Beata Biedrońska-Słota  
Katowice School of Technology, Poland

### **Abstract:**

The dress that later became known as Polish costume developed in the time of deep transformations that took place in Polish society in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. With the growth of landed estates many knights abandoned their way of life and preferred to indulge into farming and economy. The group of landlords began to grow. Its members readily identified themselves with the tradition of the Sarmatian people. Inspired by theses forwarded in writings of some Polish Renaissance authors, attempts were made at demonstrating that Polish gentry descended from and were similar to ancient Sarmatians, migratory pastoral tribes of Iranian origin. These changes, fed with the Sarmatian ideology, also resulted in changes in life style, including the way of shaping men's dress, so that it looked more and more like the dresses used in the Orient. The dress soon became a distinctive mark of the gentry. So the dress came to determine social identity and even, in the opinion of some observers, expressed the views of this group. It testified of wearer's social position and his views, it was also a means of propaganda. It could, in some situations, declare one's attachment to tradition, but could also be seen as a symbol of benightedness and provincialism. Drawings in a tailor's book from that time demonstrate that dresses following the Spanish and the French fashion were also used in Poland in the 17th century.

### **Contents:**

Native costumes used in Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, represented mainly by kontusz / Legend of Sarmatians origin / Native costumes used in Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania in the 17th and the 18th century / The trend of wearing costumes sewn according to the Western fashion / The use of the justaucorps fashion / Sources for the history of Polish tailoring

## **Native costumes used in Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, represented mainly by kontusz**

Costumes used in the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania belonged to two contrasting groups: native costumes, represented mainly by kontusz, and costumes made after the Western fashion, with justaucorps as a representative example. This distinction is reflected in literature in such a way that the groups, when mentioned, are presented in opposition to one another. When modernity is the topic, both types of costumes represent tradition versus a thirst for novelty, in a debate on nativity they are marks of parochialism versus enlightenment and in the eighteenth century, specifically nativity versus Francomania. In the context of citizenship, kontusz was a manifestation of patriotism while Western costumes were perceived as a mark of yielding to the Western influence. So when mentioned in literature, the costumes appeared as pairs of contradictory symbols. Where the tailcoat was condemned, kontusz was put on pedestal.

## **Legend of Sarmatians origin**

The distinctive Polish costume which clearly differed from those worn in the west of Europe, gained its shape under the influence of the fashion coming from Near East. The costume did not faithfully replicate the construction of its models; it only included some elements of cut similar to those used in the East. Nevertheless, these similarities are sufficient for regarding the men's costumes used in Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania as Oriental ones, because of their cut and hence also the general look. The form of the classical Polish

costume began to develop in time when Polish society was undergoing deep transformation during the sixteenth century. Knighthood as the way of living was being abandoned by many people who undertook farming and economy; it was then when landed estates became popular. The group of landlords emerged and began to grow in size and importance. Its members readily identified themselves with the tradition of Sarmatian peoples - migratory pastoral tribes of Iranian origin. Attempts were made, inspired by theses forwarded in writings of Polish Renaissance authors, at demonstrating that Polish gentry descended from ancient Sarmatians and were similar to them.

The Sarmatian legend was a symptom of emerging national consciousness and the desire to determine the place of Poles between the nations of Europe. So the myth was born of Polish separate ancient tradition. Though it was not defined in a clear and comprehensible way and its fabulous themes were too convolute to follow, its consequences lasted for centuries. In this way the sixteenth century, the age of the growth of humanist ideas, of opening to the world and its appeals, saw the birth of a concept that provided foundations for national megalomania and, in later time, also of xenophobia.

It should be stressed, however, that the Sarmatian humanism, full of contradictions, was at the same time open to the others, including infidels. It was then when Sarmatian gentry discovered the appeal of the "golden liberty", a magnificent slogan that nevertheless led to the growth of social anarchy.

As a result of the described transformations, fuelled with the Sarmatian ideology, the way of life was changing, including change in the form of men's clothing which was becoming more and more similar to the dresses used in the East. This kind of costume soon became the tool of gentry's consolidation as a social group. Costume thus became a mark of its bearer's social affiliation and even, according to some observers, it expressed the views of the whole class of the society. It testified of its bearer's social position and its outlook on life, it was also a means of propaganda. It could, in some situations, declare one's attachment to tradition, but could also be seen as a sign of benightedness and provincialism.

The costumes worn in the sixteenth century Poland did not yet follow a well-established standard. Mikołaj Rej of Nagłowice (1505-1569), a leading personality of Polish Renaissance literature, wrote sarcastically that various clothes worn in Poland are similar to those used in Spain or Italy as frequently as to the Turkish, Tartarian and Moscovian ones.

Worth of mentioning here is a widespread opinion that one of main reasons of Polish costume's orientalization was the presence of Oriental clothes in Poland and their blending into the Polish custom<sup>1</sup>. Original clothes from the East, usually from Turkey, were indeed brought to Poland as dresses of honour by the way of diplomatic gifts that expressed respect and devotion. They were called *hil'at* (after Arabic *khil'a*)<sup>2</sup> and were sewn from very expensive silk textiles with addition of golden and silver threads, decorated with sophisticated patterns

---

<sup>1</sup> P. Mrozowski 1994, p. 24

<sup>2</sup> P. L. Baker 1995, p. 93



Figure 1: Portrait of Roman Fedorowicz Sanguszko (1537-1571), Poland, 17th century, Tarnow District Museum, inv.no MT-A-M/391 (Photo Museum).



Figure 2: Silk hilat, Istanbul, 1 quarter of the 17th century, Topkapy Palace Museum, inv.no.13/532 (Photo after IPEK. Imperial Ottoman Silk and Velvets, London 2001, fig.8.).

Often quoted is the message from Sultan Suleiman I's wife Roxelana to King Sigismund II Augustus in 1549 saying that: "... To avoid the letter being empty" she sends two pairs of trousers with a shirt, with a sash for them, six kerchiefs and a towel"<sup>3</sup>. King Sigismund II Augustus's envoy wrote in 1557 that during the farewell in the Sultan's court "...an under dress of gold-threaded textile was brought and another, also gold-threaded, wide overcoat, and also a few pieces of *kemha*"<sup>4</sup>. „After the banquet Chaush Pasza leads the envoy and some of his men to a separate room where they are dressed in colourful gold-threaded kaftans, with various figures of birds and other animals, all this as an expression of favour"<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Sefer Muratowicz, a diplomat sent to Persia by king Sigismund III in 1601, was there dressed in a green damask żupan and a gold-threaded dress over it..."<sup>6</sup>. So the import of ready Eastern costumes to Poland, ones which could be later used for demonstration of majesty and splendour, could contribute to the shaping of Polish fashion.

### Native costumes used in Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century

The Polish costume in the 17<sup>th</sup> century consisted of a żupan which resembled Turkish and Persian dresses and a delia, whose form, with the long decorative sleeves reaching down to the ankles, attached at the openings for hands and thrown on the back, was an accurate imitation of the dresses from the sultan's court. Delia had a large fur collar and it was often completely lined with fur; sometimes it was braided decoratively in front. The headdress consisted of a kalpak with a bundle of feathers set in a szkofia; a karabela (Turkish-style sabre) hang at the left side. The whole was complete with jewellery in the form of golden or silver knobs with gemstones, meticulously decorated with granulation or filigree. Hairstyle was also distinctive. Young Sarmatians shaved their heads high, leaving only a crest of hair over the top of the head. This haircut soon became the sign of social affiliation.



Figure 3: Votive picture, Poland, 17th century, Piotrawin, St.Stanislaus and St.Thomas church (Photo B.Biedrońska-Słotowa).

<sup>3</sup> Katalog dokumentów tureckich. Dokumenty do dziejów Polski i krajów ościennych w latach 1455-1672 [Inventory of Turkish documents. Documents to the history of Poland and adjacent countries in years 1455-1672], Warszawa 1959.

<sup>4</sup> J. I. Kraszewski 1869, p. 20

<sup>5</sup> Z. Gołębiowski 1861, p. 132

<sup>6</sup> Relacya Sefera Muratowicza obywatela warszawskiego do Zygmunta III króla polskiego dla sprawowania rzeczy wysłanego do Persji w roku 1602 [Report of Sefer Muratowicz, citizen of Warsaw to the Polish King Sigismund III for solving the matters sent to Persia in year 1602], Warszawa 1777

The classical form of Polish national costume was established in the eighteenth century. It consisted of the described above żupan and kontusz, which was characteristically cut at the back: with a “trunk” and “open” sleeves which could be taken off the hands and thrown on the back, exposing the żupan beneath.



Figure 4: Kontusz costume, Poland, about 1770-1775, Krakow National Museum, inv.no MNK.XIX-2798, MNK.XIX-2799 (Photo Museum).

Kontusz was tied with a long coloured sash threaded with silver or gold. The kontusz sashes themselves have an interesting origin, also Oriental. They were brought to the Commonwealth from Persia by Armenian merchants already in the seventeenth century. They gained so wide an appeal that already in the eighteenth century every noble man's wardrobe obligatorily included sashes made of pure silk or silk with golden or silver thread, designed as decoration of the costume, tied on the kontusz. In the second half of the eighteenth century they were produced in Polish manufactures, such as at Słuck, Grodno, Lipków, Kobyłka, Gdańsk, Kraków<sup>7</sup>.

Our knowledge of Polish kontusz costumes is based on contemporary portraits, but first of all on the preserved costumes stored in Polish museums and private collections<sup>8</sup>. Nearly no information on their cut is preserved in the form of cut patterns or drawings in tailor's guild books preserved in Polish archives. Exceptions include notes on delia, żupica and

---

<sup>7</sup> M. Taszycka 1990; J. Chruszczyńska 1995.

<sup>8</sup> B. Biedrońska-Słotowa 2005.

kopieniak<sup>9</sup>. This implies that the native kontusz costumes were so widely known and used that their cut was widely known and any drawings or patterns were not necessary.

### The trend of wearing costumes sewn according to the Western fashion

As mentioned above, parallel with the Oriental fashion persisted in Poland the trend of wearing costumes sewn according to the Western fashion. This trend, though not common, was always treated as a novelty when compared to the native fashion. Especially the trends coming from France became popular since the second half of the seventeenth century.

Influence of French thought and literature is noticeable since break of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This coexisted with vision of incorporating Poland into the community perceived as the “French Europe”. The increasing presence of various elements of the French culture in Polish social life was the obvious mark of this trend and wearing French costumes was its most apparent manifestation<sup>10</sup>.

A real novelty in tailoring were the dresses sewn according to the Western fashion and it was their construction that needed drawn cut patterns.

### The use of the justaucorps fashion

Obviously, sewing dresses according to the western fashion or just importing them from the West was common in the Commonwealth already for centuries. Poles generally used to follow the western fashion. This was especially true of women. Local tailors needed precise directions and drawn patterns of cut were the best suited for this purpose. It is probably for this reason that the preserved tailors’ guild books contain drawings of cut patterns according to the Spanish, Hungarian and Italian fashions, with a special distinction for the justaucorps pattern.



Figure 5: The manuscript of the tailors’ guild, 17th/18th century from the collection of the State Archive in Opole, p.27, sygn.80, no 123. (Photo State Archive in Opole).

<sup>9</sup> M. Molenda, M. Sepiał 2003

<sup>10</sup> Agata Roćko 2015

Women's fashion in Poland, as it was mentioned above, followed the trends created at European courts while men's fashion used the western trends besides the native ones. Thus at the beginning of the eighteenth century the wardrobe of a fashionable man besides a kontusz costume contained also a justaucorps complete with a suitable, long at that time, waistcoat reaching below the hips and a pair of fitting trousers reaching to the ankles.

Justaucorps replaced tailcoat, in accordance with the Western fashion, in the second half of the eighteenth century. This was a result of infiltration to Poland of the cultural style born at the French court. The increasing numbers of ladies and gallants exchanging compliments became finally also the mark of the Polish enlightened class. The optimistic writings by Voltaire and sentimental works of Rousseau induced some enlivenment in Poland, which later resulted in the works of such great poets as Ignacy Krasicki or Trembecki who was educated in France, or in lyrical poems by Adam Naruszewicz.

At the same time a fashion appeared that was styled on Hungarian hussars, represented by a short kaftan, a fur-lined jacket and fitting trousers whose leg ends were tucked into the high boots.

According to the contemporary sources, tailors in the Commonwealth received a thorough education. An apprentice started with a three-years learning under a journeyman's supervision. After that he could become a journeyman himself, open his own workshop and further master his skills. After reaching a high level in his craft he could approach a master's exam. The required tailor master's skills usually included sewing liturgical costumes (chasuble, alba and habit), a doctor's coat and an outer dress following the pattern provided by a customer. It was the masters who were responsible for meeting the demands of the local environment for which they were working.

### **Sources for the history of Polish tailoring**

Sources for the history of Polish tailoring that contain oldest drawn patterns are scarce. The literature on the subject usually refers to a tailors' book from the town of Wschowa, dated at 1640, and a guild book of the Poznań tailors, dated at the seventeenth century. The first item includes two patterns of cut: of a żupnica (a short horse-rider's man's dress used mainly in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries: fitted, with tight sleeves and buttoned with small buttons, open at front) and a kopieniak (a short men's dress used till the first half of the seventeenth century: loose with slit sleeves, a small collar and haberdashery decoration at the fastening). The Poznań tailors' guild book dated at the seventeenth century contains seven drawn patterns, namely: a doctor's coat from the seventeenth century, a chasing gown (hunter's dress), a cavalry gown (a soldier's dress), a hood, a kabat jacket, horseman trousers, a woman's gown with "a shape" that is a corselet. Only at the end of the twentieth century, in 1992, a manuscript was studied that contains correspondence carried on in Polish in 1567 between tailors from Wrocław and Bytom. The manuscript has been found at Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The introductory note says that it includes nine drawings of patterns: a chasuble, a church dalmatic, a priest's coat, a priest's gown, woman's coat, a hunting dress following a pattern of a Spanish man's dress with a short dublet (a Baroque man's dress, a kind of cape) and with wide trousers reaching down only to hips, a carter's hat, a soldier's hat, a cover of horse's saddle. A comparison of the content of this document with the known younger archival documents proves that the available sixteenth century specimens to a large degree duplicated the Wrocław instructions from 1567<sup>11</sup>.

A much richer visual material is contained in a still inedited manuscript that contains a collection of cut patterns provided by an anonymous tailor from Silesia. Unfortunately the

---

<sup>11</sup>Grzegorz Brożyna, Krystyna Kossakowska-Jarosz 2016, s.12.

document's title is missing and, if present, it could unanimously tell if this 28-page manuscript, with drawings of 23 cut patterns to scale, was prepared by a journeyman or a master. Nevertheless, its comparison with another collection of cut patterns made by a master and now stored at State Archive in Opole, makes it very likely that the discussed document was prepared by a craftsman approaching the master exam, or even by a fully qualified master tailor. Suggestive arguments are provided by the content of both pattern books.

Another recently elaborated and made available document is a manuscript of the tailors' guild from the collection of the State Archive in Opole<sup>12</sup>. The book comes from the break of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It includes drawings of cut patterns of church dresses (a chasuble, a cope, a dalmatic), of a gown put on a bekishe, a coat, a dress under a cuirass, a loose coat, a men's gown, a coat with wedges, a Spanish dress, a Hungarian sheepskin coat, a Holy Communion gown, a hood, a carter's coat, a dress to put on a horse, a żywotek or corselet, a French dress, and, first of all, the justaucorps itself, as the true example of the French influence.

A large part of the drawings is devoted to the patterns of ecclesiastic clothing and of feminine dresses and coats. Polish women's fashion usually followed the western trends.



## References

Katalog dokumentów tureckich. Dokumenty do dziejów Polski i krajów ościennych w latach 1455-1672 [Inventory of Turkish documents. Documents to the history of Poland and adjacent countries in years 1455-1672], Warszawa 1959.

Relacja Sefera Muratowicza obywatela warszawskiego do Zygmunta III króla polskiego dla sprawowania rzeczy wysłanego do Persji w roku 1602 [Report of Sefer Muratowicz, citizen of Warsaw to the Polish King Sigismund III for solving the matters sent to Persia in year 1602], Warszawa 1777.

P. L. Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, London 1995

B. Biedrońska-Słotowa, *Polski ubiór narodowy zwany kontuszowym: dzieje i przemiany opracowane na podstawie zachowanych ubiorów zabytkowych i ich części oraz w świetle źródeł ikonograficznych i literackich* [Polish national costume known as the kontusz costume: its history and modifications studied on the grounds of iconographic and literary sources] , Kraków 2005.

Grzegorz Brożyna, Krystyna Kossakowska-Jarosz, *Manuskrypt cechu krawców ze zbiorów Archiwum Państwowego w Opolu. Edycja krytyczna* [A manuscript of the tailors' guild from the collection of the State Archive in Opole, a critical edition], Opole 2016.

J. Chruszczyńska, *Pasy kontuszowe z polskich manufaktur i pracowni w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* [Kontusz sashes from Polish manufactures and workshops in the collections of National Museum in Warsaw]. Warszawa : Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. 1995.

Z. Gołębiowski, *Ubiory w Polsce od najdawniejszych czasów aż do chwil obecnych, sposobem dykcjonarza ułożone*, Kraków 1861.

J. I. Kraszewski, *Podróże i poselstwa polskie do Turcji* [Polish travels and diplomatic missions to Turkey], Kraków 1869.

M. Molenda, M. Sepiał, 'Tailor's Books in Polish Archives', in: *Crossroads of costume and textiles in Poland: papers from the International Conference of the ICOM Costume Committee at the National Museum in Cracow, September 28 - October 4, 2003*

P. Mrozowski, *Ubiór jako wyraz świadomości narodowej szlachty polskiej XVI-XVIII wieku* [Costume as an expression of national consciousness of Polish gentry in the 16th-18th centuries], *Ubiory w Polsce*, Warszawa 1994.

Agata Roćko, *Kontusz i frak. O symbolice stroju w XVIII wiecznej literaturze polskiej* [Kontusz and tailcoat. On symbolics of costume in the 18th century Polish literature], Warszawa 2015.

M. Taszycka, *Pasy wschodnie, Katalog zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie* [Oriental sashes, A catalogue of the collections of National Museum in Kraków], Kraków 1990.