

Swiss costumes

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Despite the exiguity of her territory, Switzerland is subdivided into innumerable distinct regions and has given birth to a great variety of costumes. The similarity and differences of form in these popular fashions were determined, not by geographical frontiers, but by the physical features of the country itself — here a broad, open valley easy of access, there the barricade of a mountain wall. Properly speaking, there is not in Switzerland, any more than in other more extensive regions inhabited by peoples of different races and subjected to diverse influences, a real *national* costume. The belief that popular costumes are the heirloom of a far-distant past has proved a fallacy which must be attributed to the Romantic conception. In point of fact, the most ancient characteristics of this distinctive form of clothing cannot be traced further back than the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, as has been proved by the patient research of Julie Heierli. The Swiss popular costume really came into being in the XVIIIth century and had already reached its apogee by the end of that same century. A direct relation can be traced between this rapid evolution and the development of class-consciousness among the peasantry, which culminated naturally in the conception of the equality of rights as edicted by the French Revolution. For, it must be remembered, the popular costume is the dress of the peasantry and not of the town-dweller. Country folk were long distinguished by the costume they adopted. The popular costume can therefore be considered quite rightly as the emblem of a class, and such it was as long as it remained the sole garb of country populations, that is to say with its triple hierarchy of working, Sunday and ceremonial clothes. The wearing of costumes, as it is practised to-day, and whatever the ethical grounds on which the practice is based, springs from an entirely different reason, because costumes are no longer — or, at least, hardly ever — a usual form of dress, especially in towns where, in point of fact, they never were adopted: they are worn now for demonstration, put on and taken off at will, as one would do an evening gown. Costumes strike a discordant note and look rather like fancy dress when the wearers persist in clinging to artifices which belong to other styles and are therefore inharmonious: lip-stick, for instance, hair dyes, fancy hairdress and nail varnish.

It is true that popular costumes were always inspired by town fashions and their unmodishness was always proportionate to the distance separating the centre of influence from the region in question. The more outlying the district, the longer the old styles remained in vogue, and vice versa. However, the fundamental change in taste manifested in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, which crystallized in international styles known as *Rococo* and *Empire*, and in national styles termed *Second Empire* and *Biedermeier*, also proved a determinant factor in the evolution of popular costumes. The influence of the Rococo style, gay, rich in line and colour, has not entirely disappeared from the costumes worn on the Swiss Plateau and in Central and Eastern Switzerland, whereas the women's costumes in the Hasli (Bernese Oberland) and Guggisberg districts, as well as in the Canton of Vaud, are very reminiscent of Second Empire styles.

1 « Ceremonial costume of young betrothed couple in the Canton of Schaffhausen. »

The servant (on left) is wearing the costume of Hallau. The fiancée is wearing the nuptial crown; her hair hangs in plaits for the last time. Note the handworked belt.

Water-colour sketch by Joseph Reinhardt (1749-1829) for the series of copper engravings published under the title « Collection of Swiss costumes » published in 1819 by Birrmann & Huber, Basle.

Courtesy of the Prints and Engravings Room, Basle Museum.

2 Fiancée of Guggisberg.

Her hair hangs in plaits and she is wearing a «Schapel». About 1816. («Schapel», Fribourg dialect: the word is derived from the French «chapeau»). Water-coloured pen-sketch by Georges-Louis Vogel. Courtesy of the Swiss National Museum, Zurich.

3 « Ceremonial costume of betrothed in the German-speaking region of the Canton of Fribourg. »

The fiancée is wearing the «Schapel» or nuptial crown of gold sequins. The two women are wearing the ceremonial costume with ruff, pendant and pleated skirt adorned with coloured ribbons. Under the fiancée's apron appears the inserted

COSTUMES

The improvement in travelling facilities brought about in the last century by the building of mountain roads, the establishment of Alpine stage-coach services and, above all, by the railroads, caused the inhabitants of outlying districts to come into more frequent contact with the rest of the world. In this way, age-old customs and characteristic practices, which had passed into the rank of traditions, began to crumble, to loosen and finally to disappear. The men whose trade or craft carried them far afield were the first to abandon their peculiar type of dress which attracted too much attention outside their little home world: the women, however, continued to wear their costumes for many decades and still have not entirely given them up in certain parts of Switzerland. In this, as in other spheres of life, women have exercised a conservative influence.

At first, the peasant costume was made only of home-produced fabrics and accessories. After the status of the peasantry had improved with the rise of the farming classes, the costumes became more refined and were enriched by the addition of imported materials, such as velvet, silk, laces, silver ornaments and gold sequins. These fineries reflect the historical relations of certain regions with the outside world. The Canton of Schwytz, for instance, which supplied mercenaries to the Royal House of France, always remained the most submissive to French influence. The Cantons of Vaud and Geneva were attracted by Savoy, the Southern valleys of the Grisons and Ticino were influenced by the Brianza region (south of Lake Como), Eastern Switzerland by the Swabian Bodan and the Allgäu district, while the Frick Valley drew closer to the Austrian Hotzenwal.

Among the Alpine group to which they belong, the Swiss costumes are characterized by their sobriety and harmony. They also present certain bold yet delicate forms, especially in the women's ceremonial head-dresses which seem in many cases to take no account of the inclement weather and high winds of the Alps. Swiss costumes were never extravagant or eccentric and, despite their valuable ornamental accessories, always retained a certain air of homeliness. Winter and summer costumes do not show any great differences. Coats were rarely worn, warm shawls being used as a substitute: women further protected themselves against the cold by wearing several skirts at the same time.

The costume formed part of the affianced bride's trousseau and, enriched by a few accessories reserved for married women alone, remained the pride of the comely goodwife her whole life long and often served as her burial dress. The ceremonial costume reflected the wearer's status, as it were. It indicated whether she was married or a spinster and, by the value of the ornaments and quality of the fabrics, her social rank. Her personal taste was expressed in the choice and arrangement of the ornaments. Thus, despite its apparent uniformity, the costume was never a uniform, but an individual and distinctive form of dress.

MARGUERITE PFISTER-BURKHALTER

Dr. ès lettres.

band of cheap material which forms the front of the skirt. The fiancé's trousers are of swanskin.

Water-colour sketch by Joseph Reinhardt (1749-1829) for the series of copper engravings published under the title « Collection of Swiss costumes » published in 1819 by Birmann & Huber, Basle.

Courtesy of the Prints and Engravings Room, Basle Museum.

④ Young Bernese girl in the bright-hued costume of the Rococo period; short sleeves, long laced bodice and supple straw hat.

Coloured line-engraving in the style of Gabriel Lory the Elder.

⑤ Woman of the Nidwald in short-sleeved Sunday costume. Her plaits are held by a silver pin; the underbrim of her straw hat is lined with printed calico. *Hand-coloured lithography by François-Nicolas Kœnig (1765-1832), printed by Haller, Berne.*

⑥ Young girl of Lucerne in Sunday costume; short sleeves, wide straw hat, petticoat longer than the skirt. Round her neck she is wearing a typical pendant called the « Daili ». In the background can be seen the town of Lucerne.

Aquatint by an anonymous artist: 2nd half of the XVIIIth century.



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