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### COMMON ELEMENTS IN THE TOWN COSTUME WORN IN SERBIA AND GREECE IN THE 19th CENTURY

In this paper we shall discuss the town costume as it was worn by Serbian women and the so-called «Amalia's costume» worn by Greek women during the 19th century. This highly original costume, which is a common cultural property of the two peoples (Serbs and Greeks), has not yet received a proper and systematic treatment from the historical and cultural point of view. The existing studies treat this costume for each people separately, without entering into a comparative analysis. We shall mention some authors of these studies among Serbs—M. Jovanović, D. Stojanović, B. Krstić, Lj. Prošić, and A. Hadžmihali and Z. Popi among Greeks. However, some passing remarks concerning the similarity between the Serbian and Greek town costume can be occasionally found, especially in the catalogue «The Town Costume in Serbia», compiled by Dobrila Stojanović and published on the occasion of the exhibition held at the Museum of Applied Arts in Beograd in 1980.

A comparative study of both costumes as a common property of Serbian and Greek middle-class society leaves many problems open and arouses many associations, suppositions and dilemmas. Unfortunately, our limited time does not allow us to enter into a broader analysis. We shall, therefore, concentrate on two problems only, first, how to account for such a striking similarity that exists between the Serbian and the Greek town costume, and, second, where to look for the genetic roots of individual parts of this costume?

To begin with, we shall give a short, comparative description of this costume.

The *košulja*, chemise, made of silk cloth and richly embroidered round the neck and on the edge of the sleeves, was worn close to the body.

The *fistan*, with Serbs, and *fustan* or *kavadhi* with Greeks, is a long dress with a short waist to underline the bust; its upper part closely fitting, with a heart-shaped opening in front, is fastened with small buttons all the way down below the waist. The lower part of the dress, *suknja*, skirt, is gathered in rich folds. The sleeves could be either with a slit or without it, of normal length or even longer than the arm, with

a fan-like ending and a slit on the inner side. The fistan or fustan was made of striped silk, mostly of brocade. Such materials were adorned either with woven or with embroidered floral ornaments. This article of clothing is embroidered with gold threads or braids round the neck and on the edge of the sleeves and the skirt.

The Serbian *libade*, or the *kondogouni* in Greek, a tightly fitting bodice open on the bust, was worn over the fistan. The front parts are sometimes prolonged towards the centre in an oblique way, but they can be straight or more or less rounded as well. Occasionally, they are fastened with a button. The sleeves, as a rule, are long, ending in an ample opening. They are sometimes provided with a smaller or bigger slit on the inner side. This article of clothing attracts our attention not only on account of its cut, but especially because it is richly adorned with gold, less frequently with silver thread. The golden embroidery was applied on the front parts, but it was especially conspicuous on the back and on the sleeves. The embroidery on the Greek condogouni was executed in a much richer ornamentation than on the Serbian libade. The basic ornament consists of stylized flowers with richly marked details such as potflowers, trees with branches and leaves, and wine-like and similar flower ornaments which are also stylized in geometric patterns.

In this bodice the animal representations have been given special prominence. On the whole they consist of realistic or stylized birds often represented in the act of picking the leaves of some plant. Prominent among these motifs is a two-headed eagle, so frequent in the Greek condogouni, and which can be occasionally found in the oldest specimens of the Serbian costume. The two-headed eagle is represented either in a realistic or stylized manner.

The *fes* (kalpaki), a shallow headwear of red felt, decorated with a tassel (papaz), made of braid of silk, gold or silver threads, is worn on the head. The tassel was fixed to the fes through a hole in the centre, specially provided for this purpose. The length of the tassel varied, and sometimes it hang as far as the shoulders. The fes could be worn in several manners. In Serbia women wound around it a thin silk kerchief, *bareš* and adorned it with gold jewelry (a sprig studded with diamonds, and a ring). The *tepeluk* was a small, round fes. In Greece it was made of gold or of silver in the shape of a disk. It was fixed to the upper part of the fes and was executed in filigree or was shaped with a hammer. A bride in Greece wore for her wedding a gold or sil-

ver tepeluk, often decorated with precious stones<sup>1</sup>. The tepeluk covered with pearls, arranged in rows of small cones, was worn by Serbian well-to-do women. In Vranje (Serbia) the tepeluk was made of silver filigree in the shape of small buds and each bud was decorated with various precious stones<sup>2</sup>.

A comparative description of the Serbian and Greek town costume from the first half of the 19th century, which was in use in some towns as late as the beginning of the 20th century, has revealed a striking similarity both with regard to their cut, materials used and manner of dressing, and the use of decorative elements and the manner in which they were arranged. At that time the town womenfolk, including the Serbian princess and the Greek queen, were dressed alike, the only exception being that the richer women had dresses made of more costly material, adorned with richer gold embroidery, and wore tepeluku made of gold or pearls, as well as richer jewelry.

The first question we are posing here is how to account for the striking similarity and common features that exist between the Serbian town costume and the Greek «Amalia's costume».



For centuries Greeks and Serbs have been closely interrelated from the historic, demographic, economic, cultural and artistic point of view. The historical events that took place at the beginning of the 19th century, marked with the Serbian and Greek uprisings against the Turkish domination over the Balkans, are of particular importance for the subject we are dealing with in this paper. The emergence of new, independent states and the abolition of Turkish feudalism, have brought about great political and economic changes in these countries. The links existing between Serbs and Greeks have become stronger and have become particularly evident in the trade and handicrafts. In this sphere contacts have grown more intense every year.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the Greek and Tzintzar population constituted the dominant part in the demographic structure of Serbian towns. They left their imprint on the town inhabitants of that time. These two ethnical groups played great role in the estab-

1. Z. Popi, *Broderies et ornements du costume grec*, Athènes 1966, 19.
2. J. Hadži-Vasiljević, «Vranjska gradska nošnja ranijih godina», *GEM* VII, Beograd 1932, 26.

lishing of the new middle-class society and in their life in general, and their influence has been particularly felt in the costumes and the manner in which they were worn.

In their efforts to attain a better, more beautiful and worthwhile life, the burgeoning middle-class society became aware of new aesthetic imperatives, which were particularly manifested in the manner womenfolk dressed.

The town costume, an article in great demand, was one of the artisan products of the time. Not only ready-made articles of clothing but all the textile fabrics necessary for the making and adorning of the clothes could be bought in the shops. Silk and cotton were imported from Thessalonici, Serez, Thessaly and Epyrus. The cloth of which fistan was made was purchased in Constantinople. Thus, for example, the merchants from Zaječar imported the fesese for women from Thessalonici. Koukoulides and Sakhelides, the merchants in Beograd, of Greek origin, in a separate department of their shop sold all that was necessary for the town costume, as well as ready-made articles of this costume. The tepeluk adorned with pearls could be bought there, too<sup>3</sup>.

This costume, especially its parts adorned with gold embroidery such as libade - kondogouni, was made by famous artisan-tailors, «terzije». The biggest centres for the gold embroidery on the Balkans were in Janjina, Sirako, Kolorites, and it is to these artisan-tailors that we are indebted for the most beautiful specimens of this town costume. In the tailors' shops of Janjina 1200 needles were employed. Prominent among these was the tailor's shop of Kostos Bitsios, from Sirakoso by origin. Some forty tailors worked for him, and his shop could make up to 1000 costumes a year<sup>4</sup>. At the beginning of the 17th century an association of professional embroiderers with gold thread existed on the island of Heptanese in Greece. Other towns in the Balkans were famous for their gold-embroidered costumes, to name only Kruševo with its distinguished artisan-tailor Mihail Kicos, and towns like Bitolj, Prizren, Peć, Skadar, Niš, Vranje, Beograd, and others. The costumes they made reached all parts of the Balkans, especially those in Serbia and Bosnia. They were exported as far as Egypt and Tuni-

3. B. Vladić-Krstić, «Gradska nošnja u Zaječaru», *GEM* 42, Beograd 1978, 287.

4. A. Hadžimichali, *Costumes nationaux helléniques* I, Musée Benaki, Athènes 1948, 19.

sia. The costumes were made after the fashion of the local models, which were customary in the countries they were sent to<sup>5</sup>.

In Turkish times the Christians from Vranje enjoyed the reputation of the best embroiderers with gold and silk thread in Serbia. As the time went by they even surpassed in their skill the Moslem artisans. Until the liberation of Vranje Apostol Tomo Hristić employed in his workshops about 30 to 40 master and apprentice embroiderers with gold thread<sup>6</sup>.

Textile fabrics necessary for the town costume were imported into the Balkan countries from the East and the Mediterranean. From the account-book kept by Petar Andrejević, a merchant from Peć, we have learned what kind of textile fabrics were imported in the middle of the 18th century. Large quantities (measured by «aršin») of the finest cloth in red, blue, green and purple, velvet, silk and especially gold and silk threads. He also imported a special kind of felt of which fesese were made. Andrejević sold his merchandise to tailors-terzije in Niš, Vranje, Pirot, Leskovac, Beograd and in other towns of Serbia<sup>7</sup>.

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The second problem we want to discuss in this paper raises a question of genesis of some of the clothing articles of the town costume. We have fallen into the habit of looking upon this costume as a medley of attractive and aesthetic details, representative in their ensemble, and some authors have too easily and very conveniently found the genesis of this costume in the Turkish substratum. Nothing could be less true than such a priori conclusions, for the facts are pointing to other approaches. It is true that Serbian people referred to this costume as «Turkish», because some articles of clothing belonging to it had been worn exclusively by Turks during the period preceding the liberation. This is evident even from the letter sent by Miloš Obrenović to Naum Ičko in Zemun, on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter Petrija, in which he is asking his friend whether her dresses should be «European» or «Turkish»<sup>8</sup>.

5. D. Antonijević, «Ustanički kostim Srba i Grka», *I Grčko-srpski simpozijum*, Thessaloniki 1979, 234.

6. J. Hadži-Vasiljević, *op. cit.*, 10.

7. D. Antonijević, *op. cit.*

8. M. Gavrilović, *Ispisi iz pariskih arhiva, Građa za istoriju I srpskog ustanka I*, Beograd 1904, 729, napomena 3.

Viewed as a whole, the town costume has not come into being spontaneously. Some parts, if not all, have been created gradually, in a long anthropogenetic process. The special and most prominent accent it received has come from the Levantine (oriental) cultural layer. Behind the harmonious unity of this costume lies a very archaic basis, much older than the 19th century.

The oriental influence was felt all over the south-east part of the Balkan peninsula much more before the Turkish invasion, especially through Byzantine connections. Greek people has, after all, been in close relationships both with Asia and Northern Africa. Byzantine culture itself has been shot through by oriental elements, which have been transmitted to the Balkan peoples.

It is a well-known fact that since the time of the Crusades, when trade links between the east and the west had been established, European fashion has been under the Oriental influence of varying intensity<sup>9</sup>. Long, broad sleeves on the so-called Čepkendolama (dolman), a purely Oriental element, entered into the Gothic costume worn by men and women, during the Crusades<sup>10</sup>. During the 19th century the Oriental element was reintroduced in the Empire Period, when turbans, tunics à la mameluc, large shawls for wrapping and scarabs became the highest fashion<sup>11</sup>. In addition to some articles of clothing the Romantic Period introduced also oriental motifs<sup>12</sup>.

Two things, in our opinion, are of major importance when ascertaining the origin of the libade-kondogouni, one of the most typical and beautiful articles of clothing of the town costume. The first is the cut of the bodice and the material used, which in its basic characteristics displays traditional Levantine features. The second element, a little more complex and difficult is the technique of the golden embroidery as well as the ornamental motifs which point to a somewhat more remote past.

As far as it was possible we have found out that there are two different techniques used in embroidery with gold thread. In the older technique gold thread is embroidered direct onto the fabric of the clothes, and it was secured on the underside by ordinary silk with

9. F. Bucher, *Histoire du costume*, Paris 1965, 173.

10. M. Gušić, «Nošnja senjskih uskoka», *Senjski zbornik* V, 1971-1973, 28.

11. F. Bucher, *op. cit.*, 344, 346, 348, 359, 366, 392.

12. M. Prošić-Dvornić, «Ženski građanski kostim XIX veka», *Zbornik Muzeja primenjene umetnosti* 24/25, Beograd 1980/81, 18.

invisible stitches. The more recent technique applies gold thread onto the cloth without using silk, so that almost as much gold thread is used on the wrong side as is used on the right side. In the former technique threads had to be carded, spun, twisted like filigree and cut. For this process it was necessary first to hammer metal into thin leaves which thereupon were passed between two cylinders in order to achieve greater pliancy and softness; leaves are then cut into narrow stripes which are wiredrawn and in the form of thread used for the embroidery<sup>13</sup>. This spirally spun gold thread, in Greece known under the name of *sirmakisiki*, was used in the 17th century to embroider the kondogouni. Great technical skill was necessary to apply this thread onto the fabric. Gold thread spirally spun was cut into smaller bits which were then fixed one next to the other with invisible stitches of silk thread. The adornment was presented in its endless motif so that the ends could not be detected<sup>14</sup>.

The embroidery with gold thread was cultivated in Greece from the Byzantine Era until the very end of the 19th century. Artisans worked in their workshops, but women embroiderers were also hired to work for them in their homes. The wiredrawn gold thread was known and used in embroidery already in the Ancient World, but it reached its highest point in the workshops of Constantinople and Thessaloniki. Between the 10th and 13th centuries the objects made of gold and silver reached their golden period in Byzantium<sup>15</sup>. Constantinople was the centre and the main market for the masterpieces of Byzantine craftwork, for fabrics in glittering colours, for rich gold embroidery and for jewelry, for priceless golden costumes. For a long time, Constantinople supplied the Balkan countries with all that could satisfy refined taste and a higher standard of living, and that developed an idea of intellectual and material refinement<sup>16</sup>. Beside Constantinople, Thessaloniki was the next big town in Byzantium and served as a link between the Byzantine world and the Balkan countries. Merchants and customers from all over the Balkans used to congregate there on for the fair which was held on St. Dimitry's day, the patron saint of the town.

13. D. Stojanović, «Umetnički vez u Srbiji od XIV do XIX veka», *Muzej primenjene umetnosti*, Beograd 1959, 15.

14. Z. Popi, *op. cit.*, 15.

15. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

16. J. Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, Beograd 1969, 12.

Among other things, various forms of gold embroidery were exported from this big trade centre<sup>17</sup>.

According to the data found in Serbian Medieval sources, Serbian courts had their own workshops for golden embroidery. The biographer Danilo speaks of rich presents offered by King Dragutin in his own country and abroad, specifying that precious gold-embroidered costumes were made at his court<sup>18</sup>. The same can be said of our monasteries where nuns were busy embroidering with gold<sup>19</sup>. The technique of applying gold thread direct onto the fabric was also known in Dubrovnik in the 13th and 14th centuries<sup>20</sup>. It is certain that in Serbia gold embroidery was applied as decoration on sacral objects and on priest's vestments all the way through the so-called Turkish period, until the end of the 19th century.

Bearing all these facts in mind, it is possible to assume that the gold embroidery on the libade and kondogouni is not accidental. As if it had come down from the «ikons», to quote the words of a contemporary, it takes us back to the Byzantine and Medieval tradition, fraught with Oriental accents, which are older than the Turkish invasion. This opinion, which I hold in common with several other authors (J. Cvijić, Z. Popi, A. Hadzimihali, etc.) is further born out by the ornamentation itself, which together with the traditional technique of the «sirmakisiki» embroidery lends an archaic feature to this costume.

We have already pointed out what kind of ornamentation can be encountered on the libade-kondogouni. We have particularly underlined that the two-headed eagle occupies a special place. Let us take a brief look at one specimen, the principal ornament on the kondogouni from Epyrus, made of black silk (Fig. 28), displaying a sure taste in the composition of gold embroidery on the sleeves, where one eagle with one head was represented, whereas a two-headed eagle with a crown was embroidered on the back, where there was more room to display it<sup>21</sup>.

17. Š. Dil, *Balkanska kultura u doba Vizantije, Knjiga o Balkanu I*, Beograd 1936, 104.

18. Danilo, *Životi kraljeva i arhiepiskopa srpskih*, Beograd 1935, 44.

19. D. Stojanović, *op. cit.*, 11-12.

20. Đ. Petrović, «Prilog proučavanju kulturnog kontinuiteta u materijalnoj kulturi Jadranskog područja», *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 21, Split 1980, 670.

21. Z. Popi, *op. cit.*, 28.



The two-headed eagle was the principal ornament in the motifs used in Byzantine art, and it was consistently used in gold embroidery. It was particularly popular during the reign of the Paleologues. It can be encountered even today in all the spheres of Greek traditional folk art. The fabrics with two-headed eagles made in Constantinople, and their application to the gold-embroidered costumes could be worn only by highest dignitaries and «despots» and «sevastokrators».

Fabrics with two-headed eagles were imported from Byzantium into Serbian Medieval provinces. The capes worn by Stevan and Radoslav on the frescoes of the Mileševa Monastery with two-headed eagles embroidered upon them are explained by the family relations that existed between the Nemanids and the Comnens. In this particular case the motif of the two-headed eagle should not be interpreted as a heraldic emblem but as a textile decoration. It is not easy to determine whether the early examples of the two-headed eagle found on the «azdijas» (long jackets) have been woven into or embroidered on the fabric. On the two «azdijas» that come from the 14th century the two-headed eagles were embroidered onto the fabric. The two-headed eagles displayed on the «azdijas» of the portrait of Oliverina and on the women portraits in Mali Grad at Prespa have been painted over an ornamental fabric<sup>22</sup>. (According to the definition given by Vuk Karadžić, «kolasta azdija» is a kind of long jacket).

The two-headed eagle goes among the most frequent and popular motifs used in other arts and crafts in the Balkan countries during the Turkish reign. We cannot enter at this point into the semantic, mythological and symbolic analysis of the two-headed eagle used as an ornament on the fabrics, as it calls for a special and separate treatment.

The question arises as to whether the technique of gold embroidery found on the libade and kondogouni and the application of the two-headed eagle could be taken as a conclusive proof that here we are dealing with a continued Balkan tradition, whose origin was in the Medieval Byzantium, or, whether they represent phenomena stemming from the tendencies for the renewing of and returning to old patterns, caused by specific economic and social circumstances? Already at the beginning of the 17th century the renaissance of the gold embroidery on the fabrics took place in Greece, and it was particularly evident

22. J. Kovačević, *Srednjovekovna nošnja balkanskih Slovena*, Posebna izdanja SAN CCXV, Beograd 1963, 196.

on the outer jackets, worn by town womenfolk<sup>23</sup>. No matter whether it was a conscious or unconscious continuation of the tradition or whether it was done in imitation of old models, we can say that workshops for gold embroidery both in Greece and Serbia cultivated and developed the technique of gold embroidery, and transmitted the skill from one generation to another until the very end of the 19th century. Another problem is that it is not possible to establish a chronological order and links between the Byzantine era and the Middle Ages, separated in time from the emergence of the town costume, because of the lack of reliable sources.

Let us now take a look at the genesis of other parts of this costume. The *fistan-fustan* in the elements of its cut and materials used reveals Levantine characteristics. This is particularly true of its long sleeves, often provided with a slit, and which frequently were longer than the arm itself; all these features point undoubtedly to their oriental provenance. In the shape of the neck opening, the manner it is fastened, the kind of decoration and the places to which it is applied as well as the use of textile fabrics of oriental origin, they show great similarity to the «anterija» (type of a long-sleeved coat). However, a characteristic difference between them lies in the fact that Anterija is open on the front part and is worn over the dimije, Turkish baggy trousers, or over a chemise, and it is not cut at the waist<sup>24</sup>.

Visual sources from the end of the 18th century in Rumania represent women dressed after the fashion from Constantinople, wearing the dresses similar to the *fistan-fustan*, but which are not cut at the waist, so that they can be considered as a transitional form between the *anterija* and *fistan-fustan* in the Serbian and Greek variant of the costume<sup>25</sup>.

*Fes* especially the one adorned with a tassel has always been a Levantine product. Thin, silk girdles, and the manner in which they were tied and worn belong to the same cultural substratum.

In spite of the obvious Levantine (oriental) influences and layers of the Byzantine medieval tradition, which we can detect in the Greek and Serbian town costume from the 19th century, we should not ignore

23. Z. Popi, *op. cit.*

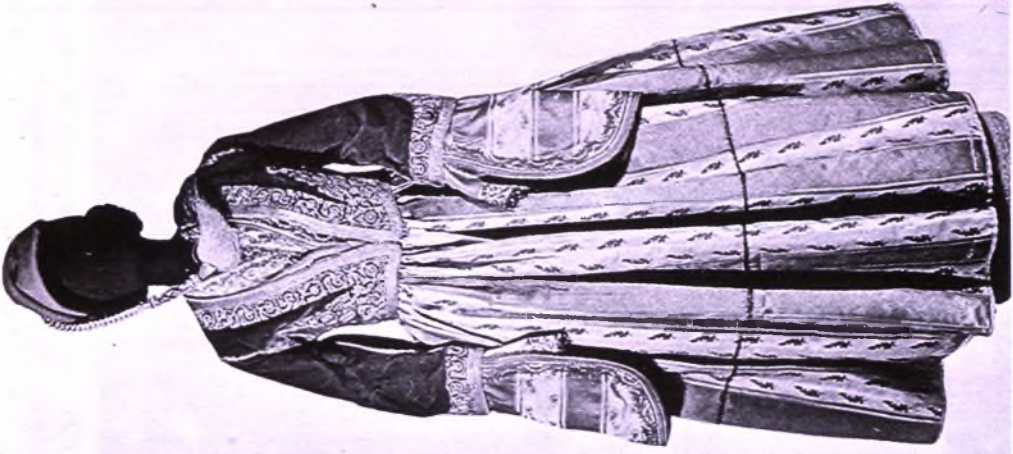
24. M. Prošić-Dvornić, *op. cit.*, 16.

25. D. Stojanović, *Gradska nošnja u Srbiji tokom XIX i početka XX veka*, Beograd 1980 (Katalog izložbe).

the fact that all the influences and imitation of models have more often than not served only as an inspiration and endless source to create, under more or less similar circumstances, an entirely original town costume for women. In spite of the identical and common features that exist in the costume of both countries, there exist inevitable local variants, into which the creator introduced his own aesthetic criteria and artistic expression. Likewise, some minor fashionable details of purely European provenance, introduced in this costume (the neck kerchief, parasol, gloves, handbag, etc.) do not change and disturb the overall unity of these highly original stylistic features, which have been created by the artisans and the fresh impulses given by the burgeoning middle class society in Greece and Serbia in the 19th century.



Fig. 1. Town costume of Serbia (Ethnographic Museum, Belgrade).



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Fig. 2. «Amalia» costume of Greece (Catalogue of Exhibition of Greek Folk Art).



*Fig. 3. Katarina Ivanović, Portrait of princess Persida  
(National Museum, Belgrade).*



*Fig. 4. Jovan Popović, Portrait of a woman in town costume  
of Serbia (National Museum, Belgrade).*





*Fig. 5. Town costume of Greece (A. Hadžimichali, Costumes nationaux helléniques I, Musée Benaki, Athènes 1948).*



*Fig. 6. Town costume of Greece (A. Hadžimichali, Costumes nationaux helléniques I, Musée Bénaki, Athènes 1948).*



*Fig. 7 (a, b). Libade of Serbia (National Museum, Kruševac).*





*Fig. 8. Libade of Serbia (Ethnographic Museum, Belgrade).*



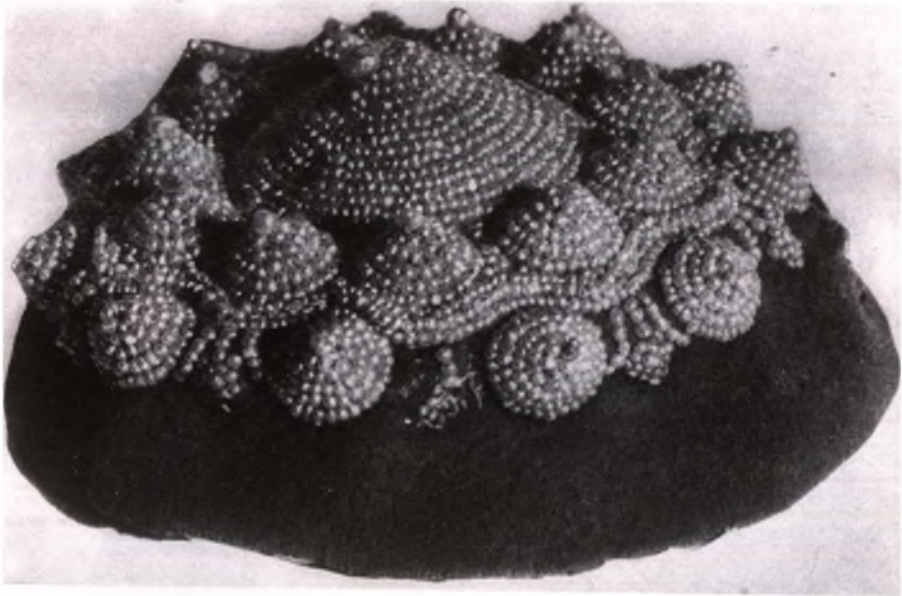
*Fig. 9. Kondogouni of Corfu (P. Zora, Broderies et ornements du costume grec, Athènes 1966).*



*Fig. 10. Kondogouni of Athens (P. Zora, Broderies et ornements du costume grec, Athènes 1966).*

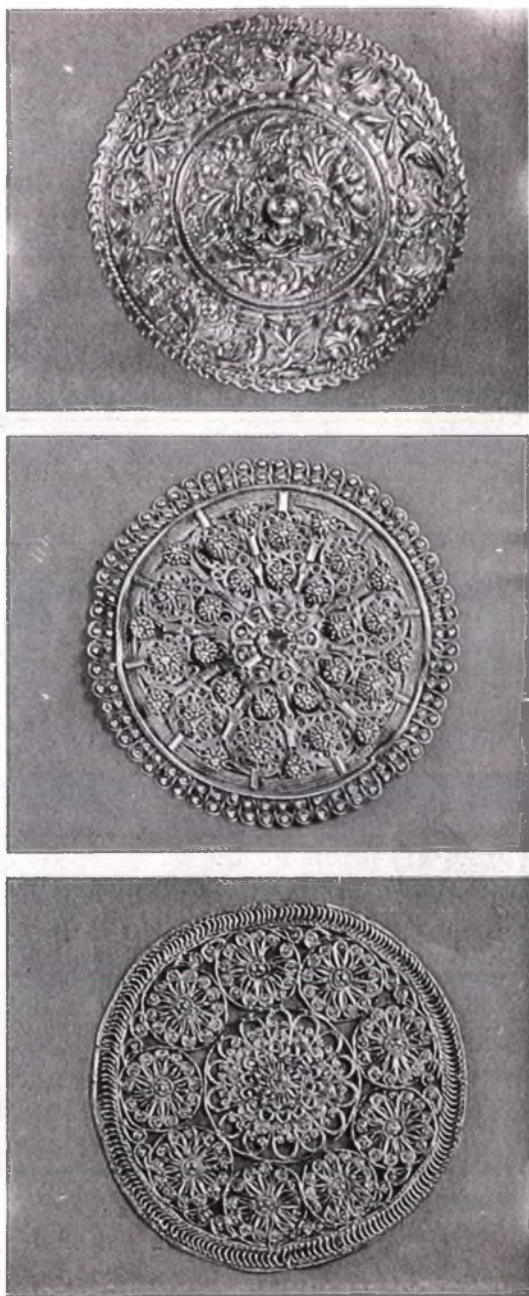


*Fig. 11. Kondogouni of Epirus (P. Zora, Broderies et ornements du costume grec, Athènes 1966).*



*Fig. 12. Tepeluk of pearls (National Museum, Kragujevac).*





*Fig. 13. Tepelika of Greece (P. Zora, Broderies et ornements du costume grec, Athènes 1966).*