

## ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHT INTO THE COLORFUL ZADRIMA: THE ZADRIMA BRIDAL ATTIRE



### Anthropology

**Keywords:** Albania, Zadrime, Archeology, History, Culture, Heritage, Bridal Attire, Traditional Costume, Illyrians, Loom, Yoke, etc.

**Mirela Dragusha**

Teacher of History and Geography; Master of Science in Geography, Albania

### Abstract

This study examines the bridal attire of Zadrime as a fundamental element of cultural heritage and ethnographic identity in northern Albania. Its analysis demonstrates the strong interrelation between the aesthetic function, the ritual dimension, and the determination of the bride's social and familial status. The research highlights the materials employed (flax, wool, silk, cotton), weaving and embroidery techniques, as well as the chromatic symbolism, all of which convey meanings tied to fertility, protection, and continuity of life. At the same time, the Zadrime bridal attire is considered as part of a broader cultural perspective, where Illyrian and Mediterranean cultural impacts (such as Etruria) are reflected in its structure and ornamentation. This study, grounded in Albanian ethnographic literature and comparative sources, seeks to provide a new interpretative perspective by situating Zadrime bridal attire not only within its local traditional framework of local tradition but also as an integral part of the national heritage and, potentially, of the world's cultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

The traditional regional costumes of a country not only reflect the identity of the specific area to which they belong but above all embody the culture and spirit of the local population. Folk costumes represent one of the most powerful manifestations of a nation's traditional culture. They serve as carriers and transmitters of numerous elements that originate from antiquity and the medieval period while at the same time clearly expressing the intercultural relationships among peoples throughout the course of centuries.

Zadrime costume is one of the most beautiful and authentic traditional Albanian attires. It is not merely a garment but a mirror of the spirit of Zadrime. Through it, we perceive the history, traditions, and artistic expression of our people. It has been an integral part of daily life, festive occasions, and traditional rituals; it has functioned as a marker of identity and pride, preserved across generations and preserving elements of ancient heritage. Through this costume, we can read centuries of culture and tradition.

In times when neither formal education nor literature was widely present, traditional clothing, songs, and customs carried the history and worldview of the people, and within this silent system of cultural communication, the "Zadrime bridal attire" assumed the role of a "living book."

Zadrime bridal attire, by virtue of its role and function, constitutes one of the most significant elements of Albanian folk material culture. A closer examination of its constituent components—such as the handcrafted textiles from which it is made, the ornamental components, the artistic forms it assumes, and the decorative functions within—has also emerged as a valuable aesthetic expression.

It is a ceremonial and ritual attire<sup>1</sup> worn by brides on their wedding day in the Zadrime region. This costume represents a complicated synthesis of textiles, ornaments, embroideries, and adornments, all of which carry both symbolic and social functions.

Each component of the attire conveys rich cultural symbols associated with fertility, virtue, spiritual protection, and the bride's social status. The costume holds great significance within the wedding ceremony, and its preparation is often the result of the collective labor of several generations of women in the family. Within the marriage ritual, the act of wearing this attire marks the transition from maidenhood to the status of a married woman, incorporating a profound ritual and communal function.

The moment you set eyes on a Zadrime bride dressed in her traditional attire, you are instantly captivated by its remarkable and unique richness—whether in terms of colors but above all, the numerous elements that comprise it. Without hesitation, one can say that it is among the most elaborate traditional costumes of our country—if not the very one—that, through its abundance of details, achieves completeness and refinement worthy of a princely garment.

## **A HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW OF ZADRIME AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS OF ZADRIME BRIDAL COSTUME**

Zadrime is an ethnographic region located in northwestern Albania, between the cities of Shkodra and Lezha and the mountains of Mirdita. It is a region with a rich cultural heritage. This area, characterized by flat terrain and fertile land, has been not only a traditional agricultural center but also an important cradle of Albanian folk culture. The material and spiritual culture of Zadrime has been shaped through the harmony between its fertile nature and the history of a resilient community that has preserved its traditions with great devotion, despite having endured centuries of invasions and persecution.

From a geographical perspective, Zadrime is located in northwestern Albania, specifically on the left bank of the lower course of the Drin River. This geographical extension, approximately 30 km in length from north to south and 8–10 km in width, has also given the region its name Zadrime, meaning “the land beyond the Drin” along its lower course<sup>2</sup>.

The history of this region has not been documented or discussed as extensively as it deserves, although this land has been inhabited since the earliest times. Nevertheless, references and writings concerning the Zadrime plain can be found among several authors, both local and foreign, reflected in various sources, reports, documents, and publications.

---

<sup>1</sup> Andromaqi Gjergji, “*Albanian Costumes Through the Centuries*,” Tirana 1988, p.69.

<sup>2</sup> Liza Brunga - “*The Churches of Zadrime up to the Council of Arbër*,” p. 59

Zadrime and its antiquity as a region are not entirely unknown to Albanian history and archaeology. Father Shtjefën Gjeçovi (1874–1929), a priest, scholar, and ethnographer deeply passionate about Albanian culture, was also a preserver of the country's cultural heritage. He conducted the first, and perhaps the only, archaeological investigations in this area. On the basis of his findings and studies of graves in Troshan, a village in Zadrime (Illyrian-period graves), Father Gjeçovi compared them with Etruscan tombs in Italy<sup>3</sup>.

\*This testimony, as it seems to me, may be of value for Tarquinia and Corneto, because here, when I happened to open that tomb on the 'Hill of Kuveth,' I found it covered with large bricks, similar to those of the Etruscans."

He discovered ancient tombs, which, in terms of their shape, dimensions, construction method, and content, were compared by him to Etruscan tombs dating back 2000–3000 years. In this work, he also provides several explanations for the burial rites among the Illyrians<sup>4</sup>.

Foreign authors have also written about Zadrime. Among them, John Wilkes, in his work *The Illyrians*, noted, among other observations, "In the Zadrime plain, warrior graves containing numerous weapons are found."

Among other observations, the author noted that the tumuli in the Zadrime plain are contemporaneous with the Glasinac tumulus cemeteries in the eastern part of Sajevo, dating to the Bronze Age. He emphasized the existence of a warrior class but also highlighted the accompanying adornments, stating that the bronze fibulae from Borshat are similar to those found in the Glasinac graves<sup>5</sup>.

It also states that the cemeteries in Zadrime continued to be used until the 4th century, with iron being used for weapons and bronze for ornaments.

Today, Zadrime covers an area of 349 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of approximately 60,000<sup>6</sup> inhabitants. Administratively, it is divided into two counties Shkodër and Lezhë, encompassing approximately 40 villages distributed across four administrative units—Bushat and Hajmel, which belong to the municipality of Vau i Dejës, and the villages of Dajç and Blinisht, which fall under the municipality of Lezhë.

---

\*"Kjo dishmi, si me bâhet mue, mûndet me pasë vjeftje per Tarkivina e per Korneto, se ktû, si me kà rà mue me çil at vorr mi "Koder Kuveth" e gjeta të mblue me tulla t'mdhaja, si ato të Hetruskëve"

<sup>3</sup> At Shtjefën Gjeçovi: "An Archaeological Excursion – Thraco-Illyrian Heritage, An Analstatic Edition – Franciscan Publications, Scutari 2019, p. 54."

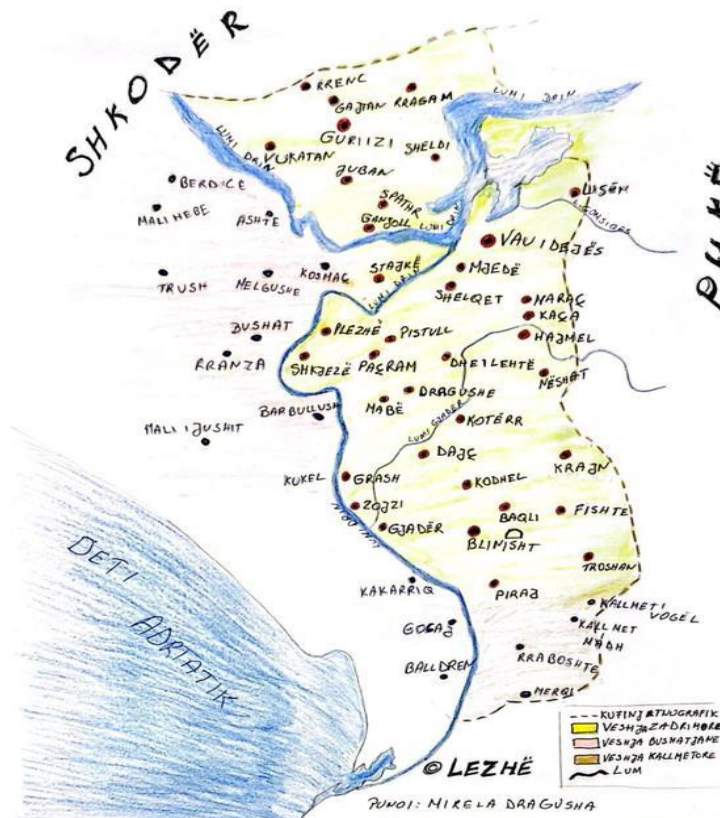
<sup>4</sup> At Shtjefën Gjeçovi: "An Archaeological Excursion – Thraco-Illyrian Heritage, An Analstatic Edition – Franciscan Publications, Scutari 2019, p. 63

<sup>5</sup> John Wilkes – "The Illyrians", USA 1992, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> In the same source, vol. I, doc. 789 p. 58.

The following villages that constitute this region are as follows: Laçi, Vau i Dejës, Mjeda, Shelqeti, Naraçi, Kaça, Stajka Pistulli, Paçrami, Kukli, Plezha, Hajmeli, Dheu i Lehtë, and Nënshati which are under the administration of the Shkodër district. Meanwhile, those belonging to the Lezhë district are: Krajni, Fishta, Troshani, Baqli, Blinishti, Kodheli, Dajçi, Kotrri, Dragusha, Maba, Grashi, Zojzi, Gjadri, and Piraj. It should be emphasized that some border villages, such as: Ganjolla, Jubani, Guri i Zi, Renci, Vukatana and Spathari (in the north), in their customs, traditions, clothing, and social relations, are closely aligned with Zadrime.<sup>7</sup>

## HARTA SKICË ETNOGRAFIKE E ZADRMËS



Ethnographic sketch map of Zadrina (prepared by Mirela Dragusha)

This plain is traversed by the Drin of Lezhë, one of the most important branches of the Drin River, the longest river in Albania, with a length of 285 km. The Drin River, which flows through the Albanian territory, is formed by two major rivers: the Black Drin, which originates from Lake Ohrid near the city of Struga in North Macedonia, enters the Albanian territory and flows

<sup>7</sup> In the same source, vol. I, doc. 789, p. 58.

northward until near the city of Kukës, where it joins the other significant branch, the White Drin, which originates at the foot of Mount Rusolia from the Radavc in Kosovo.

The majority of the territory is completely flat, with approximately 75% consisting of plains. However, it is distinguished by the interweaving of flat and hilly relief. Within the region, several low terrigenous hills rise to heights of 30–100 m (such as those of Bushat and Berdicë), whereas in the northeastern surroundings, the Sheldi–Velë hilly range reaches elevations of 300–600 m<sup>8</sup>.

Historically, the inhabitants of this area have been engaged in agriculture, the main branch of the local economy since then, owing mostly to the fertility of the land. Another important economic activity in the region has been animal husbandry, from which residents obtain not only milk and its byproducts but also wool, which is essential for producing yarn and weaving it on looms. Primarily, the local sheep—referred to by the inhabitants as “*delja e vendit*”—were raised, whose wool was particularly suitable for the production of woollen textiles. In this region, the cultivation of vineyards and olive trees has long been, and continues to be, a tradition, providing high-quality wine as well as olive oil.

As a result of these historical and geographical conditions, the aspects that fully convey the influences and cultural values of this region are its traditional attires in general and the “Zadrime bridal costume” in particular.

The practice of producing the costume and the manner in which it is worn also serve as a means of preserving and transmitting the history of the region through generations of girls and women. Although, over time, some elements have been adapted (e.g., the use of modern materials), the essence and symbolic form of the attire have been faithfully preserved in many villages of Zadrime.

The women of Zadrime, with their craftsmanship, created motifs using a variety of elements, drawn both from nature and geometric forms such as spirals, triangles, rhombuses, squares, wavy lines, discs, six-pointed stars, and crossed lines in the shape of an “X.” When compared with archaeological findings, these motifs reveal genetic and cultural links to the traditions of our ancestors.

Based on studies conducted on the ornamentation used in Illyrian regions and later in Albanian territories, it has been shown that, in addition to their decorative function, these ornaments also carry symbolic meaning. M. Zeqo cites A. Stipčević, noting that the majority of

---

<sup>8</sup> In the same source, vol. I, doc. 789 p. 59

these motifs are associated with lunar and solar symbols<sup>9</sup>, although over time they may have lost this symbolic significance and transformed into simple decorative elements.

The “X” symbol is sewn on nearly all components of the Zadrime attire, including the collar, the legs of the tina, the shirt sleeves, the riza, and other elements. It is believed that this symbol, like the cross with which it is sometimes paired, represents the Sun, and by extension, life<sup>10</sup>—a concept venerated by the Illyrians. Individuals bearing this symbol traditionally held liturgical roles or occupied important positions within their communities<sup>11</sup>.

Other geometric symbols used in specific parts of the Zadrime attire—primarily in the embroidery of collars, shirt necklines, and the legs of the tina—include triangles and rhombuses, which are also symbolic of fertility<sup>12</sup>. However, it can be said that over the centuries, and up to the present day, these motifs may have been transformed into designs of purely decorative character.

The use of these motifs was executed with delicacy and refinement, thereby enhancing the overall beauty of the attire while simultaneously providing compositional unity to the garment, particularly in the areas where embroidery is applied, all without overwhelming or overburdening the design.

In addition to the garment itself, the adornments held great significance for Zadrime women, especially for the Zadrime bride. Here, as well, the attire is complemented by a substantial number of ornaments, contributing to its completeness and richness.

The jewelry of Zadrime women represents a special treasure, not only for the woman who wears them and her family but also for the national culture. When observed attentively, one is captivated by their beauty and the exceptional skill with which they were crafted.”

The details present in the craftsmanship of these ornaments can lead us deeply into history and antiquity, drawing parallels with the adornment of Illyrian women. The exceptional skill and delicacy exhibited in the making of these ornaments could not have been achieved in a single day or over a short period unless their roots reach far back into history. It is understandable and plausible that, over time, they acquired further sophistication under the influence of the eras they passed through.

Let us consider, for example, an element that was widely used by the Illyrians, such as fibulae with circular forms, spirals, or double spirals linked to the ancient motif of the “tree of life.” These forms are still found today in the ornaments of the Zadrime bride, particularly in the strands of necklace with 1 and 3 calons placed on the chest. The symbolism of the cross, present

<sup>9</sup> Moikon Zeqo “*Aspects of Illyrian Mythology*, Tirana - 1996. p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Aleksander Stipčević, *The Illyrians: History, Life, Culture and cult symbols*, Tiranë 2002, p. 293

<sup>11</sup> Moikon Zeqo “*Aspects of Illyrian Mythology*, Tirana - 1996. p. 13

<sup>12</sup> Aleksander Stipčević, *The Illyrians: History, Life, Culture and cult symbols*, Tiranë 2002, p. 359, p. 361

not only in the attire but also in the ornaments, further attests to its roots in Christianity, which spread in these regions as early as the first century through the apostles Saint Paul and Saint Andrew.

The material and spiritual heritage of Zadrime has been preserved and transmitted in various forms, with a special role played by:

collective memory,  
oral narratives,  
archival materials,  
and ethnographic studies conducted by renowned specialists in Albanian folk culture.

**Detailed Description of the Attire** (Materials, Methods of Fabric Production, Elements of the Costume, Colors, Purpose, and jewelry)

In a society without factories, shops, or a textile industry, every garment was handcrafted, from the processing of flax (linen), wool, and silk, and later cotton, to dyeing with natural colors, and finally to embroidery and decoration. This work required time, patience, and skill, making the bridal outfit a true masterpiece of folk art.

Zadrime was known for its mastery of embroidery and the refined technique used to create geometric and floral motifs, which are rich in inherited symbols. For example, these embroideries often feature figures representing fertility, protection, prosperity, or family life.

The making of bridal attire was not an ordinary process; it required long preparation, involving local seamstresses, elderly women skilled in embroidery, and experienced weavers. Notably, the preparation of the entire dowry was a task that demanded time, great effort, and dedication. As soon as a girl reached puberty—or even from the moment she was born—her mother would begin to think about the realization of her dowry.

The placement of each element was determined with the utmost care: from the arrangement of the hair, the wearing of the shirt, the tying of the belt, the placement of the headscarf, the donning of the vests, the arranging of the shawls, and so on, continuing with the positioning of the earrings and the adjustment of the jewelry. It was a true ritual, which symbolically granted the woman the recognized status of a “new lady” in a new household.

Among the earliest materials used for weaving in the past were flax, or *lini*, which, as the inhabitants of the area, called it. In antiquity, for the production of fabric—just as in the European region and beyond—flax was also used in Albania and in Zadrime area. This material, referred to by local women as *lini*, continued to be used in Zadrime until the 1960s–1970s, and in some families, it may have even been cultivated into the 1980s.

Indeed, ethnographer A. Gjergji stated, “The parts of clothing for the broad rural population were produced within the framework of a self-sufficient household economy, using materials derived from agricultural and livestock products, such as leather, wool, flax, hemp, and silk. The oldest hemp fabric preserved in our country dates back to the year 1373<sup>13</sup>.”

Among the materials used by the inhabitants of our country, including Zadrime, for making fabrics for bedding, coverings, and clothing were also wool yarn<sup>14</sup>. Since antiquity, the people of these regions have been engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, providing not only food products but also materials for clothing. The wool threads were dyed with natural colorants using natural dyes derived from plants<sup>15</sup>. Classical authors frequently speak of Illyrian women and their skills in textile production.

The work of women was not limited only to the production of raw material but also went further to its processing, resulting in finished products—whether textiles for bedding and coverings—but above all to meet the clothing needs of themselves as well as other members of the family.

The elements of the Zadrime attire made from wool included the following: the *koreti*, the *dallama*, the belt, the socks (knitted with needles and an inseparable part of both winter and summer clothing, always decorated with various colors and motifs), the *bohçe odalie* or striped cloth, the *mbështjellake* (wrap skirt), the black *boçja* or *faqore*, the vest of the *koreti* adorned with braids (*gajtana*) and *tehri* embroidery featuring geometric motifs, the *strajca* (bag), the blouse worn under the shirt (in ancient times made of finely spun wool thread by hand with a spindle), the *rredi*, the *anteria* of the *koreti* made of *shajak* (thick felted wool), embroidered with braids and *tehri*, with some parts also decorated with gold thread.

Another type of material used in the production of fabric for traditional costume elements is silk. It is one of the oldest and most precious fibers known to humankind and has been recognized since early antiquity in the world’s most ancient civilizations. Produced by the silkworm (*Bombyx mori*), this luxurious material is obtained through a delicate and complex process that intertwines nature, patience, and human craftsmanship. This was an ancient tradition and practice requiring special care and technique, known as the cultivation of the silkworm and the processing of its threads, primarily intended for clothing needs and, above all, for bridal trousseau.

The cultivation of silk during the medieval centuries has been mentioned in several documents, beginning in the years 1335 and 1348<sup>16</sup>, among others. By the late 14th century,

<sup>13</sup> Andromaqi Gjergji, “*Albanian Costumes Through the Centuries*.” Tirana, 1988, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, Department of Ethnography – Albanian Folk Art. *Wool Works on Looms*. Tirana, 1977.

<sup>15</sup> E. Šufflay, *Stadte und Burgen Albaniens*, Wien und Leipzig, 1924, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> L. Thalloczy - C. Jireček – E. Šufflay, *Acta et Diplomata res Albaniae Mediae-Aetatis illustrantia*, Vindobonae, 1913, vëll. I dok. 746, 798, vëll. II, dok. 46.



customs duties on silk were recorded in Shkodër and Drisht<sup>17</sup>. The production process of silk involves a collaboration between nature and humans, which requires time, patience, a clean and controlled environment, and specialized techniques.

For this reason, silk has been and remains a symbol of status, refinement, and exquisite craftsmanship in many cultures around the world.

We are fortunate that today in Zadrime there is a laboratory that still produces silk thread using traditional methods. This is the COLORS OF ZADRIMA laboratory.

Another type of material used for fabric production was cotton, which, in its early use, was imported from Venice for higher quality and later from other regions.

All the work involved in producing the fabric, from which the complete costume and its individual elements would later be made, was done on the *veke* (loom)<sup>18</sup> (Fig. 1). The tradition of working on the loom was passed down from mother to daughter, generation after generation.



Fig. 1. Veku – Vegja (Photo by M. Dragusha)

With this wooden tool, which at first glance appears both beautiful and easy to use, Zadrime women, for hundreds of years, passed down the weaving technique from generation to generation. Through their skill, time, and hard work, they clothed their families and provided their households with a variety of fabrics. This tradition continues to the present day, with workshops established in several areas of Zadrime, such as Guri i Zi, Dajç, Lezhë, and others, as well as through individual production.

These workshops produce garments, bedding, *mësalla* (woven cloths), materials for home decoration, and even curtains for windows.

<sup>17</sup> In the same source, vol. I, doc. 789.

<sup>18</sup> Zojzi, Rrok. *Studies on the National Costume*. Tirana: *Bulletin of the Institute of Shkodra*, No. 3, 1950, p. 70.

## Elements of the costume

Equally important in the ritual of preparing the bride was, among other things, her attire. The elements that comprised the Bridal Costume were not worn randomly; rather, there was a specific sequence of how they were put on. The ritual of dressing the bride was passed down from generation to generation and was meticulously preserved until the early 20th century.

The complete bridal costume comprises a total of 30 elements, which are divided into three categories:

1. Fabric materials are used to make the majority of the costume's elements.
2. Leather materials used for crafting the shoes.
3. Metal materials used for creating the ornaments and jewelry.

### 1. Rredi (Fig. 2)

It was made of wool material, that is, very finely spun wool thread. It was placed over the hair and had two functions:

1. A separating function divides the hair into two parts at the center of the head.
2. A supporting function, as it serves as a “base” upon which small pins or needles are fastened during the arrangement of the headscarf or the draped veil.



Fig. 2 Rredi (Photo Colors of Zadrime)

The *rredi* also had another part called the *kshet*<sup>19</sup>, a small bump of approximately 2 cm, which served to keep the veil (*riza*) slightly raised at the top of the head and to secure it more firmly. The color of the *rredi* was generally red. On its right side, a pendant, usually made of silver, was attached. The *rredi* was traditionally a gift brought by the groom's family.

On this element of dress, the Albanian ethnographer A. Gjergji writes: “The simple everyday *keza* of Arbëresh women, I believe, finds an analogy with that inner head covering, resembling a kind of pouch, which the women of Zadrime used beneath their silk veil (*riza*), to

<sup>19</sup> Mimoza Pjetrat, artisan, Dajç.

gather the hair at the back of the head. Under no circumstances could unmarried girls wear the *keza*<sup>20</sup>, just as Zadrime girls were not allowed to wear the *rredi*.”

## 2. The Socks

They were an inseparable part of the Zadrime costume, knitted with **needles (gjypnyr)**. The oldest model that the bride wore on her wedding day **was** woolen socks reaching up to the knee. The base color of the wool yarn used was **red**, combined with various other colors, such as **yellow, green, blue** and white. The main decorative motif was known as “**with birds**”, hence called “*bird-patterned socks*.”

However, in everyday use and with the passing of time, the knitting of the socks became simpler, yet **red always remained the dominant color**.

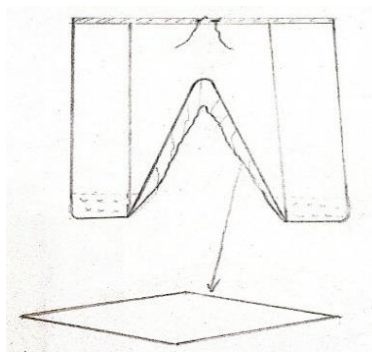
## 3. Undershirt-sweater

Earlier, it was made with finely spun wool yarn, knitted with needles, and later replaced by a cotton knit blouse.

It was worn under the shirt, and typically, light-colored undershirts were used, in shades of yellow or apple green, whereas for the bride, it was a more pronounced yellow–orange but also white for older women. The undershirt was embroidered on the front because this is the visible part when the tunic is worn.

## 4. Rousers or “leggings” (fig. 3)

The first material used to make the *rousers* (tlinta or tlina) was linen - flax, which may also be the reason they are called by this name—**tlinta**, meaning those made from linen, produced by the local inhabitants themselves. The linen threads were finely spun and then processed on the veke (loom), just as was done for the other parts of the costume.



*Pattern sketch of the rousers (Fig. 3) - Sketched by M. Dragusha*

<sup>20</sup> Andromaqi Gjergji, “*Albanian Costumes Through the Centuries*.” Tirana, 1988, p. 214.

Later, the **tlinta** were made from cotton. After the fabric was woven on the veke (loom), it was cut to the appropriate length, embroidered, and sewn, giving it a shape suitable for the dimensions of the girl or woman who would wear it. Obviously, the cutting technique (pattern) was the same for both girls and adult women.

To make this element of the costume, two uncut panels in width were needed, which were placed on the sides—left and right. Two additional panels were then placed at the front and back; here, the fabric was cut to shape both legs. These panels were joined together by a **rectangular piece called a “kindi”**<sup>21</sup>, which also served as an expansion piece, providing greater freedom of movement for the woman during her daily tasks.

The embroidery and decoration of the lower part of the tlinta served two functions:

1. For ornamentation, the beauty of the garment should be enhanced.
2. To preserve the fabric’s durability, where often, in cases where re-embroidery was not possible, the embroidered piece would be reused and incorporated into newly sewn tlinta.

The **embroideries were made with white silk threads** and featured various symbolic motifs (Fig. 4), such as bridges and different geometric patterns, with the diamond shape being the most commonly used, followed by triangles, the “X” sign, and others. These motifs were combined into varying sizes—smaller in some areas.



Fig. 4 The legs of the tlinta were embroidered and finished with a needlework hem at the bottom

## 5. Tunica (Fig. 5)

The **tunica** is a fundamental part of the attire for both men and women. In earlier times, from antiquity and up to a certain point in the Middle Ages, it was made from linen–flax. Later, with the local cultivation of silkworms by families in the region, silk thread was used. The Zadrina

<sup>21</sup> Kristina Ndoci, 62 years old, artisan from Juban

woman's shirt, in terms of its shape and style (techniques of weaving and sewing), can be compared to the attire of women in antiquity. With respect to its origin, women's shirts in this area belong to a single type, known as the **"illyrian dalmatic type."**<sup>22</sup>

The Zadrina woman's shirt also belongs to this type. Originally, it was long, reaching down to the feet, and the cut of its panels followed the same pattern. However, over time, as society evolved, the tunica came to be made only as long as the calf, likely because of the woman's ease of movement and greater freedom during daily tasks.

A second-century CE author, Isidore, wrote, "Dalmaticavestis primum in Dalmatia... texta est"<sup>23</sup>. (Fig. 6). This type of shirt was entirely different from the Greco-Roman or Dacian tunics<sup>24</sup>. Historical documents indicate that the dalmatica was attire worn by broad social strata in Illyrian society and later spread rapidly among early Christians.



Fig. 6 Darenberg's Dalmatica



Fig. 5 Traditional Zadrina blouse

In both of these shirts shown in the photos above, we can observe the following **similarities**: the cut – a single undivided panel at the waist, the front and back sections, the length reaching the calf, and a loose fit on the body. The **only differences** noted are the cut of the neck line and the addition of the "kinds" (small gussets), which are believed to have been introduced later in the Zadrina shirt for practical reasons.

The same cut has been preserved to date. As mentioned above, the shirt, like every other element of the attire, has undergone changes and evolution over the years and centuries, yet we can say that it has retained its essence (its shape). The shirt of the Zadrina woman is made from a single piece of fabric (front and back, uncut at the shoulders), with only the neckline being opened (since after antiquity, the ancient patterns were no longer used and were replaced by needle

<sup>22</sup> Andromaqi Gjergji, *"Albanian Costumes Through the Centuries."* Tirana, 1988, p. 176

<sup>23</sup> Darenberg-get Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*. Tom. II, p.19, note.10

<sup>24</sup> Andromaqi Gjergji, *"Albanian Costumes Through the Centuries."* Tirana, 1988, p. 184



stitching). The sleeves were also attached straight, with a wider width at the lower part, near the wrists. Its shape almost resembled that of a cross.

The bridal attire was made with embroidery of the “harkate anmunashe” type (Fig. 7) along the hem and edges, which was 100% silk. The fabric was woven on a loom using the *two-thread* technique, with a width of 50 cm, and the total length of the cloth usually reached approximately 7–8 m.

This type of shirt requires great care, as it is made entirely of silk, and as is well known, silk, while being beautiful, also demands careful handling because it is very delicate.

***The tunica is a very important element in the dowry of every girl who is married.***

Usually, a girl would receive 1–2 “harkate” shirts as part of her dowry, whereas several “anë” shirts were included for everyday wear, typically numbering 10–15 pieces. In general, the bride received approximately 15–30 shirts in her dowry; of course, the exact number depended on economic means. These shirts were of the “harkate” type, whereas another kind was the “melez” shirt—a combination of cotton and fine silk threads—which was also used for making the riza (a type of overgarment).

Great care was given to opening the shirt at the neckline, that is, at the front. It was opened slightly or more fully in a V shape (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7 Harkate image



Fig. 8. The neckline of the pattern was cut into a V- shape (photo by M. Dragusha)

The tunica of the Zadrina woman was cut to a unique method, as shown in the pattern sketch (Fig. 9).

1. Front part of the tunica
2. Back part of the tunica
- 3–4. Sleeves of the tuica
5. “Kinde” of the tunica (triangular pieces of fabric inserted into the tunica to widen it from the waist down to the shirt’s length).

In total, there are 9 kinde: 2 large and 2 small on one side and 1 large and 4 small on the other side.

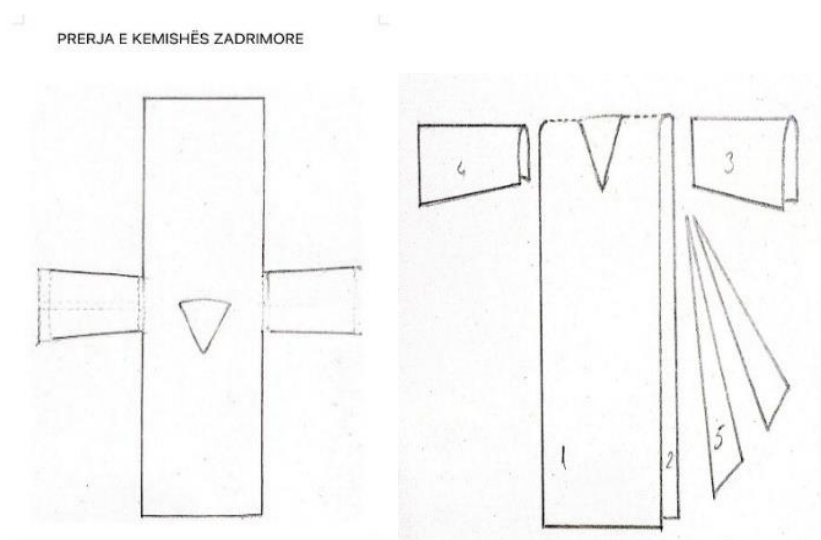


Fig. 9 Sketch of the tunic cut (made by Mirela Dragusha)

Embroidery was a separate process used to further adorn the shirt. It also expressed the artistic spirit of the Zadrime woman and her particular care in selecting decorative elements, each of which carried its own meaning and significance. The larger the embroidered area is, the more beautiful the shirt is. The motifs used were especially important, particularly in the chest area, which was visible from the outside.

Decorations were made on the shoulders, the midsection, and the cuffs. Special care was given to the embroidery of the collar and neckline (Fig. 10). Notably, everything was done by hand with a needle, starting with a minimum of 2–3 “bridges,” to which rows were added. The beginning and end of each bridge form a kind of spine called “sheqera” or “kokrra<sup>25</sup>,” which serves as the base upon which the entire motif is built. Other elements included the “legs,” usually in the shape of a triangle or semicircle, over which the “large bridges” or “small bridges” were laid, followed by the “krymet,<sup>26</sup>” and so on.

With these elements, numerous motifs were created, such as the “cartwheel,” among others. This style of collar embroidery is not found in any other garment. Then, this part (the collar and neckline) was placed over the already cut part of the shirt to provide beauty, elegance, and refinement to the collar area.

<sup>25</sup> Academy of Sciences of the P.S.R. of Albania, Institute of History, Ethnography Sector. *Albanian Folk Art: Works in Crochet and Needlework*. Tirana: 1976, p. IV.

<sup>26</sup> In the same source, p. IV.



Fig. 13 Different patterns of the collar and neckline of the “harkate” shirt, embroidered by hand with various motifs (photo by M. Dragusha)

*It is also very important to highlight embroideries with various shapes, where diamonds of different sizes, X-shaped signs, cross forms, floral motifs, and others are presented.*

#### 6. Koreti - The yoke (Fig. 11)

Yoke is among the most beautiful, finest, and most distinctive parts of Zadrime bride's attire. It was worn on the wedding day and thereafter only on important celebrations. In the Zadrime region this is an essential element of the bridal costume, which is crafted with high skill. Even if the family could not afford to make it themselves, they would certainly find a way to obtain it for the wedding day<sup>27</sup>.



Fig. 11 Koreti

<sup>27</sup> Tereze Gega, artizan Lezhë – Artistike Zadrime



According to the renowned scholar and Albanologist F. Nopça, until the beginning of the 20th century, in Zadrime, the yoke was called a “xhokë.”<sup>28</sup> Zadrime yoke is a type of yoke in which the upper body is cut separately from the lower body.

The yoke is composed of two parts: the upper part, or vest portion (above the waist), without sleeves, and the lower part, or skirt portion (below the waist), which consists of panels and is roughly oval in shape.

The technique used to make the yoke was the four-thread weave, through which the piece called “shajaku” was created—a fabric made with fine wool threads and tightly pressed. The entire piece was woven on a loom. Two colors were used: red and black.

The front part of the yoke had no panels, allowing it to remain straight and maintain its beauty. Another element, the “futa,” or in the days after wedding, the “bohçet,” was also incorporated.

The length of the yoke almost reached the knees, and since the garment was made entirely of shajaku, its weight as part of the bride’s attire ranged from 14-18 kg.

The embroidery pattern with “gajtana” was skilfully executed on the sleeves to enhance the beauty of the garment and maintain a consistent line of workmanship, including at the seams where the parts of the yoke were joined. The yoke was brought as part of the bridal trousseau by the groom’s family.

## 7. The belt

It was made with wool threads from local sheep, selecting the best, longest, and softest wool. The entire piece was woven on a loom using the **four-thread** technique<sup>29</sup>.

The colors (dyes) of the threads were chosen according to preference. Cherry red predominated, beautifully interwoven with various stripes, mainly yellow, green, or blue, whereas black was always used either for side contours or as a divider between colors.

Its width ranged from 15–20 cm, whereas its length was 3–5 “pash” long (1 pash = 1.51.8 m). In the end, the belt also had a “thakë” (fringe), whose length varied according to preference.

<sup>28</sup> F. Nopcsa, *Albanien, Bauten Trachten und Geräte Nordalbaniens*, Leipzig 1925, p. 164

<sup>29</sup> Luçe Pjetri 62 vjeç – artizan from Hajmeli

### 8. The fine vest, or Maniku (with “sumulla” and “fodulle”).

The bride wore it on the wedding day. It was made using the four-thread technique and was very tightly woven. The material used for the vest was cotton, which was woven entirely on a loom. The colors were predominantly red, with thin stripes in yellow. The embroidery was done in yellow thread. It was worn beneath the *anteri* and above the yoke.

To enhance its beauty and elegance, the vest was adorned with **sumulla** (Fig. 12), crafted with filigree—usually 10 sumullas made of silver or other gilded materials, as well as materials that did not tarnish—and **fodulla** (silver plates, Fig. 12).

The sumulla and fodulla were made by skilled filigree artisans, with the main centers for their production located in the cities of Shkodër and Prizren.



Fig. 12 Sumulla Fodulle (*Photo Colors of Zadrima*)

**9. Futa:** It is black or dark blue, made of linen or cotton, woven with very fine threads, slightly loose in density, and lightly beaten. It was woven on a loom using the two-thread technique, with a uniform surface and a width of 70–80 cm, and worked on a wide shuttle.

Zadrima belongs to the group of futa with a horizontal placement of the material (woven across the body). It was decorated on both sides, at the top and bottom, with a red or beige stripe. As an element of the attire, it serves two functions:

1. It was worn at the front on the wedding day, making it essential for that occasion but also on other important days, for example, when the bride went to church, and so on.

2. Its second function was that the woman would preserve it and use it on occasions of death, even as a headscarf, which was placed over the white riza, completely covering the head. The futa was also used by elderly women; on the day of a funeral, the woman would wear the futa and then place the black headband around it.

### 10. Silk scarves (Fig. 13)

The bride usually places 10 scarves at her waist in different bright colors. When folded, they formed a small triangle at the top. They were fastened with pins or small-headed needles at the waist—five on one side and five on the other.

They are usually made of silk in colors such as yellow, red, orange, or pink. These scarves were generally purchased by the bride herself, but the groom would bring two of them—one at the engagement and one with the bridal trousseau.



Fig. 13 Silk headscarves (*Photo by M. Dragusha*)

### 11. Fine front part (Fig. 14).

The bride wore this element of the attire if wedding took place in the spring, summer, or autumn. The fabric was woven on a loom. The weaving technique used was the four-thread method, and the threads were made of cotton. The body part of the garment was simpler, whereas the sleeves received greater attention and were crafted using the fine vest technique.



Fig. 14 Fine front part  
(*Photo 'Colors of Zadrina' on the left and by Mirela Dragusha on the right*)

The fine front parts were decorated on the lower part of the sleeves, which were embroidered with **gajtana** and **tehri**. Stripes made with gold thread were also added. The color of the fine front part was always predominantly red. The fine front part, or delicate front part, were worn over the vest with the **sumulla** (a traditional small bag or pouch).

## 12. The anteri of the yoke were worn in the winter. (Fig. 15)

*It is made of **shajaku** (wool), which is woven entirely on a loom using the four-thread technique.*



Fig. 15. Anteria of the Koreti (photo by M. Dragusha)

The embroidery was done entirely by hand with a needle, using **gajtana** in different colors—red, white, black, and orange—carefully coordinated to match the decorations of the yoke, artistically combined. The embroidery also included **tehri**, a technique that further enhanced the beauty of the garment. The motifs used were diverse, primarily floral and cross, with tehri a particular emphasis on these designs. The anteri made of **shajaku**, or the yoke's anteri, was worn when wedding took place in the winter season.

## 13. The yoke vest (Fig. 16)

It was woven on a loom entirely made of wool using the **shajaku** technique and the four-thread method. For decoration and to harmonize with the yoke, it was embroidered with **gajtana** and **tehri**. This element of the attire was worn over the **shajakuanteri**, as it was paired with the anteri worn in winter, that is, when the wedding took place during the winter season.



Fig. 16. The yoke vest (photo by M. Dragusha)

#### 14. Vests with **gajtana** or with gold embroidery (Fig. 17)

The fabric used to make this element of the attire was, in earlier times, woven with linen threads and later with cotton threads. It was woven entirely on a loom using the four-thread technique. For decoration, embroidery with **gajtana**, mainly made of silk, was used, as well as **tehri**, all of which combined beautifully and harmoniously.

The beauty of this element was further enhanced by the use of gold threads or threads gilded in gold (the threads were wrapped with gold or dipped in gold), which were skillfully interwoven through the embroidery, creating a variety of forms and even combinations, such as floral motifs in the shape of a cross, adding greater elegance to this element of the attire. Gold strips (fabric woven with gold threads) were also used. It was worn not only over the *anteri* but also over the vest with the *fodulla*, without an *anteri*. The *Zadrima* woman also wore this vest with a wrap.



Fig. 17. Vest with **gajtana** or vest with gold embroidery (*photo by Mirela Dragusha*)

The embroidered motif in gold on the back of this vest (Fig. 17, a) is particularly interesting. It is oval in shape and made with gold threads using the wrapped-wire technique, which gives the embroidery a relief effect and visual richness.

At the center of this motif is a stylized floral ornament (Fig. 17a1) resembling a rosette flower or a bird with outstretched wings. This form was common in traditional Albanian embroidery, especially in the *Zadrima* region and northern Albania. As a motif, it symbolizes life, continuity, and the connection between nature and the universe.

Around this ornament, a branch-and-leaf motif was used (Fig. 17a2). At first glance, it resembles an olive branch, which, for Catholics, has been widely used as a symbol associated with Christianity, representing peace and longevity.

Another motif shown in (Fig. 17, a3) is a large rosette with four petals, accompanied by a smaller one nearby, both of which are embroidered on both sides at the upper part of the design.



The embroidery continues with another motif, the shape of a grapevine, as shown in (Fig. 17, a4), which entirely surrounds the central part. The depiction of grapes as a motif in embroidery symbolizes fertility, wealth, and the continuity of life. It is also a symbol in the Christian faith, representing wine—the blood of Christ.

Then, the stylization of the embroidery continues with **tehri**, which adds further beauty and refinement, visually emphasizing that the part works in gold at the center.



Fig. 17, a.



Fig. 17, a 1.



Fig. 17, a 2



Fig. 17, a 3



Fig.17, a 4

### 15. Half scarf with floral pattern, or half scarf

As an element of the attire, it may have been added later, as there is limited information about it. More information about this element exists from the 20th century onward. It is an industrially produced fabric with floral patterns. It was placed over the **rredit** to cover it, which was usually red with flowers in various colors. Typically, part of it was meant to extend slightly below the Marama or under the **riza**.

### 16. Traditional scarf worn - Marama

It is approximately the size of a **riza** towel, approximately 1 meter in width (two panels). In length, it is equivalent to two arched towels, approximately 180–200 cm, sewn in the middle with a needle using a **melez** thread and without a hem. At the lower edge, a stripe with a light color could also be added using silk. The scarf was woven on a loom in an arched pattern, white in color, made entirely of cultivated silk, spun and processed by the women of Zadrime. It was fastened on the head with **small-headed pins**, while the remaining part of the scarf was left to flow behind the back and puff over the head.

### 17. Handkerchief - traditionally used as part of bridal or ceremonial attire

On the wedding day, the bride held this handkerchief at her waist. It also served to position her hands when she stepped forward before the guests performed the **temenë** ritual. The handkerchief was made of silk.

## 18. Bridal veil

The exact time when the **duvak** was first used is unclear. It was traditionally worn to cover the bride's head on the day she left her father's house. Earlier, it was woven on a loom with linen threads using the two-thread technique. The duvak was kept on the bride's head until she arrived at the groom's house. It was only removed after the women of the groom's household and the bride's attendant had arranged and prepared her so that when she appeared before the wedding guests, she was presented in perfect form.

The **duvak** was a piece of fabric that extended from the top of the head to just below the chest. It was red in color and always featured religious motifs, primarily the cross—possibly originally woven into the fabric on the loom and later embroidered by hand with yellow threads. The cross was golden-yellow in color. Today, the **duvak** is no longer used.

## 19. Red shoes

These were the fine shoes that the bride wore on her wedding day. She also wore them on other family occasions, such as engagements, weddings, and various family celebrations. They were made of leather. To enhance their beauty and aesthetic refinement, leather is sometimes decorated with embroidery in different motifs and colors, including gold threads. Today, these shoes are no longer produced, but they are preserved in museums or by collectors who feel a spiritual connection to the traditions and culture of the region.

### *Inner Elements of the Zadrime Girl's / Bride's Trousseau*

The bride's trousseau in Zadrime represents one of the fundamental elements of the material and spiritual culture of the region. The preparation of the trousseau was a long process, beginning in the girl's early childhood. In fact, the mother would think about it from the moment her daughter was born, continuing until the day of her wedding. In this way, the trousseau was seen not only as a material possession but also as a "school of life," where the girl was shaped through work, patience, and the skill of her hands. It remains a vivid testimony to the intertwining of folk craftsmanship with social life and to the role that traditional culture assigned to women as bearers of values, aesthetics, and the continuity of tradition.

In addition to the bridal garments, the bride had to wear on her wedding day—and to which she paid great attention—she also worked on other elements of attire that would accompany her not only in daily life but also on various family occasions.

Below, we list some of the other elements of the bride's clothing worn after marriage and in the following years:

**Wraps with panels** – pështjellcë, pështjellake, kotull

**Pështjellak** – faqore or the black *bohça* (decorative cloth bundle)

**Bohças** – (woolen bohça, cotton bohça, or apron)  
**Riza**, etc.

## **Jewelry**

In traditional Albanian culture, especially in northern regions, the bride's ornaments constitute a fundamental element of wedding attire, serving as indicators of cultural identity, social status, and the symbolic beliefs of the community.

In this context, Zadrime, as one of the regions richest in material and spiritual heritage, offers a distinctive model of how the bride's ornaments are closely intertwined with the rites of passage from girlhood to marriage and with the representation of the bride within the context of family and social life.

The jewelry of Zadrime's bride did not serve merely an aesthetic or decorative function; it also held social and symbolic significance (in the sense of providing protection against evil forces). They expressed the family's wealth, artisanal skills, and beliefs associated with marriage.

The heritage of Zadrime's bridal ornaments also serves as a vivid record of family and social life. In most cases, they were passed down from generation to generation, regarded as valuable assets that conveyed not only material wealth but also memory and symbolic continuity. Considering the large number of ornaments a bride wore on her wedding day; Zadrime can be ranked among the leading regions in terms of traditional ensembles. The bridal ornaments here were richer not only in quantity but also in their constituent elements, craftsmanship techniques, and the materials used.

Importantly, the traditional ornaments of Zadrime's bride preserved ancient features reminiscent of those worn by Illyrian women in antiquity, who incorporated beads, coins, and metal elements into their necklaces. Their forms are often inspired by nature—for example, the sun represented by a disc, floral motifs, and similar designs. Moreover, these ornaments reflect the highly developed filigree craftsmanship of the late medieval period and beyond, as well as the influence of international trade, which introduced new materials and decorative elements such as glass and precious stones, which were imported not only from East but also from the West.

This coexistence of old and new elements makes the Zadrime ornament a clear testimony to cultural continuity, as well as to its flexibility in assimilating foreign elements while adapting them according to local tradition. The primary material used in crafting these ornaments was silver, although gold was also employed depending on the family's economic status. The technique used for all the ornaments was filigree work.





**Crown**



**Necklace**



**Silver coin necklace**



**Cross**



**Amulet**



**Strands of neck lace with 1 calon**



**Strands of neck lace with 3 calons**



**Mhyri (ring)**



**Rosary**



**Earrings**



**Medallion Necklace**



**Zadrina Bride** (*photo by Mirela Dragusha*)

## Conclusion

Over the centuries, the Zadrime attire has been preserved and continues to be kept today in old chests or among the bridal trousseaux, which are then worn during various family ceremonies or other events held in the region. In terms of centuries-old authenticity, Zadrime dress is among the oldest and best-preserved costumes in northern Albania.

This attire, in addition to reflecting the richness of our ethnographic heritage, is also a testament to the craftsmanship of local artisans and a proof of our shared cultural identity. The use of multiple colors in an extremely harmonious manner, along with the finesse evident in every detail—whether in delicate embroidery or in the choice of fabrics—speaks to us today of a special aesthetic sensibility and a tradition deeply rooted in the spirit of the inhabitants of this region.

The Zadrime bride's attire is not a mere product of fashion or daily wear but a ceremonial creation that represents the very connection between generations. Each generation has received this attire as a legacy to be preserved and passed on. Girls grew up watching their mothers and grandmothers work on the trousseau, learning not only how to embroider or prepare the fabric but also how to respect and carry an entire identity through the wedding garments in particular and through traditional dress in general.

Today, this attire reaches us as a still-living reflection in which history, aesthetics, symbolism, and society coexist within a single garment. This memory, preserved through the clothing, is now the most valuable source for documenting and analyzing Zadrime bride's attire—not merely as a physical object but also as a reflection of an entire cultural world hidden within the threads of its embroidery.

Despite the waves of history, Ottoman invasions, the spread of Western civilization during the 19th and especially the 20th centuries, and later the prohibitions and standardizations of the communist regime, Zadrime has steadfastly preserved the form and spirit of its traditional costumes. This resilience is an expression of the strength of local identity and of the role the community has assigned, generation after generation, to its spiritual values.

The risk of loss, due to globalization, emigration, and rapid social changes, is very high, making this cultural heritage fragile. Its national and international protection would ensure its preservation, promotion, and revitalization for future generations.

## References

1. Academy of Sciences of the PRSH, Institute of History, Department of Ethnography. (1976). *Albanian folk art: Works with crochet and needlework*. Tirana, Albania: Author.
2. Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, Department of Ethnography. (1977). *Albanian folk art: Wool works on looms*. Tirana, Albania: Author.
3. Brunga, L. (2024). *Kishat e Zadrimes deri në prag të Kuvendit të Arbërit / The churches of Zadrime up to the eve of the Assembly of the Albanians*. Lezhë, Albania: Author.
4. Daremberg, C., & Saglio, E. (n.d.). *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines* (Vol. 2, p. 19, note 10). Paris, France: Author.
5. Gjergji, A. (1988). *Albanian clothing through the centuries*. Tirana, Albania: Author.
6. Gjeçovi, S. (2019). *An archaeological delight: Thraco-Illyrian heritage (Analytical edition)*. Shkodër, Albania: Franciscan Publications.
7. Šufflay, E. (1924). *Städte und Burgen Albaniens*. Wien & Leipzig, Austria: Author.
8. Stipčević, A. (2002). *The Illyrians: History, life, culture, and religious symbols*. Tirana, Albania: Author.
9. Thallóczy, L., Jireček, C., & Šufflay, E. (1913). *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae mediae-aetatis illustrantia* (Vols. 1–2). Vienna, Austria: Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung.
10. Wilkes, J. (1992). *The Illyrians*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Blackwell.
11. Zeqo, M. (1996). *Aspects of Illyrian mythology*. Tirana, Albania: Author.
12. Zojzi, Rr. (1950). Studies on the national costume. *Bulletin of the Institute of Shkodër*, (3), pages if available. Shkodër, Albania: Author.
13. Pjetraj, M., Gega, T., Pjetri, L., & Ndoci, K. (2024). *Interviews on traditional Zadrime crafts* [Unpublished field interviews]. Shkodër–Lezhë, Albania.