

## Technology Preparation of “Xhubleta”

ME. Ongoing PHD, Silvana Nini

University Planetar of Tirana, Faculty of Social Science and Education.  
Collaborator: Institute for Educational Development, Arts Curriculum Development Specialist, Tirana, Albania  
silva\_nini@yahoo.com

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### Abstract

Without any doubt, in the Albanian folk heritage, the greatest interest in terms of dresses appeared to be xhubleta. This is a popular costume known as a distinctive element in traditional dressing of woman in the mountain areas of Northern Albania. Several archaic features make this clothing distinct out of many other popular clothing, making this the most interesting object for study for many researchers. The xhubleta is a complex garment, consisting of several elements that make it complete, and give it a final shape. Each of the components of xhubleta has its own shape, its own size, and features, which by joining together create a harmonious and interesting ensemble. But what is the technology preparation of xhubleta? What are the materials and its elaboration process? What are the cutting and sewing processes that give it the undulating bell form? What is the image that creates this dress? In producing this popular costume it is very important the combination of the material with the cutting way, functionality and the final image created.

**Keywords:** xhubleta, përparje, pëshjtjellaku, kraholi, mëngët, kallcet, postava, kapica, folk heritage, technology preparation, preservation processes, cultivation processes.



Xhubleta, part of the “bell” (fig 1)



Xhubleta, Dhimiter Mborja, 1956, “watercolor”

**Xhubleta**, this important part of the costume, is formed by several elements, where each of them plays an important role in creating the image of the popular costume. Each of these elements is a particular object of study in their form, ways of sewing, and symbolic motifs, to ensemble then in a whole costume. Without doubt the most dominant element of “xhubleta”, in creating his image, is part of the “bell” (fig 1), so named just by its similarity with the object. Considering the modern techniques of cutting, this part of the “bell” will classify  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the circle cutting, but it certainly contains quite interesting individual specifications. Part of the bell is formed from several strips of felt, sewn into horizontal line, and “spiku” used to unite them, which are known as “ivat e xhubletës”. The felt used is a product manufactured within the household and mostly is obtained from sheep’s wool. The process of making the wool fiber with “furka” is followed by a weaving process using a double junction technique. After the fabrics is weaved, it is refined the process of “dërstita”, which gives the desired shape felt. Water, and friction through the blades, allows the homogenization of the wool fiber (feature wool material) making the felt dense and thick. This is the way that felt is prepared to be used for sewing the

"*xhubleta*".

According to measurements made while shaping the "*xhubleta*" we could build a technical outline of its spiku strips as they appear to us in the dress (fig.2). What we observe is the progressive increase of the strips length of "*xhubleta*" that are located at the bottom. This increase is the same as the strips (ivat) made with felt and the ones made with "*spik*". We notice this expansion to the strips (iva) itself, to its upper and lower width, and from stripe (iva) to stripe (iva).



Fig. 2. technical sketches

The margin of the bottom width to the upper width of the "spiku" strips:

2,5 cm, 3 cm, 3,5 cm, 3,5 cm, 4,5 cm, 6,5 cm, 6,5 cm, 8,5 cm, 8,5 cm, 12, 5 cm, 16 cm, 40 cm, 40 cm

1. Up to the 6th strip, we have an extension of the lower stripe width ranging from 2.5 to 6.5 cm.
2. From the 7th-11th strips, we have an extension of the lower stripe width ranging from 8.5 to 16 cm.
3. While the strips nr 12 and nr 13 are extended toward their bottom with 40 cm each.

This remarkable change in the two last stripes (iva) (adding here the strips of respective felt and the white felt at the end) are visible in the oval shape that "*xhubleta*" takes at its end, similar to the shape of the "*bell*". Considering the figure nr 3, which shows us the straight strips on the side, we see how they stand step by step, where the lower base of a stripe does not correspond with the upper part of another stripe that comes after. Noticing these, some questions arise:

1. How these strips join together to create lateral oblique lines that join with the front part?
2. In what way they relate to each other to create the bell shape at the bottom?
3. How the strips made of felt relate to those made of "*spik*"?
4. Which element plays a key role in creating the desired shape?

In the second sketch, we added the felt strips on the empty spaces between the "*spiku*" strips (with interrupted lines), that reduces the difference from stripe (iva) to stripe (iva).

Thus, we have such a reduction of the difference:

1. Up to the 6th stripe, their difference changes from 2-6 cm to 1-3 cm.
2. From 7th -11th strips, their difference changes from 8-16 to 4-8 cm.
3. The last two stripes, 12th and 13 th, their difference changes from 40 cm to 20 cm.

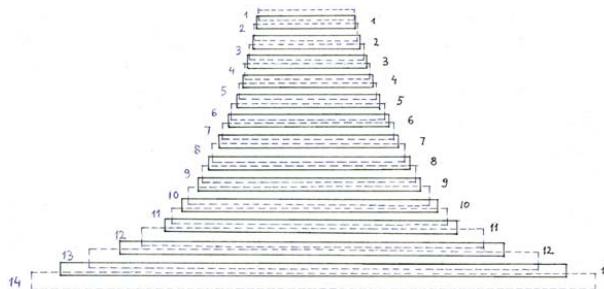


Fig.3. cutting scheme

This softening of the difference is a maneuver toward uniting the strips (iva) with each other. Another factor that makes possible the unification of strips (iva), eliminating side scales, is the sewing technique. To accomplish this, it is enough to turn the inside part of the "xhubleta", where the "creator of xhubleta" does not hide to us the used sewing technique.

The "Spiku" strips are those that play a key role in creating the form of the "bell" of "xhubleta". "Spiku" is the construction or pillar holder, not only for the "bell" part, but in general for the all "xhubleta", because it links all parts of the felt. "Spiku" was made with thin threads of wool painted with black color called "karaboje", like black felt, then woven on basket of "spiku" through "cinglave". This type is similar to knitting and is made possible through the help of the "cinglat e spikut", which more or less have the same role as sweater knitting tools. Such technique creates elasticity and flexibility in the material obtained, as in this case "spiku", although his weaving is very compressed to adapt quite well with the felt material. Having this kind of flexibility, strips of "spiku", obtain more easily the proper form of the felt strips (iva), to even those in itself (by way felt is processed) have a manipulation opportunity, gathering with a slight wrinkle in the upper width in order to get of the desired shape of the arch. "Spiku" strips are placed on the felt strips and sew with woolen thread. "Spiku" strips have a height varying from 3.5 cm to 4.5 cm, all visible in the upper part, while the visible part of the felt strips, between "spiku" strips, vary in height from 1 - 2.5 to 3 cm, and only in two rows the height grows more. The felt strips vary from 5-6 cm in height, but a good part of their height is hidden after strips of "spiku", the inner side. Such placement of strips gives the part of "bell" more thickness and sculptural form, and at the same time it makes invisible the slight wrinkles of the felt strips. It is said that "good xhubleta stands", this is achieved with the quality of the compacting strips of felt and strips of "spiku". In some cases felt strips are covered with black velvet. Regarding the front of "xhubleta", the back part and holder strips, (fig 4) they are on the bell-shaped function. The whole "xhubleta" is created with felt pieces, which "spiku" relate to each other and decorates them at the same time. We saw the pieces of felt cut needed for the strips for the bell. We see these pieces in the front, where seven of them are placed in a symmetrical manner, a long strip in the center and three parts located on both sides of the ribbon.

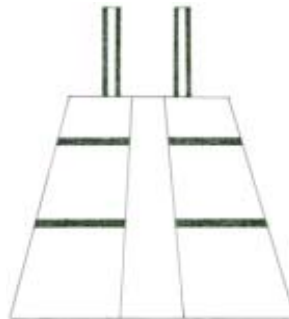


Fig. 4. Technical sketches, represents the front of xhubleta.

This part has trapezoidal shape, with greater width in the lower part.

The roundabout at the waist is about 130 cm. About 50 cm belongs to the "bell" strips part and about 80 cm belongs to the front. Of course the question is why all this latitude?

Firstly, we will explain the functional side of the dress: "Xhubleta" is a dress that women wear not only on the wedding day but also at other periods of life. In dowry they obtained five "xhubleta", so that they were suitable for women physiological changes, such as pregnancy or physical change.

Secondly, if we see in aesthetic terms, considering the standard of female beauty at that time, and the visual form that "xhubleta" is worn by mountain woman, this "xhubleta" latitude of the waist makes a woman's figure robust and with a stable and solid stature. Its folding on both sides increases the width (which certainly does not lose waist effect due to large waves of establishing in the bottom of xhubleta), and presents a more robust female figure which "will be able to afford the house works", but that also expresses the local aesthetic requirements. In the upper part, "xhubleta" connects with two belts - the front and the back. Even this part of "xhubleta" is made with felt and with "spik", and is proven to be insufficiently solid to keep the weight of the bottom. The making of the upper part in this way, enables the weight of "xhubleta" not to prevent the easily movement of arms, and to create the desired shape. The back up part can be covered with black or blue velvet and mostly embroidered with black thread.



Fig. 5

Other elements of "xhubleta" is "**përparje**" (fig. 5), which set in the section of the chest of "xhubleta". This part is fixed on the shoulders and on the front part of the waist. "**Përparja**" is prepared completely differently from other parts of "xhubleta". "**Perparja**" takes the shape of the chest without pressing it, because of the material produced. Its side parts are between borders, which are made with lacing of "spiku". Both sides are knitted and are soft and flexible because of the knitting work. This keeps the breast soft and allows its form be visible. So let's say that "**përparja**" plays the role of "modern" brassieres.



Fig. 6. Cutting scheme

"**Pështjellaku**" (apron) (fig. 6) is an important and highly visible part of "xhubleta". This part is placed in front of the body. It has trapezoidal shape, with greater width in the lower part. "**Pështjellaku**" consists of many pieces of felt connected between them with black "spiku". Its constituent part is a square piece of woven woolen thread with geometrical shapes that is located in the upper part of "pështjellaku" before abdominal. The rest of "pështjellaku" is developed around this woven part with felt strips placed horizontally and related with spike in the same way as at the bell of "xhubleta". The felt used, at this part, are about six strips with thicknesses from 4.5 to 7 cm. Felt strips are covered with velvet.

"**Kraholi**" (fig. 7) is the upper garment as a short jacket. Its characteristic is that it formed by use of small pieces of felt that serve to create the desired shape. Visually, the very special feature is the great undulation on the back part (should emphasize that "**kraholi**" does not always show with this back undulation). Although the small pieces that make up the front and the back are tailored made by hand, they look like a whole piece because of the lacing straps placed on it. (fig. 9). Part of undulation is formed by numerous pieces which serve to create the vaulted part (fig. 8).



Fig. 7 & Fig. 8 cutting scheme, undulations part

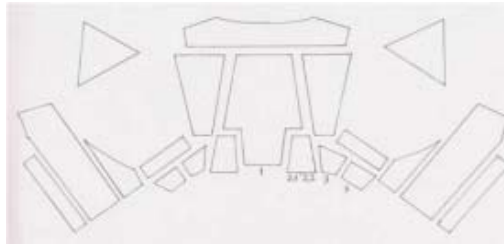


Fig. 8 cutting scheme, upper part

The undulation part, formed by setting of triangular pieces one after the other, which creates a very large width at the bottom, goes up to 3 meters. This undulation part is very obvious, and it is shown by his base on the waist, the back part is 26 cm and it has 10cm +10 cm on both sides. This part of "kraholi" is a full circle and creates very fine undulations on the bottom and back of "kraholi" also showing the accuracy of work and the proper management of this part that is difficult to realize. We notice the good work, as far as regard the cutting and unification of pieces: we see it at the regularity of the undulations and at the symmetry of their development on both sides. If we counte them, starting from the middle, we will see that there are eleven undulation on the one side and at the other, and one undulation at the center. This once again proves the exact calculation of cutting and unification of pieces of felt. On the undulation part, nearly at half of its length, a piece of woolen cloth is set, what makes possible hiding the sewing parts that felt apart. On this part, where the woolen cloth relates with felt, a wide strip of "spiku", made by black wool thread and gold thread, is put also. This strip serves to cover sewing, but it also emphasizes more undulation in this part. On the inside, a wool thread reinforced by some threads, passes from one to the other undulation to keep them well disciplined. The upper and the front part have the shape of waistcoats. Borders are decorated by braids of silver and gold thread, and by embroidery. Generally, waistcoats in folk costumes stay open at the front and here we have the same outcome. This makes possible the harmonization of the chest part, where is "përparja" is placed, and over which are put necklaces of silver or gold. The interesting part of the "kraholi" are the shoulders, hence comes out the name of this element of the dress (in the northern dialect of Albanian language, "the shoulder" means "krahë"). Although simply made, they play an important role in the aesthetics of the suit. Cut into triangle shapes, the ongoing shoulder, together with colored tufts, provide shoulders a more extended form.



Fig. 10. cutting scheme

"Mëngët" (sleeves) (fig. 10) are components part of the "kraholi". They are removable, indicated by the use of "ylyqe". Sleeves are presented with diversity within their kind because of the use of colors at tufts located on the upper, as well as the types of the embroidery. Sleeves are divided into two cut parts, creating the idea of the cufflinks at the bottom, which reinforces by the presence of buttons on this model (buttons are a new commercial element added). The material used here is black velvet, in both the upper and lower part. The use of two types of velvet creates texture contrast. We can see this type of texture contrast on the bottom of the sleeve that the embroidery is made, by using the matt black color thread on shiny black velvet. We can see such a texture contrast in all elements of the dress, at the embroidery as well as the fabrics used, as the base color of all "xhubleta" is black. The inside part of the sleeves are accompanied by the inside fabric that is sewed manually.



Fig. 11. Cutting scheme

"Çorapet" (socks) (fig. 11) are part of the dress of "xhubleta". They have an interesting form that reminds the modern boot. Part of the foot is knitted thread wool, and also decorated with colors (regarding decorations and colors used, they vary in different "xhubleta"). Part of the dress is "opingat" cow leather. The upper part or "kallcet" is black felt and covered with black velvet. At the ankle it sews with the sock part, and has a height of about 30 cm. Since the felt has not elasticity, they are given form of foot, more closed around the ankle lock and expanding on the upper part. For this reason it is not closed as knitted socks, but it is open on the inside where accompanied by "spiku" and both females and males connect it with buttons. This piece is embroidered with black beads and less colored beads.

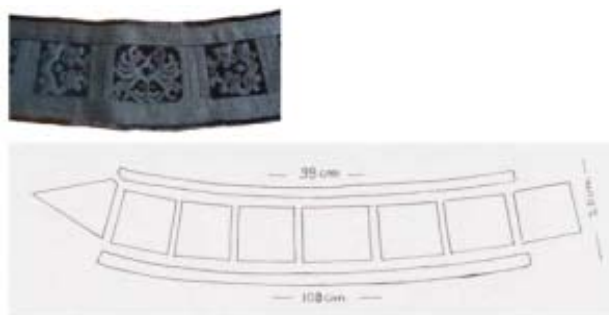


Fig. 12. Cutting scheme

"Postava" (fig. 12) is a belt that serves to be placed around the waist and also serves to tighten "xhubleta" in this part of the body. It is an evident and important part of dress, as for the function, also for aesthetic image of the costume. Even this element is made by felt pieces and strips of "spiku". Its length depends on the size of the body. However its length is also taken into consideration because the part of the waist of "xhubleta" has a considerable width (as we mentioned in part of the bell). Its height is about 20 cm. At the bottom it is longer than in the upper part, and it takes a slight curve. It appears to variations in regards of decoration. On the sides it is decorated by strips of "spiku" with a width that varies by 4-5 cm, which share even an embroidered space from one another. Usually there are seven areas covered with velvet ornamenting it with black lacing and black beads. Usually it is used quite a bit beads of color like blue and red.



"Kapica" (fig. 13) is a kind of velvet cap which routinely is used by young women. "Kapica" is adorned with silver studded, mainly worked with filigrees. Figures used here represent different symbols of the sun and the moon. It has a simple cutting in half circle shape. It is made with a double fabric and becomes concave through a cordon that gathers it on the back. That received shape is made stable in the head with the help of the hairpins. At the back of the "kapica" it is

put the white veil. The veil material is a thin cotton fabric embroidered with white thread with refinement (the highland women have used commercial floral veils). Also in this case, we have a texture contrast white on white, and the aesthetic characteristic of "*xhubleta*" shows us a very refined taste.

In conclusion:

- the technology preparation of *xhubleta* is a very significant indicator of popular creative imagination;
- over the years, the production of these clothes, in their original form, has become impossible, but it is very important that these garments be treated as precious objects of cultural heritage through preservation and cultivation processes and their preparation techniques. This point of view is also the object of study in this paper.

## Dictionary

**Iva spiku:** is a type of strip, made with different thickness thread, which has served for decoration and coverage of sewing on folk costumes.

**Dërstila:** is elaboration process of felt.

**Furka:** is an object which serves to create the wool fiber by hand made process.

**Cinglat:** are cylindrical rods, which serve to woven *spik*.

**Ylyqe:** is a kind of lacing, which serves to connect two parts of the dress through a cordon.

**Opingat:** Albanian leather shoes like moccasins.

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