



Qendra për  
Administrim Social  
Ekonomik Territorial

# ALBANIA

## EMBROIDERED WITH MEMORY

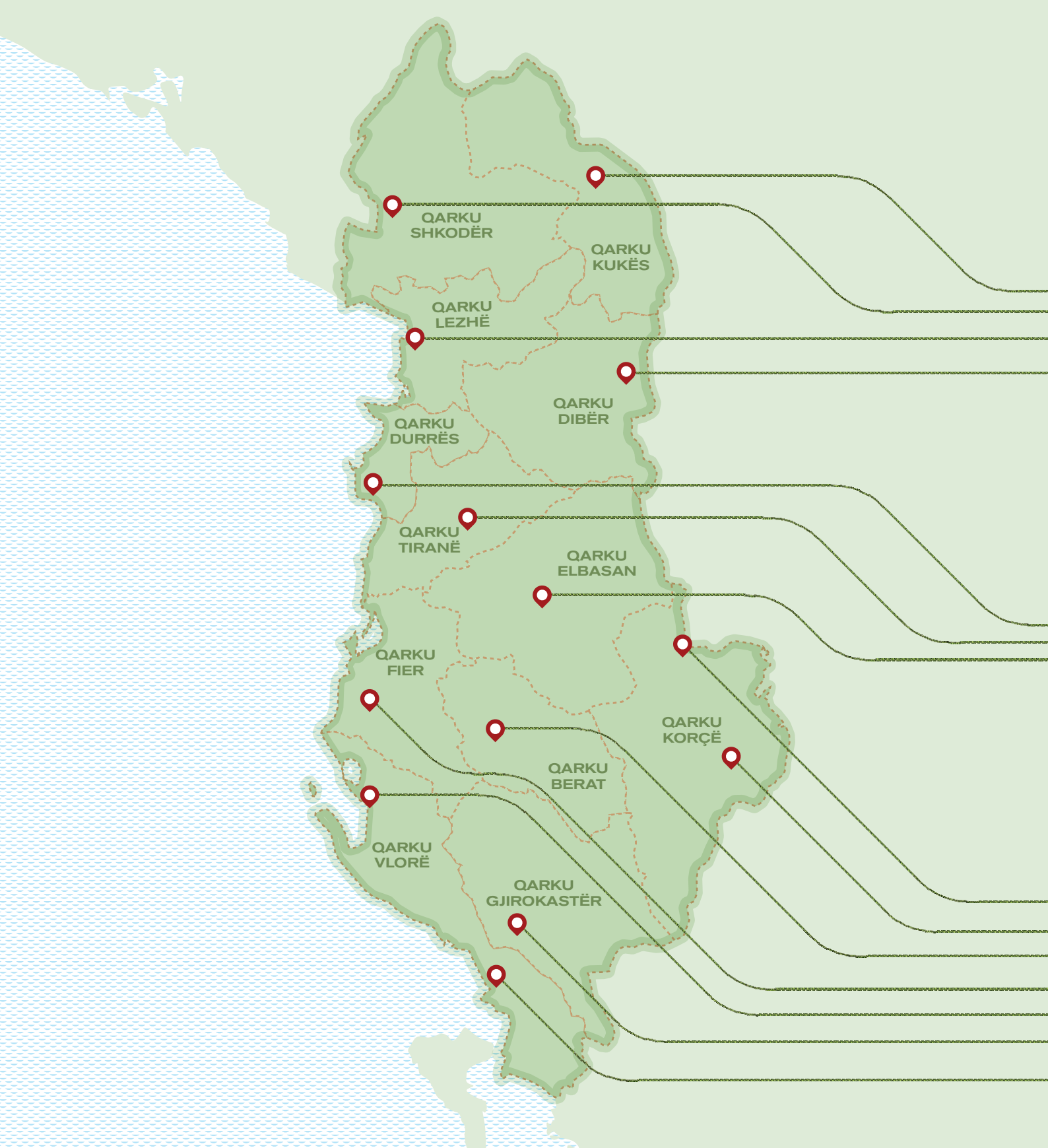




# ALBANIA

## EMBROIDERED WITH MEMORY





QARKU SHKODËR

QARKU KUKËS

QARKU LEZHË

QARKU DIBËR

QARKU DURRËS

QARKU TIRANË

QARKU ELBASAN

QARKU FIER

QARKU KORÇË

QARKU BERAT

QARKU VLORË

QARKU GJIROKASTËR

**KUKËS**



**SHKODËR**



**LEZHË**



**PESHKOPI**



**DURRËS**



**TIRANË**



**ELBASAN**



**VLORË**



**GJIROKASTËR**



**SARANDË**



**POGRADEC**



**KORÇË**



**BERAT**



**FIER**



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Printed by "XXXXX"

ISBN 000-0000-000-00-0

Tirana 2026



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The project "Albania Embroidered with Memory" aims to promote awareness, preservation, and appreciation of Albanian cultural identity through non-political and non-commercial educational activities. Any unauthorized reproduction, modification, or commercial use of the project materials without prior written permission from ASET is prohibited.



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# Summary

This album is dedicated to Albanian folk clothing as one of the most visible forms of cultural heritage. Its purpose is not only to present traditional costumes as aesthetic objects, but also to highlight their connection to the landscape, history, and way of life of the communities that created and wore them.

Within the Albanian lands, characterized by a remarkable geographical and historical diversity, folk clothing developed in various forms, reflecting natural conditions, social organization, and cultural interactions. It varies from one region to another, while at the same time preserving shared elements that make it part of a common identity.

Through this album, readers are invited to explore not only the form and ornamentation of the garments, but also their meaning. Folk clothing is not merely an element of the past; it represents evidence of how communities were organized, how they lived, and how they expressed themselves through material culture. In this context, the album presents the costumes according to the main geographical regions — Northern, Central, and Southern Albania — highlighting both their differences and their interconnections. This approach helps provide a clearer understanding of how tradition has been shaped and transformed over time.

The division into Northern, Central, and Southern Albania helps us better understand how historical processes have been experienced on the ground. Although national identity, language, and efforts toward independence form a shared foundation, the way these elements have appeared and developed has differed from one region to another. These historical differences also provide a basis for better understanding the diversity of Albanian culture and, in particular, traditional clothing, which reflects not only tradition but also the historical path of each region.

Methodologically, this publication is based on a descriptive and comparative approach, drawing upon ethnographic sources, scholarly studies, and documentary materials. It does not claim to present a complete overview of Albanian folk clothing, which is extraordinarily diverse and varies significantly from one region to another. Rather, it seeks to offer a guiding framework that facilitates the understanding of its historical and cultural development, focusing primarily on the last two centuries. The selection and organization of the material have been carried out with the aim of emphasizing the main characteristics and regional distinctions, creating a presentation that is as clear and accessible as possible for the reader.

Finally, this album seeks to contribute to the documentation and preservation of this heritage by bringing it closer to the contemporary reader and placing it within a broader cultural context. In a time of rapid change, returning to these forms of material memory remains a way of better understanding identity and cultural continuity.

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*Researcher/Historian*

*Tirana, May 2026*





**CHAPTER  
I**

*Albania:*  
**LAND, MEMORY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

## The Geographical Position and Spatial Division of Albania

Albania is located in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, in a territory that connects the interior of the Balkans with the coasts of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. This geographical position has been a determining factor in the country's development throughout the centuries. Important communication routes passed through this territory, among the most notable being the Via Egnatia, which connected Durrës with Thessaloniki and further with Constantinople. This positioned the Albanian territory within a zone of continuous economic and cultural interaction, where influences arrived from different directions.

Although relatively small in size, with an area of 28,748 km<sup>2</sup>, Albania presents a remarkable diversity of terrain. In the north and east lie prominent mountainous regions, such as the Albanian Alps in Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjin, as well as the deep mountain massifs of Tropoja and Dibra, which create a rugged landscape often difficult for communication and movement. In these areas, valleys and river courses have frequently served as the only natural corridors connecting settlements.

Meanwhile, the western part of the country opens into the coastal lowlands, where fertile plains such as those of Durrës, Kavaja, Lushnja, and Myzeqe are located. Historically, these areas have been more favorable for agricultural development and the establishment of stable urban centers, creating conditions for more frequent contact with the Mediterranean world.

The hydrographic network — with rivers such as the Drin in the north, the Shkumbin crossing central Albania near Elbasan, the Devoll originating in the southeast and joining the Osum to form the Seman River, as well as the Vjosa in the south flowing through Tepelena and Fier — has significantly influenced both the natural division of Albanian territory and the organization of settlement and population movement. In many cases, these rivers functioned as regional boundaries, separating areas with different cultural and economic characteristics, while simultaneously serving as natural communication routes that facilitated exchange and the development of settlements along their banks.

The climate varies from one region to another, directly affecting ways of life. In coastal areas such as Vlora and Durrës, the Mediterranean climate prevails, with mild winters and hot summers, while in the mountainous regions of the north and east, such as Kukës, Puka, and Korça, the climate is harsher, with lower temperatures and longer winters. These conditions have also influenced material culture, especially the use of materials and the form of traditional clothing.

Thus, geography has not merely been a natural backdrop, but an active factor influencing economic development, social organization, and the shaping of culture.

This relationship between territory and development remains visible today. Cities such as Durrës, with its history as an important port, Elbasan along the old Via Egnatia route, and Berat and Gjirokastra as preserved historic centers, represent important points of interest for cultural tourism. The northern mountainous regions, such as Valbona and Theth, also attract attention for their landscapes and for preserving a way of life closely connected to nature.





Within this diversity, Albania may be approached through three major geographical divisions: Northern Albania, Central Albania, and Southern Albania. This division should not be understood as a fragmentation of territory or national identity, but rather as a form of classification that helps highlight the natural and developmental characteristics of each region. Despite differences in terrain, climate, and lifestyle, these three areas are part of a single whole, historically, culturally, and economically interconnected, together forming the shared Albanian identity.

Northern Albania includes areas such as Shkodra, Malësia e Madhe, Dukagjin, Tropoja, and parts of Dibra, where the mountainous terrain and relative isolation have contributed to the preservation of traditional social structures. In these regions, community ties and regional belonging have been essential, and this is also reflected in material culture. Folk clothing here appears more structured and functional, closely connected to climatic conditions and ways of life.

Central Albania extends across a more open territory, including areas such as Tirana, Kruja, Elbasan, and Durrës. Historically, this region has served as a connecting crossroads where various influences intersected through trade routes and continuous contact. As a result, ways of life reflect a combination of tradition and change, which is also visible in folk clothing. Traditional garments preserve local elements while simultaneously incorporating external influences in materials and ornamentation.

Southern Albania includes areas such as Berat, Gjirokastra, Korça, Vlora, and Tepelena, where diverse terrain and connections with other cultural spaces created a more open and interconnected development. In this region, cities played an important role in social and cultural life, contributing to the formation of a richer material culture. Folk clothing in the south is distinguished by its elaborate ornamentation and a more pronounced aesthetic sensibility.

Overall, this division helps explain how geography, history, and economic development intertwined to create different forms of living and cultural expression. In this context, folk clothing appears not merely as an aesthetic el-



ement, but as a direct testimony to this interaction — a memory preserved in material, form, and detail.

In this way, the Albanian territory cannot be understood solely through its physical form. Relief, climate, and geographical position created the conditions, but it was historical development that gave concrete shape to life within this territory. Political changes, social movements, and contact with the surrounding world, especially during the last two centuries, directly influenced the way communities were organized, how they lived, and how they expressed themselves through material culture.

In this sense, to better understand the differences and similarities reflected in Albanian folk clothing, it is necessary to focus on the historical developments of the last two to three centuries — a period in which tradition and change coexist and visibly intertwine.



## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

To understand Albanian culture, and especially folk clothing, it is necessary to examine, in summary form, the historical path of the country. Albania did not develop as an isolated space, but as part of a region where political, cultural, and economic influences from different directions intersected.

In antiquity (ca. 8th century BCE – 5th century CE), the territory of present-day Albania was associated with the Illyrian populations and later with the Roman Empire (2nd century BCE – 5th century CE), which established a developed network of cities, roads, and trade centers. After the division of the Roman Empire, these territories became part of the Byzantine Empire (5th–11th centuries), although its control was not continuous and was challenged by other regional powers. During the Middle Ages (5th–15th centuries), the Albanian lands became part of the complex political developments of the Balkans, passing under various forms of rule, including Bulgarian, Norman, Angevin, and Serbian domination, while also witnessing the formation of local Albanian principalities.

An important moment of this period was the resistance led by Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1443–1468), who succeeded in uniting part of the Albanian principalities and organizing successful resistance against the Ottoman Empire for 25 years, creating an important point of reference in Albanian history and identity.

At the end of the Middle Ages, from the late 14th century and throughout the 15th century, the Albanian territories gradually came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which lasted for several centuries and deeply influenced the political, economic, and social organization of the country. Nevertheless, Ottoman rule did not completely replace local structures. In many areas, especially mountainous regions, communities preserved their customs, forms of organization, and language.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, within the broader framework of national movements in the Balkans, the Albanian National Awakening developed, ultimately leading to the declaration of independence in 1912.

An important aspect to understand is that Albanian society was not homogeneous in religious terms. Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities coexisted within it. However, unlike some other countries in the region, Albanian identity relied less on religion and more on other unifying elements — above all, the Albanian language and shared traditions.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Language, Identity, and Efforts Toward Self-Organization**

The 19th century represents a decisive period in the formation of modern Albanian identity. During this time, the Ottoman Empire was weakening, while various national movements were emerging throughout the Balkans. In this context, Albanians also began to articulate more clearly their belonging as one of the oldest peoples in the Balkans.

One of the most important elements in this process was the Albanian language, upon which national con-



sciousness was built. Efforts toward its standardization, the spread of education, and the publication of texts in Albanian were essential for preserving identity within a territory divided into different regions and religions.

The opening of Albanian-language schools and the creation of cultural societies in cities such as Korça, Shkodra, Elbasan, and Gjirokastra were not merely educational initiatives. They carried a clear national, political, and cultural character, aiming to create a shared national consciousness at a time when borders and influences in the Balkans were being reshaped.

Parallel to this cultural development, continuous uprisings against the Ottoman administration broke out across Albanian territories. These uprisings, which took place in regions such as Kosovo, northern and southern Albania, and beyond, were initially local in character, but over time became increasingly connected to demands for autonomy and recognition of national rights.

A key moment was the establishment of the Albanian League of Prizren in 1878, which emerged as a response to the threat of the partition of Albanian territories following the decisions of the Great Powers. The League sought to defend these territories and to politically organize Albanian representation. For the first time, the Albanian question was articulated more clearly on the international stage.

## **The Threat of Partition and the Formation of the Albanian State**

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Albanian territories found themselves at the center of competing political interests in the Balkans. Neighboring states and the Great Powers pursued territorial and strategic ambitions, while the Albanians still did not possess a consolidated state of their own.

In this situation, the threat of the partition of Albanian lands was constant. This is a fundamental point for understanding Albanian history: the struggle for independence was not connected solely with separation from the Ottoman Empire, but also with the preservation of the territories inhabited by the Albanian population.

During this period, another important cultural development also took place: the Congress of Manastir in 1908, where the common alphabet of the Albanian language was established. This decision created a stable foundation for the development of education and culture, further strengthening national identity.

The uprisings of 1910–1912 demonstrated that the Albanian national movement had entered a more organized phase. These developments led to the Declaration of Independence in Vlora on November 28, 1912, a foundational moment in Albanian history.

However, in 1913, the Conference of Ambassadors in London recognized the Albanian state but established borders that did not include all territories inhabited by Albanians. Regions such as Kosovo, parts of present-day North Macedonia, and Chameria in the south remained outside political Albania. This reality created a complex situation that influenced the later historical and cultural developments of Albanians throughout the region.







## The Interwar Period: State Formation and Modernization

After Independence, Albania faced major challenges in building the state. The First World War further destabilized the country, while the years that followed were characterized by efforts to consolidate state institutions.

The Congress of Lushnja in 1920 marked an important moment in the establishment of the Albanian state and the organization of its functioning. In the following years, efforts were made to modernize the administration, the educational system, and public life, particularly during the monarchy of Ahmet Zogu.

During this period, the distinction between urban and rural life became more evident. Cities began to change more rapidly, reflecting external influences and processes of modernization, while in rural areas traditional forms of life and material culture continued to be preserved for a longer time.



## The Second World War and the Communist System

The Italian invasion in 1939, followed later by the German occupation, drew Albania into the wider European conflict. After the end of the Second World War, a communist regime was established in the country, which lasted until 1990.





The socialist system introduced profound changes in the organization of Albanian social and economic life. The collectivization of agriculture, industrialization, and the centralization of state power transformed ways of life and the structure of society.

At the same time, this system was accompanied by strict political and social control, limitations on individual freedoms, and various forms of repression against real or perceived opponents of the regime. Political persecution, internment, and censorship significantly affected everyday life and the cultural development of the country.

During this period, tradition did not disappear, but was reinterpreted. On the one hand, many forms of traditional life weakened, while on the other hand, folklore and folk costumes were institutionalized and used as part of a publicly represented cultural identity.

As a result, folk clothing shifted from everyday use to a more ceremonial and representative role, being preserved through festivals, folk ensembles, and museums.



## Towards the End of the 20th Century

By the late 1980s, the socialist system in Albania began to weaken, within a broader context of political changes in Eastern Europe. In 1990, the country entered a period of transition toward democracy and a market economy. This process was accompanied by profound political, economic, and social transformations, including political pluralism, openness to the world, mass migration, and rapid changes in ways of life.

This opening also led to a re-evaluation of how cultural heritage was understood and valued. Traditions, including folk clothing, began to be seen not only as part of the past, but also as an important element of identity within a new social and cultural context.



However, the transition period was also characterized by the weakening of state and cultural institutions, which significantly affected the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. The lack of stable policies, funding, and consolidated institutional structures meant that part of this heritage was neglected or even damaged.

At the same time, globalization and external cultural influences brought new challenges, contributing to a decline in the everyday use of folk clothing. Nevertheless, in parallel with these developments, interest grew in its documentation, preservation, and promotion through cultural activities, academic studies, and relevant institutions, giving it a new role as an identity symbol in a transforming society.

## Historical Developments According to Regions

Although the historical processes of the 19th and 20th centuries affected the entire Albanian territory, they did not unfold uniformly. Geographical conditions, proximity to communication routes, social structures, and levels of urbanization created different rhythms of development in the North, Central Albania, and the South.

This division helps to better understand how identity, struggles for independence, and social transformations were reflected in everyday life and material culture.

## CULTURE AND ALBANIAN ETHNOGRAPHY

Albanian culture has been formed in a space where diverse natural conditions, historical developments, and continuous contacts with the surrounding world have long been intertwined. For this reason, it does not appear as a uniform form, but as a diverse set of expressions that vary from region to region, while at the same time preserving certain fundamental common elements.

For the reader, especially a foreign one, it is important to understand that this culture did not develop only in cities or major centers, but primarily in local spaces—villages, regions, and communities that have lived for a long time under relatively stable conditions. These communities have been the carriers of tradition and have ensured its continuity.

Albanian ethnography shows that for many centuries life was organized around several stable pillars: the family, regional belonging, and the relationship with the environment. Within this framework, tradition is not simply a legacy of the past, but a practical system that has regulated daily life and defined how individuals relate to one another and to the community.



















## FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL ORDER



In traditional Albanian society, the family was the fundamental unit of organization. It was not only an economic structure, but also a space where values, customs, and knowledge were transmitted. In many areas, especially in the north, the extended family and kinship ties played a decisive role in social life.

Relations between individuals were regulated by clearly defined norms that established duties and responsibilities within the community. Although these norms sometimes varied from one region to another, they shared a common function: maintaining social order and balance.

In urban areas, where external influences were more present, these structures changed earlier, but the family nevertheless remained a central element of social life.

## CUSTOMS AND THE LIFE CYCLE

One of the richest aspects of Albanian culture is the customs and rituals connected to the life cycle. Birth, marriage, and death are marked by a range of practices that include symbolic, social, and aesthetic elements.

The wedding is perhaps the fullest expression of this. It involves not only the union of two individuals, but also the connection of two families and, in many cases, two communities. Through ceremonies, music, song, and clothing, the wedding becomes a moment in which tradition is fully expressed.



Likewise, the rituals connected to the annual cycle—such as seasonal celebrations (e.g. Dita e Verës, Shën Gjergji) and practices accompanying agricultural work such as sowing and harvesting—reflect a direct connection with nature and its rhythm. Alongside them, religious holidays (such as Christmas, Easter, and the Bajram holidays), although primarily spiritual in content, unfold within this yearly cycle and are often intertwined with folk customs and practices. Together, these rites marked important moments of the year and organized the daily life of communities, being passed down from generation to generation as part of cultural identity.

## **BELIEFS AND CULTURAL INTERWEAVING**

In Albanian culture, folk beliefs and religious traditions are often intertwined. Elements of earlier belief systems continue to exist alongside religious practices, creating a complex system of symbols and meanings.

This interweaving is also related to the fact that three main religions coexist in Albanian territory: Islam, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy. However, religious affiliation has not always been the main defining element of identity. In many cases, language, customs, and regional belonging have played a greater role in defining cultural identity.



## MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY

Material culture includes all concrete aspects of life: housing, tools, crafts, and clothing. In Albania, these elements have developed in close connection with the environment and ways of life.

Craftsmanship has been an important element, especially in cities such as Shkodër, Berat, Gjirokaštër, and Korçë, where woodworking, stone carving, metalwork, and textile production reached a high level of development. In rural areas, these practices were more directly linked to the needs of everyday life.

Within this context, traditional clothing holds a special place. It is not only a practical element, but also a visible form of identity. Through it, one can understand regional affiliation, social status, and in some cases even the stage of an individual's life. Clothing encapsulates elements of history, environment, and social structure within itself.



























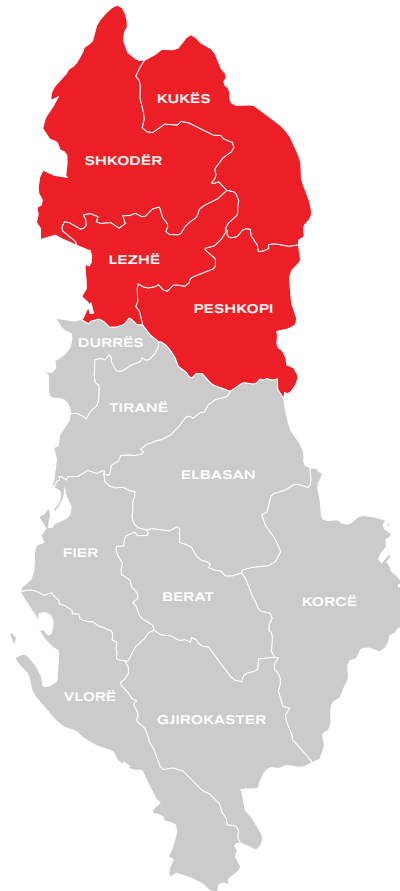






# CHAPTER II

## *Northern Albania*



## **HISTORY**

Northern Albania, which includes areas such as Shkodra, Malësia e Madhe, Dukagjin, Mirdita, Puka, Tropoja, and parts of Dibra, represents a space where mountainous relief played a decisive role in historical development.

During the 19th century, these areas were characterized by a high degree of local autonomy. Social organization was based on kinship ties and customary norms, which regulated daily life and relations between communities. This structure often limited and interrupted Ottoman administrative control.

In this context, uprisings against Ottoman rule found favorable ground. Areas such as Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjin became important centers of resistance, playing a role in the broader movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Shkodra represents a special case within this region. As one of the most important cities in the north, it was a commercial and cultural center with extensive connections across the region. It brought together Ottoman, European, and local influences, creating a more open environment compared to the surrounding mountainous areas.

During the 20th century, especially after the establishment of the communist (socialist) system, these regions were included in processes of centralization and economic transformation. However, due to relative isolation and the strength of tradition, many elements of social life and material culture continued to be preserved longer than in other parts of the country.

In this region, history is characterized by a stronger continuity of tradition and a slower pace of change, which is also reflected in the preservation of forms of folk clothing.

## **CULTURE AND ETHNOGRAPHY**

In Northern Albania, which includes Shkodër, Malësia e Madhe, Dukagjin, Mirditë, Pukë, and Tropojë, traditional culture has been preserved in more stable forms. Geographic conditions and, as a result, relative isolation over the centuries have influenced the preservation of community structures and customs.

In this area, the community and its belonging hold particular importance. Rituals and customs are closely connected to daily life and social organization. Traditional clothing here appears more structured and functional, reflecting living conditions and the need for durability.

## **TRADITIONAL CLOTHING OF NORTHERN ALBANIA**

Traditional clothing of Northern Albania represents one of the most distinctive groups within Albanian costume culture. It was shaped in a region where mountainous terrain, harsh climate, forms of social or-



ganization, and the strong preservation of tradition have directly influenced the appearance, function, and symbolism of clothing.

In this area, clothing was not only a practical means of protection from climate conditions or daily labor. It also served as a marker of identity. Through clothing, one could “read” a person’s region of origin, gender, age, social status, and in some cases even family status.

Northern Albania includes a wide and diverse area: Shkodër and its surroundings, Malësia e Madhe, Dukagjin, Mirditë, Pukë, Tropojë, Has, Kukës, and parts of Dibër. Within this area, clothing shares common elements but also shows clear local differences, making the north a very rich field for studying traditional costume.

A fundamental characteristic of northern clothing is the use of natural materials, especially wool. Wool was closely connected to the pastoral economy and the climatic conditions of mountainous areas. It was used for *tirq*, vests, socks, belts, and other clothing elements. Its processing required inherited knowledge: spinning, weaving, fulling, sewing, and decoration.

The colors in many of these garments are restrained. White and black are especially prominent, particularly in men’s clothing, while women’s clothing more often includes decorative elements, embroidery, and richer combinations. This does not imply aesthetic simplicity; on the contrary, the beauty of northern clothing often lies in the strength of form, the rhythm of cut, and carefully crafted detail.

## **Men’s Clothing in the North**

Men’s clothing in Northern Albania is closely connected to active life in mountainous terrain. It needed to be durable, warm, and suitable for movement.

The most well-known element is *tirq*, usually made of white wool, tightly fitted to the body and suitable for walking in the mountains. They were worn with a shirt, vest or *xhamadan*, belt, and often traditional shoes (*opinga*). In some areas, black embroidery on the *tirq* created a strong visual contrast and gave the clothing an immediately recognizable appearance.

The *xhamadan* or vest had not only practical but also aesthetic importance. It could be simpler for everyday use or more decorated for ceremonial occasions. The belt, beyond its practical function, completed the silhouette of the outfit and often carried meanings related to male status.

Men’s clothing in the north creates an image of restraint, strength, and functionality. It reflects a society where mobility, work, protection, and public representation played an important role.

## Women's Clothing in the North

Women's clothing in the north presents a richer world in terms of form and symbolism. It varies significantly from one region to another and is often closely connected to marital status, age, and the occasion of use.

One of the most distinctive forms is the *xhubleta*, used in Malësia e Madhe and nearby areas. The *xhubleta* is one of the most well-known and ancient garments in Albanian tradition. It is characterized by its unique form, rigid structure, and flared lower silhouette. It is not merely a decorative garment; it represents an entire system of values, symbolism, and craftsmanship.

The *xhubleta* requires a specialized construction technique and is made of many elements carefully assembled. Black is often dominant, while geometric motifs and white or multicolored contrasts give it a strong visual character. It carries a solemn appearance and is closely linked to the identity of highland women.

In other northern areas, women's clothing varies in cut and decoration. Long shirts, aprons, vests, headscarves, belts, and handmade socks are used. Embroidery and the combination of elements are not only decorative; they form a visual language through which local identity is expressed.

## MAJOR CULTURAL REGIONS

### Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjin

Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjin represent some of the most important areas for the preservation of northern clothing traditions. In these regions, relative isolation and the continuity of traditional structures have allowed clothing forms to remain stable over time.

The *xhubleta* is the most prominent element of women's clothing. It is constructed according to a specific logic, where form, weight, and decoration create a powerful ceremonial appearance. It was not worn in the same way for every occasion; differences in use were related to age, status, and event.

Men's clothing in these areas is more restrained in color but very clear in form. The *tirq*, *xhamadan*, belt, and *opinga* form a strong and functional ensemble. This clothing is closely tied to mountain life and to the image of the man as an active member of the community.

### Shkodër and Surroundings

Shkodër holds a special place because it connects the highlands with the city. As a commercial, cultural, and artisanal center, it has absorbed various influences while maintaining a strong connection to local tradition.







Nowe Gold



In Shkodër's urban clothing, there is a noticeable refinement in materials, tailoring, and decoration. Women's clothing often includes richer fabrics and more delicate workmanship, while men's clothing maintains ties to northern tradition but takes on a more urban appearance.

Shkodër is also important for the development of crafts related to clothing: textile production, embroidery, metalwork for accessories, and the creation of decorative elements. Therefore, Shkodër's clothing tradition should be understood as the result of both urban and regional culture at the same time.

## **Mirditë, Pukë and Surrounding Areas**

Mirditë and Pukë present a material culture closely connected to mountain life and traditional social organization. Clothing here preserves simplicity in form, while maintaining a clear sense of identity.

In these areas, practical function is highly important. Clothing must withstand cold weather, physical work, and movement across difficult terrain. Yet even within this simplicity, regional differences appear in details: the cut of garments, the shape of the vest, the making of socks, the way belts are tied, or the use of headscarves.

Women's clothing in these areas is more restrained compared to some other centers, but symbolism is not absent. Embroidery, aprons, and the way garment pieces are combined reveal a controlled aesthetic, closely connected to social norms and everyday life.

## **Tropojë, Has and Kukës**

Tropojë, Has, and Kukës form an area where clothing is closely linked to the mountain culture of the north, but also to historical communications with Kosovo and surrounding regions. This creates a clear similarity in several clothing elements, especially in men's dress.

*Tirq*, belts, vests, and wool-based elements are present, but differences appear in decoration, color, and usage. In women's clothing, aprons, headscarves, and handmade textiles play an important role.

These regions show that cultural borders do not always match political ones. Clothing traditions often cross from one side to another, preserving older regional and family connections.

## **Dibër**

Dibër is a transitional area where elements of the north, east, and Central Albania intertwine. This position makes Dibër's clothing particularly distinctive.





In men's clothing, well-known northern elements are preserved, but with differences in form and decoration. In women's clothing, there is greater diversity in colors and details, reflecting contacts with various regions.

Dibër is important because it shows that tradition is not confined within strict borders. It absorbs, adapts, and preserves at the same time.

## Common Features of Northern Clothing

Despite local differences, the clothing of Northern Albania shares several common features. First, it is strongly based on local materials, especially wool. Second, it has a clear functional structure adapted to mountain life. Third, it uses a restrained visual language, where form and contrast play an important role.

In these garments, beauty does not always lie in decorative abundance, but in the strength of construction and the meaning of detail. A black line on *tirq*, a carefully tied belt, a motif on a *xhubletë*, or a headscarf can convey more than what is immediately visible.

## Regional Characteristics

Each region of the north expresses itself differently through clothing.

Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjin are distinguished by the *xhubletë* and the strong structure of clothing. Shkodër stands out for combining tradition with urban refinement. Mirditë and Pukë are known for durability and functionality. Tropojë, Has, and Kukës maintain strong links with the wider Albanian northern cultural space beyond state borders. Dibër shows a transitional character where different influences merge.

This diversity shows that traditional clothing is not a single model. It is a cultural map, where each region carries its own signs and expressions.





























#Photo\_Joni

















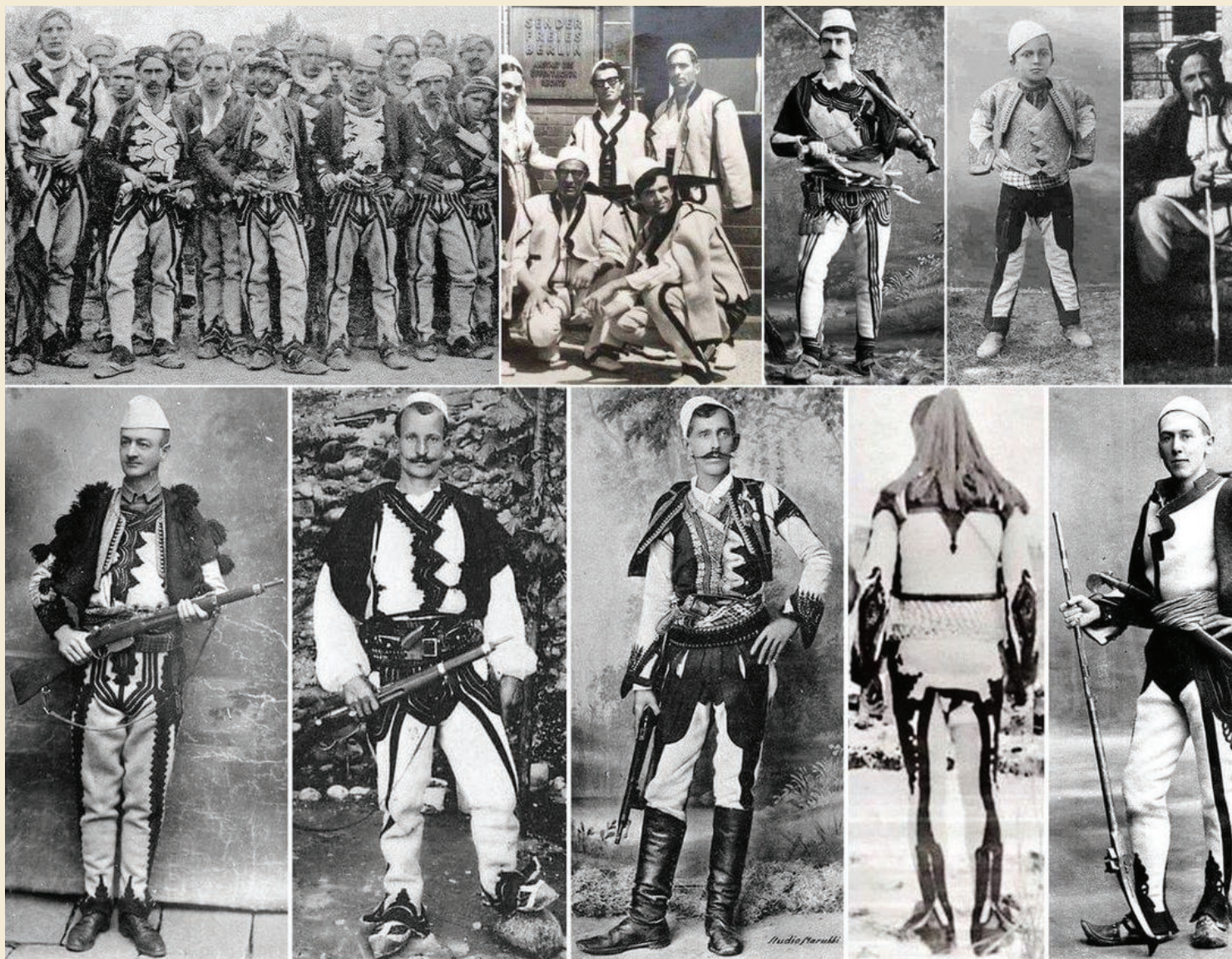












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Traditional clothing of Northern Albania represents some of the most vivid evidence of life and tradition in these regions. In these garments, the connection between the individual, the place they lived in, and the community they belonged to is clearly visible. Neither the form, nor the material, nor the decoration was random; every element was linked to the way of life, the climate, the work, and the customs of the time.



These garments carry within them a long history, preserved not only in oral narratives or documents, but also in wool, embroidery, and the way clothes were sewn and worn. Through them, one can understand not only the aesthetic taste of the time, but also the sense of belonging and identity that people carried in their everyday lives.

# CHAPTER III

## *Central Albania*



## **HISTORY**

Central Albania covers a more open territory, where major centers such as Tirana, Krujë, Elbasan, Kavajë, and Durrës are located. Historically, this area has been an important hub of communication and exchange, which has directly influenced its historical development.

Elbasan, situated along the ancient Via Egnatia route, played a significant role in connecting the interior of the Balkans with the coastline. Durrës, as the country's main port, served as a key entry and exit point for goods, ideas, and various cultural influences. These two centers clearly illustrate the open character of this region.

Krujë, with its historical importance linked to the period of Skanderbeg, remained a symbol of historical and national continuity. Meanwhile, Tirana, declared the capital in 1920, gradually became the political and administrative center of the country.

During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, this region was more involved in political and economic developments. The spread of education, trade relations, and urban influences meant that processes of change were felt earlier and more clearly here than in other regions.

Between 1945 and 1990, Central Albania became one of the most important areas for industrialization and urban development. Tirana and Durrës expanded significantly, while Elbasan became an industrial center. These developments brought major changes in lifestyle and social structure.

As a result, this region presents a strong blend of tradition and modernization. Traditional elements transformed more quickly but did not disappear completely, creating a rich and diverse material culture.

## **CULTURE AND ETHNOGRAPHY**

In Central Albania—Tirana, Krujë, Elbasan, Durrës, and surrounding areas—culture presents a more visible blend of tradition and external influences.

This region has been more open to movement and contact, which has led to faster changes in lifestyle. In urban areas, crafts and trade created a more dynamic environment, while in rural areas more traditional forms continued to be preserved.

Traditional clothing in this area reflects this intermediary character, preserving traditional elements while also incorporating new influences in materials and decoration.

## **TRADITIONAL CLOTHING OF CENTRAL ALBANIA**

Traditional clothing of Central Albania represents one of the most intermediate and dynamic forms of



Albanian costume culture. Unlike the north, where clothing shows stronger continuity and a more stable structure, in this area it appears as a more open, flexible system, strongly influenced by cultural contacts.

This is directly related to the nature of Central Albania itself. Located in a territory where important communication routes cross and where plains, hills, and cities intertwine, this region has historically been an intermediary space—a meeting point between north and south, between the inland Balkan world and the Mediterranean one.

As a result, traditional clothing here does not appear as a closed form, but as an adaptive structure. It preserves traditional elements while at the same time adapting and transforming them, reflecting changes in lifestyle, social relations, and cultural contacts.

Materials are more diverse. Alongside wool, which remains important especially in hilly areas, cotton and lighter fabrics are widely used. This is connected to a milder climate and an economy more closely linked to agriculture and trade. Colors are lighter and more varied, while decoration plays a more visible aesthetic role.

## **Clothing as a Form of Mediation**

One of the most important features of clothing in Central Albania is its mediating character. It is neither as rigid as in some northern areas, nor as richly ornamented as in some southern areas. Instead, it stands between these two poles, creating a distinct balance.

In men's clothing, elements such as *tirq*, vest (*jelek*), and belt remain present, but often appear with variations in cut, materials, and usage. In some areas, especially in urban centers, these elements begin to coexist with other forms of clothing influenced by urban culture and contacts with the Ottoman world or later European influences.

In women's clothing, this mediating character is even more evident. The basic structure—shirt, apron, vest, belt, and headscarf—remains stable, but the way these elements are combined is freer and more varied. Embroidery, colors, and decorative details create a richer and more flexible visual language.

## **City and Village: Two Different Rhythms**

An important distinction in this region is between urban and rural life. In cities such as Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës, and Krujë, clothing began to change earlier, reflecting new influences and a more open way of life.

In these centers, crafts, trade, and contact with the wider world brought new materials, new forms of tailoring, and a stronger aesthetic sensitivity. Clothing became more refined, lighter, and in some cases less directly tied to daily practical function.

In rural areas, by contrast, clothing preserved its traditional character for longer. It remained closely connected to the agricultural life cycle, to work, and to the rhythm of nature. This created an interesting contrast within the same region: a culture that changes in the city but is preserved in the countryside.

## **MAJOR CULTURAL REGIONS**

### **Tirana and Surroundings**

Tirana, as a city that developed later as the capital, presents a special case. Traditional clothing here is not preserved in rigid forms but is continuously adapted and transformed.

In the surrounding areas, especially in rural villages, more clearly traditional forms are preserved, where the basic elements of clothing are linked to the structure of Central Albania, but with small differences in decoration and use.

### **Krujë**

Krujë represents a space where history and tradition carry particular weight. Clothing here maintains a balance between simplicity and decoration.

In women's clothing, careful use of embroidery and color can be observed, while men's clothing retains traditional features but is more open to external influences compared to the mountainous areas of the north.

### **Elbasan and the Shkumbin Valley**

Elbasan and its surrounding area are among the most representative spaces of the intermediary character of this region. Located along an important historical corridor, this city has absorbed various influences.

In clothing, this appears as a combination of elements: forms linked to northern tradition, but also elements closer to the south. Colors, materials, and decorations are more diverse, creating a more complex overall picture.

### **Durrës, Kavajë and Myzeqe**

Durrës, Kavajë, and the Myzeqe plain represent coastal and lowland areas where clothing differs significantly from hilly and mountainous regions. The milder climate and more open way of life influence the use of lighter materials and looser forms.



Cotton is more widely used, while colors are lighter and more vivid. Clothing here is less heavy and better suited to a lifestyle connected to agriculture and trade.

## **COMMON FEATURES AND DISTINCTIVE TRAITS**

Traditional clothing of Central Albania is characterized by a particular balance between the preservation of tradition and changes brought by time. Although the regions have their differences, many elements remain common, such as the use of materials adapted to climate, function, and local resources, the basic structure of clothing, and the presence of decoration and embroidery as signs of identity and belonging.

At the same time, each area has preserved its own distinct features. These differences are especially visible in the degree of external influence, in the contrast between urban and rural clothing, and in the way traditional elements are combined with newer forms. For this reason, clothing in Central Albania is not a fixed model, but a tradition that has continuously evolved and adapted to life and time.









































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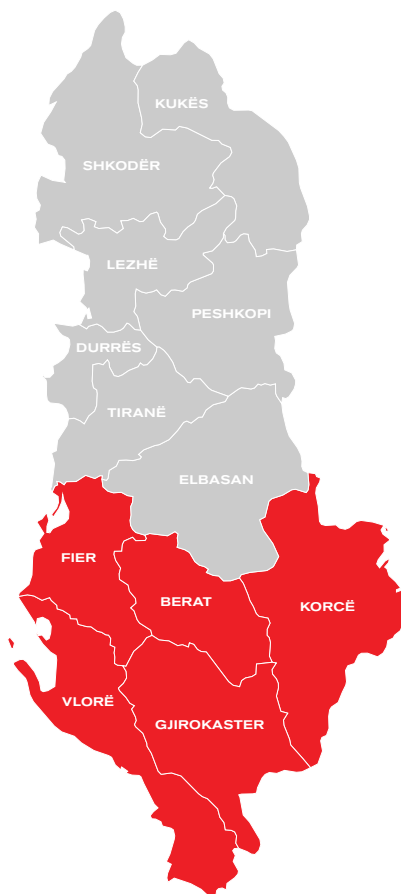
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Traditional clothing of Central Albania reflects a society in motion, a space where tradition is preserved not only through continuity but also through adaptation.

It is evidence of a culture that maintains continuity not by remaining unchanged, but by transforming itself. In this sense, clothing becomes one of the clearest ways to read this process: a form in which past and present visibly coexist.

# CHAPTER IV

## *Southern Albania*



## **HISTORY**

Southern Albania covers a wide area with cities and regions such as Berat, Gjirokaštër, Korçë, Vlorë, Përmet, and Tepelenë. This region is characterized by an earlier development of urban life and broader connections with other Balkan regions and the Mediterranean world.

During the 19th century, cities such as Korçë and Gjirokaštër became important cultural and educational centers. In particular, Korçë played a key role in the spread of education in the Albanian language, becoming one of the main centers of the National Awakening.

Vlorë, as a coastal city, had strong ties with the Mediterranean world and holds special historical importance as the place where independence was declared in 1912. Berat and Gjirokaštër, with their urban traditions and distinctive architecture, represent a highly developed form of urban life in this region.

During the 20th century, these cities continued to be important cultural and economic centers. In the socialist period, processes of industrialization and social transformation also took place here, but a significant part of urban and craft traditions managed to be preserved.

In this region, history is characterized by a greater openness to external influences and a more visible blend of tradition and change. This is reflected in the way of life and in material culture, which shows a greater variety of forms and influences.

## **CULTURE AND ETHNOGRAPHY**

In Southern Albania—Berat, Gjirokaštër, Korçë, Vlorë, Përmet, and Tepelenë—culture is characterized by an earlier development of urban life and a greater diversity of influences.

Southern cities have been important centers of education and culture, creating an environment where tradition and external influences continuously intertwine. This is also reflected in material culture and clothing, which is distinguished by richer ornamentation and a strong aesthetic sensibility.

Albanian culture and ethnography cannot be understood as a system frozen in time. They are the result of a long process of interaction between tradition and change, between environment and history.

Within this context, traditional clothing appears as one of the most complete expressions of this culture—a form in which practical function, social identity, and aesthetic sensitivity are intertwined.

## **TRADITIONAL CLOTHING OF SOUTHERN ALBANIA**

Traditional clothing of Southern Albania represents one of the richest and most diverse expressions of Albanian costume culture. It was shaped in a space where local traditions intertwine with multiple cultural





influences, coming through continuous contact with the Balkan and Mediterranean worlds.

This region includes cities and areas such as Berat, Gjirokastër, Korçë, Vlorë, Përmet, Tepelenë, and Labëria. In this context, clothing is not only part of everyday life, but also a form of representation, closely linked to status, identity, and a developed aesthetic sensibility.

## **Fundamental Elements of Clothing: Qeleshe and Fustanella**

Within Albanian traditional dress, some elements transcend regional divisions and serve as shared identity markers. Among the most important are the *qeleshe* and the *fustanella*, which appear in different forms and distributions across Albanian territory.

The *qeleshe*, also known as *plis* in the north, is one of the most stable and representative elements of traditional Albanian clothing. Made of white wool, it is used throughout Albanian-inhabited areas—north, central, and south—as well as in Albanian regions beyond state borders.

Its form may vary from region to region—higher, rounder, or flatter—but its meaning remains the same. The *qeleshe* has been part of men’s public appearance and is closely linked to identity, belonging, and cultural continuity. It is not merely a head covering, but an element that synthesizes a shared Albanian tradition.

The *fustanella*, unlike the *qeleshe*, has a more limited distribution and is more closely associated with Central and Southern Albania, as well as broader Balkan areas. In the south, it is one of the most characteristic elements of men’s clothing, especially in regions such as Labëria.

Composed of multiple white pleats, the *fustanella* creates a distinctive silhouette and a unique sense of movement. It is not only practical, but also an element of symbolic and ceremonial significance, associated with representation and the public image of the male figure.

## **Clothing as an Aesthetic and Urban Expression**

In Southern Albania, clothing takes on a strongly aesthetic dimension. It develops in a context where the city plays an important role and where crafts and trade create conditions for a more advanced processing of materials and for the development of a more refined sensibility.

In men’s clothing, the combination of elements such as the *fustanella*, vest (*jelek*), belt, and *qeleshe* creates a figure balanced between function and representation. Even when decoration is limited, the form and contrast of elements construct a clear visual identity that simultaneously communicates the social status, geographic origin, and martial pride of the wearer.



In women's clothing, this tendency toward ornamentation is even more evident. Embroidery, the use of color, and the combination of garment parts create an ensemble in which each element has a specific role. Clothing becomes a space where tradition is transformed into art.

## MAJOR CULTURAL REGIONS

### Berat

Berat, as one of the oldest and most stable urban centers in Albania, offers an example of a refined culture also expressed in clothing. Urban tradition and craftsmanship have influenced the creation of garments characterized by aesthetic balance and restraint.

Women's clothing stands out for the use of high-quality fabrics and careful embroidery with harmonized motifs. Colors are balanced, creating a refined appearance. In men's clothing, traditional elements are preserved but with more careful attention to detail.

### Gjirokastër and Labëria

Gjirokastër and Labëria represent one of the strongest areas in terms of identity. In this space, men's clothing with the *fustanella* creates one of the most distinctive figures of Albanian costume.

The *fustanella*, combined with an embroidered vest, belt, and *qeleshe*, forms an ensemble where shape and contrast construct a strong visual identity. Its whiteness emphasizes structure, while the other elements add depth and character.

Women's clothing is rich and carefully constructed, often with multiple layers and elaborate embroidery. Colors and motifs create a powerful and distinctive appearance, closely tied to local tradition.

### Korçë and Surrounding Areas

Korçë presents one of the most developed forms of urban culture in Southern Albania. This is reflected in clothing through a higher level of refinement in materials and craftsmanship.

Women's clothing is rich in detail, with delicate embroidery and diverse color combinations. The use of processed materials and urban influences creates a more sophisticated style. In men's clothing, a blend of traditional elements and new urban influences is also visible.

## Vlorë and Coastal Areas

Vlorë and the coastal regions reflect a greater openness to Mediterranean influences. Climate and lifestyle affect the use of lighter materials and looser forms.

Colors are brighter and structures lighter, creating a more vivid and open appearance. External influences are present, but they are absorbed and adapted in a way that preserves local character.

## COMMON FEATURES AND DISTINCTIVE TRAITS

Traditional clothing of Southern Albania is characterized by a rich development of ornamentation and a strong aesthetic care present in every element. These garments use diverse and processed materials combined with decorations that give the ensemble a distinctive and recognizable appearance. At the same time, identity markers such as the *qeleshe* and the *fustanella* hold an important place in the tradition of this region, becoming well-known symbols of cultural belonging.

At the same time, clothing varies from one region to another. These differences are visible in the structure of the costume ensemble, the degree of ornamentation, and the balance each area maintains between local tradition and external influences. In this way, traditional clothing of Southern Albania appears as a rich and dynamic tradition, where regional identity and aesthetic sensibility develop together.

Traditional clothing of Southern Albania is evidence of a culture that not only preserves tradition, but continuously develops it. In these garments, every element—from the *qeleshe* as a shared Albanian symbol, to the *fustanella* as a distinctive regional expression, from material to embroidery—becomes part of a language that expresses the identity and memory of the community.



































FESTIVALI  
FOLKLORIK  
KOMBËTAR  
GJIROKASTËR



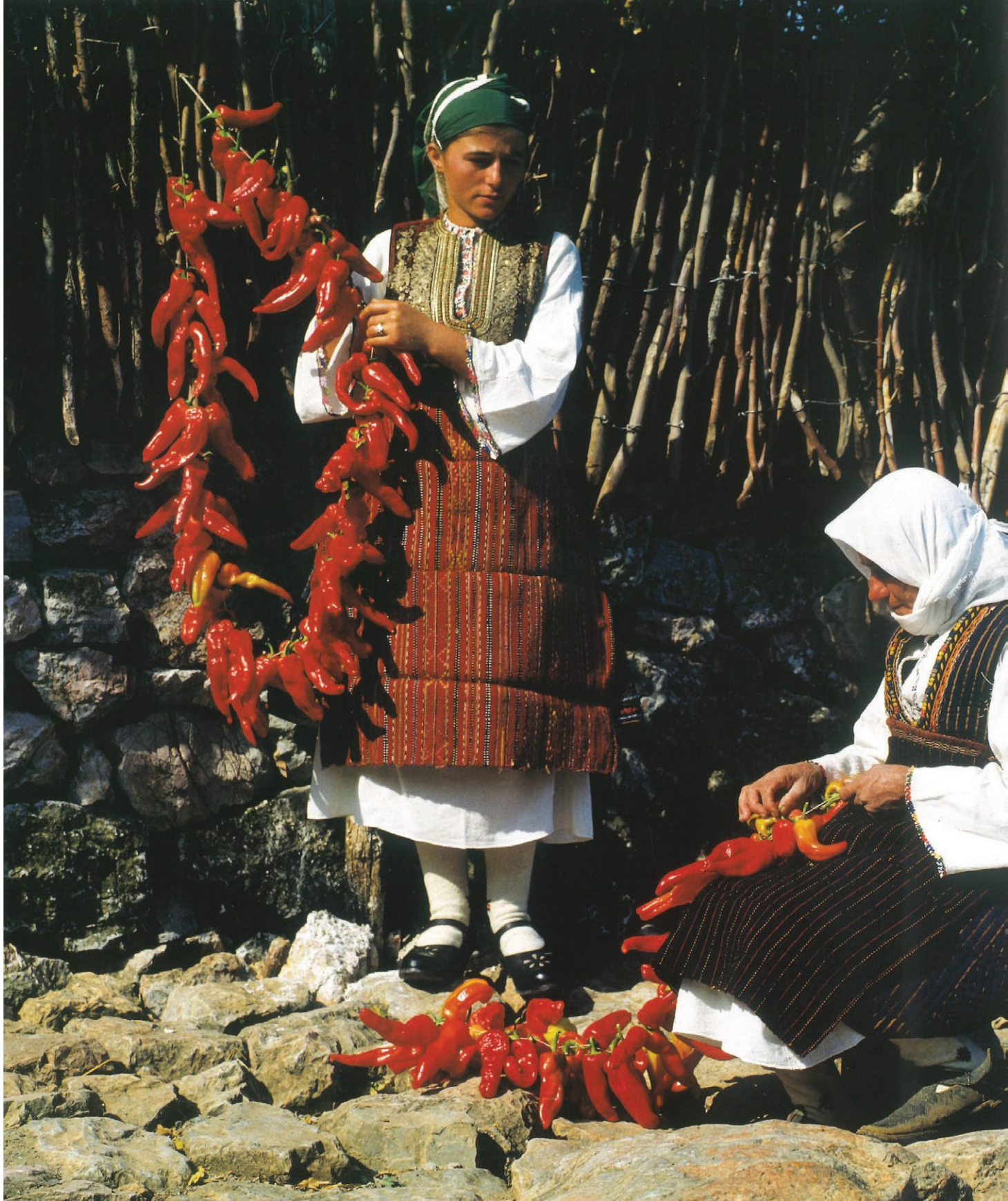














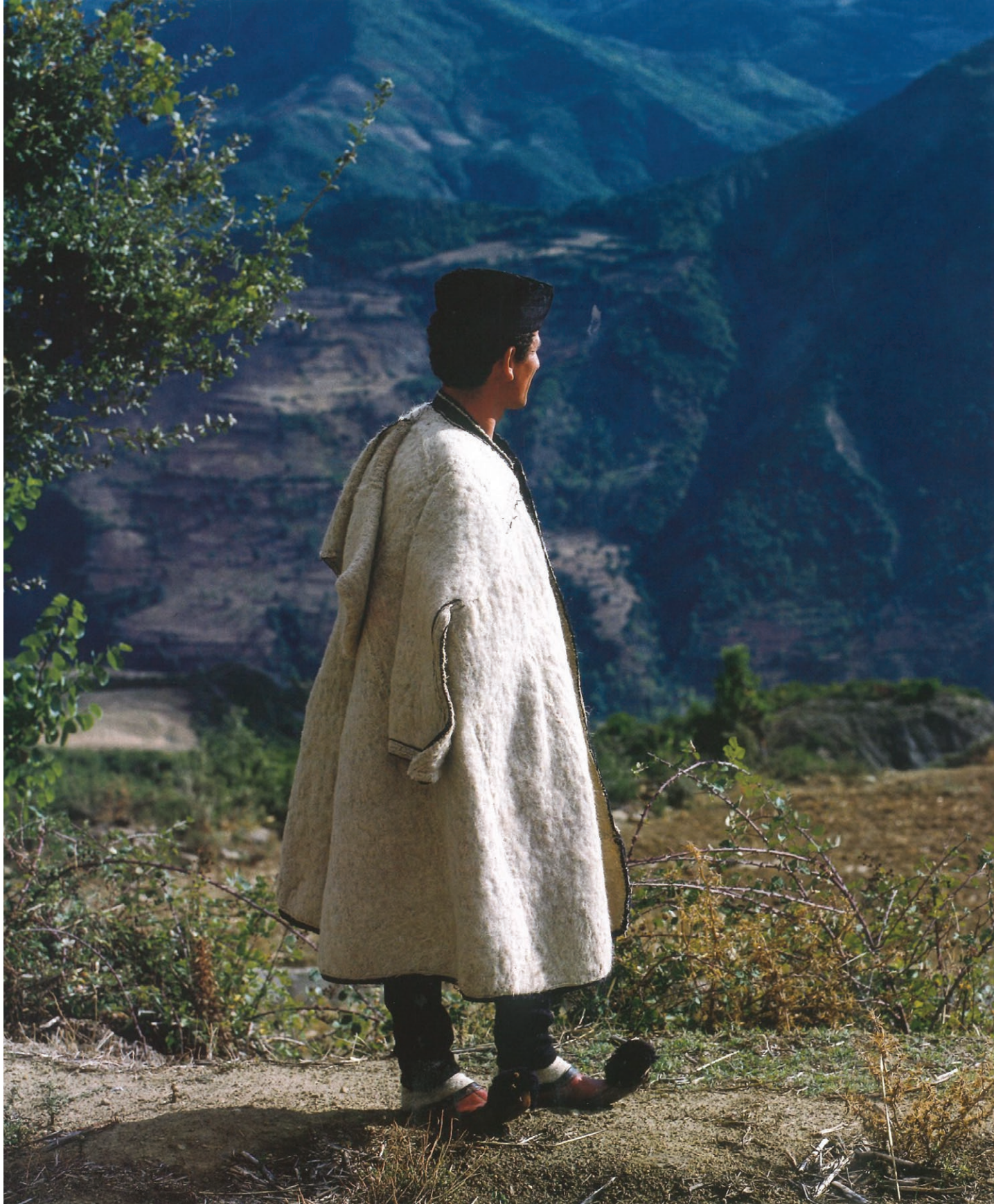




















## CONCLUSION

This publication has been conceived as an introductory overview of the main features of Albanian history, culture, and traditional clothing, focusing on the geographical space of the political Albania of 1913—which corresponds to the territory of today’s Albanian state.


It does not aim to provide a complete or definitive account of this broad heritage, which in its entirety extends beyond these borders. Instead, its purpose is to offer a first understanding, a clear orientation for the reader, and especially for the foreign visitor, bringing them closer to some of the most representative elements of this culture.

Within this framework, the illustrations accompanying the text are not merely visual descriptions, but a way of observing details more closely: material, embroidery, cut, color, as well as elements such as the *qeleshe*, the *xhubleta*, or the *fustanella*, which carry meanings deeper than their immediate appearance.

Overall, Albanian traditional clothing appears as a condensed form of cultural memory, a testimony to the connection between environment, history, and everyday life. Through it, the reader can gain a fuller understanding of how this culture has been formed, preserved, and transmitted over time.

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# ALBANIA EMBROIDERED WITH MEMORY

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