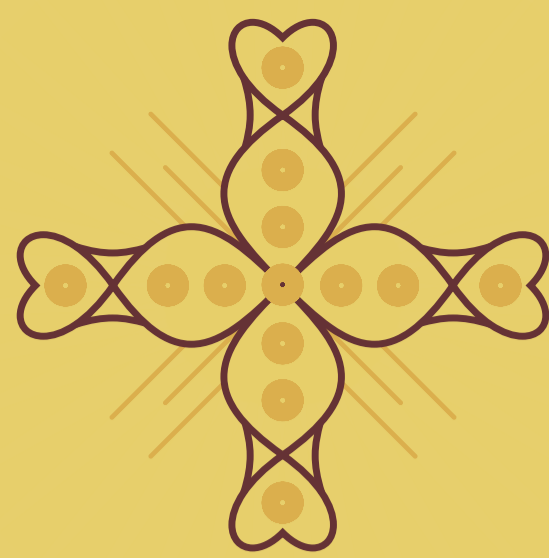




Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik  
Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church



Madli Sepper  
madlisepper@gmail.com

# Textiles in Estonian Orthodox churches. The Estonian craft heritage or the production of foreign factories?



Phelonion from the tsarist period. Aj 355:24 in Valga Museum



Aer from the tsarist period in Kuressaare Church



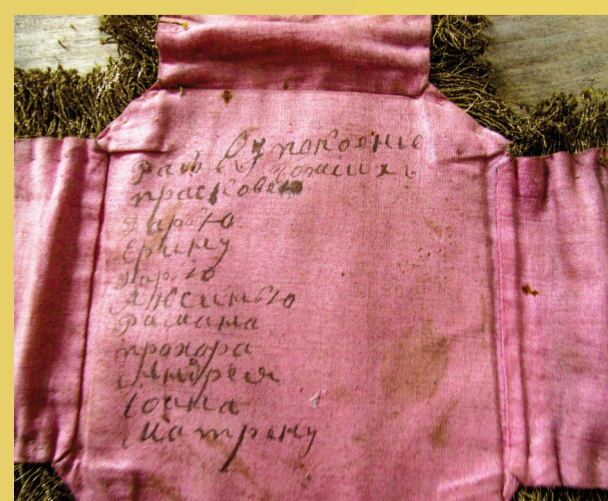
Navedrennik from the period between the two world wars in Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Tallinn



Phelonion from the Soviet period (1980.-es) in Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Tallinn



Greek style phelonion fabricated nowadays and used in St. Simeon's and St. Anne's Church in Tallinn



Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church In the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox churches can be found textiles from the tsarist period (most orthodox churches in Estonia were built after the year 1845), from the period of the Republic of Estonia (1918 – 1939), from the Soviet period and as well as from the period of the restored Estonian Republic.(beginning from 1992). Their age can be determined by the sewing technologies and designs of fabrics used.

During the **tsarist period** the state supported the construction and furnishing of the orthodox churches. The textiles among them. Lots of them have been remained in Estonia from that period. These have been **manufactured** in Moscow and St.Petersburg factories. The church textiles could be ordered from their order catalogues. In manufactories where the items were essentially made by hand, but still similar technologies and pattern stencils were used. Characteristic of that period are the natural materials: silk, cotton, fabrics with gold and silver threads: brocade, moir, suède cloth (very thin glossy silk brocade).

In that period church textiles were made by **craft masters** as well, but these are difficult to date because quite similar patterns and materials were used up to the Second World War.

If during the tsarist time the factory-made textiles formed a greater part, then during **the period between the two world wars**, the special fabrics for the Orthodox Church textiles had been **factured** in the textile mills within the Republic of Estonia. Artificial silk was in use already. Each congregation had to arrange their sewing by itself.

During the period between the world wars church textiles were made as **crafts** as well. The set on the picture is made in a national romantic style. At that time it was thought that church textiles need not be made of expensive brocade, everything was tried to simplify and introduce the Estonian nationalism.

**The Soviet time** was hostile to the churches. Congregations were closed and clergymen deported to Siberia. The remained congregations used the church equipment originating from the earlier times. In particular, the textiles of the tsarist time were used, whereas they had been sewn perfectly, preserved well and there were lots of them in the congregations. Since the 1960ties, however, **factory-made** church textiles were already received with the financial support from the state. All the textiles made at that time were similar.

Lots of church textiles were **made by hand** during the Soviet time. The materials used were either the most expensive ones that were managed to find at that time or pieces of old expensive fabrics or cheap and available ones such as cotton print and flannel had to be used. Material was deficit and if somebody saw anything somewhere, it had to be purchased at once. Old paper patterns were used upon sewing. For example, material designed for shoulder straps (epaulettes) of military officers were used as stripes.

**After restoring our independence**, textiles originating from all different periods have still been in use in Estonia. However, new textiles are more and more changing into the ones characteristic of Greece. Priest vestments are nowadays ordered from Greece, Russia and Belarus according to the catalogues. These are made of thin synthetic materials. Today in the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) you can see priests serving side by side in vestments both in Slavonian and Greek styles.

Although textiles ordered from foreign catalogues are cheaper, however, church textiles are still **made as artistic crafts** as well, though less, if compared to the earlier periods. I would recommend to make textiles for the Orthodox Church locally and bring in national elements, as the items with foreign patterns ordered from abroad need not address the Estonians in churches so much as domestic church textiles with the patterns characteristic of Estonia. In the case of good planning, the congregations can afford for themselves fine work made by the Estonian masters, which are certainly expensive but **shall remain for decades**.

In the tsarist period it was accustomed to make a set of veils by themselves or order from catalogues, donate these to the church and write the list of the names of their family for the intercessory prayer (for the deceased and for the health of the living) on the back side. The set of the Veils on the pictures in last row is from tsarist period in Tornimäe Church.

The small veil (Paten) from the tsarist period in Kuressaare Church. It was used on the Chalice when the Coverings have been taken off in time of special pray. This sort of veils have been used very rarely only in few churches.



The Set of priest robe from the period between the two world war in Museum of St. Simeon's and St. Anne's Church in Tallinn



Phelonion from the Soviet period. Made by Selma Kadarik in 1965 in Kuressaare Church.



Detail of my own made Altar table covering in Jõõpre Church

