

## **1. Introduction**

Dress is a multi-dimensional cultural phenomenon and its development is affected by many factors, climatic/geographical, historical, political, social, religious. Dress denotes difference or similarity, devotion and defiance. National identity, class identity, gender or political allegiance, ethnic or regional distinctions are expressed in dress. Furthermore, dress is the mirror of history and culture, the outcome of the exploitation of local natural resources but also of imported materials acquired by trade; it reflects the technological standard at any given period, the political and financial situation, the social stratification, the religious beliefs, customs and rites; it incorporates tradition and reflects identity, as well as foreign influences selectively adopted and/or assimilated. Clothing has been characterized as the visual expression of cultural norms, a complex system that involves economic as well as social and aesthetic factors.

In the case of a whole population it reflects not only the standard of living but also the level of cultural development, the history and traditions of a place, its relations with the rest of the world, its capacity to assimilate and its sensibilities. Costumes in a country moreover differ in many ways, including, according to the region (hilly/flat or rural/urban for example), the age of the wearer, the seasons (summer/winter) and even the nature of a given day (festive/ordinary) or with events and circumstances in life (marriage, periods of mourning or confinement). Clothing is a code whose messages are automatically conveyed and immediately understood by people of the same community, but remain as a general rule inaccessible to the foreign observer.

In pre-industrial societies tradition played an essential role. In contrast with fashion, tradition resists abrupt change and tends to selectively adopt novelties and absorb new features that can be assimilated. Traditional dress is characterized by conservatism and slow development.

The digital library facilitates the study and dissemination of the history of the Cypriot dress in its broader socioeconomic and cultural context. Dress in Cyprus includes the apparel of the Greek Cypriots, who represent the majority of the population, as well that of the Turkish Cypriots and the Armenian community in Cyprus. Utilizing the available written, visual and material evidence, primary focus is given to the early modern and modern eras corresponding to the periods of Ottoman and British rule in Cyprus. During this time the development of Cypriot dress mirrored aspects of the cultural identity, the daily life and the socioeconomic

aspirations of the various strata of Cypriot society as they transitioned between the insular realities of Ottoman Cyprus and the island's gradual Europeanization in the colonial context of the British Empire. The use of advanced digital technologies and applications offers a unique approach to an important aspect of Cypriot Cultural Heritage. Digital documentation, 2D and 3D imaging and database applications contributes to the creation of a web-based digital platform that virtually narrates and explores the cultural development of the Cypriot dress. Furthermore, the project is an integral part of the framework of Dioptra, the Cyprus Institute's digital library for Cypriot Culture. It is also worth mentioning that this is the first comprehensive attempt to utilize the great opportunities offered in the field of Digital Cultural Heritage for the study and dissemination of the history of dress in Cyprus.

### 1.1. Sources for the study of Cypriot dress

The remnants that survived from all the variety of dress items of the periods of Ottoman and British rule are incredibly poor. We have at our disposal a very thin and fragile warp on which we attempt to weave the polychrome textile of the apparel. The earliest authentic, well-preserved examples of garments date from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. In view of the scanty tangible evidence, our knowledge of the Cypriot attire before that time can only be based on artistic representations and written sources.

The accuracy of the descriptions of native dress found in written sources can be checked by comparing them with illustrations, such as drawings, engravings, paintings and photographs. Travellers' books often include illustrations, to which some of their comments refer. As far as artistic works are concerned, the subjects depicted, either landscapes or people, invariably pass through the personal filter of the artist. Consequently, compared with photographs, paintings are usually conventional or less accurate. The study of the local dress has to take into consideration all these sources, even more so the surviving dress items.

Donor portraits on icons and frescoes in churches, engravings, drawings and paintings (for example the portraits of Dragomans, a lady painted on the wooden case of a grandfather clock etc.) offer a precious testimony of what Cypriot people wore. More information is extracted from photographs, particularly during the period of British rule.

Written sources comprise dowry contracts, travellers' accounts, consular reports, ottoman documents, folk songs etc., as well as manuscript lists of properties of deceased people. These

inventories, which date to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, analytically record garments, jewellery and other personal belongings.