

1.1. The period of British Rule (1878-1960) Greek Cypriot dress

The ceding of the administration of Cyprus to Britain, in 1878, brought about serious transformation in the society of the island. The new elite, members of which founded the first industries and occupied high administrative posts, created a different lifestyle, adopting the *Frankish* dress and building neoclassical houses, as Cyprus moved gradually but steadily towards its Europeanization.

At the dawn of the 20th century, in 1901, the *Patriotic Association of Greek Cypriots in Athens* organized a great Cypriot Exhibition in the Greek capital with a view to strengthening the bonds between Cyprus and Greece, considering this as a priority of national importance. Prefacing the presentation of the traditional Cypriot costumes exhibited in Athens in April 1901, the main organizer of the Exhibition, G.S. Frangoudes, summed up in a few concise words the entire development of Cypriot dress during the second half of the 19th century. It was during this time that Cyprus adopted the European dress. According to Frangoudes, in the towns, the men of good class, the *tselepides* (Turk. *çelebi*, the well-bred, educated, gentleman), who wore in earlier times the oriental *anteri* (Turk. *entari*, loose robe) and *salvaria* (Turk. *şalvar*, long pantaloons), which differed little from those of the Turks, had replaced them long ago by the *Frankish* (Western, European) dress. At the same time ordinary people proudly wore and continued to wear the *vraka* (baggy trousers), which by the end of the 19th century had become the national dress of the Cypriot male.

What we can deduce from this statement, is that persons of a higher status, who had previously adopted the oriental dress – while ordinary people were dressed in local traditional attire – were the first who changed their appearance, in order to adopt the European dress. Also now, at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, the local costume was considered national Greek, as opposed to the *Frankish* dress.

In the last decades of the 19th and in the early 20th century, the upper class ladies appear in long, high neck dresses in ivory-cream, black or other solemn colours, decorated with pleats, lace and frills. A waist jacket with skirt also became common. For men as well, the oriental garments belonged to the past, as they were thoroughly substituted by the *Frankish* outfit. Late 19th century photographs show a combination of the European-style costume, either with a straw hat or with a *fez*, which was still worn by elderly men or by the more conservative Turkish

Cypriots. From this time onwards, European fabrics were increasingly imported; local clothing and the shoe industry followed Western designs. The factories were now producing drab shoes and boots of European styles replacing the blue, red and yellow shoes they had supplied to Turkey and Egypt before the British occupation. The European fashion expressed different ideals, ambitions and values. The members of the upper classes, who first adopted it, formed, as in the past, a small portion of the Cypriot population; yet, they represented the new dynamic element in their society, which gave further impetus to economic and social transformations.

Women's dress

By the end of the nineteenth century, the *Amalia* type of dress was replaced by the European dress which was adopted by the upper classes in the urban centres. However, it survived in rural areas as bridal and festive dress, with a headscarf instead of a *fez*, until the twentieth century. It is made up of a *foustani* or a *fousta* (skirt), a white cotton petticoat, a silk off-white chemise trimmed with *pipilla* (lace), and the *sarka*, a felt or velvet sleeved jacket. The skirt was made of European silk fabric or the local *satakrouta* (*seta cruda*, raw-silk) with horizontal bands in various bright colors. The *sarka* was usually black, blue or lilac, with rich ornamentation made of gold or silver twisted thread. The waist was girded by a belt with a filigree clasp. The head in the urban original of this costume was covered with a red *fez*. The typical Cypriot *fez*, different from the one used in Greece, had two black silk tassels, a short one which was fixed to the crown and covered the whole cap in a radial pattern, and another one falling to the shoulder on the side. The *fez* was decorated with the *fiora* (flowers), garlands made of tiny pearls and braided with silk. The *Amalia* ensemble is known from dowry contracts, portraits and photographs, as well as many preserved examples. It was described by travellers.

Emile Deschamps was the first French traveller who visited Cyprus after the arrival of the British. In his book *Au pays d'Aphrodite, Chypre. Carnet d'un voyageur*, which was published in Paris in 1898, Deschamps described his stay in the island from November 1892 to March 1894. His comments on the attire of local people are scattered through the chapters of his book.

Watching the crowd at the fair of 'Cataclysmos' (Pentecost) in Larnaca, Deschamps noticed that blue, 'the colour of the clear sky of the East' was prevalent on their costumes. Looking curiously at the people, he did not see a single charming face among the women-folk, who were sun-tanned, ungraceful and prematurely old. It seems, however, that he paid much

attention to the national costume of the peasant women, and recorded it in detail. Their head-cover comprised one or more scarves, blue or white with a green border and gold or silver decoration; they were tied under the chin and covered the hair on the back. The velvet or cotton jacket, mostly with applied gold decoration, had a square opening on the chest, exposing a shirt made of tulle or batiste; the skirt, usually red, black or grey, monochrome or with floral patterns, fell from a thick waist. They wore necklaces, like Arab women, and glass bracelets – also a jewel of Syrian provenance. This is an accurate description of the festive dress, the Amalia type costume of the Greek ladies.

Mrs Scott-Stevenson found the dress of the country people she saw in Lapithos (a small town in Kyrenia district) very picturesque and suitable, writing, ‘Yellow or crimson shoes, short white socks, loose white trousers fastened at the ankle, a skirt of bright cotton, and a richly embroidered bodice (generally in velvet) cut in a low square on the bosom, which is covered with a transparent piece of worked muslin. Innumerable glass bangles on the arms complete the costume. On their heads they wear a silk handkerchief tightly fastened across the top, and holding back two long plaits of hair. Bunches of jessamine and sweet-scented geranium-leaves are fastened on one side, and on the other a half-wreath of worsted and silk flowers on wire’.

The costume struck her as very quaint and pretty, and becoming to the classic features and splendid black eyes of most of the local women. She adds, ‘A few had lines of khol painted round the rims, and all the babies had a black line on both upper and lower lids. This, it is supposed, keeps the eyes cool and preserves them from attacks of flies’. Of the village women, she makes the following comment: ‘Poor creatures! They had never left their villages except to visit some fair, and the sight of an English lady in European costume was one to be remembered for all time’ (Scott-Stevenson. 1880, 56-57).

Scott-Stevenson’s fairly detailed description does not leave any doubt that the costume she saw is made up of a dress or skirt above a shirt, a jacket (*sarka*), and a headscarf. This costume was established in urban centres by the mid-nineteenth century. It was linked with the name of Amalia, Queen of Greece (1836-62) and is known as ‘the Amalia type’ costume. In the urban original a fez (cap) was worn in place of the headscarf. This cap was different from the one used in mainland Greece; the Cypriot fez had a wide, black tassel which covered the whole cap and was decorated with *fiora* (flowers), garlands of flowers made of pearls and braided with silk. We see this type of clothing in various pictures, for example in women's portraits of the

mid-nineteenth century (Mariou Pieraki in Larnaca, Iouliani Vondiziano in Nicosia). A noteworthy example of costumes of town women and which were on the verge of disappearing from the towns was exhibited in Athens in 1901 as the costume of 'a Cypriot town lady'. The same type is preserved in the costume of 'a village woman with festive dress' in another surviving example of the Athens Exhibition, although this shows a headscarf in the place of the fez. As Scott-Stevenson's account shows, this one-time town dress began to spread in the countryside by the first days of British rule. In the countryside, in a less ornate and luxurious form, it served not only as a festive dress for a young village girl, but also as a bridal dress.

In the traditional bridal costume of the Karpass, the *sarka* was combined with the *routziettin* (crimson pleated skirt), probably a survival of the *skarpetta* of the *Cipriotta* dress, and a long red veil sewn with gold coins at the edges. The *routziettin* was also thrown over the shoulders like a cape. Another type of pleated skirt, made of white cotton, the *doublettin* (folded double), most probably of western origin, was also worn by the Karpass women as a cape when going to church.

Other types of traditional village dress echo eighteenth century or earlier urban styles. Thus, the oriental-looking type of a long open dress with sleeves, cut very low on the bosom, secured at the waist with a couple of buttons and a sash, and worn over a white chemise and pantaloons, survived until the mid-twentieth century in the form of traditional costumes with the *sayia*, in the most conservative regions of rural Cyprus, Paphos and Karpass, on the west and east tips of the island respectively. The Karpass *sayia*, slightly shorter than the shirt, was cut straight and had long openings at the sides to make walking easier. It was made of *alatzia* (woven striped or checkered cotton fabric), or of white cotton cloth with stripes at the back. The opening in the front was embroidered with red appliqué felt patches, coloured and gilt cord. A variation of the Karpass *sayia* was all white, decorated with white woven embroidery and coloured glass beads. The blue beads were believed to ward off the 'evil eye'. The *sayia* worn in the Paphos area was made wider by inserting triangular pieces of cloth, and the side openings were smaller. In both areas, a stamped or embroidered scarf was tied around the waist on top of the *sayia*. The lower part of the long pantaloons, which protruded beneath the outfit, had thick woven embroidery. The *sayia* was also worn in other areas of Cyprus.

The costume with the *sayia* is described in detail and is shown in photographs by Magda Ohnefalsch-Richter, an example being the Sunday summer dress of a girl from Rizokarpaso.

According to the description, the short, wide-cut, white cotton one-piece dress, which was decorated with white embroidery and coloured glass beads, was entirely open in the front to reveal the silk striped shirt. This in turn was worn over the white, richly decorated pantaloons, which protruded beneath the outfit. The pantaloons fell just above black boots made of sheep's leather and sewn with coloured thread. Round the waist the women used to wear a bright-coloured silk handkerchief. Thrown over the tightly knotted black muslin headscarf was a white handkerchief made of coarse cloth, which served as protection from the sun. Ohnefalsch-Richter notes that women's pantaloons differed in colour, material and decoration according to the area. She notices that the farm women of the Mesaoria Plain preferred white pantaloons while those in Paphos preferred red, and in the Karpas peninsula the women sewed white and multicoloured cotton cloth with embroidery and glass beads to wear on the front of their white pants.

The costume with the *sayia* is described also by Mrs Scott-Stevenson as it was worn in Akanthou (given as 'Accatou' in the text, Akanthou is a village in the Kyrenia district), where natives in a body came out to inspect the foreigners. She wrote, 'I saw some remarkably pretty girls, who, fortunately, were in their native dress, unspoilt by vulgar modern finery. Loose coarse canvas trousers made the stockingless feet, which they almost touched, look small by comparison; a loose skirt of cream-coloured Cyprus cloth; and over all a kind of long coat, cut very low on the bosom - in fact, merely secured at the waist with a couple of buttons, and encircled by a gay-coloured sash. As it is rare (I have hardly ever seen one) to see a stout woman of the peasant class, the dress is admirably adapted to their figures, and in very young girls and the more graceful of the women the effect is charming. They set great store on the little necklaces of coral and seed pearl, often extremely pretty, which are bought at the larger fairs, and mostly worn very becomingly' (Scott-Stevenson, 1880, 262).

Other, more general comments made by British women travellers about the appearance of Cypriots are very critical. Mrs Scott-Stevenson reached the conclusion that, 'The women have no modesty. In England their dress would be considered indecent. Among the Greeks it is the custom to leave the gown open over the chest, often as far down as the waist' (Scott-Stevenson, 1880, 130). However the deep opening over the chest, which was thought by British women travellers to be indecent, was very practical as it facilitated breast feeding, particularly in the fields where rural women worked all day.

The old-fashioned one-piece garment, the *foustani*, made of a tight-fitting sleeved bodice with a large opening at the breast, and a wide gathered skirt, also survived as a traditional dress, both in the plains and the mountain villages of Cyprus. In the course of the twentieth century, the *foustani* gradually replaced the *sayia*. When shoes were worn, these were usually black boots similar to those of the men, but shorter and smaller. They were made of sheepskin and sewn with colored thread. Plain slippers were also common.

The best dress was complemented by a variety of jewellery: earrings with pearls or filigree beads and other pendants, silver or silver-plated necklaces, often made of coins, beads or coral, chains and various bracelets. The cross, in many variations, and amulets, were symbols of faith in miraculous religious and prophylactic properties. Jewels of this kind, as well as bracelets and belts with buckles of mother-of-pearl, were souvenirs from the Holy Land. Buckles, local or imported, are found in a wide range of types, usually silver with embossed decoration or filigree work with inlaid glass beads or enamel. A typical Cypriot jewel was the *splinga* (brooch) with a filigree bead and chains with suspended coins and other attachments. The *splinga* was usually pinned on the headscarf or at the opening of the shirt on the chest. Poor women in the countryside had cheap bronze jewellery, and often used real flowers to decorate their printed headscarves. In contrast to the white complexion of the town ladies, which became the ideal of feminine beauty, peasant women were sun-burnt and looked aged even in their thirties.

Traditional Cypriot costumes are simple both in terms of cut and decoration. The processing of raw materials (cotton, linen, wool, silk), weaving, sewing and embroidery were done by the Cypriot women themselves, with the exception of the gold embroidered *sarka*, which was made by professional tailors in towns. Garments did not particularly flatter the female figure, though they did not lack charm. Finally, traditional costumes were perfectly adjusted to hot climatic conditions and bound with the customs of the island.

The upper class ladies in the urban centres, who were the first to adopt European dress styles, set the model for the wider strata of the population. A common type, apart from the long, high neck dresses was the *sakkos* (waisted jacket) with skirt. By the end of the 19th century the new styles had invaded the countryside, where, however, traditional costumes continued to be worn. Patterns in fashion magazines provided further impetus to the spread of European vogue in the

course of the twentieth century. This tendency influenced young Turkish Cypriot women too, although the dustcoat, a white garment covering head and dress, remained in use.

In the first half of the 20th century European dress became prevalent in the towns and gradually penetrated the countryside in a more provincial fashion style. A consequence of the change in attire, particularly among the urban population, was the creation and development of new special occupations, such as tailors for men's European attire and seamstresses and dressmakers for women's clothes.

Men's dress

The characteristic male costume worn both by Greek and Turkish Cypriots, in the towns and the countryside, was the costume with the *vraka* (baggy trousers) as its main component. It belongs to the Aegean island type of dress that was well established during the later Ottoman period. The Cypriot *vraka*, the equivalent of the *vraki* worn in the Greek islands, was made of coarse dimity woven on the loom and then dyed by local dyers, usually black, or blue for younger men. The *vraka* varied in shape and size from region to region. Its main characteristics, particularly in the towns, were the big volume of material and its innumerable pleats, especially of the middle part, which was hanging between the legs and had to be tucked up into the belt in order to avoid swinging to and fro as the wearer walked. This long and densely pleated part was called *vakla*, because it resembled the fat tail of a sheep. It was only left to hang freely when the wearer went to church. Originally, the *vraka* was starched and made a pleasant swishing sound as the young wearers walked. A folk song, which is still very popular, recalls the distinctive qualities of the old *vraka*. According to it, forty yards of dimity were required for a *vraka*, which made 'trikki-trakka'.

The *vraka* was worn with a shirt made of cotton fabric for every day, or silk for best wear. The groom's silk shirt was a present from his bride. Around the waist, they used to wear a black cotton cummerbund with fringes at the narrow ends, or the multi-coloured silk *ttalapoulouzin* (sash), imported from Tripoli in Syria. The attire was complemented with a *yelekkın* (sleeveless waistcoat), a *zimounin* (sleeved jacket), a *fez* with or without a headscarf, and *podines* (top-boots). Waistcoats and jackets present an incredible variety in fabric and ornamentation. Those worn by peasants were made of *alatzia*, woven, sewn and embroidered by local women. Festive or wedding waistcoats were highly elegant garments, straight or crossed-over and fastened at the front by means of an oblique row of buttons. The back had an opening down the middle,

which was laced with two ribbons so that the fit could be adjusted. They were made of velvet and felt in contrasting bright colors, and decorated with applied braids. The most elaborate examples were sewn by professional tailors. The back-side was often decorated with stylized plants, confronting lions and birds, or other motifs. Such waistcoats survived into the first decades of the twentieth century and bear the date embroidered on their pocket.

Although of the same type in general, the dress worn by peasants and the lower classes in towns, differed in the quality of the garments as well as in the headdress and shoes, from the best costume with *vraka* of the townsman. He wore a red fez, locally made or imported from Tunis or France, and flat leather shoes with monochrome socks, or *frangopodines* (European-style boots), while the peasant used to wear a headscarf as a headband or wound around a fez, or a straw hat in the plains, and *tsangaropodines*, heavy boots with broad-headed iron nails covering the sole.

In his *Winter Pilgrimage*, published in 1901, H. Rider Haggard described the native boots, which impressed him most: 'These are made of goatskin and high to the knee, with soles composed of many thicknesses of leather that must measure an inch through. Cumbersome as they seem, the experience of centuries proves these boots to be the best wear possible for the inhabitants of the mountainous districts of this stony land. On the very day of which I write I saw a Cypriote arrayed in them running over the tumbled ruins of an ancient city and through the mud patches whereby it was intersected, with no more care or inconvenience than we should experience on a tennis lawn.' (Haggard 1901, 133-34, 91).

Winter clothes were of darker colors, as also those worn in the mountains, or by elderly people in general, and were complemented with a *cappotto* (a thick cape) made of sheep's or goat's wool.

References by women travellers to men's dress of the period are very few, the main exception being Magda Ohnefalsch-Richter, whose study noted the most typical characteristics of traditional Cypriot dress. This featured a shirt, a *vraka* (baggy trousers), *zimbouni* (waistcoat), *zostra* (a belt at the waist), a fez with or without a headscarf and boots. It is well known that the *vraka* was established on the island under Turkish rule and that it constituted the national dress of Cyprus, surviving in the countryside until our times. Ohnefalsch-Richter gave detailed descriptions of the various types of shirt, the many-pleated *vraka*, black for weddings, blue in

the winter and white in the summer, the striped *zimbouni*, the wedding-day velvet waistcoats with a line of buttons, the heavy capes and the silk sashes/scarves or belts at the waist, which were equipped with a knife. She also noted that the prominent and educated Greek men of the towns who retained the fez had otherwise adopted European dress from the days of Ottoman rule. Naturally, changes in fashion tended to reach Cyprus some years after these appeared in other regions.

Among the British women travellers, only Agnes Smith described men's festive dress, examples of which she saw worn on Easter Sunday in 1887, in the village of Trikomo (Famagusta district). She notes, 'On week-days all Cypriots wear the same dress as the Turks, only the full-cloth trousers are shorter and the ankles are protected either from the sting of reptiles or from thorns by stout leather gaiters. Today, [Easter Day] their trousers were well fastened up at the knee, showing a pair of handsome calves in snowy stockings. The waist was encircled not with a gay silk scarf, like that of an Arab, but with a coarse black, woollen one; the shirt sleeves were of chequered blue and white cotton, the whole dress being toned down so as to throw into relief the magnificence of the waistcoat, or what would be considered by a woman a sleeveless bodice. The back of this remarkable garment was bright scarlet, open down the middle, and laced with two laces, one blue the other red. The front was a figured velvet, the pattern of leaves being black and red on a light blue ground, ornamented with sundry tufts of black wool. On the head was a red tarboosh, and the whole appearance of the wearer was enough to turn the head of a dozen girls.' (Smith, 1996, [1887], 125-126).

This is a most accurate description of the festive waistcoat, as found in pictures and in surviving examples. A few years later, Mrs Lewis referred generally to male dress, criticising the ugly material imported from Manchester, which had flooded the markets of Nicosia;

'The extraordinary patterns and colours which our manufacturers turn out for the East, prove how far astray the native taste can go when it ventures beyond the good old reds and yellows, and navy blues for their outer shirt-shaped jackets, which are confined by a many-folded sash over the baggy nether garments. Sometimes a cloth jacket with long sleeves, open in front, is worn over the vest... And with regard to these nether garments which are mostly of black cloth or stuff, or, for quite common wear, of blue cotton, one sees them perceptibly differ in shape as one goes about the Island, and I am told that anyone really conversant with the habits of the Cyprus people would recognise at a glance, by the cut of their garments, the parish whence

they severally come. The high boots that many wear are never, I believe, patronised by the Turks' (Lewis, 1894, 195).

Vraka proved to be the most persistent dress item, and remained in use until the end of the twentieth century, in combination with a European-style jacket, shoes and hat. Also the fez was worn with European clothes. In the course of the 20th century European male dress became prevalent in the town centers and gradually infiltrated in the countryside.

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