

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

The arrival of the British in Cyprus opened the way to more travellers, especially from Britain. As a result, the dress of local people is documented with more descriptions and even more visual evidence.

In his book *British Cyprus*, published in London in 1879, W. Hepworth Dixon occasionally records his glimpses – like camera snapshots – of the appearance of the natives. In the chapter titled ‘Nicosians’, Dixon offers the most flattering description of Muslim women’s appearance: ‘Men and women in Nicosia proclaim their nationality in their dress; men by means of turban and fez; women by means of yashmak and shawl. The female dress is apt to strike you first; all Moslem women being robed from head to foot in white with nothing but their eyes exposed; while the Orthodox women are clothed in gaudy colours – sea-green, orange, red and striped – with all their charms obtruded on the public sight... At nine or ten the girls are lovely; having eyes like antelopes, and softly-rounded cheeks, hinting at Hebes by and by. But in their after years, when comeliness is needed most, much of this beauty fades. Fine eyes remain; but contour, colour, bloom, expression, all depart. The Moslem females seem to understand their fate. If their sisters of the Orthodox rite were knowing, they too would glide about the courts and market-places veiled. A Christian woman bares her neck and face; a Moslem woman shows no more than a pair of sparkling eyes. No man looks twice at the retreating figure of a Greek, though she is habited in pink and amber. Everyone turns and gazes at the gliding mystery of a girl in white, whose face is shrouded from his view. White-robed, white-winged, these Moslem women flit through alley and bazaar; coming and going on their household errands... As you approach, a Moslem woman draws her yashmak round her face...’ (Dixon 1879, 52-53,155).

Dixon compared Turks and Greeks, trying to see differences and similarities behind the costumes: ‘In Nicosia contours and colours are much the same. No Moslem in Cyprus can be rich in Turkish blood. What keeps the memory of race alive is dress – turban and caftan, articles of costume never worn by Greeks. These things are visible to the eye. Behind lie other things; creed, name and language.... Moslem and Orthodox are languid, for the life is easy and the glow intense. Squatting in their slippers – those in shawls and caftans, these in skirts and trousers – under the shade of either wall or tree, they like to listen to the story-teller’s yarn.... Whether “Turk” or “Greek” they are an Eastern people, taking their pastime in an Eastern style...’. Worth noting are also his remarks on the character of ‘the Cypriotes’: ‘Except in

name, they are neither Turks nor Greeks: neither are they an amalgam of these two races... In common speech a Musulman is called a "Turk", an Orthodox Christian is called a "Greek"; for, in the absence of any physical sign of difference, ordinary speech has fastened on the visible differences of dress and ritual. A man who wears a turban, and goes to mosque, is a "Turk;" a man who wears a skull-cap, and goes to church, is a "Greek". In blood and race both men are Cypriotes.' (Dixon 1879, 19).

It is worth noting that, focusing on one distinctive feature, the headdress, in specifying the difference in the appearance of Turks and Greeks, Dixon conceived and stressed the 'Cypriote' identity shared by both. Other observers noticed that the Muslims of Cyprus generally lived in harmony with their Christian neighbours in town and country.

In fact, both similarities and differences are expressed in dress. These were noticed by foreigners who came to study the island and its people, and spontaneously juxtaposed and compared Greeks and Turks. In his 'Notes from Cyprus' (1879) Horatio Herbert Kitchener, who carried out the first trigonometrical survey of Cyprus between 1878 and 1883, described the very distinct types of the 'two races' and included some useful comments on dress: 'They [the Turks] prefer white-and-red-striped Manchester stuffs for their clothes, whereas the Greeks are almost always dressed in blue indigo-dyed stuffs of home manufacture... The natives, both Turk and Greek, wear high boots with clump soles, loose baggy trousers, a shirt and small jacket, and a fez; a Manchester cotton handkerchief is tied round the fez by the Greeks, and sometimes a white turban, but generally plain by the Turks. On feast-days and at weddings the Greeks dress themselves up in very long baggy trousers of dark-blue cloth or shiny calico, tied round the knee, so as to show a white stocking and shoes with buckles. Their waistcoats are bright with embroidery, and they wear small close-fitting jackets. Turkish Effendis and landed proprietors assume a European dress'. (Shirley 2001, 58-59).

British ladies recorded traditional costumes in detail. Esmé Scott-Stevenson described and compared the clothing of Muslim and Greek women in Nicosia: 'Over the Turkish women I marveled greatly, in their absurd French boots and long white sheet, which, shrouding them from head to foot, left visible only the single eye that peered so curiously at me as I passed. They looked like great white bundles, though hardly more ungraceful than the Greek women. The latter dress in European skirts of the fashion of twenty years ago, with much fullness round

already abundant hips.... Altogether, the nationalities and costumes in Nicosia are quite as varied as in Alexandria' (Scott-Stevenson 1880, 20-21).

Mrs Scott-Stevenson did not refrain from criticizing the appearance of the male population, particularly the Turks. Strolling in the narrow streets of the bazaars in Nicosia, she observed: 'The natives amused me most. Some of them were the very blackest people I ever met; so intensely black that I know of nothing to which to compare the colour of their skins. They were always dressed in the gaudiest and brightest hues – marvellous combinations of blues and greens, yellows and crimsons – which it must have severely taxed the invention of the manufacturer to produce. These men generally were the servants of the higher class of Turks. They serve without wages, receiving only a certain amount of oil and bread, and their clothes. But they invariably seemed well fed and clothed, and looked the most contented part of the population. Near them, and in marked contrast, would be seen dignified Turks in white turbans and long fur-lined robes (generally fox-skin) of charming soft hues, beautiful olive greens, shaded yellows and browns such as would have delighted the eye of an artist. To me these people were intensely interesting – they recalled so vividly 'The Arabian Nights', and 'Aladdin with his Wonderful Lamp', those great delights of my childhood. Quite another individual, and not half so magnificent a creature as his primitive brother, is the Turk who affects European costume, the somewhat longer coat and the red fez being the difference from our own dress' (Scott-Stevenson 1880, 19-20). The exotic oriental elements she observed in the appearance of the Turk likened to Aladdin presented a relic or remnant of the past, old-style garments which coexisted with innovative styles of European dress, the latter gradually replacing the former.

Another British lady, Mrs Lewis, having witnessed a performance of the 'Dancing Dervishes' in the Mevlevi Tekke in Nicosia, left a vivid description of the Dervishes, their whirling and clothing. At a certain point of the ceremony, when 'the time of the music changed, the Dervishes slipped off their cloaks, and each in turn approaching the Sheik bowed low and forthwith commenced whirling, at first with hands crossed but soon with arms extended, to balance himself as he span smoothly and rapidly round, his long garment of spotless unbleached cotton standing out in a stiff circle, inflated by the rapid movement. The robe had a bodice of the same, confined by a coloured sash-belt. They wore open jackets and knee-breeches of the same cotton, with neat white stockings and black shoes, and their hats, as well as the Sheik's, which he never removes, are of brown felt, conical except at the apex. The costume was well made and most absolutely clean... This went on for perhaps half an hour or

more with only one pause, during which they prostrated themselves by the wall, and an attendant acolyte, in black, who could not see their faces but knew the coloured order of their cloaks, passing behind them, threw over each Dervish his own special cloak...’ (Lewis 1894, 198; Her description is quoted by Gunnis 1936, 45-46). It should be added that each tomb of the fifteen sheikhs of the Mevlevi mosque has at the end a painted plaster representation of the camel-hair hat with a green band at the base, the typical headdress of the sheikhs.

In his *Winter Pilgrimage*, published in 1901, H. Rider Haggard offers occasional and cursory glimpses on the appearance of the native people. For example, he observed the camel-drivers resting with their animals in the yard of a hovel at Choirokoitia, ‘motley-garbed men with coloured headdresses, half-cap, half-turban...’ He paid more attention to a Turk mounted on a donkey, ‘followed by three wives also mounted on donkeys, one or two of them bearing infants, and shrouded head to foot from the vulgar gaze of the infidel, in *yashmaks* and white robes...’ (Haggard 1901, 133-34, 91).

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. Regarding the appearance of the male natives, Greeks and Turks, Deschamps remarked that they were similarly dressed, the Turks being tidier and more comfortable (‘plus d’aisance et plus de propreté chez les Turks’). He remarked the local dandies in their fezzes and baggy trousers, tied at the calves with garters. The fez was often very tall, worn slightly askew, wound with a white scarf decorated with golden fringes, and with its end falling on the face. He commented that this headgear was the most ungraceful part of their attire. For decoration they often put a flower over the ear or a small bunch of flowers which was held tight under the fez. Over the broad-sleeved shirt they wore a waistcoat, often with different colours on the front and back, such as bright red on the chest and apple-green with flower patterns on the back. The waist was surrounded with a wide colourful cummerbund with gaudy vegetal designs, falling to the middle of the calves. The attire was completed with pink, blue or yellow stockings, tightly held by red garters, and open shoes; such shoes were worn by the townsmen, while peasants wore heavy top boots. This attire was a typical traditional male costume of the Turks of Cyprus.

Finally, Deschamps devoted to the Turkish ladies a rather impressionistic imaginative description: he noticed a swarm of them in front of the walls of Larnaca castle; seen from a distance, with their colourful umbrellas contrasting their white garments, they looked like a beautiful flower-bed in a field covered with snow.

In 1928, Maynard Owen Williams recorded some interesting details about the Muslims' attire: 'The Moslems wear a kerchief with lace flower fringes about their red tarbooshes, and pink or orange shirts, blue trousers, and purple stockings, all protected from autochromes [sic] by religious tenets.' At the same time he noticed the 'up-to-date flavor', 'an air of modernity' in the progressing Nicosia, and documented in photographs the European-style dress of its people in busy Ledra Street (Williams 1928, 6, 8 and 44).

In his book *More Moves on an Eastern Chequerboard*, London 1935, Sir Harry Luke, who first knew Cyprus in 1908, described with enthusiasm the dress of the 'Cypriote Turk' or 'the Turkish countryman of Cyprus', as 'perhaps the most attractive of all Turkish costumes': 'Stockings of brilliant hue, embellished with birds or equally startling devices; short knee-breeches of dazzling white, immensely baggy; a *qawushdurmá*, a tightly fitting sleeved jacket of magenta, yellow or apple-green velvet; and a silken scarf of many colours wound about the waist, constitute the equipment; villagers often add a flowered muslin handkerchief worn round the base of the fez. Sometimes men of a certain substance wear breeches of heavy blue broadcloth (*shalwar*) instead of the white *vráka*, and a *yelek* (a double-breasted embroidered waistcoat) in the place of the *qawushdurmá*.' These descriptions refer to the holiday attire of the Turks on Muslim festivals, such as the two Bayrams and the Mevlid, the Prophet's birthday, during which the atmosphere of Nicosia was 'more Turkish, even, than usual'... 'On these days, too, the Turkish women abandon their habitual black or white cotton *charshaf* for the brightest of silks as they gather on the ramparts by the Paphos Gate to watch the *jerid* match in the moat below... the ramparts themselves, from bastion to bastion, are lined with serried rows of Turkish ladies, a brilliant splash of blue and crimson, orange and purple silk.' (Luke 1935, 177-178 and Luke 1957, 112-113).

In the above recorded descriptions, Luke presents two different costumes, which, though both worn by the Turks of Cyprus as their gayest holiday attires, seem to reflect social differences. The costume with the white baggy trousers, called *vraka*, the same name used by the Greeks for their similar but black in colour nether garments, was the costume of the countryman but

also of ordinary people in general. In the same book, the author refers to ‘a flower-seller, dressed in the baggy white breeches of the Turkish peasant of Cyprus and with bare legs and slippers...’. (Luke 1935, 187) The second costume, worn by men ‘of a certain substance’ differed in fabric and colour; the blue breeches of heavy broadcloth, called shalwar, were matched with an embroidered *yelek*, a substitute for the sleeved jacket, the *qawushdurma* of the peasants’ dress. Another interesting point is that he distinguishes the Cypriote Turk’s costume from other regional Turkish costumes as something special and most attractive.

Revealing, though of general character, is his reference to Turkish ladies’ dress; it allows us to view and admire the colourful silk dresses instead of the usual monochrome cotton *çarşaf*, ‘the one-piece garment, covering head and dress, worn out of doors by Turkish women who have not adopted European or semi-European fashions’. (Luke 1935, 160)

Harry Luke focused more on the oriental character of Nicosia, which he considered, despite the changes of the first decades of the 20th century, as ‘the most typical example of a Latin Eastern town’... ‘...the most picturesque of towns, filled with folk as picturesque as itself.’ Worth quoting, among others, is the following scene: ‘Turkish ladies pick their way daintily across the muddy streets; others look down from projecting balconies of lattice... elderly khojas, in fur-lined gowns and white turbans, pass solemnly by, fingering the *tessbih* (conversation beads) which hang like rosaries from their wrists. Grave Turkish merchants squat cross-legged in their booths...’ (Luke 1935, 169, 171).

Being certain that such scenes would soon belong to the past, Harry Luke took a photograph of ‘A Cypriote Turk (Khalil Ali) in front of “Othello’s Tower” wearing the now obsolescent Cypriote Turkish dress’ (Luke 1957, 96).

The Europeanization of Cyprus was underway, first of all in the capital: ‘alas that town-bred Turkish boys of the younger generation, even those of the peasant class, are beginning to discard it [the dress of the Turkish countryman] in their foolish ambition to garb themselves *alla franca*’ (Luke 1935, 178).

Late 19th century family photographs document that the red fez in combination with European clothes was a feature shared by both eminent Turks and upper-class Greeks in the urban centres of Cyprus. In such photographs young members of the family appear in ‘Frankish’ costumes,

but the older ones still wear the fez. Ladies pose in long, high-necked dresses decorated with pleats, lace and frills. They were made of Cypriot silk and lace, or imported fabrics, mainly of British manufacture. Upper-class women were the first to adopt European dress styles, and they set the example for the wider population.

Apart from the general modernization of Cyprus under British rule, the westernization of dress as part of the radical reforms in Turkey imposed by Kemal Atatürk, was yet another major factor that affected the dress of the Turks of Cyprus after the first decades of the 20th century. Harry Luke commented: 'The 'Hat Law' of the Ankara Republic and consequential westernization of Turkish dress have not been without their influence on Cyprus. Now that Cypriote Turks have given up not only the countryman's baggy breeches but the townsman's fez, and the Greek villager's distinctive dress is seen but rarely, it is often difficult to tell the races apart. Formerly identification was automatic, and on the great Moslem holidays the atmosphere of Nicosia within the walls could be very Turkish' (Luke, 1935, 112).

The above mentioned abandonment of the fez, initially in the urban centres, is echoed in the diminishing number of fez blockers in the course of the first decades of the 20th century: in the list of occupations included in the *Census* of the year 1901, 5 fez blockers are recorded (all male); they diminish to 3 in 1911, only 2 are mentioned in 1921, and none in 1931.

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 especially photographs.

As was to be expected, the Turkish Cypriot photographers mostly immortalized Turkish Cypriot people in their daily life or special events, more often in portraits or family photographs. Their contribution to the documentation of Turkish Cypriot dress is invaluable. Not only their clientele but also these first photographers themselves, who could afford to make endeavours in the new art, seem to have belonged to the elite of the Turkish Cypriot community. Their self-portraits give the impression of intellectuals, individuals with a cultural background and a refined taste. Their whole appearance, posture and style show pioneers in photography and life.

As numerous photographs taken by professional photographers (J.P. Foscolo, T.H. Toufexis and other) clearly show, European fashion had also penetrated the Turkish Cypriot community. In spite of the expanding new trend, however, traditional costumes still persisted in the second half of the 20th century, particularly among the country people.

Preserved garments are the material evidence *par excellence* for studying the traditional Turkish Cypriot costumes. The best examples are the two complete costumes brought to Athens for the Cypriot Exhibition which was organized by the *Patriotic Association of Cypriots in Athens* in April 1901. The aim of the Exhibition was the strengthening of bonds between Cyprus and Greece, considering it as a priority of national importance. Despite this, the founder of the Association and main organizer of the Exhibition, G.S. Frangoudes, acquired costumes worn not only by the Greek but also by the Turkish community. In proportion to the size of the respective populations, he presented in the Exhibition ten Greek and two Turkish Cypriot complete costumes. The latter comprise the attire of the Turk of the towns and the apparel of the Turkish peasant. Both costumes, which are representative of the Turkish dress in Cyprus during the first decades of British rule, were donated by the Association to the National Historical Museum, where they are kept to this day. According to the description by G.S. Frangoudes in his introduction to the Cypriot Exhibition ‘The Turkish costume of the towns, with its high red fez, pumps, coloured decorated stockings (or gaiters), kondovraki [short vraka] made of blue fabric, coloured silk chemise, large multi-coloured silk sash, which comes down almost to the knees, and [watch] chain hanging from the neck, can be seen worn by the vlamides in all the Turkish towns’ (Frangoudes 1901, 36)

In general, the costume of the peasant Turk, like that of the Greek villager, consisted of home-made dress items of simple cut and decoration. Their construction was based on loom-woven, narrow widths of cloth (40-44cm), joined together. Peasant clothes differed from the sophisticated and colourful Turkish town attire, the component parts of which were made of imported fabrics, such as velvet or woollen cloth (*çuha*, broadcloth), and decorated by specialized craftsmen in Nicosia. Worth mentioning is the case of a Greek Cypriot craftsman, called Manouris, who sometime in the first decades of the 20th century travelled to Smyrna in order to learn how to sew men’s waistcoats and decorate them with braids and silk thread embroidery.

The traditional garments became old-fashioned in the course of the 20th century and were slowly abandoned. Although they were still used in villages until recent times, it seems that only a restricted number of old traditional Turkish Cypriot costumes have been preserved as family heirlooms or as museum pieces.

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