

### 1.1. The period of Ottoman Rule (1571-1878) Turkish Cypriot dress

What style of garments did the Ottomans bring to Cyprus when they conquered the island in the late 16th century, and what was the impact – if any – of Ottoman dress on the appearance of the local population?

Evidence documenting Ottoman dress in Cyprus during the period from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century is almost non-existent. It is reasonable, however, to assume that the conquerors brought with them their attire, not only the brilliant costumes of the military and religious officials, but also the various dresses worn by the immigrants (artisans, peasants etc.) from Anatolia and Asia Minor.

The Ottoman dress becomes tangible in Cyprus in the course of the 18th century and information increases thereafter, especially during the period of British rule. Information drawn from written sources, such as travellers' descriptions, is complemented with visual evidence, e.g. drawings, engravings and paintings, as well as photographs from about the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. As far as dress items themselves are concerned, preserved examples can hardly be found before the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A detailed study of these sources has documented that at least during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the elite of Cyprus – including Orthodox Christians of the upper classes – had adopted the dress which was fashionable among the well-to-do throughout the Empire. Men's clothing consisted of a shirt combined with *salvaria* (Turk. *şalvar*, baggy trousers) or *tzaktziria* (Turk. *çakşır*, baggy breeches), usually red, onto which were sewn the *mestia* or *meskia* (Turk. *mest*) footwear made of Morocco leather in the privileged yellow colour. Over the shirt they wore an *anterin* (Turk. *entari*, loose robe, gown) with a sash around the waist and as outer garments, coats made of costly fabrics, usually lined with fur.

Throughout the Ottoman Empire furs constituted the main article of Russian commerce and Constantinople was the chief emporium for it. In the Ottoman palace furs and skins were accorded special importance, but also in the provinces, notables, both Muslim and non-Muslim, displayed their wealth and status by appearing in fur-lined garments. Cyprus was not an exception. Here, as elsewhere, the pelisse was the favourite object of luxury, the mark of opulence and social prestige. Common people wore coats made out of sheepskin, if they could

afford furs at all. Another common outer robe with full sleeves, with or without fur, was the *tzoupe* (Turk. *cüppe*), worn by both sexes, in combination with the *anterin*.

A much-esteemed, valuable overcoat was the *kaftanin* (*kaftan* or *caftan*), a sleeved outer gown, usually offered as a robe of honour. An example of such use in Cyprus is described by William Turner in 1815: ‘This Tatar brought an account of the suppression of the late tumult among the janizaries, at which the Musellim was so delighted that he invested the Tatar with *Caftan*’. This long coat, considered to be of Turkic, Persian or Central Asian origin, had a long tradition in the Ottoman Empire. Kaftans of honour were offered by Grand Viziers to consuls before they appeared to the Sultan. It should be mentioned that the *kaftan*, as well as the *entari* and the *cüppe*, dress items deeply rooted in Turkish tradition, have been considered by other scholars as Byzantine garments which were adopted and transformed by the Turks. The *kaftanin* and the similar robe called *kavadin*, were symbols of authority, passing from the East to the West and from the Persians to Byzantium and to the Ottomans.

As far as the female costume is concerned Giovanni Mariti’s offers a fair idea of the 18th century oriental-style (*alla Turca*) female dress, of both Greek and Turkish women in Cyprus, and concludes ‘the Christian ladies when they go abroad make a great parade of their costumes, while the Turks are covered from head to foot with a white cotton sheet’ (Mariti [1769] 1971, 4-6). Descriptions of indoor or festive dresses of Turkish women in Cyprus can hardly be found, because, following the Islamic tradition, modesty dictated their complete covering by an outer garment. Consequently, the Ottoman female dress in Cyprus during this period is mainly known from the descriptions of the apparel of those Christian ladies who used oriental-style dress. In general, Cypriot town dress, especially the clothing of the upper classes, followed the fashion which is observed in the urban centres all over the Ottoman Empire. The trendsetter of this fashion was Istanbul, and the elite of all ethnic groups encompassed by the Empire, were the first to adopt the new styles.

The oriental-looking dress continued to be typical for the elite of Cyprus in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The dress of ordinary people is not so well documented. They are generally described as wearing loom-woven white cotton garments of the simplest cut. Thus, in 1735, the travelling monk Bars’kyj mentioned that it was customary in Cyprus for workmen and common people to wear garments made of white cloth. Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, who landed in Limassol in August 1800, gives more details on the appearance of the local

population: the attire of men, who, in his eyes, were slender and nice-looking, consisted of broad white breeches reaching to the knees, black 'Frankish' boots, a brown jacket and a turban wound around the head, also a scarf with fringes, hanging around the neck. The language, as well as the dress of ordinary people, both Turks and Greeks, looked to him the same, so that it was difficult to distinguish them. The women were moving along the green fields like waves of figures dressed in white, like ghosts. They were covered from head to feet in a long white shirt; even the face was covered, being here stricter than in the capital of the Empire; only the eyes were left uncovered. Undoubtedly, he referred to Muslims.

The characteristic male dress for the wider strata of the population was the attire with the *vraka* (baggy, pleated trousers) as its main component. Baggy breeches, either *vraka* or *şalvar*, tied with a sash at the waist, were combined with shirt and waistcoats of different types. This type of men's attire, with the *vraka* as its main part, was also the characteristic Aegean island type of costume. In Cyprus it is well documented in depictions of both Turks and Greeks. Despite some distinctive features of either nationality, the resemblance is noticeable; clothes of Cypriots at that time appear to have been a mixture of Turkish and Greek island costumes.

Although the abolishment of the turban created strong reactions among the Mussulmen's in the Ottoman Empire, Mahmud's reforms found a panegyrist in the most famous of the Turkish poets of Cyprus, Hilmi Efendi (1782-1847), who was active in Nicosia in the first half of the 19th century. In his work, Hilmi struggled for innovation through tradition, both in poetry and real life, and praised the social and political innovations of the new regime. As far as the dress reforms are concerned, he promoted them by focusing on the importance of the fez, which he praised in one of his poems as symbol of the renovated social order. The poem, which was evidently intended to be read by Mahmud II, begins with a eulogy of the Sultan as a powerful Muslim ruler. The fez, used metaphorically throughout the poem, is compared to the heart, or to a cup of red wine; the curls slipping out under the fez are described, and the origin of the fez (Maghrib/ North Africa) is mentioned. References are also made to the tassel (*püskül*) and the white linen cap (*arakçin, terlik*) worn under the fez. The last two verses are a clear reference to the fez as symbol of modernity. The poem as a whole reflects Hilmi's enthusiasm for the new headdress, which is described as if it were a beloved person. He even draws parallels between the fez and breathing, as the word *fes* is contained in *nefes*, which means 'breathe'. About 1826 (?), Hilmi was called to the court of Mahmud in Istanbul and was given the title 'leader of the poets'.

Sooner or later, signs of the new order would also reach Cyprus. In his diary of the year 1835, the American missionary Lorenzo Warriner Pease, who lived in Larnaca, recorded: 'The Governor has returned dressed in Frank clothes as he now holds a new office from the sultan, which renders it necessary' (Severis (ed.) 2002, 566)

The adoption of the new forms of dress, however, was a slow process in the provinces of the Empire. Apart from political and religious factors that were the cause of much reaction to the dress reforms, first of all in the capital, innovation had to fight with tradition or rather with many different traditions all over the state.

The effects of the Tanzimat reforms on the appearance of the people of Cyprus would gradually become visible. The fez, the main marker of the dress reforms, appears often in paintings of the second half of the 19th century and only occasionally earlier. Turkish dignitaries were depicted by several artists who visited Cyprus. In Cyprus, as elsewhere, the fez as the head-cover imposed by Mahmud, was first adopted in the urban centres, and primarily by the upper classes who wore it in combination with west European, 'Frankish' dress.

Photographs dating to the last decades of Ottoman rule are complemented by some descriptions of the appearance of Cypriots by that time. In 1873, five years only before the island's administration was transferred to Britain, Archduke Louis Salvator described the Turks of Nicosia, as he saw them with the eyes of a young man and artist: 'The Turks of Levkosia often have strangely-shaped eyebrows, growing upwards about the middle of the forehead, a broadly cut mouth, large dark-brown eyes with long lashes, and the hair shorn in the Turkish fashion. Most of them have sea-green shirts, which suit them very well, and are distinguished by their wide white trousers and many-coloured garments. The women wear in the streets upper garments of a snowy whiteness, and underneath frequently rich silk dresses (Salvator [1873] 1983, 58).

Written and visual evidence clearly show the prevalence of traditional, popular costumes. The baggy *vraka* was well established by the later Ottoman period and worn, in combination with various waistcoats and jackets, by Turks and Greeks alike, the main distinction being the colour, expressed in the preference of the Turks for white. Another feature typical of this period is the widespread use of the fez, even among the Greeks on the island, worn alone or with a

scarf around its base, in combination with either traditional or western-style garments. The first signs of Europeanization of clothing among the urban population were already apparent.

However, European attire seems to have been adopted only by the most ‘progressive’, well-to-do people in the towns, both Turks and Greeks, high officials, such as members of the council, rich land proprietors or merchants like the Armenians. Describing his last days in Larnaca, at the close of Ottoman rule, Franz von Löher commented that the dress of most people there ‘was a curious mixture of European, Grecian and Turkish fashions’. (Löher 1878, 232)

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