



CLOTHING V. IN PRE-ISLAMIC EASTERN IRAN

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Modern knowledge of the dress of the eastern Iranian peoples is derived from literary and archeological sources, which can be compared, though with caution. Although there were regional differences, as well as a broad change over time, on the whole the costume remained fairly uniform. Material for the periods around 500 b.c.e. and 200 and 600 c.e. is especially abundant. It permits identification of three general costume types: the ceremonial dress of men and women and warrior's garb. Male ceremonial dress consisted of forms of headdress, an undergarment similar to a shirt, a knee-length mantle open in front, a belt, trousers or leggings, and shoes or high boots. Female dress changed more sharply over time, from a full-length cloak draped over the head to a long dress with an opening at the neck. The warrior's outfit consisted of a helmet and chain or laminated mail.

In the Avesta (between 1000 and 500 b.c.e.?). Little concrete information can be gleaned from the Avesta itself about the dress worn by the Iranian people among whom it was composed (see [avestan people](#)). Several general clothing items are mentioned but mostly not described: *vanhana-* or *vastra-* "dress," *adka/aṭ.ka* "mantle" (*Yt.* 5.126; *Nērangistān* 92; *OInd.* *átka*), *āθrauuana-*



“leggings(?)” (*Vd.* 8.23; *Nēr.* 86), *karana-* “trousers (?)” (*Vd.* 8.24), *aoθra-* “shoes” (*Yt.* 5.64, 78; *Vd.* 6.27), and *aiβiiānhana-* “belt” (*passim*). In *Nērangistān* 91-96 the clothes to be worn at the sacrifice are described (text and tr. in Waag, pp. 92-96, discussion pp. 129-37).

The goddess Anāhitā, in the hymn to her (*Yt.* 5.64.78, 125-29, see *ābān yašt*), is said to wear a dress girdled under the breast (*uskāt̄ yāstā*), a golden decorated mantle with long sleeves (? *frazuš-*, Gershevitch, p. 220 n., but doubted by Kellens, p. 86), rectangular earrings (*gaošāuuara . . . čaθru-karana*), a golden necklace (*minu-*), an outer garment of beaver fur, and a golden octagonal diadem (*pusā-*) adorned with a hundred stars. Her shoes are laced with gold cords (*zaraniiō.urvīxšna-*). In the *Ard yašt* women waiting for their men to return home are described as wearing pins (*aṅku-*; fibulae?), earrings, and necklaces (*Yt.* 17. 10).

The bellicose *fravašis* are said to be accoutered with metal (*aiiah-*; iron?) helmets and shields (*Yt.* 13.45), and Vāyu wears a helmet, crown, necklace, dress, shoes, and belt, all of gold (*Yt.* 15.57). Although no representations have yet been discovered, helmets and laminated armor of iron have been found at Persepolis.

Achaemenid period (ca. 500-300 b.c.e.). The eastern Iranian peoples represented on the reliefs of the *Apadāna* at Persepolis can be divided into two groups, on the basis of their clothing. The representatives of Haraiva (Herat; see *aria*), Drangiana (Zranka), and Arachosia (Harauvatiš), peoples of the eastern plateau, wear knee-length mantles, with trousers tucked into their high boots. They also display a variety of head coverings (see, e.g., delegations IV, VII, XV; see ii above, Figure 46). The Sakas, Bactrians, Sogdians, and Choresmians, on the other hand, wear long trousers, which cover the uppers of their boots; over their shoulders they trail a type of long mantle, with one diagonal edge in back. The Choresmians wear a piece of cloth wrapped around the chest and thrown over the shoulder. Again the caps are varied (e.g., delegations XI, XIII, XVII, XXI). One particular tribe of Sakas wore pointed caps (the Saka *tigraxaudā*, cf. Herodotus, 7.64; Hinz, p. 98, pls. 26a, 39).

Herodotus in his description of the Persian army (7.61-80), though describing mainly the arms and armor, mentions the following items of clothing worn by some of the eastern contingents: the Sakas, or Scythians, trousers and tall pointed caps (7.64); the Caspians and Paktyans cloaks of skin; and the Drangians dyed garments and buskins that reached to the knees (7.67).



Original items of Saka dress have been preserved in several tumuli (kurgans) in the Soviet Union (see vi, below). For example, at the excavations at Issyk Kurgan near Alma Ata, it was possible to reconstruct the original burial clothing from the position of a set of small gold plaques that had formerly been attached to it, even though the textiles themselves were not preserved. The Avestan terms *zaraniio.pis-* or *zaraniio.paesa-*, literally “with golden decorations,” may refer to this practice. The warrior who was buried in the tumulus wore a pointed cap, a jacket that closed in front, a belt, leggings, and shoes (Akishev, pp. 24-27). At Pazyryk, in the Altai, where the kurgans have been frozen for more than two thousand years, the burial clothing itself has been preserved: caps; long-sleeved jackets that closed in front with ties; long-sleeved shirts with neck openings; leather belts; leggings or stockings; and felt shoes. Although the ethnic connections of these people are unknown, they wore garments recognizable as of eastern Iranian type.

Representations of women from this period occur only on the tombstones of the Persian satraps of [Dascylium](#) at Ergili in Anatolia (Borchardt, pls. 40, 45; Akurgal, p. 170) and on a woven textile from Pazyryk (Rudenko, 1970a, p. 296, pl. 177); they show two long, flowing outer garments corresponding to those in the description of Anāhitā. One is thrown over the head like a cloak, and the other seems to be belted; a crenellated diadem is also represented. The conclusions drawn from study of these representations are confirmed by some of the finds from Pazyryk; a fur jacket with sleeves and a cloak reaching from the head to the feet have been preserved, as well as a long, flowing headdress, with a diadem ornamented with figures. Leggings or stockings and shoes are embroidered (see ii, above, Figures 56, 60, 61).

Clothing around 200 c.e. In the Krorain texts (ed. Boyer and Senart; tr. Burrow, 1940) the Khotanese loanwords (cf. below) *prahuni* or *prahoni* “dress” (Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 225), *kamaṃta* “trousers” (?) with *suj’inakirta* “embroidery” (Lüders, p. 31), and *lastug’a*, “some article made of cloth” (Burrow, 1935, p. 786), as well as the Indian word *cīnāmśuka* “Chinese silk,” are mentioned. These garments can be recognized on the sculptures from the Kushan palace at Khalchayan (Stawiski, p. 96). The men wear the belted mantle that closes in front over a shirt with a neck opening; long trousers or leggings are worn over the boots. The Median cap (see ii, above) is the [royal crown](#). The female dress consists of a tiara or crown, several floor-length dresses worn one over the other, and shoes. Often both men and women have pieces of cloth thrown over their shoulders. On one relief a set of armor, possibly of iron, is represented.



On the basis of these sculptures it is possible to reconstruct the garments buried in the tombs of a warrior and his five wives at Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan (Sarianidi), again owing to the arrangements of small gold plaques that were once sewn to the cloth. Actual woven textiles have been preserved in the frozen graves of Central Asian tribal people wearing Iranian garments at Noin Ula (Mongolia; Rudenko, 1970b, p. 36) and in remains at the desert sites of Loulan and Niya (the possibly Saka kingdom of Krorain, in eastern Turkistan; Sylvan). They include mantles, shirts, leggings, shoes, and caps made of wool, linen, and silk, some of them decorated with Persian embroidery.

Sogdian and Khotanese, 600 c.e. The Sogdian texts contain few references to items of clothing (the brocade jacket, *zyrnwfč qwrty*, and the belt, *r'n'kh*, are mentioned, but the Khotanese texts are more explicit; cf. Bailey, 1960; idem, 1982, pp. 15-16). Buddhist texts contain frequent references to garments (*prahauna-*), and other texts mention *thauna-* “cloth”; *vāsta-*, *cilā-*, and *pamūha-* “dress”; *kaumadai* “trousers or leggings”; *rrāna-* “belt”; *khausa-* “shoe or boots.” Fabrics include *kapāysa-* “cotton,” *kāmha-* “hemp,” *namata-* “felt,” *pe'ma-* “wool,” and *śacī* “silk” (from Chin. *xian-chi* “white silk”).

As represented in wall paintings from Khotan and Qizil in eastern Turkestan and Panjikant and Afrāsīāb in western Turkestan, the mantle was cut from patterned silk, overlapping below the neck like a modern European jacket and belted. The trousers were worn outside the boots or tucked into the tops; and warriors wore diadems or felt caps.

Female dress is not described in texts from this period, but in the wall paintings of Khotan and Qizil (Le Coq; Gropp) women are represented as wearing full-length dresses with neck openings and long sleeves.

In Khotanese sources the warrior's outfit *āysira-* (Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 21, s.v. *āysira-*), *nyūrra-* (Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 194, s.v. *nyūr-*), *baṃggāma-* (Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 265), *baṭha-* “laminated (?) armor” (Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 266) are all mentioned. Depictions of such armor are to be found especially in the battle scenes from Panjikant (Belenizki).

Because in this period the majority of the Iranian peoples belonged to one of the great redemptive religions, there are no graves with burial objects in which garments could have been preserved.



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