



CLOTHING VI. OF THE SOGDIANS

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The very few representations of Sogdian people that survive from before the 5th century c.e. do not allow any conclusion more specific about their clothing than that it was part of the general historical complex of Middle Eastern dress, specifically the category associated with the Central Asian steppes (Gorelik, pp. 32-33). Information about Sogdian dress between the 5th and the mid-8th centuries is, however, much richer, owing to representations in wall paintings uncovered at Panjīkant, [Afrāsīāb](#) (Afrāsīāb, the site of old Samarkand), Varakhsha, and other sites (Al'baum; Azarpay et al.; Belenitskiĭ, 1973; idem, 1980; Bentovich, 1980; Lobacheva; Shishkin; *Skul'ptura i zhivopis'*; *Zhivopis'*).

The most common type of male outer garment was a caftan ([PLATE LXXXII/2](#)) with long, tapered sleeves; a round neck; and slits on the sides of the skirt. The neckline, lapels, cuffs, hem, and side slits were trimmed with fabric of another pattern. The caftan was worn belted, and the neck was probably fastened with a single button. A rare variant of this costume wrapped across the chest, creating a V-shaped opening at the neck. Sometimes the sleeves were very full and gathered in rich folds above the elbows ([PLATE LXXXII/1](#)). In the 6th century the typical caftan was short ([PLATE LXXXII/3](#)), but later it reached to



mid-calf. A special type of wrapped, short-sleeved caftan was worn over armor (PLATE LXXXII/4). Another kind of caftan had no opening in front but was pulled on over the head (PLATE LXXXII/5, 6, 12), a style facilitated by slits along the shoulders to widen the neck opening. Again, all the edges were trimmed with contrasting fabric, including the shoulder slits and later the decorative epaulettes that replaced them. In religious ceremonies a mantle with large triangular lapels was worn over the caftan (PLATE LXXXII/7).

Undergarments might or might not be worn under the various types of caftan. Trousers were usually tucked into the tops of tall boots (PLATE LXXXII/3), but sometimes they were worn outside, and it is possible to observe that the hem and side seams (or possibly side slits) were trimmed with fur or fringe (PLATE LXXXII/19, 23). In one instance a figure wears leggings of leopard skin (PLATE LXXXII/18).

The most common form of male headdress was a soft, pointed cap (PLATE LXXXII/25-27, 32), but various types of skullcap (PLATE LXXXII/1), sometimes bordered with a band of fur or twisted cloth (PLATE LXXXIII/28), as well as turbans and headbands (PLATE LXXXIII/24, 29, 31), were also worn. For celebrations wreathes encircled the head (PLATE LXXXIII/30). Representations on coins show that before the 5th century the main symbol of royal power was a simple diadem with fluttering ribbons at the back; in 5th-century Bukhara a crescent moon was added at the top (PLATE LXXXIII/33). In the 7th century a winged crown reminiscent of Sasanian prototypes became quite common in royal representations (PLATE LXXXIII/ 34; cf. iv, above), but it did not entirely displace the old pointed cap; in fact a combination of the two can be seen in representations of the ruler at Panjikant (PLATE LXXXIII/39).

Women wore caftans or mantles similar to those worn by men (PLATE LXXXII/14, 15). One distinctive female garment was a shawl draped over the shoulders, with weights or pendants at the front corners (PLATE LXXXII/17). Female deities were represented wearing a short-sleeved blouse over what may have been either a belted tunic below which a skirt of light material fell in lavish folds or a single full-length garment constructed of several components stitched together (PLATE LXXXII/16). The sleeves were cut obliquely at the elbows. Diaphanous scarves were part of the costume of dancers and other entertainers (PLATE LXXXII/15).

The most common female headdress in representations was a small, close-fitting cap (PLATE LXXXIII/36). Young girls wore their hair in five plaits



(PLATE LXXXII/14, 15), two at each side and one in back, but insufficient information on adult coiffures is preserved. Various wrapped turbans seem to have been worn (PLATE LXXXIII/35), and several hairnets have been excavated at Mount Mug (PLATE LXXXIII/38).

Typical footgear for both sexes consisted of high boots without heels. Two examples were found in excavations at Mount Mug (Vasil'ev, p. 25) and Kūh-e Sorḵ (Kukh-i Surkh; *Drevnosti Tadzhikistana*, p. 249 no. 598; PLATE LXXXII/19). Shoes with turned-up toes are known from wall paintings, from finds at Yakka-Parsan (Nerazik, p. 16 fig. 8/13; PLATE LXXXII/21); and from a pair preserved in the Shosoin treasury in Japan. Also depicted in paintings are luxurious sandals ornamented with pearls, buckles, and ribbons (PLATE LXXXII/22). From documents excavated at Mount Mug it is clear that a pair of shoes might cost as little as 2 drachmas (Livshits, p. 182). On the other hand, among the booty captured from Boḵārā Ḳātūn in 54/674 were a shoe and stocking of "gold" studded with gems, which were evaluated at 200,000 dirhams (Naršakī, p. 53).

It seems that members of the Sogdian upper classes, regardless of regional or ethnic origin, wore essentially the same costume. There were no significant differences in ensemble or cut. Furthermore, the same basic dress seems to have been worn at all social levels. Social status was expressed, rather, in the textiles from which the garments were made. The common people generally wore plain fabrics, whereas a merchant or aristocrat might wear rich silks, sometimes in three or four different patterns. Textiles were also subject to shifts in fashion. Whereas in the earlier period even the upper classes wore monochromatic textiles, in the 7th century these fabrics were displaced by bright-colored silks patterned with pearl-bordered roundels familiar from representations of Sasanian textiles (PLATE LXXXII/13; see iv, above); in the 8th century large rosettes with double or triple frames and more complex rosettes of Chinese origin were popular (Belenitskiĭ and Marshak). A more certain indicator of social status was the **belt**. Nobles wore belts consisting of series of gold plaques (PLATE LXXXII/8), though sometimes the plaques were of copper covered with gold foil (Belenitskiĭ and Raspopova). Members of the lower classes wore a soft girdle knotted at the waist (PLATE LXXXII/10). A triple cord reminiscent of the Zoroastrian *kūstīg* and a mask (*padān*) over the lower part of the face (PLATE LXXXII/6) distinguished the priests. Even more important was the weapon or utensil attached to the belt: for the noble a sword (PLATE LXXXII/4, 6), for the merchant a large ornamented dagger



(PLATE LXXXII/8), and for the peasant a simple knife with a single-edged blade.

With the knowledge presently available it is impossible to make definitive statements about foreign influences on medieval Sogdian costume, partly because the clothing of neighboring regions is even less well known than that of Sogdiana. Nevertheless, it is possible to recognize strong similarities between the clothing of Sogdiana and Sasanian Persia (see iii, above), on one hand, and Sogdiana and eastern Turkestan, on the other, leaving aside details of belts that were common from the Pacific Ocean to the Black Sea.

See also [armor](#); [belts](#).

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