



# CLOTHING XVI. KURDISH CLOTHING IN PERSIA

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## CLOTHING

### xvi. Kurdish clothing in Persia

Kurds can easily be recognized by their dress, which has quite distinctive features, though there are significant variations among regions and social classes (see xvii, below). The Kurdish population of Persia is concentrated in four main regions (Žiā'pūr, p. 13): western Azarbaijan (see xxi, below), Kurdistan, Kermānšāh, and Khorasan (see xx, below).

*Female dress.* In western Azarbaijan Mahābād is the main urban center for the Kurds ([plate cxxxvii](#), [plate cxxxviii](#)). Women wear balloon-shaped trousers (*darpe*), 4-6 m wide, fitted at the ankles, and a long pleated dress (*kerās*), 4-5 m wide, with a round neckline and long sleeves that terminate in triangular projections (*sorānis*) at least a meter long, which are wrapped around the wrists. Over the dress a short jacket (*kavā*) is worn. A cotton sash (*peštand*) 3-6 m long is wound loosely around the hips. Finally, there is a kind of cylindrical cardboard hat (*tās-kelāw*) covered with velvet and wrapped in a long triangular scarf (*dasmāl*). The *dasmāl* is often of printed cloth or ornamented on both sides with gold embroidery and sequins.

Farther south, in Kurdistan, the main city of which is Sanandaj, the basic female dress varies somewhat from that of Azarbaijan ([plate cxxxix](#)). The trou-



sers are only about 3 m wide and worn under a long bell-shaped dress, 3-4 m wide, with a round neck; the sleeves terminate in *sorānis*. The jacket is similar, but it is supplemented by a long mantle (*sāya*) worn open in front. The traditional head covering in this region is the *kalāgī*, a cap decorated with sequins and wrapped with one or two scarves. In recent years young city girls have ceased to wear this headdress or have eliminated the scarves and retained only the cap.

Still farther south, in Kermānšāh, women wear the trousers under a long, full dress, cut straight with an open neck and no *sorānis* on the sleeves. Over the dress are a waist-length bodice or vest and a long mantle (*qabā*), closed at the bodice but open from the waist to the ankles. A sequined cap is wrapped with one or several scarves.

In Qūčān, a city in Khorasan with a Kurdish population, the Kurdish costume is completely different from those of other regions. Its basic elements include a knee-length dress with a round neck and sleeves without *sorānis*, worn under a hip-length tunic and a skirt (*šalīta*); long thick stockings and a scarf about 1.5 m square complete the outfit (see xx, below).

*Male dress.* Kurdish male costume varies little from region to region, except for that of Khorasan around Qūčān. In Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermānšāh Kurdish men generally wear a shirt (*kerās*) with a round neck and sleeves ending in *sorānis* at the wrists; a buttoned vest like those of military uniforms (*kavā*; [plate cxl](#)) or an unbuttoned version (*čūka*; [plate cxli](#)) with an open neck; and baggy trousers (*pāntol*) fitted at the ankles. The fullness at the bottom of these trousers decreases from Mahābād to Kermānšāh. A cotton sash (*peštand*) 60-70 cm wide and 3-4 m long is folded in half lengthwise and wrapped tightly around the torso from waist to chest. The normal headdress consists of a turban (*pač*) 2-3 m long, usually of fringed cloth, except for a kind of muslin called *āgābānū*; it is wrapped around a cap (*kelāw*), which can also be worn without the turban.

The clothing of the men of Qūčān is entirely different: It consists of a red or white collarless shirt with sleeves that do not have *sorānis*, narrow trousers, a knee-length mantle, a kind of legging (*patāva*) 20 cm wide and 1 m long, a narrow leather belt, and a felt or fur hat.

*Variations.* There are many small variations in Kurdish clothing, reflecting differences in age, designed for special occasions, or adapted to the changing



seasons. For example, young people tend to wear lighter and brighter colors. Their clothes are also generally less bulky than those of their elders; at Mahābād the length of the *peštand* is 3 m for girls and 6 m for older women. The *tās-keḷāw*, which was the traditional headdress of Mahābād, is worn today only by older women; others wear a simple *dasmāl* on their heads or wrap it around their shoulders. Girls choose finer fabrics for the *dasmāl*, whereas the majority of elderly women wear thicker fabrics in white.

Everyone wears darker and less vivid colors for mourning, however. On the other hand, for celebrations the brightest and most festive colors are chosen, and the fabrics are finer and often quite expensive. For a wedding a virgin bride wears a very fine red veil (*tārā*), the symbol of purity; a widow wears white or yellow when remarrying. Upon returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca both men and women briefly don an orange scarf (*kašida*).

Clothing does not usually differ in type according to the seasons, but its weight does vary with the temperature. Men of the Harkī tribe in western Azarbaijan do wear a summer suit consisting of wide, straight trousers and a vest open at the neck. Children traditionally wear scaled-down versions of adult dress (plate cxlii).

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All the information concerning western Azarbaijan is based on fieldwork.

In Kermānşāh province, toward the Iraqi frontier, the southern group of Kurds use a generally distinct vocabulary. Thus the women's shift is known not only as *kerās* but also as *korvās*, *şev*, and *şovī*; the trousers, buttoned at the ankle, as *şovāl jāfī* and the shorter underdrawers as *er-şovāl*, *şovāl-kol*, *toneka*, or *tanka*; and the plain velvet waistcoat, trimmed with braid, as *jelezqa* or *sokma*. The velvet jacket, usually black, worn over the waistcoat in winter, with straight sleeves, small collar lapels, front pockets at the waist, and side vents, is *salta* or *yal*, and the long, lined, sleeved coat worn over it in winter, with braid or coins trimming the collar, is *koter* or *qevā*. An alternative form of topcoat, which may be worn over the first, is of black velvet, waisted, and buttoned at the chest below the collar lapels; this is called *kavā*, *zebūn* or *zavūn*, or *kamařčīn*. The women's headdress is based on a hemispherical cap (*kelāw*, *kolū*, or *kelū*), which for younger women and girls is embroidered and for older women of plain velvet; both have a chain of silver coins sewn to one side, to be passed under the chin and hooked to the other. Unmarried women wear a white gauze headscarf (*dasmāl*) up to 2 m long. Married women wear their hair in plaits, which are either knotted on the cap, leaving the sides of the face free, or



thrown back over the shoulders. A headband (*sarvan*, *sarūvayn*) is folded from a rectangle of dark silk, centered over the brow, with the two ends tied behind the head, then brought back and tied again over the brow. Over this a large colored kerchief (*golvanī*) with tassels is wrapped around the head from right to left so that the tassels hang down all round. In some areas a different kerchief is used instead of this; it is called *dastmāl-sar*, *meškī*, or *boyama*. When going outside women cast a rectangular black silk shawl (*māšta*) over their shoulders and knot it below the throat. In this region the sash is not an essential part of everyday dress. In the mid-1960s stockings (*jūro*) were still used mainly by richer and more educated women, though shoes (*koš*) were already of an urban type. Women did not traditionally change their clothes or undress when going to bed, except to take off the turban and cover their heads with a cloth. Men's costume in the same region, around *Qaṣr-e Šīrīn* and *Šāhābād-e Ġarb*, has a very similar terminology; thus *korvās*, *šev*, or *šovī* is the man's collarless shirt, with three buttons at the front opening and side vents; *er-korvāsī*, *er-kerās*, or *er-ševī* is the undervest; and *šalvār jāfī* are the broad trousers caught close at the ankles. The upper garments are a plain, coarse waistcoat (*soḵma*), of urban cut; a coarse brownish jacket (*salta*); or a plain collarless jacket (*zebūn*) worn open in front without buttons. The sleeve pendants (*faqyāna*) are separate from the shirt, though in principle as before, 1 m long and of white linen or silk, wrapped between wrist and elbow. The sash (*šāl-pešt*) is wrapped with a series of knots in front. The headdress is a *kelāw* and turban cloth (*sarvan*) of black-and-white silk rolled diagonally and wound around the head several times from right to left, so that one end hangs to the side and the other is concealed in the folds, with the fringes hanging all round. As with the women, there was traditionally no distinction between daytime and nighttime clothes.

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