



# CLOTHING XVII. CLOTHING OF THE KURDISH JEWS

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## CLOTHING

### xvii. Clothing of the Kurdish Jews

The following description of the clothing worn since the beginning of this century by the Jews of Persian and Iraqi Kurdistan is based on field observations and interviews among the immigrant community in Israel and on a visit to northern Persia in 1974-79 (Shwartz-Beeri, pp. 71, 96, 147).

In general the Jews of Kurdistan wore the same clothes as the rest of the population (see xvi, above; xxi, below). The restrictions imposed on Jews in Islamic countries in earlier centuries continued to affect their dress in the present century. As the economic position of the Jews was often higher than that of most of their neighbors, they generally wore garments of better quality.

*Fabrics.* Everyday men's clothes were made from handwoven sheep's wool (*amra*). Suits for weddings and other festive occasions were of handwoven mohair (*mar'az*). These suits were embellished with embroidery and worn for many years. According to informants, expensive fabrics for women's and children's clothes were also handmade of wild silk, from worms that feed on oak trees in the region (cf. Hyde). Everyday dresses were of cotton. After World War I factory-made textiles of natural fibers began to penetrate the region, mainly from Aleppo via Mosul, gradually replacing local handwoven



fabrics. Since World War II synthetic fabrics have begun to replace natural ones in the markets.

Traditionally women made the clothing for themselves and their families. With the introduction of the sewing machine, however, male tailors took over this work.

*Dress.* The women's costume in Iraqi Kurdistan (Figure 65) was composed of four principal parts, which were generally uniform throughout the region, whereas such accessories as handkerchiefs, belts, and jackets differed according to district. The principal garments included, first, a long, wide underdress (*sudra*) with long sleeves flaring to a large triangle at each wrist. These triangles were folded and tied together behind the neck. A similar dress was found in Syria. Because of its fullness, this dress is suited to a woman's needs at every stage in her lifetime. Second was a short, close-fitting sleeveless waistcoat (*helake*). Over it a long, narrow coat (*kurtak*) with narrow sleeves was worn open in front. This outfit was completed by a pair of wide, long trousers worn under the dress. Similar components are known from a wide geographical area, ranging from Central Asia throughout Persia, Turkey, and the Middle East. Bright colors, especially violet and green, were preferred by young women, but older women wore black. On their heads women wore scarves tied in various ways, with pendant tassels.

In Persian Kurdistan the typical Jewish women's dress was fitted at the waist, in contrast to the normal bell-shaped style worn by Kurdish women (see xvi, above). The skirt was gathered, the bodice open in front with lapels and buttons, and the sleeves long and narrow. The fabric was cotton or silk, and the most characteristic color violet. The very wide trousers (*šarwāla*) were visible below the skirt hem. Over the dress a short velvet jacket striped with many colors was worn, along with a wide girdle of cotton or silk. In the southern part of the region older Jewish women still wore the traditional costume: dresses in dark colors without embroidery and square black cloaks over their shoulders. They also wore two kerchiefs, one with the ends tied behind and the second knotted round the forehead. In the northern area, on the other hand, it was customary to wear a sort of crown embroidered in gold thread, over which a transparent kerchief was draped to the shoulders and fastened under the chin with a metal brooch.

In Iraqi Kurdistan men wore a type of suit (*šalla šappikta*) consisting of two parts: a short jacket and wide trousers in the natural white, black, and brown



colors of the wool (Figure 66). The same clothes were worn summer and winter, but in cold regions woolen mantles (*'abayye*) were added. Like the women men kept their heads covered, wearing caps around which scarves were wrapped as turbans. In town leather shoes were worn, but in the villages, if shoes were worn at all, they were homemade, with soles constructed from several layers of cloth and knitted or fabric uppers.

In Persian Kurdistan most Jewish men wore wide trousers only at home. A common type of belt was made of material woven in several colors 6 m long, which was wrapped repeatedly around the waist and interlaced in front. Outside the home the accepted costume was a suit of modern Western cut.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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