



# CLOTHING XXI. TURKIC AND KURDISH CLOTHING OF AZARBAIJAN

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## CLOTHING

### xxi. Turkic and Kurdish clothing of Azarbaijan

In Azarbaijan as a whole, including both Persian and Soviet territories, the traditional costume, now worn largely in a tribal context, retains the form of garments much as they were at the end of the 19th century; it is maintained primarily by women, and it is only among Kurdish, rather than Turkic, men that elements have survived the reforms of Reżā Shah (see xi, above) in everyday wear.

#### Turkic dress

*The Azeris.* The Turkic dress of Azarbaijan has much in common with clothing in the Caucasus. That of women is based on a full-sleeved shirt (*könyäk*) with straight-cut shoulders and a breast opening fastened with a clasp, worn over a full lower garment reaching the ground; this consists either of very wide cotton drawers (*tuman*, *jüt-tuman*) of six layers of cloth, cut as a skirt divided by a gusset and gathered with a drawstring, or of much narrower drawers (*darbalaq*), also cut straight. Undergarments are thus called *tuman-köynäk*.



Over these drawers are worn one or more full skirts (*tuman*), of equal length and cut; there might be four or five underskirts (*ara tumanı*), each of ten to twelve widths of material. In the Nakhichevan (Naxjavān)-Ordübād region skirts are only calf length. Normal clothing is completed by a jacket, again cut with straight seams at the shoulders. The *čäpkän*, lined throughout, is close-fitting to the waist, where there is a rounded projection (*čapıq*) over each hip, forming a vent down to the hem some 20 cm below the waist; the sleeves, attached only to the upper parts of the armholes, hang behind the arms as loose flaps to the wrists (sometimes with buttons), where they end in spade-shaped extensions (*älčäk*), as if to cover the hands. The two sides of the *čäpkän* are cut to converge as a V to the waist. In the *arqalıq*, once the most widespread form of jacket (see xxvii, below), there are true sleeves, either cut plain, or plain to the elbow and then slit as far as the wrist, or, in the type called *lelüfär* (Pers. *nīlūfar*), flared from the elbow like the bell of a lily and trimmed with an extra 4 cm of lining from the inside. The sides of the jacket are generally cut to form a wide opening over the breast, displaying the shirt, and are then buttoned to the waist, though they sometimes button from the neck down. In most instances the short skirt of the *arqalıq* is gathered or pleated, but in some it is plain, with the same rounded projections at the hips. Other types were formerly known as *nimtänä*, *don*, and *zivin*. All were belted with a frequently elaborate girdle (*kämär*) of gold, silver gilt, or silver-mounted leather. Occasionally the *arqalıq* is cut as a full-length coat. The range of materials used reflects the former wealth of the textile crafts in Azerbaijan, in wool, silk, and cotton. Sometimes jacket and upper skirt would be of matching brocade, and others would contrast. Cut velvet (*güllü mäkmar*), gold brocade (*zärqara*), and a striped woolen twill cloth (*tirmä*) were characteristic of the finer garments, all trimmed with decorative braids (*bafta*) and often with silver or gold lace (*zänjirä*, *šahpäsänd*) at the cuffs. Velvet is still popular for jackets, though lurex and other artificial silks have replaced brocades and satins.

True coats reaching to the knee also take several forms. These are little used nowadays. The *küläjä*, made of twill or velvet, is tailored at the waist, where the flaring skirt is gathered; the straight sleeves are complete but open at the armpits. There are no buttons, but both sides of the straight front opening, the cuffs, and hem are trimmed with gold lace and a deep border of floral embroidery. The *katibi* corresponds to the *čäpkän* in having open sleeves with *älčäk*, but closes above the flared skirt with a button at the waist, and may be trimmed with fur at the collar. Sometimes the *čuqa*, a coat with elbow-length



sleeves, was worn; the *baḳari* was similar, but usually shorter, with no buttons, quilted inside, and often trimmed lavishly with gold lace and gilt embroidery. A *läbbadä* was even shorter, reaching barely below the waist, with the rounded hip projections and side vents, short sleeves, and an open front tied at the waist; it was also quilted inside and richly trimmed. The *ešmäk* is very similar, but lined with fur, whereas the *kürdü*, also fur-lined, is simply an open, sleeveless waistcoat. Woolen socks (*jorab*; Pers. *jürāb*) are knitted with a characteristically sharp fold all round the foot, either ankle or calf length, and in a wide variety of colorful motifs. The typical footwear, before the advent of mass-produced shoes, was an open-heeled slipper (*bašmaq*) with a sole in the shape of a figure 8, the front heavily embroidered or covered with beadwork ending in an upturned curl. Boots (*uzun boğaz čäkmä*) had low heels and uppers of tooled leather or embroidered broadcloth. It is the headscarf (*kalağay*, Pers. *kalāğī*), made from specially woven silks, that is the most persistent of traditional garments, sometimes worn over a low (6 cm) flat-topped skullcap (*araqčın*), almost covered with gold embroidery, or alternatively a small bonnet (*täsäk*). Formerly a tube-like hood (*čutqu*) could be worn to cover both the head and plaits.

*The Šahsevän and Qaradaği.* Among the Šahsevän (Šähsevan; [plate cxlviii](#)) and Qaradaği (Qarādāği) tribes of Persia this pattern is varied a little. The *köynäk* becomes a shift about 150 cm long, of which front and back are in a single 60-cm width, unseamed at the shoulder and flared below the armpit by the insertion of four triangular gussets; a decorative rectangular panel may surround the small upright collar. The lower garments are simply a set of superimposed skirts (*tuman*), each about 90 cm long and 900 cm in circumference. Ordinary tribeswomen wear three to five of these, and ladies from begs' families five to seven, with the shift over them; the underskirt is of a soft cotton print, and there is no undergarment. The jacket (*kot*) is cut with a yoke, lapels, and tailored sleeves and reaches only to the waist, with buttons and two small pockets. The white headcloth (*čargat*) is held in place by a browband (*yağlıq*), folded diagonally from a silk square and tied at the rear; the right end of the cloth can be brought across the mouth as a *yašmaq* (veil). This dress was still general in the mid-1970s.

Whereas female costume shows many such local variants, the male dress formerly worn was rather uniform. It went out of use after the reforms of Režā Shah were enforced. A calico or other cotton shirt (*köynäk*), with a low, upright collar and straight shoulders, could have the opening at the front, or



set to the right side, and buttoned. Trousers of woolen cloth, often homespun *šal*, were cut relatively wide at the waist and seat and tapered in the legs, with gussets at the crotch and decorative tassels on the drawstring; they were worn over underpants (*tuman*, *dizlik*). Socks (*jorab*) were like those of the women and worn either with moccasins (*čariq*) of rawhide, with a network of twisted loops over the foot, or plain, low half-slippers (*bašmaq*) with strongly upturned toes in towns. Closefitting soft-soled inner shoes (*mäst*) could be worn to avoid repeatedly washing the feet at prayer times. Over the shirt was a tunic (*arkalıq*), with flaring open skirts gathered at the waist, buttoned from throat to waist, with a small upright collar and full-length sleeves tailored at the shoulders, either plain or open underneath at the wrists, and sometimes at the armpits; it might be made from broadcloth (*mahud*), cashmere, satin, or cotton. The *čuka*, a typically Caucasian garment, was cut from heavier broadcloth, with skirts reaching to the knees; the *vāznāli čuka*, with long plain sleeves, had a set of eight cartridge holders on each breast, and the *čärkäzi čuka* had long false sleeves, sometimes with rows of buttons down the openings, and hand flaps. Both normally closed to form a deep V-neck, with a few buttons at the waist only. For winter a simple sheepskin overcoat (*kürk*), with the long fleece inside, could be worn buttoned to the collar; a variant is the *ķurasan kürkü*, embroidered lavishly with patterns in silk. Shepherds may wear a felt cloak (*yapınja*). The cylindrical black hat of sheepskin, or sometimes astrakhan, called *papaq*, was worn over a skullcap (*araqčın*); in the 19th century the hat had the tall Qajar shape (see x, above). Tall embroidered nightcaps (*šäbkülah*), with four triangular sides, were typical of Azarbaijan. The outer coat was belted with a leather, silver-studded girdle (*qayıš*), often with pendant straps, or a silver one (*kämär*), or, in the case of old men, a waistband (*quršaq*) folded from a strip of material 4-6 m long and wound with a special knot. The use of embroidery extended to such items as watch cases (*saat qabı*), tobacco pouches (*tänbäki kisäsi*), pistol holsters (*tapanja qabı*), bandoliers (*patrondaš*), and even moustache ties (*biğ bağı*) for use at night. Otherwise, men wore no ornament other than the belt and a long dagger, or, for the *vāznāli čuka*, sets of silver cartridge caps with chains converging to the shoulder.

Women's jewelry included a wide variety of belts (*kämär*), of linked plaques with a rosette-shaped buckle, filigree, or flexible silver wire; rings (*üzük*); necklaces of small pearls; and notably a large ensemble consisting of an elaborate linked gold chain with either a large crescent pendant containing a star or four lateral medallions and a central, pointed pendant. The crescent-



and-star was also a favorite motif for earrings (*sirgā*). In Qarābāg the very low-cut breast opening of the *arḳalīq* was trimmed with a set of leaf-shaped pendants.

In urban areas women could go out only after covering themselves with a *čādor*, called a *čaršab* (Pers. *čādor-šab*) reaching to the ankles; it was sometimes augmented by a face veil (*rubānd*) of fine cotton gauze, embroidered, with a “window” of pulled-thread work. The legs were covered with broad silken leggings (*čaḳčur*), which covered even the feet.

As the upper garments have, since the late 1960s, been gradually replaced by cardigans and raincoats, the headscarf and jewelry have proved the most durable elements, though gathered skirts are still retained in some villages.

#### Kurdish costume

Since the early 19th century at least, Kurdish costume has been noted for its vivid colors and sometimes violent contrasts, bearing a generic resemblance to the Azeri costume described above, but with some differences in detail and terminology and some additional elements. It was still quite distinct in the mid-1970s.

*The Mīlān.* Among the Mīlān ([plate cxlix](#)), between Makū and K̄voy, the women’s shift (*kīrās*, *gīrās*) is cut like that of the Šahsevān, but with the addition of a flounce at ankle level, rows of buttonhole-stitch reinforcement at waist level, where the side gores meet the front and back panels, and underarm gussets; it is made of cotton print or silk brocade. Two or three of these are worn at a time, and the undermost (*gīrās-i banī*) is fitted at the wrists with very long, tapering pendants (*eḷček*, *kīčīk*), which are wound around the wrists of the upper coats and then fastened back to a pair of buttons at the root. The wide trousers (*darpi*, *haval kīrās*) are cut from two layers of cloth, each of two widths, and quilted together, with a separate gusset at the crotch, and gathered at the ankles. The upper garment (*der*) is a long-sleeved coat, of ankle length, with a very full skirt cut from six widths and gathered in tucks (*pur-pur*) at the waist; the edges of both sides at the breast are quilted, and the armpits are left open for 5 cm. Up to four or five of these may be worn at once, depending on the season and the means of the wearer; typically they are of velvet (*der-i maḳmer*), and the uppermost is double-breasted, the others having straight sides left open in front. A waistcoat (*eylāk*), fitted with two pockets on each side and buttoned or tied at one point in front, is decorated on



the breast with coins (*parā*). A square of brocade (*šāl-pišt*) is folded diagonally and tied around the waist as a sash, and an apron (*mizār*) is hung over it with ties knotted in front; nursing women wear an apron with an upper bib tied around the neck. The head is covered with a scarf of hand-printed silk edged with colored tassels, folded to a triangle (*desmāl*); when the triangle is centered on the brow, the right-hand tail is brought to the left and turned around the left one, and both are then wrapped around the head in opposite directions and tucked in. This scarf may be worn with a cap (*kufī*). Young girls wear essentially the same clothes but can go bareheaded, their hair in six shoulder-length plaits. Social standing is reflected in the number, quality, and condition of garments. Thus, to give two individual examples, a chief's wife wore a shift of mauve velvet with green cuffs over one of plum-colored silk, with a bright-blue velvet apron, a black waistcoat with gold trinkets, and a black-and-yellow headscarf, while an ordinary tribeswoman wore a shift of maroon-and-silver lurex over a floral cotton print, with an apple-green apron trimmed in red, a black waistcoat with silver coins, and a plain green headscarf. Both wore large bead necklaces, and the chief's wife several beaded bracelets and a large jeweled ring. Most younger married women preferred a red headscarf with yellow tassels. The Jalālī costume is similar. Men simply wear a dark Western suit and shirt; status is indicated by a white shirt, waistcoat, and a Western felt hat in place of the local knitted-mohair cap. Most women wear plastic shoes and the more prosperous men leather.

*The Zarzā.* Farther south, in the region of Ošnūya, Zarzā women wear a shift (*kerās*) in which the seam between the tight bodice and full pleated skirt occurs well below the waist; it has wide sleeves with very long pendants, which in normal use are knotted behind the shoulder blades, though they are let down for dancing and prayers. The wide trousers (*derpe*) are caught in with a tie at each ankle. The jacket (*alkāloḡ*) has elbow-length sleeves but is left open in front; it is usually of plain velvet. The broad, soft sash (*peštband*) is up to 20 m long and wrapped loosely so as to rest on the hips. The cylindrical cap (*tās-kolā*), of red or plum-colored velvet on a cardboard foundation, is embroidered with counterset triangles. The triangular shawl (*dezmāl*) placed over this is fringed on the two outer sides that meet below the shoulders; the other two comers are knotted once over the chest, and then thrown back and knotted once more to hang over the first behind the neck. A black scarf (*hūrī*), with red and white motifs and measuring 3-12 m long by 40 cm wide, is then wound round the cap and shawl together, and trimmed with a black-silk strip with a fringe, held onto the cap with a brooch. The shoes are of the light type known



as *kāl-e šīrāzī*, moccasins with knitted foot coverings attached, also worn by men. The men's white calico shirt (*kerās*) is collarless, with a single button for the front opening, and again has long sleeve pendants, which are wound around the coat cuffs. The trousers (*pāntor*) are very loose at the top, so that the crotch gusset hangs down to mid-thigh, but taper below the knees; they are of home-woven cloth. The rather military coat (*kovā*) is closed to the neck with two rows of buttons, with two pockets on the breast, tailored sleeves, and skirts to mid-thigh, which are, however, worn inside the trousers; the coat is now being replaced by an ordinary Western-style officer's coat. A felt waistcoat (*pastak*) reaches the hips on top of the coat, and this is secured, open, with a sash (*peštpand*), which, unlike that of the women, is relatively tightly bound at the waist. A headcloth (*šaddā*), fringed along both edges, is bound around a flat-topped skullcap that is sometimes embroidered with riders and other figures.

*Kurds of Mahābād.* Among the urban Kurds of Mahābād (see also xvi, above) the ensemble of married women's costume is similar ([plate cl](#)), with shift (*kirās*), broad trousers (*darpe*) made from 6 m of material, and a sash (*pištend*) 8 m long; the shawl (*dastmāl*) is made up by cutting a 3-m length of chiffon or figured gauze diagonally and resewing it to form the triangle, and the gold-embroidered cap (*kilāw*) is hung with a gold piece within a ring at each temple, and a chain of smaller pieces reaching from these under the chin, sometimes accompanied by a gold necklace with pendants and elaborate earrings of a doubled fan shape. There is no headscarf, so the cap is exposed. Girls do wear a scarf. A black waistcoat (*kavā*) may be trimmed with small gold pieces and patterned with sequins, or a plain, open coat with sleeves may be worn. In general older women's clothes are darker, in, for example, blue velvet and a cotton print with a dark ground; they may also wear a dark floral shawl over the shoulders. Men's summer dress could be a suit of the traditional striped mohair cloth, still woven in 16-cm widths on a pit-treadle loom, creased in half down its length. This is made up into straight, pajama-like trousers (*rānk*), with prominent creases, and a V-necked, sleeved jacket (*čoḡa*) with decorative stitching. In the 1970s, however, the influx of Kurdish refugees from Iraq led to a preference for the *pešmerga* (freedom fighters) costume of matching jacket (*kavā*) and trousers (*pāntol*) in black or brown, similar to the Zarzā suit, worn with a colored sash. The turban (*peč*) of a fringed dark print is folded diagonally to leave a triangle at the back of the head.



*The Harkī.* Near the Iraqi border the Harkī use a different terminology. The shift (*gerāz*), with several rows of embroidery around the neck opening, has sleeve pendants (*lavānd*) wrapped around the upper arms of an open silk gown (*körtak*) with embroidered edges and short side vents and a short-sleeved jacket (*gotak*). The headdress is particularly remarkable, as the cap (*gulow*) is 20 cm tall, black, and crowned with a gilt rosette and boss (*tabelik*); it is also fitted with four downturned gilt crescents (*gul*) in front, after being swathed with a silk scarf (*ben pušī*) knotted once in front and then behind, with pendant ends. A black mantle (*jāruq*) is hung from the shoulders behind, decorated with a broad grid of blue lines, and embroidered at the intersections and with multicolored radial rosettes at the shoulders. The men wear either the mohair suit (*šāl šepik*) or the newer military suit, both with the sash wound in successive loops at the front, and the usual turban ([plate cli](#)).

*Kurds of Yerevan.* Kurds to the north of Azarbaijan, in the former province of Yerevan, wore a costume that in style and nomenclature showed an Ottoman origin. Over the inner shirt (*kirās*) of white calico men wore a buttoned jacket (*gejalik*) of broadcloth and over that an upper jacket (*čakmen*) with false sleeves. Broadcloth trousers (*šalvār*) were cut with a very wide gusset and worn with red morocco boots (*jizma*). Both jackets and the trousers were trimmed and extensively decorated in *cordonné* work of a contrasting color. The sash (*kuršak*) was usually of shawl material. A white cloak or a caftan of camel's hair, both called *aba*, could be worn over these. The headgear consisted typically of a tall fez (*uzun fez*) of red felt over a small felt cap (*külle*), swathed in a turban of silk scarves (*čalma*), which could be added to every year. A long-sleeved coat was also known. In the 1840s this dress was essentially the same, with a flared jacket (*gubur čekman*) worn over a lightly quilted, long-sleeved cotton jacket (*goksu yelek*) buttoned down the front, on top of a double-breasted, low-collared, quilted shirt (*gısa enteri*), with trousers (*šalvār*) in which the gusset reached the ankle openings.

See also xvi, xvii, above.



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