

## A Study of Women's Clothing During the Achaemenid Period

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### ABSTRACT

Clothing is a necessity for every person's life, to best adorn their appearance and protect their body from climatic conditions. With the emergence of civilizations, clothing took on a fashionable form, so that different societies can be distinguished from each other based on the characteristics and differences of their clothing. The changes in clothing, including shape, form material, and color, are directly related to the historical, social, and political developments of the people of the society. The Achaemenids, as one of the glorious and honorable periods of antiquity, attached great importance to the elegance of their clothing and believed that clothing gave its wearer elegance, dignity, and splendor and reflected their personality and social status. The purpose of the present study is to examine women's clothing during the Achaemenid period. Information was collected from library sources, articles, and theses using a descriptive-analytical method. The results of the research indicate that the clothing of Achaemenid women is divided into two categories: queen's and maid's clothing. The queen's clothing was made of delicate and decorated fabrics and had one or two rows of pleats on the skirt, a pleated crown, and a veil, while the maid's clothing was unadorned and simple, in some cases pleated, and they used a belt on the clothing. They did not have a veil or crown.

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## **Introduction**

The clothing of each nation and people reveals the changes in society and the class differences existing among the strata of that society. The clothing of early humans was the result of defending the body against climatic conditions and displaying the body in a beautiful way, not to cover nudity. Over time and during the early stages of civilization, their clothing, with the advancement of environmental tools and equipment, took on a decorative and cosmetic aspect, and according to the natural and climatic conditions, the degree of civilization, social, political and religious factors, it changed shape over the ages and became a means of expressing taste and class symbols, that is something beyond the needs and changes in climate and environment. Gradually, in different lands and societies, clothing took on a certain form and became distinct from each other. This distinction led to the emergence of fashion.

Clothing is the most obvious, important, and rapidly changing cultural symbol that is quickly influenced by the phenomena of acculturation of human societies, such that cultural domination and subjugation primarily take place through the transmission of clothing, and by changing the clothing of a society, their livelihood and religious beliefs can be transformed.

The Achaemenid Empire was one of the largest empires in the world, and countless ethnic groups were under the rule of this empire. For this reason, the art of this period has made considerable progress. Iranians absorbed the arts of various lands under their rule and combined them with authentic Iranian characteristics, which is why art reached the peak of its greatness and prosperity during this period. Arts such as carving, sculpture, carpet weaving, fabric weaving, etc. were popular during the Achaemenid period.

During the Achaemenid rule, due to the peace and understanding achieved the spread of knowledge and culture in society, and the importance of the appropriateness of clothing, the material and color of fabrics, external adornment was given with ease. The clothes of the Achaemenids or the Persians were created in accordance with the climate of the region and had some differences from the clothes of other regions. Iranian textiles during this period had a special place in the field of woolen fabrics, sewing and tailoring techniques, and the kings were known for having luxurious clothes. Various archaeological data show that the Persians, like other peoples, had their own special clothes, which were woven with various designs and patterns. During this period, there was never any sign of nudity and all clothes had sufficient dignity and modesty, so that the clothes and apparel of ancient Iran became a model for the clothes of the era after the advent of Islam. There are still people in the southern regions of Iran who use the lang as a skirt and throw a blanket of the same material over their shoulders.

The purpose of this research is to examine women's clothing during the Achaemenid period. Due to the lack of solid facts to follow the evolution of clothing during this period, it is necessary

to seek help from complementary research such as the study of bas-reliefs, carved objects, sculptures, paintings statues, seals, etc.

### ***Research questions***

How many categories were women's clothing divided into during the Achaemenid period?

What were the differences in form and function between the clothing of court women and servants?

### **Research Method**

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytical in terms of method and nature. The research population studied is women's clothing in the Achaemenid period. Data collection was done using a descriptive-analytical method and library resources, articles, and thesis were used. Using these resources and considering the research objective, the required information and texts were extracted and indexed, and in order to answer the research questions and finally, the findings were analyzed using a qualitative method.

### **Achaemenid Empire (330-559 BC)**

The Achaemenid Empire was one of the most glorious eras in the ancient world, founded by Cyrus the Great. They were of Persian descent and became very wealthy due to their many conquests (Talebpour, 2017: 38). Will Durant writes about the reign of Cyrus the Great: "Cyrus organized the Median and Persian soldiers so that they became an invincible army; he conquered Sardis and Babylonia and ended the rule of the Semitic tribes over the West in such a way that they were unable to establish a state or government for a thousand years afterwards; he annexed all the countries that had been under the rule of Assyria, Babylonia, Lydia and Asia Minor before him to Persia and created from them a royal state and empire, which is considered the largest political organization before the ancient Roman " .state and one of the most well-governed states of all historical periods (Durant, 2019).

Cyrus the Great was the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty and Darius was the wisest, most intelligent and most efficient Achaemenid king, he was the factor that sustained power and stabilized the Achaemenid state. Finally, this kingdom ended with the invasion of Alexander the Great around 331 BC after years (Mohammadi, 2013: 230).

### **Achaemenid clothing**

The Achaemenids, by creating peace and understanding among different ethnic groups, spread knowledge and culture. Freedom, peace, and understanding among different and conquered ethnic groups allowed people to freely apply makeup, covering their bodies and heads, and decorating their body parts. They spent several hours a day covering their bodies and heads decorating their heads and faces, and sprinkling gold dust on their faces (Gheibi, 2008: 105).

The Achaemenids attached great importance to the elegance of their clothing, and for this reason, they attached great importance to the material and color of the fabric (Ranjdoost, 2008: 27). The role of clothing among the Persians, in addition to its practical nature had an aesthetic role. They believed that clothing, with its elegance and dignity, made the wearer look magnificent and considered clothing to be a reflection of the wearer's personality (Pourbahman, 2016: 57).

It is quite clear from the images of the Persepolis carvings that the clothing of the Achaemenids during the time of Cyrus the Great was different from their clothing during the period of Darius and his successors (Figure 1). During the time of Cyrus, the Great, the ceremonies and rituals of the Median court were used without exception in the Achaemenid court, even the material clothes were of great interest to the Persians, so that later the Persian clothes were changed to the material clothes (Talebpour, 2017: 38).

The long, pleated robe, which is always seen in the images of Persepolis and which the king also wears, is the distinctive dress of the Achaemenids Xenophon writes: “Cyrus had borrowed this garment from the Medes and had convinced all his servants to wear it. Apparently, he believed that this garment covered the imperfections of the body and made a person appear beautiful and tall” (Koch, B.T.A.: 161).



**Figure 1. Winged Man Petroglyph Attributed to Cyrus, Pasargada (URL 1).**

In general, the Persians, especially the kings Cyrus and Darius, being intelligent and creative people, received the good aspects of mixing with their neighbors and native inhabitants of the conquered nations in a good way and generalized them among their people. For example, they

adopted the riding dress from the Medes and the formal dress from the Elamites of course, they made intelligent changes to it in the form of a candice with regular pleats that they created in its sleeves and skirt, and presented it to the world as their national dress. Duncan Head (1992) writes about the ordinary dress of the Achaemenids in his book: "The tunic and trousers were used by all Iranians in the steppes, while the Persian robe was used by non-Iranians or by the Elamites." Also, Professor Hyde Marie Koch writes in her book about the motifs of the eastern staircase of Apadana: "The Elamites wore a long dress with a draped skirt. This is the same dress that served as the model for the Persian court dress" (Figure 2). Consequently, based on the countless documents available from the Elamites and the Achaemenids, it can be said that the Achaemenid dress was derived from the indigenous people especially the Elamites (Gheibi, 2008: 106).



**Figure 2. Darius on the throne, eastern staircase of the Apadana Palace (Koh, B.T.A., 76).**

### **Fabrics of the Achaemenid period**

Silk and woolen fabrics were very popular during the Achaemenid period. The kings of this period were known for their luxurious and beautiful clothes. Alexander, with all his Greek historian. According to the writings of Herodotus prejudice, preferred Iranian clothing and lived in Iranian clothes made of gold from the time he arrived in Iran until his death (Talebpour, 2017: 38).

According to the Avesta, the Iranians of that era knew how to weave cloth and in the cold seasons, animal fur and skin were used for edging and lining and sometimes they embroidered cloth and garments with gold, and carpet weaving was also popular among them (Bijan, 1971: 95). During this period, every family had to provide for its own necessities. Therefore, there was

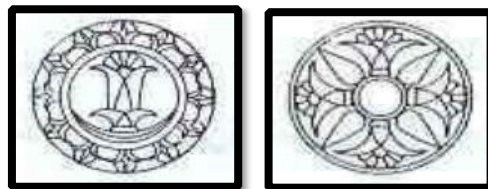
a weaving machine in every house and women were skilled in weaving. Even Queen Amistad (wife of Xerxes) wove cloth and made clothes for her (Talebpour, 2017: 39).

Examples of fabrics from this period have been discovered in Susa and Persepolis, some of which resemble silk fabrics. It is likely that silk skeins were imported from China and transformed into fabric in Iranian factories (Hamedan, Susa, etc). Among the silk garments, sometimes threads and wefts of gold and silver were also seen, and for this reason these fabrics were unique (Gheibi, 2008: 134).



**Figure 3. Persian archers Immortal Guard (Louvre Museum, Paris) (URL 2).**

Color had a special place in Achaemenid clothing. They avoided choosing harsh and gaudy colors and often preferred bright, cheerful, and rich colors (Mohammadi, 2013: 39). There were many fabrics made of silk, cotton or wool in various colors: especially orange, white, yellow, brown, turquoise and purple (Ziapour, 1964 and 53). The pink purple color was famous and precious due to its high quality (Pourbahman, 2016: 57). The purple color had a unique value. This color was the official color of royal clothes and the sacred color and special for kings (Mobashari, 2015: 26). Another favorite color of the Achaemenids was white and gold or close to it yellow and orange. Gold was assigned to the sun. Achaemenid kings wore saffron-colored clothes during the Mehregan celebration (Kazemi Abhari, B.T.A: 27). Achaemenid clothing had patterns of flowers and leaves (Figure 4), and their trousers were embroidered with gold. The clothing of the soldiers of the Immortal Guard (Figure 3), has elaborate designs, such as square and rectangular shapes, an eight-pointed star on a yellow background, and green and yellow flowers on a white background (Talebpour, 2017: 39).



**Figure 4. Patterns on Xerxes' clothing, Harem painting (Koh, B.T.A.: 166).**

### **Achaemenid women's clothing**

In the countless paintings of Persepolis, Susa and Pasargadae, no woman is depicted. Apparently, women did not play a role in the framework that displayed the great plans of the empire and its ruling power. But among the small works of art, we come across countless drawings with the help of which we can achieve a complete picture of the appearance of women in the great Persian empire. The first thing that immediately attracts attention is the women's clothing, which is the same pleated Achaemenid dress and the same hat that the men wear (Koh, B.T.A: 190-191).

Women's clothing is divided into two classes: A. Queen, their dress was pleated with a short decorative veil with a veil that covered the ankles and over it they wore a simple and long veil, and of course sometimes only pleated clothing was used without a veil. B. Servants, this class was considered the lowest social class. A simple and long dress with a simple belt on it was their only clothing (Kazemi and Mousavi, 2010: 3).

#### ***A. Women's clothing on Achaemenid seals***

A beautiful example of an Achaemenid cylinder seal motif preserved in the Louvre Museum in Paris, depicts a woman sitting on a chair with her feet on a stool and holding a lotus flower. Her dress is the same as that of the Achaemenid court (Shahdi and Mohammadi, 2023: 18).

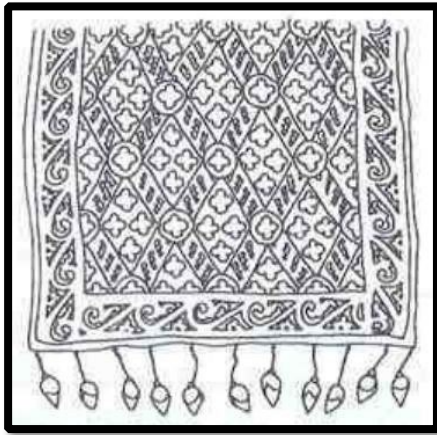
The queen (the woman) on the left in (Figure 5) is dressed in a long, pleated dress that completely covers her ankles. The skirt of the dress consists of two rows of pleats, with a simple strip vertically dividing the pleats into two rows in the middle of each row. Its sleeves are long and wide, while its bodice is simple and tight, without pleats, so that the body's features are clearly visible. She wears a pleated crown on her head, on which is a short veil embroidered with short diagonal geometric decorative motifs. She holds a two-bud lotus flower in her right hand. In front of the queen stands a servant in pleated dress but without a veil, and behind her is an incense burner or fire-burner with a long base. On the right side of the image is a queen standing in pleated dress and a pleated crown (Mahzoun, 2019: 85-86).



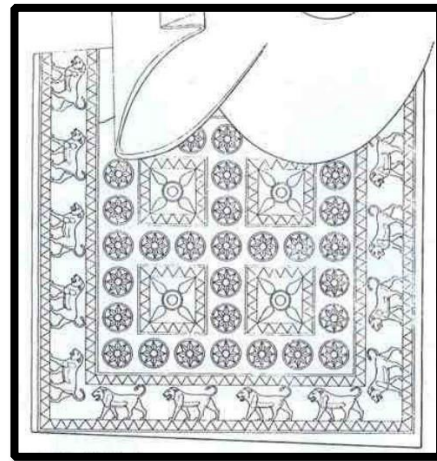
**Figure 5. Achaemenid cylinder seal (URL 3).**

### ***B. Women's clothing based on Pazyryk findings***

In the Pazyryk Valley in the Altai Mountains, southern Siberia, the oldest remains of Iranian civilization have been discovered (Figures 6 and 7). Alongside the discovered objects are clothes and fabrics, one of which has designs of lions placed one behind the other, very similar to the designs found in Persepolis. There are also several carpets the most amazing of which is the Pazyryk carpet and hand-woven carpet saddles (Pourbahman, 2016: 74).



**Figure 6. Horse saddle felt pattern in Pazyryk tomb (Koh, B.T.A: 159).**



**Figure 7. Left side of the mat on the king's throne, western gate of the Hall of a Hundred Columns (Koh, B.T.A: 160).**

Pazyryk carpet saddle It consists of four squares which It shows a religious ceremony. It depicts two queens and two women who are responsible for their protection (Figure 8). The women are wearing long, decorated dresses. The women's dresses have more fabric than the two ladies behind them, and the difference can be seen in the decorations. These women have a veil over their frilled crowns that hangs behind their heads (Rajabi, 2002: 343). The queens, separated by the sacred fire-place (the incense burner), have raised their right hands and are taller than the other two women, which reveals their superiority in rank. The color of the clothes varies according to the background. Thus, when the background is brown, the clothes are yellow, and red, and when the background is blue, the clothes are yellow and brown and the fire-place is blue or brown (Sami, 2010: 247).

The two ladies in front are shown larger, indicating their high status compared to the two ladies behind them. They are dressed in long-sleeved dresses that extend from below the chin to

the feet. The bodice and skirt of the dress are sewn with a wide strip that consists of three narrower strips.

The two side strips are decorated with zigzag patterns and the middle strip with a circular pattern with a smaller circle inside. These decorative strips are located on the ends of the bodice and collar of the dress, and their tail extends downward in two parts until it ends at the edge of the horizontal strip at the end of the bodice. The skirt of the dress is also decorated with a decorative strip with geometric patterns and is decorated with a short pachinki at the end and edge of the skirt so that the decorative strip cuts across the front of the dress. The difference between the band on the bodice and the skirt is that the band on the skirt is made of two bands with zigzag patterns next to each other, and on the bodice, on the other hand, there is a wider band with circular patterns between these two zigzag stripes. Their crown is a crown with large corbels decorated with circular patterns, and the veil on the crown is short, reaching to the knees, and is decorated around its edge with a decorative band with triangular patterns. The clothes of the two ladies behind the queens are similar to the clothes of the two older queens. The details of the clothes are exactly like the clothes of the two queens, with the difference that they do not have a veil on their crown (Mahzoun, 2019: 97 ,96 ,90 ,89).



Figure 8. Achaemenid women, woolen cloth Zain Farsh (in Pazyryk) (Ziapour, 1964: 80).



**Figure 9. Reconstructed images of the Pazyryk carpet saddle (Ziapour, 1964: 80).**

In the Pazyryk excavations, a short female cloak or kaftan was found, made of squirrel skin, lined with fur, with edges made of black foal skin, and with narrow sleeves decorated with symmetrical pieces of tanned leather. Another item discovered was a female headscarf made of two layers of fine leather covered with black foal skin and decorated with parallelogram leather pieces that were placed on the shoulders (Shapour shahbazi, 2004: 64).

### ***C. Woman's clothing in a statue (limestone sculpture of a woman)***

A limestone carving from Egypt (Brooklyn Museum) shows a woman in Achaemenid dress (Figure 10) adorned with a pearl necklace and earrings. The woman's dress has horizontal pleats in the front and the fabric that is folded into the pleats and forms repeated arches, which is clearly the same as that seen in Achaemenid dress and in carvings from Persepolis. The dress is beautifully cut and hangs to the ground at the back. The sleeves are wide and hanging. The figure's hands are tied together in front and she wears a multirow pearl necklace, similar to those found in Pasargadae (Gheibi, 2008: 131). The hairstyle is similar to the sari made of lapis lazuli from Persepolis (Figure 11) (Koch, B.T.A.: 193).



**Figure 10. Portrait of a woman in Iranian dress (Mahzoun, 2019: 146).**



**Figure 11. Lapis lazuli stone head, Persepolis (Gheibi, 2008: 137).**

#### ***D. Women's clothing on Arguli stone relief***

In the work of the Arguli people in northwestern Anatolia, women riding horses are depicted and are currently in the Istanbul Museum (Figure 12). It presents for the first time a covering like a chador in its primitive form (Gheibi, 2008: 131).

In the main image of this relief, three women on horseback and two men on foot are seen. The women's clothing and attire consists of: a long dress from below the chin to the ankles, simple with short sleeves and a simple and long veil but shorter than the dress. It seems that under the veil is a simple hat decorated with a decorative ribbon (Mahzoun, 2019: 98-99).



Figure 12. Arguli petroglyphs in northern Anatolia (Shapour shahbazi, 2018: 104).

## Conclusion

Studying the clothing of ethnic groups in different eras is important because it allows us to obtain information about historical development, aesthetics beliefs, social classes, and the progress of industry, especially textiles and weaving. According to the images of the works left from the Achaemenid era, it seems that they were beautiful, tall, and strong people. An important point that can be understood from their clothing is that there is no naked person in all the images, and nudity was very ugly and ugly from the Achaemenid point of view, their clothing was complete and beautiful.

In studying the clothing of Achaemenid women, it was noted that there are no female figures in the works and sculptures of Persepolis, Susa, and Pasargadae. Perhaps the reason for this was the high status of women, and they considered women a sign of purity and spirituality, and they were unwilling to take advantage of the role of their women in the material environment, and they also did not want the role of beautiful women to be seen by any stranger. Because the aforementioned places were international places and were places where agents and envoys from different countries came and went. For this reason, in studying their clothing, works such as seals, carpets, and sculptures have been examined. The results of this study indicate that the clothing of Achaemenid women was very similar to that of Achaemenid men. According to the social classes of that period, women's clothing and attire are divided into two groups: queens' and servants' clothing.

The queens' clothes were made of delicate and expensive fabrics. The fabrics of the Achaemenid period were woven from wool or cotton and linen, and silk yarn was imported from

China to weave silk fabrics and weave silk fabrics. Their clothes had many decorations and were made of two parts: a top and a skirt. Their upper body was tight and tight with wide sleeves, and the skirt had one or two rows of pleats. Their crown was pleated, which was also seen on Achaemenid men. High-ranking Achaemenid women used a short and decorated veil over their crown. Of course, due to the argyle pattern, a simple type of veil was used when traveling.

The clothing of the female servants was simple and long. In some cases, such as (the cylinder seal) they also wore pleated clothing. The clothing of the female servants of the Achaemenid period was simpler and more used less fabric than the clothing of the queens. They also wore a belt on their clothing. Achaemenid clothing used orange, red, white, yellow, and purple colors. Among them, purple and gold were the favorite colors of the kings, who used them in official and religious ceremonies.

### **Author Contributions**

The author has conceptualized the article and writing of the original and subsequent drafts.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Data available on request from the authors.

### **Ethical considerations**

The author avoided data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and misconduct.

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### **Conflict of interest**

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