

Anaxyrides in Greek Art

Paulina Kucharska-Budzik

The paper aims at presenting an issue of west-Iranian trousers called *anaxyrides* and their representations in Greek art. The period between the 6th century BC and the 4th century BC is being analysed.

Anaxyrides were worn by Medes, Persians, Armenians, Scythians and Cappadocians and also by mythical Amazons and Arimasps. We base our knowledge about those Iranian trousers on literary records and Achaemenid and Greco-Persian iconographical sources.

Anaxyrides were most probably made either of leather or of colourful fabric. It depended on their function, a particular context of their usage and maybe personal preferences of their users.¹ There are depictions of plain, tight trousers pulled on feet, tied round joints and insteps by leather thongs, or worn with shoes.² Lack of folds on many renditions does not necessarily mean that leather was used to produce them because folds could be painted and decoration simply might not have survived. Looser type of trousers with many folds can be seen on various other representations. Significant examples of Iranian trousers' depictions come from Achaemenid art in "Court Style". The Apadana reliefs from Persepolis show a procession of 23 delegations of the subject peoples of the Achaemenid Empire bringing gifts to the Great King. Those tribute-bearers are dressed in their national costumes.³ It can be seen that various types of trousers are worn by Medes, Persians, Armenians, Scythians, Cappadocians, but also by Arachosians, Bactrians, Sogdians and a few more nations. Generally speaking, it was an item of clothing used by Iranian peoples inhabiting the territory of the Achaemenid Empire and the Eurasian Steppe, and by neighbouring peoples.⁴ Other examples of representations of *anaxyrides* were found among the artefacts from the Oxus Treasure⁵ (fig. 1). *Anaxyrides* were also represented on many Greco-Persian works of art.⁶ Additionally, we have some Scythian iconographical sources, which provide information about the costume of Scythians.⁷

In the west, in the Classical period Greek aristocracy often incorporated items of Oriental dress into their own costume. Nevertheless, *anaxyrides* were rejected in the Greek and Macedonian world. Even Alexander the Great who adopted many elements of the Iranian costume did not use *anaxyrides*. It can be explained by the fact that *anaxyrides* belonged to a different system of dress.⁸ Moreover, Iranians were treated by Greeks as exotic, foreign, inferior and feminine and consequently *anaxyrides* could not be adopted by them. And yet, *anaxyrides* were depicted in Greek art of this period on various objects.

Greek artists knew about Iranian trousers. Sources of their knowledge might be of various kinds. In 580s BC Greeks encountered Medes in the course of the war between Lydia and the Median army. In the following years Greeks confronted Iranians due to



Fig. 1: The Oxus Treasure, figure in Median costume, 5th–4th century BC.

the conquest of Ionian cities by the Persians, the Greco-Persian wars and the campaign of Alexander the Great.⁹ Besides, Greek mercenaries worked for Persians. Greek secretaries, doctors, artists and craftsmen were also employed in the East.¹⁰ Some of them could provide Greek artists with knowledge about the Oriental clothing, not to mention the literary references.¹¹

Research has shown that changes, which occurred in depicting *anaxyrdes*, are rather chronological and as such are analysed below.

Figures in full Scythian-like costume, including trousers, appeared in Greek art in 530s BC. This image stems from contacts with the Median and later the Achaemenid army. Both armies incorporated contingents of various ethnic origin and some of them were surely prototypes for the Scythian-like costume.¹² This image of "Scythian" archer was popular between 530s/520s BC and 490s BC. In this period his costume did not have ethnic sense but indicated the function of archer, the mythical character of a depicted person or the status of characters who wore it. Figures dressed in the Scythian-like costume were mainly non-hoplite companions or helpers of main heroes.¹³ Nonetheless, such images reveal Greek attitudes towards the east. Greeks generally treated the easterners as exotic, remote and even inferior. Since Amazons were regarded as Oriental figures they were also described as exotic and mythical. They began to be depicted in Scythian-like costume roughly at the same time, although their dress was often a mixture of Oriental and Greek elements emphasising their mythical aspect.¹⁴ In eastern Greek art, however, figures in the Oriental attire were not neutral but depicted as enemies because of direct confrontations with Medes and Persians.¹⁵

The Scythian-like costume definitively resembles Iranian prototypes but it is not identical with real Scythian attire. It is rendered in a schematic way and artists often merged trousers and a caftan to form a grotesque close-fitting garment.¹⁶

A visible change in depicting *anaxyrdes* occurred around 490s BC so in the time of Greco-Persian wars. As a result of them, the hostility towards Iranians appeared among Greeks. Consequently, neutral Scythian-like archers were replaced by Iranian figures with clear ethnic associations.¹⁷ Portrayals of single eastern warriors or representations of duels and multi-figured struggles between Greeks and Iranians were executed (fig. 2). Compositions depicting confrontations with Amazons continued to be popular and images of Arimasps began to gain popularity in 4th century BC.¹⁸

Not only the attitude towards barbarians changed but also the style of representing the Iranian costume. The clothing is depicted with a greater degree of precision and realism.¹⁹ Trousers are no longer so artificially tight and generally images seem to be closer to their prototypes. We can notice, however, that *anaxyrdes* of Amazons are rendered as very tight more often than in the case of male Iranian warriors. The realism noticeable in depictions of figures in the Iranian costume undoubtedly resulted from contacts with Iranians at close quarters during the Greco-Persian wars. Later on, especially during the conquest of Alexander the Great the knowledge of the eastern world grew rapidly. This evidently influenced the way *anaxyrdes* were depicted. Splendid



Fig. 2: Attic amphora, 480–470 BC.

renditions of *anaxyrides* can be seen on the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii and on friezes from the Alexander Sarcophagus from Sidon.²⁰

Nonetheless, two points need to be stressed here. First of all, there existed certain artistic conventions that changed in time. Secondly, techniques of rendering clothing were evaluated in art. In red-figure vase painting, since 530s BC, drapery was gradually rendered in a more precise, detailed and elegant way. All this influenced changes in the way *anaxyrides* were depicted which coincided with artistic phases in Greek art. Thus, information acquired by artists about the original Iranian attire was not the only factor influencing the rendition of trousers.²¹

Apart from colour, trousers were richly decorated with patterns. Those patterns were not confined to specific types of figures with *anaxyrides* and were also used for depicting Greek figures. Patterns underwent stylistic changes in Greek art and artistic conventions also played a role. Overall, geometric patterns were widely used. We can see trousers decorated with horizontal zigzags most often. Diamond-grid with dots, already known in the early Classical period, is also visible on *anaxyrides*. Checker-pattern was used from the middle of the 5th century BC and its popularity grew towards the end of the century. Other patterns used for depicting *anaxyrides* included: diamonds, leopard dots, vertical stripes presumably along seams, bands of zigzags and dots and a few more variations of the mentioned decorations.²² Folds, however, were usually not marked in vase painting.

The described patterns, however, were not strictly based on reality but were often the outcome of artistic canons, preferences and imagination.

Concluding, thorough analysis has shown that it is not possible to ascribe different types of *anaxyrides* to specific ethnic or social groups because figures in Iranian trousers were images of general easterners in Greek art. *Anaxyrides* symbolised everything that was foreign and different. Furthermore, modifications are chronological and connected with historical context and social-political situation within which depictions of Oriental *anaxyrides* were produced and which influenced attitudes towards Iranians. Additionally, images were rendered according to certain artistic canons, specific and characteristic for different periods and regions of production. Apart from those conventions, artists had their own artistic styles and preferences. Depictions of *anaxyrides* in Greek art, thus, are the mixture of reality, changing associations, artistic canons and artists' imagination.

Notes

¹ Hdt. 1.71.2.

² Schmidt 1953, pl.135; Kubala 2006, 147.

³ Miller 1997, 280, fig. 65; Boardman 1988, 40; Gershevitch 1985, 822 f.

⁴ Calmeyer 1978, 80; Gershevitch 1968, 822 f.; Sekunda 1992, 13; Olbrycht 2004, 283.

⁵ Curtis 2012.

⁶ Seyer 1996; Shabhazi 1975, 146 f.; Jenkins 2006, 179; Boardman 2001.

⁷ Gleba 2008, 18–23; Rolle 1989.

⁸ Miller 1997, 185; Barthes 1967.

⁹ Jaczynowska 1999; Ivantchik 2006, 235. 244 f.; 247.

¹⁰ Miller 1997, 100–103.

¹¹ Hdt. 1.135, 7.62.1, 1.71.2; Xen. Kyr. 8.1.40, 8.3.13 f; idem, Anab. 1.5.8; Miller 1997, 185.

¹² Ivantchik 2006, 233. 235. 244–246; Gleba 2008, 14 f.; Shapiro 1983, 110 f.

¹³ Shapiro 1983, 111; Ivantchik 2006, 206. 214 f. 225. 230–233. 240 f. 246; Vos 1963, 40–51. 56–60; Raeck 1981.

¹⁴ Shapiro 1983, 110–112; Gleba 2008, 15; Bothmer 1957.

¹⁵ Ivantchik 2006, 246.

¹⁶ Ivantchik 2006, 248; Raeck 1981.

¹⁷ Raeck 1981, 214; Vos 1963, 44 f.; Miller 1989, 327; idem, 1997, 153–187; Gleba 2008, 16.

¹⁸ Boardman 2001a, 237.

¹⁹ Ivantchik 2006, 245–247.

²⁰ Bernoulli 1905; Moreno 2001; Graeve 1970; Calcani 1989.

²¹ Gleba 2008, 17; Boardman 1999; idem, 2001a.

²² Miller 1997, 179; Boardman 2001a.

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Fig. 1: Image by Author. – Fig. 2: 2000–2013, The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York.

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