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# HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN'S MILITARY UNIFORM

*Heavy-armed knight of the state of Safavids.  
Tabriz miniature, 16th century*



*Hasan Bay Agalarov, commander of  
the Transcaucasian cavalry regiment  
in the clothes of the regiment. Painter  
Kanriewski, Warsaw, 1856, the National  
Museum of History of Azerbaijan*



THE TERM "UNIFORM" MEANS SPECIAL CLOTHING THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO DISTINGUISH A GROUP FROM OTHER PEOPLE. THE UNIFORM INCLUDES SPECIAL CLOTHING AND ITS ELEMENTS, AS WELL AS INSIGNIA AND EQUIPMENT. THE UNIFORM SHOWS ONE'S BELONGING TO A PARTICULAR PROFESSION AND THEIR PLACE IN THE GROUP AND AT THE SAME TIME, FACILITATES THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL DUTIES IN VARIOUS CLIMATIC AND SPECIFIC CONDITIONS.

**T**he uniform originated in ancient times in connection with the needs of war. In combat, it was necessary not only to protect the body of a warrior from the enemy, but also help distinguish him among other fighters. In the Middle Ages, when soldiers fought encased in armor from head to toe, the need for insignia manifested itself especially strongly.

There are various requirements for the uniform and its elements. These can be hygienic, tactical-technical

and artistic-aesthetic requirements. In addition, elements of the uniform must meet the national characteristics of a country.

The first samples of specific military attire were strictly utilitarian - to protect the soldier from enemy weapons. Therefore, the first examples of armor are considered the first military uniform. **According to researchers, the first samples of protective armor appeared in the Mesolithic era** (12<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> millennia BC). Rock paintings show that in Azerbaijan, armor was

shaped as broad stripes that covered the belly, chest and shoulders of a warrior. Perhaps, they were made of leather, and therefore, researchers consider them to be a type of "soft armor". Later, bone and copper or bronze plates started to be sewn on the soft armor, and there appeared "enhanced soft armor". A helmet was used to protect the head, and originally, it was also made of leather. On Gobustan rock paintings, there are images of a warrior in a helmet with feathers. Archaeological finds show

*Officials of the 4th Platoon of the Guards of the Caucasian squadron of His Imperial Majesty's convoy. Painter A. I. Gebens, 1861. The State Russian Museum, according to D. Klochkov*



that the metal helmet was used in Azerbaijan from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. During excavations at the Manna fortress of Hasanlu (South Azerbaijan), two bronze helmets of the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC were found. Researchers attribute them to the "Middle Eastern helmet" type.

Excavations at the barrow of a tribal leader of the 14<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC near the village of Sarichoban and barrows near the village of Bor-sunlu (Tartar and Goranboy districts of Azerbaijan) caused a sensation. It turned out that **at that time, they used armor in which metal plates were sewn on a leather base ("scaly armor"), as well as helmets of the "Scythian-Savromat" or "Sindo-Meoto-Saka" types.**

Wide bronze belts and pectorals (semicircular bronze plates that covered the upper part of the chest) were special elements of military equipment. Helmets, belts and pec-

torals were richly decorated with ornaments and narrative scenes.

From a wall painting of the 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, it is clear that soldiers of the state of Manna used soft armor reinforced with plates in the form of capes and high shoes (boots) with sewn plates. Interestingly, the uniform clothing depicts whole groups of soldiers, and they are found in different scenes (accompanying the king, offering gifts and defending a fortress). We can conclude from this that **during the existence of the state of Manna, the tradition of making a single army uniform began to emerge. Cuneiform sources mention so-called "royal workshops" where clothing and weapons were made not to order, but in large quantities and on single samples.**

**The troops of the state of Midia (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) had heavily and lightly-armed horsemen and heavily-armed and lightly-**

**armed infantry.** Their military attire was strikingly different among themselves: the lightly-armed soldiers were dressed in leather armor, sometimes reinforced with metal





*“Warriors from Zagatala in forest clothing”  
Painter G. G. Gagarin, 1844,  
the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan*



elements; the heavily-armed soldiers used complex metal armor and helmets. Interestingly, the armor of a heavily-armed Median horseman had a stand-up collar and a tubular, composite sleeve.

Warriors of the state of Atropatena (4<sup>th</sup> century BC – 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) used scaly and laminar armor and riveted conical helmets. In laminar armor, the plates were connected with straps. Warriors of Caucasian Albania made more use of armor made of soft materials, mostly leather and layered leather. Finds in the graves of Albanian soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC near the villages of Mollaisagli and Nuydi (Shamakhi and Agsu districts of the Azerbaijan Republic) showed that attempts to create a single uni-

form continued.

**Starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the chain mail started to be used in Azerbaijan** – a shirt made of metal rings. During excavations near the village of Rustov (Guba District), a tomb of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC was unearthed, in which a soldier with original armor was buried. The armor was in the form of a chain mail, but enhanced with square steel plates, while the shoulders were protected by long silver plates. It is believed that this armor connected Sarmatian and Roman traditions.

In the early medieval period, knighthood starts to emerge in Azerbaijan. Every knight tried to stand out not only for his exploits, but warlike armor and weapons. It is interesting

that from this period, the red color started to dominate the uniform. Even in the 7<sup>th</sup> century grave in the Uchtepe barrow in the Mil steppe, the warrior was wrapped in a red cape. The military clothing of the period was dominated by elements typical of nomadic tribes of Avars, Turkuts and Khazars.

Azerbaijani miniatures of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries demonstrate the whole diversity of knights' costumes. Protective clothing and the hat were made up of the same elements - the helmet, or annular or laminar armor, bracers (hand protection) and greaves (leg protection). Each warrior tried to decorate his armor with notches, gold and silver ornaments and inscriptions. Therefore, **up until the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was no unified military uniform in Azerbaijan.** A thin cloak of fabric, whose colors and patterns allowed the warrior to be identified among others, were worn over the armor.

Only the personal guard of monarchs had a unified uniform. In the state of Azerbaijani Atabays Eldegizids (1136-1225), a detachment of

*Officials of the 4th Platoon of the Guards of the Caucasian squadron of His Imperial Majesty's convoy. Painter K. K. Piratskiy for imperial service, 1866. The State Russian Museum, according to D. Klochkov*



mamluks; in the state of Shirvanshahs (861-1538), a detachment of gulams; in the states of Qaraqoyunlu (1410-1478) and Aqqoyunlu (1478-1503), a detachment of boynukers; and in the Safavid state (1501 -1736), a detachment of gorchus had their own uniform that distinguished them from the rest of the troops. And the distinctive element was not just the clothes. For example, the mamluks had long braided hair, while the gulams had an earring in the form of a flat ring in one ear, and the boynukers wore long drooping mustache.

**In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasib I (1524-1576) begins to introduce a single uniform. About 30,000 sets of the same armor were ordered for cavalry, artillery and riflemen.** Shah Abbas I (1585-1629) conducted a major military reform, providing his guards – the detachment of gulams – with a unified uniform, although it proved impossible to introduce a single uniform for the entire large Safavid army. In the troops of Nadir Shah Afshar and Azerbaijani khanates of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was no unified military uniform.

**At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Prince Abbas Mirza Qajar began to create a regular army in the modern sense.** Despite the deep political, economic and military

*Regular cavalry horseman of Prince Abbas Mirza Qajar. RGVIA, 1810's.*



crisis that gripped the Qajar state and the unwillingness of the central government and Fatali Shah to support him, the prince was able to create regular units in the Azerbaijan vilayet. Regular cavalry artillery was the first to be created (The British led by Major H. Lindsay provided assistance). A. Yermolov wrote in 1817 that “the best people who dressed more neatly and had better looks than the other troops of Persia were selected for artillery”. The gunners were dressed in blue dolmans with red collars and lapels and yellow cords, white national trousers, lambskin peaked caps and black boots. From 1807, regular infantry – sarbazes - was created. The sarbazes wore a green uniform with red collar and cuffs, yellow buttons, white trousers, black lambskin hats and black boots. Officers had shoulder straps or epaulettes, noncommissioned officers had chevrons on the sleeves. Regular cavalry was created on the French model. The horsemen were dressed in light blue uniforms with red collars and cuffs, white trousers and a black lambskin cap.

Painter Prince G. G. Gagarin, who visited the Caucasus in the 1830s-

40s and left numerous images of Azerbaijani soldiers, made interesting pictures. These pictures show the absence of any special uniform. The exception is the painting, which shows the “soldiers of Zagatala in forest clothing”. The soldiers are dressed in leather chukhas and pants, have their legs wrapped in tight fabric and wear leather gloves on their hands. All this facilitates their movement in the mountains covered with forests and can be considered a special uniform. In the poem “The Demon”, M. Y. Lermontov gave an interesting description of the military clothing:

“With a belt tightened around the slender waist, The holder of the sword and dagger glistens in the sun;

Behind there is a rifle with a carved notch. As the wind plays with the sleeves of his chukha

It is surrounded by a lace from all sides. His saddle is embroidered with colored silk,

The bridle has tassels. Beneath is a dashing horse all in a lather And with priceless golden color; The playful pet of Karabakh.”

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, five Azerbaijani Muslim cavalry

regiments and Iravan infantry (sarbaz) regiment were established in the Russian army. A single uniform was introduced for all the regiments: dark coats, gold laces for officers, silver laces for privates and dark high astrakhan hats. An eight-pointed star made of cloth was sewn on the front of the hat: it was red in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Muslim Regiment, white in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, yellow in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, blue in the fourth, and green in the Kangarli cavalry regiment. In the 1840s when Russia did not conduct major wars and irregular formations had been disbanded, the best soldiers of these regiments were chosen for **the Transcaucasian Muslim cavalry regiment and the Muslim team of the convoy of His Imperial Majesty's convoy.** The Transcaucasian Muslim cavalry regiment had its own uniform made on the basis of national men's clothing. The Crimean War of 1853-1856 involved four Muslim cavalry regiments, the bays' squad from Kangarli horsemen and a detachment of mounted scouts (300 horsemen) composed of Azerbaijanis, whose uniform was similar to that of the regiments created in 1829. In 1857, the Transcaucasian Muslim cavalry and four numbered Muslim cavalry regiments were disbanded. The war of 1877-1878 involved Transcaucasian guard units and the Baku, Yelizavetpol, Zagatala, Iravan irregular cavalry regiments, which also wore the 1829 uniform.

The National Museum of History of Azerbaijan keeps a painting of 1857 showing the commander of the Transcaucasian Muslim cavalry regiment Major General Hasan bay Agalarov. This picture and the portraits and photos of officers of Muslim cavalry regiments of 1853-1856 and 1877-1878 show that the outer clothing consisted of a chukha with

drop sleeves, on which shoulder straps or epaulettes were sewn. The chukha was embroidered with laces like the shirt collar. Thus, the uniform preserves national features.

**In 1830, the uniform of Muslim boys - cadets of military schools in St. Petersburg - was approved.**

The sons of prominent Azerbaijani military leaders coming from the most famous aristocratic families of Azerbaijan negatively perceived the monotonous cadet uniform, and the



government met them halfway. The new clothing was compiled in accordance with national traditions: an astrakhan hat, a beshmet from yellow fabric, dark blue trousers, a silk yellow sash and black leather shoes. A cap was used for everyday wear, and all the metal parts were made of silver.

**In 1839, a team of Muslims was created in His Imperial Majesty's convoy, and its personnel were composed of Azerbaijani officers and privates. The best fighters of the Transcaucasian Muslim cavalry regiment were selected for the team:** "People capable of Guards service and excellent courage, serviceability and behavior are selected

for the team." The team had its own clergy - mullahs, and they lived in the barracks by Azerbaijani customs and ate national dishes. The team accompanied the emperor and his family all the time, guarded imperial palaces and residences, participated in celebrations and was involved in wars. Subsequently, the team was named the 4<sup>th</sup> (Muslim) platoon of the Caucasus squad of His Imperial Majesty.

The team of Muslims had their own clothes made on the basis of national men's clothing. During a trip to the Caucasus in 1837, Nicholas I was struck by Kangarli cavalry dressed in white Circassian coats in Nakhchivan. Therefore, the uniform of the team of Muslims was based on the clothing of Kangarli cavalry. The headgear was an astrakhan hat with a red top, the uniform was called a chukha and sewn from white (dress uniform) or blue (everyday uniform) cloth with drop sleeves, the beshmet was yellow, the pants (trousers) were wide and in the traditional style made of blue cloth. The shoes were black and made of leather. The metal parts (belt, epaulettes and buttons) were made of silver. The weapons consisted of the Caucasian gun, sword, dagger and two pistols. The harness also had a national form and different colors. All the horses of the team were from the Karabakh breed. The Muslim team was the highlight of all the parades, delighting audiences with excellent horses, bearing, national uniform and trick riding. The right to serve in the team had to be deserved with excellent service, although there were isolated cases of fraud.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, individual military units from Azerbaijanis were created, but they were highly irregular and temporary. Numerous photographs of the time portray Azerbaijanis in the original

*Juvenile Muslim students of military educational institutions in everyday and ceremonial uniforms.  
The State Hermitage Museum, according to D. Klochkov*

uniform: national hat, white or dark Circassian coat or chukha with attached straps.

When World War I began, there was a need for fast cavalry once again. Then there appeared the idea of creating a Caucasian Native Cavalry Division, which included **the Tatar cavalry regiment (Azerbaijanis continued to be called Caucasian Tatars). This regiment was the only regular unit of the Russian army, which consisted of Azerbaijanis. The regiment fought on many fronts of World War I and was the first regiment of the division to have been awarded the standard personally by the emperor.** The regiment fulfilled its duty to the very end, and only in November 1917, did it return to Azerbaijan. The Tatar cavalry regiment had its own uniform: gray or black Circassian coats, black beshmets, gray or brown astrakhan hats and black boots. The shoulder straps were red (had a gray or protective color in military campaigns) with the yellow encryption "Tt".

In 1918, with the creation of the independent Azerbaijan Republic and its Armed Forces, an appropriate military uniform was created as well. This period marked a new stage in the history of the national military uniform in Azerbaijan. 🌸

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