

***Sartorial Sanctuary: Clothing and Traditions in the Eastern Islamic World,***  
December 19, 2008-April 26, 2009

If asked to identify typical Islamic dress, many Westerners would likely name the veil and the turban, articles of clothing that are both visually powerful and politically and emotionally charged in today's world. This exhibition seeks to enlarge upon these monolithic images by exploring a range of garment styles, colors, and motifs worn by Muslim men and women across the reaches of the Islamic world—from North Africa through the Middle East to Southeast Asia—from the 18th to the 21st century. A comparison of specific dress items from various areas in which Islam has thrived reveals fluidity and interaction across ethnicities, but also distinctions spawned by the forces of local culture. Just as interpretations of Islam have emerged and transformed with time and geography since the religion's establishment in early-7th-century Arabia, so too have the appearance, symbolism, and function of the attire worn by its adherents.

On the whole, the items on display respond to the Quran's explicit counsel to dress modestly. The loose, enveloping shape of these otherwise stylistically diverse garments—which is to say their common sartorial sanctuary—unites them in accommodating the moral sensibilities advocated by the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime. Together with the requisite to conceal the body's contours, the obligations to cover one's head and to wear an additional outer layer in public have formed for centuries the basic guidelines for dressing in accordance with the Muslim way of life (*shari'ah*). While additional dress recommendations were issued in the time of Muhammad—in regard to avoiding extravagant fabrics, for instance—such prescriptions have tended to relax with the rapid and widespread dissemination of the religion following the Prophet's death (632 CE).

By the mid-8th century, the Islamic empire stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to Central Asia, and thus incorporated a vast array of cultures and textile traditions. Far from a static tradition, dress in the expansive Islamic world has ceaselessly adapted to suit both requirements of religious belief and local codes distinguishing a person's social rank, domestic role, tribal affiliation, or geographic origin. From a sumptuous Moroccan brocade kaftan to a stunningly quilted Syrian coat and breathtaking Indian tapestry chogha, the clothing on view in this gallery manifests not only Muslim socio-religious ideals but tradition and honor, intricacy and splendor.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Indonesian; Javanese

*Iket kepala* (man's headcloth), ca. 1850-1900

Cotton; plain weave, wax-resist dyed (batik)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.100

Since at least the 13th century, Islam has enjoyed a prominent place in Southeast Asian culture. Over time, the region's ancient and flourishing textile tradition has synthesized Hindu, Buddhist, and animist motifs with design elements traceable to the influence of Persian, Mughal Indian, and Ottoman Turkish arts. Most of the region's textiles do not exhibit overt Islamic references, but instead have responded in form to the drive for modest dress and in pattern to the ornamental aesthetics, such as stylized floral and tendril motifs, seen in the greater Islamic world. The head cloth (*iket kepala*) here presents a rare example of Islamic imagery used both to publicly signal the wearer's faith and to offer him spiritual shelter. The swirling, stylized calligraphic notations, largely illegible, provided a sense of protection, an auspicious layer of meaning that would guide the wearer to good fortune and behavior.



Turkish

*Man's hat (fez)*, late 1800s

Wool, straw, leather; felted, silk tassel

Bequest of Lyra Brown Nickerson 16.484

Following the example of Muhammad and his companions, men in most Muslim societies have traditionally worn a head covering, especially when praying. This basic requisite has led to the adoption of a wide variety of turbans, hats, and caps—so long as they have no brim that would interfere with a worshipper's forehead touching the ground during prayer. Some caps might serve as a base for the turban, though men also wear them alone, offering their decoration as a display of devotion and dedication. Mirrors, for example, on the Middle Eastern prayer cap here might be seen to reflect God's glory and to deflect the evil eye, while the ritual of embroidering the text on the Iranian dervish cap is said to aid in the attainment of salvation.



Other hats, differing in shape from the typical rounded cap, reveal additional layers of meaning related to history and geography. The turban form of the Javanese batik head covering shows an indigenous fabric fashioned to announce the wearer's faith while keeping him relatively comfortable in a typically humid environment. The Turkish fez, originally imported from North Africa, has a complicated political

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history: a symbol of Turkish nationalism and modernization under Sultan Mahmud II around 1826, when it largely replaced the turban, it changed to one of Islamic orthodoxy under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), who outlawed it in 1925 in favor of Western varieties of hat.

Middle Eastern

*Woman's face veil (ru-band), 1800s*

Silk; plain weave, embroidered

Gift of Elizabeth Bugbee 18.182

This exhibition seeks to demonstrate that Islam embraces many types and combinations of garments that articulate *haya*, or principles of modesty and humility, and that these garments convey additional meaning outside of religion. However, most of the women's garments on view, particularly those worn in urban contexts, would have been concealed beneath enveloping overgarments in public, so this meaning was often expressed privately.

Whether worn as head or face covering, one garment that is always visible is the veil. Established as a practice in the Mediterranean world well before the advent of Islam, the wearing of veils dates to ancient times and hails from varied cultural and religious contexts. Like the Afghan *chaadaree* in this gallery, the head scarf or face veil can help a woman accomplish hijab, or "sanctity, reserve, and privacy," but it also communicates many other details about the wearer—from cultural origin to status to taste. Also like the *chaadaree*, it is praised by advocates as a demonstration of faith and castigated by critics as a sign of the repression of women.

In the swirl of debate regarding these issues, it might be useful to pause and consider the words of Rezia Wahid, whose ethereal contemporary head scarf is displayed here beside varied 19th- and 20th-century examples of face covers: "The textiles I weave are more than mere pieces of cloth; for me they represent the sanctity, beauty, and serenity of Islam along with nature and are the revival of cultural form and technique." Whether worn by a 21st-century artist, an upper-class Egyptian woman, or a Middle Eastern Bedouin, the pieces on view here are individual forms of expression tied to specific experience and belief.



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Palestinian; Syrian

*Woman's dress (thōb)*, 1800s

Cotton, silk: plain weave, embroidered, appliqué, braid trim

Gift of John Davis Hatch in honor of Olivia Eggleston Phelps Stokes

1991.013.19

The Arabic word *thōb* refers both to a man's shirt and to a loose, ankle-length, collarless dress worn by women. In rural areas of the Islamic world, women's dress revolves around this minimally constructed garment, which provides ample space for modesty and for personalized and regionally specific embellishment.

Exquisitely embroidered Palestinian versions of this basic garment are some of the most impressive examples of Middle Eastern regional dress. The quality of workmanship and distinctions in motif, stitch, color, pattern, and design arrangement have created a lexicon of types that can be easily deciphered to place a woman according to both status and region or town. The Bethlehem woman who created and owned this trousseau garment would have worn it first at her wedding and thereafter as ceremonial dress, with a jacket of felt or broadcloth and a distinctive felt hat embellished with silver or gold discs, coins, and coral beads.



Syrian

*Man's head rope (agal)*, late 1800s-early 1900s

Camel hair, metallic yarn, silk; wrapped

Gift of John Davis Hatch in honor of Olivia Eggleston Phelps Stokes

1991.013.21



# RISD MUSEUM

Syrian

*Woman's dress (thōb)*, early 1900s

Cotton; plain weave, tie-dyed

Gift of Anne G. Cann 1992.058.11

This Bedouin dress with triangular “wing” sleeves dazzles the eye with an overall tie-dyed diamond pattern. Material evidence indicates that artisans practiced tie-dyeing in Syria by the 5th and 6th centuries, inspired by the *bandhani* (tie-dyed) cotton-trade textiles of India that traversed the well-beaten path to the Middle East. On this festive-occasion dress, the geometric design reflects embellishment on Bedouin jewelry and peasant ceramics, serving as striking decoration as well as an amulet to bestow magical protection on the wearer; the red on black and the yellow spots were understood to ward off the evil eye.



Middle Eastern

*Woman's face veil (ru-band)*, 1900s

Cotton, metal strips; plain weave, embroidered

Gift of Anne G. Cann 1992.058.14



Iranian

*Man's dervish cap*, early 1900s

Wool; felted and machine embroidered

Gift of Anne G. Cann 1992.058.2





# RISD MUSEUM

Turkish

*Man's prayer cap*, early 1900s

Wool, cotton; soumak (supplementary weft wrapping)

Gift of Anne G. Cann 1992.058.3



Afghan; Iranian

*Man's prayer cap*, 1800s

Silk, metallic yarn; plain weave, embroidered, appliqué

Gift of Anne G. Cann 1992.058.5



Middle Eastern

*Man's prayer cap*, Early 1900s

Silk, synthetic yarn; plain weave, embroidered, mirrorwork

Gift of Anne G. Cann 1992.058.8



Iraq; Middle Eastern; or; Saudi Arabian; Syrian

*Man's head cloth (keffiyeh)*, 1800s

Silk; plain weave

Gift of Edward and Casandra Stone 1992.118.3



The custom of covering one's head as a gesture of modesty and respect existed in the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean well before the advent of Islam. During Muhammad's lifetime, Arab men wore turbans, hats, caps, and head cloths (*keffiyeh*), often in combination with one another. Turbans, however, dominated until the mid-19th century, when the keffiyeh and head rope (*agal*) came into widespread popularity, evolving in the 20th century into badges of national identity in many countries of the Middle East. The checked pattern of the red-and-white cotton *keffiyeh* shown here is said to derive from ancient Mesopotamian symbols for wheat or fishing nets.

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Men generally fold the square *keffiyeh* into a triangle, arranging the long edge over the forehead and leaving the points to fall at each shoulder and down the back. The *agal*, once a simple rope that doubled as a camel hobble among Arab Bedouin, now functions to hold the *keffiyeh* in place on the head. The gold and silk wrapped around strands of wool (originally camel hair) indicate wealth and elite status.

Egyptian

*Woman's robe (yelek)*, 1800s

Silk, cotton, metallic yarn; plain weave, supplementary weft patterning, braid trim

Gift of the Estate of Eleanor Fayerweather 1993.085.105



Afghan

*Woman's dress and veil (chaadaree)*, 1977

Rayon, silk; plain weave, pulled work, embroidered, pleated

Gift of Dr. John N. Loomis 1995.023

At once familiar and alien and distinctive and infamous to a Western audience, the Afghan *chaadaree* is among the most recognized expressions of Islamic belief. On the one hand extolled as the paramount mode for maintaining a woman's honor and on the other reviled as a tool for women's oppression, this ensemble might also be viewed in shades between black and white.

The *chaadaree* came to Afghanistan via Persia or Mughal India as an upper-class urban prerogative in the 18th century. Over the centuries since, it has been alternately enforced and chosen. Scholarship focusing on the perspective of women wearing the *chaadaree* shows that many appreciate the privacy, or *purdah*, that this garment provides as they move about in public (the wearer removes it once she is inside and among women or immediate family members). Many also deliberately circumvent the potential anonymity of a total body covering by focusing on fabric choice (cotton, silk, or synthetic fiber), decoration, and color, each of which can indicate social status,



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geographic origins, and even religious belief (Muslim vs. Hindu, for example).

This *chaadaree* was never worn; the donor purchased it in 1977 (before Taliban rule) at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. Describing the street scene there, he states: "Almost all the women, 90 to 95 percent, were heavily veiled and wore costumes like the one you now have. . . . Most of these were beige, brown, or black; but maybe 25 percent were in brighter colors—blue, green, yellow, orange, purple—and many of them, of any color, were pleated. A few of the women, maybe 2 or 3 percent, were in ordinary Western-style clothes, particularly if they were dealing with tourists." A straightforward outsider's snapshot, his recollection gives an impression of multiplicity and nuance rather than passivity or repression.

Yulnara Atanaazarova, Uzbek, b. 1968

*Man's robe (chapan)*, 2000

Silk, cotton; plain weave, ikat dyed, quilted, printed lining

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.104.3

The flowing open robe, called *chapan* in Uzbekistan, has reigned supreme in the Central Asian clothing repertoire since nomad hordes first rode their horses to the region from the eastern steppes. By the 1st century CE, the robe had already settled into being a symbol not of action but of sporting leisure. In Uzbekistan the *chapan* might appear as a belted formal outer robe covering a simple tunic and trousers, as well as just one of many layers of colorful silk robes. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, a rich man might have worn ten *chapan* at once, crowned by a turban as many yards in length.

This *chapan* is dyed using the *ikat* technique, a time-consuming and precise tie-dyeing of warp yarns before weaving that results in a blurred pattern resembling clouds (*abr*). Though *ikat* has long been integral to local textile production, the 19th century saw an explosion of creativity and sophistication that placed *ikat* textiles and garments at the center of Uzbekistan's production and pride.





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Uzbek

*Woman's cap*, early 1900s

Silk, cotton; velvet, pain weave, printed

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2006.104.4



Rezia Wahid, British, b. 1976

*Mosque in Rome I (head scarf, scarf or wall hanging)*, 2007

Spun silk, merino wool, linen, gummed silk; plain weave,  
supplementary weft patterning

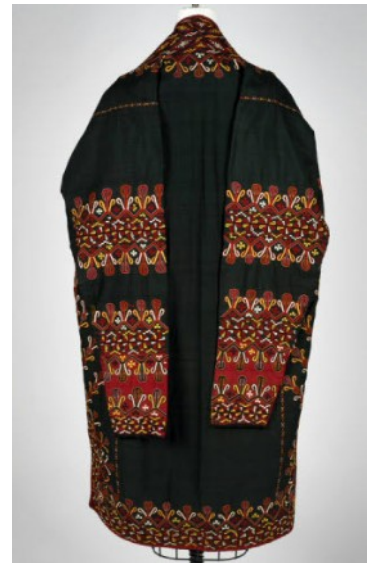
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2009.4

Turkmen; Turcoman

*Woman's cloak (chyrpy)*, 1930s

Silk, cotton; plain weave, embroidered, printed lining

Gift of Rebecca S. More and Timothy T. More 2009.5



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Egyptian; Bedouin

*Woman's face veil (burqa)*, Late 1800s-Early 1900s

Cotton, metallic yarn, sequins, brass; plain weave, velvet, embroidered

Museum Works of Art Fund 47.624



Thai

*Man's prayer cap*, early 1900s

Cotton; embroidered, drawnwork, quilted

Bequest of Miss Ellen D. Sharpe 54.147.103



Indian

*Man's robe (chogha)*, 1800s

Silk, metallic yarn; compound weave, supplementary weft patterning

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.260



Most of the garment forms in this gallery follow a general Islamic style but defer in detail to local practices and aesthetics. A comparison of the shimmering Moroccan kaftan and Indian chogha in this case, on the other hand, shows remarkable continuity in form, technique, imagery, and color. Exemplified by these two garments, a well-defined trade network—united by mutual faith and aligned with centers of luxurious textile production created by Silk Road traffic—enabled an unbroken stream of influence from North Africa to India. The meandering floral vegetation, opulent gold and silk brocade, and dazzling white-and-gold color combination strike a common chord at two of the farthest reaches of the Muslim world.

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Indian; Kashmiri

*Man's robe (chogha)*, late 1800s

Goat's hair (pashmina); double interlocking twill tapestry weave

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.263

The open coat and trouser ensemble traveled not only westward, but also southward from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. Though coats, tunics, and other stitched garments pre-existed the establishment of Islam in India, it was the Muslim Mughal rulers who inspired the widespread fashion for wearing these garments in the elite courts. The early Mughal rulers also saw fit to establish and support royal weaving workshops throughout the country. With this patronage, traditional techniques such as the breathtakingly intricate tapestry weave used to construct this coat soared to new heights, enabling veritable recreations of heavenly gardens in garment form.



Indian; Gujarati

*Woman's tunic (kurta)*, mid 1800s

Silk, metallic yarn; plain weave, gauze weave, embroidered, appliqué

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.372

Loyal to the sartorial traditions of their Central Asian homeland, the earliest Muslim rulers in India, as well as those of the later Mughal Empire, retained the basic components of Islamic men's and women's dress: loose outer robes worn over a long undergarment and wide trousers. Nonetheless, regional styles of embellishment did much to personalize the uncomplicated cuts of the individual components. On this straight, tunic-like *kurta*, the applied pattern drawn with gold threads represents a long tradition of such ornamentation perfected by Indian Muslim craftsmen over the centuries. The gold designs accent a rare gauze-weave silk fabric, likely imported from China, decorated with one more layer of visual allure, this one patterned using the age-old *bandhani* (tie-dyeing) technique that is a specialty of artisans living in western India.

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Persian

*Woman's robe (anteri)*, 1800s

Silk, metallic yarn; discontinuous supplementary weft patterning, braid trim

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.516

The Ottoman Turks and Persians shared not only religion and common ancestry but a close trading relationship in luxury textiles. Much of the extravagant silk woven in Turkish centers, exported via Italy to Europe, came from Persian producers until the mid-17th century.

Among the urban elite, both Turkish and Persian traditional ensembles comprise loose trousers (*salwar*) and a shirt (*gomlek*) worn under any number of jackets, vests, or long robes in various patterns and textures. The resulting bulky layering could suggest luxury, formality, and even proximity to the divine. Starting with the elaborate hems of the *salwar* and ending with the outermost robe, the harmonies and cacophonies of pattern in a single ensemble served, as in architectural ornament, as analogies for the natural world, intimations that what appears arbitrary in actuality forms part of God's plan.



Turkish

*Man's robe (kaftan)*, 1700s

Silk, metallic yarn, linen; velvet, appliqué, embroidered

Gift of Mrs. John W. Mackay 58.009.9

The form of the kaftan, a sleeved, full-length robe with buttoned-front opening, traveled to Turkey by way of Persia. The open coat derives from Central Asian prototypes developed as functional cavalry garments that could be donned or removed easily while on horseback. This style has dominated men's silhouettes throughout the Islamic world, showing subtle differences in shape and diverse textile treatments.

During the Ottoman period (1299–1923), the kaftan, the most visible male garment, served alone and in layers as the perfect medium for display of the empire's textile riches and technical expertise. The liquid silk velvet here conveys power and wealth in its technical sophistication and its regal red color. Because the basic kaftan shape was worn by men at all levels of society, in addition to the quality of fabric, the width of the sleeve and length of the garment determined status, with non-Muslims restricted to wearing narrow, short sleeves.



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North African; Algerian

*Man's cloak (aba)*, 1910

Silk, metallic yarn; tapestry weave, braid trim

Gift of Helen Tufts Davis, RISD, Class of 1961 59.058.8

Examples of opulent men's cloaks like this one abound in the Near East, particularly in the northern regions that have specialized in silk production and trade. This *aba* mimics the construction of the camel bisht but features luxurious materials of silk and gold and intricate weaving techniques. Though sartorial demonstrations of austerity remain prevalent in certain arenas, most of the garments on view in this exhibition reveal the effects of Islamic counter-traditions, one of which proclaims: "When God bestows benefaction upon one of his servants, He wishes the physical sign of that benefaction to be visible on him." The ruling Islamic courts as early as the 7th century focused increasing attention on the production and personal display of luxurious fabrics as an expression of divine inspiration and favor. Fine textiles and garments circulated widely across the expanse of the Islamic empire, forming a major industry, network of artisanship, and honorific system tying the empire together.

Despite the endorsement of lavish fabrics that comes after Muhammad's time, vestiges of the hadiths discouraging them persist: the custom of keeping silk from touching the skin remains strong, for example. As an outer garment, this silk *aba* presumably would have touched another layer of fabric, not the wearer directly.

Persian

*Woman's jacket (yahl, ausin sambusedar)*, ca. 1850-1900

Cotton, silk, brass buttons; plain weave, painted, block printed, braid trim

Gift of Mrs. Richard Lisle 63.027

This jacket's form, which would have been seen from the 17th through 19th centuries, represents a crossroads of influence: the sleeves that narrow to a point derive from coats worn by horsemen on the Asian steppes, while the flanged hips draw from the expanded skirts of 17th- and 18th-century European women's dress. In addition, the design and technique of the Persian-made mordant and resist-dyed cotton fabric owe much credit to Indian patterning and printing techniques. This light summer jacket, which by the 18th century had largely replaced the longer outer robe in Persian dress, would have topped a hip-length undershirt and typical voluminous trousers.





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Saudi Arabian

*Woman's face veil (burqa)*, ca. 1950

Cotton, metal strips, mother-of-pearl buttons, metal coins, glass beads; plain weave, applique

Gift of Mrs. Mary S. Andrews and Ms. Mary Card 64.047.2



Arabian Peninsula; Saudi Arabian

*Men's shirt (thōb)*, 1949

Cotton; plain weave

Gift of the Estate of Theodore Francis Green 69.138A

The earliest Arab garments were unseamed lengths of cloth draped and wound around the body, a style still seen today in the consecrated garments pilgrims wear to Mecca (*irham*). Contact with the Hellenistic Mediterranean world led to the adoption throughout the Near East of the seamed, unfitted tunic (*thōb*), a loose garment that gave refuge from the desert heat, and later suited the Quran's call for modesty in dress. In the southern Arabian Peninsula, wrapped garments continued for some time to cover the lower half of the body, but further north and east, early communication with Persia ushered in the rigid camel saddle and with it, trousers (*sarwal*). A gift of ancient Central Asian horsemen, the functional trouser form - which protected the legs from chafing while riding - dispersed quickly, both westward and eastward, well before the Christian era.



The austerity of the plain white cotton *thōb* and *sarwal* here recalls a declaration from the oral traditions conveying the words of Muhammad (*hadiths*): "The best of your clothes are white," he is said to have advised, for white frees the mind from the distraction and ostentation of luxury fabrics.

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Arabian Peninsula; Saudi Arabian

*Men's trousers (sarwal)*, 1949

Cotton; plain weave

Gift of the Estate of Theodore Francis Green 69.138B



Saudi Arabian

*Man's cloak (bisht)*, 1949

Camel hair, metallic yarn; plain weave, embroidered, braid trim

Gift of the Estate of Theodore Francis Green 69.138C

Worn over the *thōb* and *sarwal*, the *bisht*, a flat, rectangular, heavy cloak of finely woven camel hair (most often in brown or black), provides ample coverage and warmth at night. Its broad canvas requires much time and energy to make; gathering enough camel hair alone can take months. Men typically wear the *bisht* over the shoulders, putting their hands and arms through small slits when necessary. The gold braid trim, once reserved for religious and political leaders, adds formality to this traditional and functional garment, as does its length, making this particular *bisht* an item only a wealthy man could afford.



Arabian

*Man's head rope (agal)*, 1949

Wool, metallic yarn, silk; wrapped

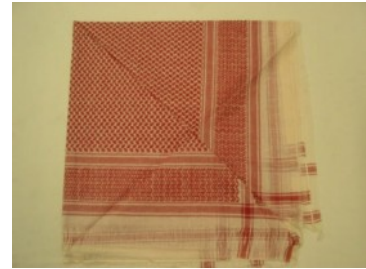
Gift of the Estate of Theodore Francis Green 69.138F



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Arabian Peninsula; Saudi Arabian  
*Man's head cloth (keffiyeh)*, 1949

Cotton; plain weave, discontinuous supplementary weft patterning  
Gift of the Estate of Theodore Francis Green 69.138G



Moroccan

*Man's robe (kaftan)*, 1900s

Silk, metallic yarn, rayon (facing); discontinuous supplementary weft patterning, braid trim

Gift of Mrs. Robert T. Galkin 72.005



Most of the garment forms in this gallery follow a general Islamic style but defer in detail to local practices and aesthetics. A comparison of the shimmering Moroccan kaftan and Indian *chogha* in this case, on the other hand, shows remarkable continuity in form, technique, imagery, and color. Exemplified by these two garments, a well-defined trade network—united by mutual faith and aligned with centers of luxurious textile production created by Silk Road traffic—enabled an unbroken stream of influence from North Africa to India. The meandering floral vegetation, opulent gold and silk brocade, and dazzling white-and-gold color combination strike a common chord at two of the farthest reaches of the Muslim world.

Albanian

*Woman's robe (yelek)*, late 1800s

Silk, metallic yarn, metallic ribbon, beads; velvet, embroidered, appliqué, braid trim,

Gift of Philip Adams 73.086.3



Starting in the mid-14th century, Albania fell under the umbrella of Ottoman rule, and thus inherited many of the social and artistic traditions of the Islamic world. Particularly in the southern part of the country, the influence of Turkish aesthetics inspired vibrant reactions, here evident in the presentation of gold embroidery on red velvet (see also the man's kaftan in this gallery) and in the arabesque motifs on the garment.

The style of this ceremonial robe approximates that of the Persian *anteri* and Egyptian *yelek* also on view in this case, and, like these garments, would have coordinated with an equally sumptuous sleeveless robe, an undershirt or dress, and trousers, or *salwar*. Such extravagant embroidered work would likely have been made by

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women of high enough status that they could afford to spend their time at home in seclusion.

North African; Algerian  
*Man's prayer cap*, 1900s  
Cotton; plain weave, cutwork, embroidered  
Gift of Mrs. David C. Scott, Jr. 79.107.12



Syrian  
*Man's or woman's robe*, 1800s  
Silk, cotton; satin weave, quilted  
Gift of Mrs. Robert Blumenthal 84.031

Syria enjoyed a key position on the Silk Road, and by the 8th century had become a center of luxury silk production and weaving; its famed artisans supplied their wares across the Islamic world, including India and Central Asia, as well as to countries closer to home. The delicate and elaborate hand quilting on this glistening satin-weave silk fabric represents untold hours of work. Made in an area awash with lavish silks, this robe represents a pinnacle of workmanship and refinement.



Yemen  
*Woman's dress (thōb)*, ca. 1930  
Cotton, metallic yarn, metal strips, synthetic yarn; satin weave, embroidered, appliqué, braid trim  
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 84.157

Removed from the centers of Islamic rule, the rural population of North Yemen nonetheless augmented their artwork, insofar as they could, with riches derived from the empire's extensive trade network while retaining a highly developed regional aesthetic. Only the most festive or ritual occasion would have warranted wearing this heavily embellished dress, which would likely have been given as a trousseau item to a bride by the groom's family.



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The narrow silhouette, dark, satin-weave cotton ground, and distinctive cotton and metallic braid embellishment pinpoints the wearer as hailing from the Tihameh region in North Yemen. Despite these markers, many underlying pan-Islamic influences are also apparent, including the tunic style of the dress, the incorporation of silk brocade detailing, and the presence of metallic threads in the embroidery.

Mindanao; Philippine  
*Men's trousers (sawal)*, ca. 1960  
Abaca fiber, cotton; plain weave, embroidered  
Gift of Wendy Shah 85.001

Across Southeast Asia the words for trousers vary only slightly, all deriving from the Persian *shalwa* or the Turkish *shalvar*, and therefore pointing to an Islamic source for the garment's introduction to the region. While women in other parts of the Islamic world wear trousers under layers of clothing, only the men wear *sawal* in Southeast Asia. *Sawal* generally have a straightforward silhouette that is typical of Middle Eastern tailoring: two tubes for legs are joined by a large gusset at the crotch. In the Mindanao example here, burnished abaca fiber from a wild banana plant provides a stiff and slick base for colorful embroidery characteristic of the area. The mostly geometric pattern includes an abstracted human figure that survives from the pre-Islamic symbolic repertoire. A regionally significant motif, the figure blends into the overall design and references ancient tradition, while the trouser form itself shows the more recent influences of Islam in the community.



Turkish  
*Woman's trousers (salwar)*, ca. 1910  
Silk, metallic yarn; embroidered, crochet trim  
Gift of F. F. Olney 85.072B





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Indonesian; Javanese  
*Man's turban*, early 1900s  
Cotton: plain weave, wax resist-dyed (batik)  
Museum Collection S82.232



Afghan  
*Woman's dress (thob)*, 1900s  
Cotton, silk; plain weave, tie-dyed, embroidered, discontinuous  
supplementary weft patterning  
Museum Collection S85.050

