

Turkish Coats

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Figure 1 Humay on the Day After his Wedding Has Gold Coins Poured over Him as he leaves Humayun's Room from Khwaju Kirmani, *Divan*, Baghdad, 1396. London, British Library.

The garment we habitually call a Turkish Coat is more properly called an enteri or yelek. This garment is the basic unit of middle eastern period garb. A study of Persian and Turkish miniatures shows every person, man or woman, wearing some version of what appears to be a long tunic (figure 1). The sleeves are of varying length and width, and the hem can vary from hip to ankle. These garments were normally worn over a gömlek (chemise) and salvar (loose pants). The fit ranges from very tight as depicted in Figures 2 and 3 to loose and flowing as depicted in figure 1. Normal dress consisted of 3-4 enteri of varying lengths, worn so that as many layers as possible could be displayed. Note the variety of necklines, from deep 'V' for 'U' to simply left open. The sleeves can be absent, short, or long enough to hang over the hands. The extremely long sleeves were often pushed up so that they pooled at the wrists, or slit at the shoulders so the arms could be passed through. The sleeves then hung behind the shoulders as decorations and can be seen tucked into a sash or belt. Sleeves can also be seen to be left to hang behind the shoulders, with the garment worn as a throw or cloak. Note that the sleeves are invariably sewn all the way to the cuff.

Very few of these garments from our period of study have survived, the exception being the sultan's ceremonial robes. Although these robes cannot be relied upon for detail, as they were not worn as everyday garments, basic construction methods can be garnered from their study. These garments are often constructed of very elaborate fabrics and lack a closure, even though the pattern has been carefully matched across the front. Written testimonials from ambassadors indicate that the sultan most likely did not move



Figure 2 Turkish lady at home. Water color painting from a traveler's handbook, Turkey 1588.

when he wore this garment, but stood motionless throughout the audience it give the impression of greater power. (Bloom et al, 1997 p. 379)

We can, however, draw some useful conclusions from miniatures that have survived, although they are often drawn in a flat schematic way that does not indicate the fit of the garment. There is still evidence in these illustrations that indicates the garments were extremely well-fitted through the torso. Consider, for example, the dancers depicted in figure 3, dated early 16th century. These dancers are depicted wearing a well-fitted bodice and a full skirt. Consider also the illustration shown in Figure 4, from Scarce. There are tension lines indicated on the front standing figure at far right that indicates a very close fit through the torso.

An examination of figure 1 will reveal a variety of necklines for the enteri, including high round, "V", "U", and crossed. Necklines can be rather deep to show much of the upper chest of gömlek, or closed nearly to the neck. The goal seemed to be to display as many layers as possible, so the necklines often deepened with the outer layers.

The enteri can be nearly any length from hip to ankle. The skirt is usually sewn at all seams, but can be slit at the back or sides. The garment always closes up the front, and so the skirt is always open in the front and frequently allows the gömlek and salvar to show. The flat depiction of many of the miniatures can make it difficult to estimate skirt fullness. Figures 2 and 3 both seem to indicate a rather full skirt that hangs elegantly from the hips.



Figure 3 Indian Kathak entertainers at the Marriage or Bagi Muhammad Khan (early 16th century)



Figure 4 The Harem in Topkapi Palace (Scarce)

Construction

These garments are constructed using simple rectangles and triangles in much the same manner as an early period tunic as shown in the illustration below. The godets and skirt gores should be trimmed to provide a smooth circular hem. With this construction method a nicely flowing fitted garment can be achieved with only geometrically simple pieces and straight seams.

These garments were frequently lined in contrasting fabrics. There are examples, however, that show a wide facing of contrasting fabric with no visible lining. The fabrics appear to be primarily fairly light with a nice drape based on the artistic depiction.

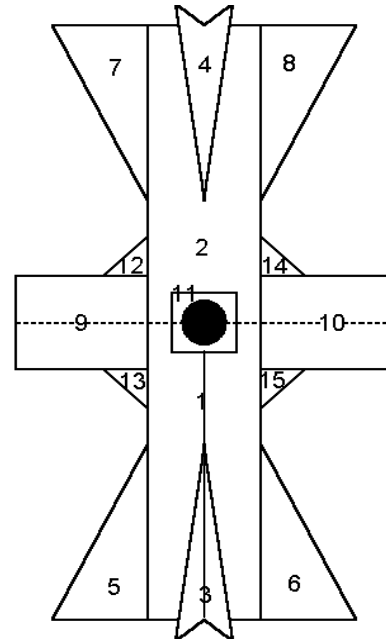
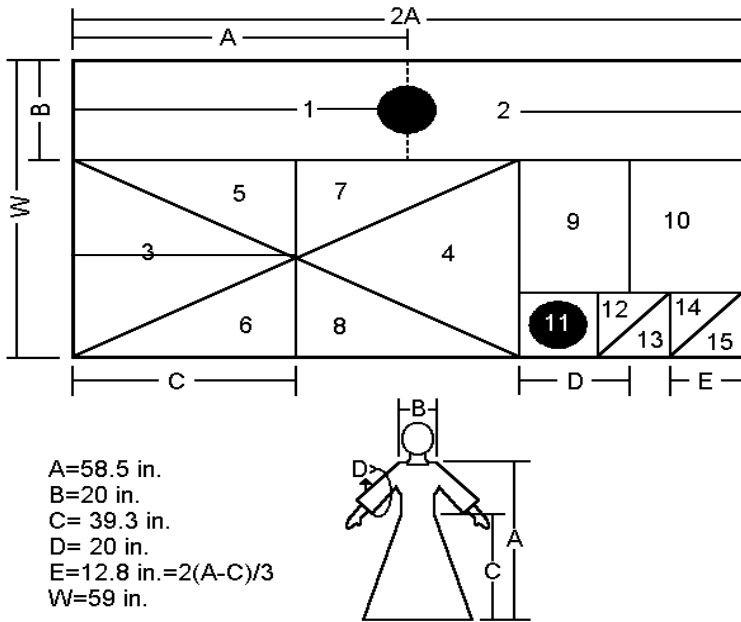


Figure 5 Schematic for construction

Beyond the Middle East

The elegant lines of the Turkish Coat can be found in many garments of the Mediterranean region. There is a collection of portraits from the studio of Titian that Venetian ladies wearing garments that illustrate a strong Turkish Coat influence (Figure 6). The short pointed sleeves and long elegant lines of her outer gown are very strongly reminiscent of the Enteri we see in Turkish miniatures. Similar examples can be seen in the art of Moorish Spain as well as in Sicily, although examples of the latter regions are not shown here.



Figure 6 Portrait of a Lady 1555

Conclusion

Evidence gathered from artwork completed during our period of study as well allows us to construct a consistent picture of what the costume of a typical woman residing the Middle East regions of Persia and Turkey would have looked like. The basic element of Middle Eastern costume is the enteri, or Turkish Coat. This elegant garment can be constructed from simple geometric shapes utilizing straight seams. The alternatives from neckline, sleeve style, length, and decoration allow for a large variety of garments based upon this simple foundation.

References

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