

Welcome to Horace Mann's Webpage on:

## **Muslim and Middle Eastern Clothing, Jewelry, Make-up**

### **Introduction: What Influences What We Wear?**

Clothing worn by all people is influenced by the climate, available materials, and cultural traditions which include social status, group identity, and religion.

**Climate:** People living in a desert environment often covered up in loose clothing to protect themselves from the sun and to keep cool. White clothing was cooler than dark clothing in the sunlight. And head coverings were important for protection against the sun, too.

**Fabrics:** Five main fabrics were available for clothing. **Cotton** was a cool fabric. In winter or in cold environments, clothing was commonly made of **wool**. **Camel hair** was also woven into clothing for cold weather. Some clothing was made from plant fibers called **linen**. **Silk** was imported from China or Persia and was very expensive, so only the rich could afford it.

**Traditions, status, and group identity:** Cultural traditions were also important in style of clothing. There were many differences in clothing throughout the medieval Islamic World. In each culture, **clothing showed the social status of its people**. Married and unmarried women might wear different clothing or head coverings. Young girls would not be required to wear the clothing of older girls nearing the **age** of marriage and married women may wear another style of clothing. Rich and poor, educated and uneducated, military or civilian might wear different styles of clothing which showed who they were and their **occupation or status**. Clothing worn out **in public** would be very different from clothing worn **in the home**, especially for women. (Long before Islam, Arab women were usually kept away from mixed society. But in Turkey, women had much social freedom.) A Muslim student, a scholar or judge would wear appropriate clothing showing his religious status. An older man would have a beard while a younger man might not. And a slave would wear very different clothing than a master. Moreover, clothing was also part of a tribal or group identity. People from one tribe, village, or culture traditionally wore one type of clothing to show their **group membership**. Finally, clothing would differ as to **the situation** one was in.

Clothing while doing hard farm work, for example, would be different from clothing when going to a mosque.

**Influence of Islam:** But there were also similarities that were dictated by the Qur'an. The Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad had much influence on the clothing of all medieval Muslims. As Islam spread across its vast empire, traditional clothing styles were affected by the requirements of Islam.

## **Part I: What do the Qur'an and Hadith have to say about Muslim Clothing?**

- The Qur'an tells both women and men to be **modest**. [For some Muslims, [modest](#) clothing for women is a head covering called a '**hijab**', but this was not worn in all medieval Muslim societies. Whenever a woman entered a mosque, however, she would always have her head covered. (This was also true of medieval Christian women entering a church.) In some societies even the woman's face was covered.]
- The Qur'an tells **men** that they **should not wear silk or gold jewelry** to show off their wealth.
- Clothing should **not attract attention or be worn to show off**.
- Clothing must **cover the entire body**; only the **hands and face may remain visible**.
- The **material must not be so thin** that one can see through it.
- **Clothing must hang loose** so that the shape of the body is not shown off.
- The **woman's clothing must not resemble the man's clothing, nor should the man's clothing resemble the woman's**.
- **Women shouldn't artificially lengthen their hair** with wigs or weaves, **nor have tattoos**.
- A Muslim should **not wear clothing to look like a non-Muslim**. (For example, the Persians were known for wearing red, many silk robes, and their men's robes had long trains which dragged behind them. The Prophet Muhammad was against Muslims copying these styles.)
- Men's robes or shirts should extend down from halfway below the shin but over the ankles, but not so long as to trail behind on the ground.
- **While praying** in a mosque, **clothing should be plain** and not be distracting.

- A **man's hair** might be criticized if it was shoulder-length or longer. The Prophet Muhammad preferred men to wear their hair neat and cut a little below the ears.

**Hadith** (or Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad): Volume 7, Book 72, Number 720: The Prophet said, "There is none who wears **silk** in this world except that he will wear nothing of it in the Hereafter." [beyond the size from the middle to the index fingers - this is addressed to men]. Volume 7, Book 72, Number 722: ... Allah's Apostle said, 'Gold, silver, silk and Dibaj (a kind of silk) are for them (unbelievers) in this world and for you (Muslims) in the hereafter.' ... Volume 7, Book 72, Number 816: The Prophet said, "Allah has cursed the lady who artificially lengthens (her or someone else's) hair and the one who gets her hair lengthened and the one who tattoos (herself or someone else) and the one who gets herself tattooed" ... Book 32, Number 4038: The Prophet forbade men putting silk at the hem of their garments like the Persians, or putting silk on their shoulders like the Persians.) **Read more [hadith on clothing](#).**

## **Part II: Women's Clothing during the Middle Ages - A glimpse through time from paintings and written records**

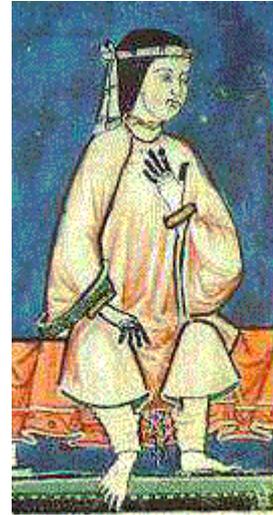
Look at the following paintings. By looking at these images, what can you **generalize** about Muslim women's clothing from Andalusia (Spain) to Persia (Iran)? Are there similarities and differences? Are any of these styles similar to modern clothing?



A veiled Berber woman in Andalusia (Muslim Spain) playing chess with another woman. Image from The Book of Chess, Dice, and Board Games by Alfonso X El Sabio, dated **1283**.



A woman in Andalusia (Muslim Spain) playing chess with another woman, both with henna on their hands. Image from The Book of Chess, Dice, and Board Games by Alfonso X El Sabio, dated **1283**.



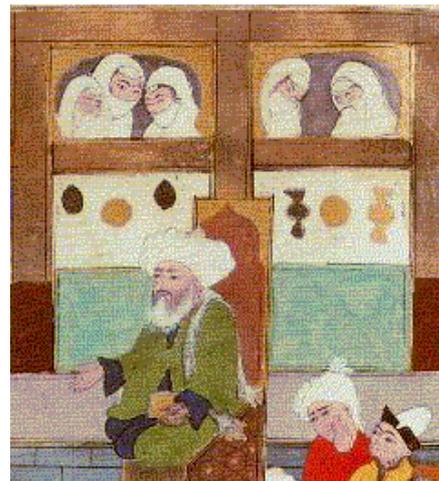
A woman in Andalusia (Muslim Spain) playing chess with another woman, with henna on her hands, wearing robes over tight pants. Image from The Book of Chess, Dice, and Board Games by Alfonso X El Sabio, dated **1283**



Persian women (shown in preparation for a funeral at a home) painted by Shaykh Zadeh from a Khamsa of Nizami, **1494** in Herat.



A Persian woman with pants covered with a robe and head and face covering. From "[Rustam saves Bizhan from the well](#)" in Shah-nama (Firdawsi's 'Book of Kings') by Ali b. Husayni



Turkish women were veiled and separated from the men in this mosque scene. [Topkapi collection](#) Shaykh Baha'al-Din Veled preaching in Balkh Jami' al-Siyar,

	Bahmani, Shiraz, 1330.	1600. Hazine.
 <p>The clothing of the automated concubine is an important example of female <b>apparel</b> (clothing) in the <b>13th century</b>. Her loose and long sleeved dress falls just below her knees and seems to be belted. It has tiraz bands on its arms, while similar bands go round the edges of her skirt and the short slit in the front of the dress. She has a pair of white lined red ankle length trousers and black house shoes with scalloped edges. [Automated Drink Server, Miniature from al-Jazari's "Kitab fi Marifet el-Hiyal el Handasiya (Knowledge of Mechanical Devices). Seljuk, Diyarbakir, <b>13th century</b>. (<a href="#">Topkapi collection</a>)]</p>	<p><b>Not veiled? Shocking!</b></p> <p><b>Ibn Battuta</b> was a traveler in the 14th century. He tells us about women's clothing in many of the places he visited: In Turkey he tells us that the women did not veil themselves.</p> <p>About Turkey, he writes: "A remarkable thing which I saw in this country was the respect shown to women by the Turks, for they hold a more dignified position than the men. ... I saw also the wives of the merchants and common [men]. [Their faces are] visible for the <b>Turkish women do not veil themselves</b>. Sometimes a woman will be accompanied by her husband and anyone seeing him would take him for one of her servants." [Gibb, p. 415 - 416]</p> <p>In Mali, West Africa, Ibn Battuta observed ...</p> <p>"Their women are of surpassing beauty, and</p>	<p>Other men were shocked at women's clothing, too:</p> <p>"About 1118 AD [the founder of the Almohad dynasty in Morocco], returned from the East... He seems to have dedicated himself chiefly to studying ... theology ... and was convinced that [North African] life was not what it should be. The moral laxity of Marrakesh [the capital city of the veiled Almoravids] <b>scandalized</b> (shocked) him so much when he was there that the sight of the Emir's (the prince's) sister riding unveiled on horseback through town, accompanied by her women, <u>caused him to throw her down...</u>" (Arabs in Europe, p. 31, quoted in <a href="#">Sadar &amp; Davies: Distorted Imagination</a>).</p> <p>See the image below: This picture shows a Mongol Princess on a promenade (a horseback ride) from a Persian miniature about mid-14th century. Note that the Persian women in the background are veiled. Mongol women had their heads covered, but their faces were not veiled. (This was after the Mongol Invasion and conquest of Persia, 1258.)</p>

are shown more respect than the men. These people are Muslims, **punctilious** (very exact, never late) in observing the hours of prayer, studying the books of law, and memorizing the Qur'an. Yet **their women show no bashfulness before men and do not veil themselves**, though they are **assiduous** (worked hard) in attending prayers. Any man who wishes to marry one of them may do so, but they do not travel with their husbands, and, even if one desired to do so, her family would not allow her to go. The women have their 'friends' and 'companions' among the men outside their own families." He also criticized the women of Mali for going topless: "Female slaves and servants who went stark naked into the court for all to see..."  
[Dunn, The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, p. 300.]



**Learn more about medieval Muslim women's clothing:**

- [Arab Women's costume from the Fourth to Sixth Century](#), from [The History of Costume](#) by Braun & Schneider.
- Also see [Thirteenth Century Andalusian Women's Clothing](#).
- Here are some pictures of people during the Middle Ages in [Andalusia](#) (Muslim Spain), the [Magreb](#) (from Spain to Tunisia), [Palestinian](#), and [Palestinian historical costume](#) (from ARAMCO World Magazine).
- Also see another SCA newsletter describing [Near Eastern Women's Clothing from North Africa to the Levant](#), and [Magribri \(North African\) Clothing](#). [Note: SCA stands for Society for Creative Anachronisms, a group of people who like to dress up and become

someone from the past. This is a group of history-buffs! Some of their research is quite good. You may have heard of some groups who go to Renaissance Fairs in costume and play their historical personae.]



And in Andalusia (Spain): The entertainer playing the oud (a lute) is wearing a **turban**. The queen has her head covered (with a crown), but the female attendants' heads are uncovered. In the back row there are two male servants.

"Maghribi (North African) queen in a garden with female attendants listening to oud player, 13th century CE." This is part of the love story of Bayad and Riyad. Bayad sings in front of the noble lady, and her female and male companions. Hadith Bayad waRiyad; Maghreb; 13th century; Vatican, Bibliotheque Apostolique; Ms. Ar 368, fol. 10r.

### **A Modern Debate:**

Wearing of the **hijab** (which means "head covering" or "veil") is debated in some Muslim societies.

In Turkey the hijab or head scarf is "banned" on some university campuses because it is not "progressive" and men can't wear the traditional Islamic beard. This government policy has angered many fundamentalist or conservative students. [Read more about the debate](#) (Christian Science Monitor article of

3/25/98.)

Clothing, especially wearing the hijab, has become an "identity" issue with many Muslim women.

**Conclusions:** Throughout the Islamic world of the Middle Ages, there were differences in women's clothing. In many cultures the women wore head covering, but not all. After the spread of Islam from Spain to India and south into Africa, there was no central authority that controlled how people interpreted the Qur'an.

### **Part III: Traditional Women's Clothing Worn Today - With Comparisons to the Past**



Clothing for Muslim men and women varies with the culture they are from. There is no one style of clothing today, nor was there in the Middle Ages. Today some women wear veils, others do not. Traditional costumes may be very different from modern clothing. Look at some of these images to make some generalizations about clothing of the Middle Ages in the Islamic

Empires.

See a [conservative Arabian veiled woman](#)'s costume and explanation of women's clothing in the Middle East. Not all women wear the veil or head covering (hijab); it varies with cultures. (For example, few Turkish women wear veils today and they didn't in the 14th century.)

See Tareq Rajab Museum's description of [Kuwaiti and Arabian costumes](#) and [jewelry](#) (stating that jewelry is for women, not men according to the Qur'an; men shouldn't even wear all silk clothes or gold! There is also a little about nose rings (page 3), and costumes. Pictures are separated - see their images in the section on [jewelry](#) and costume.

See [Moroccan traditional costumes](#) Great pictures, but the text is in French, so here is a brief translation: The clothing of Morocco varies according to the regions and according to local traditions. In modern cities the people wear "western" or European clothing, but one also sees many traditional clothes being worn. The most common is the "djellaba" robes worn by both men and women. It is a long, loose-fitting robe that covers all. People wear it over other clothing, and in Morocco, the hood is worn over the traditional red felt cap. The "gandoura" is a kind of tunic without sleeves and is generally white. The caftan, which is even imported to Europe, is common with city dwellers; it has loose sleeves, is buttoned up the front, sometimes worn in special occasions with rich fabric, decorated with gold or silver embroidery, and worn with a fancy belt.



**An excellent site:** [Traditional Women's Costume in Muslim Countries](#). It has many pictures from [Saudi Arabia](#), [Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates](#), [Oman](#), [Yemen](#), [Afghanistan](#), [North Africa](#) and more. It shows the traditional clothing of different tribal and ethnic groups in these countries.

See some images of women in Afghanistan. Note that some are veiled, some are not. [Afghani women 1](#), [Afghani women 2](#), [Afghani women 3](#) (from GeoWeb, photos by Powell Photographs were taken in 1970's. Since then government policies have become more conservative, which means more women would be wearing the covering garments. See below.)

Learn more about [Saudi Arabian](#) traditional costume from their

U.S. embassy site. Also visit the [Tareq Rajab Museum](#) for a good description of traditional Arabian costume, but unfortunately it's without photographs.

[Women's Head dresses in Turkish Folklore](#) are shown. (Click on the fancy arrow pointing right at the bottom of each page to continue.) Note how the readdresses change throughout the woman's life and signal rites of passage - or changes in one's status by age or because of a ceremony (like marriage, becoming an adult, etc.).

[Palestinian Costumes](#) (women's costumes) are shown. For some background about the tradition of embroidery, see the introduction page to these costumes. You can order a video (\$25) about Palestinian Costumes and Embroidery: [A Precious Legacy](#).

### More Women's Head Coverings and Hats



© Cameron Davidson, 1996  
An Arabic wedding veil, from  
[Smithsonian Magazine site](#)



A young Turkish girl -  
note coins on hat.  
Photograph from [OguzTurk](#)



A young Turkish woman  
- note coins on hat.  
Photograph from [OguzTurk](#)

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### **Books, Magazines, and Slides**

1. Modern Knowledge Library, Rise of Islam: Page 23
2. Medieval Banquet by Shabbas "Clothing Fit for an Andalusian Banquet" p. 81 - 90
3. Palestinian Costume (check title, publisher - it's in Arabic!)
4. ARAMCO World: March-April, 1997 "These Stitches Speak" p. 2 - 11
5. ARAMCO World: January-February, 1991 "Woven Legacy" p. 34-43
6. ARAMCO World: November-December, 1987 "Stitches Through Time" p. 12-19
7. ARAMCO World: September-October, 1987 "Fabric of Tradition" p. 21 - 29
8. ARAMCO World: November-December, 1980 "Fashion in the Sand" p. 4-1
9. ARAMCO World: September-October, 1992 "Berber Silver, Arab Gold" p. 14 - 21 for jewelry of the Berbers (in North Africa)