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CLOTHING I. GENERAL REMARKS

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i. General remarks

Of the twenty-seven subsequent articles in this series eleven are devoted to clothing of the Iranian peoples in successive historical periods and fourteen to modern clothing of various regions and ethnic groups in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Persia. The remaining two are compilations of terminology for various types of garment in these settings.

Although details of dress have frequently provided clues for scholars seeking to date or localize various monuments in the history of art, the systematic study of dress, especially dress of the Middle East, is still largely in its infancy. As for clothing in Persia in particular, scholars are only beginning to come to grips with fundamental issues, and the study of costume is still in the initial, descriptive phase.

Sources. Foremost among the issues confronting those who study clothing, as is repeatedly indicated by the contributors to this series, is the problem of sources. The Safavid period (907-1145/1501-1732) is the earliest from which any meaningful quantity of actual garments survive; before that time only rare and usually fragmentary pieces have been recovered from sites widely separated in time and place. For periods spanning more than 2,000 years,

then, it is necessary to rely primarily on textual descriptions and pictorial representations. Not only does the richness of this documentation vary with the group or period being studied, but also it is often difficult to integrate the two kinds of evidence in a coherent picture. Interpretation of representations is further complicated by the difficulty of distinguishing the formal conventions and traditions of a particular medium from realistically observed details of the subject matter. Before the Safavid period it is often risky to conclude that clothing illustrated in manuscript paintings or relief sculptures faithfully depicts clothing actually worn in contemporary life. Very often particular styles of mantle or robe, particularly in courtly settings, may simply follow established “types” widely recognized as identifying “king,” “courtier,” “warrior,” “servant,” and the like. On the other hand, a marked change in particular types of representation may reflect either an observed change in the clothing worn or the impact of new artistic models. Conclusions must be reached independently in each specific instance.

Then, too, the documentation is usually uneven. Because most of the texts surviving from before the Islamic period are concerned with political and dynastic events in which the protagonists were almost exclusively male and because most representations are to be found on official, courtly, and religious monuments—relief and other sculptures, wall paintings, coins and seals, and metalwork—knowledge of the clothing of women in those early centuries is particularly scanty and for the most part limited to that of aristocrats and entertainers. As for male costume, the monuments provide information on princely dress and the garments of warriors and priests but almost nothing on what peasants and other classes of society wore. Nothing at all seems to be known about children’s clothing in the pre-Islamic periods (see ii-vii, below).

For the first millennium following the Islamic conquest textual and pictorial sources are generally more plentiful, but the problems of coverage and interpretation are equally severe. The texts continue to be focused on historic events and affairs of interest to men, with little attention to the details of daily life; information about the lives of women is only incidental. In addition, assessing how much confidence is to be accorded to visual documents requires even more caution than in previous periods, for representation of human figures is often characterized by a deliberate androgyny (Ettinghausen, p. 53), and it is thus difficult to differentiate the clothing of men and women, especially in the centuries before the Mongol invasions.

Persian manuscript painting was first developed into a form of fine art in the

8th/14th century and reached a peak in the 9th/15th century, when scenes from both epic and lyric poetry were illustrated with relative frequency (see ix, below). Until that time women other than entertainers were even rarer in artistic representations than before the Muslim conquests, owing to the strictures imposed on them by religious law and custom; women were discouraged from leaving their houses and were not permitted to appear outside the immediate family circle unless completely swathed in veils or mantles of various kinds (see viii, below). Although some of these restrictions apparently sat lightly on Turkish and Mongol princesses and noblewomen during the period after the Saljuq invasions of Persia (429-654/1038-1256) and in the ensuing Il-khanid (654-754/1256-1353) and Timurid (771-912/1370-1506) periods, for the most part women in the Islamic world were invisible (see Lambton, esp. pp. 481-83). In the same periods, however, depictions of male costume were more sharply differentiated than before, and the wealth of surviving material permits some identification of clothing associated with specific social groups: aristocrats and courtiers, clerics, warriors, merchants, servants, laborers, seamen, nomads, shepherds, peasants, and professional mourners. It is even possible in certain instances to observe variations in the dress of smaller component groups within these broad categories; for example, among religious figures several kinds of dervishes, preachers, and teachers are distinguished by their clothing. Children are only occasionally represented and then usually in the same types of clothing as their elders.

Beginning with the Safavid period, however, though textual and representational sources are still important, they can be supplemented with actual surviving garments, particularly courtly pieces fine enough to have been treasured and collected through the centuries. The available texts, including Western travelers' accounts, are also more comprehensive in their treatment of artifacts and practices of everyday life in Persia. Furthermore, from the middle of the 13th/19th century traditional visual sources have been supplemented by photographs (see ix-xi, below; cf. Stein).

By the end of that century some Western travelers and field expeditions were beginning to collect contemporary clothing and jewelry in Persia and especially Central Asia. Some of these collections found their way into museums, for example, the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin (primarily materials collected by W. R. Rickmers and the Turfan expeditions; Westphal-Hellbusch and Soltkahn, pp. 7-9), the Musée Historique in Bern (collection of Henri Moser), and the Danish National Museum (see xiv, below). More

recently several institutions, notably the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh (Scarce) and the Ethnological Museum in Tehran (for illustrations of comparable material, see Shay), have exerted efforts to form comprehensive collections of Persian and tribal clothing, drawing on both donations and the marketplace.

Such collections help to add a historical dimension to the detailed field investigations of clothing by modern anthropologists and ethnographers. These field studies, based on both direct observation and verbal reports by members of the communities under study, yield a wealth of detail about specific distinctions among different types of garment and, taken together, provide a rich and subtle picture of the way in which clothing both contributes to and reflects the intricate social arrangements within each community. Details of headgear appear to be the main carrier of these social clues, but other garments can also function in this way. In view of the conservatism of clothing remarked by many of these investigators, it is possible that eventually, when the work of description is farther advanced than it is now, parallel conclusions about clothing in some earlier periods of history will become possible, though they will necessarily always be more speculative

Classification. A second problem confronting those who study clothing is that of classification. Most of the contributors to this series have adopted, whether explicitly or not, a general five-part classification, based on the position of the garment on the body: headgear, overgarments, undergarments, trousers, and footgear. Not every costume includes all these parts, and other items of apparel, for example, jewelry, belts, gloves, armor, and weapons are generally classified separately as accessories. There is no unanimity on further subclassification, however. Soviet archeologists, for example, divide garments worn on the body between those that hang from the shoulder and those that hang from the waist (cf. xv, below). An especially common approach is based on construction of the garment. A recent four-part classification derived from Western historic dress included draped garments, in which the shape depends on the fluid arrangement of textiles, often single flat pieces, on the body; straight-cut garments, in which geometric pieces are stitched together with straight seams; tailored garments, in which the component pieces are “sculpted” so that they maintain their shape even off the body; and garments shaped according to predetermined aspects of the cloth, for example, embroidered panels (Palmer).

Another approach to classification emphasizes the context in which the

clothes are worn. Such classifications include, for example, the distinction between Achaemenid court and cavalry dress (see ii, below); distinctions among urban, rural, and nomadic dress; those between members of different occupational groups; and those between daily life and ceremonial occasions.

To some extent these classifications are determined by the type of evidence available. For example, an inductive survey of dress in a given historical period, based largely on pictorial representations, may be limited by the nature of the evidence to only the most general categorization of garment types, despite the complexity that may actually have characterized the clothing of the period. When evidence is more abundant, as in relatively modern times, the classification is more often dictated by the interests of the investigator; ethnographers, for example, are more likely to focus on the social function of garments.

Interpretive framework. Each issue of *Costume*, the organ of the Costume Society of London and a leading journal in this field, appears with the following statement of purpose: “to promote the study and preservation of significant examples of historic and contemporary costume. This embraces the documentation of surviving examples and the study of decorative arts allied to the history of dress, as well as literary and pictorial sources.” This approach is firmly rooted in the concrete reality of surviving evidence, and its proponents emphasize that “the study of clothing exists in its own right” (Saunders, p. 2). On the other hand, many scholars view the history of clothing as one aspect of the study of social history and value it mainly for what it can reveal about broader trends. Dramatic “clothing events” in the social history of Persia include the imposition by Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) of European ballet dress on the women of his harem (see x, below), the forcible banning of the *čādor* under Reżā Shah Pahlavī, and the equally forcible reimposition of the *čādor* by religious authorities after the Revolution of 1358 Š./1979 (see xi, below). Such shifts, though particularly severe in relation to women’s clothing, have also affected men: European-style military uniforms (see xii, below) and European-style civilian dress for officials were mandated by Reżā Shah (1304-20 Š./1925-41), but Western styles were generally unpopular with the clergy, and fundamental changes in men’s clothing thus also became part of the revolutionary agenda.

Although the study of Persian clothing has not yet been focused on discussion of method, it is possible to find some useful directions in the study of Western clothing. In a recent discussion of Central European dress Wolfgang Brückner

has emphasized the ways in which scholars' theoretical orientations influence and sometimes even dictate the direction of their investigations and their methods. Drawing upon principles previously formulated for the parallel study of house types, he has identified four complexes of theory and method, in the historical order of their appearance.

The first are so-called "ethnic theories," in which specific types of clothing are assumed to identify specific language and regional or tribal groups. According to a second, diffusionist theory, actual garments should be viewed as descendants of some original basic type; for example, the simple cover with a hole for the head may be viewed as the ancestor of various kinds of shepherd's dress known throughout the world. Third is the history of development, which encompasses both internal evolution and the assimilation of outside cultural influences. Finally, there are theories of social function, which Brückner characterizes as "ahistorical" (p. 17); they encompass, among others, semiotic approaches to clothing as a language of signs that can be decoded and read (see, e.g., Petraschek-Heim; cf. Lurie). With this level of abstraction, in which actual garments and their consideration as historical documents are of little interest (Brückner, p. 17), the study of clothing can be said to reach the polar extreme from that of "a field of study in its own right."

Elements of the first three approaches can be found in the articles that follow; nevertheless, as information accumulates, it will become necessary to reformulate and refine this basic framework for specific application to Persia, Afghanistan, and the various ethnic groups that live there. In fact, a primary focus of research and controversy in the study of clothing in Persia is delineation of the specific contribution made by the Iranian peoples to the repertoire of clothing (see, e.g., Moorey; Stillman and Stillman, p. 747). All the array of sources, classifications, and methods outlined above have been brought to bear on this question. In addition, linguistic evidence promises further assistance in these fundamental investigations (see xxvii, xxviii, below; cf. Stillman, pp. 740-42; idem and Stillman). As in the study of the diffusion of technology, systematic collection and analysis of the terms for specific items of clothing may eventually permit conclusions about a characteristically Iranian vestimentary system, as well as helping to establish or confirm patterns of reciprocal influence between the peoples living in Persia and in neighboring lands.

Although none of the contributors to this series on clothing has taken a semiotic approach, nevertheless many of them have focused on different

aspects of the social and economic functioning of clothing, for example, as diplomatic gifts or a repository for capital (see x, below). Others have focused on more subtle types of social symbolism rooted in intimate communal relationships, in an effort to understand and delineate the underlying dynamics of particular cultural groups. For example, the prevailing sobriety of the clothing of married women can be contrasted with the livelier dress worn by young girls in several traditional communities (see, e.g. xvi, xvii, xxii, below). Among Baḵtīārī men the type of trousers distinguishes full-fledged members of the community from outsiders (see xxv, below).

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