COSTUMES OF MAMLUK WOMEN

SARACENIC women used to wear chemises (*qumsān*), visible—to judge by literary evidence—underneath their upper garments. This caused offence, so that when, in 751 A.H., in the heyday of Mamlūk luxury during the vizierate of Amīr Manjak, a peculiar kind of chemise called *bahṭala*, with long train and sleeves three ells wide became fashionable, the vizier ordered the sleeves to be cut, imprisoned a number of transgressors, and by using various other means succeeded in restraining the women from wearing them.[1] But this reform was of short duration. During the early Circassian period, when sleeves became even wider, an edict was issued by the Amīr Kumushbughā, then viceroy of Egypt during the absence of the Sulṭān (*nā'ib ul-ghaiba*), and promulgated in 793 A.H. in Cairo and its vicinity, forbidding the wearing of chemises with sleeves wider than 12 ells. As was often the case before, this attempt too remained ineffective. A few days after the edict was published, Mamlūks and pages of Kumushbughā patrolled the bazaars, the streets of Cairo and the neighbourhood, in order to enforce it, and cut all the superfluously long sleeves with knives.[2] After the Sulṭān's return, the women reverted to the old fashion,[3] although years later ibn-Taghrībirdī still saw chemises made according to Kumushbughā's order—and called after him *al-qumsān ul-Kumushbughāwiyya*—and described them as having sleeves like those worn by Bedouins.[4] The chemise itself which, according to religious law, ought to have been long, was—at least during the 14th century—often short, reaching only to the knees.[5] Together with the

1. Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, ed. Būlāq, II, p. 322, l. 26 ff.; Ibn-Iyās, I, p. 193, l. 26 ff.

2. For further information see ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, ed. Zurayk and Izzedin, IX, pp. 267, l. 16; 268, l. 19 ff.; cf. also ibn-Taghrībirdī, *an-Nujūm az-Zāhira*, ed. Popper, V, p. 541, ll. 1-5; Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn ul-Muḥāḍara*, ed. 1299, II. p. 217, l. 22 ff. (where Ketbughā is a mistake for Kumushbughā). The edict was prompted by an outrageous use of 92 ells for a chemise! Dozy, *Dictionairie des vetements*, p. 374, knew this story from a passage in Suyūṭī but quoted in addition a passage from ibn-Iyās which is not to be found in our printed edition.

3. Ibn al-Furāt, *op. laud.*, p. 268, l. 25.

4. Ibn-Taghrībirdī, l. c., l. 5.

5. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Kitāb al-Madkhal*, I, p. 201, l. 3.

chemise, the *mi'zar*,[1] a kind of knickers was worn, an undergarment perhaps identical in cut as well as in name with that worn by men.[2] For some time at least long drawers (*sarāwīl*) were also worn,[3] perhaps in lieu of a chemise like gown (*thaub*).[4] There is an explicit reference to them in the case of the first Mamlūk Sulṭāna, Shajarat ad-Durr, who, done to death by the maids of the harem, was thrown into the ditch with nothing on but chemise and drawers (*sarāwīl*). These drawers were kept tight by an expensive band (*tikka*).[5] But it is doubtful whether the wearing of either of these two kinds of drawers was universal, although numerous arguments for and against could be invoked.[6] The fact that lists of women's trousseaux in marriage-contracts of the Mamlūk period make no mention of drawers or—what is far more important—of the luxurious trouser-bands, may be quoted as an *argumentum ex silentio* against the assumption that drawers were very popular. But the value of this evidence is much restricted by the scarcity of such contracts. On the other hand the fact that some time later during the Circassian period the usual word for drawers was *libās*, *i.e.*, dress *kat exochen*, seems to indicate its popularity at that time.

Above these undergarments a gown (*thaub*) was worn, the most common component of young women's dresses as we can see from the above-mentioned lists of their trousseaux. Again, the prescriptions of the law were disregarded and the gown was made short, with short and wide sleeves. Ibn al-Ḥājj mentions this as of recent date, *i.e.*, of the early 14th century.[7] The whole person was swathed in an ample wrap (*izār*) which covered the entire clothing. The garment was generally white for Muslims,[8] whereas the women of the People of the Book had to wear it in

1. Dozy, *op. laud.*, p. 38 ff., with examples for men (Sulṭān Shaikh) and women. Wearing the *mi'zar* in a public bath was considered of special importance, cf., Kutubī, *Fawāt*, *al-Wafayāt*, 1299, I, p. 44, l. 16, (with reference to ibn-Taimiyya).

2. Arnold v. Harff, *Pilgerfahrt*, ed. Von Groote, who, to judge by a standing phrase in his vocabularies ought to know, says of Cairene women : die vrauwen dragen leder hoesen mit bruechen an (p. 106).

3. Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, ed. Ziada, I, p. 540, l. 10 ; Frescobaldi, *Viaggio in Egitto e Terra Santa*, Roma, 1818, p. 95.

4. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *op. laud.*, I, p. 201, l. 5.

5. Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, p. 404, l. 3 f. ; ibn-Iyās, I, p. 92, l. 11 f., explains that it was of red silk, with pearl and a vesicle of musk.

6. Cf., *e.g.*, a story about a man disguised as a woman who wears no drawers (*sarāwīl*), Usāma, *Kitāb al-I'tibār*, ed. Hitti, p. 43, l. penult. ; an indirect proof that women wore no knickers may be found in ibn al-Ḥājj, *op. laud.*, I, p. 201, l. 3-4 ; l. 5. So far as men are concerned the position is even clearer: On the one hand al-Malik al-Mu'izz in 653 A.H. forbade men to go out without trousers (*sarāwīl*) (Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, p. 397, ll. 3-6), on the other the Ottoman conquest of Syria, the defterdār of Damascus, had to issue a special edict immediately afterwards forbidding men to appear without trousers (*sarāwīl*) outside their own houses. The population was most unwilling (ibn-Ṭulūn, *Das Tübinger Fragment der Chronik*, ed. R. Hartmann, p. 48, l. 12 ff. under the events of the last day of Rabī' I, 923 A.H.).

7. *Op. laud.*, p. 203, ll. 1-5.

8. A. v. Harff, *l.c.*, ; Bernard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam*, Speier, 1490, I. II (= Davies, *Bernard von Breydenbach and his Journey to the Holy Land*, pl. 34*a*).

distinctive colours,[1] Christians in blue, Jewesses in yellow, and Samaritans in red. It was fastened by a girdle (*zunnār*), alleged to have been invented by Mutayyam, a favourite at the court of al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim.[2] As headgear they used a piece of cloth (*'iṣāba*) wound turban-like round that part of the wrap (*izār*) which covered the hair similar in fashion perhaps to that of Bedouin women today,[3] except that it was sometimes richly embroidered and adorned with precious stones.[4] Women's turbans were the subject of much controversy, and although it was often denied that they ever used them[5] "the vigour with which theologians attack women who wear turbans.....shows only too clearly the existence of such practices."[6] The word *'imāma*, turban *par excellence*, does occur in descriptions of turbans of women, as, *e.g.*, in the edict of Muḥarram 662 A.H., forbidding women to wear turbans,[7] or by ibn-ul-Ḥājj,[8] who mentions with disgust a turban resembling the double hemp of the dromedary. During the second half of the 15th century, this unsightly thing disappeared and a tall *ṭarṭūr*, covered by the outer wrap, served as headgear. As Arnold von Harff described it, "women wear a high thing on their head, in the shape of a goblet, wound with expensive

1. Nuwairī, s.a. 700, cf. ibn-Taghrībirdī, *op. laud.*, VII, op. 722, l. 2 ff. Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-A'shā*, XIII, p. 378, l. ult. 379, ll. 1, 3-4 ; Suyūtī, *op. laud.*, II. p. 214, l. 11 ff. ; Dozy, *op. laud.* p. 28 ; Tritton *the Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects*, London, 1930, p. 123.

2. *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Būlāq 1285, Vol. VII, p. 35, l. 10 f. With regard to the question whether this girdle was to be worn by the women of the People of the Book above or underneath the wrap there was no unanimity among the guardians of the law, cf. Nuwairī quoted by Dozy, *op. laud.*, p. 28, and Belin, 'Fetoua relatif a la condition des Zimmis.' *Journal Asiatique*, ser. IV, t. 18, 1851, p. 505 ; a fact that makes one feel that this little problem was purely academic and of no importance in everyday sartorial life.

3. Cf. among numerous other pictures : Scholten, *Palestine Illustrated*, I, p. 142, fig. 308 ; Musil, *the Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, 1928, p. 123 ; fig. 34.

4. Several Arab chroniclers relate among the events of the year 787 A.H. a story of which the essential part is that a woman was alleged to have seen the Prophet in a dream, who forbade the wearing of the shash, so *e.g.*, 'Ainī, *Tā'rīkh al-Badr*, s.a. (MS., British Museum, fol. 123r, l. 16) ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *adh-Dhail*, s.a. Rajab 787 (MS., Paris, 1509, fol. 10r, l. 20 ff.) quoting ibn-Duqmāq عصابات تسمى الشاشات تشبه سنام البخاتى (Egyptian fashion only). Dozy, *op. laud.*, p. 239, quoted the same story from the Leyden manuscript of ibn-Iyās, but in our printed edition the whole passage is omitted.

5. V. Harff, p. 106, l. 24/5 ; similarly Dozy, *op. laud.*, p. 311, who in this case quoted only two very late travellers, categorically stated that the turban was worn by men and never by women.

6. Björkman, *Encyclopædia of Islam*, s.v. turban (p. 889).

7. Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, p. 503, l. 9.

8. *Op. laud.*, p. 201 (bottom). Ibn al-Ḥājj's compatriot 'Alī b. Maimūn al-Maghribī, in describing this headgear used the same expression : على روسهن كا سنمة البخت . By a curious slip, Goldziher (*Zeitschrift d. Deut. Morgenland. Gesellschaft*, XXVIII, 1874, p. 320, n. 1) quoted this passage from 'Ali b. Maimūn's *Ghurbat ul-Islām* without realising that it is a paraphrase of a *ḥadīth*, cf. Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Libās*, last but one *bāb* (Nawawī's commentary, Vol. IV, p. 458, explains : ومعنى روسهن كاسنمة البخت أى يكبرنها و يعظمنها بلف عمامة أو عصابة أو نحوها , thus adding a further example of the word *'imāma* being used for a woman's head-dress.

cloths and ornaments,"[1] but on the accompanying picture nothing of the latter is to be seen.[2] In Rajab 876 A.H. the Sulṭān Qāytbāy published an order in Cairo that no woman should wear a crested bonnet (*'iṣāba muqanza'a*) and a silken *sarāqūsh*,[3] further that the "paper" of the *'iṣāba* should be a third of an ell long and bear the stamp (*khatm*) of the Sulṭān on each side. Appropriate orders were given to dealers in "papers of women," and agents of the then police inspector (*muḥtasib*) Yashbak al-Jamālī went round the bazaars, and on finding a woman wearing either of these types of headgear, they would beat her and pillory her with the *'iṣāba* hanging down from her neck. Women got flurried and went out bareheaded, or without an *'iṣāba*, or, much against their will, with a long *'iṣāba* as ordered by the Sulṭān, but they would wear the prescribed headgear inside their houses. After a while things quietened down and the Cairene ladies wore what they liked, as before.[4]

Nāṣir ud-dīn b. Shibl, in 830 appointed police inspector, forbade women the wearing of *ṭāqiyya*-caps.[5] Perhaps we shall not go wrong in assuming that during the early 9th century of the Hijra these caps were about two-thirds of an ell high, with tops shaped like domes padded with paper and trimmed with beaver-fur about an eighth of an ell wide.[6]

Their shoes were identical in shape with the light and fine boots worn by men (*khuff*). They were usually made of coloured leather.[7] Over them was worn the *sarmūza*, a kind of low shoe (*na'l*) removed when entering a house. All three kinds were sold in Cairo in a special bazaar (*sūq al-akhfāfiyīn*) founded some time after 780 A.H.[8] A slipper, worn in the street as well, was the *madās*, mentioned occasionally as being used as a weapon when the populace wanted to vent their wrath on a victim who fell into their hands.[9]

1. *Op. laud.*, p. 106 : want die vrauwen dragen eyn hoych dynck off yerem heufft in aller gesteltnysse wie eyn kelick, dat gar mit koestlichen duechen ind tzieraeten vmb wonden is.

2. *Op. laud.*, p. 107. Exactly the same headgear is to be seen on the picture of Carpaccio, Mansuett and Bellini, but also without any ornaments.

3. This is not the right place to discuss fully this headgear which in the second half of the 13th century was typical of Tartar male dress and later on became, as the edict of Qāytbāy shows, quite an ordinary headgear for Mamlūk women. Suffice it to say that the definition in *Burhān-i-Qāṭi'* to wit, that the *sarāqūsh* was a woman's headgear, or, at least, a woman's headgear as well as a man's, is proved to be correct against Quatremère (*Sultans Mamlouks* Ia, p. 236, n. 110) and Dozy, *op. laud.*, p. 379, n. 1.

4. Ibn-Iyās ed. Kahle and M. Mustafa, III, p. 64, ll. 8-22.

5. Al-Asadī, ap. ibn Ṭūlūn, *Rasā'il Tā'rīkhiyya*, IV, *al-Lam'āt al-Barqiyya*, p. 63, l. 6 ff., for which reference I am obliged to Prof. J. Sauvaget, Paris.

6. This is the description of a *ṭāqiyya* of a man, given by Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, II, p. 104, l. 11 ; but our author condemns this fashion as making men look like women : وهم على استعمال هذا الزى الى اليوم و هو من اسمج ماعانوه و يشبه الرجال فى لبس ذلك بالنساء .

7. Cf. also v. Harff, *op. laud.*, p. 106 ; but Frescobaldi, p. 95, mentions only white ones (*stivaletti bianchi*)

8. Maqrīzī, *op. laud.*, II, 105, 1.

9. Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, p. 802, l. 13 (cf. also Quatremère, *op. laud.*, II *b*, p. 13 and n. 19) ; ibn-Taghrībirdī, *op. laud.*, ed. Cairo, VIII, p. 46, l. 8. Cf. also a similar although earlier, incident in ibn ar-Rāhib, ed. Cheikho, Beirut, 1903, p. 87, l. 11 (where the plural امدسة instead of the more common مداسات is used).

In this connection the wooden clogs (*qabāqib*) should be mentioned. Sometimes richly decorated, they played a sad role in the history of Mamlūk women—the earliest occasion being when Queen Shajarat ad-Durr was beaten to death with them.[1]

Prostitutes could be recognised by their special apparel, the most conspicuous parts of which were apparently red trousers and a peculiar kind of wrap, (*mulā'a*).[2]

It goes without saying that town women went about veiled. Various forms of veils (*miqna'a, qinā', niqāb*) existed, mainly of the following types: (*a*) a veil of black net covering the entire face,[3] (*b*) like (*a*) but leaving two holes for the eyes,[4] (*c*) a white or black face-veil (*burqu'*) covering the face up to the eyes.[5] To appear in public without the veil was a sign of great distress.[6]

Boys and girls wore clothes of the same cut as their elders, except that instead of the veil the girls wore small caps (*al-kawāfī waṭ-ṭawāqī*), for which there was a special market in Cairo (*sūq ul-bakhāniqiyyīn*).[7]

The all-covering wrap was no hindrance to fashion. It developed nevertheless, and although it found no historian of its own, nor Arab poet, like the Persian Maḥmūd Qārī, to sing its praise, it angered the men of the law and the police inspectors, from whose hand-books we learn something about the trends prevailing in those days. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-'Abdarī, better known as Ibn al-Ḥājj, who lived in Egypt during the early 14th century, protested against the clothes of women being made short and tight-fitting, the latter especially in view of the obvious manner in which they moulded the figure.[8] He complains that the long drawers (*sarāwīl*) are worn much below the waist-line instead of starting from it, as prescribed by the law.[9] Incidentally we hear that these drawers were mainly worn out of doors, and were discarded at home.[10]

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1. Cf. references mentioned in note 5, p. 2, of this article.

2. Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, II, p. 96, ll. 15-16. Cf. also Wiet, *L'Egypt Arabe*, p. 494.

3. Frescobaldi, *l.c.*, in dealing with types, (*a*) and (*c*) describes the former as pertaining to the nobility ; "e le più nobili portano una stamigna nera dinanzi agli occhi ; " cf. also v. Harff, *op. laud.*, p. 106 f. v. Breydenbach, *l.c.*

4. Joos van Ghistele, *Tvoyage*, p. 23, cf. Dozy, *op. laud.*, p. 424. To this kind Dozy applies the term *niqāb*.

5. Frescobaldi, *l.c.*, and Mamlūk miniatures.

6. On Ghāzān's approach to Damascus in Rabī' II, 699 A.H., women left their houses unveiled (Zettersteen, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlukensultane*, p. 59, l. 12 ; Yūnīnī, s.a., MS. Topkapu Saray Müzesi, no. 2907 E., Vol. II, fol. 154r bot.); when the Qalā'ūnid princes Ḥājj and Ḥusain were suspected of revolt and summoned to their brother, the Sulṭān al-Malik al-Kāmil Sha'bān, their mothers appealed on their behalf, appearing unveiled (ibn-Duqmāq, *al-Jauhar ath-Thamīn*, MS. Istanbul, As'ad Eff. 2243, fol. 72r) and often elsewhere.

7. Maqrīzī, *op. laud., supra*, II, p. 104, l. 3.

8. *Op. laud.*, I, p. 200, l. penult, p. 201, l. 2.

9. *Op. laud.*, p. 201, l. 6 f.

10. *Op. laud.*, 11, l. 17 f.

It would be a mistake to think that these garments were either simple or cheap. If we are to believe the words of Maqrīzī, who as inspector of police (*muḥtaṣib*) was in charge of the morals of Cairene women and therefore well informed, there was a growing tendency to luxury. Whereas under the Baḥrī Mamlūks, only Sulṭāns and their wives and the most important amīrs used to wear costly furs, under the Circassians, even the soldiers, scribes, and common people, and every woman of the upper classes wore imported furs.[1] Similarly, at a time when there was a general dearth of precious metal in the country and the wearing of gold and silver dresses had to be abandoned, they wore caps (*tawāqi*) luxuriously ornamented with gold and silver.[2] Sumptuary laws were passed time and again, like those of Manjak mentioned above, who forbade shoemakers to make expensive shoes (*al-akhfāf al-muthammana*) and announced in the bazaars that whoever sold silk *izārs*, will have his property confiscated by the Sulṭān—but with only ephemeral results.[3]

We are indebted to Maqrīzī for a few details about these excessive prices, *e.g.*, that about the middle of the 8th century A.H. a chemise called *bahṭalā* was sold for 1,000 dirhams and more, a wrap (*izār*) went as high as 1,000 dirhams, shoes or boots (*al-khuff wa'ssarmūza*) might cost 100 to 500 dirhams a pair,[4] and a particularly fine pair of drawers (*sarāwīl*) of the wife of the Amir Aqbughā 'Abd ul-Wāḥid 200,000 dirhams or approximately 10,000 dinars.[5] But the most striking example of extravagance in women's dress is the story of a wife of the Sulṭān Barsbāy who managed to spend 30,000 dinars on a single dress, made for the circumcision of her son and Barsbāy's successor, al-Malik al-'Azīz Yūsuf. What a pity that the sole record of its splendour is the angry outburst of a *faqīh*![6]

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1. Maqrīzī, *op. laud.*, II, 103, l. 31 ff.
2. *Op. laud.*, II, 104, l. 15 f.
3. *Op. laud.*, II, 322, l. 28 f.
4. *Op. laud.*, II, 322, l. 25 ff.
5. *Op. laud.*, II, 384, l. 34.
6. Ibn-Taghrībirdī, *op. laud.*, VI, p. 739, ll. 2-5; Wiet, 'L'Historian Abu'l-Maḥāsin' (in *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte*, t. XII, 929-30, p. 100).