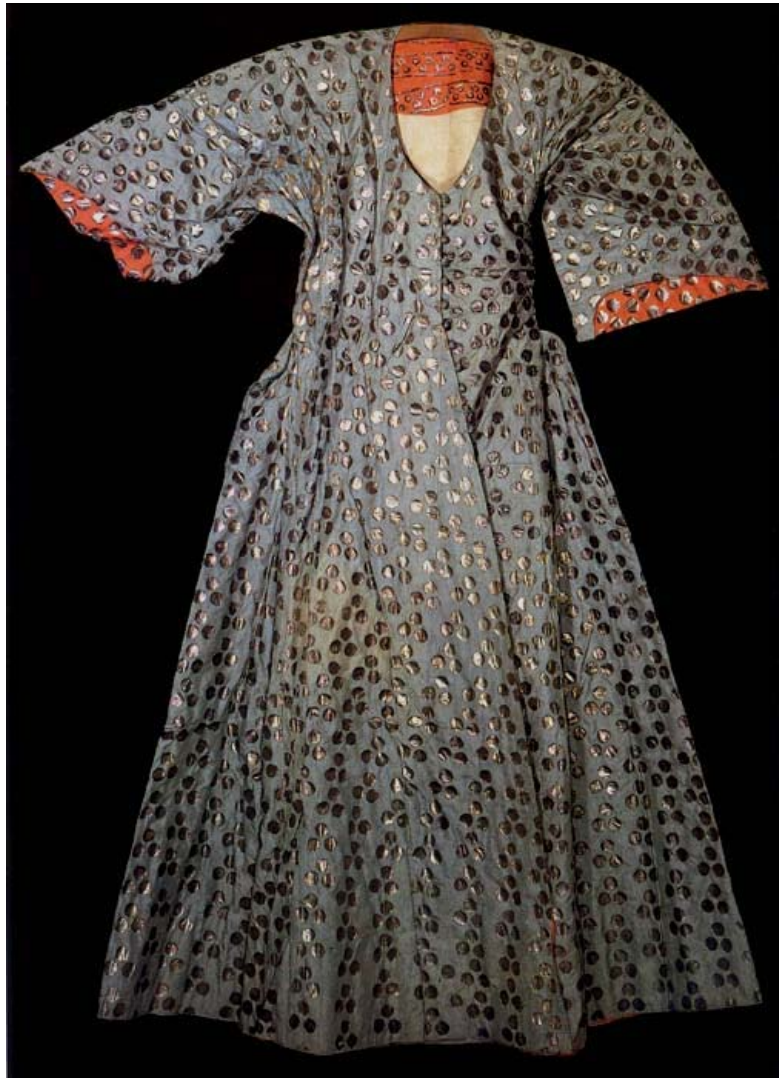


# **Ottoman Turkish Garb**

## *An Overview of Women's Clothing*



Caftan 13/198, identified as Murad III (1574-1595)

*by Baroness Katja Davidova Orlova Khazarina*

“I want to wear Middle Eastern garb. Can you tell me how to do that, please?”

I hear this request over and over, so I thought it would be helpful to offer a 101-type class on the specific style of clothing I am trying to recreate. There are several different kinds of garb in the areas we commonly call the Middle and Near East, just as there are ones from different countries and time periods in Medieval Europe. The type I will focus on today is clothing worn during the middle of the lengthy Ottoman reign in Turkey.



### *The Ottomans (also spelled Osmanli, Osmali)*

The Ottoman Empire ruled Turkey and parts of Southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa from 1299 to 1922, although it is best known for its Golden Age during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent (also Suleyman).<sup>1</sup> At its height, the Empire

<sup>1</sup> Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, pg. 4.



dominated both the Silk Road trade route and the Mediterranean, spread Islam throughout the region, and blended Seljuk Turk, Persian, and Greek influences to develop, among other things, a completely new style of architecture.<sup>2</sup> Stunning examples of this include the Green Mosque in



Bursa and the Topkapı Sarayı (Palace) in Constantinople. The latter survived the centuries and is now a museum, which houses an extensive collection of Ottoman artwork.

Unlike most other cultures, the Turks did not appear to sculpt. Instead, they boasted of luxurious fabrics (velvets, brocades, and silk) and pottery & ceramic tiles.<sup>3</sup> Painted miniatures existed as well, dominated by scenes of the Sultan and his men hunting, fighting, working, or in court. These miniatures depict the vibrant colors and distinctive shape of Turkish clothing: a bell-like shape, tight through the torso with side gores from the waist to the floor.

Paintings? Didn't the Koran prohibit the depiction of human figures? Actually, it was Muslim law, not Koranic doctrine, which enforced the tradition as a way of preventing idol worship.<sup>4</sup> Yes, most court-approved painters restricted themselves to elaborate floral and geometric designs. Some, however, unofficially and quietly did portraiture, especially of the Sultan and his court.

*Above, painting of a Turkish woman by Gentile Bellini, late 15<sup>th</sup> Century, depicting entari, necklace, gomlek, tarpus, and veiling.*

<sup>2</sup> Levey, *The World of Ottoman Art*, pg. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Levey, pg. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ettingham, *Turkish Miniatures*, pg. 5.

## Female Clothing

*Thomas Dallam, an English organ-maker who had gone to Constantinople to show the organs which Elizabeth I had offered to Mehmed III, managed to catch a glimpse of the young women of the Harem playing ball through a grille, thanks to the help of a dignitary of the Seraglio. They were wearing on their heads little bonnets made of golden yellow material, with necklaces of pearls, ear-rings and jewels on their dresses. They wore tunics, which were either red or blue. Their breeches reached the middle of their legs and were made of cotton so fine 'I could see the skin of their thighs'. Some wore elegant closed shoes made of rope, others had naked legs decorated with a gold ring, or a kind of velvet buskin four to five inches high.*

*Not all Turkish women, of course, were dressed like that, but their costumes always included the same items: long trousers (or salvar), a bodice, a vest (or tunic), a caftan, shoes and slippers for indoors, a bonnet or a skull-cap. Finally, there was the yasmak, the veil which all Muslim women wore when they were outside and which differed in shape and material according to the country.<sup>5</sup>*

Comparatively little Turkish art during our period of study depicts women. The miniatures were dominated by a decidedly masculine tone until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century; then, court painters began to depict female dancers and musicians and even scenes from public baths.<sup>6</sup>

Other sources for women's clothing during the Golden Age were journal entries and reports from foreigners of the dress of Suleiman's wife, Hurrem Sultan (known in Europe as Roxelane), and daughter, Mihrimah.

Fortunately, several 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> Century coats survived and are displayed at the Topkapi, Victoria and Albert, and Royal Scotland Museums.

*(Right, Mihrimah, 1541.)*



<sup>5</sup> Clot, **Suleiman the Magnificent**, pg. 220.

<sup>6</sup> Levey, pg. 97.

The terms for items of female clothing are:<sup>7</sup>

**Tarpus:** Tall pointed or pillbox-like hat.

**Yasmak:** Two-piece veil tied over the hat and around the lower face, worn while outside the home; made of linen, cotton, or silk.

**Kaftan** (*also caftan*): Loose outer coat with wide sleeves, made of elaborate and sumptuous velvets and silks, often lined with fur; worn for ceremonial occasions.

**Ferace:** Dark, loose, wool overcoat, sometimes lined with fur, worn when outside during cold weather.

**Yelek:** Slightly fitted, crotch-length coat with elbow-length or wrist-length sleeves, made of silk and lined with cotton, worn over the entari during cold weather.

*Left, Bremen's*



*walking outdoors, wearing a ferace. Right, Bodleian watercolor of a Turkish lady at home from an unknown traveler's notebook, late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, depicting gomelek, salvar, hirka, and tarpus.*

**Entari** (*enteri, anteri, antari*): Medium-weight, A-shaped or bell-shaped coat, fitted to the waist and shaped with side gores and an overlapping front gore, generally reaching to the floor. The neckline was either round or a V. It was closed down the front with small buttons & loops or long frogs; however, it was often depicted unbuttoned from the neckline to the chest and from the waist to the floor. Sleeves were most often wide to the elbows although some are narrow to the wrists (showing the Persian and Venetian influence). Very occasionally, you see extremely long maunche-like sleeves with slits, as in



<sup>7</sup> Clothing terms from Scarce's **Women's Costume**, *Ottoman Costume, An Overview of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Turkish Dress*, <http://www.geocities.com/kaganate/ottocloth.html>, and *Ottoman Women's Clothing*, [http://www.geocities.com/anhita\\_whitehorse/ottofemcloth.html](http://www.geocities.com/anhita_whitehorse/ottofemcloth.html).



many Persian outfits. Made most often of silk, lined with cotton. There was rarely any trim, but the inside edge was faced with silk.



Above, late 16<sup>th</sup> Century Codex Vindobonensis 8626.

Below, late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Nicolay.

**Hirka** (*chirka*): Very fitted thigh-length underjacket, worn over the gomluk. May be sleeveless, with wide elbow-length sleeves, or long, wrist-length narrow sleeves.

**Kusak**: Soft, wide sash or girdle worn on top of the entari.

**Uckar**: Leather or metal belt, decorated with gold, ivory, or silver plaques, semi-precious stones, and beads.





**Gomlek** (*gonluk, goomluk*): Lightweight, sheer, long- and narrow-sleeved, round-necked undershirt. Wide, long sleeves seen in late period. Appears to be generally white cotton, silk, or linen. Some paintings show what appears to be embroidery or even tablet weaving along the seams and hem.

(Left, 14<sup>th</sup> Century Persian kamiz)

**Shalwar** (*shalvar, sirwal, salwar, chalwar, chalvar*): Very soft and lightweight ankle-length pants, wide at thigh, narrowing to the ankle.

Could be white or patterned silk or cotton.



**Shoes** Footware appears to have been knitted socks and soft yellow leather or embroidered brocade slippers inside, with soft boots worn outside and nalins worn to the hammam (public bath).

Accessories included small pendant earrings, pearl and/or bead chokers, and finger rings. No tribal kuchi jewelry!

(Left, embroidered velvet shoes, 1453)





Above. a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Codex illustration of several women in gomleks, entaris, hirkas, shalvar, nalins, and tarpus.

## *Fabrics*

*Turkish fabrics are unique in weaving features, materials used and designs reflecting Turkish taste. Research on the subject identified about six hundred and fifty names such as Kadife, Atlas, Gezi, Canfes, Selimiye, Hatayi, Catma, Seraser, Sevayi, etc. The main material was silk with gold and silver threads, rich in motifs such as flowers (tulips, carnations, roses, spring blossom, and hyacinth), trees (apple, date palm, cypress), animals (peacock, deer), crescent moon, star motifs, fruit (pomegranate, apple, date, artichoke, pineapple), etc. An excellent reference on the subject is "The Art of Turkish Weaving", by Nevber Gurusu, Redhouse, Istanbul, 1988 with an extended list of additional resources.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> 2006 Turkish Cultural Foundation Official Web Site, <http://www.turkishculture.org/pages.php?ParentID=14&ID=67>.





*Above, a dancer by Bremen, 16<sup>th</sup> Century.*

*Right, another dancer, Bodleian (?). Note the facings on the inside edge of her entari.*



*(Below, two paintings by Peter Mundy, 1618)*

Note the embroidery on the edges of the gomlek.



*(Right, Sultana by Coburg)*





Silks and velvets dominated Ottoman textiles, many woven with gold and silver threads and stamped with gold designs. Dominant colors were BRIGHT red, cobalt blue, lime green, brilliant yellow. Designs were bold and large, often with repeating floral motifs (especially tulips and roses) and geometrics like hexagons. Specific kinds of fabric included:<sup>9</sup>

- Kadife, a velvet
- Catma, an extremely finely woven velvet
- Kemhu, a silk brocade decorated with figures
- Tafta or atlas, a lightweight monochrome silk with a satin weave



One of the most distinctive patterns was Cintamani, a twill weave in gold thread of three spots atop wavy stripes.

Lightweight versions of all of these were used for linings or facings, although they never matched or coordinated with the outer fabric.

Wool, linen, and cotton were also used, but more for uniforms or under or outer garments. Cotton, specifically, was often used to line the coats.

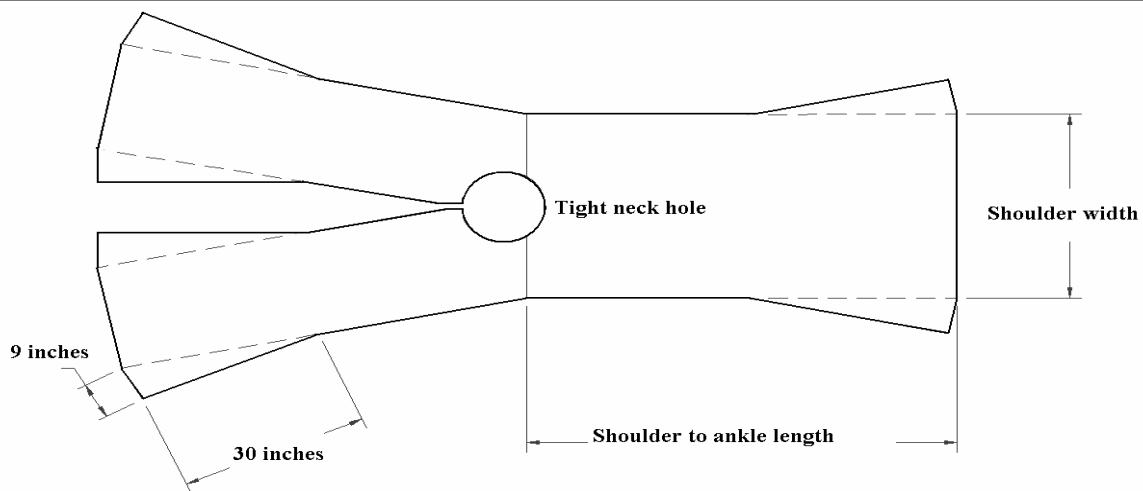
*(Above, more dancers, possibly Bodleian)*

<sup>9</sup> Scarce, *Women's Costume of the Near and Middle East*, pgs. 39 to 41.

## Garb Patterns

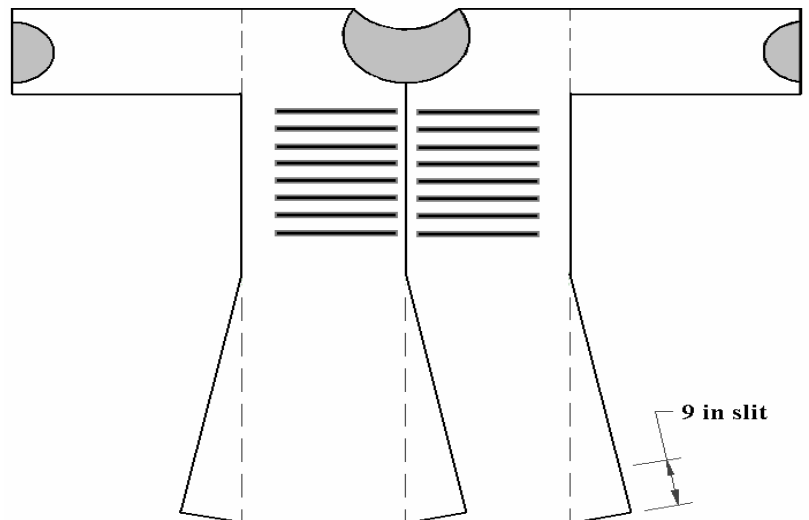
**Gomlek:** Use a long t-tunic pattern with a small key-hole neck and long sleeves (wide or narrow as you prefer), or use Duchess Roxane Farabi's pirahan pattern (a Persian undershirt) at <http://www.roxanefarabi.com/PatternPages/PirahanInstructionsPeriodNew.htm>.

**Caftan/entari:** Use Master Rashid al-Gyanji's caftan/coat at [http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/Rashid/fitted\\_caftanII.gif](http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/Rashid/fitted_caftanII.gif). You can also use Duchess Roxane's patterns for Persian coats, cutting them closer to the torso and using wider gores: <http://www.roxanefarabi.com/PatternPages/FemalePatterns.htm>, or her pattern for a Turkish ferace (also making it wider at the hips): <http://www.roxanefarabi.com/PatternPages/Turkish/ferace.php>, or use THL Caradawc's pattern, below:



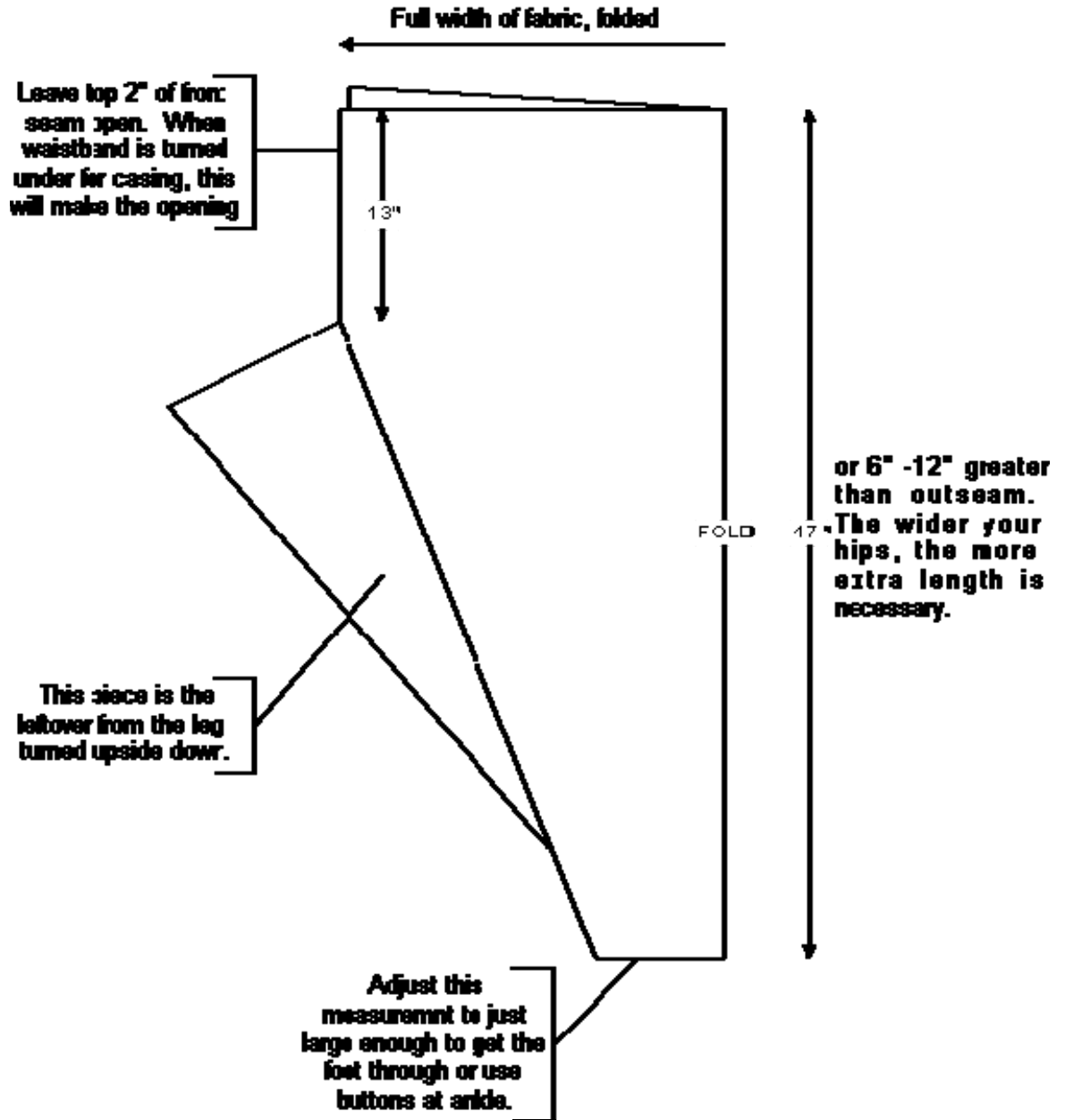
- ◆ The average person will need five yards of 45 in wide material for an elbow length caftan. If the pattern on the material is not a one-way design, cut the front and back out of one piece. If it is a one-way design, cut the 2 sides separately and sew at shoulders.
- ◆ The arms are rectangular and should extend just past the elbows when bent. Sleeves should be loose and baggy, mine are typically 18 to 20 inches in diameter.
- ◆ Sew the arms into tubes.
- ◆ Arms may or may not have gussets.
- ◆ Split the front down the center and cut out the neck.
- ◆ Sew on the six gores. If possible, try and keep the pattern consistent with the body. Sew the front and back together starting at the arm pit and going down the side.
- ◆ At the bottom edge of the side gores, it remains split for approximately nine inches.
- ◆ Cut sleeves on the inside of the elbow to allow bending.
- ◆ Sew in; lining, hem, add trim, and closures as needed.

*Pattern ©2007 Bill Crosby*





**Salwar/salvar:** Use Master Rashid's pattern at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/Rashid/salwar.gif>, Baroness Hanzade's pattern at <http://www.roxanefarabi.com/PatternPages/Salvar%20notes.htm>, or the one from the Red Kaganate, <http://www.redkaganate.org/clothing/legs/pantMellor.shtml>), see below.



## *Things I Wish I'd Done Differently with My Garb*

- Don't confuse Persian miniatures with Turkish miniatures. This is easy to do, since there is a lot more Persian than Turkish art, they aren't always labeled clearly or accurately, and Persian artists sometimes painted miniatures of the Ottoman court, and vice versa. How do you tell the clothing apart? Roughly, Persian clothing does not have the bell shape common in Turkish garb. Rather, it is straight and looser on the body., much more Asiatic or Japanese in style, not the close-fitting Turkic/Mongol style.
- Don't use Atira's ghawazee coat pattern. It's a modern dance coat pattern, so it has curved seams and darts. I spent years trying to recut this properly until finally realizing that I needed to start from scratch with a completely different (and accurate) pattern.
- Along the same line, don't cut the neckline under the bust—that's an 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ghawazee shape. The female neckline should be a V or a small round.
- Don't wear huge floofy harem pants. Period pants are tight at the ankles.
- Don't pick stripes for all your garb. Few period miniatures depict striped patterns; those that do exist appear to be mostly of military scenes or middle- or lower-class people. Striped cloth appears much more commonly in the artwork of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, especially by European artists.
- Along the same line, BE CAREFUL that you're looking at artwork that's 16<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier. A lot of Turkish artwork is post-period.
- Don't select paisley fabric, since that's a post-period fabric pattern. Instead, look for large florals, vinework, or geometrics.

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### *Recommended Online Resources*

**Asim**, an Eastern laurel in Turkish studies and modern librarian, has several articles on Ottoman clothing and fabric at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2900/Overview-of-Ottoman-Clothing-in-SCA-Period>.

**Dar Anahita** has a lot of helpful information on various Middle and Near Eastern cultures, including an article on the various kinds of Turks as well as the Persians, Syrians, Mamluks, Maghribi, Andalusians, etc. (<http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/Library/KnowYourTurks.html>)

Notably, Urtatim offers photographs of a surviving 14<sup>th</sup> Century Persian undershirt (pirahan), which can be used as a pattern for a Turkish gomlek: [http://www.geocities.com/anahita\\_whitehorse/kamiz.html](http://www.geocities.com/anahita_whitehorse/kamiz.html).

Also interesting is a collection of common myths about Middle Eastern culture and clothing: <http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/MEMyths.html>. Finally, her **Ottoman Turkish Clothing Resources** contains a great list of useful books and websites for Ottoman artwork and clothing. See <http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/Costuming/OttomanLinks.html>.

Mark Calderwood's **The Red Kaganate**, an international reenactor web site exploring all things Tartar/Mongol, Turkic, Iranian, etc. See <http://www.redkaganate.org/>.

**SCA Turkish Personas** e-group, which discusses and shares tips, history, artwork, garb patterns, and more. See <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SCATurkishPersonas/>.

**Style and Status**, the Smithsonian Institution's WONDERFUL interactive online exhibit of kaftans, textiles, etc. about the Ottomans: <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/current/StyleStatus.htm>.