Summary: What makes the construction of Eastern garments different than other clothing?

Eastern garments (those found south and east of Constantinople/Istanbul) must be approached from a completely different mindset than European garments. This is for several reasons. Firstly, due to the dry climate and types of raw materials available, textiles were quite different than Europe. This radically changed the drape and fit of garments. Secondly, due to the extremely mathematical and logical nature of the culture, pattern cutting was different. It was approached from geometric methods, producing pattern pieces that were mostly triangles and rectangles, and wasted practically no fabric at all while lying out and cutting the garment.

In these notes, I will be discussing extent garments from 9th to 16th century. I will also present a theory on tunic/coat side-gore placement that allows the hems to be straight instead of curved on the bottom. This will not have the very tip of the gore hang lower than the rest of the hem, just as the extent garments we will examine do.

Since this is a two part class, you find some information the same in both sets of notes. This ensures that the basic construction information is present for us to build our theories on.

I. Extent Garment - “Dragon Coat” - 17th Century Persian Qaba (Coat)

This is the only complete 17th century Persian garment of this type that is left. The coat is now located in Russia, which up until recently, made it almost impossible for Westerners to study. As there are only a few pictures of it in books, and some of the seams on the coat are a little difficult to see, making patterns people have drafted from it vary slightly in design. It will remain this way until someone is lucky enough to take a trip to the Kremlin Armory to see it. The pattern in this handout is based mostly on this coat, with help from fragments of other garments, the look of miniatures, written accounts, and slightly out of period garments that have been studied face to face.

This garment also follows the basic layout with the reversed wedge side gore. It is a very geometric, conservative pattern. (See Layouts) Upon experimentation, I discovered that the Reverse Gore Theory works on this coat. This Theory gives you a straight hem on the bottom. The tips of the gores do not hang below the rest of the hem, just as the garment appears in the photo (where the hem is not cut on a curve, but straight) and as the hems seem to appear in the miniatures. (See Picture 2 again)

II. Fabrics

Types of Fabrics Used
(What was used in period, and suggestions for reproductions)

Persian Qaba-ha (plural for the word "coat") is a Persian garment. It was made of silk, and we have many fragments of Persian silk, some of which probably from garments, as well. The Persians were well known for their silk manufacturing & importing of Chinese silks. We have written accounts that describe Qaba-ha being lined in qalamkar, a highly detailed block-printed cotton fabric made in both Persia and India, that still being produced today. Written
accounts also discuss linen manufacturing, and wool. Persian garments appear to have been lined, not only with fabric, but also with fur sometimes.

Persian silk was very, very thin and as light as tissue. Scholars have no idea how they were able to weave such intricate patterns on such a lightweight fabric. Contrary to popular belief, upholstery fabrics with Persian-esque patterns are not a good choice. The fabric is too stiff and heavy. 100% Silk fabrics are always a good option, but avoid Noil; it is not a period weave. Dupioni (with as little slubs as possible) or Habatoi are good choices. Persian garments were lightweight on the outside, and heavier on the inside, so if the silk is thin, choose slightly heavier 100% cotton to line it with to give it body. Cotton and linen garments are also fine choices, as well as lightweight wool. Silk/rayon blend Chinese brocades are also excellent choices, while not 100% silk; they look similar to the brocades seen in the miniatures. There is a myth that Turkish coats are striped, and Persian coats are floral, which is not true. The lower classes of both cultures wore stripes are this is a fabric that is much easier to weave, so if you choose stripes, you will be making a coat for a lower class Persian (non-nobility,) or a religious person demonstrating humility.

The Importance of Fabric Width

- Keeping period fabric widths in mind is of the utmost importance to achieve a truly correct reproduction of a period garment!
- Width- the width of fabric we will be using for these garments is 24-25 inches.
- Rationale- Most Persian fragments available are between 22 - 27 inches in width on average.
- Effect on the Garments- using the correct width of fabric, and cutting the pattern pieces accordingly, can radically change the hang and over-all look of the garment. Respecting the way the garment was actually cut in period is the only way to achieve the correct look.

III. Fitting

- It is important to look at the miniatures when making Persian garb; they are the only "photos" we have for the time period. A 14th century more “relaxed” fit, clean looking fit, and it should not be tight. Well-tailored or “tight” versions do not appear until the 17th century
- (See Picture #12) Soft A-line drape, not an extreme bell-shape from the waist.
- Coat is fitted through the torso, yet comfortable and relaxed enough to move freely in.
- Coat is tailored to softly accentuate the body, skimming the hips, etc, without looking stiff.
- Coat is generally floor length but can be worn shorter for earlier period, dancing or servants.
- Sleeves are fitted nicely at the shoulders, not "droopy" and baggy looking. They may be long (12” past the fingertips) or short (just at the elbow when bent).
- Sleeves are over-long and fitted at the wrist so that the extra fabric may be pushed up.
- Necklines are cut in a scoop tight to the base of the neck.
- Button closures – front of garment meet for straight cut and over laps for crossover coats

Suggestions

Use a tape measure, ruler, fabric marker/pencil, etc. Be as precise as possible; do not estimate or "guess." One big suggestion that will help determine other pieces is to make the center panel width meet at the nipple line, like a modern princess seam does. Make a mock-up pattern before cutting into expensive fabric. Keep a sewing journal of your work, so that you don't forget what you did. Remember to write everything down; there are a lot of pieces, so it's easy to forget numbers. Don't forget to add seam allowances to your pattern pieces!
**Figuring out Pattern Pieces**

Carefully studies the fabric layouts, and takes it one step at a time. Have someone help you if it's your first time; this is a more advanced method of sewing, so don't feel bad if you need help. As we go over the cutting layouts in class, make notes where needed and please ask questions! When in doubt, you can always email me (rozzie@allstream.net) and I will be there to help you!

**IV. Cutting and Piecing Together**

*Cutting Layouts (See the Layout Page for details)*

This pattern is based on the extent garment commonly known as "The Dragon Coat." Duchess Roxanne Farabi Shazadeh drafted this particular pattern, with assistance and construction variations by Mistress Safia al-Khansaa'. The only difference is that my Reverse Gore Theory has been added, which was not previously used before. Since we only have pictures of the coat and do not have a pattern drafted by someone who has seen and studied the coat in real life, layouts of this coat vary, especially in the sleeve area, because it is very difficult to see all of the seams. This "Dragon Coat" pattern was further augmented after studying actual Persian coats up close, in real life, by private appointment at the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. Some of the seams that are difficult to make out in the picture were determined after viewing quite a number of other coats, albeit slightly out of period, but where all of the sleeves were basically constructed the same and coincided with much of the "Dragon Coat." Although the pattern, especially in the sleeve area will continue to be debated, this pattern is an excellent method for getting the correct look as seen in the miniatures.
**Pattern Pieces**

- On the Persian extent garment there ARE shoulder seams. It can be preferable not to have a shoulder seam the fabric drapes in a much more pleasing way.

- It is VERY important that the angle cut of the side gore is not more than 20 degrees. The Reversed Gore Theory does not work properly without this. You can use a compass or protractor to find the angle, but basically, do not make gores that get really, really wide on the bottom. Remember, we are trying to achieve an a-line, not a bell. And, remember your period fabric widths...keep them in mind when cutting the side gores!

- When the Side Gore angled cut is made at 20 degrees; it begins to simulate what happens when you make a bias cut. It is not quite a bias cut, but it gives the fabric a little bit of a stretch for a nice flowing, full bottom. It is also one of the factors in helping to create the special straight hem along the bottom.

**Sizing the pattern**

- The main body pattern should be measured from your shoulder to the floor plus hem. The width is about nipple to nipple plus seam allowances for the sides and the front facing.

- The top of the side gore is one quarter of your chest measurement less the front and back of the body PLUS four inches. Don’t forget to add seam allowances.

- Measure sleeve length from the side of the body at the shoulder. Ensure that you have included a hem on the sleeve end.

- Depth of the sleeve. Measure the thickest part of your upper arm. Add three inches. Now subtract the sleeve gore. Again, don’t forget the seam allowances.

**Cutting and Sewing Directions**

- Pattern layouts vary depending upon the size of your fabric. Period seamstresses/tailors did not match patterns, although it does appear that some care was taken to mind the grain of the fabric, especially at the gores. As most of the extents left are garments of royalty or nobility, this may not have always been the case in the lower classes. Garments were cut in the most economical layout possible as Persian fabric was of the very highest quality and was therefore extremely expensive, far more than their Egyptian or Turkish counterparts, who (especially in Turkey) appear to have been much less mindful of fabric waste than the Persians. It is also important to keep in mind that looms from the time period were probably not as wide as they are today. Keeping this in the back of your mind as you layout and cut (for example, if you take 60 wide fabric and cut it in half lengthwise) it will help you to have pattern pieces that might reflect the way a garment may have been constructed in period, rather than huge, wide pieces that would have been impossible in the 16th century.

- Depth of the sleeve. Measure the thickest part of your upper arm. Add three inches. Now subtract the sleeve gore. Again, don’t forget the seam allowances.

- Cut all pattern pieces out. Please note that the following diagrams are NOT to scale. For relative pattern piece sizes, please refer to the diagram pictured left of a ruyi qabā over-laid on a person.

**Putting it together**

It is really easy to mix up the pieces once they are all cut out, so make sure you label them! Mistress Safia puts all her pieces in designated spots in her sewing room, which are the same every time she makes a Qaba. I use ordinary chalk on the wrong side and mark the direction/top/bottom of the pieces. You might want to try separating your pieces from each other and organizing them in a manner you can keep organized before you start. **NOTE:** The method for putting these pieces together is in a different order than Duchess Roxane mentions on her website because of the Reversed Gore Theory. (See Picture 6:)

Persian Qaba-ha 16th C

August 2007

Baroness Rozalynd of Thornabee on Tees
• Dotted perpendicular line on triangle gusset is for the relaxed fit version. Red drawings below are for the relaxed fit version as well.

1. Sew the triangular sleeve gusset to the upper of the Side Gore. The Gusset must be sewn to the straight side of the Gore, (see right angle) not the angled side. Repeat for all four side gores.

2. For fitted version, lower side gore to upper side gore. Omit this step for relaxed fit version.

3. Sew the pieces you created in step 1 (for relaxed fit version) and step 3 (for fitted version) to the sleeve center as pictured below:

4. Sew the opposite gore to the piece you created in step 4.

Repeat for the other side of the garment. You should have 2 pieces that look the same as the picture above.
5. Sew front pieces to back piece at the shoulders.

6. Sew the piece you created in step 5 to the central rectangle. Ease the lower side gore (or gore, for relaxed fit) to the main body of the coat by carefully pinning it and watching closely to make sure the fabric does not bunch up and create any tucks. It might be useful to baste the waistline portion of the gore in first (for fitted version) before sewing. If the gore is not fitting smoothly, the center seam in between the upper and lower gore can be taken out and stitched by hand to ease the gore in place. If the gore is still not fitting smoothly, it may be necessary to cut it on less of an extreme angle (narrower at the bottom.) When the side gores are sewn into the main body, they angle up. This is not drawn below in the drawing, but the gore in the drawing is rounded on the edge to note the angle. Remember…the gore hems are NOT cut so they curve at the bottom, they are cut straight. Press the seams away from the gores. Notice how the gores angle out on a gentle a-line away from the main rectangle of the coat.

7. Pin sides together. It is very important that the junction of the sleeve and body are matched, even if that means you must re-cut the end of the sleeve. Sew both sides together. Again, the hems at the bottom are not curved; they are rounded in the drawing to show how the reverse gore method creates a natural curve even when the hem is cut straight. Repeat above steps with lining and line garment.
8. Place frogs or buttons and loops from the waist to the neckline. Buttons may extend to edge of garment if desired. Pictures below show variations in necklines and in closure arrangements found in miniatures. A special "waterfall" collar is discussed at the very bottom.

V. Finishing

Sewing Techniques

• Most likely the garments were assembled with a running stitch.

• A feather or “fagot” stitch to attach the lining at the underarms if the sleeve are not to be lined – this allows “give” to the two pieces when wearing.

• I also use Gutterman silk to hand finish my garments. ALWAYS hand stitch at least everything that will show on the outside...it is well worth the effort!

Lining Techniques

• Neckline- Most Eastern extent garments that do not have a collar and are lined have a neckline that is finished with a bias-cut piece of fabric stitched over to cover the edges. (See Picture __). Using narrow silk ribbon is most desirable but can be a little challenging. You can use matching fabric bias by cutting a strip of fabric on a 45-degree angle to create a bias. I have also used just a slip stitch to turn the neckline – the seam allowance must be small to be able to curve around the neck and lay flat.

• Bag-lining versus Suit-lining- The extents that have been viewed in the DC Textile Museum were suit lined, meaning all of the outer edges have a facing, are turned to the inside, and then the lining meets the facing on the inside and is stitched neatly underneath it. This was often accomplished with embroidered trim, being sewn along all the edges, and even mitered beautifully at the corners. Since these garments were slightly out of period, they are probably more in line with the stiffer, tighter, tailored look of the 17th century. Garments in period may have possibly been bag lined - that is, the lining and the garment being stitched to each other and then turned. The "Dragon Coat." garment appears to have partially suit lined, and partially bag lined. Experiment with both to see which method you prefer the look of.

• When doing any lining, try to make the lining ¼ to ½” shorter. This helps the lining from hanging down past the outside fabric.

Closures for Persian Qaba- (See Picture ____)

• "Band leader" style closures - These can be made from trim, embroidered bands, or different types of narrow work (inkle weaving, finger loop, etc.). 2% gold torsade (ecclesiastical embroidery thread) is good for special garments.

• Wooden core buttons, wrapped in silk thread were used on the extent garments. Gemstone, pearl, glass beads or buttons- 6 to 8mm are the perfect size for these buttons. Use a "nailhead" (jewelry finding) and make a drop that can be sewn onto the garment.

• Loops- Tatting threads or crochet threads is perfect for making loops. Plied loops or finger-braided loops are excellent. The loops should be sewn in between the lining and the shell of the garment. Stitch over the loop several times to keep it from coming loose.
Credits

These notes are a combination research and study by Roxane Farabi Shahzadeh (Melinda C. Haren), Safia al-Khansaa (Heather H. Stiles) and me, Rozalynd of Thornabee on Tees (Shelley L. Featherstone).

Roxane did the painstaking original research, viewing the extent garments first-hand in “real-life” and making actual up-close measurements, calculations, and observations, as well as pouring over thousands of miniatures, and reading hundreds of pages worth of written accounts to draft with the initial ground-breaking patterns, which are the compilation of all of these sources put together, to come up with one pattern that reflects the sewing techniques and modes of dress during the period. Safia developed the sewing variation that eliminates the need for sewing corners, and revised the patterns to include the “reversed” side gores, which Rozalynd, her apprentice, developed in the spring of 2005, and first presented at a class taught at Pennsic 35, summer of 2006. Rozalynd has worked diligently to perfect this revolutionary technique on Persian patterns for more than four years. Some of the small notations about suggestions for hand sewing in certain areas of the piecing are also suggested by Safia & Rozalynd – this comes from the experience of sewing upwards over 80 of these coats, and learning the little nuances of the pattern itself.

I would at this time like to thank them for their assistance. For further information about Persian research please see:

http://www.roxanefarabi.com/ - for more extent garments and patterns

http://www.willofyre.com/ - for pottery, artwork and scrolls - NB this site is currently under renovations

http://www.rozie.ca/ - for pictures of complete garments and more research on Egyptian and Persian textiles.

NB this site too is currently under construction - please stay tuned!!

Please DO NOT print, copy, or otherwise duplicate in any way the information and the “Reverse Gore Theory,” as applied in these patterns from these notes, without obtaining express permission from above researchers. Thank you
Bibliography


Picture #1 & 2: Two views of the front of 16th Century Persian Qaba, "Dragon Coat" Notice how the hem of the coat hangs straight across and is not cut on a curve.

Picture #3: With drawn lines to show seams; dotted lines, show possible variations.

Picture #4: Close up detail of the hem
Picture #5: Close up of the ball buttons & loops closures; see the lining at the crisp front edge.

Picture #6: Finger loop braiding and the thread wrapped ball buttons.

Picture #7: Another example of loops (Egyptian) closures; see the wide facing for mounting.

Picture #8: Usage of long triangle piecing of sleeve.

Picture #9: Facing at sleeve end & lining piecing.

Picture #10: Usage of facings (bias cut) and example hand stitching.
Open to waist, 1 button at waist line holds garment closed.

Open to waist, held closed by strips of trim "marionette" style across the chest.

V-neck with a small collar, as pictured in miniature on page 1 of this handout.
Qaba has soft A-line drape, not extreme bell skirtng.

Nicely fitted through the shoulders, sleeves are not overly baggy or droopy. Short and long sleeves are worn.

Qaba is nicely fitted through the torso, yet relaxed enough to move comfortably and freely.

Qaba is tailored to nicely accentuate the body, skimming the hips, gently showing curves, etc. without looking tight and stiff.

Sleeves are everlong and are worn down or pushed up on the wrist.