Understanding Persian fashion in the 16th century requires careful study of multiple sources. The tumultuous history of medieval Persia has left few extent garments for review. However, there are a large number of miniature paintings for study as well as eye-witness accounts from European travelers.

**Male Garments**

"His Majesty ... was clad in a short garb without robe, which is against the custom of Mahommed and he wore a gold brocade doublet and tight breeches of the same material. On his head was a turban adorned with many precious stones and rich plumes."

This description of Shāh 'ābbas’ clothing in 1598 by Abel Pincon provides a starting point for understanding Persian, male clothing from the 16th century. The description is vague and open to interpretation; however, by viewing miniatures, we can more accurately interpret Pincon’s description.

Undergarments for men were limited to a pair of short pants, called zir-šalwar (literally “under-pants”).

In rare miniatures, laborers or slaves are shown wearing only these under garments. *(Figure 1a--note the first detail view)*

Over the zir-šalwar, pants were worn. There are no extent Persian pants from the 16th century available for study, leaving miniatures as the primary source for information on pants. There are extent garments from Egypt and from Turkey, which may shed light on trouser construction in Persia. *(Figure 1b—see first detail view)* The 16th century extent garments from Turkey are šalvār, a type of loose fitting pants which appear similar to pants pictured in Persian miniatures. *(Figure 1b)--note the first detail view)*

Indian tradition holds that šalvār are of Persian origin, making it likely that šalvār were worn by Persians. *(Figure 1b)—note the first detail view)*

Sir John Chardin, a French jeweler who visited Persia during the reign of Shah 'ābbas I, described male pants in the following manner:

"The men wore no Breeches [underwear], only a pair of Drawers lin’d, which hang down to their Ancles, but which have no Feet; they are not open before, but must be undone when they have occasion to make Water."

Miniatures of the period show loose fitting pants that appear similar to šalvār, such as those pictured in *(Figure 1b)*. They are pictured either as a solid color or in patterns that must represent brocades. As silk, cotton and linen were readily available, it is reasonable to assume that Persian pants were made of these materials.
types of fabrics.

Both men and women wore an undershirt called a pirahan. - Pirahan-hā (plural for pirahan) for both sexes were generally made out of cotton, though nobility used silk as well. - Figure 2, while gruesome, is a rare miniature showing a man wearing just his pirahan and pants. Sir John Chardin describes the pirahan worn by men in the following manner:

"The shirt is long and covers their knees, passing over their drawers instead of being put into them. It is open on the right side, upon the pap (breast) to the stomach and on the sides below as ours are, having no Neck [collar] to it, only stitched as the shifts of our women are in Europe."

"Stitched as the shifts of our women are in Europe" refers to the unfitted chemises of European women, stitched at the shoulders and the sides.

An extent Persian, silk, male pirahan is in the Theron J. Damon collection. (Figure 3) The pirahan is dated 1583 and roughly matches the description by Sir John Chardin. It is decorated with painted roundels and many Kufic inscriptions with praises to Allah. - The decoration of pirahan with praises to Allah dates back to Zoroastrian times. - The Zoroaster’s (the religion many tenets of both Christianity and Islam are based upon) placed a sacred shirt on male children when the reached a certain age as protection against evil. - This 16th century pirahan is constructed similarly as two other Egyptian extent examples as well as a 17th century extent pirahan. (Figure 4) The body is formed of a central rectangle with rectangular shaped sleeves and sidepieces. This construction method is common throughout the Middle East during the 16th century.

Over the pirahan, another layer appears to have been worn. Figure 4a shows a youth helping man who is falling. Under his red-orange outer coat, we can see a long green brocade coat with a red lining. This zīrī qāba (literally “under-robe.”) - seems to have a front which is crossed-over, though this may be an artist’s interpretation of garment flow. Chardin mentions this layer, though his description is vague. (also see Figures 5 & 14).

An extent coat, sleeveless coat located in the Museum für Islamische kunst in Berlin may be an example of this layer. The coat is from the 17th/18th century, however it fits the description by Chardin. The coat is a sleevless brocade coat which fastens in the front. - (Figure 4b) Towards the latter end of the century, they may have worn a cotton waistcoat (vest) called an arḵāloq. -

Over this, a rūyi qāba is worn. A rūyi qāba - is either a crossover or straight-front coat with long
When the rūyi qāba has short sleeves, it is known as a kurdī. (Figure 5) There is one extent 16th century qāba in the Kremlin, pictured in Figure 5. This qāba is constructed of a central rectangle, side pieces for shaping and rectangular-shaped sleeves. This rūyi qāba is made of silk brocade decorated with a famous Persian hero killing a dragon and lined in silk. A rūyi qāba or kurdī (Figure 5) was usually made of silk brocade, lined in silk, cotton or linen. Recalling the description from Picon, the brocade may be enriched with gold or silver thread. While the primary decoration for a rūyi qāba or kurdī was the elaborate brocades of the period, sometimes they were decorated with cloud collars which were either woven or embroidered. (Figure 6) The brocades of the 15th and 16th century Persia were of a superior quality, which we no longer have the knowledge to weave. At a trip to the Textile Museum in Washington D.C., we were able to view some of these silk tissues. (Figure 7) They are about the weight of a 10mm Habatoi silk (a common weight for silk veils) with incredibly complex designs and colors. Often the cotton linings were stamped with designs. This type of printed cotton was known as qalamkār and was made in Persia from the thirteenth century to today. (Figure 7) Towards the end of the 16th century, qalamkār cottons from India became preferred as the Indians had greater skill in making these types of cottons and the price was lower.

Sir John Chardin describes a rūyi qāba with a crossover front in this manner:

“as wide as a Women’s Petticoat, but very strait above, passing twice over the Stomach, and is fasten’d under their Arms, the first round under the left Arm, and the other which is uppermost, under the right Arm. This Gown is cut sloaping, in the Manner you see it in the Figure, which on the Side. The Sleeves are narrow, but as they are much longer than they should be, they Plait ’em at the Top of the Arm, and button ’em at the Wrist. The Gentlemen likewise wear the Cabai (this is Chardin’s translation of the Persian word qāba) after the Georgian Manner, which are not different from others, only that they are open upon the Stomach, with Buttons and Loops.”

According to Upham Pope, former curator of the American Institute of Iranian Art and Architecture, frogs were used to close the qāba in the early part of the 16th century, but by the latter half, buttons were used. The buttons on the extent qāba-hā in the Textile Museum I observed, were probably constructed on a wood core, wrapped with silk and then covered in gold that was woven in a basket pattern. The technique appears to be similar to those used to make Temari Balls in Japan. However, there are three extent, Persian buttons recently sold from the auction house, Art of Persopolis. One button is dated 500 B.C. and is made of carved metal. The other two buttons are dated to the 11th century and are made of carved ivory. It is likely that both materials were still in use in the sixteenth century to make buttons. Miniatures show qāba with the cross-over front closed with ties.
The qāba and the kurdī were then belted with either a sash or a placard belt. Often a small dagger, pouch, pen cases or other instruments were hung from this belt.

"Tho’ this wastcoat [referring to the qāba] very well fitted to the Back, yet they tie two or three Sashes upon it, folded double, about four Fingers wide, Rich and Genteel, which makes 'em a wide and strong Pocket, to put what they have in, with greater Security than in our Breeches Pockets."

Thomas Herbert, a European who visited Persia in 1627, provides the following description of the sashes worn by men:

"Their waists are girt with fine towels of silk and gold about eight yards long; those and the shashes distinguish the quality of those that wear them; dukes and other of the noble sort have them woven with gold, merchants and coozelbashaws with silver: of silk and wool those of inferior rank.”

Over top the qāba, a jobba was sometimes worn. This loose, flowing garment, also made of silk brocade, had short or long sleeves. If the sleeves were long they often would have a horizontal slit cut just above the elbow for the arm to be put through. A jobba was usually worn open and unbelted. Sometimes it was lined in fur. Sir Chardin describes the types of fur that these coats are lined with:

"they are Furr’d some with Sable-Skins, and others with the Skins of the Sheep of Tartary, and Bactriana, the Hair of which, is finer than that of Horses, and of no longer Curl than the Gold-Sand."

Ermine, while not mentioned by Sir Chardin, is also seen in miniatures. Thomas Herbert states they also used fox, squirrel, and the fur of a martin (mūsh-i-kharmā in Persian). It is possible that when the coat is lined in fur, it is called a katībī, though the sources conflict on the exact name for this garment.

They may have worn stockings in late period, which were also described by Sir John Chardin:

"The Stockins are of Cloth, and all of a Piece, as I have said, that is, they are cut like a Sack, and not according to the Shape of the Leg; they come but just up to the Knees, below which they tie them; they put a Piece of red Leather, very well stitch’d, to the Heel of them, to hinder the Heel of the Shoe, which is sharp, from doing it any harm, and piercing thro’, which it would do in three or four Days time"

Chardin goes on to mention that prior to trading with the Europeans, they did not wear stockings but wrapped their legs with linen strips “about six Fingers wide, and about three or four Ells long” (an Ell is...
a measurement equivalent to 34 inches long, making the length between 102” to 136” long). It is difficult to decide exactly when the Persians of wealth (servants and lower class continued to wear the linen strips in the 17th century) switched to stockings. Unfortunately in miniatures, it is difficult to see what they wore on their legs under their pants. However, trading with the Europeans was very well established by the end of the 16th century so it is possible that an argument can be made for stockings in the late 16th century. Also, socks made by nalbinding were found in Egypt from as early as 6th century.

Thomas Herbert states that they:

"...have hose and stockings sewed together; the stockings falls not always into their shoes, but from the ankle down gives to the eye two inches of leg naked".

In miniatures, men are also pictured wearing leggings (čakčur or called peytowa in Afghanistan), held up by string garters over top of their pants. (Figure 24) These are worn with a short kurdī or rūyi qāba (just above the knee). These men are usually outdoors, often pictured riding a horse. (Figure 23) Cross garters are also seen in some miniatures picturing men working. (Figure 18a) Shoes were either flat-soled slippers or Cuban-heeled clogs. On horseback or while in armor, men are sometimes pictured wearing boots. The slippers appear to be similar to a pair of extent slippers from Egypt dated 8th – 10th century located in BC Galleries (an auction house). (Figure 26)

Headgear for the upper class was primarily a turban (amâmeh, mandîl, dastār, and pagrī all mean turban in Farsi, though mandil was probably the period term). (Figure 18b) A cap called a tāj, served as the foundation. The tāj was a close-fitting skullcap, which by late 16th century tapered into a long point from the center of the crown and was made of felted wool. In the late 16th century, this tapering formed the "horn" seen in miniatures coming from the tops of turbans. (Figure 27) Earlier the tāj was shorter. Over time it progressed to the higher cone worn during the Safavid period. During the 16th century, descendants of Ali wore a green tāj. Over this they wound long lengths of cloth. Sir John Chardin describes the mandîl:

"These turbans are made of course white Cloth, which they use to shape it, and they cover it with fine rich Silk Stuff, or of Silk and Gold, about six or seven Inches in breadth, which they tie in a Knot, in the middle of the Turban, like a Plume of Feathers"

Thomas Herbert, described mandîl-ha (plural of turban) similarly to Sir Chardin:

Those [turbans] in Persia are excessive large and valuable, albeit commonly of calico [cotton]; for the superior sort of people have them woven with silk and gold with a rich fringe or tassel ofgold and silver at the end; but at feasts, entertainments, and gaudy-days I have seen them wreath their shashes [turbans] with ropes of Orient pearl and chains of gold set with precious stones of great value".
Chardin also complains about the weight of the mandīl, saying that they weigh anywhere from 6 to 15 pounds. A mandīl was most likely formed on a stand and made like a hat so that they were easier to wear. Figure 18a shows a turban after it has fallen off the head of the wearer still in its original shape.

Usually a mandīl was white, however, the ends may have some scrolled foliage on them and sometimes they are seen in other colors such as red, blue or yellow. Prior to the 16th century, descendants of Mohammad wore a green mandīl. A mandīl was not a clear indicator of wealth, though the turbans of amīr-ī (prince’s) and shah-ī (king’s) often were decorated with large feather plumes, held in place by jeweled aigrettes. The Farsi word for aigrette was sarpač or sarpaš. Turbans, originating in the Near East in pre-Islamic times, had religious and ethnic connotations. The turban denoted Muslims from non-Muslims throughout the time of Islam. The giving of a turban was incorporated into coronation ceremonies and other rites that denoted an increase in status. During the reign of Shah Esma’īl, a distinctive turban, known as the taj-e háayadar became associated with the dynasty of the Safavids. Prior to this, the taj-e háayadar was associated with Iranian Sufis. The hat consisted of 12 gores or slashes symbolizing the 12 Imams with a spike above it. Underneath the turban, a flat skullcap was worn. This cap was called an araqčīn.

In some miniatures, men of high noble rank (usually the rank of amīr or shāh) are pictured wearing a hat that looks like a small crown with a cap inside of it. This hat was called a tāj kulāh and developed from ancient Irano-Turkish and Indo-Buddhist hats. (Figure 31) The center of the hat either has a rounded top or a cone top. The Mongols also wore a similar hat. By reviewing modern Mongol hats (which have been made the same for hundreds of years), we can guess at the construction of this hat.

Mongol hats are made of burlap, soaked with glue to form the shape and then covered with fabric. (Figure 32)

Hair was generally shaved, though sometimes a tuft of hair was left in the center of the head. Dadāy oil was used to retard hair growth on the rest of the head. They wore their hair in this manner as there was a Moslem belief that the Prophet would be able to distinguish them from the Christians by this hairstyle.

The Prophet would use this tuft of hair to lift them up to heaven. (Figure 33) Facial hair was generally shaved except for a long moustache or perhaps a small, pointed beard. (Figure 34) Older men might retain a neatly trimmed beard and mustache.

It was considered poor mannered to bare the head in public. Though, Shah ‘ābbas I, apparently used to take his turban off in order to shock those present.

Men are sometimes pictured in miniatures wearing a small cap with a turned up rim and a notch in the front. This cap was commonly worn by all men prior to the 16th century. By the 16th century, only
servants and lower class continued to wear the cap.

**Female Garments**

Women's clothing in late period Persia is much more difficult to research than men's. Women were discussed very little in the primary writings of the age; to date there is only one extant garment prior to the 17th century that I am aware of that may be a female garment - a 14th century pirahan which will be discussed below. As a result, we must study the men's extant garments, work from the descriptions in primary sources and compare them to the miniatures that exist. By doing this, we can more readily judge the accuracy of the artists' depictions of people and society of the time. Using this same process, if the male clothing seems to be depicted accurately, then we can draw a reasonable conclusion that the women's clothing portrayed in the art of the time is also depicted fairly accurately. Based on this, a basic female fashion can be derived.

Beginning with one of the few mentions of women's clothing as well as a study of Persian miniatures, we find that women also wore šalvār. Sir Chardin described women's pants and stockings:

"the Drawers fall in the same manner [as men's pants] down to their Ancles, but the Legs of them are straiter, longer, and thicker, because the Women wore no Stockings. They cover their Feet with a Buskin, which reaches four Fingers above the Ancle, and which is either Embroider'd or of the richest Stuff"

The buskin described is most probably an embroidered sock-boot. Sock-boots were boots made of brocade with soft, leather sole. They could be worn alone or with clogs or slippers. (Figure 35) Sockboots were worn by both men and women.

Sometimes they wore another type of pants called naqsh-e. These pants were patterned with diagonal stripes completed in tapestry embroidery. Most probably they were worn by the lower classes or women from nomadic tribes. While there are no extent examples of these types of pants prior to the 17th century, there are miniatures that show women wearing naqsh-e. The extent examples have been taken apart and stretched to be sold as coverings for household goods, making it impossible to discern the original construction. Figure 37 shows a stretched out pant leg from a pair of naqshe.

The female pirahan was made differently from the male pirahan. A 14th century pirahan appeared at an auction house in 2001. While this garment is not labeled a female garment, I believe that it is likely that it is. There are several extent male pirahan-hā (Figure 3 &4), which are very different from this garment. The garment construction also seems likely that it is female as the cut supports the shape of female garments, while for men the cut seems as if it would provide an awkward fit for men. The neckline of the extent garment (perhaps explaining why it was preserved) is unfinished; however, Sir John Chardin describes the neckline as “being open to their navel”. In Figure 39 we can see the edge of a fine white garment as the bottom layer. Note that its neckline is close to the neck and open to the navel. Chardin goes on to add:

"The Women, who are rich, and sometimes the Men, new border the Neck of the Shirt or Shift,
with an Embroidery of Pearl, about a Fingers breadth, upon solemn Occasions"

I am aware of one miniature in which it appears that the pirahan has a row of pearls sewn to its upper edge. However, as this detail is very fine and the reprint I own not of the highest quality, it is difficult to be certain. I have not included this miniature in this paper as, once scanned, the detail is lost entirely.

The extent pirahan was made of very fine cotton gauze. It is constructed of a central rectangle, sidepieces for shaping, with the lower being pleated into the upper one and long rectangular sleeves with gussets. The edges are finished with finger-loop braiding, which aside from adding an additional decorative element, provided a stronger edge to the sleeves and skirt. It was decorated with embroidery down both arms and the front and back of the garment along the areas that would be under the most stress.

Over the pirahan, women wore a series of lined robes called zīrī qāba (literally “under-robe.”). It is difficult to tell how many of these were worn. One is always worn and in some miniatures, it appears that two may have been worn. Currently, I am unaware of any extent zīrī qāba. It appears to be similar in shape to the rūyi qāba (outer robe), though it may have also been in the form of a long vest as the men’s were. Miniatures show the zīrī qāba are either in a solid color or in patterned brocade. Figure 40, shows a 16th century court lady with her rūyi qāba tucked into her belt. We can clearly see the end of her zīrī qāba. The zīrī qāba is shorter than her rūyi qāba, ending about mid-calf level. At her throat, we see a zīrī qāba which is a dark red color while the one we view below her rūyi qāba is slightly flipped over, showing a very dark color (most likely a dark green or blue). Either she is wearing two coats or most likely the dark, red zīrī qāba is lined with dark green or blue. I believe it is reasonable to assume that they were also made of silk, cotton or linen.

Over the zīrī qāba, the rūyi qāba (shortened to qāba in John Chardin’s writing) was worn. This garment usually had long sleeves and was made of silk brocades. In the late 16th century, the female rūyi qāba was cut with a straight front and did not have the crossover panel worn by the men. The neckline was often cut to the navel, or had a straight front with a close, round neckline. The qāba with the close neckline are almost always pictured worn open. In the very late end of the century, the neckline develops a small round collar. The sleeves extended beyond the end of the hand. Miniatures picture women wearing them pushed up behind their hands when working and over their hands when at leisure.

The rūyi qāba is then belted with a sash. I have not seen any examples of women wearing the placard belt worn by the men. In some miniatures, it appears they may be wearing a belt, however this is actually a small purse as described later in this article. Unlike the men, miniatures rarely picture anything hanging from the belts of women. However, John Chardin states:

*The Princesses of the Blood Royal have the Priviledge to wear a Dagger. They don’t at all suppress this Luxury in Persia, but quite the contrary; they generally excite and encourage it*
braided, often attaching long lengths of silk (usually ending in a tassel or other ornament) to lengthen the hair. In some miniatures they are pictured with their hair loose over their shoulders. Plate 23 shows a Persian woman wearing her hair plaited with yellow and maroon fabric, ending in a tassel. Over their hair they wore variations of headdresses primarily formed of silk veils. These veils are pictured with delicate patterns on them. These patterns may have been embroidered or painted. The simplest of these and the basis for most headdresses worn by women, is the chārqad. The chārqad is a square, white scarf, made of either silk, cotton or linen, folded into a half-diamond. It is worn over the head and tied under the chin. The chārqad was generally worn both indoors and outdoors. It was worn either alone, or in combination with other veils. Plate 24 pictures a Persian woman wearing a chārqad underneath a diadem-style headdress (discussed below). You can see the white chārqad tied under her chin.

In some miniatures, a small diadem was worn. Sir John Chardin describes the diadem:

“The Head is no otherwise dress’d under the Vail or Kerchief, but from the End of a Filler, cut or hollow’d Triangularwise’ and this is the Point that covers the Head, being kept upon the top of the Fore-head by a little Fillet, or String about an Inch broad. This Head-band or Fillet, which is made of several Colors, is small and light: The little Fillet is Embroider’d, in Imitation of Needle-work, or cover’d with Jewels, according to the Quality of the People. This is, in my Opinion, the ancient Tiara or Diadem of the Queens of Persia; none but the Married Women wear them; and this is a Mark whereby they known to be under Authority.”

It is difficult to say if Chardin’s remarks regarding this headdress denoting marriage apply to the 16th century. In some cases, the story line pictured in a miniature seems to indicate that the woman is unmarried. However, often the story being depicted has multiple versions in some of which, the woman is married. This makes it difficult to determine any pattern regarding the wearing of the diadem.

As described above, ladies of noble rank also wore the tāj kulāh. The tāj kulāh is the equivalent of the European coronet.

Most headdress variations were accompanied by a small band of pearls worn under the chin. Sir Chardin describes a band of pearls used for this purpose that he received as a gift from one of Shah ʿAbbās I’s princesses:

"It consisted of Thirty-eight Oriental Pearls, each weighing Twenty-four Carats, all well form’d, of the same Water, and same Bigness: It is not an Ornament for the Neck, but for the Face, after the Persian Manner: It is fasten’d at the Temples to the Head-band, or Fillet, and comes down the Cheeks, and under the Chin."

In some miniatures, it sometimes appears that there is a triangle made of a small, folded scarf worn over the top of the head. According to Jennifer Scarce, this is actually the artist’s attempt at drawing a charghat (a type of face veil), pichah (face veil made of black horse hair) or a burqu (face veil with holes for the eyes) foreshortened. The veil is twisted and thrown back over the forehead, forming the triangle-like structure. Veiling is discussed in more detail later in this article. In the more detailed miniatures of the late 16th century, it seems that this adaptation may have actually become a small triangular veil, folded in half. However, it is difficult to state if this is an actual headdress or a misinterpretation of earlier miniatures by the artist. The artist may or may not have first hand knowledge of the dress of...
noblewomen.

Jewelry was small and discreet, usually limited to earrings, bracelets, one or two rings and perhaps a small choker. Figure 48 shows a 16th century extent bracelet in the Hermitage Museum that is identified as worn by a female. Figure 49 shows extent earrings which may have been worn by a man or a woman.

Some miniatures picture a small box at the waist. It often appears to look like a belt buckle. However, it is a small “purse” hung around the neck by a chain.

"Their Necklaces are either Chains of Gold or Pearl, which they hang to their Neck, and which fall below the Bosom, to which is fasten’d a large Box of Sweets. There are of these Boxes as big as one’s Hand, the common ones are of Gold, the others are cover’d with Jewels; and all of them are bor’d through, fill’d with a black Paste very light, made of Musk and Amber, but of a very strong Smell."

Chardin also mentions that animals, women and children often wore a small bag, with prayers to God for protection underneath their Pirahan.

Women’s shoes were very similar to men’s. Indoors, slippers with pointed toes were worn. Figure 25 shows both women’s and men’s slippers. The slippers appear to be similar to a pair of extent slippers from Egypt dated 8th century located in BC Galleries (an auction house). There is an . They seem to have changed little from those pictured in miniatures. Outdoors, Cuban heeled clogs or boots were worn.

Women also wore make-up. The ideal eyebrow was a large sweeping curve that met in the middle, usually made of kohl.

According to Jennifer Scarce, they may have tattooed the black connecting-line between their eyebrows. Eyebrows were also plucked to make the perfect sweeping curve. Women painted their lips so that they appeared small and puckered. White powder or perhaps lead was used to lighten the skin. Thomas Herbert mentioned that they used cosmetics to make their skin appear pale and a “vermilion dye” to redden the cheeks. Both men and women used Al-hinnā (henna). Al-hinna was used on both hands and feet. Sir Chardin states that the purpose of Al-hinnā was to prevent sunburn, while this may have been its original purpose, by the 16th century, Al-hinnā was an art form, with the hands and feet decorated with complicated designs. Women also had tattoos placed on their hands and breasts called kāl-kūbī.
When in public, women usually wore a čādor. A čādor is a long veil that covered the entire body from the head to the feet. Women would sometimes hold a corner of the veil over their face. Sometimes women are pictured wearing a burqu' or a pīcheh underneath their chādur. A burgu' is an Arabic term that means a long linen veil, with holes for eyes. A pīcheh is a hair mask made of black horsehair. The face veil was attached with a long, cord that extended from the top of the veil and was tied under the chin. Note the black "dog ear" shape. This is the structure holding the veil in place.

Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, Castillina ambassador to Timur from 1403 to 1406 described the outdoor dress of Persian women in Tabriz:

"These women go about, covered all over with a white sheet, with a net made of black horse hair before their eyes..."

In some miniatures noblewomen appear to be outdoors without a čādor. However, this is usually not the case. If it is clearly a public place, such as the bazaar, noblewomen are generally pictured with the čādor on. Sometimes, the veil is only held at the neck, not covering the entire body or face. However, in miniatures in which noblewomen are seen without a čādor in an outdoor setting, generally they are in a private garden or courtyard. These spaces were not considered public and therefore it was acceptable for noblewomen to not wear the čādor. It is important to note that the custom of veiling was not universally followed. Generally, city women veiled in public, where women in the country usually wore a charqad only. In some regions of Persia, women did not veil at all.

The degree of veiling was often determined by rank. The higher the rank, the more veiled a women might be. Slaves were forbidden to veil. Old women and pre-pubescent girls were also not required to veil. There are no extent čādor from the 16th century, though the čādor is described in poetry. The čādor at one time may have been made in two parts and in some other periods it appears that it was a full body veil, covering even the face. It is possible that not only did the shape of the čādor change with time but also with geographic location and with the ethnicity of the wearer.

The information on clothing in Persia in the 16th century is by no means conclusive. Much of it continues to be based upon conjecture, due to the lack of primary sources and extant garments. As extant garments are discovered and studied, we can only hope that more information will come to light. Until then, we can only continue to use the resources we have in an attempt to reconstruct what may have been a common fashion.

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[1] Referring to Shāh 'ābbas I
There are four commonly seen spellings of these types of pants; šalvār, şalvar, shalwar and salwar. Šalvār is the Persian spelling, şalvar is the Turkish spelling and shalwar and salwar are translations of these words. Shalwar is the correct pronunciation.

I am grateful to Mistress Danabren Madadh-Mara for this information.

Observations of extent garments in the Textile Museum in Washington D.C. combined with curator descriptions of several other extent garments.

I am grateful to Jennifer Davis for arranging this trip to view extent garments and for her’s and Mistress Rose Otter’s insights into the construction of the garments we viewed.
several other extent garments.


[31] the plural form of qāba

[32] I am grateful to Mistress Rose Otter for making this observation on our trip to the Textile Museum in October of 2002. For further reference see Temari, How to Make Japanese Thread Balls, Diana Vandervoort, Japan Publications Trading Co. Ltd., 1992


[35] i.e. qizilbash(red-head) the soldiers who formed Shah Abbas I army made up of Persianized Turks, Georgians and Armenians. From Herbert pg. 4


Understanding Persian fashion in the 16th century requires careful study of multiple sources.

M. McBride & Company, 1929, pg. 91,


[58] "Esma’il Safawe,” Encyclopedia Iranica Online, 2004, pg. 2


[60] amīr means territorial prince (it does not mean sons of the king or queen)


[62] I am grateful to Lord Gulugjab Tangghudai, known as Puppy and Lady Melinda for this reference and the information on construction.


[71] Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart, Carol Bier, editor, The Textile Museum, 1987, pg. 269

A Brief Guide to Persian Embroideries, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1950, pg. 7
Also listed in Woven from the Soul, is another miniature completed in period which shows a woman wearing naqsh, which I could not locate “Fitna Astonishing Bahram Gur” by Mohammad Zaman, from the Khamsah of Nizami (unknown version).


[73] From http://www.sarakuehn.com, I am grateful to Anahita al Shazhiyya for posting this to the SCA Persian YahooGroups.


[76] From http://www.sarakuehn.com, I am grateful to Anahita al Shazhiyya for posting this to the SCA Persian YahooGroups.


[80] I am grateful to Master Rashid for this observation.


[87] Persian Lost Treasures, Vladimir Loukonine & Anatoli Ivanov, Confidential Concepts 1996

[88] I am grateful to Master Rashid for this information.

[89] By amber, Sir Chardin meant ambergrease, a substance coughed up by whales used as a perfume and in cooking throughout the Orient.


[93] Domestic Culture in the Middle East, Jennifer M. Scarce, National Museum of Scotland, 1996, pg. 76


Understanding Persian fashion in the 16th century requires careful study of multiple sources.


[101] Domestic Culture in the Middle East, Jennifer M. Scarce, National Museum of Scotland, 1996, pg. 76


[103] Development of Women’s Veils in Persia and Afganistan,” Jennifer Scarce, Costume, 1974, pg. 6

[104] Development of Women’s Veils in Persia and Afganistan,” Jennifer Scarce, Costume, 1974, pg. 6

[105] Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the Court of Timour at Samarcand A.D 1403-6, Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, Hakluyt Society 1859, pg. 89
