

# But Not In Spain: Thirteenth Century Hispano-Muslim Costume

Doña Violante de Sant Sebastian, OL  
violante@spanishpeacock.com  
<http://www.spanishpeacock.com/violante.htm>

## Introduction

Moorish fashions in the thirteenth century are as unique among the Islamic world as Christian fashions of the era were within Europe. (By Moorish, I mean to say the culture which resulted from the intermixing of Arab/Islamic, Berber/North African, and Christian/Visigothic-Roman characteristics. Meaning "Moorish" could be used adjectivally for any number of races and religions. Hispano-barbaro-arab could be used too, I suppose, but it's much harder to say.)

The primary visual sources for this period are from the works commissioned by Alfonso X "el Sabio", such as the Cantigas de Santa María and the Book of Games. There is also one Arabic illuminated manuscript: the Hadith Bayad wa Riyad, a rare example of Moorish miniatures. No



garments survive due to several traditions, including a bustling second-hand garment industry and the practice of burying the dead in a simple white shroud. Legal treatises, poetry and histories are among the text sources of the period, but since this is an introductory course I won't go into them in detail.

## Undergarments

Undertunics are loosely cut and have wide sleeves like a regular tunic. The neckline was cut in a "keyhole". Some ladies' versions had ties, pleated trim at the neckline, and embroidery on the shoulders. The predominant fabric is gauzy and white - nearly transparent in miniatures - and might have been cotton or linen.

Men, women, and children alike wore pants made of the same white fabric. The pants are cut long and snug at the ankle, which forms horizontal wrinkles around the lower leg. The drawstring which held

up the pants could be richly embellished. For some purposes, bloomers ending at the knee may be worn instead.

Instead of pants, wraps might cover the legs from knee to ankle. Text sources indicate that women might wear these leg wraps but the only picture shows red or blue ones worn by foot soldiers.

## Tunics



Moorish tunics in the 13th century tended to be loose. The richer you were, the more generously cut your robes. It took more fabric to make, and the sleeves alone made any sort of labor impractical. The tunics worn by nobles and the wealthy featured gold- and pearl-trimmed embellishments at the neckline and cuffs as well as tiraz on the upper arms. Tiraz could have geometric designs or Arabic script. Luxury tunics were made from richly patterned silks produced in domestic workshops or imported from elsewhere in the Middle East.

Tunics worn by foot soldiers, by contrast, had tight sleeves and short hems. In fact the style looks identical to Christian men's functional garments during this period.

Tunics could be made from linen, cotton, silk or wool depending on wealth/social status, season, or activity. So far I have found no sumptuary laws restricting certain colors to certain classes or religions, as may be found elsewhere in the Muslim world at various times and places.

Generally speaking, necklines were high and round, with no apparent closure or other mechanism to get the tunic over your head. A half-ellipse shape - with or without vents at the seam for

additional ease - creates the right look. While there is some text evidence for a front opening garment in this period, I haven't found a picture of one yet.

Men's tunics usually fall to between calf and ankle length, whereas women's reach the floor.

## Outerwear

Outerwear came in two major categories: sewn and semi-circular, or un-sewn and rectangular.

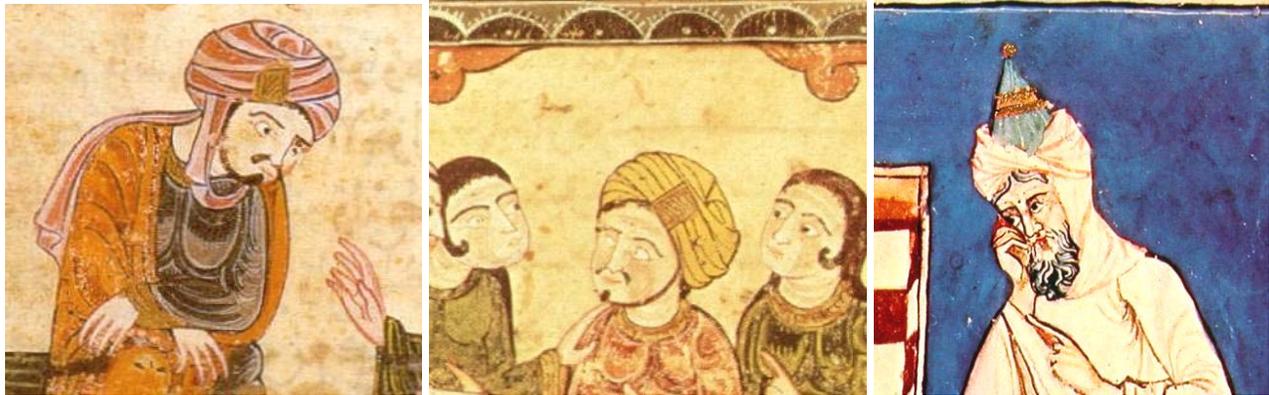
In the first category fall the burnus and the rida. Both were half-circles. The woolen burnus originated in North African and had a hood. The rida, by contrast, provided little protection against the elements, as it had no hood, and was usually made of richly embellished silks. Soldiers might wear a short red cloak, a style borrowed from the Christians.

The rectangular wraps could be arranged around the body in multiple ways. Over the shoulder, around the body, then over the same arm is one common method. Over the head and both shoulders is another.



## Turbans

Turbans were worn inconsistently in the 13th century, and their use may have been associated with certain professions or ethnicities. Moorish turbans (when worn) might have as many as three different parts: the roll which encircled the head; a chin-strap; and a hanging tail cascading down the back. The roll might appear with either the chin-strap, or the tail, or both, or neither. Turbans were neat and compact, and sometimes embellished with a gold plaque or embroidered strip. Occasionally, turbans were wrapped around conical hats.



## Veils

Text sources suggest that at various times, face veiling was widespread in al-Andalus. However, pictures of face veils are rare. One sole miniature from the Book of Games shows two women wearing tall scarf-wrapped hats with white face veils that look like surgical masks covering their mouths, noses, and chins.

Head veils are much more common. Black or white were the preferred colors. A fastening under the chin and a filet of fabric might hold the veil in place although some gravity-defying fashion mavens used neither.



Some head veils could be very large indeed, to the point where they might be better classified as outerwear. The ends of these veils could be held in front of the face as decorum required, a handy trick still seen in the 16th century.

Last but not least, we must mention the veil fashion most commonly associated with Moorish women; that is, none at all. This is a class on costume, not medieval Spanish feminism, so I won't debate the possible reasons for it. The fact remains that text sources and miniatures alike give evidence for women going bareheaded.



## Bibliography

Anderson, Ruth Matilda. "Pleated Headdresses of Castilla and Leon (12th and 13th Centuries)". *Notes Hispanic*, 1942, p.50-75.

Very detailed study of this uniquely Spanish headdress. Suggests that at least in part, the fashion was influenced by Moorish women.

Arié, Rachel. "Le costume des Musulmans de Castille au XIIIe siècle d'après les miniatures du Libro del Ajedrez." *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, tome II. Madrid 1966, pp. 59-66.

Based largely on secondary sources. A good place to start if Levi-Provençal is unavailable. Arié's work assumes that the costume terms do not change throughout the centuries, so she is not careful to use contemporary sources.

Arié, Rachel. "Quelques remarques sur le costume des Musulmans d'Espagne au temps des Nasrides." *Arabica*, tome XII/3, Leyde 1965, pp. 244-261.

This article uses primary sources to a greater extent than the previous one.

Bernis, Carmen. *Indumentaria Medieval Española*. Madrid: Institute Diego Velasquez, 1956.

A book of mostly Christian stuff, through the 15th century. Useful to cross-reference with Moorish fashions.

Bolens, L. "The Use of Plants for Dyeing and Clothing: Cotton and Woad in al-Andalus." *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*. Ed. S.K. Jayyusi. Leiden, 1992. 1004-7.

In case anyone doubted that cotton was grown in medieval Spain...

Chalmeta, P. "El Kitab fi adab al-hisba de Al-Saqati (Libro del buen gobierno del zoco)". *Al-Andalus* (1967-1968): XXXII/1, pp. 125-162; XXXII/2, pp. 359-397; XXXIII/1, pp. 143-195; XXXIII/2, pp. 367-434.

Corriente, F. *A dictionary of Andalusí Arabic*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1997.

Dodds, Jerrilynn Dozy, ed. *al-Andalus : the art of Islamic Spain*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

Exhibit catalog; source of many wonderful pictures, including textiles, jewelry and ivories carvings. Source of the Ximénez de Rada Tunic (no. 94), and pictures from Hadith Bayad wa Riyad (no. 82).

Dozy, Reinhart. *Dictionnaire détaillé de noms de vêtements chez les Arabes*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1843.

Detailed dictionary of medieval Arabic clothing terms, including many Spanish sources. The entries are very dated, though, so Dozy is best used to supplement newer research, or provide context on the usage in other parts of the Middle East.

Guerrero Lovillo, José. *Las Cántigas: estudio arqueológico des sus miniaturas*. Madrid: Instituto Diego Velásquez, 1949.

Study based on the miniatures in the Cántigas de Santa María. Includes facsimile plates, but they are small and in black and white, and the author's line drawings interpreting the miniatures.

Levi-Provençal, E. *Histoire de l'Espagne Muslumane*. 3 vols. Paris, G. P. Maisonneuve, 1950.

Say, rather, history of Muslim Spain to the 11th century. Volume 3 has all the good stuff, including snippets from Ibn Sa'id about costume in the 13th century.

May, Florence Lewis. *Silk Textiles of Spain: Eighth to Fifteenth Century*. New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1957.

Very thorough study of silk and its use in medieval Spain; good source for designs, but not colors.

Menéndez Pidal, Gonzalo.; Bernis, Carmen. *Las Cantigas :la vida en el S. XIII según la representación iconográfica (II) : traje, aderezo, afeites*. [Granada?] : [Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Dirección General del Patrimonio Artístico y Cultural, Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife?], Year:1979 1981.

A thorough study of both Christian and Moorish garb in the 13th century, based mostly on Christian sources.

Millas Vallicrosa, J. M. "El cultivo del algodón en la España árabe." *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*. 139 (1956): 463-72.

Methods for growing cotton in the 12th and 13th century in Spain.

Monasterio de Las Huelgas de Burgos (Spain). *Vestiduras ricas: el Monasterio de las Huelgas y su época, 1170-1340 : del 16 de marzo al 19 de junio de 2005, Palacio Real de Madrid*. [Madrid]: Patrimonio Nacional, 2005.

Remie Constable, Olivia. *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The commercial realignment of the Iberian peninsula, 900-1500*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Economic study which covers textile trade and available dyes for fabric.

Serjeant, R. B. *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1972.

Detailed exploration into the institution of tiraz, and a chapter on Hispano-Muslim textiles.

Smith, Bradley. *Spain: A History in Art*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966.

Has some lovely, large reproductions from the Libros de Ajedrez and Cantigas de Santa Maria.

Stillman, Yedida Kalfon. *Arab dress : a short history : from the dawn of Islam to modern times*. Ed. Norman A. Stillman. Boston: Brill, 2000. Themes in Islamic studies, v. 2

A great introduction to period Islamic costume using literary and pictorial sources. The chapter on Spain and North Africa provides some interesting insights, but is very lop-sided in its treatment of Andalusian costume.

*Vestiduras pontificiales del arzobispo Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, S. XIII: su estudio y restauración*. Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes y de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, Instituto de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, 1995.