

Moorish Fashion in Thirteenth Century Spain

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Introduction

The more I learn about Moorish costume, the more I am amazed at how much remains to be uncovered. Traditionally, studies – however enlightened – tend to rely very heavily on either medieval Spanish or Arabic sources, rarely both. By reconciling the two perspectives, one can recreate a large amount of vocabulary throughout the medieval period. The following list is just a starting point towards a glossary of Moorish costuming terms in the thirteenth century.

Glossary and Concordance

One of the greatest challenges in documenting Moorish costume is the language barrier. The following list serves two main purposes. First, it provides a beginning vocabulary drawn largely from 13th century Spain: the Arabic word is provided, followed by its Spanish equivalent *or* translation, where known. The English definition is likewise drawn from 13th century Spain wherever possible, though sometimes it is necessary to draw on context from earlier or later centuries, other Middle Eastern countries, or pictorial sources. The second portion of each entry provides the citation for the costuming term, both in terms of primary and secondary sources. By cross-referencing as many sources as are available, we can increase our level of confidence in the vocabulary. The Spanish words, while period, are not necessarily contemporary to the Arabic.

Methodology

There are several categories of source. A reference source serves to place the term in a particular century & geographical location. Then if we can find a context source - one which, by context, definition, or description, explains the use of the garment - for a different century *or* a different geography, then we can identify the clothing item with a certain degree of confidence. The best context source, of course, comes from the right geography *and* century. Fortunately, thanks to the many translations made from Arabic into Castilian in the thirteenth century, there are several examples where Arabic word is transliterated, and a Spanish explanation provided.

Note: The Arabic transliteration in this list has not been standardized.

Textiles

A wide variety of textiles were available in thirteenth century Spain, including wool, cotton, linen, and silk. In addition to these “pure” fibers, blends were also used in Moorish costume, including wool and silk, silk and cotton, and linen and wool.¹ Popular colors included: scarlet, from *kirmiz*; blue, from indigo; yellow, from saffron; as well as a variety of intermediate colors made by varying dyes and mordants. Sumptuary laws restricting the dress of Mudejars give special insight as to which colors were the most treasured. The Ordannances of Seville (1252) singled out white, red, and green,² while the Cortes of Jerez specifically forbade the wearing of scarlet, orange, and white.³

Silk

Ar. harir. Sp. seda.

These words identify the material, and not the weave. Both Arabic and Spanish sources provide a variety of words to identify different weaves of silk, and there is not always a one to one correspondence between the two; the following list serves only to describe the diversity of silk fabrics, rather than to reconcile them. Silk was woven in a variety of ways, including a plain compound weave, tapestry, as well tablet woven. Most surviving textile fragments are brocaded, and come in a variety of colors including red, blue, and yellow. In addition, silk was often worked with gold thread. Popular motifs included roundels, wide decorative bands, and Arabic calligraphy. The use of heraldic designs was also prevalent in Castilian society. The weaving of silk was almost exclusively a Moorish trade, either in al-Andalus or other centers throughout the peninsula with large Mudejar populations.⁴ Silk might be blended with linen or other coarse fibers for a stronger fabric, especially in linings.⁵

Ar. attabi.

A fabric made in imitation of Baghdadi silks, which may have been striped black and white like a zebra.⁶

Sp. cendal.

Sendal. A form of taffeta; strong & lightweight, it was used for banners, upholstery, and clothing. Sendal may also describe a gauzy linen woven with bands of white or colored silk used in ladies' headdresses.⁷ Sendal was among the fabrics the use of which was forbidden to Mudejars.⁸

Ar. dibaj and washi

Brocade, or figured silk textile.⁹

Ar. kirmizi. Sp. escarlata.

Like *urdjuwan/purpura*, *escarlata* may have originally designated only a color, and was eventually generalized to designate the fabric which was usually dyed that color.¹⁰

Ar. siklatun. Sp. ciclaton.

A silk used primarily for garments.¹¹

Ar. urdjuwan. Sp. purpura/porpola.

A very rich fabric of Moorish origin. While the name originally designated a color, it came to refer to a silk that was woven in Almería and Granada. It could be used both for clothing and upholstery.¹²

Sp. xamet.

Samite – Used for clothing and upholstery, as well as tents.¹³

Other textiles.

Ar. kattan or qasab. Sp. lino or lienço.

Linen. Usually white, frequently used for undergarments such as chemises and braies.¹⁴

Ar. qutn. Sp. algodón.

Cotton.¹⁵

Ar. suf. Sp. lana

Wool.¹⁶

Ar. lubud. Sp. fieltro.

Felt.¹⁷

Leather.

Sp. cordouan.

A goat leather originally of Muslim manufacture, named for the city of Cordoba.

Cordoban was white or red, often tooled with gold, and used for making shoes. It was prized throughout Europe for its softness and durability.¹⁸

Furs.

Ar. julud al-qunaliyat. Sp. corambre de coneio, or de liebre.

Rabbit and hare pelts were exported from al-Andalus to Europe and throughout the Middle East.¹⁹

Ar. fanak. Sp. marta.

Marten.²⁰

Ar. sammur. Sp. zebellina.

Sable.²¹

Ar. qaqum. Sp. arminna.

Ermine. The use of ermine and otter was carefully regulated in sumptuary laws, suggesting that they were among favorites for use in clothing. Their use was specifically forbidden to Jews under Christian rule, and by extension to the Mudejars as well.²²

Sp. nutria.

Otter. See above.

Undergarments

Ar. gilala.

A shift made from a “delicate fabric”.²³ The Middle Eastern context suggests it’s primarily a ladies’ garment. The *gilala* may be the white sheer shift that Moorish women are depicted wearing with *sarawil* around the house in the *Ajedrez*.

Ar. qamis. Sp. camisa.

A shirt or shift worn under other clothing.²⁴ Its usage appears to be more Castilian than Andalusian at this time.²⁵

Ar. qandura. Sp. alcandara.

A short shift or shirt of cotton.²⁶

Ar. sarawil. Sp. zaragüelle.

Pants which were held up by a *tikka*, and usually wrinkled horizontally at the lower legs and the ankle.²⁷ Both men and women wore the *sarawil*, and in the pictures they are always white.

Ar. jawrab.

Stockings.²⁸ These might have been knitted, like modern socks, or woven and cut to shape, like hosen. Where they are visible in pictures, *jawrab* appear to be white.

Ar. tarabiq.

Leg wraps.²⁹ While Ibn ‘Abdun was referring to women’s fashion when describing *tarabiq* in the 12th century, only one 13th century picture shows leg wraps, and those are on foot soldiers. In this case, the blue or red leg wraps were worn without *sarawil* under them, and covered the leg from the ankle to just below the knee.

Main Garments

Ar. jubba. Sp. aliuba, aljuba.

A long robe with full length sleeves; the main robe for both sexes.³⁰ The Ximenez de Rada tunic, which is believed to be of Granadan manufacture, may be an example of an aliuba.³¹

Ar. misha. Sp. almexia, almejia.

A long garment with wide sleeves, worn as an outer layer. The Arabic sources suggest it is a coarse garment used in times of mourning, but in Castile, the word *almexia* was used in a wide variety of contexts. Christian captives returning home from Moorish lands might wear “a poor *almexia*”, while valuable versions of the same garments would pay the ransom for other captives.³²

Sp. pellote.

Christian sideless surcoat, which would come into Moorish hands as ransom for captives.³³ Only one picture from the 13th century shows a Moor wearing a pellote, suggesting that their use was not very widespread.

Ar. shaya. Sp. saya.

A garment similar to that worn by Castilian peasants. The *shaya* was a functional garment, short with fitted sleeves. Despite the humble origins of the *shaya*, it was worn by all classes, including Muhammad ibn al-Ahmar, who founded the Nasrid dynasty in Granada.³⁴

Outerwear

Ar. burnus. Sp. albornoz.

A hooded cloak. While originally an African garment, the *burnus* was found in al-Andalus as early as the 10th century. At the end of the thirteenth century, the *albornoz* sold for one *dinero*.³⁵

Ar. kisa. Sp. alquice.

A piece of fabric used as a covering. The *kisa* could be variously worn over the head, or draped around the shoulders and body as required to meet the needs of fashion or warmth. It was worn by either gender. The *alquice* cost one or two *dineros*, and like the *burnus*, was originally an African garment.³⁶

Ar. qaba. Sp. capa.

A cape of scarlet worn by military officers. Like the *shaya*, the *qaba* was borrowed from Castilian fashion.³⁷

Headwear/Veils

Ar. gifara.

A wool skullcap of green or red (“yellows being reserved for Jews who were forbidden to wear a turban”).³⁸ The *gifara* was worn in combination with the *taylasan* or *mi'zar*, and as such its shape is unknown; in any miniatures which might have show it, it is covered with fabric.

Ar. imama. Sp. toca.

Turban.³⁹ The turban was worn inconsistently during the 13th century, and its use appears to have been regional. In the east and south, only jurists and qadis still wore turbans. In the west, on the other hand, where Berber influence had been stronger, turbans could still be found. The traditional Spanish *imama* was distinguished by a piece of fabric that curved the under the chin (*hanaq*), as well as a long tail which hung down the back (*adhu'aba*). Fabrics for the turban included wool and wool/linen blends, and a silk *tiraz* may decorate a fashionable turban. Interestingly, there does not seem to be any sumptuary laws regarding the color and wearing of turbans, except that Jews were forbidden to wear them (see *gifara*).⁴⁰

Ar. litham. Sp. oral.

A veil which covered the lower half of the face.⁴¹ The *litham* was variously worn by men or women at different times during the course of history; the Almoravids were characterized by this style to the extent that they were nicknamed “those who wear the *litham*”. The *litham*'s primary purpose was as a face veil, as opposed to other coverings, like the *milhafa* or *kisa*, which could be pulled in front of the face as needed. They were silk, and could be simple or worked with gold. Moorish and Castilian women alike might tear their veils as a sign of intense grief. *Orales* could range in price from one to two *dineros* for a dozen.⁴²

Ar. milhafa. Sp. almalafa.

A woman's veil or covering.⁴³ The *milhafa* was likely larger than the *miqna'a*, and may have been worn like mantle or cloak.

Ar. *miqna'a*. Sp. *toca*.

A woman's veil.⁴⁴ The *miqna'a* is the most common veil found in pictures of Moorish women in the *Ajedrez*. It is a simple rectangle or semicircle of fabric covering the head and falling to the shoulders, and which may be pinned beneath the chin. Sometimes they have fringe, or stripes, or both; all of them are black or white, of sheer fabric.

Ar. *mi'zar*. Sp. *almaizar*.

A long piece of fabric draped over the head and shoulders; worn by men in combination with the *gifara*.⁴⁵ The *mi'zar* is distinguished, not by its use, but by its shape; longer pieces can be used to wrap a turban.

Ar. *qalansuwa*. Sp. *tocado*?

A tall conical hat most often worn by men.⁴⁶ While this word does not appear in 13th century Arabic sources, pictorial evidence suggests that the use of the *qalansuwa* lasted into the 13th century. In addition to the miniatures in the *Ajedrez* and *Cantigas*, we also see similar tall headdresses in use among Castilians, especially the women. A surviving ladies' hat, or *tocado*, from the 13th century was made with a frame of parchment, lined with linen; originally, it was wrapped with a long, pleated linen veil similar to the way a *qalansuwa* may have been wrapped with an *almaizar*.⁴⁷ The *qalansuwa* may have been crafted in a similar manner, then covered with fabric or embroidery as desired. Another interesting parallel between the *qalansuwa* and *tocado* is their use in combination with a face veil. One miniature from the *Ajedrez* shows veiled Moorish women, who wear the veils (*litham*) in combination with a tall pointed hat – the *qalansuwa*. Likewise, the *tocado* was sometimes worn in combination with the *oral*.

Ar. *qina'a*. Sp. *alquina*, pl. *alquinales*.

A face veil, which might be white in color.⁴⁸ The shape of the *alquina* is not clear, nor how it differs from the *litham/oral*.

Ar. *taylasan*.

A long piece of fabric draped over the head and shoulders; worn by men in combination with the *gifara*.⁴⁹

Ar. *wiqaya*.

A head band, or hair band.⁵⁰ This may refer to the decorated bands which Moorish ladies used to hold their veils in place, or perhaps to a more basic head scarf worn to keep the hair out of the face.

Shoes

Ar. *khuff* (pl. *akhfaf*).

Tall leather boots worn for fighting or traveling.⁵¹

Sp. *çuecos* or *çapatos*.

Shoes.⁵² While the Moors must have worn some shoe besides platform sandals, it is not clear what the word for those shoes would have been. The miniatures generally show a low, black slipper with a small curl at the toe. These were worn in combination with white stockings (*jawrab*). Sumptuary laws from the mid-13th century specifically forbid Mudejars to wear shoes which are white or decorated with gold, which may be a reference to shoes made of *cordoban*.⁵³

Ar. *qabqab*.

Platform sandals with wooden soles.⁵⁴

Ar. *qurq*. Sp. *alcorques*.

Platform sandals with cork soles.⁵⁵

Accessories

Sp. barba

Beard hair. According to sumptuary laws, Mudejar men were required to wear long beards “as commanded by their law.”⁵⁶ This last part suggests that beards were common among Granadans and other non-Mudejar Moors as well.

Ar. dumluj. Sp. manilas.

Large bracelets.⁵⁷

Ar. henna. Sp. alheña.

Henna. Henna was used to dye hair and beards, as well as to decorate hands, fingernails, and feet. Christian captives were sometimes used as slave labor to grind the henna into powder.⁵⁸

Ar. ‘iqd. Sp. sartales.

Necklace.⁵⁹ Only a few miniatures show the ‘iqd, which appears to have been much like a choker given how high it sits on the neck.

Ar. khatim. Sp. anillo/sortija.

Ring.⁶⁰

Ar. kuhl. Sp. alcohol.

Black eye makeup.⁶¹

Ar. manteca. Sp. cinta.

A belt. The Middle Eastern sources suggest it was made of gold or silver, never leather.⁶²

Ar. shanf. Sp. çarçillos/arracada.

Earrings.⁶³

Ar. tikka. Sp. cinta.

A lady’s highly decorated belt or drawstring which held up their *sarawil*.⁶⁴ This may have been brocaded tablet weaving, or embroidered.

Ar. tiraz. Sp. *tiras?* *orofres?*

Strips of fabric embroidered or otherwise embellished, used as decoration on the upper arms of garments like the *jubba*.⁶⁵ To judge by the predominance of brocaded tablet weaving among the thirteenth century finds at Las Huelgas, it seems like that the *tiraz* of this period were tablet woven.⁶⁶

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<http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/>

Corpus del Español.

Search by Spanish word, which returns source and context. A very friendly site, as it has directions in English, in addition to a simple way of narrowing the search by century.

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¹ Serjeant, 184, describing the costume of the Sultan of Tunis.

² Rachel Arié, "Quelques remarques sur le costume des Musulmans d'Espagne au temps des Nasrides." *Arabica*, tome XII/3 (1965), 247.

³ Cortes of Jerez, via CORDE.

⁴ Florence Lewis May, *Silk Textiles of Spain: Eighth to Fifteenth Century* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1957), 63 – 117, passim.

⁵ May, 60.

⁶ May, 67. Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The commercial realignment of the Iberian peninsula, 900-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 145.

⁷ May, 61.

⁸ Cortes of Valladolid, 1258; Cortes of Jerez, 1268, via CORDE.

⁹ R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1972), 169.

¹⁰ Serjeant, 187. Gonzalo de Berceo refers to *escarlata* in the same context as *purpura* in *De los signos que asparesçeran ante del juicio*.

¹¹ May, 63, 67. Serjeant, 170.

¹² May, 63. Serjeant, 187.

¹³ May, 60.

¹⁴ Serjeant, 173-175, *passim*. Fuero General de Navarra

¹⁵ For the cultivation of cotton in 13th century al-Andalus, see J. M. Millas Vallicrosa, "El cultivo del algodón en la España árabe," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*. 139 (1956): 463-72.

¹⁶ Serjeant, 173.

¹⁷ Serjeant, 204.

¹⁸ Constable, 217-8.

¹⁹ Constable, 199, 219.

²⁰ Serjeant, 168, 211.

²¹ Serjeant, 168, 211.

²² Serjeant, 209. For sumptuary laws on ermine and otter, see for example Cortes de Jerez, and Documentos de Alfonso X dirigidos a Castilla la Vieja, via CORDE.

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²⁴ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 143. Dozy, 371.

²⁵ Menéndez-Pidal & Bernis, 100, 115.

²⁶ Raimundo Martín, in Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 143

²⁷ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 142. Dozy, 203

²⁸ Arié, "Nasrides", 248. Dozy, 131.

²⁹ Ibn 'Abdun, from Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 142. Ibn 'Abdun, from Arié, "Nasrides", 248.

³⁰ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 141. Dozy, 107.

³¹ Jerrilynn Dodds, ed, *al-Andalus : the art of Islamic Spain*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), no. 94.

³² Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 123. Dozy, 405.

³³ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 143.

³⁴ Ibn al-Khatib, from Arié, "Nasrides", 245. Dozy, 212.

³⁵ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 142. Dozy, 73. The *albornoz* is listed in the Fueros of Sepúlveda (p. 138, 141), Alarcón (fol. 85 v^o.), and Baeza (p. 241).

³⁶ *Lapidario*, in Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 125-6, 143. Dozy, 383. Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab dress: a short history: from the dawn of Islam to modern times* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 88-9.

³⁷ Ibn Sai'd, from E Levi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne Muslumane*, (Paris, G. P. Maisonneuve, 1950) vol. 3, 429. Dozy, 360

³⁸ Ibn Sai'd, from Levi-Provençal, 429. Ibn Sai'd, from Arié, "Nasrides", 246. Dozy, 312.

³⁹ Ibn Sai'd, from Arié, "Nasrides", 246. Dozy, 305.

⁴⁰ For the "anatomy" of the turban, see Serjeant, p. 184.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Abdun, from Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 144-5. Dozy, 400. Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 136.

⁴² On the usage of the oral: *General Estoria V*, fol. 60 v. On the tearing of veils in times of grief: *General Estoria II*, fol. 191 R, and Stillman, 93. The inventory of the cathedral at Salamanca included eight silk *orales*, some of which were whole and some torn, as well as two which were striped with gold. For the prices of the *orales*, the *Fuero de Sepúlveda*, 140, 142.

⁴³ Arié, "Nasrides", 248. Dozy, 401.

⁴⁴ Mozarabes de Toledo, from Arié, "Castille", 65.

⁴⁵ Ibn Sai'd, from Arié, "Nasrides", 246. Dozy, 45.

⁴⁶ Dozy, 365.

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- ⁴⁷ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 139. For more on this style of hat, see Ruth Matilda Anderson, "Pleated Headresses of Castilla and Leon (12th and 13th Centuries)", *Notes Hispanic* (1942), 50-75.
- ⁴⁸ *Estoria de Espanna*, fol 79R. *Estoria de España II*, 237V. Dozy, 375.
- ⁴⁹ Ibn Saï'd, from Levi-Provençal, 429. Ibn Saï'd, from Arié, "Nasrides", 246. Dozy, 278. Ibn Saï'd found it worthy of comment that the Sultan of Tunis "has a tailasan of wool of very fine material which he wears as a cloak and does not put over his head" (Serjeant, 185).
- ⁵⁰ Arié, "Nasrides", 248. Serjeant, 203.
- ⁵¹ Arié, "Nasrides", 253. Dozy, 155.
- ⁵² Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 150.
- ⁵³ Cortes of Valladolid, 1258; Cortes of Jerez, 1268, via CORDE. Given that the Cortes of Jerez warn against "nin çueco, nin çapato dorado", it seems likely that these two words actually identify different styles of shoe.
- ⁵⁴ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 150; 84; Dozy, 347
- ⁵⁵ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 150. Rachel Arié, "Le costume des Musulmans de Castille au XIII^e siècle d'après les miniatures du Libro del *Ajedrez*," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* (tome II, Madrid, 1966), 84; Dozy, 362
- ⁵⁶ Cortes of Valladolid, 1258; Cortes of Jerez, 1268, via CORDE.
- ⁵⁷ Mozarabes de Toledo, from Arié, "Castille", 65. Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 152.
- ⁵⁸ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 153
- ⁵⁹ Mozarabes de Toledo, from Arié, "Castille", 65. Menedez-Pidal & Bernis 152.
- ⁶⁰ Mozarabes de Toledo, from Arié, "Castille", 65. Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 152.
- ⁶¹ Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 153.
- ⁶² Arabic: *Libros del Saber de Astronomia*, by way of Corpus del Español; Dozy, 420.
- ⁶³ Arabic: Mozarabes de Toledo, from Arié, "Castille", 65; Spanish: Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 152
- ⁶⁴ Ibn al-Khatib, from Menedez-Pidal & Bernis, 143. They give the word as *likka*, but that was probably misread for *tikka* in their source. Dozy, 95.
- ⁶⁵ Constable, 149.
- ⁶⁶ May, 98.