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Circulation of fashions: Deciphering foreign influences on the creation of Muslim Clothing in early Islam

Hadas Hirsch

1. Introduction

- 1 Culture is created through practice and performance, and material culture is a tool to analyze cultural processes¹. The mutability of things is embodied in their contextualization and the many ways in which they can be perceived². The identities of material culture are composed of the nature of things themselves, the significance of human agency, and the role of individuals and systems that construct and imbue them with value and meaning³. Material culture is composed of production, exchange, and consumption that are all set in socio-religious and economic contexts and consequences⁴. The relations between people and things reflect social-religious and economic order and artifacts play a role in everything we do which means that people and objects are intertwined⁵.
- 2 Clothing is shaped to construct appearance and its power derives both from its wearing and its viewing⁶. Clothing is purposed for concealing and revealing the body, protecting it, and manifesting religious, political, and social declarations, and its language is at the same time complicated and contradictory. Clothing is a practice of body construction that is not a matter of free choice since it is bound by cultural norms that determine its rules and boundaries. It is a mute testimony and a manifestation of meanings that change and are renegotiated throughout life. Clothing by its nature is neither feminine nor masculine, but is the product of culture, it is both personal and social, and its meanings are familiar and acceptable to consumers and observers alike. A new way of clothing is also a new fashioning of the self, a biographic process of changing the inner person to fit new outer garments⁷.

- 3 Fashion can be defined in as many ways as there are various disciplines investigating it. It involves transformation and continual changing of styles, or in Michael Carter words: "stylistic restlessness"⁸. According to Crane the commodification of change is an essential factor in a fashion system⁹ and Laurel adds that fashion is "a system in which change is the most desirable commodity"¹⁰. Laurel mentions that there are some components that enable the existence of this system¹¹: continual change where some new values replace old ones that became devalued; a range of choices in garments, colors, and patterns to create complexity and enable choice; a growth of commercial society with luxury consumption and increasing accessibility and widening circulation.
- 4 The attempt to trace and untangle the journey of foreign clothing and its influences on Muslim clothing is challenging and complicated, accordingly the concept of biography of things is very helpful. While foreign clothing was manufactured under concrete circumstances of time, place, socio-religious, and economic conditions, it has a dynamic life in which it exceeds its own narrative and accesses other spheres of narration. This movement is best described by the "biography of clothing", a term that was first introduced by Igor Koppitof who tried to establish that things could not be understood just at one point of their existence, but processes, cycles of production, exchange and consumption should be added to their analysis¹². Context and exchange create meanings, hence, constructing the clothing's biography includes time, movement, and change that transform them¹³. The cultural biography of garments reflects their contact and circulation in social, cultural, and religious spheres, and the interchanges that caused their resocialization and reclassification. Clothing is successively moved and re-contextualized, and at the same time, it creates new social contexts¹⁴. This means that clothing was in motion, propelled by human relations, and its specific life course was changed and created its own biography. Garments move in religious, cultural, and social spheres and clothing from a specific culture was changed under another one, while simultaneously changing some aspects of the receiving culture.
- 5 Importation of goods is one aspect of the complicated web of contacts and relations between cultures. Imports are needed to fill the need for goods that are unavailable, or to function in previously unknown purposes in the importing culture¹⁵. Knowing the garment and textile biography is important because its movement may change some of its meanings¹⁶. The transport of garments and textiles is an action that may strip them of their context and draw our attention to the way in which they should be analyzed¹⁷. The appropriate repertoire of textiles permitted for clothing in Islam did not fit the new fashions and the required status symbols, a problem that was solved by the importation and the legitimization of foreign clothing. The volume and influence of the imported goods varies, but when the process is successful, the items are domesticated and the need for them grows. The study of intercultural relations is challenging because it involves a study of the complex network of relations between the origin cultures, the accepting culture, Islam in our case, and the nature of the transference mechanism, which in this case is Muslim jurisprudence¹⁸. The spread of the Muslim empire and its extensive conquests accelerated processes of inter-cultural influences and exchanges that exposed Muslims to a new world of clothing and adornment. The lack of political barriers in this vast realm aided the movement of commodities, artisans, and craftsmen. In addition, changes in consumption, the rise of an aristocracy and a bourgeoisie, the conquest of new climate areas, and the cosmopolitan nature of

the empire, enabled the infiltration of textiles and garments that were unknown to Muslims or heretofore were unacceptable.

- 6 The goal of this article is to decipher the place and role of foreign influences and the complicated and contradictory ways in which these influences found their way into the Muslim world of clothing by processes of adoption, rejection, and adjustment. The aim is not to identify, catalog, and technically analyze fabrics and clothes, but to present some of their descriptions according to legal sources. These examples will show the integral part of textiles and garments in life by contextualizing them within social, religious and cultural reality. The discussion will reveal the role and contribution of foreign influences in the creation of Muslim clothing and decipher and analyze some of its visible and symbolic significances. Economic aspects and ways of production will not be discussed, but rather the focus will be on the role of material culture within socio-cultural history¹⁹.
- 7 In *The Fashion System*, Barthes suggests choosing between an analysis of the real system of clothing or its written descriptions. This type of analysis focuses on the way in which the system of clothing is translated from a visual sign system into words in a text. However, the connections between the reality of clothing and its written descriptions are complicated and mutually dependent. By following Barthes, the present study deals with the written descriptions of textiles and clothing as they appear in medieval Muslim legal sources²⁰. This means that Medieval Muslim jurists who monopolized the discussion of personal appearance, played an active role in the creation of Muslim fashion by mechanism of acceptance and rejection with adjustments to norms and wishes.

2. The Sources

- 8 The main sources for this research are *hadith* collections and medieval legal compendiums that were composed in different places in the Muslim East throughout the medieval era. A basic methodological question regarding these sources is whether they represent theoretical and hypothetical discussions or reality²¹. My preliminary assumption is that these sources represent theory and practice together in a mix that thwarts the attempt to separate them. This weave is a creation of moral boundaries through socialization, with a defined sphere for interpretations and variations of time and place²². Moreover, I argue that the information that comes from the sources reflects a mixture of wishes, norms, and reality that enable us to portray the medieval Muslim world in numerous aspects. In other words, medieval Muslim jurisprudence is a central source for understanding the Muslim world of clothing by analyzing the complicated contradictory discussions that reveal, tastes, fashions, customs, foreign influences, and variations of time and place. The fact that these subjects are discussed in detail hints at the centrality of jurisprudence in Muslims' life and to their crucially active role in determining many aspects of their world of clothing and fashion.
- 9 Jurisprudence is a religious and moral system consisting of theoretical, substantive, and practical aspects. Islam, a law-based religion, has developed a complicated living system of jurisprudence that discusses all aspects of the believers' life ranging from cult and religious duties to clothing, adornment, and fashion. The sources of this research are medieval Muslim jurisprudence composed by jurists from varying schools of law. This legal literature sought to fit the often abstract law to the community's

needs, aspirations, changes, and developments. It served as a mechanism for creating norms, but at the same time, these norms reflect the tension between contradictory tendencies. The fact that Muslim life depends on jurisprudence, gives the legal discussion a monopolistic control over rulings regarding personal appearance.

3. Circulation of fashions

- 10 Although the research focuses on cultural and social history, a comment concerning the economic background should be added. Many of the juridical sources of this research are anchored in an economic reality that was best defined by Shatzmiller as a period of growth, namely, between 750 ca. and 1100 ca.²³. She adds that an increased supply of money along with structural change in indicators such as trade mark this economic growth. These are an indication of consumption habits and a standard of living that should be supplied from elsewhere because the areas surrounding the Arabian Peninsula lacked an agricultural hinterland²⁴. This period of economic prosperity of the Muslim empire under the rule of the Umayyad and the Abbasids opened new options and markets for adoption, rejection, and circulation of textiles and garments. Economic prosperity and in particular the growth of an urban bourgeoisie created demands for new and luxurious textiles and garments and new preferences, some of these demands were an outcome of an economic and social circulation of fashion²⁵. Dijkman points to the growth in international trade in the first three centuries of Islam and its share in the circulation of fashion²⁶. Ashtor adds that merchants and manufacturers in the early medieval caliphate were not subjected to state control, a fact that enabled circulation of influences and fashions²⁷.
- 11 The juridical discourse reveals the origins of foreign influences on Muslim clothing from across the Mediterranean and even from as far as Persia and Yemen, as well as intercultural relations that create a built-in tension between authenticity and imitation. The jurists' mission was to filter the flow of foreign clothing by defining criteria regarding what is considered appropriate clothing, and thus permitted, and what should be rejected, and thus prohibited. The following discussion will present the questions of textiles, and the motifs for adorning clothing as a demonstration of the complexity and controversial nature of foreign influences on medieval Muslim clothing.

The fabrics of culture: Textiles and other raw materials

- 12 Traditional textiles do not exist in conditions of stability and their context of use is dynamic and subject to economic, religious and cultural forces. The cultural meanings of textiles and their functions are also subject to change and we might find examples side by side of continuity, decline and innovations²⁸. Textiles are used on a daily basis, but ceremonial textiles or a particular style might reflect socio-religious status and the ways in which they were communicated²⁹. Society depended on textiles for basic and luxurious clothing, variety and beauty; the textiles depended on the technology that depended on the social demand to foster innovations³⁰. Textiles and other raw materials for clothing provide information on climate, the status of the wearer, moral codes, boundaries between groups, technologies and roots of trade. By mapping the

geographical movement of raw materials and textiles we learn about geographic and intercultural circulation between Muslim territories and elsewhere.

- 13 The basic differentiation of raw materials for clothing is the division into the permitted and the prohibited. The permitted raw materials were sometimes used separately, but in other cases mixed for the purpose of creating new textures and traits³¹. The demand for various raw materials for clothing, simple and precious, represents socio-economic stratification in a wide geographical distribution. The study of the most discussed raw materials will be presented in gradation, first the most common and recommended materials, then some permitted materials will be presented and lastly, the prohibited materials³². Another interesting perspective that will be presented is the physical proximity of textiles to the skin, and their capacity to excite admiration of the skills of manufacture and the physical comfort created by the touch of textiles on the skin³³.

Permitted textiles

- 14 **Wool (*sūf* or *sh'ar*)** – nomads in the pre-Muslim Arab Peninsula based their living on camels and sheep for food and clothing, hence, the use of garments made of wool is a typical nomadic heritage. Different qualities of wool were manufactured in variety of colors and sold in Muslim towns as well as in the countryside³⁴. In general, al-Nawāwī (died 1227) explains that the wool and hair of any impure animal is also impure³⁵. When *sūf* or *sha'r* are mentioned as raw material for clothing, there is no gendered differentiation because it is a basic raw material, usually not delicate or tight to the body and therefore suitable for both sexes. A garment made of wool was perceived as simple and representing a low socio-economic status, and also a manifestation of modesty, for example Sufis were named so because of their simple wool cloaks³⁶.
- 15 Some *hadīth* traditions refer to the aesthetic aspects of wearing wool and even mention that while sweating, or being in the rain those who wore wool cloaks smelled like sheep and goats, an unpleasant smell. “[he] told me: my son if you have seen us while we were with the Prophet, peace be upon him, when it rained, you would have thought that we smelled like sheep and goats”³⁷. In other words, the process of making wool cloaks lacked a technique that would remove their bad smells, and when the garments got wet, the bad smell reappeared. According to another tradition, the Prophet accepted as a gift a cloak made of wool, but due to its bad smell he poured perfume over it³⁸. *Hadīth* transmitters, and in particular those who believed in the Sufi way, had a special interest in ascribing to the Prophet an affection for woolen garments. This preference reflects the Prophet’s modesty and his simple personal appearance as a role model for his followers.
- 16 **Cotton and linen (*kuṭn* and *kattān*)** – Cotton and linen are not mentioned in detail in the legal sources researched here, perhaps because they were local and known before the rise of Islam, or because they did not cause controversy, consequently, there was no need for a separate discussion of them. In general, cotton and linen textiles were widely used throughout the Muslim world and a variety of types were manufactured all over its territories³⁹. Linen fabrics were known and esteemed already in pre-Islamic times and were mostly imported from Egypt⁴⁰. Though, Egypt had a long history of cultivation of flax and manufacturing linen even before the rise of Islam, its production and prestige expanded and flourished up to the later middle ages⁴¹.

- 17 **Fur (*firāa*)** - Only 'Ibn Taymiya deals with this subject when he permits women to wear fur for fear of the cold, a reflection of the need to protect women outside of the Arab Peninsula who lived in cold weather⁴². Men are not mentioned in this report, although they also had to protect themselves from climate injuries, perhaps because it was more appropriate to ascribe fur only to women. Furs should be considered also as an indication of a standard of living that was satisfied with imports as Shatzmiller points out, a testimony to consumption habits of people of high socio-economic strata⁴³.
- 18 **Leather (*Ihāb*)** - some techniques for processing and purifying leather are mentioned, along with a tolerant attitude of the Prophet himself to the use of leather. As we have seen in the discussion of wool, there is no gendered differentiation regarding the use of leather. Permission was given to use the leather of animals that were slaughtered or died, but sometimes the process itself was not enough and an additional purification with water and other materials was necessary⁴⁴. Some contravening *hadīths*, although only a few, claim that the Prophet forbade the use of leather and bones of dead animals. According to an interesting tradition, the use of animal fat (*shuḥūm*) to oil leather was forbidden because the Jews who ignored this prohibition were killed by God⁴⁵. It seems that it was convenient to ascribe this practice to Jews as a partial explanation for the massacre of the Jewish tribe in *al-Madīna* on the eve of Islam. Most traditions forbade the use of leather of the following animals: predators such as tigers and lions, and dogs and pigs⁴⁶. It might be suggested that the prohibition against eating some animals included prohibiting the use of their leather, either because their purification was complicated, or because these animals were used in pagan cults and the Prophet wanted to avoid foreign influences. Perhaps as an echo of local pagan customs, al-Wansharisī (died 1509) mentions that it is prohibited to use human skin for clothing⁴⁷.

Prohibited textiles

- 19 **Silk** - The English word silk refers to some words in Arabic that describe different kinds of textiles that include a silk component such as *ḥarīr*, *al-qāsi*, *Istibrāq*, *sunsdus*, *dibāq* and *khazz*⁴⁸. At least until early modern times, silk was one of the most important textiles in international trade. Even though it was prohibited, the detailed discussion of various kinds of silk and its subdivision into different kinds of silk according to quality, exclusiveness, frequency, costs of buying, and transportation represents its high socio-economic status. These parameters, that are meaningful for the creation of fashion, exemplify the existence of fashion and reflect the elite's demand for precious textiles. The discussion of silk demonstrates that the then appropriate repertoire of textiles permitted for clothing in early Islam did not fit the new fashions and required status symbols, a problem that was solved by the import, adoption, and then legitimization of foreign textiles.
- 20 While silk was known since antiquity, the basic proper raw material for clothing on the eve of Islam was common wool, which also symbolized modesty and simplicity. All kinds of silk were prohibited for men's clothing, but permitted for women, and there is a difference of opinion regarding the wearing of silk by male children: "the Prophet, peace be upon him, ordered us, and prohibited us from wearing silk, satin and brocade"⁴⁹. 'Ibn Ḥanbal (died 855) reaffirms this prohibition by claiming that no one's place in heaven is assured because humans are sinful, they are not allowed to wear silk clothing in this world⁵⁰. In contrast to the public sphere, in the private sphere men and women could wear silk clothing that signified informality, intimacy, and sexuality.

- 21 The explanations for this prohibition reflect different and even contradictory perceptions of the centrality of silk as an economically and socially high valued and precious textile. According to some traditions, men are prohibited from wearing silk clothing and gold jewelry for fear of imitating those who have already reached heaven⁵¹. Men should pay heed to their earthly behavior because heavenly life is not promised to them automatically. Therefore, they are not allowed to dress themselves in this world in a way that would demonstrate their lack of fear of the day of judgment and flaunt their self-confidence in obtaining a secured place in heaven. Another tradition describes 'Umar b. al-Khaṭāb's reaction when he saw that his soldiers wore silk: "take it off! This is the clothing of the people of hell"⁵². Because silk is mentioned clearly in the Quran as a textile appropriate for and bestowed in heaven, those who wear silk in this world are sinners, and hell awaits them. Male believers had to choose between earthly adornment with silk, and then hell in the afterworld, or avoiding silk clothing in this world in return for a promise of reward in heaven. Other explanations claim that silk was prohibited based on its Persian origin, that its people are called sometimes *ahl al-shirk* – those who practice polytheism – a censorious nickname⁵³. In contrast to earthly life, men (and women) will be rewarded in heaven with precious clothing made of silk, a compensation promised for those who followed the right path⁵⁴.
- 22 'Ibn Taymiya (died 1328) reports that tailors were prohibited from sewing silk clothing for those who were forbidden to wear it, namely men, but they were allowed to trade silk textiles with non-Muslims and with women who were omitted from the prohibition⁵⁵. It appears from *ḥisba* manuals that it was the *Muḥtasib*'s duty to enforce this prohibition in the markets of the Muslim cities⁵⁶. The expression "writing on silk" which means writing on silk textile or adorning or embroidering with silk threads represents a gendered differentiation because all kinds of silk adornments on men's clothing were prohibited⁵⁷. Even so, some jurists permitted the adornment of the margins of the upper garments with silk textiles or threads, a gesture that enabled the demonstration of high socio-economic status⁵⁸. The high economic value of silk justifies the permission to sell silk textiles or silk clothing and use the money, although the textile itself was forbidden for men's clothing⁵⁹.
- 23 However, under special circumstances there are cases where silk clothing is permitted for men such as illness, allergy or lice⁶⁰. 'Ibn Ḥazm (died 1064) reports that there are people (*qawm*) who permit wearing silk during war, perhaps because silk clothing is more impressive, prestigious, shining, frightening, or symbolizes power and supremacy over potential enemies⁶¹. More interesting is the permission that was given to Muslim warriors to wear silk for battle and be buried while wearing it⁶². Those who died during war are perceived as martyrs (*shuhadā al-ma'raka*) and their bodies are exempt from purification and changing of clothing⁶³. These martyrs' reward is heaven, and they are allowed to enter it without purification, meaning while wearing their silk clothing. On the one hand, these unique privileges are aimed at motivating the warriors to fight, while on the other hand, creating a prestigious status for the dead in the view of humans and God.
- 24 The profusion of silk textiles, an outcome of the conquests, widened the gap between the prohibition against wearing silk clothing by men and the new reality that exposed Muslims to a variety of silk textiles. Although silk was prohibited for men's clothing, and many traditions announce and reaffirm this prohibition, nevertheless there is evidence for its use because the tradition reports that men used to adorn the trim of

their upper garments with silk decorations⁶⁴. The permission for women to wear silk clothing exemplifies a gendered differentiation in which only women are allowed to wear silk, based on the argument that they should be adorned for their husbands or masters. This explanation by the patriarchal jurists demonstrates how foreign influence was ascribed to women consumers as a mechanism to legitimize the use of silk in the name of women's needs for adornment.

Motifs of adorning clothing

The permitted motifs

- 25 Textiles for clothing of men and women were adorned in various techniques such as dying, painting, embroidering, printing, combining textiles, and using different threads for horizontal and vertical weaving⁶⁵. Following are some of the most popular techniques:
- 26 **Arab letters** - Arabic script became the main Islamic visual culture because it was the language of the revelation of Islam and its civilization. The importance of the written word, in particular the five first verses in *sūra* 96 together with some other verses, and the centrality of the Quran, promoted the Arabic language as the *lingua franca* of the Muslim empire. The Arabic language was esteemed for its content and form, and the characteristics of the Arabic script enabled its development as one of the main methods of Muslim artistic expression, a distinguishing characteristic of Islamic civilization⁶⁶. Inscriptions were also used in other visual media than texts and architecture, for example to adorn textiles and particularly *ṭirāz*⁶⁷.
- 27 The prohibition of human figures for decoration, alongside the need to glorify and put into practice the new religion based on the Arabic Qur'an, led to the development of Arab calligraphy which is derived from Arabic letters⁶⁸. Alongside the development of Arab calligraphy as a central motif in Islamic art, inscriptions also became essential in adorning clothing and three basic techniques were used to combine them: embroidery, dying, or a combination of these while weaving⁶⁹. The most famous embroidery art that was produced in Muslim territories until the 14th century was *ṭirāz*⁷⁰. These inscribed textiles, that were designed either for decoration or for religious and political reasons, were highly valued and manufactured in special factories. They often included the *bismilla* and other religious formulas, the name of the *khalif* or other personal names, and the date and place of manufacture⁷¹. The development of these unique embroidered textiles through the use of Arab writing instead of figures to adorn textiles is proof of a creative solution to a juridical prohibition. Alexandria had been the seat of *dar al-ṭirāz*, where ceremonial gowns with embroidered inscriptions were woven⁷². *Ṭirāz* gowns were characterized by their embroidered honorific inscription bands made of silk or gold threads, particularly around the sleeves. The royal workshops produced textiles from precious materials and as with most fashion trends, the middle classes began to adopt the new style adding embroidered words and phrases to their garments and textiles to emulate the royal personal appearance. Many of the inscriptions were talismanic, containing blessings to protect the wearer and attract good fortune. The juristic sources which are the groundwork data for this research only occasionally mention the term *ṭirāz* perhaps because it reflects over arrogance that should be avoided. 'Ibn Khaldun (died 1406) adds that *mulūk al-'ajam* (the foreigners' kings, usually a term that refers to the Persians) already used to embroider typical

patterns or even their names on textiles before the rise of Islam⁷³. This description sheds light on the Muslim need to differentiate themselves by creating their own typical clothing and limit foreign influences.

- 28 **Vegetal and geometrical motifs** - Another creative solution for the problem posed by the prohibition against using human figures for decoration is the use of geometrical patterns and vegetal motifs such as plants and trees, known decorative methods that were adopted from Persian, Byzantine, and Coptic garments. The basic juridical justification was that the permitted decorations must be inanimate “without the spirit of life” (*ma la nafs laho*), like trees for example⁷⁴.
- 29 The basic assumption of the Islamic geometric design is “unity in diversity” that is achieved by endless repetition of motifs and geometries with strong centers and symmetries, which add up to a unifying impression⁷⁵. Some researchers claim that the use of circle with its center expresses the unity of Islam, the belief in one God and the centrality of Mecca as the place of worship⁷⁶. The variations of the geometric patterns are manifested in different sizes, shapes, overlaps, and colors, all create a visual impression of extreme intricacy and complexity. The process of repetition creates the development of increasingly complicated geometric patterns in which one shape melds into another⁷⁷. From the combination and repetition of squares, triangles and stars emerge complex forms, which exhibit symmetry, scalability, and movement that support exploration into philosophical aspects of Islamic faith⁷⁸. The pattern itself relies upon the interaction of technology such as weaving or embroidery and medium such as wool and silk, an interaction between craft and technology that is based on symmetry as the organizing principle that signifies aesthetic ideas⁷⁹.
- 30 **Colors** - Another way to adorn raw materials was by the use of colors, this subject has already been discussed in detail, hence, only some summary remarks will be presented⁸⁰. The jurists identified the potential of colors as an instrument to adorn textiles and at the same time establish, preserve and reinforce socio-religious and political differentiation, and gendered differentiation. Medieval jurisprudence lays out a hierarchal scale of groups of colors appropriate and inappropriate for clothing based on their symbolic interpretations and the perceptions about adornment and aesthetics. This scale reflects reality on the one hand, and the jurists' aspiration to create moral and exclusive norms of clothing for Muslims on the other hand. The most preferred color during life and death is white, sometimes popularly used with green, then only green, and to a lesser degree, then black. The second group consists of red in varied hues, and yellow, which is more problematic. At the bottom rank we find blue, which is perceived as a negative color, even though it appears in Muslim architecture.

The Prohibited motifs

- 31 **Human figures** - “The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: those who create figures will be punished in the day of resurrection and they will be told to give life to what they have created”⁸¹. The origin of the prohibition against adorning textiles with human figures is Judaism, it is also mentioned, although indirectly, in the Quran, but its full development is expressed in *hadith* literature. The Quran mentions idols and images only a few times in comparison to other prohibitions, a fact that is interesting for a new holy scripture of a monotheistic belief that should oppose pagan practices of idol worship⁸². According to *hadith* traditions, it is forbidden to copy human figures to statues and vessels, and this prohibition was extended by the Prophet Muhammad to

garments, pillows, carpets and curtains. The main explanation for this prohibition is that creating human figures on fabrics is an attempt to imitate God's creating existence out of nothing. Because it is obvious that humans cannot resemble God, they must be punished even for this thought or aspiration⁸³. On the day of resurrection, the artisans that created human figures will be punished in the name of God by the same figures that they have created. Before the final punishment, God will challenge the creators by ordering them to give the figures life, an impossible mission that will expose their inability and powerlessness. Some other traditions add that the angels do not enter houses where these figures are found. Indirectly we learn that the fear of influence and imitation of figures and images stemmed from the fear of imitating the figures and images prevalent in Christianity or pagan cults.

- 32 *Hadīth* and jurisprudence reveal contradicting opinions about images, a reflection of political, social, and religious concerns and interpretations, a fact that enlighten the problems and possibilities related to the depiction of figural images. Recent research argues that practices of figural representation in Islamic traditions were and still are guided by cultural and political pragmatism rather than religious or legal principle, therefore, they should be analyzed in their historical context⁸⁴. According to Lecker, the destruction of idols at the eve of Islam was not from fear of their coming alive, but an act of separation from pagan worship and tribalism and a move toward a new non-tribal community of believers in one exclusive God⁸⁵. Gruber adds, "the act of idol-breaking was an ultimate manifestation of breaking with the past and taking an oath of loyalty to Islam"⁸⁶. Over the centuries and as Islam became established and was effected by changing circumstances, Muslim theologians, jurists, and artists did not regard figural representation as idolatry. Their main argument was that "depicting sentient beings has never been prohibited in Islamic history" and figural representations are not an equivalent to idolatry⁸⁷. Images for religious devotion remained prohibited, but figural images ostensibly possessing souls did not prove problematic for adornment. As the fear of pagan practices diminished, the use of images was increased, but at the same time, some medieval scholars such as al Zamakhshari (died 1144) continued to support the anti-image stance.
- 33 **Cross** - Islam, the latest of the three monotheistic religions, had to differentiate itself from Judaism and Christianity. Although similarities exist between Judaism and Islam, Judaism was a religion with little power, while the actual religious and political threat was Christianity. Garments and textiles of Coptic and byzantine origin were decorated with crosses and since the cross had become the dominant symbol of Christianity the Prophet himself is described as removing images of the cross from garments and textiles⁸⁸. "The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not place in his home a garment with a cross, but destroyed it"⁸⁹. Because the Prophet was perceived as a role model, all Muslims were obliged to follow his actions (*sunna*) and remove all Christian images, and in particular crosses, from clothing.

Foreign origin garments and jewelry

- 34 The spread of the Muslim empire and its conquests accelerated processes of urbanization and the development of an urban bourgeoisie. The demands of this bourgeoisie buttressed by their economic status accelerated urban trade in textiles and luxurious clothing. The demand for raw materials on one hand and the cosmopolitan

nature of the empire enabled the flow of materials that were unknown to Muslims or unacceptable. By following the movement of garments, we may trace their foreign, religious and geographical origins and reveal their influence on the creation of a mixed Muslim fashion. Socialization agents of various garments were usually men who controlled the public sphere and monopolized intercultural relations by either trade or conquests, or both. Contrarily, women's choices of clothing were more limited. They usually were forced to be satisfied with the socio-cultural circles of their home and family, and the men supplied them with textiles and garments. Following is an analysis of some of the most noticeable categories of foreign garments adoption:

Adjustment to different climate conditions

- 35 The conquest of new geographical areas whose climates were different from that of the Arab Peninsula required the adoption of new garments that would suit their seasons and their weather conditions. According to 'Ibn Taymiya, the first believers were satisfied with *izār* (loincloth) and *ardiyā* (upper garment), and only few of them wore *sirwāl* (an inner garment for the lower part of the body, a kind of trousers). Conversely, the inhabitants of the cold lands could not be satisfied with the mentioned garments and they needed to add *qamīs*, *khifāf* and *sirwāl* to protect their bodies⁹⁰. 'Ibn Taymiya adds that women were not ordered to wear gloves, but between the lines we understand that those who lived in cold climates needed a garment to protect their hands. In light of the climate, conditions jurists permitted women to wear gloves, although in reality women spent most of their lives indoors⁹¹.

Foreign names

- 36 The sources preserve many references to foreign names of garments and jewelry that were assimilated into Arabic, following are some examples:
- 37 ***sirwāl*** - an inner garment of Persian origin for the lower part of the body, a kind of trousers⁹².
- 38 ***Tājj*** - a Persian crown set with gems and gold. According to al-Nawawi a woman that is used to wearing *tājj* is permitted to continue this custom, but a woman that is not used to it, has no reason to adopt it because it is of Persian origin and because it produces a resemblance to men.
- 39 ***Khil'a*** - *robe of honor* - an upper, luxurious garment, rarely mentioned in juridical discussions probably because of its Egyptian and Persian origin⁹³. Other possible reasons for it being rarely mentioned are that it was made of gold and silk which were defined as prohibited for men, or simply because it was perceived as arrogant ostentation⁹⁴. The *khil'a* was given in a public ceremony to people to whom the *khalifa* wanted to show appreciation⁹⁵. The publicness of the ceremony shows that all the participants, whether courtiers or ordinary people shared in its importance and understood its meanings⁹⁶. Clothing people with precious garments in a public ceremony is already known from the ancient east, it is first mentioned in Islam in the 8th century, and from then on, it became a distinctive custom in the Abbasid court⁹⁷.
- 40 ***Sahl and khums*** - upper precious garments from Yemen, the first was named after a region in Yemen and the second after a local king⁹⁸.

- 41 **Ṭirāz** – A Persian term originally meaning embroidery or decorative work on garments or fabrics that made them luxurious. This has already been discussed in detail⁹⁹.
- 42 **Taylasān**– a Persian origin garment that was worn under the 'amāma and was typical for the Jews of Khaybar¹⁰⁰. al-'Abdarī mentions that it was an imitation of a Jewish custom from the Prophet's time¹⁰¹. As time passed, The *taylasān* became a status symbol for high ranking clerks and al-Suyūṭī (died 1505) devoted an essay to it¹⁰².

Preservation of the origin in the garment's name

- 43 Some traditions mention the garment's origin, religion or geography, by adding its name as an adjective to the garment's name or even preserving its original name.

Geographical origin

- 44 *Khaḍrmawt* - *riddā' khaḍarmī*, is an upper garment from *khaḍarmawt*, an area in Yemen¹⁰³. *al-Shām* - *thawb shāmī*, is a garment from *al-Shām* and *Jubba shāmiyya*, an upper garment from *al-Shām* with tied sleeves¹⁰⁴.
- 45 *Najrān* - *burd Najrānī* is an upper garment whose origin is *Najrān*¹⁰⁵, an important urban center in pre-Muslim Arabia that was settled mainly by Christians who earned their living from agriculture, industry, and trade¹⁰⁶. According to 'Ibn Sa'ad, the Prophet signed a contract with the people of *Najrān* that a part of their taxes would be paid in clothing, evidence of the high economic value of their locally produced clothing¹⁰⁷.

Religious origin

- 46 *Qubṭiyya* – is a garment made of light and delicate cotton. It originated in Egypt, and it was probably worn by Copts¹⁰⁸. Because *qubṭiyya* was an expensive garment, the Prophet is described as tearing it into a head cover and a tunic in order to use the delicate textile, yet in a different way than the original garment was designed¹⁰⁹.
- 47 *Juba Rūmiyya* – a byzantine upper garment that according to some traditions the Prophet wore while praying¹¹⁰. The priority in daily life and while praying was to cover the body, especially the pubis, with garments, even those of heretics or sinners¹¹¹.
- 48 *Juba ṭayālisa kasrawāniyya* - an upper garment of Persian origin that was worn by 'Aysha, the beloved wife of the Prophet, and then by the Prophet himself¹¹².
- 49 'Ama'im *ahl al-thimma* – head cover typical of the protégée did not have an additional part under the chin and had no tassels (*thu'āba*), all of which are considered as non-Muslim¹¹³. According to 'Ibn Taymiyya's descriptions, Muslim men who followed the Prophet's *sunna* and *Ḥijāzi* customs used to wear *qalanswa* under the 'amama and tie it under the chin otherwise it was considered an objectionable innovation (*bid'a*)¹¹⁴. al-'Abdarī adds that non-Muslim manners of wearing the 'amama are typical for the people of Lot or the people of Sodom and Amora¹¹⁵. A different direction of influence is presented by 'Ibn Taymiyya who reports that the *salaf* (Muslim ancestors) wore 'amama that was fastened under the chin because they rode horses and made *jihād* war. He adds that *ahl al-Shām* imitated and adopted this custom because they were the warriors of their time¹¹⁶. This is an example of circulation of fashion from Muslim origin lands to newly conquered territories outside of the Arab peninsula.

Preferred and condemned foreign fashions

Preferred foreign fashions

- 50 Yemen - Many traditions report that the favorite fashion in the Prophet's eyes came from Yemen and in particular upper garments such as *mirṭ muraḥḥal*, an upper garment with embroidered scenes from the nomads' life in Yemen¹¹⁷. al-Nasā'ī adds that the Prophet preferred Yemeni customs in appearance, footwear, and personal grooming¹¹⁸. According to 'Ibn Sa'd, 'Aysha testified that the Prophet was buried with Yemeni garments¹¹⁹.
- 51 *al-Ḥabasha* - Some traditions mention that the Prophet's ring was adorned with *ḥabashic* (Ethiopian) adornments. According to another tradition, 'Umar b. al-'As brought the Prophet a signet ring when he came back from Ethiopia, proof of foreign influences and fashions that were imported to the Arab Peninsula¹²⁰.

Condemned foreign origin fashions

- 52 The complicated legal question of what should be condemned was best encapsulated by the concept of *tashabbuh* (imitation), a *sunni* doctrine that discusses the reprehensible imitation of others, especially non-Muslims in various aspects of life¹²¹.
- 53 *al-A'jām* - a term that usually refers to Persians¹²². It was a condemned foreign adornment on the margins of men's clothing or silk decorations on the shoulders¹²³.
- 54 *Ahl al-'Irāq* - the people of Iraq used to adorn their clothing with patterns, a fashion condemned by the Muslim jurists, although it is not clear if the patterns were human figures that were prohibited in Islam¹²⁴.
- 55 *al-samā* or *'ishtimāl al-Yahūd* - Jews who were local inhabitants in Muslim territories, resembled Muslims in daily life, a fact that accelerated the need to enforce differentiation and subordination in various aspects of life including clothing for prayer. A clear juristic instruction prohibits assimilation of Jewish clothing while praying, so Muslims were ordered to wrap their clothes about themselves differently¹²⁵. It is not exactly clear what was the Jewish custom, perhaps it is a description of the Jewish shawl (*tallit*) already familiar from the second century CE¹²⁶.

4. Conclusions

- 56 - **Geography of clothing** - clothing in the medieval Islamic world played a role in interacting with other regions and creating cross-cultural circulation and trans medial and trans material dynamics. Mapping the geographical movement of clothing enables us to trace the origins, define the main routes, and portray the characteristics of Muslim clothing.
- 57 - **Intercultural relationships** - Muslim conquerors, who developed intercultural connections with their enemies, accelerated processes of inter-cultural influences and exchanges that created a new Muslim fashion. The demand for varied clothing, the rise of a bourgeoisie, the cosmopolitan nature of the empire, and the intercultural connections, enabled the infiltration of new garments. Some foreign names were assimilated into Arabic while others preserved their geographical or religious origin by

adding adjectives to garments as a reminder of their paths of influence on Muslim clothing.

- 58 - **A mixed Muslim fashion: an outcome of circulation** - the arrival of Muslims to new climate zones required the adoption of new wardrobes that would fit weather conditions. At the same time, the needs and wishes of Muslim communities changed, partly, because they were astonished and confused by the new rich world of clothing that inundated them. The intersection with other cultures and religions caused curiosity, confusion, and clashes that exemplified the built-in tension between authenticity and imitation, acceptance and rejection. The outcome of these contradictory tendencies is a mixture of clothing that is composed of nomadic and urban clothing from the pre-Muslim Arab peninsula with Persian, Byzantine, Christian and Jewish influences. Although it is possible to trace some of the influences, the result is a differentiated Muslim fashion with its own characteristics and variations according to regional norms, legal demands and weather conditions. The appearance of the self in fashionable style was built upon the continuity of local manners, adoption of new foreign influences, and the decline of some of the old manners.
- 59 - **The jurists' role as fashion creators** - Medieval Muslim jurists who monopolized the management of personal appearance were active in the creation of the standards for proper Muslim clothing. Their juridical discourse was a choreography of ambivalence composed of juridical norms, human wishes, imitation, rejection, and selective adoption, pragmatism, creativity and multiple tastes. The jurists developed and monitored the mechanism of acceptance and rejection by suggesting a classification for rejected and accepted and then legitimizing textiles and garments according to climate, fashions, norms and wishes. All of which are echoed in the continuous juridical decisions that reflect adjustment to time and place and created a mixed fashion. The outcome was Muslim clothing within the borders of jurisprudence, including an area of shifting boundaries with tolerance and creativity that enabled self-expression.
- 60 - **Deciphering and constructing boundaries and identities** - imposing visibility difference was an important tool for marginalizing groups that were perceived as subordinated, foreign, or inferior. Differentiated visibility allowed a delicate and fragile balance between the visual particularities and assimilation with the rest of society. The tension between visibility through othering or self-labelling, and invisibility through cultural assimilation was a constant in the complex medieval Islam.
- 61 - **Religion** - Muslim clothing had to be differentiated from Christian, Jewish, pagan, mostly Persian, and Byzantine, fashions. At the same time, Jews and Christians were subjected to sumptuary laws of clothing and to the same regulations and fashions as Muslims¹²⁷. Therefore, their appearance was a mixture of their own clothing and those characteristics common to Muslim societies¹²⁸.
- 62 - **Socio-economic status** - The large variety of garments widened the gap between the simplest and most precious ones and enabled a wide socio-economic stratification. Luxury clothing made of precious raw materials such as various silks became a symbol of high socio-economic status and represented an elitist lifestyle and delicate tastes. Those who could afford it became a model for imitation on one hand, yet on the other hand they were censured for their over arrogance.
- 63 - **Gender** - Fashion in Muslim societies was usually under men's control, whether jurists, traders, merchants, husbands or masters, regardless who was wearing the clothes. Even when women were involved, their right to make choices was limited and

they could exercise it only in the private sphere before other women and a defined group of men relatives.

- 64 - **Culture** - Some clothing has a cultural biography whose specific life course altered under the rule of Islam, while other clothing led to changed tastes and ideology in the new stronger society. Deciphering the Muslim boundaries of clothing was part of building an identified communal culture that is ensconced in Muslim jurisprudence. These definitions created cultural boundaries between Muslims and others and established the principles of proper Muslim clothing as part of developing a separated cultural identity within the borders of Islam.

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109. 'Abū Dā'ud, *Sunan 'Abū Dā'ud*..., Vol. 1, p. 79.
110. 'Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*..., Vol. 3–4, p. 74.
111. The basic decree to cover the pubis is *al-Nūr* 24: 30–31 and *al-'A'rāf* 7 31–32 adds the need to be clothed for prayer.
112. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*..., Vol. 7, pp. 43, 47.
113. 'Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*..., Vol. 3, p. 309.
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118. Al-Nasā'ī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*..., Vol. 8, p. 185.
119. 'Ibn Sa 'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabakāt*..., Vol. 1–2, p. 149; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*..., Vol. 7, p. 57.
120. 'Ibn Sa 'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabakāt*..., Vol. 1–2, p. 164.
121. The concept of *tashabbu* has played an important role in shaping the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in a variety of aspects from rituals to personal appearance. For a more detailed research see Y. Patel, "The Islamic Treaties...", in particular footnotes 1, 2.
122. W. E. Lane, *Lane Arabic English Lexicon*..., Vol. 5, p. 1967.
123. Al-Nasā'ī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*..., Vol. 8, p. 173.
124. Al-Nasā'ī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*..., Vol. 8, p. 215.
125. 'A. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan*..., Vol. 1–2, p. 259. Stillman explains that *al-samā* describes men without underwear that were forbidden to sit or squat in public. Hence, they had to drape themselves in a fashion called *al-samā* which means that one end of the upper garment is pulled up on the shoulder while the other side of the body is exposed "in the style of Greek chiton". For more see Y. K. Stillman, *Arab Dress*..., p. 11.
126. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik (eds.), "Tallit".

127. A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs...*, pp. 116, 119; idem, “Zunnār”; M. Perlmann, “Ghiyar”; Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Mi'yār...*, Vol. 2, p. 256; Al-Shayzārī, *al-Muḥadḍhab...*, Vol. 5, pp. 327–328, Vol. 3, pp. 326–329.
128. Y. K. Stillman, *Arab Dress...*, p. 52.

ABSTRACTS

The article delves into the place and role of foreign influences on Muslim clothing, and the complicated and contradictory ways in which these influences found their way into the Muslim world through processes of adoption, rejection and adjustment. Clothing played a role in interacting with other regions and creating cross-cultural circulation and trans-medial and trans-material dynamics. Mapping the geographical movement of clothing enables us to trace the origins, define the main routes, and present the characteristics of Muslim mixed fashion of clothing as an outcome of circulation. Inferentially we learn that the jurists were active in the creation of proper Muslim clothing, or Muslim fashion. In other words, the consequence of the meeting between foreign cultures and Islam was Muslim clothing within the borders of jurisprudence, including an area of shifting boundaries with tolerance and creativity that enabled self-expression.

Este artigo debruça-se sobre o papel das influências estrangeiras na indumentária muçulmana, e as formas complexas e contraditórias em que aquelas encontraram o seu caminho para o mundo muçulmano, através de processos de adoção, rejeição e adaptação. O vestuário desempenhou um papel fulcral na interação com outras regiões e na criação de uma circulação transcultural e de uma dinâmica “trans-medial” e trans-material. Mapear o movimento geográfico da indumentária permite-nos traçar as origens, definir as principais rotas, e apresentar as características da moda mista do vestuário muçulmano como resultado da circulação. Por outro lado, por inferência apreendemos que os juristas foram ativos na criação de vestuário muçulmano próprio, ou de uma moda muçulmana. A consequência do encontro entre as culturas estrangeiras e o Islão foi a criação duma área dentro das fronteiras da jurisprudência para a indumentária muçulmana, incluindo um âmbito de mudança de fronteiras implicando tolerância e criatividade, o que permitiu a auto-expressão.

INDEX

Keywords: medieval jurisprudence, clothing, foreign influences, intercultural relations, fashion, circulation

Palavras-chave: jurisprudência medieval, vestuário, influências estrangeiras, relações interculturais, moda, circulação

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