

16th Century Safavid Persian Headwear:

Part I; Styles for Women

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Searching for a suitable hat or head covering to top off their pre-1600's Islamic clothing, one naturally, sometimes immediately, looks to the turban as the most likely option. While in some circumstances, *for men*, the turban is a wonderful and fair possibility, there are much more appropriate and historically correct head coverings for women that are quite attractive, and are relatively simple to make. In this article, we will very briefly discuss a few of these millenary possibilities.



As with any historical clothing, it is important to be quite specific as to time period and geographical region, for this greatly effects its attributes. The pre-1600's Islamic lands are no exception. Here, we will focus on 16th century Safavid Dynasty Persia. During this time period, there were literally hundreds of headwear styles, in a beautiful array of shapes, patterns, colors, etc. This can be seen in the beautiful miniatures that are painted in the time period, extent fabric fragments, and the very few extent hats that have survived. Although it would be nearly impossible to cover them all in depth here, I will attempt to give a bit of a two-part gender specific overview so that those who are interested will have somewhere to start.

As with much of Persian clothing reproduction, a certain amount of conjecture is necessary, because there simply isn't a huge selection extent pieces that have survived. Through using what we *do* have left, reading period written accounts, and examining miniatures and other works of art, we can start some steps toward meaningful recreation.

The Veil

When we think of Islamic women's headwear, what often comes to mind first is the veil. Veiling customs have been a part of the Persian region for thousands of years, long before the advent of Islam. The first known document that mentions veiling is an ancient Assyrian text from 13th century B.C. Laws regarding veiling vary throughout period and region within Persia, and also varied depending on the lady's social class. It appears that the higher a woman's rank was, the more likely she was to veil, and cover more of her body. As a large, enveloping veil hinders one from a lot of movement



without becoming disheveled, it would be reasonable to assume that the higher ranking ladies with servants to do the work for them would veil in this manner. Women that were not quite as high of a rank sometimes wore veils that were not quite as long, and did not hinder the body as much. Slave women were forbidden to wear veils at all. With the coming of Islam, veiling in pre-1600's Persia evolved into a combination of ancient Persian attitudes (veiling being a privilege denoting rank) and Islamic religion (veiling being a way of separating the sexes from one another to control morality.) This was different than the rest of the pre-1600's Islamic lands, and is a different attitude than is visible today in Iran, where veiling laws are much more stringent than

they were in period.

The large, rectangular veil that is pictured in miniatures, wrapped around the woman's body, fully or partially covering it, is called a **chador**, pronounced /chah'-dur/. Later on, after period, this veil actually became a sewn loose poncho-type garment, and evolved into the all-encompassing black garment worn in Iran to this day. However, in the pre-1600's, the chador was just a piece of fabric, about 5 or 6 yards long. When draped over the head and pinned at the chin, wrapped around the shoulders and body again, the entire body can be covered.

The Pinning Structure



It appears, from examining the miniatures, when wearing the often multi-pieced, complex headpieces, Persian women began by wearing a type of pinning structure under it all. This can be seen, very faintly, at the side of the head in some of the paintings, especially those at the end of the 15th century, and the very beginning of the 16th. By the mid-16th century, the pinning structure, when used, was very small and in some cases not visible at all. When it appears in paintings, it seems to be black, to match the dark Persian hair, and was probably made of felted wool, pressed into a curved oval shape to fit the head, like a hat form. There are a few rare examples in paintings where it even appears to have been embroidered. This appears to be tied under the chin with a cord, or under the nape of the neck. Sometimes it looks to be decorated with pearls along the edge. After experimenting with theoretical structures of this type, we have found that it makes placement of veils and other head adornments much easier, and they tend to stay on the head better. As with the recreation of most Persian headwear, of course, is conjecture, as there are no extent pinning structures that have survived.

Common Headpieces



A very basic headpiece that was worn by varying classes of Persian women was called a **cargad**, pronounced /chahr-kahd'/, is a simple square, white scarf that is folded in half to form a triangle. It is placed over the head and tied under the chin like a Russian babushka. Sometimes the tied ends of the scarf are twisted under several times to make the scarf thinner under the face. This is pictured many times in the miniatures. (**fig. 3**) Just

wearing this alone is a perfectly suitable Persian headpiece for a lady. This can be worn in conjunction with the aforementioned chadur, or with a few of the other head pieces that will also be discussed.

Another hair adornment that is seen quite often in the miniatures is the braid case. This is a fabric tube that widens on the end, forming what looks like a long spoon. The “handle” part of the spoon is the actual tube, in which the hair is gathered, and put into.

The “spoon” part goes on the head, ending right at the forehead, just above the eyebrows. The braid case is held on with a small fabric



fillet or the carqad. Often you will see a lady with a half-circle shaped object at her forehead. This is the end of the “spoon” peeking out from the fillet or carqad. People have often asked if this is metal at the forehead, but it is not, because metal objects in miniatures are these parts of the head pieces are

treated with gold powder, and usually painted with colored pigments, decorated with designs that appear to indicate embroidery. Occasionally they painted with some gold accents or dots, which could show some type of gold braid, trimming, etc. It logical to assume that this moon shaped bit is part of the braid case, because it is usually the same color as the rest of it that hangs down the lady’s back, and it tucked into her sash-belt. It usually has a nice little tassel, a few little beads or baubles attached to the end for decoration. Sometimes, the braid case appears to be faked. It looks to be a small, round cap, (such as a Juliet cap) with a stuffed tube attached to the end. The cap is sometimes decorated with some gold embroidery or trimming. Small square-shaped scarves, folded in half to make a triangle, are pinned (or stitched) to the top of the cap, looking very much like little napkins. This style of hat is worn a lot by the servant class, but there are many variations on this style, and they are worn by the upper classes as well. Pictured at the end of this article are sketches of theories on how two different braid case styles could be made.

Headpieces for Modesty

There is a headpiece worn very often by ladies in the miniatures, but it is painted in a very faint and delicate manner, and it can be difficult to see. This covering is called a **carghat**, pronounced /chahr-gaht’/, and it is a hood-type garment made out of a white, very light silk chiffon or gauze. It covers the head, neck, shoulders, and in some cases, it even comes to the top of the bust line. It is probably a garment designed for the Islamic practice modest dress for women, or hijab.



The opening for the face is just large enough to fit the face and chin through. Pearls are often stitched along the opening. Sometimes the fabric appears to be a type of pulled work, and show a pattern of horizontal stripes across the hood.

Attached to the pinning structure, a square veil was sometimes worn, called a **burqu**, pronounced /ber-koo’/. A face veil mentioned in period writings, it was probably worn down at times, also for modesty. It either had two eye-holes cut out, or may have been draped just low enough for the eyes to peek through. According to Jennifer Scarce, who has written much on clothing in the Islamic lands, discussed the

development of these veils in depth in her fine book. This burqu, not usually seen worn down in the paintings, is twisted and thrown back over the head to get it out of the way. This forms a triangular point at the front above the forehead. Often this interpreted by artists as a pointed fillet of sorts, and may have developed into one later on. Along with this, a series of other colored scarves are also sometimes seen thrown back over the head, tied in knots, pinned with feathers sticking out, etc.

There are many paintings depicting women with veils draped over the head, around the face, tied over the nose and mouth “bandit” style, several knotted on top of the head, etc. Sometimes the veils are several colors, or are embroidered, patterned, painted, etc. Styles of scarves and veils, and reasons for wearing them greatly varied. It depended on many factors, including social class, geographic region, and setting. It is also important to point out that complex, veiled headdresses were not always worn. Headpieces could be as simple as a fabric fillet tied around the head with a spray of feathers or even a flower pinned to the front. Sometimes this was augmented with the well-used square scarf folded into a triangle, and placed at the forehead, with the fillet holding it in place. There are literally thousands of possibilities for Persian women’s headpieces; but by having a familiarity with a few of the main “parts,” it is possible to adequately reproduce the look of the miniatures.

Tiaras and Crown-Hats



Finally, there are tiaras and crown-hats that are good Persian renditions of circlets and coronets for the SCA. Tiaras were usually worn in combination with a braid-case, veil, pinning structure, hood, or any combination thereof. Sometimes they were just worn alone. A tiara was a diadem of sorts, and it is described as being embroidered, although it could be made of metal. Writings describe them being tied around the head with a fillet or cord. They are also described as being jeweled or covered with metal thread embroidery depending on the lady’s rank. Tiaras can be shaped to have a single point in the front for a good circlet equivalent, or it can have multiple points with pearls for a coronet version. Veils should be worn over the top, as pictured in many miniatures, to hide the tied cord in the back.



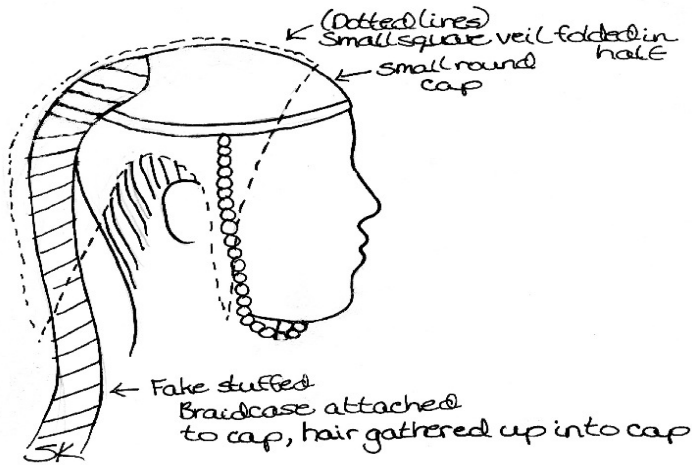
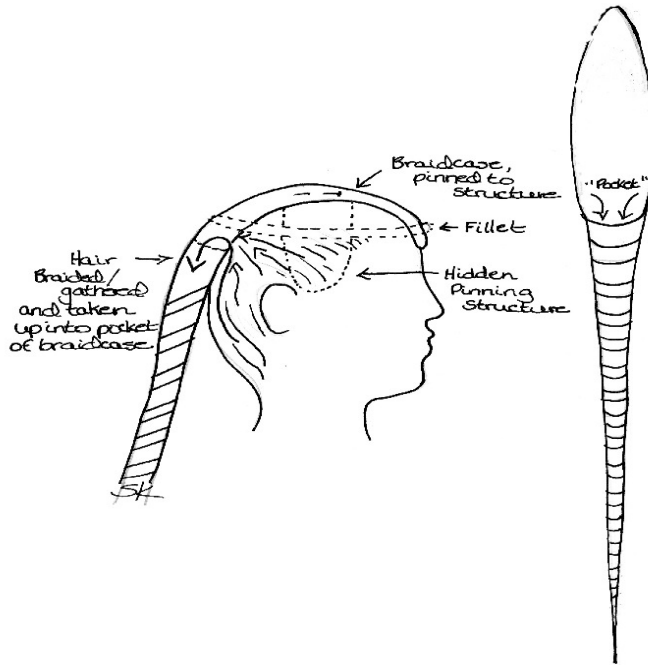
For an SCA appropriate coronet, the **taj-kulah**, /tahzh-koo’-lah/ or “crown-hat” is perhaps the best Persian option that resembles the European coronet. This is an obviously Mongol-inspired hat, worn by Persian nobility, made of an attached crown brim, and a quilted fabric or leather hat with a finial on top. Since the Mongols greatly influenced the fashions of 14th century Persia and beyond due to their invasion of the region, it is easily understood why this hat became fashionable. Although there are no extant Persian examples left, there are enough Mongolian hats from varying time periods that we can study the construction and make an educated conjecture to the methods of creating their Persian counterparts. Women are pictured in two different types of taj-kulah, one being the same as the type worn by the males, and the other appears to have a tiara-like front crown with extending vine-like “arms” on either side of it, which is only worn by females. It is unclear whether the crown was made of metal;

stiffened fabric covered with metal thread embroidery, or tooled leather with metal overlays, etc. All of these methods are possibilities.

Summary

As one continues their study of 16th century miniatures, it can be determined rather quickly Persian women wore a myriad of headpieces, arranged in many different styles. We have found, through trial and error, that the best method of reproducing these images is to continue experimenting and “playing” with the simple components that made up these often times complex combinations of millenary options. Although much of Persian women’s headpiece recreation must be based on a certain amount of conjecture, it is possible to reenact a fairly period looking headpiece. This will accent the rest of one’s 16th century Persian garb, giving it an attractive, “finished” look that is well worth the effort.

Two theoretical methods of braid case placement:



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All line drawings by Master Safi al-Khansaa' (Heather Stiles,) based on 16th Century Persian miniatures.