

# *Textiles in 16<sup>th</sup> C. Ottoman Turkey*

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In Turkish culture, wealth was displayed in the quality of the textiles worn—not necessarily in the style of the garment. Turks would buy the most expensive cloth possible (Scarce, 2003). Most garments preserved in the Topkapi Saray Museum in Turkey are comprised of solid colors and are very simply cut (Atil, 1980). People in the sixteenth century were very fabric-savvy and could easily distinguish well-made textiles from their inferior counterparts.

There are many extant imperial garments from this period, housed primarily in the Topkapi Museum (over 1,000 *kaftans* alone), thanks to the custom of saving imperial garments in the treasury after the death of the sultan. Many different types of fabric were available to the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth century. Silk, linen and cotton are frequently found in extant pieces from the Topkapi. Wool is rarer, but was worn in the Ottoman court.

## **Fibers:**

### ***Ipek (silk):***

By the sixteenth century, Turkey's silk industry was well established and produced high quality silk brocades, velvets and satins (Atil, 1980). The court had their own specialty weavers to customize fabric colors and widths. While a good many of the extant textiles are Turkish in origin, Venetian brocades and velvet were highly prized at the Ottoman court. Venetian weavers even wove Ottoman motifs just for export to the Turkish market. (Raby, 2001)

### **Types of Silk:**

There were several different types of silk fabric that were used during this time period. A vast majority of the extant garments are of this type of plain fabric.

- ***Atlas*** is a silk satin. Sometimes, *atlas* could be stamped with hot irons or have an additional twill pattern. Some extant children's *kaftans* are striped satin. *Atlas* was commonly used as facing on *kaftans*.
- ***Tafta*** is a silk taffeta with a ribbed surface. Sometimes used as facing for garments.
- ***Serenk*** was patterned with multiple colors—which usually included yellow. *Serenk* is woven in *lampas* weave and did not use metallic threads.
- ***Kehma*** is a “brocaded silk fabric with metallic thread” (Atil, 1980, p. 344). Often these had intricate patterns highlighted in silver or gold. These textiles were often made using a *lampas* weave.
- ***Kadife*** is a basic velvet.

- *Çatma* was also a type of velvet. *Çatma* combined satin weave with a pile weave to create a voided effect and usually included gold or silver.
- *Seraser* was the most opulent textile, and made entirely of metallic thread. Usually there were no more than three colors used. The *seraser* textiles were woven in a structure known by the French name *taqueté*.

### **Bez (linen and cotton):**

Cotton and linen were very common in the Middle East and were often used for lining garments. Several kaftans in the Topkapi are lined with cotton fabric. This may be due to Islamic teaching, which says that those who wear silk in life supposedly give up that luxury in the afterlife. One way to get around this was to wear cotton or linen—not silk—next to the skin (Scott, 1999). Cotton would also be appropriate for a lower class person's garment. Cotton and linen were often used for undershirts, underpants, shirts, nightgowns, stockings and turbans.

### **Sof (wool):**

*Aba* was a heavy wool weave. European wool was highly prized and very expensive, since it was imported from northwest Europe. Sultan Süleyman owned woolen kaftans, and they were often favored by the elderly elite for their comfort. Plain woolen garments were often worn by ranking religious figures as well. Wool is made of animal hair and many different varieties are available including wool from sheep, goats, camel and others.

### **Blends:**

Many different blends were available. Blends were often made by combining different threads to create a fabric rather than using a spun blend, i.e. a linen warp with a silk weft. Cotton/silk and linen/silk blends were known well before the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Weaves:**

#### **Simple Weaves:**

Simple weaves utilize one weft and one warp. Simple weaves include plain weave or tabby, twill, satin and damask. Turkish twills are mostly weft-faced and have a float of at least one. Turkish satin weaves typically use a float of the warp over four wefts and under one weft. Damask is usually a solid color and the design is created by alternating simple weave types. There are not many examples of damask in the Topkapi textiles. (Raby, 2001)

#### **Compound Weaves:**

For the production of *seraser*, *kadife*, *kehma* and *serenk*, there are two sets of warp used. One set is for the pattern design, while the second set is used to actually hold the fabric together. *Taqueté* has two sets of warps and the complementary weft entirely covers the face of the fabric. Velvets are a pile weave and sixteenth century weavers used many techniques, like leaving the pile uncut—creating a looped pile. Also, several extant textiles have multiple layers of piles in a technique called *alto-basso*. (Raby, 2001)

## Colors:

Think BRIGHT! Most extant textiles are very bright with high contrast. Ruby red, pistachio green and a bright medium blue were the most popular colors which were combined with ivory, tan or brown (Atıl, 1987). Other colors are black, navy, light blue, fuschia, yellow, emerald green, rose, coral, white and purple.

## Patterns:

The last thing one would call most Turkish patterns is subdued. Many designs are enormous to modern eyes, and many would hesitate to put patterns that size on a sofa, let alone on something to be worn. On several *kaftans*, the motif is only repeated two or three times per side. Smaller patterns can be found in extant textiles, but they are typically furnishing or for other uses besides clothing. Turkish textiles were designed to create impact at a distance—especially in the royal *kaftans*. Also, these motifs can be found appliquéd on a basic satin ground.

The *rūmī* style and the *hatāyī* style were the two main decorative styles of the fifteenth century. These were the main Timurid style, which was very popular in Islamic countries at the time. (Bağcı & Tanindi, 2005) Ogival (Oh-jī-vul) or arched oval patterns were very popular throughout the sixteenth century. Below are some of the patterns that were used during the sixteenth century:

- *Rūmī*—The *rūmī* style is also known as “arabesque” and consists of scrolling branches, two-dimensional leaves and/or split palmettes. *Rūmī* is a controlled geometric structure. This style originated from Byzantine and pre-Islamic art from the Near East, and was one of the more conservative styles of Ottoman art. (Bağcı & Tanindi, 2005)
- *Hatāyī*—The *hatāyī* style consisted of stylized lotus and peony blossoms originating from the Far East. According to Serpil Bağcı and Zeren Tanindi, “although the Ottomans used this style prior to the reign of Mehmed II, it was only sometime they during the mid- fifteenth century that they reinterpreted *hatāyī* in accordance with Ottoman tastes (Bağcı & Tanindi, 2005, p. 265).” The *hatāyī* style is asymmetric, freely drawn and features free-flowing vines curling in on themselves. (Bağcı & Tanindi, 2005)
- *Sāz*: The *sāz* (“forest”) style surfaced in the sixteenth century and mimics the pen strokes from the art form that it was derived from. Swirling leaves, some with serrated edges, some with bent tips piercing each other, lotus and peonies in bud or bloom, and no obvious planned design are typical of this style. (Bağcı & Tanindi, 2005)
- *Şhukūfe*: The *şhukūfe* (“flower” *catre-fleur*) style is prominent in the second half of the sixteenth century. Flowers including hyacinths, roses, tulips, carnations, irises, pomegranate and prunus blossom were stylized in many different colors inside of medallions or attached to undulating “vines”. (Bağcı & Tanindi, 2005)
- *Çintemani*: The *çintemani* style is recognized by any combination of triple balls and double wavy lines.

## Summary:

There are so many interesting and different textiles that survive from the Ottoman period that the options for costuming are phenomenal. With a little bit of research and careful shopping, you can reproduce the authentic Ottoman look.

## Recommended Reading:

### **General:**

Scarce, J. (2003). *Women's costume of the Near and Middle East*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Scott, P. (1993). *The book of silk*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Titley, N. (1983). *Persian miniature painting and its influence on the art of Turkey and India*. London: The British Library.

### **Ottoman Art:**

Atil, E. (1987). *The age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent*. Washington D.C.: Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art.

Atil, E. (1980). *Turkish art*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Bağcı, S. and Z. Tanindi. (2005) "The art of the Ottoman court". In D. Roxburgh (ed.), *Turks: A journey of a thousand years, 600-1600*. London: Royal Academy of the Arts, pp. 262-271.

Raby, J. (ed). (2001). *Ipek, the crescent and the rose: Imperial Ottoman silks and velvets*. London: Azimuth Editions Limited.

Rogers, J. M. (1986). *The Topkapi Saray Museum: costumes, embroideries and other textiles*. London: Thames and Hudson.

*Style and status: Imperial costumes from Ottoman Turkey*. (2005). London: Azimuth Editions Limited and the Smithsonian Institution.

## Web Resources:

### **Museums:**

The Topkapi Saray Museum-- <http://www.ee.bilkent.edu.tr/~history/topkapi.html>

The Smithsonian Institution—<http://www.smithsonian.org>

- Style and Status Ottoman Imperial Costumes Interactive site--  
<http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/styleAndStatus/>