Mongol Costume in Art
A Study of Mongol Clothing in Contemporary Art
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There is a surprising amount of Mongol art depicting both the rulers and the more 'common' man, dating from the reigns of Genghis and Khublia.

One of the most prolific artists was Rashid-al-Din\(^1\) a chief minister of the court of Ghazan the Reformer, who does the majority of his work after the previously mentioned great khans. Although Rashid al-Din complied his manuscripts at a later date, it is based on earlier commissions and history, allowing us to suggest the costume in the art is not representative of Ghazan's court but of earlier times.

This paper will discuss a possible theory on the various pieces of primarily men's Mongol clothing based both on these art sources as well as contemporary writings of western visitors to the Mongol courts during this period of time.

\[^1\] The first world historian Rashid al-Din was born in 1247 in Hamadan (Iran). Son of a Jewish doctor he embraced Islam at the age of 30. He was a physician to the-Il-Khan Abaqa (1265-81), possibly the steward to the Il-Khan Geikhatu (1291-95), and as financial advisor to Abaqa's grandson, Ghazan (1295-1304). He was commissioned by the latter to write a history of the Mongols and their conquests, which he completed during the reign of Ojeitu (1307-16). This work, the Complete Collection of Histories (Jami' al-Tawarikh) was at the time of completion (ca, 1307) of monumental size. The Complete Collection of Histories (Jami' al-Tawarikh) is the single most comprehensive Persian source on the Mongol period.
The Theory:

The Mongol Court clothing consisted of an under tunic, much like a linen shirt, but possible wool, cotton linen or silk, also possibly under trousers, trousers, a tunic with overly long sleeves which was worn bunched up at the wrists, and a short sleeved over tunic that may or may not be decorated. The outfit would be cinched by a leather belt with plaques and worn with flat toed boots.

Evidence of the Under Tunic and Possible Patterning:

"A stylized portrait said to be Hülegü, made in Iran a few centuries after his death. The Mongol conqueror is, however, dressed in typical Central Asian costume and carries a re-curved composite bow with broad-headed arrows, features that had not changed over the years. British Museum, Ms.Per.1920.9.17.130)^2

This picture best illustrates the three layers worn by this Mongolian. You can easily see the shorter sleeved over tunic which in this case fastens down the centre front, the longer sleeved under tunic which crosses over across the front and a third neckline that is almost horizontal in its neck edging.

There is a Coptic shirt in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum (910.1.9) which dates from the 10-12th century that would account for this style of neckline, including a side neck opening.

^2 Nicolle, D. The Mongol Warlords pg 97
My adaptation of the ROM garment.

Man's shirt c.10-12th century.

The Under Tunic

It is pure speculation as to this cut and design but existing sources of garments of related and influenced regions suggest that it could be one possible solution to the design of this obvious bottom layer.

3 Burnham, Dorothy K. Cut My Cote. Pg 11
"We can perhaps attribute to the Persians the spread of the long under-tunic or caftan, known as the candys…with more certainty we can credit them with the introduction in the Middle East of long trousers, called by some sources *anaxyrides*, which are represented on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis (approximately 400-360 BC) and whose origins are to be sought among the Steppe nomads."

It appears that during the reigns of the Great Khans, trousers are a well established item of clothing and not an adaptation of later period Persian clothing attributed to the earlier period in the Mongol art by the Persian artists.

"The Huns, ancestors of the Turks and Mongols, seem to have been at the centre of these movements in the Steppes of central and eastern Mongolia. From the earliest times they had been tribes of warlike herdsmen, who had remained very savage and endlessly migrated to and fro in the immense plains. They wore a long tunic-robe reaching to mid-calf, slit down the sides and belted at the waist with a girdle whose ends hung down in front; for better protection against the cold, the sleeves were tightly closed at the wrists. Fur was used for short capes and caps. Wide trousers were fastened with straps at the ankles above leather shoes very similar to European shoes."

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4 Boucher, François. *20,000 Years Of Fashion*. Pgs 60, 64
5 ibid Pg 68
A Possible Pattern for the trouser based on Persian sources and designed with a wider crotch gusset for riding.

"Steppes costume possesses a characteristic element whose appearance in the Middle East constitutes an innovation of capitol importance: trousers, a garment essential to nomadic horsemen, indissolubly linked with the use of horse in the Steppe."6

While direct evidence of the Mongol trouser is sparse and not enough to speculate on the patterning or cut of the garment, the pattern I have designed is based on the knowledge of trouser cuts during this time and therefore more than likely resembles a full length set of braes, or the later 16th century Persian Salwar7. As the Salwar are not as baggy as the earlier Mongol style, this design suggestion is based on that required increased fullness as well as it is surmised that this style of crotch gusset may be more conducive to long hours in the straddled position on horseback. It is in no way, however, a definitive answer to the design question.

6 ibid Pg 72
7 Mellor, C. "Rashid's Persian Patterns" http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/Rashid/salwar.gif
Under trousers for wearing during colder months could be made of cotton, linen or silk and would provide extra warmth and protection from coarse wools of the outer trousers.

"...They make also breeches with furs. The rich Tartars sometimes wad their gowns with silk stuffing, which is exceedingly soft, light and warm. The poor line their clothes with cotton cloth, or with the fine wool which they are able to pick out of the coarser. With this coarser they make felt to cover their houses and coffers, and also for bedding. With wool and a third of horse hair mixed with it they make their ropes. They also make felt covers for their stools, and caps to protect their heads from the weather as well as saddle-cloths and rain cloaks; so they use a great deal of wool. This much concerning the attire of men." - From Chapter 7 "Of Their Garments" The Journal of Friar William of Rubruck, (1253-1255).[^8]

[^8]: Komroff, M. ed. Contemporaries of Marco Polo: The Journal of Friar William of Rubruck (1253-1255), pg 67-68
Long Sleeved Tunic

Details from an Enthronement Scene
Iran (possibly Tabriz), early 14th century
Ink, colors, and gold on paper
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung (Diez A fol. 70, 5.22)
cat. 19 Photo: Ellwandt, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (http://www.lacma.org/khan/2/2.htm)

It is very evident, from pictorial sources, that the Mongolian of the 13th century wore a long-sleeved tunic. This tunic has been seen worn alone, with either a centre front fastening or the more common cross over fastening or with a short-sleeved over tunic that also can fasten down centre front or cross over. This cross would always be towards the right. ⁹ Notable is the length of the sleeve and its tightness at the wrist when worn bunched up to expose the hands of the wearer.

The patterning for this long under tunic has been inspired by both contemporary pictorial evidence, as well as, an existing garment. There is a robe, or tunic at the Inner Mongolian Museum, Huhehaote that dates to the time period under discussion which has a cut that lends itself easily to the long sleeved tunics under discussion

⁹ Komroff, M. ed. *Contemporaries of Marco Polo: The Journal of Friar William of Rubruck (1253-1255)*, "...and tied on the right side. For in this the Tartars differ from the Turks; the Turks tie their gowns on the left, the Tartars always on the right." pg 69
"A detail from a work of Zhao Mengfu, Khubilai Khan's favourite painter, portrayed the winter wind whipping through a horse's mane and the clothes of a groom."\textsuperscript{10}

"Robe Mongolian, 13th - 14th century, Found at the Onggut tomb site, Silk with gold brocade, 142 x 246 cm" (Inner Mongolian Museum, Huhehaote) \textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Baker, R & Baker C. The Mongols pgs 18-19
\textsuperscript{11} (http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/silkroad/exhibit/mongols/mongols.html)
"Although this drawing postdates the period of Ilkhanid rule and instead belongs to the Timurid dynasty (1370-1507) its subject is not a contemporary one. For example, the rider's costume (including his distinctive owl-feathered headdress) was no longer in fashion at the Timurid court, although the imagery must have appealed to a Timurid audience given the dynasty's claims to Mongol ancestry. The artist, Muhammad ibn Mahmudshah al-Khayyam, probably based his composition on an Ilkhanid work perhaps preserved in an album." \(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) http://www.lacma.org/khan/5/6.htm
The Proposed Long-sleeved under Tunic Pattern - the back section cut on the fold.
The Proposed Long-sleeved under Tunic Pattern - the front section.

There are several pictorial sources that suggest that the garment is joined from two pieces at centre front. (See the "Mongol Archer on Horseback" and the painting of the robust groomsman shown above for examples.)

This tunic would be constructed in three main pieces, although as stated earlier, for narrower fabric widths, the obvious seam joining is seen along the centre front of the front pieces. The pictures also suggest a banded edge on the neckline of the garments and side ties of multiple numbers of the same fabric as the garment itself.

This pattern is for a garment of ankle length however the pictorial evidence suggests both ankle and calf lengths for this and the over garments.
Remarkable in my exploration of Mongol clothing was this repeated use of a shorter sleeved over tunic in the art of the time. It gave the confidence to believe that this was truly a style of garment worn, although it is my belief that it was very likely a court related garment.

There is other evidence that suggests more wide-spread fashion than just the courts but this could be a convention of the artist whose work is for those of a court environment.

Regardless of this debate, it is a garment seen throughout this period and could be highly decorated or plain, depending upon the wearer.

"Khubilai Khan and Chabi on a Cook-out" detail.

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13 Marshall, Robert. Storm From The East pg 75
"Genghis Khan is proclaimed Emperor"

Two details of "Mongol's captives lead away" from Rashid al-Din's Jami' al-Tawarikh
Detail from "Lamentation at the bier of Chingiz Khan" from Rashid al-Din's Jami' al-Tawarikh

"Mongol Cavalrymen Engage the Enemy" early 14th century.
The proposed pattern for the back of the short-sleeved over tunic.
The proposed pattern for the front the short-sleeved over tunic.

This is cut virtually the same as the long-sleeved tunic but with the truncated sleeve length. Again please note the required banding for the neck edge and the ties along the right-hand side for closing the robe.

**Cloth & Colours**

There does not seem to be any real limitation to colour in the cloth of garments: "The first day they were all clad in white, but on the second they wore scarlet robes...on the third day they were all dressed in blue robes, and on the fourth in most rich robes of baldakin [brocade]."¹⁴

"The merchants carry ermines and grey furs, with other rich and costly skins. Others carry clothes made of cotton and silk, and various kinds of spices."¹⁵

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¹⁴ Komroff, M. ed. *Contemporaries of Marco Polo: The Journal of Friar William of Rubruck (1253-1255)*, pg 40
¹⁵ ibid, pg 54-55
"Of their clothing and customs you must know, that from Cathay and other regions of the east, and also from Persia and other regions of the south, are brought to them silken and golden stuffs and cloth of cotton, which they wear in summer. From Ruscia, Moxel, and from Greater Bulgaria and Pascatir, which is greater Hungary, and out of Kerkis, all of which are countries to the north and full of forests, and which obey them, are brought to them costly furs of many kinds, which I never saw in our parts, and which they wear in winter. And they always make in winter at least two fur gowns, one with the fur against the body, the other with the fur outside exposed to the wind and snow; these latter are usually of the skins of wolves or foxes or papions and while they sit in the dwelling they have another lighter one. The poor make their upper gowns of dog's or of goats' skins...."16

"After that he made us show him all our clothing, and what seemed to him of little use he made us leave with our host. The next day they brought each of us a sheepskein gown, breeches of the same material, boots according to their fashion, felt stockings, and hoods such as they use. .."17 - From Chapter 7 "Of Their Garments" The Journal of Friar William of Rubruck, (1253-1255).

**Accessories**

The Mongol attire is completed with boots, belts and hats. Of the three main accessories, the hat appears to be he most regionally defined.

The most notable of the court headdress for men is the Owl Feather Headdress depicted by several artists and throughout the main Mongol period. (Women’s hats for nobility are towering pieces of art that do see slight change between the ages of Ghengis and Ogedei.)

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16 ibid pg 67

17 ibid pg 104
Details from (left) "Genghis Khan is Proclaimed Emperor" (top) "Istindiar's Funeral Procession" and (bottom) "The Mongol Archer on Horseback".
Details from (top left) "Enthronement Scene", (top right and bottom right) "Court of the Mongol Il-Khans" both (Iran (possibly Tabriz), early 14th century).

The Owl Feather Headdress is seen mostly as court wear, and not seen in the warfare illustrations of the period. Other hats styles are seen throughout the art and it is surmised that these may very well vary by region and season.

Details from (left) "Shah Zav Enthroned" and (right) "Chinggis Khan and his Sons".
Details from (left) “Chinggis Khan and his Sons” and (right) "Lamentation at the bier of Chingiz Khân".

Boots

Boots seen in contemporary sources are not the curled-toed footwear seen in Mongolia today, rather a flat heelless variety of boot in a variety of colours.

Details from (top left) "The Enthronement of Ogedei Khan, from a manuscript of Rashid al-Din.", (bottom left) "Shah Zav Enthroned" c.1330, and (top right) "Tent Mosque"
Belts

According to a Virtual Mongol Exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "the exchange of belts and horses was evidently one means of commemorating alliances among the peoples of the Mongolian steppes."

As is seen in these details, often beautiful ornate plaques were attached to leather belts used to girdle the outer tunics. The cloth wrap belts which are worn in Mongolia today came late in Mongol history with Persian cultural influences and were actually worn at the hips rather than at the waist.

Details from (top) "The Enthronement of Ogedei Khan, from a manuscript of Rashid al-Din", (left) "Shah Zav Enthroned" c.1330, (right) Three Belt Plaques (Southern Russia or Central Asia, 13th century), and (bottom) "The Groom" by Zhao Mengfu.
Mongol Women

"...The women's garments differ not from the men's, saving that they are somewhat longer. But on the day after one of their women are married, she shaves her scalp from the middle of her head down to her forehead, and wears a wide garment like the hood of a nun, but larger and longer in all parts than a nun's hood, open before and tied under the right side...

...They have also an ornament for their heads which they call *botta*, made of the bark of a tree, or of some such other light material. It is so thick and round that it cannot be held but in both hands together, and it has a square sharp spire rising from the top more than a cubit high and fashioned like a column. This *botta* they cover all over with a piece of rich silk: it is hollow within, and upon the spire or square top, they put a bunch of quills, or of slender canes a cubit long and more. This tuft they beautify with the feathers of a peacock, and round about its length with the feathers from the mallard's tail, and also with precious stones.

Great ladies wear this kind of ornament upon their heads, binding it strongly with a certain hat, which has a hole in the crown fit for the spire to come through it. Under this ornament they gather up their hair in a knot, and they bind it strongly under their throats. When a great company of such gentlewomen riding together are beheld far off, they seem to be soldiers with helmets on their heads carrying their lances upright. All their women sit on horseback like men, and they bind their hoods or gowns with a blue silk scarf, and with another scarf they gird it above their breasts. They also bind a piece of white silk like a muffler or mask under their eyes, reaching down to the breasts. These gentlewomen are exceedingly fat, and the smaller their noses, the fairer they are esteemed."¹⁸ - From Chapter 8 The Journal of Friar William of Rubruck, (1253-1255).

¹⁸ ibid, pg 71-72
(Left) Empress Chabi (favourite of Khubilai Khan) (right) detail from "Court of the Mongol Il-Khans".

(Left) Detail from "Mongke Khan with his wives" and (right) detail from "The Enthronement of Ogedei".
Addition Pictorial Sources

(Left) "Tent Mosque" (right) **Bowl**, Seljuq period, late 12th–early 13th century Iran.

(Left) "The Mongol Archer on Horseback" (see previous notation) (right)
"Shah Zav Enthroned" c.1330
(Left) "Enthronement Scene" Iran (possibly Tabriz), early 14th century, (right) "Mongke Khan and his Wives"

"The Tented Encampment of Jengis Khan"
"Enthronement of Ogedei"

"The Ilkhan Abaqa (reigned 1265-82) and his son Arghun (reigned 1284-91). From a Persian miniature"
"Court of the Mongol Il-Khante"

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