

Draping a Body, Magnifying a Space:
Textiles as Political Legitimacy and Cultural Identity in Mongol West Asia

Yuka Kadoi

By using various visual sources from Ilkhanid West Asia, this paper considers the ways in which textiles played a multivalent role in the transmission of colours, design schemes and dress concepts from east to west during the Mongol period.

Like the Mongols in Eurasia, the Ilkhanids exploited the material value of brocade and associated its chromatic opulence with imperial authority and ideology. They also explored the performative quality of dress as the expression of their identity, status symbol, and dynastic claims. As suggested by visual evidence, distinctive types of Mongol fashion accessories (e.g. feathered hats, the chimney-like headgear, the four-lobed shoulder attachment and the embroidered badge) were integrated into West Asian sartorial modes at that time.

Tent hangings were equally interwoven with the nomadic notions of conspicuous consumption. The Ilkhanids remained accustomed to staying at seasonal encampments, and the integral use of tent hangings for their dwellings is self-evident in architectural idioms of Ilkhanid Iran, which shows a decorative tendency to cover the building surfaces with textile-like richly patterned stuccos, tiles and frescos.

Luxurious woven products also served to disseminate decorative vocabularies typical of the East Asian domain westwards to the Iranian cultural sphere. This paper thus examines how various sinicising motifs derived from imported textiles were duplicated or reconfigured through reinterpretations and came to acquire a dual identity of sovereignty in Mongol-ruled East Asia and West Asia; this served to attach a dynastic label across different media of the arts and crafts.