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THE KITĀB AL-HADĀYĀ WA AL-TUḤAF: A UNIQUE WINDOW ON ISLAMIC TEXTILES

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Like other objects of material culture, textiles are more than mere reflections of the culture in which they are present. They are also active constituents of that culture, influencing both social behaviour and intrinsic values of that society. They actively contribute to both continuities and changes in society in diverse ways. Before and during the early and Classical periods of Islamic history, textiles were especially important because of their wide distribution and versatility that enabled them to be used in many ways in daily life in the eastern Mediterranean region. They clothed every body and were found as primary furnishing and household cloths in most homes. However, the importance and ubiquity of textiles is difficult to appreciate and contextualise historically because of their inherent vulnerability to deterioration over time. The same vulnerability was true of the equipment—the looms and hand tools—used to make them. Taken for granted at all social levels and frequently modest appearance, the full cultural value of textiles and the activities surrounding their making and use are difficult to uncover, except for the most ostentatious examples.

Textiles are typically under-recorded in the written historical record. They rarely received particular attention in the fragmentary writings—themselves similarly perishable—that textile historians rely on to describe and provide social context. As a result, the rare surviving writings that mention textiles assume a crucial importance in elaborating the social context surrounding those few textiles that have survived to be studied. Pre-Islamic Roman documents such as the early fourth century Edict of Maximum Prices (Giacchero, 1974) reveal not only the many kinds and uses of textiles as garments and household textiles, but also the acute sensitivity to the gradations of quality distinguishing a broad range of textiles, along with their prices. Garments, textiles, and related materials form the largest group of items in the Edict, by far. 274 types of linen alone are listed—the single largest category in the entire Edict. This large and detailed presence of textiles in the Edict also indicates that textiles were particularly prone to inflation, which the Edict was intended to control (Giacchero, 1974).

The *Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf,* or *Book of Gifts and Rarities* (al-Qaddūmī, 1996), is another important record of the material culture of textiles and other objects in early Islamic and adjacent civilizations over the second half of the first millennium. It is a unique, vivid, and entertaining document, containing almost 500 anecdotes describing often remarkable material objects and contexts in which they were used. The historical accuracy of the anecdotes cannot be verified or taken literally. At least some of the tales may be pure fiction or myth, while others may be gossip or exaggeration. Nevertheless, analysis of the *Kitāb* reveals implicit aspects of Islamic views of material culture, with references to textiles outnumbering other kinds of objects. Whether or not the stories accurately report historical events, they do attest to many familiar facts, such as the fragility of silk, reported for the year 936 CE: "Forty-year-old labelled sacks of pure silk (*khazz mu'lam*) were also taken away; when the sacks were opened their contents crumbled to dust as a result of long storage" (al-Qaddūmī, 1996, §243). The descriptive tales contain many elements and beliefs that arguably would have been culturally familiar and convincing to the author/compiler and his audience, indicating social habits or expectations of use.

In this paper, references will be cited according to the section numbers (designated by §) and related annotations in the al-Qaddūmī translation, rather than to page numbers, for ease of reference to the Arabic edition published by Muhammad Hamīdullāh.

The *Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf* is an anonymous Arabic text apparently compiled in late eleventh century Egypt, possibly by an official or administrator of the Fatimid caliphate residing in Cairo (Grabar,

1997). Hamīdullāh (Grabar, 1997) and al-Qaddūmī (1996) argue that the descriptions of the objects found in the Fatimid palace treasuries indicate that the author lived in Egypt around the time of the looting of the Fatimid imperial palace in 1067-1068 CE (during the reign of Al-Mustansir), possibly witnessing these events at first hand. He may have lived in Egypt at least between 1052 and 1071 CE (al-Qaddūmī, 1996). Authorship has tentatively been attributed to an al-Rashīd ibn al-Zubayr, although which one is in dispute (al-Qaddūmī, 1996). The Arabic text was first published by Muhammad Hamīdullāh in 1959, followed by an offset edition in 1984, under the title *Kitāb al-Dhakhā'ir wa al-Tuḥaf* —known in English as "The Book of Treasures and Gifts". This publication has been a valuable resource for many scholars of Islamic artefacts.

In 1996, Ghāda al Ḥijjāwā al-Qaddūmī published the first English translation of the manuscript as *Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf—Book of Gifts and Rarities*. Al-Qaddūmī is a Harvard-trained art historian and curator who built a career in Kuwait, at the Dār al-Āthār al-Islamayyah Museum and subsequently in the Department of Antiquities and Museums of the National Council for Cultural Arts and Letters. Her translation is based on a manuscript consisting of selections compiled in the early fifteenth century from a possibly incomplete eleventh century manuscript. The fifteenth century manuscript, dated prior to 1406 and continuously located in the collection of the Gedik Ahmet Pasa since the late fifteenth century, consists of 57 folios, plus an addition made by the same fifteenth century compiler from another source. This fifteenth century editor is identified as al-Shaykh [later Amir] Shihāb al-Din A'mad ibn cAbd-Allāh ibn Ḥasan al-Aw'adī al-Muqri' al-Shāfī.

The *Kitāb* text is a collection of anecdotes that describe gifts and rarities, material objects of wonder, beauty, and luxury, often associated with feasting and celebration or other important ritual events, as well as inventories of treasuries and of booty looted in raids. Some of the descriptions are focused on the appearance of objects but other reveal the manner in which objects were used, exchanged and regarded, as well as who used or saw them and in what contexts. Occasionally there are glimpses of who made objects.

The anecdotes in the text cover the first five centuries of Islam, up to 1071. A handful of early pre-Islamic anecdotes extend the relevant period as far back as the reign of the Sassanid ruler Khusrau Anushirvan, in the middle of the sixth century. Many of the anecdotes were selected from other written or oral sources by the eleventh century author. Only some of these earlier sources are explicitly identified or identifiable. As a result, the veracity of the anecdotes and descriptions is debatable from a present-day perspective, although it is possible that the descriptions of fantastic, mythical creatures were believed to be true, and were not intended as fiction.

The anecdotes are organised into eight thematic chapters, some of which are titled (in Arabic) in rhymed prose (al-Qaddūmī, 1996). The anecdotes in each chapter are as follows:

106	Gifts
26	Expenditures on Famous Wedding Banquets and Memorable Parties
26	Famous Circumcision Feasts and Well-Known Celebrations for Proficiency in Reading the Qur'ān
16	Notable Days and Gatherings on Special Occasions and Crowded Festivities
184	Exotic Objects and Safeguarded Treasures
90	Booty in Conquests and Shares in Raids
2	References to Treasures, Treasure Troves, Ancient Buried Treasures, and to Who Found Them
45	Expenditiures

This yields a total of 495 sections. An additional section, apparently appended by a later editor, quotes Usāmah ibn Munqudh, a twelfth century writer. The organisational order of material objects in some of the longer lists of objects, such as inventories, is consistent with the order found in Geniza trousseau lists, wills, and inventories of possessions, which are dated to the eleventh century for Fustat, Egypt. This organisational order is indicative of prevailing general systems of value throughout society.

According to al-Qaddūmī, the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* is an almost unique survivor of a genre of light popular literature represented by a handful of identified texts, and by chapters in more wide-ranging works (1996). The existence of a distinct literary genre devoted to remarkable stories about material objects suggests a cultural delight in the sensual materiality of objects, and in extravagant display.[1] It might even have served as a secret guilty pleasure among those who might ostensibly decry such opulence and waste as impious or self-indulgent. In the text this sensitivity is expressed not simply in visual terms, but also in terms of material quality and titillation of other sensations, especially olfactory and less obviously tactile, as well as the emotional titillation of gossip. The opulent material sensuality is further heightened by links to the expense of objects, especially when material quality is related to quality of both materials and of craftsmanship, as it assuredly is in the realm of textiles. Such material sensitivity is integral to their relationship with artefacts as important symbolic constituents and expressions of their cultural history, meanings and values. The vivid descriptions in our text and other examples of the genre substantiate this proposition. It is unfortunate that the idea of an embedded cultural attention to materiality and to textiles has been used unjustly to denigrate Middle Eastern cultures, as postcolonial critics have pointed out.

The existence of this genre as light popular reading at the literate, middle or upper level of society indicates the importance of material objects in social relations of all sorts, along with a tacit awareness of that importance. In some instances the objects possess life stories and even names of their own. Although the reputations of such objects depend partly on the persons through whose hands or ownership they have passed, they also often depend on the material perfection of the object itself as unique and remarkable, meriting special attention. The terms in which these objects are described reveal the aesthetic values of the eleventh century author and his sources. These descriptions extol not only beauty but also artisanal achievement and ingenuity. These essential elements of technologies were actively encouraged by the luxurious style of the aristocratic classes, through their patronage.
These objects both triggered and anchored cultural memory, providing more or less tangible links to their historical past, however mythologized they may become in the telling. Material objects and the tales about them crystallised and vivified cultural achievements in a particular and collective way that extended individual experience, thereby perpetuating a unified tacit sense of identification with valued ideals of Islamic civilization and its past, even in the absence of access to the actual objects. More ordinary objects also served as links to the imagined ideals; they provided tangible, familiar models of experience that could be imaginatively elaborated. Those with sufficient resources could go further, by producing concrete elaborations to demonstrate their cultural superiority. Indeed, such materialisation of cultural superiority often was expected of the sovereign and upper classes, as clear evidence of superior cultivation and fitness to lead. The use and appreciation of richly elaborated material objects, and the practice of gifting textiles, was also common to the Byzantine courts (Cutler, 2001; Grabar, 1997; Oikonomidès, 1997). Sections of the *Kitāb* indicate that these elaborate habits were shared by Persian (§§ 1, 2, 5, 176, 178, 184-6, 188, 192-3, 196), Chinese (§1), Indian (§§ 2, 29, 30) and Turkish (§205) courts prior to and during Islamic times, and the Frankish court of Queen Bertha (§69), in addition to the Byzantine courts with which Islamic courts carried on frequent diplomatic relations involving gift exchanges (§§ 7, 73, 82, 161-3, 263).

Interest in the economic value of goods pervades this text, from first to last. Many of the paragraphs refer directly or obliquely to the monetary cost or value of objects. Such references were likely intended to amaze the reader. But for those acquainted with the marketplace, they also situated the items and their owners (or donors) within a social hierarchy partially manifested through materially measured by quantity of possessions, quality of goods, and aesthetic taste. Quantity of possessions is related not only to the potential to control resources or facilitate one's desires, but also to the need to support many dependants

[1] In today's terms, this genre might be viewed as a parallel to "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and similar TV shows and publications.

(including servants and slaves) and to facilitate appropriate social relations through gift exchanges and celebrations. In addition, it was necessary to support God and the disadvantaged in the community. Finally, material goods, such as textiles, were often used as a form of payment, included in the salaries of officials (Cutler, 2001), tribute payments as conditions of securing peace agreements, and payment of taxation obligations. The presence of large quantities of material objects entails underlying economic systems of production and commerce, whether local or widely distributed.

This literary genre reminds its readers not only of the delights of objects, real or vicarious, but also of the pervasive presence and importance of objects in a variety of social relations and symbolic uses. These material objects embodied cultural power in particular ways, which were not always or only about cultural superiority or subordination, or even the power to control material resources and the labour of others. Hierarchies of objects paralleled social hierarchies, both reflecting and reconstituting these social hierarchies. Some anecdotes show how social or political power depended on the possession or lack of objects. Several tales report the sad fate of those who lost their fortunes and means of support. Qabīḥah's denial that she had any funds to help her son the caliph al-Muʿtazz to pay the soldiers, despite later evidence that she actually had considerable wealth, suggests that her refusal of his request led directly to his death in 869 (§346). The report of her opulent possessions suggests that her desire for material comforts caused her to refuse to assist her son. But her wealth was tied to her social position as mother of the caliph; when she had to hide following her son's assassination, she lost it all.

I examined the *Kitāb* anecdotes individually to characterise the kinds of cultural characteristics that each seemed to reveal. I began by examining all the anecdotes to identify those that referred specifically to textiles, or revealed or implied something pertinent to textiles. This information was recorded in a master chart. I identified 138 such anecdotes, which amounted to over ¼ of the 495 anecdotes. Second, I examined each of the anecdotes in this subset to determine the characteristics it seemed to reveal or illuminate. I identified 41 distinctive characteristics emerging from the textiles subset—some implied, some explicit. This information was recorded in a second master chart for textiles references. I tabulated the number of anecdotes that possessed each characteristic, and calculated their proportionate representation. This information is summarised below. I organised these characteristics into eight more general categories: agent, cultural, economic, social, religious, political, technology, and use.

The category of *agent* refers to reports showing the occasional ability of a textile to serve as a catalyst for events, either by:

a) directly provoking some kind of event or action; or
b) causing direct consequences (such as setting a precedent or trend).

The cultural category refers to indications or evidence of the cultural or aesthetic role of textiles, and the particular ways in which they contribute to or manifest elements of culture. The following characteristics are categorised as cultural:

a) index of aesthetics;
b) shows or relates to tent culture;
c) ease of portability;
d) architectural use;
e) modifies environment or atmosphere;
f) shows wide appreciation or criteria of assessment;
g) relates mythic properties: magical or healing;
h) reflects or spreads foreign influences;
i) exports or spreads Islamic influences.

The economic category contains the characteristics that relate to aspects of production, trade, prosperity, or monetary worth. The specific characteristics of the reports of textiles that I have identified for this category are:

a) shows the textile as a commodity or reveals its monetary worth;
b) source of local or personal wealth;
c) indicates extent of trade;
d) indicates local workshop;
e) indicates state factory;
f) employment is implied.

The political category captures indications of some of the ways in which textiles were used for political or administrative ends. Political characteristics include:

a) marker of political or official authority, such as a badge of office;
b) index of bureaucratic or official relationship, such as possession of a robe of honour;
c) index of diplomatic relationship, such as a diplomatic gift or tribute payment.

The religious category is used to refer to evidence of the practice of distinguishing non-Muslims from Muslims in Islamic states, such as by wearing different garments or colours. It may include indications of particular religious affiliations.

The social category encompasses characteristics related to social status or relationships, including:

a) index of social status or wealth;
b) overt index of social or political affiliation;
c) overt index of social relationship with others members of society or family.

The technological category contains indications of a technical or technological nature, including making processes or raw materials. Most such anecdotes can only be said to imply the necessary productive techniques (spinning, weaving, dyeing, farming, etc.), rather than specifying what they are or describing them in detail. For example, descriptions of garments imply their mode of making. I distinguished the following three characteristics:

a) textile technologies are implied;
b) other non-textile technologies are implied;
c) textiles combined with precious metals or gems.

The use category refers to particular kinds of uses or functions, some of which overlap cultural, political or social purposes. This large category relates to the more general, utilitarian uses:

a) object appears as gifting convention;
b) shows utilitarian, practical use;
c) meaning relates to instrumental use;
d) relation to regional identity;
e) bears imagery;
f) bears calligraphy;
g) poetical, metaphorical meaning or use;
h) overt display of court or cultural superiority;
i) overt display of wealth to impress others;
j) overt display of favour, as in personal gifts;
k) gift of slaves or servants implies garb they wear;
l) equipment for mounts;
m) wrapping, tying;
n) military implications.

The following summarises the proportionate incidence of each of the characteristics:

category	characteristic	no. §	proportion
TECH	textile technologies implied	120	86.96%
ECON	employment implied	119	86.23%
USE	shows utilitarian, practical use	99	71.74%
SOCIAL	index of social or wealth status	84	60.87%
USE	meaning relates to practical/utilitarian use	83	60.14%
ECON	shows commodity / monetary worth	68	49.28%
CULT	index of aesthetics	67	48.55%
TECH	other non-textile technologies implied	64	46.38%
CULT	shows wide appreciation, criteria	60	43.48%
TECH	combined w/ precious metals or gems	51	36.96%
USE	overt display of wealth to impress	48	34.78%
USE	overt display of court/ cultural superiority	41	29.71%
USE	object appears as gifting convention	40	28.99%
CULT	reflects, spreads foreign influences	34	24.64%
POLIT	index of diplomatic relationship	34	24.64%
CULT	modifies environment or atmosphere	30	21.74%
CULT	architectural use	28	20.29%
USE	relation to regional identity	27	19.57%
USE	wrapping, tying	22	15.94%
POLIT	index of bureaucratic or official relationship	21	15.22%
SOCIAL	indicates social relationship w/ others	21	15.22%
USE	equipment for mounts	21	15.22%
CULT	ease of portability	20	14.49%
USE	gift of slaves or servants implies garb	20	14.49%
SOCIAL	overt index of social / political affiliation	19	13.77%
USE	military implications	17	12.32%
USE	poetical, metaphorical meaning or use	15	10.87%
AGENT	direct consequences	14	10.14%
CULT	shows or relates to tent culture	14	10.14%
CULT	exports, spreads Islamicate influence	13	9.42%
USE	bears imagery	12	8.70%
POLIT	marker of political or official authority	11	7.97%
USE	overt display of favour	11	7.97%
ECON	indicates extent of trade	10	7.25%
CULT	mythic properties: magical, healing	8	5.80%
ECON	source of local or personal wealth	7	5.07%
AGENT	directly provokes action	4	2.90%
ECON	indicates state factory	3	2.17%
USE	bears calligraphy	3	2.17%
ECON	indicates local workshop	2	1.45%
RELIGIOUS	religious identifier as Muslim/non-Muslim	2	1.45%

As already noted, 138 anecdotes refer to textiles. Some of these references are only casual references included as ordinary elements in everyday descriptions of a person, place or object. Others are fuller descriptions of particular textiles, how they are used, or the relationship of people to them. Unfortunately, many of the descriptions are still too vague to accurately envision the particular kinds of textiles in the way a textile specialist would find useful, because the descriptive or literary use of terms for the textiles is often ambiguous.

The text preserves numerous Arabic terms for textiles, ranging from plain and utilitarian to elaborate and special. Other terms refer to descriptive features, such as colour or visual effect. There are several terms for types of clothing or other textile articles, as well as references to kinds of fur or articles made using fur. Some textiles are described as being made with threads of gold, or embellished with pearls, jewels or precious stones. There are several mentions of velvet or pile textiles, some of which are related to 10th century Byzantine courts (§§ 73 and 302).

The glossary of Arabic terms and the annotations for each anecdote provided by al-Qaddūmī (1996) are essential resources for trying to ascertain what textiles existed and how they were used and discussed, and attempting to match them to surviving textiles. Nevertheless, it is often unclear whether the terms refer to specific technical features or distinctive fabrics, to the perceptual effects achieved, or to imprecise descriptive conventions of the time. It is likely that the original author relied heavily on a cultural imagination familiar with a range of objects, styles, techniques, and uses that would have been understood in particular ways by a contemporaneous audience. Such understanding is no long fully available. The generic mode of description makes it impossible to match the kinds of artefacts surviving today with the textiles described, despite the efforts of many other scholars to facilitate such identification. For example, the term *washy* is usually translated as meaning "richly coloured" or elaborately coloured cloth, which may refer to nearly any kind of elaborately patterned cloth of any technique. This typical linguistic ambiguity is exacerbated by the difficulties of translating terms for which there is no convenient English or modern equivalent, that may have altered their meaning over time, or that have a wide range of senses and applications.

The terms used cannot be accurately matched to surviving examples, especially in terms of technique or structure, materials used, or many other qualities that might have held specific meaning in the original context. However, some of the descriptions of motifs or patterns are consistent with surviving examples: for example, motifs depicting lions, eagles or other animals, or hunters. Terms for textiles often refer to places or regions associated with particular kinds of textiles that are expected to be familiar to the audience of the *Kitāb*. Such terms also indicate trade or styles associated with particular places of origin, at least as understood at the time.

The way that textiles are described indicates that tactile characteristics, such as texture, were of lesser importance in the anecdotes than were visual characteristics, monetary worth, or connections of the textile to a particular person or event. For example, one textile considered very special was an elaborate jewel-studded *badanah* (a sleeveless waistcoat) reputed to have belonged to 'Abdah, daughter of Mu'awiyah, the 5th caliph, who ruled during the mid-7th century. The anecdotes (§§ 111 and 112) report that this garment was given by the 5th Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to his wife Zubaydah about a century later (ca. 781 CE) and remained in the Abbasid treasury until the caliph al-Mutawakkil, sent it to the bride of his son al-Mu'tazz in the mid-9th c. The reports highlight the connections of this garment to these important personages, more than its specific features of appearance. Its monetary value is implied by the jewels, and the long period of time it was kept in the treasury and used as an imperial gift within the imperial family.

Among the contents reported in the treasuries of Hārūn al-Rashīd upon his succession by al-Amīn (ca. 809 AD), textiles are listed in astonishing quantities (§ 302):

"4,000	long outer garments (*jubbah*) with open front and wide sleeves made of richly colored fabric (*washy*)
4,000	long outer garments with open front and long sleeves made of pure silk (*khazz*) lined with (*mubaṯṯanah*) sable fur, desert-fox fur (*fanak*), and other kinds of soft hair (*wabar*)
10,000	knee length closed shirts [with round opening and ample sleeves] (*qamīṯ*), along with undergarments (*ghilālah*)
10,000	long [wide closed] garments (*khuftān*)
2,000	drawers (*sarāwīl*) made of all types of fabric
4,000	turbans (*'imāmah*)
1,000	hooded mantles [worn over the shoulders] (*taylasān*)
1,000	wraps [not cut or sewn] (*ridā'*) in various fabrics
5,000	kerchiefs (*mindīl*) of various kinds
500	velvet garments (*qaṭīfah*)
1,000	Armenian carpets
4,000	curtains (*sitr*)
5,000	cushions (*wisādah*)
5,000	pillows (*makhaddah*)
1,500	pile-rugs (*ṯinfisah*) of pure silk (*khazz*)
100	decorative [pure silk rugs to be placed over] carpets (*namaṯ*)
1,000	cushions and pillows of pure silk
300	Maysān carpets
1,000	Darābjirdī carpets
1,000	brocade cushions
1,000	cushions of striped pure silk (*khazz raqm*)
1,000	pure silk curtains (*sitr*)
300	brocade curtains
500	Tabarī carpets
1,000	Tabarī cushions
1,000	small arm bolsters (*mirfaqah*)
1,000	pillows
4,000	pairs of high boots (*khuff*), most of them lined with sable and desert-fox fur, or other kinds of fur; inside each boot there was a knife and kerchief
4,000	pairs of socks (*jawārib*)
4,000	[ceremonial] tents (*qubbah*) with their equipment (*ālātihā*)
150,000	camping tents (*maḍrab*)" (§ 302)

Many items of clothing and textile furnishings accumulated in the court treasuries. Some of the anecdotes read as inventory lists of goods, in which the quantities, especially of luxury items, appear to be intended as the most impressive element. Although the veracity of the reported inventory of the contents of al-Rashīd's treasury (§ 302) cannot be confirmed, the large numbers of garments and other items listed may not be exaggerated. Its simple itemisation and lack of elaborative language give the impression of facts taken from an actual document, although the rounded simplicity of the numbers is suspicious. Such an inventory might include ceremonial state robes worn by the imperial household and not necessarily part of the personal daily wardrobe of the caliph or his family. Many of these goods were diplomatic gifts or tributes received and needed for future diplomatic gift exchanges or tributes. Such exchanges occurred frequently, thus requiring the large numbers of goods to be stockpiled. At the same time, the caliphal palace was responsible for a large staff of officials, servants and slaves, who may also have needed to be clothed. Robes of honour (*khila'*) had to be stocked for distribution along with salaries regularly distributed to state employees (Cutler, 2001).

The above list also testifies to the variety of textile furnishings and their importance. Common and plentiful furnishing included various kinds of carpets, curtains, cushions, pillows, and bolsters. On the other hand, there is a notable absence in this and similar lists of the more utilitarian kinds of textiles: towels, bedding, napkins, tablecloths, and the sacking and linen covers used for storage, reinforcing the idea that the goods in the treasury were primarily for diplomatic use. Such everyday cloths were more likely held in household stores accessed by servants, and may have held little of the glamorous aura that would surround the more costly kinds of textile goods. The boots, socks and tents are listed along with other items of military equipment, including weapons and armour (§ 302), so they seem to be part of the military stores, rather than for the daily running of the imperial household. Nevertheless, such articles were also suitable for diplomatic gifts or tributes paid to other sovereign states.

Other references to utilitarian cloths indicate that linen sacks were used for protective wrappings and storage. Cloth purses were used to hold money. Plain or decorative cloths—napkins, kerchiefs, or *mandīl*—were used as tablecloths to lay out a spread of food or to cover food laid out on trays or transported in baskets. In that sense, we might say that in addition to the obvious uses to protect goods or provide comfort, cloths were used to "dress up" objects and spaces, enhancing and emphasising the presentation or display. This extended even to the *Kaa'ba* in Mecca, which was draped annually with a new cloth. Lombard (1978) observes that draping this sacred Islamic structure was equivalent to dressing it in a *khila'*, a robe of honour. It was an immense honour to be responsible for providing this very special, large cloth.

The *Kitāb* provides little information on the vast production network required to supply and maintain the quantities of textiles used by either imperial or everyday households. The only mention of palace or state workshops or their products, both known as *tirāz*, is found in § 290, which reports that the practice of placing inscriptions on textiles was initiated by Hīsham in 727 CE. There is also no further information directly describing techniques or textile artisans. However, §§ 355-357 report that Lady Rashidah, daughter of the tolerant 4th Fatimid caliph al-Muᶜizz, (r. 953-975) earned her living from spinning yarn and never laid a hand on anything in the royal treasury, despite her evident wealth—an estate that on her death included 30,000 robe lengths of silk and 12,000 pieces of coloured plain cloth. It is not clear from these anecdotes whether her crafting activity was typical among high status women, or whether it was valued as an appropriate and lucrative pastime for them. It seems likely that this anecdote was intended to impress the reader with her laudable industry and self-sufficiency, despite her lack of need. It is unlikely that the enormous figures of cloth derived from her personal spinning livelihood, however industrious and thrifty she might have been.

These anecdotes confirm how material objects serve to define and express personality to others. Textiles are especially key objects in this regard. Some textile scholars have pursued the notion of clothing as a second skin, examining its relationship to the projection or formation of social as well as personal identities. This text substantiates such ideas for the early Islamic period. These anecdotes primarily describe individuals in terms of what they wore, rather than in terms of their physiognomy, their stance, or their manner. They often read as if the clothing was the principal characteristic of the personality, the status, or the authority. At the very least, garments were implicated in the codes of social order, but they still required interpretation. Extravagant or modest dress was equally remarkable as potential indices of personal character or piety, as were particular taste preferences. Interestingly, although Islam soon developed and periodically reiterated sumptuary laws that distinguished Muslims from non-Muslims (Golombek 1988), no indications of such discriminatory practices appear in the references to textiles in this text, irrespective of the period of the reference.

The *Kitāb* confirms that textiles, along with other material goods, were understood to be an important political tool, habitually used in state diplomacy. Many of the anecdotes refer to gifts between rulers, as tributes or gifts to cement political bonds or "sweeten" negotiations. Nearly 30% of the anecdotes

involve using conspicuous wealth and remarkable objects to impress an audience with the superiority of the court or the cultural resources. Almost 25% of anecdotes state or imply a diplomatic relationship. A few anecdotes show the kind of powerful intimidation or other consequences that might be caused by such splendid or legendary objects, sometimes reaching mythical proportions. The accounts of the manner in which Byzantine (§§ 161-3, 173) and Chinese (§§ 167-171) envoys were received highlight the fact that these extravagant courtly displays were deliberately orchestrated as a means of intimidating, confusing, and disarming these envoys, and generally exerting Islamic cultural superiority. Such material magnificence, with all its implications of economic and cultural potency could only be effectively orchestrated or expected to succeed in this way if it was assumed that its material presence could indeed influence people in itself, in quality, quantity, or aesthetic appreciation. Its ability to symbolically present cultural power and sophistication was tied to its explicit material presentation of the accepted indices of such power and sophistication. Most importantly, in the case of the Chinese envoys, this ploy supposedly succeeded in intimidating them and preventing warfare, through the dazzling display of luxurious materiality. These textiles thus served symbolic roles in addition to potential practical or economic roles. Their value as diplomatic exchange capital usually depended on some combination of quality and quantity.

Other anecdotes refer to gifts to relatives, serving not only to show affection, particular favour, or regard, but also to measure its degree. Very special textiles might be kept and given to relatives for special occasions, such as marriage, as previously mentioned. The giving of robes of honour and other garments and fabrics, especially from the caliphal courts, demonstrates that such gifting and payment practices involving textiles and garments were a well-known, wide-spread convention, typical of many courts (Culter, 2001). The reports in the *Kitāb* are consistent with citations of robes of honour in other contemporaneous reports of gifts and estate possessions, and were distributed according to "rank and station". In such circumstances, subtler distinctions among textiles may become more important to distinguishing particular favour from convention, or evaluating personal traits.

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