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A Brief History of Academic Dress in the Middle East and the Maghreb

By Valentina S. Grub

Introduction

Hidden deep within the labyrinth of Fez el Bali, the old town of the historic Moroccan city, an unassuming, narrow street opens into a magnificent courtyard graced with white archways, tiled floors, green tiled roofs, and plaster walls carved with elaborate, geometric patterns. This is not a palace for royal family, but rather a palace of knowledge, Al-Qarawiyyin. It is also one of the oldest institutions of higher education in the world, founded by Fatima bint Muhammad al Fihri in 859 CE. However, while this school and mosque have operated for centuries, honing scholarly minds and turning them out to the world, there is almost nothing written about the daily lives of those students, and certainly nothing about what clothing they wore. Institutions of higher education have been present since the earliest recorded eras in northern Africa and the Middle East.¹ Moreover, scholars have always been afforded a high social status in both pre-Islamic and Islamic society. Nonetheless, in spite of the importance placed on education, there is little evidence to suggest that academic dress was in any way different from everyday garb—in stark contrast to the academic dress developed in the West, which has a history rich with details and scholarship. Part of the reason that scholars were not differentiated from society through dress is for practical reasons: adding further layers of robes would be impractical given climatic realities in the warmer months. But a more significant reason is that, during the Golden Age of Islam, when many institutions of higher education were established and the academic world flourished, education was seen as an essential part of every man's status as a practising Muslim. Education was a continuous process and integrated with the daily life of the mosque. Though eventually most men chose a trade or a profession, rigorous academic lectures and debates were open to all, sometimes including women.²

Today, there are hundreds of universities in the Middle East and the Maghreb, yet the academic dress that they wear, if any, varies widely. Colour standards for hoods (if present) are non-existent, and gown shapes vary among British, American, and European shapes, sometimes incorporating elements of each into a single gown, and elaborated with local

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr Sandra Wearden, FBS. As my Burgon Society adviser, she has tirelessly offered advice, support, and pictures of glorious academic gowns: thank you for your mentorship and friendship. I also owe Barbara A. Grub another bottle in exchange for proofreading, again.

1 I hesitate to use the term 'university' because it is not entirely accurate due to the cultural and religious connections between mosques, *masjids*, and *madradas*, which I will discuss further.

2 One may be tempted to hypothesize that this lack of academic dress corresponded to a lack of hierarchy in Islamic scholarship and education. This is not the case and the *masjids* and *madradas* of the Muslim world operated in a scholastic hierarchy, albeit organized somewhat differently.

cultural details. The current, fluid state of academic dress in the region is due in part to the fact that academic dress is not indigenous to the region and in part to the after-effects of the imposed colonial educational systems.

There is little to no scholarship about the academic dress in the region, and information can be sparse, communication irregular, and correspondence at times unforthcoming, as Hugh Smith corroborates in his three-volume work, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World: Gowns, Hats, Chains of office, Hoods, Rings, Medals and Other Degree Insignia of Universities & Other Institutions of Learning*. At the time of its publication in 1970, Moroccan universities had begun but not finalized their academic costume, universities in Libya, Syria, Tunisia had no prescribed academic dress, and there was no reply from any university in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan.³ In the half-century since its publication, though many more universities have been established in the region, in spite of technological advancements that should make communication and information retrieval that much easier, institutions are often loath to cooperate, or even acknowledge correspondence. This naturally results in those individuals and institutions who are accommodating being that much more appreciated.⁴ In short, a physical presence on the part of the researcher is essential to studying the academic dress in the region.

This study aims to encourage scholastic inquiry into the historic and current academic dress of the Middle East and the Maghreb. The terms 'Middle East' and 'Maghreb' were chosen not without careful thought and debate. While my initial focus was on the Arab world, that definition would exclude countries and institutions not populated by Arabs, including Turkey. And yet, to speak of the Islamic or Muslim academic world (which was my next choice, given that Islam brought the advent of proto-universities to the regions), would discount the Jewish and Christian universities in Israel and Lebanon, as well as secular institutions founded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Given the sparsity of information about the history of academic dress in the region, I chose the broadest possible geographic parameters for this study, which therefore includes Bahrain, Egypt, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (the Middle East) as well as Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and the Western Sahara (the Maghreb, literally 'the West' in Arabic). Though this spans a vast area of history and geography, this work is intended as an introduction and survey of the history of academic dress in the region.

In comparison to other fields of study, there are surprisingly few scholarly works on the history of education in the Middle East and Maghreb, and none about academic dress in the region. Therefore, this study relies on a variety of sources to develop an overview of the subject. For instance, some scholars have looked at the evolution of Islamic education, including George Makdisi's invaluable volume, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*.⁵ The establishment and faltering of nineteenth- and twentieth-

³ Smith, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World*, p. 1.

⁴ Of particular note, I must thank Daphne Flanagan, former Head Librarian at the American University of Sharjah, and Abdulrahman Taha at the Juma Al Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage in Dubai, and Itay Keren, archivist at The Technion, Israel.

⁵ See also Alatas, 'From Jāmi`ah to University: Multiculturalism and Christian-Muslim Dialogue'; Khuluq, 'Modernization of Education in the Late Ottoman Empire'; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*.

eth-century colonial educational institutions has also been studied.⁶ A number of recent articles have questioned the value of Western-style universities in the region; these have offered valuable insight into the degree ceremonies—among other issues—held for modern universities.⁷ Works on the history of dress and fashion were used to corroborate and substantiate observations about historic academic fashions; one of the few works containing relevant articles is *Robes of Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*. However, by far the most fruitful sources were the brochures, prospectuses, and yearbooks produced by the universities themselves, which often prominently displayed photographs of their academic dress at graduation ceremonies. These reveal that, although the history of academic dress in the region is murky, contemporary institutions of higher education have embraced and modified the ceremonial regalia.

Historically, as Makdisi unequivocally states, ‘in Islam, the university did not exist until modern times, when it was borrowed in the nineteenth century from the West. With the absence of the university and its faculties, the degree, as it came to be known in the West, did not exist.’⁸ Nonetheless, institutions of higher education have been present in the region from ancient times. The choice to divide this study by chronological rather than geographic boundaries is due to the oft-changing national borders of the region. Moreover, Arnold Green’s study of libraries of the Arab world delineates five distinct eras that defined education in the region: traditional, pre-Islamic Arab culture from antiquity to the mid-seventh century; a transitional period during which Arab culture became Islamized and absorbed Hellenistic and Syrio-Persian knowledge from the mid-seventh to the mid-eighth centuries; the cosmopolitan or ‘Golden Age’ of Islamic education from the mid-eighth to the mid-thirteenth centuries; the ‘medieval’ era of regional Arab-Islamic societies from the mid-thirteenth to the late-sixteenth centuries; and the economic and cultural inertia of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries which, in part, facilitated colonialism.⁹ However, given the scope of this study, it is more prudent to study the academic dress of the region during five, more broadly defined eras: academic dress in the ancient Middle East, during the height of Islamic scholarship (c. seventh–thirteenth centuries), during the Ottoman Empire (c. 1570–1922), during the age of Colonialism (c. 1870–1945), and in the modern era.

Ancient and pre-Islamic era

Institutions whose sole purpose was to educate have been in place in the Middle East since ancient Pharaonic times. Then, they were known as scribal schools, though they produced more than merely writers: administrators, soldiers, courtiers, priests, clerks, and secre-

6 Adams, ‘Colonial University Education’; Kolinsky, ‘The Demise of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas: A Chapter in the History of the Idea of the University’; Nwauwa, ‘The British Establishment of Universities in Tropical Africa, 1920-1948: A Reaction against the Spread of American “Radical” Influence’; Offor, ‘University Libraries in the Colonies—I’.

7 Anderson, ‘International Universities in the Arab World: What Is their Place?’; Knight, ‘Education Hubs: A Fad, a Brand, an Innovation?’ and ‘Education Hubs: International, Regional and Local Dimensions of Scale and Scope’; Lee, ‘Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Emerging Education Hubs in Asia’; ‘The University Looks Abroad: Approaches to World Affairs at Six American Universities’; Wilkins and Huisman, ‘Student Evaluation of University Image Attractiveness and Its Impact on Student Attachment to International Branch Campuses’.

8 Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, p. 129.

9 Green, ‘The History of Libraries in the Arab World: A Diffusionist Model’, p. 455.

taries were all products of the schools, which were run by priestly scholars (or scholarly priests; a continuing theme throughout this work is that the two were intertwined, if not interchangeable, until the colonial era). These administrators, secretaries, and scribes wore white kilts to show that they did not have to do manual labour, leading John A. Wilson to coin the term 'white kilt' social class, an apt derivative of the more familiar 'white-collar class'.¹⁰ However, there is no evidence that these scholars or schoolboys wore anything in particular to show their place in the educational system.

In the West, Christian monasteries often became centres of learning (and, some argue, for the advent of academic dress). There was an abundant number of Christian monasteries in the Middle East,¹¹ yet none is known to have been a centre of secular learning.¹² On the other hand, the Academy of Gondishapur in Gundeshapur, Iran, was an educational institution founded in the late fifth century. Here, Greek philosophers and Christian scholars became renowned for their studies in medicine and mathematics.¹³ However, there is little known about either the students' or scholars' daily life, let alone their mode of dress.

Through the ancient and pre-Islamic eras, scholars and students are not believed to have worn any specific clothing to demarcate themselves from others. Despite the political and religious upheavals which the region underwent in the earlier half of the first millennium CE, with the advent of Islam, new modes of scholarship meant that more institutions of higher education were established.

Islamic era

Islam and education have been inseparable since the religion's foundation in the seventh century. Indeed, education is a central tenet of Islam, and to be a Muslim one must be able to understand, if not read and write, Arabic. Studying the Quran and the *hadiths*, Quranic commentaries written by various revered scholars, is an equally essential aspect of Islam. One of the few works in English about the history of education in Islam is *The Rise of Colleges*. This work, presupposing the reader's knowledge of Islam and its history, traces the development of Islamic education from the seventh through the fourteenth centuries. The first teaching occurred in the *jami'*, where 'besides being a place of worship for the Muslim congregation on the sabbath, Friday, with its Friday sermon, also supplied the place where the various Islamic disciplines and their ancillaries, including Arabic language and literature, were taught.'¹⁴ There were no set degrees or courses, or upper age limit of the students.

10 Mertz, *Red Land, Black Land: Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*, p. 125.

11 Including the Syrian Monastery (sixth century, Egypt), St Catherine's Monastery (c. 565, Egypt), St George's Monastery in Wadi Qelt (c. 500, Egypt), the Monastery of St Theodosius (c. 476, Palestine), Surb Karapet Monastery (fourth century, Turkey), the Red Monastery (c. 335, Egypt), Parameos Monastery (fourth century, Egypt), the Monastery of the Virgins (sixth century, Jerusalem), Dayro d-Mor Gabriel Monastery (c. 397, Turkey), the Monastery of St Macarius the Great (c. 360, Egypt), the Monastery of Mar Behnan (fourth century, Iraq), Dayro d-Mor Mattai (c. 363, Iraq), the Monastery of Mor Augin (fourth century, Turkey), the Monastery of St Anthony (c. 300, Egypt), and the Vazelon Monastery (c. 565, Egypt).

12 Certainly there was a great tradition of monastic libraries in the region; however, they were built and sustained to 'support the monastic form of individual prayer', and never developed into the centres of learning, particularly later secular education, which occurred with their Western counterparts. See Peterson, 'The Genesis of Monastic Libraries', p. 330.

13 Nasr, 'Life Sciences, Alchemy and Medicine', p. 396.

14 Makdisi, pp. 18–19.

From the earliest age of six, students would progress through learning the basics, until they reached an age when they would listen to and interact with more advanced lecturers or professors (known as *ulama*). These teachers occupied a *halqa*, a professorial chair, and students would attend lectures that interested them. The *halqa* was financially supported by the caliph or patron of the mosque, and all students would receive a stipend.¹⁵ Though there was no degree as such, a certificate of auditing or reading, called a *sama'*,¹⁶ was sometimes bestowed, and the most accomplished student in the 'art of disputation' was called a *rivasa*.¹⁷ When a student progressed from (what in the West would be called) an undergraduate to a postgraduate (also known as a fellow in this context) in the discipline of religious law, he was given the title *sahib*.¹⁸

It was in this educational environment that the Golden Age of Islam, between the mid-eighth and mid-thirteenth centuries, flourished. Contrary to modern Islamic schools, the earliest educational institutions in the Islamic world, called *masjids*, studied aspects of the Quran alongside 'ancillary subjects', including grammar, lexicology, morphology, metrics, rhyme, prosody, Arab tribal history and genealogy, the literary arts including dialectic for grammar and grammatical theory and methodology, legal theory and methodology, as well as 'foreign sciences', such as philosophy and medicine.¹⁹ The most famous of these *masjids* are Al-Qarawiyyin²⁰ in Fez (859), Al-Azhar in Cairo (970–89),²¹ and Abu-Haneefa (now the University of Baghdad, established in 1067). Other *masjids*, which could be considered institutions of higher education if not universities as such, and which later evolved into *madrasas*, included Al-Zaytuna in Tunis (c. 703) and Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem (c. 705), both of which were connected to, as well as institutionally and intellectually defined by, their respective mosques. Other famous *madrasas* of the era included Nizamiyyah (or Nizamiya) of Baghdad (1064), one of a series of *nizamiyyah* institutions which were, like the *masjid*, forerunners of the *madrasa*.²² Institutions which were founded later and were *madrasas* from their first inception include: Mustansiriya established c. 1227–33, now Mustansiriya University (1963) in Baghdad; Fadiliya *madrasa* (1233) and Madrasah of the Amir Sarghatmish (1356), both in Cairo; and Al-Saffarin *madrasa* in Fez, founded in the thirteenth century.²³

These institutions were attached to mosques, and both types were funded by a family or an individual patron. Moreover, they were open to both Muslims and non-Muslims, and women were known to attend some lectures (albeit in curtained-off areas). Scholars from the West (including the future Pope Sylvester II, who went to Al-Qarawiyyin c. 967–69²⁴) attended these schools. Adelard of Bath (c. 1080–c. 1152 AD), after being thus 'imbued with

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 140.

17 Ibid., p. 131.

18 Ibid., p. 175.

19 Ibid., pp. 78–79.

20 Also spelled Al-Karaouine and Al Qauraouiyyine.

21 *al-Azhar, Al-Azhar University: (A.H. 361–1370) its History and Work*, p. 1.

22 Bearman et al., 'Al-Nizāmiyya, al-Madrasa'.

23 Green, p. 459; Michell, *Architecture of the Islamic World*, p. 216.

24 There are no exact dates for when Gerbert d'Aurillac, the future Pope Sylvester II, travelled to Morocco; however, he travelled to Muslim Spain in 967. He is next recorded in Rome c. 969; therefore, it is probable that the education which occurred at Al-Qarawiyyin was between 976 and 969. See Darlington, 'Gerbert, the Teacher', p. 456.

Arabic learning, [tried] to convince his nephew of its superior character' because authority needed to be tempered with reason, as he learned through Arabic.²⁵ As the educational institutions were connected, both physically and financially, to mosques, there was always a tension between subjects that were *waqf*, essential to the study of Islam and its laws, and inessential subjects.²⁶ Those subjects which were *waqf*, including Quranic exegesis, science of the various readings of the Quran, sciences of tradition, science of legal methodology, jurisprudence, and the principles and sources of religion, were taught in a special section of the schools, called the *madrasa*.²⁷ While the term has certain unsavoury connotations today, the *madrasa* was, first and foremost, a school for the study of Islamic law and the Quran. However, after centuries of struggles between progressive and conservative scholars, by the early twelfth century the educational traditionalists gained power and the *madrasa* became the dominant educational institution, causing the study of 'ancillary' and 'foreign' subjects to all but disappear.²⁸ However, Makdisi does state that 'the place of the professor in the community appears clearly as one of great honour. His honoured status was evidenced by the development of the inaugural lecture, accompanied by the attendance of government officials and the bestowal of robes of honour.'²⁹ In this case, Makdisi describes an inaugural lecture in Baghdad, though it is unclear just how far west the tradition of bestowing honorary gowns was practised. Though there is no description of these robes, they were known as the *khil'a*.³⁰

Whether in the earliest days of the *masjid* or the height of the *madrasa*, there is no evidence that students wore any particular dress to differentiate themselves from the non-student. This might be, in part, because every man was supposed to constantly be a student of Islam, ever increasing his knowledge and understanding of his religion. One of the few contemporary depictions of scholars and students during the zenith of Islamic learning is in copies of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Hariri, a collection of fifty short stories written by Abu Muhammad al Qasim ibn Ali al-Hariri (1054–1122). In Figure 1, the students of Abu-Haneefa/University of Baghdad are shown listening to a lecture in the library. The students, seated on the floor in front of an elaborate shelf of books stacked on top of each other, are shown wearing robes of blue, grey, dark red, gold, purple, and white, and turbans in either green, white, or gold. All the male figures wear turbans, either green, white, or gold. All the men are shown to be students, regardless of the figures' ages, as some have short black beards while one has a white beard, and all have the universal gold trim on their robes. The most accomplished scholar, in this case the subject of the composition, is indicated not by his attire, but by holding a book and the faces turned towards him with attention.

Though the robe and tunic were worn on all occasions, records indicate that 'robes of honour' were given to viziers, military commanders, courtiers, and scholars in medieval Baghdad. Dominique Sourdél describes them as a 'black robe with [gold] embroidered

25 Makdisi, pp. 239–40.

26 Ibid., pp. 78–79

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid. Makdisi adds that, while officially these 'foreign subjects' were banned from the *madrasas*, some scholars taught them under the guise of being 'relevant to hadith (classical Islamic law)' or taught the subjects to students at home. These subjects included medicine, philosophy, grammar, lexicology, tribal histories, and rhetoric.

29 Ibid., p. 154.

30 Ibid., p. 155.

borders and a pocket, a second black robe without pockets, a black turban, [and] a silk tunic ...'.³¹ Viziers' robes lacked the golden border (which was reserved for the political elites), while intimates of the sultan were given two different robes, an embroidered turban, and a cloak.³² These robes, along with other valuable accoutrements, would be bestowed in a ceremony known as the *khil'a*.³³ Not only were these robes symbols of authority and kingship, but they were also emblematic of the 'bonding between a [social] superior and inferior'.³⁴ The relationship between teacher and student fell into this category, and evidence indicates that students received robes from their Sufi 'masters'.³⁵ Moreover, in Fatimid Egypt (969–1171), the 'head of the Jewish community (*nagid*) conferred embroidered silk robes of honour upon scholars'.³⁶ In both cases, whether the bestowal of the robes was to commemorate scholastic achievement or another event is unclear.

Therefore, while education was of enormous religious, social, and even economic importance (given the vast sums of money spent on founding and supporting mosques, *masjids*, and *madrasas*), the ordinary garments of students and faculty alike were robes worn in their daily life. While Makdisi notes that some Sufi academics wore the 'sham of patched shabby garments' to look more scholarly, other scholars have shown that there were special robes to honour the medieval Islamic scholar.³⁷

Imperial Ottoman era, c. 1299–1922

Though the Golden Age of Islamic education had waned in the Middle East and the Maghreb, Islamic scholarship continued to flourish in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was established c. 1299; however, schooling remained provincial, centred around *madrasas* or *zawiyah* (Sufi lodges for basic education). Due to the dearth of local educational institutions, promising students and professors would travel to Persia and Egypt to attend their renowned centres of learning.³⁸ The state of the poor educational system in the Ottoman Empire was such that even the honorary conferral of *khil'a* robes (while common in the Middle East and North Africa) was introduced only in the seventeenth century, when at the 'inaugural lecture for the professor of law, three robes of honour were bestowed'.³⁹ Though there is no description of these robes of honour, one likely possibility of their appearance is shown in the watercolour image of the *Seyh-ül-Islâm*, or Grand Mufti. The Grand Mufti is a consular position which was established during the Ottoman Empire. He offers religious and jurisprudential advice, and can issue religious opinions, called *fatwas*. Because of his elevated scholarly status, his attire might be considered as a form of academic dress. This image (Fig. 2), drawn by an anonymous artist in 1809, shows the Grand Mufti wearing robes which look remarkably similar to Western academic dress.

31 Sourdel, 'Robes of Honor in 'Abbasid Baghdad during the Eighth to Eleventh Centuries', pp. 138–39, 141. It is unclear if the second black robe was to be worn under or over, or separately from, the first black robe.

32 Ibid.

33 The robe shared the name of the ceremony at which it was presented.

34 Hambly, 'From Baghdad to Bukhara, from Ghazna to Delhi: The Khil'a Ceremony in the Transmission of Kingly Pomp and Circumstance', pp. 194–95, 215.

35 Elias, 'The Sufi Robe (Khirqa) as a Vehicle of Spiritual Authority', pp. 275, 278–79.

36 Sanders, 'Robes of Honor in Fatimid Egypt', p. 233.

37 Makdisi, p. 179.

38 Khuluq, p. 26.

39 Ibid., p. 159.

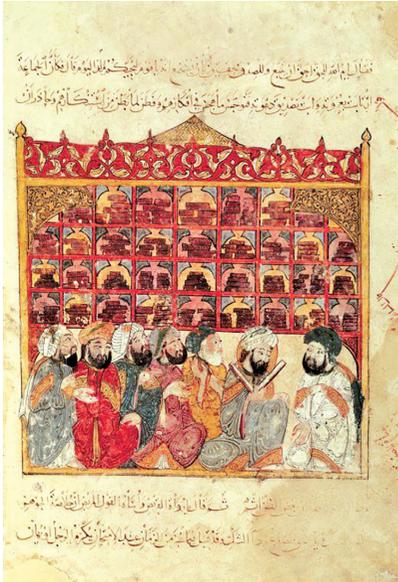


Fig. 1 (left). Scholars in Bagdad Library, dated 7 Ramadan 634 (4 May 1237), Baghdad (?), Iraq. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Arabe 5847, fols 5r



Fig. 2 (right). Seyh-ül-Islâm, or Grand Mufti, watercolour by Anonymous Artist, 1809, London.

© Bibliothèque nationale de France

Victoria and Albert Museum, ms. D.23-1895

The gown is made of white material, with the billowing, open sleeves, facings, and neckline trimmed in black fur. Where the Grand Mufti's costume differs from Western academic dress is, of course, the white, elaborately pleated turban wrapped around the head.

While these robes were, and continue to be, the visual marker of a learned religious scholar in Islam, the encroachment of Western society and culture did not leave dress unaffected in the Ottoman Empire. In the 1820s, the Empire adopted the fez, also known as a *tarboush*.⁴⁰ The fez soon became 'a symbol of the Europeanised administrator, soldier, or merchant. Western-style jacket, trousers, and shoes usually accompanied the *tarboush*, as did the title *effendi*. Educated men who kept the robes, sandals, and turban of the *ulama* continued to be called *shaykh* (or *sheikh*).'⁴¹

There are a number of surviving universities which were founded during the Ottoman Empire. In 1453, a *madrassa* was founded in Istanbul which, by the nineteenth century, was found to be insufficient to the needs of an increasingly modern and cosmopolitan Ottoman society: thus, a *Darülfünûn* (literally, a 'house of sciences') was established. By 1846 it was expanded and renamed the Ottoman Imperial University, though it was suppressed and re-established several times. In 1900 it was re-established and known as the University

40 The design similarities between the fez and the pileus (as worn at the University of Sussex and the University of the Creative Arts; for the latter see *Burgon Notes*, 46 (Winter 2018/19), has been brought to my attention, and indeed there are many: both are cylindrical, brimless hats with a central button or tassel. However, there is insufficient evidence to indicate that both had a common ancestor. The pileus developed in Europe during the Middle Ages as clerical headwear (see Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 5, 8), while the fez is indigenous to the Eastern Mediterranean (see Amphlett, *Hats: A History of Fashion in Headwear*, p. 212). The possibility of the relationship between the fez and the pileus is potentially contentious, and deserves further research.

41 Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt*, pp. 13–14.



Courtesy of the Ministry of National Defense of Turkey

Fig. 3. Teaching staff of the Imperial School of Naval Engineering, Istanbul, early 1900s.

of Constantinople, and after the Second World War was renamed Istanbul University.⁴² According to Hugh Smith, the rector of this university wears a white woollen gown, whose design (I argue) resembles that of the Grand Mufti.⁴³ The addition of a ‘professorial scarf’ in gold silk and a white hat (whose design is hybridized between a smoking hat and a fez, without a tassel) completes the ensemble. Professors and other teaching staff don the same gown, albeit in black, with scarves of various colours according to their faculty.⁴⁴ Unusually for the region, the Universities of Istanbul and Ankara (the latter founded in 1859 and re-established in 1946) subscribe to the same colour scheme for their faculty scarves: scarlet for Law, light green for Letters (and Philosophy in the case of Ankara), claret for Medicine, and deep orange for Science.⁴⁵

One of the earliest secular universities in the region was the Imperial School of Naval Engineering, founded in 1773. Until it was renamed and re-founded as Istanbul Technical University in 1928, students and teachers wore naval uniforms and the fez (Fig. 3). The effect of this combination is striking, at once emphasizing the military nature of the school, while acknowledging the scholarship of the professors and lecturers with the fez. After it was incorporated as a university, it adopted academic dress in the style of the Universities of Istanbul and Ankara.⁴⁶

Robert College in Istanbul occupies a special position in that it was established during the Ottoman Empire but, like many institutions in the region that would follow its example, was created by expatriates and missionaries in order to bring Western educational ideals to the East. It was founded in Istanbul in 1863 by American philanthropist Christopher Robert (1802–78) and missionary Cyrus Hamlin (1811–1900).⁴⁷ Though founded on the principles of an American Protestant educational system, the College was ostensibly non-denominational and accepted (male) students of any nationality or religion.⁴⁸ It would

⁴² Green, p. 463.

⁴³ For example, the Grand Mufti’s gown has two slits on either side of the hem, which are also clearly shown in Plate 418 of Smith.

⁴⁴ Smith, p. 1515.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1514–15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1515.

⁴⁷ Schrader and Schrader, ‘Robert College’, pp. 165–69.

⁴⁸ Green, p. 462.

come to encompass a variety of secondary and tertiary schools, including Reed Academy, Robert Yükses, and the American College for Girls, the latter two having since been dissolved. Reed Academy now retains the Robert College name while the university portion of the school became the Boğaziçi University (Bosphorus University). Given its American roots, it is unsurprising that the academic gowns follow the 'pattern prescribed by the United States Intercollegiate Code, made with black material' and the hoods are of the Oxford shape, with 'velvet binding, over the anterior side ... 2 inches wide on the outside and ½ an inch wide on the inside.' These hoods are black, lined with pale blue and a red chevron; for the BA degree, the hood is bound with white velvet, while for the BSc degree it is bound with gold yellow velvet.⁴⁹

The academic dress of the Ottoman Empire was shaped by the position it occupied, both geographically and culturally, between Europe and the Middle East. Earlier academic robes (in the broadest sense of the term) reflected the Islamic origins of the educational institutions within the Empire, while later dress followed Western academic dress more closely, a reflection of the preference for Western-style education. The Ottoman Empire's most important contribution to the realm of academic dress, however, was the fez, which soon became a symbol of an educated Arab man.

Colonial era, c. 1870–1945

In comparison to the Ottoman Empire, the rest of the Middle East and Maghreb was not as tightly sandwiched between East and West, in geographic terms. Nonetheless, the colonizing of the countries by France and the United Kingdom created a tension between the traditional and the colonial educational systems. While some institutions of higher education, such as Al-Azhar in Cairo, continued as they had for centuries, many new universities were established, by both colonial governments and missionaries.

The first 'new' universities in the Middle East were founded by missionaries. In Lebanon, the Syrian Protestant College was established in 1866, and the Catholic Université La Sagesse and the Jesuit Saint Joseph University were both founded in 1875. Though most Islamic educational institutions adhered to the *madrassa* template, the Omduran Islamic University in Sudan (1901, re-established 1912) was organized as a modern university but offered traditional Islamic subjects. In Israel, the establishment of universities was also affected by religion. Between 1905 and 1913, while an Ottoman territory, the 'War of Languages' raged between two educational systems, one which favoured German as the official academic language, while the other favoured Hebrew. In the midst of this heated debate, the David Yellin College of Education was founded (1913), choosing to teach in Hebrew. Though this became the norm, both the First World War and the 'War of Languages' had a lasting impact, to the extent that Technion—Israel Institute of Technology was founded in 1912, although teaching did not commence until 1925. At its first (and all subsequent) graduation, academic dress was entirely eschewed (perhaps to visually reinforce their distance from European academia), men merely wearing dark suits and women dark blue dresses.⁵⁰

49 Smith, p. 1519. It is significant to note that the United States Intercollegiate Code was only created in 1896. It is unclear when Robert College adopted the academic dress which conformed to the Code. In Haycraft's *The Degrees and Hoods of the World's Universities and Colleges* there is no mention of red chevrons decorating the hoods.

50 'Distribution of Diplomas to Palestine Engineers'. According to archivist Itay Keren, ac-



Al-Azhar University (AH 361–1370): Its History and Work

Fig. 4. Al-Azhar University, c. 1905–06.



Reid, Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt

Fig. 5. Egyptian University (now Cairo University), 1908.

Though not the norm, some secular institutions of higher education opened in the nineteenth century, including the Engineering School in 1821, the School of Languages in 1836, and the Teacher Training College in 1872 (all in Egypt) and Sadiqi College in 1875 (Tunisia).⁵¹ Subsequent educational institutions in the Middle East and Maghreb were established under blatantly colonial decrees, such as Algerian universities, including the University of Algiers (1859), the *École Supérieure de Commerce* (1900), and *École Nationale Supérieure Agronomique* (1905), which were restricted to Europeans until the early twentieth century.⁵² The University of Khartoum originated as the Gordon Memorial College in 1902, named for Major-General Charles George Gordon (1833–85). The British government would eventually create a council for the express purpose of regulating colonial higher education, called the Inter-University Council in 1946, and renamed it the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas in 1955.⁵³ After it was reorganized in 1968, the ICHEC was subsumed into the British Council in 1981.⁵⁴

The academic dress during the colonial era reflects the difference between the two dominant educational systems, one secular and the other religious. This disparity is exemplified by the contrasting academic dress in two contemporaneous photographs. Figure 4, a photograph of Al-Azhar University in 1905–06, shows the interactive lectures and study

academic dress has never been worn in Israel at all (11 July 2018). However, Hugh Smith notes one exception: at Bar-Ilan University the academic staff wear an American-style black doctoral gown faced and decorated with three bars on each sleeve, both of black velvet. This is worn with a black mortar-board with a gold tassel. Graduates wear a suit without a gown, but with a black cape (somewhat like an oversized hood) lined with a colour indicating their degree (orange for bachelors, blue for masters, bordeaux red for honorary doctors). With this they wear a black beret, lined with their degree colour and decorated with a black tassel (pp. 1130–31). The adoption of the American-style gowns for the faculty reflects the American roots of the University ('Bar-Ilan University'), yet the attire of the graduands is distinct and unique.

⁵¹ Green, p. 463.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Adams.

⁵⁴ Kolinsky. See also London, The National Archives, 'Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas: Correspondence and Papers', Reference Number BW90, 1929–84, online at <discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3494> [accessed 24 June 2018].

of a traditional *madrassa* which had remained unchanged for centuries. All the men, regardless of their status as student or lecturer, wear robes and turbans, much as they did in the manuscript illumination previously described. Figure 5, on the other hand, shows a patently different mode of education. While at Al-Azhar the students sit and read on the floor of the mosque courtyard, heedless of the camera, the students at Egyptian University pose for the artist, the front row sitting in Western chairs, the back row standing at attention. All of the Egyptian University students are dressed in Western suits (with the appropriate accessories) and wear the fez. While the fez had originated in the Ottoman Empire, by the late nineteenth century it had been adopted by the local intelligentsia of the Middle East and North Africa as a marker of their Western, secular education, regardless of their differing colonial rulers. The Egyptian University, founded with the express purpose of offering a secular education as a contrast to Al-Azhar, epitomized this education. By the First World War, according to Taha Hussein,⁵⁵ even the truest religious scholars wore the fez, rather than the traditional robes, which were seen at best as anachronistic, at worst an affectation and pastiche of historic scholars of Islam.

After the First World War, though most countries in the region remained as protectorates or colonies, many universities distanced themselves from their colonial foundations. The Syrian Protestant College was renamed the American University of Beirut in 1920. Though the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was established in 1924 in order to teach the growing Jewish population of the region, in general the movement away from colonial educational systems coincided with a movement toward the foundation of secular, and even nationalist, universities. This included the Arab Academy of Damascus and Damascus University, founded in 1919 and 1930, respectively.⁵⁶ During this time, academic attire at all of these institutions consisted of a suit and fez for both faculty and students at formal occasions (though according to photographs, Western faculty eschewed the fez).⁵⁷

While the post-First World War educational landscape in the Middle East and Maghreb was defined by a movement towards nationalist institutions, established by and for the local people, there was also a trend towards the American-style university. While originally felt only in small doses, such as the establishment of the American University in Cairo in 1919, after the Second World War it would turn into a tidal wave of educational institutions emulating their American counterparts.

Modern era

The post-Second World War, modern era of education in the Middle East and the Maghreb continues to be caught between two extremes. While some historic centres of Islamic education remain, such as Al-Qarawiyyin and Al-Azhar, the two prevailing university types are

⁵⁵ Taha Hussein (1889–1973) was one of the great scholars and authors of Egypt in the twentieth century. He was a student at Al-Azhar University, then received an MA at the University of Montpellier, a PhD at Cairo University (1914) and a PhD at the Sorbonne (1917). He was a professor at Cairo University until 1931, the founding rector of the University of Alexandria, and the Egyptian Minister of Knowledge.

⁵⁶ Green, pp. 463–64.

⁵⁷ Contemporary academic dress in Lebanon vacillates between the American and French traditions according to institution. For more, see Smith, p. 1196. The state of academic attire in Syria is unclear.



Alehthnain Magazine, 1943

Fig. 6. King Farouk as President of King Fuad I University (now Cairo University).



Collection of the Burgon Society

Fig. 7. Lecturer gown from King Fuad I University or Alexandria University, 1942, belonging to Sir Hilary Wayment.

independent universities and branch campuses of Western universities. The contrast between these two modes of university administration are visually displayed in the academic dress prescribed by the universities. Some adhere faithfully to the American style of dress, others the British, some a *mélange* of the two, and others are completely original designs.

One such *mélange* is the academic attire of the University of Alexandria. The University was established in 1938 as a branch of the Egyptian University (founded in 1908). In 1942, King Farouk I (1920–65)—who had since renamed Egyptian University to King Fuad I University to honour his father in 1940—established the Alexandria branch as an independent entity. With much fanfare and publicity, he became its new chancellor and was widely shown in his academic regalia (see Fig. 6). An extant gown is in the Burgon Society's Collection (Fig. 7), which once belonged to Sir Hilary Wayment (1912–2005), a former lecturer at the University. The gown is made of black material, with facings and the upper part of the sleeves in blue silk (somewhat reminiscent of the vertically divided Oxford doctoral gown sleeves). The infinity marks embroidered in gold on the sleeves indicate the wearer's rank (five for the chancellor, three for the dean, one for the lecturer). However, the gown's design also incorporates unique Egyptian elements, such as white lotus flowers embroidered on the standing collar and the embroidered badge of the University, 'the ancient lighthouse of Alexandria built by Ptolemies'.⁵⁸ Moreover, the wearing of the fez rather than a mortar-board continues the sartorial style for educated men established in the Ottoman Empire.

The appearance of the fez as an academic dress accessory continued well into the middle of the twentieth century. As evident in Figure 8, at this time academic dress in Egypt—and throughout the region in general—had entered an era when the use of academic dress was haphazard at best. In this image, some university administrators wear American-style gowns and mortar-boards, others wear the suit and fez combination, while others eschew academic dress altogether.

⁵⁸ Smith, p. 1525.

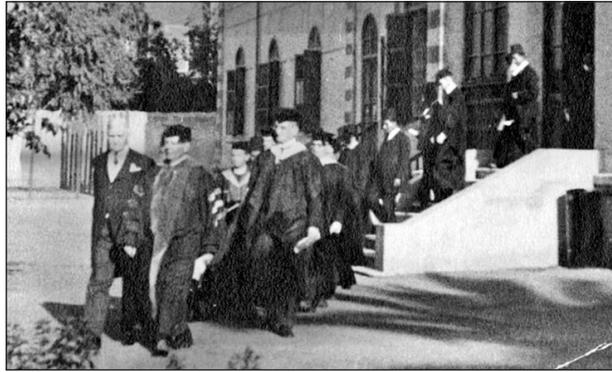


Fig. 8. First graduation ceremony at American University in Cairo, 1923.

However, this ‘state of undress’ would not continue for long: as more new universities were established, they increasingly recognized the visual impact of academic dress, sartorially confirming their status as bona fide academic institutions, visually reinforcing the institutional hierarchy, and generally adding pomp to new graduation ceremonies (which were virtually unknown in the region, given that one never graduates or receives a degree from a *madrassa*).

Independent institutions

Countries in the region flexed their newly emancipated, post-colonial status by establishing a bevy of new universities.⁵⁹ Institutions were quick to introduce academic dress into the new, Westernized university culture. At the inauguration of Kuwait University in 1966, the entire entering class was robed in gowns, whose design was a cross between the Cambridge basic undergraduate gown and the Cambridge doctoral gown (see Fig. 9). The gowns, made of black material, are faced with blue satin and the sleeves are trimmed with gold fabric. The necktie is a distinctly local invention and is also made of gold fabric. Since that time, the gowns have changed considerably. They are simply plain black gowns with no decoration, save for the necktie, which is now blue and gold. A matching vertically divided sash has been added, worn over the gown and emblazoned with the university crest, as has a black mortar-board, similarly decorated with the crest.

While the sash and epitoge may seem interchangeable, for the purposes of this essay there is a distinct difference between the two. An epitoge, a narrow band of fabric which can be decorated, is worn over the academic gown, draped over and hanging vertically from one or both shoulders. A sash, while of similar design, is worn with the robe, diagonally from one shoulder to opposite hip.⁶⁰ The sash became an ever-more popular accesso-

⁵⁹ Including Aleppo University (1946); Aysut University (1949), Ayn Shams University (1950), and Mansura University (1972), all in Egypt; the Lebanese University (1951) and the Arab University of Beirut (1960); University of Baghdad (1957), al-Mustansiriya University (1963), and the University of Mosul (1967), all in Iraq; University of Jordan (1962) and Yarmuk University in Jordan (1976); Umdurman Islamic University in Sudan (1965); Gar Younis University (1955) and al-Fatah University (1973) in Libya; Mohammed V University in Morocco (1957); the University of Tunis (1958); Universities in Constantine and Oran, Algeria (both 1961); King Saud University (1957) and Islamic University Medina (1961) in Saudi Arabia; Kuwait University (1966); University College Bahrain (1978) (from Green, p. 466).

⁶⁰ Though Shaw’s *Academical Dress of Great Britain and Ireland* describes the University of



Fig. 9. Kuwait University Inauguration Day, 8 October 1966.

ry to academic dress in the region, not least because it could be worn with the often-billowy national dress. For instance, at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, male graduands wear national dress rather than academic robes. The black, gold-trimmed *bishat* or *mishlah* is worn over a white *dishdasha*, with a Hejazi turban or *emamah* worn instead of a mortar-board.⁶¹ A blue sash embroidered with the university's crest is easily worn beneath the *bishat*. At a separate ceremony for female students (indeed, the entire campus is segregated), the women graduands wear purple *hijabs* and robes which more closely resemble academic attire, faced with gold satin, with a crimson sash worn over the gown, also embroidered with the university's crest.⁶² Men wear the sash under their robe, while women wear it over their robe.

While new universities were being established, older educational institutions were officially sanctioned by the new governments and drawn into the twentieth century. Thus, the three most renowned *madrasas* in the region were elevated to university status: Al-Azhar in 1961, Al-Qarawiyyin in 1963, and Abu-Haneefa (renamed the University of Baghdad) in 1957. With their new status, these universities also adopted graduation ceremonies and academic dress. At Al-Azhar University, the distinction between traditional Islamic studies and modern subjects is reinforced through academic attire. At the graduation of traditional Islamic *ulama* scholars (Fig. 10), men wear a black *thwab* (long tunic with a high, closed collar), which is historically associated with Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam. A white and red *taqiyah*, the style of cap associated with the Prophet Mohammed, is worn, along with a green (the holy colour of Islam) sash embroidered with Arabic text, a brooch, and a medallion on a red, yellow, and white neck ribbon. Women *ulama* scholars wear a black *abaya* (a loose, long-sleeved robe which is closed in the front, completely hiding the garments underneath), and a white *hijab* as well as the same green sash, brooch, and medallion. Overall, the regalia of the modern *ulama* scholar, while fundamentally opposed to the simplicity of the original scholars, is designed to visually announce their status as Islamic scholars. Male scholars of the secular disciplines wear the same as their religious scholar counterparts, albeit

St Andrews LLA band as an epitome (p. 360), it is called a sash by R. N. Smart, 'Literature Ladies—A Fifty Year Experiment' and the Burgon Society (*Burgon Notes*, 21 (Autumn 2012)).

61 A *bishat* or *mishlah* is a type of cloak. A *dishdasha* is an ankle-length tunic. *Hejazi* turban or *emamah* is a type of turban, wrapped around the head without the traditional cord to hold it in place.

62 A *hijab* is a close-fitting head scarf which also hides part of the forehead, and leaves no hair visible.



Fig. 10 (top). Ulama scholars at Al-Azhar University graduation, Cairo.



Fig. 11 (right). Female graduates at Al-Azhar University, Cairo.

without the sash, brooch, or medallion. For female scholars of secular disciplines the academic dress at Al-Azhar University is more similar to British and American academic dress (Fig. 11). The gown design for women is similar to the Oxford doctor's [d2] gown, with facings and cuffs elaborately embroidered with gold, Bedouin-style trim. With this is worn a simple black mortar-board over a pale *hijab*. The decorative finishing on the Al-Azhar gowns reflects the rich history of geometric patterns and gold embroidery in the region.

Overall, the independent universities founded or re-established in the post-colonial era have created an academic dress style that is a combination of many traditions, often dictated by local customs, culture, and the availability of resources. At times, they eschew academic dress altogether. However, academic dress continues to be worn more traditionally in branches of Western universities and cultural institutions.

Branches of Western universities and cultural institutes

The era of official colonies has passed; however, universities and cultural institutions are playing an increasingly important role in what some would call an academic and institutional colonialism. On the one hand, branches of Western universities in the Middle East and Maghreb ostensibly offer high quality educations to those who cannot or do not wish to leave their home countries. These universities manifest a presence of the host university (and its country) in the region, and are significant investments, both for the institution and the students.⁶³ Cultural institutions, on the other hand, have a much smaller footprint, and offer short language courses, cultural exhibitions and events. Academic dress is evident in both types of institutions.

The academic dress worn at branch campuses is often identical to that worn at the home institutions, sartorially reinforcing the education received at these outposts as identical to that of the home institution. Some of these branches, however, recognize that inevitably there are differences between the home and branch universities, and display this

⁶³ Jane Knight has written extensively on the subject of international educational hubs and university branches. See 'Education Hubs: A Fad, a Brand, an Innovation?' and 'Education Hubs: International, Regional and Local Dimensions of Scale and Scope'. See also Wilkins and Huisman; Lee; Anderson.



New York University Abu Dhabi

Fig. 12. Celebrating their graduation from New York University Abu Dhabi in 2015, Benjamin Jance, front, takes a selfie as Sumit Dahal, Selbi Nuryyeva, and Gaby Garcia pose for the photo.

in small details in the academic attire. For instance, students of New York University Abu Dhabi wear Mayfair violet gowns and black mortar-boards with gold tassels, identical to those of the home institution in the United States (Fig. 12).⁶⁴ However, much like the trim on the gowns at Al-Azhar University, the cuffs are decorated with colourful, geometric Bedouin-style embroidery, a clear nod to the region's handicraft heritage and culture. More commonly, branch universities conform completely to the academic dress precedent of their home university campus.

Despite the best efforts of European, particularly British, universities to expand into the Middle East and Maghreb, branches of American universities are more prolific.⁶⁵ To

64 N.B.: NYU Abu Dhabi describes itself as a degree-granting research university with a fully integrated liberal arts and science undergraduate program, rather than a 'branch' campus. However, given that its origins are in the NYU New York campus, it is included in this article.

65 Nwauwa (q.v.) attributes this to enduring, anti-colonial sentiments.

Fig. 13. The Confucius Institute at the University of Bahrain and the fifth batch of Chinese language learners, January 2017. The Institute's emblem appears on the epitoges.



ameliorate this trend, many countries now utilize 'soft-power' diplomacy by establishing cultural institutions around the world whose aims are to educate the local people in the language and culture of the home country. Academic dress is increasingly used as a visual marker of this academic imperialism, and the Middle East and the Maghreb are the regions with the highest concentration of these institutions. The oldest of these organizations is the Alliance Française, founded in 1883, with successive institutions increasing their presence in the region exponentially.

One of the oldest and most prolific soft-power educational institutions is the British Council. Founded in 1934 to 'create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries', the organization offers many educational opportunities in the Middle East and the Maghreb.⁶⁶ As a part of that, they also recognize graduates of UK universities and host a graduation for those who could not attend their ceremonies.⁶⁷

Confucius Institutes promote Chinese language, culture, and teaching. With institutes in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco, it is clear that China is using education as a means of cultural colonialism. Confucius Institutes mimic the British Council's graduation ceremonies by hosting graduations for students who have completed extensive Chinese language courses at their centres.⁶⁸ Though the students do not wear gowns, they are bedecked in bright red silk epitoges draped around the neck, tapered at either end and emblazoned with the Confucius Institute's emblem (Fig. 13). This simple academic accessory lends itself to be easily worn with both European and various styles of national dress.

In this modern era of academic attire, just as the variety and number of institutions of higher education has expanded, so too has the variety of academic dress. Institutions, whether independent universities, branch campuses, or cultural institutes, have recognized the visual impact of academic dress and are progressively implementing it in a bid to visually reinforce their positions as academic institutions by means of this globally recognized sartorial vocabulary.

66 From the British Council website, <www.britishcouncil.org>.

67 There is photographic evidence of this ceremony in *Pakistan Today*, 16 Jan. 2012. However, the location of that ceremony does not fall in the remit of this study, and there is no evidence of such a ceremony in the Middle East or Maghreb. Nonetheless, the British Council remains an important institution in the region.

68 Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, p. 517.

Conclusion

This represents the first foray into the study of the history of academic dress in the Middle East and the Maghreb, and an extension of Hugh Smith's initial study of current academic dress practices. Though Hugh Smith began the initial study over fifty years ago, no scholar has continued the work.⁶⁹ Given the proliferation of universities and institutions in the region, a volume (or volumes) entirely dedicated to describing the academic dress in the Middle East and Maghreb is warranted. However, this essay's intention was never encyclopaedic. Rather, it is intended to give the reader an overview of the history of academic dress in the region, offering an explanation as to how and why it developed as it did within the changing academic milieu of the Middle East and Maghreb. When the first institutions of higher education were formed in Antiquity, there was no differentiation between daily and academic dress. With the advent of Islam, a renewed emphasis on education did not correlate with the development of academic dress in the region. While 'robes of honour' were given to eminent scholars in the *madrasas*, wearing the robes was barred to all but the most elevated Islamic law scholars, even within the Ottoman Empire. However, it was at the same time that the fez became a sartorial symbol of the well-educated gentleman, regardless of his actual scholastic abilities. With the advent of Western-style universities in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the contrast between Islamic and Western higher education was visually enacted, with traditional scholars favouring robes and turbans, and modern scholars the fez and suits. It is only in the post-colonial era that universities in the Middle East and Maghreb began to fully embrace academic dress, often incorporating their own national symbols into the robes, with trimmings, sashes, turbans, and embroidered seals. Moreover, in the wake of an ostensible withdrawal from colonial imperialism, nations have turned to soft-diplomatic cultural and educational institutions in a bid to expand their influence in the region. Part of this often entails wearing academic robes or sashes, suggesting that academic dress has a form of agency that projects and aggrandizes the expansionist aims of these institutions, as well as creating an identity for its students and faculty. Overall, academic dress in the Middle East and Maghreb was shaped by Islam and colonialism, evolving from everyday garb to a marker of education and imperialism. Its identity is ever-changing, morphing to fit the needs of a university, institution, or nation, and thus will be of continuing interest to scholars.

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69 The bulk of the relevant information in his work centred on Iranian universities, which were particularly communicative. That is not the case today, and as other countries were left unmentioned in his books, I focused on that lacuna.

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