

DOCUMENTATION OF A 16th CENTURY RUSSIAN FERIAZ COAT

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Historical Description:

This item is a typical court garment for a successful Russian merchant or lower level service (deti boiarin) or court (dvoriane boirin) noble in the territories controlled by Moscovite Russia, circa 1540 - 1600. The idea for this costume originated in a picture by the famous Nuremburg artist, Jost Amman, of the Tsar's ambassadors in the processional at the coronation of Maximillian II in 1576. In this picture, the garment is obscured by the odnariadka worn by the ambassadors but still displays the decorated front closure. (Exht 1) This garment is also described by Giles Fletcher in 1589. 1

The Russians in this time wore many items of Asiatic, Persian or Turkish origin and the feriaz is no exception. In name, cut and materials, it appears to be of Persian origin while the lining, closures and utility have employed definite Turkish elements. In historical descriptions, it is made of silk or cloth of gold 2 and would be analogous to the colorful vest of a modern tuxedo for the upper nobility and great officers of state. It was the court garment for lesser nobility, merchants and bureaucrats of the state chancery services, the Prikasy 3.

As a merchant who does not wish to draw the attention of the Tsar's capricious tax collectors but still wants to make an impression of prosperity, I have chosen to construct this garment of polychrome brocade cloth. I have also elaborately decorated it with gold metallic embroidery and a profusion of freshwater pearls, but no fur, as the accessory items that would have been worn with it already display generous amounts of this last item.

In the interest of historical accuracy and veracity, several accessory items such as a hat (shapku), overcoat (achabeny / okhaben or odnariadka) and possibly a fur lined shuba coat would have been worn either with or over it, dependant upon the wearer's social position. In accordance to the rules of this competition, I will also model these items and describe them completely, though for reasons of seasonal comfort, I will abstain from wearing a silk caftan beneath it or a wool achbeny over the feriaz, opting only for the shuba coat 4.

Historically, my character lives in the Russian controlled port of Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea, which is a semi-ariad climate, so many of my garments are lined with cotton instead of fur. A man in my profession would also have had daily dealings and interaction with merchants of Chinese, Persian, Turkish, Indian and Arab carvansi origin, so my garments reflect these influences and materials in subtle affectations. As a fur merchant of Russian extraction, the liberal usage of fur edgings on these accessory items serve as both an ethnic and professional identification 5.

Materials:

Feriaz

The materials used in the construction of this item were three point five yards of polychrome pomergarite patterned brocade cloth in three shades of blue, one shade of grey and one shade of white. This garment is lined with navy blue cotton velveteen edging at the hem, neckline and cuffs over a lighter blue cotton cloth lining in the turkish fashion of 16th century garments seen in the Tokapti Museum ⁶. The decoration employs six thousand, seven hundred and seventy-nine (6,779) 2.5 mm freshwater pearls (est.), 370 yards of 2 ply / 300 yards of 3 ply metallic gold thread in the embroidery, five yards of 6mm gold metallic cord for the loop closures, 26 gold filigree bobs with hematite finials and metallic ear ring posts for the buttons.

I had niether the money or access to silk / metallic brocade so I used a polychrome brocade with some natural and man-made fibers which I could afford. I used cotton lining instead of the linen lining employed by Russians at this time becuae the use of cotton from Egypt by Turks is well documented ⁷ and would have been accessable to my character. Cotton is also one third the price of pure linen and much more durable. I used cotton velveteen for purely financial and access reasons. Silk velvet was accessable in period Russia to the fabulously wealthy but my character would not have been able to afford it.

I used gold metallic thread for obvious financial reasons instead of the real thing. An additional reason is that the Koran prohibits the use of gold in decoration so this use would have further ethnically differentiated my character in period. I used a profusion of freshwater pearls for purely ostenstacious appeal. Pearls from the river systems of northern Russia have a slight blue tint ⁸ and would be appropriate for garments before the 1570's whereas a whiter pearl is more typical of Indian origin and would be appropriate for my feriaz geographically. These pearls became so common throughout 1580's Russia that English merchants and ambassidors mentioned that the boiarin ladies complained bitterly that the wives of merchants and bureaucrats were able to use them. ⁹ I also used filigree gold bobs because they were an accessable extravagance from artisans in Bokhara in period and I could not find any appropriate cast buttons. (Exhbt) I have not found any historic record of the used of refined and polished hematite but have used it purely for the astetic reasons that it perfectly offset the gold filigree button bobs and because I simply love hematite.

Accessories:

The materials used in the outer shell of the Shuba are silver / gold pomergarnite patterned polychrome brocade, burgundy based pomergarinte patterned brocade with biege, green and white highlights, silver metallic wrapped cord, aventurine beads to simulate jade, freshwater pearls and 14mm cloisonne beads to simulate the famous Novgorod products (German manufacture) ¹⁰ and raccoon fur (I couldn't obtain any asiatic raccoon fur). The inner shell is constructed of red cotton twill and raccoon fur edging along the front opening the inner edge of the fur was not turned under before being sewn down to pervent a bulky ridge that would have destroyed the illusion of furlining.

The materials used in the Shapku is a lining of raccoon fur with a layer of craft felt

covering the leather side and a layer of white dupionti silk over that covered with hand applied diagonal strips and edgings of gold metallic ribbon. The "wings" of the upturned brim are closed in the front with gold cloisonne 14mm beads matching those used on the shuba coat and gold cord loops in the Turkish fashion.

Construction

Feriaz

This garment is collarless and constructed of two 38" x 50" lengths of brocade for the body, two 26" long sleeves 12" wide at the armhole and tapering to ten inches at the wrists with a 2" wide split cuff. The body is widened by triangular gores sewn to each side of the body pieces lengthwise and extending from the hem to 4" below the armpit gusset.

In the present case, I have used a Turkish style lining with typical Turkish style fabrics instead of linen for comfort, cost and durability reasons alone. These fabrics would have actually been available in Astrakhan during the period because of the international nature of the commerce and the multi-ethnic backgrounds of the local artisans. Other Turkish affectations of style used on this garment are the loop closures and button bobs used at the cuffs, the front opening, the side vents and the "ruched" sleeves . 11

Persian influences can be seen in the excessive decoration in these areas in plant type designs, the collarless neckline, the close fit of the upper body and the flaring expansion of the garment from the mid abdomen to the hem. 12 Russian elements of construction include the even lengthed hem, the closures at the side vents, the choice of pattern on the fabric and the closures from neck to hem. (Exht)

Accessories

Shuba— This garment is based upon a pattern used in a surviving artifact worn by the Metropolitan Philip in the 1560's (Exht) and using a pattern that uses nearly 100% of a piece of cloth roughly measuring 52 " in width and 118" long. This is a pan-Slavic pattern typical in cut from the Balkans to the White Sea and differentiated primarily by fabric type, decoration affectations and cut of sleeve, collar and closures 13. The construction itself consists of two rectangles of equal size (52" x 24") to comprise the body and expanded at the sides by the triangular wastage pieces left from cutting the tapered sleeves (24" & 12" at each end and 50" long). (Exht) The armpit has a further expansion in the form of a square shaped gusset (7" x 7") made from the wastage length of fabric not used in the sleeves or collar. The collar is 12" wide and lined a layer of craft felt and an outer layer of the brocade. The opening is cut on the diagonal to allow the edge of the collar to lay parallel to the shoulders instead of behind it as a none cut neck opening would have made it lay. The decorated brocade strip down each side of the front opening is adhered to the fabric beneath it with heat bond and acts to stabilize the lighter weight outer fabric against the heavy fur interlining. (Exht) Each shell was cut together to insure an mirror image fit and the appliques along the front openings were applied prior to construction and hand stitch together along all openings. The outer edge of the brocade edging is sewn to the interlining by hand to further stabilize it.

Shapku— This item was constructed to resemble artifacts worn by ambassadors in a

procession at the coronation of Maximillian II as depicted by Jost Amman in 1576. (Exht) The shapku was sometimes worn with the wings turned up or turned down and was worn widely by the populace. (Exht) This accessory is lined with the rubbed part of a long raccoon coat where the original owner sat. The up-turned "wings" or brim is the original coat's collar and is a heavier denser raccoon fur than the coat portion, which is a lighter raccoon fur for weight purposes. This item is cut in a bullet shape with the wings sewn on the flat end opposite the rounded edge with the widest edges touching and left unsewn. The fur lining was laid across the doubled craft felt layer, which was cut 1/2" wider than the lining on all sides. This pattern was used to cut the outer shell fabric. Both layers were sewn together separately and turned inside out before being put over the fur lining separately and pinned through all three layers 1" from the edge. The fur lining was then turned under and the two outer layers turned under along the edge and pinned. Next layer was applied and pinned. After sewing the pinned edges together, the gold ribbon was pinned diagonally in strips on each side with ribbon pinned on the edges and over the seam to produce a finished look. This was handsewn down and finished with three cloisonne 14mm beads topped with a 4mm adventurine bead on a metallic earring posts on one wing and a gold metallic string sewn down on the opposite wing.

Pearling and Embroidery

The feriaz is decorated with 6,779 2.5mm freshwater pearls (57 strands x 120 ct. per strand) at the neck, cuffs, side vents and both sides of the front opening from hem to neck. I initially experimented with beading wire but soon opted for employing the tough thread each strand came on so I could apply them to the garment using thread, without fear of the wire cutting that same thread.

The application method I used was to tie the strands together with the stringing thread and trim the excess. I then placed the pearls on the fabric and followed the natural vine and petal design woven into the fabric, couching down each pearl along the strand with a stitch. (Exht) I found that this was faster to apply than single application and much stronger and durable than relying upon normal / beading thread or wire. I did experience a crimping problem with the limited length of the original thread versus the high number of turns in following the design but alleviated this problem by periodically "crunching" a pearl with a pair of needlenosed pliers for extra thread length. Out of 57 strands, this method sacrificed approximately 71 pearls.

I followed the woven design in the fabric because it was quite beautiful in its own right and this choice would also preserve the continuity of the garment already existing in the weave of the fabric. This was also done at the side vents and is the reason this garment has cuffs. I chose not to continue this method around the neckhole for the same reason of continuity of effect and opted for a simple double strand of 6mm pearls instead of exactly duplicating the ambassador's feriaz (Exhit).

The feriaz is also embroidered with 370 yards of 2 ply metallic thread (est.) at the side vents and cuffs and 300 yards of three ply metallic thread down the front closure. When I started this project only three ply was available to me and halfway through, it disappeared from the shelves and was replaced by the 2 ply thread. Between them, I discovered that the two ply was more time intensive to work with but yielded much better

looking results. Only time restraints and near insanity prevented the re-working of the front closure embroidery with two ply thread.

The embroidery followed the existant pattern of the woven petals in the design. I used a satin stitch to apply this thread to achieve an effect similar to stumpwork overlayersed felt or cording to imitate the look of the period Russian technique, *skanny*. (Exhits) Another efficient use of this thread would have been to couch the thread down to the surface of the fabric using a technique similar to *Or Nue* ¹⁴ in Western Europe or using one of the other traditional Russian embroidery techniques like brickwork (Exht), basket weave (Exht) or herringbone (Exht) that are generally grouped under the description of *prikrep*. (Exhits)

Personal Alterations

Several features of these items show the typical Persian and Turkish influences one would expect from a trading port on the Silk Road but controlled by Russian officials and troops. The utilization of clothing features seen in other cultures by the Russians dates back to the conscription of their troops and artisans by the Golden Horde during the Mongol domination period (1240-1464). ¹⁵

On the feriaz, I made two alterations to the standard construction design for personal comfort reasons. First, I tapered in the armholes to the actual width across the back of my sholders so it wouldn't feel bulky under two other coats that would have normally covered it. Second, I found that I have become stockier in my thirties and needed a gusset inserted under my arms to accomadate my chest. I can document this practice in outer coats like the shuba (Exht) and shirts like the rubakha (Exht) but they are not mentioned as being used on the feriaz or any other coats for that matter, in period descriptions of this garment ¹⁵. Caftans like the feriaz are not mentioned as being lined with anything in period sources , save the garment beneath. Olearius does mention cotton lining being used in 1630 in the feriaz but that is an obviously OPP source and of no use here. ¹⁶

On period garments, the fur was rarely shown (Exhts) but on the accssory garment I have sewn a strip on each cuff and the hem for practical wear reasons. I have found through past experience that on coats of this length, these areas become very, very noticeably dirty. A tough fur hides this and adds a dramatic flair used in seventeenth century Russia. Another distinctly foreign feature is the fur interlined edging that is Turkish in origin but allows the garment to give the illusion of opulent furlining without the heat in warm climates. The use of fur edging in hats and wide collars on clothing was also a distinguishing characteristic in Astrakhan to announce Russian heritage among the many cultures of this area. My collar was based upon those seen in the drawings of Sigismund von Herberstein, featuring himself and Tsar Vassily Ivanovich (1526). (EXht)

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF EXHIBITS

- 1 Patterns: Feriaz, Accessories (Shapku & Shuba)
- 2 The Horizan History of Russia, American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1970 pg 94; a reprint of art from Amman, Jost, Der Kunstbilder (1596), reprinted as "293 Renaissance Woodcuts", Second Edition, Dover Publishers, New York, 1986
- 3 The Armoury in the Moscow Kremlin, Sovietsky Khudozhnik Publisher, Moscow, Russia, 1988
- 4 Alyoshina, T.S., The History of Russian Costume from the Eleventh to the Twentieth Century, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art , Nicholas / David Lithographers, 1978
- 5 Herberstein, Sigismund, Description of Moscow and Moscovy,1557, Barnes and Noble, Inc., New York, 1969
- 6 Early Russian Embroidery, in the Zagorsk Museum Collection, Sovietskaya Rossia Publishers, Moscow, 1983