

## BYZANTINE LITURGICAL VESTMENTS

**C**hristian Church vestments were not inherited from any other religion but gradually evolved out of the ordinary dress of the people of the Roman Empire. In those first days of Christianity the clergy presided in their ordinary clothing, although undoubtedly costlier and more beautiful garments were used. The Church therefore, did not invent vestments but rather a conservative instinct naturally retained something of the gracious and ample vesture once worn by all Mediterranean peoples. Beyond conservatism it seems that a deep human instinct prefers special clothing for ceremonial occasions and thus many of the ancient world religions have evolved ritual garments for their priests.

The use of such dress over the course of centuries and in all parts of Christendom gave rise to a sense of stability and continuity which is important in a religion concerned with external verities. Vestments strikingly remind the participants at the sacred mysteries that they are wonderfully joined to all generations of past believers forming but one undivided family of faith which spans both time and space. Finally, the sacred vestments of the clergy clothe over, to some extent, the individual personality of the officiating priest who acts at the altar not simply in his own name but as the one Christ who still “is offered and offers” the Holy and Divine Liturgy. The use of noble and flowing vestments born in Christian antiquity tend to underscore the uniqueness of this Christ-action.

At present the following liturgical vestments are used by Byzantine clergy, both Orthodox and Catholic (numbers refer to indications on the center illustration):

## VESTMENTS OF THE DEACON

- 1. **Sticharion** – the tunic, which is worn by anyone serving in The Holy Place, is in fact the baptismal garment, the robe of glory. Since no other vestment is worn over the deacon's Sticharion, it is generally more ornamented than that of the priest who uses it as an undergarment.
- 2. **Epimanikia** – the cuffs worn by the deacon and higher ranks of clergy. The priest and bishop wear the cuffs over the sleeves of the sticharion while the deacon places them underneath his sticharion's broader sleeves.

- 3. **Orarion** – the diaconal stole, a long band ornamented with crosses and often the word “holy” repeated three times. The orarion is worn on the left shoulder, passes across the chest and falls down front and back.

## VESTMENTS OF THE PRIEST

- 1. **Sticharion** (discussed earlier)
- 2. **Epitrachelion** – the priestly stole, a long band worn around the neck and falling down to the ground in front where the two extremities are sewn together. It is usually marked with seven crosses.
- 3. **Zone** – the sash or belt, girding the sticharion and passing over the epitrachelion to hold it in place.
- 4. **Epimanikia** or cuffs (discussed earlier)
- 5. **Phelonion** – this outer cloak has the same origin as the Roman *chasuble*. Its very full form in the Byzantine usage is reminiscent of the ancient *paenula* which gradually replaced the Roman toga as the outer garment of the upper classes toward the close of the imperial period. This ample vestment is often cut slightly up the front to facilitate arm movements and is marked by a large cross on the back.
- 6. **Epigonation** – a lozenge shaped ornament suspended by a cord from the left shoulder and hanging at the right knee. It is properly a Bishop's vestment but is worn by some priests as a sign of dignity. It probably originated in the imperial regalia as a sort of purse or bag but now is purely ceremonial, marked with a cross and made of cloth covered cardboard.



## VESTMENTS OF THE BISHOP

- **1. Sakkos** – that vestment proper to Bishops which gradually replaced their use of the phelonion. Directly copied from late imperial regalia, it is a shorter tunic with ample sleeves and marked with a cross on the back. It is worn over the sticharion or under-tunic.
- **2. Omophorion** is probably one of the most ancient of the Bishop's vestments with a strictly' symbolic origin. Copied from the scarf of office worn by the Roman Emperor and other officials, it identified the Bishop as head of the community. A large, long band of cloth it is marked with crosses and is passed around the neck hanging in front and behind. A “small” omophorion worn simply around the neck and hanging in two pendants on the chest is properly worn in place of the large one after the gospel at the Liturgy. The omophorion is worn by all Eastern Bishops and by Western metropolitans in an abbreviated form (the *pallium*).
- **3. Pectoral Cross** (discussed later)
- **4. Engolpia** (discussed later)
- **5. Crown** – the Bishop's head covering, adapted from the imperial regalia when the Byzantine clergy began assuming civil functions. The crown is embroidered and bears small icons and is often surmounted by a cross. Some Archimandrites and Archpriests, although not of episcopal character, have the right to the use of the crown.
- **6. Dikerion and Trikerion** – candlesticks used by the Bishop to give solemn blessings. The dikerion holds two candles, symbolizing the dual nature of Christ as God and Man. The trikerion holds three candles, symbolizing the Trinity.
- The Bishop also wears all the vestments of a presbyter indicated above with the exception of the phelonion.
- **The Eagle Rug** – Bishops stand at their throne on a small oval or circular rug on which is embroidered an eagle in flight above a city. This represents his governance of the local Church under his care.

## PERSONAL CLERICAL DRESS

Besides these liturgical vestments, Byzantine clergy employ several distinctive garments for their ordinary dress. These are simply ritualized forms of the ordinary dress of the Middle East which is still regularly worn in traditional societies. These include:

- **Mandyas** – or mantle is the monastic choir and processional cloak. A Bishop's mandyas is generally purple in color and is adorned by icons of the four evangelists and by ornamental bands, suggesting the streams of grace flowing through the Bishop's ministry. The mandyas is closed at the front bottom as well as at the neck.
- **Pateritsa** – the pastoral staff of a Bishop or Abbot. It is terminated by two serpents looking toward an orb surmounted by a cross, and is reminiscent of the brass serpent erected by Moses to heal the Israelites. The Bishop carries a shorter and simpler staff of wood topped by a simple knob when walking.
- **Pectoral Cross** – In the Byzantine usage this is not a distinctive emblem of Bishops but may be worn by any priest as a sign of a special honor or dignity. In the Russian usage all priests make use of it. The Bishop wears the pectoral cross in conjunction with the Engolpion.
- **Engolpia** or medallions depicting Christ and the Mother of God are a distinctive sign of the Bishop in the Byzantine Church. A Bishop usually wears one with the pectoral cross; a Metropolitan, Archbishop or Patriarch employs two.
- **Kamelavkion** – a cylindrical hat with a small brim on top worn by the three orders of priesthood. Monks, Bishops (since they were monks) and certain dignitaries cover this hat with the *Epanokamelavkion*, the black monastic veil.
- The (outer) **Rason** -a wide-sleeved tunic worn over the **Andirion** or inner rason (not visible in the illustration). The andirion, which may be of any color, is usually girt by a sash or, in the case of monks, by a leather belt. The outer rason is usually black although Russian metropolitans often wear white.

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