

# religious dress



Buddhist monk

Buddhist monks in front of  
Mahagandayon Monastery in  
Amarapura, Myanmar.

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**religious dress**, any attire, accoutrements, and markings used in religious rituals that may be corporate, domestic, or personal in nature. Such dress may comprise types of coverings all the way from the highly symbolic and ornamented eucharistic vestments of Eastern Orthodox Christianity to tattooing, scarification, or body painting of members of nonliterate and contemporary tribal societies. Some types of religious dress may be used to distinguish the priestly from the lay members of a religious group or to signify various orders or ranks within a priesthood. Some religious communities may require that religious personages (e.g., priests, monks, nuns, shamans, priestesses, and others) garb themselves with appropriate types of religious dress at all times, whereas other religious communities may only request that religious dress be worn during rituals.

In theocratic traditions, such as Judaism and Islam, religious sanctions govern what may and may not be worn by members of the community. Religious dress embraces not only what is worn by a prayer leader but also what is worn by the congregation outside as well as inside a place of worship. In many traditions, habits serve to identify monastic groups. Indeed, in the latter case, the function of religious dress is more akin to heraldry as a form of symbolic identification than to liturgy with its ritualistic symbolic motifs.

In a more restricted sense, religious vestments articulate a liturgical language as part of a figurative idiom shared with other religious symbols—e.g., icons (images), statues, drama, music, and ritual. According to the richness of the liturgical or ritual vocabulary employed, the more feasibly can a symbology of vesture be attempted. This is especially the case with



Bartholomew I

Bartholomew I, patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox church, attending a service in honour of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Mikulčice, Czech Republic, on May 25, 2013.

Eastern Orthodoxy, whose predilection for symbolical theology has spread from sacraments to sacramentals and everything associated with worship, including dress. With allegory paramount in the Middle Ages, the Western church could not escape attributing symbolical values to garments whose origin may have owed little to symbolism. From the liturgical writer Amalarius of Metz in the 9th century to the theologian Durandus of Saint-Pourçain in the 13th–14th century, sacerdotal vestments, in particular the stole and the chasuble, were viewed as symbols and indeed

operated as such in a way that still influences current usage. Thus, because the stole is a yoke around the neck of the priest and he should rejoice in his servitude, on donning or doffing it he kisses the emblem of his servile status.

The notion of dress as a substitute skin and, hence, as an acquired personality temporarily assumed has been widespread in nonliterate and in tribal religions; such practices in shamanism have been widely observed in Arctic and Siberian regions. The use of a substitute skin in religious ritual is also explicit in the cultic actions of some advanced cultures, such as in the rite of the Aztec maize goddess Chicomecóatl. A virgin chosen to represent Chicomecóatl, after having danced for 24 hours, was then sacrificed and flayed. The celebrant, dressed in her skin, reenacted the same ritual dance to identify with the victim, who was viewed as the goddess.

Religious dress may also serve a memorial function. In the case of the mullahs (religious leaders) of the Shīʿite Muslims (members of the party of ʿAlī, fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, black gowns are worn that allude to the sufferings of Ḥusayn (ʿAlī’s son by Fāṭimah, Muhammad’s only surviving daughter), who was martyred at Karbalāʾ (now in Iraq) in 680 CE. In the Eucharist, which is both a thanksgiving and a reenactment of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Golgotha, the chasuble (outer garment) worn by the celebrant depicts scenes from the Passion on the orphrey, the name given to the elaborately embroidered strips stitched on the chasuble. The fringes on the Jewish prayer shawl (*tallit*) witness to “the commandments of the Lord” mentioned in chapter 15 of Numbers and remind the worshipper that he (or she, depending on the tradition) has

covenanted to observe them.

## Types of dress and vestments in Western religions

### Judaism

#### Early sacerdotal dress

Jewish vesture, worn only by men, is an amalgam of ancient and modern religious dress. Originally, sacerdotal dress was probably varied and complex, but, after the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the subsequent disappearance of the Temple offices, many garments associated with priestly functions passed into oblivion. Chief among these offices was that of the high priest. In addition to the usual Levitical garments (those of the priestly class), the high priest, while officiating, wore the *me'il* (mantle), the ephod (an upper garment), a breastplate, and a headdress. The *me'il* was a sleeveless robe of purple the lower hem of which had a fringe of small gold bells alternating with pomegranate tassels in red, scarlet, purple, and violet. The ephod—an object of much controversy—probably consisted of a wide band of material with a belt to secure it to the body, and it was worn over the other priestly garments. Most important was the breastplate (*hoshen*), which was square in outline and probably served as a pouch in which the divinatory devices of Urim and Thummim were kept. The book of Exodus specifies that it was to be woven of golden and linen threads dyed blue, purple, and scarlet (28:15). Because of its oracular function, it was called the “breastpiece of judgment.” On the face of the breastplate were set 12 gems in four rows, symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel. These stones were a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle in the first row; an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond in the second; a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst in the third; and a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper in the fourth. The identity, sequence, and objects of representation of these stones are matters of controversy. Worn over the ephod, the breastplate was slung from the shoulders of the wearer by golden attachments. On his head the high priest usually wore a *mitzenfet* (either a tiara or a turban), except on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), when he wore nothing but white linen garments upon entering the Holy of Holies (the inner sanctuary).

#### Later religious dress



Jewish religious dress

Jewish man wearing a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries) on his head and hand. .

Later religious dress of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE reflects usages that predate that event but were continued in Judaism at the synagogue.

Included among such garments are *tefillin* (phylacteries) and *tzitzit* (fringes), which have certain features in common. The name *phylacteries* is sometimes thought to point to a prophylactic origin, but the term is actually a translation of the Hebrew word for “frontlets” (*toṭafot*). Phylacteries are worn in

obedience to the commandment found in Deuteronomy (11:18) and Exodus (13:9, 16):

“And you shall bind [the words of God] as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” This implies that there should be two phylacteries: one to be worn on the arm, the other on the head. Both kinds consist of a small black box of hide containing a manuscript and are secured to the respective parts of the body by leather thongs. On the sides of the head *tefilla* is the Hebrew letter shin, the first letter of the name Shaddai (“Almighty”). Both boxes are secured by leather thongs. The practice can be dated at least as far back as the 3rd century BCE. The knotted thongs indicate a prophylactic purpose—i.e., to protect the wearer against demons. Likewise, the wearer of these objects was, for the prayer’s duration, under the protection of the Almighty, whose name he bore. The importance of knots in Semitic magic is also alluded to in the Qur‘ān (the Islamic holy book).

Something similar obtains in the case of the *tzitzit* (fringes), or “twisted cords.” The wearing of fringes is in obedience to a commandment in Numbers: “It shall be to you a tassel to look upon and remember all the commandments of the Lord, [and] to do them” (15:38–40). The fringes were attached to the outer garment with no attempt at or reason for concealment. Later, because of persecution, they became an inner garment, enabling the wearer to observe the Torah clandestinely. This garment, which is not entirely obsolete, is styled *arba ‘kanfot* (“four corners”) in allusion to a verse in Deuteronomy enjoining the worshipper to “make yourself tassels on the four corners of your cloak with which you cover yourself” (22:12), although no literary reference to its use can be traced further back than the 14th century.

The *tallit* also has the four fringes, but it is often confined to synagogal use and, even there,



Rosh Hashana

A Jewish man blowing a shofar during Rosh Hashana.

is generally limited to the morning service, whereas the *arba kanfot* is worn all day. Both silk and wool are used, but the woollen *tallit* is preferable, with white as its ground colour. In the 20th and 21st centuries the *tallit* is worn like a scarf and is sometimes pulled over the head to aid in concentrating during prayer.

Formerly, however, it was always wrapped around the head. In Orthodox Judaism the head is invariably covered during worship, usually by a skullcap known as a *yarmulke*, or *kappel*. Because a Jewish male is not supposed to walk more than four cubits (six feet) with his head uncovered, observant Jews wear the skullcap clipped to their hair and indeed may wear it all day because they believe themselves to be in the presence of God at all times.

The dress of rabbis never conformed to precise standards. Rabbis do not generally wear special clothing except during special observances such as Yom Kippur, when they wear a white robe called a *kittel* (also called a *sargenes*). This white garment, however, is worn not only by rabbis but also by other worshippers. The *kittel* emphasizes that Yom Kippur is an occasion not only of repentance but also of grace, for which festal wear is appropriate. Emphasis on the atoning aspect of the occasion also led to the *kittel* being interpreted as *takhrihim*, or graveclothes, which are worn to aid the worshipper's mood of repentance, a practice also adopted by the *hazzan* (cantor) on two other occasions and by the host at the seder (meal) on Passover (a feast celebrating the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt in the 13th century BCE). Shrouds are normally of unadorned white linen, following the sumptuary ruling of the 1st-century-CE rabbi Gamaliel the Elder. To the shroud may be added the *tallit* used by the deceased, but with the fringes removed or cut, because the prescription governing their use applies only to the living. Both liturgical vesture and everyday clothing must conform to the Mosaic requirement that forbids the combination of linen and wool in the same garment.

## Christianity

In the pre-Constantinian church (before the early 4th century), no distinctive liturgical dress was worn, and the Eucharist (Holy Communion) was celebrated by priests whose dress did



not differ from that worn by lay members of their congregations. Present liturgical vestments in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches derive from a common origin—i.e., the garments that were fashionable in the late Roman Empire. After the Schism of 1054, however, they each followed separate courses.

## Roman Catholic religious dress



Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II wearing a pallium.

A distinction is made between the insignia of ecclesiastical and sacerdotal office in the hierarchy and the functionally and symbolically significant liturgical robes. After the so-called barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire from the 4th century on, fashions in secular dress changed, and thus the clergy became distinct in matters of dress from the laity. Certain robes indicate a position in the hierarchy,

while others correspond to function and may be worn by the same individual at different times. The most important vestment among the insignia is the stole, the emblem of sacerdotal status, the origin of which is the ancient *pallium*. The stole originally was a draped garment, then a folded one with the appearance of a scarf, and finally, in the 4th century, a scarf. As a symbol of jurisdiction in the Roman Empire, the supreme pontiff (the pope, bishop of Rome) conferred it upon archbishops and, later, upon bishops as emblematic of their sharing in the papal authority.

The distinctive garb of the liturgical celebrant is the chasuble, a vestment that goes back to the Roman *paenula*. The *paenula* also was the Eastern Orthodox equivalent of the chasuble, the *phelonion*, and perhaps also the cope (a long mantlelike vestment). In its earliest form, the *paenula* was a cone-shaped dress with an opening at the apex to admit the head. Because ancient looms were not wide enough to make the complete garment, it was made in several parts sewn together with strips covering the seams. These strips, of contrasting material, developed into the orphrey (embroidery), on which much attention was later lavished. Next in the hierarchical order after the priesthood were the diaconate and subdiaconate, whose characteristic vestments were, respectively, the dalmatic (*dalmatica*), a loose-fitting robe with open sides and wide sleeves, and the tunic (*tunica*), a loose gown. A priest wore all three, one over another. Under these he wore the alb (a long white vestment),

held round the waist by a girdle, and around the neck the amice (a square or oblong, white linen cloth), with the maniple (originally a handkerchief) on the left arm. Although the deacon used a stole, the subdeacon did not. In the formative period of liturgical dress, these practices were in the process of becoming normative. During the 9th–13th century the norms now familiar were established. The chasuble became an exclusively eucharistic garment. The cope, excluded from the Eucharist, became an all-purpose festive garment.

Next in importance to the chasuble is the cope, a garment not worn during the celebration of the mass but rather a processional vestment. It is worn by the celebrant for rites of a non-eucharistic character, such as the Asperges, a rite of sprinkling water on the faithful preceding the mass. The origins of the cope are not known for certain by liturgical scholars. According to one theory, it derives from the open-fronted *paenula*, just as the chasuble derives from the closed version of the same garment. (The subsequent wide divergence between the two vestments need not preclude a common origin.) Unlike the chasuble, the form of which has never stopped changing, the evolution of the cope was complete before the end of the Middle Ages. Cope chests, based on the quadrant of a circle and designed to preserve the embroidered surfaces by keeping the copes flat, were a common feature of medieval cathedrals. When it is worn, the two sides of the garment are held together by a morse (a metal clasp). The cope occupied an intermediate position between liturgical and nonliturgical vestments, the most important of which was the cassock, the normal dress of the priesthood outside church ceremonies. When engaged in religious ceremonies, the officiant would wear the liturgical vestments over his cassock.

The tiara, the papal diadem or crown apostolic, emerged in the early medieval period; and the mitre (the liturgical headdress of bishops and abbots), the most conspicuous of the episcopal insignia, began as a mark of favour accorded to certain bishops by the supreme pontiff at a somewhat later date.

Like the cope, the surplice (a white outer robe) entered liturgical usage in the Middle Ages as a late modification of the alb. By the 14th century its present role as a choral or processional garment was established. With the passage of time, the length of the garment grew progressively shorter.

The surplice was also associated with the monastic orders, but vesture distinguished only



vespers

Benedictine monks singing vespers on Holy Saturday at St. Mary's Abbey in Morristown, New Jersey.

the order and not the kind of order. Eremitical (hermitic) monasticism allowed no standard form of dress to develop, and only communal monasticism, beginning with the Rule of St. Benedict in the 6th century, enabled standardization to become possible. Monastic dress included habit, girdle or belt, hood or cowl, and scapular (a long narrow cloth worn over the tunic). The salient characteristics of monastic dress have always been sobriety and conservatism. The

orders proved even more retentive of archaic fashions than the hierarchy, and, in contrast to the deliberate splendour of ecclesiastical vestments, monastic dress was expressive of a renunciation of luxury. The contrast was functional in origin: the menial tasks of the monk related him sartorially to the peasant, whose humble avocations he often duplicated, rather than to the princes and prelates of the church, whose dress reflected the splendour of the ceremonies in which they engaged.

Because of the diversity of the monastic orders, only a summary account of their vesture may be given. The Benedictine mantle was black, fastened with a leather belt, but the Cistercians—reformed Benedictines—eschewed any dyed material and instead dressed in undyed woollen material, which was off-white in colour. In the course of time this became white, a tacit relaxation of the earlier austerity adopted as a protest against “luxury.”

Carthusians, a contemplative order founded in the 11th century, likewise wore white. In the 13th century the mendicant orders (friars) emerged. The Franciscans, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, first used a gray habit, which in the 15th century was exchanged for a brown one; in spite of this change they continued to be known as the Grey Friars. The Carmelites, an order founded in the 12th century, became known as White Friars.

Dominicans, founded by St. Dominic from Spain, adhered from the beginning to a black robe over a white gown. Canons regular (communal religious persons living under vows), although ordained, lived like the orders under a rule, and the Augustinians (several orders following the Rule of St. Augustine) are styled Black Canons in contradistinction to the Premonstratensians, or White Canons, an order founded by St. Norbert in the 12th century. Because the office (prescribed prayers) took up so much of a monk's time, his choir robes were almost as important as his day clothes. Surplices were worn in choir with an almuce



over; this last was a lined shoulder cape designed to help the wearer resist the cold of medieval churches.



St. Teresa of Ávila

Nuns' costumes were similar to those of monks, the chief difference consisting in the replacement of the hood by a wimple (collar and bib) and head veil. Habits are white or black or mixed, and this remained unaltered until the 17th century, when the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul introduced blue. The Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa in 1950, wear a distinctive white sari with three blue stripes. These exceptions remained unique; nuns' habits retained a markedly medieval aspect until reformed by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Many modern nuns are no longer required to wear a habit, especially those in active, rather than contemplative, service.

The cassock has its origin in the *caracalla*, a robe favoured by the Roman emperor Bassianus (reigned 211–217), who came to be known as Caracalla because of the garment he habitually wore. Worn by the clergy as early as the 5th century, it became in time the standard day wear for prelates and priests, hierarchical rank being indicated by colour: bishops, archbishops, and other prelates wore purple; cardinals, red; the pope, white; and ordinary clergy, black.

## Eastern Orthodox religious dress



Russian Orthodox priests

Russian Orthodox priests walking outside Ascension Cathedral, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The Middle Ages also witnessed the evolution of Eastern Orthodox vestments into approximately their present form. The eucharistic garment corresponding to the chasuble was the *phelonion*, with variant forms in the Greek and Russian churches. The *sticharion*, which is held by the *zōnē*, or girdle, corresponds to the alb. The cuffs, or *epimanikia*, which fit over the *sticharion*, bear little or no resemblance to the maniple. The *epitrachelion* is the Orthodox equivalent of the stole, but it hangs straight instead of being crossed over the chest, as is the case with

the stole in Western churches. On the deacon, the *epitrachelion* is pinned to the left shoulder and hangs in front and behind; with this exception, the deacon's vesture is identical to the priest's. The bishop wears an *omophorion*, whose shape and manner of wearing are closer to the original *pallium* than either the stole or the *epitrachelion*. In place of the *phelonion*, since the 16th century, the bishop uses a dalmatic known as the *sakkos*. The *epigonation*, or rhombus-shaped portion of silk hanging to below the right knee, is common both to bishops and archimandrites (head abbots).

The monastic habit of the Eastern Orthodox monk differs according to which of the three grades he occupies. The fully professed monk wears the great, or angelical, habit, which consists of the inner and outer rasons, girdle, cowl (with veil), *analvos*, and *mandyas* (mantle). The inner rason corresponds to the cassock and, like it, is used by the secular clergy (i.e., those who minister in parishes). The outer rason, a wide-sleeved garment, is black in the Greek church but variable in colour in the Russian church among the secular clergy. The *analvos* (shaped like the Western scapular, although the two garments have no historical connection) differentiates the full, or perfect, monk from the other grades, and its substance must be of animal, nonvegetable origin to remind the wearer constantly of death. The *mandyas* is the bishop's cloak (for non-eucharistic occasions), and in the Russian church its use is granted to monks of the intermediate grade, although this license does not obtain in the Greek church. In neither church may the *mandyas* or *analvos* be worn by monks of the lowest grade. Unlike Western orders, Orthodox monks dress only in black, but they share the same sartorial conservatism, their habits having remained unchanged in essentials from medieval times to the present.

## Protestant religious dress

The Reformation of the 16th century varied in intensity from one country to another, and the fate of liturgical vesture suffered accordingly. With the rejection of the dogma of transubstantiation (the Roman Catholic teaching that in the Eucharist the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the body and blood of Christ, with the properties of the bread and wine remaining the same), the use of the mass garments might have been expected to be eliminated, but, wherever an altered eucharistic doctrine survived, an attenuated liturgical vesture contrived to survive with it. In the case of the Anglican and Lutheran churches, a paradoxical situation emerged whereby pre-Reformation practices

(e.g., use of crucifixes) survived in Lutheranism alongside a Reformation theology while a Catholic theology survived in Anglicanism along with a repudiation of Catholic rites. The Lutherans rejected the insignia of a celibate clergy but retained the chasuble for Communion services and the surplice and alb for other services.



Barbara Harris

Barbara Harris blessing the congregation at the end of the ceremony for her ordination as the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion, Boston, 1989.

Bishops in both Lutheran and Anglican communions retained the cope. The different editions of the Book of Common Prayer, the Anglican liturgical book, attest to 16th-century reforms and the rising power of Puritanism, a 17th-century reform movement; the use of vestments declined in consequence. The cathedrals, however, maintained liturgical vestment standards to a certain degree, even when the last vestiges of liturgical propriety had been extinguished in the parishes in the 18th century. The cope became the High Church (liturgically oriented) vestment par

excellence, worn by bishops not only processionally but even during Communion. Many views about the ceremonial revival of the 19th century have not in all respects been accurate, and followers of Edward Pusey, a leader of the Catholic revival known as the Oxford movement, and ritualists sometimes blundered not from an excess of archaeological zeal, as has been commonly supposed, but rather because they were inordinately influenced by their sociocultural environment. This may be less immediately obvious in the case of vesture than in architecture, but one result of overreacting was the loss in the 19th century of the customary dress of the clergy. The gown and cassock, as street attire, were allowed to fall into desuetude because in Puseyite views the gown was Genevan (Reformed). Another instance lay in the adoption of the (local) Roman biretta, introducing an Italian fashion even though adequate indigenous precedents were not lacking.

The gown, now inseparably associated in the popular mind with Genevan divines, was in fact opposed by these same divines in England and Scotland in the 17th century. In spite of this, standard vesture in Presbyterian churches is now the black gown and white linen bands over cassock and cincture, with the academic hood added for preaching services as a mark of learning appropriate to the pulpit, and a stole or scarf.

## Changes in religious dress and vestments since the 20th century

With a change in emphasis, chiefly expressed in the episcopal use of the cope, Episcopalian usage in the first half of the 20th century differed little from Roman Catholic rules except in Anglo-Catholicism, in which deliberate archaism imposed an adhesion to Baroque (17th to early 18th century) models, themselves superseded within Roman Catholicism. The Liturgical Movement of the 20th century exercised an influence beyond the boundaries of the church in which it originated, and modern clerics of different denominations increasingly resemble one another sartorially because all have had recourse to the same sources of liturgical inspiration.

In Roman Catholicism, the formative period of religious dress was over before the Reformation, and Reformation influence was indirect—via the impetus supplied by the Counter-Reformation, which made Baroque its official art style. The emphasis on richness of material, excessive decoration, and preoccupation with surface set in motion a process of decline that was not arrested until the 20th century. The degeneration of the Gothic chasuble with its pointed folds into a stiff, fiddle-backed, overembroidered vestment had begun as early as the 13th century with the practice of elevating the host (sacrificial elements) in the mass. The elevation of the host entailed the folding back on the celebrant's shoulders of the sides of the chasuble. The flexibility of the early chasuble permitted this, but, to facilitate the elevation, more and more material was removed from the sides until the garment became a caricature of its early form, distorted beyond recognition and its vestigial portions—dorsal (back) and pectoral (front)—came to be viewed simply as canvases for the display of virtuoso embroidery. Undergarments also became what is now viewed as effeminate with the addition of lace, and, although the Liturgical Movement began with a new theology of the Eucharist, its repercussions forced a decline of the Baroque style in dress.

From the late Middle Ages to the mid-20th century, the history of religious dress in the Roman Catholic Church has been the history of its rubrical evolution. The regional variants of patristic (early church) and early medieval times were eliminated in the interest of ultramontanist (a theory that advocated a greater authority for the papacy). The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) reversed the process of eight centuries, again sanctioning regional divergences. Council rulings also simplified the use of the mitre and suppressed the use of the maniple altogether. Increased lay participation in the liturgy led to an

extension of lay religious dress in more than one communion. To lay offices such as the verger, who wears a gown over the cassock, and chorister, who wears a surplice, Anglicans added that of the lay reader, who vests in cassock and surplice, with a scarf as his or her ensign.

The upheavals of the 16th, 19th, and 20th centuries did not have much effect on Eastern Orthodox vesture, and the same canons (rules) prevail today in Orthodoxy as obtained prior to the fall of Constantinople in the 15th century. To ascribe this condition in Eastern Orthodoxy solely to the effects of cultural isolation would be an oversimplification. Suppression of vestments or their alteration is less likely to occur in a church in which such vestments have higher symbolic value attributed to them than in other traditions.

## Islam

Islam attaches less importance to liturgical vestments than do most religions, but the social emphasis of the Islamic faith finds expression in the universal application of the regulations governing dress—e.g., all who enter the mosque remove their footwear, and all going on pilgrimage must wear the same habit, the *iḥrām*, and thus appear in the holy places in the guise of a beggar.

Because Islam recognizes no priesthood in a sense of a class sacramentally set apart, “clerical” functions are discharged by the ‘*ulamā*’, “the learned (in the Law),” whose insignia is the ‘*imāmah*’ (a scarf or turban). The garb of the ‘*ulamā*’ exhibits geographical variations, but the ‘*imāmah*’ is found everywhere. Two broad regional distributions obtain, with Iraq as the area of confluence between the two. In the western part of the Muslim world, “clerical” dress tended to become standardized according to the Azhar (Egyptian) pattern: a long wide-sleeved gown (*jubbah*) reaching to the feet and buttoned halfway down its total length over a striped garment (caftan), with headgear consisting of a soft collapsible cap (*qalansūwah*) of red felt around which is wound a white muslin ‘*imāmah*’. In Syria a hard *ṭarbūsh* of the same red shade replaces the *qalansūwah*. Both the *qalansūwah* and the *ṭarbūsh* are provided with a blue tassel. The *jubbah* is usually a sober shade of blue, gray, or brown, seldom black. Among the Sunnis—from Iraq eastward—the *jubbah* is worn in association with an ‘*abā*’ (a long, full garment), traditionally of camel hair and brown or black. This is sometimes secured by a *ḥijām*, or cummerbund. In this second regional

variant, the *‘imāmah* becomes a full turban replacing the cap, or fez. A green turban usually denotes a *sharīf*, or descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and among the Shī‘ites (the party of ‘Alī) the entire “clerical garb” is black, as a symbol of mourning for the death of Ḥusayn at Karbalā’.

The Ottoman Turks, as strict Sunnis, preferred turbans of other colours, which, elaborately wound, served to distinguish the wearer from a non-Muslim. On conquering Constantinople in 1453, they adopted the Byzantine cap and wound the turban around it in demonstration of conquest. The elaborately wound turbans of Iran and India also have a skullcap as a foundation for their folds. The art of winding a turban required no small degree of skill, the wearer fitting the cap over his knee and winding it in that position, whereafter the cap kept the folds in place. To the Prophet Muhammad is attributed the saying “What differentiates us [in appearance] from the polytheists is the turban.” In India the turban has also been worn by non-Muslims, but the Muslim turban has remained distinguishable from the Hindu by the use of the skullcap as its foundation.



Qur’ān

Muslim girl studying the Qur’ān.

For all Muslim males, whether Sunni or Shī‘ite, clerical or lay, the wearing of gold or silk is forbidden in consequence of a prescription in a saying (Hadith) of the Prophet, whereby the wearing of either was rendered “*ḥarām* [forbidden] for the males of my nation.” Footwear must be removed on entering a mosque for fear of defiling the interior with ritually impure substances that may have adhered to the sole

of the shoe. This rule applies also to entering a grave; thus, gravediggers and stonemasons must be unshod on such occasions. Because covering the head is a Middle Eastern way of showing respect, a head covering should properly be worn by individuals of both sexes in the mosque and even when praying outside the mosque.



When a Muslim prepares to visit the holy city of Mecca at the time of the major pilgrimage (hajj), he or she enters into a state of consecration and is robed in two white seamless garments (*iḥrām*), which may not be exchanged for normal dress until the



## pilgrimage

Muslim pilgrims at the Great Mosque of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

deconsecration after the conclusion of the pilgrimage ceremonies. To these two garments women may add a veil.

Many of the mystical dervish orders (*turuq*) wear distinctive robes, frequently with hierarchical differences. In Turkey, headstones are carved in the shape of the headdress distinctive to the order to which the deceased belonged and are tintured in the appropriate colours. Particularly interesting are the ceremonial robes of the Mawlawiyyah order (popularly known in the West as the whirling, or dancing, dervishes), in which the symbolism of the robes is central to the mysteries of the order. The dervishes wear over all other garments a black robe (*khirqah*), which symbolizes the grave, and the tall camel's hair hat (*sikke*) represents the headstone. Underneath are the white "dancing" robes consisting of a very wide, pleated frock (*tannūr*), over which fits a short jacket (*destegül*). On arising to participate in the ritual dance, the dervish casts off the blackness of the grave and appears radiant in the white shroud of resurrection. The head of the order wears a green scarf of office wound around the base of his *sikke*.

For all Muslims of any sect, the standard graveclothes are the threefold linen shroud, or *kafan*, consisting of the *izār*, or lower garment; the *ridā'*, or upper garment; and the *lifāfah*, or overall shroud. Martyrs, however, are buried in the clothes in which they die, without their bodies or their garments being washed, because the blood and the dirt are viewed as evidences of their state of glory.

## Types of dress and vestments in Eastern religions

### Indian religions

The distinction between ordinary dress and religious dress is difficult to delineate in India because the ordinary members of the various socioreligious groups may often be distinguished by their costumes. For example, Parsi (Indian Zoroastrian) women wear the *sari* (robe) on the right shoulder, not the left.

Hindu men frequently wear short coats (*angarkha*), and the women wear a long scarf, or robe (*sari*), whereas typical Muslim attire for men and women is a long white cotton shirt (*kurtah*) and trousers (*pā'ijamah*). Some Muslim women also wear a veil called the *burka*,

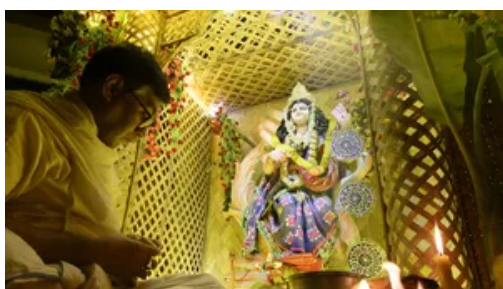
which not only hides the face but also envelops the entire body.



Consulting the *Adi Granth*

A Sikh consulting the *Adi Granth* in the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar, Punjab, northwestern India.

Traditional Sikh dress is an ordinary *kurtah* and cotton trousers, covered by a long hanging coat (*chogah*). The male Sikh is recognized especially by his practice of wearing his hair and beard uncut, the former being covered by a particularly large turban and the latter often restrained by a net.



*yajna*

*Yajna* being performed by a Nambudiri Brahman, Kerala, India.

The Brahman (Hindu priest) is distinguished primarily by the sacred thread (*upavita*), which is bestowed on him during his boyhood investiture and worn diagonally across the body, over the left shoulder, at all times. During the water offering to saints, it is worn suspended around the neck and, during ancestor rites, over the right shoulder. Devotees may also wear a tonsure that leaves a tuft of hair longer than the rest (*shikha*). The *pravrajya* (“going forth”) associated with some Upanishads (Hindu speculative texts) involved a ritual rejection not only of homelife but also of the *upavita* and *shikha*. Ascetics usually wear the ordinary loincloth, or *dhoti*, for meditation or Yoga, but there is also a tradition of naked asceticism. A teacher (*swami*) traditionally wears a yellow robe.



sadhu

A sadhu at the colonnade of Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India.

## Buddhism

A major factor in the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia was the strong organization of its monastic communities (*sangha*). One of the main outward signs of the *sangha*, along with the tonsure and the begging bowl, has always been the monk’s robe; “taking the robe” became a regular expression for entering the *sangha*. The *sangha* was organized in accordance with



Buddhism

Novices at a Buddhist temple  
monastery at the Ayutthaya Historical  
Park, Ayutthaya, Thailand.

the traditional code of discipline (*vinaya*), which  
includes the basic rules regarding robes in all

Buddhist countries. These rules are all linked to the  
authority of the Buddha himself, but at the same time they have featured enough flexibility  
to allow for adaptation to local circumstances.

The robe (*chivara*) illustrates two main types of religious action, each symbolized by the  
character of the materials used. First, the wearing of “cast-off rags” was one of the “four  
resources” of a monk, being an exercise in ascetic humility similar to the other three, which  
are living on alms, dwelling at the foot of a tree, and using only cow’s urine as medicine.  
The use of rags was later formalized into making the robes out of separate strips or pieces  
of cloth, but the rough patchwork tradition was carried over into China, where hermit  
monks in modern times wore robes made of old rags. In Japan, robes have been preserved  
with designs imitating the effect of patchwork, and robes sewn from square pieces of cloth  
were nicknamed “paddy-field robe” (*densōe*). This latter term is reminiscent of an old  
Indian Buddhist tradition according to which the Buddha instructed his disciple Ananda to  
provide robes for the monks made like a field in Magadha (in India), which was laid out in  
“strips, lines, embankments, and squares.” In general, whatever the degree of formalization,  
the rag motif ensured that the robe was to be “suitable for recluses and not coveted by  
opponents.” The second type of religious action associated with the robe stemmed from the  
permission granted to monks to receive robes or the materials for making them from the  
laity. The presentation of materials for robes was thought to have the same beneficial  
karmic effects (toward a better birth in the future) as the offering of food. The practice  
meant that various good materials were offered as well as rags, and in due course six types  
were allowed on the authority of the Buddha—namely, linen, cotton, silk, wool, coarse  
hempen cloth, and canvas.

There are three types of *chivara*: the inner robe (Pali: *antaravasaka*), made of 5 strips of  
cloth; the outer robe (*uttarasanga*), made of 7 strips; and the great robe, or cloak  
(*samghati*), made of 9, 15, or 25 strips.

In order to avoid the primary colours, Buddhist robes are of mixed colours, such as orange  
or brown. Another common term for the robe, *kasaya*, originally referred to the colour  
saffron, though this meaning is lost in the Chinese and Japanese derivatives, *jiasa* and *kesa*.

The robe is normally hung from the left shoulder, leaving the right shoulder bare, though some ancient texts speak of disciples arranging their robes on the right shoulder before approaching the Buddha with a question. In cooler climates, both shoulders may be covered with an inner robe, and the outer robe is hung from the left shoulder, as in China.

Sandals are allowed if they are simple and have one lining only, or they may have many linings if they are cast-off sandals. The rules for nuns' robes are similar, but they also wear a belt and skirt. Some special vestments are worn by Tibetan Buddhists, including various hats characteristic of the different sects, such as Dge-lugs-pa (the Yellow Hat sect).

## Chinese religions

Court dress, sacrificial dress, and ordinary dress were all influenced in ancient China by the Confucian-inspired civil religion. The classical text for the Confucian ideal of deportment and dress is Book X of the *Lunyu* (*Analects of Confucius*), in which the emphasis is on propriety in every detail, whether at home or in affairs of state or ceremony. The undergarment, for example, was normally cut wide at the bottom and narrow at the top to save cloth, but it had to be made full width throughout for court and sacrificial purposes.

Confucius was also said to have insisted on the primary, or “correct,” colours—blue, yellow, red, white, and black—rather than “intermediate” colours, such as purple or puce, and to have avoided red for himself because it was more appropriate for women.

Garments used in sacrifices to former kings and dukes were prepared from silk grown in a special silkworm house. According to the “Doctrine of the Mean,” the clothes used by ordinary people at sacrifices were “their richest dresses.” The fully developed Imperial costume for sacrifices was a broad-sleeved jacket and a pleated apron around the waist. Decorative symbols represented the universe in microcosm and thus the universal sovereignty of the emperor.

Funeral dress was generally white, although the *Shujing* (“Classic of History”) refers to a funeral at which those who officiated wore hempen caps and variously coloured skirts. According to the *Yili*, mourning dress consists of “an untrimmed sackcloth coat and skirt, fillets of the female nettle hemp, a staff, a twisted girdle, a hat whose hat string is of cord, and rush shoes.” For Mencius, a 4th–3rd-century-BCE philosopher, the wearing of a coarse

cloth mourning garment was an important aspect of traditional filial piety (*xiao*).

Buddhist robes in China followed Indian tradition fairly closely, though they were noted under the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) for being black in colour. Daoist robes, in contrast, were yellow. That this is an old tradition may be seen from the example of the 2nd-century-CE Yellow Turban movement, in which the missionaries and priests wore yellow robes and the followers yellow headdresses.

## Japanese religions



Shintō blessing

A Shintō priest blessing children during the Shichi-go-san (Seven-Five-Three) festival at the Meiji Shrine, Tokyo, Japan. The priest waves a *harai-gushi*, a wooden wand with folded-paper pendants, symbolically purifying the children and assuring them of good health and prosperity.

The priestly robes of Shintō are an example of the way in which rather normal garments of a formative age became the specialized religious vestments of later times.

They consist of an ankle-length divided skirt (*hakama*) in white, light blue, or purple, depending on rank; a kimono in white, symbolizing purity, and of which there are various types; and a large-sleeved outer robe of various colours that is frequently a *kariginu*, or hunting garment, as used in the Heian period (794–1185). The headgear is a rounded black hat (*eboshi*). The more elaborate “crown” (*kammuri*)

has a flat base, a protuberance rising forward from the back of the head, and a flat band curving down to the rear. Within a shrine, stiff white socks with a divided toe (*tabi*) are worn, and, when proceeding to or from a shrine, officiants wear special black lacquered clogs (*asagutsu*) of paulownia wood. Shintō priests carry a flat, slightly tapered wooden mace (*shaku*), which symbolizes their office but otherwise has no precisely agreed upon significance. The dress of *miko* (girl attendants at shrines), whose main function is ceremonial dance, also typically consists of a divided skirt and a white kimono. They carry a fan of cypress wood. Young male parishioners bearing a portable shrine through the streets may wear a kimono marked with the crest of the shrine and a simple *eboshi*.

Buddhist robes continued the general Buddhist tradition, but of particular interest are the ornate ceremonial robes of high-ranking monks, especially in the Shingon and Nichiren

sects; the white robes worn by devotees in the syncretistic Shugen-dō tradition (famous for its *yamabushi*, or mountain priests) during lustrations and similar rituals, symbolizing purity, as in Shintō; and the deep, inverted bowl-shaped hats of woven straw (*ajirogasa*) worn by Zen monks during begging tours.

Many new religions in Japan have carefully manufactured ceremonial vestments based on Shintō or Buddhist models or of mixed or original design. A common feature is the use of fairly simple uniform clothing for all believers during dedicated labour, mass rallies, or acts of worship. In Tenri-kyō, a religion founded in the 19th century by Nakayama Miki, the name of the religion figures prominently on the back of the garment, and, in Nichiren Buddhist movements, the central symbol *namu Myōhō renge kyō* (“I devote myself to the *Lotus Sutra* of the wonderful law”) may be displayed on a stole hanging from the left shoulder.

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