

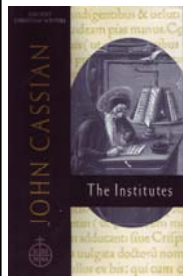


Question & Answer

Why Do the Monks wear Black?

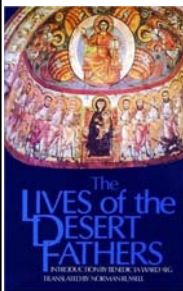
It has been recorded in the monastic literature such as the (*Historia Monachorum*) that the community of monks that gathered around abba Apollo looked like an “army of angels, drawn up in perfect order, robed in white.” It also says about abba Or that the monks lived with him were “roped in white like the choirs of the Just.” Around the ninth century, another text which records the history of the Coptic Patriarchs up until the thirteenth century commonly known as (*The History of the Patriarchs*) records that in the ninth century, the Muslim ruler al-Hakim ordered that the Christians “should have a belt fastened round their waists and that they should wear black turbans on their heads... and that they should wear crosses a span in length, then he ordered again to make the crosses a cubit and a half in length.” Again in the eleventh century under another Muslim ruler, a decree was written saying that “all the Christians should fasten round them black girdles that they might be distinguished.” Ever since the Monks and priests kept wearing black gowns as a sign of remembrance of their persecution.

Further Readings



John Cassian, “*The Institutes*” Newman Press.

The institutes is the first written work of St John Cassian. It consists of two sections. In the first section, St John deals with the institutes and the rules of the Egyptian Monasteries, including Monastic garb and forms of prayer. The second section treats the eight principal vices (gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory, and pride) and discusses strategies for countering their effects.



Norman Russell, “*Lives of the Desert Fathers (The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto)*” Cistercian Publications.

In the year 394 seven monks from Palestine made the difficult journey through the Egyptian desert, drawn there by stories of remarkable men. What they found in the communities living far up the Nile valley fully accorded with their expectations, and in the account written by one of their number, we have a rare contemporary source of information about the lives of these Desert Fathers. In here long and illuminating introduction sister Benedicta Word explores the background of these travellers.



Published by

Saint Shenouda
the Archimandrite
Coptic Orthodox
Monastery
Sydney, Australia

Address

8419 Putty Rd,
PUTTY, NSW 2330

Phone/Facsimile

(+612) 65 79 7093

Email

pimonakhos
@copticmail.com

Website

Ssthenouda
monastery.org.au

To receive this
Newsletter
Monthly by
email, send
your request
to the above
email or
download it
from the
above website



PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

Vol: 3 Issue: 10

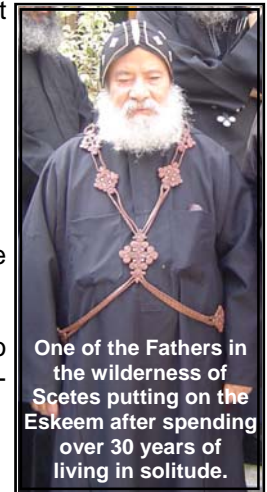
Baba 1726 / October 2009

The Holy Eskeem

By: Bishop Mettaous
Abbot of El Sourian Monastery



The ‘Eskeem’ is a Coptic word which means ‘shape’ it is a string of plaited leather with crosses in equal distances, it surrounds the chest and the back. Two big crosses are in it; one at the chest, and one at the back, then 12 more crosses. The hermits who has reached high levels of spirituality wear it, following these strict practices and rules:



One of the Fathers in the wilderness of Scetes putting on the Eskeem after spending over 30 years of living in solitude.

1. To read the 150 Psalms daily.
2. To pray the Mid-night praise daily.
3. To do 500 metania daily.
4. To live the life of silence.
5. To continually read the Holy Bible and the lives and sayings of the saints.
6. Fast daily till sunset
7. To keep eat, drink, and sleep to a minimum so that he reaches mental and psychological serenity and purity.

The Rite of Wearing the Eskeem:

It is like the Rite of ordaining monks to a great extent, but the prayers and crossings are done here on the leather plaited Eskeem. In one of the prayers, the Abbot prays “we ask and entreat to Your Goodness O Lover of mankind, make him worthy of this Eskeem, which is the sign of the Holy Cross of Your Only Son, and His life-giving death, to live with Him in eternal life forever. Amen.” Then he clothes the Eskeem on the monk saying: “Put on the seal which is a token of the Kingdom of heaven, the holy Eskeem. Carry on your arms the sign of the glorified Cross. Follow our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, the True God, to inherit the light of eternal life through the power of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” After finishing the prayers and reading the commandments, the monk participates in the Holy Liturgy and partakes of the Holy Communion



What Did the Fathers Say About the Monastic Habit

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

We wear also a cowl or hood: this is a symbol of abasement. Little ones, not full-grown men, wear the cowl without malice. We wear the cowl for this reason: that we may be little ones in malice. As the Apostle says, 'Do not be little ones in understanding, but be little ones in malice.' What is being a little one in malice? A baby has no malice. If he is not treated with honor he is not angry; if he is honored, he is not subject to vainglory. If what he has is taken away he is not troubled. To be a little one in malice means having no desire for revenge and laying no claim to glory.

St John Cassian

Thus, day and night they always wear small hoods that extend to the neck and the shoulders and that only cover the head. In this way they are reminded to hold constantly to the innocence and simplicity of small children even by imitating their dress itself. Those who have returned to their infancy repeat to Christ at every moment with warmth and vigor: 'Lord, my heart is not exalted, nor are my eyes lifted up. Neither have I walked in great things nor in marvels beyond me. If I thought not humbly but exalted my soul, like a weaned child upon its mother' (Ps. 131:1-2)

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

The belt which we wear is a symbol first of all that we are ready for work. Everyone who wants to work first girds himself so that he is not hindered by his robes. As the Apostle says, 'They stood with their loins girt.'⁴² Again, as the belt is made of deer skins, it is a sign of bodily mortification, and so we should mortify our fleshly desires. The belt is worn around the loins, from which area voluptuous pleasures are said to proceed. This is what the Apostle says, 'Mortify your members on the earth against fornication and uncleanness'



and feet in order to show by this gesture of his what he would suffer, and he said: "Thus says the Holy Spirit: This is how the Jews will bind the man whose belt this is and hand him over to the gentiles." The prophet would surely not have been able to speak out and say "the man whose belt this is" if Paul had not been in the habit of always putting it around his loins.

There are some other things in the garb of the Egyptians that pertain not so much to the well-being of the body as to the regulation of behavior, so that the observance of simplicity and innocence may be maintained even in the very character of their clothing.

(From: The Institutes, By: St John Cassian)



A Group of youth from QLD spending a retreat at the monastery



A Group of youth from St Marks Church



Monastic Belt

By: St John Cassian

As we start to speak of the institutes and rules of monasteries, where could we better begin, with God's help, than with the very garb of the monks? After having exposed their outward appearance to view we shall then be able to discuss, in logical sequence, their inner worship. And so, it is proper for a monk always to dress like a soldier of Christ, ever ready for battle, his loins girded.



For the authority of Holy Scripture makes it clear that those who in the Old Testament were responsible for the beginnings of this profession namely, Elijah and Elisha went about dressed in this way. And we know that thereafter the leaders and authors of the New Testament namely, John, Peter, and Paul and other men of the same caliber behaved likewise. When the first of these, Elijah who already in the Old Testament manifested the flower of virginity and examples of chastity and continence, was sent by the Lord to protest with the messengers of Ahaziah, the sacrilegious king of Israel, because when he was sick he sent them to consult Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron about the state of his health, and the prophet met them and said that he would never get out of the bed in which he was wasting away, the smitten king realized who he was as soon as he learned how he was dressed.

For when the messengers returned to him and informed him of the prophet's words, he asked them about the appearance and clothing of the man who had met them and spoken like that, and they replied: "He was a hairy man, and his loins were girded with a leather belt." From his clothing the king at once pictured the man of God, and he said: "It was Elijah the Tishbite." He clearly recognized the man of God by his belt and by the hairy and unkempt aspect of his body because, among so many thousands of Israelites, this particular style was always associated with him; it was as it were a kind of trademark of his.

The evangelist also says as follows about John, who served as a sort of sacred boundary between the Old and New Testaments and who was an end and a beginning: "This John wore a garment of camel hair and a leather belt around his loins." Likewise, when Peter was thrust into prison by Herod and was going to be put to death the following day, he was ordered by an angel who stood by: "Put on your belt and sandals." The angel of the Lord would certainly not have admonished him to do this if he had not seen that he had freed his weary members for a short while of the accustomed constraint of his belt in order to get a night's rest.

So, too, when in Caesarea the prophet Agabus met St Paul going up to Jerusalem, on his way to being put in chains by the Jews, he took his belt and bound his own hands



The Monastic Hood

By: One of the Youth

When a person sees a monk, they immediately notice that he is wearing a hood embroidered with crosses and with a split down the middle. The monastic hood or cowl, along with other pieces of clothing formed the monastic habit which Evagrius Ponticus outlines in his work *The Praktikos*. Evagrius writes "...an explanation of the symbolism of the habit of the monks who live in Egypt.. not without purpose is this habit made in a form so very different from what other men employ for the style of their clothes." . He then mentions the components of the monastic habit: the Cowl, scapular which has the form of a cross, the belt and staff. It is important to note that the monastic habit had some variations across Egypt in the early monastic period. Nowadays the monastic habit consists of the cowl, belt and tunic. Some monks, although rare, also where the 'Eskeem' or Schema. Regarding the cowl, Evagrius explains that it is " a symbol of the charity of God our Savior. It protects the most important part of the body and keeps us, who are children in Christ, warm". John Cassian in his work *Institutes* also mentions the cowl, "For they constantly use both by day and by night very small hoods coming down to the end of the neck and shoulders, which only cover the head, in order that they may constantly be moved to preserve the simplicity and innocence of little children by imitating their actual dress.". Interestingly, an artifact from the 11th century shows the clothing of a child, and attached to the collar is what looks very similar to the current monastic hood, with a split down the middle however, without crosses.



In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Sayings of the Desert Fathers) there are occasions which mention the hood, such as " Abba Zacharias drew his hood off his head , put it under his feet , and trampled on it. Then he said to Abba Moses " If one does not allow others to treat him in this way, then he cannot become a monk" . There are also many

icons In Egypt which depict monastic fathers wearing hoods. The famous 13th Century fresco's in the Monastery of St Anthony in the Red Sea depict many of the desert fathers wearing hoods, so do the fresco's in the monastery of St Paula in the Red Sea. However, it is important to note that the hoods in those artworks are slightly different to the current monastic hood, since some do not have crosses and some cover the ears whilst others do not.



The Monastic Garb being blessed on the relics of saints before the consecration ceremony



Icons in the latter half of the 2nd millennium have a closer resemblance to the current hood, such as the icon of St Pachomious in Haret Al'Rum Cairo which depicts the Holy Father wearing a cowl with many crosses but with no split down the middle. An Icon of St Macarius in his monastery in Wadi El Natrun also shows the saint wearing a black hood with many crosses but also with no split in down the middle.

Thus it is evident that the monastic cowl is an ancient component of the monastic habit present from the early days of Egyptian Monasticism. Before the era of Pope Shenouda the third, the monastic hood was only a skull cap (a beanie which sits above the ear) and a long piece of black cloth (about a couple of inches wide) which sits under the skull cap, and extends into their tunic forming a cross when it reaches the belt. This image can be seen in photos of contemporary saints such as Pope Cyril VI or Fr Yustus el-Antony. However soon after Pope Shenouda the third was enthroned in 1971, he revived the ancient monastic hood which is what all Coptic monks wear now.

The current hood is identical to that of the monks of the Syriac and Indian Orthodox Churches, except that their hood may sometimes not cover the ears. Also, in the Eastern Orthodox Church, when a monk is given the Great Schema or what is also referred as the "angelic habit" he is given a hood to wear over his head.



H.G. Bishop Daniel and H.G. Bishop Athanasius during his visit to the monastery



Monasticism as Second Baptism

There was a certain old man amongst the fathers who used to see visions. This man testified, and said, "That power which I have seen existing in baptism, I have also seen in the apparel of the monks when they take the garb of the monk, thus, their sins are forgiven and they start fresh and pure."



After the celebration of the Nayrouz



H.G. Bishop Daniel with St Mark's Pre-Servants class spending time at the Monastery



I am not yet a Desert Monk

A certain brother had recently received the garb of a monk. He went shut himself up in a cell, and said, "I am a desert monk." When the fathers heard [this], they came, took him out of his place, made him to go about to the cells of the brethren, and to make apologies to them, saying, "I am not a desert monk, and I have only just begun to be a disciple."