



OBJECT ID	1993.19.3
OBJECT NAME	Coat
DATE CREATED	1908, 1908
MATERIAL	Linen
OBJECT ENTITIES	(mother of Elaine Godellas), Constance (owned by)
RELATED ITEMS	Bedspread, 1993.19.1 Handkerchief, 1993.19.2
ACCESS POINTS	Coatdresses Outerwear

OBJECT DESCRIPTION

Handmade, embroidered cream colored baptismal coat with cape collar. Coat is small, likely sized for a child. The coat would have been fastened by one button (now missing) and a small hook. The interior of the coat has a stain that occupies the middle third of the back panel. The cape collar has a scalloped edge with a little lace edging. The cape collar and about three-fourths of the way down the body of the coat is embroidery with a winding vine-like line and small dots. The shape of the coat might be considered a-line as the lower portion of the skirt flares outward.

ORIGIN

In the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches of the Byzantine Rite, the baptismal garment is worn by the newly baptized for eight days, after which there is a special ceremony on the eighth day for the removal of the baptismal robe. For adults, the robe is a long, sleeved garment, similar to the Western alb, tied at the waist usually with a white cloth belt or rope. A woman may also cover her head with a white veil (usually a simple kerchief). For infant baptisms, the robe may be a white gown and bonnet, and a white blanket.

These garments are placed on the newly baptized immediately after coming up out of the waters of baptism (the Orthodox baptize by immersion, even in the case of infant baptism). As the robe is being placed on the new Christian, the priest says the prayer: "The servant of God, N., is clothed with the robe of righteousness; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." and the choir sings: "Vouchsafe unto me the robe of light, O Thou who clothest Thyself with light as with a garment, Christ our God, plenteous in mercy."

In Orthodox theology the baptismal robe symbolizes the "Garments of Light" (i.e., the fullness of Divine grace) with which Adam and Eve were clothed in the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Man. Baptism is believed to cleanse the believer of all the sinful defilements both of original sin and personal sins^[2] and the white garment is symbolic of this. During the ektenia (litany) before baptism, the deacon prays "That he (she) may preserve this (her) baptismal garment and the earnest of the Spirit pure and undefiled unto the dead Day of Christ our God...", referring not so much to the material garment as to the spiritual cleansing it represents.

The newly baptized will traditionally wear their baptismal garment for eight days, especially when receiving Holy Communion. These are special days of prayer and fasting,^[3] at the end of which they return to the church for the "Removal of the Robe on the Eighth Day" and ablutions (in many places today, this ceremony is performed on the same day as the baptism, immediately after Chrismation). During this ceremony, the priest loosens the belt on the baptismal robe and prays:

"O Thou who, through holy Baptism, hast given unto Thy servant remission of sins, and hast bestowed upon him (her) a life of regeneration: Do Thou, the same Lord and Master, ever graciously illumine his (her) heart with the light of Thy countenance. Maintain the shield of his (her) faith unassailed by the enemy [i.e., Satan]. Preserve pure and unpolluted the garment of incorruption wherewith Thou hast endued him (her), upholding inviolate in him (her), by Thy grace, the seal of the Spirit, and showing mercy unto him (her) and unto us, through the multitude of Thy mercies..."

He then sprinkles the newly baptized with water and washes all of the places the chrism was applied, and performs the tonsure.

Someone who has been baptized as an adult will often be buried in their baptismal robe, if they have not advanced to some higher ministry within the church.

In the Roman Catholic Church, most of those born into the faith are baptized as infants. The traditional clothing for a child being baptized into the Roman Catholic faith is a baptismal gown, a very long, white infants' garment now made especially for the ceremony of christening and usually only worn then. They are in fact the normal, or at least "best", outer clothing of Western babies until about the 19th century. The moment of progression to shorter dresses (for both boys and girls) was known as "shortcoating", which coincided with the beginning of walking, which was impossible in a long robe. Christening gowns are usually made of fine white linen or cotton fabric, and may be trimmed with tucks, lace, whitework embroidery, and other handwork. Baptismal gowns often have matching bonnets, and may become family heirlooms, used generation after generation.

CITATION

Coat, 1908, 1908, *National Hellenic Museum*, <https://collections.nationalhellenicmuseum.org/Detail/objects/>. Accessed 04/26/24.
