

Baroque chasuble



- Date of production 17th/18th century
- Dimensions length: 99 cm, width: 66 cm
- ID no. 1/IV
- Museum [Cardinal Karol Wojtyła Archdiocesan Museum in Kraków](#)
- Subjects [religion](#), [clothing](#)
- Technique [painting](#), [lancé weave](#), [grading embroidery](#)
- Material [silver thread](#), [brocade](#), [gold thread](#)
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- Tags [katolicyzm](#), [liturgia](#), [tkanina](#), [strój](#), [rzemiosło](#), [3D](#), [barok](#), [kościół](#), [sztuka sakralna](#), [kapłan](#), [techniki zdobnicze](#), [domena publiczna](#)

The presented baroque chasuble represents the so-called Roman type. It has a column separated by a gold piping, which was also used to hem the sides and collar. The sides are decorated with shaded embroidery with gold and silver thread with an arabesque motif and representations of puttos at the bottom of the fabric. In the field there are pretexts (columns) of the chasuble and medallions with embroidered figural

scenes from the New Testament, containing painted faces and hands of figures, covered with a vegetal vine with a motif of large flowers. At the front, we can see: the Birth of Christ, the Presentation in the Temple and the Assumption of Mary, separated by wreaths and olive branches; at the back: the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Adoration of the Child, Mary's Ascension to the Temple and the Annunciation, between which a crown of stars and a wreath of roses have been placed.

Chasubles are the outer garments put on by priests in the Roman Catholic rite to conduct a holy mass. Their colouring is of significance and depends primarily on the period of the liturgical year. Nowadays, the rules of using the colours of liturgical vestments are precisely defined in the so-called General Introduction to the Roman Missal. The document mentions six colours: white, green, red, black, purple, and pink. The white colour of the chasuble is used primarily during the mass of Christmas and Resurrection, as well as on the Holidays of the Lord, Mary, angels, saints (excluding martyrs), on All Saints' Day, and in St. Peter's Cathedral.

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A few words about the chasuble

The chasuble is a basic element of the liturgical attire used by the clergy during the celebration of the liturgy. It is the outer garment, put on the alb (or surplice/rochet depending on the church rites) and the stole. The priest is obliged to wear a chasuble during the Holy Mass, of which he is the minister, although there are exceptions to this rule at present.

Its name comes from the Latin word *ornatus*, which simply means: dress, attire. Although the function and general shape of the chasuble has not changed over centuries of Christianity, it has undergone a kind of formal and symbolic evolution, before finally adopting its current appearance.

The genesis of the chasuble, as well as of the most of the first liturgical garments, should be sought in antiquity. Elements of everyday Roman garments were adapted as a garment pattern, which acquired full liturgical significance in about the 6th century, when they were no longer worn as an everyday garment. This vestment obtained its form from the sleeveless hooded coat used in Rome (detachable or worn separately, called *cucullus* or *cucullio*s), pulled over the head and reaching to the knees; sometimes slit at the front: referred to as the *paenula*. It served as a traveling cloak or was worn in particularly cold weather, because it was made from thick fabric. Greeks also called it *planet* (according to Saint Isidore) because it was sewn on a circular basis and could rotate around the body. It is also known as *casula*, referring to *parva casa*; that is, a small house, a cell in which—as in a robe—a man was locked.

The first chasubles were exclusively white (until the ninth century, later the number of liturgical colours increased). They had the form of a circle segment, fully covering the arms. During the celebration, the fabric was lifted and thrown over the shoulders to gain freedom of movement. At the front they were decorated by an emblem, on the back, by a cross. Also, the decoration used in *paenula* was adapted to them, namely the belts called *clavi*. They took the form of a narrow, purple band at the front (*pectorale*) and on the back of the robes (*dorsale*).

In the Middle Ages (around the 13th century) the sides of the chasuble were shortened, so that they reached the elbows, while the front and the back were extended. In consequence, a custom was born whereby, during the liturgy, at the time of the elevation, when the priest kneeled, the altar boy lifted the long back of his chasuble. The belts adorning the robe—still quite narrow—took a form close to the Greek letter *upsilon* (Y, υ), namely, one of a narrow cross with transverse arms raised up (see: [Sculpture of St. Nicholas](#)).

Starting from the fifteenth century, chasubles without side covering began to appear, with shoulder breadth. The fabric fell only down the front and the back, and it was donned by pulling it over the head.

This shape was established in the 17th century. The edges of the fabric were hemmed with a decorative tape—a braid—which also marked a wide belt called the orphrey through the middle of the robe, a derivative of the earlier clavi. Most often, it created a simple column at the front and the Latin cross (cross orphrey) on the back. In order to prevent the chasubles from slipping, strings were sewn into the lining, which were tied around the priest's torso. Violin box chasubles, with an s-shaped cut-out in the side line at the front, became typical for baroque ([white liturgical chasuble](#)).

Over time, chasubles came to be made of extremely expensive, colourful, and ornate fabrics (satin, damask), with plentiful patterns and embroidery created with gold and silver thread, sometimes also decorated with precious stones. Interestingly, it was also customary for noblewomen to donate splendid gowns to the church, which were later used to make whole sets of liturgical vestments (sometimes their cuts can be recreated on the basis of fragments of the fabric from which the garments were made). The column of the chasuble, delineated by a decorative braid, was usually made of a different material than its sides and was filled with rich embroideries (whole figural scenes, sometimes additionally with elements painted on canvas) and applications. Coats of arms, for example, those of the donors, usually appeared on the back, at the bottom of the column (see: the [chasuble of the Lubomirski foundation](#)). In the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, kontusz belts were often sewn into chasubles as an orphrey.

The symbolism of the very form of the chasuble was indicated by its former nomenclature: planet. This evoked its cosmological significance, the divine universe, casula and—as a small chapel or cell—an enclosed form of contemplative space or prayer. Already, in the oldest scripts (Honorius, St. Isidore, St. Jerome), there appeared references endowing the chasuble with the symbolism of love which should cover up the whole person, reflecting its perfect character. A reference to this view became embedded in the rite of ordination, during which the bishop put a chasuble on the presbyter (nowadays it is done by a priest); then he rolled it up. The fabric's spacious folds referred to love which should embrace the entire soul of the new priest, and the circular pattern: perfection. At the end of the ceremony, the vestment was unfolded—evoking innocence—which should accompany love. The chasuble also symbolizes the Lord's yoke, which is laid on the shoulders of a new priest, though grace makes it light, according to the words: “My yoke is sweet and my burden is light, let me carry it, so I might have Your grace.”

Presently, the cut of chasubles is relatively uniform. These are long robes, reaching to about mid-calf at the front and at the back, while the sides cover the arms fully or up to the elbow. The use of appropriate liturgical colours of garments, according to the church year, is regulated by the General Introduction to the Roman Missal.

See also the specimens from the Archdiocesan Museum in Krakow ([chasuble from Wadowice](#)) and from the Niepołomice Museum ([chasuble of late Renaissance set of liturgical vestments](#)).

Elaborated by Paulina Kluz (Editorial Team of Malopolska's Virtual Museums



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Tags: [clothing](#), [fabric](#), [The Cardinal Karol Wojtyła Archdiocesan Museum in Kraków](#), [Christianity](#), [craft](#), [priest](#), [liturgy](#), [Catholicism](#), [ornament](#), [church](#), [Roman Empire](#), [Creative Commons licenses](#)

From dailiness to ceremonial – about the origin of liturgical vestments

The priest of every religion—as a person worthy of leading worship practices and mediating in the contact between people and God (gods)—was an ennobled figure in society. Therefore, priests—as a social class—were distinguished from the common folk by special attire, appropriate to their dignity and the activities represented by them.

The current form of the elements of the liturgical vestments for the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, traces its origin back to the beginnings of Christianity. The followers of Christ, due to the dangers of persecution and the poverty of the early church, did not use any official attire accompanying the practice of worship. During prayer, the men had their heads uncovered and the women were veiled.

Initially, people celebrating the liturgy did not use special vestments. They used the clothes which were worn by the Romans at that time. In order to distinguish priests from the lower classes of society—townsmen and commoners—vestments took the form of the luxuriant costumes of consuls, senators, and patricians. The robes of different status did not differ from each other in their cut, but in the type and quality of the fabric. Some sources claim that men belonging to priesthood covered their heads for the duration of the prayer.

The crucial moment in shaping the appearance of liturgical vestments occurred during Emperor Constantine's reign, when Christians were granted freedom of religion through the Edict of Milan (313). In the Constantinian era, the etiquette of court costumes had a great impact on the appearance of the robes of Christian priests, as many distinctions used in court attire were adopted. At that time, bishops were recognized as imperial officials and, because of this, they adopted the insignia they were entitled to. Around the 7th century, in the wake of the increasing influence of fashion from Germanic countries, the formula of the Roman costume underwent change. However, the robes adopted earlier by the Christian priests retained their form. On this account, the robes worn by the clergy began to stand out among the clothes used in everyday life, distinguishing priests as a different social class. It was the process of consolidating certain patterns which, over time, also gained a symbolic significance. It is a natural consequence of the transformation of rarely used elements of everyday garment into a festive or ceremonial attire which has taken place in various cultures (e.g. folk cultures).

In terms of the cut and function, Roman robes were divided into two categories. There were robes worn underneath (*inductus*) and outer garments (*amictus*). The first group included all types of tunics, as well as *stola* and *dalmatica*. The second was a type of outer covering in the shape of a coat, such as a toga, *paenula*, *pallium*, *paludamentum*, or *chlamys* (see also Greek *chiton* and *himation* on the [Stele of Chaeremon and Isidore's son from Kom Abu Billou](#)). *Tunica* was generally used as an undergarment. In ancient Rome, it took the form of a short-sleeved outfit, which was worn by both sexes. Men wore it under the toga, and women under the stola. Many types of robes were defined as “tunic”, differing in form, length, and type of decorations. This is why their descriptions were supplemented with adjectives (*tunica manicata*, *tunica recta*, *tunica augusti clavia* etc.). On cold days, more tunics were sometimes worn at once—one on top of the other. They also served as nightgowns, called *camisia* (hence an alb is *camice* in Italian).

The church tunic and its secular counterpart diverged in the 4th century. There were many types of tunic, differing in material (*tunic linea*—linen), length (*tunica talaris*, *poderis*, *camisia*) and colour (*tunica alba*). The alb (Latin. *albus*—white) was derived from the white tunic. The alb is the base garment or undergarment in liturgical attire. It is a long garment, usually made of linen, pulled on over the head, with long sleeves. In the Old Christian period, albs were worn for the baptism of catechumens. When it became established as a liturgical vestment, the alb also received appropriate decorative details, such as edges finished with lace or embroidery, a collar hemmed with parure (a decorative material strip).

A slightly greater relationship can be shown between two other garments derived from the tunic—namely the *tunicella* and *dalmatic*—both worn over the alb. *Dalmatic* took its name from its country of origin, namely Dalmatia; in church it was worn by deacons and bishops under the chasuble (see: [Dalmatic from the late Renaissance set of liturgical vestments](#)). Subdeacons were entitled to wear *tunicella*, which was a kind of dalmatic. The dalmatic was worn by Greeks and Romans of the second century; later, it was

popular in Byzantine countries, and subsequently it spread to Western Europe. In the fifth century, it disappeared from everyday life, gaining strictly liturgical significance. Both *tunicella* and *dalmatic* were white and made of linen, decorated with two vertical and transverse stripes at the front and on the back, up to the thirteenth century (*Clavi*). Originally, *tunicella* was longer than the dalmatic and had narrower sleeves; over time both of these garments became very similar and—in the fourteenth century—they were shortened. They had short sleeves and were slit open at the sides to the bottom seam of the sleeves, where they were tied. Over time, they came to be tailored from increasingly rich fabrics, decorated with ornamental embroidery. Most often, the same material was used as in the case of the chasuble, cope, and the stole, as they all constituted a set of vestments. The use of *tunicella* was abolished along with the function of subdeacons, while the dalmatic is currently only used during the Tridentine Mass. In the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic rite, the sakkos has a form close to the dalmatic (see the attire of the Eastern Rite bishop on the [Icon “Christ on the cross”](#)).

Antique tunics and all undergarments (especially the long ones) were tied around the waist with a strap or a belt—in the form of a flat, wide band—in order to better fit the body. This solution was also adapted to liturgical vestments. The alba (as well as the religious habit) is tied at the waist with a more or less decorative rope, called *cingulum*.

Another element of the priest’s attire is the stole, which is worn over the alb. It takes the form of a band with bell-shaped extensions, which is put on the neck and falls down the chest (see: [a stole from the late Renaissance liturgical vestment set](#)). It is also called *orarium* (lat. *ors. oris*—mouth), and in the eastern rite—*orarion* (lat. *ora*—pray, because it gives you the sign to start the prayer). There are several versions of the story describing the origin of stoles. One of them claims that it comes from a Roman female outer garment: a stole, which fell on the chest in the form of a wide drapery. Adapted as an element of *strictly* Christian liturgical attire, it was becoming increasingly decorated and narrower, over time reaching the width of the ribbon. Another source sees the genesis of the stole in the Jewish prayer scarf called *tallit*, because it assumes a similar function. It is most likely, however, to indicate its prototype in the ribbon worn on the neck by the officials of the Roman Empire, as well as the clergy recognized during the Constantine period as members of the Roman administration, who received appropriate signs of this dignity (maniple, pallium).

The maniple had a form similar to the stole, but its purpose and symbolism were different. It took the form of a short ribbon, widening in a shape of bells and stitched at the ends. It was put on the left forearm. Its name, lat. *maniple*, means a handful or an armful. It evolved from the antique fabric worn by the townsfolk and Roman dignitaries known as *sudarium*, which was tied at the wrist, or held in the hand. It was used to wipe the face and hands, or to give signals to start the ceremony. The maniple was also used at the Byzantine court for liturgical purposes, from the 7th century until 1969, when its use stopped after the then reform. Maniples were made of the same material as the stole, because they belonged to the set of liturgical vestments.

The chasuble (lat. *ornatus*—outfit), i.e. the upper vestment worn on the alb (either on a surplice or a rochet, depending on the ecclesial dignity) went through a most interesting and varied series of changes. Its form is derived from a traveller’s coat with a hood worn in ancient Rome, put on over the head and reaching down to the knees, called *paenula* (more on that in a separate article: [A few words about the chasuble](#)). The equivalent of the chasuble among the Greek Catholics is a phelonion, worn on the sakkos. However, it takes a slightly different form: put on over the head, it ends at the height of the breast at the front, while the back reaches to the ground.

The development of worship practices, as well as the centuries-long separation of various rites, contributed to the emergence of further elements of liturgical attire, bearing unique symbolism, which greatly expanded the range of paraments belonging to specific ecclesial functions and dignities. The garments became increasingly decorative and embellished with a multitude of details; a division of liturgical colors reserved for a specific period in the church calendar emerged. However, despite the whole process of shaping them, links with traditional patterns remained clearly visible in the cut of individual vestments: proof of the durability of certain customs since the beginning of Christianity, with only slight changes due to the liturgical reform of 1969.

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Ornamental subtexts

One of the ideas guiding us in the creation of the portal “Malopolska's Virtual Museums” is to draw attention to the details of the exhibits, often overlooked intricate decorations, which sometimes surprise when looking closer at the texture and shapes of the presented objects. We strive to use advanced technology to bring out these details and draw people closer to them. With the help of such “magnification”, we would like you to stop you for a moment, or maybe even sometimes make you feel delighted?

What do the ornaments want? What are they to a work of art? Could an ornament be a signature? These, and many other interesting questions, came up during the LXIII National Science Session of the Association of Art Historians entitled *Ornament and decoration of a work of art* (November 20-22, 2014, Krakow), in which we had the pleasure of participating, presenting exhibits selected for the conference subject matter from the collection of Malopolska's Virtual Museums.



All presented objects, seemingly diverse, with a different purpose, being results of the work of manufacturers from different cultures, different types of crafts and artistic periods, are united by one thing: their own ornamentation.

The tendency to decorate, results from the inner need of a human being to aestheticize the surrounding space and the elements organizing it. The motifs and their sets, characteristic for particular periods of history—which created the ornament and thus a certain decorative form—covered and organized the surface of the works. We encounter ornaments in all fields of arts and crafts. It is an inseparable component of a work, even if it does not appear physically, it reflects conscious non-use: an absence. The relationship of an ornament to an object used to vary; it was an accompanying form, its decoration; it could determine the divisions of planes, but, over time, it distinguished itself and assumed the primary role. Treated autonomously, it created forms which constituted artworks in themselves. However, its relation to the surface vacillated from [horror vacui to amor vacui](#), down to complete cleansing. Ornamental forms had their origins in nature, or they were treated as the main source of inspiration, hence the distinction between geometric, vegetal, and animal ornamentation. Its gradual transformation was aimed at achieving an abstract shape, which was, however, still intuitively rooted in reality, or was rather transformed reality: a set of familiar elements combined in fanciful forms with a surprising relationship to each other.

Distinguishing its character, its accompanying motives and inspirations—including its essence—allows one to get a lot of information about the work itself. This can be done on many levels. A non-accidental juxtaposition of seemingly different objects in a single presentation—in each case adorned with ornamentation—opens up a new field for their interpretation and finding correlations between them. The desirability of decoration is visible in each of the objects presented—whether in the works of “highbrow”, professional, or folk art—there is an evident need of the conscious or often intuitive use of

sometimes very naive ornamental forms, which marked divisions contouring the shape of the object and filling its surface (see: [Powder cone](#), [Painted wooden chest with a drawer](#), [Sculpture “Mother of God of Skepe”](#)).

The variety of forms of decoration and ornamentation that has appeared on works from particular cultural circles has been conditioned by many factors. Undoubtedly, the most important was the fashion prevailing at that time, which specified the formal repertoire used, or access to sources of inspiration. However, in most cultures—especially eastern ones—there was a dominant tendency to draw inspiration from nature, which formed the basis for shaping ornamentation in multiple versions (cf. [Enamelled vase](#), [Besamin tower box from Vienna](#), [Jewel box](#), [A dyeing template](#)). The ban on figurative art—particularly in Islamic and Jewish culture—led to developing ornamentation as the only acceptable form of art which fully utilized the repertoire of plant and geometrical forms.

The intended purpose of these objects, differing from one another to an extreme extent, allows one to notice that the ornamentation decorating them is not dependent on their function. An ornament is non-political and non-ideological; hence, it was possible to use the same motif on everyday objects and objects of worship (see: [Armchair with handrails](#), [Mug with a cover](#), [Chalice](#)). The situation was similar in the case of particular fields of craft, characterized by different techniques, where, regardless of their variety and degree of difficulty, the same ornamental forms appeared. Thus, the quintessence of the ornament is the manipulation of its form. And yet this form itself was specific to the era in which it crystallized. An example of this can be *rocaille*, containing in its shape, elements and behaviour, epithets corresponding to the Rococo period (see: [A woman’s fan](#)). A somewhat different usage and problem, however, was posed by the fact the decoration could take the form of representation, and thus carry specific information, often referring to the purpose of the work or its founder (see: [Horn of Salt Diggers Brotherhood of Wieliczka](#), [Baroque chasuble](#)).

Many kinds of contextual trails—which combine different objects on different levels—can be created. Despite their otherness, we can find many correlational factors among them. We encourage you to look for your own links between the objects presented and the function of the ornaments and decorations, which allow you to see the work from a different perspective: both formal and interpretive.

Opracowanie: Paulina Kluz (Redakcja WMM),



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