

AN OVERVIEW OF SACRED CLOTHING
IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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Temple rites and rituals in the ancient Near East, and indeed throughout the rest of the ancient world as well, were dramatic, somber, and sacred events. As with all drama, the costumes of the participants (and even of the spectators) played a crucial role in the re-creation of ancient myths; such costumes served to enhance the sacredness of the occasion and at the same time provided visual overtones of the presence of royalty. Such clothing lent dignity to the proceedings, filled the people with a sense of awe and wonder, and helped legitimize the temple and its officers as central figures in ancient polities.

While originating in temple services (at least as far as the record indicates), sacred clothing in the ancient world soon became integrated into other facets of life, particularly in those dealing with kings and palaces. This is not a surprising development in light of the fact that there was never a strict demarcation in the ancient world between priests and kings, temples and palaces, the sacred and the profane. Thus early coronation rituals compare favorably with temple reenactments of the mystical, heavenly enthronement reserved for the righteous.

It is the thesis of this paper to demonstrate that sacred vestments were an integral part of all ancient temple ceremonies, that they were utilized by secular rulers to legitimize their authority, that such clothing was remarkably similar in its essentials even across extensive boundaries of space and time, and that garments of light and glory are held in reserve and promised to the faithful in the end of time.

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to utilize all existing sources, for they are legion, nor to exhaust all that may be said regarding each individual case. Neither is any great pretension to original scholarship claimed. In addition, I have deliberately

limited myself to reference sources in the English language, all of which are readily available. As indicated by the title, this paper is intended to provide only an overview or a survey of the form and function of sacred clothing in the ancient Near East. I have also deliberately limited the time frame involved; no effort will be made to discuss the subject and its development beyond the opening centuries of the Common Era.

In the Beginning

"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).

In their exegesis of the above passage, some rabbis have interpreted this to mean that before their expulsion from Eden, Adam and Eve were clothed in garments of light, whereas after their transgression, they received garments of skin.¹ The full form of this midrash is found in the Zohar:

"Before, they were dressed in garments of light (kuthanoth 'or, with an aleph), but after their trespass, in garments of skin (kuthanoth 'or, with an ayin) which were of use only for the body, but not for the soul" (Zohar, I, 36b).

This same theme, with its interesting Hebrew homonymic word play, is found in Bereshith Rabba 20.12, in a variant attributed to Rabbi Meir, and is also intimated in the Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 25a. Similar traditions can be found in Samaritan, Christian, and gnostic sources,² lending credence to the supposition that we are dealing here with an ancient and widespread motif.

In this manner Adam, the Father of the human race, received a garment from God to hide his nakedness. Yet this was no ordinary garment. It was made of skin or leather; it was a sign of Adam's authority;

it was a source of protection, comfort, and assurance. John Chryso-
stom argued that this garment represented both kingship and repentance,
and that it was a model of the garment worn by John the Baptist who
lived in the wilderness, ate locusts and honey, wore skins, and cried
repentance. (Other early prophets, including Elijah, Elisha, and Eze-
kiel, also wore garments of skins as they preached repentance to the
people.) Traditions from ninth-century Persia relate that Adam's gar-
ment contained distinctive marks or cuts.³ A Coptic text discovered in
1913 relates that Adam and Eve had certain characters or marks written
upon their garments as signs of the Holy Ghost.⁴

The Book of Jasher reveals the fate of Adam's garment of skin.
After the death of Adam, the garment was given to Enoch, who gave it to
Methuselah, who gave it to Noah. Ham stole the garment from his father
and hid it from his brothers before passing it on to his son Cush, who
in turn gave it to his son Nimrod:

"And the garments of skin which God made for Adam and his wife,
when they went out of the garden, were given to Cush.
For after the death of Adam and his wife, the garments were given
to Enoch, the son of Jared, and when Enoch was taken up to God,
he gave them to Methuselah, his son.
And at the death of Methuselah, Noah took them and brought them
to the ark, and they were with him until he went out of the ark.
And in their going out, Ham stole those garments from Noah his
father, and he took them and hid them from his brothers.
And when Ham begat his first born Cush, he gave him the garments
in secret, and they were with Cush many days.
And Cush also concealed them from his sons and brothers, and
when Cush had begotten Nimrod, he gave him those garments
through his love for him, and Nimrod grew up, and when he was
twenty years old he put on those garments.
And Nimrod became strong when he put on the garments, and God
gave him might and strength, and he was a mighty hunter in
the earth..." (Jasher VII:24-30).

Subsequently Esau stole the garments from Nimrod, and then sold
them to Jacob (Jasher XXVII:10-12). At this point the story becomes
very confused, and there are several variations as to what happened

next. One version reports that Jacob dug a hole and buried the garments. Another version relates that Jacob wore Adam's garment when he went to receive his blessing from Isaac. Isaac, though blind, recognized the garment by feeling the marks or cuts in it and proceeded to bless Jacob accordingly with the birthright blessing.

Philo, writing at the time of Christ, tried to explain this leather garment of Adam's but failed and finally admitted his ignorance of the subject. He hypothesized that the leather garment was synonymous with a human, mortal body which Adam received after the fall.

Such a theory, however, does not explain the myriad of myths and legends regarding this garment. In the Combat of Adam, Satan's efforts to get this garment from Adam are portrayed. In one instance, Satan sent one of his five friends to Jared's cave to get the garment. The messenger, unsuccessful in this endeavor, manufactured a replica and subsequently succeeded in deceiving many people into following him because they thought he had the real garment.⁵

The Apocalypse of Moses relates that Adam, having been washed three times in a lake, was transported to the third heaven, anointed with oil, clothed in linen garments, and was thus prepared to return to the presence of the Father.⁶ This procedure proved to be a model of initiation rites that would persist for centuries to come. What we find here is an intertwining of two basic motifs. First we have the basic initiatory pattern⁷ which recurs again and again in various civilizations and religions: (1) a washing of the initiate, sometimes synonymous with baptism and sometimes a separate ordinance; (2) an anointing with oil of various parts of the body; and (3) the receipt of a special garment, almost always white and usually made of linen.⁸ Secondly, we have the concept of an original pristine garment, replaced

by a garment of a lower order, with the eventual promise of a restoration to the original garment of glory:

"At creation Adam and Eve were clothed with the glory (kavod) of God. When they disobeyed and ate the fruit, Adam exclaimed to Eve, '... what have I done to thee that thou hast deprived me of the glory of God?' (Apocalypse of Moses 21:6). In the end, when Adam is to be resurrected, God promised him that his original glory will be restored -- the original glory which is an indescribable brightness in his face which is not shared by any other member of the human race. His glory in the Endzeit will correspond to his glory at his creation in the Urzeit; thus it will be also with the New Creation which will be a restoration of man's prelapsarian state."⁹

In the Land Between the Rivers

In Mesopotamian temples, statues of kings and figures of gods and goddesses were initiated according to the above-mentioned procedure. Inside these temples "images of deities as well as kings, temple priests, and worshippers" were "washed, anointed, clothed, fed, enthroned and symbolically initiated into the presence of deity, and thus into eternal life."¹⁰ A typical example follows:

"At the consecration of the statue of the sun-god, made by the order of King Nabuapaliddin, the official washed its mouth and put garments upon it. The statue was anointed with various unguents and the eyes were painted with green and black cosmetic. The mention of oils at the beginning of the text... suggests that in the Babylonian rite also (i.e., in addition to the Egyptian) the statue was anointed at one stage or other in the proceedings, though we are not actually told when this anointing took place."¹¹

Geo Widengren has done a great deal of research concerning the themes of baptism, anointing, clothing, enthronement, and initiation among the Mandaean, a gnostic Judeo-Christian sect living in Babylonia, often connected (probably anachronistically) with John the Baptist, and the Syrian/Mesopotamian background of their customs.

We are primarily interested here in the sacred garments utilized

by the Mandaean community. At a Mandaean baptism, the officiating priest appeared in sacred vestments consisting of seven different parts. (Widengren speculates this seven-piece garment may be a vestigial remnant of an ancient Mesopotamian enthronement ritual wherein each of the seven planetary deities gave the newly-enthroned king one article of clothing. He considers also the Mandaean wedding ceremony, wherein seven planets are represented as bringing gifts to the newlyweds, with the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn bringing gifts for the bridegroom, and Venus giving a gift to the bride.¹²) This priestly baptismal costume, thus devolving from ancient Mesopotamia (albeit with subsequent deviations due to Iranian influence), consisted of: (1) a garment, (2) a girdle, (3) a covering (shirt), (4) a stole, (5) a crown, (6) drawers, and (7) a staff.¹³

In a text describing the Mandaean marriage ceremony, the bridegroom (who is presumably already wearing drawers and a stole) is given by the planetary deities a garment, shirt, a crown, a wreath, and armor. It is of interest to note that the bridegroom, having been invested with this ritual dress on the day of his wedding, then receives his baptism on this occasion. If he is already a priest, he then is called a "king."¹⁴

Sacred clothing played yet a further role in the Mandaean cult. In their belief, an individual at death was met by "the guide," "the helper," or "the companion," who gave special clothing to the disembodied spirit and escorted him back to his heavenly home. The following passage from the Ginza illustrates this procedure:

"The Man who brought me hither,
brought me a beautiful robe.
He put on me a robe of splendour,
in a turban of light he covered me.
He set on me a wreath of ether,

and of what the Great bestoweth on the Uthras.
He set me up amongst the Uthras,
and raised me up amidst the perfect." (Ginza p. 516:14-19).

In another passage from the Ginza, the departing spirit
movingly addresses its lifeless body:

"If thou, my body, wert a garment of splendour and light,
that I might put thee on,
thou wouldst ascend with me to the House of Life.

If thou wert a girdle of splendour and light,
that thou wert bound around my hips,
thou wouldst ascend with me to the House of Life.

If thou wert a wreath of splendour and light,
that thou wert placed on my head,
thou wouldst ascend with me to the House of Life.

If thou wert a staff of splendour and light,
that I might hold thee,
thou wouldst ascend with me to the House of Life.

If thou wert shoes of splendour and light,
that thou wert put around my feet,
thou wouldst ascend with me to the House of Life."
(Ginza, p. 537:4-18).

The interesting thing here is that both girdle and staff are mentioned as accoutrements given to the soul as it ascends to the House of Life. Thus the other components of Mandaean ritual dress must be received at or prior to death. In fact, an examination of Mandaean burial customs reveals that the dying individual is baptized (if he has not already received this ordinance), clothed with the ritual dress, a wreath of myrtle is placed upon his head, and the knot in his girdle is tied at the very moment of his passing away.¹⁵ Interestingly, after his burial the family and/or the community participated in a cultic meal. Thus we see again a repetition of the ancient pattern:

- (1) Water purification of a baptismal character
- (2) Investment with the ritual dress
- (3) Celebration of a cultic meal.¹⁶

Before we leave the Mandaeans, note should be made of the conjunction of priestly and royal motifs, symbolized by the crown and staff (sceptre) components of the ritual dress. The representation of both priestly and kingly functions in ritual clothing is a common ideology in ancient Near Eastern religions, and is found not only in earthly priestly garb but also in myths describing heavenly enthronement. We shall return to this idea later in our discussion of the Testament of Levi.

Without going into greater detail, it is evident that Mandaean baptism and enthronement practices, including certain water purifications, anointing with oil, and investment with a priestly/royal garment, are but a continuation of extremely ancient Syrian/Mesopotamian traditions:

"These purification ceremonies originally came from the Ea cult in Eridu, near the Persian Ocean, where the Fresh Water Deep was held to be found and where the Water of Life and the Plant of Life had their place in the Sumerian Garden of Paradise. In that way the Mandaeans, living in the same part of Mesopotamia and constructing their cult-hut after the same manner as the Sumerians, have been true to a venerable cultic tradition."¹⁷

Though our information is scanty, it appears that sacred clothing was also found among the Eblaïtes of Syria, at least as far as burial customs are concerned. References have been found indicating that multicolored robes and other garments were often put in tombs for the use of the dead.¹⁸

In the Land of the Canaanites

Sacred ritual clothing was a common feature of Canaanitic worship and its origins extend back into the earliest times. A representative example is the Canaanite/Ugaritic "Poem of Baal," ostensibly a

simple, exciting story of the quarrels and contentions of various gods and goddesses, whose essential significance lies in its being a nature myth. Its theme is the alternation of the seasons. In the part of the Poem dealing with the Summer Cycle, Baal, the god of rain, seeks further conquests, while Mot, god of all that is lifeless, tries to dissuade him:

"If now thou go fighting Leviathan, that dragon evasive,
if now thou wouldst try to destroy the Slant Serpent,
that seven-headed monster of might,
thou wouldst (but) wear thyself out;
the girdle of thy robe -- (that robe which is) the sky -- would
thereby become loosed!"¹⁹

To symbolize the possibility that Baal would lose his strength if he were to fight Leviathan,²⁰ Mot warns him that the girdle of his robe would thereby become loosened. This peculiar idiom is extant in the Old Testament, as, for example, Job 12:21, "He pours contempt on princes, and looses the belt of the strong," as also Isaiah 45:1, "Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings."

Baal's robe is identified as the sky. This is a common theme in a variety of ancient myths. In Psalm 104:2 we read: "Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment, Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain." In Yasht XIII:3, "Mazda takes heaven to himself as a garment, star-embroidered, god-woven." In Teutonic mythology, Odin wore a blue or azure mantle representing the sky. Among the Ewe-speaking Negroes of Africa, the azure sky is the veil with which Maiou, the supreme god, covers his face, and the clouds are his garments and ornaments. In the Phoenician cosmogony of Pherekydes, Zas, after conquering the Dragon, makes a great garment and embroiders thereon the earth and the sea. Heracles (i.e. Baal) of Tyre is described by Nonnus as wearing a "jerkin of stars" and as being wrapped in a garment which

lights up the sky at night. In Rig Veda I, 173.6, Indra is said to wear heaven as a crown. In Sumerian hymns the goddess Inanna is addressed as "she who dons the garment of heaven;" and the expression "garment of heaven" indeed occurs also as a title of Ishtar.²¹

Canaanite worshippers as well as deities wore special clothing, though we have little detail in this regard. According to II Kings 10:22, the clothes of the worshippers of Baal of Tyre were provided out of a special wardrobe. Similarly, worshippers at Phoenician shrines were required to wear special dress. In like manner, special clothing was provided for persons consulting the oracles of Trophonios at Delphi in Greece.²²

In Tabernacle and Temple

"And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.
And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty.
And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office." (Exodus 28:1-3).

A total of eight garments are specified in scripture for use in the Tabernacle in the wilderness and in the Temple at Jerusalem, though only Aaron, as High Priest, attired himself in all eight. Four undergarments were worn by the common priests; Aaron was embellished with four more items. In addition, four other garments of linen were worn during the performance of extraordinarily holy acts.

The four undergarments, worn by the common priests as well as Aaron, were to be made of fine-twined (superior quality) linen. They

consisted of:

(1) A coat. This garment, a long garment or covering, made of plain linen for the ordinary priests, reached to the wrists and ankles. Aaron's coat was more elaborate and exhibited a checkered pattern.²³

(2) A girdle. The girdle, tied around the coat, was a vestment of distinction (cf. Isaiah 22:21). The girdle of the common priest was made of linen; Aaron's girdle was of fine linen, dyed wools, and contained embroidery.

(3) A headdress. The common priests wore a cap or a decorated turban, recognized as a mark of distinction, while Aaron wore a mitre, a more imposing headdress, often used to represent a crown.

(4) Breeches. These were worn for purposes of modesty, "to cover their nakedness, from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach" (Exodus 28:42; Ezekiel 44:18).

The four outer garments, peculiar to the High Priest, were of greater richness and splendour than the four undergarments. They were a mixture of fine linen and dyed wool, and were of "skillful workmanship." Some contained threads of pure gold. These costly substances and mixtures, generally prohibited in profane clothing, attested a high degree of holiness in the high priestly garb. In substance the garments of the High Priest corresponded to the curtains and veil of the Tabernacle, which also displayed "skillful workmanship" and were a mixture of wool and linen.

The four outer garments had several features characteristic of royalty, such as the crown, the gold, blue, and purple colors; in conjunction with the anointing oil poured on the High Priest (Exodus 29:7), they gave him a regal appearance. We may note here again the common motif of the conjoining of priestly and royal function.

The four outer garments were:

(1) The ephod, made of gold and a mixture of wool and linen.

In addition to being part of the priestly vestments, the ephod (from Old Assyrian epadatum, "wrap") is considered analogous to the ezor or loincloth, the typical raiment of a Semitic suppliant, pilgrim, or ascetic (cf. II Kings 1:8). In I Samuel 2:18 the ephod is explicitly said to have been worn by the young Samuel when he served as an acolyte in the sanctuary at Shiloh. David is said (in II Samuel 6:14) to have worn the linen ephod while performing religious exercises.²⁴

(2) The breastplate, attached to the ephod, measuring a span by a span. In it were set twelve precious stones on which were engraved the names of the Tribes of Israel. The Urim and Thummim was placed on the breastplate.

(3) The robe of the ephod, worn under the ephod, made of woolen threads only, all of blue. On the hem were alternating golden bells and pomegranates made of a mixture of dyed wool and fine linen.

(4) The gold plate or crown, secured by a blue thread on the front of the mitre. Made of pure gold, it initially contained the engraving "Qodesh le-YHWH," "Holiness to the Lord." In Second Temple times, only the Tetragrammaton was inscribed on it.

A third group of priestly garments were made of ordinary, not fine, linen, and were used for officiating in the holiest of places. "In the ancient temple, the high priest stood in sacred vestments, on the most sacred of ground (the Holy of Holies) on the most sacred of days (the Day of Atonement) and spoke the most sacred of words (the Tetragrammaton)."²⁵ On Yom Kippur, Aaron entered the inner sanctum clothed in four garments of ordinary linen: breeches, a coat, a girdle, and a mitre (Leviticus 16:4). These simple garments of ordinary linen

bore a holiness greater than even the vestments of gold and wool and linen. Because of their extraordinary sanctity, a custom developed that only these garments could be worn when entering the Holy of Holies and ascending the altar.²⁶

In the Testament of Levi

The Testament of Levi is part of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, an early Jewish pseudepigraphic work purporting to be the last words of the twelve sons of Jacob to their descendants. It is not our purpose here to discuss the validity of this claim. We may, however, note that there is a general concensus among scholars that this work is of Jewish Palestinian origin, though tainted with later Christian interpolations.

It will be sufficient for our purposes here to examine only the eighth chapter of the Testament of Levi, as it contains some interesting information regarding sacred clothing:

- 1 "And there again I saw a vision like the first one after we had spent seventy days there.
- 2 And I saw seven men in white raiment saying unto me:
- 3 Arise, put on the robe of priesthood,
- 4 and the crown of righteousness,
- 5 and the breatplate of understanding,
- 6 and the garment of truth,
- 7 and the plate of faith,
- 8 and the turban of the head,
- 9 and the Ephod of prophecy.
- 10 Then each of them brought forward a thing and put it on me, and said unto me: From henceforth become a priest of the Lord, thou and thy seed for ever.
- 11 And the first man anointed me with holy oil, and gave me a staff of judgment.
- 12 The second washed me with pure water, fed me with bread and holy wine and clad me with a holy and glorious robe.
- 13 The third clothed me with a linen vestment like an Ephod.
- 14 The fourth put round me a girdle like unto purple.
- 15 The fifth gave me a branch of rich olive.
- 16 The sixth placed a crown on my head.

- 17 The seventh placed on my head a priestly diadem and filled
my hands with incense, that I might serve as priest to the
Lord, God.
- 18 And they said unto me:
19 Levi, thy seed shall be divided into three dominations,
as a sign of the coming glory of the Lord.
20 The first one shall be great. Yea, greater than it none
shall be.
21 The second one shall be in the priesthood.
22 The third one shall be called by a new name because a king
shall arise in Judah and establish a new priesthood to all
peoples, after the fashion of the Gentiles.
23 His coming is beloved because he is a prophet of the Most
High, and comes from the seed of Abraham our father.
24 Thus, every desirable thing in Israel shall be for thee and
thy seed, and ye shall eat everything fair to look upon,
and the table of the Lord thy seed shall apportion.
25 Out of them shall come priests as well as judges and
scribes, and by their mouth shall the holy place be guarded.
26 And when I awoke, I understood that this dream was just like
the first one I had.
27 And I hid this too in my heart, and I did not tell about it
to any man on earth."²⁷

A close examination of this text reveals that the exhortations
of the seven men (lines 3-9) do not correspond to the attributes they
subsequently give to Levi (lines 11-17). A linear comparison²⁸ makes
this easier to see:

Exhortations of the Seven Men

Handing Over of the Attributes

The robe of priesthood	The staff of judgment
The crown of righteousness	The holy and glorious robe
The breastplate of understanding	The linen vestment like the ephod
The garment of truth	The girdle like unto purple
The plate of faith	The branch of rich olive
The turban of justice	The crown on the head
The ephod of prophecy	The diadem of priesthood

Interestingly, the exhortations of the seven men correspond

to the sacred vestments worn by the High Priest according to Exodus 28. (The Septuagint version of this chapter is exceptionally similar to the exhortations above.) The attributes, on the other hand, have three items in common with the garments of the High Priest, viz., the ephod, girdle, and diadem, and three additional items, viz., the staff of judgment, the branch of rich olive, and the girdle of purple.²⁹

These three latter items were symbols of kingship and royalty in the ancient Near East. Purple was the color of sovereignty and rulership; the staff or sceptre was a symbol of kingly authority; the olive branch in Israelite tradition was represented as having been plucked from the Tree of Life, and hence the king's possession of such a branch represented his possession and distribution of (eternal) life.

Thus on this occasion Levi received three royal emblems, and in addition a diadem and a crown, two symbols of royalty which were also integral parts of the High Priest's garb, plus two expressly priestly articles of dress (the holy garment and the ephod). In this manner Levi was invested with "a holy garment of a character at the same time priestly and royal."³⁰

Also of interest here is the number of angels (seven) who dressed Levi and performed various rituals with him. It is reminiscent of the ancient Mesopotamian planetary deities encountered in our discussion of Mandaean enthronement procedures. Of perhaps even greater interest are the rituals which Levi participated in: purification in water, anointing with oil, and a sacred meal of bread and wine. This entire heavenly enthronement ritual as it is recorded in the Testament of Levi may be supplemented and clarified by comparisons with the Enoch literature. (see, for example, I Enoch 51:3; 62:2; II Enoch

22-24; 56:2.) Armed with this material, Widengren constructed a pattern of enthronement which would consist of the following rituals:

- (1) Ascent to heaven
- (2) Ablution (washings)
- (3) Unction (anointings)
- (4) Communion (sacred meal)
- (5) Investment with a priestly garment
- (6) Handing over of the ruler's attributes
- (7) Participating in the heavenly secrets
- (8) Sitting on the Throne of God.³¹

In the Pseudepigrapha

Other pseudepigraphic writings, in addition to the Testament of Levi, have a great deal to say about the nature and significance of certain holy garments. Such statements are in closest agreement with ancient Babylonian and Egyptian writings. There are literally dozens of such writings; we have only enough space here to look at a few of the more prominent examples.

Most significant, perhaps, is the Pistis Sophia, a third-century Christian work written in Thebes, purporting to be the secret teachings of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection. This highly esoteric work describes, for example, an early Christian prayer circle, in which the apostles and their wives, dressed in linen garments, formed a circle. In the center of the circle Jesus stood at an altar, thus facing, as it were, the four corners of the world, and offered the prayer.³²

Another example of the prayer circle is found in II Jehu.

purportedly written by Enoch and hidden up in a cleft of a rock, wherein the Apostles, "clothed in their garments formed a circle, foot to foot, and Jesus, taking the place of Adam, proceeded to instruct them, saying, 'I will teach you in all the necessary ordinances.' The point is, when they formed a prayer circle, they always mentioned 'clothed in their garments' or 'clothed in white linen.'"³³

The Pistis Sophia describes the garment as belonging to the individual in the pre-existence. It is held in reserve so that it may be returned to the individual upon his return to heaven. The garment is said to contain five marks or cuts, called carigma. There are three sets of carigma, representing the three degrees of glory, the glory of the Name (of God), and all the mysteries of the ordinances. The Gaphalia, a Coptic document discovered in 1965, further expounds the meaning of the carigma. They are said to be the marks of the Church. "The first is the greeting of peace, by which one becomes a son of peace. The second is the grasp of the right hand, by which he is brought into the Church. The third is the embrace, by which he becomes a son."³⁴

In the Early Church

In the so-called "Secret Gospel of Mark," derived from a copy of a letter of Clement found in the monastery library at Mar Saba in 1958, reference is made to an early Christian rite, initiated by Jesus himself, wherein young men clothed only in a "linen garment" spent the night with Jesus and were taught and instructed regarding the "mystery of the kingdom of God."³⁵ A similar passage is found in the

canonical Gospel of Mark:

"And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him:
And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked." (Mark 14:51-52).

It is beyond the thesis of this paper to delve into the particular ordinances being administered by Jesus on these occasions.³⁶ We may simply note that a linen cloth worn over a naked body (i.e., next to the skin) was an integral part of an initiatory ceremony, and was in common use in later Christian baptisms.

For example, the ancient Byzantine baptismal rite (3rd-4th centuries C.E.) was as follows: "The servant of God, _____, is baptized in the name (of the Trinity)." Thereupon Psalm 32 was sung, and the priest dressed the newly-baptized in a white garment and said, "The servant of God, _____, is clothed with the tunic of righteousness, in the name (of the Trinity)."³⁷

The ancient Coptic and Ethiopic rites (also 3rd-4th centuries) were very similar. In both rites, after being baptized, washed, and anointed, "the neophyte was then dressed in white, crowned, and girdled."³⁸

Among the Sethians and other gnostic circles was the idea of changing the garment after baptism, or to put on a "heavenly garment":

"This is the well-known gnostic symbol, which was represented in baptism by the white garment put on by the newly baptized. Because of the correspondence of inner value and outward form, as we have been able to ascertain from our texts, there was presumably a special rite also among the Gnostics concerning a garment that was put on after baptism, reminiscent of the practice in both the Christian Church and the Mandaean community."³⁹

Cyril of Jerusalem described the early Christian rites of washing, anointing, and clothing. He described the anointing specifically as "the anointing of the brow, face, ears, nose, breast, etc.,

'which represents,' he says, 'the clothing of the candidate in the protective panoply of the Holy Spirit,' which however did not hinder the initiate from receiving a real garment on the occasion."⁴⁰

The basic appearance of these garments is known to us from archaeological excavations. Remarkably well-preserved samples have been discovered by archaeologists as prominent as Petrie and Schaeffer in such diverse areas as Egypt, the Dead Sea area, Asia Minor, Rome, and Minoa. Such garments are characterized by a compass on one breast and a square on the other; the compass signifies (they presume) "balance, or measure in all things," while the square represents "rectitude" or "uprightness."⁴¹ The sign of the square, similar in appearance to the Greek letter gamma, was a popular motif in ancient Christian clothing; it can be seen in the edges of Christian robes from the fourth century, in fifth century and later mosaics in Rome, Naples, and Ravenna, and in paintings in early Christian art. According to the Zohar, these gamma marks were originally in the mantle (veil) of the Temple in Jerusalem. In later times the gamma was transferred from clothing to the altar cloth of the Church, which became known as the "gammalia."⁴²

In Eschatology

Enough has been stated to sufficiently validate our opening hypotheses, namely, that sacred vestments were at the core, not the periphery, of ancient temple worship, that earthly kings utilized the basic initiatory rites of the temple as part of their coronation and enthronement ceremonies to help legitimize their reigns,⁴³ and that sacred vestments retained their essential characteristics, in both

form and function, across boundaries of time and space. The remaining point to be discussed is what David Montgomery refers to as the "So what?" factor, or in other words, what does all this have to do with us, here and now, other than to satisfy mundane academic curiosity? Is there something here of significant value for modern man?

Joseph Smith's translation of the New Testament parable of the marriage supper notes that those who are "called" but not "chosen" are those who "do not have on the wedding garment" (JST, Matthew 22:14).

We will turn once again to ancient sources to confirm the concept that sacred garments have an integral role to play in eschatology.

The Dead Sea Scrolls "hold out to the faithful the promise of a 'crown of glory' and a 'robe of honor' and the prospect of joining the celestial choir after death," and "the Iranian doctrine envisages the bestowal of a similar crown and robe, the enjoyment of celestial radiance (khvarenah)..."⁴⁴ Such clothing is analogous to the shining, heavenly garments of Adam; "the world would be renewed; the elect would inherit the 'glory of Adam,' 'every blessing and eternal joy in life without end, a crown of glory and a garment of majesty in unending light.'"⁴⁵

The Jews once taught that when Michael and Gabriel lead all the sinners up out of the lower world, "they will wash and anoint them... and clothe them with beautiful pure garments and bring them into the presence of God."⁴⁶ In the Apocalypse of Elijah we read, "Then will Gabriel and Muriel portray the fiery columns. They will come down as in a column from heaven and they will lead them into the holy land. And they will settle them there so that they may eat of the tree of life and wear a white garment, and there they will not thirst."⁴⁷ A

similar idea comes from the Acts of Judas Thomas: "They shall be in the glory, and they shall be in the joy into which some enter. And they shall put on shining garments and shall be clothed with the glory of the Lord, and they shall praise the living Father of whose food they have received which never has any impurity in it, and they will drink of eternal life."⁴⁸

In II (Slavonic) Enoch, discovered in 1892, we find:

"And the Lord said to Michael: 'Go and take Enoch from out his earthly garments, and anoint him with my sweet ointment, and put him into the garments of my glory.' And Michael did thus, as the Lord told him. He anointed me, and dressed me... and I looked at myself, and I was like one of his glorious ones." (2 Enoch 22:8-9).

In the Pearl, a portion of the (first century) Acts of Judas Thomas, the protagonist, upon leaving his heavenly home, leaves his heavenly garment also. After successfully passing through the vicissitudes of life, he returns home and is exceedingly eager to return to his heavenly garment, which he hastily dons and then recalls all his former glory.⁴⁹

The most striking example of heavenly garments awaiting the righteous is found in the pseudepigraphic Ascension of Isaiah, an early (first century) Christian apocalypse, which contains an account of Isaiah's ascent to the seven heavens. Describing the end of the world, the author states:

"But the saints will come with the Lord with their garments which are (now) stored up on high in the seventh heaven: with the Lord they will come, whose spirits are clothed, they will descend and be present in the world, and He will strengthen those, who have been found in the body, together with the saints, in the garments of the saints, and the Lord will minister to those who have kept watch in this world." (Ascension of Isaiah⁵⁰ IV:16; cf. Revelation 3:5).

While journeying through the second heaven, Isaiah is informed of what awaits him in the seventh heaven:

"For above all the heavens and their angels has thy throne been placed, and thy garments and thy crown which thou shalt see." (Ascension VII:22).

In the sixth heaven Isaiah is informed by his angelic guide:

"Hear, furthermore, therefore, this also from thy fellow servant; when from the body by the will of God thou hast ascended hither, then thou wilt receive the garment which thou seest, and likewise other numbered garments laid up (there) thou wilt see." (Ascension VIII:14).

Upon entering the seventh heaven, Isaiah

"... saw Enoch and all who were with him, stript of the garments of the flesh, and I saw them in their garments of the upper world, and they were like angels, standing there in great glory." (Ascension IX:9).

Near the throne of God, Isaiah perceived many garments in storage and inquired of the angel concerning them:

"And I saw there many garments laid up, and many thrones and many crowns.
And I said to the angel: 'Whose are these garments and thrones and crowns?'
And he said unto me: 'These garments many from that world will receive, believing in the words of That One, who shall be named as I told thee, and they will observe those things, and believe in them, and believe in His cross: for them are these laid up.'" (Ascension IX:24-26).

Isaiah (sic) concluded the theophany with a warning and a promise to the righteous:

"And watch ye in the Holy Spirit in order that ye may receive your garments and thrones and crowns of glory which are laid up in the seventh heaven." (Ascension XI:40).

NOTES

1. A. E. Waite, The Holy Kabbalah, (Secaucus, New Jersey: University Books, n.d.), pp. 281-285.
2. See Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," in Jacob Neusner, ed., History of Religions Vol. V, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), p. 232, n. 51.
3. Hugh Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, n.d.), pp. 23-31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
7. In addition to the basic initiatory procedures described in the text, at least two others are known to have existed in ancient Near Eastern temple rituals: (1) the giving of a new name; and (2) a sacral meal. This is not to imply, however, that all these procedures were used in every occasion.
8. The use of linen was adopted at an early date by the Egyptians because of its resistance to decay and insect infestation. Linen will remain white and clean long after leather or wool begin to deteriorate. Eventually linen will yellow but it remains resistant. Thousands of samples of linen from as far back as the First Dynasty of Egypt have survived to our day, many of them in remarkably fine condition.
9. John L. Sharpe III, "The Second Adam in the Apocalypse of Moses," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 35, p. 43.

10. John M. Lundquist, "What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green, eds., The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 212-213.
11. Aylward M. Blackman, "The Rite of Opening the Mouth in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia," a paper read before the Royal Asiatic Society during the Centenary Celebrations on July 20, 1923; JEA, Vol. I, p. 56.
12. Geo Widengren, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism Studies in Mandaean Baptism," in Jacob Neusner, ed., Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 552-553.
13. Ibid., p. 553.
14. Ibid., pp. 555-556.
15. In Babylonia the bathing of the dead with water, anointing them with oil, and clothing them in a special garment was also known as far back as Akkadian times. See Widengren, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism," pp. 577-578.
16. Ibid., p. 557.
17. Ibid., p. 582.
18. Mitchell J. Dahood, "The Temple and other Sacred Places in the Ebla Tablets," in Truman G. Madsen, ed., The Temple in Antiquity (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1984), p. 83.
19. Theodor H. Gaster, Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East (New York: Gordian Press, 1975), p. 201.
20. Leviathan: a monstrous dragon known to us from allusions in Old Testament poetry. See Isaiah 27:1; Psalm 74:14; 104:26; Job 3:8.

21. Gaster, Thespis, p. 202.
22. Ibid., pp. 330-331.
23. For other examples of checkered coats, compare Joseph's coat of many colors (Genesis 37:3) and Tamar's coat (II Samuel 13: 18-19).
24. Gaster, Thespis, p. 330. See Scrolls in English (Harmondsworth,
25. Truman G. Madsen, "The Temple and the Restoration," in The Temple in Antiquity, p. 12.
26. In the Egyptian priesthood, garments of simple linen were regarded as holy. In the Bible, angels are usually portrayed as being similarly attired (Ezekiel 9:2-3, 11; 10:2; Daniel 10:5; 12:6-7).
27. H. Ludin-Jensen, "The Consecration in the Eighth Chapter of the Testamentum Levi," in La Regatta Sacra (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), pp. 356-357.
28. This diagram is taken from Geo Widengren, "Royal Ideology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in F. F. Bruce, ed., Promise and Fulfillment, Hooke Volume, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), pp. 204-205.
29. The girdle is actually mentioned as part of the High Priest's dress, but nothing is mentioned about the purple color.
30. Widengren, "Royal Ideology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," p. 206.
31. Ibid., pp. 209-211.
32. G. R. S. Mead, ed., Pistis Sophia (Secaucus, New Jersey: University Books, 1974), pp. 295-296.
33. Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," p. 3.
34. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

35. Morton Smith, The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 17.
36. Some 'scholars,' ignorant of the true nature of these proceedings, have been reduced to suggesting that the young man in this passage was merely an innocent passerby who got caught in the conflict between Jesus and the Romans. Others have blasphemously intimated that Jesus was occasionally immorally involved with young men. We will dismiss both arguments as being unworthy of comment.
37. Geoffrey Wainwright, Christian Initiation (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 22.
38. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
39. Geo Widengren, "Baptism and Enthronement in some Jewish-Christian Gnostic Documents," in S. G. F. Brandon, ed., The Saviour God, E. O. James Volume (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), p. 211.
40. Hugh Nibley, "What is a Temple?" in The Temple in Antiquity, p. 27.
41. Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," p. 12.
42. Ibid., pp. 9-10.
43. We have not dealt extensively with this theme in this paper, although we have noted the conjoining of royal and priestly characters in ritual clothing. For a development of the theme of the temple as an instrument in divine-human governance, see Richard J. Clifford, "The Temple in the Ugaritic Myth of Baal," in Frank M. Cross, ed., Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1975), pp. 137-145. For a discussion of Solomon's use of the Temple in consolidating his reign, see Frank M. Cross, "The

Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research," in The Temple in Antiquity, especially pp. 97-101.

44. Theodor H. Gaster, The Dead Sea Scriptures (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 25.
45. Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: C. Nicholls & Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 48.
46. Nibley, "What is a Temple?" p. 28.
47. Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," p. 17.
48. Ibid., p. 18.
49. Hugh Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), pp. 267-272.
50. This and subsequent quotations from the Ascension of Isaiah are from the edition by R. H. Charles, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1900).

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