

Habit

The Canonical Habit

The habit of the Canons Regular is something which needs some explanation, especially to the many who are unfamiliar with the strange looking white tie-like garment which is worn around the neck and hangs down the front and the back of the cassock. This rather impractical and cumbersome looking thing is actually a meaningful part of the habit of the Canons Regular, and something which should inspire him daily in his work and in his prayer.

The everyday habit consists of a black cassock, formerly white until the 18th century, a black wool sash, a baroque collar of white linen, and the sarozium, also known as that funny, starched white linen tie. The term sarozium comes from the Latin, *sacrum rochetum*, or sacred rochet. A rochet is worn by certain levels of the clergy when they are chanting the choir Office or are simply in choir dress. This was part of the habit from earliest times and indicates the canon's dedication to the worship of God.



The Provost of Stift Klosterneuburg welcomes the three Novices of 2004, who are wearing the habit for the very first time. [Click to enlarge.](#)

Originally a white linen garment worn over the cassock for worship, in the Middle Ages it was worn without sleeves by the canons. Over time it grew cumbersome and was made narrower and narrower until it became what we see today. Nevertheless, it continues to point to the canon as a man dedicated to God's service, not just when he is in church, but wherever he is. When he is in church, he removes the sarozium and puts on a full rochet.



The development of the Habit. [Click to enlarge.](#)

On solemn feasts the canon in solemn vows also wears a violet mozzetta or shoulder cape for offices in the church. This was also not always the case. Originally the canons wore an almutium, which certainly wouldn't make our animal-loving friends happy, as it was a fur cape made from the skins of small animals, whose tails were attached to the hem and hung down. It was fastened at the neck with cords and had a hood on it.

In the 18th century the almutium was replaced by the mozzetta, though in some abbeys (Neustift in the South Tyrol, for example), it was retained into the modern period prior to being dropped. The Premonstratensian canons of Schlägl Abbey here in Austria still wear the fur almutium.



Gerhoch of Reichersberg wearing an almutium.

The mozzetta of the canons of Klosterneuburg is usually decorated at the neck with violet tassels and cords. On these feast days, a biretta is also worn for the liturgical services.

Another peculiarity of the Klosterneuburg habit is the use of tassels at the bottom of the sash of the solemnly professed members. Until solemn vows, the novice and junior have fringe at the bottom of their sash. When solemnly professed the new sash with tassels at the bottom is given.

In the Middle Ages, the Canons Regular wore cape over the rochet as part of their everyday habit. This went through several evolutions at Klosterneuburg. Now during the winter months and beginning on the Feast of All Saints, the community wears a thick, black coat of baroque style when in the church choir.

The Austrian Constitution on the Habit:

The form of our habit has evolved throughout history. Therefore, there are differences among the individual Stifts. Further details are laid down in the house-rules. In principle the habit is to be worn. For a legitimate reason, a discreet kind of dress similar to that of the secular clergy is permitted. For isolated cases and for important reasons, and for as long as these reasons last, the Provost may on these occasions permit lay clothing.

