

# Orthodox Monastic Tradition

## Novice

Novice (Greek: δόκιμος;

Church Slavonic: послушникъ, *poslushnik*), lit. "one under obedience"

Those wishing to join a monastery begin their lives as novices. After coming to the monastery and living as a guest for not less than three days, the abbot or abbess may bless the candidate to become a novice. There is no formal ceremony for the clothing of a novice, he or she simply receives permission to wear the clothing of a novice. In the Eastern monastic tradition, novices may or may not dress in the black inner cassock (Greek: Αντερίον), Esorason (Εσώρασον); Church Slavonic: *Podriasnik*) and wear the soft monastic hat (Greek: *Skoufos*, Church Slavonic: *Skufia*), depending on the tradition of the local community, and in accordance with the abbot's directives. In some communities, the novice also wears the leather belt. Monks are given a prayer rope and instructed in the use of the Jesus Prayer.

If a novice chooses to leave during the period of the novitiate, no penalty is incurred. They may also be asked to leave at any time if their behavior does not conform to the monastic life, or if the superior discerns that they are not called to monasticism. When the abbot or abbess deems the novice ready, they are asked whether they wish to join the monastery. Some, out of humility, will choose to remain novices all their lives. Every stage of the monastic life must be entered on a completely voluntarily basis.

## Rassophore

Rassophore (Greek: ρασοφόρος, Rasophoros;

Church Slavonic: рясофоръ, Ryasofor), lit. "Robe-bearer"

If the novice continues on to become a full monastic (monk/nun), they are clothed in the first degree of monasticism during a Service at which they

receive the tonsure. Although no formal vows are made at this point, candidates is normally required to affirm their commitment to persevere in the monastic life. The abbot will then perform the tonsure, cutting a small amount of hair from four spots on the head, forming a cross. They are then given the outer cassock (Greek: ράσον, Rasson, Exorasson, or Mandorrason; Church Slavonic: ряса, Riassa), an outer robe with wide sleeves, from which the name of Rassophore is derived. He is also given a kalimavkion, a cylindrical brimless hat, which is covered with a veil called an epanokalimavkion. (These are separate items in the Greek tradition; in the Russian tradition the two are stitched together and collectively called a klobuk.) If They have not previously received it, a leather belt is fastened around his waist. The Habit is usually black, signifying that they are now dead to the world, and they receive a new name.

Although the Rassophore does not make formal vows, they are still expected to continue in the monastic state for the rest of their life. Some will remain Rassophores permanently without going on to the higher degrees.

### Stavrophore

Stavrophore (Greek: σταυροφόρος, Stavrophoros;  
Church Slavonic: крестоносець, Kkrestonosets), lit. "Cross-bearer"

The next level for Eastern monastics takes place some years after the first tonsure, when the abbot feels the monk has reached an appropriate level of discipline, dedication and humility. This degree is also known as the Small Schema and is thought of as a "betrothal" to the Great Schema. At this stage, the monastic makes formal vows of stability, of chastity, of obedience and of poverty. Then they are tonsured and clothed in the habit which, in addition to that worn by the Rassophore, includes the Paramandyas (Greek: παραμανδύας; Church Slavonic: параманъ, Paraman), a piece of square cloth worn on the back, embroidered with the instruments of the Passion, and connected by ties to a wooden cross worn over the heart. The Paramandyas represents the yoke of Christ. Because of this addition they are now called Stavrophore or Cross-bearer. They are also

given a wooden hand cross ("profession cross"), which they should keep in their icon corner, and a beeswax candle, symbolic of monastic vigilance and personal sacrifice to God. They will be buried holding the cross, and the candle will be burned at their funeral. In the Slavic practice, the Stavrophore also wears the monastic mantle, which symbolizes 40 days of the Lord's fasting on the Mountain of Temptation.

After the ceremony, the newly tonsured Stavrophore will remain in vigil in the church for five days, refraining from all work, except spiritual reading. Customarily, this vigil is often reduced to three days. The abbot increases the Stavrophore's prayer rule, allows a more strict personal ascetic practice and gives more responsibility.

## **Great Schema**

**Great Schema (Greek: *μεγαλόσχημος*, *Megaloschemos*;  
Church Slavonic: *Схиμα*, *Schima*)**

Monastics, whose abbot feels they have reached a high level of spiritual excellence, enter the final stage, called the Great Schema. The tonsure of a Schemamonk or Schemanun follows the same format as the Stavrophore, They make the same vows and are tonsured in the same manner. In addition to all the garments worn by the Stavrophore, they are given the Analavos (Church Slavonic: *Analav*) which is the article of monastic vesture emblematic of the Great Schema. For this reason, the Analavos itself is sometimes itself called the "Great Schema". It drapes over the shoulders and hangs down in front and in back, with the front portion somewhat longer. It is embroidered with the instruments of the Passion and the Trisagion. The Greek form does not have a hood, the Slavic form has a hood and lappets on the shoulders, so that the garment forms a large cross covering the monastic's shoulders, chest and back. Another piece added is the Polystavrion (*Πολυσταύριον*, "Many Crosses"), which consists of a cord with a number of small crosses plaited into it. The Polystavrion forms a yoke around the monk and serves to hold the analavos in place. It reminds

**the monastic that they are bound to Christ and that their arms are no longer fit for worldly activities, but that they must labor only for the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Greek tradition, the mantle is added at this stage. The Paramandyas of the Megaloschemos is larger than that of the Stavrophore, and if they wear the Klobuk, it is of a distinctive thimble shape, called a Koukoulion, the veil of which is usually embroidered with crosses.**

**The Schemamonastic also shall remain some days in vigil in the church. On the eighth day after Tonsure, there is a special Service for the "Removal of the Koukoulion". – In some monastic traditions, the Great Schema is never given or is only given to monks and nuns on their death bed, while in others, e.g., the cenobitic monasteries on Mount Athos, it is common to tonsure a monastic into the Great Schema only three years after commencing the monastic life.**

**In Russian and some other traditions, when bearers of some monastic title acquires the Great Schema, their title incorporates the word "schema". For example, a Hieromonk of Great Schema is called Hieroschemamonk. Archimandrite becomes Schema-Archimandrite, Hegumen Schema-Hegumen, etc. In the Russian Orthodox tradition, in such cases the part "Schema" is commonly truncated to "схи" (skhe), and correspondingly the titles are spelled as схимонах (skhemonach), иеросхимонах (ieroskhemonach), схиархимандрит (skhearchimandrit), and схигумен (skheigumen).**

