

Urara, the Official Vestment of the Clerical Ministry in the East Syriac Tradition

Urara, being the official dress of the clerical ministry,¹ is worn by Heupdiaqna, Mšamšana and Priest. While receiving the orders the Urara is given to the ordained person according to the dimension of his ministry. Karoya (Reader) is not permitted to wear the Urara. At the end of the ordination of the Karoya, Urara is placed on his hands, as a preparation for his future ministry as a Heupdiaqna. Heupdiaqna wears the Urara on the left shoulder and folds it around his neck. Mšamšana wears it on his left shoulder, but without folding it around the neck. That Heupdiaqna's ministry is restricted is shown through the fact that the Urara is put on the left shoulder folded around the neck. The restriction of Mšamšana's ministry in comparison with the ministry of the Priest is shown by the fact that Mšamšana wears the Urara only on the left shoulder. In the case of the Mšamšana and Priest the free hanging Urara stands for the freedom of the ministry. Compared to the Heupdiaqna, Mšamšana has more freedom in the ministry and that is shown through his free hanging (floating) Urara. In the case of the priest the Urara points to the full freedom of service. It is worn by the priest on his neck without any sort of restriction.

In the East Syriac tradition the priest wears the sacred vestments according to the same manner in which he received the sacred vestments through various orders. With *karoyutha* he receives the Kothina and Zunara. Urara is placed on his hands. With *heupdiaqnutha* he receives the Urara, but wears on the left shoulder folding it around the neck. With *mšamšanutha* he puts the Urara freely on his left shoulder. When he becomes priest he puts the Urara freely on his neck. He also receives Zande and Paina. Urara is usually worn above the Zunara. Sometimes Zunara is worn above the Urara only to keep the Urara in a fixed position. The proper theology of liturgical vestments requires that Urara is worn above the Zunara.

Theodore of Mopsuestia in his Catechetical Homily on the Eucharist speaks of the aspect of freedom of ministry pertaining to the symbolic meaning of Urara.

“They [deacons] place on their left shoulders a stole, which floats equally on either side, forwards and backwards. This a sign that they are not performing a ministry of servitude but of freedom, as they are ministering unto things that lead to freedom all those who are worthy of the great house of God, that is to say the Church. They do not place the stole on their neck in a way that it floats on either side but not in front, because there is no one serving in the house who wears such an apparel; it is only those who are masters of themselves and remote from servitude of any kind who wear it in this way, but the deacons place it on their shoulders because they are appointed for service. The stole is their only sign of that freedom to which all of us who believed in Christ, have been called.”²

¹Timothy II, “On the Mysteries of the Body and Blood”, 4.2.15. For the English translation see Jose Mathew Kochuparampil, *The Mystery of the Eucharist*, Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum, Roma 2000, 56.

² Theodore, “Homily on Eucharist”, in *Homilies and Interpretation on Holy Qurbana by Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Narsai, Gabriel Qatraya Bar Lipah, Changanacherry, 1977, 14.

Theodore distinguishes between the Urara or Stole worn by the priest and by the deacon. The floating Urara in the case of both priest and deacon is sign of freedom of service. This freedom is different in the service of the priest and that of the deacon. The fact that deacon's stole is limited to the left shoulder side accounts for the limitation of the freedom of his service. In the case of the priest the stole floats on both sides and thus manifests the full freedom of his service.

The ninth century anonymous commentator of the East Syriac liturgy insists on the aspect of freedom in the symbolism of the Urara, calling it the "king's sign and mark".³The king's stole is radically different from the stole of the servants, especially with regard to freedom.

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³ F. Pittappillil, *The Celebration of the Holy Mysteries: A Critical Study of the Eucharistic Treatise in the Exposition of the Church Services of Pseudo-George of Arbel of the 9th Century*, Kottayam, 2011, 125.