ABSTRACT

This thesis is devoted to the study of the monastic habit in female monasteries in Poland in pre-partition era. It covers an extensive historical study which enables critical look at the development of its forms, including all noticeable changes. The study begins with outlining the historical and religious context where the custom of wearing a special outfit was being formed by those who have taken an ascetic life understood as the choice of God.

The development of monastic dress in this period embraces two main stages. The first one is the period of beginnings and lasts from the second to the eighth century. At that time the outfit tends to emphasize the dissimilarity of life, its form and parts are chosen and symbolic meaning is given. The search for forms of monastic dress took place mainly within the repertoire of commonly worn clothing. The basis for these phenomena is hermit life, and the turning point is the rise of communities guided by the generally accepted rules. The monastic rules of St Pachomius (d. 346), of St Basil (d. 379), of St Augustine (d. 430), of John Cassian (d. 435) were the first documents that in the legal sense defined the function of monastic clothing, its use customs, the amount and symbolic meaning. The critical point was the emergence of the Rule of St Benedict (d. 550) and the development of the idea of Benedictine monastic life. Presentation of forms of clothing from the secular fashion, which entered the monastic repertoire, has become an attempt to reconstruct the original monastic dress functioning at this stage of monasticism.

The second stage is associated with the popularization of monastic life in Europe, the Christianization of Poland and the development of new religious foundations – Benedictine Nuns, Cistercian Nuns, Poor Clares, Augustinian Nuns, Sisters of the Holy Spirit, Norbertine Nuns, Dominican Nuns. Monastic habit becomes a sign of religious identification, legitimized by church regulations. Its detailed form was determined on the basis of the order’s own laws. The study of monastic outfits, which was carried out within individual monastic families, shows a close connection with the development of fashion (mainly female), basically, up to the twelfth century. Gradually there emerged elements such as cuculla, veil, coif, wimple, shawl, which were common to both areas and showed a clear similarity in the structure and the method of wearing. The difference was the material, the colour and the austerity of the form. Nun’s headgear was an element which was the most frequently subject to some changes.
in various monastic families. It was confirmed by source and iconographic material (mostly dating from the post-Tridentine period).

Habit as the outfit was also adopted by the groups of women who formed the communities that were not formally monasteries - beguines and tertiaries. Female orders funded in our land which had their origin outside Poland, such as Visitandines, Carmelite Nuns, Sisters of Charity, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, had brought their own patterns of dress which they strictly complied with. They were documented in the form of miniature models and a set of clothing templates. Also in this case these outfits parallel to women's fashion functioning in the areas of their development.

Monastic habit had a multitude of symbolic meanings referring to both a whole outfit and its particular components. This symbolism was that of the baptismal, nuptial, eschatological, apotropaic. Habit was understood as tunica sacra providing salvation, as the robe of testimony contemptu mundi, as the sign of sequella Christi interpreted in the sense of the Passion, and finally, as the participation in newness of life of a child of God. The given symbolic meanings have their reference in the source texts of an ascetic and theological nature and in the iconographic representations in the form of devotional images included in the thesis.