

# EXPLORING THE LIFE OF PAINTED DOWRY CHESTS. ASPECTS OF MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUES, CONSERVATION STATUS, AND SUBSEQUENT INTERVENTIONS

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**Keywords:** dowry chests, conservation, subsequent interventions, degradation, scientific analysis.

**Abstract:** Dowry chests, intricate symbols of social and cultural heritage, mirror community status and traditions. Crafted by folk artisans, they embody local, artistic, and spiritual symbols, reflecting ancestral values. Manufactured with region-specific techniques, they feature carved or painted symbols relevant to local customs. These chests also bear witness to community ties through owner or local craftsman “repairing” interventions.

This study presents the results of the examination of a dowry chest from Bucovina, in the Suceava County, dating back to 1899. The employed methods – non-invasive and minimally invasive — allowed for the identification of the materials and techniques which were used by the craftsmen. By comparing with similar models, diverse aspects related to the quality of materials and the method of correcting technical flaws could be highlighted. Additionally, details related to the changes these objects suffered through the passage of time and the importance given to them could be identified.

The reinforcement of the chest structures, the replacement or addition of hardware elements, as well as the masking of degradation signs represent facts that are part of the chronology of the majority of painted dowry chests.

**Rezumat:** Lăzile de zestre, obiecte complexe ale identității sociale și culturale, sunt expresia tradiției comunității. Realizate de meșteri populari, aceste lăzi conțin simboluri locale, artistice și spirituale. Fiind legate de comunitate, ele reprezintă o mărturie a valorilor și obiceiurilor ancestrale. Această conexiune cu zona și comunitatea locală se regăsește nu numai în modalitatea de construcție, materialele folosite, motivele decorative utilizate cât și, mai ales, în intervențiile ulterioare, de „reparare”, realizate de proprietarii lăzilor sau chiar alți meșteri locali.

Acest studiu prezintă rezultatele examinării unei lăzi de zestre din Bucovina, județul Suceava din 1899. Metodele utilizate – non-invazive și minim-invazive, au permis identificarea materialelor utilizate și a tehnicii folosite de meșteri. Prin comparație cu alte piese similare, au putut fi evidențiate aspecte inedite, legate de calitatea materialelor și de modalitatea de rezolvare a unor vicii de tehnică. De asemenea au putut fi identificate detalii legate de trecerea prin timp a acestor piese și de importanța care le era acordată.

Ranforsarea structurii lăzilor, înlocuirea sau adăugarea elementelor de feronerie și mascarea degradărilor reprezintă realități ce fac parte din cronologia majorității lăzilor de zestre pictate.

The dowry is defined as a transfer of parental property, gifts, and goods to the daughter who is about to marry. These elements were to remain under the name and control of the daughter, to use them as she saw fit. Understanding the significance of the dowry and the symbolism behind it, the crafting of a container seemed like an organic progression of things. Thus, the dowry chest was conceived, a nucleus of the new household and a source of pride in itself.

Each geographical area approaches the manufacturing of this type of object in a unique manner, imbuing it with a particular charm by endowing it with attributes specific to the local heritage. We can observe that dowry chests do not appear as a standalone invention in the ancient Romanian territory. The evolution of Romanian society indicates where this tradition of dowry chests might have begun, namely through cultural and social exchange with various peoples through trade and commerce. The dowry chest represented a fundamental piece of the ancient rural interior, not only from a practical point of view, being used for storage, but also because of its role in the conduct of the woman’s marriage ceremony, as it was the only possession which the woman had after leaving her parental home.

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