

UNCOVERING THE GREAT ARTISTIC VALUE OF THE 18TH CENTURY ICONOSTASIS PAINTED BY VASILIE ZBOROSKI THROUGH THE REMOVAL OF OBSCURING ADDITIONS

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Abstract: This article presents a case study of an object of great value for Romanian culture, neglected over time and affected by the lack of communication between social groups interested in it. The object is an 18th century iconostasis, of an uncertain geographic origin, signed by the painter Vasile Zboroski, that was in liturgical use for 50 years in the cemetery church in Mănăstur, Cluj-Napoca. The lack of protection against both natural and anthropic damage factors caused extensive alteration of the overall appearance of the object. The removal of the materials added during recent inappropriate interventions, which used to cover over 90% of the painted surface, was based on thorough investigations and discussions over the ethical and practical aspects of the operation. Through the conservation treatment the high artistic qualities were brought to light enhancing the object's value for all its users, regardless of which of its meanings they see as prevalent.

Rezumat: Articolul prezintă situația unui obiect valoros pentru cultura românească, neglijat de-a lungul timpului și afectat de lipsa de comunicare dintre grupurile sociale interesate de acesta. Obiectul este un iconostas din secolul al XVIII-lea, de origine geografică incertă, semnat de pictorul Vasile Zboroski, care s-a aflat în uz liturgic timp de 50 de ani în biserica cimitirului Mănăstur, Cluj-Napoca. Lipsa de protecție împotriva factorilor de degradare naturali și antropici a provocat alterări grave ale aspectului general al obiectului. Îndepărtarea materialelor adăugate prin intervenții necorespunzătoare recente, care acopereau peste 90% din suprafața pictată, s-a bazat pe investigații și discuții temeinice cu privire la aspectele etice și practice ale operațiunii. Prin tratamentul de conservare au fost descoperite calități artistice deosebite, sporindu-se astfel valoarea obiectului pentru toți utilizatorii acestuia, indiferent care sunt semnificațiile pe care aceștia le consideră prevalente.

Ancient religious art objects are sometimes part of a so-called “conflictual heritage” with meanings in both religious practice and art history. The conservators’ ideal of keeping heritage alive, by maintaining it closely connected to the life of the community, is not easily achieved. The main reason is the difference in the perception of the object’s meaning between the two groups, the religious community seeing only its functional side, while the specialists in the field of culture are focusing only on the historical or artistic one. In Romania, the insufficient involvement of the state institutions and the excessive power of the church in matters of decision-making are unfavourable for the preservation of this type of heritage objects, which often become the target of inappropriate interventions, undertaken by unqualified people, with prejudicial long-term results for all parties involved.

A representative example of the ambiguous situation of old religious art objects is an 18th century iconostasis that stood in the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in the Mănăstur cemetery of Cluj-Napoca until March 2012 (Fig.1). This object is a high wooden iconostasis of medium size (3.83 m tall and 5.85 m wide) with three registers above the architrave and three openings towards the shrine, the central one being closed by the Holy Doors. It is composed of 40 icons painted on wooden panels and over 50 carved wooden pieces which make up the decorative framework. A peculiarity of this iconostasis is the dual function of each component, both aesthetic and structural, the latter owing to the technique of assembly: each piece is joined with another and the wall they form is leaning on a beam structure.

Regarding the iconography, the studied object follows the typical configuration, the representations being organized by theme on the traditional tiers: the Sovereign, the Feasts, the Apostles (Deisis) and the Prophets (Fig. 2). The paintings were executed in post-Byzantine style with strong Baroque influences, which can easily be observed in the freer manner of applying the colour and in the use of a wider chromatic range. The dynamic postures of some characters given by the ample gestures and the disproportion of their bodies, accentuated by the light beams incline towards Baroque art, while the gilded backgrounds show the connection to the hieratic taste of Byzantine art (Fig. 3). The richly detailed landscapes and sceneries, in some cases created using colour strokes in realistic illusionist manner, and in others using the reversed perspective, picture perfectly a moment

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Fig. 1. The iconostasis before being removed from the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in the Mănăstir cemetery of Cluj-Napoca, in March 2012.

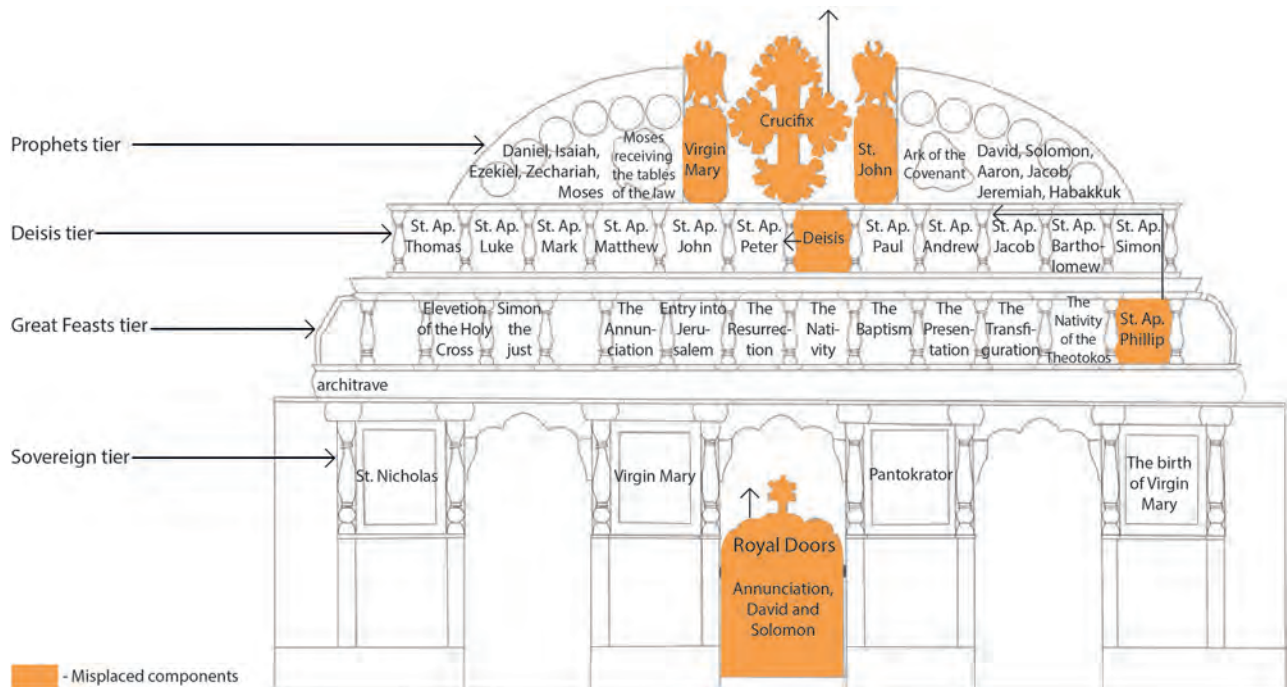


Fig. 2. Graphic documentation of the iconographic configuration of Vasile Zboroski's iconostasis.

Excerpt from Caiete ARA 7, 2016.

of transition in artistic values. In some cases the resort to Catholic iconographic compositions can be noticed, such as the image of Christ rising from the grave used for the Resurrection scene, while in the Orthodox tradition Christ is usually pictured stepping on the broken gates of Hades and rescuing Adam and Eve.

In general, the iconostasis is considered to be a complex object from a conservation point of view, due to the multitude of materials and techniques involved in its execution, which, in this case, are low-relief, fretwork, polychromy, metal foil gilding and tempera painting. For most of the components coniferous wood is used, only the Holy Doors and the panels from the Prophets tier are made of linden wood, and some of the crossbeams on the back of the panels are made of hardwood. A white ground layer composed of gypsum and animal glue covers all the frontal surfaces of the panels and of the decorative pieces, varying in thickness mostly on the areas with carved relief. The paint layer (Fig. 4) is thin and with a matte appearance due to the use of tempera technique and the lack of varnish. Large areas are gilded using thin metal foil applied sometimes over a layer of red bole.

Compared to the Brâncovenesc-style iconostases or to those in southern Transylvania, inspired by this style, the one studied here may seem modest in terms of carved and polychrome ornamental repertoire, but by relating it to the iconostases of wooden churches, which are prevalent in its area of origin and its historical period, it can be considered unusually rich in detail, while the refined painting shows the author's artistic training. Nevertheless, all its qualities indicate a great financial effort from the community that ordered it, which was very rarely possible due to the social and political situation of the Romanian people during that time in Transylvania.

Although this iconostasis was mentioned in the parish inventory drawn between 1965 and 1975, a detailed description of its state of preservation or of its components was missing. In academic circles, it has long enjoyed recognition from art historians, who assumed it was the last work of the painter Ștefan Tenețki before his death, dating from 1798,¹ and originating from the village of Certege in Alba County. This hypothesis is supported by documentary evidence which provides information about an iconostasis taken by the cardinal Iuliu Hossu in 1933 from the above mentioned village, and kept in the Greek Catholic Episcopal Chapel on

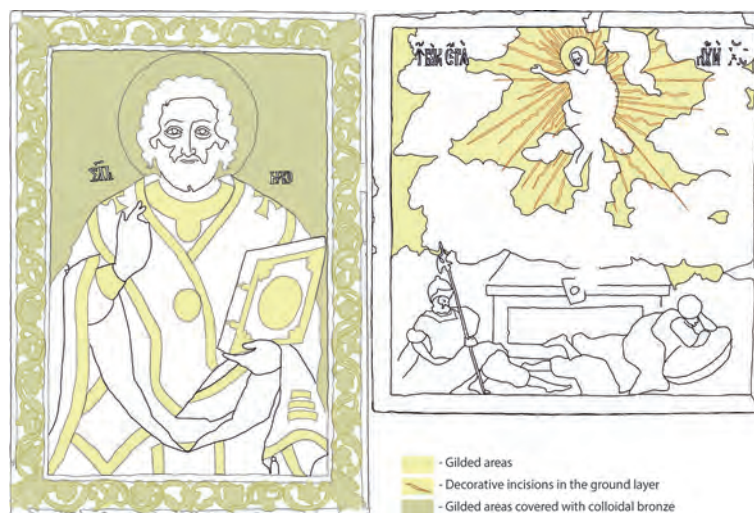


Fig. 3. Graphic documentation showing the typical Byzantine composition used for the Sovereign icon of Saint Nicholas, in contrast with the Catholic representation of the Resurrection, while both use the gilded background.

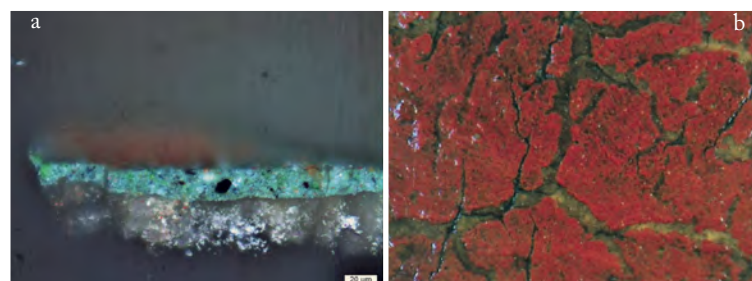


Fig. 4. The paint layer: a. microscopic view (500x) of a cross section from the blue area depicting water in the panel painting situated beneath the Pantokrator showing a mixture of pigment grains, while forming a thin layer (approx. 20µm); b. microscopic view (50x) of the red garment of the Virgin Mary on one of the icons, showing the execution craquelures, specific for all red areas, exposing the ground layer.

¹ Porumb 1998, p. 416.



Fig. 5. Reverse of the dedication icon showing the text that attributes the execution of the iconostasis to the painter Vasilie Zboroski and the carpenter Ion, and dates it to 1752.

Moșilor Street, Cluj-Napoca, until 1948, when the Greek Catholic Church was banned by the newly installed communist authorities, and all its property was seized by the state.² The next installation of this object took place only a few years after 1961, when its new home, the newly built Orthodox church of the Mănăstur cemetery, was finished. It was only when the iconostasis was removed for restoration in March 2012 that the inscription on the reverse of the icon of dedication was found. It contains the following text in Romanian, written in Cyrillic alphabet: “1752 Vasilie Zboroski Zugravu și Ion Tâmplariu” (“1752 Vasilie Zboroski Painter and Ion Carpenter”, translation by the author) (Fig. 5). Beside these markings made using black paint, others were added over time in pencil, one mentioning the name of Archbishop Emil Mureșan(u), who was instrumental in the construction of the Mănăstur church, him being one of the 38 Greek Catholic priests who signed the so-called “act of returning to the Orthodox faith” in 1948. The years 1949 and 1965 are also inscribed, all this somewhat explaining the fate of the iconostasis from its requisitioning to its mounting in the cemetery church. The disappearance of the old wooden church in Certege makes it impossible to verify the origin of the iconostasis found in the cemetery church in Mănăstur, and its

atypical morphology for a wooden church iconostasis only further complicates the situation.

The new discoveries regarding the history of the iconostasis, and especially its attribution to an unknown artist, might seem to decrease its value to art history. Nevertheless, its revised, much earlier dating makes this artwork a particularly important one, being the oldest high wooden iconostasis in Cluj County. Also, the artistic achievement in itself marks a unique, early moment in the transition to Baroque in iconostasis art. Objects of this kind are quite scarce mostly due to the fact that, for a long period of time, churches in Transylvania were built of wooden logs, and the role of iconostasis was given to a wall built as part of the construction, while iconostases as distinct pieces are to be found only in masonry churches. Also, not many of the high wooden iconostases that are preserved still possess so many of their original parts, since many of the mobile ones got lost over time. Therefore, the value of the iconostasis by Vasilie Zboroski is supported both by historical aspects, such as the testimony it gives of an important moment in art history and of the culture in the area, and artistic ones such as the compositional unity and integrity, as well as the coherence and the legibility of the artistic message. This iconostasis’s undeniable value to the Romanian culture makes its preservation become a matter of national interest.

The community’s attachment to the old church’s iconostasis was heterogeneous. Unlike a tight-knit rural community, the one adjacent to the Mănăstur cemetery had divided opinions. The sponsoring for manufacturing a new iconostasis provided by one of the families in the parish was regarded by many of the faithful as an opportunity to replace the old iconostasis, which showed visible degradation and was inadequate in size in regard to the much wider opening of the sanctuary apse. Others mourned the loss of icons they felt they had a bond with, and with whose archaic beauty they were accustomed, but were consoled with the thought of a potential restoration. Therefore, the decision to remove and replace the old iconostasis was taken by the parish priest

² In order to break any connections with the Vatican, on the background of the Cold War, Soviet Russia pressured the Romanian authorities to abolish the Greek Catholic Church. In 1948 the clergy of this church was forced to turn to Orthodox faith using threats, violence or even favor offerings, while the ones resisting to comply were arrested. The result was presented to the people as a return to the true and original faith of the Romanians and a declaration of independence from outside forces. In 1948, the Greek Catholic Church was banned by law, and it’s property was split between the Orthodox Church and the State (Kon 2002).

against the well established guidelines and practice in conservation,³ but with the partial support of the community.

In order to save the valuable artwork, the department of Conservation and Restoration from the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca took the responsibility of caring for the iconostasis during its dismantling, packing and transport to another location, while also performing the emergency interventions necessary for maintaining the object's integrity. Afterwards, an agreement of collaboration was concluded between the university and the Metropolitan Museum of the Orthodox Church, in whose custody the iconostasis was taken. At first, the main purpose of this pact was to carry

out the preservation of the object. Only after certain discussions and further investigation of the object, the ultimate goal of the conservation work became preparing the iconostasis for its exhibition, in whole or in part, in the Orthodox Metropolitan Museum in Cluj-Napoca, recently opened at the time, in the basement of the Orthodox Cathedral. This solution represented a compromise which did not fully satisfy any of the interested parties, because, being an essential component of the liturgical space, the presence of the iconostasis inside a church is requisite for the wholeness of its meaning, from both artistic and religious perspective.

The state of conservation was difficult to determine at first contact with the object, because no reference image was available for comparison with the current state. Still, the overall appearance was marked by dull colours and by the excessive glossiness of the icons. The later additions were very easy to notice at first glance, especially the two new Festal icons that replaced the lost original ones, which were remarkable through their lack of artistic qualities and the bright, cool colour palette (Fig. 6). At a closer look errors in the positioning of the composing parts distorted the overall configuration of the iconostasis: the Doors were placed too low in the central opening towards the altar, the cross was at the same level as the prophets' register, the icon of the Apostle Philip was lowered to the feasts' register and the main icon of the Apostles tier, Deisis, was off-centre (Fig. 2).

Although problems regarding the adhesion of the ground layer to the wooden support were identified, the extent to which the painting was affected by this degradation could only be quantified during and after the dismantling, when it became clear that this was the most severe degradation affecting the object due to the imminent risk of material loss. In the case of the columns, the ground layer in the low areas of the bas-relief showed blind detachments, while the protruding parts of the relief had the ground layer cracked and portions of it separated from the support (Fig. 7). The pillars of the railing, rectangular in section, had the ground layer on the edges pushed outwards and detached from the support by



Fig. 6. Original icons and decorative framework marked by dull colours and excessive glossiness, side by side with the newly added icons that lack artistic qualities.

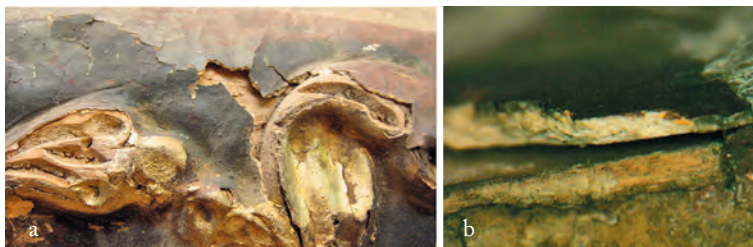


Fig. 7. Portions of the ground layer detached from the support on polychromy pieces: a. detail of a detachment that led to the loss of a ground layer portion, on a column from the Sovereign tier; b. detail of a detachment on the frame of the icon of Virgin Mary in microscopic view (50x).

³ *The Venice Charter* 1964, articles 6, 7 and 8.



Fig. 8. Portions of the ground layer detached from the support, oriented vertically following the wood fibre: a. the Sovereign icon of Virgin Mary; b. the icon of Saint Apostle Luke.



Fig. 9. Inappropriate fillings of lacunae that cover the edges of the original painting, on the Transfiguration icon: a. the filling putty used for the central lacunae is plastic and adhesive; b. the filling putty used for the lacunae on the edges is rigid.

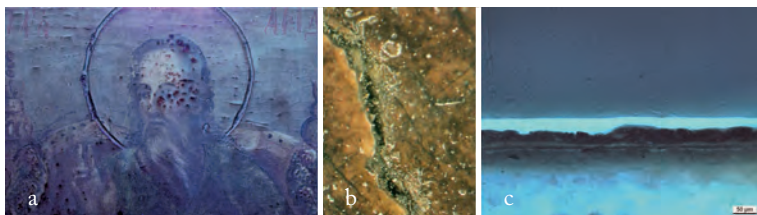


Fig. 10. Nitrocellulose lacquer covering the paint layer: a. detail of the icon of Saint Apostle Andrew in UV fluorescence; b. microscopic view (200x) of a detail from the icon of Virgin Mary; c. UV microscopic view (200x) of a cross-section from the panel painting situated beneath the Pantokrator.

iconostasis into a micro-climate very different from the one where it had previously been stored could certainly be the triggering factor of this series of degradations, but since none of the spaces it had been stored or assembled in had any climate control or monitoring, the hypothesis cannot be taken any further.

Apart from the degradations that endangered the material integrity of the object, others of great impact on the aesthetics were discovered. With the in-depth study of each piece, numerous inadequate interventions

approximately 0.5 cm. The panels showed separation of the ground layer from the wooden support that took the shape of blind detachments or ridged roofs, the apex of both types being oriented vertically following the wooden fibre (Fig. 8). The ground layer extended beyond the side edges of the panels being partially or totally detached from it. The total area of painted ground layer detached from the support represented over 50% of the total. Many pieces that were significantly raised from the support were still kept in place at the moment of the intervention due to the tension exerted by the adjacent edges, yet in a particularly precarious state of stability, a simple touch being enough to cause total detachment. Lacunae in the ground layer, resulting from detachment, were identified in several areas, with the side edges and central portions of the panels being most affected, while the parts with relief had lacunae of varied shapes distributed equally on all the surface. The morphology and the recurrence of this type of degradation clearly reveal a considerable and sudden decrease in the volume of the wooden support due to drying, while the uniform distribution of the degradation on all the components could also indicate towards a possible execution vice, such as inappropriate composition of the ground material, insufficient drying of the wood or improper primer treatment.

The exact time the degradation process started is impossible to determine, but knowing the approximate history of the object, it can be assumed that the detachment occurred after the last relocation and mounting of the iconostasis (in 1965, as noted on the reverse of the icon of the dedication), because fragments so far apart from the support could not have resisted the handling needed for transport or assembly. The transfer of the

were identified, most of them involving later additions of incompatible materials with an obstructing effect on the original. At the level of the wooden support, these interventions were limited to a few coarse completions made of putty on the relief and openwork. Regarding the treatment of lacunae in the ground layer, a large variety of putties, which differed in colour, texture and plasticity, had been applied harshly, and went far beyond the edges of the lacuna (Fig. 9). The lacunae in the colour layer, which were small and less important to the global appearance, were covered in an imitative manner, in a relatively delicate way, especially in the areas covered with red pigment which, in addition to the broad craquelures due to the execution, had proven of poor durability.

Conversely, the most critical aesthetic degradations were the ones produced by the indiscriminate coverage of large areas with industrial products unfit for restoration, with varying degrees of opacity. The entire painted surface had been covered with glossy nitrocellulose lacquer (Fig. 10), the gilded areas of the pieces with relief had been coated with a suspension of brass foil pieces in organic media (Fig. 11), and for the relief background oil paint of different colours, all shades of red, brown and green, had been used (Fig. 12). In total, over 90% of the iconostasis's paintings and polychromy were covered (Fig. 13). Many lacunae in the ground layer had been coated with successive layers of lacquer, brass paint or oil paint, which may indicate the existence of several stages of intervention, a hypothesis which is also supported by the different manner in which the integration of the lacunae in the painting layer was executed compared to the fillings put in the lacunae of the ground layer. The application of the brass paint over the metal foil is supposed to have taken place sometime between 1979 and 2010, but more precise dating is unavailable since the lack of legitimacy of these interventions is always concealed through the absence of documentation and records of the works.

The most plausible motivation for undertaking these actions must have been the desire to repair damaged and neglected parts, to stabilize or remove fragile portions, and then to visually harmonize the ensemble, as the taste for new and glamorous appearance is common these days,⁴ being used to show the wealth of the community and its devotedness to God. Although the ultimate goal of these actions, namely to maintain a stable condition while keeping the function of the iconostasis, would have been shared by specialists, without necessarily any difference of opinion regarding the choice of presentation, the parish preferred to avoid the bother of consulting experts and restorers, deciding to act as it saw fit, resorting to the solution described as “a progressive silent adoption of forgery”⁵ by the authors D. Mohanu and C. Serendan. This kind of attitude is widespread in the ecclesial environment and, despite the already lengthy tradition of heritage conservation as

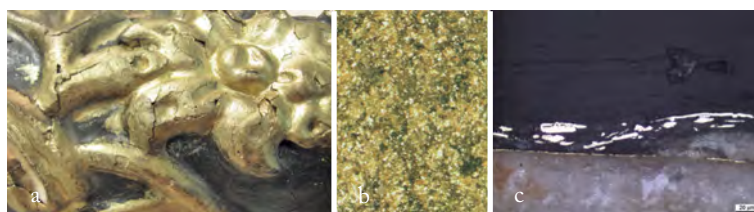


Fig. 11. Brass paint covering the gilded areas: a. detail of a column from the Sovereign tier; b. microscopic view (200x) of the brass paint in the same area; c. microscopic view (500x) of a cross section from the architrave showing metallic alloy pieces in a translucent media applied over the thin layer of gold foil.

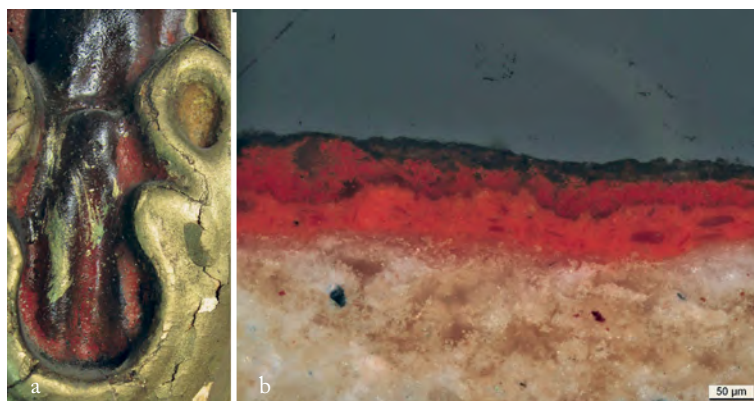


Fig. 12. Dark red oil paint covering the background of the relief: a. detail of a column from the Sovereign tier; b. microscopic view (200x) of a cross section from the same area showing two original colour layers covered with oil paint.

⁴ Mohanu, Serendan 2015, p. 202.

⁵ *Ibidem*, loc. cit.

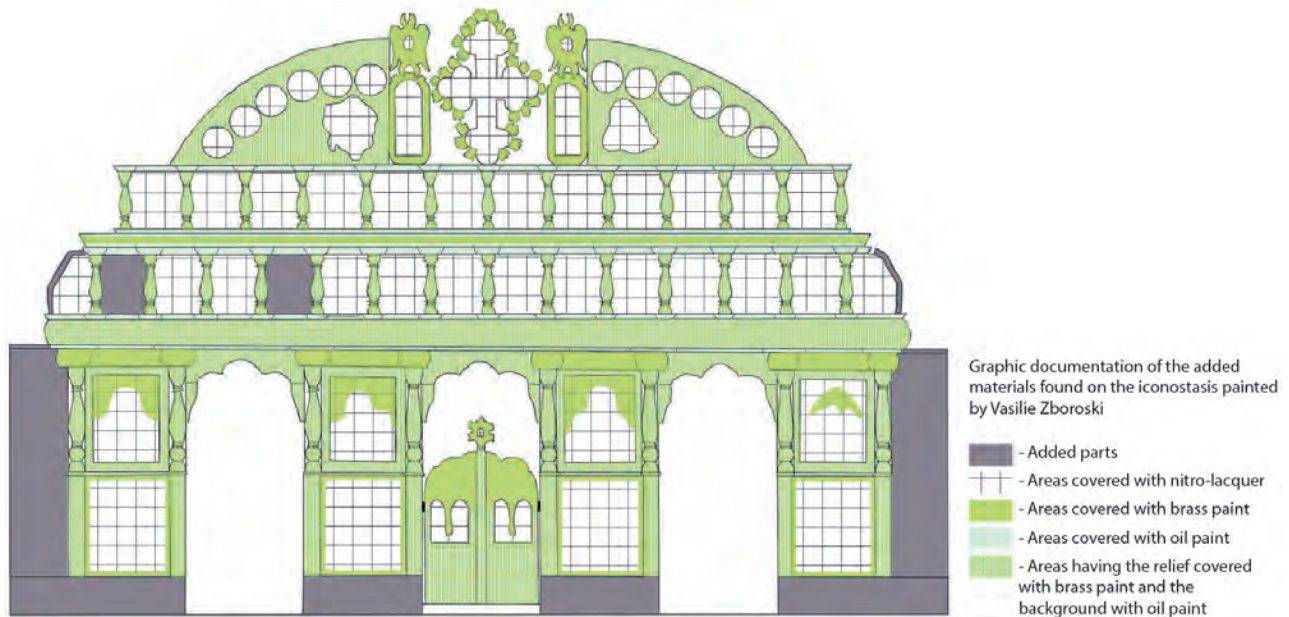


Fig. 13. Graphic documentation of the added materials found on the iconostasis painted by Vasile Zboroski.

a highly qualified profession, requiring a special training, those responsible of heritage objects often consider turning to specialists for advice as merely a whim or a needless complication.

The first aim of the conservation plan was to regain the object's stability and to eliminate the danger of material loss. Actions towards this objective started to be carried out during the dismantling by securing the detached pieces using Japanese paper and animal glue, and continued in the university's workshop with operations designed to rebuild the adhesion between the ground layer and the support, while laying and fitting the detached portions back into place. Once returned to a stable state, the question of reversing or retaining the previous repairs became of interest. In this decision it was necessary to take into consideration certain factors concerning the object, such as the current context, the value and the utility of the object.⁶ On the other hand, of a great importance was the thorough examination of the repairs, in order to obtain information such as the reason for which they originally took place, physical and aesthetic characteristics and the value of the intervention itself.⁷ Apart from this preliminary evaluation, the advantages and the disadvantages of the proposed intervention were weighed considering the physical consequences, the aesthetic consequences, financial and time limitations.⁸ Using the approach presented above, the following arguments were considered:

In favour of keeping the added materials:

- The interventions, although subsequent to the original execution of the object, are part of its history;⁹
- The interventions were remedial, being determined by the appearance of degradation, so perhaps underneath them a significant loss of original material will be discovered;
- The appearance of the iconostasis after restoration might not be well received because of the significant chromatic changes, the exposure of material losses and the elimination of the warm glow, all of which could differ from the visual expectations of certain people;

⁶ Bede 2013, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 13-15.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁹ Brandi 2005, p. 68. "From a historical point of view an addition to a work of art is nothing more than new evidence of human activity and, therefore is part of history ... only the conservation of an addition is unconditionally legitimate, whereas its removal always needs justification, or should at least be carried out in a manner that will leave a trace both in record and on the work of art itself."

- The process of cleaning with organic solvents poses high risks to the object and the health of the operator;
- Conservation operations of this type are long-lasting and imply high cost.

In favour of removing the added materials:

- As it had been determined that the prevailing value of the object was the artistic one, further additions should be removed because of their un-aesthetic appearance and because they obstruct the perception of the expressive component of the object;¹⁰
- The identity of the artwork is difficult to distinguish due to the mixture between new and old materials giving confusing messages to the viewer. The new ones do not build an image¹¹ by themselves, being originally designed as mere completions. What reaches the viewer nowadays is a poor and misguided repair of no distinguishable historical value, not being able to testify to something in particular;
- The fillings are partially detached and unstable, failing to serve their intended purpose of securing the edges of the painting, and at the same time posing the risk of engaging the original material in their motion, unless the added material is separated from the original one and removed through specialized conservation operations;
- The newly added materials have an unpredictable behaviour, which over time can cause damage, thus endangering the integrity of the object.



Fig. 14. Repaint removal tests showing the well conserved gold foil underneath the brass paint.



Fig. 15. Nitrocellulose lacquer removal test showing the revived look of the colour layer uncovered and the selectivity of the solvent mixture proved by the lack of interaction with the original pigment or binding media.

Beside the theoretical analysis of the proposed intervention's adequacy, a quite significant importance in the final decision was held by the results of the removal tests. Firstly they revealed that there are solutions composed of organic solvents with low toxicity able to dissolve brass paint and nitrocellulose lacquer, while showing selectivity through the absence of a chemical reaction between them and the original painting or the metal foil. Secondly, making random tests for the removal of brass paint in different areas, it was determined that the metal foil was largely preserved underneath, and the chemical analysis showed the presence of gold and silver leaf (Fig. 14). The added lacquer had incorporated dirt, therefore the painting, released of this burden, became more readable and actually proved to be in a very good state of preservation (Fig. 15). Both the added oil paint and putty reacted to mixtures of the same solvents and could thus be removed from most of the surfaces.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 73. "Since the essence of a work of art must be seen in the fact that it is a work of art, and secondarily has a historical case, it is clear that if the addition disturbs, perverts, obscures or detracts in part from the sight of the work of art, the addition must be removed."

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 74. "If it involves reaching a new artistic oneness, then the reconstruction should be kept."



Fig. 16. Part of the Annunciation scene painted on the Royal Doors: before (a) and after (b) the removal of the nitrocellulose lacquer.

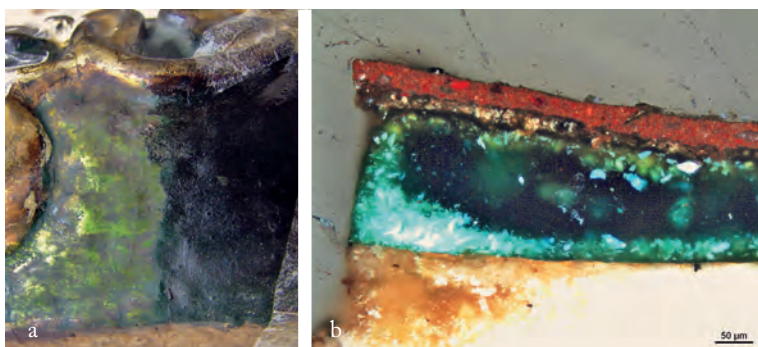


Fig. 17. The lustre technique used on columns from the Sovereign tier: a. uncovered area of the background of the relief; b. microscopic view (200x) of a cross section from another area on the column showing the horizontal succession of layers: ground layer, silver foil, green pigment in translucent media, brass paint, red oil paint.

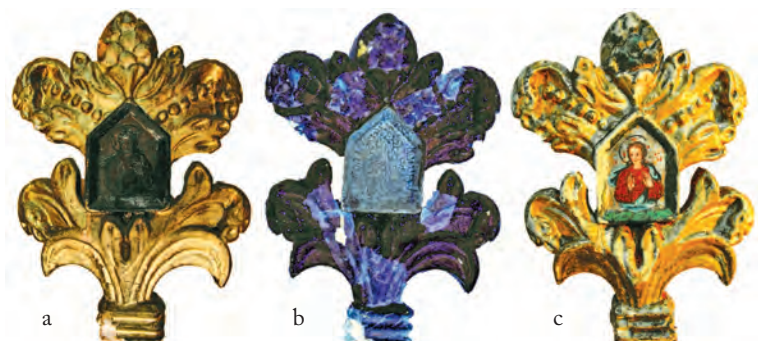


Fig. 18. The top ornament on the Royal Doors: before the removal of added materials - in direct light (a) and in UV fluorescence (b) - and after (c).

Therefore, it was possible to presume that the consequences of the removal operation would be beneficial from an aesthetic point of view, while they appeared to be harmless to the paint layer and metal foils which both seemed to be well preserved in a substantial proportion.¹²

Thus, taking into consideration both the theoretical arguments and the relative feasibility of the operations, it was decided to remove the added materials in order to enhance the legibility of the work of art and to point out its artistic value. Even though the decision regarded all the components of the iconostasis, the uncovering was carried out for each portion insofar as it did not jeopardize the conservation of the painting, the operating restorer being the one to discern which risks were worth taking.

The results of the restoration on a number of components of the iconostasis showed improvements in the perceived image, confirming the appropriateness of the decision, while, at the same time, turning out to have surprising results. The removal of the lacquer had a double effect: expelling the dirt embedded therein and the restitution of the original purity of colour, previously altered by the yellowish glossy filter of the lacquer (Fig. 16). The more impressive discoveries occurred during the uncovering of the polychrome parts. Underneath the oil paints, putty and bronze the columns showed a succession of red and blue strips, interspersed with metallic gold and silver foil. The background of the relief on the columns proved to be originally blue or red for the higher registers, while the columns in the lower one had the background done in the lustre technique by applying a semi-transparent green varnish over the silver foil (Fig. 17). These findings

¹² *Ibidem*. "But it may be that the reconstruction – whether a misguided repair or a new adaptation – cannot be removed, as it has brought about the partial destruction of some of the features that would have allowed the monument to be either preserved as a ruin, or brought into accord with its potential oneness. In this case, the reconstruction must be retained, even though it prejudices the monument."

reveal a synthesis of influences through the use of alternating red-blue columns, which is specific to the Brâncovenesc-style iconostasis, and, at the same time, the use of lustre technique which is borrowed from Catholic polyptych altar pieces. Uncovering the polychromy and the icons' painting produced a marked change of the general appearance and revealed a much more elaborate and refined original execution (Figs. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22) emphasizing the object's aesthetic and artistic value.

The disadvantages of the conservation-restoration intervention are anyhow worth mentioning. As during any professional cleaning or repaint removal, certain original material particles are lost and though in small amounts, losses were recorded during this operation too. They occurred mostly on moisture-sensitive colours or on the metallic foil, due to its sensitivity to friction. All in all, the relative success of the operation does not mean that the improper interventions were fully reversible in this case. Some of the reasons for this are the facts that traces of the added materials still persisted, the original painting could not be brought to its state as it was prior to the damaging interventions, and simply that the conservation process was very costly both financially and in time.

Furthermore, a plan regarding the presentation of the iconostasis is necessary in order to highlight its value and to create a bond between it and the public. Holding in mind that the disregard of the desires of people interested in the object was one of the main causes for the illegitimate damaging actions, when developing the current conservation plan, one of the main goals is to take into consideration the whole variety of meanings that this iconostasis encompasses. The perspective of exhibiting the iconostasis in an antique art museum has consequences on which features will be emphasized. On one hand, the importance of the aesthetics is undeniable in the case of an object with acknowledged artistic value, while, on the other hand, the story the iconostasis tells could provide the connection people need in order to identify themselves with this cultural product. Still, for the comprehension of any of these messages to take place, the religious function, which is essential to the iconostasis, will have to be served by recreating some of the characteristics of the original exhibition space.



Fig. 19. Icon of Saint Apostle Jacob before (a) and after (b) restoration.



Fig. 20. Deisis icon: before (a) and after (b) restoration in direct light; in UV (c, d) showing the removal of the nitrocellulose lacquer.



Fig. 21. The icon of Virgin Mary before (a) and after (b) restoration.



Fig. 22. Uncovered (a) and covered (b) sections of columns from the higher tiers.

Nevertheless, beside the specific conservation problems discussed in the case of Vasile Zboroski's iconostasis, the fact that the most difficult to reverse and aesthetic altering damages were produced under the pretext of repairs brings into question, once again, the issue of who should have the authority to decide the final desired state and the course of action towards it for a heritage object. Lately, it became obvious that the preservation of an object significant for many groups in society, such as a religious one, can be successful only through genuine dialogue between the stakeholders. In this negotiation, which is considered to be the basis of contemporary conservation by many authors,¹³ alongside with specialists in conservation and in various related fields, the involvement of the members of the church community is required, as representatives of those

for whom the object has a religious significance, but not as owners of the object, since in this case it is not the legal ownership of the physical object which is discussed, but the moral ownership of the intangible cultural values carried by the object in question. The immaterial value of a heritage object, made up of all its meanings, belongs to all people, existing and forthcoming, who have a contribution in generating its significance or are affected by changes thereto, and it is for these people that the conservation work takes place. Furthermore, the role of the conservator resides in integrating as much as possible all the opinions on the object's future state manifested in the so called "trading zone", and not to impose the will of the majority over others.¹⁴ Therefore, in the particular case of old religious art objects, which are part of a living culture and, at the same time, have particularly important connotations for both Romanian history and art, it is important that the opinions of experts in conservation weight the most in the decision-making process, but these opinions should also respect, to a certain extent, the desires of other stakeholders.

¹³ Muñoz Viñas 2005, p. 163.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 163-164.

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