

# Abstracts

**Zsuzsanna Mara**

## **Restoration of the late Gothic wooden statues of Saint Barbara and Saint Catherine**

The late Gothic wooden statues of Saints Barbara and Catherine are preserved in the art collection of the Szekler Museum of Csík. They were restored for the occasion of the city historical exhibition titled *At Crossroads*. The few earlier written and pictorial mentions of the statues suggest that they probably accompanied as secondary figures the devotional image of the Holy Virgin on the altar in Şumuleu (Csíksomlyó).

The carved figures survive in good condition for their age, the paint layer adhered relatively well to the wooden substrate, with some losses of paint at places. In the course of time the objects were repainted and layers of paint were exposed to the naked eye where flakes peeled off.

Prior to restoration, parallel with the historical research into the background, material examinations were carried out. The wood of the Catherine statue was examined with the radiocarbon method which set the date of the wood to between 1407 and 1435. Further material tests were carried out in 2024. Specialists defined the material as lime. Microscopic paint examinations verified the preliminary assumptions about repainting. Mainly the red, blue and green pigments were analysed. The structure of the overpainting and original layers was investigated on microscopic cross sections of samples taken from areas of different colours using a polarization microscope. It was found that the statues were only repainted once. The ground of the repainting contained zinc-white whose application spread wide in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The repainting master aimed to imitate the original techniques and colours. Where originally there was gold foil applied to red bole, he put bronze colour with some orange hue under it. He tried to reproduce the original appearance of garments made lustrous with coloured varnish.

After removal of the repaints, the sculptures regained their original colours. There is gold and silver foil on the garments of the saints onto which the master applied red and green lustres at places. In less visible places silver leaves covered with yellow varnish was used instead of gold. The colour of the saints' hair is light brown, the faces are pale, the eyes fairly small, the eyebrows are thin. The lost elements (sword, arm) were not reproduced during restoration. Aesthetic completion or retouching was only done in conspicuously disturbing places.

*Translated by: Judit Pokoly*

**József Lángi**

## **Research on painted decorations and stuccoes in the former Franciscan church and monastery of Sopron**

Prior to the restoration of this significant piece of Hungarian Gothic architecture, during the investigation we found painted evidence for almost every historical period. Contrary to our expectation only few remains of figural paintings were found as hardly any of this kind were painted. On the other hand, decorative paintings of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> century were completely recognizable. In theory the reconstruction of the ornamental and architectural paintings could also be drawn up. The main characteristics of the early period are the remarkably bright colours and gliding on the surface of the stone carvings, while the wooden surfaces and arches are painted in a homogeneous rose hue. It turned out during the investigation that under the more than 1-cm thick painted layers we could find exceedingly rich carvings.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century – presumably for the coronation of a king or queen – the church was repainted, but this time the walls were coloured white and the ribs were painted grey. On the keystones red rosettes were placed. In this time period two galleries were built on the Northern and the Southern walls of the nave. On the parapet of the Southern gallery we can find stuccoes while on the other side on the Northern parapet the same motifs are rendered in painting. The motifs represented by the artist are angels playing music and also two events of St. Francis' life. On the Southern wall of the chancel the coronation is recorded on a long-painted ribbon of inscription. This text was renewed in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in 1802, and also in 1857.

The Baroque painting was simple. Only inscriptions appeared on the white walls and arches, and also the altars were framed with canopies painted *al secco*. Quality figural paintings executed in the *al fresco* technique are found only on the gallery. This particular fresco shows the sculpture-like figures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary painted by István Dorffmaister in 1779 with the gold *grisaille* technique. In 1857 bright coloured neo-baroque ornaments were painted on the crown of the chancel and the surroundings of the Széchenyi tomb. In the following period most of the decorative paintings disappeared from sight as the walls were painted white. Only the inscription of the coronation remained visible. The 17<sup>th</sup> century layer is to be restored in order to preserve the historically significant older layers.

*Translated by: Zsófia Lángi*

**Raluca Dumitrescu**

**A 16-17<sup>th</sup> century painted chest.  
Research and conservation**

The subject of this paper is a painted wooden chest, manufactured with carved decorations, which puts it into the category of renaissance furniture, more exactly in the so-called *cassone* type. The function of the large extant Transylvanian chests is not known exactly. The very few chest inscriptions, ornaments and more importantly, written sources, inventories do not suffice to prove that all these chests were dotal gifts or kept the trousseau.

As a piece of renaissance furniture, the object's decorative traits allude to the workshops of painters and carpenters during the active period of Georgius Rössler and perhaps later on, to urban guilds. Based on the circle of related objects that were encountered, but also on the results achieved in the research process, our aim was to have a possible date of manufacturing, or a possible author, but all that we can say for the moment is that we can delineate a manifestation area of similar works around centers like Rupea, Sighișoara, Mediaș, and a time frame between 1680-1740.

After the description of the artistic and technical details of the object, other similar painted furniture or painted wooden artefacts in museum and private collections including church furniture are discussed with the common elements highlighted.

Next, we present the research stage that revealed some details such as the extent of inadequate additions to the contour path, the paint and varnish condition with the help of UV luminescence and IR images. The stratigraphy of the paint layers was examined on microscopic cross samples. The identification of the pigments and other compounds was carried out by specific optical and microchemical tests, and with XRF, FTIR etc. The xylophagous insects as degradation agents were identified based on some samples found. The wooden materials were determined on sections of small samples taken from the object.

The restoration based on the investigation results consisted of fixing the lifted paint layers, removing the old inappropriate additions and carrying out new gap fillings. Cleaning had to be done selectively with different solvents due to the different types of soiling and the different sensitivity of the paint layers.

Further on, although the main conservation goal was achieved, no retouching was done, the whole aesthetic presentation may require chromatic integration of some completed or grouted areas, as well as some worn areas in the future. The chest is currently on display in the permanent exhibition of the Historical Department of the Mures County Museum, entitled The Key City, in Târgu Mures Castle.

*Translated by:* the author

**Tímea Bakonyi – Szilveszter Terdik**

**The conservation of the Rococo iconostasis  
of Magyarokmját**

The conservation of the Rococo iconostasis of Magyarokmját took place in connection with the exhibition presenting the history and art of the Hungarian Greek Catholic community, organized on the occasion of the 52<sup>nd</sup> International Eucharistic Congress. The project was carried out in cooperation between the Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog (Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* of Hungary) and the Museum of Ethnography of Budapest between 2018 and 2019. The conservation works was led by Tamás Seres, a painting conservator and icon painter.

Although the artists of the iconostasis are unknown (the painter was Vencel Viller from Kassa), it can be dated to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and follows the style of the monumental iconostasis of the Greek Catholic Cathedral in Ungvár.

Some pieces of the iconostasis were catalogued and protected from further deterioration between 2004 and 2006. In 2009, the four Sovereigns Icons and some carved elements were conserved.

During the current treatments mentioned in this study, forty-six icons and their frames, the Royal Gates, two tables, six lesenes, five supporting elements, the cornices under the Feasts tier, the carvings and base of the Calvary icons, the carving above the Jesus Christ the High Priest, and six carved ornaments above the tiers of Feasts, The Old Testament Prophets and Patriarchs, and the Twelve Apostles were conserved from the entire iconostasis.

The elements of the iconostasis were in widely different conditions: some were severely damaged while other pieces remained in relatively good condition. The goal of the conservation was to restore the original beauty and unity of the iconostasis, preserving the materials and the cultural values of the artefact. Technical examinations were carried out using the following methods: ultraviolet fluorescence and infrared photography, light microscopy examinations, and microchemical testing.

Some of the most damaged parts of the iconostasis were the Royal Gates. Before the conservation, it was clearly visible at the places of wood loss how severely damaged by insects the support of the Gates was. The carvings on the wings were also in very poor condition. Their surface was heavily contaminated, their gilding had considerable losses revealing the wooden support and the original gold leaves were covered by yellow brass-based overpainting layers. The lustres of the carved leaves and the grape clusters were almost completely destroyed. The removal of overpainting layers of the Gates was a complex task due to its composite painting technique. Different methods and materials had to be used. It was also necessary to structurally reinforce the wood. The separated, disassembled elements were returned to their original positions using wooden nails and pegs, as well as gluing,

in accordance with the original technique. The missing decorative elements and motifs were re-carved, as was the reconstruction of the lost triple-arched closing element of the door jamb.

The properly consolidated and reinforced supports of the icons, frames and carvings provided the basis for starting the reintegration process. This began with filling the losses, followed by the replacement of the missing layers. The most complex task of the reintegration proved to be the restoration of the gilding. The differently damaged gold surfaces had to be brought into aesthetic unity. For this purpose, different materials and techniques were applied: mica pigments in gum Arabic binder were used with mimetic retouching or *tratteggio* or pointillism, water gilding with a patina layer, water gilding with metal leaves, also covered by a patina layer.

Abrasions and losses of the icons were given water-colour inpainting. For the more complex reconstructions, such as missing facial details or folds of clothing, many intact parts of the iconostasis could be used as analogies. The most extensive reconstruction was done on the paintings of the Calvary. The painted surface of the Our Lady of Sorrows icon was approximately 35% incomplete. After varnishing the icons, the final retouching was carried out with oil paint with reduced oil content using the varnish material as the painting medium. It was important that the aesthetic appearance of the originally unvarnished icons did not change significantly during the restoration, so the goal was to achieve a uniformly matte effect when applying the final varnish layer.

As a result of the conservation, the iconostasis regained its former glory and was given a worthy place in the permanent exhibition of the Greek Catholic Museum of Nyíregyháza.

*Translated by:* the authors

## **Péter Pál**

### **Creating central archives for the old books and archival material accumulated in parishes in Háromszék**

The archdiocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) aged over a millennium is currently divided into fifteen arch deanial districts housing 258 parishes. In addition, the parishes of the archdiocese also look after 350 affiliated churches. By the early 2000s it became clear that the vast expanse of the archdiocese is in urgent need for the establishment of a few central archives to gather the parochial document collections. In addition to the Archiepiscopal Archives of Gyulafehérvár, the following nine towns have collecting archives now: Gyulafehérvár, Szamosújvár (Gherla), Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe), Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș), Gyergyószentmiklós (Gheorgheni), Székelyud-

varhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc), Szamosújvár (Gherla, Armenian), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc).

The deposition of documents in central archives also brought up another urgent project: that of the centralized libraries for the old books in the parishes. Between 2005 and 2021 seven collecting libraries were founded close to the archives: in Marosvásárhely (2005), Gyergyószentmiklós (2012), Csíkszereda (2018), Kolozsvár (2021), Sepsiszentgyörgy (2021), Szamosújvár (2021) and Székelyudvarhely (2021). After the setting up of the Sepsiszentgyörgy library, the collection of the old book stocks of parishes in Háromszék began in summer 2021 and ended in summer 2023, together with the archival material of some parishes.

The paper gives a comprehensive picture of the process in the course of which the library and documentary material arrives via the restoring workshop at the central collections from the parishes. It describes the circumstances under which the stocks were found, the damage caused by environmental factors or human neglect, what dry and – if necessary – chemical treatments had to be applied to the historical documents, and finally, what conditions can be provided by the central archives for the adequate storage of the collected stocks.

*Translated by:* Judit Pokoly

## **Mónika Lökkös**

### **Lending of charters for exhibitions**

When borrowing archival documents, the work of the conservator plays a very important role, as he or she is the person responsible for the condition of the documents. The lending protocol must be carried out by professional standards. Documents of particular importance are charters, which are generally among the most valuable documents. Their materials have changed somewhat over the centuries, both in terms of the carrier, the writing materials, and the seals. These documents can be subject to various types of damage, due to the technique of production, use, and storage. It is therefore important to be aware of these to preserve the condition of the documents and prevent damage.

In the case of the Hungarian National Archives, the lending protocol involves several departments, coordinated by the Information Office. During the exhibition process, the conservator not only treats the document but also prepares the document for transport and exhibition. For placing in a display case, the charters get support: they will be attached by polyester strips to acid-free cardboard. In addition, an important task of the conservator during a loaning process is to assess whether the document can be exhibited and whether the planned location

is suitable for the document from a conservation point of view. Care must be taken to ensure that the parameters are appropriate for the document both during transport and during the exhibition. During transport, the preservationist will accompany the documents as a courier and place them in the display case. It is the responsibility of the lending party to ensure the necessary exhibition conditions. During the preliminary survey, the lending party must fill in a questionnaire with the characteristics of the planned exhibition venue. The facilities report contains important information that will enable the conservator to decide whether the exhibition location is suitable. If there are any questions about the conditions and other safety circumstances, the conservator can provide expert advice to help the lending party secure the parameters. At any time during the exhibition, the conservation specialist can check that the lending party is indeed complying with the requested values.

The exhibition protocol should be initiated at least three months before the scheduled opening date to ensure that the loaning process can be carried out in a relaxed environment. This allows both parties to negotiate on necessary steps to be taken, taking account of professional considerations.

*Translated by: the author*

## **Rebeka Kovács**

### **Restoration of Vencel József Schunda's album**

The decorative album, kept in the National Széchényi Library, was restored as a diploma thesis at the Department of Conservation, within the framework of paper and leather restoration specialisation of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts (HUF).

The object is a high-quality decorative, leather covered album made in the workshop of Nándor Gottermayer, which was given to the instrument maker Vencel József Schunda at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The album was heavily soiled, mouldy and significantly deformed. A UV-luminescence images were taken to determine more accurately the extent of the soiling and mould.

When restoring the object, many of its unique characteristics had to be dealt with, such as its size, weight, the complexity of its materials, its layered structure. It was important to keep the album's original structure, and if possible, to treat it without dismantling. Particular attention had to be paid to the sensitivity of the photographs throughout the process.

First, the album was partially dismantled, by mechanically separating from the album the back board, including the spine. All the parts were thoroughly mechanically cleaned and then the body of the album was disinfected

with essential oil. The sheets separated from the album were de-acidified and then added paper castings and/or Japanese paper. The photographs were restored according to the principle of minimal intervention, with a focus on physical stability while preserving the damage associated with the historical life of the object. The deformation of the pages of the album and boards were mitigated by means of a humidification through semi-permeable membrane. Leather infills of varying colours that matched the colour of the surrounding areas, were used to infill losses in the leather cover of the boards. The spine's back skin was supported in the openings to ensure proper stability of the joint. The loose stacks on the first panel were fixed by replacing the missing stacks. The three sliding knobs missing from the back board have been electroplated to give the album a proper support. The binding of the album has been assembled according to the original technique. The missing textile endpapers have been replaced with silk of the same colour and appearance as the original, for the sake of the interpretability of the object. The fragments have been secured to the addition with conservation stitching. The assembled object provides a unified aesthetic appearance, faithfully reflecting and presenting the specific characteristics of decorative albums, making the album exhibitable and researchable.

*Translated by: the author*

## **Krisztina Franges**

### **The role of design and mechanisation in the preservation of the National Széchényi Library**

For some years now, the Hungarian National Library has been using a mechanisation solution at the disposal of the Preservation and Conservation Department, which greatly facilitates the work of the colleagues. This paper is about this increasingly used, creative, practical and innovative system for the technical preparation of design and cut-out packaging, which is complex and uses integrated software and hardware. This system allows the use of unique methods to create custom housing for our artworks.

The three pillars of the system are the ArtiosCAD structural design software, the Kongsberg X22 cutting table and its production control software, the i-cut Production Console. The different tools used in production, their capabilities and features are defined, the materials used for the machine are listed with an analysis of their behaviour and their possible uses. The design software is presented, highlighting its special features. Examples are adduced about how custom-made and special boxes are created with the machine as housing solutions that are perfectly suited to the needs of the objects. A specific workflow from idea, through design, to realisation is also

described. The possibilities of mass production and the freedom of flexible design based on collaboration with colleagues are also touched on. The paper summarizes our experiences and the further possibilities offered by the new technology. Finally, the role of our technical preparation system for packaging in modernising our institution's preservation methods is discussed.

*Translated by: the author*

**Éva Mester**

**The role of inscriptions, master's marks and signatures in identifying unknown works. Thoughts inspired by the unexpected discovery of a glass painting in an air shaft**

From the earliest times, already in the Gothic period, bands carrying inscriptions appeared in glass paintings. In the Basilica of Saint Denis, the recumbent Abbot Suger can be identified by the ribbon inscription as the first patron known. In the chapel of Merton College (Oxford) patron Magister Henry de Mamesfeld is already shown kneeling. In the age prior to the prevalence of literacy the donor's coat of arms was put into a salient place or his clearly identifiable portrait was painted looking out of a group of figures. In this manufactural milieu the workshop was not indicated – that would become a traditional practice in the period of historicism. The designation of the patron and the glass painter on the windows is the accurate imprint of the hierarchic relations between them.

In the Carpathian Basin devastated by so many wars, the forgotten tradition of mediaeval stained-glass art was revived with considerable material and intellectual resource input in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The collaboration of the most outstanding painters and the best stained-glass artists promoted Hungarian glass painting to European ranks. The signatures are again informative about the relationships between the two groups. The upswing was cut short by the political changes, the fall of the Monarchy and the economic recession after WWI. Several art works had to be concealed for their themes. The palaces in the capital usually included decorative portraits of rulers, political events painted on glass. During a building renovation a large work on a historical theme was discovered. No documents have been found so far about the antecedents of the painting or the client who ordered it, no sketches or written records are known, let alone the original location of the work. The only clue is the small signature revealing the manufacturer Miksa Róth which also tells the date via the combination of the initials of his monogram.

*Translated by: Judit Pokoly*