

PROJECT OF THE RESTORATION OF DRETEA CHURCH, XVIIth C

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ABSTRACT

S .C. CONS - ART S.R.L. Craiova, ROMANIA, is a private firm, founded in 1991. The main object of activity is the restoration of the mobile and immobile cultural patrimony in Romania. The firm's restorers, acknowledged by The Romanian Ministry of Culture, realized more than 90 Restoration and Emergency Interventions Projects, on XVIIth - XIXth C. churches and on some civil monuments.

For the ASTRA Museum, Sibiu, one of the most important ethnographical museums in Europe, we conceived a project for the relocation of The Dretea Church, Cluj County, to the Sibiu Museum. Because the local community build another church, the wooden one was neglected. So, it was imperative to save this beautiful monument. The solution was to move it from its location to the premises of The Astra Museum, Sibiu, Romania. We have sketched a project of restoration. After a careful surveillance, for a period of time, were drawn all the documents necessary for the moving of the church at the Astra Museum, Sibiu (upsweeps, drawings, chemical and biological analyses).

The next step was the strengthening of the painting coat in order to facilitate the dismantling of each element from the structure of the church. Then each piece was dismantled, and the structures were protected. Each stage has a photo and video documentation.

Next the church will be integrated in the circuit of the Astra Museum, Sibiu. The next stage is the beginning of the restoration of the painting.

Romania has an exceptional patrimony of wooden churches (cca. 1200), dated XVIIth - XIXthC., and 15 of these are on the list of monuments, belonging to the world's cultural patrimony, that are protected by UNESCO.

Through our work we think that we can have an important contribution to save the world's cultural patrimony.

1. INTRODUCTION

On the outskirts of the Dretea village, Mănăstireni commune, Cluj County, you can found the wooden church “ The Descent of the Holy Spirit” (Coborârea Sfântului Duh), that dates back to the second half of the XVIIth Century, being erected in 1672. The plan of the church is rectangular, for the narthex and nave, and polygonal for the apse. The tower has the shape of a prism, formed from four oak pillars that were fixed on the transversal beams of the narthex, is one of the elements characteristic for the wooden churches at the end of the XVIIth and the beginning of the XVIIIth Centuries.

2. PREVIOUS INTERVENTIONS

In time the monument suffered a series of changes, the oldest one being made in the period 1860-1870, when the porch was included in nave and narthex in order to enlarge the interior space destined for the faithful people.

Besides the above-mentioned changes, the church suffered a series of other alterations, which can't be fixed in time but which are obvious today. Thus, in the altar, on the North and East walls, there were made two openings, for small windows, affecting the interior painting. On the North and South walls, of the narthex and nave, five openings, also for windows, were cut, affecting again the original painting. The West wall of the nave (the East wall of the narthex) was also cut, the opening having 1,10 m height, in order to allow women to assist at the service. Another intervention sectioned a part of the painting on the vault of the nave and the North and South walls. The floor from the nave, narthex and altar is made of wood, being recently put in place. The church has now a thin iron plated³ roof and some of the beams were recently replaced. The church was super-elevated, being put on a concrete belt.

3. THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF THE MONUMENT AND ITS INTERIOR PAINTING

The support of the interior painting is the oak wood, for the beams that form the walls, and the fir tree wood, for the vaults, and hemp canvas for the interstitial spaces.

The biological analyses made proved that the wooden support doesn't show traces of biodegradation, although a weak attack of insects was observed on the iconostasis panel. This attack didn't affect the mechanical resistance of the wooden support of the painting coat. The fir tree wood wasn't affected by biodegradation, too.

The chemical and stratigraphical investigations showed, once again, the use of the hemp canvas, as a completion of the wooden support, in the interstitial spaces created between the wooden beams. The priming that fixed them on the designed place has a thickness that varies between 320 and 400 um and was made of a homogeneous mixture of plaster and animal glue. The mixture contains a small quantity of impurities, especially silicates. The priming is disposed along the fiber of the wood, thus there are no differences of level. On the surface of the priming there can be observed an isolating stratum of protean nature and starch. Two are the major causes that contributed to the degradation of the interior painting and the loss of big painted surfaces: the infiltration of water and even the direct contact of the painted surface with rainwater, because of the human interventions in time.

The infiltration of water reached the painting coat and caused its detachment from the priming, and influenced the stains produced by dirt and smoke and caused the detachment of the plaster priming, too.



Detail – Nave
(before the movement of the church)



Detail – Nave – Southern Wall
(before the movement of the church)



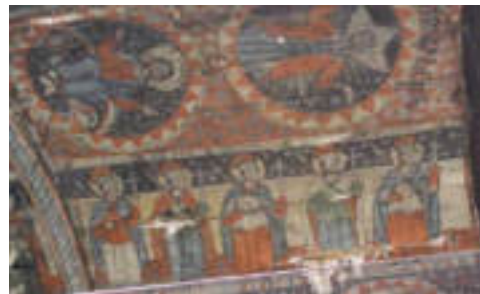
Detail - Iconostasis
(before the movement of the church)

The same causes produced the loss of painting coat in the interstitial areas, where hemp canvas was used to fill the empty spaces. The human factor was one of the factors that affected the conservation status of the interior painting: first of all, the interventions made in time; secondly, all the religious objects received as gifts by the church were nailed on the walls, thus affecting the painting from the walls and the loss of it, partially; the flags were and are kept in the nave, thus the appearance of many scratches on the painting coat; and last, because of the big

number of people that attended the service and the behavior of all these people, the original painting coat was scratched and torn and there are a lot of inscriptions on it, reaching to the depth of the priming.



Detail Narthex (wall and ceiling) –
before the movement of the church



Detail Nave – Northern wall and vault,
before the movement of the church

4. PROJECT OF AN EMERGENCY INTERVENTION

Taking into consideration the fact that this church was going to be moved from its original location to The National Complex Astra, Sibiu, Romania, we have made a project regarding the emergency intervention on the monument before its movement. That project was sent to the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Creeds, The Monuments Committee, for approval. When the approval was given the project started.



Dismantling of the roof



Dismantling of the walls of the church

The first step of this complex process was the strengthening of the existing painting coat with fish gelatin and thin Japanese paper.



Nave (vault) - strengthening with fish gelatin and thin Japanese paper



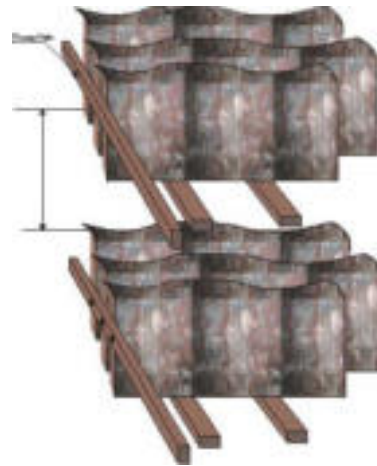
Iconostasis Ensemble – strengthening with fish gelatin and thin Japanese paper

The second step was the detachment of the hemp canvas that covered the interstitial spaces between the beams and its strengthening with paper, in order to protect better the original painting coat and to prepare the individual packing of each element.

The next step was to mark each element and to include them in a rough plan of the monument. In the whole period of the disassembling of the monument measures of conservation and protection of the church and its constitutive elements were taken. Each element was packed so that the interstitial hemp canvas, strengthened with fish gelatin and thin Japanese paper, that was put in the superior part of the box, would suffer no physical shock. All these operations were recorded with a video

camera and lots of photos were taken with the monument as an ensemble and architectural details. The spaces where all these components were deposited were very well conceived, taking into consideration all the measures necessary for the maintaining of the conservation status of the painting coat. All the operations, from the dismantling of the church to the arrival of the transport at the new location were recorded with video camera and photos were taken, and were made under the supervision of the architect, the chief of the building site and the painting' restorer.

During the transport from Dretea to Sibiu, wooden poles were used as distance pieces between the wooden boxes, in order to lessen the mechanical shocks on the road.



Example of packing and fixing of the panels for transport

When the transport arrived in Sibiu, at Astra Complex, the above mentioned specialists supervised the moving of the components of the church in a temporary deposit.

The specialists from The Astra Museum made investigations regarding the structure of the soil where the church was going to be erected.

When the investigation was finished and the right place was found, they started the erection of the church. The first step was the removal of the thin Japanese paper from the painting coat and then all the elements of the church were reassembled in the reverse order than that used when the church was dismantled.



Rebuilding of the church after the transport



Rebuilding of the vault after the transport



Rebuilding of the vault after the transport



Rebuilding of the roof after the transport



Rebuilding of the roof after the transport



Rebuilding of the spire after the transport



Wooden nails, used for the fixing of the pillars to the foundation



The Dretea Church, after it was moved and rebuilt

The next step is the restoration of the painting coat, that will start in the summer of 2005. One of the reasons for this operation, besides the conservation-restoration ones, is the fact that in 2007 the Sibiu town will be The Cultural European Capital.