

Phelonion - an essential item of the liturgical vestments

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In 1966, more than 50 objects (vestments, crosses, icons on glass and paper, various liturgical objects etc.) were donated to the Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography by the Diocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, these cultural goods being exhibited in the wooden churches within the Museum's outdoor section. The conservation and restoration of those artifacts were the subject of the project "Horea's Church - a heritage for the future. Valorization of an 18th century architectural monument through virtual reality", carried out by the Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography, together with the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca and with the Norwegian Association NUDA AS, which involved a laborious, long and meticulous work, accomplished by the Museum's conservation specialists and restorers, these talented specialists with a complex training, unknown to the visiting public. The result of their work was highlighted in a temporary exhibition, to which also contributed the museographers involved in the project and the specialists from the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca.

The conservation and restoration of the textile pieces in the exhibition was a complex work, both in terms of the choice of materials used (the objects were made of heterogeneous materials: linen, cotton, hemp, wool; metallic threads with textile core, metal strips, trimmings), as well as the choice of intervention techniques and their application.

The phelonion (or Romanian "*sfîta*" - as it is also known, after the Slavonic name of the object) has the shape of a cape, is worn over the other vestments and is much longer at the back than at the front. It is often made of expensive fabrics, decorated with embroidery made in gold thread, silver thread and silk, representing the sign of the cross, plant stylistic motifs, images of saints or Major Feasts, such as: The Nativity of Jesus, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, The Dormition of the Mother of God. The iconographic theme is usually the patron saint of the church for which the phelonion was made. The colors and decorations of the phelonion have been diversified, over time, depending on the clerical levels for which they were made. Thus the white phelonion, decorated on its entire surface with small crosses, red or black, has long been the distinctive vestment of the patriarchs.

The phelonion proposed for the restoration is made of dark red brocade fabric, with golden metallic threads and plant ornamentation. It is decorated with 13 mm wide trimmings, with golden metal threads all around. The piece is doubled with a cloth.

Upon careful examination, in order to carry out conservation-restoration interventions, the following types of degradation were found: functional wear, chromatic degradation, folding, tearing, flaking, floating threads, loss of material, improper interventions, stains of unknown origin. The restoration operations involved: dust removal, wet cleaning, disassembly of the piece, doubling and consolidation on a natural silk support, replacement of the support fabric with a new one, compatible with the original, final assembly of all elements. All the conservation-restoration stages of the phelonion were photographically documented and they complied with the rules of conservation and restoration of textiles.