

# Notes on the Iconostas of St. Theodore's Church from Iași. Technique of execution, stylistic description and state of conservation

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**Abstract:** This paper proposes an overview of the iconostasis of the Church *St. Theodore's* of Iași with mention of the execution technique, stylistic description of the registers that compose the iconostasis and also description of the state of conservation of the assembly. Information about the iconostasis is preceded by a brief description of the building architecture. The material is part of a research project that dealt with the technical expertise of the monument and its artistic components.

**Keywords:** preservation, restoration, wood paintings, iconostasis, cultural heritage

## Introduction

From the spiritual, artistic and historical thesaurus of the national society, an integrated part are the churches and old places of worship which adorn the land of our country. They make precious history pages that convey the beliefs of people of the past generations. The region that offers the majority of places of this kind is the region of Moldavia dominated by the monuments founded by Stephan The Great and other architectural works of cultural significance.

The city of Iași was first mentioned in a commercial privilege by the Moldavian ruler Alexander the Good, issued in 1407<sup>1</sup>. His documentary attestation is also committed, as Professor Ghibănescu says, in a book of geography in the Slavonic language dating back to the 14th century, where he talks about an *askii trăg* (Iași Fair)<sup>2</sup>, the fair from the market of the missing Church of Holy Friday.

The importance of these edifices was also presented by the historians of the times, as Gheorghe Ghibănescu points out:

Când am început adunarea materialului pentru scrierea unei istorii a Iașilor, cel întâiu și mai de sémă capitol mi-a fost *biserica* și apoi *curtea*

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<sup>1</sup> Monografia Orașului Iași, <[http://www.bg15mc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Monografia\\_municipiului\\_Iasi.pdf](http://www.bg15mc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Monografia_municipiului_Iasi.pdf)>, 18 iunie 2015

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Din trecutul bisericeii Române (Bisericile din Iași)*, conferință ținută la cercul societății „Viitorul”, extras din revista *Viitorul*, Ed. Dacia P. Iiescu & D. Grossu, Iași, 1902, pp. 5-6

*domnescă*, pentru că *biserica* e mai veche în Iași de cât *curtea* și una a fost nu arare ori dirigitorea celeilalte<sup>3</sup>.

## Short History

The Orthodox Church of Saints Theodore is among the main cultural and architectural monuments of Iași, being representative for several historical periods. This church bears the patronage of the Saints Theodore's, namely *St. M. Mc. Theodore Tiron* and *St. M. Mc. Theodore Stratilat*. It is located on nr. 14 St. Theodore Street, a small side street that ascends to the *Bolta Rece* and to the Villa Sonnet, the memorial House of the poet Mihai Codreanu. Although it is an 18th century architectural monument, today it is hidden by the massive apartment blocks of Independence Avenue.

Being originally made of wood, the only indication of the period in which it was constructed is written in the Slavonic language in the year 1665. The building of the church is linked to two large names of the history of Moldavia: *Istrate Dabija-Vodă*, and the great *Vornic Solomon Bîrlădeanu*. The historian Nicolai Adriescu-Bogdan presents the theory of the building of the wooden church:

The founders of this church, as found in the *Sinodiconul* of 1875, would be *Istrate Dabija-Vodă* and *Dafina Doamna*; from the reading, however, of a Slavonic inscription on two old icons, described by Mr. Ghibănescu, it results that before this stone church, there was another, a wood one, built perhaps even by the donor of the icons, a great *Vornic* of the up-country *Solomon Bîrlădeanul* and his wife Maria, in the time of *Istrate Dabija*, the year 1665; however, it may have existed a long time ago, and the icons were given to the church by this *Bîrlădeanu*.<sup>4</sup>

In the year 1759, a fire started, which consumed the wooden church building but its testimony remains of the two icons dated from the time it was built. Here's what Professor Ghibănescu says about the two old icons:

*Solomon Bîrlădeanul*, marele logofet al atâtor domni și o figură interesantă din șirul boerilor moldoveni, și-a legat numele – *poate* – de Biserica Sf. Teodor, ce vedea pe ulița de afară, căci și adî biserica păstrează în altar 2 icône vechi cu inscripție slavonă, de la fosta bisericuță de lemn din 1665 (7173), care a ars în 1759, s-a refăcut cum e adî în 1760 printr-un compromis cu starostele bresleî petrarilor și s-a îmbogățit prin dărnicia bogatului și evloaviosului boer Vasile Roset hatman.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Prof. Gheorghe Ghibănescu, op. cit., p. 6

<sup>4</sup> N.A. Bogdan., *Orașul Iași. Monografie istorică, socială, ilustrată*, ediția a doua, refăcută și mult adăugită, Tip. Națională I.S. Ionescu & M.M. Bogdan, Iași, 1914, p. 230

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Gheorghe GHIBĂNESCU, op. cit., p. 36

From the monography of N.A. Bogdan, we learn that in the year 1760, the land for the future stone construction of the church was given by the nun Sofia, which before becoming a nun was called *Catrina Tudori (Tudoroaie)*, the daughter of *Ioan Vîrnav Jignicer*.<sup>6</sup>

Left orphaned by the reigning family who build it and passed through a devastating fire, the Church of Saints Theodore's was in ruins. After the arson, the cult nest was rebuilt around 1760, at the expense of the nun Sofia, daughter of *Jitnicer Iordache Vârnav*. After the death of the nun Sofia and the fall into disgrace of *Vornicești* family, the church needed new repairs. At that turning point, the meeting was held with the Furrier's Guild, who were looking for a church to worship. Thus, around the year 1783, during the reign of the *Fanariot Alexandru I Deliberiu Mavrocordat*, the Church of the Saint Theodor entered the care of the Furrier's Guild. The roofs of the two towers and the exterior plaster were rebuilt, with ornaments that created a new architectural style – taken over by numerous churches in the Romanian countries. Important for the history of our culture is also the collection of *Minee*, printed at Râmnicu Vâlcea between the years 1779-1780 - all given to Saint Theodore's Church by the Furrier craftsmen.<sup>7</sup>

The characteristic note of this church is the iconostasis, unique in Moldavia. During the care of the church by furrier craftsmen, it is believed that they would have added another row of iconostasis icons. The iconographic system was framed in different eras following the specialists' analyses, observing a difference in style.<sup>8</sup>

The church was in the Furrier Guild's care for about a century until the guild was threatened with extinction.

By setting up corporate workshops, even small leather factories, the furrier craftsmen from Iași were crushed by the development of technique and industry. Many were employed by factories and thus the Furrier's Guild system ceased around 1920.<sup>9</sup>

## **Architecture**

The Church of Saint Theodor presents an architecture as important and complex as its history, having a mixture of Moldavian, Baroque and Turkish elements (direct or indirect), with details from the south of the

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<sup>6</sup> N.A. Bogdan, *op. cit.*, p. 231

<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Pintilie, *Sfinții Teodori – biserică a cojocarilor ieșeni*, <<http://sfteodor.iasi.mmb.ro/19613-sfintii-teodori-biserica-cojocarilor-ieseni>>, 19 iunie 2015.

<sup>8</sup> <https://sfteodor.mmb.ro/19613-sfintii-teodori-biserica-cojocarilor-ieseni>

<sup>9</sup> <https://sfteodor.mmb.ro/19613-sfintii-teodori-biserica-cojocarilor-ieseni>

country, knowing some changes, especially in vaults and the details in decorations, mixed with new elements of southern influence.<sup>10</sup>

The interior maintains the traditional division of medieval churches in Moldavia, in four rooms: porch, pronaos, nave and the altar. We observe at the entrance of the church a small porch with a canopy, from which the staircase ascends to the belfry placed above it. The pronaos has a rectangular shape, wider than long (relative to the axis of the church), vaulted in the monastery vault style (*Voûte de Cloître*). The nave is vaulted in the Moldavian style, and above the narrow circle of the four diagonal arches appear, as in Golia monastery, a row of octogonal arches. The curvature of the arches from the sunset to the east on the two-meter tall pillars resembles the style of Dragomirna monastery, Solca, Three Hierarchs, Putna and so on. Ornamentation is represented by rich decorated and gilded pillar heads, of a Corinthian kind. The consoles of the western arch of the naos show a two-headed eagle, while the lower console, also gilded, depicts a bird with its head turned to the body.

On the outside, the side of the wall that comes above to the eaves is adorned with hollowed/dug panels in the wall plane, panels composed of a Turkish character's brake braces, encountered in a number of other Moldavian and south Carpathian churches from that time. The eaves are supported by smaller, simpler or richer stone consoles. The windows have horizontal masonry in braces with various shapes, that differ from one window to another. The navel tower is octagonal, and the bell tower is rectangular with the smooth edges.

## The Paintings

The altar is separated from the naos through a beautifully carved and gilded iconostasis, presenting icons dating back to the time of Istrate Dabija. The icons of the Saviour, the Mother of God, the Saint Theodor and Saint Nicholas are probably the opera of the painter Grigore Zugravul, painted in the year 1665.

The church has no inner painting, the parietal ornamentation being represented by the image of Jesus *Pantocrator* (in the cap of the tower of the Naos), the four gospels' authors representations in the pendants at the base of the tower and decorative patterns of frieze type. We have no information on the date of these mural decorations.

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<sup>10</sup> BALȘ ACAD. G., *Bisericile și Mănăstirile moldovenesti din veacurile al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea cu un rezumat în limba franceză*, Institutul de Arte Grafice „E. Marvan”, București, 1933, pp. 239-241

## **Thesaurus items**

As regards manuscripts and cult objects, they are no longer present in the church's heritage, the only information about them appearing in other books. Thus, we find out about a book of Varlaam of religious texts that belonged to the Church of Saint Theodor on the year 1776.<sup>11</sup>

From the writings of the historian Nicolae Iorga about the church of Saint Theodor we learn that the following inscription appears on an icon in Slavonic: “Această icoană a făcut-o Solomon Bîrlădeanul, Mare-Vornic de Tara-de-Sus, și jupâneasa lui, Ana; anul 7173 = 1664-5”, being supplemented by the inscription: “În zilele Domnului nostru Io Istratie Dabija; 7173”.<sup>12</sup> Also from Iorga we find that a Greek mark appears from the year 1825 on a chalice, and on a gospel it says that it was bought by Maranda (22 February 1769), and metal plated in silver by “Giupânul Trifan” and Maria (1775). There is also a gospel of 7258, mentioned by Iorga and an *Octoih* of Râmnic. Another writing related to the Church of Saint Theodor is described by G.T. Kirileanu, it supports the presence of a 7256 (1748) written text by “Popa Anastasie de la Sf. Theodor din Eș”<sup>13</sup>, belonging to the *Molitfelnic* from the Church of Pipirig.

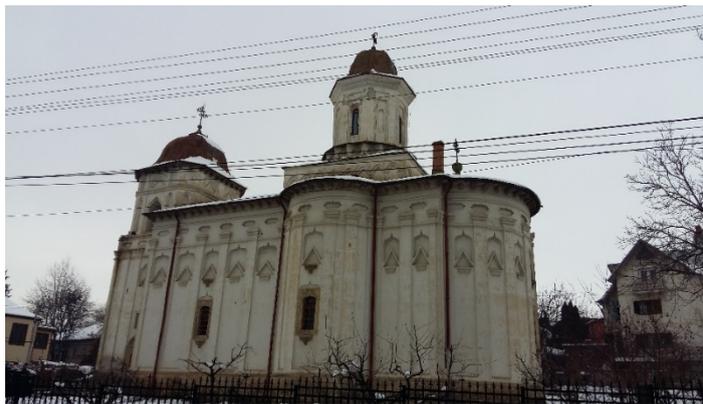


Fig. 1. Overview of St. Theodor's Church

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<sup>11</sup> Pr. Paul MIHAIL, „Știri noi privind circulația Cazaniei Mitropolitului Varlaam”, în: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, LXXXII (1964), 3-4, p. 387

<sup>12</sup> Prof. Nicolae IORGA, *Inscripții și însemnări din bisericile Iașului*, Atelierele grafice Socec & Comp., București, 1907, pp. 16-17. și Idem, *Inscripții din bisericile României adunate, adnotate și publicate*, vol. II, Atelierele grafice Socec & Comp., București, 1908, pp. 128-129

<sup>13</sup> G.T. KIRILEANU, „Despre satul Pipirig”, în: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, LIII (1945), 11-12, p. 669



Fig. 2-6. Details of the interior architecture of St. Theodor's Church



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

## Data on the execution technique of the Iconostasis

The iconostasis of St. Theodor Church in Iași presents icons made in several historical stages. The oldest are the icons of the Royal Register (17th century), most likely dating from the period of the first church where the current edifice was erected. The upper and bottom registers fall to 18th-19th century Baroque stylistics, made of soft<sup>14</sup> fretted and carved wood.

Iconostasis presents a rich volumetric decoration that prevails quantitatively against the painted side, being decorated in the classic gilded technique based on “poliment” (Metal leaf – gold, applied on layers of primer and *Bolus*). The painting of icons (except the Royal Register) is a baroque invoice with influences from Neoclassicism, the technique of realization being one of Secco – painting – fat tempera or oil<sup>15</sup> and return with metallic pigment (colloidal gold).

The iconostasis ensemble consists of overlapping registers, the superior ones being placed with a slight forwarding in the plane compared to the lower ones. As a technical peculiarity, it is noted that the registers above the royal one is made of merged wooden plates, over which, subsequently, the composition of the registers was transposed, the surfaces of the volumetric decoration being then fretted and carved. The areas with painting are not separated and applied by overlap, but they result from the planar structure of the merged panel. The pillars of the Royal registry and those from the Register of Apostles were worked separately and subsequently added to the Iconostasis, the first being fretted and sculpted, and the latter having a sculpted decoration without frets.

The back of the iconostasis is fixed by an anchoring system with elements of wood and metal (wires from time interventions on the iconostasis) on the built-in horizontal beams. Due to the presence of a false wall behind the iconostasis, made of drywall (unsuitable modern intervention, likely to provide some isolation of the altar space), it is not possible to accurately analyze the strength of the structure and state of conservation as also potential interventions in time to the reinforcement structure of the iconostasis. We appreciate that there are likely to be 3 or 4 built-in beams on which the iconostasis is anchored to. The anchorage structure is very likely to have been modified through interventions and changes over time.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Soft deciduous-the determination of the essence will be achieved by conducting analyses on micro samples taken from the wood substrate

<sup>15</sup> Samples shall be taken for both the sculpted decorations and the areas of painting, and analyses shall be carried out to accurately determine the original execution technique

<sup>16</sup> It is necessary to remove the gypsum structure from Verso iconostasis in order to enable the preservation of the conservation status and the maintenance of conservation-restoration interventions at the level of the timber and support elements



Fig. 7. Overall appearance of iconostasis



Fig. 8-9. Overall aspects of main royal register icons



Fig. 10. Overview of the top registers



Fig. 11-12. Details of fretted and carved decorations



Fig. 13. Detail with the highlighting of the tile joints that compose the iconostasis register



Fig. 14. Overall aspect of the upper part of the back of the iconostasis

### **Description of Registers**

At the top level sits the “**Coronament**” which is made up of “Trimorfium” (Cross and two “molenii”) supported by two gryphons (Dragons) represented front to front. It is framed to the left and right by two decorative panels flattened carved with square boxes, limited to the upper part by a heavily profiled wood rod cropped at the far right and left sides by a console and a double curve with a volute in the middle.

The cross with trefoiled extremities is painted with “Crucifixion” and the Four Evangelists at the ends. The painting is framed by a fretted, carved and gilded decorative border made up of stylized acanthus haulms. At the intersection of the arms the decoration is complemented by four groups of profiled rays.

The gryphons hold on the heads the two icons called “molenii” (the Mother of God and John the Evangelist painted as characters standing). In turn, these icons have decorative frames- fretted, carved and gilded, made up of stylized vegetal elements.



Fig. 15-16. Details of the “Coronament”

The register of **Prophets** consists of two friezes (strips) merged into the median axle. They are made by fretted and symmetrically sculpted decorative elements, which divide the 13 round icons, representing in the center the Mother of God in the “Oranta” aspect, flanked to the left and right by 6 icons with the Prophets. The round icons are carved from the thickness of the panel being framed by a high profiled rod, decorated with two volutes in the upper and lower median. The registry is limited by two heavily profiled wooden rods placed in console.

The register depicting the **Apostles** consists of a flat frieze (made from several pieces) on which the icons with the 12 holy Apostles are painted. They are represented standing and holding the identification symbols in the hands. They are oriented 6 to each side of the central icon “Deisis” which is of larger size. At the top the icons of the Apostles end with a profiled semicircular arc, gilded and fixed to the painted panel. An exception is the central icon “Deisis” which has a decorated frame ending at the top into a trefoiled arc.

The icons are separated by semi-cylindrical columns placed on a pedestal. The columns decoration is made in a profiled torsade with the motif of the rose.

At the top, the icons present the gables ending with a curved wand decorated with the same motif as the frame of the icon “Deisis”.



Fig. 17. Detail of the registers with the Prophets and Apostles



Fig. 18-19. Detail with the scenes from the median axle of the two registers

The register with the **Main religious Holidays (Holly Feasts)** – dominates the Iconostasis ensemble. It consists of the Holly Feasts icons, limited to the upper and lower part of two semi-cylindrical decorative friezes, separated by the frieze of icons through profiled wands and decorative stripes with stylized leaves. The upper wand is slightly higher on the curvature of the central icon “Sf. Mahramă”, which has a quadrilobate shape, made from a wrinkled ribbon frame. The 12 icons are rectangular with frames made all of the wrinkled ribbon with the motif of the “foamed wave” at the top and bottom. The icons are separated by a strong fretted, symmetrical designed floral motif (tulips and haulms with roses).

The upper frieze with a curved plane is fretted with vegetable motifs (grapes and roses), interspersed by 6 bulging cartridges framed by wrinkled ribbons and stylized leaves.

The lower decorative frieze, carved in a curved plane, is decorated with a pattern of vegetal beanstalk woven with wrinkled ribbon and grapes, strongly marked by curves and counter curves. The decoration is interrupted by three oval medallions describing a grate from diamonds.



Fig. 20-21. Assembly and detail of a semi-frieze from the Holly Feasts register

The **Royal Register** consists of:

The Royal Doors in the central axle and the two side Deacon's doors. In between and sideways there are four vertical frames that support the monumental Royal icons separated between them by the Royal columns that have a semi-cylindrical profile with double heads and are free standing on the pedestal.

At the top of the icons there are the gables with fretted sculpture, containing, in the central part, medallions in the form of a shield painted with symbols. The carved ornamentation is made of haulms with grapes and roses. The decoration is taken over by the Royal columns being symmetrically placed in their vertical median axle, interrupted at the half-height by medallions with a bulging field decorated with painting.

The Royal Doors have two symmetrical curves set against the central pillar decorated with motifs in torsade, which supports at the top a "mitră" with "the Eye of the One of old days" surrounded by profiled rays in the upper half. The decoration which is fretted with the motif of "Mandorla" overlapped with roses and haulms, supports 4 quadrilobate medallions with ribbon frames wrinkled marking the painted field (at the top – "Annunciation", and at the bottom two of Evangelists).

At the top of the door, the empty space is occupied by a richly adorned gable with the lower edge completed in a three-foiled arc.

The Deacon's doors – which are not original – were replaced with panels cut out by the shape of the frame and painted with the representation of the Saints Michael and Gabriel. From their original decoration, the gables of the upper part, made in a manner similar to that of the Royal Doors, are preserved.

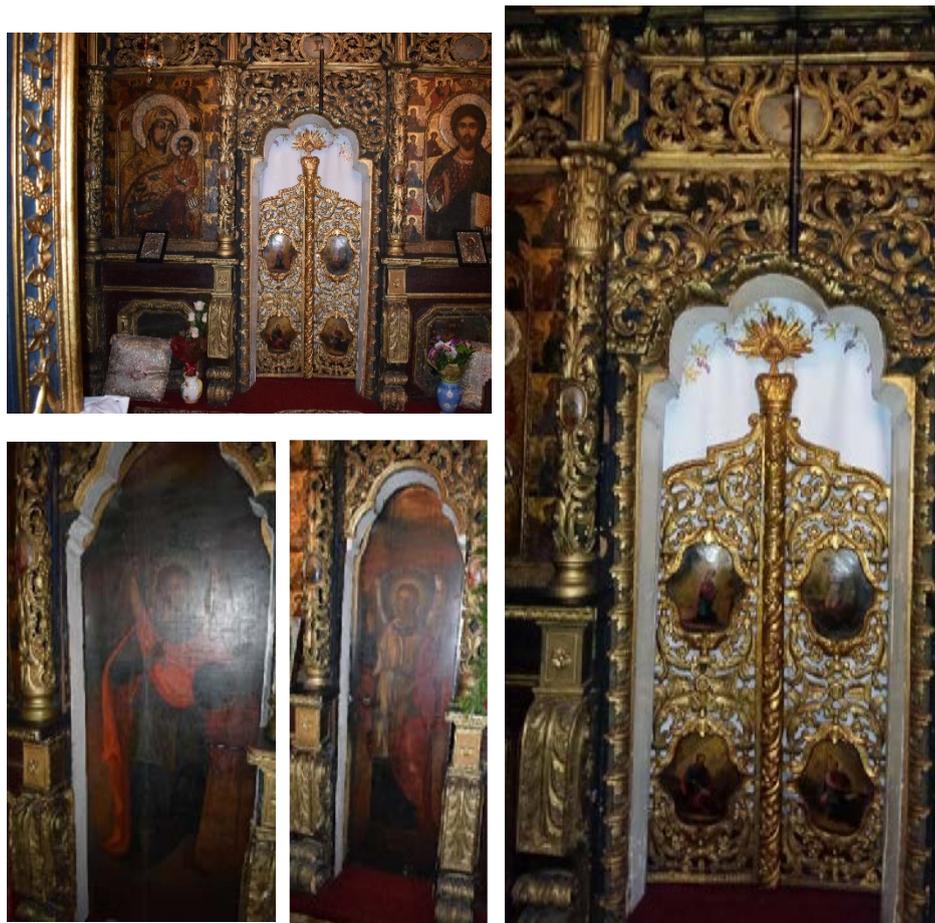


Fig. 22-25. Overall aspects of iconostasis doors

The monumentality of the registry is marked by the four older Royal icons, which are (left to right): “St. Nicholas” flanked by Hierarchs; “Mother of God *Hodigitria*” framed by the Prophets; “Jesus *Pantocrator*” framed by the Apostles and the icon of the feast of the church with “St. Theodor Tiron and Theodor Stratilat”, flanked by the Saints.

From a stylistic point of view these icons constitute a special group, taking into account their representation with side scenes – of older tradition – and the background decorated with geometrical and floral elements in gilded relief. At the bottom of the icons there are inscriptions made in flat relief mentioning the donor *Solomon Bârlădeanu – Mare Vornic* – painted by “Unworthy painter Grigorie from Bierilești in the year 1665”.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Efremov Alexandru – *Icoane românești*, Editura Meridiane, București, 2003, pag. 112-113.



Fig. 26-29. Overall aspects of the Royal icons

The foot register, the one that supports the iconostasis base, is made up of large pedestals in console that support the interrupted wood panel of

the registry with the Royal icons. On the four vertical corresponding panels (placed at the foot level under the Royal icons) are painted icons in octagonal frames whose ornamental motif is made with stylized acanthus leaves. These are higher to the Panel plan.

The image of these icons was subsequently overpainted in “fat” technique and does not respect the traditional iconographic program, here being represented (from left to right) the scenes: “Dinner at Emmaus”, “Fleeing Bethlehem”, “Healing of the Blind” and “Sf. George killing the Dragon”. The base pedestal is missing.

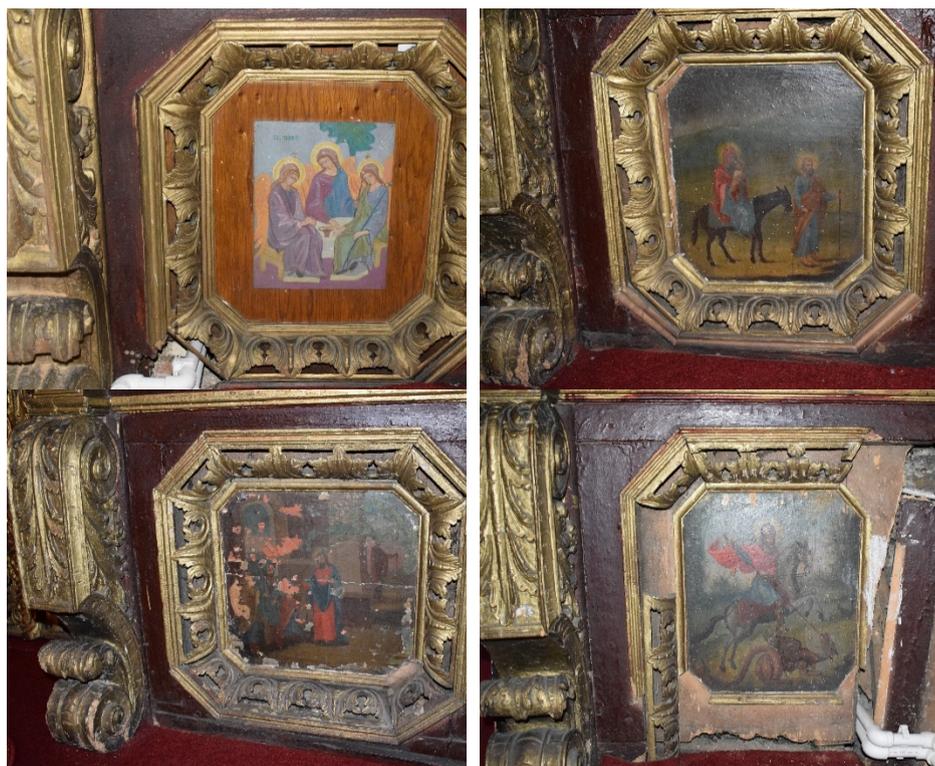


Fig. 30-31. Overview of the icons of the foothills

### **Previous interventions on iconostasis**

The Iconostasis has undergone various interventions at both aesthetic and structural level. Apart from the fact that in the iconostasis are included icons from several eras, there can be seen previous interventions both at the level of the pictorial layer and at the support (wood).

Thus, the icons in the Royal Register are the oldest (17th century), the upper part of the iconostasis can be classified at the end of the eighteenth

century, beginning of the 19th century, and the side doors (*diaconești*) and the painting of the foot Register are later.

There are also present repaints of the gilded sculpted shape – application of a layer of “bronze” paint over the original decorated surfaces with metallic leaf (gold) and repainting of flat surfaces by covering them with one or more layers of paint (Foot Register and soffit of the doors of the Royal Register). You can also see partial repaints of the foot icons.

We mention the presence of metallic objects (nails, wires) of previous intervention with the role of securing the detached items from the iconostasis structure. These were used both at the sculpted and decorated part and for the reinforcement (insurance) of the iconostasis support elements (on the back). As far as the iconostasis's resistance structure is concerned, we note the use of new wood elements on the back of the iconostasis with the purpose of fixing the constituent parts to the built-in beams.

In the altar, behind the iconostasis, a false wall (gypsum boards), covering more than two-thirds of the iconostasis ensemble, was made likely to close the “gaps” and provide some sort of insulation for the Church’s altar area.

Last but not least it is to mention the heating plant of the church, which includes pipes for the transport of the heat agent, passing from the Naos to the altar through “cut” spaces in the iconostasis structure.



Fig. 32. “Bronze” repaints on carved shape



Fig. 33. Late interventions at the foot icons



Fig. 34. Interventions at the resistance structure of iconostasis



Fig. 35. False wall behind the iconostasis

## **Iconostasis Conservation Status**

### **A. Wooden support**

The wood, once introduced into the art object, is subjected to degradation factors that can be grouped by their effect in a series of degradation types: rotting, burning, infestation with wood borer insects, frailty, curvature, traction, tensioning, color modification, etc.

For each situation it is necessary to know the mechanism of the process in question, as well as the ways of preservation and restoration in accordance with the principles and legal normatives. The wood in the opera can have native (natural) defects, degradations produced by processing, handling or use, but also due to the microclimate factors (temperature, humidity, light) as well as the biological and anthropogenic ones.

As a whole, wood degradation forms occur depending on the environment in which it was preserved, in close connection with the way it was used, protected from moisture, micro-organisms, insects, dirt and pollution.

The wood used at the iconostasis was subjected in time to numerous changes in microclimate conditions characterized by high fluctuations in temperature values and humidity from the monument's premises. As a result of the hygroscopic properties of wood, the sudden changes in temperature and humidity parameters lead to the emergence of tensions on the wood fiber that cause dimensional and flatness changes.

Due to these specific manifestations of wood fiber, the iconostasis elements have undergone numerous degradations that manifest by: splinting of fiber; takeoff of the sleepers; cracks on the wood fiber; detachment of component elements; deformations of flatness with partial or full takeoffs;

fractures; ruptures with partial or full loss of constituent elements, especially in the decorative part of fretted and carved wood.

In the lower part of the iconostasis the wood presents an advanced state of degradation due to excess humidity absorption. The timely exposure of this part of iconostasis to excessive humidity has favored the installation of a complex biological attack of fungi and wood borer insects which partially affected the resistance structure of the wood through consumption, in the metabolic processes, of lignin and cellulose from the wood's constitution.

The whole phenomenon of dimensional change due to the action of superficial and deep tensions on the woody fiber, is also transmitted by default to the areas with carved and gilded decorations as well as those with paintings.

At the same time, the wooden support of the whole ensemble has numerous local deteriorations from subsequent improper fastening interventions with metallic elements (nails, wires, etc.) visible in the upper part.

At the back of the iconostasis are present staple accumulations of atmospheric particles (dust, smoke, tars), congested deposits being probably accumulated in the space created by the false wall closure of the back of the iconostasis towards the altar.

## **B. Polychrome sculpture**

The decorative shape on the face of the iconostasis, carved, fretted and gilded, is fully repainted with a metallic pigment (bronze) dye distributed with scum and patchy thickness, with several reverts in some areas (especially in the lower parts). It was applied by coarse brushing in order to mask the degradations of the polychrome layer from the sculpted decorations.

These repaints with materials incompatible with the original polishing technique produce, by default, damage to the polychrome layer, in the present case of the gold leaf and the corresponding adhesive layer beneath. On the whole of the carved and decorated surface, it is evidently noted the unsightly appearance of the repainting which has deteriorated over time by oxidation of the metallic pigment, coverage heading the original golden tone. Over the repainting subsequently joined atmospheric deposits accumulated over time (smoke, tars and dust) amplifying the appearance of degradation.

Also, there are many detachments of the pictorial layer, microcracks on the direction of the wood fiber, cracks at the level of gold leaf and losses with partial or full lacuna. These are due to improper microclimate

conditions, by tensioning the wooden fiber, either due to subsequent mechanical shocks manifested in the form of scratches, small gaps, etc.

### **C. Pictorial layer of icons**

The degradations of the pictorial layer from the icons are represented by those of the color layers with the corresponding preparation layers from beneath and the protective film.

Superficial deposits and adhesions of atmospheric particles are present in the case of painted surfaces – staple accumulations of dust, smoke, tars. At the level of the protective film there are tough hardened deposits (embedded in the lacquer layer).

The loss of adhesion caused pictorial layer detachments (peels) and favored the appearance of gaps both at the level of the color layer and the primer (plaster). Wear and erosion are also present at the level of color layers.

On the entire surface of the painting are present networks of cracks (superficial and deep) and microcracks – the cracks of old with a regular shape leaving the primer (plaster) layer reaching through the color layer to the protective lacquer. They appear in time and are considered as a normal consequence of the aging process of materials. The cracks present on the surface of the icons are caused by the tensions produced by the wooden support over the primer (plaster), respectively the pictorial and the protective layer (lacquer / varnish).

The varnish layer is characterized by tonal changes (darkening) caused by the photochemical degradation that produced over time (aging). In different areas are reported matte spots due to the degradation in time, as well as the phenomenon of embedding the surface deposits.

On the surface of the pictorial layer are locally present accidental traces (drips, leaks) of bronze paint, following the careless application of overpainting's from the carved shape. At the same time, local repainting interventions are also reported in later icons and over varnishes.



Fig. 36. Fractures on the wood merge



Fig. 37. Distance fractures, gaps in carved shape



Fig. 38. Repaints, missing decorative elements



Fig. 39. Biological attack, destructive interventions



Fig. 40. Gaps in the pictorial layer, degraded varnish

Fig. 41. Detachment, peels, gaps

Fig. 42. Embedded deposits

## Conclusions

An 18th century Monument, the Church with the patronage of the Saints Theodor, from Iași, was erected on the place of a wooden church that date from the year 1665. The conservation status of the architectural structure requires general interventions for structural rehabilitation and restoration of architectural elements.

The potential entry in restoration of the edifice requires the protection of artistic components that do not require interventions (dismantling, disassembly, transport – pews, cult objects – as appropriate) and is a factor supporting the initiation of restoration treatments of components whose conservation status advertises this – this is the iconostasis situation as well.

As we have described in the present paper, there are a series of previous inappropriate interventions, executed in different periods and related to the conservation status of the iconostasis (support, polychrome sculpture, painting). From these emerges the necessity of the preservation and restoration of iconostasis in its whole material structure (interventions in the resistance structure – wooden support, carved, gilded decoration and painting surfaces).

In addition to the conservation status of the components of the iconostasis, another factor arguing the need for restoration interventions is the historical, artistic and cult value of the ensemble.

Made on six overlapping registers (including the canopy), the iconostasis comprises icons from several historical stages enclosed in friezes with a special carved decoration, the majority of the surfaces being fretted, carved and gilded in traditional technique.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the icons in the Royal Register are of great value, dating back to the first wooden church (1665), attributed to “Grigore the Painter”. The conservation status of these icons is one that also requires preservation-restoration interventions, which is an additional argument for the necessity of starting, on the iconostasis assembly, of a restoration process.

### **List of illustrations:**

All images used in the present paper were taken by the author

**Fig. 1.** Overview of St. Theodor’s Church

**Fig. 2-6.** Details of the interior architecture of St. Theodor’s Church

**Fig. 7.** Overall appearance of iconostasis

**Fig. 8-9.** Overall aspects of main royal register icons

**Fig. 10.** Overview of the top registers

**Fig. 11-12.** Details of fretted and carved decorations

**Fig. 13.** Detail with the highlighting of the tile joints that compose the iconostasis register

**Fig. 14.** Overall aspect of the upper part of the back of the iconostasis

**Fig. 15-16.** Details of the “Coronament”

**Fig. 17.** Detail of the registers with the Prophets and Apostles

**Fig. 18-19.** Detail with the scenes from the median axle of the two registers

**Fig. 20-21.** Assembly and detail of a semi-frieze from the Holly Feasts register

**Fig. 22-25.** Overall aspects of iconostasis doors

**Fig. 26-29.** Overall aspects of the Royal icons

**Fig. 30-31.** Overview of the icons of the foothills

**Fig. 32.** “Bronze” repaints on carved shape

**Fig. 33.** Late interventions at the foot icons

**Fig. 34.** Interventions at the resistance structure of iconostasis

**Fig. 35.** False wall behind the iconostasis

**Fig. 36.** Fractures on the wood merge

**Fig. 37.** Distance fractures, gaps in carved shape

**Fig. 38.** Repaints, missing decorative elements

**Fig. 39.** Biological attack, destructive interventions

**Fig. 40.** Gaps in the pictorial layer, degraded varnish

**Fig. 41.** Detachment, peels, gaps

**Fig. 42.** Embedded deposits

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