
MUSEUM VALORISATION OF OLD CHURCH BOOKS

SOME CASE STUDIES

Elena Ardelean and Nicoleta Melniciuc-Puica*

University of 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza', Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Str. 9 Closca, Iași, Romania

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Abstract

This study, in continuation of previous researches, deals with specific aspects of the preservation and restoration of two church books from the 19th century entitled Book of Hours. The results will contribute to the elaboration of an investigation and intervention protocol and especially to the reintegration into the exhibition network and the scientific storage of the old books from the collection of the Banu Church in Iași. The valorisation of the cultural heritage in the church museums in Romania aims at restoring, preserving and promoting the local heritage.

Keywords: valorisation, Book of Hours, conservation, restoration, engraving

1. Introduction

For hundreds of years, in the Romanian space, the church book was the most appreciated and respected element of culture. The first schools appeared alongside churches and monasteries [1] and the church books were the first school textbooks. At the same time, church books were means of spreading the Romanian literary language and contributed significantly to the preservation of the unity of the Romanian language in the Romanian provinces that were so vitiated over time. The book, as Hașdeu said, was the main weapon of the Romanians from Transylvania, in comparison to which, “the sword and the rifle played a secondary role” [2]. Often the same manuscript was used to print an edition in Wallachia and another one in Transylvania.

Used for a long time in worship and kept in churches and monasteries, but also in private collections, these objects, that carried spiritual significance, cultural, artistic, historical, memorial and material values, became, over time, during the 19th-21st centuries, part of some church collections, and many of them were taken over by a number of institutions such as museums, libraries, archives, etc. [F. Șerbănescu, *Muzeele și colecțiile din cadrul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Ziarul Lumina, 9 May 2017, <https://ziarullumina.ro/documentar/muzeele-si-colectiile-din-cadrul-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane-122375.html>].

*Corresponding author, e-mail: nicoletamelniciuc@yahoo.com

But, as these books were made of organic materials (such as paper, leather, animal or vegetable glues), chemically and physically unstable, often stored under improper conditions, they could undergo irreversible damage [3-5]. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the activity of preserving and restoring these values is both an act of responsibility and a duty to the ancestors and to future generations.

The case studies presented in this paper refers to the museum valorisation of two old church books within the Parish of the 'Sunday of All Saints' Banu, a cultural landmark of the historical capital of Romania, the city of Iași.

Being an important historical and architectural monument of the city of Iași, documented in 1638, during the reign of Vasile Lupu, Banu Church was founded by the boyar Savin Zmucilă vel Ban and was consecrated on June 15, 1705 by Misail, The Metropolitan Bishop of Suceava and Moldavia. Initially, it was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin. The dwelling's name is related to the title of high official ('ban') worn by its founder. In the late eighteenth century, the Metropolitan Bishop Iacob Stamati and the parish funded the construction of a new church dedicated to the 'Sunday of All Saints', the blueprints and construction of the church being done by a Transylvanian architect, named Herr Leopold. The interior mural painting, the sculpture and the iconostasis painting, were made by the Moldavian craftsman Eustatie Altini [I. Sasu, *Consolidarea și restaurarea Bisericii Banu din Iași, Partea I*, Al 2-lea Simpozion Național Monumental. Tradiție și viitor, Iași, 2012].

This church is the oldest church in Iași for which the architect's name is mentioned in the 'pisania' (the inscription accompanying the foundation, placed above the entrance door) [6]. This is the first church where, from the very beginning, the service was held exclusively in Romanian, as compared to other churches or monasteries in the city, dedicated to the Holy Places, where the service was performed in Slavonic or Greek (monasteries Galata, Three Hierarchs, Barnovschi, etc.). As of the beginning the church was provided with 17th century Romanian books, such as the Sermon printed in Iași in 1643 (today exhibited at the Museum of the Holy Hierarch Dosoftei the Metropolitan), the Prayer Book (Iași, 1681), the Missal Liturghier (Iași, 1683), and the Greek-Romanian Gospel (Bucharest, 1699) [I. Sasu, *Consolidarea și restaurarea Bisericii Banu din Iași, Partea I*]. Being strongly affected by the 1977 earthquake, the Banu Church started, in July 2010, the implementation of the project entitled 'The Rehabilitation and Tourist Development of the Historical Monument Banu Church in Iași', funded by the European Union through the Regional Operational Program 2007-2013. Within the project, extensive actions were undertaken to consolidate the building but also to arrange, in the basement, a generous space for exhibiting the heritage assets found in the possession of the church but also from the private collection of the parish priest, a scholar collector of old books, icons, numismatics, etc.

From this collection, a number of 20 books, printed between the 18th and the 19th centuries, were restored in the old book restoration and preservation Laboratory of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology - Alexandru Ioan Cuza

University of Iași. Specific aspects of the preservation and restoration of a jubilee gospel from the late 19th century were addressed in a previous study [7]. To continue the research carried out previously, this paper contributes to the elaboration of an investigation and intervention protocol for the old church books from the 19th century and to their reintegration into the exhibition network and their scientific storage.

2. Operational goals and results

2.1. Case study 1 - Book of Hours, 1835

The first book presented is a Book of Hours (Ceaslov). It is a worship book printed in the 19th century. The book represents a printed work in Romanian with Cyrillic characters, on handmade paper crafted from textile fibres with black and red typographic ink. The seam was made as hardcover book binding type. The book block consists of 303 pages, grouped into 87 flat sheets. The book block is 26 cm long, 17.5 cm wide and 4.5 cm thick. The book block has several ornaments: decorative borders framing the text mirror, vignettes, frontispieces, decorated initials. In addition to the natural aging of the paper, the yellowing and the lowering of the pH (5.2-5.5), the book block presents damage caused by the cumulative action of the physical, chemical, biological and social factors: multiple stains and wax deposits, dirt and dust deposits, functional patina, haloes, oil stains, chromatic changes caused by the biotic attack, foxing, cracks, brittleness, fractures, massive lack of support, empirical restorations (Figure 1). The book have been analysed through non-invasive techniques, according to literature [8, 9]. Biological investigations have identified, in these areas, the following species of fungi: *Aspergillus flavus*, *Penicillium sp.*, usually find in old books from 19th century [10]. From the book binding, only the seam was preserved, the cover being totally destroyed.

After the scientific investigations, with the consent of the restoration committee, the book was preserved and restored. Disinfection and debugging treatments were performed with Thymol in ethyl alcohol. The dry cleaning was carried out in two stages: a) *dusting* the sheets of the book block with the help of a wide and soft brush, from the book spine towards the outside; b) *mechanical cleaning* through abrasion was performed with the help of an eraser. Using this eraser, the dirt deposits were removed from the surface of the sheets. The wax deposits were removed with the help of the scalpel by breaking - cutting. The disjunction of the text block required special attention because there was a thick layer of adhesive (vegetable glue) on the book spine. In order for it to be removed, dressings damped in distilled water were applied in the area of the book spine, allowing a few minutes for the glue to soften, and after that it was removed with the scalpel, thus easing the detachment of each flat sheet. Dusting was performed again in the area of the book spine, removing the last dust deposits.

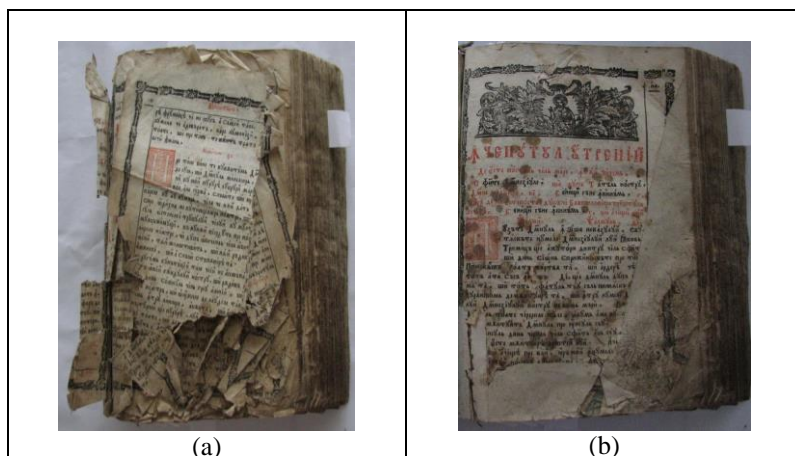


Figure 1. Multiple deteriorations on Book of Hours, 1835: (a) fractures, massive lack of support, (b) stains and wax deposits.

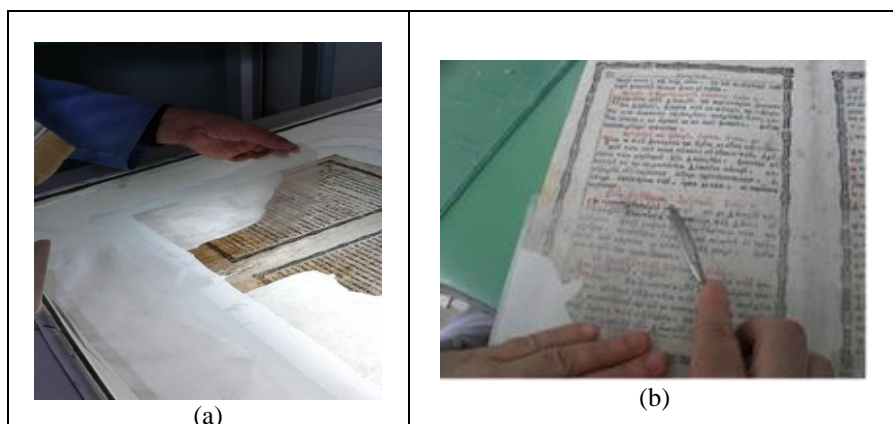


Figure 2. Different stages of restoration process of Book of Hours 1835: (a) consolidation and completion of the pages, (b) removal of excess of Japanese paper.

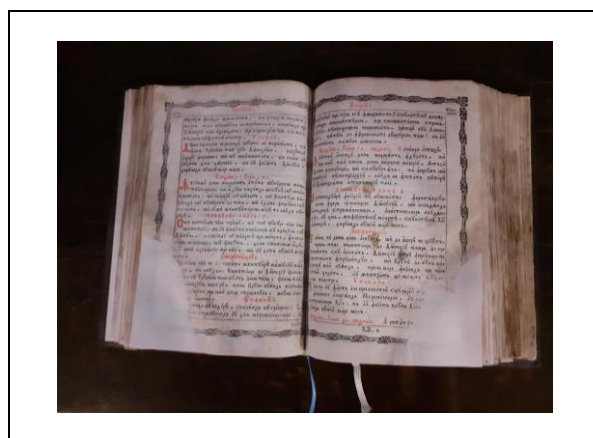


Figure 3. Book of Hours 1835 after restoration.

Wet cleaning was performed by immersing the sheets into deionized water to which an amount of calcium hydroxide solution was added, in order to make pH value equal to 7. The temperature of the cleaning water was 36°C. Wet cleaning was carried out in 3 baths. The additions from the previous empirical restorations were also removed.

After that, the treatment of aqueous de-acidification with calcium hydroxide was performed. As a result of this treatment, the pH of the paper, measured on the surface, has increased to 7.4-7.6. The free drying of the sheets followed, and then the consolidation by gluing with a 0.5% methyl cellulose gel.

After pressing, the fragile sheets and those with cracks were reinforced with 11g/m² Japanese paper and 2% methyl cellulose gel. The sheets with gaps were refilled using 18g/m² Japanese paper and 2% methyl cellulose gel. After pressing, the excess of Japanese paper was removed and the book block was restored. Different stages of restoration process are presented in Figure 2. The restored Book of Hours is presented in Figure 3.

2.2. Case study 2 - Book of Hours, 1833

This book is printed in black and red ink on handmade paper crafted from textile fibres and glued with gelatine. The cover is made of cardboard; the coating is made of brown leather, adorned with a frame made of geometric motifs. The book stands out through a series of engravings (Scene of Annunciation, Saint Nicholas, Saint Varvara, Saint John the New from Suceava, etc.) on the entire page, engravings crafted with great mastery.

Wood engraving for the illustration of church books represents a precious chapter in the history of Romanian culture. The image engraved on a book is not a mere ornament but, closely related to the text, the engraver's icon always taking the nature of a comment through pictures. In the composition of the engraver, nothing is meaningless, but everything converges to express the transposed idea. That is why, the proportions are often not fair, the face expressions are harsh, and the lines are rough. The book engraving, often performed by monks, has always found its inspiration in iconography and liturgical textiles and has resorted to other sources only in terms of technical novelties.

Starting with the second decade of the 19th century, the art of book illustration is dominated with authority by the engravers from the Neamț Monastery. Two of them, Ghervasie and Teodosie, contributed to the illustration of the Book of Hours from 1833: Ghervasie (the Portrait of the Saviour, the Synod of the Holy Angels, Saint John the Baptist) and Teodosie the Monk (the Scene of Annunciation, Saint Varvara, Saint George).

It is known that the monk Ghervasie was a great engraver. Showing unparalleled creativity, he executed dynamic scenes, complex drawings created with rough lines, full of expressiveness [11]. Teodosie is the monk Ghervasie's descendant and is considered to be the most productive engraver who lived on Romanian land. He had been working for over 30 years illustrating the books printed at Neamț Monastery. Although his art does not show the dynamism or

finesse of its predecessors, it stands under the sign of scrupulousness, zeal, discretion and love for the church book. For example, the scene in which Saint Varvara is depicted stands out through its special compositional balance (Figure 4a): in the centre, Saint Varvara dressed in expensive clothing, according to the princely rank, having at her feet the sword with which she was killed, the scene being presented also in the background, on the right side. In the background, it is represented the tower in which she was enclosed by her father and the bathroom with three windows, representing the sacrament of baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. Besides, on the frontispiece of the bath stands written “I honour the Holy Trinity”. The engraving made by Teodosie, can also be found in the Book of Hours printed in 1835 and in that from 1874.

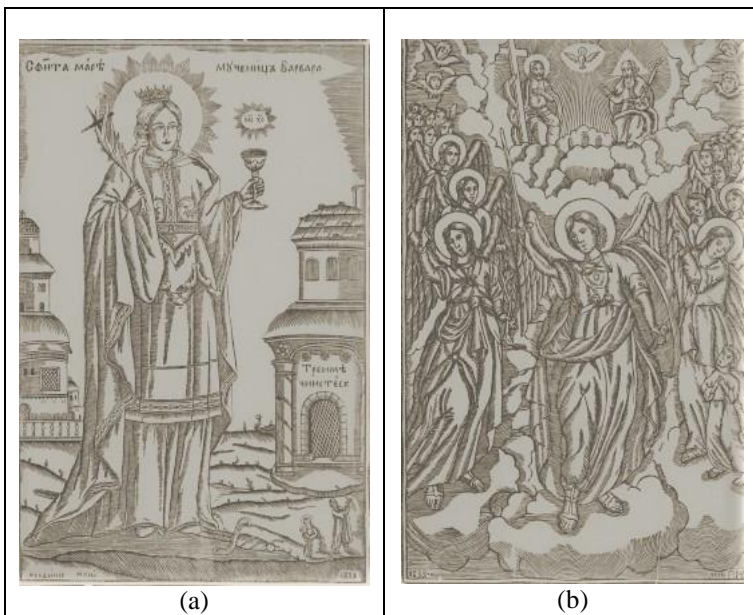


Figure 4. Book of Hours 1833: (a) engravings made by monk Ghervasie and (b) monk Teodosie.

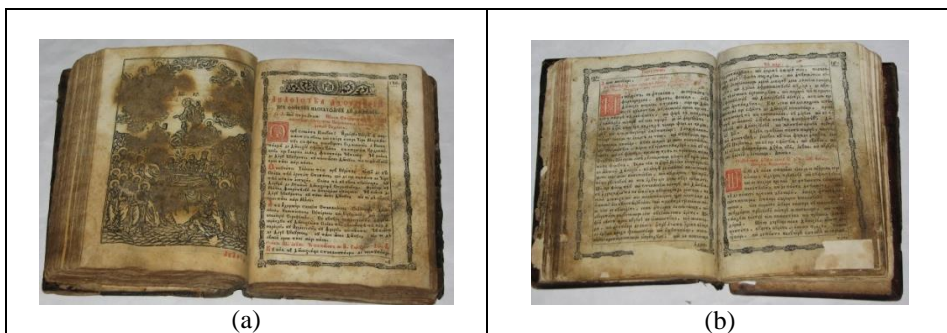


Figure 5. Deteriorations on Book of Hours 1833: (a) wax deposits oil spots, (b) empirical restoration.



Figure 6. Different steps of the restoration process of Book of Hours 1833: (a) removing the wax spots after mechanical cleaning, (b) chromatically reintegration of the book cover using water colours.

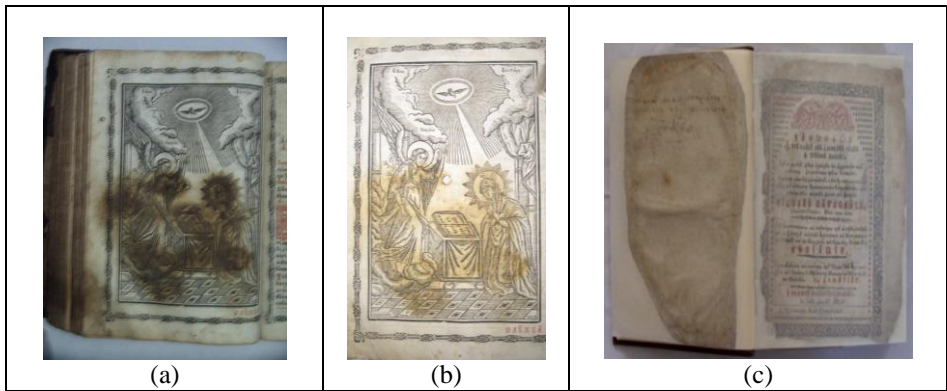


Figure 7. Book of Hours 1833: (a) page with engraving before, (b) after restoration, (c) the book after restoration.



Figure 8. View of a part of Banu church Museum.

The engraving with the scene the Synod of the Holy Angels is dynamic and western by concept (Figure 4b). The Archangel Michael appears in the foreground, and the Archangel Gavriil on the right. At the bottom, on the right side, is depicted a baby with his hands joined in prayer and an angel shows him the roadside crucifix.

The book is in an advanced state of deterioration, with many oil stains, empirical restorations, biological attack, foxing and massive wax deposits, especially in the area of the valuable engraved scenes (Figure 5).

Wax stains and deposits are commonly found on old church books, as a result of their use in churches, where lighting was achieved for a long time with the help of wax candles [12]. The relatively high temperature of molten wax droplets (approximately 65°C) favours their penetration into the structure of the paper causing the appearance of stains. If there is a larger amount of wax, deposits form on the surface of the paper. Whether if stains or deposits, the surface of the wax draws dust, the dust particles encrusting themselves heavily.

Scientific investigations have identified a biological attack (*Aspergillus niger*, *Aspergillus flavus*) in the area of wax deposits, as well as an acidic pH of the paper (5.1-5.4).

Preservation and restoration were carried out according to the protocol approved by the Restoration Committee and consisted of disinfection treatments, dry cleaning, solvent cleaning, wet cleaning, aqueous de-acidification, consolidation and filling of the sheets. The difficulty in restoring this book was the removal of the massive wax and dirt deposits.

These deposits were first removed mechanically, with the help of a scalpel, then with the help of an electric spatula (the treated sheet was inserted between filter paper sheets which were changed until the wax was removed entirely) (Figure 6a), then the area was cleaned with organic solvents. Next, the preservation-restoration process was carried out by performing wet cleaning with deionized water, consolidating the sheets by coating them with 0.5% methyl cellulose gel, drying, pressing, re-filling the sheets with gaps using 18g/m² Japanese paper and 2% methyl cellulose gel.

The cover was mechanically cleaned by brushing, then with a 5% methyl cellulose gel, was emolliated with a lanolin-based dressing, re-filled with a mixture of neutral cellulose fibre and 3% methyl cellulose gel and was chromatically reintegrated using water colours (Figure 6b).

A page with engraving of Book of Hours 1833, and entire book, before and after restoration is presented in Figure 7.

The two restored books will be kept in good condition and its conservation status will be periodically monitored. Eighteen more volumes belonging to the old book collection from the Banu Church were restored in the restoration laboratory of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Iași. Each volume represented a new, laborious activity coordinated by committees of specialists consisting of restorers, investigators, artists, art historians and theologians. The works were exhibited in the museum of the Banu Church in Iași, keeper of some valuable cultural assets (Figure 8).

It was also established a collaboration protocol between the parish of the Sunday of All Saints - Banu and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Iași. The main objective of the concluded protocol was the inter-institutional cooperation in order to rediscover and promote the local cultural and traditional heritage, by involving the students and the teaching staff from the Faculty in carrying out activities specific to the field of restoration and preservation of old books, icons and polychrome wood.

3. Conclusions

This study, as well as the previous ones, addresses specific aspects of the preservation and restoration of two books from 19th century. The results will contribute to the elaboration of an investigation and intervention protocol and to the reintegration into the exhibition network and the scientific storage of the old books from the collection of the Banu Church in Iași.

At the same time, the valorisation of the cultural heritage in the church museums aims at restoring, preserving and promoting the local heritage, at developing the capacity of young people to appreciate the local culture, spirituality and history, at stimulating tourism and the local rural pilgrimage. Through these patrimonial and cultural concerns and activities, the Romanian Orthodox Church confirms and continues its vocation to create, preserve and valorise its treasures of spirituality, history, culture and art, as defining elements, fundamental to the Christian spirituality and the self-awareness of the Romanian people in present and future times.

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