
THE CASTLE OF MICLĂUȘENI
A SPACE OF FAITH, ART AND SCIENCE
ASPECTS OF PRESERVATION-RESTORATION OF
THE INDOOR PAINTING

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Abstract

The paper makes a general presentation of the restoration works performed at the Miclăușeni Castle in Romania. The preservation-restoration activity is described from the perspective of the relation religion-art-science. The European tradition and cultural heritage of the former owners of the Miclăușeni domain is also analysed.

One of the main causes of the damages supported by the castle was the fire mentioned in the building's history (1968) that represented a true calamity. During the fire, according to the testimonies that were preserved, huge amounts of water were pumped on the upper level that infiltrated mostly in the floors from the upper level that separated the attic from the floor. That great humidity remained in the stratigraphy of the ceilings and infiltrated in the wooden, mortar, and reed structure, leading in time to multiple specific damages that can also be noticed nowadays.

The floors, whose strength structure was made up of massive wooden beams, underwent complex damages mainly due to the presence of the accentuated humidity in several areas. Those damages of the support also lead to the loss of important decorated portions. In order to rescue those decorations that were important, so as to illustrate the influence of the "Art-Nouveau" current within the Romanian art, complex restoration procedures were performed, applied both on the support and the pictorial layer.

The fractured, detached and deformed areas of the ceilings were horizontally lifted with special devices and laser levels and then different resins were injected so as to strengthen and fix in the plane the respective areas. The damages of the painted surfaces were stopped by fixing – strengthening the pulverulent areas, as well as the other types of detachments of the colour film. The adherence between the support layer, the preparation and the colour layers was remade by applying differentiated treatments, according to the types of damages.

Keywords: Sturdza family, confluence zone, ecumenism, culture, Neo-gothic style, Art-Nouveau style, humidity damages

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1. A short history of the monument

It is often easier and more efficient for the sake of any contemporary period to build again than to keep up what history is transmitting to us. The knowledge acquired in the past is useful because the future may be weakly built up when the present time is not enough concerned of its own roots. Usually, the preservation and restoration, often rendered at the confluence of science-art-religion, involve a hard and long work in various long lasting, minute and not necessarily spectacular stages on their running course. Physically and psychically the working phases could be stressing, and rather expensive, not always promptly offering a total satisfaction to those who want prompt outcomes. Preservation and restoration role, which differs from the new building; is to keep, maintain and re-build (when is the case) so many material proofs with cultural and historical value that remind us that the world do not begin and do not end with us, and that our duty is to keep and transmit on in good conditions the heritage that honours us.

The castle with the church (and now including the monastery and pilgrim and aging people centre) of Miclăușeni comes in support of this idea belonging to the Metropolitan Orthodox Church of Moldavia and Bucovina and is waiting for Europe to discover it as an integrated part, not only since the third millennium but from the beginning of XXth century.

Placed on George Sturdza's family land (who married with Maria, daughter of the writer Ion Ghica), the castle of Miclăușeni is re-built with devotion by them between 1880-1904. Surrounded by a novel dendrological park, the castle was in those days a proof of high cultural level of its owners that brought among the Moldavia hills models of existence, of construction and of environment that they have found during their trips along the Southern and Western Europe.

The Sturdza's family vast library of 60,000 books contained at the time exquisite books, published in the European space, the theological ones being directly ordered as soon as they were published. Out of all these, quite few ones were preserved; over 50.000 of them disappearing after the II World War.

At Miclăușeni, at the beginning of XXth century, the ancient Orthodox faith has harmoniously co-existed with formal Eastern and Western influences, visible both in the way of organizing and managing their family life and in their way of decorating and placing the mural pictures. Here, the cultural and geographical coordinates of Europe have met through the writings and objects gathered in the castle, through the indoor ornaments, through their noble way of living among the local people for who Sturdza family was a behavioural and civilizing model. If George Sturdza was maybe equally passionate on the new and the old, collecting books, arms and various old even weird objects, Maria, his wife, had real artistic gifts, especially in fine arts and had an obvious sensitivity towards nature, people and Orthodox faith. Their daughter, Ecaterina, inheriting her parents' attitude, donated the castle to the church that only after 1989 managed to benefit of the possibility to start the arrangement and the

reparations of what for a long time was disconsidered and neglected. During George Sturdza's life, on the castle walls there were written Latin sayings alike those sayings from the Orthodox Sunday sermons heard at the local church, in whose small graveyard rests Sturdza family, just to remember to the living ones about the continuous spiritual presence of those passed to eternal rest.

2. Restoration and memory

To restore objects or images or any other material that needs recovery, it is not only a sum of technical actions with a scientific base but also a spiritual approach of energetic recovery and of ideatic restitution that the belief in the power of restoration makes it keeping viable. To keep in the III Millennium what has more than one hundred years of existence on the Moldavian land, it is an act of faith for the native inheritance, if we consider that in other spaces of Europe even what is thirty years old may be included in the preserving sector.

The stylistic eclecticism of the Castle of Miclăușeni (late Neo-Gothic with Art-Nouveau influences) and from this deriving the novelty of the outdoor ornaments and its indoor decorative motifs, does not obviously imposes an actual cosmetics just to unify the environmental aspects and to cancel, of various reasons, a part of those kept till today. It is rather sure that the old existing samples, kept as control samples to know how they were in the past, should become a source of interest and consideration than some momentary innovations that could delight an expeditive eye, wishing only a visual comfort. In fact the Castle of Miclăușeni is in its integrity a vestige as it is the church with its treasures, the small graveyard with its old graves (among them those of Sturdza couple), as well as the English garden that is waiting for its revival every year and like the nature that embrace it and makes it to express itself.

Restoration, simultaneous faith-art-science, gives on turns to each of its valences, the necessary priority neither of them taking over a right of exclusive primordial status or of demonstrative supremacy. It is in fact the implied desideratum of restoration whose meritorious outcomes exist mainly when consequence of the harmony of the three defining aspects is installed (faith, art, science). Because anytime and anywhere the Trinity is pregnant, as the theology-science relation implies the necessity of art to associate them. The dogma, the sensitivity and the exactness have nothing but to win when they ally in balanced proportions in order to secure, not only their permanence but also their receptivity and opening towards an ensemble of expressions not only to the restrictive preoccupation of their own sectors.

The restoration of the castle of Miclăușeni and its domain, which lie on a hill of Moldavia between Targu-Frumos and Roman, does not mean only a section or another, a priority or another but an aggregate of necessities. Here we are talking about the restoration of various types of materials and spaces correlated to the ideatic restoration of a place which kept at the beginning of XXth century the memory of Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt (Holy Stephen the Great), offering to his spirit a deserving appreciation.

When in the present the youth, attracted by the sacred side or by science, risks to neglect his sensitive human side, the artistic step with moral-educational valences find out its motivation in the very fact that it brings back to balance what a momentary inclination could create the unbalance. An example in this respect is the very remind of the effort made one century ago in order to rebuild the Castle of Miclăușeni, fruit of the toil and belief to leave behind something worthy on the ancestors land. We also have to mention here as well the library of Miclăușeni, with its selected books whose theological, scientific and artistic titles support the idea of the vast culture that Moldavia has had before the XIXth century. The memory of this opening, also proved by the novelty look of the Miclăușeni Castle, can't be but stimulating and comforting for the ones who open the door of the past to learn from its experience. That do not means not to live in the present and to not foresee the future.

There, in the past of Miclăușeni there were actions that must not be forgotten, each generation keeping its concern to maintain the material proof as long as possible under the auspices of faith and science reunited under the sensibility of art.

In fact, the science, without its humanity side, is not able by itself to reconstitute the whole as any restoration without a humanistic implication risks to act unilaterally or sequentially, sometimes ignoring even what can be equally important and valuable but is not the object of the respective restoration. Concretely, in the case of the Castle of Miclăușeni it is about the rush to restore the building and to minimize the importance of indoor murals; in this way some writings in the gorges placed between the walls and the ceiling will be irremediably affected, the Latin sayings, which, due to some necessities of construction reinforcements, disappear as a material proof of a past time. Sometimes, even when the artistic value is not primary or it is not the most convincing, it is necessary to carry out a minute research and a careful decision making because every historical proof has its own significance.

From George and Maria Sturdza, the residents of Miclăușeni, at the beginning of the XXth century, have remained Latin writings which, if are correlated with the cross motif surrounded by a crowned snake, repeated on the walls as ornament, and with the image of a huge indoor hall ceiling, decorated with two large trilobated crosses united by their bases, are offering us the idea of an "avant la lettre" ecumenical tendency. In this way, in a Moldavian noble castle, the Orthodoxy and Catholicism were reunited by the association under the same roof of some decorative motifs of the walls and ceiling whose Christian significance came out of different sources. Could it be a mere happening or a moment inspiration? Or the castle eclecticism is due to the design made by two Western educated architects, Reinecke and Grisberg?

On the Miclăușeni domain, in the near vicinity of the castle, it is also the old Orthodox church with its traditional icons and with the small graveyard of the family and of their acquaintances where George Sturdza's tomb, by its senioral lion and family coat of arms, brings again in association the old style with the native one, of Byzantine tradition. Here we see how the very this

stylistic eclecticism, repeated from the inner castle to its outer part, in the domain of Miclăușeni where we also meet that remarkable English dendrologic park, denotes a bridge between East and West, existing in the Europe of the beginning of XXth century and in Moldavia, part of a Romania opened to the world, receptive to its values, integrated to them but also preserving the native ancestral traditions. We may say that it was the Moldavia of Stephen the Great, a well-known and appreciated county of Europe even since the times of the brave prince. [1, 2]

3. Occidental artistic influences

The same spirit of assimilation and synthesis of some European cultural values of the time is emphasized by the entire indoor mural decoration where the confluences of a late Neo-Gothic interfere with conclusive aspects of the "Art Nouveau" trend that putted its mark on many significant sites of the time. While in most of the spaces we meet a combined executing technology between the use of the patterns and then the manual processing of decorations, in some rooms we may notice a mostly manual approach, like the ceiling of the upstairs hall and of other rooms which is a real prove of technical and artistic virtuosity where the "trompe d'oeil" type technical method of three-dimensional illusion is masterly sorted out with only few means.

Almost exclusively decorative, the "Art-Nouveau" style has created, in Romania too, schools with specific influences based on valuation of the traditional symbolical and ornamental elements. These indoor decorative paintings of Sturdza Castle, bear the neat print of some artists who knew well the defining characteristics of this artistic current, where the line becomes an essential factor of the composition, the interest for traditional perspective disappears and the volumes are suggested by new means, stylisations, shadows and lights, with a decorative character, in combined arabesques. A happy integration of some texts in Latin, treated with a synthetic decorativism, additionally personalizes some rooms but especially the upstairs central hall. Excepting some spaces where the decorations remained at pattern level, most of the ensembles present with certitude both artistic and historical-documentary value.

4. Techniques and methods of restoration

The tumultuous history of the castle during the II World War when it was turned into warehouses or military base, lead to the depreciation of the entire building. One of the main causes of some serious and irreversible damages was the fire that was also mentioned in the building's history (1968) that represented a true calamity, starting with the almost total destruction of the roof. During the fire, according to the testimonies that were preserved, huge amounts of water were pumped on the upper level that infiltrated mostly in the floors from the upper level that separated the attic from the floor.



Figure 1. The monitoring of humidity and temperature.



Figure 2. Vacuum consolidation of wooden prop (girders).

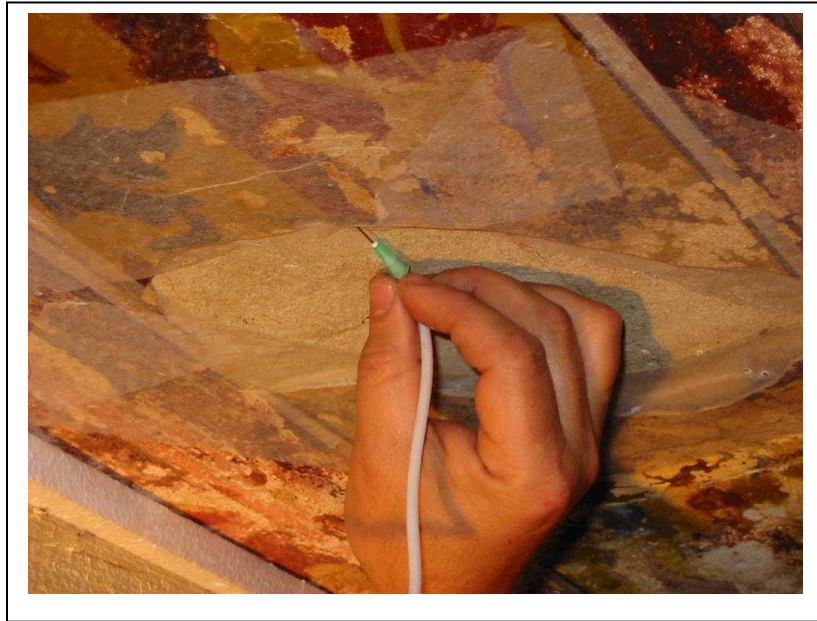


Figure 3. Consolidation of preparing layers.



Figure 4. Consolidation of coloured layers.

That great humidity remained in the stratigraphy of the ceilings and infiltrated in the wooden, mortar and reed structure leading in time to multiple specific damages that can be also noticed nowadays (Figure 1).

The approached casuistry within the restoration works of the mural decorations of Sturdza Castle is extremely complex due to the advanced damages, of various types, both of the support and the pictorial layer.

The floors whose strength structure was made up of massive wooden beams underwent complex damages mainly due to the presence of the accentuated humidity in several areas (Figure 2). Those damages of the support also lead to the loss of important decorated portions. In order to rescue those decorations that were important so as to illustrate the influence of the “art-nouveau” current within the Romanian art, complex restoration procedures were performed, applied both on the support and the pictorial layer (Figures 3 and 4). The damages of the painted surfaces were stopped by fixing – strengthening the pulverulent areas, as well as the other types of detachments of the colour film.

The fractured, detached and deformed areas of the ceilings were horizontally lifted with special devices and laser levels and then different resins were injected so as to strengthen and fix in the plane the respective areas (Figures 5 and 6).

Applying differentiated treatments, adapted to each type of degradation, it was remade in the first stage of restorations the adherence between the support layer, the preparation and the colour layers, activities which were considered emergencies [3].



Figure 5. Consolidation of prop detachment (intonaco).

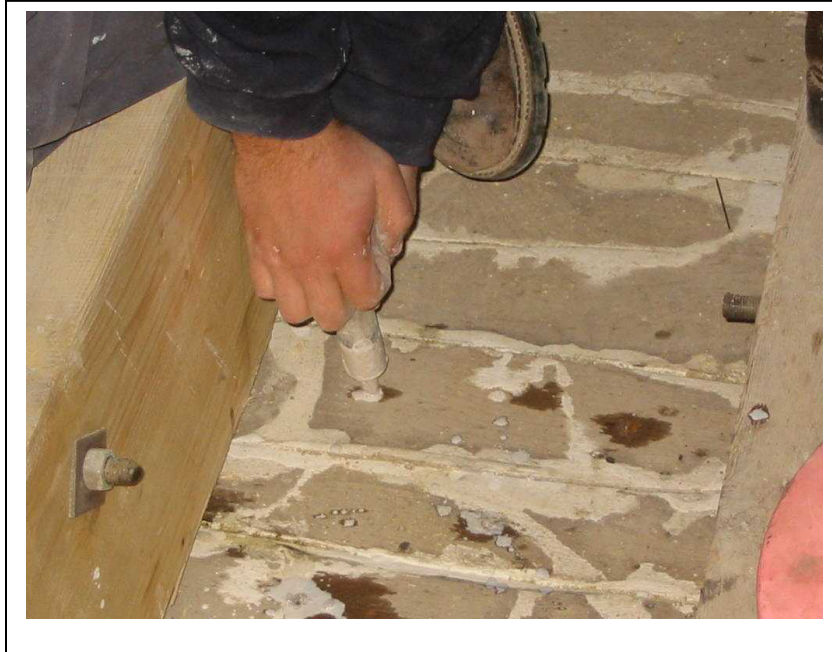


Figure 6. Consolidation of detached prop fracture.

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