
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DATING OF SOME PIECES BELONGING TO SUCEVIȚA MONASTERY[†]

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Abstract

The paper presents the main contributions regarding the dating of two identical pieces of church furniture belonging to the patrimony of the Sucevița Monastery Museum (district of Suceava). During the conservation - restoration process, due to some detailed investigations, it was revealed the existence of some Cyrillic words, written on the wood, in the interior part of the lectern, mentioning the *potron* as the current coin at that time. According to the field literature, the *potrons* or the *potronici* are referred to as silver polish coins, current in the Romanian states, particularly in Moldova, at the end of the XVIth century and the beginning of the XVIIth century. This information permitted the dating of these pieces, a dating also confirmed by the chemical and physical investigations made on the leather.

Keywords: lectern, Sucevița, inscriptions, potron, dating

1. Introduction

The word *Analog* (also *Analogion*, *Analoghion*) comes from neo – Greek language and is used when referring to a mobile, wooden stillage, situated near the Southern door of the Altar. This piece is specific for the Orthodox Church, the Gospel, which is to be read, or an icon being usually placed on it; it can also have the meaning of a pew.

The pieces are part of the main exhibit of the Sucevița Monastery Museum and are in need of urgent conservation–restoration interventions, being in an advanced state of degradation.

The dating of these pieces is uncertain, being approximated to the XVIth or XVIIth centuries without any concrete data and only by taking into consideration other objects from the same museum, dating from this period, on which some writings have been found.

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2. Experimental

The main body of the piece is a pyramidal frustum in octagonal section, made of sculptured, gilded wood, and enhanced with a superstructure covered in leather. The surfaces of the pyramidal frustum are divided by selvages of belts, decorated with motives resembling a rope twisted in two directions, the same motif being also observed on the middle of the frustum (Figure 1).

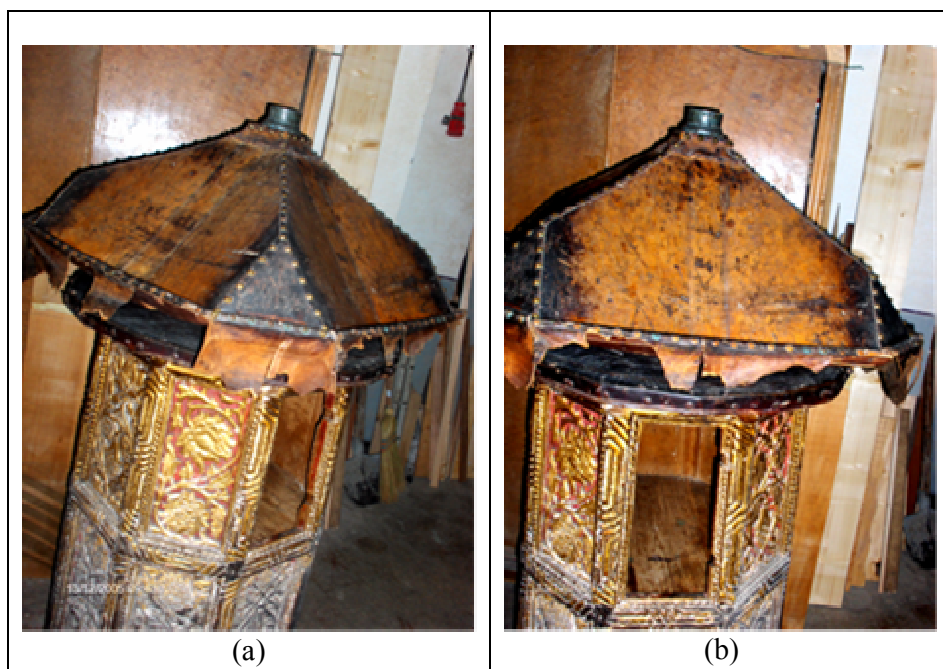


Figure 1. (a) Lectern 1 – ansamble, (b) Lectern 2 – ansamble.

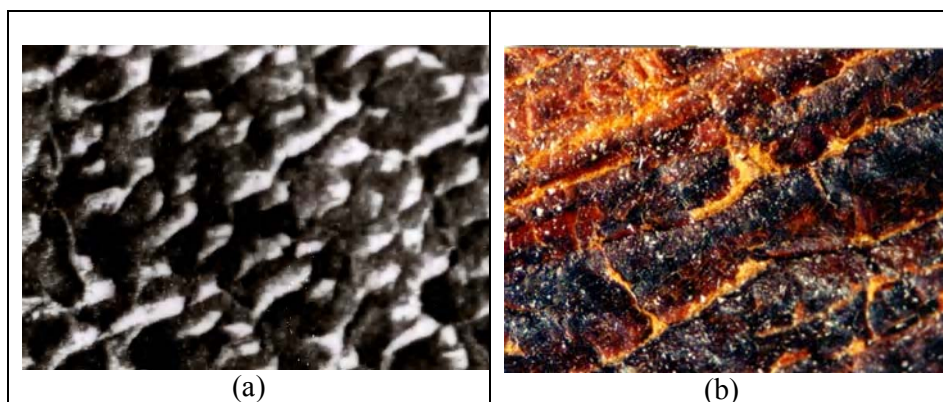


Figure 2. Microscopic examination of: (a) bovine leather (witness) (x25), (b) lectern leather (x25).

The faces of the frustum have been decorated using different motifs: cherry flower, tulip, oak leaf, variations of palmettes and semipalmettes, four-leaf clover, grain ear and grape bunches. The main body is covered with a wooden lid clad in dark brown leather.

The mobile, pyramidal, four-selvage superstructure is made of wood that was covered in leather fastened by riveted, copper staples, having a drab color and, at the inferior side, a fringed surface.

The leather that covers the wooden plane surface, under the mobile body of the Lectern, is extremely fragile and crumbly due to high dehydration. A section of about 30 cm is torn, with lots of adherent dirt, discolorations, numerous sores, holes made by decays, losses of material and of many of the rivets used to fasten the leather on the wooden surface.

The leather that covers the book rack (the mobile part), has about 70% losses of material on the inferior part, being in a high state of degradation consisting of advanced dehydration, adherent depositions (wax, smoke, grease), exfoliation of the face, decay holes, exfoliation of the surface's *gren*, discolorations, sores, especially on the selvages, and the lack of some fastening elements.

First of all, due to the macro and microscopic study of the leather, could be established that it was of bovine origin, probably vegetable tanned in accordance with the techniques specific for that period of time. This feature was also confirmed by the stereomicroscopic investigations performed on the leather, highlighting the characteristic aspect of the bovine *gren* that was slightly modified as a result of the degradations occurred. Furthermore, the investigations determined the type of the tan used by the artisans by comparing the stereomicroscopic images of the sample with a reference (Figure 2) [1].

The vegetable tanning was the prevalent technique used until chrome – tanning technique appeared in 1835. From the aspect, colour and the quality of the leather and by considering the techniques used at that time, it could be supposed that the leather was vegetable tanned [2].

Chemical investigations have been performed in order to determine the type and quality of the tanning as well as its conservation state (Table 1). Comparing the test results with field literature we were able to establish that the leather sample from the Lectern corresponds to an oaken tan, a fact also mentioned in the historic documents of that period, both according to the aspect, color and the characteristics of the leather and by the traditions of that time (the XVIth century) [3].

Table 1. The results of the analyses of the tan extract.

No.	Tests	Results
1.	Reaction with iron alum	Precipitate
2.	Reaction with acetic acid and lead acetate	Tintless precipitate
3.	The cobaltic Schell reaction	Virescent precipitate
4.	UV irradiation	Fluorescence

3. Results and discussion

A thorough study of the pieces led to the identification, on the interior part of one of the Lecterns, of some Cyrillic writings made directly on the wood.

Thus, on one of the compound parts of the pyramidal frustum the following inscription may be read, representing names of persons followed by a certain sum (Figure 3).

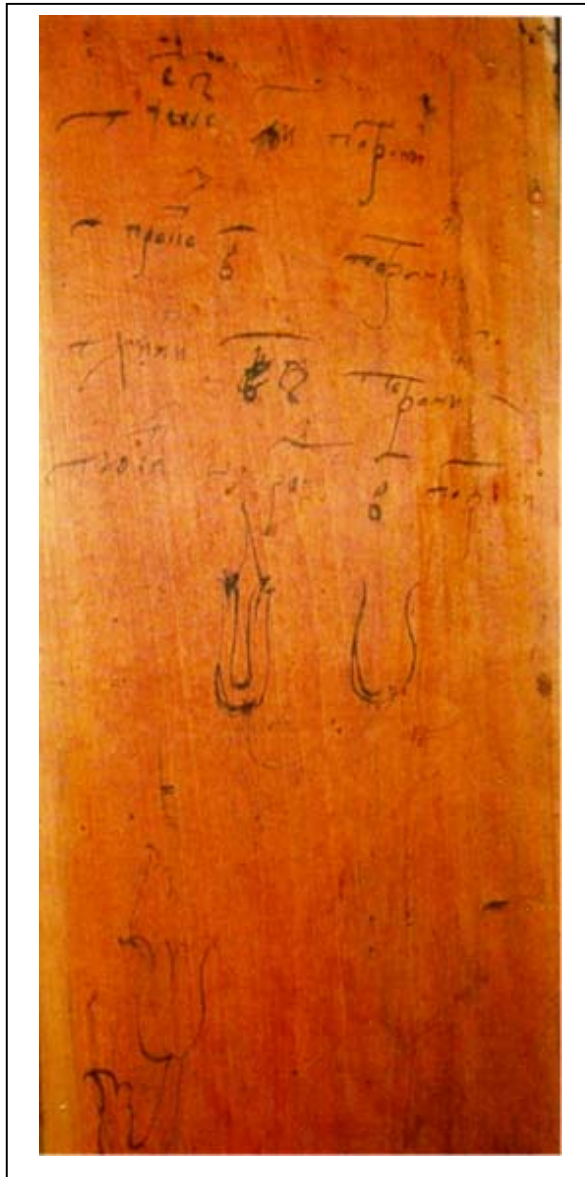


Figure 3. Details of the inscriptions.

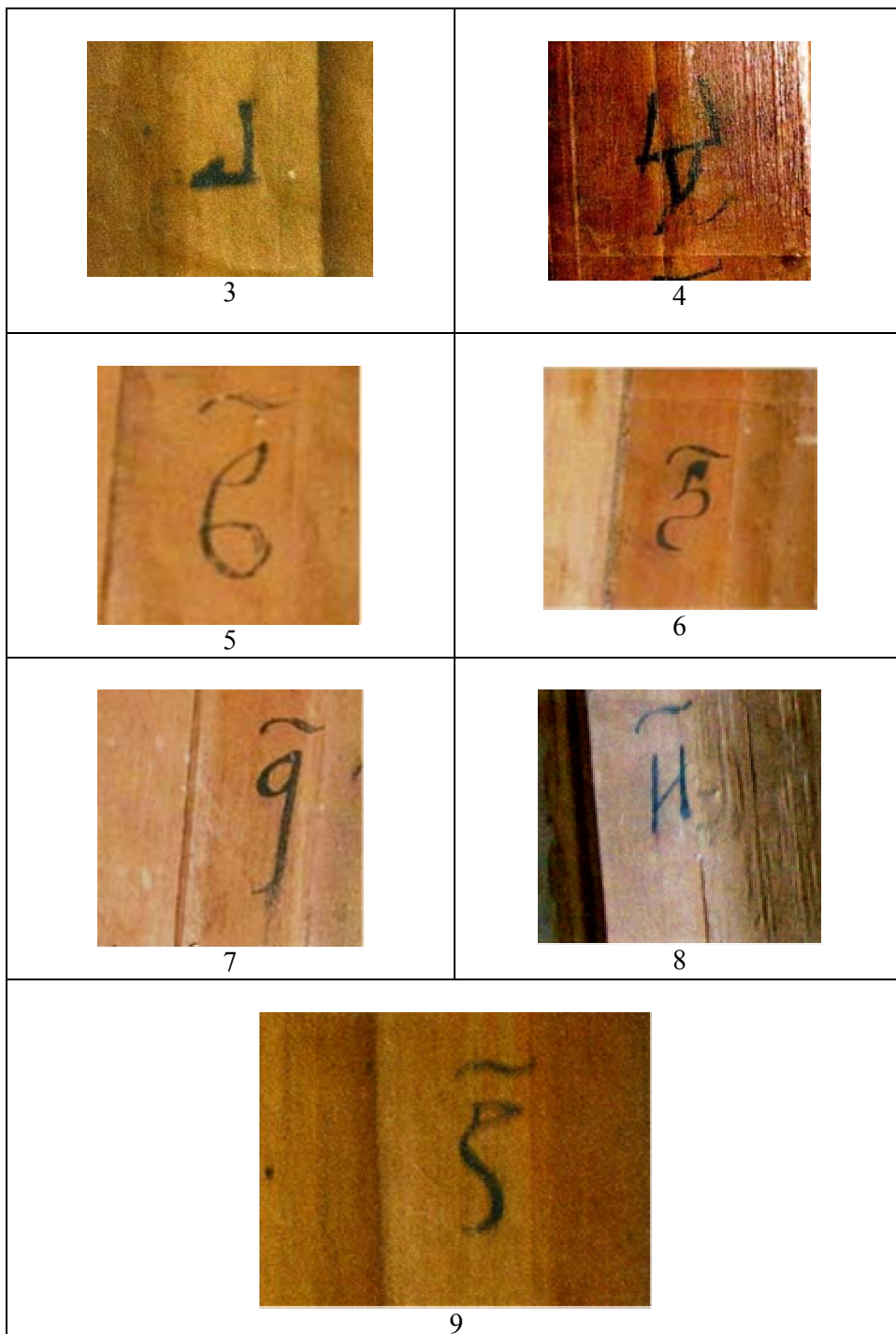


Figure 4. Numbers inscribed on the lectern 1.

The inscription has the following interpretation:

“ARCHIEP – 88 *POTRONI*
PROCOPI – 20 *POTRONI*
HILIP – 80 *POTRONI*
IOSIP POHURANIDI – 20 *POTRONI*”

There is no exact data about what these sums stand for, but according to some regional customs, they can represent the beneficence given by the persons mentioned to the monastery, as contributions to the making of these lecterns.

It is certain however that the respective coin is in fact the *potron* or *potronici*, a silver, polish coin, current in the Romanian states, particularly in Moldova, at the end of the XVIth century and the beginning of the XVIIth century. In Moldova and in the Romanian states they were called *potronici*, later on the denomination of *costande* being met; in Transylvania they could be found under the term of *dutce* [4].

Also, on each of the compound parts of the hexagonal surfaces have been written, using Cyrillic letters, the following numbers:

- on the first lectern are represented the numbers from 3 to 9 (Figure 4);
- on the second – the numbers from 10 to 16 (Figure 5).

The main body of the piece consists of a pyramidal frustum in octagonal section, each of the eight parts that form it are blended with wooden spigots but only seven of them have inscriptions, the only one numbered is that, which has a perforation permitting the access to the inferior shelf of the lectern where the books are usually kept.

The numbering of the pieces doesn't start with 1 but with 3 and ends with 9 in the case of the first lectern (this also being the argument for naming them lectern 1 and lectern 2), and for the second one the numbering starts at 10 and ends at 16.

The artisans may have numbered the compound parts in order to assemble them in a certain order, the numbers 1 and 2 being used for the exterior, wooden lids. Nevertheless, no inscriptions have been found on the lids because of the thick stratum of adhesive used to fasten the mobile part of the Lecterns.

The physical and chemical investigations of the leather that covers a great part of these pieces led to the following conclusions.

5. Conclusions

In the issue we can assert once more that through restoration a lot of spectacular discoveries can be made, many due to the detailed investigations of the patrimony pieces that can lay open novel aspects related to the object's historic, appurtenance or dating [5].

More detailed studies are needed in order to identify the exact type of substance used for tanning, the respective results and methodology being the subject of a future presentation.

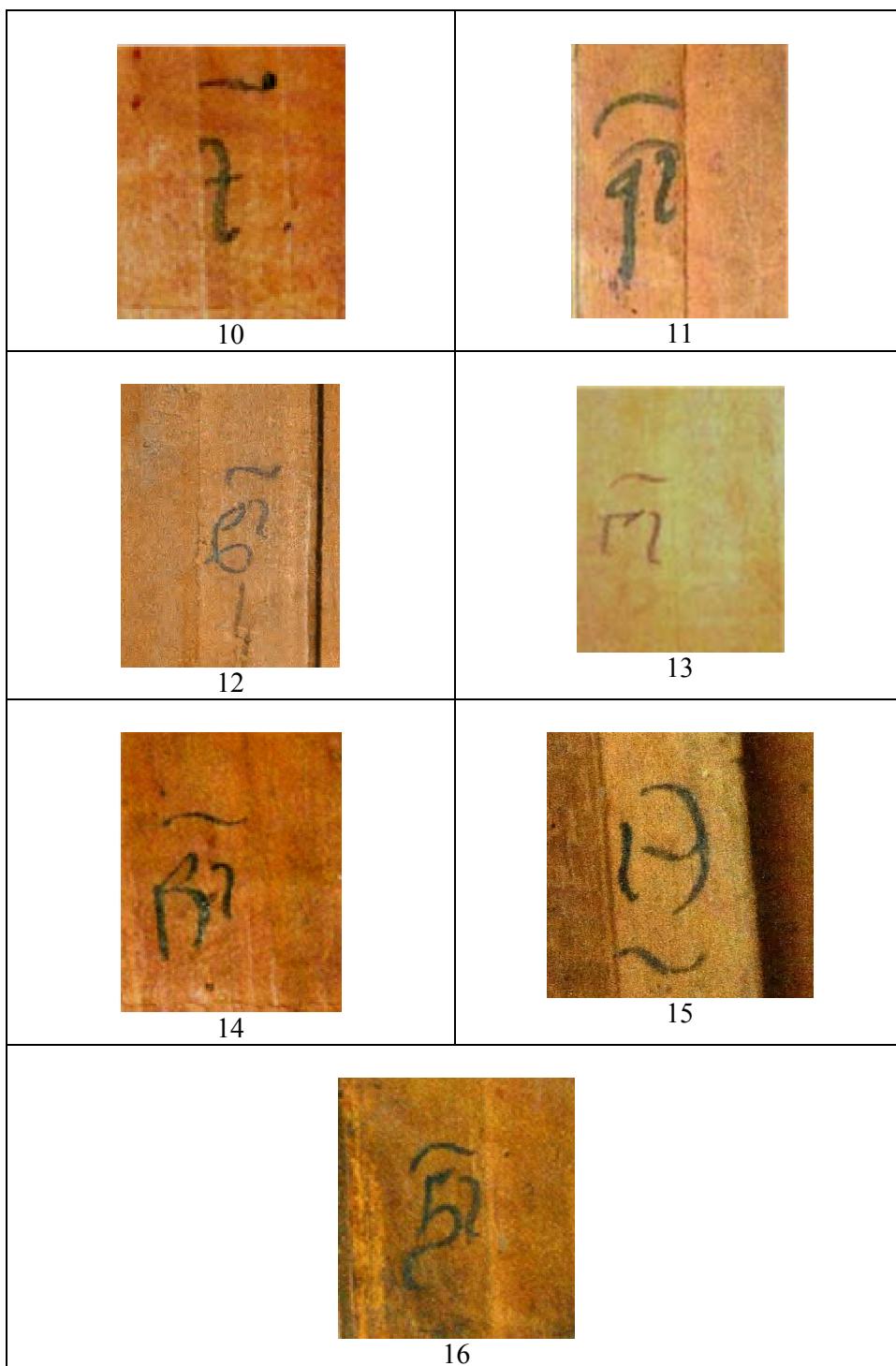


Figure 5. Numbers inscribed on the lectern 2.

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