



Conservation and restoration treatments on the mobile inventory of the Church of Saint Nicholas, Mikluševci

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GENERAL INFORMATION

This project concerns the mobile inventory of the Church of Saint Nicholas in Mikluševci, near Vukovar, in Eastern Croatia, and encompasses the following objects:

- twenty venerating icons of similar size – H 23-29 cm, W 20-22 cm, D 2 cm; tempera on panel (**Picture 1**);
- four ripidas, H 194 x W 47 x D 7 cm; tempera on wood, with gilding, and an upper layer of bronzine;
- crucifix, H 223 x W 32 x D 7 cm, tempera on wood, with gilding, and upper layer of bronzine.

The author of the works is unknown, and all objects are dated around the turn of the 19th century. The inventory is stored in the parochial house located next to the church (**Picture 2**).

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Supervision: Conservation Department in Vukovar, Croatia

Cultural heritage registry number: R-98 (1978.)

Head of project: Full Professor Tamara Ukrainčik MA

Associate: Assistant Professor Barbara Horvat Kavazović MA

Team members: Iva Galijan, Judita Gracin, Matea Primožič, Kali Radojlović, Angela Sukarowska, Antun Škrlec, 2nd year students, Department of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art, Academy of Fine Arts, Zagreb

Estimated end of project: 2022

INTRODUCTION

This project was devised to give 2nd year students a unique chance of *in situ* conservation practice, which is a rare occurrence in courses concerning easel paintings. The aim was to document and perform preventive treatments in order to transport the inventory to Zagreb for ionizing radiation at the *Ruder Bošković* Institute and subsequent treatments. Sadly, the worsening situation with COVID-19 lead to these plans being cancelled. The necessary treatments were performed only by T. Ukrainčik (**Picture 3**) and B. Horvat Kavazović. After transport and radiation, the objects were brought to the Department and introduced to students as part of the curriculum.

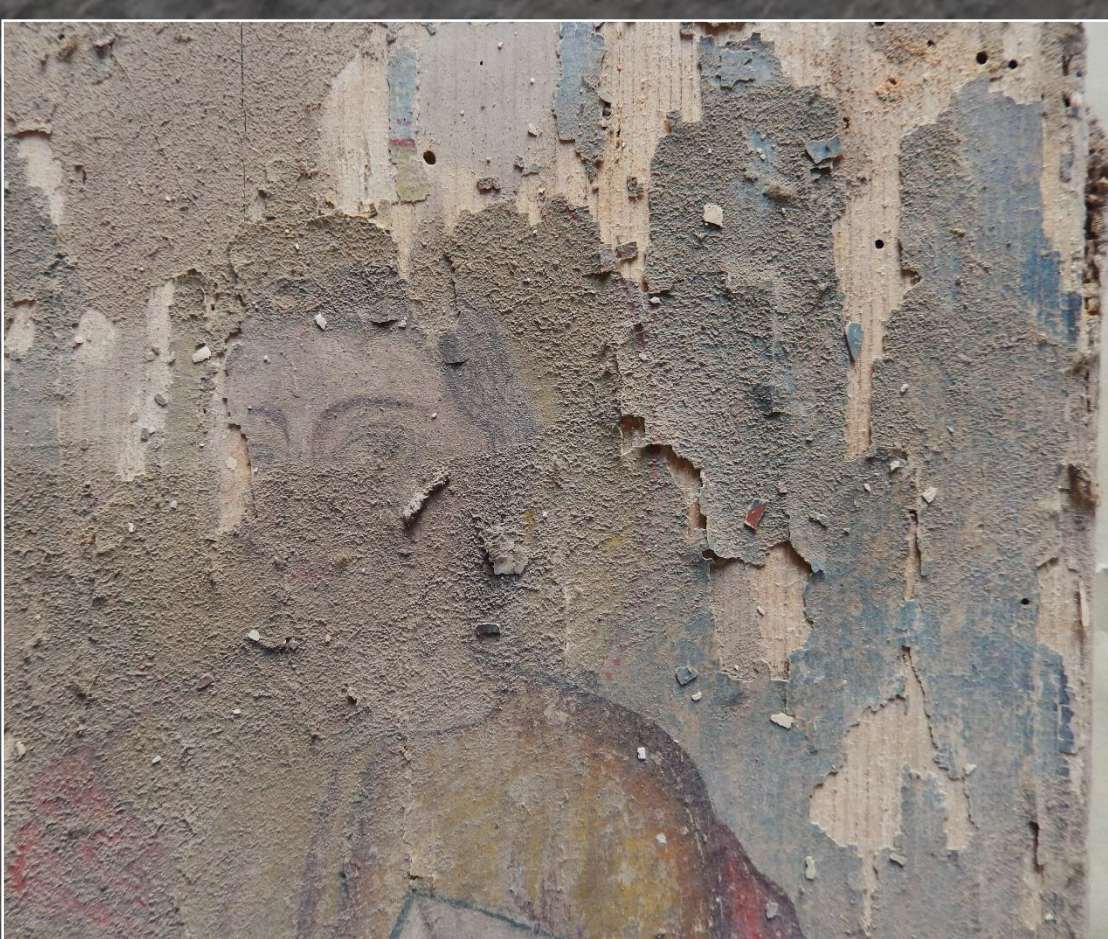


Picture 2 Church of Saint Nicholas of Myra in Mikluševci, near Vukovar, Croatia; the parochial house is visible on the left

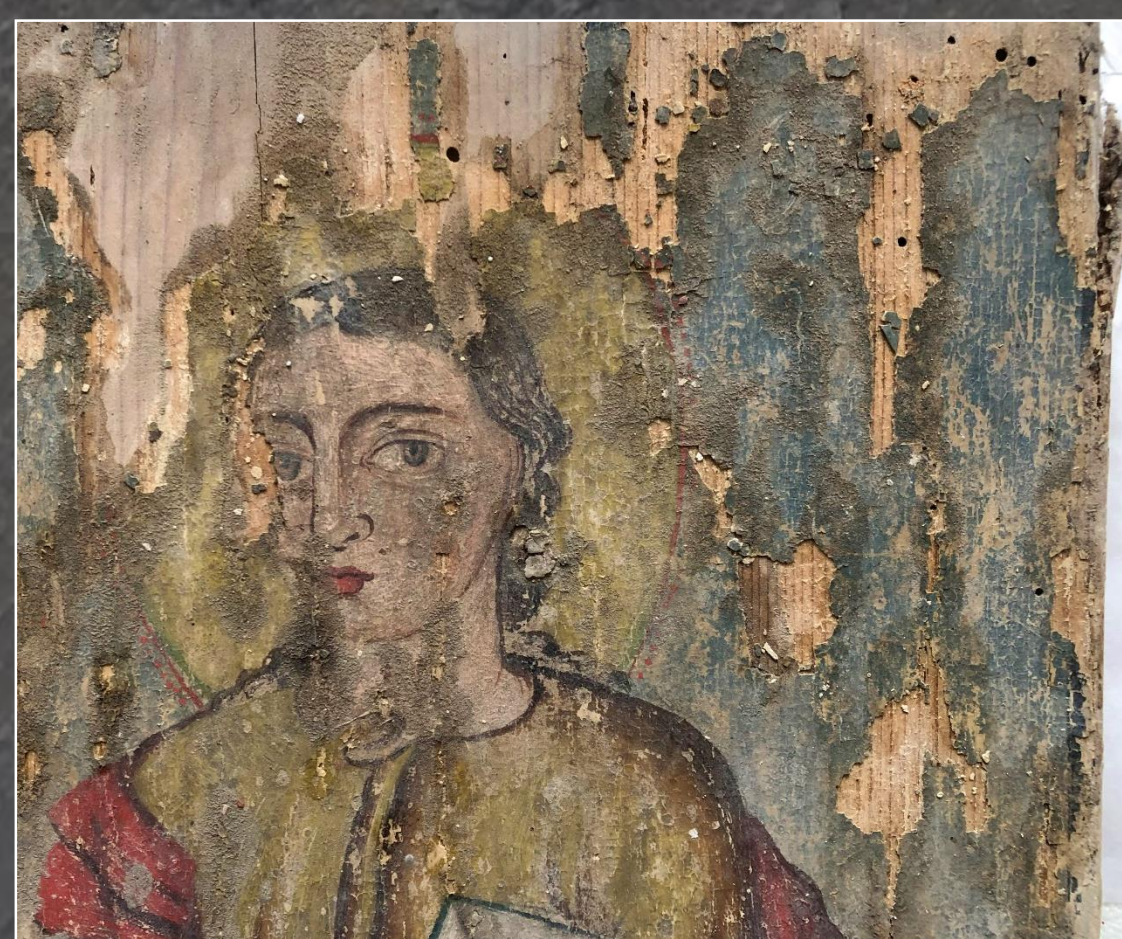
SHORT ART HISTORICAL REVIEW

The Eastern orthodox church in Mikluševci, dedicated to St. Nicholas of Myra was built in 1758-1762. Before its construction, the settlement had 31 worshiping houses, and a wooden church. A century later, the Greek Orthodox Rusyns started settling here and eventually became the dominant population. The entire inventory of St. Nicholas' church represents a quality opus of orthodox sacral art, typical for the end of the 18th century, when it starts to flourish after the Austro-Turkish wars. It's characterized by baroque influences of Western Europe, entangled with East-Byzantine and Russian elements, but without any periodic determinant. This is commonly seen on other such objects in Slavonia.

The documentation from 1990 lists that the inventory consists of an elaborate iconostasis, venerating icons, candle holders and ripidas. According to paroch Branišlav Polimac, the iconostasis is located in Novi Sad since the recent war.



Picture 4 Detail of icon M-1 before treatments



Picture 5 Detail of icon M-1 during consolidation and cleaning



Picture 1 The Venerating icons of the church of St. Nicholas of Myra in Mikluševci, held in the parochial house



Picture 6 Venerating icons, during different stages of conservation treatments

IDENTIFICATION AND CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2019-2020

The objects were found in very poor condition, with damage and losses evident in all layers (**Picture 4**) – the panel was damaged by wood-worms, chalk-ground and paint layer showed no stability or adhesion to the support. Due to this, the icons could not be turned and inspected from the back. UV fluorescent imaging showed no signs of a protective varnish layer. Covered in a thick layer of dust, dirt, grime and cobweb, a true assessment of the icons' condition was only possible after preventive consolidation.

TREATMENTS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

After preventive consolidation, the objects were taken to the *Ruder Bošković* Institute to suppress wood-worm infestation. At the Department, treatments included further consolidation, and cleaning tests. In 2021 work continued with laboratory analyses of layers, cleaning of the support and paint layer (**Picture 5**), comprehensive documentation etc.

CONSERVATION CONSIDERATIONS

After preventive consolidation and initial treatments, a minimal approach was implemented in conserving the icons. The esthetic integrity of the objects as a whole was considered, hence only necessary conservation measures will be carried out – i.e. consolidation, cleaning, fillings in the support, and application of a varnish. The degree of damage is such that no filling of upper layers and no reintegration will be executed (**Picture 6**). The ripidas and crucifix are in an overall better condition, so complete conservation-restoration treatments will be possible.

CONCLUSION

Even though students were thoroughly involved in treatments from the objects' arrival at the Department (**Picture 7**), they sadly missed out on the experience of field work – the voyage, on-site organization, preparation for transport; the immediate contact with the surroundings and cultural environment. The treatments will continue as part of conservation courses, and will finish by the end of 2022.

Sources:
 - Ukrainčik, T., (2020), *Izveštaj o okončanoj situaciji – Konzervatorsko-restauratorska istraživanja i preventivni konzervatorsko-restauratorski radovi na pokretnom inventaru crkve svetog oca Nikolaja, Mikluševci*
 - Dokumentacija KO Vukovar (izradili Lj. Sarlah, Z. Lasto, A. Krajačić i V. Geiger), Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, Zagreb, 1990.
 - <https://srbi.hr/hranovi-posveceni-svetom-nikolaju-mirlikijskom-pacetin-jagodnjak-i-miklusevci/>



Picture 3 Consolidation treatment on one of four ripidas



Picture 7 2nd year students during consolidation treatments on icons