

The renovation and protection of the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the Hilandar Monastery

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For contemporary art conservation practice, the renovation and protection of the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the *Hilandar Monastery* is a great and complex challenge. The access to the material is granted only under specific conditions and the works can only be performed in the intervals between daily rituals. Due to the specific circumstances and inability to take the objects outside the territory of *Mount Athos*, the application of modern research, and especially conservation techniques, was limited to in situ examination, using mobile equipment of small dimensions, limited analysis of movable samples for laboratory diagnostics and techniques of conservation-restoration work applicable in the conditions of fieldwork.

Apart from conservation works on numerous individual items, the experts from the Provincial Institute have completed three total reconstructions of iconostases since 2004, while a team of experts from the Provincial Institute has been commissioned since 2015 on the protection of decorations and most valuable sacred items, kept in the main facilities of the monastery – the church of the Entrance of the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Temple (1321) and the Grand Dining Room (XII-XIII). The multiannual conservation works on the throne featuring the icons of the Virgin with Three Hands, St. Nicholas and Holy Three Hierarchs, which cover the southwest stone pillar started in 2017. In the first phase, the third zone of engraved, gilded elements was conserved and restored. The degree of damage of the icon on the east throne – the Virgin with Three Hands (XIV) was established with visual inspection, while a more detailed analysis is planned for the forthcoming period.

The analysis of hidden layers may bring new findings about historical facts and events on the territory of medieval Serbia. One such object is King Milutin's Charter, written in 1324. The text of the charter, written on a parchment, was "repainted" by Bulgarian monks from Mount Athos at the beginning of the 19th century. It is still not known whether the new base contains a copy of the original text or whether the content of the text was changed. The original letters and signs are visible on the parts of the parchment from which the newly-applied layer has fallen off. Determining the content of the original text would be of great art-historical and iconographical value. The ultimate goal of our work is to determine adequate methodology that would allow the conservators to implement the methods of contemporary conservation in the specific working conditions in the monastery.