

NECESSARY CONSERVATION TREATMENT OF TEXTILE ITEMS FROM THE CRYPT OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT TERESA OF ÁVILA IN POŽEGA

The years of co-operation between the Požega Conservation Department and the Department for Textiles of the Croatian Conservation Institute started in 2006 with a project concerning textile items from the Crypt of St. Teresa of Ávila.

The key and decisive phase of "Necessary Conservation Treatment" was carried out on seven selected textile objects which shared specific issues, and they were in an extremely poor state due to the conditions they had been found in.

The selected items were: Ana Ljubić's dress, Ana Slavetić's dress and scarf, the noble Josipa Maljevac's dress, Ana Erlinger's dress and scarf, and Julijana Dubenik's dress. These pieces offer an interesting and uninterrupted cross-section of fashion styles from the beginning of the 19th c. to the 1860s, while at the same time providing a glimpse into the burial customs of the time.

During the phase of basic conservation treatment, the primary threats were eliminated and the condition of the textile items was stabilized, creating the conditions for further comprehensive conservation-restoration procedures to be performed on each object separately.

Phases of the required conservation treatments

Monitoring of the microclimatic conditions in the cellars of the Požega Conservation Department revealed extremely high levels of relative humidity (around 90% at approximately 10 °C), which caused mould to develop on the items.

A microbiological analysis, conducted in co-operation with the Industrial Ecology Institute of the Faculty of Chemical Engineering, isolated a number of bacteria cultures, some capable of proteolytic action, and various mould cultures capable of proteolytic and cellulitic action. The activity of microorganisms (*Cladosporium sp.* and *Penicillium brevicompactum* mould) had resulted in irreversible changes in fibre pigments.

Drying phases (at 47% relative humidity and approximately 21 °C over 1 month) were carried out at the Ludbreg Conservation Centre of the Croatian Conservation Institute, resulting in the elimination of further growth of microorganisms and their destructive effect. The textile artefacts were also disinfected by soaking in 70% denatured ethanol for 10 minutes, resulting in microorganism removal of limited effectiveness.

Repeated soaking in distilled water removed coarse dirt (wood shavings, an insect cocoon, surface and deep dust, bodily fluid deposits).

Two soaks in neutral anionic Hostapon T detergent and multiple rinsing over several hours restored the natural sheen, colours, elasticity and fibre volume of the textile objects as far as it was possible.

The original volume was brought back by drying the dresses on tailor-made mannequins. Relaxation of the scarves smoothed out the wrinkles and weave structure. After the procedures were completed, the items were placed in individual acid-free boxes and tubes.