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THE RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION OF FUNERAL HATCHMENTS PAINTED ON SILK

Abstract: The Project of Rehabilitating the Central Reformed Church in Cluj-Napoca, conducted in 2014-2015, included the conservation and restoration of the largest collection of funeral hatchments in the country, a collection discovered in that church. The state of conservation of the pieces, their different ages and the specific properties of each component material demanded the use of several methods of intervention upon those pieces.⁴

The majority of the hatchments painted on silk are pasted on cardboard and a few are on canvas stretched on chassis. Some of them raised serious issues regarding the degree of intervention, as they needed to be transferred on crepeline. Expert restorer Laura Troșan was in charge of their restoration.

Keywords: hatchments, restoration, Middle Ages, conservation, heritage

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Introduction

The funeral hatchments from the Reformed Church on Kogălniceanu St. in Cluj-Napoca are vestiges that are reminiscent of funerary customs going back to the 16th century and that are no longer practised nowadays. On these hatchments, especially on the older ones, there are inscribed the most important biographical data of the persons concerned. They represented a source of family pride and memory.

“At the level of social or family history, coats-of-arms speak about origins and identity, about the founders of a family, about glorious ancestors, who proved their worthiness on the battle field and who acquired a privileged social status for themselves and their followers. Coats-of-arms speak about marriages, kinships, the administration of estates, or the ownership of certain objects... Coats-of-arms speak about ranks, social hierarchies, concessions of titles and estates, about patronages and protections, about fidelity and devotion. They evoke a whole world that was built on such values.”⁵

Raised by Franciscan monks in the period 1486-1516, the Central Reformed Church has suffered several interventions over time.

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⁴ Aurel Moldoveanu, *Conservarea preventivă a bunurilor culturale*, Târgoviște, Ed. Cetatea de scaun, 2010-2011, pp. 88-92; Ioana Lidia Ilea, *Metode de conservare și restaurare a pieselor textile*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006.

⁵ Sorin Iftimi, *Vechile blazoane vorbesc, Obiecte armorate din colecții ieșene*, Iași, Ed. Palatul Culturii, 2014, p. 10.

On 22 April 1804, after the rehabilitation of the church after the fire of 1798, the church council decided that the hatchments should be cleaned, fitted inside identical black frames and then placed on the walls again.

At the turn of the 20th century, extensive restorations were made, coordinated by the National Committee of Monuments in Hungary. Negotiations began in 1904 and the restoration project was completed in 1909. The restoration works began on September 29, 1910 and ended in 1913.

On this occasion, there were found several funeral monuments carved in stone from the 15th-18th centuries. They were transferred to the Transylvanian Museum and then became part of the collection of the National Museum of Transylvanian History.⁶

Restoration works at this church were also conducted in 1930, when the northern gable was reinforced and the chronological table was completed after the model of the one from 1913, and in 1959-1961(1958-1963).

Of the 120 hatchments and obituaries, 11 date from the second half of the 17th century, 4 from the first half of the 18th century, 30 from the second half of the 18th century, 31 from the first half of the 19th century, 21 from the second half of the 19th century and over 15 from the first half of the 20th century.⁷

These armorial hatchments were ordered ahead of time and served to identify the deceased. They served as notices of death and were distributed to those who attended the funeral. They had a very important role during the various moments of burial ceremonies in Transylvania. Several copies were made for a single funeral ceremony, using a number of techniques (metal embossing, textiles, painting).

The burial ceremony was assessed on the basis of the quality and quantity of these funeral hatchments, which depended on the noble rank of the deceased. The ones painted on silk were given to important people and priests, while those made of paper were distributed to the other participants. Hatchments were hung on the bier, placed in the coffin, displayed in front of the casket during the funeral procession, or sent as invitations to the ceremony. A copy was to be displayed in the church where the funeral would take place.⁸

At funerals of lesser rank, around 100-150 hatchments were required. Their number increased for the deceased of higher rank. Thus, to take the example of the funeral of Princess Bornemisza Anna, 550 hatchments of different qualities were prepared there.

Speaking about the preparations for the funeral of his father-in-law, Banffi Gyorgy, Wesselenyi Istvan mentioned that, after the governor's death on November 15, 1708, he was placed in the coffin on the 20th, the wake took place on the 29th, and arrangements were made for the funeral to be carried out in March.

⁶ Géza Entz and András Kovács, *A Kolozsvári Farkas utcai templom cimerei (Stemele bisericii din str. Farkas de la Cluj)*, Budapest, 1995, pp. 27-28.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁸ Alicu D, Ciupea I, Cojocneanu M, Glodariu E, Hica I, Iambor P, Lazarovici G, *Cluj-Napoca, de la începuturi până azi*, Cluj-Napoca, Cusium, 1995, p. 13.

Negotiations were made for the big hatchments painted on silk, costing four forints, and for the small ones, costing three forints, the golden flag, the silver escutcheon, and many hatchments made of paper.⁹

The funeral customs practised in Transylvania in those times are very clearly described by Apor Peter in his work *Metamorphosis Transilvaniae* from 1746.

At the house that was in mourning, people set up a shed dressed in black cloth on the inside, on the outside and around the door, hatchments of paper being hung from place to place. Inside the shed, the bier was high, allowing the persons participating in the funeral to see the deceased person.

The bier was dressed entirely in black cloth, which hung down to the ground. 12 armorial hatchments painted on silk were nailed onto the coffin. In the tomb and in the coffin there were placed personal items of the deceased, which were representative for him (sword, dagger, mace, etc.), engraved tablets with a crest, or a mortuary escutcheon, for the identification of the deceased.

Depending on the rank of the deceased and the relationship between the grieving family and the princely family, the following distinctive elements could appear during the funeral ceremony: a knight dressed in armour, a golden flag with a crest, a silver escutcheon, etc.¹⁰

The oldest armorial hatchments found in this church are the metal reliefs discovered in 1911 in the graves of the children of Prince Michael Apafi I (1664, 1666), and the newest date from the early 20th century, when they were no longer used as accessories at funerals, but merely as objects of personal or family prestige in the church.¹¹

Of the over 120 hatchments and obituaries, several dozen were painted on silk, two of them being presented in this article.

Hatchment on silk – LUDOVICI of BETHLEN (1715 – 1779)

Dimensions: 75.5 x 64 cm, frame thickness 6.3 cm

Description: The shield is oval, decorated on the edges with a white ribbon that twists around the frame. In the blue field, there is a white snake with black scales, which undulates five times. The snake, face turned right, has its head surmounted by an open crown, made of gold, and it holds a golden cross-bearing orb in its mouth.

The shield, supported by two angels with an hourglass, is framed by blue-and-gold lambrequins on the dexter side and red-and-silver lambrequins on the sinister side. Above there is a crown with nine spikes, adorned with precious stones.

Underneath the shield is a marbled plinth, with the Latin inscription: INSIGNIA GENTILITIA ILUST AC MAGNIFICI DOMINI, D. COM. LUDOVICI DE BETHLEN. STRENUI IN JUVENTUTE PER XIV ANN. MILITIS. AETAT. LXIV NATI A. AE. CH. MDCCXV DE NATI A. MDCCLXXIX

⁹ Géza Entz and András Kovács, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp.41-42.

¹¹ *BISERICA REFORMATĂ DE PE STRADA KOGĂLNICEANU, CLUJ-NAPOCA* - Weisz Attila, Enciclopedia Virtuală, <http://referinte.transindex.ro/enciclopedie/monument>.

In translation: Family hatchment of the illustrious and magnificent lord, Count Ludovici of Bethlen. An energetic fighter in his youth, for 14 years. Aged 64. Born in 1715, deceased in 1779.

Conservation state: The hatchment, which was restored at a previous time, was reinforced by being glued to cardboard. In the upper part, the silk is missing in a proportion of 25%, evincing numerous displacements and fabric overlaps. (**Fig. 1**) The silk is fragile, with heavy deposits of dust and dirt, folds and separations from the cardboard (**Fig. 2**). The red and blue areas were repainted. (**Fig. 3**) The frame has become fragile.

Treatment: Given that deposits of mould were detected in the majority of the funeral hatchments, on the obverse of the cardboards on which they were consolidated, the decision was reached to undertake the preventive disinfection of all the hatchments. This hatchment was disinfected with a 2% Thymol alcohol solution, followed by the mechanical removal of the dust by brushing it with a soft-haired brush.

For the removal of the dirt deposits, the hatchment was subjected to a wet cleaning operation: small surfaces thereof were dabbed with a 1:1 hydro-alcoholic solution and the excess moisture was immediately removed by dabbing with filter paper. The areas where the silk had detached from the cardboard were reinforced by gluing with an aqueous solution of carboxymethyl cellulose.

The operation was carried out on small surfaces, by pressing the hatchment between melinex sheets and marble tiles. Where it was possible, the folds were straightened. Next came the stage of chromatic integration, carried out by the restorer of the painting. The frame was consolidated with Perxil, completed with Baliste, subjected to chromatic integration and varnished.

Hatchment on silk-Ádám Székely (1721-1789)

He was the son of Ádám Székely Sr. and Katalin Rhédey. A former royal chamberlain, he patronized the Reformed Church in Transylvania. He was the last representative of the Székely of Borosjenő family.

Dimensions: 64.5 x 49, frame thickness - 3 cm

Description: Modern French shield, in whose blue field, on a green terrace, there is a golden lion, face to the right, holding in its raised right paw a silver sword, coming out of a circlet with five spikes, adorned with pearls and precious stones. The shield is charged with an open helmet, with bars, from which lambrequins shoot off, blue-and-gold on the dexter side and red-and-silver on the sinister side. Above is repeated the figure of the lion on the shield.

Underneath the coat-of-arms there is a console with the Latin inscription: "INSIGNIA GENTIL. ILLUSTR. DOMINI COMITIS ADAMI SZÉKELY DE B. JENŐ ET SAMOLYKESZI. S. C. R. A. M. CAMERARII AULICI. QUI VTAE ET ILLUSTR. PRO SAPIÆ SUÆ, TERRIS EREPTUS, FINEM IMPOSUIT. ANNO SALUTIS MDCCLXXXIX. DIE XXXI MAY. AETATIS LXVIII."

In translation: Lineage crest of the Illustrious Lord Comes Ádám Székely of Borosjenő and Samolykeszi, chamberlain of the court of His Holy, Imperial, Royal Apostolic Majesty, who, at the end of his life on this earth, has remained in the

memory of his family for his worthiness and brilliance. In the year of Redemption, 1789, the day of May 31. Aged 68.¹²

Conservation state: Painted on thin silk, the hatchment is preserved in a proportion of about 60%, mostly to the right side. It was reinforced by being glued onto cardboard, during a previous restoration.

The elements that decorate the hatchment have been repainted, with the exception of the gold, the silver and the pedestal with the inscription. After it was consolidated, there appeared displacements and fabric overlaps. (**Fig. 6**)

The hatchment shows moisture halos, dirt deposits, stains and areas that have detached from the cardboard. (**Fig. 7**) On the reverse of the hatchment, the cardboard shows mould stains. The frame has become fragile. (**Fig. 8**)

Treatment: The hatchment was disinfected with a 2% Thymol alcohol solution, followed by the mechanical removal of the dust by brushing it with a soft-haired brush.

Because the silk was very thin and fragile, the hatchment underwent a wet cleaning operation by slightly dabbing it, on small surfaces, with a 1:1 hydro-alcoholic solution and the excess moisture was immediately removed by dabbing with filter paper. The areas where the silk had detached from the cardboard were reinforced by gluing with an aqueous solution of carboxymethyl cellulose, on small surfaces. The operation was carried out by pressing the hatchment between melinex sheets and marble tiles. Where it was possible, the folds were straightened.

The chromatic integration was carried out by the restorer of the painting. The frame was consolidated with a Rexil anti-woodworm solution, consolidated with Perxil, subjected to chromatic integration and varnished.

A similar hatchment has been preserved in the Reformed parish of Doboșeni. It probably got there through a member of the Daniel family who attended the funeral.¹³ (**Fig. 11**)

¹² Szekeres Attila István, “Ținutul Pădurilor – ținut al stemelor,” in *Monumentul*, Year XIV, Iași, 2013. [ISSN 1844-9042], p. 82.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

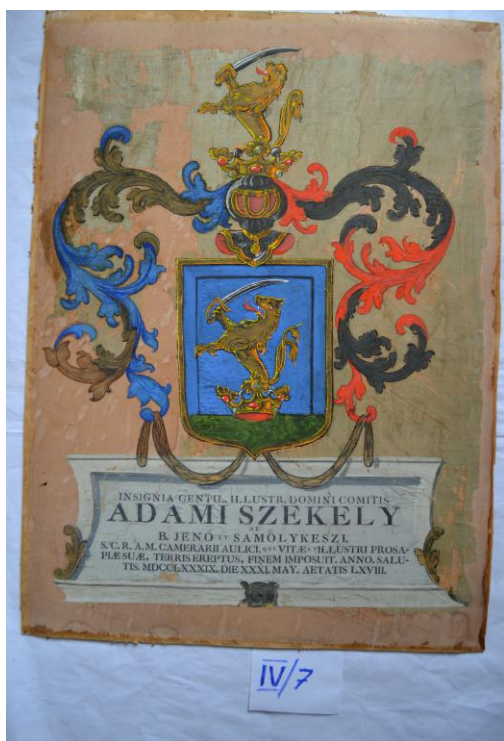


Fig. 9

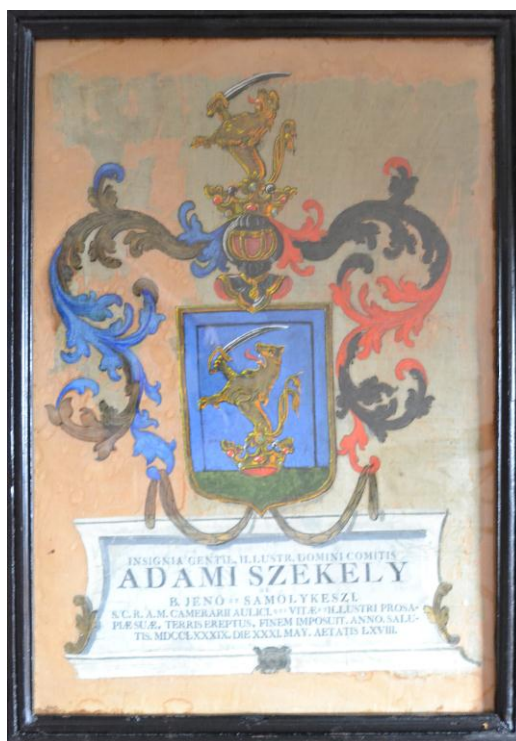
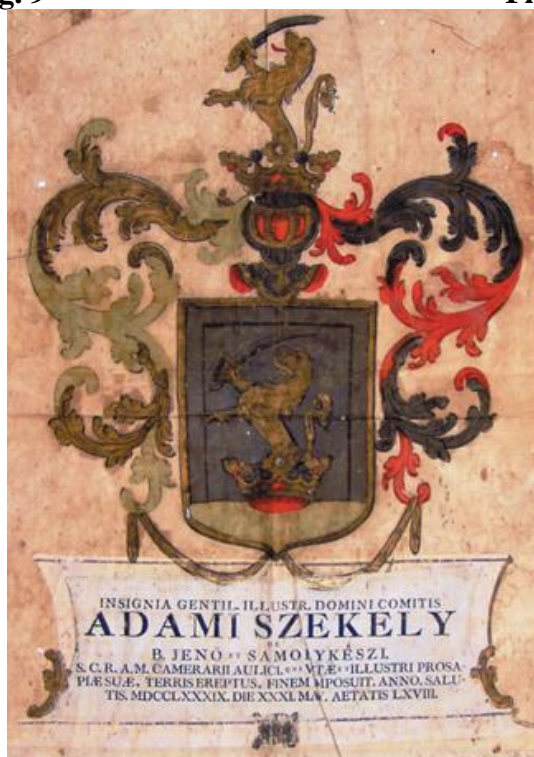


Fig. 10



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Fig. 11

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 80.