

# Study on the Restoration of the Icon Painted on Wood of Virgin with Child, Located at the Sub Piatră Hermitage, Sălciua Commune, County of Alba

*Alina Geanina CURCĂ-IONESCU*

Photographs: Alexandru OLĂNESCU

**Cuvinte cheie/keywords:** *icoane pictate pe lemn/icons painted on wood, restaurare/restoration, conservare/conservation*

**General Issues.** The icon painted on wood support, named Virgin with Child, belongs to the Sub Piatră Hermitage, Sălciua commune, county of Alba. This holy place was established between 1797 and 1798. The new holy place preserves valuable icons inherited from the old monastery, as Ioana Cristache Panait states in her book „Biserici de lemn“ (“Wooden Churches“).

The icon that is the subject of this study is painted on linden wood. The method of embedding the wood cross-pieces made of fir tree across the fibre, into the icon's borders, is specific to the Russian icons.



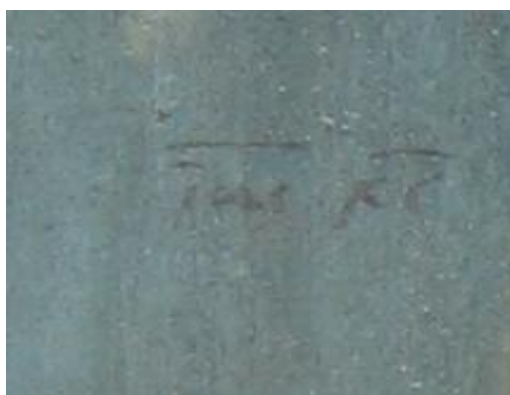


### Iconographic Description

The icon that is the subject of this study represents Virgin with Child – Eleusa. The painting is incised, fluent, with elegant tendencies in featuring certain details (countenances, cloths, inscriptions). The image is outlined on a light blue background. The upper part displays two inscriptions on both sides of the two countenances. MP to the right and OY to the left (Our Immaculate Mother).



Below the MP inscription, letters can be read as Jesus Christ, as illustrated.

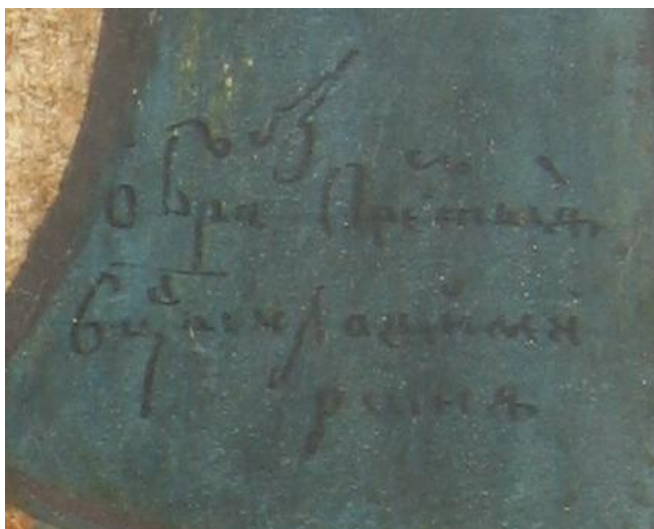


Under the initials of Jesus, above the right shoulder of the Virgin, another inscription is legible, that translated means „painted“, and there is an abbreviation next to it.



The aureole of Jesus also bears an inscription which, however, is almost imperceptible.

Below the OY inscription, a short Slavonic text is written (“The Countenance of the Immaculate – forgiver of all human sins“).



### **Aesthetic description**

The icon of the Virgin with Child is of simple construction, the countenances being outlined against a light blue background. The Virgin is dressed in a dark blue tunic. Over it She is wearing a linen scarf called maforion painted in shades of ochre and brick colours. She is wearing on her head a blue headscarf. Two little stars can be seen, one on the head of the Virgin and one on Her left shoulder. They are white styled flowers.

Child Jesus is dressed in a tunic painted in shades of ochre and brick, embellished with brown and white lines.

The nimbi performed as circular incisions are outlined in dark brown shades. The aureoles feature a background of leaf. On the blue background there are the inscriptions written in black. Black is also encountered at the border that has an outer double border in red-brick shades.

The effect of volume of the flesh tint is achieved by using white with shades of ochre for the hands and feet of Jesus, and the countenances use mainly brown shades combined with white and ochre.

The folds of the cloths are painted in shades of brown-brick and white. The sleeve of the tunic of the Virgin is blue, decorated in black lines emphasised with white.

The countenances are round, with large eyes and curved eyebrows. The painting is fluent. Touches have been carefully added for the sake of volume and detail. However, this is not the case of the hands, for which the painter used only dashes of colour. The painter used a narrow range of tempera colours.

**Description of the Object (Conservation status before restoration).**

The icon has the following size: length = 28.3-28.4; width = 23.7-23.8; thickness = 2.9-3 cm.

On the painted surface the panel presents small lacunae in the paint coating, aged and brown gloss paint make it difficult to read the image. Also, there are deposits of wax, superficial deposits of adherent and clogged dirt. Besides the lacunae in the paint coating, on the surface of the icon there are also the lacunae in the layers of paint, thus the preparation layer becoming visible. Note should be made that both the paint coating and the preparation layer are thin.

The linden wood support presents dust, superficial adherent dirt. The panel is not bent. It consists of a single board, with fir tree cross-pieces, embedded in both the upper and the lower borders.

The metal loop is mounted in the upper border.

The reverse of the icon there are gaps in the wood board and scarce xylophagous insects attack.



**Error!**



### Description of the Restoration Operations

1. mechanic superficial cleaning of the piece by dedusting by means of a soft brush;
2. disinsection by injection of Lignoprot (white spirit, tebukonazol);



3. mechanic and chemical (white spirit) removal of the wax deposits;



4. fixing the paint coating with a 6% solution of rabbit-skin glue, by means of warm press;



5. cleaning the reverse with ethyl alcohol and solution 1 (ethyl alcohol, turpentine, boiled linseed oil, ammonia, water) and mechanic cleaning;

6. removal of the Japanese leaf by dipping with warm water followed by dry dipping;



7. cleaning the paint coating consisted of moistening the deposit of dirt and gloss paint by means of a mixture of ethyl acetate and dimethylformamide;



8. afterwards, solution 1 (ethyl alcohol, turpentine, boiled linseed oil, ammonia, water) was used;

9. after the mechanic removal of the wax deposits and the removal with white spirit, after the dirt and gloss paint deposits were moistened, the latter was thinned and leveled out;

10. the orifices created by the insects and the lacunae have been covered with lute on the front of the icon after the cleaning of the paint coating;



11. egg-yolk emulsion 1:4 was used to remove the excess of lute, abrasive paper with small particles and emulsion for lute leveling;

12. the chromatic integration was performed by punctual and emulative finishing, followed by checking in UV light;

13. afterwards, the piece was varnished with gloss paint made of rosin –



dammar in 12% turpentine essence, by brushing, after warming the support up by means of IR.



*Note:* the cleaning operation was the most spectacular stage; this statement is endorsed by the attached images.