

Conservation of a presumable oriental embroidered silk wall decoration with special consideration of the problematic nature of the removal of soot deposits and splashes of paint



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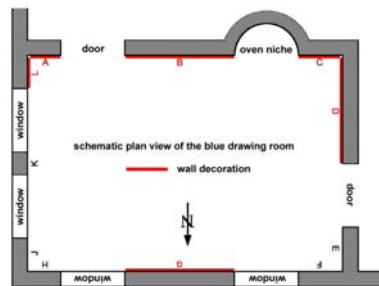


ISCR
Ministero per i Beni
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Conservazione e il Restauro

The blue drawing room at Wildenfels castle near the city of Zwickau in Saxony (Germany) contains a probably unique blue coloured silk wall, which is richly decorated with an oriental dense tambour frame embroidery for which exclusively threads of silk, silver or gilded silver were used. It shows repeating delicately drawn niche motifs which contain vases with bouquets of flowers, oil lamps and parrots. Both the embroidery and the used material are of high quality and value. Probably of Ottoman or Persian origin, it might have been the inner shell of a state tent dating from the beginning of the 18th century. Until now no other comparable piece of such high quality and extensive size (about 26 m²) is known. Therefore its art-historical significance and importance for research is undoubted.

Object history and problem definition

Until the end of the Second World War the wall decoration was in good condition, because the room was rarely used and was, with closed window-shutters, mostly kept in darkness. Furthermore, the room was almost never heated. These circumstances changed by using it as an office during the 1950's and 60's or as a storage for the city library afterwards. That led to significant mechanical damages such as crack formations and blemishes, paint splashes from repeated painting of the ceiling, and, in parts, heavy soot deposits, caused by stove heating, which both affect the legibility and seal the surface.



Schematic plan view of the blue drawing room
Graphic: Dipl.-Rest. Andreas Schulze/ Dresden)



Panels C – during cleaning



Panels C and D – before cleaning
(Photo: Dipl.-Rest. Andreas Schulze/ Dresden)

Conservation concept and treatment

After condition recording, an extensive research was done into the handling of soot-damaged textiles as well as cleaning tests on dummies. Given the limited possibilities for cleaning silk in combination with silver and due to the fact that the removal of soot requires some mechanical action, only specific methods were tested. As it was possible to reduce the soiling successfully by using small pieces of Wallmaster sponges, the cleaning method was tested on a first panel. The cleaning result finally turned out much better than ever expected. The textile could be carefully cleaned almost to the level of the formerly covered parts.



Panels C, detail – before cleaning
dirty and formerly covered parts of the textile



Panels C – after cleaning

Conservation history

In the 1950's first tests were undertaken to find a suitable solution for the cleaning of the panels. However, they only led to dissatisfying results. In 2007, the Saxonian Department of Monuments and Sights in Dresden started to cooperate with the Institute of Conservation and Restoration Science of the University of Applied Sciences Cologne/ Germany. The decoration of the wall became the (main) subject of a Diploma Thesis which target it was to find a suitable solution to clean and stabilize the panels in a way which makes it possible to show them at Wildenfels castle again.

In the meantime further pieces are going to be conserved in Dresden, while the classical shell of the room is also in treatment. The research on the wall decoration runs since its working technique seems to provide important information about this kind of embroidered textiles, which have been seldom considered in the past, the Ottoman or Persian tent culture and the reasons for their surprisingly good state of preservation.

Dipl.-Rest. (FH) Roxana Naumann • Lichtenberg • GERMANY

MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONSERVATION
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