EXPANDED SUMMARY

The restoration of the textile tabernacle of the Venerable Confraternity of Our Lady of Lampedusa: looking into the sacred

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1 Introduction

At the Catholic Church, a tabernacle or a sacrarium is the heart of the main altar, it must be in good condition to fulfill the sacred function of the Eucharist. In Rio de Janeiro, there is a rare surviving example of a sacrarium with a textile structure in the Venerable Confraternity of Our Lady of Lampadosa, located in the Church of Lampadosa. These are damask linings with trimmings, gold metallic fringes, cotton and synthetic fabrics. The ceiling was installed in 1955, and the tabernacle remained closed until 2023. This feature gives the church the distinction of housing one of the few examples of woven tabernacles in Brazil. Changes have been implemented since the new administration of the Confraternity by Provider Maurício Barros da Cruz in 2023, to emphasize the preservation of the site, thus expand the devotion of almost 300 years (Freire, 2023). The fact that the tabernacle remained unused for decades may explain its existence today. However, careful study and conservation-restoration processes were necessary. Its textile structure is divided into seven parts: the veil with a band, the lining of the base, the inner lining of the door, the two sides (left and right) topped by an arch, the back, and the lining of the door. The tabernacle is approximately 150 cm high and 100 cm wide. The corporal placed inside the tabernacle has also been restored.

2 Methodology

Interventions on objects of an active religious nature need to be in constant dialogue between the needs of worship and the professional ethics of the conservator. In this sense, the approach of this work was based on the methodology of museum conservation, respecting the temporal marks on the material with minimal intervention. The Tabernacle was initially studied from the perspective of history and material culture. We base the work on the dialogic view that objects of worship are subject to conservative treatments that do not distort their aesthetic, image-based, and religious function. In agreement with the Confraternity, all objects were restored without additions or replacement of materials, allowing their use again, following the methodol

ogy of museum conservation (Timar-Balazsy; Estop, 2020). The goal was not to make the tabernacle look new nor to create a false history (Brandi, 2014). By respecting the antiquity of the material, one was respecting the venerated Saint herself. In the left veil, however, whose lower part had been lost, the gap was filled with approximate characteristics, since the veil has a structural and spiritual protection function.

After establishing the methodological guidelines, we conducted a material study and conservation plan, which included macroscopic and microscopic photographic documentation. Then, we examined the acidity and alkalinity of the fabrics using pH tests. Utilizing a colorimetric spectrophotometer (CIE, 2014; Melgosa et al., 2001), the colors of the fabrics were measured before and after restoration to verify the effectiveness of the proposed cleanings. At the end of the initial analyses, we performed a qualitative micromycological analysis on the water stain using Stuart® in situ, which was then plated on Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA) in a petri dish. After a positive result, the slides were impregnated with Amann's Lactophenol (Lacaz et al., 2002) and observed directly under an optical microscope.

3 Conservation Status

Although the tabernacle had remained closed for several decades, it showed signs of deterioration due to use, and stains caused by contact with water through a small opening in the door. In general, the arch and the back were in better conditions, while the lower areas, such as the base and sides, showed more deposited particles and tears. The corporal of the altar was also diagnosed and restored. It had been folded producing two sharp creases, which caused the two exposed parts to darken while the protected part remained lighter. Small holes, moth droppings, and deposits of black matter were found, the latter possibly derived from candle flames and vehicle pollution. There was no damage caused by wood-eating animals found.

The trimmings and linings were joined together with wood glue. In some parts, this material formed a thick film over the metal and fabric. The areas protected

by nails had an intense gold color on the metal part, revealing the original idea of ornamentation of this tabernacle. The other areas displayed a blackish coloration. Two species of inactive fungi were detected on the veil and the body: Aspergillus niger and Aspergillus fumigatus. There were not any bacteria or other microorganisms observed.

4 The restoration process

The restoration process began with the careful removal of the textile lining, which was adhered to the wood using glue and 36 gold nails. The work began with the door, followed by the base, sides, arch and back. Considering that cardboard and glue are the main causes of the degradation of the tabernacle, the removal of these materials was a priority in the conservation treatments, and we took measures to ensure that the paper would be replaced in the future. The use of adhesives and consolidants was not a priority as a treatment to prevent the damask from coming into contact with these materials again.

Regarding the other damask parts of the tabernacle, it was decided to temporarily remove the embroidery by the meter, since much of it was peeling off. This way, more suitable separate treatments could be carried out: one for the metals and another for the fabrics. Once the quantities of adhesives had been satisfactorily removed, the fabrics were physically and chemically cleaned in four total baths with deionized water and anionic surfactant, in order to correct the acidic pH to 7.0 (neutral). After this, some stains lightened. To subdue deformations and creases without increasing tears and seams, the panels were placed on a low-suction vacuum table. The equipment itself helped to completely dry the fabrics.

The last stage consisted of planning the structure of the back that the lining would receive, given that without rear support, the fabric would be wrinkled and in direct contact with the wood. To this end, materials from the conservation area with archival quality were selected and tested. The secondary barrier material, the one that would be in direct contact with the wood, was the white polyurethane sewn on the back of the primary layer (the one that would be juxtaposed with the damask).

The fabric selected for the primary function was a beige twill dyed so as to be slightly noticeable.

5 Conclusion

The Restoration Project of the Tabernacle of the Venerable Confraternity of Our Lady of Lampadosa, in Rio de Janeiro, made it possible, for the first time, to study the textile lining of the piece, expanding the debate on its design as a “memory device” (Ferreira; Arantes, 2021). Through the analyses, we understoodd how the materials chosen for its construction tell its story, with the gold representing divine royalty and the light damask symbolizing the nobility and purity of safeguarding the instruments necessary for the Eucharist.

The state of conservation, as well as the wishes of the religious involved, guided the conservative and restorative treatments. In addition, the employees of the site received instructions on basic maintenance. The exchange of experiences with the body of the church and its faithful was enriching, and the strength and collective organization of the Confraternity allowed the preservation of the objects to take place. The resacralization of the tabernacle is expected to occur soon, thus, it will return to full use benefiting the entire community[1].

6 References

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