

# Textile Conservation in Gjirokastra Museum, Albania

Albana Leti Tota<sup>1</sup>, Ermira Shehi<sup>2</sup>

PhD Student, Department of Textile and Fashion, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Polytechnic University of  
Tirana, Albania<sup>1</sup>

Associate Professor, Department of Textile and Fashion, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Polytechnic University  
of Tirana, Albania<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Protecting the clothes and accessories that make their way into museum collection present a boost of technical problems requiring careful study and methodical procedures. Working with a costume collection opens the door to knowledge and understanding of the way of life of our forebears. Clothing is part of people's lives and communicates a range of valuable information. Costumes were not intended to be works of art. Gjirokastra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Southern Albania; a historic Ottoman influenced town built around a 13th century castle. However, in recent decades many of these traditional skills have been dying out and the Ethnographic Museum, once one of the most important in Albania, is facing huge difficulties to survive, along with many other museum

**KEYWORDS:** Collection maintenance, textile, conservation, restoration, cleaning.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gjirokastra perches on the steep side of the Drino valley overlooking an historic landscape framed by snow-capped mountains. This 'city of a thousand steps' comprises hundreds of Ottoman-style tower houses with distinctive stone roofs, wooden balconies and whitewashed stone walls. Dominated by the sheer flanks of its vast castle, Gjirokastra is a magical city with a tumultuous past. From feudal stronghold to Ottoman jewel to Italian colony, the city has known many rulers and has inspired poets, authors and artists. Known by many as the City of Stone, Gjirokastra is a developing centre for cultural heritage tourism. A walk around the network of cobbled streets that climb steeply out of the bazaar will transport you back in time. The area has a rich textile history, with much of the production of costume and textiles traditionally undertaken by women. Costume displays in room settings need to be cleaned as though they are historic interiors. The museum's group undertakes to clean the museum site but some cleaning activities, especially of object stores, are best integrated into the collection care program.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this project the groups were divided in different processes. The groups that were responsible for the storage, where the Ethnographic Museum's fund is preserved, focused on cleaning up and putting in order the storage space. With this in mind, the group suggested the following restoration techniques:

1. Cleaning of textiles as the best way for their conservation; a vacuum cleaner to remove dirt not firmly encrusted in the fabric, which would then be treated with distilled water with no detergents; alcohol to be applied to the silver threads to remove tarnish; the use of a closely stitched net seam to repair the most threadbare parts of the dress; the inspection of pest activity, preparing the exhibition mount, and creation of padded hanger for costumes.
2. Pest activity identification
3. Preparing the exhibition mount, that prevents the object to come in contact with the wall
4. A padded hanger for costumes. Man dress (waist coat) with mengore Korca

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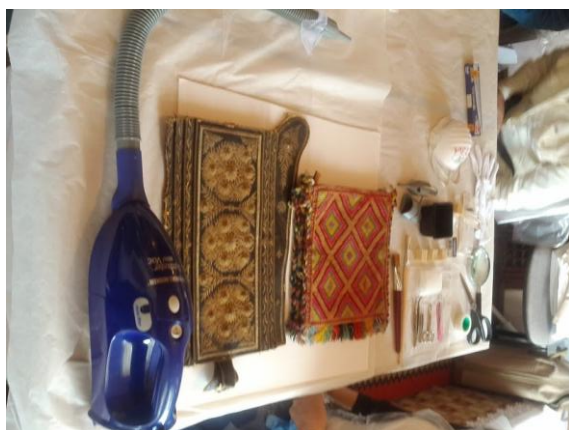
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## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Although conservation and restoration treatment can strengthen damaged objects and mask their problems very well, it is not able to make them brand new and bring back all their initial features and original mechanical strength. During the work with museum staff, as it was shown in Figure 1(a, b) vacuuming techniques were discussed and utilized. Textiles were vacuumed on top of a clean table surface covered with plastic (polyethylene). The first step in the vacuuming procedure is to place the nylon screening over the textile on the area that is to be vacuumed. Vacuuming textiles is a common conservation procedure and the best method for keeping textiles clean. In this case, six months after the textiles had been vacuumed and stored properly, their condition and appearance had improved. New, light, metallic shelves were installed; textiles were packed with care and placed on the new shelves. The dining room was in need of an intervention, not only in cleaning, but also in preventing further damages caused by humidity and water that got in through the problematic roof. All of carpets and sitting places were taken off and cleaned and underneath them TYPEK materials were placed, to prevent damages from humidity and allows for ventilation. Sergeant, shelves for dishes, were cleaned, organized and the dishes, which were cleaned with care, were put back on.

### Equipment and Tools for cleaning of textiles as the best way for their conservation

- sewing tools (scissors, pins, needles) and threads making dust-covers, sewing on labels
- iron and ironing board
- gloves
- dust-covers
- cylinder type vacuum cleaner with cleaning stores and displays adjustable suction
- magnifiers glass (loupe), microscope
- papers and boards,
- synthetic vacuum brush



a)



b)

**Figure 1.** Equipment and tools of the cleaning process of textiles

The figure 1 shows the basic tools for space cleaning is the adjustable suction, cylinder-type vacuum cleaner and synthetic brush.

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**Figure 2.** Pest activity identification

Figure 2 (a, b) shows the identification and the evidence of pest activity waist coat and apron. The evidence of pest activity, the vacuum-cleaner bags were removed after each use, sealed in a polythene bag and disposed of with a range of nozzles and soft brushes.

The first stage of restoration of- that fabrics - was then complete. It remained to restore the original shape of the garments by constructing a hooped petticoat (farthingale). This entailed an elaborate research process. Participants that worked on the exhibition were responsible for conservation of and organizing the objects that are showcased at the museum, preparing the exhibition mount, which prevents the object to come in contact with the wall, and their correct exhibition.



**Figure 3.** Covering the mount

In the figure 3 was shown the preparing the exhibition mount, that prevents the object to come in contact with the wall As it is shown in this figure 3 (a) the material used for covering the mount is an unbleached, un dyed cotton fabric.

After that the group worked on making a padded hanger for costumes. Man dress (waist coat) with mengore Korca. Apart from very heavy or fragile items, many garments can be stored on padded hangers. Padded hangers are used for hanging costume such as shirts, bodices and dresses. Other items such as trousers or skirts need additional support. It is

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important to remember that by ensuring an even distribution of weight on the hanger, you will be giving the item maximum support while it is hanging in storage. Padded coat-hangers are quite simple to make.

### Equipment and Tools:

- a coat-hanger—it should be strong and made of either wood or plastic. Wire hangers are not suitable. The size of the coat-hanger it must be appropriate for the garment to be hung. For example, don't use a large coat hanger for a child's garment. The hanger can be cut down to the appropriate size if necessary
- Fabric - all fabrics used to cover the hanger must be washed before use. White or unbleached fabrics are preferred. Unbleached calico or white/cream, stretch-cotton fabrics are ideal
- dust-cover
- thread
- Needle and scissors.

Place layers of Dust polyester wadding over the hanger, padding it to the same width as the shoulders of the garment. The hanger should be padded to suit the shape of the garment; for example, if the garment has sloping shoulders make the padding to match. The Dust may need to be hand-stitched to hold it in place.



**Figure 4.** A padded hanger for costumes

Figure 4 illustrates the padded hanger for costumes and how the hanger should be padded to suit the shape of the garment.

Once the padding was in place, it was covered the dust with stretch-cotton fabric to provide a smooth surface on which to rest the garment.

Finally, the instructors recommended making covers for each garment to protect them from dust. The best materials for making covers for hanging garments are clean, washed cotton, for example, old cotton sheets or calico.

It recommends to not using plastics and synthetic fabrics as covers. A garment stored in this type of cover can't breathe and may rot. The exception to this rule is Tyvek, which is a specially made polyethylene fabric which can be used because it allows textiles to breathe. It is best practice to deep-clean storage rooms and display galleries at least once a year this involves vacuum cleaning the spaces under and behind furniture.



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**Figure 5.** Putting in order the storage space

Figure 5 demonstrated the work done for storing the costumes and textiles in an appropriate way.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This paper is focused on the preservation and the maintenance of Gjirokastra museum collections. It shows that information and some steps which are fundamental to achieving this. Such information must be based on values; it must serve objectives; and it must be useful to the people doing the work. Museum collections everywhere are large and growing larger. It is a primary function of museums to develop and add to collections, but it is also necessary to take care of them time to time.

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