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# The Movable Heritage of Drăghia

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and Loreley-Diana Jianu*

## Abstract

The movable heritage of the Drăghia village, Maramureș County, is still around today thanks to a handful of people who diligently tended to the aged objects forsaken long ago. The old wooden church, built in 1706, is today a museum in which some of the age-old ritual objects, as well as other type of objects, are conserved. The decorations of the church, an important aspect over time, include various objects which today can be considered movable heritage. In this regard, the icons or paintings were highlighted by decorating them with decorative towels, woven by the village's women. Other cloths, rugs and mats were also used for „dressing” the church. We will open the list of movable heritage objects with the key to the church, and tell its over 300-years old story. The icons, religious books, royal doors, banners, thurible, the two choir pews, the church bells, and the priest robes will complete our study. On the other hand, you can find an old shirt, a towel, a bench or some other object kept out of respect for their ancestors in almost every house in the village. The Radu families have impressive collections, having establishes a so-called personal museum.

**Keywords:** movable heritage, church, religious books, key, icons, table cloth

## 1. Introduction

Patrimonial artifacts of Drăghia Village, Maramureș county, exist today only through the benevolence of some people that are aware of their value and managed to take care of their family's heritage until today, despite the modernity taking over [1].

The village's church, built in 1706, has long developed into a museum, where one can have a glimpse of various objects used in old Christian rituals. Embellishment of churches was an important aspect in the old days. The icons and the paintings were framed and exposed with special handwoven textiles made by the women of the village. In the same time, carpets and other types of local made textiles were used for covering the floors or furniture in the church. Beside the church, almost in every house one can still find an old traditional shirt (ie), a hemp towel, a bench or several other objects kept out of respect for their ancestors' tradition. Most impressive are the collections coming from Radu family and Blenche family, that managed to create a small private museum.

The key, the icons, the old religious books, the altar doors, the church' flags, the censer, the two lecterns, the bells or the priest clothing will be part of our study.

## 2. The key

The first object in the series of patrimonial objects presented herein is the key of the wooden churches' front door. We'll take a moment to tell the 300 years key story.

The key from the old church is a specific one for the area. It is a long iron key, with a fixed part of 39 cm and a mobile part of 10 cm, acting upon a wooden closing system. An encrusted 19 cm wooden beam is set in motion by the key, therefore blocking the door. A mechanism that works flawless for more than 300 years (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.**  
*The key.*

### 3. The doors

The main entry door in the church is made out of fir tree. Impressive about it is the painting of Michael Archangel on the exterior side. It is an advanced damaged



**Figure 2.**  
*The indoor door.*



painting, almost entirely faded, so one can solely see the contour of the eyes, the aura and the wings. Being outside, throughout the years, the meteorological phenomena took their toll on the majestic painting.

The wooden door inside the church marks the passage between naos and pronaos and it is an element that enriches, through its artistic value, the local patrimony [2]. It is made out of fir tree and painted on 4 levels by the local masters of that time. The dimensions are about 87/162 cm, with a depth of 6 cm. In the two sections of the superior level, we can see the painting of two saints, a man with a cross in his hands and a woman holding a twig (**Figure 2**).

The two characters have no inscription to reveal their identity. In symmetry, on the inferior level, we can see two identical paintings of the tree of life, with green leaves, coming out of a traditional pot. The frame that surrounds the paintings is blue and embellished with iron nails with very thick heads. The nails have a functional role (to sustain the wood elements that make the door) while giving great esthetic pleasure, through their order and design. In the middle of the door frame there is a simple iron handle, allowing for door opening. The handle is simple yet its shape and execution creates a beautiful ornament. The door jamb is painted in blue with black tulip motif all around (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3.**  
*Framed around the entrance.*



There is a solid wood doorstep as a part of the doorframe. The door was inserted in the doorframe after the church was constructed and it is framed around the entrance with several symbols often encountered in Transylvanian churches, such as rosettes, the seed of life, the quarter moon motif or Woolf teeth motif, having a protective role, but also the honeycomb motif within the rosette [3]. These symbols are in part covered by the doorjamb. On the inside, facing the naos, the door is unpainted. Might be because that is a side that never gets to be seen or just for the simplicity of the naos.

The doors that make the passing from naos to altar are attractive through their painting. We can see here the 4 evangelists on the lower side, and on the upper side the Annunciation Day (**Figure 4**).

The inscription marks the years 1773 and 1797, most likely indicating the time interval in which the altar was built. The Cyrillic inscription Ячасть помань а8 плътьть Тома Опришь шй соаца са Марие шй [...], translated roughly as “1797 gift



**Figure 4.**  
*The doors that make the passing from naos to altar (royal doors).*

made by Toma Opreș and his wife Marie with their sons Filip and Ștefan and sister Teodora Anisia. Painted by Petre”, withstand the passage of time, remaining visible until this day. This inscription talks about the painter Petre from Preluca (his work can be recognized in various other churches in the area) [3] and the family that financially supported the work.

These doors were opened by many pilgrims and locals throughout the years and have collected the energy, good thoughts, prayers and hopes of all those that stepped in.

#### 4. The lecterns

The lecterns, made out of fir tree wood, are the costume made, containing in one piece the chairs where the singers stay and a desk for supporting the books of the singer. They are and are positioned on each side of the iconostasis, in the naos. Above each lectern there is a small window, so that the light strategically falls on the singer's book (the church is not and has never had indoor electricity). The age of the lecterns can be established according to the painting on them. Two characters, a man and a woman, with a Latin inscription above, are painted on the left side of the iconostasis (**Figure 5**).



**Figure 5.**  
*The lectern.*

All other inscriptions in the church are in Cyrillic alphabet, therefore this Latin inscription shows us that the lecterns painting is more recent. The text, “this lectern paid by me, Cosma Costan and the wife ...” helps us date the donation through the parish registers. According to this, Cosma Costan and his wife, Sofia Rus, from the neighboring village Coroieni, appear in the parish registers of civil status as parents at the marriage of their daughter Terezia, being 45 and 40 years old [4]. We can therefore confirm that the church donation happened around the middle of the XIX century. The second lectern is painted in brown. There are traces showing that it formerly had an intricate painting, but at a later time, allegedly with the intention to be renewed, was covered with brown oil paint. Each of the lecterns has leather belts with



buckles on the sides, to maintain in a vertical position the support of the banners. The original blue painting is still visible under the belt of the left lectern (**Figure 6**).



**Figure 6.**  
*The leather belts with bucles.*

## 5. The religious books

Most of the cult books belonging to the church are kept in the Museum of History, since 1977. Today we can find only two of these books under the churches roof, namely the Anthology (Antologhionul) and Cazania.

In the old days, the priests had only manuscripts for their religious rituals. Following the Guttenberg invention, books in Cyrillic language started to appear in the area. Our ancestors had a strong religious conscientious - we see this through the fact that they bought books for their churches, very expensive back then, some of the prices being as much as a good pair of horses.

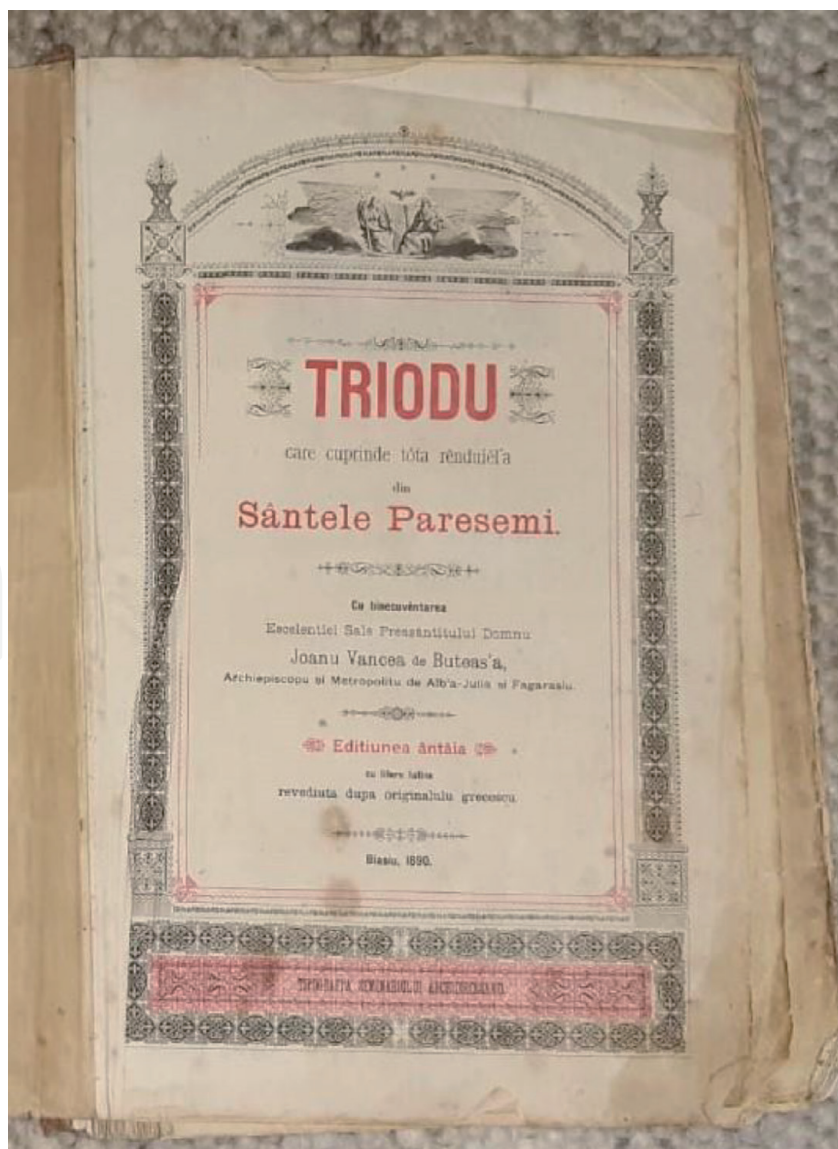
- Octoih, Bucharest, 1730
- Cazanie or Kiriodromion, 1855 (belonging today to the church)



- Evanghelic, Blaj, 1765
- Apostol, Blaj, 1767
- Penticostarion, Blaj, 1768
- Strașnic, Blaj, 1773
- Antologhion, Blaj, 1797 (belonging today to the church)
- Triodion, Blaj, 1800 (**Figure 7**).

The Strașnic from Blaj was bought in 1841 with village collected money by Corui Petru, during the period when Ilieș Toader was the main singer. The money paid was 15 zlots (foreign currency).

The Triodion from Blaj was printed in 1800. The writings “This holy book belongs to Drăghia church, bought by Pop Iosif, husband of much respected Tarța Irina, in the memory of their ancestors. January 1st, 1811.” Whoever will steal it or give it away from this holy church, to be un-blessed by the 318 holy priests.” can be found on its cover. On the cover of Antologhion is written: “belonged to Gherman

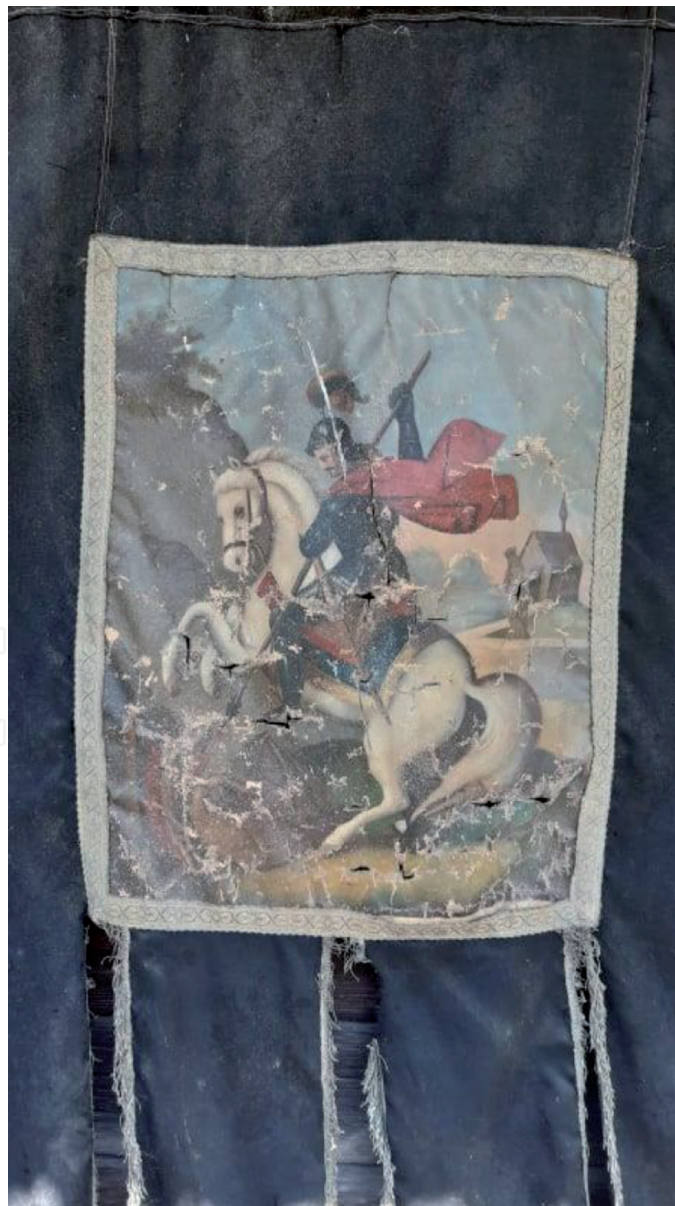


**Figure 7.**  
*The Triod book from Blaj.*

Simion, singer in Rohia, which gave it to the priest Popa Ioan from Poiana Porcului, for 24 vonași” this priest later brought the book in Drăghia’s church. The Apostol book, from Blaj, was a „gift of the lordly mercy of the Principe Iacob Anton, the vicar of Făgăraș episcopacy, for Drăghia church”, as mentioned on the cover. In 1922, Radu Constantin buys the necessary Latin books, with the equivalent price of a cow.

## **6. The banners**

The banners (locally named prapor) are religious items for processions or other solemn gatherings. They represent the divine power and are perceived as a parental protection which gives hope for people on this life on Earth. They are the symbol of a power army led by Christ and had the power to activate the community, in the different events that they were used. In the old church in Drăghia we can find two pairs of banners, a black pair and a dark-red one. The paintings on them represent faces of saints or scenes from Jesus’s life. They are having the following components, from the top down: a wooden a piece of rectangular thick fabric on the lower side



**Figure 8.**  
*The banner painted with Saint George.*



being split in 3 parts and ornate with fringe, hanging from a thin wooden beam. In the middle of the banner, on both sides, features a 55x45 cm painting.

One of the black banners (whole size 79x120 cm) has the painting of Saint George on the horse, killing the dragon on the one side and the painting of Saint Archdeacon Stefan (the martyr killed with stones) holding a censer in his hand, on the other side (**Figure 8**).

The second black banner features the painted image of Saint Nicholas one side and the image of Saint Michael the Archangel on the other.

One of the red banners (74x145 cm in dimension) features the paintings of Annunciation and Saint Anne with Virgin Mary holding a child in her arms, while the second red banner is incomplete, the painting missing from the fabric frame.

## 7. The censers

In the church collection we can find also two old censers, undated. The censer is a ritualist artifact, made of metal and hanging in chains, for fumigation with frankincense (**Figure 9**).



**Figure 9.**  
*Two old censers.*



There are particular moments in the liturgy when the priest uses this, going around the altar and church. The censers are made out of brass and have specific ornamentations.

## 8. The priest clothes

Other valuable objects belonging to the church are the priest clothes: one long black robe (reverend) and a brown color vestment article, embroidered with crosses (patrafir), dating back since 1950, are worth mentioning (**Figure 10**).



**Figure 10.**  
*Long black coat (reverend) and another vestment (patrafir).*

Another patrafir, a long vestment article that is often hanged around the priest neck during religious ceremonies (the length is about 1.30 cm) is kept





**Figure 11.**  
*Vestment (patrafir).*

in the church. Is made of natural silk with very exceptional artwork featuring colorful flowers (**Figure 11**).

The vestment's age has not been assessed, but judging by the unique style (not at all common today), and by its degrading state, we can assume it dates back to the XIX century.

## 9. The icons

The icons belonging to the wooden church of Drăghia are today at the History Museum [5]. They were picked up together with the cult books in

1977. All that is left in the church today in the icon from the holy table, the altar table, representing a portrait of Mary, Jesus and Josef. It is made in oil on canvas, with a beautiful and simple wood frame [6]. As a style it follows a renaissance approach, the portraits are very realistic, and was probably brought in the church when Greek- Catholics religion dominated in the area (**Figure 12**).



**Figure 12.**  
*The icon from holy table.*

The iconostasis presents on the lower level 3 frames made out for the most valuable icons belonging to the church, paintings that today sit in the History Museum: in the North, Saint Nicholas, in the middle Virgin Mary



and baby Jesus, with guardian angels, in the South Archangel Michael, the protector of the church (**Figure 13**).



**Figure 13.**  
*Virgin Mary and baby Jesus (archive photo) [7].*

**10. The table cloth**

There are patrimonial objects of exceptional value in the area, apart from those belonging to the church. One of these objects is a table cloth belonging to a family in Baba Village, inherited from the grandmother of the family, while the original owner remains lost in time (**Figure 14**).



**Figure 14.**  
*Table cloth.*

It is a table cloth with a unique elegance, but what makes it particularly priceless is the handmade embroidery featuring a metaphor of the Universe. The execution, with a highly bourgeois appearance for a peasant family, is unquestionably not a typical rustic, country-side embroidery, but more likely coming from the era of Hungarian dominance. The fabric of the usual hemp textile used in the area, it is very delicate and silky, presenting a more shadowy white than the pure crispy white we normally see in peasant houses. The embroidery work is of particular interest. It is associated with Sunday: Sunday as a state of being, when the air is still and there are less worries floating around, as a popular hearsay in the area, but also with Sunday lunch, most special lunch of the week. The decorative embroidery is also made in white, discrete, unlike peasants' models which are embroidered with vivid colors. One can easily get lost in the embroidery like in a symbolic journey. A representation of the Sun is featured in the middle of the cloth, surrounded by a Latin liturgic quote "Benedictus est. Domine in firmamento coeli" (tr. Blessed is the Lord to shine). The quote encircles the Sun, followed by the Moon and stars on a secondary plan. What is interesting here, beyond the esthetic beauty and the level of the craft, is the mix between the very canonic words and the images, coming rather from a laic world, representing the nature and the power of nature. God is represented by the universe, the entire existence. The center - our center - is the Sun. The second level of the work is represented by the four directions, each with its symbol - a mythical animal of power: the elephant, the eagle, the bull and the crane, surrounded by other natural elements and power of winds, like the Zephyr wind, arranged in symmetry. Overall, the construction and symmetry of the embroidery follows a mandala principle, and on different levels more quotes in Latin are introduced, for the grace of the Lord and virgin Mary. The richness of symbolistic makes it new every time one sets eyes on it and what invites for further contemplation is the fact that it seems unfinished. There are missing spots in its perfect symmetry where one can only imagine what elements should be added to close the circle; which is a wise concern: things do not have to be perfectly finished, the possibility of a continuity should exist, like in the wabi-sabi oriental tradition. In an ideal situation, 100 or more years ago, in the middle of this table, where sun is represented, a candleholder would mark the lunch occasion. Perhaps the candleholder would be the very same recovered in the same village, from the church, during some modernizing works, and abandoned in a deposit. The candleholder is not particularly valuable in itself, it is a humble object from an unpretentious material, probably coming from the old wooden church, and did not pass the beauty & shiny conditions imposed by the new tendencies in ecclesiastic objects: it is too modest.

But together with the table cloth they form a dynamic duo of simplicity, mysticism and gentleness, a benediction for the food and all those that worked for it and enjoy it.

## 11. The dowry coffer

The dowry coffer is a mandatory must-have in any traditional Transylvanian house (**Figure 15**).

This was originally designed for keeping the clothing and all the textiles that belonged to the dowry of the girls when they got married. It was a symbol of the financial power, the status of the family, but also of the talent and craft of the bride. The dowry chest was also an armoire so it had a central role in the house, hence the 3 main functions of the dowry chest: storage, furniture and ritualistic object. Most likely, originally it was a home-made object which later grew to be more sophisticated and special artisans had to work on it [8].





**Figure 15.**  
*The dowry coffer.*

We'll go on with a dowry coffer from Drăghia village and its story. Today, the chest belongs to the Radu family, and it is inherited from a female ancestor in this family that married Radu Constantin from Drăghia (**Figure 16**).

The young girl came from another county, more than 100 years ago, from Dobrocina on Someș, the largest river in the area. Together with properties and animals, she brought also this chest. Inside the chest it is a lateral pocket where Ruxandra, the young girl, kept papers and other small objects. On the inside of the chest lid, she stuck pictures of her family. Every time she'd get homesick, she opened the chest to look at picture. On top of the chest, she kept pillows and other items. We can say that the dowry coffer is a continuation, an appendix of the bride. So many times, she opened it and took care of her personal items. She took care of the chest with such a warm heart, it was after all a silent witness of her life far away from home. Throughout the years it gathered all her memories and speaks to us today about the beautiful Ruxandra.

Most common objects that we can find in almost every house are the traditional towels (*ștergare*), that are not particularly used as towels, but rather as decorative items. They are rectangular piece of hemp cloth, sometimes embroidered with





**Figure 16.**  
*The family story in dowry coffer.*

traditional patters or fringed at the edges. As decoration, they are placed above the icons or ornamental plates, to form wings-like accessories. Usually, they are made out of hemp, woven on the loom in a traditional manner. As a model, we present the towel belonging to Maria Rus, from Gâlgău Village, Sălaj county. She married in a village neighboring Drăghia, to where she brought, as dowry, various textiles. This particular towel is decorated with flowers in a vase. The embroidery, that took many weeks to be completed, represent a vivid representation of fresh flowers from the garden that have just been picked and set the vase. The towel is part of the private collection of Radu family from Drăghia.

Other not-to-miss objects in a local family are the pillow cases. They are entirely made from hemp, hand-woven on the loom, and sometimes later even cotton. But mostly hemp, because country-side used to be bountiful in hemp plantations and women were highly specialized in working with hemp. The embroidery is usually set in the middle part of the large piece of hemp, with various motifs: flowers, animals or geometric shapes. These pillow cases had a more decorative that practical purpose. On the other hand, the wealth of a family could be deduced from the number of pillows you could see in the house.

## 12. Conclusion

In terms of artifacts, known today as patrimonial artifacts, we try to recover and conserve them from forgotten places, yet the loss is major. Families who had/have such artifacts as family heirlooms usually perceived their pragmatic utility and used them till exhaustion, later replacing them with modern and upgraded alternatives. Moreover, at certain moments in time, they lost their purpose in the modern day-to-day economy, so they went out of usage. Of course, the new objects that replace them, work on the efficiency principle, an efficiency not necessarily backed up by quality or the emotion of the contact. A plastic bucket is certainly easier to use and to manipulate than a wooden or copper one. But following this transition, not only the artisanal objects disappear, but also the craft involved in their making, and along with the craft, the science and philosophy behind it. Ultimately the water kept in copper or the brandy kept in glass covered in wickerwork (to protect from light and maintain a steady temperature), the fruits macerating in wooden barrels, the cheese aging in oak - in themselves, are better for our health and reflect on a more sophisticated level, an upper stage of taste education.

Patrimony is not just the object in itself, the object is perishable and needs to be replaced regularly, but it is about the entire complexity that allows its continuation. Patrimonial conservation, more than valuing the objects in themselves, is about valuing the craft, the craftsman, the ones that know and do. Craft, handmade objects are expensive today, precisely because of the scarcity of the craft and our lack of willingness to pay for their time and their knowledge, gained also in time. We find cheaper, more efficient ways. Regardless of the perspective we look at things, patrimonial conservation is about respect for time and knowledge gained in time.

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