

EXPANDED SUMMARY

“Cápiti hujus antístitis”:

*safeguarding three mitres from the Archdiocese of
Belém*

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Introduction

This article discusses the historical, liturgical, and conservationist analysis of three mitres from the collection of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Belém. These items, used in episcopal ceremonies by archbishop Dom Alberto Gaudêncio Ramos, hold profound religious and cultural significance for the Catholic Church in the Amazon region. The study focuses on their symbolic importance, the suboptimal conditions of their preservation, and strategies for ensuring their conservation.

The Mitre and the Catholic Church in the Amazon

Mitres are liturgical insignias symbolizing the spiritual authority of bishops. Crafted of two pieces sewn laterally and open at the top, they form a pointed structure that represents the union of the two biblical testaments in Christ. These items feature ornamental details such as goldwork embroidery, gemstones, and *infulae* (fabric bands hanging at the back). Beyond their aesthetic function, they carry theological meanings that reinforce the bishop's leadership and spiritual guidance role in his community.

The analysis focuses on three specific mitres: two of the “pretiosa” type, richly decorated and used in solemn celebrations, and one “auriphrygiata”, simpler and intended for sacramental ceremonies. These items were used by Dom Alberto Gaudêncio Ramos, one of the most influential religious leaders in the Amazon region, during his tenure as bishop and archbishop. The research also explores the symbolism of the decorative elements of the mitres, such as the use of wheat, flowers, and the Christian symbol Chi-Rho (XP), which evoke abundance, hope, and divine glory.

The study highlights the role of Dom Alberto Gaudêncio Ramos, ordained bishop in 1949, as a central figure in the history of the Archdiocese of Belém. Born in the region, he dedicated his life to the Church, marking his trajectory with significant religious and cultural contributions. His episcopal ordination, held at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Belém, was a major event filled with rituals and symbolism that

reinforced the mitres' role as insignias of power and consecration. One such mitres, described in this study, was used in this ceremony, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Installation of Dom Alberto Ramos as bishop of Amazonas



Source: Ramos, José Pereira. Dom Alberto: the shepherd of the Amazon. Belém: FCPTN, 2006, p. 78.

The history of the mitres is also linked to the Catholic Church's expansion in the Amazon, dating back to the creation of the Diocese of Pará in 1719. This historical context provides insight into the patrimonial value of the mitres, not only as liturgical items but as testaments of the Church's presence and influence in the region's cultural formation.

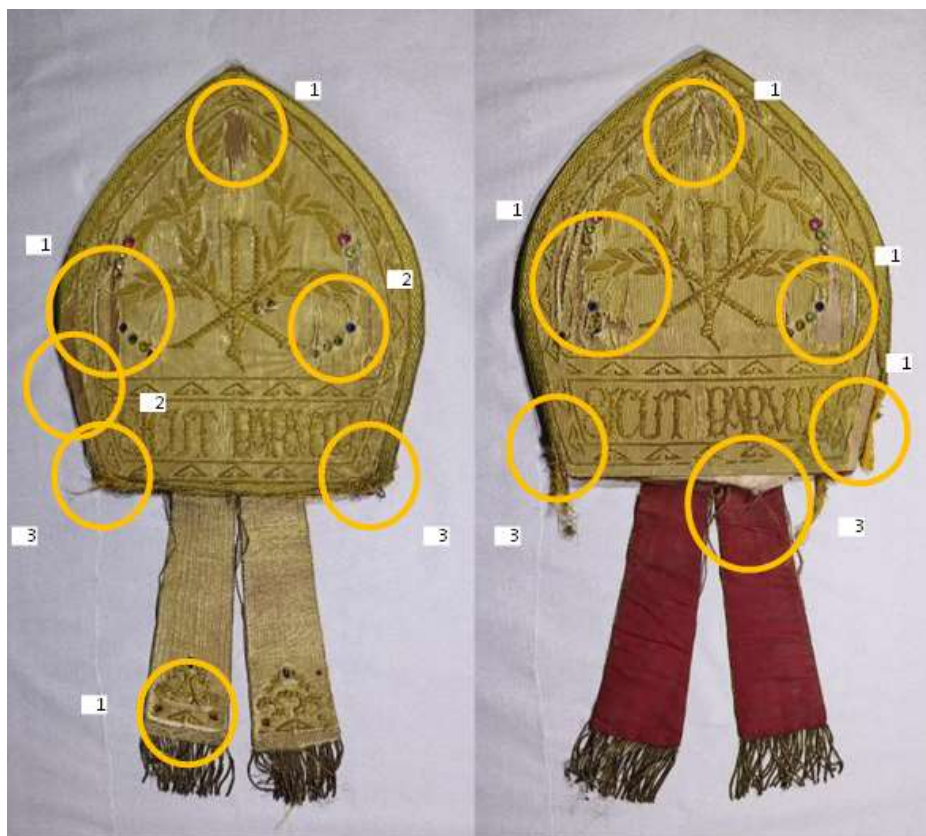
The Mitre and the Catholic Church in the Amazon

The Amazon's climatic conditions, characterized by high humidity and temperature, pose a significant challenge to preserving textile artifacts like mitres. Currently, these items are stored in a wooden cabinet, exposed to a relative humidity of 70.5% and an average temperature of 30°C. These factors contribute to the

deterioration of the fabric, goldwork embroidery, and gemstones, with damages such as acidification, oxidation, and fiber weakening.

In the mitre 1, shown in Figure 2, areas marked as “1” indicate gaps caused by the acidification of the paper support that shapes the mitre, leading to fabric fiber degradation. Areas marked as “2” show oxidation in sections of the golden braid, weakening and breaking the threads. This oxidation process is also evident throughout the goldwork embroidery, which has lost much of its golden shine. Area “3” highlights seam ruptures and significant loss of the finishing golden braid. These physical and chemical processes are directly linked to the storage location's relative humidity and temperature conditions.

Figure 2 - Damages in mitre 1



Source: Photograph Ida Hamoy, n.d., Episcopal mitre, fabric with embroidery and golden fringes. Collection of the Archdiocese of Belém, 2024.

In mitre 2, presented in Figure 3, the damages resemble those of mitre 1, with an additional issue labeled as “4”, indicating a tear in the lining fabric of the infulae, caused by improper folding during storage.

Figure 3 - Damages in mitre 2



Source: Photography Ida Hamoy n.d., episcopal mitre, fabric with embroidery and golden fringes. Collection of the Archdiocese of Belém, 2024.

The mitre 3 exhibits fabric thread abrasion, likely caused by friction with other materials. The edges of all three mitres are fragile, with poor adhesion in the embroidery parts, risking thread breakage and detachment. Accumulated dust and dirt is also evident. These mitres are considered in fair condition but exhibit significant vulnerabilities caused by various factors, including elevated temperature and humidity as well as inadequate handling and storage.

Preventive Conservation Strategies

Preventive conservation requires a continuous commitment to regular inspections and practices that avoid exposing items to degrading agents, such as intense light and drastic temperature fluctuations. Among the suggested strategies are strict control of temperature and humidity, the use of inert materials for storage, and regular cleaning using non-invasive methods, such as soft brushes and low-power vacuum cleaners. These measures aim to extend the mitres' lifespan, preserving their physical integrity and symbolic value.

The study highlights the creation of a small museum in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Belém as an initial step in safeguarding the religious collection, including the mitres. This space serves as a starting point for the musealization of the pieces, promoting their preservation, research, and appreciation. Musealization is seen as an opportunity to expand public access to these items, reinforcing their role as historical and cultural testimonies.

Conclusion

The article concludes that conserving the mitres from the Metropolitan Cathedral of Belém is an urgent and multifaceted task requiring integrated actions in preservation, research, and public awareness. The detailed analysis of these items revealed not only their aesthetic and symbolic richness but also the challenges involved in ensuring their longevity in an adverse environment.

The preservation of the mitres extends beyond preventive physical care. It also encompasses educational initiatives as a way to keep the history of the Catholic Church in the Amazon alive, celebrating its contribution to regional culture and strengthening ties between the past and the present. Therefore, conserving these insignias is not only a technical responsibility but also a commitment to the memory

and identity of a community, with the potential to inspire future preservation and research initiatives focused on cultural heritage conservation¹.

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