

Editorial

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Reflections on the preservation and conservation of sacred vestments in Brazil: technical, historical, and museological aspects

Traditional museum institutions in Brazil record and store clothing, accessories, and other fabric objects in their technical reserves, such as ethnographic museums with their indigenous and ancient society artifacts. However, with regard to collections of sacred textiles, especially artifacts bearing religious images, procedures for their preservation and conservation are still in their infancy.

Based on the thesis research entitled "Clothing and Images: identity functions of the mantles of Our Lady of Aparecida — origins and trajectories in the decades from 1940 to 1960" (MOREIRA, 2021), a major gap was detected with regard to the clothing of the original sculpture of Brazil's patron saint. Only three cloaks of the Virgin Aparecida were found, kept in the Museum of the Basilica of Aparecida, in Aparecida (SP).

Despite the great care taken with the Aparecida Museum collection, observed during Fuviane Galdino Moreira's thesis research, completed in 2021, it was found by the technical team at the National Shrine itself that, for a long time, there was a lack of awareness about the value of this type of textile and sacred artifact, as well as the practices of inventorying, indexing, and preventive conservation of collections of fabric garments from religious sculptures, with emphasis on the garments of Our Lady of Aparecida herself. Other types of cultural assets have been legitimized and widely disseminated throughout history and captured in museum collections and arts education, including clothing: their preservation and conservation.

During the research for the aforementioned thesis (MOREIRA, 2021), it was also concluded that, among the patron saints of the states of this country, there are other sculptures with textile garments, in addition to the aforementioned national patron saint, Our Lady of Aparecida, originally made of terracotta. There are state patron saints made of plaster; carved in the round; and terracotta, polychromed, with

fabric clothing additions. But it was in the state of Espírito Santo that we identified a patron saint whose image is dressed (MOREIRA, 2017). Dating back to the 16th century, Our Lady of Penha has a rich collection of fabric garments, probably from the 20th and 21st centuries, stored in the technical reserve of the Museum of the Convent of Our Lady of Penha, in Vila Velha (ES).

Regarding clothing images, professor and researcher Maria Regina Emery Quites (2006, p. 33) discusses the marginalization of this sculptural category, which is often relegated to the background and considered a minor art form. This may explain why many researchers and professionals in the field are unaware of the cultural and historical significance of textile collections depicting religious imagery.

As for the patron saint of Espírito Santo, the museum that houses her collection was inaugurated on December 12, 2000, located in the annex of the Room of Miracles at the Convent of Penha. During the process of creating the collection, liturgical objects and vestments were selected, including images of saints and vestments worn by priests during Mass (PEREIRA, 2000).

Access to the Espírito Santo Sanctuary collection—through the mediation of volunteer Maria Célia Dalvi Brunelli Sales, initially with Friar Paulo Roberto Pereira, and later with the consent of Friar Djalmo Funck – led researchers and conservators Carolina Morgado Pereira and Fuviane Galdino Moreira to develop the project “Inventory and preventive conservation of textile garments from the sculpture collection of the Convento da Penha, in Vila Velha, Espírito Santo.” This project, proposed by the Historical and Geographical Institute of Vila Velha (Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Vila Velha - IHGVV), was submitted and approved by public notice 06/2022 – Selection of projects for the preservation and enhancement of the Cultural Heritage of ES, by the State Secretariat of Culture of Espírito Santo (Secult–ES), and completed in 2024.

Upon examining the textile pieces that were not properly inventoried and stored at the Convento da Penha in Vila Velha, Espírito Santo, it became clear that a professional specializing in clothing and preventive conservation was needed to increase the lifespan of the textile objects, prevent damage, and maintain their stability. To this end, specialist Carolina Morgado Pereira joined the project's multidisciplinary team and provided guidance to the museum and conservation assistants.

O trabalho de orientação realizado por essa pesquisadora e conservadora

têxtil, Carolina Morgado Pereira, é resultado de sua trajetória profissional, inicialmente na graduação, quando trabalhou no Centro de Referência Têxtil e de Vestuário, acervo atualmente integrante do Museu D.João VI da EBA/UFRJ. In addition, this Center has been enriched by the knowledge of this professional who, during her doctoral research, inventoried and packaged 1,231 pieces from the private collection of artist Olly Reinheimer, in the Ipanema neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro (RJ). Thus, the invitation to join the team and work with sacred art came from researcher Fuviane Gadino Moreira, due to Morgado's experience in preventive conservation of clothing and textiles and her training in the field of clothing and fashion.

It is important to note that most experts in museum curation and textile conservation have learned this knowledge empirically, through their daily work cataloguing and conserving clothing items, since there are few training courses in textile conservation in this country. This corroborates a shortage of professionals in Brazil who are skilled in the storage and packaging of this type of object, which reflects the state of the issue raised here.

This dossier highlights our urgent need to promote preservation and conservation measures for this type of collection. This is justified by the relevance of the theme to sacred art not only in Espírito Santo, but also throughout the country. We took into account the previous finding that there is no widespread location of the physical vestments of Brazil's patron saint, Our Lady of Aparecida, which could also occur in the future with the vestments of Espírito Santo's patron saint, as well as with other collections of sacred textiles in Brazil. We deal with cultural assets that are sometimes undervalued in museums, preservation institutions, churches, and even by some scholars in the fields of arts, fashion, and the like.

We propose a different perspective on the crafts used in the production of these and other textile items, focusing on the elements that adorn sacred images, initially highlighting the Virgin of Aparecida, and later, the Virgin of Penha. With regard to the garments of Espírito Santo's patron saint, during technical visits to the collection at her sanctuary, we identified textile objects stored in wooden wardrobes, which were inadequately equipped for their proper preservation and conservation. In addition, we also found some garments stored in an old map library, in contact with mothballs and identified with masking tape.

The pieces showed discoloration of the fabrics, stains caused by contact with metal threads in the embroidery and garment finishes, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. Others had breaks in the fabric weave and holes (perforations), probably caused by wood-eating insects or moths.

Figures 1 and 2 — Parts of the map library. In figure 1, (from left to right of the observer), we identify tunics of the Baby Jesus; and in figure 2, we find some cloaks and tunics of Our Lady of Penha.



Source: Sales (2024).

During our technical visits to the Convento da Penha collection, we checked the condition of the pieces, their quantity, and their characteristics. In addition, we located tunics, cloaks, petticoats, nightgowns, and a series of garments belonging to sacred images that had their inventory process completed in 2024.

We know that the oldest records of museum inventories with descriptions of sacred sculpture vestments date back to the 13th century and are kept at the Museum of Salamanca, Spain. They include donations of cloaks to devotional images (MARCOS, 1997). This confirms the traditional practice of dressing sacred images throughout history, a custom that can be passed down personally between families and regional groups.

The inventory of textile collections, especially sacred sculptures' vestments, with their different ornaments and embedded in various cultures, highlights their value as important historical and symbolic sources of our emotional memories, as will be shown in the articles: "Inventory and conservation of the mantles of Our Lady of Penha, patron saint of Espírito Santo: revealing and preserving sacred crafts from Espírito Santo," by Fuviane Galdino Moreira and Carolina Morgado Pereira; as well as in the article "Museum documentation and religiosity: the case of the collection of textile garments of the Marian image of the Museum of the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Penha, Espírito Santo," written by researcher and museologist Anne Teixeira Barcellos.

Furthermore, this dossier also highlights the relevance of tailored garments to the history of sacred art, based on the article "Morphological Analysis of Veiga Valle's Drapery: a case study," authored by researchers Lia Sipaúba Proença Brusadin, Leliane Macedo de Souza, and Marco Antônio Ramos Vieira. Representations of clothing, whether in fabric, painted, or sculpted, can make accessible things that have simply been forgotten in relation to our social and cultural history.

Sacred textiles, including religious vestments, identify the ornamental and occupational characteristics of a particular social group. They encompass traditions and symbolic beliefs, as well as signaling secular tastes in relation to the types of fabrics, accessories, and embroidery commonly used in the cultural and religious customs and traditions propagated in this country. Regarding embroidery, we highlight in this dossier the article "Art, memory, and conservation: considerations on the art of embroidery," written by Chrystianne Goulart Ivanóski.

We emphasize the need to preserve, conserve, and restore sacred textile collections, as shown in the following articles: "Cápiti hujus antístitis": safeguarding three mitres from the Archdiocese of Belém, by Idanise Sant'Ana Azevedo Hamoy and João Lacerda; and "The restoration of the textile tabernacle of the Venerable Confraternity of Our Lady of Lampadosa: a look at the sacred," written by Thainá Vígio.

In short, this dossier, with the articles mentioned, encourages and deepens research in this country on a topic that guides the relationship between textile objects and sacred practices and rituals. We are therefore dealing with a kind of portal that

leads us to revisit our past and reflect on the relevance of sacred textile cultural assets in our present and what we can do for them in the near future.

We wish everyone a great read.

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