

“Case study: Lending and Transport of Icons in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens”

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The present study was carried out in the framework of the broader collaboration of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens with the Department of Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art, Technological Educational Institute (T.E.I.) of Athens. Its aim is to provide a brief overview of the Hellenic reality in the process of works of art lending and transportation, to reveal the multiple risks involved in such undertaking, to propose solutions for avoiding damages and to serve as basis for reflection and raising issues for further research.

The Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens has in its possession a rich collection of icons that approximately comes up to 3000 objects. Apart from their particularly vast number, these icons are known for the variety of iconographic patterns as well as for covering an extended time spectrum and having a wide geographical representation.

The Museum is one of the biggest organizers as well as participants in temporary exhibitions. On the average it organizes 5 temporary exhibitions per year and it participates in many others by lending representative items of all of its collections. Among the most common lent objects are the icons. For this reason the transport of these artefacts constitutes and it will continue to constitute one of its major concerns. An object faces more risks during its transport than while staying inside a museum either for being exhibited or for being stored. During transport and preparation of a temporary exhibition an artefact is touched and carried 6 – 18 times by different museum professionals or technical teams (objects' preparation for their transport to and from the museum, arrival and receipt of objects, install or remount of objects,

objects' transport for conservation, packing - unpacking and internal movement for any reason). Planning and meticulously preparing the transport of artefacts is integrated in the framework of a systematic program of preventive conservation and aims to eliminate or reduce hazards that may cause an accident with irreversible consequences.

This study presents regulatory and normative procedures followed by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture on lending artefacts for temporary exhibitions both in Greece and abroad: what covers the insurance company, which are the responsibilities of the escorts, how many people are involved in a works of art transport and which are their responsibilities, whether there are in force general provisions on international level etc.

Furthermore, it describes a series of required actions and procedures concerning objects' lending starting from the moment of their preparation to depart from the museum until their return to it: how an icon is properly handled, transported and protected against vibrations and accidental drops, which are the performance characteristics of packing materials, which are the environmental conditions control methods during transport, how are selected the adequate materials and how is designed the appropriate packing case accordingly to icon's state of preservation and to the means of transportation that will be used, at which extent all the above mentioned conditions will lead to a safe-non hazardous transport of an artefact.

The way that those involved in works of art movement perceive the notion of risk is subjective and in correlation with their knowledge as well as expertise. For this reason, a quantitative and qualitative risk analysis during icon transportation was adopted. The purpose of this analysis was to identify, assess and evaluate the main causes of damage, to develop a strategic action for better management of potential risks and to plan preventive actions for the optimum protection of the artefacts.

The results of this analytical method led to a series of proposals on improving the organization and planning of transport procedures, on condition report forms, on ensuring adequate level of protection by packing – support – protection materials, by the suitability of packing cases, by handling methods and by the appropriate environmental conditions.

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