Antimension - Lamentation of Christ

Textile and Costume Collection

Accession Nr.:	2009.184.1
Place of production:	Hungary; Romania
Materials:	canvas
Techniques:	woodcut
Dimensions:	length: 56 cm width: 45,5 cm

The antimension (Gr. “instead of the altar”or “above the altar”) is a rectangular cloth used in churches of the Byzantine rite. Usually it features the scene of the Lamentation of Christ printed on the textile with a wooden block or copper die. Into the stem of the cross in the background of the composition some relic is sewn and the cloth is lined. The antimension is consecrated by the bishop whose name and the year of consecration are registered in a field beneath the icon. Without this the Eucharist cannot be celebrated, so it can be found on the altar of every church. In the composition of the item in the Museum of Applied Arts the Virgin is lamenting for her dead son with arms stretched out.Christ is being placed on a shroud held by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The lamenting group next to the Virgin includes Martha, Mary Magdalene, the Apostle John and angels. Above the cross in the central axis God the Father in blessing, and under the right stem of the cross the dove symbolizing the Holy Ghost can be seen. In the corners of the central icon there are the evangelists in medallions with their symbols. In the background we find the Calvary, a view of Jerusalem, the temple of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre. On either side of the cross and along the shorter sides of the composition instruments of the Passion are depicted. In the halos of the saints their names are written, and around the icon Romanian liturgical texts complete the decoration. The Romanian inscription below the icon says that this antimension was consecrated by the Orthodox bishop of Buda and Transylvania Dionisie Novákovics in 1761. The style of representation suggests a master from the Balkan, with the closest analogies being by craftsmen from Moschopolis (Voskopojë in the southeastern area of today’s Albania) who adhered to the late Byzantine traditions but already applied some western iconographic prototypes. Novákovics was the first orthodox bishop in Transylvania in the modern age (1761–1767), therefore it is understandable why his successors in the 19th and 20th centuries used and still use this composition on new antimensions almost without any alteration.

Literature

- Szerk.: Szilágyi András: Acquisitions between 2006 and 2010. *Ars Decorativa 28*, 2012. Iparművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2012. - Nr. 5.4. (Terdik Szilveszter)

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