Restoration and scientific investigation of exquisite historic furniture from the collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein

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In 1691 the Palais constructed according to plans of Andrea Zuccarelli was acquired when still unfinished by Prince Johann Adam Andreas and re-designed as a residence Palais of the Liechtensteins in Vienna. The construction was accomplished by Domenico Martinelli and from 1705 the Prince’s collections were exhibited in the upper floors. Between the years 1836-1847 the Palais was rebuilt in High Rococo style by the architect Peter Hubert Desvignes and the interior décor re-designed by Carl Leistler and Michael Thonet. After the completion of the restoration the modern galleries exhibiting unique artworks will be re-opened in the ambience of the original historic rooms by 2012.

The aim of the restoration was the reconstruction of the original coating on the upholstered chairs and the study of the applied techniques. By microscopy and simultaneous analysis of binding media by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) there was an animal glue based ground layer followed by an oil-resinous coating detected.

Pre-treatment investigations carried out on two lacquer cabinets, which are decorated with high quality hira- and tako-makie with gold, silver, and other metal powders, clarified the multilayer stratigraphy of the coating based on several layers of a black lacquer and transparent varnishes of European origin. Due to the varnishes the appearance of these furniture pieces is that of European lacquer cabinets and the Japanese origin was, therefore, doubtful. By Pyrolysis-GC-MS urushiol was detected in the black layers, which proves the Japanese origin.

In the case of the 18th century table, an original dark green polychrome layer was observed under the current gilding, which was examined with regard to its stratigraphy, pigments, and binding media. The goal of the treatment performed was the stabilization and preservation of the historic gilt surface using the most reversible possible materials.