



David A. Paterson  
Governor

**New York State Office of Parks,  
Recreation and Historic Preservation**

Bureau of Historic Sites • Peebles Island, PO Box 219, Waterford, New York 12188  
518-237-8643 Fax: 518-235-4248  
www.nysparks.com

Carol Ash  
Commissioner

## OBJECT CONSERVATION TREATMENT REPORT

**ACCESSION NO.** COE-1990-6-1  
**SITE AND REGION:** Coe Hall – Long Island Region  
**ITEM:** Majolica drug - jar

**MAKER/ARTIST/SCHOOL/DATE:** Italy, c.1520

**EXAMINER:** Olga Grinberg, conservation volunteer **DATE OF EXAMINATION:** 02/04/09  
under the supervision of Heidi Miksch, Conservator

**TREATMENT PERFORMED BY:** Olga Grinberg, **DATE OF COMPLETION:** 03/18/09  
under the supervision of Heidi Miksch, Conservator



**DIMENSIONS:** 9" tall; 10 ¼" maximum height at handle; 6 ½" maximum diameter of body; 3 ¾" diameter of neck; 4 ½" diameter of mouth; 3 7/8" diameter of foot; 8 7/8" maximum width – spout to handle; 1 7/8" width of handle; 4" length of handle; 5 ½" length of spout

**DESCRIPTION:** Spouted jar for liquid drugs. It has a wide body, narrow foot, and flaring out mouth that is slightly wider than the foot. The handle is wide and strap-like; it springs out of the upper part of the neck, and returns almost vertically to the widest part of the belly. The handle ends with a wrapped finial. The body of the jar is thrown with applied handle and spout. The spout is cast/modeled into a dragon head with scaly neck and wrinkled face. This is the example of Italian maiolica ( tin-glazed earthenware ) which dates to c.1520 (accession record ). The jar is tin-glazed inside and outside

(usually tin-glaze was used only on visible surfaces, other surfaces were clearglazed to save expense ), and decorated outside with cobalt drawings filled with yellow, brown and copper-green colors, and then clear-glazed over. The design is devised in two upright panels (upper part of the body), and horizontal band under the panels with decorative scroll inscribed in gothic printing: SY BIZANTIMY (Latin for Syrup of Byzantium). One of the panels, which includes the handle, is decorated with curvilinear stem-like cobalt drawings, the handle is strapped. The most decorative part is the front panel which includes the dragonhead-spout. This panel is decorated with two profile busts-portraits of young men, facing each other on either side of the spout. The space around the men is filled with floral designs, and there is also a landscape consisting of some vegetation on a ground and clouds in the sky. The foot under the scroll is decorated with a stylized meander executed in sgraffito technique (tin-glaze is covered with cobalt and scratched through).

CONDITION: Poor – structurally unstable.

The jar has several areas of damage, which were repaired probably in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The spout of the jar is completely broken off with evidence of adhesive material on broken surfaces. The finial of the handle seems to have been damaged/broken off, rebuilt and overpainted. There are blind cracks inside on the bottom, and one through the wall. There is a small piece on the rim of the mouth that had been broken and re-adhered. It is stable, but slightly out of alignment. There also is a crack under the spout, which seems to have happened during fabrication of the pot. There are discolored patches of overpaint applied broadly over the cracks. There is additional overpaint on the back of the head of one of the portraits, and under the handle. There are other isolated small overpainted areas which are probably old repairs, or concealment of flaws. There is a small piece of kiln material stuck to the side of the jar. There is dirt on exposed body of rim and foot due to usage.





PROPOSED TREATMENT:

1. Examination and photographic documentation
2. Test and remove old adhesive with appropriate solvent and technique
3. Test and remove old overpaint with appropriate solvent and technique
4. Attempt to try to remove old repair from the mouth with various solvents
5. Kiln residue will be retained – this is part of the history of this jar
6. Surface cleaning (cleaning of exposed body: rim, foot )
7. Consider reshaping of the handle finial to make it less noticeable as a repair
8. Using an appropriate adhesive re-attach the spout to the body
9. Repair the rim ( re-adhere piece to rim using appropriate adhesive )
10. Fill losses ( use plaster and/or acrylic putty )
11. Inpaint to duplicate color and surface glow



PROGNOSIS: The jar will be fully reassembled. The old overpaint will be removed revealing original surface. The finial will be reshaped to give it more natural look of a pulled handle, so it matches the other jar.

ESTIMATED TREATMENT HOURS: 15 hours

TREATMENT:

1. Examination and photography
2. Old adhesive on broken surfaces of the spout was removed by applying acetone poultice; in areas where the poultice didn't work, used methylene chloride and scraped away remained adhesive with scalpel
3. Removed old repair from the mouth by applying acetone poultice; cleaned broken surfaces from old adhesive with acetone, scraped with scalpel remained adhesive
4. Glazed surface and exposed body was cleaned with detergent
5. Old overpaint was removed with alcohol, paint-strip, and by scraping with scalpel. A different decorative design was found painted on the handle finial (see picture at right)
6. After removing overpaint and old filling from the handle finial, found that fill had accomplished by inserting a piece of fired ceramic; historic fill was retained
7. Before re-attaching the spout and chip from the rim, broken surfaces were pre-coated with poly vinyl acetate, PVA AYAF 5% solids in acetone
8. Re-adhered spout and piece from the mouth with PVA AYAF – 20% solids in acetone; secured with tape.
9. Losses were filled with plaster and acrylic putty.
10. In-painted with GOLDEN water-based acrylic and SCHMINCKE gouache paint.
11. Glazed with GOLDEN water-based acrylic polymer varnish.



TREATMENT HOURS: 64.75 hours (This was the first major ceramic repair undertaken by a conservation volunteer. It is expected (and desired) that treatment hours exceeded those initially projected for standard treatment by an experienced practitioner.)

CHANGE IN CONDITION:

The jar looks clean and intact; the handle finial looks natural and matches the other jar well.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAINTENANCE AND OTHER CARE:

DISPLAY: the jar should be display in a stable and secure manner

ENVIRONMENT: a stable environment is recommended, keeping within the normal range of a museum environment, avoiding extremes or rapid fluctuations of temperature and relative humidity; light exposure will not effect this object

HANDLING: handle with care; gloves can be worn when handling the jar, but are not necessary, hands should be clean; gloves can diminish dexterity sensation

MAINTENANCE: surface dust can be removed with a brush or clean cloth; upon occasion, a dampened cloth can be used to wipe the surface of the jar; due to the repairs on the jar – it should never be submerged in a water bath

COMMENTS: 1). This is a rare Castelli maiolica drug-jar, of Orsini-Colonna type, c. 1520 (accession record ). 2). Under the old overpaint on the handle finial, there was another one with different design; the more recent design was used for the final version.

PHOTOGRAPHY:  
before treatment





During treatment



left: majolica jar in sand box with spout repositioned, readhered, and held in place with tabs of tape. A sandbox is used to allow for positioning to have gravity work with you, instead of against you, in the reassemblage and readhering process.

below: Olga Grinberg working on majolica jar in Decorative Arts Conservation Lab at Peebles Island Resource Center



Progression of repair of the handle finial:

above: partial removal of overpaint revealing prior (inaccurate) design

left: removal of all old overpaint and fill

below: inpainting of base color on handle finial

below right: full compensation of handle finial with design and surface gloss





Losses filled with plaster  
and/or acrylic putty

After treatment

