



**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

David A. Paterson
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

OBJECT CONSERVATION TREATMENT REPORT

ACCESSION NO. COE-1990-6-2
SITE AND REGION: Coe Hall – Long Island Region
ITEM: Majolica pharmacy jar

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

EXAMINER: Jamie Gleason, conservation volunteer, **DATE OF EXAMINATION:** March 19, 2009
under the supervision of Heidi Miksch-Conservator

TREATMENT PERFORMED BY: **DATE OF COMPLETION:** June 25, 2009
Jamie Gleason, conservation volunteer,
under the supervision of Heidi Miksch-Conservator



DIMENSIONS: 9" tall;
10 1/4" maximum height to
top of spout; 6 1/2"
maximum diameter of
body; 4" diameter of
mouth; 3 3/4" diameter of
foot;

DESCRIPTION:
Earthenware jar decorated
with metal oxides on a tin-
oxide glaze. The main
body of the jar would have
been hand thrown; while
the handle and spout
would have been attached
separately (the spout in
this case would have been
cast first). All of the

decoration would have been applied before firing. The vivid colors are just as they would have appeared nearly 500 years ago. The jar is decorated with two line drawn profiles of elderly men. These figures dominate the body of the jar and they are surrounded by eastern decorative motifs. At the base of the jar there is a horizontal band with Latin script on a light background, reading "Succi Rosary" (or "Syrup of Roses"). These jars were used in pharmacies so it was advantageous to clearly label their contents. The bottom of the jar is unglazed.

CONDITION: FAIR - Structurally stable but with unacceptable appearance

The overall structure of the jar seems sound. There are large cracks/old joints running down the length of the jar, mostly visible from the inside. Prior restoration has resulted in excessive overpaint which has discolored and become unsightly. The paint used to hide old repairs has aged and cracked in several spots. There are several areas where the glaze seems to have crawled and the ceramic body itself is visible. These flaws are a natural part of the piece and will not be obscured. A ¼" crater (which is discolored) can be seen on the figure above "Succi" and a smaller crater appears on the opposite figure as well. There is evidence of repair at the head of the dragon spout. The head may have been broken off at some point. (We will know more after removing overpaint.) The handle seems to have been repaired where it meets the rim of the jar. There is a fair amount of dirt built up on the surface of the jar



PROPOSED TREATMENT:

1. Examination and photographic documentation
2. Test and remove old overpaint with appropriate solvent and technique, mechanically and/or with solvent
3. Reassess condition of jar once obscuring overpaint has been removed; if overpaint has hid old repairs rather than cracks, the stability of the repairs will be assessed, if they are found to be sound and appropriate they will be retained; if they are found to be unstable, out of alignment, ill-sized or -ill-shaped, they will be removed or adapted. The treatment proposal will be amended at that time.
4. Test and surface clean with appropriate solvent(s) and techniques
5. Fill losses use plaster and/or acrylic putty)
6. Inpaint to duplicate color and surface gloss.

PROGNOSIS: The old overpaint on the jar will be removed revealing original surface. The surface of the jar will be clean. Old repairs will be mitigated but not obscured.

ESTIMATED TREATMENT HOURS: 15 hours

TREATMENT:

1. Examination and photography
2. Cleaned surface with de-ionized water.
3. Removed over paint with alcohol and removed plaster fill with acetic acid and gentle scraping with a scalpel. (The damages are worse than they at first appeared, the piece was broken in several areas and will require extensive inpainting.)
4. Applied an acetic acid poultice to the handle and large chunks of plaster came off revealing the actual extent of the loss.
5. Interior of the jar was covered with a layer of plaster which obscured many fissures, but also completely covered the original surface. This was also removed with acetic acid.
6. The neck of the dragon spout was heavily painted and upon removal it was discovered that areas of glaze have been lost.
7. Examined under UV light to detect any further areas of overpaint.

8. Main crack in the jar is somewhat out of alignment, making the inpainting more difficult. Applied acetone gel to the crack in an attempt to loosen the bond, but was unsuccessful. Applied an acetone poultice and allowed it to sit for about 40 minutes, but adhesive was unaffected. Tested a small sample of the adhesive (removed with a scalpel from the interior) with iodine to determine if it was lead based. The sample turned bright yellow when viewed under a microscope, indicating that lead was indeed present. Applied a coating of paint remover to the crack and covered with foil for about one hour. The bond was still strong and it was decided to stop all attempts to dismantle the jar (considering the damage further attempts could cause.)
9. Cracks filled with 222 spackling paste.
10. Handle was repaired with plaster (applied in two separate batches and carved/sanded into shape.)
11. All cracks (interior and exterior) were carefully inpainted, making sure to obscure as little of the original surface as possible.
12. Applied light varnish to all painted areas and cleaned entire surface with de-ionized water.

TREATMENT HOURS: 51 hours

CHANGE IN CONDITION: The jar now is free of unsightly overpaint and original surface is no longer obscured. All of the discolored plaster has been removed.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAINTENANCE AND OTHER CARE:

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

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

ENVIRONMENT: a stable environment is recommended, keeping within the norms of a museum environment, avoiding extremes or rapid fluctuations of temperature and relative humidity; light exposure will not affect 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: This is a rare Castelli majolica drug-jar, of Orsini-Colonna type, c. 1520 (accession record.)

Photography:
Before Treatment





left: detail of discolored overpaint

before left: detail of damage to lip revealed after overpaint removed

before right: : detail of damage to lip and handle revealed after overpaint removed



During Treatment – overpaint removed



After Treatment



Comparisons – Details of before (left column) and after (right column) treatment





Comparisons – Details of
before (left column) and after
(right column) treatment

