

# THE 16TH – 18TH CENTURY ARCHAEOLOGICAL CERAMIC ARTEFACT RESTORATION IN THE MUSEUMS OF LATVIA

## JANA LĪBIETE

Master restorer of ceramic, porcelain and glass items  
janalibiete@inbox.lv  
The Latvian National Museum of History  
Pulka street 8, Riga

## INTA TILTĪŅA

Master restorer of ceramic, porcelain and glass items  
inta.tiltina@lnmm.lv  
The Latvian National Museum of Art  
Skārņu Street 10, Riga

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years the specialists of the history museums of Latvia accurately choose items for restoration and conservation, considering their state of condition, exhibition plans of museums, display conditions, scientific research needs, and accessibility for public viewers.

Unfortunately, in most part of archaeological excavations only sherds of pottery are found, rare are the cases when archaeologists have been lucky to find whole items, usually there is a half of an item, or even a remaining quarter of the vessel body.

Part of the vessels had already been restored before in the 1920s and 30s. It was done in poor quality – fragments were glued together with no precision using unsuitable glue, and the surface of fragments was smeared. The dismantling of these glued together fragments is very time consuming because glue does not react to solvents and proves to be harder than the original material of the objects.

The restored artefacts at present are used as characteristic examples to illustrate the cultural and social processes which were going on during Middle Ages on the territory of Latvia. At present extensive research on the types and uses of ceramic ware found in the archaeological excavations on the territory of the Turaida Castle is conducted by historian Ieva Ose in cooperation with specialists of the Turaida Museum Reserve. The catalogued information is in the process for upcoming publication. The restored items add also specifically to the picture of ware used in Turaida Castle in the 15th to 18th centuries.

The poster shows restoration of four, the most characteristic vessels of the 15th–18th century found on the territory of Latvia. It also points out the problems restorers had to address in their work.



### Restoration of the 14th–15th century stoneware jar (No. SM 11329). From the archaeological collection of the Turaida Museum Reserve.

The stoneware jar is registered in the collection of the Turaida Museum Reserve. According to experts, the jar was made in Siegburg (Germany, near to Cologne). It was found in 1982 on the territory of the Turaida Castle during archaeological excavations in the VI-Z square (well). The jar is part of a 15th century ware deposit and is one of the oldest items found during the excavations.

The jar is made of light grey-brown clay, it has one handle, a widened base with a wavy rim. It has a horizontal ribbed surface due to the turning process. Mouth Ø 7.5 cm, h-21.5 cm. The stoneware jar consists of many fragments glued together with dark brown transparent glue. The fragments are in a relatively good condition with no friable glaze, some spots have losses of glaze and scratches. Some fragments are stained. High loss of body material. The jar was previously restored, but the gypsum had decomposed and, in some places, missing. There is only a small original fragment of the bottom that has survived. However, it is possible to carry out the restoration of the jar.



Before restoration.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.



After restoration.

### THE RESTORATION PROCESS

1. The jar was cleaned; clues from the previous restoration were removed.
2. Inaccurately glued fragments were unglued, cleaned, gently washed, dried.
3. The edges of the jar fragments were soaked with glue and glued.
4. To create matrices moulds were made based on original shapes.
5. The matrices were filled with gypsum polymer, treated and glued to the original parts.
6. All newly created parts were worked over with putty, carefully sanded and glued to the original parts.
7. After processing, tinted close to the original applying cold ceramic paint.
8. Covered with varnish.

### Restoration of the 14th–15th century pilgrim's bottle (No. VI 132: 577), Āraiši Castle site excavations, 1973. Stored in the archives of the Archaeology Department of the Latvian National History Museum.

During excavations 10 fragments of different sizes were found, some of them in the course of time were lost, including the neck of the bottle. During the previous restoration, some of the fragments were glued together. The outside of the bottle is covered with a green glaze, the inside is unglazed.



Before restoration.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.

### THE RESTORATION PROCESS

1. Disassembly of previously inaccurately glued fragments by applying compresses soaked in white spirit to the seams of the glued together fragments, remnants of glue mechanically cleaned with a scalpel.
2. Existing fragments glued together with PVA (polyvinyl acetate) glue.
3. To cast missing fragments Protasil mass applied to take shapes.
4. Cast the missing fragments in plaster.
5. The cast fragments are worked over mechanically and sanded with fine sandpaper.
6. The neck of the bottle is made in sculpting plasticine. Original form is obtained after a photograph of an identical bottle.
7. The double-sided mould from the newly formed neck is taken.
8. The missing bottleneck is cast in plaster, worked over and polished.
9. All the newly made fragments are covered with a thin layer of acrylic putty, dried and polished.
10. The new fragments are tinted.



Process of restoration.



Process of restoration.



After restoration.