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THE RESTORATION OF AN URN FROM THE BRONZE AGE, THE WIETENBERG CULTURE

Abstract: Following the archaeological excavation campaign undertaken at the archaeological complex Polus - Floreşti, Cluj County, in the summer of 2007, there were exhumed funerary urns, tombs, ceramics and objects made of metal and bone, commonly used in funeral/burial rituals. An urn from the Bronze Age, the Wietenberg Culture, was brought to the Zonal Restoration Laboratory of the National History Museum of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, in the shape of a clod of earth protected by a plastic sheet to preserve its microclimate and slow down the degradation of the ceramic material. The operation of restoring an archaeological object involves a sequence of steps that must be followed chronologically, in the order of their importance and in keeping with the phases of the conservation-restoration process to which the objects in the patrimony are subjected. The urn with a height of 34 cm and a width of 42 cm has been restored and consolidated by the implantation of copper wedges in the side walls of the potsherd, reinforcing thus and supporting the object. Without this method of implementing the wedges, it would not have been possible to restore the object under optimum conditions.

Keywords: restoration, conservation, consolidation, ceramics

The archaeological excavation campaign carried out, in the summer of 2007, at the archaeological complex Polus - Floreşti, Cluj County, led to the unearthing of items made of metal, bone and ceramics - objects that were integral to funeral rites.

An urn from the Bronze Age, the Wietenberg Culture, was brought to the Zonal Restoration Laboratory of the National History Museum of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, in the shape of a clod of earth (Fig. 1), in which ceramic shards were embedded. In order not to change the microclimate parameters suddenly and drastically, the object was protected with a polyethylene film.

The friability of the fragments did not allow for cleaning or immersing them in a distilled-water bath.

After removing the coarse soil layer with a scalpel and a brush with soft bristles, the visual analysis found that the item suffered from multiple mechanical degradations (cracks, flaking), so the first stage was, by necessity, that of drying it under controlled conditions, accomplished by placing the ceramic fragments on paper filter, protected by a sheet of polyethylene, to facilitate controlled drying and slow down the degradation processes of the potsherds.

The final drying of the ceramic shards at room temperature was somewhat slower and took longer, as the fragments could not be subjected to artificial drying.

The consolidation of the fragments was performed in two stages: first with a solution of nitro-lacquer and acetone of a more fluid consistency so as to penetrate more easily the pores of the material, and then with a more consistent solution of nitro-lacquer and acetone so as to strengthen and confer mechanical resistance to the next stage in the

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assembly of each fragment, according to the original shape, by using the plasticizer-free polyvinyl acetate adhesive, which, by drying, becomes transparent, thus helping reconstruct the original shape of the vessel.

After completing the assembly of all the fragments, we realised that the fragments necessary for reconstituting the upper part of the object, that is, the lip, were missing; on account of this reason, and since there were no similitudes, it was decided that the lip should not undergo reconstruction.

Due to vessel size: height 34 cm, middle width 42 cm, the base diameter of the vessel 15 cm, the diameter of the upper part 36 cm and because of the precarious state of preservation and the poor quality of the clay, it was necessary to implant copper wedges (Fig. 2) in the side walls of the potsherd, which made it possible to reinforce and support the object.

Without this method of implementing the wedges, it would not have been possible to restore the object under optimum conditions.

We also used this method in order to extend the life of the object, by conferring it physical and mechanical resistance and returning thus the object (Fig. 3) to the patrimony of the museum, where it will survive for a long period of time.

List of illustrations:

Fig. 1 Before the restoration

Fig. 2 During the restoration

Fig. 3 After the restoration

Fig.1

Fig.2

Fig.3