



## Art Conservation *and historical repairs*

*When a two-handled terracotta drinking cup became a treatment project and technical study this year for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Cassia Balogh, she knew immediately that someone in antiquity had valued it highly. The evidence was scattered across the vessel's black-slipped surface—small chunks of lead stretching between holes approximately 1/8 inch in diameter that had been drilled through the ceramic on either side of a number of ancient breaks.*

A long-ago owner had used these still-visible lead staples to repair the cup, which was made near Athens, Greece sometime between 450 BCE and 420 BCE and is known as an Attic skyphos, when he chose to keep it after it cracked and broke. While this relatively inexpensive repair process was likely common 2,000 years ago when ceramics could be expensive to replace, it is unusual to find remnants of the staples still in place today.

Although the cup's clay body and slip are in generally good condition, the lead staples are one of two sets of extensive repairs that together make the object very fragile. The cellulose nitrate adhesive used to make the later repairs, which likely date to sometime between 1850 and 1950, is failing, and many gaps can be seen among the 19 separate terracotta pieces that together comprise the skyphos. The most heavily damaged area, just below one of the handles, has broken into five separate pieces. Cassia's goal is to stabilize the skyphos so that it can be safely handled and studied. This will require separating the fragments, removing any adhesive residue, and then rejoining the pieces using a strong adhesive that is also reversible, most likely Paraloid B-72. Cassia intends to keep the lead staples in place due to their historical importance, a goal that will require working with special care because they are likely to be very brittle. Should any of the fragments break, Cassia will reassemble these pieces and adhere them back in place with the same adhesive she is using elsewhere in her treatment.

Because the skyphos, which belongs to Bryn Mawr College, is not intended for display, Cassia's treatment beyond structural stabilization will be limited to a light cleaning and filling and inpainting losses. Cassia enjoys working with objects she knows will be used as learning tools, and she is pleased that when her treatment is complete, the skyphos will help modern-day students at Bryn Mawr learn something about life in ancient Greece.



### ARTC Spotlight—December 2017

*The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at [www.artcons.udel.edu](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).*

*Top: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Cassia Balogh examines and cleans the break edge of a sherd from the skyphos. Above: The most damaged area of the vessel before treatment, exhibiting corroded lead*



*staple mends as well as failing adhesive mends. (Photos: Dine and Balogh.)*



*Left to right: Three views of the skyphos before treatment. Staple and adhesive mends are visible. (Photos: Balogh.)*

