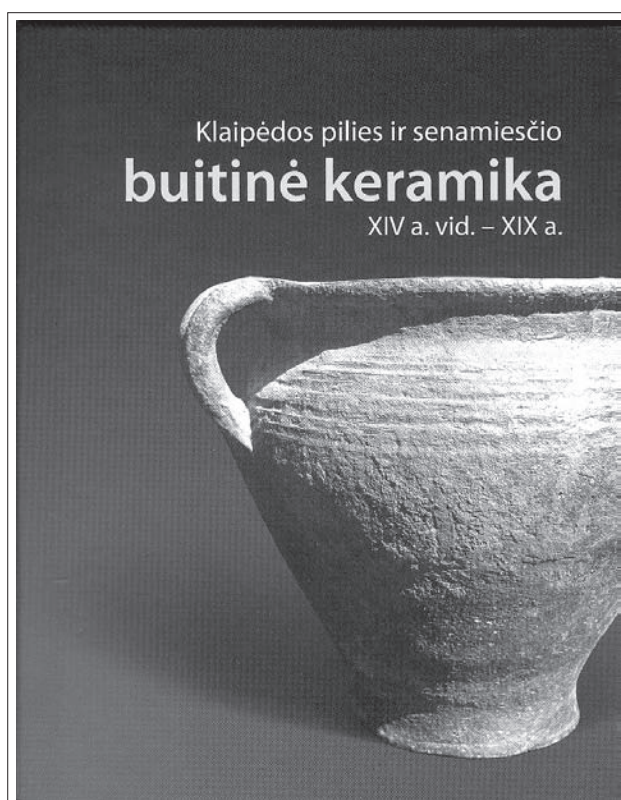


BOOK REVIEW

EVERYDAY POTTERY FROM KLAIPĖDA CASTLE AND KLAIPĖDA OLD TOWN FROM THE MID-14TH CENTURY TO THE 19TH CENTURY

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*Klaipėdos pilies ir senamiesčio buitinė
keramika XIV a. vid. – XIX a. Iš Mažosios
Lietuvos istorijos muziejaus rinkinių.*

*Domestic ceramics from Klaipėda Castle
and Old Town, mid 14th – 19th century*

*(From the collections of the History
Museum of Lithuania Minor).*

Compilers R. Songailaitė, L. Rutkaitienė.

Klaipėda: Mažosios Lietuvos istorijos
muziejus, 2010 – 152 p.: iliustr.

Just before the New Year in 2011, Baltic researchers involved in historic archaeology received a very rare and valuable gift. The Museum of the History of Lithuania Minor in Klaipėda published a book about everyday pottery or domestic ceramics found in the city's castle and the Old Town during archaeological excavations. To get a better understanding of its value, it is necessary to make a short review of the role of Klaipėda and the state of research into regional pottery.

Klaipėda (or Memel in German) nowadays appears to be the only town and castle in modern Lithuania

founded by the Teutonic Order in Medieval times (the mid-13th century). It was ruled by the Teutonic Order, secular Prussia (from 1525), and the German Empire (from 1871), up to the beginning of the 20th century, remaining the northernmost town, port and fortress of all these states. This history predetermined the development of this region of Lithuania. It is particularly evident in the material culture, including archaeological finds. In 1252, the Teutonic Order founded Klaipėda Castle in land that belonged to the Curonians, a Baltic tribe. However, with the passage of time, tendencies

in the development of the material culture, originating from German cities and formations, became dominant both in the castle and in the town. In a wider sense, this could be treated as the influence of Western Europe over the Baltic Sea region. This influence is particularly evident from the beginning of the 16th century, when the town started moving towards its present site. Archaeological explorations in Klaipėda Old Town started around 1970, and provide most of the material illustrating this process. As in any other settlement, archaeological ceramics (mostly potsherds) make up the largest part of the finds. However, proper scientific generalisation is inversely proportional to the quantities of the material, which happens very often when dealing with other numerous and abundant material. In this sense, Klaipėda appeared to be very lucky. The exploration and analysis of its ceramics started rather early (Žulkus V. XVI–XIX a. *Klaipėdos buitinės keramikos klasifikacija, Archeologiniai tyrimai Lietuvos miestų istoriniuose centruose*, Vilnius, 1981, pp.38, 39, 86, 87). It was collected in a modern way during archaeological excavations in the 1970s, and included the period until the middle of the 19th century (the great Klaipėda fire of 1854 is imprinted in the cultural layers of most parts of the Old Town). However, the continuing archaeological research into the castle and the Old Town formed impressive museum collections (over 40,000 archaeological finds are mentioned in the book, pp.7, 10 and 12). In that sense, the situation of the last decade regarding the knowledge of archaeological ceramics in Klaipėda hardly differs from the situation in other towns in Lithuania. More has been done only in the exploration and analysis of ceramics in Vilnius (in 1999, G. Vaitkevičius defended his doctoral dissertation ‘Vilnius Everyday Pottery: 14th to the 17th centuries’); whereas till now, on the whole, only late ethnographic ceramics (19th century to the beginning of the 20th century) have been more widely presented (*Lietuvių liaudies menas. Keramika*, Vilnius, 1959; *Lietuvių liaudies keramika. XIX a. vidurys – XX a. pirma pusė*, Vilnius, 2006).

There is still a shortage of research on specific historical periods relating to the whole Baltic region. Belarusian researchers are probably the most conspicuous in this field, since they have made a broad analysis of some types of these ceramics originating from their joint heritage with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Левко О.Н., *Средневековое гончарство северо-восточной Белоруссии*, Минск, 1992; Здановіч Н.І., Трусаў А.А., *Беларуская палівная кераміка XI–XVI-II стст.*, Мінск, 1993). A study by the Estonian researcher Erki Russow about imports of West European ceramics should also be mentioned (*Importkeramika Lääne-Eesti linnades 13.–17. sajandil*, Tallinn, 2006).

Other related material is either scattered in articles by other authors or, what is most frequent, is in publications about specific archaeological objects.

The discussed study appears in this not very cheerful general context, from a cognitive point of view. Naturally, it cannot and is not attempting to fill a huge gap in the exploration and research of ceramics. However, it lightens the work of other researchers who are interested in this mass archaeological material. It also shows it from the point of view of Klaipėda Castle and the town, introducing it into wider scientific circulation. How is this done in the reviewed book?

It was carried out by five people, representing the museum of the History of Lithuania Minor: the archaeologists Ramunė Bračiulienė and Simona Rauktytė, the museum director Dr Jonas Genys, the pottery restorer Liolė Rutkaitienė, and Roma Songailaitė, the head of archaeology-restoration. They selected and described examples of ceramics from the catalogue, and prepared the introductory texts. The resulting book, although a study, is the result of joint efforts, and many more people contributed to it: photographers, artists, translators and editors. All this was done by the museum itself, and it also received support from the Ministry of Culture. The publication was prepared by experienced professionals, and the younger generation (S. Rauktytė) was also involved in the process. The final result is 500 copies of a colour, A4-size, hardback book, published in three languages (Lithuanian, English and German). It is a top-quality publication, on top-quality paper and with perfect design, which shows that publishing in Lithuania nowadays corresponds with the West European level and standards. This is to be followed by a broader analysis of the content.

The book consists of an introduction, briefly presenting the museum itself and its archaeological collections, and a brief characterisation of Klaipėda potters and pottery (the chapter ‘Briefly about Klaipėda Potters and Pottery’), taking up almost two pages with references and brief descriptions of chapters. All the ceramics presented and introduced in the book are divided into the following seven categories: 1) different pots, 59 items described; 2) trivet pods and pans, 39 items; 3) lids, 14 items; 4) plates and dishes, 270 items; 5) water bottles, jars, mugs, cups and bottles, 78 items; 6) candlesticks and glims, eight items; 7) other domestic items, 43 items. These categories need no further discussion, since they are all translated into English (pp.130-140) and German (pp.141-151). The translation into these languages is complete (it even includes publishing-related information and item certification), so we can treat it as ‘three books in one’. It is an additional facilitation to the foreign reader, although cata-

logue-type publications are usually without this, as the illustrations in them dominate. The book contains 506 illustrations (64 utensils have two photographs), with 502 specific ceramic articles, 364 intact and restored (and also partly restored), and 78 fragments. Each illustration is certified, and indicates the type of utensil, the date on the basis of reports about archaeological research, the place it was found, and the time (they are absent only in photographs 83, 100, 106, 109, 151, 183, 224, 230, 244, 255, 301, 325, 366, 368, 371, 399, 436: 3 and 5), the basic data (the photographs give no scale), and the inventory number in the museum. The photographs in the book are not crowded (each page has between one and eight, very often three or four), and the items are presented reduced in scale (from 1.5 to four times), so it is always possible to distinguish all the details easily. The ceramics presented in the book were discovered at different times, starting from 1972 and ending in 2010 (as in the case of Klaipėda Castle, where discoveries were made in the autumn of 2010). Numbers 7, 11 and 349 could be treated as a peculiar record in the finding of archaeological material and its introduction into scientific circulation. Very interesting also is the spread of ceramics in compliance with its dating. Ten items are dated to the 14th/15th century, 13 to the 15th century, eight to the 15th/16th century, 19 to the 16th century, one to the early 16th century, five to the first half of the 16th century, one to the second half of the 16th century, one to the late 16th century/17th century, two to the late 16th century/early 17th century, one to the 16th century/early 17th century, three to the 16th/17th centuries, 73 to the 17th century, two to the early 17th century, five to the first half of the 17th century, one to the middle or second half of the 17th century, 25 to the second half of the 17th century, seven to the late 17th century, four to the second half of the 17th century/early 18th century, four to the second half of the 17th century/18th century, three to the late 17th century/early 18th century, 17 to the late 17th century/18th century, six to the 17th/18th centuries, 97 to the 18th century, nine to the early 18th century, one to the first half of the 18th century, two to the middle or second half of the 18th century, six to the second half of the 18th century, three to the late 18th century, four to the second half of the 18th century/early 19th century, 32 to the late 18th century/early 19th century, one to the late 18th century/first half of the 19th century, one to the late 18th century/19th century, 57 to the 18th century/early 19th century, two to the 18th century/first half of the 19th century, 16 to the 19th century, 36 to the early 19th century, nine to the first half of the 19th century, and one to the second half of the 19th century (No 385). One fragment (No 170) is undated. Another 11 ceramic items are specifically dated, starting with

1683 (No 419) and ending with 1837 (No 223) (they are utensils, mostly plates and dishes). These statistics should be useful for potential readers, since they tell us about everything that it is possible to find in the book. It is also a good demonstration of the chronological precision of the material culture related to the Old Town of Klaipėda and its castle.

The use of too many unconventional abbreviations is one of the things in the book that could have been better. One of them is even in the title ('*vid.*', meaning 'middle'). Fortunately, this hardly comprehensible point for foreign readers (they cannot be found in dictionaries) is compensated for by the translations. Also missing are the details of the pot depicted on the cover of the book. The book could also have been provided with a plan of Klaipėda Old Town, with the places of the finds marked. That would have been very desirable. Streets indicated in the details of the finds would have provided them with additional information. Limits for perfection do not exist.

To sum up, this book is a long-awaited study, important to the material culture of the Baltic region, which will very soon become a part of regional research culture. It could be treated as a very good start for a new local trend in the processing of large quantities of material. The research conference 'Aspects in Research of Urban Culture in the Middle Ages and Modern Times (on the Basis of Archaeological Data)' which took place at Klaipėda University on 12 and 13 November 2009 is another, more academic, aspect of this work (its material will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Archaeologia Baltica*). The project which the museum started recently is in every possible way a model that other museums and research institutions should follow, as it shows that purposeful and focussed activities lead to good results. Prestigious names and famous institutions are not necessary.

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