

Altertumskunde des Vorderen Orients

Band 19

**Implementing Meanings:
The Power of the Copy between Past,
Present and Future**

An Overview from the Ancient Near East

Edited by Silvana Di Paolo



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Altertumskunde des Vorderen Orients
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des Alten Orients

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Manfried Dietrich



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Deckard: *She's a replicant, isn't she?*
Tyrell: *I'm impressed. How many questions
does it usually take to spot them?*
Deckard: *I don't get it, Tyrell.*
Tyrell: *How many questions?*
Deckard: *Twenty, thirty, cross-referenced.*
Tyrell: *It took more than a hundred for
Rachael, didn't it?*
Deckard: *[realising Rachael believes she's
human] She doesn't know.*
Tyrell: *She's beginning to suspect, I think.*

(Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*, 1982)

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Gloria London

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Cypriot Wheel-thrown Copies of Traditional Handmade Pottery: the Ethnoarchaeological Record

Gloria London—Seattle (WA)

For the past 9000 years potters in Cyprus have made utilitarian and decorative ceramics. The abundance and variety of local clay deposits are amenable for glazed tablewares and coarse cookware, water jars, pipes, bricks, and tiles. Local red and white clays are ideal for unglazed handmade jugs, jars, decorative pieces, and cookware made by village potters who use the coiling technique. Tan, white, and gray clays, are suitable for throwing tablewares on a fast turning wheel by potters in private studios or factories with assembly-line production methods. All the potters cater to meet the needs of a Cypriot rather than a foreign clientele.

In 1986 I initiated an ethnoarchaeological project involving rural women potters who produce red firing wares. They have been photographed and visited for over a century by archaeologists.¹ It was commonly held that the rural industry no longer existed by the late 20th century. This proved to be an inaccurate assumption. Handmade pottery is still produced in the early 21st century alongside wheel-thrown copies of the traditional cooking pots, incense burners, and jugs.

Ethnoarchaeology of Traditional Handmade Pottery in Cyprus

Traditional craft specialists in Cyprus are women potters who work without modern mechanical equipment. They create a handmade thick-walled repertoire from local clays in a handful of villages. Urban and rural Cypriots buy the jugs, jars, deep and shallow cooking pots, decorated juglets, incense burners, ovens, beehives, goat-milking pots, and flowerpots. Instead of using the larger shapes – ovens, jars, beehives, and goat-milking pots – for their original purposes, they usually join the flowerpots as garden ornaments today.

¹ Archaeologists and scholars who recorded the industry over the years include Ohnefalsch-Richter, 1891, 34–43; Ohnefalsch-Richter, 1913, 235; Taylor/Tufnell, 1930; Peridou, 1960; Hampe/Winter; Yon, 1985.

In contrast, ceramic incense burners maintain their ritual functions, cooking pots are still used for baking, and some jugs remain in use as water coolers and purifiers.²



Fig. 1. Map of villages where handmade pottery was produced in Cyprus until ca. 1980. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. By Carport CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/-sa3.0>). Village locations added by the author.

In 1986 roughly 25 rural potters in Kornos, Agios Demetrios, Kaminaria, and Fini, coil built pots for household use (Fig. 1). Currently potters remain active in two communities: Kornos and Fini. Rural potters who built pots by hand worked during the dry season, from April/May until October/November. Each year, the start date depends on the weather and timing of Greek Orthodox Easter, whose date fluctuates according to the Julian calendar. Work continues until the winter rains, beginning in October or November, make it impossible to find dry wood for firing the pottery in kilns that stand outside in the courtyard. The wares made in each village fire to a deep terra cotta red color.

In Kornos village, south of the capital Nicosia, a Pottery Cooperative was organised in the early 1950s. Both men and women made pottery in Kornos until the end of World War II. Afterwards, the men found more lucrative work factories near the lowland or coastal urban centres of Nicosia and Larnaca. Many potters joined the Cooperative. Others worked privately in the courtyard of their homes. For several decades, the Coop potters used an electric grinding machine to crush their clay. In all other villages the clay was ground manually in the traditional method. Before the clay was ground into powder manually or with a machine, the first task was to remove the largest rocks by hand. The rest was

² For a meal cooked in a handmade ceramic casserole in Kornos village during 2013, see London/Dometios, 2015, figs. 10–11.

ground into powder (Fig. 2). Each woman then prepared her own clay by mixing it with water. Nothing else was incorporated into the clay body.



Fig. 2. A potter in Agios Demetrios uses a wooden stick (*matsola*) to pound red and white clays into powder. Photo by the author (June 2000)

In the villages of Fini, Agios Demetrios, and Kaminaria, located far from the cities and high in the Troodos Mountain region of Marathassa, men rarely made the regular repertoire of handmade pottery. They mined red and white clays from the surrounding slopes. From the nearby lush pine forests, men collected wood and bark to fire the kilns.

In the late 19th century, a Fini potter taught the craft to her relative, Marietta Theori Neophytos (1869–1939), the first potter who lived in Agios Demetrios. Women in neighboring Kaminaria learned the technique at a later date from another Agios Demetrios potter.

In Fini, prior to 1970, itinerant male potters known as *pitharades*, used the slab technique – rectangular pieces of clay applied like coils – to shape the largest jars (*pitharia*) and basins (*danes*). They traveled the mountain slopes to make the huge containers in the high altitude wine-producing villages.

Written sources about Cyprus document the fermentation and storage of wine in large jars at least since the mid-18th century.³ *Pitharades* also lived in other villages scattered in the Troodos foothills where they made the large jars and basins.⁴

The last *pithari* was commissioned in the early 1970's. No one builds them today. The number of women potters has been declining as well. In 1986 there were eight practicing potters in the Troodos villages. By 2000 there were two. In

³ Mariti, 1984, 58.

⁴ Jensen, 1980; London, 1989.

2015 one potter alone works in Fini. An effort to teach the craft to more people is underway at new Museum of Traditional Pottery in Agios Demetrios.⁵

In Kornos, financial support from the government supports a handful of women who shape the regular repertoire, except for decorative composite vessels. Two independent private potters work in their private studios where they make the full repertoire and traditional decorated pots.

While living full time in Kornos and Agios Demetrios, from April through October 1986, I recorded clay mining and preparation, manufacture and decoration, pot names, firing (schedule and fuel), sales, and the repertoire of each potter. Quantitative data were collected for vessel sizes and overall proportions, clay recipes, firing time, rate of loss, pricing, etc.

My brief visits to urban and rural potters, who throw pots on a wheel, were designed to learn their clay sources (local and imported) and repertoire. A year-long follow-up study from September 1999 to June 2000, and shorter visits over the years focused on many of the same issues.⁶

Handmade Manufacturing Techniques: Lowland and Mountain Traditions

The rural potters who supplied the entire island with red unglazed handmade wares can be divided into two traditions. They all use the coiling method and a slow moving wooden turntable to shape round-bottomed pots that have incised patterns (Fig. 3). They all rotate the turntable with their fingers, toes, or indirectly while exerting pressure on the clay as they shape a pot. Slight differences in the incised patterns, manufacturing technique, color, and overall vessel proportions, differentiate the lowland and mountain traditions.⁷

The lowland tradition was concentrated at Kornos and a few other low altitude villages. In contrast were potters who lived and worked in the Troodos Mountains. Potters in each group made a similar repertoire of utilitarian pottery, but there are subtle variations in the pot shapes, order of the work, decorations, and clay. To the casual observer all the pots look alike.

⁵ London/Demetrios, 2015. For more information, see the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ayiosdemetriospottery>.

⁶ A Fulbright Award (1986) and a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (1999/2000), that made the field research possible, were administered by the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI) in Nicosia under the umbrella of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). I thank CAARI Directors, S. Swiny and N. Serwint, for their generous assistance. Mr.G. Makrides has provides valuable information about this days processing clay as a youth in Agios Demetrios. The help and cooperation of the potters, my hosts Mr. and Mrs. L. Michael, Mrs. Yiangou, and Mr. and Mrs. Morphitis cannot be sufficiently acknowledged. M. den Nijs and P.A. London graciously provided IT assistance. I thank D. Mook for reading and early version of this text.

⁷ London, 1987.



Fig. 3. A Kornos potter in 1999 incises a rosette decoration while rotating the turntable with her other hand. Photo by the author.

The lowland tradition was not confined to Kornos. In former times, it was practiced periodically, in villages in the adjacent foothills, as at Klirou in the Troodos foothills, 26 km southwest of Nicosia. Prior to 1960, Kornos potters would work temporarily in foothills' villages for one or two months in the summer.

Entire nuclear families made the trip. Children would crush the clay under foot, collect wood and bark for the kiln, enjoy cool fresh air, and sometimes meet their future spouse. If a young woman took up permanent residence in the village, she practiced the Kornos technique of manufacture. Residents of the foothills recalled pots made in their village by potters from Kornos.

For example, an old jar recorded in Lazania village (30 km southwest of Nicosia) has an incised pattern made with a rouletting tool (*trochoudi*).⁸

Rouletting and incised rosettes were characteristic of Kornos designs exclusively. They are not found on pottery made in the Troodos tradition, which is characterised by multiple bands of incised lines, combing, or individual dots.⁹

The incentives for the Kornos potters were many. In addition to escaping the hot humid summer of the lowlands, they were able to make and fire pots where

⁸ Jensen, 1980, 48. The author's daughter, Elin Fischer and the Danish National Museum have generously made the manuscript of Knud Jensen available to me for publication.

⁹ In 2014, the residents of Agios Demetrios contributed 115 pots and 20 tools to create a new museum (London/Demetrios, 2015). None of the pots, regardless of age, display roulettes patterns. Troodos potters in 1986 and 2000 did not use a rouletting tool. <https://www.facebook.com/ayiosdemetriospottery>

they were needed by expanding their distribution area without the risky business of transporting pots over the hilly countryside.

The pots were exchanged for essential basic foods from the surrounding areas.

History of the Traditional Pottery Industry in Cyprus

The earliest written record of recent Cypriot pottery comes from a businessman, John Locke, who visited Cyprus in 1553.

He described foods in clay pots that were exported to Europe. Jars to store wine and pots used in water wheels were observed 45 years later, by a Dutch professor, Ioannes Cotovicus (Iohann van Kootwyck), who visited in 1598/1599.

He noted that small birds, preserved and packed in jars with vinegar and herbs, were sent to Venice.¹⁰

An 18th century text refers jars produced at Kornos and Lapithos, a northern coastal town west of Kyrenia.¹¹ Pottery is still produced both places: handmade red wares at Kornos and glazed or plain wheel-thrown wares at Lapithos.

Another major production center for wheel-made glazed cookware, tableware, and industrial products was outside Famagusta at Varosia and Mia Milea.¹²

Many workshops and factories produce glazed pottery in rural and urban settings. For example, in 2000 a potter working in Kofinou village, south of Kornos, mixed local light colored clays and a small quantity of the red clay used by Kornos potters, to throw pots on a mechanical wheel. He fired them in a wood-burning kiln.

Complementary Roles of Handmade and Wheel-thrown Glazed Pottery

Wheel-thrown and handmade pottery coexist. Glazed and/or plain wheel-made pottery did not eliminate the need for handmade wares in recent times. Each category serves different purposes.

Glazed pots with their homogeneously smooth, impermeable surfaces are easy to clean and do not leak until they break. Food can easily be cooked or stored in them. In contrast, the handmade wares were valued for their porous surface. The unglazed coarse red wares leaked and absorbed fluids, yeasts, bacteria, proteins or whatever was placed into them. The innate properties of handmade pots made them irreplaceable for processing, fermenting, cooking, and storing food until the invention of refrigerators and modern food preservatives.

Food processing and preserving. When sheep or goat milk become seasonally abundant it is traditionally used for human consumption immediately imme-

¹⁰ Cobham, 1969², 72, 199–200.

¹¹ Mariti, 1984, 58. Pottery was not made in Agios Demetrios until the late 19th century.

¹² Papademetriou, 2005.

diately or made into foods that will last over night, but no longer. In order to preserve milk for use during winter, it was transformed into yogurt, cheese, or fat through the process of fermentation. A small quantity of bacteria-rich yogurt added to fresh milk causes fermentation. Due to their high porosity, once a porous jar was used to make yogurt, the jar walls became inoculated with the bacteria. The pot itself could convert fresh milk into a fat or cheese with a long shelf life. In contrast, the sealed surfaces of glazed wheel-thrown pottery did not absorb bacteria. The pot itself could convert fresh milk into a fat or cheese with a long shelf life. In contrast, the sealed surfaces of glazed wheel-thrown pottery did not absorb bacteria. Glazed containers could not function as yogurt makers. Before electricity reached Agios Demetrios in 1962, with their bare hands, women used clay to fashion yogurt makers and other essential household equipment.

The porous handmade pots similarly were indispensable to make wine. In the 18th century, old wine jars, *pitharia*, with bacteria filled walls and ‘must’ or ‘lees’ in their bases, were more costly than new jars.¹³

Cooking. Food could bake in handmade and wheel-thrown glazed pots either in a modern oven or in a clay oven in the courtyard. Glazed cookware held its contents well. For the porous handmade cooking pots, women employed three traditional methods to season the pots and thereby eliminate porosity. New family-sized deep cooking pots (20cm tall x 23cm in diameter) filled with water were first set in the sun or in a hot oven to guarantee they had no cracks or fissures.



Fig. 4. Museum of Traditional Pottery in Agios Demetrios: jugs and cooking pots.
Photo by the author

¹³ Wallace/Orphanides, 1988, 137.

The pot was emptied, filled with lard, and placed in the kitchen where the fat was used in the daily cooking. The pot walls became saturated with the fat. Once all the lard had been used, the pot was impervious and ready for cooking (Fig. 4 middle lower shelf).

A second technique to prepare a new casserole (*ttavas*) involved placing it empty in a heated oven. If it did not crack, it was filled to the top with water, reheated, and then cooled and left to stand until it became fully saturated with water. After emptying the pot, the owner smeared the interior with a blend of egg white and sugar. A mixture of ash and egg white was applied on the exterior. Once dry it was ready to cook vegetables, with or without meat.

A third method calls for boiling potatoes in a new pot before cooking any other food. The potato starch enters each pore to seal the walls closed.¹⁴

Water storage. For handmade water jugs, high porosity was an asset. The red clay jugs can cool, sweeten, and purifying water. A wheel-thrown glazed jug or jar is no match for porous handmade jugs and jars. Red clay jugs are the original water coolers and purifiers. When water was poured into them, it would slowly seep or 'sweat' and through the walls. As a consequence, the water became cool through evaporation. Sometimes a basin collected any water than might drip down.

During this process the bitter tasting minerals naturally occurring in the water would adhere to the pot interior. This results in: 1) a white coating on jug and jar interiors; and 2) a sweeter tasting water absent the bitter minerals. Water jugs and jars lost their ability to cool or filter water within 3–12 months after their walls became clogged.¹⁵ The soft white mineral deposits would harden over time and seal the pores. The jugs then became useful for other purposes. Recipes from the 13th century CE specifically call for storing oils, cheese in brine or oil, vinegar, and rosewater in older jugs with clogged walls.¹⁶ As a result, there was a constant demand for: 1) new handmade porous water containers; 2) older jugs and jars to hold fluids; and 3) wheel-thrown glazed pots that did not leak their contents. The high porosity of handmade pottery was indispensable to maintain the agricultural subsistence economy. It enabled villagers to process and preserve dairy products and other foods for long term storage. Glazed wheel-thrown ceramics served other purposes.

Wheel-thrown Copies of Traditional Handmade Pottery

Wheel-thrown ceramics normally differ from the handmade repertoire in shape, surface finish, and use. Wheel-thrown copies of traditionally handmade incense

¹⁴ I successfully tried this method by taking potatoes in a *tsouka* with water and heated in a modern oven.

¹⁵ Macalister, 1912, II, 145, note; Matson, 1965, 204; Ali, 2005, 30.

¹⁶ Zaouli, 2007, 138–139.

burners, cooking pots, jugs, and money-boxes have been available for purchase at shops, markets, or churches at least since 1986. Their thin walls fire to a pale red or orange color, unlike the darker handmade shapes. The uniform walls and smooth texture display concentric circles. Pot overall dimensions, morphological features, and lack of incised decorations mark them as wheel-thrown copies of traditional handmade originals.

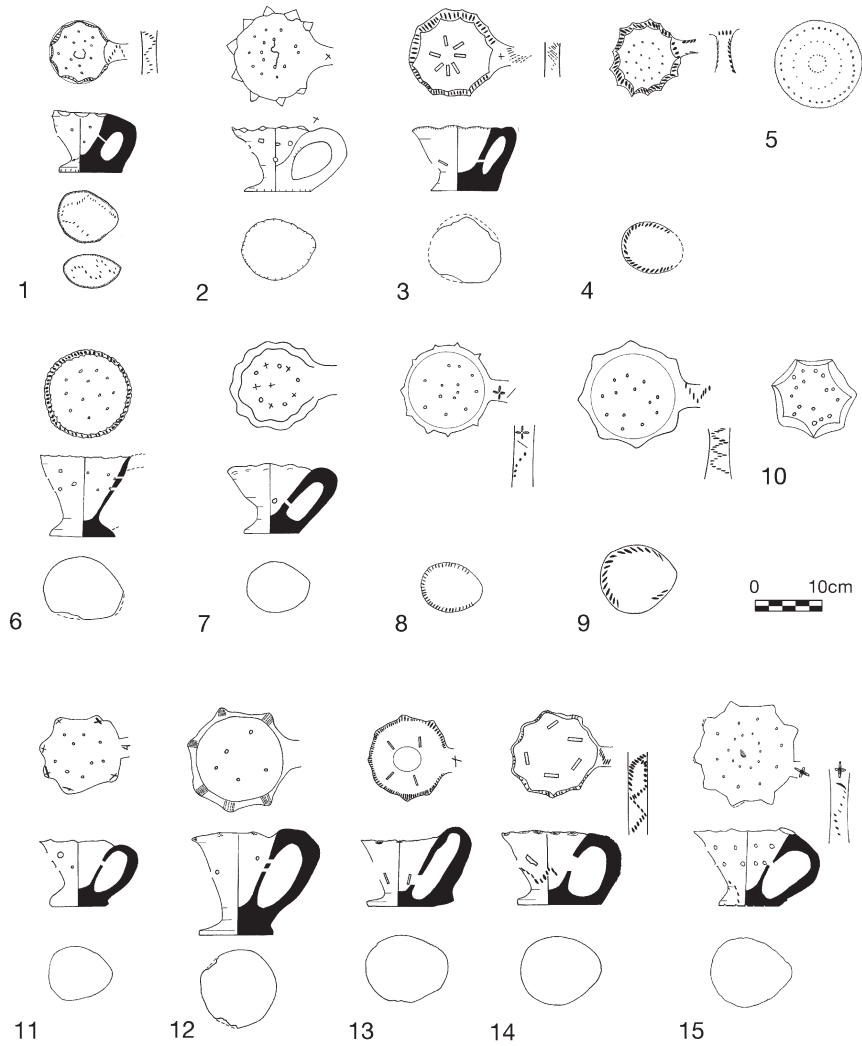


Fig 5. Incense burners handmade in Agios Demetrios prior to the year 2000. Views from above, side, top and underneath the base. Drawn by the author.

Incense burners. Clay, glass, or metal incense burners are found in many Cypriot households. In former times people would burn olive leaves, charcoal

and sometimes incense. Moslems used them to ward off the evil eye.¹⁷ Greek Orthodox Christians would make the sign of the cross with the burning incense burner in order to bless people at home or when a funeral procession walked past the house. They are also placed at cemetery gravesites and in churches to this day. Handmade examples from Agios Demetrios, Kaminaria, Fini, and Kornos were morphologically and stylistically unique and different from the wheel-thrown versions (Figs. 5–6).

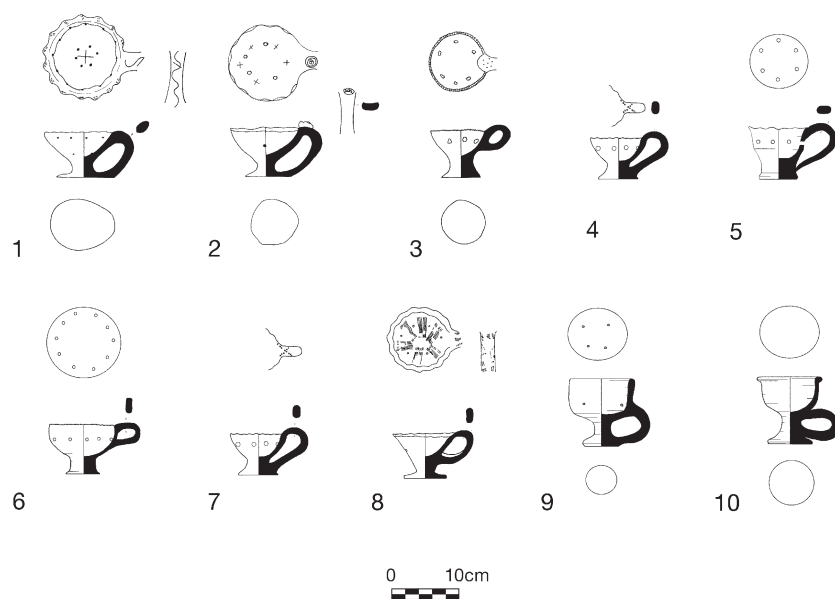


Fig. 6. Incense burners from Fini (1 and 2), Kornos (3–7), Kaminaria, (8) and wheel-thrown versions (8–9). Drawn by the author.

Many, but not all, handmade incense burners have incised ‘crosses’ and/or a snake-like pattern on their handle.¹⁸ The round or rectangular air vents might not always penetrate the walls fully. Handmade examples often have decorated rims, handles, or bases.

Wheel-thrown incense burners are found in private households, cemeteries, and churches. Handle placement (upper body or below), air vents (present or not), and pedestal shape (plain or not), vary according to the workshop producing the wheel-made examples. They lack decorations and symbolic markings. Air vents and incised marks, which can be considered as functional or

¹⁷ Many thanks to Musafa Izil for providing this information in October, 2015.

¹⁸ Five of 13 examples (Fig. 5) made before 2000 in Agios Demetrios have incised crosses and another two had incised snake-like patterns on the handle.

symbolic essentials for incense burners, are nonetheless absent from the wheel-made clay copies.

Cookware. There are wheel-thrown copies of two shallow and one deep cooking pot. Local handmade casseroles (*ttavades*) lack a lid or handles. Wheel-thrown versions are made in multiple locations and supply local restaurants.¹⁹

A second type of casserole (*tsouka*), with a lid and two ribbon handles, is a copy of a wheel-thrown glazed pot (*tsoukali*) originally imported to Cyprus from the Aegean islands.²⁰

The disruption of imports during World War II led local potters to fill the gap with handmade and wheel-thrown copies. The ribbon handles, flat base, and casserole lid were atypical for the Cypriot repertoire. An interior glaze found on some wheel-thrown local copies was replicated on the imported *tsoukes*. The handmade deep cooking pots (*kourelli* or *koumnoudi tou kleftico*), have a lid (*stoupoma*), two loop handles, and decorated shoulders. Potters who work with electric wheels make copies that resemble handmade originals in shape only. They might have a faint wavy incised and or no decoration. The base can be flatter than the round-bottomed traditional form. The lightweight thin walls contrast with the heavier handmade originals.

Jugs. Wheel-thrown copies of traditional jugs lack the typical flat or ring base of plain or glazed jugs. There are morphological, stylistic, and textural differences between handmade and wheel-thrown incense burners, cookware, and jugs, which are becoming increasingly expensive and uncommon. Fewer women make them each year. On one occasion I met a young Cypriot living abroad who came to Kornos village looking for a particular type of handmade cooking pot. He had not been able to find it in the city. He wanted his Australian wife to replicate the taste of his mother's cooking, which he insisted started with a handmade clay pot. He left without the pot.

Perpetuation of Traditional Handmade Pottery Forms as Wheel-thrown Copies

The resilience of handmade Cypriot pottery into the 21st century is a reality.

Few people today can discriminate between handmade versus wheel-made pottery given their similar shapes. The pale colored impervious copies made of tan, yellow, and white clays, by male potters have a wider distribution via markets, shops, and churches, than the handmade wares of rural women potters. The copies lack the signature decorative patterns but their walls are thin and smooth. Customers almost prefer the even smooth walls to the thicker, heavy

¹⁹ Wheel-thrown cooking pots currently are made at the Zizia Pottery Factory in Jordan, southwest of Amman (Sideroff, 2015, 101), but were not recorded in 1987 or 1989 (Londn/Sinclair, 1991). The factory has expanded over the years and produces a variety of small tourist wares, jars, and cookware. The latter are used in restaurants.

²⁰ Ionas, 2000, 226, 251.

handmade pots with their superficial imperfections. Wheel-thrown incense burners might lack air holes and incised patterns embodying religious meaning, but they are sold in churches and shops.

Handmade or wheel-thrown clay incense burners are used for their original purpose. Jugs to cool and filter water have been replaced largely by refrigerators but still serve to cool water in village courtyards and kitchens. Metal cookware has replaced ceramic pots, except in restaurants or in Kornos village, where a few potters still produce handmade clay pots for cooking and food processing. If properly treated prior to use, they function as well as any metal or glass container while preserving a memory and taste of the past.

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