

# Wine Jars and Jar Makers of Cyprus: The Ethnoarchaeology of Pitharia

By Gloria London. Nicosia: Astrom Editions 2020. Pp. 240. €25.44. ISBN 9789925745555 (cloth).

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London's latest book on wine jars and jar makers supplements her earlier studies on the Cypriot jars and the people, mostly female, behind them. What is new in the present study is the incorporation and detailed interpretation of an immense contribution made by Knud Jensen, a Danish police officer whose diaries are presented in London's publication. Jensen undertook his research on *pitharia* (from the ancient Greek *pithos*) and other Cypriot agricultural tools during his service with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus between 1964 and 1971. In his effort to acquire agricultural tools for the ethnographic collections of the Danish Museum, he was encouraged to become a "pot detective" (9), and he returned to Cyprus on various occasions to continue his research. Jensen kept diaries of all his daily activities, providing valuable information on the island's most recent history. His exhaustive descriptions of pots, accompanied by drawings and photos, and his oral interviews with the people who either produced or owned the jars provide important data for researchers. What is more valuable, however, is his search for the stories behind the pots and his ability to trace the individuals and families responsible for their production. London, with her immense knowledge of jar manufacture, has taken advantage of Jensen's diaries, properly interpreted all the available information, and built upon it to produce a fascinating account for both the specialist and the lay person. In this respect, I fully agree with Stuart Swiny's statement "others could have published Jensen's diaries, but none could have done it with Gloria's sensitivity and background knowledge" (xxii).

Part 1 of the narrative deals mostly with Jensen's biography, his first years in Cyprus and his initial ethnographic studies, which gradually developed into more specific research on the huge wine jars that were scattered around the countryside, mostly in deserted villages across the Troodos Massif. He was the first to appreciate the historical value of the information inscribed on the

jars and, after carefully recording their inscriptions, he searched for the people who produced them (5). He also noticed the presence of bread stamps on various parts of the jars, a practice that resembles the use of impressed scenes on pithoi that I excavated at the Late Bronze Age site of Alassa. This long-lasting tradition may have been associated with a wish for a successful fermentation, the most critical step in wine production. I noticed a similar practice at the sixth-century CE site of Byala, on the west coast of the Black Sea, where a wine fermentation jar bears an inscription in Greek with the words "help me God" enclosed by a cross and a bunch of grapes. The site specialized in wine production and the manufacture of wine jars to satisfy local needs. A similar continuity in the methods used for the manufacture and decoration, and in the ideology of wine jars in Cyprus is observed by both Jensen and London. For example, techniques described by Columella in the Roman period and by medieval travelers for coating the interior of wine fermentation jars were practiced well into the middle of the 20th century (89).

Part 2 of the book is mostly dedicated to ceramic ethnoarchaeology and the possible association between the information inscribed on jars and the history of settlements, as well as to the archaeological implications of London's observations. In reviewing London's narrative in this section of the book, following the publication of my excavations at Alassa which raised many questions related to the impressed pithoi, I realize the importance of ethnography in interpreting archaeological material. Some of those questions might now be answered with greater credibility, in view of the continuity that is often a feature of the island's conservative communities. Of interest also is Jensen's attempt to relate the dating of wine jars and other vessels with the establishment of settlements, a suggestion questioned by London (144). Thanks to the recent publication of the 1572 Ottoman census of Cyprus (I.P. Theocharidis, *Η Πρώτη Οθωμανική Απογραφή*

της Κύπρου (1572), E. Epifaniou Publications 2021), we now have an independent source for dating settlement foundations. A good example is provided by the village history of Agios Demetrios (Marathasa). The earliest securely dated jar in the village dates to 1859, while oral tradition places the establishment of the settlement between 1800 and 1824/1830 (142–43). We now know, however, that the village existed during the 1572 census (Theocharidis 2021, 77).

London's *Wine Jars and Jar Makers of Cyprus* is a further contribution to her beloved subject—the huge jars and ceramic utensils produced primarily by female potters to satisfy the everyday needs of an agrarian society that has changed little since the Bronze Age. Her extensive use and interpretation of Jensen's diaries and her own research combine to provide a handbook for both ethnographers and archaeologists, and at the same time a fascinating narrative for the layman on a self-sufficient

way of life that persisted well into the middle of the 20th century. The abundant illustrations, both line drawings and photographs (more than 134), constitute a special merit of the book; in particular, the drawings with measurements do much to illuminate the written account. Of great value is the mass of material prepared by Jensen and presented here for the first time. London's deep insights into the manufacture of the jars, her wide knowledge of the eastern Mediterranean region, and her (and Jensen's) active use of oral information obtained from local people combine to make this book a welcome contribution to the history of the rural society of Cyprus.

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