

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Excursion to the pottery makers of Thrapsano / Prefecture Iraklion**

Towards *Thrapsano* [Θραψανόν] take the National road (E75) from *Heraklion* [Ηράκλειο] about 15.5 miles east to *Chersonissos* [Χερσόνησος]. Here take left towards south *Kastelli* [Καστέλλιον]. From *Kastelli* all roads lead to *Thrapsano*.

The step that you could make from clay formed vessels stable with fire, has already been done in the Middle Stone age. One of the oldest burned potteries is dated to around 12,000 years. Ceramic products from the Neolithic have served not only for the everyday usage but were also used as cinerary urn for funeral. The first potter's wheels were formed around 3500 BC, and were made of stone or burned from clay. Base of pottery is a thorough preparation of clay, to eliminate annoying impurities. The raw material must mix multiple times, kneaded and beaten, so that a plastic, homogeneous mass accrues, which than can be shaped. This is done by various techniques such as disk technology, bulge-, or composition technology; formed with the hands or on a Potter's wheel. If the vessels are half dry ("leather hard") the objects be garnished, i.e. equipped with handles or other "decoration". When vessels are dry, the (first) brand occurs, which is called annealing or bisque firing. After the glazing a second brand occurs, called glazing- or glost firing, where the temperature is set the way, the powdered glaze melts and forms a thin, glassy skin, which seals the vessel.

Like in Greece, its own ceramic art devised at Crete. Vases and urns of Cretan artisans remained unglazed, but had a delicate polished gloss. The name "ceramics" comes from the Greek (keramos = argil or potter's clay).

Since vessels were made already with the 7th Millennium BC in Crete (expected to be the most valuable works of Aegean culture), "Attic golden age" of the pottery was established during the further development. Geometric patterns with motifs from the flora and fauna are seen on some monumental amphoras. These increasingly yield figure representations in the course of history.

Famous are the Cretan "Pithoi"¹, huge supply vessels which were manufactured in historical time by wandering pottery families. The craftsmen camped for several months on the outskirts of large villages, mostly in the vicinity of a waterhole. There they formed each 10 "Pithoi" per working cycle, built up on a potter's wheel. The jars were burned once a week. Even if today's potters do not wander anymore and the pickup has replaced the donkey, several pottery are still on Crete; as in the "pottery city" *Thrapsano*. It is eternalises within the verse of an old Cretan folk song: "I hope with all my heart, to marry in the city and now I celebrate wedding in Tranpsano where I have to sieve black earth".



¹ A Pithoi which contains a child skeleton from Minoan time and is clearly a funerary vessel is to be seen in the Archaeological Museum of Agios of Nikolaos.



Times have changed – but not the pottery art. Potter at the potter’s wheel. Past (left) and today (right).



For the first drying the vessels get several days in the Sun (Picture. right); the picture left show ready burned vessels, which are stored „outdoors“ and are spread from here to the market on the island.

Within the pottery guild the master is called MASTORAS, his assistant SOTO-MASTORAS, the TROCHARIS veers the wheel, the CHOMATAS prepares the clay, the XYLOS the fire and the KOUVALITIS the apprentice.

Photos: U. Kluge (2004)

