POTTERY MAKING IN ANDROS

By JUDY BIRMINGHAM

Three pots by Nikos Lukataris of Strapuries.
From left to right: pithos for wine, bournies for cheese, and stamnos for water.

When, in 1966, it seemed likely that an expedition from Sydney might one day undertake archaeological excavations in the Greek island of Andros, I extended a visit there in order to investigate the present-day pottery situation. If local potters were still working, any investigation must yield useful information about clay sources and types, which should enable us to make a distinction among the excavated material between imported and locally produced wares. A knowledge of traditional methods of clay preparation, forming techniques, fuels and kilns also seemed likely to be rewarding, since there might well have been little change in the island since the introduction of the kick-wheel and the appearance of the village potter in place of the older household tradition. Just what changes there have been, of course, only excavation can show. I was also concerned to see the role of the potter in the community he was working for—the extent to which he was affected by changing demand, to what degree his individual creativity could express itself within the comparatively rigid framework of a learned craft. Finally the pots themselves: how they are used, when and where, how much they cost, what they are called. Such information is an unbelievable luxury to the archaeologist, and he seizes eagerly upon it in the hope that even if it is not directly transferable to the prehistoric situation it will lead him to a more enlightened approach.

It took a surprisingly long time to locate any potters at all in Andros, for my first discovery was that the bulk of the domestic pottery still used in the coastal towns and villages was imported. Such is the topography of the island with its rugged mountainous interior and numerous harbors that communication by sea with other islands or with the neighboring mainland region of Euboea is often easier and cheaper than communication, still often by donkey or mule, with its own mountain villages. One potter, Panayiotis Kozanitis, still survives and works in the village of Amolocho, high in the northern mountains, but he now supplies only his own village with pots instead of sending them down to Gavrio on the coast. One reason seems to be that the Euboecan potters of Chalkis are geared to a far
greater output, with power-driven wheels and coke-fuelled kilns, than the local potters with their kick-wheels and brush-fired kilns; and the Euboean potters are then able to send their products out by caiques to the island ports. Evidence from other islands in antiquity suggests that this Euboean domination of the pottery trade may have occurred at other times even before the mechanization of the industry there. They may always have been cheaper and more easily available than the local products because of the ease of sea transport. Probably they were also considered preferable, for the clays of Andros are red and full of mica, whereas the Euboean clay is light in color and appears much finer. However, this question needs further investigation.

The main imported shape is the stamnos, or narrow-necked two-handled water jar, often decorated with a white-painted square or flower on the shoulder which was characteristic, I knew, of the work of Vasili Sotyrko at Chalkis (Euboea). In spite of the cheapness and availability of other materials like plastic and aluminium, and the steady extension of piped water throughout the island, the stamnos retains a limited use even in the towns because it keeps water cool by evaporation. I heard that a unique full of pottery had recently unloaded at Chora, probably from Chalkis. It included a variety of jars, plates and bowls, in which I found later that the two Andros potters made the same shape, a hominy, also glazed inside to prevent evaporation, but less attractive. In addition to these pleasant utilitarian pots there was in the main pottery shop in Chora a selection of the heavily ornate, brightly-colored prestige ware of Athens—mostly flower pots and vases, some inlaid with fragments of looking-glass for more eye-catching effect.

Eventually I was able to track down the two surviving local potters, Kozanitis of Amolocho and Nikos Loukakaris of Strrapury, who still makes his living by potting, selling some of his wares in Chora as well as in his own village, and George Klerarkis of Koundi, who died some ten or twelve years ago. The fourth was Kozanitis of Amolocho, now nearly seventy and coming towards the end of his working career. I sought out the potteries of the Siphnian at Korti, and of Kalerakis of Kountani, finding them fast disappearing. The Korti pottery had been remodelled as a farm building, and there remained only a few sherds, and a fire-reddened patch in a wall where the kiln had been removed. At Kountani, used more recently, the kiln still survived, several old pots, and far more sherds. Such places have an obvious interest for the archaeologist, for they are already
archaeological sites with the added value of known data.

But it was the working potters I wanted to meet, and so walked up into the mountains one day, a four-hour walk, to spend a day with Panayiotis Kozanitis and his family. He was hoeing newly irrigated vegetables near his home when I arrived, and explained that he only made pottery two or three months in the year, in May, June, and early July, since winter was too cold and in summer he grew vegetables. Also there was less and less demand for pottery even in this isolated village, for the general Aegaeans drift away from the villages had operated drastically here in Ano-

locho, and few of the several hundred houses were now occupied. Later, when we went to his pottery workshop, he pointed across the valley to two villages in the distant range, and commented that he would no longer be bothered to carry his wares over there, to load up himself or a donkey as once he had, nor indeed did he now sell in Gavrión either. Once too he had made his own white paint—he picked up a chip of limestone from the path as we walked and showed me. Now he bought it from Athens and the old handmill in which he ground it still lay on a shelf in his workshop. Once too there had been a red paint as well as the white he still used.

Nevertheless it was apparent from the variety of pots in his own house, as well as in his workshop, that he still made a very wide range of vessels, wider apparently than that of Loukataris. These vessels necessarily related above all to every aspect of food and drink. First, the collection and storage of water, for which there were large and small two-handled water jars (stamniki) with narrow necks, secondly smaller handleless pots or carafes (kanas) and wide-necked jugs for decanting and drinking. These were all unslipped or unglazed for maximum evaporation, and there was a good range of sizes for every occasion. Then there were the large glazed jars with medium wide necks (phyrhaki), for wine, although Loukataris had far more of these than Kozanitis. Kozanitis said he also used to make little sets of coffee cups but there was no longer any demand.

For serving food a variety of flaring dishes, usually slipped and decorated inside, were made, called lekanis. These usually had an emphatic squared-off rim, and a white swirled design inside. They would be used to hold communal pilaff, yoghurt or meat into which each member of the family would dip his scoop of bread. Such dishes could of course be used for other purposes as our own dishes are—I saw quite large ones being used as flower pots, and again to carry washing out to the line. Cooking pots were both slipped and unslipped inside, with either thick tubular handles or two small vertical loop handles. One of them was a cassarole dish (called by him roufali, and by Loukataris skafali) with lid, slipped inside, the same shape as I saw in many other parts of the Mediterranean and in Attica. Associated with it
knowledge of living in Amoloch—a small cer-
ery used by the priest, small pots for children,
large curved tiles made in an iron frame over a
curved wooden mold, and mud bricks made in a
square wooden frame.
Kozanitis, I gathered, had learned his craft
from his father, who in turn had been appren-
ticed in Athens. Thus in Panyiotis one might see
ultimately an Amoloch method rather than an
earlier native ceramic tradition. Yet for nearly a
century the needs of the villagers of Amoloch had
acted selectively upon father’s and son’s work;
what were cut off from intercourse with the continuing
Atic trends. Certainly it would be interesting
to compare the two situations today in detail. My
impression is that Kozanitis still made many
shapes which the more highly specialized main-
land potters no longer made and sometimes im-
ported, and of those that he did, one or two
showed unmistakable deviation in form.
His methods of clay collection and prepara-
tion, and of throwing and firing seemed in general
similar to those in most parts of the Aegean. He
quarried his clay from the hillside behind the pot-
ttery, which was built almost directly on a hill
edge on the side of the mountain. He built the
clay and rock for two hours with a long curved
wooden beater (kalo kopano) and then sieved it
through a quarter-inch sieve. It was then dropped
into the upper of two small wooden tanks, soaked
and stirred, then sieved through into the lower
tank where it dried out. It was then again and
stored dry, mixed with water at the time of use.
Non-plastics were added. Before throwing he
bolted the clay, halved it, and worked each half
into the other. His wheel, trochos, was a kick-
wheel, both wheels of stone. His decorative tech-
niques included the use of white paint applied
with a foiled piece of wood or bamboo, used for
simple bands, a wavy line, or a series of SSSS.
Rims, bases, and grooves he cut with a smooth
square wooden plate, with a hole in it and rounded
corners. Rims were decorated with different
finger touches. Like the other potters I saw in
Andros and Aegina he had a single stone-built
kiln about six to eight feet in diameter and about
two feet high which he graduated filled. Fuel was
the dry thorn bush pushed in at the fire hole,
the heat rising through sherd-covered holes in the
floor. I could not discover how often the old man
fired the kiln—perhaps only once or twice a
season by now. The Aegina potter George Garis
fired a similar kiln every two or three weeks, with
the same thorn bush fuel. Kozanitis, like Louka-
taris, charged ten drachmae for a large starnnos,
five to six drachmae for smaller pots.
The other working potter whom I found in
Andros was Nikos Loukataris of Struparvus, a
village on the mountain slope above Chora itself,
with good traffic communications with the island
capital. He was out on the occasions when I
called, but I saw his workshop, clay preparation
while over a hundred species are finely
illustrated in color by H. Wayne Trimm of the
New York State Conservation De-
partment. This excellent portable guide includes
descriptions of songs and call notes as well as
the eggs and nesting habits of the species
that abound at Tikal.
The archaeological guide was written
to fulfill a long felt need to provide visitors with
facts and understand the ancient Tikal.
Dr. Coe was formerly director of the Tikal
Project and is now in charge of the Tikal
publication program. The handbook, with a
detailed guide map, carries the reader
through the ruins, describing the buildings,
the monuments and carvings. It contains
data on their dates and how they may have
functioned. It also summarizes what is
known of the history of Tikal, beginning
around 600 B.C., and an Appendix explains
the methods used by the Maya of Tikal to
record their past. The book is full of:
both black-and-white and sixteen pages
of color photographs—showing many of
the treasures of Tikal.