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Cronache di Archeologia

Scavi e ricerche 2

Edizioni Quasar

An Ancient Art in a Modern World: the Challenge of Thrapsanò Traditional Potters in Crete

Marco Prete

Introduction

The village of Thrapsanò is located in north-central Crete within the municipality of Minoa Pediada, surrounded by a hilly landscape covered with hundreds of olive trees¹. Nowadays, Thrapsanò is mostly known for the ceramic tradition still performed in the village². From the beginning of the fifties traditional pottery production in Greece suffered a major crisis which threatened its survival. Within this scenario Thrapsanò potters represent a virtuous example of resilience, being able to overcome the unfavorable circumstances affecting them and preserving at the same time their original practices. Through the preliminary presentation of data collected during a study season on the perception and usage of Minoan heritage by Cretan-based individuals and communities, this paper aims to document the strategy adopted by Thrapsanò potters to face critical periods relying on the cultural legacy of the island. Following a presentation of Thrapsanò and its potting tradition, the author

will analyze the changes in social and economic conditions forcing the villagers to abandon their long-established way of life, as well as pottery production as a form of sustenance. Subsequently, he will examine the choices undertaken by the few remaining potters in the seventies and the role played by the reference to the archaeological past of the island. A final discussion will eventually consider the use of Thrapsanò case study as a comparison for similar situations, as well as a starting point of reflection on the active role to be performed by archaeologists in comparable contexts.

History of Thrapsanò and its potting tradition

Most of the information related to the history of Thrapsanò and its potting tradition is covering a timespan going from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day, while data concerning previous periods are less frequent but still extremely valuable. Its history can be traced back to the 14th century A.D., when a village known as Trapsiano or Thrapsiano is reported in the archive of the Duke of Candia (*Χάνδακα*), modern Heraklion³. Nonetheless, as a survey conducted between 2005 and 2007 has shown, ceramic and numismatic data seem to confirm human presence in the area during the Second

1 Thanks are due to Kostis Christakis and Simona Todaro for the valuable suggestions and incitements they provided during my research period in Crete. Acknowledgments are also due to Mr. Michalis Ploumakis for sharing his information about Thrapsanò and everything involving the Minos Potters Cooperative. I am also very grateful to the University of Catania and the British School at Athens for providing me with means and resources to carry on with my Cretan studies.

2 Other Cretan villages with a tradition in pottery manufacture are Nochia in the area of Chanià, Margarites in the area of Rethymno and Kentri in the area of Ierapetra. See in general JONES 1986, pp. 855-856; VALLIANOS, PADOUVA 1986, pp. 19-23; DAY 2004, pp. 106-107. For Margarites and Nochia see also HAMPE, WINTER 1962, pp. 33-35 and pp. 43-45; for Kentri see BLITZER 1984.

3 PSAROPOULOU, SIMANTIRAKIS 2007, p. 21.

Byzantine Period (961-1204 A.D.) as well⁴. A document dated to the Venetian period (1611 A.D.) and containing the last will of Andrea Cornaro testify the status of Thrapsanòs as a fief of the Venetian Cornaro family⁵. In a census held in 1671 during the Ottoman period the village is listed under the names of both Trapsana and Comleksy koy⁶, the latter appearing also in the *Κώδικας των Θυσιών* (transl. *Codex of Sacrifices*, 19th century)⁷. The Egyptian census held in 1834 A.D. indicates the place as Trapsanò, and ultimately the village is registered with its current name in 1881⁸. In demographic terms, recent literature suggests a relatively high population for the village since the beginning of the Ottoman period, a situation which remained more or less unchanged until the end of the 20th century⁹. According to the 2011 demographic data, a population of 1261 inhabitants resides within its administrative borders¹⁰.

The potting tradition in Thrapsanò is said to begin around the late Venetian period, based on etymological, documentary and material evidence. As far as etymology is concerned, the same name of the village is somehow telling. It has been suggested that its origin might be related to the noun *θράψαλα*, indicating the sherds scattered around a kiln¹¹, while the Turkish

name *Comleksy koy/ Τσομλεκτοσή* is maintained to mean “village of potters”¹². Even the names used to address the different roles performed by the potters (such as *Mastoras*, the “head potter”) and the one employed to define their itinerant activity (*Vendema*, “harvest”) are of Venetian derivation¹³. Documents and chronicles dating to the 17th century support this scenario as well: a catalogue written in Monastiraki (Amari region in the area of Rethymno) lists among other things one’s possession of five *σκοιντέλια θραψανά* (Thrapsanò bowl/dish)¹⁴, while Xathoudides reports a passage of the book entitled *Αμαρτωλών Σωτηρία* (lit. transl. “Salvation of the Sinners”) in which the monk Agapios Landos claims that the inhabitants of Thrapsanò are all potters (*τσονκαλάδες*)¹⁵. Lastly, the recovery of kiln remains in the area as well as sherds dating from the 15th to the 18th century provide material evidence for a continuity in pottery production at Thrapsanò since the Venetian period¹⁶.

As a final remark, it is of some interest the information given by Psaropoulou and Simantirakis about a study aiming at the quantification of the amount of clay removed during the past centuries from the area of *Λίμνη στη Λιβάδα*, close to Thrapsanò: the results showed an amount of 62.240 m² of retrieved material, suggesting a period of exploitation going back to roughly the Hellenistic period¹⁷. Yet, the use of clays from the area of Thrapsanò is known even for the Minoan period¹⁸.

The traditional products and the practice of Vendema

The most popular product worthing the fame of

4 HAMMOND 2017a, p. 260; 2017b, pp. 120-129 for the First and Second Byzantine periods.

5 The document is thoroughly analyzed by S. G. Spanakis (1955), who provides the Italian version and its Greek translation. In his examination Spanakis suggests the identification of Andrea Cornaro’s brother Vincenzo, listed as one of the heirs in the document, as the author of the famous epic poem *Erotokritos*. The existence of different individuals sharing the same name between the 16th and 17th century in Crete is nonetheless problematic in these terms (see ALEXIOU 1957; MAVROMATIS 1984). P. Day (2004, p. 111) reports an encounter between the geographer and monk C. Buondelmonti with a member of the Cornaro family in the area of Thrapsanò already in 1415.

6 PSAROPOULOU, SIMANTIRAKIS 2007, p. 21; HAMMOND 2017a, p. 260.

7 *The Κώδικας των Θυσιών* (DEMETRIADES, DASKALOU 2003) is a register held in the Heraklion Ottoman Archive which lists the names of Cretan inhabitants who were variously affected by the 1821 revolution. Among other things, it registers the different types of movable and unmovable goods confiscated by the Turks both in Heraklion (Candia) and other villages, including *Τσομλεκτοσή* (2003, p. 33, 163).

8 HAMMOND 2017a, p. 260.

9 DAY 2004, p. 111; HAMMOND 2017a, p. 260.

10 www.discoverminoapediadas.gr/project/θραψανο/

11 VALLIANOS, PADOVA 1986, p. 20. Another possibility was

originally put forward by XANTHOUIDES (1927, p. 119, note n. 2), who suggested a correlation with the ancient Greek verb *θάλπω*, having within its meanings “warming up, heating”. The verb *θάλπω* has nonetheless also different contextual meanings, such as to comfort/to cherish.

12 DAY 2004, p. 112.

13 CASSON 1938, p. 468; DAY 2004, p. 111.

14 PSAROPOULOU, SIMANTIRAKIS 2007, p. 21.

15 XANTHOUIDES 1927, pp. 118-119.

16 VALLIANOS, PADOVA 1986, pp. 19-23; HAMMOND 2017a.

17 PSAROPOULOU, SIMANTIRAKIS 2007, p. 22.

18 RETHEMIOTAKIS, CHRISTAKIS 2011, p. 202.

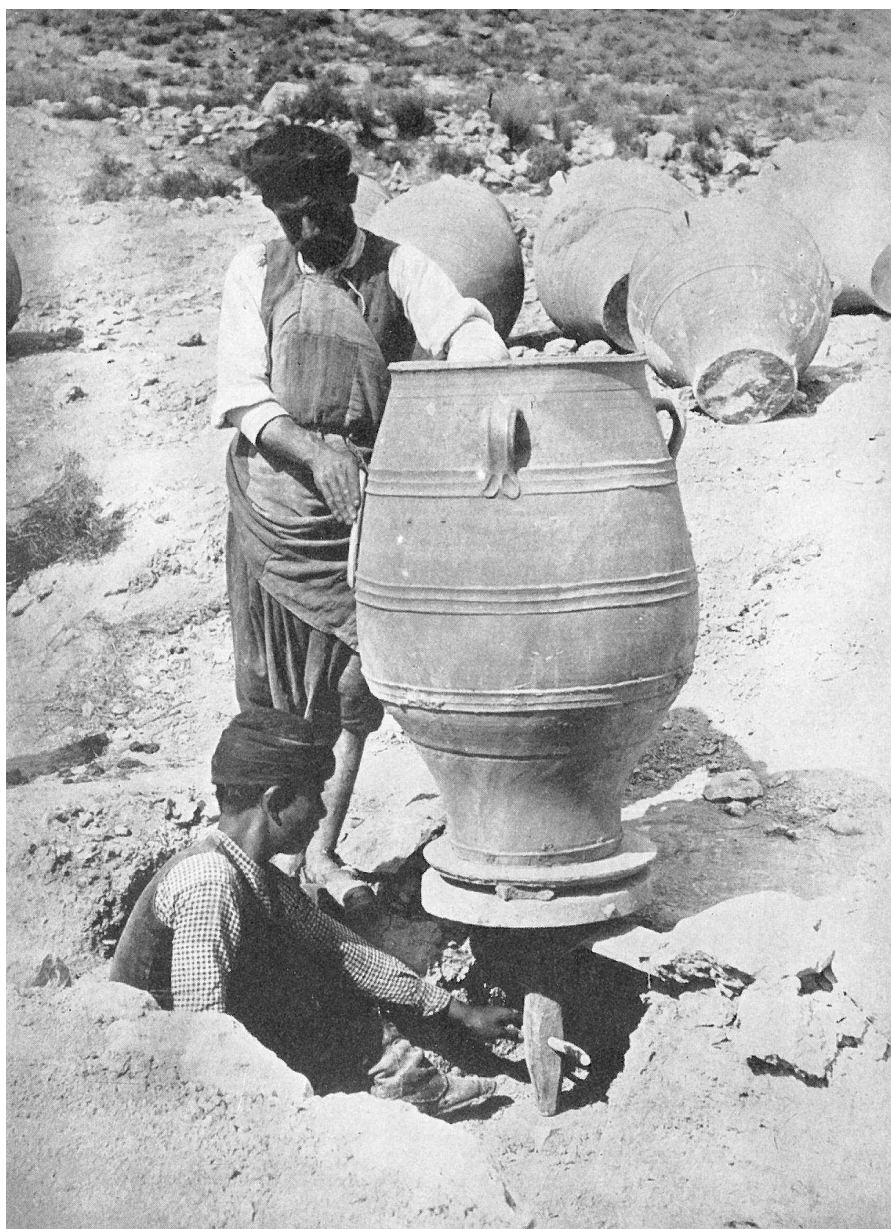


Fig. 1 - Thrapsanò potters finishing a *pithari* at the beginning of the 20th century. After XANTHOUDIDES 1927, fig. XXI.

Thrapsanò potters is the *pithari*, a solid type of large jar employed in pre-industrial Crete as the main container for storage purposes (Fig. 1)¹⁹. *Pitharia* were made simply using hands and a potter's wheel (*τροχή*), requiring every time the common effort of at least two craftsmen of whom one spinning the wheel (Wheeler) and the other shaping the actual vase (Master), al-

though the presence of a third craftsman (Second Master) is usually reported²⁰. The *pithari* is nonetheless one of the many shapes produced within the Thrapsanò tradition: after meeting a party of Thrapsanò potters in the village of Silamos in 1916, Xanthoudides accounted for many different shapes manufactured by these craftsmen such as *stamnoi* (water jars), *lagenoi*, *oinochoai*, *gastres* (flower-pots), *kypselai* (hives

19 See VOYATZOGLOU 1972 for the most exhaustive discussion on Thrapsanò potters and their practices.

20 VOYATZOGLOU 1984.

or boxes), *skyphoi*, *poteria* (cups and tumblers) and *flaskia* (flagons), as well as some leaded wares²¹.

However, the most distinctive aspect concerning the potting activity of Thrapsanò is to be found in the practice known as *Vendema*²². Much of the information collected about it comes from the ethnographic research of M. Voyatzoglou, widely quoted in later ethnographic and archaeological studies²³; accounts on the *Vendema* are also reported in the analyses carried out by R. Hampe and A. Winter, C. Vallianos and M. Padouva, B. Psaropoulou, P. Day and M. Giannopoulou²⁴. The *Vendema*, a Venetian-derived name meaning harvest, consisted in the itinerant activity performed by the potters of Thrapsanò during the summer months, when they used to travel all over the island producing and selling pottery to cover the needs of the rural population. The period of itinerancy started at the end of May and ended in September, a timespan covering the exact duration of summer according to the orthodox calendar (from the 21st of May to the 14th of September)²⁵. Parties formed by 6 to 12 people were leaving the village to reach the designated locations chosen during the winter, which were often equipped with permanent kiln used year after year²⁶. Every member of the party (called *takimi*, Turkish word for band or team)²⁷ had to perform a specific task within the group²⁸: the Master (*ο Μάστορας/Πρωτομάστορας/Πιθαράς*)²⁹ was

the director and manager of the company and its resources, responsible for the picking of the other members, the negotiation of the spot where the activity would have taken place, the selling of the products and the actual creation and shaping of the most delicate parts of the *pithari*; the Second Master (*ο Σοτομάστορας*) was the only other craftsman involved in the proper construction of the *pitharia*, as well as in the production of secondary shapes; the Wheeler (*ο Τροχάρης*) was responsible for the continuous rotation of the turntable in close synergy with the Master, along with being in charge for filling the kiln with the wares and the regulation of the firing conditions (*ο Καμινάρης*); the Clay Man or Clay Worker (*ο Χωματάς*) was requested to pound and sieve the clay, besides participating in its kneading process together with the Master, the Second Master and the Wheeler; the Wood Cutter (*ο Ξυλάς/Ξυλοφόρος*) was responsible for the collection and preparation of the firing material; the Carrier (*ο Κουβαλητής*), finally, was in charge for the transportation of clays and woods from their source as well as the delivery of the final product to the buyer.

To understand the importance accorded to the Thrapsanò potters, their *Vendema*, and especially their production of *pitharia*, is essential to observe the use and the meaning of such vessels in a pre-industrial context as that of Crete before the fifties. Various notary documents dating to the Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman period list these big specimens of jar known as *pithoi* and *pitharia* together with valuable goods, being themselves indicators of status³⁰. Some Byzantine sayings reported by K. Christakis are telling in this sense: *εκ πίθω αντλείς* and *μικρόν γεύμα παμπλήρους πίθου* are respectively translatable as “you draw wealth from the pithos” and “a small meal from a full pithos”, indicating the prosperity of the owners; in some cases, *pithoi* were also rent for the storage of perishable resources³¹. As far as the function of this type of vase is concer-

21 XANTHOUIDES 1927, p. 119.

22 Other villages whose potters were involved in itinerant practices are also those of Margarites and Karoti (West Crete), though they haven't received the same attention as Thrapsanò (see DAY 2004, p. 111).

23 VOYATZOGLU 1972, 1973, 1974, 1984.

24 HAMPE, WINTER 1962; VALLIANOS, PADOVA 1986; PSAROPOULOU 1996; DAY 2004; GIANNOPOULOU 2010.

25 VOYATZOGLU 1973, p. 14; 1974, p. 18; 1984, pp. 131-132.

26 VOYATZOGLU reports group of potters composed by 6 people (1972 for a detailed account; see also 1973, p. 14; 1974, p. 18; 1984, pp. 131-132, while XANTHOUIDES (1927, pp. 127-128) accounts for groups from 7 to 12 members. XANTHOUIDES (p. 128) also noted that the “peregrinations” of these potters started in the middle of May to end within the first 10 days of August.

27 DAY 2004, p. 111.

28 See VOYATZOGLU 1984 for a complete summary about all the technical, professional and social aspects related to this practice.

29 The terms *Πρωτομάστορας* and *Πιθαράς*, as well as *Ξυλοφόρος*

below, are reported in XANTHOUIDES 1927, p. 128.

30 For a summary on this topic see CHRISTAKIS 2005, pp. 64-67. See also GIANNOPOULOU 2010, p. 45.

31 CHRISTAKIS 2005, p. 66-67.

ned, much evidence can be drawn from ethnographical research. The primary use of *pithoi* in pre-industrial contexts relates to the storing of foodstuff. Many secondary terms employed to name these pots show a clear reference to the products held within them, providing useful insight on the types of substances suitable to be stored in such a way: together with cereals and pulses, names such *ladopitharo*, *krasopitharo* and *melopitharo* refer respectively to the storage of olive oil, wine and honey, whereas *rovopitharo* indicates the storing of chickpeas³². Besides their use as containers both for perishable and non-perishable goods, these vessels were employed in a variety of ways according to their morphological attributes, that is like chimneys, cooking ovens, mobile hearths (sherds of a broken *pithos*), beehives, as well as for productive activities like grape processing, washing clothes or dyeing fabrics³³. In a rural environment devoid of highly disposable materials (e.g., plastic) and any other type of commodity, the importance given to *pithoi* in light of their polyfunctionality and symbolical meaning it's easy to grasp.

The practice of *Vendema* was carried out since the 19th century at least, although B. Psaropoulou and N. Simantirakis allow the possibility of a date as early as the 17th century; its last year of occurrence was 1976³⁴.

Modernization and crisis

Until the seventies, approximately half of the adult male population of Thrapsanò was involved in the process of pottery manufacture, resulting in 30-35 parties leaving for the *Vendema* every summer³⁵. This art was strictly connected with the identity of the villagers as shown by some *mantinades* (Cretan traditional sung poetry often accompanied by lyres), one of which recalls the complain of young women (*οι Κορασπούλες*) carrying the heavy water jars for

long distances and begging the Thrapsanò potters to make them lighter, while the newly-married (*οι Φρεσκοπαντρεμένοι*) were questioning their own choices about marrying a girl from the village and ending up in pounding earth (to prepare the clay). Another saying points out that the breaking of *pitharia* during their transportation is the main fear of Thrapsanò inhabitants, so that "Everyone fears God, whereas the Thrapsaniots fear the wall"³⁶. Pottery production was also an essential part within the yearly routine of the community: even though in some cases the manufacture of pots was continuous during the year, the seasonal cultivation of olive trees, vineyards, some cereals and pulses allowed the possibility of a summer brake in the agricultural activities, giving the chance to join the *Vendema* and make better profits than the ones granted by fieldwork alone³⁷.

However, the situation started to change during the second half of the 20th century³⁸. New possibilities arose in towns far from the rural landscapes, and the introduction of new and less expensive disposable materials such as plastic or metal slowly replaced ceramics as a utilitarian tool. Even the agricultural fieldwork and its seasonality were affected by the mechanization of the agricultural processes, together with the decision to increase the cultivation of vines (requiring more intensive and constant care) at the expense of cereals. The general feeling was that of an unavoidable abandonment of the secular tradition of pottery-making in the village, an impression restated many times by the same ethnographers trying to document this art before its eventual disappearance. In this regard, M. Voyatzoglou clearly stated that «No other potter or jar maker ever considers the possibility of changing his working conditions or the kinds of wares he produces. [...] there are no children or young men learning the art anymore. In the case of an art laden with such a long tradition, total obliteration is more probable than adapta-

32 CHRISTAKIS 2005, p. 65.

33 CHRISTAKIS 2005, pp. 64-66.

34 PSAROPOULOU, SIMANTIRAKIS 2007, pp. 22-25.

35 VOYATZOGLU 1974, p. 18.

36 These sayings are reported on the Thrapsanò website, available at Θραψανό (e-thrapsano.gr).

37 VOYATZOGLU 1984, p. 141.

38 VOYATZOGLU 1984, p. 141.

tion to new social conditions»³⁹. Similar words are expressed by another scholar, B. Psaropoulou, who stated that «When in the 1960s I was in a village in Crete with the Thrapsanò potters and I was recording the making of jars, I was very sure about the end of this ancient art, the art of clay»⁴⁰. As reported by Voyatzoglou, at the beginning of the seventies only ten master craftsmen were still living in the village, of which only three were still producing jars and only one was considering adapting his work in order to encounter the new needs of the market, requiring more and more decorative vessel against utilitarian ones⁴¹.

More in general, pottery production in Greece became an activity carried on in professional workshops operating all year-round, in most cases employing industrial raw materials and completely altering the technological tradition⁴².

Resilience and the role of the archaeological past

Despite the worst predictions, however, the tradition at Thrapsanò did not fade into oblivion. Some pottery workshops carried on with their art trying to adapt to the new economic and social conditions. In this respect, a meaningful example is represented by a cooperative of potters deciding to join their efforts immediately after the last *Vendema* held in 1976. As noted by Mr. Ploumakis, one of the potters now responsible for the cooperative, collaboration was back then perceived as the only way to cope with the situation by craftsmen not able to sustain their work singularly⁴³. A programmatic name was to be chosen by this new association in 1977: the potters' cooperative was named after Minos, the mythical Minoan king ruling over the island of

Crete famous for his labyrinth and his magnificent palace at Knossos.

The best way to explain this choice requires to take into consideration two strictly interconnected events occurring both inside and outside the island in the aftermath of the Second World War, namely the increase of public interest about the Minoan archaeological past and the new mass phenomenon of tourism. Scholars analysing the matter noted that contrary to the first half of the 20th century, when aspects of the Minoan civilization were considered mostly in literature as far as non-archaeologists were concerned, since the fifties Minoan cultural elements spread also to reach other fields like architecture, arts, media and advertisement⁴⁴. The image of an exotic, sensual, mysterious, peaceful and even gender-free society resulting from the pen of both academics and other artistic personalities grew stronger and more attractive, eventually finding a fascinated audience in the tremendous number of tourists setting foot on the island⁴⁵. In this regard, Knossos has undoubtedly played a major role with its mythological background and its more or less explicit presence in the media sector with movies, radio programs, books, journals and theatrical plays⁴⁶. The centrality of Knossos may also be ascertained from the data recording the touristic affluence at this archaeological site: in 1977, when the potters' cooperative was created, Knossos was the 7th most visited site in Greece⁴⁷. In the fol-

39 VOYATZOGLOU 1974, p. 24.

40 «Όταν τη δεκαετία του 1960 βρισκόμουν σε ένα χωριό της Κρήτης μαζί με τους Θραψανιώτες αγγειοπλάστες και κατέγραφα την κατασκευή πιθαριών, ήμουν πια σίγουρη για το τέλος αυτής της πανάρχαιας τέχνης, της τέχνης του πηλού». PSAROPOULOU 1999, p. 20; translation of the author.

41 VOYATZOGLOU 1973, p. 13.

42 VOYATZOGLOU 1984, p. 141.

43 M. Ploumakis was interviewed by the author at the cooperative workshop in Thrapsanò on February 2021.

44 See in general MOMIGLIANO 2020; for the period starting after the end of the Second World War see pp. 137 ff. In this respect, G. Cadogan (2004, pp. 537-538) reported that travellers landing at the Heraklion airport until the 1960s were welcome by a small neo-Minoan terminal building, which has now disappeared. For some examples on the employment of Minoan features on architecture see also KRAPF 2019.

45 MOMIGLIANO 2020, especially pp. 137-224 for the timespan covering the second half of the twentieth century; see also WHITMORE 2004 for the reactions to Knossos in the travel literature after WWII and SOLOMON 2005 for the experiences and perceptions sensed by tourists visiting this archeological site. On the aspects concerning the conceptualization and definition of the Minoan civilization and the relationship with modern ideals and political agendas see HAMILAKIS, YALOURI 1996; MACGILLIVRAY 2000 (especially for the *persona* of Sir Arthur Evans); MCENROE 2002; PAPADOPOULOS 2005.

46 MOMIGLIANO 2020. See also D'AGATA 2010 for a history of the site from the end of the Bronze Age until its (re)discovery in the 20th century.

47 The data as well as the statistics are provided by ELSTAT -

Year 1977	Year 1987	Year 1997	Year 2007	Year 2017	Year 2022
Akropolis of Athens (1.269.409)	Akropolis of Athens (1.417.298)	Akropolis of Athens (1.200.880)	Akropolis of Athens (1.151.587)	Akropolis of Athens (2.766.218)	Akropolis of Athens (2.711.800)
Delfi (460.798)	Knossos (623.317)	Knossos (684.188)	Knossos (680.323)	Knossos (634.710)	Knossos (802.664)
Epidavros (451.200)	Delfi (612.097)	Akropolis of Lindos (487.275)	Akropolis of Lindos (491.743)	Ancient Agorà (549.492)	Akropolis of Lindos (587.786)
Mycenae (442.964)	Epidavros (540.423)	Epidavros (383.282)	Epidavros (413.680)	Ancient Olympia (481.252)	Spinalonga (391.284)
Ancient Corynth (337.592)	Mycenae (531.172)	Delfi (377.400)	Mycenae (and T. of Atreus) (363.339)	Olympieion (477.456)	Epidavros (365.147)
Sounio (329.326)	Akropolis of Lindos (434.767)	Mycenae (346.403)	Ancient Olympia (360.997)	Epidavros (469.060)	Mycenae (and T. of Atreus) (344.143)
Knossos (298.001)	Sounio (306.796)	Akrotiri (203.700)	Theatre of Dionysus (335.101)	Akropolis of Lindos (441.012)	Ancient Olympia (316.265)

Fig. 2 - Table showing the number of visitors per site. Adapted from ELSTAT, visit www.statistics.gr.

lowing decade it never left the top five positions till 1987, when it became the second most visited site in Greece until nowadays (Fig. 2). Even if heavily reconstructed⁴⁸, or possibly because of that, Knossos have been intriguing enormous amounts of visitors, who are usually interested also in other types of related cultural activities such as paying a visit to the National Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, exploring other sites on the island or even trying the recipes claimed to be directly inspired by the Minoan traditional cuisine.

Given the fame acquired by Knossos and the Minoans, it is not at all surprising the choice of such a name by the first potters of the cooperative. Besides the name itself, the intention to suggest a specific connection with Knossos might be grasped even from the logo of the company (Fig. 3). The original cooperative's label was and still is composed of three elements adjusted side by side from left to right: a *pithari*, the traditional product of the village and very much

resembling the Minoan *pithoi* still displayed in some rooms of the Knossian palace, the name Minos (in the red colour typical of Minoan frescoes), and the horns of consecration, a very common symbol in Minoan art and architecture. The precise choice of the latter in association with the name Minos might well be a further reference to the Minotaur and its labyrinth, which Minos built for him in Knossos; it should also be noted that the tourists might difficultly miss the big specimen of stone horns of consecration standing in the southern area of the palace.

All about the aforementioned discussion clarifies the goals and strategy pursued by these potters in 1977. Considering the relatively isolation of Thrapsanò at that time, roughly 30km far from the nearest bigger centre of Heraklion, an attempt was made to join the touristic network revolving around Knossos and the economic fallout it guaranteed. Together with the choice of name and logo, the other means to achieve it was the creation of a narrative in which these potters were introduced as the modern (and ideal) perpetrators of the millenary art of pottery on the island, an art which reached its highest peak in Minoan times. Narratives can be defined as «di-

Hellenic Statistical Authority (visit <https://www.statistics.gr/>)

48 See PAPADOPOULOS 1995 and 2005 about restoration and conservation works from Evans to date.



Fig. 3 - The logo of Minos Potters Cooperative. Reproduced with the permission of Minos Potters Cooperative L.T.D.

scourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it»⁴⁹; moreover, they usually have a specific purpose⁵⁰. All the defining elements are here covered, that is a chronological order from Minoans to modern times (sequential order of events), the transmission of an art defining identity (the "meaningful way" of the definition), a definite audience (the tourists) and a scope (being acknowledge and join the economic network of Knossos).

However, an important point must be made. Despite the direct reference to the Minoans and their ceramic art, no attempt was made by the potters of the Minos Cooperative to replicate their ancestors' (professionally speaking) shapes, nor to produce small and colourful replicas of individual specimens like those usually found on sale in front of the main archaeological sites. Conversely, traditional local and foreign shapes already in vogue remained the main object of production, and the raw materials employed are strictly selected within those offered by the natural clay deposit of the area. Even the technological knowledge involved for the production of the *pitharia* has remained the same, with two potters working harmoniously on the same piece. Being potters is still a strong marker of identity and a way of life to be proud of, rein-

forced and legitimised by the acknowledgment of its archaic roots. A very important and worth mentioning side effect of this close connection with Minoan potters has resulted in the experimental creation of Minoan-like *pithoi* by some younger potters of the cooperative, moved by a real interest in understanding the ancient ways and outstanding technical level of specialization required to produce such pots (Fig. 4). In other words, they found their own way to approach and experience the Minoan cultural heritage through the morphological and technical study of the ancient *pithoi*.

According to Mr. Ploumakis, recalling the Minoans had a fundamental role to improve their activity and make their business know. Even if somewhat oversimplistic, this narrative of modern potters working within the same technological and environmental conditions of the prehistoric one has now become a general *leit-motif* generally applied to all the workshops of the village and is restated many times in websites, touristic guides and journals. Nowadays, pottery production is the main occupation of the 55% of the village population, with ceramics being sold and shipped mostly in Great Britain, Germany, Holland, Austria, France, Denmark and Israel⁵¹. Happily, the dark predictions concerning the future of Thrapsanò didn't come true, and its traditional art of making pottery will soon be added in the national list of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage⁵².

Concluding remarks. An active role for archaeologists?

The case-study discussed in this contribution should highlight how the archaeological past might be conceived as a resource on which to rely during difficult periods. Its usefulness becomes even stronger when related to discourses about identity and continuity, proving that not only the mate-

49 HINCHMAN, HINCHMAN 1997, p. xvi.

50 ELLIOT 2005. For other discussions on narratives in human and social studies see also EWIC, SILBEY 1995; ANDREWS *et alii* 2004; BERGER, QUINNEY 2004; POLLETTA *et alii* 2011.

51 FRENTZOU 2022. It is of some interest to note a communication given to R.E. Jones (1986, p. 867) in 1983 by an employee working in Thrapsanò, who already back then mentioned the demand for *pitharia* by north European markets and tourists.

52 FRENTZOU 2022.



Fig. 4 - Experimental reproductions of Minoan (Knossian) pithoi. Reproduced with the permission of Minos Potters Cooperative L.T.D.

riality of things belonging to cultural heritage can be of some relevance within strategies directed to produce an economic income on the one hand and a personal enrichment on the other, the latter being (or at least should be) an unalienable right and aim to pursuit. The potters of Minos Cooperative and Thrapsanò more in general undoubtedly apply this concept, regularly opening their workshops to the public even to simply explain their art and letting someone to experience how to be a potter for a day. The creation of a narrative based on the cultural legacy of the island surely helped them to join a major touristic network with the benefits it provides, allowing the continuation of their traditional art without necessarily requiring the introduction of major changes. As such, the case of Thrapsanò might well be used as a model for similar circumstances.

Even if the role of archaeology in this scenario has mainly been passive, that is without the active and direct involvement of archaeologists, this case might also provide some suggestions for future projects aimed at the collaboration with scholars and communities whose traditional arts are in danger. For instance, involvement within projects of experimental archaeology or interested in the reconstruction of ancient craft activities and their

meaning would be an ideal situation. Research showing cooperation between archaeologists and traditional artisans is already a reality in many parts of the world. An example from Crete is to be found in the work of I. Caloi and S. Todaro, who with the aid of a professional potter analysed the technical and social aspects of pottery production in the Minoan site of Phaistòs during the pre- and protopalatial periods⁵³. Such collaborations should be enhanced and further developed within broader projects framed by an interdisciplinary approach.

This way, archaeologists would acquire the necessary knowledge and expertise for which the artisans are the ultimate source, whereas workshops and activities would be joining institutional and corporate networks involved in the research and therefore achieve new stakeholders, partnerships, public promotion and/or financial support. New productive strategies following current guidelines on green economy and environmental sustainability would also have the chance to be applied.

⁵³ CALOI 2019, 2021; TODARO 2018, 2020.

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SUMMARY - Modernization and globalization have been two of the main processes shaping world's history during the last century. The introduction of both physical and virtual new technologies has deeply affected the ways human beings relate to objects, environment, and ultimately to each other. Past traditions involving the use and production of material culture have often suffered the changes introduced by innovation, chiefly when coming along with the new capitalistic paradigm framing the economic, social and political assets around the world. In this respect, many of the traditional practices defining a community's ancient knowledge, identity, and sense of belonging are more and more threatened and condemned to oblivion. Fortunately, resilience is a defining characteristic of traditional practices as well. A meaningful example worth to be noted and further analyzed in this respect concerns the small village of Thrapsanò in Crete, seat of a community of potters whose identity was and still is strongly defined by their traditional approach to ceramic manufacture. Invaluable source of comparison for ethnographers and archaeologists, this potting center suffered a major crisis in the seventies due to the pressing modernization processes occurring in Greece in the aftermath of World War II. Contrary to the previsions of ethnographers documenting this art before fading, Thrapsanò potters were able to survive the emergency and delineate their own new business model. This paper aims to explore and present Thrapsanò's response to crisis as a model suitable to be applied in similar cases of traditional practices suffering the changes introduced by modernization. Moreover, it will analyze the connection established by these potters with the Minoan past of the island as a major characteristic defining their identity as well as their marketing strategies. This second aspect is regarded as a fundamental starting point for the investigation of the role of archaeology in providing direct support in comparable scenarios.

RIASSUNTO - La modernizzazione e la globalizzazione sono stati due dei principali processi che hanno caratterizzato la storia del mondo nell'ultimo secolo. L'introduzione di nuove tecnologie, sia fisiche che virtuali, ha inciso profondamente sul modo in cui gli esseri umani si relazionano con gli oggetti, con l'ambiente e, in ultima analisi, tra loro. Le tradizioni del passato che coinvolgevano l'uso e la produzione della cultura materiale hanno spesso sofferto i cambiamenti introdotti dall'innovazione, soprattutto quando accompagnata al nuovo paradigma capitalistico che inquadra gli assetti economici, sociali e politici di tutto il mondo. In questo senso, molte delle pratiche tradizionali che definiscono l'antico sapere, l'identità e il senso di appartenenza di una comunità sono sempre più minacciate e condannate all'oblio. Fortunatamente, anche la resilienza è una caratteristica distintiva delle pratiche tradizionali. Un esempio significativo che merita di essere notato e analizzato ulteriormente riguarda il piccolo villaggio di Thrapsanò a Creta, sede di una comunità di vasai la cui identità era ed è tuttora fortemente definita dal loro approccio tradizionale alla produzione di ceramica. Fonte inestimabile di confronto per etnologi e archeologi, questo centro di produzione di vasi subì una forte crisi negli anni Settanta a causa degli incalzanti processi di modernizzazione che si verificarono in Grecia all'indomani della Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Contrariamente alle previsioni degli etnologi che documentavano quest'arte prima che svenisse, i vasai di Thrapsanò riuscirono a sopravvivere all'emergenza e a delineare un loro nuovo modello di business. Questo articolo si propone di esplorare e presentare la risposta di Thrapsanò alla crisi come un modello adatto a essere applicato in casi simili di pratiche tradizionali che subiscono i cambiamenti introdotti dalla modernizzazione. Inoltre, analizzerà il legame stabilito da questi vasai con il passato minoico dell'isola come caratteristica principale che definisce la loro identità e le loro strategie di marketing. Questo secondo aspetto è considerato un punto di partenza fondamentale per indagare il ruolo dell'archeologia nel fornire un supporto diretto in scenari simili.

Parole chiave: Thrapsanò, cultura materiale, resilienza, ceramica, identità.

Keywords: Thrapsanó, material culture, resilience, ceramics, identity.

