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The Jar Makers of Thrapsano in Crete

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THE VENDEMA

Thrapsano is a village of about 1500 inhabitants in the province of Pediada, 30 kilometers from Herakleion. It is known all over Crete as the village of the jar makers. Every year guilds of jar makers set out from Thrapsano to settle in other parts of Crete, where they make and sell jars during the three summer months. This system of work is called vendema and those who take part in it are called the vendemari.

The vendema begins on May 21st and lasts till September 14th. The departure of the groups of jar makers from Thrapsano takes a festive aspect. The guilds separate as soon as they come out of the village, each taking a different direction to reach its destination. Each guild stays throughout the summer months at the same place and sells the jars it makes to the people of the neighboring district. About 30 or 35 guilds used to set out from Thrapsano in the past, about two hundred men, that is, approximately half the male population of the village.

The guild consists of six technician members:

- 1. The Master Potter: he is the chief craftsman. He is a master at shaping the jar; it is he who picks the craftsmen, who are called pourgoi. He is also the business manager of the guild.
- 2. The Second Master: he is the exclusive assistant to the Master. He prepares and lays out the coils on each separate "brim" and also does the first "dry" movements at the turn-

- table, the "dressing" and the "milking."
- 3. The Wheeler, sitting opposite the Master, but at a lower level: he turns the (hand-operated) turntable. The Wheeler also acts as Kiln-man, whose job is to set the wares in the kiln, cover it, build up the kiln door and regulate the duration and intensity of the fire.
- 4. The Clay Worker: he has to pound and sieve the dry clay for the jars. During the first days, all the members of the guild help the Clay Worker in order to produce without delay the quantity of clay required to begin work.
- 5. The Woodcutter: he cuts faggots for the firing of the kiln and loads the bundles on the pack animals.
- 6. The Carrier: he brings the faggots and the dry clay from the hills, loaded on the Master's animals. He also brings the jars to the buyer's house, two on each pack animal, and provides water for the slaking of the jars to prove that they are sound.

When a guild has arrived at the site where it plans to work, the Master negotiates the renting of the field where the workshop is to be put up. The most suitable field is the one which offers the three essential materials required for their work: clay, water and fuel.

They build the kiln or repair the old kiln, if there is one. They put up huts made of tree branches, where they can have their meals and take a rest. Of all the work involved in ceramics, only the kneading can be done inside the hut. The turntables are put up in the

