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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Event Review: Vounous 2024

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The annual Vounous Symposium was once again held at the site of the Bronze Age cemetery in Çatalköy, Northern Cyprus, from 1-16 September. Over 60 artists and researchers from Europe and America participated in the event, recreating Bronze Age Vounous ceramics. As in past years, artists, craftworkers, and researchers gathered from around the world to participate and experiment with firing technology, various clays, and burnishing techniques. The artists not only recreated ancient ceramics using locally dug clays, but also were taken on tours of regional museums and archaeological sites. The tours gave the participants contexts to the objects in the museums they were recreating. Short daily videos of the symposium

were made that highlighted events and artist interviews (videos are available on YouTube here.

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New projects

A new area for pit firing was created this year. The large circular area was bordered by a short wall made of clay daub. It created a controlled space for pit firing, but was also became a gathering place for conversation and discussion about ceramic technique in the evenings. Freshly dried ceramics were fired nearly in it every evening. The firings included experiments in different burnishing techniques and the use of locally sourced powdered limestone that was burnt, mixed with water and then used for filling incised lines on the pottery.

This year there were demonstrations of modern ceramic firing techniques given by Ahmat Taşhomcu, a master of different raku firing techniques. All the different techniques involved pulling individual pieces out of the kiln while they are still hot and employing various treatments to the surfaces. These techniques included copper matte raku, that produces a colourful iridescent surface with granular texture, the obvara technique, in which the ceramic piece is dipped into water with fermented yeast that produces shades of brown in abstract patterns, and the horsehair technique where organic material such as hair, feathers and leaves are placed on the hot ceramic, causing permanent black patterns on the surface.

Some of the firing projects were delayed because of fire warnings. The summer had been exceptionally dry, and the local authority is told when fires will be set. However, on a couple of occasions the symposium directors were told that because of high winds, setting a fire would be prohibited. This included setting fires in kilns and furnaces.

Metalworking

The pot bellows made two years ago did not survive well. They weren't fired at a high enough temperature and so degraded over time. This year a new set of pot bellows was made and fired in the wood-fired kilns to a higher temperature. Some of the ceramic artists joined us in making waxes and moulds, and eventually burning them out, and casting the figures they made.

Bread Baking

Every year a day is set aside for baking traditional bread made with hellim cheese and olives. In the morning a fire is laid in the bread oven and the prepared dough is brought. When the fire is burnt down and the oven is hot, the ashes are swept out and several loaves of bread

are placed on the floor of the oven. When the crust is brown, the loaves are flipped over and baked some more. After several minutes they are pulled out and allowed to cool.

Continuing the project

After the symposium ends, the work continues. Only a small portion of the objects that were made during the symposium were fired. In the evenings following the symposium, pots, sculptures and other ceramic objects are fired in the bonfire pit or in the dual chambered kilns at the site. Afterwards they are included in the collections that will be part of travelling exhibits. Many of the objects made in previous years are kept on display at Vounous. Even though it is not officially an open-air museum, visitors can come and see the ceramics when they come to visit the necropolis. In addition, classes are invited to come from regional schools to learn about life and craft work in prehistoric times. The students not only listen, but participate in craft activities and later write about their experience. Displays from the collection of Vounous ceramics are also put on display in schools.
As Rauf Ersenal and the people heading the symposium plan for the future, they are increasing their outreach and awareness of the work done at the symposium by loaning objects for exhibition in schools and other public places including resort hotels.
Artists, archaeologists, and researchers who are interested learning more about these ancient crafts are encouraged to participate. For more information contact Rauf Ersenal through the Vounous Facebook page or through EXARC.

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Gallery Image

FIG 1. REPLICA VOUNOUS BOWL IN RED AND BLACK. PHOTO BY E. GIOVANNA FREGNI.

FIG 2. PIT FIRING AT VOUNOUS. PHOTO BY E. GIOVANNA FREGNI.

FIG 3. RECREATING VOUNOUS POTTERY (WITH ELĪNA TITĀNE AND EMEL BILGE). PHOTO BY E. GIOVANNA FREGNI.

FIG 4. BAKING TRADITIONAL OLIVE BREAD WITH DOLMACI. PHOTO BY E. GIOVANNA FREGNI.

FIG 5. VISITING ARTISTS AND VOUNOUS CERAMICS. PHOTO BY E. GIOVANNA FREGNI.