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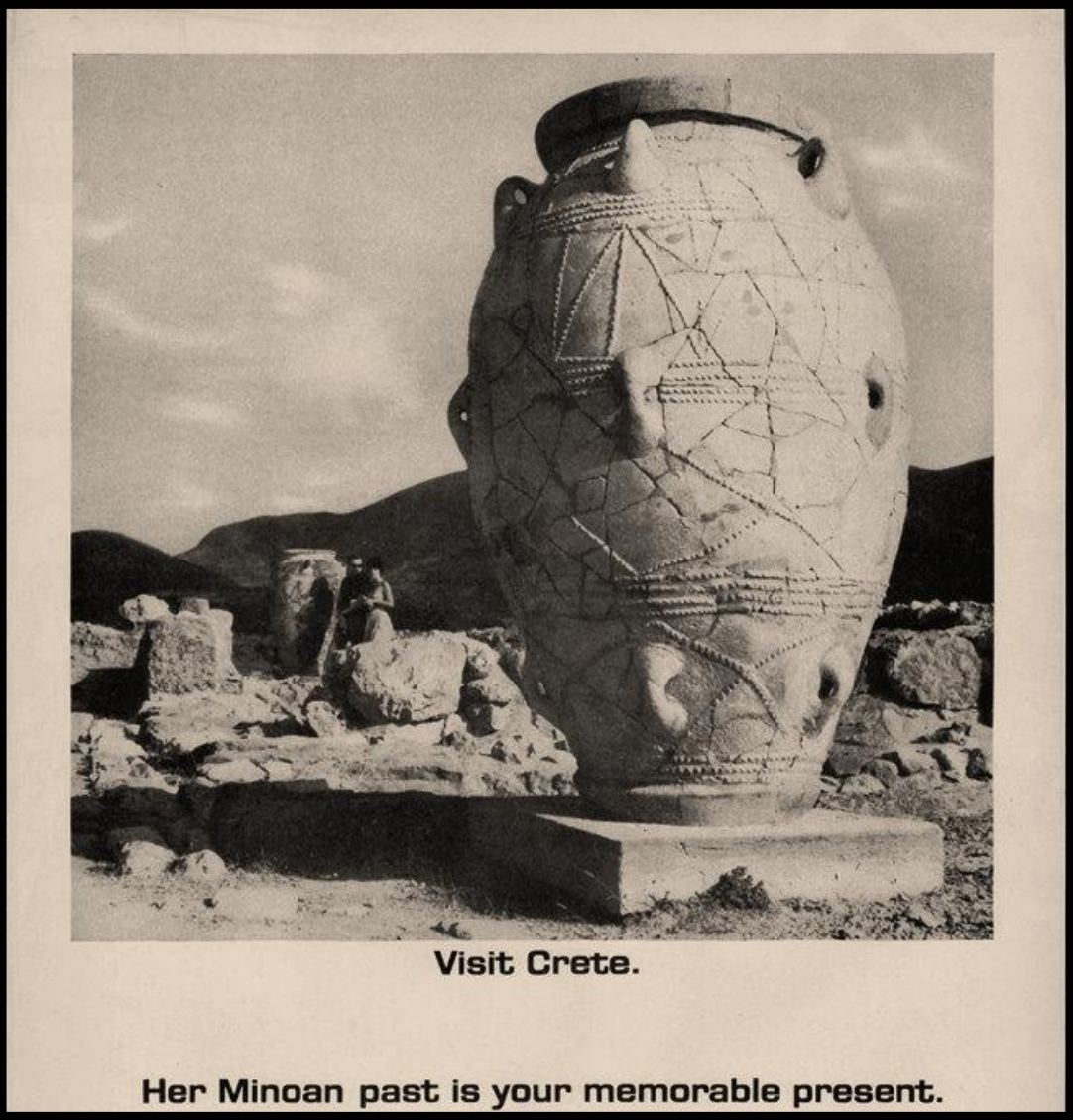
Cultural Biographies of Cretan Storage Jars (*pithoi*): from Antiquity to Postmodernity



Samantha Ximeri

Cultural Biographies of Cretan Storage Jars (*pithoi*): from Antiquity to Postmodernity

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Abstract

Cultural Biographies of Cretan Storage Jars (pithoi): from Antiquity to Postmodernity.

In a short story entitled '*The Jar'* (*La Giara*, 1909), Luigi Pirandello narrates the cultural biography (making, breaking and mending) of a huge storage jar and the way it represents socio-political and economic realities in a traditional Sicilian village. Inspired by *La Giara*, and integrating material culture theory with ethnoarchaeological, art-historical and science-based approaches, this thesis treats the cultural biographies of Cretan pithoi from antiquity to postmodernity to reveal the intertwined lives of people and artefacts and the dynamics of a very powerful relationship, hinting at the many possibilities and stories which lie behind these vessels.

The body of material discussed includes published and unpublished Cretan pithoi and fragments thereof, which date from the second and the first millennia BC, especially ca. 800-500 BC. This material is examined primarily in the form of case-studies which contextualize the production, distribution and consumption of these vessels in their ancient and modern socio-cultural settings.

In viewing ancient Cretan pithoi as the protagonists in the various episodes of their lives as well as of the lives of the people who interacted with them, this study illustrates the shifting meanings and symbolism of objects and highlights the fluid and ever-changing agency of archaeological artefacts as they move through different contexts. Ultimately, this work hopes to encourage future investigations on other types of durable archaeological objects and to centre discussions on the socially-constituted processes that create meaning in the material world of people.

Samenvatting

Culturele biografieën van Kretenzische voorraadpotten (*pithoi*): vanaf de oudheid tot de postmoderne tijd.

In zijn korte verhaal *De kruik* (*La Giara*, 1909) presenteert Luigi Pirandello eigenlijk de culturele biografie (het maken, het breken en de reparatie) van een grote voorraadkruik, waarmee hij ook de sociaal-politieke en economische situatie van een traditioneel Siciliaans dorp verbeeldt. Geïnspireerd door *La Giara* behandelt dit proefschrift, door 'material culture theory' te integreren met ethnoarcheologische, kunsthistorische en natuurwetenschappelijke onderzoeksbenaderingen, de culturele biografieën van van Kretenzische pithoi (grote voorraadpotten) vanaf de oudheid tot de huidige postmoderne tijd. Dit legt bloot hoe levens van mensen en artefacten verstrengeld zijn, toont de dynamiek van die krachtige relatie, en biedt inzichten in de vele mogelijkheden en verhalen die deze potten met zich meedragen.

Het corpus aan materiaal dat in dit proefschrift bestudeerd wordt omvat gepubliceerde en ongepubliceerde Kretenzische pithoi en pithosfragmenten uit het tweede en eerste millennium voor Christus, vooral uit de periode 800-500 voor Christus. Dit materiaal wordt vooral onderzocht via case studies die de productie, verspreiding en consumptie van deze potten in zowel hun historische als hun moderne sociaal-culturele setting contextualiseren.

Door de Kretenzische pithoi uit de oudheid als 'hoofdpersonen' te nemen op verschillende momenten van hun eigen levensloop, maar ook van die van de mensen die met ze interacteren, laat deze studie zien hoe de betekenissen en symboliek van objecten verandert en belicht ze de vloeiende, steeds wisselende 'agency' van archeologische objecten die zich door verschillende contexten bewegen. Uiteindelijk hoopt dit proefschrift daarmee een inspiratie te zijn voor verder onderzoek naar andere soorten archeologische objecten, en de aandacht te richten op de sociaal bepaalde processen die betekenis geven in de materiële wereld van de mens.

Contents

Abstract ... iii
Samenvatting ... iv
List of Tables ... viii
List of Maps, Plates and Figures ... viii
Acknowledgments ... xiv
INTRODUCTION ... 1
CHAPTER 1. APPROACHES TO STORAGE AND STORAGE VESSELS ... 6
1.1. Studies on Greek storage vessels ... 6
1.1.1. Art-Historical approaches ... 7
1.1.2. Ethnoarchaeological Studies ... 11
1.1.3. Novel approaches to Greek pithoi ... 13
1.2. Storage and the study of ancient economies ... 21
1.3. The approach adopted: cultural biographies of Cretan pithoi ... 31
Part I. 'From antiquity ...' ... **39**
CHAPTER 2. PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF CRETAN EIA AND ARCHAIC PITHOI ... **40**
2.1. Ethnoarchaeology of Cretan pithos production ... 40
2.1.1. Cretan centres of pithos production ... 45
2.1.2. Modes of production ... 49
2.1.3. The distribution of Cretan and other modern Greek and Cypriot pithoi ... 55
2.1.4. Itinerant pithos makers in Crete ... 58
2.2. Petrographic analysis of EIA-Archaic pithoi from Central Crete: Knossos, Prinias, Aphrati and Lyktos ... 61
2.2.1. Past scientific analyses ... 61
2.2.2. Research aims ... 64
2.2.3. Methodology ... 64
2.2.4. Geology of the areas under analysis ... 68
2.2.5. Petrographic analysis and fabric groups ... 69
2.2.6. Petrographic perspectives on pithos production and distribution ... 78
Conclusion ... 84
CHAPTER 3. CONSUMPTION OF CRETAN EIA AND ARCHAIC PITHOI AS AN INDEX OF SOCIO-POLITICAL COMPLEXITY ... **87**
3.1. Storage and storage jars in EIA-Archaic Crete ... 88
3.1.2. Epigraphic and literary sources on economy and socio-political organization ... 95
3.2. Morphological, chronological and socio-economic considerations ... 102
3.3. Ideology and status on display ... 111
3.3.1. Pithoi from Temple A in Prinias: horses and the elite ... 113
3.3.2. Horses on pithoi as a metaphor for wealth and status ... 118
3.4. Cretan Archaic pithoi in context: the case of Azoria ... 127
3.4.1. Storage and pithoi in public/communal buildings ... 129
3.4.2. Storerooms and pithoi in domestic quarters ... 134

3.4.3. Storage patterns, consumption of pithoi and socio-political complexity at Azoria....140
3.4.3.1. Storage and agricultural surplus management in public buildings....142
3.4.3.2. Pithoi and storage behaviour in domestic contexts....147
3.4.3.3. The consumption of Cretan pithoi in post-7th c. Archaic period. 156
Conclusion 157
CHAPTER 4. SECONDARY USE AND REUSE OF ANCIENT CRETAN PITHOI 161
4.1. Writing on Cretan pithoi 161
4.1.1. Laws, literacy and social hierarchy in Archaic Crete 161
4.1.2. Pithoi as inscribed media 163
4.1.3. Inscriptions on Archaic Greek pithoi....170
4.1.3.1. Inscribed pithoi from Crete....170
4.1.3.2. Inscriptions on pithoi beyond Crete....179
4.1.3.3. Later examples and ethnographic comparanda....184
4.1.4. Cretan inscribed pithoi as monuments....187
4.2. Reuse of ancient Cretan pithoi....194
4.2.1. Cretan pithoi in later contexts: review of case-studies 196
4.2.1.1. Central Crete 197
4.2.1.2. East Crete....204
4.2.2. Heirloom-ability of Cretan pithoi 209
Conclusion 217
Part II: '...to Postmodernity' 219
CHAPTER 5. POST-DEPOSITION LIVES AND TRAVELS OF SELECT ANCIENT CRETAN PITHOI (END OF THE 19TH – BEGINNING OF THE 20TH C. AD)....222
5.1. Archaeology, politics and ideologies....223
5.2. Case-study: cultural biographies of twelve Minoan pithoi from Knossos....226
5.2.1. Crete at the end of the 19th - beginning of the 20th c. AD....226
5.2.2. Knossos before Kalokairinos 229
5.3. Minos Kalokairinos, the excavations at Knossos and the pithoi 231
5.4. Interpretations of the pithoi by Kalokairinos and his contemporaries....237
5.5. The politics behind the pithoi 243
5.5.1. *'Charin Ethikon Logon' ('For the Sake of National Purposes')* 243
5.5.2. Pithoi sent abroad: international politics and the start of a thrilling archaeological race....246
Conclusion 253
CHAPTER 6. RECLAMATIONS AND ITINERARIES OF ARCHAIC PITHOI FROM CRETE (1960s AND BEYOND)....255
6.1. Reclamation and itineraries of objects....255
6.2. Looting in Greece and beyond....256
6.3. A prelude to the 1960s: the first 'migration wave' of Cretan Archaic pithoi (1900s - 1950s). 259
6.3.1. Arthur Evans and pithoi in the Ashmolean....261

6.3.2. The collection of Stylianos Giamalakes 263
6.4. The plundering of Aphrati 267
6.5. Domestic itineraries and reclamation by looters and collectors 269
6.5.1 Cretan private collections 271
6.5.2. Private collections at Athens 276
6.6. International itineraries of Cretan pithoi 280
6.6.1. The boom in the international art market: collectors, museums and archaeologists 280
6.6.2. Fabrication of another worldwide web: expatriation and laundering of Cretan pithoi 284
6.6.2.1. Exhibitions 287
6.6.2.2. Auctions 291
6.6.2.3. The archaeologist-curator and the circulation of pithoi 293
6.7. Pithos itineraries interrupted: police chases, confiscations and the reclamation of pithoi by the Greek State 298
Conclusion 301
CONCLUSION 304
REFERENCES 308
APPENDICES 350
Appendix I: Selected sherds for petrographic analysis 350
Appendix II: Catalogue of Cretan pithoi and pithos fragments according to their present location 364
Tables 392
Maps, plates and figures 400

List of Tables

Table 1: Smyth's scheme of general archaeological expectations in relation to storage systems and methods of state surplus generation.
Table 2: Stages of pithos forming process, showing the number of coils used for each stage and their height.
Table 3: Fabric Group 1.
Table 4: Fabric Group 2.
Table 5: Fabric Group 3.
Table 6: Fabric Group 4.
Table 7: Samples which appear to be organically tempered.
Table 8: Comparison of numbers and types of inscriptions between Crete and Attica.
Table 9: Whitley's revisited tabulation of inscriptional evidence for Archaic Crete as known in 2013.
Table 10: Number of Cretan pithoi and pithos fragments in private and museum collections abroad.
Table 11: Distribution of pithoi outside Greece (after 1960s).
Table 12: Dispersal of pithoi in private collections, art galleries and university museums.
Table 13: Number of Archaic pithoi exhibited in Hamburg arranged by origin of purchase.
Table 14: Pithoi and fragments of pithoi as published in the catalogue of the exhibition DKK in Hamburg. Arranged by country of purchase.
Table 15: Modern distribution of Cretan Archaic pithoi (1900s to today).

List of Maps, Plates and Figures

Front Cover: Tourism advertisement, 1964; unknown photographer, National Tourist Organization of Greece.

Map 1: Map of central-east Crete showing the distribution of relief pithoi from Aphrati.
Map 2: Map of Crete showing the main pottery production centres in operation during the 20th c. AD.
Maps 3a-b: Sites sampled for petrographic analysis.

Plate 1a-c: Photomicrographs of samples with organic (vegetal?) temper.
Plate 2: Assemblage of storage vessels from Room AA at Phaistos.
Plate 3: Late 7th - early 6th c. BC pithoi of the Phaistos workshop.
Plate 4: Fragments of pithoi with decoration of horse chariots and riders from the areas around the temples of Prinias.

Figure 1: Main decorative patterns of Cretan relief pithoi, published by Mariani.
Figure 2: Pithos fragments from Prinias and Aghios Elias at Aphrati, published by Savignoni.
Figure 3: Pithos neck fragments from Aghios Elias at Aphrati and Lyktos.
Figure 4: The *Mykonos Pithos* and a fragment thereof depicting a fallen warrior.
Figure 5: Fragments of relief pithoi from the Temple of Apollo in Dreros.
Figure 6: Thrapsano. Preparation of clay for the making of pithoi: crushing of the clay; sieving crushed clay; kneading the clay.
Figure 7: The *trochi*.
Figure 8: Reconstruction of the *trochi*.
Figure 9: The master potter and the wheeler working on the *trochi.*
Figure 10: Thrapsano 2014. Modern reconstruction of the *trochi* and initial stages of pithos making.
Figure 11: Thrapsano 2014. Traditional pithos making showing the first brim, known as *phytema*.
Figure 12: Reconstruction of the stages of manufacture on a pithos from Margarites.
Figure 13: A series of finished pithoi drying on the tournettes.
Figure 14: Ground plan of pithos kilns built in pairs at Thrapsano.
Figure 15: A typical updraft kiln in Crete.
Figure 16: Remains of a pithos kiln.
Figure 17: Filling of kiln showing the outer circular raw and part of the perforated floor.
Figure 18: The filling of a kiln at Margarites.
Figure 19: Types of pithoi (*Koroneika* jars) produced in Koroni during the 19th c. AD.
Figure 20: A pithos probably imported from Koroni placed outside a house in Heraklion.
Figure 21: *Koroneika jars* outside a house in Mykonos.
Figure 22: Fabric group 1: with grey siltstones and quartzites.
Figure 23: Subgroup 2a.
Figure 24: Subgroup 2b.
Figure 25: Subgroup 2c.
Figure 26: Sample AF10 (XP).
Figure 27: Sample AF17 (XP).
Figure 28: Sample AF26 (XP).
Figure 29: Sample AF28 (XP).
Figure 30: Sample AF42 (XP).
Figure 31: Fabric Group 3: with red sedimentary rocks.
Figure 32: Fabric Group 4: with mica.
Figure 33: Sample KN7 (XP).
Figure 34: Minor group with biotite schist.
Figure 35: Sample KN1 (XP).
Figure 36: Sample KN9 (XP).
Figure 37: Sample KN34 (XP).
Figure 38: Sample KN35 (XP).

Figure 39: Sample LY10 (XP).
Figure 40: Sample AK5 (XP) showing a distinctive clay pellet.
Figure 41: Pithoi found on the terrace of the temple of Apollo in Dreros.
Figure 42: Geometric pithos from Mandra di Gipari in Prinias.
Figure 43: Geometric inscribed pithos from Phaistos.
Figure 44: Frieze on the facade of Temple A in Prinias.
Figure 45a-c: Reconstructions of Temple A of Prinias as suggested by Pernier, Stucchi and Beyer.
Figure 46: Pithos from the entrance of Temple A at Prinias and detail of decoration on the lower body.
Figure 47: Pithos fragments from Prinias.
Figure 48: Pithos fragments from Prinias with representation of armed horse-riders found by Pernier.
Figure 49: Pithos from Aphrati and detail of the decoration on the shoulder; the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Figure 50a-b: Pithos fragments from Aphrati (?) with riders holding a horse-whip.
Figure 51: Pithos fragments with horse riders from Lyktos.
Figure 52: Pithoid jar from Aphrati (?); Archaeological Museum in Heraklion.
Figure 53: Pithos fragment in J. Paul Getty Museum.
Figure 54a-b: Pithos fragments from Aphrati.
Figure 55a-b: Pithos fragments with representations of winged (?) horses.
Figure 56: Pair of walking horses on a pithos fragment from Astritsi in Pediada.
Figure 57: Pithos fragment from Aphrati.
Figure 58: Large pithos fragment from Aphrati; Archaeological Museum in Heraklion.
Figure 59: Pithos from Phaistos.
Figure 60: Cretan pithos fragment (unknown provenance); Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.
Figure 61: Large pithos fragment with *Potnia Theron* taming winged horses and detail of decoration; Glyptotek, Denmark.
Figure 62a-b: Pithoi from Aphrati with depiction of a man thrown off a winged horse.
Figure 63: Azoria. State plan of the South Acropolis.
Figure 64: Archaic pithoi with decorative motifs ‘of the Orientalizing tradition’ from B1500 at Azoria.
Figure 65: The ‘Olive Press’ (D300) at Azoria.
Figure 66: Grand pithos from the ‘Olive Press’ (D300) at Azoria.
Figure 67: The Communal Dining Building (putative *andreion*) of Azoria.
Figure 68: Two pithoi from A1200 at Azoria.
Figure 69: Plan of the Archaic houses at Azoria.
Figure 70: Pithos assemblage from the houses of Azoria.
Figure 71: Rim and neck of a pithos from B300 at Azoria.
Figure 72: Architectural activities in units H 24/25/32/33/40/41 and H 26/27/42/43 at Zagora.
Figure 73: Geometric pithos from Phaistos and detail of the inscription on the neck.

Figure 74: Inscribed pithos from the Patela of Prinias.
Figure 75: *Graffito* on a pithos sherd from Kommos (7th c. BC).
Figure 76: Inscribed pithos handles and pithos neck from Azoria.
Figure 77: Detail of centaur in relief on a pithos from Azoria.
Figure 78: Pithos from Arkalochori, 6th- early 5th c. BC (?) and detail of the decoration on the belly.
Figure 79: *Graffito* under the handle of the pithos from Arkalochori.
Figure 80: The inscription under the ram, in the frieze of the pithos from Arkalochori.
Figure 81: Part of relief, inscribed pithos from Zarax, Euboea and detail of the fragment.
Figure 82: Inscription on the rim of the pithos fragment from Zarax, Euboea.
Figure 83: Inscription on a relief, mid-7th c. (?) pithos fragment from eastern Attica.
Figure 84: Part of a pithos rim from Building H at the Sanctuary of Despotiko.
Figure 85: Inscription on the rim of a pithos from the necropolis of Aiani.
Figure 86: Inscribed pithos rim from Praisos (3rd c. BC).
Figure 87: Monastery of Moni Odigitria at Asterousia: a row of early 20 c. AD pithoi placed at the terrace.
Figure 88: Pithos at the Monastery of Moni Odigitria. Pre-firing inscription with the name of the pithos maker and the date of production/donation to the Monastery.
Figure 89: Nikos Kavgalakes, a famous pithos maker from Margarites, Crete. Photographed at Marousi, Athens, while demonstrating the making of an enormous pithos. The Athenian ceramist, Tassos Patiniotis, sits on the *trochi* as an apprentice.
Figure 90: Inscribed wine-jar (*krasopitharo*) donated by Kavgalakes to the Folk Museum of Spili. The inscription has the date of production/donation, the name and place of origin of the potter: '*22-5-2008, Νίκος Καυγαλάκης, Μαργαρίτες, Ρέθυμνο, Κρήτη'*.
Figure 91: Plan of *Trial Trench 1* at Koutela, in Lyktos.
Figure 92: Overview of *Trial Trench I* in Lyktos.
Figure 93: 7th c. pithos from the Hellenistic layers at Koutela, Lyktos.
Figure 94: Early 6th c. (?) pithos from Koutela, Lyktos.
Figure 95: Hellenistic pottery from Koutela, Lyktos.
Figure 96: View of the excavations at the east slope of Prophitis Elias in Arkalochori. Complex of late Classical-Hellenistic houses.
Figure 97: Destruction layer at the east slope of the hill at Prophitis Elias in Arkalochori.
Figure 98: Archaic pithos fragments from the Hellenistic houses at Prophitis Elias in Arkalochori.
Figure 99: Orientalizing pithos found in a Hellenistic room of 'Casa Greca' in Phaistos.
Figure 100: General plan of the Theatral area west of the Minoan Palace and cross-section of Casa Greca at Phaistos.

Figure 101: General plan of the excavations west and south of Piazzale I in the Minoan Palace at Phaistos.
Figure 102: Vano l' in the Hellenistic quarters west of the Theatral area at Phaistos.
Figure 103: Vano q' at Phaistos and the Archaic pithos.
Figure 104: View of the Hellenistic compartments at Chalara (Central Sector) in Phaistos.
Figure 105: The restored pithos from Chalara at Phaistos.
Figure 106: Fragments of Archaic pithoi found on the Late Roman floor levels at Chalara in Phaistos.
Figure 107: Late Roman room in Chalara at Phaistos showing a Late Roman pithos found *in situ*.
Figure 108: Sketch plan of the Hellenistic house below the *agora* at Dreros.
Figure 109: Destruction layer in the storeroom of the Hellenistic house at Dreros.
Figure 110: Archaic pithos in the storeroom of a Hellenistic house at Dreros.
Figure 111: Building clusters B2 and E at Trypitos.
Figure 112: Three Hellenistic pithoi and one Archaic pithos found in room E1 at Trypitos.
Figure 113: General and detailed view of the floor level of Trench A-200 at Praisos showing the collapsed pithoi and the hearth.
Figure 114: Fragments of Archaic pithoi found in Classical-Hellenistic floor levels at Praisos.
Figure 115: LM IIIC pithos on the late Archaic destruction layer at Azoria, Building B300.
Figure 116: Graph showing the longevity of Cretan plain and decorated pithoi.
Figure 117: Heraklion in the aftermath of the Massacre of Candia on 25th August 1898.
Figure 118: Lithography (1898) entitled 'The Resurrection of Crete'. Crete is represented by a woman surrounded by Sultan Abdul Hamid, the president of the Cretan Executive I. Sphakianakis, King George I of Greece, the Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, Queen Victoria of England, the President of the France, Félix Faure, the King Umberto I of Italy. To the left, the people of Crete break their chains of slavery. National Historical Museum.
Figure 119: Rare photograph of Minos Kalokairinos.
Figure 120: Pithos sent by Kalokairinos to the National Archaeological Museum at Athens
Figure 121: Pithos in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, probably given to the *Syllogos* by Kalokairinos.
Figure 122: The pithos donated by Kalokairinos to the British Museum of London, as it now stands amongst other Cretan antiquities brought to London.
Figure 123: Pithoi donated to the Louvre by Kalokairinos.
Figure 124: The bust of Kalokairinos as it now officially stands at Knossos since March 2019.
Figure 125: Aphrati: view from the hill at Aghios Elias.
Figure 126: The cache from Aphrati in the Norbert Schimmel collection.

Figure 127: Tourism advertisement, 1964; unknown photographer, National Tourist Organization of Greece.
Figure 128: Nikolaos Metaxas poses next to a pithos from Aphrati, set in his living room.
Figure 129: Pithoi from Aphrati, formerly in the private collection of K. Mitsotakis; Archaeological Museum of Chania.
Figure 130: Part of an Archaic pithos from Aphrati, the Benaki Museum.
Figure 131: Norbert Schimmel.
Figure 132: Nikola Koutoulakis and his business card, with addresses of his shops in Paris and Geneva.
Figure 133: Pithos from Aphrati, now in Louvre.
Figure 134: Archaic pithos acquired through Sotheby's for the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
Figure 135: Cretan pithos fragment, said to be from Phaistos. New Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Acquired through the auction at Lucerne in 1966.
Figure 136a-b: Cretan relief pithoi from Aphrati (?) auctioned by Christie's in New York.
Figure 137: Pithos fragment gifted to the Isreael Museum in Jerusalem by C. and D. Marks.
Figure 138: Fragment of pithos, now at the Archaeological Museum of Aghios Nikolaos, confiscated by the Greek archaeological authorities in May 1965.
Figure 139: Confiscated fragments of pithoi from Aphrati, Archaeological Museum of Heraklion.
Figure 140: Confiscated pithoi from Aphrati, previously in Fygetakis' ownership.
Figure 141: One of the confiscated pithoi from Aphrati, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

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