



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

The ceramist village Margarites and the pottery maker *George Dalamvelas*

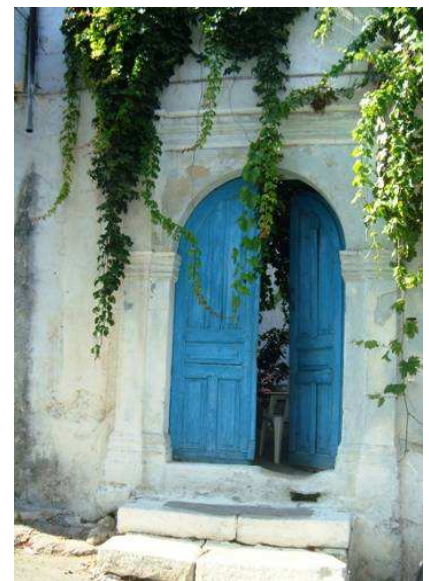
An article from our NLUK member *Stephanie Krips*, Gourmes



The picturesque village *Margarites* [Μαργαρίται] (approx. 500 inhabitants), is located around 17 miles southeast of *Rethymno* [Ρέθυμνο], beautiful nestled between green hills. Perhaps it is this location, which justifies the stories to the name of the village:

The Queen of Eleftherna, Margarita, was so impressed by the beauty of the area that she sold her jewellery to build a place there. It also means that the name comes from the Byzantine word "magarikon". The Byzantine called pottery "magarika" and the village is very famous for its pottery. The residents by the way are called "Margaritsani".

Enjoy a few hours in *Margarites* by strolling through the narrow streets and open yourself to this magical place. Peace, quietness and flowers are everywhere. It is recommended, if possible, to come in the afternoon; excursion buses drive in during the morning and "populate" the small village. Look for old house fronts with beautiful wooden doors (fig. **right**) partly from Venetian times or visit one of the multiple churches in *Margarites*.



The tiny church of "John the Baptist" for example is located directly on the main road just before the main market square. Here are some frescoes (see **fig.** left) to admire.

[The key is always in the main entrance door which is pointing west. The other door (to the main road) is closed]. The statue of the Abbot Gabriel (from Monastery Arkadi; see also http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/151-06E.pdf) is located at the market square, one of the most important figures in the resistance against the Turks. He came into the world here as *Gabriel Marinakis* (1826).

Then go to "our" Potter. There are still 20 potters in the place, but *George Dalamvelas* (see fig. left next page.) and his pottery "*Keramion*" [KEPAMEION] are something special. He probably has the love of the pottery from his father *Michalis*; George studied in Athens and then returned to *Margarites*, here he connects his own ideas in his pottery with traditional crafts. He gladly give information's "in terms of pottery".



Six (6) out of the 20 potters in *Margarites*, including *George* go mine their clay in the mountains, all others buy it ready packed for process. 50 Years ago, a piece of land in the mountains was acquired by the potters in *Margarites*, where every craftsman could mine its own; therefore they must endeavour 2.5 miles in the mountains. The mined clay(stone) must be watered, kneaded and impurities need to be out sieved; these procedures take about 1 week. There are 4 clay types: white, black, yellow and red.

After the "clay stones" were prepared to capable clay, they can be used for pottery creation.



Many of the produced pottery are polished (before burning); this operation "seals" the pottery material. The pottery must dry about 2 days before polishing.

Hereafter the polish takes place with water smoothed stones (*George* takes them from the nearby river *Geropotamo*). Now only the decoration or the "fingerprint" of the pottery is missing before burning. A Palm or a palm leaf is typical of *Margarites*. Therefore a special and rare kind of clay is used, which *George* also finds at the *Geropotamo*. With a special brush made from sheep hair (see **fig.** left), these ornaments are then applied (see **fig.** right). Hereafter the pottery is ready for the kiln.



The colour of a vessel originates during burning and is subject to the oxygen feed. If working with modern electric stoves you can of course regulate the oxygen. But *George* mainly works with the traditional wood-fired oven. Here he then never knows exactly what colour his pottery will have at the end.

It is hard to resist a shopping flush at *George*; there are too many beautiful potteries; I would like particularly to go into 2 because many do not know what it will be or what to use it for:

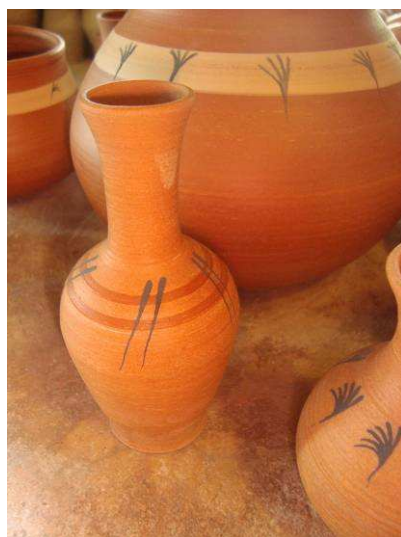
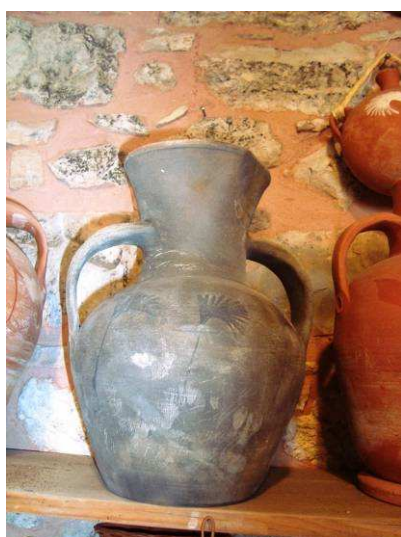
Fig. left: The "Nightingale carafe (= Potamida)", is a 10 cm high "decanter", which indeed will be filled with water, but not used to drink out of it, but rather take the beak-shaped spout into the mouth and blows into it. The resulting noise consults then like a Nightingale singing; but only works for 10 cm high carafes, not at large ones (as shown). In the area of *Margarites* the Nightingale is also called "Potamida".

Fig. right: Hole decorations around the carafe neck label the Byzantine carafe. How can you drink from this carafe without everything flows from the hole ornaments? Well, to find out you must go your way to *Margarites*, I won't tell here.



The pottery "**Keramion**" by *George Dalamvelas* is open (09: 00-21: 00) April - October.

See more images from the pottery "**Keramion**" below and on page 4.





Finally two additional notes:

Close to *Margarites* (1.5 miles) is a worth to see **Minoan tholos tomb**, therefore see also a leaflet at our Homepage [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/191-06E.pdf]

Besides *Margarites* (Rethymno) there are still three more pottery villages in Crete (one in each prefecture); it is *Thrapsano* within the prefecture Iraklion: here see our leaflet [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/020-04E.pdf]