

Craft and Community: Social and Economic Adaptation in the Corinthian Potters' Quarter

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Corinthian fineware was widely exported in the 7th–6th centuries BC, and excavations in the Potters' Quarter of Corinth have produced extensive evidence of production, including misfired pottery, kiln supports, water channels, and workshop buildings. Yet, demand for Corinthian pottery declined over time, and the Quarter underwent a drastic transformation in the mid-5th century BC when the rerouting of the city wall destroyed several buildings. This paper focused on this later period of transformation and, particularly, on a 5th–4th century BC house and workshop, the Terracotta Factory, which produced figurines and miniature vessels long after other production in the Quarter ceased. In the excavations of the Potters' Quarter in 1929–1931, Agnes Newhall Stillwell recovered hundreds of objects from this building, including items related to household daily life (loomweights, cooking pottery, storage vessels, and small personal items) and craft production (molds, tools, workshop debris, and repeated figurine types).

Though terracotta figurines from the Classical period are common at sites across the Greek world, the workshops which produced such objects have rarely been excavated and even more rarely published in detail. The Terracotta Factory is one exception to this trend. This household workshop presents an opportunity to examine not just the processes of production, but also the daily lives and economic choices of the craftspeople who lived and worked in this space. The Terracotta Factory can be understood in the context of other domestic coroplastic workshops from mainland Greece, such as those from Olynthos and Nea Halos. Typically, figurines were formed in the house and fired elsewhere, as seems to have been the case here.

The building provides clear evidence of the ability of a crafting household to respond actively to changing social and economic circumstances. I argue that this workshop survived into the 4th century by intentionally modifying their range of products to meet a local religious market, rather than the long-distance market upon which earlier potters had relied, while still drawing on traditional technical knowledge and established infrastructure. In addition, after the rerouting of the city wall several destroyed buildings became sites of unusual cult activity, in the form of small stelai-shrines installed on top of the abandoned structures. Similar shrines were found at several other ceramic workshops elsewhere in Corinth, as well as in the Terracotta Factory. The residents of the Terracotta Factory thus likely remained part of the larger community of ceramic craftspeople. Participation in the repeated rituals of dedication at stele shrines marked one as a member of the group and reinforced community identity and affiliation, even as members of the community moved elsewhere, due to both the destruction of parts of the Quarter and changes in the demand for Corinthian pottery across the Mediterranean. The neighborhood of the Potters' Quarter was undergoing tremendous social and phys-

ical upheaval and the memory practices associated with the stelai-shrines represented a link to the past, as well as a very tangible link to place for both individual households and the wider community of potters. The Terracotta Factory was part of a community of craftspeople based in both technical knowledge and social practices.