



LASTDROP

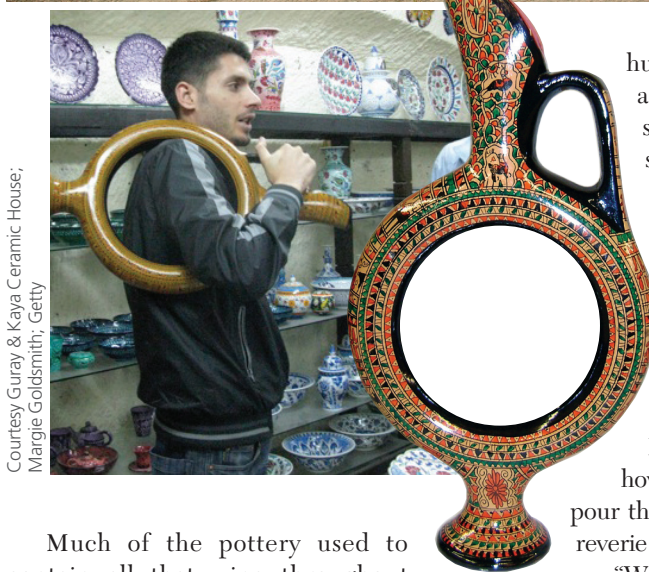
THE HITTITE WINE JUG

Holding history in my hands, I wonder how modern wines would taste in a clay container.

Pottery maker Galip Korukcu sits at a traditional kick-wheel in Avanos, a small Cappadocian town and major pottery center in Turkey. He is creating red clay ceramics the same way the Hittites did 4,000 years ago. Galip, a fifth-generation potter whose father taught him the craft when he was just seven years old, is a master who creates, conducts workshops for aspiring potters and demonstrates his craft for tourists like me.

I've come to Cappadocia to see the famous cone-shaped volcanic rocks sculpted by the wind and known as fairy chimneys (pictured). The area's stone churches and subterranean cave towns, which are said to date back to 1200 B.C., are also compelling. The local people carved them in order to seek shelter from conquering armies; the upper levels of these underground communities were used as living quarters, and the lower levels were used for storage, winemaking and worship.

"Wine has always been important in Turkey," Galip assures me. "Even for Noah. After 150 days afloat, Noah's Ark came to rest on Mount Ararat in northeastern Turkey. Mount Ararat is close to Transcaucasia, considered the motherland of the wild vine species *vitis vinifera sylvestris*, from which all domesticated vines are derived. And what did Noah do when he stepped off the ark? He planted a vineyard and produced wine."



Courtesy Gurey & Kaya Ceramic House; Margie Goldsmith; Getty

Much of the pottery used to contain all that wine throughout the centuries has been crafted here in Avanos, where every house once had a potter's wheel and no family would give their daughter in marriage if the groom could not make pots. Galip, who lives with his wife and three daughters, doesn't have to worry about his son-in-laws throwing clay because his three daughters are expert potters.

In the showroom, Galip's assistant points out a small ceramic vase. "This is a teardrop holder," he says. "When a Hittite man left home, his wife was supposed to cry into it, and when he returned, she'd show him the tears." He picks up an intricately designed ceramic object shaped like a

huge donut, complete with spout and handle. Teapot? Vase? He slips his arm through the hole, slides it onto his shoulder and pretends to pour. "This is a wine jug the Hittites used."

The Hittite wine jug is a masterpiece, decorated with hundreds of warriors and horses against a tan background. I hoist the jug on my shoulder to see how heavy it is. I can feel how clever the design, how easy it would be for servants to pour the wine at banquets. I fall into a reverie of wine history.

"Winemaking has never stopped in Turkey, not even when wine drinking was banned during the Ottoman Empire. And they always used this type of wine holder," the assistant is saying. "You want to buy this, yes?"

Do I have an obligation to buy it? In so many countries, the salespeople's persuasive powers are superior to my ability to just walk away. Besides, how will fine wines taste in a clay container?

I ask my guide, "Will they be very angry if I don't buy the piece?"

"Of course not," he laughs. "A tourist does not buy? This is not important. But a tourist does not like our wine? Now that would offend." —MARGIE GOLDSMITH