

Traditional pottery – The ethno-
archaeological view

**PRODUCTION OF EARTHEN VESSELS IN THE
WORKSHOPS OF MONASTERY UVAC**

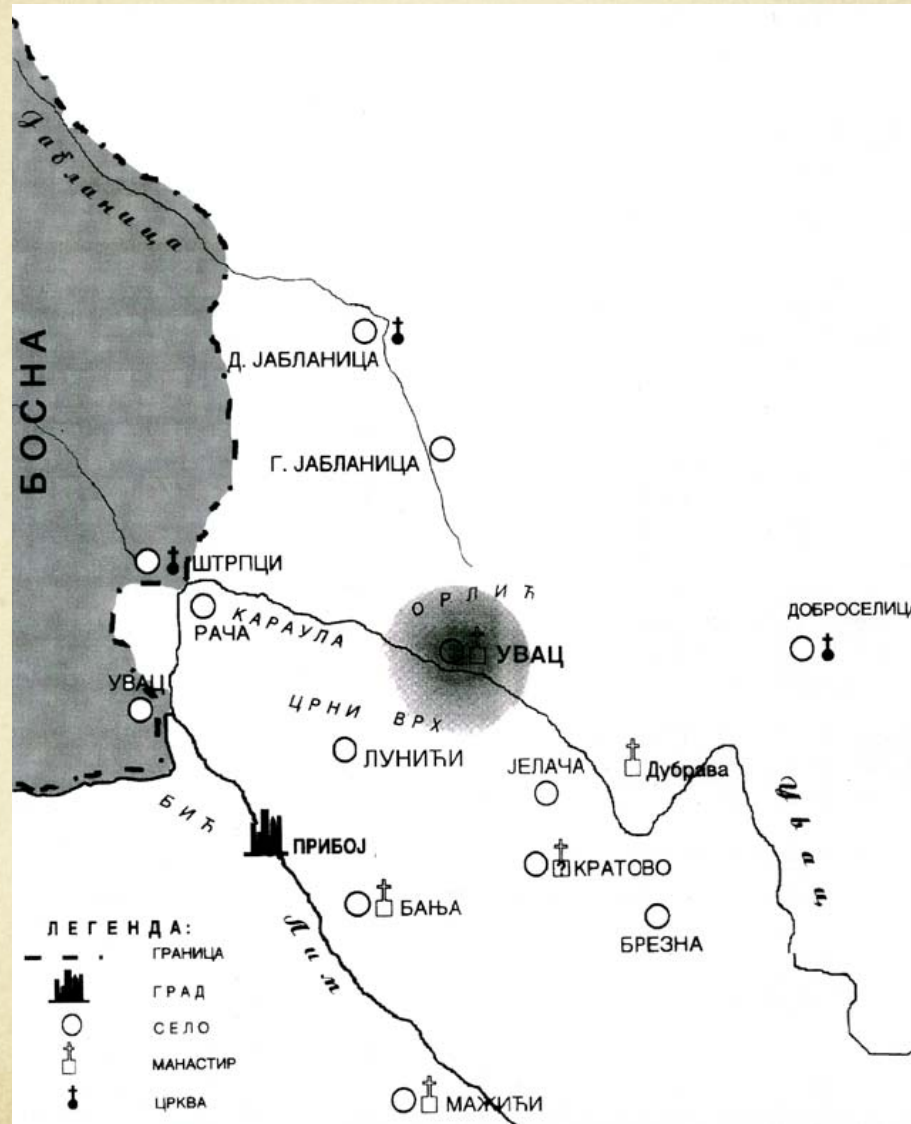
Bosa Rosic

Ethnologist, Museum Councillor

- In Southwest Serbia, the term *pottery* or *ceramic* is not used.
- The craftsman who produces these products is called "loncar" (a person who produces pots/vessels - *potter*), or "crepuljar", if he produces specific earthenware dishes used for baking – "crepulje".
- They called themselves "loncari" from Zlakuse or "crepuljari" from Rupeljevo.

- Zarko Joksimovic in 1909 published a paper entitled "Crepulje from Uzice".
- Bisenija Perunicic in 1936 published a paper entitled "About the production of pots from Zlakuse".
- In 1974, Natalija Blagojevic published a paper "National Ceramics in Uzice area"
- Persida Tomic in 1983 published her study "Pottery in Serbia."

Map of the area, Monastery Uvac

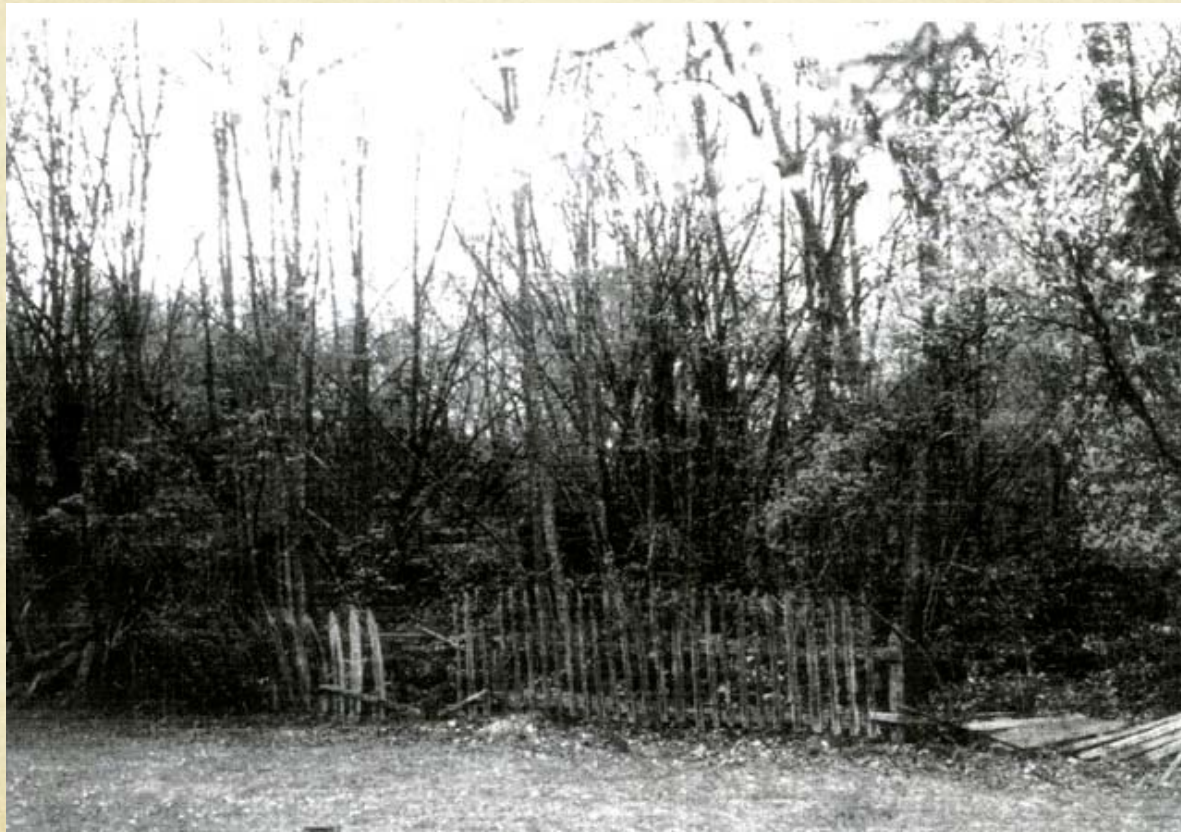


- Uvac Monastery is located on the river Uvac by which it is named, in a mountainous area of Stari Vlah in Southwest Serbia.
- It occupies the central part of the former Serbian state of Raska.
- Uvac is the largest river in this area. It flows through several beautiful canyons in which is preserved a very rare bird - the griffon vulture.

Canyon of the river Uvac near the Monastery Uvac



- Team from National Museum of Uzice initiated the research of this area in 1994 by using a military helicopters. The site was surrounded by a wooden fence, overgrown by tall trees and shrubs.



- The research team started a multidisciplinary research in 1994. After conservation and restoration of the entire complex in 1998, the renovated church entered under the custody of the Serbian Orthodox Church.



- Monastery during its existence (from XV to XVII century) represented such a productive community, which satisfied the needs of the monastic community, and supplied the surrounding population with craft products, furnishings and agricultural tools.
- Complete area was independent from the neighboring urban centers. Serbian population stayed away from the cities in order to avoid the conflict with the Ottoman ruling class.

- On the south side of the church the following facilities were done in stone masonry: barn, storage room for groceries, kitchen with fireplace and dining area.



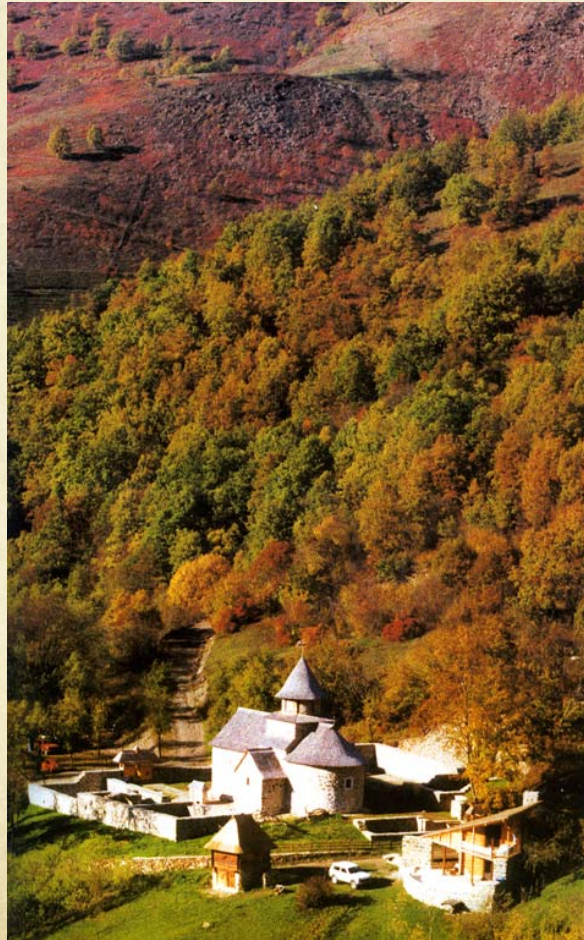
- On the north side in a length of 27 meters – blacksmith workshop with two blacksmith bellows and pottery workshop with running water



- East side of Monastery lodgings – ice storage



- Finished work on the Monastery complex, renovated Church of the Birth of Virgin Mary, with new lodgings, and wooden guest building.



- Around the church are located the buildings intended for storage and workshops, done in stone masonry, and above them were built the wooden monastic cells with porches.
- During the renovation and extension of monastery, running water was provided not only for the pottery workshop, but there was also built the courtyard fountain.

Monastery fountain on the southern side of the Church



- During this period the European political scene is changing.
- There is the uprising of Serbs in Banat region; Mehmed Pasa Sokolovic was strangled by a dervish; and the Ottomans begin their vengeance in Serbia.
- Turkish grand vizier Sinan Pasa burned at the stake the relics of Sant Sava, a major Serbian saint, on the hill Vracar (in Belgrade), in order to punish a rebellious population.
- Ottomans began the destruction of the churches and monasteries. On that occasion, the monastery Uvac suffered the devastation.

- Monks and the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, fled before the Turkish anger, and soon began to rebuild their destroyed habitats.
- The archaeological material found during restoration work confirms this as a fact: two coins of Matija II from 1611 and 1614 (Kremenc mint).
- After this renovation starts the prosperity of monastery Uvac. But as well the other parts of Serbia, monastery was under the influence of the international events in Europe.

- These events have caused extensive displacement of the Serbian people to the north of the Sava and Danube: migration of 6,000 Serbs from this region in 1688, to Slavonija, on the border between Ottoman Empire and Austria.
- After that comes the Great Migration of the Serbian people, organized under the auspices of the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose leader was the Serbian Patriarch Arsenije Carnojevic.

- Serbian land was abandoned, which led to the Ottoman Empire's loss of revenue.
- Revenge that followed included the persecution and torture of people who left, as well as the ignition of Serbian churches and monasteries.
- In that time, in late XVII and early XVIII century, monastery Uvac was also demolished.

- After that the monastery was overgrown with the grapevine planted during the heyday of the monastery, wild hazelnuts, ash-trees and maples



- After 300 years, in 1994, the team from the National Museum of Uzice came in this site by helicopters. There were found 23 abandoned household.



- Under dense undergrowth and trees, the ruins of the monastery church were hardly noticed.
- After four years of excavation of these ruins and their restoration, the site with its numerous authentic buildings that are used as workshops and storage, now look as if it is brought back directly from the time of Ottoman Empire.

- At twenty kilometers downstream was passing the old road, which connected this area with Dubrovnik and enabled the trade and exchange of products.
- Sima Trajanovic "Our merchants" (1909): "In 1503 during 15 days, we sold in the city of Dubrovnik 16 650 freights of tar", which would be, calculated in today's European currency, equivalence to over 200,000. Euros.
- Other goods were exported over the city of Dubrovnik to the Netherlands, such as the Royal Purple, a plant important in shipbuilding, since it was used for the impregnation of wood; wool; dairy and other food products.

- In the monastery ruins, in the part where the workshops were situated, there was found blacksmith workshop with two blacksmith bellows.
- Supposedly, it included carpenter's workshop, for production of wooden vessels such as vats and small vats for plum and dairy storage, barrels of brandy etc.
- This assumption is confirmed by discovered carpenter's tool, most probably made in this local blacksmith workshop

Carpenter's tool found during the excavation



- One of the most important workshops of the monastery was certainly ceramic - pottery workshop



- The production of pottery was enabled by the wealth of diverse soil material that could be found in the bays of the river Uvac, as well as various types of sand and stone, which were used as the basic material.
- Even today we can recognize very clear the areas on both riverbanks of Uvac, from which the material was extracted.

- Discovered pottery workshop on the north side of the monastery church, with its organization of production surpasses all of today's potters in Zlakusa.
- The workshop is of a large scale, and unlike today's outdoor production in Zlakusa, the monastery had the indoor pottery workshop in the middle of the sixteenth century at the latest.

- During the archaeological excavation, in the pottery workshop was discovered the pit used for kneading the clay and mixing it with quartz.
- Besides, the necessary water supply was found, together with the fireplace, which probably included the space with shelves, for vessels drying.

- In monastery Uvac was used the earth-clay material, which was mixed with other different elements for pottery production, depending on the type of product.
- Clay was mixed with quartz, in the way it is still done in Zlakusa, as well as with crushed limestone and sand.
- Clay is, like today, kneaded with water by using the bare feet, and after that was left to turn sour. In the meanwhile the quartz and sand were prepared, or a limestone that had to be triturated with a sledgehammer and sifted through a sieve to make it more homogeneous.

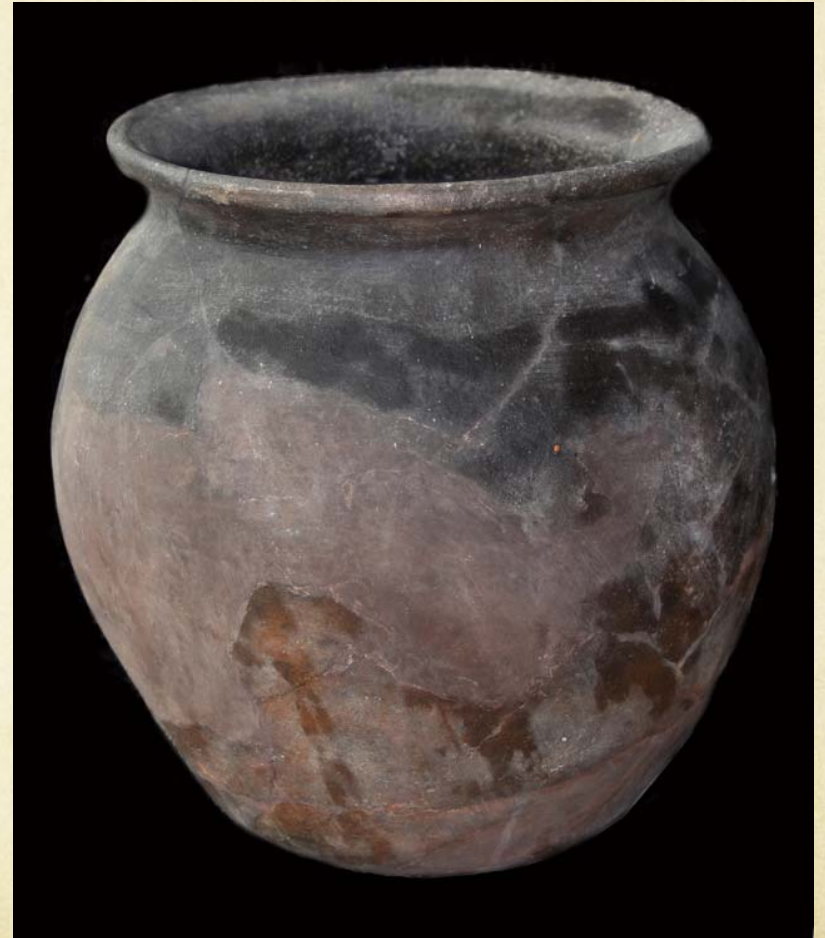
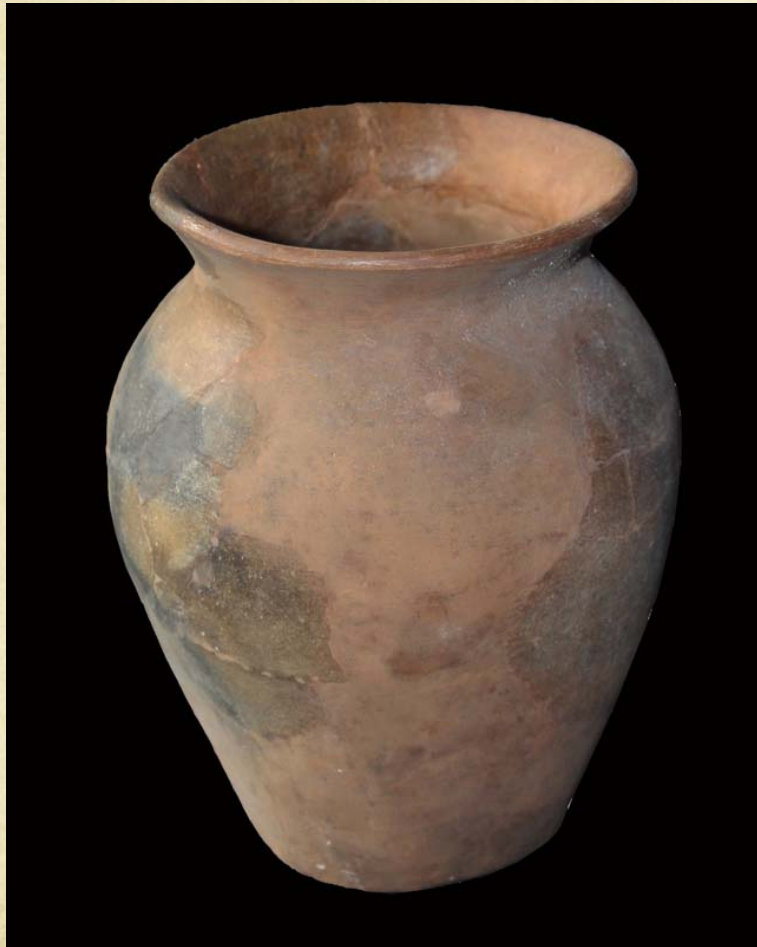
Pottery hammer, used for triturating of calcite or limestone, after which was sifted and mixed with clay



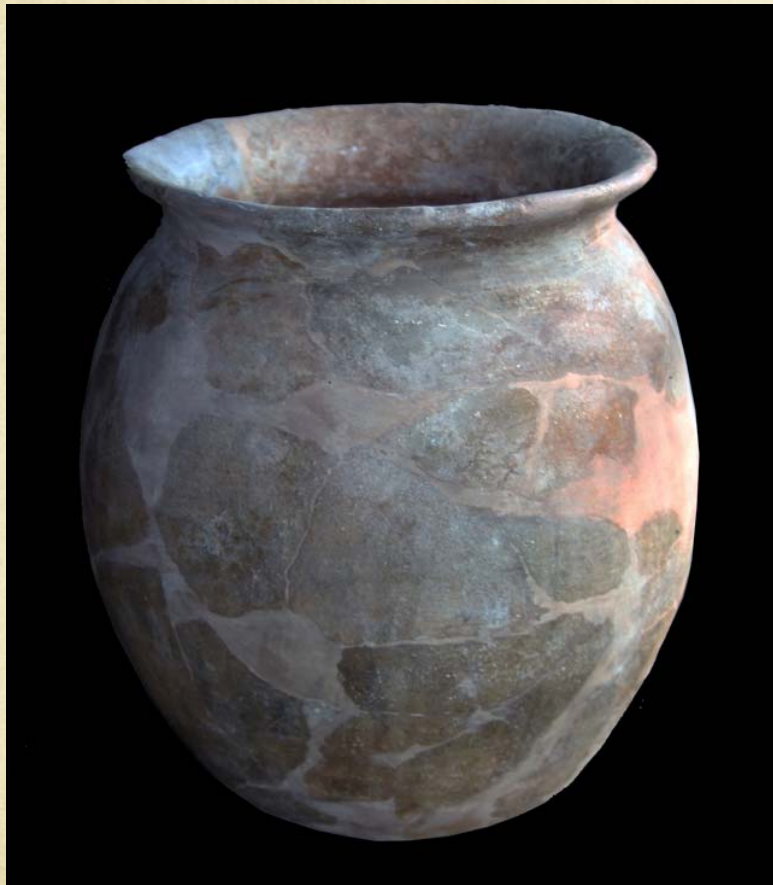
- After the process of souring clay, the two materials were mixed together, by using the feet.
- Following this preparation process the artisan, probably a monk, made the vessels on a small hand-wheel.
- The products made in this workshop were finer than the present one produced in Zlakusa. In Zlakusa is used a mixture of a clay and calcite, while in the old times was used mixture of clay and sifted calcite as a fine powder, or combination of clay and sifted limestone or clay and fine river sand.

- Uvac artisans were making vessels of various sizes, ranging from those of larger volume of about 20 kilograms, up to the vessels of smaller volume of about one kilogram.
- Besides that were made the earthenware dishes – “crepulje”, pots for ovens – “pecnjaci”, pipe smoke – “solundare”, and some pipes for smoking tobacco.

Vessels made in the pottery workshop of larger volume (around 20 kilograms)



Vessels made in the pottery workshop of larger volume (around 20 kilograms)



Vessels made in the pottery workshop of larger volume (around 20 kilograms)



Earthenware dishes – “crepulje”, made in pottery workshop



Pots for ovens – “pecnjaci”, made in pottery workshop



Pipe smoke – “solundare”



Pipes for smoking tobacco, made in pottery workshop



- With the destruction of monasteries Uvac at the end of XVII and beginning of XVIII century, stopped the pottery production and functioning of the workshop.
- The local population, which probably learned and acquired some skills for pottery production, went along with the migrations.

- Some of them maybe fled over the river Uvac to the village Dzurovo, and continued to produce the earthenware dishes – “crepulje”, which were produced there after the Second World War.
- Also, there is possibility that some of them migrated to the north, and inhabited the villages Rupeljevo, Zlakusa and Vrane, and there continued the pottery production.

- Their products were not as sophisticated as the pottery made in the monastery, under the supervision of artisans-monks.
- These are all assumptions that have to be confirmed through the future research within the Project "Zlakusa".



Thank you!

TRADITIONAL POTTERY – THE ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL VIEW

**PRODUCTION OF EARTHEN VESSELS IN THE WORKSHOPS OF
MONASTERY UVAC**

Bosa Rosic