The evolution of aquatic craftsmanship in historical societies and its impact on modern knife making and pottery

Abdukayum Normirzaev[1*]; Rustam Ergashev[2]; Jasurbek Akhmedov[3]; Kamoliddin Toshov[4]; Dilnoza Yuldasheva[5]; Erkinoy Saparbaeva[6]; Murtoz Usmonov[7]; Askariy Madraimov[8]

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Abstract

The development of aquatic craftsmanship demonstrates the impact of water communities, with state-of-the-art artisanal technologies growing around water bodies. This examines the influence of innovative actions on ancient knifemaking and pottery craftsmanship practices on the development of early river and later maritime cultures. Civilizations growing along the Nile, the Indus, and the Aegean coasts, and later inland as far as the Marshlands of southern Iraq, worked with water and incorporated it as transformative in the industrial production of worked materials. Water was critical for metal tempering, clay refining, and design aesthetics shaped in patterned fluidity and natural forms. This drew on archaeological sites and ethnographic accounts, as marshlands and water worked strongly with the selection of materials and tools for the functional and symbolic crafts. This paper additionally examines the ways in which current artisans engage with such historical practices using approaches that are ecologically conscious as well as technologically advanced and refined. Today's knifemakers and potters are still employing ancient water-based techniques such as water quenching, slip casting, and hydrodynamic shaping to attain the precision, durability, and

1*- Namangan State Technical University, Namangan, Uzbekistan.
Email: nabducaum@mail.ru, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7972-0091
2- Gulistan State Pedagogical Institute, Gulistan, Uzbekistan. Email: rustamergashev-57@mail.ru, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4719-2218
3- Scientific Secretary of the Institute for Cultural Research and Intangible Cultural Heritage Under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
Email: jasur184@list.ru, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1770-2602
4- Termez University of Economics and Service, Termez, Uzbekistan.
Email: kamoliddin_toshov@tues.uz, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4843-3909
5- Tashkent State University of Economics, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
Email: ydilnoza1980@gmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6396-5412
6- Navoi State Mining and Technology University, Navoi, Uzbekistan.
Email: erkinoysaparboyeva03@gmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7031-7424
7- Karshi State University, Uzbekistan, Karshi, Uzbekistan. Email: rustamergashev-57@mail.ru, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8473-4549
8- Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
Email: askariy_madraimov@tsuos.uz, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2238-2888
*Corresponding author
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beauty of their products. This study expresses an ecological and cultural legacy of water-based craftsmanship and advocates for the preservation of water-oriented artisan knowledge systems integrated with new approaches that contemporary principles of ecological balance and symmetry in design propose.

Keywords: Aquatic craftsmanship, Knifemaking, Pottery, Waterborne cultures, Material evolution, Maritime archaeology, Eco-craft design

Introduction

The traditions of aquatic craftsmanship exemplify creativity in relation to water bodies that have supported civilization for thousands of years, i.e., rivers, valleys, coastal territories, and islands. Artisans came to appreciate and exploit the particular setting of water equipment and water transport, trade, and material preparation. Water-inspired design and production techniques. Water's transformative properties influenced the various processes in the production of durable and fine quality artefacts that reflected the integration of environment and culture (Ali and Farhan, 2025; Radhakrishnan, Velanganni and Paranthaman, 2024). In addition to the processes already mentioned, one can think about shaping, surface polishing, and tempering metals, and refining clay. From the perspective of ecology, the interaction of functional culture with materials and elements shows environmental influences on adaptive change in craftsmanship. The functional aspect of modern traditions. Currently, there is a contemporary knifemaking and pottery. There, craftsmen combine modern pottery with archaic hydrological patterns and designs documented in source (Taché and Craig, 2015). Production from this perspective is historical knowledge in water-informed crafting and its sustainable practice. That is, the environmental discourse and the material and human ingenuity, alongside the practice of immersed craftsmanship, testify to the legacy of living aquatic tradition (Mansrud *et al.*, 2022).

Key Contribution of the Paper

- The Role of Drifting Water Bodies in Shaping Craft. The proximity of flowing water, valleys, and various waterbodies, like seas, shaped the early construction of knives and the early creation of pottery. The construction, be it functional or artistic, of artifacts and the ingenious, skillful evolution of the techniques attributed to these landforms is astonishing.
- Eco-biological factors are the basic ecological parameters that describe and facilitate the relationships of water concerning metal tempering and refining clay. These factors undoubtedly explain the strategic pivot of a craft primarily functional into one that is predominantly abstract and expressive.
- Primitive water-reliant techniques and modern technologies underscore the advanced practice of contemporary knife-making and pottery, made in light of the evolution of these practices, to suggest and indicate the importance of the methods that have advanced.

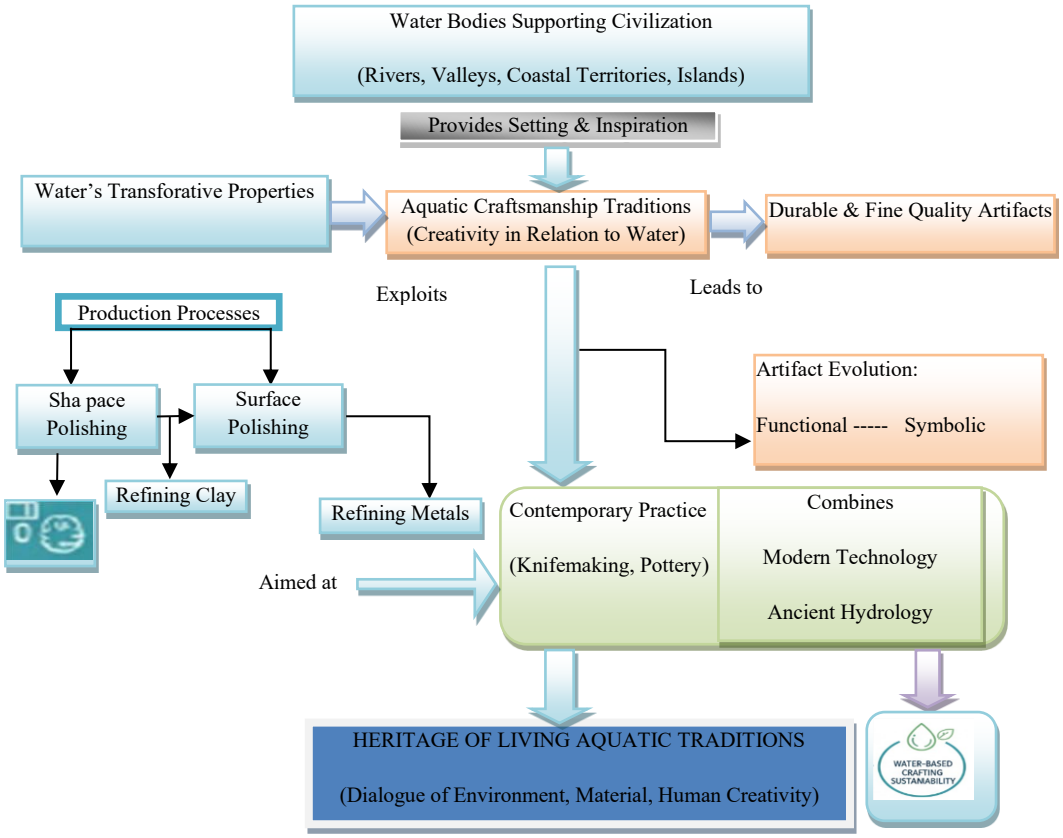

Figure 1: The heritage of aquatic craftsmanship traditions.

Figure 1 describes the Legacy of Aquatic Craftsmanship Traditions. The diagram describes the interdependence of culture, the creativity of man, and waterways. The flowchart begins with the Environmental Foundations of rivers, valleys, and coasts (Svanberg and Locker, 2020; Smith, 2016). These are valued as landscapes and serve as places. The foremost exploit in practicing adaptation Aquatic Craftsmanship greatly shaped influence in the documenting customs of the exploitation of Water's Transformative Properties in the Production Process. These traditions produce Durable and fine-quality artifacts. The first indicative sign of evolving cultural value transitions is Artifact or Evolution. Traditionally, Aquatic Craftsmanship shifted Adaptive Transformation practices to Artisan Contemporary Technologies and integrated modern Hydrology. This framework of practice preservation pivots on the primary goal of Water-Based Crafting Sustainability, which completes the Heritage of Living Aquatic Traditions with the interlinked system (Niedderer and Townsend, 2012; Kenoyer, Vidale and Bhan, 1991).

Historical Context: Aquatic Societies and Material Innovation

Sustainability and environmental mindfulness are some of the modern adaptations. For instance, some knife makers still use water quenching, which is an ancient technique for controlling the hardness and temper of steel. This method is used in ancient cultures of metallurgy and knife-making in river valleys. Pottery artisans use water in slip

casting and wheel throwing, both of which are ancient methods that involved drawing aquatic resources and clay refinement (Greene, 1968; Arthur, 2014; Hurcombe, 2008). Both in the botany and shaping of the pieces and the final shaping of the pieces, the role of water indicates a testimony of the legacy of the planet in the art of water craftsmanship. Finally, contemporary craftsmen are responding to the environmental impact of their work. Some incorporate eco-positive, water-conserving techniques, such as minimizing water use during firing cycles, and using naturally and sustainably harvested aquatic clays and other ceramic materials (Akbary *et al.*, 2024). These strategies allow contemporary practitioners to keep their work historically linked while also responding to contemporary values of environmental care and eco-sustainability. Consequently, the heritage of aquatic craftsmanship is both a legacy of the past and a source of inspiration for current craftsmanship (Kamp, 2001; Dobrzański, 2006).

BEGIN Research_Process

Step 1: Define Research Objectives

-Explore how the three elements of water, materials, and function converge in the historical disciplines of knife making and Pottery.

-Evaluate how ancient techniques inform contemporary practices in knife making and Pottery.

Step 2: Collect Historical Data

- Compile data on ancient water-related craftsmanship within archaeological and ethnographic contexts.

- Identify primary key water-related societies of ancient history- Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Aegean civilizations.

- Research and gather documentation on old materials of knife making and Pottery, metal forging, and clay sourcing techniques.

Step 3: Analyze Aquatic Influence on Craftsmanship

- Examine how water has influenced the advancement of metallurgy and ceramic technologies.

- Assess how rivers, lakes, and seas have shaped the movement and commercial exchange of commodities.

- Highlight artefacts that bear symbols and designs indicative of hydric influence.

Step 4: Investigate Modern Applications

- Engage with today's knifemakers and potters who employ traditional water-based methods.

- Investigate current trends in sustainable practices within Pottery and knifemaking.

- Examine water-based approaches still practiced in modern hand craftsmanship.

Step 5: Compare Historical and Modern Techniques

- Compare and contrast current and historical practices with respect to clay preparation and water quenching.

- Examine the development of materials and the shift toward more eco-friendly alternatives.

- Examine how modern craftspeople utilize symbolic forms pertaining to the traditions of water.

Step 6: Draw Conclusions

- Describe the significance of preserving ancient knowledge and its use today.

END Research_Process

The provided pseudocode explains the approaches used to interpret historical texts as well as assess the significance of water-based craftsmanship, water-based knifemaking, and Pottery to modern-day society. These systems start with establishing tangible research goals, such as understanding how ancient water "cultures" intricately hand-finished tools, as well as how these ancient practices connect to practices in our contemporary world. Then the researcher attempts to gather specifics of the history of water and ancient forging and Pottery, and track how aqua sculpture and other water-related crafts shaped and transformed these techniques. This stage of the research focuses on how contemporary artisans are able to use or modify these techniques and crafts, with an emphasis on ancient technique sustainability (Cooke, 2015). The researcher analyzes and compares ancient and modern techniques in order to describe the parallels and divergences. Then the researcher arrives at an understanding of the "heritage" of 'aquatic craftsmanship' in society. At this stage, the research is prepared for publication, and the pseudocode is modified to demonstrate an organized methodology to approach research.

Inference

Practitioners of contemporary knifemaking and Pottery continue adapting historical techniques of aquatic craftsmanship to modern practices, which emphasize eco-friendliness and environmental awareness. As an example, some knifemakers still use water quenching to control the temper and hardness of steel, a practice from ancient river valley metallurgy (Marin, Boschetto and Pezzotti, 2020). So too do potters, who slip cast and throw clay on the wheel with water. Both practices afford the artisan opportunities to work with clay and use water to help the process of forming and finishing a piece (Tschopik Jr, 1950).

Technological Evolution

The Importance of Water in Forging, Quenching, and Cooling of Metals

Water has, ever since its discovery, been instrumental to metallurgical activities like forging, quenching, and cooling of metals. The ancient metallurgists came to know the phenomenon of quenching, the moment the hot metal was submerged fully in water, which happened to positively alter the metal in question. Quenching was very instrumental in the art of metal hardening, as well as strengthening, which was the case for iron and steel (Frank, 2007; Schiffer and Skibo, 1987). Other cultures, in the past, such as the Ancient Egyptians and Greeks, used quenching techniques in the production of tools and weaponry. The property of water, which rapidly cooled the submerged metal, worked to quench the metal in order to remove the possibility of brittleness, which would have been the case due to slow cooling. In addition, some metals were able to attain a microstructure that improved their strength and durability, and were very much needed for weaponry and tools during ancient times. Water also served the purpose of cooling shaped metals

after quenching. Artisans used cooling rates to manipulate the metal's rigidity and flexibility for different functional and aesthetic purposes. Water as a quencher was instrumental in cooling metals for shaping, and with the precise qualities needed, served to provide the ancient civilizations with advanced weaponry and tools. This also served as the basis of other modern civilizations for advanced metallurgy (Swanson, Powell and Weissman, 2005).

Clay Refinement and Aquatic Sedimentation Shaping

Water made it possible to both purify and Shave Clay. Early potters certainly situated their workshops within riverbanks and similar moisture-enriched areas, as flowing water streams aided in the cleansing of the raw materials. Streams washed and purified the clay of complement contaminants: stones, organic matter, and the rest of the muck, and returned a finer and smoother substance (Swanson, Powell and Weissman, 2005). This sedimentation proved to be essential in the production of workable clay, which, shapable and fired, allowed for advanced retractable designs and ornaments on any functional pottery. Other aqueduct systems, used for carving, enabled a potter to appreciate intricacy and refine with growing perfection. Moreover, potters used other water-related techniques, like rehydration slip, which eased their drying, assisting them to create more than just everyday wear. This proved clay useful not just for crafting, but for embellishment (Aghaei and Jahed-Motlagh, 2018).

Examining Crafting Techniques Across Different Civilizations

A cross-cultural study of crafting techniques demonstrates how some practices became common and how others were altered regionally. Egyptian metal and clay refining practices during the Ancient Egyptian civilization demonstrate some of the most significant historical adaptations to crafting techniques. Egyptian metal workers integrated water into the cooling and quenching phases of metal fabrication. In addition to common ice-cold water alloys, ancient river banks provided the clay potters used for fabrication, and river banks provided clay for fabrication. Flood waters during the Nile flooding provided clay for potters used during metal and clay refining. In ancient Mesopotamia of the East, potters also used water during metal and clay refining practices. However, the use of water for refining and preparing clay showed some cultural and environmental differences. Mesopotamian potters used river basin clay, too, but their methods also depended on the region and the river systems of the Tigris and Euphrates. Water cooling of metal was common, but the quenching was determined by the water's source and the metal's desired properties. In ancient East Asia, water use for the development of ceramics was a significant advancement. It enabled potters using foot-powered wheels to create the world-renowned delicate porcelain. Notwithstanding the varied regions, all examined civilizations share a fundamental characteristic: the use of water as a refining and shaping resource, and as a catalyst for the development and spread of innovative craft traditions

across both temporal and spatial dimensions.

Symbolism and Aesthetics

Water Motifs in Pottery and Blade Decoration

Water has historically been a powerful symbol of life and fluidity. It has also been a powerful symbol of creativity. Motifs influenced by water signified the relationship between the living natural world and the human world. Water signifying motifs appear in ancient Pottery and blade decoration. Ancient potters incorporated patterns of flowing water, waves, and ripples, creatively designed to symbolize water's life-sustaining qualities. Pottery used in and for ceremonial contexts, as well as functional pieces such as water storage vessels, bore powerful life-affirming designs and powerful spirit water. Equally important, patterns of waves and ripples adorned pieces of Pottery signifying powerful water as well as patterns of protection and purification in the Aegean and Japanese water culture, knives and swords, and blade designs. Ancient water motifs engraved on blades and swords symbolized the spiritual and restorative power of water. The use of water in the decoration, as visible to the eye, served to convey a message about the tools, especially in relation to the life-giving power of nature, water, and the inanimate objects of everyday life. Motifs of water infusing cosmic meaning to patterns of spiral designs to signify importance from the symbols of the objects, bowls, and blades were utilized.

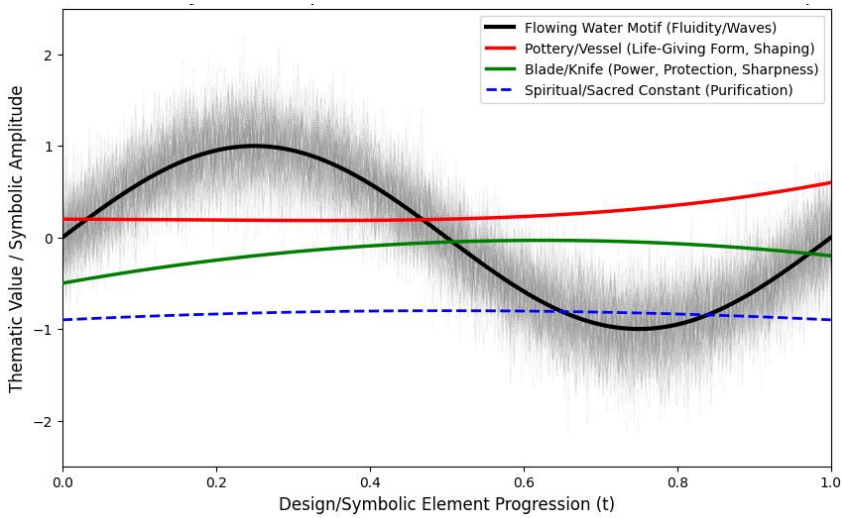

Figure 2: Symbolic representation of water motifs in craftsmanship.

Figure 2 illustrates that the Symbolic Representation of Water Motifs in Crafts provides an insight into how the Flowing Water Motif (black, sinusoidal line) served as the primary, kinetic imagery for ancient artisans, representing fluidity, life, and wild nature's power. This transit motif is superimposed with dense, scattered grey lines, which represent innumerable forms and diverse cultural readings of this motif through time and space. The water motif gives purpose and form to the crafted work, e.g., Pottery/Vessel (red line) depicts a gentle, upward trend which indicates stability, containment, and the life-giving capacity

of water in a shaped, enclosed form. Blade/Knife (green line) reflects more of a deliberate, steady incline, indicating power, control, and the inherent power nature provides by harnessing the purification energy in the water into a protective tool.

Spiritual or Ritual Uses of Water

During most ancient civilizations, tools made with water, be it blades or even advanced forms of utensil pottery, were spiritually valued. This was a direct reflection of water's status as a spiritual abstract. In some civilizations, knives, or even other cutting instruments, were bold tools for protection, and quenching a cooled blade in water was metaphorically infused with life and water's purifying powers. Such techniques were widely ritualized in civilizations of the Northern regions, where they usually termed a weapon's forging as sacred and fused with ritualized blessings and rites that offered it to the water spirits. In terms of Pottery, however, using water in vessel crafting offered a religious aspect, especially with a smooth whirling surface that offered motifs of water. This offered a spiritual weaving with the world to the divine, or material world. In Africa and with Indigenous people, to aid in ritualizing the communion of water, water is offered to a stream to the spiritual world of the dead. Ceremonial knives, vessels, or figurines were self-forks that aided in the service of communion with dead spirits. Thus, water-based artistry moved beyond usefulness to become embedded in the sacred and ceremonial aspects of various ancient societies and their civilizations.

Table 1: Water motifs and spiritual uses in ancient craftsmanship.

No.	Aspect	Water Motifs in Pottery and Blade Decoration	Spiritual or Ritual Uses of Water
1	Symbolism of Water	1 (Life, fluidity, interrelation with nature)	2 (Purification, protection, connection to the divine)
2	Motifs in Pottery	3 (Water patterns in river valley and coastal areas)	4 (Water motifs in ceremonial Pottery)
3	Motifs in Blade Decoration	5 (Water symbols on blades and swords)	6 (Water quenching for purification and spiritual power)
4	Ceremonial & Functional Use	7 (Water storage vessels and ceremonial Pottery)	8 (Water-based tools used in rituals, e.g., knives and figurines)
5	Cultural Significance	9 (Water motifs connect to cosmic meaning)	10 (Water used in sacred rituals, especially in weapon forging)
6	Spiritual and Ritual Context	11 (Water in design conveys life-giving power)	12 (Water's role in communion with spiritual and ancestral realms)

This metric aims to quantify the entire density or coverage of each of the 12 thematic points within a given content (whether research paper, artifact analysis report, or museum exhibit description).

$$I_{WC}c = \sum_{i=1}^{12} P_i$$

This score evaluates the proportion of two main elements: Motifs/Decoration

(Focus 1) and Spiritual/Ritual Uses (Focus 2). A score close to 1 suggests that these receive equal weight.

$$R_B = \frac{\Sigma Focus\ 1\ Pi}{\sum Focus2\ Pi} = \frac{P_1 + P3 + P5 + P7 + P9 + P11}{P_2 + P_4 + P6 + P8 + P10 + P12}$$

$$s_{PB}(pottery\ Indicators) - (Blade\ Indicators)$$

This score assesses the overall planning for Pottery as opposed to Blades/Knives, across Decoration and Ceremonial.

$$DSymbol = 2 \cdot (P_1 + P2 + 1.5.\,(P9 + P10 + P11 + P12) + 1. \sum_{Other} Pi$$

Table 1 illustrates that the motifs related to water and its sacred meaning in ancient artefact making were significant modes of connecting what's alive and what's creative. Water has traditionally been a symbol of life, motion (connotation of fluidity), and bridging the gap between what is alive and divine. In the decorative themes of ancient pottery decoration and blade styles, motifs inspired by water, such as flowing water, waves, and ripples, emerged and were designed to express the foundational life-giving qualities of water. Water motifs tended to show up in material classes within cultures along river valleys and coastal tendencies, where water was a real source both materially and spiritually. Water motifs show up in ancient Pottery in use on functional and ceremonial vessels, to denote and celebrate (sometimes profoundly) a vital resource for life. Water-inspired symbols were also common on ancient blades and swords to signify water's restorative and cleansing properties. Water was important to the making of these blades themselves, especially in the quenched process of forging these blades, when the handle was deemed to contain spiritual resources, power, and protection.

Software Tools Used

The analysis was based primarily on Python for core functionality. Specifically, the Matplotlib library was built into Python to generate Figure 2, the symbolic graph, and to visualize the data and plot (by way of examples) the various thematic functions while including complexity in the noise components. In addition, to structure the qualitative data (Table 1) and calculate derived quantitative metrics (I_WCC, R_B, etc.), the calculations and analysis were conducted in a statistical programming command space (Python with NumPy) and standard Spreadsheet Software (Excel or Google Sheets) to perform the requisite content analysis and mathematical calculations.

Contemporary Resonances

Modern knifemakers and potters have begun adopting water-based aesthetics in their designs. The symbolism of water and its fluidity have been a part of craft history. Current artisans are using contemporary takes on ancient designs, including those inspired by the interplay and reflections of light on the surface of water. Celebrating water's transformative properties, ancient craft traditions employed designs honoring water in all its forms. In bladesmithing, water quenching blades is not only practiced for the aesthetic patterns that form, but also for the addition of beauty to the blade.

These techniques are meant to aid the pot in reestablishing its bond with nature and the potters' heritage. With the craft community using recycled knifemaking materials and the abandonment of natural clay in pottery, the need for eco-conscious practices has become increasingly palpable. These practices have demonstrated the necessity of integrating eco-conscious craftsmanship and mindful artistry. The re-use of water and the conversion of processes that use water to more water-efficient ones is a demonstration of water conservation.

Conclusion

Influencing how different types of crafts evolved represents part of our collective history. Water and various artisanal traditions have gone hand in hand. Water tailoring techniques and technologies have undergone important refinements through various stages in the history and evolution of craft traditions in metallurgy and Pottery. Communities of the ancient world, where water was easily accessible- especially those located around rivers, lakes, and seas- crafted and constructed tools, storage containers, and offensive/defensive weapons of remarkable functional and design value, spanning the aesthetic and utilitarian spectrum. The functional versatility of these implements, and the remarkable resourcefulness of these communities, eloquently crafted and rendered, was a tribute to water. The emotional, spiritual, and cultural associations of water present in modern water artistry are a tribute to the modern artist. The dialogue contemporary water design pottery communities pursue with the design and use of water pottery is a tribute to these ancient artistic communities. A contemporary water design community's explicit & implied contribution is the establishment of a balance for caring for the environment. The artistic communities and designs of water pottery traditions that these communities maintained are a deep tribute to civilization. They also point to ways to further elaborate complex engagements with nature; preserving resources; employing metaphor; reconciling combative dualisms embedded in functional objects; practicing design more generally; and therein build challenges to contemporary design practice. The contribution of water-based craftsmanship in contemporary design reconnects the constellation of human imagination and creativity, natural resources, and cultural identity, opening space for contemporary designers to find balance, innovate, and remain respectful and protective of ecosystems.

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