

## POTTERS OF HEBRON

*1978 American Film Festival Blue Ribbon (first place) in "Crafts"; CINE Golden Eagle; Sinking Creek Film Festival Judges Award; First International Crafts Film Festival Award*

Robert Haber's prize-winning film carefully documents the ancient tradition of zir-making in a small village in the Hebron hills south-east of Jerusalem. The zirs are large pots used to carry water, and the eight or so families that continue this dying craft supply the whole Jordan valley with their wares. The craft has been handed down through the generations (by the males of the family) for a thousand years, but now is in danger of dying out as production in plastic increases, and young people become seduced by city life.

Step-by-step procedures of how the pots are made in the old way preserves this tradition on film. In cinematic detail we see how the two types of clay (red and white) are mixed together in outdoor mixing tanks, soaked for two hours, checked for impurities, then removed to a settling tank. After, the clay is piled in a large heap on the floor and wedged with the feet. Every process is hand done, except for the final wedging which is done by machine.

The pots are formed on a kick-wheel sunk into the ground, allowing the potters to be at waist level with the floor. When this complex process is



completed and the pots have been formed, they are laid out in the sun to dry for a day, then are loaded into a kiln for firing. One would like to know what happens to the zirs from this point, and how such a small number of potters are able to distribute these pots to the large area mentioned in the opening of the film.

I felt too that I wanted to know more about the people involved. However, if one approaches POTTERS OF HEBRON as a film about the dying art of zir-making, then this film is an excellent documentary of a unique craft tradition. It will be useful to teachers and librarians, but especially useful to craftspersons and potters interested in viewing and comparing the work of other cultures.

Although the narration is sometimes verbose and removed, original Arab

music helps to warm up a basically cold soundtrack. The cinematography is gorgeous: cameraman Ilan Rosenberg gives the images a lush, textural effect that draws viewers of any age into the film.

— KAREN KRAMER

**30 mins. (short version), color; produced and directed 1976 by Robert Haber. Distributed 1977 (sale, rental) by Phoenix Films Inc., (FN), 470 Park Ave. So., New York 10016; in Canada, by International Telefilm (FN), 47 Densley Ave., Toronto M6M 5A8**