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THE COOKING POT IN PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF SIXTH MILLENNIUM TELL KURDU

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Este artículo aborda la producción de vasos con borde engrosado del sexto milenio de Tell Kurdu (Turquía). Su correlación con hogares y grasas animales han confirmado su uso culinario. Sus dimensiones y distribución sugieren la presencia de grupos familiares extensos y la vida cotidiana de las comunidades de Neolítico final en el norte de Mesopotamia.

Vasijas de cocina, Tell Kurdu, Arqueología doméstica, Sexto milenio, Vasos de borde engrosado.

This paper considers splayed rimmed cooking vessels from the sixth millennium levels of Tell Kurdu (Turkey). Their correlation with hearths and animal fats confirm their use for cooking. Their large sizes and distribution suggest extended household groups and lets to approach to daily lives in Late Neolithic communities in upper Mesopotamia.

Cooking vessels, Tell Kurdu, household archaeology, sixth millennium BC, splayed rimmed vessels.

INTRODUCTION

Not only a habitual everyday task driven by the necessity of sustenance, but also the jell of a social group, cooking lies at the heart of community life (Atalay/Hastorf 2006; Graff/Rodriguez-Alegria 2012; Barthes 1979). Cooking and food preparation imply far more than caloric sustenance and must be viewed as important building blocks of a community (Graff/ Rodriguez-Alegria 2012; Meigs 1988; Mintz/Du Bois 2002; Weismantel 1989). Insights into this everyday task and other accompanying activities allow us to understand how a community sustained itself and how it functioned in a social sense. This paper deals with cooking pots, archaeologically speaking, one of the clearest indicators of cooking activities.

Cooking pots contain residues and countless insights into one of the most central daily activities of past societies, yet they often become relegated to a secondary position within ceramic studies. Frequently, this class of pottery is ignored or underrepresented in publications because fine ware vessels, used for serving and display, remain not only better chronological indicators sensitive to fluctuations in fashion and style but they attract more attention given their decorations and elegant profiles. The general propensity to study fine wares is perhaps even more pronounced for periods where painted or decorated wares play a prominent role in the pottery repertoire.

The Halaf Period of Northern Mesopotamia, when painting becomes prolific in pottery assemblages, provides a case in point. With few exceptions specifically focused on coarse wares (Diebold 2004; Hopwood 2010), the general trend for this period of north Mesopotamia, has been to analyze motifs from the painted repertoire of designs and to consider fine-ware shape typologies (Akkermans 1993; Campbell 1992; Davidson 1977; Nieuwenhuyse 1997; Perkins 1949).

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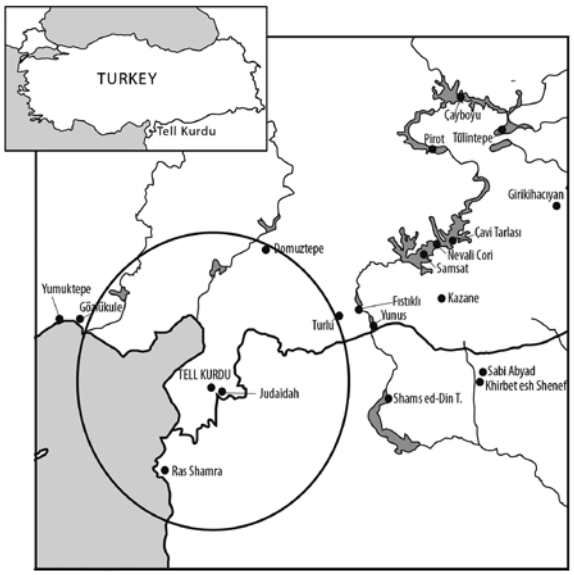

Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Amuq Valley and the site of Tell Kurdu.

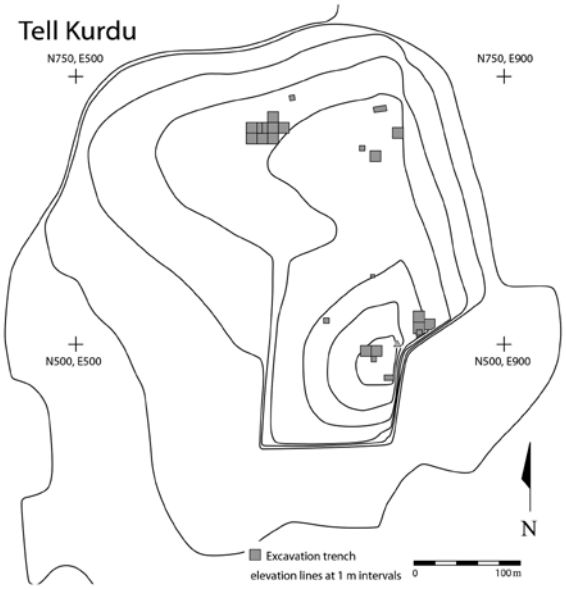

Figure 2. Topographic map of the site of Tell Kurdu.

Admittedly, though less informative when it comes to chronological questions, cooking pots can, nonetheless, give very definite clues about food preparation routines, as well as insights into social life and community relations given cooking's central role in daily life. The very necessity and mundaneness of this task is noteworthy. Cooking not only supplies individuals with nutrition but it creates and maintains social bonds between people that partake together in this act.

This chapter presents a study of cooking pots from the early sixth millennium levels of Tell Kurdu, located in the Amuq Valley of southern Turkey in the province of Hatay (Fig. 1). Excavated in 1938 by Robert and Linda Braidwood and then between 1999-2001 under the directorship of Aslıhan Yener, Tell Kurdu is the largest known prehistoric site in the valley (Fig. 2) (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960; Özbal *et al.* 2004; Yener *et al.* 2000a, 2000b). The site occupation spans from the sixth millennium (where Amuq C levels contemporaneous with the Halaf Phase are present) to the fifth millennium levels (where Amuq E deposits contemporaneous with the Ubaid Phase are present). Focusing specifically on the pottery excavated during the 2001 season, when sixth millennium deposits were excavated, this paper provides a general overview on this long-neglected ware (Özbal *et al*. 2004; Özbal 2006). The 2001 excavations at Tell Kurdu yielded a neighborhood dating to the first half of the sixth millennium BC of small residential houses aligned along streets. This settlement layout enables a contextual study of pottery distributions and concentrations (Fig. 3, Özbal *et al.* 2004; Özbal/Gerritsen 2013). Ultimately, this paper aims to investigate the practice of cooking and food preparation primarily through a ceramic based study.

Unlike typical North Mesopotamian sites in the early sixth millennium BC, the quantity of painted and decorated wares at Tell Kurdu remains quite low, comprising only 5.7% of the pottery by count and 9.2% by weight (Özbal 2006). In fact, coarse wares (unburnished wares and cooking wares) comprise over two thirds of the assemblage both by count and by weight (72% by count and 68.6% by weight). Yet, given the settlement's connections with sites to the east where painted Halaf vessels are a typical part of the assemblage, Kurdu painted wares have often received more interest (Akkermans 1993:132; Davidson 1977:265-72; Matthews 2000:101; Özbal 2017 a and b; Özbal/Gerritsen 2013; Watkins/Campbell 1987:439). This chapter attempts to put cooking vessels in the foreground and to give them the attention they deserve.

Focusing specifically on the sixth millennium splayed rimmed vessel which must have functioned as the main cooking pot of the Amuq Valley at the time, the chapter's aim is to present the attributes, the characteristics and the spatial distribution of this vessel type in order to provide some information on the ware and offer insights about how and where it was used. Furthermore, two splayed rim vessel examples with positive residue results provide an overview of the types of food cooked in such vessels.

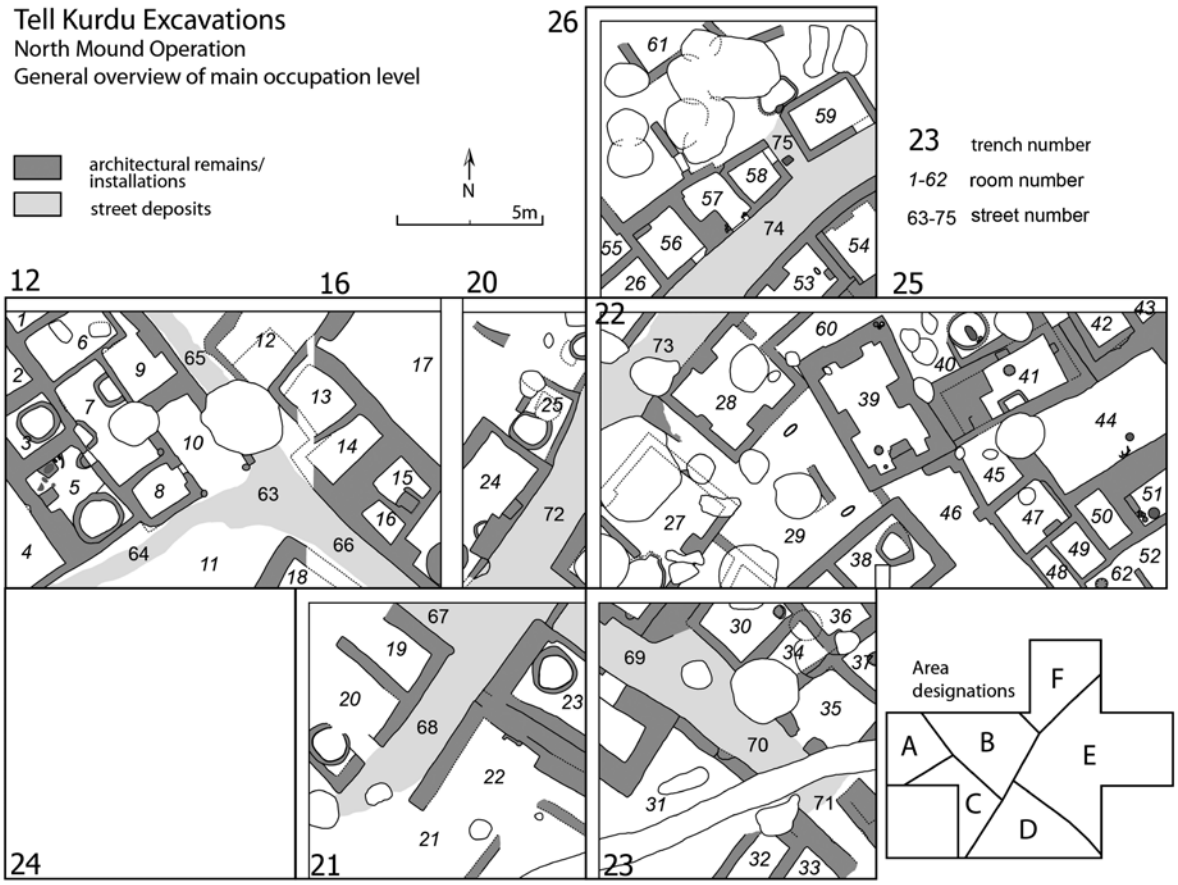

Figure 3. Plan of excavated portion of the sixth millennium settlement at Tell Kurdu.

SPLAYED RIM VESSELS: AN OVERVIEW

As prolific as they are at Amuq C Period Tell Kurdu - with one in every five diagnostics belonging to a splayed rim vessel - as well as at other sites in the Amuq Valley yielding notable quantities such as Tell Rasm, AS80, Hasanuşağı and Tell Judaidah (Casana 2003; Diebold 2004:54), the shape and ware, surprisingly, does not appear to extend far beyond the valley into surrounding regions. In other words, the geographic distribution of splayed rim vessels is remarkably narrow. With the exception of closely related types discovered during the Qoueiq survey (Mellaart 1981:fig. 90-91), examples are conspicuously absent among other published sherd assemblages. The shape has not been identified (or published) among the pottery repertoire of the neighboring Rouj Basin, specifically at Tell Aray I, among Ras Shamra's IVB levels, nor among Hama and Tarsus Gözlükule's prehistoric levels (de Contenson 1992; Goldman 1956:65-75; Ingholt 1934; Iwasaki *et al.* 1995:fig. 16-17, see Özbal 2017a).

Albeit restricted in their geographic extent, splayed rim vessels were used extensively starting in the Amuq Phase B and continuing through the First Mixed Range, Phase C and Phase D. Though they remained a steadfast feature of the Amuq for millennia, they were eventually replaced with the "New-Style Cooking Pot Ware" in the fifth millennium with the advent of the Amuq Phase E. This remarkable continuity may result from the conservatism societies exhibit when it comes to cooking. Consequently, pots, utensils and traditions have been known to remain unchanged for exceedingly long timespans sometimes regardless of their functional effectiveness (Pierce 2005; Villing/Spataro 2015:12). Often this persistence highlights the loyalty that societies feel towards unwavering daily routines like the task of preparing food and explains why cooking vessels tend to lack the typo-chronological sequencing that short-lived and readily refashioned serving and display vessels often exhibit. The inability of archaeologists to apply form and design based frequency seriations may explain why cooking vessels received a subordinate role in the archaeological study of ceramics.

Accordingly, considered here is the distribution of splayed rim cooking vessels across the settlement and a narrow time range (not a chronological overview of changing vessel types). Insights gained on how such vessels were used and whether they are found in spac-

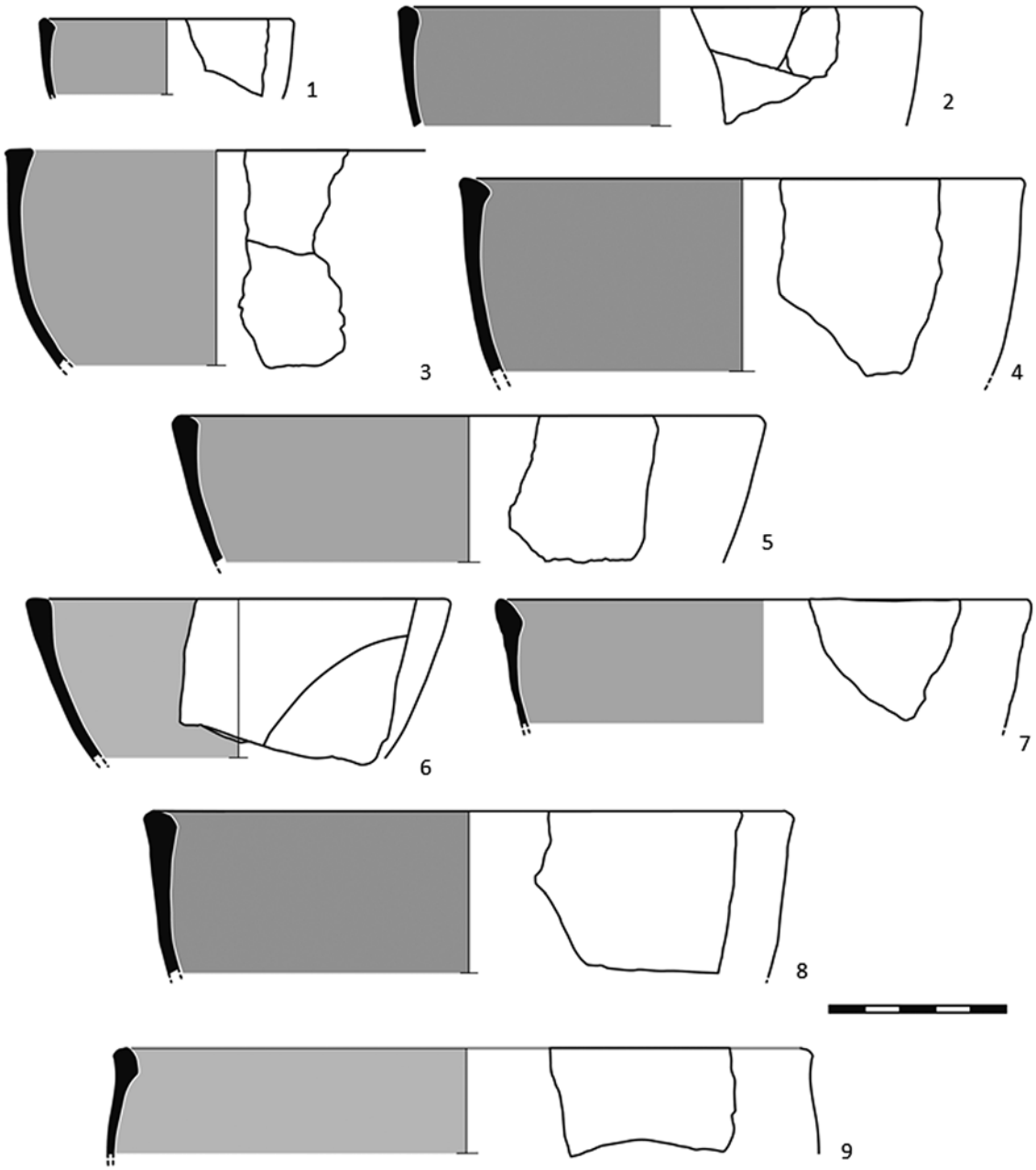

Figure 4. Examples of straight-sided splayed rim vessels.

es equipped with other cooking related facilities may inform us about the provisioning of meals and preparation of food in this sixth millennium settlement.

Comprising 20% of all form diagnostics in Amuq Phase C, splayed rim vessels at Tell Kurdu are immediately recognizable given their surprisingly thin walls and yet remarkably thick lips (Braidwood/Braidwood 1960:142; Diebold 2004, Fig. 4-6). Their thickened rims, often 1 cm thick, must have given the brittle vessel walls some tensile strength. The soot that some sherds display on their exterior surface is clearly suggestive of placement on an open-fire. Splayed rim vessels from Phase C come both in bowl and hole-mouth variants and often have large diameters.

Apart from a small burnished component comprising around 1-2% of the overall assemblage, splayed vessels from the Amuq C Period are unburnished and typicalfall within the Amuqian Dark Faced Unburnished Ware (DFUBW) category. Braidwood and Braidwood further place splayed rim vessels from Tell Kurdu's sixth millennium levels in DFUBW Variant 2, known for its large mineral, shell, sand and grit inclusions (Braidwood/Braidwood 1960). Using Rye (1976), Diebold suggests the high frequency of large inclusions could have added re-

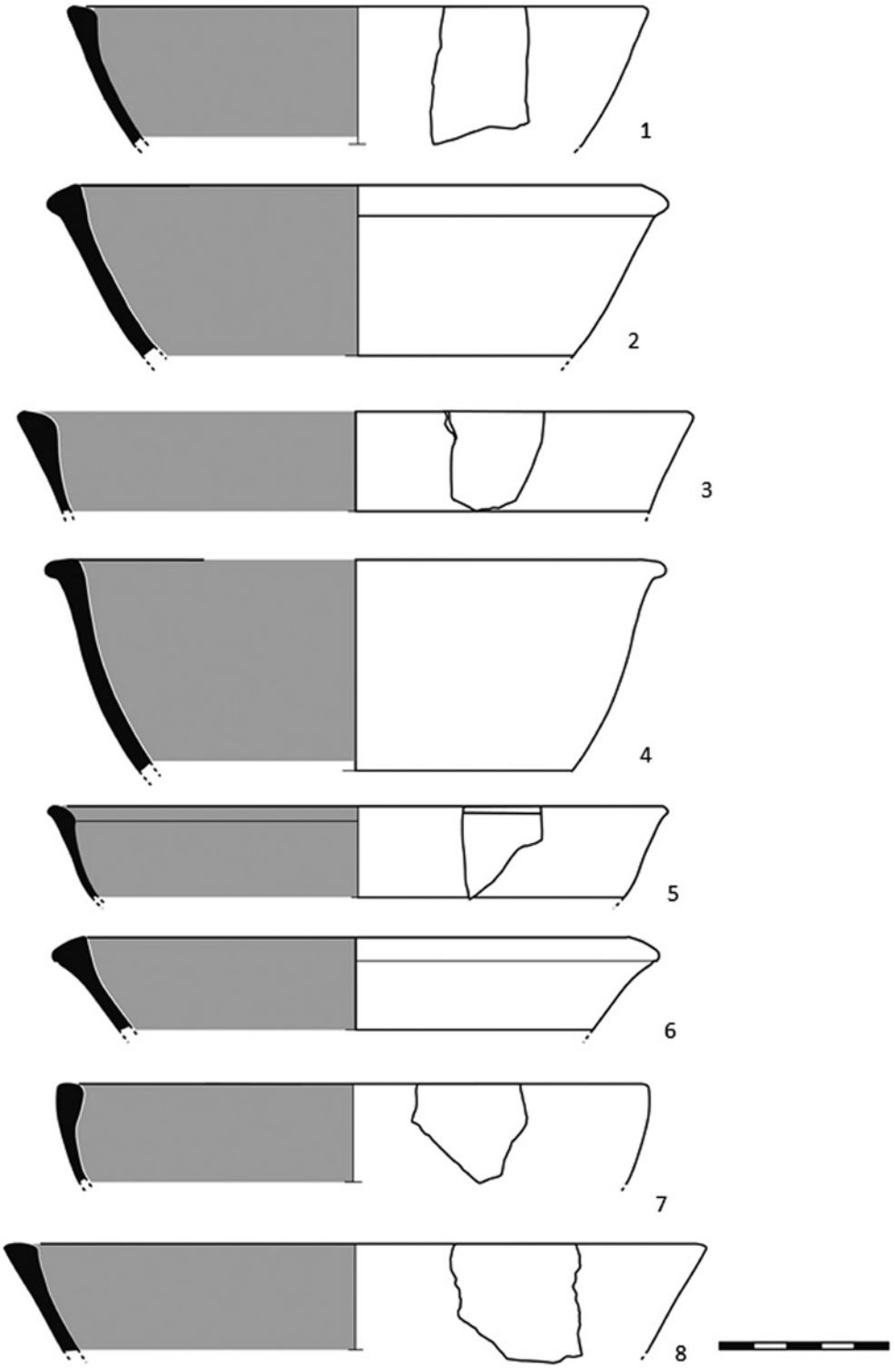

Figure 5. Examples of open-mouthed splayed rim vessels.

sistance to the vessel against thermal shock (2004:54). In fact, the sand-grit temper is so intensely added that it gives the surface a sandpapery look and feel. This, combined with the thin vessel walls, which range between 3 and 8 mm (Braidwood/Braidwood 1960:141-142; Diebold 2004:54), must have equipped them with exceptional thermodynamic properties, allowing the effective conduction of heat to cook the foods within. Though thin, the cores of splayed rim vessels, mostly brown, grey or black on their outer surfaces even when

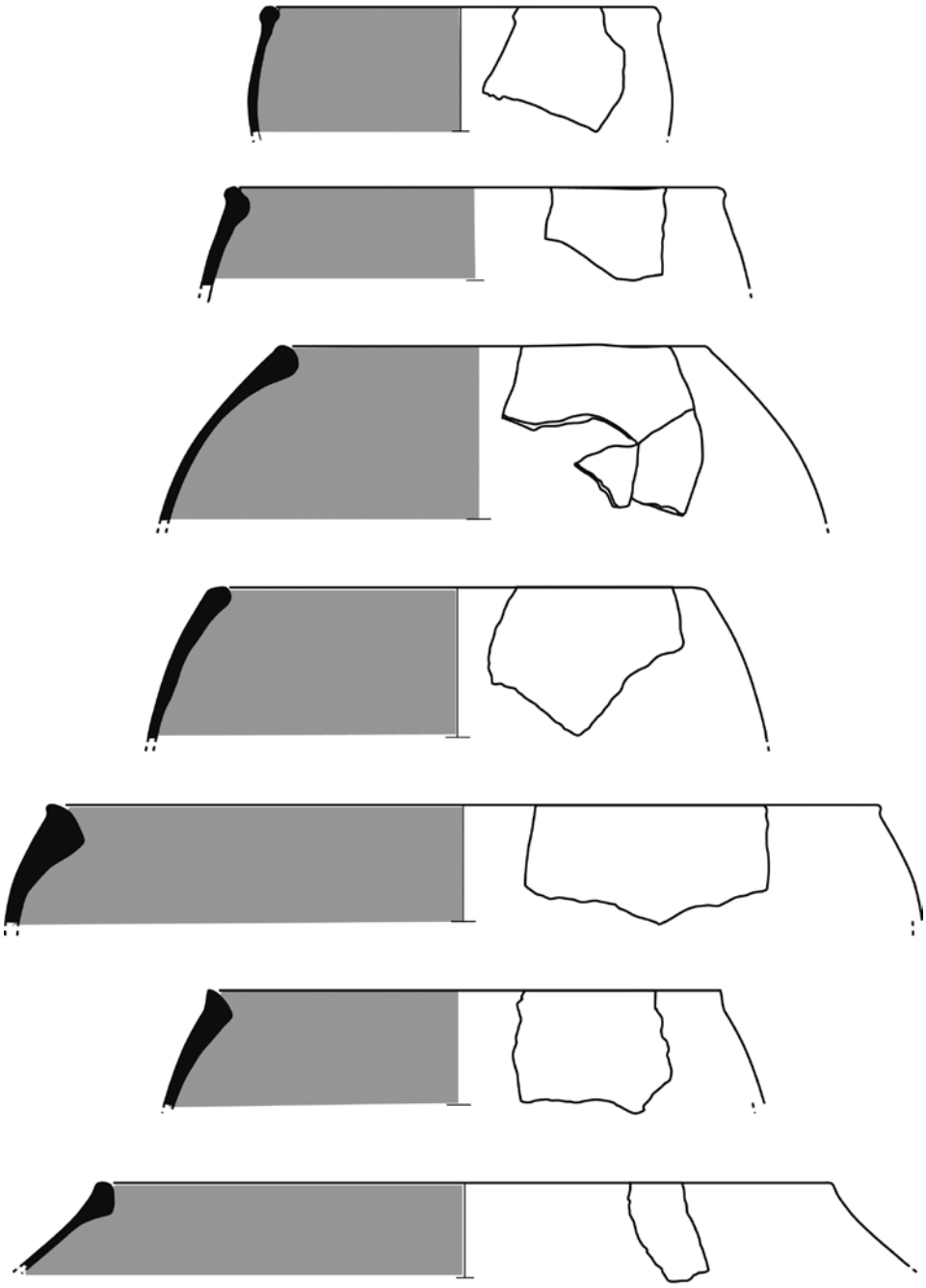

Figure 6. Examples of closed-mouthed splayed rim vessels.

oxidized, are always dark black and often show a sandwich type effect with the oxidized surfaces surrounding a darker sherd center.

Splayed rim vessels tend to be quite large and must have held a large volume of food, potentially making them suitable for commensal dining. The average rim diameter (based on around 250 open and straight-sided rims) ranged around 37 cm (Fig. 4). However, open deep bowls (Fig. 5) and closed hole-mouthed pots (Fig. 6) were found equally as often as straight sided splayed-rim vessels. A sample of nearly 400 splayed rim vessels revealed that about 39% were straight-sided, while approximately 35% were slightly open shapes. Of the remaining 36%, approximately half were slightly constrained in shape while the other half had restricted orifices and could be called true hole-mouth shaped splayed rim vessels. Especially with the open shapes, rim diameters approached 50 cm (also see Diebold 2004:54). Diameters were naturally smaller for closed

vessels and ranged around 29 cm (based on around 150 rims). Bases were generally rounded, probably for efficient heat distribution and for thermal shock absorption. Even the most conservative volume estimation suggests that vessels could contain in excess of 15 liters of liquid. Such substantial sizes suggest that foods were prepared and cooked for relatively large groups.

In fact, a general look at the cooking pot diameters for splayed rim vessels across the various Amuq Phases indicates that there is an increase in the diameters of Dark Faced Un-burnished Ware splayed rim cooking pots in Amuq Phase C (Fig. 7). Based on the data generated by Braidwood and Braidwood, splayed rim cooking pots showed a 40% increase in diameter size after the First Mixed Range, reaching 34 cm by Phase C[1] and continuing into Phase D (1960). However, the assemblage becomes inundated by the so-called "New Cooking Pot Ware" first with an initial trickle in Phases D and thereafter fully in Phase E.

Jack Goody (1982:86-87) and others point out that a one-to-one relationship between vessel size and group size is not always substantiated, given that communal meals can be cooked in multiple smaller containers (Villing/Sparato 2015:6). However, a large vessel diameter implies a large volume and hence quite undeniably must suggest that considerable amounts of food were being prepared. Using an unwieldy vessel with a 15-20 liter capacity to prepare food for small nuclear family groups is unlikely and suggests the provisioning of food for a large group and the practice of commensal dining (Pollock 2012). Addressed below are basic insights towards answering where, how, and what these vessels were used for, what types of foods were cooked in them, as well as how and under what conditions foods were prepared across the settlement and the various neighborhoods of Tell Kurdu's sixth millennium settlement.

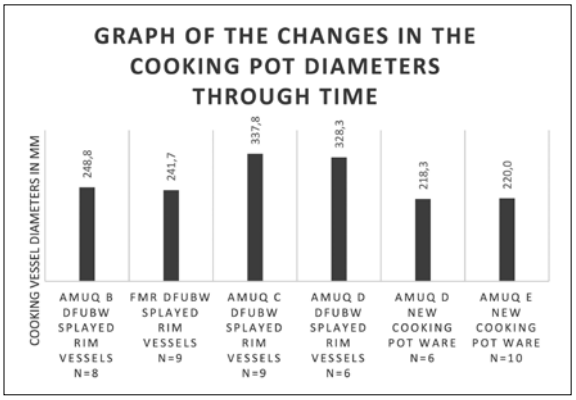

Figure 7. A comparison of diameters of various types of cooking pots across different phases based on Braidwood and Braidwood's (1960) data.

SPLAYED RIM VESSEL RESIDUES FROM TELL KURDU

One of the best ways to understand vessel usage in recent years has been to analyze the residues of the remaining lipids captured inside vessel walls. When complemented by faunal studies, such analyses allow for a thorough reconstruction of the consumption of animal based products. A range of vessels from Tell Kurdu were analyzed for residues at the Boğaziçi University Archaeometry Laboratory in Istanbul. Interestingly, two of the Tell Kurdu vessels that yielded positive residue results were splayed rim vessels: while TK 6227.5 yielded porcine residues (H. Özbal *et al.* 2015:180), TK 6760C lies within the ruminant lipid range (Türkekul Bıyık 2009: 102). In addition to providing unequivocal information that splayed rim vessels were used for the processing of meat-based products, they show that both pork as well as beef and/or mutton was prepared in these vessels. Indeed, faunal studies have shown that ruminants dominate the Tell Kurdu assemblage with average NISP values ranging around 40.5% for cattle and 42.5% for ovicaprines. Suids comprise only 8.5% of the identifiable faunal remains, although this value reaches 10.3% for Area E (Loyet/Nardulli 2004). It is notable that residues belonging to a species comprising such a small part of the assemblage were discovered within a splayed rim vessel wall. This and the expected discovery of ruminant fats confirm that these vessels, as presumed, are indeed reserved for cooking, boiling and the preparation of daily meals, from soups to other pot dishes.

CONTEXTUAL DISTRIBUTION OF VESSELS ACROSS TELL KURDU'S SIXTH MILLENNIUM PHASE

Given attributes like soot and thermal shock discussed above, splayed rimmed vessels at Tell Kurdu can function as excellent indicators of cooking activities. Their distribution across the various rooms and courtyards of the Amuq C neighborhood at Tell Kurdu could potentially provide firsthand information on the location of food preparation activities. As part of this contextual study,

1. This value is based on the nine vessels measured by the Braidwood's, yet, our sample of 250 vessels shows that the average diameter range is actually 37 cm.

the distribution of splayed rim vessels across rooms and courtyards of the settlement that yielded at least 20 form diagnostic sherds was considered.[2]

Interestingly, the main splayed rimmed vessel concentrations appear, contrary to initial expectations, not to be located in rooms with large walled ovens (such as R05, R23 and R20, see Fig. 3) but rather in rooms with small fire-pits (such as R52, R41 and R47). In each of the latter rooms, splayed rim cooking vessels comprise more than a third of their diagnostic sherds. This is significant, especially when the site average of 18.5% is considered. Also remarkable is the fact that all three rooms/ spaces with the highest percentage of splayed rimmed vessels contain or have immediate access to fire pits. Note that R47's fire-pit dates to an early use phase in the history of the room, prior to the construction of the west wall and may not be directly related to the room, but the ceramics are also likely to be from an earlier floor as well. R52's fire-pit, on the other hand, is in the associated eastern extension, R62.

Nonetheless, the connection between splayed rim vessels and fire-pits is especially strengthened by floor 25:82 in R41. R41 went through several use phases as various features such as a bench, a bin, wall niches, and a platform appeared and disappeared throughout the use-life of the structure. The eighth floor from the top (25:82) was the only one in this room to yield a fire-pit. Interestingly, the splayed rim vessel ratios from this floor are remarkably high; 16 of the 38 identifiable form diagnostics from this floor or 42.1% are from different splayed vessels. The vessels have diameters that range between 19 and 50 cm, with an average of 38 cm. All the fire-pits found in Tell Kurdu, interestingly, are located in Area E, which correspondingly yielded the highest quantities of splayed rim vessels across the site. The lack of these features in other areas is unexplained at present. Interestingly, both splayed rimmed sherds that yielded residues come from Area E. The one yielding ruminant adipose fat comes directly from R41, the room described above, while the porcine lipids come from a mixed context from Area E.

Other rooms like R62, R37 and R30 also have fire-pits, but none of these spaces yielded more than 20 diagnostic sherds, and the percentages obtained for splay-rimmed sherds or other vessel types may be less representative. Rooms with walled ovens such as R05 and R23, on the other hand, range below the site average at 12-13 percent when splayed rimmed vessel sherd ratios are considered. This could indicate that walled ovens were not used in conjunction with splayed rimmed vessels, which were likely employed for foods that were boiled or left to simmer, such as porridges and soups. This is corroborated by the lipid residue data that yielded adipose fats from various animals. In fact, in many cases, a walled ovens' proximity to concentrations of grinding stones suggests that they were instead used for baking bread, similar to the tall-walled ovens (called tannours or tandırs) as supported by ethnographic studies in the Near East (Horne 1994:145; Kamp 2000:88; Sweet 1960:274; Yakar 2000:164).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Beyond a means to provide an intake of nutrients and a way of acquiring our daily subsistence needs, cooking is a social activity that fosters families, sharing, strengthens community ties and forms the foundation of a household unit (Graff/Rodriguez-Alegria 2012, Hendon 1996). Although often ignored in archaeological interpretations given the mundaneness of the activity, its very necessity and routineness makes cooking a fundamental part of society. Splayed rimmed cooking pots of the Amuq Valley were used as cooking vessels as confirmed by residue analyses yielding positive lipid signatures for animal fats.

Overall, the paper has demonstrated that also for periods where painted and chronologically idiosyncratic fine ware serving vessels remain the main ceramic type studied, cooking pots too can provide important insights into the functioning of a community. By approaching cooking as a multifarious task including the spatial distribution of cooking vessels and hearths, as well as lipid residue results, the paper aimed to address this often-neglected activity and gain insights into social organization across the settlement. Hearths and cooking vessels seem to occur together in the sixth millennium levels of Tell Kurdu in a rather concentrated manner in Area E while bread ovens often appear in other areas. Ultimately, this separation enables the distinction of tasks and the identification of designated boiling and baking locales.

The exceptional size of the cooking pots in this phase is remarkable and suggest the presence of extended household groups as vessels of such unwieldy sizes were unlikely used when cooking for small restricted

2. Form diagnostics refer to sherds with features that include aspects such as rims and necks that enable the functional determination of the vessel to be established. Sherds with interesting surface features are thus not considered form-diagnostics. The measure of 20 diagnostic sherds was taken to ensure a representative breakdown of the pottery, given that percentage values are skewed for rooms with less than this number. The values are always calculated as Minimum Number of Vessel (MNV) values. Two rim sherds from the same vessel are thus always considered as one vessel.

groups. The juxtaposition between the small room sizes and the sizeable cooking pots is remarkable and suggests household groups likely crosscut residential groups. Large pot sizes are suggestive of the processing of considerable food quantities and also imply the presence of a system for the division of labor and allocation of food/cooking related tasks. Overall, these insights provide a deeper understanding of daily life within the Tell Kurdu community in the sixth millennium BC.

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