

Kitchenalia in Bronze Age Cyprus

Abstract: This article explores the materiality of food production and consumption within the household in Bronze Age Cyprus. The focus is on embodied encounters with the “stuff of food”—the pots, pans, and other kitchen implements that were used on a daily basis—and how these shaped people’s lives. Throughout the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, generations of families on Cyprus used Red Polished pottery to serve and consume food and drink: the round-bottomed pots were not designed to be laid on a table, indicative of the development of very specific customs of dining at home. The very limited range of pottery (wares and forms) available to the Early-Middle Cypriot householder suggests a monotone cultural experience. The introduction of vessels with flat bases or ring bases at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age might indicate a move to dining around a table—a radically different

engagement with the physical, material world that undoubtedly affected social relations. This was accompanied by radical shifts in production practices—a move away from household production into the realm of craft specialists—alongside which there was an explosion in the range of tableware for consumption of food and drink and of utilitarian wares used within the kitchen. This article interrogates the implied transformations in the cultural knowledge embedded within people’s engagement with their material world and the very different visual and tactile experiences involved in the daily use of pottery in the Late Bronze Age Cypriot household.

Keywords: pottery, habitus, hospitality, embodiment, materiality

Material Habitus

THIS ARTICLE ENGAGES WITH EMBODIED encounters with the “stuff of food,” focusing on the materiality of foodways, namely the pots, pans, and other items of kitchenalia that were used on a daily basis within the household of communities on Bronze Age Cyprus and interrogates how these objects shaped people’s lives and experiences. The aim is to move away from more traditional empirical approaches to the analysis of pottery, which are situated in modes of production and technologies; instead, it examines how these objects were incorporated in household practices and thus how they mediated and transformed people’s relationships with foodstuffs. “Shaping” is the conceptual golden thread weaving together pots, praxis, materialities, substances, identities, and meanings.

The only way archaeologists can know the inhabitants of Bronze Age Cyprus is through their material world—the things they made, used, and discarded on a daily basis. Numerous studies of material culture have demonstrated the stuff of daily life to be instrumental in the (re)production of social worlds. “[B]eginning in childhood, we constantly think through things, actively engaging our surrounding material environment” (Malafouris 2013: 7), and thus it is through people’s interactions with the material world that they become social beings. A materialities approach recognizes that people and

the things they craft are equal agents within social worlds; people physically shape materials and substances to create their material world, producing and reproducing this in repeated embodied practices. Thus, through embodied praxis objects are culturally (re-)produced and situated within habitus (Bourdieu 1977), but similarly they are agents that reproduce habitus; the resulting interweaving of objects and people shapes human experiences and identities. As noted by Philipp Stockhammer (2012: 11):

The concept of habitus . . . is able to explain why different actors act in a structurally similar way. Actors with a similar habitus are moved by similar motivators of action. These actors are entangled with structurally similar actors and actants. They are, for example, surrounded by similar material objects or participate in the exertion of similar social practices.

For archaeologists, however, it is difficult to engage with these daily repeated actions; instead they can only be inferred from the surviving detritus of daily life. The physical processes involved in manipulating substances such as clay or stone (both discussed below) to form material objects, likewise the subsequent bodily engagement with these objects in daily incorporated actions, shape the human mind, body, and people’s lived experiences. To reach an understanding of the material experiences and sensations evoked through the social action and habitus of communities that have long since disappeared, the

archaeologist needs to physically engage with and handle the stuff of their daily lives.

The focus of this article is the humble pot, an object used in myriad activities shaping people's relationship with food, from storage over the long- or short-term, to processing, cooking, serving, and consuming. These activities took place in the ancient Cypriot household, typically within open courtyard spaces or adjoining ancillary rooms. Pottery used in these domestic spaces served to bind together actors, both within daily familial patterns of consumption and also in extra-household social events involving interaction and reciprocal exchanges with visitors (Fisher 2014). Engaging with the materiality of ancient pottery and considering what this might have to say about embodied practices allows archaeologists to think about the daily household experiences of the inhabitants of Bronze Age Cyprus. Although archaeologists cannot observe people using these objects and lack the luxury of questioning them about their household practices, they can at least experience the physical, tactile sensations of handling their pots and pans.

Pottery and Praxis

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE KITCHENALIA

Throughout the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) (Table 1), generations of families on Cyprus, living within small households in egalitarian villages, used Red Polished pottery to store, serve, and consume food and drink (Fig. 1). There was, however, a significant degree of regional variation throughout the island in terms of clays used to shape the vessels and in the choice of vessel forms (Webb 2014: 219–20). Red Polished pottery is best known from the detailed analyses of the ceramic assemblage from Marki *Alonia* in the foothills of the Troodos mountains in central Cyprus (Frankel and Webb 2006: 105–38), which comprises the focus of the present study. The pottery was handmade and, for the most part, comprises forms that would be easy to shape from the raw material—there is an ongoing debate in the literature as to the extent to which production was specialized or based in the household (Webb 2014: 213–16; Frankel and Webb 2014), but probably most households would have been largely self-sufficient. The resulting pottery is visually attractive and, given the smooth and glossy finish of the polished surface, very tactile and smooth to the touch. Tableware comprised a range of bowls and jugs. Most typical were small round-bottomed bowls, large conical bowls with flattened bases, and large jugs with round mouths or cutaway spouts used for serving liquids. Coarser clay was used to make a limited range of cooking pots (Frankel and Webb 2006: 133, figs. 4.46–47)—one- and two-handled jars with a wide rim and rounded base, and tripod pots—which were placed directly on the flame at the hearth.

TABLE 1. RELATIVE CHRONOLOGICAL PHASES ON CYPRUS (AFTER STEEL 2004B, TABLE 1.1; CREWE 2007, TABLE 1)

Relative Chronological Period	Approximate Date B.C.E.
Middle Cypriot (MC) I-II	2000-1750
Middle Cypriot (MC) III	1750-1650
Late Cypriot (LC) IA	1650-1550
Late Cypriot (LC) IB	1550-1400
Late Cypriot (LC) IIA-B	1400-1340/15

Flat circular trays with low walls were also involved in the cooking process, indicated by carbon deposits on the interior surface, and were plausibly used for baking flat breads (Frankel and Webb 2006: 132). There was also a range of storage vessels of varying sizes. The limited, homogeneous range of pottery available to the Cypriot householder might suggest a monotone cultural experience within the household (certainly with respect to daily engagement with ceramics, although it is of course impossible for archaeologists to envisage other perishable materials that made up daily household visual and other embodied experiences, such as textiles, woodwork, and basketry). There is, however, increasing evidence for specialization of pottery production during this period, in particular the crafting of specialized ceremonial vessels incorporated within funerary ritual (Webb 2014: 214–17).

It is possible to make some assumptions concerning the incorporated practices (Connerton 1989) involving the daily use of this pottery, accepting that there were culturally constructed ways of using and handling this material (Stockhammer 2012) and associated engagements with foodstuffs, which not only created but equally became embedded in the Cypriot habitus. The round-bottomed pots were not suitable to be laid on a flat surface such as a table, which has implications for the location and practice of dining customs in the Cypriot households of this period; plausibly families did not dine seated around a table, but instead ate while seated on the floor. The small bowls, most probably used by individuals for eating and drinking, were designed to fit in the hand, while the round-bottomed jugs would be placed in dipped pot emplacements on the floor. Most of the eating bowls were plain, but some had incised decoration; for the most part they did not have projecting handles (although some have pierced lug handles used for suspension), but instead were probably held cupped in one or two hands: this implies a very tactile engagement with the object, particularly comforting if consuming a hot meal or beverage. Some bowls

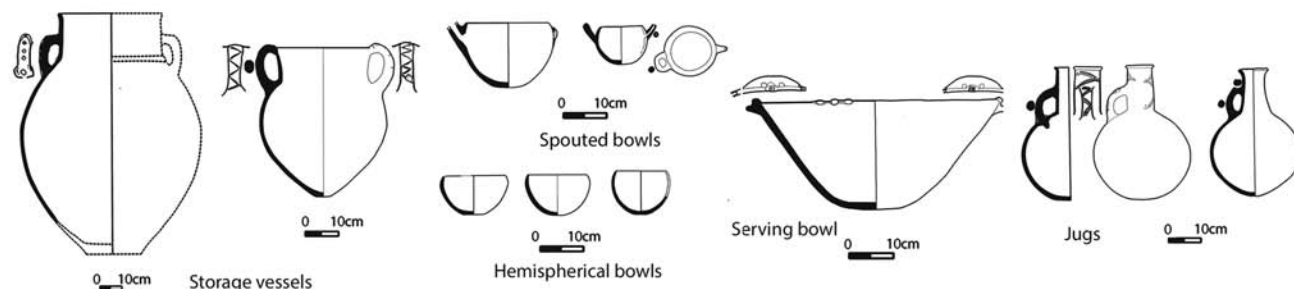


FIGURE 1: Red Polished Pottery, Marki, after Frankel and Webb 2006. Pithos (P22430) and amphora (P4372), fig. 4.40; serving bowl (P9609), fig. 4.28; spouted bowls (P16280, P14117), fig. 4.31; hemispherical bowls (P13568, P13705, P15666), fig. 4.17; jugs (P2910, P13854), fig. 4.33.

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have high horizontal handles and would have been suitable as scoops—either for portioning out food or perhaps measuring out ingredients. There are also occasional crudely fashioned ladles, likewise for scooping and measuring food. The large conical bowls were used for presenting and serving foods and, I argue, were probably laid out on the fixed benches at the sides of rooms, suggesting communal serving of meals.

We might also infer that care was taken in the presentation and serving of food and drink, reflecting the social value of dining, as the serving bowls were frequently decorated with relief clay or incised motifs. Moreover, the jugs with cutaway spouts were designed to exaggerate the stream of liquid when pouring, which would have created a dramatic visual display. Wine was probably served in these more elaborate jugs (Steel n.d.), while the round-bottomed jugs might have been used for water. There is also evidence that beer was consumed in some communities (Crewe and Hill 2012). The morphology of the pottery therefore can be seen to have shaped the dynamics of daily social interactions centered upon presenting, sharing, and ingesting food and drink.

Red Polished pottery also shaped patterns of household storage. Individual households were economically independent in terms of their subsistence needs and employed a variety of long- and short-term storage strategies. Basic, large-scale storage of unprocessed foods was in mud brick or plaster rectangular bins, while three-sided bins allowed easier access to foodstuffs and may have been used to store foods that had already been processed (Frankel and Webb 2006: 23). Short-term storage, meeting the daily needs of food preparation, however, was accommodated by a range of storage vessels of different sizes: large storage jars (*pithoi*) and smaller two-handled jars and amphorae decorated in relief (Frankel and Webb 2006: 126–29). The *pithoi* stand to an estimated 1 meter in height and might be adorned with simple relief decoration

(Barlow 1996: 282, pl. 38/F122; Frankel and Webb 2006: 129)—this decoration of what otherwise is an essentially utilitarian object emphasizes its significance and value within the household. These *pithoi* contained bulk quantities of food or liquids (oil, wine, or water for example); their broad necks suggest that ease of access to the contents was important.

Despite intense engagement with storage strategies in the archaeological literature, largely from an economic perspective (e.g., Christakis 2011), there has been virtually no discussion as to how these large objects were practically integrated within embodied household practices. Presumably the ladles and handled bowls discussed above were used to scoop out food, but the easiest way to access the contents toward the bottom of the *pithoi* would be to physically climb into the vessel; although other suggestions are tipping them on their sides or using a long-handled ladle (presumably wooden as these do not otherwise survive). The size of the jars might indicate that the task of emptying the *pithoi* was performed by children within the community, although the small stature of Bronze Age Mediterranean populations would not discount this as an adult practice.¹ The physicality of these jars, the need to move through the mouth and into the belly of the pot, therefore shaped and informed the lived experience of some of the community at Marki. The two-handled jars and amphorae stocked smaller quantities of foodstuffs probably in use on a daily basis and the decorative aspect of the amphorae suggests they might also have been used to display food as part of the dining sets.

Although archaeobotanical evidence and animal bones give some indication as to the components of the diet, there is no firm evidence as to the cuisine of the Cypriot MBA households, namely the range of herbs and spices and accepted combinations of ingredients. Staples comprised bread wheat, barley, chickpeas, and lentils, while the major source of meat was sheep/goat, supplemented by venison, pork, and possibly beef for special occasions (Steel 2004b: 131, table 5.3;

see Keswani 1994 for discussion of feasting). The range of kitchenalia examined above might indicate that meat- and pulse-based stews were common, as well as porridges or gruels made from ground cereals. The large quantities of fragmentary flat pans used to bake bread suggest these objects were frequently used, broken, and replaced within the household, highlighting the importance of the daily bread to MBA foodways; very likely, as a staple foodstuff, bread might be assumed to have shaped and structured mealtimes. Although there is some indication as to how the hemispherical bowls might have been handled (later representations from the Late Bronze Age [LBA] suggest these would have been cupped in the hand, much as was the tradition in the contemporary Levant; cf. Stockhammer 2012), the actual bodily process of handling and ingesting food remains an unknown. The lack of any surviving implements analogous to spoons suggests that foodstuffs were ingested hand-to-mouth (though the possibility of wooden spoons should not be discounted); equally it is possible that flat breads might be used to scoop out food from the bowls and to mop up sauces. These daily incorporated practices, unconsciously performed through ingrained habit, reiterate the theme of bodily shapings and the forming of habitus.

There is no direct evidence for the processing of milk products; however, this might be inferred from the pottery. A key component of MBA kitchenalia was the large spouted bowl with either a tubular or open spout; this was designed to serve or process liquids and would have been suited to straining off whey when processing milk for yogurt or cheeses. Certainly, the importance of dairy produce in the ancient Cypriot diet should not be dismissed, especially considering the substantial evidence for milk production in surrounding regions of the Near East, Anatolia, and southeast Europe from the seventh millennium BC (Evershed et al. 2008). Even so, evidence from faunal assemblages is equivocal. Swiny (1989: 23) has suggested sheep and goat were reared at Sotira *Kaminoudhia* and Episkopi *Phanemoreni* for their milk, while data from Marki *Alonia* is more in line with meat rather than milk production (Croft 2006: 267).

Despite the seeming homogeneity of the pottery it does reveal interesting information concerning ancient foodways and embodied praxis within the MBA household. Coming together to consume food was an important and daily part of social reproduction, which bound together members of the household through the repeated, embodied acts of preparing, serving, and sharing food and drink, thus shaping their lived experiences while at the same time making and shaping their habitus. The very characteristic Red Polished style mediated these relations and shaped people's actions at all stages;

equally, the pottery itself was shaped by human agents who had the necessary cultural knowledge of how to create, handle, manipulate, and use this equipment. This analysis of the stuff of food draws into focus the recursive interaction between people, the objects they formed and used, and the subsequent shaping of their lifeways—it is a two-way flow of agency that thoroughly embeds object worlds within human praxis and demonstrates how the stuff of food (namely kitchenalia) shapes people's embodied engagements with foodways.

LATE BRONZE AGE KITCHENALIA

Significant social and economic changes mark the transition from Middle to Late Bronze Age (MBA–LBA) on Cyprus (see Table 1); these transformations are usually related to a shift from more egalitarian, village-based communities to a socially stratified, urbanized society (Steel 2004b: 152–54; Knapp 2013). Ancient settlements and burial grounds were abandoned, reflecting changing relationships with, and experiences of, place; alongside these locational disruptions, ancient traditions and materialities, embedded in time-hallowed practices, fell out of use. Additionally, there is evidence for technological transformations and changes to the economic infrastructure in LBA urban communities.

There were significant transformations in Cypriot household pottery at the beginning of the LBA, characterized by the introduction of new technologies and styles as well as the integration of hybridized social practices from the Levant. These have typically been interpreted as evidence for increasing specialization of production, associated with a population shift into newly established urban centers (Crewe 2007; Steel 2010). These very different settlements grew up initially to develop trading interests with the Aegean and Levant, in particular the movement of Cypriot copper. The populations of these towns were a conglomeration of larger groupings of people, presumably moving together from a number of different settlements in the Cypriot hinterland, and also probably comprising resident foreigners (such as traders and merchants for the Near East); as such therefore the residents of the urban centers did not share social ties and would have needed to develop new social strategies to mediate changing social relations within the new urban context. Likewise, increasing complexity of the household resulted in changes in social practices at a smaller, familial level (Fisher 2014).

The following discussion focuses on how these changes were shaped by, and in turn shaped, LBA habitus, with the aim of elucidating people's changing relationships with foodways in a very different social world from that evidenced in

the MBA. The key aspects examined include the multiplicity of styles (wares), the introduction of new forms, and new household storage strategies. The discussion will draw primarily upon pottery from two contrasting LBA sites, to test the extent to which these changes might be attributed to urbanization: Aredhiou *Vouppes* (Steel 2009; Steel forthcoming) was a small farming settlement in the island's interior, while Kalavassos *Ayios Dhimitrios* (Keswani 1989; Russell 1989) was an important trading town on the southern coastal plain. In particular, the following discussion highlights how social relations in the new urban environment were mediated through hospitality between households, an activity that should be viewed as distinct from the ritualized feasting posited for ceremonial spaces (see discussion in Steel 2004a).

The most immediate change is the dramatic increase in the range of tableware available to Cypriot householders, be they in an urban or rural environment. The vibrant and diverse pottery assemblage contrasts noticeably with that of the preceding MBA, suggesting more colorful interaction with the “stuff” of food and also a considerable degree of personal choice. Initially, some of the more decorative wares were restricted to ceremonial performance in funerary ritual or at sacred sites—such as the finely made Red on Black pottery produced in a specialized workshop on the north coast (Smith 2008: 61–62). The range of tableware in daily use in households during the earlier part of the LBA was subject to regional variation but typically included Red and Black Slip jugs (either hand- or wheelmade; Fig. 2), and a series of bowls: hemispherical White Slip bowls, carinated Monochrome bowls, and delicate Base Ring cups.² By the fourteenth century BC the range of wares was more or less standardized throughout the island. Standard household assemblages (Fig. 3) comprised Plain ware round-mouthed or trefoil jugs, large basins, small hand-held bowls (the latter of which were frequently wheelmade), Monochrome round-mouthed jugs, ladles and hemispherical bowls, White Slip hemispherical bowls, and Base Ring carinated cups (Russell 1989; Steel and McCartney 2008: 18–19).³ Imported Mycenaean drinking sets (typically amphoroid kraters and shallow bowls) were used in the towns, especially in the wealthier households, as were local imitations in the White Painted Wheelmade III (WPWM III) ware.⁴

It is generally accepted that production of this pottery was no longer situated within the household but was in the hands of specialist potters (Steel 2010: 108). This disruption to household production, which removed the making and shaping of pottery from everyday experiences within the wider community to a more restricted element of society, curtailed people's sensual engagement with materials. Rather than

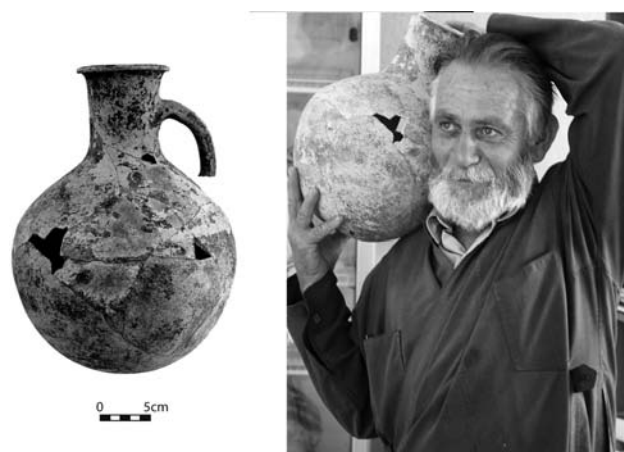


FIGURE 2: *Black Slip Jug, Aredhiou, and local priest Papas Petros Photiou demonstrating the traditional way of carrying a round-bot-tomed water jug.*

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mixing clays, shaping these into the cups, bowls, and jugs of daily use, and thus haptically engaging with their kitchenalia and tableware, people's quotidian interaction with pots, pans, and drinking cups was instead commoditized and this undoubtedly shaped and transformed the bidirectional relationship between people and things.

In urban households food was typically processed, cooked, and consumed within the central courtyards of domestic dwellings (Fisher 2014: 405), as had also been the case during the MBA; this is the place where daily social practices were shaped by the new range of kitchenalia and dining equipment. The introduction of vessels with flat or ring bases (jugs and kraters in particular, and also some of the bowls) at the beginning of the LBA suggests very different practices surrounding the serving and consumption of food within the Cypriot household (see Fig. 3). These vessels were suited to being placed on a flat surface, such as a table or on fixed stone benches, which indicates significant changes in how food was displayed, served, and consumed. Although no physical remains of furniture survive, contemporary representational material suggests portable furniture (chairs and tables) was incorporated within dining activities (Fisher 2014: 408). Stone benches are another common feature in LBA houses, as they had been in the MBA—see, for example, the benches in Room 27 of Building II at Kalavassos (Fisher 2014: 408, fig. 23.5). These might have been used for processing and laying out foodstuffs.

The shift from social gatherings, where people ate together sitting on the floor, to more formal practices centered around being presented and served food on a table and sitting



FIGURE 3: *Kitchenalia, Aredhiou: four Plain ware jugs, one Canaanite jar, two Plain ware basins, one Monochrome ladle, and one (incomplete) small pithos.*

alongside or facing each other on chairs represents a fundamental change in daily commensal practices within the Cypriot household. Undoubtedly, this shaped changing social relations and foodways within the new urban contexts. This might imply more structured social practices such as the development of “table manners” and new forms of etiquette associated with the placement of eating and drinking materials, and people’s place at the table. Consequently people’s haptic engagement with food and drink was transformed through these new practices and the concomitant embodied actions.

The ubiquitous White Slip hemispherical bowl (Fig. 4) represents the daily engagement of most individuals with pottery: these are found repeatedly in household contexts and would have been used for personal consumption of food and drink. I suspect that individual members of the household each had their own bowl, which they used at mealtimes on a daily basis. The incorporated practices integral to the use of these bowls were learned at the hearth and unconsciously repeated as part of the quotidian rhythm of the household, shaping identity and reproducing LBA Cypriot habitus. Continuity of the hemispherical shape might suggest some conservatism in embodied praxis surrounding the consumption and ingestion of food and drink and the persistence of ancient dining traditions and handling of bowls cupped in one or two hands. As with the Red Polished bowls (discussed above), the physical engagement with this pottery would have been a pleasant experience (and indeed still is!), due to the smoothed, almost polished finish of the thick white slip coating the surface of the bowls. Our own tactile interaction with these bowls today then allows the archaeologist at least some physical communion

with the experiences and socialized knowledges of their ancient Cypriot owner and/or user.

Hearths, ovens, and grinding equipment were located in the courtyards (Fisher 2014: 405), indicating that this space was where most food-processing and cooking activity took place. Cooking pots were made from a coarse gritty clay and shaped to form two-handled, round-bottomed jars, typically with very thin walls; these were frequently fire-blackened at the bottom (some were even burned right through the section) and were directly placed in the hearth, on the flame. The form and capacity of these cook pots suggests that they were particularly suited for making gruels and stews, perhaps a very similar cuisine to that surmised for the MBA households (see above). Their size varies from c.15cm to 25cm in height, suggesting they were used to cook differing quantities of foodstuffs. The other main vessel used to prepare and cook food was the shallow pan—a shallow, flat-bottomed pot with a loop handle formed by piercing the wall just below the rim. These also might be fire-blackened, and were probably used to prepare a very different type of cuisine. At Kalavasos cooking ware was the most plentiful type of pottery, suggesting that pots were used on a daily basis and were regularly broken and replaced. Intriguingly rather less cooking ware survives at the rural settlement at Aredhiou, and this tends to be very fragmentary. Ongoing research should throw light on what this might indicate about household practices, social reproduction, and foodways in a nonurban environment.

Household storage practices were transformed during the LBA. Survey material from Aredhiou sheds light on these changes during the transitional MBA–LBA. The Red Polished *pithoi* were replaced by new Plain White Handmade storage jars (Steel and McCartney 2008: 16)—a type of vessel embedded in the emergent cultural traditions of eastern Cyprus. This represents a significant shift in the organization of food practices in the household that is still poorly understood, but which appears to be situated in the hybridized social practices of the emergent urban communities of eastern Cyprus, such as Enkomi. The vessels’ estimated height is 33–56cm, but some occasionally reach 1m (Pilides 1996: 107–9; Crewe 2013: 53, Fig. 2); the modest size is suggestive of small farming households storing agricultural produce for their own subsistence needs, but Aredhiou equally demonstrates a community with knowledge of new ways of doing things and changing relations with foodways in the new urban communities.

By the fourteenth century BC households across the island used a standardized range of *pithoi*, with no significant distinction between rural and urban (Keswani 1989: 13–18; Pilides 2000: Fig. 2; Steel and McCartney 2008: 15–16; see Fig. 3); variations in volume capacity and neck indicate func-

tional differences, illustrating increasing specialization of food production and household storage strategies. *Pithoi* with short wide necks tended to be smaller, usually standing at 50cm high, and thus had a reduced overall storage capacity. These were more suited for relatively short-term storage and were probably used on a daily basis; certainly the contents would be easily accessed, scooped out as and when needed. The open neck suggests dry foodstuffs and the frequent usage might imply the *pithoi* contained ready processed grains or pulses. Slightly larger *pithoi*, standing between 50 and 70cm high, have slightly narrower, longer necks, which would restrict access to their contents. At Kalavassos these *pithoi* tend to be more numerous, suggesting that in urban households these were the preferred long-term storage solution. They probably contained a range of unprocessed dry foodstuffs such as grains, pulses, and olives. Liquid storage (wine, olive oil, water) was in *pithoi* with tall narrow necks. Some stood at knee height, and were presumably in daily use, while others stood to a height of c.1m. The *pithoi* were decorative (raised or incised bands and wavy bands) and some were certainly displayed prominently within the household in the central courtyards. The LC householder responsible for measuring out foodstuffs and preparing meals faced similar challenges in accessing the contents of the pithos as it was progressively emptied, as described previously for the MBA householder. No doubt similar strategies were employed, with someone, possibly a child, entering the body of the pithos to scoop out its contents.

Having considered embodied household practices associated with the handling and consumption of foodstuffs in both urban and rural contexts in LBA Cyprus, the following discussion will focus more specifically on the changing social setting of the urban community. Specifically, I will look at the pottery from these towns (using Kalavassos as my case study) with the aim of elucidating the mediation of social relations beyond the immediate household. This approach in particular should shed light on the sudden *floruit* of tableware within the urban setting—not just new forms for serving and consuming food and drink but likewise a plethora of decorative wares, seemingly beyond the immediate physical needs of the members of the household. I argue that these new wares and forms were used specifically to signal social messages of identity and exclusion/belonging within the framework of hospitality.

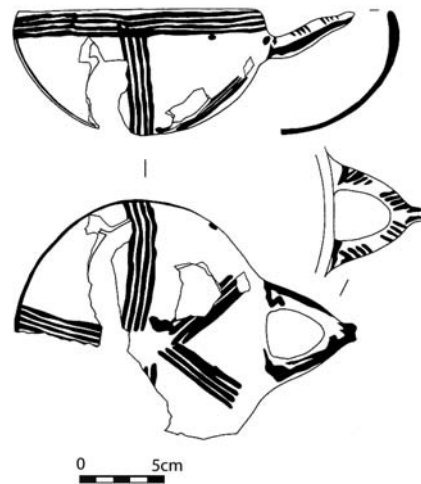
HOSPITALITY IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Without a doubt, the move of a large part of the LBA Cypriot population into an urban setting, such as that at Kalavassos,

radically altered the mechanisms by which individuals traditionally mediated social relations. The traditional smaller rural communities who lived in close proximity but interacted largely within their individual household units were transplanted into a new social environment with a much larger population grouping, not necessarily linked together through kinship ties; there were myriad new vertical and social relations that needed negotiating, both within and beyond the household. In addition, a key component of these new urban communities was the temporary resident, the traveling stranger, who likewise needed to be incorporated within the social and material world of the townsfolk. Increasing community size, therefore, inevitably impacts on how people shape and use their material culture, manipulating this as a form of social communication. As noted above, material culture is an agent in people's daily interactions; within expanding communities, therefore, there will be increased manipulation of symbolic materials to facilitate more effective communication between the increasing numbers of interacting individuals (Fletcher 1995: 7). This is reflected in the Cypriot LBA household by the multiplicity of utilitarian and decorative ceramic wares used to present, display, and consume pottery within very different social situations—namely, daily praxis and hospitality.

Hospitality entails admitting outsiders into the home and temporarily sharing familial space with “strangers” (Still 2013: 14).⁵ Recent commentaries on hospitality have highlighted this practice as “a powerful mediating control mechanism” (Lynch et al. 2011: 5), which recognizes the very real danger of allowing the other into public and private social spaces—this danger applies equally to the host and the guest as, with no kinship relations (either real or created through gifting), both parties are at risk. The host's space might be violated and robbed, the guest is at the mercy of the host—hospitality stabilizes this relationship, incorporates the stranger/guest within the visited community's social world (Candea and da Col 2012: 55–56), and re-establishes the power and position of the host. It is primarily mediated through the sharing of food and drink; “we might reconceive food itself as a prime manipulating substance designed to lure and establish a pivotal asymmetry between hosts and guests” (Candea and da Col 2012: 59), in particular through the ingestion of mind-altering substances such as alcohol, along with special, high status or valued foodstuffs. The consumption of these substances is intended to coerce a particular response from the hosted. Furthermore, it is dangerous to be the recipient—one might be poisoned or equally shift from guest to prisoner (Candea and da Col 2012: 59); there are certainly echoes of this ambivalence in the correspondence of the Amarna archives⁶ contemporary

White Slip hemispherical bowl



Base Ring carinated cups

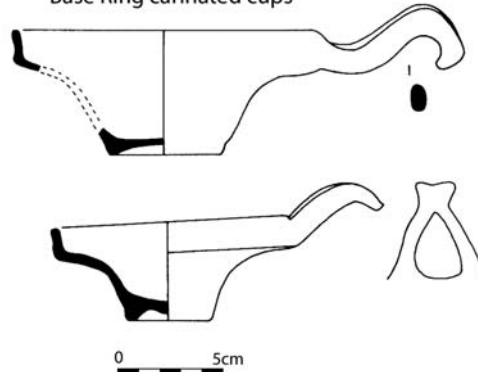


FIGURE 4: LBA drinking cups from Kalavassos: White Slip II Late Style hemispherical bowl (KAD930), after Russell 1989, fig. 6; Base Ring II carinated cups (KAD935, KAD592), after Russell 1989, fig. 7.

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with the Cypriot example discussed below. The embodied sharing of food and drink, ingesting the same valued substances and foodstuffs, effectively was a process of “saming” at the same time as establishing a social asymmetry—the host and the other were physically shaped into one through this mutual incorporated practice.

Hospitality offered to guests in Cypriot urban centers allowed them to penetrate the domestic setting as far as the central courtyard space (Fisher 2014: 408); such practices can similarly be extrapolated to feasting within the public areas of monumental buildings, such as the central court of Building X at Kalavassos *Ayios Dhimitrios* (Steel 2004a: 290–91; Fisher 2009: 202–3). Debris from these feasts found in wells at several LBA towns indicates that meat (mutton, beef, and venison) was typically consumed at these events—there is some suggestion that these meat products were more unusual in normal household consumption (Steel 2004a: 290). Alcoholic beverages, namely wine, reiterated the power and prestige of the host at the same time manipulating the senses of the guest. This was consumed following Syrian social practices, served from an amphoroid krater (Steel forthcoming). Hospitality was mediated through fine tableware distinct from the everyday pottery used within the rhythm of household praxis. The novel wheelmade pottery, imported Mycenaean drinking sets centered around the large decorative kraters for mixing wine (Fig. 5), and the delicate Base Ring drinking cups and jugs might all be viewed as specialized dining equipment not used in daily interactions but only brought out, displayed,

and used when outsiders were allowed into the public space in the home. Although Mycenaean kraters were typically used to display and serve wine, Cypriots preferred to drink from the local Base Ring cups (Fig. 4); the deep well of these cups was plausibly designed to trap sediment, allowing the drinker to ingest the clear liquid settled in the shallow bowl on top (Steel 2004a: 292–93, fig. 7). The more uncommon Mycenaean drinking cups were erratically included within a household’s drinking equipment and were possibly exclusive to consumption on the part of visitors and guests as a particular token of honor and/or difference.

The choice of distinctive equipment, imbued with symbolic meaning, further shaped social interactions within the modes of hospitality—while shared consumption “samed” the host and guest, the symbolic messages of the pottery highlighted their differences and plausibly deliberately “othered” the visitor. There had been no need for such a distinction between public and private materials and spaces in the MBA household, hence the limited corpus of household pottery, but during the LBA urban residents perceived a clear need to demarcate particular social engagements in which relations beyond the household were mediated through sharing and ingesting highly valued foods and alcoholic drinks, but equally were shaped by the specialized equipment used to consume these foodstuffs. Evidence from Aredhiou *Vouppes*, however, suggests such exotic hospitality wares were extremely rare, implying that in the rural environment other strategies for mediating supra-household interaction were employed



FIGURE 5: Mycenaean amphoroid krater from Kalavassos (KAD1619), after Steel 1994, Fig. 2.

or indeed were not necessary within the smaller resident community.

The Daily Grind

The materiality of Bronze Age kitchenalia is not wholly situated in the realm of pottery; indeed a large part of food production within the household was shaped by a range of ground stone tools. The repetitive embodied practices involved in manipulating and handling these tools undoubtedly forged the primary sensory experiences of many individuals in a community. Moreover, the durability and ubiquitous presence of these objects shapes our own physical experience of the Bronze Age in the present; typically Bronze Age sites are strewn with fragments and occasionally complete examples of a variety of ground stone tools such as grinders, rubbers, pestles, mortars, and pounders. Holding and handling the tools—knowing how they sit in the hand, where best to position fingers, replicating the motions of grinding and rubbing—allows the modern observer a tactile engagement with how these items would have been used in the past. Although ground stone tools are highly visible, and accordingly there are detailed technological studies of these objects, there has been comparatively little consideration of their materiality or social lives. The apparent simplicity of ground stone technologies and their uses has resulted in gendered narratives,

as these objects are being typically viewed as the paraphernalia of female household activities, primarily utilized in the daily processing of foodstuffs (Lidström Holmberg 2004: 201–2; 1998: 123).

The primary food processing set in a typical Cypriot household (MBA and LBA) comprised a quern and its rubber (Fig. 6); both tools were used together to grind various foodstuffs, typically grains and pulses. Saddle querns are substantial objects and are not easily portable; it is probable, therefore, that these were set up and used in a semi-permanent position, usually within the courtyard of houses (Fisher 2014: 405). Typically the individuals doing the grinding would kneel, resting the quern on their knees, with the thicker, concave end away from them to collect the ground flour or meal; the elongated handheld rubber, used with two hands, was pushed repeatedly up and down at right angles to the quern, providing the grinding action. Processing grains involved intense, repetitive, rhythmic motions, which for some members of the household might typically have taken up much of their working day; ethnographies suggest an average of between three and five hours a day would be devoted to this activity (Hayden et al. forthcoming). Grinding grain was an intensely physical process, which shaped and transformed the bodies of the individuals responsible for this aspect of food production; most famously Molleson (2007: 19–20) has shown the impact on female skeletons from Neolithic Abu Hureyra, resulting from repetitive grinding actions. This reiterates the recurrent shaping motif running through this article—not simply embodied practices but the actuality of people’s physical experiences, the discomfort and even the bodily pain embedded in their daily life and how this impacted morphologically on their bodies. Although certainly arduous, grinding grain and other foods was also a very social and socialized activity that undoubtedly bound together members of the household, most probably female, in a variety of embodied activities. Food-processing not only was central to social reproduction of the household, providing its members with their daily bread, but it also shaped female interactions at an intimate, familial level on a daily basis. Fendin (2006: 161) for example, highlights the importance of singing to accompany and mimic the rhythmic process of grinding. The open spaces where women gathered together to work, in all probability accompanied by their children, might be envisaged as lively places where they gossiped, sang, and shared stories, all the while grinding grain for the household’s daily bread. Daily praxis embedded in food production therefore might be viewed as a creative process that shaped social reproduction and lived experiences in the Bronze Age Cypriot household.



FIGURE 6: Author grinding grain with saddle quern and rubber from Aredhiou.

PHOTOGRAPH BY S. THOMAS © 2006

Shaping our Understanding of Pottery as the Stuff of Food

This article has explored what the surviving pottery of the distant Bronze Age inhabitants of Cyprus might have to say about their daily embodied encounters with the “stuff of food.” The disjuncture between the lives and experiences of the rural communities of the MBA and their urban-dwelling descendants in the LBA, in particular in relation to their foodways, is put into sharp relief through this analysis. Pottery was not simply background noise to daily interactions, but instead it shaped the way in which people interacted and engaged with each other. Food was (indeed is!) the stuff of life—while archaeologists cannot taste, smell, or otherwise sensually experience the foods and drinks consumed by these ancient Cypriots, we can haptically engage with their pottery and through this catch glimpses of how they stored, prepared, displayed, served, shared, and ingested foods; thus it is possible to understand how these interactions shifted in different cultural settings from internal household practice to the political actions of hospitality in urban settings.

Archaeology’s methodological approach to the stuff of food (in this instance pottery and ground stone tools) provides empirical knowledges surrounding food production and the objects that people engage with on a daily basis. The integration of a materiality focus allows us to engage more forcefully with the bidirectionality of people and their objects, understanding how each not only shapes but is equally shaped by the other. Moreover, the embodied interactions surrounding daily foodways (from the initial processing of foodstuffs, measuring and scooping ingredients, preparing and cooking meals, displaying, serving, and ingesting) is accessible via the materiality of kitchenalia. This has implications for other areas of food studies in vastly different social, cultural, and chronological contexts, as it provides a new visceral understanding of how unwrapping foods, the visual display of cuisines, and the sensual experiencing and ingesting of foods are mediated through and shaped by material cultures. ©

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Emma-Jayne Abbots for inviting me to contribute to this special edition of *Gastronomica*, and also for exciting my interest in “kitchenalia” past and present. Thank you to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for funding the “Embodied Foodstuffs” workshop at Lampeter (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David) in 2014, and also to the participants, whose interesting papers and informed discussion provided the genesis of many of the ideas developed and presented in this article. I am also grateful to the participants of the 2015 spin-off workshop, also at Lampeter, for their insightful observations, in particular Ben Coles and Anna Lavis. Luci Attala, Eloise Govier, and Katharina Zinn have provided stimulating discussions of materialities and materialisms that have shaped many of the ideas developed in this article. Thank you to my anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments. Steve Thomas read the final manuscript and I am, as always, grateful for his support, suggestions, and comments.

NOTES

1. There are parallels for this physical interaction between children and rice storage jars among the Tharu of Nepal that have been illustrated by Eric Valli.
2. Characteristically carinated bowls have a sharp projecting angle in the vessel’s profile.
3. This ware is distinct from the earlier Monochrome typical of the beginning of the LBA—vessels were shaped from coarser clay and had thicker walls, but typically with a slipped and smoothed surface.
4. A krater is a large jar with two handles from rim to shoulder, used to mix wine with water.
5. Although it might be hard within Western society to conceive of a situation in which the unknown stranger is admitted within the

household space, anyone who has conducted fieldwork in the Near East has undoubtedly had the privilege to experience being welcomed into the home of complete strangers—I certainly have been lucky enough to experience this on numerous occasions in Gaza as well as on Cyprus.

6. EA7 (lines 72–83) from King of Babylonia to Akhenaten reports the robbing of two caravans of his messenger in Egyptian territory; EA8 reports the murder of the King of Babylon's messenger in Egyptian territory. EA24 (lines 40–46) from King of Egypt to King of Mitanni refers to the detaining (i.e., holding guests as “prisoners”) of their respective envoys (Moran 1992: 14, 16–17, 70).

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