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Another look at Red Lustrous arm-vessels

Louise Steel

Abstract

This paper focuses on Red Lustrous Wheelmade (RLW) arm-vessels from Cyprus, central Anatolia and Cilicia, with the aim of examining how these objects were handled, used and embedded in social and cultural practices in the three regions. The approach taken draws upon the materiality of objects—both the physical properties, as well as human-object entanglements—and theoretical approaches exploring embodiment and material habitus. Examining the material qualities of the arm-vessels should help us to better understand how people physically interacted with these and incorporated them within distinct social practices. This paper also explores the social messages encoded within the visual vocabulary of the arm-vessels, situating this within a wider understanding of drinking scenes from the Cypro-Levantine social worlds, specifically to throw light upon embodied practices and material habitus. Through this discussion I highlight that these objects should not simply be considered as museum pieces or catalogue entries; but instead we should attempt to understand how they were integrated within social and material worlds and how they were handled.

Introduction*

In this paper I want to examine a specific and (in Cyprus) unusual type of pottery: the so-called Red Lustrous arm-shaped vessel, some examples of which I have been able to study first-hand at Kalavassos. Indeed, excavations at the site have added significantly to the known corpus of Red Lustrous Wheelmade ware (RLW) from Cyprus (South & Steel 2007); substantial quantities, mostly spindle bottles and lentoid flasks, have been excavated at Kalavassos, primarily in the wealthy tombs (Tombs 11, 13, 14) to

*I have known Alison since I first came to Cyprus in 1987 to participate in the excavations at Kalavassos *Ayios Dhimitrios*. From 1990 Alison gave me permission to work with the pottery from the site and the opportunity to publish some of the more unusual Cypriot LBA ceramic vessels (Steel 1994, 1997, 2006). Dealing with the problems of fragmentary, utilitarian settlement pottery alongside the more complete vessels and possibly more prestigious wares placed in tombs has helped to gain an insight into how pottery is variously embedded in social practices in the household (Steel 2016) as well as the use and social meanings ascribed to pottery—an understanding that has formed the basis of much of my research. Subsequently Alison has provided invaluable assistance in my ongoing fieldwork at Arediou. It is in thanks for all these opportunities that I write this paper.

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the west of Building X and also in Tomb 21 some metres to the west of Building X (South & Steel 2007). Alongside the more typical spindle bottles and flasks, three arm-shaped vessels, together with sherds from a fourth mixed in with a cluster of pottery fragments discarded by the tomb looters, were found in Tomb 14 (South & Steel 2007: 186, 190). This paper will focus on these and other examples of arm-vessels found on the island and beyond. My aim is to examine how they were handled, used and embedded in social and cultural practices.

Red Lustrous Wheelmade ware—a Cypriot product?

RLW is one of the most distinctive classes of ceramic that circulated around the eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age (LBA). It has a characteristic reddish-orange, very finely grained, non-porous and homogenous fabric and is fired consistently in oxidising conditions; although occasionally it was not completely fired through and can be grey in colour (e.g. Johnson 1980: 18; Eriksson 1993: 21; South & Steel 2007: 182). The exterior surface was covered with a red slip and had a highly burnished finish, or more rarely scratch burnished (Åström 1972: fig. 41). Moreover, the range of forms—spindle bottles, pilgrim flasks (some with integrated fenestrated bases), kraters, jugs, bowls and arm-vessels—all demonstrate considerable expertise and dexterity in manipulating and shaping clay. RLW was evidently the product of skilled potters, who were able to handle a clay with very plastic properties and had excellent control over firing conditions at a high temperature (up to 900°–1000°C) (Eriksson 1993: 21), resulting in a uniform product. I would concur with Knappett (2000) that RLW was the product of a highly organised workshop, the location of which has yet to be identified (see discussion below). Although earlier scholarship contended that the skills involved in the production of RLW, in particular production on the wheel, are not consistent with LBA Cypriot ceramic production (cf. Eriksson 1991: 81; Knappett 2000), recent studies of the island's handmade wares in fact indicate these too were the products of highly proficient master craftsmen (cf. Åström 2001; Karageorghis 2001; Steel 2010), hence their very desirability in the Near East (see Bergoffen 2005; Steel 2012: 188). For example, firing temperatures between 900° and 1200°C were achieved in the production of White Slip ware (Aloupi *et al.* 2001: 23), indicating that artisans working in potters' workshops on the island had the necessary expertise to control kilns at a high temperature. We should also note that there in fact was knowledge of the potter's wheel on Cyprus, which was introduced to the island at the beginning of the LBA and was largely used in the production of plain wares (see Crewe 2007, 2015).

RLW is widely distributed around the East Mediterranean (Eriksson 1991, 1993; Knappett 2000), linking together two distinct geographical spheres of commodity exchange—namely the maritime trading networks between Syro-Palestine, Cyprus, Egypt and the Aegean (a few examples are known from Crete and Rhodes) and the overland network between Cilicia and north-central Anatolia, which more typically traded over the Taurus mountains and down the Euphrates into southern Mesopotamia. On Cyprus, current distribution maps would suggest that RLW was confined to the urban centres around the coast; however, detailed analyses of the fragmentary sherds that make up the ceramic assemblage at Arediou *Vouppes* indicate the consumption of this exotic, ritual ware in inland farming communities. Although

only small quantities have been found at the site, and in very fragmentary condition, there is clear evidence that these objects were used in special contexts (tombs and in association with the sunken room 103) at the site. Where identifiable, these are most commonly from spindle bottles or, occasionally, flasks.

There has been an ongoing debate on where RLW pottery was produced. The homogeneity of the fabric suggests a single source of production and early studies identified Syria or Cilicia as probable sources of this ware (see Eriksson 1991: 81–83, table 1; 1993: 1–16; Knappett *et al.* 2005: 26). Eriksson's meticulous study (1991, 1993) of the chronological and geographic distribution of the ware, however, identified Cyprus as the most likely place of production. She highlights that it was used on Cyprus from the beginning of LC IA until LC IIC (15th to 13th centuries BC), even surviving into LC IIIA (12th century) at Hala Sultan Tekke, Enkomi and Myrtou Pigadhes (Eriksson 1991: 89; 1993: 142); moreover, the island is the only part of the eastern Mediterranean with the complete repertoire of RLW vessel forms (Eriksson 1991: 94). In Egypt and Syro-Palestine RLW dates to the earlier LBA (up to the reign of Thutmose III), while in Anatolia Eriksson suggested that it dates to the 14th and 13th centuries, from the reign of Šuppiluliuma I. This apparent shift in distribution she attributes to the geopolitical history of the Levant during the LBA, namely the rise of the Hatti as the dominant military and political power in the northern Levant (Eriksson 1993: 129). The dating of RLW in Anatolia, however, has been contested by Mielke (2007: 156, 161–162) and Kozal (2015: 55), who suggest that its earliest occurrence is at least contemporary with that attested on Cyprus (see also Merrillees 2007: 150; Manuelli 2009: 253). The likelihood of a Cypriot source for this ware might be reinforced by the similarities of the signs marked on some of the vessels prior to firing with the Cypro-Minoan script (Eriksson 1991: 93; 1993: 145–147, figs 41, 42; Knappett *et al.* 2005: 26), although Hirschfeld contends that the pre-firing marks on RLW vessels are not necessarily Cypro-Minoan but instead might belong to one of several marking systems used during the LBA (Hirschfeld 2002: 68, 93, 95–96; 2014: 263–264; see also Kozal 2015: 57; South & Steel 2007: 188).

Over the past decade or so, archaeologists have revisited this question using various scientific techniques, such as Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA) and petrography, to identify the geochemical signature of the fabrics and from this to pinpoint where RLW was produced. The consensus is that the paste from which the vessels were formed has a common geochemical signature, pointing to a single place (or region) of production (Bouthillier *et al.* 2014: 145). Knappett *et al.* (2005) suggested a location on the north coast of Cyprus for the manufacture of this ware. More recently, Grave *et al.* (2014) completed a study matching NAA results from Bronze Age Cypriot ceramics with those from sediments from across the island, to correlate the ceramic signature with geological deposits. The results identified a match for RLW with the sediments from the Mamonia Complex in the southwest of the island, suggesting that RLW was made from the bentonitic clays of this region (Grave *et al.* 2014: 1195), which the team argued confirmed initial petrographic results of RLW from Kilise Tepe (Knappett 2000). Kozal (2015: 54), however, has suggested that Anatolia was the origin of RLW, based on her studies of material from Kilise Tepe and Kinet Höyük (Cilicia) as well as material from Alalakh in the Amuq Valley, specifically identifying the region of Rough Cilicia as the place of production (Kozal & Kibaroglu 2017: 317; see also Manuelli 2009: 263). Therefore, while several studies have identified Cyprus as the source of RLW, the exact location still remains unresolved.

Arm-vessels

The arm-vessels (Fig. 1) typically had a long tubular body tapering slightly towards a narrow aperture at one end and with a small base (button, disc or ring) at the other. At the end of the narrow aperture the vessel narrows forming a 'wrist', frequently with three moulded ridges, and is attached to a small hemispherical bowl, perpendicular to the tubular body, cupped in a delicately sculpted right hand; this modelling was extremely fine, in particular the detail of the fingernails. The tubular body can vary in length between around 29 and 85cm. Although Eriksson (1993: 27) suggests that the tubular body was wheelmade, personal observation shows that it was in fact handmade, formed from thick coils of clay—as also seems more logical given the logistics of throwing such a vessel on the wheel, namely the ceramic paste maintaining its tensile strength without the body collapsing. Although these are commonly called arm-shaped vessels, in fact the tubular body in no way mimics the musculature of an arm, although the details of the hand, wrist and in particular the nails can be finely modelled. In Anatolian contexts they might be termed libation arms (Symington 2001: 169, 171; Knappett *et al.* 2005: 27; Knappett & Kilikoglou 2007: 3; Bouthillier *et al.* 2014: 100, 140, 144), which presumes a specific function for these vessels. To avoid confusion by further adding to the terminology, I will continue to call them arm-vessels.

The four arm-vessels (three extant and one fragmentary) from Kalavasos Tomb 14 stand out against the wider Cypriot RLW assemblage, as this form is only rarely attested on the island (Eriksson 1993: 258–259). The largest group of these vessels on Cyprus was found in the so-called sanctuary of Ayios Iakovos *Dhima* (to the north of Enkomi) dating to LC IIA (see most recently Lindqvist 2017). Here a group of six were found adjacent to a bathtub sunken into the plaster floor and a spindle bottle was found in the tub. Other examples have been found on the island, usually singly: at Episkopi *Bamboula* (Steel 2003–2004: 99, fig. 7), Kourion Site D Tomb 102 (Walters 1900: 71, 81, no. 10), in a tomb from *Ayia Paraskevi* (Ohnefalsch-Richter 1893: 385, pl. XL.8), Maroni Tomb 7 (Johnson 1980: 9, 18, 73, pls XV.59, LXII.59) and several from Enkomi—the cup and hand surviving from one arm-vessel, the tomb number



Figure 1. Arm-vessel from Maroni. © The Trustees of the British Museum

unknown, one from British Tomb 57 (Murray 1900: 9, 39, fig 16), two from British Tomb 69 (Murray 1900: 9, fig. 68) and one from French Tomb 2 (Schaeffer 1952: fig. 42.13). Sherds from arm-vessels are recorded from Ayios Iakovos, Enkomi, Episkopi and Hala Sultan Tekke (Eriksson 1993: 260–261). Given the apparent rarity and restricted distribution of the arm-vessel in Cypriot contexts, it is interesting to note the presence of this form at the inland farming community of Arediou *Vouppes*, in the area of a tomb, where a single sherd from an arm-vessel was identified by the particularly pronounced internal coil marks.

The shape is most common in Anatolia, where it is found in large quantities at the Hittite capital Boğazköy, as well as at other sites, such as Kuşaklı Sarissa, Maşat Höyük, Alaca Höyük, Eskiypar, Alishar Höyük and Porsuk (Mielke 2007). RLW arm-vessel fragments are also found in quantities at several sites in Cilicia, most significantly at Kilise Tepe (Knappett 2000: fig. 1; Symington 2001; Bouthillier *et al.* 2014) (Fig. 2). Other than Anatolia, where most examples have been found, and Cyprus, RLW arm-vessels are extremely rare. Two examples were found in a residential building, House 37, at Alalakh (Eriksson 1993: 259, cat. nos 1023, 1024) along with some sherds (Eriksson 1993: 267). Otherwise there are only sporadic fragments, from Ugarit and Tell Abu Hawam in the Levant and Kom Rabi (Memphis) in Egypt (Eriksson 1993: 268). This, then, was not a vessel intended for distribution in the normal Cypro-Levantine exchange networks but instead was made specifically for the Hittite market.

Material objects, social worlds

The use of the arm-vessels, their social significance and how they were handled still remain unresolved. Through a detailed consideration of the materiality of these objects—both their physical properties as well as their human-object entanglements (see Boivin 2008: 26)—we shall explore how the arm-vessels were embedded within

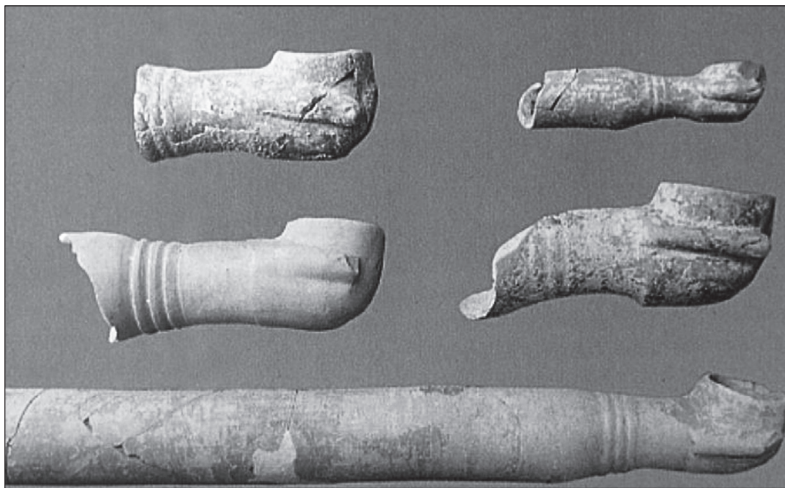


Figure 2. Arm-vessel fragments from Kilise Tepe. Courtesy of Nicholas Postgate and Ekin Kozal

social worlds. This approach recognises the agency of objects and allows us to explore recursive relationships between people and the material world, through which the object shaped social practices as much as it was itself shaped by humans (see Latour 2005; Stockhammer 2012: 9). Examining the objects from the perspective of people's haptic experiences of, and interactions with, the material world (see Mauss 1935; Csordas 1994), will shed some light on how these objects were both handled and physically experienced. Thus, bringing together an understanding of the material qualities of the arm-vessels and how people physically interacted with them will help elucidate how they were embedded within distinct social practices.

We can explore the materiality (the material properties) of the arm-vessels through the lens of Gibson's concept of *affordances* (1979: 119–136). Affordances describe the material qualities of things, for example their material, form, size, colour, weight, tactile properties etc. Specific attributes (properties) are intrinsic to certain objects and these *afford*, or enable, certain ways in which humans might interact with them. Figurines, for example, are portable whereas statuary is not: the former facilitates a tactile handling/carrying relationship between object and person whereas the latter is more appropriately displayed and viewed. Thinking about the affordances of RLW arm-vessels allows us to focus on how these objects were handled, namely how they facilitated specific types of actions and practices.

Our consideration of the materiality (or social entanglement) of the arm-vessels also needs to take into consideration that they were used within three very different cultural landscapes—namely Cyprus (the primary focus of this study), Cilicia, which lies at the cultural and economic periphery of the Hittite Empire, and the heartland of the Hittite Empire itself, in the central Anatolian plateau. In each of these three areas there were very different social practices, customs and belief systems, each underpinned by a distinct habitus (see Bourdieu 1977). The things people do—the correct (socially sanctioned) way to use objects, interact with each other, create social spaces etc—are all culturally-informed. Habitus comprises incorporated knowledges, actions performed repeatedly and unconsciously, which become sedimented in the body (see Mauss 1935; Connerton 1989; Merleau-Ponty 2012: 131–132). This includes people's material engagements—how to hold a knife and fork or to use chopsticks, the correct way to wear specific items of clothing, how to ride a bike etc; 'things are integrated within social practices' (Stockhammer 2012: 9).

In a recent study of people's bodily engagements with Black Topped Red Polished ware in Middle Bronze Age Kerma, Walsh (in press) explores how the handling of certain types of material culture blurs the boundaries between body and object, demonstrating how these objects effectively become incorporated within the *body schema* (see Malafouris 2008; Merleau-Ponty 2012: 101–103) and thus at one with the person. This approach reflects the notion, increasingly gaining ground within the social sciences, that the body is not a separate bounded entity (Attala & Steel in press) but is in fact 'an amalgamation of materials' (Walsh in press: 3). Certain embodied actions in particular, such as wearing clothes or eating and drinking using specific utensils, reinforce the close, intimate interaction of body and object and are embedded in peoples' material habitus (Bourdieu 1977). The physical entanglement of the human body with other materials—be it through handling objects, anointing the body with, or ingesting, substances etc (see Attala & Steel in press)—becomes hardwired in people's interaction with the material world: social practices are mediated by the objects people use—through their affordances and capacities—

and these in turn become a part of people's bodily and cognitive experience of their material and social worlds.

Affordances of the RLW arm-vessels

The arm-vessels were originally interpreted as incense burners (Gjerstad *et al.* 1934: 359; see also Johnson 1980: 18), in part due to their apparent similarity with Egyptian incense burners, such as those depicted on New Kingdom reliefs (Courtois *et al.* 1986: 163–164). There is in fact no evidence for burning on the arm-vessels (personal observation; Courtois 1979; Courtois *et al.* 1986: 164; Mielke 2007: 164; Steele & Stern 2017: 643) and this interpretation has now been dismissed (most recently Steele & Stern 2017: 642). Here I want to demonstrate how focusing specifically on the materiality (properties) of the arm-vessels allows us a more nuanced understanding of their use and thus to explore how they were embedded in social worlds.

As discussed above, the specific material qualities, or affordances, of the arm-vessels facilitated certain types of person-object interactions (see Gibson 1979; see also Walsh in press: 5–6). The closed form of the arm-vessels informs us that these objects were used as containers, that they held some sort of substance. Like the more typical RLW forms—the spindle bottle and flask—the arm-vessels typically have a narrow aperture (ca 1cm at the ‘wrist’ of the vessel while the opening of the cup is ca 3cm), suggesting that they contained free-flowing liquids of some kind (see Eriksson 1993: 27). That these vessels were used in some way with liquids is reinforced by their association at Ayios Iakovos *Dhima* with a sunken bathtub and a Mycenaean krater (Lindqvist 2017: 36).

Perfumed oils are a likely candidate for the substance stored in and dispensed from the arm-vessels, which receives some support from residue analyses (most recently Steele & Stern 2017; see also Eriksson 1993: 143–144). We might perhaps equate this with the highly prized fine oil *Ī.DÜG.GA* known from Hittite texts (Hoffner 1995: 110), which had ritual uses and was also used in royal funerary practices. As noted above, we can deduce that this precious liquid was free-flowing from the narrow aperture of the tubular body (as would also be the case for the spindle bottle and flasks with their long narrow neck and small opening at the rim). We might compare this substance to one of the grades of the highly prized perfumed oil identified from the Linear B archives: *po-ro-ko-wa* (προχορή), or a pourable liquid, which Leonard (1981: 96) suggests was kept in the characteristic Mycenaean stirrup jars and pilgrim flasks, likewise with a narrow neck and aperture. The particular qualities of RLW might suggest that this substance had some economic or cultural value; certainly, particular care was taken to form the vessels from a dense fabric with few voids, the walls tend to be thick (ca 0.5–1cm) and the exterior surface was slipped and highly burnished. The vessels were essentially non-porous and unlikely to lose much of their contents through evaporation. Moreover, initial studies of RLW vessels from Bögazkoy indicate that the interior was lined with beeswax, as an additional sealing of the vessels (Knappett *et al.* 2005: 39–40; Steele & Stern 2017: 648–649).

Nonetheless, the question remains whether the arm-vessels were primarily intended to store liquids or designed more specifically to dispense these liquids. We can dismiss them as vessels used to transport liquids as their specific shape did not afford easy sealing (Steele & Stern 2017: 653). The arm-vessels were likewise too

unwieldy for storage, not simply because they were not easily sealed. With their long, narrow tubular body and small base it appears that they would be unstable, liable to be knocked over and thus to lose their precious contents. Eriksson (1993: 27) has suggested they could stand easily on their base; I personally have not tried to do so (and indeed would be reluctant to do so in museum conditions!) and therefore cannot comment on this observation. In museums the arm-vessels are typically displayed on their side and my own experience of handling the Kalavassos arm-vessels suggests that they are in fact stable in this position. Moreover, in this horizontal position the primary opening of the vessel (through the cup) is perpendicular (i.e. vertical) to the body, suggesting that the contents would not easily flow away, perhaps supporting the idea that they were designed to hold a liquid.

Other properties of the vessels, however, might indicate that their primary purpose was for dispensing a liquid within a highly visual ceremony. As noted above, RLW is visually distinctive, with its bright red/orange colour and its highly burnished surface with a lustrous finish. This finish is reminiscent of the finest Hittite red burnished wares used to make a range of ceremonial libation vases (Aruz *et al.* 2008: figs 114–116; see Eriksson 1993: 134), explaining the appeal of RLW ware in the Hittite heartland. The arm-vessels also stand out for their unique form, in particular the carefully modelled cup and hand, and for their length. These objects stood out visually from the wider range of Cypriot and Anatolian ceramic vessels and were clearly intended to make a statement, to have visual impact, which no doubt would be compounded by the logistics of handling such an object. Eriksson (1993: 134) suggests that the distinctiveness of the arm-vessel served to advertise their contents, effectively a form of LBA commodity branding (see Wengrow 2008, 2010). However, the rarity of this form on Cyprus and its restricted distribution in funerary or ritual contexts situate their use beyond that of LBA exchange systems and commodity consumption. Certainly, as noted above, it is unlikely that the arm-vessels were exchanged for their contents. Instead, I would argue that the peculiar qualities of the arm-vessels indicate that they afforded very specific human-object entanglements in ceremonial performance, being used to dispense liquids in a highly visual display, and it is for their own intrinsic value that we see their widespread distribution in central Anatolia and Cilicia (see Kozal 2003; Mielke 2007).

Embedding arm-vessels in social practices

How then were these arm-vessels integrated in social practices? Their liquid associations are commonly accepted (see Eriksson 1993: 27) and typically interpretations focus on their use as libation vessels. In central Anatolia, for example, Mielke (2007: 165) notes the repeated association of arm-vessels with spindle bottles, from which he concludes that these two objects were used in conjunction: the spindle bottles carried a liquid product which was subsequently dispensed by the arm-vessels during ritual anointing of a statue or person (see also Hoffner 1995, for discussion in Hittite texts of the rituals uses of oils). There are obvious distinctions between Cypriot and Anatolian use of the arm-vessels: on Cyprus they are extremely rare and, with the exception of the examples from Ayios Iakovos, are exclusively funerary. It is worth noting, however, that Webb (1992: 94–96; 1999: 34) has questioned whether Ayios Iakovos was in fact an early example of a sanctuary. Instead she suggests the

enclosure formed part of a wider funerary landscape and was incorporated within rituals performed at nearby cemeteries such as Ayios Iakovos *Melia*, possibly serving as a cenotaph or a place for commemorating the dead. The Cypriot arm-vessels also tend to be near complete, or restorable, suggesting that they were carefully curated, if used in life, or otherwise were procured specifically for the burial of a special individual. Possibly they were used to anoint the body of the deceased—a practice that we might infer was embedded in Late Cypriot funerary ritual from the small perfume vases and unguent containers typically placed in LBA tombs on the island (Steel 1998: 295–296). The choice of a RLW arm-vessel, however, was unusual and probably proclaimed the elevated status of the individual being buried. In the Hittite heartland arm-vessels are found in religious contexts (see Mielke 2007). Moreover, the large numbers and the very broken condition of the Hittite and Cilician examples implies that they were readily available and used repeatedly, being broken and replaced regularly. The inevitable conclusion is that there were very different interactions between these objects and their users in Cyprus and Anatolia, reflecting the different values being placed upon them.

The form of the vessel might throw some light on its social meaning, although how this would be negotiated culturally would presumably vary across its three different regions of use (see discussion of *habitus* above). The arm-vessel effectively comprises two parts—the long tubular container and the small hemispherical bowl cupped in the right hand; the repeated recurrence of this motif might suggest it encoded a very specific social message within the visual vocabulary of the LBA East Mediterranean. In this respect it is interesting to note the feasting scenes from the Megiddo ivories (Loud 1939: pls 4/2a–b, 32/160) and a bronze statuette of a seated male from Enkomi (Schaeffer 1971: fig. 6), which depict Canaanite kings and gods drinking from a hemispherical bowl cupped in their right hand. This presumably was the appropriate, socially sanctioned high-status way to consume wine in the Levant (see Stockhammer 2012: 23) and also resonated with Cypriot practices of consumption, which we might infer from the ubiquitous hemispherical White Slip bowl (see Steel 2016: 84) and the popularity of bronze hemispherical bowls in LC IIC–IIIA burials at Enkomi (Keswani 1989: 65). The arm-vessels therefore potentially tell us something about Cypro-Levantine and Anatolian embodied practices (cf. Mauss 1935; Connerton 1989; Walsh in press) centred around liquid consumption. The repeated gesture (cupping the *right* hand) and body-object interaction implicit in these arm-vessels give us an insight into Near Eastern etiquette and possibly also social taboos, such as eating and drinking with the right rather than left hand. I would argue that they then illustrate unconscious, socially learned bodily knowledges and material *habitus*, which conveyed messages of status, identity and belonging to the people who handled and/or viewed them.

The visual language of the arm-vessels, however, does not help us understand how these objects themselves were handled. Unfortunately, despite the rich visual imagery of ceremonial performance from the Hittite heartland, there are no representations corresponding to the arm-vessels and these objects likewise do not appear to be mentioned in Hittite ritual texts (Mielke 2007: 164). In trying to make sense of how they were used, we can only refer to the physical properties of the pot. As it has not been possible personally to fully physically engage with these objects (for example filling the arm-vessels with liquids and pouring them out), the following are preliminary observations; hopefully future research with replicas will further

elucidate their use. The long tubular body suggests that these vessels might in fact be unwieldy to handle, indicating a certain level of skill on the part of the individuals filling them and more so pouring them out without unnecessary spillage. The effort invested in placing a cup perpendicular with the body (rather than the very many other solutions there might be for fashioning a pouring vessel) suggests that the cup itself had some significance: one possibility would be tipping the vessel until the cup was full, thus measuring out a specific volume of liquid. Given the presumed value of the contents (see above), this might have been a carefully designed vessel to ensure that only the desired amount was poured, nothing being wasted. Without performing these actions with such a vessel (and of course we are also constrained by lack of knowledge of the substance contained within, in particular its viscosity), it is difficult to assess how they might be performed. I would, however, tentatively suggest that using the arm-vessels was the work of skilled practitioners who had the necessary body knowledges to handle these objects and dispense their liquid contents.

Final remarks

The past decade has seen numerous publications focusing on RLW; in particular there is increasing awareness of the importance of this type of pottery within central Anatolia and Cilicia, which has myriad intriguing implications for understanding social, political and economic interactions between the Hittite Empire and Alashiya (the island of Cyprus). Nonetheless, despite numerous scientific analyses looking at the geochemical composition of RLW, it is still unclear where this distinctive pottery was produced. There is a better understanding of the contents of the ware (Steele & Stern 2017), but there has been rather less focus on how these containers were actually handled, viewed and valued by the communities who used them. The arm-vessels are particularly neglected in scholarship, at least in the Cypriot context, being overshadowed by the more numerous spindle bottles and flasks. Focusing on the arm-vessels from a theoretical approach informed by materiality, embodiment and habitus, I have attempted to move discussions of RLW forward, encouraging consideration of how these objects were handled and used. This approach, centred on object-person interactions, seeks to situate the arm-vessels within their social and material world, to highlight that these should not simply be considered as museum pieces or catalogue entries; instead they were items that were handled and filled with liquids, which were subsequently carefully dispensed; depending on their geographical location they were either carefully looked after or carelessly broken. They had distinct social lives in their Anatolian and Cypriot contexts, which become accessible to us as we focus on their very materiality.

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