

Aegean-style pottery from the old excavations at Alalakh

chronological and socio-historical implications

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ABSTRACT

Aegean-style pottery, produced across the Eastern Mediterranean, has been identified in limited quantities at Alalakh. Despite its scarcity, this pottery is pivotal for dating the onset of the Iron Age I (IA I) period, both at Alalakh and across the region, and is often interpreted either as evidence of migration or socioeconomic interactions and identity formation. This study examines previously unpublished Aegean-style pottery from Woolley's excavations, housed at UCL, to reassess its chronological and cultural significance. Through macroscopic analysis and stylistic comparisons, eight vessels were identified, offering new insights into Alalakh's earliest IA I habitation phase. Furthermore, functional interpretations of the pottery vessels' diverse shapes reflect dynamic cultural entanglements of local and Aegean practices, highlighting the importance of Aegean-style pottery for the study of socio-historical developments in the region during this period.

INTRODUCTION

The movement of populations across the Eastern Mediterranean is among the most contested topics in discussions surrounding the period following the collapse of the palatial systems of the Late Bronze Age. As Sherratt observed more than a decade ago (Sherratt 2013, 621), the discussion surrounding migration movements and ethnic identities during this period is largely centered on pottery. The northern Levant (Fig. 1) has not been excluded from these debates. As in other regions (e.g. Dothan 2000; Karageorghis 2000; Kopanias 2018), archaeological data, mainly Aegean-style pottery, have often been interpreted as evidence for the presence of Sea Peoples in the area (Yasur-Landau 2003; 2010, 116–18, 190, 192), which were also involved in the establishment of the kingdom of Palastini (Janeway 2006, 140–41; Hawkins 2011; Yasur-Landau 2012, 549–50; Singer 2013; Emanuel 2015). For instance, Aegean-style pottery has been cited as direct evidence of distinct “Sea People” groups originating from the Aegean (Jung 2011, 129; 2012, 115–16; 2017, 30) and from Cyprus (Lagarce and Lagarce 1978, 61; 1988, 148–49; Bounni et al. 1979, 257; Lagarce 1983, 224; Venturi 2008, 374; 2010, 9), based on stylistic and functional similarities.

An alternative perspective has been proposed by some scholars, emphasizing the stylistic similarities of Aegean-style pottery across various regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. From a socioeconomic standpoint, the intensive interactions and exchanges that characterized the Late Bronze Age –which persisted even after the collapse of palatial systems– facilitated the adoption of certain cultural traits and practices (Bauer 1998; Sherratt 1998, 302; Barako 2000; Middleton 2015, 59–60; Lehmann 2017; Killebrew 2018). In line with this perspective, the presence of Aegean-style pottery in the Ras Ibn Hani area has been interpreted as a reflection



Fig. 1. Map of the northern Levant with sites indicated in the text. Produced by the author.

of close contact with Cyprus and not of migration (Badre 1983). These “innovative traits” were seen as markers of socioeconomic status, particularly among individuals who were actively engaged in the interactions and networks that underpinned these cultural exchanges (du Pied 2011).

One of the production centers for this type of pottery was the Amuq Plain, located in the modern-day Hatay province of Turkey. Aegean-style pottery has been identified through surface surveys (Braidwood 1937; Swift 1958; Yener et al. 2000, fig. 12:b) and excavations at numerous sites in the region. Among these, Tell Tayinat (Janeway 2017) and Chatal Höyük (Pucci 2019a) have yielded the largest quantities of Aegean-style pottery. The phenomenon of migration, often associated with the “Sea Peoples”, has long been considered a key explanatory framework by archaeologists working in the area. Swift (1958, 162–78) was the first to correlate the locally produced Aegean-style pottery in the Amuq Valley with westward migrants, identifying them as part of the “Sea Peoples” (see also Pucci 2013, 102). However, recent studies in the region, along with the reanalysis of finds from earlier excavations, have provided new insights into this pottery category. Similar to the coastal sites, the emergence of Aegean-style pottery in the Amuq Valley has been attributed to intense contact with the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean (Lehmann 2007). This interaction is thought to have fostered a blending of local and foreign pottery traditions (Harrison 2009, 2013; Welton et al. 2019, 325–26). Within this hybrid “cultural entity” (Montesanto 2018, 114–15; 2020a, 235; 2022, 83–4; Montesanto and Pucci 2019, 116–17; Pucci 2019a, 290–91), Aegean-style pottery has been reinterpreted as a marker of a newly formed identity for an emergent elite group, which likely consisted of both local inhabitants and migrants (Pucci 2020a, 140; 2020c, 338

–39).

Despite the long history of excavations at Tell Atchana, ancient Alalakh, Aegean-style pottery dated to

the 12th century BCE was not identified at the site until recently (Koehl 2017; Montesanto 2018). However, this pottery, discovered in the topsoil and Iron Age (IA) archaeological layers during recent investigations (Montesanto 2018, 109), has been very significant. Firstly, these vessels provide a reliable means of dating the beginning of Early Iron Age (EIA) occupation at the site, which has now been securely established for the first time (see discussion below). Additionally, Koehl (2017) and Montesanto (2018), in their analysis, exploited the broader historical and cultural implications of the Aegean-style pottery presence at Alalakh. Koehl (2017, 284–85) interpreted this pottery as an indicator of an “ethnic minority” of Aegean migrants, who coexisted with the local population. In contrast, Montesanto (2020a, 234–35) emphasized its role as a medium of social significance, which contributed to the processes of a new community identity formation rather than serving as a marker of population movement.

The number of published Aegean-style pottery vessels from Alalakh remains limited. This scarcity of data is partly due to the absence of studies specifically focusing on Aegean-style pottery from earlier excavations. In contrast to the imported Mycenaean pottery, widely distributed across the site and primarily dated to the 14th to early 13th centuries BCE (corresponding to the Late Helladic (LH) IIIA2 period in Aegean terms) (Koehl 2005, 2010, 2020), Woolley’s final publication made no mention of Aegean-style pottery of the 12th century BCE. However, Woolley did note the discovery of “numerous fragments of similar decadent Mycenaean ware were found loose in the surface soil” (Woolley 1938, 4), an observation confirmed by recent excavations (Montesanto 2018, 109). Based on this remark, it is reasonable to infer that Woolley may have encountered Aegean-style pottery during his work at the site, some of which was also depicted in his final publication (Woolley 1955, pl. CXI: 28b and 33), even if it was not formally identified or documented in detail. A small-scale project was recently carried out, aiming to re-examine the pottery from Woolley’s excavations, now housed in various museums in the United Kingdom.

An initial search for material from Woolley’s excavations identified artifacts in several institutions across the United Kingdom. Most of the pottery was housed at the British Museum, with a significant quantity located in the storerooms of University College London (UCL). Smaller collections were identified at the Ashmolean Museum of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Due to funding constraints, the current research project concentrated on the material stored at the British Museum and UCL. Following an initial cataloguing of the finds from Alalakh in these two institutions, a selection process was undertaken based on the descriptions provided. Whole pottery vessels and sherds categorized under other pottery traditions, such as local drab ware, Nuzi ware, or Cypriot pottery, were excluded. Instead, the focus was placed on sherds described as undiagnostic or Mycenaean, particularly those lacking accompanying images, for further examination. Subsequent museum visits to UCL and the British Museum were dedicated to the macroscopic analysis and cataloguing of the selected pottery finds. This process included photographing and a detailed drawing of the artifacts, ensuring their documentation for further study.

This study aims to contribute new data to the corpus of Aegean-style pottery from Alalakh, expanding our understanding of its presence and significance at the site. First, the paper necessitates a reevaluation of the chronology for the establishment of the 12th-century BCE occupation phase at the site. The revised chronology is informed by a stylistic comparison of the pottery vessels with Aegean-style pottery from neighboring regions, including Cyprus, the coastal northern Levant, and the Aegean. Additionally, the analysis includes a discussion of the identified vessels’ functions, shedding light on their related daily practices. This examination further explores the significance and perceived value of this pottery among its users, contributing to a deeper understanding of its social implications in the Eastern Mediterranean during EIA.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Alalakh, located in the south-central region of the Amuq Plain next to the Orontes River, was first excavated by

a British Museum mission led by Sir Leonard Woolley in the years 1936 to 1939 and 1946 to 1949. No further exploration of the site was undertaken in the subsequent decades. After three years of preliminary studies, including surface surveys, digital documentation, and reanalysis of finds from the earlier excavations (Yener 2005), Professor Ashhan Yener initiated a new phase of excavations at the site in 2003 (Yener 2010; Yener et al. 2020).

Woolley uncovered an extensive stratigraphic sequence (Woolley 1955; Fink 2010), including a temple, a palace, and residential buildings. He identified two reconstruction phases of the temple (Levels 0A and 0B), built over its predecessor, from which it was separated by a one-meter layer (Woolley 1955, 89, 197; see also, 170–71, fig. 69 and Fink 2010, 56), which he interpreted as evidence of a significant time gap and dated the structure to the early 12th century BCE (Woolley 1955, 399). However, this chronology has been contested. A scarab Woolley attributed to Ramses IV (Woolley 1955, 202–3, 398–99, pl. 66:131) was reassigned by Kitchen to the reign of Amenhotep III (14th century BCE) (Kitchen 1982), dating to the mid-to-late 14th century BCE. Woolley's claim that cremation burials were introduced by the Sea Peoples in the 12th century BCE was also refuted, as such burials are documented at Alalakh as early as Level V (Bienkowski 1982).

Most of the LBA buildings at Alalakh appear to have gone out of use between the late 14th and early 13th centuries BCE. This conclusion is based on the dating of imported Mycenaean pottery (LH IIIA2–B1 phase) (Fink 2010, 136; Yener 2013, 21) found throughout the excavated areas during both old and recent excavations (Woolley 1955, 374, 398; Fink 2010, 136–37; Yener 2013, 17–8), associated with the final occupation phases of the buildings and graves within them. Additional evidence includes C14 analyses, which date Levels III–I (phases 4–1 in recent excavations) to the 15th–13th centuries BCE (Yener and Yazıcıoğlu 2010, 32), and a clay sealing belonging to an official dated to late 14th to early 13th centuries BCE (Yener et al. 2014; Yener 2017, fig. 5), providing a *terminus post quem* for the buildings' final use, a dating also supported by the presence of the scarab mentioned above. While the settlement likely experienced a decline during the 13th century BCE, sporadic occupation appears to have persisted in the acropolis area for a short time thereafter (Montesanto 2020a, 235; Pucci 2020a, 135).

Traces of sporadic habitation dating to the period after the late 14th or early 13th century BCE were identified in Area 1 during the recent excavations (Montesanto 2020b, 60–1; 2021, 268), beneath the later 12th-century levels. Similar findings were recorded in Areas 2 (Yener and Yazıcıoğlu 2010, 16–24) and 4 (Akar 2020, fig. 2). Archaeological layers from the Iron Age I period (12th–9th centuries BCE) (Harrison 2009, 187, 2013, 76–7; Montesanto and Pucci 2019, 117) were uncovered only in Area 1 and only in locations that Woolley did not excavate, such as the Fortress area (Trenches 32.52, 32.53, and 32.63) and west of the Temple (Trench 42.10) (Montesanto and Pucci 2019, 94; Pucci 2020b, 251–52). In the Fortress area, the Iron Age layers were thin and associated with an Iron Age II–III building. In contrast, Trench 42.10 revealed a complete sequence of IA I layers over an area of 90 m². Although only floors and traces of architectural elements have been recorded, the area appears to have been intensively used, as suggested by the quantity of pottery (Montesanto and Pucci 2019, 95–6, 103, 107, fig. 2; Montesanto 2020b, 62).

The occupation of the area was divided into two main habitation phases. The first phase (Phase 3) began in the second half of the 12th century BCE, based on Koehl's dating of the Aegean-style pottery (LH IIIC Middle 1/Developed, in terms of Aegean relative chronology) (Koehl 2017). Koehl's analysis suggests that this pottery category had a relatively short production span, confined to this habitation phase. No stylistic development was observed within the pottery assemblage studied, and none could be dated to the subsequent chronological-stylistic phase of Aegean-style pottery (LH IIIC Middle 2/Advanced, late 12th to early 11th centuries BCE).

The pottery is macroscopically characterized by a local clay fabric with inclusions consistent with other locally produced pottery (Pucci 2019b, 180–1). Surface treatment, paint, and the shape repertoire –primarily of a domestic nature– resemble 12th-century BCE Aegean-style pottery found in the Aegean and other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, as noted by Koehl (2017, 279–82). The Aegean-style pottery from Alalakh predominantly consists of decorated and undecorated tableware, primarily eating and drinking vessels, alongside a

smaller number of serving and transport/storage vessels. A single example of an Aegean-style cooking jug was also catalogued.

THE POTTERY

Aegean-style pottery from Woolley's excavation was identified only in the material stored in UCL. The stratigraphic association of the sherds could not be established during the study due to the absence of documentation accompanying them. The sherds were categorized based on their morphological elements and decorative motifs. Vessel shapes were reconstructed primarily from the profiles of the upper body, as no complete specimens were preserved. The shapes and surface treatments closely resemble 12th century BCE Aegean-style pottery known in the area (Venturi 2010, 5; 2011, 145–46; 2013, 235; Janeway 2011, 168; 2017, 50–1). All represent open vessels shapes intended for drinking or eating, such as kylix (cat. nos. 3, 4, 5), deep bowl (cat. no. 1), shallow angular bowl (cat. no. 8), pedestal bowl (cat. no. 6), handleless bowl (cat. no. 2), and cup (cat. no. 7). The surfaces are slipped on both interior and exterior, with traces of polishing on one example. The paint is consistently red or reddish-brown, with a matt or semi-lustrous texture. Bands are a common decorative feature on both surfaces, while four sherds are fully monochrome, and motifs are present on two specimens. The fabric is fine, with a few small inclusions varying in color (black, whitish, silver, or grey), traits already observed in the Aegean-style pottery produced in the region (Pucci 2019b, 180–81).

Deep Bowls (Furumark Shape, hereafter FS, 285) (Cat. no. 1; Fig. 2:1)

The vessel is bell-shaped, with the upper part slightly inclined inward, forming a wide mouth with a slightly everted rim. A single loop handle is preserved, placed horizontally and rising to the rim. The decoration features horizontal bands on the rim and below the handle, applied to both the interior and exterior. A zone of alternating V-pattern motifs (Furumark Motif, hereafter FM, 59) is displayed on the exterior upper body.

FS 284/5 deep bowls from Alalakh typically feature a more globular body, with decoration comprising monochrome surfaces and wider bands on both the exterior and interior. A stroke around the base of the handle is a rare trait among deep bowls in the region. Deep bowls from Tell Tayinat, Chatal Höyük, and Tell Afis generally display a stroke extending along the full length of the handle, from one base to the other, consistent with the norm during the late 12th and 11th centuries BCE in Cyprus (LC IIIB–C) and in the Aegean during the LH IIIC Middle-Late period. By contrast, strokes around the handle's base alone appear in only one example in Alalakh. This decorative trait occurs at Tell Kazel (Badre et al. 2018, pl. XLVII:533, 538, 540) and in Cyprus until the third quarter of the 12th century BCE (LC IIIA). In the Aegean, it is more typical of the 13th and early 12th centuries BCE (LH IIIB–IIIC Early), often accompanied by an additional stroke on the handle's ridge.

Elaborate decorative motifs are absent from deep bowls in the inland regions of the northern Levant. The V-pattern motif, applied in a zonal arrangement on deep bowls, did not occur in the Levant or Cilicia during the 12th century BCE. In Cyprus, this motif remains rare, with a single example recorded in Enkomi's Level IIIA (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 221:1472). However, its placement on the upper body near the lip, along with accompanying linear decoration, suggests a close chronological correlation. In the Aegean, the V-pattern motif is widespread from LH IIIA to IIIC, but is more commonly found on closed vessels (Mountjoy 1986, 70, 96). It also appears on cups, bowls, and stemmed bowls within narrowly framed zones (Mountjoy 1986, 84–92). The motif is found on a deep bowl from Iasos (Benzi 2019, fig. 27:d), though its precise dating is unclear. Additional parallels include a LH IIIB deep bowl from Pellana in Laconia (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 93:154) and a LH IIIB2 deep bowl from Khania, which features the motif within a narrow zone (Hallager and Hallager 2003, pl. 52).

The presence of the zonal V-pattern motif in an open space, along with the linear and handle decorations in semi-lustrous paint, does not support an early date within the horizon of the 14th and 13th centuries BCE. Instead, it situates the vessel within the early 12th century BCE, aligning with LC IIIA and LH IIIC Early pottery traditions.

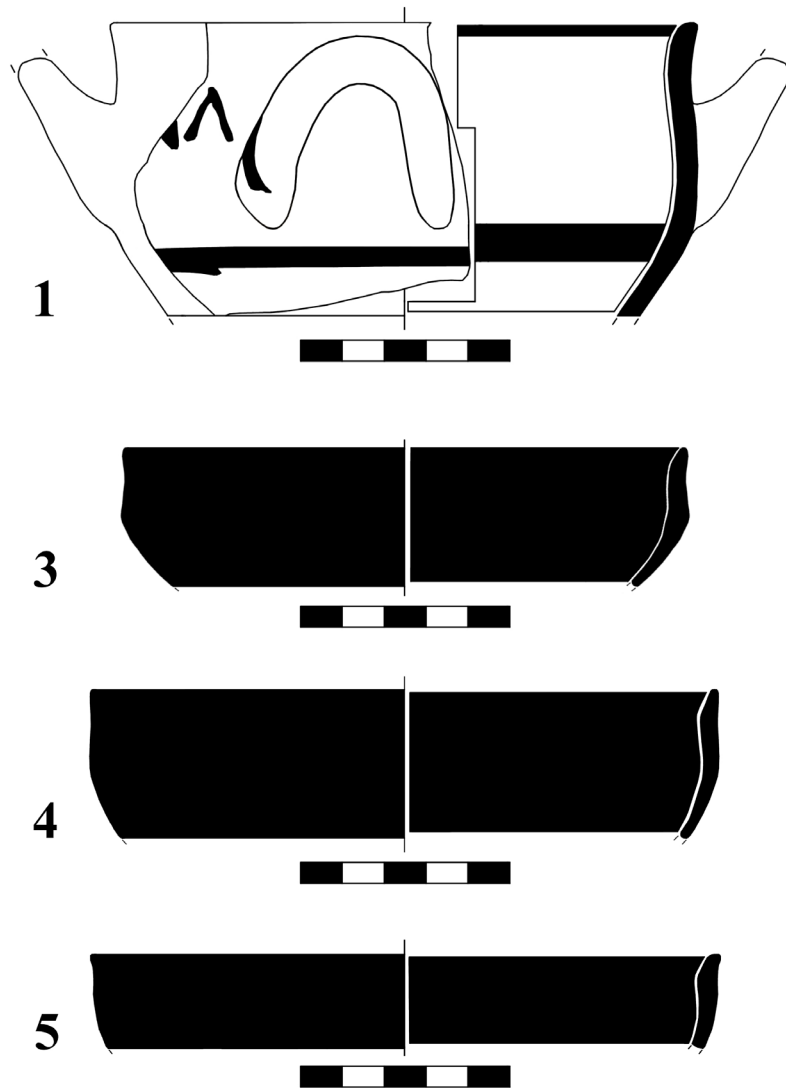


Fig. 2. Aegean-style bowl and kylikes from Alalakh. Drawings produced by the author. Digital reproduction by A. Psychas.

Handleless Bowls (FS 210) (Cat. no. 2; Fig. 4)

The vessel features a spherical body that tapers to a thin, rounded rim. Its decoration is minimal, consisting of a single band near the rim on both the interior and exterior. Its shape does not fit into the FS 242 type. Koehl classified three sherds found at Alalakh as one-handled conical bowls (FS 242) bearing monochrome decoration. This shape is relatively rare in the region. A similar vessel was identified by Janeway at Tell Tayinat (Janeway 2017, pl. 3:3), featuring linear decoration and an everted rim. In Ras Ibn Hani, this shape with a conical body and lipless rim appears during the middle phase of Iron Age I (Bounni et al. 1979, fig. 25:9–12; du Pied 2011, fig. 10:d), displaying linear decoration and spiral motifs at the base's interior. At Tarsus, one-handled conical bowls are much more common, typically bearing linear decoration and spirals at the base interior, with a straight conical body and incurving lips (Mountjoy 2005, figs. 5–7). However, only a few examples exhibit the same rounded body and decoration as the UCL specimen (Mountjoy 2005, fig. 7:128–29). Mountjoy stylistically linked this example to similar vessels in Cyprus.

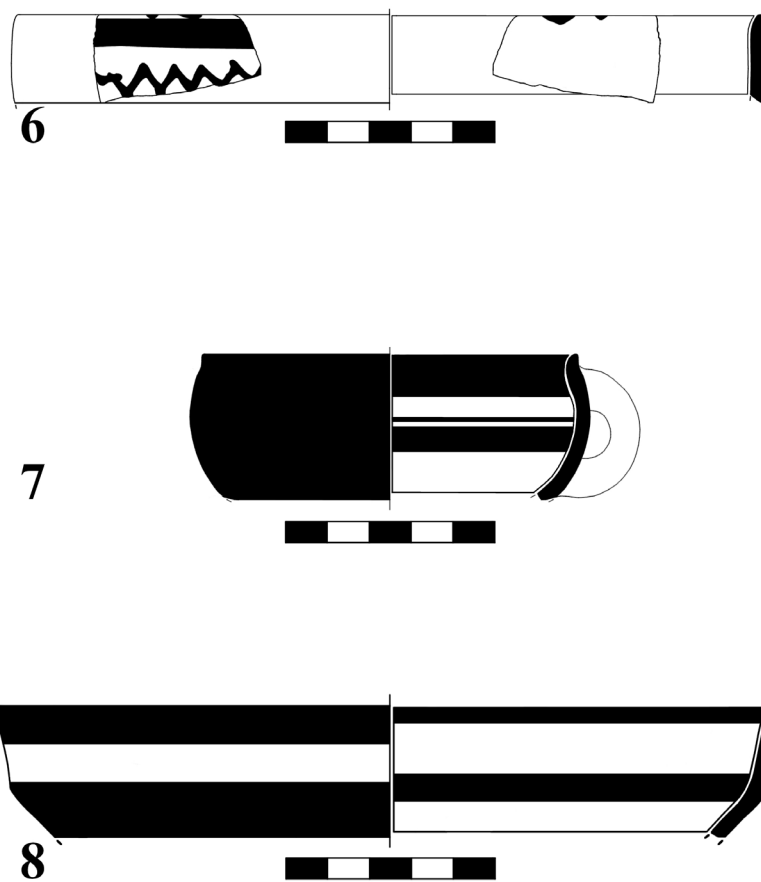


Fig. 3. Aegean-style bowls and cup from Alalakh. Drawings produced by the author. Digital reproduction by A. Psychas.

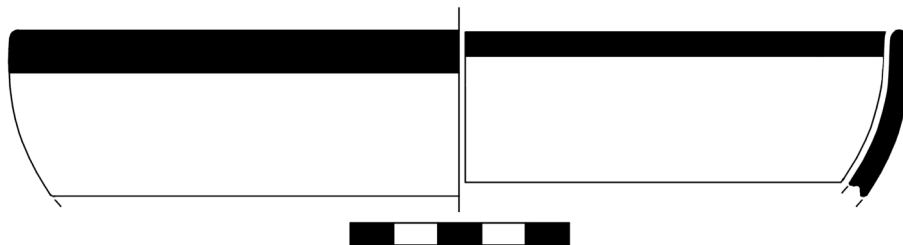


Fig. 4. Aegean-style bowl from Alalakh. Drawings produced by the author. Digital reproduction by A. Psychas.

In Cyprus, though, FS 242 was not widespread. However, hemispherical bowls with rounded body profiles (FS 210), incurving rims, and simple linear decorations emerged during the late LC IIC period. These bowls became part of the Levanto-Helladic pottery repertoire (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 20) and were produced across multiple sites throughout the late LC IIC/early LC IIIA periods (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 109:197) and consistently across LC IIIA (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 43:40 and figs. 134:503, 143, 184:1008, 217:1422, 300:279, 409:74, 410:81). Similarly, in Philistia, a comparable vessel with a rounded body and linear rim decoration appears at Ashdod during the second quarter of the 12th century BCE level (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 623:2–3). Accordingly, Alalakh's example should be ascribed to the same chronological horizon of the first half of the 12th century BCE, based on its hemispherical profile and linear rim decoration.

Shallow Angular Bowl (FS 295) (Cat. no. 8; Fig . 3:8)

This vessel features a wide-open shape with a conical lower body, a sharp carination, a short upper body and a slightly everted and rounded rim. Its linear decoration includes two bands on both the interior and exterior: one at the rim and another at the carination level. At Alalakh, examples of these shallow angular bowls are undecorated and exhibit concave profiles with higher, flaring upper bodies. Vessels of this type have been identified in neighboring sites, though they were not very common. Examples were found at Tell Tayinat (Janeway 2017, pls. 3:10, 14 and 4:3), Chatal Höyük (Pucci 2019a, pl. 44:h), and Tell Afis (Venturi 2007, fig. 57:2; 2013, fig. 15:3). Tarsus yielded numerous similar vessels, both painted and unpainted, which Mountjoy (2005, fig. 15:373, 381) dates to the LH IIIC Middle phase in Aegean pottery chronology. In Philistia, comparable vessels also exhibit deeper and more concave profiles (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 660).

The shorter, straighter upper body and rounded rim of the UCL specimen closely resemble two nearly identical examples from Ugarit, dated to the early 12th century BCE (Monchambert 1996, fig. 1:1–2; 2004a, fig. 120:1631–632; 2004b, 136, cat. no. 24–25). These are considered the latest Aegean-style pottery at the site before its destruction and abandonment around 1175 BCE. Similar bowls with linear decoration are also found at Ras Ibn Hani (Bounni et al. 1979, fig. 25:3–4; Badre 1983, fig. 1:c; du Pied 2006, fig. 7:g). In Cyprus, while this type typically also features a more concave profile during the LC IIIA and later periods, shallow angular bowls with a straighter, low-height upper body are documented (Mountjoy 2018, figs. 54:343; 61:103; 63:66; 103:127; 134:503; 224:1524; 290:149; 380:34; 426:18). These are dated from the LC IIC to LC IIIA periods. Comparable vessels in the Aegean were used during the LH IIIB2 phase, particularly at Mycenae (French and Stockhammer 2009, fig. 25:4). The body profile and linear decoration of the UCL vessel likely place it chronologically to the first quarter of the 12th century BCE, based on the parallels from the Aegean and Cyprus and especially in close accordance with the examples from Ugarit.

Cup (FS 215/229) (Cat. no. 7; Fig. 3:7)

This vessel features an open shape with a globular body, a slightly everted rim, and a vertically positioned cylindrical handle. Its decoration includes a monochrome exterior and horizontal bands on the interior. The profile and thick band decoration on the interior of the rim are reminiscent of a deep bowl from Alalakh, though the vertical handle arrangement is unusual for this type. This probably represents a deep cup (FS 215) with a more globular body and a slightly everted rim. The vessel connected to this shape by Montesanto (2020a, 233–4, fig. 4:3) probably belongs to a local hybrid shallow cup type of small size. Deep cups similar in shape to the vessel presented in this study, typically with monochrome interiors and linear bands on the exterior rim, have been found at Mycenae and Tiryns (French and Stockhammer 2009, figs. 18:6; 19:8; 20:2; 22:1–2), dated to the late 13th century BCE (LH IIIB2). Comparable examples appear in Phocis (LH IIIC Early) (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 304:187) and in Rhodes (LH IIIC Early-Middle phase) (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 434:224–25). An identical vessel with linear decoration on the rim was found at Ekron, dated to the first quarter of the 12th century BCE (Philistine IIIC Early1) (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 600:1).

Similar profile and handle position have some kylikes from Khania, dated to the LH IIIB2 period (Hallager and Hallager 2003, pl. 48, 83), and in cups with globular bodies, dated to the LH IIIB1 (Hallager and Hallager 2011, pl. 91–92). These cups often feature linear decoration or elaborate motifs, and many have monochrome interiors. Monochrome cups dated to the late 14th to early 13th century BCE, found in Crete (LM IIIA2) (Smith 2010, fig. 5:IIB.117) and mainland Greece (LH IIIA2) (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 294:58), also appear similar. However, cups and kylikes of this period typically exhibit truncated rims, slight carination in their body profile, and straighter lower bodies. Moreover, the linear decoration on the interior suggests a later date for the UCL vessel.

Thick linear bands on deep cup interior, though uncommon, are documented in mainland Greece during the late 13th century BCE (LH IIIB2) (French and Stockhammer 2009, fig. 19:8) and the early 12th century BCE (LH IIIC Early) (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 212:359, 361). These bands often appear near the rim and in the lower body. In Cyprus, similar interior decoration is observed on deep cups from Enkomi, dated to the early 12th century BCE (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 503:356, 361). Linear decoration on deep cups with everted rims (often cited

as FS 216) continued into the third quarter of the 12th century BCE (LH IIIC Middle Developed) (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 274:69; 390:55–57). By the late 12th and 11th centuries BCE (LH IIIC Middle-Late), bands became thinner and often grouped in pairs or triplets in both the Aegean (Mountjoy 1999, figs. 56:427–32, 123:135; Evelyn 2006, figs. 2.7:1, 2.8:4–6) and Cyprus (LC IIIB) (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 538). Therefore, the linear decoration of thick bands on the interior, as well as the shape, points towards a late 13th or early 12th century BCE dating for the cup stored in UCL.

Rounded/Conical Kylix (FS 258/274) (Cat. nos. 4–5; Fig. 2:4–5)

The vessels feature a rounded upper bowl with either a short, everted rim (No. 5) or a straighter upper body with a lipless rim and a slight ribbon just below the rim interior (No. 4). The decoration is monochrome on both the interior and exterior. Koehl (2017, 280) identified this as an uncommon shape in the Levant and Cyprus, while Lehmann did not include kylikes in his analysis of locally produced Aegean-style pottery in the region (Lehmann 2007). At Tarsus, only one unpainted specimen resembling a kylix with a short stem was identified (Mountjoy 2005, fig. 17:417).

At Alalakh, some examples attributed to this type lack any surface treatment (Koehl 2017, 278; Montesanto 2018, 111), while monochrome kylikes have been also identified (Koehl 2017, fig. 18.2:4). Unpainted specimens with rounded bowl and lipless or everted rim were found at Tell Kazel (Jung 2011, fig. 4:1 and 4), dated to the LH IIIC Early (1st quarter of the 12th century BCE). Kylikes with rounded body, slightly everted rim, and linear decoration were also found at Enkomi (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 152:677), dated to the first half of the 12th century BCE (Level IIIA), as well as in Kition (floor IV, late 13th to 1st quarter of the 12th century BCE) and Apliki (Phase II, 1st quarter of the 12th century BCE) (Mountjoy 2018, figs. 317:387, 445:9).

In the Cyclades, monochrome kylikes with similar upper body profile were found on Kea (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 360:73), Melos (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 373:145), and Paros, where they were the most common vessel type at the site of Koukounaries (Koehl 2021). While Koehl dates the Paros' examples to the LH IIIC Middle, Mountjoy places them in the LH IIIC Early (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 381:6). In mainland Greece, this shape appears from the LH IIIB2 Late at Mycenae, though unpainted (French and Stockhammer 2009, fig. 2:4). In Crete, similar vessels feature linear decoration on the rim (Langohr 2017, fig. 7.12:e).

The profile of the kylix with an everted rim from Alalakh, housed at UCL, suggests a date in the late 13th or early 12th century BCE. However, these vessels should be attributed to the pottery production of the first three quarters of the 12th century BCE, as the monochrome surface of the kylikes is more characteristic of pottery production of the 12th century BCE, primarily based on parallels from the Aegean.

Angular Kylix (FS 267) (Cat. no. 3; Fig. 2:3)

The angular profile of this sherd, featuring a flaring upper body of low height, a slightly everted rim, and a conical lower body, suggests it belongs to an angular kylix. The vessel's monochrome surface shows traces of polishing, a treatment Pucci noted on monochrome vessels with non-local fabric (Pucci 2019b, 180–81). This shape, typically with one handle and a short stem, is rare in the region. Montesanto (2018, fig. 2.2) catalogued an unpainted example, with another similar specimen featuring a vertical handle (Montesanto 2020a, fig. 4:5). This shape also appears unpainted at Tell Kazel (Jung 2011, fig. 4:6–8) and Tell Arqa (Charaf 2007, fig. 4:i).

In Cyprus, angular kylikes were uncommon. They are present in small numbers at Hala Sultan Tekke, where examples with low upper bowl and marked carination, similar to the UCL specimen, resemble Cretan prototypes according to Mountjoy (2011). Angular kylikes from other sites in Cyprus dated also to the LC IIIA (second quarter of the 12th century BCE, LH IIIC Early 2) feature monochrome interiors and linear decoration on the rim exterior (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 562), a decorative syntax common during the late 13th century BCE in the Argolid (LH IIIB2) (Vitale 2006, fig. 3:6; French and Stockhammer 2009, fig. 8:3, 20:6) and Attica (LH IIIB2–IIIC Early) (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 205:287). Similar examples were also identified at Menelaion (Catling

2009 figs. 212:8–9, 220:22, 238:251–52, 299:237–44) and Ayios Stefanos, Laconia (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 96:196), likely date to the LH IIIB. A vessel with an identical profile and monochrome decoration was found at Melos in the Cyclades, dated to the LH IIIC Early (Mountjoy 1999, fig. 373:146). At Paros, this type, referred to as a “low-stem cup,” also appears with a monochrome interior and is dated to the LH IIIC Middle by Koehl (2021, 135–36, 225–26). The shape and surface treatment (monochrome) point to the correlation of the UCL example to the LH IIIC Early to Middle pottery tradition in the Aegean and Cyprus.

Deep bowl/Stemmed bowl (Cat. no. 6; fig. 3:6)

This sherd features a slightly curved wall with a pointed, lipless rim, decorated with a horizontal band and a wavy line motif on the exterior. Its rather straight wall, rim profile, and diameter suggest it may belong to a stemmed bowl, though it could also be ascribed to the deep bowl shape, with the straighter body and rim, potentially indicating a Cretan influence. A pottery sherd also from Alalakh, stored in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge (acc. no. 1953.134 F), may come from a similar vessel, sharing an identical decorative motif (rim band and zig-zag line) and similar paint color. The Cambridge example provides additional insight into the vessel’s decoration, which includes a quirk (FM 48:5) framed by a wavy line (FM 53:18).

The same motifs appear as primary decorative themes on deep bowls from Tarsus (Mountjoy 2005, figs. 8:181–85, 11:274, 286) and Cyprus during the first half of the 12th century BCE (Level IIIA) (Mountjoy 2018, figs. 521, 525, 583, 589–90), though not in combination as seen on the Alalakh example. Wavy lines below rim bands were a common feature of deep bowls from Enkomi, dated to the LC IIIA (Level IIIA–IIIB Early). Some of the wavy lines were irregularly applied, resembling the Alalakh example (Mountjoy 2018, figs. 116:317; 176:932; 190:1089; 191:1097). However, in Enkomi, additional motifs were rarely positioned below the wavy lines. One exception from Enkomi, dated to the third quarter of the 12th century BCE (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 212:1337), shows an irregular wavy line with a loop just below it, possibly resembling a second wavy line or a quirk. A similar motif appears on a deep bowl from Hala Sultan Tekke, dated to the same period (Mountjoy 2018, fig. 360:156).

The irregularly executed horizontal wavy line, forming a zig-zag, is a common motif of the early LH IIIC period in deep bowls (Furumark 1972, 374), as is the quirk applied within a horizontal zone (Mountjoy 1986, 135–7). These motifs became prevalent during the LM IIIB and especially LM IIIC period in Crete (Popham 1965, 324, 327, fig. 5:18–23), where deep bowls with straight profiles, linear rims, and wavy/zig-zag lines are documented in Khania (Hallager and Hallager 2000, pls. 35, 52; 2003, pls. 45, 50, 87), Palaikastro Kastri (Sackett et al. 1965, figs. 8:a–d, 9:a–c), Phaistos (Borgna 1997, fig. 6:4–5; 2017, fig. 10.6.:6) and Kavousi (Day et al. 2009, fig. 26), often applied within narrow zones. Carelessly applied wavy lines, resembling the Alalakh examples, are also seen on cups (Hallager and Hallager 2003, pl. 46) and kraters (Hallager and Hallager 2003, pl. 59) dated to the LH IIIB2 period. These observations point to the dating of the vessel to the early 12th century BCE, mainly based on the choice of these motifs as the main decorative theme of the vessel’s surface, as well as the irregular wavy line, since the wavy line during the later LH IIIC (or LC III) was characterized by smoother and wider waves. However, the banded decoration below the rim and the wavy line below it, a decorative syntax that appeared in Cyprus, also points to a dating into the LC IIIA (till the third quarter 12th century BCE).

DISCUSSION

The pottery fragments examined in this study represent Aegean-style vessels. Despite the inadequacy of their stratigraphic correlation, they could be ascribed stylistically to the 12th century BCE, or even some of them to the late 13th century BCE. Their features (shape, surface treatment, and painted decoration) suggest an

indirect connection to the Aegean-style pottery tradition of the 12th century BCE, a cultural trend spanning the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean (Killebrew 1998; Mountjoy 2018). While the precise function and meaning of these vessels require contextual analysis (Stockhammer 2012, 2014, 2017), which is currently impossible in Alalakh, the data align with the broader role of Aegean-style pottery as a tableware category (Killebrew 2000, 234; Kling 2000, 282; Mountjoy 2005, 83; du Pied 2006, 169; Lehmann 2007, 521; 2017, 236; Pucci 2019b, 182), primarily composed of open-shaped vessels for consumption. Closed vessels for serving (e.g., jugs, feeding bottles), storage (e.g., hydriae, amphorae), or utilitarian purposes (e.g., cooking jugs, dippers), which have been documented in small numbers at Alalakh and other sites in the region (Koehl 2017; Montesanto 2018), were not identified.

Despite general stylistic and functional similarities, the production of Aegean-style pottery across the region was not uniform. Variations in decoration, shapes, and production quantities occurred at both intra- and inter-regional levels (du Pied 2011, 226–27; Janeway 2011, 167; Jung 2017, 25–27; Lehmann 2017, 234). This study highlights a broader variety of shapes used at Alalakh compared to the more limited repertoire found at neighboring sites. At Tell Tayinat and Chatal Höyük, consumption vessels predominantly consist of deep bowls, along with some shallow angular bowls. A similar pattern is observed at inland sites like Ain Dara and Tell Afis. In contrast, Alalakh features a wider range of Aegean-style consumption vessels, including different types of kylikes, cups, and bowls, which are absent from the aforementioned sites. On the coastal sites, kylikes appeared during the early 12th century BCE but in limited numbers, while other types of cups and bowls were relatively scarce or even absent. The scarcity of common decorative motifs, such as the wavy line band or the spirals, and the presence of new motifs and layouts, as seen in the deep bowl (cat. no. 1) or the linear decoration in cups (cat. no. 7), further underscore Alalakh's Aegean-style pottery distinctiveness within the region.

I argue that many of these differences may also reflect variations in the chronological periods of production for this pottery category. As Lehmann noted nearly two decades ago (Lehmann 2008, 137–38), the lack of archaeological excavations of Iron Age sites in Syria with continuous stratigraphy poses significant challenges for chronological studies of this period. Lehmann, like many archaeologists before and after him, considered Aegean-style pottery as a key chronological anchor for early Iron Age occupation. He proposed that Aegean-style pottery was produced during Iron Age IA and IB in the region, aligning with the LH IIIC Early to Late Aegean pottery phases and the LC IIIA and IIIB in Cypriot terms (Lehmann 2007; 2008, 145–48).

As stated in the introduction, Aegean-style pottery in the Amuq Valley is believed to be a rather late phenomenon compared to neighboring regions (Cilicia, coastal north Levant, Cyprus), confined mainly to the second half of the 12th century BCE, indicating the late start of the IA habitation in the sites of the region. At Chatal Höyük, Pucci (2013; 2019a, 179–84) proposed that the beginning of Iron Age I (Phase N) corresponds to the LH IIIC Middle/Late phase in the Aegean. A similar timeframe has been suggested for the earliest phase of Iron Age habitation at Tell Tayinat, proposing a date in the late 12th or early 11th century BCE (LH IIIC Middle2/Advanced pottery phase) (Janeway 2017, 69, 92; Welton et al. 2019, 322–23; Harrison 2021, 340).

The earlier production of Aegean-style pottery at Alalakh, corresponding to the LH IIIC Middle 1/Developed phase in Aegean terms (Koehl 2017, 276, 284–85), suggests a distinct process at this site. This interpretation is supported by the stylistic analysis of the sherds from the UCL, which revealed that several pottery vessels from Alalakh could be attributed to this period or even earlier. Some vessels, such as the shallow angular bowl (cat. no. 8), the one-handled cup (cat. no. 7), and the kylikes (cat. nos. 3–5), show connections to the late 13th century and early 12th century BCE pottery traditions of mainland Greece (LH IIIB2 and LH IIIC Early). Similar shapes and decorations were produced across the Cyclades, Cyprus, and the coastal northern and southern Levant primarily during the early 12th century BCE. The handleless bowl with linear decoration (cat. no. 2) and the bowl (cat. no. 6) also align with this timeframe based on their decorative features. The deep bowl (cat. no. 1) is likewise linked to the first half of the 12th century BCE. Its rare motif strongly suggests Cypriot or Aegean influence.

I further suggest that the production of Aegean-style pottery at Alalakh began earlier than at other sites in

the region, such as Tell Tayinat, Chatal Höyük, and Tell Afis. It likely started as early as the first quarter of the 12th century BCE, as in the coastal sites like Ras Ibn Hani, Tell Tweini, Tell Kazel, and Tell Arqa, and continued until the third quarter of the same century. This chronological difference may also explain the variation in the pottery repertoire between Alalakh and other sites in the Amuq Valley and inland Syria. During the early phase, the production of Aegean-style pottery at Alalakh was marked by a diverse range of shapes, including kylikes, various types of bowls, and cups, paralleling similar trends observed at Tell Kazel (Jung 2011). The continued production of certain shapes, such as deep bowls and shallow angular bowls, into the later 12th century BCE suggests an eclectic process of cultural appreciation and interaction at the site.

During IA I, food and drink consumption largely adhered to established local practices, even as certain “foreign” pottery vessels were selectively adopted for specific contexts or occasions (Pucci 2020a). Despite the morphological differences of some shapes (the presence of handles), such as deep bowls and shallow angular bowls, Pucci (2020b, 258) argued that their use was comparable to that of local handleless bowls. The introduction of these vessels did not significantly alter eating and drinking practices (Montesanto and Pucci 2019, 116–17; Pucci 2019a, 228, 290–91; 2019b, 184; 2020b, 257–60; Montesanto 2020c, 349–50), even though their morphological traits were incorporated into some local pottery forms (Montesanto 2018, 112–13; 2020a, 232–34; Montesanto and Pucci 2019, 113, 116–17). This selective integration likely reflects processes of cultural interaction, with certain types incorporated into existing local practices, a kind of “relational entanglement” (Stockhammer 2013, 2017). The distinct decoration of these vessels may have served as a tool for identity construction among local elites in IA I, as Pucci has suggested (see introduction; Pucci 2019b, 186).

In contrast, vessels requiring different handling (Yasur-Landau 2005), such as kylikes and cups, and primarily associated with drinking, were not reproduced and subsequently abandoned, along with the distinct consumption practices they represented. The distinct consumption practices observed at Alalakh during the early and/or middle 12th century BCE, indicated by the use of kylikes and cups, may indeed reflect the presence of a small migrant enclave. Contemporary migration studies in archaeology have moved beyond simple associations between pots and people (Anthony 1990; van Dommelen 2014), focusing instead on habitual trends across space and time (Yasur-Landau 2010). Food habits are considered strong indicators of migrant populations. While cooking traditions in the Amuq Valley remained largely uninterrupted during the transition from the LBA to IA I (Montesanto 2022), the small number of Aegean-style cooking jugs identified so far in the northern Levant and Cilicia (Goldman 1956, tbl. 389:1220–221; du Pied 2011, fig. 11:11G), including Tell Tayinat (Janeway 2017, pl. 24:1–4) and Alalakh (Koehl 2017, fig. 18.5.:2), suggests the presence of a group with distinct culinary practices. At Alalakh, these differences might also be linked to Aegean consumption habits, particularly the use of kylikes, a shape largely absent from local pottery repertoire in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 12th century BCE, especially in the northern Levant and Cilicia. In the Aegean, kylikes were integral to multiple realms of use –rituals, burials, and daily use– during the LH III period (Mountjoy 2011, 333–34). These distinct practices likely indicate the presence of a migrant group established at Alalakh or, rather, a group prone to adapting exotic (Aegean-inspired) drinking practices in the early to middle 12th century BCE. However, their presence appears to have been short-lived, as they eventually abandoned their distinct habits in favor of local traditions or relocated to another site (Koehl 2017, 285).

What remains obscure in this and previous studies focusing on this pottery category from Alalakh is the stratigraphic correlations for most of the sherds, which were likely found “loose” in surface layers across the site or scattered in various contexts. The pottery labels stored at UCL provided no information on the stratigraphic layers, where these sherds were discovered, nor their alignment with Woolley’s stratigraphic sequence, leading us to rely heavily on their stylistic traits for their dating. Future excavations at the site could yield more securely stratified examples of this pottery, offering clearer insights into its development of production and use at Alalakh. Additionally, petrographic and chemical analyses could also establish a framework for the local production of Aegean-style pottery, focusing on clay fabric, chemical and petrographic profiles –an aspect still lacking in research for this region– and providing valuable insights into the origins of the pottery and its connections to other regional sites or regions of the Eastern Mediterranean.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the critical importance of revisiting materials from older excavations, demonstrating their potential to yield transformative insights that challenge existing interpretations. It provides further evidence for the chronology of the Iron Age occupation at Alalakh, based on the still limited Aegean-style pottery found at the site. Building on Koehl's dating, this study places its initial use in the site further back to the chronological horizon from the late 13th to the first half of the 12th centuries BCE and underscores Alalakh's unique role in the regional pottery tradition. Moving beyond the purely stylistic analyses, this study adopts a practice-based approach, following Montesanto (2020c), to examine the functional integration of Aegean-style vessels into the consumption practices shaped by the social contexts of the period. Situating the production and appreciation of Aegean-style pottery within the macro-historical developments of the region reveals the pottery's significance not only in daily consumption, but also as dynamic artifacts reflecting historical events like migration and social motivations such as identity formation.

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POTTERY CATALOGUE

1. Deep Bowl (FS 284). Fig. 2:1

Inventory number: 50/7552 (ATP 294) (1 sherd).

Dimensions: height pres.: 7 cm; width pres.: 8.1cm; rim thick.: 0.55 cm; handle thick.: 1 cm; body thick.: 0.5 cm; rim diam.: 14 cm.

Fabric: fine; yellow orange (7.5 YR 8/8), few inclusions (black, white, silver).

Surface treatment: slipped; yellow-orange (7.5 YR 8/8).

Decoration: band below the handle (0.5–0.7cm), splash around its base, V pattern row in the level of the handle, band on the lower body of the interior (0.9 cm), rim painted on the tip (worn off) (FM 59).

Paint: semi-lustrous; red (10 R 4/8).

Notes: The surface is covered by salt element coating; the paint has worn off.

2. Handleless Bowl (FS 210). Fig. 4

Inventory number: 50/7556 (6 rim-body sherds; probably from the same vessel).

Dimensions: max. height pres.: 3.75 cm; max. width pres.: 3.9 cm; rim thick: 0.4 cm; body thick.: 0.45 cm; rim diam.: 20 cm.

Fabric: fine; yellow-orange (10 YR 8/8); very few inclusions (white).

Surface treatment: slipped; yellow (5 Y 8/6) interior; yellow-orange (10 YR 8/8) exterior.

Decoration: bands on both the interior and exterior of the rim (0.6–0.9 cm).

Paint: lustrous, dark reddish brown to brownish black (5 YR 3/6–3/2); varied application of paint.

3. Angular Kylix (FS 267). Fig. 2:3

Inventory number: 50/7444 (1 sherd).

Dimensions: height pres.: 3.3 cm; width pres.: 3.65 cm; rim thick.: 0.3 cm; body max thick.: 0.4 (upper body), 0.5 (carination), 0.25 (lower body) cm; rim diam.: 13.5 cm.

Fabric: fine; bright reddish brown-orange (5 YR 5–6/8); very few inclusions (white).

Surface treatment: monochrome on both the interior and exterior; traces of polishing on the surface.

Paint: semi-lustrous; reddish-bright brown (2.5 YR 4–5/8); homogeneously applied, worn off in the exterior in some spots.

4. Rounded/conical Kylix (FS 258/274). Fig. 2:4

Inventory number: 50/7444 (1 sherd).

Dimensions: height pres.: 3.55 cm; width pres.: 3.45 cm; rim thick.: 0.3 cm; body thick.: 0.25–0.4 cm; rim diam.: 15 cm.

Fabric: fine; bright reddish brown-orange (5 YR 5–6/8); very few inclusions (white).

Surface treatment: monochrome on both the interior and exterior.

Paint: semi-lustrous; red-reddish black (10 R 4/6–2/2) interior, brownish black (7.5 YR 3/2) exterior; paint not homogeneously applied, different tone in some spots.

5. Rounded/conical Kylix (FS 258/274). Fig. 2:5

Inventory number: 50/7462.

Dimensions: height pres.: 2.15 cm; width pres.: 3.8 cm; rim thick.: 0.25 cm; body thick.: 0.35–0.4 cm; rim diam.: 15 cm.

Fabric: fine; 2.5 YR 5/8 (reddish brown).

Surface treatment: slipped; yellow-orange (7.5 Y 7/8). Monochrome on both the interior and exterior.

Paint: semi-lustrous; reddish-bright brown (2.5 YR 4–5/8); paint worn off in some points.

6. Deep Bowl/Stemmed Bowl (FS 309). Fig. 3:6

Inventory number: 50/7397.10.

Dimensions: height pres.: 2.1 cm; width pres.: 3.9 cm; rim thick.: 0.45 cm; body thick.: 0.45 cm; rim diam.: 18 cm.

Fabric: fine; light yellow-orange (10 YR 8/4); very few inclusions (white).

Surface treatment: slipped; pale yellow (5 YR 8/4) interior, yellow-orange (7.5 YR 7–8/8) exterior.

Decoration: band just below the rim (0.7 cm) and a wavy line below (FM 53).

Paint: semi-lustrous paint; reddish brown (5 YR 4/8); crackling.

7. Cup (FS 215/229). Fig. 3:7

Inventory number: 50/7558.

Dimensions: height pres.: 3.5 cm; width. pres.: 4.35 cm; rim thick.: 0.35 m; handle thick.: 0.70–0.75 cm; body thick.: 0.3 cm; rim diam.: 9 cm.

Fabric: fine; bright brown (2.5 YR 5/8).

Surface treatment: slipped; bright reddish brown (5 YR 5/8). Monochrome exterior.

Decoration: Bands on the interior; below the rim (1.05 cm) and lower body (0.3–0.6 cm)

Paint: semi-lustrous; reddish brown (2.5 YR 4/8); irregularly applied; faded away in many points, worn off in the handle.

8. Shallow Angular Bowl (FS 295). Fig. 3:8

Inventory number: 50/7560 (2 sherds).

Dimensions: max height. pres.: 3.15 cm; max width pres.: 7.75 cm; rim thick.: 0.65 cm; body thick.: 0.4 cm; rim diam.: 19 cm.

Fabric: fine; bright reddish brown (5 YR 5/8); very few inclusions (white, silver).

Surface treatment: slipped; yellow-orange (10 YR 7–8/8).

Decoration: Bands; interior, on the rim (0.4 cm) and lower body-carination (0.65 cm); exterior, below the rim (0.9cm) and lower body-carination (0.70 cm).

Paint: semi-lustrous; red (10 R 4/8); paint worn off at some points.

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