



## Book Reviews

### **FROM COOKING VESSELS TO CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE AEGEAN EDITED BY J HRUBY AND D TRUSTY**

*Oxbow Books, Oxford. 2017. 173pp, 117 B&W and col figures and plates, 10 tables, ISBN 978-1-78570-632-5, pb, £38.00*

Cooking vessels have been largely invisible in excavation publications of Aegean sites. Even if the vessels themselves were kept despite being 'non-diagnostic', researchers often simply ignored them as an object category worthy of study. Added to these challenges is the fact that cooking vessels are generally low-fired and may not survive as well or may be more fragmentary. If published, they can be hard to find as they may be catalogued with 'coarse ware', 'domestic ware' or 'plain ware' as we lack a commonly accepted definition or typology. And they are often published in less detail, with fewer photos, illustrations and contextual information, than their decorated counterparts.

Nevertheless, some progress has been made – especially since the 2000s – as Trusty and Hruby highlight in the introductory chapters: fabrics have been investigated for their temper, clay mixing, provenance, mechanical characteristics and thermal shock abilities. Experimental archaeology has tried to reconstruct the original uses and cooking practices. And residue analysis has been drawn on to get a better understanding of foodstuff consumed. Still, there is much left to do!

This book's mission is thus to bring together scholars working on cooking vessels across the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean to move the debate forward. The editors have done a wonderful job and inspired high-quality contributions that are beautifully illustrated with an abundance of illustrations and colour photos.

The chapters vary in their depth, breadth and research question. While some authors take the opportunity to summarise cooking vessel assemblages from a single or multiple sites, others attempt to move the conversation beyond chronology and fabric groupings by discussing cooking practices and speculating about space requirements and gestures implied by different cooking equipment. The first set of papers looks at the social context that underpins cooking practices. Hruby, for example, hypothesizes that the appearance of griddles and souvlaki trays in LH III elite contexts heralds the introduction of roasting/grilling as a high-status practice to replace wine whose production and consumption had become too widely known. Gulizio and Shelmerdine, working within a similar overall paradigm, link the rise and decrease of souvlaki trays (and hence the practice of grilling) at Iklaina to the town's initial independence and subsequent incorporation into the state of Pylos. The role of the palaces on pottery production and cooking practices is also a theme investigated by Lis. Based on an interregional comparison of three sites from the early Mycenaean to the post-palatial period, he is able to confirm that the commonly recognized trend towards greater similarity and homogeneity in decorated and fine wares throughout the Mycenaean

period is also found among cooking pots. The disappearance of more specialized cooking equipment, such as tripod cooking pots, souvlaki trays and griddles in the post-palatial period is interpreted as a return to simpler cooking practices and a cuisine focused on quantity rather than diverse cooking styles or food types. Reporting on the Aeginetan Cooking Ware Project, Gauss and his collaborators have already made great strides understanding the changing context of ceramic production on the island. Here, limited variety in cooking pot fabrics throughout the MBA and early LBA is replaced by greater variability in the Late Helladic period. This relative lack of standardization is interpreted as reflecting the presence of many individual workshops in this time period. This interpretation is supported by strong evidence from potters' marks which also hints at a proliferation of production units. That these potters shared knowledge and practices is evident in common clay recipes and similar choice of raw materials.

Communities react differently to fashions. While some welcomed them and incorporated new shapes and technologies others persevered in their established traditions. In many cases, some degree of hybridization either in morphology or technology took place. Analysis of the pottery assemblage at Ayia Irini, Kea, by Gorogianni and colleagues shows that the locals used cooking vessels imported from different regions and also copied them locally. Whether this diversity hints at the actual presence of people from different regions is uncertain. However, one point is clear: the cooking pots required different postures, gestures and movements, and as such this would support the notion that different foodstuffs were prepared within this community. The situation on Kos was rather different as Vitale and Morrison explain. Despite several traditions intermixing and being copied locally, the unifying factor remained the continuity in the clay sources used between EBA and LBA. What does change is the forming technique which gradually develops from handmade to wheel-fashioning and eventually wheel-throwing. A switch from handmade to wheelmade cooking vessels is also visible in Cyprus where Mycenaean-type cooking pots replaced traditional Cypriot shapes in Late Cypriot IIC-III A. Interestingly, NAA analysis shows that these Mycenaean cooking vessels were also made with different clay recipes indicating both a technological and typological break. Contrasting with this is Borgna and Levi's Italian case study that shows the strong local character of Italian impasto cooking vessels which remained largely unaffected by Mycenaean fashions. Last but not least, Morrison tackles the thorny issue of methodology and explores how we can recognize remains of prehistoric kitchens which are often relatively invisible archaeologically. One of the reasons for this inconspicuousness can be found in the fact that kitchens may actually have been multi-functional spaces that accommodated, for example, cooking, eating, drinking, food processing, metalworking, weaving, and even ritual activities. Likewise, food-related activities may be evidenced in many rooms within the same building, leaving archaeologists with real methodological problems to overcome.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking contribution of this volume is the discussant chapter by Galaty who recounts the history of coarse ware studies in North America in order to act as example and indeed warning for cooking ware studies in the Aegean. Frank about the shortcomings of the Aegean state of affairs (poorly developed typologies, lack of datasets and methodologies), Galaty is also very candid in his analysis of the pitfalls of the North American situation. And it is from this vantage point that he offers recommendations for the future of Aegean cooking vessel studies, stressing the importance of a problem-oriented approach: 1. We must retain all pottery. 2. Pottery assemblages need to be analysed with

reference to a shared terminology and reproducible variables to look for meaningful patterns and allow for comparisons between assemblages. For the same reason, analyses should be less descriptive and more quantitative in nature. 3. Scholars should follow a deductive, hypothesis-testing approach. 4. Archaeologists should be more knowledgeable about how pots are made and draw more on scientific techniques to determine fabrics etc. 5. Typologies should not be simply shape or type-based, but should be sensitive to human behaviour and change (the author is suggesting a function-based typology). While sympathetic to Galaty's plea, I was cheered, however, in particular by those contributions that moved beyond data, chronologies and typologies to speculate about the broader social and cultural context of cooking – be it as signifier of class and power, symbols of cultural contact, or indicators of new dietary patterns and cooking practices. No doubt, these kinds of analyses can only be strengthened by a better understanding of the subtleties of each assemblage. However, there is no need to be too gloomy – if nothing else, this timely book has demonstrated that the future of cooking vessels studies is bright and full of possibilities.

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