Asia Anteriore Antica
Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures

Firenze University Press
www.fupress.com/asiana

Citation: Mariacarmela Montesanto (2022). Cooking in Iron Age Alalakh: Change and Continuity in Vessels' Functional Role. *Asia Anteriore Antica. Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures* 4: 71-87. doi: 10.36253/asiana-1543

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Cooking in Iron Age Alalakh: Change and Continuity in Vessels' Functional Role[1]

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Abstract. The site of Alalakh is located in the modern province of Hatay, southern Turkey. The recent discovery of Iron Age levels at the site offered the perfect opportunity to shed new light on the Iron Age I and the beginning of the Iron Age II (12th-9th century BC). This paper will focus on the analysis of cooking vessels retrieved from the Iron Age levels of the site. Studies on cooking and food preparation activities represent a long-standing *lacuna* in the archaeology of the Ancient Near East. The analysis of cooking vessels' typology and function can offer a deep understanding of social habits and cultural behaviours and add new data towards the interpretations of the Iron Age in the site and in the Northern Levant.

Keywords. Iron Age, Northern Levant, Cooking, Pottery, Archaeology.

INTRODUCTION

Now more than ever before, studies on cooking and food preparation are fashionable. Since the last 50 years food and human activities related to it are increasingly appearing in the archaeological literature (Karageorghis, Kouka 2011; Graff, Rodríguez-Alegria 2012; Graff 2018; Mee, Renard 2007; Spataro, Villing 2015; Hruby, Trusty 2017; Ivanova *et al.* 2018; Steel 2016; Lymperaki *et al.* 2016; Killebrew 1999; Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008). Food is fundamental to human survival and activities related to food are part of our daily practice. Therefore, daily-use ceramic wares (cooking wares) are unique tools to investigate social and political aspects of the past and can offer a deep understanding of social and cultural processes.

This study aims to examine the temporal changes of the Iron Age cooking vessels from the site of Alalakh, located in the modern province

[1] The paper presents part of the results of the analysis of the Iron Age pottery from Tell Atchana/Alalakh. My deepest gratitude goes to the former director of the excavation Prof. Aslıhan Yener, the director Murat Akar, and the ceramic specialists Marina Pucci, Müge Bulu, Mara T. Horowitz, Ekin Kozal and Robert Koehl.

of Hatay, southern Turkey. The starting point of this research is the examination of the Iron Age cooking vessels from two perspectives: typological and functional. The background for these changes is then discussed with special emphasis on the relation between food and social practice to understand ancient daily life and economy. Cooking vessels as containers used for the preparation of food could be a rich source of information on cooking practices. Apart from providing information on the actual food cooked in the pots through the analysis of organic remains, their shape provides a useful indicator of the techniques used for its preparation and it may be related with the kind of food cooked in them, while their size provides information over the number of people sharing the food in the relevant social context (Lis 2008; Lymperaki *et al.* 2016).

FOOD AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

Archaeologists have long been aware of the importance and significance of food and consequently they approached the subject in different ways (Dietler, Hayden 2010). In particular, recent studies focused on the understanding of foodways and cuisine as well as character and development of past cooking practices and cultural interactions. Archaeological studies have focused on the material culture of food, as well as with the substances consumed. Scientific analysis on archaeobotanical and faunal remains were conducted in order to identify the ancient diet and the physicality of food. However, to understand the materiality of food and therefore the cultural habits and social behaviours linked with food consumption, it is necessary to better analyse the cooking vessel's functional role. This article focuses on the materiality of foodways, i.e. the cooking pots, and interrogates how these vessels shaped people's lives and how changes in cooking pots' morphology may reflect changes in social practices through the Iron Age at Alalakh.

Cooking pots are one of the most easily identified groups of utilitarian pots in any ceramic assemblage and they are unique tools for investigating social and political aspects of the past as well as understanding complex social and cultural process behind historical change. The analysis of cooking vessels is strictly connected with the analysis of foodways and any change visible in cooking vessel's morphology and function might help in identifying the relationship between food and social practice as their morphology can reflect modifications in diet or recipes that can be connected to changes within the society. Archaeologists, however, find difficult to deal with social practices, as they can only be inferred by the analysis of the remains of daily life (Steel 2016). Engaging with the materiality of pottery, in particular with the cooking vessels, and considering what can be interpreted about changes in social practices allow the archaeologists to assume information on daily life and economy of ancient people. One of archaeology's contributions to the study of food and foodways is the analysis of the objects used to produce and consume food. These objects can be considered as mediators between food and social body, and they can reveal information related to their possible functions and connected practices (Stockhammer *et al.* 2018).

For instance, the typology of the base can provide information on the type of installation used for cooking: a ring or flat base means that the pot was placed next to the fire; a rounded base suggests that the cooking pot was placed on the fire pit or directly on top of the circular oven. Furthermore, the presence or absence of handles and the typology of rim may also provide information regarding the manipulability of the vessel. In addition to this, information on rim size and vessel's capacity may point to a larger or smaller quantity of people involved and therefore provide information about household size and meal preparation (Montesanto 2020b).

Therefore, changes in cooking vessel's function, recipes and ways of cooking could reflect social changes, while changes in cooking vessel's morphology and technology may detect information on ancient daily life and economy and, as a consequence, helping in interpreting ancient cuisine and cultural habits. Functional traits tend to change over time at gradual rates in the way. They are introduced, drift, adopted and spread through populations and eventually replaced. As utilitarian items, cooking vessels should therefore be analysed according to their functional characteristics to get a better idea of behavioural processes through time (Galaty 2017).

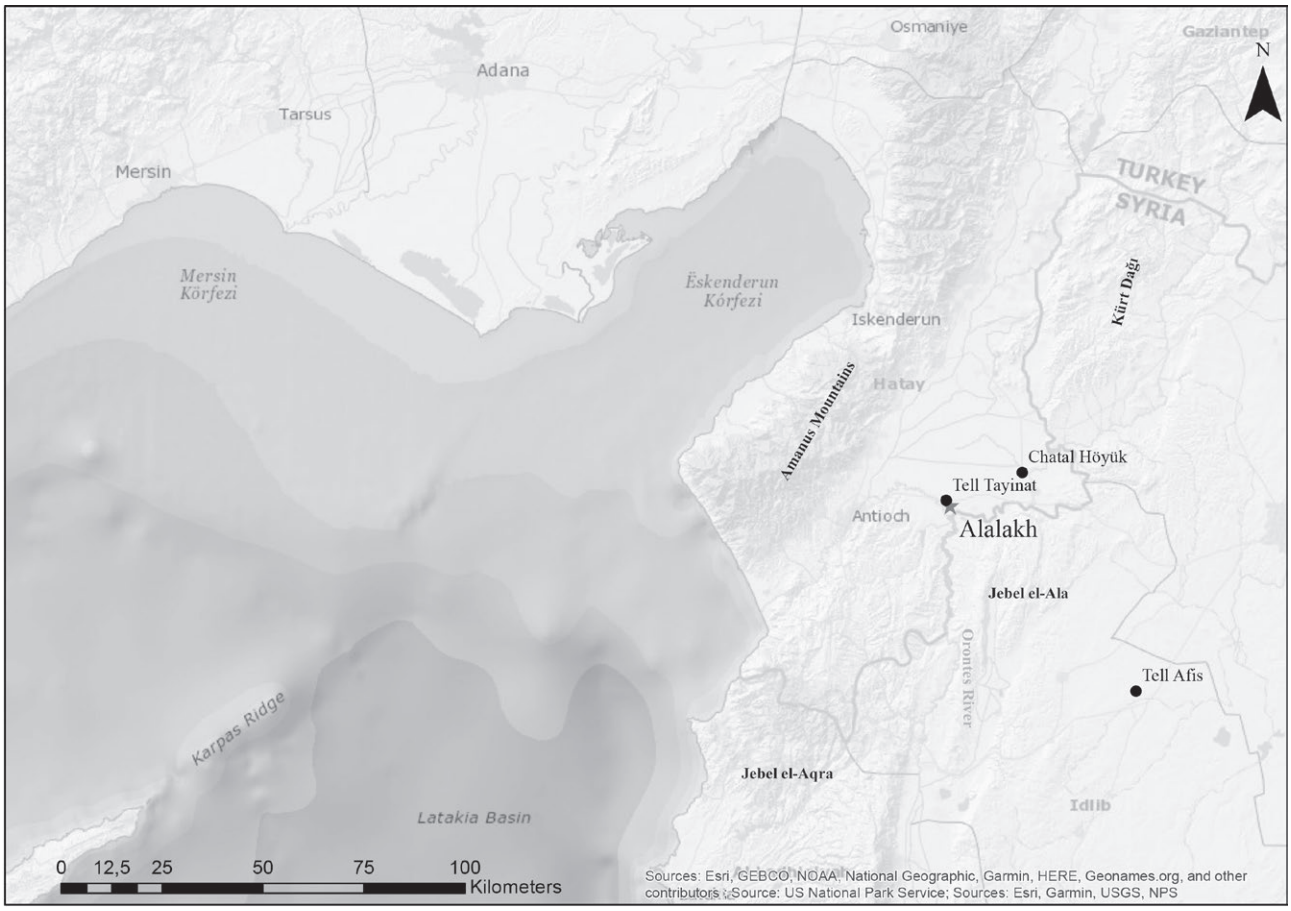

Fig. 1: Map location of Alalakh and other sites mentioned in the text.

ALALAKH IN THE IRON AGE

The site of Alalakh is located in the Amuq region, in southern Turkey (Fig. 1). The Amuq is a triangular valley, positioned in the Hatay region, enclosed by mountains (the Amanus or Nur Dağları to the north, the Kürt Dağı to the east and the Jebel el-Aqra or Kel Dağı, Jebel el-Ala and Jebel Siman to the south) and is crossed by three main rivers: the Orontes flowing north from Syria, the Afrin entering the valley from south-east, and the Kara Su from the north. The Amuq region was never the seat of powerful polities but of relatively small sized kingdoms, from Mukish to Unqi to Antioch (Yener 2005). Archaeological research focused towards the Amuq with the Oriental Institute of Chicago's surveys and excavations (Braidwood 1937; Yener 2005) and with excavations in Alalakh (Woolley 1955; Yener 2010; Yener 2013). In the Iron Age, the Amuq region was the seat of the Syro-Hittite kingdom of Unqi (Bryce 2012) whose capital city was located on the site of Tell Tayinat (Harrison 2009; Harrison, Osborne 2012). Recent research on the site of Alalakh yielded a series of well stratified Iron Age deposits. Until recently, it was thought that Alalakh occupation ended in the final stages of the Late Bronze Age (13th century BC), however, new evidence suggests a prolonged period of occupation until the 9th century BC. In particular, excavations in square 42.10 (Fig. 2) revealed a total of three occupational phases (local phases 1-3) dated to the Iron Age I-beginning of the Iron Age II (mid-12th century BC-9th century BC). The square is located in Area 1, to the south-east of the so-called "temple area" first excavated by Woolley (Woolley 1955: 89-90; Montesanto, Pucci 2019; Yener *et al.* 2020, Fig. 2).

The occupational phase dated to the Iron Age begins with phase 3 (Fig. 3). This phase has been divided into two sub-phases (a and b) because of the identification of two floors and of the disappearance and appearance of

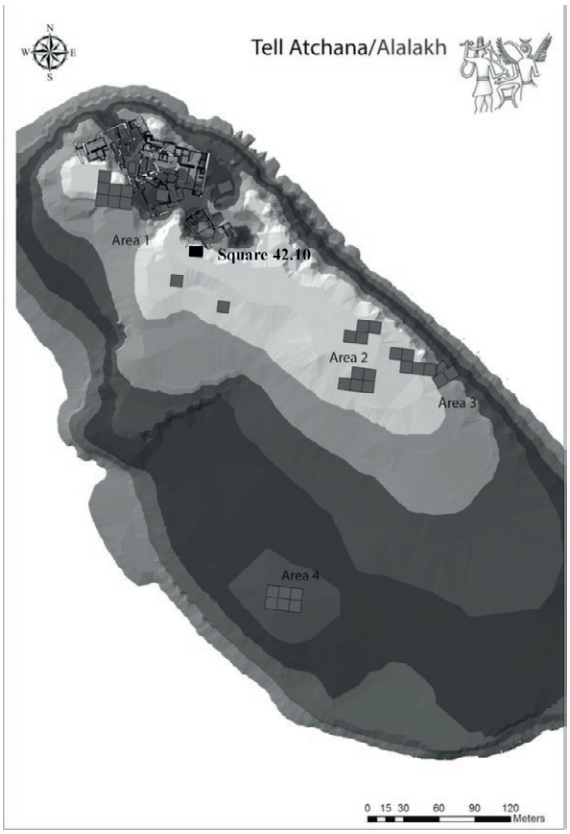

Fig. 2: Location of square 42.10.

new features while the general plan did not change. The deposition between the floors is about 15 cm. Phase 3b is placed directly on top of phase 4a, dated to the Late Bronze Age II (Yener *et al*. 2014; Yener 2017; Montesanto, Pucci 2019; Yener *et al*. 2020; Montesanto 2020a) and is the first occupational phase to be recorded after the 14th or 13th century BC and it can be dated to the mid-12th century BC because of the presence, *in situ*, of shapes such as the pilgrim flask, the truncated cup and the fusiform jar generally dated to the 14th and 13th centuries BC (Horowitz 2015; 2020), and because of the recovery of a painted sherd inspired by the Aegean LH IIIC Middle Developed style (Koehl 2017: Fig 18.1, 7). This phase 3b consists of an open area with the upper face of the threshold stone of phase 4 reused on a clay floor (Locus 24). Here a pyrotechnical installation (Locus 23) has been identified consisting of an elliptic pit with a stone at the bottom and located in the south-western part of the square. This installation can be interpreted as a circular oven. The surface near this installation is irregular and a shallow pit with partially disarticulated bones of a small sized bovid and a dog was identified. The floor yielded some *in situ* objects such as pottery, a grinding stone, hand-stones, beads, earrings, pendant, pins, a metal beer strainer, a ceramic hob, a tripod base of a stone vessel with traces of burnings, and a pivot stone, suggesting it was an area dedicated to daily life or domestic activities such as the processing and the preparation of food.

The main architectural feature identified in phase 3a is a curvilinear structure (Locus 18) lying on the floor (Locus 16) that runs in a north-south direction and divides the area in two. The structure consists of mud bricks fragments and stones kept together by a mixture of fragments of pottery and bones put together. The structure is preserved for a height of about 30 cm considering the absence of mortar and the building material, it has a thickness that varies from 20 to 40 cm. The structure could be possibly interpreted as an installation separating the square into two areas rather than a proper wall. The ceramic material in the fill above the floor is very abundant and only few *in situ* objects were found such as a burnt cookpot (Fig. 6.n), beads, needles, rings, grinding stones,

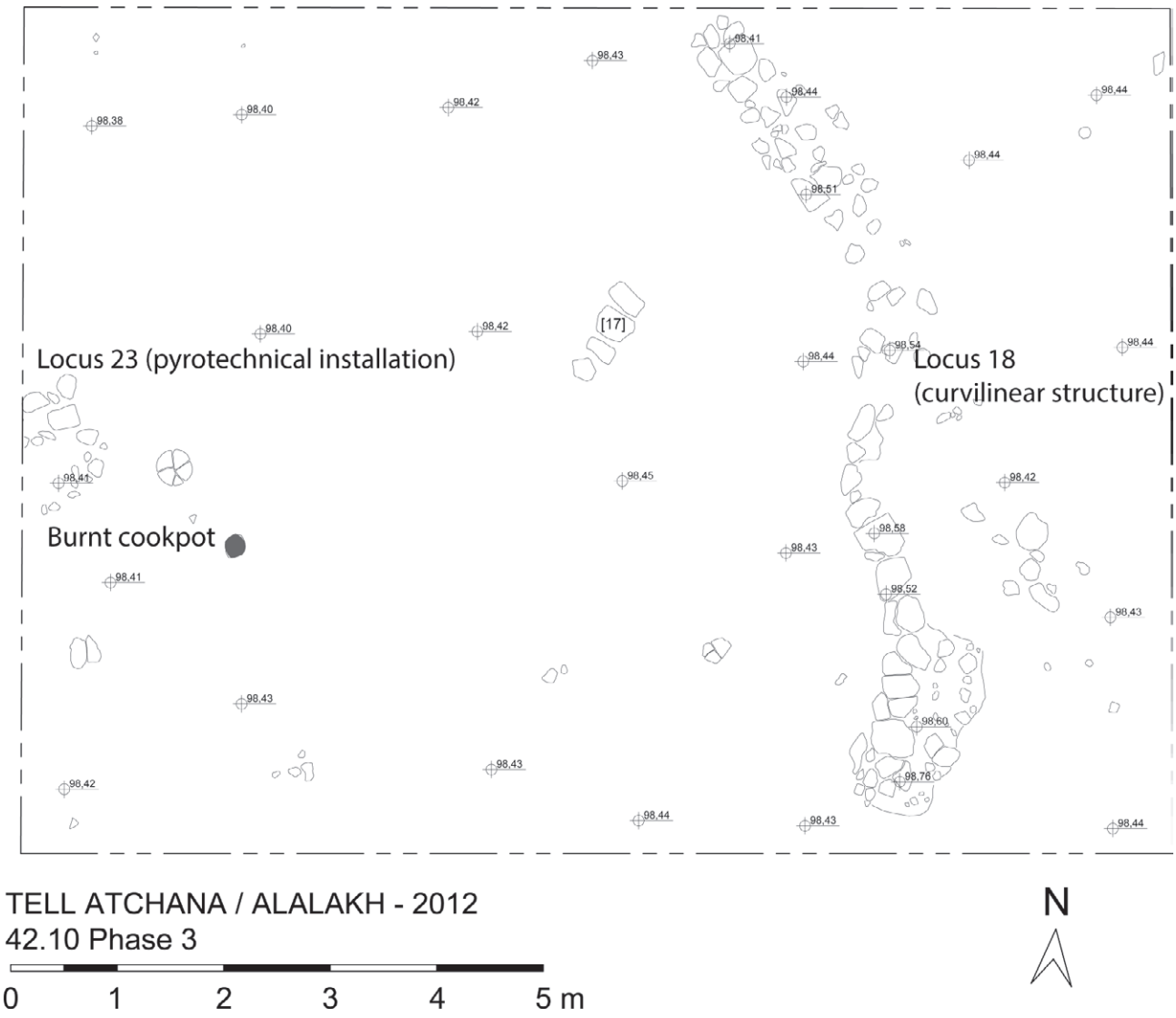

Fig. 3: Plan of square 42.10 Phase 3. Drawing courtesy of the Alalakh excavations project.

fragment of basins, fragments of an ivory plaque, a palette, miniature wheels and a lid. Pottery retrieved from Phase 3 includes a total of 722 identified rim sherds of which 44 (6.09%) are cooking pots. The pottery assemblage consists of a majority of eating and drinking shapes (namely plates and bowls), few craters and very few storage vessels. Objects retrieved from this phase includes personal items such as beads, pendants and rings, six hand-stones, one grinding slab and four ceramic basins.

Phase 2 can be securely dated to the Iron Age I because it is stratigraphically located on top of phase 3a. Furthermore, the presence of two floors and of few installations, without any change in the general plan, allows the distinction of phase 2 into two sub-phases (a and b, see Fig. 4). The deposit between the two floors is of about 20 cm and it represents the continuous use of the open area. A small patch of stones (Locus 15) has been retrieved in the western part of the area and the remains of the curvilinear feature are still visible on the surface of this phase. A few objects have been retrieved, mainly beads and roundels.

Phase 2a is again an open area with almost no architecture. The floor belonging to this area is more regular if compared to the previous one. On top of the older curvilinear structure (Locus 18) a row of stones indicates

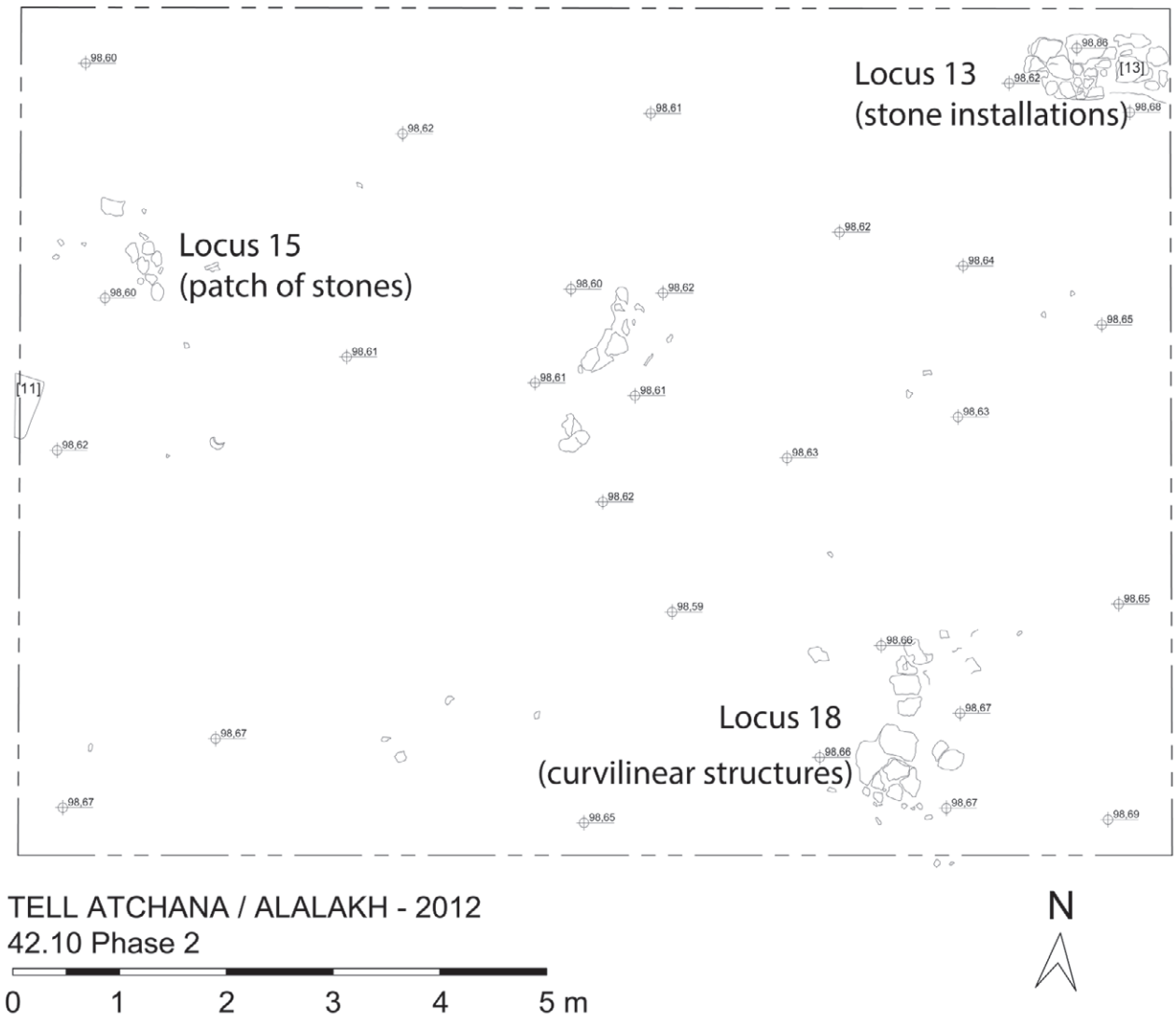

Fig. 4: Plan of square 42.10 Phase 2. Drawing courtesy of the Alalakh excavations project.

that the area was still separated into two parts (Locus 15), while a stone installation (Locus 13), which was probably built as a limited floor for specific activities, was built on the north-eastern part of the square. Few objects have been retrieved from this phase: a fragment of basin, a hand-stone, a mortar and two stone maces. Pottery retrieved from Phase 2 includes a total of 758 identified rim sherds of which 87 (11,4%) are cooking pots. The pottery assemblage consists of a majority of shapes related to eating and drinking functions such as plates, bowls, craters, small and medium-sized jars, and very few storage vessels. Objects retrieved from this phase includes personal items such as beads, pendants, rings, a mortar, one hand-stone and a ceramic basin.

Phase 1 was probably an open area consisting of a floor and few installations related to it (see Fig. 5). Loci 8 and 10 are rounded stone structures, where the central stone is flat and deeper suggesting the use of it as support for a vessel, possibly they were potsherds hearths. A large storage jar was found smashed into pieces not far from one of the installations (Locus 10). Several other flat stones (Loci 6, 7 and 9) were found located in the western part of the area and next to grinding stones, grinders and grinding slabs as well as quern-stones, basins, hand-stones, mortars and an axe. This is the last phase of occupation of the square and possibly representing the last

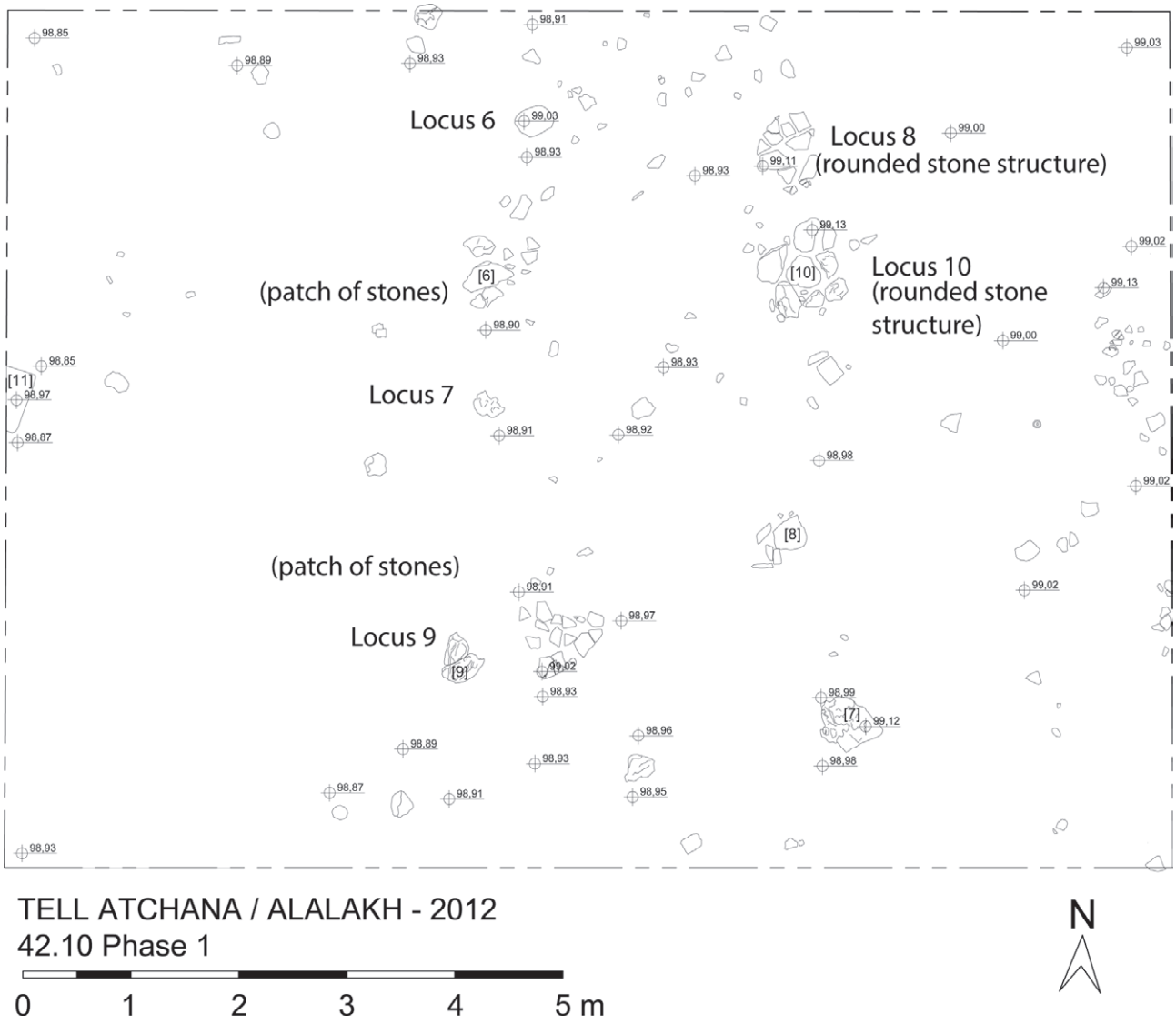

Fig. 5: Plan of square 42.10 Phase 1. Drawing courtesy of the Alalakh excavations project.

phase of occupation of the entire site as it lays immediately underneath the topsoil. This phase of occupation is dated to the 9th century BC because of the finding of pottery shapes that can be compared to the assemblages dated to the Iron Age II of sites such as Tell Afis (Mazzoni 2014: fig. 20.14), Tell Mastuma (Egami *et al.* 1988-1989: fig. 11.6) and Tell Tayinat (Osborne 2011: pl. 4.1). Pottery retrieved from Phase 1 includes a total of 393 identified rim sherds of which 42 (10,68%) are cooking pots. The pottery assemblage consists of a majority of plates, bowls, few craters, jars and very few storage vessels. Objects retrieved from this phase includes personal items such as beads, pendants and rings, seven hand-stones, four grinding slabs, three querns, one mortar and a basin.

The finding of objects such as grinding slabs, querns, hand-stones, mortars and basins, related to the processing of foodstuff and the presence of vessels linked to the processing (cooking pots), and eating (plates and bowls) of food support the idea that the square was an area linked with food preparation and consumption (Montesanto, Pucci 2019; Pucci 2020; Montesanto 2020a).

COOKING POTS TYPOLOGY

The Iron Age cooking pot from Alalakh is a well-known type within the pottery assemblage of nearby sites. It is similar to other cooking pots found in other sites of the Amuq region such as Tell Tayinat (Ünlü 2017: Fig. 7;

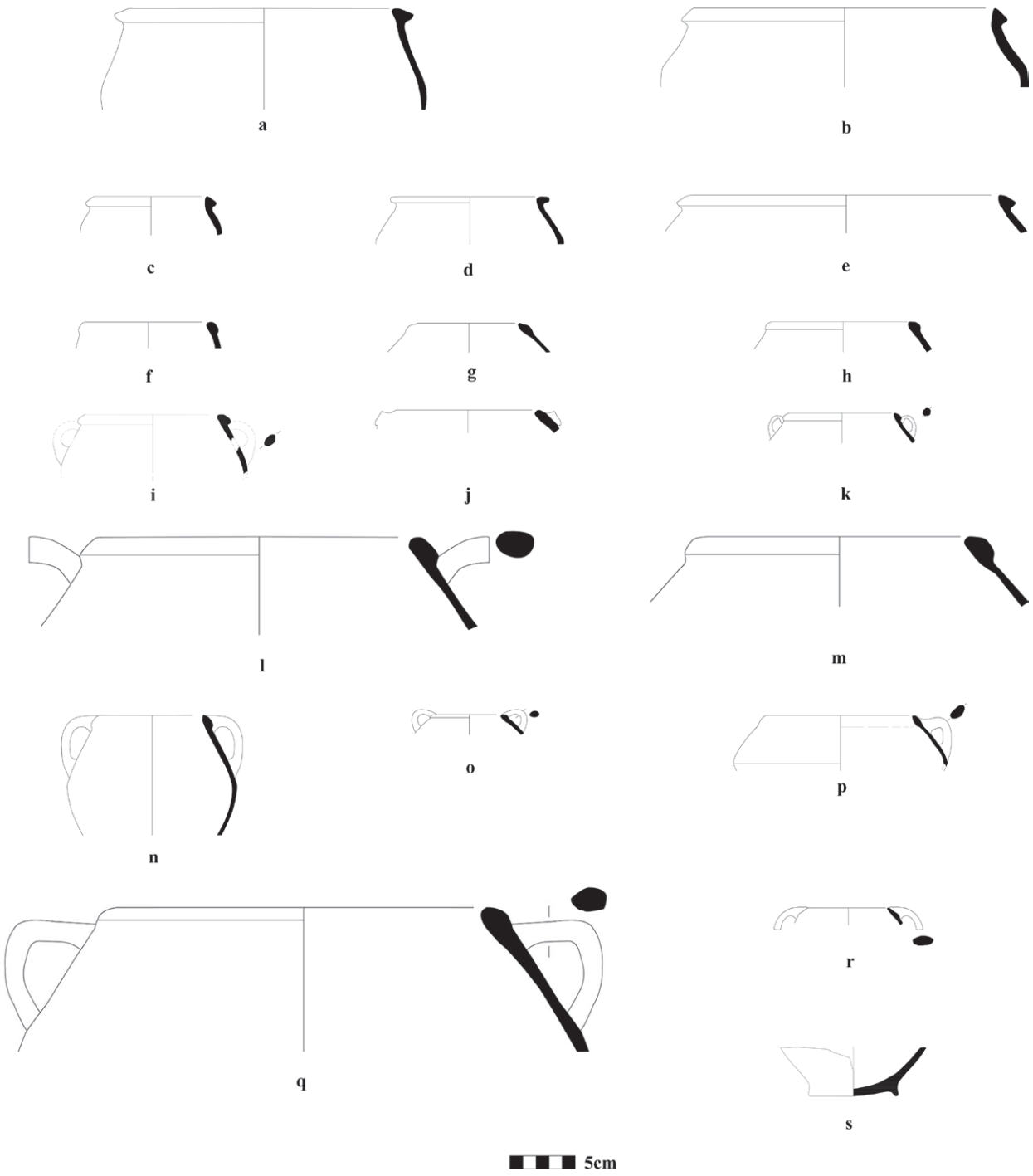

Fig. 6: Cooking pots from square 42.10. a-e) Broad cooking pot; f-r) Hole-mouthed cooking pot; s) ring base. Drawings courtesy of the Alalakh excavations project.

Fig. 7: Hole-mouthed cooking pot.

Fig. 8: Shell ware fabric.

Welton *et al.* 2019: Fig. 18) and Chatal Höyük (Pucci 2013: fig. 2.17, 15; Pucci 2019a fig. 50) and of Northern Syria (Venturi 2007: 264-266; Venturi 2010: figs 9.7-12, 12.1-5; 2020: 65, 73).

Iron Age cooking pots at Alalakh are produced in what is called "shell ware" (Fig. 8). Shell ware is a highly plastic material with hardly any grit or sand that gives to the pot a characteristic peachy-brownish colour. The fabric is heavily tempered with shells. Experimental work done in Alalakh (Morrison, Horowitz 2016) demonstrates that a huge amount of shell is needed in order to create the shell ware fabric, possibly the same amount in weight as of the clay used. The adding of a large amount of tempered material increases the thermal shock resistance (Müller *et al.* 2014: 269). The primary component of shell is calcium carbonate and the inclusion of calcite elements to clay pastes reduces the shrinkage during drying and increases thermal shock resistance during firing and use (Rice 1987: 97-98; Rye 1976). The shell in the archaeological samples analysed shows signs of mechanical breakage, possibly caused by using grinding tools (Horowitz and Çakirlar 2017). Probably, this special temper was added to reduce the effects of thermal stress on the cooking pot as a result of repeating heating and cooling. Experimental work also shows that while the shells were not heated to a high temperature prior to being fired, they might have been boiled, suggesting the cooking of mussels (Morrison, Horowitz 2016: 186). In particular, shell ware fabric (Figs 7-8) at Alalakh generally has a brown core (Munsell colour chart 7.5YR 5/2-4/4) and a black surface or peach-brown (Munsell colour chart 7.5YR 5/6-4/6; 7.5YR 5/2-4/4).

Two types of cooking pots have been recorded in the Iron Age pottery assemblage: the broad cooking pot and the hole-mouthed cooking pot. The broad cooking pot (Montesanto, Pucci 2019a: 115; Figs 6a-e) represents the 4 % of the whole assemblage and it is more popular in the first levels of the Iron Age (Iron Age I; 55-77%[2]; phases 3b and 3a), while they become less popular in later levels (48-21%; phases 2b-1). The broad cooking pot is generally considered the typical Late Bronze Age cooking pot (Horowitz 2020: 217, fig. 7.11), however, it continues to be used also during the Iron Age. Broad cooking pot has a wide opening, a kind of neck and a biconical body. The rim (flanged, rolled out, and rail) generally ranges from *c.* 25 cm to 35 cm in diameter. Its volume is ranging from *c.* 10 to 28 l. Bases are always rounded, sometimes a gentle carination on the shoulder creates a biconical profile (Montesanto, Pucci 2019: 115).

The hole-mouthed cooking pot (Montesanto and Pucci 2019: 115; Figs 6f-r) has a rounded body with narrow opening, rolled out rim with a diameter ranging from 10 cm to 25 cm. It has a narrower opening when compared to the broad cooking pot, a biconical body and a low carination (Montesanto, Pucci 2019: 115; Figs 6f-r). Furthermore, the hole-mouthed cooking pot often has strap or, in later levels, ear-like handles. It usually has a flat base, but ring bases (Fig. 6s) are also attested. They represent the 5% of the whole assemblage. They are less popular in the first levels of the Iron Age (45-23%; phases 3b-a) but they become quite popular in the later phases (Iron Age I-II; 52-79%; phases 2b-1). The rim (folded over) is ranging between 12-25 cm and its volume is of *c.* 6-8 l. The hole-

[2] Percentages are given in reference to all the cooking pots in the phase.

mouthed cooking pot is considered almost a standard during the Iron Age (Birney 2008) and at Alalakh is present on all the Iron Age phases. This cooking pot starts to appear during the Late Bronze Age II, although in very small quantities.

The hole-mouthed cooking pots from Iron Age Tell Atchana are shell-tempered. The use of crushed shell as temper for cooking pots has a long tradition in the Amuq valley, starting from the Late Bronze Age (Morrison and Horowitz 2016; Horowitz 2020). While shell tempered cooking pots are attested in Iron Age I levels from Tell Tayinat (Welton *et al.* 2019: 311) and Chatal Höyük (Pucci 2019a: 68), cooking pots dated to later phases of the Iron Age are similar in shape but made with a mineral-tempered fabric (Pucci 2019a: 204-206). However, such change is not visible in the cooking pots from Tell Atchana. The tempers are used independently from the shape of the vessels, since shell and mineral tempers in Tell Tayinat and Chatal Höyük were applied to different cooking pot types.

According to several studies (Killebrew 1999; Sassaman 1995) the shell temper is more suitable for indirect heating, thus suggesting that the cooking pots were either suspended over the fire or placed next to it. Most probably, the broad cooking pot, with the rounded base, was suspended over the fire by the use of a rope or of andirons or hobs to support it. The flanged and rolled out rim might suggest the use of a rope to suspend the pot or to remove it from the fire. The hole-mouthed cooking pot, with the flat or ring base, was most probably placed next to the fire and the handle would have permitted an easy removal.

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF COOKING POTS

Cooking pots are included in the broader food processing class. Food processing is the transformation of raw materials into food, or of food items into other forms for consumption. This processing involves non-ceramic utensils such as grinding stones, mortars, knives and other objects that were used to process raw materials. However, since the main focus of this paper is on pottery, only pottery vessels will be considered. The approaches used here takes inspiration from behavioural archaeology (Schiffer 2010; Montesanto 2020b) which understands that objects are shaped by the interactions between humans and things, the affordances theory (Gibson 1979) which define the specific ways an object can be used and the entanglement theory (Hodder 2012) which adds the notion that the human-thing relationship is constraining and it teaches to explore the networks of dependencies that drive the human condition. Since the things we use are linked and shaped by the world around people and by the way people uses them, changes visible in their function or in the way vessels were used might reflect changes in social and cultural habits and therefore can be used to reconstruct an historical narrative for a specific period.

In order to understand any change in the way cooking pots were used, i.e. vessel's function, it is necessary to look at aspects in their technology and morphology. i.e. vessel's attributes, that might hint the way they were used. The specific attributes of cooking pots allow an involvement in the transformation of food into a consumable product. These attributes include design parameters that define the affordance of a vessel for a specific task (Montesanto 2020b). The main attribute related to cooking pots is technology defined as the use of different types of clay minerals that are more or less naturally resistant to thermal shock ware type. Other attributes that make the cooking pot suited for food processing are its size and shape, i.e. its morphology. Shapes fitted to process food need to be suitable to be put close to a heating source, they need to have a body shape with no sharp carinations in order to minimise different thermal gradients from one side of the vessel to the other. Additionally, they may have a shape designed for the production of a particular type of food or intended for a particular use, such as trays often used to keep the food heated.

Functional analysis of pottery not only allows to understand the technological choices made by the potters but also how these choices shaped and were shaped by the social community. For instance, this type of analysis allows to understand what type of food was cooked and how it was cooked.

The cooking pot typology recovered from the Iron Age levels of Alalakh, compared with similar items recovered from contemporary sites located in the Amuq Valley and Northern Syria (Welton *et al.* 2019: 311; fig. 18;

Pucci 2019a: 202-206; fig. 50; Venturi 2020: 65, 73; pls. 36.3, 37.4-5; 44.7-10, 55) suggests the use of two different style of cooking: cooking pots with wide mouths, such as the broad cooking pots, enable an easy access to the content and a fast evaporation and are usually meant to cook dishes that are meant to thicken liquids and that require frequent stirring (Villing, Spataro 2015: 6). The broad cooking pots, with their wide opening, were used suspended over the fire and were used mainly for rapid, high-temperature cooking (boiling) and therefore could have been used to cook soups and similar dishes.

In contrast, cooking pots with a narrow opening, such as the hole-mouthed cooking pots, reduce the relative surface area so that the liquid evaporates more slowly and it is practical to cook food with high liquid contents, such as stew, porridges, broth and legumes. Hole-mouthed cooking pots, with their narrow opening, were placed next to the fire and they were meant for slow, low-heat cooking (simmering) of liquid dishes (Killebrew 1999: 107). Therefore, the adoption of a narrower cooking pot and the gradual reduction of cooking vessels with a rounded base might be related to a change in the types of foods cooked, changing from a predominantly consumption of food to a preference of more concentrated stews. The use of two different styles of cooking is also supported by the finding of two types of cooking installations at Iron Age Alalakh: the pyrotechnical installation, possibly a circular oven (Locus 23; Fig. 3) found in phase 3 that might have been used in connection to the broad cooking pot and the rounded stone structures (Loci 8 and 10; Fig. 5) from phase 1 that may be interpreted as potsherd hearths used in connection with the hole-mouthed cooking pot.

The functional analysis of cooking pots can also be used to understand social daily life and practices of ancient societies. The differences in size and volume may show a different strategy used when cooking a meal for a bigger or a smaller household. The size of cooking vessels is related to the quantity of food and thus to the number of people for whom the food is prepared. Therefore, the capacity of the cooking pot might be related to the contexts in which the consumption of food took place. Large cooking vessels imply the consumption of a large quantity of food and point to a greater number of people involved, while smaller cooking vessels might refer to a house's ordinary cooking pot assemblage and therefore they might reflect a more domestic scale of food preparation and consumption. For this study, a reconstruction of broad cooking pots and hole-mouthed cooking pots has been used to calculate the volume. The reconstruction is based on the archaeological samples retrieved from Alalakh and from complete, contemporary cooking pots from Tell Tayinat and Chatal Höyük (Welton *et al.* 2019: 311; Pucci 2019a: 202-206).

It is possible that larger sized cooking pots, as the majority of the broad cooking pots, were used to cook more than one meal at once or a meal for a higher number of people in comparison to the medium sized cooking pot, as the majority of the hole-mouthed cooking pots, that could have been used for a smaller number of people or for one or two meals for a small household. According to some studies (Nelson 1981; Whitelaw 2014: 253), a cooking pot with a volume of *c.* 8 l, such as the hole-mouthed cooking pot, could provide two or three meals for a household of 3-5 people. In comparison, the broad cooking pot could potentially contain two to three times as much of food. Therefore, the increase of the hole-mouthed cooking pot in Iron Age levels and the gradual decrease of the use of the broad cooking pot may be linked with a change in cooking habits with regard to what was cooked inside these vessels, and possibly it may suggest a reduction in size in the households. This hypothesis can be confirmed by evidence coming from the nearby site of Chatal Höyük (Pucci 2019a: 289-293; Pucci 2019b: 185-187). Here, the gradual decrease of the broad cooking pot and the increase in the use of the hole-mouthed cooking pot might be related to the reduction in size of the settlement's structures, which became smaller and more agglutinated during the Iron Age I and II (Pucci 2019a: 290).

It seems that the hole-mouthed cooking pot does not replace the broad cooking pot as they appear together from the first layers of the Iron Age up to the end of the Iron Age occupation on the site. However, it can be noted the preference for a different way of cooking, probably linked with the adoption of different dishes such as stews. This preference is represented by the increase of the hole-mouthed cooking pot during phase 2.

The beginning of the Iron Age at Alalakh and in the Amuq Valley witnessed a process of re-urbanization after a period of ruralisation. This process is mirrored in the material culture and in particular in the cooking pots. The preference of the hole-mouthed cooking pot over the broad cooking pot suggests a change in cooking habits, but more importantly a smaller household dimension. The use of two types of cooking pot proposes a use of two dif-

ferent cooking installations. Broad cooking pots, with rounded or convex bases, needed a support to be placed on the fire and several studies (Killebrew, 1999; Ben-Shlomo *et al*. 2008; Yasur-Landau 2010) suggest that they were placed inside circular ovens; hole-mouthed cooking pots, with flat or ring bases, could have been placed directly on the surface and next to the fire and therefore they were suitable to be placed on open hearths (Yasur-Landau 2010). Cooking vessels and cuisine are generally very conservative and any change visible in cooking pots and cooking habits rarely happens for mere functional reasons but rather for social and cultural factors. Therefore, besides changes in cooking practices, changes in cooking vessels from Iron Age Alalakh might also be the result of change in local economy.

For instance, the adoption of the hole-mouthed cooking pot may refer to a different style of cooking. Furthermore, the different size and morphology refers to different quantities of food that needed to be prepared and to different types of food.

The use of the hole-mouthed cooking pot is visible not only in Tell Atchana, but also in Chatal Höyük (Pucci 2019a), Tell Afis (Venturi 2020) and Ain Dara (Stone, Zimansky 1999). In these sites, the hole-mouthed cooking pot is used alongside the broad cooking pot. Although the hole-mouthed cooking pot appears in many sites of the Amuq valley and inner Syria around the beginning of the Iron Age (Birney 2008; Venturi 2020; Pucci 2019), the hole-mouthed cooking pot starts to appear at Alalakh at the end of the Late Bronze Age II (Montesanto 2020a; Horowitz 2020).

Yasur-Landau defines the change in cooking practices and the differentiation of foodways as markers for the "deep change" (2010: 13). While change visible in other spheres may be influenced by fashion or style, any change in cooking, an activity generally conducted inside the house, may be a marker of acculturation or some degree of migration (Yasur-Landau 2010: 227). From this point of view, the adoption of the hole-mouthed cooking pot in the Amuq valley and inner Syria during the Iron Age I can be considered as an indication of migration. However, recent analysis of the Chatal Höyük pottery material demonstrated that while the pottery assemblage shows a strong infiltration of foreign elements in the drinking and eating sets, these new shapes did not influence the way of eating and drinking, but only the appearance of the tableware (Pucci 2019b: 184).

Along this line, evidence from Tell Atchana shows that the change in cooking practice was happening well before the beginning of the Iron Age. Therefore, the increasing use of a different type of cooking pot does not need to be linked to migration, but it might mirror the introduction of a different practice, which did not necessarily substitute completely the local repertoire and tradition but coexisted with the previous tradition and therefore maintaining two different types of cooking behaviours.

The absence of a visible change in cooking habits at the beginning of the Iron Age confirms this hypothesis: the local broad cooking pot in shell temper persists from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age, alongside the hole-mouthed cooking pot and they clearly belong to a local tradition visible in other sites of the Amuq valley.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Studying cooking activities from the past can provide a window in many aspects of ancient societies, such as social change, cultural practices and social identity. Cooking and eating are essential elements of social interaction and therefore a better understanding of cooking activities and of cooking vessels provides unique insights in social habits and behaviours. As a consequence, change and/or continuity in cooking vessels, cooking installations and recipes may give an insight in changes in social habits, cultural behaviours and everyday life. The analysis of the cooking pots coming from the Iron Age levels of Alalakh offered a unique opportunity to understand if any change affected people living on the site at the beginning of the Iron Age and through the Iron Age I and the beginning of the Iron Age II.

As it was pointed out by this study, the increased use of the hole-mouthed cooking pot might be linked with the preference of different dishes such as stews, of different cooking installations and it might also suggest a change in the site's and household's economy during the first centuries of the Iron Age I and the beginning of the Iron

Age II. According to the shapes and sizes of the Iron Age cooking pots from Alalakh, there was a certain variety of dishes that comprised an ordinary meal in that period. Meals were prepared for both a large and a limited number of people. The presence of cooking pots of larger capacities indicates the consumption of food by a larger group of people who shared the everyday meals, or it may be related to their use in special events that involved a larger number of people. The use of smaller cooking pots indicates that meals were consumed by a rather limited number of people, suggesting a more domestic scale for their use.

The study of cooking pots' shape also shows morphological differentiation which points to different culinary practices. It appears that during the first part of the Iron Age I there was a preference for ceramic vessels used for boiling and placed on circular ovens like the one recovered from phase 3b, while at the beginning of Iron Age II cooking vessels used for stewing were more popular and placed on an open fire like the potsherd hearth from phase 1.

The Iron Age I witnessed a change in the organisation of the Near Eastern states, in the material culture, in the distribution of the settlements and in the social and cultural ideology of the Near East. This period has been considered a period of transformation, not only in the political and economic systems, but also in the material culture (Weeden 2013; Venturi 2010; Pucci 2019b; Osborne 2020). The archaeological evidence dated to the Iron Age in the Amuq Valley is limited to the sites of Alalakh, Tell Tayinat and Chatal Höyük. The archaeological evidence from Chatal Höyük shows a process of re-urbanisation of the village during the mid-12th century BC (Pucci 2019a) which continued until the 9th century BC. A similar situation is visible at Alalakh. Here the site underwent a significant reduction in size is visible from the mid-12th century to the 10th century BC. Many scholars believe that the period of change and instability represented by the early Iron Age is due to the migration of Aegean people (Yasur-Laundau 2010; Janeway 2017). The presence of Aegean migrants in the region is witnessed by the local production of typical Mycenaean shapes recovered at Alalakh, Tell Tayinat and Chatal Höyük (Koehl 2017; Janeway 2017; Pucci 2019b). However, the Mycenaean shapes introduced in the local assemblages of the Amuq valley did not influence the traditional way of eating and drinking, but they affected the appearance of the wares, contrary to what can be assumed from the evidence coming from other regions in the same time frame. For instance, the appearing of Aegean cooking practices in Cyprus is reflected by the introduction of Aegean cooking jugs alongside local cooking pots (Bunimowitz, Yasur-Landau 2002; Yasur-Landau 2010: 141). Evidence from the northern Phoenician area suggests that migrants originated from Cyprus or Syria manifested their identity in a minor way, creating special drinking vessels fit for their feasting (Gilboa 2006-2007; Yasur Landau 2010: 171). At the same time, the recovery of Aegean cooking jugs alongside local cooking pots in Philistia indicates that Aegean and local behavioural patterns were conducted side by side from the beginning of the appearance of Aegean material culture (Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008; Yasur-Landau 2010: 140).

Sometimes, any change in the way of cooking is linked with the arrival of a new population (Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008) and with the creation of new tastes. However, the creation of new tastes is never socially neutral, but it is always entangled with affiliations to different social groups (Bourdieu 1984). It is unclear if the creation of new tastes and, therefore, the increased use of a different cooking pot, is related to the introduction of new foodstuff such as stews or whether old ingredients were processed in a new way. However, it seems that at Alalakh the newcomers, or the new social group, are not visible in the material culture or they merged with the local community. The evidence coming from the analysis of the Iron Age cooking vessels from Alalakh suggests a new model for the interpretation of the Early Iron Age in the Northern Levant: small groups of migrants arrived in a context that had experienced a strong economic decay and disruption before their arrival. These migrants were too few to build their own enclave and did not encounter any resistance from the local communities. Therefore, their impact upon these communities was neither culturally nor economically dominant. However, the migrants and the local communities were not passive, they interacted and contributed to the creation of a new pottery assemblage and material culture (Lis 2018; Pucci 2019b). In particular, it seems that in the Northern Levant locally produced Aegean shapes were introduced as part of the eating and drinking assemblage (Koehl 2017) while cooking vessels were mainly of local origin. An exception is represented by the site of Tell Tayinat, where a small number of Aegean-style cooking jugs have been found (Welton *et al.* 2019: 311). The presence of Aegean-style cooking jugs in Tayinat and their absence from the assemblages retrieved from Alalakh and Chatal Höyük well fits with the recon-

struction of Tayinat as the initial seat of the migrant group (Hawkins 2009; Harrison 2009; Welton *et al*. 2019), thus suggesting that the impact this group might have had was not strong enough in the site of Alalakh to deeply change the material record within the Iron Age. Indeed, the evidence here contributes to the interpretation of the Iron Age in the Amuq Valley and confirms the complexity of this period, thus highlighting the inadvisability of the mega-narratives that mask the diversity of the local sequences. The analysis of Iron Age cooking vessels from Alalakh confirms the idea that, in the material culture record, continuity and change coexist and that the Iron Age cultural landscape displays both continuity and discontinuity in the material culture.

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