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A Functional and Morphological Analysis of the Iron Age Pottery Assemblage from Taşlı Geçit Höyük, Turkey

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Abstract

The 2009 and 2010 excavation seasons, conducted by the joint Turco-Italian expedition at Taşlı Geçit Höyük (Turkey), have brought to light a rural Iron Age III settlement. The architectural features uncovered, allow better understanding of the urban development and use of space in the town during the early 7th century BC. In addition, the investigations yielded a vast array of materials suggesting that a wide range of activities took place there. The pottery assemblage revealed several connections throughout Northern Syria and Southern Anatolia.

In this article I first propose a preliminary methodological framework for pottery analysis focused on the functional and morphological aspects of the pottery assemblage. This is pursued through several steps, which finally produce vessel typologies. The second aim is that of providing a chronological attribution for pottery types in the light of their connections with Northern Syria and Southern Anatolia during this period.

Keywords

Pottery analysis, methodology, function, morphology, Iron Age, Turkey, regional connections

Introduction

The site of Taşlı Geçit Höyük is situated in the central part of the İslahiye valley, in a strategic location closed-in by the Anatolian mountains to the north, the Levantine coast to the south-west and the Inner Syrian plain to the south. Here, between 2009 and 2010, a joint Turco-Italian expedition directed by Prof. Nicolò Marchetti of the University of Bologna, undertook a salvage excavation project.¹ The aims were to better understand the urban development of the site during the 2nd and 1st millennia BC as well as to preserve the endangered archaeological heritage.

Investigation of the site revealed an occupation extending from the Early Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Nicolò Marchetti (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna) for allowing me to undertake this study on the Iron Age III materials and for his guidance and support during my research. Thanks are also due to Prof. Maurizio Cattani (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna) for his suggestions on the methodological framework and to Dr. Sebastiano Soldi (Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici of Florence) for some fruitful discussions on the pottery chronology. I am also grateful to Antonio Bonomo (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna) for his useful comments on my work.

(Marchetti 2011; Id. 2012),² with Iron Age III³ remains found on both the acropolis and the lower town. The pottery assemblage revealed several connections with Inner Syria, the Levantine coast and Southern Anatolia.

In the following paragraphs, a preliminary result of a typological analysis on the Iron Age III pottery assemblage from Taşlı Geçit Höyük is provided through two steps. In the first instance the methodological framework developed and used to detect pottery typologies is shown. Following this, the chronological attribution of pottery typologies, dated to the Iron Age III, is illustrated in light of their connection with the surrounding geographical areas.

Methodology

The methodology of analysis applied to the Taşlı Geçit Höyük pottery assemblage consists in the development of a theoretical framework, followed by the application through three steps of analysis. Each stage has been shaped considering the need not only for ease and flexibility, but also precise definitions in order to reduce personal interpretations as well as provide a sufficient number of types (Orton *et al.* 1993, 156-158). This method has been developed in order to be applied also to the pottery assemblages of the Pre-classical Near East.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provided (**Figure 1**) is grounded on the functional and morphological aspects of the vessels and is articulated here in three stages, titled: 1) Functional Classification, 2) Macro-morphological Classification and 3) Elements Variation.

The first stage aims at providing an interpretation of vessel use. This is based on an intuitive method (Sinopoli 1991, 50-52) concerning a multivariate correlation (Magness-Gardiner 1996, 184). Such variables consider the morphological (shapes and dimensions) and technological aspects (fabrics, inclusions and decorations), as well as the vessel contexts. So far, this approach has produced different interpretations leading some scholars (Oggiano 1999, 386; Hendrickson and McDonald 1983, 631-634) to distinguish four main functional types (Serving/eating, cooking, storing and transport or other). Others (Magness-Gardiner 1996, 187; Mills 1989, 137-139; Rice 1987) emphasise three types (Serving/eating, cooking and storing/transport), on the

² Nonetheless, some squatter occupation dating to the Roman and the Ottoman periods is attested at the site in areas B and C (Marchetti 2011, 299).

³ Aside from the pottery evidence, this dating is supported by 14C analysis of some stratified wooden charcoal samples, giving a range between 800 and 520 BC.

other hand, in some cases (Hally 1986) it was preferred to stress the multi-functional character of the vessels, rather than addressing specific definitions.

The functional types recognized here are:

1. Simple Ware (SW): vessels for serving and processing activities without cooking. Simple Ware embraces almost all the vessel shapes, from platters to jars (cf. below). These are fired at medium to high temperature (600-900 °C).⁴ In addition, SW shapes may have different kinds of surface treatments and decorations.
2. Kitchen Ware (KW): vessels used for processing activities involving cooking. Few shapes can be statistically connected to this functional class, among which pots are most notable. These are usually fired up to 500 °C with inclusions usually occurring in medium to large dimensions and a high frequency. Surface treatments or decorations are rarely attested.
3. Preservation Ware (PW): this class includes large storage containers or transport vessels. Jars or pithoi, used for food and liquids preservation are the most common shapes. Preservation ware is usually medium to low-fired, with many medium to large-size inclusions. Several types of decoration or surface treatments are attested.

The above mentioned functional classes have been chosen in order to group pottery shapes within exhaustive but flexible definitions, keeping in mind that vessels could have been used for a number of purposes during their lifetime.

The next step involves the macro-morphological identification of shapes (**Figure 3**). These classifications have been selected by calculating the ratio between the rim diameter and the maximum diameter of the vessel. If the latter is larger than the former then we have a closed shape, while if they coincide we have an open shape. This preliminary analysis provides some particularly interesting information with regard to closed shapes. The rim diameter of juglets is narrower than jugs, suggesting a different function, whilst kraters and pots have similar ratios, but differ in the range of functional classes in which they occur. Furthermore, in order to establish a precise equation for distinguishing open and closed shapes, rim diameter and the vessel height ratio have also been correlated (Rice 1987).⁵ Among open vessels, this approach highlights three groups: platters, whose rim diameter/height ratio ranges from 4/1 to 10/1, bowls ranging between 2/1 to 3/1 ratio and beakers that are mainly 1/2. Less clear is instead the information obtained for most closed shapes with ratios that fall between the general range of 1/2 and 1/5. The only notable evidence is that of kraters and pots, which have a 1/1 ratio. Finally, an attempt to better distinguish vessel dimensions was made by calculating their volume.

⁴ It must be pointed out, that this typological classification does not consider technological elements, such as fabric or inclusions. These will be integrated once the ongoing archaeometrical analyses undertaken on a selected sample of sherds will be completed.

⁵ These data are based on a sample of 230 complete vessels recovered during the 2009-10 excavations at Taşlı Geçit Höyük.

This analysis provides some especially interesting information concerning closed shapes. For example, both juglets and small jars show a striking difference in capacity if compared to jugs and jars. In addition, the wide range of volumes attested for kraters and pots suggests different uses.

The last step of the theoretical framework (Element Variation) focuses on identifying variations within six elements of the shape. These are the rim, the neck, the wall, the base, the handle and other less frequent elements (such as the spout). Each of the above-mentioned elements has not more than six different associated terms, which have been identified through the analysis of the assemblage. The study of the Iron Age III pottery assemblage from Taşlı Geçit Höyük in fact, allows proposing a preliminary list of element variations (**Figure 4**).

Pottery analysis

The definition of the framework is followed by the analysis of the pottery assemblage, with the aim of identifying typologies. This has been achieved through three steps named: 1) Identification, 2) Testing and 3) Definition (**Figure 2**).

Typologies do not necessarily reflect the evidence of a standardized production. Instead, such shapes could have been affected by minor variations due to a number of reasons.

In the first step, analysing shape by shape of a specific functional class, I aim to detect the element variations (**Figure 4**) that are essential for characterizing each typology. Within each shape, specimens sharing the same element features were grouped into a preliminary typology creating accessible charts showing the combinations attested for each shape. Following this, preliminary typologies were then labelled with the alphanumeric codes as follows: KW 09 201120. In this case, 'KW' means Kitchen Ware, while the next two digit numbers '09' represent the shape, in this case a pot (see above). The last six digits describe the elements of the vessel (see above): in-turned thickened rim (2), no neck (0), globular wall (1), Rounded base (2), Single ovoid handle (2) and no other element (0). This code reflects the three stages of the methodological framework outlined above. More specific characteristics of the elements, such as the rim thickness, or other definitions of this type, such as, 'out-turned triangular, ledged' or 'vertical hammered', have been deliberately discarded as they can be easily inferred from both the drawing and the written discussion.

In the second step (Testing), the validity of such typologies is tested using two methods. The first one is 'the envelope' system created by Clive Orton (1987). As described by the author, vessels of a same broad form are overlaid and 'clearly the more tightly defined the form, the thinner the envelope' (Orton *et al.* 1993, 158-59).⁶

⁶ This method is not only useful for defining the profile variations of a typology but also for eventually detecting volume variations and more general standardisations.

The second method is that of comparing typologies with others from contemporary assemblages of neighbour or distant sites.

Once typologies are validated we become able to provide, in a schematic table, the key information about each typology (Definition).

The pottery assemblage

Simple Ware

Simple ware (**Figure 5**) is the functional class embracing the greatest number of shapes, as well as the largest quantity of sherds and complete shapes. Within open shapes we have recognized the following typologies:

SW 01 305000: Platter with straight rim and wall. This type may have red burnishing surface treatment. Fabric usually has medium firing and small mineral or both vegetal and mineral inclusions. Such platters are well attested from late IA II through IA III in Northern Syria such Tell Afis (Mazzoni 1987, figs. 9.7, 16.1) and Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, 457, fig. 4).

SW 02 205000: Bowl with in-turned thick rim and straight wall. Several specimens of this type may have a red burnished surface treatment. Fabric has usually a medium to high firing and bears small mineral or vegetal and mineral inclusions. Comparison can be made with both northern Syria, like Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, pl. 10.3) and Tell Rifa'at (Lehmann 1996, pl. 8, type 48/1), and the middle Euphrates region, such as Tell Sheikh Hassan (Lehmann 1996, pl. 8, type 48/3).

SW 02 302000: Bowl with vertical hammered rim and rounded wall. This type may have a smooth surface treatment. Fabric has usually a medium to high firing and small mineral inclusions. Parallels can be made with late IA II-III at Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, pl. XVI.1).

SW 02 302400: Bowl with straight flat and thick rim, rounded wall and ring base. This type of bowl may have both reddish burnished or smooth surface treatment. Firing is medium while inclusions are either mineral or vegetal and mineral. This type can be paralleled with early IA III specimens from Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 2000, fig. 3.10).

SW 02 403400: Bowl with out-turned (ledged) rim, carinated wall and ring base. The rim can be thin or slightly thick and rounded while the wall carination can be high or medium. The only surface treatment attested for this shapes is smoothing. Firing is medium to high, while inclusions can be mineral or vegetal and mineral. Such bowls are attested in late IA II-III levels at Tell Mardikh (Mazzoni 1992, figs. 19.4, 21.10) as well as in the IA III at Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 2000, fig. 2.25).

SW 02 502000: Bowl with out-turned thick triangular rim, and rounded wall. Several specimens of this type may have a red burnished surface treatment. Fabric usually have medium to high firing and small mineral or vegetal and mineral inclusions. This type has close

comparisons with northern Syria, such as Tell Afis (Mazzoni 1987, fig. 10.1) and Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, pl. XXV.1-4) and the Middle Euphrates area like Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 2000, fig. 3.7).

No beakers (3) occur within the IA III assemblage. Closed shapes are attested in the following types:

SW 04 405000: Krater with out-turned rim and straight wall. No surface treatments or decorations are attested for this type. Firing can be medium high, while inclusions are mixed. This type has close comparisons with IA III specimens from Tell Afis (Cecchini 1998, fig. 19.10).

SW 04 502000: Krater with out-turned thick rim and rounded wall. This type does not show any surface treatments or decorations. Firing is generally medium, while inclusions are both vegetal and mineral. Parallels for this type can be found in the IA III at Tell Afis (Cecchini 1998, figs. 27.19-20).

SW 05 013420: Juglet with in-turned neck, carinated wall, ring base and single ovoid handle. Some specimens can be painted. Firing is usually medium, with mineral inclusions. This type has close comparisons with Zincirli Höyük (Dr Soldi p.c.).

SW 05 011410-50: Juglet with out-turned neck, globular wall and ring or footed base. This type can have a single rounded or double rounded handle. Several specimens of this type may have a burnished or smooth surface treatment. Fabric usually has medium to high firing and mineral inclusions. According to Lehmann (1996), this type belongs to the early IA II tradition of northern Syria.

SW 06 534120: Jug with out-turned thick rim, out-turned neck, piriform wall and flat base. This type can have a single rounded or ovoid handle. Some specimens of this type may have a burnished surface treatment. Fabric usually has medium firing and mineral or mixed inclusions. Parallels for both kinds of jugs can be proposed with IA III assemblages from the Islahiye valley, like Coba Höyük (Du Plat *et al.* 1950, fig. 27.8), Northern Syria like Tell Afis (Cecchini and Mazzoni 1998, fig. 30.6-7, 9) and Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, types ABC 24/43) as well as the middle Euphrates area at Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 2000, fig. 6.19).

SW 06 533210-20: Jug with out-turned triangular thickened rim, out-turned neck, carinated wall and rounded base. This type can have a single rounded or ovoid handle. Several specimens of this type may have a burnished surface treatment. Fabric usually has medium firing and mineral or mixed inclusions. This type is mainly attested during the late IA II in the Middle Euphrates area, such as the Yunus cemetery (Lehmann 1996, pl. 56, types 338/1, 339/1).

SW 08 002600: Partially preserved jar with rounded wall and disk base. This typology may have incised decoration. Firing is generally high with few mineral inclusions. Parallels can be proposed with IA III levels at

Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 2000, fig. 7.1-3) and Tille Höyük (Blaylock 1999, fig. 9.2).

SW 08 300000: Jar with vertical flat and inner thickened rim. No surface treatments or decorations are attested for this type. Firing is usually medium, while inclusions are mineral or both vegetal and mineral.

SW 08 502420: Jar with out-turned thick rim, no neck, rounded wall, ring base and single ovoid handle. Most of these vessels have a reddish burnished surface treatment, medium firing and mineral inclusions. Similar vessels can be found in the IA III levels at Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 2000, fig. 7.9).

SW 08 510000: Jar with out-turned rim and in-turned neck. No surface treatments or decorations are attested for this type. Firing is usually medium, while inclusions are mineral or both vegetal and mineral.

SW 08 430000: Jar with out-turned rim and neck. Some exemplars may have smooth surface treatment. No firing trend is attested, while inclusions are usually mineral.

No small jars (7) are attested within the Iron Age III assemblage. Preliminary technological analyses on the SW assemblage revealed that pastes with mineral inclusions cover almost 70% of the total while one third has both mineral and vegetal inclusions. These data suggest that there is a notable amount of shapes made of raw clay. External fabric colours are usually reddish yellow (5YR 6/6) or yellowish red (5YR 5/6), with a grey core (5YR 5-6/1).

Kitchen Ware

Kitchen ware (**Figure 6**) is well represented in terms of both the number of sherds and complete shapes, found as well as the range of typologies. Macro-morphological statistical analyses undertaken underline a striking predominance of pots within the entire assemblage. Among the open shapes category, typologies have been defined as follows:

KW 01 302210: Platter with straight rim, rounded wall and base and single rounded handle. Some vessels may have had a reddish slip surface treatment. Firing is generally low with a high frequency of mineral inclusions.

KW 02 205460: Bowl with in-turned triangular thick rim, straight wall, ring base and ledge handle. No surface treatment or decoration is attested. Fabrics are low fired, with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions.

KW 02 302000: Bowl with vertical flat rim and rounded wall. No surface treatment or decoration is attested. Fabrics are low fired, with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions.

KW 02 302460: Bowl with vertical hammered rim, rounded wall, ring base and ledge handle. This type of handle is also attested among other KW such as pots

(KW 201120). No surface treatment or decoration is attested. Fabrics are low fired, with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions.

KW 02 405000: Bowl with out-turned triangular rim and straight wall. No surface treatment or decoration is attested. Fabrics are low fired, with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions.

KW 02 405210: Bowl out-turned ledge rim, almost vertical wall, rounded base and single rounded handle. No surface treatment or decoration is attested. Fabrics are low fired with a medium frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions.

Among the open shape category we find some typologies sharing the same characteristics as the SW specimens. Four KW closed shapes have been identified:

KW 09 201120-220: Pots with in-turned thick rim, globular wall, rounded or flat base and single ovoid handle (so-called 'hole-mouth'). This type of pot may have incised or applied decoration. Fabrics are low fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. This type is widespread from the late IA II through the IA III not only in the Islahiye valley, but throughout northern Syria and the middle Euphrates valley. With regards to the former, specimens are attested at Coba Höyük (du Plat *et al.* 1950, fig. 27.5), while in northern Syria, hole-mouths have been recovered at Tell Afis (Cecchini 1998, figs. 28.24, 30.17, 34.5, 36.17-18, 39.22-23), Tell Mardikh (Mazzoni 1992, figs. 14.5-6, 8) and Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, pl. 48.5). Along the middle Euphrates, this type has been found at Tell Ahmar (Jamieson 1999, figs. 5.1, 3, 10) and Tell Sheikh Hassan (Schneider 1999, fig. 9.1).

KW 09 302410: Pots with vertical rim, globular wall, ring base and single rounded handle. Fabrics are low fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. This is a typical shape of Southern Anatolia during the IA III at Lidar Höyük (Muller 1999, fig. 21, BC 05), or between IA II-III at Porsuk (Dupré 1983, fig. 86, 213-14).

KW 09 403440: Pots with out-turned rim, carinated wall, ring base and single thin handle. Some of these vessels have blackish burnished surface treatment. Fabrics are low fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. This type can be paralleled with late IA II-III specimens from Tell Abu Dannè (Lebeau 1983, 481, pl. LI.1).

KW 09 410000: Pots with out-turned triangular rim and in-turned neck. Fabrics are low fired with a high frequency of mineral inclusions. According to Lehmann (Lehmann 1996, pl. 84, type 444/2) this probably belongs to a late IA II-III Levantine tradition.

Preliminary technological analyses revealed that KW vessels were made of somewhat raw clay with many whitish, reddish or blackish mineral inclusions as well as vegetal ones. Inclusions occurrence is the same as the SW examples. Fabrics appear to be made of mostly brown or

light brown (7.5YR 6-5/4) clay with a grey core (7.5YR 3-6/1).

Preservation Ware

Few though mostly well preserved specimens of Preservation Ware (**Figure 7**) have been found. Two types of jars and three types of pithoi have been detected: PW 08 500000: Jar with out-turned thick rim. Fabric is low to medium fired, with a high frequency of mineral or both vegetal and mineral inclusions. No surface treatment or decoration is attested.

PW 08 510000: Jar with out-turned triangular thick rim and out-turned or almost vertical neck. Fabrics are low to medium fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. No surface treatment is attested

PW 10 203600: Pithos with in-turned thick rim, slightly carinated wall and disk base. Fabrics are medium to low-fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. No surface treatment or decoration is attested. Parallels can be made with Karkemish (Woolley 1921, 132, fig. 53).

PW 10 502120: Pithos with out-turned thickened rim, rounded wall, flat base and single ovoid handle. Fabrics are medium to low fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. No surface treatment or decoration is attested.

PW 10 502500: Pithos with out-turned thick rim, rounded wall and high-footed base. Fabrics are medium to low-fired with a high frequency of vegetal and mineral inclusions. No surface treatment or decoration is attested. This type has parallels with IA III specimens from Zincirli (Lehmann 1996, pl. 67.368/1, 369/1) and Tell Ahmar (Jamieson, 1999, 307).

Conclusion

To conclude, this research has allowed proposing a tentative method for pottery analysis based on the functional and morphological features of the Iron Age III vessels from Taşlı Geçit Höyük. The outcomes of this method are both the identification of pottery typologies and the provision of an identification coding system, containing the main characteristics for each type. Among SW shapes, 17 typologies have been identified, while 10 types have been detected for KW and 5 within PW. Most of these types were based on complete shapes. Several other patterns may be noted among the entire assemblage, such as the correlation of specific types of rims and walls in SW bowls as well as several similarities between SW and KW typologies.

Another aim of this study has been that of proposing a preliminary chronological attribution as well as the cultural relations for the assemblage. Comparisons revealed that most of the shapes belong to a transitional IA II-III tradition. However, many of those types statistically occur much more in IA III contexts than IA II

(Lehmann 1996). Moreover, some of those, such as SW 06 534120, SW 08 002600 or PW 10 502500 can be considered IA III hallmarks. For this reason, a preliminary attribution to the early Iron Age III for the assemblage can be hypothesized. Analysis of the geographical distribution of comparisons reveals a close connection with Northern Syria. Nonetheless substantial parallels with the Middle Euphrates and minor relations with Southern Anatolia and the Levant can also be noted. This datum suggests a primary cultural connection between the Islahiye valley and Northern Syria at least during the IA III, while minor influences were coming from other neighbouring areas.

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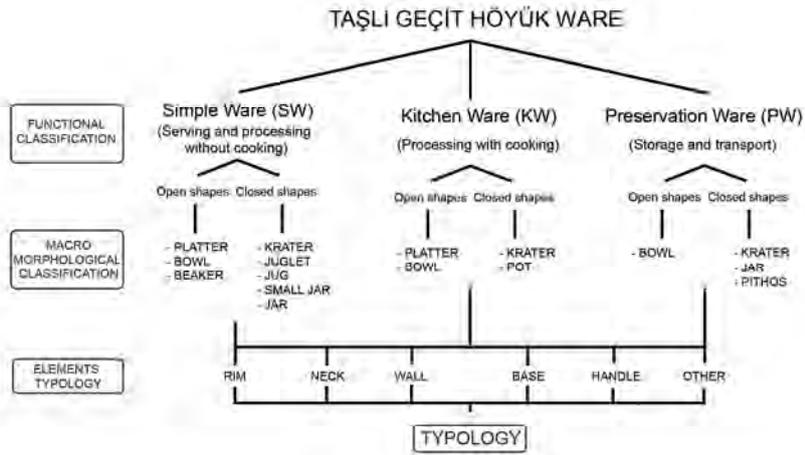


Figure 1: Taşlı Geçit Höyük pottery methodological framework

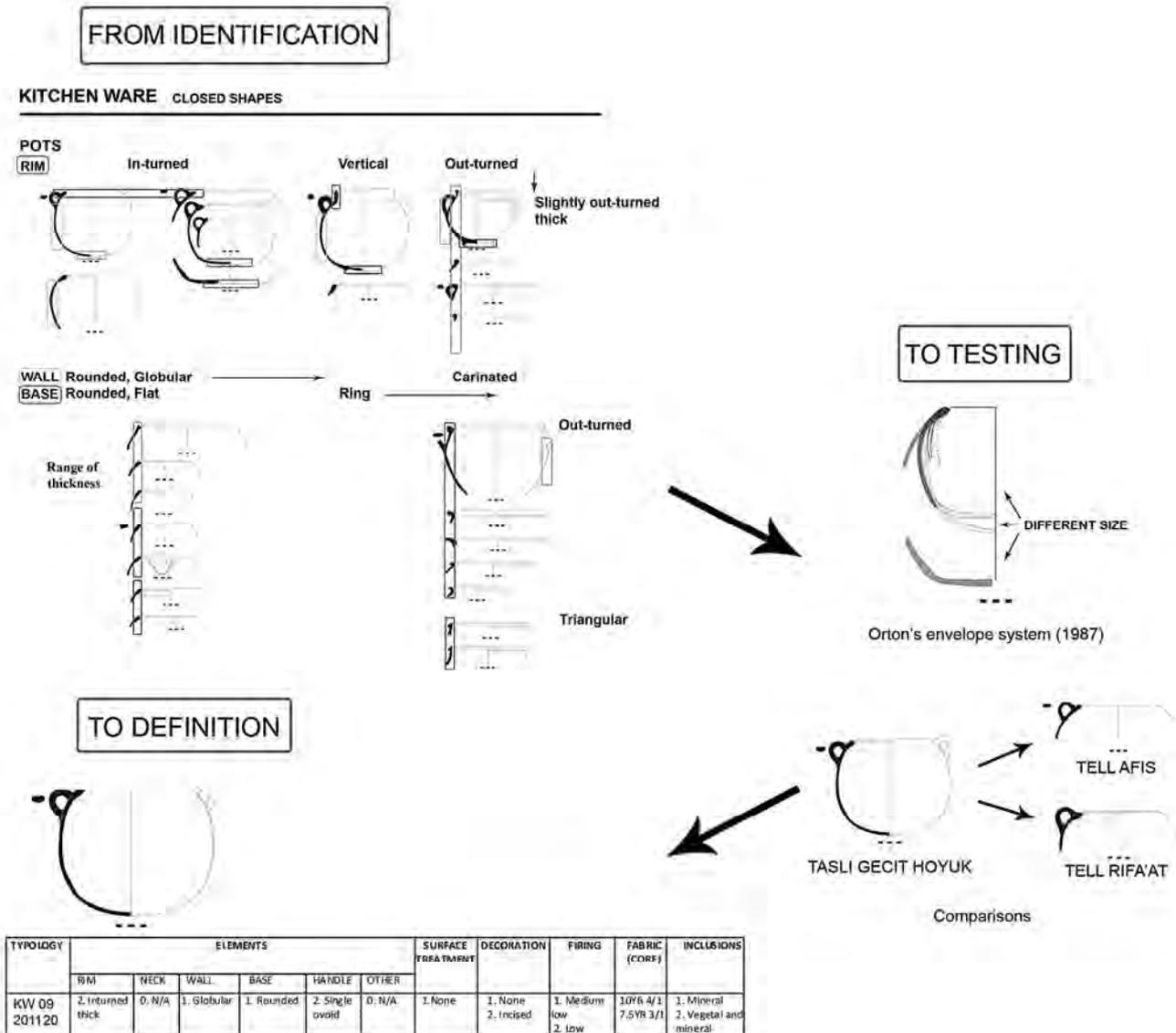


Figure 2: Pottery analysis scheme

TYPE	NAME (Number)	FUNCTIONAL CLASS OCCURRENCE			Rd-Md RATIO	Rd-Mh RATIO	VOLUME (litres)
		SW	KW	PW			
Open	Platter (1)	x	x		/	4/1 – 10/1	0.2-0.4
Open	Bowl (2)	x	x		/	2/1 – 3/1	0.5-1.7
Open	Beaker (3)	x			/	1/2	0.4-0.5
Closed	Krater (4)	x	x		1/1.5	1/1	3.4-17.1
Closed	Juglet (5)	x			1/4-1/5	1/2 – 1/3	0.2-0.7
Closed	Jug (6)	x			1/2-1/3	1/4 – 1/5	7.7-17.7
Closed	Small jar (7)	x			1/2-1/3	1/1.5 – 1/2	0.2-0.5
Closed	Jar (8)	x		x	1/1.5	1/3 – 1/4	11.4-23.5
Closed	Pot (9)		x		1/1.2-1/1.5	1/1	3.9-17.6
Closed	Pithos (10)			x	1/1.5 – 1/2	1/2 - 1/3	213-315
Other	Lid (11)	x	x		/	/	/

Figure 3: Taşlı Geçit Höyük shapes definition

	RIM	NECK	WALL	BASE	HANDLE	OTHER
0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1	In-turned	In-turned	Globular	Flat	Single rounded	Spout
2	In-turned thick	Vertical or straight	Rounded	Rounded	Single ovoid	
3	Vertical or straight	Out-turned	Carinated	Pointed	Twisted	
4	Out-turned		Piriform	Ring	Single thin	
5	Out-turned thick		Vertical or straight	Footed	Double rounded	
6	Double out-turned			Disk	Ledge	

Figure 4: List of elements with their variants

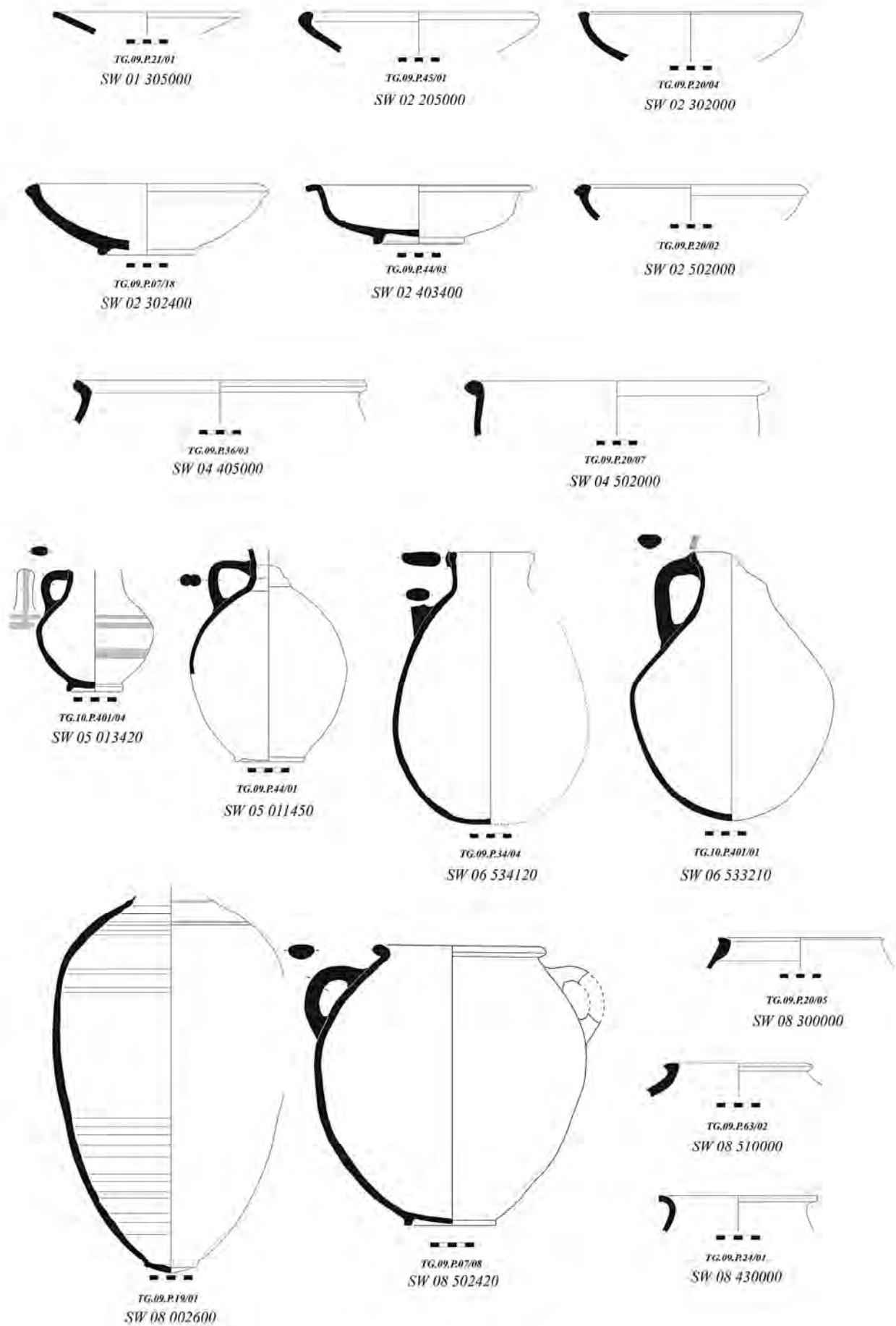


Figure 5: Iron Age III Simple Ware (SW) typologies

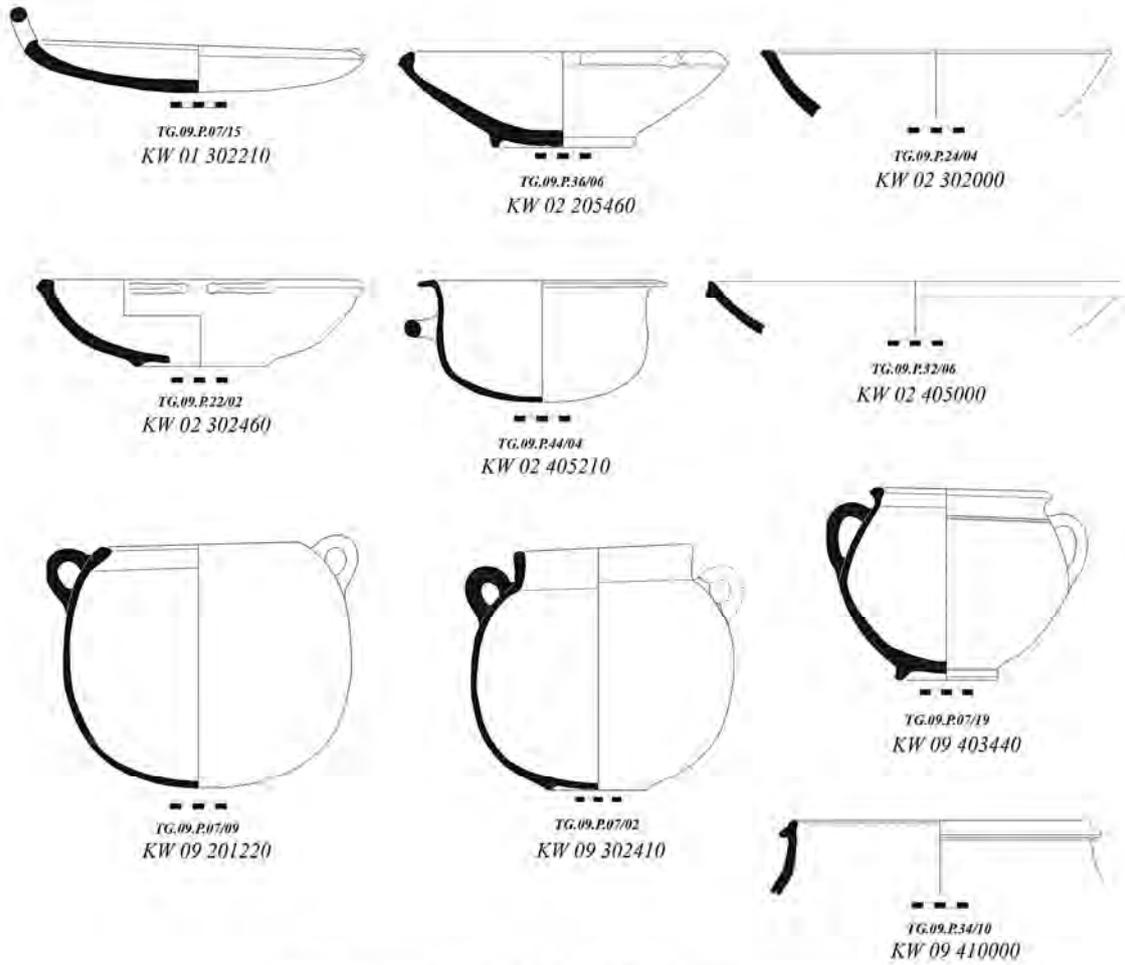


Figure 6: Iron Age III Kitchen Ware (KW) typologies

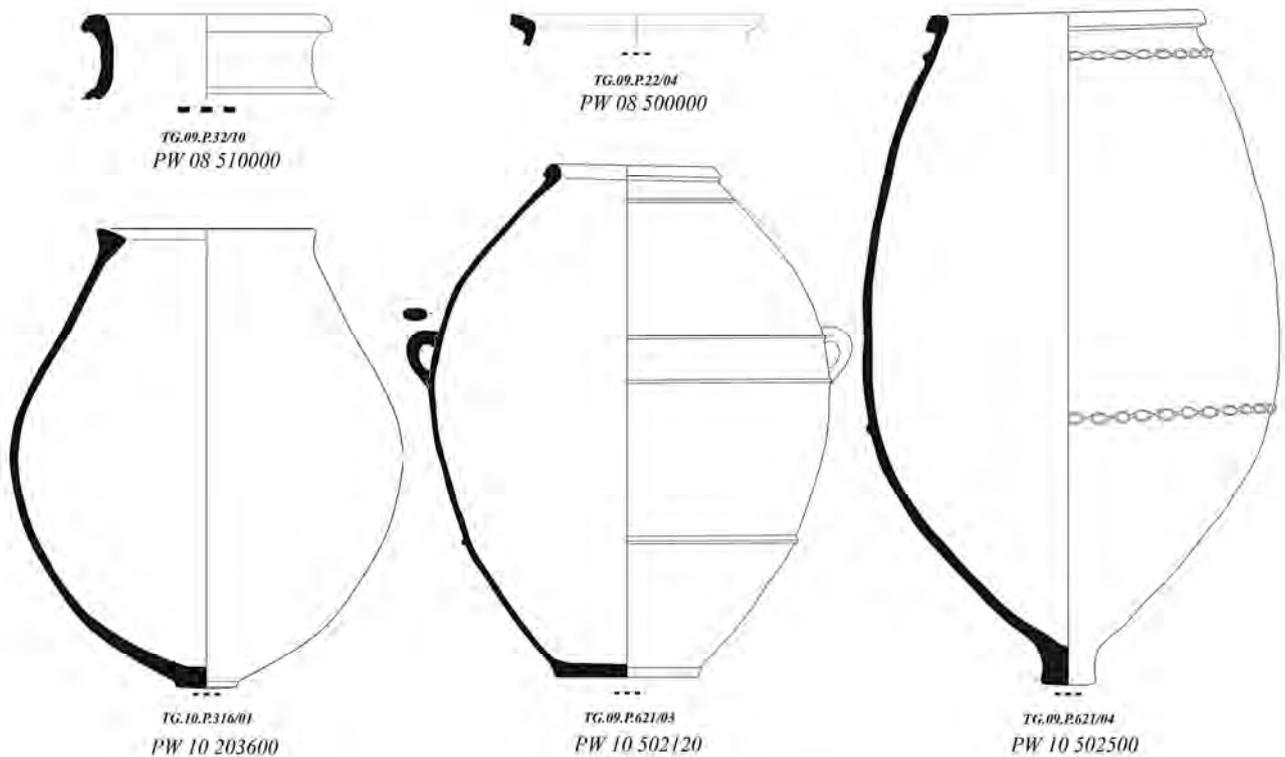


Figure 7: Iron Age III Preservation Ware (PW) typologies