

# Two White Painted Vessels and Dating of Hamza Tepe (Elbistan-Karahöyük) Cemetery<sup>1</sup>



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Keywords: Hamza Tepe, Urn, White Painted Ware, Middle Iron Age

*The site of Hamza Tepe cemetery is located 10 km north-west of Elbistan district of Kahramanmaraş province and lies to the west of Elbistan Karahöyük settlement. Within the scope of the renewed archaeological excavations at the Elbistan Karahöyük settlement, a test trench was opened at the Hamza Tepe which revealed a cremation cemetery. The archaeological excavations carried out so far in the north-eastern part of Hamza Tepe uncovered mostly urn graves as well as a cremation grave surrounded by stones and a simple pit grave. There are few examples of urns with grave goods. Within those urn graves two white painted vessels were recovered in the tombs number 17 and 29. Similar vessels with concentric circles are encountered in settlements located on the coasts of Cilicia and the Eastern Mediterranean. The vessels are dated to the Middle Iron Age (8th-7th centuries BC) and thus play an important role in dating of the Hamza Tepe cemetery.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hamza Tepe, Urne, Beyaz Astarlı Seramik, Orta Demir Çağı

*Hamza Tepe mezarlık alanı Kahramanmaraş ili Elbistan ilçesinin 10 km kadar kuzey batısında ve Elbistan Karahöyük yerleşim yerinin batısında bulunur. Karahöyük yerleşim alanında başlatılan yeni dönem arkeolojik kazı projesi kapsamında, höyüğün batısında yer alan Hamza Tepede sondaj çalışmaları yapılmıştır. Çalışmalar sonucunda Hamza Tepe'nin bir kremasyon mezarlık alanı olduğu tespit edildi. Hamza Tepe'nin kuzey doğu kesiminde büyük çoğunluğu urne mezar olmak üzere taş çevrili bir kremasyon ile bozulmuş bir toprak mezar açığa çıkarılmıştır. Çalışmalarda Urne mezarların çok az bir kısmında mezar eşyası tespit edildi. Çömlek formunda olan bu urnelerden 17 ve 29 nolu mezarlarda kırık bir şekilde iki adet beyaz astarlı seramik tespit edildi. Gövdeleri üzerinde konsantrik daireler bulunan bu seramiklerin benzerlerine Kilikya ve Doğu Akdeniz kıyılarında bulunan yerleşim yerlerinde rastlanılmaktadır. Orta Demir Çağı'na tarihlenen (MÖ 8-7 yüzyıllar) söz konusu kaplar aynı zamanda Hamza Tepede ortaya çıkardığımız mezarlık alanın tarihlenmesinde önemli bir rol oynar.*

<sup>1</sup> Hakeme Gönderilme Tarihi: 15.07.2019 Kabul Tarihi: 27.07.2019.

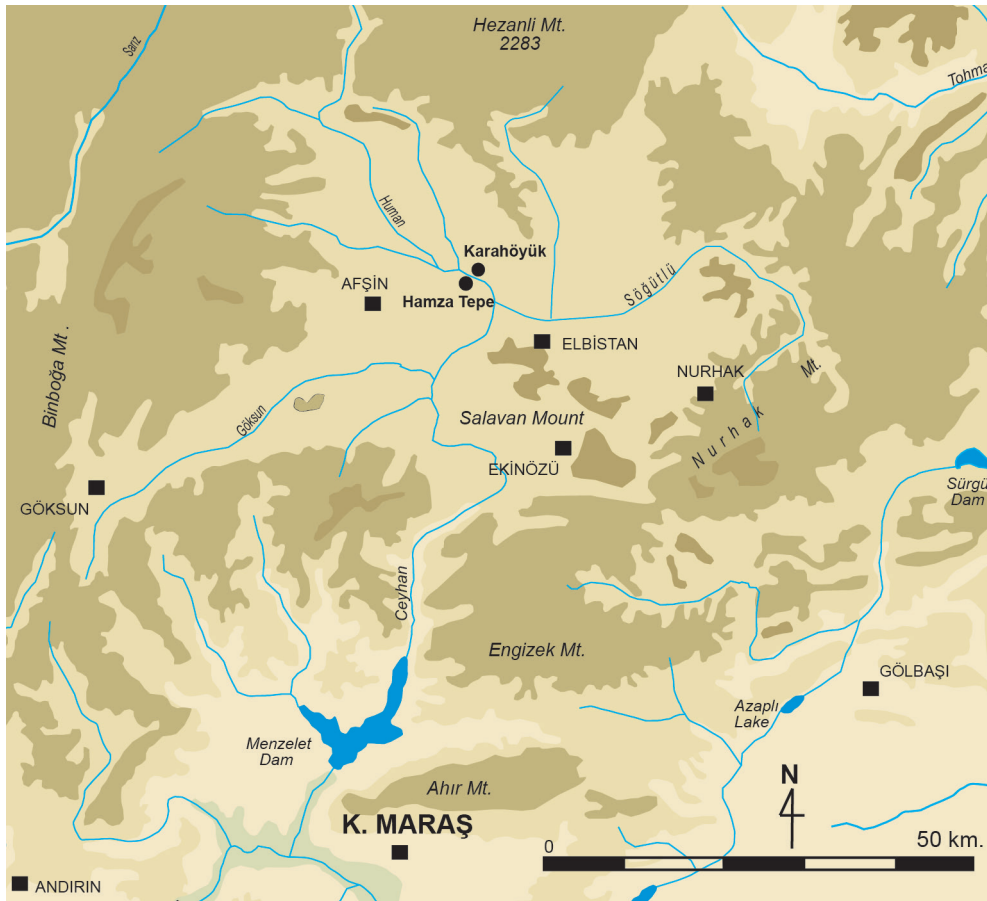
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## Introduction

The site of Hamza Tepe is the cemetery of Elbistan Karahöyük and lies to the west of the mound and the Hurman River, a branch of the Ceyhan River (Pyramus). The cemetery is located on the north-eastern edge of the sequence of hills stretching between Karahöyük and Izgın neighbourhoods and covers approximately an area of 380 x 380 m in dimensions (Fig. 1). The hilly area is situated at 1236 m above the sea level and its western and some parts of the eastern sides are covered with rock. The excavated area, where the cemetery is located lies on the northeast end of the main hill and it is also known as the Hamza Tepe (Uysal 2017; Uysal – Çifçi 2018: 572-573, Fig. 14; 2019: 399-401). This paper will first deal with two white painted vessels recovered within the urn graves that were part of the grave goods, and then by doing so, it will try to date the urn cemetery of Hamza Tepe.

Archaeological evidence from the Elbistan Plain indicates that throughout the second and the first millennium BC the region was densely occupied. The settlements were in particular located in the north-western parts of the plain (Çifçi – Greaves 2010), where



**Fig. 1.** Map of Elbistan Plain and the location of Hamza Tepe and Karahöyük.

the site of Karahöyük and Hamza Tepe cemetery are located. The first attempt to conduct archaeological excavations at Karahöyük were undertaken by Hugo Grothe (Grothe 1911: CCLXXXIII-CCLXXXIV) at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was the one season excavation in 1947 conducted by Tahsin and Nimet Özgüç that revealed the site was occupied from the Late Bronze Age (Hittite Imperial Period), to the Iron Age (Neo-Hittite Period with four building level), and Hellenistic and Roman periods (Özgüç – Özgüç 1949: 20-21, 36). However, after one season of excavation, the archaeological work at the site came to an end. After a long hiatus, in 2015 a new excavation project was started by the Kahramanmaraş Museum with Bora Uysal as the scientific advisory (Uysal – Çifçi 2017, 2018, 2019). The new excavation project on the site has the main aim to establish a chronology and stratigraphy of the settlement and to address some specific questions regarding the archaeology of the region.

## Hamza Tepe Cemetery

While conducting archaeological excavations at the Karahöyük, the team also visited the north-eastern section of the Hamza Tepe, to see whether there was any pottery sample in this area. Before our visit to the site we have been told by the villagers that the top of the hill was flattened for a water tank in order to provide water for the village. Also, shortly



Fig. 2. *Hamza Tepe from the North-east.*

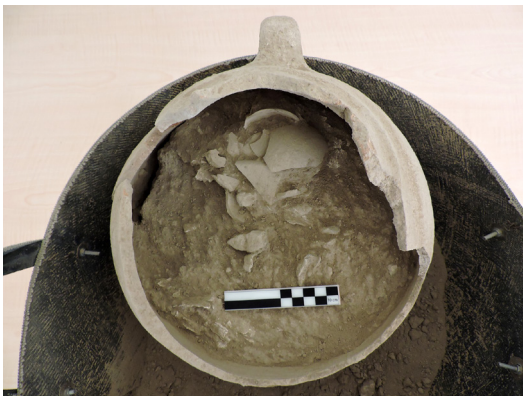




**Fig. 3.** *No 17 Urn.*



**Fig. 4.** *No 29 urn.*



**Fig. 5.** *No 17 Urn grave.*



**Fig. 6.** *No 29 Urn grave.*

before our arrival the slopes and the top of the hill were planted with trees. Therefore, the top of the hill and some of the slopes areas were damaged prior to our work at the site (Uysal – Çifçi 2018: 572-573). However, on our visit, we found sherds of pottery and burned human bones on the surface areas of the hill, in particular on the northern slopes of it. Therefore, in order to understand if there was any architectural or others remains, it was decided to open a test trench on the north-eastern part of the main hill during the 2017 excavation season (Fig. 2). In this small test trench and very close to the surface of the hill, urns and fragments of burnt human bones as well as fragments of pottery started to appear. After setting the topographic plan of the Hamza Tepe, excavations were conducted during 2017 and 2018 in the H10, I10, J10 and K10 trenches. As a result of the above mentioned damages, the pottery sherds recovered from the excavation are very mixed, and dated from the 2nd millennium BC to the Classical period.

Our excavations at the north-eastern section of the main hill uncovered 29 urn burials, a cremation grave surrounded by stones and a simple pit grave (Uysal – Çifçi 2019). The urns were placed vertically onto the bedrock at a shallow level and since the slopes of the Hamza Tepe are inclined towards the Hurman River, the bottom part of the vessels are

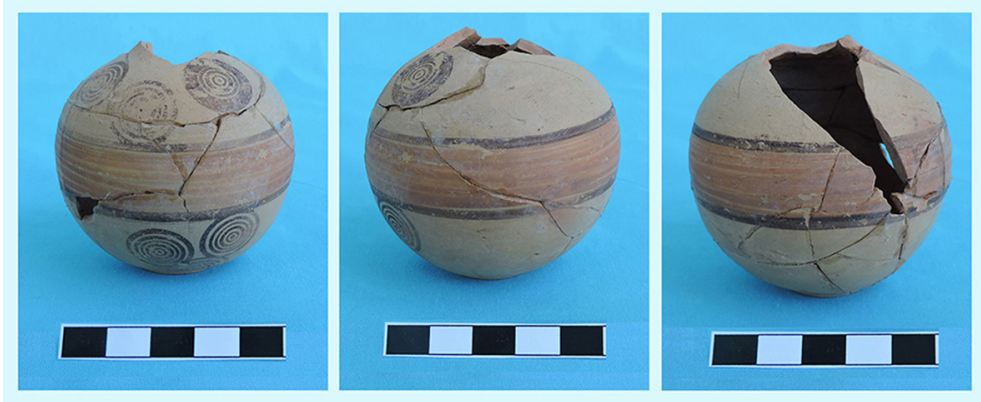


Fig. 7. Number Ht. 17.036 ware.

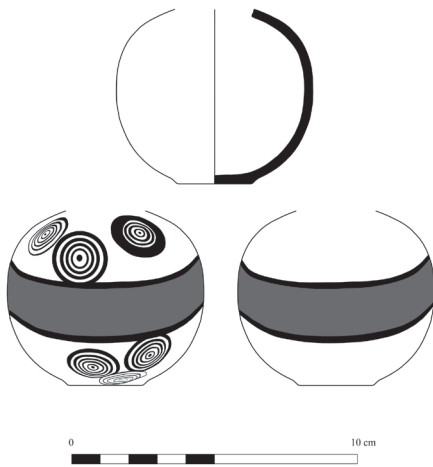


Fig. 8. The drawing of Ht. 17.036 ware.

usually supported by small stones.<sup>1</sup> The urn vases are not specially made for the burials. Except for two large rimmed examples, the other vases are in the form of necked and spherical pottery. The vessels generally consist of the round as well as flat and ring bases. Much of the recovered urn vessels were either broken or partially recovered due to erosion or to the recent damages to the slopes of the hill. 10 out of 29 recovered urns were nearly intact. Though the remaining urn vessels are fractured by more than half or in some cases more than half of the vessel is missing, they still contain ashes mixed with burnt human bones.

Although there are few examples of urns with grave goods, around some of the other excavated urn burials there were beads, spindle whorls, terra cotta weights, as well as iron and bronze arrowheads. Some of these artefacts have been exposed to the fire and it is therefore possible that they might have been associated with the broken urns (Uysal – Çifçi 2019). Among the finds related to these urns, there are two distinctive white painted ware, which are the subject of this study. Both vessels were uncovered from the trench I10 within urns number 17 and 29 (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6). The vessels were deliberately broken and placed within the urn burials. Both vessels were placed in the mouth of the urn, on top of the burned bones and ashes that were deposited into the urns. The first vessel's neck

<sup>1</sup> The bedrock, where the urns are placed, is a calcified limestone and is often easily friable, though in some places the bedrock is very tough.



**Fig. 9.** *Number Ht. 18.010 ware.*

part and the second one's rim section are broken and the broken parts were missing. The fact that broken parts are not in the urn indicates that the vessels were broken away from the burial ground prior to placing them within the urns.

### **White Painted Ware**

The first vessel (Ht. 17.036), is in the form of a juglet and was recovered from the no 17 urn grave (Figs. 3 and 5). The juglet has a spherical body and a flat base. It has a horizontally painted black-brown band circle around its body and there are three black concentric circle motifs placed on above and below this band (Figs. 7 and 8). It is not clear whether there is a handle or not. If it is handled, then it can be argued that it resembles to the second ware (see below) with the exception of its body being spherical. However, similar concentric circle motifs appear at Karkamış Yunus cemetery level II-III and Al-Mina level VIII-VII. Although at Al-Mina a jug has a horizontal painted band around its body and concentric circle motifs (Taylor 1959: 67-68, Fig. 1.14) above the band and on the shoulder, the jug coming from the Karkamış Yunus cemetery presents concentric circle motifs both above and below a horizontally painted band (Woolley 1939, Pl. XVI. b 2; Karacic – Osborne 2016, Fig. 2, no 4).

On the other hand, the second vessels (Ht. 18.010) has a short neck, a rounded oval body and a flat base (Figs. 4 and 6). It is thin-walled and the outer surface of it is smooth, which is also the case for the first vessel. A vertical handle is attached from the rim to the shoulder. On the middle of each side of the vessel's body, there are small concentric circles. Around both of these small concentric circles there is a large painted circle. After a gap, there are two more black painted linear circles and then a large circle (Figs. 9 and 10). At the front, four small concentric circles are placed vertically under two small intertwined circle motifs on the upper side. At the rare, there are two small, perhaps three small concentric circles, painted vertically. Here some parts of the jug are missing which is also the case for the front section of the vessel, but the circle motifs on the jug indicates a



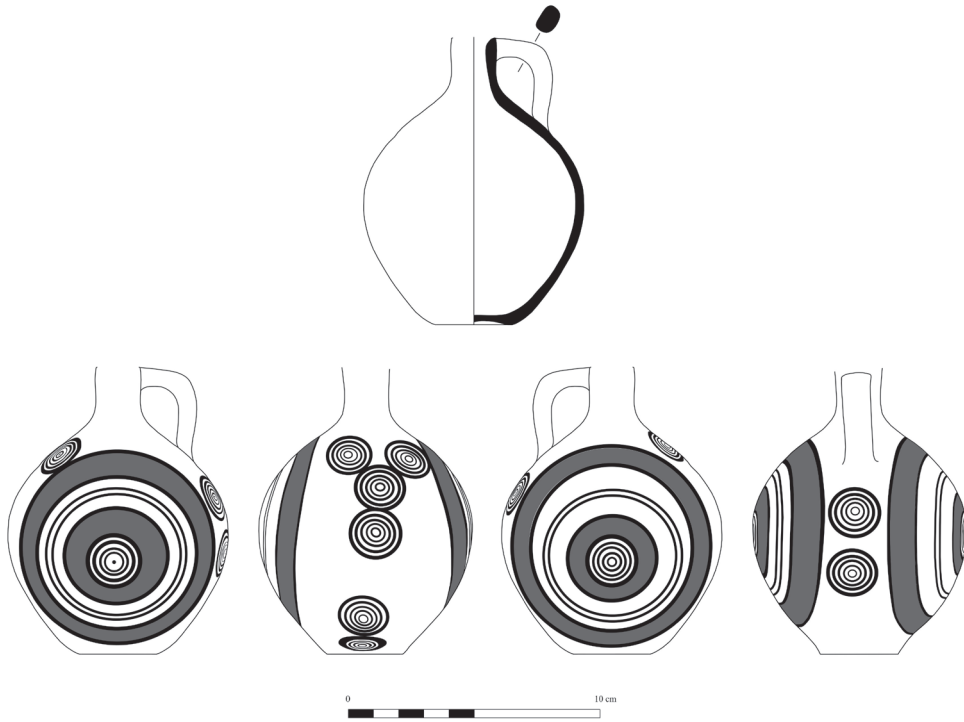


Fig. 10. The drawing of Ht. 18.010 ware.

continued sequence of the same motif.

The second vessel from Hamza Tepe finds similarities with vessels coming from the Hama cemetery. For example, one of the jug coming from Hama Period III has a series of black horizontal thin lines around its body with concentric circles (Riis 1948: 66, Fig. 82). Further examples come from Karkamış Yunus cemetery Iron Age II-III level (Woolley 1939, Pl. 16, b.3; Bonomo – Zaina 2014, Fig. 5. 5), Kilise Tepe Level IIf (Hansen – Postgate 1999: 118, Fig. 29; Postgate – Thomas 2007a, Fig. 241-242; 2007b, Fig. 402, 851; Bouthillier *et al.* 2014, Fig. 51. b), Misis (D'Agata 2017: 5, Fig. 5), Karatepe (Darga 1986, Pl. V-Va), Al-Mina level V (Taylor 1959, Fig. 1. 15), Tell Tayinat (Karacic – Osborne 2016, Fig. 2, no 4) and Tarsus Gözlükule Middle Iron Age (Hanfmann 1963, Fig. 68: 445) where jugs with vertical lines and concentric circles have been uncovered. However, it should be pointed out that the Kilise Tepe jug, contrary to the second vessel retrieved from Hamza Tepe, has no filling between the vertical lines as well as the multiple horizontal lines on its shoulders (Hansen – Postgate 2007a, Fig. 241-242, 2007b, Fig. 394 no 707) as is also the case for similar jugs recovered at Tarsus Gözlükule and at Tell Tayinat (Hanfmann 1963, Fig. 68: 445; Karacic – Osborne 2016, Fig. 2, no 4). However, it is not just the decoration of the vessels that find similarities with wares from those sites. These vessels are also with rounded body as is also the case for the Hamza Tepe second jug.





**Fig. 11.** *The Map showing the site names mentioned in the text.*

## Discussion and Conclusion

There are no similarities between these two vessels and the other pottery samples coming from Hamza Tepe and from the nearby site of Karahöyük, so far (Özgüç – Özgüç 1949: 29; Uysal – Çifçi 2017, 2018, 2019). Although the majority of the Iron Age pottery from the Karahöyük is unpainted, there are some painted sherds with zigzag motifs, wavy lines, dots and concentric circles, dated to the Iron Age. Those paint-decorated potteries of Karahöyük show similarities with the Phrygian period in central Anatolia (for example, Kültepe (Özgüç 1971: 14-30, Fig. 8-55), Boğazköy (Genz 2004, Taf. 64-69), Gordion (Sam 1994, Pl. 51, 52, 90 and 94) and Arslantepe (Puglisi – Meriggi 1964, Tav. XLV, LVIII 1-3; Manuelli 2010, Fig. 8) in the Upper Euphrates valley).

However, on the one hand, the neck and shoulder parts of these white painted wares with concentric circle motifs is a common feature that appears in the Eastern Mediterranean (Hansen - Postgate 2007a: 346), in particular at the Cyprus during the early first Millennium BC throughout Cypro-Geometric III to Cypro-Achaic I periods (850-600 BC) (Gjerstadt 1948: 288, Fig. XXXIX 1. 14a, XXXVIII 9. 3a; Karacic – Osborne 2016: 2). The concentric circle motifs that appears on these types of ware usually decorated with black-brown concentric circle motifs along with horizontal or vertical lines (Arslan 2010: 50-51). Beside Hamza Tepe examples, there are very few similar sherds of these imported pottery from sites such as Arslantepe (Manuelli 2010, Fig. 4.10-12), Köskerbaba (Bilgi

1991: 13, Fig. 02.11.4; Ökse 1988: Abb. 638) as it mentioned above from the Karkamış Yunus Cemetery (Bonomo – Zaino 2014: 142) beyond the Eastern Mediterranean or Cilicia region. Although archaeological excavations from the Eastern Mediterranean and Cilician sites yielded a large number of fragments of this type of ware, only very few intact vessels have been recovered so far. Therefore, Hamza Tepe vessels are very unique and contribute to shed light on the distribution of this type of ware. Also their recovery from Hamza Tepe cemetery, located beyond the Taurus Mountains and away from the coastal areas of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Cilician region indicates a closer connection between the nearby site of Karahöyük and the coastal areas. It also should be pointed out that despite the existence of cremated burial grounds from the Late Bronze Age central Anatolia (such as Osmerkayası (Bittel *et al.* 1958) and İlica (Orthmann – Helmuth 1967) as well as Hittite mortuary texts (Kassian *et al.* 2002), their absence in the former Hittite land during the Iron Age -with exception of an urn grave from Boğazköy Lower town (Schachner 2012: 92, Figs. 13-14; 2019: 253), is noteworthy. The only known cremated urn graves similar to the Hamza Tepe dating to the Iron Age were recovered from the cemeteries of Karkamış (at Yunus) (Woolley 1939) and Hama (Riis 1948) in Syria. Whether such burials ground remain to be found in the former Hittite land or if their absence is due to mere chance of survival and recovery of it, is hard to know.

On the other hand, textual evidence from the Elbistan plain indicate that throughout Iron Age the plain itself was under the control of Neo-Hittite kingdom of Malizi (Assyrian Melid and Urartian Meliteia). The IZGIN stele<sup>2</sup>, which was found 2 km southwest of the Hamza Tepe and Karahöyük, illustrates that from the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC onward until its annexation by the Neo-Assyrian kingdom the Elbistan plain was part of Malizian kingdom (Hawkins 2000: 314-318). The Malizian kingdom was based at the site of Arslantepe in Malatya and its western boundaries were limited by the contemporary kingdoms of Gurgum (Maraş) and from southeast was by the Kummuh (Adıyaman) (Hawkins 2000: 282-321). However, despite its location and the limitation imposed by the Taurus Mountain the recovery of these two concentric circle decorated jugs provide evidence that there was a cultural and commercial relationship between the Malizian kingdom and the Cilicia or the wider region of Eastern Mediterranean during the Middle Iron Age -perhaps Elbistan region played the role of intermediaries between the communities that located on the both side of the Taurus Mountain and the site of Karahöyük was at the forefront of this exchange.

<sup>2</sup> The KARAHÖYÜK stele is also from the Elbistan plain which is dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Early Iron Age (12<sup>th</sup> century BC) (Hawkins 2000: 289). However, this stele shows close links with the central Anatolian group such as KIZILDAĞ, KARADAĞ, and BURUNKAYA inscriptions in terms of palaeography and chronology rather than Malatya-Arslantepe group (Hawkins 1993: 273-279; 1998: 69; 2000: 287-288). Although the stele provides vital information for the historical geography and history of region, it's the IZGIN that link the region with Malatya during the Middle Iron Age.

Overall a very close analysis of these two vessels from the cemetery of Hamza Tepe suggests an Eastern Mediterranean production, most likely from the sites in Cilicia (Fig. 11). Their fabric is not compatible with the local Iron Age pottery from Karahöyük. Although the exact dates of such ware is still debated (Iacovou 2004: 61-66), it is, nevertheless possible to compare the forms and decorations of Hamza Tepe vessels with the sites such as Tell Tayinat (Hanfmann 1963, Fig. 68: 445; Karacic – Osborne 2016, Fig. 2, no 4), Karkamış (Woolley 1939, Pl. XVI. b 2), Al-Mina (Taylor 1959: 67-68, Fig. 1.14), Kilise Tepe (Hansen – Postgate 2007a, Fig. 241-242, 2007b, Fig. 394 no 707) and Tarsus Gözlükule (Hanfmann 1963, Fig. 72, no 583, Fig. 68 no 445). At Kilise Tepe similar ware from the level IIf were considered to correspond to Cyprus White Painted IV (750-650 BC) (Postgate is Thomas 2007a: 346), while at Tarsus Gözlükule and at Tell Tayinat<sup>3</sup> similar pottery were dated to the Middle Iron Age – a date range between 850 to 700 BC (Hanfmann 1963: 20; Karacic – Osborne 2016: 11). Therefore, it seems appropriate to suggest the same date range for the Hamza Tepe's vessels, namely the Middle Iron Age (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC) and tentatively date the Hamza Tepe cemetery to the same period.

## Catalogue

**Figure 3, 5, 7 and 8.** Inventory Ht. 17.036. Preserved height 6.45 cm, width 7 cm, base dimension 2.8 cm, wall thickness 0.2-0.3 cm, coating 7,5 YR 8/3, paste 5 YR 7/6, lines and concentric circles 10 YR 4/1, painted line 2,5 YR 6/8.

**Figure 4, 6, 9 and 10.** Inventory Ht. 18.010. Preserved height 10.5 cm, width 8.1 cm, base dimension 3.1 cm, wall thickness 0.3-0.5 cm, paste 7,5 YR 8/2, coating 7,5 YR 8/3, horizontally painted lines and concentric circles 7,5 YR 5/4, colour of painted circles 2,5 YR 7/8 - 5 YR 7/8.

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