EVALUATION OF A CLAY-COVERED VOTIVE PIT FROM KÜLLÜOBA IN LIGHT OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

KÜLLÜOBA'DA ÜSTÜ KİL İLE SIVALI BİR ADAK ÇUKURUNUN DİSİPLİNLERARASI ÇALIŞMALAR IŞIĞINDA DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

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ABSTRACT

The end of the 3rd millennium BCE, known as the Early Bronze Age (EBA) III in Anatolia, is the period when the first urban societies developed and the inter-regional exchange networks that extended from Northern Syria to the Aegean region and the Balkans increased. The spread of new technologies such as the potter's wheel, the weight systems, metallurgy, and the practice of sealing, as well as the circulation of small prestige objects such as the Syrian bottles, drinking vessels such as depas and tankard, bone tubes that were used to carry pigments, or semi-precious stones can be counted as indications of these relations. One of the most characteristic practices of the 3rd millennium BCE is the votive pits seen in many of the period's settlements.

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Although this practice, which was observed in a wide geographical area extending from Northern Syria in the east to Thrace and the Balkans in the west, has been discussed in various publications so far, they were generally just about artefacts such as pottery and small finds.

In this study, the pit that was discovered during the 2022 excavations in Eskişehir-Küllüoba and identified as a votive pit, as well as the pottery and the small finds found inside it, are discussed as a case analysis, using archaeozoological and archaeobotanical data. The layer of clay covering the above-mentioned pit distinguishes it from the previously evaluated pits. This study in general aims to evaluate, through the data gathered on the said pit, the differences particularly between the domestic refuse pits to which remains such as ash or rubbish are deposited and the ritual pits.

Keywords: Pit, Ritual, Küllüoba, Early Bronze Age, Clay

ÖZET

Anadolu'da İlk Tunç Çağı III olarak adlandırılan MÖ 3. binyılın sonları, ilk kentsel toplumların gelişmesi ve Kuzey Suriye'den Ege'ye ve Balkanlar'a uzanan bölgeler arası değişim ağlarının yoğunlaşmasıyla bilinir. Bu ilişkilerin kanıtları arasında çömlekçi çarkı, ağırlık sistemleri, metalürji ve mühürleme uygulamaları gibi yeni teknolojilerin yayılmasının yanı sıra Suriye şişeleri, depas ve tankard gibi içki kapları, kemikten boya taşıma tüpleri veya yarı değerli taşlar gibi küçük prestij nesnelerinin dolaşımını sayabiliriz. MÖ 3. Binyıl'ın en karakteristik uygulamalarından birisi de dönemin görüldüğü pekçok yerleşmede karşımıza çıkan adak çukurlarıdır. Doğuda kuzey Suriye'den batıda Trakya ve Balkanlar'a kadar çok geniş bir coğrafyada görülen bu uygulama bugüne kadar çeşitli yayınlarla ele alınmış olmasına rağmen bu çalışmalar genellikle sadece çanak çömlek ve küçük buluntu gibi eserler üzerinden gerçekleşmiştir.

Bu çalışmada Eskişehir-Küllüoba'da 2022 yılı kazılarında saptanan ve adak çukuru olarak tanımlanan bir çukur, vaka analizi olarak, içerisinde bulunan çanak çömlek ve küçük buluntular dışında, arkeozooloji ve arkeobotani verileriyle birlikte ele alınmıştır. Söz konusu örnek üzeri kil ile kapatılmış olması açısından daha önce değerlendirilen örneklerden farklıdır. Bu çalışmada özellikle kül veya çöp gibi evsel atıkların gömüldüğü çukurlar ile ritüel karakterli çukurlar arasındaki farklılıklar söz konusu çukur verileri üzerinden genel olarak değerlendirilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çukur, Ritüel, Küllüoba, İlk Tunç Çağı, Kil

INTRODUCTION

From prehistory to present day, human has dug pits for various reasons such as to bury or to sacrifice, majority of which are archaeologically defined as ash pits, silo pits, ritual pits, ceremonial pits or votive pits. Theoretically evaluated, pits are both a way to create a link between the past and the present as well as to present offerings (Chapman, 2000). Offerings are instrumental for humans to reach to the supernatural to have their certain wishes granted. Pits dug into earlier "cultural layers" enable individuals to connect with their ancestors. According to Mesopotamian mythology, the underworld is also located below the ground (Bottéro & Kramer, 2017). Therefore, establishing a connection with the said world must also have been intended by pit-digging (Oğuzhanoğlu, 2019). Pits are defined in Hittite texts as an instrument for humans to communicate with the divine forces. In these texts, pits are associated particularly with sacrifices offered to the gods of the underworld (Sevinç-Erbaşı, 2013).

Although pits were discovered in many excavations, it cannot be said that all of them were used for sacrificial or offering purposes. Some criteria were proposed to distinguish the pits for non-domestic usage, in other words, pits not used for refuse or rubbish. Firstly, in this context, preparing and closing special pits must have been structured in more detail. Therefore, pits that were previously used for other purposes must not have been used for cultic purposes. The practices of plastering with clay, burning, or closing the pit with a layer of clay that would seal in the contents could be considered among the practices used for the special pits. Considering the symbolic meanings behind the use of clay (Black & Green, 1992), important evidence proving the contextual use of clay in pits were observed in Kandilkırı in southwestern Anatolia (Oğuzhanoğlu, 2015). In her research dated 2019, Oğuzhanoğlu associates the presence of clay in pits both with the symbolical creation myths, and its role in preserving what is deposited in the pits. Based on the Gre Vrike examples, Ökse suggests that pit-digging could be related to rituals for abundance (Ökse, 2003; 2005).

In cult-pits, deliberately placed ceremonial remains, whole or easily repairable objects, or complete animal bones, all of which would not be present among the context of rubbish, were found. Occasionally, some of these objects were deliberately broken and then deposited in pits (Chapman, 2000).

Different pit practices are known from the Neolithic period that also continued in the Ubaid period in Anatolia and its surrounding areas (Arimura, 2000; Esin, 1987). Various examples dating back to the Neolithic and later periods are commonly observed in the Marmara region and the Balkans (Özdoğan et al., 2008)(Karamurat, 2018). Especially in the Balkans, some areas were reserved only for pits (Nikolov; 2015).

Figure 1. Sites mentioned in text / *Metinde adı geçen yerleşimler.*

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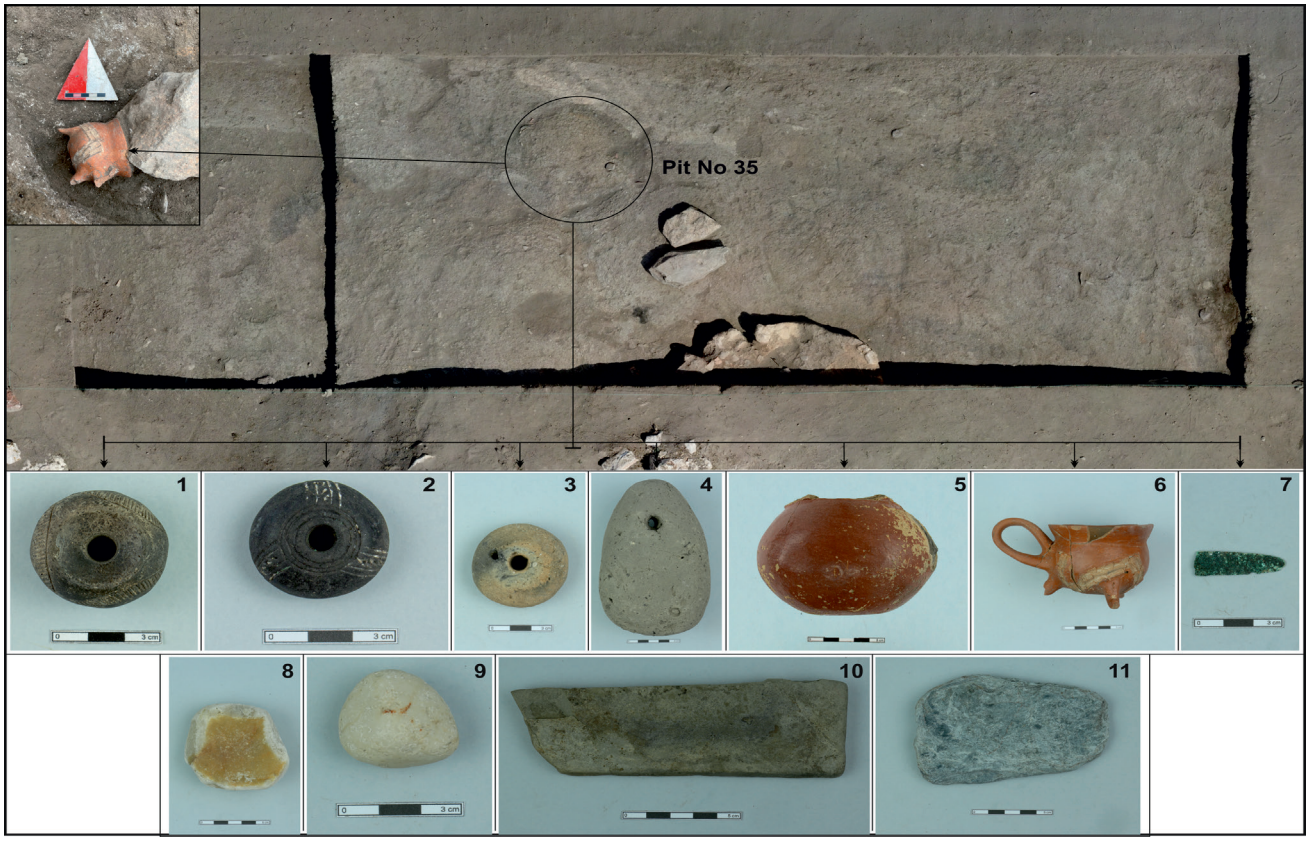


Photograph 1. Pit no 35 and it's findings. / *35 No'lu çukur ve buluntuları.*

Examples of pit practices before EBA were found in Proxynas, Greece, in relation to the burial area (Psimogiannou, 2012). Afterwards, it is known that there are votive pits in the Blue phase (Cultraro, 2013) and the Red phase in Poliochni (Kouka, 2011).

THE EARLY BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENT OF KÜLLÜOBA AND ITS VOTIVE PITS

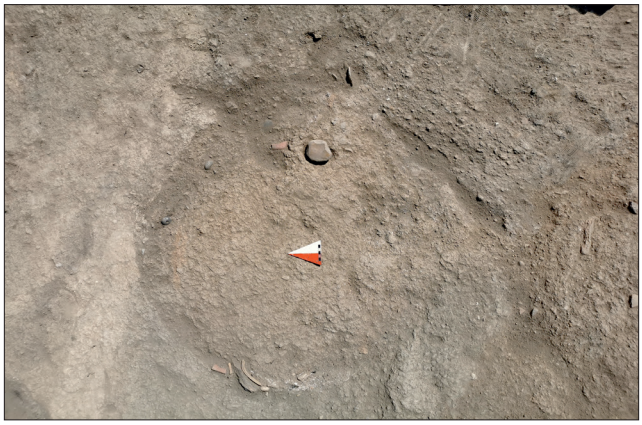
Küllüoba settlement is situated to the west of the Upper Sakarya basin, on the natural route that extends from the north and the south of Central Anatolia, and on the main route which connects the region to the Inner Aegean and Marmara Regions (Fig.1).

According to the research carried out so far, the settlement has a long sequence of stratigraphy in which all three phases of the Early Bronze Age were actually represented (Türkteki et al. 2021). During the excavations performed in Küllüoba, which was continuously inhabited from 3200 to 1950 BCE, a large number of pits, all of which date to the second half of EBA III, were uncovered (Türkteki & Başkurt, 2016). When evaluated according to the above-mentioned criteria, 63% of these pits were identified as votive pits (Türkteki & Başkurt, 2016). They were generally found in the empty area corresponding to the courtyard of the EBA II settlement. This suggests that the empty area in question, on which the acquired architectural data for EBA III is insufficient so far, could also have been a courtyard in EBA III as it was in EBA II. Generally oval in shape, these pits are usually not very deep. However, although rare, 4 m wide and 1.5 m deep pits were also discovered (Türkteki & Başkurt, 2016). The pottery found in the pits mainly consisted of whole or mostly-whole depas, plates, tankards, Syrian bottles, and tripod pots. Besides these, spindle whorls, grinding stones, figurines, and whole animal skeletons were uncovered as well (Türkteki, 2021). In regards to the question whether pits were especially covered or not, only one pit has been found in Küllüoba to date which suggests that it was covered with clay, but this has not been clearly verified yet. In this context, the votive pit uncovered in Grid AE 18 during the season of 2022 is evaluated in this study as an important example (Photo. 1).

Contents of the Votive Pit in Grid AE 18

Various pits have also been found before inside and around the above-mentioned grid that is situated at the centre and at the highest point of the Küllüoba mound's nucleus (Türkteki & Başkurt, 2016).

Therefore, studies were carried out during the season of 2022 in this area to further examine the pits. The votive pit, no. AE 18-35, was discovered during the excavations performed near the northern side of the grid (Photo. 2).



Photograph 2. Photo of the pit before it's excavated. / *Çukurun kazılmadan önceki hali.*

Photograph 3. Profile of the pit and clay layer on top of it. / *Çukurun profilden görünümü ve üzerindeki kil tabakası.*

The top of the 90 cm wide and 35 cm deep pit has been covered deliberately with a 4-6 cm thick layer of clay (Photo. 3).

Beneath this layer of clay, the votive pit was filled with grey, ashy soil. Going deep into the fill, a burnt humerus and a maxilla, both of which are identified as pig bones, were unearthed. Other finds in the pit included three spindle whorls, two burnishing stones, a body fragment of a tankard, a nearly-whole bowl, the tip of a copper dagger, two sharpening stones, a loom weight, and a tripod cup with barbotine decoration on its body (Photo. 1-6).The spindle whorls, the loom weight and the burnishing stones were found whole (Photo. 5) The tripod cup is also among the finds found whole in the pit. Besides these, a fragment from a tripod cooking pot and fragments of red-coated bowls were discovered in the pit as well (Photo. 4).

Dating

Among the pottery recovered from the pit, the pottery forms represented by the leg fragment of a tripod cooking pot, the red-coated ware bowl and the tripod cup suggest that the pit must be dated to Early EBA III.

In Küllüoba, the red-coated ware was not seen before EBA III. On the other hand, the tripod cooking pot first appeared at the end of EBA II. In previous studies, the Early EBA III in Küllüoba was dated to between 2450 and 2250 BCE (Türkteki et al. 2021). The barbotine decoration on the tripod cup had been represented in different forms in Küllüoba since the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (Efe & Ay Efe, 2000). This kind of decoration in combination with reserve slip ware is also known from the contemporary settlements of Küllüoba such as the example from Elmalı-Karataş (Mellink, 1964, 276-7, Fig.28; Eslick, 2009). However, the tripod cup form with handles was not found before (Photo. 4-6).

Although it looks like a tankard, the said vessel is identified as a cup due to its legs. It could be considered unique in this context since it has no direct parallel in Anatolia as far as we know. The fact that features of different pottery forms such as barbotine decoration, tankard, tripod vessel, and loop-handled bowl are used together on the same vessel and thus create somewhat a mixed form should be seen, just like the abovementioned pit phenomenon which spread over a large geographical area, as a reflection of interregional relations.

Photograph 4. Pit no 35 within it's findings during the excavation. / *35 no'lu çukurun kazı sırasında içerisindeki buluntularla birlikte görüntüsü.*

Photograph 5. Findings on the floor of pit no 35. / *35 No'lu çukurun tabanı üzerindeki buluntular.*

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Photograph 6. Tripod cup. / *Üç ayaklı fincan.*

As Mellink mentioned red-slipped barbotine ware might be a different sub-group of West Anatolian local ware that differs from further west such as Yortan etc (Mellink, 1964).

A soil sample from the pit was analysed by ICP-OES (Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emission Spectroscopy) at METU Central Laboratory to assess the elemental contents. Based on this analysis, calcium is observed to have the highest average rate (Table 1). Calcium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium and sulphur are considered among the most significant elements involved in human activities before the Industrial Revolution (Leonardi et al., 1999).

As a result of the phosphorus rate, which was determined to be higher than the average phosphorus rate found in Turkish soils, it is possible to talk about a high level of human activity at the archaeological area in question[1].

A total of 36 (205.4 g) animal bone remains were found in the votive pit[2]. As a result of archaeozoological analysis, these bones in the votive pit were identified to belong to two animal species, sheep and pig (Photo. 7).

Among the bone remains that belonged to the pig species, two individuals were identified in the pit using joint and tooth aging methods. As a result of the age determination test done on the third molar of one individual, it was ascertained that the individual was 2.5 years old when it was killed (Photo. 8). It was determined that the other individual was killed before it reached the age of one since the joint at the distal end of the humerus bone was not ossified yet.

Table 1. The results of ICP-OES analysis of the above-mentioned sample. / *ICP-OES Analiz Sonuçları.*

Element	Sample AE 18-35
Na (%)	0.59 ± 0.03
K (%)	3.0 ± 0.1
Ca (%)	4.5 ± 0.1
Mg (%)	1.72 ± 0.06
Fe (%)	3.3 ± 0.1
P (%)	0.35 ± 0.03
S (%)	2.1 ± 0.1
Sr (mg/kg)	173 ± 3
Zn (mg/kg)	97 ± 9
Cd (mg/kg)	-

No joint or teeth were found on the remains identified as sheep bones that would help in determining the age of the animal when it was slaughtered.Considering the identified animal bone remains in general, cut-marks of butchery were observed on the rib bones (Photo. 9). There are also gnaw marks on these bones which were made by carnivores (possibly dog) (Photo. 10). Burn marks caused by cooking fire are seen as well on the bone remains of both species.

A botanical sample from the votive pit (2.70 liter of soil), no. AE 18- 35, was floated by using a tank flotation system and sorted under the trinocular stereo 0.7-4.5x zoom microscope3. The morphological structure of the plant remains from the botanical sample demonstrates a highly carbonized condition. In addition to the non-wood charcoal remains, a large number of wood charcoals were found in the sample as well. No analysis work has been done on the wood charcoal remains so far. Among the plant remains, excluding charcoal, the cereal grains are abundant compared to other species/types (Table 2).

In general evaluation, cereal grains and rachis fragments of einkorn/emmer wheat (T. monococcum/ *dicoccon*), which are two types of the hulled wheat of the cereal group, constitute the majority in this sample (Photo 11).

1 The mentioned analysis has been carried out with the contribution of Assoc. Prof. Dr. İsmail Tarhan, Faculty Member in Biochemistry Department of Selçuk University. For the analysis, 3 grams of powdered soil sample has been incinerated in a muffle furnace at 440 °C for 12 hours in order to evaporate the organic matter in the soil sample and to convert the organic form of phosphorus into inorganic form. The samples were then subjected to multiple acid extraction so that they could be analysed by ICP-OES. According to method used, 0.25 grams of sample was transferred to a Teflon beaker and mixed with 3 mL of 1:1:1 concentrated HNO3-HClO4-HF. The mixture was then placed on a hot plate and heated at 100 °C until all particles were completely dissolved. When the process was completed and the solvent completely evaporated, 3 mL of 8 N HCl was added to the sample and the volume of the solution was brought up to 100 mL with distilled wate.

2 The animal bones were analysed by Faculty Member Dr. Can Yümni Gündem of Batman University, and Ebedin Emlük.

3 The analyses were done by Hüreyla Balcı, Lecturer in Istanbul University, and A.Cavit Özcan.

Photograph 7. Animal bones from pit no 35. / *35 no'lu çukurdaki hayvan kemikleri.*

Photograph 9. Cutmarks on the rib bones. / *Kaburga kemiklerindeki kesik izleri.*

Photograph 8. Maxilla of a pig. / *Domuza ait üst çene.*

Photograph 10. Humerus of a pig and gnaw marks. / *Bir domuza ait üst kol ve kemirme izleri.*

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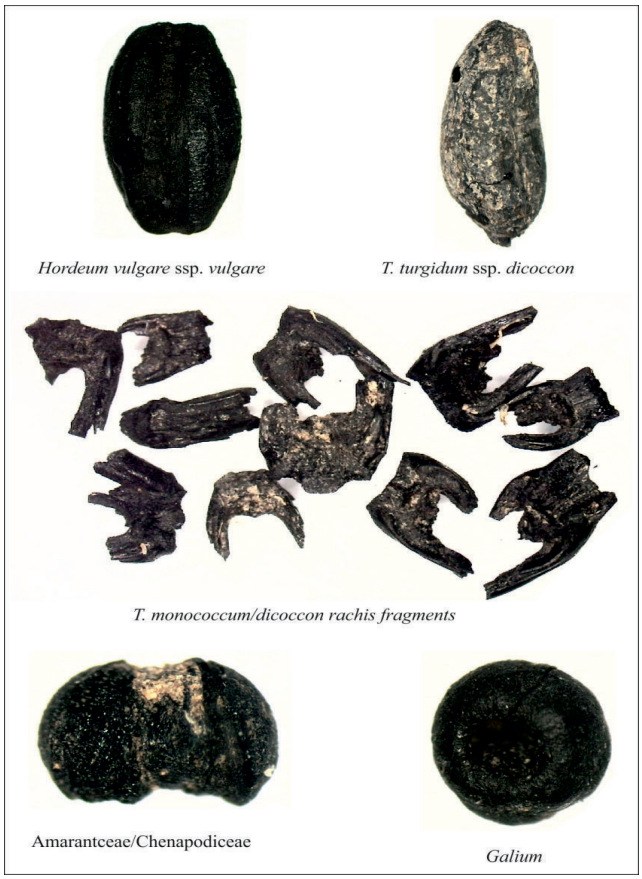
Table 2. The plant remains found in the Votive Pit, No. AE 18- 35/9. / *AE 18-35 No'lu çukurda bulunan bitki kalıntıları.*

			Trench and Unit	**AE 18**
			Context	**Votive Pit**
			Liter of Soil	**2.7 lt**
	Latin Names	**English Names**	**Plant Part**	**Number of re mains**
Economic Plants	*Hordeum vulgare ssp. vulgare*	six-row barley	fruit	2
	T. monoccum ssp. monococcum	einkorn wheat	fruit	2
	T. turgidum ssp. dicoccon	emmer wheat	fruit	12
	T. turgidum dicoccon/monococcum	emmer/einkorn wheat	rakis fragment	44
	T. aestivum/durum	bread/hard wheat	fruit	4
	Triticum/Hordeum	wheat/barley	fruit	10
	Lens culinaris	lentil	seed	1
	Pisum sativum	pea	seed	1
	Rubus	bramble	fruitlet	1
Wild Plants	Amaranthaceae/Chenopodiaceae	Amaranth/Chenepod	spisperm/fruit	1
	Cyperaceae	sedges	seed	1
	Galium	bedstraw	fruit	3
	Salsola sp.	Salsoloideae	seed	1
	Unidentified	Unidentified		4

Although the sample volume is not sufficient to make a detailed comparison, the abundance of rachis fragments of hulled wheat indicates that the cereals have been with their spikes or spikelets in the context (Photo. 11).



Photograph 12. Some of the plant species in the pit, no 35. / *35 no'lu çukurdaki bazı bitki türleri.*

As mentioned above, the pit was filled with grey, ashy soil. In the light of the first observations and taking into account a large number of charcoal remains, it is possible to say that the presence of the small number of different pulses and sedges as well as the species such as bedstraw, which are known as field weeds, (Photo. 11) suggest them to be a group of trash remains. Even if the food preparing-eating activities were carried out as a part of the pit ritual, the plant remains indicate the possibility of trash that was created during the preparations mixing in with the firewood, rather than the preservation of a part of the food.

VOTIVE PITS IN ANATOLIA DURING THE EARLY BRONZE AGE AND AFTERWARDS

As mentioned above, a large number of pits belonging to this period have been unearthed so far. An example particularly from the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE is known, in connection with graves, from Karataş-Semayük in Southwestern Anatolia (Warner, 1994). Like in the example of Küllüoba, the practice of covering the top with a layer of plastered clay is also known from some of these pits. Another example that could be associated with graves is from Kandilkırı, which is located also in Southwestern Anatolia. Here, the top of the pit was covered with grey clay (Oğuzhanoğlu, 2015). In Western Anatolia, the Limantepe examples, in which tortoise shells were deposited as well, were situated around the central complex (Kouka, 2011; Erkanal et al., 2009). In Troy, Blegen had identified a "pit phase" in level IId (Blegen et al., 1950).

In Tarsus-Gözlükule, a large number of pits were dated to the beginning of EBA III (Goldman, 1956). In Kanlıgeçit in Thrace, a large pit containing materials of Anatolian origin was found in front of a monumental megaron (Özdoğan & Parzinger, 2012).

In addition to these data from Anatolia, examples from the second half and the end of the EBA were also discovered in Northern Syria (Collins, 2004; Marchetti & Nigro, 1997) and Bulgaria (Nikolov, 2010; Leshtakov, 2002).

Although detailed accounts of pits were found in the written sources of Hittites in the 2nd millennium BCE (Sevinç-Erbaşı, 2013), similar pits are only known from Ortaköy/Sapinuwa so far (Süel & Süel, 2011). In these examples, unlike the EBA examples, bird bones were discovered. However, they are parallel to the EBA examples in that grinding stones, mudbrick fragments, seals, and spindle whorls were also present in these votive pits. The fact that the pits of Ortaköy, like the Küllüoba example, were covered with layers of clay stands out as a common feature.

CONCLUSION

The fact that the animal remains found in the votive pit in Küllüoba belonged to only two species, sheep and pig, and that they have cut-marks from butchery and signs of cooking on direct fire indicate that a feasting activity associated with pit ritual could have taken place here. However, the gnawing marks found on the bones generally suggest food refuse.

In this case, it is possible that the pit was not immediately covered by the layer of clay after this ritual, but after some time. On the other hand, the abundance of charcoal among the analysed plant remains, the existence of hulled wheat together with its by-products (rachis fragments), and signs of exposure to high heat on the remains suggest that the plant remains could have spilled from the vessels deposited in the pit as a part of the feasting activities during the pit ritual, they could also suggest the possibility of food trash actually getting mixed in with the firewood which was later deposited in the pit. Analysis of the depas examples found from different pits in recent years has shown that various fermented products and other products with sedative effects were also contained in these vessels (Türkteki et al., 2022). Therefore, the depas and the other drinking vessels found in the pits could be associated with ceremonies held during the above-mentioned pit rituals. Accordingly, the vessels considered "dirty" could have been deposited in the pit after such ceremonies. It has not been possible so far to establish a connection between the pits and the graves in Küllüoba, especially since graves belonging to the period have not yet been discovered.

However, if we consider the pit in Küllüoba had a similar function to that of the examples in Karataş-Semayük and Kandilkırı, the whole finds such as the spindle whorls, the loom weight and the burnishing stones as well the broken dagger fragment in the pit could be considered to be associated with the individual to whom the ritual was dedicated. In the light of all these evaluations, it is clear that the pit in question should be considered as a votive pit associated with ritual and, in this context, is different from other pits used for domestic refuse or as silos where products were stored. Particularly, the fact that the pit was covered, could even be said sealed, with a layer of clay is considered as another practice that supports this opinion as well.

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CATALOGUE OF THE FINDS RECOVERED FROM THE VOTIVE PIT, NO. AE 18-35

1: Spindle Whorl (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/2). Measurements: W: 3.8 cm, H: 1.9 cm. The low, conical spindle whorl has concave holes. It is made of grey paste, and its surface is grey slipped and burnished. Its whole lateral surface is decorated with two rows of grooves in herringbone pattern, creating chevrons.

2: Spindle Whorl (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/1). Measurements: W: 3.1 cm, H: 1.5 cm. The spindle whorl has a low, conical shaped body. Its black paste is mineral-tempered, and it is black slipped and burnished. Its surface is decorated with white inlay. There are three concentric rings on the top and bottom sides, and inlaid grooves of fours cut the outer ring vertically from three places.

3: Spindle Whorl (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/11). Measurements: W: 4.5 cm, H: 2.1 cm.

4: Loom Weight (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 36/1). Measurements: W: 9.6 cm, H: 15.6 cm.

5: Tankard Fragment (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/17). Measurements: W: 10.2 cm, D: 6.7 cm, H: 7.8. Red-coated ware. Its buff paste has no additives. Its surface is red slipped and well-burnished. Its mouth and handle are missing.

6: Tripod Cup (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/21). Measurements: W: 7.6 cm, D: 7.6 cm, H: 7.2 cm. Red-coated ware. Its buff paste has no additives. Its surface is red slipped and well-burnished. There is a chevron shaped barbotine decoration on its body where no slip was applied.

7: Dagger Fragment (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/13). Measurements: W: 1.0 cm, H: 3.1 cm

8: Burnishing Stone (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/4). Measurements: W: 2.7 cm, H: 2.9 cm

9: Burnishing Stone (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/5). Measurements: W: 7.8 cm, H: 3.2 cm

10: Sharpening Stone (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/18). Measurements: W: 4.8 cm, H: 13.7 cm

11: Sharpening Stone (Excavation Inventory No**:** AE-18 35/8). Measurements: W: 7.8 cm, H: 11.8 cm

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