

THREE EARLY NEOLITHIC STONE VESSELS FROM THE MARDIN MUSEUM

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Abstract: Three Neolithic stone vessels from the Mardin Museum in southeast Turkey are presented in this study. Unfortunately, there is no information about the find location and context, but comparanda indicates that the vessels may have been found in graves located in the region of Diyarbakır, Batman/Siirt, and Mardin. The stone vessels are decorated with incised geometric and figurative motifs. Comparison of the museum vessels with excavated material from Körtik Tepe, Hallan Çemi, and Hasankeyf Höyük indicate that the vessels should be dated to the Pre-pottery Neolithic period.

Keywords: Stone Vessels, Pre-pottery Neolithic A/B (PPNA/B), Motif, Mardin Museum

Mardin Müzesi'nden Üç Erken Neolitik Taş Kap

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Özet: Bu çalışmada Mardin Müzesinde bulunmakta olan üç Neolitik taş kap tanıtılmaktadır. Buluntu yeri ve konteksti hakkında maalesef bilgi bulunmamakla birlikte, karşılaştırmalar, taş kapların Diyarbakır, Batman / Siirt ve Mardin bölgelerinde bulunan mezarlarda bulunmuş olabileceğini göstermektedir. Taş kaplar çizi bezeme tekniği ile yapılmış geometrik ve figüratif motifler ile süslenmiştir. Mardin Müzesinde bulunan üç taş kabın Körtik Tepe, Hallan Çemi ve Hasankeyf Höyük kazılarında çıkarılan taş kaplar ile karşılaştırılması sonrası, taş kapların Çanak Çömleksiz Neolitik Çağ'a tarihlendirilmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Taş kaplar, Çanak Çömleksiz Neolitik A/B (PPNA/B), Bezeme, Mardin Müzesi

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to discuss three early Neolithic stone vessels from the Mardin Museum.³ These vessels were purchased by the museum to prevent the possible smuggling of these objects, and therefore their original find locations are unknown.

All three stone vessels have different sizes and shapes. It is possible to observe various incised decorations on each stone vessel. The raw material is thought to be chloritic, since stone vessels made of chloritic are found in great numbers in the other early Neolithic sites in the region.⁴ Stone vessels from Pre-pottery Neolithic periods are quite well known archaeological finds in southeast Anatolia. Similar stone vessels were found in various excavations including Hallen Çemi / Batman, Hasankeyf Höyük / Batman, Körtik Tepe / Diyarbakır, etc. (Map. 1).

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³ Mardin is located on the border with northern Syria, as well as close to northern Iraq.

⁴ The authors of this study are not experts in geology, however, when the museum's stone vessels are compared with stone vessels made of chloritic, the materials are almost identical.

2. THREE STONE VESSELS FROM THE MARDIN MUSEUM

2.1. MMSV - 1⁵ (2010/1917 (A) / E: 1044)

This greenish stone vessel with a simple flat rim has a polished surface. The diameter narrows from the top to the bottom and ends with a flat base (Fig. 1). Side by side drilled double holes were placed face to face on the short sides of the rim (Fig. 2/1). At first glance, it seems that there are no decorations on the stone vessel's body except for a band along the rim. However, when one looks carefully, there are faded incised motifs on the stone vessel. One band was incised close to the rim (Fig. 2/2), and in the centre are two opposing figures (Fig. 2/3). The figures were finished with simple lines, without any details and both somewhat resemble snakes or possibly animals with a tail.

2.2. MMSV - 2⁶ (2010-6026 (A) / E: 1043)

The vessel has a spherical body and a simple inward rim (Fig. 3). Two holes near the rim were pierced parallel to each other. The whole body and the base were decorated with incision. There is one incised band near the rim, and two bands near the base. Between the top and bottom bands, five centred, repeating, intertwined (nested) diamond motifs were applied in different numbers to the whole body (Fig. 3/A and Fig. 4). A similar pattern with four-centred, repeating, intertwined (nested) half diamond motifs occurs on the vessel's base (Fig. 3/B and Fig. 5).

2.3. MMSV - 3⁷ (2010-6025 (A) / E: 1163)

The last stone vessel, which is the most damaged, has a bowl shape with a simple rim and a flat base. Only one drilled hole was preserved on the rim, and a missing one was probably on the damaged side (Fig. 6). Decorations on the stone bowl were made through incision (Fig. 7). Three bands were placed by the rim (Fig. 7/1), and a single band is located c. 2 cm under the rim (Fig. 7/2). Half intertwined diamond motifs were incised between the bands, which give an irregular 'zigzag' motif (Fig. 7/3). Motifs resembling arrows, pointing to the rim, were placed into some of the empty space among the zigzag motifs (Fig. 7/4).

Various incised geometric and figurative motifs appeared on all of these differently shaped and sized vessels, including: zigzags (MMSV-3), simple band (all), intertwined (nested) diamonds (MMSV-2), arrows (MMSV-3) and an unclear figure (MMSV-1).

Each stone vessel has a different shape, however, they have all have double (MMSV-2 and MMSV-3) or even numbered drilled holes facing each other along the rim (MMSV-1). These holes were probably intended for hanging the stone vessels. Again, each stone vessel has at least a single band by the rim, although MMSV-2 has additionally two bands close to the base and MMSV-3 has a band almost in the middle of the vessel. This gave the craftsperson the opportunity to apply the geometrical patterns horizontally between the bands. Decoration on the base is only observed on MMSV-2. Possible figurative twin motifs have been applied only to the MMSV-1 vessel. They have been carved in a back to back position and it appears that they are the reflection of each other.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY STONE VESSELS FROM SOUTHEAST ANATOLIA

Stone vessels have been found abundantly in the region especially from the early dated sites. Körtik Tepe could be pointed to as the centre for such stone vessels since they have been excavated in great numbers there. Hallan Çemi is another site, which has delivered early produced stone vessels from the region.⁸ Stone vessels and their fragments, some with incision, were found in large numbers in Hallan Çemi. Numerous kinds of motifs have been detected on the vessels, such as crosshatching, meanders, zigzags, nested crosses as well as an animal (Rosenberg, 1999).

⁵ Mardin Museum Stone Vessel - 1

⁶ Mardin Museum Stone Vessel - 2

⁷ Mardin Museum Stone Vessel - 3

⁸ Benz et al. 2015, 10, wrote that "Previously the site of Hallan Cemi had been dated to the 10th Millennium BC. However, the ranges of those older data were very wide, and also covered the Early Holocene; 17 new AMS radiocarbon data (Higham et al. 2007) range between 9640 and 9400 cal. BC (μ ; 1 σ). Additionally, the archaeological remains from Hallan Cemi resemble more to those of the Early Holocene layers at Kortik Tepe than to the Younger Dryas ones; M. Rosenberg, personal comm. 23.9.14."

Recent excavations in Hasankeyf Höyük started to uncover a few of the oldest samples of stone vessels from the region.⁹ Geometrically decorated stone vessels made of chloritic included as grave goods were found in Hasankeyf Höyük (Miyake, 2013).

Stone vessels were produced for daily life requirements, but they were also an indispensable element of grave goods (Özkaya and Coşkun, 2008.). Some burials from Körtek Tepe contain grave goods like beads, stone tools, mace heads, and geometrically as well as figuratively decorated carved stone bowls (Arbuckle and Özkaya, 2006). Stone vessels, which were produced for daily use, are usually plain, while those used as grave goods exhibit more careful workmanship and richness of motifs (Özkaya and Coşkun, 2008.).

The three stone vessels from the Mardin Museum show similarities and differences in form as well as in motifs with the stone vessels from other sites. Indeed, there is nothing unusual about the form of the stone vessels from the Mardin Museum. Similar vessel forms could be observed at other sites in the region. Drilled holes by the rim in different numbers and the band by the rim or somewhere else on the vessel in different numbers can also be seen in vessels from Hallan Çemi, Hasankeyf Höyük, and Körtek Tepe.¹⁰

Geometrical motifs, especially the zigzag, are commonly observed on stone vessels. However, the combination of the zigzag with arrow motifs, like on MMSV-3, is unknown. The intertwined (nested) diamond motif on MMSV-2 that covers the entire body and the base could not yet be detected in the studied published material.

Figures like the ones on MMSV-1 could not be observed on any vessels that have been published (Fig. 8/A). However, one possible similar figure is detected on a stone plaque from Körtek Tepe (Fig. 8/B) (Özkaya and Coşkun, 2013); these figures are not exactly alike, but some similarities can be seen in the general rounded smooth body shape and especially the tail at the end of the body.

Another group of figures¹¹ were found on stone plaques again from Körtek Tepe (Fig. 8/C) (Özkaya et al., 2013). They have been found in small numbers and they might represent a different stage of the similar figure that has been found in Körtek Tepe (Fig. 8/B). One figure was pictured as it stands or floats in the air (Fig. 8/B); whereas the other is pictured as a kind of foetus or a figure rising up or stretching (Fig. 8/C) (Özkaya, 2004, Fig. 9/C).

Additional similarities between figures 8/B and 8/C are the position of the concentric circle in the chest area and the head. Figure 8/B is shown frontally and the other from the side (Fig. 8/C). Since the figure 8/B's head is finished frontally, the nose probably could not be highlighted as much as in figure 8/C. This very similar figure is detected as well from Hasankeyf Höyük, but this time on a bone plaque (Miyake, 2016).

4. CONCLUSION

Three stone vessels from the Mardin Museum were introduced in this study. It is almost impossible to locate their exact find locations. They might have been unearthed from very different locations by treasure hunters. However, there might be a possibility that they were uncovered somewhere between the cities of Diyarbakır, Batman/Siirt, and Mardin.

The vessels have been previously dated to the Neolithic. However, now the vessels can be dated more precisely to the early periods of the Neolithic namely to PPNA or PPNB after comparing them with early sites in the region.

⁹ The site is dated to Pre-pottery Neolithic A (Miyake et al. 2012).

¹⁰ Please see Sığın 2008; Lichter 2007 for the catalogue of 'Vor 12.000 Jahren in Anatolien'; Özkaya – Coşkun 2007; Özkaya – Coşkun 2013; Miyake 2013.

¹¹ Özkaya et al. 2013 described the figures on the stone plaques as looking like insect larvae. These kinds of finds are otherwise unknown in the region. The figures' heads resemble a dog or a goat. The extensions on the head could also be antennae and if so these figures might represent an insect like a bee. It is believed that these were related with the cult of the dead and were created as grave gifts.

The journey of these stone vessels might have ended as grave goods, but again there is no evidence for whether they may have been only used in daily life and not found in graves. The forms of the stone vessels do not give any key information since they are common forms in the region.

Geometrical and figurative motifs have been detected on each of the three vessels and it has been noticed that indeed each decorated vessel is so far unique in the region. There might be similarities, but not exact replications.

MMSV-2 has a unique nested diamonds decoration that covers the whole vessel, arrow motifs on MMSV-3 are yet unknown in the region, and figurative motifs on MMSV-1 might represent some similarities with the figures on the stone plaques that were found in Körtik Tepe and Hasankeyf Höyük. On the other hand, these figures on MMSV-1 might be representing snakes.

Understanding the stone vessels with decoration could lead us to understand what was happening in the minds and hearts of people who were experiencing the transition period from Palaeolithic life to settled life. People incised different motifs on the stone vessels to reflect and share their beliefs, ideas, fears, anxieties, dreams and stories.

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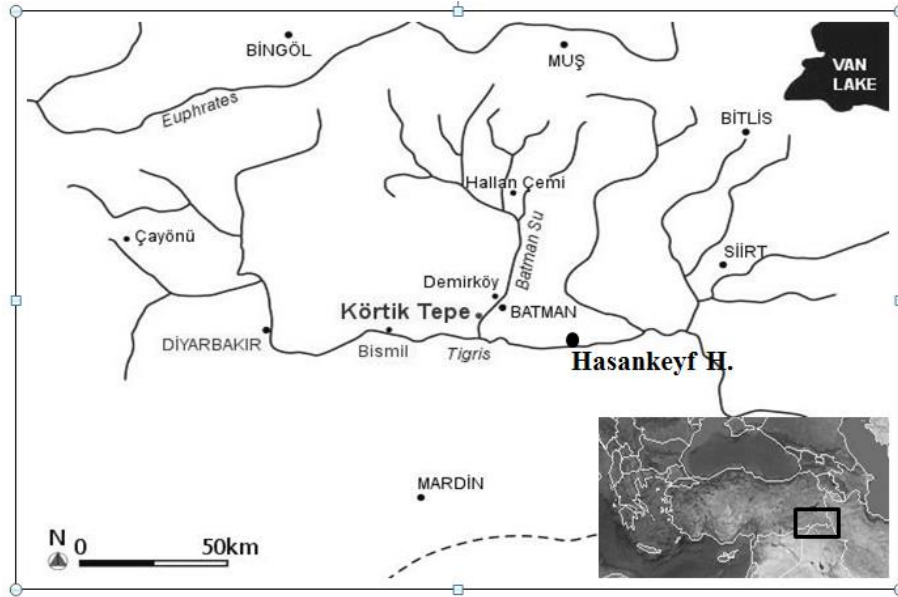
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Map. 1: Location map of the sites of Hallan Çemi, Hasankeyf Höyük, and Körtik Tepe, Southeast Anatolia (Özkaya and Coşkun 2009, modified by the authors).



Fig. 1: The greenish stone vessel (Height: 12 cm / Rim diameter: 9.4 cm x 12.5 cm / Base diameter: 7.7 cm x 5.9 cm). (Photo, Mardin Museum Archive).

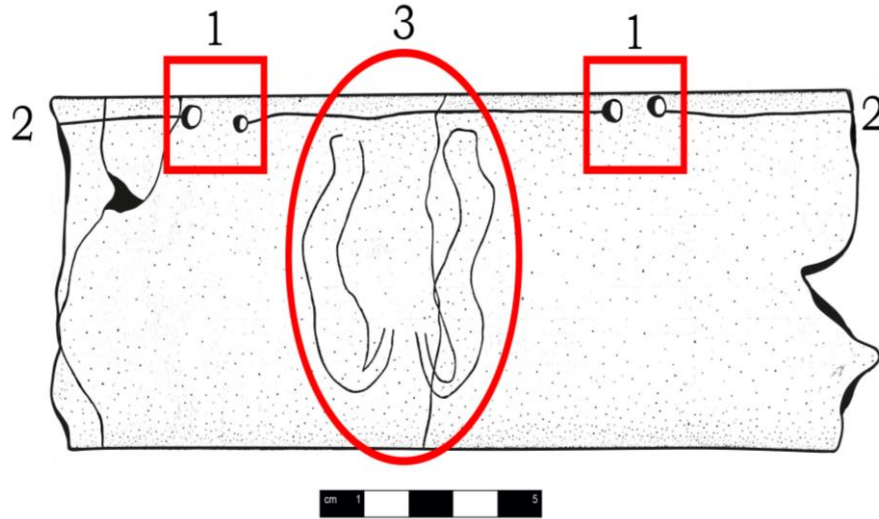


Fig. 2: Drawing of the stone vessel MMSV-1.¹²

¹² Stone vessels have been drawn and digitalized by Melahat Dağlı.



Fig. 3: The stone vessel with the nested diamond motif. A - Decorated body. B – Decorated base (Height: 8.1 cm / Rim diameter: 6.4 cm / Body diameter: 9.1 cm / Base diameter: 5 cm.) (Photo, Mardin Museum Archive).



Fig. 4: Body drawing of MMSV-2.

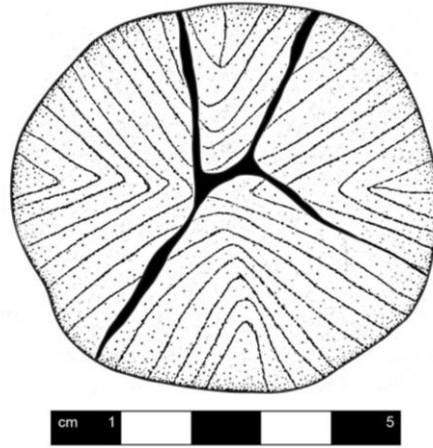


Fig. 5: Base drawing of MMSV-2.



Fig. 6: The stone bowl with arrow motifs (Height: 8.2 cm / Rim diameter: 11.2 cm / Body diameter: 12.5 cm / Base diameter: 10 cm) (Photo, Mardin Museum Archive).

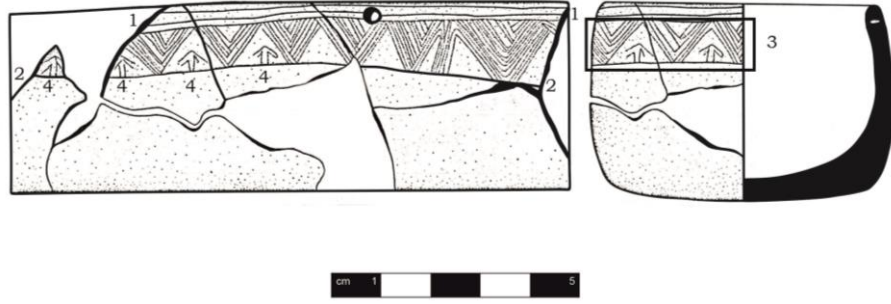


Fig. 7: Drawing of the stone bowl with arrow motifs.

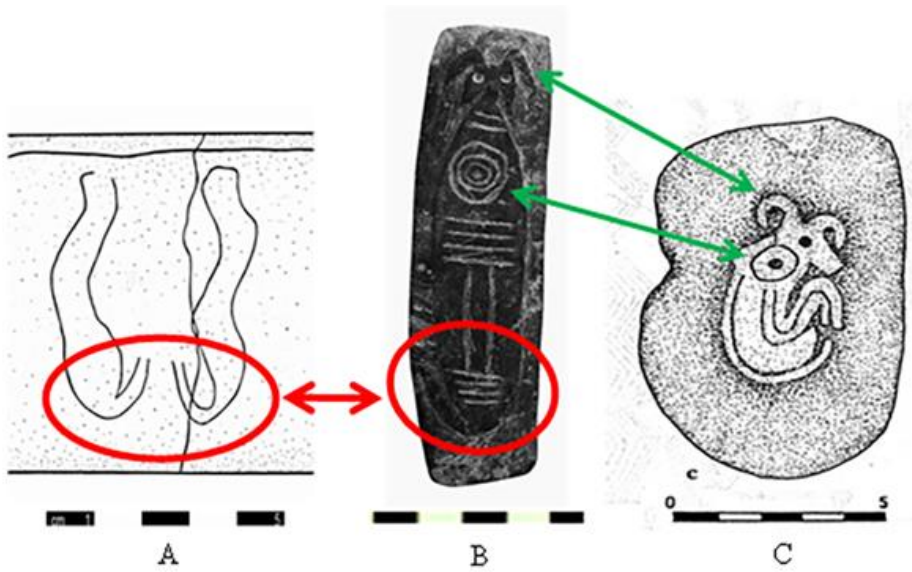


Fig. 8: A - Figurative motif on the stone vessel MMSV-1. B/C - Stone plaques found in Körtik Tepe.