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TÜRK ESKİÇAĞ BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ

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# Cult Tables in Anatolian Prehistory: Sapmaz Höyük Findings

*Anadolu Tarihöncesinde Kült Masaları: Sapmaz Höyük Buluntuları*



**Pınar ÇAYLI\***

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sapmaz Höyük, Kült Masası, Orta Anadolu, Neolitik, Kalkolitik

Köşeli ve çok ayaklı kaplar, bir diğer söylemle “kült masaları” Güneydoğu Avrupa tarihöncesi yerleşmelerinde sıkça karşılaşılan, bununla birlikte fonksiyonlarına ilişkin tartışmaların güncelliğini koruduğu madde kalıntılardandır. Anadolu coğrafyasında Güneydoğu Avrupa’ya göre daha geç tanınan kült masaları, özellikle Trakya, Doğu Marmara ve Batı Anadolu’da yoğunlaşmakta, Göller Bölgesi ve Orta Anadolu’da ise tekil örnekler görünmektedir. Kült masalarının kontekst dışı örneklerde bölgesel ve kronolojik dağılımı, biçim ve bezeme özellikleriyle yapılan tip tanımlamalarıyla takip edilebilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, “Aksaray Tarihöncesi Yüzeysel Araştırması: Kalkolitik Dönem Buluntu Alanları (AKYA)” 2023 sezonunda, Sapmaz (Yassıören) Höyük’te bulunan kült masalarına ait üç örnek değerlendirilmiştir. Höyükteki örneklerden biri taş, diğer iki örneğe pişmiş topraktan yapılmıştır. Buluntular hammadde, tipoloji ve bezeme özelliklerine göre tanımlanmıştır. Anadolu bağlamında kült masalarının genel tip tanımlamaları ve yaygınlık alanlarıyla ilgili genel çerçeve çizilerek, Sapmaz Höyük örneklerinin Fikirtepe ve Güneybatı Anadolu tipleri içindeki yeri değerlendirilmiştir.

**Keywords:** Sapmaz Höyük, Cult Table, Central Anatolia, Neolithic, Chalcolithic

*Angular and multi-legged vessels, also known as “cult tables”, are among the material remains frequently encountered in prehistoric settlements of southeastern Europe. However, the functions of these items remain a topic of debate among scholars. Cult tables, which were recognised in Anatolia later than in southeastern Europe, are particularly concentrated in Thrace, eastern Marmara and western Anatolia, while isolated examples are found in the Lakes District and Central Anatolia. The regional and chronological distribution of cult tables in out-of-context examples can now be traced through the use of type descriptions based on their forms and decorations. The findings of the Aksaray Prehistoric survey of Chalcolithic period find sites (AKYA) project for the 2023 season are presented herewith. At Sapmaz (Yassıören) Höyük, three examples of cult tables were subjected to evaluation. One of the samples from the mound is made of stone, while the other two examples are made of terracotta. The finds were identified according to their raw material, typology and decoration. This paper presents a general outline of the typology and distribution of cult tables in the Anatolian context, and evaluates the place of the Sapmaz Höyük examples within the Fikirtepe and southwestern Anatolian types.*

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## Introduction

The site of Sapmaz Höyük has been identified through archaeological surveys conducted in the vicinity of Salt Lake since the latter part of the 20th century. The site was initially documented by I. Todd (1966: 43-44; 1980), then by S. Omura (1991: 71; 1993), and subsequently within the scope of the Central Anatolian Salt Project, which was initiated in 2003 (Erdoğu, Kayacan 2004). Notwithstanding the evidence from the surveys indicating that the region was inhabited during the prehistoric period, no comprehensive excavations have been conducted in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements situated around Salt Lake. The relative dating based on surface finds is predominantly derived from chipped stone tools, indicating a probable date within the Neolithic period<sup>1</sup>. In some cases, the chipped stone artifact assemblages were corroborated by pottery<sup>2</sup>, while in others, the prehistoric chronological framework was augmented with new discoveries, as observed in the case of Sapmaz Höyük.

This study analyses the fragments of three distinct cult tables discovered at Sapmaz Höyük, which was visited during the 2023 season as part of the Aksaray Prehistoric Survey (AKYA).<sup>3</sup> The assemblage comprises two terracotta fragments and one stone fragment. One of the terracotta fragments represents a single foot, while the other is a body and foot fragment belonging to the same vessel. The terracotta examples display evidence of decoration. The stone one is devoid of decoration and of sufficient size to allow an estimation of the overall dimensions. The sherds were subjected to analysis by the following criteria: raw material, typology and decoration.

Cult tables are a prominent feature of the archaeological record in southeastern Europe throughout the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. They are notable for their stylistic diversity and abundance. Since the early 20th century, this region has been the focus of intensified research on prehistoric material culture. Despite the introduction of systematic approaches to the classification and interpretation of cult tables since the 1980s, the interpretation of their functions remains controversial due to the fragmentary nature of the majority of examples, the relatively small number of examples found in defined contexts, and the lack of comprehensive catalogue information on published examples (Schwarzberg 2003; 2006: 128).

Cult tables are most prevalent in eastern Thrace, eastern Marmara, and western Anatolia. However, there are individual examples in the Lakes District and Central Anatolia.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Neolithic settlements around Salt Lake dated on the basis of bifacial chipped stone tools; for the chipped stone tool industry of Ilıcıpınar, see Mellaart 1958; Todd 1966.

<sup>2</sup> The similarities of some of the pottery collected around Salt Lake within the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements known from excavations in the region are emphasised, (Erdoğu et al. 2007: 90, 91; Erdoğu, Özbaşaran 2007: 142).

<sup>3</sup> A foot fragment with incised decoration from Sapmaz Höyük is known from the literature (Omura 1991: 77, Fig. 3.1).





Figure 1. The settlements mentioned in the text

Some of the documented examples were identified through surface surveys, while others were discovered during excavations, either in the fills or in the layers. The Anatolian examples have been classified into typologies and decoration groups in accordance with their geographical distribution. The earliest examples can be traced back to approximately 6400 BC, with the latest examples dating to 5500 BC (Schwarzberg 2009: 169).

In this context, the Sapmaz Höyük findings, as identified in the AKYA 2023 studies, were considered together with the chronological table and the types associated with prehistoric cultural regions. This evaluation was based on examples from Anatolia.

## The General Characterictis of Sapmaz Höyük (Yassören) and the Project

One of the primary objectives of the Aksaray Prehistoric Survey Project is to identify processes that are not acknowledged by conventional archaeological excavation techniques (Demirtaş *et al.* 2023: 460). The project commenced in 2021 and encompasses the entirety of the Aksaray province. In the context of AKYA, the objective is to address the chronological gaps concerning to the prehistoric cultures of the region by focusing on transitional processes. The study of sites reflecting the Pottery Neolithic-Early Chalcolithic and Late Chalcolithic-Early Bronze Ages, as well as the transitions between these periods, is currently underway. In this context, Sapmaz Höyük was visited in 2023.

Sapmaz Höyük is located on the Aksaray-Ankara road, approximately 2 km from the village of the same name and at an altitude of approximately 1000 m to the southwest



**Figure 2.** *A general view of the Sapmaz Höyük*

(Fig. 2). It is not possible to define the boundaries and height of the mound due to the impact of agricultural activities. However, the mound is approximately 7 hectares large. In this study, an area of 250 x 280 meters was subjected to an intensive survey by a team of six individuals over two working days. The excavation of the illegally dug pits revealed no architectural traces of the settlement, and the damage caused by deep ploughing was evident. However, the construction of a facility on the mound revealed the presence of mud bricks in a section of a three-metre-deep foundation pit excavated by a construction machine (Fig. 3).

The 2023 survey at AKYA Sapmaz Höyük yielded a variety of obsidian artifacts, including flakes, cores, arrowheads, leaf-shaped arrowheads, blades, and re-touched blade fragments. (Fig. 4h-i). Additionally, handmade pottery, raw materials, and tool fragments suitable for grinding stone technology were recovered. It was established that the raw materials employed in the production of grinding stones included diabase, gabbro, basalt, fine-grained gabbro, granite, ignimbrite, tuff and marble (to a lesser extent)<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 4k). The homogeneous structure of the assemblages indicates that the mound was only occupied during the prehistoric era.

An arrowhead crafted from flint was unearthed in the context of the chipped stone tool

<sup>4</sup> The identification of the raw materials used in the production of the grinding stone tools was conducted by Dr. Aleš Bajer (Mendel University, Department of Geology and Soil Science) and Mustafa Yıldız (Aksaray University, Department of Geological Engineering).



**Figure 3.** *Destruction pit at Sapmaz Höyük*

industry (Fig. 4j). It is notable that obsidian was used extensively, with macroscopic observations indicating that the sources were Nenezi, Göllüdağ, Kayırlı, and Kömürcü-Kaletepe.<sup>5</sup> The archaeological site of Sapmaz Höyük has been dated to the late 8th millennium BC (Late Aceramic Neolithic) based on the observed similarities between the artifacts found there and those from the Musular specimens. These similarities include the presence of unifacially pressure arrowheads with inverse retouch, which is limited to the proximal end. Furthermore, arrowheads crafted using a similar technique have been unearthed in the settlements of the Konya Plain (Erdoğu, Kayacan 2004: 222; Erdoğu, Özbaşaran 2007: 142).

Of particular interest among the sherds that can be dated to the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic, are the grey/brown/buff burnished fine ware groups, the scraped, the finger-printed and incised decorations, a small number of red slipped burnished ware groups and the footed table sherds<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 4a-g). Initial observations indicate that the ware group

<sup>5</sup> Previous publications have indicated that the raw materials utilized in the flaked stone industry of Sapmaz Höyük were predominantly obsidian, with a relatively limited number of flint tools. The macroscopic observations of the obsidian revealed a predominantly light grey coloration. The obsidian exhibited a range of colours, including transparent, opaque black, striped and opaque green. The sources of the obsidian could be Göllü Dağ and Nenezi Dağ. For further details, see Erdoğu and Kayacan (2004: 221).

<sup>6</sup> As the AKYA Sapmaz Höyük ware groups are the subject of a separate study, detailed information will not be provided here. For the ware groups identified in previous studies, please refer to Todd (1966: 43-44) and Erdoğu and Kayacan (2004: 219, 221).

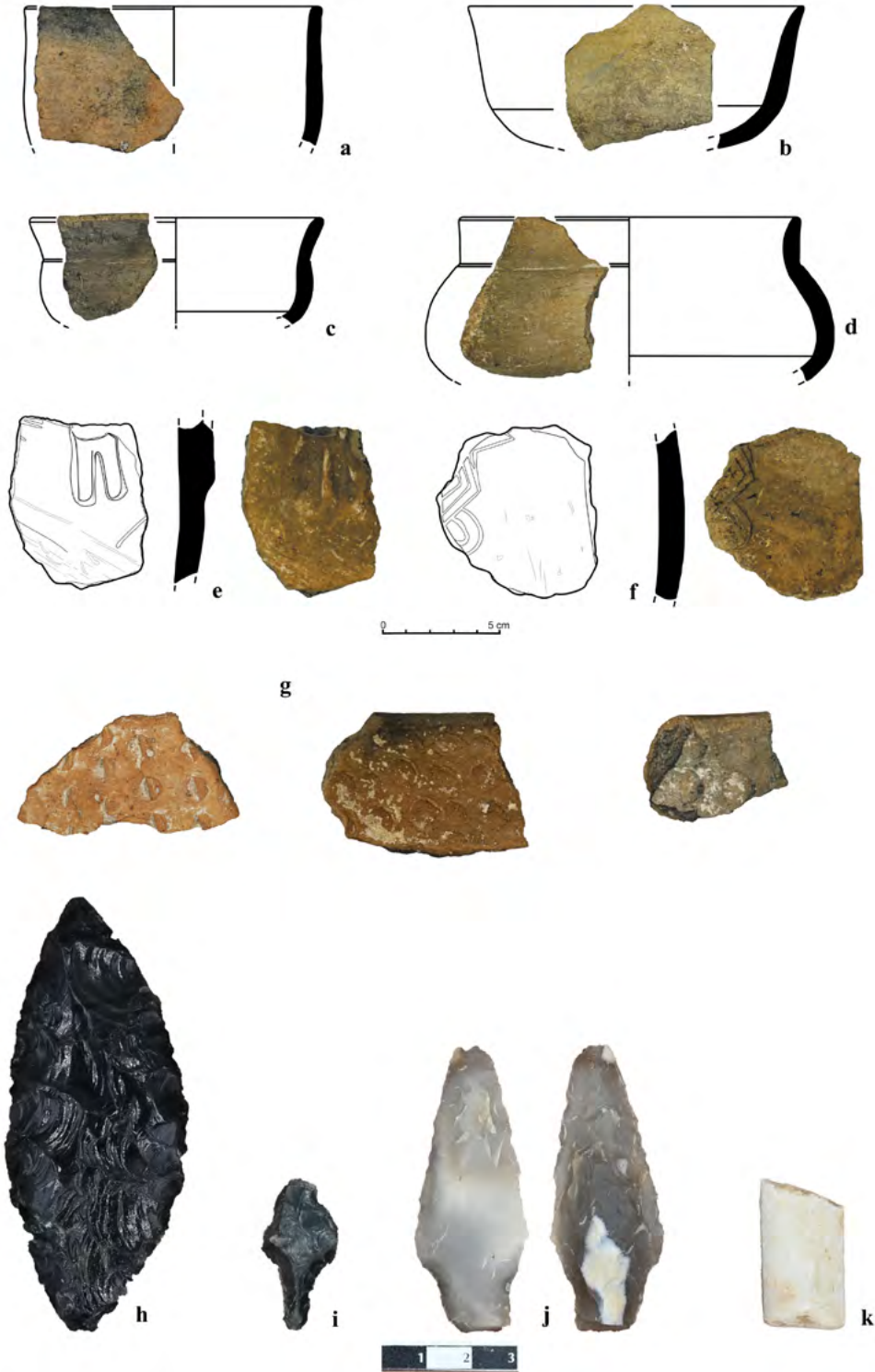


Figure 4. Sapmaz Höyük find samples in AKYA 2023 season

and vessel shape characteristics are comparable to those of the Demircihöyük ware Group E. The finger-printed decorated sherds, grey and greenish grey thin-walled burnished vessels, incised decorated sherds, and short bases, which are not known in the region, exhibit the closest similarities to the Demircihöyük sherds of the Early Chalcolithic. The archaeological evidence comprises the presence of Late Neolithic pottery and chipped stone tools comparable to those from East Çatalhöyük, as well as Chalcolithic material (Omura 1991: fig. 2, 3(1-6), and 10-12). Additionally, the arrowheads with bifacial pressure-retouched found in the chipped stone tool industry are also present and support this dating (Erdoğu, Kayacan 2004: 219, 221, 225). The pottery displays a comparable relief, incised and impressed decoration to that observed at Köşk Höyük 2-3 (Özcan, Özkan 2003: 451), Tepecik Çiftlik 2 (Bıçakçı *et al.* 2007: 243) and Gelveri (Özbudak 2012: 276).

In light of the aforementioned arguments, it appears feasible to delineate an uninterrupted chronological interval spanning from the end of the 8th millennium BC to the beginning of the 6th millennium BC at Sapmaz Höyük.

## Research History of Cult Tables and Some Reflections

Despite the introduction of systematic approaches to the classification and interpretation of cult tables, which played a significant role in the inventory of material culture throughout the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods in southeastern Europe, the interpretation of their functions remains a topic of contention (Schwarzberg 2003; 2006: 128).

Due to the distinctive forms of cult objects, they are referenced in the literature under a variety of terms, including altar, oil lamp, clay table, sacrificial platform, sacrificial vessel, and throne. Nevertheless, despite the implications of these terms regarding the function of the finds, typological analyses are insufficient to prove that they were used for ritual purposes. A comparable situation arises with the term “multi-legged prismatic vessel” which encompasses altars in the form of tables or angular vessels. While these finds, which can be broadly categorized<sup>7</sup> as three-legged, four-legged, and footless, are a fundamental aspect of the Balkans as a whole, a variety of local forms have also been identified, with notable differences and subtypes, particularly regarding their decorative elements. Furthermore, there are a few examples that feature appliquéd human or animal heads, as well as pedestal altars with intricate anthropomorphic and zoomorphic embellishments. It is hypothesized that these applications serve to reinforce the symbolic meaning of the vessel. Although it has been proposed that in some instances, the receptacle on the table is identified as a platform for liquid or solid objects and that they were utilized as oil lamps or incense burners, there is a paucity of analyses to substantiate these proposed uses. The

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the sub-forms classified in addition to the three types, please refer to Naumov (2011: 93; 2009: 113–117).

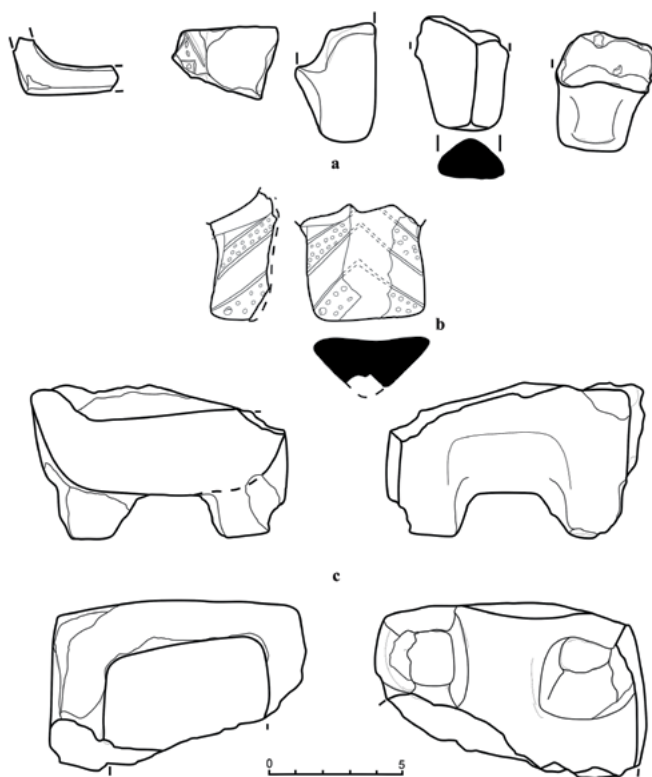


Figure 5. *Sapmaz Höyük cult tables in AKYA 2023 season*

tables with holes in the center, from contexts such as tombs, workshops, ritual pits and/or silos, provide the most compelling indication that these finds were used as cult objects. In the majority of archaeological studies where these finds have been recorded in great detail, they are only recorded as part of the pottery inventory, which makes it challenging to ascertain their function. Notwithstanding, there are notable exceptions that elucidate their symbolic nuances and offer more exhaustive chronological and typological analyses (Schwarzberg 2003; Naumov 2011: 90-93, 95, 100; 2009: 118-123; Stanković 1986).

In the literature, prismatic multi-legged vessels are also referred to as “offering tables” and “cult tables”.<sup>8</sup> The terms “prismatic multi-legged vessels” and “cult tables” are used to describe terracotta vessels with a prismatic body, triangular, rectangular or square in shape, and three or four legs at the corners, measuring up to 20 cm in length. The decoration is predominantly incised, carved, occasionally burnished and painted, and in a limited number of cases, appliquéd (Schwarzberg 2006: 127-128; 2005a; Çilingiroğlu 2012: 30, 62). The footless, flat prismatic vessels with a flat table surface are typically regarded as

<sup>8</sup> The term “cult table” will be employed throughout this study to refer to small prismatic multi-legged vessels.



**Figure 6.** *Sapmaz Höyük cult tables in AKYA 2023 season*

miniature tables. It is recommended that both such vessels and miniature examples of domestic or furniture items be considered as distinct find groups, to be evaluated separately from cult tables (Schwarzberg 2005b: 247, 250-251).

The initial identification of cult tables was made through the examination of examples discovered in Bulgaria (Seure, Degrand 1906: 368, 412-413). During the same period, cult objects from the Vinca culture (Vassits 1910: 38) were also included in the literature. In addition to the southeastern European examples, which also warrant attention due to their high density in the settlements where they were found, Neolithic and Chalcolithic cult objects have been identified in a broad region, including western Anatolia, since the 1970s (Bittel 1971: fig. 9-10; Özdoğan 1979: pl. 49-52, 74, 76; Roodenberg 2001: fig. 3; Seeher 1987: Taf. 16.1-40; 17.1-34; 18.1-4; Schwarzberg 2006).

As previously stated, the challenge in classifying the general typological characteristics and vessel parts of cult tables lies in the fact that they are predominantly recovered in broken fragments. In light of the available descriptions of the complete or incomplete examples, there is a general consensus that these objects are composed of three main parts. These comprise the foot, the body wall and any additional attachments, such as the neck,

handle or protome<sup>9</sup>. The tabletop, which is bounded by the body wall, typically exhibits a concave shape. The tabletop is circumscribed by a rim of varying heights. In some cases, the presence of incised and painted decoration in this area, referred to as the chamber, suggests that it may have been used for the production of oil lamps or incense, thereby reducing the likelihood of its designation as a cult object. The decorations, which are predominantly located on the external surfaces, are limited by a dashed line (see Schwarzberg 2005b: 247-250; 2005a: 259; 2006: 128).

In the initial comprehensive studies on typology, function and dating, the “cult tables” were evaluated in southeastern Europe in conjunction with western Bulgarian painted pottery. A basic classification was established, comprising three- or four-sided forms with or without a hollow tabletop (C’ochadziev 1978: 32; 1983: 29–68). The term “cult vessel” was first employed and the vessel’s constituent parts were identified at the Sitagroi site (Elster 1986: 323, Fig. 10.2.9; Schwarzberg 2005b: 251).

In the 1990s, the classification of the decoration of the cult tables based on the examples from Bulgaria and Croatia, and their inclusion in miniature vessels, as well as typological distinctions based on a limited number of cult objects, were subjected to criticism for being superficial and regional. Nevertheless, the identification and classification of cult table examples from southern Bulgaria (Vandova 1995: 1-7; 1997) is acknowledged as a comprehensive study conducted in 1995. Over time, the scope of research on the subject has expanded, and a variety of views on formal sub-classifications (form, foot, table top), decoration and function have been proposed (Schwarzberg 2005b: 252-253). In the 2000s and beyond, there has been a notable increase in the number of studies on cult tables, accompanied by a diversification of typological descriptions (for further details, please see footnote 7 and the works of Buzea 2006; Terziiska, Ignatova 2010, 2018; Mirea 2015; Eduard-Ştefan 2014; Grębska-Kulow, Zidarov 2021).

The distribution of cult tables in geographical areas designed to trace elements of the Neolithic package has been assessed in light of the proliferation of data on the subject from different regions: (1) the primary area of Neolithisation the Levant, northern Syria-Mesopotamia, western Iran, southeastern Anatolia, and the Central Anatolian Plateau, and (2) the western parts of the Anatolian peninsula. This also includes the immediate vicinity of this region, the western parts of the Anatolian peninsula, and possibly the coastal areas of the Aegean Sea and the Lakes District, where cult tables are not a significant feature of the pottery assemblage. Conversely, it is emphasised that (3) in the north-south aligned region in the interior-west of Anatolia and in the eastern parts of the Sea of Marmara, as

<sup>9</sup> Despite the association of protomes with the appliqué of human and animal heads on vessels and other objects, it is proposed that their meaning be expanded to encompass the practices observed on some cult tables (Schwarzberg 2005b: 247).



well as (4) in most of the Aegean and the Balkans, except for the Adriatic coast, these are common objects (Özdoğan 2014: 35-36, 45).<sup>10</sup>

The growth in research activity on the subject of “cult tables” has given rise to the development of new approaches to the topic. Some researchers propose a more comprehensive approach on evaluating this specific group of finds. In light of the aforementioned considerations, it is proposed that the cult tables from southeastern Europe, which have been identified across a vast geographical area and exhibit a range of variants at various stages of the Neolithic process, should be incorporated into the “Neolithic package(s)” by taking chronological and regional arguments into account (Schwarzberg 2006: 131; 2005a: 267). In another study, which discusses the concept of “Neolithic package” from the Near East, which is often used in Neolithic studies, offering vessels/cult tables which are not found in the Neolithic east of the Taurus Mountains according to our current knowledge<sup>11</sup>, are discussed together with their regional and chronological differences (Çilingiroğlu 2005: 3-4,8).

## Neolithic and Chalcolithic “Cult Tables” in Anatolia

The emergence of cult tables in Anatolian archaeology lagged behind that of the same phenomenon in southeastern Europe. The earliest known examples originate from the Marmara and Lakes District. In the initial stages of analysis, the artefacts from the Fikirtepe culture were categorised as “footed vessels” (Bittel 1971: Fig. 10), whereas those from the Lakes District were designated as “boxes” (Duru 1993: 131). Mellaart (1965: 156) and Özdoğan (1979: 122-126) were the first to establish the southeastern European connections of these small finds and to identify them as cult tables. The majority of cult table examples recovered in Anatolia, regardless of whether they are fragments or complete examples, were recovered independently of the levels to which they belong (Schwarzberg 2005b: 251). Additionally, examples from context have been recovered at Fikirtepe (Istanbul), Pendik (Istanbul), Yenikapı (Istanbul), Menteşe (Bursa), Ilıpınar (Bursa), Aktopraklık (Bursa), and Barçın (Bursa). Additionally, examples have been recovered from the following locations: Demircihöyük (Eskişehir), Ulucak (Izmir), Uğurlu (Gökçeada), Bahçelievler (Bilecik), Hacılar (Burdur), Höyücek (Burdur), Kuruçay (Burdur), Bademağacı (Antalya), Doğu Çatalhöyük (Konya), Köşk Höyük (Niğde), Hocaçeşme (Edirne)

<sup>10</sup> For further details on the core and sub-regions designed to follow Neolithic package elements, please refer to Özdoğan (2023: 246-251, Fig. 226).

<sup>11</sup> It is worthy of note that two four-legged altars, dated to the late Neolithic period, have been discovered at the Hakemi Use settlement. One is red-slip and unburnished, while the other is paste-coloured with bitumen strip paint on the rim. These examples, which are not attested in northern Mesopotamia, are currently considered to be exclusive to Hakemi Use. Tekin (2007) Figure 18, number 53.

and Aşağıpınar (Kırklareli)<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 1).

In his extensive studies of Balkan and Anatolian examples, H. Schwarzberg defined the Anatolian examples according to typology and decoration groups. The initial group comprises rectangular and box-like forms, typically burnished, with fine incised decoration (geometric forms and checkered patterns) and dot decoration. These characteristics are associated with the Late Neolithic period of northwestern Anatolia, specifically with the Fikirtepe culture, and are referred to as the “Fikirtepe type” in the relevant literature. Examples of this group have also been identified in settlements in western Anatolia. In recent years, with the increase in the number of examples from western Anatolia and the identification of local styles, the term “western Anatolian type” has begun to be used with greater frequency. These examples, which are found extensively on the eastern coast of the Marmara Sea and in the hinterland of Anatolia, are also known from the Burdur Region and Central Anatolia, where they exhibit some typological (absence of large handles) and decorative differences (Schwarzberg 2005a: 256, 262; 2009: 169, 170).

The second group is rectangular and table-like in shape, with a low rim, a shallow chamber at the top, long or short legs, and a markedly rougher surface than the boxes. The examples from the Konya Plain and the Lakes District are typically devoid of any decorative embellishments. In the literature, it is referred to as the “southwestern Anatolian type”. The limited number of examples that have been identified are described in Schwarzberg (2005a: 261, 262; 2009: 169). Duru (2008: 108) defines these finds as “miniature table” or “table model”, which were produced for use in votive offerings or other ceremonial activities during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods.

The cult tables with rounded legs and triangular form in Thrace and the quadrangular form at the Gökçeada Uğurlu site, which are evaluated in a separate category and show Balkan connections, are not included in the scope of this study<sup>13</sup> (Schwarzberg 2005a: 269-270; 2009: 169).

<sup>12</sup> For further details, please refer to Özdoğan (2013: 211, Figs. 8-9), Özdoğan (1983), Kızıltan (2014) and Roodenberg, Alpaslan Roodenberg (2013) 77, Fig. 13; Thissen 2001, Fig. 14; Avcı 2010. Please refer to Plate 53 in Schwarzberg (2009) for further details: 167, 168; Seeher (1987), Table; 16.31-40; 17; 18.1-4; Çilingiroğlu (2012: 21); Çevik, Erdoğan (2019: 12); Sarıaltun et al. (2023: 6, 7); Schwarzberg (2005a: 261, Fig. 7:1); Duru (2008) 108-111, Fig. 199; Duru 2019: 78; Mellaart 1962: 55, Fig. 9.3; Öztan, Özkan 2003: 449, 457, Fig. 3.5; Özdoğan 2013: 242, Fig. 93-94; Özdoğan et al. 1991; Schwarzberg 2005a: 261, Fig. 7: 8-10.

<sup>13</sup> The majority of cult tables that can be traced without interruption throughout the entire Neolithic period (7th-2nd levels - 5950-4700 cal. BC) at the site of Aşağıpınar originate from the Early Neolithic (Early Chalcolithic in Anatolian chronology). All of the aforementioned examples are triangular in form. From Level 5 onwards, the presence of rounded corners on triangular forms and a scarcity of quadrilateral forms are also observed (Özdoğan 2013: 183; Schwarzberg 2005b: 248, 254, 261-278, Abb.1, Lev. 1-25; Lev. 3/6, 5/1, 6/1, 9/3; Schwarzberg 2005a: 261; 2005b: cat. nos. 20, 38, 39, 87, 139, 201). A foot fragment from the neighbouring Kanlıgeçit site is comparable to the Aşağıpınar examples in terms of decorative elements (Schwarzberg 2005a: 261, Fig. 7/11). Furthermore, triangular or quadrilateral forms (Özdoğan E. 2009: 431, 432; Özdoğan 2013: 182, 242, Figs. 93-94) have been observed. In 2009, Özdoğan (2013: 182, 242, Fig. 93-94) identified a triangular-shaped example from the Middle and

## Fikirtepe Type

The Fikirtepe Culture is defined by the data of Neolithic settlements on the coasts of the Marmara Sea, especially in eastern and southern Marmara and western central Anatolia.<sup>14</sup> The area of influence of the culture has been expanding with the research conducted in recent years, and it is also observed in the west of Istanbul and in the interior of northwestern Anatolia (Özdoğan 2018: 21, 22; 2023: 22, 23).

The Fikirtepe settlement, which lends its name to the culture, yielded 160 sherds belonging to cult tables, which Özdoğan (1979) describes as “unusual and interesting components” of the culture (Please refer to Table 49-52; 74; 76; 2013: 211, Figs. 8-9; 2023: 44; Schwarzberg 2005a: 257). The Fikirtepe culture is characterized by the presence of rectangular vessels with multiple legs, also referred to as boxes. These vessels are typically decorated and are not associated with utilitarian purposes. While these types of vessels were uncommon during the Archaic phase, they became prevalent during the subsequent Classic Fikirtepe phase (Özdoğan 2007: 412, Fig. 12-13). The majority of pottery produced during the Fikirtepe culture era is crafted from a paste containing a high proportion of grit temper. The surfaces of the vessels are characterized by a high degree of smoothness and burnishing. The majority of these vessels are characterized by dark colors, primarily brownish black, though not in particularly vibrant tones. The angular footed vessels, which are predominantly dark brown, reddish brown, or blackish brown in color, are typically mottled in their own hue, burnished, and well-fired. The dimensions of the vessels are approximately 10 cm in length and width. The most notable aspect of the pottery

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Late Neolithic Phase I (levels 1 a-c) at Hoca Çeşme. Similarly, Schwarzberg (2005a: 261, Fig. 7/4-6) also documented an example from the same period. Furthermore, a triangular-shaped example from the Yarımburgaz Cave (dated to 5400 cal. BC) was assigned to Level IV (Özdoğan 2013: 177, 221, Fig. 36; Schwarzberg 2005a: 261). In the Gökçeada Uğurlu context, cult tables were initially observed in small numbers during the early Phase IV period (5900-5500 cal. BC), before becoming more prevalent during Phase III (5500-4900 cal. BC) (Çevik, Erdoğan 2019: 12). It is noteworthy that a significant number of quadrangular cult tables have been unearthed within ritual pits (Erdoğan 2013: 6-7; see Fig. 38, 43; Karamurat 2018: 90-92, Fig. 27, Fig. 28; Karamurat et al. 2021: 28, Fig. 5). The triangular forms, which are absent from the archaeological record of Anatolia, indicate connections with the Balkans (Schwarzberg 2005a: 261, 262, 265). In this section, the names of the prehistoric periods are used in accordance with the Balkan chronology. For further details regarding the chronology employed in eastern Balkan prehistory, the regional context, and their equivalents in Anatolian prehistory, please refer to Özdoğan (2013: 168).

<sup>14</sup> The culture is relatively dated, with finds from the Fikirtepe and Pendik settlements in Istanbul in the 1980s. The cultural connections established through the excavations at Ilıpınar and Demircihöyük in the 1990s, and later at Menteşe, Barçın, Aktopraklık and Yenikapı, demonstrate that the Fikirtepe culture dates back to the mid-7th millennium BC and has a wide geographical distribution. The culture is analysed in four phases: “Archaic Fikirtepe” (Pendik, Ilıpınar X-IX, Menteşe, Demircihöyük, Aktopraklık C, Barçın Höyük), “Classical Fikirtepe” (Fikirtepe, the Pendik phase, the Fikirtepe-Yarımburgaz transition phase (represented by the Demircihöyük and Yenikapı sites), and the Advanced Fikirtepe phase (represented by the Yarımburgaz IV and Ilıpınar VIII sites) are distinguished by Özdoğan (2013: 193-195; 2023: 241-244; 300).

decorations of this culture is the prevalence of simple geometric motifs, including zig-zag, lattice, checkerboard, cross-striped triangles, and dashed lines. Additionally, a small number of decorations are observed to be in a naturalistic style. The decorations, which are predominantly applied to the external surfaces of the vessel walls, are created through the utilization of incision, scratching and punctuation techniques. A total of 30.3% of the decorated vessels at Fikirtepe are of the “Form V” variety, which is characterized by a box-like shape with a base and foot. The incising is executed with extremely thin and shallow lines, which are occasionally nearly invisible. The incised lines are typically shallow, although some of the fragments employ the use of a broad-bladed tool. On occasion, the principal motif is encased within a double-lined panel. Additionally, some foot fragments have been observed to exhibit decorative elements. The feet are positioned either at the corners or inwards from the edges. The height of the feet varies between 2 and 4 centimeters. The presence of rounded edges and horizontal, large handles, also observed on cult tables, is notable for its rarity. The presence of examples with long handles suggests that the vessels may have been used to carry lamps or fires. However, none of the examples show any traces of soot (Özdoğan 2023: 70, 72, 75, 76, 78, 300, 30, Fig. 137/D2, D249, Fig.138/D2, Fig.139/D3, Fig.142/7750, Fig.152, Fig.153/D87, Plate 20-21).

At the Pendik settlement in East Marmara, angular-box sherds commonly display a variety of geometric patterns, including parallel lines, bands, and triangular or quadrilateral motifs filled with fine incised decoration. However, some sherds display incisions of greater depth, filled with a white material. Additionally, rounded edges and banded handles have been observed in this context (Özdoğan 1983: Fig. 5, 6.6.7.10.14.15; Schwarzberg 2005a: 257).

The band handle application on cult tables from Fikirtepe (Özdoğan 2013: 211, Fig. 9; Schwarzberg 2005a: 258, Fig. 2:3) is also known from Menteşe, a settlement in South Marmara. The handle was affixed to one of the shorter sides. The object was recorded as a grave find. The angular vessel, measuring 10 cm, bears a striking resemblance to the Fikirtepe examples in terms of typology, geometric excavation decoration and filling elements (Roodenberg, Alpaslan Roodenberg 2013: 77; Fig. 13).

Similarly, the Ilıpınar site, situated in the same region and associated with the Fikirtepe culture, has yielded incised-decorated angular vessel sherds in Levels X and IX. The most readily identifiable of these is a 5 cm long and 4.5 cm high sherd with a circular motif comprising filled incised and dot decoration (Thissen 2001: Fig. 14; Schwarzberg 2005a: 259, Fig. 3:5).

The examples from Aktopraklık C, dated to the mid-7th millennium BC, are typically square in shape, though triangular examples are also present (Avcı 2010: Pl. 53). As observed at other Fikirtepe culture sites, these vessels are decorated with geometric incised patterns and exhibit a high degree of burnishing. The discovery of cult tables, a defining feature of the Fikirtepe culture, at the earliest phases of the Aktopraklık C, Menteşe, and

Barçın settlements provides compelling evidence of early contact and continuity within the culture (Karul 2017: 71, 92).

Barçın represents one of the most significant Neolithic settlements in the southern Marmara Region, alongside Ilıpınar, Menteşe and Aktopraklık. The initial example is documented in the archaeological surveys conducted in the 1960s (French 1967: Fig. 20, 72). The study of examples of deep, box-shaped cult tables was conducted in great detail. The majority of the samples were retrieved from layers (Özbal *et al.* 2014: 617, Fig. 6). The majority of the vessels are characterized by a dark coloration, predominantly brown or black, and display evidence of both well-fired and burnished manufacture. The mean height of the square or rectangular vessels is 5.5–9 cm. The aforementioned samples are of shorter stature than those from Fikirtepe and Menteşe. The most proximate similarities of the examples with handles (Pendik, Menteşe, Marmaracık, Demircihöyük) (Seeher 1987: Taf. 6/21; 16/36; 17/21.23.30; 18/3) include one example from Barçın (Gerritsen *et al.* 2013: 98, Fig. 11). The majority of the sherds are decorated, with the most common forms of decoration being nets, lattices, zigzags, triangular scratch marks and scrapes. The checkerboard motifs that are commonly used in the northern Marmara region are not present in the Barçın assemblage. While the pottery groups from Barçın are generally reflective of the Fikirtepe culture, local characteristics were identified on the cult tables. The earliest and most clearly defined cult tables of the western Anatolian type are found at the settlement, and the examples originate from levels dated between 6400 and 6200 BC (Schwarzberg 2009: 169–171; Roodenberg, Alpaslan Roodenberg 2008: 55, Fig. 6).

The Yenikapı excavations, conducted as part of the Istanbul Marmaray Metro Transport Project, have not only augmented the archaeological record of Istanbul pertaining to the prehistoric era, but have also yielded new insights into the Fikirtepe culture. The Neolithic layer identified during the Yenikapı excavations yielded evidence of the Archaic and Classical phases of the Fikirtepe culture, as well as pottery groups similar to those of the Yarımburgaz IV pottery. During the course of the excavations, a cult vessel dated to the Fikirtepe Classic Phase was documented. This vessel, characterized by a short four-legged base and a handle breakout on one of the short sides, displays an incised decoration and a distinctive technique. It features checkers on one side and geometric motifs on the other, which are consistent with the attributes observed in cult vessels associated with the Fikirtepe culture. Additionally, foot fragments of such vessels were discovered (Kızıltan 2014: 27; 41, Fig. 11).

One of the settlements in the interior of northwestern Anatolia where the influence of the Fikirtepe culture can be observed is Demircihöyük, located near Eskişehir. The Neolithic and Chalcolithic levels underlying the Early Bronze Age settlement were identified through the analysis of pottery recovered from depth soundings. The seven ware groups (A-G) were dated to the Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods (Seeher 1987: 13, 75,

76).<sup>15</sup> Ware groups A-E were attributed to the Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods, while ware groups F-G were assigned to the Late Chalcolithic period. The closest analogues of the boxes with and without feet, which are well documented from the Fikirtepe culture sites, are ware Group C (Seeher 1987: 19, 20, Taf. 5-7), which represents Fikirtepe ware, and ware Group B (Seeher 1987: 19, Taf. 2-4), which can be considered as Fikirtepe ware in terms of both formal and decorative characteristics, as well as other ware groups. Furthermore, ware Group E (Seeher 1987: 21, Taf. 16-18) encompasses all the forms of the other ware groups but differs from them in terms of the densest and most mixed material (stoneware) (Seeher 1987: 25, Abb. 3). The samples from the site have been published as a comprehensive collection. The specimens provide evidence for the influence of the “Fikirtepe type”, demonstrating the numerical abundance and diversity of cult tables in northwestern Anatolia (Schwarzberg 2005a: 256-257).

The angular fragments indicate that the cult table forms are rectangular and/or square, as the side walls do not meet at acute angles.<sup>16</sup> A notable feature is the prevalence of sherds with foot projections beneath the corners. It can be observed that in some instances, the length of the feet is relatively short. Of the total number of corner sherds, only two are devoid of feet (Seeher 1987: 26, Taf. 16/34, Taf. 16/32). Despite the considerable number of specimens from Demircihöyük (165 sherds, 60 of which are rim sherds), an attempt has been made to avoid type variations on the sherds, while emphasizing prominent features. While the wall heights of the sherds do not clearly indicate whether there is a fixed proportion between the length and width of the boxes, it is nevertheless possible to speak of different box forms. The turns of the body walls are rounded in ware Group B (Seeher 1987: 27, Taf. 3/16) and angular in Groups C and E. Ware Group E, which is characterized by stylistic diversity, is also characterized by decorative diversity. In addition to the discovery of deep, narrow boxes with high legs, the archaeological record also reveals the presence of flat, table-like boxes with low sides. The height of the vessel is typically between 5 and 7 cm, the feet are 1 to 1.5 cm in height, and the chamber heights range between 3 and 6 cm. The rim is characterized by a rounded and flattened profile. The internal cross-section of the feet is rounded or flattened, while the external surface exhibits a corner. In only three instances does the foot cross-section take the form of a square or an L-shape (Seeher 1987: 27). It can be stated with certainty that one example is an

<sup>15</sup> The majority of research conducted in western and western central Anatolia, that elucidates the expansion of the Fikirtepe culture, was not initiated during the period in which the material was studied.

<sup>16</sup> One of the studies conducted on the Aşağıpınar specimens, which were published as a comprehensive collection, involved the classification of types based on the outer angle of the sides and the angular sum of the foot, corner, or wall fragments associated with the side fragment. In this context, while it may be possible to define a rectangular vessel if the outer angle is approximately 90 degrees and a triangular vessel if the outer angle is 60 degrees, the outer edges of the tables are not always straight, but rather concave. Additionally, there are instances of cult tables where none of the outer angles are identical (Schwarzberg 2005a: 259; 2005b: 264).

animal-shaped cult vessel. However, it is also assumed that several unidentified examples may belong to four-legged animal-shaped vessels. Furthermore, it is assumed that a single handle in the shape of an animal head may have been placed in the center of the box on one of the short sides (Seeher 1987: 27, Taf.18/1-4, Taf.18/2-4).

Of the 165 sherds published as a large collection from the Demircihöyük assemblage, 102 display incised decoration. The majority of the incised decoration is documented on the boxes. The patterns comprise a variety of incised lines, including simple or multiple zigzags, triangles, bands, steps, and filled dots between steps, as well as checkerboard patterns. The presence of filled dots between the steps is a common feature observed in the examples from ware Group E. The decorations are predominantly located on the lateral surfaces of the boxes, typically within delineated areas defined by an incised frame (Seeher 1987: 27, 28, 35; 34-Abb. 6). The sherds of ware Groups B and E, which feature intersecting incised lines arranged in a wide net-like pattern, have also been identified as Fikirtepe ware due to their similarities (Seeher 1987: 35, Taf. 7, 30; Taf. 17, 30-34).

Based on the currently available evidence, the earliest pottery group of western Anatolia has been identified at the Bahçelievler (layers 8-7, 7100 cal. BC). In the sixth layer, which is dated to the middle of the seventh millennium BC, the appearance of Fikirtepe ware and incised and incised decorated pottery marks a significant development. During the same period, a small number of box-shaped vessels were also observed. In the third and second levels, which date to the end of the seventh millennium BC, the pottery is predominantly composed of dark ware, and there is a notable increase in the number of boxes. Furthermore, the diversity of motifs employed in the incised decoration technique, which is a defining feature of the Fikirtepe culture, also expanded. The most common decorations are angled and intersecting lines, which are used in triangle, cage, and checkerboard motifs, and broken lines, which are used in zigzag and step motifs. The majority of vessels with incised decoration are box-shaped and are regarded as cult tables in the academic literature. Nevertheless, the presence of analogous decorative elements in other vessel forms indicates that the decorations should be evaluated beyond their ritual significance. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the decorations may reflect a narrative related to the socio-economic structure of the society or decorative applications reflecting a taste, such as fashion (Sarıaltun *et al.* 2023: 9, 10, 15, 16; Fig. 4, 5, 7).

A number of sherds documented in various excavations and short-term surveys in western central Anatolia can be considered to fall within the Fikirtepe type. Single examples from the settlements of Fındıkkayabaşı and Akmakça in Eskişehir-Kütahya, Alyamak in the Porsuk plain, Coşkuntepe in the Biga Peninsula, and Moralı near Manisa provide comparative material with cult table examples from eastern and southern Marmara, as well as from Western Anatolia, stratified by various excavations (Schwarzberg 2005a: 259, 260 Fig. 3). In the vicinity of Izmir, an incised, line-decorated, four-legged box fragment from the surveys (Dinç 1997: 279, Fig. 20) and examples from the Late Neolithic-Early Chalcolithic (layer IV) levels at the Ulucak settlement, which are not very well preserved,

have been associated with cult tables representing the Fikirtepe type (Çilingiroğlu 2012: 21). A miniature table (Derin 2012: 182, 195, Fig. 21), undecorated and approximately 5 cm in length, bears resemblance to the red slipped, burnished ware group at Ulucak IV (Çilingiroğlu *et al.* 2021: 143, 144, 163 Fig. 10), and was also discovered at Yeşilova (Layer III.1-2).

In addition to the examples from the western and northwestern regions, there are a few from Central Anatolia and the Lakes District. Some of these are known from surveys and some from excavations. They are identified within the Fikirtepe type.

In the Lakes District, a sherd with a lid rim from Hacılar IIa and the examples from Kuruçay (Schwarzberg 2005a: 261, Fig. 7/1, Fig. 3/13-14) and Bademağacı are regarded as Fikirtepe type. The sherd from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic levels of Kuruçay is a fragment of a terracotta cult table, measuring 5.8 cm in height, with a quadrangular table and four short legs. The tabletop features an antithetical bull's head painted in red, while the body wall is decorated with a bull's head in relief within niches (Duru 2008: 111, Fig. 199). The depiction of bullsheads is typically associated with notions of power and fertility. In the prehistory of Anatolia, the most common symbolic elements are relief bullheads and horn depictions on pottery, as evidenced by the archaeological record (Demirtaş 2019). An additional example was discovered in the Early Neolithic II level of the Bademağacı settlement. This consisted of a single short foot, measuring 8.5 cm in height, with a corner part of the body wall rising on the existing foot (Duru 2019: 78, Lev. 125/3). From the manner in which the foot is seated, it can be inferred that it was finished by being drawn inwards towards the other foot with which it is in contact. The body fragment of this deep-topped example is decorated with incised zigzags arranged in a band surrounded by incised decoration.

One of the surface finds from the Central Anatolia region is a red-slipped, burnished box fragment from Sakarlar Höyük near Konya. This was described by Mellaart (1963: 218, Fig. 10/9) and can be classified as the Fikirtepe type based on its incised decoration elements (Schwarzberg 2005a: 259, Fig. 3/11). The other is a fragment of a foot with dot decoration, discovered at Sapmaz Höyük (Omura 1991: 77, Fig. 3.1) during the Central Anatolian surveys, conducted under the direction of Omura in the 1990s. The object measures approximately 7 cm in length, comprising a short single foot and a body fragment rising on it. The fragment displays a deep incised decoration, intersecting bevelled bands, and a single line of incised decoration on the foot. Some of the bands feature a squarish area with dot decoration in the corners. The height of the foot is 2.5 cm.

The first reference to Gelveri in the academic literature appeared at the end of the 1950s, with further data obtained from short-term sounding excavations. It is dated to the beginning of the 6th millennium BC in Central Anatolia. It is associated with the most controversial pottery group in Anatolia, with cultural connections initially established with southeastern Europe and subsequently with new findings from both Central Anatolia and western regions (Özdoğan 2019: 447). The discussion begins with the Gelveri



style ware group, which is characterized by its distinctive decoration techniques in pottery. The primary motif of the Gelveri decoration is a series of intertwined, curved parallel lines, which are predominantly observed on smaller vessels such as bowls and boxes. It is established that the areas delineated by the lines were carved with punctuation, and in the majority of cases, these hollows were filled with white paste (Özbudak 2012: 276, 277; Godon, Özbudak 2022). To date, seven box fragments have been identified, comprising both surface collections and soundings. All of the sherds are characterized by a black and brown color scheme, with a dominant mineral temper and burnished surface. Additionally, they exhibit groove decoration. One of the sherds indicates that some of the boxes had legs (Özbudak 2010: 62, 128, Lev. 11/4), while a 1.5 cm fragment of a foot with incised decoration provides further evidence for the presence of cult tables at the site (Özbudak 2012: 293, Fig. 9:6).

Köşk Höyük, which plays an important role in defining the prehistory of Central Anatolia, has been the subject of considerable research interest due to the presence of incised, relief and painted decoration elements in Neolithic and Chalcolithic pottery finds (Öztan 2002: 58-59). In particular, the Neolithic levels II and III of Köşk Höyük (corresponding to the second half of the 6th millennium BC to the early 5th millennium BC) frequently yield incised and dot-decorated vessels that were left as gifts in subsoil graves. It can be surmised that these decorative techniques were employed on all vessels except for those of a particularly large size. Additionally, simple geometric motifs were applied to the self-slipped and burnished vessels, predominantly in black, brown, and its associated tones. Additionally, a subset of the incised and dot-decorated vessels exhibits a prevalence of spiral and meander motifs. This type of decoration at Köşk Höyük is considered to be the closest analogue of the shallow and deep striped bands that have been identified at Gelveri. Additionally, instances have been documented where the decorations are filled with white paste. It is evident that the spiral decoration is a common feature of the box-like vessels, which can be further categorized as either footed or footless. It has been documented that some of the feet are triangular in cross-section and decorated (Öztan, Özkan 2003: 455, Fig. 1/4). The exterior surface of the cult table's rectangular body wall, which is characterized by diminutive legs measuring approximately 10 cm in length, is adorned with a spiral motif executed through an incised technique that extends to the legs. The decoration commences beneath a band situated beneath the rim, which has also been incised and is filled with white. The Fikirtepe example is comparable to the Menteşe and Sapmaz Höyük examples (Öztan, Özkan 2003: 447, 449, 450).

## **Southwestern Anatolia Type**

The term “southwestern Anatolia” is used to describe a cultural region that encompasses a narrow strip of land extending from Lake Burdur to the southern slopes of the Taurus Mountains. This region separates the coastal plain of Antalya from the Anatolian Plateau.

The region's distinctive characteristics render it a pivotal element in the definition of prehistoric periods in Anatolian archaeology (Duru 2008: 2). The second type of cult table defined within the scope of Anatolian examples is referred to as the “southwestern Anatolian type”, named after this region. This type, exemplified by a limited number of specimens from the Lakes District and Konya Plain, is characterized by a low rim, a shallow bowl at the summit, a rectangular shape, and surfaces that are comparatively coarser than those of the boxes (Schwarzberg 2005a: 261). All prehistoric excavations in southwestern Anatolia have yielded cult tables from the Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods. Examples have been documented from Hacilar, Höyücek, Bademağacı, Doğu and Çatalhöyük.

The two short single-legged, shallow-topped sherds from Level V of Hacilar<sup>17</sup> are believed to represent a subgroup within the southwestern Anatolian type (Schwarzberg 2005a: 261). The Late Neolithic Level VI, which includes marble or alabaster stone vessels, yields examples with three or four legs, as well as examples without legs. One of the most noteworthy discoveries is a marble grave offering with three legs, measuring approximately 10 centimeters in length (Mellaart 1963: Pl. IV-e).

Two complete cult tables crafted from terracotta were unearthed at the Neolithic settlement of Höyücek, situated within the confines of the Temple period archaeological site. One of the aforementioned artifacts is located within a silo. The object in question measures 16 cm in height and features a quadrangular top with a shallow bowl on four conical legs, each of which is decorated with animal head reliefs. The vessel, which is coated in a white slip, displays evidence of red paint (Duru 2008: 108, Fig. 194). The other example was discovered on the floor of the temple workshop. The vessel, measuring 8 cm in height, features a shallow tray that rests on four cylindrical feet of minimal height and length. The square-shaped vessel is characterized by the projection of small square inserts at the center of the sides (Duru 2008: 109, Fig. 195). Additionally, there are examples with roughly shaped vessels and a very shallow tray on a single cylindrical foot (Duru 2008: 110, Fig. 198).

The Early Neolithic II level of Bademağacı, where both the Neolithic and Bronze ages were identified, yielded five identifiable terracotta cult tables, undecorated on the exterior, and fragments that may belong to different cult tables. Among these, the atypical example, measuring 7 cm in length, features a slightly pitted, four-leaf clover-shaped tabletop with raised edges, which stands on a single thick cylindrical leg. The interior of the well-burnished bowl exhibits a hard and thin layer of off-white paint (Duru 2019: 78, Lev. 124/1; 2008: 109, Fig. 196). The remaining specimens are rectangular, with lengths ranging between 0.6 cm and 6.5 cm. They feature shallow trays and rest on short legs (Duru 2019: 78, Lev. 124/2.5). Furthermore, three terracotta boxes with shallow chambers were

<sup>17</sup> The aforementioned layers are associated with the initial phase of archaeological excavations. For further discussion on the chronology of Hacilar, please refer to Duru (2016: 26-27).

also discovered (Duru 2019: 78, Lev. 125/1-2, 4). A larger sample, an oval terracotta vessel with a deep chamber and three legs, was identified as an altar in the Early Neolithic II (6450-6080 BC) level (Duru 2008: 60).

In West Çatalhöyük, which is known for the Early Chalcolithic I and II levels, the quadrangular, footed vessels, which cannot be related to the aforementioned levels, are made of andesite. The andesite specimens are approximately 11x5 and 5.5x5 cm in dimensions. One of them is a corner fragment with relief and incised decoration (Mellaart 1965: 151, Fig. 11/18), while the other is a corner fragment and a specimen with incised decorated bevelled bands on the outer surfaces of the fragments (Mellaart 1965: 151, Fig. 11/19). The second period is comparable to the marble examples unearthed during the excavations at East Çatalhöyük. In his 2005 study, Schwarzberg (2005a: 261) posits that these examples represent a sub-type of short-footed cult vessels. A terracotta example from Level III at East Çatalhöyük is approximately 12 cm in height, rectangular in shape, greyish buff in colour, well burnished and undecorated (Mellaart 1962: 55, Fig. 9.3). Mellaart posits that these initial examples are particularly indicative of clay copies bearing resemblance to the wooden vessels unearthed at Çatalhöyük.

## Sapmaz Höyük “Cult Table” Fragments

This study describes three different cult table samples found as shards at Sapmaz Höyük, which was visited during the 2023 season within the scope of the Aksaray Prehistoric Survey (AKYA). The samples are described according to their raw material, typology and decoration characteristics.

**1- Cult table leg and body wall fragment (Fig. 5a; 6a):** The remaining fragments of the vessel, a foot and the other body wall fragment, are also of terracotta.

The mineralised paste of the body wall fragment is tempered with fine grit. The interior and exterior surfaces exhibit a light brown burnished (10YR-5/4) finish, with a grey core. The existing height is 2.2 cm, the present width is 3.7 cm, and the thickness is 1 cm. The fragment displays evidence of burnishing on both the internal and external surfaces.

The rim, which has a thickness of approximately 0.5 cm and is slightly bevelled inwards, appears to have been the subject of careful burnishing. The sherd belonging to the body wall exhibits a combination of two sides. On the outer surface of the short edge, which forms a turn, there is a thin incised decoration with white fillings. The existing decoration is insufficient for the identification of a pattern. The surface displays incised lines that merge with one another and are interspersed with short dashed lines. The bowl of the vessel is devoid of any decorative elements. It is not possible to ascertain from the available evidence how and at what height the fragment was placed on the foot of the vessel. Nevertheless, the height of the fragment suggests that the chamber depth exceeded 2.2 cm.

The foot is composed of mineralised paste, with a finely grit-tempered quartz component. The inner and outer surfaces display a light brown burnished (10YR-5/3) hue, while

the core exhibits a dark grey colouration. The height of the object is 4.1 cm, its width is 3.1 cm, and its thickness is 1.6 cm. Evidence of burnishing is discernible on the unadorned foot.

The foot is triangular in cross-section and 2.1 cm in length. The inner leg has been thinned by means of a pressing technique applied to the centre, resulting in a concave form that rises towards the body wall. The height of this thinning is 2.4 cm. The body chamber, commencing at this level, is fractured in a linear fashion at the point of attachment. The foot, with an exterior height of 4.1 cm, exhibits a 90-degree turn, indicative of its provenance from an angular vessel. The symmetry is maintained on both sides of the turn, with a single wing width of 2.5 cm. In light of the available evidence, it can be inferred that the depth of the bowl exceeded 1.7 cm.

**2-Cult table leg (see Figures 5b and 6b):** The clay paste is characterised by a finely mineralised and vegetable-tempered composition, with the presence of lime particles. The surface is characterised by a mottled dark brown and black/grey patina (10YR-2/1, 10YR-4/1, 10YR-5/2), with evidence of burnishing on both the interior and exterior. The height, width, and thickness of the object are 4.2 cm, 4.2 cm, and 2 cm, respectively.

The foot posture indicates that the vessel is angular in nature. The foot is triangular in cross-section and 3.5 cm in length. The inner surface is devoid of decoration and concave in shape. In contrast, the outer surface is decorated with a triangular motif that features a bevelled section. On the outer side, symmetrical white-filled deep incised and incised dot decoration is present on both sides of the centre junction line. While the centre line is worn, the overall pattern can still be discerned. On both wings, three parallel and oblique incised lines are present, as well as two densely spaced lines of dot decoration between lines 1 and 2, and between line 3 and the end of the foot. The incised decoration on the outer surface of the foot is delineated by three inverted “V” shaped linear depictions that converge at a 90-degree angle in the centre, as well as a double row of white-filled dots. The foot is fractured on the outer surface at a height of 4.2 cm, where the body wall begins. On the inner surface, the undecorated and burnished table/chamber extends to a height of 3.1 cm. In light of the available evidence, it can be inferred that the depth of the bowl exceeds 1 cm.

**3-Cult table fragment (Fig. 5c; 6c):** The height of the object is 10 cm, its width 7 cm, and its thickness 2.5 cm. The height of the foot is 1.8 cm. The colored vein was formed as a result of the firing of the secondary tuff layer over the underlying ash layer, with a more intense heat effect. It can be surmised that the raw material used to construct the cult table was extracted from an environment where two consecutive colored veins were formed. It can therefore be concluded that the light tile coloration represents the firing zone.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup> The rock description was provided by Dr. Mustafa Yıldız. For a detailed account of the geology of the Sapmaz Höyük region, situated within the Karapınar Formation on the border of the Tuz Lake area, the reader is directed to the seminal work of Uçar (2008).

careful utilization of the raw material has resulted in the cult table surface exhibiting a light tile-white, natural banded appearance in two rows, extending from the foot to the vessel wall. The reddish hue observed on the surface is the result of the subsequent filling of the voids in the tuff with iron oxide.

Two feet are preserved on the rectangular vessel; one foot displays a prominent break, while the body is fractured in a longitudinal direction. The current height of the body wall, rising on four short legs, is approximately 4.5 cm. The diameter of the opening in the short side of the foot is 2.5 cm, while that in the long side is 3.5 cm. The chamber slot, which measures approximately 6 cm in length, is particularly prominent. However, due to the fracture, the depth of the chamber was only 1 cm at its highest point. The interior of the chamber was abraded against the coloured grain, and the slot was smoothed. The feet, which narrow towards their extremities, are rounded towards their bases, which are flat on the ground. The entire surface and the feet display evidence of bevelled flaking. The surface of the body and the floor of the vessel are both smooth.

## **Evaluation and Conclusion**

The majority of documented cult table examples in Anatolian archaeology have been found in a fragmented state, lacking contextual coherence. Consequently, the functions of the vessels remain a topic of ongoing debate. To the best of our knowledge, 19 sites in the Anatolian Peninsula<sup>19</sup> (see pp. 6) have identified the stratum to which the vessels belong, and only a small number of sites have identified the contexts. The identified contexts include grave finds from Menteşe and Hacılar (see pp. 7 and 12), a workshop and two specimens from a silo (see pp. 12) belonging to a special building in the Temple period level at Höyücek, and specimens documented in ritual pits at Uğurlu (see footnote 13). As is the case with numerous other examples, the Sapmaz examples are not contextualised.

While the most commonly used definition of cult tables states that the vessels should be made of terracotta, it is understood that stone examples are also considered cult tables in published sources. The three stone cult tables that have been identified to date (Hacilar Late Neolithic Level VI, see pp. 12; East-West Çatalhöyük, see pp. 13) are considered to belong to the southwestern Anatolian type. The example from Sapmaz Höyük (Fig. 5c; 6c) can also be included in this group due to its raw material preference and the rough shaping of the vessel, which differentiates it from terracotta vessels. The absence of stone vessels in the general vessel repertoire of the aforementioned sites, which are known for their excavations, serves to reinforce the meaning attributed to these vessels. It is notable that stone cult tables are not attested in the Marmara and western Anatolian examples.

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<sup>19</sup> For further details on the cultural ties with the Balkan geography, see footnote 13, which includes the sites in Gökçeada and the West Marmara group. These ties are not detailed in this study.

While the prismatic multi-legged vessel made of crystal tuff (Fig. 5c; 6c) found at Sapmaz can be classified as a cult table in terms of its dimensions and form, it is an atypical example due to its preference for local raw materials. It is evident that the inhabitants of Central Anatolia and the Lakes District, who have been engaged in stone carving since the early Neolithic period, also employed their expertise in this field to create ritual objects.

Two types are defined for Anatolia in general, on the basis of whole/near-whole or whole samples (Shwarzberg 2005a: Fig. 2, Fig. 4). The first type is the Fikirtepe type, which is rectangular and box-like in form, typically burnished, and decorated with fine or deep incisions and dot motifs. This type, which constitutes the most numerous group, is found mainly in eastern, southern Marmara and northwestern Anatolia, and rarely in Central Anatolia and the Lakes District, as in the terracotta Sapmaz examples. The most illustrative examples of the Fikirtepe type are those from the Fikirtepe, Pendik, Menteşe and Demircihöyük settlements. The earliest examples of this type of pottery appear in southern Marmara (Barçın) and western Anatolia (Bahçelievler) around 6500 BC, and just before this date<sup>20</sup>, and can be traced back to 5500 BC (Pendik, Köşk Höyük (?)) (see pp. 8-10). The second type, as defined by the examples from the Lakes District and the Konya Plain, is the southwestern Anatolian type. The defining characteristics of this type are a low rim, a shallow bowl, a rectangular and table-like shape, and a rough surface texture that differs from the smooth surfaces of the boxes. The most salient characteristics of this type are exemplified by the findings from Höyücek, Hacılar, Bademağacı and Çatalhöyük (East-West). The earliest examples date to approximately 6400 BC (Höyücek (TD) and Bademağacı (ENII)) and can be traced back to 5700 BC (West Çatalhöyük) (see pp. 13). It can be inferred that the Anatolian examples were in use for approximately 1,000 years, spanning the second half of the 7th millennium BC to the middle of the 6th millennium BC. Furthermore, macroscopic observations on the pottery of Sapmaz Höyük indicate that the terracotta cult table sherds are comparable to the ware groups present in the site's general pottery repertoire (Fig. 4a-g). The closest analogues of this repertoire can be dated to the Demircihöyük ware Group E (Early Chalcolithic) (Seeher 1987: Taf. 13/14-19; 14/1-23; 15/1-24).<sup>21</sup> Regional analogies with the chipped stone tool industry (see pp. 4) also indicate that the site may have been inhabited until the mid-6th millennium BC. In this context, the Sapmaz samples demonstrate that the utilization of cult tables in Anatolian types persisted until the conclusion of the Early Chalcolithic period (5500 BC).

<sup>20</sup> The dates used for the Anatolian examples in this paragraph are taken from Özdoğan (2013). Please refer to Fig. 171 and the chronological tables (p. 270) in the same publication. For further information on the sites in the Marmara Region, please refer to Özdoğan (2023: 254).

<sup>21</sup> The "S" curved bowl is a common feature of the stoneware-tempered ware Group E. The majority of these bowls are burnished, exhibiting a range of colours including grey, blackish brown, dark brown and beige.

The small size of the Sapmaz specimens and their surface discovery make it challenging to establish an analogy. It is proposed that form or decoration elements may be inconclusive in the chronological evaluation of cult tables, and that evaluations based on ware groups are definitive (Seeher 1987: 52, 53, 56). Despite the cultural dissimilarities between the examples, the striking similarity in typological terms underscores the significance of chronological evaluations based on ware groups (Schwarzberg 2005a: 268, Fig. 7). Nevertheless, parallels can be identified between the decorative elements observed on Anatolian cult tables and those seen on triangular cult tables from southeastern Europe and Thrace (Schwarzberg 2005b: Lev. 1-25; Lev. 3/6, 5/1, 6/1, 9/3; 2005a: 261, Fig. 7/11). Irrespective of the technical characteristics of the form or paste, it is evident that groove, incision or incised bevelled band decorations, with or without filling, were also extensively employed in the Vinča culture (Garašanin 1998: Fig. 13h), the Early Dudești culture (Mirea 2015) and the Karanovo II-III culture (Nikolov 1997: Lev. 59, 64).<sup>22</sup> It can therefore be surmised that it will not be possible to delineate sharp regional or chronological boundaries with the aid of the aforementioned criteria alone. In this context, both the example previously published and the terracotta sherds from two cult tables discovered during the AKYA 2023 survey (Fig. 5a; 6a; Fig. 5b; 6b) can be evaluated within the Fikirtepe type based on their form, decoration, or ware group characteristics. No relationship could be established between these examples and the southwestern Anatolian type.

Among the defining characteristics of the Fikirtepe culture are geometric decorations created through a range of techniques, including fine incision, shallow incision, dot, nail print and cut. These types of decorations are predominantly observed on vessels that are not intended for daily use, with the majority concentrated on the body wall, and less frequently on the foot. The examples from the identified sites within the culture demonstrate that deep incising is predominantly employed on the frame lines bordering checker, triangular or quadrilateral motifs filled with fine incised or dot decoration. In some instances, the deep incisions and dots are filled with white pigment (Özdoğan 2007: 412-413; Schwarzberg 2005a: Fig. 3). An examination of the samples from the distribution area of the Fikirtepe culture reveals that in the initial phases, simpler and shallower incised decorations were employed, whereas in the subsequent phases, the incisions became more pronounced and a white filling was introduced (Saraltun *et al.* 2023: 14). The body wall sherd (Fig. 5a; 6a) from the Sapmaz settlement, which is light brown burnished and white, filled with shallow incised lines, is reminiscent of the Fikirtepe type (Pendik, Menteşe, Ilıpınar, Aktopraklık C, Barçın and Bahçelievler) with its shallow incised decoration character.

<sup>22</sup> In the context of Anatolian chronology, the Vinča culture is contemporary with the Middle-Late Chalcolithic period, the Early Dudești culture with the late Early Chalcolithic-early Middle Chalcolithic period, and the Karanovo II-III culture with the Early Chalcolithic period.

The location of Demircihöyük at the northwestern edge of the Anatolian highlands is of particular importance for establishing connections between the north and south, between the Marmara Region and the plateau. The majority of the boxes and cult tables unearthed at Demircihöyük are adorned with incisions and dots. The incisions are combined to create patterns such as filled triangles, checkerboards, and steps that are circumscribed by a frame line. The closest analogous examples are known from Fikirtepe, Marmaracik and Barçın (Seeher 1987: 45, 52; Schwarzberg 2005a: 257). The Fikirtepe ware, represented by ware Group C, is characterised by a burnished or plastered surface, exhibiting a brown-black-brown colouration with brown-red mottling. It features shallow incised lattice decoration and triangles between deeply incised bands (Seeher 1987: 86, Taf. 6:20-24). The Early Chalcolithic ware Group E is characterised by a predominantly burnished surface, exhibiting a range of brown, dark brown, black, brown-black, grey-beige, brown-brown-grey and light brown hues. The decoration comprises filled dots and a combination of shallow and deeply incised motifs, including step, zigzag and bevelled bands. Examples of decorated items featuring a combination of filled dots and deep incised decoration cages are most common in this ware group (Seeher 1987: 91, 92, Taf. 17/1-34; Taf. 16/32, 35-38). In addition to its resemblance to the Fikirtepe culture, Fig. 5a; 6a can be linked to ware Group C (Fikirtepe ware group) due to its similar paste colour and shallow excavation decoration with white paste filling on the body wall. Similarly, Fig. 5b; 6b, with its comparable paste colour and foot fragment with white paste filling, deep excavation and dot decoration consisting of bevelled bands, can be associated with Demircihöyük ware Group E (Seeher 1987: Taf.16/40; Taf.17/7). The example published by Omura (1991: 77, Fig. 3.1) with deep incised decoration, intersecting bevelled bands, and a squarish area with dot decoration inside some bands incised into the corners is similar to the examples from Demircihöyük (Seeher 1987: Taf.17/1) and Köşk Höyük (Özkan, Özkan 2003: 456, Fig. 2:9). All terracotta specimens are reminiscent of the Barçın specimens concerning their decoration forms, with the exception of the white filling used in the incisions or dots (Schwarzberg 2009: Fig. 1/1; 2/2; 4/12).

To date, four terracotta sherds, pertaining to three cult tables, have been found at Salmaz Höyük. Two of the sherds are decorated foot fragments. The remaining specimens are sherds from a vessel with a decorated body wall and an undecorated foot. All of the samples can be classified as belonging to a dark-colored ware group. This particular ware group is known to have emerged almost simultaneously<sup>23</sup> in both Anatolia and southeastern Europe (Özdoğan E. 2017: 22). It is known that incised decoration has been present on different ware groups in Anatolia since the early stages of the Neolithic. However, it is understood that geometric decorations formed by incision, deep groove, printing and

<sup>23</sup> It is contemporary with the Early and Middle Neolithic periods in southeastern Europe, and with the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods in Anatolia.



punctuation techniques, sometimes filled with a white paste-like material, diversified with dark-faced ware from the end of the 7th millennium BC to the middle of the 6th millennium BC, and continued until the beginning of the 5th millennium BC, albeit with a decrease (Godon, Özbudak 2022: 111-113). In this process, which can also be regarded as an advanced stage of Neolithic culture, the elements in terracotta vessels, which exhibit local and regional differences in Anatolia, are regarded as the product of a new understanding and an important distinction in the Neolithic-Chalcolithic transition. All of the cult table examples known from Sapmaz Höyük and its vicinity (Gelveri, Köşk Höyük, Sakarlar) are consistent with this chronological picture.

The cult tables and other surface finds from Sapmaz Höyük represent a significant data source for understanding the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods of Central Anatolia, as well as the cultural connections with the prehistory of northwestern Anatolia, which are currently the least well-known.

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