

## ARCHAIC MORTARIA: OBSERVATIONS ON THEIR DISTRIBUTION AND USE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

*Arkaik Mortarlar: Doğu Akdenizdeki Dağılım ve Kullanımları Üzerine Bir Gözlem*

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**Öz:** Doğu Akdeniz coğrafyası birçok kültürün ilerlemesine ve yükselmesine ev sahipliği yapmıştır. Bölgenin stratejik konumu medeniyetlerin kalkınmasını sağlamıştır. Doğu Akdeniz'in avantajlı konumu Antik Dönemde medeniyetlerin hayatta kalmasını sağlayan ticareti mümkün kılmıştır. Uzak bölgelerin Doğu Akdeniz hattını kullanarak gerçekleştirdiği ticaret, ekonomik kalkınma için oldukça elzemdir. Bu bakımdan ticari faaliyetlerde ticareti yapılan ürünlerin çeşitliliği hacmi ve kalitesi ticaretin devamlılığı açısından oldukça önemlidir. Doğu Akdenizde bölgeler arası ticari faaliyetlerin değerlendirilmesinde somut bir veri olan mortarlar bu bakımdan önem arz etmektedir. Arkaik Dönemde üretim merkezi genel olarak Kıbrıs'ı işaret eden bu mütevazı kaplar, Mısır, İonia ve Levantın birçok merkezinde de takip edilebilmektedir. Mortarların Doğu Akdenizdeki dağılımı ticarete bir pazar payının olduğunu göstermektedir. Arkaik Dönemde Doğu Akdenizde bölgeler arası ticari faaliyetlerin nasıl bir sistemde ilerlediği bilimsel açıdan hala büyük bir tartışma konusudur. Mortarların Doğu Akdenizdeki bu yolculuğu ticari faaliyetlerin işleyişine yol göstermesi açısından oldukça kıymetlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Arkaik Mortarlar, Doğu Akdeniz, Ticaret, Dağılım.

**Abstract:** The Eastern Mediterranean has hosted the progress and rise of many cultures. The strategic and advantageous location of the region has enabled the development of civilisations and has paved the way for commercial activities that enabled them to survive in antiquity. Commercial activities from remote regions conducted on the Eastern Mediterranean route were essential for economic development. In this respect, the variety, quantity, and quality of the products traded in these activities were significant for the continuity of trade. Mortaria, which form concrete evidence for evaluating interregional commercial activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, are important in this respect. These modest vessels, whose production centre in the Archaic Period was mainly Cyprus, can also be identified in many centres in Egypt, Ionia, and the Levant. The distribution of mortaria in the Eastern Mediterranean suggests they had a market share in trade. The system of interregional commercial activities in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Archaic period is still a subject of scholarly debate. The journey of mortaria in the Eastern Mediterranean is very valuable for following the operation of these commercial activities.

**Keywords:** Archaic Mortaria, Eastern Mediterranean, Trade, Distribution.

### Introduction

Mortaria are kitchen vessels used in daily life in antiquity. These vessels are stated to be called "mortarium" in Latin and served for grinding-crushing processes<sup>1</sup>. Besides being a kitchen item, it is also a preferred element of equipment in medical and industrial contexts<sup>2</sup>. Mortaria are generally made of clay. However, there are also many examples made of stone. The earliest use of mortaria is estimated to date

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1 Villing 2006, 169-170.

2 Hilgers 1969, 68-70, 225-227; Pallecchi 2002, 34-39, 279-271, no. 1-118; Hargis 2007, 9-10.

back to the Neolithic Period. Particularly the stone vessels known as “crushing stones” from the Neolithic Period should be the functional prototype of mortaria<sup>3</sup>.

The earliest terminological use of mortaria is recorded in Greece. *θυεία* and *θυία* are early uses of mortaria. These words are encountered in the works by Aristophanes and other contemporary ancient authors<sup>4</sup>. It is also understood that the *thyeia* seen in Ancient Greece was a grinding bowl since it was used with a pestle<sup>5</sup>. The less common terms *ἴδις* and *ἴδη* are equivalent to *thya*<sup>6</sup>. In addition, another term, *igdis* was used by Hippocrates and Galen<sup>7</sup>. Finally, based on the inscription found on a fragment of a Hellenistic vessel at Nymphaeum Kafizin in Cyprus, the term *τριβιον* was suggested to be used as equivalent to mortarium<sup>8</sup>. Together with *thyeia* and *igdis*, the term *δοῖδυξ* is defined by Aristophanes, Galen and Dioskurides as a pestle<sup>9</sup>.

*Thyeia/igde* and *doidyks*<sup>10</sup> were kitchen tools common from the Classical Period onwards and used in domestic culture<sup>11</sup>. From the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards *thyeia* and *doidyks* were listed as kitchen tools, along with cheese graters, bowls, knives, and cooking vessels<sup>12</sup>.

Mortaria are characterised by certain typological features determined by their intended use. It is presumed that certain forms and production techniques were consciously preferred in accordance with their functional purposes. These open-formed vessels may have conical, hemispherical, or flat bases, as well as short-footed forms<sup>13</sup>. However, it should be kept in mind that this general form definition may vary regionally, and different types may have been adopted. For example, some mortaria have handles or lug handles, while others have neither. It should be noted that there are deeper examples as well as shallow examples. It is also observed that some of them have thicker walls while others are thinner. Besides the examples made of clay, there are also mortaria made of stone and metal. The spectrum of materials indicates that the form and characteristics of mortaria vary according to function.

Although the traces of abrasion on the bases indicate that they were used for grinding-crushing processes, the fact that they were present in sanctuaries in the Archaic Period raises the possibility that they were votive offerings as well as being part of the domestic culture. This context indicates that mortaria were transformed from modest kitchen vessels into commercial goods that could be dedicated as votive offerings in sanctuaries<sup>14</sup>.

## Function

The function of mortaria is a subject of debate among researchers<sup>15</sup>. Although it is generally accepted that they were used in grinding-crushing processes, some researchers have stated that they may have been used for different purposes. Eliezer Oren has a different opinion on the function of mortaria. Oren emphasises that mortaria, along with basket-handled and torpedo amphorae, were widely distributed in the eastern Mediterranean. Oren concludes that mortaria accompanied these amphorae, thought to have contained grain and wine, as measuring vessels<sup>16</sup>. Salles also stated that mortaria served as measuring cups<sup>17</sup>, especially for measuring the amount of grain distributed to the soldiers. From a different perspective, it

3 Doğan 2007, 64.

4 *Vesp.* 924-992; *Plut.* 710-712.

5 Villing – Pemberton 2010, 557.

6 *Paus.* 6.26.1.

7 *Hippoc. Nat. mul.* 88; *Gal. De antidotis*, 14.130.9–10.

8 Mitford 1980, 84-85, no. 114.

9 *Plut.* 711.

10 *Schol. Ar. Eq.* 984; *Zenobius, Paroem.* 3.40; *Vit. Phoc.* 4.1.

11 Villing – Pemberton 2010, 558.

12 *Plaut. Aul.* 95.

13 Villing – Pemberton 2010, 559.

14 Villing 2006, 35.

15 For the discussion see Belleli – Botto 2002, 296-300; Berlin 1997, 123-124.

16 Oren 1984, 17.

17 Salles 1985, 199-212; Defernez 2001, 407-408.

was suggested that the mortaria could be bowls used in cheese making<sup>18</sup>. Villing, however, disagreed with these two ideas based on the abrasion traces<sup>19</sup> seen on many Archaic and Classical mortaria. These traces indicate that the mortaria were subjected to strokes and pressure by the pestle. Another contribution to the functional aspect is a mortar found in the necropolis of Perge determined to serve in paint making<sup>20</sup>. Mortaria served as lids of amphorae<sup>21</sup>, pithoi, and urns<sup>22</sup>, and were also used in burial rituals<sup>23</sup> and graves as grave goods<sup>24</sup>.



Figure 1: Villing 2006, 34, fig. 14.

The assumption that mortaria functioned as grinding bowls leads to the question of the grinding processes in which these vessels were used. The studies on the subject reveal scarce evidence regarding exactly which foods were processed in mortaria. Except for mainland Greece, there is almost no information on mortaria dating before 500 BC. The examples found in Boiotia and Corinth are significant in this respect. The first example from Corinth is a monkey figure depicted with a mortarium and pestle, while the other is a mule carrying a mortarium on its back (fig. 1-2)<sup>25</sup>. Both examples are terracotta figurines and form a significant group of evidence in terms of giving an idea regarding the intended use of the mortaria. In particular, the mortarium depicted on the back of a mule contains grated cheese, a small slice of cheese, and a food presumed to be onion or garlic.

This example gives a clue regarding which foods were processed in the mortaria. Similarly, the Boiotian figurines show cheese grated in mortaria<sup>26</sup>. Based on these examples, it can be said that mortaria were used in cheese processing. Additionally, ancient sources<sup>27</sup> serve as evidence for the utilization of mortaria in the processing of cheese within the context of domestic culture in ancient Greece and Rome.

Besides, the mortaria could have been used to crush and grind various aromatics and spices, as well as nuts and fresh herbs.

Preparing the basic ingredients of daily meals in mortaria would have been reasonably practical. The mortaria discovered extensively in household contexts in Archaic Miletus<sup>28</sup> confirm this estimation.



Figure 2: Villing 2006, 34, fig. 15.

18 Hanfmann 1963, 90; Amyx – Lawrence 1975, 110.

19 Villing 2006, 34. Villing also noted the presence of abrasion marks on the mortaria found at Naukratis and Tell Defenneh, see Villing 2010, 31, fig. 1, 19.

20 Çokay - Kepçe 2017, 24, fig. M18.

21 Jasopi 1931, 269, fig. 294.

22 For the examples from Salamis, see Karageorghis, 1967, pl. 41, 125; Karageorghis 1970, pl. 53, 203; Karageorghis 1973, pl. 41, 47, 51, 233; Karageorghis 1978, pl. 7, 44.

23 Villing 2006, 37.

24 Tombul 2005, 255, fig. 2.; Villing 2006, 37.

25 Villing 2006, 34, fig. 14-15.

26 Pisani 2003, 13-14, fig. 5.

27 In his poem *Moretum*, Vergilius describes in detail the use of crushed herbs and garlic to make Roman spicy cheese, see Fairclough 1922, 25. Additionally, the Ionian poet Hipponax, who lived in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC, mentions a Greek spicy cheese sauce called *myttotos/myssotos*, which is especially tasty with bonito. See *Ar. Pax*. 228-288.

28 Villing 2006, 35.

Mortaria could have been used in the preparation of purees and soups made with ground vegetables and pulses. Additionally, the use of mortaria in grinding cereals such as porridge, barley and wheat demonstrates that mortaria had an essential place in domestic culture in daily life.

### Centres in The Eastern Mediterranean

Some early examples of mortaria widely distributed in the Eastern Mediterranean come from the Levant. Mortaria dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC were found mainly in Beirut<sup>29</sup>, Tyre-Level III<sup>30</sup>, Tell Keisan<sup>31</sup>, Horvat Rosh Zayit<sup>32</sup>, Yoqneam<sup>33</sup>, Ashdod-Level VIII<sup>34</sup> and the Phoenician shipwreck Elissa on the Ashkelon/Gaza coastline<sup>35</sup> in the south Levant, whereas the examples dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>36</sup> were discovered in Ashkelon<sup>37</sup>, Dor<sup>38</sup> and Mesad Hashavyahu<sup>39</sup>. Mortaria, presumed to have increased in number in the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, have been found in Galilee, the Jezreel Valley, the Central and Southern Coastal Plain, Shephelah, the Northern Negev and Transjordan, beside the southern Phoenician coast<sup>40</sup>.

Mortaria shards from Level X at Tell Arqa dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>41</sup> and a shard from Level V at Al Mina dating to 650-580 BC<sup>42</sup> were recorded in the northern Levant.

The earliest examples in Cilicia come from Tarsus and Mersin. However, the dating of the mortaria found in these settlements is problematic. The imported and locally produced mortaria are dated between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>43</sup>, while a shard from Level IV in Mersin is dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Researchers have frequently discussed the chronology of the early mortaria from Tarsus and Mersin<sup>44</sup>. Considering the destruction of the Iron Age levels at both sites<sup>45</sup>, the homogeneity of the evidence has been questioned.

The evidence provided by Cyprus is clearer. Forty-one examples<sup>46</sup> from Tomb 79 at Salamis have been attributed to the Cypro-Achaic I period (750-600 BC)<sup>47</sup>. Mortaria examples continued to be seen in Cyprus until the 300s BC<sup>48</sup>.

Mortaria are known to have been present in Crete, Corinth, Rhodes, Samos, and Eastern Greece, respectively in Miletus, Ephesus, Xanthos, and Klazomenai from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards<sup>49</sup>.

The distribution and functions of mortaria in the Eastern Mediterranean suggest that they were used in kitchens as a part of domestic culture. However, 26 mortaria<sup>50</sup> found in the sanctuary of Apollo in Naukratis<sup>51</sup>

29 Badre 2007, fig. 37-38.

30 Bikai 1978, pl. IX:19.

31 Brient – Humbert 1980, pl. 45:5.

32 Gal – Alexandre 2000, fig. VII.11:19.

33 Zarzecki-Peleg et. al. 2005, 247.

34 Dothan 1971, fig. 45:15, 50:1.

35 Ballard et al. 2002, fig. 9:3.

36 Zukerman – Ben-Shlomo 2011, 89, fig. 1.

37 Master 2003, fig. 7:2-3.

38 Gilboa 1995, fig. 1.3: 9-10.

39 Fantalkin 2001, fig. 16, fig. 29: 5-9.

40 Zukerman – Ben-Shlomo 2011, 90.

41 Thalmann 1978, 79-80, 89, fig. 47:12-13.

42 Thalmann 1978, 79-80, 89, fig. 47:12-13.

43 Hanfmann 1963, 90. Villing finds the dating of the mortaria quite confusing see Villing 2006, 37, no. 109.

44 Salles 1985, 204; Ballard et al. 2002, 162; Artzy – Lyon 2003, 187.

45 Barnett 1940, 99; Hanfmann 1963, fig. 2.

46 Karageorghis 1973, 116.

47 Karageorghis proposed 700 BC for the date of this mortaria group in his first publication regarding the subject, see Karageorghis 1973, 121. However, the Cypro-Achaic I Period is generally dated to the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BC, suggesting that the mortaria may be of a slightly earlier date, see Coldstream 1979, 266-267.

48 Villing 2006, 44.

49 Villing 2006, 37-38.

50 Villing 2006, 31.

51 It is not surprising that mortaria, which were widely used in the Eastern Mediterranean, were found at Naukratis. Considering the location of Naukratis and its role in commercial activities during the Archaic Period, it was a

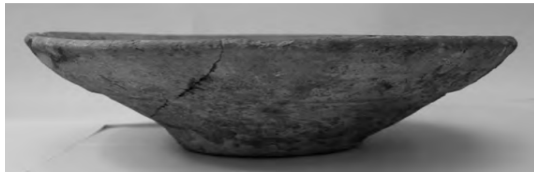


Figure 3: Villing 2006, fig. 1.



Figure 4: Villing 2006, fig. 2.

fragment found in the Heraion of Samos was offered as a votive to Hera<sup>58</sup>. The incised letter “H” finds its parallel in the “Hera Cups” found at Naukratis. “H, HP or HPH” inscriptions are assumed to represent Hera as in Naukratis. In addition to Samos, examples bearing graffiti were found in Samothrace. Two mortaria dating to the late 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century BC were found in the filling layer beneath the large hall where votive offerings were preserved. There is an inscription on the lip which is read “ΔΕΔ and ΔΕ” in the local language<sup>59</sup>. According to Roebuck, two mortaria bearing the painted inscription *Αιοκλαμ* in the Asclepeion at Corinth, dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, were used in sacrificial rituals<sup>60</sup>. Additionally, a large number of mortaria have been discovered in the Sanctuary of Athena at Pedasa<sup>61</sup>.

in Egypt demonstrate that they were dedicated as votive offerings. These mortaria generally exhibit the same form characteristics and bear graffiti naming Apollo (fig.3-4)<sup>52</sup>.

Villing mentioned some indications suggesting the mortaria were produced rapidly<sup>53</sup>. The abrasion traces on the interior indicate that the vessels were in use. The inscriptions on the mortaria deem these vessels even more important. The inscriptions do not follow a pattern; they can be seen on the interior (fig.5)<sup>54</sup> or exterior<sup>55</sup> of the rim or on the foot<sup>56</sup>. The inscription *τωπόλλωνος* (Apollo)<sup>57</sup> is clearly visible on ten mortaria. Similarly, a mortarium

fragment found in the Heraion of Samos was offered as a votive to Hera<sup>58</sup>. The incised letter “H” finds



Figure 5: Villing 2006, 32, fig. 5.

In Egypt, mortaria were discovered not only in Naukratis but also in its hinterland. They have also been found in other centres such as Tell Defenneh (fig. 6-7)<sup>62</sup>, Tell-el Balamun<sup>63</sup>, Migdol<sup>64</sup>, Tell-el Herr<sup>65</sup>, Tel-el Makhouta<sup>66</sup>, Mendes<sup>67</sup>, Heliopolis<sup>68</sup>, Karnak<sup>69</sup>, Gourni<sup>70</sup>, San-el Hagar<sup>71</sup>, Saft-el Henneh<sup>72</sup>.

frequent destination for many merchants. The sanctuaries in the city were revered not only by the locals but also by these merchants. The mortaria dedicated as votive offerings in Naukratis imply that they were brought by merchants.

52 Villing 2006, fig. 1-2.

53 Villing 2006, 31.

54 Villing 2006, 32, fig. 5.

55 Villing 2006, 32, fig. 6.

56 Villing 2006, 32, fig. 9.

57 Villing 2006, 31-33, fig. 1-13.

58 Villing 2006, 35, fig. 16.

59 Lehman 1960, 40.

60 Roebuck 1951, 131, 135, no. 65-66.

61 The mortaria found in the Sanctuary of Athena in Pedasa have been examined in detail under the topics of Cypriot Mortaria, Southeastern Aegean Mortaria, Cypriot/Southeastern Aegean Mortaria and Other Mortaria, see Özer 2017, 43-49.

62 Petrie 1891, 48; Villing 2006, fig. 19-20.

63 Spencer 1996, 89.

64 Oren 1984, 17, fig. 21.10.

65 Defernez 2001, 402-411.

66 Holladay 1982, 109.

67 Allen 1982, 13-27, pl. 14.

68 Petrie 1915, 17.

69 Defernez 2001, 203.

70 Petrie 1909, 54, pl. 821.

71 Brissaud 1990, 77-80.

72 Petrie – Duncan 1906, pl. 39.





Figure 6: Villing 2006, fig. 19.



Figure 7: Villing 2006, fig. 20.

Archaeological evidence confirms that mortaria have a wide range of use throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. It is estimated that these vessels were in circulation from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards, and their number increased during the Archaic Period. At this point, the origin of mortaria is a crucial question. Clay analyses on mortaria from Ashkelon<sup>73</sup>, Mesad Hashavyahu and Tell Kabri in the Levant generally point to Cyprus<sup>74</sup>. Similarly, Naukratis mortaria point to Cyprus as their production centre<sup>75</sup>. This evidence indicates that Cypriot mortaria had a prominent place in the market during the Archaic Period. Thus, they gained the status of commercial goods as well as being a part of domestic culture.

## Conclusion

The earliest examples of mortaria, which were in use along the Eastern Mediterranean coast during the Archaic Period, have been observed in the Levant from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards. As a part of domestic culture, they were used in kitchens to prepare food and grind grain which was very important in antiquity. However, the inscribed mortaria found at Naukratis were not only modest kitchen vessels but also served as votive offerings.

What was the driving force behind the widespread use of mortaria in many centres and presumably gaining commercial object status? The answer is particularly sought in the function of mortaria. These vessels are associated with processing various spicy sauces and condiments, such as *myttos*. They are considered professional kitchen vessels used to prepare such mixtures. Particularly, the examples from Boeotia and Corinth support this suggestion. The figurine depicting a mule carrying a mortarium pestle, cheese grater, cheese, and onion/garlic on its back emphasises the function of mortaria. Moreover, crushing wheat, barley, various pulses, vegetables, and herbs and making porridge and cheese seem possible in the centres where Eastern Mediterranean mortaria are abundant. Furthermore, the presence of mortaria in sanctuaries can be explained by them serving to prepare ritual meals. The presence of mortaria bearing votive inscriptions, particularly in the sanctuary of Apollo in Naukratis, suggests their significant role in sanctuaries. It seems likely that in the sanctuary of healing, such as the Asklepieion of Corinth, they were used to mix medicines and prepare food and drink for the sick.

73 The clay analyses on the Ashkelon examples point to Northern Syrian and Eastern Greek production in addition to Cypriot production, see Master 2001, 134, 137-138.

74 Zukerman – Ben-Shlomo 2011, 92. For Ashkelon see Master 2001, 72, 110-111; Master 2003, 55; For Mesad Hashavyahu see Fantalkin 2001, 80; For Tell Kabri see Goren and Cohen-Weinberger 2002, fig. 15.1: 44.

75 Villing 2006, 39; For the clay analyses of mortaria from Naukratis, see Mommsen et al. 2006, 70. However, it should be kept in mind that in addition to Cyprus, the East Greek Region might also have had a role in mortaria production.

Recent research on mortaria reveals that their distribution in the Eastern Mediterranean is rather complex. The wide distribution of mortaria suggests that they may have been traded over a wide area for a long period. Especially the clay analyses of the mortaria from the Levant reinforce the emphasis on trade. Almost all of the analysed shards were made of imported material. The Late Roman workshop<sup>76</sup> at Ras Al-Bassit in Northern Syria<sup>77</sup> exported mortaria to many centres in the Eastern Mediterranean. Based on this evidence, a similar distribution that may have taken place in the Archaic Period has been suggested. The similar petrographic profiles of the examples emphasise this interpretation. The mortaria recovered from the Elissa Shipwreck near Ashkelon were also reported to have similar characteristics. Furthermore, the petrographic profiles of the examples from the north-eastern coasts of the Mediterranean and the profiles of the Cypriot mortaria are close. Therefore, Cyprus stands out as a mortarium production centre since the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. It should be kept in mind that the connections between Cyprus, Levant and Phoenicia were quite strong in the Archaic Period.

It is possible to state that the Eastern Mediterranean was very active in terms of commercial activities during the Archaic Period. Therefore, it is thought that mortaria may have joined this already active commercial network with their increasing use. The mortaria from the shipwrecks of Cape Tektaş<sup>78</sup>, Kekova Island<sup>79</sup> and Çaycağız Bay<sup>80</sup> indicate that they had a place in the Eastern Mediterranean market. Especially the 30 mortaria from the Çaycağız Bay Shipwreck support this suggestion<sup>81</sup>. Moreover, their presence was not limited to the Eastern Mediterranean; they were also found in North Africa, the Western Mediterranean and the Black Sea colonies of Ionia<sup>82</sup>. Therefore, they must have taken their place in the market as commercial goods by maintaining their position in a vast commercial network. Thus, mortaria may have gained functional and economic value and turned into commercial goods that made a difference in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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76 Hayes 1967, 387-447.

77 Villing 2006, 38.

78 Greene et al. 2008, 688-711.

79 Aslan 2015, 324.

80 Özer 2017, 50.

81 Özer 2017, 49.

82 Villing 2006, 38.

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## ÖZET

Bu çalışma MÖ. 8. yüzyıldan itibaren görülmeye başlanan ve Arkaik Dönem'de daha yaygın hale gelen mortarların ticari faaliyetlerdeki yerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Mortarların en erken örnekleri Neolitik Dönem'de kullanılmış olmalıdır. "Ezgi Taşı" olarak bilinen bu taş kapların mortarların prototipi olduğu belirtilmektedir. Tunç Çağı'nda ise üç ayaklı kâse biçiminde taş malzemeden yapılan mortarlar genel olarak öncü örnekler olarak kabul edilmektedir. Arkaik Dönem'de taş malzemenin yerini pişmiş toprağın aldığı görülmektedir. Ancak Klasik Dönem ile tekrar taş örneklerin piyasaya girdiği söylenmelidir. Mortarların üretiminde yaşanan bu malzeme değişikliğini dikkatli yorumlamak gerekmektedir. Kültürel alış-verişin getirdiği yeniliklerle beraber değişen ve gelişen mutfak kültürünün de etkisi bulunmaktadır.

Taşıma ve kullanma açısından pratik olan mortarlar, öncelikle domestik kültürde kullanım görmüştür. Antik Dönem'de mutfak kültürünün bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Havaneli ile kullanılan bu kaplar, çeşitli yiyecek ve baharatların öğütülmesi ya da ezilmesini sağlamıştır. Öğütme-ezme işlevine ek olarak içerisinde yemeklerin de hazırlanması ve soslu ya da baharatlı peynirlerin yapımında mortarların kullanılması çok fonksiyonlu olduklarını göstermektedir. Ayrıca mortarların zemininde görünen aşınma izleri havaneli kullanımından kaynaklanan ağır bir işleme maruz kaldıklarını göstermektedir.

MÖ. 8. yüzyıldan itibaren Doğu Akdeniz'in birçok yerleşiminde varlıkları bilinmektedir. Mortarlar genel olarak, uzak mesafe ticaretinin en büyük göstergesi olan ticari amphoralarla birlikte seyahat etmiştir. Mortarların gemi kargolarında amphoralarla birlikte görülmeleri, kullanımı açısından tartışmalara neden olmuştur. Bu bakımdan ölçü kabı olarak kullanılmış olabilecekleri belirtilmiştir. Ayrıca arpa, buğday ve çeşitli kuru gıdalar ile yağ (zeytin yağı?) gibi gıdaların ölçüm işleminde (ölçü aracı olarak) kullanılmış olabilecekleri ifade edilmiştir. Bu kullanımlara ek olarak ölü gömme ritüellerinde, mezar hediyesi, urne, pithos ve amphora kapağı olarak da kullanım görmüştür.

Mortarlar Arkaik Dönem'de domestik kültürün dışında kutsal alanlarda da görülmeye başlanmıştır. Kültürel bağlamlarında kullanımı öncelikle kutsal yemekleri ve tıbbi ürünleri hazırlama amaçlı olmalıdır. Naukratis'te bulunan ve Apollon'a adanan mortarlar bu bakımdan oldukça önemlidir. Oldukça nadir olan bu örnekler kutsal alanlarda mortarların işlevine dair veri sunmaktadır. Üzerlerinde kazıma tekniğiyle işlenmiş "Apollon" ifadesinin bulunması adak kullanımını doğrulamaktadır. Bunun dışında Samos Heraion, Pedasa Athena kutsal alanı ve Korinth Asklepieion'da adak olarak karşılaşılmaktadır. Ayrıca Demeter, Artemis ve Aphrodite kutsal alanlarında da kullanım görmüştür. Adak kullanımına paralel olarak kutsal alanlarda mortarların bulunması ritüel yemeklerin hazırlanmış olmasıyla açıklanabilir. Naukratis örneğinden yola çıkılarak adak yazıtı taşıyan mortarların varlığı, kutsal alanlarda önemli bir amaca hizmet ettiklerini göstermektedir.

Mortarların erken örnekleri tipolojik açıdan konik formda olup yassı tabanlıdır. Daha çok Kıbrıs'a özgü olan bu forma, Doğu Akdeniz dışında Batı Akdeniz ve Karadeniz'de de rastlanmaktadır. İtalya ve İspanya'nın yanında Kuzey Afrika'da ithal ve yerel üretim örneklerin bir arada bulunduğu örnekler bilinmektedir. İonia kolonilerinin Karadeniz'deki faaliyetleri göz önüne alındığında bu durum şaşırtıcı değildir. Bu bakımdan Kıbrıs'ın yanında üretim merkezi olarak İonia da unutulmamalıdır. Ayrıca Levant Bölgesi'nde Ashkelon'da bulunan Doğu Yunan üretimi seramikler arasında İonia kaseleri, oinokhoe, hydria, ticari amphoralar ve pişirme kaplarına ek olarak mortarlar da yer almaktadır. Bu bakımdan Arkaik Dönem'de Kıbrıs'ın yanında Doğu Yunan kentlerinin de üretim merkezi olabileceği düşüncesi kuvvetlenmektedir. Miletos, Klazomenai, Ephesos ve Knidos/Emecikte gerçekleştirilen kazılar mortarların İonia'daki kullanımı hakkında fikir vermektedir. Yaklaşık olarak MÖ 500'lerden itibaren Akdeniz'in birçok noktasında mortarları görmek mümkündür. Doğu Akdeniz'e hâkim olan Fenike-Kıbrıs pazarını muhtemelen bu tarihten itibaren Korinth ele geçirmiştir.

Doğu Akdeniz'de geniş bir dağılım gösteren mortarların üretim merkezi üzerine yapılan çalışmalar, araştırmanın kapsamı açısından önem arz etmektedir. Bu bakımdan kil analizleri, mortarların üretim

merkezi konusuna yön verecek arkeolojik verilerdir. Ashkelon, Mesad Hashavyahu, Tell Kabri, Naukratis gibi çeşitli yerleşimlerden alınan örnekler üzerinde yapılan kil analizleri genel olarak Kıbrıs'ı işaret etmektedir. Ancak az sayıda örnek üzerinde yapılan kil analizleri Kuzey Suriye ve Doğu Yunan yerleşimlerinin de üretim merkezi olabileceğini göstermektedir. Bennet ve Blakely, Kuzeydoğu Akdeniz'de, Kıbrıs'ta ya da olasılıkla MÖ 8. ve 7. yüzyılda Ege, Kuzey Afrika ve Levant'a mortır ihraç edilerek Kuzey Suriye atölyelerinin uzmanlık elde ettiğini kabul etmişlerdir. Arkaik Dönem itibariyle bazı bölgelerin mortır üretiminde uzmanlaşmış olduğu tahmin edilmektedir.

Mortırların domestik kültüre ait bir kap olma özelliği taşımanın yanı sıra kutsal alanlarda adak eşyası olarak kullanım görmeleri kapların farklı bir anlam kazandığına işaret etmektedir. Bunların yanı sıra Tektaş Burnu, Pabuç Burnu ve Çaycağız Koyu batıklarının kargolarında mortırların bulunması, bu kapların Arkaik Dönem'de ticari obje statüsü kazanmış olabileceğine işaret etmektedir. Bu bakımdan Arkaik Dönem'de bölgeler arası ticari ilişkilerin kavranmasında mortırların rolü göz ardı edilmemelidir.