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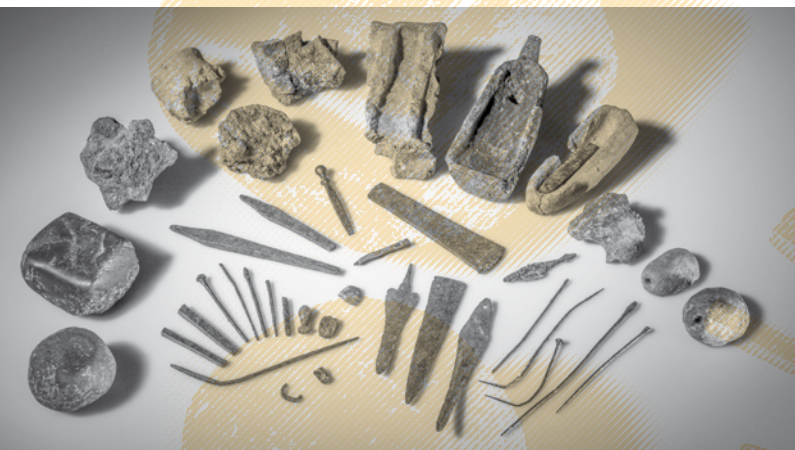
METALWORKING AS A HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITY

Status symbols—material objects that mark distinctions between classes and groups—may vary considerably between past and present societies. In prehistoric archaeology, claims such as “metals have always been viewed as a status symbol” remain largely unquestioned.¹ This conception also prevails for the Early Bronze Age (EBA) period, when the alloying of metal objects coincided with the emergence of elites in the Aegean and Anatolia. Yet, based on ethnographic studies, it has been documented that metals, including iron and copper, but even gold, can be treated as a free resource, to which access can be granted through kinship relations.² Therefore, metalworking and metal objects should be contextualized through a site-specific and comparative context, if we are to understand the local meaning of metals in a particular region or period.

In this essay, I will discuss the role of metals and metalworking at the EBA site of Çukuriçi Höyük in western Anatolia, a case study in my Ph.D. research. During the EBA 2 in western Anatolia, metals were associated with the elite graves and monumental buildings.³ Therefore, metalworking and the possession of metal objects can be taken as the main proxy for assessing differences between houses within an EBA 1 settlement, such as Çukuriçi Höyük.

I argue that metals and metal production at Çukuriçi Höyük were not markers of distinction and wealth, unlike in the succeeding EBA 2 period. Instead, the practice of metalworking was incorporated into domestic modes of production, within households at

↓ Fig. 1: Metallurgical ensemble excavated from Çukuriçi Höyük (Mehofer 2014, 464, Fig. 1)⁸



Çukuriçi Höyük. This argument combines a household archaeology approach toward the study of archaeological data with historical anthropology.

Çukuriçi Höyük was an EBA 1 (2,950–2,750 calBC), two-hectare settlement site on the western Anatolian coast, close to the modern town of Selçuk, Turkey. At the dawn of the Bronze Age, Çukuriçi Höyük was an arsenical-copper production center, as is evident from the presence of a large number of metal objects, metalworking tools, and smelting debris (see Fig. 1).⁴ The metallurgical evidence from Çukuriçi Höyük, however, challenges Gordon V. Childe's arguments about the organization of early metalworking. He claimed that EBA smiths were full-time specialists, who were the first to abandon kinship relations. According to Childe, metalworkers' "emancipation from kinship ties" was a consequence of itinerant work.⁵ Smiths traveled from village to village, producing metals in exchange for food.

Childe based his argument on the spatial organization of metalworking in the EBA archaeological record. At the time, metalworking had been confirmed only in single metalworking workshops per settlement.⁶ Yet recent evidence from Çukuriçi Höyük, raises questions about Childe's claims, for at EBA 1 Çukuriçi Höyük, metalworking was practiced by more or less sedentary villagers, scattered across the site, and within households. Metalworking at Çukuriçi Höyük was therefore likely organized along kinship lines, as I will discuss below.

Kinship relations can hardly be inferred from prehistoric material data. However, understanding houses as persons may help us address the spatial relations between houses and, consequently, social relations between members of different households at the site.

At the dawn of the EBA 1, from 3,000 BC onward, the newly erected rectangular houses at Çukuriçi Höyük were freestanding and became agglutinated in succeeding building phases. The gradual agglutination of houses took place over 100 years, a period that can be translated into four human generations. New dwellings

¹ Vasif Şahoğlu, "The Anatolian Trade Network and the Izmir Region During the Early Bronze Age," in: *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 24.4, 2005, p. 341.

² Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, Madison 1975; Madina Ly-Tall, *Contribution à l'histoire de l'Empire du Mali, (XIIIe-XVIe siècles): Limites, principales provinces, institutions politiques*, Dakar 1972.

³ The Early Bronze Age is an archaeological period that spans 3,000 and 2,000 BCE in the East Aegean and Anatolia. This period can be further divided into the EBA 1 (3,000–2,700 BC), the EBA 2 (2,700–2,400 BC), and the EBA 3 (2,400–2,000 BC). Eva Alram-Stern and Barbara Horejs, "Pottery Technologies in the Aegean and Anatolia During the 3rd Millennium BC: An Introduction," in: Eva Alram-Stern and Barbara Horejs (eds.), *Pottery Technologies and Sociocultural Connections between the Aegean and Anatolia during the 3rd Millennium BC*, (= *Oriental and European Archaeology* 10), Vienna 2018, p. 18n2.

were attached next to the pre-existing ones, gradually filling the space in between. In a literal sense, the houses at Çukuriçi Höyük grew together. The physical and social space between houses gradually decreased, so far that only narrow alleys separated agglutinated rows of house-

AT THE EARLY BRONZE AGE SITE OF ÇUKURIÇI HÖYÜK

holds. A similar practice has also been ethnographically documented in Northwestern Iran, such as in villages in Kharo Tauran.⁷ There, sons erected new houses next to their parents' houses after marriage. Therefore, it can be argued that the arrangement of new houses at Çukuriçi Höyük likewise corresponded to the developmental cycle of domestic groups, widely attested through participant observation elsewhere. Dwellers at Çukuriçi Höyük attached new houses next to the preexisting ones, which resulted not only in closer spatial relations but also in social proximity between dwellers, if we treat houses as persons.

Within houses at Çukuriçi Höyük described above, dwellers alloyed metals such as arsenical copper, as well as tin bronze, silver, and gold in smaller quantities. Both spatially and temporally, metal production at Çukuriçi Höyük took place alongside other household activities. These included textile and leather production, food storage, preparation, and consumption. In addition, hearths and ovens, mainly located within houses at Çukuriçi Höyük, were multifunctional installations. Fireplaces were used for cooking, heating, and metalworking. Regarding the architecture and associated finds at the site, none of the excavated buildings could be referred to as an elite structure. House construction, the layout, and the organization of interior spaces were largely homogeneous across the settlement. Therefore, metalworking was integrated into the domestic mode of production, practiced within the multigenerational and multigendered household at Çukuriçi Höyük at the dawn of the EBA.

If we combine house architecture, relations between houses, and their internal organization, it is possible to draw some conclusions

about the organization of metalworking at Çukuriçi Höyük. Firstly, metalworking at Çukuriçi Höyük was vital village expertise, though most likely a part-time and not a full-time specialization, as initially argued by Gordon V. Childe. Secondly, metalworking knowledge, access to raw materials, and metal objects appear to have been widely shared between households at Çukuriçi Höyük,

rather than hoarded or limited to a particular dwelling, which speaks against metals being a status symbol at the site.

Thirdly, metalworkers at Çukuriçi Höyük were not solely itinerant craftsmen and did not break off kinship relations. As

seen from the architecture and spatial organization of houses at Çukuriçi Höyük, part-time metalworkers relied on inter- and intra-household social relations to produce metals and reproduce

themselves as a society.

Although the evidence from Çukuriçi Höyük disproves Childe's claims about early metalworking, his work remains valid concerning other contemporary EBA 1 sites on the Eastern Aegean islands and in western Anatolia. At EBA 1 sites other than Çukuriçi Höyük, metalworking was limited to one household per settlement, which could support the existence of full-time itinerant smiths. Therefore, we should not perceive metals as *a priori* status symbols—either in the Bronze Age or today. Metals, like other objects, were always embedded in local, subjective worldviews that could vary between or within “archaeological cultures.”

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⁴ Mathias Mehofer, “Çukuriçi Höyük – Ein Metallurgiezentrum des frühen 3. Jts. v. Chr. in der Westtürkei,” in: Martin Bartelheim, Barbara Horejs, Raiko Krauss (eds.), *Von Baden bis Troia. Ressourcennutzung, Metallurgie und Wissenstransfer. Eine Jubiläumsschrift für Ernst Pernicka*, (= *Oriental and European Archaeology* 3), Rahden/Westf. 2016, p. 359–374.

⁵ Gordon V. Childe, “The Urban Revolution,” in: *The Town Planning Review* 21.1 (1950), p. 7.

⁶ Gordon V. Childe, *The Bronze Age*, London 1930, p. 5.

⁷ Lee Horne, *Village Spaces: Settlement and Society in Northeastern Iran*, London 1994.

⁸ Mathias Mehofer, “Metallurgy during the Chalcolithic and the Beginning of the Early Bronze Age in Western Anatolia,” in: Barbara Horejs and Mathias Mehofer (eds.), *Western Anatolia before Troy – Proto-Urbanisation in the 4th millennium BC: Proceedings of the International Symposium held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien*, (= *Oriental and European Archaeology* 1), Vienna 2014, pp. 463–90.