

---

# Metalworkers as ritual specialist of the Levantine Chalcolithic

Milena Gosic\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade – Čika Ljubina 18-20, 11000 Belgrade, Serbie

## Résumé

Levantine Chalcolithic metallurgical practices have been extensively discussed in relation to the levels of specialization and standardization, yet ritual aspects of the metallurgical craft are only starting to receive scholarly attention. Two different copperworking techniques appear within the Levantine Chalcolithic, which can thus be divided into its premetallic and metallic phases. Mastering metallurgy did not bring drastic changes to the ways in which communities went about their daily tasks, as tools were still produced in stone and bone, the same materials used during the premetallic phase. Instead, metalworkers produced ritual artifacts that displayed repertoire of symbols recognizable within the context of the period. Thus, when we discuss metalworkers we cannot approach them with the same conceptual tools we use to discuss craft specialist who produced mundane everyday tools, as there was a significant ritual aspect to their craft. Even though the notion of ritual specialists is not new to archaeology, theoretical and methodological frameworks utilized in discussing their specialization is considerably different from those used to discuss craft specialization. There are two main aspects discussed in relation to both ritual and craft specialization: spatial organization of the practice (e.g. household vs. centralized production or ritual) and the level of specialized knowledge required in order to perform specific tasks. Aside from these shared aspects, we have, on the one hand, in the case of ritual specialist, the focus on the level of control they exert over spiritual life of the community and on the means by which they attain it. On the other hand, specialization of craft production is discussed in relation to the scale of production and standardization. It is my contention that the varying scholarly treatment these specialists have received in archaeological literature has its roots in western philosophical traditions, marked by the dichotomy between practical and symbolical concepts, which also translates into the dichotomy between scientific and religious practices. However, in the case of Chalcolithic metalworking, these dichotomies do not apply: the practice is technologically sophisticated and can be discussed in terms of scale and mode of production, but is simultaneously ritual and symbolic. In the present paper I would like to focus on the ways in which ritual aspects of the Levantine Chalcolithic metallurgy shaped not only the social identity of the people who practiced it, but also the spatial and social organization of their metallurgical practice.

**Mots-Clés:** Chalcolithic, metallurgy, copper, technology, ritual, specialization, standardization, spatial organization

---

\*Intervenant