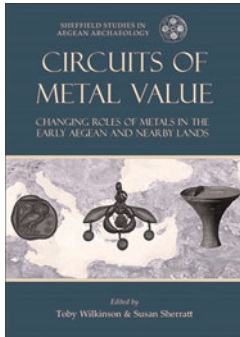


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TOBY C. WILKINSON & SUSAN SHERRATT (ed.). 2023. *Circuits of metal value: changing roles of metals in the early Aegean and nearby lands*. (Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology 14). Oxford: Oxbow; 978-1-78925-961-2 paperback £42.



The production, trading, uses and deposition of metals in the distant past has, for a long time, preoccupied many scholars. Their motivations lie both in the contemporary importance of metals and the relatively widespread preservation of metals in the archaeological record—at least when they were not recycled. At the core of many metal-orientated debates lie questions of ‘value’. What values did a society place on metals and therefore what roles did the metals play within that society? The volume *Circuits of metal value* arises from a roundtable meeting held in 2016 dedicated to exploring these questions from activities in the fourth millennium to the early first millennium BC with a geographical range from the central

Mediterranean to Central Asia, with a focus on the Aegean. Rather than exploring the technicalities of metal production and provenance, as in an earlier volume in the same Aegean Archaeology series (Day & Doonan 2007), the chapters engage primarily with the metal objects and re-evaluate their socio-political, economic and ritual interpretations. The Introduction by the editors provides a stimulating and detailed overview of the seven subsequent chapters and a useful summary of the unpublished papers presented at the roundtable, all within the context of the current state of research.

The contribution by Borja Legarra-Herrero compares and contrasts the use of gold in elite tombs across the east Mediterranean during two centuries of intense connectivity, *c.* 2000–1800 BC. It presents case studies from Egypt where unique, complex and exclusive gold objects were crafted to project power onto the body of a person in life and death from the Pharaoh downwards. Emulation of this elite strategy can be seen in ancient Byblos, Lebanon, albeit for an audience that is not as clearly defined as the Egyptian political and religious hierarchies. These two traditions can be contrasted to the earlier use of gold on Crete where skilled, local craftspeople used simpler forms and techniques for both individual *and* communal burials within much smaller and far less hierarchical societies, thus demonstrating a different value and understanding of gold ornamentation. Martina Massimino also investigates the theme of the conspicuous consumption of metal artefacts in elite funerary rites. The chapter compares the Maikop-Novosvobodnaya kurgans in the north Caucasus dating to *c.* 3100–2900 BC with the contemporary ‘royal graves’ of Arslantepe and Başür Höyük in southeast Anatolia. It highlights the significant similarities in the monumental construction and location of the funerary sites as well as the placing of large, typologically and technologically overlapping assemblages of elaborate copper alloy, gold and silver metal forms with the deceased. In addition, the excavated graves have revealed striking ceramics, exotic materials such as carnelian and rock crystal and, in the case of Arslantepe and Başür Höyük, human sacrifice. These

similarities are interpreted as a short-lived but influential expression of elite identity and geographically distant networks of values and relationships spanning the Caucasus and southeast Anatolia.

Toby Wilkinson explores this broader spatial and temporal perspective by re-assessing the emergence of metal wares and metal skeuomorphs from the Aegean to Central Asia in the late fourth to second millennium BC. The rapid increase in the visibility of not only metals but also other materials, which were coloured or shaped to resemble specific metals, is framed within an interpretation that draws on the newer theories surrounding the agency of objects as well as traditional notions of a *Metallschock*. The research reveals how the dramatically heightened symbolic and economic roles of metals stimulated the emergence of metal-related circulation and connectivity across vast areas which in turn re-shaped the societies involved.

Susan Sherratt tackles the long-running debate over whether the early use of silver in Greece, prior to the sixth century BC and the introduction of coinage, should be regarded as a currency. As well as critically analysing the textual and archaeological evidence for silver—predominately in pieces as *hacksilber*—Sherratt argues clearly that there is no inevitable transition from silver metal to silver coinage in Greece. Silver metal, furthermore, even seemed to have inhibited the use of silver coins in the Levant. Elisabetta Borgna thoroughly reviews the interpretations underpinning the circulation of metals and the connections between the Aegean and Italy in the fourteenth to eleventh centuries BC. In particular, the chapter emphasises the potentially significant and under-appreciated impact of Alpine metal sources, such as the vast Trentino copper mines, on the Aegean. In proposing the bronze sword/dagger as representing the symbol of exchange for the Aegean and the bronze axe for the Alpine systems, the author identifies two interconnected economic spheres of circulation whose development and fragmentation can be traced through hoards across the central and east Mediterranean.

Christopher Pare provides an intrinsic and thoughtful view on the earliest evidence for iron in the Near East and its subsequently rapid transmission, both west to the Atlantic Ocean and east to the Central Asian steppes, after *c.* 1200 BC. In evaluating the evidence from both the written and archaeological records, Pare demonstrates the regional and temporal variations in early iron—from bimetallic blades to ring ornaments—as well as their ritual and symbolic importance. The geographical expansion and innovative intensification of a far more utilitarian iron technology between *c.* 1200 and 800 BC is assessed and explained within the context of the downfall of the elite palatial system in the east Mediterranean. This transformation on Cyprus is explained in detail by Joanna Palermo who investigates the unique island trajectory of iron production and use. The large-scale copper smelting centres on Cyprus produced iron as a by-product and ensured a reliable source for the metal as well as a relatively seamless scaling of its production and integration into society.

Unfortunately, as is common for many edited volumes from conferences and roundtables, several of the original speakers were unable to contribute to the volume and various chapters overlap significantly with other publications by the same authors. As a whole, however, this volume can be considered as a major development in the scholarship of early metals in the Mediterranean and south-west Asia as it provides a range of pathways to explore the different values and changing roles of metals. It certainly succeeds in its aim of building on the much-cited *Metals make the world go round* (Pare 2000). Indeed, taken together with another recent

edited volume, *Metals, minds and mobilities* (Armada *et al.* 2018), *Circuits of metal value* provides an excellent insight into the present research of European scholars on early metals.

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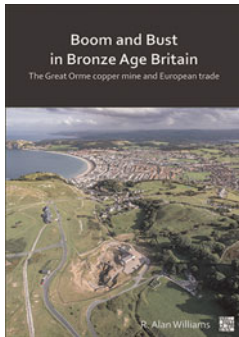
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R. ALAN WILLIAMS. 2023. *Boom and bust in Bronze Age Britain: the Great Orme copper mine and European trade*. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-378-5 paperback £60.



The book is based on the doctoral thesis of Alan Williams, a former mining geologist, completed after an intense career in the mining industry and a long-term interest in prehistoric mining and metallurgy (e.g. Williams 1985).

This 343-page book about the Great Orme Bronze Age copper mine in north Wales is organised in 10 chapters, with an up-to-date bibliography. It also includes appendices with the analytical results of published ore and metal analyses for the following: British and Irish Bronze Age mines (Appendix I); Cornish (Appendix II); and Great Orme copper ores (Appendix III); chemical analyses of Group-1 palstaves (Appendix IV); and a compilation of isotope results of British and Irish Bronze Age copper mines (Appendix V). The book ends with a useful subject/geographical index. Some of the core results contained in this book were previously synthesised (Williams & Le Carlier de Veslud 2019) and incorporated into broader Atlantic research projects such as ‘Moving Metals’ (e.g. Melheim *et al.* 2018) and ‘Maritime Encounters’ (<https://www.gu.se/en/research/maritime-encounters>), on which I am a collaborator.

The Introduction (Chapter 1) presents the state of research and the new concept of a ‘mine-based metal group’ to establish the chemical and isotopic relationship between the Great Orme mine and the metal artefacts. Chapter 2, ‘The Bronze Age research context’, deals with metal production in the Bronze Age and its archaeological sequence from the Early to Late Bronze Age; from the initial role of Ross Island in Ireland; and the ‘bronzization’