

# **A Social Archaeology of Metal Production in the Early Iron Age Aegean**

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Study of the transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age in the Aegean has undergone a transformative boom in the past several decades. Despite increasing scholarly attention, the answer to a fundamental question about this transition remains obscure: why was iron metallurgy adopted in place of bronze working for the production of some weapons, tools, and many forms of jewelry in the centuries following the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE? While various hypotheses either directly or obliquely related to this question have gained and lost favor over the years, none has been shown to be thoroughly convincing. The purpose of the proposed research project is to reinvigorate the question of bronze and iron production in the Early Iron Age Aegean in two ways. First, the book synthesizes relevant archaeological and archaeo-metallurgical evidence, of which a great deal has come to light since the last such synthesis. Second, the argument shifts the analytical frame of debate, attending primarily to the social and ritual meaning of metal production rather than to its technological and economic characteristics. While metal production in the early Aegean is usually categorized as a technological or economic process, comparative ethnographic and anthropological research documents widespread, complex connections between metallurgical production and producers and many non-economic aspects of society, including political structures, eschatological beliefs, and superstitious magic. While non-technologist discourse has been integrated into the study of metal production in some archaeological literatures, it has not been brought to bear on the Aegean Iron Age. This research project will consider how viewing dynamics of production and consumption within a broadly comparative and primarily social, rather than local and techno-economic, framework enables an original reconstruction of the cultural dynamics surrounding the history of metal production.