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From Inalienable Possessions to Magic: Social Practices Behind the Diversity of Chalcolithic Symbol-laden Objects[*1]

Abstract: There is a great variety of symbol-laden objects in the late Chalcolithic period (ca. 4300-3900 BC). In the past, they have been interpreted mostly as designators of social status and evidence of social hierarchy. The present paper discusses this heterogeneity and the use of symbol-laden objects through the concept of *inalienable possessions* defined by Annette Weiner. The symbolism of these objects makes them socially valuable. It dictates their use as a means of communication, which is frequently ritual or ceremonial (or both), while restricting them from being exchanged for economic gain. In the case of the Chalcolithic period, the heterogeneity of such objects, on the one hand in terms of their materiality, production, and design, and on the other as related to the context from which they have been retrieved, points to their prominent use in household ritual practices best described as magical.

Keywords: inalienable possessions, prehistory, magic, Chalcolithic, southern Levant

Introduction

The Chalcolithic period of the southern Levant is a transitional period between the Stone and the Metal Ages. This transitional quality is exemplified

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[1] The paper is based on a conference presentation titled "Are magical practices behind the diversity of Ghassulian symbol-laden objects?" delivered at *The 15th meeting of the Forum for the Research of the Chalcolithic Period: Ideology, Iconography and Worship in the Chalcolithic Period*, held on February 26th, 2023 at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

by the fact that the first regional appearances of phenomena such as metallurgy (Golden 2009b), social complexity, and the emergence of priesthood and organised religion (Levy 1995) have all been discussed within this, in prehistoric terms, a short period of time. Furthermore, material culture, especially ceramic and flint technology of the Chalcolithic period, bears a close resemblance to that of the preceding pottery Neolithic (Gilead 2009), and the transition to the Early Bronze Age is a much-contested topic (Bar and Winter 2010; Braun 2013; Vardi and Gilead 2013), making the clear boundaries between the periods topic of much scholarly discussion. Likewise, the internal chronology of the Chalcolithic is a debated topic (Burton and Levy 2001; Joffe and Dessel 1995; Rowan and Golden 2009), and the approach used here is based on the work of Gilead (1994, 2011). What is characteristic of the Chalcolithic period and bears no resemblance to preceding or subsequent periods is the metallurgy that emerged during the second half of the period and the numerous symbol-laden objects, frequently referred to as ritual objects. This is why the present paper will focus on these objects, particularly metal artefacts and other symbol-laden objects that appear around the same time as metallurgy. These are the objects that, in archaeological interpretation, feature prominently with concepts such as social hierarchy and religion, yet their ritual application is rarely discussed. Although it is generally understood that there is a considerable variety of symbol-laden objects in the Chalcolithic period (Ilan and Rowan 2012; Rowan and Ilan 2007), how those objects were used and how they related to each other is not discussed. It is, nevertheless, clear that they coexisted and were part of the same broader social and ritual system of belief-based practices. Additionally, other types of artefacts are found in contexts related to ritual behaviour, such as flint tabular scrapers (Manclossi and Rosen 2022, 53-58) or are even considered to be indicators of ritual contexts, such as ceramic cornets (Gilead 2002, 111; Ilan and Rowan 2012, 95), neither of which are included here. The reason is that they appear much earlier than metallurgy, are not symbol-laden, and are found in various contexts. They are considerably more common than the artefacts dealt with in this paper.

The present paper aims to understand the system that connected the symbol-laden artefacts from the perspective of Annette Weiner's concept of inalienable possessions. Inalienable possessions, which commonly include ritual-related artefacts, have social meaning and significance deeply intertwined with that of their owner, who retains ownership even if the object is transferred to another individual as an heirloom or a gift (Weiner 1992).

Symbol-Laden Objects of the Late Chalcolithic Period

The term *symbol-laden objects* is preferred here to the more commonly used terms such as ritual and/or prestige objects, as it includes objects that have been defined as both. For example, metal artefacts are considered more commonly as prestige objects serving as indicators of social status, but also as ritual. In contrast, ivory figurines are typically considered ritual, as are ossuaries, though in relation to mortuary practices. So, even though in the conclusion below, their probable use in magic-related rituals will be argued for, it is important not to assign such a quality to them before a discussion. The term symbol-laden is appropriate as all objects considered display various symbols, including anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and abstract. The second term, *belief-based practice*, similarly relates to what are typically considered ritual, religious and magic practices. However, as it will be discussed below, it also includes practices that might be considered technological or otherwise not typically associated with ritual.

Fig. 1. Map of the southern Levant showing major sites mentioned in the text.

Settlements and burials of the Chalcolithic period (Fig. 1) are known across the southern Levant (Gilead 2011). In this paper, the focus is on the sites in the

northern Negev, the Dead Sea basin, the southern and central Coastal plain, the Shephela and the Jordan Valley during the period from ca. 4500 BC to 3800 BC due to their relative proximity and shared material culture, such as ceramics, flint and architecture, defined in Levantine archaeology also as the Ghassulian culture (Gilead 2011, 13). Other cultural entities, Golanian to the north and Timnian further south, are not discussed here as they represent distinct cultural contexts (Gilead 2011, 14-16) (see Table 1). The variety of symbol-laden objects of the Chalcolithic period has a clear chronological aspect (Gilead 2011, 14). The early phase, ca. 4500-4300/4200 BC, which is represented by sites such as Teleilat Ghassul, Grar and Gilat, is known for its violin-shaped figurines, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels, numerous ceramic cornets, ground stone mace-heads, wall paintings and shrines. The late phase, ca. 4300-3900/3800 BC,\a\ which is represented by settlements such as Bi res-Safadi, Abu Matar, Nahal Mishmar and Shiqmim, as well as numerous caves for second burial rites[2], is known for the introduction of the extractive metallurgy to the region which was used to produce symbol-laden objects, elaborate ceramic ossuaries for second burials, painted pebbles and ivory figurines.

Table 1. Chronology of the cultural entities of the Chalcolithic Period (after Gilead 2011, 14). Neolithic entities that terminated before the Chalcolithic period are not included.

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>Period</td><td colspan="3">Archaeological cultures</td></tr>
<tr><td>3800 BC</td><td rowspan="3">Chalcolithic</td><td>Late Ghassulian</td><td rowspan="2">Golanian</td><td rowspan="5">Timnian</td></tr>
<tr><td>4200/4300 BC</td><td rowspan="2">Early Ghassulian</td></tr>
<tr><td>4500 BC</td><td rowspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td>4700 BC</td><td rowspan="2">Chalcolithic-Neolithic Transition</td></tr>
<tr><td>5000 BC</td><td rowspan="2">Late Neolithic</td></tr>
<tr><td>…</td></tr>
</table>

[2] The term “second burial” is used here deliberately following Bryant and Peck (2009) instead of the more commonly used term “secondary burial” as it might unintentional imply that it is a burial rite of lesser importance.

The present paper focuses on the late phase of the Chalcolithic period. The reason is threefold. The first is that understanding the social and belief system that held them all together would have to assume that the same system existed throughout the period, which appears not to have been the case. One of the most prominent differences between the two phases is in the assemblages of symbol-laden objects and belief-based practices, including second burial practices, alongside the introduction of metallurgy and establishment of new settlements in the northern Negev (Gošić 2015, 718-721). The introduction of metallurgy in the region did not change how communities in the southern Levant went about their daily tasks. Copper and copper/based alloys were used to produce elaborate symbol-laden objects. It is, thus, likely that its introduction was related to the overall change in belief-based practices, which included the change in the burial customs and possibly the abandonment of shrines of the earlier phases. The second is that the variety of materials in which objects bearing similar symbols are produced is greater, as metal artefacts and ossuaries represent objects related to previously unknown practices. Finally, the belief-based practices and objects of the settlements of the earlier phases have been studied to a greater extent due to the existence of regional central places of worship, which have caught much of the scholarly attention. During the late phase of the Chalcolithic period, symbol-laden objects are present in most sites (such as copper artefacts, ivory figurines and incised and painted smooth stream pebbles), within household units, yet there is not a single architectural feature at those sites that can be defined as a temple (Gošić 2016). The temple at En Gedi, which was previously thought to date to the earlier phase of the period (Gilead and Gošić 2014, 236), appears to be later (Goren et al. 2025). The new research also questions the site's function, as it might have been related to metallurgical activity. However, it is noteworthy that the metallurgical and ritual activities are not mutually exclusive.

The Metal Symbol-Laden Artefacts

Two distinct casting technologies were used: open mould casting in pure copper (Shugar 2001) and lost wax casting using complex metals composed of copper with varying amounts of antimony, arsenic, nickel and, less frequently, lead (Tadmor et al. 1995; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2015). The process of copper smelting and open mould casting is best documented in a cluster of settlements close to modern town Beersheba: Abu Matar (Shugar 2003), Bi res-Safadi (Eldar and Baumgarten 1985), Horvat Beter (Ackerfeld et al. 2020) and Shiqmim (Golden 2009a; Shalev and Northover 1987), where several kinds of ore, mainly from Feinan, have been used (Shugar 2001). The only confirmed location for the practice of the lost wax casts is the site of Fazael in the Jordan Valley (Rose et al. 2023). The provenance of the ores used to produce complex metals used

for it is unknown, although several locations have been suggested, including Anatolia, Caucasus, Iranian Plateau, Sinai and Zagros mountains (Ilani and Rosenfeld 1994; Key 1980, 242; Rothenberg 1991, 7; Tadmor et al. 1995, 141-142).

The bulk of copper objects comes from the hoard of Nahal Mishmar in the Judean desert, remote from settlements and burial caves (Bar-Adon 1980). However, copper artefacts have also been found at settlements and burial sites. The circumstances and time within the late Chalcolithic when the hoard was hidden remain unclear (Gilead and Gošić 2014). The settlements on which copper artefacts are found can be divided into those that feature remains of metalworking and those that do not. In those that do, which are listed above, the finished artefacts were typically found adjacent to the furnace or within the exact location where remains of processing were found (Ackerfeld et al. 2020; Eldar and Baumgarten 1985; Gilead, Rosen, and Fabian 1992; Golden 2001; Rose et al. 2023). In those that feature only finished copper artefacts, such as Giv'at ha-Oranim (Namdar et al. 2004) and Meser (Dothan 1957), copper artefacts were found in caches (Dothan 1957; Namdar et al. 2004). Copper artefacts are also found in the context of late Chalcolithic burial caves, such as Peqi'in (Gal, Smithline, and Shalem 1997)(Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011), Palmahim (Gophna and Lifshitz 1980)(Gophna and Lifshitz 1980) and Nahal Qanah (Shalev 1996).

Until recently, the southern Levantine Chalcolithic copper artefacts were divided into utilitarian and prestigious groups (Potaszkin and Bar-Avi 1980, 235). This division reflected their technological properties: axes and chisels, cast pure copper in open moulds, were deemed utilitarian and complex metal lost wax castings were considered prestigious artefacts, designating social status or ritual objects. However, such division has been questioned (Gošić 2015; Gošić and Gilead 2015) based on the common archaeological context in which all the types of artefacts were found, the design of the so-called utilitarian artefacts (Tadmor et al. 1995, 97) and the lack of use-wear on supposedly utilitarian objects (Namdar et al. 2004, 81-83). It is argued elsewhere (Gošić 2015) that the objects such as chisels and axes made in copper, which are much fewer in number than their stone counterparts, were functioning as symbols as much as casts adorned by anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs that will be presented below, so all metal objects are regarded here as symbol-laden.

When copper objects are divided into utilitarian and prestigious, what is often neglected is that those assigned prestigious status are more commonly found. The most frequent Chalcolithic copper object is a macehead, with over 240 discovered in the Nahal Mishmar hoard alone (Bar-Adon 1980, 116-131). They are mostly undecorated, and few feature grooves and vertical lines (Bar-Adon 1980, 118).

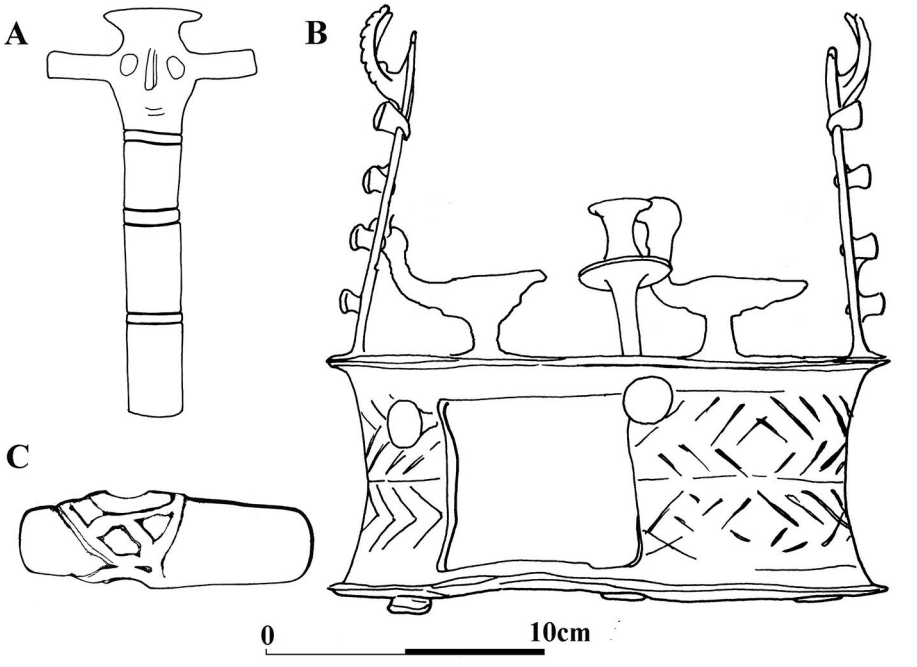

Fig. 2. Selected Chalcolithic metal artefacts from Nahal Mishamr hoard: A. skeuomorphic axe (after Bar-Adon 1980 112, no. 163), B. anthropomorphic standard (after Bar-Adon 1980 49, no. 21), C. "crown" featuring architectural and zoomorphic motifs (after Bar-Adon 1980 28, no. 7).

Standards (e.g. Fig. 2.A), the second most frequent artefact type, were also fixed on a shaft but were composite and more diverse regarding symbols. Again, most come from Nahal Mishmar (Bar-Adon 1980, 40-102), but they are known also from Peqi'in, Nahal Qanah, Palmahim, Fazael and Giv'at ha-Oranim (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011; Gopher and Tsuk 1996; Gophna and Lifshitz 1980; Namdar et al. 2004; Rosenberg et al. 2020). Sceptres are similar in shape and composition to standards but tend to be elongated, narrower and without a shaft (Bar-Adon 1980, 90-93). A single ivory sceptre has been found in a cache of ivory objects in Yavne (Shochat et al. in press).

Copper cylinders (e.g. Fig. 2.B), often called "crowns", have been discovered only in Nahal Mishmar (Bar-Adon 1980, 24-39). Three horns, resembling the horns of plenty from later periods, were found in the Nahal Mishmar cave (Bar-Adon 1980, 104-105). The Nahal Mishmar hoard also yielded several jars, including one with an elongated neck, three basket-like jars and one wide-mouthed jar (Bar-Adon 1980, 106-111).

Objects cast in open moulds are adzes, awls, axes, chisels and a hammer (Bar-Adon 1980; Eldar and Baumgarten 1985; Gal, Smithline, and Shalem 1997; Namdar et al. 2004; Shalev and Northover 1987). One axe from the Nahal Mishmar (Fig. 2.C) hoard stands out in design, as it is the only axe cast in the lost wax technique in complex metal. The axe features one sharp and one dull edge and a hole for a shaft in the thickest part of the body (Bar-Adon 1980, 112). Around the hole is an image of the rope that ties the shaft to the axe. It is a typical example of a skeuomorph: the rope image has no function and only mimics how a stone axe was tied to a handle. This axe is crucial for understanding the Chalcolithic axes as symbol-laden objects, as it was likely used in the same manner as a standard, meaning to communicate a symbolic meaning in a procession or display (Gošić 2015).

The symbolic motifs on the Chalcolithic copper artefact can be divided into the following categories: anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, tools and weapons as motifs in composite artefacts; architectural and abstract, which might also include floral. The anthropomorphic motifs (e.g. Fig. 2.A), mainly faces, and zoomorphic (e.g. Fig. 2.B), which include birds and horned animals (Gošić and Gilead 2015, 166), are relatively easily identifiable. There are no indications of gender for anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs on metal artefacts. Zoomorphic motifs include ibexes, ibex horns, and birds.

As part of the standards' design, tools constitute the last type of symbols and include mostly chisels and maceheads (e.g. Fig. 2.A). The most frequently repeated symbol on standards and sceptres is a macehead, also found as an independent copper artefact. A macehead is an apparent symbol of political or military power, especially based on comparative Egyptian iconography (Baines 1994: 111). However, it is noteworthy that there is not much evidence of interpersonal violence during this period, nor is there much centralised political power. Other abstract motifs include herringbone, vertical and diagonal grooves and ridges. Buds and bulbs interpreted by Merhav (Merhav 1993, 41) as floral motifs could also be considered abstract (Gošić and Gilead 2015, 166).

The architectural motif on a copper object is the "doorways" on one of the cylinders (e.g. Fig. 2.B). These have been interpreted as either gates of a temple (Bar-Adon 1980, 133) or a palace (Ziffer 2007, 53), but could also signify entrance to the house, as temples are not featured at most sites. The Area E temple at Teleilat Ghassul is dated to the early phase of the Chalcolithic, as is the presumed temple of Gilat (Levy 2006) that was also disputed (Gilead 2002, 107-109; Gošić 2016, 877). They could also be related to the door representations on ossuaries, which are discussed below, connecting thus metallurgy with mortuary ritual. However, attempting to decipher the meaning of individual symbols seems overly speculative. It is evident that metal artefacts exhibit a wide range of symbols. The representation of chisels and axes in the decoration of standards

and other complex castings and their already stated practical uselessness justifies the inclusion of these artefacts in symbol-laden objects.

Ceramic, Ivory and Stone Figurines

The same symbols found in the copper objects are found in other materials, most notably in ivory and ceramics. Ivories were produced from both elephant and hippopotamus tusks, and even though hippopotami inhabited streams along the southern Levantine coastal plain, Rosenberg and Chasan (2024, 224) argue that the raw materials, including objects, were acquired through long-distance exchange with populations from the Nile delta. According to Perrot (1984, 84), the ivory workshop was excavated at Bir es-Safadi, where the largest assemblage of ivories was also found. Ivory objects were in underground chambers associated with the space identified as workshop as well as in a cache that contained one male anthropomorphic figurine (Fig. 3.A), a sickle and a basalt bowl

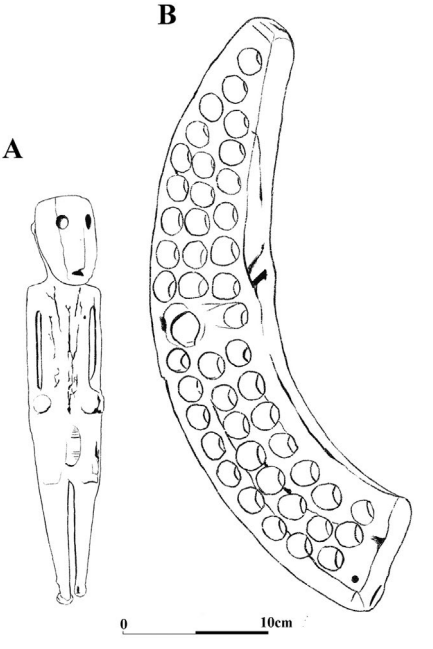

Fig. 3. Selected Chalcolithic ivory objects: A. anthropomorphic figurine from Bir es-Safadi (drawing by Mila Šami after Perrot 2006, Fig. 5b), B. sickle-shaped object from Nahal Mishar hoard (drawing by Mila Šami after Bar-Adon 1980, 18, no. 2).

(Perrot 2006, Fig. 5). However, existence of such workshop has been questioned recently since no production tools and remains are identified, which might also be the consequence of ivory working being an archaeologically relatively invisible craft (Shochat et al. in press) Other ivory objects include other anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, vessels, more sickle-shaped objects, vessels, pendants, standards, disks and numerous fragments too poorly preserved to be identified (Perrot 2006). Anthropomorphic figurines were found at northern Negev settlement sites Bir es-Safadi (Perrot 1956, 1959, 1964) and Abu Matar (Perrot 1955) and Upper Galilee burial cave Peqi'in, and there is an additional figurine that originated in an unknown location in Northern Negev (Amiran and Tadmor 1980). Five of the figurines have been described as female, two as male, and another five not gendered, as they show only a head. The figurines feature tiny holes interpreted as being used to pin hair or clothes (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024, 232-234). A single bone figurine was excavated at Shiqmim, another settlement along Nahal Beer Sheva in northern Negev (Levy and Golden 1996). The figurine is considered female due to its similarity to violin-shaped figurines from the early Chalcolithic period and the common assumption that they are female (Commenge et al. 2006). However, unlike those violin-shaped figurines, it features incisions on the chin, which could hold a beard, making such a distinction uncertain. The Shiqmim bone figurine was found in a refuse pit near a building (Levy and Golden 1996, 153). The only other late Chalcolithic site that features violin-shaped figurines is the burial cave Peqi'in (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011, 63, Figs. 9.1, 9.3, 9.5, 9.9, 9.10). While most are made from varying kinds of stone, as is common in the early Chalcolithic period, at Peqi'in, one of the violin-shaped figurines is made from bone (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011, Fig. 9.10). Anthropomorphic figurines of ceramic found in Peqi'in were actually decorative elements of ceramic vessels (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011, 202). A male anthropomorphic ceramic figurine (Fig. 4) was found within an ossuary at Quleh (Milevski 2002). The figurine with erect penis had clearly defined genitals and it is possible that the missing hand was holding the penis (Milevski 2002, 138). The figurine was broken into three pieces, and the fragments were found in different parts of the ossuary, suggesting that it had already been broken at the time of burial and treated as deceased (Milevski 2002, 140). A small basalt figurine of a human head was found at Shiqmim (Levy and Alon 1985, 78).

Zoomorphic figurines are uncommon during the late phase of the Chalcolithic period. Notable examples include an ivory figurine representing a head with horns that is alternatively interpreted as anthropomorphic from an unknown location (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024, Fig. 4d), an incomplete figurine representing hippopotamus head from Bir es-Safadi (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024, Fig. 6a, 242) and a complete bird pin from Shiqmim (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024,

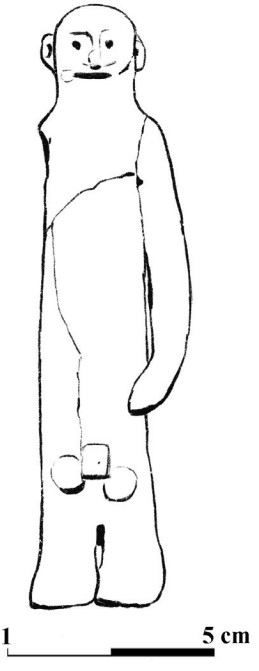

Fig. 4. Ceramic anthropomorphic figurine from Quleh
(drawing by Mila Šami after Milevski, Lupu, and
Cohen Weinberger 2023, Fig. 8.1).

Fig. 6b, 242). A bird ceramic figurine was excavated at Kissufim Road and Palmahim Quarry cemeteries (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002). A figurine of a ram bearing churns has been discovered at En Gedi (Epstein 1985, 55, Fig. 3a,b), similar only to the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic vessels found at the early site of Gilat (Commenge et al. 2006, Fig. 15.1-6). Zoomorphic motifs are commonly represented in the decoration of ossuaries and, as such, are discussed below.

Ivory Sickles

A total of twelve ivory sickles have been recovered from Bi res-Safadi, Shiqmim, the Nahal Mishmar hoard, Givat ha-Oranim and Nahal Qanah cave (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024, 242). They differ in design and level of preservation: the objects from Nahal Mishmar (e.g. Fig. 3.B) are perforated and have a shaft for placing a handle, allowing them to be displayed as standards (Bar-Adon 1980, 16-22). Similar perforations are present on partially preserved specimens from Shiqmim (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024, Fig. 7.a), Givat ha-Oranim

(Scheftelowitz and Oren 2004, Fig. 6.1) and Nahal Qanah (Gopher and Tsuk 1996, 4:27.1). Fragments of perforated ivory objects and another curved unperforated grooved object have been found recently in the aforementioned cache of ivory objects in Yavne, as was not (Shochat et al. in press). Another example from Shiqmim is solid (Rosenberg and Chasan 2024, Fig. 7b). Those from Bi res-Safadi are solid but have dotted incisions, or dimples, similar to those found on the figurines (Perrot 1959). Finally, a complete sickle with neither incisions nor perforation but with a shaped handle was found at Bi res-Safadi in a cache that contained the aforementioned male figurine and a basalt bowl (Perrot 2006, Fig. 5). What is common for all of the sickles is that neither of them had a sharp edge nor was it meant to hold flint sickle blade. This means that the ivory sickles were symbolic, just as tools and weapons in metal.

Stone Maceheads

It is important, though, to draw closer attention to a group of artefacts that will be regarded here as symbol-laden based on their similarity with copper objects: the stone maceheads. Stone maceheads are found throughout the Chalcolithic period, a total of fifty-nine objects, in settlements and cemeteries alike (Rowan et al. 2006, Fig. 12.25; Sebbane 2023). They are made from limestone (Sebbane 2023, 24), manganese and limestone readily available in the southern Levant (Sebbane 2023, 35). While there is a considerable quantity of damaged and broken limestone maceheads, copper and hematite maceheads do not appear to have been used in a way that would damage their surface. While the reason is the greater availability and workability of limestone relative to hematite and copper, it is also possible that the use was different and that the hematite and metal maceheads were likely displayed as symbols rather than used in interpersonal violence (Sebbane 2023, 54).

Painted Pebbles

Painted pebbles are a special type of symbol-laden object found at sites in the Northern Negev along the Nahal Beer Sheva. Three groups were found at Abu Matar in different arrangements on the floors of rooms (Perrot 1955, 167). Two arrangements were found in the same room: one was crescent-shaped and consisted of 14 small pebbles marked with broad strokes of red ochre in crossed lines, and the other consisted of two rows, a total of 37 marked pebbles. An octagonal arrangement was found in another room (Perrot 1955, 168). The wall of the associated house partially covered the arrangement, suggesting it was placed prior to the construction of the house. Additional pebbles were found in the fills

of several houses at Abu Matar. The pebbles were procured from a streambed adjacent to the site. They were reused, as indicated by traces of previously painted lines under the more recent ones. Most were one-sidedly painted, though some were painted on both (Perrot 1955, 170). Although the exact purpose of these pebbles is obscure, their location and commonality indicate use in domestic belief-based practice, which is possibly related to the foundation of new houses. At Shiqmim, an arrangement of 13 painted pebbles was found adjacent to a wall (Levy et al. 2023, 121).

Mortuary Customs and Related Symbol-Laden Objects

Although Chalcolithic stone vessels and ceramic types such as V-shaped bowls, churns (especially miniature ones) and cornets (Perrot 1955, 80-83) were probably used in ritual activities, they will not be discussed here as they are not uniquely found in ritualistic contexts and also do not qualify as symbol-laden. Ceramic objects that qualify are the ceramic ossuaries used for the second, i.e., the final, burial of the dead during the later phase of the period. As mentioned before, the changes in funerary rituals represent a significant distinction between the early and late phases of the Chalcolithic period.

During the late Chalcolithic period, second burials in extramural cemeteries became the preferred way of burying the dead (Gošić 2015, 720). Second burials refer to the treatment of bodies in two stages: the first involves temporarily placing the body in a designated excarnation location, and the second involves the collection of the bones for burial at a final burial location (Hertz in Chénier 2009, 27). Most Chalcolithic cemeteries represent the second stage of the process: the final burial location and the excarnation cists are confirmed only at Shiqmim cemetery 3 (Levy and Alon 1987).

Apart from Shiqmim (Levy and Alon 1985, 1987) and Kissufim (Goren and Fabian 2002), Chalcolithic cemeteries are located in caves, either natural, such as Peqi'in, Nahal Qanah and Ben Shemen, or artificial, such as Bnei Barak, Palmahim Quarry, Hadera. Until 2005, 39 Chalcolithic cemeteries were excavated (van den Brink and Gophna 2005) and more have been excavated and published since (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015). Bones of the deceased were placed in ossuaries, predominately ceramic (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015; Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011; Gopher and Tsuk 1996; Gophna and Lifshitz 1980), though stone ossuaries were also used (Goren and Fabian 2002; Gorzalczany et al. 2012).

While large bowls and churns broken on one end were used for second burials, most notably at Horvar Qarqar South (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015), ceramic ossuaries were typically vessels produced especially for burials. There is a considerable variety in the design of the ceramic ossuaries:

rectangular with gabled roofs in imitation of houses, jar-shaped with specialized openings, churns, and anthropomorphic. Ossuaries from Peqi'in (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011), Qulkeh and Mazor (West) (Milevski, Lupu, and Cohen Weinberger 2023) at Horvat Qarqar South (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015) are published in most detail. Anthropomorphic ossuaries (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011, 448; Milevski, Lupu, and Cohen Weinberger 2023, 70-79) feature eyes and noses either modelled in as plastic decoration or painted in red paint or combining both techniques. Yadin (1976) noticed that the fronts of some of the ossuaries with anthropomorphic motifs have a shape similar to the violin-shaped figurines. Shalem (2008, 30-33) differentiates between female and male ossuaries by interpreting some protrusions as breasts and some of the red paint as male beards. No two ossuaries are alike, and the anthropomorphic motifs vary greatly, so caution is advised when interpreting them.

As mentioned above, zoomorphic motifs on ossuaries are common. They consist of decorations of horned animals, probably ibexes, either in figural plastic or incised in ceramics (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015, 7, 13; Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011, 76-77; Milevski, Lupu, and Cohen Weinberger 2023, 80-82). Avian imagery is seen at Horbat Qarqar South, where four ceramic bird plastic ossuary decorations and a bird-shaped ossuary were found (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015, 12-14). Those figurines come from the upper level of a burial cave in which a large basin with incised ibexes containing a burial was found surrounded by burials in smaller vessels (Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015, 6).

Although up until now not many decorations are interpreted as architectural, Perrot and Ladiray (1980, 25-28) interpreted a whole group of ossuaries as architectural and such interpretation has been accepted and repeated since, albeit sometimes referred to as domiform (Milevski, Lupu, and Cohen Weinberger 2023: 82). The main architectural feature on the ossuaries is that of a door flanked by protrusions that in shape resemble copper standards and also the doors found on one of the copper cylinders (Bar-Adon 1980, 24). Many of the decorations on the ossuaries are challenging to interpret and can be regarded as abstract.

Even though there is variability among the cemeteries, common traits are noticeable, suggesting that societies that utilised them shared similar beliefs. A survey and mapping of burial caves (Winter-Livneh, Svoray, and Gilead 2012) showed that more than one settlement used cemeteries. It is impossible to reconstruct a hierarchical order among the burials, and burial rituals do not reflect the differential social status of individuals or their position in society, as suggested by (Gopher and Tsuk 1996, 233). The objects that otherwise might be regarded as indicative of status, such as metal artefacts, are not commonly found, and when found, they are not in clear association with a particular burial. The groupings of burial, such as the above-mentioned large crater surrounded by

small ones at Horvat Qarqar, are more likely to indicate household and family organisation, as among the numerous burial caves at the site, groupings of ossuaries are common, but no particular group stands out. However, it is important to notice that second burials in caves imply considerable investment in mortuary customs: excarnation, collection of bones, production of ossuaries, excavation of artificial caves and transport of the deceased. Such an endeavour demanded considerable social organisation, yet there is no indication that it was based on hierarchy and social stratification.

A limited number of inhumations are found in settlements, mostly articulated with no offering, and usually in abandoned underground chambers (Eldar and Baumgarten 1985; Levy et al. 2023; Perrot 1955). A cross-cultural survey of ethnographic data on second burial customs (Winter-Livneh, Svoray, and Gilead 2012, 426-427) shows it to be a practice often performed periodically by a community, and it is plausible that such was the case during the Chalcolithic period as well, especially considering how time and effort they demanded compared to first burials (cf. Nativ and Gopher 2011, 236). According to Winter-Livneh, Svoray, and Gilead (2012, 435), the distribution of second burials illustrates the need for communities to establish control over large territories.

Ritual Behaviour and Social Organisation during the Chalcolithic Period

Our knowledge of ritual behaviours during the late Chalcolithic period is limited to mortuary practices and symbol-laden objects found in households, as neither temples nor other public structures are evident (Gošić 2016). It is possible that those were the households inhabited by religious practitioners, or they indicate where such individuals were active. Anthropomorphic ivory figurines with clear sexual organs were probably related to domestic fertility rituals, while the ivory sickle found in context with one of them might have related fertility to agriculture and vegetation. Symbols painted on pebbles might have been entopic signs related to rituals of altered states of consciousness, similarly, but on a considerably smaller scale, to abstract signs from the wall paintings found in the early Chalcolithic period settlement of Teleilat Ghassul (Drabsch 2015). Finally, copper artefacts, a product of ritual technology (Gošić and Gilead 2015), display the greatest variety of symbols but are likely not centred on fertility, as gender attributes are not featured. They can probably connect household rituals with second burials, as they were found in both contexts. While the accurate interpretation of most meanings and use of symbol-laden objects might be hard to prove, it is an alternative to interpreting such objects as designators of social status and stratified social organisation. The domestic cult of the South Levantine Chalcolithic is not restricted to the northern Negev. The Chalcolithic period

in the Golan during the second half of the fifth millennium (Carmi, Epstein, and Segal 1995; Epstein 1998) features anthropomorphic basalt pillar figurines characterised by pronounced noses and occasionally zoomorphic features such as horns (Rowan and Golden 2009, Fig. 15.a). The population of Golan also utilised the Peqi'in cemetery (Gal, Shalem, and Smithline 2011; Gal, Smithline, and Shalem 1997) for second burials, showing clearly that lack of social hierarchy did not impede complex social relations and cooperation required for sharing mortuary sites across the region.

The apparent diversity in symbol-laden objects, both in settlements and cemeteries, starkly contrasts with the lack of diversity in architecture. Levy *et al*. (1994, 89) link the formation of pebbles found at Shiqmim to what they consider to be a public structure. However, the general plans of the first phase of excavations of Shiqmim village (Levy and Alon 1987b: Figure 6.2) and the recently published second phase (Levy et al. 2023, Figs. 2.197-2.181) give an impression of relatively uniform architecture throughout the site. It is doubtful that any particular structure stood out as public.

Another thing to notice is the variety of materials in which symbol-laden objects were produced and the varying availability of those materials. Pebbles were acquired from streams adjacent to settlements, and ceramic objects were made from locally available clay (Boness et al. 2016; Goren 1995). Metals and ivory were more challenging to procure. Even the so-called local copper ore originated in Feinan, Jordan, roughly 100 km to the southeast, so it was not in the immediate vicinity of the Northern Negev settlements, and complex metals were available much further in the Caucasus and the Iranian Plateau area. The varying availability of materials and, consequently, the symbol-laden objects produced from them informed the social symbolism of the objects and the people producing and handling them. Considering the lack of evidence of social hierarchy in which these objects could have served as indicators of higher social status, the following section explores alternative frameworks for understanding their social significance.

Social Organisation and the Role of Inalienable Possessions

The neoevolutionary approach to social organisation (Service 1971) focuses on theoretical concepts describing the evolutionary stage of a given society, such as tribe, chiefdom and state (Algaze 1993; Anđelković 2007; Kristiansen 1991; Renfrew 1974; Yoffee 1993). The identification is based on the assumption that identifiable criteria indicate either stage, regardless of the specific socio-cultural contexts. From all the stages, chiefdom gained particular pop-

ularity (Yoffee 1993), mainly through the work of Renfrew (1973, 543), who listed twenty traits for identifying chiefdoms in an archaeological context. Many also rushed to identify chiefdoms in the Near East (Earle 1987; Henry 1989; Levy 1986b, 1995). According to (Yoffee 1993, 60-61), the appeal of the concept of the chiefdom is that it is a complex ranked society but not a state and that, as opposed to other stages of the neoevolutionary ladder, there is a wide range of traits that could be used to identify it. Defined as such, it offered enough ambiguity to adapt quickly across various social contexts. For example, Levy's (1986a) interpretation of Chalcolithic social organisation was based on Renfrew's definition of a chiefdom. He (Levy 1986a, 87) described Chalcolithic societies of the Negev as organised in a two-tier settlement hierarchy, with smaller subsidiary sites (e.g. Abu Matar and Bir es-Safadi) functioning as dependencies of larger, planned settlement centres (e.g. Shiqmim and Horvat Beter). However, Gilead (1988a, 418) has noted that the archaeological evidence for such a hierarchy is lacking. Craft specialisation was cited (Levy 1986) as another trait of a ranked society, and therefore, metallurgy indicated to him evidence for a ranked society because many aspects of production, including ore procurement, smelting and processing of metals, required at the community level. However, ethnographic records of other societies (David and Sterner 2012) show different patterns of metalworking articulation in societies, not all of which are ranked.

Crumley (1995, 3-4) sees the common failure to differentiate between scalar hierarchy, in which all levels can affect one another, and control hierarchy, in which upper levels control lower, as a reason for insistence that complex societies need to be ranked and that egalitarian ones are simple. However, Chapman (2003, 77-79) argues that social inequality is seen in a range of societies, from hunter-gatherers to states and that egalitarian social organisation is not simple but a product of complex institutions that exist to prevent the accumulation of power. In order to prevent identifying complexity with social hierarchy, Price (1995, 140) defines complexity as a society with "more parts and more connections between parts."

A concept alternative to hierarchy is that of heterarchy, defined "as the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways...While hierarchy undoubtedly characterises power relations in some societies, it is equally true that coalitions, federations, and other examples of shared or counterpoised power abound." (Crumley 1995, 3). Society is not necessarily hierarchical or heterarchical. As Dumont (in Barraud 2015, 228) said, "equality and hierarchy must combine in some manner in any social system." For example, religious organisations might have a clear hierarchy within the same society, while power

relations might be distributed heterarchically (Chapman 2003, 81). Heterarchy is thus not an evolutionary social stage or a type of society but instead represents a way of thinking about social organisation and ways in which different sectors of society might work together or influence one another. Thus, heterarchy can discuss anything from modern democracy (Crumley 1995, 3) to pre-colonial egalitarianism (Rogers 1995).

Although Maisels (2001, 152) does not use the term heterarchy when discussing the social organisation of late prehistoric Mesopotamia, his concept of societies based on "augmented and stratified household" is precisely that. Such households are family-based, and hierarchy is assumed within a household. According to him (Maisels 2001, 153), the village consisted of many mainly self-sufficient households that were not ranked but instead cooperated on topics relevant to all, while no centralised power or chief was present. Self-sufficiency means they were all involved in food production, and each possessed an additional craft, such as pottery, metallurgy, and textile production, that they would use in exchange. Thus, hierarchy existed within households within the same society, but did not define the broader social structure.

The villages of the Chalcolithic period in the Levant, with their uniform architecture consisting of households resembling one another, are a good fit for Maisel's model of villages consisting of equal societies, and similar interpretations are not new (Gilead 1988a, 1988b). However, additional insight is needed to interpret the various symbol-laden objects' roles in those societies. A concept of inalienable possessions, as developed by Weiner (Weiner 1992). Inalienable possessions are objects with value closely related to the identity of their owners, and transferring them does not relinquish ownership of the object. However, it can affect the identity of both the giver and the receiver. They are usually objects in which various factors, such as succession, relation to high social status or connection to divinity or ancestors, separate them from other objects and assign them value that surpasses their immediate practical and economic value. Instead, they attain a transcendent value deeply connected to their owner and actual or mythical origin, and myths, gods, and fictive or actual genealogies validate their presumed power. Once such objects are inevitably transferred, they retain the value and the identity that came with them, making them transcendent treasures that must be guarded carefully (Weiner 1992, 33-38).

The value of the concept of inalienable possession from archaeology lies in its focus on objects as they were used and valued in a society beyond the immediate practical use. It may well include objects that were signifiers of social ranking, and Weiner herself (1992, 37-38) lists various regalia as examples of inalienable possessions. However, it can also include heirloom objects, religious paraphernalia and other personal items. The important notion in Weiner's work

is the "keeping-while-giving" paradox (Weiner 1992, 6-8): the inalienable objects were supposedly meant not to be given away, yet often they were. The paradox arises because giving does not result in the owner losing the object but instead strengthens his position or maintains or expands his presence and significance. While the most obvious example would be the chief extending gifts to his subordinates, thus reinforcing his role as the ruler (Weiner 1992, 66), it is evident even in the way kinship is handled (Weiner 1992), the keeping-while-giving paradox is an intrinsic trait of inalienable possessions that enables them to keep their value even when handed over.

Similarly, as was the case with hierarchy, it is not a class of objects that has firmly defined traits but rather a concept in which to think about archaeological artefacts whose practical use remains elusive. Since the early 2000s, the concept of inalienable possessions has found use in archaeological interpretation as it draws focus to the social life of artefacts and their roles in maintaining and creating social identities, both of individuals and communities, as well as creating, maintaining and challenging power relations (Kovacevich and Callaghan 2013, 5). Inalienable possessions are not commodities; their value is not based on the economic value of the material they are made of. Instead, commodification of inalienable objects results from removing them from their primary social context and stripping them of their symbolic value (Weiner 1992, 103). There are certainly challenges to identifying such objects in the prehistoric context, as it lacks the narrative information anthropologist receive from their subjects. Building on Weiner (1992), Mills (2004, 240) lists the traits that can help identify inalienable possessions in archaeological records: those are objects that are not widely circulated and are not part of everyday exchange; they are invested in knowledge and need specialised knowledge to be produced; they are often unique and can be gendered (which implies they have a personality); and they are used in rituals and might be used to assert individual and communal identity. She (Mills 2004, 248) also shows that inalienable objects can be used to construct and overthrow hierarchies, referring to this as another paradox of inalienable possessions.

Another important point when identifying inalienable possessions is that they are not necessarily produced from rare materials (Kovacevich and Callaghan 2013, 6). This does not mean that the material from which the object is made is irrelevant, but that its relevance is socially constructed. Mills (2004, 140) emphasises that the mode of production and the producer's identity of an inalienable object invest it with its social meaning. It holds even if the inalienable possession is an item collected in nature and not visibly altered, as the knowledge of the person who finds it and singles it out counts.

Symbol-Laden Objects as Inalienable Possessions and the Late Chalcolithic Ritual Practices

The concept of inalienable possessions is appropriate for interpreting the meaning and use of Chalcolithic symbol-laden objects: they are scarce and found in contexts that include cemeteries, caches and a hoard from Nahal Mishmar. The notion of scarcity might apply to both the objects and the material, as is the case for metals, especially the complex ones produced from materials originating more than a thousand kilometres away, and ivory available locally in limited quantity, but was more likely obtained from the Nile delta. However, it also applies to the painted pebbles, even though the pebbles as a raw material were readily available in streambeds adjacent to settlements. They were used as tools in everyday activities, which is true even for the copper objects that are shaped like tools and weapons, and hence were not part of everyday economic exchange, as they were not widely circulated either. Their symbolism and high level of time and knowledge invested in producing some of them point to their use in rituals, especially metal and ivory artefacts, suggesting their ritual significance. The lack of distinct architectural features, i.e. temples, shrines, and sanctuaries, during the late phase of the Chalcolithic period leads to the conclusion that households were the place in which the ritual life of the community was happening.

In order to interpret what those rituals entailed, it is important to define what is meant by the terms ritual and magic and how we can identify them in an archaeological context. Ritual is best defined as "... the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers." (Rappaport 1999, 24). The appeal of this definition is that it can be applied to any cultural context as it does not attempt to define ritual based on its religious significance or how it relates to beliefs, but on the practice itself. The ritual practice consists of repeating more or less the same protocols that were inherited. Though they do vary to an extent and change over time and space (Rappaport 1999, 36-37), they tend to be largely conservative in a way that prohibits arbitrary changes, as accuracy is necessary for the ritual to be efficient (Rappaport 1999, 46-48).

The notion of ritual efficiency makes the concept of magic particularly appealing here: rituals have a purpose; they are not done for the sake of performance itself. In the early work of evolutionary and neoevolutionary anthropologists (Frazer 2009, 127-128; Malinowski 1948, 21; Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 137-138; Tylor 1913, 113), there were attempts to differentiate between religions and magic either by defining them as belonging to different evolutionary stages of humankind or as oriented one against the other. However, it has since been shown repeatedly (Douglas 1984, 59-60; Hamilton 2001, 27; Titiev 1960) that what we might refer to as magic or religion, and hence magical or religious

rituals, are either the same thing or different belief-based practices in the same belief system. Rappaport (1999, 368) considered magic to be behind the occult efficiency of words uttered in religious rituals and behind it in general, meaning that for him, magic was the power that drove the ritual. In this sense, the word magic is also used here as a force that drove the efficiency of the Chalcolithic rituals. It is also apparent that the distinction between religious and magic rituals is not defined in prehistoric research, and justifiably so, as it is bound to be futile (Gilead 2002). Even if a society is well documented, such division based on material remains seems both redundant and flawed. Instead, discussions of material remains of mortuary, domestic and public rituals and their role in religious practices are preferred. According to (Brück 1999, 325), the most important contribution of post-processual archaeology to the study of ritual is the emphasis on the symbolic aspect of human over the practical. While the processual archaeology focuses on functional benefits of ritual and practical, common-sense explanations of a particular practice, post-processual archaeology acknowledges that functionality or practicality are not the driving forces behind every human endeavour.

When discussing the ritual role of Chalcolithic symbol-laden objects, it is first important to emphasise that, as the objects were different, so were the practices they were part of. The production of metal artefacts requires the highest level of specialised knowledge, and they exhibit the most remarkable diversity of symbols. It has been argued elsewhere (Gošić and Gilead 2015) that their production process was a ritual in its own right, and the ritual potency, or magical power, that those objects possessed was created during their production. Hence, if we perceive the metal artefacts as inalienable possessions, it becomes clear that the metalworkers were their actual owners and that the magical power of the objects was derived from the power of the metalworkers.

It does not appear, however, that the control of metal production granted metalworkers a political or ruling power as well, as now a sign of accumulation or wealth was apparent in the households that practised metalworkers. It appears more likely that different households produced different inalienable possessions, thus contributing in various ways to the ritual life and needs of the community: through making ivory figurines, painted pebbles or ossuaries in which the deceased will be buried. While the painted pebbles were made from readily available raw material, the act of placing them in a particular spot and formation likely held significance. It was a product of specialised knowledge to produce a magical, possibly apotropaic, effect. It is important, however, to emphasise that little is known about the production of ossuaries. However, the symbols found on them, as well as their connection to the Chalcolithic settlements, are a clear indication that they were part of the same general system of belief. What remains unknown is if and how they can be understood as inalienable possessions and who their true owners were.

Conclusions

Different specialists made the Chalcolithic symbol-laden inalienable possessions in varying materials. The knowledge needed to produce them and invest them with magical power empowered their producers as magical practitioners. The workshops were located in households that were similar to one another, suggesting that neither of the families living in them, practising their craft, gained the power to rule others. As shown, the settlements likely functioned as heterarchies of equal households, possibly each having an internal hierarchy and a representative in a communal decision-making process. The shared symbols in symbol-laden objects illustrate a common belief system. While the lack of a temple or similar architectural features where inalienable objects would be kept and utilised suggests that the household was the primary place of their safekeeping and ritual use, it is plausible that they were also brought out in communal rituals that might have been performed in areas between the households. The discovery of inalienable possessions in locations outside of the locations where they were produced speaks of the interconnectedness of the communities. It can be understood as a result of the "keeping-while-giving" paradox. One particular context stands out: that of the Nahal Mishmar hoard, where a large number of metal artefacts and several sickle-shaped objects were found, as it is found away from the settlements and locations of production of either metal or ivory. While it remains elusive how, under which conditions, and at what time during the late Chalcolithic period, the hoard was deposited, it is possible that it reflects the attempt to remove these objects from their original cultural context, thus either stripping them of their magical properties or attempting to transfer them to another entity.

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Od predmeta neotuđivog vlasništva do magije: društvene prakse i raznolikost halkolitskih simboličkih predmeta

Kasni halkolit južnog Levanta (ca. 4500-3800 p.n.e.) karakterističan je po postojanju velikog broja predmeta dekorisanih raznovrsnim simbolima: antropomorfnim, zoomorfnim, floralnim, abstraktnim kao i motivima alatki i oružja poput dleta i sekire. Najveći broj izrađen je od bakra i bakarnih legura, ali zastupljeni su takođe i belokost, keramika i kamen. Najveći broj metalnih predmeta potiče iz ostave Nahal Mišmar u Judejskoj pustinji. Simbolički predmeti nađeni su i u naseljima, gde su pronalaženi u domaćinstvima ili u njihovoj neposrednoj blizini, i grobnicama sa sekundarnim sahranjivanjem. U naseljima su pronalaženi u asocijaciji sa ostacima proizvodnje ukoliko su prisutne na lokalitetu, ili u ostavama. U kontekstu halkolitske arheologije, ovi predmeti su najčešće interpretirani kao indikatori visokog statusa unutar društvene hijerarhije i pokazatelji društvene kompleksnosti. U ovom radu, halkolitski simbolički predmeti se razmatraju kroz koncept predmeta neotuđivog vlasništva koncipiranog od strane Anet Wajner. Predmeti neotuđivog vlasništva su oni predmeti čiji su nastanak i društveno značenje usko povezani sa njihovim vlasnicima, odnosno individuama ili entitetima koji su ih izradili i struktuirali njihovo značenje. U

slučaju halkolita, heterogenost ovakvih predmeta u pogledu njihove materijalnosti, proizvodnje i dizajna, kao i njihova asocijacija sa domaćinstvima, ukazuje na njihovu upotrebu u kućnim ritualnim praksama koje se najbolje opisuju kao magijske. Simbolika ovakvih predmeta i povezanost sa mestom proizvodnje u halkolitskom kontekstu čini ih istovremeno neotuđivim od njihovih stvarnih vlasnika i predmetom simboličke razmene koja za cilj ima povezivanje zajednice ravnopravnih domaćinstava. Dodatna opreznost je potrebna pri interpretaciji osuara za sekundarno sahranjivanje kao predmeta neotuđivog vlasništva zbog oskudnih podataka o njihovoj proizvodnji. Ipak, simboli koji se na osuarima nalaze svedoče o pripadnosti zajedničkom sistemu verovanja između njih i simboličkih predmeta pronađenih u naseljima.

Ključne reči: predmeti neotuđivog vlasništva, praistorija, magija, halkolit, južni Levant

Des objets de propriété inaliénable à la magie: pratiques sociales et diversité des objets symboliques chalcolithiques

Le chalcolithique tardif du Levant méridional (ca. 4500-3800 av.J.C.) se caractérise par l'existence d'un grand nombre d'objets décorés de symboles variés: anthropomorphes, zoomorphes, floraux, abstraits, ainsi que de motifs des outils et des armes comme le ciseau et la hache. Le plus grand nombre d'entre eux sont faits de cuivre et des alliages de cuivre, mais sont également présents l'ivoire, la céramique et la pierre. Le plus grand nombre d'objets métalliques provient du cellier de Nahal Mishmar dans le désert de Judée. Les objets symboliques ont également été trouvés dans des localités, des maisons ou leur proximité immédiate et dans des caveaux avec inhumation secondaire. Dans les localités ces objets ont été retrouvés en association avec des vestiges de la production s'il y en a sur le site, ou dans des celliers. Dans le contexte de l'archéologie chalcolithique, ces objets sont le plus souvent interprétés comme des indicateurs du haut statut à l'intérieur de la hiérarchie sociale et des marqueurs de la complexité sociale. Dans le present travail, les objets symboliques chalcolithiques sont étudiés à travers le concept de l'objet de propriété inaliénable conçu par Annette Weiner. Les objets de propriété inaliénable sont ceux dont la fabrication et la signification sociale sont étroitement liés avec leurs propriétaires, c'est-à-dire à des individus ou des entités qui les ont fabriqués et ont structuré leur signification. Dans le cas du chalcolithique, l'hétérogénéité matérielle de ces objets quant à leur matérialité, à leur production et à leur design, ainsi que leur association avec les ménages, témoignent de leur emploi dans les pratiques de maison rituelles qui peuvent le mieux être décrites comme magiques. La symbolique de tels objets et leur liaison avec le lieu de production dans le contexte chalcolithique les rend en même temps inaliénables de leurs propriétaires véritables et en font un

objet d'échange symbolique ayant pour l'objectif de créer des relations dans la communauté des ménages égaux entre eux. Une prudence supplémentaire est necessaire lors de l'interprétation des ossuaires pour l'inhumation secondaire comme un objet de propriété inaliénable en raison des données modestes sur leur production. Cependant, les symboles qui se trouvent dans les ossuaires témoignent de l'appartenance au système de croyance commun entre eux et les objets symboliques trouvés dans les localités.

Mots clés: objets de propriété inaliénable, préhistoire, magie, chalcolithique, Levant méridional

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