

## The Late Bronze Age Archeometallurgy of Copper in Mountainous Colchis (Lechkhumi), Georgia

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**Abstract :** Studies of ancient metallurgy are a subject of worldwide current interest. Georgia with its famous early metalworking traditions is one of the central parts of in the Caucasus region. The aim of the present study is to introduce the results of archaeometallurgical investigations being undertaken in the mountain region of Colchis, Lechkhumi (the Tsageri Municipality of western Georgia) and establish their place in the existing archaeological context. Lechkhumi (one of the historic provinces of Georgia known from Georgian, Greek, Byzantine and Armenian written sources as Lechkhumi/Skvimnia/Takveri) is the part of the Colchian mountain area. It is one of the important but little known centres of prehistoric metallurgy in the Caucasian region and of Colchian Bronze Age culture. Reconnaissance archaeological expeditions (2011-2015) revealed significant prehistoric metallurgical sites in Lechkhumi. Sites located in the vicinity of Dogurashi Village (Tsageri Municipality) have become the target area for archaeological excavations. During archaeological excavations conducted in 2016-2018 two archaeometallurgical sites - Dogurashi I and Dogurashi II were investigated. As a result of an interdisciplinary (archaeological, geological and geophysical) survey, it has been established that at both prehistoric Dogurashi mountain sites, it was copper that was being smelted and the ore sources are likely to be of local origin. Radiocarbon dating results confirm they were operating between about the 13th and 9th century BC. More recently another similar site has been identified in this area (Dogurashi III), and this is about to undergo detailed investigation. Other prehistoric metallurgical sites are being located and investigated in the Lechkhumi region as well as chance archaeological finds (often in hoards) - copper ingots, metallurgical production debris, slag, fragments of crucibles, tuyeres (air delivery pipes), furnace wall fragments and other related waste debris. Other chance finds being investigated are the many copper, bronze and (some) iron artefacts that have been found over many years. These include copper ingots, copper, bronze and iron artefacts such as tools, jewelry, and decorative items. These show the important but little known or understood the role of Lechkhumi in the late Bronze Age culture of Colchis. It would seem that mining and metallurgical manufacture form part of the local agricultural yearly lifecycle. Colchian ceramics have been found and also evidence for artefact production, small stone mould fragments and encrusted material from the casting of a fylfot (swastika) form of Colchian bronze buckle found in the vicinities of the early settlements of Tskheta and Dekhviri. Excavation and investigation of previously unknown archaeometallurgical sites in Lechkhumi will contribute significantly to the knowledge and understanding of prehistoric Colchian metallurgy in western Georgia (Adjara, Guria, Samegrelo, and Svaneti) and will reveal the importance of this region in the study of ancient metallurgy in Georgia and the Caucasus. Acknowledgment: This work has been supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (grant FR # 217128).

**Keywords :** archaeometallurgy, Colchis, copper, Lechkhumi

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