

# Copper supply networks in the Early Bronze Age of south-east Spain: new evidence from the Lower Segura Valley

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## Abstract

The range of copper sources and the nature of metal supply networks used by the El Argar culture of south-east Spain have been the subject of a long-running debate. On one side of this debate we have a model that envisages supply for much of the El Argar culture coming from a closely circumscribed region and controlled centrally by a political élite, while on the other side we have a model of a more decentralized supply network drawing on a wider, geographically more dispersed range of ore sources that is lacking the same level of political control. The available archaeometallurgical data are not entirely conclusive in this respect. While results from the existing, comparatively small body of lead-isotope analyses do seem to support the notion of a single main source region supplying most if not all of the El Argar culture area with copper, results from the much larger but not easily interpreted body of minor-element analyses would appear to lend support to the notion of a more decentralized supply. In this contribution we present new analytical data from the Lower Segura Valley, both from local El Argar artefacts and from local copper ores, which provide new insights relevant to this debate.

**Keywords:** Bronze Age, copper, supply networks, lead isotopes, minor elements