A NEW GOLD MYRTLE WREATH FROM CENTRAL MACEDONIA IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI

A GOLD myrtle wreath, the product of illicit excavations, was acquired by the John Paul Getty Museum in 1993, and returned to Greece in 2007. It is now housed in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (inv. no. MΘ 24000) (PLATE 4 a). Its technical features and methods of manufacture have already been discussed in previous publications (Maish 1995; Maish and Scott 2001). This article focuses on its provenance, dating, and comparanda. On the basis of a detailed structural analysis and parallels for the wreath, I suggest Central Macedonia as its provenance and a dating towards the end of the fourth century BC. This is the eighth myrtle wreath from this area, implying that this type was made in local workshops. The concluding section offers a brief account of the use of wreaths in the Hellenistic era.

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE GOLD MYRTLE WREATH, THESSALONIKI MUSEUM INV. NO. MΘ 24000

The wreath consists of two stems bent to form a circle (diam. 0.23 m and 0.27 m) and gold leaves and branches bearing leaves and flowers. The two stems, which had been damaged, were repaired in antiquity and again in modern times (Maish 1995, Maish and Scott 2001) before the artefact reached the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (PLATE 4 c–d).

The stems consist of two tapering gold tubes whose ends are joined together to form a rough circle. At the rear, the diameters of the tubes are 0.013 m and 0.021 m; their ends overlap and are bound together with two pieces of gold wire twined repeatedly around them. The tube-ends are furnished with obliquely cut end-plates decorated with relief concentric ovals, giving the impression of growing circles of real plants (PLATE 4 c). At the front, the tubes are thicker (0.033 m and 0.053 m); their ends are separate and are connected with two pieces of thick square-sectioned gold wire. Each piece is inserted into one tube end (0.025 m long) and is secured with gold nails visible at the front. Two loops of gold wire are attached to each piece of square wire forming a double Herculean knot. The ends of one loop are soldered,

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1 Acknowledgments: I should like to thank the director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Dr P. Veleni, for hospitality and encouragement, and the conservators Mrs A. Kapizioni and Mrs V. Michalopoulou. Dr Tsimbidou provided information on the wreath from Phoinikas. I should also like to thank referees for their helpful suggestions.

2 Metal wreaths with lanceolate leaves and flowers consisting of a calyx, 5–6 petals, and stamens are characterized as myrtle wreaths.

3 The goldsmith’s art flourished in Macedonia from the late 6th c. BC thanks to the abundance of gold sources in the area. For gold sources see Tzavellas 1989; Tsigarida and Ignatiadou 2000; Vavelidis 2007. For the development and significance of central Macedonian goldsmiths’ work from the Archaic to the Roman period, see Miller (+Collett) 1996, 1998; Tsigarida 1997, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Williams 2003; Despoine 1996.

4 All gold wreaths with branches bearing leaves and flowers or seed-pods consist of two stems bent to form a circle. These stems are made of gold tubes joined at the front and the rear of the wreath with a variety of joins: see Tsigarida 1988; 1993; 2006a; McIntyre 1998.
while those of the other form two spirals, one above and one below the knot at each side. A central branch sprouts from this point (PLATE 4 d-e).\(^5\)

The two stems bear larger and smaller holes for the attachment of the branches and the leaves respectively (PLATE 5 a).

The branches grow over square-sectioned spikes (0.02 m long), inserted into the larger holes on the stems and soldered for extra solidity (PLATE 5 b). Judging by the larger holes on the stems, the wreath was originally furnished with thirty-three branches. Only twenty-three survive (twelve on one side, ten on the other, and one in the centre). The branches are made of gold-sheet tubes (0.02 m diameter), face upward and to the front, and bear leaves and flowers that sprout from small holes.

The lanceolate leaves have integral stalks and were cut from a gold sheet with the help of a template. The stalks were first cut out as ribbon-shaped strips and then twisted into wires (PLATE 5 c). The leaves bear a relief central vein, which was made by engraving with a pointed tool. The leaves are of three different sizes (0.047 m, 0.037 m, and 0.027 m): the biggest grow from the stems, while the other two from the branches, and the smallest from the top.

There are two opposing leaves growing from the holes of the stems and the branches (PLATE 5 d). Quite often, the stalks twine around the stems or the branches and there are also free stalks twining around them, either in an effort to reinforce them or as the result of repair (PLATE 5 e).

The flowers of the wreath present a great variety. They grow out of the holes on the branches and have stalks of gold wire. The stalks grow from the same holes as the leaves and quite often they twine around the tube. All stalks form a loop under the flower to support it, and protrude from the flowers as a style. At the top of the flower they form a loop, like the stigma of the style (PLATE 5 f).

The flowers consist of various parts set one on top of the other and penetrated by the gold wire that constitutes the stalk and the style. The parts are the following:

\begin{enumerate}
    \item [(a)] Hemispherical calyx (cap) of gold sheet worked over a plaster-like core, found in all the flowers. In some cases the plaster-like core is preserved in the interior (PLATE 5 f).
    \item [(b)] Die-cut convex gold sheet with six semicircular petals. In some flowers, there are two sheets of petals, one on top of the other. There are two sizes: the larger, present in almost all the flowers, and the smaller, occasionally found on top of the larger (PLATE 5 f).
    \item [(c)] Die-cut thicker sheet of gold with lanceolate, pointed, or oblong petals outlined in beaded or simple wire and decorated on the inside with enamel.\(^6\) In most cases, each petal exhibits an oval motif in beaded wire formed by the filigree technique. These elaborate petals are found in a few flowers (PLATE 6 a).
    \item [(d)] A ring with radiating stamens of gold wire (filaments) with tiny spherical gold or glass tops (anthers). There are two sizes of stamens: larger with curved filament and smaller with straight filament (PLATE 6 a).
    \item [(e)] A gold disc with relief decoration imitating one or two rows of relief stamens (PLATE 6).
\end{enumerate}

\(^5\) This join was broken an repaired in modern times. As already mentioned above, extensive restoration took place in the laboratories of the John Paul Getty Museum (Maish 1995, Maish and Scott 2001).

\(^6\) The term ‘enamel’ is used for glass fused to metal.
A hemispherical cap, like the calyx, probably representing the ovary of the flower (PLATE 7 d).

The calyx, the die-cut sheet with six petals, and the cap are invariably found in the same place, while the other parts of the flowers do not follow any determinable order. Most of them were found detached and were reattached to the flower, sometimes arbitrarily, without taking always into account the few intact examples.

Based on the combination of their parts, the following types of flowers are found on the wreath:

Type A: flowers consisting of a calyx, a die-cut sheet with six semicircular petals, a disc with two relief rows of stamens, two rings with larger and smaller wire stamens with gold filaments and glass anthers and a gold style (PLATE 6 c). Some flowers are equipped with a disc with relief stamens and a ring with wire stamens (PLATE 6 d), or just wire stamens (PLATE 6 e).

Type B: flowers consisting of a calyx, two die-cut sheets with six semicircular petals, some larger, some smaller ones, and a disc with schematic stamens (PLATE 6 f). Other flowers of the same type have a ring of stamens with gold filaments and anthers instead of the schematic stamens (PLATE 6 g).

Type C: flowers with a calyx, a die-cut sheet with six semicircular petals, a disc with two rows of schematic stamens or a disc with relief schematic stamens, a ring with radiating gold wire stamens, and a style of gold wire (PLATE 7 a–b).

Type D: simpler flowers consisting of a calyx, a die-cut sheet with six semicircular petals and a style (PLATE 7 c), or else a calyx, six petals, wire stamens with gold anthers, and a style (PLATE 7 d–f); finally, there are a few calyces without other components of a flower (PLATE 7 g).

Type E: flower consisting of a calyx, a thick die-cut gold sheet with six semicircular petals, a thick sheet with eight lozenge-shaped petals with a beaded wire running around their outline and blue enamel in the interior, fourteen radiating stamens of gold filaments, green glass anthers, and a gold style (PLATE 8 a).

Type F: flowers like the previous, without radiating stamens (PLATE 8 b).

Type G: flower with a gold calyx, a die-cut gold sheet with twelve lanceolate petals outlined in beaded wire with blue enamel in the interior, a disc with sixteen radiating stamens with gold filaments and glass anthers and a gold style (PLATE 8 e).
Gold myrtle wreaths with branches, leaves, and flowers are primarily found in Central Macedonia. This region has yielded seven gold myrtle wreaths and MΘ 24000 is the eighth example. All these present specific characteristics in terms of structure, style and technique deriving from the same regional artistic tradition. The eight examples, listed below, are all in the Museum of Thessaloniki, except where stated otherwise:

1. Inv. no. MΘ 24000, presented here.
2. Inv. no. BM2633 (Tsigarida 1987), from the antechamber of Philip II's tomb at Vergina.7
3. Inv. no. MΔ 2112, from a cist-grave in Pieria (Tsigarida and Ignatiadou 2000, 62).
4. Inv. no. MΘ 7417, from Stavroupolis (Rhomio-poulou 1989).
5. A fragmentary gold wreath from a looted cist-grave at Phoinikas in Thessaloniki (Tsimbidou-Avloniti et al. 2005).
6. Inv. no. Δ1, from Derveni, tomb D (Themelis and Touratsoglou 1997, 89, pl. 20).
8. Wreath found at Agrosykia, near Veroia, with seed-pods instead of flowers (Chrysostomou et al. 2007, 295–6, pls. iv, 11. 1–2, 12. 1–2).

1. STRUCTURE

In structure, style and technique, wreath no. 1 resembles four of the seven examples, nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5, dating to the second half of the fourth century BC.

All the above wreaths, with the exception of no. 5 (of which only some flowers have survived), consist of two stems joined together and bent to form a circle to which leaves and branches with leaves and flowers are attached. The stems are made of tubes joined together at the front and back. At the back the join is invariably the same: the two ends overlap and are bound by two pieces of gold wire, which twine around them (wreath no. 2 is bound with a single piece of gold wire). The tube ends of wreath no. 1 at the back are equipped with obliquely-cut end-plates with relief decoration imitating a real plant (PLATE 4 c).

Wreaths nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 have similar joins at the front: the stems (tubes) taper to the front, where they stay separate and are connected with one or two pieces of gold wire. On wreath no. 2 a thick gold wire is inserted into the ends of the tubes and ties them together. After a distance the two wire ends pierce the tubes and twine around them. A central branch sprouts from the join. On wreaths nos. 3 and 4 two pieces of gold wire forming two interlocking loops (Herculean knot) are inserted into the ends of the tubes of the circumference. Furthermore, on wreath no. 4 two of the ends create spirals that decorate the Herculean knot. A central branch grows from this point.

The frontal join of wreath no. 1 is similar in appearance; however, its treatment differs due to a modern ‘repair’ executed before it entered the Getty Museum (Maish 1995): two pieces of thick, gold, square-sectioned wire were inserted into the ends of the tubes and tied together. Two interlocking loops, each consisting of double wire, were soldered to the square-
sectioned wires (Plate 8 f). It is highly probable that originally the wreath had a frontal join similar to that of example no. 4.

Wreaths nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 have a central branch growing from the frontal join and the same number of branches sprouting from the two sides of the wreath: eight branches, four on either side on wreath no. 2; twelve branches, six on either side on wreaths nos. 2 and 3; and originally thirty-two branches (ten are not preserved), sixteen on either side of wreath no. 1. The branches of all four wreaths grow over square-sectioned spikes for extra solidity (Plate 8 g).

The other myrtle wreaths from Macedonia, nos. 6–7, have a different structure (no. 5 being too fragmentary to provide sufficient information). They also consist of two stems joined together to form a circumference; the rear join is the same, and the tube ends of wreath no. 6 have the same treatment as that of wreath no. 1. The frontal joins differ: on wreath no. 7 the two tubes of the circular stem taper to the front, where they become solid, cross, and entwine. The wreath is equipped with seven branches, no central one. On wreath no. 6 one end is socketed into the other and both are bound with a piece of gold wire. A thick wire stalk (0.04 m long) with an elaborate enamel-decorated rosette grows at this point. The wreath bears ten branches, five on either side. The frontal join of the wreath from Agrosyka is not known: its excavator mentions that the two tubes are connected with a gold wire. A thick wire stalk with a triple rosette decorated with enamel grows at this point. The number of branches is unknown.

2. STYLISTIC AND TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The myrtle wreaths from Central Macedonia have similar stylistic characteristics: lanceolate leaves with integral stalks growing from holes in the two stems of the circumference, and the branches and complex flowers (except for the wreath from Agrosyka, no. 8), consisting of different elements set one upon the other and penetrated by gold wire stalks attached to the same holes.

The lanceolate leaves bear a relief central vein with the repoussé technique and vary in size: the largest leaves grow from the stems of the circumference, while the leaves growing from the lower part of the branches are larger than those of the upper part. The leaves grow in pairs from the same hole in the branches and quite often the flowers grow from the same holes too.

The flowers also present similarities. Those of wreaths nos. 2 and 3 are of plain gold, while one flower of wreath no. 4 and a few of no. 1 are decorated with enamel. The central flower of wreaths nos. 6 and 8 are also decorated with enamel.

The gold flowers of the wreaths consist of the following parts:

1. Gold semi-spherical calyx (all wreaths).
2. A die-cut, concave, gold sheet bearing flowers with five semicircular petals (six in the case of wreaths nos. 1 and 7).
3. A disc with relief decoration imitating schematic stamens (wreaths 1, 2, 3, and 5).
4. A disc with relief decoration imitating two rows of schematic stamens (wreaths nos. 1 and 5).

* The flowers of the wreath no. 2 are plain gold. However, the colour of the gold of various parts of the flower differs deliberately, achieving the impression of polychromy.
5. A ring with radiating gold stamens of gold filament and gold anthers (wreaths nos. 1, 2, and 4), or gold filament and glass anthers (wreath no. 1).

6. A die-cut disc with five oblong petals (wreaths nos. 2 and 4).

7. A die-cut disc with six or eight lozenge-shaped petals (wreath no. 1).

The combination of the above elements in many cases is the result of modern repairs, since most of them were found detached and were reattached by the conservators, quite often arbitrarily.

Wreath no. 2 presents two types of gold flowers: one with a calyx, a die-cut sheet with five semicircular petals, a die-cut sheet with five oblong petals, a disc with relief stamens, and gold wire stamens and another with a calyx, a die-cut sheet with five semicircular petals and a disc with relief stamens.

Wreath no. 3 is decorated with only one type of flower consisting of a gold calyx, a die-cut sheet with five semicircular petals and a disc with relief stamens.

Wreath no. 4 bears only one type of flower consisting of a calyx, a die-cut sheet with five semicircular petals, a die-cut sheet with five oblong petals and gold wire stamens. Other types, consisting of a calyx, a die-cut sheet with five semicircular petals and stamens, or even a calyx and five petals, appear on the wreath, probably results of the arbitrary reattachment of the various parts by the conservators.

The flowers of wreath no. 1 present a variety of types, already described above.

The gold flowers of the two wreaths from Derveni are different and simpler than the above. The very few flowers of wreath no. 7 consist of a calyx and a die-cut sheet with six semicircular petals, resembling buds. There are also seed-pods on the wreath. Wreath no. 6 bears a great number of flowers, which are very simple, consisting of five petals, wrinkled and badly damaged.

Enamel is present in the flowers of wreaths nos. 1, 4, 6, and 8. One flower in no. 4 and seventeen in no. 1 were originally decorated with enamel. The flower of the former consists of a gold calyx and six lanceolate petals outlined with beaded wire and is similar to those with six petals of wreath no. 1 without the stamens. The flowers with eight lanceolate petals of wreath no. 1 recall the small ones decorating the elaborate frontal device of no. 6, again without stamens. The shape of the eight lozenge-shaped petals with enamel is also found in the tiny decorative flowers of the latter device; however, in this case, the number of the petals is only four.

Enamel was used in jewellery of the second half of the fourth century BC all over the Greek world. In Central Macedonia the use of blue enamel started in the third quarter and became widespread in the last quarter of the fourth century onwards. The use of enamel on the surface of a device was achieved by creating a sheath of beaded or, more rarely, plain wire

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10 It is similar to the equivalent of wreath no. 3 and differs from the equivalent of the other wreaths, suggesting the same workshop.

11 Remains of glass are still visible today on the surface of the petals.

12 The gold myrtle spray said to come from ‘Aspasia’s tomb’ at Piraeus (Williams and Ogden 1994, pl. 58) bears a disc with two relief rings which were probably originally filled with enamel. The spray dates to the first half of the 4th c. BC, suggesting that enamel was probably also used in jewellery from that period. See also Maish and Scott 2001.

13 The gold diadem and the rosette of the gold chest from Philip’s II tomb were decorated with blue enamel: Andronikos 1984, pls. 135 and 158-9.
to enclose the enamel. Enamel decoration is rare on wreaths: it appears in the first half, or more likely the last quarter, of the fourth century (wreaths nos. 1, 4, and 6) and continues in the beginning of the third (see wreath from Armento below).

3. MYRTLE WREATHS IN THE GREEK WORLD

Gold wreaths are found all over the Greek world, in south Italy, north Africa, Macedonia, Greece, Thrace, the North Pontic area, and Asia Minor. However, myrtle wreaths with lanceolate leaves and flowers, or more rarely seed-pods, come mainly from Macedonia, and only a few scattered examples are found in other areas, such as the myrtle spray in the British Museum that is said to come from Peiraeus, excavated in 1804 for Lord Elgin (Williams and Ogden 1994, 58, no. 10). The branch consists of a gold sheet over a bronze core. There are three pairs of lanceolate leaves whose size increases from top to bottom. The larger ones are inserted into the holes of the branch, while the smallest pair at the top is inserted into the end of the tube. Two myrtle flowers on long wire stalks grow beside the middle-sized leaves. These consist of a cap with a serrated top, six petals, and a central rod holding a ring with twenty-four blob-ended stamens capped with a disc. The discs have an inner and outer ring of fine spiral-beaded wire, both of which were probably once filled with enamel. This type of flower presents similarities to those in the wreaths from Macedonia, and it was more likely made there. Another wreath was discovered in Caria, in Asia Minor, and dates from the second half of the fourth century BC (Aykut Özeti 1994, 88–96). This example is equipped with branches, lanceolate leaves, and very simple flowers. Its appearance, stylistic characteristics, and technical details differ from those of the Macedonian examples.

Another very elaborate wreath with flowers was found at Armento in Italy and is now housed in the Munich Antikensammlungen (Lullies 1982; Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 196 fig. 145 with previous bibliography). It is not a myrtle wreath, since some of its leaves are lanceolate and some have a coarsely serrated leaf margin. The wreath bears a great number of flowers, many of which are decorated with enamel, palmettes, and figurines. It is a votive wreath unique in the ancient Greek world and very different from the Macedonian examples.

Furthermore, a few myrtle wreaths of unknown provenance, as listed below, are housed in public or private collections. Only one of them, (d), presents stylistic characteristics similar to the examples from Central Macedonia, suggesting this area as its provenance.

(a) A myrtle wreath in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Zahn 1929, 49, no. 104, pl. 41). It bears flowers consisting of a calyx, a die-cut sheet with five semicircular petals, and a disc with two rings of relief stamens, similar to those found on nos. 1 and 5. The wreath has no branch and is different in structure from the examples of Central Macedonia.

(b) A myrtle wreath in the Brooklyn Museum (Davidson and Oliver 1984, 5, no. 33). This is also decorated with flowers consisting of a die-cut sheet with six semicircular concave petals cut from one sheet of gold and on top a disc with relief decoration imitating schematic

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14 Beaded wire was also used to outline the petals of flowers of the boat-shaped earrings and the strap necklaces from Macedonia, south Italy, Asia Minor, and the North Pontic area. It may have been designed to enclose enamel that no longer survives, or, more probable, was applied for purely decorative reasons: Themelis and Touratsoglou 1997, pls. 24–6; Williams and Ogden 1994, nos. 63–4, 70, 89, 94, 106, 122–3; Despoine 1996, nos. 82–6, 147–54; De Juliis 1984, no. 68; Treasures 1979, nos. 79, 421.

15 If the spray from Peiraeus belongs to a wreath and dates to the first half of the century: see Williams and Ogden 1994, 58, no. 10.
stamens. This example is not equipped with branches and although its flowers are similar to some of wreath no. 1, it is very different from the myrtle wreaths of Central Macedonia.

(c) A wreath with flowers in the Benaki Museum, described as a myrtle wreath (inv. no. 2055; Tsigarida 1988, no. U222, pl. 78). This wreath bears leaves with doubly serrated margin and flowers consisting of five semicircular petals and a disc with relief decoration of stamens. The flowers grow from the circular stem, which is made of one tube bent to form a circumference. This example thus differs in structure and style from the Macedonian gold myrtle wreaths of the second half of the fourth century BC.

(d) A wreath with flowers in the Houston Museum of Fine Arts (Annette Finnigan Collection: Hoffmann 1970, 460–1, no. 212). The wreath consists of two tubes bent and joined together to form a circumference. They are joined at the rear and taper towards the front, where, however, they become solid and stay apart. Leaves and branches with leaves and flowers grow from the circular stem. The flowers consist of a calyx, a die-cut sheet with six semicircular petals, and a disc with relief decoration imitating gold stamens. The flowers recall some simple types of specimen no. 1. The wreath probably comes from Macedonia, where similar examples have been found.

III. DATING AND WORKSHOPS

All gold myrtle wreaths from Central Macedonia date to the second half of the fourth or the beginning of the third century BC.

As discussed above, wreaths nos. 2 and 3 are similar in appearance, structure, and other stylistic and technical characteristics. Furthermore, they both bear flowers with discs with relief stamens, which differ in style from those of other examples (no. 2 is equipped with another type of flower too). Both were found in burials dating to the third quarter of the fourth century. The wreath from Vergina (no. 2) was found in the female burial in the antechamber of Philip’s II tomb and dates to 350–336 BC. The wreath from Pydna accompanied a male burial in a cist-grave. The burial comprised a chest made of perishable materials with gilt silver decoration that survived (Tsigarida and Ignatiadou 2000, figs. 6 and 45), and a pectoral with gold decoration, and dates to about 330 BC. Wreaths nos. 2 and 3 were definitely made in the same workshop, and probably by the same goldsmith, active in the period 350–330 BC.

Wreath no. 4 presents structure and stylistic characteristics similar to the above examples. The frontal join, however, is more elaborate, showing a Herculean knot decorated with spirals (wreath no. 3 is also decorated with a Herculean knot, but without spirals), and presents slight differences in the flowers: disc with relief gold stamens, which also appear on nos. 1 and 2, a disc with relief decoration of radiating stamens and a flower with enamel, also present on no. 1. The wreath accompanied a male burial in a cist-grave at Stavroupolis in Thessaloniki dating to the last quarter of the fourth century. The structure of fragmentary wreath no. 5 cannot be determined. However, the preserved flowers are equipped with a die-cut disc with six petals and a disc with two rows of relief stamens, also present on no. 1.

Wreath no. 1 must have been made in the same workshop as the example from Stavroupolis (no. 4), which dates to the second quarter of the fourth century BC. Its tendency to luxury and polychromy, characteristics of jewellery made towards the end of the century, suggests this
period. The fragmentary example no. 5 also dates to this period, on the basis of the similarities of its flowers to those of wreath no. 1.

Wreaths nos. 6 and 7 from Derveni accompanied two burials, a female and a male respectively, discovered in two cist-graves dating to the end of the fourth century BC. These two wreaths are different from the previous and were probably made in another workshop active in Central Macedonia towards the end of the fourth or the beginning of the third century BC. Wreath no. 8 from Agroiska (with similar structure and characteristics) was also probably made in this workshop.

To sum up, considerations of technique, structure and style suggest that wreaths nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 and the fragmentary no. 5 were all made in one workshop, active in Central Macedonia from the third quarter to the end of the last quarter of the fourth century (c.350–300 BC). The wreaths of this workshop have a clear structure with an effort to balance the two sides of the wreath (a Classical characteristic), a naturalistic appearance of flowers and leaves, and a variety of flowers imitating real plants. Restricted polychromy achieved by the use of enamel appears on the wreaths from to the last quarter of the century (nos. 1 and 4). However, even in the earlier examples there is a tendency to apply differentiation of colour, achieved by the use of different hues of gold (no. 2).

Wreaths nos. 6, 7, and 8 were made in a second workshop that appeared later than the last, probably at the beginning of the last quarter of the fourth century and was active until the beginning of the third century BC. Its wreaths were different: the clear structure and balance typical of the earlier workshop have disappeared; the wreaths are now elaborate, using polychromy and an abundance of decorative parts, but lack the balance and naturalistic beauty visible on the earlier products.

IV. USE OF METAL WREATHS IN ANCIENT GREECE

The use and significance of plant wreaths in ancient Greece is well known. The association of wreaths with religion and cults results from the significance and powers attributed to the plants they represent. Myrtle was very popular in Greece and Italy, and was sacred to Aphrodite (Plin. *NH* xvi. 121; Plu. *Marcellus* 22; Blach 1982, 250–2; Blaumann 1982, 51). Its chthonic associations are especially evident in its connection to Aphrodite Epitymbia, and also in its use in the Eleusinian Mysteries (Boetticher 1836; Metzger 1965, 28; Seyrig 1950). Myrtle wreaths were worn at weddings, at symposia (the ‘Naucratite’ wreath), and were also worn by the Persians at all kinds of celebrations (Ath. 676 A–C; Hdt. vii. 54. 1).

The imitations of plant wreaths in metal and other materials were found in burials and are called funerary. However, the wreaths with circular stem consisting of two tubes joined together at least were strong enough to be worn in life, and to accompany their male and female owners to their tombs. Concerning their role in the burial customs, is not clear whether they had just an apotropaic function, whether they were symbols of social or religious rank (e.g. marking the owner as a member of aristocracy, or priest or priestess), or whether they were attributes of initiates of some rites such as the Eleusinian Mysteries.

In life, the metal wreaths are likely to have been used mainly in religious ceremonies and

16 This is probably due to the paradoxical association with both Eros and Thanatos lying in the sacred wedding of the dead with Pluto or Persephone: see Chirassi 1968.
social occasions, and were worn by members of wealthy families or aristocracy: they were wedding presents (Eur. Medea 984; Xen. Cyrop. viii. 5. 18–19), they were worn by kings at dinners (Plb. xv. 31. 8), they were used in the cult of the Hellenistic kings (Robert 1949, 5–29), and finally, they were used to reward benefactors, to adorn statues and sanctuaries, in certain religious dedications, and as prizes for victors in musical contests (Thuc. iv. 121. 1; Dem. Peri toû stefánou; Ath. vi. 234 f; Plat. Ion. 530 d; Paus. v. 11, Diog. Laert. vii. 11).

Wreath no. 1 (Thessaloniki inv. no. MΘ 24000) is one of the most elaborate wreaths to have survived from antiquity. It must have belonged to a significant member of the aristocracy by whom it was worn in life and whom it accompanied in death. The choice of a myrtle wreath might imply that the owner had been initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, widespread in Macedonia in the second half of the fourth century BC, given the association of this plant with this mystic cult.

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(a) Gold myrtle wreath, inv. no. MΘ 24000 (037838). Photo Orestis Kourakis, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

(b) Damaged stem.

(c) Broken stem (000564). Photo Orestis Kourakis, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

(d) Front join (front).

(e) Front join (rear).

BETTINA TSIGARIDA
A NEW GOLD MYRTLE WREATH FROM CENTRAL MACEDONIA IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI
(a) Holes in the stem.

(b) Branches over square-sectioned spikes.

(c) Leaves and stalks.

(d) Opposing leaves.

(e) Stalks twining around the stem.

(f) Flowers. Photo Orestis Kourakis, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

BETTINA TSIGARIDA
A NEW GOLD MYRTLE WREATH FROM CENTRAL MACEDONIA IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI
(a) Flowers with enamel decoration (000540). Photo Orestis Kourakis, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

(b) Flowers with disc with one or two rows of relief stamens (000554). Photo Orestis Kourakis, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

(c)–(e). Type A flowers.

(f)–(g). Type B flowers.

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A NEW GOLD MYRTLE WREATH FROM CENTRAL MACEDONIA IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI
(a)–(b). Type C flowers.

(c)–(e). Type D flowers.

(f)–(g). Type D flowers.

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A NEW GOLD MYRTLE WREATH FROM CENTRAL MACEDONIA IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI
(a) Type E flower.  
(b) Type F flower.  
(c) Type G flower.  
(d) Type H flower.  
(e) Type I flower.  
(f) Front join. Photo Orestis Kourakis, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.  
(g) Branches growing on spikes.

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