

THE GREEKS

AGAMEMNON TO ALEXANDER THE GREAT

EDITED BY
MARIA ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI
ANASTASIA BALASKA

POINT-À-CALLIÈRE, MONTRÉAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY COMPLEX
December 12, 2014 – April 26, 2015

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY, GATINEAU
June 5, 2015 – October 12, 2015

THE FIELD MUSEUM, CHICAGO
November 24, 2015 – April 10, 2016

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, DC
May 26, 2015 – October 9, 2016



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS

The Necropolis of Aigai

At the southern edge of the Macedonian basin, in the heart of what Herodotus considered the cradle of Macedon (*Histories* VII, 131), Aigai, the royal capital, emerges from the mist of prehistory as an “open” urban module consisting of small and larger settlements. Following an ancient model of spatial organization, it expressed a society based on the aristocratic structure of the clans, with the royal presence and power as the central point of reference and cohesive axis.

The capital of one of the most powerful Macedonian states since the beginning of the 1st millennium BC, Aigai became from the 7th century BC the seat of the Temenid Dynasty, which gave world history the likes of Philip II and Alexander the Great. Aigai's great prosperity and wealth is primarily detected through the impressive finds from its cemetery, the core of which consists of some 540 recognizable tumuli. The cemetery's almost unrestricted expansion—its surface area exceeds 200 hectares—even to the detriment of agricultural land indicates unbroken links between the living and the deceased, so attesting to population continuity.

According to ancient practice, which at Aigai survived down until the Roman period, earth tumuli with circular, dry-stone enclosure walls, the size of which varied according to the deceased's importance, marked the graves' location. In the 5th century BC, the use of stone funerary monuments became common practice, while exceptionally, as in the case of the funerary cluster connected with Philip II, impressive monuments with sculptures and reliefs similar to those from Attica were erected next to the tumulus.

Inhumation was the most common burial practice throughout the cemetery's history. The burial custom of cremation was introduced with great opulence at Aigai in the Archaic period, possibly by the Temenids. Like the Homeric heroes, the Macedonian kings were cremated accompanied by impressive offerings. Unclean and sacred at the same time, the remains of the funerary pyre were scattered over the grave. The grave and the pyre were subsequently covered by a tumulus, as in the *Iliad* (XXIII, 255–257). Originally a privilege reserved for the king and his male relatives, cremation was used by the queens in the 5th century BC and gradually for the *hetairoi* and it became increasingly popular among the lower classes from the reign of King Philip II (359–336 BC).

More than 3,000 graves (pit graves or, more rarely, cist graves) have been excavated so far. Oriented on the tumulus' centre in the Early Iron Age and with respect to the horizon's axes in later periods, the tombs were arranged in rows or clusters and formed groups, which probably corresponded to families or clans.

The deceased took with them what they wore and what identified them, such as clothes, jewellery, and weapons; vases necessary for the funerary ritual, such as perfume bottles and exaleiptra; even jugs and cups, often supplemented with other symposium vessels, to help quench their eternal thirst in Hades' realm. They are also often accompanied by objects associated with religious beliefs and social symbolism, such as priestly objects, figurines, chariot models, and so on.

A main characteristic of the Aigai cemetery, which distinguishes it from the cemeteries of democratic cities, is the great variation in the size and opulence of the burial structures and grave gifts, which obviously reflect the existing social differences. However, even the jewellery, weapons, and metal vases—all luxury objects and, consequently, status symbols—are characterized throughout the ages by a morphological austerity and simplicity, which distinguish them from equivalent assemblages found beyond the limits of the Macedonian kingdom.



THE LADY OF AIGAI

Approximately 15 m across and 1 m high, Tumulus AZ, one of the cemetery's northernmost, yielded thirteen burials, of which two probably belonged to men, three to little girls, and four to women (the sex of the tombs' remaining occupants could not be determined). Tomb AZVII, the richest of the group and one of the wealthiest of the whole Early Iron Age cemetery, belonged to a woman.

The burial was on virgin soil, suggesting that Tomb AZVII, a simple rectangular pit, 2 m long and 1 m wide, oriented east-west, was one of the tumulus' first. The deceased lay with her head pointing east, towards the centre of the tumulus, her left arm folded over her chest, her right arm extended towards her pelvis. Next to her feet was a large handmade ceramic kantharos, the traditional "Macedonian" drinking cup. Another cup, an imported wheel-made ceramic skyphos decorated with concentric circles, the period's characteristic motif, and a handmade jug of the Cutaway Spout type, a shape particularly popular in Macedonia for many centuries, were probably originally placed on the tomb's wooden lid. When the lid disintegrated the two objects fell onto the deceased's body, the cup on her waist and the jug on her chest. In doing so, the jug probably dislodged the skull so that the head ornaments were found upside down over her chest.

Literally covered with precious jewellery, the deceased was undoubtedly a wealthy lady. A fine bow fibula and three tiny double-spiral fibulae (cat. no. 157) found near her skull indicate the presence of her elaborate headdress. Attached to the headdress by means of two large bronze knobs were a set of bronze tubular coil ornaments with four strands (cat. no. 149), which would have framed the face with their warm, golden glow, like locks of blond hair. A third tubular coil with five strands (cat. no. 149), a rare and utterly unique luxury, was attached onto the back of the headdress together with a small plaque of iron, then a precious metal.

Given that gold jewellery was extremely rare at that period, the two gold multispiral hair coils (cat. no. 148) that held her hair at shoulder height and the two smaller but much thicker double versions of the coil (cat. no. 154) indicate the lady's extraordinary wealth and social prominence. These coils formed a necklace together with the two bronze double-spiral ornaments (cat. no. 155), the ring-shaped pendant (cat. no. 152), and the glass "eye" bead (cat. no. 153). A second necklace of 36 sardonyx beads (cat. no. 151) and a simple torc made of twisted bronze wire (cat. no. 150) adorned her neckline. She also wore heavy multi-spiralled bracelets (cat. no. 160) on her wrists and seven simple rings with double-spiral ornaments on her fingers (cat. no. 159).

Two huge double-spiral fibulae (cat. no. 156) held at her shoulders her heavy woollen peplos with its row of tiny bronze "buttons" sewn along the overfold vertical edge. "Well-belted" like the Homeric women, this lady, who lived approximately one century before the epic poet, wore an impressive, possibly leather, belt with three large *omphaloi* at the centre (cat. no. 158) and consecutive rows of bronze buttons along its entire length. Two more *omphaloi*, one made of iron with a bronze button and one bronze, smaller than the previous ones, could belong to a second belt that had been placed to the deceased's left.

The tomb's abundant finds provide a particularly full picture of the Macedonian aristocratic female dress of the early 1st-millennium BC. Usually made of bronze, a copper alloy with a warm yellowish color resembling gold, the jewellery was fairly rich and heavy with characteristic geometric shapes. Similar to—albeit a lot more simple and austere—con-

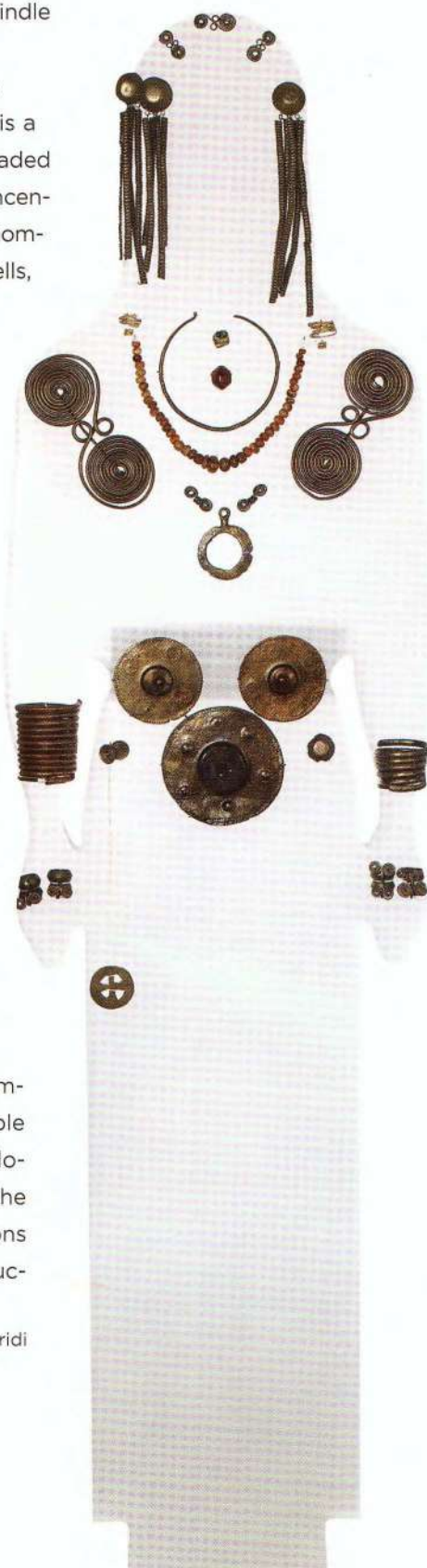
temporary jewellery from the Balkans and the Italian peninsula, they find parallels in Epiros, the Peloponnese, and Doric Crete. The ceramic vessels illustrate both the local workshops' dominant trends (handmade vases) and exchanges with other Greek Protogeometric centres (Protogeometric wheel-made vases).

Two grave gifts are particularly telling of the lady's activities. One is a stone spindle whorl (cat. no. 162) caught up in the left arm's bracelet: this shows that the lady of Aigai, like the ladies on the Prinias funerary stelai, descended into Hades holding her spindle, an object characteristic of a woman's household activities. The other is a tiny bronze wheel with four spokes in the shape of a cross (cat. no. 161). When threaded onto a length of string, which was itself attached to the two bronze buttons with concentric circles found nearby, the whole could be twirled around. This object recalls the "rhombos", an ancient children's toy, or the *iygx*, a magical device necessary for love spells, usually held by Eros in 4th-century BC vase painting. According to Pindar (*Pythian* 4. 213–219), Aphrodite gave Jason a four-spoked *iygx* to help him "charm" Medea into helping him in his plans. A distant precursor of the Classical *iygx*, the wheel from Tomb AZVII, is not the only one found at Aigai. At least four more come from wealthy women's burials. Generally considered "heliacal symbols", these wheels are most probably *iygges*, or "magical devices"; they indicate their owners' specific function within Early Iron Age Macedonian society.

The triple double axes that occur in exceptionally wealthy women's tombs, next to the deceased's right or left shoulder, also suggest a ritual function. Placed on the top of wooden shafts or sceptres, these symbolic rather than functional axes are a direct reference to sacrificial ritual and recall almost forgotten archetypes of the Aegean world. They come combined with diadems bearing heliacal symbols and all sorts of pendants and amulets—condensed phonemes of a lost symbolic language—four-spoked *iygx* wheels and tiny bronze vessels containers between cooking pots and amulets that may well have held plant extracts and medicines. All such grave goods found only in women's tombs, never in men's suggest that until the 7th century BC the ladies and queens of Aigai enjoyed, more than the men, the great privilege and serious duty of communicating with the supernatural for the good of their people—a tradition continued by the Temenid priestess queens, and passed down to Olympias, and the goddess-queens of the Hellenistic world.

Following the general trends of a period characterized by a preference for simple, geometric motifs, the Early Iron Age artifacts from the Aigai cemetery resemble closely those excavated in the cemeteries of Olympus, Pieria, and northern Makedonis, which Hesiod and Herodotus identified as the Macedonians' birthplace. At the same time, understandably, they differ considerably from the finds from the regions north and east of the Loudias and Axios rivers. The same applies to the funerary structures and customs in general.

Angeliki Kottaridi



148. HAIR COILS

9th century BC

Gold

D. 0.027 and 0.022 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4879, BM 4880

Good state of preservation.

Two open hair coils. Made of fine doubled and twisted gold wire that ends in rings. The smaller coil (BM 4879) consists of two pieces of wire knotted together.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 111, no. 278 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi



BM 4880



BM 4879

149. TUBULAR COIL ORNAMENTS

9th century BC

Bronze

BM 4141. L. max. 0.172

BM 4145. L. max. 0.191

BM 4143. L. max. 0.188

D. of knob 0.038 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4145 with knob BM 4144, BM 4143 with knob BM 4142, BM 4141 with knob BM 4140

Good state of preservation.

BM 4140–4141 and BM 4142–4143. Four bronze tubes and a squat conical bronze knob. The tubes, which consist of a triangular-sectioned sheet twisted to form a spiral, were probably threaded with string or twine (possibly of wool) and hung from the suspension ring on the knob's reverse. BM 4144–4145. Five bronze tubes and a bronze knob, similar to the previous.

BM 4140



BM 4141

BM 4144



BM 4145

BM 4142

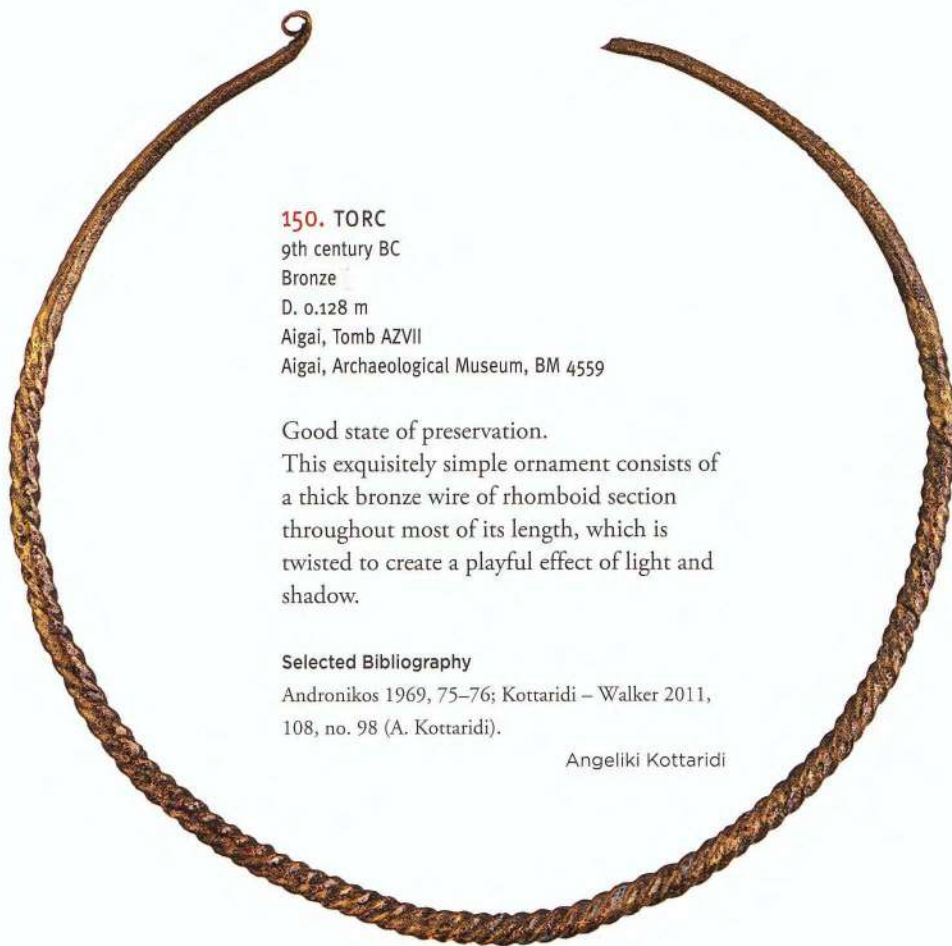


BM 4143

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76.

Angeliki Kottaridi

**150. TORC**

9th century BC

Bronze

D. 0.128 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4559

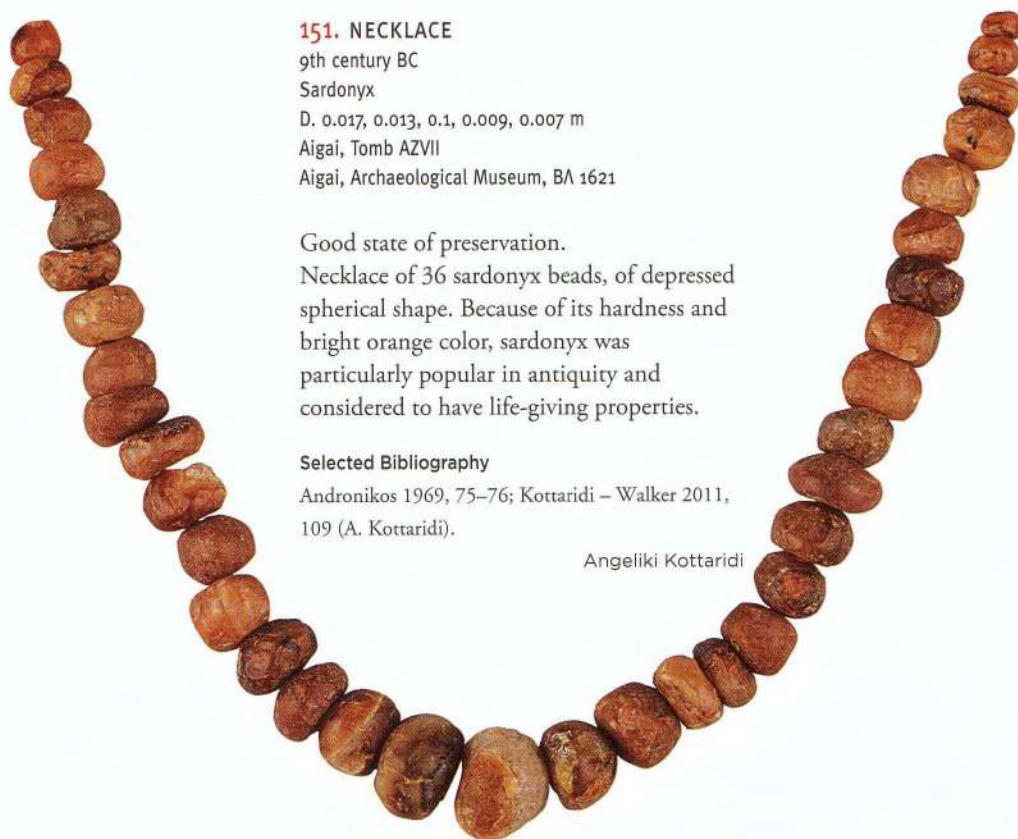
Good state of preservation.

This exquisitely simple ornament consists of a thick bronze wire of rhomboid section throughout most of its length, which is twisted to create a playful effect of light and shadow.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 108, no. 98 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi

**151. NECKLACE**

9th century BC

Sardonyx

D. 0.017, 0.013, 0.1, 0.009, 0.007 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BA 1621

Good state of preservation.

Necklace of 36 sardonyx beads, of depressed spherical shape. Because of its hardness and bright orange color, sardonyx was particularly popular in antiquity and considered to have life-giving properties.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 109 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi

152. RING-SHAPED PENDANT

9th century BC
Bronze
D. 0.059 m
Aigai, Tomb AZVII
Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4863

Fairly good state of preservation.
Flat ring-shaped object with protruding tab with tiny suspension hole. The object's position in the tomb suggests that it was used as a pendant. However, several similar objects were found hanging from belts in Early Iron Age burials at Agriosykia in Pella.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76.

Angeliki Kottaridi



154. ORNAMENTAL COILS

9th century BC
Gold
D. 0.008 m
Aigai, Tomb AZVII
Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4902, BM 4903

Good state of preservation.
Two tiny coils made of thick gold wire. Because of their small size they were probably not used for securing locks of hair, but as necklace beads, like the double-spiral ornaments cat. no. 155.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76.

Angeliki Kottaridi

153. BEAD

9th century BC
Glass paste
D. 0.016 m
Aigai, Tomb AZVII
Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BO 1693

Chipped.
Eyed bead. Probably imported from the East, glass beads resembling eyes were probably invested with apotropaic properties against the evil eye and used alone as pendants or grouped to form a necklace.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76.

Angeliki Kottaridi



155. ORNAMENTS

9th century BC
Bronze
L. 0.034 m (BM 4253), 0.037 m (BM 4256)
Aigai, Tomb AZVII
Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4253, BM 4256

Good state of preservation.
Two bronze double-spiral ornaments. The wire that forms the spirals is hammered out flat at the centre of the object to form a narrow coil through which a string could be threaded. This and the ornaments' position on the deceased's body suggest that they were probably part of a necklace.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76.

Angeliki Kottaridi



156. DOUBLE-SPIRAL FIBULAE

9th century BC

Bronze

L. 0.171 and 0.182 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 2430, BM 2421

Good state of preservation.

Large double-spiral fibulae with tight-packed spirals, to hold a heavy woollen peplos. The end spirals give the impression of concentric circles, a most characteristic Proto-geometric ornamental motif. The heavy double-spiral portion, the pin, and the clasp are made of a single piece of thick circular-sectioned bronze wire. Between the two spirals the wire is twisted to form a small perpendicular figure-of-eight, which adds elegance and rigidity to the object.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 106 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi

157. DOUBLE-SPIRAL FIBULAE

9th century BC

Bronze

L. 0.042 and 0.035 m, d. 0.015 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4255, BM 4252, BM 5039

Good state of preservation.

Three small double-spiral fibulae, similar to the two previous examples, but without pins. They were found near the deceased's head and thus probably adorned some kind of headdress rather than a garment.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 106 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi



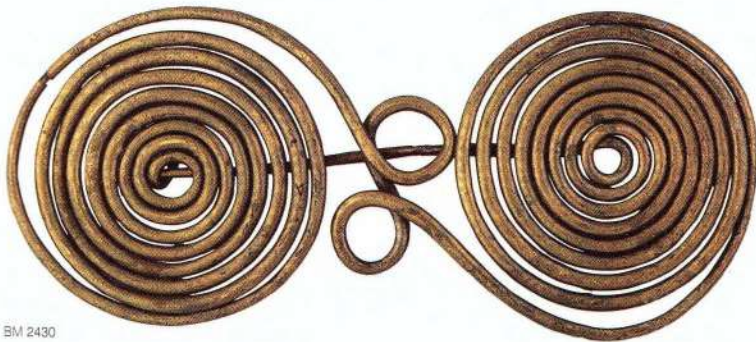
BM 4255



BM 5039



BM 4252



BM 2430



BM 2421

158. BELT OMPHALOI AND ORNAMENTS (*TUTULI*)

9th century BC

Bronze

D. 0.092–0.133 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4099, BM 4100, BM 4101

Good state of preservation.

Three bronze *omphaloi* with strongly protruding central knobs and dotted circles. These were attached to the front of a belt by means of hooks located on the reverse. A close-packed row of tiny bronze “shields” (*tutuli*) decorated the belt’s sides and back.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 111, no. 302 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi



BM 4099



BM 4100



BM 4101

159. FINGER RINGS

9th century BC

Bronze

D. 0.026 m (BM 4500), 0.026 m (BM 4499), 0.027 m (BM 4501), 0.028 m (BM 4502), 0.015 m (BM 4097), 0.016 m (BM 4098), 0.019 m (BM 4096)

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4500, BM 4499, BM 4501, BM 4502, BM 4097, BM 4098, BM 4096

Good state of preservation.

Seven bronze finger rings. Made of triangular-sectioned wire with attached double-spiral ornaments.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 106 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi



160. BRACELETS

9th century BC

Bronze

BM 4457. L. 0.043 m, d. 0.056 m

BM 4458. L. 0.083 m, d. 0.065 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4457, BM 4458

Good state of preservation

Heavy multi-spiral bracelets. These are a characteristic piece of jewellery made of thick, solid, lozenge-sectioned bronze wire.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76. Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 107 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi



BM 4457



BM 4458



161. WHEEL (YGX)

9th century BC

Bronze

D. 0.048 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BM 4842

Good state of preservation.

Miniature bronze wheel. Made from a circular plaque, with four cut-out triangles, leaving four spokes in the shape of a cross. Possibly a predecessor of the *iygx*, the magical charm used for love spells. Two bronze discs found near the wheel were probably associated with it. These tiny objects, which resemble buttons, are decorated with relief concentric circles and were probably tied to the ends of the string that threaded through the cut-outs was used to spin the wheel.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76; Kottaridi – Walker 2011, 97, no. 141 (A. Kottaridi).

Angeliki Kottaridi

162. SPINDLE WHORL

9th century BC

Stone

L. 0.001 m, w. 0.029 m

Aigai, Tomb AZVII

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BA 1620a

Worn. Good state of preservation
Biconical spindle whorl, made of red stone.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1969, 75–76.

Angeliki Kottaridi

