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THE LEGENDARY METAL: GOLD

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FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM AND MUSEUM OF ANATOLIAN CIVILIZATIONS

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THE OTTOMAN PASSION FOR GOLD OBJECTS
FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE TOPKAPI PALACE MUSEUM

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READING ERGIN INAN'S PAINTINGS

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EDITORIAL

P
Art Culture Antiques presents North American art connoisseurs with its latest issue dedicated to "Gold in Art." P first went into publication in Turkish in the spring of 1996, and since then has gained a steadily increasing readership and reputation. The English language edition was launched in 1999, winning the appreciation of influential names throughout the western art world. Until now, however, this edition has been available only at bookstores in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Louvre Museum in Paris, and the Guggenheim Museum in Berlin. With this issue P is making its debut on the New World's cultural stage, and so entering a new era. We hope that P Art Culture Antiques will equally open a new horizon for all appreciators of the arts in North America.

The Publisher

P Art Culture Antiques is published by Portakal Art and Culture House, Turkey's leading antiques dealer and auctioneer. The Portakal family has been holding auctions of the finest Ottoman Turkish and Islamic works of art since 1914. Today Portakal Art and Culture House also provides art advisory and valuation services, and since the 1970s head of the firm, Raffi Portakal, has been involved in creating such major Turkish art collections as the Sakıp Sabancı Turkish Calligraphy Collection.

The Magazine

P Art Culture Antiques presents works of art from notable museums in Turkey and the world and the most eminent private collections, together with in-depth articles by art historians and writers. Each issue carries readers on an enchanting journey from East to West through the world of art.

Gold in Art

Each issue of P Art Culture Antiques explores a specific theme, in this case the legendary metal gold and its multi-faceted role in art. The magnificent Ottoman works of art in the collections of Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, gold images in the mosaics of the Byzantine Church of Haghia Sophia in the same city, the pre-Columbian Gold collection in the British Museum, and the collection of Mughal art in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are some of the highlights of our "Gold in Art" issue.

For centuries mediaeval alchemists endeavoured to unravel the secret of turning base metals like lead and copper into gold. Although failing in this, their experiments and discoveries laid the foundations of modern chemistry. In this issue, we have set out to unravel the secret of transforming gold into art.

May all you touch turn to gold.

CELAL ÜSTER
WORKS IN GOLD FROM ALACAÖYÜK AND THE ROYAL GRAVES OF UR

BY SENGÜL G. AYDINGÜN

MUSEUM OF ANATOLIAN CIVILIZATIONS
FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM
Gold, which is easily visible in nature in mountain riverbeds and alluvial plains in the form of small nuggets or dust, and which attracts attention with its beautiful color and sheen, was one of the first metals discovered by humankind. While the earliest examples of decorative items made of gold date from as early as 5000 BC, the metal only began to be worked on a large scale in the third century BC. During this era, known as the Early Bronze Age, not only did the use of gold increase considerably, but people began to trade with it and to produce elaborate works of art. At first gold was obtained in the form of dust panned from rivers, which was then melted into nuggets, and hammered into the desired forms. Fine lines on their surface reveal that they were polished with fine sand. We know that gold was obtained using the panning method in Anatolia since ancient times. Gold deposits were also found in the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.

The Use of Gold
Archaeological excavations indicate that by the third century BC gold was being made into artifacts over a wide area from Troy in western Anatolia to Alacahöyük, Eskiyapar, Horoztepe, and Mahmatlar in central Anatolia. Gold began to be used extensively in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Aegean region during the same period.

Archaeological excavations of settlements dating from the third century BC have found that the world’s most elaborate gold artifacts of this era were those produced at Alacahöyük near the modern Turkish city of Çorum (1) and at the city of Ur near the Euphrates delta. Although these two civilizations were a great distance apart, the objects found at royal burials in both locations bear similarities in production methods, workmanship, purity of the gold, and aesthetic quality. Approximately five thousand years ago the artisans of both Ur and Alacahöyük used production techniques such as hammering, casting, riveting, and plating, and decoration techniques that included engraving, repoussé, granulation, openwork, inlay, filigree, and setting with colored stones. It is surprising how many of these techniques have remained unchanged since ancient times.

Religious purposes
Alacahöyük is regarded by scholars as one of the most important centers of power in the Bronze Age, an era characterized by powerful city states. Thirteen stone-walled burial chambers found at Alacahöyük and believed to have been tombs of the Hittite kings have to date been one of the richest sources of grave goods from this era. Most of the grave goods arrayed round the bodies, which were buried in the foetal position, are made of gold, silver, electrum, and bronze, with a lesser quantity of amber, carnelian, rock crystal, iron, and terracotta artifacts. Besides diadems, necklaces, brooches, bracelets, hairpins, and earrings, there were also gold vases, pitchers, chalices, weapons of bronze and gold, solar discs used for religious purposes, sistrons, and figurines of gods, goddesses, deer and bulls.

The vigorous and creative style of these diverse grave goods is striking. The archaeologist H. Z. Koşay has interpreted the artifacts found at Alacahöyük as having been produced for devotional purposes.
Helmet of Mes-Kalam-dug

Gr

Circa 2000-2400

Electrum (alloy of gold and silver)

Height: 25 cm.

Circumference: 50 cm.

British Museum, London.
"Alacahöyük is regarded by scholars as one of the most important centers of power in the Bronze Age, an era characterized by powerful city states."

Golden chalices
Objects for many functions were found in the graves at Alacahöyük, including vessels for eating and drinking, weapons, and personal ornaments. A notable group among them are the gold chalices with wide deep bowls, and spiral fluting on the tall stems. The best preserved of these chalices, which were probably used in ceremonies, are two found in graves B and K. A further two that were found in the same graves had been damaged by fire, and of the one found in grave K only the fluted stem remains. The similarity of shape and design to a complete chalice whose base is filled with a hard substance that was found in grave B indicates that these were originally made as a pair. The chalices, which are approximately 13-14 cm. high and reminiscent of modern wine glasses, are easily dented since the metal is only 2 mm thick (4).

Degrees of elegance
Two lovely gold pitchers found in graves B and K found must have been used to pour the beverages imbibed at religious ceremonies into the chalices. With their globular bodies, long necks that were hammered into shape, wide flaring rims, curved handles and fluted decoration, these two pitchers are remarkably similar, but the slightly longer neck and proportionately taller body of the one found in grave B lends this pitcher a greater degree of elegance. This pitcher, which is about 14.5 cm high and 8.8 cm wide, has three parallel lines incised around the neck and a pattern of zigzag herringbone flutes covering the body. When the pitcher is viewed upside down, the flutes form a six-pointed star on the base of the pitcher (6). Similar terracotta pitchers have been found at Alisar, Bogazköy, Kültepe, Troy, and Ahatlabil.

Among the vessels found at Alacahöyük there are also cups with single handles. Of these cups, which were found in the L, H, MA, and K tombs, those found in the former two are made of gold, and the other two of gold and silver combined.
The cups, which vary in height from 2.3 cm to 4 cm and in diameter at the rim from 6.5 cm to 8 cm, are of very plain design. The cups were shaped by hammering.

Another group of objects made by the same method and probably used for ceremonial purposes are small gold vessels varying in height from 5.7 cm to 8.1 cm, and rim diameters of between 8.2 cm and 11 cm. These small vessels are all similar in form, with flaring rims and broad shallow bowls that narrow towards the base. They have fluted decoration and are studded with carnelians.

**Gold weapons**

Gold was also used in the production of some of the weapons found in the graves at Alacahöyük. Since gold is a soft metal and therefore virtually useless for real weapons, its use for weapons like maces, mace-heads, ax-heads, daggers (9), weapon butts, swords, and sceptres must have been to symbolise the power and pomp of the ruling classes (70). Gold hammered into thin leaves was either used to plate the original material – such as iron or stone – of the weapon, or riveted onto the handles. One such dagger was found in the city of Ur (71).

Jewellery forms one of the most important groups of smaller gold artifacts found in tombs at Alacahöyük. Bracelets, diadems, hairpins, brooches, spiral earrings, necklaces, chokers, beads, sections of wreaths, belts, and charms in the form of hands, flattened pipes, anchor beads, and so on have been found in graves believed to have belonged to queens and women of the aristocracy. A further 500 or more pieces, including gold beads, sequins, hooks, idols, and tiny pipe-beads, demonstrate the wealth of the era. It is thought that these decorations were either used along with carnelian beads in necklaces, or were sewn onto garments.

In particular leaf-like pieces, hand-shaped decorations for crowns, and brooches bear a high degree of similarity to those from the royal graves of Ur.

**Royal graves**

Between 1926-1931 Sir Leonard Woolley excavated nearly 2500 graves in the necropolis of the city of Ur, one of the most important sites of southern Mesopotamia, dating from the third millennium BC. The riches found at this site are dizzying, including weapons, helmets, shields, mirrors, and axes, jewelry of gold, silver, and lapis lazuli, alabaster vases, game boards, and pottery. Nonetheless, among all these riches, seventeen of the graves outshine the others. These date from the early dynastic era, between 2600-2400 BC, and include the graves of Queen Shub-ad (Pabu), King Mes-Kalam-dug and Akalam-dug. The rest of the graves are known by names such as “grave of the ruler” and “great pit of death.” There is evidence that human sacrifices occurred in some of the tombs. Exactly seventy-four skeletons found in the so-called great pit of death indicate that all of these people died at the same time, perhaps by ingesting poison before they were buried. Among the victims, who are carefully arranged in the tomb, are nine women of high rank, fifty-nine female servants, and six men who were buried along with two carriages, each pulled by a team of four oxen. The palace women are distinguished by rich head ornaments decorated with leaves of gold and lapis lazuli stones. While there are similar mass burials in Egypt and in the Far East, there are no similar examples in Mesopotamia (73).

Architecturally, the large tombs were built in two forms, either semicylindrical or circular, and made of stone and brick. Ramps lead down into them. The wealth of the grave goods is unequalled in Mesopotamian archaeology. Weapons, musical
Diadem.
Alacahöyük.
Early Bronze Age.
Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.
Gold.
Length (open): 53 cm.
Width: 14 cm cm.
Length of gold tassel: 21 cm.
6054.

Hair or clothing pin.
Alacahöyük.
Early Bronze Age.
Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.
Gold.
Height: 8 cm.
Diameter: 18.2 cm.
Weight: 0.63 gr.
11740.

Hair or clothing pin.
Alacahöyük.
Early Bronze Age.
Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.
Gold.
Height: 7.7 cm.
Diameter: 12.9 cm.
Weight: 0.9 gr.
11854.
plagues, and triangles of lapis lazuli and mother of pearl inlaid in wood, pitch being used as an adhesive. The largest of these items is a 1.20 metre high lyre found in grave PG/1207. The base of the lyre is in the form of a bull's torso, the gold head of a young bull with two horns being mounted on one side. The head is beautifully crafted, with the curling horns and mane of the bull carved from lapis lazuli. A band of lozenges runs around the edges of the lyre's four scenes of liturgical animals and a tree of life motif decorate the face of the base beneath the head.

The 50 cm high bull-headed lyre found in grave PG/800 of Queen Shub'ad'a (Puzi) has marvelous decoration depicting an orchestra of animals of symbolic religious significance.

The stand of a lyre found in grave PG/1237, the great pit of death, is a fascinating object, with a ram or goat of pure gold perching in a tree. The animal stands against a small tree, having pulled itself upright with its forelegs holding onto the branches, and is stretching out its neck towards the leaves of the tree as if to eat them. The trunk of the tree and the ram are made entirely of gold. The ram's horns and other details of the head are worked in lapis lazuli, and the branches of the eight-branched tree bear a single flower. A coarser example of a similar flower has been found at Mokhlos in the Aegean region.

**Hair decoration**

Gold artifacts from the royal graves at Ur are extremely diverse in terms of function and workmanship. The helmet found in Mes-kalam-dug's grave (PG/755) is one of the most unusual items that was found, and a masterpiece of craftsmanship demonstrating both the power and wealth of the kings of Ur and the skill of contemporary artisans. The helmet is worked in imitation of a head, which even includes ears, and the hair styled in the fashion of the time, with curls at the sides, a braid around the top of the head and braided knot of hair at the back of the head. It is made of 15 carat gold and silver-electrum alloy. It has been shaped by hammering the inner surface, and then the detailing added. The helmet is 23 cm high and 50 cm in diameter. It is thought that the holes around the edge of the helmet were for attaching the fabric lining.

Another astonishing artifact is what is thought to have been a cloak made of hundreds of gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian beads that was found upon the skeleton of Queen Shub'ad. The valuable beads were arranged in vertical rows from the neckline downwards in an aesthetically pleasing and balanced design that ends in parallel rows of beads forming a band. A gold ring in the bottom row was used to close the cloak.

**Headdress of the queen**

A remarkable headdress composed of three rows of gold leaves and rings, and lapis lazuli and carnelian beads, and a set of earrings completes the unusual costume belonging to Queen Shub'ad. At the summit is a gold comb from which spring seven star-shaped flowers. This headress must have reflected the queen's inestimable fashion sense and incredible wealth.

Many decorative items have also been discovered in the grave known as the pit of death, where most of the burials were of women. Among these are leafy crowns similar to that of Queen Shub'ad, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rosettes, pendants, and charms in the form of small animals.

**Gold workmanship**

One of the most beautifully worked examples of gold craftsmanship found in the royal graves of Ur is a 33.6 cm. long dagger and its sheath. The hilt of the dagger is made of lapis lazuli and the blade of gold. The sheath is strikingly decorated in openwork and filigree, and is bordered by small round embossed points. The extremely intricate decoration makes the sheath one of the great masterpieces of the third millennium BC. The surface of the sheath is
Ram standing upright against a small tree (lateral view).
divided into seven sections, each of which has a separate linear decorative scheme. The dagger itself has a single embossed line running down the blade, and the lapis lazuli hilt is decorated with round granulated beads of gold and rows of triangles.

Many other daggers, lance and spear blades, and axes were also found in the royal graves of Ur, but these pale in comparison to the great dagger.

The group of artifacts showing the greatest affinity between the grave goods of Alacahöyük and Ur are the gold cups, chalices, and fluted bowls. These items, most of which were found in the graves of Queen Shub’ad and King Mes-Kalim-dug, are similar in terms of both workmanship and design. The similar shapes and surface decoration on these objects, as in the case of those found in graves B and K at Alacahöyük, suggest that they may have been ordered as a set.

**Figurines**

When one compares the gold grave goods dating from the same period from these two centers of civilization in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, it soon becomes clear that where musical instruments, weapons, and jewelry are concerned, the works from Ur are far more varied than those of Anatolia. In particular the musical instruments and the bull and ram statues adorning them, which employ the techniques of metal casting and inlay work, are beyond doubt the most outstanding works of art of their era made anywhere in the world. There are no musical instruments like lyres or harps at Alacahöyük. Instead, sistrons were in wide use, but these were not made of gold. The figures of deer and bulls found at Alacahöyük are not part of any instruments, but generally are in the form of independent figures and made of silver. Only a few feature electrum plating on the head. The elaborate and diverse character of the decoration on finds from the royal graves of Ur, as well as their utilization of semi-precious stones

Necklace sections (restored).
Alacahöyük.
Early Bronze Age.
Second half of the 3rd millennium BC.
Length: 1.5 cm.
Width: 1.5 cm.
*Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara.*
1517-1527.
point to the extensive trade in which the citizens of Ur were involved. But while the gold objects found at Alaca Höyük have much simpler decoration, they impress us with the elegance of their proportions. The absence of discrepancies in style among both the objects from Ur and those from Alaca Höyük indicates that they were made locally in both cases. This is confirmed by the other metal and ceramic vessels found at each location.

These elite works of art with their high degree of workmanship which were made five thousand years ago at Alaca Höyük and Ur, show for the first time a high degree of boldness in experimenting with gold as a material and with new designs on metal. They therefore represent a new era in the history of art.

Translated by WENDY SHAW

(1) The first excavations of Alaca Höyük were begun by T. Makridis in 1907. His work was continued by R. Oğuz Arık and H. Zübrey Koşay between 1935-46. Mahmut Akok continued their work until 1985. This work, which was dormant for many years, began again in 1994-5 under the leadership of H. Balkocul. Since 1997, the excavations have been led by A. Çınaroğlu. The graves at Alaca Höyük have been dated between 2500-2200 BC.

(2) Ur has been excavated by Leonard Woolley between 1926-31. The crown tombs were dated to between 2600-2400 BC.


(5) Ibid., Catalogue number: 1, 2.


(7) A. Toker, Ibid., catalogue number: 16, 17, 18, 19.


(9) H. Z. Koşay, op. cit., 1951, s. 71-74.

(10) H. Z. Koşay, op. cit., 1938, s. CLXXII-CLXXIV.


