

CHRYSELEPHANTINE COUCHES, FEASTING, AND IMPERIAL VIOLENCE IN HELLENISTIC MACEDONIA^{*}

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Abstract

Macedonian chryselephantine couches – exquisitely carved and gleaming with gold, glass, and ivory – offer a particularly illuminating case study of the material ramifications of Alexander the Great’s conquests for Hellenistic art. Well-documented in archaeological remains and written texts, the couches also offer a concrete lens through which to analyze the transfer of cultural knowledge about feasting: an ephemeral activity as significant for Hellenistic kings as for their Persian predecessors. This article examines the couches’ archaeological contexts, the aristocratic tombs in which they were found and the elaborate palaces and elite houses in which they were likely first used. It then analyzes the couches themselves as delicate luxury objects that nonetheless, in their iconography, style, and even their material, highlighted the violence of Macedonian imperialism. And finally, it considers the ephemeral practices through which the couches were activated for their patrons, that is, the feasts and funerals at which the Macedonian aristocracy both emulated and reacted against Persian precedents. This re-evaluation of Macedonian chryselephantine couches illuminates global interconnections during the formative period of Hellenistic art.

Key Words

Ivory; Macedonia; Feasting; Alexander the Great; Hellenistic



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I. Introduction

In the spring of 334 BCE, Alexander III of Macedon crossed the Hellespont – the thin strip of water separating the continents of Europe and Asia – and claimed what lay before him as *doryktetos khora*, spear-won land.¹ In doing so, he staked an audacious claim to the Achaemenid Persian Empire, the largest the ancient world had ever known.² With a brutally effective army and astute co-optation of local leaders, he managed to make that claim a reality. By the time he died as Alexander «the Great» in Babylon a little over a decade later, he ruled a kingdom that stretched from Europe to South Asia, and encompassed what are now the nation-states of Greece, Albania, Turkey, Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Egypt.

The inhabitants of Macedonia followed Alexander's progress at a distance. They heard the encomiastic dispatches of his official historian, Kallisthenes, and saw the grandiose monuments the king commissioned from prominent Greek sculptors.³ As ships arrived from the east in Macedonian harbors, they touched, smelled, and tasted the exotic precious materials extracted from the empire: lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, myrrh and frankincense from Arabia, spices and ivory from South Asia.⁴ The Macedonians also learned of their king's conquests from the veterans Alexander sent home, who numbered in the tens of thousands and whose discharge payments made them the fourth century equivalent of millionaires.⁵ The veterans of Alexander's army brought back far more than money. Fighting their way through the Achaemenid Empire, they acquired loot, scars, and a taste

¹ *Doryktetos khora*: DIODORUS SICULUS 17.17.2.

² PIERRE BRIANT, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind. 2002, p. 62.

³ For Kallisthenes' dispatches, see GORDON SHRIMPTON, « The Callisthenes Engima », in TIMOTHY HOWE, ERIN GARVIN, GRAHAM WRIGHTSON (eds.), *Greece, Macedon, and Persia*, Oxbow Books, Oxford 2015, p. 114–117; for Alexander's commissions, JEROME J. POLLITT, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, p. 1946.

⁴ On lapis lazuli and its use in the Hellenistic era, see DIMITRIS PLANTZOS, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems*, New York, Clarendon Press 1997, p. 36; for the myrrh and frankincense trade from Arabia, SHIMSHON BEN-YEHOSHUA, CAROLE BOROWITZ, LUMÍR ONDŘEJ, « Frankincense, Myrrh, and Balm of Gilead: Ancient Spices of Southern Arabia and Judea », *Horticultural Reviews*, 102 (2011), p. 1015; for spices, RICHARD STONEMAN, *The Greek Experience of India: From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2019, p. 117–119, and for the trade in ivory, SANJYOT MEHENDALE, « Begram: Along Ancient Central Asian and Indian Trade Routes », *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, 1/2 (1996), p. 47–64.

⁵ ARRIAN, *Anabasis* 7.12.1; PLUTARCH, *Alexander* 71; FRANK LEE HOLT, *The Treasures of Alexander the Great: How One Man's Wealth Shaped the World*, Oxford University Press, New York 2016, p. 120–121; PHILLIP HARDING, *Athens Transformed, 404–262 BC: From Popular Sovereignty to the Dominion of the Elite*, Routledge, New York 2015, p. 90–91.

for extravagant, Persian-influenced practices. Back home in Macedonia, they continued these practices, hosting luxurious feasts, for example, and staging elaborate funerals. They also commissioned costly monuments inspired by their conquests, ranging from enormous marble-topped burial mounds to intricately carved gems.⁶ For men who had grown up in a small, peripheral, and vulnerable kingdom, the wealth and power they enjoyed in the aftermath of Alexander's conquests must have seemed an astonishing reversal of fortune.

The Macedonian veterans' wealth and power came at a high price. They returned home after a decade or more of military service, having fought four major set-piece battles of bloody hand-to-hand combat. In each, they were outnumbered, and they faced not only familiar forces such as infantry and cavalry, but also new and initially terrifying ones like scythed chariots and elephants. Even worse were the ambushes and city-sieges they encountered repeatedly throughout their campaigns, where attacks came unexpectedly and no place was safe.⁷

To all these threats, the Macedonian veterans responded with practiced violence. Along with the horrors of battle itself, the age of Alexander saw an intensification of what one ancient military historian has labeled genocide: the killing of the entire adult male population of resistant cities and the enslavement of their women and children.⁸ Though literary accounts may exaggerate, the Macedonians' brutal practices are also suggested by the archaeological record, for instance in one well-studied region in Uzbekistan, where fully ninety percent of Persian era sites were deserted after Alexander.⁹

With the excavation of the Royal Tombs of Vergina from 1977 onwards, archaeologists have begun to uncover the concrete material manifestations of Alexander's conquest. At the moment of their discovery, the unlooted Vergina tombs – with their rich array of precious metal drinking vessels, bronze and iron weapons, gold wreaths, and chryselephantine couches – appeared singular in their extravagance, fit only for kings (fig. 1).¹⁰ As more tombs have been excavated elsewhere in Macedonia, however, we can see how closely Alexander's veterans resembled kings in their burial practices. At sites such as Korinos, Lefkadia,

⁶ For the most spectacular of the veterans' burial mounds, see KATERINA PERISTERI, « Excavation of the Kastas Tumulus of Amphipolis 2014 », *To Archaiologiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 29 (2015), p. 442; on gems in the aftermath of Alexander's conquests, PLANTZOS, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems*.

⁷ For the military service of Alexander's veterans, see ANDREW R. BURN, « The Generalship of Alexander », *Greece & Rome*, 12/2 (1965), p. 140–154.

⁸ HANS VAN WEES, « Genocide in Archaic and Classical Greece », in VICTOR CASTON, SILKE-MARIA WEINECK, *Our Ancient Wars: Rethinking War through the Classics*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2016, p. 19–34.

⁹ JAKUB HAVLÍK, « *Terra multiplex et varia natura*. On the Settlement Patterns of Bactria in the Hellenistic Period », *Studia Hercynia*, 25/2 (2021), p. 19–26.

¹⁰ MANOLĒS ANDRONIKOS, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City*, Ekdotike Athenon, Athens 1984.

Phoinikas, and Agios Athanasios, the veterans were commemorated with a consistent array of grave goods very like those of Vergina.¹¹ And stylistic and iconographic comparisons with touchstones of Hellenistic art such as the Alexander Mosaic show how closely their commissions were aligned with the programmatic monuments of the new imperial state.¹² Almost fifty years after the Vergina excavations, we have a corpus of material extensive enough to analyze in depth the powerful ties, long unexamined, between Hellenistic art and the patrons, practices, and visual forms of Macedonian imperialism.



Fig. 1: Reconstruction of Tomb II, Vergina, late fourth century BCE, showing findspots of major objects. Fragments of couches were found scattered in the central chamber, the antechamber, and above the tomb vault with material from the funerary pyre. Photo courtesy G. Dagli Orti /© NPL – DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

¹¹ On Korinos, see MATTHIAS BESIOS, « Anaskaphikes ereunes ste Boreia Pieria », *To Archaïologiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 5 (1994), p. 171–178; on Lefkadia, KATERINA RHOMIOPOULOU, *Das Palmettengrab in Lefkadia*, Zabern, Mainz 2010; and for Agios Athanasios and Phoinikas, MARIA TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, *Makedonikoi taphoi ston Phoinika kai ston Agio Athanasio Thessalonikes. Symbole ste melete tes eikongraphias ton taphikon mnemetes Makedonias*, Tameio Archaïologikon Poron kai Apallotrioseon Diethunse Demosiematon, Athens 2005.

¹² For these comparisons, see below, fig. 2, 23, 24.

Chryselephantine Couches, Feasting, and Imperial Violence

The chryselephantine couches preserved in Macedonian tombs offer a particularly illuminating case study of the material ramifications of Alexander's conquests for Hellenistic art (fig. 2). At present, 42 such couches from 38 tombs have been clearly documented in publications, and more are appearing very regularly from planned and salvage excavations.¹³ When datable finds are preserved, the couches cluster in the late fourth to early third centuries BCE, the zenith of Macedonian wealth and imperial hegemony. They are often associated with grave goods, such as bronze and iron armor and weapons, that suggest their ties to Alexander's veterans.¹⁴ So does their iconography, with images of Dionysiac revelry, battle, and the hunt. Finally, their use of precious materials, above all, ivory, connects them to the king's eastern conquests and his extraction of exotic resources. While a few of the couches have received detailed publication as part of tomb assemblages,¹⁵ this article is the first to analyze them as an aesthetic ensemble and to articulate their connections to Hellenistic imperial art.



Fig. 2. Reconstruction of gold, glass, and ivory couch from the antechamber of Tomb II, Vergina, c. 336-317 BCE. Museum of the Royal Tombs of Vergina. Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/%2B_1977_wurden_die_K%C3%B6nigsgr%C3%A4ber_in_Vergina_entdeckt._18.jpg.

¹³ See Appendix, below.

¹⁴ E.g. MARIA TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « Agios Athanasios, Makedonikos taphos III. O Oplismos tou eugenous nekrou », in *Namata: Timetikos Tomos gia ton kathegete Demetrio Pantermales*, University Studio Press, Thessalonike 2011, p. 35–363.

¹⁵ E.g. TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, *Makedonikoi taphoi ston Phoinika kai ston Agio Athanasio Thessalonikes*, p. 104–105 ; RHOMIOPOULOU, *Das Palmettengrab in Lefkadia*, p. 89–90.

The first of three broad sections examines the couches' archaeological contexts: the aristocratic tombs in which they were found, and the elaborate palaces and elite houses in which they were likely first used. The second section uses the insights gained from the first to analyze the couches themselves as delicate luxury objects that nonetheless, in their iconography, style, and even their material, highlighted the violence of Macedonian imperialism. The third section opens out to a wider consideration of the ephemeral practices through which the couches were activated for their patrons, that is, the feasts and funerals at which the Macedonian aristocracy both emulated and reacted against Persian precedents.

In combination, the sections outlined above bring into focus the significance of Macedonian chryselephantine couches for an understanding of the art and culture of the Early Hellenistic era. Scholars of the period have paid most attention to monumental architecture, painting, and sculpture: the familiar, high-profile media of later centuries.¹⁶ This analysis of chryselephantine couches highlights the significance of the so-called 'minor arts' for an enhanced appreciation of the intersections of empire and material culture at the dawn of the Hellenistic era. At the same time, precisely because these couches were functional objects connected to the Macedonians' Persian-influenced feasting and funerals, they preserve the material traces of knowledge transfer *from* the conquered *to* the conquerors. They thus offer new insights into the art and culture of Macedonia's warrior aristocracy at a time of radical change.

II. *The Tomb and the Andron:*

The Archaeological Contexts of Macedonian Chryselephantine Couches

The primary archaeological contexts of the chryselephantine couches – visually imposing and richly furnished burials that transformed the landscape of what is now northern Greece – are well documented in publications of planned and rescue excavations.¹⁷ In their painted decoration and grave goods, these burials display a complex mix of festive celebration and martial violence characteristic of the self-representation of Alexander's veterans, and they constitute part of a distinctively Macedonian funerary culture inspired by, and fueled by the proceeds of, the king's conquests. The recently excavated Tomb III at Agios Athanasios, with its well-preserved paintings and revealing finds, furnishes a particularly good example of

¹⁶ E.g., ANDREW STEWART, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1994; ADA COHEN, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great: Paradigms of Masculinity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.

¹⁷ See Appendix.

the ways in which Early Hellenistic Macedonian funerary art is permeated by imperial violence.¹⁸

The burial at Agios Athanasios was uncovered in 1994. Beneath a large tumulus, it had an elaborately decorated, temple-like facade, and on its interior a barrel-vaulted chamber in which the deceased was laid to rest (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Façade of Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

Within the chamber, a stone podium originally held a wooden couch covered with gold, glass, and ivory decoration; best preserved were several ivory heads, likely of youthful male warriors, as well as ivory griffins and eighteen glass plaques with silver figures depicting followers of Dionysos (figs. 4, 5).¹⁹

¹⁸ On the tomb, see Appendix # 3, as well as TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « Oi Taphikoi tymboi tes periokhes Ag. Athanasiou Thessalonikes (1992–1997): Ereuma kai prooptikes »; MARIA TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « The Macedonian Tomb at Agios Athanasios, Thessaloniki », in DIMITRIOS PANDERMALIS (ed.), *Alexander the Great: Treasures from an Epic Era of Hellenism*, Onassis Foundation, New York 2004, p. 149–150; TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « Agios Athanasios ».

¹⁹ MARIA TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « La tombe macédonienne d'Agios Athanasios près de Thessalonique », in ANNE-MARIE GUIMIER-SORBETS, MILTIADES HATZOPOULOS, YVETTE MORIZOT (eds.), *Rois, cités, nécropoles: institutions, rites et monuments en Macédoine: Actes des colloques de Nanterre*,

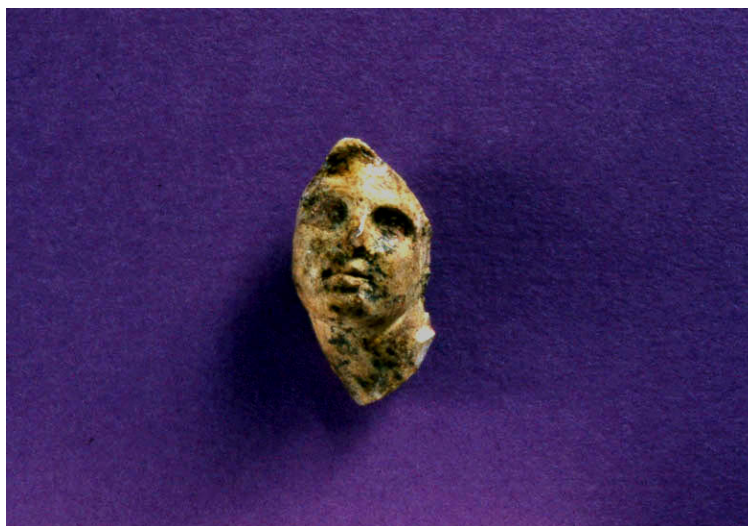


Fig. 4: Ivory male head from a gold and ivory couch in Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

Fig. 5: Two ivory griffin heads from a gold and ivory couch in Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

décembre 2002 et d'Athènes, janvier 2004, Centre de recherches de l'antiquité grecque et romaine, Athens 2006, esp. fig. 2, 3.

The tomb had been looted, but held as well fragmentary armor and weapons including a breastplate, gorget, helmet, greaves, knife, and spearheads (figs. 6, 7).²⁰ Comparison with unlooted tombs suggests that it would originally have contained further grave goods such as gold or gilded bronze wreaths for the deceased and an extensive collection of clay or metal drinking vessels.²¹ A posthumous gold coin of Philip II dates the tomb to the last quarter of the fourth century BCE, while the armor and weapons indicate that the deceased was a high-ranking military officer, likely one of Alexander's veterans (fig. 8).²²



Fig. 6. Breastplate from Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

Fig. 7. Greaves from Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

²⁰ TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « Agios Athanasios ».

²¹ Examples of unlooted tombs include Appendix # 10, 30, 32, 33.

²² TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « Agios Athanasios ».



Fig. 8. Posthumous coin of Philip II from Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

Most striking are the tomb's paintings on the exterior facade. These include golden-winged griffins in the pediment and two large-scale figures of young men, wrapped in purple cloaks and holding the enormous iron-tipped cornel-wood spears, known as *sarissas* and measuring up to 18 feet in length, that constituted the most distinctive and effective weapons of Alexander's army (fig. 9).²³



Fig. 9. Man holding a *sarissa*, detail of fresco from the façade of Tomb III, Agios Athanasios, c. 325–300 BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

²³ On the *sarissa*, see MINOR M. MARKLE, « The Macedonian Sarissa, Spear, and Related Armor », *American Journal of Archaeology*, 81/3 (1977), p. 323–339.

Above them, a frieze includes, at its center, young men feasting and drinking in a richly furnished setting along with female musical entertainers, and on the flanks, wreathed men heading to the feast on foot and on horseback, and soldiers with long spears, shorter javelins, shields, and helmets (fig. 10). The paintings feature exotic details, for instance, the purple cloaks worn by some of the individuals – recalling the Persian purple cloaks given by Alexander to his top officers – and the horn-shaped drinking vessel of Near Eastern inspiration held by one of the reclining feasters.²⁴ At the same time, the ornate furniture, gorgeous textiles (some richly colored, others diaphanous), and extensive display of precious metal vessels in the cupboard to the left of the diners highlight imperially derived wealth. And the painted armor and weapons so prevalent among the scene's protagonists, like the real ones inside the tomb, make clear the connection of that wealth to military force.



Fig. 10. Banqueters from the exterior of Tomb III at Agios Athanasios, late fourth century BCE. Photo courtesy Ephoria Archaiotheton Periphereias Thessalonikes.

²⁴ Purple cloaks: DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.77.4; JUSTIN XII.3.9; DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.78.1; horn-shaped drinking vessel: SUSANNE EBBINGHAUS, « Feasting Like the Persian King », in SUSANNE EBBINGHAUS (ed.), *Animal-Shaped Vessels in the Ancient World: Drinking with Gods, Heroes, and Kings*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2018, p. 136–184.

Imperial wealth and military *accoutrements* characterize other tombs holding chryselephantine couches as well. The late fourth century BCE Grave A beneath the Stenomakri tumulus at Vergina, for example, held besides its couch two spearheads, a butt, a sword with a silver handle, and an iron knife, as well as two iron strigils (instruments used for scraping off oil and sweat following athletic exercise) and a gilded bronze wreath. The preserved bones of the deceased showed signs of wear indicating a long career of horse-riding, so the tomb's occupant was likely a cavalry officer.²⁵ Similarly, Tomb A at Derveni of c. 330–310 BCE held a large group of bronze and clay drinking vessels, a wreath with gilded bronze leaves, a lamp, spearheads, butts, and greaves, as well as wood, glass, and ivory remains from a couch.²⁶ Grave goods from other tombs fit the same pattern, and reach their apogee in the unlooted Royal Tomb II at Vergina – the most lavish of all preserved Macedonian tombs – which contained among its finds nineteen silver drinking vessels, four complete sets of armor, a gilded quiver full of arrows, a sarissa, twelve other spears and javelins, and two shields, one bronze and one chryselephantine.²⁷ While Tomb II has been identified by its excavators as that of Alexander's father Philip (d. 336 BCE) and one of his wives, close examination of its silver drinking vessels and clay salt cellars have suggested instead a later date and an identification with Alexander's successor Philip III Arrhidaios and his wife, Adea Eurydice (d. 317 BCE).²⁸ As discussed further below, the chryselephantine couches found in the tomb likewise support a later chronology and an association with Alexander's conquests.

Examined as an ensemble, the objects found within the tombs suggest that the burials occurred largely within a tight chronological window, essentially from the last quarter of the fourth century BCE just going into the beginning of the third.²⁹ Coins from burials in Abdera, Agios Athanasios, Alykes-Kitros, Nikisiani, Phoinikas, and Sedes all date c. 325–300 BCE, while datable pots at Agia Paraskevi, Korinos, Lefkadia, Pella, and Toumba Paionia also bear out this pattern.³⁰ Similarities among grave goods, tomb paintings, and the architectural ensembles of the burials

²⁵ See Appendix # 38.

²⁶ See Appendix # 10.

²⁷ See Appendix # 32.

²⁸ Connection to Philip II argued by, e.g., ANDRONIKOS, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City*; ANGELIKI KOTTARIDI, *Macedonian Treasures: A Tour through the Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai*, trans. ALEXANDRA DOUMAS, Kapon Editions, Athens 2011; for silver and saltcellars, see DAVID W. J. GILL, « Inscribed Silver Plate from Tomb II at Vergina: Chronological Implications », *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 77/2 (2008), p. 335–358; SUSAN I. ROTROFF, « Spool Saltcellars in the Athenian Agora », *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 53/3 (1984), p. 343–354.

²⁹ OLGA PALAGIA, « Alexander's Battles against Persians in the Art of the Successors », in TIMOTHY HOWE, SABINE MÜLLER, RICHARD STONEMAN (eds.), *Ancient Historiography on War and Empire*, Oxbow Books, Oxford 2016, p. 186.

³⁰ See Appendix # 1, 3, 16, 23, 28, 30 for datable coins, and for datable pots, # 2, 19, 21, 26, 27, 31.

likewise indicate that they form a cohesive chronological group. It is true that a complex of largely unlooted tombs from Aineia, with simpler couches and fewer, more modest grave goods, may be earlier, c. 350–325 BCE, as may Grave 1 from Katerini, while Tomb IV at Dion has been dated later, to the end of the third century, based on numismatic evidence.³¹ But the overall picture is of a sudden efflorescence of chryselephantine couches and grandiose tombs in Early Hellenistic Macedonia, followed by a no less sudden decline.

The patrons of these couches and tombs belonged to a close-knit social group: probably, as archaeologists have suggested, the officers of Alexander the Great and their families.³² Such individuals were the most likely owners of the high-quality bronze and iron armor and weapons found in the tombs.³³ They also seem the most plausible commissioners of elaborate tomb paintings like those at Agios Athanasios, along with Tomb II at Phoinikas and the Tomb of the Palmettes at Lefkadia, which revolve around war and feasting, aristocratic activities closely connected to the court (fig. 3, 11).³⁴



Fig. 11. Pediment from the Tomb of the Palmettes, Lefkadia, late fourth century BCE. Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Anthemion_Makedonian_Tomb_4.jpg.

³¹ See Appendix # 5–8 (Aineia), 13 (Katerini), 11 (Dion).

³² IANNIS TOURATSOGLU, « Dated Gold: The Evidence from Hellenistic Macedonia », in DYFRI WILLIAMS (ed.), *The Art of the Greek Goldsmith*, British Museum, London 1998, p. 36–38.

³³ TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, *Makedonikoi taphoi ston Phoinika kai ston Agio Athanasio Thessalonikes*, p. 205, 207; TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « The Macedonian Tomb at Agios Athanasios, Thessaloniki ».

³⁴ Agios Athanasios: TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « The Macedonian Tomb at Agios Athanasios, Thessaloniki » (warriors and feasting); Phoinikas: TSIMBIDOU-AVLONITI, « Anaskaphikes ereunes ston Phoinika N. Thessalonikes, 1987–2006 – Mia eikosaetia anatropon » (warriors); Tomb of the Palmettes at Lefkadia: RHOMIOPOULOU, *Das Palmettengrab in Lefkadia* (feasting).

While many of the tomb owners have been identified by archaeologists as male, elite women, too, were sometimes buried with chryselephantine couches. In such cases – for instance at a pit grave at Abdera, Tomb II at Agios Athanasios, Grave 71 at Alykes-Kitros, Grave 2 at Methone Palaiokatakhas, and Tomb C at Sedes – they were often found closely associated with militaristic male graves, and thus likely the wives or daughters of Alexander’s officers.³⁵ These women were buried with a different selection of grave goods than their menfolk, including jewelry, perfume bottles, and ivory or precious metal chests along with their chryselephantine couches. Still, female patrons too had couches with Dionysiac imagery and ornament; as discussed further below, such iconography connects their burials with the material traces of Macedonian imperialism. And the woman buried in the antechamber of Royal Tomb II at Vergina was surrounded by weapons and martial images, such as the gilded quiver and a couch decorated with a cavalry battle (fig. 2).³⁶ If she was indeed Adea Eurydice, such grave goods were fitting, since literary sources describe this queen as being trained in military maneuvers and leading armies.³⁷

For both men and women, the chryselephantine couches with which they were buried were prized possessions that despite their fragility, were likely used during life. Fragmentary remains of ivory, glass, and amber from the palace at Vergina have in fact been identified as coming from a couch, though they have not yet been published in detail.³⁸ So, too, literary sources of the period document the production of ivory furniture for domestic use – for instance, by the family of the Greek orator Demosthenes – as do finds from later Hellenistic and Roman elite homes.³⁹ And it is important to note the sheer scale and complexity of the couches, which were decorated not only with ivory but also with finely worked gilded wood and sandwich glass: thin gold leaf sandwiched between slender sheets of translucent glass, a spectacular, rare, and valuable medium in the Early Hellenistic era.⁴⁰ As archaeologists have argued, assembling and working these materials would take skilled artisans considerable time and effort; the couches were not

³⁵ See Appendix # 1, 4, 18, 22, 30.

³⁶ KOTTARIDI, *Macedonian Treasures*, p. 50–52.

³⁷ POLYAENUS, *Strategems* XVIII.60.

³⁸ For the ivory, gold, and amber remains from the palace at Vergina, see KOTTARIDI, *Macedonian Treasures*, p. 81, and for the argument that these couches were used in life, KOTTARIDI, *Macedonian Treasures*, p. 82; PALAGIA, « Alexander’s Battles against Persians », p. 183.

³⁹ Demosthenes 27.10; for later Hellenistic domestic contexts with ivory couches, see ANDRIANOU, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 34–35, and for Roman ones, CHIARA BIANCHI, « I letti con rivestimento in osso e in avorio: analisi dei rinvenimenti dai contesti di abitato e funerari », *LANX* 7/1 (2010), p. 50–51.

⁴⁰ On sandwich glass, see GIULIA CESARIN, « Gold-Glasses: From their Origin to Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean », in DANIELA ROSENOW et al. (eds.), *Things that Travelled: Mediterranean Glass in the First Millennium AD*, UCL Press, London 2018, p. 22–45.

objects that could quickly be produced when someone died. More plausibly, the couches found in tombs preserve the traces of what was once a broader production of ivory furniture for Macedonian elite homes and palaces, most of which fell victim to Roman looting in the second century BCE when the tables were turned and the Macedonians found themselves the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of imperial conquest.⁴¹

If the chryselephantine couches were indeed created for use during the lives of their patrons, then their initial contexts were the elite houses and royal palaces of Early Hellenistic Macedonia. These lavish residences, concentrated in the traditional royal capital of Vergina and the new one, Pella, are familiar as some of the best-preserved examples of Hellenistic domestic architecture, and as important models for later patrons, for instance, the owners of Republican Roman villas.⁴² But like the tombs described above, they also exemplify a distinctly Macedonian style of imperial domination. The houses share with the burials a grandiose architecture with particular attention to facades, as well as decoration that combines exotic details with complex and sophisticated images of violence.

The houses' decoration was concentrated in the rooms given over to feasting and drinking. These rooms, known in Greek as *andrones* (« men's rooms »), are identifiable by their *trottoirs*, made to accommodate couches for reclining diners, and often by their sturdy and well-preserved mosaic floors.⁴³ In the Early Hellenistic House of Dionysos at Pella, for example, two andrones off the southern peristyle featured impressively naturalistic and detailed scenes made of pebble mosaics – an early technique where real colored pebbles rather than tesserae were used – that depicted, respectively, a lion hunt and Dionysos riding a panther; a griffin attacking a deer appeared at one room's entrance, while the antechambers had simpler geometric patterns (figs. 12, 13).⁴⁴

⁴¹ CESARE LETTA, *Due letti funerari in osso dal centro italico-romano della Valle d'Amplero (Abruzzo)*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma 1984, p. 92–94.

⁴² FREDERICK E. WINTER, « Residential Architecture », in *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2006, p. 157–182.

⁴³ KATHERINE DUNBABIN, « *Ut graeco more biberetur*: Greeks and Romans on the Cining Vouch », in INGE NIELSEN, HANNE NIELSEN (eds.), *Meals in a Social Context*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus – Oxford 1998, p. 82–83.

⁴⁴ COHEN, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great*, p. 64–68.



Fig. 12. Lion hunt, mosaic from andron in the House of Dionysos, Pella, c. 325–300 BCE. Universal History Archive/UIG/Bridgeman.

Fig. 13. Dionysos on a panther, mosaic from andron in the House of Dionysos, Pella, c. 325–300 BCE. Archaeological Museum of Pella, Greece© Archivio J. Lange / © NPL – DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

In the hunt scene, the men's poses and idealized nude bodies aligned them with earlier depictions of heroes in Greek art, while the lion they face is unusual in Hellenic hunt imagery and recalls the lion hunts of Near Eastern kings as well as those of Alexander the Great in Persia.⁴⁵ The mosaic of Dionysos riding a panther, too, calls to mind Alexander and the east, since the wine-god's eastern triumph was invoked by the Macedonian king as a precedent for his own campaigns.⁴⁶ In both mosaics, the artist struggled with the exotic details; neither feline is especially convincing, most likely because the artist had little personal experience with big cats. But the mosaics nonetheless testify to the importance of such imagery (in each scene, the animal is at the literal center of the image), while also emphasizing how the eastern feline is dominated by more familiar, Hellenic-style men.

As the construction of the andrones at the House of Dionysos suggests, these rooms once held couches, arranged in an interlocking U-shape with the mosaic at the center. If the couches resembled the chryselephantine ones examined in this article, then the floors and furniture of the andrones would have echoed one another in terms of both style and iconography; so, too, the nude pale bodies and vividly colored, expressive faces on the mosaics give us some sense of how the fragmentary ivories might originally have appeared. And the owner of the andrones likely came from the same elite and militaristic social milieu as the deceased in the Macedonian burials described above. Judging from the enormous scale of the house (3,400 square meters), its date in the last quarter of the fourth century BCE, and its programmatic imperial imagery, archaeologists have suggested it belonged to one of Alexander's officers.⁴⁷

Other elite Macedonian residences bear out and extend this pattern. In the House of the Abduction of Helen at Pella, for example, the andrones were decorated with the killing of a stag, with strong iconographic similarities to the lion hunt described above but a more chaotic and dramatic style, along with an image of sexual violence: the rape of Helen by the Athenian hero Theseus (fig. 14).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The men's poses especially evoke the Early Classical Tyrannicides, on which see VINCENT AZOULAY, *The Tyrant-slayers of Ancient Athens: A Tale of Two Statues*, trans. JANET LLOYD, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017; for the lion hunt, see OLGA PALAGIA, « Hephaestion's Pyre and the Royal Hunt of Alexander », in ELIZABETH BAYNHAM, BRIAN BOSWORTH (eds.), *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, p. 167–204.

⁴⁶ STRABO, *Geography* XV.9; ARRIAN, *Anabasis* V.1–2.

⁴⁷ On the scale of the house, see WINTER, « Residential Architecture », p. 263; for the association with one of Alexander's officers, PALAGIA, « Hephaestion's Pyre and the Royal Hunt of Alexander ».

⁴⁸ On the mosaics from the House of the Abduction of Helen, see COHEN, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great*, p. 20–63.



Fig. 14: Stag Hunt from the House of the Abduction of Helen, Pella, c. 325–300 BCE. Universal History Archive/UIG/Bridgeman Images.

While less eastern-focused than the scenes from the House of Dionysos, these mosaics likewise highlighted force and domination, and they too find echoes in the imagery from tombs, for instance, the «Tomb of Eurydice» at Vergina, with a painted scene of the Rape of Persephone adorning its impressive marble throne.⁴⁹ They may also have had a similar patron, since the House of the Abduction of Helen, too, has been dated to the late fourth century and associated with one of Alexander's veterans.⁵⁰

As with the Royal Tombs of Vergina, the palace there testifies both to the closeness of king and officers in terms of their artistic tastes, and to the outsize scale and ambition characteristic of Macedonian royalty. While elite houses

⁴⁹ For the throne from the «Tomb of Eurydice», see PALAGIA, «Alexander the Great, the Royal Throne and the Funerary Thrones of Macedonia», p. 27–29.

⁵⁰ COHEN, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great*, p. 66.

measured about 3,000 square meters and contained one or two andrones, the Vergina palace had a floorplan of 9,450 square meters – three times the size of the Parthenon – and could contain around 224 couches, while the open-air peristyle in the palace’s center could seat as many as 3,000 individuals.⁵¹ Still, Vergina’s andrones, though larger than those of those of the Pella houses, had pebble mosaics with notable similarities, for instance one with curving vegetal ornament that strongly resembled the vines around the Stag Hunt mosaic, and another that archaeologists suggest showed the Rape of Europa (fig. 15).⁵²



Fig. 15. Mosaic with vegetal ornament from an andron at the palace of Vergina, second half of fourth century BCE. © Archivio J. Lange / © NPL – DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

⁵¹ STELLA G. MILLER, « Hellenistic Royal Palaces », in MARGARET MILES (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Architecture*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, Hoboken, NJ 2016, p. 288–299.

⁵² MILLER, « Hellenistic Royal Palaces ».

The Vergina palace has most recently been dated by its excavators to the reign of Philip II, due to analogies in its architectural details with mid-fourth century BCE monuments such as the Mausoleum of Halikarnassos (c. 353–350 BCE).⁵³ But limited finds made it difficult to date the building foundations precisely, and it clearly continued to be inhabited and enlarged over time.⁵⁴ It thus seems possible that the chryselephantine couch whose remains were found in the palace dated to the age of Alexander and his successors, and adorned a room aligned, functionally and stylistically, with the other andrones under consideration here.

Taken as an ensemble, the elite tombs and houses in which the chryselephantine couches were used are highly revealing; they suggest how Alexander's veterans chose to surround themselves with exotic opulence and violent imagery in life and death. Even after returning from their campaigns, these officers ate and drank in rooms dominated by mosaics depicting the killing of animals and the rape of women: themes closely associated, as art historian Ada Cohen has demonstrated, with war and conquest.⁵⁵ They also celebrated Dionysos, god of eastern triumph, on their floor mosaics as well as their precious metal drinking vessels (most often found in tombs, but likely, as with the couches, used in life as well).⁵⁶ And after death, these veterans were buried in chambers bristling with weapons and permeated with militaristic imagery. While the veterans had returned to Macedonia, their houses and tombs suggest that they never really left Alexander's campaigns behind.

III. *Battle and Hunt, Gold and Ivory: The Aesthetics of the Chryselephantine Couches*

The chryselephantine couches that once decorated Early Hellenistic Macedonian tombs and houses are fragmentarily preserved, and it is often difficult to envision the lavish mixed-media ensembles they once were. But the couches of Royal Tomb II at Vergina, with around 4,000 ivory pieces discovered by excavators, suggest their basic visual format and iconography; so, too, do carved and painted marble couches from tombs such as those at Potidaia and Dion that seem intended to emulate the ivory ones.⁵⁷ And paintings like those of Agios Athanasios give precious glimpses of both ephemeral additions – for instance, cushions and

⁵³ ANGELIKI KOTTARIDI, « The Palace of Aegae », in ROBIN LANE FOX (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 BC–300 AD*, Brill, Leiden 2011, p. 302.

⁵⁴ KOTTARIDI, « The Palace of Aegae », p. 301–306.

⁵⁵ COHEN, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great*.

⁵⁶ E.g., the Derveni Krater, for whose lifetime use see BERYL BARR-SHARRAR, *The Derveni Krater: Masterpiece of Classical Greek Metalwork*, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Princeton 2008, p. 180–181.

⁵⁷ For the 4,000 fragments from Royal Tomb II at Vergina, see KOTTARIDI, *Macedonian Treasures*, p. 80; for the marble couches, see SISMANIDIS, *Klines kai klinoeides kataskeues ton makedonikon taphon*.

textiles – and the festive activities the couches were meant to serve. Pulling together these strands of evidence allows for a clearer picture of the chryselephantine couches' original aesthetic impact and their rightful place in Hellenistic imperial art.

The Macedonian couches' overall visual format was clear, consistent, and traditional. They boasted a large wooden frame of about two meters in length, one in width, one in height, covered with ivory, gold, and glass.⁵⁸ At both ends of the couch were flat rectangular legs topped by double ivory volutes curving around transparent glass eyes, and ornamented as well by groups of small rectangular plaques of sandwich glass; elegant, attenuated ivory palmettes; and at their bases slender, tapering, ivory-covered feet (fig. 2). In their ornamental decoration, the Macedonian couches resemble a group of Archaic ones found in the Kerameikos cemetery in Athens, decorated with amber, gold, and ivory and likely used for the burials of high-ranking Lydian ambassadors.⁵⁹ Vase paintings from Archaic and Early Classical Greece also show couches with similar patterns, suggesting a well-established consensus about what a luxury couch should look like in the Hellenic world (fig. 16).⁶⁰



Fig. 16. Hegisiboulos Painter, Athenian red-figure kylix with drinking scene, c. 500 BCE, showing reclining symposiasts on couches. Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.47. Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁵⁸ ANDRIANOU, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 39–43.

⁵⁹ ELENI S. BANOU, LEONIDAS K. BOURNIAS, *Kerameikos*, John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, Athens 2014, p. 119; ELIZABETH BAUGHAN, *Couched in Death: Klinai and Identity in Anatolia and Beyond*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI 2013, p. 61–63.

⁶⁰ HELMUT KYRIELEIS, *Throne und Klinen; Studien zur Formgeschichte altorientalischer und griechischer Sitz- und Liegemöbel vorhellenistischer Zeit*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1969, p. 151–155.

Where the Early Hellenistic Macedonian couches differ from their predecessors is in their extensive figural decoration. While earlier couches had their fronts decorated with simple ornamental friezes (for instance, in the Kerameikos couches, rosettes), the Macedonian ones concentrated their most labor-intensive and technically sophisticated carving there. Indeed, in the reconstructed couch from Royal Tomb II at Vergina, two friezes were juxtaposed: a smaller low-relief band with sedate Dionysiac imagery above, and a much larger, high-relief one below with dramatic scenes of a battle (fig. 2). And the marble couches from sites like Dion and Potidaia employed similar decorative strategies, their fronts adorned with beautifully detailed paintings of the followers of Dionysos or dramatic battle scenes.⁶¹ There are certainly Greek precedents for figurally decorated furniture, for example, Pheidias's chryselephantine Olympian Zeus, whose throne was decorated with Nikai and scenes from Greek mythology (fig. 17).⁶²

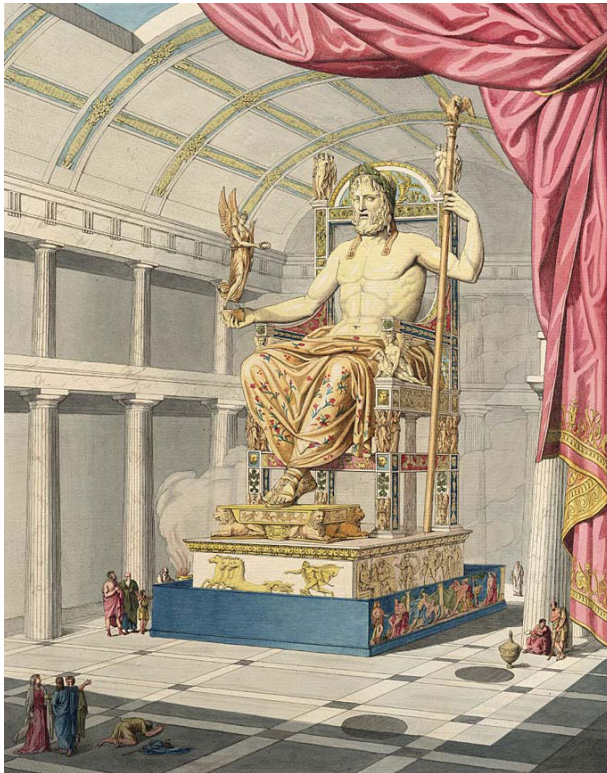


Fig. 17. Reconstruction of the chryselephantine Zeus by Pheidias, Olympia, c. 430–400 BCE. Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons,

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/66/Le_Jupiter_Olympien_ou_l%27art_de_la_sculpture_antique.jpg.

⁶¹ SISMANIDIS, *Klines kai klinoeides kataskuees ton makedonikon taphon*, p. 21–74 (Potidaia), 91–95 (Dion).

⁶² PAUSANIAS 5.11.2.

But it is also worth noting the visual parallels with Near Eastern couches, for instance, the Banquet Relief of Ashurbanipal, with a frieze of rampant lions on the stretcher at the base of the couch, as well as the longstanding and extensive Near Eastern tradition of furniture decorated with figural ivory carving (figs. 18, 19).⁶³



Fig. 18: Ivory furniture plaque with lion-headed figure, Assyrian palace at Nimrud, c. 900–700 BCE; Metropolitan Museum of Art 61.197.12. Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 19. Gypsum relief showing banquet of Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal, Assyrian palace at Ninevah, c. 645–665 BCE. British Museum. Wikimedia Commons https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f1/Assyrian_Relief_of_the_Banquet_of_Ashurbanipal_From_Nineveh_Gypsum_N_Palace_British_Museum_01.jpg/2560pxAssyrian_Relief_of_the_Banquet_of_Ashurbanipal_From_Nineveh_Gypsum_N_Palace_British_Museum_01.jpg.

⁶³ KYRIELEIS, *Throne und Klinen; Studien zur Formgeschichte altorientalischer und griechischer Sitz- und Liegemöbel vorhellenistischer Zeit*, p. 6–23 (Assyrian parallels), 60–62 (ivory decoration on furniture).

The ivory couches' possible Near Eastern precedents were both enhanced and complicated by their iconography. Significant in this regard are the images of Persians – defeated Persians – on some couches' battle scenes.⁶⁴ So, too, the Dionysiac scenes on some couches, like those of the mosaic from the House of Dionysos at Pella, perhaps alluded to Alexander's eastern triumphs (fig 13, 20).⁶⁵ And the griffins on some couches may also have appeared to the officers as connected to their conquests, since these mythological creatures were described in Alexander's day as residing at the ends of the earth, and in particular, in South Asia (fig. 5).⁶⁶



Fig. 20: Ivory image of Dionysos, Ariadne, and a satyr from the chryselephantine couch in Tomb III, Vergina, late fourth century BCE. Museum of the Royal Tombs at Vergina. Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/17/%2B_1977_wurden_die_K%C3%B6nigsgr%C3%A4ber_in_Vergina_entdeckt._19.jpg/2560px-%2B_1977_wurden_die_K%C3%B6nigsgr%C3%A4ber_in_Vergina_entdeckt._19.jpg.

⁶⁴ See Appendix # 19, 32 (?); HARICLIA BRECOULAKI et al., « A Microcosm of Colour and Shine. The Polychromy of Chryselephantine Couches from Ancient Macedonia », *Techne (Paris, France)*, 40 (2014), p. 8–22.

⁶⁵ See Appendix # 3, 20, 22, 25, 32, 33.

⁶⁶ See Appendix # 3, 5, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 33, 37; BRECOULAKI et al., « A Microcosm of Colour and Shine » fig. 12. On griffins in Early Hellenistic art, see HALLIE FRANKS, *The World Underfoot: Mosaics and Metaphor in the Greek Symposium*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 2018, p. 52–55; for their association with South Asia, Ktesias, *Indika* F 45h 26 (cited in AELIAN, *De Natura Animalium* IV.27).

While some scenes on Macedonian couches referenced the east, their iconography and style also connected them to the most up-to-date Greek art. The low-relief Dionysiac friezes included smooth nude youths, chubby erotes, and women with fluttering drapery in the best Late Classical manner, along with satyrs, herms, and images of the god Dionysos himself with more mature and strongly marked features that prefigure the Hellenistic baroque style seen at Pergamon (fig. 20).⁶⁷ The figures from hunt and battle scenes are even more vivid and innovative. The well-preserved heads from Vergina, Lefkadia, Korinos, Phoinikas, and Agios Athanasios all have descriptive, individualized features animated by highly emotive expressions: deeply furrowed brows, uplifted eyes, lips half open as though about to speak (figs. 4, 21, 22).⁶⁸ Their bodies, when preserved enough to judge, reinforce this sense of drama and dynamism. The couches from Vergina, for instance, are full of men on rearing horses, infantry soldiers poised to strike, and even one unfortunate individual sinking before a lion's attack (fig. 2).⁶⁹ And when we can glimpse something of their original coloristic effects through the preservation of paint and gilded wood, the images possess yet more evocative verisimilitude.⁷⁰ They are all the more impressive given that the images are on a minute scale; the ivory heads, for example, are around two inches high.



Fig. 21. Cleanshaven ivory head from a chryselephantine couch in the central chamber of Tomb II, Vergina, c. 336–317 BCE. Museum of the Royal Tombs of Vergina. Universal History Archive/UIG/Bridgeman Images.

⁶⁷ For Late Classical comparanda, see ANDREW STEWART, *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1990, pl. 421–22, 36–37, 509–10, 607; for the Hellenistic baroque see POLLITT, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, p. 111–226.

⁶⁸ See Appendix # 3, 20, 28, 32, 33; BRECOULAKI et al. «A Microcosm of Colour and Shine », fig. 9.

⁶⁹ BRECOULAKI et al., «A Microcosm of colour and Shine », fig. 1.

⁷⁰ BRECOULAKI et al., «A Microcosm of colour and Shine ».



Fig. 22. Bearded ivory head from a chryselephantine couch in the central chamber of Tomb II, Vergina, c. 336–317 BCE. Credit: G. Dagli Orti /© NPL – DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

Two of the ivory heads from Royal Tomb II at Vergina were identified when first excavated as portraits of Philip II and Alexander the Great, and used to label the tomb as that of Philip (figs. 21, 22).⁷¹ At the time of their excavation, the heads appeared unique, distinctive, and certifiably portrait-like: unprecedented objects within the visual culture of late fourth century Macedonia. But as more chryselephantine couches have come to light, the Vergina heads seem more familiar, deploying characteristic visual formulae within set compositions concerning war and hunting.

But if the Vergina heads now appear less original than was initially claimed, they are in no way less meaningful. Rather, the remarkably cohesive visual language to which they belonged was enhanced, indeed, made comprehensible, precisely through repetition. Good comparisons for the couches are the late fourth century BCE Alexander Sarcophagus from Sidon, the hunt painting from Royal Tomb II at Vergina, the domestic mosaics of Pella described above, and the Alexander Mosaic, a Republican Roman work based on a Hellenistic painting.⁷² All these monuments share a dramatic yet descriptive style, with a focus on intense action and emotion combined with meticulously observed details of dress and individualized faces. They also feature repeated visual tropes, for instance, a

⁷¹ ANDRONIKOS, *Vergina: the Royal Tombs and the Ancient City*, p. 129–131.

⁷² Alexander Sarcophagus: KARL SCHEFOLD, MAX SEIDEL, *Der Alexander-Sarkophag*, Propyläen Verlag, Berlin 1968; hunt painting: HALLIE FRANKS, *Hunters, Heroes, Kings: The Frieze of Tomb II at Vergina*, The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Athens 2012; Pella: POLLITT, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, p. 40–42; Alexander Mosaic: ADA COHEN, *The Alexander Mosaic: Stories of Victory and Defeat*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997.

kingly rider on a rearing horse (figs. 2, 23, 24). The visual language is so consistent that it likely goes back to major public monuments. Plausible precedents are the famous paintings and sculpted groups that, according to literary sources, were commissioned by Alexander and his officers. Created by well-known artists such as Lysippos and Apelles, these works were celebrated in their own time and influential for centuries; though later works like the Alexander Mosaic may recall them, all the originals are now lost.⁷³



Fig. 23: Detail, Alexander Mosaic, Pompeii, House of the Faun, late second century BCE. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Campania, Italy/Bridgeman Images

⁷³ Works by Lysippos and Apelles: PLUTARCH, *Alexander* 4.1–2; ARRIAN I.16.4; dedication by Alexander's companion Krateros at Delphi: PLUTARCH, *Alexander* 40.4; PLINY, *Natural History* XXXIV.64.



Fig. 24: Detail, Alexander Sarcophagus, Sidon, late fourth century BCE. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum. © NPL – DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

The loss of these famous works makes monuments like the chryselephantine couches and Pella mosaics all the more important, because they show firsthand what the art of Alexander's age was like. What comparison with other artworks demonstrates is that the couches are by no means anomalous – rather, they are closely integrated into the new visual language of imperial power at the moment of its emergence in late fourth century Macedonia. Their connection to imperial power, so marked in their iconography and style, is also suggested by their materials, above all, ivory.

For Alexander's officers, ivory was an attractive and highly significant medium. In part, the officers appreciated ivory for its cost and rarity; they used it to signal their affluence, in a society that valorized wealth and viewed it as the sign, and the appropriate reward, for heroism.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ ELIZABETH DONNELLY CARNEY, *King and Court in Ancient Macedonia: Rivalry, Treason and Conspiracy*, Classical Press of Wales, Swansea 2015, p. 233–236.

The officers may also have enjoyed ivory's stunning aesthetic qualities. Ivory is soft to carve and yet preserves detail beautifully; it has a creamy appearance, and can be polished to a high sheen. It also holds pigment well, far better for instance than marble, and the Macedonian couches fully exploited the medium for its coloristic effect. Particularly when juxtaposed with the metallic sheen of gold and the glimmer of glass, ivory showed to advantage in the couches of Alexander's officers. With its luminosity and preciousness, it contributed to the ambiance of royal opulence that was the goal of every Hellenistic feast.

Along with its materialistic and aesthetic attractions, ivory connected Alexander's officers with literary and artistic works of the revered past. It was a material celebrated by Homer, for instance in the reins of Mydon, the couch of Penelope, and Odysseus and Penelope's famous bed.⁷⁵ For the Macedonians, these Homeric references served as a model for their lived experience, with the visual evocation of Homer's world enhancing their sense of themselves the true heirs of Ajax, Achilles, etc. And in the Classical era, ivory was associated with the most prestigious sculpted commissions, for instance, Pheidias's Olympian Zeus of the later fifth century BCE (fig. 17).⁷⁶

But while the officers' use of ivory connected them to the past, they could also see in it more contemporary resonances. During their campaigns, the officers had likely observed Near Eastern ivory furniture like that found in the Assyrian palace at Nimrud or the Persian royal capital of Susa; they could thus associate their own luxury objects with the loot they beheld as conquerors (figs. 18, 19).

As these Near Eastern locations suggest, the origin of the material was also significant. Taken from the tusks of African or Asian elephants, or more unusually from the teeth of the Egyptian hippopotamus, ivory originated far away from Macedonia, in regions to which Alexander's conquests gave new access.⁷⁷ And indeed, the officers had firsthand experience with Asian elephants, because they fought against a massive force of war elephants assembled by a king they called Poros at the Jhelum River in what is now Pakistan (fig. 25).⁷⁸ They won, but literary descriptions make clear that it was a brutal and terrifying battle for the Macedonians, with the elephants spearing men with their tusks as well as seizing them with their trunks and trampling them underfoot.⁷⁹ With the officers' experience of this battle in mind, their couches' iconography takes on new

⁷⁵ HOMER, *Iliad* V.583; *Odyssey* XIX.55–58, XXIII.199; KENNETH LAPATIN, *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 15.

⁷⁶ LAPATIN, *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean world*, p. 79–85.

⁷⁷ ANTONIA BOSTRÖM, « Bone/Ivory Carving: Materials and Techniques », in HUGH BRIGSTOCKE (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.

⁷⁸ STRABO, *Geography* XV.9; ARRIAN, *Indica* 1, *Anabasis* V.1–2; JUSTIN, *Epitome* XII.7.6–8; CURTIUS VIII.10; STONEMAN, *The Greek Experience of India: From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks*, p. 189–192.

⁷⁹ ARRIAN V.15.5–7; CURTIUS VIII.14.9–13; DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.87.3–5; ANDREW M. DEVINE, « The Battle of Hydaspes: A Tactical and Source-Critical Study », *Ancient World*, 16/3 (1987), p. 91–112.

significance; their knowledge of the material's origins could only have enhanced the resonances of the violent scenes depicted with it.



Fig. 25: Silver medallion of Alexander the Great showing his battle against King Poros on a war-elephant, c. 326–323. ANS 1959.254.86. Image courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

Likewise inherent to ivory as a medium was eastern conquest. Alexander's victory over Poros did not just open up trade routes; it gave him direct access to elephants because he captured in battle most of his opponent's war elephants.⁸⁰ The king incorporated the elephants into his army and brought them back to Babylon with him, even having them serve as bodyguards around his tent.⁸¹ After his death, the officers continued to encounter elephants, because every self-respecting Hellenistic monarch had elephants in his army.⁸² The elephants were appreciated particularly for their fighting prowess, but after their deaths, their tusks were also valuable. Indeed, one might suggest that the dramatically lower price for ivory by the first quarter of the third century – it drops by about two thirds⁸³ – is due in part to the large number of elephants that entered the Hellenistic kingdoms for war.

The medium of ivory is not always associated with elephants, violence, or eastern conquest. In the massive chryselephantine statues of the Classical era, such as Pheidias's Zeus, one might argue that the source of ivory is irrelevant, that the tremendously sophisticated technical processes of unscrolling, softening, and molding required to create works on such a monumental scale function very effectively to occlude and overcome the material's origins.⁸⁴ So, too, the patrons and viewers of Classical chryselephantine statues rarely had personal experience of elephants, or of the regions of Africa or South Asia from which they came. Those who beheld the Early Hellenistic Macedonian couches, by contrast, had vivid, often

⁸⁰ DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.98.2; ARRIAN, *Anabasis* VII.18.2; HOWARD HAYES SCULLARD, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1974, p. 74.

⁸¹ ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* XII 539f.

⁸² GRAHAM WRIGHTSON, « Macedonian Armies, Elephants, and the Perfection of Combined Arms », in TIMOTHY HOWE, ERIN GARVIN, GRAHAM WRIGHTSON (eds.), *Greece, Macedon, and Persia*, Oxbow Books, Oxford 2015, p. 59–68.

⁸³ LAPATIN, *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, p. 14 n. 97.

⁸⁴ On the technical processes necessary to make these statues, see KENNETH LAPATIN, « Pheidias elephantourgos », *American Journal of Archaeology*, 101/4 (1997), p. 663–682.

traumatic memories of elephants, or were likely related to those who did. And they surrounded themselves with images that directly depicted their eastern conquests, such as battles with Persians, or metaphorically referenced them (hunts, griffins, Dionysos, mythological rapes). For such patrons and viewers, the chryselephantine couches' materials enhanced their association with Alexander's conquests; in this way, the ivories are paradigmatic works of Hellenistic imperial art.

IV. Feasts and Funerals in Early Hellenistic Macedonia

The Macedonian officers' particular world of violent eastern conquest and its aftermath gave rise to ephemeral practices that both recalled and reworked Near Eastern precedents. Two especially stand out: the aristocratic funeral and the courtly feast. To begin with the funeral, as Archaic and Classical cemeteries at Vergina and Sindos attest, Macedonian elites had long buried their dead with rich grave goods, for instance, gold textile ornaments and iron helmets.⁸⁵ But in the era of Alexander's veterans, aristocrats celebrated more elaborate funerals, erected larger, more imposing monuments, and in some cases returned to the grave to perform repeated rituals. For all these practices, they gave a central role to the chryselephantine couches, in ways that expanded and transformed the resonances of these objects for the mourners who viewed them.

In Early Hellenistic Macedonia, the wealthy and powerful began their funerals with the deceased laid on a bier, often one of the chryselephantine couches.⁸⁶ Mourners watched as the dead were transported by cart to the gravesite – in some cases, the wheel ruts of the cart are still visible in excavations – and then, if they chose cremation, to a pyre near the tomb.⁸⁷ There they surrounded the dead with offerings, kindled the flames, and saw the corpse consumed by fire. At length the bereaved doused the flames, washed the bones of the dead in wine (also attested archaeologically), wrapped them in purple cloth, and put them into a vase or chest of precious metal.⁸⁸ They then entered the tomb itself and placed the remains on a second couch, chryselephantine or sometimes stone, and filled the chamber with

⁸⁵ DOROTA GORZELANY, *Macedonia – Alexandria: Monumental Funerary Complexes of the Late Classical and Hellenistic Age*. Archaeopress, Oxford 2019, p. 25–29.

⁸⁶ E.g., ATHANASIA KYRIAKOU, « The History of a Fourth Century BC Tumulus at Aigai/Vergina. Definitions in space and time », in OLIVIER HENRY, UTE KELP (eds.), *Tumulus as sema: Space, Politics, Culture and Religion in the First Millennium BC*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2016, p. 145.

⁸⁷ GORZELANY, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 36 n. 56, 74–76.

⁸⁸ GORZELANY, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 74 n. 205.

grave goods (fig. 1).⁸⁹ For inhumation, the ritual was simpler, but similar; the deceased was brought to the tomb in the same way, placed on a couch, and given gifts. After the funeral, many tombs were covered with huge burial mounds – the non-royal Stenomakri Tumulus at Vergina, for example, was 44 m long, 25 m wide, and 5 m high – but a passageway was preserved so that mourners could return to bring offerings, or other family members could be buried in the same tomb or nearby.⁹⁰ All this was done in a spectacular and highly public manner, outside the city walls but close by, and often along a major thoroughfare.⁹¹ Macedonian elites thus celebrated their dead in a very prominent way and for what was likely a broad audience; the effort and expense they lavished on their funerals demonstrated their wealth and increased their prestige in what was, by the Early Hellenistic age, an extremely competitive aristocracy.

Early Hellenistic Macedonian aristocrats were able to commemorate their dead with such lavish funerals due to the wealth that flowed from their imperial conquests. Only those with extraordinary fortunes could contemplate putting into tombs so much precious metal – contemporary Athenian graves have just a few clay vessels⁹² – or covering them with such enormous, labor-intensive earthworks. In burying the dead, Macedonian elites used their wealth partly to emulate Homeric heroes, with their pyres evoking, for instance, the famous funeral of Patroklos in the *Iliad*.⁹³ But they also likely took inspiration from the places they had conquered. Their tumuli, for example, resemble those of Lydia in southwestern Turkey, their barrel-vaulted chamber tombs evoke Egyptian architecture, and their graves' elaborate facades, with columns and doors, recall rock-cut tombs in both western Turkey and the Persian heartland.⁹⁴ So, too, their burial with couches, unusual for Macedonians before the Early Hellenistic era,

⁸⁹ For the choice of chryselephantine or stone couches, see DIMITRA ANDRIANOU, « Chairs, Beds, and Tables: Evidence for Furnished Interiors in Hellenistic Greece », *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 75/2 (2006), p. 241.

⁹⁰ For the dimensions of the Stenomakri Tumulus, see KYRIAKOU, « The History of a Fourth Century BC Tumulus at Aigai/Vergina », p. 144; for mourners returning to the tomb, GORZELANY, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 68.

⁹¹ GORZELANY, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 47.

⁹² SANNE HOUBY-NIELSEN, « Revival of Archaic Funerary Practices in the Hellenistic and Roman Kerameikos », *Proceedings of the Danish Institute of Archaeology*, 2 (1998), p. 130.

⁹³ HOMER, *Iliad* XXIII.1–897.

⁹⁴ Tumuli: RICHARD LIEBHART, LUCAS STEPHENS, « Tumulus MM: Fit for a King », in C. BRIAN ROSE, GARETH DARBYSHIRE (eds.), *The Golden Age of King Midas*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2016, p. 28–39; barrel-vaults: VON MANGOLDT, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur: Die Makedonischen Kammergräber und ihre Vorläufer*, p. 21; rock-cut tombs: JANOS FEDAK, *Monumental Tombs of the Hellenistic Age: A Study of Selected Tombs from the Pre-Classical to the Early Imperial Era*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, CA 1990, p. 96–101 (western Turkey); ERICH FRIEDRICH SCHMIDT, *Persepolis*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1953, vol. III (Persepolis).

finds close parallels in Achaemenid Turkey, where tombs with stone couches arranged as for a banquet are remarkably similar to the later Macedonian ones.⁹⁵

A final source of inspiration for Alexander's officers was the burial practice of their king himself. Given his many battles, Alexander performed frequent funerals for the war dead; he also conducted lavish public ceremonies for several of his officers who grew ill and died.⁹⁶ Most prominent was that of the king's closest companion and lover Hephaestion, whose funeral pyre in Babylon was described by literary sources as gargantuan, enormously expensive, and decorated with a mix of traditional Hellenic and Near Eastern imagery.⁹⁷ The king's officers are even said to have brought portraits in gold and ivory to the pyre, a detail that suggests how appropriate such materials could be to honor the dead.⁹⁸ For their own funerals, Macedonian aristocrats did not emulate Alexander precisely – the iconography of their paintings and sculptures, for instance, remained far more resolutely Hellenic – so, too, they borrowed eclectically from a range of Near Eastern and Homeric burial practices. And they made all these borrowed elements serve highly Macedonian ends, enhancing their reputation in an era of high-stakes competition for imperial power.

In their feasts as in their funerals, Macedonian aristocrats drew on a range of traditional precedents to serve the goals of their particular historical moment. They looked, to begin with, to the well-established institution of the Greek symposium. As in southern Greece, Macedonian elite men attended feasts and respectable women were likely excluded, although there might be some courtesans or flute-players (fig. 10).⁹⁹ The Macedonians also emulated Greek models in their drinking vessels: large open ones for mixing wine and water, ladles for pouring, sieves for the lees, and wide shallow bowls or smaller deeper cups for individual consumption.¹⁰⁰ In these ways, Macedonian feasts closely resembled Greek symposia as regards material culture – albeit on a grander, more costly scale – but how people behaved at the feasts was rather different. The Greek drinking party had a strongly egalitarian ethos, at least among aristocratic male participants; guests shared the same wine, took turns speaking, and felt themselves strongly bound to other members of the group.¹⁰¹ Due to their larger

⁹⁵ BAUGHAN, *Couched in Death*, p. 272.

⁹⁶ E.g., DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.87 (war dead); ARRIAN VI.2 (funeral of high-ranking general Koinos).

⁹⁷ ARRIAN VII.14.8–9; DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.115.1–6; PLUTARCH 72.3–4; WILHELM VÖLCKER-JANSSEN, *Kunst und Gesellschaft an den Höfen Alexanders d. Gr. und seiner Nachfolger*, Tuduv, München 1993, p. 100–116; PALAGIA, «Hephaestion's Pyre and the Royal Hunt of Alexander».

⁹⁸ ARRIAN VII.14.9; DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.115.1.

⁹⁹ On women at the Macedonian symposium, see CARNEY, *King and court in Ancient Macedonia*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁰ GILL, «Inscribed Silver Plate from Tomb II at Vergina»; KOTTARIDI, *Macedonian treasures*, p. 98–105.

¹⁰¹ KATHLEEN LYNCH, «The Hellenistic Symposium as Feast», in FLORIS VAN DEN EIJNDE, JOSINE H. BLOK, ROLF STROOTMAN (eds.), *Feasting and polis Institutions*, Brill, Leiden 2018, p. 234–238; MAREK WECOWSKI,

scale and courtly nature, Macedonian feasts had a less democratic character, though they still served to connect the king and his followers, especially since freedom of speech was encouraged at them.¹⁰²

Another difference from Greece particularly concerns couches. In Macedonia, reclining on couches was a closely guarded privilege. According to the Greek historian Hegesander, guests could not adopt it until they had killed a boar without a net, a dangerous and difficult endeavor.¹⁰³ Those who had not managed this feat – women, who were excluded from hunts, as well as adolescents and a few unlucky adult males – sat upright (fig. 26). Everyone noticed; Kassander, a prominent aristocrat in the court of Alexander and a subsequent ruler of Greece and Macedonia, famously had to sit upright and uncomfortable into his mid-thirties.



Fig. 26. Terracotta banquet scene of a wedding, showing a seated bride and reclining husband along with two figures of Eros, third to second century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 2016.253. Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

« When Did the Symposium Die? On the Decline of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet », in VAN DEN EIJNDE, BLOK, STROOTMAN (eds.), *Feasting and polis Institutions*, p. 257–262.

¹⁰² EUGENE BORZA, « The Symposium at Alexander's Court », *Ancient Macedonia*, 3 (1993), p. 54–55; CARNEY, *King and Court in Ancient Macedonia*, p. 242–243.

¹⁰³ ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* I.18a.

In their extravagance and rather hierarchical nature, Macedonian feasts were less like Greek symposia, and more like the royal banquets of the Persians. At Persian feasts, the Great King asserted his power through the seating chart and even the furniture. According to Xenophon, the Persian king gave the seats closest to him to those he wished to reward most, and altered seating arrangements as courtiers rose or fell in his favor.¹⁰⁴ And he made his precedence clear at drinking parties, when even the most powerful nobles sat on the ground, while he reclined on a couch with feet of gold.¹⁰⁵ The Great King's food, too, signaled court hierarchy and regal power. The best was consumed by the king himself, as Greek visitors to the court enviously noted; he even had water brought from the Choaspes River near Susa, far-famed for its exceptional purity.¹⁰⁶ The Persian king also offered his top guests exotic meats – for instance, Arabian ostrich – and rare spices such as cumin and saffron.¹⁰⁷ In doing so, his banquets displayed the extent of his empire and his command of resources; foods from outside the realm were rigorously excluded because, in the words of historian Pierre Briant, «the king does not buy, he takes».¹⁰⁸

A final noteworthy characteristic of Persian feasts was the extraordinary number of guests. Cuneiform tablets recording what was «consumed before the king» include massive amounts of provisions, for instance, 1,224 head of sheep or goats, 126,100 quarts of flour, and 12,350 quarts of wine.¹⁰⁹ Though not all food was consumed onsite – guests were expected to take home considerable quantities for their dependents – these must have been feasts on an astonishing scale.

Alexander's officers had likely experienced both Greek symposia and Persian royal banquets, but the feasts they were most familiar with were those of the king himself. Alexander was famous for the scale and quality of his banquets, with hundreds or even thousands of guests, exotic foods, free-flowing wine, and entertainment from philosophers, poets, musicians, and actors.¹¹⁰ In their

¹⁰⁴ XENOPHON, *Cyropaedea* VIII.4.3, 5.

¹⁰⁵ ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* IV.145c.

¹⁰⁶ HERODOTUS I.188.

¹⁰⁷ Ostrich: ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* IV.145e; cumin and saffron: POLYAENUS, *Strategms* IV.3.32.

¹⁰⁸ BRIANT, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, p. 200.

¹⁰⁹ Sheep or goats: Persepolis Fortification Tablet 0696; flour: Persepolis Fortification Tablet 0701; wine: Persepolis Fortification Tablet 0728; on the figures see WOUTER F.M. HENKELMAN, «'Consumed before the King'. The Table of Darius, that of Irdabama and Irtaštuna, and that of his Satrap, Karkiš» in BRUNO JACOBS, ROBERT ROLLINGER (eds.), *Der Achämenidenhof. Akten des 2. internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema 'Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen,' Landgut Castelen bei Basel, 23.-25. Mai 2007*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 679.

¹¹⁰ CARNEY, *King and Court in Ancient Macedonia*, p. 225–264; BORZA, «The Symposium at Alexander's Court»; ANTONY SPAWFORTH, «The Court of Alexander the Great between Europe and Asia», in ANTONY SPAWFORTH (ed.) *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 97–101.

elaboration, their rituals, and even their seating arrangements, the king's dinners recall Persian precedents.¹¹¹ They also align very closely with anthropologist Michael Dietler's concept of the «empowering feast», that is, an occasion where food, drink, furniture, etc., are used to acquire social capital. As Dietler stresses, such feasts often occur in societies where political roles are fluid, and where hosting is a way for powerful individuals to acquire the authority necessary to lead.¹¹² The literary sources suggest that Alexander sought to use feasts in just this way; the enormous numbers of guests, huge quantities of food, and opulent settings of his banquets are best understood as instrumental to his efforts.

Alexander's example proved attractive for the king's successors in their own struggles for power, for instance, in a feast given by the king's former bodyguard Peukestas at Persepolis in 317 BCE. At the feast, Peukestas provided meat and drink for the entire army, arranged in circles and with the top officers reclining on couches in the center next to altars for the gods as well as for Alexander and Philip.¹¹³ In its scale and hierarchical arrangement, Peukestas's feast recalled both those of the Great King and Alexander's own efforts; it was intended as a bid for supreme command of the army, though in the end it did not succeed.

While Peukestas's feast took place in Persepolis – making its evocation of Achaemenid practices particularly appropriate – there is also some evidence for Alexander's Persian-style banqueting customs being deployed in Macedonia. Particularly striking in this regard is the literary description of a wedding feast given by the Macedonian aristocrat Karanos, perhaps a descendent of Alexander's officer of the same name, in the early third century BCE. According to the description, Karanos fed his guests course after course of meat, fish, and wild game; gave each of them costly gifts, such as silver cups, gold bowls, and ivory baskets, as well as huge amounts of food to take home; and provided flute-players, singers, harpists, dancers, and naked acrobats for entertainment.¹¹⁴ In all this,

¹¹¹ AELIAN, *Varia Historia* VIII.7; ARRIAN VII.4; ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* XII.538b–539a; DIODORUS SICULUS XVII.107; PLUTARCH, *Alexander* 70.2, *Moralia* 329e; BRIAN BOSWORTH, « Alexander and the Iranians », *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 100 (1980), p. 10–14; BRANKO VAN OPPEN DE RUTTER, « The Susa Marriages – a Historiographical Note », *Ancient Society*, 44 (2014), p. 25–41; CORINNA HOFF, «The Mass Marriage at Susa in 324 BC and Achaemenid Tradition », in SIMO PARPOLA, ROBERT M. WHITING (eds.), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001* Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki 2002, p. 239–244.

¹¹² MICHAEL DIETLER, « Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts », in MICHAEL DIETLER, BRIAN HAYDEN (eds.), *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa 2010, p. 76–82.

¹¹³ DIODORUS XIX.22.1–3; MATTHEW CANEPA, *The Iranian Expanse: Transforming Royal Identity Through Architecture, Landscape, and the Built Environment, 550 BCE–642 CE*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2018, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* IV.128a–130e; ANDREW DALBY, « The Wedding Feast of Caranus the Macedonian », *Petits propos culinaires*, 29 (1988), p. 37–45.

Karanos's feast recalled those of Alexander and the Persian king, and it was famous in its day and for centuries afterwards. At the same time, it differed in its scale, with a mere twenty guests, and in its egalitarian treatment of those invited. As such, it suggests what Macedonian aristocrats found attractive in Alexander's feasts, for instance their abundance, entertainment, and gift-giving, and also what they rejected: hierarchy, the isolation of guests from the host.

V. Conclusions

As this article has demonstrated, in the Early Hellenistic era, Macedonian aristocrats took inspiration from the Near East – mediated by Alexander – to celebrate «empowering feasts» and also what might be termed «empowering funerals», since these occasions, too, were used to acquire social capital. In doing so, they show the complexities of knowledge transfer in an age of conquest.

To judge from their ephemeral practices, Macedonian elites learned from and appreciated some aspects of the feasts and funerals of those they conquered. And they emulated them back home in Macedonia, so that even those who had not themselves participated in Alexander's campaigns (for instance, the younger Karanos), retained the knowledge gained from the wars. At the same time, the Early Hellenistic aristocrats' emulation of Near Eastern practices was highly selective, and meant to serve decidedly Macedonian goals. In this way, they exhibited a freedom and creativity in their knowledge transfer that reflected their position as conquerors.

Appendix

CATALOGUE OF MACEDONIAN IVORY COUCHES

Because bone and ivory can appear very similar, and in some cases the same object has been identified differently by various scholars, I am including here all couches that appear to use ivory, with the acknowledgement that some may in fact be created with the less expensive and more accessible medium of bone. The published couches so far include:

- 1) Abdera, fragmentary ivory decoration of ivy and ornamental reliefs from a pit grave in the area of Xyrovisti, dated to the last quarter of the fourth century BCE. Dimitra Andrianou, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2009, p. 44; Dina Kallintzi, « Abdera: sostikes anaskaphes sto plasisio tou anadasmou agroktmeatos Belones », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 9 (1998), p. 450.
- 2) Agia Paraskevi near Thessaloniki, small plaques of ivory and glass beads from a Macedonian double chamber tomb dated to the end of the fourth century. Julia Vokotopoulou, *Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Thessalonike*, Kapon Editions, Athens 1996, p. 98; Kostas Sismanidis, *Klines kai klinoeideis kataskeues ton makedonikon taphon*, Tameio Archaialogikon Poron kai Apaollotrioseon, Athens 1997, p. 169–171; Hans von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur: Die Makedonischen Kammergräber und ihre Vorläufer*, Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, Tübingen 2012, p. 63–66.
- 3) Tomb III at Agios Athanasios, fragments of two ivory beds with griffin heads and those of young men along with 18 glass plaques from a Macedonian chamber tomb dated to the fourth quarter of the fourth century BCE. Maria Tsimbidou-Avloniti, « Oi Taphikoi tymboi tes periokhes Ag. Athanasiou Thessalonikes (1992–1997): Ereuma kai prooptikes », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 10a (1997), p. 432; Tsimbidou-Avloniti, *Makedonikoi taphoi*, p. 104–105, 161–165, fig. 21; Hariclia Brecolaki, « ‘Precious colours’ in Ancient Greek Polychromy and Painting: Material Aspects and Symbolic Values », *Revue Archéologique*, 1 (2014).
- 4) Tomb II at Agios Athanasios, glass and ivory fragments from a single chamber grave in the same tumulus as Tomb III, dated to the end of the fourth century BCE; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 47–48; Maria Tsimbidou-Avloniti, « ‘Larnakes eis agureein’ », in Dimitrios Pandermalis (ed.), *Myrtos: Mneme Ioulaias Bokotopoulou*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 2000, p. 563–566; Andrianou, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 44.

- 5) Grave 1 from Tumulus A at Aineia, ivory, glass and stucco decoration including the head of a griffin and ornamental reliefs, dated to the end of the third quarter of the fourth century BCE. Andrianou, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 46; Dorota Gorzelany, *Macedonia – Alexandria: Monumental Funerary Complexes of the Late Classical and Hellenistic Age*, Archaeopress, Oxford 2019, p. 42, n. 84 (bone); Julia Vokotopoulou, *Hoi taphikoi tymboi tis Aineias*, Tameio Archaialogikon Poron, Athens 1990, p. 16–22, esp. 19–20 (ivory), 131–35, pl. 9a.
- 6) Grave 2 in Tumulus A at Aineia, fragments of figural, floral, and architectural motifs of ivory from a cist grave dated to the third quarter of the fourth century BCE. Andrianou, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 46; Vokotopoulou, *Hoi taphikoi tymboi tis Aineias*, p. 22–49, esp. 28–30 (ivory), pl. 17–19.
- 7) Grave 3 from Tumulus A at Aineia, ivory or bone and glass fragments from a cist grave dated to the beginning of the third quarter of the fourth century BCE. Andrianou, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 46; Vokotopoulou, *Hoi taphikoi tymboi tis Aineias*, p. 49–77 esp. 84, fig. 43 and pl. 52; Gorzelany, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 36, n. 55.
- 8) Grave 4 from Tumulus B at Aineia, ivory, bone, and glass fragments from a cist grave dated to the late third quarter of the fourth century BCE. Andrianou, *The furniture and furnishings of ancient Greek houses and tomb*, p. 46; Vokotopoulou, *Hoi taphikoi tymboi tis Aineias*, p. 19–20, 78–85, pl. 9:a, y, 10:a; Gorzelany, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 36, n. 56.
- 9) Tomb TVII at Amphipolis-Kastas, fragments of bone inlay from a cist grave dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Staurovoula Samartzidou, « Nea euremata apo tis nekropoleis tes archaias Amphipolis », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 1 (1988), p. 329; Gorzelany, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 45, n. 102.
- 10) Tomb A from Derveni, with fragments of wood, glass, bone, and ivory from a cist grave dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Gorzelany, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 37, n. 70; Vokotopoulou, *Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Thessalonike*, p. 215; Petros Themelis and Iannis Touratsoglou, *I taphoi tou Derveniou*, Tameio Archaialogikon Poron kai Apallotriozeon Diethnes Demosieumatou, Athens 1997, p. 28–60, 193–94.
- 11) Tomb 4 at Dion, ivory fragments of an equestrian battle scene and glass inlays from a Macedonian chamber tomb dated to the late third century BCE; Dimitrios Pandermalis, « Ancient Dion: A chronicle of the excavations », in Dimitrios Pandermalis (ed.), *Gods and Mortals at Olympus: Ancient Dion, City of Zeus*,

Onassis Foundation, New York 2016, p. 20; Sismanidis, *Klines kai klinoeideis kataskeues ton makedonikon taphon*, p. 147–149; Hariclia Brecolaki, *La peinture funéraire de Macédoine: emplois et fonctions de la couleur IVe-IIe s. av. J.-C.*, Centre de recherches de l'antiquité grecque et romaine, Athens 2006, p. 249–151; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 128–129.

- 12) Macedonian chamber tomb at Giannitsa/Mesiano, ivory fragments and glass plaques and palmettes, dated to the end of the fourth to early third century BCE. Pavlos Chrysostomou, « Ho Makedonikos taphos Giannitson », *To Archaïologiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 7 (1997), p. 127; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 198–200.
- 13) Grave 1, Katerini, gold, silver, and ivory fragments from a two-room chamber tomb dated to the second quarter or second half of the fourth century BCE. Aikaterini Despini, « Ho Taphos tes Katerines », *Athens Annals of Archaeology*, 13 (1980), p. 198–209; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 53–55.
- 14) Grave 8 at Alykes-Kitros, ivory fragments from a cist grave dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE. Matthias Besios, *Pieridōn Stephanos: Pydna, Methōnē kai hoi archaiotētes tēs voreias Pierias*, Katerini, A.Ph.E 2010, p. 238.
- 15) Grave 13 at Alykes-Kitros, ivory fragments including heads and limbs as well as glass decoration from a cist grave dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE. Matthias Besios, « Anaskaphes sten Pydna (1988) », *To Archaïologiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 2 (1988), p. 189–190.
- 16) Grave 29 at Alykes-Kitros, ivory fragments from a cist grave dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE. Besios, *Pieridōn Stephanos: Pydna, Methōnē kai hoi archaiotētes tēs voreias Pierias*, p. 238–239; Matthias Besios, « Anaskaphes ste Boreia Pieria (1992) », *To Archaïologiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē* 6 (1992), p. 247.
- 17) Grave 38 at Alykes-Kitros, ivory fragments from a theke grave dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE. Besios, *Pieridōn Stephanos*, p. 238.
- 18) Grave 71 at Alykes-Kitros, ivory fragments from a cist grave of the last quarter of the fourth century BCE. Besios, *Pieridōn Stephanos*, p. 236–237.
- 19) Macedonian tomb of Tumulus B at Korinos, with ivory fragments of a battle between Macedonians and Persians from a chamber tomb dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Matthias Besios, « Anaskaphes ste Boreia Pieria (1992) », p.177; Brecolaki, « 'Precious colours' in Ancient Greek Polychromy and Painting: », p. 14–15; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 159–160.

- 20) Tomb of the Palmettes at Lefkadia, ivory fragments of a battle scene in high relief as well as lower relief vegetal ornament, palmettes, erotes, maenads, a satyr, and a herm of Dionysos from a chamber tomb dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Rhomiopoulou, *Das Palmettengrab in Lefkadia*, p. 89–91, pl. 3.1, 18.2, 22.
- 21) Tomb of the Judgment at Lefkadia, ivory fragments and glass plaques from a couch or throne from a double chamber tomb dated c. 300 BCE. Andrianou, *The Furniture and Furnishings of Ancient Greek Houses and Tombs*, p. 45; Liana Stefani, « He anaskaphes ston prothalamo tou taphou tes kreiseos Lefkadias », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 12 (2000), p. 419; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 177–181.
- 22) Grave 2 at Methone Palaiokatakhas, ivory fragment of a seated maenad from a cist grave dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE. Besios, *Pieridōn Stephanos*, p. 309.
- 23) Grave 3 at Nikisiani, bone and glass remains from a cist grave dated to the late fourth to early third century BCE. Demetre Lazaride, Katerina Rhomoiopoulou, and Ioannis Touratsoglou, *Ho Tymbos tes Nikesianis*, Athenais Archaialogike Hetaireia, Athens 1992, p. 26–31 (grave goods), 57–61 (coins); fig. 9–10, pl. 13–15.
- 24) Grave 1 at the East Nekropolis of Pella, bone fragments including a griffin battle with a stag as well as glass from a cist grave dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Maria Lilimbaki-Akamatis, «Anatoliko nekrotapheio Pellas. Anaskaphe 1989», *Arkhaiologikon Deltion: Meletes*, 44–46, A (1989–1991), p. 78–79.
- 25) Grave 10 at the East Nekropolis of Pella, bone and glass appliqués with a Dionysiac scene as well as a griffin battle with a stag in a cist grave dated to the end of the fourth to beginning of the third century BCE. Gorzelany, *Macedonia – Alexandria*, p. 31, n. 37; Lilimbaki-Akamatis, « Anatoliko nekrotapheio Pellas. Anaskaphe 1989 », p. 98 (couch), p. 94–98 (grave goods and drawing of grave); Maria Lilimbaki-Akamatis, « Apo te diakosme ton nekrikon klinon », *Athens Annals of Archaeology*, 22, no. 1989 (1995).
- 26) Grave 2 from Pella-Ampelia, bone fragments of heads and limbs as well as glass decoration from a cist grave dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Pavlos Chrysostomou, « Anaskaphikes ereunes tous tymbous tes Pellas kata to 1995 », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 9 (1995), p. 143–145, fig. 2, pl. 1.2–6.
- 27) Grave 6 near the Macedonian tombs of Pella, glass and bone decoration from a cist grave dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Pavlos Chrysostomou,

- « Anaskaphikes ereunes tous tymbous tes Pellas kata to 1994 », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 8 (1994), p. 65–67, fig. 5, pl. 26.
- 28)** Tomb VI at Phoinikas, three couches preserved in fragments of glass and ivory including multi-figured scenes and griffins as well as glass rosettes and plaques from a Macedonian tomb dated to the beginning of the last quarter of the fourth century BCE. Maria Tsimbidou-Avloniti, « Anaskaphikes ereunes ston Phoinika N. Thessalonikes, 1987–2006 – Mia eikosaetia anatropon », *To Archaialogiko Ergo ste Makedonia kai ste Thrake* (2009); Maria Tsimbidou-Avloniti, *Makedonikoi taphoi ston Phoinika kai ston Agio Athanasio Thessalonikes. Symbole ste melete tes eikongraphias ton tapikon mnemetes Makedonias*, Tameio Archaialogikon Poron kai Apallotrioseon Diethunse Demosiematon, Athens 2005, p. 39–44, 70–71, 75–79, pl. 19–21; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 262–265.
- 29)** Grave 4 at Phoinikas, ivory fragments of griffins attacking another animal from a cist grave dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE. Maria Tsimbidou-Avloniti, « Thessalonike 2005: Kleinontas (?) palious logariasmous », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 19 (2007), p. 203–205.
- 30)** Tomb C at Sedes, an ivory or bone multi-figure frieze with divinities including Demeter or Hekate as well as gold glass plaques, from a tomb dated to the last quarter of the fourth century BCE. Gorzelany, *Macedonia - Alexandria*, p. 29, n. 26; Vokotopoulou, *Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Thessalonike*, p. 186–188; Despina Ignatiadou and Bettina Tsigarida, *The Gold of Macedon*, Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens 2000, p. 59.
- 31)** Macedonian chamber tomb at Toumba Paionia, with bone heads and plaques as well as glass remains from a chamber tomb dated to the end of the fourth century BCE. Thome Savvopoglou, « Ho B' taphikos tymbos tes Toumbas Paionias », *To Archaialogiko Ergo stē Makedonia kai Thrakē*, 6 (1995), p. 427, fig. 3; Gorzelany, *Macedonia - Alexandria*, p. 32, n. 41–42.
- 32)** Royal Tomb II at Vergina, four gold, glass, and ivory couches, including one in the main chamber with a lion hunt scene in high relief and Dionysiac scenes in low relief; one in the antechamber with a battle scene as well as griffins attacking prey, erotes, maenads, satyrs, and a Nike driving a chariot, and two more fragmentary couches used for the cremation from a chamber tomb of controversial date, but likely in the last quarter of the fourth century BCE. Angeliki Kottaridi, *Macedonian Treasures: A Tour through the Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai*, trans. Alexandra Dumas, Kapon Editions, Athens 2011, p. 38–105 (couches p. 80–89); von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 275–280.

- 33) Royal Tomb III at Vergina, gold, glass, and ivory fragments showing Dionysiac scenes as well as griffins from a chamber tomb dated to the last quarter of the fourth century BCE. Gorzelany, *Macedonia - Alexandria*, p. 73; Kottaridi, *Macedonian Treasures*, p. 106–125.
- 34) Royal Tomb IV at Vergina, ivory fragments of a multi-figured scene from a Macedonian double chamber tomb dating c. 300 BCE. Kottaridi, *Macedonian Treasures*, p. 22–23; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 284–285.
- 35) Heuzey Tomb A at Vergina, ivory and glass inlay from a piece of furniture, likely a couch, from a cist grave dated to the late third quarter of the fourth century BCE. Gorzelany, *Macedonia - Alexandria*, p. 29, n. 23; Stella Drogou, « Vergina – Hoi taphoi Heuzey », *Egnatia*, 5 (1995), p. 232–238; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 61–62.
- 36) ‘Tomb of Eurydice’ at Vergina, gold and ivory remains from a Macedonian chamber tomb of disputed date, either c. 340 BCE or early third century. Olga Palagia, « Alexander the Great, the royal throne and the funerary thrones of Macedonia », *Karanos*, 1 (2018), p. 28; Angeliki Kottaridi, « L’épiphanie des dieux des Enfers dans la nécropole royale d’Aigai », in Sophie Deschamps-Lequime (ed.), *Peinture et couleur dans le monde grec antique*, 5 Continents, Milan 2007; von Mangoldt, *Makedonische Grabarchitektur*, p. 291–294.
- 37) Grave G from the Stenomakri Toumba at Vergina, fragments of ivory ornament as well as gilded clay beads and relief terracottas with griffins attacking prey from a cist grave dated to the mid-fourth century BCE. Athanasia Kyriakou, « The History of a Fourth Century BC Tumulus at Aigai/Vergina. Definitions in Space and Time », in Olivier Henry, Ute Kelp (eds.), *Tumulus as sema: Space, Politics, Culture and Religion in the First Millennium BC*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2016, p. 145.
- 38) Grave A from the Stenomakri Toumba at Vergina, ivory and stucco fragments from a pit grave dated to the later fourth century BCE. Kyriakou, « The History of a Fourth Century BC Tumulus at Aigai/Vergina », p.146.

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