

A Burial and A Bronze

Two recent announcements of archaeological finds again demonstrate the contribution of archaeology to our understanding of past cultures. The first report was made by Manolis Andronikos of the University of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece: in a small village about eight miles from the town of Veria, a team of archaeologists have excavated what they believe to be the tomb of King Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. The tomb apparently has remained sealed and intact since Philip's death by assassination in 336 B.C., and contains a treasure of artefacts easily comparable with those from the very famous tomb of King Tut of Egypt.

Finds so far announced include a solid gold chest which held the remains of Philip, ivory busts of the royal family, sculptured silver vases, gold-rimmed body armour, diadems of gold and silver, and also a gold laurel wreath. Even the remains of Philip's royal spear were found: as Professor Andronikos stated, "The spear had been placed against the wall, and as the wood disintegrated the iron head became stuck in the tomb wall and is still lodged there." Undoubtedly, this excavation will occupy archaeologists for years to come, and we will eagerly await the complete publication of all the finds.

The second report is not as exciting, but of great value in helping us understand the technology of ancient Greece. The large-scale bronze statues of ancient Greece are well known and appreciated, but we know relatively little about how they were produced. A new find in the Agora at Athens, however, promises to make the casting process used by the Greeks much more clear.

As Carol Mattusch has reported in a recent edition of Archaeology (September 1977), an actual pit used by an Athenian artist for casting a large bronze statue has now been identified by the American School of Classical Studies. This pit, on the western side of the Agora, is roughly rectangular, measuring 1.70 x .60 meters; it is approximately .85 meters deep. Within the pit were found several pieces of the actual terracotta mold used in creating a statue of a young man, 2/3's life size. This bronze was probably made in the following way: first a clay core was roughly fashioned by the artist; this core was then covered with wax carved carefully in the form of the desired statue. Over this wax model clay molds were next fashioned; the complete model was then baked over a fire so that the wax melted and escaped, leaving a full clay mold around the clay core. This was put into the casting pit, and packed with sand to hold it steady. Then molten bronze was poured into the mold to cast the actual statue.

This "Agora Kouros", as it is now called, was apparently cast in two sections: one separate mold for the head, and one mold for the rest of the figure. The statue itself is no longer extant, probably having been destroyed in the Persian sack of Athens in 480 B.C. But, as Mattusch writes, "ironically, when the mold and the debris from the casting were thrown back into the discarded pit and covered over, a more lasting record of the statue than its original form was inadvertently preserved."