



Golden necklace
Detail of the Scythian riders

scythian heralds

from the Hermitage to the Acropolis Museum

For the year 2016 Greece and Russia are programming a series of cultural events aimed at strengthening the traditional bonds of friendship and collaboration between the two countries. These events include archaeological exhibitions which will provide both the Greek and Russian public with the opportunity to become acquainted with important cultural aspects of the two countries. The exhibitions will commence with two introductory initiatives: the presentation of a marble statue of the Archaic Kore 670 from the collection of the Acropolis Museum at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Russia, and the exhibition of three golden Scythian finds from the Hermitage collection in the Acropolis Museum.

The three objects, two vessels and a piece of jewelry are part of a unique Scythian grave context that was discovered in 1830 in the royal tumulus Kul Oba in Crimea. The tumulus dates to the second half of the 4th cent. BC and contained the graves of a man and a woman together with a young servant. The grave also included horses' remains and luxurious offerings, most of which are artworks of high artistic value.

The Scythians were a nomadic tribe living in the Steppes north of the Black Sea. They developed a close relationship in commercial affairs with the Greek colonies of the Black Sea, where the masterpieces presented in the Acropolis Museum originated from. Valuable information regarding the Scythian way of life, their beliefs, ceremonies and myths are brought to us through the Greek historian Herodotus, who visited part of their vast country in the middle of the 5th cent. BC. In his lifetime, the leading social class of the Scythians was already captivated by Greek philosophy and art.

The **golden necklace**, *strepton periauchenion* (*twisted torque*) as the ancients called it, was found in the principal burial. It was wrapped around the neck of the man whose body was laid in a wooden sarcophagus. The necklace is made of six intertwined twisted metal strands decorated at their end with miniature statues in the form of Scythian riders. The riders are fastened on the necklace with a central hoop decorated with palmettes and spirals that are highlighted with blue and green enamel. The decoration with the riders is considered unique. The necklace was made in a Greek workshop with a theme chosen to please the Scythian nobleman who it was made for.

The **golden phiale** found near the sarcophagus belongs to the same deceased man. The entire surface of the vessel is decorated with intricate ornaments in relief: rows of fish and dolphins leaping in the water, Medusas' heads with writhing snakes in place of hair, bearded heads of Scythians in pointy hats, bees, and heads of boars and panthers. In ancient Greece these phiale with a central small cavity were used for libations. To the Scythians, however, they were objects of power connected with local myths concerning the origin of their kings from Heracles. According to Herodotus, Heracles bestowed his belt upon his son Scythes, where a phiale was attached. Scythes became the first king of Scythia and all the kings that succeeded him used to hang a phiale from their belt. The two attachment hoops which are preserved on the phiale from the Hermitage Museum seem to support this tradition.

The **golden vessel**, decorated with warriors in relief, was discovered near the woman's remains. One scene depicts two Scythians holding spears and a third tightening a string on his bow. Next to them a kneeling warrior is examining his companion's tooth while another is tending to his friend's wounded leg. The Greek artist reproduced the traditional nomadic clothing and armory on this vessel with unsurpassed precision. The scene of the Scythian tying the string on the bow is associated by some scholars with the myth recounted by Herodotus, according to whom the Scythian throne would be given to the son of Heracles who would be able to string his father's bow.



Golden vessel
with scenes depicting warriors

scythian heralds

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March 11th - October 2nd, 2016