

# Gold in ancient Macedonia and Thrace: Mining activity and archaeological findings

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## ABSTRACT

Gold was one of the first metals used by man, already from early prehistory. Excavated cemeteries, especially of the Classical and Hellenistic era, in Macedonia, Greece regularly display remarkable numbers of gold jewellery. The large numbers raise the question regarding the sources of gold used for their production. Ancient writers (Herodotus, Plinius, Strabo) as well as recent archaeometrical and mineralogical researches provide ample information regarding the presence of gold deposits in Macedonia and Thrace and the intensive exploitation of several of them in antiquity. On this account, we argue that the gold used for the manufacturing of some of the excavated jewellery has most likely originated from ore deposits located in Northern Greece and not from Near Eastern sources (Egypt, Persia), as it is often suggested.

In the framework of this issue a research project aiming at the identification and study of the ancient mines in Macedonia and Thrace mentioned by ancient writers has been carried on since 1978. The goals of the program embrace the study of mining techniques, the dating of the mining activity and the determination of the chemical and isotopic composition of the ore. Besides, a collaborative project between the Department of Mineralogy-Petrology-Economic Geology and the Ephorates of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the Museums in Macedonia and Thrace has been developed to analyze gold jewellery from recent excavations, dating from the prehistoric to the Hellenistic period. The aim of the project is to determine the chemical composition and the manufacturing techniques of the gold artifacts and to investigate the sources of the metal.