

Miniature Objects from the Archaic Tombs of Macedonia

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***Abstract:** A number of miniature objects in the shape of carts, tables, chairs, spits and spit holders have been found inside archaic tombs in the region of Macedonia. Their signification is difficult to determine as many different hypothesis have been formulated. However, it would seem that they were used as both status and gender markers. Most of these objects were made out of iron, but some bronze examples have also been found.*

Key words: miniature objects, iron, bronze, archaic tombs, Ancient Macedonia

Miniature metal objects were found only in very rich archaic burials in Macedonia to this date¹. Model carts, tables and chairs were often made out of iron rods folded and soldered together. It is the case of the miniatures found in the Sindos cemetery in tombs n°25, 52, 59, 65 and 115². However, the table and chair from tomb n°52 were made out of thin bronze blades and it seems that the table in tomb n°279 of the Archontiko necropolis was made out of bronze while its chair was in iron³. In any case, the similarity of material used in all these cases would possibly indicate that they were not only used as a set but also fabricated as such. Cooking spits were made of small iron rods, they were sometimes accompanied by cooking spit holders which probably helped to identify their function. This paper will attempt to summarise all the known examples of such miniature objects, their function and symbolic meanings. The catalogue from the exhibition on *Sindos* was the main source for the study of these objects as it is the most complete publication to date⁴.

The most striking particularity about these miniature objects is that they seem to constitute funerary sets. Each of these sets is composed of a cart, a three-legged table and a chair. Whenever one of these objects is excavated in a tomb, the others are also present. Likewise, no example of multiple objects in the same tomb have been found to date. The only exception to this rule is tomb n°65 from Sindos, for which there is no indication of a miniature cart in the publications. This particularity would indicate that the choice of objects accompanying the dead carried significant importance. As for the miniature cooking spits, there aren't many publications of

¹ The term Macedonia will only be used here as a geographical region. The geographical limits chosen here apply only to the period studied and are based on the similarity of the objects found in these areas. Its precise limits are hard to define and it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss them.

² See the catalogue from the exhibition in Thessaloniki: DESPOINI *et al.* 1985

³ CHRYSOSTOMOU and CHRYSOSTOMOU 2003 p.513, it might also be the case of tomb n°131, but the publication is not precise enough

⁴ The complete publication of the finds from Sindos should be published shortly, it will surely be an invaluable addition to this study

such finds. It is believed that they were only present in “male-type” tombs⁵. However, their presence might have been more difficult to detect as they were constituted of small iron rods which could have oxidized and disappeared. Therefore, their connection to the other miniature objects is difficult to determine.

Tables and chairs as status markers

The shapes of the tables and chairs are of particular interest. It is widely accepted that during the Archaic period furniture was scarce in homes⁶. Tables and chairs were not widespread and were not associated frequently⁷. Tables came in different shapes, they could be oblong, circular or rectangular and were generally made of wood or bronze⁸. However, it would seem that circular and oblong tables were more recent than rectangular ones⁹. Three-legged tables were the most common type in antiquity as they were steadier on uneven ground than four-legged tables¹⁰. Rectangular tables are often depicted on vases as low tables used during the meals to support dishes and food¹¹. Rarely to support any other type of object. It would have been common to sit at the table at the time of Homer¹². However, reclining became a rule later and couches were used in most of the greek *poleis*. Tables were low in order to be pushed under the couches when not in use¹³. They could also be simply carried out. Reclining was not practiced everywhere as people seemed to eat in a sitting posture in Crete and Macedonia for instance¹⁴. Sitting also appears to have been more commonplace in poorer houses.

Chairs were not a common type of furniture. The type of chair represented by the miniature objects is four-legged with a flat backrest. There aren't many known representations of such chairs in antiquity¹⁵. It appears that stools were more common¹⁶. Four legs were probably not very practical on uneven floors, even for miniature objects. The chair in tomb n°25 from Sindos has longer front legs folded in a way to make it more stable¹⁷. As for the flat backrests, they seem to have had different styles. The chair in tomb n°52 from Sindos has three vertical elements instead of two¹⁸. These chairs could be seen as a simplified, less elaborate version of

⁵ This is suggested by CHRYSOSTOMOU and CHRYSOSTOMOU 2007 p.117

⁶ RICHTER 1966 summarises the different types of furniture in ancient Greece and Etruria and presents their main types. Very few other studies on furniture in antiquity are known as very little remains survived. We assume that the furniture used in Macedonia must probably have been similar to the furniture depicted on the black-figure and red-figure vases which were used by G..M.A. Richter to establish her categories. The study of ancient furniture has been pursued recently by some scholars among which the work of D. Andrianou should be noted. Unfortunately, she focuses mostly on the Classical period onwards.

⁷ RICHTER 1966 p.63-72 suggests that tables were only used during meals for the support of dishes and food.

⁸ RICHTER 1966 p.65-66

⁹ ANDRIANOU 2009 p.50

¹⁰ RICHTER 1966 p.67 , ROLLEY 1984 p.36

¹¹ RICHTER 1966 p.63 , ANDRIANOU 2009 p.51

¹² RICHTER 1966 p.64

¹³ ANDRIANOU 2009 p.50

¹⁴ RICHTER 1966 p.64

¹⁵ RICHTER 1966 p.13, 33 chairs have a curving back on most representations, they were could bare many names: *κλισμός*, *ανάκλισμος*, *κλισία* or *κλιντήρ*

¹⁶ RICHTER 1966 p.13 Stools were apparently also used in Macedonia and Thrace for the placement of offerings or vessels contained cremated individuals. Remains of a wooden stool were found in a fourth century B.C. tomb, see ANDRIANOU 2009 p.27-28

¹⁷ DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.170

¹⁸ DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.241

the *thronos*¹⁹. We can assume that such chairs should indicate the presence of a person of high social rank²⁰. The fact that there is always only one chair may suggest that it was destined to a particular person, presumably, the deceased.

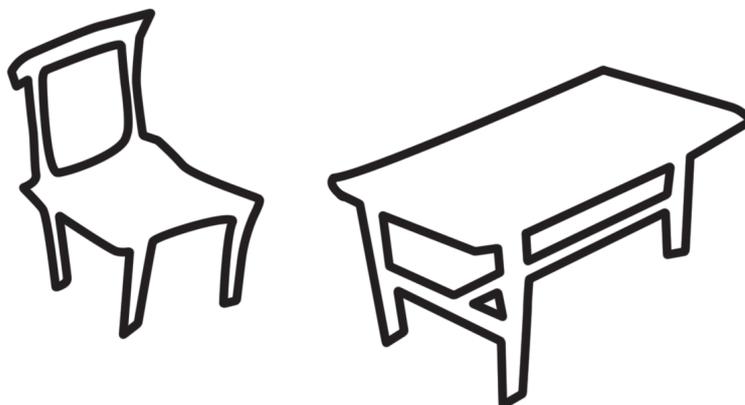


Fig. 1: Bronze table and chair from Sindos tomb n°59, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki

It seems that in Macedonia it was customary to eat in a sitting position²¹, so the interpretation of the presence of tables and chairs could either be of a reference to a normal meal or to a ritual one. It could be for instance interpreted as a reference to the ritual of *kathedra*²². It consisted of a last meal that was shared between the participants of the funerary rituals in which they were seated on chairs instead of being reclined on *klinai*. In this case, the miniature objects placed inside of the tomb could be reminders of that last meal or a means for the deceased to take part in it in a symbolical way²³. It was also suggested that miniature objects could be of use to the deceased in their afterlife²⁴.

Miniature rectangular tables and chairs are extremely rare in other regions so we may assume this to be a particularly local custom. However, we should bear in mind that there is always the possibility that such objects did exist elsewhere but were made out of perishable material hence would not have left any physical traces²⁵.

Miniature rectangular terracotta tables are occasional finds in Cyprus²⁶. A miniature bronze throne was also found in Cyprus, on the site of Enkomi²⁷. They do not seem to be linked to the miniature tables found in Macedonia neither by shape nor by function²⁸. Two miniature seats made out of lead were found in Stageira (in the Halkidiki peninsula)²⁹. Miniature lead

¹⁹ RICHTER 1966 p.13-15 we should also note that marble thrones became part of the furniture of later tombs in Vergina, see ANDRIANOU 2009 p.27

²⁰ RICHTER 1966 p.13 indicates that most chairs are associated with high rank, see also ANDRIANOU 2009 p.27

²¹ RICHTER 1966 p.64, Athenaios I, r8a we should bear in mind that Athenaios lived during the second century A.D., hence we cannot be certain of which custom was really used during the archaic period.

²² ROLLEY 1984 p.36-37, GARLAND 1985 p.40-41

²³ DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.84

²⁴ DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.84, GARLAND 1985 p.70

²⁵ Again, let's not forget the wooden stool from ANDRIANOU 2009 p.27-28

²⁶ RICHTER 1966 p.67, figs.345-346

²⁷ RICHTER 1966 p.13-15 fig.6

²⁸ These came from old excavations with no information of the place in which they were found therefore we cannot assume that they had a funerary function

²⁹ ANDRIANOU 2009 p.25-26, figs.4a, 4b, 5a and 5b

tables were discovered at Delos in domestic context and were interpreted as offering tables³⁰. D. Andrianou suggests that they might have had a similar function as the tables from Sindos which would be, according to her, either reminiscent of domestic cults or toys destined for children³¹.

Carts as gender markers

Miniature carts found in tombs of archaic Macedonia have an interesting peculiarity. They seem to have been used not only as status markers but also as gender markers. Two-wheeled carts have only been found in “male-type” tombs while “female-type” tombs contained four-wheeled carts.

female-type grave	male-type grave
four-wheeled cart	two-wheeled cart
table, chair	spits table, chair

Fig.2 Miniature objects found in male-type and female-type graves

In the Sindos cemetery, two-wheeled carts were found in tombs n°25, 52, 59 and 115 while four-wheeled carts were found in tombs n°28 and 67³². In the Archontiko cemetery, two-wheeled carts were found in tombs n°9, 131, 145, 194, 258A, 279, 280, 283, 358, 410, 417, 443, 692, 741 and 742. Four-wheeled carts were found in tombs n°197, 198, 262, 458, 465 and 712³³.

According to E. Chrysostomou, the same differentiation occurs at the cemeteries of Aiani, Vergina and Edessa³⁴. Most of the carts found were made out of iron, their average width in Sindos is of 16cm and their average length 30cm including the yoke. There is no significant difference in size between the two-wheeled and the four-wheeled carts. Every cart is unique in its shape: some are quite plain while others are more elaborate. The cart from tomb n°52 at Sindos, made out of bronze blades, bears a back seat³⁵. The cart from tomb n°28 seems to have had a covering lid³⁶.

The reason why miniature carts were used as gender markers remains unknown. It is suggested throughout the Archontiko publications that four-wheeled carts were related to agricultural chariots while two-wheeled ones represented military carts³⁷. However, the only

³⁰ ANDRIANOU 2009 p.52

³¹ The interpretation of toys for miniature objects was originally made at Sindos when some of these objects were discovered in the tomb of a child (tomb n°59). However, if we examine the rest of the offerings inside this tomb, it becomes clear that this child was not buried in a way to mark his status of child but in the same manner of the other adult individuals. Tombs containing children are rare at Sindos, it seems that children were buried elsewhere or treated in a different way at death with very few exceptions. These exceptions seemed to have acquired a status equal to the other adult individuals.

³² DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.183-184, 273

³³ CHRYSOSTOMOU 2009 p.116

³⁴ CHRYSOSTOMOU 2009 p.124

³⁵ VOKOTOPOULOU 1996 p.135 The cart from tomb n°25 might also have had one, see DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.173

³⁶ VOKOTOPOULOU 1996 p.143

³⁷ See also GINOUVES and AKAMATIS 1993 p.34

visible difference between the two types being the number of wheels, we should be cautious when trying to find its meaning. Both types may have been used for everyday practical purposes, they could also be of use in the afterlife of the deceased³⁸.

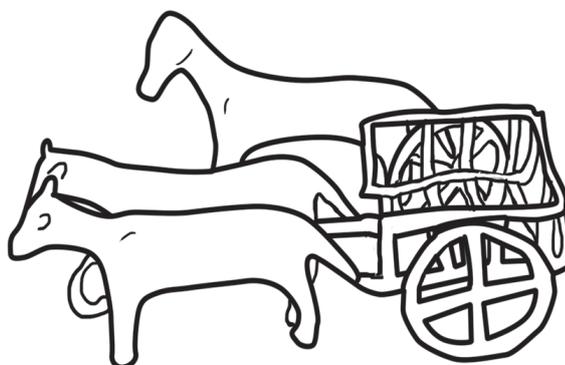


Fig. 3: Iron cart and terracotta miniature horses from Sindos tomb n°59, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki

Carts could convey a number of different interpretations. They could be a reference to the ritual transport of the dead from their home to the cemetery³⁹. They could also symbolize or facilitate the journey of the soul from this life into the afterlife⁴⁰. The use of carts in funerary rituals and processions is well established since the ninth century B.C. through its representation on attic vases⁴¹. It would seem that the carts used during processions, weddings and funerals were plain vehicles used in everyday life⁴². However, it would seem that horses were preferred to pull the cart on ritual occasions while oxes and mules were used on a more daily basis. This is confirmed by the fact that small terracotta horses were found in tombs n°59 from Sindos and n°9 from Archontiko⁴³.



Fig. 4: Main scene of a red-figure pyxis representing a wedding procession on a two-wheeled cart drawn by horses, National Museum of Athens

³⁸ GINOUVES and AKAMATIS 1993 p.34

³⁹ THEODOSSIEV 2000 p.190, VOKOTOPOULOU 1996 p.115, DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.104

⁴⁰ THEODOSSIEV 2000 p.190

⁴¹ KRUTA 2000 p.537, BOARDMANN and KURTZ 1971 p.60 It should be noted that wedding scenes depicted on vases often depict two-wheeled carts. On earlier geometric vases from the Dipylon however, it is unclear if the carts used during the funerary games in honour of the deceased were either two-wheeled or four-wheeled.

⁴² LORIMER 1903 p.136-137

⁴³ DESPOINI *et al.* 1985 p.104-105, CHRYSOSTOMOU and CHRYSOSTOMOU 2001 p.487

Horse representations are often found inside tombs, it seems that this animal carried a number of social and religious meanings in funerary context⁴⁴. They were particularly linked to the elites and appeared in tombs of both genders. The funerary function of horse-drawn carts during antiquity is also represented in a small terracotta model found in attica on the site of Vari. It is dated from the middle of the seventh century B.C.⁴⁵. It depicts a four-wheeled cart carrying a coffin and three mourners followed by a person riding a horse. The coffin is covered by a cloth and a small bird on top of it could represent the soul of the deceased departing.

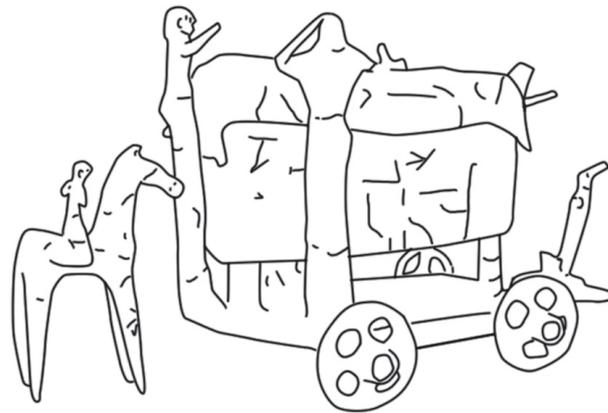


Fig. 5: Terracotta model of a funerary cart from Vari, no indication of its current location (published in GARLAND 1985, p. 33)

Cooking spits as possible gender markers

Miniature cooking spits are the most difficult items to study. This is mostly due to the fact that they were constituted by small iron rods which suffered from oxidizing in the tomb. They are seldom found on different excavation sites both in Greece and in iron-age graves from central Europe⁴⁶. The oldest known examples found in funerary context were made of bronze and were found in a tomb dating from the Geometric period from Palaepaphos, Cyprus⁴⁷. Iron spits were deposited in tombs between the tenth and the eighth centuries B.C. in Crete⁴⁸. They were also found in «warrior-type tombs» from Cyprus and Argos⁴⁹. This would support the idea that spits were closely linked to rich male graves in those areas. However, most a number of spits were commonly found in sanctuaries, sometimes linked to remains of animal sacrifice. They were often found in groups of 3, 5, 6, 12 or 18⁵⁰.

In tomb n°25 from the Sindos cemetery, there were seven spits measuring around 30cm in length deposited on a pair of iron spit holders. Tomb n°59 contained six spits held together by thin blades. Tomb n°65 also contained six spits but those are currently in a very bad state of conservation. They were also held by spit holders.

⁴⁴ LANGDON 2003 p.11

⁴⁵ BOARDMANN and KURTZ 1971 p.78, GARLAND 1985 p.32

⁴⁶ BRUN 2004 p.58 considers they are present in the two richest grave-offering categories of european protohistory

⁴⁷ VON REDEN 1997 p.159

⁴⁸ VON REDEN 1997 p.159

⁴⁹ BOARDMANN and KURTZ p.211

⁵⁰ VON REDEN 1997 p.160

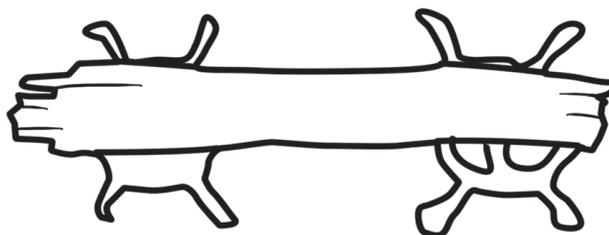


Fig. 6: Seven iron spits and pair of spit holders from Sindos tomb n°25, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki

Conclusions

Miniature objects found in tombs of Archaic Macedonia were not only status markers but also gender markers. They stressed out the importance of the person present in the tomb and allow us to make different hypothesis regarding their interpretation. The presence of all these objects in tombs is often considered as unique by excavators. However, even if it is difficult to find parallels with surrounding civilisations, if we disregard the difference in size, the presence of carts, spits and tables can also be attested in cart-burials for instance⁵¹. This type of graves spreaded throughout central Europe during the sixth century B.C. and contained numerous grave offerings like metal vases, weaponry and jewellery⁵². It is difficult to say whether there was a similar association of two-wheeled carts and four-wheeled carts with male and female graves as publications are not always precise on this matter. However, it would seem that it was more of a chronological matter as most of the four-wheeled cart burials were dated between the seventh and the sixth centuries B.C. while two-wheeled cart burials were mostly dated from the fifth to the fourth centuries B.C.⁵³.

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⁵¹ ROLLEY 1984 p.36 evokes this similarity

⁵² KRUTA 2000 p.537

⁵³ ELUERE 1985 p.144-146

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