

Hellenistic Jewelry & the Commoditization of Elite Greek Women

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Abstract: *The paper concentrates on Hellenistic jewelry, which dates from the fourth to first century BCE, and strives to answer the question: how do the different decorative functions of Hellenistic jewelry represent the various roles and social obligations of its elite Greek female wearers? Four thematic parallels exist between jewelry and women, including beauty, sexuality, fertility, and wealth. To examine these connections, this paper studies classical literary sources that focus on female sexuality and the social expectations of women. Examples include segments taken from the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, the poetry of Sappho and Ibycus, an epithalamium, and Plutarch's Life of Demetrius. The content of these sources are extracted and compared to the decorative functions of four Hellenistic jewelry pieces, which include an embellished necklace, pair of Eros earrings, diadem, and jewelry set. Based upon the research, physical attributes of Hellenistic jewelry reflect the responsibilities of elite Greek women to groom their appearance, be sexually desirable, produce legitimate heirs, and demonstrate wealth and prestige. By analyzing these similarities, one becomes aware of the extreme commoditization of ancient Greek women.*

As a staple of material culture, jewelry appears in the archeological record of almost every culture. Worn primarily for the purpose of self-adornment, it exists as a luxury object, owned by the financially affluent members of society. Despite this seemingly superficial purpose, ornamentation fulfills a multitude of functions and expresses a wealth of information and insight pertaining to its wearer and his or her designated culture. This paper concentrates on Hellenistic jewelry, which dates from the fourth to first century BCE, and strives to answer the question: how do the different decorative functions of Hellenistic jewelry represent the various roles and social obligations of its elite Greek female wearers? With the examination of four Hellenistic gold jewelry pieces and a selection of ancient Greek literary sources, this paper argues that four thematic parallels exist between jewelry and women, including beauty, sexuality, fertility, and wealth. Indeed, the jewelry not only reflects these themes, but also reinforces the ideologies of its wearer. The organization of this paper divides into four sections, each tackling one of the four themes. The sections analyze separate jewelry forms, including an embellished necklace, pair of Eros earrings, diadem, and jewelry set, and incorporate ancient literary sources written by poets and historians to examine the four parallels.

At its most basic level, jewelry represents an embellished object, meant to reflect trends in beauty and style. This emphasis on external appearance mirrors the pressures placed on ancient Greek woman to encapsulate contemporary ideals of beauty. Deduced from a reading of ancient Greek literary sources, a woman's attractiveness ranked as a highly valued asset, and to enhance physical appeal, a woman could ornament herself with jewelry. To analyze the parallel between the inherent aesthetic appeal of jewelry and an ancient Greek woman's need to present herself as attractive, this section focuses on a fourth-century BCE gold necklace and a selection of classical literary sources, including the poetry of Sappho and an excerpt from the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*.

Measuring eighteen centimeters in length, the 350 BCE gold necklace embodies a rosette and lotus-palmette design with seed-like and female head pendants (Figure 1). The preserved necklace band consists of eight lotus-palmette and fourteen rosette pieces, which alternate at the necklace center. Three tiers of petals comprise the rosettes, with each petal crafted from sheet gold and distinguished by a spiral-beaded wire border. The lotus-palmette design consists of

double palmettes with enclosed lotus leaves and a rosette at the center. Small head pendants, molded from sheet gold, hang beneath each lotus leaf. The rosettes suspend six larger female head pendants, which alternate with eight seed-like pendants. Each seed-like pendant takes the shape of an almond and includes a repoussé, or hammered design, patterned to resemble the cupule and outer scales of a seed. Molded from sheet gold and decorated with filigree, the female head charms represent generic women wearing earrings, necklaces, and headbands. Two heads incorporate bull horns and ears, which designate the figures as the priestess Io.¹

The aesthetic qualities of this necklace represent stylistic trends popular within the repertoire of Hellenistic Greek jewelry.² Artistic techniques utilized to shape the piece, like filigree and die-form, represent systems of decoration in vogue during the Hellenistic period. The filigree technique, used to embellish the female head pendants, involves the shaping of fine metal wires to create intricate designs. Die-form, a technique used to mold gold sheet, helped to form the majority of the necklace pieces. When comparing the necklace to the other jewelry pieces discussed in this paper, the viewer will notice a uniformity of the pieces. In other words, similarities in technique, materials, and iconography connect most of the jewelry. Due to stylistic similarities, the group testifies to an all-encompassing preferred aesthetic style, which establishes a standard of relative beauty. The repetitive utilization of physical attributes demonstrates the popularity of specific characteristics, suggesting a culturally constructed artistic jewelry style.

Similar to how jewelry trends signify a relative aesthetic, the standards for female beauty also change according to the historical period and culture. Based upon ancient Greek literary sources and art, personal adornment served as a popular method of beautification during ancient Greece. Although written during the late seventh and early sixth century BCE, the cultural influence of Sappho's poetry maintains a lingering presence, lasting well into the later Hellenistic period. Focusing on themes of love and female sexuality, several poems prescribe certain beauty tips and tricks. For example, an excerpt from one poem reads, "my mother once told me that in her youth it was considered elegant for a girl to put her hair up in a purple headband (47)"³ This text illuminates a mother and daughter relationship, in which the mother suggests personal ornamentation to help beautify her daughter into an elegant and attractive young lady.

As the embodiment of ideal physical beauty, Aphrodite serves as an even greater mentor of female beautification.⁴ Ancient Greek women recognized Aphrodite as a role model and learned how to emulate her process of *kosmesis* (adornment) by studying feminine toiletries that illustrate the primped goddess. A bronze mirror, dating to 350 BCE, depicts Aphrodite and Eros leisurely fishing in a natural setting (Figure 2). Aphrodite wears an assortment of jewelry, which includes bracelets, a necklace, and heavy drapery, that all have the power to beautify her appearance and arouse desire. Contrary to permanent physical features, like bone structure or eye color, jewelry represents an asset that an individual could obtain. Therefore, the iconography of these toiletries truly functions as a type of guideline for elite Greek women on how to become more attractive. An excerpt from the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* details how Aphrodite physically prepares herself before meeting her love interest Anchises. After bathing and

¹ Williams and Ogden, *Greek Gold*, 205.

² Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery*, 155.

³ Sappho, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 47.

⁴ Phoebe C. Segal, "The Paradox of Aphrodite: A Philandering Goddess of Marriage," *Aphrodite and the Gods of Love* (2011): 76.

anointing her skin with oil and perfume, “she wrapped all her beautiful clothes around her skin. She was decked out in gold (#64-65).”⁵ As the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite had the authoritative power to persuade women that they too could look like a goddess, so long as they could afford the proper adornment.

The gold necklace’s incorporation of bejeweled female head pendants best illustrates the parallel between the aesthetic value of jewelry and the expectation for women to enhance their physical appearance. Two specific pendants refer to the mortal priestess Io. According to mythology, Zeus saw the beautiful Io, and overtaken with lust and desire, abducted her, but had to quickly disguise her as a heifer to prevent Hera from discovering the affair.⁶ As a mortal who tempted Zeus with her physical assets, Io embodies ultimate beauty. Therefore, by incorporating her image into an actual jewelry piece, it reinforces and strengthens the allure of the necklace simply by association. The remaining ornamented female head pendants serve as self-referential devices to the wearer. As an inherently beautiful object, by incorporating pendants of ornamented women, the necklace associates itself to the practice of wearing jewelry. And by adorning herself with jewelry that directly refers to Io and her own decision to wear jewelry, the wearer links herself to the innate beauty of jewelry and to the legendary beauty of Io. Therefore, this necklace exemplifies the similarity between the attractiveness of jewelry to the physical charm of women.

The repertoire of Hellenistic Greek jewelry iconography did not limit itself to floral motifs, but also included anthropomorphic figures and deities. Eros, the god of love and desire, frequently materializes in the form of earring and finger ring jewelry. The iconography of Eros, a figure heavily embedded with notions of eroticism, forms a parallel to a Greek woman’s sexuality. By incorporating images of Eros into her appearance, a Hellenistic Greek woman expresses her sexuality and desire for Eros’s assistance in pursuing lovers. An examination of the historical and cultural context of Eros, extracted from ancient Greek lyric poetry, and a formal analysis of a pair of Eros earrings helps to explore this parallel.

From an historical and cultural perspective, Eros maintains a strong presence in Greek mythology. Although his form and creation story evolves with the changing phases of Greek culture, his identity as a god that inflames hearts with love and passion remains constant. *The Theogony of Hesiod*, written in the eighth century BCE, narrates the creation of the cosmos, listing Eros as the third primordial god and the, “Fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them.”⁷ By the fourth century BCE, Eros no longer represents a divine abstraction, but embodies the offspring of Ares and Aphrodite.⁸ Born from the goddess of love, Eros inherits her aptitude for manifesting violent physical desire in the hearts of mortals and gods. Throughout Eros’ evolution, a certain playfulness and obliviousness to the severity of his powers characterizes his persona. A seventh-century BCE poem written by Alcman reads, “It is not Aphrodite but wild Eros who plays like a child, as he comes down over the topmost flowers of the clover – touch them not, I beg.”⁹ By comparing delicate flowers to the hearts of lovers, this poem illustrates the careless nature of Eros, who mindlessly treads down flowers like his victims of heartache.

⁵ “*Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*,” University of Houston, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/aphrodite.html>.

⁶ “Io,” last modified April 25, 2001, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/io.html>.

⁷ Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 87.

⁸ “Eros,” last modified March 2, 2006, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eros.html>.

⁹ C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry: From Alcman to Simonides* (Oxford: At the

Greek literature suggests that ancient Greeks recognized love as something forced upon them by an external entity. Love, often coupled with intense feelings of anguish and frustration, was not always a pleasurable or reciprocated experience. As evident in ancient Greek literature, love has the power to bend an individual's perception and force them to take great emotional risks. Therefore, great hesitation and precaution characterize an encounter with Eros. Ibycus, a sixth-century BCE Greek lyric poet, muses about the irresistible allure of Eros.

Yet again Love
with melting looks beneath dark eyelids
drives me with manifold charms into the Cyprian's boundless net.
ah, I tremble at his approach,
as a champion horse bearing its yoke in old age
goes unwillingly with its swift car to the race.¹⁰

In this poem, Ibycus paints himself as the prey of Eros' hunt. Rather than utilize his bow and arrow, Eros charms the victim with his gaze and tries to lure him into a net. Ibycus responds with apprehension because he understands the danger in falling for Eros's trap. Despite his unwillingness, Ibycus cannot escape this divine intervention and falls victim to the irresistible allure of love.

By the fourth-century BCE, changes in artistic representation occurred which altered the traditional form of Eros.¹¹ The innovation most influential to Eros involved the development of intricate small-scale and three-dimensional sculptures. Miniature Eros sculptures functioned as jewelry charms and were sometimes used for cult practices. A pair of earrings excavated from Palaiokastron and dating to the second century BCE exemplifies this new form of representation (Figure 3). Made from gold and embellished with garnets, the earrings focus on the theme of love and sexuality. Suspended by a short chain, a winged and chubby young Eros charm dangles beneath each earring disc. Both figures play different instruments and wear a long sleeved Phrygian garment, which billow open to expose their chest and genitals. While one clashes a pair of castanets, the other plays a stringed instrument called a cithara. Two longer chains hang on either side of both figures, which end in a garnet shaped to resemble a pomegranate seed. The metal piece that holds the chains consists of upper and lower gold discs inlaid with garnets. While four pins, which originally secured small pearls, flank the upper discs, two rounded extensions, supporting a pearl, flank the lower disc.

Given the attributes of Eros, he represents an ideal jewelry subject worn to reflect the female wearer's inner erotic desires. During the Hellenistic period, changes in religious practices occurred which promoted a more personal relationship with the gods.¹² Young women, in hopes of obtaining a husband, focused on Eros and Aphrodite. To ensure the assistance and support of the gods, women dedicated various offerings to designated temples. Apart from her prayers and offerings, a woman possessed an additional resource – a trinket as religious and powerful in nature: her Eros jewelry.¹³ As these Eros charms suspended beneath her ears, the power of Eros

Clarendon Press, 1961), 32.

¹⁰ Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 263.

¹¹ Monica M. Jackson, *Hellenistic Gold Eros Jewellery: Technique, style and chronology* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006), 52.

¹² Jackson, *Hellenistic Gold Eros Jewellery*, 53.

¹³ Christine Mitchell Havelock, *Hellenistic Art: The Art of the Classical World from the Death of Alexander the Great to the Battle of Actium*, (New York: W W Norton & Company Incorporated, 1981), 225.

joined her in a quest for sexual satisfaction. As a final iconographic comment, the two Eros featured on the earrings play musical instruments, referring to the deity's ability to enchant the senses with music and induce intense longing.¹⁴ Eros beckons hearts by playing sweet melodies, similar to how sirens have the power to seduce sailors with their songs. This external attribute reflects a woman's ability to foster attention through bodily ornamentation. As a form of beautification, Eros jewelry enhances the physical attractiveness of its wearer and showcases her interest in erotic pursuit. Therefore, the wearer takes the form of an alternative Eros, who lures her prey with her beautified image and sexual suggestions.

The iconography of Hellenistic jewelry often incorporates vegetal motifs, reflecting the Greek value on fertility and a royal Greek female wearer's obligation to produce heirs.¹⁵ Fertility arises as a common theme in antiquity. It signifies the growth and prosperity of a society, abundance in food and water, and a strong dynasty. The birthing of legitimate heirs represents a chief responsibility for royal Greek women. Elizabeth Carney describes the practice of polygamy within Macedonian royalty, arguing that it maximized the production of legitimate heirs and gave rulers more options for establishing political alliances.¹⁶ The accumulation of wives for the purpose of making more heirs reinforces the utilitarian value of women and children because royal children had the potential to establish political alliances through their arranged marriages. A large family also signifies health and wealth because extra mouths require more resources. Therefore, childbirth resonates prosperity and the promise of a strong political dynasty.

A fourth-century BCE wedding song translated from an ancient Greek papyrus housed in the John Rylands Library reads, "now may the gods give you harmony, and may you soon have children, and the children of those children, and reach a ripe old age."¹⁷ Focusing on the theme of fertility, this epithalamium demonstrates the importance of childbirth within a marriage. By requesting divine interference to ensure harmony and an abundance of offspring, the song suggests that frequent childbirth indicates a healthy and loving marriage. The author's choice of the word "ripe" reminds the reader of the association between fertility and fruit. Fruit, which carries seeds and helps to nourish populations, functions as an ideal symbol of fertility, abundance, and motherhood. Represented by fruit and vegetal iconography, fertility exists as a popular theme of Hellenistic jewelry.

An embellished gold diadem, dating to the late third century BCE, exemplifies this fertility trend (Figure 4). Measuring 18.5 centimeters in length and 2.5 centimeters in width, the fragment constitutes approximately half of its original form. The piece consists of intricate gold metal work and carnelian and glass inlay to form a busy decorative design that reflects a trellis overgrown with vines and blossoms. A coiled wire, backed by a thin band of sheet gold, forms the outer frame of the diadem band. A trellis made from gold tubing fills up the frame. Adorning the trellis are multi-tiered blossoms and honeysuckle palmettes of varying sizes and shapes. The larger palmettes establish a central row and at the center of each palmette is a teardrop shaped recess, suggesting a once present stone or glass inlay. Voluminous blossoms alternate between the palmettes. The end of the diadem rounds off like the curvature of a horseshoe and its terminal decoration consists of palmettes, blossoming flowers, and an open pomegranate fruit constructed

¹⁴ Jackson, *Hellenistic Gold Eros Jewellery*, 56.

¹⁵ Emma Stafford, *Exploring the Life, Myth, and Art of Ancient Greece* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2011).

¹⁶ Carney, *Women and Monarchy*, 25.

¹⁷ Rebecca H. Hague, "Ancient Greek Wedding Songs: The Tradition of Praise," *Journal of Folklore Research* (1983): 138, accessed April 3, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814526>.

from sheet gold and adorned with filigree, which is an intricate metalwork technique used to articulate fine details. To make the diadem wearable, the piece contains joints that allow it to bend around the wearer's head.

With its heavy incorporation of plant motifs, including tendrils, blossoms, and a bursting pomegranate, the diadem design symbolizes a woman's reproductive potential and alludes to the female wearer's social responsibility to produce offspring.¹⁸ Flowers, fruits, and vines refer to biological growth and are charged with reproductive connotations. For example, a pomegranate fruit, characterized by an inner cavity full of fleshy seeds, makes a blatant reference to reproduction. The pomegranate featured on the diadem bursts open to reveal an abundance of seeds, expressing reproductive potential. By wearing jewelry that resonates notions of fertility, the woman subliminally reinforces her social obligation to produce children. The inclusion of these fertility motifs on to a diadem plays upon themes of dynastic succession. Given the responsibility of royal Hellenistic women to produce legitimate heirs to ensure the longevity of her family's dynasty, a diadem serves as an ideal medium to express beliefs regarding fertility. Assumingly, a Greek royal woman wore this diadem, and her obligation to help progress her husband's legacy through childbirth was reflected in the object's iconography.

Crafted from precious stones and metals, Hellenistic jewelry represents an accessory only attainable by the upper strata of ancient Greek society. Similar to how jewelry signifies wealth, wedding festivals of royal Greek Hellenistic women had the potential to demonstrate affluence and prestige. An examination of a first century BCE jewelry set and the wedding of Stratonice, the daughter of king Demetrius I of Macedon, help to explore this idea. The necklace and earrings, which match stylistically and utilize gold and garnet materials, form a jewelry set designed for simultaneous wear (Figure 5). Measuring fifteen inches long, the necklace features an oval shaped cabochon garnet backed by gold at its center. Chunky amorphous gold pieces attach to either side of the central garnet by small joints, while pearly white agate stones connect to the opposite sides of the chunky gold pieces. To complete the necklace, thick gold chains attach to the agate enclosures and terminate with either a hook or an eye to secure the necklace around a neck. Measuring approximately three inches in length, the gold earrings consist of gold charms that dangle from an oval shaped garnet. Molded from gold, the charms take the shape of rectangular prisms and small spheres. A larger gold ring hangs at the lowest point and connects to a cord designed to loop around the back of the ear and reattach to the stone so that the garnet and trinket decoration covers the front of the ear.

The materials used to craft the necklace and earrings serve as the primary distinguishers of wealth. This set exists as a representative of the standard Hellenistic jewelry style, which incorporated precious stones and gold imported from the East. Following Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire in 331 BCE, these precious resources became increasingly more available to the Greeks. Prior to this Eastward expansion, the quantity of gold and precious stones found within Greece's borders existed in short supply. With the plunder of the Treasure of Darius in 330 BCE and intensive foreign mining operations in the East, Greece suddenly had a steady supply of gold and jewels transferring back into Greece.¹⁹ In addition to the passing of resources, the East also exchanged artistic polychrome techniques that utilized and took advantage of the diversity of colorful eastern stones. Originating in the Old Persian Empire, the

¹⁸ Dyfri Williams and Jack Ogden, *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the Classical World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 42.

¹⁹ Herbert Hoffmann and Patricia F. Davidson, *Greek Gold: Jewelry from the Age of Alexander* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1965), 1.

polychrome practice involved the inlay of jewels and colored glass to produce lavish designs.²⁰ Within Macedonian courts, gems helped to propel a new cult of collecting, in which members distributed costly gems and artifacts to display personal status and to harness social obedience.²¹ Privileged owners of Hellenistic jewelry included women of the Macedonian court, who owned entire sets and wore them during special events.²² Since gold and precious stones were regarded as valuable resources and only available through foreign exchange, the materials carried connotations of wealth and prestige.

A Hellenistic jewelry piece's power to resonate notions of personal wealth for its wearer reflects a royal Greek bride's ability to showcase her family's affluence and Hellenism through her wedding ceremony. The wedding extravaganza of Stratonice, organized by her father king Demetrius Poliorcetes of Macedon in the third-century BCE, exemplifies this point. In *The Life of Demetrius*, written between the first and second century AD, the Roman historian Plutarch discusses a political agreement between Seleucus and Demetrius. Seleucus, desirable of more heirs, convinces Demetrius to approve of the marriage between his daughter Stratonice and himself. Elated with this, "unexpected turn of fortune...[Demetrius] took his daughter, and sailed with his whole fleet to Syria (31.6)," and therefore created an international spectacle to celebrate the union.²³ According to art historian Elizabeth Carney, Demetrius's initiative to transform a royal wedding into an international event helped to fulfill political needs and to display his wealth and Hellenism.²⁴ Realistically, Stratonice did not need her father's entire fleet to ensure a safe arrival into Syria. The entire production was not a gesture of practicality, but meant as a bold statement of authority and wealth. His boastful display of resources compares to a royal Greek woman's choice to wear an entire set of gold jewelry to the court. Her excessive ornamentation fails to serve a utilitarian purpose; a gold finger ring will not strengthen her nails, her diadem will not stimulate intellectual pursuits, and her jewels will not transform her into a colorful person. Her ornamentation carries a surface value and serves to impress her contemporaries and solidify her status as an elite figure. The extreme lavishness of Hellenistic jewelry and wedding extravaganzas signifies the importance placed on public presentation that existed within the elite circle of Greek Hellenistic society.

To expand on this discussion of wealth, a second parallel exists which compares the inherent trade value of jewelry to the commoditization of royal Greek daughters. In other words, both jewelry and women were "exchanged" to satisfy specific needs and desires. An examination of the historical implications of arranged marriages and the study of a poem by Posidippus helps to explore this similarity. Given the title "marriage alliance," a royal Macedonian marriage was contracted for political and dynastic purposes and was usually devoid of emotional motivations.²⁵ Royal marriages were not romantic pursuits but viewed as an opportunity for rulers to cultivate political alliances between courts, acquire land and trade rights, and expand political influence. Serving more as instruments of their fathers' political relationships, women

²⁰ R.A. Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery* (London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1980), 156.

²¹ Ann Kuttner, "Cabinet fit for a Queen: the Lithika as Posidippus' Gem Museum," in *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, ed. Kathryn Gutzwiller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 144-145.

²² Hoffmann, *Greek Gold*, 3.

²³ "Plutarch: Life of Demetrius," Last modified July 17, 2004, <http://www.attalus.org/old/demetrius2.html>.

²⁴ Elizabeth Donnelly Carney, *Women and Monarchy in Macedonia* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 204.

²⁵ Carney, *Women and Monarchy*, 19.

lacked agency and assumed an inactive role in one of their most dramatic life transitions.²⁶ This deprivation of a woman's right to pursue a romantic marriage or vocalize her own personal desires in favor of politics demonstrates her objectification.

Similar to how royal daughters functioned as objects of political exchange, jewelry serves as a commodity gifted between lovers to attain love and affection. In a section of Posidippus' work titled the *Milan Papyrus*, the Greek poet Posidippus writes a series of poems about gems and their relation to love and beauty. One poem reads, "Timanthes carved this starry lapis lazuli, soft Persian stone with golden flecks for Demylus, and in return for a gentle kiss, gave it as a gift to dark-haired Nikaia of Kos."²⁷ By crafting an ornament and giving it to his lover, Nikaia, it serves as a gesture of his love toward the woman. Although a gift, Timanthes expects a kiss in return. This poem demonstrates the exchange of ornaments between lovers for the purpose of receiving sexual favors and to strengthen romantic relationships. The basic exchange value of jewelry extends beyond itself to reflect the transactional value of royal Greek women.

Hellenistic feminine jewelry serves as a leading primary source for the study of elite Hellenistic Greek women. These ornaments, so intimately involved with the wearer, help to represent her culture and personal preference in style and taste. The materials, technical trends, and iconography utilized to produce these ornaments provide additional insight into the functionality of the jewelry. Jewelry illuminates Hellenistic ideas about wealth, fertility, sexuality, and beauty. Coincidentally, the roles and social expectations of royal Hellenistic Greek women form a parallel to these four themes. By analyzing the similarities between the jewelry and the wearer, one becomes aware of the extreme commoditization of ancient Greek women. In a sense, the worth of elite Greek women is reduced to the value of the jewelry that adorns their bodies. As a final question, what makes these jewelry pieces so popular and desirable to the average elite Greek woman? Apart from simply looking pretty, a piece of Hellenistic jewelry carries a certain level of self-referentiality for the wearer. Since Hellenistic jewelry thematically reproduces the social roles of its elite female wearer, a Greek woman feels a deep connection to her personal jewelry collection. As an inherent medium of self-expression, Hellenistic jewelry fulfills its purpose and resonates the core social responsibilities and roles of its designated wearer.

²⁶ Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 48-51.

²⁷ POSIDIPPUS EPIGRAMS, PAP. MIL. VOGL. VIII 309 LITHIKA, Center for Hellenic Studies, accessed May 9, 2013, <http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=1723>.



Figure 1: Necklace with Rosettes, lotus and blossoms, vase-shaped pendants and female heads, c. 350 BCE, gold, British Museum, London.



Figure 2: Mirror, ca. 350 BCE, bronze, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 3: Eros Earrings, 2nd century BCE, gold and garnet, Hamburg Museum, Hamburg.

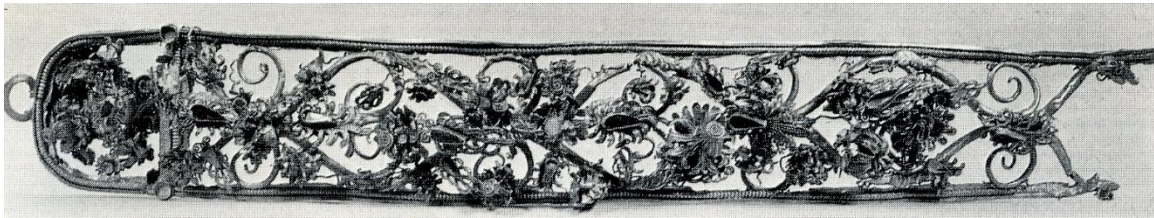
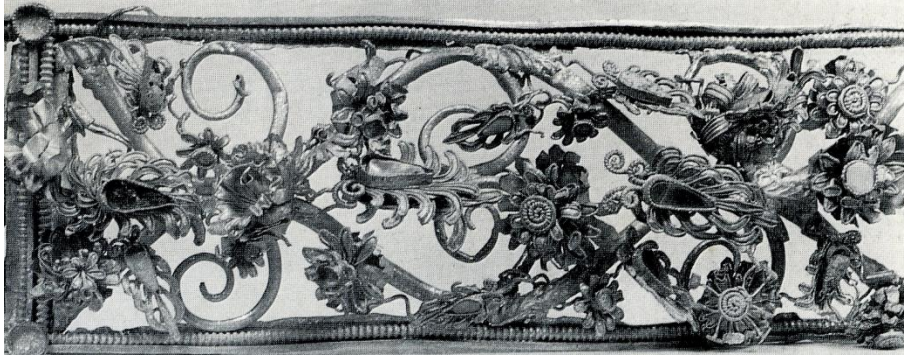


Figure 4: Diadem, 4th-3rd century BCE, Gold with glass and carnelian, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 5: Hellenistic Necklace and earrings, 1st century BCE, gold, garnet, and agate, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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