



*Greece, Hellenistic period,  
4th–1st century B.C.,  
Myrtle Wreath, 330–327 B.C.,  
gold, 10 3/4 x 12 inches, gift of  
Miss Annette Finnegan, 37.5.*

#### **Learn About Ancient Greek Wreaths:**

- Notice the realistic detail in the leaves and flowers.
- Gold wreaths are associated with burials.

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#### **Subject Matter**

This exquisite gold wreath represents myrtle leaves and flowers. Notice how natural the wreath looks. The artist carefully worked thin gold sheets into tiny, delicate flowers and leaves. Too fragile to have been worn, the wreath was probably placed in the tomb of a wealthy, important person to symbolize the achievements of the deceased during his or her lifetime.

For many years, the museum identified this as a laurel wreath. Recent scholarship has changed the identification to a myrtle wreath. Myrtle, an aromatic evergreen, was a tree sacred to Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, and was thus a symbol of love. Also associated with Hades, god of the underworld, and his wife Persephone, myrtle was a symbol of death.

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#### **Style/Technique**

This myrtle wreath is a superb example of ancient naturalism. The artist closely observed the myrtle leaves and flowers, then rendered them in gold. The leaves and blossoms were cut from thin sheets of gold, finished with stamped or incised details, and attached to the gold circle with pieces of gold wire. Originally, beads of glass or semiprecious stones may have been fastened by a wire loop to the center of each blossom.

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#### **Context**

In ancient Greece, wearing wreaths made of actual plants signified special accomplishments. Revelers wore wreaths at banquets and festivals, and ancient sources reveal that banqueters wore myrtle in an attempt to prevent drunkenness. The few surviving gold wreaths of antiquity were found in tombs, where they served as grave offerings. This wreath was found not far from Corinth in central Greece. However, it appears to be of Macedonian workmanship. A region in northern Greece, Macedonia was the home of Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great. In the 4th century B.C., Alexander's conquests of Asia Minor and Egypt made precious materials, including gold, available to Greek craftsmen. Trading systems that developed during Alexander's short life continued to supply artists well into the 1st century A.D, contributing to the flourishing of metalwork and jewelry making.



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### Discussion Questions

- Look carefully at the myrtle wreath. What details did the ancient Greek artist include to make the wreath look so naturalistic? Describe how the artist used thin sheets of gold and gold wire to create the wreath.
- In the ancient world, people wore wreaths as a sign of special achievement in the arts, sciences, athletics, etc. Create wreaths in the classroom using paper, tin foil, or other materials. Older classes might want to make smaller wreaths that can be worn as pins. Have students wear wreaths to reward special achievements in the classroom.

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### Classroom Ideas

- This wreath demonstrates how carefully the ancient Greek artist looked to nature as inspiration for art. Careful observation of nature is important in art and in science. During science projects in class, stress careful observation skills by having students make drawings of what they see and explain why the observations are important.
- Many objects from the ancient world were discovered by archaeologists. Assign students research projects focusing on archaeology.

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### For Further Study from the MFAH Kinder Foundation Teacher Resource Center

#### SP626

*Greek Art from  
Prehistoric to Classical*  
40 slides, CD-ROM, text,  
posters  
E/M/H/A  
Designed to approach Greek  
art in a creative manner,  
this resource focuses on  
5th-century Greek life  
through the discussion of  
mythology, religion, science,  
music, and philosophy.

#### SG603

*Gift of the Greeks*  
Study Guide  
E/M  
A basic introduction to  
classical Greek civilization.

#### VC682

*Light of the Gods*  
Video: 28 minutes  
H/A  
Shows the progression  
of Greek representational  
art, from the stylized  
stick figures of the  
Geometric period to the  
exquisitely carved and  
painted human images  
of the early classical era.