

Riches in the ground. How did ancient Greeks protect private wealth?

Summary: This article provides an overview of how ancient Greeks safeguarded their private wealth from the 6th to 1st centuries BC. It focuses on metal, one of the most durable of goods and the only one that is well documented by texts and archaeology. It examines literary sources, archaeological evidence, and iconography to explore the reasons for hoarding, and the methods and locations used for safekeeping. The study reveals that Greeks employed a variety of containers, from simple bags to elaborate chests, to protect their assets. Common hiding places included homes, buried caches, and sacred precincts. The wealthy often diversified their holdings through investments, loans, and bank deposits.

Key words: Ancient Greece, Wealth, Hoarding, Safekeeping, Container

Résumé: Cet article étudie la manière dont les Grecs protégeaient leur richesse privée du VI^e au I^{er} siècle avant J.-C. Il se concentre sur le métal, l'un des biens les plus durables et le seul bien documenté par les textes et l'archéologie. Il examine les sources littéraires, archéologiques et l'iconographie pour explorer les raisons de la thésaurisation et les méthodes et lieux utilisés pour la mise en sécurité des biens considérés. Les Grecs employaient une variété de contenants, allant de simples sacs à des coffres élaborés, pour protéger leurs avoirs. Les cachettes courantes incluaient les maisons, le sol et les enceintes sacrées. Les riches diversifiaient souvent leurs avoirs par le biais d'investissements, de prêts et de dépôts bancaires.

Mots clés: Grèce antique, Richesse, Thésaurisation, Protection des biens, Contenant

“None but some bird knows where my treasure lies”¹

Introduction

The way Greek temples guarded their riches has been carefully examined in scholarship on the basis of a number of accounts found inscribed on stone.² On the contrary, private riches are more elusive: they are seldom described in texts and only scanty parts of them have been found in archaeological context. The overall picture is therefore rather patchy. This article is an attempt to provide a non-exhaustive overview of how private riches were kept safe in the Greek world through the cross examination of texts, images, objects and archaeological data.

¹Acknowledgments: I owe special thanks to Louise Détrez, curator of ceramics, terracottas and glasses at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, for her help with the bibliography and her commentaries on my interpretation of scenes on ceramics. I am also grateful to Andrew Meadows for reading this article and for the improvements he suggested. Any mistake remains my responsibility.

“Οὐδείς οἶδεν τὸν θησαυρὸν τὸν ἐμὸν πλὴν εἴ τις ἄρ’ ὄρνις,” Greek proverb, Aristophanes, *Birds* 601. Transl. J. Henderson, Loeb CL.

² The temple inventories all mention systems including bags, jars and chests. Archaeology has brought to light some stone safes or offertory boxes called *thesauroi*, and, in addition to these devices, inventories bear witness to the use of locks and keys, as well as a controlled access and administrative processes ensuring the keys were always in safe authorised hands. Non exhaustive references: Rapin 1992 on the Ai Khanoum treasury; Harris 1995 on the Acropolis of Athens; Chankowski 2019, p. 32-35 on Delos where coins were kept probably in leather bags placed in jars (*stamnoi*) locked in chests (*kibotoi*); Vial 1984, p. 106, on the role of the prytanes of Delos who kept the keys to open the chests of the sacred treasury; Kaminski 1991 on the *thesauroi*.

The definition of wealth deserves a whole book and is beyond the scope of this article, but we need to set limits to the topic. We will only consider the part of the assets of a person that can be set aside, that is not necessary for everyday life, that can be stored for long periods without damage but also that is transportable, which means essentially gold, silver and precious stones.³ It can be a small amount or a fortune, depending on the capital and resources of each individual.

The period covered by this article is limited to the 7th to the 1st century BC, a time when the use of coinage spread through the Greek world and the number of texts available becomes sufficient to explore our topic. Obviously, hoarding riches is a much older practice. An eloquent example was found in 1980 by P.G. Themelis, who excavated a ceramic pot containing 510 g of gold in a house of Eretria dated to the 8th century BC.⁴ He interpreted it as a goldsmith's deposit but, in 2001 J. Kroll suggested it could be a hoard of weighed gold, just as there were hoards of weighed silver (*Hacksilber*) in the Middle East. He calls the Eretria hoard a *Hackgold* hoard, which can be compared to the talents of unwrought gold given as rewards or booty in Homer.⁵ Otherwise, gold in Homer takes the form of objects (cups, horse harnesses, belts, etc.). If this interpretation is right, the Eretria hoard would be the earliest gold money hoard identified in the Greek world, although gold objects were buried in graves as early as the second half of the 5th millennium BC.⁶ However, our knowledge of such discoveries of uncoined metal in the Greek world is incomplete in the absence of surveys or inventories, and so this article is limited to the period when coinage was in use.

1. How to study hidden wealth?

1.1. What wealth to protect?

Attic literature of the 5th and 4th centuries BC provides descriptions of large fortunes, which can be used to establish the limits of our topic. Estates consisted of land, houses and workshops, slaves, works of art, cash and gold and silver artefacts kept at home, as well as currency invested with others.⁷ A summary of general behaviours in time of prosperity is given by Xenophon:

Mark too that, whenever states are prosperous, silver is in strong demand. The men will spend silver (*argyron*) on fine arms and good horses and magnificent houses and establishments, and the women go in for expensive clothes and gold jewellery.

Καὶ μὴν ὅταν γε εὖ πράττωσιν αἱ πόλεις, ἰσχυρῶς οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀργυρίου δέονται. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄνδρες ἀμφὶ ὄπλα τε καλὰ καὶ ἵππους ἀγαθοὺς καὶ οἰκίας καὶ κατασκευὰς μεγαλοπρεπεῖς βούλονται δαπανᾶν, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες εἰς ἐσθῆτα πολυτελεῖ καὶ χρυσοῦν κόσμον τρέπονται.

Xenophon, *Ways and Means*, 4.8. Transl. F.C. Marchant, Loeb CL, modified.

The artefacts in this description, which are also found in hoards, are made of precious metal: the silver coins and gold jewellery. In fact, metal seems to have been rather common in

³ Therefore, it excludes luxury artefacts made of precious purple textile embroidered with gold or silver, ivory objects, etc.

⁴ Themelis 1983; Kopcke 1992, pl. XXII.

⁵ Kroll 2001, p. 77-78. Le Rider, Verdán 2002, p. 141-148, develop a compelling comparison with Mesopotamian *Hacksilber*. On the use of weighed gold as money, see Heymans, Verdán 2023.

⁶ See for instance the overview of the finds of the necropolis of Varna in Bulgaria in Slavchev 2010. On hoarding in early periods, see a summary in Zurbach 2017, p. 666-668.

⁷ For example: Lysias *Against Erastosthenes*, 10; Demosthenes, *Against Aphobos* 1.1, 1.9-10; Isaeus, *On the Inheritance of Ciron* 35.

private houses if we consider two significant texts that describe threats to it.⁸ In 405 BC, the inhabitants of Camarina, in Sicily, fled with their gold and silver while the Carthaginians were approaching their town:

When Dionysius arrived at Camarina, he compelled the residents of that city also to depart with their children and wives to Syracuse. And since their fear admitted of no delay, some gathered together silver and gold and whatever could be easily carried, while others fled with only their parents and infant children, paying no attention to valuables (*chremata*); and some, who were aged or suffering from illness, were left behind because they had no relatives or friends, since the Carthaginians were expected to arrive almost immediately.

Διονύσιος δὲ παραγενόμενος εἰς τὴν Καμάριναν ἠνάγκασε καὶ τοὺς ἐκεῖ μετὰ τέκνων καὶ γυναικῶν εἰς Συρακοῦσας ἀπιέναι. τοῦ φόβου δ' οὐδεμίαν ἀναβολὴν διδόντος τινὲς μὲν ἀργύριον καὶ χρυσίον καὶ τὰ ῥαδίως φέρεσθαι δυνάμενα συνεσκευάζοντο, τινὲς δὲ γονεῖς καὶ τέκνα τὰ νήπια λαβόντες ἔφευγον, οὐδεμίαν ἐπιστροφὴν χρημάτων ποιούμενοι· ἔνιοι δὲ γεγηρακότες ἢ νόσῳ βαρυνόμενοι δι' ἔρημίαν συγγενῶν ἢ φίλων ὑπελείποντο, προσδοκωμένων ὅσον οὐπὼ παρέσεσθαι τῶν Καρχηδονίων·
Diodorus 13.111.3. Transl. C.H. Oldfather, Loeb CL.

In panic, not all the inhabitants adopt the same behaviour: some privilege their portable riches, mostly in precious metal according to Diodorus, others their relatives. At the other end of the Mediterranean, the same author gives us another clue concerning the presence of abundant precious metal in towns. In 351 BC, the Sidonians burnt their houses with their families inside when besieged by the Persians:

But when they saw the city and the walls captured and swarming with many myriads of soldiers, they shut themselves, their children, and their women up in their houses and consumed them all in flames. They say that those who were then destroyed in the fire, including the domestics, amounted to more than forty thousand. After this disaster had befallen the Sidonians and the whole city together with its inhabitants had been obliterated by the fire, the King sold that funeral pyre for many talents, for as a result of the prosperity of the householders there was found a vast amount of silver and gold melted down by the fire. ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὴν πόλιν ἑώρων καὶ τὰ τείχη κατελιμμένα καὶ πολλαῖς μυριάσι στρατιωτῶν περιεχόμενα, συγκλείσαντες ἑαυτοὺς καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ γυναῖκας εἰς τὰς οἰκίας ἐνέπηρσαν. φασὶ δὲ τοὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς τότε διαφθαρέντας σὺν τοῖς οἰκετικαῖς σώμασι γεγονέναι πλείους τῶν τετρακισμυρίων. τούτου δὲ τοῦ πάθους περὶ τοὺς Σιδωνίους γενομένου καὶ τῆς πόλεως ὅλης μετὰ τῶν ἐνοικούντων ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς ἀφανισθείσης τὴν πυρκαϊὰν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀπέδοτο πολλῶν ταλάντων· διὰ γὰρ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν τῶν ἐνφικηκῶτων εὐρέθη πολὺς ἄργυρός τε καὶ χρυσὸς ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς κεχωνευμένος.
Diodorus 16.45.5-6. Transl. C.H. Sherman, Loeb CL.

Both texts indicate that precious metal was kept in houses. The inhabitants of Camarina, in the emergency of their flight, grabbed what was available at home. The Sidonians burnt with their riches. Greek temple inventories provide long lists of precious metalware offered by individuals to the gods, giving an insight into the types of precious objects the inhabitants of Camarina or Sidon might have kept at home. Other texts – see Lysias below – show that such silver or gold vessels were part of private fortunes, as well as coins.⁹

The transportable wealth requiring protection extended beyond precious metals. Alexander's conquest of the Achaemenid Empire and his expedition to India opened channels for the export of exotic stones from India and other regions to the Mediterranean.¹⁰ They were

⁸ There are of course many other descriptions of looting. See Pritchett 1991, p. 505-541; Vickers, Gill 1994, p. 62-65 (silver and goldware).

⁹ The list could be easily extended: see for instance Demosthenes, *Against Aphobos* 1, 13, *Against Nikostratos* 9.

¹⁰ Emeralds, garnets, true sapphires: Lapatin 2015, p. 111-112; "The materials employed for Hellenistic gems include all those which were in use in the Classical period, but to them is added a number of translucent coloured stones, especially suitable for ringstones, and acquired from the east. Of these the most important are amethyst and the commoner garnet, but there was a whole range of coloured stones which remained current in the Roman period: beryl, topaz and zircons," Boardman 2001, p. 361.

imported uncut as raw material, or engraved, such as the remarkable Oxford portrait of Alexander on a tourmaline bearing a brahmi (?) inscription and dated to c. 330-280 BC,¹¹ or with metal mounts as described by a boastful veteran of Alexander's wars in Theophrastus:

On a journey he is apt to put one over on a travel companion by relating how he campaigned with Alexander, and how Alexander felt about him, and how many jewel-studded goblets he got, and arguing that the craftsmen in Asia are better than those in Europe.

καὶ συνοδοιπόρου δὲ ἀπολαῦσαι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ δεινὸς λέγων, ὡς μετ' Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐστρατεύσατο, καὶ ὡς αὐτῷ εἶχε, καὶ ὅσα λιθοκόλλητα ποτήρια ἐκόμισε· καὶ περὶ τῶν τεχνιτῶν τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ ὅτι βελτίους εἰσὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ Εὐρώπῃ ἀμφισβητῆσαι·

Theophrastus, *Characters*, 23.3. Transl. J. Rusten, Loeb CL.

However, these precious stones, weather engraved or not, mounted or not, are almost never mentioned in modern descriptions of coin hoards while other types of pieces of jewellery as well as precious vessels are sometimes associated with coins. The provenance of engraved gems that survive today is often unclear, but many were found in graves,¹² or for earlier periods in several rare hoards of engraved gems.¹³ By contrast, temple inventories of the classical period indicate that engraved stones, sometimes on a gold or a silver ring, were valued enough to be offered to the gods, the type of stone being sometimes noted.¹⁴ As written by J. Boardman, "Most of the stones used in Greece are, by our standards, semi-precious, but it is likely that they came from overseas and that this, as well as the extreme difficulty of working them, enhanced their value."¹⁵ It is probable that they were kept securely at home in the same way as precious objects and coins, but it does not seem that they were buried as hoards.

The same conclusions are valid for jewellery. Most of the ancient jewellery known today is either unprovenanced or comes from graves or coin hoards. The most compelling example is probably the so-called Karpenisi hoard of 44 gold pieces sold to Helen Stathatos – now housed in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens – and the Benaki Museum in 1929. According to the Athenian antiquarian who sold them, they had been found in two vessels –

¹¹ Oxford 1892.1499. Boardman, Vollenweider 1978, p. 67 and 76-78. The Beazley Archives website notes "The small inscription below the neck is apparently Indian, either the name of the owner – perhaps a native ruler in a part of India where Alexander was active, or the maker of the gem. The material is rare for gems and of Indian provenance." Visited 1st March 2020, <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/carc/gems/Styles-and-Periods/Hellenistic-period>; <https://images.ashmolean.org/asset/10702/>

¹² A rare case of provenanced collection is Louis De Clercq's. He gathered several thousands of pieces of jewellery and engraved gems of the Classical and Hellenistic period, mostly coming from the Middle East, often provided to him by the French Chancelier du Consulat in Beirut, A. Périétié (De Ridder 1911a, p. 6). The geographical provenance is recorded in many cases, but generally without the archaeological context. When it is noted, these precious artefacts were found in tombs which excludes them from the present enquiry (see a tomb with five engraved gems in Banyias, in Northern Phoenicia, among other examples in De Ridder 1911b, p. 780, no. 3473).

¹³ Boardman 2001, p. 28: hoard of an engraver workshop of Minoan period in Malia with tools; p. 36, another in Knossos; p. 377, a hoard of lapis lazuli cylinder seals (for reengraving?) in Mycenaean Thebes.

¹⁴ For example: Athens, treasure of the Opisthodomos, Harris 1995, p. 51, no. 37, 4th century BC: an offering of a collection of engraved gems ("jasper", "onyx", coloured glass, on silver or gold rings); p. 53-55, offerings of gems engraved on "jasper" and "sard"; treasure of the Hekatompedon, p. 140, several onyxes, one with the engraving described, p. 142, other rings with stone seals, one in jasper. Delos inventories: "amethyst", "garnet", "sard", Prêtre 2012, p. 94-99; "amber" (λυγγοῦριον), p. 110-112. I note the identification of stones found in inventories in inverted commas since the Ancients named them according to their appearance which is not enough to secure a scientific identification according to modern criteria. For a list of the stones used by Greek engravers, see Boardman 2001, p. 374-379. Different stones and other materials for jewellery were found in the treasury of Ai Khanoum: Rapin 1992, p. 167-182.

¹⁵ Boardman 2001, p. 373.

one made of bronze, the other of ceramic – allegedly alongside an unspecified number of silver coins, mostly from Athens (IGCH 289).¹⁶ The provenance of the jewellery remains uncertain. It was first said to have been discovered in a brook near Halmyros, then in the region of Demodokos. Later, the antiquarian who sold it claimed they had been found in Karpenisi. All these places are in Thessaly.¹⁷ The vast majority of the jewellery in public and private collections has no better provenance,¹⁸ which means that it cannot be used to understand how the ancient Greeks protected their private wealth.

1.2. Which sources?

Many mentions of accumulations of wealth can be found in ancient literature. Greek comedy and Roman comedy of the Republican period abundantly explore the question of wealth and poverty. It is one of their main themes, and the plots of several plays focus on wealth, as in Aristophanes' *Wealth*, the lost play of Menander called *Thesaurus* or in Plautus' *Trinummus* and *Aulularia*. While drawing human archetypes in the *Characters*, Theophrastus provides plenty of references to wealth. And, of course, the Attic orators often emphasise the social status of individuals involved in trials, thereby providing insights into the nature of their assets. The body of evidence is good enough to identify different behaviours and schemes in the way people stored their wealth. It also sheds light on the fantasies created by hidden wealth and the sudden and desirable enrichment hoped from such a discovery.¹⁹

Archaeology also brings quantities of artefacts related to wealth. The most obvious are the luxury goods made using gold, silver and precious stones.²⁰ Coin hoards,²¹ although more often known from the antiquities trade than from excavations, provide a good overview of the amounts people could accumulate.²² After sorting, the total number of hoards gathered in *IGCH*, *CH* 1-12, *WW* and *EH* amounts to 4,375 from the end of the 7th century to the 1st century BC. They are in vast majority exclusively made of coins.²³ The number of hoards containing at the same time coins and other precious artefacts – vessels, jewels, *Hacksilber*, etc. – is limited in the current state of knowledge and difficult to estimate precisely due to the lack of a detailed database of hoards.

To summarise, durable riches were made of precious metal or stones, but engraved gems and jewellery seldom have a provenance. Four major questions can now be explored to understand the mechanics of keeping riches safe. What did people hoard, and why, how and where?

¹⁶ The antiquarian who sold the jewellery later asserted that it was unrelated to the coins. Amandry 1953, p. 90.

¹⁷ Amandry 1953, p. 89-90.

¹⁸ Pfrommer 1998.

¹⁹ See Peisetairus and Euelpides dreaming of digging treasure pots in Aristophanes' *Birds*, 599-602.

²⁰ Lapatin 2015.

²¹ For Greek coin hoards, the usual references are the *Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards (IGCH)* and the twelve volumes of *Coin Hoards (CH)*. These collect short descriptions of all the hoards found in commerce or literature at the time of their publication. On the same model, other projects have been devoted specifically to Syrian hoards (*WW*: Duyrat 2016) and hoards with Ptolemaic coins (*EH*: Faucher, Meadows, Lorber 2017). *IGCH* and *CH* need weeding before use: they contain hoards dated to Roman Imperial times, some hoards appeared in several volumes for updating of their content and some of the entry numbers cover in fact lists of hoards without description.

²² Duyrat 2016, p. 409-423.

²³ I gave my definition of a coin hoard in Duyrat 2016, p. 9-12: one or several coins, intentionally hidden and not retrieved by the owner. See also Howgego, Wilson 2022, p. 7-13.

2. Hiding gold and silver

2.1. Coined and uncoined metal

The vocabulary of Greek texts is often unspecific when describing wealth. *Chremata* is probably the most common word used to express the idea of property, money or treasure.²⁴ The word gives no clue of what they are made of or of the form they take. According to the place and period, what people preferred to save changed. Silver was obviously in strong demand in the Greek world as is clear from coin hoards, where it had a dominant position, and texts, as the many quotations in this article will show. However, coins were not the unique form taken by the metal before hoarding. Diodorus, reporting a spoliation of the Geloans by Agathocles in 311 BC, unveils the mixed nature of their metallic fortunes:

He also ordered all the other Geloans to turn over to him their money (*nomismata*) and their uncoined silver (*asemon argyron*) and gold, threatening to punish those who disobeyed.
προσέταξε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις Γελώοις πᾶσι τὰ τε νομίσματα καὶ τὸν ἄσημον ἄργυρόν τε καὶ χρυσὸν ἀνενεγκεῖν, διαπειλησάμενος τιμωρήσασθαι τοὺς ἀπειθήσαντας.
Diodorus 19.107.4. Transl. R.M. Geer, Loeb CL

The citizens of Gela kept both coins (*nomismata*) and uncoined silver (*asemon argyron*) at home.²⁵ No data exist on the proportion of uncoined metal versus coined metal in private hands in the Greek world, and it might be impossible to know in the current state of our sources. The brave Theban woman, Timocleia, whose virtue is praised by Plutarch, cheated an officer of Alexander's army looting the town by throwing her personal belongings into a well:

I did possess personal ornaments and silver fashioned into drinking-cups, and there was also some gold and money (*nomismatos*). When the city was being captured, I told my maid-servants to get this all together, and I threw it, or rather deposited it, into a dry well. Nor do many know of it; for there is a cover over the well, and a shady wood growing all around it.
ἐμοὶ περὶ σῶμα κόσμος ἦν καὶ ἄργυρος ἐν ἐκπώμασιν, ἧν τι καὶ χρυσοῦ καὶ νομίσματος. ὡς δ' ἡ πόλις ἠλίσκετο, πάντα συλλαβεῖν κελεύσασα τὰς θεραπεινίδας ἔρριψα, μᾶλλον δὲ κατεθέμην εἰς φρέαρ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔχον· οὐδ' ἴσασιν αὐτὸ πολλοί· Βπῶμα γὰρ ἔπεστι καὶ κύκλῳ περιπέφυκεν ὕλη σύσκιος.
Plutarch, *Moralia. Bravery of Women* 24 (260B). Transl. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb CL.

This mixture of ornaments (*kosmos*²⁶), silverware (*ekpomata*), gold without defined form and coins (*nomismata*) seems to be a good description of what the Ancients used to hoard. Demosthenes provides a detailed account of his father's fortune that amounted to c. 14 talents in silver at the time of his death, c. 376/5 BC. It was made up of precious materials for the two workshops where 52 or 53 slaves produced luxury sacrifice knives and bed-couches, a house, its furniture and different deposits and loans.²⁷ Eighty minas (8,000 silver drachms, about 34

²⁴ The Souda gives this definition for χρημάτων: συνήθως μὲν οἱ τε ἰδιῶται καὶ οἱ ῥήτορες τῷ ὀνόματι τῶν χρημάτων ἐπὶ νομίσματι χρῶνται ἀργυρίου καὶ χρυσοῦ (“Habitually both laymen and rhetoricians make use of the name of *chremata* in application to coins of silver and gold,” English translation on Suda online s.v. *chremata*, <http://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-html/>), but the meaning is more general in most cases: *chremata* “meaning all those things whose value is measured by money (*nomismata*),” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1.1., transl. H. Rackham, Loeb CL. See further developments in Pritchett 1991, p. 185-193.

²⁵ The same situation occurred in Egypt in c. 363-361 BC: Pseudo-Aristotle, *Oeconomia* 2.2.25. For a list of objects forming *asemon argyrion*, see Thucydides 2.13.4.

²⁶ On the difficult definition of the word: Prêtre 2012, p. 11-12 and 149-152, especially p. 150 with an equivalence between *kosmos* and *hormos* (ὄρμος, necklace).

²⁷ Davies 1971, p. 127.

kg) were kept at home in coins.²⁸ Demosthenes also noted the *kosmos* of his mother, but without detailing its composition, except that her jewellery was made of gold:

and the gold jewels and the apparel, my mother's ornament (*kosmos*)
καὶ χρυσία καὶ ἱμάτια, τὸν κόσμον τῆς μητρὸς
Demosthenes, *Against Aphobos*, 1.10.

Jewellery and clothes are always part of the *kosmos* of women, and their value is often specified in wedding contracts, since they should receive it back in case of a divorce, but they are not described.²⁹ The temple inventories are an important complement to understand the variety of jewellery and materials used to compose the *kosmos*, although they are only a selection and probably minimise the share of lesser value jewellery.³⁰

Metal vessels are not better known: Demosthenes mentions vessels – *ekpomata* – without indication of the metal, which, added to the furniture of the house and his mother's *kosmos*, reach the value of 10,000 drachms. We also know that, in 404 BC, Lysias kept three talents of silver (76.5 kg, 18,000 silver drachms if coined), four hundred electrum staters of Cyzicus, a hundred gold darics and four silver cups at home. Interestingly the nature of silver does not need to be specified while gold currencies are named:

When he had sworn, invoking annihilation upon himself and his children if he did not save me on receipt of the talent, I went into my bedroom and opened the money-chest. Peison noticed it and came in; on seeing its contents he called two of his underlings and bade them take what was in the chest. Since he now had, instead of the agreed amount, gentlemen, three talents of silver, four hundred cyzicenes, a hundred darics and four silver cups, I begged him to give me money for my journey; but he declared that I should be glad enough to save my skin.

ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὤμοσεν, ἐξώλειαν ἑαυτῷ καὶ τοῖς παισὶν ἐπαρώμενος, λαβὼν τὸ τάλαντόν με σώσειν, εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸ δωμάτιον τὴν κιβωτὸν ἀνοίγνυμι. Πείσων δ' αἰσθόμενος εἰσέρχεται, καὶ ἰδὼν τὰ ἐνόητα καλεῖ τῶν ὑπηρετῶν δύο, καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ κιβωτῷ λαβεῖν ἐκέλευσεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐχ ὅσον ὠμολόγητο εἶχεν, ὃ ἄνδρες δικασταί, ἀλλὰ τρία τάλαντα ἀργυρίου καὶ τετρακοσίους κυζικηνοὺς καὶ ἑκατὸν δαρεικοὺς καὶ φιάλας ἀργυρᾶς τέτταρας, ἐδεόμην αὐτοῦ ἐφόδιά μοι δοῦναι, ὃ δ' ἀγαπήσειν με ἔφασκεν, εἰ τὸ σῶμα σώσω.
Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 10-12. Transl. W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb CL.

Compared to ordinary citizens, both Lysias and Demosthenes' fathers kept large amounts of coined metal at home. Elsewhere, I have tried to evaluate the wealth gathered in 355 Syrian coin hoards buried during the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. The most numerous class, throughout these two periods, was made of hoards from 11 to 50 silver coins, tetradrachms in most cases, and so weighing 850g at most. I concluded that, in this region, our data offer limited insight into both the largest fortunes and the smallest savings. Instead, hoards seem to shed the most light on a broad middle range, spanning from modest piggy banks to substantial chests.³¹ Few represent large amounts of money comparable to the cash available in Demosthenes' father house or in Lysias' chest.

It is impossible to determine what proportion of the fortune of an individual they represent. F. de Callatay attempted to assess the place of coinage in spoils of Rome's conquest around the Mediterranean described in literary sources. He highlights the importance of hand-crafted

²⁸ Demosthenes, *Against Aphobos* 1.9–11.

²⁹ Verilhac, Vial 1998, p. 173-176. The temple inventories allow a narrow glimpse into the ornaments of women through dedications. Not all were made of gold: a box in the treasury of the Opisthodomos of the Parthenon in Athens contained gilt-wood jewels, iron rings and tin earrings, Harris 1995, p. 51, no. 36, 4th century BC. But some were particularly luxurious and probably closer to the *kosmos* of Demosthenes' mother (see below).

³⁰ Prêtre 2012, p. 12-13.

³¹ Duyrat 2016, p. 423.

gold and silver as a preferred form of metal for storage and safekeeping in the Ancient World. Coins account for a minority in the figures he gathers (less than 30% of the total),³² a proportion that seems difficult to extend to private fortunes in the current state of our knowledge, if indeed it is exact.³³ Nevertheless, from the example of Lysias, we know that gold appeared in private Greek fortunes, less often than silver according to written documents, but its relative value, being between 10 and 14 times that of silver,³⁴ balances its place in fortunes. It could also be buried in the soil, as described by Xenophon. After the conquest of Armenia, the queen of Armenia brings presents to Cyrus for restoring the peace:

And finally also the queen with her daughters and her younger son came up to him bringing not only the gold (*chryson*) which before Cyrus had refused to take, but other gifts as well.

And when he saw it Cyrus said: "You shall not make me go about doing good for pay! No, good queen; take back home with you this money (*chremata*) which you bring; and do not give it to the king again to bury (*katoryxai*), but with it get your son as fine an outfit as possible and send him to the army; and with what is left get both for yourself and your husband, your daughters and your sons, anything the possession of which will enable you to adorn yourselves more handsomely and spend your days more happily. But let it suffice," he added, "to bury in the earth only our bodies, when the end shall come to each."

τέλος δὲ ὑπήντησε καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ Ἀρμενίου, τὰς θυγατέρας ἔχουσα καὶ τὸν νεώτερον υἱόν, καὶ σὺν ἄλλοις δώροις τὸ χρυσίον ἐκόμιζεν ὁ πρότερον οὐκ ἠθέλε λαβεῖν Κῦρος.

Καὶ ὁ Κῦρος ἰδὼν εἶπεν, Ὑμεῖς ἐμὲ οὐ ποιήσετε μισθοῦ περιόντα εὐεργετεῖν, ἀλλὰ σύ, ὦ γύναι, ἔχουσα ταῦτα τὰ χρήματα ἃ φέρεις ἄπιθι, καὶ τῷ μὲν Ἀρμενίῳ μηκέτι δῶς αὐτὰ κατορύξαι, ἔκπεμψον δὲ τὸν υἱὸν ὡς κάλλιστα ἀπ' αὐτῶν κατασκευάσασα ἐπὶ τὴν στρατιάν· ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν λοιπῶν κτῶ καὶ σαυτῇ καὶ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καὶ ταῖς θυγατράσι καὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς ὃ τι κεκτημένοι καὶ κοσμήσεσθε κάλλιον καὶ ἥδιον τὸν αἰῶνα διάξετε· εἰς δὲ τὴν γῆν, ἔφη, ἀρκεῖτω τὰ σώματα, ὅταν ἕκαστος τελευτήσῃ, κατακρύπτειν.

Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 3.3.2-3. Transl. W. Miller, Loeb CL, modified

Cyrus' words are compelling in the context we are studying since they make a direct relationship between gold and hoarding in the ground: "do not give it to the king again to bury (κατορύξαι). It is a commonplace in modern literature that gold disappeared quickly from circulation to be buried. In the current state of my coin hoard database, 71 hoards contained electrum coins, 217 were made at least partially of gold coins and 19 had both electrum and gold, which represents 6.5% of the 4,375 hoards gathered there. Gold hoarding was not marginal but it had specific geographical and chronological features that have been explained elsewhere.³⁵

2.2. The reasons to hide riches

Written sources give two main reasons to hide wealth: to build a fortune through the accumulation of riches and to protect them against thieves or looting.

2.2.1. Superfluous wealth

A moral speech attributed to Cyrus by Xenophon gives a vivid picture of the incentive to hide riches: to keep safe what is not necessary for a living.

³² de Callatay 2015, p. 46.

³³ In a tentative article, de Callatay 2017 suggests a methodology to evaluate the quantities of uncoined gold in the Greek world but the scope of the article is too broad to be used here.

³⁴ Ellis-Evans, Kagan 2022, p. 182, 186-190, 196 Table 2.

³⁵ On the quick hoarding of gold coins with the types of Alexander the Great: Touratsoglou 1998, de Callatay 2019.

However, I think I am different from most people, in that others, when they have acquired more than a sufficiency, bury some of their treasure and allow some to decay, and some they weary themselves with counting, measuring, weighing, airing, and watching; and though they have so much at home, they never eat more than they can hold, for they would burst if they did, and they never wear more than they can carry, for they would be suffocated if they did; they only find their superfluous treasure a burden.

τῆδέ γε μέντοι διαφέρειν μοι δοκῶ τῶν πλείστων ὅτι οἱ μὲν ἐπειδὴν τῶν ἀρκούντων περιττὰ κτήσονται, τὰ μὲν αὐτῶν κατορύττουσι, τὰ δὲ κατασήπουσι, τὰ δὲ ἀριθμοῦντες καὶ μετροῦντες καὶ ἰστάντες καὶ διαψύχοντες καὶ φυλάττοντες πράγματα ἔχουσι, καὶ ὅμως ἔνδον ἔχοντες τοσαῦτα οὔτε ἐσθίουσι πλείω ἢ δύνανται φέρειν, διαρραγεῖεν γὰρ ἂν, οὔτ' ἀμφιέννυνται πλείω ἢ δύνανται φέρειν, ἀποπνιγεῖεν γὰρ ἂν, ἀλλὰ τὰ περιττὰ χρήματα πράγματα ἔχουσιν·

Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.2.21. Transl. W. Miller, Loeb CL.

Contrary to food, luxury clothes and garments, metal, although it is not mentioned in this quotation, keeps its value when hoarded. Therefore, coin hoards can be considered the surplus of wealth that a person or an institution can put aside. They perfectly match the definition given by Cyrus. They are a way to build wealth and power, even if Cyrus, whose moral rectitude is praised by Xenophon, despises such a material accumulation. Aristophanes does not bother with such considerations: in *Wealth*, Zeus leads the other gods thanks to the amounts of *argyria* he possesses.³⁶

M. Leese has recently dedicated an article to “Hoarding and Rationality in the Ancient Economy” in which he challenges the idea, supported by Finley and his followers, that unproductive wealth hoarding in the Greek world was so widespread that it undermined growth and economic development. Hoarding is defined as “the unproductive amassing of capital,”³⁷ as opposed to profitable investment that generates growth and development. Leese examines texts describing the fortune of wealthy Athenians during the Classical period. Most had it invested in diversified assets, with some amounts kept in coin at home – ‘hoarded’, according to the definition given above. Hence his conclusion: “based on estate inventories and anecdotal accounts, it seems that this practice was actually not substantial enough to inhibit investment or impede the circulation of money in the economy. Rather, individual hoarding was insignificant in comparison with the extant evidence for the ‘productive’ employment of money, i.e., that which yielded a profit from interest, rent, or the manufacturing of goods.”³⁸

The demonstration that private Athenian fortunes were rationally invested is, I believe, beyond dispute. But the coins they kept at home were not hoarded, they did not constitute unproductive capital: they were cash, liquidity, immediately available if a transaction required payment.³⁹ M. Leese examines only the wealthiest Athenians, whose financial practices differed from those of the rest of the population. Furthermore, the definition of hoarding employed by economists is not exactly the same as that used by ancient historians, or even English dictionaries. Hoarding often means not only to amass, but also to conceal or to hide away.⁴⁰ The wealthiest did not need to conceal their property: they had the means to protect it. But for others, hiding their superfluous riches was often the only way to keep them secure. Their aim was not to accumulate sterile capital, but to safeguard it against theft and war.

³⁶ Aristophanes, *Wealth*, 130-131.

³⁷ Leese 2023, p. 180.

³⁸ Leese 2023, p. 179.

³⁹ See a similar view on cash in Roman households in Crawford 1969, p. 76.

⁴⁰ “To collect large amounts of something and keep it for yourself, often in a secret place” (Cambridge English Dictionary); “to collect and often hide away a supply of; to accumulate a hoard” (Merriam-Webster); “to amass and put away (anything valuable) for preservation, security, or future use; to treasure up: esp. money or wealth” (Oxford English Dictionary).

Here, a word on terminology is needed. In the Greek world, *thesaurizein* has often the meaning of storing more than hoarding.⁴¹ A famous occurrence of the verb appears in Herodotus' description of the way the Persian king stores his revenues in metal:

The king stores (*thesaurizei*) his tribute in this fashion: he melts it down and pours it into earthen vessels; when the vessel is full he breaks the earthenware away, and when he needs money cuts as much as will serve his purpose.

τοῦτον τὸν φόρον θησαυρίζει βασιλεὺς τρόπῳ τοιῶδε: ἐς πίθους κεραμίνους τήξας καταχέει, πλήσας δὲ τὸ ἄγγος περιαιρείει τὸν κέραμον: ἐπεὰν δὲ δεηθῆι χρημάτων, κατακόπτει τοσοῦτο ὅσου ἂν ἐκάστοτε δέηται.

Herodotus 3.96.2. Translation A.D. Godley, Loeb CL, modified.

This text, often quoted, also provides the archaeological description of two materials characteristic of coin hoarding: metal and ceramics. However, in the *thesauros* of the Great King, this precious material is securely stored, not hoarded. In an empire that did not use coinage – except on the Mediterranean coast – the king could freely cut the weight of metal needed for a transaction or a present.

2.2.2. Protection: Theft and War

A main reason to hide riches or to keep them in safe and protected places appears repeatedly in literature: the fear of a theft. The word used to describe a thief explains why burials in the ground were such common practice.

And I suppose good behavior means stealing and burglary (*tous toichous dioryttein*)!

πάνυ γοῦν κλέπτειν κόσμιόν ἐστιν καὶ τοὺς τοίχους διορύττειν.

Aristophanes, *Wealth*, v. 565. Transl. J. Henderson, Loeb CL.

When alluding to burglary, the Greek literally speaks of “digging-through of walls” (*toichous dioryttein*). The *toichorykos* (ὁ τοιχώρυκος), who digs in the wall, is the housebreaker who can steal what was thought safe in the house. The majority of houses in the Greek world were built with mud brick, less frequently baked brick, on a base of stones.⁴² The weak protection offered by most buildings would contribute to explain why hoarding in the earth was so common.

In a general context of frequent wars, riches were also hidden to protect them against looting.⁴³ As seen in the texts quoted above, wars can reveal the forms of wealth people possessed and that they hid in a time of emergency and danger. An episode of the Roman Civil Wars sheds light on how hoarding occurred under the pressure of a foreign army. In 42 BC, Cassius was in Rhodes and in urgent need of money: he started seizing all the public riches he could, in the temples and the public treasury. As a result, individuals concealed their valuable assets. The places where they were hidden are illustrative of the variety of situations

⁴¹ A *thesaurus* in most cases, is not a hoard, but a small building meant to protect offerings in a temple precinct (Herodotus 1.14: Delphi; Roux 1984) or the riches of a wealthy person (Herodotus 2.121A.2). It can also be a stone offertory box in a sanctuary, where visitors dropped coins through a slit or a small hole. Their contents were collected by the temple staff once a year and added to the revenues of the temple (Kaminski 1991). The word also has the more general meaning of receptacles for valuables (Herodotus 7.190; 9.106.1).

⁴² Hellmann 2010, p. 159; Jones, Graham, Sackett 1973, p. 424-430.

⁴³ The reasons to hoard coins in Ancient times have been widely discussed by numismatists, archaeologists and historians on the basis of the hoard contents. In the recent bibliography, see Aubin 2007, Guest 2015, Duyrat 2016, p. 293-300, Howgego, Wilson 2022, p. 7-13.

possible when the house had to be avoided because it could be searched by the occupying army: a hole in the ground, but also wells⁴⁴ and tombs.

All the money that was found, either gold or silver, in the temples and the public treasury, he seized, and he ordered private citizens who had any to bring it to him on a day named, proclaiming death to those who should conceal it, together with a reward of one-tenth to informers and freedom in addition in the case of slaves. At first many concealed what they had, hoping that in the end the threat would not be carried out, but when they saw the rewards paid and those who had been informed against punished, they became alarmed, and having procured the appointment of another day, some of them dug their money out of the ground, others drew it out of wells, and others brought it from tombs, in much larger amounts than the former collections.

χρήματα δὲ ὅσα ἦν ἢ χρυσὸς ἢ ἄργυρος ἐν ἱεροῖς τε καὶ δημοσίοις, πάντα συλήσας ἐκέλευσε καὶ τὸν ἰδιωτικὸν ἐκφέρειν τοὺς κεκτημένους εἰς ἡμέραν ῥητὴν· καὶ ἐπεκήρυξε τοῖς μὲν ἐπικρύψασσι θάνατον, τοῖς δὲ μηνύσασσι δεκάτην, δούλοις δὲ καὶ ἐλευθερίαν. οἱ δ' ἐν μὲν ἀρχῇ πολλοὶ συνέκρυψαν, οὐκ ἐς τέλος ἐλπίζοντες ἀφίξεσθαι τὴν ἀπειλήν· διδομένων δὲ τῶν γερῶν καὶ κολαζομένων τῶν μηνυομένων ἔδεισάν τε καὶ προσθεσίαν ἑτέραν λαβόντες οἱ μὲν ἐκ γῆς ἀνώρυσσον, οἱ δὲ ἐκ φρεάτων ἀνίμων, οἱ δὲ ἐξέφερον ἐκ τάφων πολὺ πλέονα τῶν προτέρων.

Appian, *Civil Wars*, 4.9.73. Transl. H. White, Loeb CL.

The phenomenon illustrated by Appian is well known to numismatists. Coin hoards were buried to protect their contents from soldiers or simply for ordinary security, and were not recovered by their owners for reasons that are now unknown. In certain circumstances, when wars were long, particularly destructive and led to movements of populations, a visible increase in the number of hoards left in the ground is noticeable. A complete study of the hoards known in Achaemenid and Hellenistic Syria has shown that only decade-long periods of unrest lead to such a concentration of hoards: the wars of Alexander and the Successors or the dynastic wars of the Seleucids associated with the expansion of the Hasmonean kingdom during the second half of the 2nd century BC. Shorter conflicts do not create clusters of hoards: owners generally managed to recover their assets⁴⁵ or were stripped of them by force as, for instance, when in 386 BC Dionysius of Syracuse persuaded the inhabitants of Rhegium to pay for their freedom after he had besieged them for a year:

After the capture of Rhegium, he summoned a meeting of the citizens, and told them why he had a good right to sell them as slaves. If, however, they would pay him the expenses of the war and three minas a head besides, he would release them. The people of Rhegium brought forth everything they had hidden; the poor borrowed from the wealthier and from the foreigners resident in the city; and so the amount demanded was paid. But though he received this money from them, none the less he sold them all for slaves, having succeeded <by his trick> in bringing to light everything they had previously concealed. Ῥηγίον τε καταλαβὼν, ἐκκλησίαν συναγαγὼν εἶπε διότι δικαίως μὲν ἂν ἐξανδραποδισθεῖεν ὑφ' αὐτοῦ, νῦν μέντοι τὰ εἰς τὸν πόλεμον ἀνηλωμένα χρήματα κομισάμενος καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐκάστου σώματος τρεῖς μνᾶς ἀφήσειν αὐτούς. οἱ δὲ Ῥηγῖνοι ὅσα ποτ' ἦν αὐτοῖς ἀποκεκρυμμένα ἐμφανῆ ἐποίουν, καὶ οἱ ἄποροι παρὰ τῶν εὐπορωτέρων καὶ παρὰ τῶν ξένων δανειζόμενοι ἐπόρισαν ἃ ἐκέλευσε χρήματα. λαβὼν δὲ ταῦτα παρ' αὐτῶν τὰ τε σώματα πάντα οὐδὲν ἧττον ἀπέδοτο, τὰ τε σκεύη, ἃ τότε ἦν ἀποκεκρυμμένα, ἐμφανῆ ἅπαντα ἔλαβε.

Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, 2.2.20. Transl. G.C. Armstrong, Loeb CL modified.

Armies themselves were hoard bearers, either to pay the wages of the soldiers or after looting a defeated enemy. Soldiers carried money with them. Looting the camp of a fallen opponent was a promise of fortune for the winners. Thus, in 490, at Marathon, after the Persians were

⁴⁴ On hoarding in a well, see Plutarch, *Alexander*, 12 and *Moralia. Bravery of Women* 24 (cited above); Polyaeus, *Stratagems of war* 8.40.

⁴⁵ Duyrat 2011.

defeated, a man of the Persian army showed Callias “a great mass of gold buried up in a sort of pit.”⁴⁶ In 479, after the battle of Plataea, Herodotus says that hoards were found too.⁴⁷

But in later days many of the Plataeans also found chests (*thekai*) full of gold and silver and other riches (*chremata*).

Ὑστέρῳ μέντοι χρόνῳ μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ τῶν Πλαταιέων εὗρον συχνοὶ θήκας χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων χρημάτων.

Herodotus 9.83. Transl. A. D. Godley, Loeb CL modified.

Major coin hoards have often been considered by modern scholars as military chests hidden when the course of battle was taking a bad turn. This is the case for the biggest gold hoard found in Syria, in Saida (ancient Sidon), during the 19th century.⁴⁸ More than 7,200 gold coins, mostly of Philip II and Alexander the Great, were buried in six vases. The closure of the hoard is c. 323-320 BC, at the beginning of the wars of the Successors. The strategic location, the exceptional size and value of the hoard and its date are in favour of this being a military fund used to pay the soldiers and the army’s supply.⁴⁹ The Meydancikkale hoard, found in 1980 during excavations in Cilicia, contained 5,215 silver coins buried in three different pots under the floor of an administrative building. It is dated to c. 240-235; its mixed content – Attic and Ptolemaic weight silver coins – matches the geopolitics of the region: the stronghold was a Ptolemaic possession from 246 BC and an enclave in a region held by the Seleucids. The size of the hoard, its burial in an administrative building, and the abandonment of the place suggest an emergency burial of military funds when the Seleucids took the area back.⁵⁰

3. How to keep riches safe: containers

Private practices at home or elsewhere can be reconstituted by confronting texts, images and archaeology.

3.1. Bags and purses

The most simple and inexpensive way of keeping riches together is probably a bag made of organic material, either textile or leather,⁵¹ usually called a *ballantion*. Many texts attest the use of purses to keep money:⁵²

I don’t care, because here come some ambassadors with bags of silver (*argyriou ballantia*), to see me!

ὀλίγον μοι μέλει·

ἐκεῖνοὶ γὰρ ὡς ἔμ’ ἔρχονται τινες

πρέσβεις ἔχοντες ἀργυρίου βαλλάντια.

Aristophanes, *Nights*, 1195-1197, transl. H. Henderson, Loeb CL.

An Attic terracotta dated to the 4th century BC represents an actor sitting on an altar, holding a more standard purse in his left hand that he empties in his right hand.⁵³ The purse is of an

⁴⁶ πολὺ χρυσίον ἐν λάκκῳ τινὶ κατορωρυγμένον. Plutarch, *Aristides*, 5.6, transl. B. Perrin, Loeb CL.

⁴⁷ Other examples are gathered in Pritchett 1991, p. 505-541.

⁴⁸ Duyrat 2016, no. 93, p. 75-78.

⁴⁹ Duyrat 2016, p. 345-346 and 418-420.

⁵⁰ Davesne, Le Rider 1989, p. 346-348.

⁵¹ A pig’s bladder could be used as a purse: Aristophanes, *Attributed Fragments* 518.

⁵² Cf. Theophrastus, *Characters* 17.5, quoted above. Articles of silver or bronze or overlaid with metal were kept in a leather bag (φάσκωλος, *phaskolos*) in 4th century inventories of the Acropolis of Athens: Harris 1995, p. 52, no. 39.

unchanging model: a small bag made of a piece of cloth or leather closed by a drawstring.⁵⁴ A reference to characters of middle comedy, he probably embodies a slave having stolen a purse and sheltering against the owner's wrath on the untouchable sanctity of the altar.



Fig. 1. Central medallion of a kylix in Baltimore, c. 510 BC. Image courtesy of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum, photography by James T. VanRensselaer, B4

Purses also appear on painted ceramic. Their content is rarely identifiable, except when the scene is clearly a commercial exchange, allowing us to guess that they are bags of coins (fig. 1).⁵⁵ They should not be confused with other types of bags intended to carry knucklebones, small balls or other objects: a recent study by Dyfri Williams defines a clear typology of bags on vases (*ballantia*, *phormiskoi*, *diktydia*?) with separate uses, *ballantia* being exclusively designed to carry coins⁵⁶. They are, in particular, a standard attribute of citizens, identified by their long staff and cloak on Attic vases. J.F. Forstrom devoted a study to these representations of purses on the basis of the 155 vases in the Beazley Archive representing such a device.⁵⁷ Interestingly, the purse motif appears principally in Attic vase-painting from

⁵³ Louvre Acquisition 1889 CA 265. Duyrat 2016, fig. 8.1, p. 407. See also a young man unfastening his purse on the Louvre cup G143, Duyrat forthcoming.

⁵⁴ The simplicity of money purses depicted on vases is underlined by Williams 2022: “Smaller, seemingly soft, opaque and undecorated pouches, perhaps of leather rather than cloth and sometimes shown with a closing cord at the neck.” Pots could be in the shape of purses as emphasised by Beazley 1927, p. 193-194: the small *lekythos* called *aryballos* was “a pot resembling a purse with the string drawn tight.” Both words *lekythos* and *aryballos* can also serve for a purse.

⁵⁵ Duyrat forthcoming with a collection of vases depicting coins and purses. Other commercial scenes: Boardmann 1975, p. 221; Meyer 1988; Bažant 1985, p. 33; von Reden 2003, fig. 8a-d.

⁵⁶ Williams 2022.

⁵⁷ Forstrom 2015. This documented study, based on a significant sample, provides a statistical approach that supersedes previous interpretations of the meaning of these purses, often related to seduction and sex, including von Reden 2003, p. 195-216.

the second half of the 6th century BC, after coinage became common in this area of the Greek world. The study confronts the chronology of the vases, their shape, their place of production and provenance, the workshops and artists names that used the purse motif and a careful examination of the scenes and gestures involving purses. The conclusion of this enquiry is that purses appear mainly in Attic vase-painting between c. 500-450 BC, mostly on cups and *pelikai* by two groups of painters – the Penthesilea and Polygnotos groups – that were then found principally in Etruscan sites (54%) and, for a quarter of them, in Attica. Purses are represented in scenes involving men, youths and women, men and youths being generally the purse bearers, other youths and women the receivers when there is a gift gesture. The conclusion of Forstrom’s study is that “No singular interpretation arises out of the motif. The purse does feed into the broadest possible interpretation of ‘exchange’, where gift-giving and monetary exchange are combined.... [T]he purse can include other possibilities, especially as a signifier of social status.”⁵⁸

A skyphos in the collection of St Petersburg State Hermitage Museum provides a rare scene with a coin.⁵⁹ on the right of face A, a man holds a purse in his right hand and raises an object resembling a coin in his left. His eyes meet the eyes of the woman standing on the left. Her right hand emerges from her himation, palm up as to receive the coin. Between them, hanging on the back wall, a lekythos, probably filled or to be filled with perfumed oil, could be the merchandise sought by the man. The scene would then take place in a shop or in a mobile stall on the agora. On face B, a woman presents a lekythos in her outstretched right hand to a youth leaning on his staff. Her left hand also emerges from her himation, palm upward. The left hand of the youth plunges into his himation toward a bulge, the shape of which could be that of a purse. Face B seems to confirm the market environment of the iconography of this skyphos.⁶⁰

Its organic nature makes a purse an inconspicuous artefact for the archaeologist. It is nonetheless possible sometimes to find traces of them in hoards. There is no detailed study of these remains, but I have tried to track the scarce notes existing in publications of 355 Syrian hoards: only four of them noted or suspected the existence of a bag or a cloth wrapping the coins at the time of their burial.⁶¹ None provided pictures. Among the 4,375 coin hoards available in *IGCH*, *CH*, *WW* and *EH*, only a handful is described as found in a bag or a cloth⁶² while of the eight hoards found in the excavations of Olynthus in the 1930s, only three were in pots while the five others had apparently no container,⁶³ or an organic one that was entirely degraded with time. The rarity of the information is not a true reflection of the use of bags to bury coin hoards, but of the degradable nature of the material and also the lack of care when the hoard was recovered, either by archaeologists or other finders. Although we lack sufficient

⁵⁸ Forstrom 2015, p. 56.

⁵⁹ St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum, 4224. See also Duyrat Forthcoming.

⁶⁰ Better than a man buying the services of a hetaira as usually supposed, even in Lewis 2002, p. 110. On both sides the same legend is repeated: ὁ παῖς κάλος, a common inscription on Attic vases dated to the 5th century. Lissarague 1999. On the sale of perfumed oil on Attic archaic and classical ceramic, see Chatzdimitrou 2008 and Verbanck-Piérard, Massar 2013, p. 275-277 with bibliography. On other scenes with coins on vases, see Duyrat forthcoming.

⁶¹ Duyrat 2016, p. 406-408.

⁶² “In silver vase, wrapped in linen cloth”, *IGCH* 1042, Dabla-Gomi, Georgia, before 325 BC; in a rag, *IGCH* 1614, *WW* 322, Samaria-Sebaste, 74 BC; “Coins wrapped in cloth”, *IGCH* 1681, Saqqara, Egypt, mid-3rd century BC; *IGCH* 1714, “cloth of wrapping still adhering to some coins”, Mit Rahineh, Egypt, c. 88 BC; “in cloth bag”, *CH* 8.281, Eretria, c. 281 BC; “in a linen sack”, *CH* 9.369, Ascalon, 4th century BC. *CH* 11 mentions several purses but they might be ceramic pots: *CH* 11.3, 146 and 147.

⁶³ Robinson, Clement 1938, hoards I-V, p. 165-176.

traces, it seems clear that sometimes coins could be buried only protected by a bag or a simple cloth. This was probably the case for most of the coins found in the ground without any visible container, since it seems doubtful that people took the risk of scattering their assets by burying them without any protection.⁶⁴



Fig. 2. Al Mina silver purse, c. 375 BC, Woolley 1938

Nonetheless, if most purses were probably made of organic material, some were made of precious metal. A unique tubular silver purse 6.7 cm long and 2.5 cm in diameter was found in the excavations of Al Mina, at the mouth of the Orontes river, in 1936 (fig. 2). It had hooks, for suspension maybe to a belt, and a silver lid. It contained 55 very small silver denominations struck in Arwad and Sidon and was probably buried c. 375 BC.⁶⁵

A rare case of a woman carrying *chremata* (*kosmos*, ornaments, not coins in this particular scene) is provided by Menander, *Epitrepontes* 381-382: the wife of Syros is given jewels to hide in the front part of her dress, the *prokolpion*, made of a fold in the cloth. As women are usually not represented with purses, it is possible that it was the place where they also carried coins.

3.2. Earthenware, metalware: a variety of pots

My dear pot, you really do have many enemies, you and the gold that's been entrusted to you. Now this is the best thing for me to do, my pot: to carry you off into the shrine of Good Faith (*Fides*); there I'll conceal you well.

edepol ne tu, aula, multos inimicos habes
 atque istuc aurum quod tibi concreditum est.
 nunc hoc mihi factu est optimum, ut ted auferam,
 aula, in Fidei fanum: ibi apstrudam probe.

Plautus, *Aulularia*, v. 580-583. Transl. W. De Melo, Loeb CL.

This address of Euclio to the *aulula* containing his gold, though a caricature of the miser, is a true reflection of raw metal and coin hoarding in the Ancient World. The choice of the word *aulularia*, meaning “little pot”, by Plautus as a title for the play underlines how ordinary it was to protect a hoard in a pot. It leads to the amusing situation when a simple request by the cook for a bigger cooking pot is seen by Euclio as a threat against his hoard.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ An example of a big hoard of silver coins probably buried in the soil in a bag completely degraded: *CH* 10.26 (second half of the 4th century BC), <https://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/deposit/f%2013%3a4?q=hoard&t=&v=list&sort=&s=6>; Anastassiades 2009, p. 117-118.

⁶⁵ Duyrat 2016, no. 33, p. 46-47.

⁶⁶ Plautus, *Aulularia*, 392.

The play was written in Rome c. 190 BC but the scene takes place in Greece and is in fact a reflection of a common practice documented by earlier Greek texts. In Aristophanes' *Wealth* 808-809, Cario describes what constitutes a happy life: abundant and delicious food and beverages, but also luxury vessels made of metal and *skeuaria* (small vessels) full of gold and silver. Another example is provided by Herodotus when he tells the story of the fictitious Egyptian king Rhampsinitus who had a building constructed to protect his silver (ἀργύρου μέγαν), but he was robbed by the builder himself who included a moveable stone that allowed him to enter the place at night:

When the king opened the building, he was amazed to see the vessels (*aggeia*) lacking their treasure (*chremata*).

ὡς δὲ τυχεῖν τὸν βασιλέα ἀνοίξαντα τὸ οἶκημα, θωμάσαι ἰδόντα τῶν χρημάτων καταδεῖ τὰ ἀγγήια.
Herodotus, 2.121.B1. Transl. A.D. Godley, Loeb CL.

Although pots were natural containers for a hoard in literature, pot hoards represent only around 10% of the 4,375 coin hoards in *IGCH*, *CH*, *WW* and *EH*.⁶⁷ Most of the time, the short notes of *IGCH* and *CH* just mention a pot without any information about its material (ceramic? metal?) or its shape. Sometimes the container has been considered noticeable enough to be named: a *skypchos* (twice, of which one in a grave), a *kantharos* (four times, all in Kavala museum⁶⁸), an *olpe*, or a lamp. Some large-scale excavations give us a bigger view of the containers. Of the eight hoards found by the excavators in Olynthos, three were in pots: a small jar (hoard VI, c. 379 BC), an oenochoe covered with a saucer (hoard VII, c. 379 BC) and a small pitcher (hoard VIII, c. 348 BC).⁶⁹ In another study, I have shown that only 30 (8.5%) of 355 Syrian hoards dating from the end of the 6th century to the end of the 1st century BC had a container identified. For the remainder, either they were wrapped in organic material destroyed with time, or their publishers failed to mention the container. 21 hoards were discovered in terracotta pots (70% of the containers known), of which only two were described by the publisher.⁷⁰ When exploring publications of hoards found with an archaeological context, it is noticeable that most of the ceramic containers are common pots, with no or little decor or specific features.

Metal containers, which are rarer, are more carefully noted. Only one seems remarkably precious: a gold vase in which were hidden at least 21 gold staters of Philip II, Alexander III and Philip III Arrhidaeus, buried c. 315-300 BC, was found with two gold torques in Moldavia in 1953 (*IGCH* 800). A tiny number out of 4,375 hoards are described as found in silver containers. For example, ten staters of Elis were deposited in a silver box in a demolished wall in Naupactus c. 460 BC (*IGCH* 19), seven coins of Tarentum were found in 1896 in a luxurious silver pyxis (fig. 3) in Tarento (*IGCH* 1983, c. 280-270 BC),⁷¹ and 87 Thasian tetradrachms and denarii were discovered in a silver vessel in Stancuta (Romania) buried after 52 BC (*IGCH* 662). In all these cases, the container is part of the value of the hoard and can even be more valuable than the coins.

⁶⁷ This is a rather raw number: it would be necessary to check the bibliography of each hoard to obtain more precise figures.

⁶⁸ All in graves: it seems that it was usual to bury hoards in vases in eastern Macedonia during the Hellenistic period, Kremydi 2018, p. 346.

⁶⁹ Robinson, Clement 1938, p. 176-183, pl. XXII-XXIV. Hoards VI and VII were found in two different rooms of the same house.

⁷⁰ Duyrat 2016, p. 405-406.

⁷¹ Vlasto 1930, p. 125-127; Willeumier 1930; Pfrommer 1987, p. 160-167, fig. 33.

a.



b.

Fig. 3. The Tarento hoard (*IGCH* 1983) silver pyxis, Wuilleumier 1930, pl. I-II (a: lid; b: side).

Copper or bronze vases are a little more frequent. In two cases the shape of the vase is an oenochoe,⁷² otherwise it is undetermined. Even lead could be used to protect buried coins, either as a simple sheet wrapped around them, or wrought in the shape of a vase.⁷³ In general, it seems that any sort of pot could be used to protect a hoard, whatever its importance.⁷⁴

3.3. Boxes, chests and keys

⁷² Hollm, Albania, *CH* 8.67 = 9.14 (393 silver coins of Aegina and 1 of Thera, late 5th century BC); Orlovka, Ukraine, *IGCH* 726 (electrum coins of Cyzicus, c. 340-330 BC).

⁷³ *CH* 7. 50 and 10.326: lead sheets; *IGCH* 1508: 6 lead vases (Duyrat 2016, p. 406); *CH* 9.734: in a lead pipe.

⁷⁴ Same conclusion for Syria with more accurate data: Duyrat 2016, p. 408.

Riches were also stored in chests, as already noted in the quotation of Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 10-12: the gold and silver he kept at home were safely protected in a *kibotos*.⁷⁵ Theophrastus provides a vivid portrait of this practice while describing Mistrust:

When he is lying in bed he asks his wife whether she has locked up the money chest (*kibotos*), whether the cupboard (*kyliouchion*) has been sealed, and whether the bolt is in place on the front door; and even if she says yes he gets out of bed anyway, naked and barefoot, lights the lamp and runs around checking all these, and only then can he get some sleep.

καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν αὐτοῦ ἐρωτᾶν κατακείμενος εἰ κέκλεικε τὴν κιβωτόν, καὶ εἰ σεσήμανται τὸ κυλιούχιον, καὶ εἰ ὁ μοχλὸς εἰς τὴν θύραν τὴν αὐλείαν ἐμβέβληται· καὶ ἂν ἐκείνη φῆ, μηδὲν ἦττον αὐτὸς ἀναστὰς γυμνὸς ἐκ τῶν στρωμάτων καὶ ἀνυπόδητος τὸν λύχνον ἄψας ταῦτα πάντα περιδραμῶν ἐπισκέψασθαι καὶ οὕτω μόλις ὕπνου τυγχάνειν.

Theophrastus, *Characters* 18.4, Transl. J. Rusten, Loeb CL

This character is so popular in comedy that he is painted on a kalyx-krater signed by Asteas, in Poseidonia, c. 350-340 (fig. 4). On a stage supported by five columns, four men are depicted in a minimalist decor: a door opening inward closes the stage on the left and symbolises a house; two female masks (one has nearly completely disappeared) and a wreath hang on the back wall. “Two rascals, Gymnilos and Kosilos, have dragged the miser (Charinos) out of his house on his strong-box (...). He looks to have gone to sleep on it to better protect his wealth.”⁷⁶ Indeed he lies on a pile of folded textile. A slave stands to the right of the scene.

⁷⁵ An early occurrence of the word ἀργυροθήκη (money-chest) may appear in a lost play of Diocles, Edmonds 1957, vol. 1, fragment 10A-13, p. 898-899; but the same word in Theophrastus 10.14 seems to be a later addition, ἀργυροθήκη becoming usual only after the 2nd century AD. Centuries later, Artemidorus of Daldis (late 2nd–early 3rd century AD) in his *Interpretation of Dreams* 2.58 states it neatly: “Chest, cupboards, and strongboxes signify the dreamer’s wife, as that is where one has deposited one’s most precious assets” (Transl. M. Hammond, Oxford World’s Classics, 2020).

⁷⁶ Trendall, Webster, 1971, IV, 14.



Fig. 4. Kalix-krater signed by Asteas, in Poseidonia, c. 350-340. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung / Johannes Laurentius, CC BY-SA 4.0, inventory number: F3044

Chests are one of the commonest pieces of furniture in a Greek house.⁷⁷ They appear in texts under different names, in most cases as a *kibotos* (κιβωτός), a *kibotion* (κιβώτιον) or a *larnax* (λάρναξ).⁷⁸ They are omnipresent in daily life scenes represented on vases, sometimes used as a seat. They were meant to store clothes or objects, precious or not, and are therefore sometimes locked or sealed or not⁷⁹. The classical form is a rectangular box, sometimes with a gabled or arched lid, plain or delicately adorned with figures or more simple patterns, of various sizes according to its use: from a trunk capable of holding two people, to a small box fitting in a hand.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ On the distinct contents and purposes of chests (*thekai*, θήκαι) in a Greek house, Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.17.

⁷⁸ Andrianou 2009, p. 109-113 for a detailed examination of the different names of boxes and chests in Greek.

⁷⁹ On a sealed box (ἐχίνοσ) used for holding a written legal testimony according to the inscription painted on the lid, see Boegehold 1982.

⁸⁰ Brümmer 1985; Richter 1966, p. 72-79.



Fig. 5. Helen and Paris, Apulian bell-krater, Painter of Stockholm, c. 380-370 BC, Louvre, K6, Tochon Collection, 1818. © GrandPalais RMN (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

On Attic and Southern Italian vases of the Classical period, small chests are shown in the hands of women who extract a jewel from them (fig. 5).⁸¹ They echo descriptions of jewel boxes dedicated by women in temples. A vivid example is provided by the inventories of the Opisthodomos of the Parthenon in Athens during the 4th century: a jewel box dedicated by the wife of an Athenian citizen contained luxurious headbands decorated with gold, and seals on gold or silver rings.

In a painted box (*kibotion*), which Kleito, wife of Aristokrates, son of Oulios, son of Kimon, dedicated, in which box there is a container in which there is a sealstone set in a gold ring, which Dexilla dedicated. A neckband having 12 gold pieces on it, and another one having 12 gold pieces, and another having 7 gold pieces. A choker having 10 gold pieces including some unfired. Two coloured glass seals having golden chains, an onyx having a gold ring, a jasper seal having a gold ring, a glass seal set in gold having a gold ring, a jasper seal set in gold, two seals having silver rings, seven coloured glass seals set in gold, a seal set in gold, a gold necklace - - -

ἐν κιβωτίῳ ποικίλῳ ὁ Κλειτῷ Ἀριστοκράτους τοῦ
 Ὀυλίου Κίμωνος γυνὴ ἀνέθηκεν· ἐγὼ κυλιχνίδι ἐνὶ ἐν
 τῷ κιβωτίῳ σφραγὶς χρυσοῦν δακτύλιον ἔχουσα·
 Δέξιλλα ἀνέθηκεν· ὄχθοιβος χρυσία ἔχων δώδεκα·
 ἕτερος ὄχθοιβος χρυσία ἔχων δώδεκα· ἕτερος
 ὄχθοιβος χρυσία ἔχων ἑπτὰ· χλιδῶ χρυσία ἔχων
 δέκα συν τῷ ἀπύρῳ· σφραγίδες ὑαλίνα ποικίλα
 δύο· περικεχρυσωμένα ἄλυσεις χρυσαῖς ἔχουσαι·
 ὄνυξ χρυσοῦν δακτύλιον ἔχων· σφραγὶς ἰασπις
 χρυσοῦν δακτύλιον ἔχουσα· σφραγὶς ὑαλίνη
 περικεχρυσωμένη χρυσοῦν δακτύλιον ἔχουσα·
 σφραγὶς ἰασπις περικεχρυσωμένη· σφραγίδες δύο
 ἀργυροῦς δακτυλίους ἔχουσαι· σφραγίδες ὑαλίνα
 ἑπτὰ ποικίλα περικεχρυσωμένα· σφραγὶς
 περίχρυσος· ὑποδερὶς---

Transl. Harris 1995, p. 51, no. 37.

⁸¹ Richter 1966, Fig. 395, 396, 399. See also Polyneikes giving Harmonia's necklace (from a box) to Eriphyle, c. 450-440 BC (Louvre G442).

In the inventories of Delos, the jewels are often exhibited with boxes: a gold ring with a stone is presented in a small box (ἐν κιβωταρίῳ μικρῷ), other objects appear in wooden boxes but also in more precious ones in ivory or covered with leather or in papyrus.⁸² They play a role in displaying the precious offerings they contain but also in keeping them together and protecting them.

A relief from Melos dated c. 450 BC depicts the release of the body of Hector in exchange for gold (fig. 6): the dead hero, still naked, lies on the ground while old king Priam stands on the right side of the scene, mourning his son. On the left, Achilles holds a large scale on which a servant of Priam places a gold ingot. He has taken it from the chest on the floor below the scale, the lid of which is still open.⁸³ The boxes, as represented, do not seem to offer a very strong protection. Sometimes, “the lid was secured not by a lock, but by winding a string around two [or more] knobs, which were respectively on the lid and on the chest.” Such a closure system is clearly represented on a plate in the National museum in Athens and a hydria in New York.⁸⁴



Fig. 6. Relief from Melos, the ransom of Hector, c. 450 BC, Courtesy of ROM (Royal Ontario Museum), Toronto, Canada, 926.32. ©ROM.

Archaeological remains of chests in a housing context are extremely rare. Generally, the only traces left are the hinge joints of the lid, nails, bronze bosses and ornaments made of ivory or

⁸² Prêtre 2012, p. 79-80, 137-145.

⁸³ Royal Ontario Museum 926.32; Brümmer 1985, p. 99-100, Fig. 28a. Homer says that Priam paid a ransom of 10 talents of gold, precious robes and cloaks, tripods, cauldrons and a beautiful Thracian cup to reclaim the corpse of his son. It was taken from a protected vault where his treasure was kept in chests: φωριαμῶν ἐπιθήματα κάλ' ἀνέωγεν. Homer, *Iliad*, 24.228 and 232.

⁸⁴ Richter 1966, p. 73 and 75-76, Fig. 393; the plate in Athens, National Museum 14792; the hydria in New York, Metropolitan Museum 41.162.87.

bronze.⁸⁵ More are known from funerary contexts (*larnakes*). The latter are of foremost importance for the understanding of our topic: contrary to the iconography of vases and sculpture, some have one or several keyholes and sometimes the key itself has been preserved.⁸⁶ In Eretria, a bronze box with a keyhole was still complete. It was found in a domestic context (house IV), under soil levelled with a filling containing sherds of ceramics. It is dated to the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd century BC (fig. 7).⁸⁷ In Elis, the tomb of Philimina contained the remains of a rectangular “wooden box with metal fittings and bone decoration” dated to the third quarter of the 3rd century. “A square, bronze fitting with four holes belonged to the exterior of the lock. Hemispherical discs were placed on these fittings. An iron Γ-shaped key, square in section, belongs to the same box and preserves a bronze ring at its end.”⁸⁸ This box was filled with toiletries, but it was probably safe enough for more precious items. In Delos, several bronze ornaments, some for a wooden box, have been found with a key and a keyhole.⁸⁹



Fig. 7. Eretria, end of the 4th-beginning of the 3rd century BC. Eretria Museum B823. © Ecole suisse d'archéologie en Grèce.

Chests are standard equipment in Greek houses, but more original boxes could be used to keep coins or precious objects. A rare coin hoard was concealed in a bronze box in the shape of an Egyptian cartouche – uninscribed – with a pivoting opening mechanism, found in the excavations led by Maurice Dunand in Byblos.⁹⁰

More rarely associated with safekeeping, cupboards (*kylicheia*) were pieces of furniture with shelves closed by curtains to keep – and display – silverware and ceramics according to

⁸⁵ Andrianou 2009, p. 66-67.

⁸⁶ A chest apparently without keyhole: Richter 1966, p. 76. List of chests in tombs: Andrianou 2009, p. 67-81. See also Prêtre 2012, p. 138, the absence of keys is noted in the Delian inventories listing boxes: κίβωτους παλαιάς κλεῖς οὐκ ἐκούσας.

⁸⁷ Reber 1998, p. 84, Fig 134; Andrianou 2009, p. 66-67, 70.

⁸⁸ Andrianou 2009, p. 73-75; Themelis 1994, vol. 1, p. 156-157, vol. 2, ill. p. 83-87.

⁸⁹ Siebert 1973, p. 569-570. Iron keys, keyholes and locks for the temples are also noted in the Delian inventories: Deonna 1938, p. 249.

⁹⁰ Dunand 1954, p. 67, fig. 44: 13 silver coins of Byblos, Tyre, Lycia, and a Persian siglos, buried c. 450 BC. Duyrat, 2016, no. 11.

Athenaios.⁹¹ In Theophrastus, the cupboard can be sealed and is obviously part of the security of precious objects in the house,⁹² but it is not as common as pots, chests and boxes.

3.4. Money boxes and beehives

Individual collection boxes are rather common in the Roman world but seem rare in the Greek world. As a result, a fine moneybox in the shape of a temple found in house 25 in Priene in the 1890s and dated to the 2nd century BC has been considered the oldest known private piggy bank (fig. 8).⁹³ It imitates one of the *thesauroi* that were so common in Delphi or Olympia: the terracotta building stands on a three-stepped *krepis*; only the façade is moulded, with two engaged columns framing a closed door and supporting a pediment decorated with *acroteria*. The horizontal slit to insert the coins is pierced in the pediment. The style of the columns, with the upper half fluted and the lower half smooth, dates to the Hellenistic period. The rear part of the box is semi-circular and smooth. A square opening in the back, the lid of which is lost, allowed the owner to remove the coins. Such ‘piggy-banks’ were called *thesauroi* in Greek. The Priene potter played on words when he gave his terracotta *thesauros* the shape of a stone *thesauros*.



Fig. 8. Terracotta moneybox from the excavations of Priene, 2nd century BC, 16 x 9 x 8 cm
© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung / Johannes Laurentius, CC BY-SA 4.0, inventory number: TC 8574.

However remarkable, the moneybox of Priene is not the oldest in the Greek world. The Tel Tsippor hoard (IGCH 1514) buried c. 311 BC in Judaea was deposited within an already closed jug that had a hole pierced into its side, large enough to insert the coins, transforming the jug into a moneybox (fig. 9).⁹⁴ It contained 56 tetradrachms with the types of Alexander – lifetime and posthumous – as well as 4 local imitations of Athenian drachms. Reusing a

⁹¹ *Deipnosophistai* 5.199c with a luxurious example of cupboard in the *pompe* of Ptolemy II; Andrianou 2009, p. 82-83 with other references.

⁹² Theophrastus, *Characters* 18.4, Andrianou 2009, p. 82-83.

⁹³ Wiegand, Schrader 1904, p. 465.

⁹⁴ Duyrat 2016, hoard 105; Rahmani 1966.

ceramic vessel by opening a slit in its side became a well known practice during the Roman period; furthermore, the ordinary collection box of the time was very simply shaped as a round pot with a slit.⁹⁵ Therefore, it is probable that slitted pots like the Tel Tsippor one existed elsewhere in the Greek world but have not been noticed by excavators, especially if the pots were broken and the slit or hole invisible.



Fig. 9. Tel Tsippor hoard (IGCH 1514) and its jug, buried c. 311 BC,
Photo: Clara Amit, Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

A more original case is raised by Aristophanes in *Wasps* 241 (422 BC), where a verse about Laches, the Athenian general allied to Nicias and opposed to Cleon, mentions a beehive as a place where money could be hidden: “Everybody says he’s stuffed his hive with money.”⁹⁶ If meant to make the Athenians laugh at Laches’ greed, the mention of the hive is probably not a metaphor. Roman moneyboxes could take a beehive shape, maybe because beehives, like piggy banks, have a slit through which the insects come in,⁹⁷ and maybe also because of the symbolic strength of the business of the bees accumulating pollen and producing honey all through the summer, but of course probably also because the stings of the insects could discourage thieves. Greek beehives were terracotta pots, either intended to lie horizontally on the ground or to stand upright, and they could as well have been used to keep coins.⁹⁸

4. Public and private places

Once gathered in a container, riches could be concealed or simply protected in many different places.

4.1. At home

⁹⁵ Graeven 1901, p. 169-170, Figs. 8-10.

⁹⁶ Σίμβλον δέ φασι χρημάτων ἔχειν ἅπαντες αὐτόν, Aristophanes, *Wasps* 241, Transl. J. Henderson, Loeb CL.

⁹⁷ Graeven 1901, p. 181.

⁹⁸ Jones, Graham, Sackett 1973; Anderson-Stojanović, Jones 2002. On a hoard found in Yemen, “allegedly inside a beehive vessel”, see Huth 2010, p. 103, no. 15.

Houses were the first place where people kept their assets.⁹⁹ As seen previously in Lysias' speech against Eratosthenes, the orator had placed a fortune in gold, silver and electrum coins and silver vases in his bedroom (*domation*). The comedy miser of the Italic painter Asteas is pictured sleeping on a big chest (fig. 4) that might also be the sort of furniture (*kibotos*) used by Lysias in his own bedroom. Of the eight hoards from Olynthus buried between c. 479 and 348 BC, five were hidden in houses, of which two under the floors of a kitchen and one in the flue next to it.¹⁰⁰

Even in the poor house of Euclio, the miser of Plautus (c. 190 BC), the gold treasure can be kept at home, with two bolts locking the door.¹⁰¹ The presence of bolts and locks at home is repeatedly noted as a key disposition for securing the house: Theophrastus' *Mistrust* character cannot sleep without double checking that the house is properly locked although his wife assures him she has done it. He also checks that the chest and cupboard are properly sealed.¹⁰² The security of the house relies on these successive locks.¹⁰³ The importance of these devices is also emphasised in Aristophanes' *Wealth*:

Not true! That's a burglar's slander. You see, he broke into the house but had nothing to snatch, because he found everything under lock and key, so he called my precautions cowardice.

ἦκιστ', ἀλλά με
τοιχωρύχος τις διέβαλ'· εισδὺς γάρ ποτε
οὐκ εἶχεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν οὐδέν λαβεῖν,
εὐρῶν ἀπαξάπαντα κατακεκλημένα·
εἶτ' ὠνόμασέ μου τὴν πρόνοιαν δειλίαν.

Aristophanes, *Wealth*, v. 203-207. Transl. J. Henderson, Loeb CL

Coin hoards have been found in houses during excavations. One of the oldest examples in Greece is the 8th century BC hoard of *Hackgold* excavated in a house in Eretria, under the floor of a room and near a wall. It would be easy to provide a long list of other examples of coin hoards found under house floors, though the detail of the context of these finds is rarely given by archaeologists.¹⁰⁴ Different situations can be identified. In many cases, archaeologists can clearly locate the hoard under a floor and the voluntary burial by the owner is not in doubt. This is the case for the famous Khirbet Qumran hoard buried c. 8 BC in three jars in the same house: two under a threshold and the third one near the north wall of the same room.¹⁰⁵ However, it also happens that the destruction of the house blurs our understanding. In Al Mina, c. 375 BC, the structure's floors were destroyed, and thus it is impossible to say whether the coins were found on the floor (fallen from a collapsed first floor or a shelf) or buried below.¹⁰⁶ Hoards could be buried in walls, as in Mit Rahineh (Egypt) where 36

⁹⁹ In 7 of 18 occurrences of coins in Plautus and Terence, they are kept at home: de Callataÿ 2015, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, Clement 1938, p. 161-162.

¹⁰¹ *Aulularia* 103-104.

¹⁰² Theophrastus, *Characters* 18.4.

¹⁰³ Plautus provides a series of scenes with the same environment: a treasure locked at home in a chest or a cupboard or buried: *Trinummus* 140-156 (at home); *Epidicus* 308-309 (at home in a sealed cabinet, *opsignato armario*); *Aulularia* 1-14 (at home buried in the middle of the hearth), 823-824 (in a chest at home, *in arca apud me*).

¹⁰⁴ For example in Syria: Duyrat 2016, no. 145, Tell Sukas, c. 243/2, beneath the floor in the corner of a house; no. 166, Oylum Höyüğü, c. 203/2 BC, in the corner of a room; no. 285, Maresha, c. 112 BC, under the floor of a room; no. 294, Ascalon, c. 100 BC, under the floor of a room, etc.

¹⁰⁵ Duyrat 2016 no. 357.

¹⁰⁶ Duyrat 2016, no. 36.

Ptolemaic coins were found in excavation, with traces of the cloth in which they were wrapped.¹⁰⁷

Olynthus offers a unique case of a Greek city abandoned after its destruction by Philip II's army in 348 and widely excavated in the 1920s-1930s. N. Cahill carefully mapped the coin finds made in around a hundred houses excavated. Single finds – mostly bronze coins – were concentrated around the agora, in streets and houses where workshops and shops were identified. Silver coin hoards created a different pattern: eight were found in houses, away from the agora, in both North and South Hills of the town. “The fact, however, that nearly all the silver hoards were found in houses on the North Hill which were involved in domestic industry, but which did not display outward signs of prosperity such as mosaics or cut-stone facades, emphasizes the association between monetary wealth and trade and industry rather than with traditional pursuits.”¹⁰⁸ Coins only represented a small proportion of fortunes: readily usable and transportable wealth. The link made between trade, industry and coin hoards observable in Olynthus on the basis of a town-size sample is interesting. It would be worth comparing Olynthus with other large size excavations but I do not know of similar approaches in their publications.

4.2. In the ground

Literature gives a foremost place to burial as the way of safeguarding a treasure. It is a commonplace to describe a character worried by the protection of his gold looking for the safest place to dig a hole and bury a pot of gold as described by Ploutos himself in the play of Aristophanes: “If I find myself in a pauper's house, he immediately digs a hole and puts me underground.”¹⁰⁹ Such behaviour was so common that it is repeatedly described in literature. One of the most frequently quoted instances is this sentence in Xenophon:

No one ever yet possessed so much silver as to want no more; if a man finds himself with a huge amount of it, he takes as much pleasure in burying the surplus as in using it.
ἀργύριον δὲ οὐδεὶς πω οὕτω πολὺ ἐκτίησατο, ὥστε μὴ ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι· ἀλλ' ἦν τισὶ γένηται παμπληθές, τὸ περιτεῦδον κατορύττοντες οὐδὲν ἤττον ἠδονταὶ ἢ χρώμενοι αὐτῷ.
Xenophon, *Ways and means* 4.7, Transl. E. C. Marchant, Loeb CL.

But this observation should not be read out of context: it ends a paragraph in which Xenophon observes that copper, iron, wine or corn, when abundant, become cheap, while a new silver seam creates a rush to open new mines and an increased eagerness for the metal. He also underlines one of the properties of precious metal: it keeps its value through time and is worth hoarding, at least the surplus. These widespread habits explain why so many coin hoards have been identified. As a matter of fact, the 4,375 hoards known to us probably represent a minority of what was really buried between the end of the 7th century BC and the 1st century BC: the owners may have removed their assets from the ground in many cases, others may have found what was left, and last but not least, *IGCH*, *CH*, *WW* and *EH* are only a reflection of what numismatists have recorded in collections and commerce, mostly since the beginning of the 20th century. In the 58 excavations in Syria I was able to analyse, isolated gold or silver coins were rare.¹¹⁰ This observation shows that the vast majority of precious-metal coins

¹⁰⁷ *IGCH* 1714, c. 88 BC.

¹⁰⁸ Cahill 2002, p. 272-273 and fig. 61, p. 271; table 14, p. 272.

¹⁰⁹ ἦν μὲν γὰρ εἰς φειδωλὸν εἰσελθὼν τύχῳ, / εὐθύς κατώρυξέν με κατὰ τῆς γῆς κάτω. Aristophanes, *Wealth*, 237-238, Transl. J. Henderson, Loeb CL.

¹¹⁰ For the Hellenistic period: 54 silver coins and 1 gold coin were found isolated on 19 different sites, of which one was a necropolis where 5 silver coins and 1 gold coin were found in tombs. Duyrat 2016, p. 258-259 and

currently held in coin cabinets and private collections, most without provenance, or sold on the market, come from hoards that elude our knowledge. Hoarding coins in the soil seems to have been a widespread habit.

It is difficult to determine a pattern in hoarding in the current state of knowledge, but one place was obviously related with the protection of wealth: sacred precincts. Temples kept treasuries, deposits, products of tithes (*dekate*) and other taxes, and offerings of the worshippers; they also had banking activities.¹¹¹ But sacred precincts also seem to have been considered safer to bury private nest eggs.¹¹² Plautus provides a vivid example of such behaviour. In *Aulularia*, Euclio decides that his house is not safe enough to keep his pot of gold, and chooses to bury it in the grove and shrine (*luco et fano*) of Fides,¹¹³ with this invocation:

Good Faith, you know me and I know you. Make sure you don't change your name if I entrust this to you.
I'll go to you, Good Faith, with trust in your faithfulness.
Fides, nouisti me et ego te: caue sis tibi
ne tu immutassis nomen, si hoc concreduo.
ibo ad te fretus tua, Fides, fiducia.
Plautus, *Aulularia*, 584-586. Transl. W. De Melo, Loeb CL.

The invocation is repeated later and overheard by a servant eavesdropping (v. 608-623), leading Euclio to move his hoard again. He chooses another shrine, but in a wilder place, outside the town walls, in a grove dedicated to Silvanus, “difficult to reach and full of willow thickets”.¹¹⁴ As usual, Plautus, though describing a scene supposedly taking place in Athens, brings mixed realities where it is not always easy to differentiate Greek and Roman features. But in such a case, he seems to depict a behaviour transcending cultures.¹¹⁵ Euclio's choices, although caricatural, might explain why we sometimes unearth hoards in lost places far from housing or farm buildings. Rural precincts, only identified by a *peribolos* wall or several *horoi* that have left no archaeological trace, could have felt safer than houses or a town environment.

Conclusion

The sample gathered in this article, if not exhaustive, already provides a reliable case study on how the ancient Greeks protected their wealth. Literary texts mostly refer to an Athenian reality, but they also depict archetypal behaviours that remained true in other places and times. The variety of containers noted in texts, iconography and archaeology contrasts with our ignorance of the places in the house that were considered appropriate for keeping riches safe: Lysias' bedroom, the floor of a kitchen in Olynthus, the hearth in Plautus, no place seems to be particularly devoted to this role.

Table 3.1.

¹¹¹ For a sacred hoard of gold buried in the earth in a precinct in Locri, see Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 20.9.

¹¹² Examples of hoards buried in shrines, that are not foundation deposits or offerings: Iseion, Eretria, Euboea (IGCH 221); Alabanda, Caria (CH 10.299, Hamdi Bey 1905); Jerusalem, Temple Mount, outside the East Wall (IGCH 1625, WW 350); North Bubastid door, Karnak temple (CH 10.454, EH 197).

¹¹³ Plautus, *Aulularia* 615.

¹¹⁴ Plautus, *Aulularia* 667-676.

¹¹⁵ For a detailed study on the historical nature and archetypes in Theophrastus' *Characters*, see Lane Fox 1996.

Precious belongings, especially gold and silver artefacts, required a physical protection organised as best as possible. The numerous cases of failure reported in literature, as well as the anxiousness of the owner highlighted in comedy, shed light on the difficulty of keeping these riches safe. As a result, wealthy people avoided putting all their eggs in the same basket: cash at home (not in the earth), loans, deposits in banks, investments in businesses, women's *kosmos* and precious metalwear represented a protective diversification. The wealthy did not hoard their precious metal, whether coined or uncoined: they stored it. They did not hide it: they ensured that their cash, precious metalwear and jewellery were protected at home and remained liquid. It is probably for the same reason that engraved gems and jewellery, when their provenance is known, mostly come from tombs. Either the dead departed with them, or they were traded, inherited or recycled.

Very large coin hoards are often associated with military contexts and do not appear to be linked to the upper classes. Characters in literature connected with the burial of hoards are generally poor people or misers. Hoarding in the ground was practiced by the less well-off who did not have secure places at home. It is not certain that the amounts of precious metal hidden in the ground or elsewhere were sufficient to hamper economic growth and investment. The proportion of buried wealth was probably limited, although it increased in war time, as mentioned by Plutarch in the *Life of Pompey*, when his army landed near Utica in 81 BC:

Some soldiers, it would seem, stumbled upon a treasure (*thesauros*) and got considerable amounts of money (*chremata*). When the matter became public, the rest of the army all fancied that the place was full of money which the Carthaginians had hidden away in some time of calamity.

στρατιῶται γάρ τινες, ὡς ἔοικε, θησαυρῷ περιπεσόντες ἔλαβον συχνὰ χρήματα. τοῦ δὲ πράγματος γενομένου φανεροῦ δόξα τοῖς ἄλλοις παρέστη πᾶσι χρημάτων μεστὸν εἶναι τὸν τόπον ἐν ταῖς ποτε τύχαις τῶν Καρχηδονίων ἀποτεθειμένων.

Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 9.3-4. Transl. B. Perrin, Loeb CL.

War was a major disruption in people's life. They fled with their belongings or were stripped of them by the winner as shown by the examples of Dionysius in Rhegium in 386 BC or Cassius in Rhodes in 42 BC. Armies would exert violent coercion to obtain hidden wealth. Such upheavals could lead anyone to bury or hide treasures in wells, holes in the earth or anywhere unusual, but in principle only temporarily. For the very wealthy, the best way to safeguard their wealth could be, as it is today, to lend it to someone else. As a consequence, what texts and archaeology bring to our knowledge of how the Greeks kept their private wealth safe, is only the tip of the iceberg.

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