

*Taxus baccata* 'Aurea Midasii' or 'Heart of Gold'

Further into the Bozdağ forest than you can walk in a day, towering over a stream, there is a yew tree.

Profile

- circumference: 11.24m
- height: 31.4m (estimated)
- location: withheld
- age: to be determined.

It is bigger — maybe older — than the controversial Gümeli Porsuğu yew, claimed as 4,112 years.

Last Tuesday I took a core sample. I struck camp at dawn, climbing fast in the cool of the morning, slower as the heat built and the forest quietened.

Yew is hard. I braced myself on the steep bank, feet cushioned by needles. The wood pushed back, dense and private. I withdrew the sample as the sun set.

Dendrochronology gives me migraines, counting and recounting magnified stripes under bright lab light. The yew's tight rings aged from creamy sapwood to carmine heartwood. The gold was a shock. Seven years out from the centre, a slender curve of metal, at c2,200 BCE.

My hands trembled as I googled 'Midas'. I imagined the exhausted Phrygian king bending into the racing Pactolus to wash away the curse, steadying himself on a sapling, one last metamorphosis. First roses, then food, his own daughter! And finally, this yew tree, resistant to pests and magic, growing over the trauma.

I saw first-author papers, prizes, tenure. TikTokers, bulldozers, sawdust. Be careful what you wish for.

I switched off the spotlight, packed up my kit and left the lab with the last two centimetres of the core in my pocket: secret, safe.