



© The J. Paul Getty Museum (digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program)

Alexander the Great, Greece, ca 320 BC.

MACEDONIA THROUGH MODERN EYES

Zosia Halina Archibald

introduces Macedonia and its extraordinary archaeological history

When we think of classical Greece, we think immediately of Athens or Sparta. We don't think about the north. The north only comes into the political game later, when the story moves, in the middle of the fourth century BC, to the equivocal contest for dominance of the Aegean region and the rise of Macedon. Historians have tried to explain what happened in terms of the military and diplomatic brilliance of King Philip II and of his more famous son, Alexander the Great. The Macedonian kings swept the whole of Greece into a new world order, in which classical Greek political and cultural values

were fused in a new, multicultural, territorial empire.

There is much to commend in this historical sketch. At the same time, this broad-brush image distorts the past. Before the foundation of modern universities, in the 19th and 20th centuries, ideas about ancient societies developed in the context of discussions about contemporary societies. The philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle formed a natural framework for these conversations, alongside Plutarch's biographies. Models of the Greek states and of the Roman Republic were frequently adopted in the heated debates of the 17th and 18th centuries about good

society, the most desirable political order and statecraft. In the 18th century, the Macedonian kings, Philip II and Alexander the Great, offered models of leadership. From the 19th century onwards, the aspirations of nation states towards democracy increasingly favoured Athens as a model. In the Greek War of Independence, Athens became the geographical, ideological and political focus of national Greek aspirations. The classical past, visibly represented in the surviving monuments of central and southern Greece, was intimately linked with the emergent nation state, in the eyes of politicians and public alike.

First clues to ancient northern secrets

The north of the Balkans is a mountainous region, dominated by the Pindos range, which forms a giant spine down the Greek peninsula, separating the western districts of Epirus, Aitolia and Ambrakia from Macedonia and Thessaly. Mount Olympos was always, it seems, a natural point of orientation, visible, in clear weather, from hundreds of kilometres away. Wreathed in clouds and snow, it became the seat of the gods from the time of Homer onwards. Beyond Olympos were numerous peoples with whom the southerly Greeks had regular maritime connections: Macedonians, Thracians, Paionians and others.

When Professor Manolis Andronikos, and fellow archaeologists from the University of Thessaloniki, discovered royal tombs at Vergina, in Macedonia, in the late 1970s they were at first unsure whether this gift horse was one that they wanted to accept. After all, they had all been schooled in a Greek liberty based on Athenian democracy. What would it mean to recover the tomb, and the body itself, of Philip II, the man who, according to the Athenian orator Demosthenes, had crushed Greek freedom?

Andronikos proved to be not just a very successful archaeologist, but also a charismatic storyteller. He created a new story about the Macedonian kings and their royal cemetery at Vergina, which charmed his fellow Greeks. These were kings, but they were Greek kings, who commissioned splendid art works, as well as being magnificent hosts and great military commanders.

Greece between the 'Great Powers'

The nascent Greek kingdom did not include large parts of what had been the community of Greek-speaking states in the pre-Roman era as well as under Byzantine rule. The provinces of the Ottoman Empire were organized along territorial divisions that were quite different from the divisions of pre-Roman,

Roman or Byzantine administration. Most of Greece north of Thermopylae belonged to the Ottoman province of Rumeli until 1867. By the time that significant territorial changes took place, at the Congress of Berlin (1878), the so-called 'Great Powers' of Europe had become closely involved in the affairs of the Ottoman provinces of southern Europe. Greece took control of Thessaly and part of Epirus, while Macedonia remained part of the Ottoman Empire. Macedonia at this time included lands that extended well to the north of what is now North Macedonia, and Thrace extended into large parts of what is now Bulgaria. The final chapters of this story of territorial rearrangements occurred in the latter years of the 19th century, and particularly in the first two decades of the 20th century (the era of the 'Balkan Wars'), when the geographical apportionments began to resemble the border lines that we see today.

World War I and the discovery of Early Iron Age Macedonia

An important moment in the story of archaeological discoveries in Macedonia took place during the First World War. Until the early 1900s, Macedonia did not play a part in the national Greek narrative of the classical past. Significant steps began to be made by Greek and non-Greek scholars, notably Christos Tsountas, Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson, who had started to investigate the surviving above-ground monuments and remains, which included the prominent 'tombas' or 'tells', the artificial mounds created by long-lived human settlements over centuries in prehistory.

The French scholar and explorer Léon Heuzey had identified the ancient site of Vergina and published a detailed map and account in 1876. Nevertheless, it was not until 1912, when Macedonia was incorporated into the Greek state, that this interest developed. The first Archaeological Service was founded to record and investigate sites in Macedonia. When French and British troops

landed in Salonika in 1915, during the First World War, recording of archaeological remains became a key auxiliary activity of the British Salonika Force and the Service Archéologique of the Armée de l'Orient, its French equivalent. The Governor-General of Macedonia, Giorgios Oikonomos, became the first Ephor of Antiquities in Macedonia, and made it his task to ensure that military (and non-military) activities in the region conformed to the state's laws about the preservation of antiquities and that the recording of monuments would proceed systematically.

In the years that followed, a wide range of sites and monuments, of different historical periods, was investigated by detachments of allied troops. Ernest Gardner, who was Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of London, happened to be seconded to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and became a key figure in the organization of a strategy and as curator of the British Salonika Force Museum. Gardner had been Director of the British School at Athens, and some of his former students, including Captain Stanley Casson, were among the archaeologists who conducted fieldwork, while Lieutenant Marcus Tod, a university lecturer in Greek epigraphy, was a pioneer in the recording of inscribed texts in the region. For the first time, plans and drawings began to be made of a wide series of sites and monuments across Macedonia, but particularly those in the region north and east of Thessaloniki and in the direction of the Chalkidic peninsula. These discoveries continue to represent the founding datasets of archaeology in the region.

The Early Iron Age in the Thermaic Gulf

Among the sites excavated by archaeologists such as Wace, Thompson and Casson, or Léon Rey of the French service, were settlement mounds and cemeteries with remains of the Early Iron Age (ca 1000–700 BC). Some of these

were located in the immediate vicinity of the city of Thessaloniki, notably the 'Toumba' on its north-eastern periphery and another at Karabournaki, in the direction of the modern airport and closer to the sea. These settlements did not become comprehensible until they had been investigated by large teams of specialists, using modern scientific methods, from the 1970s onwards, 'Toumba' under the direction of Stelios Andreou, on behalf of the University of Thessaloniki, and Karabournaki by Professor Michalis Tiverios. They were unlike the sites of central and southern Greece, with their stone public monuments.

The cemeteries, on the other hand, such as those at Chauchitsa and Karabournaki, yielded rich, even spectacular burials, the men furnished with iron weapons, bronze ornaments and sometimes helmets, and occasionally gold-foil attachments, the women with rich bronze jewellery and decorative attachments for clothing. Sometimes they too wore gold-foil ornaments and necklaces. Like the enigmatic settlements, the men, women and children of Macedonia and its neighbouring regions looked very different from their southern counterparts.

'North' and 'south' in the archaeology of the Greek mainland

Andronikos' discoveries at Vergina changed the ways in which the 'north' was perceived by educated Greeks of the south, as well as by popular audiences, in Greece and internationally. From the late 1970s onwards, investments and resources began to be directed northwards, not just to Vergina and the preservation of its royal tombs, but also to many significant cities and rural districts, including Pella and Kozani. The pan-Macedonian sanctuary at Dion became the focus of major long-term investment, as did sites along the north Aegean coast, such as Amphipolis and Abdera.

The rapid expansion of the city of Thessaloniki brought with it the need for rescue excavations in the city centre (most recently the Metro

project), as well as in the suburbs. An updated railway line towards Athens, motorways to Athens and across Macedonia, particularly the new Egnatia Odos, linking central Europe to Istanbul, and the Transadriatic Pipeline Project have all resulted in major archaeological discoveries that are transforming the image of the north. New ancient city centres (such as Edessa and Kozani), wealthy country houses and farmsteads (along the Egnatia Odos) and traces of quays along the coastline of the Thermaic Gulf (Transadriatic Pipeline) are among the most notable additions to Macedonia's burgeoning range of antiquities. Discoveries of inscribed texts and graffiti on clay show that a number of different dialects of Greek co-existed in the region (North Greek and Ionian Greek).

A six-year field project at ancient Olynthos, which is a collaboration between the Greek Archaeological Service (represented by Bettina Tsigarida) and the British School at Athens (Zosia Archibald, University of Liverpool; Lisa Nevett, University of Michigan), has revealed new data about a complete ancient city and its

immediate rural hinterland. The city had a nucleus, on the South Hill, dating from the Early Iron Age, which expanded across the slopes and onto the North Hill in the late fifth century, as a result of an initiative by the Macedonian king, Perdikkas II, in 432 BC. Ceramic finds on the South Hill suggest that the population shared many features with the occupants of the 'Toumbas' in the area of Thessaloniki. As research continues, we are likely to find out a great deal more about the inhabitants of the 'north' and their societies.

Further reading

Nevett, L.C. et al. (2017) 'Towards a multi-scalar, multidisciplinary approach to the classical Greek city: The Olynthos Project', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 112, 1–52

Martin González, E. and Paschidis, P. (2017) 'The 21st-century epigraphic harvest from Macedonia', *Archaeological Reports* 63, 181–200

Shapland, A., Stefani, E. (eds) (2017) *Archaeology behind the Battle Lines: The Macedonian Campaign (1915–19)*. London



The birth of Alexander by the so-called Master of the Jardin de vertueuse consolation and assistant (Flemish), ca 1470–1475.