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A. KOTTARIDI  
THE EXCAVATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE 17<sup>TH</sup> EPHORATE OF PREHISTORIC & CLASSICAL  
ANTIQUITIES IN THE MOUNTAINOUS LAND OF MAKEDONIS  
AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF ANCIENT LEBAEA (ΛΕΒΑΙΗ)

Within the context of the new Archaeological Law, the 17<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (EPCA) collaborated with the Municipality of Makedonis in undertaking –under the 3<sup>rd</sup> CSF- the performance of distinct archaeological projects that had previously been incorporated in various municipal infrastructure projects (expansion of irrigation and water supply networks) as independent sub-projects. This pilot collaboration proved to be very productive for both sides, in my opinion, as on the one hand the project was completed without any delays, while on the other a series of finds enriching our knowledge in the history of the region and of Macedonia in general were brought to light.

For six months, my colleagues, G. Karliambas and K. Papastathis, who can now be considered experts in the mountainous archaeological work, and me practically scoured the Pieria mountains managing to be present in the networks expansion works and performing small or more extensive rescue excavations. So, the already long list of the ancient sites found in the area<sup>1</sup> was enriched with ten new:

- One Neolithic site, the second one<sup>2</sup> identified in the plateau of Sfikia.
- One Bronze Age cemetery located to the north side of the plateau.
- Three settlements dated back to the Iron Age, two in the plateau and one in the riverside area of Haliacmon.
- One megalithic monument like the ones characterised as “written rocks”, which in most cases are related to open-air prehistoric shrines, increasing the total number of such monuments found in Pieria to six.
- A section of a stone-paved road that seems to lead towards the low neck of the mountain, an area crossed by the road axis that led to the area of Rytini and, through the Petra and Agios Dimitrios passages, to Ellassona and the south. This road is very similar to the stone-paved road of Vermio mountain<sup>3</sup>, which, we believe, was constructed in the ancient times.
- Two burial clusters, a late Hellenistic one at the site of Alepotrypa and one dating back to Late Antiquity at Marmara site. At the latter site, apart from the burials and the remains of a medieval hut, we also found pieces of the superstructure of a marble temple from the Early Imperial period, which is obviously the reason for the site’s name\*. These bulky marble members were probably transported here, in order to be chiselled and used as building material in the construction of the close-by Byzantine church of Agios Dimitrios, the walls of which contain marble *spolia* that seem to have been extracted from the same building. Fragments of Ionic pillar bases, *cymatia*, and pieces of a coffered ceiling were found scattered in the area or embedded in rubble masonry *periboloi* that either marked properties in a traditional manner or formed terraces for the cultivation of crops on the sloping terrain. Yet the most impressive finds are the bulky Ionic cornices with their distinctive dentils and the monolithic corner of a pediment that, uniquely, had dentils on the raking cornice as well. The width of this member is approximately 3 ft. (90cm), which

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<sup>1</sup> See A. Kottaridi – Ch. Brekoulaki, AEMTh (Archaeological Work in Macedonia & Thrace) 11, 1997, 109-114, and A. Kottaridi, AEMTh 14, 2000, 527-536.

<sup>2</sup> Information about the first Neolithic site found in the area can be found in A. Kottaridi, AEMTh 14, 2000, 527-536.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Kottaridi, AEMTh 15, 2001, 502.

\*TN: *Marmara* in Greek means “marbles”.

means that the width of the corresponding wall could not exceed 2 ft. This apparently was a rather small building, an Ionic *prostyle* or *in antis* temple. The random and accidental discovery of fragments of votive and architectural reliefs, as well as of marble statues, combined with the local oral tradition, make us believe that at least two big temples probably existed in the plateau of Sfikia, one in Paleochora and one close to the archaic cemetery and the settlement at the site of Kaloki Karya. However, the area's dense, almost impassable low vegetation rendered the locating of the ancient temple impossible.

This year's most significant find, however, is a cemetery of unknown size at the site of Paliomelissa, next to the deep river (Agioneri) that crosses the plateau, really close to the archaic cemetery that was previously investigated at the site of Kaloki Karya<sup>4</sup>.

In an effort to meet the requirements of the project and to protect the antiquities in the wider area of a country dirt road, we excavated fifty four (54) graves in total, most of which belonged to women, and managed to proceed to the conservation of some of the grave offerings revealed.

Eleven graves date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pre-Christian centuries. They are cist graves, built with tiles, slates or rubble masonry, following the typical for this era orientation (along the east-west axis) and often seeming to ignore the earliest burial structures. Their grave offerings, i.e. small Macedonian *amphorae*, *oenochorae*, ladles, relief *skyphoi*, small *skyphoi* and *kantharoi*, *unguentaria*, Charon's oboloi (coins), some weaponry, a few pieces of jewellery and no figurines, form an interesting alternative to the Hellenistic *koine* on the mountains, which is certainly simpler and more reserved than its counterpart in the contemporary prosperous urban centres, i.e. Veroia and Pella, while being very similar to the living conditions in the declining city of Aigai in the late Hellenistic times. What stands out in this burial cluster is a rubble-masonry grave belonging to a rather robust man buried with his short Macedonian sword and his *sarissa*, from which just the spearhead and the joint between its two wooden pieces survive. The absence of a butt-spike and the relatively small length of its head indicate that this was a cavalry *sarissa*, a weapon that, together with the sword, help us conclude that the warrior "resting" here was one of the Macedonian cavalymen that took part in the numerous warfare adventures in the time of *Diadochoi* (Alexander's Successors).

The remaining forty-three burials are pit graves dating back to the late Archaic period. This is the second archaic cemetery unearthed in the area, a fact indicative of a rather dense population on the plateau of Sfikia during the Archaic times. Densely positioned, either in rows or in clusters, lacking a strict orientation, all graves contain rich offerings –more so than the contemporary burials in Kaloki Karya- and seem to belong to a wealthy clan holding a distinctive status in the local society. With the exception of one male burial dating back to the Hellenistic times, where remains of a funeral pyre were identified, all other burials, both Archaic and Hellenistic, were inhumations, a fact proving that cremation never became a common practice in the mountainous land of Macedon<sup>5</sup>.

In general, the burial practices followed in this case, apart from any differences spotted in the extravagance of the burials, are similar to the contemporary cemetery at Kaloki Karya site: men attired in cloaks fastened by one or more big double silver, bronze or iron pins, sometimes wearing silver rings and bearing their weaponry, i.e. knives, spears, lance heads and –in eight burials, an unusually high percentage- swords, which the deceased held with their right hand on their chest.

The vessels accompanying the deceased are usually bronze ones, e.g. plain small *lebetes*, *lecanides* and *omphalos bowls*, the typical libation vessel, and of course some clay ones,

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<sup>4</sup> See A. Kottaridi – Ch. Brekoulakis, AEMTh 11, 1997, 109-114.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Kottaridi, «Το έθιμο της καύσης και οι Μακεδόνες, Καύσεις στην Ελλάδα από την εποχή του χαλκού ως την πρώιμη εποχή του σιδήρου», *Cremations in Greece from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age*, Conference Minutes, Rhodes 29/4-2/5/1999 (2001) pp. 359-371

mainly necessary in burial ceremonies *exaleiptra*. A clay *gorgoneion* fixed on the inner side of the wooden sarcophagus protected with its apotropaic power one of the dead warriors, while the grave of another one contained, except for the sword and the rest of his weaponry, iron stonemasonry tools –a totally unexpected find- a possible indication that the mountainous Macedonians honoured their talented craftsmen. In some of the male, as well as female, burials silver mouthpieces were also found.

The presence of two or three pairs of pins on the shoulders indicate that women wore both *peploi* and *chitones*, while the pins found at the sides of their torso imply the presence of *himatia* or *epiblemata* that were wrapped around the body. The jewellery worn is rich and diverse: gold and silver amulets, either granulated or plain,  $\Omega$ -shaped banded gold or silver earrings, rich necklaces with many large beads made of amber, glass, bone or metal, plain silver rings, bronze upper arm and wrist bracelets, as well as something constituting a unique piece of fashion in the mountainous Macedonia: strings of clinking bronze bracelets ornamenting the fair ankles of the local vain women, one of whom wore rings even on her toes.

These imperial ladies of the mountain were armed: one or more leather or cloth sheaths were often hanging from their belts containing knives. Some of them carried a special ornament with a possibly symbolic significance: one thick string of various types of beads and bronze rings –even an old-fashioned bronze amulet- hanging from their belts and almost reaching their ankles.

Figurines and busts –very common offering in other sites- are extremely rare here, but what we do find in abundance is clay pots, *exaleiptra* and *unguentaria*, small and big jugs and cups –*kylikes*, *skyphoi*, *kantharoi*, but also *kraters* and *lebetes-dinoi*. There also exist many Corinthian vases, although the Attic vases prevail; these represent the painters' workshops of the latest phase of the black-figure style, among which “the painter of Aimon” stands out. One of his large *skyphoi* depicts, on both sides, the Delphic Triad on a chariot. Apparently, Apollo was one of the favourite art themes on the mountain of the Muses, a theme we encounter on an older high-quality Attic black-figure *krater* found in fragments among the deposits in one of the graves.

Less, but not absent, are products of the East Ionian pottery workshops; one rather unusual *skyphos* with geometric decoration<sup>6</sup> has been attributed to the Thasian or Parian pottery workshop. Naturally, the local pottery is abundant –*kantharoi*, low *kylikes*, *krater*-shaped vessels and *exaleiptra*- which co-exist along with imported pottery in undisturbed units.

The economic status of the family of the deceased, the commercial relations, the styles prevailing in each period, and above all the burial customs and post-mortem beliefs determine the quantity, the quality and the types of pottery<sup>7</sup>. However, what is worth underlining here is that this exact combination of these factors will help us better classify and comprehend the local pottery production. The rich pottery sample we now have from the city of Aigai and other sites in Macedonia can help us identify the particularities of distinct local pottery workshops.

The bronze beads, the amulet, and also the eight-shaped pin previously found in the other archaic cemetery, as well as similar finds from the archaic necropolis of Aigai, all local metalwork products, are indicative of the typical conservatism that results in forms and types surviving from the Early Iron Age to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> pre-Christian century and should make us cautious as far as the dating of finds is concerned.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. Tiverios, AEMTh 3, 1989, 618 *op. cit.*, image 1.

<sup>7</sup> On the rationale behind the selection of pottery and other kinds of offerings in Macedonian burials, see A. Kottaridi, AEMTh 10A, 1996, 79-92.

On the contrary, the abundance of imported products from various distant or neighbouring centres –a typical example being the small ivory head-shaped amulet with Phoenician references found in one of the female burials (let's not forget that these are the times when the army of Xerxes crossed this land)- attests to a wish for communication, as well as to an extraversion that contradicts the supposed traditional conservatism of the mountainous centres, yet is explainable if we consider the proximity to the central and intertemporal mainland communication axis connecting Macedonia with the south<sup>8</sup>.

The extensive dispersion, the antiquity, the density and quality of the finds indicate that this was a significant old centre that would however never constitute an enclosed urban unit that could be named a "city". Having none of this knowledge, N.G.L. Hammond, with his unmistakable instinct based on his excellent insight on the sources, history, and the area itself, sought to place somewhere on the Pieria mountain<sup>9</sup> the traditional centre of the Macedonians, the city of Lebaea (Λεβαίη), the landscape of which, as described by Herodotus<sup>10</sup> in his reference to the assumption of the Macedonian throne by the Temenids, in my opinion greatly corresponds to the geography of the site that expands on the slope of the Pieria mountain, over the narrow valley of Haliacmon, between the villages of Sfikia and Rizomata.

In the neighbouring shrine of Lefkopetra, which is located beyond the river on the opposite slope of Vermio mountain, an inscription dating back to the Late Imperial times reads that a Flavius Eutrapelus gives away his belongings "όντα εν Αλ(α)ιβέοις" (which can be found in Alevia), while another inscription refers to an Aur(elius) Rufus residing "εν Αλεβία κώμη της Ελίμειας" (in the settlement of Alevia, in Elimeia)<sup>11</sup>. On the maps that conventionally define the four regions of the Roman-era Macedonia, the borderline between the third and fourth region that coincides with the borderline between Pieria and Elimeia is somewhere in the area of Sfikia. In reality, the mountain ridges of Liacha to the east and of Kokova to the north separate our plateau, where the villages had always been facing Velvendo, both from Pieria mountain and from the city of Veroia and its wider area. It is, therefore, highly possible that this was a frontier area of Elimeia during Imperial times, and that this settlement of Alevia, as ancient Lebaea survived, was located somewhere here, in the heart of the Municipality of Macedonis.

*Edessa,  
17<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities*

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Kottaridi, "Discovering Aegae, the old Macedonian capital", in *Excavating classical culture*, 2002, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> N.G.L. Hammond, *A History of Macedonia*, (Greek translation 1995), Vol. A', pp. 473 *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Herodotus, *Histories* 8.137.

<sup>11</sup> P. Petsas, M.B. Hatzopoulos, L. Gounaropoulou, P. Paschidis, eds. *Inscriptions du sanctuaire de la Mère des Dieux autochtone de Leukopetra (Macédoine)*, 2000, 12 L 4, 106 L 14.



1. The remains of a stone-paved road. 2. Marmara site, part of a marble pediment. 3. Part of a marble ceiling. 4. Paliomelissa site: the ancient cemetery. 5. Paliomelissa site: a cist grave dating to the Hellenistic times. 6. Paliomelissa site: excavation of a pit grave dating to the Late Archaic times.



7. Paliomelissa site: detail of a Late Archaic female burial. The picture shows the bracelets ornamenting the ankles and the rings worn on the toes. 8. Grave offerings of a Hellenistic burial. 9. A clay gorgoneion dating to the Late Archaic times. 10. Corinthian and locally-produced exaleiptra as grave offerings in Late Archaic burials. 11. Attic black-figure skyphoi produced in the workshop of the painter of Aimon.