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THE EXCAVATION OF THE 17TH EPCA IN THE CITY AND THE NECROPOLIS
OF AIGAI IN 2003-2004: NEW DATA REGARDING
THE ROYAL BURIAL CLUSTER OF EURYDICE
AND THE ANCIENT CITY WALL

A small rescue excavation carried out in collaboration with colleague G. Karliabas in 2003 in a plot in Vergina brought to light twenty-four graves. They were all pit-graves and all but one are looted, a generally unusual phenomenon, which however, as we have repeatedly pointed out¹, is the rule in the necropolis of Aigai and most probably related with the looting by the Gauls².

The particular importance of this find lies in the fact that all these burials date to the 6th pre-Christian century, with some of them dating to its first half. This confirms our proposed model of spatial occupation, according to which the necropolis of the Archaic and Classic times is found to the southwest of the Cemetery of the Tumuli³, unfortunately with its larger part lying under the modern settlement of Vergina, once again proving that the lack of finds dating to the Early Archaic times, considered by some⁴ as a counter-argument with regard to the identification of the ancient city, is a void in research and not in history. Besides, only about one hundredth of the necropolis and one five-hundredth of the city have been excavated until now.

The size and shape of the graves imply that they did not belong to prominent people, as is the case in the cluster of Eurydice (cluster B) and the Town Hall cluster⁵. However, and this is a definitely important fact, the offerings

¹See, *e.g.*, A. Kottaridi, "Discovering Aigai, the old Macedonian capital", *Excavating Classical Culture*, 79.

² Plout. Pyrrhus 26.11-26.13.

³ A. Kottaridi, *AEMTh* (Archaeological Work in Macedonia and Thrace) 10A, 1996, 79-92.

⁴ P. Faklaris, *AJA* 98, 1994, 609-16.

⁵ About the cluster of Eurydice see M. Andronikos, *AEMTh* 1, 1987, and *AEMTh* 2, 1988; A. Kottaridi, *AEMTh* 3, 1989, 1-11; *id.*, The lady of Aigai, in *Alexander the Great, Treasures from an epic Era of Hellenism* (2004) 139-148. In general for the necropolis of Aigai see *id.*, *AEMTh* 10A, 1996, 79-92; *AEMTh* 11, 1997, 129-137; *AEMTh* 12, 1998, 405-412; *AEMTh* 14, 2000, 527, 536. Especially about the Town Hall cluster, see A. Kottaridi, *AEMTh* 14, 2000, 530; *id.*, "Βασιλικές πυρές στη νεκρόπολη των Αιγών", *Αρχαία Μακεδονία VI* (1996) 631-642; *id.* "Macedonian Burial Customs and the Funeral of Alexander the Great". *Alexander the Great from Macedonia to the Ecumene, Symposium Proceedings* (Veria 27-31/5/1998) 113-120; *id.*, «Το έθιμο της καύσης και οι Μακεδόνες», *Cremations in Greece from the Bronze Age until the Early Iron Age, Symposium Proceedings, Rhodes 29/4-2/5/1999*, (2001) 359-371; *id.*, *Discovering Aigai, the old Macedonian capital, Excavating Classical Culture*, 75-82. Cf. Also, Cicero, *de Legibus* II 26.64.

that evaded looting, mainly locally made or imported clay vessels -from Corinth, Attica and eastern Ionia- and some iron objects -weapons, jewellery, *omphalos* bowls- give the impression of a widespread prosperity and richness, and associated to the rest of the data coming from this necropolis, as well as from other sites with contemporary finds -mountainous Macedon, Mieza, Veria etc.- create the impression that the Archaic period is an era of particular wealth for Aigai, concretely substantiating the view that this was the most important urban centre within the boundaries of the Macedonian kingdom.

The preliminary works carried out in the context of the Third European Support Framework aiming at the design of a construction study for a big protective cover similar to the one of the royal tombs, with an engine room for temperature and humidity regulation and with exhibition and public services halls, and for the organization of access points, parking spaces and the general arrangement of the site of the burial cluster of queen Eurydice, led us to a site which I had the good fortune to investigate from '86 until '94, as an assistant of M. Andronikos and a member of the team of the regular excavation: the burial cluster B and the northwest sector of the ancient city⁶.

Knowing the critical character and the importance of the area, with the help of colleague E. Kontogoulidou, we have carried out with great care and meticulousness a number of trial trenches, documenting the finds as fully as possible. The anticipated field works were completed only one and a half month ago and of course the cleaning and the study of all the pottery have not yet been completed. However, despite the particularly complex emerging picture, I will venture to draw a few initial conclusions, which up to a point could also be considered working assumptions (Fig. 1).

The construction of the asphalt road leading to the palace, following the west edge of the slope along the Palaiopanagia stream, in the early 70's, and the deposits of the farm fields to the east of the burial cluster have resulted in a modern image of the area far different from the original one in antiquity. At that time, the slope where the city extended dipped steeply towards the west and north, being rather inaccessible from these sides, which is where the stream flows deep. On the contrary, it had a mild inclination towards the east and northeast, where the stream becomes wider and shallower. Here, to the east of the burial cluster, after removing the backfill, we have discovered an ancient shallow basin, through which the waters of the area run off to the adjacent stream. The ancient road apparently followed this basin, softly ascending from the west and the necropolis to the city (see topographical plan).

In this part of the slope the subsoil is composed of weak rocks, diabase and terra rossa. The stony subsoil is covered by a 20-30 cm-thick layer of pure dark-brown clayish soil, in or on which the older buildings are founded. Above it spreads a layer of man-made deposits with a thickness that varies greatly from place to place.

In the northwest corner of this area there are no finds. Two burials of the Early Iron Age, one in the southwest and the other in the northeast are the oldest

⁶ See M. Andronikos - A. Kottaridi, 'Εργον 1986 and 'Εργον 1987 and Proceedings of the Archaeological Society 1986. See also A. Kottaridi AEMTh 1, 1987, 109-118; AEMTh 3, 1989, 1-11; AEMTh 4, 1990; AEMTh 6, 1992, 67-72 and AEMTh 7, 1993, 77-82

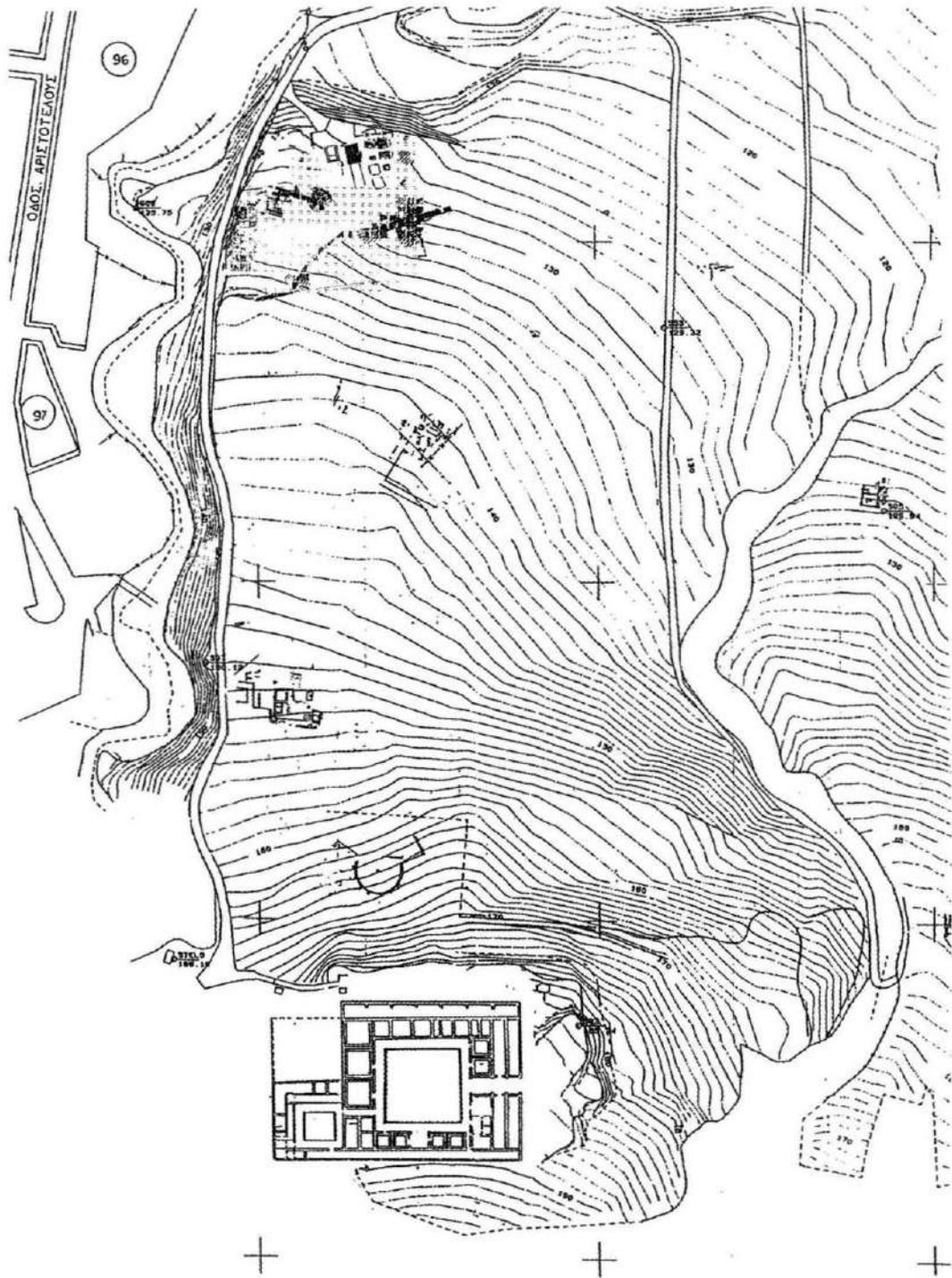
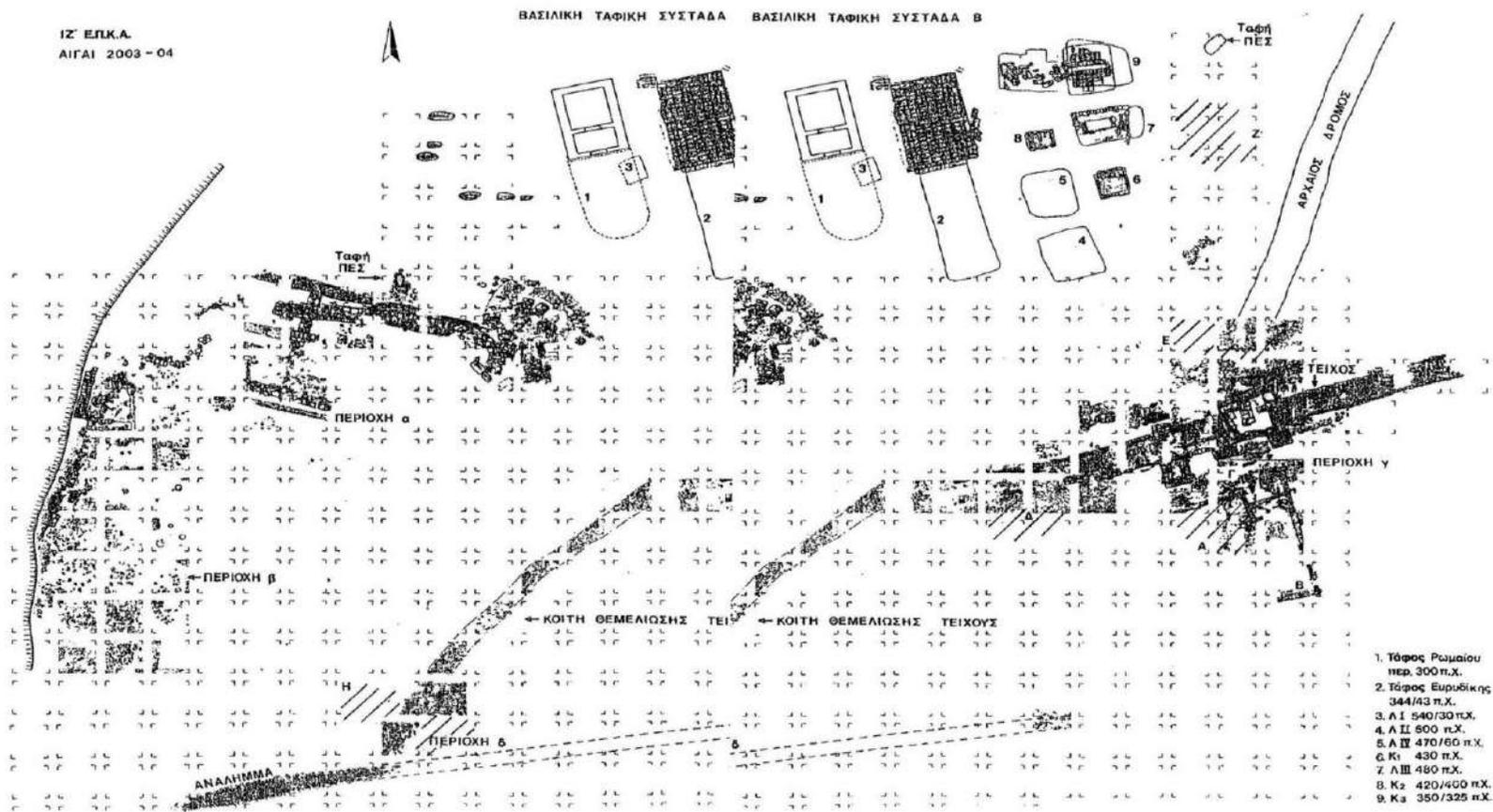


Fig. 1. General topographic plan of Aigai



1. Tomb of Romaios ca 300 BC, 2. Tomb of Eurydice 344/43 BC, 3. Λ I 540/30 BC, 4. Λ II 500 BC
5. Λ IV 470/60 BC, 6. Κ₁ 430 BC, 7. Λ III 480 BC, 8. Κ₂ 420/400 BC, 9. Κ₃ 350/325 BC.

traces of human activity to the northwest of the slope defining the boundaries of the burial cluster (cluster B), for which I have often said that it is in many ways set apart and stands out from the general picture of the necropolis of Aigai⁷. In the Late Archaic times at least four huge pit graves are constructed here: among them the unlooted grave of the opulent “Lady of Aigai”, the richest grave of that time found until now in the whole region of Macedonia, and the looted grave with the enigmatic clay heads⁸.

The oldest of the graves of this cluster, which is dated to 540-30 BC was “cut” by the road of the “Tomb of Romaios”. The Archaic pottery included in the deposits of this grave⁹ and of the neighbouring grave of queen Eurydice¹⁰ shows that there probably were other older pit graves that were destroyed when the two Macedonian tombs and their roads were constructed.

To the southwest of the burial cluster (Fig. 1, area a), despite the very shallow depth of the deposits, parts of the foundation and of the foundation beds of a big building founded on the natural subsoil survive (Fig. 2, building I). The surface of compacted clayish earth on which it is based in many parts shows intense signs of burning that have made it harder, changing its colour. The fragmentarily preserved floor plan of the building seems normal, with walls that form rectangular angles and oblong inner spaces. In the southwest corner a large storage jar (*pithos*) is found half-buried in the ground, however the pottery is scarce and the mobile finds non-existent.

A few sparse fragments of Laconian tiles, many of which preserve traces of a dark-brown coating, probably come from its roof. Well-fitted stones, many of which are chiselled, but also some limestone blocks, placed in the foundation, a phenomenon completely unusual for the buildings of the city of the Late Classical and the Hellenistic ages, were used for the surprisingly thick walls: 1 m., which is double the usual wall size in the buildings of Aigai, and almost 2 m. for the long northern outer wall, thus becoming solid as a fortress.

Based on a few black-figure shards we can date building I to the end of the Late Archaic times. Contemporary to the neighbouring pit-graves, this building, which is the oldest known until now in Aigai, marks the northwest edge of the city, while its strength and the large width of its exterior wall can be explained if we compare the Late Archaic Macedonian capital to Plataea, where the external walls of the outer buildings were connected to each other, thus forming the city’s fortification.

The building that took its place definitely had a fortifying purpose: a strong enclosure (Fig. 2, enclosure II) of a thickness of 2-2.10 m. built with fairly big, chiselled and unchiselled stones passes directly over the north wall of the old building, partly using it as a foundation, and turns to the south, following the

⁷ For a detailed description of the royal burial cluster B or the cluster of Eurydice, see recently A. Kottaridi, *Couleur et sens: l’emploi de la couleur dans la tombe de la reine Eurydice*, in *Meletemata* 2005, (under publication) with bibliography.

⁸ AI 540-530, AII (the grave of the “Lady of Aigai”) ca 500 BC, AIII (the grave with the clay heads) ca 480 BC, AIV 470-60 BC see also note 7 and 5.

⁹ K.A Romaios, *Ο μακεδονικός τάφος της Βεργίνας* (1951) 48.

¹⁰ Fragments of Corinthian *cotylae* and *aryballoi* of the second half of the 6th pre-Christian century.

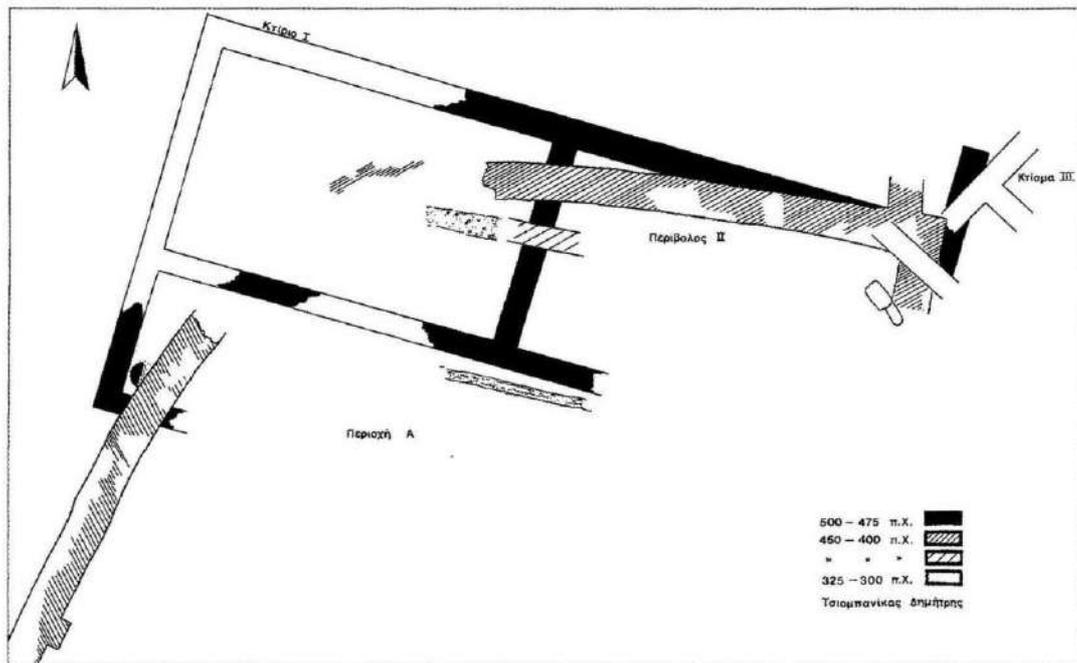


Fig. 2 Aigai. Building I and enclosure southwest of the burial cluster.

fringe of the slope, where, unnoticed during the construction of the asphalt road, it was unfortunately destroyed. The steep incline of the slope to the west and the deep stream that flows here forming a deep, natural “moat” completed the fortification of the city, making it inaccessible from this side. Without any traverse walls or rooms, but with at least one strut in the west, this enclosure is very similar regarding its width and construction to the walls of the acropolis, for which an early Hellenistic date has been supported¹¹. However, no Hellenistic shards have been found here. The scant recognizable pottery from the deposits is dated to the Classical era; in the layer corresponding to the foundation level of the enclosure a coin of Perdikkas II has been found -while in the layers corresponding to the level of its use and destruction five coins of Amyntas III, one coin of Potidaea dating before 356 BC and one Perdikkas III coin have been found scattered¹². Hence, it is highly possible that this is a construction of the 5th century BC, contemporary with two of the three cist-graves of this cluster, the grave with the white *lekythoi*, many of which are works of the “painter of women”, and K2, in other words this could be a building of the time of Perdikkas II (454-413 BC) or of Archelaos (413-399 BC).

Presumably contemporary with enclosure II is a building with rubble masonry walls, of which very few traces survive, mainly wall foundation trenches with an east-west orientation. This building is definitely more recent than building I, because at the only point where one of its walls is well preserved it is founded on one of the transverse walls of the former.

Next to the preserved east edge of enclosure II and of building I limestone cornerstones and limestone gravel have been found. There probably was a tower on this spot, however the foundations of a small building, constructed here in the last quarter of the 4th century BC – a date based on pottery and on two Alexander

¹¹ P. Faklaris, AEMTh 10A, 1996, 69-78.

¹² For the identification and the dating of the coins, I would like to thank Mrs S. Kremydi, who has undertaken their publication.

III coins- have disturbed the picture. It is unknown whether and how these buildings extended eastwards, since modern interventions have scraped the area in front of the two Macedonian tombs and have erased or distorted the ancient remains. The clay table bearing the inscription ΔΩΡΕΑ (donation) found together with a guttus-type *askos* in the northwest edge of the investigated area, should be dated to the last quarter of the 4th century BC (Fig. 1, area b). However, modern-day ploughing has almost reached the natural subsoil here and the context is totally vague. To the southeast of the cluster (Fig. 1, area c), at a distance of only 20 m. from the “grave of the Lady of Aigai”, the west edge of the north part of the wall of Aigai came to light having a small gate in about the middle of its preserved part with a total length of 56 m. The gate is located in the area of the natural basin where the ancient uphill road ends and the human deposits reach the unusual height of approximately 2 m. To the right and left of that point the natural subsoil rises and within a distance of a few metres deposits are only 30 cm deep, resulting to the total destruction by ploughing of the fortification wall, which partly follows this incline.

Stratigraphy: underneath the gate, at a quite lower level than the layer of the wall foundation, a limestone construction founded on the stony natural substratum has been revealed. Crafted with meticulous care, these limestone-blocks, which in this case served as a foundation of a strong wall, most probably come from the lining of the façades of an even older building. It is characteristic that their width is 30 cm., in other words one foot, typical size for the stone-blocks of the 5th century BC cist-graves, but totally unusual in later times. To the west and at a little higher level there is a second row of similar limestone-blocks, which apparently correlate to the previous in terms of their construction. These possibly are the remains of an older phase of the fortification wall (phase A), which apparently featured a gate at almost the same point as the newer one, since on the east front of the wall there is a regular vertical cut on one of the blocks designed for the placement of a wooden frame (Fig. 3). Near the same side a deep scour is found, showing that there was an opening for the disposal of the rainwater coming down from the slope. This older foundation is constructed in the layer of dark red-brown clayish earth, the precursor of the natural rocky subsoil.

Above the older foundation, covering a rather large area at the gate but under the wall towards both sides, a thick layer with dense remains of a pyre is found (ashes, charcoal, a fairly large number of pottery items). It is probably an extensive “destruction layer” from fire, with which a pile of Laconic-type tiles to the northeast of the gate, a half-destroyed rubble wall, as well as the remains of a large animal to the south of the gate are probably associated.

Above this extensive “destruction” layer the newer phase of the wall was founded. As the stratigraphic study of the gate shows, in order to achieve better foundation for the wall, they dug a trench of a width of approximately 2 m and a depth of about 70 cm, with a U-shaped cross section. The bottom and rim of the trench were paved with a layer of clayish earth, most probably the same that would be used for the construction of the unbaked mud-bricks of the superstructure. Subsequently they filled the trench with big rubble stones in order to form a firm layer, where the rubble masonry foundation of the wall is based (*euthynteria*), thus literally embedding the fortification wall to the ground thanks to this rubble masonry substratum.

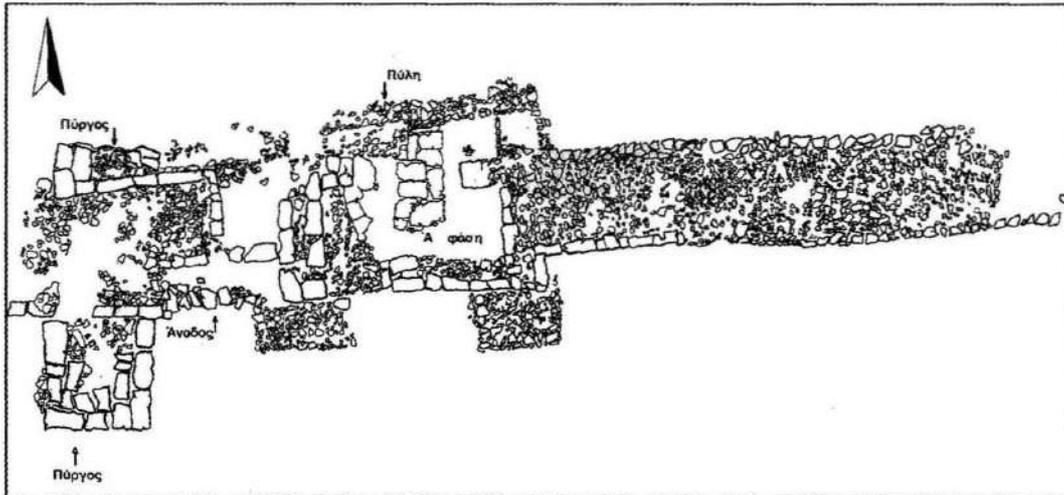


Fig. 3 Aigai. Plan view of the wall and the city

The width of the wall is 10 feet (3 m). To a height of at least two courses above the *euthynteria* it was made of stone, with limestone blocks on the facades and a filling of rubble stones. At a higher level, it was possibly built with unbaked mud-bricks, which, probably being above the current ground surface, have left no traces. On the fronts, limestone blocks with finished edges probably coming from its predecessor were also used.

To the west of the gate the wall is up to 4 metres thick, on account of the presence of a staircase or a ramp leading to the wall walk. At this point, two small square towers (3x3 m), symmetrically placed inside and outside the wall, reinforce the construction. The towers are built with limestone blocks on the fronts and filled with rubble stones. The outer tower has been largely destroyed by the Late Hellenistic building activity; however the way that it is connected with the curtain wall can still be seen. The width gradually reduces away from the towers until it reaches again 3 m. The gate has a 5 m.-wide opening, but two large *antae* standing in the inner part limit this space to 3 m. Similar *antae* architecturally shape the facade of the gate both towards the city and the outside. The latter are further extended to form a kind of small courtyard, but because of the Late Hellenistic buildings that had been constructed at that point, covering the older foundations, it was impossible to determine their shape.

In the inner part of the gate the natural depression has been filled with building waste and earth and its floor has been levelled to reach the *euthynteria* of the wall. However, apparently due to the erosion of the earth floor by rainwater flowing out from the gateway, the wide and high stone threshold facing the city was constructed, which was also eroded by use. Two square rubble stone constructions founded at the same time as the main wall, something between a pedestal and a terrace framing the gate on the side facing the city, apparently stopped being used and were backfilled when the threshold was constructed.

In the west, as well as in the east, the wall, whose foundation rises as it follows the rocky natural substratum, disappears. The deposit is minimal here, and ploughing, reaching as deep as the natural subsoil, has completely erased its traces. However, to the west, at a distance of only 5 m. from the preserved end of the wall, a 2 m.-wide foundation trench appears with a cross section identical to

the one of the foundation trench of the wall. This trench is dug in the natural rocky subsoil and at the points where the stones were not removed in the Late Hellenistic times big rubble stones from its filling have been found in their place. I believe that it is the sub-base of the strong city wall with the limestone *toichobates*, which rose uphill turning slightly to the southwest and leaving out of the wall the city's northwest corner, where the remains of the older building have been found. This way we can explain the presence of the dense destruction stratum of a roof with richly decorated Corinthian-type tiles of the 5th century BC that we found in the 90's immediately under the surface layer to the southwest of this area¹³. It is obvious that exactly because it had been left outside the walls the space next to the fringe of the hill was not built after the 4th century and thus the older remains survived.

Chronology: inside the gate, on the level of its use and a few centimetres higher than the *euthynteria* a coin from the older coinages of Philip II has been found. The date occurring from this coin is also supported by the pottery found in the relevant strata, but there is also a more decisive evidence: deeper than the coin, on the lower part of the *euthynteria*, next to the foundation of the east inner *anta*, inside a trench opened by the rain water on the earth with which the inner part of the gate had been backfilled above the building waste, ten black-glazed bolsal-type Attic *skyphoi* have been found broken¹⁴. The excellent condition of the *skyphoi* and their sharp edges show that it was a load of new vessels that probably fell and broke when their holder crossed the gate and remained at that point save for a few pieces that have been carried away by water. The *skyphoi* date around or a little earlier than the mid-4th pre-Christian century, thus determining as a safe *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the wall with the porous *toichobates*, at least in this part, the year 350 BC, a date with which the finds from the broader area of the foundation coincide.

When the tomb of Eurydice was constructed, a little earlier than 340 BC, the wall, the gate and the road existed, which explains both the tomb's orientation and the total absence of a tumulus that we had pointed out already from the beginning¹⁵, while the proximity of the cluster to the gate of the wall, which, according to all evidence, was definitely reserved for the most important women of the royal dynasty, once again highlights its particular importance. However, this discovery becomes even more important, if we consider that we are looking at the oldest known fortification –it would be more appropriate to say fortifications- of a Macedonian city of the historic times and this is not by chance of course, since we are in Aigai, the kingdom's first and most important urban centre. The question that needs to be answered is whether it was Philip II (359-336 BC) the one who started building the new majestic and powerful wall of Aigai as soon as he assumed power, this way rewarding the residents' loyalty during the crucial moments when the pretender to the crown Argaios¹⁶ appeared, or someone of his direct predecessors. I hope that the systematic

¹³ See A. Kottaridi, AEMTh 4, 1990, 38.

¹⁴ Cf. B. Sparks – L. Talcott, The Athenian Agora XII (1970) 107 *et seq.*, n. 558, table 24, fig. 6.

¹⁵ Right next to the west side of the tomb of Eurydice and behind the "tomb of Romaïos" there are three small cist-tombs of the imperial years, whose floor reaches until the superstructure of the Macedonian tombs. This proves that in the Ancient times the deposits at this point would hardly be over 1 m., which excludes that a tumulus may have existed.

¹⁶ Diod. 16.3.

study of the pottery will soon give us the answer. It is certain though that Aigai, a city organized by the traditional way as a collection of scattered villages (*kata komas*)¹⁷, had a walled *asty* already in the 5th century BC, which is natural, if we consider the risks that the Macedonian state faced during the Peloponnesian war¹⁸.

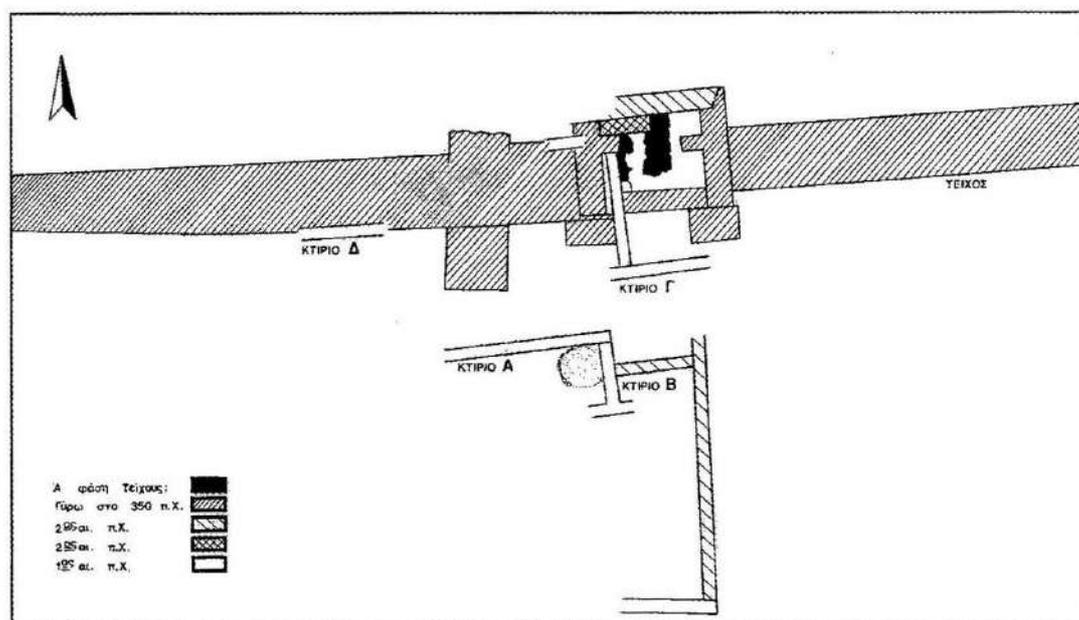


Fig. 4. Aigai. Buildings A and B north of the gate

After the defeat of Perseus in Pydna, in 168 BC, and the dissolution of the kingdom by the Romans, Aigai, the cradle of the Temenid dynasty, is destroyed. The wall is levelled to the ground and its blocks are taken. Before the end of the 2nd century BC a building with at least two consecutive construction phases and a form that could not be determined, is built above the north side of the gate (Fig. 4). Contemporary to this one is building B, which was found at a distance of a few metres towards the south of the gate. Built with second hand material, building B, of which a long spacious room has been revealed, had an unusually wide door with uneven door leaves, as the characteristic tenons on the porous limestone threshold attest.

¹⁷ See also A. Kottaridi, "Αιγαί η πρώτη πόλη των Μακεδόνων", Scientific Two-day Conference Proceedings 7-8 June 2003, «Γνωριμία με τη γη του Μεγαλέξανδρου. Η περίπτωση του νομού Ημαθίας» (2004) 85.

¹⁸ The east part of the wall, which survives in a much better condition, has already been revealed to a large extent by P. Faklaris from 2000 to 2004. Featuring a strong stone *toichobates*, which survives to a height of at least two courses, with fronts bearing well-fitted porous limestone blocks and rubble masonry filling, and 3 metres wide it is obviously the east segment of the same fortification, part of which we have revealed next to the burial cluster B. The fact that in that part it is reinforced at regular intervals with strong towers, which apparently is not the case in the part that we excavated, is probably due to the morphology of the area, which is totally flat to the east of the city without the natural protection that the rather steep slope offers in the west, while the size and the magnificence of the east gate, which is much more impressive than the one that we excavated in the northwest, can be explained if we consider that this was the main entrance to Aigai, where the road coming from the ports of the Thermaic gulf, Pydna and Methoni. For some initial general thoughts concerning the fortification of Aigai, see A. Kottaridi, *op.cit.*

As the dense layer with the large Laconic-type tiles covering its earth floor shows, this building was demolished in the 1st c. BC and immediately a new one (building A) was built on its ruins, having a small round kiln in one of its rooms. A number of other buildings, probably residencies, also belong in the same constructional and chronological horizon as this one, all destroyed in the early imperial era (1st c. BC): building C in the area of the gate and building D a little to the west, which used not only the blocks of the city wall as building material, but also its remains as a sub-foundation; building E to the north of the gate; building F to the east of the burial cluster; and building G to the south (fig. 1, area d), which had been built on the southernmost part of the excavated foundation trench of the wall. Built with rubble masonry and clay, their roofs covered with simple Laconic-style tiles, these humble buildings belong to the last habitation phase of the old city of Aigai. Their remains being almost entirely superficial, they have been in most cases heavily disturbed by modern ploughing and the ploughshare has literally ground their destruction layers, with the result that it is almost impossible to determine their floor plan. However, there is plenty of pottery and many vessels can be assembled together, thus providing us with an unexpectedly complete picture of their household utensils, a fact revealing that their destruction was so sudden, that their residents did not have the time to take their belongings with them. It is hence possible that the old site was abandoned and the city moved northeast to the plain due to a violent natural event, perhaps an earthquake.

Three cist-graves are the only mark of life during the imperial years in the area, which is essentially abandoned. The large rubble masonry retaining wall, a dry stone construction similar to those made by the local inhabitants since as early as the Early Iron Age¹⁹ and is still in use in southern Greece, which retains the soil forming a spacious terrace that can be used for cultivation and defines the contour lines even today, can be dated to the Late Antiquity or even later. Contemporary or even newer than this retaining wall are the six humble burials with no grave offerings found to the west of the “tomb of Romaios”, which, judging from the position of the dead, should probably belong to Christians.

*Edessa,
17th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities*

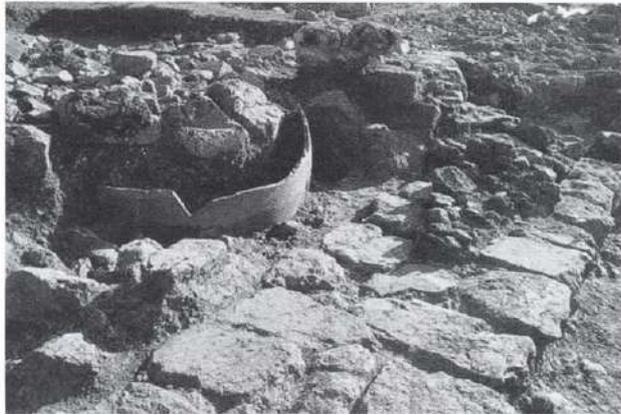
¹⁹ A clear organisation of the space with terraces is found in the small settlements of the Early Iron Age that have been investigated in the area of Tzamala in Vermion, see A. Kottaridi, AEMTh 15, 2001, 501-507 and AEMTh 16, 2002, 501-508.



1



2



3

1. Burial of the Early Iron Age in a pithos. 2. The western wall of building I with the pithos in-situ, on which the foundation of the enclosure II is based. 3. The north wall of building I and enclosure II.



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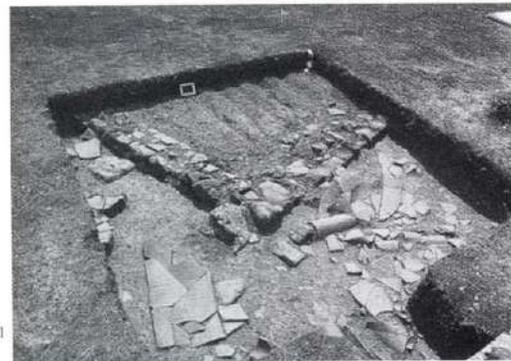
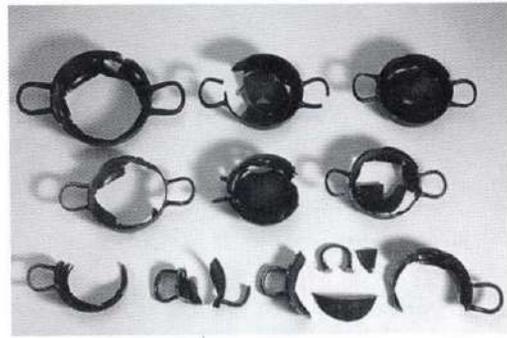
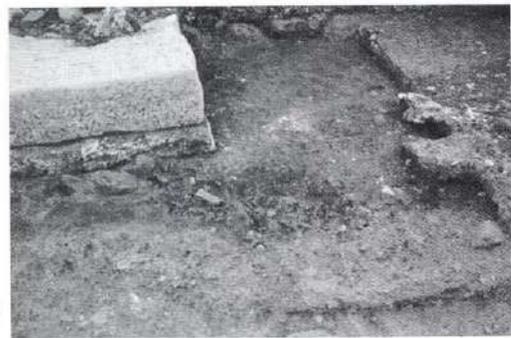


5



6

4. The city wall of Aigai in the area of the burial cluster of the Queens (cluster B) seen from the west. The city, the inner tower and the remains of the interior space can be seen. 5. The city wall of Aigai in the area of the burial cluster of the queens, seen from the east. The gate, the threshold and the rubble masonry constructions of the inner side can be seen. 6. The city wall of Aigai in the area of the burial cluster of the Queens, general view of the excavated part seen from the east.



7. The area of the gate and the older phase. 8. The area of the gate. Detail: The east inner anta, the rubble masonry sub-foundation, the layer with the remains of the cremation and the older building phase based on the rocky "natural" subsoil can be seen. 9. Area of the gate and the layer with the black-glazed Attic skyphoi in-situ. 10. The Attic black-glazed skyphoi found gathered next to the east inner anta of the gate. 11. The late Hellenistic building A south of the gate during the excavation. Traces of modern-day ploughing can be seen. 12. Buildings A and B, the gate of the city wall and the burial cluster of the Queens seen from the south.