Studies in Classical Archaeology I

Excavating Classical Culture

Recent archaeological discoveries in Greece

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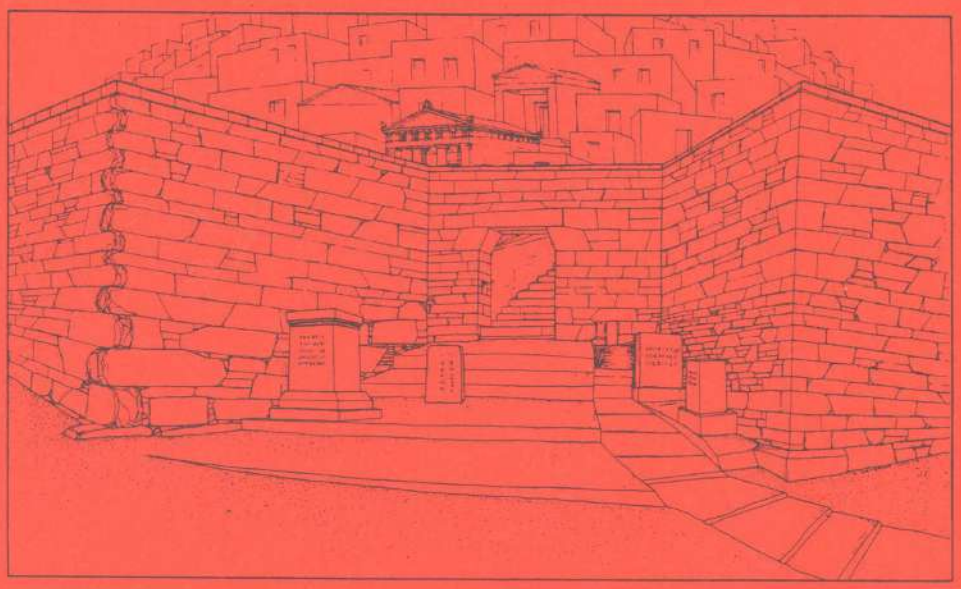

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Discovering Aegae, the old Macedonian capital

Angeliki Kottaridi

At the edge of the Macedonian plain, perched at the foot of the Pieria mountains, which Herodotos calls the 'Macedonian mountain',[1] lies the ancient city of Aegae, the first capital of the Macedonian kingdom.

The importance of the site was obvious from the very moment of its discovery in the 19th century, but incorrect information by Justinus caused great confusion among scholars.[2] Professor N. Hammond was the first to identify the site with Aegae.[3] His identification was further confirmed by the systematic study of the ancient sources and inscriptions, the finds, as well as the extensive topographical investigations and the excavations, which we undertook in the wider area of the Pieria mountains in the last decade.[4]

I warmly thank my friend Mrs Chrysa Tsalikidou for the translation of my Greek text, and my colleagues Mrs Rena Karajannidou and Mrs Charikleia Brekoulaki.

Abbreviations

Andronikos, *Vergina* = M. Andronikos, *Vergina. The Royal Tombs and other Antiquities* (Athens 1984).

History of Macedonia II = N.G.L. Hammond and G.T. Griffith, *A History of Macedonia* II. *550 - 336 B.C.* (Oxford 1979; Greek translation Thessaloniki 1995).

[1] Hdt. vii.131.

[2] Just. vii.1.7. See also L. Heuzey and H. Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macedoine* (Paris 1876), 179ff, 457ff; K.A. Rhomaios, *Ο μακεδονικός τάφος της Βεργίνας* (Athens 1951), 12ff.

[3] N.G.L. Hammond, 'The Archaeological Background to the Macedonian Kingdom', in *Ancient Macedonia. Papers read at the First International Symposium held in Thessaloniki, August 24-29, 1968* (Thessaloniki 1970), 53-67; *id.*, *A History of Macedonia* I (Oxford 1972; Greek translation Thessaloniki 1995), 177-178, 185, 216, 329, 447, 475ff; *id.*, 'The Location of Aegae', *JHS* 117 (1997), 177-179. See also M.B. Hatzopoulos, 'Aigéai: la localisation de la première capitale Macédonienne', *REG* 109 (1996), 264ff with further bibliography.

[4] See A. Kottaridi and Ch. Brekoulaki, 'Αρχαιολογικές έρευνες στα ημαθιώτικα Πιέρια', *AEMTH* 11 (1997), 109-114 and A. Kottaridi, 'Από τη νεκρόπολη των Αιγών στο νεολιθικό οικισμό των Πιερίων', *AEMTH* 14 (2000) (in press).

Aegae means a 'kidplace', a place with many goats, and testifies to the husbandry, which was the base of Macedonian economy until the reign of Philip II. As expected, the first large Macedonian urban centre lay on the south bank of the Aliakmon river, within the area called by Herodotos '*γῆ Μακεδονίς*', the cradle of the Macedonians.[5] And this is not all. At the very place where the city lay two major routes met: the road crossing Pieria, leading to south Greece, and that following the foot of mount Vermio leading to the north and east.

The road leading to the south, which crossed the fertile plateau of western Pieria – an area densely populated in ancient times – all along the Aliakmon river valley, was in use until modern times. It was the main hub of communication between the settlements of Macedonia with those of Thessaly and also offered the easiest access to Elimeia and Pindos. Five castles which go back to the years of the Macedonian kingdom mark the route of this road and indicate its strategic importance. Its continual use is confirmed by the presence of: Middle Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements; artefacts with strong Mycenaean influence; cemeteries and Early Iron Age settlements; sanctuaries of prehistoric and historical times; and small towns, villas and citadels dated from Archaic to post-Byzantine times.

It is in this protected and fertile bosom of the mountain, in the extensive area of ruins where the Archaic ladies sleep, wearing a bunch of bronze bracelets on the legs and amber on the neck, in a place still guarded by dead warriors holding the sword tight to

[5] Hdt. vii.127.

their chest, that we should look for Levaie, the mythical centre of the Macedonians, which – as if by instinct – was placed by Hammond up in the Pieria mountain[6] long before these new discoveries.

From this area, following the ancient route, after almost a four-hour walk one gets to the plain at Aegae. The first settlement here dates back to the Early Bronze Age. In the Early Iron Age an immensely rich and populous centre with satellite settlements existed in this area.[7] The town of historical times, which was situated on the hills, is barely known to us, since only a small part of the total area has been excavated.

The centre of Aegae, with the palace and the sanctuaries, occupied 7 terraces on the slope to the south of the cemetery. The different axes of the habitation blocks show that in Aegae we should not expect the so-called Hippodameian system.[8] At the end of 4th century the city was fortified with strong limestone walls and the fortified acropolis was built on the hill which dominates the palace.[9] The earliest architectural remains revealed so far are those of a building, whose destruction layer dates to the 5th century BC.[10]

Aegae was an area rich in timber but poor in stone suitable for building purposes. Thus, one should rather expect building remains constructed with rough stones, raw bricks and timber which look poor. However, the extensive use of architectural terracotta members partly restores the image [**pl. 13C**].

The second half of the 4th century BC was a time of prosperity for Aegae. A new magnificent palace and a theatre near by were constructed as part of a major building project, during the last years of Philip's reign;[11] moreover, the neighbouring sanctuary of the goddess, where we discovered votive offerings of Queen Eurydice, Philip's mother, to Eukleia, was organised.[12] These buildings, constructed with expensive limestone, strictly follow the orientation. Though the placing of these structures would have entailed serious problems, it is obvious that it was the result of specific planning, inspired by an explicit ideological concept. The political and religious centre of power which is merged in the ruler's person is combined with the theatre, the centre for art and culture.

By continuing what his ancestor Archelaos had started, Philip II becomes a patron of the arts, an enlightened monarch, according to Plato's prototype,[13] and inaugurates in Aegae a tradition which establishes the image of the royal city during Hellenistic times.

Another sanctuary, poorer and more modest, dedicated to Kybele's cult was discovered at the eastern part of the city.[14]

The peak of prosperity of the city during the 4th century BC is followed by a partial destruction of some buildings, attested at many places. This destruction could have been caused by the Gaul mercenaries of Pyrrhos, who conquered the city in 276 BC and plundered even the royal necropolis.[15] Immediately afterwards the buildings are restored, the palace expands and life continues without interruption. The period of prosperity however has gone forever.

A great catastrophe, followed by fire, occurs in the first half of the 2nd century BC. I believe that this should be directly related to the conquest of the Ma-

[6] Hammond 1972, *op.cit.* n. 3, 473ff.

[7] On the famous Early Iron Age tumuli cemetery see M. Andronikos, *Βεργίνα* I, *Τὸ νεκροταφεῖον τῶν τύμβων* (Athens 1969); Ph. Petsas, "Ανασκαφαὶ ἀρχαίου νεκροταφείου Βεργίνας', *ADelt* 17 (1961/2) A, 218ff; 18 (1963) B, 217ff; K. Romiopoulou and I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, 'Neue Funde aus der eisenzeitlichen Nekropole von Vergina, griechisch Makedonien', *PZ* 64 (1989), 86-151. In the last years we have found in the area of Vergina three new cemeteries dated to the Early Iron Age: see A. Kottaridi, 'Βεργίνα 1991. Τοπογραφικές έρευνες στην ευρύτερη περιοχή και ανασκαφή στο νεκροταφείο των Αιγών', *AEMTH* 5 (1991), 23-30 and Kottaridi 2000, *op.cit.* n. 4.

[8] See A. Kottaridi, 'Ανασκαφή Βεργίνας', *AEMTH* 7 (1993), 80.

[9] See P. Faklaris, 'Ο Οχυρωτικός περίβολος και η Ακρόπολη', *AEMTH* 10 (1996), 69-78. In the last two years (2000-1) Professor Faklaris discovered the eastern and north-eastern part of the city wall and the monumental eastern gate. Made of limestone, strengthened by a huge number of towers, this very expensive construction testifies the importance of the old royal town until the end of the 4th century BC.

[10] A. Kottaridi, 'Βεργίνα 1990. Ανασκαφή στο νεκροταφείο και στο βορειοδυτικό τμήμα της αρχαίας πόλης', *AEMTH* 4 (1990), 38-39.

[11] M. Andronikos, G. Bakalakis, Ch. Makaronas and N. Moutsopoulos, *Το ανάκτορο της Βεργίνας* (Athens 1961); Andronikos, *Vergina*, 38-49; D. Pandermalis, 'Η κεράμωση του ανακτόρου της Βεργίνας', *ΑΜΗΤΟΣ. Τιμητικός Τόμος για τον καθηγητή Μανόλη Ανδρόνικο. Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης* (Thessaloniki 1987), 579-614; S. Drougou, 'Το αρχαίο θέατρο της Βεργίνας και ο περιβάλλων χώρος του', *AEMTH* 3 (1989), 13-20; G. Velenis, 'Τεχνικές στο ανάκτορο της Βεργίνας', *Μνήμη Μανόλη Ανδρόνικου* (Thessaloniki 1997), 25-37.

[12] Ch. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, 'Το ιερό της Εύκλειας στη Βεργίνα', *AEMTH* 10 (1996), 55-68.

[13] As Plato's nephew Speusippos in his letter to Philip II confirms, the philosopher had close connections with the Macedonian royal family and he sent his pupil Euphraios to Perdikkas III, trying to realise his dream of the 'philosopher-king' in the person of this young ruler, who was the older brother of Philip. See *Σπευσίππου, Ἐπιστολαί Σωκρατικαί* 30.12 (R. Herscher, *Epistologr. Graeci*). See also Pl. *Grg.* 471 a-d; *History of Macedonia* II, 203, 205-207.

[14] S. Drougou, 'Το ιερό της Μητέρας των Θεών', *AEMTH* 10 (1996), 41-54.

[15] Plut. *Vit. Pyrrh.* xxvi.11.

cedonian kingdom by the Romans in 168 BC. The theatre, the palace and the walls are destroyed once and for all. The sanctuaries decline. Houses are built where public buildings used to lie and the old hierarchy is abolished.

The city, although in decline, is still standing on the same place until the 1st century AD, when a sudden catastrophe, possibly an earthquake, leads its inhabitants to abandon the place for good.[16]

Aegae dies out. Even the name is forgotten.[17] The population moves to the plain, where a small settlement is founded which exists until early Christian times.[18] In the Byzantine period a small village bearing the characteristic name 'Palatitzia', which means the little palace, will be the only witness to the lost glory of Aegae, cradle of the Temenid dynasty.

Better known than the city is the necropolis of Aegae, the place where the kings were buried. 500 new graves, which were added to the known finds of the old excavations, allow us to express some general conclusions about the burial customs in Aegae.[19]

For the soul to find its place in the world of the dead the body has to disappear from the world of the living. For the ancient Greeks this belief was the cornerstone of world order and of the entire system of burial customs as well. By dying, man passes to another dimension. The funeral rites ensure the peaceful passage. In exchange for the life that has been lost, the dead receive the appropriate honours, so that, reconciled with their destiny, they will leave without becoming dangerous for the living.

By honouring its dead, the family gets an excellent chance to manifest its position in society, flaunting its wealth and power. Moreover, the ruler's funeral, an act with great political impact, consolidates emotionally the ideological concept of power and becomes the tangible symbol of status quo, a collective declaration of faith and acceptance of the system.

The tholos tombs and the treasures of the Mycenaean burials, as well as the epic hero's legendary funerals are the material expression of this concept. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the first priorities of democracy since Solon's times was the curtailment of the funeral expenses and the simplification of funeral rites.[20] The citizens of a democracy – alive or dead – have to be and, above all, have to appear equal.

However, in the frontier kingdom of the Macedonians, a kingdom that led its existence independent from the social and political developments of the Greek south and preserved the archaic social structures of Homer's epics until the Hellenistic age, there arose no need to moderate the traditional burial customs.

The lack of sufficient data concerning the Macedonian towns of pre-Hellenistic age does not allow us to compare the grave goods to the total household of a family unit, in order to be able to estimate the true dimensions of the expense that the dead person's dowry meant to the family's budget. It is, however, certain that there was a tremendous difference between the burials of the aristocracy and those of simple people, a fact that would constitute a provocation for the southern democrats and is presented in a particularly impressive way in Aegae's necropolis.

Indicative of the respect of the citizens of Aegae for their dead and of their idea of land use, is the spatial development of the necropolis, which knows almost no limits, despite the fact that the 'residences' of the dead occupy fertile land, fit for cultivation. The horizontal expansion is the rule to which even Alexander adheres, burying his father at the west end of the cemetery, so that the pre-existing graves will not be disturbed. The cases of vertical expansion, where new graves cut across the old, are quite rare, an exception that is imposed for special reasons, or concerns graves of later times, when the old hierarchy was abolished at every level.

[16] See also A. Kottaridi, 'Ανασκαφή στο ΒΔ τμήμα της πόλης των Αιγών', *AEMTH* 1 (1987), 113.

[17] To the identification of Aegae with 'Acerdos' or 'Archelos' of the Roman Itineraria see also M.B. Hatzopoulos, 'Strepsa: a Reconsideration, or New Evidence on the Road System of Lower Macedonia', *Meletemata* 3 (1987), 40ff with further bibliography.

[18] An Early Christian Baptisterion has been discovered there.

[19] See Andronikos, *Vergina*; A. Kottaridi, 'Βεργίνα 1989. Ανασκαφή στο νεκροταφείο και στα βορειοδυτικά της πόλης', *AEMTH* 3 (1989), 1-11; 'Βεργίνα 1997', *AEMTH* 10 (1996), 79-92; 'Το Αρχαιολογικό έργο της ΙΖ' Ε.Π.Κ.Α. στη Βεργίνα. Το ιστορικό της έκθεσης των θησαυρών των βασιλικών τάφων', *AEMTH* 11 (1997), 129-137; 'Το αρχαιολογικό έργο στη Βεργίνα το 1998. Νέα ευρήματα από τη νεκρόπολη των Αιγών', *AEMTH* 12 (1998), 405-412; 'Βασιλικές πυρές στη νεκρόπολη των Αιγών', *Ancient Macedonia* VI. *Papers read at the Sixth International Symposium held in Thessaloniki, October 15-19, 1996* (Thessaloniki 1999), 631-642; 'Macedonian Burial Customs and the Funeral of Alexander the Great', in *Alexander the Great from Macedonia to the Oikoumene, Congress Verroia 27-31/5/1998* (in press), 113-120; 'Το έθιμο της καύσης και οι Μακεδόνες', *Καύσεις στην εποχή του χαλκού και την πρώιμη εποχή του σιδήρου. Πρακτικά συμποσίου. Ρόδος 29/4-2/5/1999* (Athens 2001), 359-371 with bibliography.

[20] Cic. *Leg.* ii.26.64. See D.C. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Thanatos. Tod und Jenseits bei den Griechen* (Mainz 1985), 111, 142ff, 194, 237ff.

The graves, oriented towards the centre of the mound in the Early Iron Age,[21] and towards the horizon later, are organised in rows and plots, forming groups that ought to be related to families.

According to the ancient custom, which in Aegae survives until Roman times, earth mounds show the location of the graves, whereas stone circular enclosures mark the limits of the tumuli. The size of the mound varies according to the status of the deceased; therefore, the special significance of the fact that Philip II's grave was found under the largest tumulus of the southern Balkans is obvious.

The burials of the aristocracy of the Archaic era – and only those – are marked by low cairns (stone piles), made of white pebbles brought from faraway places.

Grave stelai with carved and painted decorations conforming to the southern Greek custom become common in the 5th century [**pl. 13A**].[22] In at least one case, that of Philip II's funeral plot, beside the tumulus was an above-ground monument, which Manolis Andronikos very accurately described as a heroon.[23]

The material remains of rituals, few in any case, resist time with difficulty. Nevertheless, we managed to recognise in some cases traces of offering pyres and to locate broken or upside-down libation vessels, thrown onto the burial pit. In the landfill of the immense burial pit of a noblewoman, who died around 480 BC, 26 clay heads of goddesses and demons were found thrown in, probably fragments of xoana [**pl. 13B**], unique testimonies of Macedonian art, witnesses of an enigmatic ritual,[24] as far as we know unparalleled. This tomb is situated in the same plot with that of Queen Eurydice, a plot that is in many ways exceptional and exalted in the necropolis and seems to have been reserved for the burial of female members of the royal family, most of whom must have held a high sacral office while alive.

Even though there was abundant timber in the region, and surely much cheaper than in other places, the usual burial practice in Aegae was inhumation. Cremation appears for the first time, and very impressively indeed, as a way of burying the eminent persons of the Archaic period.[25] The oldest known cremations in Aegae date from the middle of the 6th century and are located in a plot reserved for distinguished dead, who are probably related to the Temenid family. Funeral pyres of warriors with rich offerings [**pl. 13D**]: amphorae full of honey and oil, clay and metallic vases, sets of clothes, unguents, armour etc., horse harnesses, swords with silver nails that were 'killed'; all these are associated with the burials of the noblemen of the Geometric period and recall the descriptions in the epics.

I think that it is not inappropriate to relate the majestic appearance of this burial custom, new to the Macedonians, to the assumption of power by the Temenids,[26] Dorians from Argos in the Peloponnese.

When the fire goes out, the bones are washed in wine, wrapped in a piece of cloth, collected in an urn and buried. The remains of the pyre, both holy and unclean, as is everything that comes in contact with the dead, are thrown onto the grave. Both the grave and the pyre are covered by the tumulus, as in the *Iliad*.[27]

In the 5th century, the practice of cremation spreads to women as well: the mistress of the grave with the white-ground lekythoi in Eurydice's plot was cremated. Nevertheless, cremation continues to be a privilege of the powerful, and only towards the end of the century appear, hesitantly, the first cremations of ordinary people, cremations that increase during the reign of Philip II (9%). For the warriors who die in battle away from home, cremation is an especially convenient practice and, as it seems, Philip's continuing wars and the eastern campaign of Alexander created the external conditions for its propagation. As a consequence, in the Hellenistic era cremation tends to become the main burial practice for the Macedonians, who found themselves dispersed throughout the world.[28]

Cremated or not, the dead ends in the grave. His eternal residence is usually a simple rectangular pit, the size of which varies according to age, wealth, and social status of its occupant. There is often a step at one side of the pit, on which they sometimes placed the bathing or libation vessels.

Less common are cist graves, which are generally larger and more monumental. Towards the end of the Archaic period cist graves appear in Aegae, built of

[21] See Andronikos, *op.cit.* n. 7, 151ff.
[22] See also Ch. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, *Τα επιτάφια μνημεία από τη Μεγάλη Τούμπα της Βεργίνας* (Thessaloniki 1984).
[23] Andronikos, *Vergina*, 65.
[24] Kottaridi 1989, *op.cit.* n. 19; *Greek Civilization, Macedonia Kingdom of Alexander the Great* (Athens 1993) 153ff, n. 141.
[25] See also Kottaridi 2001, *op.cit.* n. 19.
[26] Hdt. viii.137-138. On the Temenid dynasty see *History of Macedonia* II, 11ff with further bibliography.
[27] *Il.* Ψ, 255-257.
[28] "After the cremation of the dead soldiers of Perdikkas, Ptolemy ordered to organise the funeral they deserved, and to send their ashes to their families and friends", Diod. xviii.36.

limestone, a material that increases the monumentality and spaciousness of the grave. Gradually, cist graves become regular underground chambers with stucco and painted decoration, whereas the tendency for even larger size leads at times to the use of a stone pillar.[29]

The effort to create a really monumental, spacious underground chamber will lead to the construction of the vaulted Macedonian tombs,[30] which are the most characteristic product of the Macedonians' funerary concept. And, of course, it is not just a coincidence that in the royal necropolis of Aegae we find the largest number as well as the earliest monuments of this kind – twelve until now.

Unfortunately, with the exception of the tombs of Philip II and Alexander IV, which were protected by the enormous landfills of the Great Tumulus, all the other graves were pillaged. It must be noted that in Aegae pillage was a common phenomenon that tended to become the rule even in the cases of simple pit graves, a fact that justifies the ancient reputation of the golden royal necropolis but obstructs archaeological research. The lure of easy money led ancient tomb robbers to try their luck in the shadowy underground chambers of the tombs, despite their fear and the miasma. And it was their greed that led to their just desserts. Like most thuggish thieves, they would often murder each other to increase their share.

The dead were buried laid on wooden stretchers or beds that have usually disappeared without leaving many traces. Men wore the woollen coat that enveloped the body, closing at the chest with one or two double pins. They wore one or more rings on the fingers of their right hands, rings that were often also seals. Women wore one or more dresses (peplos and chiton). Their presence is suggested by the fibulae and pins that, in undisturbed burials, are found by the shoulders and arms.

Jewels are of the essence [**pl. 14A-B**]. These objects were very dear to the ladies of the period, and, following the fashion of the time, they are found in every shape and material, according to each person's purse. Rings and earrings were as popular as the pins and fibulae. We also find pendants, necklaces and chains, while bracelets, diadems and sophisticated spirals are rather rare. The noblewomen of the Aegae court descend to Hades treading on golden soles, wreathed literally in purple cloth, covered with gold from head to toes.

Weapons were for men what jewellery was for women [**pl. 13D**]. One or two spears or javelins and one knife is the standard. Swords, much more expensive, are rare and even rarer are the helmets. Naturally, nothing can be compared to the four gold-trimmed sets of armour owned by Philip II - weapons worthy of Achilles.[31]

Objects characteristic of the dead person's sex are the strigils for men and the metallic or clay pyxides, filled with make-up powder and jewels for women. Even though it seems strange, mirrors and toiletries are non-existent, while objects like pens, inkpots or tools – indicative of the dead person's previous profession – are not very common.

The vessels used for the ritual anointment of the dead, containing aromatic oils, follow them to the grave, regardless of their sex. Exaleiptra are the rule until the end of the 5th century. The Corinthian aryballoi of the 6th century are replaced by Attic small lekythoi and askoi which, in their turn, will give their place to the humble perfume bottles of the Hellenistic age.

For the rich there were many and more sophisticated choices: glass perfume containers, iron and marble exaleiptra, alabaster and marble alabastra, beautiful white-ground Attic lekythoi [**pl. 15A-B**], elegant red-figure squat lekythoi, like those of the Eleusinian Painter found in Eurydice's tomb, even exotic ostrich eggs.

The metallic vessels used for washing the dead are found only in the graves of the élite [**pl. 14C**]. The same applies to the golden strips that decorate clothes and weapons, as well as for the roundels with the star.

The coin for the ferryman appears for the first time, as far as we know, during the reign of Archelaos; the dead hold it in their right hand or have it in their mouth. We find the first gilded wreaths in Philip's time and, naturally, they are imitations of the golden ones.

Protomai of the goddess and clay figurines appear in rich burials of the Archaic period [**pl. 14D**]; later they are limited to the burials of women, girls and

[29] For example the so-called Palatitsia-grave. S. Drougou and Ch. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, *Βεργίνα. Περιδιαβάζοντας τον αρχαιολογικό χώρο* (Athens 1999), 40.

[30] For the origin of the so-called Macedonian tombs see M. Andronikos, 'Some Reflections on the Macedonian tombs', *BSA* 82 (1987), 1-16 with bibliography.

[31] On the armour of Philip II see: Andronikos, *Vergina*, 131ff and P. Faklaris, in *Vergina. The Great Tumulus. Archaeological Guide* (Thessaloniki 1994), 104ff.

children. Generally, however, clay figurines are encountered more often in the graves of Pella or Verroia than in those of Aegae.

The dead are always thirsty. A goblet, sometimes a jug or a pitcher are the most usual accompaniments for the journey. Depending on the age and the financial condition of the family, these objects change shape but their use remains the same.

The Attic red-figure pelike, imported in Aegae since Hermonax's time, becomes popular in the 4th century. Kraters are rare. Large vessels, such as amphorae, seem to be a privilege of the rich, and only the simple unpainted jugs, the so-called Macedonian amphorae of the Hellenistic age will become a common burial gift for the majority of the people.

The hieratic sceptre, set with amber, follows to the underworld the mistress of one pit grave in Eurydice's plot, who died a little after 500 BC. This seems to continue the tradition of the symbolic double axes which characterised the noble priestesses of the Early Iron Age. I believe that this woman's special status is also suggested by the iron *obeloi* and the model of a four-wheel carriage [**pl. 14B,D**]. The silver omphalos phiale that lies at her feet bears the inscription ΠΕΠΕΡΙΑΣΙ. The dative is indicative of the sacred votive nature of the object.

Omphalos bowls, the libation vessel *par excellence*, – usually made of bronze – are found in the graves of the élite and only in these, suggesting their right to perform sacred rituals. In the 5th century, the paterae will gradually take the place of the bowls.

The torch and the diadem, which imitates the *strophion*, from Philip's II grave,[32] are symbols of power. Especially the diadem seems to indicate the highest hieratic office of the Temenid ruler, who was also the high priest of the kingdom.[33]

After the discovery of Philip II's grave, the most impressive find in Aegae is the great Macedonian tomb, which should almost certainly belong to Queen Eurydice, mother of three kings.

Fragments of three Panathenaic amphorae from the funeral pyre bearing the name of Lykiskos, the eponymous archon of the year 344/43 BC, give the exact date of the monument,[34] which is the oldest of its kind. This tomb, which externally does not differ from any ordinary cist grave, seems to realise the notion expressed in the Platonic laws, concerning the burial of the leaders of the ideal society.[35]

Inside a magnificent underground chamber that recalls marble temples, in a place where everything is made for eternity and the gate of Hades exists as an architectural reference in space, the charred bones of the dead queen, wrapped in cloth, well protected in their marble chest, were placed on the splendid marble throne that looks as though it was made of gold and ivory [**pl. 15C-D**]: a trophy in the arms of Persephone, the Mistress of Beyond. The goddess, followed by her dark companion, appears at the back of the throne in a painting bathed in light, where we see – illustrated by means of a peculiar composition – the inescapable fate of death.

After studying very carefully the remains of Philip's and Eurydice's funeral pyres [**pl. 16A**], that were found thrown onto their graves, we were faced with an unexpected discovery: the funeral pyres of the two royal dead did not consist of a simple pile of wood but of monumental wooden buildings.[36] The corpses, accompanied by unusually rich offerings, were laid there and surrendered to the flames.

The Temenid rulers of the Macedonians, direct descendants of Herakles, son of Zeus, incarnate incessantly through the myth of their family the heroic tradition. When they die, they are offered heroic honours – let us not forget the funeral games that continue to take place until Kassander's time.[37]

In the ideological ambience of Philip II, the man who put his own image between those of the Twelve Gods,[38] the old notion of the heroisation of the chosen immediately after his death, a notion affected by Plato's ideas and the beliefs of the Orphics, returns to the fore with a vengeance.

Nurtured by ambition, power and wealth, the ancient burial customs will gain new glory. Along with the idea of the Macedonian tomb, the underground indestructible residence of the chosen that looks like a palace and a temple, another idea is born: that of the funeral pyre in the shape of a monumental 'house of

[32] The torch found in the Tomb of Philip II is unique. It should be noted that in Doric Sparta it was customary for a torch-bearer to accompany the king in his public appearances.

[33] On the function of the Macedonian king as high priest see *History of Macedonia* II, 184ff with further bibliography.

[34] This date is supported by the other ceramic finds in the remains of the funeral pyre and in the grave itself, especially by the two fine squat lekythoi which are attributed to the Eleusinian Painter.

[35] Pl. *Leg.* 947 d-e.

[36] See Kottaridi 1999, *op.cit.* n. 19.

[37] Diod. xviii.52.5.

[38] Diod. xvi.91-94.

the dead', a notion, which starting with Eurydice's and Philip's burials reaches its height with the funeral pyre of Hephaistion,[39] and will leave its traces in the faraway Salamis in Cyprus.[40]

The idea of heroisation will pass from the king to his companions and successors. Alexander established the worship of Hephaistion as a hero. He himself will be worshipped like a god.[41]

Fire has the power to transubstantiate. Cleansed by flames, the perishable objects can be rendered back to those who have passed to the other side, becoming citizens 'of the land of dreams'. Fire abolishes the mortal body. Through the holocaust the dead are purified, they themselves become offerings for the Lord and Lady of Hades.[42]

The mythical archetype of cremation is Herakles' death. Towards the end of his hard career, this greatest of heroes, mortal son of a god, prepares his last sacrifice. His highest offering will be himself. The flames of the altar will become his fiery grave. The holocaust will be for him both an end and a beginning. Only his shadow will remain in Hades. The hero himself, accompanied forever by Hebe, eternal youth, will rejoice in the banquets of the immortals.

For the initiated to the Bacchic and Orphic Mysteries, which had gained many ardent devotees in the bosom of the Macedonian court in the 4th century BC, death is nothing more than a passage to a new life. The initiated will rejoice in the eternal banquet of the blessed heroes in the splendid light of the Elysian Fields.

In the graves of the kings and their rich companions we find the complete equipment for a banquet: precious silver and bronze vessels, necessary for the feasts of Hades. Equally essential for banquets are the couches – made of wood and decorated with gold and ivory and later, for reasons of economy, made of stone. They are the main pieces of furniture in the Macedonian tombs, and they are specified in the Platonic Laws.[43] Following this notion, two couches made by the greatest artists of their time, richly decorated with ivory, gold and glass are placed in the grave of Philip II, one in the main chamber over the marble sarcophagus containing the golden chest with the bones of the king [**pl. 16B**], and another in the antechamber over the sarcophagus of his faithful wife, who accompanied him to the shadow realm of Hades [**pl. 16C**]. These two unique masterpieces of ancient toreutic art, which we gathered from almost 4000 fragments fallen on the floor of the grave, are now reconstructed,[44] and the visitors to the Museum of the Royal Tombs in Vergina have the opportunity to enjoy them.

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[39] Diod. xvii.115.

[40] V. Karageorghis, *Excavations in the Necropolis of Salamis I* (Nicosia and London 1967).

[41] To the worship of Hero Hephaistion Diod. xvii.115.6; Arr. *Anab.* vii.23.5. On Alexander's deification see especially W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great II* (Cambridge 1948), 347-374; E. Badian, 'The Deification of Alexander the Great', in *Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edson* (Thessaloniki 1981), 27-71; A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire. The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1988), 278-290; A. Stewart, *Faces of Power. Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley and Oxford 1993), 95-102 with further bibliography.

[42] For the sacrifices to the gods of the underworld see W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Berlin 1977), 417ff with further bibliography.

[43] Pl. *Leg.* 947 d-e.

[44] For a preliminary report see A. Kottaridi, in *Vergina. The Great Tumulus. Archaeological Guide* (Thessaloniki 1994), 96-104; also Kottaridi 1997, *op.cit.* n. 19. For the exhibition of the treasures of the Royal Tombs in Vergina see A. Kottaridi, 'Vergina: The Discovery of the Ancient Macedonian Capital and the Museum of the Royal Tombs', in *Saving Cultural Heritage, Schriften des Hornemann Instituts* 3 (2000), 149-158.

13A. Carved gravestones, 5th and 4th centuries BC.

13B. Kore. Clay head of a xoanon from the burial pit of a noblewoman, c. 480 BC.

13C. Antefix, end of the 5th century BC.

13D. Weapons from the funeral pyre of a warrior, c. 550-525 BC.

14A. Gold roundels with wild animals from the grave of a lady, c. 540-530 BC.

14B. Bronze vessel, last quarter of the 6th century BC.

14C. The gold earrings of the lady with the sceptre, c. 500 BC.

14D. Protomai of the goddess from the grave of the lady with the sceptre, c. 500 BC.

15A. Attic white-ground lekythoi of the Woman Painter and his followers, 430-420 BC.

15B. Detail from a lekythos of the Woman Painter.

15C. The tomb of Queen Eurydice.

15D. Detail of the painted throne from the tomb of Queen Eurydice.

16A. The remains of the funeral pyre of Philip II.

16B. Detail from the frieze with the royal hunt decorating the gold and ivory couch found in the main chamber of Philip's tomb.

16C. Detail from the frieze with the battle scene decorating the gold and ivory couch found in the antechamber of Philip's tomb.