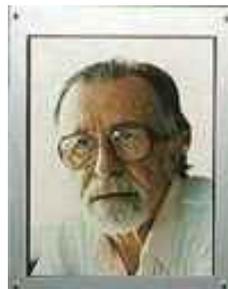


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The “Vergina” Heritage Site



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ABSTRACT

The following paper is about the heritage site of “Vergina”. “Vergina” refers to all archeological sites located in a small distance around the village of Vergina as well as to the Municipality of Vergina and the village itself. All of the above comprise the heritage site of “Vergina”.

The first part is a description and presentation of “Vergina”, along with a brief history of the site from its foundation by King Archelaus to its last days, followed by an extended reference to the excavations from 1855 to this today.

The second part is the SWOT analysis of “Vergina”. Strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats are presented and evaluated.

The third part of this paper is a reference to the “best practices” related to the “Vergina” heritage site.

The last part includes the authors’ suggestions for further development of the site.

KEY-WORDS

HERITAGE TOURISM: A type of tourism concentrated on art, cultural events, natural and historical monuments etc.

SWOT ANALYSIS: A marketing practice in which the strong and weak points, the opportunities and the possible threats of an administration unit are overviewed.

BEST PRACTICES: Past successful actions taken to this day for the development, the promotion and the advertising of the enterprise.

SUGGESTIONS: Provided by the authors for the further development of the site.

Description and presentation of the “Vergina” Heritage Site

Eleven kilometers Southeast of Veria, in the foothills of Mountain Pieria and at a height of 120m above sea-level, stands the village of Vergina (pop.1050). It is one of the most important archeological sites not only in Macedonia but the whole of Greece.

The modern village of Vergina was founded in 1922 on the site of two small herdsman's settlements, Koutles and Barbes. The new village was given the name of Vergina by the then Metropolitan of Veria, who named it after a legendary queen who dwelt somewhere to the North of the river Aliakmon and had her summer palace (Palatitsa) near the village. The story goes that Queen Vergina drowned herself in the Barbouta, a tributary of the Aliakmon, to avoid being captured by the Turks.

The village became famous both in Greece and abroad in the autumn of 1977, when the tomb of Alexander the Great's father, King Philip of Macedon, was discovered unspoiled and intact, and it was proved beyond any shadow of doubt that Vergina was indeed the site of ancient Macedonia's first capital Aegae.

According to the legend, Archelaus, son of Temenus, went to Macedonia to help King Cisseus fight his enemies. Cisseus initially welcomed him, but later tried to kill him. Archelaus himself killed the perfidious king and fled, following a she-goat (aega) in accordance with an oracle. On the spot where the goat stopped, he founded the city of Aegae, and ever afterwards a she-goat was the city's emblem and even depicted on its first coins (known as Aegae staters). The excavations in Aegae's ancient cemetery have shown that the site was inhabited from the early Iron Age onwards (1000-700 BC).

Somewhat lower down, however, nearer to the Aliakmon, a prehistoric tumulus gives evidence of habitation during both the Bronze Age and the late Neolithic.

Aegae was the capital of the Macedonian state until King Archelaus transferred his seat to Pella. However, it remained customary for Macedonia's kings to be buried in the original capital, and it was on the basis of this tradition that Vergina, where the royal tombs were discovered, was identified as ancient Aegae. Aegae flourished chiefly in the 2nd half of the 4th BC. To this period belong the Palace, the Theatre, and the Sanctuary of Euclia, an archaic deity who was originally venerated as the goddess of marriage and birth. In the reign of Antigonos I Gonatas (3rd century BC), King Pyrrhus of Epirus conquered Aegae, and his Galatian mercenaries destroyed the cemetery and robbed the royal tombs of fabulous treasures. Their looting is attested by the smashed remains of funerary stelae which have been found in the area. In 168 BC, the city was seized by the Romans and burnt down. It was later rebuilt, but from 1st century ZD onwards it entered an irreversible decline, because the inhabitants moved away to the Northeast to a site where an early Christian basilica has lately been discovered. The name Aegae vanished for ever. But in certain Byzantine documents of the 14th century the city is referred to as “Palatitsa”, a name which is undoubtedly connected with the ruined Palace nearby.

In 1855, the French archaeologist Leon Heuzey was traveling, mainly in Central Macedonia, in search of ancient ruins. As he wrote in his subsequent book, “the story of the initial discovery of the ruins of Palatitsa clearly demonstrates that those who travel in search of ruins should not be content merely to present the local inhabitants with a stream of questions”. Since the locals were unable to tell him anything about any ancient ruins when he was in the locality, Heuzey moved on,

accompanied by a Professor Delacoulonche, to the River Axios, where, during a chance encounter with a remarkably learned priest, he learnt of the existence of the ruins of Palatitsa, a mere 2 km away from Vergina. He set off again at once, taking a guide with him, and was amazed to find that this was the most fascinating place he had visited on all his travels in the Central Macedonia. However, excavations did not begin until 18614, when Heuzey returned to Macedonia at the head of an expedition, which enjoyed the supreme patronage of Napoleon III. He was ably assisted by the architect H.Daumet.

The expedition arrived on a corvette provided by the Emperor and manned by 15 sailors. They established themselves at Koutles (which was to join with the community of Barbes in 1922 to form what is now the village of Vergina). The excavations began with the help of 40 local workers, but they were limited to the East section of the Palace and lasted only a few days, owing to malaria, which was taking a heavy toll in the area.

Much later, in 1937, the excavations were resumed on the initiative of the University of Thessaloniki and under the direction of Professor Konstandinos A. Romaios, and continued until the outbreak of the Greek-Italian War in 1940. These 3 years of digging brought to light part of the central courtyard, rooms in the S wing, and two rooms in the West section, and the ground plan of the whole complex was accurately drawn up. The first Macedonian tomb was also found (3rd century BC). The Singer-Polignac Foundation, a legal entity established in 1932 for the purposes of archaeological research, sponsored the excavation of the Palace by Professor Romaios and the Ephor of Antiquities Professor C. Makaronas (1954-6). During this period, another room in the South wing was uncovered, as was the peristyle around the central courtyard and the foundations of the North wall. A second injection of funds from Singer-Polignac and the University of Thessaloniki in 1959 made it possible for Professors G. Bakalakis and Manolis Andronikos to join the archaeological team. From 1960 to 1961 the archaeological investigations were founded by the Philosophical School of the University of Thessaloniki, the Singer-Polignac Foundation, and the Ministry of the Presidency and Government's Department of Antiquities and Restoration.

Three wings and the whole of the central courtyard and its surrounding porticoes were uncovered. While subsequent excavations in 1962, 1963, and 1976 still did not lay bare the Royal Tombs concealed in the Great Tumulus', they were very useful nonetheless, because they revealed that the tumulus had been constructed out of vast quantities of red clay soil, gravel, and stones. These had been transported from the surrounding area and contained fragments of funerary stelae which had been violently destroyed and dated from the 3rd century BC (300-250 BC). Bearing in mind the English archaeologist N. G. L. Hammond's original hypothesis that Aegae had stood on the side of the modern Vergina and that the ancient city's cemetery had been destroyed by Pyrrhus' Galatian mercenaries in 274-273 BC, Professor Andronikos now became convinced that this was indeed the site of Aegae, that the tombs of the Macedonian kings must be somewhere in the same area, and that the most obvious place for the latter to be was in fact inside the Great Tumulus.

His convictions were strengthened by the results of the 1977 excavations, which produced fragments of 40 funerary monuments, and the 1978 excavations, which yielded a relief funerary stele.

At this point it is worth mentioning just a few of the names of ordinary Macedonian people as inscribed on the stelae, for they clearly prove the Hellenic origin of the

Macedonians: they include Alcetas, Hermon, Theocritus, Theodore, Theophanes, Cleitomachus, Leander, Peucolaus, Philotas, Bernice, and Clio.

In 1977-8, Professor Andronikos and his colleagues toiled for 6 weeks to uncover the group of 3 Royal Tombs, which had hitherto lain hidden within the Great Tumulus. The largest of the tombs belonged to Philip II (336 BC); the small one was dated to around the end of the 4th century BC; and the cist-grave, contemporary with Philip's, belonged to a woman.

On 5th August 1978, a fourth Macedonian tomb was found to the Northwest of the large Royal Tomb discovered the previous year. It was dated to around the 2nd quarter of the 4th century.

In 1980, the exploration of the Great Tumulus was completed and new excavations were started at Palioporta, 500 m to the East of the Palace. They brought to light parts of a Hellenistic dwelling. In 1981, the excavation of the dwelling continued, and 3 more Macedonian tombs were also discovered, despoiled but intact. Their facades and interiors were cleaned in 1982, at which time a stone cline or sarcophagus was found in the first, a marble throne in the second, and another sarcophagus of enormous proportions in the third. Further discoveries included the ancient Theatre (between the Palace and "Romaio's Tomb"), the Sanctuary of Euclia, the bases of 3 of her statues outside the Sanctuary, and an inscription engraved on the vertical face of the first base (4th century BC), from which it was possible to deduce that the goddess's statue had been dedicated by Eurydice, daughter of Sirrhas, wife of Amyntas III, and mother of Philip II.

Professor Andronikos' team continued excavating in 1983, concentrating on the ancient Theatre, the Sanctuary of Euclia, and the Citadel. In 1984, conservation work on the finds from Philip's tomb was completed and another tomb was explored in the environs of Palatitsa. In 1986, work was extended to the Sanctuary of Euclia and the Citadel.

In 1987, the area to the east of "Romaio's Tomb" was investigated, and the looted tomb of a woman was found.

The most important find made in 1988 was a pit-grave of the late archaic period. In 1989, still under Professor Andronikos' direction, excavations continued in the Palace, the Theatre, the Citadel, the Sanctuary of Euclia, and the cemetery.

The following year saw further excavations and conservation of earlier finds. The 1990 finds included a piece of papyrus, which unfortunately bore only scattered words, a despoiled cist-grave of porous stone, another base of a statue of Euclia identical to the one found in 1982 and bearing the same inscription and, a little way to the North, a marble statue of a veiled figure 1.65 m tall and dated to 340 BC. Excavations were also conducted in the Sanctuary of Cybele, where a black-painted fluted cantharus was found bearing an inscription, which confirmed the identity of the Sanctuary.

Aegae, the first capital of the Macedonian state, occupied a gently sloping terraced site to the East of the modern village of Vergina. It was protected by a strong triangular wall of porous rock, stone, and brick, the North section of which faced the plain, while the Citadel stood on the South side.

Vergina, identified as Aegae was the first capital of the Macedonians. Its numerous archaeological finds of exquisite art, the royal tombs, the grave steles, the majestic palace, the theatre, the houses and the city walls, give a complete picture of the high standard of the civilization typical of a Macedonian city. Only in Vergina does the art of the 5th century BC unfold in all its splendid manifestations: architecture, sculpture, painting, metalwork and jewelry. This is due to the fact that, as the ancient capital of Macedonia, Vergina possessed numerous workshops where able and experienced craftsmen created works of art that vied in quality with those of Attica. The majority of these finds are now on display in the archeological museum of Thessaloniki. The sensations experienced by the visitor to Vergina are unique. Here history is no longer a dull science, but it comes to life right in front of one's eyes. The ancient city lying on the north slopes of the Pierian Mountains was the capital of the kingdom of the Macedonians. Archaeological evidence proves that the site was continuously inhabited from the Early Bronze Age (3rd millenium BC) while in the Early Iron Age (11th – 8th centuries BC) it became an important center, rich and densely inhabited.

The city reached its highest point of prosperity in the Archaic (7th – 6th centuries BC) and Classical periods (5th – 4th centuries), when it was the most important urban center of the area, the seat of the Macedonian Kings and the place where all the traditional sanctuaries were established. Moreover, it was already famous in antiquity for the wealth of the Royal Tombs, which were gathered in its extensive Necropolis. (Vergina history and archaeology. Rekos Publications).

Philip II "King of the Macedonians – Alexander the Great's father"

Philip II (386-336 BC) was one of the greatest politicians and generals of the Ancient Greece. He was the third son of the Macedonians' king Amynta III and father of Alexander the Great. He had a unique education and he was known for his political and diplomatic activity. In 359 BC became Philip King of the entire Macedonia by taking the throne from his nephew Amynta the IV. He was assassinated at the age of 47 (336 BC) by one of his seven bodyguards while attending the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra in the theatre nearby.

The most important monuments on the site:

The Royal Tombs in the Great Tumulus

Of the three Royal Tombs, the largest belonged to Philip II, the smallest to a young prince (probably Alexander IV, son of Alexander the Great), and the cist-grave, which is contemporary with Philip's, belonged to a woman.

Philip's tomb

The largest monument of its type, this tomb measures 9.50 X 5.50 meters. It has a main chamber and an antechamber, a Doric façade with a marble door, 2 half columns between pilasters, triglyphs and metopes, and an Ionic frieze (directly above the Doric frieze) depicting a hunting scene.

Inside the tomb is a marble sarcophagus in which was deposited a gold reliquary (larnax), which contained the dead king's bones, washed and wrapped in purple cloth, and a wreath of gold oak leaves and acorns.

Also found beside the reliquary were the dead king's gold and ivory shield, his iron breastplate, his iron helmet, and his sword. Other finds included numerous silver and bronze vessels, utensils for use in the bath, a silver gilt circlet, the remains of a wooden kline with ivory ornamentation and a few clay pots.

Another gold reliquary was found in the antechamber, containing the bones of Cleopatra, one of Philip's seven consorts, who must have been assassinated immediately after him. Also in the antechamber were another gold circlet, a length of gold and purple cloth, a gold myrtle wreath, an ivory-decorated wooden kline, a pair of bronze gilt greaves (one shorter than the other) and a gold gorytos (a kind of quiver in which both bow and arrows were carried).

The prince's tomb

This tomb closely resembles Philip's. The only difference between them is that the latter has two half columns on the façade instead of pilasters. This tomb too is comprised of a main chamber and an antechamber, its overall dimensions being 5.40 X 6.00 meters. The frieze was apparently painted on wood and has been completely destroyed.

The tomb's occupant was cremated and his bones were deposited in a silver hydria and covered with purple cloth. The main chamber contained two large silvered vessels and a number of silver vases, a pair of bronze gilt greaves, a necklace, a lantern, a kline with gold and ivory ornamentation.

The cist-grave

The smallest of the three tombs, consists of a four-sided chamber, 2.09 X 3.50 meters in dimension, roofed with horizontally laid porous stones. All it contained was a few shards of black-painted pottery, as it had been looted in ancient times. The most valuable finds here are the wall paintings, which cover the upper part of all except the west wall.

The Palace and the Theatre

i) The Palace

Dating from the last 3rd of the 4th century or the beginning of the 3rd century BC, the Palace is a two-storey structure, covering an area of 9.250 square meters. The main building measures 104.50 X 88.50 meters. The palace was built around a central courtyard 44.50 meters square.

ii) The theatre

Standing at the bottom of the slope below the Palace, the theatre was built at the same time. It had 9 rows of seats, an orchestra 28 meters in diameter and a wooden stage, the foundations of which still survive. It was in this very theatre that Philip of Macedon was assassinated in the spring of 336 BC, while celebrating the marriage of his daughter Cleopatra to King Alexander of Epirus.

The Sanctuary of Eukleia

It lies to the north of the theatre and includes two temples of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, a monumental pastille and a series of offerings among which two bases of the votive statues dedicated by queen Eurydice, grandmother of Alexander The Great.

The Acropolis and the City Walls

It is located on the step hill to the south of the settlement. The fortification wall extends to the east of the city. Excavations on the Acropolis have revealed parts of the circuit wall and Hellenistic houses in the enclosed area. The fortification of Aigai dates to the early Hellenistic period (end of 4th – beginning of 3rd century BC).

The royal tombs of the Northwest of the city

Two Macedonian tombs are included in this group, the so-called “Romaïos’ Tomb”, an Ionic, temple-shaped structure, dated to the beginning of the 3rd century BC and the “Tomb of Eurydice”, which probably belongs to the mother of Philip II and is dated to circa 340 BC. Three cist-graves dating from the 5th and 4th centuries BC also belong to the same group, as well as four pit-graves of the late archaic period.

The tombs in the Bella tumulus

Three Macedonian tombs and one cist-grave dating from the Hellenistic period were found in the tumulus. One of the Macedonian tombs is decorated with an interesting wall painting and another contains an elegant marble funerary couch.

The cemetery of Tumuli

This is the imposing necropolis of the Iron Age (11th – 8th centuries BC), which includes more than 300 small earthen tumuli, constructed over clusters of burials, which contained rich offerings. (Vergina history and archaeology. Rekos) Publications.

Vergina in the modern age

After the last major excavations by M. Andronikos, the excavations sites were fenced, the Great Tumulus was reconstructed over the Royal Tombs including an exhibition space for the finds, and the area around the sites has been reshaped in order to become accessible to visitors. A map of “Vergina” is given in Appendix 1.

SWOT Analysis of the “Vergina Heritage Site”

Strengths

Structures

The Great Tumulus was reconstructed over the last years so as to provide accessibility to the three tombs. The inside of the Tumulus has been shaped as an exhibition site for the finds from the tombs and the surrounding area and the tombs themselves. The architects that redesigned the inside of the Tumulus have managed to capture the stateliness of the burial site. Well placed lighting combined with massive construction materials (granite, marble) give the visitor a unique experience.

Security

The security of the archaeological site and the museum has been assigned to a standard team of eight experienced guards supported by an equal number of seasonal guards. The exhibition site is also equipped with an up to date surveillance system.

Thus constant vigilance and a well-coordinated communication and promotion strategy are required.

During the ‘post-Olympic’ year 2005 the generally upward course of tourism is expected to continue, but a decline in the increase rate of the tourist movement compared to the achievements of the year 2004 is bound to take place, as recorded in all previous cases of organizing and hosting the Olympic Games.

Fractions inside the European Union created because of the War on Iraq

The military operations in Iraq have created certain fractions inside the European Union. This fact reflects in the tourist behavior around Europe. Tourists coming from countries such as Germany and France, which are opposed to military operations in Iraq, have expressed preference in countries of the same stance, such as Greece, as opposed to countries supporting the operations, such as Spain, Portugal or Italy. It is already a fact that many holiday reservations concerning these countries have been cancelled and exchanged to holiday reservations in Greece.

One-day trips to Veria

Over the last years Veria has become a popular one-day trip destination. Veria is easily accessible through the national road network and attracts visitors for various reasons. People visit the city for its traditional colour, architecture, cuisine and pastry. This provides an opportunity for a visit increase in “Vergina”, since it is at a fairly small distance from Veria.

Ski Resorts

Three of Greece’s best and most known Ski Resorts are to be found in Imathia. Namely Seli, Chryso Elafi (Golden Deer) and 3-5 Pigadia (3-5 Wells). All equipped with training centers, these Ski Resorts attract not only ski enthusiasts but also professional skiers and skiing teams from around the world.

A significant amount of people visits the resorts every year and also gets the chance to visit “Vergina” during its stay there.

The Roads of Wine

The Macedonian Wine Roads is an innovative tourist program that enables the visitor to embark on a journey into the lands of Macedonia, visit the places where wine is produced, savour the local culinary delights and explore interesting archaeological sites, one of them being “Vergina”.

The Prefecture of Imathia boasts a long tradition in winemaking. Naousa, Gianakochori, Stenimachos, Nea Strantzsa and Episkopi are just a few stops on the journey into the vineyards and traditional wineries.

Movies based on Alexander the Great’s history

For a destination – a small hotel or an entire continent – there is no finer publicity than that generated by a major motion picture. Not only do most tourism entities lack the big funds to finance a far-reaching advertising campaign, but also no pocket brochure can match the wide screen miracle of Technicolor, Dolby and high profile spokesmen.

The promotion of tourism and tourist destinations for receiving locations is a challenge. Favorable impressions, which heighten consumer awareness levels, are difficult to project through conventional technology and formats of sales communication. Most products and services use advertising to entice buyers and they