

# Introduction

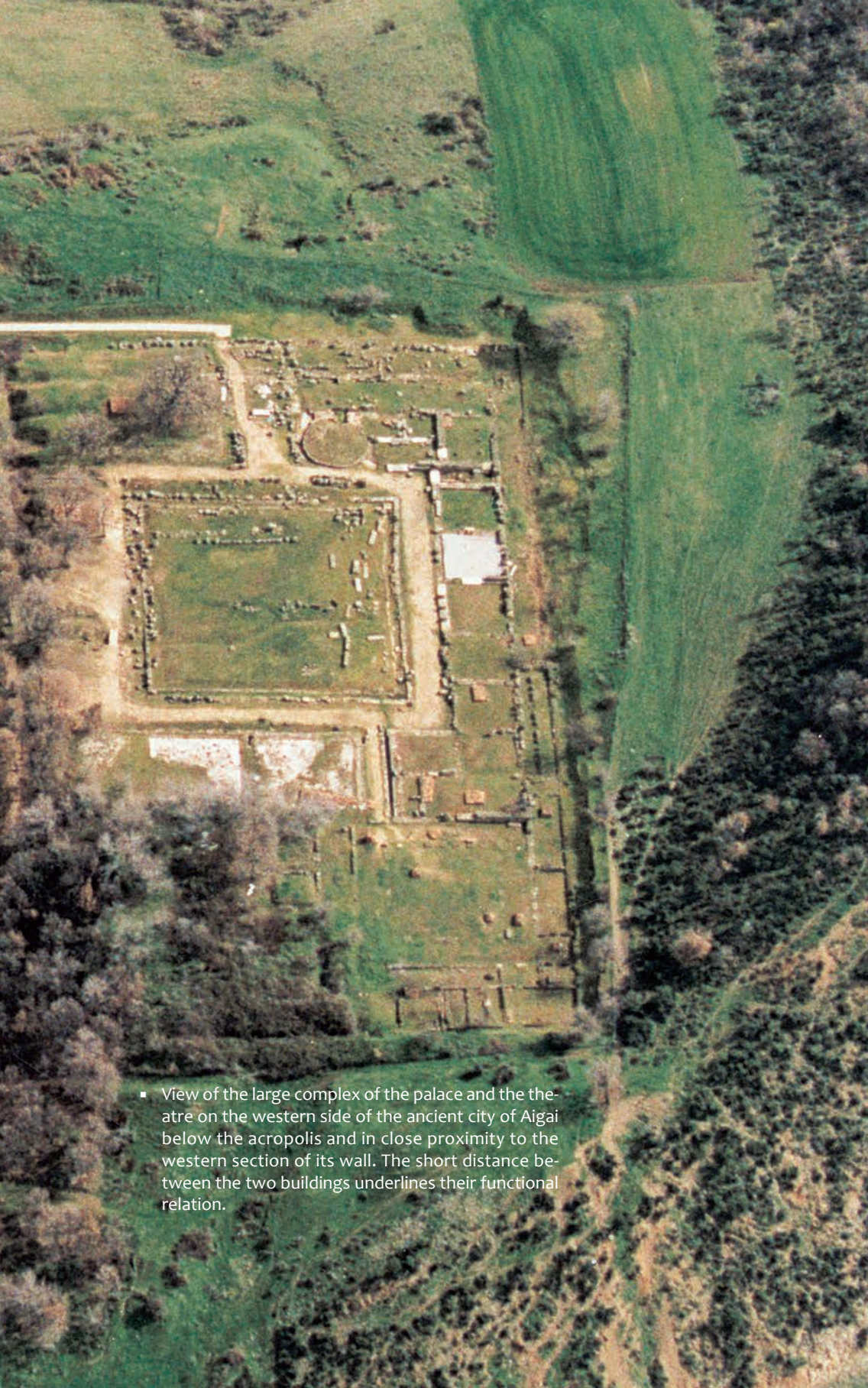


**T**he Vergina excavation already numbers several decades of research. Ever since 1938 until now a days, the archaeologists of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Archaeological Service have been continuously working on the site bringing to light new monuments. It was in 1856 when the French archaeologist and traveler L. Heuzey during his journey in Macedonia had discovered the first ruins of ancient structures in the “AgiaTriada” area west of the Palatitsia village, at the spot where the village of Vergina would later develop, and had indicated their significance. Excavations were resumed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, when professor K. Romaios with a team of students undertook the research of the Vergina remains in 1938.

The breakthrough in the history of the on going excavation has undoubtedly been the research in the Great Tumulus and the dis-

- Ground-plan of the archaeological site of Vergina. In colour, the ancient city of Aigai on the northern low slopes of Pierian Mt., the Cemetery of the Tumuli, the “Bella” tumulus and the Great Tumulus. (Based on the ground-plan by G. Gatsios – Z. Al Saayah).





- View of the large complex of the palace and the theatre on the western side of the ancient city of Aigai below the acropolis and in close proximity to the western section of its wall. The short distance between the two buildings underlines their functional relation.

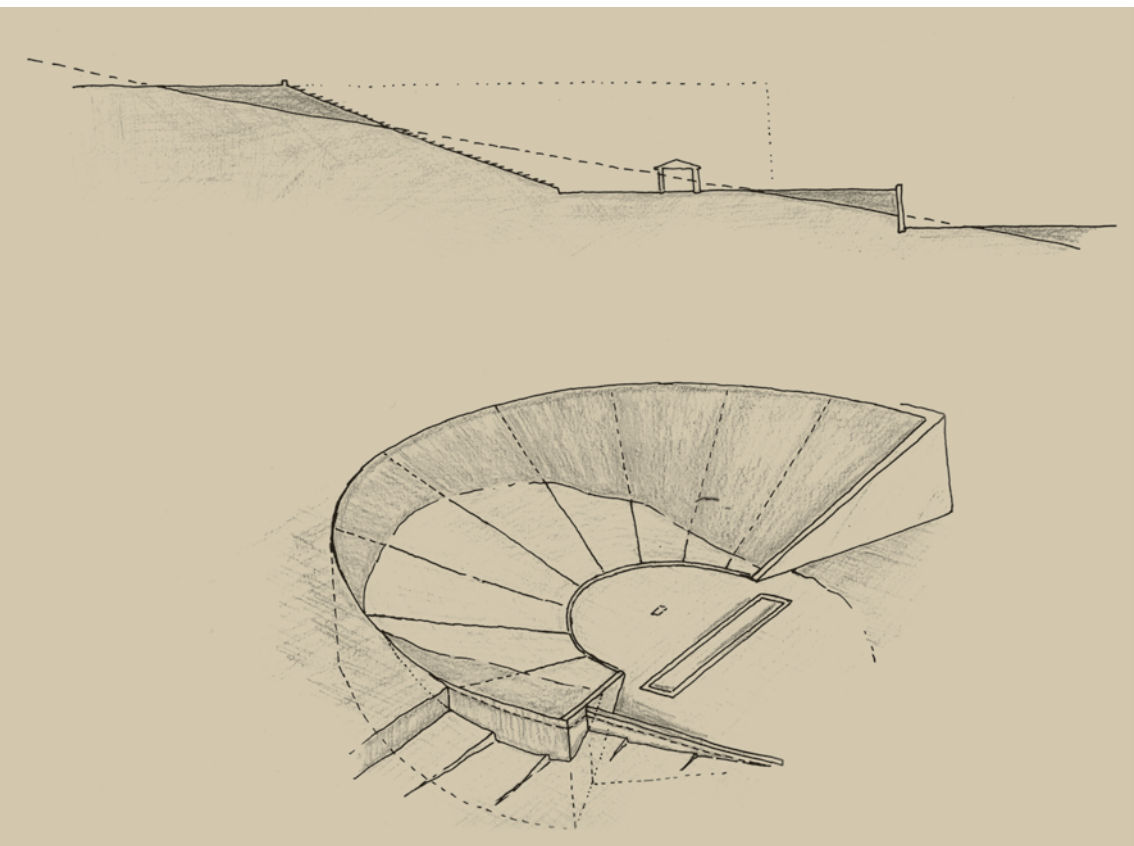
covery of the royal tombs (1976-1978). These monuments caused universal admiration as well as intense debate on their meaning and interpretation. The excavator Prof. M. Andronikos, applying an earlier comment made by the English historian N. Hammond, initially (1976) linked the ruins in the archaeological site of Vergina with the ancient city of Aigai, the ancient capital of the Macedonians while in 1977, he suggested the identification of the deceased in the grand Macedonian tomb in the Great Tumulus with king Philip II. Since the beginning, those views became useful regarding excavation as both recognizing working methods and the starting-point in the search of the extended area of Vergina, which produced quite significant results.

After the impressive discovery of the Great Tumulus, the next appealing but also difficult target of excavation research in Vergina became the ancient city itself. The **theatre** was identified next to the already well-known big structure of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC **megaron** while slightly to the north the city's market-place (agora) came to light and the **sanctuary of Eucleia**. The eastern sector of the city revealed the **sanctuary of the Mother of Gods** (dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the Hellenistic times) and other public and private buildings offering rich information on the ancient city. The theatre was among the early structures to appear during the 1982 excavation season, right after the discovery of the royal tombs and became a true point-of-reference for the excavation on the basis of its historical data and morphological features; for these reasons, it constitutes the focus of our attention.

- The Haliacmon river, one of the greatest rivers in Greece, flows between the Pierian Mt. and the Vermion Mt. reaching the Macedonian valley. In reality, it forms a natural path through three southwestern mountain ranges to the East and the sea and has been one of the primary factors in the country's development throughout antiquity up to the modern era.



In the years to follow the new monuments in Vergina, their interpretation and the newly-introduced views have deeply contributed to the understanding of the ancient city of Aigai while at the same time have posed new questions about ancient Macedonia, its organisation and culture. For a large period of time, and in particular after M. Andronikos' death (1992), the discussion had been centred on his identification of the ancient city in Vergina with ancient Aigai and of the deceased in the big Macedonian tomb in the Great Tumulus with Philip II. However, the debate has been occasionally marked by lack of progress and absence of results since the argumentation is repeated without any new data. In contrast, the findings from the ancient city and its extensive cemetery not only in-



- Drawing reconstruction of the theatre of Aigai, Vergina (drawing by N. Chatzidakis).



- Fragment of a hellenistic stamped tile depicting the bust of a goat, possibly the symbol of the city, found in the Metroon.

crease the number of monuments but primarily reveal historical events and offer information, sometimes unidentified, that nevertheless confirm the excavator's initial belief. The huge –in terms of topography and chronology– extent of the **cemetery**, the royal dedications of the royal family in the **agora**, the complex of the **palace** and the **theatre**, the unexcavated but certain public buildings comprise those characteristic monuments which support the initial view, though they are obviously in need of further research. The fact is that as time draws further away from the important find in the Great Tumulus either the size of the excavation work decreases or its aim alters.

The ancient theatre of Vergina has been a monument of varying significance since its topography, form and excavation data agree with the historical evidence on the city in a way virtually impressive



- The palace of Aigai, Vergina, view from the south. The grand peristyle courtyard is impressive.

and mandatory. Its dating to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, its proximity to the palace and the Agora of Aigai as well as its wall and form all allow the scholar to refer to the dramatic events of Philip II's murder on the basis of the chronological sequence of its monuments.

Both the palace and the theatre's premises are indeed sites worthy of further future research. Still, in the current context a lot of issues have emerged concerning the area and in connection with the theatre itself that mark an important urban-planned and at the same time, "a building complex of political significance". M. Andronikos notes in *Vergina. The Royal Tombs and Other Antiquities*, 1984, p.





- The theatre of Aigai was discovered inside an olive grove. Few olive trees still stand as guardians of the ancient monument.

235 “The archaeological research in the area has so far given an abundance of material both on the knowledge of the culture of the Macedonians and the understanding of their historical profile. It is certain that its continuation and the systematic study of the findings will enable us to form a much more well-defined and above all, more reliable view of this part of Hellenism, which since the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards became the leader in its historical course and achieved in spreading the Greek culture and language nearly across universal borders”. This is exactly the picture that the scholar should comprehend and make it available to all by investigating everything while crossing through truth and time.