

Excursions



**Castle of Platamonas, Vergina, Aristotle's School,
The city of Naoussa**

Platamonas, Greece, September 3-8, 2009

The Castle of Platamonas



The Byzantine Castle of Platamonas (platamonas = a long beach) is located in the southern part of Pieria, on the side of the national motorway, on the top of a small hill by the sea. It is built at a key-position, just opposite the "passage" of the Valley of Tempi, which has connected Thessaly to Pieria since the remote antiquity. It has been reasonably supported that the city Heraclia or Heraclion, which was probably built in the 5th century BC, was located exactly in the same place. The castle -its greatest part at least- was built by the Franc king of Thessalonica, Bonifacius e Monferèt, in 1205, upon a Byzantine castle that had previously existed there, as is confirmed by parts of its castle walls (dating from the 6th, 9th and 10th centuries). During the years 1218-1224 AD, the castle was seized by the Duke of Hepirus, Angelos Komninos, who gave an end to the Franc Occupation in Thessaloniki in 1224, naming this city the capital of the Byzantine Empire.



The Castle of Platamonas was conquered -in 1389- by the Turks, who, thus, could have the overall control over the "passage" of the Valley of Tempi, leading to Southern Greece. Later on, nevertheless, while Mourat was encircling the Bay of Thermaikos, the Venetians took over the administration of Thessalonica in 1423. The castle of Platamonas was fortified, then, on a parallel with the fortification of Cassandra, Chalkidiki, so that control over the entire Bay of Thermaikos would be possible.

During the years of the Turkish Occupation, the Castle of Platamonas was considerably fortified very early, owing to its strategic position and the commencement of the nationalistic liberating movements and revolutions taken up by the Greeks, the epicentre of which uprisings being the Olympus. Even more, John Lazos, son of Captain Lazos -coming from the district of Olympus-, managed to conquer the castle after a row of tremendous battles against its Albanian defenders.

Later on, when Southern Greece was liberated and Thessaly was attached to it (1881), the Castle of Platamonas regained a new and considerable significance for the Turks. Nevertheless, it was abandoned afterwards, as its defence would be of no avail to the conquerors.



Vergina

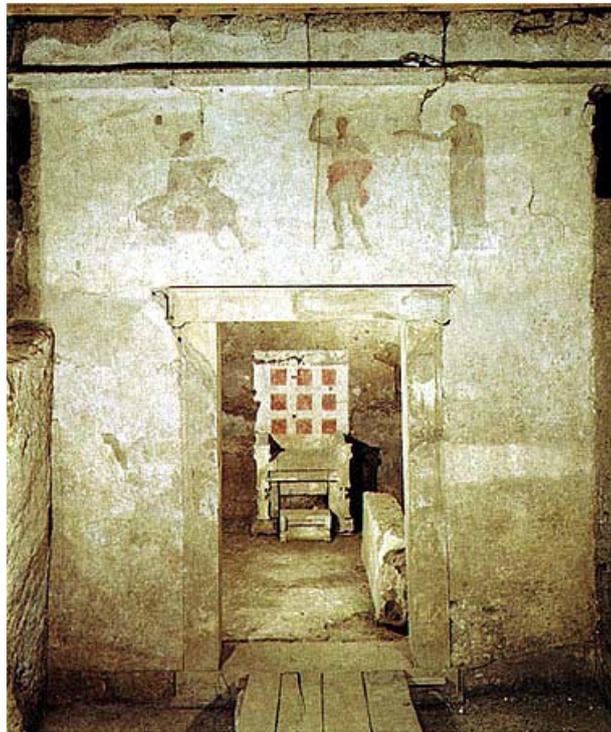


Vergina is a village in Imathia, 12 km from Veroia, 75 km from Thessaloniki, and 515 km from Athens. It has enjoyed worldwide renown in the past few decades, due to the discovery of the ancient city of Aigai, the ancient capital of the Macedonian kings, and its cemetery. Of particular note are the tombs of the royal dynasty, most notably King Philip II and a young prince who is identified as Alexander IV, and a cist grave. The royal tombs were discovered in 1977-8 by the archaeologist Manolis Andronikos.

Until their discovery, the tombs were covered by a tumulus 13 m high and 110 m across. It must have been constructed at the beginning of the third century BC by Antigonos Gonatas, to protect the royal tombs from further pillaging after marauding Galati had looted and destroyed the cemetery.



An underground building was constructed in 1993 to enclose and protect the royal tombs, maintaining the stable temperature and humidity necessary to preserve the wall paintings. From the outside, the building looks like an earthen mound; inside, the treasures found in the royal tombs have been on display since November 1997. Apart from the sepulchral monuments themselves, there is an open area of 1,000 m², where the finds from the tombs are displayed in showcases. Lighting is very subdued to draw visitors' undivided attention to the exhibits. The tombs, however, which are at a lower level, are illuminated normally, to give visitors a complete picture. The first thing visitors see is a number of grave steles that were found in the fill of the tumulus, and three display cases containing artefacts used by ordinary people of Philip's time, to point out the difference between their life and that of the Macedonian kings.



The first tomb is a large Macedonian tomb, almost contemporary with the others, which was found desecrated and completely destroyed. It is important because it illustrates the development of Macedonian sepulchral architecture since the time of Philip's tomb (the latter had piers with half columns, while this one had independent columns which simply stood close to the front wall).

Next is the Heroon, a building which was intended for the cult of the dead kings. The foundations and the cist grave survive. This is a particularly important grave because it contained a wall painting of the rape of Persephone by Pluto. It was found desecrated.

The most important tomb of all is Philip II's, which measures 9.50 x 5.50 m and has a deep antechamber and a large, square burial chamber. The facade has the form of a Doric temple, with a marble door, and is adorned with triglyphs and metopes. Above the Doric frieze, however, there is an Ionic frieze with a painting of a hunting scene. Three horsemen and seven men on foot pursue a lion, deer, and boar. Only one of the men is mature and bearded, and he is identified as Philip. Another of the men is Alexander. This hunting scene and the Rape of Persephone are the only surviving

examples of ancient Greek painting, and are probably the work of Philoxenes and Nikomachos.



In the burial chamber was found a marble sarcophagus, inside which was a gold larnax containing the ashes of the dead king and his crown. His weapons were also here, together with symposium and bathing accoutrements and the remains of the wooden mortuary couch adorned with gold, glass, and ivory. The larnax, the crown, the weapons (most notable among which is the shield), the mortuary couch, the rest of the personal effects, and grave goods are displayed in showcases in the open space in front of Philip's tomb.



In the antechamber of Philip's tomb another gold larnax was discovered with a royal diadem inside a marble sarcophagus, together with a wooden mortuary couch with similar decoration to Philip's. The larnax must have contained the ashes of Kleopatra, Philip's youngest wife, who was assassinated immediately after her husband. Last is the tomb of the prince, which is ascribed to Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great. It closely resembles Philip's, though it is smaller and instead of half columns has two omphalia, or discs, with painted heads.



The tomb had a painted frieze, nothing of which survives, however, owing to the technique used to paint it (fresco). The cinerary urn was a silver hydria, with a gold oak wreath placed around the neck. There were also weapons in the tomb, together with quantities of grave goods and vases and a wooden mortuary couch adorned with gold and ivory. The decoration of the couch is notable for a representation of Dionysos with a flute-player and a satyr. All the contents of the tomb are displayed in showcases in the open space in front of the tomb.

The exhibition concludes with an extensive account of the life and work of Manolis Andronikos, who excavated the royal tombs.



Vergina: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2PISRtw-Tc> video-voice

Aristotle's School



A place of universal interest, the ruins of Aristotle's School, is found only 2 kilometers away from the contemporary Naoussa, at the district of Isvoria. Here is the place with the racing water and the deeply-shaded caves, mentioned by the ancient writers, where the greatest philosopher of antiquity taught the greatness of classical Greek thought and the ideals of the Platonic philosophy to the King's of Macedonia, Phillip II, son, Alexander and the other nobles of the Macedonian court. The encounter of these two Great personalities of the ancient world at the Nymphaeum of Mieza would definitely affect the future of mankind, and of all Western Civilization.



The area of the Nymphaeum, which is the sanctuary dedicated to the Nymphs, is a very impressive natural landscape, where the ancient remnants -a wall prop of a two-floored arcade with Ionic columns forming a Π- combined with the three natural caves which are found there, constitute the main grounds of the School. The vertical surface of the rock, where the openings for supporting the roof's girders are discernable, comprised the back-end of the shady stoa, (built at 350 B.C. and later), where Aristotle taught «the doctrines of morals and politics" (Plutarch VII, 668) to the youths of the Macedonian Nobility. The landscape, where the Great Teacher rambled with his students on the fully vegetation riverbank trails, among calm and cool streams of water, gushed from the springs around, is completed by an even greater cave, a little further off, with two carved entrances, obviously for devotional use.



Aristotle school (with voice) near Naousa central Macedonia:
<http://www.leechvideo.com/video/view1226725.html>

The city of Naoussa



Naoussa is the town where the organizing institution of the festival resides. Naoussa, a city in central Macedonia and municipality of prefecture Imathia, is built at the foot of Vermio mountain.

The city has a glorious history and a rich tradition. In February 1822, the citizens of Naoussa declared the revolution against the Turks. The rebels defeated the Turkish army of Kehagja Bey. For the first time a Turkish army was confronted by Greek rebels and lost. On 10th of April 1822 Naoussa fell.

The Turks totally destroyed it. The last defenders were killed in Zafeiraki's tower and the women and children preferred to fall in the waterfall of Arapitsa rather than fall in the hands of Turks. For this sacrifice Naoussa was nominated a "heroic city" along with Mesologgi, Souli and Arcadia.



Naoussa was liberated on 17th of October 1912 and since then, it has followed a rapid course of industrialisation, which was intensified after the end of World War II and established the city as a model of growth. Particular growth was marked in the sector of textile industry, while a big part of workforce deals with the agriculture. Basic productions are apples, peaches, cherries and grapes, which give the wine of Name of Origin of Superior Quality of Naoussa.



Naoussa is a city of unique beauty. Places such as the grove of Saint Nicolas and the ski centre in Three - Five Pigadia constitute a pole of attraction for thousands of visitors. The archaeological site of School of Aristotle is just outside the town, where two eminent personalities, the great philosopher Aristotle and Alexander the Great met.



Finally, the traditional carnival of Naoussa is well known all over Greece, where the entire city lives in festive rhythms.



The characteristic of Naoussa is the warmth and the hospitality of its residents. In a few words, it is worth visiting Naoussa and getting to know its history at first hand.

video with voice: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI_v0JiP_xQ