

CHAPTER 2

MACEDONIA AND MACEDONIANS

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The geographical term Macedonia means nothing else but the land inhabited and/or ruled by the Macedonians. Its extent has followed the expansion of the Macedonian kingdom from its foundation around 700 BC to its suppression by the Romans in 168 BC. That is why it is impossible to give a single geographical definition of its limits. In the five centuries of its existence Macedonia proper (excluding the external fluctuating dependencies never integrated into the state) came to comprise the lands from the Pindus mountain range in the west to the plain of Philippi in the east, and from Mt. Olympus in the south to the Axios gorge between Mt. Barnous (Kaimaktsalan) and Mt. Orbelos (Beles) to the north. Almost ninety percent of its lands fall within the present-day borders of Greece, of which it is the northernmost province.¹

The Macedonians were not the first inhabitants of the country to which they eventually gave their name. Ancient literary sources mention the Pieres in Pieria, the Brygoi, remnants of a people who migrated to Asia Minor, where they are known under the name of the Phrygians, the mysterious Bottiaians, who allegedly hailed from Crete and Athens, Pelasgians in Emathia, the Almopes in Almopia, the Eordoi in Eordaia, Paionians along the Axios, and further east the Mygdonians, Edonians, Bisaltai, and Krestonians.² Our ignorance of the languages spoken by them—except for the Brygoi/Phrygians³—does not allow us to determine their precise habitat, and even less their ethnic affinities. All these population groups,

¹ On the question of the definition of Macedonia, see M. B. Hatzopoulos, "Les limites de la Macédoine antique," *Πρακτικά τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν* 70 (1995), 164–77 (in Greek with a French abstract); id., *Macedonian Institutions under the Kings*, 1, (MEΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ) 22 (Athens, 1996), pp. 167–216 and map I at the end of the volume.

² The main sources for Macedonia before the Macedonians are Thuc. 2.99; Strab. 7, fr. 11; Just. 7.1. For the Bottiaians in particular, see Plut., *Thes.*, 16.2–3 and *Mor.*, 299A.

³ For a survey of the Phrygian language, see Cl. Brixhe, "Le Phrygien," in Françoise Bader, ed., *Langues indo-européennes* (Paris, 1994), pp. 156–78.

whatever their origin, were either expelled or reduced to a subordinate position and eventually assimilated by the conquering Macedonians.⁴

The origin of the Macedonians themselves has, for more than a century, been the object of a lively debate, in which scientific considerations are sometimes inextricably intermingled with ulterior motives of a political nature. Macedonian authors, like most Greek writers of the late classical and Hellenistic period, used the Attic *koine* instead of their local dialect, while conclusive epigraphic evidence concerning the ancient Macedonian speech was not forthcoming. Inscriptions discovered in Macedonia were both rare and late, dating from after the reign of Philip II, who had introduced the Attic *koine* as the official idiom of his administration. We therefore had to rely on the contradictory evidence of ancient authors, who may have not been immune to political considerations when they stressed the common origin and common language of the Macedonians and the other Greeks or when they denied it. As for the collection of glosses, that is rare words attributed by ancient authors to various foreign and Greek peoples, among which feature the Macedonians, their *ex hypothesi* exotic nature and the uncertainty of the manuscript tradition deprives them of a large measure of their value as evidence.⁵

In the last thirty years the discovery, systematic collection and publication of a large number of inscriptions, sometimes of an early date, has made it possible to study in perspective proper names and technical terms that preserve phonetic and morphological features, as well as their divergences from the norms of the *koine*. Very recently a couple of longer texts entirely written in the local idiom have come to light and been published. They leave no doubt that Macedonian was a Greek dialect presenting affinities partly with the dialects attested in the inscriptions of Thessaly and partly with those known from documents discovered in north-western Greece. Moreover its phonology seems to have been influenced to a limited extent by the languages of the conquered peoples, in which the distinction between voiced and unvoiced consonants tended to be blurred.

⁴ For all these questions, see exhaustively N. G. L. Hammond and G. T. Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 2 (Oxford, 1972), pp. 405–41.

⁵ On the speech of the ancient Macedonians, see M. B. Hatzopoulos, *La Macédoine. Géographie historique, langue, cultes et croyances, institutions* (Paris, 2006), pp. 35–51, with bibliography.

Although it is true that Philip succeeded in fusing the different populations within his kingdom into a single people,⁶ the study of the *onomasticon* reveals that until the conquest of Macedonia by the Romans, the army, and therefore that part of the population which possessed full political rights, were descendants of the group of transhumant shepherds who had founded the Argead kingdom, or had assimilated to them.⁷

The cradle of the Argead kingdom of Lower Macedonia consisted of the vast alluvial plain formed by the rivers Haliacmon, Loudias and Axios, and the smaller one of Pieria (Katerini), along with the foothills of the mountains surrounding them: Mt. Olympus, the Pierian mountains, Mt. Bermion, and Mt. Barnous. The centre of the great plain, called in antiquity Bottia or Emathia, was until the beginning of the last century occupied by marshes and lake Loudiake, which was connected to the sea by the river Loudias.

West of Mt. Bermion extended Upper Macedonia, a series of mountainous uplands, each forming an independent kingdom: Elimeia on the middle Haliacmon valley, Orestis on the upper Haliacmon basin and around lake Kastoria, Lyncus in the present plain of Florina. With the exception of Eordaia, the basin of the lakes Begorritis and Petron, these regions were definitively annexed to the Argead kingdom only during the course of the fourth century BC. Further to the West Tymphaia-Paravaia and Atintania straddled the Pindus range forming both a boundary and a transition area between Macedonia and Epirus.

The "New Territories" east of the Axios were gradually annexed by the consistent efforts of a series of kings from Alexander I to Philip II. They included in the centre Mygdonia, the land corridor around lakes Pyrroia (Koroneia) and Bolbe; to the north the inland plain of Crestonia; to the south the valley of Anthemous, the northern and southern Bottike, around the cities of Kalindoia and Spartolos respectively, and Chalcidice with its three prongs thrusting far into the Aegean; further east and along the Strymon, from north to south, Sintike on the gorge of the river, Bisaltia,

⁶ Cf. Just. 8.6.1–2: *Alios populos in finibus ipsis hostibus opponit; alios in extremis statuit; quosdam bello captos in supplementis urbium dividit. Atque ita ex multis gentibus nationibusque unum regnum populumque constituit.*

⁷ On the value of the *onomasticon* as historical evidence in the case of Macedonia, see M. B. Hatzopoulos, "L'histoire par les noms' in Macedonia," in S. Hornblower and Elaine Matthews, eds., *Greek Personal Names. Their Value as Evidence* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 99–117. On the relation between military service and full political rights, see Hatzopoulos, *Institutions*, 1, p. 209, n. 1; id., *L'organisation de l'armée macédonienne sous les Antigonides: problèmes anciens et documents nouveaux*, (MEΛETHMATA) 30 (Athens, 2001), pp. 102–7.

Odomantike and Edonis and, by the sea, Pieris. The plain of Philippi, although under Macedonian rule, remained outside Macedonia proper until the reign of the last Antigonids.⁸

Two major communication routes, which were later to become Roman roads, provided a certain unity to this—by Greek standards—overextended state. The first connected the Danube basin with the Thermaic Gulf and southern Greece beyond through the Morava and the Axios valleys. The second, the famous Via Egnatia of the Romans, linked from west to east the Greek colonies of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic Sea to the gates of Asia, Byzantium and Sestos, on the Bosphorus and the Hellespont respectively. These royal roads were laid and measured in stadia by the Macedonian administration.⁹

To modern Greeks of the south, Macedonia is an exotic country. The traveller who penetrates the valley of Tempe to enter Pieria discovers a land the scale of which, if not the nature, is completely different. He is greeted by the permanent snows of Mt. Olympus, the highest mountain of Greece (2917 m). Straight roads lined with lofty poplars take him across vast plains watered by all-season rivers, whose banks are grazed not only by sheep and goats, but also by cows and buffalo. Olive trees are no longer a typical feature of the landscape, but can be seen only near the coast. As he ascends into the uplands, he encounters forests of oak, beach, fir, and even birch. Although lion and wild ox, once the favourite trophies of royal hunts, no longer haunt its hills and valleys, the deer, the lynx, the wolf, and the bear still resist the attacks of modern civilisation. Over the vast stretches of lakes Prespa and Begorritis fly swans, storks, and pelicans, while in their depths swarm freshwater fish.

⁸ For a detailed account of the expansion of the Macedonian kingdom, see Hatzopoulos, *Institutions*, 1, pp. 167–216. In the absence of a recent comprehensive study of Upper Macedonia incorporating the very important archaeological finds of the last thirty years, see Hammond, Griffith, *History*, 2, pp. 102–23.

⁹ On the Macedonian section of the Via Egnatia, see Lucrèce Gounaropoulou and M. B. Hatzopoulos, *Les milliaires de la Voie Egnatienne entre Héraclée des Lyncestes et Thessalonique*, (MEΛETHMATA) 1 (Athens, 1985); I. Lolos, *Έγγραφα Όδός* (Athens, 2008). On the South-North axis, see M. B. Hatzopoulos, "Strepsa: A Reconsideration or New Evidence on the Road System of Lower Macedonia," in M. B. Hatzopoulos and Louisa Loukopoulou, *Two Studies in Ancient Topography*, (MEΛETHMATA) 2 (Athens, 1987), pp. 19–53. For the organization of the communication system under the Macedonian kings, see Chaido Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, "A propos des voies de communication du royaume de Macédoine," in Regula Frei-Stolba and Kristine Gex, eds., *Recherches récentes sur le monde hellénistique* (Bern etc., 2001), pp. 53–64.

This twenty-first century picture of Macedonia is not very different from the one which met the eyes of travellers in Classical antiquity, such as Demosthenes and Aeschines on their way from Athens to Pella. The civilizing action of a series of Argead kings had to a large extent domesticated the hard and dangerous country into which their ancestors had roamed with their flocks at the beginning of the seventh century BC.¹⁰

In effect, according to legend, the Macedonian kingdom was founded by Perdiccas, a descendent of Temenus, the first Heraclid king of Argos, who along with his two elder brothers had migrated to the Macedonian uplands and had gone into service tending the sheep and goats of a local king.¹¹ It was under the guidance of these goats that he allegedly occupied the site of Aegae (modern Vergina), which was to become the capital of his kingdom.¹² These founding legends, together with parallels drawn from observation of the pastoral people of modern Balkans, suggest that the first Macedonians were a group of Greek-speaking transhumant shepherds, closely related to the Magnesians of Thessaly.¹³ Having over the centuries moved around the summer pastures of Mt. Olympus and the Pierian mountains, and the winter pastures of the plains of Pieria and Emathia, it seems that they came under the authority of a clan hailing from the mountain range of Pindus, and that under their guidance they took possession of the strategic site of Aegae and settled there.¹⁴

Literary texts, inscriptions and coins, all confirm that transhumant pasturing of goats and sheep, together with the breeding of cows and horses in the plains watered by the great rivers Haliacmon, Loudias, Echedoros, Axios, and Strymon, continued to be one of the main activities of the Macedonians until the end of antiquity and beyond. Transhumance requires discipline and courage to control the movement of the animals and deal with the dangers involved. Encounters with wild beasts and hostile humans cannot have been unusual during the migrations across the mountain wilderness. It was accordingly an excellent school for a nation of hunters and warriors.¹⁵ Our sources inform us that a young Macedonian

¹⁰ Cf. N. G. L. Hammond, *The Macedonian State* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 152–4.

¹¹ Hdt. 8.137–8.

¹² Diod. 7.16; Euphorion fr. 30 (Schweidweiler); schol. In Clem. Alex., *Protr.*, 2.11; Just. 7.1.7–10.

¹³ Cf. Hes., *Eoëae*, fr. 7.

¹⁴ M. B. Hatzopoulos, "Herodotos (8.137–8), the Manumissions from Leukopetra, and the Topography of the Middle Haliakmon Valley," in P. Derow and R. Parker, eds., *Herodotus and his World* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 203–18.

¹⁵ Hammond, *State*, pp. 1–8.

was not fully integrated into adult society until he had killed a wild boar in the hunt and an enemy in combat.¹⁶

Nevertheless, on the rich alluvial lands of Pieria and Bottia, the Macedonians who devoted themselves to more sedentary occupations cultivated cereals, vegetables and all kinds of fruit trees. The Macedonian kings took particular pains to regulate the water courses, to undertake land-reclamation schemes and to provide diligent cultivators for the land.¹⁷

The Macedonian land was not merely a source of agricultural wealth. It concealed mineral treasures too: copper, iron, and in the eastern part, gold and silver in exceptional quantities. The working of the mines, which was exclusively a royal prerogative, and the exploitation of the forests, also in the hands of the state, constituted the two foundations of the material strength of the monarchy.¹⁸

The exploitation of the mines and forests was accompanied by the development of activities related to converting and marketing raw materials. Consequently, already from the earliest historical records in the fifth century BC, Macedonia displays the characteristics not only of a rural, but also of a partly urbanised society.¹⁹

From its very foundation the Argead kingdom appears as the state of a people (*ethnos*), the Argeadai Macedonians, but centred around a *polis*-capital, Aegae. Its subsequent expansion led to the inclusion within the kingdom of other settlements, which since the end of the sixth century were also qualified as *poleis* in our sources. As we shall see below, in the course of the following two centuries, some of them managed to secede from the kingdom either to join other political formations as autonomous units (the Athenian confederacy or the Chalcidic League) or in an attempt to attain independent status.²⁰

Central power was focused in the king and his immediate entourage. His freedom of action was however reined in by the obligation to govern according to customary law, the Macedonian *nomos*. This regulated his

¹⁶ For the rites of passage in ancient Macedonia, see M. B. Hatzopoulos, *Cultes et rites de passage en Macédoine*, (MEΛETHMATA) 19 (Athens, 1994).

¹⁷ See above, note 10.

¹⁸ E. N. Borza, "The Natural Resources of Early Macedonia," in W. L. Adams and E. N. Borza, eds., *Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage* (Washington D.C., 1982), pp. 1–20, republished in E. N. Borza, *Makedonika* (Claremont, 1995), pp. 37–55. Hammond, *State*, pp. 177–87; id., "Philip's Innovations in Macedonian Economy," *Symbolae Osloenses* 70 (1995) 22–9, reprinted in id., *Collected Studies*, 4 (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 125–32.

¹⁹ Hammond, *State*, pp. 9–12.

²⁰ Cf. Hatzopoulos, *Institutions*, 1, pp. 464–86 (see above, note 1).

relations with the *ethnos* and with the other members of the dynasty and also with his Companions, those few dozens of Macedonians who formed his entourage and without whose support he would have been unable to rule effectively. The “commons” made only rare appearances during this period, notably as a last resort, punishing a king’s failure by dismissing him from the throne.

The predominant position of the king was due not only to the fact that he was the political, military and religious leader of the Argeadai Macedonians, who founded the kingdom of Aegae, but also that he united in his person two other capacities. He was suzerain, more or less recognized and obeyed, of the kings of Upper Macedonia, and at the same time the master of conquered cities and territories that had not yet been colonized by Macedonians and integrated into Macedonia proper.²¹

After the conquests and the annexations of Philip II, which tripled the territory of the kingdom, Macedonia proper was divided in four administrative and military regions (Upper Macedonia, Bottia, Amphaxitis, Parastrymonia(?)), each under a *strategos*, who supervised and controlled the political units (old *poleis* in the Old Kingdom), new boroughs (*metropoleis*) with their satellite villages (*komai*) in the New Territories, and old *ethnē* in Upper Macedonia, into which the country had been systematically subdivided by his reforms.²²

²¹ Cf. Hatzopoulos, *Institutions*, 1, pp. 487–96.

²² On the civic units of Macedonia, see Hatzopoulos, *Institutions*, 1, pp. 49–123, and on the administrative districts, id., *Institutions*, 1, pp. 230–60.