

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Archaeological Site of Vergina
<i>Location</i>	Region of Central Macedonia, Province of Veroia
<i>State Party</i>	Greece
<i>Date</i>	23 October 1995

Justification by State Party

The archaeological site of Vergina (ancient Aigai) satisfies **criteria i, iii, and vi**.

Here some of the most important surviving original works of late Classical Greek art have been found which testify to achievements in miniature art and metal-working.

The group of magnificent wall-paintings which adorn the Macedonian tombs at Aigai constitute a unique example of ancient Greek painting, a high art form formerly known only through Roman copies (eg at Pompeii and Herculanaeum).

Aigai is the oldest and most important urban centre known in northern Greece and promises to provide important information about the culture, history, and society of the ancient Macedonians, the Greek border people who preserved age-old traditions until late Hellenistic times and carried Greek culture to the outer limits of the ancient world.

Some of the monuments found there are directly related to historical events and figures such as the Macedonian rulers Philip II and Alexander the Great, who made a vital impact on the course of human history.

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Vergina is a *site*.

History and Description*History*

The ancient city in the northern foothills of the Pierian range has been identified with certainty as the capital of the kingdom of Lower Macedonia, Aigai. According to tradition it was founded by Perdiccas I when the Macedonians of the Argive spread northwards over the plain of Emathia. This region was already settled in the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC), as evidenced by a tumulus (grave-mound) near the river Haliakmon. The wealth and density of over three hundred grave-mounds in the Cemetery of the Tumuli testifies to the importance of Aigai in the Early Iron Age (1100-700 BC). The quality of the grave-goods show that this was a period of highly developed culture and technological skills in the community.

As the capital of the Argive Macedonian kingdom and site of the royal court, Aigai was the most important urban centre in the region throughout the Archaic Period (800-500 BC) and the century that followed. The grave-goods in a series of tombs dating from the 6th and 5th centuries BC demonstrate commercial and cultural links with the Greek centres of eastern Ionia and the south, such as Athens, Samos, and Corinth, and illustrate the wealth and sophistication of the royal court. At the end of the 5th century Archelaus brought to his court artists, poets, and philosophers from all over the Greek world: it was, for example, at Aigai that Euripides wrote and presented his last tragedies.

Although the administrative centre was transferred to Pella in the 4th century BC, Aigai retained its role as the sacred city of the Macedonian kingdom, the site of the traditional cult centres and the royal tombs. It was during the marriage here in 336 BC of Alexander, King of Epirus, to Princess Cleopatra that Philip II was assassinated in the theatre and Alexander the Great was proclaimed king.

The bitter struggles between the heirs of Alexander, the *Diadochoi*, in the 3rd century adversely affected the city, and it was further slighted after the overthrow of the Macedonian kingdom by the Romans in 168 BC. Nevertheless, it was rebuilt and survived into early Imperial times. However, between the 2nd and 5th centuries AD the population progressively moved down from the foothills of the Pierian range to the plain, so that all that remained was a small settlement whose name, Palatitsia ("Palace"), alone indicated its former importance.

Description

The ancient city of Aigai occupies the hills to the south and east of the modern town of Vergina. There are traces remaining of the late 4th century walls that encircled the central section, between Vergina and Palatitsia. The fortified acropolis, of Hellenistic form, lies to the south, on a steep hill.

The most important building so far discovered is the monumental palace, located on a plateau directly below the acropolis. This building, which rose to two and perhaps three storeys, is centred on a large open courtyard flanked by stone Doric colonnades. The various rooms were used for religious, administrative, and political functions. On the north side was a large gallery that commanded the stage of the neighbouring theatre and the whole Macedonian plain. It was sumptuously decorated, with mosaic floors, painted plastered walls, and fine relief tiles. The theatre, dating from the second half of the 4th century BC, forms an integral part of the palace complex.

Just to the north of the theatre there is the sanctuary of the goddess Eukleia, with small temples of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC containing statue bases inscribed with the names of members of the Macedonian royal family. A sanctuary from the Hellenistic period dedicated to the goddess Cybele lies a little to the east, and the remains of a number of impressive buildings are known from other parts of the city.

The best known feature of the site is the necropolis, which extends for over 3 km, with the Cemetery of the Tumuli at its heart. This contains over three hundred grave-mounds, some as early as the 11th century BC. To the north-west of the ancient city there is an important group of tombs from the 6th and 5th centuries BC belonging to members of the Macedonian dynasty and their courts. These contained rich funerary deposits, along with imported materials such as amber, ostrich eggs, and Phoenician ceramics. Of particular interest is one from c. 340 BC with an imposing marble throne, believed to be that of Euridike, mother of Philip II.

However, the most impressive funerary monument is the Great Tumulus, an artificial mound 110 m in diameter and 13 m high, beneath which four very elaborate royal tombs were discovered. One contains wall paintings representing the rape of Persephone, believed to be the work of the famous painter Nikomachos. Two of the tombs were found to have been undisturbed in antiquity and both containing rich grave-goods. In Tomb II the body was found in a solid gold casket weighing some 11 kg; the occupant has been identified as Philip II, father of Alexander the Great and consolidator of Macedonian power. This tomb is especially noteworthy for the frieze that adorns it, believed to be the work of the celebrated Philoxenos of Eretria.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Most of the archaeological site is owned by the Greek state, with other sectors in the ownership of the Commune of Vergina and private individuals, the latter being agricultural smallholdings. It is the long-term objective of the Greek state to bring the entire area into its ownership and to create a large archaeological park.

The entire area is designated as an Archaeological Site under the provisions of a series of Greek laws (No 5351/1932, No 35/2.2.1962, No 175/22.2.1962, and No 175/26.3.1966). In the event of antiquities of any form coming to light on privately owned land the state retains the right of ownership and may forbid its further use, in return for annual compensation payments until the land is expropriated or purchased by the state.

In 1993 the archaeological site of Vergina and the whole of the surrounding area was designated a "Site of Outstanding Natural Beauty" by the Minister of Macedonia-Thrace by Ministerial Decree No 8383/92 28.1.1993, which provides for strict control over the development of settlements and individual buildings and for protection against activities that might significantly alter or damage the landscape.

Management

The Central Archaeological Council of the Ministry of Culture resolved in 1995 to create a complete protection zone (Zone A) covering the ancient city, the necropolis, and all the surrounding area within which antiquities have been discovered. The resolution also provides for the creation of two further zones (B and B1) by the Ministry of the Environment, involving strict control over construction and development in the two settlements of Vergina and

Palatitsia (B1) and over any form of intrusive activity (eg quarrying, industrial operations, intensive stock-raising) in the landscape within sight of the archaeological area.

In Zone A no form of building, excavation, or disturbance of the subsoil is permitted without special permission from the Ministry of Culture. Archaeological excavations may only be carried out by archaeologists of the Ministry of Culture or by approved cultural institutions (eg the University of Thessaloniki), following authorization by the Central Archaeological Council. In Zone B there are similar controls over any form of excavation.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Investigations in the area began in the mid 19th century, when the French archaeologist L Heuzey excavated part of the palace and a Macedonian tomb; the finds from this excavation are now in the Louvre in Paris. This work was not taken up again until the 1930s, and was halted by World War II. The present campaigns began in the 1950s under the direction of Manolis Andronikos, jointly for the Ephorate of the Ministry of Culture and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Excavation of the palace was completed in the early 1970s and that of the Great Tumulus at the end of that decade. Work is still in progress on different monuments in the site.

Conservation began with the discovery of the royal tombs in the Great Tumulus in 1977. The wall-paintings were consolidated and metal rods inserted into the stonework to reinforce the load-bearing structures. Since that time a model shelter in the form of an earthen mound has been erected (completed in 1993) to enclose and protect the monuments and to provide access for visitors. It is equipped with computer-controlled installations to maintain constant temperature, humidity, and lighting. Similar installations are planned for two other groups of Macedonian tombs.

There has been an on-site conservation laboratory since 1980, working principally on some of the more fragile finds from the tombs; it was rebuilt and re-equipped in 1991-4.

This work forms part of a five-year programme (1994-9) of works on the Macedonian tombs. There are also plans to build a large modern museum on the site, which will incorporate an international centre for conservation.

Authenticity

It is generally accepted that excavation, especially of earthen structures and deposits, is necessarily an act of destruction. The original Great Tumulus is therefore no longer in existence, and has been simulated in the cover structure. However, the interiors of the tombs are entirely authentic, with only minimal modern interventions in order to preserve their continued stability. Elsewhere on the site (eg the palace) the remains are entirely authentic.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the town in February 1996. ICOMOS also consulted European experts in the field of classical history and archaeology on the cultural significance of the site.

Qualities

Vergina ranks high in significance among the remains of the classical Mediterranean civilization. It represents the crucial transition from the city-state of classical Greece to the territorial imperialism of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. There has been some controversy about the identification of Tomb II in the Great Tumulus as that of Philip II of Macedon. However, this identification is not central to an evaluation of the cultural significance of the finds at Vergina; the quality of the tombs themselves and their grave-goods places Vergina among the most important archaeological sites in Europe.

The nomination is for the entire archaeological site at Vergina. This is logical and appropriate: it is important that individual monuments such as the royal Macedonian tombs should be seen within their context. The palace and its associated sites demonstrate the nature and quality of Macedonian culture at this period, and the entire area is an archaeological reserve of high potential.

Comparative analysis

It is difficult to compare the Vergina site with any other. This was the capital city of a relatively short-lived but extremely influential state that played a seminal role in a decisive political change in the classical world, and as such it must be considered to be unique.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *critterion iii*:

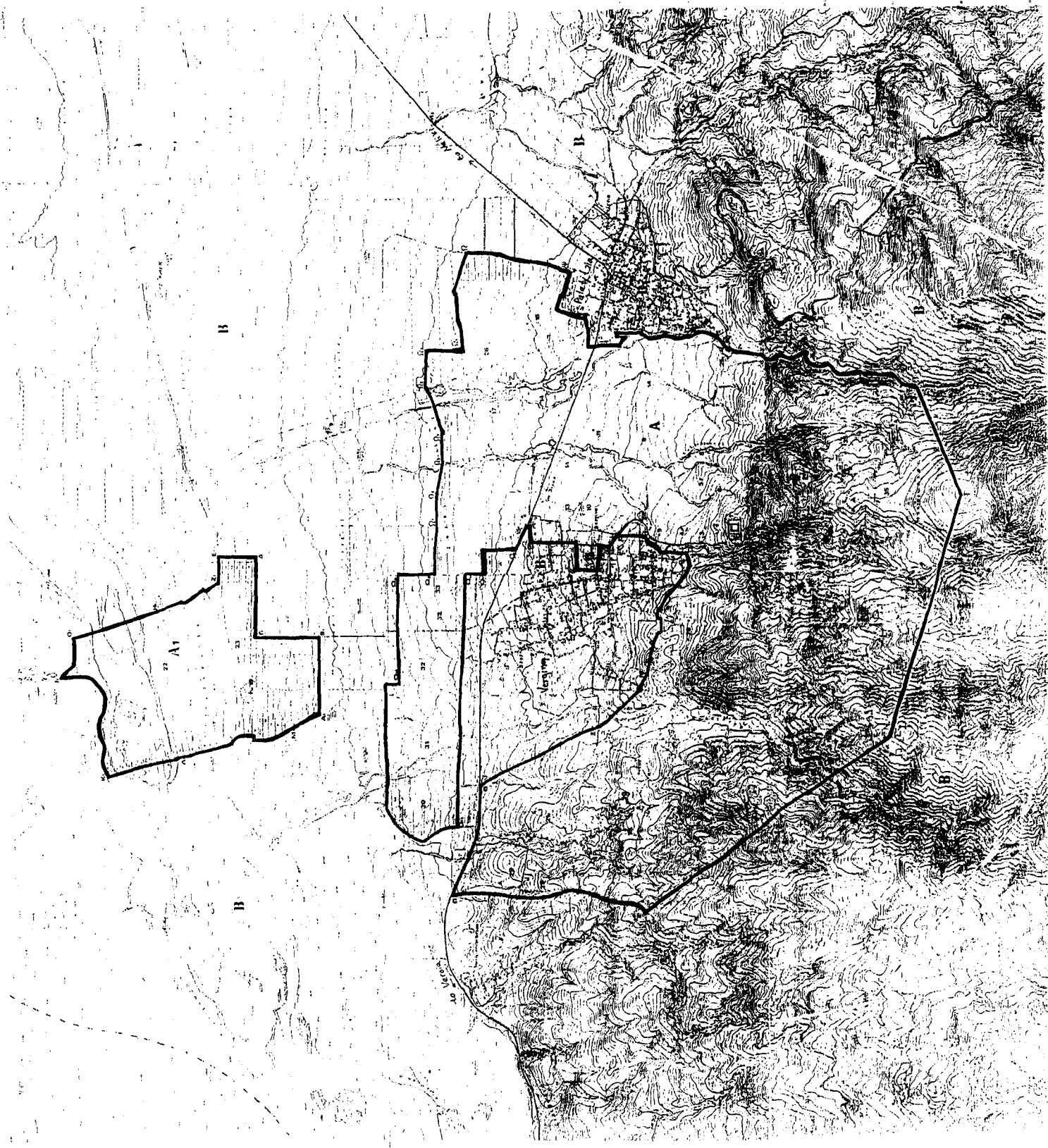
Vergina represents exceptional testimony to a significant development in European civilization, at the transition from the classical city-state to the imperial structure of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This is vividly demonstrated in particular by the remarkable series of royal tombs and their rich contents.

ICOMOS, October 1996

Map III
The archaeological
Site of Vergina
(Vergina)

ZONE A, A1, B.

1:10,000



Vergina : plan de la zone proposée pour inscription
et de la zone-tampon

Vergina : map of the nominated area and buffer zone



Vergina : le site archéologique, vu du sud

Vergina : the archaeological site, from the south