

# GREECE

## Archaeological Site of Vergina

### Brief description

The city of Aigai, the ancient first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia, was discovered in the 19th century near Vergina, in northern Greece. The most important remains are the monumental palace, lavishly decorated with mosaics and painted stuccoes, and the burial ground with more than 300 tumuli, some of which date from the 11th century B.C. One of the royal tombs in the Great Tumulus is identified as that of Philip II, who conquered all the Greek cities, paving the way for his son Alexander and the expansion of the Hellenistic world.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription** 1996

**Agency responsible for site management**

- Hellenic Ministry of Culture  
17<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities  
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### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C (i), (iii)

### Justification provided by the State Party

It is proposed that the archaeological site of Vergina be included in the World Heritage List chiefly on the grounds that they satisfy criteria (i), (iii) and (vi) as follows:

1. Here some of the most important surviving original works of late classical Greek art have been found which testify to the achievements of miniature art (the gold and ivory couches), metal-working and gold-and silver-work.
2. The group of magnificent wall-paintings which adorn the Macedonian tombs at Aegae constitute a unique example of ancient Greek painting, a high art form which until recently was known to us only through Roman copies (Pompeii, Herculaneum etc.).

3. Aegae constitutes the oldest and most important urban centre in Northern Greece and promises to provide important information about the culture, history and society of the ancient Macedonians, the Greek border race that preserved age-old traditions until late Hellenistic times and carried Greek culture to the outer limits of the ancient world.

4. Some of the monuments that have been found here are directly related to historical events and figures such as Philip II and Alexander the Great who made a vital impact on the course of history and mankind.

The archaeological site of Vergina is protected by a series of strict measures (laws and regulations) concerned with protecting the character of this historical site, while the unique shelter protecting the royal tombs, together with the current conservation programme and the Ministry of Culture's ultra-modern conservation laboratory, guarantee the best possible protection for the unique monuments and works of art.

At the same time, following the international impact caused by the discovery of the royal tombs, Vergina is already a place of pilgrimage for large numbers of visitors, lovers of antiquity from all over the world who flock here every year in their thousands, while the works being planned by the Greek Ministry of Culture (a modern archaeological museum, exhibition of antiquities in the shelter housing the royal tombs, and creation of an outdoor archaeological park) promise to turn the ruins of ancient Aegae into a modern international centre of culture and historical memory.

### As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

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 criterion 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.

#### Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1996): The Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criterion (iii) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value representing an exceptional testimony to a significant development in European civilization, at the transition from 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.

Session (1996): The Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criteria (i) and (iii) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value representing an exceptional testimony to a significant development in European civilization, at the transition from 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. The Committee decided to add to the proposed criteria cultural criterion (i), since the paintings found at Vergina are of extraordinarily high quality and historical importance.

- Statement of significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- Change to the name of the site required

#### Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate

- Buffer zone: the designated archaeological site of Aigai (Ministerial Decision 35117/2019/2.8.95) is located inside a designated area of outstanding natural beauty (decision of the Minister of Macedonia and Thrace 8383/92/28.1.1993). There is a direct and urgent need to delimit a Buffer Zone B, due to the intensifying trend of building in the area, which risks radically altering a very significant historical landscape, which has remained almost untouched to our days. Buffer Zone A includes: 1. The walled city and the acropolis of the city of Aigai; 2. The immense royal necropolis along with the unique cemetery of tumuli; 3. The first village of Aigai to the east and two nearest to the west; 4. The Late Roman and Early Christian phase of the city; 5. An early Bronze Age settlement (Toumba Varka) located north of the necropolis of Aigai
- On the basis of the areas already excavated, as well as extensive surface investigations, the limits of the archaeological site were set and defined on the Army Geographic Service survey maps, on a scale of 1:5000. The 17th EPCA delimited the Buffer Zones A and B. Buffer Zone A was legislated (Ministerial Decision 37634/2180/2.8.95), however the delimitation of Buffer Zone B is still pending. The 17th EPCA submitted a document (protocol no. 7566/19.12.03) bringing its initial proposal concerning its delimitation, which had been submitted in 1993, up to date and in fact proposed that Buffer Zone B be extended to the east and west, in order to include therein all the villages of Aigai that were located around the precinct of the ancient city centre over the past years

#### Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- Qualities: Vergina ranks high in significance among the remains of the classical Mediterranean civilization. It represents the cultural 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 of 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 change in the classical world, and as such it must be considered to be unique

- Positive changes: all the objects found in the tomb of Philip II and the tomb of Alexander IV were returned to Vergina from the Museum of Thessalonika and were exhibited inside the protective shell of the royal tombs of the Greater Tumulus (Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai). The treasure exhibition was completed on 28.9.2003 and since then, its doors have been open to the public, constituting a particularly original and attractive example of the co-existence in a particular space of a “museum” within the architectural confines of the monument, containing the movable finds that were discovered therein
- Because of the intensive building activity and mainly due to the construction of industrial complexes in the general area there is an immediate need for the delimitation of Buffer Zone B, so that the appearance of the site will remain intact

### 3. Protection

#### Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The following are in effect: 1. Designation of the archaeological site (Ministerial Decision 35117/2019/2.8.95) 2. Designation of the landscape as being an area of outstanding natural beauty (decision of the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace 8383/92/28.1.1993) 3. Legislated Buffer Zone A of absolute protection (Ministerial Decision 37634/2180/2.8.95)
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Delimiting Buffer Zone B in accordance with the proposal of the competent Ephorate; constructing a protective shell for the cluster group of the queens’ tombs (the tomb of Eurydice etc.); building and putting into operation the central nucleus of the Multi-centered Museum at Aigai, which will shelter the multiple movable items found throughout the site except for the royal tombs at the Greater Tumulus, which are already on display;

as well as educational programmes for visitors and visitor service functions

### 4. Management

#### Use of site/property

- Paid visitor attraction

#### Management /Administrative Body

- Management by the State Party, under protective legislation
- Site manager on full-time basis, but with responsibilities added to an existing job
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national; regional
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

### 5. Management Plan

- No management plan; the management and protection of monuments and archaeological sites in Greece is not based on a concrete management plan. Greece has a system of protection, which is administered centrally by the Ministry of Culture through its regional services, i.e. the Ephorates of Prehistoric & Classical and Byzantine Antiquities. The Ministry of Culture is the competent body supervising the sites and overseeing all works carried out. As far as the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage is concerned, there are cases where other competent bodies besides the Ministry of Culture are involved. The Ministry of Culture sets out the guidelines and the general policy for the management of the monuments and sites, which is then implemented by the competent Ephorates. In the case of the Archaeological Site of Vergina the 17th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities is responsible for the management and protection of the monuments

### 6. Financial Resources

#### Financial situation

- National resources (public investment, the Archaeological Receipts Fund)
- European resources (Community Support Frameworks)
- Funding for the protection and conservation of the site: adequate; funding for adequate management of the site: insufficient

## 7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 13. Existing human resources are, on the one hand, suitable, but on the other hand, numerically, far from adequate

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation, promotion, interpretation
- Good: management
- Average: education
- Bad: visitor management

## 8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- A very well equipped, up-to-date conservation laboratory for ancient objects exist and has particular experience and expertise in the conservation of organic materials (ivory), glass and metal. The laboratory also runs training programmes for new conservators from time to time

## 9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 173,166 (ticket counting), 2004
- Visitor facilities: cloakroom with hand luggage storage facilities, bilingual explanatory texts (in Greek and English), an educational video is shown with Greek-language narration and English subtitles, a site shop of Hellenic Culture Organisation, café-refreshment area, lavatory facilities (also for the disabled), infant care station, recreational park

## 10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to the value of the site; monitoring exercises; condition surveys; archaeological surveys
- Exhibition studies and landscaping, presentation studies for individual monuments and areas. The archaeological site of Aigai has an ongoing regular dig under the auspices of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and a host of supporting and exploratory excavations by the 17th EPCA. The study and the reconstruction-rebuilding of the gold and ivory couches and the gold and ivory shield from the tomb of Philip II · A host of conservation studies have been completed and are currently underway for various materials and categories of objects (wall paintings, ivory, organic, glass,

metal). Archaeometric research has been completed and further research is currently underway (painting techniques, colours, metalworking techniques). Studies took place for “ongoing conservation” to arrive at the ideal conditions of temperature, humidity, and lighting for the exhibition of various objects and groups of objects (wall paintings, written funerary stelae, metals, ivory). There is continuous electronic surveillance, recording and monitoring of the temperature and humidity data at the Museum - protective shell of the royal tombs, as concerns the monuments themselves and each display case individually. A series of archaeological publications, monographs, articles and announcements concerning the site were published or presented at conferences and symposia over the past few years. Architectural restoration studies were completed as well as studies concerning the presentation - landscaping of individual monuments and sites

- The results of the archaeometric studies and the conservation studies were utilised for the conservation as well as the creation of ideal exhibition and storage conditions (temperature, humidity, lighting etc.) of the monuments with the wall paintings (the royal tombs) and of the various groups of movable finds (organic, metal etc.). · Study of the gold and ivory couches led to the re-construction of the gold and ivory decorations of the two pieces of furniture that comprise exceptional examples of the wonderful masterpieces of Ancient Greek miniature art. Re-constructed, these unique objects are on display at the museum, where they are accessible to the public, to experts and to the media. · Scientific research greatly assists in the dissemination of historical and other data contained in the very significant monuments of the site, and contributes to a great extent in increasing the understanding of the broader public vis-à-vis the particular universal values of these monuments

## 11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- There is no adequate awareness of World Heritage among visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities, etc.

- Need for awareness raising: suitable educational policy
- Web site available
- Local participation: there are plans to develop education programmes with schools
- On site there exists the Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai with visitor service infrastructure and the Archaeological Receipts Fund guide. The Hellenic Culture Organisation is currently producing a CD-Rom on the subject of Aigai, as well as a wireless electronic guide system through the Museum and the site

## 12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

### Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

### Conservation interventions

- The gold and ivory couches and the weapons (shields and corselet) from the tomb of Philip II underwent conservation and were re-constructed
- Several hundred objects underwent conservation (weapons, jewellery, vases, vessels, etc.) some of which are on display, while the rest are guarded in air-conditioned and very well secured warehouses
- Wide-ranging excavations were undertaken, particularly at the necropolis site, but also along the area of the ancient city walls
- Procedures have advanced (an architectural study is being prepared) for the construction of the central nucleus of the multi-centred museum of Aigai, portion of which will be the already existing Museum of the royal tombs
- Present state of conservation: good, needs more resources

### Threats and Risks to site

- Development, environmental, human made (agricultural/forestry regimes)
- Specific issues: Immoderate development and intensive use of natural resources are threatening to alter the nature of the landscape and to create a deterioration of the environmental conditions
- Emergency measures: delimitation of buffers zones; construction of shelters, conservation of the monuments

## 13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme

- In the tombs with the important wall paintings and drawings, the humidity and temperature conditions are continuously recorded electronically and there is also an air conditioning system

## 14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation; social. The conservation, protection and enhancement procedures have progressed for certain sites and monuments (movable, immovable)
- Strength/Weaknesses of management: funding and consequently staffing continues to be insufficient, and despite the fact that the site is well known and loved by the public, the procedures for education and promotion are lagging considerably

### Future actions:

- Creation of electronic audiovisual material. Organisation-reconstruction-landscaping and conservation of individual monuments and sites