



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES – I.C.O.M.O.S.
THE OFFICIAL TECHNICAL ADVISOR OF UNESCO

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HELLENIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE

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Subject: The Palace(?) of Philip II(?) at Aigai(?)

The Palace(?) of Philip II(?) at Aigai(?)

The International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has been reading the press releases of the Ministry of Culture, as well as the announcements and statements of the Minister of Culture and the former Head of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Imathia, regarding the completion of the restoration project of the "palace" of Vergina.

The Ministry of Culture describes the intervention as a "major technical project". This description probably refers to the cost, which was indeed very high, exceeding twenty million euros, an amount that certainly does not correspond to the scientific result. As a restoration challenge, it could only be described as "major", since the restoration involves an unacceptably high proportion of new material, mainly travertine (in place of the original material, poros limestone) and cement with admixtures. In large part the walls have been restored with new material above the foundations, restoring the lower layers of the walls, since the overlying sections in the original construction were made of unbaked mudbrick. Similar work was also carried out on the columns.

Technical failures in the intervention are already apparent: rainwater pools on the floors of the sympotic halls (*andrones*) and the peristyle, where cement has been used. The former Ephor of Imathia compared this use of cement with those used on the Acropolis of Athens, "about which some people are causing trouble". Subsequently, the fact that a huge oak tree has been allowed to remain in a pebble-floored *andron* is extremely detrimental to the monument, as its roots will continue to damage it, given that the tree will continue to grow. Indeed, it appears that there is no intention to cut down the oak tree, as the area around it has been marked out for further growth. The poor quality of the work can be explained to some extent by the fact that the restoration project was carried out by engineers without significant accomplishments in anastylosis.

Despite having been inaugurated, the project has not been completed and it is clear that it was launched hastily, perhaps because the project manager was retiring (?). As a result, access to the monument is not possible for many people with disabilities, the elderly and children in prams. After it has rained, the approach to the monument involves a "mud bath" and "skating" on the dirt path. Furthermore, the public route is not clearly defined and delineated, and is interrupted by obstacles, namely thresholds and stylobates of considerable height, which visitors have to jump over.

Of similar quality is the interview of the former Ephor of Imathia on the state television channel, as well as her tour with a megaphone (available on the internet), characterized by a mixture of data and her inventions. She even seems to be unaware of the relevant terminology. For example, she characterizes stone subsections (*scotches*, *hypotomes*) as "little steps", even though steps have a horizontal tread and a vertical riser, not *vice versa*.



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As if the abuse of the monument itself was not enough, the Ministry of Culture, aiming at the political “exploitation” of the project, falsifies the historical and archaeological data, arbitrarily attributing to the monument uses and properties that do not stand up to scientific scrutiny. In view of the seriousness of the matter, we quote the archaeological and historical evidence that proves the views presented on the occasion of the inauguration to be false.

1) The construction of the monument is attributed by the Ministry of Culture to Philip II. It is invalid, however, to date the building to the period 350-336 BC and to associate it with Philip II. Let us examine things in order: This building, after being discovered first in 1861 by L. Heuzey (and not 1865, as is referenced in formal announcements), came to light as a result of a long systematic research by the University of Thessaloniki (like all the other monuments of Vergina) and not by the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry intervened in the excavation of the University, dismissed it and did not cooperate with it, in order to receive expertise and to benefit from the involvement of its leading experts in this project, because they would probably not approve opinions without a scientific basis.

The scientists who for years excavated and uncovered the building, Professors K. Romeos, G. Bakalakis, M. Andronikos, N. Moutsopoulos, and the Ephor of Antiquities Ch. Makaronas, assigned the monument to the first half of the 3rd century BC and specifically to the reign of Antigonos Gonatas, who reigned after 274 BC until 239 BC. The monument’s date is based on the architectural elements, mainly the column capitals, but also on a coin of Lysimachus, which was found in the foundation of the eastern part and assigned by the numismatologist Irini Varoucha-Christodouloupoulou to 306-281 BC.

Later, Ch. Macaronas, excavator of Pella, found that the roof tiles of the luxurious houses “of Dionysus” and “the rape of Helen” were impressed with the same seal that had been impressed on the tiles of the building of Vergina. The antefixes of the eave tiles of Vergina were similar to those of the two luxurious houses of Pella. The two houses of Pella are dated with certainty by ceramic and numismatic finds, found within the subfloor of their mosaic floors, to the last quarter of the 4th century BC and onwards, suggesting that they date to the reign of Cassander. With this in mind, Ch. Macaronas and M. Andronikos considered that the building of Vergina dates to the reign of Cassander. This view was later adopted by the numismatist I. Touratsoglou.

A. Kottaridi, taking into account the opinion of W. Hoepfner, and comparing the capitals of the Vergina building with capitals of selected buildings dating from around the middle of the 4th century BC (the temple of Alea Athena, the poros temple of Pronaea at Delphi, the Tholos of Epidaurus and the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus), dated it to the time of Philip II. Another argument, on which she supported this date, is the comparison of floral decorative themes from the mosaic of the “Palace” with decorative themes from Tomb II, the so-called Tomb of Philip II. However, she fails to include in her comparisons the capitals of buildings whose dates do not serve her argument, but which are related morphologically to a much greater extent, such as those of the Temple of Zeus at Nemea, whose construction is dated to after 330-320 BC (as was noted by Prof. Stella Miller-Collett). Also, the chronological evaluation based on similarities of the floral mosaic decoration of the “Palace” with similar finds of Tomb II leads in fact to the confirmation of the dating of the “Palace” after 317 BC, since it is now widely accepted that Tomb II is definitely dated after 317 BC and is therefore not the tomb of Philip II. The Ministry of Culture does not seem to take into account the publication of a relevant study from 2007, which proves that Tomb II was built after 317 BC (S. Rotroff, Review of Drougou, The clay vessels of M. Toumba, *American Journal of Archaeology* 111.4 [2007] 809-810). It is worth noting that the excavation of the Vergina tumulus has not been completed, since none of the buildings have been excavated to the depth of their foundations. The



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foundation trenches of buildings are among the most authoritative testimonies of their date, and any excavation of them would certainly reject the narrative that they are royal tombs.

2) The building is interpreted by the Ministry of Culture as a palace, prytaneion, administrative seat of Philip II, sanctuary, court, political market, art gallery, archive, library, assembly hall, etc. It was everything in one, as is stated, and not one here and another there, as in Athens. It is subsequently compared to buildings of classical Athens (the Parthenon, the Agora of Athens, the Painted Stoa, the Royal Stoa, the Stoa of Attalos, and so on), so as to be linked with them chronologically and qualitatively, without actually having any connection to them. It is also compared to the Parthenon and is found to be superior to it in size and importance, but in actuality it was a building made of inferior materials, mainly of poor quality limestone and unbaked mudbricks. In fact, the large natural gaps in the limestone were filled in and subsequently covered with stucco in antiquity. These materials are described by the Ministry of Culture as “luxurious”, however, despite the fact that the use of marble in thresholds is sparing. There is no evidence of the high levels of decoration and refinement which characterize the Parthenon. The “Palace” is also assigned functions of the Athenian democracy, such as the functions of the Prytaneion, political market, open judicial procedures, which however characterize democratic city-states and not Macedonia, which was a kingdom where the monarch had absolute power and whose subjects did not participate in the democracy. It could not, moreover, be the administrative seat of Philip II, since the capital of the kingdom was Pella, something that the Ministry of Culture goes so far as to suppress, because it does not serve the narrative of Vergina-“Aiges”.

The interpretation of the building in question as a palace is not supported by the remains, which consist of numerous spacious symptotic halls (*andrones*) with their vestibules and service areas. These are arranged around a peristyle court, and there are no areas with evidence of other functions. The supposed second floor, where the administrative rooms would have been located, is not documented by the finds. Although the palace is normally the residence of the king, A. Kottaridi, due to the lack of documentation consistent with living quarters, formulated the imaginative theory that the residence of the king was located elsewhere and therefore compared this building with the Maximos Mansion, where the Prime Minister of Greece does not reside!

Poros piers on the south-eastern side of the building, at a non-central point, were possibly intended to support a small wooden ladder to access the roof. There are no staircases for access to an upper floor. In a palace, especially a luxurious one, the staircases to the upper floor would also have been sumptuous, substantial, and probably constructed of marble (like the thresholds of the building), located in central and prominent places, and leading to the king’s living quarters, the administrative areas, and the places where the king received his visitors.

The architectural data of the building, which include exclusively symptotic halls (*andrones*), lead to the conclusion that it was a dining facility; that is, a building in which numerous festive banquets were held in the context of the worship and celebration of a Sanctuary, which should be relatively closeby.

Moreover, the building is not an archetype or a prototype, as the Ministry of Culture maintains, since the arrangement of rooms around a peristyle court is found in public and then in private architecture beginning at the end of the 5th century BC. Such structures appeared for the first time especially in public buildings with *andrones* that face an inner peristyle and then in private houses before the reign of Philip II, e.g. in Olynthos.



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The building was also characterized, in the announcements of the Ministry of Culture, as "the largest monument in Greece", while for example the "Palace" of Pella is incomparably more extensive, as is natural, given that it was located in the capital, while the building of Lefkadia (with an excavated length of about 150 m.) is certainly larger, as is the Thersilion of Megalopolis.

The possible attribution of the design of the building of Vergina to the architect Pytheos, who worked on the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, is also unfortunate, since Pytheos was born in the first quarter of the 4th century BC or even before 400 BC, in the 5th century BC. When the building of Vergina was built, Pytheos would have been more than 100 years old, even assuming he were still alive.

The statement that Alexander the Great was proclaimed king in the courtyard of this building by soldiers who celebrated by striking their shields with their spears, which "these columns heard", as described so vividly, is false. In 336 BC, when Philip II was assassinated and succeeded as king by Alexander III, the building in question did not exist. The statement that this building became the starting point for Alexander the Great's campaign in Asia also lacks historicity, since the departure for the campaign took place at Dion.

The so-called Palace of Vergina, which according to the Ministry of Culture is superior to the Parthenon, propagandizes on the basis of myths, unfounded interpretations, cherry-picking of the data, and the implementation of a supposedly magnificent restoration project of national importance, but it does not manage to conceal the reality of this very expensive and unfinished project and all the fundamental problems of the Vergina narrative.

On behalf of I.C.O.M.O.S. Hellenic National Committee

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