

# A COMPANION TO ANCIENT MACEDONIA

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## Macedonian Religion

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*Paul Christesen and Sarah C. Murray*

Perhaps the best place to begin a survey of Macedonian religion is with an appreciation of its immense complexity. Polytheism, the great expanse of the Macedonian state, ethnic diversity within the boundaries of that state, openness to foreign influences, and change over time all contributed to the creation of an unusually diverse religious life. The city of Stobi offers an illustrative example. Stobi was located 125 km north-west of the Macedonian capital at Pella and was inhabited primarily by Paionians, a Thracian people who spoke their own, non-Greek language. The city was conquered by Macedonia in the third century and later became a Roman colony. In the Roman period Stobi was the site of religious activity that was specifically Paionian, such as the worship of the sun in the form of a small, round disk on top of a pole. During the same period Greek deities were also worshipped in considerable numbers. Cults of Aphrodite, Apollo Clarios, Apollo Soter, Artemis Ephesia, Artemis Locheia, Asclepius, Dionysus, the Dioscuri, Hera Basileia, Heracles, Hygieia, Nemesis, the nymphs, Pan, the river gods Axios and Erigon, Telesphorus, Tyche, and Zeus Olympios are all attested. Influences from outside the Greek world were also present, in the form of the worship of the Roman gods Jupiter Dolichenus, Liber, Ultrix Augusta, and the Lares, of the Egyptian god Sarapis, and of the Anatolian goddess Cybele.<sup>1</sup> The rich texture of the religious life of Stobi was repeated, with endless variation, throughout the entirety of the Macedonian state.

This chapter will not attempt to explore Macedonian religion in all its complexity, a task that would require a multi-volume series of its own, but will instead focus on the religious activity of the Macedonian people (rather than of all the peoples within the fluctuating borders of the Macedonian state). Since it is now widely acknowledged that Macedonians were from the outset linguistically and culturally Greek and since

<sup>1</sup> On religious activity in Stobi, see S. Düll, *Die Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens in römischer Zeit* (Munich 1977), pp. 172–3 and Hammond, *History of Macedonia* 1, p. 175.

there is already a vast literature on Greek religion, it is those religious practices in which the Macedonians diverged from their fellow Greeks that will be highlighted.<sup>2</sup>

Macedonian religion was distinctive in a number of ways, six of which will be discussed in detail. Greek religion was by no means a monolithic phenomenon; there was considerable variation within the Greek world in regard to which deities were objects of cult and how they were worshipped. This definitely held true for the Macedonians who were typically Greek in pursuing a unique collection of religious practices. The six aspects of Macedonian religion that will be addressed are (1) deities of particular significance to Macedonians, (2) an understanding of death as passage into an afterlife, (3) openness to foreign cults, (4) the tendency to expend resources on the construction of tombs rather than temples, (5) the role of the king as chief intermediary between the gods and the Macedonian people, and (6) the deification of rulers.

Before proceeding a few cautionary notes are in order. Due to the nature of the relevant evidence, the discussion that follows will focus on the period from the fourth century onward, will pursue a generally synchronic approach, and will treat the religious activity of elites in much greater depth than that of non-elites. Evidence for Macedonian religious practices comes from literary texts, inscriptions, coins, art (especially votive reliefs and tomb paintings), and material remains (especially sanctuaries and dedications). These sources provide very little information for the period before the fifth century, and the vast majority of the relevant inscriptions, perhaps the single most abundant source, date to the Hellenistic and Roman periods.<sup>3</sup> As a result, it is only with the fourth century that the evidence becomes sufficient to discuss Macedonian religion in any detail.

The approach adopted here is cautiously synchronic, in that it is based on the assumption that much of Macedonian religious practice remained unchanged from roughly the fourth century BC to the third century AD. The lacunose nature of the available evidence makes it difficult to trace changes in cult practice among Macedonians over the course of time. Significant changes that are clearly reflected in the sources, such as the introduction of important new cults, will of course be given due weight, and every effort will be made to avoid unjustifiable extrapolations backward in time on the basis of later evidence. Nonetheless, some elision of ongoing evolution in Macedonian religious practice is inevitable.

Finally, the discussion that follows concentrates on the religious activities of those who possessed wealth and power. Here again, the nature of the relevant evidence is the crux of the matter. Material remains such as sculptured gravestones and lead tablets with magical spells cut into them offer glimpses of the devotional practices of non-elites, but the majority of the available materials – literary texts, inscriptions, coins, and art – primarily reflect elite concerns.

<sup>2</sup> A good introduction to Greek religion can be found in J. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Oxford 2005). A collection of articles that provide more detailed but still accessible surveys of a wide range of topics pertaining to Greek religion can be found in D. Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Oxford 2007).

<sup>3</sup> On these sources, see P.J. Rhodes, chapter 2.

## I Deities of Particular Significance to Macedonians

Macedonians had a particular and lasting attachment to the worship of Zeus, Heracles, Artemis, Dionysus, and Isis and Sarapis. Other deities were of course objects of cult. Aphrodite, Apollo, Asclepius, Athena, the Cabiri, the Dioscuri, Draco (a snake god), Eucleia, Helios, the Mother of the Gods, the Muses, various river gods, the nymphs, and Selene all merit mention but not detailed discussion. Some gods and goddesses popular elsewhere in the Greek world – most notably Hephaestus and Poseidon – seem to have received only minimal attention from Macedonians.

From an early period Zeus was the single most important deity in the Macedonian pantheon. Macedon, a mythical individual from whom all Macedonians were ostensibly descended, was widely believed to be the son of Zeus,<sup>4</sup> and a head of Zeus featured prominently on Macedonian coinage beginning with the reign of Philip II. Zeus Hysistos (Highest) was worshipped throughout Macedonia, including the ancient capital at Vergina. Zeus was also worshipped under a number of other epithets, including Agoraios (of the Marketplace), Hyperairetes (on High), Eleutherios (the Deliverer), Hetaireios (of the Companions), Cronides (son of Cronos), Ctesios (Protector of House and Property), and Olympios (from Olympos). Roman soldiers and settlers brought with them the worship of Zeus' counterpart Jupiter. The most important cult site for Zeus in Macedonia was located at Dium, the spiritual center of the Macedonian kingdom. Sometime around 400 King Archelaus established there an annual festival in honor of Zeus and the Muses that included lavish sacrifices and contests (Diod. 17.16.3–4),<sup>5</sup> and important treaties were displayed in the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios there.<sup>6</sup> A sanctuary of Zeus Hysistos with remains from the Hellenistic and Roman periods was recently uncovered at Dium;<sup>7</sup> an inscription found at the sanctuary shows that the cult was active well into the third century AD.<sup>8</sup>

Zeus' son Heracles also played a prominent role in Macedonian religious practice. A head of Heracles and associated attributes (e.g., lion skin or club) appear regularly on Macedonian coins beginning in the fifth century. This was in large part because Macedonian kings traced their lineage back to Heracles (Satyrus, *FGrH* 631 F 1). As one might expect, he was worshipped at Vergina and Pella, where the kings made regular sacrifices to Heracles Patroos as their ancestor. Alexander the Great was especially devoted to Heracles, making sacrifices to him in places ranging from the Danube to the Hydaspes (the river Jhelum in India). Heracles was also worshipped with the epithets Augustus, Cynagidas (Hunter), Phylakos (Guardian), and Propylaios

<sup>4</sup> R. Merkelbach and M.L. West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford 1967), F 7.

<sup>5</sup> See further, E.N. Borza, 'The Philhellenism of Archelaus', *Ancient Macedonia* 5 (Thessaloniki 1993), pp. 237–44.

<sup>6</sup> Rhodes and Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions*, no. 50 line 9, from 356.

<sup>7</sup> For the most recent archeological data on this sanctuary, see D. Panderimalis, 'Oi anaskafes sto Dion to 2004 kai ta euremata tes epoches ton filalexandriou basileon', *To Arkaialogiko Ergo ste Makedonia kai Thrake* 18 (2004), pp. 377–82.

<sup>8</sup> On the worship of Zeus in Macedonia, see Düll, *Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens*, pp. 98–106 and Hammond and Griffith, *History of Macedonia* 2, pp. 164–5.

(Guardian of the Gate). The cult of Heracles Cynagidas was particularly important. Hellenistic- and Roman-era dedications to him have been found throughout Macedonia. Young men from elite Macedonian families who were attached to the royal court took Heracles Cynagidas as their tutelary deity from ages 18–20 when they served as *basilikoi kynegoi* (royal hunters). This may explain why Demetrius II took the trouble to intervene on behalf of a priest of Heracles Cynagidas at Beroia after a portion of the cult's revenues had been inappropriately taken over by the city (*SEG* 12.311).<sup>9</sup>

An abundant collection of votive reliefs and dedications attests to the importance of the worship of Artemis. The cult of Artemis had a long history in Macedonia, as is evident from the fact that Philip II issued small coins (intended for local usage) with a head of Artemis and from Herodotus' statement that Paionian women sacrificed to Artemis Basileia (4.33). Alexander took steps to enrich the cult of Artemis at Ephesus during his time in that city (*Arr.* 1.17.10) and seems to have had it in mind to build a massive temple to Artemis Tauropolos (Worshipped at Tauros or Hunter of Bulls) at Amphipolis (*Diod.* 18.4.5). Artemis was most frequently depicted as a huntress and, like Heracles Cynagidas, served as a tutelary deity in the coming of age process, though for young girls entering the process rather than young men finishing it. A related practice was the worship of Artemis Eileithyia (the goddess of childbirth) at Diium. There appears to have been a great deal of local variation within Macedonia in regard to the fashion in which Artemis was named, depicted, and worshipped, which suggests that a number of local deities were gradually syncretized with Artemis. This is most apparent in regard to Bendis, the Thracian goddess of the moon and the hunt, whose cult practices significantly influenced the nature of Artemis' worship in areas of Macedonia that bordered on Thrace. Bendis' functions as a chthonic, fertility, and vegetation deity were in some cases transferred to Artemis.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 Death as a Passage into an Afterlife

An expectation of a meaningful existence after death was not part of standard Greek religious practice. At least some Macedonians stood apart from other Greeks in seeing death not as the extinguishing of life but as a passage into an afterlife. This is apparent from the importance and nature of the cult of Dionysus in Macedonia, from the contents and decoration of tombs, and from the inscriptions on and iconography of gravestones.

The cult of Dionysus was extraordinarily popular in Macedonia. Each year the Macedonian king sacrificed to Dionysus on a specific day that was sacred to the god

<sup>9</sup> On the worship of Heracles in Macedonia, see Düll, *Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens*, pp. 86–93, Hammond and Griffith, *History of Macedonia 2*, pp. 155–6 and Hammond, *Macedonian State*, pp. 221–2. On Heracles' role as a tutelary deity, see M.B. Hatzopoulos, *Cultes et rites de passage en Macédoine* (Athens 1994), pp. 87–111.

<sup>10</sup> On the worship of Artemis in Macedonia, see Düll, *Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens*, pp. 58–71 and Hatzopoulos, *Cultes et rites*, pp. 41–53.

(Arr. 4.8.1). The single most famous piece of ancient Greek literature with a Dionysiac theme, Euripides' *Bacchae*, was written and performed for the first time in Macedonia in the late fifth century. Among the most spectacular objects excavated in Macedonia in the past century is a large, fourth-century gilded-bronze vessel for mixing wine called the Derveni krater, which is covered in embossed panels that depict episodes from Dionysiac myth.<sup>11</sup>

Macedonian worship of Dionysus seems to have begun at a very early period and continued for centuries. According to the second century AD Macedonian author Polyaeus, Argaeus, the first king of the Macedonians, tricked a numerically superior enemy force by having women pose as men wearing wreaths and carrying *thyrsi*, both of which were closely associated with Dionysus (*Stratagems* 4.1). To celebrate the success of this ruse, Argaeus erected a Temple of Dionysus Pseudanor (False Man). However one assesses the veracity of this story, it shows that Macedonians in Polyaeus' time believed that they had long worshipped Dionysus. A wide range of finds such as votive reliefs show that the worship of Dionysus flourished through the Roman period.

The popularity of Dionysus' cult in part derived from the fact that he served as the tutelary deity for boys beginning their coming-of-age process, probably because his uncertain and shifting sexuality echoed that of young males. Another, more important, reason for the enthusiasm with which the Macedonians worshipped Dionysus was the close link between his cult and belief in an afterlife. Alongside public sacrifices to Dionysus, itinerant devotees of the god conducted private rituals (*teletai*) that introduced participants to secret practices and knowledge and thus initiated them into what modern scholars call the Dionysiac mysteries. The nature of these rites is largely unknown but it is clear that an ecstatic union with the god (*mania*) was an essential component. Initiates gathered together in private associations (*thiasoi*), each of which was an independent, local organization with its own priests and officials. One of the primary functions of *thiasoi* was to ensure proper burials for their members.

The connection between the Dionysiac mysteries and an afterlife is most immediately evident from small, inscribed gold tablets that were deposited in tombs. These have been found primarily in Thessaly/Macedonia, western Crete, and Sicily/southern Italy. The examples from Macedonia mostly date from the fourth to the second centuries. They were intended for the use of initiates into Dionysiac mysteries who expected to be recognized as such on their arrival in the underworld and to meet Persephone, Hades' queen. The texts contain information that would be useful to the initiates in navigating the transition from life to death to afterlife. The precise texts vary quite a bit but there are repeated themes: expectation of a journey to the underworld, an encounter with a gatekeeper, movement through a landscape dominated by trees and water, and formulaic responses for expected questions.

Two tombs from Vergina suggest that, as one might expect, Macedonians had a special reverence for Persephone. The so-called Tomb of Eurydice (built about 350–340) contained a 2-meter high, elaborately decorated marble throne. A painted panel on the

<sup>11</sup> See now B. Barr-Sharrar, *The Derveni Krater: Masterpiece of Classical Greek Metalwork* (Athens 2008). The krater is also discussed by C.I. Hardiman, chapter 24.

throne shows Hades and Persephone standing in a four-horse chariot. A closely related scene was found in the nearby and contemporaneous Tomb of Persephone (Tomb I). The paintings on the interior walls of this tomb show the abduction of Persephone by Hades, which was the myth around which the Eleusinian mysteries were built. Those mysteries, which were celebrated in Athens and which welcomed devotees from all over the Greek world, promised initiates a happy afterlife. It is likely that there was a certain amount of cross-fertilization over the course of time between the Eleusinian and Dionysiac mysteries.

Parts of Dionysiac rituals and beliefs are also likely to have been taken from a body of mystic literature associated with the mythical singer Orpheus, whose grave was ostensibly located in Macedonia (Paus. 9.30.7). That body of literature was built around theogonies (stories about the origins of the gods) according to which Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Persephone and was intended to become ruler of the cosmos. However, malicious intervention by the Titans left that design unfulfilled. Dionysus was killed by the Titans but was reborn because Zeus had saved his heart. The similarities with Dionysiac mysteries are evident, though the precise relationship between Orphism and Dionysiac beliefs remains unclear. The Derveni papyrus, a fourth-century religious and philosophical tract found at Derveni in Macedonia, contains a lengthy commentary on an Orphic theogony.<sup>12</sup>

The texts on some of the aforementioned inscribed gold tablets strongly suggest that Dionysiac initiates expected to attain heroic or divine status after death. By the end of the Hellenistic period this belief seems to have become widespread in Macedonia even among those who were not obviously initiates of a cult promising an afterlife. This is apparent from inscriptions and reliefs on gravestones. An inscription from northern Macedonia that dates to the first half of the third century AD records a dedication by two women to their daughter/sister Ariste.<sup>13</sup> Ariste is described as a *sunnaos* (someone sharing the same temple) of Aphrodite, which strongly implies that she had achieved something akin to divine status after her death. A number of Hellenistic- and Roman-era gravestones from Macedonia show deities such as Heracles and Aphrodite either alongside the deceased or alone. The implication is that, as was the case with Ariste, the deceased had in some sense become like the deity in question.<sup>14</sup>

The preceding discussion of underworld deities and inscribed tablets found in graves points in the direction of a related but quite distinct dimension of Macedonian

<sup>12</sup> On the worship of Dionysus in Macedonia, see Düll, *Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens*, pp. 77–8 and Hatzopoulos, *Cultes et rites*, pp. 63–72. On the cult of Dionysus and the gold tablets buried with Dionysiac initiates, see F. Graf and S.I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* (London 2007), who argue for a close relationship between Dionysiac mysteries and Orphism, a subject about which there is as yet no scholarly consensus. For an alternative view, see S.G. Cole, ‘Finding Dionysus’, in D. Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Oxford 2007), pp. 327–41.

<sup>13</sup> Düll, *Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens*, no. 7.

<sup>14</sup> On religious iconography in Macedonian gravestones, see S. Düll, ‘Götter auf Makedonischen Grabstellen’, in *Essays in Memory of Basil Laourdas* (Thessaloniki 1975), pp. 115–35 (no editor given) and F. Felten, ‘Themen Makedonischer Grabdenkmäler klassischer Zeit’, *Ancient Macedonia* 5 (Thessaloniki 1993), pp. 405–31.

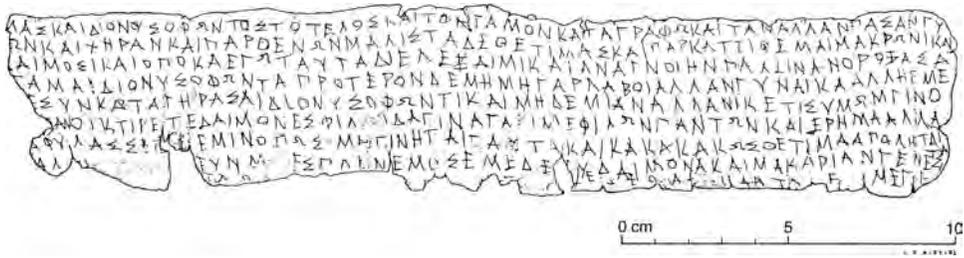


Figure 21.1 Drawing of the Lead Curse Tablet from Pella

religion: magic. Magic is of particular interest in the present context because it has much more to do with popular religion than the practices of Macedonian elites. For a considerable period of time scholars made a strict division between religion, which was seen as based on a belief in the power of divine entities, and magic, which was seen as based on the notional ability of human beings to manipulate natural forces. Due in large part to the fact that extant literary sources have much more to say about religion than magic, scholars tended to dismiss the latter as insignificant and to focus on the former. However, ongoing excavation has produced a large and rapidly growing body of physical evidence, such as inscribed curse tablets, which shows that magic was widely practiced in ancient Greek communities. Moreover, the division between religion and magic is no longer considered to be valid for the study of ancient Greek religion primarily because careful examination of the relevant materials showed that belief in the power of divine entities played an essential role in Greek magic. That said, magic did differ from standard Greek religious practice in that it was conducted largely in secret by people who were in many ways on the margins of society. A further valence of obscurity was provided by the strong association between magic on one hand and the underworld and *daimones* (supernatural beings whose status was somewhere between that of gods and humans) on the other.

Greek magic embraced a wide variety of beliefs and practices. Greek magicians claimed to be able to control the actions of other humans and natural elements such as wind and rain, to cure sickness, to offer protection against old age and death, and, at least in some cases, to bring back the dead. They cast spells, spoke incantations, engaged in divination, handled snakes, and created illusions. Spells were normally written on thin sheets of lead that were placed in the sanctuary of a deity or deposited with a recently buried body (so that they would be carried to the underworld along with the corpse). A lead spell tablet that was discovered in Pella in 1986 offers a glimpse into the practice of magic by Macedonians (see figure 21.1 and plate 15), as well as having relevance for a Macedonian language as J. Engels discusses in chapter 5. The tablet was found in a grave alongside a skeleton; it dates to the middle of the fourth century. Here is the text:<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The translation is that of E. Voutiras, *Dionysophontos Gamoi: Marital Life and Magic in Fourth-Century Pella* (Amsterdam 1998), pp. 15–16.

Of Thetima and Dionysophon the ritual wedding and the marriage I bind by a written spell, as well as (the marriage) of all other women (to him), both widows and maidens, but above all of Thetima; and I entrust this spell to Macron and to the *daimones*. And were I ever to unfold and read these words again after digging (the tablet) up, only then should Dionysophon marry, not before; may he indeed not take another woman than myself, but let me alone grow old by the side of Dionysophon and no one else. I implore you: have pity for [Phila?], dear *daimones*, [for I am bereft] of all my dear ones and abandoned. But please keep this (piece of writing) for my sake so that these events do not happen and wretched Thetima perishes miserably [short section of text lost] but let me become happy and blessed.

Phila, the person casting the spell, seeks to prevent the marriage of Dionysophon (with whom she evidently cohabited as wife or concubine) and Thetima and more broadly to ensure that she will lead a long and happy existence with Dionysophon. Macron seems to be the name of the deceased person to whose corpse the spell tablet was entrusted.

The fact that in Pella in the fourth century one could find kings making elaborate sacrifices to Heracles Patroos as well as people such as Phila casting magic spells serves as a reminder of the diversity of Macedonian religious practice.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 Openness to Foreign Influences

Macedonians showed themselves to be unusually open to foreign religious influences, particularly in the period beginning with the reign of Alexander the Great. Alexander himself was an omnivore when it came to religion and over the course of his lifetime became increasingly attached to non-Greek deities and practices. He sacrificed to the Egyptian gods while in Egypt, organized the rebuilding of the temple of the god Bel in Babylon, and placed a considerable amount of faith in Egyptian, Persian, and Babylonian priests and diviners. A pivotal moment seems to have been the pilgrimage he undertook in 331 to the oracular site of the Libyan-Egyptian god Amun at the oasis of Siwah in the desert in western Egypt. Greeks became familiar with Amun via the Greek colony of Cyrene, which was located on the coast of North Africa and which was founded in the seventh century. Amun's name was Hellenized to Ammon, and he was syncretized with Zeus. By the middle of the fifth century Zeus Ammon was being worshipped in a number of Greek communities, and Greeks regularly went to Siwah to consult his oracle. Since the Greek city of Aphytis, which was under Macedonian control during Alexander's lifetime, had a prominent shrine of Zeus Ammon, Alexander was almost certainly aware of the existence of Ammon before arriving in Egypt. After capturing Egypt, Alexander undertook a journey to consult Ammon's oracle at Siwah. Exactly what transpired

<sup>16</sup> For an introduction to Greek magic, see M. Dickie, 'Magic in Classical and Hellenistic Greece', in D. Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Oxford 2007), pp. 357–70. The lead curse tablet from Pella is discussed at length in Voutiras, *Dionysophontos Gamoi*.

during Alexander's visit remains unclear, but there is little doubt that Alexander afterward began to think of himself as the son of Ammon.<sup>17</sup>

Alexander's conquests brought Greek soldiers and settlers into much closer contact than ever before with the cultures of the Near East. One result was the gradual spread of the worship of the Egyptian deities Isis and Sarapis to most Greek communities. Isis was worshipped in Egypt from a very early date but the beliefs and practices associated with her cult evolved markedly during the Hellenistic period. One major change was the development of a set of secret rites that promised some sort of happy afterlife. Isis was initially closely identified with Demeter and Artemis, but over the course of time the powers ascribed to her grew considerably. By the Roman period some of her devotees had abandoned the worship of all other deities. Sarapis was originally an Egyptian god whose name and cult practices underwent significant alterations under the guidance of the Ptolemies. The Hellenized version of the god achieved considerable popularity as a healing deity, and his worship spread throughout the Aegean during the Hellenistic period. The Sarapis cult was gradually submerged by and into the worship of Isis.

The worship of Isis and Sarapis attained great importance among Macedonians. Isis became the tutelary deity of the city of Philippi, and she was worshipped in Dium under the name Isis Locheia (Protector of Women in Childbirth). Statuettes of Isis assimilated to the personification of Tyche (Fortune) are the single most numerous kind of religious dedication found in excavations in northern Macedonia. One of the most famous sanctuaries of Sarapis (and other Egyptian deities including Isis) in the Greek world flourished in Thessaloniki from the third century BC to the third century AD. The significance of this sanctuary is apparent from the fact that in 187 Philip V sent a letter to officials in Thessaloniki forbidding the use of its revenues for non-cultic purposes and spelling out penalties for any attempt to do so (*IG* 10 2, 1.3). Evidently the cult had become wealthy enough to make it a tempting target.<sup>18</sup> The popularity of Egyptian deities among Macedonians can be attributed to a number of factors, including the fact that Macedonians as a group were much more deeply involved in the Near East than other Greeks, the connection between the Isis cult and the hope of a happy afterlife, and an openness to foreign religious beliefs and practices.

## 4 Tombs not Temples

A distinctive feature of Macedonian religious practice was a preference for expending resources on tombs rather than temples. In most Greek communities, tombs were relatively modest while the construction of monumental temples was a major focus of civic activity.

<sup>17</sup> On Alexander's religious beliefs, see L. Edmunds, 'The Religiosity of Alexander', *GRBS* 12 (1971), pp. 363–91.

<sup>18</sup> A good introduction to the worship of Egyptian gods in Greece can be found in M. Bommas, *Heiligtum und Mystrium: Griechenland und seine ägyptischen Gottheiten* (Mainz 2005). For a more in-depth treatment of the cult of Isis, see F. Dunand, *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée*, 3 vols. (Leiden 1973).

An important, often central, feature of many Greek cities was an acropolis dominated by one or more impressively large temples. Greek religious sanctuaries are likewise usually focused around one or more major temples. In Macedonia, however, archaeological evidence for monumental temples is sparse, while elaborate tombs built for private individuals and filled with expensive grave goods have been found in considerable numbers.

Both sociopolitical factors and religious convictions were responsible for the impoverishment of Macedonian temples and the opulence of Macedonian tombs. Many Greek *poleis* were small, largely autonomous communities with a strong inward orientation and an equally strong sense of civic-mindedness among their inhabitants. These *poleis* frequently restricted the size and richness of family tombs by means of sumptuary laws while simultaneously emphasizing communal building projects. Macedonia, on the other hand, was a large kingdom dominated by an aristocracy that had the wealth, desire and freedom to invest in familial rather than civic monuments. In addition, as we have seen, a deep-seated belief in an afterlife set Macedonians apart from other Greeks. That belief clearly served as a powerful incentive for Macedonians to invest their wealth in tombs and grave goods rather than in temples. A connection between Macedonians' special interest in tombs and a belief in the afterlife is evident in the design of tombs, the nature of grave goods and the iconographic content of the decoration of tombs. For obvious reasons the focus of discussion here will be on religious rather than sociopolitical issues.

Monumental religious architecture in the form of grand temples is conspicuously absent in Macedonian cities and religious sanctuaries. The major excavated cities of Macedonia are Vergina and Pella. Vergina was the capital of the Macedonian kingdom from the mid-seventh century until the seat of power was moved to Pella at the start of the fourth century. Both cities have extensive urban remains and prominent acropoleis, which are capped by sprawling royal palace complexes rather than temples. Even the main Macedonian sanctuary at Dium has yet to yield remains of any major temples. The only notable temples excavated so far there are in the sanctuary of Demeter to the south of the city. Here two small megaron-like structures dating to the late sixth century were replaced at the end of the fourth century by two larger, but still modest, temples (7 × 11 m) with no exterior colonnades.<sup>19</sup>

Simple temples such as these are typical of Macedonian religious architecture. At Pella no temples have come to light on the acropolis, but small sanctuaries to Aphrodite, Demeter, Dionysus, and the Mother of the Gods have been excavated in the lower town. A small Temple of Euclia and a sanctuary to the Mother of the Gods were found in Vergina.<sup>20</sup> Literary references and reused blocks built into later fortification walls testify to the existence of shrines for Asclepius, Athena, Dionysus and Heracles in Beroia (one of the more important cities in the Macedonian heartland).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On architectural remains at the major Macedonian sites, see I. Akamatis, R. Ginouvès, K. Lazaridou and D. Pandermalis, 'Cities and Sanctuaries of Macedonia', in R. Ginouvès (ed.), *Macedonia: From Philip II to the Roman Conquest* (Princeton 1994), pp. 82–105.

<sup>20</sup> M. Andronikos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City* (Athens 1988), pp. 49–51.

<sup>21</sup> M.B. Hatzopoulos, 'The Sanctuaries', in R. Ginouvès (ed.), *Macedonia: From Philip II to the Roman Conquest* (Princeton 1994), pp. 106–9.

However, the lack of *in situ* material remains of temples indicates that the structures associated with these cults were not of a monumental nature. Other major Macedonian cities such as Edessa, Pydna, and Thessaloniki have likewise yielded only scattered epigraphic or literary references to various cults.

Given the power and wealth that Macedonians accrued starting in the fourth century and the abundance of material remains from Macedonia, the lack of monumental temples in Macedonian cities and sanctuaries is striking. Scholars have in the past tended to assume that the limited amount of archaeological work that was done in northern Greece during the twentieth century was to blame for the lack of known, large-scale temples in Macedonia.<sup>22</sup> However, the pace of archaeological exploration has increased markedly during the recent past, and as the archaeological record becomes gradually more complete it seems more likely that the under-representation of temples in Macedonia is reflective of a real lack of monumental religious architecture of the type common elsewhere in the Greek world.

The relatively minimal amount of resources expended on temple building stands in stark contrast to the enormous investment that Macedonians made in tombs. Excavations at Sindos, a suburb of Thessaloniki, have uncovered a rich archaic and classical cemetery. The tombs there contained large amounts of gold and silver artifacts ranging from gold death masks to weapons and jewelry as well as iron models of everyday objects. Early archaeological remains from non-mortuary contexts in Macedonia are notoriously poor, which makes the amount of wealth invested in the burials at Sindos all the more remarkable.<sup>23</sup> The abundance, expense, and nature of the objects used as grave goods there strongly suggest a desire to prepare the deceased for the afterlife.<sup>24</sup>

The opulence of the Sindos tombs was eventually superseded by an even richer form of burial that developed in the Hellenistic period. From the fourth through the second centuries Macedonians built elaborate sepulchers, the so-called 'Macedonian tombs'. These tombs consist of a built burial chamber, square or rectangular in shape, with a barrel-vaulted roof. After the tomb was finished and the deceased had been interred the entire structure was covered by an earthen tumulus. The exterior facades of the more impressive examples are made from plaster moulded and painted to mimic temples. It need hardly be said that these tombs were expensive to build and were as a result the preserve of the elite. Macedonian tombs are abundant; over 70 have been excavated to date, and many known tumuli have yet to be explored.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Errington, *History of Macedonia*, p. 225 and F.E. Winter, *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture* (Toronto 2006), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> The remains from colonies founded in Macedonia by southern Greek *poleis* are not relevant to the issues under discussion here.

<sup>24</sup> On Sindos, see I. Vokotopoulou, A. Despinis, D. Misailidou and M. Tiverios, *Sindos: Katalogos tes ekthses* (Thessaloniki 1985).

<sup>25</sup> For a general overview of Macedonian tombs, see Winter, *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture*, pp. 87–90.

The appearance of these tombs, the finds they contain, and the iconographic content of their decoration all suggest that the Macedonians' priorities in regard to religious architecture were shaped by their concern with an afterlife. To begin with, the resemblance of Macedonian tomb facades to temple facades is unlikely to be a coincidence. The Dionysiac rites, epitaphs, and sculptured gravestones discussed above, as well as the tendency of Macedonian kings to expect and receive ruler cults (to be discussed below), make it clear that Macedonians believed that human beings could attain heroic or divine status after death. It is worth recalling the case of the Macedonian woman Ariste who was considered by her family to have become the *sun-naos* of Aphrodite. The Macedonian dead, or at least those fortunate or accomplished enough to warrant elaborate burial, were literally sent to the afterlife already enshrined in a *naos* (temple).

The anticipation of life after death also helps explain the incredible wealth expended on the grave goods placed in Macedonian tombs. While the categories of finds – vessels, weapons, jewelry – are largely the same as those found in the tombs of other Greek communities, the volume and quality are truly of another order. The so-called Tomb of Philip (Tomb II) at Vergina is the most lavishly equipped Macedonian tomb discovered to date. The tomb contained two burials. The remains of both of the dead were cremated and wrapped in purple cloths and then placed in gold chests. The offerings found within the tomb and amongst the remains of the funeral pyre that was burnt at the time of burial were rich and abundant, including a gold wreath of oak leaves and acorns; four swords; a dagger; several spears; three cuirasses; an iron helmet; three pectorals; two golden diadems; four pairs of greaves; silver, bronze and terracotta vessels of various shapes and sizes; a silver spoon; a silver ladle; one bronze tripod; one iron tripod; a bronze lantern; a basin with a sponge; the glass, gilded silver, and ivory remains of a massive chryselephantine shield; a bronze cover for the shield; a bow with a case and 74 arrowheads; silver rings and rosettes; and a gold *gorgoneia* (a mask carved in imitation of a Gorgon's head).<sup>26</sup> The abundance of precious objects mixed together with the sorts of things needed for everyday life suggests that the contents of the tomb were intended for the enjoyment of the deceased in the afterlife.

The decoration of some Macedonian tombs lends further support to the idea that Macedonians invested substantial resources in the construction of tombs because of a belief in life after death. The most salient example is the Great Tomb (or Tomb of the Judgement), which was built at Lefkadia in the late fourth century (see plate 16, discussed also by C.I. Hardiman in chapter 24). The facade features a frieze showing a battle between Macedonians and Persians, 11 painted metopes decorated with scenes from the legendary battle between Centaurs and Lapiths, and 4 painted panels.<sup>27</sup> The panels show the descent of the occupant of the tomb (in the leftmost panel) to

<sup>26</sup> Andronikos, *Vergina*, pp. 72–159, S. Drougou, C. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, P. Faklaris, A. Kottaridou, and E.-B. Tsigarida, *Vergina, the Great Tumulus: Archaeological Guide* (Thessaloniki 1996), pp. 104–13.

<sup>27</sup> P. Petsas, *O Taphos ton Lefkadiou* (Athens 1966).

the underworld, guided by Hermes in his guise of escort to the dead. The figures to the right of the doorway show two famous judges from myth, Rhadamanthys and Aiacos (the figures are labeled). According to Greek myth, most clearly recounted in Plato's *Gorgias* (523e–524e), Rhadamanthys and Aiacos decided the fate of the dead, whether they were sent to the Isles of the Blessed or punished in perpetuity in Tartaros. The Tomb of Persephone (Tomb I) from Vergina is decorated with a painting of the abduction of Persephone by Hades, another mythological theme closely tied to death and afterlife (see above).<sup>28</sup>

The idea that belief in life after death and preparation for the afterlife were at the very heart of Macedonian religious practice is therefore strongly supported by the characteristics of Macedonian tombs.

## 5 Role of the King

The sociopolitical structure of the Macedonian kingdom was quite different from the *polis* model common in much of the Greek world. While the religious personnel of *poleis* were usually selected from the populace and did not typically play a major role in the governance of the community, in Macedonia the king was not only the head of the army and of the state, but also the chief priest of the kingdom.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, there is evidence that in individual Macedonian cities such as Amphipolis and Cassandria the chief priest of the tutelary deity was simultaneously the nominal head of state (*IG* 10 2, 1028, *Syll*<sup>3</sup> 332, 380). A distinctive trait of Macedonian religion is, therefore, the investment of religious power in political authorities, especially the king. Macedonian kings served as the chief intermediaries between the Macedonian people and the gods and between the Macedonian people and religious centers in the Greek homeland.

The ritual duties of the king both within and outside of Macedonia were varied. At home, it was the king's responsibility to sacrifice on a daily basis in order to ensure the favor of the gods in activities as diverse as agriculture and warfare (*Arr.* 7.25.2, *Curt.* 4.6.10). It may have been customary in at least some Macedonian cities for the king to pour a libation from a special type of goblet (a *guala*) upon entering (*Marysas*, *FGrH* 135–136 F 21). When a new city was founded, the king marked the limits of its territory with a sprinkling of barley meal (*Curt.* 4.8.6). Furthermore, it was incumbent upon the king to be present at both local and national festivals in order to sacrifice to the relevant gods (*Diod.* 17.16.3–4, *Arr.* 1.11.1).

As commander of the army, the king was often away on military campaigns, and here too he had religious duties to perform. If the army was in need of purification (as happened after the death of Alexander in 323 for instance) the monarch presided over a ritual involving the sacrifice of a dog (*Curt.* 10.9.11–12). The dog

<sup>28</sup> M. Andronikos, *Vergina II: The 'Tomb of Persephone'* (Athens 2003).

<sup>29</sup> See further, C.J. King, chapter 18.

sacrifice in these purificatory instances was probably related to the Xandika, a festival held in the spring at which the king mustered the army, purified it by having it march between two halves of a sacrificed dog, and mobilized it for the upcoming campaign (Livy 40.6.1–7.9). The army kept multiple seers on hand, and another religious role of the king was to consult them in the interpretation of dreams and omens (Arr. 7.26.2).

Macedonian rulers also served as the kingdom's chief representative in dealings with important sanctuaries outside of Macedonia and in that role carried out sacrifices and made dedications. Though the Macedonian kings did not build large temples in the Macedonian homeland, they were often involved in the sponsorship of elaborate religious dedications at various locations and to a varied array of gods throughout the Greek world. Philip II sacrificed at Delphi, constructed a temple-like building for the display of statues of himself and other members of the royal family at Olympia, and spearheaded a surge of building at the sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace (where the Cabiri, an enigmatic group of deities that enjoyed some popularity in Macedonia, may also have been worshipped). Alexander the Great offered sacrifices at many important religious sites in the Near East and had a hand in a number of far-flung temple projects (Artemis at Ephesus, Athena Polias at Priene, Bel at Babylon).<sup>30</sup> Philip V made an offering of a statue at Olympia (Paus. 6.16.3) and a stoa at Delos (IG 11 4, 1099). Antigonus Gonatas likewise built a stoa dedicated to Apollo at Delos (IG 11 4, 1095). Interestingly, none of the dedications made by the kings was credited to the Macedonian people but to the individual benefactor king himself. This is a major point of divergence from the dedications made by *poleis*, which were usually credited to the community as a whole, and recalls the interest in familial rather than civic monuments observable in regard to expenditures on temples and tombs by Macedonians.

## 6 Divine Rulers

One of the major innovations in Greek religion during the Hellenistic period was the widespread granting of divine honors to monarchs and members of their families, which was the direct result of the actions and initiatives of Macedonian kings. Greek religion generally might be characterized as the way in which the ancient Greeks recognized the power of the gods over various aspects of their lives that they saw as being beyond their control. Macedonian monarchs exercised great political, military, and religious power, both within Macedonia and in the Greek world as a whole. More particularly, the improbable feats accomplished by Philip II (leading a small, marginal kingdom to hegemony over all of Greece in 25 years) and especially

<sup>30</sup> The dedications made by Macedonian kings at Panhellenic sanctuaries are summarized in Errington, *History of Macedonia*, pp. 226–8. H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage* 1 (Munich 1926), pp. 85–100, treats Alexander's dedications and sacrifices in detail. S.G. Cole, *Theoi Megaloi: The Cult of the Great Gods at Samothrace* (Leiden 1984), pp. 16–25, is a good source for information about Macedonian activity at Samothrace.

by Alexander III (defeating the Persian king and conquering most of the known world) made these men seem to possess the sort of power over human life that made the gods worthy of worship. In addition, Philip and Alexander appear to have encouraged others to assign them godlike status. This combination of factors induced many Greek communities to create cults in which the kings of Macedonia were worshipped as gods.

This is not to say that the Macedonians were the first among the Greeks to heroize or divinize outstanding men. From an early period great athletes and founders of colonies were often posthumously worshipped as heroes or gods. The first clearly attested instance of the deification of a living individual dates to the end of the Peloponnesian War when Samos renamed its annual festival after the Spartan general Lysander and feted him with rites, games, and songs formerly dedicated to the goddess Hera. When the Syracusan general Dion freed the people of Syracuse from 50 years of tyranny in 357, he too was honored as though he were a god.<sup>31</sup>

The examples of Lysander and Dion show that there was precedent in Greek culture for the elevation of particularly prominent humans to heroic or divine status when the Macedonian kings began to experiment with self-divination in the later fourth century. The worship of Macedonian kings was not, therefore, a total break with traditional Greek religious beliefs. However, there is no doubt that with the Macedonian kings of the fourth century, and Alexander the Great in particular, there was a turning point in the history of Greek religion. The worship of living rulers as gods became an ordinary feature of the post-Alexandrian world.

Though Alexander is generally considered to be the prime mover behind the trend toward royal deification, some of the credit for divine aspiration may perhaps go to Philip II. Amyntas III, Philip's father, was said to have had a shrine (the Amynteion) dedicated to him at Pydna (Aelius Aristides 38.480), but the first reliable testimony for a king having a dedicated cult during his lifetime comes from Philippi (*SEG* 38.658). Since Philip was also the founder of Philippi, it is perhaps not entirely surprising to find that he was worshipped as a god there (though in southern Greece the worship of the founder of a city was never instituted prior to his death). However, there is evidence that Philip's cult was not limited to Philippi. Literary sources point to Philip cults at Amphipolis, Ephesus, and Eresus. Furthermore, the Philippeion, a building at Olympia in which stood statues of Philip and his family, may be evidence of Philip's desire for deification, as is the fact that on the day of his assassination he had a statue of himself paraded alongside statues of the 12 Olympian deities. The path may have been paved for the development of a cult of Alexander in the years after Philip's death.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> An extensive discussion of early hero cults can be found in E. Badian, 'The Deification of Alexander the Great', in H.J. Dell (ed.), *Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles Edson* (Thessaloniki 1981), pp. 27–71. See also M. Flower, 'Agesilaus of Sparta and the Origins of the Ruler Cult', *CQ* 38 (1988), pp. 123–34.

<sup>32</sup> The matter of whether Philip considered himself to be divine is not yet settled. For a general discussion, see Borza, *Shadow of Olympus*, pp. 249–50, but see now (arguing against Philip

Alexander played a major role in the institution and growth of his own cult. His visit to the oracle of Amun at Siwah had a great effect on his actions throughout the rest of his life. In the years after visiting the oracle, Alexander considered himself worthy of being worshipped as a god (Arr. 7.20.1), tried to require *proskynesis* (a gesture of reverence usually reserved by Greeks for the gods but granted by Persians to their king) from Greeks (Arr. 4.10.5), and there is a belief that he solicited divine honors from Greek communities on at least one occasion (Din. 1.94, Hyp. 5 *Demosthenes* 31).<sup>33</sup>

While the worship of Macedonian kings preceding Alexander had been relatively contained both geographically and chronologically, Alexander cults spread rapidly and took a more lasting hold on their adherents. Cults to Alexander were established in many cities in Asia Minor during his lifetime and the worship of Alexander persisted: new games and buildings were being dedicated to him as late as the second half of the second century (at Priene).<sup>34</sup> The enduring nature of the worship of Alexander and the profusion of ruler cults that grew up in the wake of his rule can be attributed in part to his charisma, his untimely death and his incredible achievements. The political chaos that followed his reign was also a contributing factor. The successors to Alexander quarreled over access to his corpse and their relative legitimacies as heirs to his kingdom. They had much to gain by worshipping their former leader, as well as by establishing their own cults (or encouraging cities who wished to gain their favor to do so) in order to emphasize their similarity to and relationship with the divine Alexander. Thus it is no surprise that one of the distinctive features of the Hellenistic period was the increasing worship of living rulers alongside the traditional Olympian gods. After Alexander, Macedonian kings such as Demetrius Poliorcetes and Antigonus Gonatas were the subject of cult worship as a matter of course.

## 7 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on a number of ways in which the religious beliefs and practices of Macedonians differed from those found in other Greek communities. By necessity, the relevant material has been treated in a selective fashion, and the views offered here represent only one of many possible interpretations of the extant evidence for Macedonian religion. Though the study of and excavations in Macedonia have become increasingly common during the last several decades,

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having any divine pretensions and explaining the cults to him elsewhere), Ian Worthington, *Philip II of Macedonia* (New Haven 2008), pp. 228–33.

<sup>33</sup> The so-called Deification Decree of 324, but any decision to recognize Alexander as divine did not come from him but from the mainland Greeks and then only for political reasons: see especially G.L. Cawkwell, 'The Deification of Alexander the Great: A Note', in Ian Worthington (ed.), *Ventures into Greek History: Essays in Honour of N.G.L. Hammond* (Oxford 1994), pp. 293–306.

<sup>34</sup> C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1970), p. 17.

Macedonian religion has never been the subject of a comprehensive work, and so there remain major gaps in the collective knowledge of this subject. For instance, it is possible that Macedonian religion was heavily influenced by Near Eastern cult practices at a relatively early date. Macedonia became a vassal kingdom of Persia in the last quarter of the sixth century BC and Macedonia's sociopolitical structure resembled a Persian monarchy more closely than a Greek polity. The potential was therefore certainly present for Macedonians to absorb Persian ideas and customs. It may not be coincidental that Macedonian architectural remains, which skew toward palaces and tombs rather than temples, have more in common with Persian sites than Greek ones. However, at the moment there is not enough evidence to draw a causal connection.

Even the points about Macedonian religion that emerge readily from existing evidence should be treated with caution. Interpreting a set of data that is at least partially fragmentary and that relates to the religious beliefs of a group of people is always a complex matter. Moreover, it is always possible that further excavations may uncover major evidence about Macedonian religion that could dramatically change the state of knowledge on this topic. The clearest conclusion that can be drawn at this juncture is that religion is an aspect of Macedonian studies that will benefit greatly from further study and, especially, from further archaeological work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

There is at present no single work that provides a comprehensive survey of Macedonian religion, though there is a large and growing body of scholarship on specific issues having to do with Macedonian religious beliefs and practices. The evidence for the existence and relative importance of individual cults is collected in W. Baege, *De Macedonum Sacris* (Halis Saxonum 1913) and S. Düll, *Die Götterkulte Nordmakedoniens in römischer Zeit* (Munich 1977). On Macedonian initiation rites and the deities connected to those rites, see M.B. Hatzopoulos, *Cultes et rites de passage en Macédoine* (Athens 1994).

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