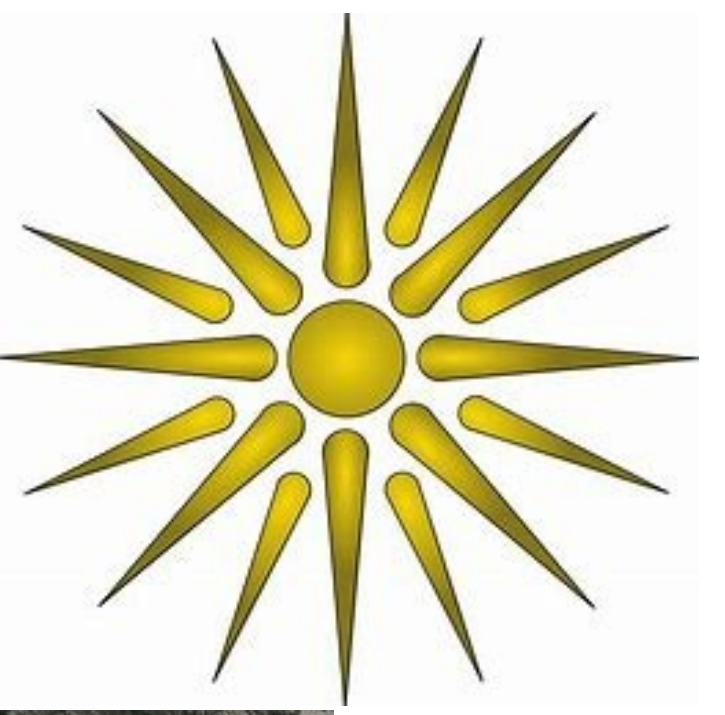




Aigai: the Theatre and Sanctuaries



First excavated in 1981 by a team of archaeologists from Thessaloniki University, this theatre buried beneath the great palace at Aigai is a confusing stylistic blend of Greek and Macedonian architecture. First dated to the mid fourth-century BC by the lead excavator M. Andronikos, however this has been disputed by Borza who later cited that some structural features may point to “both earlier and later dates”, alongside the fact that the cavea of the theatre is comparatively very small when looking at other fourth-century Greek theatres.

The design of this royal theatre is somewhat unique considering that only the first row have built-in stone seating with most of the audience presumably making do lounging on the grassy bank behind or as has been suggested on long wooden benches that have long since disappeared. There is debate as whether there was ever any specific seating for priests or royalty as there is an absence of any stonework to suggest this, there could have been a wooden structure for this purpose, however Borza points out that the existing front row would roughly fit 100 people – the same number of people as Alexander’s inner circle of friends and companions.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this fascinating building is the size of its orchestra, measuring at 28.5m across almost 10m bigger than the average orchestra size for theatres on the Greek mainland. Obviously this structure far outdoes its purpose if it were just utilised for dramatic performances signifying that this had another use as an Amphitheatre where a variety of rituals could be held. One such example of this is the festivities at which Phillip II was assassinated at whilst celebrating his daughter’s marriage in 336BC: “So great numbers of people flocked together from all directions to the festival, and the games and the marriage were celebrated in Aegae in Macedonia” Dio.Sic 16.91.1.



Stonework front row of seating.

Cavea.

Orchestra.

Hence we can see that this theatre is not entirely Greek nor Macedonian, yet it is certainly designed for the needs of the latter in mind. It is this amalgam of architecture and design that the historian Borza remarks as making this theatre so difficult to accurately date, but that if it is indeed from the fourth-century BC then what we are looking at is the actual location of Phillip II assassination.



Along with the discovery of the theatre at Aigai the archaeologists excavating there also came upon a small temple or shrine consisting of three statues with one displaying the inscription *Euridika Sirra Eukleia* – “Eurydice, daughter of Sirrhas, [erected this statue] to Eukleia”. It is believed by Borza to be dated to the latter half of the fourth-century BC due to the style of the letter forms used.

Eukleia herself is a minor deity representing renown, reputation and honour – suitable for a royal capital! M. Andronikos uses an account of a similar dedication to Eukleia in the Athenian agora memorializing their victory at the battle of Marathon in 490BC by the writer Pausanias; putting forward the theory that this sanctuary to Eukleia in Aigai is dedicated to the Macedonian victory over a combined Greek force at Chaeronea in 338BC. This whilst a seemingly plausible argument is once again disputed by the historian Borza who argues that this Athenian Eukleia is in fact Eukleia Eunomia, whereas at Aigai it would make more sense for worship to be directed towards the Goddess Artemis Eukleia. He argues that since there was widespread worship of Artemis Eukleia in neighbouring Boeotia and that in the mid-fourth century there was an distinct closeness between the two states it makes more sense for the deity being Artemis Eukleia.

Bibliography:

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