

Dion and the Argead expansion in the Late Archaic period

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ABSTRACT The aim of this study is to examine the expansion of the Argead kingdom of Macedon over the region of Pieria, and the role played by the sacred city of Dion in this process. Despite northern Pieria belonging to the core of the Macedonian realm, southern Pieria did not fall under Macedonian sway until the end of the Archaic Age. By using evidence from both literature and archaeology, this paper attempts to reconstruct the assimilation of southern Pieria into the Macedonian kingdom and the way that influenced the development of Dion.

KEYWORDS Dion, Pieria, Argead dynasty, Macedonian kingdom, frontiers.

1. The Argeads and the early stages of their kingdom

The core territory of the Argead dynasty lies in Lower Macedonia. Lack of information in sources makes it difficult to discern how the dynasty consolidated territory and expanded into neighbouring areas in the lead up to the last decades of the Classical Age. However, two regions, Bottia and Pieria, were the main components of this realm in its first centuries¹. This paper aims to show that Dion contributed to the consolidation of the Argead control of the southern borders of the kingdom. It combined an optimal location for agricultural expansion and its role as a cult site. In order to delve into the theme of this topic, it is necessary first to examine what we know about Dion in its first centuries and the territorial extent of the Argead kingdom of Macedon.

In his second book, Thucydides provides the most complete overview of the origin and development of the kingdom. Founded by the ancestors of Alexander I, the Temenidae were supposed to have come from Argos to establish their kingdom in regions previously populated by natives, namely Pieria and Bottia. According to his account both communities of Pierians and Bottians were expelled in the process. Afterwards, following the enumeration of Thucydides, the kings proceeded to conquer sections of nearby regions, Paeonia to the north, Migdonia to the northeast, Eordaia to

* This research has been carried out within the framework of project RYC2021-031612-I, derived from a Ramón y Cajal postdoctoral contract.

¹ The concept and meaning of Emathia presents several problems when trying to discern its geographical or political scope. Both ancient sources and modern works have referred to it as the original name of the territory and kingdom of Macedon, an administrative region next to Pieria and Bottia or, from a mainly geographical perspective, a plain that connected Upper and Central-Lower Macedonia by means of the Haliacmon River (see examples in Str. 7 Fr. 11; Plin. *HN* 4.34; Ael. *NA* 10.48; Solin. 9.1 and 10-11; BORZA 1990, 30; HATZOPOULOS 2011a, 45; KOTTARIDI 2011, 153). Sometimes it can be misled with Bottia or Pieria itself, which leads to confusion. In order to avoid that, this paper considers Emathia just in geographical terms, as the plain in Central-Lower Macedon right to the north of the coastal plain of Pieria, part of which therefore was the region of Bottia.

the west and Almopia to the north-west. This process of expansion included the far-eastern territories of Anthemus, Crestonia, and Bisaltia².

These lines summarize two centuries of expansion that we may suppose was far less linear than this account suggests, with variable dynamics of growth and regression. This makes accurate modelling of the fluctuating boundaries of the kingdom difficult. Similarly, our knowledge about the settlement patterns in Lower Macedonia and the extent to which the emergence of the Temenid/Argead kingdom entailed shifting of the local communities suffers from uncertainty. We can at least be certain that there existed a realm that, during the eighth and seventh centuries, founded several settlements and spread its power over Bottia and Pieria³. Borza assumed that Thucydides' passage evinces that this was a period characterized by conflicts leading to the displacement of some communities. Despite the Athenian writer mentioning Pieria, it is unlikely that the entire territory of Pieria fell into the hands of the Argead kingdom at such an early date. We must bear in mind that Thucydides transmitted political propaganda in a period in which the Argeads aimed to conquer nearby regions⁴, as such, although his passage is commonly accepted, it is plausible that the description was to some extent sweetened. Either way, this dynasty was surely able to have secured defensible borders on all sides by the end of the sixth century⁵, and what we see in Thucydides' reference is the territorial scope of Macedon during the Peloponnese War.

The process of annexation of southern Pieria to the Argead kingdom remains unclear. This paper assumes that this incorporation did not happen in the earliest stages of the kingdom. Now, before a deeper examination of this issue, we are going to take a look closer at the settlement that would become the main religious centre of Macedon.

2. Dion, the sacred city

Dion dominated the southern part of the Pierian plain. Close to Mount Olympus and the shoreline, the site stood as a landmark on the coastal route that connected Macedon and Thessaly. The oldest remains found here do not belong to the urban centre, but to the first sanctuary attested, which was consecrated to Demeter. In this temenos there were two twin megaron-style temples dating to the Late Archaic Age or Early Classical times. One of them was devoted to Demeter, the second supposedly to Kore/Persephone⁶, although the possibility of Aphrodite should not be discarded⁷. This hypothesis is based on materials that did not appear just in the layers of this period, but also in the strata of the late temples erected in the Hellenistic period.

We do not have evidence of the settlement until the fifth century BCE. In fact, currently the only materials published that go back to this century are the ones found inside a hole discovered in the inner space of the Augusteum, which was built in the Imperial period in the western wing of the agora. The deposit, 6 m deep, was filled with rests dating to Classical and Hellenistic times. The oldest materials were lamps from the fifth century⁸. Outside the perimeter of the urban centre, to the southwest, there was a tetrobol of Alexander I among the remains of the stadium. Though this coin remained

² Thuc. 2.99.

³ MARI 2011, 84-85.

⁴ VASILEV 2011, 93.

⁵ BORZA 1990, 85-89.

⁶ PINGIATOGLOU 2016, 33.

⁷ PINGIATOGLOU 2010, 186.

⁸ PINGIATOGLOU 2006 [2008], 581-582.

in circulation after Alexander's death, it could date the construction of the stadium to some point in the fifth century, before the sovereign Archelaus created –or reorganized– the agonistic competitions called Olympia that were celebrated in Dio⁹. An earlier foundation date for the urban area, rather than the shrines, is certainly possible. Only a small part of the urban space has been excavated, and the oldest layers lay below large strata whose activity endured until the Byzantine period and are still under examination. Therefore, we can surmise that the very foundations of Dion, established somewhere at the end of the Archaic Age, are yet to be discovered.

Now, we have seen that the shrine of Demeter provides the oldest evidence of the entire site; yet, for several reasons, there is no doubt that the main sanctuary was devoted to Zeus Olympius. First, the few literary accounts that talk about any sanctuary in Dion just refer to Zeus' shrine¹⁰. Second, the festival of the Olympia was celebrated in honour of Zeus Olympius and the Muses¹¹. Third, the name of Dion itself, Δῖον, seems to derive from the tutelary god of the settlement¹². These three arguments point to the assumption that Dion originated as a cult place for Zeus, probably in connection with Mount Olympus, located at a short distance to the southwest. Despite this reasoning, the oldest remains of the shrine of Zeus Olympius date to the Hellenistic Age¹³. Given the importance of the cult of Zeus in Dion, the lack of material evidence of earlier structures could be due to the initial configuration of this sacred space as an open-air non-monumentalized sanctuary¹⁴. However, we should be careful; the absence of Zeus-associated votive offerings from Classical times or earlier is telling, since these sorts of objects reflect the cult practice in a shrine. Therefore, the foundation of the sanctuary of Zeus Olympius remains open to interpretation. There are no more remains that attest other specific cults in Dion in its early history¹⁵.

In a wider scope, the scholarship regarding the origins of Dion leads us to conclude that the foundation of the site was linked to shepherding, one of the main economic activities in Macedon¹⁶. Cattle-herding was important to the kingdom, as is well known¹⁷. The presence of pastoral elements in the specific area of Dion is also clear, since the site is both next to the slopes of Mount Olympus and a stop on the coastal route. The plains of Pieria were suitable for pasture in winter, whereas in summer flocks would ascend to the mountains¹⁸. However, it is worth pointing out that the fertile lands of Pieria, including the surroundings of Dion, could be employed for agriculture, too.

⁹ KARADEDOS 2012, 64–65 and 71. For the Olympia, see GIUMAN 1999. Cf. D.S. 17.16.3; Arr. *An.* 1.11.1; D. 19.192 Schol.

¹⁰ D.S. 18.4.5; Livy, *Epit.* 44.6.15; Plb. 4.62.2 (not explicitly mentioned, but its identification can be inferred from the context).

¹¹ D.S. 17.16.3; D. 19.192 Schol.

¹² VOUTIRAS (2006, 335) suggests the existence of an ancient festival in honour of Zeus, known as Dia.

¹³ PANDERMALIS 1996 [1997], 205, where the Greek archaeologist discerns traces of reforms, surely due to the restoration works required after the Aetolian attack led by Skopas in 219 BCE.

¹⁴ As happened in Dodona, where the first permanent structure –the temple of Zeus– dates to the end of the fifth or beginning of the fourth century BCE: CHAPINAL-HERAS 2021, 42–44.

¹⁵ The cult of Orpheus seems to have been important in the region, based on the accounts that located the death –and subsequent tomb– of this hero in the slopes of Mount Olympus and near Dion (Paus. 9.30.7–8; also Plu. *Alex.* 14.5, mentioning a cult statue of Orpheus in Leibethra, a neighboring settlement; and Str. 7 Fr. 18, referring to Orpheus of Kikona, a diviner). However, none of the materials found in the various shrines of Dion show any connection to this hero.

¹⁶ HATZOPOULOS–MARI 2004, 505.

¹⁷ Arr. *An.* 7.9.2. The origin of the Temenid dynasty is precisely linked to this activity, with the three shepherd brothers (Hdt. 8.137), and even the names of the two capitals of the kingdom are related to this: Aegae to goats (KOTTARIDI 2011, 155) and Pella to oxen (GREENWALT 1999, 169–172).

¹⁸ HATZOPOULOS 2011a, 47.

In fact, cattle breeding had always a greater presence in Upper Macedonia than in Lower Macedonia. The Pierian plain, with large tracts of land in good condition for cultivation, undoubtedly served both agriculture and seasonal shepherding. The early date of the shrine of Demeter may indicate the importance of the former at the site during this period. The functions of this goddess certainly went beyond protection of grain, but agriculture was clearly her special province¹⁹. The association of Demeter with shepherding at Dion is therefore possible, but we should rather see this new shrine as evidence of a certain effort to promote agriculture.

Literature does not cast light on this topic, since we need to wait to the fifth century to see Dion mentioned. But here it gives us valuable information. The oldest preserved account of Dion belongs to Thucydides, when the historian refers to the general Brasidas and his army in Macedon. During the Peloponnesian War, the Lacedaemonians established an alliance with Perdiccas II and sent troops to grab control of Amphipolis from the Athenians. The campaign started in 424 and ended in 421 with the Peace of Nicias. The conflict altered the political position of Northern Greece in the war²⁰.

According to Thucydides, when the Spartan army crossed the territory of Macedon to reach its destination, the Perrhaebians led Brasidas “...ἐς Δῖον τῆς Περδίκκου ἀρχῆς, ὃ ὑπὸ τῷ Ὀλύμπῳ Μακεδονίας πρὸς Θεσσαλοῦς πόλισμα κεῖται”²¹. The meaning and connotations of the term *polisma* is relevant in this paper, for it might specifically point to the urban role of the site. Hatzopoulos interprets the description of Dion as *polisma* as evidence that the site was a *sacrarium*, an open space with a cluster of sanctuaries²². However, the aim of Hatzopoulos is to clarify why Thucydides refers to Dion with a term applied to a town or to buildings of an urban centre, while the place later was mostly known for its religious character. Perhaps the meaning of the Athenian writer was not ambiguous, but referred to what the site actually was in that period, that is, a settlement that included –as a secondary feature– one or more extra-urban shrines.

This assumption would coincide with all the occurrences of the term *polisma* in literature. In a study of the Copenhagen Polis Centre, Flensted-Jensen enumerates and analyses the 42 references employed in sources of the Classical period, 16 of them in Thucydides²³. There is no specific definition that applies to all these cases, but the study confirmed that the word is employed as a sort of synonym of “city, town”, although in its physical sense rather than as a political community. Likewise, is it mostly –although not always– employed for towns in border areas of the Greek world. There is no mention of *polisma* as a cluster of sanctuaries whatsoever. The fact that the fourth-century *Periplus* of Pseudo-Scylax mentions Dion as a polis is another argument in favour of this reasoning²⁴.

The material evidence that could support this hypothesis is, however, scarce; though not non-existent. As explained above, the strata of later phases of Dion, periods of major development, make the excavation of the potential early-Classical urban centre more difficult. Besides, it would be surprising that a site with two shrines did not have a proper settlement functioning as the *asty*. In fact, sanctuaries devoted to Demeter were

¹⁹ COLE 1994, 201.

²⁰ ZÄHRNT 2006, 593.

²¹ Thuc. 4.78.6. More concise is Diodorus Siculus, who just states that Brasidas crossed Thessaly, arrived at Dion and then continued to Acanthos (D.S. 12.67.1-2).

²² HATZOPOULOS 2013, 164.

²³ FLENSTED-JENSEN 1995, 129-131; HANSEN 2003, 273-274.

²⁴ Scyl. *Per.* 66.

usually founded within a city, just outside, or at the borders of the *chora*²⁵. In Dion we can see the second of these possibilities.

Whether we are to believe that Thucydides used *polisma* due to Dion's urban features will have to wait for confirmation. However, I am inclined to think that Dion did have an *asty* when the Argead monarchy consolidated its control over the territory of southern Pieria. One of the reasons for this opinion is that Dion eventually had at up to five different cult places, to Zeus Olympius, Demeter, Artemis Eileithyia –later to Isis Lochia–, Asklepius and Zeus Hypsistus²⁶, but their foundations took place in different moments of the history of the site. We have already discussed those of Zeus Olympius and Demeter; the shrine of Artemis probably dates to the end of the Classical period²⁷, the one of Asklepios to the end of the 4th or beginning of the third century BCE²⁸ and, finally, we need to wait to the imperial period to see the creation of the shrine of Zeus Hypsistus²⁹. At the time of Thucydides, therefore, Dion had just two sanctuaries –assuming that one of them devoted to Zeus Olympius already existed in this epoch. Considering this, the use of the term *polisma* to identify the place as a grouping area of shrines as its main feature does not match well.

From the passage of Thucydides, it remains clear that Dion was a relevant enclave in the territory controlled by the kingdom –“ἐξ Διὸν τῆς Περδίκκου ἀρχῆς”– already in the second half of the fifth century BCE. Archaeologists have shown that its growth, consisting of an orthogonal urban planification with walls that delimited the perimeter of the *asty*³⁰, took place later, in the last decades of the fourth century BCE, probably under Cassander³¹. Despite the scarcity of materials from its earliest phase found in the urban centre, this paper assumes that Dion, as both an urban and religious centre, was, despite its limited dimensions, one of the most important sites in southern Pieria when Thucydides wrote his work, and thus it could have played a noteworthy role for the control of this territory. With this in mind we turn to our next question: when did the Argead territorial expansion over southern Pieria take place?

3. The control of Pieria

Pieria, as discussed, was core to the Macedonian kingdom. However, Pieria is a large and varied area with many geographical elements, as we can see in Map 1. The Pierian Mountains separate it from the hinterland on its west and northwest sides, while as we approach the coast the Haliacmon River forms the natural frontier with the northern region of Bottia. To the south, Mount Olympus acted as a formidable wall that only allowed fluid communication with Thessaly by means of the coastal corridor through

²⁵ COLE 1994, 215.

²⁶ There might have existed also one more, dedicated to the cult of Dionysos that was thought to be situated to the southwest of the urban centre, but the most recent publications on Dion seem to have discarded this option, so its location –if indeed there was a specific shrine– is still unknown. On this topic and the evidence of this cult, mainly epigraphical, see NIGDELIS (2016, 675-679). Likewise, under the Roman Empire an Augusteum was established in the forum, therefore within the *asty* (PINGIATOGLU 2006 [2008], 581-582).

²⁷ PANDERMALIS 1997, 28. Isis Lochia became the main divinity here surely under Philip V (GIUMAN 1999, 438).

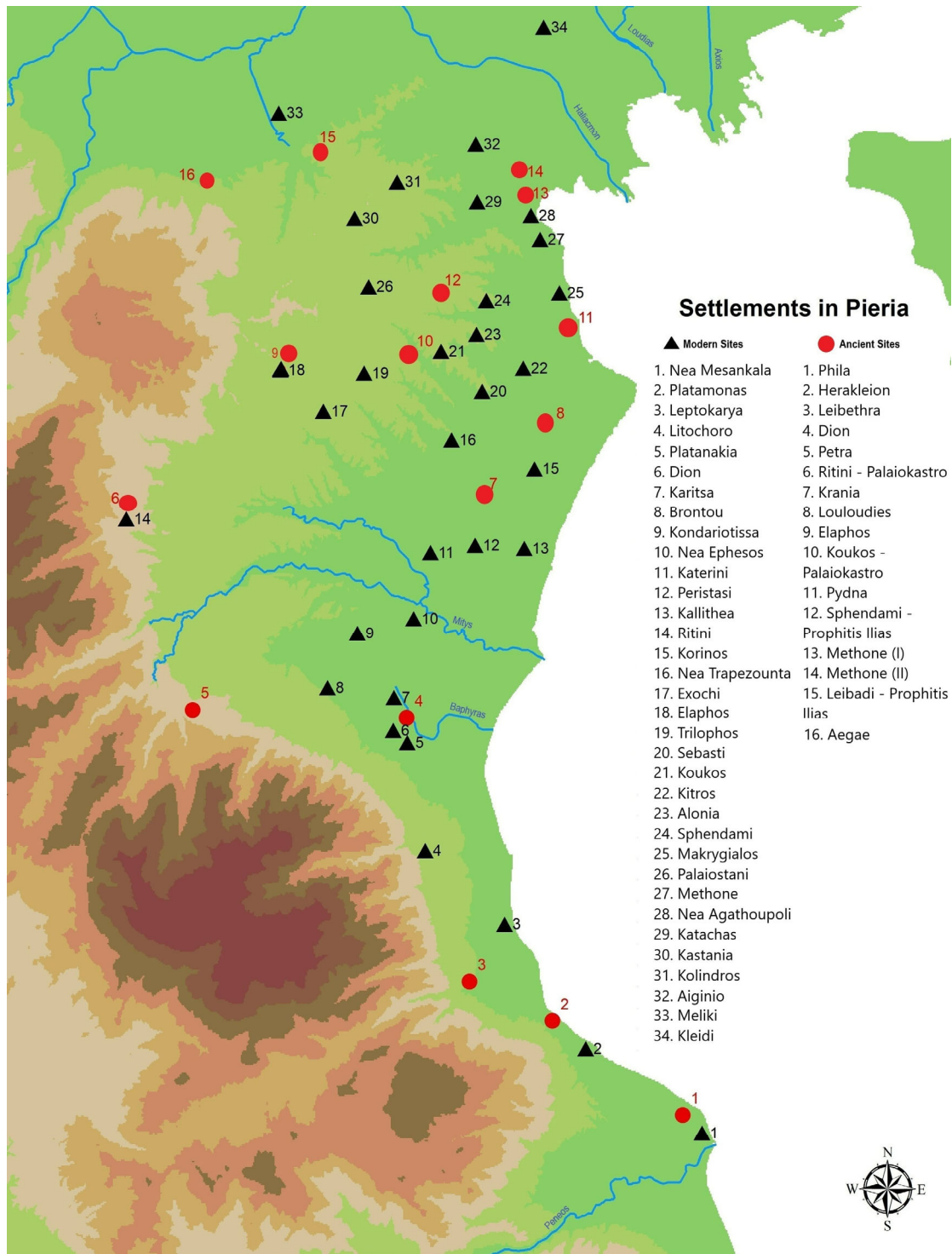
²⁸ PINGIATOGLU 2006 [2008], 578.

²⁹ KREMYDI-SICILIANOU 2016, 46.

³⁰ A second and major growth would take place in Imperial times, once Dion became the *Colonia Iulia Augusta Diensis*.

³¹ HATZOPOULOS-MARI 2004, 507. A second period of splendour took place in the imperial period, mainly under the Severan dynasty.

the Vale of Tempe, where the Peneus River flows. This definition of the borders of Pieria is based in both geographical and historical aspects, although we must bear in mind that political borders were always subject to change and interpretation, depending on a variety of factors.



Map 1. Settlements in Pieria.

The location of Aegae, right to the north of the Pierian Mountains and thus on the fringes of Bottia and its southern neighbour, makes it clear that, once established, the Temenids/Argeads ruled over a territory that included at least the northern part of

Pieria. Aloros, just south of the Haliacmon River, is considered by Strabo as a Bottian centre³². On the coast, the two main sites of Pieria were Methone and Pydna, the former an Eretrian colony³³, the latter a sort of Greek city within the Macedonian sphere with some degree of autonomy in some periods³⁴. Both places were located in the north. Aside from this, the coastal plain of Pieria emerges as a vast and fertile territory where apparently very few settlements took advantage of the resources available here³⁵.

Archaeologists have documented settlements that cast some light on a territory that, apart from the sites of Methone and Pydna on the coast, Aegae in the hinterland and Dion in the south, was scarcely known. Often it is difficult to discern the span of active habitation in these places, but, relevant to this paper, data confirms a few settlement types: some began their existence during the Bronze Age and also present evidence of activity in later epochs (Louloudies); some were founded in the Early Iron Age and in later periods were abandoned or remained as lively centres (Prophitis Ilias at Sphendami, Palaiokastros at Koukos, Prophitis Ilias at Leibadi, Palaiokastros at Ritini and Elaphos); yet others were founded in Archaic times or shortly later (mainly the colony of Methone on an already existing site and, surely in the Classical period, Krania)³⁶.

Dion was one of the most relevant centres of southern Pieria. In this area, there were a few settlements, also with different chronologies. Leibethra, one of the oldest sites, has remains from at least 800 BCE³⁷. On the opposite side is Phila, close to the Peneos River, founded by Demetrius II³⁸. Regarding Herakleion, between both centres, sources tell us that it was a member of the Delian League; its fortifications, although mentioned in a passage about the Third Macedonian War, are likely to date from the fifth century³⁹. It is still unknown when this settlement was established. Something similar happens with Petra, on the northern slope of Mount Olympus, whose earliest mention in literature is an episode of Philip V. In this fragment, the king criticizes the Thessalians and Perrhaebians for conquering Petra, until then a Macedonian centre⁴⁰. The place was strategically paramount since the main mountain route that connected Pieria with Perrhaebia started from its area⁴¹.

A complete list and description of all the sites would be excessive and is not the purpose of this study. It is enough to confirm that in both coastal and hinterland areas of Pieria there has been activity since Prehistoric times and there seems to have been a shift of population in the transition from the Dark to the Archaic Age, in a process that coincided with the formation of the Macedonian kingdom. Northern Pieria is better studied than the southern section, where Dion has been the focus of most of the archaeological works, due to the nature of the site and the magnitude of its remains. On the other hand, the presence of the colony of Methone, as well as the commercial

³² Str. 7 Fr. 20 and 22.

³³ TZIFOPOULOS 2012, 20.

³⁴ Scyl. *Per.* 66. On this topic, HAMMOND 1979, 149; GIRTZY 2001, 95. With a different point of view, HATZOPOULOS 2011b, 237, considers that Pydna “had always been Macedonian”.

³⁵ No systematic approach to the entire Pierian territory has been applied yet, which entails the need to compile information from works about specific relevant sites or areas, as well as from archaeological reports that, in some cases, inform about eventual findings in emergency excavations. Despite the existence of publications that analyse Macedon as a whole, a more comprehensive and updated study of the region of Pieria, its development and dynamics, still lacks.

³⁶ BESIOS 2010, 17-20, 78-79 and 94-95.

³⁷ POULAKI-PANDERMALI 2007 [2010], 161.

³⁸ Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Φίλα.

³⁹ HANSEN-NIELSEN 2004, 802 (fortifications in Plb. 28.11.1).

⁴⁰ Liv. *Epit.* 39.26.1.

⁴¹ As it can be inferred in Thuc. 4.78.6.

importance of Pydna, are two signs of the larger development of the north relative to the south, where up to this day only a few settlements have been identified and where urban development was probably less complex.

It is time now to go back to the establishment of control over Pieria by the Macedonian kingdom. The excerpt of Thucydides cited at the beginning of this study delineates the Argead borders during the Peloponnesian War⁴². We can trace the development of the Pierian frontier a few more decades back, primarily to the reigns of Amyntas I and Alexander I. There are two passages that make it reasonable to confirm that the latter controlled the southern area of Pieria. First, if we are to believe Justin, Xerxes favoured Alexander I to rule from Mount Olympus in the south to Mount Haemus in the northwest⁴³. This statement could be further supported by Herodotus, who explains that when the Persian army advanced through northern Hellas the Greek alliance decided initially to establish its camp in the Vale of Tempe. This was a strategic location, “which runs from the Lower Macedonia into Thessaly along the Peneus River, between the mountains Olympus and Ossa”⁴⁴. At this point of the conflict, the Thessalians had decided to join the allies, whereas the Macedonians still fought with the Persians. Eventually, the Hellenes decided to draw back to Thermopylae, supposedly following the advice of Alexander I⁴⁵. Regardless of the historicity or real motivation of the intervention of the Macedonian monarch⁴⁶, in this account Mount Olympus again appears as the border between Thessaly and its northern neighbour. A geographical reference that, aside from its importance in the development of the war, might point to the separation between the state that still supported Xerxes, Macedon, and the region that had changed sides, Thessaly. Justin’s passage does not imply, on the other hand, that before Alexander I the Argeads did not control the territory that reached the Olympus. The Roman writer highlights the dominance of a large area, from there to Mount Haemus, reinforced by the Persian support. For this reason, we should carefully consider this account in terms of the *terminus ante quem*. We can therefore confirm that since at least Alexander I the kingdom ruled over the entire region of Pieria—except the territories of Methone and Pydna⁴⁷.

4. Dion and the Argead expansion over southern Pieria

A few decades ago, Borza discussed two major goals for the Argead expansion up to *ca.* 500 BCE: the acquisition of fertile lands and the security of its borders⁴⁸. The annexation of southern Pieria seems to achieve both these goals. First, it meant the

⁴² Thuc. 2.99.

⁴³ Just. *Epit.* 7.4.1. As HAMMOND (1989, 43) clarified, this implies that Alexander I would have gained control of Upper Macedonia, too.

⁴⁴ Hdt. 7.173.1 (transl. GODLEY).

⁴⁵ Hdt. 7.173.3-4.

⁴⁶ For this topic and, in general, the image of Alexander I in Herodotus’ work, see BADIAN 1991.

⁴⁷ More problematic is the account of Hes. Fr. 7, which places the mythical figures of Magnes and Macedon in the surroundings of Pieria and the Olympus. The mention of the famous mount as part of Macedon by an author that lived around the seventh century might point to the inclusion of southern Pieria in the Macedonian kingdom. However, the theme and context of the fragment plays down its historical accuracy and, therefore, it is not considered here as evidence of the Argead control of the area that reached the Olympus in such an early stage of this state.

⁴⁸ BORZA 1990, 89. We should also add the need to control the coast, a difficult task since the kingdom did not usually have a strong control over Pydna, whereas Methone was autonomous until Philip II destroyed it.

incorporation of highly productive land. Second, the kingdom gained the use of the region's natural defences, with the mountain range acting as the border as far as the Peneus River.

The area of Dion, a coastal plain crossed by the Baphyras River, could plausibly have improved the Macedonian economy. As stated above, the territory was already important for shepherding, as the common opinion about the origin of the religious site of Dion suggests⁴⁹: an activity somewhat connected to Mount Olympus, the residence of Zeus, after whom the settlement was named. Likewise, the foundation at the end of Late Archaic or Early Classical times of the sanctuary of Demeter tells us about the relevance of agriculture, an activity that we logically expect to see in the fertile fields of this area. Could we see a cause-effect relationship here if we consider the historical context of the Argead kingdom?

If we follow Justin, Alexander I assured his control of southern Pieria by means of his alliance with the Persian Empire⁵⁰. It is difficult to discern whether this area had been previously in Argeads' hands, or if the conquest took place at this moment. Literature does not provide more precise information. However, archaeological data might help us to reconstruct the political development of the territory. Dion, in this sense, could be the key.

At time of writing, the oldest materials found in Dion are the two megaron-shaped temples devoted to Demeter and –likely– Persephone/Core. We can surmise that the cult of Zeus Olympius started before, perhaps connected to cattle work, and that there was a settlement here prior to the foundation of the shrine of Demeter. I suggest tying this new sanctuary together with the effective dominance of Alexander I over southern Pieria. It is possible that before this time the Argeads already had some influence on the area, but it was not until the Persian Wars that they gained full control. Once they did, the foundation of a shrine fits the classic manoeuvre of showing an important change, in this case greater political and territorial control. At the same time, the choice of the cult of Demeter could be motivated by an attempt to promote agriculture in the area, although there could be other preferences, either in terms of Argeads policy or in terms of the local community. Be that as it may, the fact is that Dion incorporated a new cult space consecrated to the goddess of land fertility and harvest.

Reconstructing the first stages of a state usually presents difficulties. Myths and history are intermingled, and literature may lack accuracy, due to the large timespan separating the time of writing and the period of interest. Combining with archaeology, however, makes it possible to fill some of the lacunae and obtain a more complete overview of the issue. The aim of this analysis has been to cast some light on the process of expansion of the Argead realm in the territory of Pieria and, in this context, to point out the role played by the sacred city of Dion.

Strong control of Pieria, including the southern sector, is likely not to have been possible until the end of the Archaic period⁵¹. My main argument for this is the reference of Justin regarding the dominance of the territories between Mounts Olympus and Haemus under Alexander I thanks to the support of the Persian Empire⁵². Although the focus of the passage is the expansion of the kingdom to the north and northwest, the fact that the Thessalians were also temporarily under the zone of influence of the

⁴⁹ HATZOPOULOS–MARI 2004, 505.

⁵⁰ BADIAN 1991, 108–110; MORGAN 2016, 259–260.

⁵¹ We must not forget that full control did not happen until the territories of both Pydna and Methone were conquered, with Philip II.

⁵² Just. *Epit.* 7.4.1.

Persians makes it reasonable that Alexander I of Macedon took advantage of his good relationship with the Empire and established a more solid dominance in southern Pieria. I suggest that the incorporation at Dion of a new shrine in this moment was a consequence of this expansion, a foundation that emphasised greater control over the territory. Cult places are founded for multiple reasons and factors; they do not arise spontaneously. Alexander I gained influence over southern Pieria, which probably until then had been within the orbit of the Argeads. A mechanism to strengthen this control would have been the installation of a new cult in Dion: a sanctuary consecrated to Demeter, which enhanced the kingdom's goal of acquiring more fertile lands. Currently, we cannot be sure whether the connotation of the site as *polisma* by Thucydides⁵³ refers to its urban nature or, as argued by Hatzopoulos, it was a *sacrarium*, a grouping area of sanctuaries⁵⁴. Nevertheless, at the time of the Peloponnesian War Dion surely had only two shrines, to Zeus Olympius –despite its oldest remains date to the Hellenistic Age, we can surmise that Dion had a specific space for the cult of this god from the beginning– and Demeter. Therefore, the use of *polisma* to denote a cult site with different sanctuaries, instead of an urban settlement which included sacred spaces, seems unlikely.

The distribution of settlements in Pieria identified to this date, Map 1, shows the strategic location of Dion in its southern sector. We can safely assume that more settlements will be found in the future. However, the very fact that Dion became the sacred city of the Macedonian kingdom, hosting the Olympia since at least the end of the fifth century, is a good argument for the idea of this place as a landmark in the routes that crossed Pieria. This process also ensured the effective control of the territory once the Argeads consolidated their influence here. To the south of Dion, the coastal corridor connects with Thessaly through the Vale of Tempe. In order to guarantee their dominion over the lands as far as the mouth of Peneos River a number of settlements were essential; Dion could meet this goal.

Admittedly, the site did not experience major urban development until the beginning of the Hellenistic Age. However, before then it had already become the sacred city of the Macedonians, and therefore provided a common place of focus in the southern fringes of the kingdom. This pan-Macedonian connotation of Dion would have contributed to structure and give coherence and cohesion to the territory. We can see Dodona in Epirus as a parallel case. This sanctuary also played a very important role as a binding mechanism for the different communities that made up the vast Epirote territory⁵⁵. On the other hand, it is difficult to know when Dion emerged as a pan-Macedonian religious centre. It is perhaps risky to go back to the very origins of the settlement. For example, we do not find elements that had a dimension beyond the local until relatively late in the classical period, such as the foundation of the festival of Olympia, probably under Archelaus I (413-399 BCE)⁵⁶. I therefore consider it more likely that this pan-Macedonian character was incorporated at a later stage than the period on which this study has focused.

⁵³ Thuc. 4.78.6.

⁵⁴ HATZOPOULOS 2013, 164.

⁵⁵ HATZOPOULOS–MARI 2004; CHAPINAL-HERAS 2021, 220-235. Epirus, fragmented in different communities, did not have a common space or tradition. In this sense, Dodona was central to the purpose of unifying Epirus, to a greater degree than Dion with respect to Macedonia, where there were already other places and elements that served this purpose.

⁵⁶ Certainly, Dion never had a panhellenic projection. For this reason, it is more useful to compare it with other regional sanctuaries, such as Dodona for Epirus, as we have just seen, and Thermo for Aetolia.

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