The Identity of the Occupant of the Amphipolis Tomb Beneath the Kasta Mound

By Andrew Michael Chugg

Introduction

The ancient monument known as the Kasta Mound lying just outside the ancient Macedonian city of Amphipolis has been subject to continual excavation since the 1960s, but in August of 2014, the site came to extraordinary prominence when its archaeologists announced the discovery of chambers beneath the mound, which have become known as the Amphipolis Tomb. This monument is of interest to the study of ancient history, because it is the largest and most magnificently decorated tomb ever discovered in Greece and because it appears to date to the immediate aftermath of the reign of Alexander the Great. However, a particular reason for readers of this journal to concern themselves with this matter is the question of the identity of the person for whom this complex was constructed, because the solution that has been proposed by the archaeologists is quite at odds with our understanding of the history of events after Alexander's death as portrayed by the written sources and all other evidence to date.[1]

The Archaeological Context

The Kasta Mound sits on a ridge overlooking the River Strymon about 2km NE of the walls of the ancient Macedonian city of Amphipolis (Figure 1). The earliest scientific excavations in 1964–1965 revealed the existence of a circular *peribolos* or enclosure wall in the skirts of the mound with a diameter of 158m and a height of 3m.[2] The facing stones of the wall

[1] Of course, other solutions to the identity of the occupant have been proposed, but in general they have no specific evidence to support them or they seek to contradict explicit historical evidence: one example would be Peter Delev, Who was buried in the Kasta tomb near Amphipolis? An argument for Cynane, the daughter of Philip II, Jubilaeus VII, Sofia 2018, pp. 163–170, however Cynane is stated to have been buried at Aegae by Cassander by Athenaeus 4.155a and also by Diodorus 19.52.5.

[2] Demetrios Lazaridis, Amphipolis, Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens 1997,

comprise a total of over 2500 large blocks of marble quarried on the Aegean island of Thassos and finished to a high quality and precision by master masons. The interior backing masonry comprises many more rough-hewn blocks of lower quality limestone. In addition, the foundations of a building measuring just over 10m square were uncovered at the apex of the mound in 1973.[3]

In August of 2014, archaeologists announced the discovery of an entranceway set into the peribolos facing approximately 26-degrees to the west of due south and therefore looking directly towards the acropolis of Hellenistic Amphipolis (Figure 2). They uncovered steps leading down to a sealing wall of rough limestone blocks stacked without mortar. Upon removing the wall, they unveiled a portal guarded by a pair of two-metre-tall sphinxes sculpted from blocks of Thassian marble in the best early Hellenistic style and sat either side of a lintel spanning the portal. The sphinxes had been deliberately mutilated through decapitation, smashing of their wings and precise hacking off of each breast. The threshold of the portal was decorated with mosaics in both a diamond and a rectangular pattern executed in black and white pebbles. There were Ionic pilasters either side of the portal with capitals painted with classical egg & dart decorations (an Ionic cymation) in surviving blue and red pigments.

The archaeologists cleared three chambers in succession (Figure 3), each about 4.5m wide, running into the mound beneath a shared semi-circular arched stone roof. The chambers had been sedulously filled to approximately the base of the arch by sand and grit hauled up from the bed of the River Strymon in antiquity.

The first chamber was about 6m long and had a floor fabricated from irregular fragments of white marble set into a red cement. This has an almost exact match in a section of the flooring of the late 4th century BC Macedonian royal palace at Aegae (modern Vergina). There was a horizontal strip of imperfectly preserved painted decoration, probably fronds and flowers, surmounted by the continuation of the egg & dart motif around the upper section of its walls. A second sealing wall of dry stone blocks of the same type as the first had next to be removed from the side facing into the mound.

Immediately behind the second sealing wall, a pair of greater than life-size caryatids (female statues serving as pillars) were stood on plinths either side of a continuation of the central passageway.[4] They supported another lintel which was decorated with a horizontal line of sculpted eight-petalled flowers and surmounted by sculpted imitations of the tiles found at the edge of the roof of a Macedonian high-status building. Similar roof-rim sculptures had also been used to top out the peribolos wall, and in general, the style of masonry inside the

p. 61; Georges Daux, Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques en Grèce en 1965, Bulletin de correspondance hellénique, Volume 90, livraison 2, 1966 pp. 879–881.

[3] Demetrios Lazaridis, Amphipolis, Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens 1997, p. 64.

[4] The discovery of the caryatids was announced in a Press Release of the Greek Ministry of Culture on Τύμβο Καστά, Αμφίπολης on 7th September 2014.

tomb chambers was an excellent match for that used to face the peribolos wall. The dress of the caryatids and their box-like headgear may be recognised as characteristic of priestesses of Dionysos, who were known as Klodones or Mimallones in ancient Macedon. They each had their inner-side arm raised over the passageway to the second chamber. They were probably jointly holding an object (a wreath or a serpent?) above the entranceway, but we cannot be certain of its identity or even its existence, because most of the length of the raised arm of each of the caryatids is missing.

The second chamber was dominated by a magnificent polychrome pebble mosaic covering its entire floor area (approximately 3m x 4.5m). It is perhaps the finest pebble mosaic to survive from antiquity. It clearly depicts the abduction of Persephone into the Underworld by Hades. The bearded lord of the dead clings to the distressed daughter of Demeter in a small chariot drawn by a pair of panicking white horses led by Hermes wearing his *petasos* hat and his winged sandals and gripping his caduceus. Of course, the Persephone figure symbolises the occupant of the tomb, and it would be natural for a visitor to suppose that she is a portrait of the otherwise unnamed occupant, perhaps a woman snatched cruelly and unexpectedly from life in the same fashion as Persephone.[5]

The second chamber also featured a badly decayed strip of painted decoration around the top of its walls depicting scenes from life. The central scene above the entrance to the third chamber appears to depict a man and a woman dancing either side of a garlanded bull and off to their right an amphora-sized jar and then a Nike (winged goddess of victory) beside a brazier of fire sitting on a tall tripod. This Nike possibly stands in the prow of a galley blowing a trumpet. These scenes are reminiscent of the nocturnal rites at the Mysteries that took place on the Aegean island of Samothrace at the sanctuary where the famous sculpture of the Nike of Samothrace standing on a ship's prow was discovered in fragments in March 1863. The dancing man and woman even appear to be wearing the crimson-purple belts reported to have designated initiates into these Mysteries according to Varro. Demetrius Poliorcetes as king of Macedon in the very early 3rd century BC employed the device of a Nike blowing a trumpet in a ship's prow on some of his silver tetradrachms, so there is a contemporaneous association of this Samothracian motif with Macedonian royalty.

A flat ceiling had originally been installed in the second chamber using large slabs of stone across its narrow length, but only one slab was in situ when excavated. The underside of this ceiling slab was divided into square panels, each painted with a stylised flower.

[5] The discovery of the mosaic was announced in a Press Release of the Greek Ministry of Culture on Τύμβο Καστά, Αμφίπολης on 12th October 2014, but only the central portion had at that point been excavated. I pointed out that what had been considered to be the second arm of the charioteer was actually the arm of a yet to be uncovered woman wearing a bracelet and that the mosaic would therefore be found to depict an Abduction of Persephone in an article in the Greek Reporter on 15th October 2014. A Press Release on 16th October 2014 by the Ministry of Culture duly confirmed my prediction.

The entrance to the third chamber had originally been closed off with a pair of magnificent white marble doors, imitative of temple doors in ancient Macedon. Such doors are a standard feature of the entrances to the burial chambers of high-status Macedonian tombs from the late Classical to the mid-Hellenistic period.[6] However, these doors were found in pieces inside the third chamber having been smashed to bits by the infliction of some immense blow, such as from a battering ram. The excavation photos, published by the Greek Ministry of Culture on 21st October 2014, show some fragments suspended in the sand of the fill and others suspended in the fill of the grave slot, as though the doors had been destroyed actually during the process of backfilling the chambers with sand.[7] Certainly, the pattern of the distribution of the fragments implies that they were excavated just where they fell when the doors broke asunder.

The third chamber was found to be about 6m long, and the missing head of one of the sphinxes and fragments of its wings were found in its fill, apparently placed there by the sealers. The floor had originally been covered with blocks of limestone, but many were missing across the central area of the floor. They had evidently been removed prior to the sealing in order to expose and desecrate the grave lying beneath the floor of this chamber. This grave was in the form of a cist tomb with rough-cut blocks of limestone forming a subterranean chamber about 4m long and 1.2m wide and 1m deep. The upper slabs of the cist chamber lay about 1m beneath the floor of the third chamber, but most of these slabs had been removed by the desecrators in order to access the interior of the cist. It was immediately apparent from the initial photos released by the Ministry of Culture[8] that the build standard of this cist tomb was much below the exalted quality of the overlying chambers. This observation engendered speculation that the cist tomb might not have been constructed at precisely the same time as the overlying monument.

A grave slot measuring about 3m long and about half a metre wide and 0.4m deep was uncovered in the base of the cist tomb. A 0.6m section at its southern (chamber-entrance) end was divided from the remaining 2m section by a large slab of stone. That the longer section was a grave for an uncremated coffin burial was supported by its dimensions together with the discovery in the fill of fragments of egg & dart banding and beading carved in bone and pale-blue glass discs, which are consistent with the embellishments that might be expected on a wooden coffin of the early Hellenistic era.

The grave had been completely dug out by the ancient desecrators, who had begun by robbing any valuable grave goods. It seems that the desecrators themselves had backfilled the

[6] Manolis Andronicos, Vergina: The Royal Tombs, Ekdotike Athenon, Athens 1984, p. 33 (Rhomaios tomb), p. 34 (main tomb in Bella Tumulus), pp. 76 & 101 (Tomb II in the Great Tumulus), p. 199 (Tomb III in the Great Tumulus); see also the tomb of Lyson & Kallikles at Lefkadia.

[7] Press Release of the Greek Ministry of Culture on Τύμβο Καστά, Αμφίπολης, on 21st October 2014.

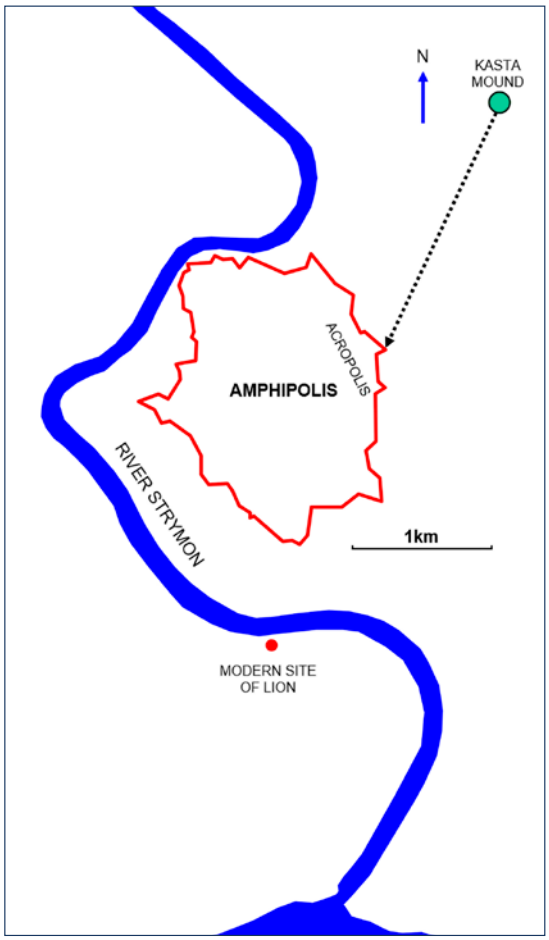
[8] Press Release of the Greek Ministry of Culture on Τύμβο Καστά, Αμφίπολης, on 12th November 2014.

grave with more than five hundred bones and bone fragments mixed with the soil excavated from the metre-thick layer lying between the floor of chamber three and the top of the cist tomb. As already noted, the suspension of marble door fragments in the sand fill implies that it was also the desecrators who sand-filled and wall-sealed the entire tomb.

The results of an initial study of the bones were released by the Greek Ministry of Culture on 19th January 2015. There were three main uncremated human skeletons present: those of two men aged approximately 35 and 45 respectively, and that of an elderly woman aged sixty years or more. Only the woman's skeleton had a skull, and the Ministry particularly noted that her bones had been concentrated in the bottom 1.1 metres of the backfill, whereas most of the other bones had been found in a range between 1.1 metres and 2.6 metres from the bottom of the cist grave. Overall the scattered bones were distributed from approximately the floor level of the third chamber all the way down to the bottom of the grave slot. There were unhealed cuts to some of the younger man's bones, indicating that he had died violently. In addition, there were a few arm bones and skull fragments from a young infant and nine small fragments of cremated bone, presumed to be human, as well as some animal bones, including some from one or more horses.

Finally, it should be noted that another slab of the sculpture is reported to have been found in the third chamber: it depicts a serpent coiled around the trunk of a tree. The archaeologists have also reported that they found a couple of low-quality pots only roughly datable to the late classical or early Hellenistic period during the excavations of the chambers and three bronze coins, one assigned to the reign of Alexander and two more from the early second century BC. But it does not appear to have been specified exactly where these coins were found and in particular, whether they were inside or outside the first sealing wall and whether they lay on top of the sand/soil or within it or on the ground or flooring beneath the fill?

A large proportion of the stones from the peribolos wall of the Kasta Mound were dismantled, removed and used in later constructions in and around Amphipolis by the Romans long after the sealing of the tomb chambers. Most significantly these stones were used to construct a dam or ford across the River Strymon just south of ancient Amphipolis. In 1916 officers of the British Army on deployment in the region recognised fragments of a colossal ancient lion sculpture among these ancient blocks and attempted unsuccessfully to remove them to Britain. The 5.37m tall seated lion was reconstructed in the 1930s and set up on a plinth made from peribolos facing stones next to the road near the modern bridge across the Strymon (Figure 1). Since also the archaeologists have reported finding a lost fragment of the lion in the Kasta Mound excavations and considering that the building foundations found atop the Kasta Mound appear to have features that are consistent with them being the remains of a base for the lion sculpture, it would seem relatively clear that the famous lion of Amphipolis was originally erected upon the peak of the Kasta Mound and is a part of that monument. Independently of any knowledge of its connection with



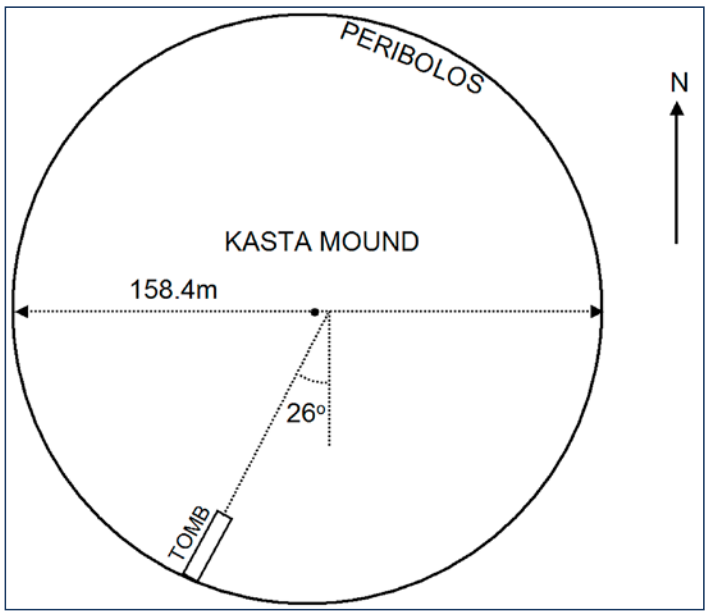


Figure 1: The geographical context

Figure 2: (Left) Plan of the Kasta Mound monument showing the location and orientation of the tomb

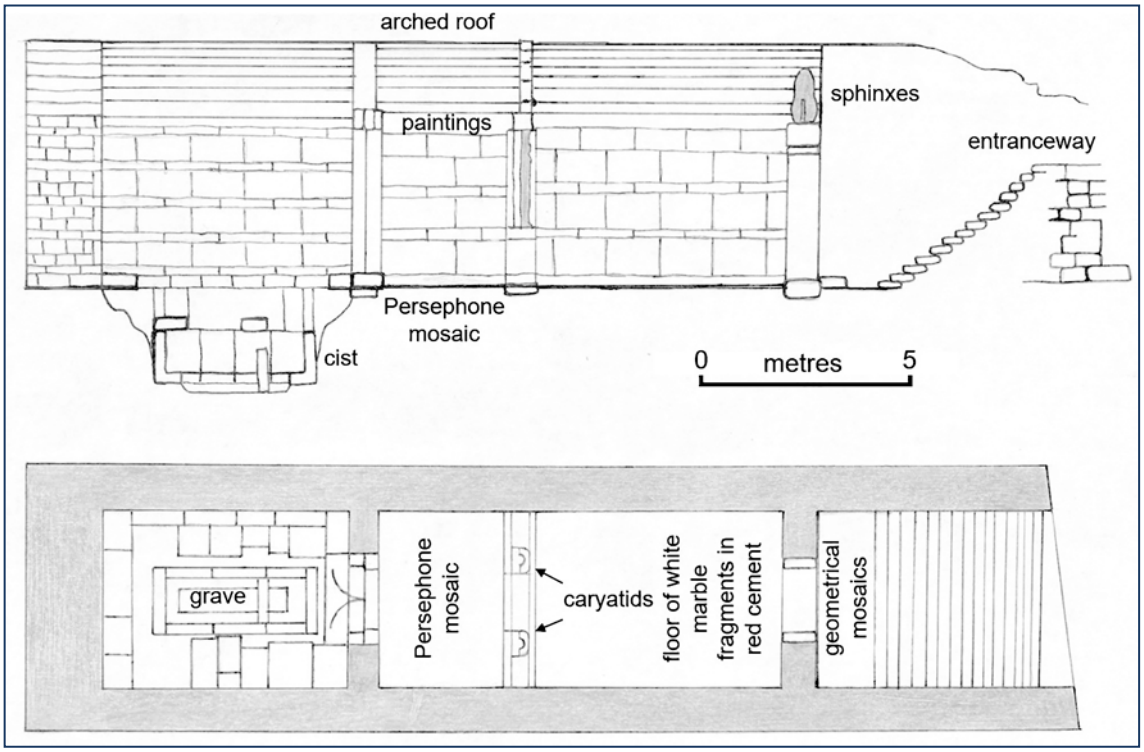


Figure 3: Plan and section through the Amphipolis Tomb chambers

the mound, Oscar Broneer, one of its reconstructors, dated the lion to the last quarter of the 4th century BC in 1941.[9]

A Proof that the Mound is not a Monument for Hephaistion

At the end of September 2015, the archaeological team for the excavation of the Amphipolis Tomb in the Kasta Mound announced their conclusion that the monument had been built for Hephaistion, the Chiliarch of Alexander the Great.[10] Their reasoning was based on the evidence from two similar graffiti inscriptions on two loose blocks that had originally formed part of the peribolos of the Kasta Mound. Figures 4 and 5 depict these inscriptions as presented by the archaeologists. The word ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ had been scratched right across the long faces of both blocks, followed in each case by a letter bundle or monogram including a prominent eta and phi together with a number of smaller and less distinct characters. The archaeologists' sketches of these inscriptions and their locations relative to the margins of their respective blocks are shown in Figure 6. However, the archaeologists' photos and reconstructions omit a feature of the blocks that may in fact lead inexorably to the opposite conclusion: that the Kasta Mound cannot have been conceived and constructed for Hephaistion but must instead have been dedicated to some other prominent Macedonian, who was connected with the Royal Family and who perished in the decade or so after Alexander's death.

The archaeologists have explained that they and their epigraphic experts have been able to distinguish most of the letters of Hephaistion's name in the monograms as detailed in their reconstructions of the inscriptions in Figure 6. They have argued persuasively that ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ, meaning "received by" or "received for" was intended by ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ, despite the leading Π being missing in both cases. They, therefore, concluded that the inscriptions indicated that the monument had been "Received by Hephaistion". They augmented their case with a set of scratches found in the middle of a rosette painted on the surviving part of the flat ceiling in the middle chamber of the Amphipolis Tomb immediately above the large pebble mosaic of the Rape of Persephone. These scratches (Figure 7) bear some resemblance to the largest letters (eta and phi) in the monograms on the loose blocks. However,

[9] Oscar Broneer, The Lion Monument at Amphipolis, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1941, pp. 48–51.

[10] The initial public announcement of the archaeologists' Hephaistion Heroon theory of the Kasta Mound and the Amphipolis Tomb was given in an ad hoc series of presentations and a press conference at the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki on 30th September 2015. The archaeological team subsequently presented four more formal papers on their excavations between 12:15 and 13:15 on 4th March 2016 at the 29th conference on Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και στη Θράκη – these were: 12:15 Κ. Περιστέρη, Ανασκαφική έρευνα τύμβου Καστά Αμφίπολης 2014; 12:30 Κ. Περιστέρη, Μ. Λεφαντζής, Αρχιτεκτονικά και οικοδομικά χαρακτηριστικά στην εξέλιξη του μνημειακού συνόλου τύμβου Καστά Αμφίπολης; 12:45 Κ. Περιστέρη, Μ. Λεφαντζής, Α. Corso, Μελέτη διάσπαρτων μαρμάρινων αναγλύφων από την ευρύτερη περιοχή τύμβου Καστά Αμφίπολης; 13:00 Δ. Εγγλέζος, Το ταφικό συγκρότημα του λόφου-τύμβου Καστά από πλευράς πολιτικού μηχανικού.

it is evident that the supposed eta and phi are poorly formed to the extent that it is doubtful whether they would be recognised as eta-phi unless the viewer had some reason to wish to discover such a monogram. Secondly, there is an inexplicable additional C on the left side, which would not be expected to occur in a three-letter monogram for Hephaistion's name, should we suppose for example that it represents a lunate sigma. This means that there is a high probability that there is no connection between these scratches and the monograms in the APEΛABON inscriptions, in which the sigma candidates have the standard capitalised form. Given the huge surface area of sculpted stone used in the Amphipolis tomb (around 2000 square metres), it is likely that there are other incidental and meaningless scratches somewhere that would bear as much resemblance to an eta-phi monogram as those on the middle chamber ceiling block.

Nevertheless, the APEΛABON inscriptions on the loose blocks are substantive, and this inscription was virtually duplicated at least once. Furthermore, both blocks are from the peribolos of the Kasta Mound with high confidence, due to their size and form, their material and the context of their modern rediscovery amongst many other blocks demonstrably originating from the peribolos.

It is difficult for independent scholars to discern and verify the smaller letters in the monograms on the blocks with reference to the released photos. Access to the blocks themselves has not been possible, because they were locked away in 2014 (or perhaps even earlier), despite the fact that one of them at least sat on public view for decades in a collection of peribolos stones beside the highway next to the reconstructed lion. Nevertheless, it should be allowed that the archaeologists have had the opportunity to study the inscriptions most closely. It is therefore quite possible that they are correct in their interpretation of what the inscriptions say and that they are right that these inscriptions are original to the Kasta Mound wall. It might be objected that many of the loose blocks from the wall have ancient graffiti inscriptions that were manifestly carved onto the blocks after they were removed from the wall. In fact, papers were published long ago addressing these post-demolition inscriptions.[11] However, the archaeologists have responded that detailed examinations of the APEΛABON inscriptions suggest that they were carved before the final finishing of the blocks by the masons at the Kasta Mound and it is apparent in the various photos that the stippling of the block surfaces that constituted this finishing runs into the strokes of the inscriptions, and the stippling is closer to obliterating the inscription in Figure 4 on its left-hand side. Nevertheless, even if the inscriptions have been correctly read and they were indeed inscribed before the peribolos was completed, the key question remains of whether it is correct to deduce that the monument was built for Hephaistion?

[11] G. Bakalakes, Θρακικά χαράγματα εκ του παρά την Αμφίπολιν φράγματος του Στρυμόνος, Θρακικά 13 (1940), pp. 3–32 (especially pp. 17–32); The 'Classical' Bridge at Amphipolis, AJA LXXIV (1970), pp. 289–291 (especially p. 290).

A basic problem with the archaeologists' assignment of the monument to Hephaistion is that it conflicts with our current understanding of the history of the period immediately after Alexander's death as described by ancient written sources, such as Diodorus and Justin. These sources strongly imply that the only person likely to have wished to commemorate Hephaistion with such a huge and expensive monument as the Kasta Mound at Amphipolis was Alexander the Great. However, Alexander himself died only about seven months after Hephaistion. Seven months is enough time for monuments to have been ordered and designed and for the marble blocks for the construction to have begun to be quarried, but it is not nearly enough time to complete the construction of a monument as huge and as grand as the Amphipolis Tomb.

Figure 4: The first ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscription block as presented by the archaeologists

Figure 5: The second ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscription block as presented by the archaeologists with guidance on the inscription letter locations

Figure 6: Diagrams of the inscriptions on the two ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ blocks and the block edges as presented by the archaeologists

Figure 7: The scratches in the rosette above the mosaic in the Amphipolis Tomb (eta-phi-lunate-sigma?)

There is firm historical evidence that Alexander did indeed instigate the construction of monuments for Hephaistion at widespread locations across his empire, especially including Greece and Macedonia. For example, Diodorus 18.4.2 records that a stone version of Hephaistion's funeral pyre was planned as a permanent memorial in Babylon. Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.23.6–7 notes that Alexander sent orders to his governor, Cleomenes, in Egypt for shrines in honour of Hephaistion to be erected in Alexandria and on Pharos Island. We also have a marble relief inscribed and dedicated "To the Hero Hephaistion" from about this period found at the Macedonian capital Pella, and there is a papyrus fragment which records that Hypereides, the Athenian orator, publicly complained in a speech dating to about 322 BC[12] that the Athenians were being forced to erect shrines and perform sacrifices to "the servants of Alexander", which must be an allusion to Hephaistion's monuments and his worship as a hero or demigod as endorsed by the oracle at Siwa.[13] There is enough to show conclusively that Alexander ordered monuments for Hephaistion to be erected right across his empire fairly soon after Hephaistion's death.

The blocks with the ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscriptions are stated by the archaeologists and by earlier investigators[14] to have been sourced from the famous white marble quarries on the island of Thassos in the northern Aegean Sea, which is still quarried for this type of marble today. This stone was commonly used by the Macedonian rulers for their pre-eminent building projects, so it is highly plausible that marble blocks were being cut on Thassos for Hephaistion's monuments in July of 323 BC, when news reached Greece of the death of Alexander in Babylon. Some of the rough-cut blocks were probably crudely inscribed to designate the project for which they were intended, so the existence of blocks with traces of inscriptions reading "Received for Hephaistion" is not at all unlikely or surprising.

In the aftermath of Alexander's death, it is highly likely that virtually all the projects to build monuments commemorating Hephaistion were abandoned. It is recorded that the army specifically voted to abandon Alexander's project to build a stone monument to Hephaistion in Babylon (Diodorus, 18.4.6). That decision virtually had the force of law according to the Macedonian constitution, so it would have been a very daring act to divert vast funds into monuments for Hephaistion once the result of the vote had become known. Furthermore, there is no archaeological evidence from anywhere else in the empire that any of Hephaistion's monuments was ever completed. It can be deduced that the Kasta Mound must have cost a thousand talents or more to complete (equal to 25,000kg of silver) because we know that Alexander had assigned a budget of 1500 talents for the construction of each of six temples

[12] Hypereides, Epitaphios col. 8.21–22 from a papyrus fragment of a speech delivered in 322 BC.

[13] Diodorus 17.115.6; Justin 12.12.12; Lucian, Calumniae 17; Plutarch, *Alexander,* 72.2; Arrian, *Anabasis,* 7.14.7 & 7.23.6.

[14] Oscar Broneer, The Lion Monument at Amphipolis, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1941, p. 28.

that were envisaged in his Last Plans (hypomnemata) as recorded by Diodorus 18.4.4–5. The enormous size and magnificence of the Amphipolis Tomb, its colossal lion and its peribolos would imply a cost at least comparable with one of Alexander's planned temples. Only a few of the leading generals and the Royal Family itself could command such riches at that time, and the historical sources suggest that Hephaistion was unpopular with all these people. Hephaistion is recorded to have been at odds with Alexander's mother, Olympias[15] and he had engaged in feuding with both Craterus and Eumenes.[16] As Alexander's confidante and deputy, Hephaistion was deeply implicated in the decision in 324 BC to replace Antipater as viceroy of Macedon and to require that he appear before the king in Babylon, which was a profoundly threatening command, given that Alexander had just executed several of his governors in Asia. Perdiccas, the regent, was perhaps the least antagonistic of the leading players towards Hephaistion, having served with him in the campaigning in India.[17] Yet, it was he who proposed the abandonment of Hephaistion's monuments to the army assembly. Furthermore, all the factions had more immediate priorities for their financial resources in the context of the sequence of rebellions and civil wars that broke out upon Alexander's death. Therefore, it is historically implausible that the Kasta Mound was built in precisely those years to commemorate Hephaistion and most likely instead that blocks cut for Hephaistion's monuments were stockpiled on Thassos during the wars in the immediate wake of Alexander's death, where they awaited re-assignment to the next appropriate major commission to be awarded to the Thassos marble quarries when the times had grown more politically stable.

The archaeologists have suggested that Antigonus Monophthalmus might have built the Kasta monument on the basis of ANT monograms found on 4 or 5 of the peribolos blocks. But Antigonus never controlled Amphipolis or its territory. He was a refugee when he fled back to Macedon in 322 BC. He did not begin to become extraordinarily powerful and to control vast wealth until after the second division of the satrapies at Triparadeisus in 320 BC. There is no known reason why he would have wished to celebrate Hephaistion's memory, and it is most unlikely that he would have sought to offend both Olympias and the Antipatrids (specifically Cassander), with whom he was allied, and also have defied a formal vote of the army by resuming the funding of Hephaistion's monuments after a 5-year hiatus. Two percent of all the names in prosopographies of Alexander's reign begin with ANT, and it is most likely that the ANT monograms on the peribolos blocks are simply masons' marks.

Most of the loose blocks from the Kasta Mound retaining wall were rediscovered in and around the River Strymon just south of Amphipolis by officers of the British Army in 1916.[18]

[15] Diodorus 17.114.3; Plutarch, *Alexander,* 39.5.
[16] Plutarch, *Alexander,* 47.5–7 & *Moralia,* 337A; Plutarch, *Eumenes,* 2.1; Arrian, *Anabasis,* 7.13.1 & 7.14.9.
[17] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 4.22.7–8 & 4.28.5 & 4.30. & 5.3.5; Curtius 8.10.2–3 & 8.12.4.
[18] Jacques Roger, Le Monument au Lion d'Amphipolis, BCH Vol 63 (1939), pp. 4–5; Oscar Broneer, The Lion Monument at Amphipolis, 1941, pp. 3–4.

They seem to have been re-used at that site by the Romans to build a causeway or dam across the river. An important and illuminating study of these loose blocks was published by Stella Grobel Miller & Stephen G. Miller under the title "Architectural Blocks from the Strymon" in the journal Archaiologikon Deltion in 1972 following scrupulous cataloguing of the blocks performed by the Millers on behalf of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens.[19] The ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscribed blocks appear to be examples of the particular type of Kasta Mound peribolos wall stone that the Millers designated "low full-thickness" blocks. The faces of these blocks that were exposed when built into the wall are 118cm x 32.5cm, and they are 64cm deep. The Millers stated that they believed that the architect of the antique wall was using an ancient foot of about 32cm to 32.5cm for the block dimensions. This means that the low full-thickness blocks are 1-foot x 2-foot x 3.67-foot in the units used by the architect of the Kasta Mound.

However, let us suppose that the inscribed blocks had originally been rough-cut on Thassos to the more regular dimensions of 1-foot x 2-foot x 4-foot as ordered for a monument for Hephaistion by its architect. In that case, they would have been available for re-assignment to the Kasta Mound when the commission for its stone was awarded some little while after the Hephaistion monument project had been abandoned. That re-assignment would have required that between 10cm to 12cm (one-third of an ancient Macedonian foot) would have needed to be cut from their length to fit them into the Kasta Mound retaining wall. That is exactly the amount of trimming or truncation that would have been required to remove one letter width from the inscriptions that had been scrawled on a few of the blocks to identify their former purpose. Nine letter spaces were required for ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ and one or two for the Hephaistion monogram. The original 4-foot length would have been 132cm, so a space of 12cm or 13cm was available for each character and hence the evidence of a single missing end-letter is clearly pointing to the blocks having been 4-foot long when the inscriptions were carved onto them. If the trimming had been from the left-hand margin, then the Π of ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ would have been consistently removed from all such re-assigned blocks bearing that inscription. Only two examples have yet been put forward, so it might just be by chance that both had the Π end of the inscription trimmed off. But it is also possible that the masons were superstitious and preferred to trim that end rather than cut through a monogram representing a dead hero.

This has not been so clear as it might have been, because the archaeologists initially elected only to present and release cropped photos of the ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscribed blocks.[20] In parallel,

[19] Stella Grobel Miller & Stephen G. Miller, Architectural Blocks from the Strymon, Archaiologikon Deltion, Volume 27, 1972.

[20] A photo was released showing the whole of the first inscribed block whilst it still sat among the loose blocks from the peribolos displayed next to the reconstructed lion shortly after I had pointed out the misleading nature of the diagrams in February of 2016.

the drawings of the inscriptions on these blocks presented by the archaeologists defined that the spaces where the Πs would have sat in front of the initial alphas are still present on the blocks, but simply blank with no sign of the expected Πs ever having been inscribed at all. The photos presented by the archaeologists were cropped exactly where the initial alphas start, so as to allow the conclusion that the Πs were missing because they had never been carved. This confusion has further been facilitated by the removal of the inscribed blocks from the public gaze (at least one of the blocks used to sit next to the highway beside the reconstructed lion at Amphipolis, but it was taken away no later than 2014, probably before the discovery of the tomb chambers was announced on 12th August in that year).

Fortunately, however, the Millers were thorough and efficient in their cataloguing of the blocks, and they took photos of all the blocks that they catalogued. By following the kind advice of Professor Stephen G. Miller in early 2016, I was able to confirm that the catalogue and the accompanying photos now reside in the archives of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. Furthermore, I am most grateful to the American School for having diligently searched through their archive to locate relevant images and extremely pleased to be able to present two photos of the first of the two blocks. These images were taken by the Millers at the beginning of the 1970s and are presented in this article (Figures 8 and 9). The Millers gave this block the reference number 73 in their catalogue. It is interesting to note that another block of the same type is shown standing next to block 73 in the second photo (Figure 9). It appears to be about the same length as block 73, suggesting that block 73 was not cut down for re-use *after* it was removed from the Kasta Mound peribolos wall. If block 73 is still the same length (118cm) as the other "low full-thickness" blocks from the peribolos, then it follows that the Π was cut off before it was incorporated into the peribolos.

In Figure 10 the first photo of block 73 is reproduced with the letters of the inscription highlighted in white and with added white lines indicating the degree of original extension of the block towards the left from the edge in front of the initial alpha of the inscription on the assumption that the block was originally quarried to be 4-foot long.[21] Finally, it is demonstrated in this Figure how the missing Π of ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ fits exactly into the space where the block was truncated to fit into the peribolos wall of the Kasta Mound. By comparison with Figure 6, it is also indicated in Figure 11 on a copy of the sketch of the inscription presented by the archaeologists where the actual edges of the block lie relative to the inscribed letters: it is incontrovertible that the leading Π was cut off rather than that it never existed or had been erased.

In the light of this evidence, it is likely that the reason that the Πs are missing from the ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscriptions is that they were trimmed off the blocks when the stones

[21] Note that my version of the first alpha differs slightly from that proposed by the archaeologists based on careful study of a number of photos that I have collected including the two taken by the Millers.

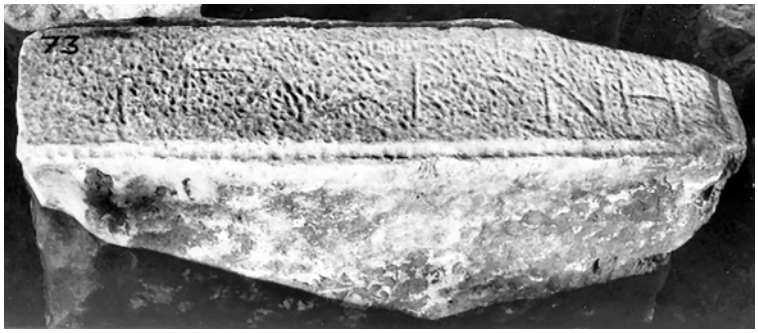


Figure 8: Loose block 73 from the Kasta Mound peribolos, the first example bearing the APEΛABON inscription (photo courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Archives, Adm Rec Box 204/1, folder 7)

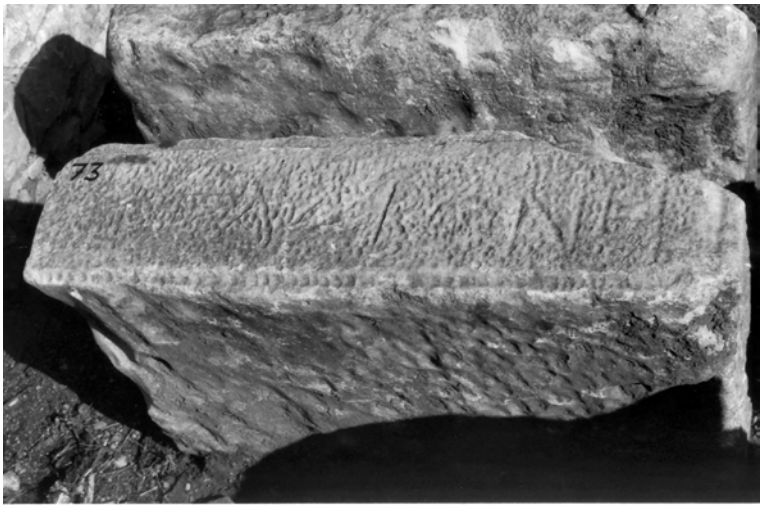


Figure 9: Another view of Loose block 73 from the Kasta Mound peribolos bearing the APEΛABON inscription with another loose block of the same length standing behind it (photo courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Archives, Adm Rec Box 204/1, folder 7.)

Figure 10: How the Π of ΠAPEΛABON was cut off the block when it was shortened from an initial 4 feet in order to fit it into the Kasta Mound peribolos (photo courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Archives, Adm Rec Box 204/1, folder 7.)

Figure 11: Where the edges of the block are actually located relative to the inscribed letters and block margins in the sketch of the first ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscription presented by the archaeologists (bold lines indicate the true edges and margins)

were cut down in length in order to re-assign them for use in the Kasta Mound peribolos wall. That means that the Kasta Mound was NOT the monument for which the blocks were originally quarried, because nobody would have ordered blocks for a monument for Hephaistion that were too long to be used in its design. Hence it can be concluded that the Kasta Mound was never a monument to Hephaistion and probably itself has no connection with Hephaistion. Thus, it is dictated by analysis of the evidence that if the archaeologists have correctly interpreted the Hephaistion monogram, the conclusion is the opposite of the conclusion presented by the archaeologists. Instead of being built for Hephaistion, the Kasta Mound tomb was built around a decade or so later, when there was an interlude in the wars between Alexander's successors. The reason that the ΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscriptions have been found on blocks from the peribolos wall of the Kasta Mound is that its builders made use of large numbers of Thassos marble blocks that had been prepared in 323 BC on the orders of Alexander the Great for monuments to Hephaistion that were never built and a few of those blocks happened to have been inscribed to mark the fact that they had originally been quarried with the purpose of use in Hephaistion's monuments.

This hypothesis neatly avoids the historical conundrum of who could possibly have funded an immensely grand monument for Hephaistion after Alexander's death. It respects and accommodates the historical context rather than challenging our historical sources and implying that they are giving us an utterly misleading impression of what actually took place. It also explains exactly why the initial Πs are missing from the inscriptions, whereas the archaeologists have offered no explanation of this salient fact. Finally, it has the incidental effect of confirming the dating of the construction of the Amphipolis Tomb to a decade or so after Alexander's death.

It should also be noted that an additional conclusion was presented by the archaeologists in September 2015, the significance of which has been overlooked due to the glare of the controversy surrounding the Hephaistion inscriptions. The team asserted that the tomb was sealed no later than the earlier part of the 2nd century BC. That excludes the possibility

that the skeletons that were found in the grave cut are later Roman intrusions from an era when cremation of important individuals had largely ceased to be practised. It also means that the skeletons of a woman of sixty or more and two middle-aged men are likely to be the original occupants that the entire edifice was built to commemorate. Despite the grave having been desecrated and robbed, the scattered bones ought logically to include the remains of the hugely important person for whom the monument was erected, because they were the only things left inside the tomb that could have had sufficient significance as to have justified the effort and expense of the sealing of the tomb chambers with 500 tonnes of sand and two massive walls.

Furthermore, female sphinxes like those found at the entrance of the tomb were used to decorate two thrones of Macedonian queens in the late 4th century BC. The caryatid sculptures are now generally accepted to be priestesses of Dionysus, called Klodones in Macedon and closely associated with a Macedonian queen in the late 4th century BC. And the mosaic depicts a queenly woman with the flaming red hair closely associated with the ancient inhabitants of Northern Greece being forcibly abducted into the Underworld following her untimely death in the guise of Persephone being kidnapped by Hades.

My conclusion from these facts is that the elderly woman found in the tomb is somebody of immense importance who died in disgrace during the decade after Alexander's death and was hastily buried in a poor cist grave. Perhaps a couple of her leading supporters, who were killed at the same time, were buried in the overlying soil. But within a short time thereafter her family caused the Kasta Mound of the Amphipolis tomb to be erected over her grave to celebrate her illustrious status in life as well as their own continuing rule. Absolutely the only person that this could reasonably be is Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, who could have been as young as her early fifties or as old as her mid-sixties at the time of her death. The birth of Alexander in 356 BC makes it hard for her to have been born later than 370 BC. Furthermore, William Greenwalt has plausibly concluded that the betrothal of Philip and Olympias on Samothrace took place between 364 and 361 BC.[22] If Olympias was at least 14 in order for her to qualify for induction into the Mysteries and for Philip to fall in love with her, then she was at least about 59 when she died. More likely, she was a few years older, and there is no constraint on her having been as old as her mid-sixties.

The Site of the Tomb of Olympias

The archaeologists have stated that they ruled out the possibility that the Amphipolis tomb was built for Olympias, because they consider that it has been proved that she was buried at Pydna, despite the fact that no candidate for a tomb of Olympias has ever been found in the

[22] William Greenwalt, Philip II and Olympias on Samothrace: A Clue to Macedonian Politics During the 360s in Macedonian Legacies, ed. Timothy Howe and Jeanne Reames, pp. 79–106, 2008.

vicinity of Pydna. Their evidence is in the form of a paper published in 1949 in Hesperia by Charles Edson, in which he presented a new reconstruction (seeking to supersede two quite different earlier reconstructions) of an ancient inscription found near Pydna and mentioning a tomb of Olympias.[23] Hence it is necessary to examine the question of the site of the tomb of Olympias in some detail.

As a starting point, let us review the most detailed surviving account of the events leading to the death of Olympias from Diodorus 19.49–51: "Although Cassander had shut Olympias into Pydna in Macedonia, he was not able to assault the walls because of the winter storms, but by encamping about the city, throwing up a palisade from sea to sea, and blockading the port, he prevented any who might wish to aid the queen from doing so. And as supplies were rapidly exhausted, he created such famine among those within that they were completely incapacitated. In truth, they were brought to such extreme need that they gave each soldier five choenices of grain per month, sawed up wood and fed the sawdust to the imprisoned elephants, and slaughtered the pack animals and horses for food. While the situation of the city was so serious and while Olympias was still clinging to hopes of rescue from outside, the elephants died from lack of nourishment, the horsemen that were not in the ranks and did not receive any food whatever nearly all perished, and no small number of the soldiers also met the same fate. Some of the non-Greeks, their natural needs overcoming their scruples, found flesh to eat by collecting the bodies of the dead. Since the city was being quickly filled with corpses, those in charge of the queen's company, though they buried some of the bodies, threw others over the city wall. The sight of these was horrible, and their stench was unbearable, not merely to ladies who were of the queen's court and addicted to luxury, but also to those of the soldiers who were habituated to hardship.

As spring came on and their want increased from day to day, many of the soldiers gathered together and appealed to Olympias to let them go because of the lack of supplies. Since she could neither issue any food at all nor break the siege, she permitted them to withdraw. Cassander, after welcoming all the deserters and treating them in most friendly fashion, sent them to the various cities; for he hoped that when the Macedonians learned from them how weak Olympias was, they would despair of her cause. And he was not mistaken in his surmise about what would happen: those who had resolved to fight on the side of the besieged forces changed their minds and went over to Cassander; and the only men in Macedonia to preserve their loyalty were Aristonous and Monimus, of whom Aristonous was the ruler of Amphipolis and Monimus of Pella. But Olympias, when she saw that most of her friends had gone over to Cassander and that those who remained were not strong enough to come to her aid, attempted to launch a quinquereme and by this means to save herself and her friends. When, however, a deserter brought news of this attempt to the enemy and Cassander sailed

[23] Charles Edson, The Tomb of Olympias, Hesperia, Volume 18, Issue 1, 1949, pp. 84–95.

up and took the ship, Olympias, recognising that her situation was beyond hope, sent envoys to treat of terms. When Cassander gave his opinion that she must put all her interests into his hands, she with difficulty persuaded him to grant the single exception that he guarantee her personal safety. As soon as he had gained possession of the city, he sent men to take over Pella and Amphipolis. Now Monimus, the ruler of Pella, on hearing the fate of Olympias, surrendered his city; but Aristonous at first was minded to cling to his position since he had many soldiers and had recently enjoyed a success. That is, a few days before this in a battle against Cassander's general Crateuas he had killed most of those who faced him. When Crateuas himself with two thousand men had fled to Bedyndia in Bisaltia, he invested him, took him by siege, and dismissed him on terms after taking away his arms. Aristonous, encouraged by this and ignorant of the death of Eumenes, believing, moreover, that Alexander and Polyperchon would support him, refused to surrender Amphipolis. But when Olympias wrote to him demanding his loyalty and ordering him to surrender, he perceived that it was necessary to do as ordered and delivered the city to Cassander, receiving pledges for his own safety. Cassander, seeing that Aristonous was respected because of the preferment he had received from Alexander, and being anxious to put out of the way any who were able to lead a revolt, caused his death through the agency of the kinsfolk of Crateuas. He also urged the relatives of those whom Olympias had slain to accuse the aforesaid woman in the general assembly of the Macedonians. They did as he had ordered; and, although Olympias was not present and had none to speak in her defence, the Macedonians condemned her to death. Cassander, however, sent some of his friends to Olympias advising her to escape secretly, promising to provide a ship for her and to carry her to Athens. He acted thus, not for the purpose of securing her safety, but in order that she, condemning herself to exile and meeting death on the voyage, might seem to have met a punishment that was deserved; for he was acting with caution both because of her rank and because of the fickleness of the Macedonians. As Olympias, however, refused to flee but on the contrary was ready to be judged before all the Macedonians, Cassander, fearing that the crowd might change its mind if it heard the queen defend herself and was reminded of all the benefits conferred on the entire nation by Alexander and Philip, sent to her two hundred soldiers who were best fitted for such a task, ordering them to slay her as soon as possible. They, accordingly, broke into the royal house, but when they beheld Olympias, overawed by her exalted rank, they withdrew with their task unfulfilled. But the relatives of her victims, wishing to curry favour with Cassander as well as to avenge their dead, murdered the queen, who uttered no ignoble or womanish plea. Such was the end of Olympias, who had attained to the highest dignity of the women of her day, having been the daughter of Neoptolemus, king of the Epirotes, sister of the Alexander who made a campaign into Italy, and also the wife of Philip, who was the mightiest of all who down to this time had ruled in Europe, and mother of Alexander, whose deeds were *the* greatest and *most* glorious."

An incautious reader of this account of the Macedonian civil war in 317–316 BC between Olympias and Cassander as sketched by Diodorus Siculus writing towards the end of the 1st century BC might conceive the impression that the eventual surrender of the queen to Cassander at Pydna and her subsequent murder were successive episodes in time, perhaps separated by just a few days. In Diodorus' version, the two events are just a few paragraphs apart, so that his readership has hardly recovered from the shock of the queen's surrender when they are confronted by the treachery of her ensuing murder. This has led some to infer that Olympias also died at Pydna or even to assert that Diodorus states that she died at Pydna, although he is actually silent on her specific location at the time of her death. The same is true of the other extant account of her murder, which reaches us via Justin, the epitomiser of the Philippic History by Pompeius Trogus.

Clearly, the supposition on account of textual brevity of a close spacing in the time leading in turn to an assumption of continuity of location is an intrinsically fallacious line of reasoning. For example, Diodorus 17.117 could similarly be read as implying that Alexander the Great died from the effects of drink shortly after falling ill at the party hosted by Medius:

"The soothsayers bade him sacrifice to the gods on a grand scale and with all speed, but he was then called away by Medius, the Thessalian, one of his friends, to take part in a comus. There he drank much-unmixed wine in commemoration of the death of Heracles, and finally, filling a huge beaker, downed it at a gulp. Instantly he shrieked aloud as if smitten by a violent blow and was conducted by his Friends, who led him by the hand back to his apartments. His chamberlains put him to bed and attended him closely, but the pain increased, and the physicians were summoned. No one was able to do anything helpful, and Alexander continued in great discomfort and acute suffering. When he, at length, despaired of life, he took off his ring and handed it to Perdiccas. His Friends asked: 'To whom do you leave the kingdom?' and he replied: 'To the strongest.' He added, and these were his last words, that all of his leading Friends would stage a vast contest in honour of his funeral. This was how he died after a reign of twelve years and seven months."

However, we know from other sources that Alexander survived for at least eleven more days, whilst ailing from an escalating fever and that he spent much of this time, not "in his apartments", but across the river from the palace in gardens by a pool[24] and he was also taken to "the highest place in the city".[25] This type of distortion by omission is attributable to the fact that Diodorus has composed a very considerably condensed epitome from much more detailed source texts. Neither is he a particularly careful epitomiser. Nor does he care very much about failing to convey the true timescales of events or their exact nature and location, but instead a great deal of contextual information is omitted in order to generate

[24] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 7.25–27; Plutarch, *Alexander,* 76.
[25] Justin 12.15; Liber de Morte 104–105 in the *Metz Epitome*.

a fast-paced and smoothly flowing storyline. On the evidence of such comparisons with parallel accounts by other writers, it can be appreciated that nothing whatsoever can safely be inferred about continuity in time or place from Diodorus' silences.

Nevertheless, more careful and logical analysis of the things that Diodorus (19.50–51) actually discloses does strongly suggest that there was both a significant space of time and a major change of scene between the capture of Olympias at Pydna and her subsequent demise. Firstly, we are told that the families of Olympias' victims (Justin, 14.6.6, says the parents — "parentes interfectorum") were on hand to testify against her at her trial before the Macedonian Assembly and afterwards to effectuate her killing when Cassander's own troops baulked at so heinous and dangerous an act. Why would these people, presumably emanating from all corners of the kingdom, have been on hand at the siege of Pydna? Would it not in all probability have taken weeks to summon them to Cassander's camp? He could only have issued such a summons when he needed their testimony after Olympias' surrender.

Secondly, Diodorus tells us that Cassander sent advance troops to Pella and Amphipolis upon Olympias' surrender to demand the capitulation of those cities, which had remained loyal to the queen. But Aristonous at Amphipolis refused, and this message was conveyed back to Cassander. Then Cassander sent a note from Olympias also demanding that Aristonous surrender to Cassander. Finally, Aristonous capitulated. Yet Cassander cannot have brought Olympias to trial until after he had received the surrender of Aristonous, because he might have had further need of her influence up until the point that Macedonia was completely pacified. How long did it take messengers to journey to Amphipolis and return to Pydna to bring news of Aristonous' recalcitrance to Cassander? How long did it take thereafter to courier a message from Olympias back to Aristonous and for Cassander to receive confirmation of Aristonous' surrender to his forces, such that he was free to take action against Olympias? The distance between Pydna and Amphipolis is around a hundred miles (160km) and the messengers probably needed to be escorted by troops in each case, so the journey must have taken five days each way. Therefore, the entire process would have taken at least three weeks to play out and more likely, it was a month or two after her surrender before Olympias' trial took place. It is incredible that Cassander together with his army lurked at Pydna on the periphery of the realm during all this time when major cities and population centres of the kingdom remained hostile to him. It is surely implicit in Diodorus' statement that Cassander sent *advance* parties of troops to Pella and Amphipolis as soon as Olympias surrendered that Cassander intended to follow them with the main army as rapidly as possible.

Thirdly, we are told that Olympias was occupying the "Royal Residence" (βασιλικὴν οἰκίαν) when she was murdered. Why would there be a distinct royal palace within a small frontier fortress-like Pydna? Is it not more likely that this is a reference to a royal palace in one of the great cities of Macedonia, meaning Aegae, Pella or Amphipolis?

Fourthly, how did Aristonous know that the message from Olympias was not a forgery? After all, Cassander would have captured her seals. Even a trusted servant of Olympias might have been suborned in the circumstances of her capture. A possible answer is that Cassander and Olympias had actually arrived at Amphipolis in person so that Aristonous was persuaded to surrender by a note he and his supporters witnessed to be passed from the hands of the queen. Perhaps a herald proclaimed the note's contents so as to be heard by Aristonous' troops. If his soldiers could be made to believe that the queen had ceased to back him, then further resistance from Aristonous was indeed futile.

Finally, there is a strategic imperative that is implicit in the account of Diodorus to the effect that Cassander needed to move his entire army further up into Macedonia as quickly as possible to forestall any respite for the royalist forces in which they might seek to regroup and mount a serious attempt to counter him. We are explicitly told by Diodorus that Aristonous was minded to protract his resistance, so the position was still clearly very dangerous for Cassander. It is most unlikely that he would have been content to tarry at the borders of the kingdom for one moment longer than was strictly necessary.

Therefore, there is much in Diodorus' pared-down account and even in the briefer account in Justin 14.6 that throws up difficulties, if it is supposed that Olympias remained at Pydna until she was murdered. Conversely, all such problems are immediately resolved if we infer that Cassander set off in the footsteps of his advance troops almost immediately with Olympias in train; that he reached Pella and secured the city about a week after Olympias' surrender and that he reached Amphipolis, the last Macedonian redoubt of the royalist faction, about three weeks after her surrender. There is nothing in either Diodorus or Justin to contradict this version of events, so it follows that it was most probably at Amphipolis after the surrender of Aristonous that Olympias was subjected to a show trial and subsequently murdered.

Furthermore, even if Olympias was killed at Pydna, her family were kept at Amphipolis for the next six years, so Amphipolis would still be a likely location for her tomb.[26]

However, on page 87 of the volume of Hesperia in which his paper on The Tomb of *Olympias* was published, Edson asserted: "…it was at Pydna in 316 BC that Cassander besieged Olympias, starved her forces into submission, caused her to be condemned to death by the Macedonian army assembly and executed by the relatives of those Macedonians whom she herself had so recently put to death." Then in a footnote to this passage, he attributed this version of events to Diodorus 19.50–51 and added: "From Diodorus' account there can be no doubt whatsoever that Olympias was put to death at Pydna."

It would appear that Edson's motivation for making this dubious claim in his paper was to record that he had adopted the idea that Olympias had died at Pydna as supposedly authorised by Diodorus as a kind of axiom on which to base his new reconstruction of the fragmentary inscription referring to a tomb of Olympias. Some such guiding principle is needed to select

[26] Diodorus, 19.52.4; Justin, 14.6.13 & 15.1.3.

a particular reconstruction of the full inscription from the fragment because it is clear that there are many possible reconstructions of its original text that qualify as good Greek.

Unfortunately, Edson does not seem to have succeeded in making this methodology clear to his readership, perhaps partly because he relegated his clearest statement of his interpretation of Diodorus' account to a footnote. This weakness has allowed some of Edson's readership to assert that his reconstruction has proved that Olympias died at Pydna because naturally enough the reconstruction proposed by Edson makes the inscription read as though a tomb of Olympias existed near the site where the inscription had originally stood, which was probably in the vicinity of Pydna. In fact, however, Edson himself had used Olympias having died at Pydna as his main guiding principle for his reconstruction. Therefore, the argument that Edson's reconstructed inscription proves that Olympias died at Pydna is circular, because he assumed that she died at Pydna in formulating his reconstruction.

The objective of Edson's paper was to supersede two earlier reconstructions of the severely damaged second century BC inscription, which is basically too fragmentary to allow the possibility of a unique reconstruction based solely on epigraphical principles. The paper examines a series of fragmentary inscriptions found near modern Makriyialos towards the southern border of ancient Macedonia at the foot of Mt Olympus. The precise location of ancient Pydna remains unknown, but somewhere in the general vicinity of Makriyialos is probable and uncontroversial. Just one among these inscriptions seems to mention a "tomb of Olympias", as these words (…ΡΗΙΣΤΥΜΒΟΝΟΛΥΜΠΙΑ…) appear in the second line of the fragment, which is illustrated in Figure 12.

This fragment has been dated to the 2nd century BC mainly on the basis of the style of its letters. This was nearly two centuries after the death of the mother of Alexander. Such a gap of time engenders considerable doubt as to whether the Olympias mentioned was identical with the mother of Alexander. It needs first to be recognised that the fame of Alexander's mother was such that it led to many other women in Northern Greece being named Olympias in the ensuing centuries. For example, there was another queen of Epirus named Olympias in the early third century BC. She was a daughter of Pyrrhus, who also twice ruled Macedon (reigning 288–284 and 273–272 BC). Furthermore, "Olympias" was originally an honorific rather than a name just as Augustus was an honorific for Octavian. It literally means "one of the goddesses from Mount Olympus", and it was conferred upon Alexander's mother by his father, perhaps not long after Alexander's birth. Another source of ambiguity is that Pydna stood at the foot of Mount Olympus, so it is alternatively possible that the word was being used with its literal meaning in an inscription that was actually found in the shadow of the mythical home of the gods. Hence it is at least uncertain whether the Olympias mentioned in the inscription is the mother of Alexander or else some other Olympias or else a reference to an actual Olympian goddess, for example, the guardian deity of a shrine commemorating burials beneath an old tumulus.

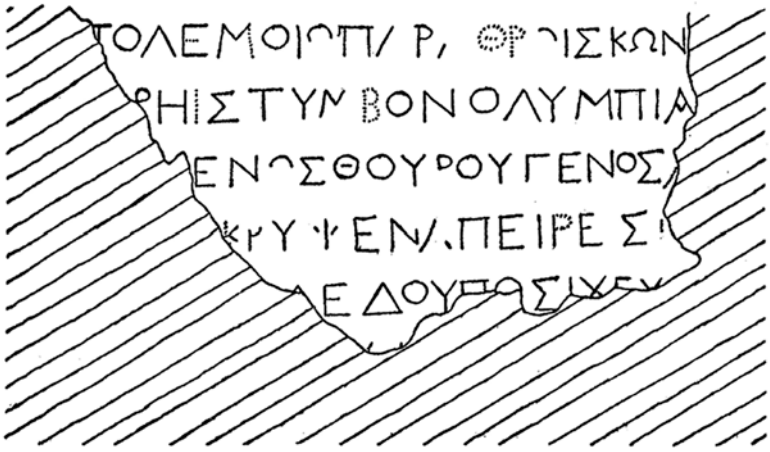


Figure 12: Fragmentary inscription found near ancient Pydna referring to a tomb of Olympias in its second line.

What then was the reasoning that led Edson to propose a new reconstruction of a fragment of an inscription for which he himself cites divergent antecedent reconstructions by two earlier scholars? As we have seen, it was his dubious belief that Olympias died at Pydna, so he presumably felt the effort of a fresh analysis to be justified if he could apply this theory to resolve the innate ambiguities. It is in this light that we should view the reconstruction that Edson produced, in which he added the text shown in square brackets to the surviving text from the fragment:

> [μνῆμα Νεοπ]τολέμοιο παραθρωίσκων, [ξένε, στῆθι],
> [κυδίστης ἵν' ἀθ]ρῆις τύμβον Ὀλυμπιά[δος],
> [μυρόμενος δ' Ἄλ]ενος θούρου γένος Α[ἰακίδαο],
> [υἱὸν γῆς κόλποις] κρύψεν ἀπειρεσί [ης]
>
> An English translation would be:
> "As you pass [the memorial] of [Neop]tolemus, [stranger, stay, that] you may see the tomb [of famed] Olympia[s. Hel]enus, [bewailing] the race of impetuous A[eacides], buried [his son in the bosom of] measureless [earth —]."

This reconstruction implies that the "tomb of Olympias" was near the site at which the inscription was originally erected, so Edson argued that his reconstruction is consistent with his axiom that the tomb of the mother of Alexander lay at Pydna. Note, however, that Edson himself did not claim in his paper that his reconstruction proved that the tomb of Olympias lay at Pydna (because he considered that the text of Diodorus had already proved the point).

However, Edson did additionally demonstrate that we have no idea how wide the original inscription was and where its edges lay relative to each side of the fragment because the fragment was part of a stone that had been trimmed from both sides in the context of it being

re-used as an Ionic capital in antiquity.[27] This means that an epigrapher who wishes to propose a reconstruction is in the position of needing to propose new text to fill gaps of unknown size in formulating a reconstruction. But this is a thing that cannot be done uniquely or reliably. Even with the constraint of gaps of known size between the surviving parts of each successive line, there are very many alternative possibilities that are all good Greek, because the gaps have to be at least of the order of ten to twenty letters (and more probably twice that) because the block on which the fragment survived seems to have been at least as wide as Edson's sketch of the inscription (Figure 12) and because the fragment narrows sharply towards its lower lines, thus extending the size of the gaps. The fact that we cannot tell how many letters stood in each gap magnifies the number of possible reconstructions enormously so that it is quite impossible to decide between them without making narrow assumptions about what kind of things the text should be saying. Even then, a sceptic might reasonably observe that the freedom to extend or contract the gaps allows the epigrapher to make the text locate the "tomb of Olympias" wheresoever he or she wishes. Instead of "As you pass the memorial of Neoptolemus, stranger, stay, that you may see the tomb of famed Olympias" it should be feasible to reconstruct the fragment to say "As you pass the memorial of Neoptolemus, recall his city of Amphipolis, where you may see the tomb of famed Olympias." I would commend the exercise of attempting such a reconstruction to expert epigraphers. Given the new evidence of a possible tomb of Olympias at Amphipolis, if it is allowed that such a reconstruction is feasible, then Edson's reconstruction founded on a misreading of Diodorus concerning the location of Olympias' demise should no longer be accepted. Furthermore, if in 1949 it was deemed a scholarly exercise to reconstruct the inscription based on a misconception that the sources place the tomb of Olympias at Pydna, how much better it would be to reconstruct it on the basis of genuine archaeological evidence that the tomb actually lay at Amphipolis.

Firm conclusions from this discussion are that Edson's reconstruction has no validity as evidence on the whereabouts of the tomb of the mother of Alexander the Great and that his assertion that she died at Pydna is without a basis in the evidence. In fact, the fragmentary inscription is not inconsistent with the hypothesis that the Kasta Mound and the cist grave beneath it constitute the tomb of Olympias. It is equally as false to assert that "from Diodorus' account there can be no doubt whatsoever that Olympias was put to death at Pydna" as it would be to claim that Diodorus' account of Alexander's death makes it clear that the king stayed in his apartments in the palace throughout his fatal illness.

Dating Evidence

During the excavation of the tomb chambers in 2014 controversy raged regarding the dating of the complex, despite the confident statement of the archaeologists that it had been

[27] Charles Edson, The Tomb of Olympias, *Hesperia*, 1949, p. 89.

built in the last quarter of the 4th century BC. Obviously, the number of historically viable candidates for the tomb occupancy tends to scale approximately in proportion to the width of the date range and the particular set of candidates varies in each different date range. Therefore, it is necessary to assemble and review the main strands of evidence for a late 4th century BC date for the monument in order to secure the foundations for any identification of the tomb's occupant.

a) ***The pebble mosaic depicting the abduction of Persephone***

The success of the Macedonian pebble mosaicists in seeking to achieve three-dimensional effects and realistic shading was seriously constrained by the limited contrast that they could achieve, due to the uniform background tinting of their work by the mortar gaps between the pebbles. However, from at least the first half of the third century BC, mosaicists at Alexandria were solving the mortar gap problem by closely fitting together precisely shaped tesserae, initially mixed with pebbled areas, but soon without any pebbles at all. This improved technique quickly spread throughout the entire Mediterranean area, so that by the end of the third century BC, the tesserae technique was pre-eminent everywhere. This was especially true for the most sophisticated compositions. There are lingering examples of pebble mosaics into the early second century BC, but they are found in peripheral locations or else they do not attempt sophisticated shading effects. The extremely realistic mosaic in the Amphipolis tomb (Figure 13) is therefore very unlikely to have been created after the end of the 3rd century BC, and even a date after 250 BC is significantly unlikely.[28] Furthermore, if we date this mosaic according to the dating of its closest parallels in the mansions at Pella and the palace at Aegae, then we must centre its epoch on the last quarter of the fourth century BC.

b) ***The geison soffits — moulding profiles of the geisa (crowning blocks) of the peribolos***

Lucy Shoe compiled a catalogue of Profiles of Greek Mouldings covering the Classical and Hellenistic periods in 1936.[29] The Millers published the moulding profile of the geisa (crowning blocks) of the Kasta Mound peribolos.[30] Hence it is possible to compare the Amphipolis geison profile with Lucy Shoe's entire set of profiles in order to look for matches against all details of these profiles. Upon doing so, it is evident that at least six of Shoe's profiles dating to the second half of the 4th century BC match the Amphipolis profiles very closely on all details especially in respect of the shape

[28] See Katherine Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, CUP 1999 for a detailed discussion.
[29] Lucy Shoe, *Profiles of Greek Mouldings*, Harvard University Press 1936.
[30] Stella Grobel Miller & Stephen G. Miller, Architectural Blocks from the Strymon, *Archaiologikon Deltion*, Volume 27, 1972, Figure 16D on p. 164.

and size of the soffits: a few example cases are shown in Figure 14 with the actual peribolos geison soffit profile included for comparison. There is no such close match in Shoe's catalogue among the profiles dated to other periods.

c) ***The floor of the first chamber***

The floor of white marble fragments in red cement uncovered in the first chamber of the Amphipolis tomb exactly matches a section of flooring at the edge of the mosaic with a central rosette and a caryatid in each corner in the men's dining room (andron) of the palace excavated at Aegae, which is usually dated to the second half of the 4th century BC.

d) ***The architectural elements of the lion podium and parallels at Aegae***

Oscar Broneer, one of the reconstructors of the Amphipolis lion, argued that the profile and proportions of the Doric half-columns, believed to derive from the lion's original podium, are reminiscent of the Classical era more than the Hellenistic period and that even the selection of the Doric order rather than the Ionic is more indicative of the 4th rather than the 3rd century BC.[31] We can now add that the tomb façades excavated by Andronicos under the Great Mound at Vergina in the 1970s also exhibit the Doric half-columns in the case of Tomb II (attributed to Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great) and life-size shield reliefs in the case of Tomb III (attributed to Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great), fragments of similar shield reliefs also having been found with the pieces of the Amphipolis lion. In general, the Vergina tomb façades are notably similar to reconstructions of the façade of the base of the lion monument (Figure 15).

e) ***Parallels with other monumental Greek lions including the lion of Knidos***

There was a flurry of monumental lion sculptures in major monuments in the late 4th century BC (e.g. the lion of Chaeronea, the lion sculpture found at Ecbatana [Hamadan], the lion in Venice that was taken from Piraeus[32] and the lion monument of Knidos). This may be associated somewhat with the influence of Alexander the Great, who seems to have embraced lions as symbols of his reign. Oscar Broneer particularly emphasised the close parallel between the Amphipolis lion monument and the Lion Tomb at Knidos, which is now commonly dated to the late 4th century or early 3rd century BC.[33]

[31] Oscar Broneer, *The Lion Monument at Amphipolis*, 1941, p. 49.

[32] Cornelius Vermeule, Greek Funerary Animals, 450–300 BC, *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 76, No 1, Jan 1972, pp. 49–59; Lawrence J. Bliquez, Lions and Greek Sculptors, *The Classical World*, Vol. 68, No 6, March 1975, pp. 381–384.

[33] Janos Fedak, *Monumental Tombs of the Hellenistic Age*, University of Toronto Press (1990) p. 78.

f) *Use of isodomic ashlar blocks with tooled faces and bevelled edges*

Drystone walls comprising ashlar blocks with drafted margins are especially characteristic of the early Hellenistic era. As well as the face of the peribolos and the walls of the tomb chambers in the Kasta Mound, such blocks are seen in a surviving fragment of the walls of ancient Alexandria near the site of the Rosetta Gate and in the interior of the lion monument at Knidos. At Alexandria, there are reasons to believe that these blocks were part of the original walls.[34] Oscar Broneer points out that the drafted margin series of blocks correspond to the type referred to as "Isodomic Ashlar: Tooled Face, Bevelled Edge" by Robert Scranton in his 1941 monograph on "Greek Walls".[35] He notes that this type of masonry dates mainly to the period 320 BC – 270 BC and almost all the dated examples are associated with the monuments and strongpoints of Macedonian rulers of that era.[36]

g) *The Archontikon Heroon*

There is a smaller unfinished tomb known as the Archontikon Heroon that has the same general design as the Amphipolis tomb and is located at Archontiko 4.5km NW of Pella. It has been approximately dated to the reign of Antigonus Gonatus (276–239 BC) mainly on the basis of ceramics/potsherds.[37] It is connected to the Kasta Mound in its design by virtue of the circumference of the Heroon peribolos being exactly equal to the diameter of the Kasta Mound peribolos and by having a tomb chamber penetrating into the interior via a portal in its peribolos (see Figure 16). It was probably constructed in imitation of the Kasta Mound monument since it was only ever partly finished and it is unlikely that the Kasta Mound would have been built in imitation of an unfinished tomb rather than vice versa. The Amphipolis Tomb had a diameter equal to the stade of 100 paces used by Alexander's bematists to map out his empire.[38] It would make sense that the commissioner of the Heroon could not afford a monument a stade wide,

[34] Andrew Chugg, *The Quest for the Tomb of Alexander the Great*, AMC Publications, 2nd Ed. 2012, pp. 160–162 & 188.

[35] Robert Scranton, *Greek Walls*, 1941, pp. 131–133 and 180.

[36] Oscar Broneer, *The Lion Monument at Amphipolis*, 1941, p. 49 and Note 52 on p. 69.

[37] Παύλος Χρυσοστόμου, Το Ηρώο του Αρχοντικού Γιαννιτσών in Νέοι τύμβοι στήν Πελλαία χώρα, *Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και στη Θράκη*, 1, 1987, pp. 153–156.

[38] The stade used by Alexander's pacers (bematists) and subsequently in the Hellenistic period was calculated as 157.7m by Firsov in 1972 through a statistical analysis of 81 distances used by Eratosthenes for which the start and end points are still identifiable — this supports the hypothesis that the bematists defined a stade as 100 paces (double-steps) instead of 600 feet, since it was impractical to pace out distances in feet; L. V. Firsov, Eratosthenes' Calculation of the Earth's Circumference and the Length of the Hellenistic Stade, Vestnik Drevnej Istorii 121, 154–174 (1972); Firsov's approach was criticised by Engels in 1985, but Engels selected a subset of only four distances for his criticism and used dubious endpoints, such as placing Prophthasia at Juwain, whereas it almost certainly lay near Farah; Donald Engels, The Length of Eratosthenes' Stade, American Journal of Philology 106 (3): 298–311 (1985).

but defaulted to a stade in circumference in order still to permit an impressive boast regarding its size. It is more likely that a monument a stade wide inspired a monument a stade in circumference than the opposite way around. A contemporaneous parallel case would be the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, which inspired tens of copies right the way around the Mediterranean in the several centuries following its erection. Virtually all the imitations were smaller and less magnificent than their archetype. Hence the Amphipolis tomb should be earlier than the mid-third century BC.

h) ***A bronze coin of Alexander the Great***

The archaeologists have declared various coin finds, including one bronze of Alexander the Great. The find locations have not been specified, but we can reasonably assume that their locations were consistent with the dating to the last quarter of the 4th century BC proposed by the archaeologists.

i) ***Carbon-14 dating of a charcoal fragment***

A charcoal fragment presumed to come from the campfire of one of the builders was recovered from the soil used to cover the exterior walls of the tomb chambers,[39] so it should closely date the point in time at which the tomb chambers were completed. This charcoal has been carbon-14 dated by Pavlides.[40] His results show that there is a 99% probability that the wood that was burnt to form the charcoal died between 400 BC and 200 BC. Within that range, there is a narrow peak containing about 80% of the total probability lying between 390 BC and 345 BC and a much broader flatter peak containing about 15% of the total probability between 318 BC and 208 BC. Since most of the systematic errors in carbon dating are due to contamination by more modern organic carbon, it is usual to favour the oldest peak in results that give two or more probability peaks. In this case, the older peak is also the peak containing the great majority of the probability. The older peak is perfectly consistent with the builders having burnt dead wood from trees that had died a few decades beforehand in their campfires if the tomb dates to the last quarter of the 4th century BC.

j) ***ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscriptions***

Clearly, if it is true that the monograms at the end of the ΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝ inscriptions refer to Alexander's Hephaistion, then a date within the first couple of decades after Alexander's death is highly probable.

[39] The precise location of the charcoal fragment was on the exterior surface of the arched roof about thirty-degrees up the arc of the roof as measured on the axis of the arch starting from the horizontal direction.

[40] The details of the carbon dating of the charcoal fragment are taken from a presentation given at 14:00 on 4th March 2016 entitled Τεκτονική Δομή και Παλαιοσεισμολογία του λόφου Καστά και της ευρύτερης περιοχής της ανατολικής Μακεδονίας by Σ. Παυλίδης, Α. Χατζηπέτρος, Γ. Συρίδης, Μ. Λεφαντζής at the 29th conference on *Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και στη Θράκη*.

Each of these dating arguments is a strong indication of early Hellenistic dating for the Amphipolis Tomb and the Kasta monument. However, none is absolutely decisive in isolation from the others. Yet they approach decisiveness when considered collectively. Certainly, a date in the last quarter of the 4th century BC is now probable at greater than the 95% level of confidence. The only significant contrary arguments to have been aired relate to the supposed Roman style of some of the sculptures. But such arguments are undermined by the fact that the Romans habitually copied classical and Hellenistic sculptural works and adopted their styles as their own.

A second dating issue relates to the point in time at which the Amphipolis tomb chambers were sealed. The probability of the bones being from secondary inhumations rather than the original burials increases if the sealing was later. This is especially true if the sealing was as late as the Roman era because that is when inhumation rather than cremation became standard practice, even for high-status individuals. However, the evidence on the sealing date is less extensive and less definitive than the evidence on the date of construction.

1) The fact that the two sealing walls were drystone constructions without mortar is indicative of a pre-Roman sealing because the Romans normally used mortar in major wall construction.

2) The excellent preservation of the paint on the mouldings of the portal beneath the sphinxes implies an early sealing, but this argument has been counteracted by the archaeologists' suggestion that there was originally a portico sheltering the sphinx façade of the tomb.

3) There appears to be very little wear either to the surfaces of the mosaics or to the edges of the steps within the tomb. Had the tomb been open and subject to regular visits for as long as centuries rather than mere decades, this would be quite surprising.

4) Within the sandy fill, there were layers of soot, presumed to have dropped from the torches of the sealers, which the archaeologists have had carbon-dated. The letter reporting the results has been released and reads as follows:

   Letter from Geochron Laboratories, 6th May 2015
   Submitted by: Dr Evangelos Kampouroglou
   AGE = 2020 ± 30 C-14 years Before Present (i.e. 70 BC)
   Description: Sample of charcoal
   Pretreatment: The charcoal fragments were separated from sand, silt, rootlets, or other foreign matter. The sample was then treated with hot dilute 1N HCl to remove any carbonates; with 0.1N dilute NaOH to remove humic acids and other organic contaminants; and a second time with dilute HCl. The sample was then rinsed and dried, and the cleaned charcoal was combusted to recover carbon dioxide for the analysis.

> This carbon date is uncalibrated, which means that it assumes a constant concentration of radiocarbon in the Earth's atmosphere, and it defines the "present" as AD1950. However, it can be translated into a real age range for the sample by using calibration curves, which take into account known variations in the C-14 concentration. On this basis, the result suggests 95% confidence that the organic material comprising the torches died between about 170 BC and AD80. On the face of it, this dates the sealing event to after about 170 BC. However, carbon dates are highly susceptible to systematic error due to contamination by carbon from organisms which died more recently. This makes the sample look artificially younger in the C-14 results. Normally this contamination is confined to a thin surface layer of the sample. Hence the material used for dating is taken from the interior of the sample where contamination is unlikely. Obviously, this precaution is not feasible for soot particles. Furthermore, soot has a high propensity to adsorb organic molecules. As little as a 1% adsorption of modern organic material would shift the carbon date a couple of centuries forward in time. This could readily have happened in consequence of an episode of dampness in the tomb chamber, which engendered an ingress of modern dissolved organics. For this reason, the soot carbon date can only be used to define the latest possible date for the sealing, which is AD80. However, a solution to this systematic bias in the results appears to me to be clear from the same letter. It mentions the discarding of "rootlets" from the soot in sand samples. Given that we know that roots probably did not grow in the tomb fill after it was deposited, these rootlets prospectively grew in the riverbed whence the sand fill was dredged. They, therefore, hold out a much better prospect of an accurate C-14 date for the sealing than the soot particles. It may be possible to strip off the surfaces of the rootlets to provide uncontaminated samples. Even if they are too thin for that, they will have a smaller surface area relative to their volume than soot particles and should therefore be less contaminated.

It may be added that the archaeologists have suggested, perhaps on the basis of more evidence than has yet been published, that the sealing immediately preceded the Roman conquest in 168 BC. Nevertheless, there appears to be no evidence in the public domain that excludes a very early sealing, possibly even within a decade of the tomb's completion.

The Iconography of the Finds

It is important to examine the possible connections of the decoration of the Amphipolis tomb with its occupant because it would normally be anticipated that the decoration of a 4th century BC Macedonian tomb would be intimately connected with its occupant. For example, Tomb I in the Great Tumulus at Aegae is probably that of Nicesipolis, one of the wives of Philip II, who died tragically from complications a few weeks after childbirth.[41] The only bones found on the floor of the looted tomb belonged to a woman and a neonatal infant, although some other remains were found within backfill that had entered the tomb after it

[41] Stephanus Byzantinus s. v. "Thessalonike".

had been robbed.[42] It is decorated with a splendid mural depicting a beautiful Persephone being abducted into the underworld by a fearsome Hades.[43] Tomb II has a mural on its façade showing its occupant, probably Philip II, engaging in a lion hunt surrounded by his pages and accompanied by his son, Alexander.[44] The sepulchre known as Tomb III is very likely the burial of Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great, who was murdered by Cassander aged 13. It has a frieze depicting a young boy racing a chariot around its walls.[45]

The righthand sphinx from the pair that guarded the entrance to the Amphipolis Tomb is shown in Figure 17 with its head, found sealed within the third chamber, restored through computational image manipulation. It was decapitated and had its breasts and wings mutilated by the tomb raiders.

Sphinxes were prominent parts of the decoration of two thrones found in the late 4th century BC tombs of two Macedonian queens in the royal cemetery at Aegae (modern Vergina) in Macedonia.[46] The first of these was found in the tomb attributed to Eurydice I, the grandmother of Alexander the Great. Carved sphinxes were among the decorations of its panels until they were stolen by thieves in 2001. Secondly, a marble throne was found in another royal tomb close by the tomb of Eurydice I by K. A. Rhomaios in 1938. It was in pieces but has since been reconstructed, and it has sphinxes as supporters for both armrests and also royal Macedonian starbursts at the head of its back panel. Archaeology has shown that the Rhomaios tomb was never covered by the usual tumulus, so it may never have been occupied. It dates roughly to the end of the 4th century BC. Both of these tombs are from a section of the royal cemetery dominated by high-status female graves and therefore known as the "Queens' Cluster".[47]

[42] In July 2015 the Greek Ministry of Culture issued a Press Release clarifying the relative locations of bones found in and beneath the backfill that had entered Tomb I in antiquity after it had been robbed. They did so in order to refute the claims that bones from the leg of a man could belong to the original occupant and that that occupant was Philip II, claims published in Antonis Bartsiokas, Juan-Luis Arsuaga, Elena Santos, Milagros Algaba, and Asier Gómez-Olivencia, The lameness of King Philip II and Royal Tomb I at Vergina, Macedonia, PNAS July 20, 2015. The Ministry stated: "The bones of the deceased that this study attempts to link with Philip II, in particular the bones of the legs (shins and the ossicles of the foot) were not found on the floor of the tomb, like the bones of a woman and her neonate, but they were found about 20 cm higher than the original burial, on a layer containing stones and limestone fragments, within the soil of backfill that came into the grave after its looting. The fact of finding bones in connection with each other, belonging to a shin, signifies "articulation", i.e. the presence of muscle tissue that holds them together, and eliminates the possibility that these bones came from the disturbance of the original burial (the woman's body was completely dissociated and her bones were found mixed and gathered in two groups on the mortar of the floor)."

[43] Manolis Andronicos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs*, 1984, pp. 90–94.

[44] Manolis Andronicos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs*, 1984, pp. 101–116.

[45] Manolis Andronicos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs*, 1984, pp. 202–206.

[46] Heracles to Alexander the Great (exhibition catalogue), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford 2011, p. 14 & p. 102 for the throne of Eurydice I; p. 52 for the throne of the sphinxes from the Rhomaios Tomb.

[47] A map of the cemetery at Aegae showing the Queens' Cluster, the Great Tumulus and the other tombs is shown in Heracles to Alexander the Great (exhibition catalogue), Ashmolean Museum 2011, p. 154.

It follows that sphinxes were a symbol in particular use by late 4th century BC Macedonian queens. But why might Macedonian queens have associated themselves with sphinxes? One possible answer emerges from Greek mythology. Apollodorus 3.5.8 wrote: Laius was buried by Damasistratus, king of Plataea, and Creon, son of Menoeceus, succeeded to the kingdom. In his reign, a heavy calamity befell Thebes. For Hera sent the Sphinx, whose mother was Echidna and her father Typhon; and she had the face of a woman, the breast and feet and tail of a lion, and the wings of a bird. Clearly, the sphinx was the creature of Hera, Queen of the Gods and wife of Zeus. The Amphipolis sphinxes also wear the polos crown which is a form of headgear particularly associated with Hera. It is well known that the kings of Macedon traced their descent from Zeus via Heracles (e.g. Diodorus, 17.1.5 and Plutarch, Alexander, 2.1), that they put depictions of Zeus on their coinage and that they associated themselves with Zeus quite generally. They celebrated an important festival of Zeus at Dion, and the people of Eresus in Lesbos erected altars to Zeus Philippios[48] — possibly indicating the divinisation of Philip II as a manifestation of Zeus. If the Macedonian king posed as Zeus, it would consequently hardly be surprising if his principal queen became associated with Hera, the mistress of the sphinx.

It is especially interesting and pertinent that another pair of monumental late 4th to early 3rd century BC freestanding female Greek sphinx sculptures was uncovered by Auguste Mariette in excavating the dromos of the Memphite Serapeum at Saqqara in Egypt in 1851 (Figure 18). These sphinxes are an excellent parallel for the Amphipolis sphinxes. They are in the same style, and they have the same form and posture. Notably, even their hairstyles are an exact match for the Amphipolis sphinxes. Lauer & Picard in their 1955 book on the Greek sculptures at the Serapeum argued that they date to Ptolemy I.[49] A semicircle of statues of Greek philosophers and poets was also uncovered by Mariette in the dromos of the Memphite Serapeum near to the sphinxes, and Dorothy Thompson in 1988 suggested that this semicircle had guarded the entrance of the first tomb of Alexander the Great at Memphis.[50] I elaborated on this idea in my article on The Sarcophagus of Alexander the Great published in April 2002. Later, in 2012 I wrote in the context of discussing the semicircle: "In 1951 Lauer discovered a fragment of an inscription in the neighbourhood of some other Greek statues [including the pair of Greek sphinxes] standing further down the dromos of the Serapeum. It appears to be an artist's signature in Greek characters of form dating to the early third century BC. It, therefore, seems likely that all the Greek statuary at the Serapeum was sculpted under Ptolemy I, hence these statues were contemporaneous with Alexander's Memphite tomb."[51]

[48] M. N. Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions 2*, 1948, no. 191.6.
[49] J-P. Lauer & C. Picard, *Les Statues Ptolémaiques du Sarapieion de Memphis*, Paris, 1955, p. 149.
[50] Dorothy Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies*, Princeton, 1988, p. 212.
[51] A. M. Chugg, *The Quest for the Tomb of Alexander the Great* (2nd edition), AMC Publications, May, 2012, p. 65.

The sphinxes at Amphipolis may therefore be interpreted as suggesting that the occupant of the tomb was a prominent queen of Macedon with a close connection with Alexander the Great.

The caryatids, sculptures of women acting as pillars, are now damaged with missing (smashed?) arms and one has had its face destroyed by a collapsed beam, but a sketch showing approximately how they originally appeared is shown in Figure 19, although it is likely that they jointly held some important symbol aloft — perhaps a wreath or a serpent — which is omitted from this drawing.

A parallel is to be found in the miniature caryatids also decorating the throne of Alexander's grandmother, Eurydice I, on which they alternate with actual pillars acting as struts in its construction. They too have one arm upraised and the other lowered and slightly lifting their dress. They have a slightly more dynamic posture than the Amphipolis caryatids, appearing to strut rather than merely to step forward, so they have sometimes been called dancers. Nevertheless, the parallel is striking, given that this same throne also had sphinxes.

Plutarch, in the second chapter of his Life of Alexander, gives a colourful account of Olympias and her ladies. He records that these women participated in Orphic rites and Dionysiac orgies with the queen and were called Klodones (possibly "spinners" or "cacklers") or Mimallones ("men imitators").[52] Polyaenus 4.1, in a story about Argaeus, an early king of Macedon, writes that the Klodones were priestesses of Dionysus, who became called Mimallones after Macedonian virgins carrying the wands of Dionysus were mistaken for men in a battle. Plutarch also tells us that Olympias kept serpents that would often rear their heads out of the μυστικῶν λίκνων (mystical winnowing-baskets) of her Klodones to terrify the men. The word λίκνων that Plutarch uses for these baskets describes the type of basket that is carried on the heads of the Amphipolis caryatids. Therefore, if the Amphipolis tomb is that of Olympias, the explanation for the caryatids would be that they represent those Klodones that participated in Orphic rites with the queen whose tomb they guard.

It is clear that the newly discovered Amphipolis caryatids are members of the large subclass of caryatids known as canephora: i.e. caryatids that bear baskets upon their heads. Canephora are so common and so well studied as to make any other explanation of the caryatids' headgear at least improbable. There is plenty of ancient evidence available on the form of ancient snake baskets as used in Dionysiac rites. The Dionysus Sarcophagus from the Metropolitan Museum in New York depicts a procession including Dionysus himself at its centre riding astride a panther and wielding his traditional pine-cone tipped wand or thyrsos. Its sculpture depicts a variety of baskets that should be identified as μυστικῶν λίκνων in view of the context. However, in particular, there sits on the ground beneath the feet of the god a small basket with a snake disappearing beneath its lid. This is very similar in its

[52] Plutarch, *Life of Alexander,* 2.5–6.

shape and size to the baskets worn by the Amphipolis caryatids. This Dionysus sarcophagus dates to ~AD260–270, but there are much earlier examples of Dionysiac snake baskets. For example, Cistaphoric tetradrachms minted in the second century BC in Pergamon in Asia Minor are considered to depict the *cista mystica*, i.e. the basket containing the sacred implements of Dionysus worship. There is a serpent creeping into the basket, which is similar to the baskets on the heads of the caryatids.

Comparison with other ancient artworks demonstrates that the Amphipolis caryatids wear the dress and adopt the stance of priestesses of Dionysus. In particular, there are surviving Roman copies of a 4th century BC statue of Dionysus leaning on the diminutive figure of a human priestess in the Metropolitan and Hermitage museums. In the case of the Met-Hermitage Dionysus, the priestess has many features that are also seen in the Amphipolis caryatids. Her stance is similar with one arm upraised and the other lowered to hitch up her dress. She has the same hairstyle, with three helical locks draped down the front of each shoulder. The Hermitage version wears the same thick-soled sandals as the Amphipolis caryatids. In particular, the priestess wears a similar dress to the caryatids with a chiton (tunic) worn on top. A distinctive feature is that the chiton is hung over only one shoulder and its top edge is terminated by a diagonal band running between the breasts and exhibiting intricate folds. The priestess' chiton and diagonal band appear to echo the panther skin tunic worn by Dionysus himself in the Hermitage statue. The fact that the chiton it is hung over only one shoulder is more in keeping with the way Greek men wore tunics and therefore recalls Plutarch's alternative term for the Klodones: Mimallones or "men imitators".

Another example of female figures wearing the single-shoulder chiton with a diagonal band of folds at its upper hem is a relief depicting a line of dancing women wearing this dress from the Temenos in the sanctuary of the mysteries on the island of Samothrace. This building is believed to have been constructed between 340–317 BC. Plutarch, just prior to his account of the Klodones, recalls that Olympias (then called Myrtale) first met Philip of Macedon at the mysteries on Samothrace. The dates of the Temenos make it possible that it was built under the patronage of Olympias. Her involvement might explain the dating of the completion of this phase of expansion of the sanctuary to the year preceding her death.

Regarding the mosaic (Figure 13), there is a strong presumption that the figure of Persephone should be a portrait of the deceased individual who was the occupant of the tomb. Abduction into the Underworld is a metaphor for death, so if there is a depiction of someone passing from life laid out across the path of a visitor on entering a tomb, it is hard not to form the conception that it represents the death of the tomb's occupant. Furthermore, the builders of a tomb of such phenomenal grandeur clearly intended to exalt its occupant in every possible way. Since the world was plunged into permanent winter when Persephone was abducted, representing the deceased in her guise in the mosaic would have been a

decorous compliment. The message was that the world was plunged into eternal winter by the death of the occupant. It is hard to believe that the tomb-builders, who were probably the occupant's close relatives, would have missed such an opportunity when they had gone to so much trouble and expense over the rest of the arrangements.

There are numerous examples of members of the Macedonian Royal Family being represented as deities or deified heroes in contemporaneous Macedonian art. The most directly parallel instance is the probable depiction of Nicesipolis as Persephone in the mural in Tomb I at Aegae. Additionally, numismatists strongly suspect that the profile portrait of Zeus on the tetradrachms of Philip II was made to resemble the king. It is a near certainty that the profile portrait of Heracles wearing the Nemean lion scalp on the obverse of Macedonian tetradrachms, although first used long before the reign of Alexander the Great, was nevertheless adapted into a portrait of the conqueror later in his reign, especially in the output of his Babylonian mint. Alexander is also depicted wearing a helmet in the form of a lion scalp in several sculptural works, notably the sarcophagus found in the royal cemetery at Sidon. At about the time that the Amphipolis Tomb was constructed, Ptolemy Soter was issuing tetradrachms in Egypt with a portrait of Alexander explicitly deified with an elephant scalp and the ram's horns of Zeus-Ammon.

The Amphipolis mosaic depicts Persephone with flame-like red-gold hair. Olympias was a Molossian from Epirus, where reddish-blond hair was famously associated with her family, who claimed descent from Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles. His nickname was Pyrrhus, which means flame–red in Greek. This nickname suggests an individual with reddish-blond hair in rather the same way that the nickname "Ginger" usually means someone with auburn hair in English. This Pyrrhus was, of course, a semi-legendary figure, but the grandson of Olympias' sister and uncle was the historical King Pyrrhus of Epirus, after whom Pyrrhic victories are named.

We also have some strong indications of Alexander's hair colour, which might very well have echoed that of his mother. Two ancient sources provide direct evidence on Alexander's hair colour as follows:

> "They say that Alexander, the son of Philip, was naturally handsome: his hair was swept upwards and was golden-red in colour." Aelian, Varia Historia 12.14
>
> "Alexander had the body of a man but the hair of a lion." Pseudo-Callisthenes 1.13.3

There is also a colour image of Alexander in the form of a fresco found at Pompeii in Regio VI in the Insula Occidentalis. The hair colour of this Alexander is an excellent match for the hair of the Persephone figure in the mosaic and these murals from Pompeii are mostly copies of much earlier Greek paintings.

Finally, there is a 4th century BC mosaic signed by Gnosis depicting a deer hunt found at Pella in Macedonia in which some scholars (e.g. Paolo Moreno, "Apelles: The Alexander

Mosaic", pp. 102–104) have seen representations of Hephaistion and Alexander. This is because the double-headed axe wielded by the left-hand figure is an attribute of the god Hephaistos, after whom Hephaistion was named, and also because the Alexander figure on the right has his red-gold hair swept up over his forehead in an anastole, which is a feature found in many of the most authentic surviving ancient portraits of Alexander.

The question should also be posed as to whether the Hades (Pluto) and Hermes figures in the Amphipolis mosaic also have human counterparts? Did its artist intend that there should be a kind of overall human-divine duality in its interpretation, such that each of the gods is actually a portrait of a deceased member of the Macedonian Royal Family? An example of such a duality pertaining to the Royal Family is an ivory carving found in the Prince's tomb (Tomb III) at Vergina, which has often been interpreted as representing Philip and Olympias as a god and goddess with Alexander serenading them on the pipes in the guise of the god Pan.[53]

In this ivory, it is immediately obvious that the bearded and wreathed man at its centre bears a striking resemblance to the bearded and wreathed Hades figure in the newly discovered mosaic. The Hades figure also seems recognisable from a range of other contemporaneous portraits of Philip II, Alexander's father, and it was widely remarked whilst the Persephone section of the mosaic had yet to be uncovered that he looked like a portrait of Philip II. That he is crowned as a king could equally refer to the kingdom of the Underworld or to the earthly realm of Macedon. Furthermore, Hades averts the right side of his face. This is significant because Philip's right eye was disfigured by an arrow wound at the siege of Methone in 354 BC, so the right side of his face could not be shown without spoiling the Hades-Philip duality. It is easy to appreciate the magnificent irony in depicting Philip as carrying Olympias off into the Underworld since Justin 9.7.1 repeats a persistent rumour that she was implicated in organising his assassination.

But it is the final figure's human identity, which is of most compelling interest. The artist seems to have depicted Hermes with particular verve, vivacity and drama. Staring up from beneath the viewer's feet, he virtually steals the show. If he is to have a human counterpart, he should be somebody close to Olympias who preceded her into the afterlife as he precedes her into the Underworld in the mosaic. Nobody still living at the time the mosaic was crafted could sensibly be depicted entering upon the afterlife. Philip is depicted at about his age at death, which was forty-seven. He could not be shown any older if he were to be recognisable. He died at the autumnal equinox in 336 BC, almost twenty years before the death of Olympias in the spring of 316 BC. All the human portraits in the mosaic, therefore, need to be consistent with the year 336 BC in order for them to work as a group portrait of members of the royal family. Olympias would have been about forty in 336 BC, and that is consistent with the mature looking Persephone in the mosaic.

[53] Manolis Andronicos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs*, 1984, pp. 206–207.

Hermes appears as a young, clean-shaven man of about twenty and there is something strikingly familiar about him. In fact, this riddle has a simple and singular solution: the male member of the royal family who was twenty when Philip died and who pre-deceased Olympias was their only son, Alexander the Great. There seems to me also to be a family resemblance between the figures of Hermes and Persephone in the mosaic. It is not difficult to believe that they are mother and son. Although it may be unfamiliar to see Alexander depicted wearing a petasos hat, there is in fact a parallel instance in the Pella deer hunt mosaic, where just such a hat has flown up off of Alexander's head, due to the impetus of his attack on the deer. A few other portraits of Alexander at this age survive, perhaps the most important being a head found on the Acropolis in Athens. It seems entirely likely that the Amphipolis Hermes and the Acropolis head Alexander depict one and the same individual. It is hard to see how this interpretation of the mosaic as a portrait of the most renowned royal family of Macedon would not have been obvious to a visitor to the Amphipolis Tomb at the end of the 4th century BC.

There are murals in a band at the tops of the walls of the second chamber. Parts of the painting above the doorway between the second and third chambers are best preserved. The section immediately above the portal depicts a man and a woman wearing crimson-purple belts or sashes around their waists in dancing postures either side of a garlanded sacrificial bull (Figure 21). In another section immediately to the right of the first, a winged woman appears to blow a trumpet standing in the prow of a boat with a tall urn to the left and a cauldron or brazier on a tripod to the right (Figure 22). I have added outline reconstructions beneath the original photos of these sections of the mural.[54]

These scenes appear to depict cult activities. In particular, there are significant parallels with what we know of the activities at one particular cult site: The Sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace, where the famous Mysteries of Samothrace were conducted. This island sanctuary was long patronised by the royal family of nearby Macedon and in the era of the Amphipolis Tomb, the second half of the 4th century BC, that patronage is particularly linked to Queen Olympias. Notably, Plutarch, Alexander 2.1, writes: "We are told that Philip, after being initiated into the mysteries at Samothrace at the same time as Olympias, he himself still being a youth and she an orphan child, fell in love with her and betrothed himself to her at once with the consent of her brother, Arymbas."

A first connection with the Mysteries of Samothrace is the combination of bull sacrifice with rosettes. There is a sculpted relief from the early 3rd century BC Arsinoe Rotunda at

[54] These are my reconstructions. The archaeologists have proposed that the man and woman either side of the bull are centaurs, but one hoof of the supposed female centaur was reconstructed from a fold at the bottom hem of the woman's dress and they conceived large gold crescent-shaped pendants from the outlines of the clothing about the midriffs of either figure and from the lower part of the bull's garland. They also reconstructed the Nike as a sphinx. But note that centaurs and sphinxes attendant upon a sacrificial bull would be unprecedented in Greek art.

the sanctuary on Samothrace, which depicts two garlanded bulls' heads either side of a large 8-petal rosette. It has been inferred that it alludes to bull sacrifices during the mysteries. It is known that one phase of the ceremonies involved animal sacrifices, and it is certain that this included bull sacrifices.[55] It is therefore quite striking that the newly discovered paintings depict a possible bull sacrifice in the context of a chamber also decorated with similar rosettes on its ceiling and on the lintel over its entrance.

A second connection derives from the intimate association of the Sanctuary on Samothrace with Nike, the winged goddess of victory. Most famously, the renowned "Victory of Samothrace" standing in a ship's prow and now in the Louvre, was unearthed in pieces around one of the ruined temple buildings in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods by Charles Champoiseau in March 1863. Additionally, there is a votive stele dedicated to the Great Gods of the Samothrace Sanctuary found at Larissa in Thessaly by the Heuzey and Daumet expedition. That too depicts the goddess Nike as a central part of its composition. A winged woman in Greek art of the early Hellenistic period is usually a depiction of Nike, so we can reasonably assume that the winged woman in the newly discovered painting is also the goddess of victory. This identification is further supported by the fact that she appears to stand in the prow of a ship. As already mentioned, a Nike blowing a trumpet on a ship's prow is the device on the reverse of early 3rd century BC tetradrachms minted by Demetrius Poliorcetes.

A Nike figure officiating at the sacrifice of a garlanded bull accompanied by a woman in a dancing pose in front of a tripod brazier is a scene on a famous Attic red figure pot[56], and another red figure vessel depicts women garlanding sacrificial bulls in front of tripod braziers.[57] In general, there are many ancient depictions of Nikes performing bull sacrifices.

The tomb painting appears to have a background of darkness, and it is known that some of the ceremonies at the Mysteries of Samothrace took place at night. A foundation was recovered at the Hieron building within the Samothrace Sanctuary, which could have supported a giant torch or something like the tall tripod brazier in the newly discovered paintings could have fulfilled the function of illuminating nocturnal rites. More generally, the discovery of numerous lamps and torch supports throughout the Sanctuary of the Great Gods confirms the nocturnal nature of the initiation rites. Furthermore, it is suspected that initiates at Samothrace were promised a happy afterlife, as was also the case in the mysteries conducted at Eleusis near Athens. This would make scenes from the mysteries of Samothrace an excellent subject for decoration of an initiate's tomb.

[55] The evidence is from the Roman period, but there is every reason to suppose continuity is such rites at least from the Classical period onwards.

[56] Attic red-figure amphora depicting Nike preparing a bull for sacrifice, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich.

[57] British Museum Collection, red-figure amphora type B circa 450 BC, Museum number 1846,0128.1.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, we know from ancient reports that a specific feature of the Mysteries at Samothrace was that initiates wore crimson-purple sashes around their waists.[58] It is, therefore, significant to notice just such dark reddish belts around the waists of the man and woman dancing either side of the bull in the newly discovered paintings from the second chamber at Amphipolis.

The dancing woman rather than the bull is the central figure in the mural above the middle of the doorway into the third chamber. She appears to dance away from the viewer towards the third chamber and its cist tomb. It would be natural to identify her as a depiction of the occupant of the tomb as an initiate at the Mysteries of Samothrace, a key event in her life.

The carved rosettes in a line along the lintel above the caryatids (Figure 19) have an inner and an outer ring of eight petals. They are a virtually exact match to the blue-enamelled rosettes on the gold larnax of Philip II discovered by Andronicos in Tomb II at Aegae in 1977. Olympias' original name in her marriage to Philip seems to have been Myrtale, so she was named after a flower.[59] Myrtle flowers have five petals in nature, but symbolic flowers most usually have eight petals in Macedonian art.

The archaeologists have reported that they found a sculptural relief in the third chamber carved to depict a serpent wound around a tree trunk. Olympias is closely associated with serpents. Plutarch reports that she and her Klodones kept pet snakes for use in their Dionysiac rites and Pseudo-Callisthenes alleges that the Egyptian pharaoh and magician Nectanebo came to Olympias in the form of a serpent to father Alexander on her.

Some have claimed that the lion of Amphipolis (Figure 20) that originally stood atop the tomb mound at Amphipolis is a problem for the attribution of the tomb as that of Olympias because it is ostensibly a male symbol of bravery and courage. Others have countered that it might be a lioness as no penis has yet been found for it (not all the lion's fragments have ever been found). But this is improbable because it has a very definite mane, an attribute exclusive to male lions. However, the second chapter of Plutarch's Life of Alexander indicates why a lion might have been deemed a suitable guardian to watch over the tomb of Olympias. It tells the story of how Philip, Alexander's father, dreamt that he put a seal bearing a device in the form of a lion on the womb of Olympias whilst she was pregnant with Alexander. What better symbol, therefore, to proclaim the tomb of the mother of Alexander the Great than the device on the seal under which she became his mother? Alexander is stated by Plutarch to have been born on 20th July in the lion month when the sun was in the constellation of Leo (allowing for the precession of the equinoxes between 356 BC and the present). Alexander was a putative descendant on his father's side of Heracles,

[58] Matthew Dillon, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece*, Routledge 1997, p. 71; Fragments of Varro's Divine Antiquities.
[59] Justin, 9.7.13.

who wore the Nemean lion scalp, a type of headgear also adopted by Alexander himself in some representations. For these reasons a lion was symbolic of Olympias' illustrious son, so perhaps we should view the lion of Amphipolis as a kind of stand-in for Alexander himself.

Analysis of the Bones

The cremated remains found in the Kasta tomb burial trench, insofar as they total merely nine small bone fragments in about ten cubic metres of soil and fill, should be considered to be much less significant than the skeletons found in the same grave. Although the reconstructed parts of the human skeletons are only around 50% complete, sufficient numbers of unattributed and uncremated human bones have been reported from the same archaeological context that we should conclude that these bones represent complete cadavers. Indeed, the osteoarchaeologists who performed the initial inventories on the bones have stated that all the unattributed fragments appear to be from the same set of skeletons and that there is no evidence for any more individuals having been buried in the tomb chambers as excavated.[60]

Conversely, the cremated fragments constitute less than a few percent of a complete cremation. This raises the possibility that these cremation fragments originate from a grave or graves that were disturbed when the soil was dug to create and then backfill the Kasta Mound cist tomb trench. That is the most probable reason for the absence of the rest of the cremation, although the archaeologists have aired the hypothesis that the grave robbers stole the rest of the cremation remains when they took the hypothetical urn. The problem with this concept is that it is illogical for the robbers to have removed just a few fragments from the urn, before carrying it out of the tomb chambers. It is much more likely that they would either have completely emptied the urn in seeking valuable contents, such as a gold wreath, or not have disturbed its contents at all, whilst still within the chambers.

It is known that the Kasta Mound site had been used as a cemetery for centuries prior to the creation of the Amphipolis tomb,[61] so it would be surprising if the soil used to refill the

[60] The information on the bones given in this paper mainly derives from a detailed Press Release by the Greek Ministry of Culture issued on 19th January 2015, reporting the results of an investigation by a team from the Aristotle and Democritus universities, in which it was defined that 550 bones and bone fragments had been inventoried and remains from five individuals had been identified: a woman of 60+ years, a man of ~45 years, a second man of ~35 years, an infant and nine bone fragments from a cremated adult. In a further Press Release issued on 21st January 2015 it was clarified that no bones from any other human were believed to be included among the 550 fragments.

[61] Lazarides excavated ~70 graves around the Kasta Mound and concluded that the area had been used as a cemetery by the nearby "Hill 133" settlement from the early iron age until the settlement was superseded by the foundation of Amphipolis by Hagnon in 437 BC, but continued use in the later Classical period is also likely, although that phase may lie beneath the Kasta Mound — certainly there were Hellenistic burials after the Kasta Mound had been constructed; Demetrios Lazaridis, Amphipolis, Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens 1997, p. 64.

fresh grave slot did not already contain a few cremated bone fragments. Since the amount of soil required was of the order of ten cubic metres (see Figure 3), fewer than one cremation fragment per cubic metre would suffice to explain the number of fragments discovered, and that is a rather low figure for a cemetery area that also seems to have been used as a site for cremation pyres.[62]

Another problem for the idea that the cremated bones belonged to a hypothetical original occupant (with the skeletons as later intrusions) is the fact that the cist grave slot is elongated and basically coffin-shaped with a smaller partitioned area at its doorway end. Consequently, if the skeletons were later additions, it would imply that the entire cist tomb was a later intrusion into an existing Kasta Mound monument. Yet this looks difficult to sustain from the archaeology. The cist tomb was constructed to a much lower build-standard than the chambers leading to it, yet it is located at the precise focus point of the monument beneath the centre of the last chamber, which makes it look as though the cist tomb inhumation burial preceded the rest of the monument. It has in fact been reported that the archaeologists themselves have suggested that the cist grave trench in the third chamber predates the rest of the monument.

It has also been suggested that the smaller section of the grave slot was the site of the cremation urn and that soot was found at this end, but soot from the torches of the sealers was found throughout the tomb and high status cremation remains were normally ritually washed prior to burial.[63] An alternative hypothesis, assuming that the female skeleton with its intact skull lay in the coffin, could be that the short section at her feet was used for the burial of the two (decapitated?) male skeletons recovered from the same grave fill, provided of course they were inserted curled into the foetal position.

Furthermore, somebody went to great trouble and expense to seal up the tomb chambers. We know for certain that there were no financially valuable treasures left within after the sealing, so the virtually complete skeletons were the only thing that the sealers could possibly have wished to deny others access to. It is not plausible that denial of access to the nine tiny fragments of cremated bone motivated the sealing.

It would therefore seem that the cist tomb contained inhumation burials, probably the skeletons that the archaeologists excavated from its disrupted interior and trench, and that the cist tomb preceded the rest of the monument. The burials in the cist tomb must have included somebody of high enough status to merit the subsequent erection of the monument. This was unusual and begs explanation because high status burials in the Hellenistic period were normally cremations. For example, all three of the intact burials in Tombs II and III under the Great Tumulus at Vergina were cremations, and they were certainly all members

[62] Lazarides excavated a pyre on "Kastas" as reported in Praktika tis Archaeologikis Eterias (ΠΑΕ) in 1975.
[63] Manolis Andronicos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs*, Ekdotike Athenon, Athens 1984, p. 75.

of the royal family who died in the second half of the 4th century BC. We also know from literary sources that a Homeric tradition of cremation on a pyre was the standard practice at the time.[64] The Kasta Mound and the Amphipolis Tomb are even larger and more magnificent than the Great Tumulus and its several sepulchres, so it is an anomaly for its cist grave burials to have been denied cremation. However, exclusively in the case of Olympias and nobody else, there is a viable explanation from the historical circumstances. Olympias was condemned as a murderess by the Macedonian Assembly in the late Spring of 316 BC at roughly the same time as one or two of her senior lieutenants also perished. Aristonous is recorded to have been killed at the instigation of Cassander[65], and nothing more is heard of Monimus, Olympias' commander in Pella, who had just surrendered to Cassander.[66] Despite her royal status, being technically a criminal, the queen would not have merited the glory and expense of a cremation and would probably have been hastily buried in a grave of moderate status, potentially with the bodies of her lieutenants.

Within a year of the queen's death, the Royal Family had become somewhat reconciled with Cassander, who married Thessalonike, Olympias' step-daughter. The grandson of Olympias, Alexander IV, continued to be recognised as the king and was based at Amphipolis with his mother, Roxane. The Royal Family would have had a period of five to six years to arrange the construction of a fitting monument over the grave of the king's grandmother, before Cassander, perhaps having reason to doubt the sincerity of the reconciliation, arranged the murder of Alexander IV and his mother Roxane in ~310 BC, a year before the young king would have come of age and inherited the power of his illustrious father. It is easy to appreciate that the erection of so grand a memorial over the grave of Olympias could well have convinced Cassander that he would not ultimately be forgiven for having organised the judicial murder of the matriarch of the Royal Family.

There is evidence that the people of Macedonia in that era viewed the disturbance of graves with a degree of horror and as a serious crime. For example, the desecration of the tomb of Iollas, the youngest brother of Cassander, is listed among the crimes that caused the Macedonians to hate Olympias.[67] Therefore it is likely that those who wished to honour the occupant of the cist tomb would have chosen to leave the cist unopened and undisturbed in the course of erecting a substantial monument over it. There was an established tradition of erecting such a monument in the form of a tumulus over graves.

[64] For example, the intact burials in Tomb II and Tomb III at Aegae were all cremations, Hephaistion was cremated (Diodorus 17.115) and Book 23 of the Iliad on Patroclus' funeral seems to have been used as a guide to proper obsequies.

[65] Diodorus, 19.51.1; that Aristonous came to prominence during Alexander's expedition is consistent with him having been in his mid-forties at the time he was murdered.

[66] Diodorus, 19.50.7.

[67] Diodorus, 19.11.8, cf. 19.35.1.

This was called a *sema* deriving from the term for a marker. For example, archaeology has confirmed that the Great Tumulus over the royal tombs at Aegae was erected some decades after the construction of the original tombs and that it was added without disturbing the tomb chambers. The importance of this analysis of how the specifics of the Amphipolis Tomb can be explained by the known history surrounding the death of Olympias is that it provides a unique reconciliation between the archaeological evidence and the historical sources. Of course, the further fact that the most intact skeleton and the individual whose bones were concentrated in the bottom metre or so of the grave trench was a woman of the correct age for Olympias at her death serves to reinforce this concordance between the archaeological and historical evidence.

History also volunteers an explanation as to why the Amphipolis Tomb was robbed and desecrated and then diligently sealed by the desecrators themselves. Assuming that Cassander had permitted the Kasta Mound monument to be constructed by the Royal Family and their allies as part of a policy of reconciliation in the years 316–310 BC, it must nevertheless have been a source of private indignation for him, since Olympias is recorded to have murdered his brother Nicanor and desecrated the grave of his youngest brother Iollas. Once the policy of reconciliation had been jettisoned with the murders of the king and his mother in the citadel of Amphipolis, Cassander would have been free to wreak unrestrained vengeance upon Olympias' nearby tomb, and we should naturally expect something parallel to the queen's vengeance upon the grave of Iollas. But among her enemies, Olympias had the reputation of being a witch and her bones were potentially talismans of great potency for her faction. Hence it would have been important to Cassander to deny his enemies access to her remains and also, out of superstition, to do what he could to confine her spirit and leave her skeleton in its disrupted state. There may even be a historical record of the desecration of Olympias' tomb by Cassander. Diodorus 17.118.2 mentions that Cassander "murdered Olympias and cast her out graveless" (τήν τε γὰρ Ὀλυμπιάδα φονεύσαντα ἄταφον ῥῖψαι). It has always been supposed by historians that Diodorus was implying that there was a long delay between her murder and her relatives being allowed to recover her corpse for burial. However, Diodorus' words are literally more consistent with Cassander having thrown her bones out of her grave. This is supported by the fact that Diodorus 1.64.5 uses very similar language explicitly to describe corpses being cast out of their graves (…καὶ τὰ σώματα ἠπείλει διασπάσειν καὶ μεθ᾽ ὕβρεως ἐκρίψειν ἐκ τῶν τάφων). The dating evidence on the sealing event does not appear to exclude this new interpretation, but neither does it currently exclude the archaeologists' theory that the tomb was sealed by the "last Macedonians" at the time of the Roman conquest in about 168 BC.

At the time of writing (June 2018) no results have been announced for the crucial isotopic ratio tests on the bones and bone fragments. These should include carbon-14 dating (ratio of C-14 to C-12), but the irreducible error on C-14 dates around the 4th century BC can be

over a century. Due to fluctuations in the amount of C-14 in the atmosphere seen in tree ring data, a sample from something that died in 316 BC will have the same C-14 to C-12 ratio as a sample that died in either 348 BC or 210 BC. The strontium-87 to strontium-86 ratio is potentially more important from the point of view of testing whether the female skeleton is Olympias. The strontium ratio increases with the age of the underlying geology of the territory in which the individual lived. The ratio in the bones reflects the location in which the person spent the last ten years of their lives, but tooth enamel forms in childhood, so it locks in the Sr-87/Sr-86 signature for the place the person grew up. One single decayed tooth is stated to have survived in the skull of the 60+ woman. If any enamel is intact, it should be possible to test whether its strontium ratio is consistent with Olympias' childhood, which was spent in Epirus and more specifically Molossia (vicinity of Dodona). Olympias also spent most of her last decade in Molossia, but she was back in Macedonia for the last year or so. So the strontium ratio in her bones might give a mixed signature. DNA testing is also of great interest in respect of these bones, given that it could be the maternal DNA of Alexander the Great. But there is currently nothing else specific to compare it with. Although we probably have the remains of her grandson, Alexander IV, from Tomb III at Aegae, he was cremated, so there is a poor chance of obtaining a valid DNA signature for him.

Conclusions

The archaeologists have concluded that the Amphipolis Tomb monument was a memorial for Hephaistion on the basis of rough inscriptions on a few of the peribolos blocks which imply that the blocks were cut for a monument for Hephaistion. However, the fact that the first letter of the inscription is missing from both their examples of these blocks must mean that the blocks were shortened from their original length when they were incorporated into the peribolos. That very strongly suggests that the Amphipolis Tomb was not the monument for which these blocks were originally cut, but that the builders of the Amphipolis Tomb re-assigned blocks cut for a monument to Hephaistion at the end of the reign of Alexander, which had been stockpiled when plans for monuments to Hephaistion were abandoned upon Alexander's death.

The archaeologists and others have argued that the Amphipolis Tomb cannot be the sepulchre of Olympias, because a reconstruction by Charles Edson in 1949 of an inscription from a fragment mentioning a tomb of Olympias proves that the tomb of Olympias was located at Pydna. However, no such tomb of Olympias has ever been found in the vicinity of Pydna, and Charles Edson actually stated in his paper that he used an assumption that Olympias died at Pydna, based on misreading Diodorus 19.50–51, as his guide in formulating his reconstruction of the inscription. Because we do not know the number of letter spaces between successive lines of the fragment, many viable reconstructions are possible, with the choice depending upon the reconstructor's whim. These possibilities include reconstructions stating

that the tomb of Olympias lay at Amphipolis. Diodorus 19.50–51 actually fails to state where Olympias died, but a careful reading of his account suggests that it is most likely that she was murdered at Amphipolis. She died at the end of her war with Cassander, and that war ended with the surrender of Amphipolis in the late spring of 316 BC. Furthermore, her grandson and daughter-in-law spent the next six years living in the citadel at Amphipolis.

There is overwhelming evidence that the archaeologists are correct in dating the Amphipolis Tomb to the last quarter of the 4th century BC, and there is no contrary evidence of any substance. If blocks used in the peribolos were re-assigned to the Amphipolis Tomb project after plans to build monuments to Hephaistion had been abandoned upon Alexander's death, then we can date the Amphipolis Tomb construction to the ninth decade of the 4th century BC with high probability.

The archaeological evidence for the date of the desecration and sealing of the Amphipolis Tomb is less definitive, but it supports a sealing not later than the Roman conquest of Macedonia in 168 BC. However, the archaeology suggests that the desecrators and the sealers were the same group of people acting at the same time because fragments of the smashed marble doors of the third chamber were excavated suspended in the sand fill, where they had fallen when the doors were rammed during the sealing. Therefore, the historical evidence would suggest that the most likely context for the desecration and sealing was the murder of Alexander IV and Roxane at Amphipolis in 310 BC, when Cassander would have had the motive and the opportunity to both desecrate and tightly seal a tomb of Olympias.

The iconography of the decoration of the excavated chambers strongly suggests that the tomb was built for a very high-status female occupant. Sphinxes were symbols of the principal queen of Macedon, and they also connect the tomb with the only candidate for the first tomb of Alexander the Great at Memphis. The caryatids appear to be priestesses of Dionysus, who were called Klodones in Macedon and were key adherents of Olympias. The mosaic appears to depict the tomb's occupant in the guise of Persephone being violently abducted into the Underworld. It also works as a group portrait of the Macedonian Royal Family the last time they were all alive together in 336 BC. The painting above the entrance to the burial chamber seems to depict a scene from the Mysteries of Samothrace, at which ceremonies Olympias first met her future husband Philip II of Macedon. The central figure in the composition is a woman facing away from the viewer and towards the chamber overlying the grave.

Many uncremated bones from three adult skeletons, a few from an infant and nine tiny cremated bone fragments were found strewn in the grave slot. The number of cremation fragments is no larger than would be expected to be found loose in the soil in an area that had been used as a cemetery for centuries. They were probably introduced via the soil that covered the cist tomb lying a metre beneath the floor of the third chamber. The majority of the bones of an uncremated woman over sixty years of age, the correct age range for

Olympias at death, were found in the grave, including a nearly intact skull.[68] The other two adult skeletons were men without skulls, and there were a few bone fragments from a peri-natal infant. It is consistent with the historical accounts of Olympias' death that she should have been inhumed in a poor-quality cist tomb without cremation since she had been condemned as a criminal. When, subsequently, Cassander pursued a policy of reconciliation with the royal family, including marrying princess Thessalonike and acknowledging Alexander IV as the future ruler,[69] it is feasible that he allowed the royal family to construct a more fitting memorial over the grave of Olympias. This is the only explanation for the Amphipolis Tomb that reconciles the archaeological and the historical evidence.

Conversely, according to our historical sources, nobody who could have commanded the resources required to build the Amphipolis Tomb would have had a sufficient motive to erect such an extravagant memorial for Hephaistion in the years after Alexander's death. Had they sought to build such a monument, they would have been doing so in defiance of a vote of the Macedonian army in late June of 323 BC to abandon the construction of the principal monument to Hephaistion in Babylon. Implicitly, that vote outlawed any further public expenditure on Hephaistion's memorials.

The aim of scholarship should be to find explanations of archaeological discoveries that are consistent with both the archaeological evidence and the historical evidence, rather than focussing on one or the other. It is the theory that reconciles all types of evidence that is most likely to be true. Often there will only be one such theory, so the approach of looking for reconciliation between all relevant sources of evidence is usually the best means of determining the best explanation of an archaeological discovery.

The next steps in the identification of the principal occupant of the Amphipolis Tomb should include:

a) Detailed publication of the inscribed blocks from the peribolos including uncropped photos and exact dimensions

b) Proper forensic archaeological testing of all the remains, including the elderly woman's tooth, recovered from the grave, especially including measurements of their isotopic ratios

c) There should be an early attempt to extract DNA profiles from the uncremated bones and the root of the elderly woman's tooth before remaining traces of intact DNA decay further.

The dimensions of the inscriptions will confirm whether they were reduced in length for incorporation of their blocks into the peribolos of the Amphipolis Tomb. The strontium-87 to the strontium-86 ratio in the tooth enamel of the elderly woman is predicted to match that

[68] It has been doubted whether the skull should be so intact, since Pausanias, 9.7.2, states that Olympias was stoned to death (ὃς Ὀλυμπιάδα γε παρέβαλε καταλεῦσαι τοῖς ἐπ' αὐτὴν Μακεδόνων παρωξυσμένοις), but Justin, 14.6.9–11, implies that she died by sword blows (…non refugientem gladium…).

[69] When Alexader IV reached adulthood (Diodorus, 19.105.1), which was probably 14 years of age in Macedonia.

observed in Molossia, if she is Olympias. In that case, also any DNA sequences obtained from the remains of the elderly woman would represent the maternal contribution to the DNA of Alexander the Great. It would therefore potentially provide a powerful tool for identifying the remains of the king himself and would certainly reveal many more secrets regarding such matters as his ancestry and genetic traits.

Figure 13: The pebble mosaic depicting the abduction of Persephone from the floor of the second chamber in the Amphipolis tomb. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Abduction_of_Persephone_by_Pluto,_Amphipolis.jpg

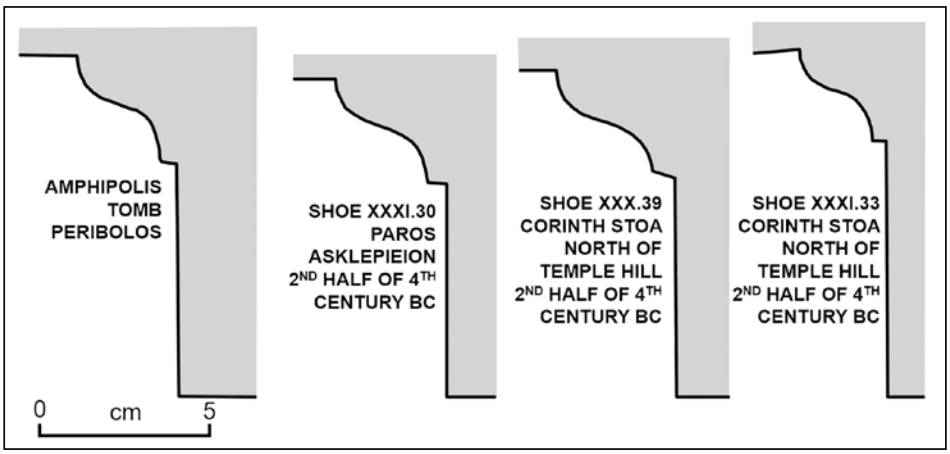


Figure 14: Dating of the Geison Soffits using Lucy Shoe's catalogue

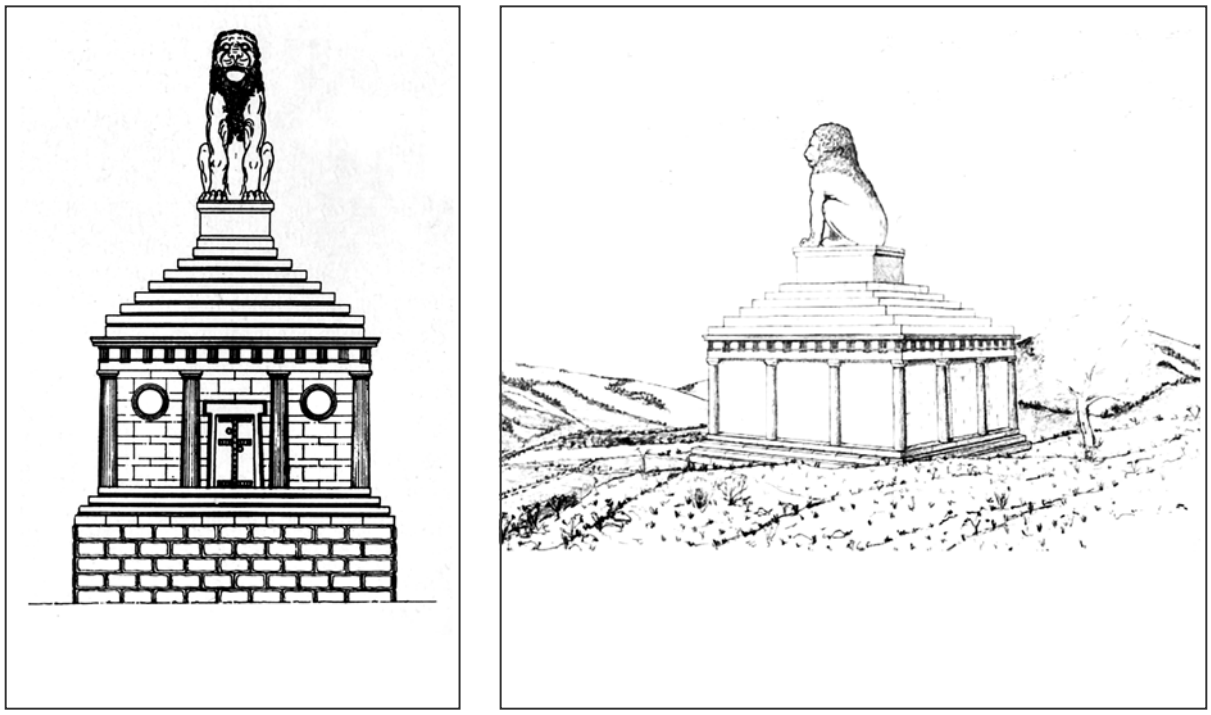


Figure 15: Reconstructions of the lion podium based on architectural fragments by Roger (left) and Broneer (right)

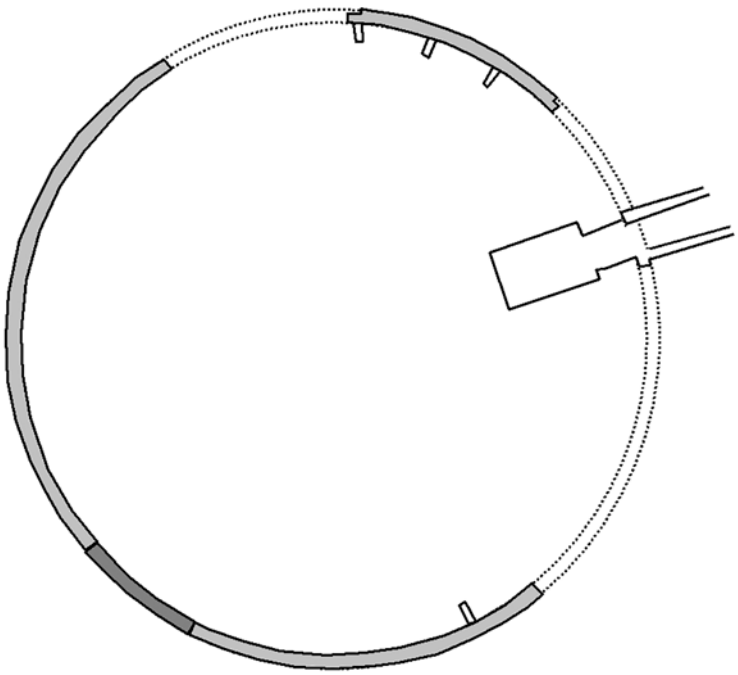


Figure 16: Archaeological plan of the Heroon tomb at Archontiko — its circumference is 158.5m, almost exactly equal to the diameter of the Amphipolis Tomb

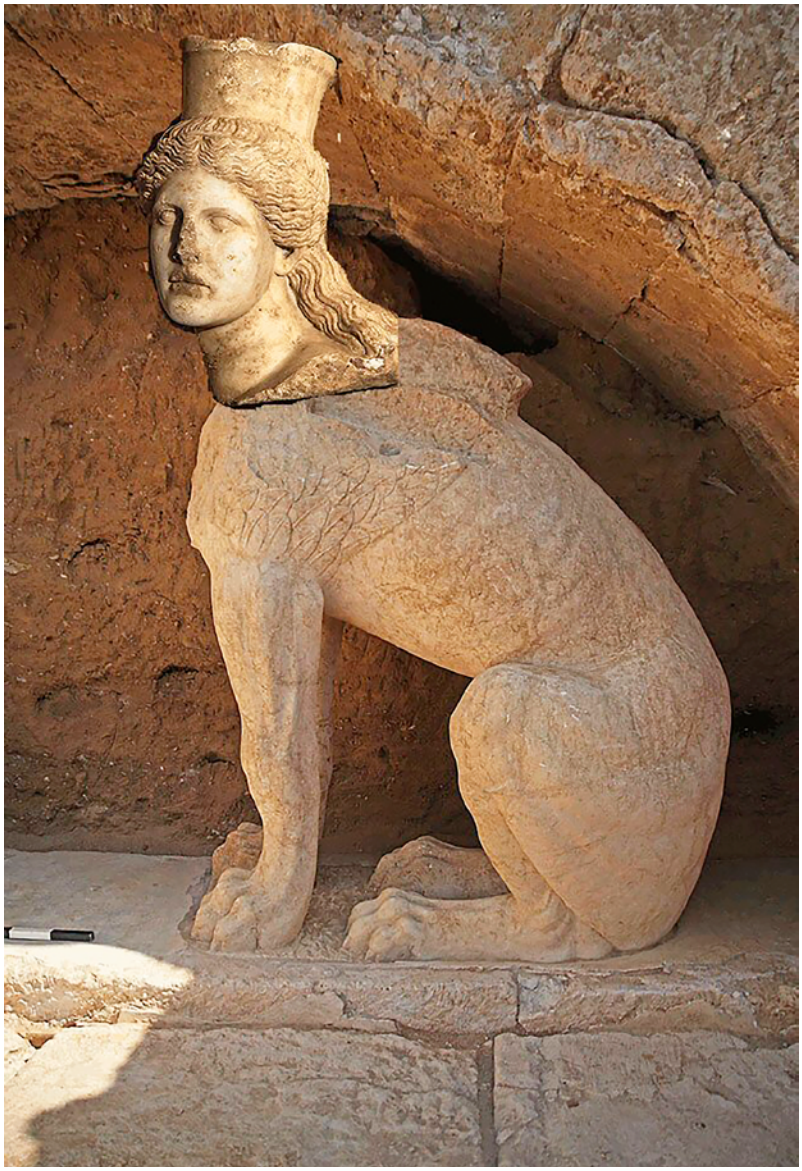


Figure 17: Righthand sphinx with head restored

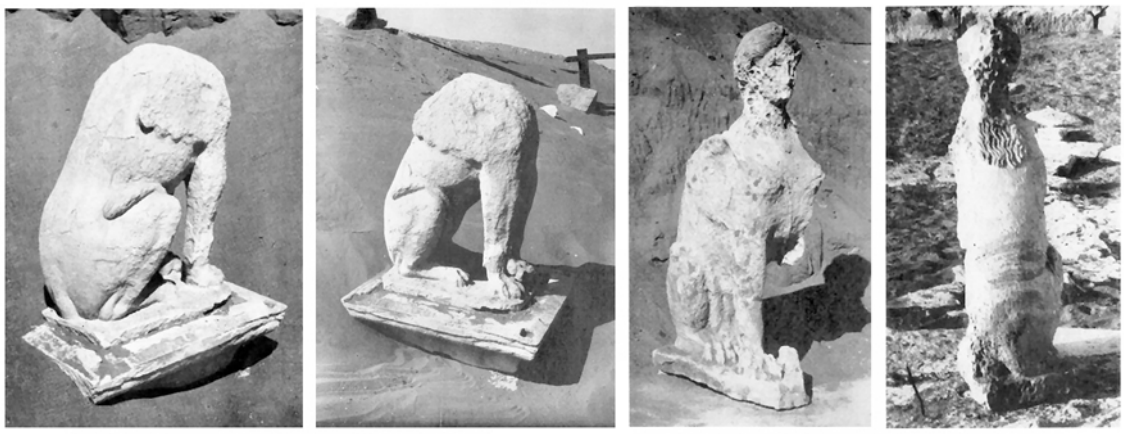


Figure 18: The early Hellenistic sphinxes found at the Serapeum at Memphis: the same seated form and hairstyle as the Amphipolis tomb sphinxes

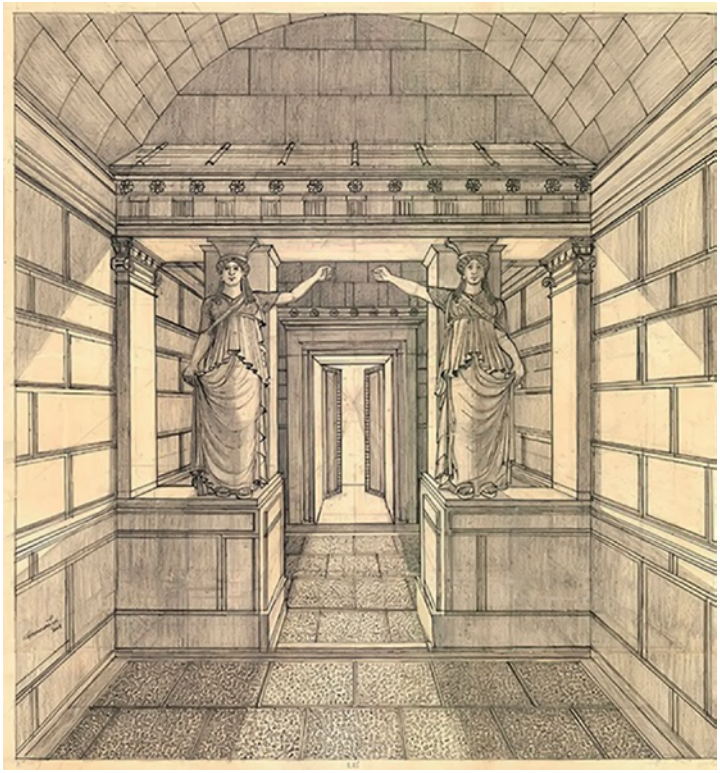


Figure 19: The caryatids standing either side of the entrance to the second chamber https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kasta_Tomb,_Amphipolis,_Greece_-_Illustration_of_Caryatids_according_to_findings.jpg

Figure 20: The lion of Amphipolis reconstructed in the 1930s just south of the city 5km from the Kasta Mound atop which it originally sat. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amphipolis_Lion.jpg

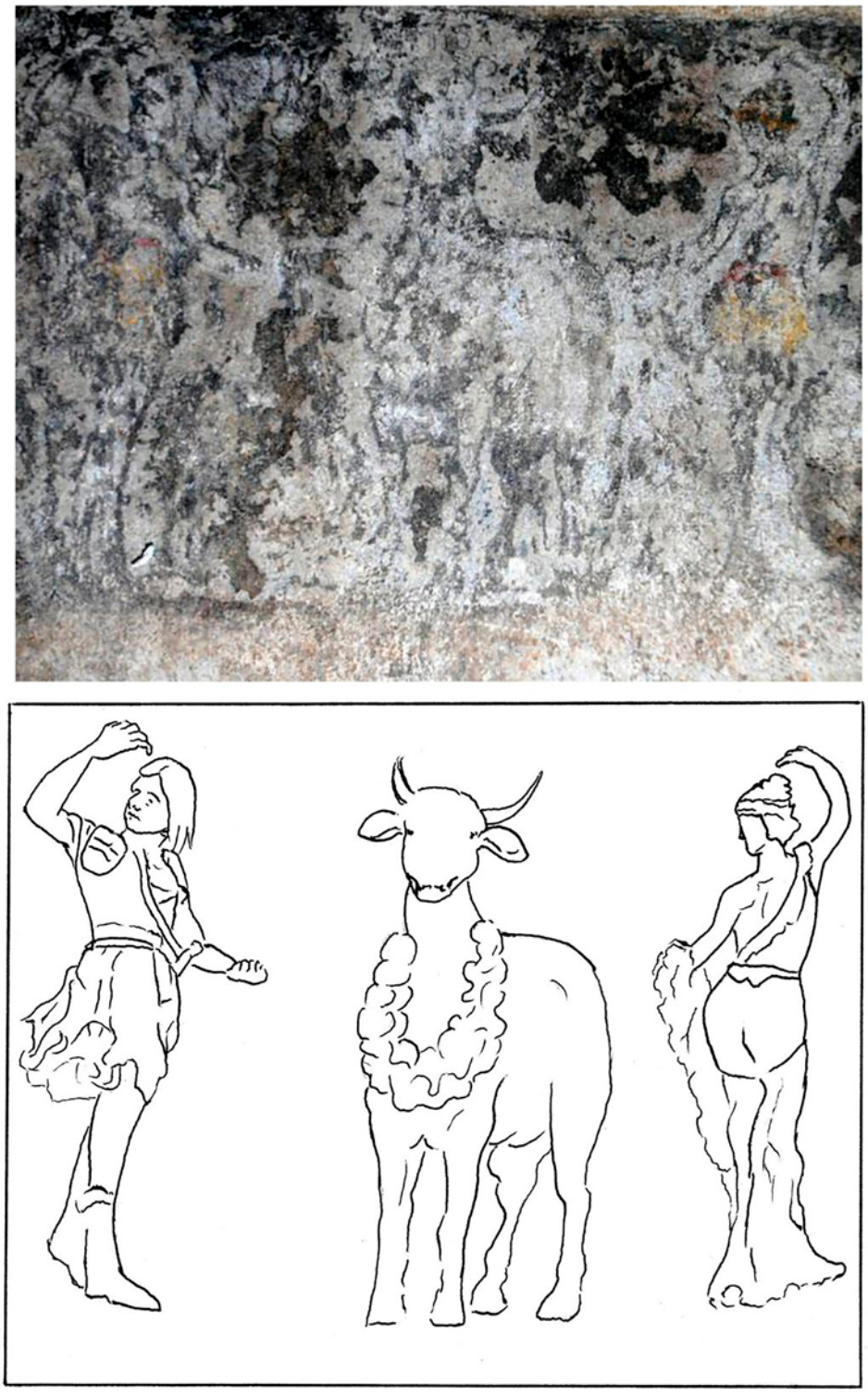


Figure 21: Central section of a mural above the entrance into the third chamber (reconstruction by the author)
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Human_figures,_2nd_chamber,_Amphipolis_tomb.jpg

Figure 22: Left hand section of the mural in the second chamber above the entrance into the third chamber (reconstruction by the author). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Winged_figure,_2nd_chamber,_Amphipolis_tomb.jpg