

## The Borders of Ancient Makedonia III: Roman Makedonia

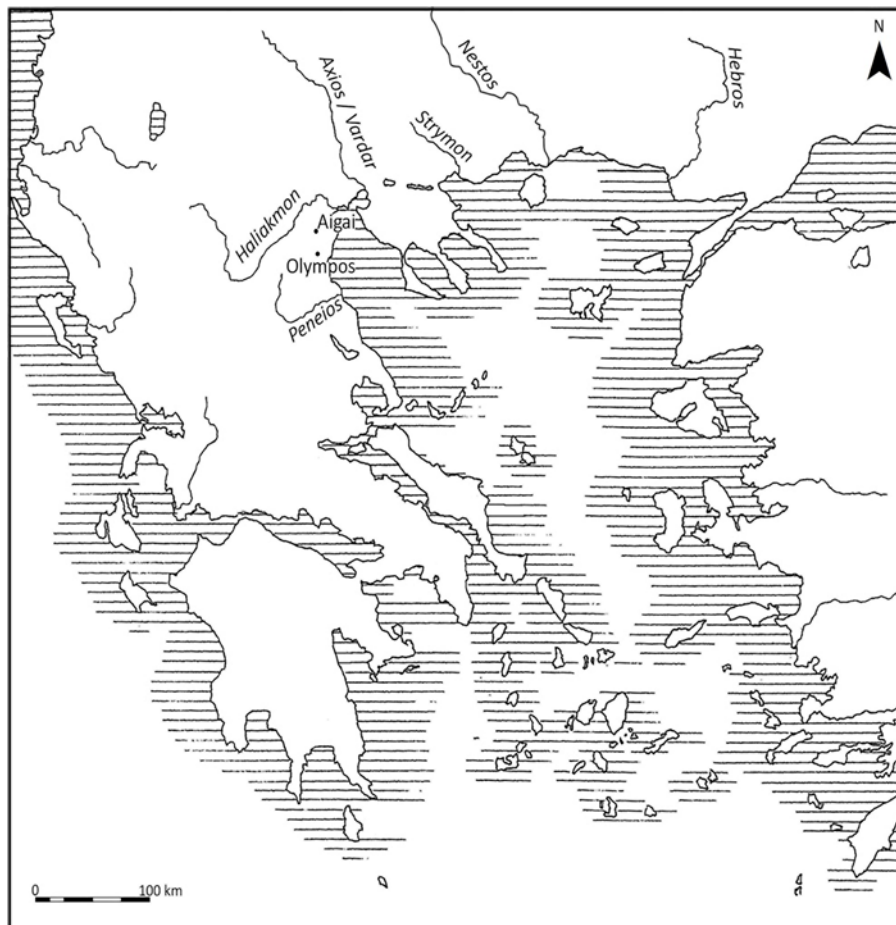
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The history and geography of Makedonia in the Roman and Byzantine periods have received less study, particularly from writers in English, than its history and geography in the earlier periods.<sup>1</sup> In fact, even the latest (fourth) edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* only recycles an earlier article by N.G.L. Hammond on this subject and does not discuss Hellenistic or Roman Macedonia. The volume of the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* that will deal with this area remains in the course of being constructed, and will, of course, be very useful when it appears. The chapter on “Géographie Historique” that occupies pp. 19–33 of M. B. Hatzopoulos’s work *La Macédoine: géographie historique, langue, cultes et croyances, institutions* (Paris 2006) does not extend to the Roman period. Similarly, Argyro Tatakis’s work, *The Roman Presence in Macedonia: Evidence from personal Names* (Paris 2006) and Fanoula Papazoglou’s book, *The towns of Macedonia in the Roman era*, Athens 1988, confine themselves to the area of the present Greek province of Macedonia. The recent study by Dimitris P. Drakoulis, *Η ιστορικο-γεωγραφική διάσταση της Μακεδονίας κατά την ύστερη αρχαιότητα. Διοικητική και χωρικοί μετασχηματισμοί* (*The Historico-geographic Division of Macedonia in Late Antiquity: Administrative and Spatial Transformations*), in Dimitris P. Drakoulis and Georgios P. Tsotsos (eds), *The Historical Geography of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean*, Thessaloniki 2012, pp. 79–106, contains much important information, but does not focus on this particular question except in a general way, and presents small maps on pp. 95–9 that seems to be correct for the periods to which they refer, without discussion of where the actual borders were. Similarly, the short article by D. Kanatsoulis, “Η ὀργάνωσις τῆς ἄνω Μακεδονίας κατὰ τοὺς Ῥωμαϊκοὺς χρόνους”, in B. Laourdas and

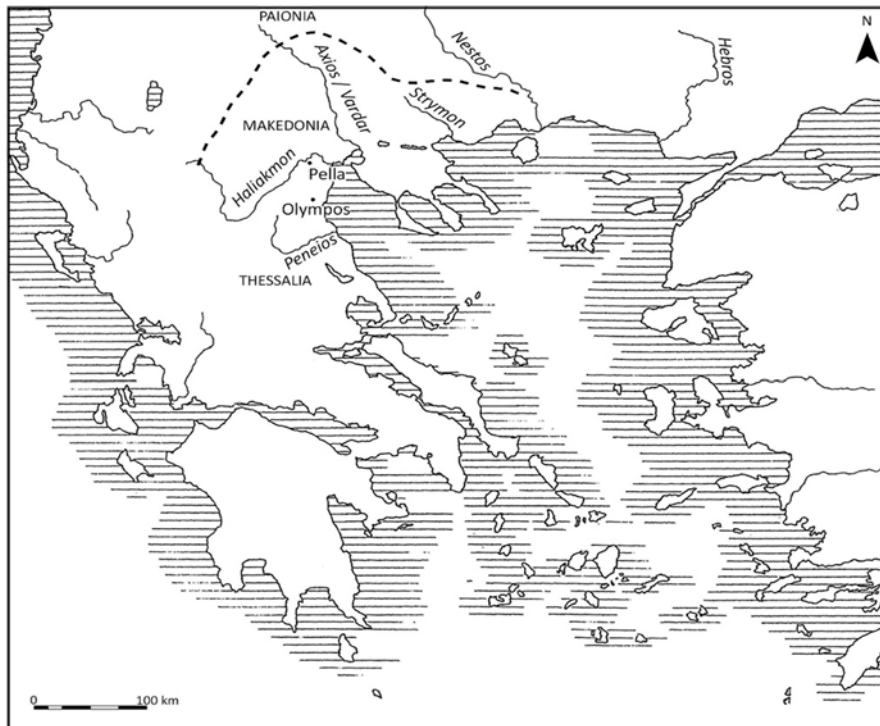
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<sup>1</sup> A partial exception is provided by the article “Probleme der historischen Geographie Nordostmakedoniens” (*Ancient Macedonia II. Papers read at the Second International Symposium held in Thessaloniki, 19–24 August 1973*, 45–52, which pays a small amount of attention to Macedonia in the Republican period, although it does not define the exact location of the eastern border.



1. These maps (drawn by Travis Hearn) show the areas considered to be 'Makedonia' at very different times. In the first of these (above), which represents the situation as it was c. 800 B.C. after the Makedones had settled in the area that was later named after them, no borders are shown. Their centre was at Aigai, and they must have controlled some territory around it, but it is not possible to suggest where the boundaries were.

Ch. Makaras, *Ancient Macedonia. Papers read at the Symposium read in Thessaloniki, 26–29 August 1968*, pp. 185–92, does not focus on the question of the borders. Brill's *Companion to Ancient Macedon. Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 B.C.–300 A.D.*, edited by Robin J. Lane Fox, is a disappointing work in this regard because in spite of its title, it pays very little attention to the history of Makedonia in the Roman period. However, the very well written and presented collection of maps with the title *European cartography and politics: the case of Macedonia*, written by Evangelos Liveriatos with a contribution by Chrysoula Paliadeli (Thessaloniki 2012) contains much useful information, and the section relating to the period when Makedonia was a part of the Roman Empire (pp. 30–41) shows some interesting maps, with lines indicating the borders that have a great deal of credibility. This general absence of a clear delineation of borders is not surprising, since the written evidence (except for Ptolemaios's *Geographia*, which will be quoted below) for anything



2. By the time of Alexander I the Makedones had expanded their control over a much larger area and an even greater expansion occurred by 336 B.C., the end of the reign of Philippos II. Their capital had been moved from Aigai to Pella, and they controlled land to the north as far as Paionia (the southern part of which he annexed), land to the west and east that stretched as far as areas controlled by the Illyrioi and Thrakes, and southwards to Mount Olympos. In addition, they sometimes had full control of Thessalia, and had a close relationship with the Epeirote community, from one branch of which, the Molossoi, Philippos's fourth wife out of the seven that are recorded for him, Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, came.

later than the writings of Strabon provides limited information, except for the names of places within the borders of the province, and most of Strabon's statements, although they mention which groups of people were neighbours to each other, do not allow clear borders to be defined. Also, surviving inscriptions, although quite numerous, do not provide useful indications of boundaries. It is therefore almost impossible to define some of the borders of Makedonia in this later period, particularly since they were sometimes changed for administrative reasons.

At the end of the second part of this survey we arrived at the moment when in 146 B.C., after the pretended son of Perseus, Andriskos, had been defeated two years earlier, a formal province<sup>2</sup> or *eparchia* of Makedonia was about to be established by the Romans. Since their

<sup>2</sup> The term *provincia* had been used by the Romans with respect to Makedonia since the closing years of the third century B.C., but only in the sense that it was considered to be within the "area of responsibility" of the Roman administrator who was responsible for keeping an eye on that part of the world. It was not a "province" in the normal sense of the word as it is used nowadays in English.

earlier attempt to destroy, dilute or reshape the ethnicity of the *Makedones* by establishing four separate *merides* had been unsuccessful, a fresh approach was adopted.<sup>3</sup>

The new province that was created covered a much larger area than the Makedonia that had been established by Philippos II and had continued to exist in almost exactly the same form since the fourth century B.C. It included land that stretched across to the Adriatic Sea and to the north and south: the southern part of Epeiros,<sup>4</sup> and Thessalia and Paionia, were now a part of this enlarged Makedonia. The area immediately to the north of Paionia that was occupied by the Dardanoi (an area in which the Roman fortress of Scupi, which will be discussed later, was later established) was not included in the new and enlarged province at this time because the Dardanoi had supported the Romans in their wars in this area, although it was incorporated into Makedonia later. We may compare this arrangement with the creation of Yugoslavia after the First World War, when areas of land occupied by different groups were thrust together into one artificially created nation, which collapsed after seven decades, and broke up into groups that had existed previously or had been recently invented; but because the Romans were better at controlling their provinces, this arrangement lasted much longer than the modern one.

Further information is provided at a much later date by Strabon, who compiled his *Geographia* during the reign of the first Roman emperor Augustus, incorporating much earlier material from sources that are now lost to us. Some of these are based on writers who lived before the Roman period, but a few of them will be presented below to show how he viewed the geography of Makedonia. Unfortunately, the surviving manuscripts of his work are incomplete, and it is greatly to be regretted that some of the lost sections in the seventh book dealt with this topic. The fragments of these passages that survive are now known only from quotations by other authors that are found in writers of the Byzantine period, and of the passages that refer to Makedonia, only one short quotation and one longer and very important extract survive in a complete form. Here is one example:<sup>5</sup>

VII, vii, 1 ... Even at the present time the Thrakes, Illyrioi and Epeirotai dwell at their (i.e., the Greeks') side (although this was formerly, even more, the case than it is now); indeed, barbarians

<sup>3</sup> At least we can delineate some of the borders of these *merides* with confidence. The first was bordered on the west by the Strymon river, and on the east by the territory of Thrakia, with a boundary that is less easy to define, as is its northern border; to the south, of course, there was the sea. Its capital was Amphipolis. The second lay between the Strymon and the Axios (Vardar) rivers, and its capital was Thessaloniki. The south was bordered by the sea, and its northern boundary is less easy to define. The third *meris*, with its capital at Pella, lay between the rivers Axios and Peneus, stretching up into Paionia, and the fourth, with its capital at Herakleia, again stretched north into Paionia. The southern border is not easy to define, but this *meris* certainly included the areas known as Lynkestis, Orestis and Elimiotis.

<sup>4</sup> This was known to the Romans as *Epirus Vetus*, and remained as a part of Makedonia until a reorganisation of provinces by the Roman emperor Diocletian at the end of the 4th century A.D. The northern part was known as *Epirus Nova*, or sometimes as "Greek Illyria", *Illyria Graeca*.

<sup>5</sup> VII, vii, 1 and 4.

occupy much of the country that is now indisputably (anantilektôs) Hellas — Thrakes in Makedonia<sup>6</sup> and some parts of Thessalia, and Epeirotic tribes, the Thesprotoi, Kassiopaioi, Amphilochoi, Molossoi and Athamanes, in the parts above Akarnania and Aitolia.

This sentence seems to be saying that even in Strabo's time there were movements of groups of people from one area to another, or that different groups of people might have gained control of territory beyond the areas that they normally controlled. It also implies that for him, Makedonia was a part of Hellas. The next passage gives much more information relating to its borders.

VII, vii, 4. From Apollonia to Makedonia there is the *Via Egnatia* towards the east. It has been measured in Roman miles<sup>7</sup> and marked by milestones as far as Kypsela and the Hebros River, measuring five hundred and thirty-five miles. And if, as most people do, you calculate a mile as being eight *stadia*, it would be four thousand two hundred and eighty *stadia*, but if, like Polybios, you add two *plethra*,<sup>8</sup> a third of a *stadion*, to the eight *stadia*, you must add another hundred and seventy-eight *stadia*, or a third of the number of miles. And it happens that those who set out from Apollonia and from Epidamnos meet on the same road after an equal journey.<sup>9</sup> The whole of it<sup>10</sup> is called the *Via Egnatia*, but the first part is called the road to Kandavia (an Illyrian mountain), going through the *polis* of Lychnidos, and Pylon (a place on the road on the border between Illyria and Makedonia). From there it goes to Varnous through Herakleia and the country of the Lynkestai and Eordoi to Edessa and Pella as far as Thessalonikeia.<sup>11</sup> This, as Polybios says, is two hundred and sixty-seven miles. For those who go on this road from the area of Epidamnos and Apollonia, there are the tribes of Epeiros, washed by the Sicilian sea as far as the Ambrakiot Gulf, and on the left the mountains of the Illyrians that we previously described, and the groups that live along with them, as far as the Makedonians and Paionians. Then, from the Ambrakiot Gulf, the places that in stretch one after another to the east parallel to the Peloponnesos are a part of Hellas; then they fall into the Aigeian Sea, leaving the whole of the Peloponnesos on the right. The Makedonians, the Paionians and some of the mountain-dwelling Thrakians dwell from the beginning of the Makedonian and Paionian mountains as far as the River Strymon; and everything beginning from the Strymon, as far as the mouth of the Pontos, and the Haemos, belongs to the Thrakians, except for the coastline. This is inhabited by Hellenes, some located on the Propontis, others on the Hellespont and the Gulf of Melas, and others on the Aigeian. The Aigeian Sea washes two sides of Hellas: one looking towards the dawn, stretching from Sounion

<sup>6</sup> The Thrakes are clearly considered not to be a part of Hellas at this time.

<sup>7</sup> A Roman mile, or a thousand paces (a pace consisted of two steps) was a little shorter than the imperial mile of 1760 yards or 1480 metres.

<sup>8</sup> A *stadion* (a distance which became the name for a race course for runners) was approximately equivalent to the English distance of a furlong, and measured about 200 metres. It contained six *plethra*.

<sup>9</sup> *i.e.*, where the two western branches of the *Via Egnatia*, starting from Apollonia and Epidamnos (Dyrrachium/Durazzo) join a little to the west of Ochrida, the distance that has been travelled on each road is the same.

<sup>10</sup> *i.e.*, the road between the Adriatic coast and the eastern Roman empire.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that Strabon uses this spelling, which is more correct for the name of a city named after a person (like Alexandria). The simpler form Thessalonike/Thessaloniki became normal both in ancient and in modern times, even though its form is more like the name of a person rather than that of a city.



to the north as far as the Thermaian Gulf and Thessalonikeia, a Makedonian city, which now has many more people than the rest, the other looking to the south, the Makedonian side, from Thessalonikeia to the Strymon; and some also assign the area from the Strymon to the Nestos to Makedonia, since Philip had such particular interest in those districts, that he made them his own property, and put together very large revenues from the mines and the other good resources of these places.

This long extract suggests that there was some doubt as to whether the area between the Strymon and the Nestos rivers should be considered a part of Makedonia in Strabon's time (although, as he says, Philip II had annexed it in the 4th century B.C., making it a part of his enlarged Makedonia).<sup>12</sup> The reference to Pylon (between Bitola and Ohrid) as being on the border with Illyria is also useful.

Another fragment of the same book of Strabon's *Geography*,<sup>13</sup> for which the context is unfortunately lost, suggests, like the one quoted above, that by his time the province of Makedonia was considered a part of Hellas, unlike Thrake, to which he felt that this name could never be applied:

The rest of Europe consists of Makedonia and the parts of Thrake that border on it as far as Byzantion, and Hellas and the neighbouring islands. Makedonia is indeed also Hellas; however, since we are following the nature and shape of places, we have decided to place it apart from the rest of Hellas and to join it to Thrake, which borders on it and extends to the mouth of the Euxine and the Propontis.

The reason for the treatment of Makedonia in this way must be geographical; the high country (particularly Mount Olympos) that separated Makedonia from its southern neighbours must have seemed to the geographer to provide a good reason for linking it with Thrake, which was not separated from Makedonia by any such formidable barriers.

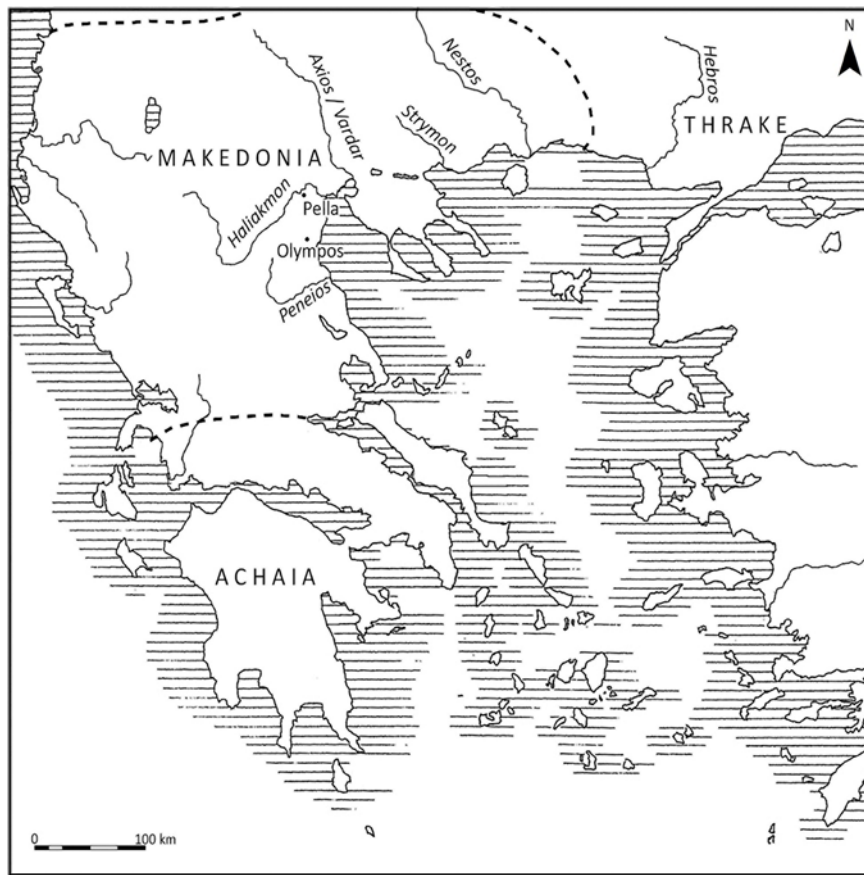
Shortly after this, Strabon mentions describes a sort of parallelogram in which the whole of Makedonia lies:<sup>14</sup>

(He says) that Makedonia is bounded on the west by the coast of the Adriatic Sea, and on the east by the meridian line that is parallel to it, passing through the outlets of the Hebros River and the city of Kypsela, on the north by the imaginary straight line that passes through Mounts Bertiskos, Skardos, Orbelos and Rhodope and Haimos (these mountains, beginning at the Adriatic Sea,

<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the geographer Ptolemaios, writing in the middle of the second century of the Christian era, clearly (*Geographia* III, 11) considered the Nestos River as forming the boundary between Makedonia and Thrake (see below). This may be because he had a better understanding of the way in which these areas were being administered; on the other hand, it is possible that in the century and a half that had passed since Strabo was writing, some administrative changes had taken place, as they certainly did at other times, for reasons that we cannot now explain.

<sup>13</sup> Book VII, fragment 9.

<sup>14</sup> Book 7, fragment 10.



3. No single map can illustrate the province of Macedonia in the Roman period, because areas on the fringes were often moved from one province to another, for administrative convenience or because of rivalry between governors. However, the general picture is clear. After 146 B.C. the name of Macedonia was applied to an enormously enlarged Roman province, which included Paionia and much of Epeiros, just as the southern part of Greece received the label of 'Achaia'.

extend in a straight line to the Euxine, creating a great peninsula to the south, consisting of Thrake together with Macedonia and Epeiros and Achaia), and on the south by the Egnatian Way which passes from the city of Dyrrachion eastwards to Thessalonikeia; and this shape of Macedonia is very close to a parallelogram.

This important passage seems to represent quite accurately the geographical extent of the Roman province in Strabon's time, with the eastern and western boundaries defined as being formed by Thrake and the Adriatic Sea. Since the geographer did not have maps of the kind that exist nowadays, the precise borders on the northern side cannot be delineated exactly, except in terms of the mountain ranges that he mentions.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Even the very detailed *Tabula Peutingeriana* (named after Konrad Peutinger, into whose possession it came in the 16th century), a mediaeval copy of a map that is believed to have been first drawn in imperial times, perhaps during the reign of Antoninus Pius, does not attempt to show the exact borders of parts of the empire.

The location of the northern border in Strabo's time may perhaps be defined in another way. At some time towards the previous century, a Roman military camp was established in an area formerly controlled by the Dardanians (whose territory was to the north of the territory occupied by the Paionians that had been incorporated into the greatly enlarged Makedonia which was established by the Romans after 146 B.C.). A colony of retired veteran soldiers was also located there (it was the Roman practice to retire soldiers after about fifteen years of service and give them land which they could farm, keeping them together so that they could be called back to service if necessary). The name of the original settlement seems to have been Scupi (which is generally assumed to be derived from the Greek σκοπή, meaning "observation place, lookout"), given to it because the camp was located on high ground from which it could keep an eye on non-Roman territory to the north. It lies close to the modern city of Skopje, which has taken its name from it.

In several stages during the first century B.C., Roman forces invaded and finally subdued an area to the north extending as far as the Danube, and by the end of the century, they had created another province which was called Moesia, named after the Moisoï, a major group which had settled in that region. The Romans then split the province into two parts, the western (nearer to Rome) being called Moesia Superior or Upper Moesia, and the eastern Moesia Inferior, or Lower Moesia.

There are other fragments of Strabo's seventh book that refer to Makedonia, but they either tell us nothing more than the fragments that have been quoted above or seem to refer to periods before 146 B.C.

Writing in the second century of the Christian era, but to some extent using earlier sources, the geographer Ptolemaios (Book III, chapter 12) wrote

It (Makedonia) is bordered at its northern end by Dalmatia and Upper Moesia and Thrakia ... to the west by ... what stretches from Dyrrachion or Epidamnos as far as the River Kelydnos (or Pepelychnos) ... to the south as far as ... the Gulf of Maliakos ... to the east as far as what stretches from the River Nestos to the Gulf of Maliakos.

This certainly fits what we believe to have been the situation in the second century of the Christian era: Makedonia extended as far as the Adriatic Sea, and its northern boundary lay at the southern end of Dalmatia. Its western boundary was formed by the coast of the Adriatic sea, stretching southward from Dyrrachion or Epidamnos. The southern border is expressed rather vaguely because although Olympos formed a natural barrier, it is not clear where along the strip of lower land to the east of it the border lay, but the reference to the Malian or Maliac Gulf shows that it included Thessalia. The River Nestos had by now become the established eastern border of Makedonia.

Another author, Stephanos of Byzantion, who wrote his *Ethnika* in the sixth century of the Christian era but mostly relied on sources that had been compiled in earlier times, gives us a certain amount of useful information because he describes a certain number of *poleis* as



being in Makedonia. These include Epidamnus on the coast of the Adriatic and Demetrias in Thessalia. This is what we would expect for the Roman period.

To summarise what has been written in these three studies of the borders of Makedonia in different periods, it seems that at some time after 1000 B.C. the Makedones had established themselves in an area around Aigai, which became their capital for a while until it was replaced by Pella. By the time of Philip II their territory had expanded greatly in all directions and had become approximately equal to the area that has become the modern Greek province of Makedonia. This also meant that the number of people who could be described as “Makedonian” had also increased greatly.

After the Roman conquest, Makedonia was greatly enlarged again, and its name was used to describe land that extended westward to the Adriatic, taking in Epirus, and northward to include Paionia, and sometimes included Thessalia. The name (like the name that the Romans used for the province that they established in southern Greece that was called Achaia) thus described a very large administrative area, much larger than the original Makedonia, which had itself been greatly enlarged by Philippos II.



Facade of Philip II of Macedon tomb in Vergina. The door is made of marble and the order is doric

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