The Homeric poems mention Pieria as a purely geographical point of reference and ignore the lands and populations beyond its northern boundaries, the remaining parts of historical Macedonia. The whole area between Pieria and the Thessalian *ethnē*, to the south, and the area close to the river Axios which was inhabited by the Paionians, to the northeast, is in the Homeric poems a “no man’s land.” Its (quasi-)absence from Homeric geography was probably one of the reasons why Greeks frequently excluded Macedonia from the *Hellenikon*. Even more importantly for such judgments, the peculiar character of Macedonian culture, society and institutions was seen by southern Greeks as a mark of backwardness and “non-Greekness.” In Macedonia, as opposed to most other parts of the Greek world, the government was still exercised by a king long after the Heroic Age, and the aristocracy surrounding and counselling him was a reminder of the Homeric world (the *Hetaîroi*, “Companions”). The royal power was often unsteady, as it was transmitted and managed according to customary rules rather than a body of laws. Macedon’s *poleis* were subject to the king’s central power and, unlike *poleis* in many other regions of Greece, were neither the core of Macedon’s political life nor self-determining states in their own right. As far as legislation, military campaigns, and foreign policy were concerned, the state was identified with its king, so much so that the cities and the *Makedones* were nearly invisible to a foreign observer. In the mid-fourth century BC, all these things looked exotic to the southern Greeks and even influenced characteristics of their historiography about Alexander the Great.

Until a few decades ago, modern views of the history and institutions of Macedonia were almost exclusively based on ancient (Greek) literary sources, although their picture was often biased and almost always

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incomplete. The archaeological exploration of Macedonia and Thrace in recent decades has enriched our knowledge of the material culture and the historical geography of these regions during prehistory and the Dark Ages and has also contributed to a change in our views of later periods too. Prior to the Archaic Age, we can now safely maintain that the whole region had close affinities both with other parts of the Balkan area and (especially in its southern part) with the Mycenaean world. Regular trade relationships existed between western Macedonia and Thessaly during the whole Bronze Age, and Mycenaean products widely spread through the whole area of future Macedonia, through mainland (that is, Thessalian) routes and also from the sea, via Chalcidice and the Thermaic gulf. Along with imported objects, many sites show a growing number of local imitations, especially during the Late Helladic III C. The analysis of pottery and metal working techniques allows more general conclusions as far as central Macedonia (between the rivers Axios and Strymon) is concerned. In the late Bronze Age, the way the manufacturing processes were organized suggests that in (at least some parts of) Macedonia social structures were more compact and centralized, as in other areas of the Aegean world. However, more and more there is no evidence of palace-centered systems similar to those of central and southern Greece, and no Linear B documents have been found so far in Macedonia. In the late Bronze Age and in the period between the Bronze and Iron Ages, a general collapse of central authorities occurred, as in the remaining parts of the Mycenaean world, but a peculiar feature of Macedonia is the decrease of settlements in number and size. Nonetheless, during the Bronze and early Iron Age the area was not isolated, and even during the Dark Ages at least its coastal regions kept contacts with southern Greece.

The starting point of the ancient historians’ narratives of the history of Macedonia falls much later. Herodotus is mainly interested in the origins of the kingdom, and the space of time (i.e., generations) he indicates between the first Temenid king, Perdiccas I, and Alexander I, who reigned.

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