CHAPTER 5

AIAI—HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

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Aiani—Elimiotis—Upper Macedonia

According to the foundation myth preserved by Stephanos of Byzantium, “Aiani, a Macedonian city, was built by Aianos, a son of Elymos the Tyrrhenian king, who migrated to Macedonia, ‘Aianaios’ was the ethnikon.” A reference to the city of Aiani was found by the French academic L. Heuzey in 1861 in two inscriptions in churches in the village of Kalliani (whose name may derive from “kali Aiani,” meaning “fair Aiani,”: in 1926 it was renamed Aiani). They led to various theories about the site of the settlement and its urban organization. The problem was not solved until official excavations began. Even if an urban settlement by the name of Elimia did also exist, Aiani became the capital of Elimiotis at a very early date.

The district of Elimia or Elimiotis, bordering Orestis and Eordaea to the north, occupied the southern part of Upper Macedonia on both sides of the middle reach of the River Haliacmon, although its exact territorial extent is difficult to determine. During the Hellenistic era it appears to have included the region of Tymphaea to the west and, perhaps at an earlier date, the northern part of the Perrhaebian Tripolitis (Pythium, Azorus, and Doliche). Territorial disputes between Elimia and its neighbours occurred, as can be seen in a Latin inscription found at Doliche, in which the emperor Trajan (101 AD) defined the boundary between the Elimiotae and the inhabitants of Doliche by reviving an earlier ruling by King Amyntas III (393–369 BC) on the same issue.

The written tradition provides only scant information about Elimiotis and the other parts of Upper Macedonia. Elimiotis included the present-day region of Western Macedonia (the prefectures of Grevena, Kozani, Florina and Kastoria), a region bounded by mountain ranges of varying size and traversed by the River Haliacmon, while part of it extended beyond the borders of the modern Greek state to take in the River Erigon, Lakes Achris (Ochrid) and Prespa and the lands bounded by the Dautika, Babuna and Dren mountains to the north. During the second millennium
BC this region was a stopping-point in the migrations of the ‘far-wandering’ family of north-western Greek tribes, which included the Macedonians and the Dori­ans (Herodotus 1.56, 8.137–139; Thucydides 2.99). After a series of migrations, one branch of this family, the Argead Macedonians, who were ruled by the Temenids, descendants of Temenos, the son of Heracles, settled in the area around Olympus. In the early 7th century BC, under their first known king, Perdiccas, they founded the settlement of Aegae. From Aegae (which according to a later tradition was founded by the Argive Karanos in the 8th century BC) and later from Pella, in about 400 BC, they continued to expand outwards for many centuries.

Upper Macedonia is mentioned for the first time in Herodotus—in two passages in particular. In the first (7.173.4) he describes the invasion of Thessaly by Xerxes’ army: ‘There was another way into Thessaly through upper Macedonia and Perrhaebea, near Gonnus—the pass, in fact, by which Xerxes’ army actually did come in.’ In the second (8.137–139), Herodotus narrates the adventures of Perdiccas (a descendant of Heracles and founder of the kingdom of Aegae), who, together with his brothers Gauanes and Aeropus, ‘had been expelled from Argos and had taken refuge in Illyria. Thence they crossed into upper Macedonia and went to the town of Lebæa’.

A clear distinction, however, between Upper and Lower Macedonia is provided by Thucydides in his narration of the clashes between Athenians and Spartans in northern Greece during the “Peloponnesian War” (2.99.1): “This force . . . prepared to descend from the mountains into the kingdom of Perdiccas in Lower Macedonia. In the interior there are Macedonians also—the Lyncestians, the Elimiots and other tribes—who are allies and dependants of the Macedonian King, but who have separate kings of their own. The part of the country on the sea-coast, known as Macedonia, was first acquired by Alexander, the father of Perdiccas, and by his ancestors, who were originally Temenids from Argos . . .” In the following two passages the distinction is equally clear: “(The Athenians) established themselves on the coast and made war in cooperation with Philip and the brothers of Derdas, who had invaded the country from the interior” (1.59) and “The Macedonians . . . sent for further reinforcements of cavalry from their allies in the interior” (2.100).

Strabo (7, C326) names four areas in Upper Macedonia that retained a certain degree of “freedom” and autonomy under the Romans: “And in fact the regions about Lyncus, Pelagonia, Orestias and Elimeia used to be called Upper Macedonia, though later on they were by some also called