The Resources of Macedonia

The land of the Macedonians was rich in natural resources. Plains were fertilized by long traversing rivers that also served as trade routes with the Thracian inland. Bottiaea, the fertile alluvial plain of central Macedonia, was highly suitable for the cultivation of grain, vegetables and fruit trees. The vineyards around Pella produced renowned wines, while the Chalcidice offered an appropriate climate for the growing of olive trees. The fertile lands proved suitable for the raising of cattle and horses and lakes provided fish but, in a specific case, also salt; the Chalastraion nitro, renowned in antiquity and with many uses from medicine to glass-making, can still be extracted at Pikrolemne.¹ Regular salt was extracted from the sea and traded. Timber was even more important than salt. Dense forests provided high quality timber, suitable for the construction of naval vessels. Since the fifth century the kings had been selling their timber to naval powers in the Aegean, primarily to the Athenians but later also to the Rhodians.² After the conquest of Macedonia and the fall of the monarchy with the settlement of 167 BC, the Roman Senate approved new regulations concerning natural resources: the sale of salt was restricted within each district, the extraction of ship timber was forbidden, and the

¹ The identification of Pikrolemne with the lake referred to in ancient sources as Chalastra was proposed by M. B. Hatzopoulos and L. D. Loukopoulou, *Morrylos cité de la Crestonie*, (MEAETHMATA) 7 (Athens, 1989), pp. 87–92, on the grounds of literary and archaeological evidence. This was further confirmed through chemical analyses: D. Ignatiadou et al., “Nitrump Chaleticum. The Natron of Macedonia,” in Annales du 16° congrès de l’association internationale pour l’histoire du verre (London, 2003), pp. 64–7, pl. 14–17. Also see: AErgMak 16 (2002), 241–8; AErgMak 17 (2003), 311–12.

exploitation of precious metal mines, by far the most important resource of the land, was also banned. Silver and gold mines were scattered outside the borders of Macedonia proper, in eastern Chalcidice and in the area between the Strymon and the Nestos. These areas had attracted colonists from cities in Southern Greece and Asia Minor as early as the eighth century BC and silver had been traded to the East even before the invention of coinage.

The control over the mining areas had been a constant source of antagonism between the local Thracians, the Greek colonists, the Athenians, and the Macedonians, and one of the main motivations for Macedonian expansion towards the East. Sources specifically mention the control of the Dysoron mines by Alexander I after the Persian retreat from Thrace; the control of Krenides by Philip II, and the efforts of Philip V to increase the revenues of his state through the exploitation of the mines. It is clear that mines were an important source of wealth that provided metal to coin, but they also provided further income. Metal could be sold or used for the production of lavish artefacts, vessels and arms, made of silver, copper, bronze and gold, all of which could be designated for either the local or international market. Such artefacts are often found as grave offerings from the Archaic down to the Hellenistic period.

The resources of the land belonged to the state, were managed by the king, and their income was deposited in the royal treasury. In many cases

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7 Hdt. 5.17.2. For the situation of these mines in the plain of Philippi, based on the discovery of an inscription, M. Farraguna, “Aspetti amministrativi e finanziari della monarchia macedone tra IV e III secolo A.C.,” Athenaeum 86 (1998), 375–8.
8 Diod. 16.8.6–7.
9 Livy 39.24.2.