CHAPTER 11

THE CITIES

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When at the end of the archaic period the veil of obscurity is lifted for the first time, the Argead kingdom of Macedonia appears as an already partly urbanized society. Poleis ("cities"), as in Thessaly, and not ethnê ("peoples"), as in Epirus or Aetolia, constitute the basic units of the realm. 1 In late sixth-century Hecataeus and, a few decades later, Herodotos using him, refer to Therme, Sindos, Chalastra, Ichnai, and Pella explicitly as poleis. 2 One might object that these were not genuine Macedonian cities, but either Greek colonial foundations—which they definitely were not—or Paeonian urban centres. Be that as it may, such an objection would in any case be unsustainable against Beroia or Pydna, which, although they are not explicitly qualified as such, emerge from Thucydides' narrative as cities no less genuine than Therma. 3 Similarly Eidomene, Gortynia, Atalante Europs or Cyrrhus, also mentioned by the Athenian historian, appear in the same context as being indistinguishable from Pella, which was explicitly qualified as a polis by Herodotus. 4 Moreover, the fact that Pydna, Beroia and Europs without doubt, and also probably Therme, Eidomene, Gortynia and Atalante, were besieged and either successfully resisted or captured (taken by force or through capitulation) seems to imply that they were fortified, albeit in a rudimentary way. 5

3 Thuc. 1.61.2. It is clear from the historian's narrative that Pydna and Beroia, no less than Therma, were fortified settlements which could withstand an Athenian attack.
In fact the urban, not to say civic, traditions in Macedonia may have begun even earlier. It is significant that the Macedonians themselves imagined their past since the foundation of the Argead kingdom in urban and not in “ethnic” terms. In the oldest version of the foundation story, which goes back at least to the beginning of the fifth century BC, the legendary founder Perdiccas, who is supposed to have lived six generations or 200 years earlier, was given the advice to found “the capital of his state” (ἀστυ κτίζε πόλης) on the site of Aegae. In a later version of the same legend, Caranus, Perdiccas’ double, is presented as conquering the city (πόλιν, urbem) of Edessa and changing its name to Aegae, and that of his fellow citizens to Argeadae (Ἀργεάδαι), the ethnic used for the citizens of the Lower Macedonia kingdom since at least the time of Hecataeus.

It is particularly interesting that the Macedonians perceived the state founded by the Argeads as a city (πόλις) according to the classical Greek model of an urban centre (ἀστυ, πόλις). They saw Aegae, surrounded by its territory (χώρα), and its subsequent expansion as a process which was not basically different from that of a city-state of ancient Greece such as Sparta or Athens. It is naturally impossible to determine to what degree such a retrospective vision corresponded to an historical reality. Nor is it possible to determine whether the Macedonians, originally transhumant shepherds, had become city dwellers already in the seventh century BC, either by founding their capital on virgin soil or by conquering Phrygian or Thracian urban settlements on the foothills of the Plerian mountains or of Mt. Bermion. It is equally otiose to speculate on the nature of the relations or on the degree of autonomy of pre-urban or urban “perioikic” communities, such as Pydna, Alorus, Beroia, Edessa, etc. in respect to the “central” authorities at Aegae during the obscure centuries before the Persian wars. It is nevertheless certain that, whether these communities did enjoy a form of participation in “national” political life (popular participation in the spring and autumn gatherings of the ethnos or presence of “provincial” notables at the court of Aegae) or not, the question of some form of elementary political activities at the local level has to be taken into account already in the archaic period. This question must have


Diod. 7.16.

Euphorion fr 30 (Schweidweiler) and Just. 7.1.7–10.