CHAPTER 15

THE PALACE OF AEGAE

A. Kottaridi

Under the hill of the acropolis, on a raised terrace that dominates the area, survive the impressive ruins of the palace whose imposing presence marks even now the image of the archaeological site of Aegae.

After its discovery and its first presentation by Heuzey – Daumet, the excavations by K. Rhomaios, Ch. Makaronas, G. Bakalakis and M. Andronikos lasted for several years and were completed in the beginnings of the seventies, leading to a full revelation of the monument. However, the palace of Palatitsia-Vergina, or more correctly, the palace of Aegae, has been from the nineteenth century until today a big paradox in archaeological research, familiar but also unfamiliar and unknown.1

Covering an area of ca. 12,500 m² the impressive edifice is bigger than the later buildings at Demetrias and Pergamon that are considered as palaces by many scholars. Its preservation is much better and its form much clearer and more readable than that of the “basileia” of Pella, which

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underwent so many extensions and alterations during Hellenistic times. As a result, although previous presentation of the finds from the excavations of the twentieth century has been very brief,—with the exception of the roof tiling—the palace of Aegae has formed a point of reference in scholarly discussion of Hellenistic architecture for many years now. Its importance, however, has not been fully recognised, since up to now three main questions have remained open: its date, the possible building phases, and its precise form.

Thanks to the great work of restoration and anastylosis of the palace that started in the spring of 2007, we have had the chance to excavate systematically older and newer fills, to reveal again and systematically study the whole monument, and to explore in depth areas that had remained unexplored during earlier excavations (figs. 32A and 32B). At the same time the hundreds of architectural members that were strewn about the site were systematically documented, so that the restoration-anastylosis of parts of the building could begin, including the work of restoring the floors that are covered with marble and mosaics and survive to an extent of ca. 1,450 m².

During this process many extremely important new finds have come to light and others have been identified for the first time. All these give answers to many of the previously open questions, reveal new horizons for research and show incontestably the huge importance of the monument. As everything shows, it was not only the biggest but, together with the Parthenon, one of the most important buildings of classical antiquity.

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4 The first serious problem that had to be resolved when the new excavation began was the complete absence of excavation diaries and of any photographs from the earlier excavations. Having to rely only on the reports of the Chronicles of the Archaeologikon Delfion and on the synoptic first publication, we decided to handle the cleaning and the digging out that had to take place for the project as a primary/original excavation despite the cost in money and time. A huge excavation canvas was placed on the whole of the monument and its direct environment and the revelation—“excavation” started with great care. It has been combined with detailed documentation of the remains and of all the, truly unexpected, new finds.