Ancient Greek religion is most easily studied in a polis, or a small regional area.\(^1\) A wide region is more difficult to investigate, especially when its political definition (like Makedonia) refers to a geographical area which changed significantly over time. The scope of Makedonia changed greatly between the Archaic, Hellenistic and Roman periods, and within it differing degrees of urban development differentiated the “micro-regions” of Macedonia from one another.\(^2\) The dialectic between polis and chora developed very differently in each of these “micro-regions,” further complicating attempts at a general study of the entire region’s cults and religious traditions. There can be no sufficiently documented study of the characteristics and functions of each god, the use of divine epithets, or even the composition—if not the very existence—of a “Macedonian” pantheon. However, some significant features of the religious life of pre-Roman Macedonia can be picked out, highlighting some constants among so many local peculiarities.

Literary sources on religion either preserve data which struck the Greeks for their strongly “local” flavour (Macedonian epithets, names of gods, festivals, or unparalleled religious usages), or which deal with single events which stand out in a “grand narrative” (mainly from Philip II’s reign onwards). Luckily, archaeological and epigraphic discoveries have enormously enriched our knowledge of the region’s cults, sanctuaries, and religious traditions, although most of the data currently available to us is not any earlier than the Hellenistic period. Thanks to this new material and epigraphic evidence, we can today safely maintain that sanctuaries of the Olympic gods did already exist in Macedonia in the late Archaic Age and that in the same period some Macedonians were already active


in Panhellenic sanctuaries outside Macedon. Macedonian religion and culture were not, therefore, progressively “hellenized” only by the kings from the late fifth or the fourth century BC onwards. Even the most seemingly “exotic” characteristic of the religious landscape of ancient Macedonia (the far from “monumental” appearance of most sanctuaries revealed by the archaeological research) is not unparalleled in the Greek world. It is at least partly due to the frequent employment of perishable building material and to the uninterrupted occupation of so many sites in later periods.

Epigraphic material provides us with more specific, first-rate information on royal interventions in the management of cult centres and “pan-Macedonian” festivals, on the sanctuaries’ administration, and on relationships with civic authorities, on private cults, and on the diffusion of individual cults in different areas. Sometimes, an inscription even confirms a later literary source (which had been previously dismissed as unreliable). Illuminating examples are the healing cult of Darron (now

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