Thucydides’ interest in Macedonia and Thrace may have stemmed from his personal connections with the area, but this was certainly not the only reason for him to write in such great detail about events in the northern Aegean. The Archidamian War was primarily sparked off by the Athenians’ difficulties with their allies on the Chalcidic Peninsula and their problematic relations with the Macedonian king Perdikkas, which had unexpected and far-reaching consequences. The situation in the areas of the Chalcidic Peninsula and lower Strymon prompted an armistice in 423; war was resumed by the Athenians, who wanted to subdue their rebellious Thracian allies, but was again interrupted following an indecisive battle outside the walls of Amphipolis. At the end of this period, the Peace of Nicias took Athenian interests in this area into special consideration.

This chapter will be less concerned with military and diplomatic events than with the (sometimes very sketchy) information that Thucydides provides about the history of the area on the northern shore of the Aegean. This region comprised Macedonia (the area ruled by the Macedonian king) and Thrace, a geographical area with indigenous tribes living in the interior and Greek cities on the coast. Both Thucydides and contemporaneous Athenian inscriptions used the name “Thrace” for the whole of the area to the east of the Macedonian kingdom, from the Greek and non-Greek cities of the Chalcidic Peninsula and the Athenian colony Amphipolis on the lower Strymon up to the west coast of the Black Sea.\(^1\) Although these regions bordered on one another, we shall discuss them separately, beginning with Macedonia—the only area whose previous history was outlined by Thucydides.

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\(^1\) Cf. Zahrnt (1997) and (2002).
In the winter of 429/8, the Odrysian king Sitalkes attacked Macedonia; Thucydides adds to his account of these events a digression in which he outlines the rise and expansion of the kingdom of Macedonia up to his own time.² Combining this report with information from other literary sources, archaeological evidence (from Vergina in particular) and the geography of the region, we can piece together the following sketch of developments from the middle of the seventh century to the first part of the fifth: the origins of the Macedonians are obscure, but we know that they initially settled south of the river Haliakmon and north of the Pierian Mountains around Aigeai (Vergina), which was to remain their capital until the beginning of the fourth century. The Macedonians soon began to expand, initially conquering the region around the Thermaic Gulf, from the mouth of the Peneios to what is now Thessaloniki: Pieria, Bottiaia, and the area on both sides of the lower Axios. They then moved inland, adding Eordaia and Almopia, west and northwest of the coastal plain respectively, while to the east they annexed Anthemus (the plain southeast of Thessaloniki), the area around Lake Koroneia and Lake Bolbe (Mygdonia), and Krestonia and Bisaltia to the north of this plain (between Axios and Strymon). Their final acquisitions were the different districts of Upper Macedonia (along the Haliakmon and in the plain northwest of Eordaia): Lynkos, Elimeia, and others which “though in alliance with the Macedonians of the coastal areas and subject to them, have kings of their own” (2.99.2). This is a very peculiar definition: how can a people be allied with another and simultaneously subject to them? Perhaps it was Thucydides’ way of expressing the invariably unstable and strained relations between the Macedonian kings in the plain (Lower Macedonia) and the rulers in Upper Macedonia.

Macedonia is next referred to when Thucydides describes Themistocles reaching “Pydna (which was in the kingdom) of Alexander” (1.137.1) in the course of his flight from the Peloponnese. Alexander’s successor, Perdikkas II, ascended the throne ca. 450; we first hear of