Advance press kit

Exhibition

From October 13, 2011
to January 16, 2012
Napoleon Hall

In the Kingdom of
Alexander the Great
Ancient Macedonia
Contents

Press release  page 3

Map of main sites  page 9

Exhibition walk-through  page 10

Images available for the press  page 12
In the Kingdom of Alexander the Great
Ancient Macedonia

This exhibition curated by a Greek and French team of specialists brings together five hundred works tracing the history of ancient Macedonia from the fifteenth century B.C. up to the Roman Empire. Visitors are invited to explore the rich artistic heritage of northern Greece, many of whose treasures are still little known to the general public, due to the relatively recent nature of archaeological discoveries in this area.

It was not until 1977, when several royal sepulchral monuments were unearthed at Vergina, among them the unopened tomb of Philip II, Alexander the Great’s father, that the full archaeological potential of this region was realized. Further excavations at this prestigious site, now identified with Aegae, the first capital of ancient Macedonia, resulted in a number of other important discoveries, including a puzzling burial site revealed in 2008, which will in all likelihood entail revisions in our knowledge of ancient history.

With shrewd political skill, ancient Macedonia’s rulers, of whom Alexander the Great remains the best known, orchestrated the rise of Macedon from a small kingdom into one which came to dominate the entire Hellenic world, before defeating the Persian Empire and conquering lands as far away as India. The exhibition takes as its theme the glorious past of this kingdom, impressive in its reach at the height of its prominence. It also provides an opportunity to explore the nature of royal burial sites in northern Greece at the time of these rulers: the wondrous artifacts unearthed, which had been protected by tumuli, provide unique insights into the virtuosity of this period’s artists.

Exhibition curators:
Sophie Descamps, Chief Heritage Curator, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, Musée du Louvre.
Lillian Acheilera, Honorary Director, 16th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities
Polyxeni Adam-Veleni, Director, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.
Maria Lilimpaki-Akamati, Honorary Ephore of Antiquities.

Communications
Anne-Laure Beatrix
anne-laure.beatrix@louvre.fr

Press relations
Laurence Roussel
laurence.roussel@louvre.fr
+33 (0)1 40 20 84 98 / 54 52 (fax)

Press release
Exhibition
Napoleon Hall

An exhibition organized by the Louvre and the Greek Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

This exhibition is made possible by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Fondation Total, and Château Margaux.

With additional support provided by the Greek National Tourist Office in Paris.

The catalogue was made possible thanks to the generous support of THE J. F. COSTOPOULOS FOUNDATION and Arjowiggins.

The three-dimensional rendering included in the exhibition is made possible thanks to the scientific support of Foundation of the Hellenic World.

© Crown of gilt oak leaves
Second half of the 4th century B.C. Vergina (Aegae), Sanctuary of Eukleia, Gold © hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism / Archaeological Receipts funds
The first work encountered by visitors to the exhibition is a 1:1 scale reproduction of a mosaic in the collections of the Archaeological Museum of Pella dating from the late fourth century B.C. Created using river pebbles following the ancient technique, this mosaic depicts a lion hunt.

I. Discovery of ancient Macedonia

Until the 1970s, northern Greece remained a little-known region, especially from the archaeological standpoint. Long outshined by the visible ruins of Attica, Peloponnesus, Turkey, Sicily and southern Italy, the buried ruins of northern Greece, a land of rivers, extensive forests, and gold and silver mines, did not arouse interest among scholars. Not a single example of civilian architecture had survived the Roman conquests and the only known written sources at the time, such as the speeches of Demosthenes, described the Macedonian king Philip II as a drunken barbarian. What could possibly be uncovered in this region of the world that the architecture of southern Greece had not already revealed?

Of course, some objects had been excavated and considered as masterpieces of Roman art, including a fully intact Attican marble sarcophagus dating from the end of the second century A.D. (Attica sarcophagus, Musée du Louvre). The lid of this monumental sarcophagus represents the deceased couple on their funeral bed. The legendary battle between the Greeks and the Amazons is depicted on the front of the case, while the back is ornamented with garlands and gryphons. Crafted in Attica, the sarcophagus was then shipped to northern Greece. Discovered in Thessaloniki in 1836, this monumental work entered the collections of the Louvre in 1844.

In 1861, Léon Heuzey (1831–1922), who later would have a career as a curator at the Louvre, and the architect Honoré Daumet (1826–1911) were sent by Napoleon III to northern Greece to look for traces of Roman civil war battlefields. The two Frenchmen excavated a number of sites that Heuzey had spotted a few years earlier, bravely contending with malaria and the sometimes antagonistic local population. They were able to unearth two wings of a monument, fragments of which they brought back to the Louvre. At that time this site was known as Palatitsia.

It was only in 1977 that a Greek archaeologist by the name of Manolis Andronikos would reveal to the world the mysteries of a colossal tumulus remarked by Heuzey: beneath this huge mound, 110 meters in diameter and 12 meters high, Andronikos uncovered three royal burial chambers, including the unopened tomb of Phillip II. His initial discoveries inspired further excavations in the following years, sometimes at a heady pace, which together have served to amply illustrate the cultural diversity and prominence of the kingdom of Macedon. In particular, the rich contents of these tombs have given insights into the phenomenal heights reached by this civilization: silver and gold objects exemplifying remarkable technical virtuosity, paintings that provide compelling early evidence of the ease and mastery with which the period’s artists made use of techniques such as the optical fusion of colors, chiaroscuro and perspective. Later excavations at this prestigious site, now identified with Aegae, the first capital of ancient Macedonia, resulted in Andronikos’ 1982 discovery of the theater where Philip II was assassinated in 336 B.C. as well as his 1987 find, the tomb of Alexander’s grandmother Eurydice, followed by the discovery of a number of other puzzling burial sites (excavated in 2008 and 2009), one of which contained a golden crown presented in the exhibition (Crown of gilt oak leaves, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki). This tomb might be the burial place of Heracles, Alexander the Great’s illegitimate son.
II. Genesis of the kingdom of Macedon, from the second half of the 2nd millennium to the 6th century B.C.

In an attempt to further an understanding of the origins of the kingdom of Macedon, the exhibition adopts a chronological presentation in this section.

With the Bronze Age drawing to a close, population movements at the dawn of the Iron Age led to the emergence of royal dynasties, included among them the Temenides. Macedonia was a particularly affluent civilization, as witnessed by the necropolises of Sindos near Thessaloniki and Archontiko near Pella, both of which have revealed incomparable treasures. The deceased were buried along with their weapons, their utensils, and their gold and silver jewelry, expertly decorated with filigree and granular work. The exhibition presents the entire funerary contents of a woman’s tomb from the necropolis of Sindos: a pair of earrings, a necklace of pearls and pendants, and a pair of gold hairpins (Pair of hairpins, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki). Mystery continues to surround another tomb dating from 520 B.C. in which the face of the deceased had been entirely hidden behind a bronze helmet and a gilt mask (Bronze helmet in the Illyrian style and gilt mask, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki), following a tradition that had fallen out of use in Greece since the period of the Mycenaean shaft graves in the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries B.C.

Several colonies were founded on the Macedonian coasts by other Greek city-states. Vases found in the necropolises of Torone, Mende, Methone or Akanthos and in those of the Macedonian cities bear witness to the flourishing development of trade throughout the region. Many pieces were imported, such as Attic, Chian or Corinthian vases, and others from Asia Minor. Two magnificent chalices, one featuring a roaring lion and the other showing a confrontation between two sphinxes, are presented in the exhibition (Chian chalice with contentious sphinxes, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

III. Kings of Macedon, from Alexander I to Alexander the Great (5th–4th century B.C.)

Were it not for the shrewd political acumen and ambition of some of the Macedonian kings, particularly the exceptional strategic skill of Philip II and his many reforms, the groundwork for eastward expansion would never have been laid and Alexander III would not have been able, at the tender age of twenty, to embark upon his conquest of the Orient.

Alexander I (500 or 498–454 B.C.) had allied himself with Athens at a time when his kingdom was under Persian rule. But Macedonia truly extended its reach during the reign of Philip II (359–336 B.C.). Held as a hostage at Thebes in his youth, he observed the practices of the Boeotian army and applied these lessons in reforming the Macedonian army, particularly the infantry, whom he equipped with the sarissa, a pike nearly 5 meters in length. With soldiers wielding this weapon in the tight formation of the Macedonian phalanx, the latter was all but invulnerable to any attack from the front.

Owing to Philip II’s boldness and genius, stopping at nothing to counter the Persian threat, the kingdom of Macedon extended its borders. He built the first Macedonian palaces, such as the one at Aegae (Vergina) discovered by Léon Heuzey. In the exhibition, Honoré Daumet’s engraving of this palace, Archaeological mission in Macedonia (1876), is displayed alongside a Grand order Ionic capital and a Grand order Ionic base, Musée du Louvre). Three works discovered in Philip II’s tomb have been loaned to the Louvre on an exceptional basis for the exhibition: an oenochoe (wine jug), a silver platter, and an inscribed tripod 60.5 cm in height, a prize received at the Argos games by one of Philip’s ancestors (Great Tumulus Museum, Vergina). The leading painters and sculptors of the day vied for recognition by the Macedonian court, including Euripides in the late fifth century B.C. Apelles of Kos and then Lysippus of Sicyon would serve as Alexander the Great’s official portrait artists, the latter represented in the exhibition by the statuette known as Alexander with the Lance.
IV. The rise of Macedonia in the Hellenistic period

In this section, several tombs with their full funerary regalia, together with a number of individual objects, allow visitors to delve into the heart of ancient Macedonia’s rich civilization.

The impressive funerary contents found at the Derveni tomb were preserved intact: a ring, a pair of earrings and a silver goblet decorated with a head of Silenus accentuated in gold (Gold ring with a sardonyx bezel and Pair of hanging earrings, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

Treasures flowed into the Macedonia kingdom under Cassander (358–297 B.C.), thanks to the conquests of his predecessor Alexander. Veterans of these campaigns returned to Macedonia laden with gold and carrying spoils confiscated in conquered lands. In its perfection, the work of Macedonian silver- and goldsmiths and sculptors approached the virtuosity of the Italian Renaissance artists.

V. Macedonian society

A thematic approach is also applied for this section, which explores different aspects of the Macedonian civilization, such as artistic production, the organization of the kingdom, education, and the world of men as distinct from that of women.

Nourishing the mind was very important for the Macedonians, as evidenced by a number of the cultural objects included in the exhibition, including a Bronze writing desk (Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

The lives of Macedonian women are explored through ornaments and jewelry, everyday objects, the use of pigments, especially a magnificent female terracotta figure whose polychrome finish is nearly intact and a black-varnished jewel box decorated with a gold necklace on the lid (Female terracotta figurine and Black-varnished pyxis decorated in the “West Slope” style, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

Banquets seem to have held a primordial role in the male universe and the deceased are often buried with splendid sets of silver tableware: one such set includes goblets with an interior decoration accentuated in gold, a strainer and a ladle (Silver banquet tableware: three silver chalices and a strainer, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

The presentation in this section is supplemented with two films, the first of which shows modern views of homes in Pella, with magnificent mosaics decorating their floors. The other film gives a three-dimensional rendering of a banquet hall of the period and its decoration: three-legged tables, divans, decorative mosaics. In the film, the objects included in the exhibition are laid out on the banquet table.

VI. Artistic production in northern Greece

In the fourth century B.C., art in northern Greece had reached its zenith. Artists attained remarkable heights of technical mastery in a variety of media, ranging from ceramics to sculpture, also encompassing the creation of mosaics, metalwork and ivory carving, and the invention of transparent glass during the reign of Philip II. The exceptional skill demonstrated in the decoration of everyday objects, such as the magnificent gold bracelet found in the Europos-Kilkis necropolis (first half of the third century B.C.), finished on both ends with ibex heads in finely incised morphological detail, attests to this artistic virtuosity (Ibex-head bracelet, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki). Another example is the medallion used to decorate a chariot representing a bust of Athena wearing a helmet incorporating Medusa’s head, whose refined execution is only equaled by its excellent state of preservation (Chariot decoration: Medallion with bust of Athena, her helmet ornamented with the head of Medusa, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).
VII. Religion and death

Religion occupied an important place in Macedonian society, as evidenced by varied objects depicting different deities. The large number of sepulchers found in recent excavations have helped us to understand the spatial organization of tombs. Beneath the burial mounds, the tombs call to mind closed temples, their façades ornamented with capitals, Doric half columns, friezes and cornices, some of which still retain their polychrome decoration, with its entire chromatic range fully preserved. They give an idea of how monuments were decorated in the Greek city-states, such as those at the Acropolis of Athens, whose edifices were originally painted. Each tomb’s interior was sometimes divided into a vestibule and an inner room. Two door leaves were brought back to the Louvre by Heuzey and are presented in the exhibition (Right and left leaves of the outer door of the tomb of Palatitsia in Macedonia, Musée du Louvre). Archaeological discoveries have provided insights into the period’s funerary practices, belief system and ancient rites. In this way, we gain an appreciation of the desire fervently espoused by members of the Macedonian elite who wanted to secure their passage to the afterlife by having themselves initiated in the cult of a god or a goddess (like Persephone) in order to learn the secrets of the journey from this world to the next. Deities are often present in tombs in the form of figurines, such as the polychrome terracotta bust included in this section and dating from the fourth century B.C., whose inward-looking and contemplative expression conveys an almost eschatological dimension (Bust of female deity in polychrome terracotta, Archaeological Museum of Amphipolis).

Objects from the life of the deceased accompany them in death. Ashes and bones retrieved from the cremation pyre may be placed in a vase, as in Black-varnished cinerary hydria with a lead lid dating from about 350 B.C. (Archaeological Museum of Amphipolis), as may crowns bestowed at banquets. The highlight of this section is a gold funerary crown, discovered in a tomb at Apollonia (Crown of gilt ivy leaves and corymbs, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

VIII. Ancient Macedonia under Roman domination

Perseus, the last king of Macedon, was defeated in 168 B.C. at Pydna. Macedonia then became a province of the Roman Empire. The Romans imposed their order on the land, building the Via Egnatia, which bisected northern Greece from the west to the east, in order to facilitate trade and troop movements. This section of the exhibition presents the Roman organization of the Macedonian province, as well as the Roman colonies of Philippi and Dion, and examines the impact of the Roman conquest, especially the upheavals affecting the arts and religious practice. Macedonians began worshipping new deities, as evidenced by a major sanctuary devoted to the goddesses Serapis and Isis, unearthed at Thessaloniki. The city became the stronghold of the Roman province of Macedonia.

As a major highlight of the exhibition, the Louvre presents a reconstruction of the Incantadas (Colonnade of the Enchanted Idols), a two-story stoa with a series of statues originally situated near the Roman agora of Thessaloniki (Sculpted pillar from the Incantadas, Musée du Louvre). The sculpted pillars ornamented with two figures from Greek mythology (one on each side), the Corinthian capitals, and the blocks of the entablature are exhibited in such a way as to give visitors an idea of the colonnade’s original dimensions. The Colonnade of the Enchanted Idols, given its Spanish name by Thessaloniki’s once-flourishing community of Sephardic Jews, is connected with a legend according to which Alexander the Great, whose palace was situated on one side of the colonnade, would have been the lover of the queen of Thrace, whose palace was found on the other side. One day, learning that Alexander was to meet up with his beloved that very evening, the king of Thrace had a spell placed on the colonnade that would affect the first group of travelers to pass through. Warned of the potential danger by his own agents who had infiltrated the Thracian palace, the Macedonian king did not venture outside his palace that night. At their next outing, unaware that they were the first to pass through the colonnade, the king of Thrace and his court were changed into stone.
IX. Ancient origins of the Alexander legend

Alexander the Great was born in July 356 B.C. at the royal court of Pella. When he reached the age of thirteen, his father Philip II employed Aristotle as the boy’s personal tutor, from whom he received an education in political philosophy and in the study of human societies as well as teachings on the essential characteristics of the ideal ruler, on faraway lands and the various peoples of the world. It was in Mieza that Alexander continued his studies with Aristotle, along with Ptolemy, Hephaestion and other sons of the royal hetairoi, the king’s personal bodyguards, closest advisers and senior officers of state. These childhood companions would later become Alexander’s own celebrated generals. In 336 B.C., Philip II was assassinated and Alexander ascended to the throne, which he successfully assumed despite his young age due to the active support of the army. At the same time as the kingdom, Alexander inherited from his father the command of a pan-Hellenic expedition that had been decided by the Council of Corinth. The objective was to completely neutralize the Persian menace that had threatened Greece on a constant basis for more than 150 years. As a young and ambitious ruler, Alexander considered the heroes of the Trojan War as his idols, but he also was a passionate reader of the epic poems of Homer and the Asian expedition offered him the opportunity to emulate his great ancestor Achilles, whose exploits had been immortalized in the Iliad. Alexander was the first to break the power of the Persia through a series of decisive battles, despite having a much smaller army. He promulgated Hellenistic culture on a lasting basis, from Egypt to India. Games were organized in his honor, as shown by the victory medals depicting Alexander and the members of his family designed for the games at Veria presented in the exhibition (Gold victory medal awarded at the Veria games, in honor of Alexander and his family, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki). In his own lifetime, Alexander’s military prowess and renown caused him to be worshipped as a hero, a god. The many portraits of Alexander executed by leading artists bear witness to this status, such as the Alexander with the Lance of Lysippus, included in the exhibition in the form of a bronze statuette. In this piece, Alexander is depicted as a conqueror, his left hand grasping a lance and his right hand holding a sword, today lost. Another stunning portrait is the Roman copy of Alexander with the Lance, taking on the attributes of Hermes (Portrait of Alexander, called the Hermes Azara, Musée du Louvre). It was unearthed in 1779 and offered to Napoleon Bonaparte, who presented it to the Louvre in 1803.
Main sites of ancient Macedonia
Related events and publications
In the Kingdom of Alexander the Great: Ancient Macedonia

Publications
Exhibition catalogue, 24.6 x 32 cm, 650 pages, 600 illustrations, hardbound, €49
This publication was made possible thanks to the generous support of the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation and Arjowiggins.

In the Auditorium du Louvre
Presentation of the exhibition
Monday, October 24 at 12:30 p.m.
In the Kingdom of Alexander the Great: Ancient Macedonia
by Sophie Descamps, Musée du Louvre

Art on Stage
Wednesday, November 2 at 12:30 p.m.
Alexander with the Lance at the Louvre: A singular adaptation of Lysippus of Sicyon’s masterpiece in Egypt of the Pharaohs
by Sophie Descamps, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities and Marc Etienne, Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Musée du Louvre.

Symposium
Saturday, December 3 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Macedonia from the sixth century to the Roman conquest: Development and cultural influence of a Greek monarchy
Free admission
In collaboration with the UMR Archéologies et Sciences de l’Antiquité (ArScAn), Maison de l’Archéologie et de l’Ethnologie René Ginouvès, Nanterre and the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (INHA)
Friday, December 2 in the Auditorium of the INHA

Concert of music from antiquity
Thursday, December 8 from 8 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Alexander the Great’s musical tastes
Concert of music from antiquity by the Ensemble Kerylos
(Musical direction: Annie Bélis)
Free admission
A number of authors of antiquity have indicated that Alexander was a passionate music lover.
For twenty years, under the baton of its founder and musical director Annie Bélis, the Ensemble Kerylos, using faithfully recreated instruments of the period, has introduced audiences around the world to the works of composers known to have been among Philip II’s favorites, a musical heritage reemerging from two millennia of neglect.
The Louvre concert will be a singular event in many respects: twenty-five centuries after Alexander the Great, the public will be able to discover several of the Macedonian works he most admired and will also be treated, at the Louvre itself, to a performance of two musical parchments from the museum’s collections.
Multimedia guide
Explore the exhibition through a selection of emblematic works from ancient Macedonia presented by one of the exhibition’s curators along with other specialists in the field. Available during the entire exhibition period.

Documentary:
Alexandre le Grand le Macédonien
Directed by Bernard George
Produced by Les Films du Tambour de Soie and the Musée du Louvre.
Co-producers: Arte GEIE, Minimal Films, ERT
Running time: 52 minutes
Television broadcast: “Théma” special to air on Arte TV on November 13, 2011
DVD co-produced by Arte Développement and the Musée du Louvre to be released in October 2011

Already a hero for some and a megalomaniac for others in antiquity, a divide between admiration and denigration that persists until the present day, the most famous of Macedonian kings has taken on iconic status through the centuries, to such an extent that his proper historical context has been nearly obfuscated in favor of the Alexander legend. In honor of the major exhibition devoted to ancient Macedonia by the Louvre, this film offers an entirely new approach to the universe of Alexander the Great by piecing together the surviving remnants of the material and artistic culture of his kingdom of Macedon. The aim is to compare the Alexander legend with the historical record, by way of the multitude of representations discovered and archaeological traces left behind over the course of his vast conquests.

Guided tours of the exhibition
Tours of the exhibition led by the museum’s guides.

For further information call +33 (0)1 40 20 52 63 or visit www.louvre.fr.

Visitor information
Exhibition
Hours
Open daily except Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and until 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Admission fees
In the Kingdom of Alexander the Great: Ancient Macedonia only: €11
Permanent collections + In the Kingdom of Alexander the Great: Ancient Macedonia: €14
Youths under 18, the unemployed, and holders of the “Louvre Jeunes”, “Louvre Professionnels”, or “Amis du Louvre” cards may access the exhibition directly without waiting in line and free of charge.

Further information
+33 (0)1 40 20 53 17 - www.louvre.fr