



THE MULTICENTER MUSEUM OF AIGAI

IMATHIA



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Heritage
Convention





THE BURIAL CLUSTER OF PHILIP II

To protect the royal tombs and their splendid paintings, the sole preserved original works by great masters of Classical antiquity, a protective shell with electronic systems for control and climate regulation was constructed that recalls an ancient burial tumulus on its exterior.

In the underground shell there are four consecutive spaces surrounding the tomb sites. Here, an original experiment was attempted: the "Museum" came to surround the monuments, becoming a Museum-Mausoleum devoted to the memory of Philip II, Alexander the Great, and his son Alexander IV.

The treasures are displayed beside the tombs that contained them, but nothing is as it once was. The modern shell continues to mark the site and protect the tombs, recalling the image of the Great Tumulus but essentially revoking its function, since it is designed to make the monuments accessible to the public, while the ancient tumulus concealed and isolated the houses of the dead from the living.

Death transubstantiates. Whatever "died" and was buried, following the deceased to his grave, whatever for centuries has been locked in earth's embrace may perhaps one day return to daylight but it will never be the same as it was. Raised on their pedestals, the objects, no longer usable but nevertheless useful, become monuments, fragments of memory, ideas rather than material objects. The finds are conserved, "restored" and exhibited to the public, totally estranged from the original function. The exhibition method is bound to respect their form and character, but it cannot avoid expressing the aesthetics of contemporary viewers, whose ideological needs it addresses.

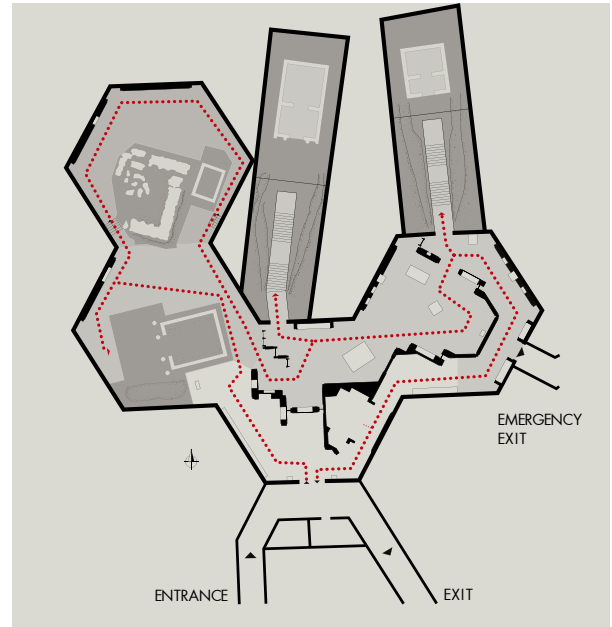
In light of these considerations, minimal, timeless forms and modern, neutral materials – metal, crystal, dull aluminum, synthetic glass – were chosen, which meet the strictest specifications. The finest that modern international technology has to offer in the field of museography – hermetically sealed, individually climate-controlled metal showcases, optical fibers, metal sound-absorbent panels, electronic control systems – was enlisted to ensure the optimum conditions for protection and ongoing preservation of the finds. And this – without losing the atmospheric element in an exhibition, which intend to address both mind and emotions.



Starting from the expression “excavations brought to light”, we took as a given the idea that death and oblivion are equivalent to “shadow and the absence of color”, while life and memory are equivalent to “light and color”. Modern constructions enveloped in tones of grey are lost in the dimness; thus was created a world of shadows, where the ancient objects, shining and warm, reign supreme, and where apart from the monuments the only color is royal purple, an allusion to the blood of the royal deceased who haunt the place like the heroes of an ancient tragedy.

With the help of the functional museum constructions in which the showcases are installed, the area was broken up into multiple spaces, creating the element of surprise that accompanies visitors’ steps, igniting their interest. The darkness that reigns in the space arouses awe and turns voices into whispers, suggesting the atmosphere in the land of the dead.

The skein of memory unwinds in the museum through the prescribed course and the sequence of thematic units. At the entrance, the picture of the Great Tumulus and its three-



dimensional model provide an overall impression of the site and its monuments. The first unit is devoted to the Macedonians whose grave stones were found in the fill of the Great Tumulus. Immediately following these are the ruins of the Macedonian tomb (IV) with its free-standing columns, a monument built in the Early Hellenistic age on the edge of the royal tumulus.

Next is the “heroon”, an above-ground monument dedicated to the cult of the distinguished dead, and beside it is the cist tomb (I) of one of Philip’s seven wives, perhaps Nikesipolis of Pherae. Here, the image of the frescoes that decorate the tomb’s walls predominates. The three Moirai, inaccessible and impartial mistresses of fate, the mute pain of Demeter, the mother who though a goddess could not save her daughter from the hands of Hades, the fear in the eyes of the nymph who becomes a witness to the abduction of the defenceless Kore by the Lord of Death all initiate visitors into the mysteries of the Underworld. Then well prepared, they arrive at the units devoted to Philip II, the king whose actions changed the course of Hellenism.



In the first area one sees king's weapons, the utensils employed in his funeral ceremony, the symbols of his authority and the precious bronze household utensils employed for his final bath. Immediately afterward one may descend the "dromos" of Philip's tomb and admire the fresco with the royal hunt, a work with nothing to envy the creations of the great Renaissance masters. The next stop is the showcase with the remains of the funerary pyre that were found thrown on the vault of the tomb, irrefutable evidence of the deceased's identity. Visitors then come to the heart of the exhibition, devoted to the heroized Philip II. Here, among the gold chests and wreaths, the splendid symposium utensils and the precious gold and ivory banquet couches, stands as a trophy to memory his "resurrected" gold-trimmed armor. Worthy of an Achilles this armor, perhaps that which Philip wore when he was proclaimed leader of all the Greeks, is marking with the sheen of gold and ivory the shape of his absence.

The following unit is devoted to Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great and Roxane who met a premature death, and who was buried in the shadow of his glorious forebear after 310 BC. The exhibition closes as it had begun, with a series of grave stones and the picture of Manolis Andronikos, the man who brought the treasures to light.







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GENERAL SUPERVISION: TAP - PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT



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