



## In Search of Alexander

Classical sites in northern Greece

**16–22 October 2023 (MJ 934)**

7 days • £3,090

Lecturer: Professor Antony Spawforth

Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine heritage in the ancestral homelands of Alexander the Great.

The history of ancient Macedonia and the rule of the great Temenid kings, extended forward to the end of Byzantium.

Fertile pastures and mountainous landscapes in a culturally rich, little-visited part of Greece.

To many Classical Greeks the Macedonians were barbarians. Hailing from beyond Mount Olympus, only relatively recently had they abandoned nomadism for settled agriculture and life in cities, and they persisted with the system of hereditary kingship that city-state Greeks considered politically primitive.

But military monarchy served the Macedonians well. In three dramatic decades in the fourth century BC which changed the ancient world, Philip II subdued most of the southern Balkans and his son, the legendary conquerer Alexander the Great, extended Macedonian rule through Anatolia, the Middle East and into Central and South Asia.

Mainstream Greeks had previously gained several footholds on the islands and coastline on the fringes of Macedonia in order to exploit the region's rich natural resources, and these settlements succumbed to the Macedonians early in this extraordinary tale of conquests. After Alexander, Macedonian kings based at Pella maintained a flourishing kingdom until they were toppled by the legions in the second century BC, when the whole area became part of the Roman Empire.

Athenian snobbishness notwithstanding, the Macedonians embraced Greek culture (Euripides and Aristotle, among others, graced the royal court). The treasures from the Royal Tombs at Vergina and elsewhere are among the most accomplished and beautiful artefacts to have survived from the ancient world.

Macedonia flourished under the Pax Romana, with important centres at Philippi and Thessalonica (Salonica). The latter went on to become a cultural and religious bastion of the medieval Byzantine empire, second only to Constantinople itself.



*Thessaloniki, wood engraving c. 1880.*

### Itinerary

**Day 1:** Fly at c. 7.00am from London Gatwick to Thessaloniki (British Airways). From there drive eastwards via the recently constructed Egnatia motorway to the harbour town of Kavala. First of two nights in Kavala.

**Day 2: Thasos, Kavala.** Reached by ferry, Thasos is a very attractive island, rugged and densely forested. The remains of the ancient city include one of the best-preserved agora complexes in Greece. The old part of Kavala, crowned by a Byzantine castle, sits on a promontory above the port joined to hills behind by a massive Ottoman aqueduct.

**Day 3: Philippi, Amphipolis.** Philippi is known for the battles in 42 BC that led to the victory of Octavian and Antony over Brutus and Cassius, and as the place where St Paul established the first Christian community in Europe. Striking ruins of a theatre, forum and Early Christian basilicas are situated in an attractive valley. Amphipolis was an important and prosperous city from its founding as an Athenian colony in 437 BC until its demise in the 8th–9th centuries. The Hellenistic gymnasium is the best preserved in Greece. First of four nights in Thessaloniki.

**Day 4: Thessaloniki.** Start the day with a walk in the upper town along the ramparts, the Vlattadon Monastery and the little church of Hosios David with its early-Byzantine mosaics. The Archaeological Museum is an excellent, extensive and well presented collection. Free afternoon or an optional visit to three great Byzantine churches.

**Day 5: Pella, Lefkadia, Vergina.** Pella was the luxurious capital of Macedonia, birthplace of Philip II and his son Alexander the Great. The extensive but only partly excavated site has outstanding floor mosaics, and there are excellent finds in the attractive new museum. A Macedonian tomb at Lefkadia has rare, high-quality paintings. Vergina is the site of the tombs of Philip II and members of his family. Only fairly recently discovered, the astonishing grave goods are among the finest survivals from the ancient world.

**Day 6: Olynthos.** The most important of the Greek settlements on the fertile peninsula of Chalkidiki, Olynthos never recovered after destruction by Philip II (348 BC). The ruins, set in rolling farmland, provide the best evidence of Greek town-planning and a chance to walk residential streets of a Classical Greek city. Back in Thessaloniki, most of the significant Roman remains date to the city's time as an Imperial

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capital under Emperor Galerius (AD 305–311): parts of his palace, the Arch of Galerius and the impressive bulk of the Rotonda, which was probably built as his mausoleum. The award-winning Museum of Byzantine Culture displays artworks and artefacts dating from the 2nd to the 20th centuries.

**Day 7: Thessaloniki.** Free morning. Fly from Thessaloniki, arriving at London Heathrow at c. 2.20pm (British Airways).

## Lecturer

**Professor Antony Spawforth.** Emeritus Professor of Ancient History at Newcastle University. A historian and broadcaster specialising in Greek and Roman antiquity and in rulers' courts. Books include *The Complete Greek Temples*, *Greece: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (with C. Mee), and *Versailles: A Biography of a Palace*.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,090 or £2,820 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,590 or £3,320 without flights.

**Included:** air travel (economy class) on scheduled British Airways flights (Airbus A320); private coach travel throughout; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 4 lunches and 5 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all state and airport taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and a local guide.

**Accommodation. Egnatia Hotel, Kavala** (egnatiahotel.gr): modern hotel, well located with fine views. **Electra Palace Hotel, Thessaloniki** (electrahotels.gr): traditional 5-star hotel with views of Aristotelous Square and the Mediterranean.

**How strenuous?** You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time in some cases on exposed sites and walking over rough terrain. Sure-footedness and agility are essential. Average distance by coach per day: 60 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.