

BEYOND THE WALLS

Rossella Pace – Aigai is one of the cities of Aeolis, built further inland than other Greek cities of the region. We started working on the necropolis two years ago as part of both an international project (French, German, Turkish and Italian) and the Turkish mission led by Ersin Doğer and Yusuf Sezgin. Aigai was a great, fortified city counting maybe ten thousand inhabitants according to the extent of the necropolis. Several Hellenistic and Roman cemeteries have been found along the main street leading to the principal gates of the town. Within the city walls many important monuments can be found, such as the bouleuterion, the theatre, and an impressive agora built three stories high. It was the merchant agora, where meat could be bought, as well as fish and grain. Among the many sanctuaries discovered, a temple specifically devoted to the goddess Cybele can be found. The necropolises are always situated outside the city. We excavated one of these monuments last year; identified as an ancient tumulus, it dates back to archaic times. However, our project focuses on the Hellenistic part of this necropolis; most of the necropolis was in use during the Hellenistic and Roman period. This dig has certainly helped us understand something unknown until then: the necropolis originally dates from at least the 7th century BC and continues to be used with surprising continuity until at least the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. I have personally taken an interest in archaic objects. I am currently studying a particular kind of vase, a small goblet with a handle, typical in this region. This item was discovered in the first tumulus, excavated last year. It is a complete specimen; I had seen such well-preserved vases only in museums, never on a dig where only fragments were to be found and never a whole vase.

Thanks to a diversified team, we have been able to conduct a certain number of studies, such as an anthropological study of the bones unearthed last year... There is genuine teamwork between archaeologists, anthropologists, archaeometers, architects, topographers and petrographers, who conduct petrographic analyses in order to identify the composition of the clay used for ceramics. We also work with geologists, who determine where the clays came from, and locate quarries from which stone was extracted for coffin making, constructed in one block of stone, a rather impressive piece of work, or for cyst coffin making. After an on-foot prospection, sector by sector, we proceed to describe every monument seen: we measure them; we identify the stone used for each tomb. We then draw and record the graves on a map. Once the data has been assembled, we try to discern whether or not there's a coherence in the distribution of the funerary monuments. We then select the monument to be excavated the following year. Because there are so many funerary monuments, and although we've already recorded over a thousand of them, I would say that

we are only up to a third of the necropolis. We have estimated the number of tombs or monuments to about three thousand. Due to the quantity, choices have to be made! Digging everything up would probably take a century! How shall we proceed next year? Since we've already excavated one tumulus, we'd like to excavate another one for comparison, to see whether or not it's exactly the same, or if inside these two tumuli, completely different funerary practices were taking place with considerable variations...

Compared to other cities of Aeolis, in Aigai it's all here! It is the first time that a necropolis in use from the 7th century BC to the 3rd century AD is being excavated. We can truly follow the development of an inland city that controlled all of the access routes coming from the sea.