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## IDENTIFICATION OF PAEONIAN WEAPONS FROM VI-V CENTURY B.C. FROM REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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*Abstract: The historical sources for Paeonia are relatively limited but still considered in context with the traces of material culture sufficient to make the identification and reconstruction of Paeonia weapons. In that regard, Homer was the first to mention the Paeonians as allies of Troy and through whom one can get a certain idea of their earliest military history, followed by Herodotus, Thucydides and Strabo. Based on the traces of the material culture in the period in question, above all the weapons discovered in a funerary context as well as the iconography of Paeonian coins, the types of weapons as well as the principle of armament and the concept of Paeonian warfare can be differentiated.*

**Key words:** Paionia, Homer, weapons, necropolis, archaic

Despite the fact that the historical sources for Paeonia are relatively modest, thanks to the interest of modern researchers, especially the archaeological excavations of the necropolises in the region of downstream of the r. Axios, modern name (Vardar) and the r. Bregalnica in the past half century, significant moves have been made in terms of reconstruction of the history of this Paleo-Balkan ethnic substratum.<sup>1</sup>

In the period from the end of II and beginning of I millennium BC. on the territory of R. Of North Macedonia, as well as on parts of present territories of Bulgaria and Greece there are evident presence of Paeonian tribes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Е. Петрова, *Пајонскиџе џлемиња и Пајонскоџо кралсџиво во II и I милениум џ.н.е.* МАА 12, 1990/91, 9 – 131; Д. Митревски, *Проџоисџорискиџе заедници во Македонија*, 1997, 190 – 204.

<sup>2</sup> Е. Петрова, МАА 12, 1990/91, 10.



Regarding the reports of historical sources that provide data on the geographical location of the Paeonians, the first is the data according to Homer, who located Paeonia on the wide Axios River and also he informs about the Paeonian city of Amydon.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, according to the sporadic mentions in the sources of the Paeonian tribes, from the authors from the classical to the Roman period, it can be assumed that the peak of its military-political power, which is reflected primarily in its territorial expansion, Paeonia reaches in the VI century B.C. Namely, in this period it extends to a wider geographical area from Struma (Strymon) river in the east to Pelagonia in the west and from the sea in the south to the spring of Strymon in the north, including the entire course of Vardar river (Axios), the basins of the river Erigon, today r. Crna and r. Bregalnica.<sup>4</sup>

As for the Paeonian military history, the data left by the historical sources are also relatively modest, so it is difficult to make a precise reconstruction, ie to give a realistic picture of the segment of Paeonia's military activities in the period up to the VI century BC. The first source who mentions the Paeonians in general and in a military context was Homer. Namely, within the composition of the Trojan army, he mentions as allies the Paeonians with curved bows, led by the hero Pyraechmes from the distant Amydon from the wide river Axios.<sup>5</sup> The Paeonians with curved bow are mentioned once again in the context of Dolon's report on the situation in the Trojan camp,<sup>6</sup> and in the sixteenth book Homer mentions them as chariot fighters in the description of Patroclos killing Pyraechmes stabbing him in the right shoulder.<sup>7</sup> Homer further mentions the Paeonian heroes who stood out in the battles against the Danaans. Among them was Apisaon, who fought with Asteropaios and was killed with a spear by Lycomedes.<sup>8</sup> Asteropaios was son of Pelagon. He led the Paeonians who were armed with spears and challenged Achilles to the battlefield. In battle he threw the two spears he was armed with at Achilles, with one spear partially piercing his shield, while the other spear wounded him in the right elbow. Achilles, after missing Asteropaios with a spear, struck him in the stomach with his sword.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the data in the Iliad, the concept of armament can be assumed. The Paeonians led by Pyraechmes were with curved bows and chariot fighters.<sup>10</sup> In this context, it could be assumed that they were from the downstream of the Axios River, where the country is flat and suitable for the concept of warfare

<sup>3</sup> Il. II, 848 – 850; Il. XIV, 287 – 8

<sup>4</sup> Str. VII, 5, 1; VII, 5, 7; VII, 5, 12; Thuk. II, 96, 3; II, 98; Her. V, 15, 16; VII, 113; Ptol, III, 13, 27 – 28; Plin. Sec., Nat. Hist., IV, 10 – 35; Liv. 39, 53; E. Петрова, МАН 12, 1990/91, 15/6. Д. Митревски, 1997, 198.

<sup>5</sup> Il. II, 848 – 850.

<sup>6</sup> Il. X, 428.

<sup>7</sup> Il. XVI, 285 – 292.

<sup>8</sup> Il. XVII, 348 – 351.

<sup>9</sup> Il. XXI, 153 – 183.

<sup>10</sup> Il. II, 848 – 850; Il. X, 428; Il. XVI, 285 – 292.

with chariots, which in turn in the hill and mountain morphology of the terrain would be almost unusable. Asteropaios, on the other hand, led the Paeonians with long spears, and his lineage also originated from the broad Axios River.<sup>11</sup>

The information provided by Herodotus and Thucydides is significant for the history of Paeonia in the period of the 6th century BC, especially for their military activities. Herodotus, in the context of the Persian conquest of the city of Perinth, reports that the Paeonians had previously acted very cruelly, as they had been called by prophecy to launch an army against the city. In this case he locates the Paionians on the Strymon River.<sup>12</sup>

Pindar's account of Abdera's attack and the rejection of Paeonian archers farther from Athos by Abdera citizens may refer to the same period.<sup>13</sup>

In the period from the middle of the VI century B.C. the process of reducing the Paeonian territory as a result of the strengthening and expansionist policy of the ancient kingdom of Macedonia begins. Probably in the time of Amyntas I 540 - 498 B.C. their territory west of Vardar River (Axios) to the sea was taken from them, and with the Persian invasion, in the time of Alexander I 498 - 454 B.C. the territory downstream of Strymon River was taken too.<sup>14</sup>

In the period after the battle of Plataea in 479 B.C. when the Persian withdrawal begins, it can be assumed that the expansionist policy of Alexander I begins, so in the years until the end of his reign can accommodate the loss of Amfazitida, Mygdonia and Crestonia as well as the areas around Mount Pangeon. After this, the territory of Paeonia was limited to the area along the middle and upper course of Vardar River (Axios), the upper course of Struma (Strymon) and Bregalnica (Astibo) Rivers.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the written sources, an important source through which one can get some idea of the Paeonian weapons is the iconography of the Paeonian coins, especially those emissions from the Paeonian tribal coinage from the end of the VI and V century B.C. The representation of the Corinthian type of helmet is present on the obverse and reverse of the coins of the Derrones and the Laeaei, namely the tetrobols, triobols, diobols and trichemiobols (Fig. 1).<sup>16</sup> Considering that the presented helmets show an intention to show the notch for

<sup>11</sup> Il. XXI, 155 – 157.

<sup>12</sup> Her. V, 1; E. Петрова, MAA 12, 1990/91, 13.

<sup>13</sup> E. Петрова, MAA 12, 1990/91, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Her. V, 15; E. Петрова, MAA 12, 1990/91, 16

<sup>15</sup> E. Петрова, MAA 12, 1990/91, 16

<sup>16</sup> B. V. Head, *British Museum Catalogue of Greek Coins: Macedonia, etc.* London 1879 (reprint Bologna 1978), 152, no. 4, 5; J. N. Svoronos, *L'hellenisme primitif de la Macedoine prouve par la Numismatique et l'or du Pangee.* Paris 1919, 14, no. 25 b, 15, no. 25b; H. Gaebler, *Die Antiken Munzen Nord Griechenlands, Band III: Makedonia und Paionia.* Berlin 1935, 145, nos. 4, 6; N. M. Waggoner, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. The Collection of the American Numismatic Society. Part 7: Macedonia I (Cities, Thraco-Macedonian tribes, Paeonian kings).* New York 1987, 932 – 3, 934; P. Josifovski, *The Beginnings of Minting Among the Paeonians (Derrones, Folia Archaeologica Balcanica I: In Honorem Verae Bitrakova-Grozdanova, Elica*



the ears between the guard and the paragance, it can be said that it is a helmet from the recent development phase which overcame the hearing problem that the soldiers armed with this type of helmet had.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the representations of the Corinthian helmet on the obverse and the reverse of the Paeonian coins, it could be assumed that in the period of the end of the VI and the beginning of the V century B.C. it was the standard in the armament of the Paionians, who were probably armed in the manner of the Greek hoplites. On the Macedonian coins in the iconography is present exclusively the Greek-Illyrian type of helmet, while the Corinthian one is presented only on the gold staters of Alexander III of Macedon in the context of the representation of the goddess Athena with a Corinthian type of helmet.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the material culture from the end of the VI and the beginning of the V century B.C., which can be especially followed through the necropolises along the lower and upper course of the river Vardar (Axios) to the south and north and the valley of the river Bregalnica in the east, one can notice the abandonment of the old Iron Age forms of jewelry, ceramics and weapons and the acceptance of forms with clearly defined Late Archaic features. Along the lower course of the river Vardar (Axios) this material culture, in which, among other things, weapons were discovered, can be traced through the necropolises Dedeli - Valandovo, Zelenishte - Valandovo, Suva Reka - Gevgelija, Milci - Gevgelija, while along the river Bregalnica through the necropolises Krivi Dol - Radenje and Gorno Pole, village. Star Karaorman near Shtip.<sup>19</sup>

From the necropolis Dedeli originates a sword of the type makhaira (Fig. 2), discovered in grave no. 44. The length of the blade is 65 cm. while the width is 0.5 cm. Based on the shape of the blade, which in the upper part is flat with a slightly widened blade, and in the lower part slightly rounded, with a recess along the entire blade, can be identified with the older variant of this type of sword characteristic of the first three quarters of V century B.C.<sup>20</sup> Given that the necropolis Dedeli based on archaeological material is dated to the first decades of the VI century B.C.,<sup>21</sup> when this territory was still Paeonian, it can be assumed that the makhaira from tomb 44 was part of the personal weapon of

Maneva (ed.). Skorje 2006, 254, no. 5, 3; Македонија: парите и историјата, каталог на постојаната музејска поставка на НБРМ, К. Христовска (уредник). Скопје

2002 [Macedonia: Coins and History, Catalogue of the NBRM Permanent Museum Exhibition, K. Hristovska (ed.), Skorje 2002]; E. Павловска, *Монетите на Пајонија*, Скопје 2008, 14, 16, 47/8, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Б. Ангеловски, *Оружје во античкојто кралство Македонија*, 2018, 59; К.Ристов, *Оружјејто прејисјавено на македонскиите и пајонски монети*, Македонско наследство 21, 2004, 36.

<sup>18</sup> К. Ристов, МН бр.21, 2004, 27; Б. Ангеловски, 2018, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Д. Митревски, 1997, 139 - 142.

<sup>20</sup> М. Раговиќ - Пешиќан, *Grčka mahaјra i problem krivih meceva*, GCBI XX, Sarajevo 1982, 28/9, 31, 35; З. Георгиев, *Елементи на раната антика во Долно Повардарије*, ГЗФФ 2, Скопје 1984, 69,70; Б. Ангеловски, 2018, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Д. Митревски, 1997, 139.

a Paeonian soldier. In the context of that attribution are the findings of the gray pottery that is associated with the Paeonians, as well as the presence of the Paeonian bronzes from an older group, which are chronologically related to the period at the end of the VII century B.C.<sup>22</sup>

The second necropolis where the presence of weapons in the Valandovo region has been confirmed is Zelenishte. In both graves no. 1 and 5, two xiphos-type swords were discovered. These are two-edged swords with a blade that flamefully extends from the handle to the top. The length of both samples is about 60 cm. (Fig. 3). These swords are associated with Greece where they appeared in the VI century B.C., and in the area of R. Of North Macedonia as well as in the interior of the Balkans are present in the period from the second half or the end of the VI century B.C. The samples from Zelenishte are chronologically determined in the transition from VI to V century B.C.<sup>23</sup> Among the other findings that can confirm the Paeonian character of the necropolis is the gray ceramics represented by a lamp and two kantharos with a biconical body.<sup>24</sup>

Three xiphos-type swords were discovered at the Milci – Gevgelija necropolis. The first was discovered in grave no. 7. It has a characteristic blade that develops flamefully from the handle to the top. The handle and the junction are in poor condition, but still the characteristic shape of the blade unequivocally indicates a xiphos type sword, and in that direction is its length of 50 cm. In the context of the tomb, beside the sword, pitchers with a sloping neck made of gray baked clay were discovered, which speaks of the Paeonian character of the necropolis, and thus of the Paeonian provenance of the buried soldier.<sup>25</sup> Within the same necropolis, a representative of the Paeonian military aristocracy was buried in tomb 103 together with his personal armament consisting of two xiphos swords, two spearheads and an arrow.<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 4)

The dimensions of the first sword are 45.2 cm long and 3.1 cm. width, while the other has a broken tip and a length of 44.3 cm. and a width of 3.8 cm.<sup>27</sup> Based on close analogies with xiphos from the military tomb 105 of the Sindos necropolis, the sword is dated to the end of the VI century B.C. The accompanying findings from ceramics speak in favor of the dating, a jug with a sloping neck made in the technique of ocher baked clay, coton and kylix, which are characteristic forms of ceramics that are especially found in a funerary context

<sup>22</sup> Д. Митревски, 1997, 129/30; Д. Митревски, *Праисторија на Република Македонија (археологија)*, Македонија Милениумски културно – историски факти 1 (Ed. П.Кузман, Е. Димитрова, Ј. Донов), Скопје, 2013, 83 – 265, 228; Д. Митревски, *Пајонија и Пајонциите – Пајонска култура: генеза и развој*, Скопје, 2022, 111 – 162, 139 – 143.

<sup>23</sup> З. Георгиев, 1984, 65; Б. Ангеловски, 2018, 35/6.

<sup>24</sup> З. Георгиев, 1984, 66. Д. Митревски, 1997, 139; С. Блажевска, *Пајонија и Пајонциите – Керамичка продукција по долините на Вардар од VII до IV век п.н.е.*, 163 – 196, 177 – 179.

<sup>25</sup> З. Георгиев, 1984, 66.36; Р. Пашиќ, Ж. Винчик, М. Ивановски, *Милци: Гевгелија-железнодојска некропола*, *Arheološki Pregled* 22, 1981, 35 – 38, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Б. Хусеновски, *Војнички гроб од некрополата Милци кај Гевгелија*, *Патримниум* 2015, 11 – 36, 14/5

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

during the transition from VI - V century B.C.<sup>28</sup> The two spears have an identical shape, based on their length of 20 and 24 cm. it can be assumed that they were in the function of throwing missiles.

From the necropolis Suva Reka - Gevgelija originates a sword of the type makhaira, discovered in grave no. 49 and three spears discovered, in grave no. 1 with dimensions 22 cm.,<sup>29</sup> and in graves no. 74 and 76.<sup>30</sup> The dimension of the spear from grave no. 1 indicates that it was most likely a throwing missile. The dimensions of the spears from graves no. 74 and 76, are not known but still based on the appearance they are smaller spears with a low shoulder blade and almost the same length of the tip and the shaft which also suggests that they were used as missiles for throwing.

Out of grave context, on tombstone no. 72 *sauroter* was discovered,<sup>31</sup> which was in function of the balance of the spear, for protection in case of delay in the ground, and at the same time it could be used as a weapon in breaking the front of the spear. The discovered ceramic vessels within the tomb contents confirm the chronological framework of living in the period from the end of the VI and the beginning of the V century B.C.,<sup>32</sup> as well as the Paeonian character of the necropolis.

Eastern part of R. Of North Macedonia, Shtip and the surrounding area, is connected with one of the possibilities for locating the Paeonian tribe Derrones.<sup>33</sup> The necropolis Krivi Dol, Radanje stands out from this region. Although the findings of this necropolis originate from scattered tomb units, their characteristics point to the Late Archaic period, and the Paeonian character can be confirmed by the numerous bronze objects discovered, which belong to the group of Paeonian bronzes.<sup>34</sup> The necropolis is significant because of the quantity of weapons discovered, one sword and several spearheads which, depending on the context, can be defined as Paeonian. The sword belongs to the xiphos type, with a flaming two-edged blade, with a length of 56 cm. (Fig. 5), it is in poor condition, and based on the context can be dated to the period of the end of the VII and the beginning of the VI century.<sup>35</sup> B.C. Six specimens were found from the spears, one of which is 53 cm long and 5 cm wide. (Fig. 6), while in the other samples the length ranges from 16 - 30 cm, and the width from 3 - 5 cm. Besides the sword and the spears, the presence of four knives with a length of

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 18 - 20.

<sup>29</sup> Р. Пашиќ, *Археолошки истражувања на локалитетот Сува Река во Гевгелија*, МАА 3, Скопје 1977, 43-57, 43.

<sup>30</sup> К. Ристов, *Сува Река - Гевгелија*, МАА 13, Скопје 1993, 98, 99.

<sup>31</sup> А. М. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*, London 1967, 80.

<sup>32</sup> З. Георгиев, 1984, 70; С. Блажевска, 2022, 166/7.

<sup>33</sup> Е. Петрова, МАА 12, 1990/91, 51.

<sup>34</sup> М. Гарашанин - Д. Гарашанин, *Археолошка ископавања у селу Радању на локалитетот Криви Дол*, Зборник на штитски народен музеј I, 1958 - 1959, 9 - 60; Д. Митревски, 1997, 142, 307.

<sup>35</sup> З. Георгиев, 1984, 65; Д. Митревски, 1997, 183; Б. Ангеловски, 2018, 36, 121.



18 - 39.5 cm and a width of 1.5 - 4 cm is also interesting. Based on the presence of other elements of the weapon as well as the length of the blades, they could be defined as offensive weapons. Spearheads and knives are also dated in the period of VII - VI century. п.н.е.<sup>36</sup>

Another necropolis that based on the grave contents, especially the elements of the Paeonian cult bronzes as well as the gray pottery could be attributed to the Paeonian ethnic substrate is the Varvara necropolis from the vicinity of Skopje.<sup>37</sup> At the end of the VI and the beginning of the V century B.C. belong two spears from the tomb 13. These are iron spears, one of which is in the form of a leaf with a conical shaft, length 50.7 and width 4.8 cm, while the other has a deltoid shape with an almost cylindrical shaft, length of 32 cm. and a width of 3.4 cm. (Fig. 7).<sup>38</sup>

Despite the fact that the forms of weapons from this period, especially the sword of the type of xiphos, are present in a wide area of the Balkans and they could not be tied to any ethnic substrate separately, the context in which they were discovered, in the necropolises of downstream region of River Vardar (Axios), as well as the necropolises Krivi Dol - Radanje - Shtip and Varvara - Skopje, undoubtedly speaks of their Paeonian provenance. Regarding the concept of armament based on historical sources, Homer's reports, can be concluded that the Paionians during the Trojan War were armed with bows. Homer also mentions them as chariot warriors, which undoubtedly speaks of a well-developed concept of warfare in the Late Bronze Age, as well as spearmen led by Asteropaios, son of Pelagon, who died in a duel with Achilles. Based on the archeological findings that can be identified as Paeonian, especially the swords of the type of xiphos and spears, in the period of VI and V century B.C. it can be assumed that the Paionians in this period were armed according to the hoplite concept of warfare, according to which the main offensive weapon was the spear, while the sword was secondary.

So far in the funerary context, except for the two spears with approximately the same dimensions from the grave 103 from the necropolis Milci, Gevgelija, which based on the length can be assumed that they were in the function of throwing missiles, as well as the two spears from the Varvara necropolis, from the grave 13, one of which is longer, probably for direct combat, while the other is shorter, for the purpose as a throwing projectile, there are no other examples in the tombs of two or more spears on the basis of which some more precise conclusions about the concept of warfare could be drawn.

However, given the assumption, primarily based on the weapons discovered in the funerary context, that they were armed according to the Hoplite

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<sup>36</sup> Музејски водич, археолошка посавка, НУ Завод за заштита на спомениците на културата и Музеј - Штип, 2014, 38/9.

<sup>37</sup> К. Ристов, *ВАРВАРА Некропола од Железно време и Римскиот период*, Скопје, 2022, 22, 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 30, 56.

concept of warfare, it can be concluded that they had two spears, one longer for direct combat, while the other shorter for missile launching.<sup>39</sup>



Фотографиите се преземени од Е. Павловска, *Монети на Македонија*, Скопје, 2008

Fig. 1



Fig. 2

<sup>39</sup> A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*, London 1967, 80; A. M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons*, Edinburgh, 1964, 136-139; J.K. Anderson, *Hoplites The Classical Greek Battle experience* (ed. V.D. Hanson), London 1991, 16-20.





Fig. 3



Фотографијата е преземена од Б. Хусиновски, *Војнички гроб од некрополата Милци кај Гевгелија*, *Патристикум* 2015, 11 – 36.

Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

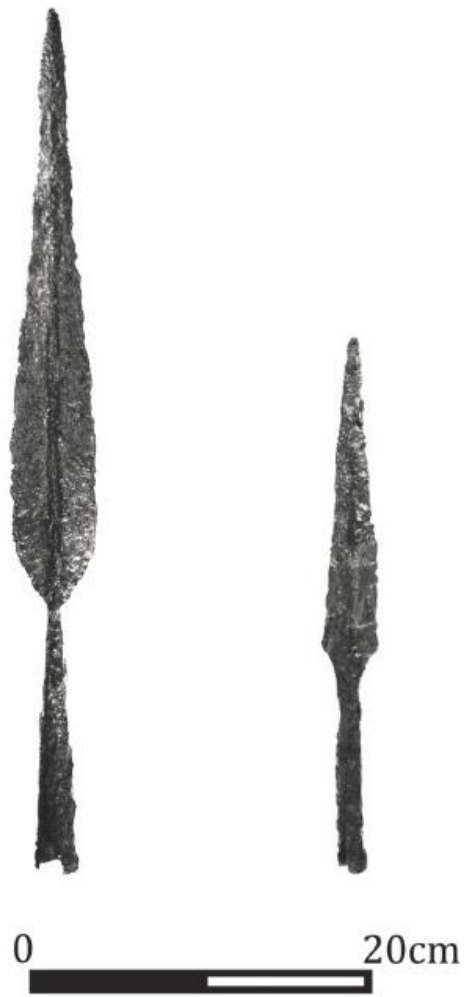


Fig. 7