

MACIEJ POMIANOWSKI

## MACEDONIAN HUNTING WEAPONS FROM HELLENISTIC AGE BASED ON ICONOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

During last quarter of IVth century BC hunting scenes, especially featuring lion hunt appeared in Greek art. Earlier majority of such scenes in Greek art represented either small scale hare hunting (quite common as attested by Xenophon *Kynogetikon* V-VIII<sup>1</sup>) or mythological scenes like Calydonian Boar hunt or Heracles adventures (for example killing Nemean lion)<sup>2</sup>. It had been suggested that this happened because ‘new wave of Orientalism’ was spreading as a result of Alexander’s conquests in Asia<sup>3</sup>. During fourth century BC pieces of art featuring hunting appeared throughout Achaemenid Empire where they had not only decorative but also important symbolic meaning<sup>4</sup>. In this article I would like to suggest that pieces of art from Macedonia are an important source for study of hunting weapons used in Macedonia and supplement very well archaeological finds.

There are two very important pieces of information concerning hunting weapons that are preserved in ancient texts. Unfortunately none of them directly address Macedonian hunting methods. First of those is work by Greek writer Xenophon entitled *Kynegetikon* that was written in beginning of IVth century. Other is a poem under the same title by Roman poet Grattius from 1st century BC.

Xenophon describes in length hare hunting, explaining how one should hunt and what equipment is needed. The most interesting information comes near the end. Author describes ways of wild boar hunt and among other information the weapons needed in this dangerous exercise. He mentions (*Kynegetikon* X.3) that a hunter needs spear (*probola*) and javelins (*akontia*). Latter is rather common term used for javelins, both hunting and battle ones. Former though is rather rare, as in military context usually appears word *dory*. This suggest that this name means some form of special, hunting weapon that has some construction features not appearing in other spears. Xenophon describes such arm in detail allowing quite safe reconstruction. It should have

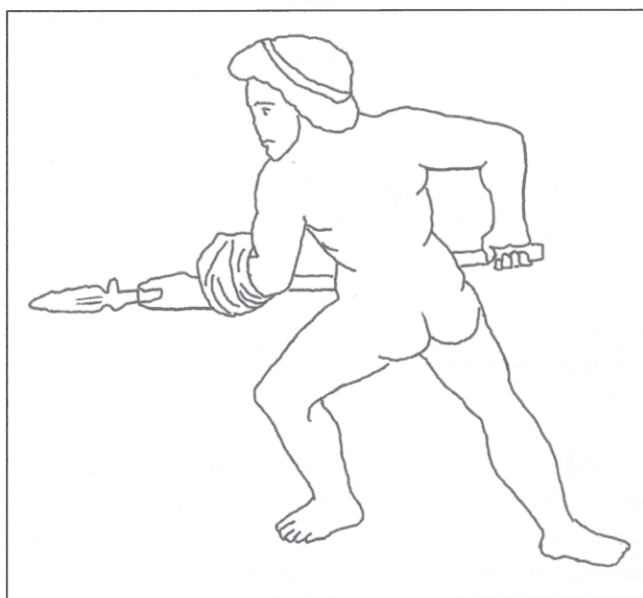


Fig. 1. Meleager with spear with ‘winged’ spearhead. Neo-Attic sarcophagus (author’s drawing).

spearhead 5 palms long, stout teeth at the middle of the socket, forged in one piece but standing out, shaft should be made of cornel wood and have the same diameter as *dory* (military spear). It seems that this spear looks more or less similar to spears with “winged” spearheads or so called boar or bear spears used both in medieval and later big game hunt. It can be identified also as similar to the weapon used by Aetolian hero Meleager in pieces of art connected Kalidonian Boar hunt myth. Good examples may be seen on the neoattic sarcophagus dated to IIIrd century AD that is currently in Archaeological Museum in Thessaloniki (Fig. 1) or in the Roman copies of Meleager statue by Skopas.

Similar weapon is also described by Grattius (*Cynogeticon* 108-110). He mentions spearhead with side extrusions on the socket and suggests that those were very important to protect hunter from the fury of wounded animal.

It is certain, both from analogies and text mentioned above, that this characteristic shape was designed to prevent the spear from getting stuck in the body of wounded animal. This was important as some animals were known to attack furiously even if, or especially if, wounded sometimes going up the shaft that pierced them.

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, *On Hunting* [in:] *Scripta Minora*, translated E.C. Marchant, G. W. Bowersock, Loeb Classical Library.

<sup>2</sup> O. Pelagia, *Hephaestion's...*, p. 175-177.

<sup>3</sup> O. Pelagia, *Hephaestion's Pyre and the Royal Hunt of Alexander*, [in:] *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, Oxford-New York, 2000, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 177-181.

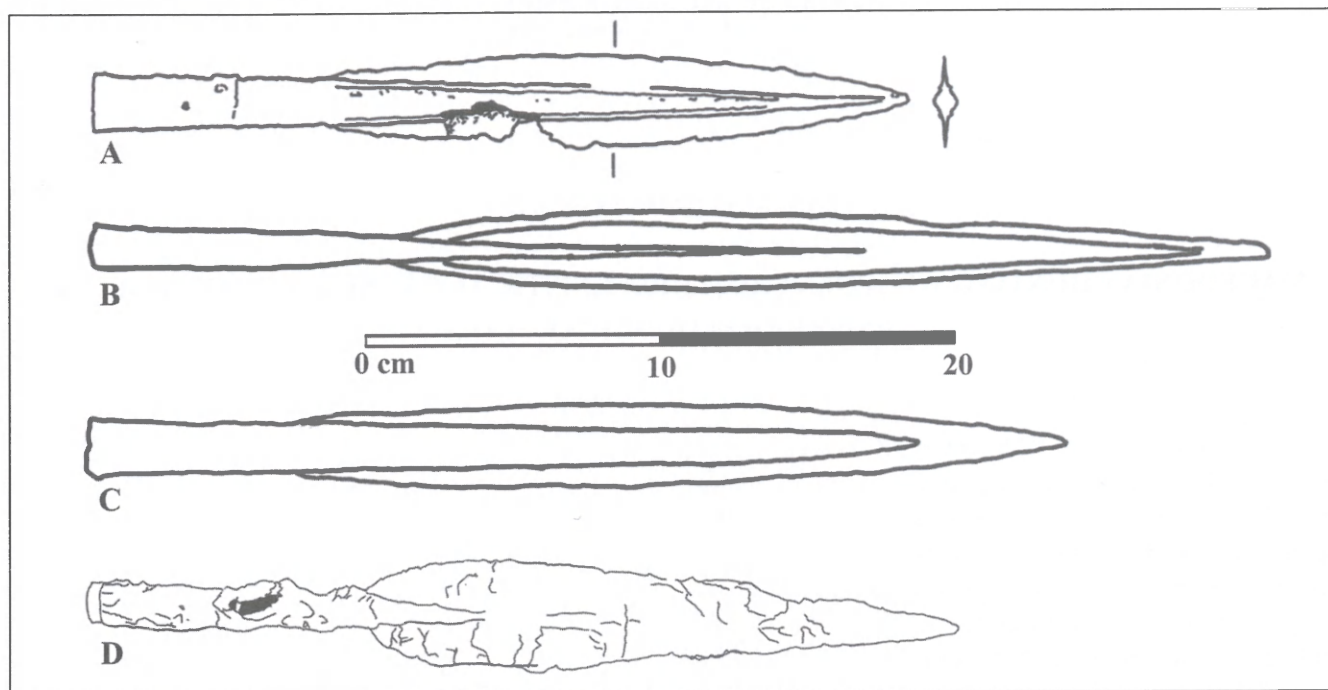


Fig. 2. Collection of spearheads from Macedonia. A – Spearhead from tumulus ̄, after Andronikos, Sarissa; B – Javelin head from Tomb II in Vergina, after Andronikos, Vergina; C – Spearhead from Tomb II in Vergina, after Andronikos, Vergina D – Sketch of a javelin head from Pydna (author's drawings).

Describing javelins, Xenophon mentions, that “The javelins must be of every variety, the blades broad (*euplateis*) and keen (*ksyrekeis*)” (Kynegetikon X.3). This may suggest existence of more than one type of javelins that were used at the same time. This suggestion is, as I will show later, quite clearly proven by hunting scenes in Macedonian art.

Studies on ancient Macedonia had gained a lot when Manolis Andronikos excavated Great Tumulus in Vergina and found there a group of Royal Tombs<sup>5</sup>. This is true even if we remember, that finds are not properly published yet. Two unrobed tombs (II and III) provided us with extreme wealth of finds including large collection of weapons. No less interesting were the marvellous frescoes that were preserved on the walls of the tombs. Especially important for the subject of this article is a fresco from the pediment of the façade of Tomb II (so-called ‘Philip’s tomb’) portraying a hunt scene involving three horsemen, seven hunters on foot, nine dogs, a lion, a bear, two deer and a boar.

It is not the place to discuss all the different theories concerning attribution of Tomb II but few remarks are necessary. At first it had been suggested by Manolis Andronikos that this may be a tomb of king Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. Later this view was put to doubt by new interpretations of evidence found in the tomb and reassessment of texts. Currently it seems more probable that the occupant of the tomb was Philip III Arrhidaios<sup>6</sup>.

This fresco is the richest iconographic evidence for hunting weapons that survived (and was unearthed) from ancient Greece. That is why I will use it as a base for further discussion. I will try to show that weapons appearing here can be located on other pieces of art as well as between archaeological materials. It can be seen that majority of arms seen on the fresco are shafted weapons. Those can be further divided in two groups: spears and javelins.

Only two of the weapons on the fresco may be safely recognised as spears. Both of them appear in central lion hunt scene and are used by some of the most important figures. Those are: the hunter on foot wearing purple cloak and kausia, who is standing in front of the lion and the bearded horseman first interpreted as Philip II who stabs the lion from above.

Shafts of those weapons are thick and knobbed, measuring c. 2 metres<sup>7</sup>. The colour used to paint them is best described as pale gray-brown. Spearheads are quite long, measuring c. 35 cm and having narrow leaf-shaped blades. Another distinguishing feature is wide and pronounced rib.

Some of those features can be seen also on a shaft that sticks from the side of a bear in top right corner. It seems to be knobbed and it is both lighter in colour and thicker than the shaft of a broken weapon that the bear grabs with teeth and paw. Those premises allow, I believe, recognising also this one as a spear.

<sup>5</sup> M. Andronikos, *Vergina*, Athens 1999.

<sup>6</sup> M. J. Olbrycht, *Aleksander i świat irański*, Rzeszów 2004, p. 319, O. Pelagia, *Royal...*, p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> All the measures base on the assumption that men portrayed on the fresco were about 170cm tall.

There are few examples of the spearheads that show striking similarities to those from the fresco. Very fine example had been found in the Tomb II itself. It measures 33.3 cm long and 2.8 cm wide, with wide socket tapering into very pronounced rib that occupies most of the narrow blade<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 2C).

Very similar head had been found in the pyre above cist tomb A in Derveni (some 14 km north from Thessaloniki, on the motorway to Kavala)<sup>9</sup>. It is badly rusted and is missing a socket and a tip of the blade. Preserved length is 20.5 cm and the piece is c. 2.5 – 3 cm wide<sup>10</sup>. It has a pronounced rib and a narrow blade and despite rust two extrusions are visible on the both sides of the rib.

Third example had been found by Andronikos beside cist tomb under tumulus Ψ in Vergina<sup>11</sup>. It is shorter than the example from tomb II, only 27.3 cm long and 3 cm wide. Rib is clearly pronounced and it has extruded lines running on both sides (Fig. 2A).

Heads of generally similar shape were found in few other places including Olympia. Those were placed by Baitinger in group A I of bronze heads<sup>12</sup>, who mentions Vergina Ψ tumulus example as analogy. The problem lies in the metal and size – Macedonian examples (at least Derveni and Vergina Ψ tumulus examples) are made of iron and more importantly, they are almost twice as long – Olympia examples are no longer than 20 cm<sup>13</sup>.

The other group of shafted weapons visible on the fresco from façade of tomb II in Vergina may be identified as javelins. They are seen, from the left: in a body of a wounded deer, another one - barely visible - held by naked horseman, two others held by hunter just to the right of a pillar, one in the hand of purple wearing horseman in centre (“Alexander”), another held by foot hunter in kausia and yellow-purple *chlamis* and finally one in bear’s jaws. One example, held by naked hunter just to the left of a pillar is questionable. It looks like a javelin, but has a longer shaft and is held more like a spear.

All examples can be distinguished from spears by slim, smooth shafts about 110-130 cm long. They are widest at first one third below the head, tapering heavily toward butt end and finishing in the point. Such design is clearly used

to provide the weapon with the best possible aerodynamic shape. The questionable one is about 170 cm long, much longer than other javelins, but still much shorter than a spear. It is important to note that all the shafts were painted in black or very dark brown. Heads may be divided in two types: majority are long and narrow, sometimes looking like metal cone on the shaft, while second group gathers significantly different examples. Both the one held by bear and the ‘long-shafted’ one have rather wide blades with visible but narrow ribs.

Façade of the tomb II is not the only place where javelins with similar shafts can be seen. Almost identical example appears on the mosaic so called the ‘Alexander’s battle’ from the House of Faun in Pompeii. Here, a Persian soldier standing in front of the Darius’s chariot is holding a javelin. Shaft of this weapon is made with black *tesserae* and this makes it exceptional among shafted weapons on the mosaic, as all others are brown or light brown. It also has aerodynamic shape – slim, smooth with lower one third extremely thin and delicate looking. It is quite long, around 180 cm<sup>14</sup> - longer than the height of the soldier.

Another example appears on the silver crater from the tomb B from Derveni (Fig. 3). Here it is held by a man in cloak and one shoe armed beside this in sword (*xiphos*). Shape of shaft sculpted here in silver follows closely the shape visible both on the mosaic from Pompeii and façade of the tomb II.

Black colour of shafts raises questions about its construction. Obvious answer is that it is made from some special, very dark wood, but I was unable to find any information in ancient texts about this. Another possibility is usage of pitch or tar to give such dark appearance to the javelin shafts.

Quite a few analogies may be found also for the heads. Three examples of long and very narrow ones were found in tomb II or in the remains of the pyre associated with this tomb. Two of them seem too long to belong to javelins, measuring over 50 cm<sup>15</sup>. They have strong rib, rectangular in cross section and look more like armour piercing weapons than hunting javelin. Third one though is no longer than 40 cm and quite delicate so fit well with the narrow javelin heads painted on the façade (Fig. 2B).

Other examples were found in tomb Δ in Derveni. Among spearheads found in the tomb and close to it two look very much like the smaller narrow one from tomb II in Vergina. They are heavily rusted so surface details are not visible, but the shape is very similar to javelin heads from the painting.

Head of the javelin from the mosaic in Pompeii looks significantly different. It seems to be shorter but at the same

<sup>8</sup> *In Search for Alexander. An Exhibition*, obj. No.168.

<sup>9</sup> Π.Γ. Θεμελις, Γ.Π Τουρατσόγλου, *Οι Ταφοί του Δερβενίου*, Αθήνα, 1997, p.44, pl.49.

<sup>10</sup> Length is from tomb publication (Π.Γ. Θεμελις, Γ.Π Τουρατσόγλου, *Οι Ταφοί του Δερβενίου*, Αθήνα, 1997), but width was calculated in museum, looking through the glass, as no other info is available.

<sup>11</sup> M. Andronikos, *Sarissa*, Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique No. 94, 1970, pp.98-100.

<sup>12</sup> H. Baitinger, *Die Angriffswaffen aus Olympia*, Berlin-New York, 2001, p.35.

<sup>13</sup> H. Baitinger, *Die Angriffswaffen...*, pp.143-145, for example No.503 seems to be exactly the same part of head as Derveni example but is only 13.7 cm long.

<sup>14</sup> Again length is calculated in proportion to height of the soldier (assumed to be 170 cm)

<sup>15</sup> One is 53.3 cm long, 3.3 cm wide - *In Search for Alexander An Exhibition*, obj. No. 169.

time wider, especially in the lower part of the blade and thus resembles two wider heads on the painting from the façade of tomb II. It is also almost identical with the head that had been found in the cemetery of Pydna (Πb 4256) with the exception of gold band decorating socket of the latter (Fig. 2D). Those two are also similar in length – example from mosaic may be calculated at around 31 cm while one from Pydna seems to be slightly shorter than 30 cm<sup>16</sup>.

Javelin head portrayed on crater from tomb in Derveni (Fig. 3) does not look like those seen on the painting on the façade of the tomb II in Vergina. Instead, it appears as a smaller version of spear head from tomb II in Vergina (Fig. 2C) or even more so the tomb under tumulus Ψ (Fig. 2A). It is also strikingly similar to the group of bronze javelin heads from Olympia (Baitinger's Bronze A I<sup>17</sup>). Its length may be calculated at 22-25 cm and that is just slightly larger than biggest examples from Olympia (18.4 cm).

All the evidence gathered above suggest, that two types of javelins appearing in Macedonian art – narrow headed (fresco and heads from Tomb II, Derveni) and broad headed (Pompeii mosaic, Pydna, fresco from Tomb II) resemble blades of javelins mentioned by Xenophon as “broad and keen“(Kynegetikon X.3).

Although spears and javelins seem to be most important hunting weapons used in ancient Macedonia, some works of art suggest that many other were used. Those include swords appearing on mosaics from houses in Pella and Derveni crater as well as double axes from those mosaics, fresco from Tomb II in Vergina and lion hunt relief from Messene.

Swords shown in hunting scenes do not look different from ordinary, battle swords. Those are either *xiphos* type or *kopis/machaira*. First type is straight, rather short, usually about 50 cm in length (type 14 according to Remouchamps<sup>18</sup>), but according to iconographical evidence some were shorter, between 30 and 40 cm (type 15 according to Remouchamps<sup>19</sup>). Blade in both types is double edged and leaf shaped. Those swords were usually held in straight scabbards with large, box-shaped piece on top and half-circular element on bottom. Great example of the sword of this type had been found in Veria<sup>20</sup>.

Second has bent, single edged blade and characteristic hilt with pommel shaped usually into birds or horses head. Scabbards of those swords are generally quite similar to *xiphos* scabbards. It can be easily seen in the tomb of Lyson and Kallikles, where swords appear among weapons painted



Fig. 3. Sketch of weapons from crater from tomb B in Derveni (author's drawing).

on the walls. Scabbards look identical even though handle reveal that two are *xiphos* while other two are *kopis/machaira* type<sup>21</sup>.

Hunting scene from façade of the tomb II in Vergina does not feature any swords, but this is quite atypical. On both hunting mosaics from Pella hunters are shown with swords - in lion hunt scene it is *kopis/machaira* while on deer hunt both hunters use short *xiphos* swords. Javelin armed figure from Derveni crater also has sword, longer *xiphos* with scabbard decorated with diagonal cord.

Another group of weapons common on the hunting scenes from Macedon and connected to it were axes, especially of the double headed type. They appear on deer hunt mosaic from Pella, lion hunt from Messene and on the façade of tomb II in Vergina<sup>22</sup>. All “Macedonian” examples are hour-glass shaped with blades in the shape of part of the circle, similar to Greek examples from the Bronze Age. They have quite long shafts, in one example (deer hunt from Pella) weapon is used two-handed.

Recently Olbrycht<sup>23</sup> suggested that introduction of axe to hunting scenes is a result of Achaemenid influences acquired during Alexander's expedition. This is possible, especially if we take it but quite a few arguments make it questionable. First of all double headed axe used on all examples

<sup>16</sup> No precise data available, measured in museum, through the glass.

<sup>17</sup> H. Baitinger, *Die Angriffswaffen...*, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> A. E. Remouchamps, *Griechische Dolch- und Schwertformen*, Leiden, 1926, pp.34-36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.36-39.

<sup>20</sup> Γ. Π. Τουρατσόγλου, *Το Ξίφος της Βεροίας: Συμβολή στη Μακεδονική οπλοπονη των υστερών κλασικών χρόνων*, Ancient Macedonia IV, 1986, pp. 611-651.

<sup>21</sup> M. B. Hatzopoulos, *Philip of Macedon*, Athens 1980, pp. 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> M. J. Olbrycht, *Aleksander i świat irański*, Rzeszów 2004, pl. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5.

<sup>23</sup> M. J. Olbrycht, *Aleksander...*, p. 321.

look in no way similar to a Persian *sangaris* pick-axe<sup>24</sup>. It is true that poses are similar to poses of Persian hunters from the so called 'Alexander's sarcophagus' from Sydon<sup>25</sup> but it is obvious as those different weapons may be used in quite similar way.

As a conclusion I would like to stress few points that I tried to show in this paper. Macedonian art seems to be very accurate in portraying weapons, including those used in hunting. Spear and javelin heads seen in art have direct analogies among examples found in Macedonia.

"Winged" spearheads appear neither in Early Hellenistic Macedonian art nor among archaeological finds. This may be problem of inadequate sources, as they appear in theoretical works of Xenophon and Grattius, but just as well it may suggest that such spearheads were not used in Macedonia.

Evidence allows suggestion that there were two types of javelins, narrow headed and broad headed, both using shaft with similar construction. This fits very well with information provided by Xenophon. Black coloured shaft suggest that some special construction was used, though no evidence allow definite answer about details. Special wood, black paint or pitch/tar covering may be considered. Those javelins seem to be used not only as hunting weapons but also in battle.

All evidence presented leads to suggestion that Macedonian art may be used as important source to study of Macedonian weaponry and big supplement to archaeological finds. Together those two types of evidence allow catching a glimpse of Macedonian hunting weapons in the early Hellenistic period.

### Streszczenie

W IV wieku na terenie Grecji i Macedonii pojawiły się nowe typy przedstawień polowań, ukazujące wydarzenia w realistycznych lub niemal realistycznych okolicznościach. Pozwalają one na analizę uzbrojenia myśliwskiego używanego na terenie Macedonii. Szczególne znaczenie w tym względzie ma fresk z fasady grobowca II pod Wielkim Tumulusem w Werginie. W artykule zaprezentowano porównanie przedstawień broni myśliwskiej z tego fresku na tle innych źródeł ikonograficznych z informacjami pochodzącymi ze źródeł pisanych oraz zabytkami uzbrojenia. Obecny stan badań archeologicznych wskazuje, że w Macedonii nie używano włóczni o grotach skrzydełkowych opisanych w tekstach antycznych i pojawiających się na późniejszych przedstawieniach.

Z drugiej strony przedstawienia ikonograficzne bardzo dokładnie oddają formy grotów, które odkryto na terenie Macedonii. Wśród broni myśliwskiej, którą udało się zidentyfikować, są oszczepy o szerokich grotach, o wąskich grotach (oba charakteryzują się bardzo ciemnymi drzewcami o gładkiej powierzchni i aerodynamicznym kształcie) a także włócznie łowieckie. W trakcie polowań, według danych ikonograficznych, wykorzystywano również miecze (dwóch typów – *xiphos* i *kopis/machaira*) oraz podwójne topory.

<sup>24</sup> Examples: Olbrycht, *Aleksander*..., pl. 2.4, 2.7.B, 2.9, 4.14. Compare scene from Messene pl. 4.3.

<sup>25</sup> M. J. Olbrycht, *Aleksander*..., pp. 313-315.

