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EVOLUTION OF THE CUTTING SWORDS AND REVIEW OF THE MACHAIRA TYPE OF SWORD FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract: *The evolution of one – edge sword can be found in some shape of prehistoric tools that were in function of the agricultural activities of the people within the Neolithic communities. In that context, the sickle was an ideal form for cutting, which remained unchanged throughout the entire history of its use.*

The emergence of one – edge sword can be seen in Egypt, primarily as a result of the development of metallurgy and undoubtedly it has reflections in the development of machaira type of one – edge sword.

Machaira is a one – edged sword, with the wavy profile blade and the handle as a styled animal head, most often of wood, bone or some other organic material. It is mentioned in historical sources as a knife and also as a one – edge sword. Its use is spread on a wide geographical region in Portugal, the northern parts of Italy, namely Etruria and also in the parts of the Balkans.

Several findings are known from the territory of the present Republic of Macedonia, mainly from southern and south-western parts. According the blades of those findings, two type of shapes can be distinguished. The first one is so called Greek machaira and the second one is probably local variant. On the basis of the context in the graves where they were found, chronologically, they were dated in the period of the beginning of the 5th century BC to the middle of the 4th century BC.

According to the archaeological and historical characteristic of this kind of swords, it could be assumed that its occurrence was largely predisposed from the harvesting tools, especially from the sickle.

Key words: blade, machaira, kopis, sword, sickle

The emergence and development of one-edge swords can be found in some shape of tools deeply in prehistoric times, when people have not yet developed a conscious awareness of the war as a conception of conquest and defence. Namely, by reaching out for the good of others and at the same time as a need those goods to be defended and preserved, the idea of war have been developed, in the period of sedentism, when people, within the first primitive communities, began to stay in one place, and consequently to create permanent goods within those communities.

In this way, the change of the economic basis of life with the emergence of agriculture predisposed the development of the tools, which were in function of the agricultural activities of the people within the Neolithic communities. The development of the tools, primarily the sickle that served as a tool for reaping, undoubtedly had reflections in the development of the weapon as a model for achieving the military ambitions of people in those early periods of prehistory.

In that context, the sickle was an ideal form for cutting, which remained unchanged throughout the entire history of its use, made first of a stone, or flint in the earliest stages of prehistory, through copper, or bronze to iron, in accordance with the evolutionary periods through which humanity passed. These types of tools were archaeologically confirmed by the earliest periods of prehistoric space in the Middle East.¹

The emergence of one – edge swords can be look in Egypt, primarily as a result of the development of metallurgy, and consequently of the arms and armour.² Namely, one of the forms of the one-edge sword that had been in use since the end of the IV and the beginning of the III millennium, and which were called Khopsh or Khephsh, which means the sickle sword, were the basis for the appearance of the Greek one-edge swords machaira, many centuries later.³

The Machaira is a one – edged sword, with the wavy profile blade, and the handle as a styled animal head, most often of wood, bone or some other organic material. The average length was about 0.50 m, and the widest part of the blade is about 5 cm.⁴

This sword is mentioned in Homer's Iliad, but not in the context of a weapon, but as a knife for everyday use,⁵ a knife for sacrifice and a surgical instrument, or a knife used to help wounded soldiers.⁶

Based on the hieroglyphs, the use of the short single-edged knives in the Egyptians can be confirmed. They were shorter than the swords, and they could have been in relation to the single-edged Greek knife called machaira, from which later have been developed the single-edged sword machaira or a kopis.⁷

The Machaira was not an exclusive Greek weapon, it was present on a wide geographical area, in the southeast and eastern parts of Spain where it was also known

¹ E.B. Banning, 1998, 188-237.

² Ibid, 128-152.

³ Ibid, 155.

⁴ A. Cermanović, 1957, 76; M. Parović – Pešikan, 1982, 44.

⁵ F. Quesada, 1994, 77; A. Cermanović, 1957, 77.

⁶ M. Parović – Pešikan, 1982, 47; F. Quesada, 1994, 79.

⁷ R. F. Barton, 1884, 160/1.

as "falcata" then in Portugal, in the northern regions of Italy, namely Etruria and parts of the Balkans, especially in Bosnia.⁸

It retained the original function of a knife, probably by the end of the 6th century BC, when the short curved sword came into use.⁹

This type of sword probably originated from the East, where it was differentiated as an offensive weapon, as indicated by its first representations of the sarcophagus of the Harps from Xanthos.

Its use as an offensive weapon began sometime in the middle of the 5th century BC since it was probably taken over by the Persians during the Greek-Persian wars.¹⁰

As an integral part of the military equipment, besides the two spears, Xenophon also mentioned the Machaira¹¹ but within the description of the arms and armour of the Persians, in his Anabasis, he mentioned that beside the other weapons soldiers were equipped with Hellenic saber for which he used the word „μαχαίρα“.

In addition to the term machaira, the term kopis was also used to denote the short one-edged sword, which was part of the Persian military equipment. The difference between these two swords is difficult to determine, and often they have been identified by ancient historiographers.¹² This was due to the fact that the ancient Greeks at the end of the 6th century BC under the influence of the Persian, improved the old form of machaira. In the middle of the 5th century BC the use of the words machaira and kopis, has been identified as a knife and as a curved sword,¹³ while based on the Xenophon's data where he, as a more practical weapon for the cavalry, recommended the curved sword, for which he used the word kopis, it can be assumed that towards the end of 5th century BC the word kopis was more used to denote the curved sword, while the machaira got the old meaning for a knife.¹⁴ Snodgrass thinks that the term kopis was used to denote the later variant of the machaira that was in use during the 4th century BC i.e. in the time of Philip II and Alexander III.¹⁵

As more appropriate weapon for the cavalry, its use was especially evident in the rapid actions to prosecute the enemy or in the siege of towns as well as scouts,

⁸ A. Cermanović, 1957, 76-77.

⁹ M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 48; F. Quesada, 1994, 79.

¹⁰ A. Cermanović, 1957, 77; A. Snodgrass, 1967, 97; J. K. Anderson, 1991, 15-37, 28-29.

¹¹ A. Cermanović, 1957, 77.

¹² F. Quesada, 1994, 81.

¹³ Ibid, 89.

¹⁴ Xenophon, 12.11; M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 48 - 49.

¹⁵ A. M. Snodgrass, 1967, 119.

when the mobility and speed of action was imperative. In such situations, the sword was an indispensable part of the arming.¹⁶

In his biography for Alexander the Great, in the description of his armament, Plutarch pointed out that before the Battle of Gaugamela he was practicing with a machaira type of sword.¹⁷ The use of the sword in certain situations was much more appropriate, especially of the fact that the machaira was a sword that cut and the wrapped blade had a larger or wider area of action, and in that way it was easier to give a fatal stroke of the enemy.¹⁸

On the territory of the Republic of Macedonia several swords of the machaira type have been discovered. Some of them, based on the shape of the blade, belong to the type of Greek machaira, while the rest, especially the few examples that originated from the Ohrid region, according to the shape of the blade can be considered as a local variant that was produced in this region.

The swords from Crkvište - Beranci, Dedeli - Valandovo, Krivi Dol - Radanje and Ždanec - Skopje belong to the type of Greek machaira.¹⁹ (T-I, Fig.1,2,3)



Fig. 1. Crkvište - Beranci



Fig. 2. Dedeli - Valandovo

In these swords, the handle and the blade have been made in one part, i.e. one piece of metal. The handle is in the form of a tile and it is separated from the blade with overhang which length is standard at 0.11 m. In the samples from Ždanec, Dedeli and Beranci, the cover of the handle has been in the form of an animal head, which consequently reflected on its profile. In terms of the blade there were two sub variants. In the machaira from the Ždanec and Dedeli, the upper part of the bla-

¹⁶ Arr.6.9.4-6, 6.10.1; Cur. 9.4.26.5.

¹⁷ Plut. Alex. 32.8.

¹⁸ M. M. Markle, 1982, 100.

¹⁹ V. Sokolovska - R. Pašić, 1975, 231-244, tb. V, sl.2 c-d; M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 28-29; З. Георгиев, 1984, 69.

de was flat with a slightly widespread blade, while the lower one was easily rounded to the top. This variant had a characteristic hollow along the entire shaft.



Fig. 3. Ždanec - Skopje

The length of the blade for this variant ranges about 50 cm, while the width between 3.5-3.8 cm. Probably the sample from Krivi Dol - Radanje belongs to this sub variant, which has not been reliably identified because of the fragmentary state. The second sub variant from Crkvište - Beranci has a blade with a wavy profile and a groove only on the upper edge. The width of the blade in this variant with some exceptions ranges between 3.5-3.8 cm and the length is between 45-47 cm. The Beranci sample is 53 cm long.²⁰ The form of this type of swords can also be traced through the visual representations of the Greek vase painting.²¹

The sample from Crkvište - Beranci in its appearance is close with one representation to the kylix from 490 BC by the painter Douris, where the duel between Hector and Achilles was depicted, as well as the representation of a dead Trojan to whom a sword of machaira tube fell out from his hand as it was shown on a kylix of the painter Brigos, who dated back to 490 BC.²² The sample from Crkvište is closely related with the sample from the grave 25, from the necropolis in Sindos near Thessaloniki. The two variants almost coexisted at least until the middle of the 5th century BC, when, on the basis of the more frequent representations of the Greek vase painting, of the second type of machaira, with a groove along the upper edge, it can be assumed that the first variant with a groove along the entire blade has been disappeared from the practical use.²³

At the same time, according to the representations of vase painting, it can be assumed that the original forms of machaira were with a tighter and elongated blade; while in subsequent samples can be notice tendency of curvature and shortening of the blade.

The machaira type of sword from territory of the Republic of Macedonia based on the context in the graves where they were found, chronologically dated from the

²⁰ M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 31.

²¹ C. Reinach, 1923, 245; M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 32; J. Boarman, 1975, fig.135.

²² P. Arias - M. Hirmer, 1962, fig.144; M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 32.

²³ M. Parović - Pešikan, 1982, 32-33.

period of the beginning of the 5th century BC to the middle of the 4th century BC which means they were in use for a relatively short time.²⁴

The local variant of the machaira has a blade with almost triangular shape, while the handle has a conical ending. Regarding the blade, there are two sub variants. First one with has a flat upper side and a curved lower side which is for cutting. This variant from the territory of the Republic of Macedonia is represented through the findings from Deboj, Opejnca – Crvejnca and Trebeniško Kale (T – I, Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Trebenište – Ohrid

The dimensions of the machairas of the second group are slightly smaller than the first ones and range from 0.40 to 0.34 m which is in line with the trend of shortening the length of the blade in the later period. The Machaira type of swords from the Opejnca – Crvejnca are known only from the reports and there are no more specific data about the same. The timeframe of these swords ranged from the end of the 4th century BC to the 3rd century BC. The second sub variant with specifics regarding the conical end of the handle and the triangular blade reflects certain local features, which also refers to the local forms of knives. The local characteristics in the production process of these swords and their concentration in the Ohrid region point to the possibility of their local production.²⁵

The development and origins of the form of one – edged swords are undoubtedly related to the fact that at the beginnings of human evolution cutting was much more familiar and more natural to the man than thrusting.²⁶ Consequently, it could be assumed that their occurrence was largely predisposed from the harvesting tools, especially from the sickle. The blade was further susceptible to improvement in the direction of increasing its performance and impact strength, which was in line with the discovering and using of new metals and the development of metallurgy and technology in the period of prehistory.

²⁴ Ibid, 35.

²⁵ M. Parović – Pešikan, 1982, 39-40, 46.

²⁶ R. F. Barton, 1884, 126.

Бошко АНГЕЛОВСКИ

ЕВОЛУЦИЈА НА ЕДНОСЕКИТЕ МЕЧЕВИ И ПРЕГЛЕД НА МЕЧЕВИТЕ ОД ТИПОТ МАХАЈРА ОД ПРОСТОРОТ НА РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА

Резиме

Потеклото и развојот на едносеките мечеви може да се бара длабоко во праисторијата, кога луѓето сè уште немале развиена свесност за војната, како концепт за освојување и одбрана. Развојот на орудијата, првенствено на српот којшто бил во функција на алатка за жнеење, несомнено се рефлектира и врз развојот на оружјето. Во тој контекст, српот бил идеална форма за сечење, која останала непромената речиси низ целата историја на употребна вредност.

Појавата на едносеките мечеви се врзува за просторот на Египет, како резултат пред сè на развој на металургијата, а консеквентно на тоа и на оружјето за одбрана и напад. Махајрата е едносек крив меч, сечивото има брановидна профилација, а рачката била изведена во вид на стилизирана животинска глава. Во тој контекст, овој тип на меч се споменува уште во најраните историски извори. Во поглед на номенклатурата, покрај терминот махајра, во изворите се употребувал и терминот копис. Имено во различни периоди овие поими се користеле за означување на едносеките мечеви, но и за означување на бодежот.

Од просторот на Р. Македонија потекнуваат повеќе примероци на едносеки мечеви од типот махајра, откриени главно во јужниот, југозападниот и северниот дел. Врз основа на нивните специфики, односно спецификите на сечивото доминираат два типа, односно т.н. грчка махајра и една варијанта, која врз основа на присутноста во југозападните делови од РМ може да се претпостави дека е локална и дека се произведувала во охридскиот регион. Покрај археолошките траги за следење на формата на овој тип на мечеви мошне значаен извор претставуваат претставите на грчото вазно сликарство.

Врз основа на гробниот контекст во кој се најдени, хронолошки махајрите од просторот на Република Македонија се сместени во периодот на почеток на V век п.н.е. до средина на IV век п.н.е. Потеклото и развојот на формата на едносеките мечеви несомнено се поврзани со фактот што уште во длабоката историја сечењето му било многу посвојствено и поприродно на човекот во однос на бодењето. Истовремено, откривањето на новите метали и нивната употребна

вредност се рефлектирало и врз развојот на сечивото во насока на зголемување на неговата ударна сила и перформанси.

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