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## TOWARDS THE PROSOPOGRAPHY OF MACEDONIAN COMMANDERS IN THRACE DURING THE REIGN OF PHILIP II AND ALEXANDER III

**Abstract:** This article reconsiders several recently published sling bullets from Thrace to showcase the entangled nature of the inscribed bullet as an object of study, as well as the methodological obstacles facing modern scholarship when attempting to contextualise them within a larger spatial and temporal framework. I demonstrate the importance of the archaeological evidence from inland Thrace and the west Black Sea coast in our understanding of the geographical scope and military logistics of the Macedonian expansion beyond the northern frontier. A complex approach remains a necessity, whereby the sling bullets treated are cross-examined via comparanda from excavations, collections and electronic auctions. Ultimately, the main goal is to get a better sense of the prosopographic profile and of the ethnic diversity of the military personnel of the Macedonian armies during the reign of Philip II and Alexander III through the lens of the Thracian interior.

**Keywords:** warfare, slingers, Thrace, Macedonian expansion, inscribed sling bullets, Philip II, Alexander III.

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A steady stream of new finds of inscribed lead sling bullets, mainly from the northern Aegean, Asia Minor and inland Thrace (Angelovski 2012; Weiss, Draskowski 2010; Özenir 2017; Manov, Torbov 2016; Nankov 2016), in particular, is on its way to solidifying the foundations of what J. Ma has already described as “molybdénologie” (Ma 2010: 166). Among the salient features of these often neglected objects of war is the fact that sometimes (but not always) they are officially endorsed with personal names (Rihll 2009, 153-154; Ma 2010, 166-173; Avram et al. 2013). Most often these belong to the military personnel responsible for the contingents of slingers (σφενδονῆται) within the Macedonian armies of Philip II and Alexander III, who both resorted to their capabilities quite regularly. Although much still remains unknown, particularly with regard to the manufacturing process and ammunition supply to troops, to name but two, the growing number of personal names attested on sling bullets from different regions allows for certain observations to be made concerning the movement of the Macedonian army over great distances,

inland Thrace in particular (Manov, Torbov 2016; Nankov 2015; Nankov 2016).

Scholars dealing with sling bullets need to sift through excavation data, private collections and electronic auctions in order to secure acceptable identifications and produce reliable historical narratives (e.g., Ma 2010; Avram et al. 2013). Although the greatest value is attached to artefacts generated through archaeological excavations, it is rather unfortunate that a sizable number of sling bullets have ended up in collections, stripped of their primary archaeological milieu (cf. Pritchett 1991: 43-49; Rihll 2009: 147-148). Subsequently, their role gets reduced to the historical value of the names inscribed on them. Nevertheless, archaeology always gets the upper hand by validating uncertainties through excavation (Kozi Gramadi: Hristov, Manov 2011; cf. Nankov 2015; Dabnitsa: Киров, Ваклинов 2022; Olynthos: Robinson 1941: 418-443; Carevi Kuli, Strumitsa: Angelowski 2012; Argilos: Romero 2015). In any case, both lines of investigation work towards a common goal – tracing the historical vicissitudes of human conflict

by extracting information from rather inconspicuous pieces of ammunition.

For a long time, the sample of personal names attested on the sling bullets excavated by D. Robinson at Olynthos has been an indispensable resource for identifying the long list of military commanders serving under Philip II (Lee 2001; Avram et al. 2013 *passim*). Among those is Potalos who is represented by 5 sling bullets inscribed ΠΩΤΑΛΟΥ (Robinson 1941: 434, nos. 2245-2248; Lee 2001: 16, Fig. 4; Avram et al. 2013: 288). At Stageira, another site on the Chalcidice peninsula besieged by Philip II in 349 BCE, Potalos' sling bullets of the same type have been found in association with those of Philip II, as in the case of Olynthos (*SEG* LII 952; cf. Avram et al. 2013: 288). Recently, at Apollonia Pontica on the west Black Sea coast another example was found, with the bullet inscribed ΠΩΤΑΛΟΥ in a retrograde manner (Cat. no. 1, Fig. 1). Although no sling bullets with the name of Philip II have so far been discovered at Apollonia, the constantly increasing number of other sling bullets (to date, 30 specimens originate from the site "Fortification walls and features" [Иванов 2019: 198, обр. 2, кат. № 220]) seems to indicate that

Apollonia was besieged by the Macedonians, most likely during the retreat of Philip II towards the Scythian king Ateas following his unsuccessful sieges at Perinthus and Byzantium in 339 BCE (Nankov 2016, 285; Damyanov et al. 2021, 118).

There is a second type of sling bullet inscribed with the name of Potalos, which has so far remained unrecognised. Up until recently, only two examples were known (Gorny&Mosch 202, Lot 679; Roma Numismatics LOT 1342<sup>1</sup>). In both cases, the

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.romanumismatics.com/201-lot-1342-greek-pb-sling-bullet?arr=0&auction\\_id=0&box\\_filter=0&cat\\_id=&department\\_id=&exclude\\_keyword=&export\\_issue=0&gridtype=listview&high\\_estimate=0&image\\_filter=0&keyword=sling%20bullet&list\\_type=list\\_view&lots\\_per\\_page=100&low\\_estimate=0&month=&page\\_no=1&paper\\_filter=0&search\\_type=&sort\\_by=lot\\_number&view=lot\\_detail&year=](https://www.romanumismatics.com/201-lot-1342-greek-pb-sling-bullet?arr=0&auction_id=0&box_filter=0&cat_id=&department_id=&exclude_keyword=&export_issue=0&gridtype=listview&high_estimate=0&image_filter=0&keyword=sling%20bullet&list_type=list_view&lots_per_page=100&low_estimate=0&month=&page_no=1&paper_filter=0&search_type=&sort_by=lot_number&view=lot_detail&year=)



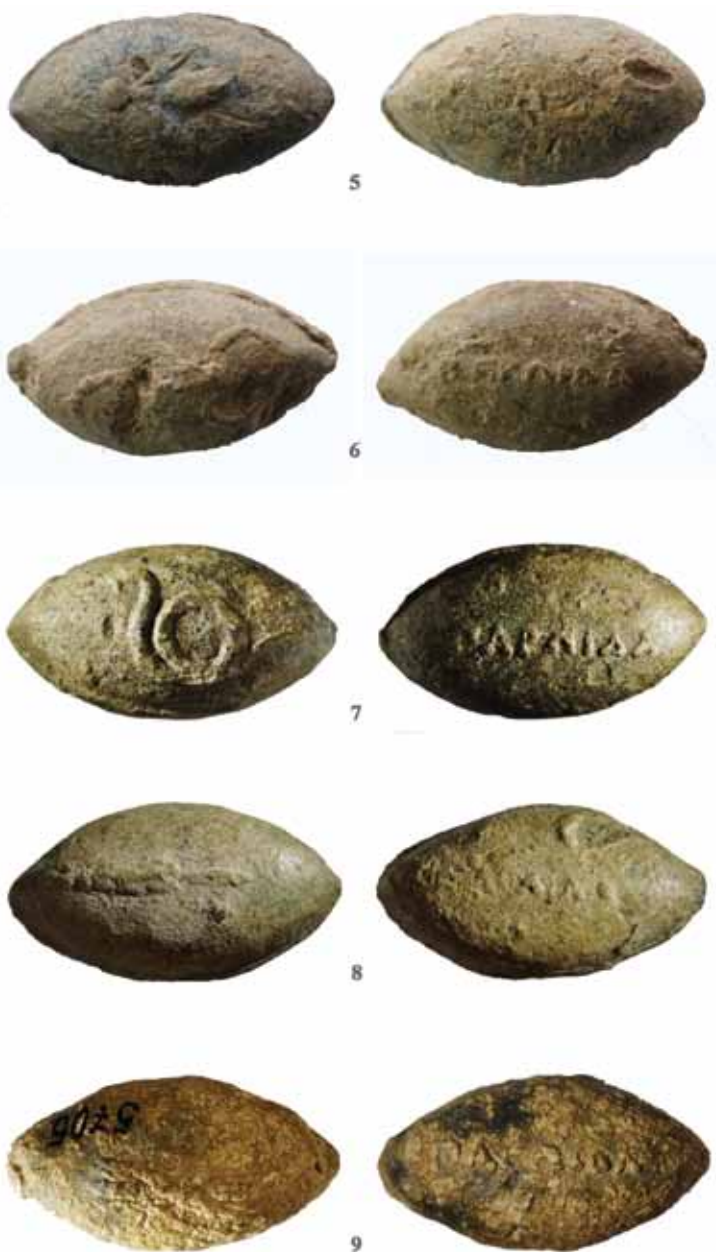
Pl. 1.

name is rendered, again, in a retrograde manner, with the letters distributed differently, and with a shortened genitive – ΠΩΤΑΛΟ. A third example found in Thrace should be added, as I will demonstrate, from the "Vatevi" collection published by M. Manov and N. Torbov in 2016 (Cat. no. 2, Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> The letters on the bullet were misread as ΙΘΝΑΙΠΠΟΥ, and the name unconvincingly identified as Ἰανθίππος (Manov, Torbov 2016: 32, cat. no. 22). The comparison with the sling bullets from the auctions mentioned above clearly demonstrates that the example found in Thrace belongs to the same type. It would appear that the sling am-

<sup>2</sup> I was able to study the sling bullets from the "Vatevi" collection, then housed at the Archaeological Museum in Plovdiv, in April 2017. I am indebted to Narcis Torbov and Rositsa Mitkova for the logistical support during this process.

munition under the name of Potalos was manufactured on a larger scale using at least two different matrices. Their presence in Thrace, especially the one from Apollonia Pontica, traces the movement of Philip II's troops during his Thracian campaign in 341-339 BCE (Nankov 2016, 286-287; Damyanov et al. 2021, 118-120).

Another sling bullet from the "Vatevi" collection that I would like to revisit here was first published by M. Manov and N. Torbov. As a result of the bad state of preservation of the lettering, they offered no possibility of reading, while the presence of a monogram was recognised on the reverse (Cat. no. 3, Fig. 3). Two better preserved examples of the same type appeared on Roma Numismatics (LOT 1486<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 4] and 1657<sup>4</sup>), which allow for an identification of the name inscribed on the sling bullet found in Thrace as Hippostratos. The inscription reads IIIIOCTPA[TOY], whereas the monogram may be interpreted tentatively as an acronym of his name. Significantly, two other identical examples originate from the immediate surroundings of Selymbria (Cat. nos. 4-5). Based on the lunar sigma, A. Avram opted for a date in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, which is in agreement with the date offered by Oikonomos and Varoucha-Christodouloupoulou (Avram et al. 2013: 275). There is, however,



Pl. 2.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.romanumismatics.com/218-lot-1486-greek-pb-sling-bullet?arr=0&auction\\_id=0&box\\_filter=0&cat\\_id=&department\\_id=&exclude\\_keyword=&export\\_issue=0&gridtype=listview&high\\_estimate=0&image\\_filter=0&keyword=sling%20bullet&list\\_type=list\\_view&lots\\_per\\_page=100&low\\_estimate=0&month=&page\\_no=1&paper\\_filter=0&search\\_type=&sort\\_by=lot\\_number&view=lot\\_detail&year=](https://www.romanumismatics.com/218-lot-1486-greek-pb-sling-bullet?arr=0&auction_id=0&box_filter=0&cat_id=&department_id=&exclude_keyword=&export_issue=0&gridtype=listview&high_estimate=0&image_filter=0&keyword=sling%20bullet&list_type=list_view&lots_per_page=100&low_estimate=0&month=&page_no=1&paper_filter=0&search_type=&sort_by=lot_number&view=lot_detail&year=)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.romanumismatics.com/219-lot-1657-greek-pb-sling-bullet?arr=0&auction\\_id=0&box\\_filter=0&cat\\_id=&department\\_id=&exclude\\_keyword=&export\\_issue=0&gridtype=listview&high\\_estimate=0&image\\_filter=0&keyword=sling%20bullet&list\\_type=list\\_view&lots\\_per\\_page=100&low\\_estimate=0&month=&page\\_no=1&paper\\_filter=0&search\\_type=&sort\\_by=lot\\_number&view=lot\\_detail&year=](https://www.romanumismatics.com/219-lot-1657-greek-pb-sling-bullet?arr=0&auction_id=0&box_filter=0&cat_id=&department_id=&exclude_keyword=&export_issue=0&gridtype=listview&high_estimate=0&image_filter=0&keyword=sling%20bullet&list_type=list_view&lots_per_page=100&low_estimate=0&month=&page_no=1&paper_filter=0&search_type=&sort_by=lot_number&view=lot_detail&year=)

no further evidence to support the idea for such a late date.

Some written sources could offer more insights regarding the identity of Hippostratos, suggestive of an earlier chronology for his bullets. For example, Marsyas mentions that Hippostratos, son of Amyntas, perished in the Macedonian campaign of Philip II in Illyria in 344/343 BCE (*FGrHist* 135/6 F7). Arrian (*Anab.* 3. 11. 8) states that the father of Hegelochos, who served as a cavalry commander and admiral of the fleet of Alexander III, was called Hippostratos. Finally, Satyros recounts that Hippostratos was the brother of Cleopatra,

Philip II's last wife (*apud* Athen. 13. 557d). According to W. Heckel, all three sources speak in favour of the same individual, whose association with the military personnel of Philip II cannot be overstated (Heckel 1992: 8-9; Tataki 1998: no. 19-20, 333). The existence of sling ammunition in his name would strengthen the link with Philip II even further. Cases in point are the bullets from inland Thrace and Selymbria, which was ravaged by Philip en route to Byzantium in 339 BCE. Furthermore, I have recently identified another commander of Philip II among the inscribed bullets retrieved from the immediate surroundings of Selymbria (Nankov 2020). If the identification proposed here is correct, though, one should allow for the possibility that slingers armed with bullets in Hippostratos' name remained under Macedonian service after his Illyrian demise in 343 BCE.

Rather intriguing is the case of the sling bullets inscribed with the name Παρώδας, numerous specimens of which are known from private collections, chance finds and electronic auctions. The greater majority originate allegedly from the fortified site of "Archangel Mihail" near the village of Dabnitsa, in the Gotse Delchev region. More than a hundred examples were first published by E. Paunov (with no photographs), who divided them into five types based on the image (bee, scorpion, snake, spearhead and thunderbolt) accompanying the name rendered in genitive (Paunov, Dimitrov 2000: 49, 53, fig. 5, Table 3). Three more examples come from the "Vatevi" collection, whose level of preservation precluded a definitive restoration (Manov, Torbov 2016: cat. nos. 24-26). The reading of the name as Παρώδας proposed by Paunov and later accepted by Manov and Torbov, was rectified by A. Avram based on a specimen that appeared on Gorny&Mosch (Avram et al. 2013: 261, 288; cf. Avram 2016: 481). The five examples I present here (Cat. Nos. 6-10, Figs. 5-9), which all originate from the region of Gotse Delchev, and most probably from Dabnitsa, confirm beyond any doubt Avram's suggestion, thus the reading of the name as Παρώδας should now be considered secure. In addition to the main core at Dabnitsa, where recent excavations have brought to light several more specimens (Киров, Ваклинов 2022: 181), singular outliers are recorded in north-eastern Bulgaria (see here Cat. No. 10, Fig. 9; cf. Manov, Torbov 2016: cat. nos. 24-26).

In addition, an overlooked parallel comes from the region of Amphipolis, which has been interpreted, together with several other inscribed sling bullets found in the town (e.g., Mikinas and Kleoboulos), as archaeological evidence confirming the written account, according to which Amphipolis was besieged and taken by Philip II in 357 BC. The bullet in question features a coiled snake in relief and an inscription published as "ΠΑΙ.ΙΔΑ." (Malamidou, Kosmidou 2006, 136). This link with Amphipolis would tip the scales in favour of the hypothesis that Parodas was a general of Philip II and less likely one active during the time of the Diadochoi (cf. Avram et al. 2013: 288). Future publication of the ongoing archaeological excavations at Dabnitsa would demonstrate the magnitude of the destruction caused by the unrecorded Macedonian siege at the site and whether it took place during the reign of Philip II or that of Alexander III (cf. Nankov 2015, 5).

M. Manov and N. Torbov presented 12 examples of a hitherto unknown type of sling bullet from the "Vatevi" collection inscribed with the name of Alexander, son of Philip (Manov, Torbov 2016: cat. nos. 1-12). Rather unusually, his name is rendered with the patronymic ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ, which makes the identification with Alexander III quite secure (Manov et al. 2019: 148-149; cf. Avram et al. 2013: 236). Here, I present one more example from the same collection (Cat. no. 11, Fig. 10). At the time of publication, no other specimen of this type was known. Recent excavations at the acropolis of the Lycian town of Patara, at the Tepecik acropolis (North Bastion), however, have brought to light numerous sling stones and one lead bullet with the legend ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ|ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ (Cat. no. 12, Fig. 11). The dimensions, weight and metrology are identical to the 12 specimens published by M. Manov and N. Torbov in 2016, together with the one presented here. Most importantly, the stratigraphic data from the North Bastion, among which were found arrowheads and projectile points, confirms that Patara was taken by force by Alexander III, along with Pinara and Xanthos, in 334 BCE (Arrian, *Anab.* 1. 24. 3; Dündar, Rauh 2017: cat. no. 64, Fig. 53). The bullet from Patara confirms beyond doubt that the now 13 sling bullets found in Thrace should be firmly associated with the Thracian campaign of Alexander III in 335 BC. In short, slingers in his army at the time were

equipped with ammunition of this particular type with the legend ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ|ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ.

Among the group of sling bullets published by M. Manov and N. Torbov is an example inscribed with ΚΑΛΑ on the front and an image of a scorpion in high relief on the back (Cat. no. 13, Fig. 12). Traditionally, there have been two major problems with this type. One has to do with the interpretation of the inscription, and the second pertains to the fact that all known specimens to date come from private collections and electronic auctions (Avram et al. 2013: 275). The link with Lydia concerning the findspot of the specimen published by F. Moog remains uncertain (Moog 2007: 281). The old view took ΚΑΛΑ to mean “good things”, but as J. Ma has already convincingly argued, it is far more likely that this is a genitive from the personal name Κάλας, which has the highest frequency in Macedonia (Ma 2010: 169-170, n. 72, Avram et al. 2013: 275). More significant is the plausible identification with the historically attested Kalas, son of Harpalos, who was appointed a satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia by Alexander III after the battle of Granicus in 334 BCE (Heckel 1992: 217-218). Significantly, he also resided in Daskyleion, the capital of Hellespontine Phrygia (Arrian, *Anab.* 1. 17. 1-2).

A further piece of overlooked evidence comes from a sling bullet, possibly inscribed ΚΑΛΑ, found in the surroundings of Daskyleion (Brelaz 2007: cat. no. 13, Fig. 3, 77, n. 43). Coupled with the 5 sling bullets inscribed ΘΕΟΔΟΤΟΥ, that have been identified with Theodotos serving under Alexander III in 331 BCE (Heckel 1992: 305), it would seem more likely that these bullets trace the movement of Alexander’s army after the battle of Granicus (cf. Brelaz 2007: 75, 77; Avram et al. 2013: 275). Therefore, the newly published example found in Thrace further solidifies the identification with Kalas, some of whose slingers apparently took part in the Thracian campaign of Alexander III in 335 BCE.

A rather peculiar sling bullet with an almost spherical shape deserves further attention (Cat. no. 14, Fig. 13). M. Manov and N. Torbov provided a dubious reading, mainly because of the state of preservation, identifying the name inscribed as Aeropos (Manov, Torbov 2016: cat. no. 13). Closer inspection and an identical example that appeared on Gorny&Mosch 202, Lot 678, allow for a better reading of the inscription, thereby disproving the untenable association with Aeropos (Manov, Torbov 2016: 31). In fact, the name reads ΜΕΤΡΩΝ, presented most likely in nominative rather than in a shortened genitive form, even though personal names in nominative are relatively uncommon on sling bullets (Avram et al. 2013: 259-294). More intriguing are the options for identifying Metron, a name found in Macedonia (LGPN IV), with a historically attested individual. In this case, again,



Pl. 3.

the connection with the entourage of Alexander III appears as a good possibility to explore. Metron, son of Epicharmos, from Pydna, a commander of triremes in the Hydaspes fleet in 326 BCE (Arrian, *Ind.* 18. 5. 1), may be identical to the Royal Page Metron, in charge of the king's armoury (Curt. 6. 7. 22). He was also instrumental in revealing the Dimnos and Philotas' affairs to Alexander (Heckel 1992: 293-294; Tataki 1998: no. 74, 373, no. 11, 171; Diod. 17.79.4-5). At this point, however, linking the sling bullets with the historically attested Metron remains inconclusive, until more empirical data comes to light.

I hope that the small sample of inscribed sling bullets presented above was representative enough to showcase the importance of employing various strings of data when tackling complicated cases. Archaeological evidence from inland Thrace and the west Black Sea coast continues to be of considerable importance in charting the geographical scope of the Macedonian expansion beyond the northern frontier. A complex approach remains a necessity, and no example should be treated in isolation. Eventually, we should be in a position to obtain a better sense of the prosopographic profile and of the ethnic diversity of the military personnel of the Macedonian armies during the reign of Philip II and Alexander III.

### Catalogue

1. Archaeological Museum, Sozopol. Apollonia Pontica (site "Fortification walls and features"); archaeological excavations by Dimitar Nedev in 2012; **L 27 W 15 Th 12 Wt: 24.05 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, intact, traces of casting sprues flattened, inscription retrograde. ΠΩΤΑ ← ΛΟΥ ←. Reading: Πώταλου (fig. 1).  
Unpublished.

2. Collection "Vatevi", Inv. No. 1862/21. Region of north-eastern Bulgaria; **L 26 W 16 Th 12 Wt: 25.47 g**. Cast in a mould, almond-shaped, intact. ΠΩΤ ← ΛΑΛΟ ←. Reading: Πώταλου (fig. 2).  
Publication: Manov, Torbov 2016: 32, cat. no. 22

3. Collection "Vatevi", Inv. No. 456/16. Region of north-eastern Bulgaria; **L 33.5 W 18.5 Th 14 Wt: 42.45 g**. Cast in a mould, almond-shaped, intact, one end chipped. ΠΠΠΟΤΡΑ[ΤΟΥ] monogram. Reading: Ἰππόστρατου (fig. 3).

Publication: Manov, Torbov 2016: 32, cat. no. 17

4. Numismatic Collection "Anastasios Stamouliis". Selymbria or vicinity; **L 35 W 18 Th not reported Wt: 40.60 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped. ΠΠΠΟΤΡΑΤΟ[Y] monogram. Reading: Ἰππόστρατου (not illustrated)  
Publication: Οικονομου, Βαρουχα-Χριστοδουλοπουλο 1955: 147, no. 994

5. Numismatic Collection "Anastasios Stamouliis". Selymbria or vicinity; **L 33 W 18 Th not reported Wt: 40.10 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped. ΠΠΠΟΤΡΑΤΟ[Y] monogram. Reading: Ἰππόστρατου (not illustrated)  
Publication: Οικονομου, Βαρουχα-Χριστοδουλοπουλο 1955: 147, no. 995

6. Historical Museum – Gotse Delchev, Inv. No. 849. Region of Gotse Delchev; **L 31 W 16 Th 12 Wt: 32.54 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, traces of mould on the sides visible; chipped on the edge.  
Bee facing left | ΠΑΡΩΙΔΑ. Reading: Παρώδας (fig. 5).  
Unpublished.

7. Historical Museum – Gotse Delchev, Inv. No. 849. Region of Gotse Delchev; **L 31 W 16 Th 12 Wt: 31.13 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, traces of mould on the sides visible; chipped on the edge.  
Scorpion facing right | ΠΑΡΩΙΔΑ. Reading: Παρώδας (fig. 6).  
Unpublished.

8. Regional Historical Museum – Blagoevgrad, Inv. No. 1.2/1808. Region of Gotse Delchev; **L 31 W 17 Th 12 Wt: 32.00 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, traces of mould on the sides visible; chipped on the edge. Coiled snake facing left | ΠΑΡΩΙΔΑ. Reading: Παρώδας (fig. 7).  
Unpublished.

9. Regional Historical Museum – Blagoevgrad, Inv. No. 1.2/1809. Region of Gotse Delchev; **L 30 W 17 Th 12 Wt: 31.00 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, traces of mould on the sides visible; chipped on the edge. Spearhead facing left | ΠΑΡΩΙΔΑ. Reading: Παρώδας (fig. 8).  
Unpublished.

10. Regional Historical Museum – Razgrad, Inv. No. 5705. Region of Razgrad; **L 30 W 16 Th 13 Wt: 31.00 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, traces of mould on the sides visible; chipped on the edge.

Thunderbolt | ΠΑΡΩΙΔΑ. Reading: Παρώδας (fig. 9).

Unpublished.

11. Collection “Vatevi”, Inv. No. 8096/25. Region of north-eastern Bulgaria; **L 30 W 18 Th 14 Wt: 39.60 g**. Cast in a mould, almond-shaped, intact, barely legible; surfaces worn. ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ|ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ. Reading:

Ἀλέξανδρου Φιλίππου (fig. 10).

Publication: Unpublished

12. Patara, PTR’13-252. L-19 (SU 025-62/fire-damaged floor). Tepecik acropolis (North Bastion); **L 30 W 19 Th not reported Wt: 37.75 g**. Cast in a mould, almond-shaped, intact, air-hole. ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ|ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ. Reading: Ἀλέξανδρου Φιλίππου (fig. 11).

Publication: Dündar, Rauh 2017: cat. no. 64, Fig. 53

13. Collection “Vatevi”, Inv. No. 1920/22. Region of north-eastern Bulgaria; **L 33 W 17 Th 12 Wt: 32.54 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, almond-shaped, intact, air-hole, small chip from impact (?). ΚΑΛΑ|scorpion. Reading: Κάλα (fig. 12).

Publication: Manov, Torbov 2016: cat. no. 23

14. Collection “Vatevi”, Inv. No. 440/12. Region of North-eastern Bulgaria; **L 25 W 20 Th 15 Wt: 41.03 g**. Cast in a bivalve mould, round-shaped, intact, casting sprues smoothed. ΜΕΤΡΩΝ|two thunderbolts. Reading: Μέτρων (fig. 13).

Publication: Manov, Torbov 2016: cat. no. 13

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