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## THE REPRESENTATION OF A RARE WEAPON IN THE CHAPEL OF ST. EUTHYMIOS, THESSALONIKE

Over the last decades, research has accomplished important achievements in the study of material culture in Byzantium. Questions about what is contemporary and what is conventional in Byzantine religious art have been answered step by step. We have slowly come to reconstruct and visualize aspects of Byzantine everyday life, from costumes and footwear, to furniture and implements, even to armors and weapons.<sup>1</sup> The scholarly interest in weapons and warfare, in particular, does not represent just a trend, but reflects our awareness on how importantly affected by warfare everyday life of the Byzantines was. This is highly documented in written sources and, at a lesser degree, in archaeological findings.

The offensive weapons the Eastern Roman warrior would fight with were the sword, the bow, the lance, the dagger, the axe, the wooden rod, the crossbow and the mace. All these weapons, with the exception of the crossbow, are depicted quite often in Byzantine monumental art.<sup>2</sup> Weapons are usually represented as part of the attire of military saints, the Massacre of the Innocents, in scenes from the Passion of Christ, and in various Martyrdoms. In most cases these weapons are painted in a simple well recognized design. Sometimes, the weapons depicted correspond almost exactly to archaeological findings, and thus can offer us pictorial hints also found in written sources.

<sup>1</sup> For general perspective of the iconography of Byzantine material culture, see Maria G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images. Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th-15th century)*, Leiden-Boston 2003. Indicatively, on the iconography of Byzantine weapons, see P.L. Grotowski, *Arms and Armours of the Warriors Saints. Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843-1261)*, trans. R. Brzezinski, Boston 2010; A. Babuin, *Τα επιθετικά όπλα των Βυζαντινών κατά την Ύστερη περίοδο (1204-1453)*, διδακτορική διατριβή, Ιωάννινα 2009; D. Nicolle, "Byzantine and Islamic arms and armor: Evidence for mutual influence", in *Warriors and their Weapons around the Time of the Crusades*, ed. D. Nicolle, Aldershot 2002, 299-325, and T.G. Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen: ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung*, Wien 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The iconographic depiction of the crossbow or *tzangra* (βαλλιστρίδα or τζάνγκρα) is rare. See, Babuin, 210.



Fig. 1. Thessalonike, Chapel of St Euthymios, Wall-Painting, St Theodore Teron (1303)

Сл. 1 Солун, Капела Св. Јевтимија, фреске, Св. Теодор Тирон (1303)

This paper focuses on the depiction of a mace, better known as *sideroravdion* (σιδηροράβδιον) or *iron-rod*, in the hand of a military saint in the chapel of St. (Fig. 1)

Euthymios in Thessalonike (fig. 1 and 2). This weapon is frequently mentioned in historical texts of military nature, but is rarely found in archaeological excavations of Byzantine settlements in the southern Balkan peninsula. The appearance of this mace will be reconstructed with the help of textual, iconographic and archaeological evidence, which will allow us to reassess the range of the weaponry used in Palaiologan Thessalonike. Moreover, this rare representation is of great interest because it offers us insight into the relationship between the byzantine artist and his sponsor, and the artist's liberty to express his everyday naturalistic elements, the constant imitation between Earth and Heaven.

Thessalonike, during the Later Byzantine era, is one of the most important centers of Byzantine art, where artists like Manuel Panselinos, Georgios Kallierges Michael Astrapas and Eftichios stand out. These artists are associated with the wall paintings of the most important churches of the period, not only of the city of Thessalonike but of the whole Macedonia and Serbia. The churches of Thessalonike are full of Late-Byzantine depictions that express the novel artistic and spiritual ideas of the period.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Indicatively see E.N. Τσιγαρίδας, Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος ο κορυφαίος ζωγράφος

The church of St. Euthymios is a *parecclesion*, a chapel incorporated into the most important religious structure of Thessalonike, the church of St. Demetrios. A dedicatory inscription in the chapel gives the names of its donors, namely the Protostrator Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotēs and his wife Maria and the date of its decorations, that is 1303.<sup>4</sup> Tarchaneiotēs and his wife had also become the donors of the *parecclesion* to the south east of the catholicon of the monastery of Theotokos Pammakaristos (Fetiye Djami) in Constantinople. Michael Tarchaneiotēs was a high official in the army of Emperor Andronikos II (1282-1328). He is known from his counterattack against the Serbians in 1297 and his negotiating role in the marriage of Simonis, daughter of Andronikos, to Milutin of Serbia. The office of Protostrator was one of the highest during the Palaiologan period, and included both civic and military duties. Written sources tell us that a Protostrator was also the leader of cavalry units, and we know that Michael Tarchaneiotēs commanded cavalry units of both Mongol and Turkish origins.<sup>5</sup>

The chapel of St. Euthymios is fully covered by frescoes, which include an iconographic cycle of St. Euthymios, scenes from the Ministry and Passion of Christ, as well as representations of single figures. On the lower zone of the north wall, one can find full-length depictions of St. Nicholas and of seven military saints, the last ones (from left to right) being St. Theodore Teron and St.



Fig. 2. Sketch of St Theodore Teron  
Сл. 2 Скица Св. Теодора Тирона

της εποχής των Παλαιολόγων, στο Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος. *Εκ του Ιερού Ναού του Πρωτάτου*, επιμ. Ε.Ν. Τσιγαρίδας, Θεσσαλονίκη 2008<sup>2</sup>, 17-18; E. Kyriakoudis, The main features of monumental painting in Macedonia in the Late Byzantine Period, in *Byzantine Macedonia. Art Architecture Music and Hagiography*, J. Burke and R. Scott (eds.), (Papers from the Melbourne Conference July 1995), Melbourne 2001, 59-79.

<sup>4</sup> Indicatively for the dedicatory inscription see Ε.Ν. Τσιγαρίδας, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του παρεκκλησίου του Αγίου Ευθυμίου (1302/3). Έργο του Μανουήλ Πανσέληνου στην Θεσσαλονίκη*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2008, 16-17, and Th. Gouma-Peterson, The *Parecclesion* of St. Euthymios in Thessalonica: Art and Monastic Policy under Andronikos II, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Jun., 1976), 168.

<sup>5</sup> Indicatively see Τσιγαρίδας, *Οι τοιχογραφίες*, 15-18; Gouma-Peterson, 168.

George.<sup>6</sup> Even though the wall painting has sustained wear, we can still discern that the weapon held by the right hand of St. Theodore Teron is not one of the weapons commonly depicted in Byzantine art. It is a *sideroravdion*, an offensive weapon, part of the wider typology of the iron staff, or mace. (Fig.2)

The *Sideroravdion* is an evolution of the wooden club. It can be composed either of a metallic or a wooden staff, the forefront of which, the head of the weapon, the *koryni*, is reinforced with metallic plates or tips made of iron, brass or steel. The head can take various shapes, spherical or polygonal with three, four or six edges. In total, the weapon weighted somewhere between five and ten kilograms, but there are cases where it could reach the weighed of 20-30 kilograms.<sup>7</sup> Because of its size the depiction of the *sideroravdion* in St. Euthymios probably falls into this category. In written sources, it can be found as: *apelatikia*, *korynes ravidous*, or *sidirous (iron) ravidos*.<sup>8</sup> It was used both by infantry and cavalry units, but mainly by the latter, because in their hands the delivering crushing blow was devastating.

Individual military saints are never depicted holding a mace in the Palaiologan churches of Thessalonike. The only example is St. Theodore Teron in the chapel of St. Euthymios. The saint is depicted in frontal view with his body and head slightly turned left, holding in his right hand a wooden or iron staff (στέλεχος), spear-like or lance-like, about twice the thickness of other spears/lances held by the other military saints of the wall decoration, possibly a *sideroravdion*, painted in dark grey colour, which conveys the material used to forge it, iron. This particular weapon is not a spear as, despite the wear of the wall painting, the staff body (στειλεός) does not rise higher than the chest of the saint; it does not cross the halo, as it should have judging from the angle that it was drawn and, above all, it does not appear anywhere at the upper three quarters of the wall painting, like the spears of the other aligned military saints. Additionally, it can be clearly discerned that a rope is tightened around the main body of the weapon, while the right hand of the saint is placed in such a way that it appears enclosing with his palm something that protrudes naturally out of the main body of the weapon, possibly a *koryni*.

The *Sideroravdion* or “long mace” is held by a soldier guard of the Holy Sepulchre in the scene of the Holy Women and the Tomb, at the church of St. Nicolas in Monemvasia.<sup>9</sup> The last soldier from the right holds a long *sideroravdion* or mace, in the same manner as St Theodore Teron in the wall painting of St. Euthymios chapel. It should be noted that the depiction of the rope tightened around weapons of simple construction or weapons that their head needs support or re-inforcement, like axes or maces/*sideroravdia*, is unusual. Particularly in the metal head, and especially on the staff body, the tightened rope reaching the handle is clearly depicted, and is similar to the mace exhibited

<sup>6</sup> See Τσιγαρίδας, *Οι τοιχογραφίες*, 54-55, fig. 25.

<sup>7</sup> About the *Sideroravdion* see also Babuin, 98-102.

<sup>8</sup> See Kolias, 173-184, and pl. XXIV, ab. 1-3, for infantry and cavalry warriors fighting with *sideroravdion*.

<sup>9</sup> For the scene see N.B. Δρανδάκης, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Νικολάου στον Άγιο Νικόλαο Μονεμβασίας*, in *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 9 (1977/79), 38-39, fig. 12β.

in the Belgrade Military Museum and, dating to the 14th century.<sup>10</sup> This detail is noted by Theodore Palaiologos in his war manual, where he mentions that maces should have their handles underlined with tendons, in order to secure a better hold.<sup>11</sup>

St. Theodore Teron, as depicted in the fresco at St. Euthymios, is definitely not holding a spear. Also, if we exclude the tightened rope and the iron head of the weapon, our sources direct us to another offensive weapon of the *ravdos*-staff type, the *dekaniki*. The *dekaniki* was a weapon and symbol of power for Byzantine officials. The top officials had decorated staffs while the lower officials had simple wooden staffs. The *dekaniki* is used in illustrations during the Palaiologan period and is depicted as part of the offensive equipment of military saints.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in all the depictions of these staffs, the military saints are drawn without any other offensive or defensive equipment, apart from the *dekaniki*.<sup>13</sup>

In the tenth century warfare manual attributed to emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969), the *Praecepta militaria* of the Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, a well-documented text about the actions and the equipment of the byzantine military units, we find that the offensive equipment of the heavy byzantine cavalry included *sideroravdia*, made of iron, bearing heads,<sup>14</sup> that, as Niketas Choniates writes, were used in battle when spears had broken and swords were blunted.<sup>15</sup> The crushing strikes of the iron clubs were, in many instances, deadly and were destroying the armor worn by the enemy.

In the Palaiologan era, *sideroravdia* were used by Byzantine and Turkish troops. Byzantine nobles, military officers and heroes of romances, like Achilles and Belthandros used *apelatikia*. So we shouldn't be surprised by the depiction of *sideroravdia* and maces during that period, and especially in the group of the military saints of the wall-decoration of St. Euthymios's chapel, when it is known that the donor of this decoration was an eminent military official, commander of a cavalry unit consisted of Mongols and Turks who, as noted by Marino Sanudo the Elder at the beginning of the 14th century, were armed with *sideroravdia*, one of the main offensive weapons of the "infidels" as they were called.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See M. Peković, *Arheološka zbirka Vojnog muzeja u Beogradu*, Beograd 2006, 114, fig. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Paleologue, *Les Enseignemens ou Ordenances pour un seigneur qui a guerres et grans gouvernemens a faire*, in *Les enseignements de Theodore Paleologue*, C. Knowles (ed.), London 1983, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Indicatively see M. Gligorijević-Maksimović, *Slikarstvo XIV veka u manastiru Treskavcu*, *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 42, Beograd 2005, pp. 154-156, fig. 33-35.

<sup>13</sup> Indicatively see Babuin, 107-109.

<sup>14</sup> See Νικηφόρος Β' Φωκάς, *Στρατηγική Εκθεσις καὶ σύνταξις Νικηφόρου Δεσπότης*, in *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth. Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, Eric McGeer (ed.), Washington D.C 2008<sup>2</sup>, 36.

<sup>15</sup> See Parani, 138; Νικήτας Χωνιάτης, *Χρονική διήγησις*, in *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, I.A. Van Dieten (ed.), *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 11, Berlin & New York 1975, 155-156.

<sup>16</sup> See Babuin, 101-105.

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ПРЕДСТАВА РЕТКОГ ОРУЖЈА У КАПЕЛИ СВ. ЈЕВТИМИЈА У СОЛУНУ

Током последњих неколико деценија, истраживања су направила значајне кораке у проучавању материјалне културе у Византији. Научни интерес о оружју и ратовању, нарочито, не представља само тренд, већ одражава нашу свест о томе како је значајан утицај имало ратовање на свакодневни живот Византије. Ово је веома документовано у писаним изворима, а у мањој мери, у археолошком записима.

Овај рад ће се фокусирати на представљању оружја често помињано у војним и историјским текстовима, али ретко нађено у ископавањима византијских насеља. Капела Св. Јефтимија у Солуну чува описе буздована (*sideroravdion* или гвозденог штапа) у руци светог војника. Појава овог буздована ће бити реконструисана уз помоћ писаних, иконографских и археолошких доказа, који ће нам помоћи да се преиспита домет наоружања које се користило у Палаиологан Солуну. Појава овог буздована ће бити реконструисана што ће нам помоћи да се преиспита домет наоружања коришћено ранохришћанском Солуну.