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**LAGOBOLON: A HUNTING WEAPON OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS  
ON PHARSALIAN COINS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY BC<sup>1</sup>**

In general, some articles of ancient hunting weaponry were similar to weapons used to fight humans, while other ones differ from the latter. Usually the weapons for hunting larger animals were similar to weapons used in battle, while the weapons used for hunting smaller animals differed from the latter. In the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods the Greeks used special-purpose hunting tools and weapons: nets, simple- and double-axes, the cloak, which was used instead of a shield, and, of course, the *lagobolon*. *Lagobolon* (λαγωβόλον) was a cudgel for hunting hares, as the very name of the weapon informs us: λαγώς-«hare» and βόλος means 'throwing' and here: 'catching'<sup>2</sup>.

In his treatise 'On hunting' Xenophon did not mention the *lagobolon* by name, he rather styles the weapon as a 'club'<sup>3</sup>. Theocritus of Syracuse, a poet of the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, mentions the *lagobolon* as a staff used by a Sicilian shepherd who wished to punish his cow with it<sup>4</sup>. The American scholar John Anderson believes that the weapon originated in *Graecia Magna*<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, an Etruscan *oenochoe* dated by the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC show us hunters who chase hares with bended or boomerang-shaped sticks<sup>6</sup>. They throw their weapons, and thus the name of the weapon corresponds to its use. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* XIV.2.2) tells us that the pole of this weapon was bent at one end like the pole of shepherd's staff, and that the weapon was called *kalaurops* (καλαῦροψ) or *lagobolon* (Fig. 1).

According to its etymology, the *lagobolon* was a hunting weapon. It was dedicated to various gods as a hunting weapon<sup>7</sup>. The *kalaurops* was a herders' staff which could be thrown, and the term was known to Homer<sup>8</sup>. Because of the similarity in both shape and use of these two implements, their names were practically used by the ancient authors as synonyms. In the



Fig. 1. Shepherds with their bended staffs. Ivory plaque from the throne of Ravenna's archbishop Maximianus (mid-6th c. AD). Archbishop's Museum of Ravenna. Shown in a biblical theme depicting the meeting of Joseph with his father Jacob whose sons are shown as shepherds. After: M. Schapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian and Mediaeval Art*, New York 1979, p. 41, fig. 5–6.



Fig. 2. A copper coin of Pharsalus, 400–344 BC. On the obverse Athena's head is shown with a three-crested helmet and shield, on the other side there a cavalryman is shown, followed by a single footman, from which the horseman fights the enemy. After: E. Rogers, *The Copper Coinage of Thessaly*, London 1932, p. 158, fig. 270.

3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Leonidas of Tarentum mentioned a *lagobolon* as a votive of a Cretan shepherd to the gods, as well as a votive of a hunter<sup>9</sup>. In Greek iconography the weapon appears not infrequently in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>10</sup>. The normal

<sup>1</sup> The paper is supported by Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Callim., *Hymn.* 3 (In Dian.), 2; Suid., s. v. λαγωβολεῖον.

<sup>3</sup> Xen., *Cyneg.* 6.11, 17: ῥόπαλον.

<sup>4</sup> Theocr. *Idyl.*, IV.49; cf. Theocr., *Idyl.* VII.128; *Epigram.* 2.

<sup>5</sup> J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*, Berkeley; Los Angeles; London 1985, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> J. K. Anderson, *Hunting...*, pp. 40–42, figs. 17a–c.

<sup>7</sup> *Anthol. Palat.*, VI.152, 188, 296.

<sup>8</sup> Hom., *Il.* XXIII.845; Schol. ad h. l.; cf. Long., *Daphnis et Chloe*, 1.8.3, 12.1, 27.2; III.17.1; IV.26.2; *Anthol. Palat.*, XVI.74.

<sup>9</sup> *Anthol. Palat.*, VI.188, 296; cf. XVI.258.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., see Universität Freiburg, *Archaeologische Sammlung*, Inv. G 384 (copy of the Stele Borgia, ca. 490–480 BC); G 399 (copy of a tomb relief of a hunter from the Greek islands, ca. 470–460 BC);

shape of the *lagobolon* was straight pole with short cut branches<sup>11</sup>. The hunters probably did not throw this weapon, but beat animals with it<sup>12</sup>.

The *lagobolon* was an implement used above all by hunters on foot accompanied by hounds. However, in one case it seems that the *lagobolon* is weapon used by a horseman. A series of Pharsalian silver and copper coins of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC probably bear the device of a horseman armed with a *lagobolon*. On the first coin series, the horseman with this weapon is followed by a footman bearing a staff on his shoulder. The horseman fights against a foe (Fig. 2)<sup>13</sup>. The second series show the same picture but without the enemy (Fig. 3)<sup>14</sup>. In the third series the cavalryman is armed with some kind of club or lash (Fig. 4)<sup>15</sup>. The interpretation of the subject is problematic. Hans Pomtow and Alike Mustaka following him, think that the horseman and footman are taken from a sculptural monument showing Achilles and Patroclus which the Pharsalians had dedicated at Delphi<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, the three people on the coins of the first series do not conform with this interpretation. It is not always clear which weapons are being used by the horse- and footman. The various series of coins show various weapons in use.



Fig. 3. A coin of Pharsalus, 400–344 BC. After: P. Dintzis, *Hellenistische Helme*, Bd. II, Roma 1986, Taf 2,2.



Fig. 4. A copper coin of Pharsalus, 400–344 BC. After: E. Rogers, *The Copper Coinage of Thessaly*, London 1932, p. 157, fig. 265.

J.M. Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece*, Baltimore – London 2001, pp. 63–64.

<sup>11</sup> For example see K. Demakopoulo, D. Konsola, *Archaeological Museum of Thebes: Guide*, Athens 1981, p. 74, fig. 25; D. Woysch-Méautis, *La représentation des animaux et des êtres fabuleux sur les monuments funéraires grecs de l'époque archaïque à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C.*, Cahiers d'archéologie romande, 21, Lausanne 1982, p. 127–128, pl. 45, 298; J. K. Anderson, *Hunting...*, p. 36, fig. 16; C. W. Clairmont, *Classical Attic Tombstones*, Plate Volume, Kilchberg 1993, № 1.289; J. M. Barringer, *The Hunt...*, p. 39, fig. 29; p. 177–178, figs. 94–95.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. D. H. Hull, *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece*, Chicago – London 1964, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> P. Gardiner, *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum. Thessaly to Aetola*, London 1883, p. 45; p. 32. Pl. IX,17; E. Rogers, *The Copper Coinage of Thessaly*, London 1932, p. 158, fig. 270; A. Moustaka, *Kulte und Mythen auf thessalischen Münzen*, „Beiträge zur Archäologie“, Bd. 15, Würzburg 1983, S. 131, № 155. Taf. 9, 155.

<sup>14</sup> K. Regling, *Die antike Münze als Kunstwerke*, Berlin 1924, Taf. XXXIX,805; E. Rogers, *The Copper Coinage...*, p. 159–160, figs. 271–274; H. Biesantz, *Die thessalischen Grabreliefs: Studien zur nordgriechischen Kunst*, Mainz am Rhein 1965, S. 32. Taf. 70, L 3; A. Moustaka, *Kulte...*, S. 107, № 55. Taf. 9, 55.

<sup>15</sup> P. Gardiner, *Catalogue...*, p. 45; p. 32. Pl. IX,10; 15; 18; E. Rogers, *The Copper Coinage...*, p. 154–155, figs. 259–260; p. 156–158, figs. 263–269; C. Seltman, *Greek Coins: A History of Metallic Currency and Coinage down to the Fall of the Hellenistic Kingdom*, London 1933, p. 301; pl. XXXIV,9; C. M. Kraay, *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins*, London 1976, pl. 21, 390; *Sylloge nummorum Graecorum*, Vol. V: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Pt. 4, London 1981, pl. LXXXII,3921; 3922; 3925; A. Moustaka, *Kulte...*, S. 107, № 54. Taf. 9, 54; *Sylloge nummorum Graecorum. France: Bibliothèque Nationale. Cabinet des Médailles: Collection Jean et Marie Delepiere*, Paris 1983, pl. 30,1142; 31,1143.

<sup>16</sup> Paus., X.13.5; H. Pomtow, Pharsalica, in *Philologus*, 77 (N. F. 31) 1921, 195; A. Moustaka, *Kulte...*, S. 61–62; contra: E. Rogers, *The Copper Coinage...*, p. 152.

The horsemen bear a short cudgel, a lash with two tails, a weapon shaped like a hockey-stick, or a stick with loop.

Representational compositions showing a horseman followed by a man on foot are not uncommon in Greek reliefs of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In one the man on foot carries a bended stick with hares on his shoulder (Fig. 5)<sup>17</sup>. An Attic red-figured crater of the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BC shows clearly that this stick was not a *lagobolon*, but a different stick of separate purpose<sup>18</sup>. Usually the mounted hunter is shown armed with a spear, whereas the accompanying figure on foot is armed with a *lagobolon* as in a fragmentary Attic relief in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (N 4744) (Fig. 6)<sup>19</sup>. Nicho-

<sup>17</sup> *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, Vol. VI.2, Zürich – München 1992, p. 715,602 (the relief from Tanagra); Museo Barracco (Rome), № 135: an Attic relief of the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

<sup>18</sup> J.K. Anderson, *Hunting...*, p. 36, fig. 16.

<sup>19</sup> A. Hekler, *Die Sammlung Antiker Skulpturen, Die Antiken in Budapest*, Abt. 1, Wien 1929, S. 30, Abb. 20; C. W. Clairmont, *Classical Attic Tombstones*, Vol. II: Catalogue, p. 153–154, № 2.214a; Plate Volume. № 2.214a.



Fig. 5. Votive marble relief from Tanagra, first half of the 4th century BC, National Archaeological Museum at Athens, Inv. no 1386. The mounted hero wears a chlamys and corselet, and is followed by a foot attendant with a staff and hanging hare. After: LIMC, Vol. VI.2, Zürich München 1992, p. 715,602.



Fig. 6. Marble *loutrophoros* from Athens, early 4th century BC. Museum of Fine Arts at Budapest, Inv. no 4744. After: A. Hekler, *Die Sammlung Antiker Skulpturen*, Wien 1929, S. 30, Abb. 20.

las Sekunda thought that the relief presents a *prodromos* and a *hamippos* in battle<sup>20</sup>, however it seems that the footman is armed with a bended stick, i. e. *lagobolon*, a hunting weapon. Therefore the relief deals with a hunt. In fact, a pedestrian could accompany a horseman not only at hunting, but also

<sup>20</sup> N. V. Sekunda, *The Ancient Greeks*, Elite Series 7, London 1986, p. 58.

in battle, as in the Attic marble *lekythos* of Cephisodotus dating to the third quarter of the 4th century BC shows it<sup>21</sup>. N. Sekunda supposes that these Pharsalian coins prove that the Thessalian horsemen fought together with light-armed *hamippoi* on foot<sup>22</sup>. However, this idea is not convincing in regard to the tactics normally applied at the time. Usually the *hamippoi* helped horsemen when fighting against superior enemy cavalry<sup>23</sup>. The Thessalian horsemen were the best cavalry in fourth-century Greece<sup>24</sup>. Usually they fought against other Greek horse. They do not need held from light infantry. The classic sources do not mention Thessalian *hamippoi*. Probably the topic of the Pharsalian coins is hunting a human being: the hunter armed with a non-battle weapon and his attendant with a *lagobolon*. The picture probably shows a local epic tradition which has not been preserved in the literary sources. It would be in accordance with this unknown tradition that the horseman is using a non-cavalry and non-battle weapon and the prey being hunted is a man, and not an animal.

### Streszczenie

Zgodnie z etymologią *lagobolon* uważa się za broń myśliwską. Opinię tę potwierdza szereg tekstów autorów antycznych oraz ikonografia. W tym przedstawienia na monetach Farsalos w Tessalii. *Lagobolon* pokazano zarówno w rękach jeźdźcy jak i pieszego. Szczególnie interesujące są wizerunki ukazujące sylwetkę jeźdźcy trzymającego włócznię oraz towarzyszącego mu pieszego, dzierżącego *lagobolon*. W opinii autora w przedstawieniach tych nie należy dopatrywać się scen walki.

<sup>21</sup> C. W. Clairmont, *Classical Attic Tombstones*, Vol. III, p. 352–353. Plate Volume. № 3.430a; N. Kaltsas, *Sculpture in the National Archaeological Museum*, Athens: Catalogue, translation of D. Hardy, Athens 2002, p. 187, fig. 368.

<sup>22</sup> N. V. Sekunda, *Classical Warfare*, in *CAH. Plates to Volumes V and VI* (1994), p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Veget., *Epit.* III.16; cf. Sallust., *Jug.* 59.3; Caes., *B. G.* VII.80.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. DS, XVII.21.4, 33,2; XVIII.15.2–4, 17.3–5.

