

## REVIEW

by Prof. Ivan Marazov, Dr. Sc.

On the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"  
*"Weapons as a votive gift in Thrace and neighboring cultures 1st millennium BC"*  
submitted by **Kaloyan Petkov**

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The choice of the topic for the dissertation is ambitious: it implies not only a good knowledge of the vast material and the specialized literature related to it, but also an attempt to make theoretical sense, since it is about a ritual and a symbol. On the other hand, as we all know, the written base for Thrace is limited and full of lacunae. So basically, the hypothesis has to be built on the analysis of the archaeological material. The material is quite sufficient to serve as a basis for a doctoral dissertation.

It is gratifying that in this work a successful attempt has been made to present the symbolic function of weapons from a new point of view – in their role as votives and as objects that have acquired a new meaning. This implies the creation of a database of the sites where weapons played this function. Placing the weapons in the broad context of Mediterranean, Celtic and Germanic cultures has the function not only of finding comparative material but also of suggesting answers to questions from the Thracian compendium. This broadens the scope of the topic and gives the conclusions more convincing credibility.

The structure of the work is logically constructed, and this is particularly important, since the subject is multifaceted both materially and geographically. Right at the beginning, the author states (albeit briefly) the meaning he puts into the main concepts used in the dissertation.

The overview of the different topics in the work is comprehensive. Historiography of the research on weapons in Thrace and Europe is detailed and rich. This proves the in-depth work of the PhD student with the scientific literature. After presenting the symbolism of the weapon in ancient Thrace (as votives and in burials), K.

Petkov begins an extensive review of the changed functions of the weapons in Greece and Europe.

The archaeological material is systematized according to its origin, condition, type and always chronologically, which makes the constructed picture historically objective and perspicuous.

The various uses of weapons are described in detail: as a trophy, as a ritual killed weapons, as a sign of authority.

The use of the weapons in its symbolic sense is rightly considered based on the archaeological material from Europe: numerous works have appeared in the study of these problems in the European literature. The marked similarities and differences help to understand the specifics of this role of weaponry items in a Thracian environment as well.

In order to reveal the symbolic value of the ritual transformation of the function of weapons, it is necessary to specify the places where they have been found. These ritual places are precisely labeled and this reveals the symbolism of the artefacts found within them more convincingly. Ritual deposition is, of course, most characteristic of Thrace.

It is this consistent approach of chronological and contextual review of a given topic that is of particular cognitive importance, but also provides the reader with a basis for the analysis of the Thracian data.

Ritual killing of weapons is an important topic within the dissertation. It is important to hypothesize the bending or breaking of weapons (mainly swords, i.e. the melee weapon that most accurately defines the warrior's qualities) when they are laid in burials. The author rightly considers this practice in the context of the ritual deprivation of objects of their utilitarian use (cf. the overturning or crushing of objects in burials or in some ritual practices – e.g. the so-called ritual pits).

Already in the Iliad, the battle for the body of the slain warrior is connected with two things: that he should not be left without a burial, and that his armor should not be taken away. In fact, Hector also took possession of Achilles' armor after killing Patroclus, who had put it on so that the Trojans would mistake him for Achilles. Because the armor is the warrior's social body. This is clearly demonstrated by the frequent depiction of armor in Apulian funerary vase painting and in Etruscan,

Macedonian and Thracian tomb paintings. In pictorial texts, mainly from the archaic period, we very often come across this plot. "The origin on the word "trophy" (*τρόπαιον/tropaeum*) comes from the verb *tropein* (to turned over in Greek)", K. Petkov explains. It could be asked whether, even at the etymological level, the term is not meaningfully connected with the symbolic "reversal" of the function of the weapon in a given ritual context: "undressing" the defeated warrior and "dressing" the tree with his armor. The rite very often uses this action (for example, when undressing and dressing in "new clothes" not only the participants of the ritual, but also statues). Indeed, the metopes of the Parthenon represent a "trophy" as they convey metaphorically, through mythological precedents, the victory over the Persians. They are also a model of propaganda art, especially since they are placed in a place of extremely high sacredness. The same can be said about the images of trophies on coins – this is the most important means of communication, and therefore for ideological propaganda.

True to his historical approach, K. Petkov suggests that we could explain the appearance of the practice of ritually killed weapons in Thrace with influences from the North. Without denying this diachronic possibility, I would also consider a synchronic one – because this ritual practice is found not only in antiquity, but also in ethnography. Ethnological data would probably suggest an even more concrete (albeit retrospective) explanation of the ancient examples.

There is an interesting moment in the burial of weapons: in the second half of the 4th century BC in the graves we find items of defensive armor from the 5th century BC. This is also a question of weapon symbolism. As well as making bronze weapons with a purely symbolic meaning in the 3rd century BC (especially among the Celts) or for weapons of gold or silver (Dabene, Bessarabian Treasure).

The signs of power, the insignia, among which weapons occupy a special place, could also be included among the symbolic incarnations of this type of item. Because they very often have a divine origin. We remember the golden gifts of Hestia/ Tabitha, which fell in flames from the sky, among which there is an ax – one of the main weapons of the Scythians. K. Petkov rightly emphasizes their function of divine choice, as well as their preservation as "votives" at the royal hearth. Surely Romulus's shepherd's crook was also kept as a "votive".

After comparing the composition of grave goods in Greece and "barbarian" lands, the author makes the correct sociological conclusion about the differences between them: The reason for this may lay in the different social models – the limited power of the aristocracy in the Greek polis, and the powerful monarchical rule in Thrace, Macedonia and others adjacent cultures.

K. Petkov draws as source material a lot of iconographic data illustrating the symbolic function of weapons, but mainly images of trophies in early vase painting, as well as on Hellenistic and Roman coins and reliefs. Further, the work could be extended precisely in the direction of the pictorial sources, both from Thrace and from the neighboring lands.

The catalog, with the compilation of which the work on the dissertation probably began, is comprehensive and complements with specific descriptions the analyzes and conclusions in the text in the main part of the dissertation.

The bibliography is impressive.

The clarity of the conclusions is enhanced by tables with diagrams and maps. And the appendices at the end of the dissertation help the reader to understand in which European regions ritual practices with weapons are most popular.

The abstract reflects the main parts of the work and the conclusions drawn in it. The contributions indicated correspond to the value of the work.

The points of contribution in this dissertation are many:

- The very placement of the subject expands the scope of archaeological research
- The collection and processing of the material
- The contextualization of rituals with weapons in Thrace among the vast material from Europe and Greece
- The search for the symbolic values of these practices is always compared to the signs of the material and practices in the surrounding world

Before us is a work that not only sets the topic, but also largely outlines the main lines of further research, before us is a specialist who is already an accomplished researcher and deserves our respect.

I allow myself to suggest to the respected jury to accept with high appreciation the dissertation work presented by Kaloyan Petkov.

May 7, 2023

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Marazov', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ochusha

(Prof. Dr. Sc. Ivan Marazov)