

“UNCUT” INSCRIBED LEAD SLING BULLETS FROM A “BUNCH” OF A CAST FROM THE ISLAND OF AIGILIA (ANTIKYTHERA)

Aris TSARAVOPOULOS*

I had known Alexandru since he visited Athens back in 1997 and since then we had had a close friendship that was not limited only to the scientific field, but also to general discussions over a glass of beer or wine. In 2003 with Alexandru we arranged to visit our excavation in Antikythera, where a large number of inscribed lead sling bullets had been found, one of his favorite topics he had been studying for many years. However, due to the bad weather, the ship did not enter the port and his visit was postponed. The collaboration with him expanded further, when we invited him to contribute to the study of the stamped handles found on the island of Chios, where I had worked for many years. My colleague Gelly Fragou undertook the study of the stamped handles from Chios for her doctoral thesis, with Alexandru as her supervisor. The first result is the article published in the Bulletin of the Romanian Archaeological Institute in Athens 2(2020=2022). The following article has to do with Alexandru’s interests in the inscribed sling bullets and it is a small offer to the memory of my friend who unfortunately will no longer see the place, where many and various inscribed sling bullets were found.

Keywords: *Antikythera, Laconia, Ptolemaic fleet, sling bullets.*

Abstract: *In the paper a segment of two, still linked, unused inscribed sling bullets, is presented which obviously were produced, during a battle, inside the “Castle” in Antikythera by its defenders.*

In May 2018 during a tour with a group of scouts from Piraeus at the site of “Kastro” in Antikythera¹, one of the scouts, Thanasis Papadeas, noticed and

* Aris TSARAVOPOULOS: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Athens; e-mail: aristsaravopoulos@hotmail.com.

collected three sling bullets and a much worn bronze ancient coin. One lead sling bullet found inside the ancient fort, was uninscribed, but its form was similar to the many sling bullets found with the inscription ΒΑCΙΑΕΩC², found on both surface and excavated layers.

The other two sling bullets were found at the highest point of Kastro, outside the base of the eastern fortification wall (**Fig. 1**). They were joined together, as they had come out of the smelter, and they both had the inscription ΕΠΑΙ (**Fig. 2-3**). As can be seen in the figures (**Fig. 5**) and comparing them with those found used or ready to be used³ (**Fig. 4**) it is observed that after the sling bullets had been detached from the “bunch”, received a light processing, during which the edges, formed by the imperfect application of the two parts of the matrix, were being removed.

Lead sling bullets with this inscription had been found in the previous years, inside and outside the fort; those found outside the fort were struck, while one from the inside of a fortification tower did not have struck traces of use. The logical conclusion is that they belonged to a military group of the fort’s defenders. The two new, uncut from the foundry “bunch” were found outside the fort, at the base of the fortification wall, and create a slight problem if they belonged to an attacker from whom would have fallen, before he would have “cut” them. But because it seems very unlikely that an attacker would have carried uncut sling bullets with him, which would have fallen during the attack, the inscription ΕΠΑΙ should be considered as part of the name of an official of the defenders and the two sling bullets might have been a hasty supply of “ammunition” of a slinger, who would have been on the walls and would not have time to separate them and of course he would not have the time to smooth the edges either! It will be very interesting, if in the future, a whole bunch or a matrix of sling bullets will be found. This is not unlikely, since the finding of the two sling bullets indicates that the most likely outcome of the battle in which the sling bullets, under discussion, were intended to be used, was the victory of the attackers.

The question that arises is who was ΕΠΑΙ? Some candidate additions are: Ἐπαίν[ετος, that was found in almost the entire Aegean and Greek area, Ἐπεινῆς in Laconia⁴ and more rarely Ἐπαινίδης and Ἐπαινός⁵. I consider more likely the completion of the name mentioned in the sling bullets as Ἐπαίν[ετος. An

¹ TSARAVOPOULOS 2015. A revised copy of the paper in English can be found in academia.edu under the title *Inscribed sling bullets from “Kastro” in Antikythera (Greece)*. In the printed copy of the last entry in *Gdanskie Studia Archeologiczne 2* (2012) there are many typographical mistakes which have been corrected in the academia.edu electronic copy.

² TSARAVOPOULOS 2004–2009 p. 332–335; TSARAVOPOULOS 2012, p. 209–210.

³ TSARAVOPOULOS 2004–2009, p. 335–336; TSARAVOPOULOS 2012, p. 210.

⁴ The possibility that ΕΠΑΙ would stand for the name of a Laconian does not seem possible, because the sling bullet belonged to a defender, which as it appears from the archaeological data (see above n. 2), the leader of Sparta, Nabis, who had given himself the title of the King, attacked the island at some point in his attempt to control the passages in the sea area south of Laconia.

⁵ LGPN I.

Ἐπαίν[ετος was mentioned⁶ as an admiral of the Ptolemaic fleet at the end of the 4th c. BC and, although it is not possible to date the sling bullets from the shape of the letters, and we cannot be sure when and in which battle these sling bullets were being made and used, even in later years could be a descendant of the above discussed Egyptian admiral. This last supposition also strengthens the discussion that Phalasarina and Aegila (Antikythera) had close allied relations with Egypt⁷.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

TSARAVOPOULOS 2004–2009 – A. Tsaravopoulos, *The Inscription IG V 1,948 and the inscribed lead sling bullets of the Antikythera Kastro* [Ἡ ἐπιγραφή IG V 1,948 και οι ἐνεπιγραφες μολυβδίδες του Κάστρου των Αντικυθήρων], *Horos* 17–21 (2004–2009), p. 335–336.

TSARAVOPOULOS 2012 – A. Tsaravopoulos, *Inscribed Sling Bullets from “Kastro” in Antikythera (Greece)*, *Gdanskie Studia Archaeologiczne* 2 (2012), p. 207–220.

TSARAVOPOULOS 2015 – A. Tsaravopoulos, *Αντικύθηρα. Ταξίδι στην ιστορία του μικρού νησιού* (Antikythera. A journey through the history of the small island), *Αρχαιολογία και Τέχνες*, 119 (2015), p. 20–35 (https://www.archaiologia.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/119_20-35.pdf).

⁶ Diodorus 19, 79.2.

⁷ Plutarch, *Cleomenes* 31,1. It is known that Cleomenes III fled, after the battle of Sellasia, to Aegilia waiting there for the Egyptian ship that would pick him up for transport to Alexandria.

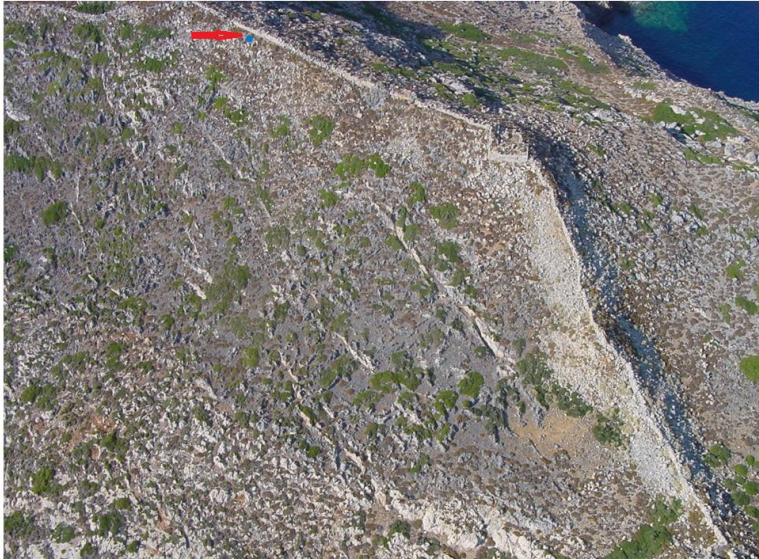


Fig. 1. Place of discovery of two sling bullets (photo Iannis Tzinakos).



Fig. 2. Two sling bullets with the inscription ΕΠΑΙ (photo A. Tsaravopoulos).



Fig. 3. Reverse side of the sling bullets (photo A. Tsaravopoulos).



Fig. 4. Another sling bullet with the inscription ΕΠΑΙ found outside the fort (photo A. Tsaravopoulos).

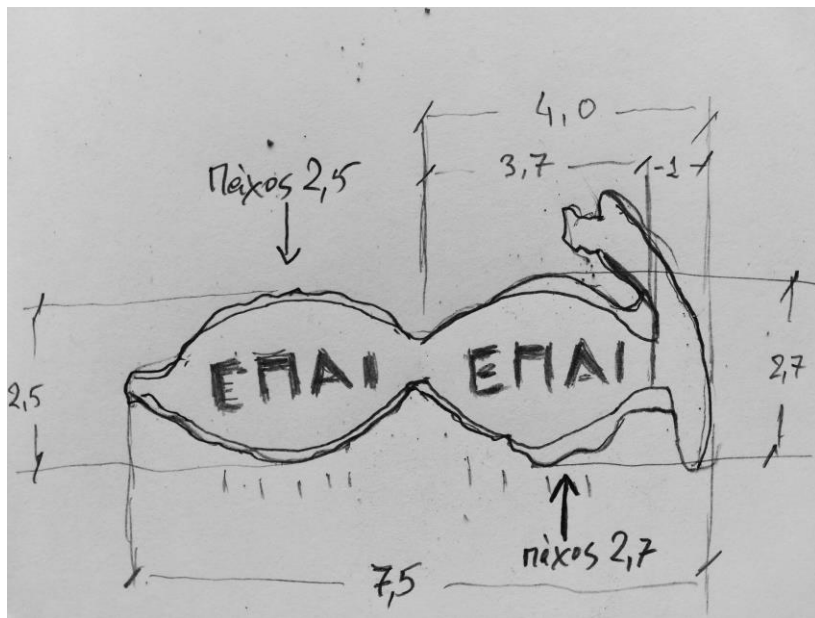


Fig. 5. Drawing of the two sling bullets (A. Tsaravopoulos).