CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TRYPHON'S SLING BULLET FROM DOR*

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Dedicated to the memory of Yaron Dan

In 1982 Schlesinger published a paper which discussed four sling bullets found within 100 m. of the remains of the ancient city of Dor.1 Of the four sling bullets, two are decorated with a winged thunderbolt in relief, while a third is unadorned. The fourth, which is the subject of this study, is made of lead, as are two of the remaining three sling bullets, and is inscribed on both sides (Fig. 13.1).2

Schlesinger offered the following reading of our sling bullet:

obverse: ΤΡΥΦΩΝΟ
ΝΙΚΗ
reverse: ΠΡΩΞΕΥΣΑΙ

In addition, he observed that Diodotus-Tryphon, the guardian of Antiochus VI who subsequently murdered his ward, had fought at Dor against Antiochus VII Sidetes.4 He therefore plausibly sought to connect the sling bullet with that battle and attributed it to Antiochus Sidetes' army.

My reading of the obverse is essentially in agreement with that of the first editor:

ΤΡΥΦΩΝΟ
ΝΙΚΗ

However, it should be noted that only the right vertical stroke of the eta is preserved. Furthermore, the iota and eta are placed midway between the first line and the nu and kappa of line 2.

My reading of the reverse is entirely different from the one cited above.3 It is as follows:

\[ \text{Line 1: } \Delta\Omega\Pi\Pi\Omega\]
\[ \Gamma\varepsilon \Upsilon\Sigma\Lambda\]

Line 1 contains the Phoenician letter dalet (although resh is also possible), then the year sign L, followed by a bird in relief flying to the left and an epsilon which therefore denotes a date, i.e. year 5.5

As we have seen, Schlesinger believes that the sling bullet had been in the possession of one of Antiochus VII's slingers, presumably because he understands the phrase Τρόφονον \( \nu \varepsilon \tau \) to mean 'victory over Tryphon'. However, this phrase can also mean 'victory of Tryphon'.6 The association of \( \nu \varepsilon \tau \) with a proper name in the genitive, such as we have here, is a well-attested formula in Greek epigraphy. The southwestern corner of Asia Minor is particularly rich in inscriptions of this kind.7 As early as 1893 Reinach expressed the view that these inscriptions are related to contests that took place in the gymnasium and were set up by friends of the contestants to convey their good wishes for a victory. Hence these inscriptions refer to a potential victory rather than a real one.8 In the course of this century Reinach's view has received widespread support.9

Our inscription is not, of course, in the realm of the gymnasium, but in that of war. However, we know that in Egypt and Asia strong links were maintained between the army and the gymnasium and, in general, the martial arts were taught in gymasia as a preparation for army life.10 More important for our purposes is the fact that these 'gymnastic' inscriptions refer to a potential, rather than actual, victory and also that the genitive is one of the subject and not the object.

Even more closely related to our subject are three clay sling bullets bearing the inscription \( \Lambda \theta \gamma \iota \nu \iota \nu \varepsilon \tau \), understood as an acclamation for the victory of Athenion, who led a slave revolt in Sicily between 104 and 101 BCE.11 We can also see that this formula was used in acclamations referring to the future from a similar type of inscription which associates \( \nu \varepsilon \tau \) with the name of a god or a goddess in the genitive. Sling bullets from Sicily offer us a few examples: \( \nu \varepsilon \tau \Lambda \theta \gamma \iota \nu \varepsilon \tau \), \( \nu \varepsilon \tau \Delta \iota \varsigma \), 'Προκλέος \( \nu \varepsilon \tau \) and others.12 Perhaps the most substantial example of this usage is to be found in 2 Maccabees. During Lysias' second campaign in Judaea, the Jews attacked the Seleucid army after a prearranged signal had been given. The signal was the battle cry \( \Theta \varepsilon \nu \varepsilon \tau \) (2 Macc. 13:15).13 Since the cry served as a signal to commence the attack, it is clear that 'God's victory' was a wish pertaining to the future. If God were to be victorious, so would be his followers. In the same way the inscription on our sling bullet is to be understood as expressing a wish for Tryphon's victory.

The conclusive proof that the acclamation on the obverse expresses the wish that Tyption be victorious is found on

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the reverse, where there are two hints that the sling bullet was cast in Dor, one of Tryphon’s cities. The Phoenician dalet found on the reverse is hardly surprising, for Dor was a Phoenician city. This dalet is, in all probability, an abbreviation of the city’s name ḫrwm, since we know of a number of Phoenician coins which bear the initial of the place where they were minted.

A further indication that the sling bullet originated in Dor is found in line 2 of the reverse, which is incomprehensible as it stands. The marked difference in height and spacing between the first three letters and the last three suggests that they should be read as two separate units. The first two letters of the line, ΔΩ, are identical to the abbreviation of the ethnicon which appears on some of the coins of Dor, the ethnicon in the genitive being ΔΩΠΠΩΝ/ΔΟΠΠΩΝ. While the coins attributed to Dor contain only a Greek abbreviation of the ethnicon, there are coins from other Phoenician settlements, such as Gabala and Zimyra, which have the ethnicon in both Greek and Phoenician abbreviations. Turning to sling bullets, we find that when the ethnicon does appear it is generally abbreviated rather than inscribed in full. Thus we find the abbreviations B and BOI for Βοουτών, K and KNΩ for Κυνετιόν and ΟΛΥ for Ὄλυπθον. Our sling bullet seems to be the first instance of a bullet having an abbreviated ethnicon in two languages, i.e. Greek and Phoenician.

The letter π immediately follows the abbreviated ethnicon ΔΩ and, as noted above, should clearly be grouped with it, for it is of exactly the same size. In our opinion the π is an abbreviation of πόλις, or to be more exact, of the genitive form πόλως. This is another unusual feature of the sling bullet from Dor, for generally the issuing body mentioned is the resident people rather than their civic organization as a whole, e.g. polis, league, etc.

Our study so far shows that the sling bullet found at Dor was made under that city’s authority and bore an acclamation for the success of a man called Tryphon. In view of the fact that Dor served as a stronghold of Diodotus-Tryphon in the war against Antiochus VII, the link between the sling bullet and Diodotus-Tryphon seems assured.

Returning to line 1 (reverse), we can see a bird flying to the left. The bird is flanked by the year sign L on the left and by a lunate epsilon on the right. Birds, especially eagles, are a common motif on sling bullets and probably symbolize their piercing power. Far more important is the date appearing in this line. Obviously the year sign taken together with the epsilon indicate the date year 5. A decoration between the year sign and the actual number, such as we have here, is found on various coins. The date can be either year 5 of an unknown era of Dor or the fifth year of Tryphon’s rule. I can find no evidence to support the first possibility and hence it seems more likely that the fifth year of Tryphon’s reign is indicated. In fact, this sling bullet is analogous in many ways to the Phoenician series of the coins of Tryphon. On these coins we find, on the reverse, a decoration (generally an eagle), an abbreviation of the ethnicon and a date which undoubtedly refers to Tryphon’s regnal years. The parallels with our sling bullet are obvious. The obverse of these Phoenician coins always has a portrait of Tryphon. The portrait is intended to express the issuing body’s recognition of and loyalty to its ruler. On the obverse of our sling bullet we have the phrase Τρυφανοῖος Λικη, which seems to serve the same function as the portrait on the coins. On this basis the date on the sling bullet is the fifth year of Tryphon.

This is the first indication that Tryphon’s rule lasted more than four years and thus it is worth while to take a more detailed look at the chronology generally assigned to Tryphon. Josephus speaks of a reign of only three years, but his statement is contradicted by some of Tryphon’s coins dated year 4. Thus a fifth year of his reign is certainly possible.

Tryphon’s reign began only after he had murdered his ward Antiochus VI. The last coins of Antiochus VI are dated to the year 171 of the Seleucid era (October 142–October 141 BCE; henceforth the Seleucid era will be abbreviated SE). Thus the earliest date for Tryphon’s reign would be 142–141 BCE. However, the dating of the death of Antiochus VI (and hence the beginning of Tryphon’s reign) is a more complex question, for the literary sources do not confirm the numismatic evidence.

To begin with 1 Maccabees, we find the following sequence of events: Antiochus VI is murdered by Tryphon (13:31–32); the Jews achieve independence in 170 SE and that year is to be reckoned as the first year of Simon the Hasmonean as High Priest (13:41–42). Thus Antiochus VI would have been murdered no later than the last month of 170 SE. This can be reconciled with the numismatic evidence only if the year 170 SE was calculated in 1 Maccabees according to the Babylonian system, i.e. the year begins in...
the spring of 142 and ends in the spring of 141 BCE. In that case there is an overlap of six months between Antiochus VI's last coins and the date given in 1 Maccabees.

Nonetheless several other sources, including Josephus and Diodorus Siculus, present a more difficult problem. They state that the assassination of Antiochus VI occurred only after Demetrius II had been captured by the Parthians. Demetrius II seems to have been taken prisoner in 173 SE (140–139 BCE) and hence, according to these sources, Tryphon could have murdered the boy king and initiated his reign only in 173 SE or later.

The chronology of events given by Josephus and the other sources raises several difficulties. No coins dating from the supposed last two years of Antiochus VI's reign have been unearthed so far and Josephus himself assigns to the boy king a reign of only four years rather than six or seven. More important for our purposes is the fact that, according to this sequence of events, both Antiochus VII and Tryphon were issuing coins at Antioch at the same time.

The mistake in Josephus and the other sources probably stems from a Hellenistic source which first described the struggle between the Parthians and Demetrius II, a struggle which ended with the latter's capture, and then went on to describe the reign of Antiochus VI and the subsequent rule of his assassin Tryphon. In other words, the Hellenistic source presented the events according to regional rulers, rather than in strict chronological order.

Thus it seems preferable to take 142–141 BCE as the starting point of Tryphon's reign. Tryphon's fifth year, which is first attested on our sling bullet, would then fall in 138–137 BCE. Up to now, for want of evidence, it has been assumed that Tryphon's coins dated year 4 and minted in 139–138 BCE were his last. In that year (174 SE) Antiochus VII Sidetes arrived in Syria and began striking coins there.

The conclusion, then, was inevitable: Antiochus VII managed to overpower Tryphon in less than a year. Our find that Tryphon's reign extended into a fifth calendar year sheds some new light on the ancient sources, namely Appian and Josephus.

Appian's statement that Antiochus VII succeeded in killing Tryphon only after great effort (σον πόνον πολλάδο) is now confirmed. In addition, Josephus' description of Antiochus VII's campaign against Tryphon in Syria is more readily intelligible now that we know that the campaign extended into another year. For, according to Josephus, after Antiochus VII landed in Syria in 174 SE he was not immediately accepted by the local population. Only after he had married his sister-in-law Cleopatra Thea was he recognized as a legitimate heir to the Seleucid throne. From the numismatic evidence we learn that it was at this stage, i.e. after his stay in Seleucia, that he set out to conquer Antioch, the capital city of the kingdom. From Antioch the new king had to proceed southwards some 507 km. to Dor and he must have encountered some resistance on the way. This chain of events clearly required some time and the discovery that Tryphon's reign extended into a fifth year provides us with that time.

The question now arises as to whether Tryphon's reign extended beyond a fifth year. The sources which tell of his death give us different versions of its manner and place. Although none of these sources mentions the exact time of Tryphon's death, the overall impression is that he died soon after his defeat at Dor. However, such an inference from the sources, even taken together with the absence of any evidence, numismatic or otherwise, for a sixth or seventh year is perhaps unjustified. In the past, this kind of argument has led to a false assumption about Tryphon, i.e. that his reign lasted only four years.

A more substantial indication that Tryphon's fifth year was his last may be gleaned from two Aradian coins. These coins bear the date of the 122nd year of the Aradian era, 138/137 BCE (i.e. the date of Tryphon's fifth year), and they mark the beginning of a new series of autonomous tetradrachms minted by the people of Aradus after a lapse of 43 years. Seyrig has convincingly connected the reappearance of the autonomous series with the struggle between Antiochus VII Sidetes and Tryphon. According to Seyrig, Antiochus VII granted this privilege to Aradus because he needed to secure a strong fleet which could be used against Tryphon's forces in Phoenicia (and against the Jewish state as well).

In our view, it is even more likely that Antiochus VII allowed the people of Aradus to mint coins only after Aradian ships and trained seamen had already helped him to defeat Tryphon, first at Dor and then elsewhere. Thus the coins were struck as a result of Antiochus VII's gratitude for services rendered rather than in anticipation of future assistance, as Seyrig argues. The fact that the goddess Nike holding an aplustre is depicted on the reverse of these coins, while on the obverse one can see the city goddess, suggests that they were issued to commemorate the final victory over Tryphon. Hence Tryphon's fifth year was, in all likelihood, his last.

The date on the sling bullet, taken together with the abbreviation ΔΩΠ, i.e. Δω(ττιν) πολις, shows that by 138/137 BCE Dor was already a polis. Indeed, three writers of the period, Polybius, the author of 1 Maccabees and Apollodorus of Athens, refer to Dor as a polis.

We now return to the final portion of the inscription. The remainder of line 2 — the word ἰδο — is in larger and more widely spaced letters than the first part of the line and is linked with the word γαστος of line 3. This taunting imperative, ἰδο γαστος, 'have a taste of sumac', is addressed to the enemy and refers, of course, to the sling bullet itself. Another sling bullet, said to have been found at Crocodilopolis, some 8 km. to the south of Dor, also has the imperative γαστο, once again inviting the enemy to have a taste. Other sling bullets bearing an inscription meant for the enemy have been found, so that we find such commands as δέξα, λάθε, κράτε, in which the enemy is requested, as it were, to seize or receive the sling bullet hurled at him.

Our sling bullet uses a more elaborate image, for the bullet itself is termed rhus and the enemy is told to taste it. Rhus, also known as sumac, is a genus of shrubs and small trees with clusters of flowers at the end of the branches and small hairy one-seeded fruits. One species, <i>Rhus coriaria</i>, is often mentioned by Greek and Latin writers. They tell us that the sumac was used for tanning and that its fruit was used both as a spice and for medical purposes. Pliny tells us that this type of sumac grew in Syria and this is no doubt why the ancients called it Syrian rhus (<i>Rhus Syriacus</i>, ῥοῦς Συρίας). The sumac is also mentioned in the Mishnah and other Jewish sources. In addition to this general evidence that the <i>rhus</i> grew in Syria and Palestine, we have
some indication that rhus was actually found in the vicinity of Dor, for less than 20 km to the northeast of Dor, on Mount Carmel, we know of a place named Kh. Summaqa. This name undoubtedly preserves the Syriac סוממא, which is no other than a synonym of rhus. It was from the Syriac, if only indirectly, that the word sumac was absorbed into several modern languages. Thus the people of Dor were probably no strangers to the sumac and its uses.

The question still remains as to why our sling bullet orders the enemy to have a taste of sumac, or to be more precise, a taste of its fruit. We have seen above that the sumac was used for three main purposes — for tanning, as a spice and in medical concoctions — and it is probably one of the two latter uses that is referred to here. In either case the command can only be an ironic one. The sling bullet is intended to hurt the enemy, not to bring pleasure or relief from pain.

It should be noted that a sling bullet bearing the inscription γεύσασθαι, a dried fruit or sweetmeat, has been found. Here also the use seems ironic; Guiducci explains that the enemy is to swallow the sling bullet as if it were dried fruit. In sum, the slightly puzzling phrase γεύσασθαι may be a combination of two separate traditions: one is the command addressed to the enemy that he take the sling bullet and the other is the ironic reference to the bullet as something good.

Before concluding this paper some remarks on the script appearing on our sling bullet are warranted. The most prominent feature of the letter forms is the lunate (or cursive) epsilon (reverse, lines 1 and 3) which in Coele-Syria is usually associated with inscriptions no earlier than the first century BCE. Nonetheless, other cursive features also appear on our sling bullet; the horizontal bar of the tau (obverse, line 1) extends only to the left of the vertical stroke, while the horizontal stroke of the delta (reverse, line 2) is connected to the adjacent omega at the latter's left foot. These features show that the artisan from Dor was influenced by the cursive script which was used at times in the Greek world from the fourth century BCE onwards. One sample of such cursive writing in our area is an inscription from Gaza securely dated no later than 198 BCE. This inscription features lunate epsilon, sigma and omega. In our inscription, however, the sigma and omega are non-cursive.

Although some of the letters (alpha, delta, sigma and epsilon) are awkward, their form is consistent with letter forms on inscriptions found in the area of Coele-Syria and dated to the second half of the second century BCE. The alpha has a broken cross-bar, while the two extreme hastae of the sigma are parallel to each other. The pi is somewhat unusual in that the right vertical stroke is a shade longer than the left one. Pi with feet of equal length is already known in the area at the time of our inscription. In short, the form of the letters on our sling bullet does not differ much from the lettering used on inscriptions of the area in that period.

The inscription on the sling bullet has thus been deciphered and should read as follows:

**Obverse:** Τρύφωνος(ς)

**Reverse:** Ἠμέρα ἐν ὀλέας. Ρόδι γεύσασθαι.

It should be translated as follows:

**Obverse:** For the victory of Tryphon.

**Reverse:** Dor. Year 5.

Of the city of the Dorians. Have a taste of sumac.

### NOTES


2. Length 3.9 cm., width 1.9 cm., thickness 1.4 cm., weight 60 gr. In the following I will frequently use such inaccurate, but convenient, terms as inscriptions, strokes, etc. The letters are, of course, in relief. Metallic sling bullets were made by pouring liquid metals (mostly lead) into moulds which sometimes bore engraved inscriptions and incised decorations. For such moulds, see D.M. Robinson: *Excavations at Olynthus*, X, Baltimore, 1941, p. 419, n. 148; J.-Y. Empereur: Collection P. Canellopoulos: petits objets inscrits, *BCH* 105 (1981), p. 555.

3. Above, n. 1.


4a. I am pleased to note that the reading of the word γεύσασθαι in line 3 has been suggested independently by B. Isaac in *SEG* XXXII (1982, publ. 1985), No. 1500. See also the different reading of the reverse now proposed by T. Fischer: Tryphon varfeht Sieg von Dor?, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 93 (1992), pp. 29–30.

5. The epsilon is 4 mm. high, as are the letters of line 3 and the final three letters of line 2. The rest of the letters in line 2 are much smaller; only 2.5 mm. in height. The Phoenician letter in line 1 is 3 mm. high and the year sign L is approximately 1.5 mm. high.


9. J. and L. Robert (above, n. 7); T. Pekáry: *Inschriftenfunde aus
22. See above, p. 491 with n. 4.
25. Conveniently assembled by H. Seyrig: Notes on Syrian Coins, NNM 119 (1950), p. 23, Nos. 30–40; henceforth this paper will be referred to as Seyrig, Notes. It should be noted that Seyrig, pp. 10–11, assigned types Nos. 34–38 to the mint of Ptolemais. Later on, however, he attributed these coins to the mint of Ascalon; see G. Le Rider and H. Seyrig: Objets de la collection Louis De Clercq, RN 6 sér. 9 (1967), pp. 35–36.
30. See Fischer (above, n. 27), pp. 210–212.
38. *Syrah*, 68.
40. For Antiochus VII’s stay in Seleucia during the first year of his reign, see E.T. Newell in *C.B. Welles: Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period*, New Haven, 1934, p. 292, n. 3. Coins of Antiochus VII Sidetes were also minted in that year (174 SE) at Antioch — see BMC Seleucid Kings, p. 73, No. 50; Waage (above, n. 36), p. 17, No. 180. As Antiochus VII was first received in Seleucia, it is obvious that nearby Antioch came under his control only later in the year. For Tryphon’s rule in Antioch prior to the invasion of Antiochus Sidetes, see E.T. Newell: *The Seleucid Mint of Antioch*, New York, 1918, pp. 71–73; Seyrig, *Notes*, pp. 15–16, 22–23, Nos. 1–29; Waage (above, n. 36), p. 16.
41. *Ant.* 13.223. It should be noted that both Orthosa and
Ptolemais are on the route between Antioch and Dor and that these two cities remained loyal to Tryphon until the battle of Dor. For Orthisia, see 1 Macc. 15:37; Syncellus, Chronographia, ed. G. Dindorf, Bonn, 1829, pp. 552-553; Seyrig, Notes, pp. 6-7. For Ptolemais, see Charax of Pergamon, FGrHist 103 F 29. Thus Antiochus must have had to detour around their territory.

42. 1 Mac. 15:37: Charax of Pergamon, FGrHist 103 F 29; Frontinus, Strategemata 2.13.2. Some sources say that he was killed: Josephus, Ant. 13.224; Appian, Syr. 68; John of Antioch, FHG IV, p. 561 (fr. 65); but others claim that he committed suicide: Strabo, 14.5.2 (668); Syncellus, pp. 552–553 (Dindorf).

43. For Tryphon's flight, see above, n. 24. For Antioch to Syria before the battle of Dor. This is because the author is interested in bringing the clash between the Seleucid king and Simon the Hasmonean to the foreground as quickly as possible.

44. For a reign of only four years, see above, n. 24. For Tryphon's flight, see above, n. 24.


46. Seyrig, Notes, pp. 18–19.

47. For Antiochus VII's use of a navy at Dor, see 1 Macc. 15:14; Polybius 5.66.1; 1 Macc. 15:14; Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. Ἀλέξανδρος = FGrHist 244 F 19 and Jacoby's commentary, ad loc. See also E. Schwartz, PWRE 1, 2 (1894), cols. 2856–2875.


49. For the site, see S. Dar: Horvat Sumaqa—Settlement from the Roman and Byzantine Periods in the Carmel, Bulletin, the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society 8 (1988–9), pp. 34–41. The site itself is of Roman-Byzantine date, but Dar notes (p. 45) the existence of an earlier settlement there dating for the Persian and Hellenistic periods. For K90, see I. Lov Die Flora der Juden, I, Vienna-Leipzig, 1928, pp. 200–202.

50. The word πολτικά applies to the plant as well as to its fruit; see H.G. Liddell et al.: A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed., Oxford 1940, s.v. πολτικά.

51. For the plant, see Pliny, HN 24.129; Celsus, de Medicina 6.11.5.

52. Ma'aserot 1.2; Pe'ah 1.5 etc. See also Tos. Shebi'it 5.7; F Shebi'it 7.2 (37b); 9.6 (39a).

53. For the site, see S. Dar: Horvat Sumaqa—Settlement from the Roman and Byzantine Periods in the Carmel, Bulletin, the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society 8 (1988–9), pp. 34–41. The site itself is of Roman-Byzantine date, but Dar notes (p. 45) the existence of an earlier settlement there dating for the Persian and Hellenistic periods. For K90, see I. Lov Die Flora der Juden, I, Vienna-Leipzig, 1928, pp. 200–202.

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56. For the site, see S. Dar: Horvat Sumaqa—Settlement from the Roman and Byzantine Periods in the Carmel, Bulletin, the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society 8 (1988–9), pp. 34–41. The site itself is of Roman-Byzantine date, but Dar notes (p. 45) the existence of an earlier settlement there dating for the Persian and Hellenistic periods. For K90, see I. Lov Die Flora der Juden, I, Vienna-Leipzig, 1928, pp. 200–202.