

Tryphon's Sling Bullet from Dor*

DOV GERA

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

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. 1; Pl. 19:A-C).²

Schlesinger offered the following reading of our sling bullet:³

obverse: ΤΡΥΦΩΝΟ

ΝΙΚΗ

reverse: ΠΡΟΣΕΥΞΑΙ

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.

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¹ D. Schlesinger: A Lead Slingshot from Dor, *Qadmoniot* 15 (1982), p. 116 (Hebrew). The following abbreviations are used in this article: *BCH* — *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*; *BE* — *Bulletin épigraphique*; *BMC Phoenicia* — G.F. Hill: *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum: Phoenicia*, London, 1910; *BMC Seleucid Kings* — P. Gardner: *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum: The Seleucid Kings of Syria*, London, 1878; *FGrHist* — *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*; *FHG* — *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*; *IG* — *Inscriptiones Graecae*; *NNM* — *Numismatic Notes and Monographs*; *RN* — *Revue numismatique*; *SNG* — *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*.

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 inscription, 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.

⁴ 1 Macc. 15:10-14, 25-26, 37; Josephus, *War* 1.50; *Ant.* 13.223-224; Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. Δῶρος = Charax of Pergamon, *FGrHist* 103 F 29. See also Syncellus, *Chronographia*, ed. G. Dindorf, Bonn, 1829, pp. 552-553.

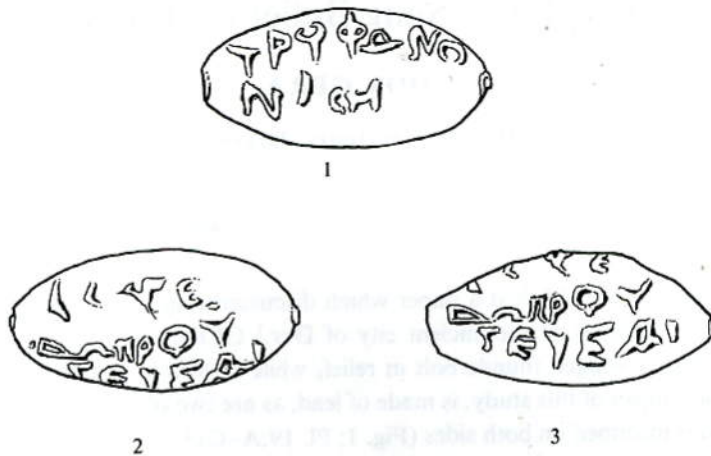


Fig. 1. The sling bullet, actual size. 1—obverse; 2—reverse, upper part; 3—reverse, lower part.

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. It is as follows:

ϣ L ε
ΔΩΠΡΟΥ
ΓΕΥΣΑΙ

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 Τρύφωνο νίκη to mean 'victory over Tryphon'. However, this phrase can also mean 'victory of Tryphon'.⁶ The association of νίκη with a proper name in the genitive, such as we have here, is a well-attested formula in Greek epigraphy. The south-western

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.

⁶ See, e.g., Polybius 27.9.1 versus 21.39.1.

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 gymnasia and, in general, the martial arts were taught in gymnasia 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 Ἀθηνίωνος νίκη, understood as an acclamation for the victory of Athenion, who led a slave revolt in Sicily between 104 and 101 B.C.E.¹¹ We can also see that this formula was used in acclamations referring to the future from a similar type of inscription which associates νίκη with the name of a god or a goddess in the genitive. Sling bullets from Sicily offer us a few examples: νίκη Ἀθά(νας), νίκη Δίος, Ἡρακλέος νίκη 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 Θεοῦ νίκη (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.

⁷ To quote only a few examples, see A. Rehm: *Milet*, I, 9, Berlin, 1928, Nos. 385–397; B. Haussoulier: *Inscriptions d'Halicarnasse*, *BCH* 4 (1880), p. 403, No. 15; G. Cousin and C. Diehl: *Inscriptions d'Halicarnasse*, *BCH* 14 (1890), pp. 114–118, No. 18; cf. J. and L. Robert: *BE* (1950), No. 165. See also nn. 8 and 9 below.

⁸ T. Reinach: *Inscriptions d'Iasos*, *Revue des études grecques* 6 (1893), pp. 197–203, Nos. 44–61.

⁹ J. and L. Robert (above, n. 7); T. Pekáry: *Inschriftenfunde aus Milet 1959*, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 15 (1965), p. 130, Nos. 21, 23, 24; see however J. Crampa: *Labraunda*, III, 2, Stockholm, 1972, p. 160, Nos. 76–80.

¹⁰ M. Launey: *Recherches sur les armées hellénistiques*, II, Paris, 1950, pp. 813–874.

¹¹ *IG* XIV, 2407, 8 a–c; Diodorus Siculus, 36.5.1–4; 7.1–10.1. Cf. G. Manganaro: *Monete e ghiande inscritte degli schiavi ribelli in Sicilia*, *Chiron* 12 (1982), pp. 240–242.

¹² *IG* XIV, 2407, 1–7; cf. M. Guarducci: *Epigrafi greca*, II, Rome, 1969, p. 523.

¹³ The reading of the manuscripts here is not unanimous. Most of the Lucianic MSS. have Θεοῦ νίκη, but the generally accepted reading is Θεοῦ νίκην. However, the inscriptions referred to above are decisively in favour of the Lucianic tradition. Consequently, the acclamation in 2 Macc. 8:23 should similarly be read Θεοῦ βοήθεια rather than Θεοῦ βοήθειαν, again in accordance with the Lucianic MSS. For the MS. tradition, see *Maccabaeorum Liber II, Septuaginta* IX, 2, ed. R. Hanhart, Göttingen, 1976, *ad loc.* Hanhart follows A. Rahlfs: *Septuaginta*, I, Stuttgart, 1935, *ad loc.*, and F.-M. Abel: *Les livres des Maccabées*, Paris, 1949, *ad loc.* For military signals and passwords given in the nominative, see Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.8.16; 6.5.25 and *Cyropaedia* 7.1.10.

The conclusive proof that the acclamation on the obverse expresses the wish that Tryphon be victorious is found on 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.¹⁴ This *dalet* is, in all probability, an abbreviation of the city's name דור/דאר,¹⁵ since we know of a number of Phoenician coins which bear the initial of the place where they were minted.¹⁶

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,¹⁷ the ethnicon in the genitive being ΔΩΠΙΤΩΝ/ΔΩΠΕΙΤΩΝ.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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 Β and ΒΟΙ for Βοιωτῶν, Κ and ΚΝΩ for Κνωσίων and ΟΛΥ for Ὀλυνθίων.²⁰ 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 *pi* 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 *pi* is an abbreviation of πόλις, or to be more exact, of the genitive form πόλεως.²¹ This is

¹⁴ See the references collected by E. Schürer: *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. G. Vermes and F. Millar, II, Edinburgh, 1979, pp. 118–119.

¹⁵ For דאר, see Josh. 17:11; 1 Kings 4:11; G.A. Cooke: *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions*, Oxford, 1903, No. 5, line 19; N. Avigad: *The Priest of Dor*, *IEJ* 25 (1975), pp. 101–105. For דור, see Josh. 11:2; Judg. 1:27; 1 Chron. 7:29.

¹⁶ See H. Seyrig: *Monnaies hellénistiques*, *RN* 6 sér. 6 (1964), pp. 14–15.

¹⁷ *BMC Phoenicia*, pp. lxxv, 113–114, Nos. 1, 2, 11; M. Rosenberger: *City-Coins of Palestine*, II, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 31–32, 34, Nos. 2, 6, 21.

¹⁸ E.g. *BMC Phoenicia*, pp. 113–114, Nos. 3, 5, 8, 12–15; Rosenberger (above, n. 17), pp. 32–33, Nos. 9, 11, 13, 16.

¹⁹ Seyrig (above, n. 16).

²⁰ Many examples are to be found in the standard bibliography on Greek sling bullets; see W. Vischer: *Antike Schleudergeschosse in Kleine Schriften*, II, Leipzig, 1878, pp. 260–262, Nos. 25–29; G. Fougères in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio: *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, s.v. *glans*, p. 1610; Robinson (above, n. 2), p. 429, n. 179, pp. 430–431, Nos. 2220–2227, p. 437, Nos. 2260–2264; C. Foss: *Greek Sling Bullets in Oxford, Archaeological Reports for 1974–75*, pp. 40–42, Nos. 2, 12, 13; Empereur (above, n. 2), p. 557, No. 7; M.-C. Hellmann: *Collection Froehner: balles des frondes grecques*, *BCH* 106 (1982), pp. 81–82, Nos. 23, 30. For ethnicons inscribed in full on sling bullets, see Robinson (above, n. 2), pp. 423–424, Nos. 2181–2183, p. 429, n. 179, p. 437, n. 201.

²¹ For another example see H. Grégoire: *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure*, I, Paris, 1922, No. 309 *ter*; see also U. Wilcken, *PWRE* II A 2 (1923), col. 2303 (bottom). Normally the *polis* precedes the ethnicon, as in ἡ πόλις τῶν Ἀθηναίων. However, the reverse also occurs; see Grégoire (above); *Oriens Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, 47, lines 5–6, 49, line 11; *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, 821.

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,²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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 Τρύφωνο(ς) νίκη, 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 4.²⁶ Thus a fifth year of his reign is certainly possible.

Tryphon's reign began only after he had murdered his ward Antiochus VI.²⁷ The last

²² See above, p. 153 with n. 4.

²³ Vischer (above, n. 20), II, p. 262, No. 32; Empereur (above, n. 2), p. 556, No. 2; Hellmann (above, n. 20), p. 85, No. 44, pp. 86-87.

²⁴ See G. Le Rider and H. Seyrig: Objets de la collection Louis De Clercq, *RN* 6 sér. 10 (1968), pp. 18-19, 21, Nos. 340-341, 345-346, 362-364.

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.

²⁶ *Ant.* 13.224. For the coins, see E. Babelon: *Les rois de Syrie, d'Arménie et de Commagène*, Paris, 1890, Nos. 1057-1059; *BMC Seleucid Kings*, p. 69, No. 16; Seyrig, *Notes*, p. 3, Nos. 21-33.

²⁷ For a collection of the ancient sources and a brief discussion, see T. Fischer: Zu Tryphon, *Chiron* 2 (1972), pp. 206-208.

