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Two more inscribed nails from Korone, Porto Rafti
(Did Persian soldiers really come to Attica in 267-262 BC?)

Almost two years ago I published[1] a number of "flat headed" nails (named *pins*) that bear an inscription on the inside of their flat head. When the nails were in their original place, "nailed", the inscriptions were not visible. In the aforementioned publication, I did not include the inscriptions of two other nails from the fort of Korone, found in the 1950s during the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies.[2] Although I had discovered that these two nails too bore inscriptions, I refrained from publishing them for the following reasons: the first nail is preserved in very poor condition so that the letters can hardly be discerned. Regarding the second nail, despite its excellent state of preservation (I think it is the best preserved inscribed nail) and also the excellent readability of the "letters", yet it was not possible for me at the time to give a satisfactory interpretation of the inscription, so I decided to leave the publication for later. The main purpose of the present publication is to make the inscriptions known and to trigger a general discussion on the subject. However, I do not think that it gives a definitive answer to the interpretation problem.[3]

Nail 1 (Fig. 1-3).

Nail with relief illegible inscription (Cat. No BE6788, Vravrona Museum).

1. Ά. Τσαραβόπουλος, Ενεπίγραφα καρφιά ή η λογιστική του στρατού τα ελληνιστικά χρόνια (οι «αόρατες» επιγραφές), *ΗΟΡΟΣ* 22-25 (2010-2013) 187-198.

2. E. Vanderpool, J. R. McCredie, A. Steinberg, Koroni, A Ptolemaic Camp on the East Coast of Attica, *Hesperia* 31 (1962) 26-60.

3. I would like to thank two colleagues Katerina Petrou and Evi Papathoma, who work at the Archaeological Museum of Vravrona and who contributed to the finding and conservation of the "flat headed" nails located in the Museum, as finds of the excavation that was conducted by the American School of Classical Studies (ASCSA) in 1960. The archaeologist Katerina Petrou helped to locate the metal finds that had been found in 1960 in the excavation of Korone and recorded the "inscribed nails" in the Catalogue of the Museum, which as "minor objects" had not attracted the attention they deserved. Katerina also recorded the "inscribed nails" that had been found along the beach of Korone by Mr. Demetres Artemis, which led me to examine the "nails" of the American excavation. Katerina also checked and corrected some of my measurements.

I would like to mention in particular the colleague conservator of metals Evi Papathoma. Her interest and the quality of her work contributed to the salvation of the "nails" (which for over 50 years were stored in detrimental - for their preservation - paper packs). Evi without delay started the excellent conservation of the "nails", which, minor objects as they are, had not yet been conserved. This was the reason why the first editors (see note 2) did not notice that the nails were inscribed.

It was found in 1960 during the excavation of the American School of Classical Studies (ASCSA).

On the excavation label is mentioned[4]: *A8, in small room floor, P29, 39*. Material: Bronze. Dimensions (in meters): stem length: 0.02, head diameter: 0.014, stem side section 0.004.

$$[- -]Α̣Π[.]Ο̣[- - -].$$

Possibly [Β]α̣(σιλέως) Π[τ]ο[λεμαίου].

The height of the discerned letters is between 0.001 and 0.0015 (Fig. 3).

The restoration of the name of Ptolemy is adopted because of the size of the letters, however other interpretations are plausible.

Nail 2 (Fig. 4-7).

Nail with relief inscription. (Cat. No BE6787, Vravrona Museum).

It was found on the 14th of July 1960 during the excavation of the American School of Classical Studies (ASCSA). On the excavation label is mentioned: "*B8 , Gate, Iron nail frg. In black fill, ref. p. 13, 46*".[5]

Material: Bronze. Dimensions (in meters): stem length (preserved) 0.0011, head diameter: 0.0141, stem base 0.004. The stem is slightly bent.

On the inside of the head, during the conservation, two small pieces of wood appeared to be preserved (Fig. 7). In the event that these are remains of the wooden shield in which they were nailed, their analysis will give very significant information not only about the kind of the wood used to manufacture the shields, but also about its origin, in view of the fact that the army that used these shields arrived in Athens from Egypt.

$$ΦΡΑΣΙΤѠΝ Γ (or Λ).$$

Letters height: 0.0028-0.0035m (fig. 6).

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4. The text appears on the label that accompanied the nail from the excavation. *P 29, 39* refers to the excavation diary that I have not seen.

5. The text appears on the label that accompanied the nail from the excavation. Of course it is not an iron nail. The reference *p. 13, 46* refers to the excavation diary that I have not seen.

Letter Α is upside down, letter omega is open. The first three letters of the inscription have characteristics of early writing: letter Φ has the loop high, letter Ρ is angular, while letter Α has its middle line leaning.

For the interpretation of the inscription there are two possibilities:

a) a proper name, Φρασίτων (-ωνος), with problematic the final Γ or Λ discerned after the letter Ν; and,

b) in the genitive the name of the military unit Φρασιτῶν (nom. Φρασῖται), where letter Γ (and less likely letter Λ) acquires a meaning as a subunit number.

Let us examine the two cases:

a) The word Φρασιτων is unattested and is a proper name or noun unknown among the ancient Greek names. It seems to be produced by the root φρασι- of the verb φράζω (φράσαι).[6] It cannot be ruled out therefore that this is a third declension new proper name, Φρασίτων, -ωνος. In addition, the fact that it appears on the inscription in the nominative does not exclude the abbreviated form of the genitive, Φρασίτων(ος).

However, the assumption of the proper masculine name causes difficulty in interpreting the last letter, Γ (or Λ), a difficulty that does not arise in the second interpretation.

b) According to the second interpretation: it could be the genitive in plural of a proper name. The type Φρασῖται is equivalent to the type Φαρσῖται, cf. θράσος – θάρσος, κράτος – κάρτος, etc (anagrammatism in many Greek words).[7]

Who are the Φρασῖται though? I have not found a national or military unit of mercenaries with this name. From the papyri we know that the ethnic composition of the Ptolemaic army included *Macedonians*, *Thessalians*, *Thracians*, *Mysians*, *Cyrenians*, "other Greeks", while a great unit consisted of the *Persians*, for a long period, until the 2nd century BC.[8] The name Φρασῖται / Φαρσῖται (= Παρσῖται)[9] seems to derive from the same stem as the ethnic Πέρσαι and to indicate those who were included in the military unit of the Persians, since the unit did not entirely consist of Persians.»

To turn to the interpretation of the last letter, Γ or Λ: it could be the number of the unit attended by the warrior, who carried the weapon with the nail (or better, the shield). Furthermore, I doubt that the army troops called «*Πέρσαι*» would have included 50 (Λ) or more subunits, so that I prefer to conclude that the letter is a Γ, i.e. the third unit.

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6. See F. Bechtel, *Die historische Personnenamen des Griechischen bis zur Keizerzeit*, Halle 1917, 456.

7. For the phenomenon see C. D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects*, London 1999 (repr.), 44-46, especially 2a. This is observed in the Modern Greek language too. For instance, in Epirus the Greek word for the chest box (*kassela*) in the region of Ioannina and Zagorochoria is *karssela*, while in the neighboring region of Souli the word becomes *krassela*.

8. Chr. Fisher-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, Cambridge 2014, chapter. 4, Military organization and hierarchy 116-159 and chapter. 5, Military recruitment and ethnic composition 160-195.

9. For the etymology of the ethnic name Πέρσαι from the Persian Pārsa, see P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris 1977, 889. This is not the place to discuss the conversion from Pars- to Fars- that happens due to the absence of the phonetic Pi (*Π*) in Arabic. As mentioned by Fischer-Bovet (s.a. footnote no 8), the Persian mercenaries were not a homogenous ethnic unit and probably they included also within them many Arabic-speaking soldiers, who would have, since they were in a neighboring geographical region, a greater participation rate in the Ptolemaic kingdom's army. Thus, it is probable that the indication of the unit's name was given to the workshop with the Arabic pronunciation of the name, especially if the workshop, where the nails were constructed, had local craftsmen. The integration, and possibly the numerical superiority, of other national origin warriors in the "national name" units of the Macedonians, the Persians and the Thessalians would not alter the "national" original name due to the desire to maintain the military reputation of these units. The maintenance of "national" names in the Ptolemaic units continued until the middle of the 2nd century BC (see above note 8).

From the presentation of the eight inscribed flat headed nails of military use for fixing the shield coating[10], it is observed that the names (inscribed) on the inside, "authorities" vary in power and kind: the king is inscribed (as Βα[σιλέως] Πτο[λεμαίου]), the army troop (Φρασιτῶν) and also names of officers (Κεφάλωνι, Δη[μήτριος]).[11] So far, there is no sufficient information available so as to understand what caused this distinction. However, demonstrated by these inscriptions is the fact that the provision of the equipment of the Hellenistic armies – at least the *Ptolemaic* –, constituted a task for which the leadership and not each mercenary had to worry. The inscription of other names than that of the king's may be due to the concession of higher proportion of the booty, from king to leaders, with the corresponding obligation to cover the cost of their units' equipment.

As for the question posed in the subtitle of the present article: *Did or did not Persian warriors come to the Attic land in the 3rd century BC* (during the Chremonidian War): If the interpretation mentioned above (Φρασιτῶν = Φαρσιτῶν = Περσῶν) is correct, we can assume that at least one unit with the national name of the *Persians*, without knowing if indeed it included ethnic Persians, was present in Korone between 267 and 262 BC.!

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10. The six (6) inscribed nails presented in *ΗΟΡΟΣ* 22-25 (see note 1) and the two presented here.

11. In my text in *ΗΟΡΟΣ* 22-25, 193 (see note 1), I discussed the inscription ΔΗ that appears on one of the nails and there I mentioned the possibility of this not being a reference to the Macedonians "Demetrius" (Demetrios Poliorcetes or Demetrios II the Aetolian), but of an officer of the Ptolemaic army with the same name. The name is not rare and in the papyri soldiers of the Egyptian army are mentioned with this name (Fisher-Bovet, footnote 8 above, 248, 249). Thus, in the case of the inscription ΔΗ with shield, it probably refers to one of Ptolemy's officers, who probably being proud that he bore the same name, added also the shield that was the "symbol" of Demetrios the Poliorcetes.

Fig. 1. Nail 1.   Fig. 2 The inside surface of the flat head of Nail 1.
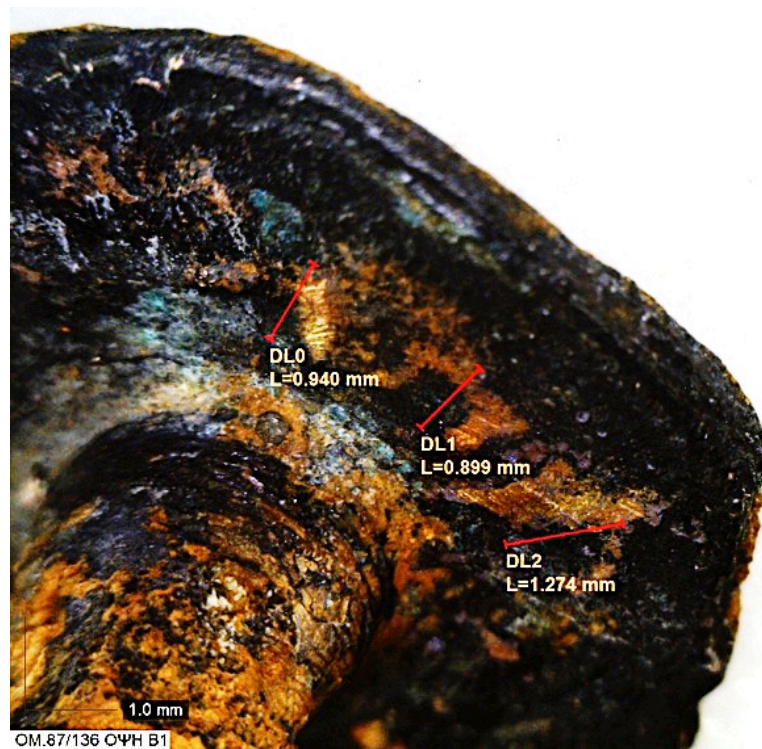

Fig. 3. The size of the letters of Nail 1 through the electronic microscope.

Fig. 4. Nail 2.
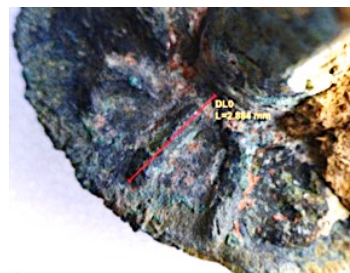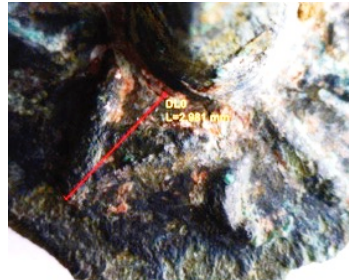

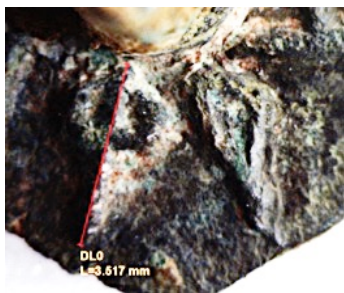Fig. 5. The inscription on Nail 2.

Fig. 6. The size of the letters (Φ, Α and Ι) on Nail 2 through the electronic microscope.

Fig. 7. Wooden remains from the shield (?).