

PARIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES DURING THE LATE 8TH C. BC, AND INFERENCES TO THE COLONIZATION OF THASOS ISLAND. THE EARLIEST POLYANDRIA OF GREECE AND PALAEOPATHOLOGICAL INFERENCES

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Cremated soldiers' bones in urns found at the burial ground next to the ancient harbor in Paroikia, at Paros Island, in two monumental cist graves, offer evidence of a forgotten battle fought around 730 B.C.

What sort of society did the late eighth and early seventh-century inhabitants of Paros and contemporary Greek cities have? The soldiers' burials in Paroikia offer some clues.

The cremated anthropological remains of 120 individuals were deposited as single and/or multiple interments in decorated funerary vases. They were all of male biological sex, ranging between 18 and 45 years at the time of death. Despite bone fragmentation sustained during pyre exposure and subsequent cultural and taphonomic processes, some of the skeletal remains showed paleopathological manifestations including *perimortem* trauma on cranial and intracranial loci, a number of which still preserve iron fragments embedded into endosteal surfaces.

These two polyandria, the earliest known in the ancient Greek world, provide testimony of socio-political conditions at the dawn of city-state formation. That the dead were interred as a group rather than in individual family graves suggests a state supported funeral of the sort first described by Thucydides in Athens 300 years later. This is an indication of their status as citizens and their inclusion in the workings of the city. And two of the burial vases show the earliest evidence of citizen-soldiers fighting in cohesive units, in a phalangeal hoplitic formation. Clearly, the people of Paros were acting as an organized city-state by 730 B.C. The community identity and centralized decision-making processes necessary to undertake such ambitious expeditions it is proposed were already in place.

Soldiers' bones in urns-evidence of a forgotten battle fought around 730 BC. Did these men perish on their island home of Paros, at the center of the Aegean Sea, or in some distant land? The loss of so many, at least 120 men, was certainly a catastrophe for the community, but their families and compatriots honored them, putting the cremated remains into large vases two of which were decorated with scenes of mourning and scenes of war. Grief-stricken relatives carried the urns to the cemetery next to the ancient harbor in Paroikia, the island's chief city and placed them in two monumental cist graves.

Excavation of the ancient cemetery began after its discovery during construction of a cultural center in the mid-1980s. It proved to be a veritable guidebook to changing funeral practices, from the 8th century B.C. to Hellenistic and Roman times. But the two collective burials of soldiers from the late eighth century are the most important of the finds; as the earliest such burials (polyandria) ever found in Greece [dated 240 years earlier than the Marathon polyandria of 490 BC] their very existence offering evidence for the development of city-states at this time.

By about 1050 BC the Late Bronze Age civilization of Greece had collapsed, and the great palace sites destroyed or abandoned. Many explanations for this have been proposed--invasion, internecine war, earthquake, drought, economic disruption--but none can be proved. Regardless, the old social system was gone. Kings, supported by a warrior caste and administrative officials, had ruled over a larger class of serfs. Now that was all swept aside.

On Paros, the island's main Late Bronze Age center in Paroikia, located at a hilltop site on the shore, was destroyed and then reoccupied in the tenth century, but was soon exceeded during the Geometric times by a growing town supported by the new harbor of Paroikia. The people prospered, for Paros is ringed with fertile coastal plains and its marble, of the highest quality, was famed throughout antiquity. But its real wealth came after Paros colonized the northern Aegean island of Thasos circa 680 BC, seizing its abundant timber and productive gold mines.

What sort of society did the late eighth and early seventh-century inhabitants of Paros and contemporary Greek cities have? The soldiers' burials in Paroikia offer some clues. Two out of the 140 vases, most of which could be dated to ca. 730 BC, show typical funeral scenes of the time. The rest of the vases are like similar pots found in individual graves in the Kerameikos, Athens' early cemetery, and elsewhere (just with Geometric designs).

One of the two vases with the figured scenes mentioned above, slightly older (dated to approximately 750 BC—was it a heirloom used for the burial?) than the other, captures the images of a skirmish with a warrior fighting from a chariot with dead combatants laying next to him, and foot warriors one of whom carries a large “hourglass” shaped shield (a type known to have been in use in the Late Bronze Age) while fighting with the sword, whereas another carries a larger round shield (typical in size and shape of the shields to be used in phalanx formation). The other of the two vases with the figured scenes (dated to approximately 730 BC) captivates the themes of war and mourning, showing in a continuous narration the killing of a warrior in battle, fighting over his body, and laying out the body (in prothesis) before cremation. The body is laid out on a high bed or bier. Mourners stand alongside, women with both hands raised (perhaps tearing their hair) and men with one hand uplifted (possibly in a gesture of grief or salute to the dead). The battle scene depicts the instance of a fight for claiming the body of a fallen warrior while cavalry men mounted with helmet, shield, and spear, supported by moderately equipped bowmen and flying arrows proceed against a team of lightly armed sling shouters, loading and throwing their missiles (the first and earliest time sling shouters are ever depicted in battle scenes in Greek vase paintings), situated in relative vanguard yet in formation with a larger group of heavily armed foot warriors each carrying two spears and a round shield, called the hoplon, the same basic type that would be used throughout the Classical period and would give its name to the citizen-soldier, the hoplite. Moreover, the soldiers are depicted acting in unison.

In the Late Bronze Age, elite members of society fought on foot or from a chariot, using a throwing spear, sword, and large “hourglass” or rectangular “tower” shields. Hoplites, by contrast, were heavily armed infantry, equipped with a thrusting spear and sword, closed helmet, breastplate and corselet, greaves, and round shield or hoplon. But the difference was more than just what the soldiers carried, it was also in how they fought. War in the Aegean Late Bronze Age area was carried out in the form of individual duels rather than combat in organized formations; with hoplites came the tactic of fighting in close packed lines several men deep, known as the phalangeal pitched battle. The two vases from the Paroikia tombs show both older and newer fighting methods, recording an important change in society.

Scholars have long debated the role hoplite warfare played in the rise of social institutions that supported Classical city-states. It was thought that hoplite gear and phalanx were adopted around 700 BC. The new style of warfare, the argument went, shifted the state's military power from an elite warrior class to farmers, tradesmen, and other common people. Subsequently these new soldiers claimed a voice in the affairs of their cities, diluting the power of the aristocracy and laying the ground for citizen assemblies. It was seen as a social revolution.

This interpretation, however, was criticized as being far too simplistic. Moreover, close study of depictions on vases from ancient Greece suggested that hoplite gear was introduced piecemeal between 750 and 700, the phalanx coming shortly afterward, further discrediting the idea of such a single revolution event. Now, however, the two vases from the Parian polyandria offer evidentiary data that hoplite warfare was already established by about 730, making necessary a reconsideration of the matter.

The most celebrated of the ancient inhabitants of Paros, both in antiquity and possibly even today, is the early half of the seventh century BC soldier-poet Archilochus, who took part in the colonization of Thasos. Many of his lyric poems and epigrams deal with his experiences as a soldier. Some provide eyewitness testimony of tactics of his day, including one alluding to battle in a phalanx formation, which we now know was pioneered by his forebears: *“Psyche, my psyche perplexed with the immeasurable troubles that have found you, stand up, and ward off the dreadful assaults that lie in wait aiming toward your chest by standing resolute close to the face of the enemies”*.

We will likely never know what battle claimed the lives of these Parian citizen-soldiers. There were conflicts between Paros and nearby Naxos Island, Archilochus himself having been involved in them, but in general we still know little of them. Ancient authors also speak of a long-running war between Chalkis and Eretria, the two largest cities on the island of Euboea, between the mid-eighth and mid-seventh century BC. It was known as the Lelantine War, after the name of a plain that both cities claimed. “On this occasion the rest of the Hellenic world did join in with one side or the other,” wrote Thucydides in the fifth century. Centuries later

(first c. AD), geographer Strabo recorded an inscription that told of an agreement between the belligerents to ban missile weapons such as sling stones, arrows, and throwing spears. These were considered inferior and less courageous ways of fighting compared to the phalanx, with its discipline and organization required for the phalangeal frontal attack. Archilochus' verses about the war suggest Paros was involved in it: *"Not even the bows will be repeatedly stretched, not even the teeming slings when Ares gathers the toil and moil of war in the plain, there the grievous swords will start the job of causing many sighs, for the lords of Euboia are the demons of this battle, famed for their spears."*

Do the bones from the Paroikia tombs reflect such savage warfare? Through the ongoing study of the human cremated bones with a focus in paleopathology some preliminary observations can be made. The cremated remains of the majority of the 120 individuals were deposited as multiple interments in the funerary vases. Sex assessments indicate that they were all males of considerable skeletal robustness, and of those for whom it was possible to determine an approximate age at death, they ranged between 17 and 45 years. Although bone structures deteriorated as a result of pyre exposure and post cremation interment, add to that taphonomic conditions, some of the remains do show traumatic conditions sustained in battle, such as perimortem deeply penetrating wounds and cut marks chiefly observed on the long bones of the lower extremities, the innominates and sacral regions, cut marks on upper extremity fragments and most notably on the scapulae and the humeri, and in a lesser degree on cranial vault fragments, while minimally on the bones of the thorax (the latter is suggested to be a synergistic result of funerary ritual processes, the histologic structure of bone components involved, as well as the conditions provided by protective armor put on during battle). More dramatic are fragments of iron spear points (not burial artifacts) some of which were still embedded into endosteal components, whereas older either well healed or in advanced stages of healing traumatic impacts some of which were of severe consequences have been also detected, exclusively on bone fragments of individuals—past the stages of Young Adulthood. Given this grim evidence, Archilochus was probably speaking for many of his fellow soldiers when he mocked in the following verses the do-or-die approach espoused by the Spartans, who admonished their men to bring back their shields or be carried home dead on them: *"Thrilled is one of the Saians (a native Thracian warrior) with that unblemished shield I left unwillingly behind in the bushes. But I saved myself, so what do I care about the shield, the hell with it; I'll obtain an equally good one"*.

These two collective burials, the earliest known in the ancient Greek world, provide testimony of the social conditions at the dawn of Classical city-states. That the dead were interred as a group rather than in individual family graves, the usual practice, suggests a state supported funeral of the sort first described by Thucydides in Athens 300 years later. This is an indication of their status as citizens and their inclusion in the workings of the city. And two of the burial vases show the earliest evidence of citizen-soldiers fighting in cohesive units rather than as individuals. Clearly, the people of Paros were acting as an organized state by 730 BC. And this possibly explains their ability to successfully colonize Thasos a few decades later, overpowering after many battles the local Thracian tribes. The community identity and centralized decision-making processes necessary to undertake such an ambitious expedition were already in place.

Reaching into the past through archaeological recovery, the study of the monuments and the human remains from the polyandria and contemplating the lives of those memorialized here we may be reminded of both Archilochus' social criticisms bitterly reminding one of the lost privileges of the dead *"Once dead one has no more claim to respect and fame among the people of the city, whereas we that are alive rather seek grace and kind feelings from the living, therefore it will for ever be the worst for the dead"*, and of Aeschylus' 5th c. BC writings on aspects of the phalangeal war *"men go to war and in their place urns and ashes return to their home"*. And yet although we may never know the names of those whose bones we have the privilege of studying, we realize in retrospect that the incidence of their death wasn't fruitless. It contributed significantly to the foundations of the social and political environment of future generations in ancient Paros, and beyond. Through our work we are trying to elucidate further aspects of their lives and heroic deeds, and speak of them to others.

NOTE: The English versions of Archilochus' poems and excerpt of Aeschylus that appear in this article are translated by A. Agelarakis.

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