

ARMS AND THE KING: THE INSIGNIA OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

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ARMS AND ARMOUR ARE SYMBOLS of status in a warring society. Macedonian soldiers of the King's Army—the Macedones proper—were inordinately proud of their arms and armour, and that pride was maintained in the Indus valley by Alexander's provision of new panoplies inlaid with gold and silver (Curt. 9.3.21) and by his naming of the Hypaspists after their silver shields.¹ It was a cause of distress to them when Alexander gave Macedonian pikes and lances to picked Asian troops (Arr. An. 7.6.1 and 5). When Macedonians fell in battle, they were buried with their arms, and a tumulus was raised over their ashes. Thus at Chaeronea a tumulus, 70 m. in diameter and 7 m. high, marked the burial of the fallen in 338 B.C. When excavated, it yielded many iron weapons, including the heads of pikes and double-edged swords.² After the Battle of the Granicus in 334 B.C. Alexander buried the Macedonian dead "with their weapons and other accoutrements" (Arr. An. 1.16.5), and in 329 B.C. he raised a tumulus over the dead and sacrificed in honour of the dead "in accordance with Macedonian custom" (Curt. 7.9.21).³ The prestige conferred by arms and armour in the homeland was such that they were portrayed in paintings on the walls of the built-tomb of Lyson and Callicles (see *Macedonia* 150); and there was a painting of an armed cavalryman charging with his lance in practice on the wall of the Kinch Tomb.⁴

It was therefore no surprise to find arms and armour in the un plundered tombs at Vergina. What was remarkable was the superb quality of the arms and armour, the rich decoration in gold, and the number and variety of the weapons all for one man in Tomb II—sword in scabbard, short

The following abbreviations are used: Andronicos = M. Andronicos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs* (Athens 1984); Borza = E. N. Borza, "The Royal Macedonian Tombs and the Paraphernalia of Alexander the Great," *Phoenix* 41 (1987) 105–121; Hammond = N. G. L. Hammond, "'Philip's Tomb' in Historical Context," *GRBS* 19 (1978) 331–350; *Macedonia* = *Macedonia*, ed. M. B. Sakellariou (Athens 1983); *Sylloge* = *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum* V 3 (London 1976).

¹Curt. 4.13.27. Bronze Shields, White Shields, and gilded armour figure in the Battle of Pydna (Plut. *Aem.* 18.6–8).

²Summary and references to excavation reports in W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (Berkeley 1985) 138.

³It may be assumed from this mention that Alexander buried the Macedonian dead in the same manner after his other battles.

⁴See *History of the Greek Race*, vols. 1–12 (Athens 1970–) 4.186.

sword, six spears and pikes (each differing in size and shape)—and shield, helmet, cuirass, gorget (to protect the base of the throat),⁵ and three pairs of greaves (Andronicos 202). The king buried there had evidently fought as a cavalryman and as a phalangite, the short sword, the shield, and the greaves being appropriate to the latter. Whether it was believed that he would want them all in an afterlife may be doubted; they are rather marks of his prowess in the past.⁶ The king in Tomb III, whose bones were found to be those of a boy under sixteen years of age, can only be Alexander IV.⁷ With him were buried four spears, a linen cuirass decorated with gold, a gorget with gilt decoration, and a pair of gilded bronze greaves (Andronicos 202). These were suitable for a king of the age of a Royal Page.

The King and the King's Army paraded in full armour on ceremonial occasions. They were preceded at the festival called Xandica by "the arms and insignia of all past kings from the founding of Macedonia" (Livy 40.6.2, *arma <et> insignia omnium ab ultima origine Macedoniae regum*).⁸ These were, of course, other sets of arms and accoutrements than those buried with the corpses of the kings. For example, a separate set of arms and accoutrements must have been kept for display at the Xandica in the years after the interment of the occupant of Tomb II at Vergina. It was, no doubt, an article of Macedonian religious tradition and even belief that the arms of past kings had some potency when the King's Army was setting out for a campaign, as it was in 182 B.C. (Livy *loc. cit.*).⁹ The close association of his arms and armour with a dead king is shown by the fact that Eumenes included in "the royal gear" of the dead Alexander "the arms which he had been wont to use" (Diod. 18.61.1), when his council met in the presence of the king's spirit at Couinda in Cilicia in 318 B.C.

We turn now to the insignia of a king. These included his arms and armour, as we have seen at Couinda. On that occasion there were also a throne, a diadem, a sceptre, and a wreath (Diod. 18.60.6 and 61.1); and in

⁵Andronicos' word for the gorget is "pectoral," which is less explicit. He noted that "these pectorals formed a complement to the cuirass" and that the pectoral in the main chamber of Tomb II was found next to the cuirass (189). See also BSA 82 (1987) 10, where Andronicos mentions the pectoral and cuirass in the large cist-tomb at Katerini, which is dated by a coin of Amyntas III to before 350 B.C. It is even larger than Tomb I at Vergina, which I have suggested was the tomb of Amyntas III (Hammond 338).

⁶Similarly the gold-embroidered purple robe, the arms of the dead man and the gold coffin on the funerary car were intended "to fit his previous accomplishments" (Diod. 18.26.4), rather than to accompany him to an afterlife.

⁷See Hammond in *Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage*, ed. W. L. Adams and E. N. Borza (Washington 1982) 116.

⁸The Loeb edition reads *arma insignia* and translates "the arms and the standards"; but with its text the meaning is "the illustrious arms."

⁹It was this belief which prompted the sacrifices to Alexander in 318 B.C. (Diod. 18.60.6 and 61.1), and to Philip and Alexander in 317 B.C. (Diod. 19.22.1 and 3).

323 B.C., when the succession to Alexander was being discussed, mention was made of a throne, a diadem, a royal robe and a signet-ring as well as of his arms (Curt. 10.6.4, *regia sella ... diadema vestisque Alexandri cum armis ... anulum*). These insignia were symbols of regal authority. When Philip Arrhidaeus was acclaimed king by the infantry, he put on "the robe of his brother, the very one which had been placed on the throne" (Curt. 10.7.13), and also the diadem similarly, because he later took it off in offering to abdicate (10.8.20). But these were not articles which Philip kept. For when the succession was completed, the embalmed corpse of Alexander was placed in a gold coffin and "the insignia of his rank were placed by his head" (10.10.13, *capiti adiecta fortunae eius insignia*); for these insignia were presumably those mentioned in the preceding sections.

The insignia were to accompany Alexander to his tomb. Mention of some of them is found in the description of the funerary car of Alexander in Diodorus (18.26-27): the gold coffin, the purple gold-embroidered robe, and the arms placed upon the coffin-cover, a plaque representing Alexander holding a splendid sceptre (27.1), and a gold wreath of olive (27.2). It was probably the traditional practice to bury such objects with a king. Thus at Vergina, in addition to the arms and armour, a sceptre,¹⁰ and a gold wreath were found in Tomb II; and a royal robe, a spear with a gold casing (perhaps a sceptre), a gold wreath, and a gilded bronze wreath were found in Tomb III. Marble thrones of fine workmanship have been found in two plundered built-tombs at Vergina.¹¹ Another object which should probably be included among the insignia in Tomb II is a remarkable shield, made of wood and leather and faced on the outside with decoration in gold, silver, glass, and ivory, and on the inside with gilded silver sheets. As Andronicos remarked, the shield was "completely unsuitable to ward off the blows of battle"; its use had been on ceremonial and religious occasions (Andronicos 140).

The burial of a Macedonian king was a matter of great moment. Death did not mark the end of his influence and power. In the discussion about the succession to Alexander in 323 Ptolemy proposed that councils should be held in the royal quarters in the presence of the royal throne of Alexander (Curt. 10.6.15); and this was indeed done by Eumenes and the other commanders in 318 B.C. When the final decision about the succession was taken by the Assembly of Macedones, the corpse of Alexander was in the centre "in order that his majesty should be witness to their decisions" (Just. 13.4.4). The assumption of Ptolemy, Eumenes, and the Macedonian soldiers

¹⁰It was described as two metres long and wrapped in gold (see Hammond 331 ff., citing early reports in n. 1 of that article); see also M. Andronicos, "Vergina. The Royal Graves in the Great Tumulus," *AAA* 10 (1977) 1-72, at 59, and *id.*, "The Royal Tomb of Philip II," *Archaeology* 31.5 (1978) 33-41, at 38.

¹¹A throne decorated with sphinxes, as in Rhomaios' tomb at Vergina, is shown on Alexander's coins (*Sylloge* 2810 and 2812).

whom Eumenes duped was that Alexander, though dead, was believed to influence the decisions of the council. It was very important therefore that his influence should be concentrated at Aegeae, the burial place of the kings of the Temenid line, and it was the intention of Perdikkas, the manager of the two kings, that the funerary car of Alexander should proceed to Aegeae for his interment in a vaulted tomb, of which the vault over the coffin was intended to be a replica (Diod. 18.26.5).

In the event the funerary car was intercepted by Ptolemy's army and brought to Egypt, where Ptolemy was establishing his own power. In Egypt "he prepared a precinct worthy of the glory of Alexander in size and construction, buried him therein, honoured him with sacrifices due to a hero and with splendid games, and won fair rewards not only from men but also from the gods" (Diod. 18.28.4).¹² There is no doubt that Ptolemy placed the arms and armour and the insignia of Alexander (which had travelled on the funerary car) in Alexander's hallowed tomb in Egypt; for in following the traditional procedure of burial he hoped to attract Macedonian soldiers to his service.

The suggestion has been advanced by Borza (105) that "some of the objects found within the tomb (Tomb II at Vergina) may have belonged to Alexander the Great." If so, of course, Tomb II has to be dated after the death of Alexander, that being a date which Borza favours on other grounds (they are not stated in his article).¹³ He is concerned with the *possibility* (his italics) that some of the objects may have belonged to Alexander. To take an outstanding example, he suggests that the ceremonial shield in Tomb II may be the shield which was taken from the shrine of Athena at Troy and saved Alexander's life at the city of the Malli and that it may have passed into the possession of Peucestas, from whom it reached Tomb II, supposedly the tomb of Philip Arrhidaeus. The difficulties are that at Troy Alexander took "the strongest of the panoplies and equipped himself with it" for battle (Diod. 17.18.1; Arr. An. 1.11.7); that the shield which was part of the panoply was carried, "they say," into the battles before him by the hypaspists (Arr. An. 1.11.8); and that this same shield with which Peucestas protected the wounded Alexander at the city of the Malli kept off the missiles, one of which had pierced Alexander's metal cuirass (Arr. An. 6.10.2, "the sacred shield from Ilium"; Diod. 17.99.4 and Curt. 9.5.17, both without saying the shield was from Troy).¹⁴ The ceremonial shield in Tomb

¹²Diodorus is here describing Alexander's final resting place, at Alexandria.

¹³I am most grateful to him for sending me a copy of his article, which encouraged me to write about Alexander's arms.

¹⁴The account of Arrian is the most dependable; see N. G. L. Hammond, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great: The So-called Vulgate Authors, Diodorus, Justin and Curtius* (Cambridge 1983) 65 and 154, for the accounts of Diodorus and Curtius, which derive from a common, unreliable source, namely Cleitarchus.

II, being made of wood and leather, would not have been the strongest at Troy and would have afforded little or no protection against the Malli's arrows at close range. As a part of Alexander's personal armoury, it would not have been, as Borza suggests, in the possession of Peucestas; and if it had been, it would have passed into the hands of Antigonos Monophthalmus, who never reached Europe, let alone Aegeae. It seems to me impossible that the ceremonial shield in Tomb II was that taken from Troy by Alexander.

Borza draws attention, as I had done (see above, n. 7, 119), to the general resemblance between the helmet, cuirass, and gorget in Tomb II and those worn by Alexander in 331. Whereas I commented that the resemblance showed that the armour in Tomb II was "entirely appropriate to the time of Philip's death" in 336, Borza suggests that these three items in Tomb II were those actually worn by Alexander in his battles. Let us consider the helmet first. That in Tomb II was of iron, with cheekpieces and a high crest, but without such sockets for plumes as are seen on the mid-fourth-century helmet from Vitsa;¹⁵ and Andronicos thought that the iron helmet, cuirass, and gorget had a silver sheen, when polished (Andronicos 144). In 334 at the Granicus River Alexander's arms and armour were conspicuous for their brilliance (Arr. An. 1.14.4, λαμπρότης, as in Polyb. 11.9.1), and the helmet was remarkable in carrying two white plumes (Plut. Alex. 16.7). No doubt its brilliance was because it was of polished iron, like the helmet Alexander wore at Gaugamela in 331 (Plut. Alex. 32.9). In the action at the Granicus the chopper of Rhoesaces broke off a part of the helmet (Arr. An. 1.15.7), split it open (Diod. 17.20.6), and broke off the crest and one plume (Plut. Alex. 16.10). The two-plumed helmet was commemorated as an emblem on a coin later issued by Alexander.¹⁶ That helmet had seen the last of its serviceable days; and it differed from the helmet in Tomb II in having sockets for its two plumes. It cannot therefore be the helmet in Tomb II, as Borza perhaps implies.¹⁷ The only detail we have of Alexander's helmet—obviously an undamaged one—for the battle of Gaugamela is that it was of iron (Plut. Alex. 32.9). The helmet depicted on the Porus medallion has a crest and two plumes (for this helmet see Borza 113); again it cannot be the helmet in Tomb II, which had no sockets for plumes.¹⁸

A cuirass resembling that in Tomb II in its shoulder-pieces, straight top, and decoration is shown on the Tarsus medallion, which has been thought

¹⁵Well illustrated in *Macedonia* 165; see also J. Vokotopoulou, "Phrygische Helme," AA 1982, 497–520, for discussion.

¹⁶*Sylloge* 2604 (two-plumed); 3064 and 3609 (a helmet crest).

¹⁷This seems to be the point of his note 30.

¹⁸For a similar plumeless, crested helmet see the cavalryman's helmet in the Kinch Tomb fresco (M. B. Hatzopoulos and L. Loukopoulos, eds., *Philip of Macedon* [Athens 1980] 70) and *Sylloge* 3064 and 3069.

generally to portray Philip.¹⁹ Alexander's cuirass at the Granicus River had a joint (as that in Tomb II does) which was pierced by a javelin (Plut. *Alex.* 16.7); and at the city of the Malli his cuirass was pierced by an arrow at close range (Arr. *An.* 6.10.1; Plut. *Alex.* 63.6; Curt. 9.5.9). After this experience he is likely to have procured a new and stronger cuirass. The Alexander-mosaic, reproducing a painting probably of the Battle of Issus, shows Alexander in a cuirass like that on the Tarsus medallion. But the cuirass in Tomb II differs from each of them in having a high back.²⁰ The gorget in Tomb II was a complement to the cuirass and was found near it. The gorget which Alexander wore for the battle of Gaugamela was attached to the helmet (Plut. *Alex.* 32.9) and was therefore quite unlike that in Tomb II, which was more like a low collar; moreover, it was set with precious stones. No such stones were found with the gorget in Tomb II. It seems then that the gorget in Tomb II cannot be equated with that worn for the battle of Gaugamela.

Although it seems clear that the helmet, the cuirass, and the gorget in Tomb II do not fit any of the known articles of Alexander's armour, the question remains whether in fact it is likely that any arms and armour worn by Alexander reached Macedonia, and if so whether it is likely that they were placed in the tomb of Philip Arrhidaeus. The answer is complicated by the fact that the king must have had several sets of arms and armour for different kinds of warfare, for ceremonies, and for replacements.²¹ All we can say is that one set went with Alexander's corpse to Egypt, never to return.²² Another set was in the treasury at Susa, later moved to Couinda,²³ where it was used for the council meetings of Eumenes and his colleagues (Diod. 18.61.1); and after the defeat and death of Eumenes that set came into the possession of Antigonus Monophthalmus and stayed in Asia. There is a remote *possibility*—and the question is of *possibilities*—that a third

¹⁹See *Philip of Macedon* (above, n. 18) 228. A. N. Oikonomides, "The Portrait of Pyrrhos King of Epirus in Hellenistic and Roman Art," *Anc. World* 8 (1983) 67–73, has doubts, but they do not seem substantial.

²⁰This point is overlooked by Borza, who does not go into detail when he says that the cuirass in Tomb II is "similar" to that in the mosaic.

²¹There was such a variety of weapons in Tomb II; weapons for hunting were probably different too. When Borza writes "it is difficult to explain how this material found its way to Macedonia" (116), he seems to be thinking of a single set of arms and armour.

²²In Roman times a glass coffin was substituted for the gold coffin at Alexandria, and it was probably from there that Caius Caligula got the cuirass of Alexander which he put on (Suet. *Cal.* 52; cf. Dio 59.3).

²³At Couinda a gold throne was made up from the abundant gold in the Treasury (Diod. 18.60.6); but "the diadem, the sceptre, and the arms which he had been wont to wear" were already at hand (18.61.1). See also Plut. *Eum.* 13.4, and for a different view see R. M. Errington, "Alexander in the Hellenistic Age," in *Alexandre le Grande. Image et réalité* (Vandoeuvres-Genève 1976, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 22, Fondation Hardt) 137–179, at 140–141: "purely imaginary relics of Alexander."

set was taken from Babylon by Perdikkas, fell into the hands of Antipater at Triparadisus, and was taken by him to Macedonia in 320.²⁴ Would this set of arms and armour and the accompanying spares then be placed by Cassander²⁵ in the tomb in which Philip Arrhidaeus, killed in 317, was laid in 316? The answer may be yes on the (to me improbable) supposition that Philip Arrhidaeus regularly wore the arms of Alexander, and also that he could get into the cuirass of Alexander, who was very short. We hear only once of Philip Arrhidaeus getting his hands on a spear. It was at the trial of Phocion, when the king tried to kill a supporter of Phocion but was tackled and stopped by Polyperchon (Plut. *Phoc.* 33.7). The probability is rather that Philip Arrhidaeus was buried not with the equipment of Alexander, a versatile warrior, but with his own gear, worn on religious occasions and at ceremonies (Curt. 10.7.2), such as a military parade, i.e., the sort of gear buried with Alexander IV—a royal robe, a cuirass of gold-decorated linen, and gilded greaves.²⁶ In short, I should reject Borza's offer of "a hypothesis that the burial goods of Tomb II may include some of the royal accessories of Alexander the Great" (118).

The case for the occupants of Tomb II being Philip II and either Meda, the daughter of the Getic king Cothelas in northern Thrace, or a Scythian, the heiress of Atheas, was strong from the start (see Hammond 335 f. and 343 f.). It has been greatly, and I think decisively, strengthened by the finding of the team of experts²⁷ that the socket below the right eye of the male skeleton showed severe damage, compatible with the wounding of Philip II at the siege of Methone in 354, which cost him the sight of his right eye (Diod. 16.34.5); and by the publication of the gorget²⁸ found in the antechamber of Tomb II, which Andronicos judged to have been "made probably for some Thracian ruler," because similar gorgets have been found in Thracian royal tombs and because the representation of the four young horsemen on the gorget, less delicate in taste, was appropriate to the Thracian market. As I wrote in 1981 (see above, n. 7, 124), "it is important to cover all the details of the evidence as they emerge and not to pick on just one or two details," and that is still true. If the hypothesis is advanced that

²⁴I am using the chronology suggested in N. G. L. Hammond, with F. W. Walbank *A History of Macedonia* (Oxford 1988) 3.618.

²⁵Cassander detested Alexander and showed it by restoring Thebes; would he have wanted to put Alexander's arms in a tomb of Philip Arrhidaeus, Eurydice, and Cynna?

²⁶Andronicos 202 and 217. The suggestion in Borza 112, that the linen cuirass worn by Alexander at Gaugamela (Plut. *Alex.* 32.8) was taken from Darius, is not consistent with Arrian's report of what was taken from Darius, namely bow, *kandys*, and shield (2.11.8).

²⁷A. J. N. W. Prag, J. H. Musgrave and R. A. H. Neave, "The Skull from Tomb II at Vergina: Philip II of Macedon," *JHS* 104 (1984) 60–78.

²⁸Andronicos 188–189, calling it a "pectoral"; it was not associated here with any cuirass and was decorated as a piece of jewellery.

the occupants of Tomb II are Philip Arrhidaeus and Eurydice, it is necessary to account for the difference between the age inferred from the cremated bones and the age of Eurydice on the literary evidence, the unfinished state of the plastering and of the marble door on the inside of the main chamber, the delay in adding the antechamber, the contents of the brick tray set in the plaster of the top, the ages of the main figures in the hunt-fresco, and the small pyre on the flat top of the facade.²⁹ This has not yet been done by the few who still think that Tomb II was made in 316 to receive the remains of Philip Arrhidaeus and Eurydice.³⁰

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²⁹For the relevance of these points to the circumstances of Philip's death and Alexander's succession, Philip being the interred king on Tomb II, see Hammond 339 and 349.

³⁰Points advanced by Borza 106 ff. against Philip being buried in Tomb II were the "salt-cellar," the size of Tomb II's antechamber, the vault, and the facade, and a lion in the hunting fresco. The discarded salt-cellar found in a well in the Agora (dated ca 325-295 in Susan I. Rotroff, "Spool Saltcellars in the Athenian Agora," *Hesperia* 53 [1984] 343-354, at 351) were not necessarily or even probably the earliest such salt-cellar to appear in Athens, let alone Macedonia; the salt-cellar in Tomb II are only one item in six separate lots of pottery dated by Andronicos (222) ca 350-325. The antechamber was large because it contained a burial, whether in 336 or 316. The vault has to be considered in relation to Sophocles fr. 367 and Plato *Laws* 947d (Hammond 338, n. 23), and more fully M. Andronicos, "Some Reflections on the Macedonian Tombs," *BSA* 82 (1987) 1-16, at 5 f. A forerunner of the facade has been found at Vergina (see Andronicos, *loc. cit.* 12 ff., and especially 15). Hunting of a lion was not peculiar to Asia; see the lion-hunt scene depicted on a coin of Amyntas III, and Hdt. 6.125 and Xen. *Cyn.* 11 for lions in Macedonia.