



Ancient Weapons

New Research Perspectives on Weapons and Warfare

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Giacomo Bardelli · Raimon Graells i Fabregat (eds)

ANCIENT WEAPONS

NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON WEAPONS AND WARFARE

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PREFACE

A strong bond connects the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum and the research on ancient weapons and warfare. The study of defensive weapons, in particular, has become a sort of »speciality of the house« since the 1970s, as shown by many contributions dedicated to helmets and cuirasses, published as monographs or as papers in different volumes of the RGZM series.

An ideal turning point in the history of the research was represented by Markus Egg's monograph on Italic helmets in 1986 (Monographien des RGZM 11) and, two years later, by the almost encyclopaedic catalogue of the Berlin exhibition »Antike Helme« (Monographien des RGZM 14), dedicated to the helmets collection of the Berlin Museums, including the famous collection Lipperheide. This book in particular set a milestone not only for the investigation of this specific type of weapons, but also for ancient weapons in general.

While the typological method had been the main research approach for many scholars for a long time, the meticulous research carried out on helmets by different specialists certified that the study of weapons had definitely emerged from the narrow recess of enthusiastic collectors and cataloguers of rarities to reach a more complex dimension, in which weapons needed to be seen as active agents of the archaeological and historical debate. In this respect, modern archaeology goes beyond the interest in the exterior appearance of ancient weapons and focuses on the study of single objects to explore new research avenues. Technological transfer, social interaction and conflict dynamics of ancient societies can be investigated through the analysis of weapons and warfare, including considering their material and symbolic features.

Aspects like their ergonomic design, the finest selection of materials, and the highly developed technological background still make pre- and protohistorical, as well as classical weapons, some of the most appreciated items by warfare specialists all over the world. However, weapons gain a special interest with specific regard to the investigation of social phenomena, such as the mobility of individuals and the recruitment of mercenaries, in order to study some features of the past for which no information from written sources is available, or to reveal unexpected traces of their ancient biographies. It is not all about warriors and war: better than other ancient objects, weapons allow to reflect on cultural transfer, since they are often the expression of identities and the result of negotiation processes. Far from being objects for amateurs and collectors, ancient weapons become protagonists in historical and scientific reconstructions, with a huge potential as sources of knowledge.

Since 2014, the department headed by Markus Egg at the RGZM has taken part in the organisation of three conferences on ancient weapons: »Waffen für die Götter« (Innsbruck 2013), »Armas de la Hispania Prerromana« (Madrid 2016) and »Armi Votive in Magna Grecia« (Salerno-Paestum 2017). Colleagues from many different European countries have participated in these congresses and published their contributions in the respective proceedings (RGZM – Tagungen 24, 28, 36). These experiences represented more than an opportunity to expose new research results and have transformed these meetings into a very dynamic network for academic exchange between scholars. Beside offering extensive updates on complex subjects, the results of the conferences are now essential references for the advancement of weapons research, especially concerning the social, religious and cultural implications of ancient warfare.

Why another conference on ancient weapons then? Considering the very positive results of the previous three meetings and the wide impact of the following publications, we thought it was interesting to go beyond the thematic approach which characterised those conferences and to propose a meeting independent from any specific region or restricted chronological frame, focusing only on the comparison between dif-

ferent methodological approaches. For this purpose, we decided to invite some colleagues who have been dealing in recent years with the study of weapons from different archaeological perspectives.

As one can see, we have chosen the format of a small meeting with the idea to compare and discuss very concrete topics. Consequently, our personal research methods and strategies to investigate ancient weapons have been the common thread to stimulate the debate.

The research presented here derives from different projects, including the results of doctoral and post-doctoral programs, some of which are still ongoing. Some contributions deal with large series of weapons, while others focus on single case studies. We looked mainly at weapons from sanctuaries, graves, hoards, and iconographic sources, considering several archaeological sites as well as large areas and different chronological periods. The aim was to deliberately create a sort of controlled chaos.

The range of different situations, questions, and archaeological realities presented in this book is as wide as possible. Therefore, the title »Ancient Weapons« does not entail any spatial, chronological, cultural, or contextual limitation. The experiment was to test the potential of this research field, and how different methods can be applied to various topics in order to develop new questions for future research. The concrete result of this idea was immediately evident in the stimulating discussions that followed each talk and in the final debate. Although no detailed account of these can be presented here, we do believe that the author of each contribution learnt something and was inspired by unexpected ideas and advices.

Unfortunately, we could not include all the papers presented during the conference in this publication. Be that as it may, we prefer to blame it on the *annus horribilis*, 2020. As adequate compensation, we are pleased to present Joachim Weidig's paper, which was originally planned for the conference, but could not be presented in September of 2019.

The organisation of this conference was possible thanks to a funding of the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. We would like to thank Christopher Pare and the department of Pre- and Protohistory of the »Institut für Altertumswissenschaften« of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz for having hosted our event in their conference room. Thanks also to the RGZM staff (Vera Kassühlke, Regina Molitor, Patrick Zuccaro) for the great assistance before and during both days of the conference. As always, this publication is the result of the meticulous work of the editorial staff of the RGZM: thank you Claudia Nickel and Marie Reiter; it was, as always, »einwandfrei«.

Finally, our deepest gratitude goes to Markus Egg. He inspired, funded, and encouraged much of our research, teaching us that, despite the love for weapons, »*nulla salus bello: pacem te poscimus omnes*«.

Mainz / Alicante, March 2021

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