

## A lead sling bullet of the Macedonian King Philip V (221–179 BC)

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### ABSTRACT

One of the most interesting ancient artefacts are the lead sling bullets, especially if they have images or inscriptions.

The current paper presents a very interesting lead sling bullet, originating from southwest Bulgaria (found somewhere between the villages of Ilindentsi and Gorna Gradeshnitsa, Blagoevgrad district) that was photographed in a private collection in Blagoevgrad some years ago. The lead sling bullet is almond-shaped and is much larger than the known standard sling bullets. The size and weight of this sling bullet puts it among the largest examples of such bullets that are generally rare. Only a few other items similar in size were previously known from Bulgaria, none of which, however, has inscriptions or symbols.

It is particularly interesting that the sling bullet discussed here has a surviving 'central branch' and uncut casting residues, i.e. it looks exactly as it was taken out of the mold. Right in the middle of the side depicting a relief thunderbolt, the Greek letters ΦΙ are visible. They are commonly found on bronze coins of Philip V as an abbreviation of his name with only the first two letters. Many numismatics examples define this lead sling bullet categorically as belonging to the Macedonian king Philip V (221–179 BC) and associate it with the campaign of this Macedonian king in the land of the Thracian tribe Maedi and the siege of their settlement Petra in 181 BC, (Livy XL, 22).

The artefact discussed here underlines the important role of the sling bullets utilized by the army in the Hellenistic period. If inscribed, these objects can serve as primary sources of information for the reconstruction of some historical events.

### KEYWORDS

Sling bullet, Macedonian king, Philip V, campaign, Thrace, Maedi, Petra

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One of the most interesting ancient artefacts are the lead sling bullets, especially if they have images or inscriptions, since that makes them an important source of historical information.

After the publication of Venedikov (Венедиков 1952), these objects were rarely discussed in Bulgarian historiography. Almost two decades ago, an attempt was made to summarize the available information (Paunov, Dimitrov 2000), but as far as this research theme is rather large there is always room for new observations and conclusions. Sling bullets found at the Thracian ruler residence at peak Kozi gramadi (Goat heaps) and published in the last decade were definitely connected with two commanders of the Macedonian king Philip II (359–336 BC) (Christov, Manov 2011; Hristov, Manov 2011). Similar inscribed lead sling bullets have been recently published from the time of Philip II that were found in the region of Sliven in Bulgaria, as well as elsewhere in the Balkans (Nankov 2015). Moreover, hitherto unknown type of sling bullets with inscriptions relating to Alexander the Great have been found in Thrace that have been linked to Alexander's campaign in Thrace in 335 BC (Manov, Torbov 2016).



Fig. 1. A large lead sling bullet with image of a club on one side and image of a thunderbolt on the other side, together with the casting 'branch' still attached (photos by the author)

Фиг. 1. Голяма оловна тежест за пращка с изображение на кривак на едната страна и мълния – на другата, заедно с „клончето“ от отливането (снимки: авторът)

The current paper presents a very interesting lead sling bullet, originating from south-west Bulgaria (found somewhere between the villages of Ilindentsi and Gorna Gradeshnitsa, Blagoevgrad district) that was photographed in a private collection in Blagoevgrad some years ago. The lead sling bullet is almond-shaped. A relief image of Heracles' club is represented on one side, occupying almost the entire length of the object. The other side depicts a relief image of a thunderbolt that also is occupying almost the entire length. The dimensions are as follows: length – 8.3 cm (with the remains of the casting) or 5.7 cm (without the remains of the casting); clear width – without the lateral edge of the casting – 2.5 cm; weight – 136 g (fig. 1). The size and weight of this sling bullet puts it among the largest examples of such bullets that are generally rare. Only a few other items similar in size were previously known from Bulgaria – two of them weighing 102 g and 104 g and originating from the region of Rupite, Blagoevgrad district (Paunov, Dimitrov 2000, 53), another two deriving from the area of the village of Ilindentsi, Blagoevgrad district (Paunov, Dimitrov 2000, 54), and four others from the region of the village of Dragoevo, Shumen district (Атанасов, Тодоров 1997, 62; 65). All of these heavy sling bullets published so far, however, are with no images or inscriptions. A relatively large sling bullet also found in Bulgaria is 4.1 cm in length and has an image of thunderbolt on the one side, together with the inscription ПАПАС on the other side (Венедиков 1952, 369-370, № 3). The large lead sling bullets are significantly bigger than their more common 'standard' counterparts, which do not exceed a length of 3-3.5 cm and weight of 30-40 grams.

It is particularly interesting that the sling bullet discussed here has a surviving 'central branch' and uncut casting residues, i.e. it looks exactly as it was taken out of the mold. That means that the mold had a 'tree' shape and this sling bullet was part of a larger casting mold. There are traces of cutting of two other sling bullets of similar size, therefore it is safe to suggest that the mold consisted of three specially made forms. Perhaps the mold consisted of only three "nests" because of the excessive size of the sling bullets. After pouring, the molten lead cools down very quickly and it would not have been appropriate for the two halves of the mold to have more "nests", as in those with smaller weights. For standard sling bullets molds could contain 6, 8, and possibly up to 10 "nests". A very good idea of how such a casting mold would have looked like is the preserved bronze half mold kept in the Paul Canellopoulos collection (Empereur 1981, 555, fig. 29) (fig.2). It consists of six nests and it is very revealing for the technological process of casting of such sling bullets. A wide opening is left on top of the mold, while the nests for different sling bullets are linked with narrow tubes; inscriptions and symbolic images, when present, are engraved in advance 'in negative' on the mold.

The large sling bullet presented here is with preserved portion of the casting ("branch")

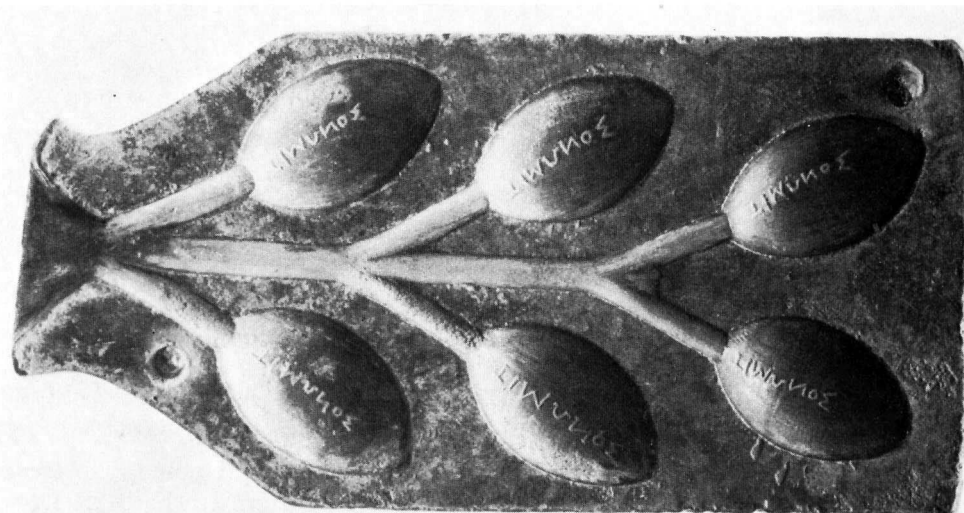


Fig. 2. A bronze mold for casting of lead sling bullets from the Paul Canellopoulos collection  
(after Empereur 1981, 555, fig. 29)

Фиг. 2. Бронзов калъп за отливане на оловни тежести за прашки  
от колекция Paul Canellopoulos (по Empereur 1981, 555, fig. 29)

of the wider opening of the mold and it is one of the two side sling bullets. The central and the other lateral sling bullets have already been cut and apparently launched in the battle. Due to unknown circumstances, however – probably shortage of time during the battle or termination of the battle – the example presented here has not been cut. It is very intriguing that the casting residues were entirely detached from only one edge, while the other has very clear traces of where the cutting has started and has stopped.

The two relief images depicted on the sling bullet are very helpful in determining its origin and dating. Thunderbolt and Heracles' club are the most popular images on the coins of the Macedonian kings of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC – Philip V (221-179 BC) and his son Perseus (179-168 BC). That is why this sling bullet should be considered as Macedonian and dated between the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

In fact, in addition of being main symbols, the thunderbolt and the club of Heracles, with iconography that is very similar to the one discussed here, have also been used as additional symbols mostly in the coinage of Philip V. The image of Heracles' club is found as an additional symbol on a series of tetradrachms of this Macedonian king (fig. 3) – tetradrachms from series III according to the classification of Chr. Boehringer (Boehringer 1972, 102-104; SNG Alpha Bank 2000, No. 1052; Драганов 2001, 181, No. 716). Moreover, this image is the main symbol on the reverse of this type of tetradrachms, which the German scholar dates to 188/187-179 BC.

Thunderbolt rendered identically to the one discussed here is used as an additional symbol on other tetradrachms of the same series of Philip V (fig. 4) (Драганов 2001, 181, No. 715). As a main symbol the thunderbolt features on the highest denomination of the bronze coins of Philip V (fig. 5; SNG Alpha Bank 2000, Nos. 1110-1115), while Heracles' club appears on a series of bronze denominations bearing the name and royal title of Philip V (SNG Alpha Bank 2000, Nos. 1099-1101). Since the sling bullet was found in the valley of middle Struma, this also supports the above argued determination and dating.

Starting with the side of the relief thunderbolt, a very distinct Greek letter Φ is depicted right in the middle and barely noticeable to the right of it is a Greek letter Ι (fig. 1b).





Fig. 3. A tetradrachm of Philip V with an additional symbol – the club of Heracles (after Leu Numismatik AG, Auction 83, May 6th, 2002, Lot number: 207)

Фиг. 3. Тетрадрахма на Филип V с допълнителен символ кривак на Херакъл (Leu Numismatik AG, Auction 83, May 6th, 2002, Lot number: 207)



Fig. 4. A tetradrachm of Philip V with an additional symbol of thunderbolt (after CNG, Mail Bid Sale 63, May 21st, 2003, Lot number: 211)

Фиг. 4. Тетрадрахма на Филип V с допълнителен символ мълния (CNG, Mail Bid Sale 63, May 21st, 2003, Lot number: 211)



Fig. 5. A bronze coin of Philip V with a winged thunderbolt on the reverse (after Tom Cederlind Auction 150, March 2009)

Фиг. 5. Бронзова монета на Филип V с крилата мълния на реверса (Tom Cederlind Auction 150, March 2009)



Fig. 6. A bronze coin of Philip V of the type "Head of young Heracles r., in lion's skin around neck; club over shoulder / ΒΑ ΦΙ, prow of galley right" (after Triton VIII, 2005, Lot: 194)

Фиг. 6. Бронзова монета на Филип V от типа „Глава на Херакъл с кривак на рамо/ ΒΑ ΦΙ прора“ (Triton VIII, 2005, Lot: 194)



Fig. 7. A bronze coin of Philip V of the type "Head of the hero Perseus right/harpa" (after V coins, e-auction, April 2007)

Фиг. 7. Бронзова монета на Филип V от типа „Глава на героя Персей/харпа“ (V coins, e-auction, April 2007)



Fig. 8. A silver didrachm of the Ainianes in Thessaly (around 168–148 BC) (image: courtesy of CNG Auction 70, Lot No. 163)

Фиг. 8. Сребърна дидрахма на Енианите в Тесалия (ок. 168 – 148 г. пр. Хр.) (CNG Auction 70, Lot No. 163)

It is very clear that the letter Φ is rendered in relief and is slightly tilted to the right. In other words, in the middle of the thunderbolt there are Greek letters ΦΙ, which are a common characteristic for the bronze coins of Philip V presenting an abbreviation of his name by the first two letters (fig. 6). Some of the lesser bronze denominations of the same ruler have the abbreviation ΒΑ referring to his royal title that is followed only by the first letter of his name – Φ (fig. 7; SNG Alpha Bank 2000, No. 1129). The presence of these two letters ΦΙ and especially that they are slightly tilted to the right – a manner well known from a series of bronze coins and some silver denominations of Philip V, categorically points to the conclusion that the large sling bullet bears the symbols of the Macedonian Antigonid dynasty in their attempt to propagandise their relationship to the oldest Macedonian Argead dynasty, as well as the first two letters of the name of Philip V. However, it is true that there is no explicit abbreviation of a royal title on this sling bullet, rather some traces of letters resembling ΒΑ on one side, just right to the club image (fig. 2b). Even if such an abbreviation is missing, the initial letters of the name of Philip V together with the very explicit Macedonian royal symbols rendered on both sides of the sling bullet and the large size of the latter are ‘eloquent emblems’ for royal identification. The dates of the silver tetradrachms from series III after Boehringer (188-179 BC), with its alternating additional symbols of club and thunderbolt, correspond very well in terms of time with the last two campaigns of Philip V in Thrace – in 184/183 BC and 181 BC. Livy (Livy XL, 22, 12) mentions a siege of the Thracian town of Petra that is linked with Philip V campaign in 181 BC.

Although there are known lead sling bullets bearing the names of important historical figures, i.e. royals and army commanders such as the Lydian satrap Tissaphernes (Foss 1975), the Macedonian kings – Philip II (Robinson 1941, 418-438, No. 2228-2241) and his son Alexander the Great (Empereur 1981, 556, No. 2, fig. 30; Avram 2016, 489-490 with lit.; Manov, Torbov 2016, 30; 33, No. 1-12), and the Theban general Epaminondas (ca. 371-362 BC) (Empereur 1981, 559-560, No. 15, fig. 38), this is the first time to my knowledge that such a large sling bullet with the name of the Macedonian king Philip V (221–179 BC.) is being published, albeit the name is in abbreviation. Moreover, Epaminondas’ name is also abbreviated by the first four letters, as well as Lysimachus’ name by the first two letters ΛΥ as is evident from several of his lead sling bullets (Avram 2016, 491; Manov, Torbov 2016, 31, No. 16).

Only one sling bullet is known so far from the excavations in Pella that is also inscribed with the two letters ΦΙ and the author of the publication identifies it as belonging to Philip V (Παπακωνσταντίνου-Διαμαντούρου 1997, 253-259; SEG 47, 930) since stamped tiles with the abbreviation ΒΑ ΦΙ were found at the same place, and despite other scholars’ opinion that this sling bullet may have belonged to any commander (Avram et al. 2013, 291 with ref.). A recently published sling bullet with the same inscription of only two letters ΦΙ has derived from the lands of ancient Thrace and probably has also belonged to the troops of Philip V (Manov, Torbov 2016, 33, No. 27). Some sling bullets found on the islands of Corcyra (Corfu) and Antikythera with the sole inscription of the title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ were also assumed as related to Philip V (Avram 2011, 345-346; Avram et al. 2013, 234-237). The sling bullet from Pella (Παπακωνσταντίνου-Διαμαντούρου 1997, 253-259; SEG 47, 930), the one found in Thrace (Manov, Torbov 2016, 33, No. 27) and the newly presented here large sling bullet also found in Thrace in the middle Struma valley – all inscribed with the first two letters of the name of Philip V – ΦΙ could now be securely associated with the troops of the Macedonian king Philip V.

The participation of units of slingers is recorded by Arrianus (Arr. *Anab.* I, 2, 4) in

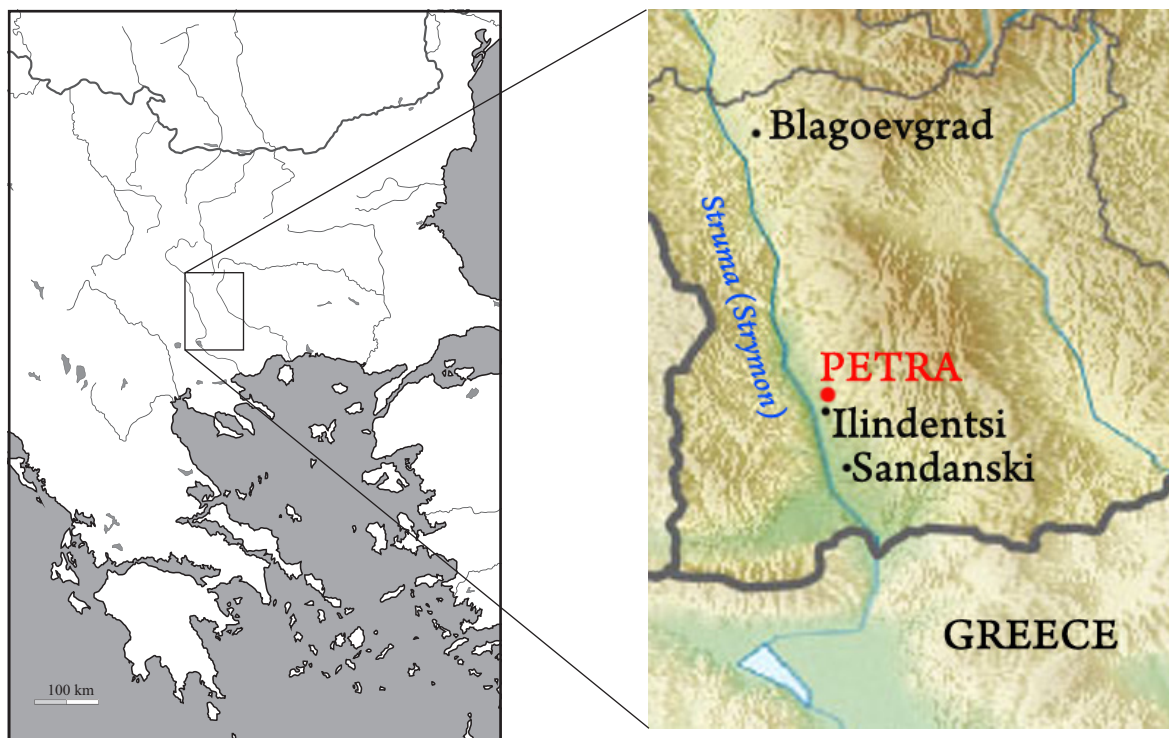


Fig. 9. Map of the Blagoevgrad region with the location of the ancient settlement of Petra.  
 Фиг. 9. Карта на Благоевградска област с местоположението на древното селище Петра

the army of Alexander the Great during his campaign in Thrace in 335 BC (Manov, Torbov 2016, 33). The best and most revealing statement for the importance of slingers in the armies of the last two Macedonian kings is Livy's account of the army of Perseus before the battle with the Romans at the hill Callinicus in Thessaly in 171 BC. The ancient author is explicit that spearmen and slingers are positioned in close proximity to the king himself (Liv. XLII, 58, 7-10). Here is the text of Livy): "... [7] Next to the wings were posted the royal cavalry and mixed units of the picked auxiliaries of many nations; [8] Patrocles of Antigonea and Didas the governor of Paeonia were in command of these. [9] The king (Perseus – M. Manov) was in the centre of the whole line; around him was what they call the Guard (in Livy – "agema" – the elite guard of the Macedonian kings – M. Manov), and the sacred squadrons of the cavalry. Before him he (Perseus – M. Manov) placed the slingers and javelin-throwers; [10] each band attained to the number of four hundred; Ion of Thessalonica and Artemon, a Dolopian, he put in command of these. Thus the king's men were arrayed.<sup>1</sup>"

It is obvious that the kings have relied on this treacherous weapon – the sling bullets, since it is equally effective in attack and in defence or during a siege.

Except from the well known image of a slinger on the coins of Aspendos in Pamphylia – minted between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and around 330 BC, an image of such a slinger occurs on rare issues of silver didrachms of the Ainiānes in Thessaly minted between 168-146 BC, where it is believed that their mythical hero Phemios is depicted on the reverse (fig. 8). This image demonstrates the popularity of the sling bullets during the Hellenistic period.

<sup>1</sup> The translation of this passage of Livy is after: Livy. Books XL-XLII With An English Translation. Cambridge. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1938: published without copyright notice (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>). The author here added some further notes.



As far as I am aware, the lead sling bullet discussed here is the first of its kind to be found in Bulgaria. Luckily, the object has preserved traces of casting that allows some justified hypotheses about ancient combat in general, and in Thrace, in particular. The most secure conclusion, based on the fact that the sling bullet had casting residues, is that these objects were not only ready-made equipment but they were also produced by axillaries on the spot. Molds and tools were carried by the axillaries who cast the sling bullets in the military camp usually located near a battlefield or a siege. That perhaps had taken place most often near heavily defended fortresses whose prolonged siege had depleted all the ready-made stock and new sling bullets had to be cast. Naturally this means that before each campaign, an adequate stock of large lead bullions was secured so that if needed new slings bullets could be cast for the slingers units accompanying the main military units. Evidence supporting this observations is the lead ingot weighing more than 200 g found in the fortress near the village of Noevtsi, Pernik district (Paunov, Dimitrov 2000, 54-55, fig. 11). Some scholars suggest that the heavy lead weights are used as catapult ammunitions (Rihll 2007, 91–92; Rihll 2009, 147-162), a hypothesis that has been recently strongly criticized by D. B. Campbell (Campbell 2011, 692-698).

The large lead sling bullet with its symbols – a club and a thunderbolt – and inscriptions – the initials of Philip V – is a silent witness and an unrealized participant of the battles between the Macedonian king and the Thracians occupying the area of modern southwest Bulgaria during the Hellenistic period and most probably should be connected with the siege of the Maedi settlement of Petra in 181 BC, mentioned by Livy (Livy XL, 22).

Until recently the location of Petra was sought at Rupite, in the region of Petrich (Манов 2004 with ref.). However, after the discovery of an inscription from the area of Rupite mentioning the name of the settlement Heracleia (Heraclea), the site there has been identified as Heraclea Sintica (Mitrev Tarakov 2002; Mitrev 2003; Lepelley 2004). This requires a new search for the location of the settlement of the Maedi – Petra. In the distant 1969, B. Gerov suggested that the ancient settlement of Petra is located between the villages of Gorna Gradeshnitsa and Ilindentsi (Геров 1969, 20). More recently, this hypothesis locating the Maedi settlement near the village of Ilindentsi, Blagoevgrad district had been put forward by another scholar (Митрев 2012, 185-195; 204; Mitrev 2016, 183-188), who is obviously unaware of Gerov's 1969 publication. The discovery of the very interesting sling bullet bearing the name of the Macedonian king Philip V is yet another evidence for the possible location of the ancient Petra (fig. 9). Moreover, the surroundings of Ilindentsi corresponds very well with Livy's account that during the siege Philip has led his army through the fields, while his son Perseus has approached from behind through the hills (Livy XL, 22). The new sling bullet discussed here together with the two above-mentioned large, although non-inscribed, examples found at the same place support the suggestion that a battle and a siege took place there with the participation of slingers units.

An inscription from the first century AD found there suggests that the same settlement was known by another name – Neine (Gerasimova-Tomova 1980, 19-26; Mihailov 1997, No. 5883). Probably later, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD the settlement reverted to the old name of Petra (Mitrev 2016, 183-188).

The artefact discussed here underlines the important role of the sling bullets utilized by the armies in the Hellenistic period. These objects can serve as primary sources of information, if inscribed and with precise context of discovery, as they indicate a possible battlefield or siege, which was the case of Kozi gramadi (Christov, Manov 2011; Hristov, Manov 2011) and now also with the Meadi settlement of Petra.

## Abbreviations

CNG Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., USA.

SEG Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum. Leiden, Brill, 1923-.

SNG Alpha Bank 2000 Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Greece II, The Alpha Bank Collection. Macedonia I, Alexander I – Perseus. Alpha Bank, Athens.

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## Оловна тежест за прашка на македонския владетел Филип V (221–179 г. пр. Хр.)

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Методи Манов

(резюме)

Едни от най-интересните антични предмети са оловните тежести за бойни прашки, особено когато са с надписи или изобразени символи, защото носят важна историческа информация.

Тук е представен един твърде интересен екземпляр от оловна тежест за прашка, доста голяма по размер, която произхожда от Югозападна България. Намерена е при село Илинденци, Благоевградска област и е заснета в частна колекция в Благоевград преди години.

Върху едната страна е представено релефно изображение на кривака на Херакъл, заемащо почти цялата дължина на тежестта, а върху другата – релефно изображение на мълния – също заемащо почти цялата дължина на предмета. Размерите са: дължина – 8,3 см (заедно с остатъците от отливане); дължина на тежестта без остатъците от отливане – 5,7 см; чиста ширина на тежестта – без странично останалия ръб от отливането – 2,5 см; тегло – 136 г. (обр. 1а и 1б; 1в). По своите размери и тегло тази тежест за бойна прашка е от големите подобни тежести, по принцип рядко откривани по нашите земи. Досега са познати само няколко подобни екземпляра: два от Рупите и още два от района на с. Илинденци, Благоевградско, както и четири други от района на с. Драгоево, Шуменско. Повечето големи тежести за прашки, публикувани досега, са без никакви изображения или надписи, като само една сравнително по-голяма такава тежест, публикувана от Ив. Венедиков, е с изображение на мълния от едната страна и надпис ПАПАС – от другата.

Тази оловна тежест е достигнала до нас заедно с централното “клонче” и неизрязаните остатъци от отливането – т.е. така, както е била извадена от калъпа. Представа за това как е изглеждал един подобен калъп за отливане на оловни тежести за прашка е запазената половина от бронзов калъп, съхранен в колекция Paul Canelloropoulos (обр. 2),

Мълнията и кривакът на Херакъл са най-популярните изображения от монетите на македонските владетели от края на III и първата четвърт на II век пр.Хр. – Филип V (221-179 г. пр.Хр.) и неговия син Персей (179-168 г. пр.Хр.). Ето защо тежестта трябва да бъде определена като македонска и датирана между края на III и началото на II век пр.Хр. Впрочем освен като основни символи, мълнията и кривакът на Херакъл – при това с доста сходна иконография като разглежданите тук изображения върху двете страни на голямата оловна тежест за бойна прашка – са използвани и като допълнителни символи най-вече в монетосеченето на Филип V. Изображението на кривака на Херакъл откриваме като допълнителен символ върху една серия от тетрадрахми на този македонски владетел (обр. 3) – тетрадрахми от серия III според класификацията на Chr. Boehringer. Освен това кривакът е и основен символ за реверса на този тип тетрадрахми, които немският учен датира в годините 188/187 – 179 г. пр. Хр. Върху други тетрадрахми от тази серия на Филип V откриваме като допълнителен символ и изображение на мълния (обр. 4). Като основен символ крилатата мълния е поставена върху най-големия номинал бронзови монети на Филип V (обр. 5), а като основен символ кривакът на Херакъл е поставен върху няколко емисии други бронзови монети с името и царската титла на Филип V.

В средата на изобразената от едната страна на тежестта мълния са изписани гръцките букви ΦΙ, които са твърде характерни и се срещат върху бронзовите монети на Филип V като съкращение на името му само от първите две букви (обр. 6). Върху някои от по-малките номинали бронзови монети на същия владетел, след съкратено изписаната царска титла ΒΑ, фигурира само първата буква от името му – Φ (обр. 7). Наличието на тези две букви ΦΙ категорично ни води до заключението, че тази огромна оловна тежест освен символите на македонската династия – кривака на Херакъл и мълния – носи и името на македонския владетел Филип V.

Голямата оловна тежст за прашка, със символите кривак и мълния, както и с инициалите на Филип V, е един мълчалив свидетел и на практика нереализиран участник в битките между македонския владетел и траките от земите на днешна Юго-западна България през елинистическата епоха. Находката би могла конкретно да се свърже с обсадата на селището на тракийското племе меди – Петра – през 181 г. пр. Хр., спомената с детайли от Тит Ливий (Liv. XL, 22, 12). Намирането на тази изключително интересна тежест за бойна прашка с име на македонския владетел Филип V на това място би могло да бъде друго указание за вероятното локализиране на античното селище Петра при дн. с. Илинденци, Благоевградско. В римски времена същото селище, благодарение на намерен надпис там, е познато с друго име – Нейне.

Освен познатите изображения на стрелец с прашка върху монетите на Аспендос в Памфилия – сечени между края на V век и около 330 г. пр. Хр., изображение на такъв стрелец с прашка се среща и върху редките емисии сребърни дидрахми на Енианите в Тесалия, сечени между 168–146 г. пр. Хр. като се смята, че на реверса е изобразен техният митичен герой Фемиос (обр. 8).

Описаната тук находка допълнително подчертава ролята на оловните тежести за прашки, ползвани от войски в периода на елинизма. Тези предмети, когато са с надписи и с точно място на намиране, могат да се превърнат в първостепенни източници на информация за локализирането на дадена битка или обсада на дадено място. Такъв е случаят с Кози грамади, а подобен се оказва и случаят с вероятно разположеното на това място селище на медите – Петра (обр. 9).