

The Port at Pella and the Macedonian Fleet

Little has been written about the Macedonian fleet prior to Alexander III's conquest of Persia (Berve 1926, Hauben 1975 and 1976, Hammond 1992) and even less about the Macedonian port at Pella (Greenwalt 1999). Yet from the second quarter of the fourth century until Cassander founded Thessaloniki near the end of the century, Pella was the principal city of Macedonia (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.13). Its prosperity was due in large part to its importance as a commercial center (e.g. Plaut. *Asinaria* 2.2), not only because it was situated on the main east/west route, which became the Roman Via Egnatia, but also because it was a thriving port (Petsas 1978, Greenwalt 1999) and, at least as late as 288, a base for the Macedonian fleet (Plut. *Demetr.* 43).

Based on the clear evidence that Philip II had a fleet (Dem. 4.22) and in spring 342 was building dockyards (Dem. 7.16), Hauben (1976: 79) claimed that Philip II "took his nation to sea" and that this 'Philippic navy' bequeathed to Alexander III in 336 had "a nucleus of truly Macedonian warships and naval potential of allied and subjected cities." The 'allied' fleet and the acquisition of Greek ports in the north Aegean (Hammond 1992: 34: "Philip had already acquired by conquest 'dockyards' at Pydna, Methone, Mecymberna and Amphipolis") has been so heavily emphasized that it has obscured the significance of the activities at the port of Pella, namely commercial trade by sea, which helped fund Argead military campaigns, and shipbuilding, which was important for Macedonian naval strategy down to the Roman conquest.

Hauben did not elaborate on the composition of Philip's 'truly Macedonian' fleet or on a possible home port for that fleet. Hammond (1992: 32-5), however, suggested that Philip did build dockyards at Pella, and – rightly arguing against the claim of Ellis (1976: 175) that Philip's fleet was "small and unskilled" – he concluded that the Macedonian fleet, which Chares

challenged at Neapolis probably in 353 (Poly. 4.2.22), must have been “considerably more than twenty” and consisting of penteconters and triaconters, while later Philip could blockade Byzantium with a fleet “of 30 or more warships” and at the same time with another fleet protect shipping at home. The evidence (which Hammond cites) for penteconters and triaconters comes however mostly from Alexander III’s reign (Arr. 2.7.2, 2.20.2, 2.21.6) and it is far from clear that all references are to “Macedonian” rather than allied ships. It is certain, though, that while Philip II and Alexander III did adopt the sleek trireme (Dem. 7.16, 19.286; Curt. 4.4.8), for the ‘Macedonian’ fleet the Argeads seem to have favored ‘light’ ships of some sort. Polyaeus calls Philip’s best ships, the four which were able to outrun Chares’ triremes, “light” (*elaphrai*), and we have Demosthenes’ (17.27) complaint that Alexander wanted to build “small boats” (*mikra ploia*) at Piraeus. At the Indus Alexander had ships built for the crossing; of these the triaconters were larger, having to be cut into three sections for portage to the Hydaspes, while the “shorter” boats were cut in two (Arr. 5.8.4-5). Curtius (4.4.6) also mentions thirty “smaller warships” of Alexander’s fleet in the context of the siege of Tyre, among which one Macedonian quinquereme was highly conspicuous.

While Greenwalt (1999) has made a strong case for the early development of Pella as a commercial port, and has suggested that in 407-406 Archelaus may have provided at Pella a dockyard for Athenian shipwrights to build triremes close to the source of timber (*GHI* no. 91) – this possibly coinciding with his relocation of the Macedonian capital from Aegae to Pella – no one, to my knowledge, has explained the Macedonian preference for the small, light ships. This paper proposes that the answer lies in the nature of the port at Pella, with the heavy silting of the Loudias and Axios rivers (Bintliff 1976), which must surely have necessitated that ships built or

anchored at Pella be 'light', possibly similar to the Illyrian *lembi*, a hundred of which Polybius (5.109) claims Philip V ordered to be constructed in 217.

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