



# BATTLE-AXES IN EASTERN IRAN

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**BATTLE-AXES** in Eastern Iran. Battle-axes made of bronze appeared in Eastern Iran during the Bronze Age. One such object comes from a burial at the Sapalli-tepa settlement in southern Uzbekistan. It has a shaft-hole, an elongated hammer butt, and its cutting edge largely widens towards the lower side. It is dated to the middle of the second millennium BCE (Askarov, p. 72, pl. XXVII/2). Battle-axes remained in use throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages (Litvinsky, 2001, pp. 418-24).

The Avesta contains information about battle-axes called *čakuš*; the description of Mithra's chariots in *Yašt* 10.131 mentions "well made double-edged iron axes" (Gershevitch, p. 139; cf. Jackson, p. 116; Herzfeld, II, p. 783). *Yašt* 1.18 also mentions battle-axes among other weapons. In both cases, the term *čakuš* is used, and its exact New Persian correspondence is *čākoš*, ('hammer' or 'mallet'; see Jackson, p. 116; Malandra, p. 273). In Tajik, *čakuš* means 'hammer' or 'mallet'; the verb *čukidan* means 'to hammer' or 'to thresh', and *čukanda* stands for 'hand threshing tool.'; In the Old Persian, the terms *isuvā* (of unknown etymology, see Brandenstein and Mayrhofer, p. 127; Kent, p. 174), and, probably, *vaçā* (Malandra, p. 281) were used to describe battle-axes.

Another reconstructable Old Persian term for the axes, namely *\*paraθu*, goes back to the common Iranian *\*parasu* (Abaev, p. 451; Bailey, pp. 13-14). For the



battle-axe, Middle Persian used the term *čakuš*, as well as *tabar* and *tabarzēn* (Tafazzoli, pp. 188 and 192).

To describe the pole-axes used by the Central Asian people, Greek authors used the term *sagaris* (Litvinskiĭ and P'yankov, p. 39). Copper pole-axes of the Massagetae (Herodotus, 9.215; Strabo, 9.8.6) and those of the Sakas (Herodotus, 7.64) are known. Quintus Curtius mentions double-blade pole-axes used by the Barkanians (Girkanians; see Curtius, 3.2.5).

Archeological excavations at the sites of Central Asian nomads have produced metal battle-axes used by the Sakas and the Massagetae. A whole series of such battle-axes derives from the Sakas burials in the eastern Pamirs (Litvinskiĭ, 1972, pp. 121-25; Litvinskij, 1984, pp. 46-48, fig. 10). Their forms vary greatly (Plate 1), which makes it possible to distinguish several types. Two bi-metal pick-axes (with a bronze bush-ear and an iron blade) have been found in burial sites nearby the Aral Sea. The earliest objects of this type (dated to the 6th century BCE) include bi-metal axes and a double-edged axe which has a long, slightly curved faceted blade with a head on one side and a long narrow blade on the other. Other axes are dated to the 5th-3rd centuries BCE. These battle-axes have a wide range of similarities among the battle-axes from the Black Sea coast, the northern Caucasus, the Kama River region, Kazakhstan, southern Siberia, and northern China (Litvinskiĭ, 2001, pp. 420-24). Central Asian battle-axes closely resemble Achaemenid battle-axes known from iconographic materials and archeological finds.

In eastern Iran, settled peoples continued using the battle-axes in warfare. Thus, iron battle-axes and an elongated silver pickaxe of an intricate shape with gilding have been found at the Old Nisa (Invernizzi, pp. 129-38, pl. H). Peculiar pickaxes, one made of bronze and several of iron, of the Indian *ankuša* type, have been found at Ay Khanum (Francfort, pp. 56-69, pls. 21, 25, XXI, and XXXVI). Pickaxes and battle hammers are presented in Central Asian and Inner Asian (northern India included) iconography, as well as on coins of the late Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic times (for detailed lists with bibliographical references see Invernizzi, pp. 137-38). A warrior depicted on a plate from Orlat holds in his hand a double-edged pickaxe (Ilyasov and Rusanov, pls. IV/1 and XIII), but this is already early 3rd century CE.

Iconography and archaeological finds testify that battle-axes were still in use in the 5th-8th centuries, both as a weapon in battle and as a symbol of power of a ruler or a military commander. A silver dish from the Kulagysh village



contains the scene of on-foot combat which shows broken battle-axes with a rounded cutting edge and with the butt-end in the shape of a long blade (Orbeli and Trever, table 21). Similar objects can be found in the paintings of Pendjikent. An iron battle-axe with a rounded narrow blade and a small butt was found in the layer of the 6th-7th centuries at Aktepe of Yunusabad near Tashkent (Terenozhkin, pp. 123-24, fig. 25/7; Raspopova, pp. 77-78).

Ceremonial maces existed too, they frequently appear in wall paintings. A real object of the type with the upper part executed like a male head has been found at the Azhartepa (Berdimuradov and Samibaev, p. 40, figs. 93-94).

Battle-axes of various types continued to be manufactured and used in Eastern Iran up until the Late Middle Ages (Mukminova, p. 114).

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