

Saneunos the Scythian

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AMONG INVENTORS of various arts mentioned in a summary of historical information preserved in *POxy.* 1241 is Saneunos, a Scythian king who is credited by Hellanikos with the invention of iron weapons. The text of this passage (= *FGrHist* 4 F 189) is as follows:

col. v

σιδηρ]ᾶ δὲ
ὄπλα πρῶτος Ἑλλ[α]ν[ι]κὸς κα-
τασκευάσασθαι φησιν Σάνευ-
5 νον Σκυθῶν ὄντα βα[σ]ιλέ-
α·

Admittedly all except the last letter of *σιδηρᾶ* is restoration, but Hunt was for accepting Wilamowitz's suggestion of that word because arms of bronze have already been mentioned.¹ It is maintained by Rostovtzeff² that Hellanikos took this over from genuine Scythian tradition. Aeschylus³ calls iron weapons Scythian and calls the Caucasus 'mother of iron', Hesiod⁴ mentions a Scythian Delas as the discoverer of copper. The celebrated iron-working Chalybes are called Scythian in the oldest tradition, which is reported by scholiasts on Aeschylus' *Prometheus*⁵ and on Apollonius.⁶ Rostovtzeff suggests that the name Saneunos indicates or represents some real historical person.

The same view is taken by Harmatta,⁷ who argues that this name is genuine old Iranian, comparing its second part with the Aorsian name

¹ *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* ed. Grenfell and Hunt, pt. 10 (London 1914) p.111, comm. on lines v.2-5.

² M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (Oxford 1922) 18, and *Skythien und der Bosphorus I* (Berlin 1931) 23. Compare also A. Kleingünther, *Πρῶτος εὐρετής* (*Philologus* Supplbd. 26 Hft. 1, 1933) 127.

³ *Sept.* 728-30, *Χάλυβος Σκυθῶν ἄποικος . . . σίδαρος*, and *PV* 301-02, *σιδηρομήτορα . . . αἴαν*. I do not pursue here the confused geography of *PV*.

⁴ *Hes. Dact.Id.* fr.282 M-W.

⁵ *Schol. ad PV* 301-02; *τὴν τῆς Σκυθίας Χαλυβικὴν γῆν, ἐν ἣ πρώτων ὁ σίδαρος εὕρηται*, 207.25-26 Dindorf).

⁶ *οἱ δὲ Χάλυβες ἔθνος Σκυθικὸν μετὰ τὸν Θερμῶδοντα, οἱ μέταλλα σιδήρου εὐρόντες μοχθοῦσι περὶ τὴν ἐργασίαν*, *schol. ad Ap.Rhod. Argon.* 2.373-76a (159.2-4 Wendel).

⁷ J. Harmatta, "Mificeskye Severnyie Plemena u Gellanikos" ("Mythical Northern Peoples in Hellanikos"), *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 1 (1952) 92-109.

Eunones in Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.15–20) and with the Parthian royal name Vonones, which corresponds to the Avestic *vanana* ‘conqueror’. The element *san* he compares with Saka *sana* or *sani*, Sogdian *san* and Ossetian *son*, all of which mean ‘enemy’. A name that meant ‘conqueror of enemies’ would certainly suit a king who invented or introduced iron weapons.

If we take Scythia, as Harmatta does, to include an indefinitely large region bounded on the south by the Transcaucasian river Phasis, which in some ancient geographers is the boundary between Asia and Europe, we find some confirmation for this tradition in the prehistory and archaeology of Caucasia.

According to researches summarized by Sulimirski⁸ there were Scythians in Transcaucasia at an early date, perhaps even in the tenth century B.C., long before the great Scythian incursion of the seventh century into Western Asia that is mentioned in Herodotus and in oriental sources. These Scythians were, like the remainder further north, in the stage known as the Srubnaya or timber-grave culture, which was at its latter end transitional between a bronze and an iron age and covered also the development of mounted nomadism among the Scythians. Urartian inscriptions give some idea of these early Scythians, who were pastoral tribes organized in small kin-groups and weak enough to be harried, plundered and enslaved. This pressure from the kings of Urartu forced the tribes to unite in a larger state and to form larger military units. The later Scythian invasion of Armenia and Western Asia, reinforced by other Scythians from the north, was the final result of this phase of development. If the Scythians of Transcaucasia learned to make iron weapons from iron-working peoples of the Caucasus or even further south, this period would seem to be right for the appearance of Saneunos, who equipped them with iron weapons to defeat their enemies.

Not all nomads of the Scythian type had iron weapons for some time later: Herodotus (1.215–16) mentions nomads of Central Asia who still made their weapons of bronze. But in Caucasia and Armenia the spread of iron metallurgy, resulting from the collapse of the Hittite monopoly during the twelfth century, would have occurred sooner than elsewhere. The Transcaucasian Scythians should have been the first of their people to learn to work the new metal.

⁸ Sulimirski, “Scythian Antiquities in Western Asia,” *Artibus Asiae* 17 (1954) 282–318, esp. pp.283, 286, 288–91, 293.

Before we go further, we should look again at the Greek. First, *πρῶτος Ἑλλανικός*, with *πρῶτος* nominative, implies that Hellenikos was the first to mention this tradition, which had evidently escaped such others as Hekataios and Herodotos. But the sentence also seems to imply that Hellenikos said that Saneunos the Scythian first made or contrived iron weapons. *κατασκευάσασθαι* is a little ambiguous, but since it occurs several times in this papyrus in a context of inventions it should take on the sense 'invent', and this may be meant as the sense of the Scythian tradition. But by itself it means only 'contrive' or 'produce' or even 'procure'; this difficulty would not be present if we had *εὑρεῖν* or *εὑρέσθαι*.

The Scythians may well have said that Saneunos invented or devised iron weapons. But historically such a king at the date suggested would have learned from earlier ironworkers to make them or would have made his smiths do so.

However, if Saneunos may be counted for legend as a culture-hero, the inventor of iron weapons, he will be a Scythian culture-hero, believed by his people to have invented iron weapons without human aid. Among Scythians remote from Transcaucasia this idea would be natural. If Saneunos began as an historical figure who learned, or made his smiths learn, from other peoples how to make iron weapons, he could in time become their legendary inventor among the Scythians.

It may appear odd that a king should practise smithing, which had a low social status among many peoples. But even when smiths were despised and distrusted as they were among some nomads, they were also feared and admired for their mastery of an important and mysterious craft. Among some of the Altaic nomads who superseded the Iranian nomads as masters of the steppes, skilled smiths had a special status, and in legend the smith's craft could carry high or even royal rank.⁹ The smith became, in lay opinion, a sort of magician and even priest of the mysterious powers that he commanded or persuaded to help him. The smith who could make iron weapons was their first owner, and if he chose to use them in war, he had power and might become king. Thus among the Turks of Northern and Central Asia the title *tarkhan*, which originally meant 'smith', became one of high nobility. Among the Mongols famous names were formed from the word *temür* meaning 'iron': Temüjin, the original name of Chingis

⁹ See M. de Ferdinandy, "Die nordeurasischen Reitervölker und der Westen bis zum Mongolensturm," in *Historia Mundi* V (Bern 1956) 180-83.

Khan before he took that title, Temüge the name of his younger brother, and Temülün the name of his sister; and many names containing the element *temür* entire. The name Timur, borne by the later conqueror, is of the same origin.¹⁰ After his death, Chingis Khan became in Mongol belief 'the mighty one of heaven, the great smith of the universe'.¹¹ That those notions of the Altaic nomads may in some degree have been anticipated among their Iranian forerunners is suggested by our reference to Saneunos.

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¹⁰ See P. Poucha, *Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen als Geschichtsquelle und Literaturdenkmal* (*Archiv Orientalní* suppl. IV, 1956) 83.

¹¹ See de Ferdinandy, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) 182.