

# TWO LATE MEDIEVAL COMBAT KNIVES – A TESTIMONY FOR THE MILITARY CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The here presented work is devoted to one type of combat knives widespread in the territory of Central Europe at the end of the Middle Ages (14th – 16th centuries). Two combat knives of the species in question – inv. numb. 790 – 791 (Fig. 1 – 5), which are its classical representatives, are discussed. They are part of the Vatevi weapon collection in Plovdiv and come from Shumen and Varna regions respectively. They date back to the 15th – 16th centuries. Analogies of the specimens considered here are two and are stored in the Historical museum of Dobrich. Parallel of the knife with number 790 is one found in Dulovo region, and the knife with the number 791 has an analogy with a weapon, discovered near the village of Svalenik, Ruse region. These weapons are more likely to be associated with the wars of Vladislav III Yagelo against the Ottomans in 1443 – 1444.*

**Keywords:** *combat knives, tesak, kord, Bauernwehr, Hauswehr.*

The here presented work is devoted to one type of combat knives widespread in the territory of Central Europe at the end of the Middle Ages (14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), but in my opinion relatively little known and used in the Bulgarian lands. These weapons have different names in the different European languages: *tesak, kord, Bauernwehr, Hauswehr* and others.<sup>2</sup> In the only study, focused specifically on those representatives of medieval European arms, they are called *tesak*. In the publications of such

artefacts, in the Bulgarian scientific literature, the last term is used equally with „боен нож“ (a combat knife).<sup>3</sup>

The present work examines two battle knives of the species in question (**Fig. 1 – 5**), which are its classical representatives.<sup>4</sup> They

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<sup>2</sup> P. ŽÁKOVSKÝ, *Tesáky a problematika jednosečných zbraní stredoveku a raného novoveku*, Brno 2014, 13 – 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ш. АПОСТОЛОВ, Средновековно оръжие и снаряжение в Парка-музей на бойната дружба 1444 г. във Варна, *Известия на Националния военноисторически музей*, 5 (1983), 108 – 109; Ш. АПОСТОЛОВ, Оръжие и снаряжение от похода и полесражението край Варна през 1444 г., *Известия на Националния военноисторически музей*, 7 (1987), 80 – 84; В. ПАРУШЕВ, Оръжия и снаряжение на войската на Владислав III Ягело. Непубликувани находки, *Известия на Нардония музей – Варна*, 44 (59) (2008), 246 – 247.

<sup>4</sup> **Inv. numb. 790**  
Tessak. Iron. Tang with a rectangular section and a shape that expands slightly at the edges. On one side, the surface

are part of the Vatevi weapon collection, located in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. To this type of weapon is devoted the study of the Czech scientist Petr Žákovský. According to the typology developed

of the tang has a trapezoidal recess. There are five holes in the form of cylinders that protrude from both sides of the tang. At the end there are two holes horizontally arranged, the other three are vertically arranged at 1.5 cm from the horizontal ones and from each other. At the end of the tang, immediately over the short, oblique shoulders of the blade the so-called nail is riveted. It is perpendicular to the plane blade-tang, has semicircular flat form, whit its arc festooned, the edge of the arc towards the blade has incised lines. The knife has one blade-edge, the dull part of the blade is horizontal, the edged part curves and narrows to a sharp point.

**Dimensions:** total length 56.7 cm; tang length 11.2 cm; width x thick. over shoulders and at the end 3.5x0.7 cm and 3.6x0.7 cm; d opening 0.5 cm; the recessed trapezium base x shoulders x depth 2.7 – 1.4x9x0.3 cm; nail length x d semicircle x d rivet 3x2,7 – 1,6x0,8 cm; shoulders width 0.3 cm; blade long x width x thickness at shoulders x at point 45,5x3,9x0,7x0,4 cm.

**Weight:** 578 gr.

**Dating:** 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> c.

**Finding place:** the region of Shumen.

**Fig. 1 – 3.**

#### **Inv. numb. 791**

Tessak. Iron. Tang with a II-shaped section and trapezoidal shape. On one side, the tang's surface has a triangle-shaped concavity. Two of the narrow sides of the tang are wider than the third. Its surface is heavily corroded, so it has only one sure manufacturing opening at the end, it also has an opening at the shoulders of the blade and a rivet at 0.5 cm above it. The tang is slightly folded. The shoulders of the blade are short, oblique. The knife has one blade-edge, the dull part of the blade is horizontal, the edged part curves and narrows to a sharp point. A small part of the blade-point is missing. At the base of the edged portion, just below the shoulder there is a circular opening.

**Dimensions:** total length 50 cm; tang length 10.8 cm; width x thick. over shoulders and at the end 2,3x0,7 – 0,5 cm and 2,8x1,2 – 0,6 cm; d opening 0.3 cm; d rivet 0.4 cm; the concave triangle on the shoulder base x shoulders x depth 2.4x11.2x0.2 – 0.5 cm; shoulders width 0.7 cm (dull side) and 1 cm (edged side); blade length x width x thickness at shoulders x at point 39,2x4,3x0,7x0,2 cm.

**Weight:** 384 gr.

**Dating:** 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> c.

**Finding place:** the region of Varna.

**Fig. 4 – 5 .**

by him, here presented tessaks belong to the type **A4** knives.<sup>5</sup> According to the Žákovský classification, the end of the handle is type **A**.<sup>6</sup> Specimen #790 has a retained nail guard at the base of the handle. Such had undoubtedly had the other knife. A hint to that is the presence of an opening for a nail at the base of the tang. The preserved protective nail is of **t5** type according to the typology of the Czech scientist.<sup>7</sup>

Analogies of the specimens considered here are two, stored in the Historical museum of Dobrich (**Fig. 6**). Parallel of the knife with inv. number 790 is one found in Dulovo region.<sup>8</sup> As considered here knife, its analog has a slender blade too, the holes for rivets in the tang are arranged in the same way (though their different numbers in the two weapons!), put in a one-sided trapezoidal recess of the handle. Knife number 791 has an analogy with a weapon, found at the village of Svalenik, Ruse region.<sup>9</sup> Like the knife of the Vatevi Collection, that of Svalenik has a relatively wide blade too. Interesting is the presence of a circular hole at the blade shoulder at its edged part.

There are a dozen such weapons coming from different places in Bulgaria already published. In general, much of the finds are concentrated in the northeastern part of the country. As a rule, it is assumed that in Bulgaria these type of weapons appeared together with the Crusader Army of the Polish-Hungarian King Vladislav III Jagello during his Crusades against the Ottomans in 1443 and 1444. The association of all the representatives of this weapon only with this military conflict, as already correctly stated in one work is somewhat one-sided. The possibility of falling into the

<sup>5</sup> P. ŽÁKOVSKÝ, *Tesáky a problematika*, 212 – 213.

<sup>6</sup> P. ŽÁKOVSKÝ, *Tesáky a problematika*, 284 – 287.

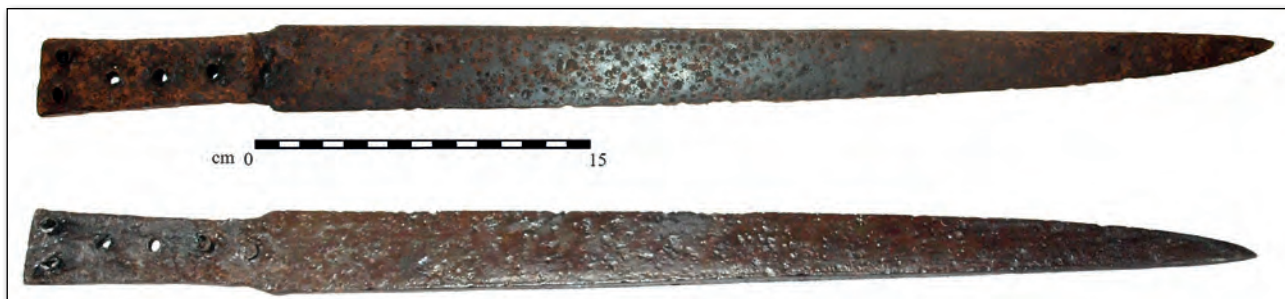
<sup>7</sup> P. ŽÁKOVSKÝ, *Tesáky a problematika*, 422 – 425.

<sup>8</sup> В. ПАРУШЕВ, *Оръжия и снаряжение*, 240 – 241, обр. 2а-б.

<sup>9</sup> В. ПАРУШЕВ, *Оръжия и снаряжение*, 240 – 241, обр. 3а-б.

territory of Bulgaria during other armed clashes with the participation of Central European troops in the second half of the 14th – 16th centuries, as well as a trophy, should not be denied. The examples of such conflicts in our lands are many: the siege of Sigismund in 1396, the uprising led by Constantine and Fruzhin at the beginning of the 15th century with the participation of the Wallachian voivode Mircho; as a trophy they

could have been brought about by the numerous Ottoman conflicts with central European countries such as Hungary – The Second Battle of Kosovo polje in 1448 and the clashes in the 16th century. I generally agree with this claim but taking into account the accumulation of multiple signs in support of the hypothesis of the connection with Vladislav's army, I am more inclined to perceive it as to the origin of a large part of these weapons.



**Fig. 1.** *Tessak, Inv. numb. 790. Vatevi weapon collection, located in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. General view.*

**Fig. 2.** *Tessak, Inv. numb. 790. Vatevi weapon collection, located in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. View of the protecting nail.*



**Fig. 3.** *Tessak, Inv. numb. 790. Vatevi weapon collection, located in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. View of the tang.*



Fig. 4. Tessak, Inv. numb. 791. Vatevi weapon collection, located in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. General view.



Fig. 5. Tessak, Inv. numb. 791. Vatevi weapon collection, located in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. View of the tang.

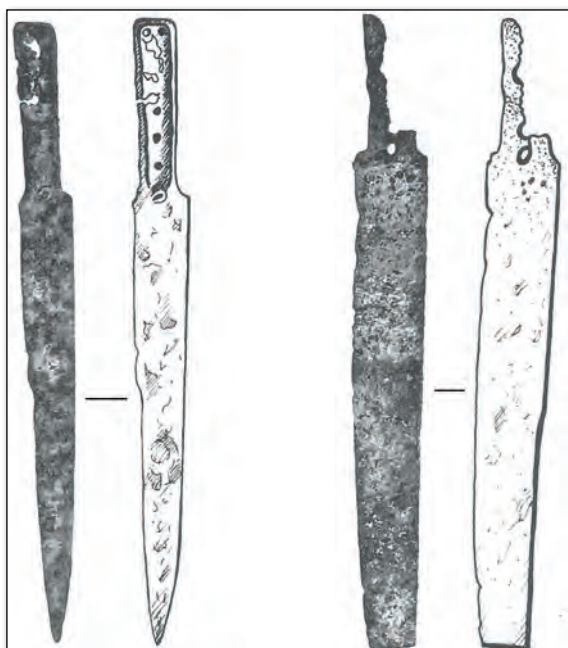


Fig. 6. Analogies of the examined knives – from Dulovo and from the village of Svalenik, Ruse region (after В. Парушев, *Оръжия и снаряжение*, 240 – 241, обр. 2а-б; 3а-б).

# ДВА КЪСНОСРЕДНОВЕКОВНИ БОЙНИ НОЖА – СВИДЕТЕЛСТВО ЗА ВОЕННИТЕ КОНФЛИКТИ МЕЖДУ ИЗТОКА И ЗАПАДА

**Стоян Попов**

**Резюме:** Настоящата работа е посветена на един вид бойни ножове, широко разпространени на територията на Централна Европа в края на Средните векове (XIV – XVI в.). Разгледани са два бойни ножа от въпросния вид – инв. №№ 790-791 (Обр. 1 – 5), които са негови класически представители. Те са част от оръжейната Сбирка „Ватеви“ в Пловдив и произхождат съответно от Шуменско и Варненско. Датират се в периода XV – XVI в. Аналогии на разглежданите тук екземпляри са две и се съхраняват в ИМ – Добрич. Паралел на ножа с инв. номер 790 е такъв, открит в Дуловско, а ножът с номер 791 има аналогия с оръжие, открито при с. Сваленик, Русенско. Тези оръжия се свързват с по-голяма вероятност с походите на Владислав III Ягело срещу османците в 1443 – 1444 г.

**Ключови думи:** бойни ножове, *tesak*, *kord*, *Bauernwehr*, *Hauswehr*.