

FINDS OF BULGARIAN TYPE SABERS¹

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Abstract: *A subject of the here presented work is findings of the Bulgarian type sabers from the European region.*

The thesis of the Bulgarian origin of these weapons and their dating was first proposed and substantiated by V. Yotov. This type of sabers is examined by N. Hrisimov and M. Petrov. They agree with the hypothesis about the Bulgarian origin of these weapons, but accounting the shape of the guard and its participation in the construction of the handle, suggests a strong Byzantine influence. The Russian scientist G. Baranov also draws attention to such sabers. According to him they are a product of the Byzantine arms industry. According to N. Hrisimov, M. Petrov and G. Baranov in the Byzantine written sources, these swords are referred to by the term παραμήριον.

The author of the present paper shares the opinion of V. Yotov, N. Hrisimov and M. Petrov, about the Bulgarian origin of this type of swords. However, S. Popov believes that the assumptions of Byzantine influence and the origin of Byzantine workshops of these weapons are not sufficiently substantiated, and the binding of these sabers with the παραμήριον also needs of more reliable proofs.

Keywords: *Bulgarian type sabers, Middle Ages, distribution.*

Since ancient times, contacts between individual human populations have gone through two main paths – peaceful (trade, diplomacy, enlightenment, etc.) and the way of the War. It can even be said that very often War was the first contact between some cultures. As well as being a mediator between tribes and peoples, the War with its goals and methods is experiencing unsatiable hunger for new technological and tactical solutions. For this reason, it is often the basis of scientific and technical progress with the discovery and introduction of new materials, new building solutions and the emergence of even

new branches of the economy. Last but not least, War requires and leads to the creation of specific products of philosophical and ideological nature. An important part of the characteristics of the War are military artifacts. In many cases, they also appear as a material embodiment of different philosophical-ideological principles of a particular human society or social stratum.

The problem of the ethnic attribution of a given material culture in archaeological research is fundamental, but often difficult to solve. This fact applies equally to the artefacts of armaments and military equipment, which are an integral

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part of the material remains left by the people who inhabited the planet. The work presented here examines the possibility of ethnic attribution to a specific type of sabers, presenting the known findings of such weapons or their elements. Map 1 presents the territorial distribution of the published Bulgarian type sabers and elements from them. Those weapons have the following features:

Grip: The tang is straight and only to the end is slightly curved to the edged part of the blade. Attaching the handle to the tang was done in the following ways: rivets were used in the first one (in some of the weapons they are preserved, while in others only the holes in the tang have left); in the second way, the handle was held in place by means of the cylindrical sleeves of the cap on one and the guard on the other side. Here, attention should be paid to the presence of a single small hole in the cylindrical sleeve of the guard of two sabers of Vatevi collection (**Fig. 3-4**), which in my opinion serves to hold the handle. The fact that such openings reciprocating in the tang and the other side of the guard's cylindrical sleeve are missing allows me to express my opinion that the handle in question was monolithic and was placed on the tang by burning. I think it is very possible with this technology the handles of the other sabers whose tangs have no trace of rivets have been constructed. The grip ends with a cylindrical cap, closed with a round, slightly protruding plate. **Guard:** Iron turned-T-shaped guard with a flat-cylindrical sleeve to the handle. The quillons are usually flat with round or rounded shape. The guard surrounds the bottom of the tang and the shoulders and the top of the blade. **The blade** has almost parallel sides. For most of its length, the blade is single-edged, with almost all specimens at its end having an elman – a double-edged section. As metric parameters based on data available to me, the following characteristics can be distinguished: the total length of these swords is within 75 – 86 cm; the length of the blades is 60.6 – 74.6 cm;

the elman is between 13 and 20 cm long; Handle length 9 – 15 cm; the weight of the weapons is within the range of 340 – 680 g. The generally accepted date of these weapons is placed within the 9th – 10th centuries.

According to the described features, the weapons presented herein refer to one type of saber, which has become known as “Bulgarian”. According to V. Yotov, the findings of these weapons and their characteristic parts on the territory of Bulgaria are several dozen in number (60 – 80 pieces), a large part unpublished (Йотов 2010: 218). The published artifacts from the territory of Bulgaria are 19. Four sabers are stored in the Vatevi Collection in Plovdiv, Bulgaria (**Fig. 1-4**) (Popov 2018). One of them (**Fig. 2**) has a fully preserved sandwich handle whose handle is made of bone plates. From the present territory of Bulgaria are known another 7 whole specimens of this weapon, stored in different places. They originate from Abritus, near the town of Razgrad (**Fig. 5**) (Йотов 2004: 61 – 62; Йотов 2010: 217); village of Batovo, Dobrich reg. (**Fig. 6**) (Йотов 2004: 63, обр. 28, Табл. XXXV: 452; Йотов 2010: 218); one with unknown localization, generally from the territory of northeastern Bulgaria (**Fig. 7**) (Йотов 2004: 63, обр. 28, Табл. XXXV: 451; Йотов 2010: 218); one of the region of Cherven briag (**Fig. 8**) (Йотов 2004: 61, обр. 27. Табл. XXXVI: 450; Йотов 2010: 218) and one of the region of Targovishte (not published). On the territory of the medieval Bulgarian capital Pliska is found the upper one-third of the saber, which is supposed to be also of the Bulgarian type (**Fig. 9**) (Йотов 2004: 63, Табл. XXXV: 453). Besides whole sabers, on the territory of Bulgaria are found elements, characteristic of these weapons. From the present Bulgarian lands are published 7 guards of Bulgarian type sabers. They originate from the fortress near the village of Starmen, Russe reg. (**Fig. 10-1**) (Йотов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 467); from the region of Dobrich (**Fig. 10-2**) (Йотов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 468); two of the fortress near the vil-

lage of Ruyno, Silistra (**Fig. 10-3, 10-4**) (Йотов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXV: 465, 466); Markovo village, Varna district (**Fig. 10-5**) (Йотов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 470); Staro selo, Varna district (**Fig. 10-6**) (Йотов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 469) and by Pliska (**Fig. 10-7**) (Йотов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXV: 464).

In two of his works, Russian scientist G. Baranov deals with such sabers and elements (Баранов 2014: 84 – 92; Баранов 2016: 76 – 92). From the region of Upper and Middle Dnester river, three whole sabers come from: the Lviv region of Ukraine (**Fig. 11**); Kamenets – Podolsky area of Khmelnytsky region of Ukraine (**Fig. 12**) and one of the Chernivtsi region of Ukraine (**Fig. 13**). From the Chernivtsi region of Ukraine comes also a guard of this type of saber (**Fig. 14**). A saber with such a cap is known from the Krasnodar reg. of Russia (**Fig. 15**) (Баранов 2014: 86 – 87). Two finds of such weapons are found in Central Europe. The first saber (**Fig. 16**) is from a grave in the Olomouc-Nemilani necropolis in the Czech Republic, on the left bank of the Morava River (Kalábek 2014: 9; Přichystalová, Kalábek, Trávníčková, Dresler 2014: 102; Přichystalová 2014: 267). Another artefact (yet unpublished as far as I know) is a weapon (in my opinion a saber, subsequently remade in a sword) with a guard of a type typical of the Bulgarian type sabers found in the Bieszczady Mountains in the region of Sanok in southeastern Poland.²

The thesis of the Bulgarian origin of these weapons and their dating was first proposed and substantiated by V. Yotov (Йотов 1995: 97 – 102; Йотов 2004: 63 – 65; Йотов 2010: 217 – 225). This type of sabers is examined by N. Hrisimov and M. Petrov, which are also agreed with the hypothesis about the Balkan and in particular the Bulgarian origin of these weapons, but taking into account the shape of the guard and its participation in the construction of the handle,

suggest a strong Byzantine influence. They also express the assumption that in the Byzantine written sources these swords are denoted by the term „παράμηριον“ (Петров, Хрисимов 2015: 344 – 351).

G. Baranov perceived the hypothesis for the Byzantine name of the weapon under consideration, but rejected the opinion for the Bulgarian origin of these sabers, considering them as a product of the Byzantine arms industry. According to him, this type of weaponry has come into the Bulgarian territories as spoils of war, and their appearance in the South-Russian steppes is connected with the pechenegs (Баранов 2016: 79 – 82).

I agree with the opinion of G. Baranov that the term „παράμηριον“ refers not to sabers, but to single edged cutting weapons (Баранов 2014: 87) and to that of M. Petrov and N. Hrisimov, that they are palashes, i.e., straight weapons with single edged blades (Петров, Хрисимов 2015: 351). I cannot agree with the arguments of the two Bulgarian scientists regarding their opinion that the sabers have also been marked with „παράμηριον“. Its description in the treatises as a long knife (Mahaira) does not bring clarity to the matter. An indirect argument in favor of this assumption is that the first appearance of the Greek term was in the middle of the 6th century AD when the palash was more widely spread (Мерперт 1955: 160; Петров, Хрисимов 2015: 337 – 341). The treatises of the 10th century also speak of „παράμηριον“, emphasizing here too on the presence of a single edged blade. It should be borne in mind that the sabers of this century already have the Elman, that is, there is a two-sided sharpening, albeit a part of the blade. This feature is available on all specimens of the type, denoted as Bulgarian!

Along with what has been said so far, considering that the παράμηριον can also be translated as “around a thigh”, it should not be ruled out the possibility that it was generally referred to as a personal weapon worn hanging on the

² Express my deep gratitude to my colleague Piotr Kotowicz from the museum of Sanok, Poland, who gave me this information!

belt at the thigh, which according to G. Baranov was put into use in case of loss or damage to the weapon of the first collision – the swords and the maces, worn hanged on the saddle (I would add here the spears too!) (Баранов 2016: 80).

According to G. Baranov, the specific type of weapon in question is of Byzantine rather than Bulgarian origin. As an argument, he presents the discovery at the Krasnodar region of a saber with a handle cap of the type of caps, which are characteristic to the Bulgarian type sabers. He rightly notes that in the 9th – 10th centuries these lands were in possession of Khazaria, which is under the powerful influence of Byzantium. The Russian author, however, misses the fact that large groups of Bulgarians live in the territory of the Khazar Khaganate. The other find of a Bulgarian type saber, which is remote from the core of the Bulgarian lands, is that of Olomouc in the Czech Republic. Already at the beginning and in almost the whole first half of the 9th century, the western borders of the Bulgarian state passed through the basin of the river Tisza. At the end of the 8th century the Avaric Khaganate was entangled in a desperate struggle for survival with the Frankish State in the West, and in those regions with Bulgaria. In the 9th century the Avars were in close contact with Danubian Bulgars, even participating in Khan Krum's wars with Byzantium as a part of his army (Гюзелев, Божилов 1999: 126 – 127, 129, 138).

Given the high mobility of the weaponry, it is not impossible the saber to reach from the Tisza border area to the place of city of Olomouc or to the Bieszczadi/Beskids mountains in South-Eastern Poland.

It is not particularly strong for me is the argument of G. Baranov that since the type of sabers in question have no performance with high artistic characteristics, this obligatory makes them works of Byzantine factories in form of mass production. The Russian author automatically assumes that the Medieval Bulgarian state could not organize a serial weapons manufacture

whose production, due to the series being characterized by some “rudeness” of appearance. As a counter argument it can be said that there is evidence of serial production in the weapons manufacture from the history of the First Bulgarian State, from the beginning of the 9th century. Then such was organized by Khan Krum (802 – 814) in his campaigns against Byzantium. The first example is the equipping of an army of 30,000 iron-covered strong, which in the winter of 813 – 814 devastated the lands of Eastern Thrace, reaching the town of Arcadiopolis (Златарски 2002: 279; Гюзелев, Божилов 1999: 137; ГИБИ IV: 23). It does not seem plausible for this “iron-covered” army to be equipped without a targeted state policy on armaments, including the organization of arms production. It also does not seem to me plausible and the possible assumption of commercial supply! Trading with whom? With the Avar Khaganate, who is at war with Franks and Bulgarians? With Khazaria – the ally of Byzantium? There can be no question of arms trade with Byzantium as well! It is equally unbelievable for me to have the Bulgarian army equipped only with a trophy weapons. Despite the fact that there is written evidence of capturing trophy weapons, it is impossible for Bulgaria to rely only on this way to supply its army. It serves rather to complete, not as a major source of weapons. Another example of mass, state-organized arms production is the well-known preparation of a new campaign of Khan Krum against Byzantium in 814. The Bulgarian ruler organized the production of various siege machines and their parts in such quantity that for their transport during the military campaign, 5000 cars towed by 10,000 oxen were prepared (Златарски 2002: 278 – 280; Гюзелев, Божилов 1999: 137).

Evidence of organized state policy on armaments is also the stone inventory inscriptions – seven in number, which describe the quantities of armaments assigned to different military officers (Бешевлиев 1992: 193 – 205). If we accept

the unification as a mark for the massification of production, archaeological data could be pointed referring the unification of weapons production, whose works originate in the lands of the Bulgarian state and date back to the 9th – 10th centuries. As example the type I mace after Popov's typology, can be brought (Popov 2015: 26 – 27). At the same time, no finds of Bulgarian sabers

are known from the territories of the Byzantine state. Moreover, the number of these weapons found on the territory of Bulgaria is several dozen (Йотов 2010: 218), many times more than those outside the core of the Bulgarian lands, which is another argument in favor of defining the weapons with the characteristics presented here as Bulgarian!

НАХОДКИ НА САБИ БЪЛГАРСКИ ТИП

Стоян Попов

Резюме: Предмет на настоящата работа са находките на българските тип саби от европейския регион. Тези оръжия имат следните характеристики:

Дръжка: tang-ът е прав и само в края е леко извит към ръба на острието. Закрепването на ръкохватката към tang-a е направено по следните начини: при първия са използвани нитове (при някои от оръжията те са запазени, а при други са останали само отворите в tang-a); при втория начин ръкохватката се задържа на място с помощта на цилиндричните втулки на капачето от едната и предпазителя от другата страна. Тук трябва да се обърне внимание на наличието на единичен малък отвор в цилиндричния ръкав на предпазителя на една от разглежданите саби, който според мен служи за задържане на ръкохватката. Фактът, че такива срецулежачи отвори липсват върху tang-a и от другата страна на цилиндричния ръкав на предпазителя, ми позволява да изразя мнение, че въпросната дръжка е монолитна и е била поставена върху острието чрез прогаряне. Мисля, че е много възможно с тази технология да са изработени дръжките на другите саби, чиито tang-ове нямат следи от нитове. Дръжката завършва с цилиндрично капаче, затворено с кръгла, леко изпъкнала плочка.

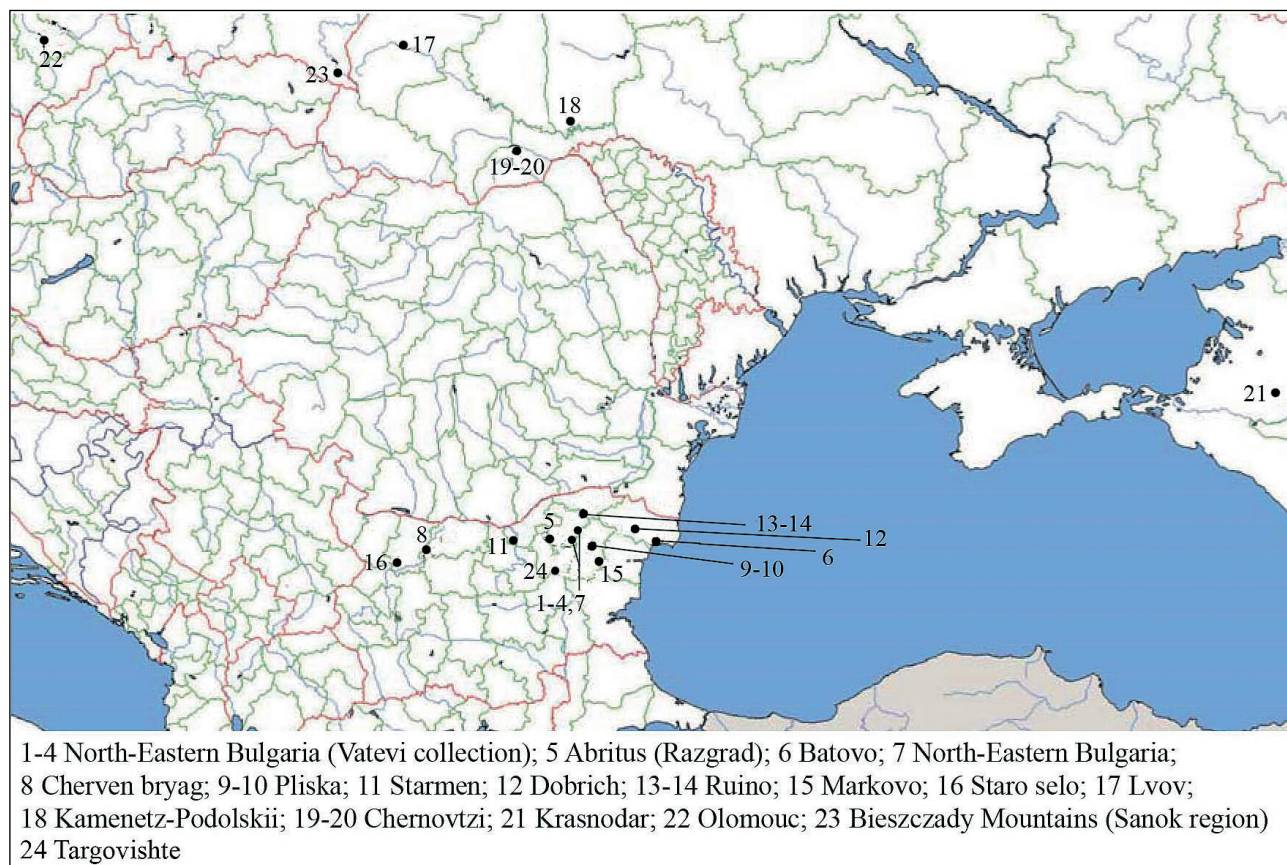
Предпазител: Железен Т-образен гард с приплеснато-цилиндрично ръкавче към дръжката. Обикновено quillons са плоски с кръгла или закръглена форма. Предпазителят обхваща края на tang-a, раменете и началото на острието.

Острието има почти паралелни страни. За по-голямата част от дължината си, острието е едноостро, като почти всички екземпляри в края му имат елман – двустранно заточена част. Като метрични параметри, въз основа на достъпните ми данни, могат да се определят следните характеристики: общата дължина на тези саби е в рамките на 75 – 86 см; дължината на острието е 60,6 – 74,6 см; елманът е с дължина между 13 и 20 см; дължина на дръжката 9 – 15 см.

Тезата за българския произход на тези оръжия и датирането им за първи път е предложена и обоснована от В. Йотов. Този тип саби се разглеждат от Н. Хрисимов и М. Петров. Те също така са съгласни с хипотезата за балканския и по-специално българския произход на тези оръжия, но като взимат предвид формата на предпазителя и неговото участие в изграждането на дръжката, предполагат силно византийско влияние. Руският учен Г. Баранов също обръща внимание на тези саби. Той възприема хипотезата на М. Петров и Н. Хрисимов за византийското наименование на разглежданото оръжие, но отхвърля мнението на тримата български учени за българския произход на тези саби, разглеждайки ги като продукт на византийската оръжейна индустрия. Според него този вид оръжие е дошло в българските територии като военна плячка, а появата им в южно-руските степи е свързана с печенегите. Според Н. Хрисимов, М. Петров и Г. Баранов във византийските писмени източници, тези саби се споменават с термина *παράσιριον*.

Авторът на настоящата статия споделя мнението на В. Йотов, Н. Хрисимов и М. Петров за българския произход на този вид саби, но относно предположенията за византийско влияние и произход от византийските работилници на тези оръжия смята, че не са достатъчно обосновани. Според С. Попов, свързването на тези саби с използвания в източниците термин *παράσιριον* също се нуждае от по-убедителни доказателства.

Ключови думи: български тип саби, Средновековие, разпространение.



Map 1. Territorial distribution of the published Bulgarian type sabers and elements from them

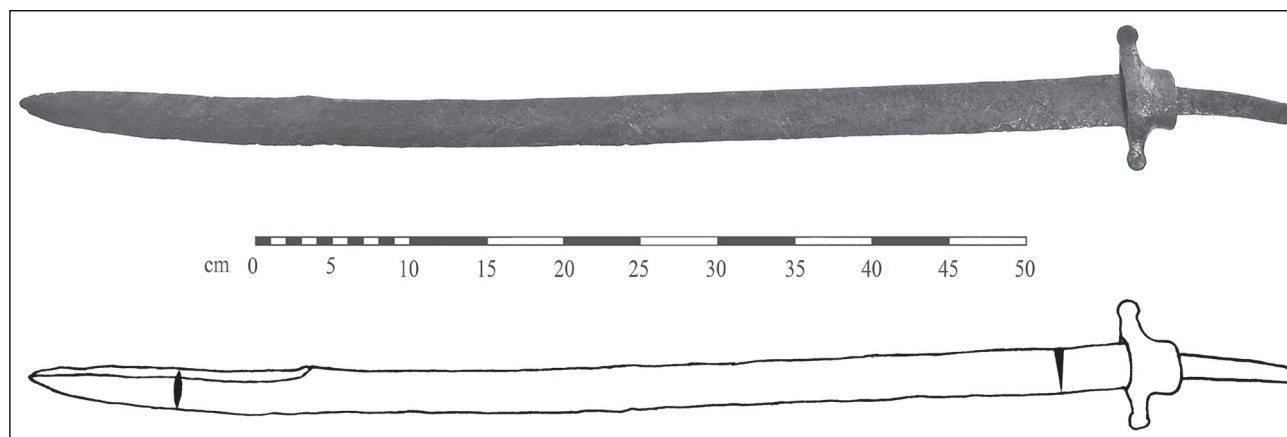


Fig. 1. Bulgarian type saber from the Vatevi collection (Popov 2018).

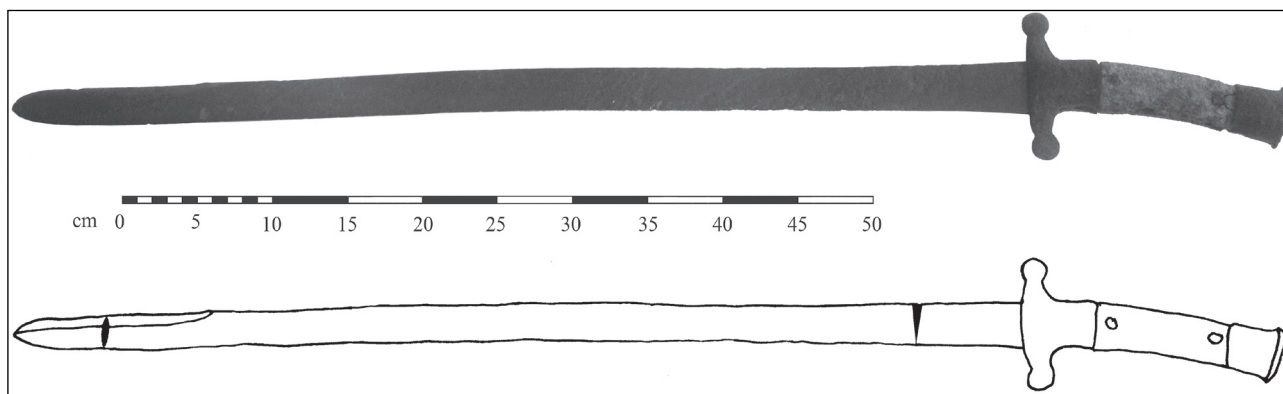


Fig. 2. Bulgarian type saber from the Vatevi collection (Popov 2018).

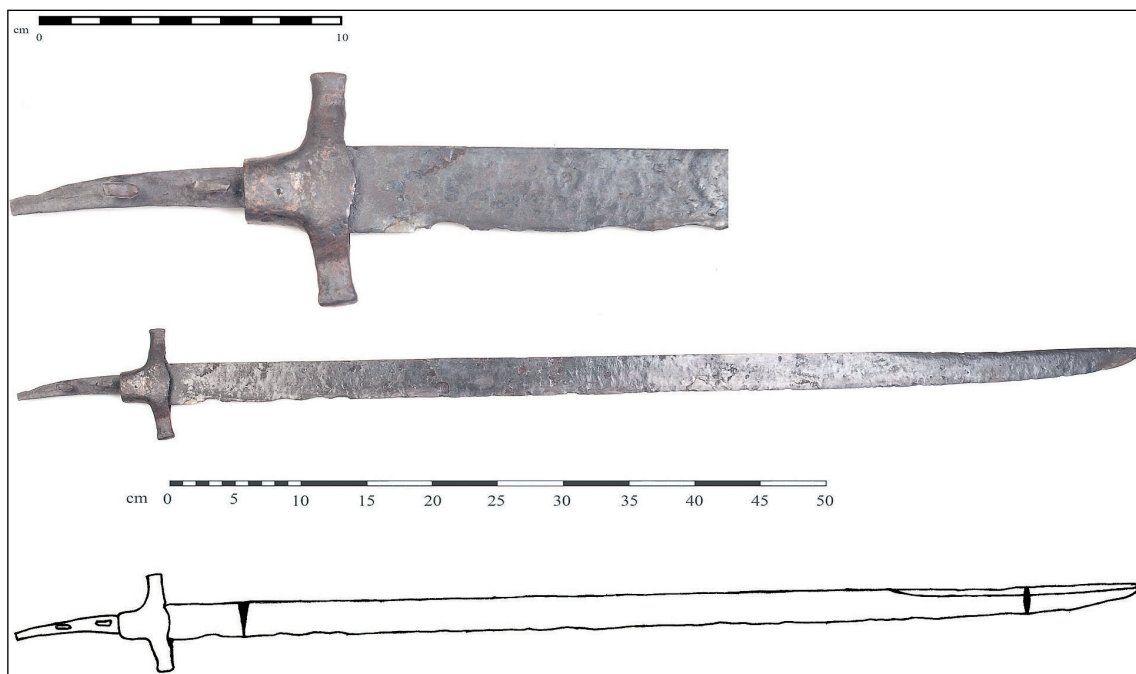


Fig. 3. Bulgarian type saber from the Vatevi collection (Popov 2018).

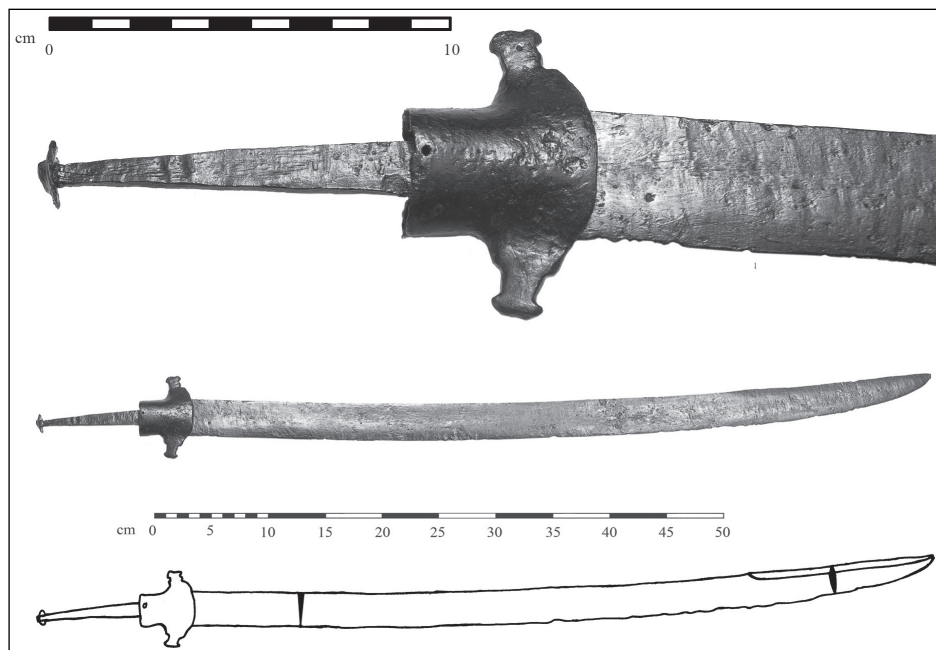


Fig. 4. Bulgarian type saber from the Vatevi collection (Popov 2018).

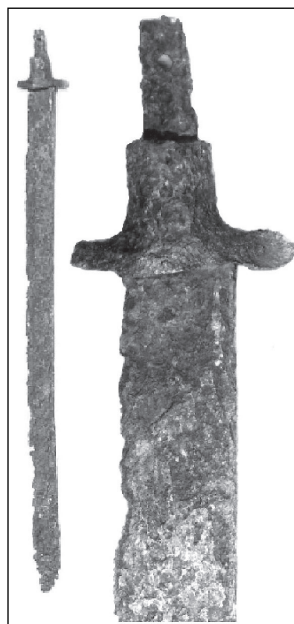


Fig. 5.

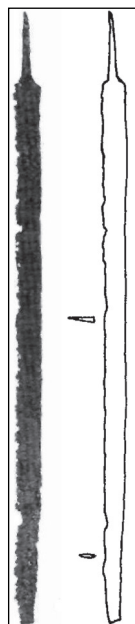


Fig. 6.

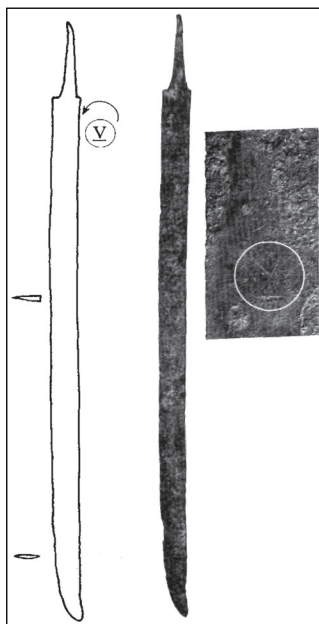


Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

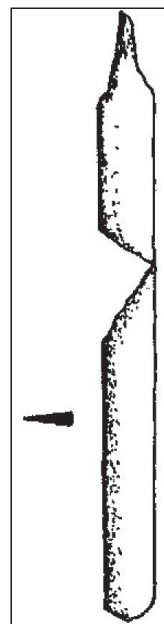


Fig. 9.

Fig. 5. Bulgarian type saber from Abritus (Їомов 2004: 61 – 62)

Fig. 6. Bulgarian type saber from Batovo, Dobrich reg.(Fig. 6) (Їомов 2004: 63, обр. 28, Табл. XXXV: 452)

Fig. 7. Bulgarian type saber from northeastern Bulgaria (Їомов 2004: 63, обр. 28, Табл. XXXV: 451)

Fig. 8. Bulgarian type saber from region of Cherven briag (Їомов 2004: 61, обр. 27. Табл. XXXVI: 450)

Fig. 9. Part of Bulgarian type saber from Pliska (Їомов 2004: 63, Табл. XXXV: 453)

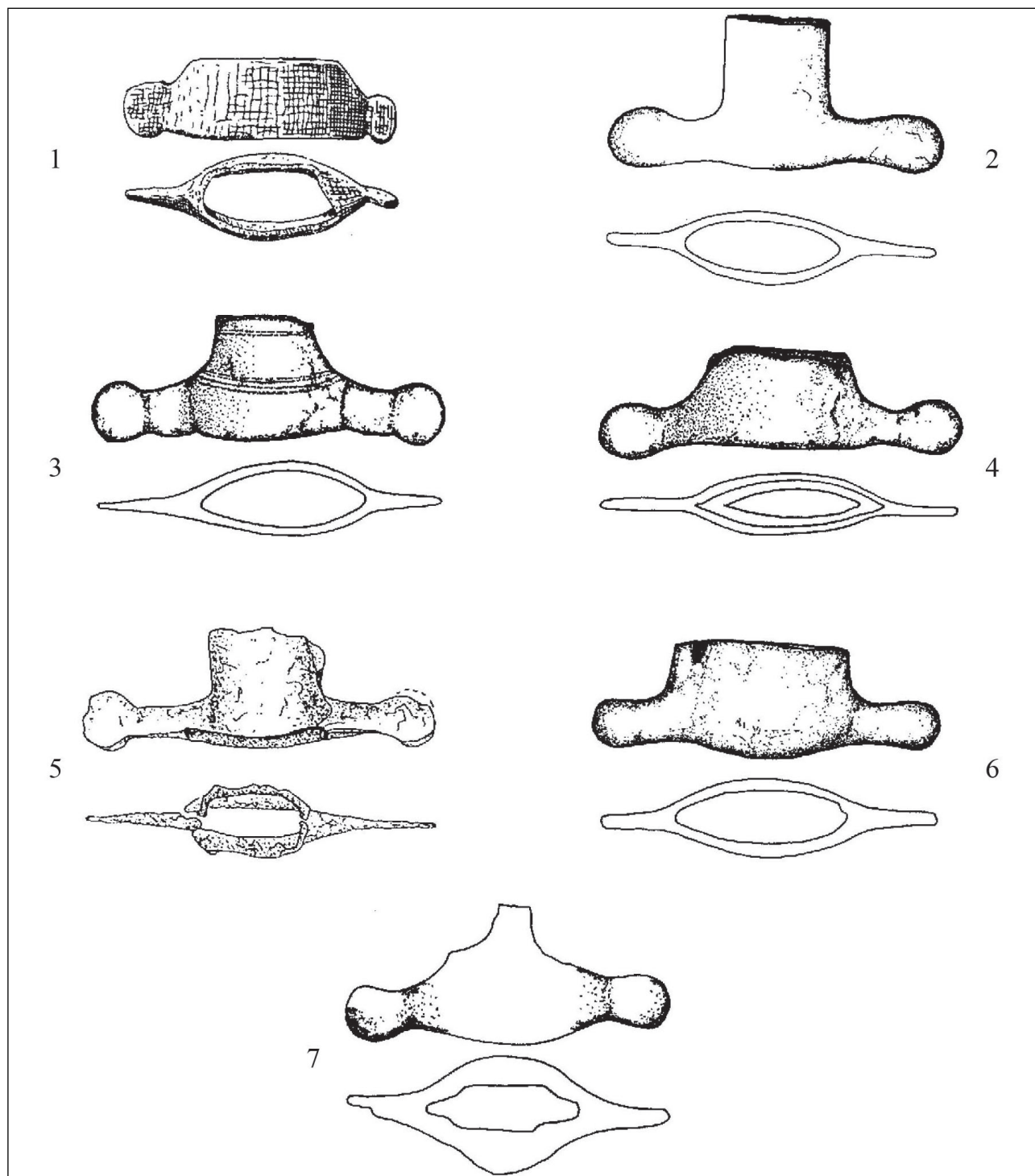


Fig. 10. Parts of Bulgarian type sabers from Starmen, Russe reg. (Fig. 10-1) (Їомов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 467); the region of Dobrich (Fig. 10-2) (Їомов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 468); the fortress near the village of Ruyno, Silistra (Fig. 10-3, 10-4) (Їомов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXV: 465, 466); Markovo village, Varna district (Fig. 10-5) (Їомов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 470); Staro selo, Varna district (Fig. 10-6) (Їомов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXVI: 469), Pliska (Fig. 10-7) (Їомов 2004: 69, Табл. XXXV: 464)

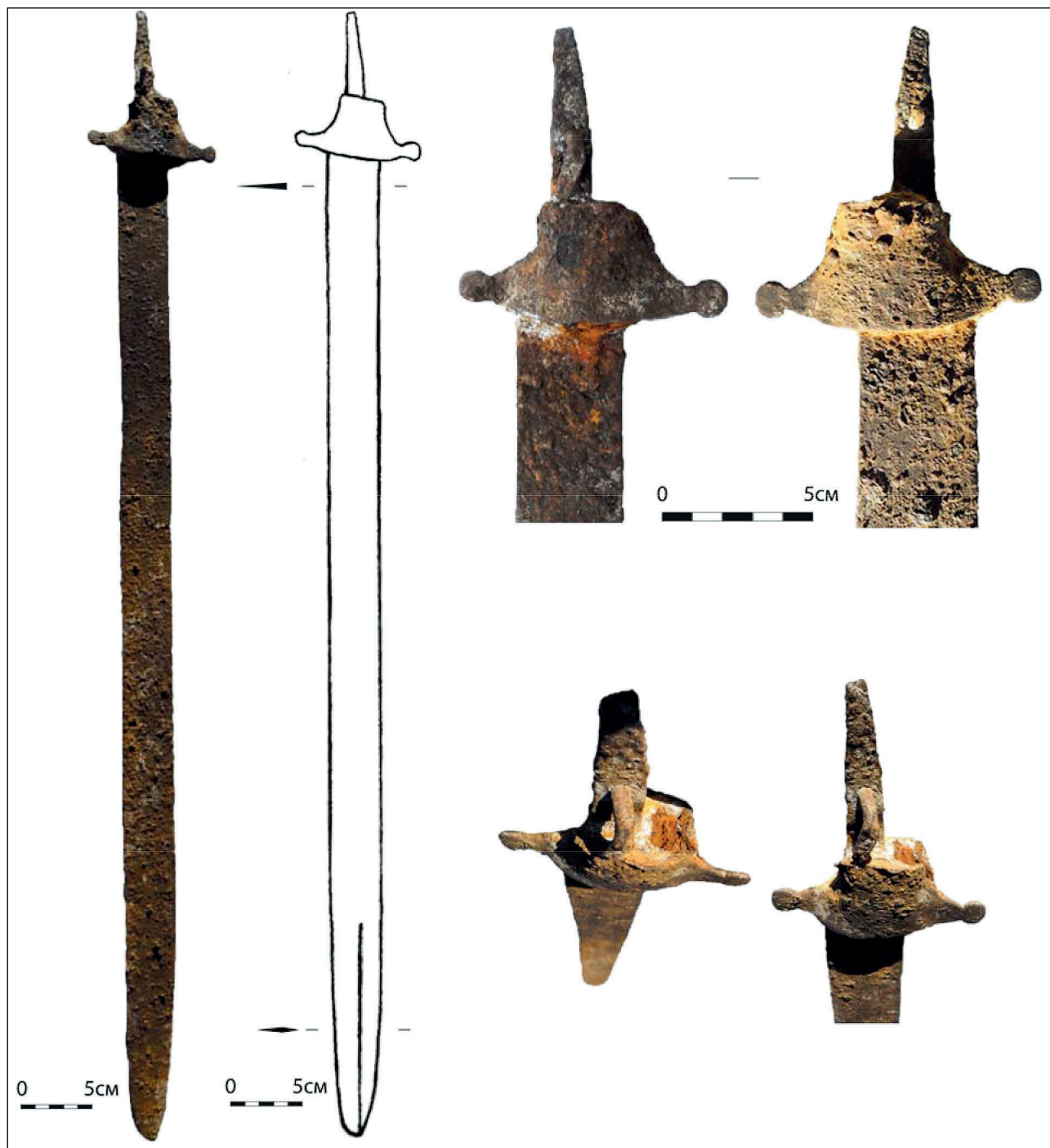


Fig. 11. Bulgarian type saber from the Lviv region of Ukraine (Баранов 2016)



Fig. 12. Bulgarian type saber from the Kamenets-Podolsky area of Khmel'nitsky region of Ukraine
(Баранов 2016)



Fig. 13. Bulgarian type saber from the Chernivtsi region of Ukraine (Баранов 2016)

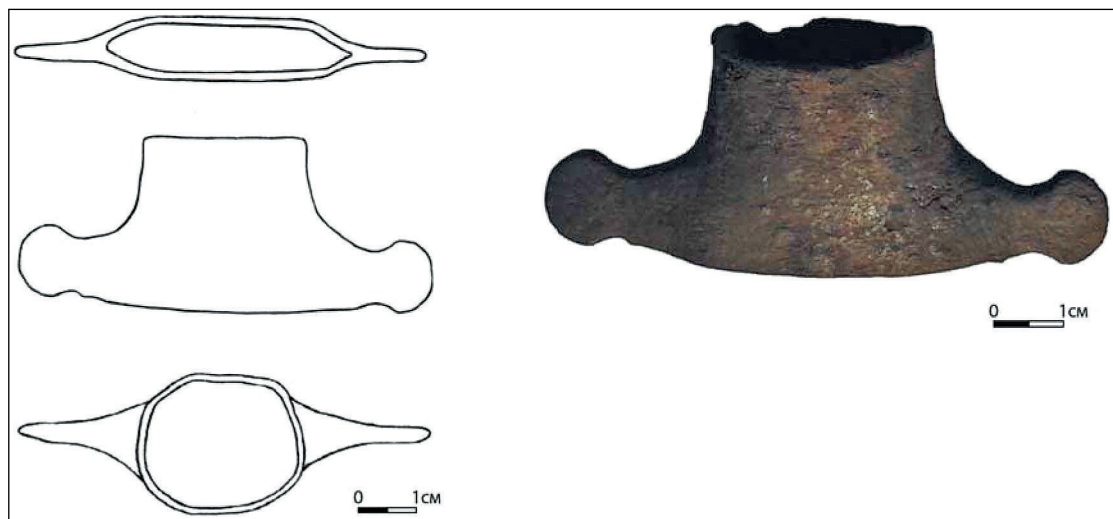


Fig. 14. A guard of Bulgarian type saber from the Chernivtsi region of Ukraine (Баранов 2016)

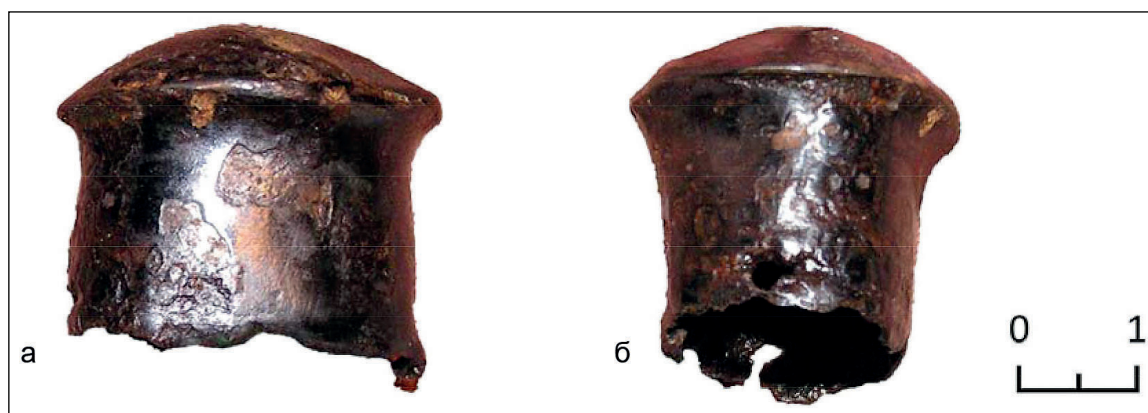


Fig. 15. A cap of Bulgarian type saber from the Krasnodar reg. of Russia (Баранов 2014)

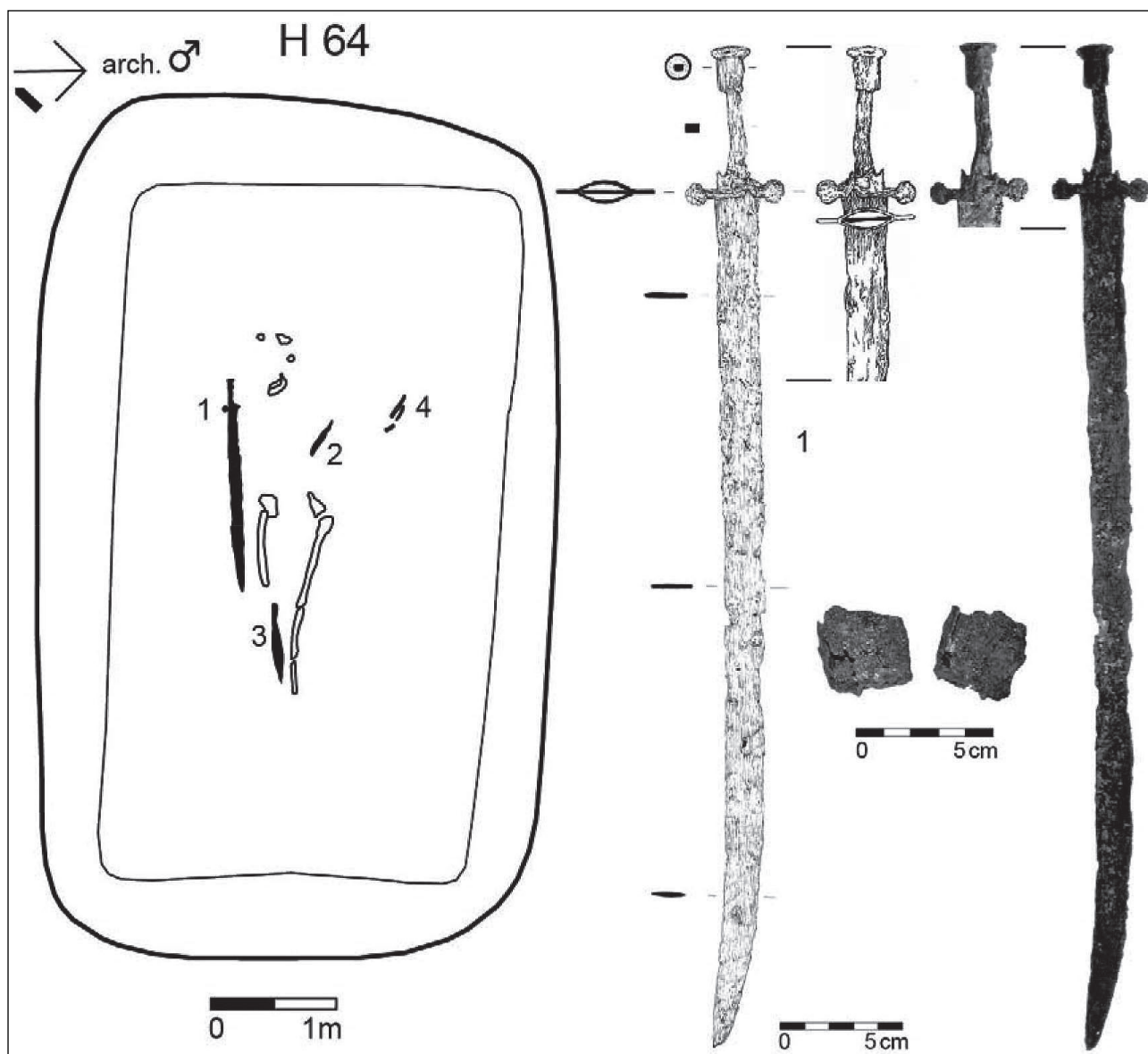


Fig. 16. Bulgarian type saber Olomouc-Nemilani necropolis, Czech Republic
(Kalábek 2014: 9; Přichystalová, Kalábek, Trávníčková, Dresler 2014: 102; Přichystalová 2014: 267)

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Abbreviations

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