

THE ARCHED SLEEVED SWORD GUARDS FROM PRE-SCYTHIAN TIME TO THE BYZANTINE AND ISLAMIC REALMS

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Abstract: *The article deals with the emergence and development of prime nomadic cold weapons for the period of almost two thousand years: from 10th century BC to 9th century AD. The presented materials show clear evolutionary lines of such weaponry, proving that each following group of nomads, living in North Pontic region and steppe parts of Eurasia, relied on its predecessors in terms of warfare and used weapons, primarily – swords and daggers. In such an environment the role of the Roman and later the Eastern Roman Empire in adapting and creating new styles of weapons is denoted, without neglecting the military tradition of the past, always reinventing itself.*

Keywords: *Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Huns, Avars, nomads, ancient warfare, swords, daggers, Eastern Europe, Byzantine Empire.*

Introduction

In 2011 and again in 2022 Valeri Yotov published the article regarding the sword from Garabonc I necropolis (Hungary) and its analogies in archaeology and art (Yotov 2011 & 2022). Despite being a really thorough work, these articles, however, do not address the subject of the prototypes for the Garabonc type swords. G. Baranov talks about the swords of Garabonc type (mostly about their cross-guards) in his 2022 lecture as well as their possible origin. The talk, however, ends with the conclusion that such items remain a mystery (Баранов 2022). Our research attempts to fill this gap, presenting the cold weapons of five sequential periods of no-

madic cultures – Cimmerian, Scythian, Sarmatian, Hunic and Avar – to show that such items forge a clear evolutionary line, which eventually leads to the swords of Garabonc type. This evolutionary procedure refers to the typological features of the predecessor sword types of the sword from the Avar necropolis of Garabonc, regarding the cross guard. Surprisingly, the arched copper alloy cross guard of the swords, corresponding to the so called “Garabonc type”, has sleeves that extend down the blade. These might also have enclosed the mouth of the scabbard, thereby precluding rain from entering (thus serving as a rain-guard), feature which surprisingly appear to have the nomadic prototypes, centuries

before. In addition, the pommels' typological categorization has been taken into consideration in a comparative manner.

1. Cimmerian time (10th – 7th century BC): the discovery of iron by eastern nomads

During the Cimmerian period the main type of swords and daggers in Ukrainian territory was the bimetallic with cross-shaped handle (**fig. 1, B**). It was crafted of two metals (hence the name): the blade was made of iron, while the handle – of bronze. Other specific features of this type include mushroom-like pommel and a distinct guard which gives the handle a cross-like appearance. The Ukrainian archaeologists (Тереножкин 1976; Klochko 2020) find origin of this type in the daggers and swords of Karasuk culture (**fig. 1, A**) which had been spread in Central Asia during the Late Bronze Age. Based on the reconstruction, the people of this culture came to modern Ukrainian territory around 10th century BC; at their new home they discovered the iron and began crafting weapons with it, believing this material to be stronger than the bronze; the physical features of the iron arranged the bimetallic nature of this type: the iron blade was forged, while the handle – casted in the mold, most likely made of wax. Unfortunately, because of these very features some of the findings come with only a part of the blade, if any at all, while the rest is destroyed by corrosion. Most of the findings of cross-shaped handles (with or without the iron blade) come from Ukraine (Klochko 2020: 68 – 69). Stand-alone findings were also discovered in Romania, Austria, Germany etc (Тереножкин 1976: рис. 74). Plenty of such artifacts also come from Russia, mainly – the Northern Caucasus (Тереножкин 1976: рис. 66).

In time, as the mastery of the iron had developed, the bimetallic swords and daggers with cross-shaped handle began to evolve. Until recently it was assumed that the developed

forms of this type originate on the Caucasus (Тереножкин 1976: 110), as most of such findings were discovered there. However, new findings from Ukraine force to revisit this concept.

The developed cross-shaped daggers and swords were mostly made fully of iron. Their guard moved from being straight and narrow to somewhat bent (**fig. 1, C**). Eventually it transformed into having a triangular “teeth” on the edges, pointing in the same direction as the blade (**fig. 1, D**). It is possible, that the reason for such evolution was not only aesthetic, but also practical and could indicate a developed tradition of the swordfight, as such “teeth” could be used to catch enemy's blade between them and the blade.

Further development of the guard shows it becoming less and less distinct, until it finally transforms into heart-like shape that we see on the swords of Scythian time (**fig. 1, E – F**). The reason for this could have been the transition in the use of the sword, probably caused by the changes in warfare traditions and the people behind it. As the presence of the cross-guard and an existence of the sword fighting tradition, its absence may mark that the use of the sword in Scythian society was different during the Cimmerian time. However, it is important to note that the evolution of the cross-shaped guard was not linear. On the contrary, the new, previously unpublished, findings from Ukraine show at least two developed traditions (ornamented (**fig. 1, 7, 11, 13, 14**) and non-ornamented (**fig. 1, 8 – 10, 12**) which were mutually influential, until one of them eventually triumphed.

2. Scythian time (7th – 4th century BC): peculiar relationships with past and future

There are mainly two types of Scythian akinaks, each with their own internal variations. The difference between them is in the pommel: in one type (presumably more archaic) it is called the brick-shaped (**fig. 2, 1 – 6**), while in another (rather more modern) – the antenna-shaped

(**fig. 2, 7 – 12**). Such dating can be supported by two facts: 1 – the brick-shaped pommel is found on the clearly Cimmerian-time dagger and sword (**fig. 1, 10; fig. 3, 2**); 2 – as Scythian akinaks were mostly made of iron, the forging of an “antenna” would be harder and therefore require deeper mastery. Both of these points also apply to the guard: like we had said and shown, the formation of the classical “heart-like” shape begins during the Cimmerian time (**fig. 1, F**), but it did not reach this form immediately as the Scythian culture became dominating in the North Pontic region – it is clearly evident by the large number of akinaks with more primitive guard rather than a “heart-like”.

In the context of our research, two subjects within the Scythian time must be mentioned. First in the long sword (97 cm) found near the Romanian village of Aldoboly. Aside from the length, this item is also worth noting due to its guard: it has distinct cross-like shape (though rather bent), which makes it similar to the developed guards of the Cimmerian-time swords and daggers (**fig. 3**). Despite this, the sword from Aldoboly is attributed to the 5th – 4th century BC (Мелюкова 1964: 56). Its length is explained by the La Tene influence. There is an alternative to such explanation, but we will cover it later. The shape of the guard itself is not discussed, but its Scythian origin is not in question due to the animal ornament depicted on it. To sum up, this artifact is interpreted as a Thracian imitation of Scythian product (Мелюкова 1964: 56). To us the sword from Aldoboly is important as it demonstrates that some archaic traditions (like the shape of the guard) may sometimes reappear after a long time since their usage.

Another subject, which needs to be discussed is the tradition of the Scythian long swords. The form of the handle in such swords is the same as in usual akinaks: the pommel is either brick-shaped or antenna-shaped, the guard is either heart-shaped or has the form of its predecessor (Скорий 1981: 22, рис. 2). The

difference is in the length of the blade: 70 cm and more, comparing to other akinaks which are shorter. The amount of such long swords is a small percent from the total number. However, the researchers trace them to the archaic period in Scythian timeline (Скорий 1981: 21). Indeed, the swords with long blades (also in small number) had originated even during the Cimmerian time, most likely due to the influence of the peoples of Central-Eastern Europe and their weaponry. This might have resulted in the appearance of the earliest mounted swordfight tradition in Eastern Europe (Ключко 2022: 47 – 48). The long swords of Scythians is also interpreted as the marker of emerging mounted swordfight within their society (Скорий 1981: 23). The fact that such swords emerge early in Scythian (and even pre-Scythian) time allows to assume that they were the source of influence (at least one of) for the appearance of such weapons in Sarmatian society.

3. Sarmatian time (4th century BC – 4th century AD): unexpected revivals

Currently there are four known Sarmatian types of swords and daggers. The first one is distinct by its sickle-shaped pommel as well as a cross-shaped guard (**fig. 4, I**). Such swords and daggers were spread in 4th – 2nd century BC, although some findings of them are attributed even to 1st century BC. Considering the general timeline, such weapons are most likely the continuation of Scythian ones with brick-shaped pommel, as indicated by the findings from Middle Asia (Иванов 2018: 169, рис. 1). Such change in form has no obvious meaning from the practical point of view, but its sense can be either purely aesthetic or symbolic, perhaps even religious.

It is also important to note (not only in the context of weapons with sickle-shaped pommel, but regarding Sarmatian swords and daggers in general) the reappearance of the cross-shaped guard, which was common during the Cimmerian time but almost completely absent in the

Scythian period. The reason for such return, in our opinion, is purely practical: as Sarmatian weapons were mostly made of iron, it is much easier and faster to forge a narrow iron stripe, which would serve as guard, rather than a heart-shaped item.

The second type of Sarmatian swords and daggers has an antenna-shaped pommel (**fig. 4, 2-3**); the guard is either also has a shape of cross or absent at all, though it is not clear if it is an original concept or it was lost to time or damage. The connection to the weapons with antenna-shaped pommels of Scythian time is beyond doubt on the first sight; however, the examination of the chronology makes it much less obvious. The Scythian swords and daggers with antenna-shaped pommels were spread during 6th – 5th century BC (Симоненко 1984: 133), while Sarmatian ones appear from 3rd century BC to 3rd century AD on different territories (Симоненко 1984: 134, рис. 5). Some scientists argue that such shape of pommel might have been preserved in Caucasus from Scythian time into Sarmatian period, though such idea remains questionable (Симоненко 2015: 38). It is also possible that antenna-shaped pommel reappeared spontaneously (Симоненко 2015: 42 – 43) – as the sword from Aldoboly with the bent cross-guard had shown, sometimes it is an option. Still, there is a potential to discover new findings which could close this gap completely.

The swords and daggers with ring-shaped pommel (**fig. 4, 4**) were common during the middle Sarmatian time (1st century BC – 1st century AD), although the earliest findings date 2nd century BC, while the latest – 3rd century AD. The origin of these weapons is believed to be Central Asian or perhaps even Chinese. Most of such swords are the same length as their Scythian predecessors – 50 – 60 cm (Симоненко 2015: 43). However, a number (although relatively small) of significantly longer artifacts with ring-shaped pommel indicates the tradition of using the long swords at that period. It is also important to note

that the swords with ring-shaped pommel served as the prototypes for the type of Roman swords with the ring as a pommel. The former appeared in Roman weaponry complex due to the nomadic mercenaries serving the Empire. The rings on the latter have somewhat different shape and blades are mostly longer. Such weapons were further used not only by the Roman soldiers but also by other nomadic peoples (Sekulov, Maniotis 2022: 87 – 88).

The fourth type of Sarmatian swords and daggers has a pin-shaped handle (**fig. 4, 5 – 6**). There are several variations of such weapons, none of them have pommels, only some have guards (cross-shaped). It is most likely that the handle was additionally enhanced by organic materials (wood, leather, bone etc.) but they did not reach the researchers. Chronologically such items belong to 2nd century BC – 4th century AD. The origin of these swords and daggers is a subject of debate. Some scientists believe that such weapons had prototypes in the La Tene weaponry complex or among the weapons of the Meothic tribes living in Kuban region (Симоненко 1984: 143). There is also a possibility that the prototypes for such swords and daggers have Chinese origin. Therefore, they appear in Sarmatian weaponry complex through Central Asia initially as trophies, gifts or maybe items of trade (Симоненко 2015: 67). Further variants of such swords and daggers would be developed based on this technology (Симоненко 2015: 68).

Regardless of origin, there is still a question why would Sarmatians incorporate these foreign long swords and daggers into their own weaponry complex? As evident by the majority of the findings, most of their history the Sarmatians used rather short swords and daggers. However, as we have previously mentioned, the tradition of using the long swords largely predates Sarmatians. Therefore, it is possible that during the clashes with late Scythians they might have met with enemy's mounted swordsmen and realized the potential of such military

unit, which resulted in forging the ring-pommel swords with long blades, as well as the adoption of the foreign long swords. Such interpretation might be rightfully challenged by the obvious gaps in chronology. However, one should keep in mind that the chronological attribution of the majority of the presented swords is based on the burial materials alongside which said swords had been found. In other words, the dating shows not so when a sword *was* used but when it *stopped* being used. But the sword, as the marker of the warrior, might have been used for several generations, passing from father to son before being finally put into the grave or a hoard, while being lost from the possession of such family or said family dying out.

4. Huns and Germanic Tribes “foederati” (4th – 5th century AD)

Originating from the Inner Asian steppe, the Huns were horse nomads, probably of Turkic origins and speaking a proto-Turkic language. They were possibly the remnants of migrating Xiongnu, a Steppe people. During the 4th century AD, Huns reached the Roman frontiers, pressuring other Germanic tribes to move to the East. It was inevitable that the Huns would sooner or later cross the Danube and penetrate the Balkan Peninsula, facing the Roman Army. According to a broader interpretation, the Hun period in the Middle Danube Basin began in the last quarter of the 4th century AD. Its second phase initiates with the relocation of the Hun power center in the Carpathian Basin (426) and lasts until the death of Attila (454).

The clash was inevitable however, the available archaeological evidence from the middle and lower Danube region does not show a dramatic socioeconomic change with the arrival of the Huns. It looks as if Hun villages, which were fixed settlements dominated by surface dwellings with wattle-and-daub walls, clay-coated floors and reed-thatched roofs. Many Huns saw the Eastern Roman Empire as a land of op-

portunity and were impressed by the ease of urban life, with its seemingly constant supply of luxuries and higher standard of living. From this period (5th century AD) we can rather recognize also traces of their Germanic allies' presence (Elton 1997: 28 – 29).

An alliance (*foedus*) was forged between Rome and the Huns as evidenced by the regular peace treaties, the exchange of hostages and the appearance of Hunnic auxiliary troops in the Roman Army, among Goths (Nechaeva 2021: 184 – 186). Later in the 6th century, Belisarius himself had in his regiments Huns, among the many other nations, making his army multiethnic, adopting the Hunnish style of warfare (Heather 2018: 51). In the Balkans many traces of the elaborated material culture of the Huns can be identified. For instance, a grave from Singidunum contains a variety of weapons (Ivanisevic, Kazanski: 2007), while metallic cauldrons or gilded saddle plates golden torque and silver belt buckles have been excavated in many sites (Popovic 2001: 234, fig. 25; Ivanisevic, Kazanski 2007: 137, fig. 4; Ivanisevic 2015: 661, fig. 7).

The military equipment of the Huns and the Germanic tribes apart from the bow included the sword. The swords belong to so called “*Asian type*” or “*Asiatischen typ*”, according to W. Menghin (Menghin 1994-95: 185 f.). As we have examined, these swords appear in Sarmatian tombs in the Pontic region as early as in the 1st century AD. The swords of this typology had large pommels and cross guards of various sizes and shapes and made of the same metal as the blade. A very typical characteristic feature of this guard is the cylindrical collars whose “mouth” engulfs the upper part of the grip and the lower part of the blade (**fig. 5**). Some pommels were also covered in a thin sheet of bronze or silver. Grips were covered in wood and leather and sometimes had metal elements. Blades, hilts, and scabbards were frequently decorated. Especially popular was the inlaying of gold, silver, and bronze, and decorative effects such as

gold cloisonné and the attachment of jewels. The wealthiest of barbarian leaders owned extremely decorated swords. A very significant example Childeric's sword, the fifth-century Merovingian chief, whose extremely rich tomb was excavated at Tournai in 1653. The sword had both gold inlay and cloisonné decoration on both the hilts and scabbards of two swords found in his grave a *spatha* and a *scramasax*. Such swords had been found also in Balkans (fig. 6) (Vagalinski 2014). Such swords with massive cross-guards, decorated with garnets, it is believed that were produced in Byzantium and reached the leaders of eastern equestrian peoples as gifts (Miks 2009: footnote 129).

One type, which is distinguished from this classification drew our attention, regarding the topic being demonstrated in this scientific work. It is the sword from Engels-Pokrowsk, Saratow Region, Russia (fig. 7). This sword has a special cross guard, where the lower zone ends in hanging bird heads with white eye inlays. The same motif comes from the scabbard mouth plates of the *spathae* of type III of the Asian typology from Ermihalyfalva in Romania and Pleidelsheim grave 71, Germany. A similar sword had been found in Taman, modern day Russia (fig. 8). Its cross guard appear to have the same shape and it is also having garnet decoration. Unlike the previous swords, the upper collar of the guard is preserved (Menghin 1994-1995: 178 – 182).

Surprisingly enough, the prolonged edges of the lower part of the sword guard remind us of the Cimmerian dagger guards (fig. 1, 9 – 10). We can observe the evolution where the bending edges are now part of the lower part of the main cross guard, engulfing the blade, like a collar. It is very crucial that our parallels come from the Eastern Europe and the steppe lands but also from regions around the Black Sea, regions where the Cimmerian and the Scythian culture flourished. On contrary, this subtype appears to be rare in the West. This might indicate that there was a solid tradition of an imitation and circulation of

an earlier chronological period type by the craftsmen. Moreover, it is beneficial not to neglect the role of the Bosporan Kingdom and the Parthian Empire and their contribution to assimilated new technologies and in our case new sword types from the East, distributing them to the West and to the Eastern Mediterranean region.

5. Avar-Byzantine-Islamic realm (6th – 9th century AD)

After examining and addressing the necessary linkage between the Cimmerian and the Scythian prototypes in an evolutionary approach till the Hunnic Period, the final comparisons with the “Garabonc” type of swords is demonstrated.

To begin with, during the 6th century AD a great reformation of the Byzantine army is occurred, to adapt to new trends of warfare. The role of the cavalry is enhanced and is equipped with a variety of both defensive and offensive weapons, while the infantry units bear lighter armament. The regiment of the horse archers is developed (*cataphrctarii sagittarii*) Again, the Byzantines had to face a fearful nomadic opponent, the Avars. Like the Huns, the Avars where skillful horse-archers and used also the sword as a primary weapon. The typologies of the swords of the Avar period vary to double-edged bladed and the new development of the single-edged sword (*proto-saber*) is occurred. The typical sword was the long double-edged sword, the *spatha*, which differs significantly from the previous types we presented, regarding the morphologies of the cross guards. Among the various types some have been also used in the Byzantine Army, but also seems that have been produced in the armories of the Empire (Eger 2014). Different types of cross guards developed, and the ring pommel sword types made again their appearance, however the scope of this research is not to examine the Avar Period swords but to bridge chronologically and in an evolutionary manner the material.

Now we proceed to an in-depth analysis of the sword of “Garabonc” type in a compara-

tive manner with the Scythian predecessors. The chronological span according to the surviving examples is from the 8th – 9th century AD, even in the 11th century, taking into account some examples from the pictorial sources.

The characteristic features of this type are the copper alloy cross guards with sleeves that extend down the blade, and they are slightly arched. These might also have enclosed the mouth of the scabbard, thereby precluding rain from entering (thus serving as a rain-guard). A typical example of this sword hilt comes from grave 55 in the Avar necropolis of Garabonc in Hungary. This sword has a trefoil pommel and a slightly volute shaped guard. The Garabonc necropolis has been dated to the second half of 9th century AD (Szöke et. al. 1992: 93, 233, Taf. 20, Taf. 63) (**fig. 9**).

This, according to Yotov is the first examined example and the specimen that gave its name, after the finding place, Garabonc, to the whole typology by the researcher himself. Initially, in the first publication for the weapons found in the grave No 55, B. M. Szöke points out *“as far as these swords have no parallels of same time nor in the Carpathian basin or in the East, or among the step-people arm, the only possibility of their place of origin I may suggest is Byzantium. But this may become true only when well dated parallels to these arms will be found”* (Szöke et. al. 1992: 94). So, in order to find analogies in the Byzantine realm, Yotov made a comparison with the artistic parallels of swords in the famous manuscript of “The Homilies of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus” Homilies of Gregory the Theologian”, Paris, gr. 510, which was produced in Constantinople in 879 – 882.

From the archaeological perspective, similar sword finds had been unearthed in the Byzantine fortress Dinogetia in Northern Dobroudja, Romania (Stefan et. al. 1967: 57, fig. 35. 19) (**fig. 10**), from Kytsivka necropolis, Kharkiv Region, Ukraine (Аксѡнов, Лаптев 2012: 100) (**fig. 11**) and from Vinnitsa Region also in Ukraine

(Баранов 2017: 252, fig. 3.) (**fig. 12**). In contrast, to the previous examples, which have a sleeved upper collar, the handle is riveted to the cross-guard, which is almost fully arched.

A further close parallel comes from the region of Cherkasy Region in Ukraine (**fig. 13**). This time the sword guard has its collar down the blade, filled with a kind of fleur-de-lis ornament. The lily is also depicted on a soldier’s sword from folio 137r in the illuminated Byzantine manuscript of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, dated approximately to the late 9th century (Баранов 2015: 99, 102).

This type of sword can be traced even in Greece (Athanasoulis, Manolossou 2021: 15) and in modern day Iran. This specimen comes from the Furuסיyya Collection (**fig. 14**). The hilt is decorated with highly stylized leaf forms and appears to have had a long U-shaped sleeve whose opening enclosed the mouthpiece of the scabbard, like a rain-guard. The hilt with the remnant of the blade, is dated to the Samanid dynasty, in the 8th – 9th centuries AD (Bashir 2008: 38)

The researchers problematized about the fact that how a “Byzantine” type of sword reached Hungary. Szöke suggested that the sword was transferred in the lands south of Balaton Lake in Garabonc by Bulgar mercenaries, who have joined the retinue of Prince Pribina, the head of the Blatna Principality and his son Chezil around the second third of 9th century AD (Szöke 2014: 109, 110).

Although, as we can observe, the distribution of this type is traced mainly again in the Eastern Europe and Eurasian steppes. The majority of the examples come from the modern-day Ukraine and Romania and only one specimen has been found in Greece and Iran (?), whose context is unknown. This fact made us consider searching for possible prototypes which could be linked with the previous long-term nomadic presence in the area.

The sword from Garabonc, but also the rest of the specimens, seem to bear analogies

with the previous Hunnic examples, also from the mentioned regions, but mostly with Scythian parallels. A significant example is the sword with its scabbard, which was founded in the burial of Tovsta Mohyla (**fig. 15**). The Tovsta Mohyla burial mound is in southern Ukraine near the city of Pokrov in Dnipro Region. The sword is typical for the middle 4th century BC. The hilt and the guard are made of gold, and they are richly decorated with scenes from the Greek mythology. The main griffin on the scabbard is lion-headed and is portrayed with a goat's horn, while in the handle there is a representation of the god Pan playing on his syringa (Pan flute or Pan pipes) with two goats near him.

Of great interest is the morphology of the lower golden "mouth" sheath, beneath the typical triangle guard, that extends towards the blade, like a sleeve. This feature reminds us of the sleeved cross guards of the "Garabonc" typology. Indeed, the analogy with the sword of the Samanid Dynasty from the Furuסיyya Collection is astonishing. According to the researchers, the pommel of the Tovsta Mohyla sword is considered uncommon for the Scythian types (Полидович 2015: 139). However it heavily resembles the mushroom-shaped pommels of the classical Cimmerian swords and daggers (**fig. 1, B**). The round pommel can be easily compared to the pommel that the Cierny Brod (Slovakia) bears (**fig. 16**) (Biro 2014: 537). Therefore it is possible that such pommels can be considered the prototypes for the "bead-like" pommels of the late Roman and early medieval swords, found in North Pontic region and its neighbouring lands (Popov 2016: fig. III, 1 – 8).

Another denoted example is the golden sword preserved in its scabbard from Velyka Bilozerka, Zaporizhzhia, stored at the Museum of Historic Treasures of Ukraine in Kyiv, dated in the 4th century (**fig. 17**). The prolonged lower part of the triangle cross guard bear similarities with the cross guards of the mentioned Middle Byzantine period swords. The way that these extend-

ed lower parts of the guards engulf the scabbard, preventing possibly the rain to rust the blade in both Scythian and "Byzantine" examples is very characteristic and significant.

Revival of a sword form through centuries. Some denoted examples

This phenomenon is not alien to the History of Arms and Armor. A very profound example is the so called new "Roman" Sword from Soknopaiou Nesos, El-Fayyum, Egypt, during the archaeological excavations carried out by the Soknopaiou Nesos Project (University of Salento, Lecce) in the temenos of the main temple in Soknopaiou Nesos, modern Dime a unique sword came to light (**fig. 18**). The sword initially was correlated with the Late Republican Period roman sword with a mixture of swords of the Hellenistic Successor Kingdom of the Ptolemaic Dynasty but also the Celtic influences cannot be excluded. However, the most intriguing part of the sword was its pommel. Such pommels could be traced among the Roman and the Hellenistic paradigms, either from iconography or the actual specimens, but the researchers found analogies in the pre-dynastic trilobate mace-heads, thousand years before, where their appearance is attributed to Near Eastern influences in the first half of the 4th millennium BC. It is very strange how this object came to fashion, having manufactured thousand years ago, in the Hellenistic/Roman Period and even in the Celtic world, let alone the fact that there were not some intermediate stages of transferring the knowledge of this shapes of trilobate maces. The researchers conclude that it is difficult to determine whether these maces functioned as prototypes for the Soknopaiou Nesos sword type (Davoli, Miks 2015).

Instigating our case, this example however, indicates the significant influences the nomadic military tradition would have in the Roman weapons, supporting the theory of the imitation and circulation of objects and the assimilation creating new styles of weaponry.

Returning to the Middle Byzantine Period, we observe that many different and unique sword types had been used by the Byzantine Army. In fact, an older type revives, that of the Roman *gladius*, at least regarding the handle form.

An exceptional specimen that shows a merging of styles is the sword hilt, discovered in a shipwreck at Serçe Limani (**fig. 19**). This shipwreck was discovered in the 1970s and was at first wrongly identified as an Arabic merchant ship. However, it now appears to have been a Byzantine ship which set sail from Constantinople in the first quarter of 11th century transporting a rich cargo, according to Joseph Schwarzer. The hilt is characterized by a large ring-pommel, a compartmentalized grip and an arched, “cuffed” D-shaped guard. The decorative motif represents the mythical bird Hamsa from the Indian mythology. The pommel has the metaphorical function of a bowl which, with the flanged quillons as the leaves, engulf the hamsa motif which could be seen as the flower. This type of guard is depicted also in Roman art during the 5th century AD (Schwarzer, Deal 1986: 50 – 51). Moreover, the most exceptional fact is that six swords on display at the military museum in Istanbul may belong to this type, one dating from the 13th century and two from the 17th century. All in all, we observe that the morphology of the hilt indicates that it could have been produced by a Byzantine or a Muslim craftsman, and that it was probably a straight double-edged sword with a lenticular blade. We can also ascertain the remarkable longevity of this “cuffed guard” type.

Conclusions

The Eurasian steppes, which span Eurasia for over 6,000 km from Manchuria in north-eastern China to Hungary in Eastern Europe and are bounded by the Taiga forests in the north and a desert belt to the south, have long been an open highway between Inner Asia and Europe. Only for the two thousand years a vast number of nomadic peoples had passed it. Proto-Scythians and

Scythians, Sauromatians and Sarmatians, Huns, Proto-Bulgarians, Avars, Magyars, Pechenegs and Cumans – this is but a small list of them. All of these peoples had left their mark in this vast region, often bringing innovative techniques regarding warfare and weapons. In addition, they served as a sort of a conduit transferring new technologies from the East to West.

The Byzantine Empire and the Islamic Caliphates stood in the middle of this process of transmission, controlling major locations like the Taurica Chersoneses, the Theme of Cherson and the Iranian steppes and Transoxiana. Both of these civilizations seem to have been particularly adaptable in military manners. This enabled Byzantium to survive for so long, surrounded by powerful and predatory foes. Byzantine military adaptability and willingness to learn from, as well as to recruit from its neighbours and even from its enemies played a fundamental role in assimilating new weapons and military tactics, where different workshops and armories produced their own forms of weapons.

In our article we presented every step of an evolutionary model, lasting two thousand years. It is important to note that we do not propose the dissemination of a culture, nor the diffusion and slavish imitation of an archaeological type, but the adaptation and profound modification which can even make the original model of a prototype, whose diffusion is demonstrated. The diffusion of objects and ideas throughout of history is a perfectly proven fact, and therefore the study of such diffusion should not be discredited by itself nor needs more defense, as long as the diffusion does not become exclusive or overvalued explanatory mode.

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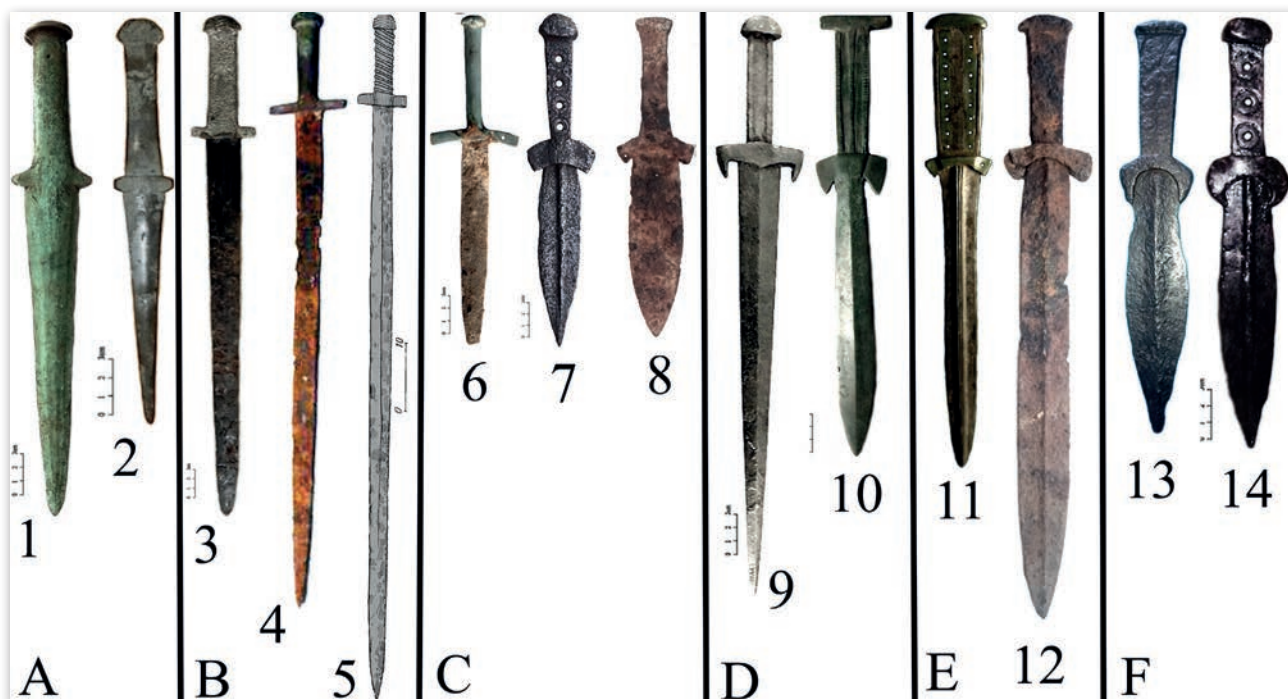


Fig. 1. The evolution of Cimmerian-time swords and daggers.

A. Weapons of Karasuk culture.

1. Unknown (Ukraine), 2. Khmelnytskyi region.

B. Variants of classical bimetallic swords.

3. Odesa region (short cross-guard), 4. Kharkiv region (long cross-guard),
5. Subotiv (long sword) (Тереножкин 1976).

C. First-stage developed cross-shaped daggers.

6. Poltava region (bimetallic, slightly collapsed guard), 7. Khmelnytskyi region (iron, with circular ornament),
8. Cherkasy region (iron, non-ornamented).

D. Swords and daggers with “teeth” on the edges.

9. Kyiv region, 10. Kharkiv region (with the brick-shaped pomel, typical for Scythian time).

E. Swords and daggers with less functional guard.

11-12. Kropyvnytskyi region.

F. Daggers with “embracing” guard.

13. Vinnytsia region (traces of double circular ornament on the handle),
14. Unknown (somewhere near Southern Buh river)

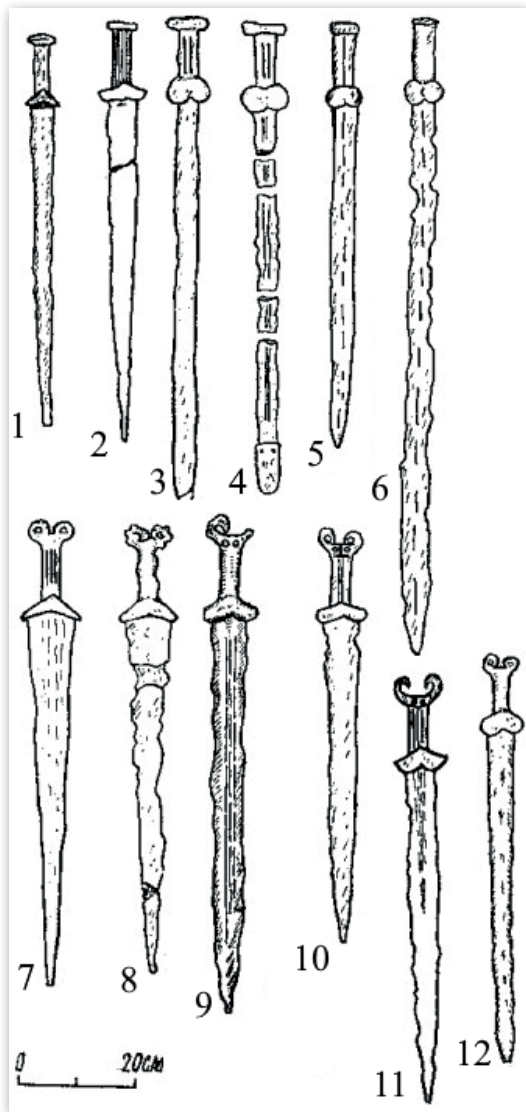


Fig. 2. Scythian long swords (based on Скопуї 1981).

1. Unknown (various), 2. Crimean regional museum,
3. Carmir-Blur, 4. Starsha Mohyla, 5. Martynivka,
6. Iziumivka, 7. Orane, 8. Vovkivtsi, 9. Berestniahy,
10. Hryshchentsi, 11. Kropyvnytskyi region,
12. Martsynivka graveyard.



Fig. 3. The sword from Aldoboly and its analogies from Cimmerian time.

1. Aldoboly (Мелюкова 1964), 2. Cherkasy region,
3. Muherhan graveyard (Тереножкин 1976).

Fig. 4. Sarmatian swords and daggers.

1. Velyka Bilozerka (Симоненко 1984),
2. Chkalovo (Симоненко 1984),
3. Sydorivka (Симоненко 2015),
4. National Museum of the History of Ukraine (Симоненко 2015),
5. Vodoslavka (Симоненко 2015),
6. Ternivka (Симоненко 2015)





Fig. 5. *Spatha*, Wien-Leopoldau/A, Verwahrfund 2/1935, 5th c. Asian Type (Miks 2009: 466, abb. 40)

Fig. 7. *Sword* from Engels-Pokrowsk, Saratow Region Russia (Menghin 1994 – 1995: 179, abb.)

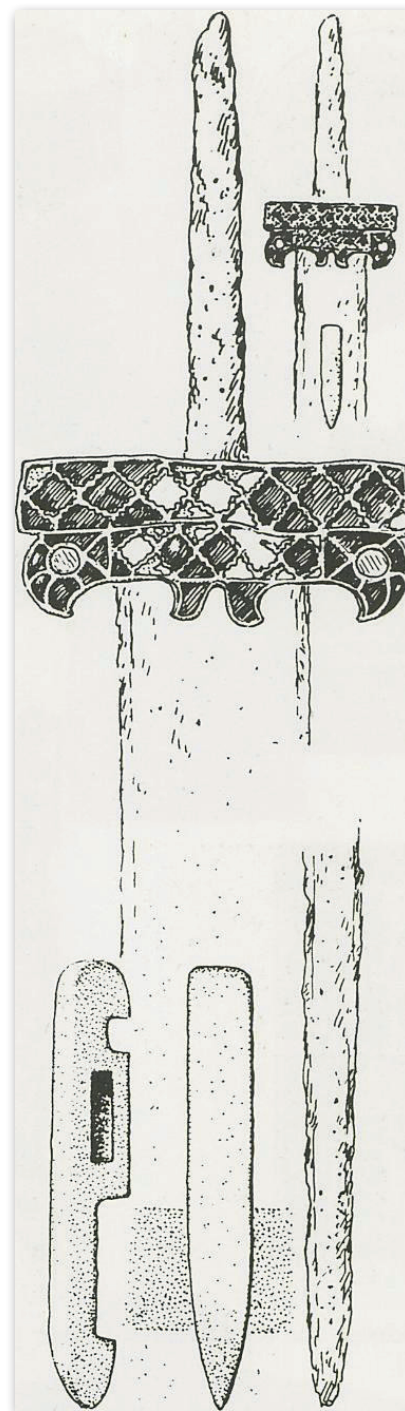


Fig. 6. A *spatha* without a certain context found in Bulgaria, 5th c. (Vagalinski 2021: 29, fig. 5).

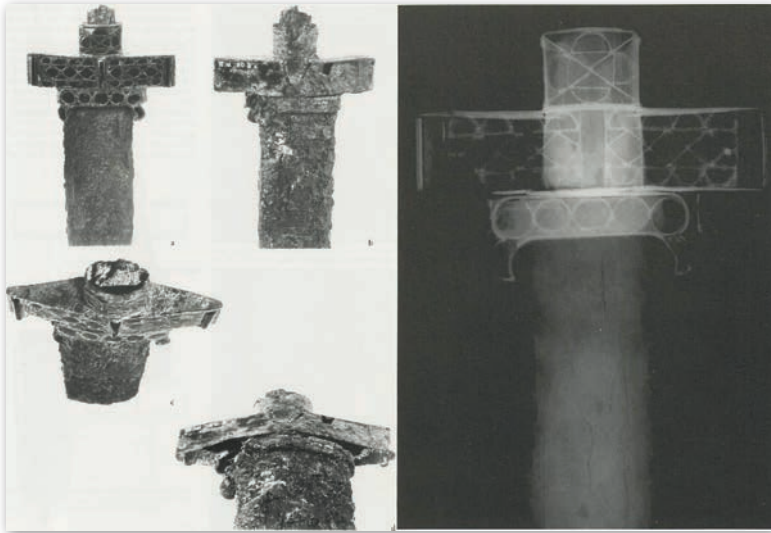


Fig. 8. *Sword from Taman, Russia, 5th c. (Menghin 1994 – 1995, 181 – 182, abb. 37, 38)*

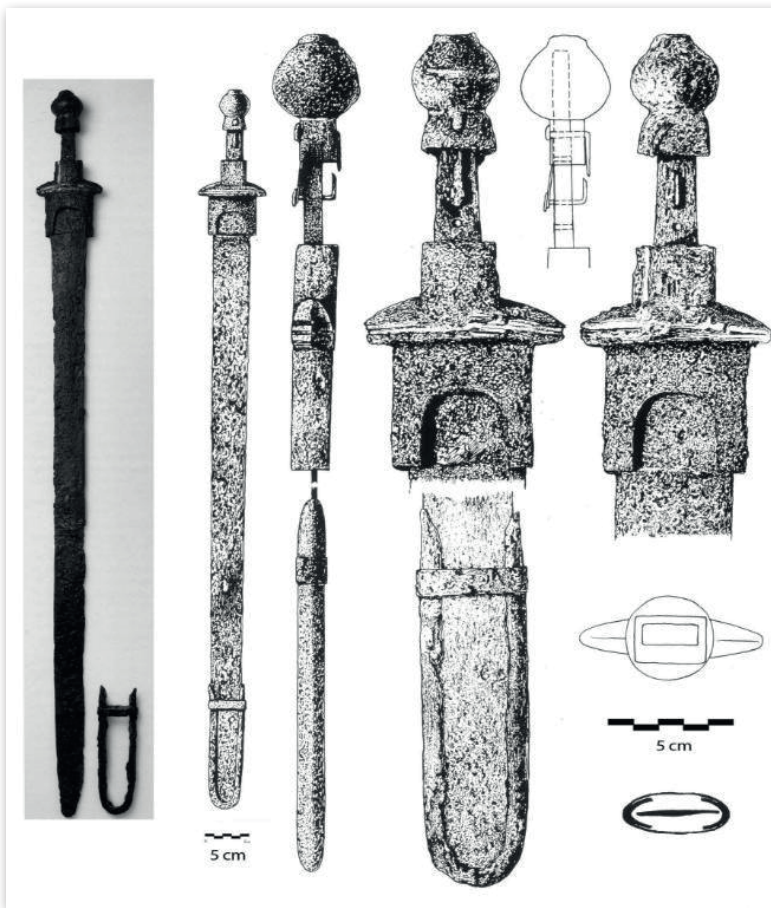


Fig. 9. *Sword from the Avar necropolis of Garabonc, Hungary, 9th c. (Yotov 2022)*

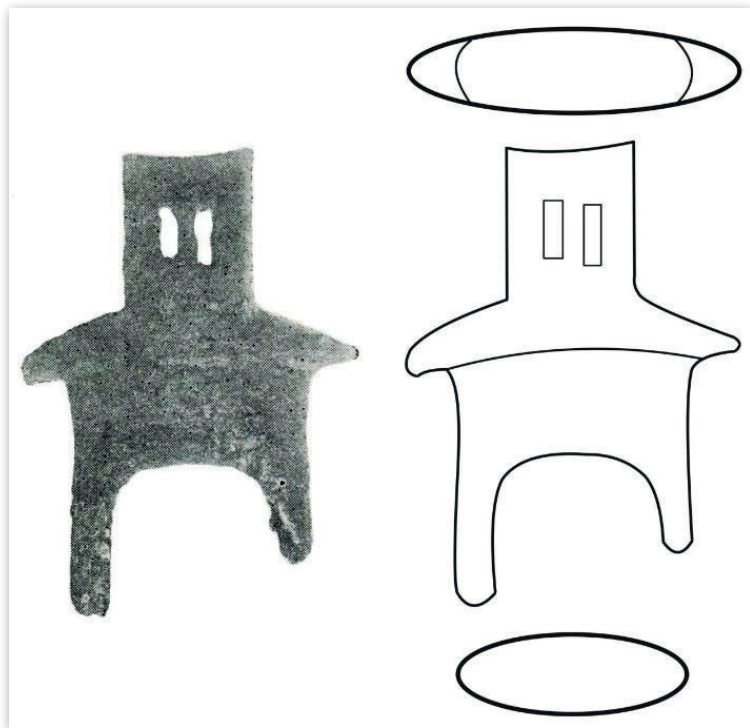


Fig. 10. Sword guard from the Byzantine fortress Dinogetia (Stefan et. al. 1967: 57, fig. 35. 19)

Fig. 11. Sword from Kytsivka necropolis, Kharkiv Region, Ukraine (Aksyonov-Laptev 2012: 100)



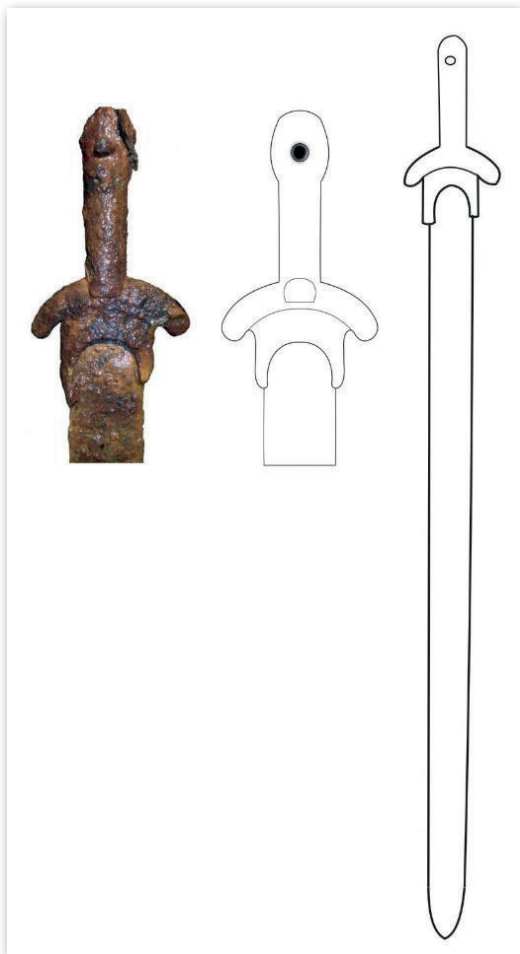


Fig. 12. *Sword from Vinnitsa Region, Ukraine*
(Baranov 2017: 252, fig. 3)

Fig. 13. *Sword-guard and pommel of the handle from Cherkasy Region, Ukraine*
(Баранов 2015: 99, 102)



Fig. 14. Sword from Furusiyya Collection, Samanid Dynasty (?), 8th – 9th c. (Bashir 2008: 38)

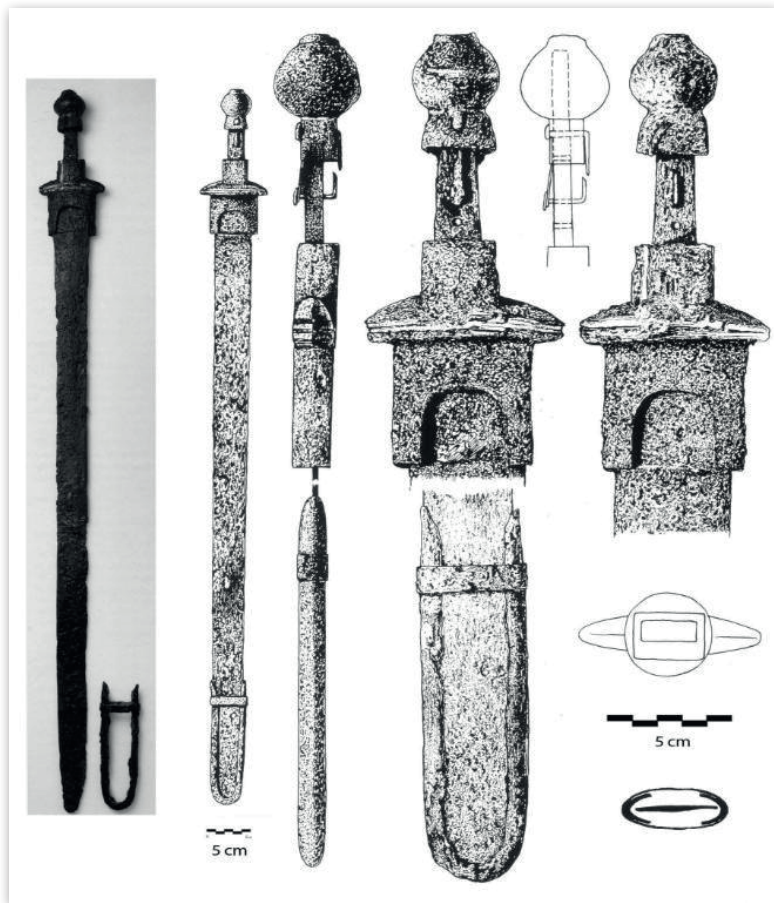


Fig. 15. *Tovsta Mohyla* sword (Полидович 2015: 125)





Fig. 16. *Tovsta Mohyla sword*
(Полідович 2015: 125)



Fig. 17. *Cierny Brod* (Biro 2014: 537)



Fig. 18. *Velyka Bilozerka sword*

Fig. 19. Sword from Soknopaiou Nesos

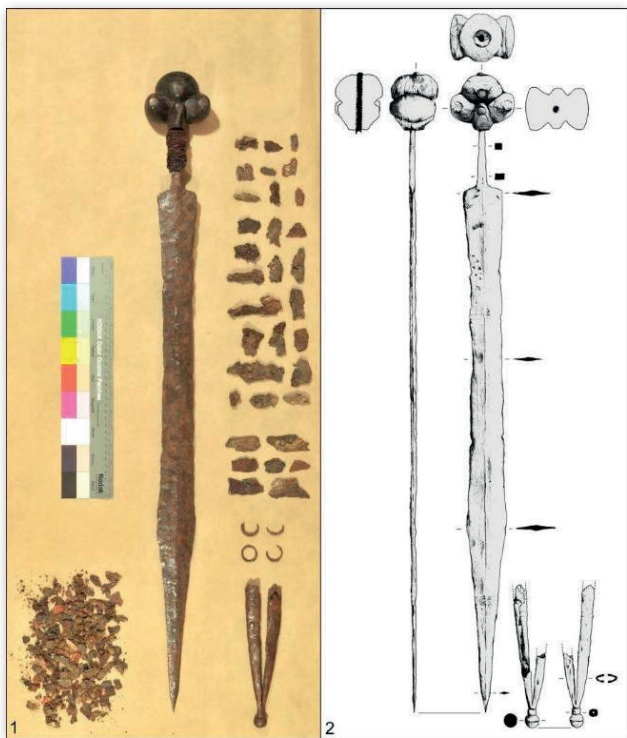


Fig. 20. From Serçe Limani, Turkey
(Bass 2004: 385)

ПРЕДПАЗИТЕЛИТЕ НА МЕЧОВЕ С АРКОВИДЕН РЪКАВ ОТ ПРЕДСКИТСКАТА ДО ВИЗАНТИЙСКАТА И ИСЛЯМСКАТА ЕПОХИ

Ерикос Маниотис, Данило Клочко

Резюме: Статията разглежда появата и развитието на основни номадски хладни оръжия за период от почти две хиляди години: от X век пр. Хр. до 9 век сл. Хр. Представените материали показват ясни еволюционни линии на това въоръжение, доказвайки, че всяка следваща група номади, живеещи в Севернопонтийския регион и степните части на Евразия, е възприемала от своите предшественици елементи от военното дело и въоръжението, предимно мечове и бойни ножове. В такава среда се отбелязва ролята на Римската и по-късно на Източната Римска империя във възприемането и създаването на нови оръжия, без да бъде пренебрегвана военната традиция от миналото, винаги преоткриваща се.

Ключови думи: кимерийци, скити, сармати, хуни, авари, номади, мечове, кинжали, Източна Европа, Византийска империя.