

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE *EUROPEAN MILITARY AFFAIRS AND THE BULGARIANS BETWEEN THE 6TH AND 17TH CENTURIES – CONFLICTS, CONTACTS AND INFLUENCES,* SOFIA, 14–17 MAY 2025

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Between 14 and 17 May 2025, an international scientific forum entitled “European Military Affairs and the Bulgarians between the 6th and 17th Centuries – Conflicts, Contacts and Influences” was held in Sofia, Bulgaria. It was organized by the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Municipal Cultural Institute – Byala, Varna province. The scientific conference was attended by 36 leading scientists from 13 countries in the field of medieval weaponry and military history. The program of the conference included 30 reports covering various aspects of medieval weapons, military equipment and culture.

The first speaker at the conference was V. Yotov, who made some comparisons between illustrated manuscripts and frescoes and archaeological finds of medieval swords and sabers from the end of the 9th – mid 15th c.

T. Kolias shared with the conference participants some thoughts concerning the sword as a symbol of power and authority in Byzantium. The scholar based his points on a few references in texts about the presence of the sword in the entourage of the Byzantine emperor and some

pictorial depictions on coins, in miniatures, frescoes etc.

D. Rabovyanov presented data on the use of combat knives in present-day Bulgarian lands during the late Middle Ages (14th – 15th centuries). The emphasis of the report was placed on archaeological evidence including weapons and their elements and number of artefacts without context. According to the author that combat knives were widely used in the 14th and 15th centuries in the Second Bulgarian Tsardom and the Ottoman Empire, long before the military campaigns of Vladislav III Jagiellon in 1443/1444, with which they were previously associated in Bulgarian scholarly literature.

A. Kubik analysed a helmet found in northern Bulgaria, near the village of Voivoda. The author compared this object with a number of helmets found in Caucasia and hypothesized that this helmet may have been produced in the Caucasus region.

In their collective report M. Zlatkov, M. Lesichkov and D. Rabovyanov presented ten one-handed swords dated in the 11th – 14th centuries, exhibited in the “Chronicles of Steel” ex-

hibition. Although all of these swords have been previously published, they were re-documented as part of the exhibition project, which enabled a more accurate dating and a deeper interpretation of the artifacts.

Z.-K. Pinter and C. Urduzia commented on one type of sword appearing more and more frequently in the Transylvania area and almost never in other areas of the European continent. This shape of sword is type “E” by Oakeshott’s typology, type XIII by Ruttkay’s, respectively type VII by Pinter’s, all dated in the 13th century. The authors made the assumption that those swords might be of local – Transylvanian origin.

F. Messner presented his research on the questions of origin of the medieval swords from the Tyrolean region, dating from the 9th to the early 16th century, and their contexts of finding. He spoke also for the problem of local production and import.

M. Holescak tried to make a reconstruction of the saddle, used by the Cumans. His conclusions are made on the basis of the archaeological finds and also on artistic depictions, mostly the frescoes of the legend of saint Ladislaus. M. Holescak paid attention also to the stirrups with a specific form which are related with the Cuman people.

G. Bozhinoski and D. Cvetanov presented a medieval saber of Eurasian nomadic steppe origin, found near the village Mokrin, Strumica. Based on its morphology, the authors dated the weapon in the time-frame of 11th – 13th c. and connected it with the presence of the Pechenegs, and later the Cumans in this micro-region.

Constantin Bajenaru reported a warrior with horse burial discovered in the fort XXV (according to Tocilescu) of the Stone Dyke in Constanța. The grave inventory is very rich, consisting of a helmet, chainmail shirt, a sword, arrowheads, a knife, horse harness – bits and stirrups and dates back to the 12th – 13th century, having analogies with discoveries belonging to late nomadic Turanian groups from the North Pontic or North Danubian area.

K. Yordanov presented the impact of the intense Latin-Bulgarian relations during the first

half of the 13th century that can be seen in the image of the Sleeping guards at the Holy Sepulchre from “The Myrrh-bearing women at the Sepulchre” (“The Resurrection of Christ”) scene depicted on the Northern arch of the dome space of the nave of The Boyana Church. The armament and the equipment of the warriors depicted in this scene finds direct parallels and references to examples of Western European armament from the era of the Crusades, reflected in the contemporary Romanesque and Gothic art.

A. Babuin tried to trace the changes affecting the swords throughout the late Byzantine period. The scholar based his conclusions on a series of dated specimens of these weapons taken from iconographic sources of the period.

P. Kotowicz drew the attention of the participants to the medieval swords discovered in the territory of Red Ruthenia, the southeasternmost part of the Polish Kingdom. Among them, there is a group with different variants of Oakeshott’s Z-type pommels, generally attributed to southern origin. The author discussed also written sources, confirming the production of swords in this area at least in the last quarter of the 14th century. This source base was supplemented by a presentation of iconography, both connected with the Latin and Orthodox circles.

P. Penkova and M. Lesichkov demonstrated the interconnections between function, form, and technology, in order to reconsider and expand the knowledge of the historical reality of the swords and of the bladed weapons in general. They think that the blades can only be studied in their relation with the armour because the changes of the weapon leads to changes of the armour.

In its report A. Michalak put once again the question of the origins of Mediaeval maces in Poland. He traced few possible lines of origin: Ruthenian, Hungarian and Bulgarian. The scholar pointed that lead isotope analysis showed a western origin of some of the exemplars discovered in Poland.

P. Bugys and M. Vitkiinas presented a distinct type of massive, ornamented bridle bits discovered in Lithuanian burial sites from 13th and 14th c. These burials are cremations with typologically similar funerary items and reduced regional differences. Bridles with massive, decorated bits stand out in warrior and horse burials. These artifacts are closely linked to the Lithuanian military elite of the time.

Y. Nikolov touched the very important question about the import in the Second Bulgarian State of goods with military use. According the Northern Italian “Cronaca Carrarese” there is actual importation of armour from Northern Italy into the lands of the Bulgarian state in the 14th c.

A. Mojsic presented a collection of Medieval weaponry found during the archaeological research of the medieval castle Milesevac in south-western Serbia. The militaria in question is presented by parts from plate armour and chain mail, crossbow bolts and projectiles of gunpowder weapons. The artefacts are dated in the mid-15th c.

The next two reports were related to the Eger castle. C. Fajsz made a review of its military history in the period of the 11th to the 18th c. E. Toth presented numerous medieval and early modern (14th – the beginning of the 18th c.) artefacts originating from the archaeological researches of the Eger castle – rifles, cannons, arrowheads, musket balls, cannonballs, mortar rounds, grenades, swords, lances, maces and pieces of armour.

P. Antonov, N. Parvanova and A. Vatov introduced to the participants of the conference the results of the conservation and restoration of a dagger with a richly decorated scabbard from the collection of the National Museum of History in Sofia. Judging by the construction of the scabbard and the pommel, the authors concluded that the dagger can be defined as a “Kard” type. Based on the formal characteristics and the decoration the artefact was dated to the second half of the 16th – 17th c.

In his report I. Bakradze traced the origin of the Georgian (Caucasian) Traditional Dagger (Khanjali or Satevari). He proposed that in Geor-

gia, the Caucasian dagger began to take shape between the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century, influenced by local military traditions as well as eastern and western arms.

Subject of the report of S. Popov were four maces, previously unpublished, part of the collection of Regional Museum of History – Pazardzhik. The weapons belong to the group of maces with bulbshaped striking heads, consisting of vertical ribs attached to a long metal sleeve – Type XXI, Variant A after S. Popov, and are dated to the 16th – 17th c.

V. Ivanov and D. Rabovyanov presented a collective find of 110 iron arrowheads discovered during the archaeological research of the town fortress of Nikopol. Most of them are for bow arrows but there are also some for crossbow bolts. The find is stratigraphically dated in the 16th – 17th c.

Another group of weapons was reported by E. Maniotis. During the excavations conducted in the Mytari peninsula in Pyrgos of Hagios Nikolaos in the region of Sithonia, Chalcidice, a complex of towers, a fortified wall and monastic cells were researched. Here parts of curved blades, arrowheads and parts of crossbows and ballistae were discovered. They were dated in the Late Byzantine Period (14th c.).

Unfortunately some of the scholars wasn't able to present their reports due to different reasons! Those are S. Stojchev which report is entitled “Nephrite scabbard-slide from Late antique fortress near Voivoda village, Shumen region”, M. Daskalov with “Short Bladed Weapons from the Present-Day Bulgarian Lands”, A. Janowski which report concerns “Early medieval sword scabbard chapes from Poland” and M. Sijaric with a report about “Spurs from the medieval cemetery in Bugojno”. As it seen from the titles the topics are extremely interesting and I think that will not make a mistake if I speak on behalf of all the other participants and say that we all are hoping to read them in the forthcoming volume!