

Relații Interetnice în Transilvania
Militaria Mediaevalia în Europa centrală și de sud-est

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Militaria Mediaevalia în Europa centrală și de sud-est

Lucrări prezentate în conferințele internaționale
Relații Interetnice în Transilvania
Sibiu, 2015-2017

Editat de / Edited by
Zeno Karl PINTER, Anca NIȚOI și Claudia URDUZIA

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“BULGARIAN TYPE” SABERS
FROM VATEVI COLLECTION IN THE CITY OF PLOVDIV, BULGARIA*

Stoyan POPOV**

Résumé: Les sujets du présent travail sont quatre sabres de la collection Vatevi, située dans la ville bulgare de Plovdiv. Les localisations de trouver exactes des objets ne sont pas connues, on sait seulement qu'elles proviennent des terres bulgares du nord-est d'aujourd'hui. Les quatre armes appartiennent au même type connu comme "bulgare".

L'auteur du présent document partage l'opinion de V. Yotov, N. Hrisimov et M. Petrov sur l'origine bulgare de ce type d'épées. Cependant, S. Popov estime que les hypothèses d'influence byzantine et l'origine des ateliers byzantins de ces armes ne sont pas suffisamment étayées. Selon lui, la liaison de ces épées avec le terme *παραιήριον* utilisé dans les sources nécessite également des preuves plus fiables.

Mots-clés: sabres de type "bulgare"; haut médiévale armes.

Rezumat: Subiectul prezentei lucrări sunt patru săbii din colecția Vatevi, aflată în orașul bulgar Plovdiv. Locurile exacte de origine ale obiectelor nu sunt cunoscute; știm doar că provin de pe teritoriul Bulgariei de nord-est de astăzi. Cele patru arme aparțin aceluiași tip, cunoscut ca "bulgar". Autorul prezentei lucrări împărtășește opinia lui V. Yotov, N. Hrisimov și M. Petrov, privind originea bulgară a acestui tip de săbii. S. Popov estimează că ipoteza influenței bizantine și originea atelierelor bizantine a acestor arme nu sunt suficient argumentate. În opinia lui, legătura acestor săbii cu termenul *παραιήριον* utilizat în surse necesită de asemenea dovezi mai solide.

Cuvinte cheie: săbii de tip "bulgar"; arme ale evului mediu timpuriu.

The subjects of the present work are four sabers (Ill. 1 – 4) from Vatevi collection, located in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv.¹ The exact finding locations of the objects are not known, it is only known that they originate from today's northeastern Bulgarian lands.

The four weapons belong to the same type. It has 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 a saber examined here, 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 made turned-T-shaped guard with a flat-cylindrical sleeve to the handle. On the side of the blade there is an arched projection. The quillons in most cases are 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.² As metric parameters

* Статията е част от изследванията по проект ДН 10/2, финансиран от Фонд „Научни изследвания“ към Министерството на образованието и науката на Република България.

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¹ See the Catalog!

² The term elman has entered the Bulgarian language from Russian. It is assumed that the term has entered the Russian

based on data available to me, the following characteristics can be distinguished: the total length of these sabers 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.

According to the described features, the weapons presented herein refer to one type of saber, which has become known as "Bulgarian". The thesis of the Bulgarian origin of these weapons and their dating was first proposed and substantiated by V. Yotov.³ This type of sabers is examined by N. Hrisimov and M. Petrov. They also agree 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, suggests a strong Byzantine influence. They also express the assumption that in the Byzantine literary sources these sabers are denoted by the term *παραμήριον*.⁴ In two of his works, Russian scientist G. Baranov deals with such sabers and elements of them.⁵ He perceived the hypothesis of M. Petrov and N. Hrisimov for the Byzantine name of the weapon under consideration, but rejected the three Bulgarian scientists' 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 a military prey, and their

appearance in the South-Russian steppes is connected with the pechenegs.⁶

I agree with the opinion of G. Baranov that the term *παραμήριον* refers not to sabers, but to single edged cutting weapons⁷ and to that of M. Petrov and N. Hrisimov, that they are palashes, i.e., straight weapons with single edged blades.⁸ I cannot agree with the arguments of the two Bulgarian scientists regarding their opinion that the sabers have also been marked with *παραμήριον*. I believe that P. Grotowski is right in his claim that special attention should be paid to linking the *παραμήριον* with sabers, as military treatises do not provide information about the presence of a bend of the blade or its depth.⁹ 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.¹⁰ The treatises of the 10th century also speak of *παραμήριον*, 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 *παραμήριον* 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 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!).¹¹

According to G. Baranov, the specific type of weapon in question is of Byzantine rather than Bulgarian origin. As an argument, he presents

from Chagatayan language (see Фасмер М., *Этимологический словарь русского языка. Том 2.* Москва, 1986, p. 16.). It is used to denote the enlargement and the double sharpening to the tip of the saber blade.

³ Йотов В., *За един тип сабя от ранното българско средновековие*. – В: *Българите в Северното Причерноморие*, 4. Велико Търново, 1995, p. 97-102. Йотов В., *Въоръжението и снаряжението от българското средновековие (VII – XI век)*. Варна, 2004, pp. 63-65. Йотов В., *Ранниесабли (VIII – X вв.) на нижнем Дунае*. – В: *Култура Евразийских степей второй половины I тысячелетия н. э.* Самара, 2010, pp. 217-225.

⁴ Петров, М., Н. Хрисимов, *Едноострите клинови оръжия от територията на България и византийската военна традиция*. – *Добруджа*, 30, 2015, pp. 344-351.

⁵ Баранов Г., *Болгаро-византийское навершие рукояти сабли с территории Северо-Восточного Причерноморья*. – Материалы по археологии и истории античного и средневекового Крыма, вып. 6, 2014, pp. 84-92. Баранов, Г., *Находки раннесредневековых сабель „болгарского типа“ в бассейневерхнего и среднего течения Днестра (к вопросу византийской воинской традиции в Восточной Европе)*. – Материалы по археологии и истории античного и средневекового Крыма, вып. 8, 2016, pp. 76-92.

⁶ Баранов, Г., *Находки раннесредневековых сабель „болгарского типа“*..., pp. 79-82.

⁷ Баранов, Г. *Болгаро-византийское навершие*..., p. 87.

⁸ Петров, М., Н. Хрисимов. *Едноострите клинови оръжия*..., p. 351.

⁹ Grotowski, P. *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints*. Leiden-Boston, 2010, p. 359.

¹⁰ Мерперт, Н. Я. *Из истории оружия племен Восточной Европы в раннем средневековье*. – Советская археология, XXIII, 1955, p. 160. Петров, М., Н. Хрисимов. *Едноострите клинови оръжия*..., pp. 337-341.

¹¹ Баранов, Г. *Находки раннесредневековых сабель „болгарского типа“*..., p. 80.

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 Bulgarians, even participating in Khan Krum's wars with Byzantium as a part of his army.¹² 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.

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.¹³ 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 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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 the mace typology of S. Popov, can be brought.¹⁶ 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,¹⁷ 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!

¹² Гюзелев, В., И. Божилов. *История на средновековна България VII – XIV век*. С., 1999, pp. 126-127; p. 129; p. 138.

¹³ Златарски, В. *История на средновековната българска държава през средните векове*, т. 1, ч. 1. С., 2002, p. 279. Гюзелев, В., И. Божилов. *История на средновековна България...*, p. 137. *Гръцки извори за българската история*, том IV, p. 23. *Scriptor incertus*, p. 346.

¹⁴ Златарски, В. *История на средновековната българска държава...*, pp. 278-280. Гюзелев, В., И. Божилов. *История на средновековна България...*, p. 137.

¹⁵ Бешевлиев, В. *Първобългарски надписи*. С., 1992, pp. 193-205.

¹⁶ Попов, S. *The Maces from the Present Bulgarian Lands (10th – 17th c. AD) Vatevi Collection*. Sofia, 2015, pp. 26-27.

¹⁷ Йотов, В. *Ранниесабли (VIII – X вв.)...*, p. 218.

CATALOG

1. Inv. № 2697 Saber. For most of its length, the blade is single-edged, at 20 cm from the point of the blade starts elman. The tang is slightly curved to the edged part of the blade. Iron-turned-T-shaped guard with a flat-cylindrical sleeve to the handle. The guard's shoulders have a circular, flattened widening at the end. The guard covers the shoulders, the lower part of the tang and the top part of the blade. The blade has almost parallel sides. At the elman, its pointed part is curved upwards to a sharp point.

Total length 83,5 cm; length handle to the guard shoulders 9 cm; tang width x thick 1,6x0,4cm above the guard and 1,2x0,3cm at the end. Guard width x height 7,7x3,4cm; d cylindrical sleeve 1,8x3,2cm; length x height x thick shoulders 2,2x1,1x1,1cm; d x thick circular widenings of the shoulders 1,2-1,4x0,3cm. Blade length below the guard x width up and at the beginning of the elman 72,5x2,7x2,7cm

Weight 478 gr

Date 9th-10th c. AD

Ill. 1.

2. Inv. № 2781 Saber. For most of its length, the blade is single-edged, at 13,4 cm from the point of the blade starts elman. Cylindrical cap. Sandwich type handle made of 2 bone plates inserted under the guard and cap; with a curve to the edged part of the blade. The bone plates of the handle are attached to the tang by means of two iron rivets. Iron turned-T-shaped guard with a flat-cylindrical sleeve to the handle. The guard shoulders have one rounded flattened widening at the end. The blade has almost parallel sides. Ends with a rounded tip.

Total length 83 cm; cap length x d (top-bottom) 3,3x3,6-2,9 cm; length handle to the guard shoulders 14,5 cm; bone handle d 2,3x2,9 cm. Guard width x height 9,1x4,4 cm; d cylindrical sleeve 2,2x3,1 cm; length x height x thick shoulders 3,2x1,2x0,5 cm; d x circular widenings of the shoulders 1,8x0,3 cm. Blade length below the guard x width up and at the beginning of the elman 67x3,3x2,4 cm

Weight 684 gr

Date 9th-10th c. AD

Ill. 2.

3. Inv. № 787 Saber. For most of its length, the blade is single-edged, at 17,5cm from the point of the blade starts elman. The tang is very slightly curved to the edged part of the blade. There are 2 rivets at a distance of 2.7 cm apart.

The rivets have rectangular heads on one side and at the other elliptical. Iron turned-T-shaped guard with a flat-cylindrical sleeve to the handle. There is an arched projection at the blade side. The guard's shoulders have one triangular opening at the base of the cylindrical sleeve. The guard covers the shoulders, the lower part of the tang and the upper side of the blade. The blade has almost parallel sides. At the elman, its edged part is curved upwards to a sharp tip. On the surface of the guard there are light-green crusts of bronze (copper?) corrosion. A small part of the blade tip is missing.

Total length 86,1 cm; length handle to the guard shoulders 10,1 cm; tang width 1,6x0,7 cm above the guard and at the end, thick 0,5 cm and 0,1 cm. Rivets d 0,4 cm, heads rectangular from the tang's end to the guard 1,2x0,6 cm and 1,1x0,5 cm; elliptical 1,6x0,9 cm and 1,4x1,1 cm. Guard width x height 8,6x3,6 cm; d cylindrical sleeve 1,8x2,6 cm; length x height x thick shoulders 2,7x1,4x0,6cm. Blade length below the guard x width up and at the beginning of the elman 74,6x3,2x2,7 cm

Weight 478 gr

Date 8th-9th c. AD

Ill. 3.

4. Inv. № 788 Saber. For most of its length, the blade is single-edged, at 17,5 cm from the point of the blade starts elman. The tang is slightly curved to the edged part of the blade, with rectangular section. At its end, a quadrangular tile is riveted. Iron turned-T-shaped guard with a flat-cylindrical sleeve to the handle. There is an arched projection from the blade. The side segments of the guard are T-shaped. The guard covers the shoulders, the lower part of the tang and the upper part of the blade. The blade is slightly curved. At the elman, its edged part is curved smoothly up to a sharp tip.

Total length 81 cm; length handle to the guard shoulders 11,5 cm; tang width 1,4x0,6 cm above the guard and at the end, thick 0,5 cm and 0,3 cm, a quadrangular tile at its end 1,4x1,6 cm. Guard width x height 7,7x4,9 cm; d cylindrical sleeve 3,3x2,7 cm; length x height (at the base/at the end) x thick shoulders 2,2x2-2,3/1,3-1,4x0,4 cm. Blade length below the guard x width up and at the beginning of the elman 66,5x3,4x3,2 cm

Weight 538 gr

Date 8th-9th c. AD

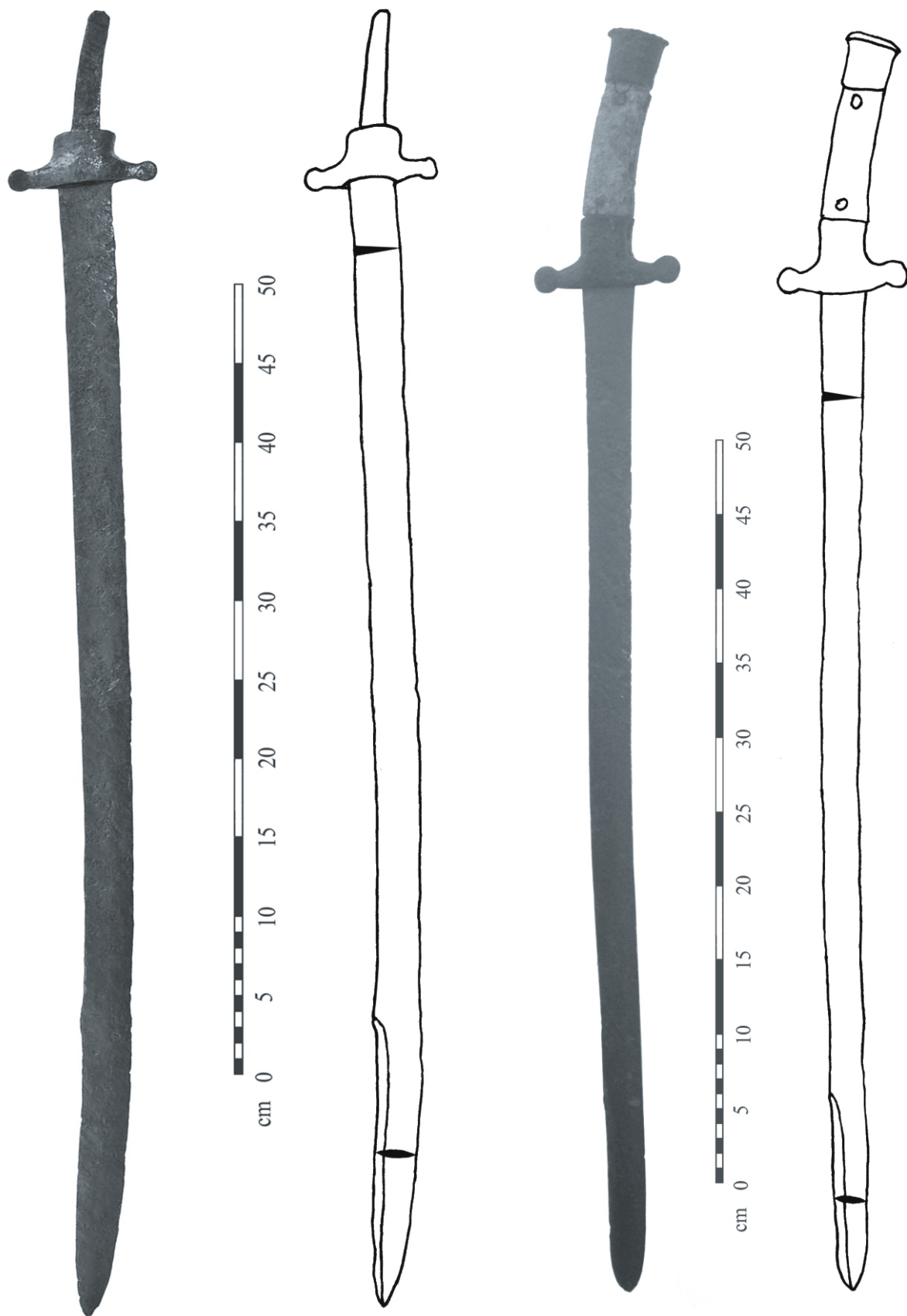
Ill. 4.

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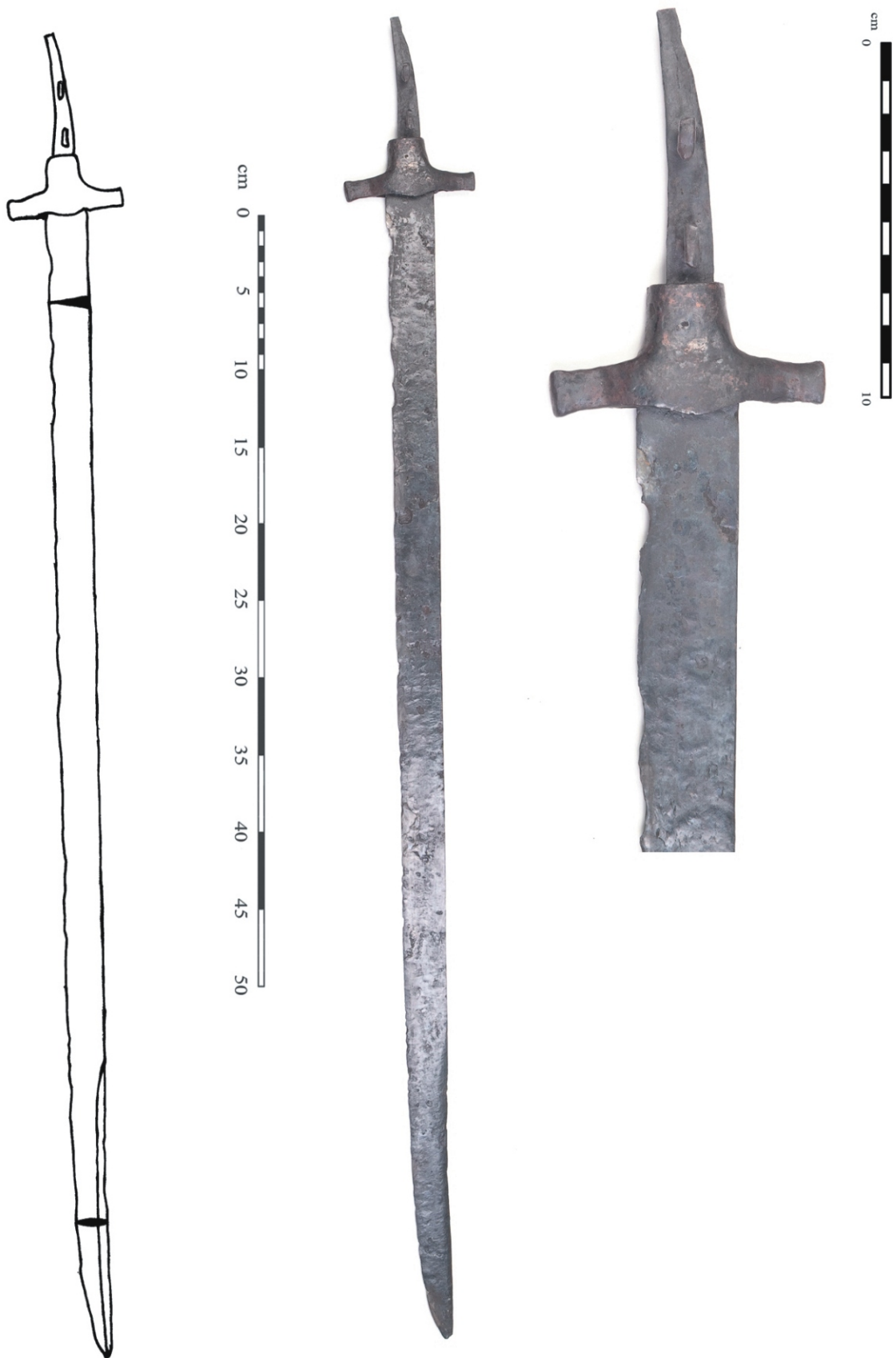
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III. 1

III. 2



III. 3

