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A NEW FIND OF A FALCHION FROM CENTRAL POLAND

Abstract: This paper discusses a find of a falchion from the neighbourhood of Gieczno in the Łódzkie Voivodeship. This artefact comes from a sequestration of the collection of an illegal treasure hunter. This 15th century falchion with a conventional blade form stands out with its hilt which is provided with a cap-like pommel, and first of all with a scales rivet which is shaped as an ornamental rosette.

Keywords: falchion, Central Poland, Middle Ages, 15th century

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Specimens of weaponry find their way to museum collections in many different ways. In recent years in Poland there has been a notable "inflow" of finds which come from confiscations of collections gathered by detectorists. In this way a medieval falchion, together with other weaponry and artefacts of daily use, got into the storeroom of the Łódź-Śródmieście Tax Office. The nature of such finds usually does not allow for a specification of their place of discovery. This is also the case here and all we can say is that this weapon was in all probability found in the neighbourhood of the localities of Gieczno – Modlna – Biała, Zgierz District, Łódzkie Voivodeship.

Description of the artefact and its state of preservation

The falchion did not survive intact. What is in the worst condition is its single-edged blade, which has no point and is rather strongly corroded through. Its state of preservation does not allow for stating with certainty whether it was provided with a fuller. However, it

seems that there was no fuller in this case (Fig. 1). On the other hand, the hilt is to a great degree complete – what survived was the tang with the pommel and one of the rivets which held the hilt scales. The present total length of the weapon is 377 mm, including c. 242 mm of the blade length and 135 mm of the hilt length. The blade slightly tapers toward the point and its maximum width is 37 mm. The blade thickness near the cross-piece is 7 mm, but it can be assumed that it was originally somewhat thicker. The hilt tang is shaped in a trapeze-like way – its maximum width is 33 mm near the pommel and 25 mm near the blade. It is concave on one side and flat on the other side. Such a shape facilitated the piercing of rivet openings.¹ Three such openings can be found in the discussed artefact. The opening next to the blade is 7 × 6 mm. The second opening is somewhat larger as it measures 9 mm. A complete rosette-like rivet with a diameter of 13 mm survived in the position nearest to the pommel. Its length is 24 mm and it probably marks the original thickness of the hilt with the scales. The pommel is low in the shape of a cap composed of a few layers of metal sheets. These are adjusted to the

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¹ Marek 2008, 47; Ławrynowicz and Rychter 2012, 257; Žákovský 2014, 259-260, Figs. 212-214.

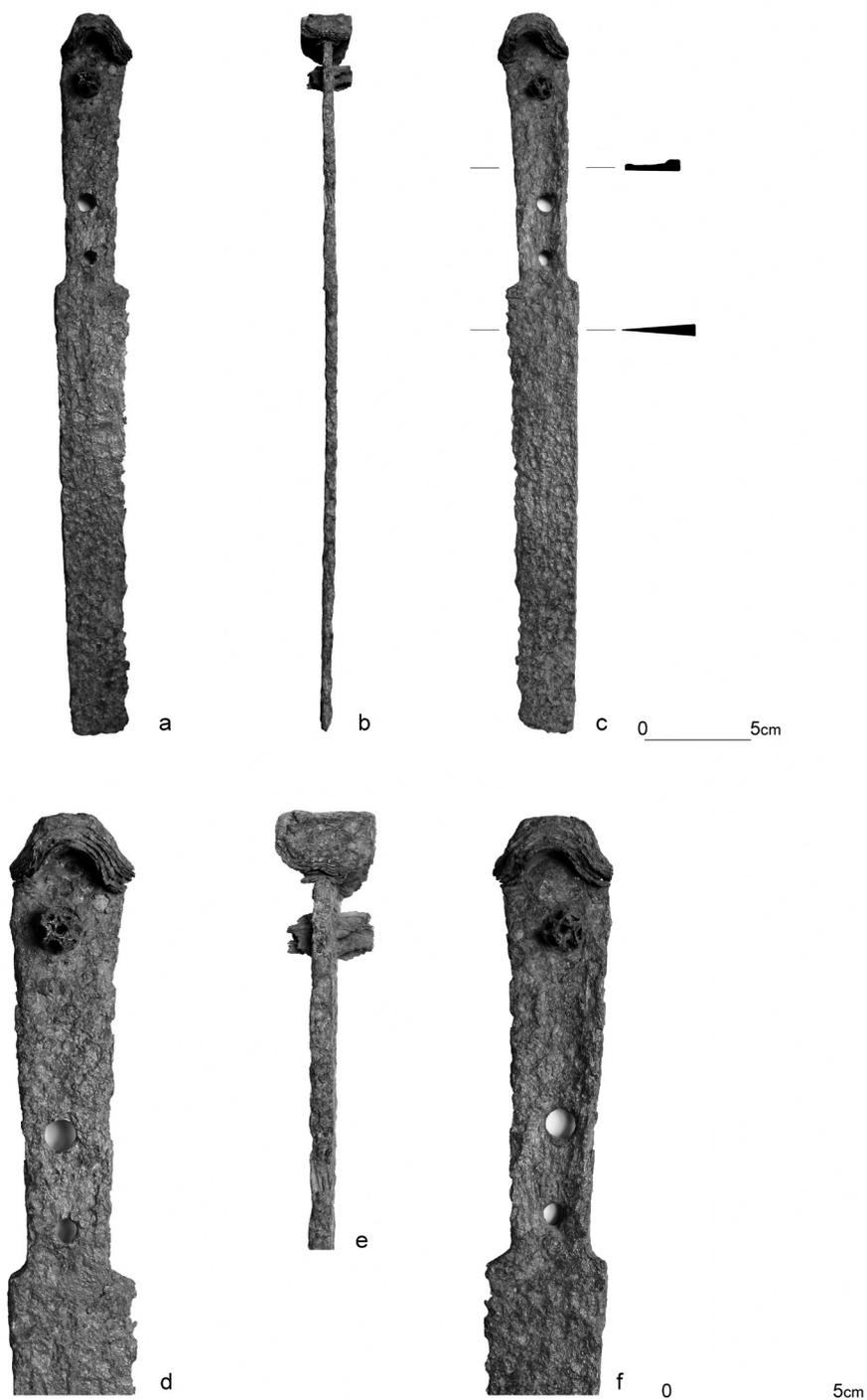


Fig.1. Falchion from the neighbourhood of Gieczno. Photo J. Słomska.

semicircular shape of the tang and are riveted on it. The pommel's dimensions are 37×27 mm and its height is 10 mm (Fig. 1). An opening for the properly shaped hilt tang goes through the entire length of the pommel. The pommel fits the tang tightly and no traces of hammering the tang for the purpose of riveting were noticed. No hand guard survived on the falchion in question. There is no opening for a protective guard that would be placed at the contact point of the blade and the hilt. However, what may have been present was a short

crosspiece which was only put onto the blade and it did not require additional fastening.² On the other hand, it is equally probable that a side guard was attached in the smallest of the openings (Fig. 2:a-b). Regrettably, this is a mere supposition. The weight of the falchion in the present state of preservation is 322 g.

² A crosspiece that is prepared in such a way can be seen, e.g. on a falchion which was found in the Town Hall in Koło, Koło District, see Górczyca 2012, 200, Figs. 2-5.

Typological and chronological analysis

The shape and the proportions of the blade of the artefact in question enable it to be rather classified as Type II according to M. Głosek and L. Marek. This is first of all evidenced by an almost parallel course of the edge in relation to the back of the blade, as well as by a small fault which separates the blade from the tang. Regrettably, as in the case of Type I falchions, the shape of the blade does not allow for a more precise assessment of the artefact's chronology. This form was in use throughout the entire 15th century.³

The next component – the pommel – is remarkable for its cap-like shape. Due to this, it can be considered Type B according to L. Marek⁴ and P. Žákovský.⁵ Their characteristic trait is the presence of metal spangles which could be used in order to exactly fit the pommel to the hilt scales with no risk of damage to the latter.⁶ Quite often iron spangles were interlaid with brass or bronze ones, thus achieving an additional ornamentation motif.⁷

Cap-like pommels of Type B (together with a similar Type A) are fairly popular among falchions which are found in the territory of Poland. It is possibly to mention, among others, two hilts from Rogowiec Castle, Wałbrzych District, and an almost complete find from Wrocław-Poświętne.⁸ An identical hilt can also be seen on an artefact from Czersk, stored in the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.⁹ P. Žákovský assumes that finds from the Czech Republic, including Moravia, which are provided with various forms of low, cap-like pommels can be dated to the 15th century. These artefacts include, e.g. finds from Bruntál, Bruntál District, Lovčičky, Vyškov District, Přerov, Přerov District, Staré Město, Uherské Hradiště District, or Starý Jičín, Nový Jičín District.¹⁰ As regards finds with more precise chronology, it is possible to mention hilt fragments from Rokštejn Castle, Ihlava District, most probably from the 1st half of the 15th century,¹¹ as well as from the knightly residence in Mstěnice, Třebíč District, which can be dated to before 1468.¹²

With regard to the construction of the discussed falchion from the neighbourhood of Gieczno, special attention is drawn to the rosette-like rivet which

survived in the tang of the hilt. So far, no analogies have been found to it among artefacts which were published in Poland. What is significant, however, is the fact that such rosettes which are usually made from non-ferrous metal are one of typical construction parts of so-called falchions of Moravian type. In such weapons these rivets can usually be seen on pommels. A falchion from Gorzów Śląski, Olesno District is one of weapons which was ornamented in this way (with two rosettes). This artefact was classified as the so-called falchion of Moravian type and it is dated to the 1st half of the 15th century.¹³ Such a motif can also be seen on the pommel that was found in the course of examinations of the knightly tower in Witków. It is dated to the 1st half of the 15th century.¹⁴ Furthermore, the pommel of the falchion from the locality of Poręba Wielka, Limanowa District, is provided with as many as four rosettes. This weapon stands out with its long double-edged blade.¹⁵ This group also encompasses the most recent discovery from Kostrzyn nad Odrą, Gorzów Wielkopolski District. This find is also dated to the 15th century.¹⁶

This way of ornamentation was also applied in falchions with so-called high pommels from the territory of the Czech Republic, just to mention finds from Mstěnice, Třebíč District, Odry, Nový Jičín District, Opava, Opava District, or Vracov, Hodonín District.¹⁷ Pommels with such traits are also known from the territory of Slovakia, e.g. Gajary near Bratislava, which is dated to before 1467,¹⁸ or from Graz in Austria (15th century).¹⁹

What co-occurred with high pommels of Moravian type falchions were remarkable “boat-like” crosspieces. In their Variant 4b according to P. Žákovský, the terminals are “filled” with the same rosettes as those in pommels.²⁰ Concerning such finds, it is possible to mention, e.g. the aforementioned artefact from Gorzów Śląski,²¹ the weapon from Aueršperk, Žďár on the Sázava River District,²² unprovenanced specimens from the Deutsches

³ Głosek 1990, 123; Marek 2008, 49.

⁴ Marek 2008, 63-64.

⁵ Žákovský 2014, 287-291, Figs. 243-244, 286.

⁶ Marek 2008, 54; see also Žákovský et al. 2013, 129.

⁷ See Žákovský et al. 2013, Fig. 5.

⁸ Marek 2008, 53-54, 156-157, Figs. 51:a, 52:a and 54:b-c.

⁹ Nadolski 1978, 39, cat. no.102, Tab. 24; Głosek 1990, Fig. 14.

¹⁰ Žákovský 2014, cat. nos. 27, 91, 195, 224, 226.

¹¹ Krejsová 2007, 268-270, Fig. 2:1-2; Měřínský 2007, 110, Fig. 62:1,11; see also Žákovský et al. 2013, 112.

¹² Nekuda 1985, 139, 141, Fig. 196:a; Žákovský et al. 2013, 110-111, Figs. 1:m and 5:c; Žákovský 2014, cat. no. 103.

¹³ Marek 2006, 197, Fig. 5:a; Marek 2008, 57, Fig. 61:a-c.

¹⁴ Marek and Michalak 2008, 453, Figs. 3, 4:a-d and 5:b.

¹⁵ Głosek 1992, 35-36, Figs. 1 and 2; Glinianowicz 2005, 156, Tab. X:2.

¹⁶ Michalak and Socha 2019, 143-145, Figs. 2 and 3:1-4.

¹⁷ Nekuda 1985, Figs. 196:b and 197:e-f; Žákovský 2012, 724-725, Figs. 7:d, 12:a-d, 15:a-b, 19:d, 22:b and 24:b-d; Žákovský 2014, 306-307, Figs. 259:a-b, d-e and 260:a-d; cat. nos. 108, 180, 184, 264-265.

¹⁸ Polla 1962, 117, Figs. 5:5, 18:11; Žákovský 2012, 721, Fig. 12:e; Žákovský 2014, Figs. 259:g and 260:e.

¹⁹ Marek 2008, Fig. 75:a.

²⁰ Žákovský 2014, 352.

²¹ Marek 2006, 197, Fig. 5:a; Marek 2008, 57, Fig. 61:a-b.

²² Žákovský 2012, 698-700, 721-722, Figs. 6:d, 24:g; Žákovský 2014, 352, Fig. 307:a, cat. no. 1.

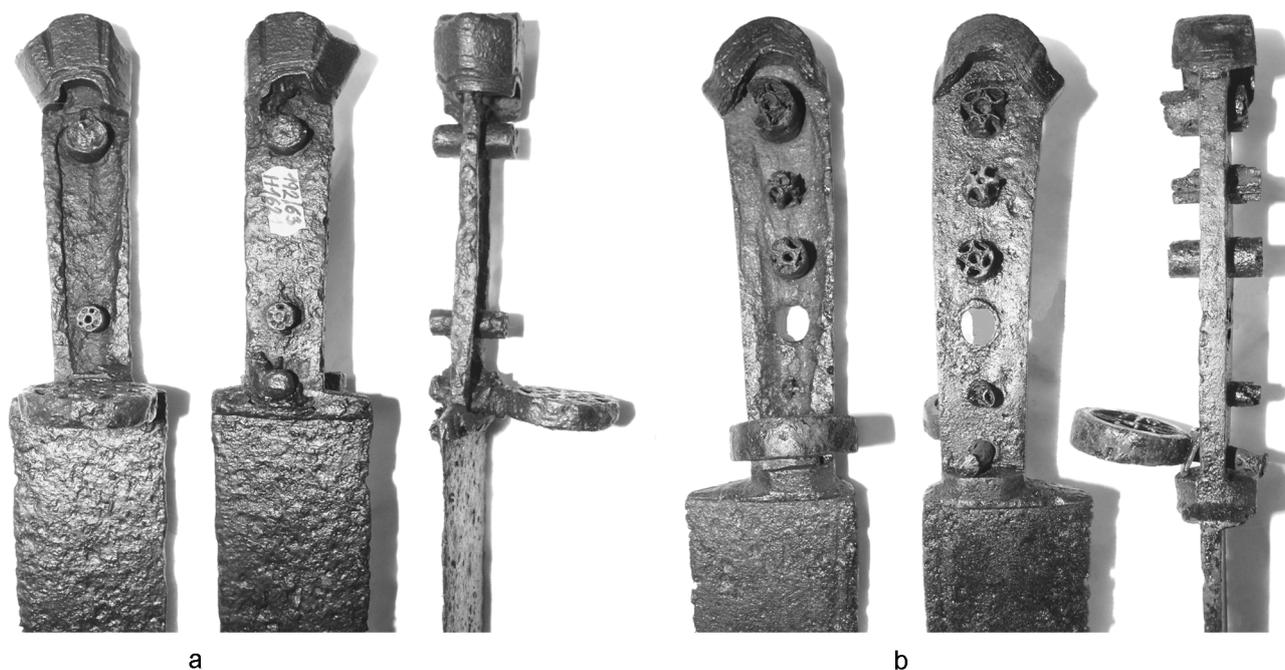


Fig. 2. Falchions from Moravia with hilt rivets in the shape of rosettes: a – Bruntál Museum; b – Vysočina Museum in Jihlava.
After Žákovský 2011, Figs. 2 and 3.

Historisches Museum in Berlin, and perhaps the weapon from the Polish Army Museum in Warszawa.²³

Some falchions are also provided with small openwork guards which protect the hand. Examples of such finds are known, e.g. from the localities of Bludov, Šumperk District, Loučka-Hradiště, Vsetín District, Příkazy, Olomouc District or Východná-Zámčisko near Liptovský Mikuláš in Slovakia. The presence of this weapon part which is shaped in such a way allows to refine the chronology of artefacts which were provided with them and date such weapons to the 2nd half of the 15th-early 16th century.²⁴

From a formal point of view, the artefact which is the most similar to the discussed falchion is the find of unknown provenance stored in the Museum in Bruntál. Its hilt is provided with a cap-like pommel and with rosette-like rivets on the tang of its hilt. Its protective guard is shaped as an openwork rosette. This artefact is dated to the end of the 15th century²⁵ (Fig. 2:a). Yet another falchion, also of unknown provenance, is stored in the collection of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands Museum in Jihlava. Its hilt is provided with three rosette-like rivets, its pommel is composed of spangles and is fitted to the scales. The weapon is provided with

an openwork protective guard (Fig. 2:b). This artefact is dated to the 2nd half of the 15th century.²⁶ Moreover, a rosette-like rivet with a diameter of 15 mm can also be seen on the falchion from Mstěnice, provided with a Type B pommel. The appearance of the hilt of the find from Nový hrad near Kunratice is similar.²⁷ In this place it must also be said that the falchion hilt from Rogowiec Castle is provided with an ornament in the form of brass tubes forming the shape of small rosettes.²⁸ As rightfully stressed by P. Žákovský, falchions with such rivets are relatively rare now. This, however, results from the state of preservation of finds, as in many cases rivets of this kind simply fell off.²⁹ The discussed weapon from the neighbourhood of Gieczno may have also been provided with one more rivet of this kind. This is implied by a large central opening in the tang.

The falchion from the neighbourhood of Gieczno completes a short list of finds of weapons of this kind from the territory of Central Poland. It is difficult to relate this discovery to specific military actions in this region in the Middle Ages. Broad-scale hostilities are not recorded in written sources. Therefore, the owner lost the falchion in other circumstances, which are

²³ Žákovský 2012, 699-700, Fig. 6:a, c, with further literature there.

²⁴ See Žákovský 2011, 511-512, Fig. 5:a; Žákovský 2014, cat. nos. 3, 87, 201.

²⁵ Žákovský 2011, 503, Figs. 1:a, 2, 4:a, 5:a, 6:a, 7:a; Žákovský 2014, cat. no. 132.

²⁶ Žákovský 2011, 503, Figs. 1:b, 3, 4:b, 5:b, 6:b, 7:b; Žákovský 2014, cat. no. 139.

²⁷ See Nekuda 1985, Fig. 196:a; Žákovský et al. 2013, 110-111, Figs. 1:m, 5:c; Žákovský 2014, 269, Fig. 224, cat. no. 103.

²⁸ Marek 2008, 53, Fig. 51:a.

²⁹ Žákovský 2011, 509.

difficult to assess. The present state of preservation of this artefact is quite far from its original appearance. Due to this, the aforementioned analogies only allow for a rather general assessment of the time of its origin as the 15th century. It is worth noting that in nearby Gieczno in the 14th-the 1st half of 15th century there was a knightly residence, belonging to the Toporczyk family. Initially, it was a place that was fortified only by

a rampart with a palisade, but in the second phase of its use it was expanded into a motte-and-bailey timber castle.³⁰ According to preliminary arrangements, after necessary procedures this weapon will be handed to the Museum in Zgierz. Thus, the collection of this museum will be enriched with an interesting example of late medieval cold steel.

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³⁰ Nierychlewska and Sikora 2018, 118-119, 143-146, Figs. 1-3.