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SWORD POMMELS OF TRANSITIONAL TYPES FROM THE TIME OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN 12TH-CENTURY WROCLAW, POLAND

Abstract: This paper presents a discussion of sword pommels found during archaeological excavations in the Old Town of Wrocław. The area under investigation, located on the left bank of the Odra River, is where the chartered town had developed a characteristic organised layout in the 13th century. Finds from the High Middle Ages, and among them, the analysed pommels, testify to an earlier settlement in this region. The pommels were excavated from the earliest strata related to this initial settlement phase. They represent forms of Oakeshott's types B and E (Geibig's types 15 and 19 respectively) which could be dated to the 12th century.


Keywords: Middle Ages, Wrocław, old town, sword pommel, social transformation

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Wrocław in the 12th century, due to its convenient location on the Odra River and land trade-routes leading from Bohemia to Kuyavia and Great Poland, as well as from Ruthenia to Thuringia, gained economic power comparable to contemporary Cracow. Prosperity resulting from trade attracted more settlers, who contributed to the development of older settlement structures surrounding centres of lay and ecclesiastical power or created their own settlement network in less densely inhabited areas. A polycentric proto-town had developed already before this period on the right bank of the Odra River (Fig. 1). The most prominent centre of power in this area was the ducal stronghold in Ostrów Tumski – the fortified seat of lay lords and the ecclesiastical authorities in medieval Wrocław. Further places of strategic and economic significance were located at the river crossing sites on the Odra River such as Ołbin, Piasek-Island and the left bank settlement including St. Adalbert's church (Fig. 1:3, 7, 12 and 17).¹ These were under the control of a Polish magnate family of

which the most remarkable member was the 12th-century castellan of Wrocław – Piotr Włostowic – a founder of churches and monasteries in the city. Relics of these activities, such as architectural ornaments, portals and lunettes, originally from the Benedictine monastery of St. Vincent in Ołbin (Fig. 1:4) and the church of the Canons Regular of the Lateran in the Piasek Island (Fig. 1:3) are still preserved in museum collections and churches in Wrocław. The high artistic quality of these objects testifies to the period of significant economic growth in 12th-century Wrocław and to the exceptional wealth of its rulers. The most relevant for our discussion is the left bank area of Wrocław where there was a settlement of artisans and traders growing rapidly at least from the 11th century, onwards.² Large scale excavations at the Nowy Targ (New Market) square in 2010-2011 and at the building block between the latter and Św. Wita (St. Vitus'-), Wita Stwosza- and Św. Katarzyny (St. Catherine's) streets in 2017 have yielded evidence for early trade and craft related activities of the inhabitants of this particular stretch of land. The left

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¹ See: Młynarska-Kaletynowa 2017, 4.

² Piekalski 2017, 14 (update on the most recent research results).

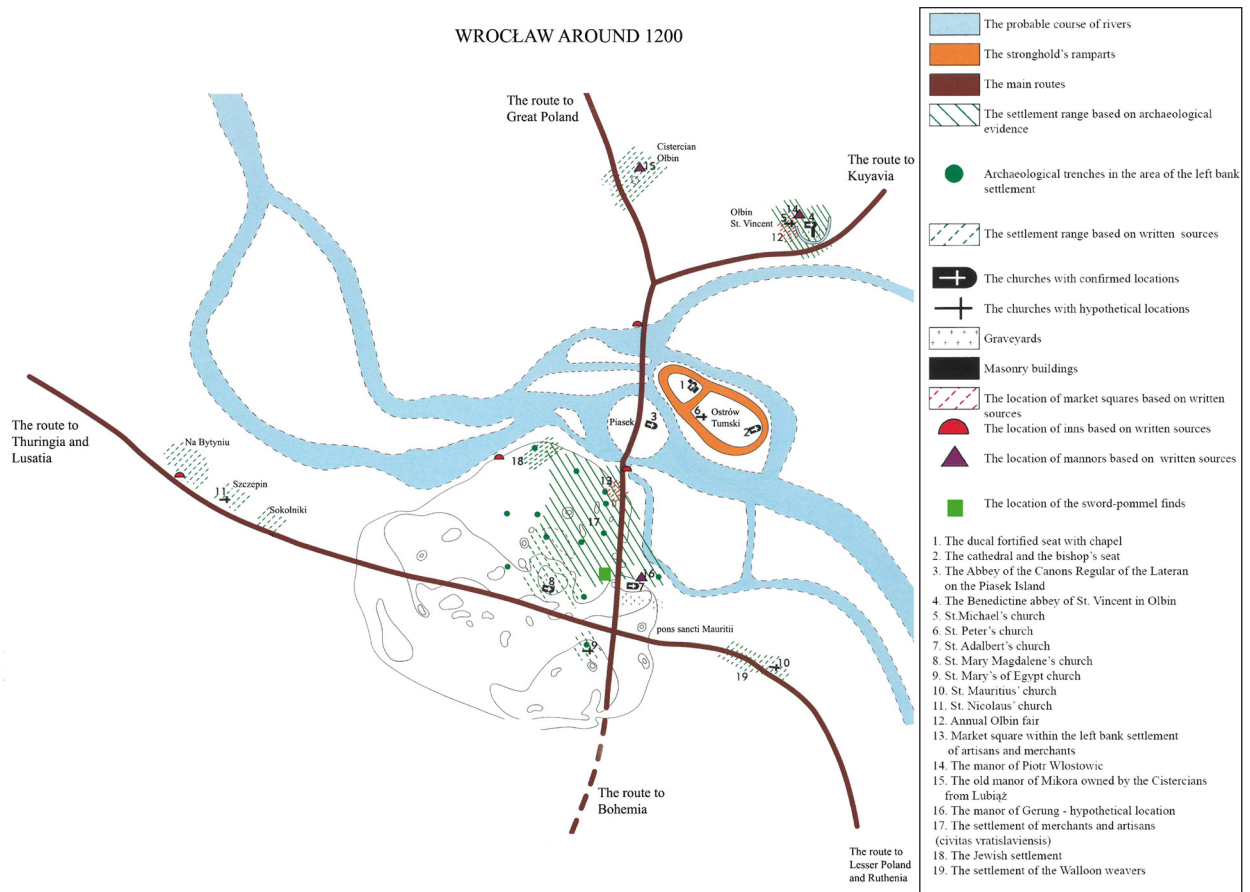


Fig. 1. Map showing the polycentric character of Wrocław in the 12th century and at the beginning of the 13th century. After Piekalski 2017. Modified by L. Marek.

bank settlement had significantly pre-dated the chartered town that was established there in the 13th century. Two sword pommels (Figs. 2:a-f and 3:a-f) which can be dated on typological grounds to the 12th century were recorded during excavations at Św. Katarzyny and Św. Wita Streets (Fig. 1: finds marked with a green square) in the archaeological context no. 108. The latter formed the lowest strata of the settlement layer-sequence. It consisted of grey sand mixed with organic matter, pieces of wood and sawdust. The thickness of this layer varied from 20 to 40 cm. In plot no. 4 Św. Katarzyny Street, at the elevation of 115.86 MASL, a leaden smelting cake (dimensions: 60 × 65 × 8 cm) was found. Moreover, two logs of birch and oak wood and a concentration of rock debris (different stones: granite, basalt, jasper) resulting from stone-working had been recorded in the context. Adding to the mentioned stone-working and lead-smelting evidence, the sword pommels could also be regarded as related to specialised craft. Both objects seem to be devoid of any assembly or disassembly marks. Moreover, there were no fragments of broken tangs inside the pommels. The objects might have been stored in a sword maker's workshop and prepared for assembly, but never mounted on a sword before being lost or discarded as useless. Unfortunately, no dendrochronological

sampling from the context proved to be useful in establishing a firm date. The numismatic evidence, on the other hand, well confirms the chronology of the layer's build-up, beginning at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries and probably lasting throughout the early decades of the 12th century.³ Generally, the initial analysis of the ceramic context within stratum no. 108 conforms to the 12th-century dating and so does the typological and chronological investigation of the two sword pommels which are the subject of this paper.

³ See: Milejski 2018, cat. nos. 13-17, 25-27, 43-44. Milejski (2018) identified the following coins from context no. 108: 1. Poland, Władysław I Herman (1079-1102), denarius [1079-1086], mint: Cracow; 2. Poland, Władysław I Herman, denarius. [1079-1086], mint: Cracow; 3. Poland, Władysław I Herman, cross denarius, type VI (later variant) [1079-1102], mint unknown; 4. Poland, Silesia, cross denarius, type VIII [c. 1090-1120], mint Wrocław; 5. Poland, Silesia, Bolesław III Wrymouth (1107-1138); earlier duke of Silesia 1102-1107), denarius [1097-1107], mint Legnica or Wrocław; 6. Eastern Saxony, cross denarius, type V, (later variant) [1060-1080], mint: Meissen; 7. Eastern Saxony, cross denarius, type V, (later variant) [1060-1080], mint: Meissen; 8. Eastern Saxony, cross denarius, type VII [1070-1100], mint unknown. Other numismatic evidence could be only generally dated to c. 1100-1150 (Milejski 2018, cat. no. 43) and to the 12th-13th centuries (Milejski 2018, cat. no. 44).

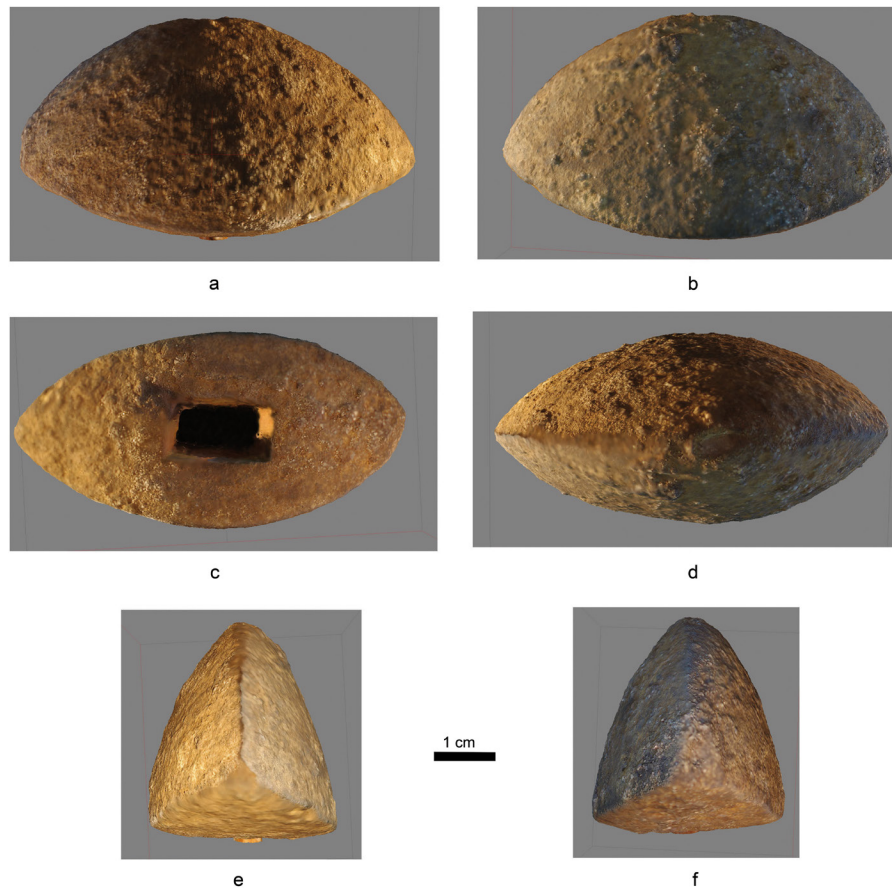


Fig. 2. Sword pommel, inv. no. 2829/17, combined type 15 by Geibig, context no. 108, sector E 10, plot no. 2 św. Katarzyny (St. Catherine's) St., Wrocław. Photo L. Marek: a – obverse; b – reverse; c – bottom; d – top, e-f – narrow side views.

Unlike most of the extant sword classification systems, the one created by A. Geibig is, in my opinion, the most trustworthy, due to the fact that it is based on meticulous metrical and morphological analysis, rather than on the personal impressions of the author. The pommel found in the plot no. 2 św. Katarzyny Street (Wrocław sector E 10, context no. 108, inv. no. 2829/17, 115 m MASL), belongs to A. Geibig's combined type 15,⁴ Variant III (Fig. 2:a-f). Most relevant for the mentioned classification are the object's dimensions in side view (length 7.193 cm, height 3.888 cm) and in top view (length 7.193 cm, width 3.242 cm). At the base of the pommel, there is a rectangular hole to take the sword-tang (dimensions: 1.004 × 1.702 cm), which tapers inside towards the top. The pommel weighs 274.21 g. Its lower edge at the base is convex and turns

away from the hand of the one wielding the sword. The top of the pommel is provided with a sharp ridge and its narrow sides are formed into acute bill-shaped projections. Analogous objects – counterparts to Petersen's late X type and Oakeshott's B type sword pommels – were dated by A. Geibig⁵ on the basis of archaeological and pictorial sources to the time range between the mid-10th century and the late 12th centuries. A. Ruttikay⁶ has drawn similar conclusions on the chronology of the analysed sword elements, noting their greatest frequency from the 11th century up to the mid-12th century. In the territories of Old Ruthenia they are well dated to the 12th and 13th centuries.⁷

Depictions of pommels of a generally similar appearance are not uncommon in the contemporary art. The most often quoted examples are present in the miniatures of the Gospel Book of Otto III (Clm 4453)⁸ commissioned by Henry II, Otto's successor c. 1002-1020, and the Passau Gospel Book from c. 1170-1180

⁴ See: Geibig 1991, 66. Overall characteristics of combined type 15, Variant III, according to Geibig (1991) are the following: Length/height ratio: 1.66-1.97 cm with the absolute length range c. 5.1-7.0 cm. Narrow pommel view – type 0-15-0-0 (Height/width ratio: 0.88-1.2 cm with the absolute height range: 2.8-4.0 cm); View from the top – type 0-0-10-0 (Length/height ratio: 1.78-2.36 cm with the absolute length: 5.1-7.0 cm).

⁵ Geibig 1991, 68, 147, Fig. 39.

⁶ Ruttikay 1976, 254 (his type IX).

⁷ Kirpichnikov 1966, 54; Plavinski 2006, 16.

⁸ Wagner 1966, 117, Fig. 95.

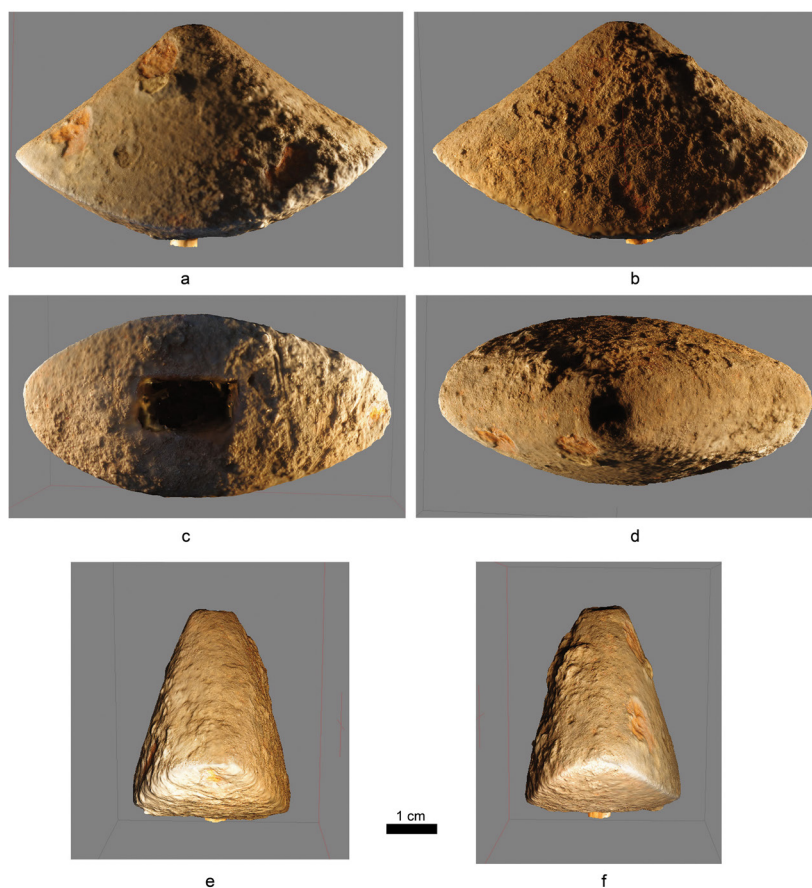


Fig. 3. Sword pommel, inv. no. 3709/17, combined type 19 by Geibig, context no. 108, sector D 6, plot no. 6, św. Wita (St. Vitus') St., Wrocław. Photo L. Marek: a – obverse; b – reverse; c – bottom; d – top; e-f – narrow side views.

(CIm 16002),⁹ both from the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and in the engraved scenes on the portable altar from Abdinghof dated to the beginning of the 12th century.¹⁰ Perhaps less known is the fine relief on the cast bronze baptismal font commissioned for the Church of Notre Dame aux Fonts in Liège made between 1107 and 1118 by Renier of Huy (Fig. 4:a), the sculpted personification of rage on a Romanesque relief column from the late 12th century in the Church of the Trinity and Our Lady in Strzelno, Poland (Fig. 4:a), or the scene of combat between characters from the Arthurian Legends – Aschelon and Sir Ywain in the murals of Rodengo Castle, Italy, dated to c. 1215.¹¹ Most of the existing type 15 pommels are plain and undecorated. This could be explained by their purely utilitarian and practical role. However, there are a few examples of lavishly ornamented sword hilts of the group. Just to mention here a very fine sword with silver and copper inlaid hilt decoration dredged up from the bed of the River Vilaine in Rennes, France,¹² and kept at Le Carré Plantagenêt,

Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire (Fig. 5).¹³ According to the literature, this specimen belongs to Oakeshott's type X and could be dated to the 10th or 11th century.¹⁴ Its "brazil-nut" pommel is decorated with the depiction of a bird on one side and, reportedly, a figure of a dog on the other. The blade is inscribed with the iron inlaid signature INGELRII, interpreted as the name of a swordsmith. The latter might have been active in the period between the 2nd half of the 10th and the 1st half of the 11th century.¹⁵ As in the case of other quality marks, the INGELRII inscription was later copied, which is confirmed by examples dated to the 12th century.¹⁶ Taking into account the long-living phenomenon of the INGELRII-inscribed blades and the Romanesque style of the hilt decoration, I can see no reason why the French find could not be dated slightly later – to the late 11th or 12th century. The bird image on the pommel was probably meant to represent a goose. If so, it might

⁹ Michalak 2018, 232, Fig. 6.

¹⁰ Ruttkay 1976, Fig. 2.

¹¹ Andergassen et al. 2012, 2, 44.

¹² Blasco et al. 2011, 20, Fig. 9, cat. no. 14.

¹³ Inv. no. 1981.885.9.

¹⁴ Blasco et al. 2011, 20, Fig. 9, cat. no. 14.

¹⁵ Geibig 1991, 156; Gorman 2005, 33 (the author also suggests a possibility of re-hilting old blades of the INGEL group).

¹⁶ Geibig 1991, 156 (late examples were found in: Flemma, Tingvoll and Møre, Norway).

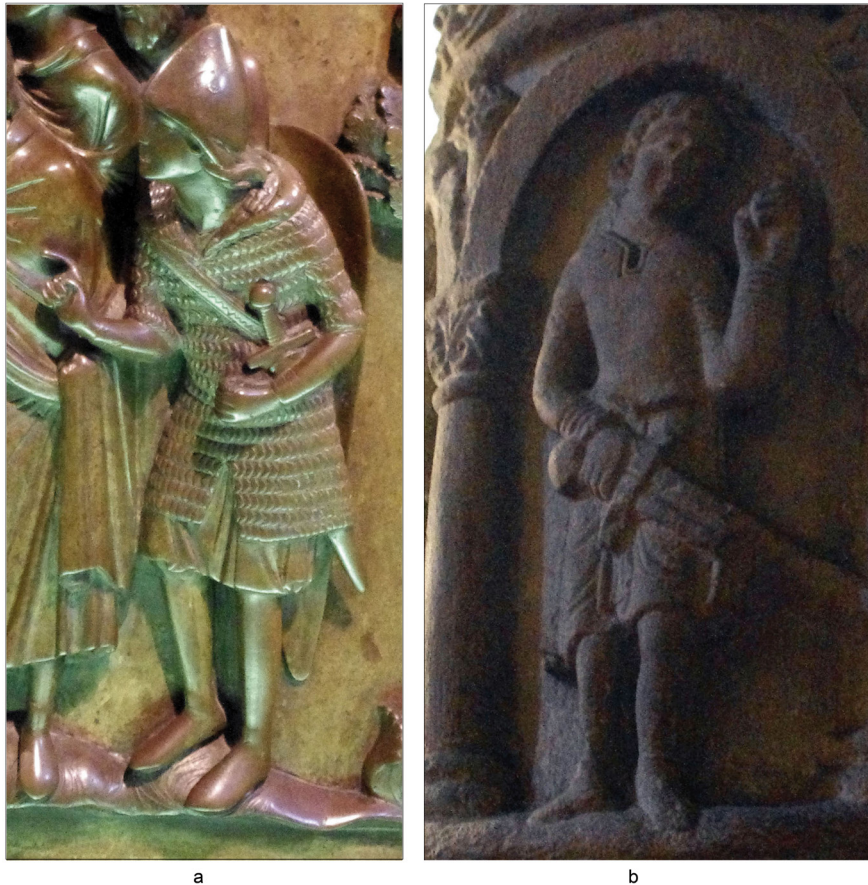


Fig. 4. Sword pommels of combined type 15 in contemporary art: a – man at arms, bronze-cast baptismal font, the Church of Notre Dame aux Fonts, Liège, Belgium, 1107-1118; b – the sculpted personification of rage, Romanesque relief column, late 12th century, Church of the Trinity and Our Lady, Strzelno, Poland. Photo L. Marek.

have been regarded in the Middle Ages as the symbol of a man constantly alert, a pious and ascetic person who renounced all earthly pleasures.¹⁷ The goose as the symbol of vigilance was borrowed from the ancient Roman tradition according to which, during an armed raid of the Gauls at night, the sleeping Romans had been warned by geese of the invaders' assault.¹⁸ Nearly identical to the River Vilaine example is the sword kept at the Army Museum in Prague,¹⁹ inscribed on its blade with the word SIGVINAIS²⁰ instead of INGELRII (Fig. 6). The polychrome hilt inlays are kept in the same style as in the case of the mentioned French find. The technique seems identical to such an extent that both hilts might have been decorated by the same hand. Unfortunately, there is no reliable information on the exact provenance of the sword kept in Prague. We only know

that originally it formed part of the collection of arms and armour at the castle of Konopiště,²¹ Czech Republic. The sword's pommel is inlaid with a tree symbol on one side and a fish over which a crescent-shaped cast net is thrown surrounded by four discs on the other. According to E. Wagner, the decoration shows the tree of life as the icon of the Old Testament, the fish in the net identified with the New Testament – and four discs representing the Four Gospels.²² I would rather interpret the emblems of this pommel as strongly related to Christological symbolism and the divine blessing of the sword as an implement of secular justice. The tree of life in Revelation (22:14) is the ultimate reward and the symbol of triumph for those blessed by God. In Proverbs (11:30) it is written that “the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise”. As such the tree of life could be regarded here as the symbol of wisdom and justice – attributes of a righteous judge. According to Christian beliefs, the tree of life is the symbol of Christ's triumph over death – identified

¹⁷ On the symbolic meaning of the goose, according to medieval bestiaries cf. Kobielius 2002, 101-102.

¹⁸ Kobielius 2002, 101. It is interesting to note that Albertus Magnus wrote about the Roman cult of golden geese which commemorated the miraculous salvation of the Eternal City (Kobielius 2002, 101).

¹⁹ Inv. no. 237.

²⁰ Wagner 1966, 115-119, Fig. 14.

²¹ Wagner 1966, 116.

²² Wagner 1966, 118.



Fig. 5. Sword with a decorated, combined type 15 hilt, Le Carré Plantagenêt, Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire, inv. no. 1981.885.9, find place: river Vilaine, Rennes, France, 11th–12th centuries. Drawing L. Marek, after Blasco et al. 2011.

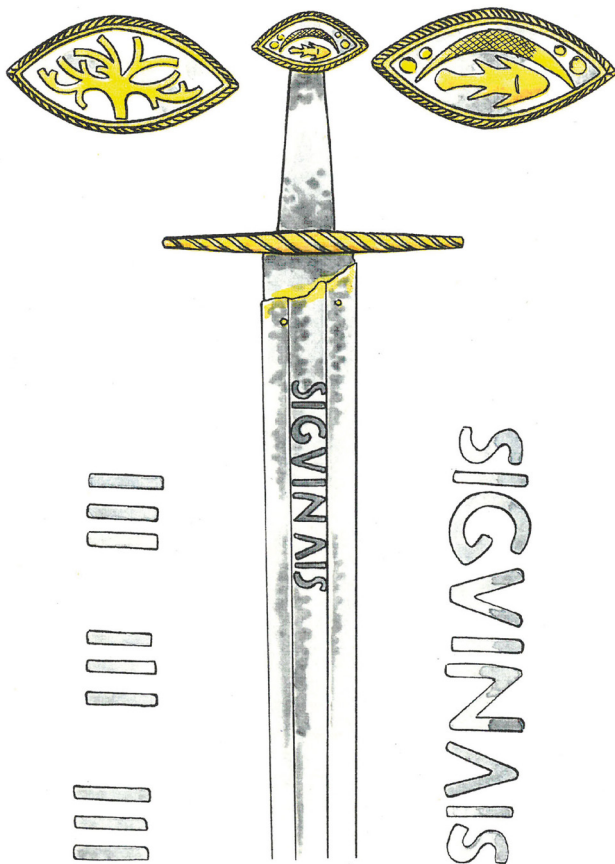


Fig. 6. Sword with a decorated, combined type 15 hilt, Army Museum in Prague, inv. no. 237, 11th–12th centuries. After Wagner 1966.

with the Holy Cross.²³ One of the most obvious Christological motifs on the pommel of the Prague sword is the depiction of a fish. The Greek name of the latter – ΙΧΘΥΣ (ichthys), or also ΙΧΘΥC, was treated in the early Christian times and later as the acronym for Ἰησους Χριστος, Θεου Υἱος, Σωτηρ; which translates: “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour”. Divine blessing of the judicial power is also present in the symbolic decoration of other sword pommels belonging to the same type. It is sufficient to mention here the famous *Reichsschwert* kept at the Weltliche Schatzkammer in Vienna with its pommel inscribed with the words of Psalm 143 – a quotation from the liturgy of the coronation of emperors and later rites of knightly accolade.²⁴ The emblematic decoration of the above-mentioned hilt elements seem to be strongly related to the common medieval belief that supernatural powers and the apotropaic qualities of a sword resided in its pommel.²⁵ The example found in Wrocław seems to be undecorated at first glance. The X-ray investigations were undertaken before conservation have not revealed any traces of metal inlays on its surface (Fig. 7:a). The conservation process, however, needs to be conducted carefully and accompanied by full archaeometric analyses. Taking into account the archaeological context and typological investigations, the pommel should be dated to the 12th century. Many similar sword elements found in Poland are analogously dated on the basis of archaeological evidence.²⁶

The other pommel (Fig. 3:a-f) found in plot no. 6 Św. Wita Street (Wrocław, sector D 6, context no. 108, inv. no. 3709/17, 115.80-116 m above sea level) belongs to a more developed but less frequently encountered combined type 19 as defined by Geibig.²⁷ Most relevant for the latter classification are dimensions of the object in side view (length 7.524 cm, height 4.378 cm) and in top view (length 7.524 cm, width 3.295 cm). At the base, there is a rectangular opening of the channel inside the pommel made to take the sword-tang (dimensions: 1.674 × 0.946 cm). The channel tapers strongly towards the top (Fig. 7:b), where there is a considerably smaller, rectangular opening (dimensions: 0.263 × 0.477 cm). The pommel weighs 262.33 g. Its base seems to be decorated with a zigzag pattern

²³ Compare: Forstner 2001, 154; Marek 2017, 92.

²⁴ Marek 2014, 10-14.

²⁵ I.e. Malory 1925, 77; Marek 2019.

²⁶ Michalak 2018, 233.

²⁷ See: Geibig 1991, 77-78, Fig. 20. The combined type 19 characteristics are (Geibig 1991): In the pommel's side view - 19-0-0-0 - length/height ratio 1.21-1.86 cm with the absolute length span: 5.8-7.79 cm; in the narrow side view of the pommel) - type 0-21-0-0 - height/width ratio 1.45 with the absolute height 4,5. Knaufaufsicht (pommel top view) 0-0-10-0. Length/width ratio 1.58-2.51 with the absolute length given in cm 6.9-7.79.

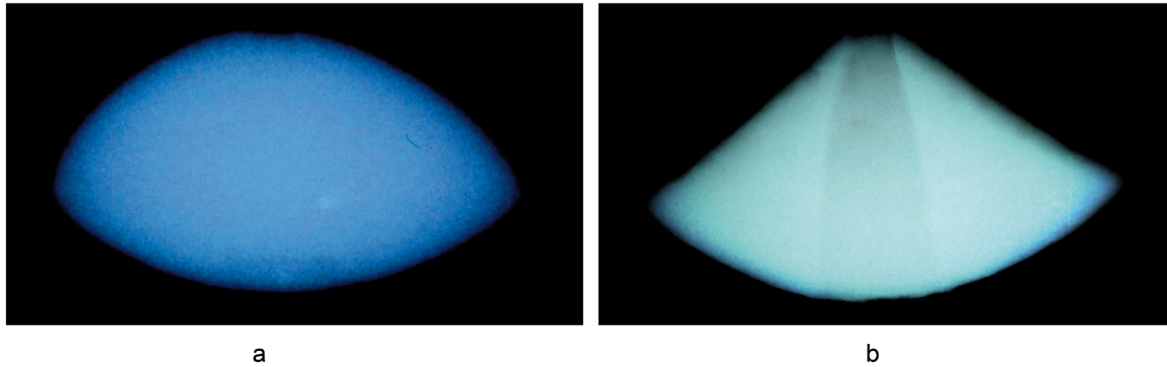


Fig. 7. RTG photos of the analysed pommels: a – inv. no. 2829/17; b – inv. no. 3709/17. Commissioned by L. Marek.

consisting of engraved lines (Fig. 3:c). Further archaeometric analyses need to be performed, however, to verify whether this feature is intentional or simply the result of random wear or damage making the impression of an ornament. Hilt elements of the combined type 19 are variously dated within the time range between the late 11th and the late 13th century.²⁸ The reportedly early sword which previously has been published in the literature as an archaeological artefact without location²⁹ can be now identified on the basis of archival sources as a find from Głubczyce, Silesia (Fig. 8:a-b).³⁰ This weapon was dated to the late 11th and the 1st half of the 12th century, which is quite early for the combined type 19.³¹ Most of the examples of a well-confirmed chronology based on archaeological and pictorial evidence come from the 12th and 13th centuries.³² A. Bruhn-Hoffmeyer saw their greatest popularity in the 1st half of the 13th century, quoting occasional representations of the type in late 13th-century funerary sculpture.³³ Evidence for the 13th-century chronology of the analysed pommels was later also collected by E. Oakeshott.³⁴ On the other hand, regarding that such hilts appear on blades of Geibig's types 6 and 10, they could be even dated to the period between the mid-11th and the 1st half of the 12th century.³⁵ Pictorial evidence for pommels of the combined type 19 from the 1140s and 1160s has

been reported in the literature also.³⁶ Even earlier is a representation of the type sculpted around 1135 in the scene of St. George fighting the dragon which decorates the lunette of the western portal of the Ferrara Cathedral, Italy (Fig. 9:a). The latest depiction of the analysed hilt element of which I am aware can be found on the 14th-century murals decorating the interior of the parish church in Szczepanów, Świdnica District, Silesia (Fig. 9:b).³⁷

Every single pommel which might be dated on the basis of firm archaeological data is extremely valuable. In Poland, such evidence was recorded during fieldwork at the cemetery in Dołubowo, Siemiatycze District, where archaeologists found a sword of the 19th combined type in grave context no. 21 from the 2nd half of the 12th century.³⁸ More problematic in terms of precise dating is the sword excavated at the remains of a medieval tower in Plemięta, Grudziądz District. The weapon with a pommel of Geibig's combined type 19 (Oakeshott's type E), was found in the building's destruction layers which, according to some scholars,³⁹ evidenced an armed raid by the Lithuanians during the so-called Polish-Teutonic Famine War in 1414. Archaeologists who published the first monograph of the site were puzzled that a sword of an evidently 12th-13th-century chronology was found in such a late context.⁴⁰ Currently, in the academic debate, there are voices of historians and archaeologists who advocate the re-dating of the entire Plemięta find context to the end of the 13th century.⁴¹

²⁸ Geibig 1991, 149.

²⁹ Głosek 1984, 170; Geibig 1991, 149: National Museum in Wrocław, inv. no. IX 1641.

³⁰ A hand-written note by W. Sarnowska records its old, pre-WWII inventory number FR 273 and the name Leobschütz painted on the object.

³¹ Cf. Głosek 1984, 170 and Geibig 1991, 149.

³² Ruttkay 1976, 257-258; Geibig 1991, 149.

³³ Bruhn-Hoffmeyer 1954, 187.

³⁴ Oakeshott 1960, 225.

³⁵ Geibig's Klingentyp 6 – narrow blades are dated to the time range from the mid-11th century to the mid-12th century – see: Geibig 1991, 153. Klingentyp 10 – heavy and long blades have a well-established 12th century chronology – see: Geibig 1991, 154.

³⁶ Geibig 1991, 150.

³⁷ Marek 2008, 68, Fig. 81a: here the pommel has been erroneously compared to early medieval Y-type pommels consisting of two elements (the base and the top of the pommel). Most probably the artist's intention was to represent a horizontal ridge on the pommel, rather than a line dividing two separate elements – the pommel's base from its top.

³⁸ Głosek et al. 1978, 71, cat. no. 3.

³⁹ Cf. Nadolski 1985, 10.

⁴⁰ Głosek 1985, 99-101.

⁴¹ Klimek and Strzyż 2011, 216, footnote 3.

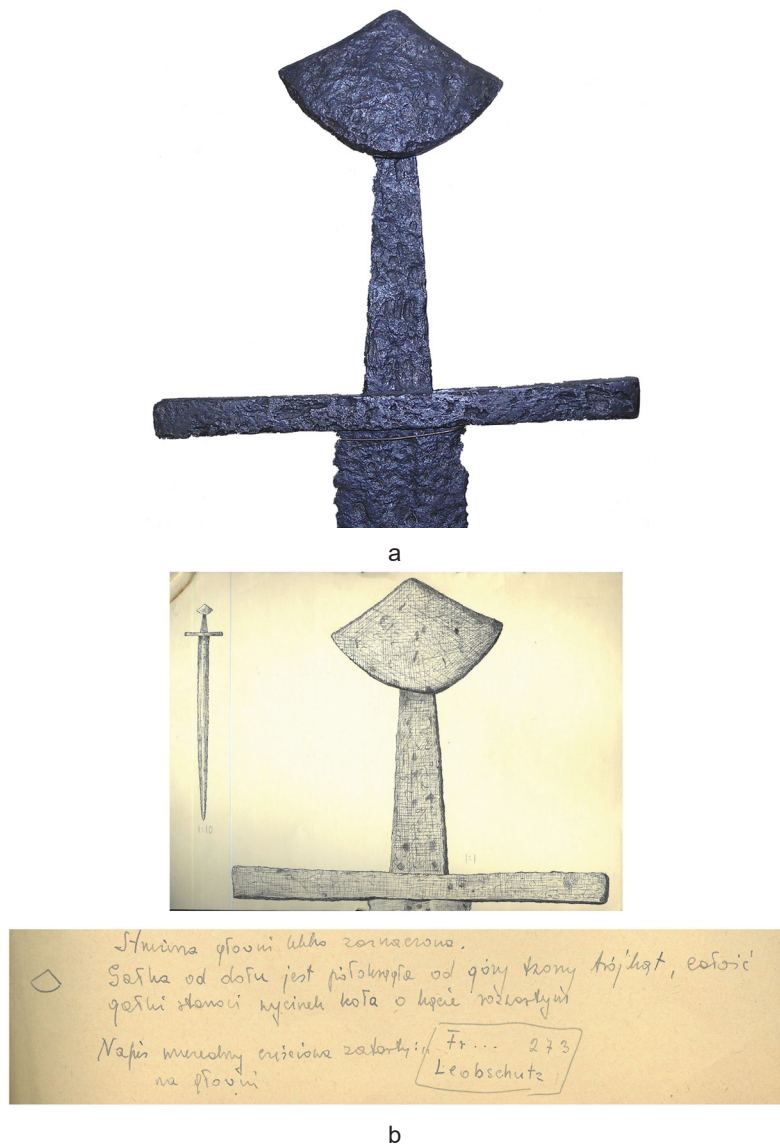


Fig. 8. Sword of combined type 19, National Museum in Wrocław (inv. no. IX 1641), find place: Głubczyce, Poland:
a – hilt. Photo L. Marek; b – handnote and drawing by W. Sarnowska.

The analysed pommel from Wrocław closes the list of similar objects found in Poland which could be dated on the basis of concrete archaeological evidence. Other pommel finds of combined type 19 from this country, although spectacular in many respects, are chance finds without properly recorded context. A good example is the very well preserved 12th century sword found probably in Złocieniec, Drawsko District, kept at the National Museum in Szczecin.⁴² Another pommel of the type is mounted on a 12th/13th century sword fragment found in Paczków, Silesia, kept at the Polish Army Museum, Warsaw⁴³ – which has a blade inscribed with the words of Psalm 143 – a quotation from the ceremony of dubbing new knights.⁴⁴ Conforming to the general characteristics

of the analysed form but exceptional in every other aspect is the pommel found in Upper Silesia and kept before WWII at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Berlin (Fig. 10:a-b).⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the current location of this unique object remains unknown. According to the description by K. Langenheim⁴⁶ the greatest width of the cast copper pommel was near the top – 3 cm. It tapered towards its base to c. 1 cm – in a different direction than usual. There was a broken part of the iron tang still remaining inside. Both sides of the pommel were decorated with multi-coloured enamel. On the obverse, there was an image of a dragon turning its head backwards. The mouth of the dragon was wide open with jaws which terminated in spirals. On its head there was a crest, which also ended in

⁴² Inv. no. A/18.316; Kucypera et al. 2013, 270, Fig. 9.

⁴³ Inv. no. 174.

⁴⁴ Cf. Głosek and Makiewicz 2007, 140; Marek 2014, 12.

⁴⁵ Inv. no. II 10633.

⁴⁶ Langenheim 1936, 288.



a



b

Fig. 9. Swords of combined type 19 in art: a – sculpted lunette, western portal of the Ferrara Cathedral, Italy, c. 1135; b – murals, Szczepanów, Świdnica District, Poland, 14th century. Drawing and Photo L. Marek.

a volute. The wings were filled with ornament consisting of crossed lines – used by the craftsman to represent feathers. Only three legs of the beast were visible. On the reverse, one could find a similar ornament of scrolls. In the centre there was a circle, with a smaller one inside bound with the former with 8 volutes. The fields created by these volutes were filled with white and yellow enamel. Inside the small circle, there was a smaller depiction of a creature turning his head with crest backwards. The dragon had no wings. On both sides there was an ornament of scrolling tendrils in relief; the background for them and the depictions of dragons were filled with blue enamel.⁴⁷ Due to the extraordinary lavishness of the pommel and the region where it was found some researchers attempted to attribute the object to

a certain owner. They sought evidence for their views in its decoration, and especially in the motif of the dragon treated as a heraldic device.⁴⁸ At the present state of knowledge, such hypotheses still remain highly conjectural and need to be confirmed by hard data. A similar dragon in relief, for instance, could be observed on the 13th-century Italian sword pommel kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.⁴⁹ One of the most credible opinions on the ornamented pommel from Upper Silesia was published by J. Źak. The latter believed it must have been manufactured according to the technique of the Limoges enamels.⁵⁰ A photograph published by K. Langenheim and his description of the pommel's decoration conforms to the characteristics of

⁴⁷ Langenheim 1936, 288.

⁴⁸ See Pudło 2013.

⁴⁹ Inv. no. 42.50.136.

⁵⁰ Źak 1960, 331.



Fig. 10. Sword pommel, combined type 19 variant, decorated in the Limoges enamel style, find place: Upper Silesia: a – obverse. After Langenheim 1936; b – reverse. After commons.wikimedia.org.

the early Limoges style enamels from the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries.⁵¹ Especially noteworthy in this case are the fantastic creatures chiselled in relief against an enamelled background. A stylistic analogue to the Silesian pommel ornament can be found in the decoration of the enamelled round plaque of gilt brass with two fighting dragons, produced in Limoges c. 1200-1250, kept at the Museum Schnütgen in Cologne, Germany.⁵²

Conclusions

Taking into account their typological features, the pommels recorded during large-scale excavations in Wrocław fit well into their archaeological find-context. Other evidence from the same settlement layer confirms their 12th-century chronology. The 12th century marks a turning point in the history of the town when economic prosperity attracted foreign settlers to the scarcely inhabited left-bank part of Wrocław. The Silesian dukes, on the other hand, inspired such settlement being lively interested in having more taxpayers. As a result of social, economic and legal changes and according to special privileges granted to the newcomers by the duke, soon the well-organised 13th-century chartered town developed a regular layout with a town square, building blocks and precisely measured plots. In general, the 12th century was also a turning point in sword hilt evolution. In the process of constant development dating back to the Carolingian times, pommels became more rugged and more functional than in the previous period. Absolutely dominant are those made of a single piece of metal, unlike most of their early medieval counterparts consisting of two elements: the upper guard (base) and

the top. The main role of a pommel in the 12th century was to counterbalance the heavy blade, to hold all of the hilt elements together and to support the firm grip preventing the sword from slipping out of hand. Sharp ridges and acute points so characteristic for pommels of the combined type 15 and 19 might suggest another interpretation of their role in combat. Offensive actions with the use of a sword hilt are well documented in combat manuals from the 15th century. The technique of striking an opponent with a sword pommel might have originated in earlier times. To support this hypothesis, however, we do not have enough evidence from iconography so far. On the other hand, the ridges and pointed protrusions on top of the analysed pommels hardly could be explained by the manufacturer's fancy. In spite of many examples of plain undecorated pommels belonging to the mentioned types, it is striking to find pieces of exceptional artistic quality and lavish decoration. Those extraordinary pieces confirm the important symbolic meaning of a sword pommel, which was often believed to be charged with supernatural powers in the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note that sword pommels of type 15 and 19 were contemporary during a long period of time between the 12th and early 13th centuries. Fine pictorial evidence for this coexistence can be found on the mentioned murals from Rodengo, Italy, dated to c. 1215.⁵³ This leads to the conclusion that common evolution schemes might be overly simplifying our perception of the development of swords, which was never linear in character.

⁵¹ Drake Boehm 1996a, 154-155; Drake Boehm 1996b, 158-160.

⁵² Kluckert 2000, 377.

⁵³ Andergassen et al. 2012, 2, 4, 44.

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