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MEDIEVAL SWORD AND SABRE FROM THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

Abstract:

M. Tsurtsunia 2015, Medieval Sword and Sabre from the Georgian National Museum, AMM XI: 159-172

There are two weapons, which belong to the High Middle Ages, preserved in the Georgian National Museum. One of them is a double-edged sword from Khevsureti whereas the other, a single-edged sabre, was found in the Vani burial site. The article presents a complete description and technical characteristics of both weapons and discusses their blade, hilt, pommel and quillons separately. The stages of the evolution of the Georgian sword are explored in comparison to the surrounding Islamic and Byzantine military technologies and the typology of the 10th-12th c. Georgian sword are also stated.

Key words: Georgian double-edged swords, sword from Khevsureti, Vani sabre, Gokhnari gravestone, down-turned quillons, langet, ricasso

There are two weapons, which belong to the High Middle ages, preserved in the Georgian National Museum. One of them is a double-edged sword from Khevsureti whereas the other, a single-edged sabre, which was found in the Vani burial site.

The sword

The double-edged (Fig. 1) sword was brought to the museum from Khevsureti (Chilashvili 1990, 22). Its full length together with the pommel is 102.2 cm whilst the length of the hilt is 14.3 cm. The sword weighs 969 grams. The width of the blade near the guard, which consistently gets a little narrower, is 4.8 cm and the point is not accented. The blade in the center of the broken part is 0.45 cm thick and lens-shaped (in the cross-sectional view). The metal hilt was fixed on the tang of the blade with three rivets which is confirmed by the remaining holes. The wooden part of the grip, on which both lower and upper parts of the hilt were hooped, is missing¹. From the one side the hilt and the guard

are covered with a simple ornament and the hilt ends with a small, spherical pommel. The width of the quillons is 8.9 cm. They are turned down towards the blade and end with spherical endings. Both sides of the guard used to possess a “langet”² which has been broken off on one side and lost.

The blade

The double-edged sword without a distinctly pronounced point was typical of the East, for example, the “spatha” – a Byzantine double-edged sword with a rounded end (Kolias 1988, 137, 144; Aleksić 2010, 129) and the Islamic sword (Nicolle 1991, 302-303). Swords with non-tapering blades and rounded ends, widely spread in Byzantium and the Islamic world, differ from the European ones with tapering blades and a sharp point³ (Nicolle 1983, 62-63). Judged by the iconographic material, the round-ended swords were widespread in Georgia⁴. As this specific blade does not leave a possibility to make any other conclusions⁵,

¹ The hilt of the sabre found in Vani reveals a similar construction.

² “Langet” is a projection from the quillons which, in this case, is bent towards the blade and fixes the sword in the sheath. It is of Indian origin and was widespread in the 7th-10th c. in Islamic countries and Byzantium and reached Europe via them (Nicolle 1983, 64; Nickel 2002, 120).

³ Al-Kindi also mentions this particular difference between the European and Oriental swords (Kindi 2006, 43). Though Western European swords with non-tapering blades are known (Geibig’s type I), they don’t have rounded ends anyway (Geibig 1991, 84-85).

⁴ Though the images of sharp pointed swords are not difficult to observe.

⁵ If we do not take into account the fact that later someone must have tried to make changes to the sword from Khevsureti as one of its edges was made blunt for 35 cm.

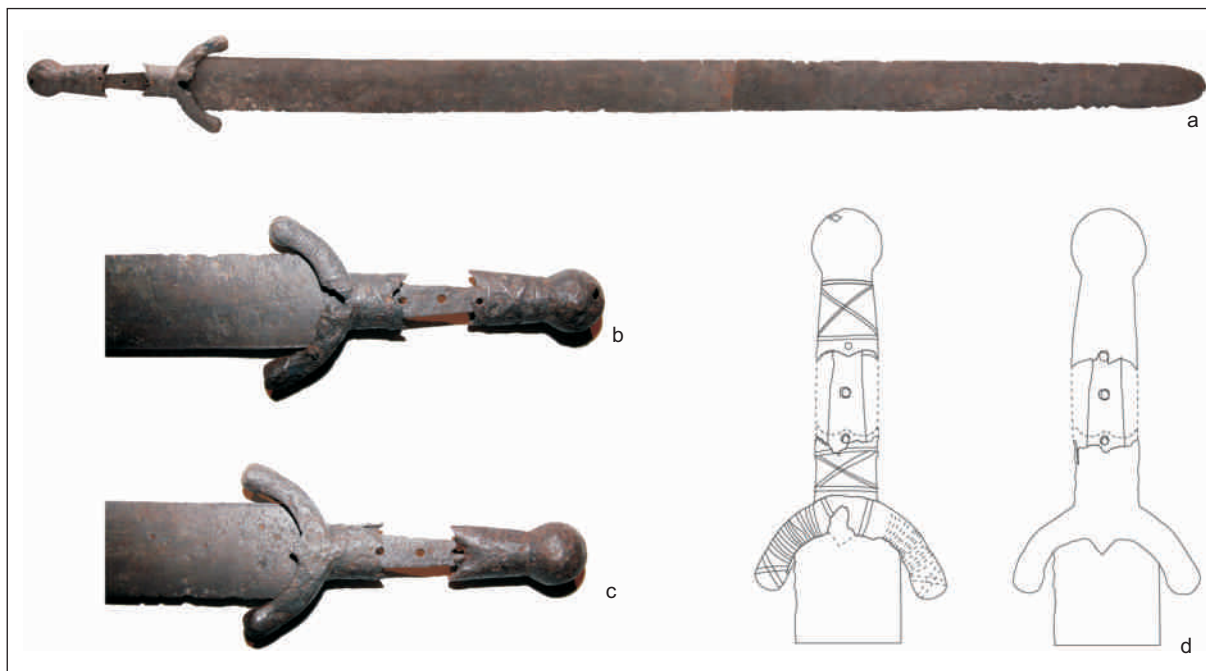


Fig. 1. The sword from Khevsureti (Courtesy of the Georgian National Museum): a – sword; b – front; c – back; d – reconstruction. *Photo and reconstruction by M. Tsurtsunia.*

Ryc. 1. Miecz z Khevsureti (udostępniony dzięki uprzejmości Gruzińskiego Muzeum Narodowego): a – miecz; b – przód; c – tył; d – rekonstrukcja. *Fot. i rekonstrukcja M. Tsurtsunia.*

I would like to move to the characterisation of its hilt and the quillons.

The hilt

The hilt of the sword plays a defining role in the process of determining its origin. The construction of the hilt and its decoration characterise the society and nation of its creator. According to W. Zabłocki, the hilt has a paramount importance for the sword's functional analysis and the determination of the sword's origin or its type based only on its blade is not right (Квасневич 2005, 14-15)⁶. Generally, while studying the sword and its representations, the shape of the guard is used for classification as it is known to be more multifarious and easily recognisable than the blade (Кирпичников 1966, 19; Nicolle 1983, 63)⁷. According to the righteous remark made by V. Yotov, *the typology of swords is often a typology of the sword-guards* (Yotov

2011a, 115). When employing iconographical material scholars are confined to the study of the hilt, the pommel and the quillons. This is quite well noticed by Hoffmeyer (1966, 95). All this increases the significance of their research⁸.

In our case when the blade is not particularly informative, we should clearly focus on the study of the hilt. In particular, the hilt of the sword from Khevsureti is made of metal, secured and connected by means of wood⁹. Such a combined hilt is observed, for instance, on the sword worn by St. Eustathios on the fresco of Ateni Sioni. In this case the upper and lower parts of the grip are distinctly separated from their binding wooden grip by means of brown stripes (Fig. 7:b). The middle wooden part is sometimes covered with a thin plate, possibly, made of precious metal as it can be observed in the case of the grip of the sword worn by St. George in Matskhvarishi¹⁰ (Fig. 8:d).

⁶ In order to define the origin of the sword, W. Kwaśniewicz discusses its parts in the following order: hilt – blade – scabbard (Квасневич 2005, 13-14).

⁷ At the same time, it is significant (significant) that the nature of the weapon (for instance, sword or sabre) is determined according to its blade whereas the type is determined by means of studying its hilt (Мернепр 1955, 134).

⁸ Due to the scarcity of existing examples the importance of iconographic images is singled out by Parani who considers that it is feasible to learn important information in this way, especially regarding the parts of the sword such as hilt and scabbard. This opinion becomes even more valuable with regard to the changes in the typology of the swords depicted by Byzantine iconography (Parani 2003, 130-131).

⁹ About the combined metal-and-wooden construction see Aleksić (2010, 127).

¹⁰ For the grip covered with a decorated silver sheet placed between the pommel and the quillons see Mohamed (2008, 37, Fig. 8).

Except for several unusual cases, the all-metal or metal-covered grip is not characteristic of the medieval European swords. However, it is well attested in the case of Oriental and Islamic weapons, especially in earlier period Arabic swords (Nicolle 2002, 174-178)¹¹. The combined type of the hilt was widespread and popular in the Byzantine Empire¹². Swords revealing the hilts of combined metal and wooden construction and their details were found in Garabonc-I necropolis and the Kunágota burial site in Hungary, in Păcuiul lui Soare fortress in Romania and in Pliska, Abritus and Drastar in Bulgaria (Fig. 2:a-c). The swords found in the above mentioned places were determined as belonging to the 9th and 10th c. and were supposed to be Byzantine (Йотов 2009, 253, Fig. 9; Yotov 2011b, 38-39; 2012, 219-220, Fig. 1)¹³. The spherical pommel found on the battlefield of Drastar (1087) deserves to be mentioned separately (Fig. 2:c) as it is identical to the pommels of the Georgian weapons. It should be mentioned that spherical pommels are not particularly typical of Western European swords although they were widely spread in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean regions (Nicolle 2002, 174). It is obvious that the combined hilt of the Georgian sword is an impact of the technology spread in Islamic and Byzantine worlds.

The quillons

The Romano-Byzantine long sword, *spatha*, inherited a short quillons from the Roman short sword *gladius* which later was increased in size. On earlier Byzantine images only a small-size quillons is observed which, in the 9th and 10th c., is only insignificantly wider than the blade. However, starting from 10th-11th c., a more distinct cross pieces appeared (Kolias 1988, 143). In the 10th and 11th c., Frankish and Viking swords developed curved quillons¹⁴, although, compared



Fig. 2. Details of the swords with combined metal and wooden construction: a – sword from Garabonc; b – pommel from Abritus; c – pommel from Drastar (a-c – after Yotov 2011b, Fig. 2:b-d).

Ryc. 2. Szczegóły konstrukcji mieczy z metalowymi i drewnianymi elementami oprawy: a – miecz z Garabonc; b – głowica z Abritus; c – głowica z Drastaru (a-c – wg Yotov 2011b, Fig. 2:b-d).

¹¹ For metal pommels and guards of the Islamic sword and the matrix for their production in the 10th-11th c. see Mohamed (2008, 106-109, Figs. 68-70, 72-76).

¹² Rabovyanov also considers that the distinct and embracing guards of swords were spread from the Islamic World to the Byzantium (Rabovyanov 2011, 78-82).

¹³ D. Rabovyanov does not agree with the opinion expressed by Yotov and considers that Bulgarian swords are of Islamic origin (Rabovyanov 2011, 73, 82-83). In spite of the fact that Rabovyanov is right about the initial Islamic prototypes of such swords, the attitude maintained by Yotov is also convincing. The specimens of swords found in the Balkans or at the Black Sea littoral must have been made in Byzantium or, locally under the Byzantine influence. It is not expected for the Arabic-Islamic technologies to have permeated all the regions of Eastern Europe, where the swords were found.

¹⁴ One of the earliest is the so-called group of English type swords dated 875/900-950 (Oakeshott 1960, 136). Based on this idea, some scholars consider the Anglo-Saxon England to be the country of origin of swords with curved quillons (Davidson 1994, 63). According to the typology suggested by J. Petersen, L, Z and Æ types belong to the swords with curved quillons (Petersen 1919, 112-116, 175-177, 178-180, Figs. 94-97, 136-137, 138; Jones 2002, 18-19), whereas A. Kirpichnikov maintains that the Petersen type Y partially falls into this group (Кирпичников 1966, 34-35), but in this case we should also take into account P and Q types as they are also characterised by a little curve of the quillons. According to the typology by Oakeshott, the quillons of the sword belonging to the type 9 is semi-circular (Oakeshott 1991, nos. X.7-8, Xa.17, XII.10-12). Kirpichnikov believes that Kievan Rus played a significant role in the process of spreading curved quillons in European and Scandinavian countries from the East (Кирпичников 1966, 34-35).



Fig. 3. The sword with a down-turned quillons and massive pommel on the Nishapur bowl (courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

Ryc. 3. Miecz z wygiętym do dołu jęlcem i masywną głowicą na misie z Nishapur (udostępnione dzięki uprzejmości Victoria and Albert Museum w Londynie).

to the Byzantine swords they have a pommel of a different shape (Grotowski 2010, 352, n. 168). European cross pieces of the similar type do not reveal a distinct ball-shaped end, which appeared here only in the 15th c.¹⁵ The sword with a spherical pommel and curved quillons were widely spread in Europe especially after the 13th c., although the curved quillons are not of European origin. Such quillons are often attested in Byzantine art of the 10th-12th c. (Hoffmeyer 1966, 103). The home of the curved quillons must be Central Asia from which, after spreading west, such quillons reached Byzantium (Hoffmeyer 1961, 64; 1966, 105)¹⁶. The predecessor of swords with spherical pommels and down-turned quillons can be the sword from a relief carving of a cavalryman on the 9th c. ivory chess piece from Islamic Sind or Eastern Iran (collection of Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 311, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), sword of the warrior on 9th-10th c. lustreware bowl from Iraq (collection of Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 57.684, Boston) and the sword depicted on the ceramic bowl from Nishapur, Khurasan, kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which already possesses down-turned

quillons with larger ends and a massive pommel (Fig. 3) (Nicolle 2002, 168, Figs. 53-55). The hunter depicted on the gold necklace from the 10th c. Iran (kept in the Cincinnati Art Museum) is also equipped with the similar-looking sword (Nicolle 1999, 261, Fig. 660) as well as the attendant on the ivory casket from Cordoba dating back to 970 AD (collection of Victoria and Albert Museum) (Kindi 2006, Fig. 5). The similar swords with down-turned quillons and without a langet were worn by the Zodiac figures in “The Book of Fixed Stars” by Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi, 1009 AD (Al-Sarraf 2002, Figs. 93:a-c). In the 12th c. the majority of the swords with down-turned quillons in Egypt already possessed langets as attested by the miniatures of Coptic “Gospels” from 1179-1180, kept in Paris (Fig. 4:a) (Nicolle 1983, Fig. 126).

Such swords are often found on Byzantine and Armenian monuments. For instance, Goliath’s sword depicted on the 10th c. relief from Aghtamar church has quillons bent towards the blade. Similar swords are depicted on ivory triptychs of Borradaile (the 10th c.), Harbaville (the 11th c.) and the Vatican (the 10th-11th c.) (Fig. 4:b-c) (Grotowski 2010, 352, Figs. 20-22), which are characterised by a large spheric pommel and curved quillons, in some cases by a langet.

Down-turned quillons were also found on sabres. A. Kirpichnikov maintains that while cutting, such quillons were more comfortable for the warrior’s hand. According to his typology, the quillons of the type Ia are characterised by a semi-circular shape, do not have a langet and were widely spread in the East European steppes in the 10th-11th c. (Кирпичников 1966, 63, 68)¹⁷. U. Kochkarov singles out two types of down-turned quillons typical for sabres: IIa, which was spread in the 10th-11th c. and IIr, which was found in North Caucasia in the 13th-15th c. (Кочкаров 2008, 32-33). M. Gorelik thinks that the down-turned quillons of sabres found in the Northern Caucasian burial sites originated from the quillons of the sword. He mentions the existence of curved quillons on the Hulaguian miniatures of the beginning of the 14th c. and adds that they must have appeared in Ilkhanian Iran from Muslim Spain, specifically, from Al-Andaluz, where they were formed during the 12th-13th c. (Горелик 2004, 294). Although the miniatures of “Jami al-tawarikh” do reveal down-

¹⁵ According to Oakeshott, the cross-style 11 observed on the swords of XVIII.10 and XXI.1 types (Oakeshott 1991, nos. XVIII.10, XXI.1).

¹⁶ This opinion is also shared by Nicolle and Kolias (Nicolle 1976, 122; Kolias 1988, 143, n. 70).

¹⁷ One of the first users of the down-turned quillons must have been the Kimaks as suggested by the sabre found in Eastern Kazakhstan dated back to, presumably, the 9th-10th c. (Плотников 1981, 166, Fig. 2; Худяков 1986, 193-194). Sabres with down-turned quillons were also found in Bulgaria (Йотов 2004, Fig. 31, Pl. XXXIX).



Fig. 4. Swords with pommels and down-turned quillons with langets: a – the miniature 79r from Coptic Gospel (Ms. Copte 13); b – Harbaville Triptych; c – Borradaile Triptych; d-e – miniatures from “Jami al-tawarikh”, folio 72a and 292a (a – after Nicolle 1983, Fig. 126; d-e – after Blair 1995, Figs. 36, 49).

Ryc. 4. Miecze z głowicami i z wygiętymi do dołu jelicami z wąsami: a – miniatura 79r z koptyjskiej „Ewangelii” (Ms. Copte 13); b – Tryptyk Harbaville; c – Tryptyk Borradaile; d-e – miniatury z “Jami al-tawarikh”, folio 72a i 292a (a – wg Nicolle 1983, Fig. 126; d-e – wg Blair 1995, Figs. 36, 49).

turned quillons (Fig. 4:d-e)¹⁸ but as I have already mentioned, this tradition had existed in Iran and the surrounding world before the Mongols and there was no need to export it from Spain.

The figures listed above clearly reveal a large geographical area on which the swords with down-

turned quillons were spread. Iranian-Khurasanian swords were also developed and transformed in Georgia. For instance, they developed a langet and the pommel got smaller and only retained a symbolic shape. Thus, it did not balance the sword's blade any more but restrained the hand and

¹⁸ Such swords are depicted on the miniatures 72a and 292a (Blair 1995, Figs. 36, 49).

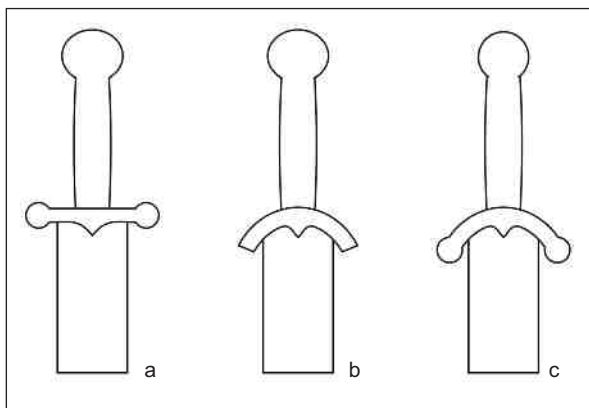


Fig. 5. A typological scheme of the Georgian swords of 10th-12th c.: a – sword with a straight quillons, 10th c.; b – sword with a down-turned quillons, beginning of 11th c.; c – sword with small pommel and down-turned quillons with langet, end of 11th – 1st half of 12th c.

Ryc. 5. Schemat typologiczny mieczy gruzińskich w X-XII w.: a – miecz z prostymi ramionami jelca, X w.; b – miecz z wygiętymi w dół ramionami jelca, początek XI w.; c – miecze z małą głowicą i z wygiętymi do dołu ramionami jelca oraz wąsem, koniec XI – początek XII w.

thus, the latter did not slide from the hilt. In order to build a correct opinion about such evolution, we should discuss the function of the sword in that

period. It was a double-edged heavy weapon used for slashing the enemy and its use in battle differed from fencing with lighter, single-edged sabres which later appeared in Georgia. Clearly, while using heavy swords in slashing the most important factor was the strength of the stroke and not its speed or frequency. In such cases even a single well-aimed hit was enough to kill or heavily wound the enemy. The diminishing size of the pommel usually served to increase the force of the hit. The smaller and lighter the pommel the farther down and closer to the tip moves the balance point. Consequently, such swords were not easily maneuvered but ensured a strong blow (Basista 2007, 50)¹⁹.

Three stages can be singled out in the evolution of the Georgian swords:

- 1) on the 10th c. icons the swords reveal straight quillons;
- 2) in the 11th c. the quillons are already down-turned;
- 3) on the verge of the 11th and the 12th c. a sword with down-turned quillons and spherical pommel has already developed, one example of which has reached us²⁰ (Fig. 5).

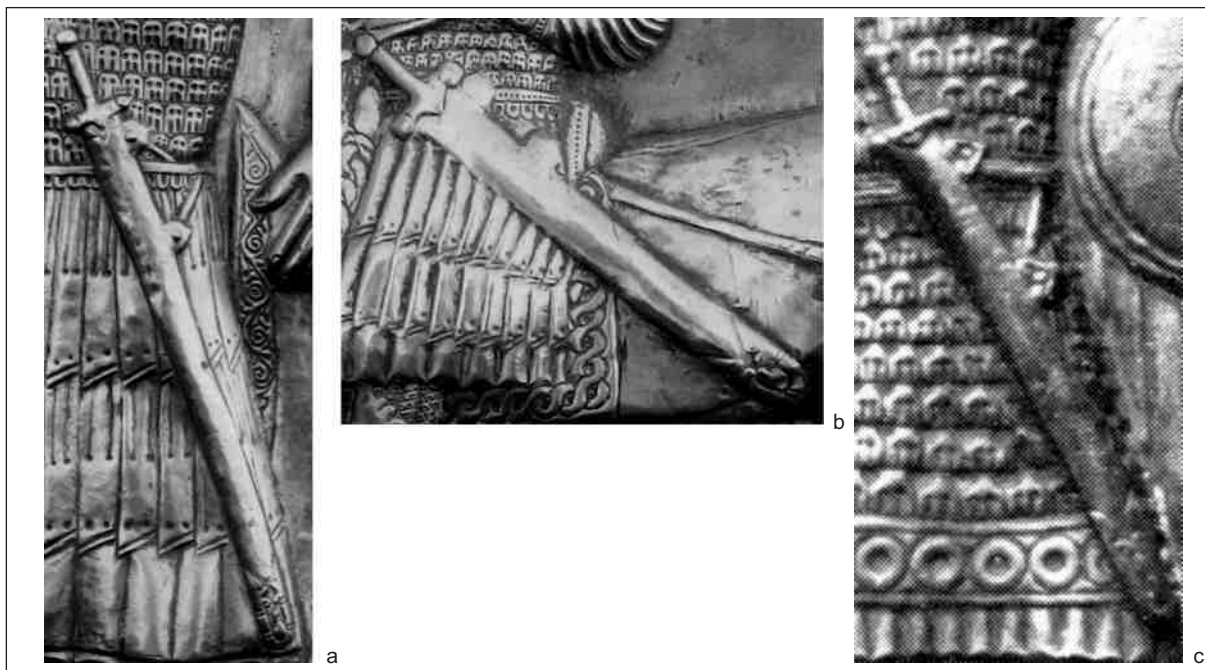


Fig. 6. Swords with a langet and straight quillons with rounded ends: a – sword of St. George of Mravaldzali; b – sword of St. George of Parakheti; c – sword of St. Theodore of Chukuli.

Ryc. 6. Miecze z prostymi ramionami jelca, zakończonymi kulkami i wąsami: a – miecz św. Jerzego z Mravaldzali; b – miecz św. Jerzego z Parakheti; c – miecz św. Teodora z Chukuli.

¹⁹ Furat also points out small pommels on Islamic swords which, unlike European ones, do not counterbalance the blade and can be considered only to be the cap terminal for the grip (Furat 1998, 322).

²⁰ Despite the earlier images, from the 12th c. a sword with a curved quillons is less frequently found in Byzantine iconography and it is replaced by the straight crossguard (Grotowski 2010, 353). At this time the swords with down-turned quillons hit the peak of their development in Georgia which points at a certain independence of the “Georgian way”.



Fig. 7. Swords with a down-turned quillons and langets: a – St. George's sword from the relief of Nikortsinda; b – St. Eustathios' sword from Ateni Sioni.

Ryc. 7. Miecze z wygiętymi w dół ramionami jelca i wąsami: a – miecz św. Jerzego na płaskorzeźbie z Nikortsindy; b – miecz św. Eustachego z Ateni Sioni.

These stages did not develop in isolation and characteristic features of each of them are intermingled with each other although the suggested scheme is valid for depicting the general picture.

The sword with the langet and straight quillons with thickened ends is frequently depicted on the 10th c. images, such as St. George's and St. Theodore's swords found on the icon of Mravaldzali, 2nd half of the 10th c. (Fig 6:a) (Чубинашвили 1959, 406-409, Pl. 36, 37), St. George's sword on the 10th c. icon from Parakheti (Fig. 6:b) (ibid., 342-343, Pl. 43) and St. George's and St. Theodore's swords on the 10th c. Triptych from Chukuli (Fig. 6:c) (ibid., 409-410, Pl. 46).

St. George's sword on the timpano relief of the Western Portal of Nikortsinda church, made at the beginning of the 11th c. (1010-1014) reveals the next stage of the development when the quillons are turned down and a small langet is already present although the pommel is still big (Fig. 7:a) (Aladashvili 1957, Pl. 19₂). The quillons of the sword of St. Eustathios found on the 11th c. fresco of Ateni Sioni, which reveals a small langet and is insignificantly turned down, links this weapon to the second stage of the development (Fig. 7:b) (Ateni... 1984, 157, Pl. 94). In addition, St. George's sword from Lagami church also reveals a down-turned quillons and a big pommel (Чубинашвили 1959, 355, Pl. 241).

By the end of the 11th c. the shape of the sword was already formed and it can frequently be seen on the 12th c. images. In Iprari church of Archangels, the fresco of Archangel Michael, painted in 1096 by the King's painter Tevdore, is still there. The Archangel's sword shows a down-turned quillons with thickened ends and a spherical pommel; its point is a little sharpened with a central fuller or rib (Fig. 8:a) (*Upper Svaneti...* 2010, 61). The similar sword can be found in the scene of St. Julitta's beheading on the Southern wall of Lagurka church, painted in 1111 (Fig. 8:b) (ibid., 72). The swords revealing the final stage of evolution can be found with St. Theodore on the Northern wall of Nakipari church and with St. George on the Western wall of Matskhvarishi (Painter Michael Maghlakeli, 1140) (Fig. 8:c-d) (ibid., 93, 112).

As can be seen, analysis of the material in Georgia and surrounding regions enabled us to determine the stages of the evolution of the sword under discussion. It is obvious that it can be classed as a typical specimen of the Georgian sword, spread in the end of the 11th and at the beginning of the 12th c.

The sabre

The other exhibit from the museum which was discovered in Vani presents a sabre (Fig. 9) (*Из архива...* 1979, 133). Overall length of the sabre



Fig. 8. Swords with small pommels and a down-turned quillons with rounded ends and langets: a – Archangel Michael’s sword in Iprari; b – sword from the scene of St. Julitta’s beheading; c – sword of St. Theodore of Nakipari; d – sword of St. George of Matskhvarishi.

Ryc. 8. Miecze z małymi głowicami i wygiętymi w dół ramionami jelca, zakończonymi kulkami i wąsami: a – miecz Archaniola Michała z Ipari; b – miecz ze sceny ukazującej ścięcie św. Julity; c – miecz św. Teodora z Nakipari; d – miecz św. Jerzego z Matskhvarishi.

found in the Vani burial site is 110 cm, the length of the hilt is 14.1 cm, the widest part of the blade is equal to 4 cms (ibid.). The steady narrowing along the whole length becomes noticeable only near the point. The sabre is a little curved and reveals a double fuller near the back-edge. The back-edge is 0.9 cm thick at the guard, 0.8 cm – near the broken part and then – 0.7 cm. The back-edge makes up nearly 3/4 of the blade and turns into a sharp part making up the 26 cm long false-edge²¹. The sword also has a “ricasso”²² – an unsharpened part of the blade of 7.5 cm length. The blade in the broken part is wedge-shaped. Currently the sabre is in an extremely rusty condition

and weighs 1123 grams. The width of the remaining quillons is 7.1 cm – it is characterized of a half-crescent shape, down-turned to the blade, with both ends chipped and broken. Presumably, they used to end by a round thickening. As well as this, the sabre is damaged on both sides and it is unknown whether the quillons used to have a langet. The hilt ends up with a 3 cm diameter spherical pommel. The metal hilt is fastened to the tang with three rivets. The wooden part of the grip is still present and enables us to have a good idea regarding the construction of the hilt.

When could such sabres have appeared in Georgia and what period does the Vani single-

²¹ The double-edged end of the curved sabre was to make penetration easier as it was more difficult to penetrate with a weapon of the triangle crosscut than with that of a lens-like one (Чики 2010, 209)

²² *Ricasso* is the blunt part of the blade, which starts from the quillon. It strenghtens the meeting place of the sword’s blade and hilt and serves to firmly insert the blade in the sheath. About the special fencing style based on rikasso, see Rabovyanov (2011, 77).

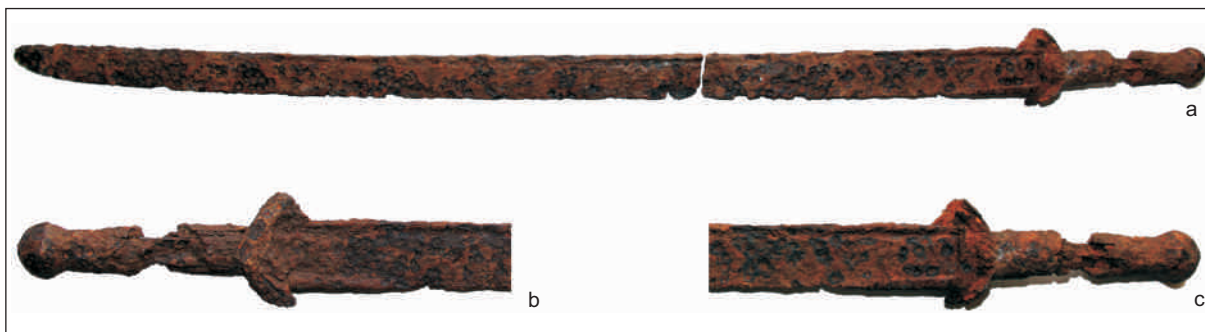


Fig. 9. The Vani sabre (Courtesy of the Georgian National Museum): a – sabre; b – front; c – back. *Photo by M. Tsurtsumia.*

Ryc. 9. Szabla z Vani (udostępniona dzięki uprzejmości Gruzjińskiego Muzeum Narodowego): a – szabla; b – przód; c – tył. *Fot. M. Tsurtsumia.*

edged sabre belong to? The popularity of light, single-edged sabres was conditioned by the fast fighting style introduced by the Nomads. The exact period of the spread of such weapon in Georgia is still to be determined as well as the exact date of Vani archeological site. N. Khoshtaria dated it by the 10th c. (*ibid.*, 133), whereas V. Artalakva believed that the sabre belonged to the 10th-11th c. (Артилаква 1976, 126, 170). L. Chrelashvili attributed it to the 11th c. (Chrelashvili 1998, 129-130). I. Bakradze agrees with the positions of the above-listed scholars and also believe that the sabre belongs to the 10th-11th c. (Bakradze 2011, 66-68, 70). All the above-mentioned works discuss the Vani burial site from the point of Georgian armament and determines the age of the sabre without considering the wider archeological context, which, naturally, promotes mistakes. Nowadays, after a complex study of the Vani burial site it was found that the sword belonged to a nomad Qipchaq warrior who had settled in Georgia in 1118 (Tsurtsumia 2013, 160-196). Judging from the reconsidered archeological data, it is easier to state the possible date of producing the Vani sabre. It is a typical nomadic sabre worn by a Qipchaq with the hilt typical of a Georgian sword. In addition to this, the Vani sabre has one more unusual feature. It is well-known that the earlier the sabre was produced the less was the curve, length and width of its blade²³. In the 8th-9th c., the sabres were characterised by the 1 m length, 2.0-3.3 cm of width and 3 cm of curve. In the 12th and 13th c. the blade lengthens by 10-17 cm, the width, in some cases, reaches 4.4 cm (Кирпичников 1966, 67) and the curve also increases²⁴. Thus, the Vani sabre by its length and width corresponds

to the 12th-13th c. specimen whereas by its curve – to the sabres spread in the 8th-9th c.

This anomaly can easily be explained. As known from the work by David IV's (1089-1121) historian, the king supplied the Qipchaqs with horses and armament (David the Builder's Historian 1955, 337). This is not surprising if we follow the route the Qipchaqs made from their settling places to Georgia. In order to cover the distance from the place of origin (Seversky Donets) to the Caucasus, the horde of Atraka had to cover 750 km (Мургулия, Шушарин 1998, 72). This was followed by the conflict with Ossetians and other indigenous peoples living in the North Caucasus. Later, the Qipchaqs had to make a difficult crossing through the Caucasus and settle in Georgia. It is obvious that while traveling such long distances, the Qipchaqs would not be able to transport entirely the numerous livestock they possessed. Thus, they would have had a great lack in equipment and horses. The historian also notes that at that time the Qipchaqs were known to be particularly poor (David the Builder's Historian 1955, 336)²⁵. As well as this, it is natural that in Georgia where the core of the army was made up of heavy armoured knights, the armament possessed by the Qipchaqs would have been considered as "light" and thus corresponding measures would have been taken to make it sufficiently "heavy". The majority of the Qipchaqs would serve as light horse archers and in order to equip them, swords and bows would have sufficed. At the same time, a great deal of effort would have been made to well-equip the Qipchaqs who were part of "monaspa" (King's guard) who would need to have both offensive and defensive weapons.

²³ In the 8th-14th c. the development of the curved sabre was based on the widening of the curve of the blade (Плетнёва 1973, 18).

²⁴ Kirpichnikov mentions that in the 13th c. the sabre became more massive under the influence of the sword (Кирпичников 1966, 6).

²⁵ This is also indicated by P. Golden and G. Anchabadze (Golden 1984, 71; Анчабадзе 1990, 108-109).



Fig. 10. The Gokhnari gravestone (Open-air Ethnographical Museum in Tbilisi). *Photo and drawing by M. Tsurtsunia.*

Ryc. 10. Płyta nagrobna z Gokhnari (Skansen w Tbilisi). *Fot. i ryc. M. Tsurtsunia.*

The Vani sabre can be considered as a product of the state arsenal, made by a Georgian smith by the order of a nomadic Qipchaq to satisfy the demands of the latter (quick and fast fight). In reality, it is a hybrid of a sabre and a sword with an insignificantly curved blade and a hilt characterised for a sword. The small degree of the curve can be easily explained by the fact that it would have been easier for the Georgian smith, who would have been accustomed to producing only straight blades, to make a blade with a little curving.

As has been mentioned, the Vani sabre has a straight hilt which presents an exact analogy of

the Khevsurian sword-hilt. Both of them are about 14 cm. The similarity of the technological process is also remarkable: both weapons reveal similar damages – they are broken along the rivet holes which is a relatively weak part of the hilt. The Vani sabre which has the hilt similar to the swords, clearly reveals the transient stage in Georgia, when curved sabres start to appear and spread. In this process we see the tendency for “lightening” of the double-edged sword and its replacement by a single-edged weapon²⁶. Relative novelty of the process is indicated by the employment of a traditional, straight hilt in the construction of the sabre²⁷.

²⁶ At the expense of the narrowing of the blade (4 cm in comparison to the 4.8 cm in the sword) the Vani sabre is longer (its length is 110 cm compared to 102 cm in case of the sword).

²⁷ The sword's hilt is always straight while the sabre's hilt is typically bent towards the blade's edge.

This transient stage of the establishment of the curved sabre in Georgia is confirmed by one more artefact, which, as I see it, is commonly and wrongly dated as belonging to the 10th-11th c. (Chrelashvili 1998, 130; Bakradze 2011, 72-73). On the gravestone from Gokhnari are depicted a bow, a quiver and a sabre²⁸ (Fig. 10) (Kekelidze 1974, 30-31). I do not accept this dating as being correct as the gravestone depicts a trumpet-shaped quiver introduced in Georgia by the Mongols²⁹. The sabre on the gravestone is insignificantly curved with its quillons turned down and it reveals a spherical pommel. Its hilt is straight and analogous to that of the Vani sabre. A trumpet-shaped quiver was successfully used in the 14th c. Georgia as well as it is depicted on the miniatures of the Psalter H1665 (Tsurtsunia 2013, Fig. 12, 15, 18, 20). It is worth mentioning that on these miniatures the sabres already reveal the characteristic hilts bent towards the blade's edge. Thus, the equipment depicted on the Gokhnari gravestone, which presents

a sabre of the transient period with the hilt characteristic of the sword, must have been made in an earlier period than the miniatures of the Psalter from H1665 and must belong to the 2nd half of the 13th c.

Finally, it must be argued that the issue of dating of the two Georgian medieval edged weapons discussed above can be considered to have been solved. The sword from Khevsureti is a typical example of the swords on the verge of the 11th-12th c. whereas the Vani sabre must have been made in 1118-1120, when Qipchaqs were organised and equipped in Georgia. The comparison of these Georgian weapons to the iconographic data confirms once again that the iconographic images, excluding the cases when they are particularly conservative, are, on the whole, reliable.

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²⁸ R. Kekelidze only determines the upper chronological limit of the stone and dates it earlier than the 15th c. (Kekelidze 1974, 32).

²⁹ About the spread of such quiver and its Mongol origin see Tsurtsunia (2008, 35-37).

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ŚREDNIOWIECZNY MIECZ I SZABLA Z KOLEKCJI GRUZIŃSKIEGO MUZEUM NARODOWEGO

Streszczenie

W Gruzińskim Muzeum Narodowym przechowywane są dwa okazy broni białej datowane na średniowiecze. Jednym z nich jest dwusieczny miecz z Khevsureti, kolejnym zaś szabla odkryta w kurhanie w miejscowości Vani.

W artykule zaprezentowano szczegółowy opis i charakterystykę obu zabytków oraz analizę formalną ich głowni, rękojeści, głowic i jeliców. Dodatkowo przedstawiono ewolucję gruzińskich mieczy w X-XII w., w oparciu o ustalenia typologiczne i techniczne dotyczące sąsiednich – islamskich i bizantyńskich – zabytków tego typu.

W konkluzji stwierdzono, że problem datowania dwóch gruzińskich okazów broni białej został wyjaśniony. Miecz z Khevsureti jest typowym przykładem okazów datowanych na XI-XII w., natomiast szabla z Vani musiała zostać wykonana w l. 1118-1120. Porównanie tych zabytków ze źródłami ikonograficznymi jeszcze raz wskazuje, że te ostatnie – pomijając rzadkie przypadki, gdzie trzymano się wcześniejszych wzorców – oddają znakomicie realia średniowiecznej broni używanej na terenie Gruzji.

Tłumaczył Piotr N. Kotowicz