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MEDIEVAL AWL-PIKE FROM ŽERANOVICE IN MORAVIA

Abstract:

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There is a massive and extremely long spear head of diamond-shape section in the collection of the Municipal Museum and gallery in Holešově. It was found in the 1960s in the coat of wall of the motte type castle in Žeranovice. Thanks to the characteristic features of the object in question, it can be assigned as an Awl-Pike, weapon which were used by European troops mostly in the 2nd half of the 15th c.

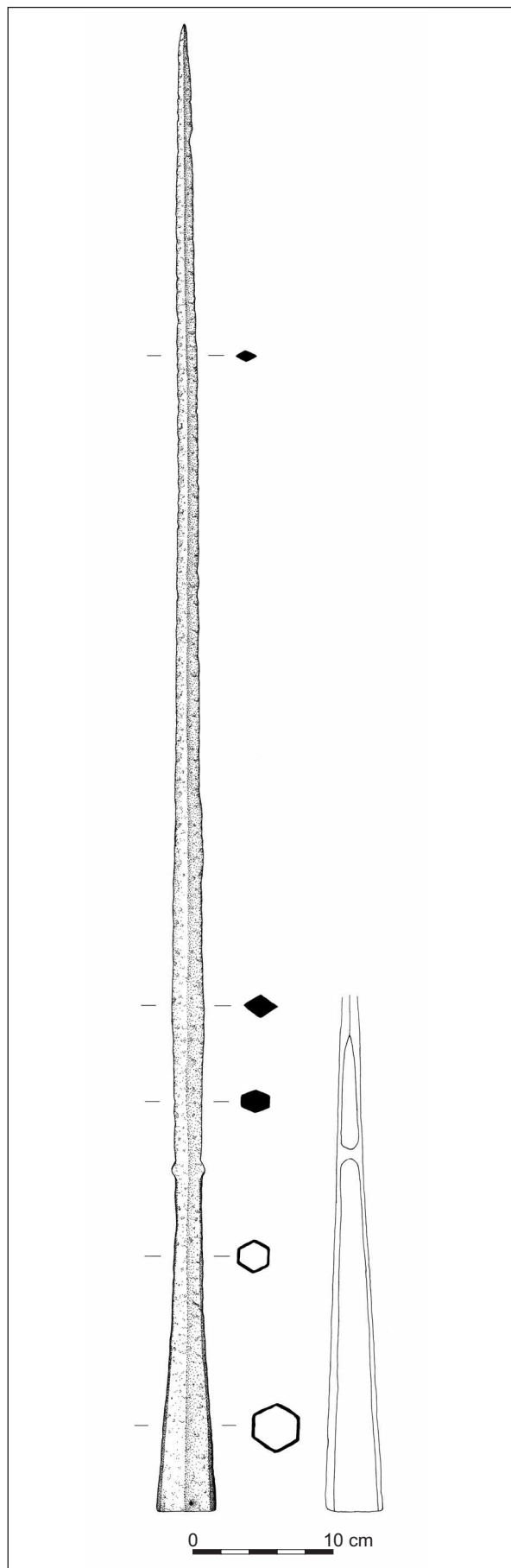
Key words: awl-pike, Moravia, motte type castle

Between the municipalities of Žeranovice and Racková in Kroměříž distr. of eastern Moravia, in the locality named “Hrádek”, there are remains of a minor fortified settlement, the core of which is of roughly trapezoidal layout. The core of the settlement is surrounded by a relatively massive ditch and from three sides also by bulwarks, nowadays relatively insignificant. In the body of the bulwark, more precisely in its front wall, at a depth of about 30 cm, an almost completely preserved massive and remarkably long spear was accidentally found in April 1965 (Doležel 1966, 91-92; Nekuda, Unger 1981, 325). The artefact is preserved in Municipal Muzseum and Gallery in Holešov (Městské muzeum a galerie Holešov, Inv. No. 4/651).

The spearhead, with overall length of 1057 mm, has 907 mm-long tip of rhombic cross section whose width tapers upwardly continuously from 22 to the final 1 mm (Fig. 1-2). Similarly, tapering the thickness of the tip, which is 28-30 mm. The tip follows into a 150 mm-long hexagonal socket, whose diameter toward the bottom edge extends continuously from 21 to the final 42 mm. In the side wall of the socket, almost at its bottom edge, is preserved a small circular hole, which was originally used for as a mount and for a better fixation of the awl-like spear to the wooden shaft of the weapon. In the lower third of the length of the tip, approximately 90 mm from the transition of the tip into the socket, the body of the awl

spear is rather markedly swollen into two lateral extensions, which originally served to attach a roundel guard made of sheet metal. The weight of the spear is 1056 g.

Thanks to the characteristic features of the object in question, it can be assigned to a specific type of awl-like spear that is in Czech literature generally referred to as the “šídlo”, in German sources and literature as “Ahlspiess” and in English literature as “Awl-Pike”. In general, their emergence or at least their great popularity is sometimes associated with the operations of the Hussite troops. Nowadays, it is certain that the first awl-pikes appeared already at the end of the 13th c. in the wider area of Central and Western Europe. It cannot be denied, however, that they reached the most prolific use after the mid-15th c., when specimens developed whose total length in many cases exceeded 1 m (see Marek 2008, 98-100). A question arises here, whether the great popularity of these armour-piercing weapons during the 15th c. cannot be related more closely with the dynamic and rapid development of plate armours against which the awl-pikes were certainly very efficient. In the mid-15th c., awl-pikes already enjoyed great popularity also among urban populations in the entire Central Europe. We can take as an example the weapons used by the Vienna defence forces. Here we encounter the first awl-pikes in the inventory of the town armoury as early as 1444. In the late 15th c.,



Viennese councillors ordered for the city arsenal a total of 322 pieces of these weapons from blacksmith Hans Maidburger of Piesting; about 170 specimens of these (e.g. Hummelberger, Gamber 1960, 35, Cat. No. 20, Fig. 11; Bisanz 1976, 152, Cat. No. 420; Perz 1977, 77, Cat. No. 59, Fig. 55; Hummelberger 1980, 203, Fig. 124; Szameit 1981, 81, Cat. No. 64; Dürriegl 1986, 21-22) are still preserved in the collections of the Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien. Although we have no clear evidence of such their mass use on the territory of former Czechoslovakia, there are quite numerous findings clearly showing their extensive propagation (e.g. Žákovský 2011, 162-163; Fig. 3).

In some respects, however, the awl-pike in question from Žeranovice fortress from the vast majority of known settlements in some details differ. Almost all pikes have a square cross-section of the tip, to a lesser extent circular (e.g. Seitz 1965, 231; Troso 1988, 128, 132; Waldman 2005, 151-154; Marek 2008, 98; Czyżewski 2013, 248-250). In contrast, however, the awl-pike of Žeranovice has a tip of rhombic cross section. Unconventionally is also conceived the fitting for a (no longer unpreserved) roundel guard, which was impaled on most pikes only on the widest part of the tip, where the pike was sometimes even deliberately indented or profiled. In our case, the fixation of this protective element was done by a pair of significant side protrusions. The Žeranovice pike differs from other weapons of its kind with the shape of its socket. In fact, on most pikes we encounter either a simple circular section socket or a two-piece socket consisting of two curved feathers. The Žeranovice pike, however, is equipped with a hexagonal socket. The awl-pike in question in many respects represents a completely original product, to which we nowadays could hardly seek a closer analogy. This finally somewhat restrains us concerning a more accurate and reliable dating of this weapon. To clarify its dating we cannot even use the written reports, which relate to the place of its discovery.

In fact, the fortress¹ is first mentioned in written sources as late as 1342, but archaeological

Fig. 1. Awl-pike from the fortress in Žeranovice (Municipal Museum and Gallery in Holešov, Inv. No. 4/651). Drawing by P. Žákovský.

Ryc. 1. Szydło z twierdzy w Žeranowicach (Muzeum Miejskie i Galeria w Holešovie, nr inw. 4/651). Ryc. P. Žákovský.

¹ Previously the building was mistakenly associated with a stronghold in Racková, where is the fortress known from written sources after year 1529 (e.g. Kvasnička 1929, 217; Červinka 1942, 74; Doležel 1966, 91; Stuchlík 1971, 107; Hosák, Zemek 1981, 199).



Fig. 2. Awl-pike from the fortress in Žeranovice with individual design (Municipal Museum and Gallery in Holešov, Inv. No. 4/651). Photo by P. Žákovský.

Ryc. 2. Szydło z twierdzy w Žeranovicach i detale jego konstrukcji (Muzeum Miejskie i Galeria w Holešovie, nr inw. 4/651). Fot. P. Žákovský.

findings obtained so far indicate the period of functioning of the fortified settlement somewhere between the 13th and 15th c. (Stuchlík 1970, 91; 1971, 107; Nekuda, Unger, 1981, 326; Kohoutek 1995, 34; Plaček 2001, 735). Hence, the settlement undoubtedly existed before that date and can be directly linked with the local gentry, of which Matouš of Žeranovice first appears on written records. In the above mentioned year 1342, the estate was purchased by Margrave Charles from widows after Racek and his son Bohuš of Žeranovice (CDM VII, 295-295, n. 406; Kvasnička 1929, 346; Pokluda 1990, 38; Plaček 2001, 736). Soon, however, the goods got back into private

hands to remain there until the early 16th c., its possession being swapped among a number of local gentry members. The fortress apparently disappeared sometime at the end of the 15th c., as at the sale of assets in 1509 a detailed listing of accessories of the Žeranovice goods was provided, however, without mentioning the fortress any more. The younger fortress, mentioned in Žeranovice in 1544, was likely built directly within the village and became the basis of the current chateau (e.g. Musil 1992, 43; Plaček 2001, 736).

Hence, for now we'll have to put up with only a framework dating of the Žeranovice awl-pike, whose making, according to the knowledge

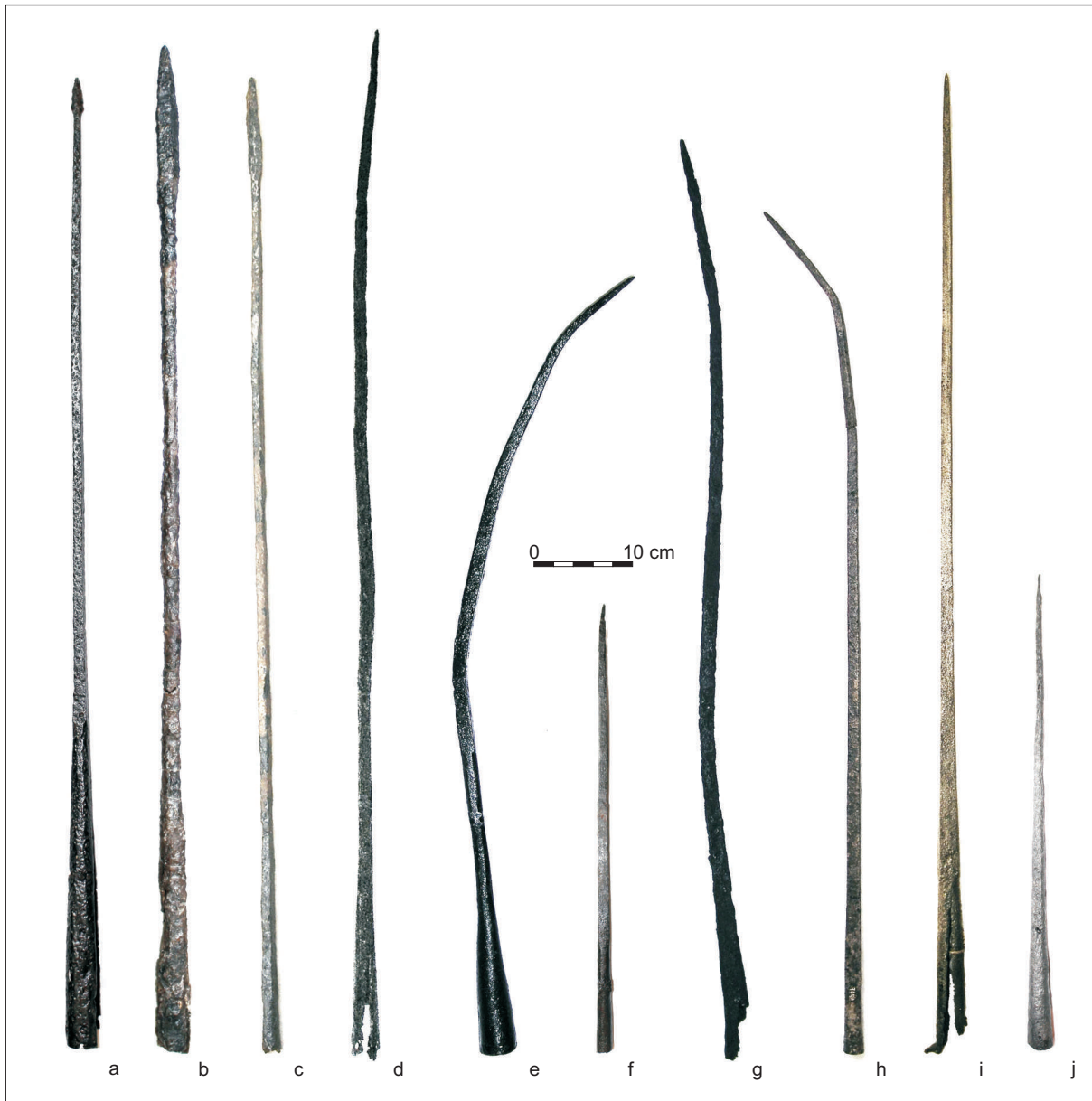


Fig. 3. Selected examples of pikes from Moravian findings: a – Česká Ves (Silesian Museum in Opava, Inv. No. A 205); b – Vartnov (Silesian Museum in Opava, Inv. No. P 206); c – Jihlava (Vysočina Museum in Jihlava, without Inv. No.); d – non-localized (Slovakian Museum in Uherské Hradiště, Inv. No. H 2275); e – non-localized (Regional Museum in Olomouc, without Inv. No.); f – Přerovec (Silesian Museum in Opava, Inv. No. 232 M); g – non-localized (Regional Museum in Olomouc, without Inv. No.); h – Templštejn (Municipal Museum and Gallery “Knižecí dům” in Moravský Krumlov, Inv. No. 765); i – non-localized (Vyškov District Museum, Inv. No. 20393 H); j – Rychleby (History Museum of Jeseník District). *Elaborated by P. Žákovský.*

Ryc. 3. Wybrane okazy szydeł z Moraw: a – Česká Ves (Muzeum Śląskie w Opawie, nr inw. A 205); b – Vartnov (Muzeum Śląskie w Opawie, nr inw. P 206); c – Jihlava (Muzeum Górskie w Jihlavie, bez nr. inw.); d – miejscowość nieznana (Słowackie Muzeum w Uherském Hradiště, nr inw. H 2275); e – miejscowość nieznana (Muzeum Regionalne w Ołomuńcu, bez nr. inw.); f – Přerovec (Muzeum Śląskie w Opawie, nr inw. 232 M); g – miejscowość nieznana (Muzeum Regionalne w Ołomuńcu, bez nr. inw.); h – Templštejn (Miejskie Muzeum i Galeria „Knižecí dům” w Moravským Krumlovie, nr inw. 765); i – miejscowość nieznana (Muzeum Okręgowe w Wyškovie, nr inw. 20393 H); j – Rychleby (Muzeum Historyczne okręgu Jeseník). *Oprac. P. Žákovský.*

available thus far, could be put somewhere in the course of the 15th c. Thanks to the original undoubted presence of the roundel guard, we

could refine the dating of the awl-pike in question to the 2nd half of the 15th c.

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Petr Žákovský

ŚREDNIOWIECZNE SZYDŁO Z ŽERANOVIC NA MORAWACH

Streszczenie

W 1965 r. na terenie gródka w Žeranovicach na Wschodnich Morawach znaleziono niezwykle długi grot włóczni o romboidalnym przekroju i zachowanej długości całkowitej 1057 mm i wadze 1056 g. Broń tę można jednoznacznie interpretować jako średnio-wieczne szydło, oręż używany przez europejskich kombatantów głównie w ciągu XV w. Od typowych

szydeł, które mają groty o czworobocznym przekroju, omawiany egzemplarz różni się głównie romboidalnym profilem oraz sześcioboczną tuleją. Na grocie u nasady liścia znajdują się dwa wyraźne boczne występy, służące mocowaniu ochronnej tarczki.

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