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ONCE MORE ABOUT THE WAWEL HELMET

Abstract:

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The article discusses two new helmets of the Wawel type discovered quite recently. One of them comes from Georgia and is kept in the Tsageri History Museum whereas the other is preserved in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg. The helmet kept in Tsageri is an almost identical copy of the Wawel Helmet. These two helmets closely resemble each other not only in their general shape and ornaments but coincide exactly in size as well. As for the Hermitage helmet, it has become an object of a scholarly discussion for the first time in this article. The Hermitage helmet is the fourth helmet of the Wawel type which has reached us and which points to its extreme popularity in the Middle Ages. At the same time, the fact that two of them (the Wawel and Tsageri helmets) are connected to Georgia must be pointing to the country of origin of the Wawel type helmets.

Key words: Wawel helmet, Tsageri helmet, Hermitage helmets

In Cracow, Poland, in the Wawel Royal Castle Museum, a well-known helmet of the 14th c. is kept which attracts attention of those interested in Oriental weaponry and which was considered to be of Persian provenance¹ (Fig. 1). In 2011 I published an article about this artefact in which the origin of the Wawel helmet and its place among Oriental armament as well as certain stages in the development of the Georgian helmet were reconsidered (Tsurtsunia 2011, 79-103). Within the framework of this research exhibits kept at various museums (specifically, in the Wawel, Hermitage, Istanbul and Georgia) were explored and compared and a paleographical study was conducted (which included determination of the age of the inscription engraved on the helmet rosette and deciphering it). In addition, historical research was also made, which meant identification of the owners of the helmet at different times. For this, it was necessary to compare Polish and Georgian historical information regarding this issue. Also, various objects of art, such as icons (the 11th-12th c.), Georgian miniatures (the 12th, 14th and 16th c.), sketches made by foreign travelers (the 17th and 19th c.) were studied.

During the research a Georgian inscription on the rosette of the helmet, which was even considered to be of Armenian provenance (Горелик 1983, 265), was deciphered. It was revealed that in the 17th c. the helmet belonged to a representative of the powerful feudal household of Imereti, Sazvereli Chijavadze. As a result, it was stated that a helmet forged in the 14th c., before appearing in Poland, had spent more than three centuries in Georgia.

Having explored the Shemokmedi icon (the 2nd half of the 11th c.), miniatures of the “Second Tetraevangelion of Jruchi” (the 12th c.), the so-called “Jalal ad-Din’s helmet” (kept in the National Museum of Georgia), the Wawel type helmet kept in Hermitage, as well as the so-called “Baqatar’s helmet” (from the Ossetian temple Rekom), the Psalter H1665 and having analysed the 17th c. paintings by Mamuka Tavakarashvili and Don Cristoforo de Castelli, I have tried to demonstrate that the Wawel helmet was not of Iranian provenance and thus did not emerge in Georgia accidentally, but presented a logical stage in the evolution of the Georgian helmet.

During the research schemes of the development of the Oriental helmet introduced

¹ For the Wawel helmet, see Robinson (1967, 27-28, Fig. 16A), Żygulski (1979, 231, Fig. 240-241; 1982, 219; 1986, 62), Nicolle (1999, 240), Chodyński (2000, 30-32); Kobyliński (2000, 690), and Горелик (1983, 263).



Fig. 1. The helmet from the Wawel Museum. *Photo by St. Michta.*

Ryc. 1. Hełm ze zbiorów wawelskich. *Fot. St. Michta.*

by H. R. Robinson and M. Gorelik were discussed, in which the Wawel helmet was allotted its deserved place, although it was assigned to Iranian provenance. These schemes, combined and presented according to the ascending line, can be presented as follows: Istanbul helmets – Baqatar’s helmet – Wawel and Hermitage helmets – Turban Helmet (Robinson 1967, 27-28, 60-61; Горелик 1983, 261-265). I have attempted to make certain changes to this line of evolution and separating the ways of development of Wawel and turban helmets, showed that the Wawel helmet developed simultaneously and in parallel with the turban helmet. Most of the earliest turban helmets are connected with Shirvan and it seems

that this helmet emerged both in Eastern Anatolia and in the Caucasus in the middle of the 14th c. and spread widely in adjoining regions in the 15th c. At the end of the 13th c. the Jalal ad-Din’s type helmet underwent further evolution in two directions: In Georgia, the so-called “Wawel line” was developed and Jalal ad-Din’s helmet evolved into Baqatar’s and Wawel (Hermitage) helmets, whilst in Shirvan and Azerbaijan, the turban helmet was developed. The active exchange of ideas and technical decisions would encourage the development of these processes which were localised in Transcaucasus. This also indicates that the Transcaucasus was a large centre of producing armament.



Fig. 2. The helmet from the Tsageri Museum. *Photo by M. Tsurtsumia.*

Ryc. 2. Hełm ze zbiorów Muzeum w Tsageri. *Fot. M. Tsurtsumia.*

While exploring the issue, I paid particular attention to the following facts: (1) the Wawel helmet reveals neither rich ornaments typical of Islamic crafts, nor Persian-Arabic inscriptions; (2) the one-piece helmet is frequently seen on the miniatures of both “the Second Tetraevangelion of Jruchi” and in the Psalter H1665; (3) later, in the 17th c., modified helmets of the Wawel type were attested in two independent sources – in the miniatures of “The Man in the Panther Skin” by Tavakarashvili and in the album by Cristoforo Castelli, which indicates a strong tradition of producing helmets of such shape in Georgia; (4) the trefoil ornament was widely used both in Georgian art (architectural monuments, icons and

miniatures) and in armament and in the paintings by Tavakarashvili and Castelli the trefoil ornament repeated the ornament of the Wawel helmet; (5) arranged the evolutionary line on the examples of the Jalal ad-Din’s helmet, the Baqatar’s helmet, the Wawel helmet as well Tavakarashvili and Castelli helmets and revealed that all the components of these helmets were connected with Georgia. As a result of this research I proposed that the Wawel helmet was of Georgian provenance. I also argued that the process of evolution of this type of helmet in Georgia from the 11th to the 17th c. was unbroken. Finally, I disclosed the reason why the helmet was found in Poland and explained it by the infatuation of the 17th c. Polish society with the Caucasian



(Georgian, Circassian) fashion and by the orientalisation of their clothes and armament.

As can be seen, the proposals which were suggested, were based on the comparison of the Georgian data to the internationally existing information about the issue in question as well as to the new findings, which enabled me to look at the previously existing facts from a new, different angle. However, it is also a known fact that a theory, no matter how logical it may sound, will remain only an unverified opinion unless testified by the discovery of new circumstances or statements.

This is why, in spite of the fact that the suggestions made by me according to which the Wavel helmet did not belong either to the traditional or well-established centres of the Islamic East and thus, proved its Georgian provenance, attracted the attention of the scholarly society although it also invited easily understandable caution.² Specifically, Deyan Rabovyanov in his review published in the works of the National Institute of Archaeology and Museum of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences writes: *The research by M. Tsurtsunia "The Helmet from the Wavel Royal Castle Museum and its Place in the Evolution of the Oriental Helmet" deserves the attention of those interested in Oriental weaponry. The conclusions of the author that this type of helmet differs from the turban helmet and it started to develop as early as in the 12th century in South Caucasus, are strengthened by considerable visual material. The connection of the helmet with the defensive armament spread in the Western Georgia of the 14th-17th centuries sounds even more convincing* (Рабовянов 2012, 125). At the same time, whilst giving a positive overall evaluation to the article, Rabovyanov finds *the statement regarding the production and spread of such helmets only within Georgia, denying their connection with large armament centres of Western Iran, overly radical* (ibid., 125).

I am pleased to mention that in the course of several years quite a considerable amount of new and significant information has been amassed about the Wavel helmet; specifically in Georgia one more helmet of the Wavel type was discovered, which closely resembles the one

Fig. 3. The helmet from the Tsageri Museum: side, front and above. Photo by M. Tsurtsunia.

Рyc. 3. Хелм ze zbiorów Muzeum w Tsageri: bok, przód i widok z góry Fot. M. Tsurtsunia.

² One of the reasons for this is a lack of knowledge of the armament centres in medieval Georgia.



Fig. 4. The window of the permanent exhibition of the State Hermitage Museum "Middle Eastern Artistic Weapons of 15th-19th Centuries" includes two helmets of the Wawel type: On the left side there is the first Hermitage helmet (B.O.-1235) whereas on the right there is the second Hermitage helmet discussed in the present article.

Ryc. 4. Jedna z gablot stałej wystawy „Bliskowschodnia zdobiona broń z XV-XIX w.” w Ermitażu (Sankt Petersburg), w której zaprezentowano dwa hełmy typu wawelskiego: z lewej strony widoczny jest okaz o nr. inw. B.O.-1235, a z prawej drugi z hełmów analizowany w niniejszym artykule.

kept in Poland (Fig. 2-3). This is a metal helmet, currently kept in one of the mountainous regions of Western Georgia, Tsageri History Museum and was purchased in 1947 for 350 roubles from Gr. Saghinadze, resident of the village of Lukhvano.³

The helmet from Tsageri is forged of one piece of metal and is decorated by a low crown of a lily (trefoil) ornament, exactly similar in shape and arrangement to the Wawel helmet. If the lily ornament on the Hermitage helmet is enclosed with similar rings from above and below, the ornament on the Tsageri helmet and that of the Wawel helmet are enclosed only from below.

The helmet has eye slits on its lower edge above which rivets and holes for decorative eyebrows can be seen whereas the brows themselves are lost. The nasal socket which, unlike

the Wawel helmet, presents a narrow steel plate, is fixed between the eye slits. This narrow nasal socket which is fastened to the dome with only two hole must be a later addition. Such a narrow socket is typical of the 15th c. turban helmets. This is attested by two lower holes in which the old, wide socket was fixed, as revealed in Wawel and Hermitage helmets. The sliding nasal which, presumably, was flat, is lost. On a lower brim of the helmet there are hooks for aventail, secured to the helmet by means of rivets. Through the hooks was passed a metal wire to which the upper rings of the aventail were secured.⁴ The mail aventail is lost. The dome of the helmet is damaged and still reveals the trace of the lost rosette. The helmet weighs 1145 grams, its height is 20.5 cm, the diameter 21.5 cm.⁵ The

³ The information about the helmet kept at Tsageri Museum was first published in 2012 in the Museum catalogue and was introduced in 2014 by I. Bakradze (see *Tsageri...* 2012, 48; Bakradze 2014, 134-150).

⁴ It is worth noting that in the case of the Tsageri, Wawel and Hermitage helmets there is a similar technology of fixing the aventail hooks: they are separately fastened to the dome with rivets. They also share the principle of fastening of the aventail employing a metal wire passed through the suspending hooks.

⁵ I'd like to use the opportunity to thank Nugzar Kopaliani, director of Tsageri History Museum for making the process of my research pleasant.



Fig. 5. The second Wavel type helmet (B.O.-1238) from the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. *Photo by M. Pechkurova.*

Ryc. 5. Drugi hełm typu wawelskiego (B.O.-1238) ze zbiorów Ermitażu w Sankt Petersburgu. *Fot. M. Pečkurova.*

measurements of the Tsageri helmet exactly coincide with those of the Wavel helmet, the height of the latter being 20 cm and the diameter 21.5 cm, revealing only a slight difference in weight. The Wavel helmet is a little lighter and weighs about 985 gr (Tsurtsunia 2011, 84).

Clearly, such a close coincidence in shapes and sizes of both helmets can be explained only by one fact: both the Wavel and Tsageri helmets not only belong to one country or region, but they must have been forged in one and the same workshop with the same instruments. Consequently, similar to the Wavel helmet, the Tsageri helmet should also be dated to the 14th c. The altered nasal socket of the Tsageri helmet strengthens

this proposition as in the 15th c. the narrow socket replaced the wide sockets employed in the 14th c.

It is also significant that this helmet was discovered in Western Georgia. On the basis of the fact that the Wavel helmet was owned by a feudal lord from Western Georgia and the Castelli and Tavakarashvili helmets also expressed the realias characteristic of Western Georgia, I arrived at the conclusion that the Wavel type helmet was, most of all, spread in Western Georgia (ibid., 94-95, 99). Discovery of one more helmet of the Wavel type in the Tsageri museum indicates the correctness of this opinion.

In addition, Tsageri helmet proves that it was not by accident that the inscription on the rosette of

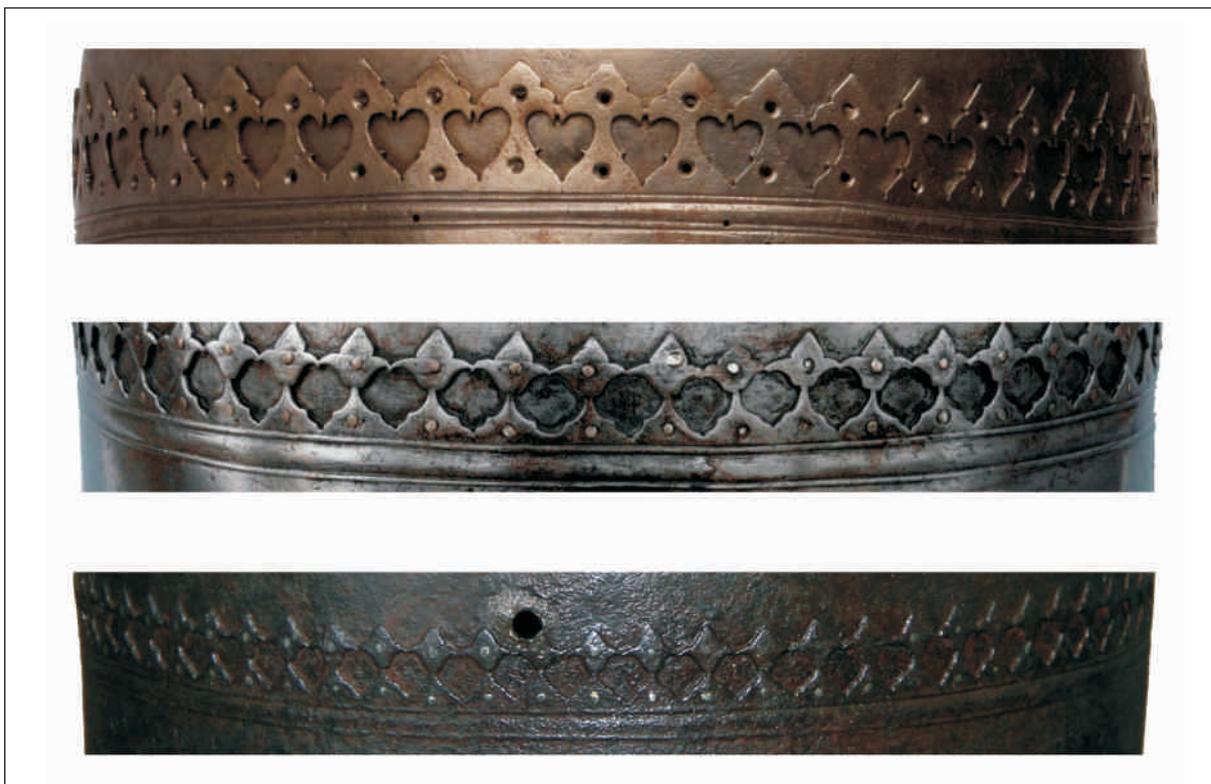


Fig. 6. Decorative lilies on the second Hermitage, the Wawel and Tsageri helmets.

Ryc. 6. Dekoracja w kształcie lilii na hełmach z Ermitażu (nr 2), Wawelu i Tsageri.

the helmet was written in Georgian and that the Wawel helmet must surely have been made in Georgia. As well as this, the Tsageri helmet confirms once again that the scheme of the evolution of the Georgian helmet according to which the Georgian provenance of the Wawel helmet was supposed, must be right.

It is pleasant to note that the interest towards the helmets of the Wawel type is increasing. For instance, on the exposition organised by the State Hermitage Museum “Middle Eastern Artistic Weapons of 15th-19th Centuries” (“Оружейное искусство Ближнего Востока XV-XIX веков”) in 2014 an absolutely unknown helmet of the Wawel type was exhibited together with the already known Hermitage helmet (Fig. 4).

Based on the information from the Hermitage I have an opportunity to describe this helmet for the first time and introduce it to the scholarly society⁶ (Fig. 5). The second helmet from the Hermitage (Inv. No. B.O.-1238) is also forged of one-piece of steel and like the Wawel and Tsageri

helmets, the lily ornament on it is marked only from below. The helmet has eye slits, with holes for rivets for decorative eyebrows above. There is also a trace of a wide nasal socket between the eye slits. The helmet lacks decorative brows, sliding nasal with its upper hook and a socket as well as hooks for the mail aventail, instead of which the holes for fixing them remain. The mail aventail has not reached us either. The helmet dome is also damaged with holes in a couple of places at the rear. The trace visible on the dome, around the hole looks to be a result of a strike although the existence of the rosette cannot be excluded either. The helmet weighs 1036 grams, is 19.8 cm high and the diameter is 20 cm. As well as the first helmet of the Hermitage, this helmet also comes from the arsenal of Tsarskoe Selo. Although it is unknown how it appeared there, it is quite well known that the collection of arms in Tsarskoe Selo contained many captured weapons among them from the Near East and the Caucasus. This helmet is mentioned in the very first catalogue published in 1840.⁷

⁶ The photo of the helmet is published for the first time for which I owe thanks to the staff of the State Hermitage Museum granting us the permission to publish it gratis.

⁷ The helmet is catalogued as *русский железный шшаак* (*Russian iron shishak*), which obviously is a mistake (Седжер 1840, 166, N170). I was given information regarding this catalogue by a staff member of the Hermitage, V. Obraztsov.

The helmet from the Hermitage must belong to the 14th c. as well. Unlike the Hermitage first helmet, the shape of its dome resembles that of the Wawel helmet, especially that of Tsageri helmet. At the same time, the ornamental lilies (similar to the lilies on the Hermitage first helmet) are less refined and elaborated compared with those on other helmets of the similar type (compare the lilies on the Hermitage second helmet and on the Tsageri helmet – Fig. 6). This helmet must have

been forged either by a less experienced master or must have been an imitation of the Georgian helmet.

The Hermitage second helmet is the fourth helmet of the Wawel type which has reached us and which points to its extreme popularity in the Middle Ages. At the same time, the fact that two of them (the Wawel and Tsageri helmets) are connected to Georgia must be pointing to the country of origin of the Wawel type helmets.

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RAZ JESZCZE O HEŁMIE WAWELSKIM

Streszczenie

W Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu w Krakowie przechowywany jest znany w literaturze XIV-wieczny hełm, wzbudzający zainteresowanie wszystkich badaczy zajmujących się orientalnym uzbrojeniem. Do niedawna hełm uznawany był za wyrób perski, ale w 2011 r. ukazał się artykuł, w którym omówiłem pochodzenie zabytku i jego miejsce wśród uzbrojenia orientalnego. Okaz został rozpoznany jako jeden z przykładów rozwoju hełmów gruzińskich.

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono kolejne dwa, niedawno odkryte hełmy w typie wawelskim. Jeden z nich znaleziono na terenie Gruzji i jest przechowywany w Muzeum Historycznym w Tsageri, natomiast drugi znajduje się w kolekcji petersburskiego Ermitażu.

Hełm ze zbiorów muzeum w Tsageri jest niemal kopią hełmu wawelskiego. Oba bliskie są sobie nie tylko kształtem dzwonu i ornamentyką, ale również rozmiarami. Tak daleko posunięte podobieństwo może być wyjaśnione jedynie tym, iż oba wykonano w jednym warsztacie płatnerskim.

Hełm z Ermitażu opublikowano tutaj po raz pierwszy. Jest on czwartym hełmem typu wawelskiego, wskazującym na dużą popularność tej formy w średniowieczu. Fakt, że przynajmniej dwa z nich są niewątpliwie związane z Gruzją sugeruje, że właśnie ten kraj jest miejscem pochodzenia hełmów typu wawelskiego.

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