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WESTERN EUROPEAN ARMOUR FROM MEDIEVAL BULGARIA (12th-15th CENTURIES)

Abstract:

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In this study we discuss pieces of armour of Western European origin found within the territory of present-day Bulgaria. They cover the chronological span between the end of the 12th and the 1st half of the 15th centuries. These artefacts are evidence for a strong Western European influence during the final period of the development of Medieval Bulgarian warfare.

Key words: medieval armour, western military influence, medieval Bulgaria

The subject of this paper is defensive armament of Western European origin found in present-day Bulgaria. The material dates back to the period between the restoration of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom at the end of the 12th century and the final loss of political independence following the defeat of the Polish-Hungarian king Vladislav III Jagiello in the battle of Varna in 1444.

However, this study will focus mainly on the period between the end of the 12th and the end of the 14th centuries, as the amount of material from this period is significantly greater. The presence of Western European armament from that period demonstrates a similarity between Bulgarian and Western and Central European warfare. The artefacts analysed here enable us to discuss the adoption of external, yet not unfamiliar military tactics and style of warfare, within the Balkan tradition.

The period after the conquest of the Bulgarian lands by the Ottomans – at the end of the 14th century – reflects a different reality. Western European arms reached the Bulgarian territories through participants in military conflicts between the Hungarians, Wallachians and Crusaders and

the Ottoman Empire. Thus, although this armament did not play a role in the building of the Bulgarian style of warfare, its presence in one way or another had an influence on the population's military culture despite the limitations imposed by the Ottoman authority. In this case it must be taken into consideration that although the 'rayah'¹ were not allowed to carry weapon, until the mid-15th century Christian sipahis² were an important part of the Ottoman military organisation. Furthermore, there were a number of Christians who had certain military obligations.

A very well preserved helmet was found during archaeological excavations of the fortress of Pernik in Western Bulgaria. According to archaeological data it was in use in the last period of the fortress' existence – the second half of the 12th century³ (Чангова 1992, 179; D'Amato 2015, 75-76, Pl. 7). Its condition is relatively good, and it is forged from a single iron plate. Its skull is conical in shape and its top is slightly bent toward the right side. On the rim of the helmet there is an iron strip over the face and there are indications of a broken-off half face-mask, as evidenced by a plate over the eyes with traces of a nasal. Above it there is an

¹ With the term 'rayah' the Ottomans designated the Christian population in the state. It had a lower social position than the Muslims and with few exceptions it did not have right to carry and use weapons.

² 'Sipahi' formed the main part of Ottoman cavalry. They received land from the state in return for military services and can be seen as a continuation of traditions of Byzantine 'pronia' and Islamic 'iqta'.

³ The fortress of Pernik was burnt during the attack of the Serbian ruler Stefan Neman in 1189 and was never recovered (Златков 2011, 224).



Fig. 1. Iron helmet from the fortress of Pernik. *Photo by R. D'Amato.*

Рис. 1. Хелм желязны odkryty na terenie fortecy Pernik. *Fot. R. D'Amato.*

iron tubule which was intended for a crest holder (Fig. 1). It was attached to the skull with three iron straps. This holder along with the nasal is a later addition to the helmet.⁴ The find from Pernik is 29.5 cm in height and 27.5 cm in diameter.

In the first publication the problem of the artefact's origin was not solved. There are similar Western European and Eastern European helmets, mentioned as analogies (Чангова 1992, 179). Many parallels between this helmet and other preserved Western examples from the period between the 12th and 13th centuries can be drawn. Examples of similar helmets can be seen on some works of art which depict Western European warriors (Gray 1938, 92, Pl. XXXIII; Nicolle 1980, Figs. 4, 13). An assumption that the helmet may be of Western origin is also supported by a Western European sword and two daggers found in the same layer of the fortress (Чангова 1992, 166-170). There is another sword, found in the fortress, which has a Latin inscription on it (Михайлов 1985, 46-47). Its Western European origin, though disputed (Попов 2007, 39-41), is more probable. The discovery of two lead seals of Konstantin Umbertopul, a Byzantine commander with Latin

lineage is very important (Юрькова 1983, 117-120). It is known that Emperor Alexios I Komnenos undertook military exercises in this area and that his army contained a significant number of Western European mercenaries. It is believed that some of them were stationed in the fortress and they participated in battles in its vicinities (ibid., 117-120; Чангова 1992, 168). This may explain the presence of weapons which were typical for "Latin" warriors. The helmet was probably modified according to Byzantine traditions. A proof for this is a later addition of the half face-mask and the crest tubule. In our opinion the helmet from Pernik is of Western European origin and must be dated to the 2nd half of the 12th century.

Recent excavations in the Byzantine fortress of Branichevo on the southern shore of the Danube yielded two exact analogies to this helmet. In a large House 4 (which existed between the 1130s and 1180s) two iron helmets were found. They offer extremely accurate analogies to the find from the fortress of Pernik (Spasić-Đurić 2016, 110-115, Fig. 58). These two helmets have no additional elements like a brow band, a nasal

⁴ This secondarily attached iron tubule-crest holder was considered by D'Amato as an upper part of nose protection (D'Amato 2015, note 47). This is cannot be confirmed by a closer inspection of the helmet.

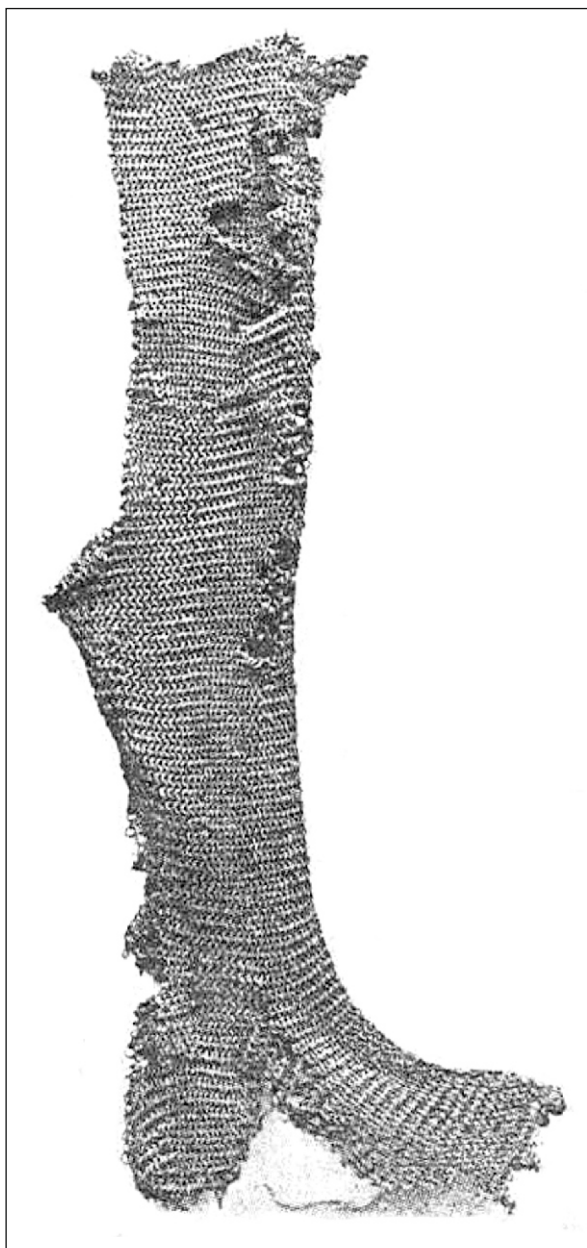


Fig. 2. Chausses from Bratzigovo (after Джамбов 1952, обр. 394).

Рис. 2. Nogawica kolecza z miejscowości Bratzigovo (wg Джамбов 1952, обр. 394).

and a tubule. They are another example of Western style armour in the Byzantine context, and are chronologically very close to the helmet from Pernik.

As participants in the Byzantine military system and subjects of the Empire, by the end of the 12th century the Bulgarians had already a direct opportunity to experience military contacts with Western warriors who were their allies as well as enemies (Драшковић 2006, 467-474).

The next artefact was found in Bratsigovo, Plovdiv Region. In 1927 on the bank of an old breeding pond parts of highly fragmented mail

were found (Fig. 2). The artefact is a leg defence made of iron rings, known in the literature as 'chausse.' It is not fully preserved and in its present condition it only reaches the mid-thigh. One can clearly see that the heel is fully protected whereas the rest of the foot remains uncovered. On the ankle there is a triangular unprotected zone, which was covered by the horseman's stirrup. The length of the chausse is 84 cm, the length of the foot – 30 cm, the width of the upper preserved part – 28 cm and its weight is 3.7 kg. It was made of 0.9 cm diameter rings, which have a thickness of 0.2 cm (Джамбов 1952, 388-389).

Among finds of armament from Bulgaria and depictions of warriors from the period in question there are no examples which resemble this artefact. On the contrary, existing analogies suggest defensive equipment used in Western Europe. This type of defence became popular in Western Europe in the 12th century and can be seen in numerous works of art. Originally just the front of the legs was covered with mail, as can be seen on the Bayeux Tapestry, which is dated to around 1080. William, Duke of Normandy, and his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, both wearing mail leggings (Borg 1979, 8; La Rocca 1995, 69-70), are depicted on it. By the mid-12th century full mail chausses were developed. They were attached to a leather belt worn beneath the warrior's mail coat (Blair 1959, 28-29; La Rocca 1995, 70-74). This kind of armour existed in its original form until the mid-13th century, when knee-pieces, made of hardened leather or iron, were added to the mail chausse (La Rocca 1995, 74-75; Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 69-70). Pieces of leg armour, consisting of separate iron plates, connected with hinges, appeared in the beginning of the 14th century and were used at varying rates in different parts of Europe (La Rocca 1995, 75-76; Scalini 1996, 253-254). In the Oriental world this sort of protective armament is not commonly seen on images and cannot be considered as a local type. The Ottomans, who settled in the Balkans at the end of the 14th century, were not familiar with this type of armour, either. The earliest examples of Ottoman leg defences are known from the end of the 15th century and are of mixed mail-and-plate construction (Russel-Robinson 1968, 46-47).

The above facts lead us to directly link the find with Western defensive armament. The chausses can be dated approximately to the period between the 13th and the first half of the 14th centuries. Unfortunately, it is not possible to say whether the armour was preserved in its entity



because its original discoverer kept only the best preserved parts, which he later donated to a museum. Unfortunately, the circumstances under which the chausses appeared in this location remain unknown.

Most pieces of defensive armament which are discussed in this paper can be generally dated to the 14th century. Firstly we should discuss an incidentally found helmet from the area of Uzana in the Stara Planina mountain range near the village of Yasenovo, Kazanlak⁵ (Fig. 3) (Стефанова-Георгиева 2008, 352).

Despite a widespread but unsupported opinion of some Bulgarian scholars and R. D'Amato (*ibid.*, 352; D'Amato 2015, 72-74), the helmet in question cannot be related to the Balkan military tradition. Many preserved works of fine art and museum artefacts indicate its unquestionable Western origin (Blair 1959, 24-29; Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 47). It belongs to the basinet type (Strong 2014) which has an ovoid or spherical skull that covers the upper part of the head, and wide openings for the neck and the face. On the helmet there are seven intact rings, so-called *vervelles*. The rings and a cord were used for attaching a mail hood, the so-called *camail* (Capwell 2011, 23). Above the face opening the helmet has a partially preserved visor with pointed arched top. It is attached to the skull by three rivets.

The helmet's shape and the preserved visor enable us to make a comparison with other preserved artefacts and images. The ovoid shape of the skull and the small rings suggest a relation between the find from Uzana and helmets preserved in museum collections and works of art, chiefly from Italy from the period between the 1330s and 1390s (Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 29; Scalini 2014, Fig. 17, 19; Merlo 2015, 133-136, Fig. 12-14, 18; Knápek, Macků 2016, Fig. 5-7). More interesting is the pointed visor in the front part of helmet. It must be stressed that a movable metal

Fig. 3. Iron helmet of bascinet type found at Uzana. Archaeological exposition of Museum "Iskra" in Kazanlyk. Photo by D. Rabovyanov.

Рис. 3. Желязны basinet открит в Узание. Експозиция археологична Музеум „Искра“ в Казанлык. Фот. D. Rabovyanov.

⁵ The helmet was found in the uninhabited mountain region, not in 'castle Ozana' (sic!), as stated by R. D'Amato (2015, 72-74). We must note that in his article about Byzantine helmets D'Amato on two occasions wrongly attributed features to this helmet. In fact, these are characteristic for another one kept in the Historical Museum of Kazanlak, that is the helmet from Yasenovo. We cannot accept a relation between a sign of the helmet's brow side and the first Bulgarian capital Pliska, which this scholar proposes.

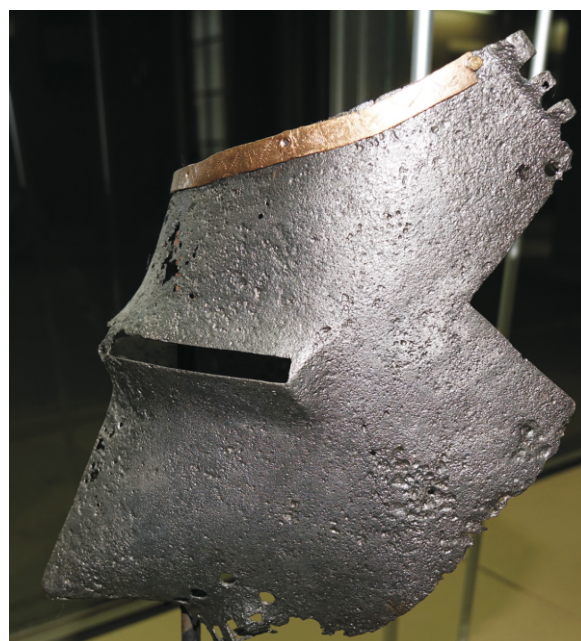
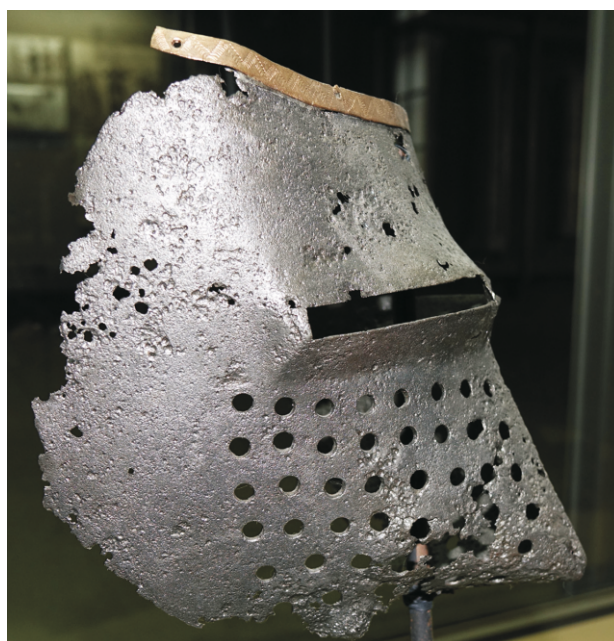


Fig. 4. Visor of bascinet type helmet from archaeological exposition of Veliko Tarnovo Museum. *Photo by D. Rabovyanov.*

Ryc. 4. Zasłona basinetu prezentowana na ekspozycji archeologicznej Muzeum w Wielkim Tarnowie. *Fot. D. Rabovyanov.*

nasal would be a more typical solution for this type of helmet. D'Amato thinks that the pointed visor is an additional part of nose protection, which testifies to an earlier date of the helmet (D'Amato 2015, 72-74). For us it is more

reasonable to relate this peculiar feature to similar visors in some works of art from Italy, like the 'Carrying the cross' fresco in the Church of Sant Abbondio, Como (1340-1360), 'Martyrdom of St Catherine' from Altichiero da Zevio in Padua

(1378), the 'Crucifixion' fresco (1366-1367) from Santa Maria Novella in Florence, painted by Andrea da Firenze, and a painting of Spinello Aretino in San Miniato al Monte, also in Florence (1387-1408). This inclines us to date the helmet to the period between the 1360s and the 1390s.⁶

The next artefact is a basinet visor. The find is on display in the medieval exhibition of the Regional Archaeological Museum in Veliko Tarnovo (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, we have no information about its origin. It is forged from a single iron plate which is 0.1 cm thick. The typical pointed visor resembles an animal's muzzle. The artefact is reasonably well preserved. Small pieces of its edge and front surface are missing. The length of its upper edge is 22.0 cm and its height is 16.0 cm in its widest part. A brass strip is attached on the upper edge and it is 22 cm long and 0.7 cm wide. On the strip there are five round holes, set at a distance of 5.0 cm from one another. The whole surface of the plate is ornamented with zigzag designs and thickly set incisions. There are two rectangular eye-slits 5.5 cm beneath the bronze strip. They are 8.0 cm long, 0.7 cm wide and protrude 1.5 cm before the visor surface. They have a trapezium-shaped section. On the 'true right', under the eye-slits and on the projecting 'muzzle' there are six horizontal rows of 0.5 cm diameter holes. In the fourth and fifth row the holes are made imprecisely. In this manner the order of the rows was broken and some of the holes overlap. Apart from these, three more holes are pierced in the front part of the visor's 'muzzle'. On the left side of the visor there is only one row of four apertures with the same diameter as the ones on the right side. Under these holes there are two more and under the latter there are two rectangular apertures and traces of one more, which has a length of 2.0 cm and a width of 0.6 cm. Thick areas between them are visibly projecting in the middle. Unfortunately, this part is broken. At each side of the visor three apertures were cut, being 0.3 cm, 0.3 cm and 0.5 cm wide respectively. Their projecting ends were bent inwards. The projecting ends of the visor were turned inwards and closed, forming a tubule through which a metal rod could be run. They formed hinges that were used for attaching of the visor to the skull of helmet.

The round apertures on the muzzle provided ventilation. They are set on the right side – the side contrary to the side of the enemy's weapons.

The indents on the mouth slit prevented the penetration of blades. Likewise, the protruding eye-slits were designed to protect the eyes from bladed weapons.

The visor belongs to the 'dog's muzzle' or 'hound skull' type (German 'Hundsgugel') (Blair 1959, 80; Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 47; Glinianowicz 2010, 193-208). According to its morphological characteristics the visor from Veliko Tarnovo stands closest to a helmet dated to about 1390 and kept in the German Historical Museum in Berlin (Müller, Kunter 1984, 257). Similarities between them include a brass strip, decorated with zigzag cuts, the indents to the mouth aperture and the ventilation apertures, set on the right side. We should not omit to mention a similarity between this visor and the basinet of Charles VI, the Churburg 13 armour, kept in the collection of Churburg Castle in South Tyrol, and a visor from the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw (Dufty 1968, Pl. LXXII; Scalini 1996, Figs. 16-17; Glinianowicz 2010, ryc. 1-6). The latter is most probably a prototype of a whole group of helmets. A need for faster and cheaper production led to introduction of some modifications, such as the brass strip, which was set on the brow, or was completely abandoned. The letter-like decoration was transformed into incisions or cord-like ornaments.

The helmet's visor from the Museum in Veliko Tarnovo differs from that of the helmet kept in the Metropolitan Museum. This helmet is part of a great find of arms in Chalcis. This discovery marks the upper chronological limit of the group before the appearance of the so-called 'great basinet' (Димитров 2003, 300). Regarding its characteristics, we can date our basinet around ca. 1390-1410. Like its closest and almost identical analogy from the Berlin Museum, the helmet is probably of Italian origin (Müller, Kunter 1984, 257). The visor from Veliko Tarnovo matches the characteristics of helmets from Northern Italy and the main manufacturing centre of Milan, where the helmet was most likely made. There is a less likely possibility which cannot be completely ruled out: the helmet could have been made in a Burgundian or French workshop.

Considering the lack of information about the circumstances of discovery, it is difficult to trace the way in which the visor got to Bulgaria. During the second half of the 14th century, the Bulgarian territories were an arena of un-abating

⁶ Of course we cannot exclude that this brow visor is a later addition that reflects Eastern/Steppe traditions. We have examples of helmets with integral visors from steppes in Eurasia dated to the 13th-14th centuries. This tradition is even more typical for later Mamluk and Ottoman helmets from the end of the 15th-17th centuries.



Fig. 5. Plates of coat of plates from Royal Palace in Tsarevets fortress, Veliko Tarnovo. *Photo by D. Rabovyanov.*

Ryc. 5. Zbrojniki płyt odkryte w Pałacu Królewskim w fortecy Tsarevets, Wielkie Tyrnovo. *Fot. D. Rabovyanov.*

conflicts in which Western combatants took part. From a chronological point of view, the Crusade of 1396, led by Emperor Sigismund, is the closest one. There is a possibility that the basinet and its visor were remains of this historical event. Many Western European

noblemen took part in it, including warriors of high rank, who wore the most modern defensive armament. At the same time, we cannot rule out a possibility that the artefact reached Bulgaria by other means – as a gift, a war booty or as an import.

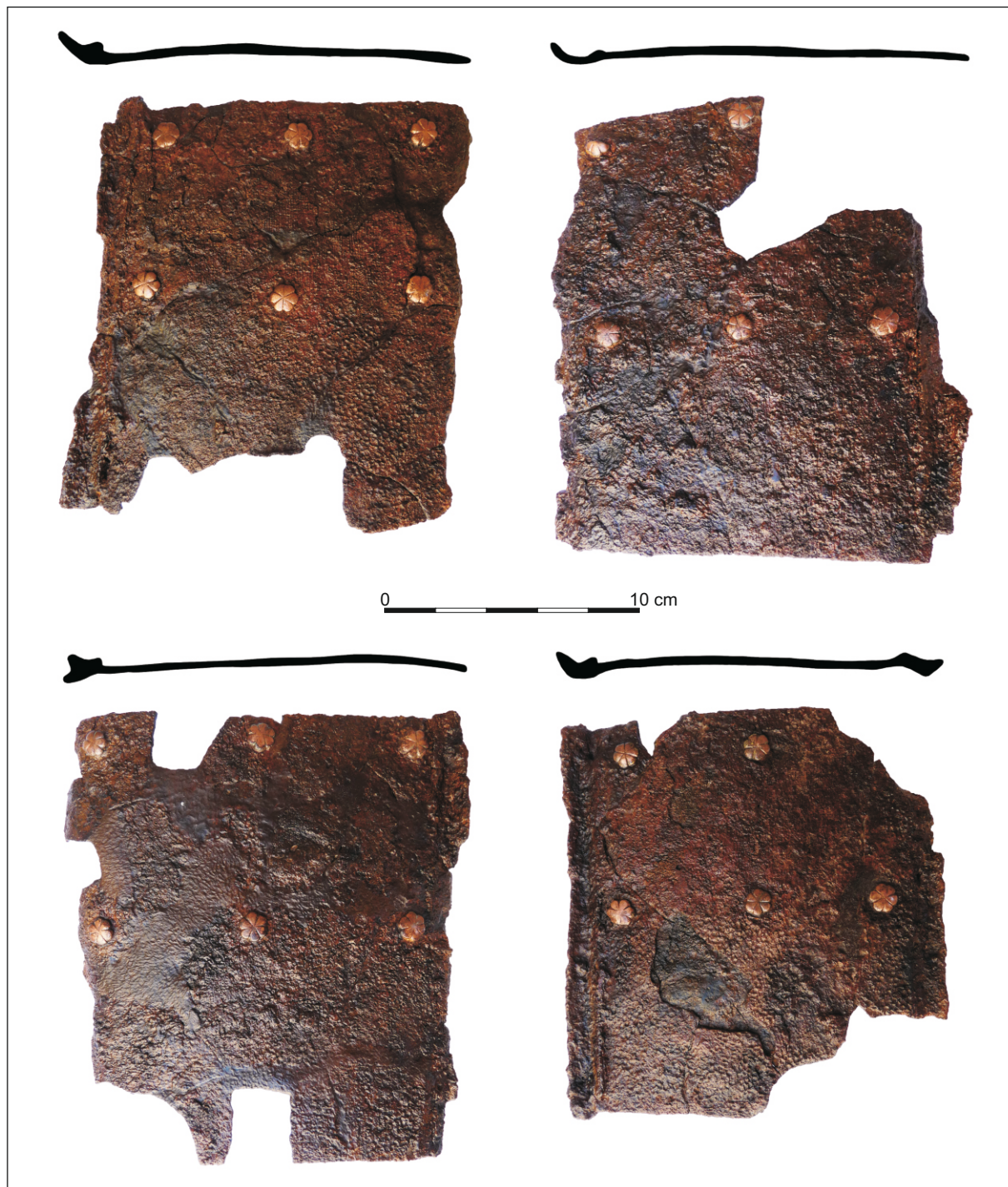


Fig. 6. Plates of coat of plates from Royal Palace in Tsarevets fortress, Veliko Tarnovo. *Photo by D. Rabovyanov.*

Ryc. 6. Zbrojniki płytów odkryte w Pałacu Królewskim w fortecy Tsarevets, Wielkie Tarnowo. *Fot. D. Rabovyanov.*

Unlike the previously discussed artefacts, a partially preserved set of armour was found during archaeological excavations of the most important centers of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. Remains of a coat of plates were discovered in Premises 1 and 4 of Building II in the King's Palace of the Tsarevets Fortress in Veliko Tarnovo (Figs. 5-6). The building served

as a residence of the king and his entourage and had storage rooms in the basement. It was destroyed in 1393 during the capture of the palace by the Ottoman Turks.

During the conservation of the find 10 rectangular plates with a size of 15.5-19.0 x 13.5-14.5 cm as well as nine smaller fragments were restored. On the back of the plates there are traces

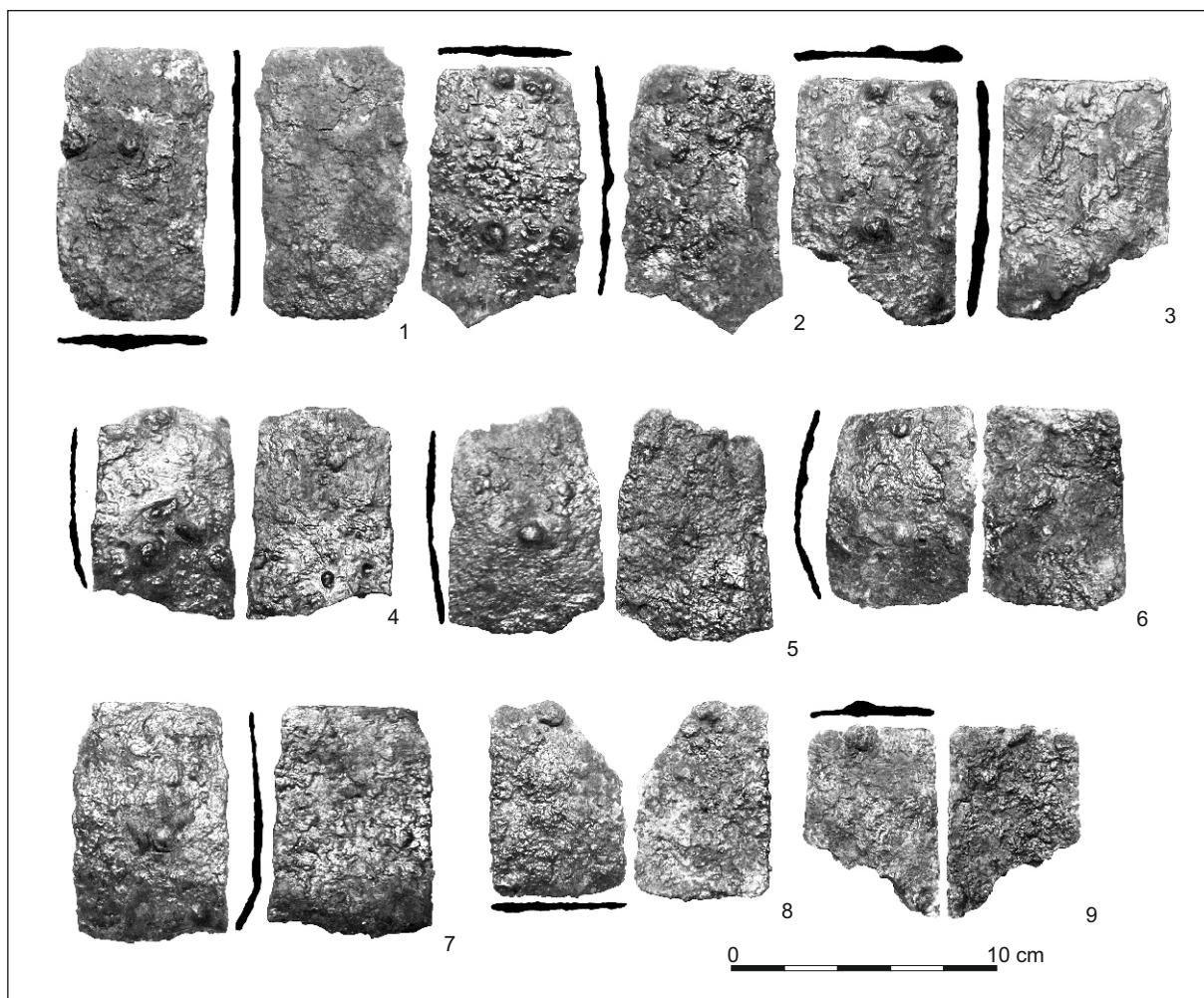


Fig. 7. Plates of coat of plates from the fortress of Nikopol (after Rabovyanov, Najdenov 2013).

Ryc. 7. Zbrojniki płyt odkryte na terenie fortecy w Nikopolis (wg Rabovyanov, Najdenov 2013).

of leather and their front side was covered with cloth. It was attached by copper alloy rivets with heads shaped like six-leafed rosettes. The plates were attached to each other by a 1.5 cm wide iron band, which was forge-welded to their long sides.

The remains were initially identified, by the finder as iron plates from a shield (Георгиева, Николова, Ангелов 1973, 101-102). However, their characteristic construction and form relate them to 14th century Western European coat of plates. The decorative rivets with heads, shaped like six-leafed rosettes, are a typical trait of armour of this kind. They are identical to rivets on two armours from Küsnacht Castle in Switzerland, which was burnt in 1352 (Gessler 1925), to rivets on some plates from Szczerba Castle in Silesia (Francke 1999, 107, Fig. 5; Marek 2008, 87, 91-92, Fig. 3:1-2), to some armour's elements from the Chalcis find (Ffoulkes 1911, 381-390) as well as to rivets on armour plates from Bistra Mureşului

in the Upper Mureş Region, Transylvania (Győrfi 2014-2015, Figs. 6-7). The artefacts mentioned above cannot be dated to before the 14th century and were used until the beginning of the 15th century.

We must note that three remains of coat of plates found in three different fortresses in Central Europe (dated to between the 14th and early 15th centuries) are the most similar to the find from the King's Palace in Veliko Tarnovo. The similarities concern the shape and dimensions of plates and the shape and distribution of rivets. These analogies are parts of a brigantine armour found in Szczerba Castle in Silesia (Marek 2008, 87, 91-92, Fig. 3:1-2), Orlik Castle in Czech Republic (Vích, Žákovský 2016, 279-282, 295-301, obr. 15-16, 19) and in the fortress of Bistra Mureşului in the Upper Mureş Region, Romania (Győrfi 2014-2015, Figs 6-7). Some of them also have folded margins along some of their sides. It must be stressed that all these plates are smaller and were probably parts

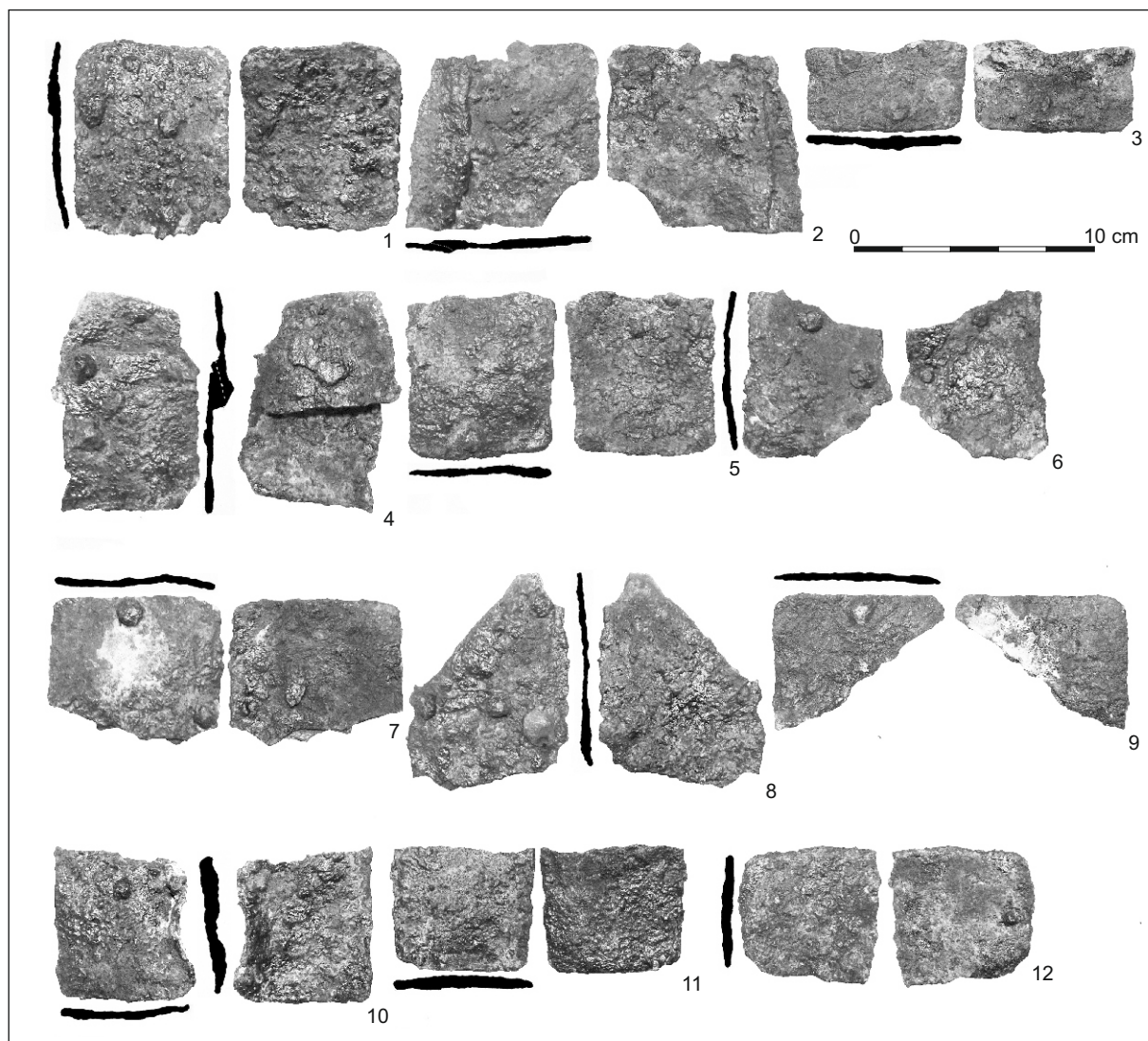


Fig. 8. Plates of coat of plates from the fortress of Nikopol (after Rabovyanov, Najdenov 2013).

Ryc. 8. Zbrojniki płytów odkryte na terenie fortecy w Nikopolis (wg Rabovyanov, Najdenov 2013).

of armour similar to the brigantine from Chalcis (Vích, Žákovský 2016, obr. 17-18). The armour from the King's Palace in Veliko Tarnovo has a different construction, similar to later breastplates. This is because its plates are connected motionless with metal tapes.

The lack of traces of sword and dagger chain attachments in the upper chest piece of the armour (sword and dagger chains were a trend which appeared around 1340) is of strong significance (Nicolle 1999, 454). A rigid fixation of the plates in rows has not been found in armours dated to earlier than the 14th century. At the same time the rows of plates are not connected to each other so as to create a one-piece breastplate – a tradition which began in the 1340s. This armour

is similar to the one, worn by a warrior depicted on a fresco in the Church of St Abbondio in Como, Italy. The frescoes date back to ca. 1330-1340 (Boccia, Coelho 1983, 12; Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 52). Obviously the armour, produced around 1320-1340, could have either remained in use, or alternatively was kept in a store⁷ until the burning of the castle in 1393 (Rabovyanov, Dimitrov 2011, 170).

Remains of another brigantine-type armour (Rabovyanov, Najdenov 2013, 73-88), displayed in the archaeological exhibition of the Regional Historical Museum in Pleven were found in a similar archaeological context. They originate from one of the most significant fortresses of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom – Nicopole. After the

⁷ Similar examples are discussed later in this text, when we deal with the coat of plates found in the fortress of Nicopole.

seizure of Tarnovgrad in 1393, for a short period of time Nicopole became the Kingdom's capital. The armour was discovered in a 'niche', in a room of significant size, contiguous to the southeast wall of the fortress. Stone balls – ammunition for stone throwing machines, and other iron objects found along with the armour, testify to the fact that the room was probably an armoury.

Nowadays 58 severely corroded iron plates of the armour are preserved (Figs. 7-8). According to their shape and size (5.5/6.5 x 9.0/10.5 cm, 6.5 x 8.0 cm, 4.0 x 10.0 cm), they are divided into five groups. Most of them are flat but some are slightly convex. On some of them there are traces of cloth, preserved on their front and back. This demonstrates that they were attached to a textile base and were covered with cloth. This was typical for the armour type to which they belong. They are attached to the textile base by iron round headed rivets which are 1 cm in diameter. Between the iron rivets in four plates there are some made of copper alloy. Apparently at some point of its working life the armour underwent repair and the copper alloy rivets replaced the original ones.

The find from the fortress of Nicopole belongs to brigantine-type armour. It consisted of iron plates of different size and shape, attached by rivets to a leather or textile base and a cloth cover. It held the plates in place, provided weather protection and contributed to the armour's aesthetic appeal (Thordeman 1939, 210-211). This type of armour became more popular in the mid-13th century due to the developments in offensive armament as well as the clash between European and foreign arms traditions (Blair 1959, 36-60; Nicolle 1999, 206-216; 2002, 210-215; Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 4-21). The shape and the size of the plates and the position of the rivets relate the armour from the fortress of Nicopole to the armour of Type IV according to Thordeman's classification. Two armours (Nos. 20 and 23) from mass graves near Visby are the closest analogies to the artefact from Nicopole (Thordeman 1939, 216-218; 1940, Pls. 90-116). Considering the small number of plates, apparently only some elements of the armour were kept in the fortress. This was a common tradition in this period (Ffoulkes 1911, 381-390; Marek 2008, 112-115) and it is not surprising regarding the armaments' high price and a widespread habit of remaking old armours into new ones (Горелик, Фомичев 1989, 73-76; Dyachkov 2011, 175-177, 182).

The closest analogies to the Nicopole armour are offered by the afore-mentioned armours from Visby (Thordeman 1940, Pls. 90-116) as well as

parts of armour, discovered in Szczerba Castle (Francke 1990, 100-114; Marek 2008, Figs. 18-26), Reichenstein Castle in Silesia (Prihoda 1929, 109-112), Czchów Castle in Lesser Poland (Szpunar, Glinianowicz 2006, 137-188) and Bistra Mureşului in Transylvania (Györfi 2014-2015, 125-128, Figs. 6-7). Several plates of this type were found in the Serbian fortress of Stalac, which was inhabited between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries (Minić, Vukadin 2007, 6-9, 122, Figs. 76, 212).

The comparison between the Nicopole armour, other armours of this type used by the Mongols (Горелик 1987, 172-184; 2002, 21-24; Świątosławski 1999, Pl. VII), and the Russian and Steppe armours (Медведев 1959, 119-134; Кирпичников 1971; Лупиненко, Макушников 2008, 140-154) clearly shows that the origin of the armour is Western or Central European.

The early development of this type of armour and its relatively long use – between ca. 1150 and ca. 1350 (Жуков, Коровкин 2005, 4-21) – do not allow us to date it more precisely. The lack of *mamelieres*, used for the attachment of sword and dagger chains to the upper frontal area of the armour (such plates are common between ca. 1330/1340 and ca. 1360/1370, see Thordeman 1939, 220-225; Nicolle 1999, 454), as well as the lack of larger plates covering the warrior's chest and the back, or the immobile fixation of the plates one to another in rows (Rossi 1990; Wackernagel 1996; Rabovyanov, Dimitrov 2011, 161-174) point to a manufacturing date before 1330-1340.

Although after ca. 1350 this kind of armour was considered as old-fashioned, it remained in use for a long time after that date. 'The long life' of the Western European armour from Nicopole is also evidenced by repairs, done with copper rivets. Probably the artefact was kept in the fortress until its fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1395.

At first glance the number of the discussed artefacts is not large. It must be mentioned though that finds of this type are not common. On the other hand, they represent more than 70% of all surviving finds of defensive armament from Bulgaria which certainly can be dated to the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. Here we must note that most finds of mail armour attributed to this period are actually of later date (15th-17th centuries). A widespread use of this armour type is nevertheless proven by many mail rings, discovered at excavated archaeological sites from the period between the 12th and 15th centuries. The lack of plates of lamellar armours which were typical for the period before the end of the 12th century is a piece of evidence for the types



Fig. 9. Kettle hat helmet from vineyard near Varna (after Димитров, Хрисимов 2006).

Рис. 9. Капалин odkryty na terenie winnicy w okolicach Warny (wg Димитров, Хрисимов 2006).

of defensive armament used in Bulgaria. This also shows that the type of armour that continued to be depicted on murals probably no longer existed at that time.

Despite limited information, we can conclude that after the 12th century medieval Bulgarian defensive armament seems to be very close to Western and Central European military style, at least in its fundamental elements. Mail was the main armour type during the 14th century and it was often worn under a coat of plates. As regards helmets, we have discussed three certain examples – the ones from Pernik, Uzana and Veliko Tarnovo which are Western origin and the one from Yassenovo, which can be related to the steppe milieu. The helmets from the Asenovgrad Fortress and Novakovo near Varna, mentioned in many previous studies, are actually late antique finds of the ‘Spangenhelm’ type (Biernacki 2012, 99-101).

Because of the fact that this study is based on artefacts we will not discuss mural images and miniatures. A substantial problem with them is that they are less informative considering defensive armament in contrast to offensive weapons. The reason for this are rules which the artist had to follow when depicting warrior-saints. Such depictions are highly influenced by late Roman traditions (Grotowski 2010). In spite of this there are some examples of Western defensive armament. We will not discuss offensive weapons here, although there are numerous weapons of probably or definitely Western European origin. This trend is evidenced by written sources where authors mention spears imported from Bohemia and other weapons which came from Dubrovnik.

The mass use of the crossbow during the 14th century is a piece of evidence for salient Western influence (Рабовянов 2010, 561-570).

Various explanations may be given for the penetration of Western types of arms and armour into Bulgaria. However, we will only be able to provide a brief outline. Armed conflicts, of course, are one possible way. In the first place we should mention the war with the Hungarian Kingdom and after that with the Latin states that arose after the Fourth Crusade. Especially during the second half of the 14th century the Bulgarian territories became the scene of continuous conflicts in some of which Western combatants took part. Of particular significance is the campaign of Count Amadeus VI of Savoy on the Bulgarian Black Sea shore (1366), the conflicts between despot Dobrotitsa and his son Ivanko with the Genoese in 1373-1387, the Hungarian intervention of 1365, and the Crusade of 1396 under the leadership of Sigismund I.

Mercenaries who served either in Bulgarian or foreign armies made an important contribution. We can give two examples – Catalan mercenaries in the Byzantine Empire; German and Spanish mercenaries who fought on the Serbian side during the battle of Velbujd; and a permanent heavily armed unit of German horsemen, used by Stefan Dušan (Uzelać 2015, 76-83).

Contacts with the Italian mercantile cities of Venice and Genoa through the Black Sea and overland contacts with Dubrovnik played a very important role. It is known that these centres carried out a large-scale trade with weapons, manufactured in Northern Italian cities. Great numbers of defensive armaments were imported

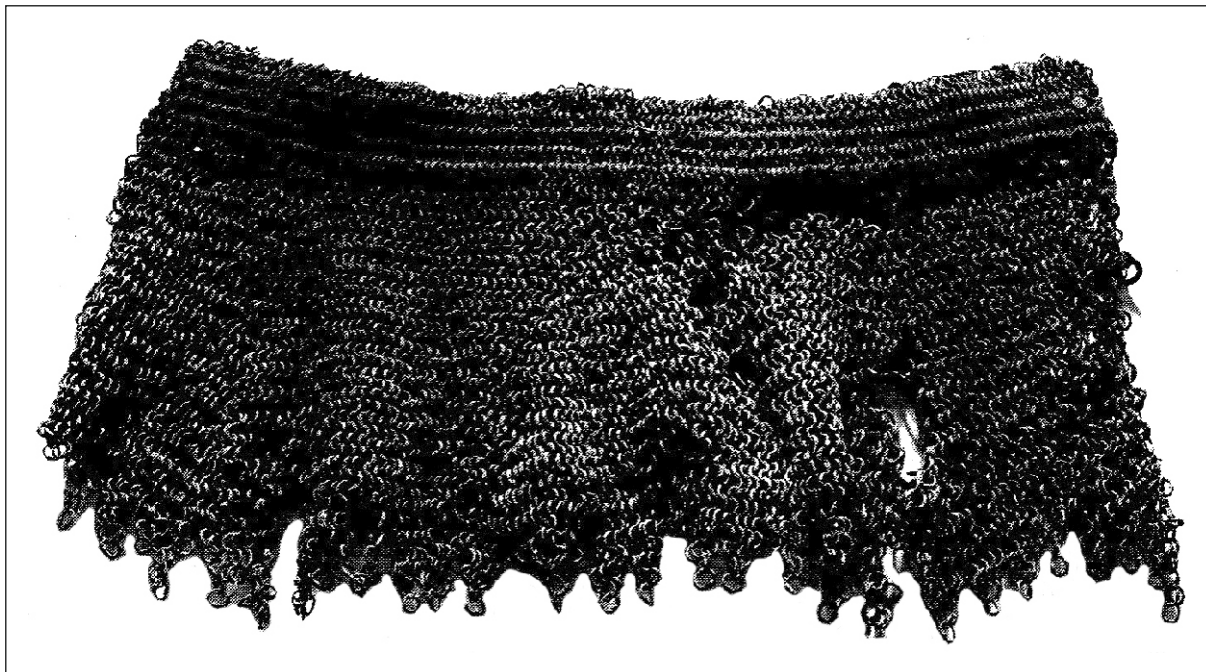


Fig. 10. Mail gorgerin from Historical Museum of Kavarna (after Димитров, Хрисимов 2006).

Ryc. 10. Obojczyk kolczy ze zbiorów Muzeum Historycznego w Kavarne (wg Димитров, Хрисимов 2006).

from Italy to Serbia and the ban on arms trade with other countries including Bulgaria (Škrivanić 1957, 298), imposed by King Stefan Dusan in 1349, is more than significant. Obviously, the Serbian ruler wanted to prevent potential enemies from receiving modern and high quality arms and armour. The mere presence of Italian merchants, sailors and combatants also contributed to the establishment of continuous contacts with the Western military culture.

Available data allows us to make the following conclusions. The Western influence on Bulgarian warfare is unquestionable especially during the second half of the 14th century. Heavily armed Bulgarian cavalry or at least some of its units like the king's personal guards, did not differ much in their appearance from their Western 'colleagues' and their defensive armament. However, we must not exaggerate this Western influence although it used to be neglected. There are numerous testimonies of a strong influence of the Northern Black Sea steppe nomads, particularly concerning bows and the equestrian equipment (Рабовянов 2011). The presence of local Balkan-Byzantine traditions could not be ignored, either, though the problem with its characteristics is still unsolved.

Despite the fact that the period between the fall of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom under the Ottoman rule and the second march of Vladislav III Jagiello in 1444 is chronologically

closer to us, we can say very little about it considering the subject of this study. A continually growing group of artefacts of Western origin is known from Northeast Bulgaria. Along with numerous finds of offensive weapons, two very characteristic examples of defensive armament should be pointed out. The first is a helmet (Fig. 9) found in 2004 in the vineyards of Vladislavovo near Varna (Димитров, Хрисимов 2006, 84). In foreign studies authors use the terms of chapel de fer, kettle hat, capelin, Eisenhut. It became an extremely popular piece of defensive armament during the 13th century and was mainly used by infantry and sometimes by cavalry, especially by combatants with more modest financial mean. It provided a good head protection against cutting blows and its wide brim protected against arrows. It also ensured good vision and ventilation.

The helmet from Vladislavovo consists of three parts. A wide round brim is forged from one iron plate with a diameter of 46.0 cm. Its rim is reinforced and thicker. The skull consists of two parts and has a bi-conical shape. Its height is 28.0 cm. The upper part of the helmet is reinforced with a slightly convex round comb. It is shaped like an chamfered cone. It is made from a bent iron sheet, tucked in its bottom edge parts. It is provided with a barely visible crest.

The helmet discovered in Varna can be related to the battle between the Ottomans and the Crusade army of the Polish-Hungarian king

Vladislav III Jagiello which took place on the 10th of November 1444. On the surface of the artefact there are two holes, probably made during the battle. Judging by their shape, they were obviously made by a fighting pick or an axe, weapons that were widely used by the Ottomans (ibid., 93-94).

The second artefact is a mail collar (gorget) (Fig. 10), kept in the Historical Museum in Kavarna. It was found in 1959 near the village of Dobroged about 15 km north of Varna (Димитров, Хрисимов 2008, 227). The artefact is trapezium shaped with curved upper and lower long sides. It is 48.0 cm long and 22.0 cm wide. It is made of iron and brass rings. According to its construction, the collar can be divided into three bands. The top band consists of six rows of rings which are thicker and more massive than the others. They are connected to each other following the scheme of 1:6. On the left part of the collar there is a hook which fixed the collar around the wearer's neck. The second band, which is situated in the main part of the collar, consists of 0.8 cm diameter rings. The binding scheme is typical for the mail – every ring is connected to four others. There is a larger ring, made of copper alloy with a stamped cross and a Latin inscription, that is now illegible. Very often similar rings have a talismanic significance (Reid, Burgess 1960, 47-48). The third lower

decorative band consists of brass rings, set in 28 projecting triangular tongues.

Similar defensive collars appeared in Italy during the second half of the 13th century in order to provide full protection for the neck. They were widely used by both infantry and cavalry especially in the 15th century (ibid., 229-236). We can speculate that the collar could have been worn with an armet type helmet, used by a wealthy participant in Vladislav III's campaign, as this type of helmet first appeared in the 1420s and 1430s in Italy (Boccia 1982, 81-82; Oakeshott 2000, 109-112). Of course the collar might have also been part of other defensive equipment from this period.

At present all we can conclude is that Western European defensive arms was introduced to Bulgaria during the 12th-13th centuries. However, in 15th century Bulgaria a large part of the population was forbidden to carry arms and the number of Christian sipahis and Christians with military obligations was very small. Though there are great differences considering the way of spread and the working life of weapons, Western defensive armament was continuously, apparently and significantly present in the Bulgarian territories in the period between the end of the 12th and the mid-15th centuries. The authors hope that this study will notably enrich our understanding of warfare in the Bulgarian territories during the Late Medieval Period.

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ZACHODNIOEUROPEJSKIE UZBROJENIE OCHRONNE Z TERENU ŚREDNIOWIECZNEJ BUŁGARII (XII-XV WIEK)

Streszczenie

W artykule zaprezentowano pochodzące spoza Bałkanów elementy średniowiecznego uzbrojenia ochronnego odkryte na terenie dzisiejszej Bułgarii. Zabytki te mają liczne analogie w zbiorach muzealnych, znaleziskach archeologicznych i dziełach sztuki z terenu Europy Centralnej i Zachodniej.

Zabytki te reprezentowane są głównie przez hełmy: okaz odkryty na terenie twierdzy Pernik datowany na 2. połowę XII w., basinet znaleziony w okolicach miejscowości Uzana pochodzący z 2. połowy XIV w. oraz zasłone kolejnego basinetu przechowywaną w Muzeum Historycznym w Tyrnowie i odnoszoną do końca XIV i początków XV w. Oprócz nich uwagę zwraca nogawica koczna z miejscowości Bratsigovo wiązana z okresem od XIII po 1. połowę XIV w., zbrojniki płatów odkryte w Pałacu Królewskim w Tarnowgradzie i datowane na l. 20.-40. XIV w., kolejny zestaw zbrojników odnoszony do pierwszych dekad XIV w., a pochodzący z twierdzy Nikopolis. Na 1. połowę XV w. datowane są natomiast koczny kołnierz i kapalin odkryte na terenie północno-zachodniej Bułgarii.

Analiza prezentowanych zabytków doprowadziła do konkluzji, iż uzbrojenie ochronne i inna broń

pochodzenia zachodnioeuropejskiego miały dużo większe znaczenie w czasach istnienia Drugiego Królestwa Bułgarskiego aniżeli w okresie wcześniejszym. W tym czasie sztuka wojenna przedotomańskiej Bułgarii charakteryzowała się mieszaniną tradycji militarnej Bałkanów z wpływami ludów Wielkiego Stepu, a dodatkowo również z przyswajaniem wzorców zachodnioeuropejskich. Zjawisko to nasiliło się szczególnie w XIV stuleciu, ale pierwsze tego symptomy odnosić można do XII w., jeszcze przed powstaniem Drugiego Królestwa Bułgarskiego.

Uzbrojenie zachodnioeuropejskie trafiało na teren Bułgarii różnymi drogami. Mogło być ono przedmiotem handlu, śladem obecności obcych najemników, a pod koniec tego okresu mogło znaleźć się tutaj wraz z uczestnikami krucjat przeciw Otomanom. Niektóre prezentowane tutaj elementy uzbrojenia mogą też wiązać się z konkretnymi wydarzeniami militarnymi. Niezależnie od tego, w jaki sposób znalazły się one na terenie Bułgarii, zabytki te pozwalają nam nieco inaczej spojrzeć na problematykę uzbrojenia bułgarskich wojowników, którzy uznawani byli dotąd za użytkowników wschodniego modelu wyposażenia militarnego.