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DAGGERS AND FIGHTING KNIVES IN GERMANY AND WESTERN EUROPE DURING THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES. FROM TOOL TO WEAPON AND FASHION ACCESSORY¹

Abstract: Since the easy reproducibility of photographs, typologies of weapons and armour have been developed primarily on the basis of artworks. Even today, daggers are regarded as a phenomenon that seems to have emerged in the 14th century. Archaeological finds are dated accordingly. In fact, however, numerous written sources show that most forms of dagger were already widespread around 1200. Some of these blades hide behind proper names such as misericordia, stabbing knife or Italian knife.

Keywords: dagger, fighting knife, misericordia, baselard, 13th century.

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Introduction

The modern German word “Dolch” was still unknown until the late 15th century. Instead, the numerous forms were referred to in German as variants of knives, as “degen” or with special names, as discussed below (Schwietering 1912, 46). The English word “dagger”, closely related to “degen”, was already known in the Late Middle Ages (e.g. Moffat 2022, 208, No. 144). If you look at the relevant handbooks on historical weaponry, daggers do not appear to have emerged until the 14th century. According to these handbooks, even unstratified archaeological finds and museum pieces are generally dated to the 14th century. The reason for this is that since the reproducibility of photographs in print media, research in historical weaponry in the German speaking area has developed its typologies almost exclusively on the basis of pictorial sources (Brenker 2022a, 47–48). It was not until the early 14th century that according to those pictorial sources what is now known as a dagger became an integral part of military equipment and civilian fashion (Knorr 1971, 131). However, as will be shown below, almost all of

these dagger forms can be traced back to the 13th century, often even as early as around 1200.

The thrust turns the knife into a weapon – fighting knives in the 12th century

Single-edged knives with an oval-cylindrical or prismatic handle, which may have been slightly curved inwards at the sides, are so similar to everyday knives that they presumably became a temporary weapon simply through their use. Such knives can already be found in use in battle on some works of art from the second half of the 12th century, such as on the Bestiary Column in Freising Cathedral, Bavaria (Germany), where four men are fighting dragons. Two of the men are wielding their knives with the blade sticking out of their hands on the thumb side, referred to below as the upperhand (Budde 1979, 52–53, Cat. 81, Abb. 81). A naked man fighting a lion above the architrave, created after 1162, of the north portal of San Giovanni Fuorcivitas in Pistoia (Italy), also wields such a knife (Fig. 1; Poeschke 1998, 145, Abb. 139). In contrast to the men in Freising, he has gripped the knife so that the

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Fig. 1. A naked man fighting a lion in the architrave of the north portal of San Giovanni Fuorcivitas in Pistoia, after 1162. *Photo F. Brenker*

Ryc. 1. Nagi mężczyzna walczący z lwem, architraw północnego portalu kościoła San Giovanni Fuorcivitas w Pistoii, po 1162 r. *Fot. F. Brenker*

blade comes out of his hand on the side of his little finger; referred to below as underhanded. On a capital in the Grossmünster in Zurich (Switzerland), a warrior protected by a nasal helmet and an almond-shaped shield stabs at the neck of an opponent armed with a nasal helmet, shield and sword with a knife wielded underhand (Blum 1919, 42, 171–174, Taf. VI:3; Gutscher 1983, 120–122, 214–215, Cat. 32). In the “Liber ad Honorem Augusti” by Petrus di Ebulo († before 1220), written in 1195/1197, the German knight Diepold von Schweinspoint († 1225) can be seen fighting three peasants who are attacking his horse with knives. The text also refers to them accordingly as “cultro” (knife) (Kölzer, Stähli 1994, 172–175). Such long, single-edged knives with a slightly waisted oval-cylindrical hilt can still be found in the “Bible Moralisée” manuscripts² (cf. Hausscherr, Stork 1992, 49, 132–133, 144–145) produced in the second quarter of the 13th century and around 1260 in the “Rutland Psalter”,³ always in the hands of unarmoured men. Apart from their size, such blades could hardly be identified as weapons in archaeological finds. Knives intended for hunting or fighting may have been somewhat longer or

decorated on the handle. A single-edged knife with an almost cuboid handle made of ivory is preserved in the Bamberg cathedral treasury. A silver cuff on the handle was identified as Rhenish work from around 1170 (Retsch 2017, 88–95). The apostle Peter is also occasionally depicted with a simple knife when Jesus is arrested,⁴ whereas the Latin Bible, the Vulgate, uses the word sword (“gladius”) (John 18,10; Luke 22,49–50; Mark 14,47; Matthew 26,51–52).

Parallel to these knife shapes, knives with a longer blade and a handle that was wide at the base of the blade and at the end of the handle, but strongly waisted in between, appear to have been widespread in the 12th century. This handle geometry prevented the hand from slipping onto the blade when thrusting against a target. The fighting knife had thus morphologically split off from the utility knife, which was designed more for cutting. One of the soldiers in the Arrest of Jesus at the west portal of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard (France), executed around 1170, wears such a hilt in an ornate scabbard on the left side of his belt (Fig. 2). The soldier’s right hand, which he has placed around the hilt, reveals that he is willing to draw the weapon with the blade downwards and

² Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vind. 2554, fol. 1r; 37r, 46v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bold. 270b, fol. 149v.

³ London, British Library, Add. MS. 62925, fol. 46v, 69r; 79r, 97r, 102v.

⁴ Cf. e.g. the “Hortus Deliciarum” (Schwietering 1912, 46, Abb. 11) and at the rood screen of Modena Cathedral (Poeschke 1998, 114–117, Abb. 93).



Fig. 2. Arrest of Jesus at the west portal of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, around 1170. *Photo F. Brenker*

Ryc. 2. Pojmanie Jezusa, zachodni portal opactwa Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, ok. 1170 r. *Fot. F. Brenker*



Fig. 3. Judith beheading Holofernes on the right-hand north portal of Chartres Cathedral, around 1220. *Photo F. Brenker*

Ryc. 3. Judyta ścinająca głowę Holofernesowi, prawa część północnego portalu katedry w Chartres, ok. 1220 r. *Fot. F. Brenker*

thus use it to make a powerful thrust. One of the murderers of Thomas Becket († 1170) in a wall painting in the church of San Nicolás in Soria (Spain), has done just that and is still gripping the scabbard on his belt with his left hand. In the “Anseis de Metz”, written between 1121 and 1177, the knife is also still worn on the left side of the belt (Sternberg 1885, 23). Judith holds a very similar, single-edged knife in a scene from around 1220 in the archivolt of the right-hand north portal of Chartres Cathedral (France), with which she has just cut off Holofernes’ head (Fig. 3). According to the biblical passage, this is the dagger (“pugio”) of Holofernes (Judith 13:1–10). As she severed the head with two cuts, she uses the knife upperhanded. Knives are also used upperhanded in the beheading of St Margaret on a late Romanesque altar in the church of Santa Margarida de Vilaseca (Spain) with a crooked knife (Vic, Museo Episcopal, Inv. No. 5),

in the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22, 1–11, “gladius”) in the Vienna “Bible Moralisée” manuscript⁵ (cf. Haussherr, Stork 1992, 54) or in the beheading of a criminal in the “Código Rico” of the “Cantigas de Santa Maria”⁶ of King Alfonso X the Wise of Aragon and León († 1284). Upperhanded thrusts such as those on the Freising Beast Pillar are limited in the artworks to those in the unprotected abdomen, for example in the insidious murder of Joab by Abner (2 Kings 3:26–27) in the Paris–London–Oxford “Bible Moralisée”⁷ painted around 1233/1245, presumably in Paris, in the slightly younger “Crusader Bible”⁸ and on a stained glass window around 1260 from the Dominican church in Strasbourg (France, today in the Musée Œuvre Notre-Dame), as well as in the depiction of a courtly tale on a Romanesque casket from the cathedral of Sion (Switzerland, Sion, Musée d’histoire du Valais, inv. MV 39, cf. Charles, Veillet 2012, 172–178, Cat. 33).

⁵ Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vind. 2554, fol. 5v.

⁶ Madrid, Real biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Ms. T-1-1, fol. 175v.

⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 270^b, fol. 45v.

⁸ New York, The Morgan Library, MS M.638, fol. 37v.



Fig. 4. Man with a double-edged knife and a shield hanging around his neck from a capital in the cloister of Monreale, ca. 1174/1189. Photo F. Brenker

Ryc. 4. Mężczyzna z dwusiecznym nożem i tarczą zawieszoną u szyi, kapitel w klasztorze Monreale, ok. 1174/1189 r. Fot. F. Brenker

Based on the pictorial sources mentioned, the knife appears to have been used as a weapon in the second half of the 12th century, although it did not initially differ noticeably from utility knives. With the advent of the waisted handle, the morphologically decisive step was taken that turned a tool into a weapon. This was associated with the change in use away from the upperhand cut to the primarily underhand thrust. A knife held upperhanded has a greater reach and can be manoeuvred more quickly. An underhanded thrust, on the other hand, requires more force. It was therefore possibly a reaction to the increasing body armour (Peterson 1968, 12–13). All the pictorial sources mentioned so far (except perhaps a depiction of King Saul in Vienna)⁹ (cf. Hausscherr, Stork 1992, 144–145) show knives in the hands of unarmed people, but not knights. This suggests that the fighting knife actually evolved from the civilian knife and that its origins are to be found among the unarmed sections of the population.¹⁰

⁹ Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vind. 2554, fol. 37r.

¹⁰ Drawings of five knives, a buckler and a human head with a basinet in an early 11th century copy of Rabanus Maurus' († 856) "De rerum naturis" or "De universe" (Montecassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia, Cod. 132, 365 [369]) are additions from the 14th century and therefore no source for early fighting knives.

The double-edged throwing knife and the buckler

Double-edged knives are already mentioned in the "Roman de Brut" by the Norman poet Wace, completed in 1155 (Bach 1887, 43). Around the same time, the "Kaiserchronik" ("Imperial Chronicle") mentions knives that are sharp on both sides (*baidenthalben was*) in the story of Odnatus in the year of the Four Emperors 69 AD and again for Emperor Titus 79–81 AD (Schröder 1892, line 4943–4946, 5445–5448). However, this may also refer to the gladii in the ancient models.

A willow leaf-shaped, presumably double-edged blade with a pommel and an almond-shaped shield hanging over it is held by a guard on a capital made around 1174/1189 in the cloister of Monreale (Nicolle 1980; Poeschke 1998, 184–187) in Sicily (Fig. 4). In the Arthurian romance "Lanzelet" by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven (mentioned in 1214), written soon after 1193, the protagonist engages in a duel with the lord of a castle, for which he carries *two sharp knives, pointed and long enough, and two bucklers* ([...] *zwei scharpfiu mezzar tuoc./ spizzic und lanc genuoc./ und zwên buggelaere*) and emphasises *the knives cut on both sides* (*diu mezzar beidenthalben sniten*) (Kragl 2013, 64, line 1119–1121, 1123; for references to early round shields in poetry see also Schwietering 1912, 50; Kellett 2012, 44). The fact that he felt he had to describe the weapons suggests that he did not consider a contemporary term to be sufficiently clear to his readers and listeners. Lanzelet's challenger organises the duel in a room in such a way that each of them stands opposing each other and uses the buckler to protect himself from his opponent's knife throws. Lanzelet, however, jumps over to him and stabs him (cf. Schwietering 1912, 46; Kellett 2012, 44; Kragl 2013, 66–68, line 1149–1183). Duels in "Wolfdietrich B" and "Wolfdietrich D" are similar (Kellett 2012, 44). The fighting style therefore has nothing to do with the classic sword-and-buckler fencing style, in which the shield primarily protects the sword hand (cf. Forgeng 2018). As the text passages, the capital in Monreale and the capital in Zurich (see above) were certainly created independently of each other, the fight with knife and shield does not appear to have been an isolated case around 1200. A knife called "misericordia" (see below) is also thrown in the Old French "Gaufrey" (Sternberg 1885, 23).

The knife and the law in the late 12th and 13th centuries: “*misericordia*” and “*stechmesser*”

After isolated references to knives in the 12th century, the number of surviving text sources increased rapidly in the 13th century. Knives are now mentioned more frequently, especially in normative sources such as legal texts. Some types were now given their own names. They had therefore become a common weapon that needed to be regulated.

King Philippe Auguste II of France († 1223) confirmed the customs of the city of Arras in 1194 and stipulated: *10. And whoever carries a knife with a point, or a short sword, or a misericordia, or a weapon of this kind made for killing, loses 60 pounds (Quicumque cultellum cum cuspidē, vel curtam spatulam, vel misericordiam, vel hujusmodi arma multitoria portaverit, sexaginta libras perdet; Delaborde et al. 1943, 566, No. 473; Knorr 1971, 130).* A pointed blade therefore turns the knife into a weapon. The pointed knives belonging to knights are also emphasised in old French poetry (Sternberg 1885, 23). The term “*misericordia*” (mercy) for a fighting knife is mentioned in the French chivalric novel “*Partonopeus de Blois*” as early as 1188 (Bach 1887, 42). It was also used outside the Romance language area. In two poems by Neidhart (until 1231 in Bavaria, then in Austria), probably written in the first four decades of the 13th century, but only handed down from the early 14th century, a sharpened *misericordia* (“*misericord/ [...] geschliffen*”) and a *misericordia* so long (“*missekor so lang*”) in a copper sheath are mentioned (Müller *et al.* 2007, 25, song 8, stanza 6, line 22, 158–159, song 85, stanza 4, line 3–5; cf. Gessler 1923, 3; Knorr 1971, 130). In “*Seifried Helbling*” an alleged land peace of Duke Leopold VI of Austria († 1230) also refers to a long *misericordia* (“*lange misicar*”; cf. Seemüller 1886, 213, book VIII, verse 879; Nellmann 1991, 152) and a strong *misericordia* (“*starkez misicar*”; cf. Seemüller 1886, 31, book I, verse 321). The term is often mentioned in northern Spain in the second half of the 13th century (Bruhn de Hoffmeyer 1982, 79–80).

In the case of the aforementioned double-edged short swords with a cross and pommel, which appear on sculptures from the 12th century at the latest,¹¹ it is possible that the weapons length was dictated by the susceptibility of the stone to breakage. It may therefore have been necessary

not to extend the scabbard beyond the hem of the figure’s skirt. They appear in wall and book paintings, where the static argument does not matter, only from the middle of the 13th century.¹²

Vienna’s city law from 1221 stipulated: *Anyone within the city walls who has a long knife, known as a stechemezzer [stabbing knife], hanging in their belt must give the judge 1 talent and this knife. But anyone who carries it in their boot or otherwise concealed and secretly with them must give the judge 10 talents and lose their hand (Item apud quemcumque infra muros civitatis cultellus longus, qui dicitur stechemezzer, in cingulo suspensus deprehensus fuerit, hic det iudici 1 talentum et eundem cultrum. Qui vero eum infra caligam vel alias apud se ubicumque latenter et furtive portaverit, iudici det X talenta vel manum amittat; Fichtenau, Zöllner 1955, 62, No. 237 [16]; Knorr 1971, 130).* The knives were therefore long by the standards of the time and yet still so handy that they could be hidden in a boot that reached no further than the middle of the shin. The “*Mainz Peace Commandment*” of 1300 also prohibited the public or secret carrying of a stabbing knife („*Stechmezzir*”) during the day and at night (Steffens 2003, 5 [14–15]). The same was true on horseback (*ibid.*, 8 [156–157]). Similar to the modern legislation of many European states, in both cases it was not the possession of these edged weapons that was prohibited, but the carrying and especially the hidden carrying. This can be found in numerous laws in the Late Middle Ages (Knorr 1971, 132–135). The term “*stechenmezzer*” also suggests a blade geometry designed for stabbing, i.e. presumably pointed, rather narrow and therefore thick, and a hilt thickened towards the blade. The stabbing knife probably also corresponded to the murder knife: in a poem by Reinmar von Zweter, who was productive in Austria and Bohemia from around 1227 to 1248, he complained that *murder knives and murder maces, sharpened axes (mortmezzert unt mortkolbe, gesliffen aks)* were now used in tournaments (Roethe 1887, 464, No. 106). A scene is said to have taken place at around the same time in Ulrich von Liechtenstein’s (mentioned 1227–1274) “*Frauendienst*”. The knight disguises himself as a leper, but carries a very long knife for defence: *we took with us and a long knife as we*

¹¹ For example, a torturer on the “*Vincentiustafel*” in Basel Cathedral (11th/12th century), the “*Arrest of Jesus*” on the Easter candelabrum in San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome (around 1170/1190), in the archivolt of the north portal in Chartres Cathedral (around 1200/1225), a soldier at the “*Coronation of Thorns*” on the west portal of Strasbourg Cathedral (around 1280/1290).

¹² For example, in an English “*Apocalypse*” from around 1250 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. fr. 403, fol. 1r) and at some crossbowmen in a wall painting of the conquest of Mallorca in 1229 in the Palau Real Major in Barcelona (cf. Brenker 2022b, 272).

feared for our bodies (wir namen zuo uns mezzier lanc./ als uns des libes vorht betwanc; Spechtler 2003, 216, stanza 1126,7–8).

In addition to these civilian legal texts, the role of the knife was also regulated in the military sphere. The feudal law (67 § 1) of the “Sachsenspiegel” around 1220/1235 lists the knife (“messer”) among the weapons (Knorr 1971, 131). In one of its supplements, the “Rule of the Knights Templar” set out the equipment for the knights and included within the knives one for fighting: *Les freres chevaliers dou covent chascun doit avoir [...] III cotiaus : I d’armes et l’autre de pain taillier et I canivet* (Curzon 1886, 109–111, § 138). As a kettlehat is also listed, which only became widespread from around 1180 onwards,¹³ the rule can only have been issued around this time at the earliest. Furthermore a reference to the True Cross (§ 122), which was lost at the Battle of Hattin (Israel) in 1187, suggests the passage was formulated around 1175/1187. While the early sources mentioned above always place the fighting knife in the hands of unarmoured men-at-arms or, in the case of Lanzelet, in an unarmoured fight between two noblemen, it appears here for the first time in the context of armed knights. This became more common in the second quarter of the 13th century at the latest. For example, in the “Assize of Arms” of 1242, King Henry III of England († 1272) assigned a knife (“cultellum”) to all classes of armoured men (Stubbs, Davis 1913, 363). While in 1255, Doge Rainer Xeno († 1268) also ordered all crew members of the Venetian fleet to wear a stabbing knife (“cutellum percuciendi”) (Predelli, Sacerdoti 1903, 96, cap. XXVII). Similarly, in the middle of the 13th century, the old Norwegian “Speculum Regale” (“King’s Mirror”) recommended that knights should be equipped with a good knife (*goðan bryn knif*; Brenner 1881, 103, line 31–32). As Ramon Llull († 1316) wrote in his book “Libre de l’Orde de Cavalleria” (“Book of the Order of Chivalry”), written around 1275, the “misericordia” was part of a knight’s standard equipment at the time (see below). Despite its obvious advantages, in the Spanish treaty “De batalla” from the early 1250s, the knife is treated as an unworthy weapon (Bruhn de Hoffmeyer 1982, 79).

New challenges: Mail armour, helms and plates

At this point, the question arises as to why this abundance of knives appears in the sources in the decades around 1200. The emergence of the

dagger has repeatedly been linked to the advent of plate armour in the late 13th century (e.g. Müller, Kölling 1990, 37). However, these conditions already existed around 1200. In the second half of the 12th century, the mail armour had been completed and now covered the entire knight except for the area around the eyes, the palms of the hands and, in some cases, the back of the legs. Also in the years around 1200, the first helmets covering the face became widespread in Europe (Schultz 1889, 64–68; Masser 1983, 187–195). Written sources also show that with “curie” and “platen” torso armour made of hard leather (“cuir bouilli”) and sheet metal had already become established in the first third of the 13th century (Schultz 1889, 40, 47–49; Nicolle 2002, 210–217; Brenker 2022a). These were presumably the challenges for the attacker that made a short thrusting weapon necessary even in these decades. Whereas in the first half of the 12th century many body blows would have resulted in cuts and stab wounds, from the first half of the 13th century onwards they would have more often encountered almost impenetrable armour. It was now necessary to hit the fewer open areas with precision. The thrust was the best way to do this, especially with a short weapon, as an obstacle such as the faceplate of the helm or the skirt of the mail armour usually had to be bypassed first.

In his report written immediately after the Battle of Bouvines (France) in 1214, William Brito († 1226) described various incidents involving knives, which he always referred to with the Latin word “cutellum”. A Frenchman held Eustach of Machelen and tore his helmet off his head, while another stuck a knife between his mail armour and chin through his throat and into his heart. Stefan of Longchamp was stabbed in the head through the slit in his helm with a knife of the type discussed below (see below). Girardus Scropha (la Truie), on the other hand, was unable to pierce the armour of King Otto IV († 1219), which according to Wilhelm Brito was impenetrable at the time, with a knife held bare in his hand and stabbed it into the eye of his horse. A servant called Cornutus or Comotus tried to thrust a knife into the abdomen of Count Rainald of Boulogne († 1227), but failed because his mail trousers were sewn to his shirt (Delaborde 1882, 278, 283–284, 289; Knorr 1971, 131). Some of the knife fighters are probably horsemen, although there is never any clear reference to knights. The knights and mounted sergeants in the miniatures of the

¹³ Cf. for example the order on the equipment of English soldiers of 1181, which stipulated the kettlehat for citizens and free men (Stubbs 1921).

“Picture Bible” for Louis IX of France († 1270), produced in Paris between 1244 and 1254,¹⁴ and in the “Vita S. Eduardi, regis et confessoris”,¹⁵ produced in London a little later, also use their knives in this way. The latter even depicts a stab through the breathing slit of a helm. In Wolfram von Eschenbach’s “Parzival”, written around 1200/1210, we also read how citizens of the besieged town of Pelrapeire thrust the fallen knights through not further specified slits – probably openings in the aforementioned mail armour: *They (the citizens) could be taught to aim at the ring armour. The citizens took their revenge. They stabbed them (the knights) in the slits. (Die kunde man si lèren/ze der halsperge gêren:/ die burgære tâten räche schîn;/ si erstâchen si zen slitzen in.* Reichert 2019, 142, stanza 207, 17–22).

The Spanish knight Ramon Llull († 1316) explained in his “Llibre de l’Orde de Cavalleria”, written around 1275, that the misericordia (see above) was used when space was too confined to use a lance, sword or mace: *The misericorde is given to the knight so that if he is lacking weapons he may turn to the misericorde, for if he is so close to his enemy that he is unable to wound him with the lance, sword or mace, he should stab him with the misericorde* (after Fallows 2013, 68 [10]; *Misericòrdia és donada a cavaller per so que, si li deffallen armes, que: s torn a la misericordia; car si és tan prop a son enamich que no. I pusca ferir ab lança, ni ab spa, ni ab massa, que li faça colp ab la misericordia* – Bruhn de Hoffmeyer 1982, 79). At least the nobles had the basic prerequisites for such close combat, as they were taught the art of wrestling even before the advent of fighting knives. In Petrus Alfonsi’s († after 1130) “Disciplina Clericalis” from around 1115, for example, it is one of the seven basic skills of a knight: *The true skills are: riding, swimming, shooting arrows, fighting with belts, hunting, playing chess [and] writing (Probitates vero he sunt: Equitare, natare, sagittare, cestibus certare, aucupare, schachis ludere, versificari;* Hilka, Söderhjelm 1911, 11). In the courtly epics of the first half of the 13th century, the heroes are also taught to wrestle, and it is practised as a competition during courtly festivities (Kellett 2012, 36). Although wrestling was probably fought without weapons, it was one

of the combat techniques that a knight would encounter in the course of his life and for which he had to be prepared. In an emergency, a fighting knife was of course an advantage in wrestling.

A depiction of the battle of the Virtues in a “Speculum Virginum” manuscript from around 1200¹⁶ shows two fully armoured fighters in close contact (Fig. 5; cf. Ex.-Cat. Herne 2010, 367 cat. F 13 [T. Pandorf]). One of the two has thrown his shield over his back and is gripping his opponent’s sword arm at the elbow with his left hand. He is therefore very close to his opponent and thrusts his own sword into his opponent’s abdomen. As his sword blade is presumably about 80 cm long and therefore longer than his left arm, which defines the distance to his opponent, he has to pull his sword arm far back and presumably finds it difficult to apply force. This is the moment when a shorter blade would have given him many more options.

The focus on the thrust in close combat is particularly significant, as European sword blades for much of the 13th century still had a centre of gravity that was quite far forward and a flat cross-section with a fuller and rarely ended in a pointed tip. Often the tip was rather rounded but very sharp (Geibig 1991; Oakeshott 1994, 25–54). However, this does not rule out a thrust (Warzecha 2007, 60–61). In the poetry of the 12th century, thrusting with swords remained rare exceptions and were then explicitly placed below the mail armour (Schwietering 1912, 49–57) – as Wilhelm Brito also reports for the knives. The point or the thrust also play no role in the French poems (Sternberg 1885, 3–23). A chronicle by the Parisian monk Primat († around 1282) has only survived in a French translation by Jean du Vignay († probably after 1340). It describes the Battle of Benevento (Italy) in 1266, in which the French were unable to penetrate the armour of the Germans. They therefore thrust their slender and pointed swords into the armpits of the Germans when they raised their arms.¹⁷ This may already have been due to the widespread use of the “plates” by the Germans at the time (Brenker 2022a). According to the annals of another Parisian monk, the call to use the swords called “estoc” was shouted during the battle, which ultimately led to

¹⁴ New York, The Morgan Library, MS M.638, fol. 29v.

¹⁵ Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.3.59, fol. 33v, 34v.

¹⁶ Hannover, Museum August Kestner, Inv. 3984.

¹⁷ N. De Wailly et al. (1894, 27 [ad a. 1266]): *Et quant les nos gens virent que l’espoisseté des armes de ces Theutoniens, desquelles il estoient garniz forment, deboutoient les coups des nos qui branloient en l’air, adonc les François boutoient les espées gresles et agües souz les essèles d’iceulz, où il apparoient touz desarmés, et les tresperçoient sitost comme il levoient les bras pour ferir, et leur boutoient les espées parmi les entrailles jusques aus espaules.* Very similar J.G. Eckart (1723, 1178 [ad a. 1266]): *Italici exinde Francorum uti cæperunt pugionibus hoc tempore, & enses obsoleti sunt* (cf. Oakeshott 1994, 43–44).



Fig. 5. “Fight of the Virtues and Vices” in a “Speculum Virinum” manuscript, around 1200, Hannover, Museum August Kestner, Inv. 3984 (after *Ex.-Cat. Herne 2010, 367, Cat. F 13*)

Ryc. 5. „Walka Cnót z Występkami” w rękopisie „Speculum Virinum”, ok 1200 r., Hannover, Museum August Kestner, nr inw. 3984 (wg *Ex.-Cat. Herne 2010, 367, Cat. F 13*)

victory: *But on the arrival of the lord the king, the bishop of Auxerre, Peter the marshal of France with their army, a cry was made on our part that they should pierce through the enemy with their thrusting swords; which being shouted and done, the enemy were slain and led to doom. (Sed adveniente domino rege, episcopo Altissiodorensi, Petro marescallo Francie cum exercitu eorum, clamatum est a parte nostra, quod in hostes de ensibus percuterent destoc; quo clamato et facto, occisi sunt hostes et ad perditionem ducti; Waitz 1882, 582 [ad a. 1266]).* “Estoc” is the name of a typical sword used by armoured cavalymen in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Seitz 1981, 171–172, 304–305) which featured a stiff slender blade designed for thrusting. One such 108 cm long sword with a wheel pommel was discovered at Körschburg Castle near Esslingen am Neckar (Germany), which was destroyed in 1292 (Arnold, Gross 1998). In the oldest surviving fighting book on unarmoured fencing with sword

and buckler, probably written in southern Germany in the decades around 1300,¹⁸ the thrust in the neck and face also plays a major role (cf. Forngeng 2018). Some depictions suggest that a similar fencing system or at least individual guards were already being practised around 1200. For example, a club fighter in Monreale, Sicily, is clearly in the first guard, a game piece could represent the second guard in combination with an almond-shaped shield¹⁹ and a 12th century relief on the portal of the abbey church in Andlau in Alsace (France) and one from Wartenberg Castle near Angersbach (Germany), which was destroyed in 1265, show a position similar to the sixth guard.

The result: a new blade geometry

In his aforementioned account of the Battle of Bouvines in 1214, William Brito described the knives used by the troops of the German Emperor Otto IV († 1218): *For the enemy used a kind of weapon which was strange and hitherto unheard*

¹⁸ Leeds, Royal Armouries, MS I.33.

¹⁹ London, Victoria & Albert Museum, Inv. 374–1871.

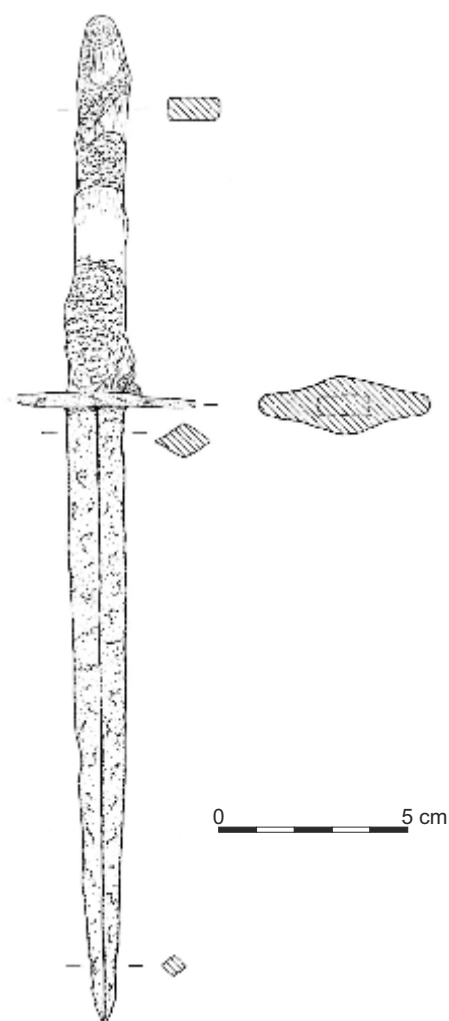


Fig. 6. Dagger from a cellar in Güstrow, second half of the 13th century (after Schindler 2005)

Ryc. 6. Sztylet z piwnicy w Güstrow, druga połowa XIII w. (za Schindler 2005)

of: for they had long, slender, three-edged knives, with edges cutting everywhere from the point to the handle, which they used instead of/like swords (Hostes enim quodam genere armorum utebantur admirabili et hactenus inaudito; habebant enim cultellos longos, graciles, triacumines, quolibet acumine indifferenter secantes a cuspide usque ad manubrium quibus utebantur pro gladiis; Delaborde 1882, 283). There are a number of remarkable things about this sentence. Firstly, he explicitly describes this weapon as new, which is also emphasised by the fact that he does not yet give a proper name for it. If one were to translate “sicut” with a comparative “like”, this would suggest

handling it like a sword, i.e. upperhanded with the point facing forwards. However, this is rather unlikely in view of the completely different blade geometry and the sword blades of the time, which were designed more for cutting. The Latin also allows a translation with “instead of”, so that the German knights – of course not all and probably only situationally – fought with these knives instead of their swords. In addition, the stiff triangular blade is clearly and probably exclusively designed for thrusting. William Brito only gives a description of the blade, but not of the handle. From the point of view of reporting a battle, the blade geometry obviously played a more decisive role than the design of the hilt. However, this effective blade shape does not seem to have been common, as there are no further mentions, illustrations or finds.²⁰ Instead, short thrusting weapons typically with a rhombic blade cross-section and cross guard appear to have existed in the 13th century. A find from a cellar in Güstrow (Germany) can be assigned to the second half of the 13th century based on other contextual finds (Fig. 6, Schindler 2005). The dating of a similar but larger specimen from the ditch of the motte-and-bailey castle in Ickt near Düsseldorf (Germany) is less clear (Binding 1979, 94–96, Abb. 14; Ex.-Cat. Herne 2010, 508, Cat. K 153c [M. Schmauder]).

The “Italian knife” and not the “baselard” – on a research problem

In 1244, the “Bavarian Landfriede” forbade the peasants to use the Latin knife (“cultrum latinum”), which was translated as Italian/French knife (“welsches Messer”) in the later edition of 1300 (Fehr 1917, 30–32; Nellmann 1991, 150). Although “welsch” generally referred to any Romance-speaking area, Latin in the older version probably refers to Italy rather than France. The Western-European knives presented below, however, seem too elaborately decorated to be imagined in large quantities in peasant ownership in south-east Germany. Unfortunately, nothing is known of its shape but clearly it must have been so widespread among farmers in south-east Germany by 1244 that it had to be banned. At the same time, however, contemporaries seem to have assumed that it originated south of the Alps, as can be seen from its name. Only one type of knife has a characteristic overall shape and seems to have a clear connection to Italy: It has a broad single- or double-edged blade of triangular shape, often with

²⁰ An old find of a three-edged blade probably from Denmark (Schleswig, Museum für Archäologie Schloss Gottorf, inv. FS 7380) unfortunately cannot be dated due to the lack of find contexts. I would like to thank Volker Hilberg for the detailed information. For a blade from Switzerland, see H. Schneider (1980, 264, Cat. 547).

two fullers and/or a prominent centre ridge, which instead of a tang forms into an 'I'-shaped handle with a band-like border, onto which handle plates were riveted on both sides (Fig. 7:a). Knives of this kind can already be recognised in Italian artworks in the second half of the 13th century (see below; Blair 1983–1985, 197; Rossi 2012, 235, Fig. 18) and may have occasionally been used in Spain.²¹ An initial miniature in a northern Italian gradual from around 1260/1270 shows this handle clearly.²² Throughout the entire 14th century, they are mainly and very frequently found in Italian art,²³ however, they are otherwise quite rare.²⁴ A very early fragment of the characteristic handle and possibly two early forms of it come from the Tremona Castello fortification in Ticino, which was abandoned at the end of the 13th century, and were recovered with other finds from around 1200 (Martinelli 2008, 280–281). A specimen from Piazza Dante in Pisa is also said to date stratigraphically to the middle of the 13th century (De Marinis 1993). Numerous other specimens have also come to light during excavations in Italy (Bressan 1996). The majority of finds in European collections come from the art trade and therefore provide no information about their historical distribution. One archaeological find (Fig. 7:a) comes from the presumed battlefield of Mühldorf in Erharting in Bavaria (Ex.-Cat. Bamberg 1998, 312, cat. 4.5 [K.U. Tapken]), where Wittelsbach and Habsburg troops, primarily from southern German and Hungarian units, clashed in 1322. In addition, numerous finds from what is now Switzerland (Wegeli 1929, Cat. 1117–1118, 1120; Meyer 1974, 73–74, Cat. C 3; 1989, 75, cat. G 5; Schneider 1980, Cat. 424, 426–429, 431–432; Martinelli 2008, 280–281; Rösch 2012, 62–63, Cat. 322) and south-west Germany (Laking 1920, 10–11, Fig. 748; Schmitt 2008, 191–192, Taf. 51.3; Brenker 2025) date from the early 14th century to the mid-15th century and prove that these weapons were also widespread in this region. There are even isolated finds from London (Laking 1920, 11, Fig. 751; Ward-Perkins 1940, 50, Fig. 10.6, Pl. X.1) and south-east France (Démians d'Archimbaud 1980, 138, Fig. 2.4–6). If knives with I-shaped riveted handles were typical for Italy, where they can be traced back to the mid-13th century at the latest, and

also found their way to southern Germany, it is quite likely that they were referred to as Latin or Italian knives in Bavaria. Perhaps the knife with two handle plates (*mezzar mit zwein schaln*) mentioned in “Seifried Helbling” around 1300 also referred to such a knife, for which the author apparently was unaware of its proper name (Seemüller 1886, 28, book I, verse 233). The question of what the knives with riveted handles were called in Italy remains unanswered for the time being. If they were the dominant form, there was probably no need for a separate name. Perhaps the “cutellum percuciendi” in Rainier Xeno’s decree for the Venetian fleet of 1255 (Predelli, Sacerdoti 1903, 96, cap. XXVII) refers to this type of knife. The triangular blades were always pointed and in the numerous illustrations they are almost invariably used for underhand thrusting. Gilded or silver-plated Italian daggers are also mentioned in the Swiss Confederation in the second half of the 16th century (*Schweizerisches Idiotikon* 1961, 1714). However, it is unlikely they were the same shape as those in 13th century Bavaria.

With their triangular blades with several fullers, rivet holes for the hilt and the crossguard, a 'I'-shaped hilt and, above all, the metal band framing one of the two handle plates, the Italian knives have no morphological predecessors in the Middle Ages. Next comparisons lead to prehistoric swords. M. Rossi (2012, 232–233) compared the Italian knives with roughly similar daggers of Cretan, Mycenaean, Sardinian and Gallic forms. Even closer are early Iron Age bronze swords with flange hilt (Fig. 7:b), which were also widespread in Italy (e.g. Bianco Peroni 1970, 78–98, Taf. 28–40). In these cases, the framing bands were simply cast on both sides, which seems to be a more obvious way to shape them. It is therefore hypothetically conceivable that the Italian knife was created around 1200, modelled on archaeological finds already discovered at the time.

Despite isolated doubts (Seitz 1981, 208–209; Retsch 2017, 95), the form of weapon just discussed is referred to as “Basilard”/“baselard”/“basilarda” in German, English and Italian-language research. This source term appears in German around 1300 in Mainz (Germany) as “beseler” (Steffens 2003, 6 [101]) and as “baßlar lang” with Heinrich

²¹ Some knives in the “Cantigas de Santa Maria” of Alfonso X el Sabio, Madrid, Real biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Ms. T-1-1, fol. 21v (cf. Bruhn de Hoffmeyer 1982, 78–79) show rows of rivets along the hilt but not at the cross guard.

²² New York, The Morgan Library, M.933, fol. 30v.

²³ Examples (Boccia, Coelho 1975, Fig. 23, Blair 1983–1985, 197, Pl. XLVI.A,E–F; Bressan 1996, 81; Poeschke 2003, Taf. 176, Abb. 77, 88) and the list of grave monuments (Michalak *et al.* 2017, 171, note 10).

²⁴ For example, on the Holy Sepulchre from Strasbourg Cathedral, now in the Musée de l'Oeuvre de Notre-Dame, or in the “Wenceslas Bible” produced in Prague around 1389/1400, Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. 2762, fol. 67.

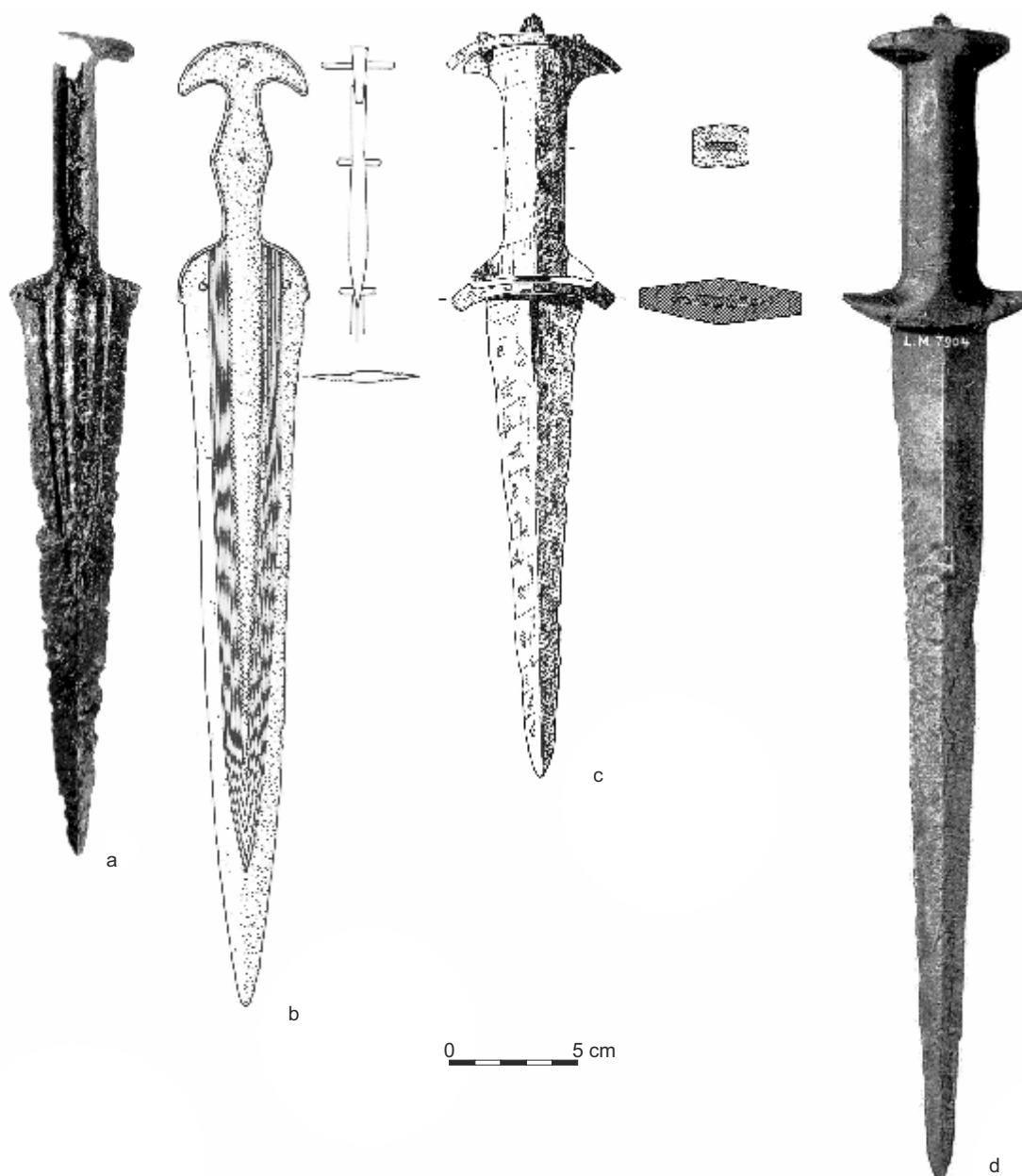


Fig. 7. Knives: a – double-edged Italian knife with four fullers from the presumed battlefield at Mühldorf in 1322; b – bronze sword of the Pontecagnano type, possibly from Abruzzo, 9th century BC; c – baselard from Böheimstraße in Stuttgart, typologically around 1300; d – baselard from Bielersee near Twann, typologically around 1400 (a – after *Ex.-Cat. Bamberg 1998, 312*; b – after *Bianco Peroni 1970, Taf. 31.212*; c – after *Löw 1962, Taf. 56*; d – after *Blum 1919, Taf. IX:5*)

Ryc. 7. Noże: a – dwusieczny nóż włoski z czterema zbroczami z przypuszczalnego pola bitwy pod Mühldorf w 1322 r.; b – miecz brązowy typu Pontecagnano, zapewne z Abruzzji, IX w. p.n.e.; c – baselard z Böheimstraße w Stuttgarcie, typologicznie ok. 1300 r.; d – baselard z jeziora Biel koło Twann, typologicznie ok. 1400 r. (a – wg *Ex.-Cat. Bamberg 1998, 312*; b – wg *Bianco Peroni 1970, Taf. 31.212*; c – wg *Löw 1962, Taf. 56*; d – wg *Blum 1919, Taf. IX:5*)

the Teichner († between 1372 and 1378) in Vienna (Niewöhner 1954, 129–131, No. 588, verse 118). In the dictionary “Vocabularius teutonicus in quo vulgares dictiones ordine alphabetico praeponuntur”, printed in Nuremberg in 1482, it is still listed as *Basle-knife, dagger or stabbing knife or side knife (Baslermesser.pugio.od*

stechmesser.od seytenmesser).²⁵ The word “bazelaire” or “badelaire” can also be found in the Romance languages from Italy to England, from 1300 to around 1500; referencing the city of Basel on the Upper Rhine (Blair 1983–1985). Although designations of origin also might refer to important places of distribution and not necessarily to the

²⁵ München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 4 Inc.c.a. 266, fol. 22r.

place of production, *six large baselards from Basel* (*vj basolardi grandi di basola*) appear in invoices from the Tuscan merchant Francesco Datini († 1410) in 1375 (*ibid.*, 196–197). Since these knives were not the usual type in Italy, they needed a specific name. It is possible that these were also made in Milan around 1400, as the mention of “basalardi” among the city’s products suggests (Frangioni 1994, 303; Bressan 1996, 81), and in Steyr, Austria, as laid down by the cutler’s constitutions 1428 and 1459 as a master’s qualification piece: “ain pasler” (Hack 1949, 98–99). The 1397 inventory of the arms and armour of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, listed among others *one new baselard of Bordeaux with maple grip – this grip is lightly harnessed with silver gilt 10s., four old baselards and falchions 5s* (*j novel baslard de bordeaux oue mazerhaste & le gayneleg[er]ement h[er]neis dargent enorrez x s iij veil’baslarden & fouchou[n]s v s*; Moffat 2022, 208–210, No. 144). In this case Bordeaux might just have been the transshipment point. As the joint listing with the falchions shows, the term probably also referred to curved knives in the 15th century (Blair 1983–1985, 199–200). The temporal and spatial distribution of the term throughout Western Europe from around 1300 to around 1500 and the linguistic reference to Basel thus differ significantly from the temporal and spatial occurrence of the knife form described above.

Exactly this temporal and spatial distribution applies to another type of knife. These knives have a comparatively simple, initially single-edged, but latterly double-edged blade with a tang. On this is a waisted wooden handle with a guard plate that is initially slightly curved towards the point (Fig. 7:c), at the single-edged and later double-edged examples curved away from it (Fig. 7:d). An embossed rivet forms the rear end of the single-edged knives, while the double-edged variants have a pommel plate curved towards the point. Early, single-edged examples include the dagger knives from the cistern of the Liechtenstein ruins on the Peterköfele near Laives in South Tyrol, Italy (Ex.-Cat. Tirol/Stams 1995, 241–242, Cat. 7.29 [St. Demetz]; Demetz 2011), which was probably abandoned soon after 1278 and subsequently filled in, one from a granary near the Mörsburg in the canton of Zurich in Switzerland (Kühn *et al.* 1999–2000, 280, Cat. 13, Taf. 1.13), that was destroyed by fire around 1300. Another comes from Altbüron

Castle in the canton of Lucerne (Switzerland), which was destroyed in 1309 (Rösch 2012, 62–63, Cat. 321), and from a well in the castle at the Letzi in Mülenen in the canton of Bern, Switzerland (Wild 1997, 41, 52–53, 104, Abb. 118). Of the double-edged variant, a find from around 1300 in a foundation of Mörsburg Castle (Schneider 1980, 208, Cat. 385; Obrecht 1981, 140, 153, 167, Cat. G 1) and a find from Schnabelburg Castle, Switzerland (Schneider 1960, 98, 102; 1980, 194, 207, Cat. 381), which was destroyed in 1309, both in the canton of Zurich, appear to be the oldest datable finds so far known. From these two early forms to the later double-edged form with the guard curved away from the blade and increasing in length (Fig. 7:d), there are countless finds, especially from present-day Switzerland (Blum 1919; Wegeli 1929; Lithberg 1932, 44 with Pl. 51:B; Meyer-Hofmann 1970, 154, 232, Cat. E 3; Ewald, Tauber 1975, 62, 81, 99, Cat. F 3; Schneider 1980; Roth Heege 2004, Abb. 81:189; Hartmann 2006, 132, 168, Cat. 148, Taf. 16:148; Frey 2014, above all Abb. 13 for the longer versions; Hostettler 2017, 50–51, Cat. 70). But they have also been found in what is now Baden-Württemberg (Brenker 2025), Alsace (Minot 2016, 59–60, Cat. 65) and Bavaria.²⁶ They can also be found in London (Laking 1920, 11, Fig. 747; Ex.-Cat. London 1987, 263, Cat. 174 [C. Blair]), the Netherlands (Zijlstra-Zweens 1987) and Poland (Michalak *et al.* 2017). Some of these are – in contrast to the Italian knives – adorned with silver as occasionally mentioned for baselards in wills and inventories (Moffat 2022, 174, 208, Nos 108, 144). A similar distribution emerges from pictorial sources. The oldest known evidence comes from the “Klosterneuburger Evangelienwerk” from the middle of the 14th century.²⁷ The reference to the emerging Swiss Confederation is also clearly recognisable in the pictorial sources. Weapons of this kind, which became increasingly longer, are frequently found in the miniatures of the “Amtliche Berner Chronik” (“Official Bern Chronicle”) from 1483 as well as the “Spiez Chronicle” from 1484 by Diebold Schilling the Elder († around 1486) and in the “Lucerne Chronicle” (1513) by Diebold Schilling the Younger († 1515) (Pfaff 1991; Frey 2014, 110, Abb. 15–17). The Swiss artists Urs Graf the Elder († 1528) and Niklaus Manuel, known as Deutsch († 1530), also show them being worn by many Swiss men-at-arms (Pfaff 1991, 154–157). In keeping with the spread of the word baselard, these

²⁶ A specimen was discovered in a field in Dollstein (Landkreis Eichstätt, Germany) and handed over to the Eichstätt Historical Society (Historischer Verein Eichstätt). Another one from Dornberg near Erharting is in the collection of the Archäologische Staatssammlung Munich.

²⁷ Stadtbibliothek Schaffhausen, Gen. 8, fol. 224r (cf. Blum 1919, 41–42, Taf. VI). The illustrations in the house Zum Grundstein in Winterthur (*ibid.*, 41, Taf. V) and in the “Codex Manesse” (*ibid.*, 174–176), which was probably produced in Zurich, show a different shape, with the ends of the hilt ending in two horns curved towards the blade (cf. *ibid.*, 109, Taf. IX.1–6).

knives can also be found in book illuminations and on funerary sculptures throughout Western Europe up to the 15th century (Laking 1920, 9; Ward-Perkins 1940, 44–45, Fig. 9.2; 4–5). Even the Augsburg patrician Matthäus Schwarz († around 1574) had himself depicted with such a dagger on his belt in 1529 in his so-called book of fashion²⁸ (cf. Rublack, Hayward 2015, 140, 298). These comparatively simple forged knives with tangs are often paraphrased in modern German or called early Swiss daggers after their name “schwizertegen” (*Schweizerisches Idiotikon* 1961, 1097–1098), which has appeared in Swiss texts since 1462 (e.g. Blum 1919; Schneider 1960). Baselard and Swiss dagger can therefore be understood as synonyms. It was not until the Late Middle Ages that the Confederates adopted the foreign name Schweizer as their proper name, while Basel did not become part of the Confederation until 1501. The question is whether “-degen” really only meant the longer versions, as often understood by Swiss scholars (e.g. Blum 1919, 35, 111–112; Schneider 1980, 58–59; Frey 2014), or only a dagger of any blade length in the medieval sense. The previous German-language designations for knives with an ‘I’-shaped riveted handle as a baselard and with a waisted solid handle and curved guard and pommel plates on a tang as a Swiss dagger are therefore probably incorrect. Although Italian- and English-language research has occasionally recognised the typological differences between the two fundamentally different knife forms (Rossi 2012, 232; Michalak *et al.* 2017, 171; Vignola 2020, 136–137), both are referred to as baselards. This subsuming of two independent weapons under one term found in the written evidence gave rise to an unresolvable debate lasting over 160 years as to the baselard’s provenance (e.g. Rossi 2012; Michalak *et al.* 2017, 170–171 – summarizing). As just pointed out, the question can only be resolved by separating the two forms. The knives with ‘I’-shaped handles that were widespread in Italy in the 13th and 14th centuries were called Italian knives in Bavaria, while the knives with waisted handles exported from the Upper Rhine to the whole of Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries were called baselards. The naming of types after Basel and Italy does not necessarily mean that the corresponding blades were all manufactured there. In terms of forging techniques, the knives from Basle were probably much more efficient imitations of the elaborate,

successful Italian models, which for its part was possibly based on a prehistoric model.

Further archaeological finds from Germany

Although the above-mentioned written sources already mention a wide variety of fighting knives for the two decades around 1200, their handles were probably largely made of wood and have therefore often long since rotted away. Furthermore it is likely that in some instances that the blades have been misidentified as coming from domestic knives.

A 9 cm long, slightly curved cross guard with an asymmetrical hole for the tang comes from 12th century layers from Schleswig, and could be part of a single-edged knife (Saggau 2000, 77, Abb. 51.3). A further single-edged knife with a cross guard from Osterlant Castle near Torgau, probably dates to the 13th century (Spehr 2012, 110, Abb. 149; Ex.-Cat. Braunschweig 2009, 370, Cat. 58a [W.-D. Steinmetz]). A 28.5 cm long, double-edged dagger with a cross guard and trapezoidal pommel made of non-ferrous metal was discovered in 2018 on the slope of Raffenburg Castle near Hagen, which was besieged in 1288 (Fig. 8), but was still in use until the 14th century (Cichy, Klötzer 2020). The tomb of a Count of Solms in the collegiate church in Altenburg an der Lahn, dated around 1270/1280, shows a sword with a comparable pommel (Kahsnitz 1992, 84, Abb. 58). A sword of similar proportions and hilt design from Geertruidenberg (Netherlands) was recovered with finds from the second to last quarter of the 13th century (Dütting *et al.* 2009).²⁹ Both swords support a dating of the dagger from the Raffenburg to before 1288. A 24 cm long dagger with a cubic pommel was recovered from a cistern used around 1250 to 1270 in the deserted town of Nienover im Solling, however, the cross guard is missing (König 2009, 172, Taf. 44.10). In addition to a few blades, the numerous sheaths of such daggers from Greifswald deposited between 1253 and 1274 speak in favour of an earlier emergence of short weapons (Schäfer, Schäfer 1996, 273–277). Apart from this, double-edged blades are only chronologically tangible thanks to surveys on the presumed 1315 battlefield of Morgarten, Switzerland (JeanRichard *et al.* 2017, 92, 125, Cat. 1–2, Taf. 1.1–2). A wooden handle with two spherical bulges towards the blade from Constance dates back to the late 13th century (Müller 1996, 177–179, Taf. 33.39). As these knives were sometimes worn at the centre front of the belt and the two rounded bulges with the handle rising vertically between them were

²⁸ Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Hs 27 N. 67a, fol. 93v.

²⁹ There is also a comparable sword from Ordrup Mose, Denmark, today Copenhagen, National Museum, inv. 16163 (Oakeshott 1994, 62, Pl. 20B); also from the canton of Bern (Wegeli 1929, 16–17, Cat. 145).



Fig. 8. Knife from the slope of Raffenburg Castle near Hagen, besieged in 1288. Photo *Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe*, image *T. Poggel*

Ryc. 8. Nóż ze zbocza zamku Raffenburg koło Hagen, obleganego w 1288 r. Fot. *Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe*, *T. Poggel*

certainly deliberately reminiscent of a phallus with testicles, they were already known in medieval England as “ballock daggers” or “ballok knyf” (Seitz 1981, 210).

The fact that the aforementioned finds of fighting knives can rarely be dated to the first half of the 13th century is due to the fact that they have no stylistic features that would allow us to determine when they were made. The destruction of the structures on the site can only be used to date the time at which they fell into disuse. As such, the weapons could have been several decades old. Archaeological dating therefore tends to make objects younger.

Western-European knives and pommels from the 13th century

The situation is different in the French-speaking area than in the German-speaking area, as knives there had characteristic shapes and decorations that can also be classified stylistically independently of the archaeological context. Some of the finds bear gilt pressed sheet metal plaques on their pommels, which are modelled on seals from the first half of the 13th century, but with different



Fig. 9. Knife from southern France, mid-13th century, Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. W1744. Photo *Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg*, image *G. Janßen*

Ryc. 9. Nóż z południowej Francji, połowa XIII w., Norymberga, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, nr inv. W1744. Fot. *Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg*, *G. Janßen*

inscriptions. A piece from the art market, now in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (Inv. W1744), bears an equestrian portrait on the front of the star-shaped pommel (Fig. 9). The horseman holds a sword with a trefoil-shaped pommel in his right hand, which is stretched backwards and for which comparisons can certainly be found on French seals of the 13th century (Demay 1880, 151–153). However, the angled arm is peculiar. Its triangular shield has pales in its coat of arms, like those of the Counts of Foix (La Plagne-Barris 1888, 153–169). The slightly pointed helmet at the top with a triangular incision as a sight slit is a somewhat peculiar depiction. In contrast to contemporary seals, the figure is also depicted in a very linear manner. This is probably due to the fact that the figure was driven into a sheet metal base from the back with a blunt chisel. The inscription reads + : A R I V A O E G E R V I P A I I : O G I [...] : [...] E [...] I I : I. According to the museum’s index card, a note was once affixed stating that it had been found near Pré du Quint. Perhaps this refers to Quint near Toulouse, which was still under the influence of the Counts of Foix. A very similar knife was found

in the Seille near Chalon-sur-Saône in 1869. Its hilt plate is adorned with a tendril-like dragon. A pressed sheet metal plaque is also attached to its eight-pronged pommel. It shows a horseman with a helmet from the first half of the 13th century leaping over a man lying on the ground with his sword arm raised and outstretched. The inscription there reads AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA.³⁰ A comparable knife was found in the Jonage Canal. A rider with a helmet and outstretched sword arm can be recognised on the pommel plaque, around which is written + IOHANNES FABER, meaning John the craftsman or the blacksmith. A double-edged dagger with a comparable hollow handle was found in the Saône near Trévoux. The seal on both sides of the pommel probably depicts a noble lady or a young gentleman with a bird of prey on their fist.³¹ Two other pieces allegedly come from old excavations in Switzerland and also near Lyon (Buttin 1933, 20, Cat. 27–28). A comparable excavation find from Durfort Castle comes closest to the Nuremberg museum piece.³² The decoration on one side only, combined with the curvature of the cutting edge, suggests that the knives were carried on the right side of the belt and then used to stab underhand. Somewhat later examples with shield-shaped fittings appear to be from the second half of the century and the early 14th century (Wegeli 1929, 275–276, Cat. 1038; Schneider 1960, Taf. 38.1–3; 1980, 201–202, Cat. 359–361; Baptiste 2016, 192).

A whole group of round pommels with a scalloped edge of eight or twelve lobes, made of hollow cast bronze and decorated with engravings or enamels, came onto the art market in various places, especially in and around Israel. The engraved coats of arms point to the Spanish-French region and date to the 13th century (perhaps even the first half of the 13th century). Therefore they may have come from weapons that French crusaders brought to the Holy Land during the Crusades, such as the Crusade of the Barons (1239–1241) or the Sixth Crusade (1248–1254) (Adams 2008, 44–45, Cat. 12, 23, 33; La Rocca 2011; Ashley, Biddle 2015, Cat. 3).³³ Others were found in England (Ashley, Biddle 2015, Cat. 1–2). The composition of the enamel used is said to be typical of the period around 1200

(Dandridge, Wypyski 2011). Another hint for the dating of these pommels is a drawing of a praying knight, which has girded a sword with a similar scalloped pommel of eighth lobes in an addition to the “Westminster Psalter” around 1250.³⁴

A pommel of the eight lobed type from the art market, now in the Landesmuseum Württemberg in Stuttgart (Inv. 1963–108), has a further hole that has already been interpreted as the attachment point for a so-called “arming chain”. In this context, a passage in the “Roman de la Violette” by Gérard de Montreuil, written between 1227 and 1229, is of interest: *And Lisiars placed his hand on a steel knife, which he had attached to an iron chain. (Et Lisiars coieient tent/ Sa main à j. coutiel d’achier/ Que il avoit fait atachier/ A une chaîne de fier; Michel 1834, 304, verse 6521–6524; Bach 1887, 43).* Daggers, which were attached to the breast of the coat of plate by arming chains, can be found in pictorial sources, especially in the second and third quarter of the 14th century (Boccia, Coelho 1975, Figs. 25, 53–54, 58; Breiding 2010, 134; Schönauer 2022, 82). It is possible that the chains (“cheten”) mentioned in 1276 in the inheritance law of the city of Augsburg among other weapons and pieces of armour (Meyer 1872, 151, Art. 76 § 1) could already be such arming chains. However, this interpretation is not based on any further details in the text.

This above-mentioned group of pommels also includes some rarer examples with crescent, crown or cross-shaped outlines (Adams 2008, 44–45, Cat. 20–22; La Rocca 2011, Fig. 29–29) of which some have been found in England and Scotland (Caldwell 1975/76; Ashley, Biddle 2015, Cat. 6, 8, 15–19). Such cloud, disc, crescent or crown shaped pommels are depicted at fighting knives in the “Picture Bible” of King Louis IX which was compiled between 1244 and 1254.³⁵

This group also comprises some rhombic pommels with engravings or enamel (La Rocca 2011, Fig. 24–25; Ashley, Biddle 2015, Cat. 12–14 said to be found in the Netherlands).³⁶ Specimens were also found in archaeological excavations in Provence (Démians d’Archimbaud 1980, 138–141, Fig. 3.3–5, 4.3–5), Wesermünde

³⁰ Chalon-sur-Saône, Musée Denon, Inv. C.A. 809 (cf. Chevrier 1866–1872; Ex.-Cat. Herne 2010, 368–369, Cat. F16 [D. Breiding]; Ex.-Cat. Speyer 2017, 358, Cat. 166 [J. Kling]).

³¹ Genf, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Inv. 2165–2166 (cf. Buttin 1933, 20–21, Cat. 29–30; Schneider 1960, Taf. 40–41; Peterson 1968, Fig. 28–29).

³² Durfort, Dépôt de fouille, Inv. 632 (cf. Ex.-Cat. Toulouse 1990, 257, Cat. 539 [B. Pousthomis], colour plate 539).

³³ Further examples: Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. W1764; Zürich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum, inv. LM 16228 (Schneider 1980, 201, Cat. 358).

³⁴ London, British Library, Royal MS 2 A XXII, fol. 220r.

³⁵ New York, The Morgan Library, MS M.638, fol. 10r, 12r, 29v, 36v, 37v, 41r.

³⁶ Further examples: Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. W1763; Chalon-sur-Saône, Musée Denon (Baptiste 2016, 193).



Fig. 10. The murder of Reinmar von Brennenberg in the “Codex Manesse”, around 1310, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 848, fol. 188r. Photo Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

Ryc. 10. Morderstwo Reinmara von Brennenberg, „Kodeks Manesse”, ok. 1310 r., Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 848, fol. 188r. Fot. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

(Germany) and Lund (Sweden) (Cloß, Post 1937/39, Abb. 5, 7).³⁷

In the inventory of King Louis X of France († 1316) is a knife with a handle made of wood and iron, which was said to have come from Louis the Saint (*i. couteau a manche de fust et de fer qui fu saint Loys si comme l'en dit*; Moffat 2022, 13, 60). Judging by the composition of the handle, it could be a knife of the type discussed here. Even if it is not, it is further evidence of mid-13th century

knives and shows that even knives of deceased persons were kept in their memory.

The knife becomes fashion

The written evidence mentioned above suggests that the fighting knife was already an integral part of knightly, bourgeois and peasant combat equipment in the first half of the 13th century. However, depictions of fighting knives being worn on the belt, i.e. not actively used, are rare in the High Middle Ages. The fighting knife on the left side of the belt of the soldiers in Saint-Gilles-du-Gard and Soria as well as a reference in the “Anseïs de Metz” are rarities (see above). From the middle of the 13th century, a soldier wearing mail armour and a kettlehat is depicted in the “Mainz Gospels”, who is about to smash the gate of a town with an axe. He is wearing a seemingly curved knife with a cross on his belt on the right³⁸ (cf. Brenker 2022b, 257). Fighting knives only became more common among foot soldiers in the early 14th century, for example in the wall paintings taken from the house “Zum langen Keller”, Rindermarkt 26, in Zurich,³⁹ in the murder of Reinmar von Brennenberg (Fig. 10) and in the depiction of Neidhart in the “Codex Manesse”, which was created there around 1310,⁴⁰ and in a wall painting in the affiliated church of St. Georgen in Rottenmann in Styria, Austria (Lanc 2002, 415–416, Abb. 552).

Even in depictions of knights, there is no evidence of the knife on the belt until the mid-13th century. For example, an equestrian statue of St. George supposedly made in Italy as early as the mid-13th century, carries an Italian knife (see above) on his belt on his right side; on his left he carries a sword with an S-shaped curved cross guard.⁴¹ A rider in a mural painting in the Palazzo Comunale in San Gimignano (Italy) from around 1288/1292 also has an Italian knife hanging from his belt (Boccia, Coelho 1975, 326, Fig. 23). The statue of St Maurice in Magdeburg Cathedral, which is stylistically dated to around 1240/1250, but may also be somewhat later, bears a probably double-edged dagger with an octagonal pommel

³⁷ The rhombic pommels resemble the sword pommels of two sleeping guards on the Holy Sepulchre in Constance Minster, Germany, which was created around 1260 (Brenker 2022a, 56–57, Fig. 5–6). This type can also be found in a wider shape, and presumably forged, on the figures of Herrmann von Meissen and Dietrich in Naumburg Cathedral (Oakeshott 1994, Fig. 16, 55; Ex.-Cat. Naumburg 2011, 919–923, Cat. X.15 [B. Leisner], 943–945, Cat. X.24 [S. Strohwal], the king horseback in Magdeburg (Ex.-Cat. Magdeburg 2009, 110–112, Cat. III.27* [K. Niehr]) and the sword and dagger of St Mauritius in Magdeburg Cathedral (Ex.-Cat. Magdeburg 2009, 106–108, Cat. III.25* [G. Suckale-Redlefsen]; Brenker 2022a, Fig. 3), which were created around the middle of the century.

³⁸ Aschaffenburg, Hofbibliothek, MS. 13, fol. 18v.

³⁹ Zürich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum, Inv. LM 19713.2 (cf. Wüthrich 1980, 59–61, Abb. 80–81).

⁴⁰ Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 848, fol. 188r; 273r (cf. Blum 1919, 174–176). For this type of knife see Blum (*ibid.*, 109, Taf. IX.1–6).

⁴¹ Frankfurt am Main, Liebieghaus, inv. 966 (cf. Ex.-Cat. Naumburg 2011, 1326–1328, Cat. XV.5 [G. Siebert]).

and an eyebrow-shaped cross on its right side; on the left is the sword with a matching pommel (Ex.-Cat. Magdeburg 2009, 106–108, Cat. III.25* [G. Suckale-Redlefsen]; Brenker 2022a, Fig. 3). As another example, the French condottiere Guillaume Bertrand de Durfort, who fell in the Battle of Campaldino in 1289, also carries a double-edged knife with a straight cross guard and crescent-shaped pommel on his right side on his posthumously erected epitaph in the Santissima Annunziata in Florence (Boccia, Coelho 1975, 326, Fig. 21–22). The fact that all these warriors carry their knives on their right side may indicate that they are using them underhand.

The rare appearance of fighting knives on the belt may be due to the fact that the objects depicted were primarily those important for the events depicted. In the picture cycles in the “Codico Rico” of the “Cantigas de Santa Maria”, for example, which were created around 1282 in the royal workshop of Alfonso the Wise, fighting knives only appear when they play a role in the plot,⁴² except for a few lightly armoured soldiers.⁴³ In the “Codex Manesse” of the early 14th century, knives are also found almost exclusively in a hunting context, except for the aforementioned fighting scenes.⁴⁴ Knives and belt purses also seem to have had a symbolic character for messengers, as the messengers in the “Vita S. Eduardi, regis et confessoris” illuminated in London around 1255/1260⁴⁵ and in the picture of the Burgrave of Rietenburg and Hartwig von Raute in the “Codex Manesse”⁴⁶ suggest. It was certainly not a mistake to carry a short blade when travelling, as criminals and wild animals posed a constant danger; not to mention the practical benefits.

For the sculptors of the early 14th century tomb of Gottfried von Cappenberg († 1127), the dagger

on the belt seems to have become a fashionable element worthy of depiction (Ex.-Cat. Herne 2010, 342–343, Cat. D 9 [B. Leenen]). Like swords and spurs, it became part of civilian fashion. By the middle of the 14th century, citizens also followed suit. As has already been made clear above, the pictorial sources often lag somewhat behind the actual appearance of an innovation (Brenker 2022b, 149–171). Conversely, the various prohibitions on carrying knives suggest that this was the case. However, from the artists’ perspective a distinction has certainly be made between the primary functional weapon of the High Middle Ages and the more fashionable accessory of the Late Middle Ages. The figures in the “Codex Manesse” and even more so the memorial picture of Gottfried von Cappenberg with their ankle-length robes no longer have anything about them that suggests an intention or necessity to use the knife. Like the eating knife before it,⁴⁷ it had now become part of the fashion.

Conclusion

The present study shows once again that pictorial sources alone are not a sufficient source basis for the history of an object. To this day, typologies of weapons and clothing are developed almost exclusively on the basis of pictorial evidence, both in academic research and in living history. Daggers in particular are a typical example of how archaeological finds are often dated to the 14th century because that is when they first appear in pictorial sources. As with similar studies on the crossbow and the emergence of plate armour, it has been shown that it is primarily administrative documents and courtly poetry that provide very early and meaningful evidence for weapons in the High Middle Ages. Pictorial sources and archaeological finds often lag behind (Brenker 2022a; 2022b).

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⁴² Madrid, Real biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Ms. T-1-1, fol. 21v and maybe with a shepherd at fol. 203v.

⁴³ Ibid., fol. 34v, 161v.

⁴⁴ Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 848, fol. 164v, 228r, 394r.

⁴⁵ Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.3.59, fol. 8v.

⁴⁶ Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 848, fol. 119v, 248r.

⁴⁷ For example, at the Wolfram chandelier in St Mary's Cathedral in Erfurt around 1160, at the tomb of Henry III of Sayn († 1247) around 1247/1248, at one of the kings on the tomb of Bishop Siegfried III of Eppstein († 1249) in Mainz Cathedral in the mid-13th century. At about the same time on the standing figure in Brunswick Cathedral and around 1270 on the tomb of Count Palatine Henry II († 1095) in Maria Laach Abbey (cf. Kahsnitz 1992, Abb. 24, 51–52, 119).

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PUGINAŁY W NIEMCZECH I EUROPIE ZACHODNIEJ W ROZWIĄNYM ŚREDNIOWIECZU. OD NARZĘDZIA DO BRONI I AKCESORIUM MODY

Streszczenie

Transformacja morfologiczna, która przekształciła nóż wszechstronnego zastosowania w broń, zaczęła się ok. 1200 r. Od początku nóż bojowy był głównie przeznaczony do pchnięć i uważany za broń skrytobójczą. Noże bojowe, określane jako noże do sztychów czy mizerykordie, pojawiają się w licznych tekstach prawnych już w pierwszej połowie XIII w. W tym samym czasie kroniki bitew sugerują, iż krótkie głównie z ostrym sztychem były ulubioną bronią do penetracji nielicznych otwarć w zbroi. W czasach ok. 1200 r. kolczuga i płaty okrywały niemal całe ciało. W połowie XIII w. w źródłach niemieckich pojawia się także nóż włoski. Określenie to zapewne odnosi się do typu noża, który był bardzo popularny we Włoszech i często niepo-

prawnie nazywany jest baselardem. Ponieważ sztylety uzyskały charakterystyczny kształt w XIII w., są one także częściej identyfikowane wśród znalezisk archeologicznych, aczkolwiek tylko niewiele z nich może być datowanych stratygraficznie albo na podstawie czasu użytkowania stanowiska. Dopiero w okresie po 1300 r. sztylety i noże bojowe stały się bardziej powszechne na rzeźbach nagrobnych i w iluminacjach książkowych. Najpóźniej w tym czasie stały się one częścią mody cywilnej. W ciągu 100 lat nóż codziennego użytku stał się wysoce skuteczną bronią, która zdobyła swoje miejsce w modzie cywilnej.

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