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## SOME TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF BYZANTINE SPATHA

This paper analyses finds of a special type of cross-guard, closer analogies of which may be found on Byzantine visual presentations from the IX–XI centuries. The only archaeological find of a sword with such a cross-guard, which includes a preserved blade, indicates the characteristics of the spatha — the type of sword that was widespread in Byzantium, in those times. Swords with this kind of cross-guard and the general characteristics of the spatha are depicted in visual presentations as the weapons of the protospatharios or some other high-ranking imperial guardsmen and, in the descriptions of Byzantine court ceremony, this weapon was also called a spatha.

*Key words:* spatha, Byzantine sword, protospatharios, spatharios, cross-guard.

У раду се анализирају налази особеног типа накрсница чије се ближе аналогije могу наћи на византијским ликовним представама IX–XI века. Једини архелoшки налаз мача са оваквом накрсном који има сачувано и сечиво указује на особине спате — тип мача који је био раширен у Византији тога времена. Мачеви са оваквим накрсницама и општим карактеристикама спате приказани су на ликовним представама као наоружање протоспатара или неких других дворских гардиста високог ранга, а у описима византијских дворских церемонија ово оружје такође носи назив спата.

*Кључне речи:* спата, византијски мач, протоспатар, спатар, накрсница.

Several rare archaeological finds with a characteristically shaped cross-guard, originate from the Balkan region. The best preserved is a sword that was discovered by chance near the village of Galovo, in northern Bulgaria.<sup>1</sup> The blade is straight, two-edged, it has an oval cross section, and is without a fuller or ridge along the middle (Fig. 1). The blade edges extend almost parallel towards a short and rounded point. The pommel of the sword is missing and the hilt is for a

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<sup>1</sup> Site Ostrovski okop, about 15 km north of the town of Knezha, *B. Nikolov*, *Rannobălgarski nahodki kray Ostrovskiya okop*, *Arheologiya* 4/2 (1962) 36–37, Obr. 9.

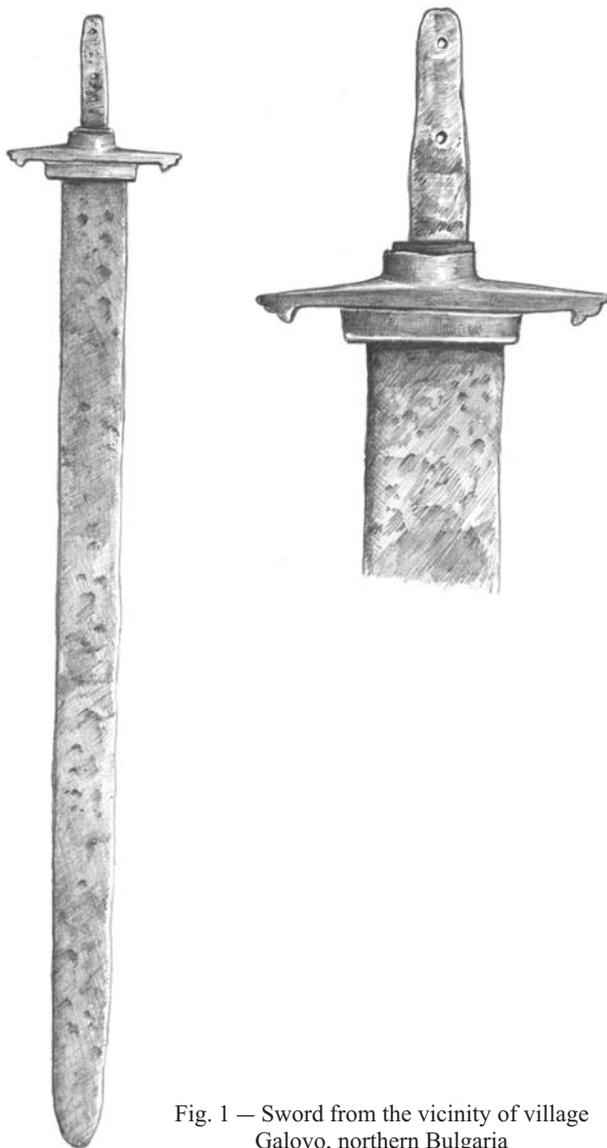


Fig. 1 — Sword from the vicinity of village Galovo, northern Bulgaria

one hand. On the tang of the hilt there are two holes for rivets that served to fix the grip, which are missing today. The total preserved length of the sword, without the pommel, is 89 cm. As opposed to the other parts which are of steel, the cross-guard was cast in bronze and, with its shape, represents an important, unique feature. It is straight, 13 cm long, with a cylindrical, oval collar on the lower side towards the blade, as well as on the upper side towards the hilt, while its ends are curved and stylised in the shape of a three-leafed floral motif.

Besides this one, however, there are a few more bronze cross-guards of the same type. One originated from archaeological excavations in the upper town of the Pliska locality in north-eastern Bulgaria (Fig. 2). Although partly damaged, one may conclude that it also has an oval collar on the upper and the lower sides, its ends are thick, straight and without any ornaments, and

the total length is 12 cm.<sup>2</sup> The third example of this type of cross-guard is a find of unknown origin, from north-eastern Bulgaria (Fig. 3). One arm is broken, and its length is 12.3 cm.<sup>3</sup> Apart from also being straight with collars on the upper and

<sup>2</sup> S. Stanchev, Razkopki i novootkriti materiali v Pliska prez 1948 g., IAI 2 (1955) 205, Obr. 24; V. Yotov, Vāorāzhenieto i snaryazhenieto ot Bālgarskoto srednovekovie (VII–XI vek), Varna 2004, 45, cat. No. 428, T. XXIX.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 45, cat. No. 429, Obr. 12, T. XXIX.

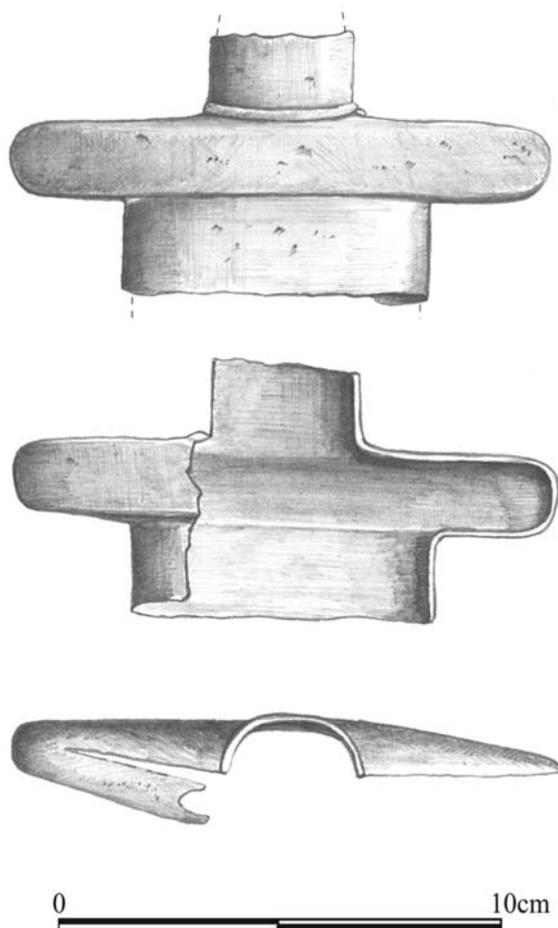


Fig. 2 — Cross-guard from the Pliska locality, north-eastern Bulgaria

lower sides, it is decorated with simple geometrical incisions in the middle and small, spherical endings at the ends. The openings on the lower side of these two cross-guards are symmetrically shaped which, apart from their typological features, indicate that they most probably also belonged to swords. In addition to the said finds, we know, from earlier, of an example of this type of cross-guard of unknown origin.<sup>4</sup> With its simple shape, it bears the closest resemblance to the cross-guard from Pliska. The rich ornamentation, covering the entire surface, suggests the time of the rule of the Fatimids in Egypt, and the verses from the Koran (Sura 112) on it indicate the time of military confrontation with

<sup>4</sup> S. *Al-Sarraf*, *Close Combat Weapons in the Early 'Abbāsīd Period. Maces, Axes and Swords*, ed. D. *Nicolle*, *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, Woodbridge 2002, fig. XII-40; D. *Nicolle*, *Byzantine and Islamic Arms and Armour: Evidence for Mutual Influence*, *Graeco-Arabica* 4 (1991) 305, 312, fig. 5.

Christianity, most probably in the period of the wars with Byzantium, in the X century.<sup>5</sup>

The cross-guard on a sword from the Čierny Brod locality in western Slovakia, from around the first half of the IX century bears some similarities to the aforesaid finds.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that, generally speaking, it does not have the shape of a horizontal bar like all the other examples, it is in fact also horizontal, except that its arms are circular in shape but positioned along a horizontal axis. Like the previous finds, it too is of bronze, with cylindrical collars on the upper and lower sides. The blade of the sword is without a fuller or ridge, while the bronze pommel has a simple, circular shape in the form of an expanded stylised knob, fixing the grip of the hilt from the upper side. Nevertheless, the shape of its arms does not bear any similarity to the aforesaid finds from Bulgaria and Egypt, therefore, it does not belong to this type of cross-guard even though, ostensibly, it is similar to it.

As close analogies for the shape of the arms of the cross-guard on the sword from the vicinity of the village of Galovo in northern Bulgaria (Fig. 1), one may mention the Byzantine visual presentations from around the second half of the XI century. These are mosaic presentations of swords in the monasteries of Nea Moni on the island of Chios from around 1045, and Daphni in Attica, from around 1100. Preserved in the naos of the Daphni monastery, not far from Athens, are presentations of the half-figures of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus with swords (Fig. 4).<sup>7</sup> The cross-guard of St. Bacchus' sword is straight, horizontal, with stylised ends in the shape of a trefoil floral motif, bearing a close resemblance to the sword from Bulgaria. The cross-guard of St. Sergius' sword is almost identical, except that the artist did not depict the ornament on the ends of the cross-guard in such detail. The difference between the arms of the cross-guards on the visual presentations and the said find lies almost solely in the fact that the ornament on the cross-guard from Bulgaria faces downwards to the blade, and those from Greece, up towards the hilt.

Among the presentations of eight martyrs in the small dome of the narthex, in the Nea Moni monastery on Chios, are the figures of St. Bacchus (Fig. 5) and St. Sergius, with swords in their left hand.<sup>8</sup> The images of these two saints look very like each other, as well as their swords. The cross-guards are horizontal, straight, and with ends bent at sharp angles towards the blade, like the arms of the

<sup>5</sup> *D. Nicolle*, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era, 1050–1350: Islam, Eastern Europe and Asia*, London 1999, 123, cat. 294.

<sup>6</sup> *B. Chropovský*, *Slovensko na Úsvite dejín*, Bratislava 1970, 147; *A. Kiss*, *Frühmittelalterliche byzantinische Schwerter im Karpatenbecken*, *Acta AASH* 39 (1987) 204–205, Abb. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *E. Diez* — *O. Demus*, *Byzantine mosaics in Greece. Hosios Lucas and Daphni*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1931, fig. 68 (St. Bakchos), fig. 69 (St. Sergios); *Nicolle*, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era*, 37–38, cat. 40.

<sup>8</sup> *D. Mouriki*, *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, Athens 1985, 66–67, Pl. 58, 60. The presentation of St. Bacchus is better preserved so that the shape of the cross-guard on his sword is clearer.

cross-guard of the said find from Bulgaria. Although the general shape of their ends is very similar, the cross-guards from Nea Moni are not decorated with the trefoil floral motif, as is the case of the sword from northern Bulgaria. All four mentioned visual presentations depict swords in their scabbards, so all one can conclude is that the hilts are for one hand and that the blades are straight, long (in the images from the Nea Moni monastery) and most probably, two-edged. The cross-guards from Nea Moni are not depicted with collars while, in the Daphni monastery, one can recognise only the upper collars (primarily, on the sword of St. Sergius),<sup>9</sup> so their similarity with the archaeological find from Bulgaria is limited primarily to the arms and their ends.

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All the said archaeological finds of cross-guards are distinguished by straight, horizontal arms and cylindrical, oval collars, which extend to the blade on the lower side, and to the hilt, on the upper side. Both cylindrical collars are nearly the same length, while the upper is narrower and the lower is wide enough to sheathe the broad blade. In some cases, the ends of the cross-guards can be stylized or ornamented. One of their particular characteristics is that they are all made of bronze, which is generally a very rare phenomenon among the medieval finds in Europe. Cross-guards with a collar, primarily based on visual sources, have been recognized as one of the variants that appear on the swords in Byzantium.<sup>10</sup> The said archaeological finds of straight cross-guard, with a cylindrical collar on the upper and on the lower side, would also belong to them.

The curved, so-called D-shaped cross-guard from the X–XI century also has a cylindrical collar towards the blade.<sup>11</sup> However, even though they are close in terms of time and territory to the straight cross-guards with a collar, this is their almost sole, mutual morphological similarity. The origin and dating of early medieval, straight cross-guards with a collar on the lower side was sought mainly based on Byzantine and Islamic artistic sources. Those from the Manuscript of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, from around 880, would be one of the earliest, to which attention has been drawn earlier on.<sup>12</sup> To these, one should add the miniature ‘St. Gregory and Theodosius’<sup>13</sup> in which the *protospatharioi* or some other high-ranking guardsmen in the emperor’s suite carried the swords. In spite of their being depicted in scabbards, on which one can distinguish a straight cross-guard with a short and broad lower collar. The swords carried by people from the

<sup>9</sup> Diez — Demus, Byzantine mosaics in Greece, fig. 69.

<sup>10</sup> T. G. Kolias, Byzantinische Waffen. Ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung, Wien 1988, 143; Nicolle, Byzantine and Islamic Arms and Armour, 305 sq.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 306.

<sup>12</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Grec 510, Fol. 137, Fol. 215v; *ibid.* figs. 36a, b.

<sup>13</sup> Ms. Grec 510, Fol. 239; S. Der Nersessian, The Illustrations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Paris Gr. 510, DOP 16 (1962) fig. 12.

imperial suite were straight, long and most probably two-edged (the scabbards are of a symmetrical shape, the hilts are straight and in the same axis as the blade).

Besides some more schematic and uncertain images,<sup>14</sup> the presentation in the Theodore Psalter from 1066 belongs to a rather later date, which depicts a two-edged sword without a fuller, and with a straight cross-guard that has a collar on the lower side.<sup>15</sup> The collar is longer and narrower than in the aforesaid examples from Bulgaria and Egypt. Likewise, the blade has a different shape than on the sword from northern Bulgaria, with edges tapering almost smoothly towards a sharp point. One should also note that the cross-guard is of a bronze colour in contrast to the blade, which is white or bluish-white, the colour of steel. Based on the aforesaid and some later visual presentations from Byzantium and the Islamic countries, cross-guards with a collar were dated to the IX century onwards,<sup>16</sup> or to around the X–XI century.<sup>17</sup> Their origin was sought in the Middle East, in Byzantium and the Islamic countries.

Certain rare finds of *spatha* from the times of the Great Migrations also have a collar on the lower or upper side.<sup>18</sup> Certain types of cross-guards with collars on the upper and lower sides also appear on some specific swords and pallasches that were used at the time of the first Avar Khaganate in Pannonia and later, and over the broader area of the Eurasian steppes. Their cross-guards are short and sometimes have a collar on the upper and lower sides. The origin of this weapon can be sought in Persia as they are very similar to some preserved specimens of the richly decorated swords from the times of the Sassanid dynasty.<sup>19</sup> The cross-guards of these Persian swords are, however, very short and do not have a collar on the lower side, whilst the upper side often extends to the integral metal grip of the hilt.

The integral metal grip is known from Roman times and the Great Migrations and it was also used in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> It also appears on a luxuriously ornamented sword, discovered in a rich hoard near Malaya Pereshchepina, in eastern Ukraine, which is very much like the Avar swords from Pannonia.<sup>21</sup> Like many of the Avarian pallasches, it also has a ring on the top and P-shaped scabbard mouths. For example, the specimen of a sword from an Avar grave on the Kecel site in southern Hungary bears a great resemblance

<sup>14</sup> *Nicolle*, Byzantine and Islamic Arms and Armour, figs. 20, 46a, 60b, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore Psalter, British Library, Add. 19.352, f.191.

<http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/results.asp?imagex=8&searchnum=0002&image=022965> (20. 06. 2008).

<sup>16</sup> *Nicolle*, Byzantine and Islamic Arms and Armour, 305–306, fig. 40.

<sup>17</sup> *Kolias*, Byzantinische Waffen, 143.

<sup>18</sup> *A. K. Ambroz*, Vostochnoevropejskie i sredneaziatskie stepi V – pervoj poloviny VIII v., ed. *S. A. Pletnyova*, Step'i Evrazii v e'pohu srednevekovja, Moskva 1981, 15, Ris. 5/5,6.

<sup>19</sup> *M. Gorelik*, Arms and Armour in South-Eastern Europe in the Second Half of the First Millennium AD, ed. *D. Nicolle*, A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour, Woodbridge 2002, fig. XI–2. 9–12; *Al-Sarraf*, Close Combat Weapons, fig. XII–17.

<sup>20</sup> *D. Nicolle*, Two Swords from the Foundation of Gibraltar, *Gladius* 22 (2002) 174–176, figs. 9, 10, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *V. N. Zelenskaya — Z. A. Lvova — B. I. Marshak — I. V. Sokolova*, Pametnici na nomadite ot Iztochna Evropa ot VII do nachaloto na VIII vek, (edd.) *V. N. Zelenskaya — I. P. Zasetskaya — K. V.*

to it.<sup>22</sup> Theirs cross-guards have a very similar shape and the essential difference is that the sword from Hungary does not have an integral metal grip, but a collar on the upper side of the cross-guard. In this difference, perhaps we may seek the purpose of the cylindrical collar on the upper side of the cross-guard — that it was part of the solution for fixing the grip (most probably wooden) — which was a substitute for the integral grip. In this kind of solution, the lower part of the grip was fixed by the collar of the cross-guard, and the upper part, by the pommel in the form of a simple circular, metal knob. Sabers and pallasches from the IX–XI century from the regions of the Ukrainian and the southern Russian steppes have a grip that is fixed with a cap-like shaped pommel from the upper side and, from the lower side, by the cross-guard, that is, its cylindrical collar.<sup>23</sup> Similar cross-guards also appear among the finds of sabers dating from the same time, in Bulgaria.<sup>24</sup>

The integral metal grip on some specimens of Persian swords was also replaced by a similar solution that imitated it but in the middle of the hilt, it is 'interrupted' and actually consists of two parts.<sup>25</sup> The lower part of such a hilt is connected with the cross-guard and represents an integral part of it and so it can be interpreted as its cylindrical extension, that is, as the collar. The upper part of the grip is shaped like a long metal knob. This is one more analogy between the swords and pallasches of the European nomads and Persian swords from around the first half of the VII century, and indicates what kind of role the upper cylindrical collar of the cross-guard had on both these weapons. The existence of a collar on cross-guards, which extends to the hilt, can thus be perceived as part of the grip, which was an integral part of the cross-guard so as to attach it more firmly. The upper cylindrical collar could have had the same role in the said cross-guards from Bulgaria, although none of these finds have fully preserved hilts. This role is indicated in an aforesaid sword from Čierny Brod, western Slovakia, where it served to encase the grip from its lower side, while on the upper side, this was performed by the pommel in the form of a stylised, circular metal knob. The aforesaid pommel and cross-guard from Egypt with an inscription from the Koran, which are the sole preserved parts of a former sword, evidently have the same role. The holes on the tang on the hilt of the sword from northern Bulgaria (Fig. 1) indicates that its, most probably, wooden grip was also fixed with rivets to the tang.

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*Kasparova et. all*, *Säkrovishte na han Kuvrat*, Sofiya 1989, 46, cat. 79. This sword, as well as some other valuable finds in this hoard (or grave), are usually interpreted as part of a diplomatic gift, which the emperor Heraclius sent the Bulgarian khan, Kubrat, some time during the fourth decade of the VII century.

<sup>22</sup> Gy. László, *Études archéologiques sur l'histoire de la société des Avars*. *Archaeologia Hungarica* 34 (1955) 232–238, T. 46/8, T. 52/5.

<sup>23</sup> A. N. Kirpichnikov, *Drevnerusskoe oruzhie I, Mechi i sabli*, *Arheologiya SSSR* E1–36, Moskva-Leningrad 1966, 61–72; *Gorelik*, *Arms and Armour*, 133, 139, fig. XI–15; H. Nickel, *The Mutual Influence of Europe and Asia in the Field of Arms and Armour*, ed. D. Nicolle, *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, Woodbridge 2002, 120.

<sup>24</sup> Yotov, *Väoräzhenieto i snaryazhenieto*, 61, 69 (type 2 A), *Obr.* 27/448–450, T. XXXV/465–466, T. XXXVI/ 449–450, 467–470.

<sup>25</sup> *Gorelik*, *Arms and Armour*, figs. XI–2, 10.

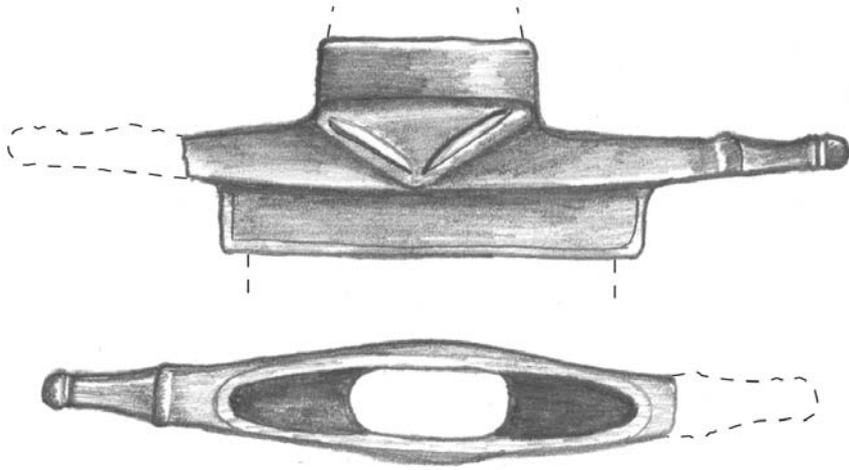


Fig. 3 — Cross-guard from unknown site, north-eastern Bulgaria

Among the Avar finds from Pannonia is the specimen of a saber from a warrior's grave that came from the Šebastovce locality near Košice in eastern Slovakia.<sup>26</sup> The shape of its cross-guard is similar to those on European swords. Its arms are long and slender, and the lower collar is short and broad, which approximates it to the said archaeological finds of cross-guards from Bulgaria. It does not have an integral metal grip nor a collar on the upper side, while a metal plaque-handle that has finger grooves, is fixed to the wooden grip. The metal handle with finger grooves, like some ornaments on the cross-guard itself, represents yet another element, suggesting a closer connection to the aforesaid Sassanid swords. The short, horizontal cross-guard, with the lower collar and with globular ends, is also to be found in a single-edged sword from the vicinity of Shumen in eastern Bulgaria, which is also dated to around the second half of the VII century.<sup>27</sup>

A cross-guard from an unknown site in north-eastern Bulgaria has ornaments at the ends of its arms, in the form of small spherical endings (Fig. 3). The spherical endings are one of the features of the cross-guards on the said early medieval sabers and pallsches of the nomadic tradition in south-eastern Europe.<sup>28</sup> The short, horizontal or slightly curved cross-guards with spherical endings were known even in Byzantium, during this time.<sup>29</sup> This kind of cross-guard was also discovered in a hoard of metal objects from the X–XI century, on the archaeological site of

<sup>26</sup> V. Budinský-Krička — A. Točík, Jazdecký hrob 94/1967 z doby Avarskej ríše v Košicach, časť Šebastovce, Zborník prác L'udmile Kraskovskej, Bratislava 1984, 184, Obr. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Yotov, Vāorāzhenieto i snaryazhenieto, 39–40, cat. No. 420, Obr. 12, T. XXVIII.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. n. 23 and 24.

<sup>29</sup> Koliaš, Byzantinische Waffen, 144. This kind of cross-guard was also depicted on the fresco of St. Theodoros Stratelates in the St. Panteleimon monastery in Nerezi, northern Macedonia, dating from 1164, G. Škrivanić, Oružje u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji, Bosni i Dubrovniku, Beograd 1957, 142, sl. 80.

Gamzigrad, eastern Serbia, and from the same locality, we have two sword blades dating from the same period but they belong to a different context of find.<sup>30</sup>

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The sword from the vicinity of the village of Galovo in northern Bulgaria is the only specimen of the aforesaid cross-guard finds of this type, which also has other preserved sword parts. Its 78 cm-long and 5 cm-wide (below the cross-guard) two-edged blade with a rounded point suggests the general typological features of a spatha. The remaining, aforesaid finds of this type of cross-guard from the Balkans, based on the broad and symmetrical lower cylindrical collars, suggest that they, most probably, also belonged to two-edged swords with broad blades.<sup>31</sup> The blade from Galovo is without a fuller, which is a rare phenomenon among early medieval swords in Europe. The Arabian philosopher Al Kindi from the first half of the IX century mentions blades without a fuller, as a feature of the Byzantine swords.<sup>32</sup> The blade from northern Bulgaria is distinguished by its compact shape, with edges that extend almost parallel towards the short and rounded tip. Blades of this type have been recognized as Byzantine and Middle Eastern and they are roughly dated to the period of the VII–XI centuries.<sup>33</sup> According to its dimensions, this example would belong among the longest, currently known finds of swords that one may assume are of Byzantine origin.<sup>34</sup> According to its general characteristics — the long, straight, two-edged blade with a rounded tip — this sword would correspond to the typological features of the spatha, which was the most widespread type of sword in Byzantium up to the XII century.<sup>35</sup> The length of its blade would tally with the only preserved written data regarding the dimensions of Byzantine swords in those times. In the *Sylloge Tacticorum* manuscript, from around the beginning of the X century, it says of cavalry swords that they should be no shorter than four spans (93.6 cm), while its blade should not exceed this length. The infantry carried swords that were four spans, that is, 93.6 cm long (1 σπιθαμή = 12 δάκτυλοι = 23.4 cm).<sup>36</sup> With the assumed length of the hilt of

<sup>30</sup> *D. Janković*, U sutonu antike — Slovenski grad, (edd.) *D. Srejšević — D. Janković — A. Lalović — V. Jović*, Gamzigrad, kasnoantički carski dvorac, Beograd 1983, 155, 157, 159, kat. 316, 317, sl. 126.

<sup>31</sup> The type of blade of a cross-guard of unknown origin with verses from the Koran as a rule was also interpreted in this way. cf. n. 4 and 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Kirpichnikov*, *Drevnerusskoe oruzhie*, 46, with sources.

<sup>33</sup> *Nicolle*, *Byzantine and Islamic Arms and Armour*, 302–303; about these features of Byzantine blades, *Kolias*, *Byzantinische Waffen*, 144–145.

<sup>34</sup> About some finds of Byzantine swords, as well as the dimensions of their blades, *Kiss* *Frühmittelalterliche byzantinische Schwerter*; *M. Aleksić*, *Medieval Swords from Southeastern Europe*. Material from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Belgrade 2007, 76–79.

<sup>35</sup> *A. Bruhn-Hoffmeyer*, *Military Equipment in the Byzantine Manuscript of Scylitzes in Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid*, *Gladius* 5 (1966) 91–92; *Kolias*, *Byzantinische Waffen*, 137–138.

<sup>36</sup> *Kolias*, *ibid.* 137.

around 16 cm,<sup>37</sup> the blade of the sword from the vicinity of Galovo would correspond with these values, and with the assumed height of its missing pommel of about 3 cm, the length of its hilt would also closely approach these values.

The *spatha* (σπάθη, σπαθίον) was one of the most frequent terms used in Byzantine sources as the word for a sword. It was taken from the Roman, that is, Celtic *spatha*, the type of straight and, in its time, long, two-edged sword. In Byzantine written sources, this term generally retained its meaning for the type of long, two-edged sword, and it was not used to denote, for instance, types that had single edged or curved blades.<sup>38</sup>

The general typological features of swords that are presented in the aforesaid scene of St. Gregory and Theodosius, in the Manuscript of St. Gregory of Nazianzus from around 880, would primarily correspond to the *spatha*, and one may conclude the same for the swords on the presentations of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus in Nea Moni on Chios (Fig. 5) and, with a little less certainty — because the blades are not depicted in their entire length — on the presentations from the Daphni monastery near Athens (Fig. 4). The hilts of these swords are for one hand, and although their blades are in scabbards, one may conclude that they are straight, long and most probably two-edged. Given their position alongside of the emperor, the men that carried swords in the scene of St. Gregory and Theodosius could be *protospatharioi*, *spatharioi* or some other high-ranking imperial guardsmen.<sup>39</sup>

The title *spatharios* (σπαθάριος) had a long tradition in Byzantium and most probably derives from the Roman title of *cubicularius*. The basic, formal role of the *spatharios* was to carry the imperial weapons, and the basic insignia of this palace dignitary was a sword with a golden hilt.<sup>40</sup> The title *protospatharios* (πρωτοσπαθάριος) became a separate, higher-ranking palace dignitary at the end of the VII century, formally, as the leader of the *spatharioi*<sup>41</sup> and their attribute was also a sword. The men from the imperial suite could belong to some other, lower-ranking units that generally belonged to the οἱ βασιλικοὶ ἄνθρωποι and whose basic role was the emperor's personal security. In the Book of Ceremonies by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the *spatha* was mentioned several times, as the weapon of the *protospatharioi*.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> This value was proposed by Prof. Taxiarchis Kolia, although with more tolerance we could assume its length to be around 15 cm (± ca 1 cm).

<sup>38</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> The people from the imperial suite wore a necklace that can be interpreted as a μωνιάκιον, worn by high-ranking imperial guardsmen — the different ranks of the *spatharioi* and *protospatharioi* and *manglavites*, H. Maguire, *Byzantine court culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington 2004, 47. On the maniakion, cf. M. F. Hendy, *Alexius I to Michael VIII. 1081–1261*, eds. A. R. Bellinger, P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, Vol. 4, Washington 1999, 161–163.

<sup>40</sup> J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century*, London 1911, 22, 112; N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Paris, 1972, 297–298.

<sup>41</sup> *Oikonomides*, *ibid.* 297, 328.

<sup>42</sup> *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae libri duo*, ed. I. Reiske, Bd.1–2, Bonn 1829, I, 82; II 574–575, 640.

In the Nea Moni monastery on Chios, as well as the Daphni monastery near Athens, the presentations of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus are very similar to each other. In both cases, the saints are wearing court dress,<sup>43</sup> and some items (the *spekion*, *maniakion*) are part of the uniform of the *protospatharioi*.<sup>44</sup> Besides swords, all four presentations depict St. Sergius and St. Bacchus with a kind of ceremonial weapon on a pole, the *spathobaklion*, which was also characteristic for the imperial court guard, above all, for the *protospatharioi*.<sup>45</sup> The two saints, who lived at the beginning of the IV century, belonged to a military unit of the palace guard, the *schola gentilium*, which was one of the reasons for them to be depicted in official attire, that is, the uniforms of the highest-ranking imperial guardsmen.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from a specific type of cross-guard, the blade of the sword from Bulgaria also indicates that it was manufactured in Byzantium or on the model of Byzantine swords, and that, according to all its general typological characteristics, it belongs to a type of spatha. The said visual presentations indicate that swords with these characteristics could exist not only in the weaponry of the Byzantine army but also that some specimens of ceremonial weapons could also have these typological features. The fact that on the Byzantine visual presentations, swords with these features appear as an attribute and an element of the ceremonial weapons of the *protospatharioi*, indicates that this applies to a clearly defined kind of weapon called the *spatha*.

The swords that were used during imperial ceremonies were often mentioned as being of gold. Gold or gilt can primarily refer only to their hilts or scabbards.<sup>47</sup> Given that they were valuable, these weapons were primarily intended for court protocol and were not used in combat.<sup>48</sup> In the description of the reception ceremony of Arab emissaries to the Byzantine court in 946, it was recorded that the members of the imperial palace suite (*σπαθαροκουβικουλάριοι*) carried gold swords (*χρυσόκανα σπαθία*), whereas the *σπαθαροκουβικουλάριοι* of a slightly lower rank, carried their own, ordinary swords, which were obviously not of gold.<sup>49</sup> This indicates the possibility that the ceremonial and ordinary swords did not differ significantly in type but in their rich ornamentation, that is, whether they were of

<sup>43</sup> C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Aldershot, Hants, 2003, 158.

<sup>44</sup> Maguire, *Byzantine court culture*, 45, 47; P. L. Grotowski, *Military attire of warrior saints — between iconography and written sources*, Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London 2006 = [www.byzantinecongress.org.uk/comms/Grotowski\\_paper.pdf](http://www.byzantinecongress.org.uk/comms/Grotowski_paper.pdf), (07. 02. 2009), 1–9.

<sup>45</sup> Grotowski, *ibid.* 7–8.

<sup>46</sup> Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, 146, 261–262.

<sup>47</sup> Bruhn-Hoffmeyer, *Military Equipment*, 91–92.

<sup>48</sup> M. G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (XI–XV Centuries)*, Leiden 2003, 103.

<sup>49</sup> οἱ σπαθαροκουβικουλάριοι ἐφόρεσαν ἐπάνω τῶν καμισίων αὐτῶν χρυσᾶ παραγαύδια καὶ τὰ χρυσόκανα σπαθία τῶν ἀξιωματῶν. οἱ λοιποὶ σπαθαροκουβικουλάριοι οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες χρυσᾶ παραγαύδια ἐφόρεσαν τὰ ἑαυτῶν καμίσια καὶ σπαθία. De Cerimoniis, II 574–575. About σπαθαροκουβικουλάριοι cf. Oikonomides, *Les listes*, 300–301; Maguire, *Byzantine court culture*, 47.

gold (or gilded) or not.<sup>50</sup> Medieval ceremonial swords in Europe, most often, are typologically the same or very similar to other swords of their times, and exceptions mostly fall in the late medieval period. The typological similarity of the find of the sword from northern Bulgaria and the visual presentations of this weapon used in court ceremony would confirm such an assumption.

Considering that this is the case of a sole, chance find outside of any archaeological context, the circumstances in which the sword from the village Galovo arrived in the ground on this site can only be supposed. It could have reached this part of the Bulgarian Danube basin during peaceful Bulgarian-Byzantine contacts, just as it could have in circumstances of war. In the latter case, one could primarily consider the conflicts in which the Byzantine army participated in this area during the second half of the X and early XI century. After the conquest of Great Preslav in April 971, Byzantine emperor John I Tzimiskes proceeded to the lower Danube, where he conquered the city of Silistra (Dorostolon) after a siege in June, which successfully ended the military campaign against Prince Sviatoslav I of Kiev.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the main military events took place about 250 kilometers east of the area where the sword was discovered. A somewhat more realistic possibility is that the sword could have arrived here during the Byzantine military campaign to crush the Bulgarian rebellion under Samuel, some thirty years later. In the conquest of north-eastern Bulgaria in the year 1000, a large Byzantine army under the command of the patrikios Theodorakan and the protospatharios Nikephoros Xiphias conquered the cities of Great and Lesser Preslav, and Pliska.<sup>52</sup> At the end of the winter in 1002, the emperor Basil II started the siege of Vidin. One can assume that in the preparations for the siege, one section of the Byzantine troops marched along the Danube, from the east to Vidin. In this case, the place where the sword was discovered, which is located about 140 kilometres downstream from Vidin, could have been in the direction of this military movement. However, the sword could also have arrived here when Byzantine military garrisons were stationed in Bulgaria throughout most of the XI century, and that it had been in the possession of a Bulgarian or even Russian, or perhaps some other military force or warrior. Furthermore, we may also assume the possibility that it arrived here in other circumstances, such as a trade, or a diplomatic gift and the like.

Although finds of Byzantine swords are still rather rare, we may assume that the term *spatha* in Byzantine sources in this period, also referred to swords like the aforesaid chance find near the village of Galovo in northern Bulgaria. Some of the Byzantine visual presentations from the IX–XI century also allow for the possibility that these types of swords were well known in Byzantium and that they could be used as ceremonial weapons and the insignia of high-ranking palace

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<sup>50</sup> For the two imperial swords, 'one for the procession, the other for the road', cf. *Hendy*, *Alexius I to Michael VIII*, 174.

<sup>51</sup> *G. Ostrogorski*, *History of the Byzantine State*, Oxford 1956, 262.

<sup>52</sup> *S. Pirivatrić*, *Samuilova država*, Beograd 1998, 115–116.

dignitaries. Even though the appearance of this type of cross-guard in Byzantium is attested from the IX century, its morphological and functional characteristics can also be followed in earlier centuries, from the late Roman tradition and in the regions with which the Eastern Empire set up close cultural relations.

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#### НЕКЕ ТИПОЛОШКЕ ОСОБИНЕ ВИЗАНТИЈСКЕ СПАТЕ

Са простора Балкана потиче неколико ретких примерака бронзаних накрсница карактеристичног облика. Најбоље очуван налаз је железни мач који је случајно откривен код села Галово, северна Бугарска укупне сачуване дужине од 89 cm. Сечиво му је право, двосекло, без жљеба или гребена по средини, док је дршка за једну руку (сл. 1). Накрсница је права, са водоравним крацима и повијеним и украшеним крајевима и има особене цилиндричне тулце са горње и доње стране. Поред овог налаза, праве бронзане накрснице са цилиндричним тулцима са горње и доње стране потичу и са локалитета Плиска (сл. 2) и са непознатог налазишта такође у Бугарској (сл. 3). Од раније је био познат један налаз овог типа накрсница, непознатог порекла са урезаним украсом и стиховима из Курана који упућују на X век и владавину Фатимида у Египту. Наведеним налазима је типолошки блиска и бронзана накрсница железног мача из око прве половине IX века са локалитета Черњи Брод у Словачкој. Она такође има цилиндричне тулце са горње и доње стране, али јој краци нису прави већ кружног облика.

Блиске аналогије за облик кракова накрснице и тролисног украса на њиховим крајевима мача из Галова у Бугарској могу се наћи на ликовним представама у манастиру Неа Мони на Хиосу из око 1045. г. (сл 4) и Дафни

крај Атине из око 1100. године (сл. 5). У оба манастира налазе се међусобно врло сличне представе Св. Сергија и Св. Вакха са мачем у руци. Накрснице мачева ових светитеља у манастиру Дафни имају крајеве обликоване као код мача из Бугарске, стим што је тролисни украс на ликовним представама окренут на горе, а на накрсници мача из Бугарске на доле. Оштро повијене крајеве накрсница, као код поменутог мача из Бугарске, имају и мачеви представљени у манастиру Неа Мони на Хиосу, стим што немају тролисни украс.

Праве, водоравне накрснице са тулцем, пре свега на основу ликовних представа, одређене су од IX века надаље, односно у време X–XI столећа као једна од варијанти византијских и исламских мачева. Као једна од најстаријих, овим ликовним представама може се додати и она у минијатури „Св. Григорије и Теодосије“ из Хомилија Св. Григорија Ниског из око 880. године.

Накрснице са тулцем са горње или доње стране имају и неки ретки налази мачева из Сеобе народа као и особени мачеви и палаши европских номада VII столећа. Ово оружје има доста сличности са нешто старијим или истовременим персијским мачевима из времена Сасанидске династије. Код обе ове врсте мачева присутни су и примерци који имају интегралну металну облогу дршке као и они код којих је она замењена решењем из два дела. Доњи део овакве дводелне металне облоге дршке спојен је са накрсноном и може се најпре разумети као њен горњи цилиндрични тулац. Његова улога била је да причврсти дрвену облогу дршке са доње стране, док је са горње то чинила јабука у улози металног окова. Исту улогу има и сачувана бронзана јабука мача са локалитета Черњи Брод у Словачкој, а овакво решење причвршћивања облоге дршке може се претпоставити и код других наведених налаза водоравних накрсница са тулцима. Причвршћивање облоге дршке горњим цилиндричним тулцем накрснице као и јабуком са горње стране имају и налази палаша и сабљи евроазијских степа током готово читавог раног средњег века.

Сечиво мача из околине села Галово у Бугарској нема жљеб што би, уз његове остале особине — широко, право двосекло сечиво и кратак, заобљен врх — указивало такође на византијско порекло. Наведене особине овог мача указују на опште типолошке карактеристике спате — типа правога, дугога, двосеклог мача који је био и најчешћи тип мачева у Византији до XII века. Опште типолошке особине спате могу се претпоставити и за поменуте ликовне представе мачева у манастирима Неа Мони на Хиосу и Дафне на Атици као и за мачеве које носе људи из цареве пратње у минијатури „Св. Григорије и Теодосије“ из око 880. године.

Св. Сергије и Св. Вакх у поменутих манастирима носе делове униформе (спекион, манијакион) и атрибуте (мач у корицама, спатобаклион) протоспатара. За људе из цареве пратње у поменутој минијатури из око 880. године који носе мачеве, такође се може закључити да имају ранг високог царског гардисте. Ови церемонијални мачеви помињу се у византијским

изворима тога времена као спате. Најчешће су били златни, односно позлаћени, а такви су и мачеви инсигније спатара и протоспатара. У опису византијске дворске церемоније из 946. године у књизи *О церемонијама* Константина VII Порфирогенита помињу се и царски гардисти, *σπαθαροκουβικουλάριοι* који носе златне, као и они, нешто нижег ранга који носе обичне мачеве, који очигледно нису били златни, односно позлаћени. Може се претпоставити да се церемонијални и обични мачеви који су се користили у борби — какав је и мач откривен у околини села Галово — нису значајно разликовали по својим типолошким особинама него пре свега по скупocenости, односно да ли су од злата или не.

Иако су налази византијских мачева још увек веома ретки, можемо претпоставити да се израз спата византијских извора овог времена, између осталих, односио и на мачеве попут поменутог случајног налаза из околине села Галово у северној Бугарској. Неке од византијских ликовних представа IX–XI века дозвољавају могућност и да је овакав тип оружја био добро познат у Византији као и да су могли бити коришћени као церемонијално оружје и инсигније високих дворских достојанственика. Иако је појава оваквог типа накрсница у Византији засведочена од IX столећа, њене морфолошке и функционалне особености могу се пратити и у ранијим столећима у областима са којима је источно царство ступало у директне културне односе.

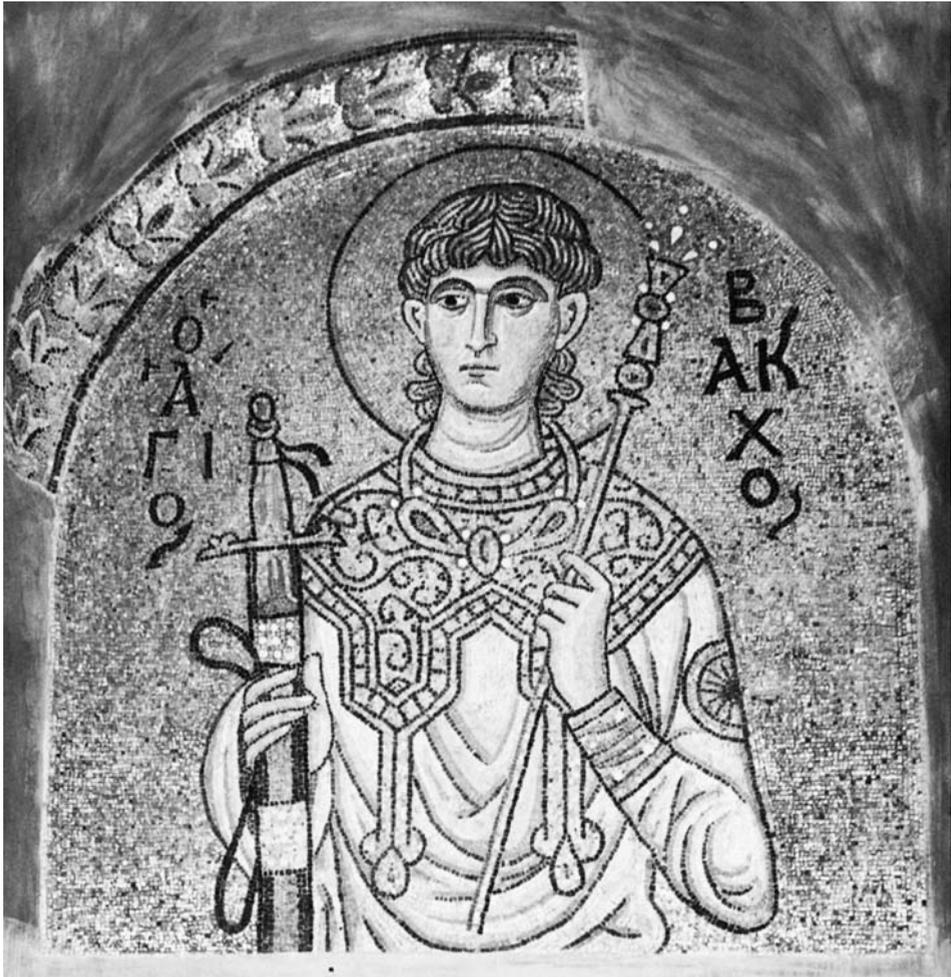


Fig. 4 — St. Bacchus, Daphni monastery, Attica, around 1100



Fig. 5 — St. Bacchus, Nea Moni monastery, Chios, around 1045