

ON THE MEDIEVAL BATTLE KNIVES FROM TRANSYLVANIA

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Although enriched and even stimulated by the recent volume of Zeno K. Pinter,¹ Romanian historical literature still has much to add in the field of the identification and classification of medieval offensive weapons. Besides the swords, which are already well studied and inventoried, a large number of different categories of weapons need to be researched. A short overview of the more recent historical literature indicates that battle knives have remained unstudied so far.²

In the present article I will attempt to merge all the different aspects related to battle knives. In Pinter's book on swords and sabers one finds the almost classical wall painting from Crișcior (Hunedoara County) depicting "jupan" (also spelled župan) Balea as a "sword"-bearer (fig. 1a).³ It is apparent that the weapon on his hip, hanging from his belt, is relatively short and without a guard, elements which contradict all, or most of, the typological criteria used in the classification of swords.⁴ Jupan Balea is not the only character wearing the weapon. In fact, all the male characters of the wall painting, Balea's brother, children, and nephews are depicted wearing identical weapons. Other iconographic evidence from Transylvania reveals the same or similar types of weapons. The oldest example is to be found in the wall paintings of Ghelnița (Covasna County), dating from around 1330. There, St. Ladislav is represented three times in the narrative cycle dedicated to him as wearing on his belt a short

¹ Z. K. Pinter, *Spada și sabia medievală în Transilvania și Banat (secolele IX-XIV)* (The medieval sword and saber in Transylvania and Banat between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries) (Reșița, 1999) (henceforth Pinter, *Spada și sabia*).

² C. Vlădescu, C. König, D. Popa, *Arme din muzeele din România* (Weapons from museums in Romania) (Bucharest, 1973), 11 and passim; *Istoria militară a poporului român II* (The military history of the Romanian people) (Bucharest, 1986), chapter "Înzestrarea, echiparea și asigurarea materială a oastei" (The equipment and the supplies of the army), 51 and passim, (henceforth: *Istoria militară*).

³ Pinter, *Spada și sabia*, 250, plate 24 a.

⁴ Although excluded in the case of Crișcior because of the abundance of depictions of this type of weapon different from a sword worn by all the male characters, I do not rule out the real existence of the sword without guard. A good example is the depiction of Archangel Michael in the monastery of Bistrița in Moldavia from the fifteenth century. See the color image in *Istoria militară*.

weapon, without a guard, which reaches just above his knee (fig. 1b).⁵ The handle is essential in the identification because it is shaped in such a way as to be used with a single-edged blade.

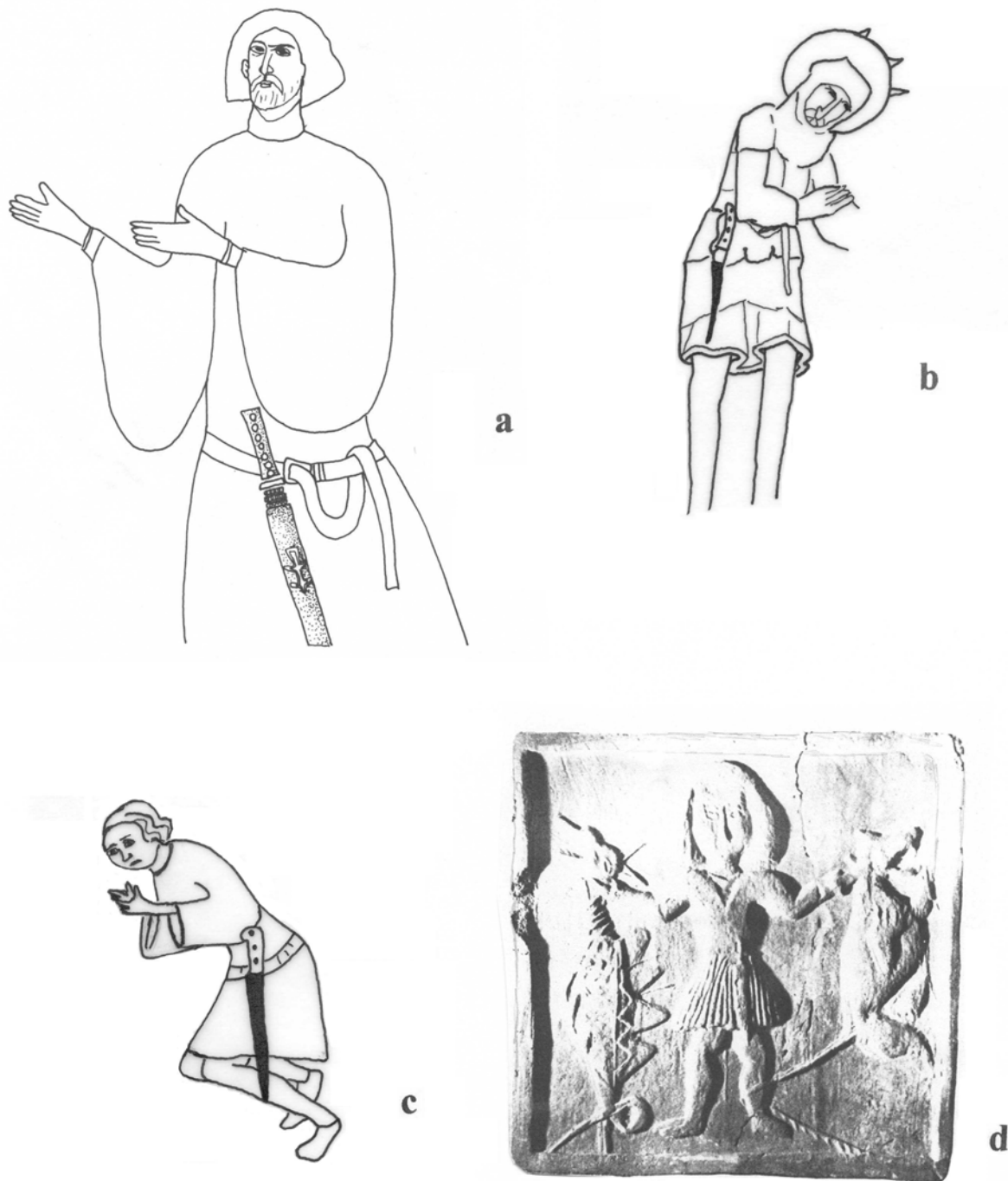


Fig. 1: Iconographic evidence: **a.** jupan Balea (1411) (Crișcior); **b.** king Ladislas I the Holy (1330) (Ghelnița); **c.** strategos (1420) (Mediaș); **d.** Fifteenth-century stove tile.

The next depiction comes from the St. Nicholas narrative cycle from the parish church of St. Margaret in Mediaș (Sibiu County), dated to 1420. In this image,

⁵ V. Drăguț, *Arta gotică în România* (Gothic art in Romania) (Bucharest, 1979), 193, fig. 216 (henceforth Drăguț, *Arta gotică*).

one of the three *strategoi* kneeling in front of the saint and kissing his hand wears a battle knife attached to his belt (fig. 1c).⁶ The weapon also end above the knee, and the end of the handle indicates clearly that it belongs to a single edged blade, so to a knife. In Mărtiniș (Harghita County), the fifteenth-century wall painting includes two knights, both wearing battle knives without guards. One of them, a royal knight, has the handle of his weapon fashioned in the manner typical for knives.⁷ Another depiction of such a knife is to be found on a fifteenth-century stove tile whose place of discovery is unknown but which is kept in the Bruckenthal Museum in Sibiu (fig. 1d).⁸

These iconographic examples may come from an incomplete series, but they point to a clear chronology (1330-1420) and a geographical spread that covers all of Transylvania from west to east. In none of the cases does the bearer of the weapon come from a low social stratum that could not have afforded the luxury of wearing a sword. They are kings, high-ranking military persons, knights or nobles. By chance or not, the examples come mostly from the main ethnic layers of the province: Szekler, Saxon, and Romanian.

Preliminary to the discussion of the archaeological material, the iconographic evidence points to the need for introducing the category of battle knives into taxonomies and repertories as weapons independent from sabres, swords or other bladed weapons from the same family. In order to avoid any confusion and doubt, one has to keep in mind that swords, also characterized by a single-edged blade but almost always longer and without a guard, re-appeared in medieval arsenals only from the second half of the fifteenth century. They ceased to be used in Central Europe for several centuries after the arrival of the migrating Hungarians (in the tenth century), the Cumans and the Tatars (in the thirteenth century).

It is not easy to track the individuality of the battle knife in other types of sources. Meant for current use, it seems that the knife was a basic tool of all people during the Middle Ages, regardless of social status, age or even sex. It is precisely its everyday use that kept it anonymous. Just like the axe, the knife was used both as a tool and as a weapon. But unlike an axe, the knife was an object of personal wear, as one can discern, for instance, from the 1561 statutes of tinsmith apprentices from Brașov.⁹ The usage of knives was such an important daily necessity that they became an item of European production and trade. Imre Holl recently discussed the production of knives in Central Europe.¹⁰ By the later Middle Ages, the production of knives had become an urban specialty; entire streets bore the name of the knife-makers. Production developed so much that the knife-producers proper, who assembled the parts, differentiated among

⁶ Drăguț, *Arta gotică*, 236, fig. 271.

⁷ J. Huszka, in *Archaeologiai Értésítő* 6 (1886), 128.

⁸ H. Klusch, *Zauber alter Kacheln aus Rumänien* (Sibiu, 1999), 78, fig. 12.

⁹ *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt*, vol. 9 (Brașov, 1999), 268.

¹⁰ I. Holl, "A középkori kések mesterség" (Medieval Knife Production), *Archaeologiai Értésítő* 121-122 (1994-1995): 159-188 (henceforth: Holl, "A középkori kések mesterség").

those creating the blades (*Klingenschmied*), those sharpening them (*Schleifer*), and those who created the hilts (*Schroter*). The blade makers seem to have been grouped around the places of metallic ore extraction, that is, in rural areas. Some of the masters dealt with all the aspects of production. Knife blades started to be marked with signs of the different masters and different cities; in London from the second half of the thirteenth century, then in France and Switzerland from the beginning of the fourteenth century, and in German areas from the end of the same century.¹¹ The outer end of the hilt was reinforced with metal and the inner end of the handle has a small orifice where a metal blade is attached. Knife production concentrated in Austria, Styria, and around Nuremberg. The urban production of other places in Central Europe should not be excluded but rather accepted.¹² In the Carpathian Basin, knife production is not so often attested due to the fragmentary preservation of written documents. It is clear, though, that large quantities of knives were imported from specialized cities.¹³

One should not be surprised, therefore, to note that the knife held an exceptional place in the trade among the Romanian medieval states. The early trade is not documented through written documents. Knives produced in Steyr have been excavated in two town houses in Baia, dated to 1440 and 1476, respectively. In both Moldavia and Wallachia, knives have been excavated in rural contexts.¹⁴ Knives of the same type came from Borniş and Lunca (Moldavia), and Coconi (Wallachia).¹⁵ In Transylvania, they have only been identified at Cristuru Secuiesc.¹⁶ Things started to change toward the end of the fifteenth century. The first written evidence about the knife trade comes from 1500, when Voivode Radu of Wallachia wrote a complaint to the city of Sibiu, asking for the significant number of 31,000 knives.¹⁷ A series of other data is available from the sixteenth century: in 1503 alone, 422,050 knives entered Wallachia and 25,327 entered Moldavia; in 1505 a single Wallachian merchant bought 18,000.¹⁸ In 1532, the unit measure in the knife trade is mentioned: the “bun-

¹¹ Holl, *A középkori kések mesterség*, 163-168.

¹² For Prague, see V. Huml and R. Pleiner, “Die Schmiede im mittelalterlichen Prag,” *Archaeologica Pragensia* 11 (1981): 194-195, plate 5-6. See other examples in Holl, “A középkori kések mesterség.”

¹³ Holl, “A középkori kések mesterség,” 159-161.

¹⁴ Holl, “A középkori kések mesterség,” 177.

¹⁵ Holl, “A középkori kések mesterség,” 186.

¹⁶ E. Benkö, I. Demeter, and A. Székely, *Közepkori mezőváros a Székelyföldön* (Medieval market towns in the Szeklers’ land) (Cluj, 1997), 114, 119, fig. 34.

¹⁷ E. Hurmuzachi, *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor* (Documents related to the history of the Romanians) vol. 15/1 (Bucharest, 1911), 152-153 (henceforth: DIR). See the commentary by Șt. Pascu, *Meșteșugurile din Transilvania până în secolul al XVI-lea* (Transylvanian crafts up to the sixteenth century) (Bucharest, 1954), 166 (henceforth: Pascu, *Meșteșugurile*).

¹⁸ Pascu, *Meșteșugurile*, 171; Minerva Nistor, “Producția și negoțul cu feronerie, arme de foc, clopote și mortare ale Brașovului în secolele XV-XVIII” (The production of and trade in iron tools, firearms, bells and mortars of Brașov from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries), *Cumidava* 13, no. 2 (1983): 71-72.

dle.”¹⁹ In the sixteenth century luxury needs can be traced. For example, golden knives from Vienna and Cracow and iron knives from Nürnberg are found in Romanian areas.²⁰

The demand for knives soon led to the appearance and organization of local specialized production. For example, a guild from Sighișoara included masters such as Gheorghe *Cultifex* (1412), Ioan *Cultellificis* (1420) and Ștefan *Cultellifaber* (1472).²¹ In Brașov, a certain Iacob *Messersmyd* is mentioned in 1438.²² In 1469, a chaplain from Sibiu was called Anton *Cultelifaber*,²³ probably from what was once his family’s profession. The craft was also present in the countryside. One Hans *Messersmid* is attested in Slimnic (Sibiu County) in the last decade of the fourteenth century²⁴ and a certain Petru was manufacturing knives in Țigmandu during the first years of the fifteenth century.²⁵

The previous remarks point towards the need for a distinction between knives considered as weapons, such as those depicted in the iconography, and knives used as tools. Certain elements are suggested by the images. It seems that the weapon-knives were slightly larger than those designed for home use. In the trade documents though, this distinction is never made. One has to keep in mind that in the sixteenth century, if not already in the second half of the fifteenth century, the battle knife had already gone out of military fashion, being replaced by weapons of similar character but very different from the tool knives. One can suspect that the objects circulating in large bundles mentioned in the documents were (primarily?) for non-military usage. Naturally, according to these observations, the textual sources are unsatisfactory here. The only way of differentiating the functions of a medieval knife is through archaeology.

Further on I will refer to the archaeological material that has greatly stimulated this article. My research started from the archeological inventory of the fortification of Măgura Codlei (Brașov County). It was excavated more than thirty years ago by Ioan Pop and Florea Costea, but remained mostly unpublished.²⁶ Through the generosity of my colleague Florea Costea, the material has

¹⁹ Gr. Tocilescu, *534 documente istorice slavo-române din Țara Românească și Moldova privitoare la legăturile cu Ardealul* (534 Slavo-Romanian documents regarding the relations of Wallachia and Moldavia with Transylvania) (Bucharest, 1931), 413.

²⁰ S. Golenberg, *Clujul în secolul XVI* (Cluj in the sixteenth century) (Bucharest, 1958), 262-263.

²¹ G. Nüssbächer, “Documente și știri documentare privind meșteșugurile din Sighișoara în secolul al XV-lea” (Documents and textual information regarding the crafts from Sighișoara in the fifteenth century), *Studii și comunicări. Arheologie-istorie* 14 (1969): 226-227.

²² *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, ed. Franz Zimmermann et al. (1892 ff.), vol. 5, 4 (henceforth: *Urkundenbuch*).

²³ *Urkundenbuch*, 6, 381.

²⁴ *Urkundenbuch*, 3, 85-95.

²⁵ Pascu, *Meșteșugurile*, 238.

²⁶ The only reference is to be found in Fl. Costea, “Obiecte metalice descoperite în cetatea Codlea” (Metal objects excavated in the fortification of Codlea), *Cumidava* 2 (1968): 80-89.

been available to me since 1998. Although a rich and complex material, it cannot be dated except according to the documentary mentions of the fortifications, that is in the interval between 1267 and 1335.²⁷ The latter year is not attested as the time of final destruction, but only as the last mention. The fortification was certainly destroyed violently through a great fire, at a time that one has to establish with the help of general analysis of the excavated material that, unfortunately, does not include any coins. Anyway, what is important for the following analysis is that the entire inventory of the fortification was kept *in situ* and preserved in the ashes some time before the end of the fourteenth century.

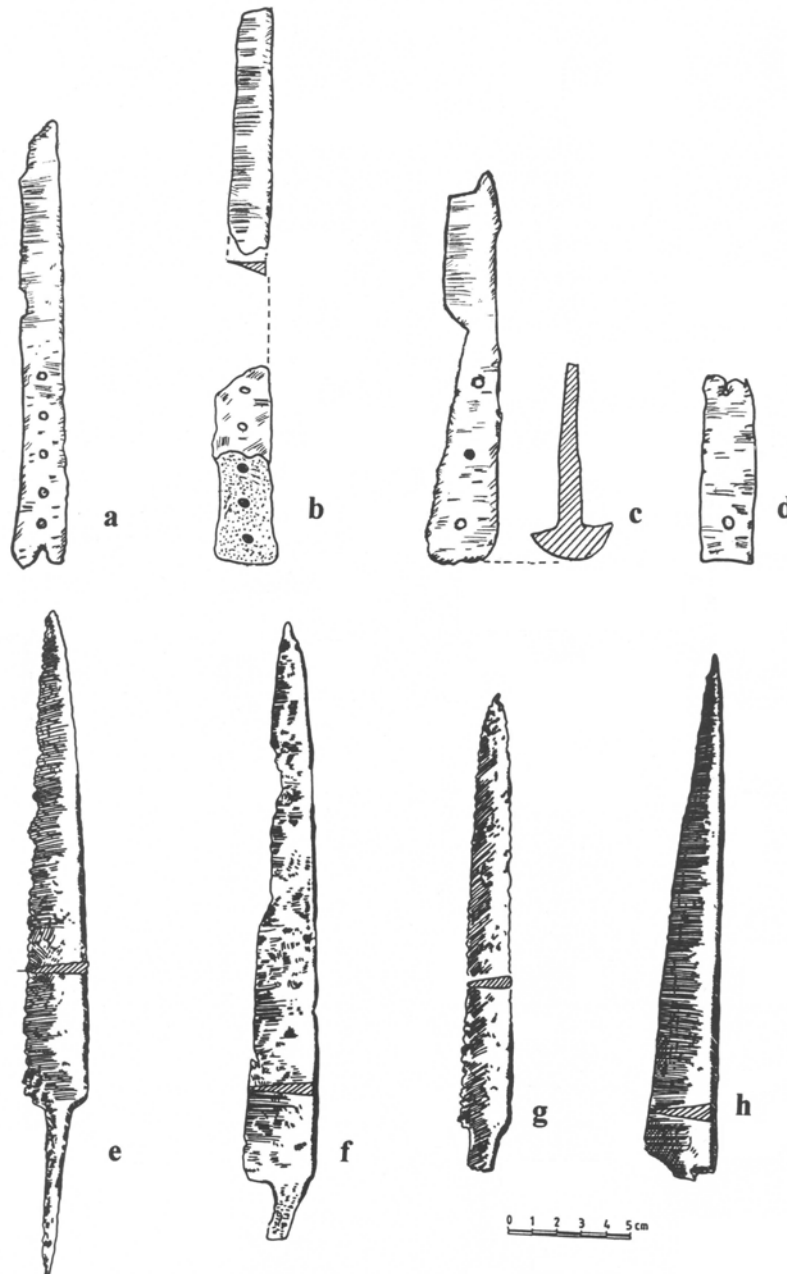


Fig. 2: Knife blades **a-d**. Codlea, **e-h**. Dăbâca

²⁷ For the history of the fortification, see W. Horwath, "Die Schwarzburg und ihre Bedeutung," *Das Burzenland* vol. 4, no. 1 (1929): 64-65.

The group of knives excavated at Codlea is one of the most important ever discovered in Transylvania. The classification of these knives is relatively easy: the largest type is formed by entire pieces or fragments of small and medium knives, provided with tangs and wooden or bone handles. Only some of the objects from this type have the handles provided with orifices that allow the hilts to be fixed with nails. I will concentrate here on the knives from the second type. It consists of six knives, out of which only two are preserved in their entirety (some are depicted on fig. 2a-d). Their dimensions vary between 31 and 41.4 cm. Without exception, the hilts are modelled carefully, with curved modelling on the inner side for better grasping, with nail holes, and with additional fittings for added strength. It would be a sufficient argument to accept the grouping in two taxonomic types, according to the dimensions and quality of execution, but first, I will compare the knives from Codlea with other similar or related objects.

Very recently, a group of iron weapons excavated several years ago at the fortification of Dăbâca have been published. Rightfully, Petre Iambor treated the objects independently from everyday knives. The selection started from 120 pieces.²⁸ He also took into account the different places of discovery. The battle knives were found inside the fortification, many even inside the keep, while the ordinary knives came mainly from the buildings. From the published knives, the longest has a blade 23.3 cm long, narrowing from a width of 3 cm (fig. 2f).²⁹ The handle, like most of the knives from Dăbâca, has a tang rather than a hilt. Unfortunately, the tang is broken on this piece, but one can estimate that originally the knife was 35 cm long, considering the handle at its minimum length (10-11cm). There are also 21.5 cm long blades (fig. 2h),³⁰ 20.5 cm long ones with seven centimeter-long tangs (fig.2e),³¹ and 18 cm (fig. 2g) long ones, respectively.³² At least seven other fragmentary blades come from the same group.³³ Besides the description and the dimension taxonomy, one has to decide whether the knives from Dăbâca can still be considered “daggers.”

Since a certain number of battleknives have been excavated from different sites, one can re-analyze published items that have so far been misinterpreted. “Large knives” were excavated from the site of the church in Căvăran (now

²⁸ P. Iambor, “Așezări fortificate din Transilvania în secolele IX-XIII (Aspecte economice, sociale, politice, militare, demografice și culturale)” (Fortified settlements in Transylvania between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. Economic, social, political, military, demographic and cultural aspects), PhD dissertation (University of Cluj-Napoca, 2000), 277 (henceforth Iambor, “Așezări fortificate”).

²⁹ National History Museum of Transylvania, inventory no. F. 12470.

³⁰ National History Museum of Transylvania, inventory no. F. 17931.

³¹ National History Museum of Transylvania, inventory no. F. 13594.

³² National History Museum of Transylvania, inventory no. F. 17904.

³³ Iambor, “Așezări fortificate”, plate LIV, nos. 1-5 entire pieces, nos. 6-8 fragments; plate L, no. 31, 32 (?), 37; plate LI, nos. 1-2 (wrongly inventoried this time as saber fragments).

Constantin Daicoviciu, Caraș-Severin County).³⁴ The knives excavated at St. Gheorghe-Bedeháza (Covasna County) are almost identical to these. One of them even preserved a metallic ring used for affixing the handle.³⁵ At Cuhea (Bogdan Vodă) there are also mentions of undifferentiated fragments of knife blades. One of them is notable for its large size (17 cm in length);³⁶ it can be included into the battle knife category. A single sharp-edged blade with its corresponding trapezoidal handle was excavated by chance at Ruștior (Bistrița-Năsăud County), on the site of a historically undetermined fortification. The handle has a fixing orifice towards the blade. The total length of the object is 69 cm.³⁷ One can suspect in this case that the object is a later, longer weapon resembling a saber. The item excavated at the Viile Tecii fortification (Bistrița-Năsăud County) is much clearer. It has a blade of 30 cm and just the starting part of the handle preserved, where one can only suspect the presence of a fixing orifice or at least a narrowing for the tang. The knife was associated with fourteenth-century ceramics.³⁸ A 28.6 cm-long knife, with hilt affixed with rivets, was excavated at Urmeniș (Mureș County).³⁹ Another single blade of 68 cm, which could be reconstructed, comes from the fortification of Hațeg (Hunedoara County).⁴⁰ It cannot be dated later than the fifteenth century. A fragmentary blade, longer than 25 cm, was uncovered in the fortification of Căpâlna (Alba County). It bears a master's sign in the shape of an X and it was defined as single sharp-edged saber (!).⁴¹ It seems to date prior to mid-fifteenth century. The list of such knives is certainly longer.⁴²

³⁴ I. Miloia, "Biserica medievală dela Căvăran" (The medieval church in Căvăran), *Analele Banatului* 3 (1930): 41.

³⁵ K. Horedt, in *Materiale și cercetări Arheologice* 2 (1956): 22, 31, fig. 17/10, 15, 17.

³⁶ R. Popa, M. Zdroba, *Șantierul arheologic Cuhea* (Cuhea archeological site) (Baia Mare: publisher, 1966), 25, 26, fig. 17. The quality of the image only indicates that the hilt (?) ended with a tang.

³⁷ Șt. Dănilă, "Contribuții la cunoașterea unor cetăți din nord-estul Transilvaniei" (Contributions to the research on some northeastern Transylvanian fortifications), *File de Istorie* 2 (1972): 100, fig. 34, plate 101 (henceforth: Dănilă, "Contribuții").

³⁸ Dănilă, "Contribuții:" 104, fig. 38, 105.

³⁹ A. Zrinyi, in *Marisia* VI (1976): 149, preserved in Reghin.

⁴⁰ A. A. Rusu, in *Sargeția XVI-XVII* (1982-1983): 340, 357, fig. 11/11.

⁴¹ Șt. Matei, in I. Glodariu, V. Moga, *Cetatea dacică de la Căpâlna* (The Dacian fortification in Căpâlna) (Bucharest, 1989), 155, fig. 112/1.

⁴² See, for example, a blade from Cefa which cannot be added to the series due to its dating (fourteenth to sixteenth century) and incomplete description (I. Crișan, in *Crisia* 25 (1995): 58, plate IX, 3). The same can be said about "three fragments of knife blades" from Racoșul de Sus (Covasna County). I disagree with their dating to the twelfth century, *Repertoriul arheologic al județului Covasna* (The archaeological collection of Covasna County) (Sfântu Gheorghe, 1998), 40.

It is also useful to mention the Moldavian examples. A battle knife found in Baia, described as a hunting knife, has the same cluster of hilt-affixing holes⁴³ as on one of the Codlea pieces. Other fifteenth-century fragmentary blades have been considered sabers.⁴⁴ The description of a twelfth or thirteenth-century straight blade from Bâta Doamnei as belonging to a saber seems quite uncertain.⁴⁵ At Coconi, in Wallachia, blades over 25 cm in length⁴⁶ can be considered as weapons. A high quality iron blade from Curtea de Argeş was classified as a saber and dated around 1350.⁴⁷ But, as I have pointed out earlier, the existence of fourteenth-century sabers is improbable.

As mentioned above, the examples used here could be multiplied. Besides the length that makes them recognizable, doubts about the function of such blades and knives still remain, since in the Middle Ages agricultural, hunting or transportation tools were frequently transformed into weapons. Even the length of knives, taken so far as an indicator of their military function, can be found in tools, such as those of a butcher, for example.

The weapon-like function of a large knife becomes evident when analyzing its accessories. A special sheath and or a special belt-attachment system point more clearly to the use of the knife as a weapon. Therefore, the preservation and excavation of the accessories becomes even more important than that of the knives themselves. In some parts of Europe (London, Austria) the artisans producing such accessories are mentioned separately.⁴⁸

Through analogy with sword sheaths, the chape, made of stronger materials, is the most probable sheath accessory. It is the small tip protecting the extremity of a sheath made of wood, leather⁴⁹ or a strong textile (like thick felt, for example). In shape, the knife chapes must be similar to those of swords, but smaller in size. Starting from this observation, the archaeological material from the fortification of Codlea offers a few clues. A cone-shaped object, slightly flattened and provided with a ring at the end is clearly a chape (fig. 3a). Its state of preservation does not allow a reconstruction of how it was attached to the

⁴³ E. Neamţu, V. Neamţu, and Stela Cheptea, *Oraşul medieval Baia în secolele XIV-XVII* (The medieval town Baia from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century) (Iaşi, 1980), 166, fig. 14/7, 167, fig. 15/5 (henceforth: Neamţu, Neamţu, and Cheptea, *Oraşul medieval Baia*).

⁴⁴ Neamţu, Neamţu, and Cheptea, *Oraşul medieval Baia*, vol. 2 (1987), fig. 39, 1-3.

⁴⁵ V. Spinei, *Moldova în secolele XI-XIV* (Moldavia between the eleventh and fourteenth century), (Bucharest, 1982), fig. 7/14.

⁴⁶ N. Constantinescu, *Coconi, un sat din Câmpia Română în epoca lui Mircea cel Bătrân* (Coconi, a village on the Romanian plain in the time of Mircea the Old) (Bucharest, 1972), 91 (henceforth: Constantinescu, *Coconi*).

⁴⁷ N. Constantinescu, *Curtea de Argeş (1200-1400). Asupra începuturilor Ţării Româneşti* (Curtea de Argeş (1200-1400). On the beginnings of Wallachia) (Bucharest, 1984), 109, fig. 48/2 (henceforth: Constantinescu, *Curtea de Argeş*).

⁴⁸ Holl, "A középkori késes mesterség," 159.

⁴⁹ The remains of such an object, decorated with small lozenges, was preserved on a knife excavated in grave no. 140 from the cemetery of Négyszállás (See L. Selmeczi, *A négyszállási I. számú jász temető* (The Yazig cemetery no. 1 from Négyszállás) (Budapest, 1992), 36, 110, fig. VI/3 (henceforth Selmeczi, *A négyszállási*).

(presumably) softer parts of the sheath. Things become clearer in the light of analogies such as a published chape from Curtea de Argeş dated around 1350⁵⁰ and another from Coconi, related to unpublished material from Zimnicea.⁵¹

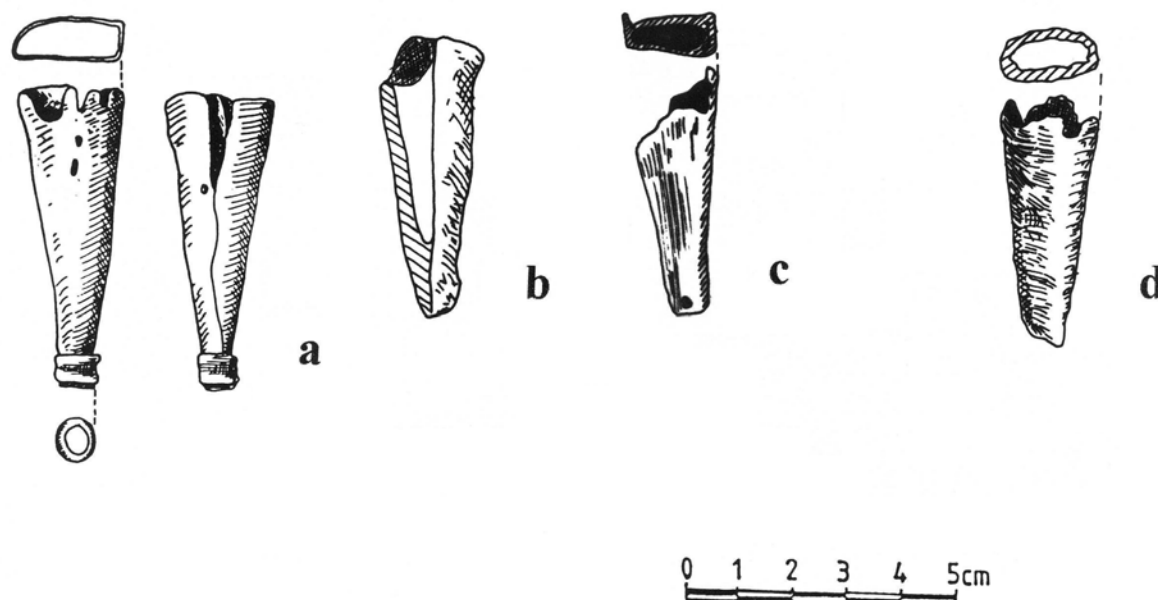


Fig. 3: Chapes **a**. Codlea, **b-d**. Dăbâca.

Other examples from Transylvania have not been interpreted correctly, are unpublished or have been published only recently. Chapes with similar dating were excavated at Dăbâca. There are three such pieces, alike in execution (fig. 3b-d). It is exceptional that two of them were found near or together with the corresponding blades.⁵² One is clearly datable to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It is possible that the lower part of a small iron dagger sheath excavated at Piatra Craivii⁵³ also belonged to the same category, but the piece has not been published or described typologically or chronologically.

An object from Codlea can be considered a metal fitting for a knife sheath, although it could be a fitting used for fixing and strengthening the hilt, too. The object is composed of an iron stripe, flattened at one end into two circular surfaces (once with orifices?). The stripe was bent in half, remaining 3 cm in length with a thickness of 0.5-0.6 cm. It is hard to reconstruct the shape of fittings from the throat of a sheath, because they may be easily confused with other fittings; such were also attached to other instruments, tools and weapons.

An alternative solution to the sheath with a chape is the sheath with a metal frame, although one cannot tell whether this possibility was more efficient

⁵⁰ Constantinescu, *Coconi*, 98, 245, plate XI/16.

⁵¹ Constantinescu, *Curtea de Argeş*, 111, 112, fig. 49/3.

⁵² National History Museum of Transylvania, inventory no. F 12470 and F. 17931. Published by Iambor, *Aşezări fortificate*, plate LIV, 9, 10, 12.

⁵³ I. Berciu, Gh. Anghel, "Cetatea feudală de pe Piatra Craivii" (The feudal fortification in Piatra Craivii), *Apulum* V (1965): 317.

and easier to produce. I suggest that it proved impractical or went out of fashion over time. Still, it is certain that sheaths with metal frames were used as accessories for light, knife-like weapons. The material excavated from the fortification of Măgura Codlei is conclusive from this point of view.⁵⁴ The items are in fact thin iron bars, rectangular in section and bent in the middle until it reached a narrow U-shape, by hammering and flattening the metal at a length of around 24.5 cm. Each arm has a small angular or circular loop at both free ends. The same type of loops were attached while the metal was hot, approximately towards the middle of the bars. With the help of these loops the non-metallic parts of the sheath and the frame were connected, and the entire knife was fixed to the belt by cords, leather stripes or, maybe not so often, small metal chains. The Măgura Codlei frame-group is composed of at least eight pieces (fig. 4a-g). This is a significant number and, considering the small excavated area, I suspect the number of knives from the entire fortification must have been impressive.

These frames have appeared now and then in published archeological material. Their strange shapes and the lack of systematic European research has led to their misinterpretation and even assignment to different eras. It is, therefore, mandatory to proceed to the important task of correction and recovery of such material. Here, I will start from the opposite direction, pointing towards examples and analogies from areas other than Moldavia and Wallachia.

The earliest analogies that I know of were excavated in Slovakia and dated to the second half of the twelfth and mid-thirteenth.⁵⁵ Alexander Ruttkay, the author of the research, uses the same terms of knife accessories to explain their function (sheath components for *Kampfmesser*). Dealing with a restricted series (from Hubiná), he suggested a reconstruction which can no longer be accepted. Without being very strict in pointing towards a clear distribution area, he just mentioned the Northern European, where similar pieces spread in the ninth and tenth centuries. In the meantime, other knife accessories have been excavated in Slovakia, and, based on this evidence, it has been suggested that their shapes did not change essentially until the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁵⁶ In present-day Hungary, such items are rarely known. A sheath frame was found around the keep of Kács (county Borsod). Its hanging loop is larger than usual, and it was dated to the fourteenth century.⁵⁷ The author that thought it could be a dagger sheath (*Dolche*), but it is known that such weapons had sharp double-edged blades. The sheath with a metal frame would not be efficient in such a case since the frame affects one of the edges at every move. Other examples have been mentioned in the village of Muhi⁵⁸ and Abaújszék.⁵⁹ Since then, an-

⁵⁴ During restoration, some dimensions of the original pieces have changed and some loops were lost; therefore, it is difficult to identify them.

⁵⁵ Al. Ruttkay, in *Slovenská Archeológia* 24, no. 2 (1976): 295-296, (type A 2), 297, fig. 34.

⁵⁶ V. Hanuliak, in *Archaeologia Historica* 19 (1994): 210, fig. 3/1-2.

⁵⁷ N. Parádi, in *Acta Archaeologica*, 34, fasc. 1-4 (1982), 140-141, fig. 7/8.

⁵⁸ I. Éri. and A. Bálint, in *Régeszeti Füzetek*, Ser. 2, vol. 4 (1959): 39, fig. XXI/9.

⁵⁹ Excavation of 1982 (unpublished).

other piece has been uncovered, again from a fortified complex.⁶⁰ Sheath frames are also present in Moravia,⁶¹ but they do not lead to new conclusions for our research. Several similar discoveries from Bulgaria share the vague dating. The archaeologist who published these knife accessories, however, introduced a new element, their presence in the Slav milieu.⁶² In Rusia (Novgorod), similar discoveries are dated from the ninth to the thirteenth century.⁶³ These latter cases bear a strong relevance for all future attempts at identifying the origins and distribution of knife accessories. One needs to keep in mind, as a suggestion, the possible Northern European origin and the chronology which usually ends at the fourteenth century.

The first sheath frames to be published from the Romanian area originated from Baia, in Moldavia.⁶⁴ One of the pieces is dated by the stratigraphic context to the fifteenth century.⁶⁵ It could be an older inheritance, since the shape of these frames changed as early as the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century. At the time the material from Baia was published, the authors were engaging in a pioneering work since no analogies had been published previously from Romania. Under such conditions any substantial research was nearly be impossible.

Indeed, the pieces existed now but, not yet being understood, they remained unpublished. The group from Codlea was the first illuminating case. The accumulation of evidence has surpassed all expectations, because the knives and their accessories from there form the largest group of similar items from all the geographic areas invoked for analogies and reference.

At Căpâlna, the excavations concentrated on the Dacian fortification. Despite this, the medieval material published as such or misattributed to other ages shows that the site also functioned as an important (fortified?) settlement during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Knife accessories from Căpâlna were published, but one cannot be sure if they comprise all the material of this sort or just parts of it.⁶⁶ Anyway, just two of the four mentioned objects with unknown use are knife accessories. One fragment belongs represents the two frame bars of a sheath, both broken at 10,5 cm, conveying the impression of a chape. Another frame is composed of two arms (20 cm) connected at the ends with a small

⁶⁰ Zs. Mikós, in *Castrum Bene I* (1989-1990): 195, fig. 5-2.

⁶¹ Vl. Nekuda, *Mstěnice* (Brno, 1985), 28/, 29, fig. 34/f, 35, fig. 35/I, without clear context and dated only through analogies.

⁶² Z. Kurnatowska, in *Slavia antiqua* 20 (1973): 95, with bibliography for the Slav milieu on page 92, fig. 2/9.

⁶³ A. N. Kirpičnikov, *Snarjaženije vsednica I v Rrchovogo konja na Rusi IX-XIII vekov* (Horsemen and horse equipment in Russia from the ninth to the thirteenth century) (Leningrad, 1973), fig. 5/8.

⁶⁴ Neamțu, Neamțu, and Cheptea, *Orașul medieval Baia*, vol. 2, 106, 108, fig. 39/7, 109.

⁶⁵ Neamțu, Neamțu, and Cheptea, *Orașul medieval Baia*, vol. 2, 109, 108, fig. 39/7.

⁶⁶ The author says: "...among which we present as illustration just four items". See Șt. Matei, in I. Glodariu and V. Moga, ed., *Cetatea dacică de la Căpâlna* (The Dacian fortification in Căpâlna) (Bucharest, 1989), 156 (henceforth Matei, *Căpâlna*).

metal ring. One arm is provided with two holes and the other with only one. The author did not know the function of these objects and found them strange, looking like scale beams.⁶⁷



Fig. 4: Sheath frames: **a-g**. Codlea, **h-o**. Cladova, **p-r**. Dăbâca.

⁶⁷ Matei, *Căpâlna*, 156, 112 fig. 19 and 20. Unfortunately, the dimensions cannot be read from the graphic scale.

An entire sheath frame from Cladova was published in 1980 but not identified as such.⁶⁸ It was dated to the fifteenth century. Inquiring about this discovery and with the help of my colleagues from the County Museum of Arad, I found out that it was not a unique item but one in a series of sheath frames produced at Cladova, along other metal objects. The objects from Cladova are the same thin metal bars with rectangular sections, around 27 cm long. They are flattened at the top, and loops for tying them to the belt are attached (fig. 4, h-o). All in all, there are at least six sheath frames from Cladova, with debated dating concerning which of them can best be attributed to the thirteenth century.⁶⁹

Probably based on the association of sheath frames with a Dacian fortification, suggested at Căpâlna, a sheath fragment from the fortification of Merești (Harghita County) was also classified as Dacian. The fragment has all the attributes of a sheath frame as described so far. It is a bar with an angular section, provided with the characteristic loop for hanging from the belt. As in the case of Căpâlna, at Merești the Dacian fortification was re-used in the early Middle Ages. Unfortunately, all that is known about these re-uses is that they date back to the twelfth-thirteenth century.⁷⁰ Sheath frames were also found at Dăbâca (fig. 4, p-r). They are part of the inventory of the keep and were dated to the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries.

Based on the assembled information about sheath frames, it can be seen that the preferred dimension was around 20 cm, never less. Different solutions were used for the top of the sheath, from a slight flattening to more visible methods. Probably for knives with parallel blade edges, an extra metal segment was attached on the top, meant to protect the back side of the sheath.

All the sheath frames (some 20 or 30 pieces) came from fortifications. Two cases, Cladova and Codlea, could even have been centers of production. The number of fortifications to be connected with battle knives increases even more if one also takes into consideration the findings of blades. This cannot be surprising, because fortifications always had small workshops that repaired and adjusted the garrison's weapons produced elsewhere. If this is true, the knife-related items are the first material to clearly attest the existence of such workshops.

* * *

The attributes of battle knives have already been established: a handle with hilts connected with tangs or bolts, shaped for a single, sharp-edged blade, around 30

⁶⁸ V. Boroneanț, "Săpăturile arheologice de la Cladova (jud. Arad) din anul 1979" (The 1979 archeological excavations in Cladova (Arad County), *Ziridava* 12 (1980): plate 2, no. 7.

⁶⁹ *Repertoriul Arheologic al Mureșului Inferior. Județul Arad* (The Archaeological Inventory of Lower Mureș, Arad County) (Timișoara, 1999), 57.

⁷⁰ V. Crișan, *Dacii din Estul Transilvaniei* (Dacians in eastern Transylvania) (Sfântu Gheorghe, 2000), 54-56 (the settlement), 136 (erroneous classification of the sheath among Dacian materials), plate 107/4.

cm long, with a sheath, sometimes decorated, connected or tied to the belt. In the case of the battle knife in a metal-framed sheath, I suggest a graphic reconstruction (fig. 5). So far, the metal-framed sheath seems characteristic for the battle knife. Such weapons were quite frequent, as one can see from the iconographic and archaeological evidence presented above.

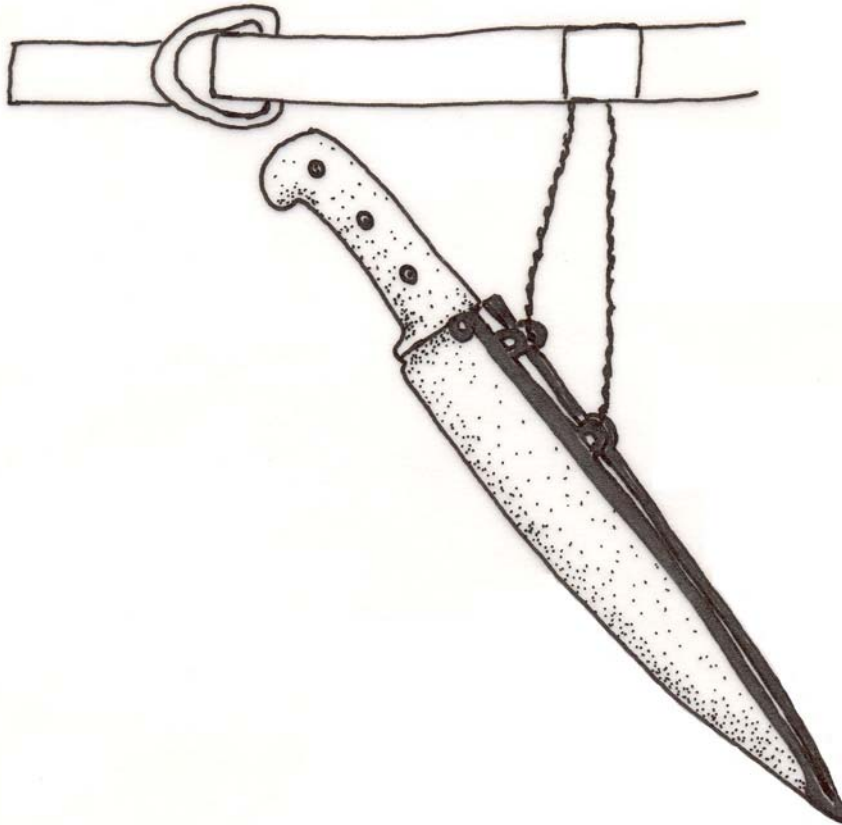


Fig. 5: Reconstruction of a battle knife with metal frame sheath.

There were certainly some exceptions and particularities in respect to these general characteristics. Looking again at the weapon on Jupan Balea, one sees that it is longer than the usual battle knives. The same case was found in Ruștiori. The knife from the cemetery of Négyszállás, dated to the reign of Sigismund, was 0.70 cm long.⁷¹ The end of the handle could also have different shapes; it also might have ended in an independent pommel.⁷²

The period of use of battle knives seems fairly extended. As a weapon of the military elite from western (present-day) Romania, it seems to have become frequent in the thirteenth century. In Transylvania proper, it was frequent in the fourteenth century and perhaps still in the first decades of the fifteenth century. After this period, the battle knife must have become connected to lower and poorer social groups. Being much cheaper than a sword, the use of battle knives

⁷¹ Selemeczi, *A négyszállási*, 51, fig. 32, 113, table IX/75.

⁷² See the northern Slovak example from Liptovská Mara in K. Pieta, *Liptovská Mara. Ein frühgeschichtliches Zentrum des Nordslowakei* (Bratislava, 1996), 105, fig. XIII/6.

extended to burghers and servants.⁷³ The way it was attached to the belt and the quality of the material were the only attributes which made it a noble or common weapon. Generally, It was mostly used by soldiers. Its use in close combat led to its association with other infantry weapons like the lance, spear, bow, axe or club. For knights, the battle knife was always an auxiliary weapon besides the sword, being worn even when the sword was not. The most useful example is the statue of King Ladislav from Oradea, erected in the middle of the fourteenth century by Martin and Gheorghe, brothers from Cluj. Before being melted down by the Turks, the statue was described about 1600 in a land-register: The king reportedly wore a sword and “dagger.”⁷⁴

Much more could be written on this type of weapon. In Classical Antiquity a similar weapon was known as *machaira*, and in the Middle Ages as *semispatha* or *sax*, *sacramasax*, *semitiar*.⁷⁵ They were used throughout the early Middle Ages. Their dimensions always drew attention to them and distinguished them from other cutting and piercing weapons.⁷⁶

The oldest Latin term that one finds in regional documents from the second half of the thirteenth century is *pugio*, perhaps incorrectly translated as “dagger.”⁷⁷ One has to wait another half-century (until 1354) to find another similar reference. A nobleman from the county of Szolnoc, from the village of Chegea (Satu Mare County), wore a sword (*gladium*) and a *bicellum*.⁷⁸ The term used in Romanian was again “dagger.” In 1366, a nobleman from Sătmar, unhappy with the decision of the *vicecomes*, attacked him with a *bicello* in his hand.⁷⁹

It is generally accepted that Latin does not make fine distinctions when referring to the material culture. Terms like *pugio* and *bicellus* are equated with *parva quaedam species hastae*, *malleus bellicus*, *hasta amentata*, and, at least in Hungarian, they could also mean hammer.⁸⁰ The Hungarian translation (*tör*) is still used, demonstrating that, as in the case of Romanian translations, the lack of formal and functional distinctions could apply to these weapons. In the Teutonic Prussian weapon production, one single term was used for both objects that we consider here as battle knives and for daggers.⁸¹ Practically, the battle knife

⁷³ The last traces of the use of this medieval weapon date to a bloody episode from the beginning of state nazism, the so called “night of the long knives” (30 June 1934).

⁷⁴ D. Prodan, *Iobăgia în Transilvania în secolul al XVI-lea* (Servitude in Transylvania in the sixteenth century), vol. 2 (Bucharest, 1968), 820.

⁷⁵ Pinter, *Spada și sabia*, 29, 69-70.

⁷⁶ D. Nicole, *Medieval Warfare Source Book I* (London, 1995), 34, 80-81, 190-191.

⁷⁷ *DIR*, vol. 13, II, no. 304

⁷⁸ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, vol. C 10 (Bucharest, 1977), no. 248, 255, translation on page 256 (henceforth: DRH).

⁷⁹ DRH, vol. 13 (Bucharest, 1994), no. 128, 233.

⁸⁰ A. Bartal, *Glosarium mediae et infimae latinitatis regni Hungariae* (Leipzig, 1901; reprint 1983), 76, with reference to Du Cange.

⁸¹ A. Nowakowski, *Arms and Armour in the Medieval Teutonic Order's State in Prussia* (Łódź, 1994), 89-90.

represented no terminological identity, although, as I have shown, it enjoyed an obvious material individuality.

Battle knives preceded the sixteenth-century daggers with saber guards. The first were relatively sturdy, but soon a new type appeared and took over, with a slimmer blade: *bicellus* (Lat.),⁸² dagger (Engl), *tör* (Hung.), *stilet* (Ro.). Such a dagger is depicted on the Mediaș altar (second half of the fifteenth century) in the Resurrection scene⁸³ and on the Hălchiu altarpiece (first half of the sixteenth century) in the scene of the martyrdom of St. Peter.⁸⁴ Daggers of this type have been excavated in the fortifications of Piatra Craivii and Tăuți.⁸⁵ From the same period it may be expected that also so-called “Hussite knives”⁸⁶ have been found.

The knife types that were used during the following centuries were designated by more and more diverse terms, which create serious identification problems. As an example, I want to enumerate the knife types traded in Cluj in the first half of the seventeenth century: peasant knives with wooden handles; knives with square, decorated hilts; *batolfw*; peasant knives; Viennese knives; Styrian knives; Polish knives.⁸⁷ But this is already beyond the scope of the present article. It is an invitation for continuing the research on the general history of the mistreated and common knife.

⁸² 1441, Zs. Jakó, *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzőkönyvei (1289-1556)* (The registers of the Cluj-Mănăstur monastery between 1289 and 1556) I (Budapest, 1990), 277. no. 351.

⁸³ G. and O. Richter, *Siebenbürgische Flügelaltäre* (Thaur bei Innsbruck, 1992), 178, plate XVII (henceforth: Richter and Richter, *Siebenbürgische Flügelaltäre*).

⁸⁴ Richter and Richter, *Siebenbürgische Flügelaltäre*, 218.

⁸⁵ Gh. Anghel, I. Berciu, *Cetăți medievale din sud-vestul Transilvaniei* (Medieval fortifications from southwestern Transylvania) (Bucharest, 1968), 16, fig. 8, 26, fig. 13/7.

⁸⁶ J. Kalmár, *Régi magyar fegyverek* (Ancient Hungarian weapons) (Budapest, 1971), 117-118.

⁸⁷ Fr. Pap, “Comerțul Clujului cu Cracovia în registrele vamale din prima jumătate a sec. XVII” (The trade of Cluj with Cracow in the trade registers from the first half of the seventeenth century), *Acta Musei Napocensis* 13 (1976): 365.

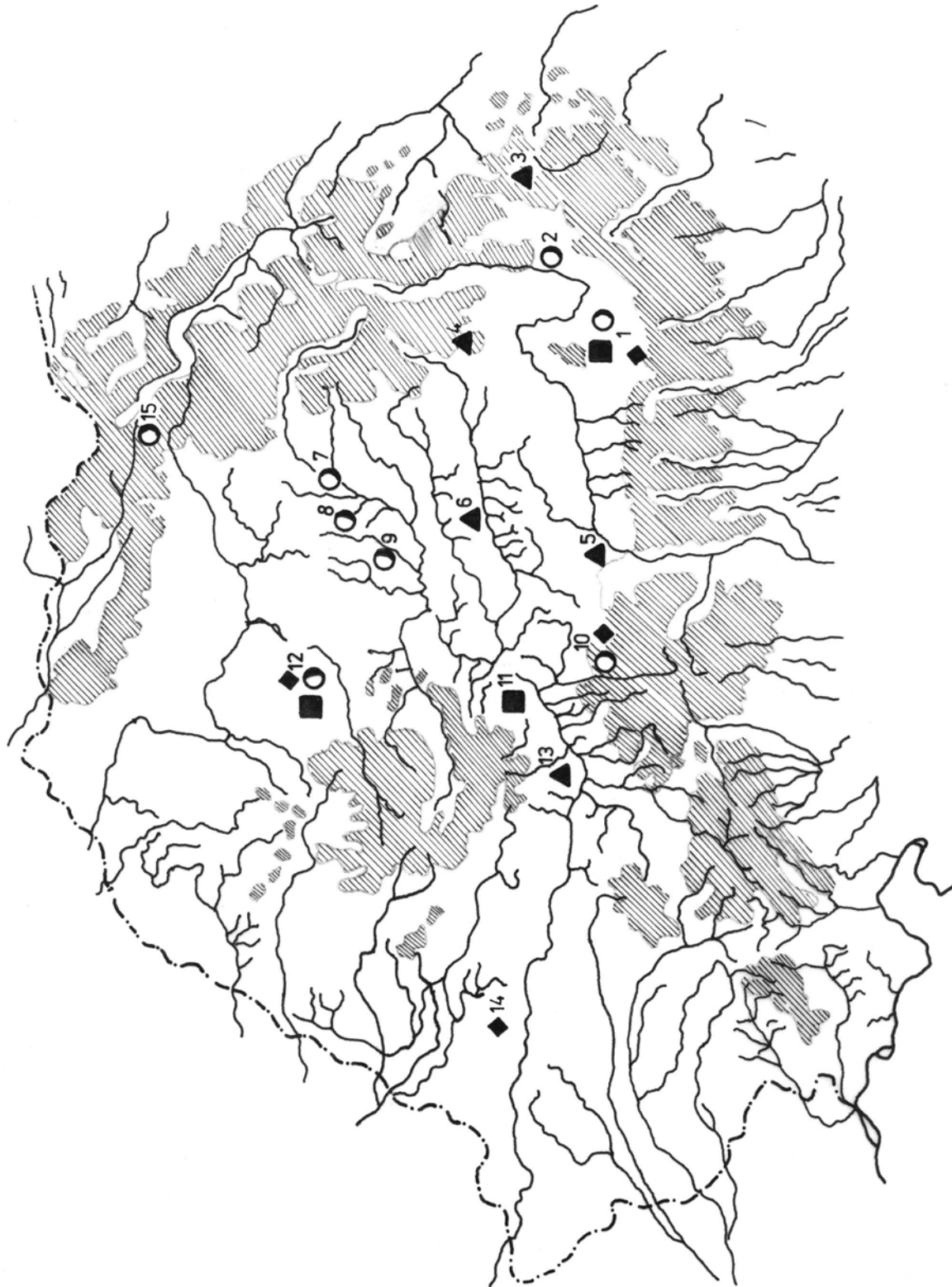


Fig. 6: Distribution of battle knives in Transylvania:

- chapes
- blades
- ▲ iconographic evidence
- ◆ frames

Identification of the settlements:

- 1 Codlea
- 2 St. Gheorghe
- 3 Ghelnița
- 4 Mărtiniș
- 5 Sibiu
- 6 Mediaș
- 7 Ruștior
- 8 Viile Tecii
- 9 Urmeniș
- 10 Căpâlna
- 11 Piatra Craivii
- 12 Dăbâca
- 13 Crișcior
- 14 Cladova
- 15 Cuhea

MEDIUM AEVUM
QUOTIDIANUM

51

KREMS 2005

HERAUSGEGEBEN
VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

niederösterreich kultur

Titelgraphik: Stephan J. Tramèr

Herausgeber: Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der materiellen Kultur des Mittelalters, Körnermarkt 13, 3500 Krems, Österreich. Für den Inhalt verantwortlich zeichnen die Autoren, ohne deren ausdrückliche Zustimmung jeglicher Nachdruck, auch in Auszügen, nicht gestattet ist. – Druck: Grafisches Zentrum an der Technischen Universität Wien, Wiedner Hauptstraße 8-10, 1040 Wien.

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VORWORT

Das vorliegende Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* soll neuerlich die Verschiedenheit von Fragestellungen und Ansätzen vermitteln, die in einer Geschichte von Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters von Wichtigkeit erscheinen. Dabei geht es vor allem auch um trans- und interdisziplinäre Aspekte, welche regelmäßig zu berücksichtigen sind und ohne die eine moderne Forschung nicht auskommen kann. Dies gilt für Untersuchungen zu spätmittelalterlichen ‚Kampfmessern‘ genauso wie für die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Einsatz, der Funktion und den symbolischen Werten von Tieren zu den unterschiedlichsten Anlässen und in verschiedensten Diskursen, besonders auch dann und dort, wann und wo man dieselben vielleicht nicht erwarten würde. Ebenfalls trifft dies für jede theoriegeleitete Einzeluntersuchung zur Gender-Problematik zu, wie am bekannten Beispiel von spätmittelalterlichen Cross-Dressing-Darstellungen der Heiligen Kümmeris wieder einmal gut vorgestellt werden kann.

Die nächsten Hefte und Sonderbände unserer Reihe werden auch auf derartige Forschungsdesiderata und -prinzipien Bezug nehmen. Dies gilt vor allem für einen Sonderband, zu dem der erwähnte Beitrag von Helmut Hundsichler in diesem Heft über die Rolle von Tieren in Kontexten, in welchen man sie nicht erwartet, gleichsam als ‚Vorhut‘ angesehen werden kann. Dieser Sonderband wird sich mit „Tierwelten – Animal Worlds“ auseinandersetzen, sich den verschiedensten Möglichkeiten des Zugangs zur mittelalterlichen Beziehung von Mensch und Tier widmen und sich vor allem auf entsprechende Vernetzungen beziehen. Die Beiträge des Bandes werden unter anderem erste Ergebnisse des internationalen Forschungsprojektes MAD („Medieval Animal Database“) beinhalten, sowie überarbeitete Vorträge und Diskussionsbeiträge, die an den heurigen Internationalen Mittelalter-Kongressen von Kalamazoo (Sektion „Animal Networks“) und Leeds (Sektion „Representing and ‘Transforming’ Medieval Fauna“ und Round Table-Diskussion „A Digital Net of Medieval Animals?“) angeboten wurden.

Ein weiterer Sonderband wird sich an Hand eines niederösterreichischen städtischen Beispiels mit der Rolle, Aussagekraft und den Analysemöglichkeiten von spätmittelalterlicher Rechnungsbuchüberlieferung für die Geschichte von Alltag und materieller Kultur beschäftigen.

Schließlich wird ein dritter Sonderband die bereits mehrmals angekündigte neue Auswahl-Bibliographie zu „Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters“ enthalten und nun entweder Ende 2005 oder Anfang 2006 zum Erscheinen kommen.

Darüber hinaus wird Heft 52 noch heuer vor allem wieder neue, internationale Beiträge aus der Forschungspraxis der Mitglieder von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* anbieten können.

Gerhard Jaritz