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Demetrios ATHANASOULIS (Δημήτριος ΑΘΑΝΑΣΟΥΛΗΣ), Eleni MANOLESSOU (Ελένη ΜΑΝΩΛΕΣΣΟΥ)

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A MIDDLE BYZANTINE SWORD FROM CORINTH

Το 2014, σε οικόπεδο της Αρχαίας Κορίνθου, κατά την ανασκαφική έρευνα της αρμόδιας Εφορείας Αρχαιοτήτων, βρέθηκε ένα σπαθί. Το σπαθί, σιδερένιο, αμφίστομο, με χάλκινο χειροφυλακτήρα και σφαίρωμα, είναι δυνατό, μέσω των ανασκαφικών δεδομένων και της σύγκρισης με ανάλογα παραδείγματα, να χρονολογηθεί στο δεύτερο μισό του 9ου αιώνα. Με βάση τη διακόσμησή του μπορεί να προέρχεται από αυτοκρατορικό οπλουργείο. Αποτελεί ένα από τα σημαντικότερα ευρήματα της βυζαντινής Κορίνθου, καθώς η εύρεση τέτοιου είδους αντικειμένων είναι πολύ σπάνια.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Μεσοβυζαντινή περίοδος, βυζαντινά όπλα, σπαθιά, Κόρινθος.

The study¹ provides an account of the discovery, in 2014, of an intact Byzantine sword, during a rescue excavation in Ancient Corinth². The comparison with similar

* Demetrios Athanasoulis, *Archaeologist-Byzantinist, PhD, Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades, dathanasoulis@gmail.com*

** Dr Eleni Manolessou, *Archaeologist-Byzantinist, Deputy Director, Head of the Dept. of Sculpture, Woodcarving, Ceramics, Minor Arts, Textiles and Canvasses, Byzantine and Christian Museum, emanolessou@culture.gr*

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¹ First presentation: D. Athanasoulis – E. Manolessou, “Βυζαντινό σπαθί από την Κόρινθο”, *40th Symposium of the ChAE (2021)*, 43-44.

² D. Athanasoulis – E. Manolessou, “Αρχαία Κόρινθος. Σχολικό

In 2014, in a plot of land in Ancient Corinth, excavations by the local Ephorate of Antiquities brought to light a sword. It is an iron sword with a bronze cross-guard and pommel, and may be dated, on the basis of the excavation data and of comparisons with relevant parallels, to the second half of the 9th century AD. Judging from its decoration, it could be attributed to an imperial weapon smithy. This sword constitutes one of the most important finds of Byzantine Corinth, since the discovery of such objects is extremely rare.

Keywords

Middle Byzantine period; Byzantine weapons; Swords; Corinth.

finds mainly from Southeastern Europe, and with iconographic parallels in art, and the study of the excavation led to the establishment of the sword's typology and dating, and to conclusions concerning the importance of the find for Byzantine weaponry and for Byzantine Corinth in general.

Personal weapons, and melee weapons like swords in particular, were of special importance in Medieval societies³. The depictions of sword-bearers in Byzantine murals

Συγκρότημα Αρχαίας Κορίνθου”, *AD 69 (2014) [2020]*, B1a Chronika, 418-423.

³ A. Bruhn Hoffmeyer, “Military equipment in the Byzantine manuscript of Skylitzes in Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid”, *Gladius V (1966)*, 91-92, 93-94. T. G. Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen. Ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung* (Byzantina Vindobonensia 17), Vienna 1988, 133, with previous literature. P. L. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints. Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843-1261)*, Leiden – Boston 2010, 348.

and manuscripts bear witness to the prominent position that these weapons held in everyday life but also in the collective imagination of the Byzantines. However, the surviving stock of swords from Byzantium, as compared to that from Medieval Europe and the Middle East, is minimal.

The absence of swords, and of weapons in general, from the Byzantine domain has been attributed to a variety of reasons⁴. It is certainly not due to lack of research. In fact, excavations in Medieval sites have multiplied, and have included locations such as Byzantine fortifications, where the finding of swords and other weapons would have been expected. Similarly, the castles excavated by the main author in the Peloponnese and the Cyclades have yielded very few weapons⁵. We may note, e.g., that in the Acrocorinth, the largest castle in Southern Mainland Greece, the remains of armour, crossbows and arrows all post-date the Byzantine period⁶.

In Corinth itself⁷, the thematic capital, weapons as evidence of the undoubtedly solid military presence are lacking; the systematic excavation of Corinth has revealed only minimal remains from swords, and in very poor state of preservation⁸. Nevertheless, it was in Corinth, in 1938, that one of the first intact swords of the Byzantine world was discovered, dated to the early 7th century AD⁹. However, the sword in question was

a “cultural implant”: it came from the grave of an Avar warrior, as indicated by the surrounding material finds (buckle of Olympia type dated to the late 6th-early 7th century, jar-type vessel of the 7th century), as well as by similar instances of swords discovered in Avar warriors’ graves excavated in necropolises of Eastern Europe¹⁰.

The dearth of Byzantine weapons, especially swords, in imperial lands can be attributed to standard cultural practices, as well as to the institutional framework through which the state administration controlled the availability or the trafficking of military material¹¹. The concomitant difficulty in locating, identifying and classifying Byzantine sword production is due not only to the lack of primary evidence, but also to the special nature of these artefacts: swords are valuable, and thus have a long, trans-generational one could say, service life¹². Furthermore, they are continuously being repaired and modified. Since they also have an added functional value, they may change hands or travel, as objects of trade exchanges, as gifts or as battle trophies¹³. Byzantium, at the centre of a

⁴ G. Davidson, *The Minor Objects* (Corinth XII), Princeton 1952, 199. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 26-29. Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 134.

⁵ Cf. D. Athanasoulis (ed.), *Castles of Argolid, Arcadia, Corinthia*, project website, <http://ecastles.culture.gr> (accessed: 15.1.2022).

⁶ D. Athanasoulis, *The Castle of Acrocorinth and its Enhancement Project (2006-2009)*, Ancient Corinth 2014. D. Athanasoulis – E. Manolessou, “Αρχαία Κόρινθος. Κάστρο Ακροκορίνθου, Νοτιοδυτικός (“Φράγκικος”) πύργος – κρήνη Άνω Πειρήνη”, *AD* 69 (2014) [2020], B1a Chronika, 237-238.

⁷ D. Athanasoulis, “Corinth”, J. Albani – E. Chalkia (eds), *Heaven and Earth. Cities and Countryside in Byzantine Greece*, Athens 2013, 192-209.

⁸ O. Broneer, “Excavations of Corinth 1925: Area North of Basilica”, *AJA* 30 no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1926), 51. Davidson, *The Minor Objects*, op.cit. (n. 4), 202, nos 1562-1563 pl. 93, no. 1565 pl. 92 p. 203, no. 1566 pl. 92.

⁹ G. Davidson Weinberg, “A wandering soldier’s grave in Corinth», *Hesperia* 43/4 (1974), 512-521, pls 110-113. V. Yotov, “A new Byzantine type of swords (7th-11th centuries)”, M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium. Ninth Symposium (Niš, 3-5 June 2010), The Collection of scientific works, IX, The days of Saint Emperor*

Constantine and Helena, Niš 2011, 114, with previous literature. Chr. Eger, “Zur Frage byzantinischer Blankwaffen im Ausgehenden 6. und 7. Jahrhundert: Schwerter mit bronzenem Parienstück vom Typ Aradac-Kölked-Korinth”, *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums* 61 (2014), 205-206, 215, 229-230, fig. 4.

¹⁰ Cf. S. László, “Korai avar kardok”, *Studia Comitatensia* 22 (1991), 263-346 (German summary: 322-325). F. Daim, “Vom Umgang mit toten Awaren”, J. Jarnut – M. Wemhoff – A. Nusser (eds), *Erinnerungskultur im Bestattungsritual: Archäologisch-Historisches Forum* (Mittelalter Studien 3), Munich 2003, 41-57.

¹¹ J. Haldon, “Some aspects of early Byzantine arms and armour”, D. Nicolle (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, Woodbridge 2002, 72. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 19-26. On the lack of information concerning the imperial monopoly of weapons after the time of Justin I, Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 146.

¹² See also A. Babuin, *Τα επιθετικά όπλα των Βυζαντινών κατά την ύστερη περίοδο (1204-1453)*, I. Text, open access PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, Ioannina 2009 [<https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/18101#page/1/mode/2up>], 35.

¹³ Bruhn Hoffmeyer, “Military equipment”, op.cit. (n. 3), 100-101. Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 134 note 8, 136. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 348-349. Yotov, “A new Byzantine type”, op.cit. (n. 9), 114. Idem, “Byzantine Time Swords (10th-11th Centuries) in Romania”, I. M. Ţiplic (ed.), *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference, Interethnic Relations in Transylvania. Militaria Mediaevalia in Central and South Eastern Europe (Sibiu, October 14th-17th 2010)*, Sibiu 2011, 36.



Fig. 1. Ancient Corinth, Zeiko. Aerial view of the Secondary School Excavation. Detail: The paved room where the sword was found, after removal of the earth deposits.

Eurasian world with great mobility, inevitably influenced Medieval weapon production, as swords are material objects usually devoid of distinctive cultural identity¹⁴. Researchers have identified certain types of swords as Byzantine¹⁵, by capitalizing on every single available piece of evidence, including representations in art¹⁶, which, however, are of variable reliability: they range from exact copies to abstractions indifferent to detail.

Let us now return to the sword from Corinth. From 2008 to 2014, the former 25th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, in a systematic attempt to explore and delimit

the extent of Byzantine Corinth, had implemented a project of intensive archaeological surveys in areas far from the already excavated archaeological site of the town. The project resulted in the discovery of new, unknown districts of Byzantine Corinth, in locations previously considered bare of antiquities. The most impressive discovery, without doubt, was the fact that the Byzantine regional capital extended in all directions radiating from the hitherto investigated area. More specifically, to the west, at the sites of Koutsoukomachalas and Zekio¹⁷, the excavations revealed building complexes with a horizon from the Proto-Byzantine period up to the 13th century, which constitutes a cut-off period for the urban development of the Peloponnesian town¹⁸.

One of these sites was the 5000 sq. m. plot intended for the construction of the new State Secondary School of Ancient Corinth¹⁹ (Fig. 1). The excavation uncovered extensive building remains, namely Proto-Byzantine buildings

¹⁴ Haldon, «Some aspects», op.cit. (n. 11), 79. Yotov «Byzantine Time Swords», op.cit. (n. 13), 36. D. Rabovyanov – S. Velikova, «Medieval Sword from the Collections of the Russe Regional Museum of History», *Armi Antiche* 2019, 11-12.

¹⁵ Concerning the typology of Byzantine swords see Haldon, «Some aspects», op.cit. (n. 11), 73. M. Aleksić, «Some typological features of Byzantine spatha», *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines XLVII* (2010), 125, 129-130, 131. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 350. Yotov, «A new Byzantine type», op.cit. (n. 9), 113-116. Idem, «Byzantine Time Swords», op.cit. (n. 13), 36. Rabovyanov – Velikova, «Medieval Sword», op.cit. (n. 14), 11-12, 15, with previous literature.

¹⁶ Koliass, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 33-34. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 348, 353-354, 354-355, 355-356. Yotov, «A new Byzantine type», op.cit. (n. 9), 113.

¹⁷ Athanasoulis, «Corinth», op.cit. (n. 7), 204, fig. 180. D. Athanasoulis – E. Manolessou, «Αρχαία Κόρινθος. Ιδιοκτησία Δ. Τσιπλικώφ. Ιδιοκτησία Γ. Ψωμά», *AD 69* (2014) [2020], Β1α Chronika, 309-310, 343-345.

¹⁸ Athanasoulis, «Corinth», op.cit. (n. 7), 207.

¹⁹ The building of the school had been planned since 2006. Excavations have led to the postponement of this plan until further notice.

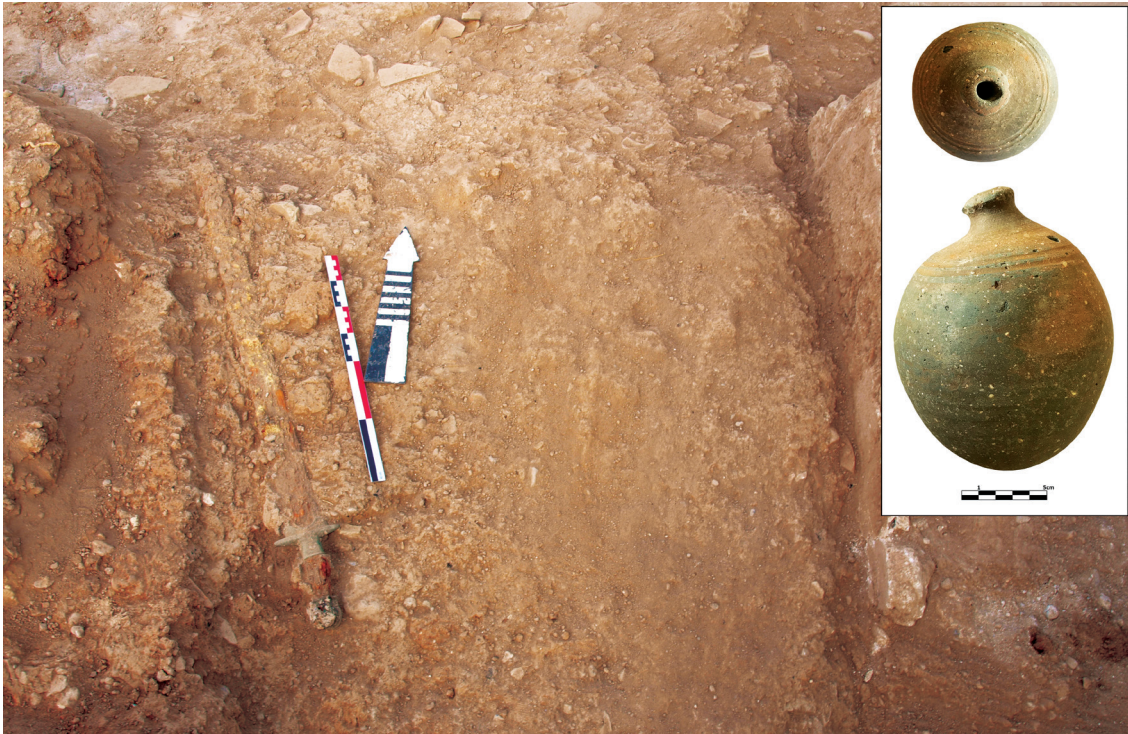


Fig. 2. Ancient Corinth. The sword upon discovery and the ceramic grenade.

with mosaic and opus sectile floors, and strong walls surviving to a considerable height, up to the springing of the vaulting. Their construction quality indicates that the buildings were probably upscale mansions²⁰. The area seems to have been temporarily abandoned at the start of the transitional period, judging from the later addition of a cist tomb and of a vaulted chamber containing human skeletons²¹. Red crosses had been painted on the plaster of walls, and the excavation yielded no grave goods. The possibility that this vaulted underground room belonged to an earlier building which was re-used for funerary purposes once the area lost its residential character cannot be excluded. Given that it is not located in the extra muros Proto-Byzantine necropolises, and that it is not an intra muros ad sanctos burial, its dating could be placed to the 7th century AD.

The proto-Byzantine ruins are put to new uses in the

²⁰ As confirmed by further excavations conducted by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Corinthia in recent years.

²¹ Athanasoulis – Manolessou, “Αρχαία Κόρινθος. Σχολικό συγκρότημα”, *op.cit.* (n. 2), 420.

next centuries, with additions, modifications, sealing of openings, changes of function etc. The later Medieval complex also possessed storage and workshop areas: the building in Zekio testifies to a renewed intensive use of the area at least from the 9th century onwards.

The sword came to light in a collapse layer of this middle Byzantine neighbourhood, near the east wall of a rectangular area (Fig. 1). The excavation uncovered the lower section of the room’s walls built from rubble and clay mortar. The floor was covered with tiles from the collapsed roof. The excavation of a layer of dirt over the tiles led to the discovery of the sword (Fig. 2). The composition of the soil indicates that the upper part of the room’s walls consisted of mud bricks, which collapsed on top of the already fallen tiled roof, dragging along the sword, which must have been hanging on the wall in its scabbard.

The southeastern rectangular section of the middle Byzantine floor was stone-paved (Fig. 1), while the west and northern sections were of packed dirt²². The joints of the paved floor were sealed with mortar, thus forming

²² *Ibid.*, 422, fig. 427.



Fig. 3. Ancient Corinth. The sword from Zekio, Corinthia.

an impermeable surface with a slight northern inclination, which directed the flow of liquids towards an underground pear-shaped reservoir, lined with crushed-tile mortar, with access footholds on the walls and a cavity for cleaning of subsidences. A storage pit was constructed to the west of the reservoir. One may conclude therefore that the area had a storage, and possibly workshop function, and was part of the western edges of the town, in a residential block probably outside the Medieval walls²³. The sword was found in a middle Byzantine horizon, since on the same ground layer the excavation uncovered a *foliis* of Romanus I Lecapenus, dated to 931-944²⁴, and in a layer higher than the sword an intact ceramic grenade²⁵ (Fig. 2), without traces of glazing²⁶.

²³ Athanasoulis, “Corinth”, op.cit. (n. 7), 199-206, fig. 172.

²⁴ Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, 3: Leo III – Nicephorus III (717-1081) [Part 2: Basil I to Nicephorus III (867-1081)], Washington, D. C. 1973, 538, Class 4 (No 25) AD 931-944, pls XXXVIII, XXXIX.

²⁵ Athanasoulis – Manolessou, “Αρχαία Κόρινθος. Σχολικό συγκρότημα”, op.cit. (n. 2), 422. Dimensions: ht. 0,13m., max. diameter 0,10m. On these vessels in Greece see M. Michaelidou, “Πήλινα αγγεία για εκτόξευση εμπρηστικής ύλης”, N. Bonovas – A. Tzitzibasi (ed.), *Βυζάντιο και Άραβες* (exhibition catalogue: *Περιοδική Έκθεση, Μουσείο Βυζαντινού Πολιτισμού, Οκτώβριος 2011 – Ιανουάριος 2012*), Thessaloniki 2011, 62-63, with previous literature.

²⁶ S. Vasileiadou, “Πήλινα σφαιροειδή αγγεία, πιθανόν για εκτό-

After the preliminary conservation of the sword by the former 25th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, its form and importance was revealed (Fig. 3): it has a total length of 0,84 m.²⁷ Its iron blade, 0,045 m. in width, is double-edged and has no fuller²⁸. The edges are parallel in most of its length, and converge with a slight rounding towards the point, which is also slightly rounded²⁹. The hilt (Fig. 4), which consists of an iron grip integral to the blade, has been fitted with a bronze straight horizontal cross-guard with a six-sided ring³⁰, decorated at

ξευση εμπρηστικής ύλης”, *Βυζάντιο και Άραβες*, op.cit. (n. 25), 66 no. 24.

²⁷ On the length of Byzantine swords, see Koliass, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 137. Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 129-130. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 344.

²⁸ Koliass, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 145-146. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 355. Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 129. According to the Arab Al Kindi (9th century AD), the lack of a fuller is a Byzantine characteristic (R. G. Hoykand – B. Gilmpour, *Medieval Islamic Swords and Sword-making. Kindi’s treatise ‘On swords and their kinds’. Edition, translation and commentary*, Exeter 2012, 89, 90). M. Aleksić, *Medieval swords from Southeastern Europe. Material from 12th to 15th centuries*, Belgrade 2007, 10.

²⁹ For these features, considered as Byzantine, see Bruhn Hoffmeyer, “Military equipment”, op.cit. (n. 3), 91, 92. Koliass, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 141-145. Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 129. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 355.

³⁰ Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 125.

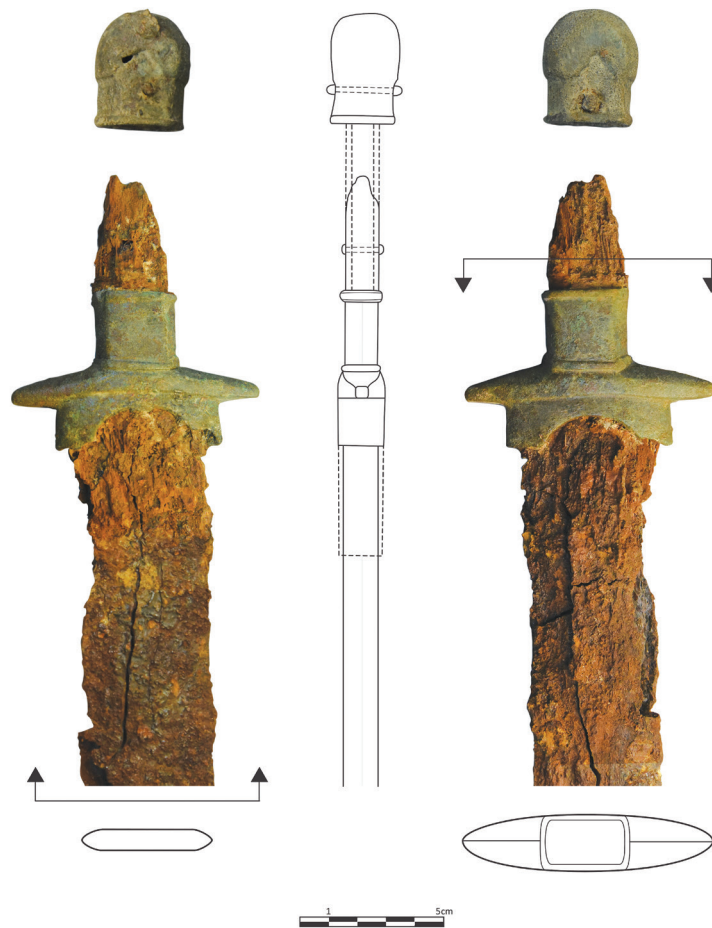


Fig. 4. The upper part of the sword with the bronze hilt: the front and back side and the narrow side, cross-sections of the hilt and the blade.

the edges with simple bands and short, prismatic pointed arms³¹, and with integral arc-shaped sleeves covering the upper part of the blade. Higher, the iron grip bore a wooden cladding³², attached to it with two rivets, one over the ring-shaped cross-guard and a second one at the bronze pommel of the hilt. The pommel is spherical, with trian-

³¹ The Byzantine spatha probably inherited its short arms from the Roman sword (gladius), which later increased in length [M. Tsurtsumia, "Medieval sword and sabre from the Georgian national museum", *Acta Militaria Mediaevalia* XI (2015), 161]. During the 9th-10th centuries the arms of the cross-guard of Byzantine swords were not long [Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 143].

³² Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 142-143. The type of hilt combining wood and metal was widespread in the Byzantine empire [Tsurtsumia, "Medieval sword", op.cit. (n. 31), 161, with previous literature].

gular grooves on both sides, and has a height of 0.04 m.

The special characteristic of this type of sword are the integral arc-shaped surfaces formed by the bronze hilt, which cover the blade. Despite the losses due to advanced corrosion, one may distinguish important details. On the rust of the iron grip, the shape of the wooden cladding of the grip has been imprinted around the rivet, attaching it to the iron grip. Furthermore, on the iron grip where it meets the cross-guard, one may distinguish on the rust traces of wrapping of the hilt with some kind of filament, probably wire, something also not unfamiliar in sword grips³³. Traces of the wooden cladding can also be detected on the upper part of the blade, right

³³ Cf. Babuin, *Τα επιθετικά όπλα*, op.cit. (n. 12), 48.

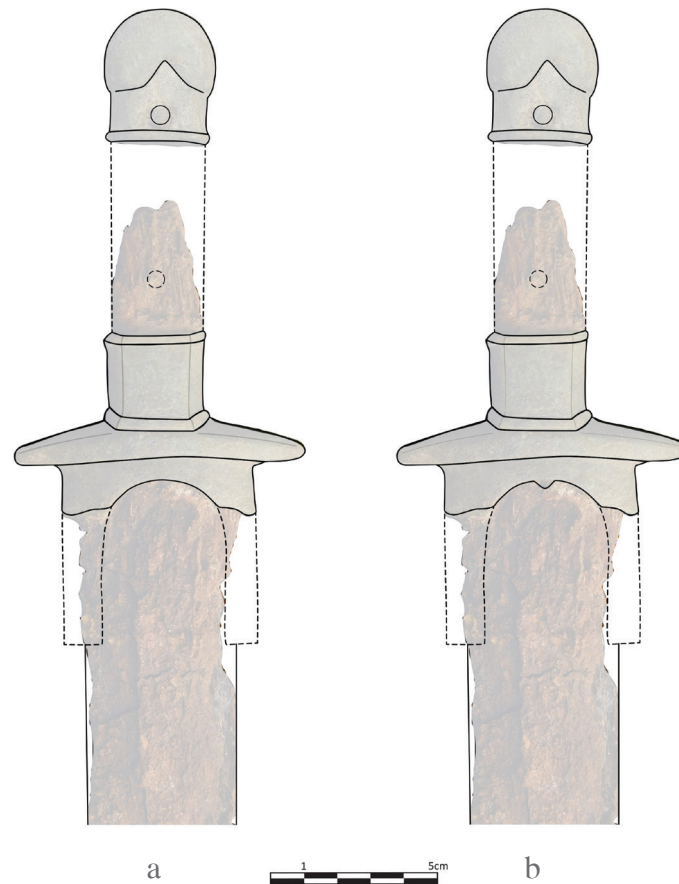


Fig. 5. Graphic reconstruction of the hilt.

under the arc-shaped covering, something which indicates that the scabbard of the sword was wooden³⁴. As already mentioned, the probable positioning of the sword, hanging on the wall, presupposes that it was sheathed in its scabbard, which must have possessed a baldric for suspending the sword on the warrior's right shoulder³⁵.

The sword, at the time it was buried under the rubble, was already considerably worn. Although it is not possible to detect hits on its highly corroded blade, the

³⁴ Koliaş, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 148. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 345.

³⁵ Note the difference between the Byzantine (roman) type of sword suspension over the shoulder as compared to the "paramerion" worn from a waist-belt and hanging over the thigh, see J. F. Haldon, "Some aspects of Byzantine military technology from the Sixth to the Tenth centuries", *BMGS* 1 (1975), 31. Koliaş, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 137-138, 149-153. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), 345-346, 351 and n. 162, 356-357.

bronze hilt bears obvious traces of wear and tear due to its long use. Careful observation reveals that the integral arc-shaped bronze blade sleeves have sustained serious damage: the edges at the ends of the arcs are not shaped as a finished surface, but have an irregular, jagged outline (Figs 3, 4). These irregular edges are in contrast to the regularity of the outlines of the arcs, which are intact and still preserve their geometrical shaping. Furthermore, the arc on side A of the sword is punctuated at the centre by one more protrusion with a jagged edge. These clues lead to the conclusion that the bronze blade sleeve was originally longer, and became truncated at some point (Fig. 5). As will be shown below, swords of this type have longer integral blade sleeves.

On the basis of the follis of Lecapenus and other contextual finds, the sword can be placed to a stratigraphic horizon of the first half of the 10th century. However, taking into consideration the wear and tear from its long

use, its manufacture could easily be antedated to the second half of the 9th century.

Indeed, the sword from Zekio, Corinthia has exact parallels from this period. More specifically, it belongs to type IA according to the classification of Byzantine swords³⁶. This is a group of swords also termed Garabonc type swords³⁷, from the Hungarian place name of the first such sword discovered in a late Avar necropolis of the second half of the 9th century. Since then, more variants of this type have been located, all outside the domain of the Eastern Roman Empire. Three have been found in the Ukraine, at the sites of Vinitsa³⁸, Kharkov³⁹

³⁶ Yotov, “A new Byzantine type”, op.cit. (n. 9), 116, 121, pl. II. Tsursumia, “Medieval sword”, op.cit. (n. 31), 161. For the most common type of spatha between 9th-12th century: Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 121, 129.

³⁷ B. M. Szőke, “Karolingerzeitliche Gräberfelder I-II von Garabonc-Ófalu”, *Die Karolingerzeit im unteren Zalatal. Gräberfelder und Siedlungsreste von Garabonc I-II und Zalaszabar- Derzsósziget, Antaeus. Communociones ex Instituto archaeologico*, Budapest 1992, 92-96, pls 18, 20, 63. Idem, “Karoling-kori szolgálónépi temetkezések Mosaburg/Zalavár vonzáskörzetében: Garabonc-Ófalu I-II”, *Zalai Múzeum* 5 (1994), 263-264, figs 5, 7.2 and 9.1a-b. J. Frings – H. Willinghöfer (eds), *Byzanz: Pracht und Alltag: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (exhibition catalogue: Bonn, 26. Februar bis 13. Juni 2010), Bonn 2010, 293, fig. 102. Yotov, “A new Byzantine type”, op.cit. (n. 9), 116, pl. II.4. Idem, “Byzantine Time Swords”, op.cit. (n. 13), 38. Idem, “Byzantine Weaponry and Military Equipment in the Homilies of St Gregory of Nazianzus (Par. gr. 510)”, *Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae* 30 (2017), 155, fig. 3. G. V. Baranov, “Byzantine (Mediterranean) 9th-11th century swords with sleeve cross-guards” (in Russian), *Materials in Archaeology and History of Ancient and Medieval Crimea, Archaeology, History, Numismatics, Sigillography and Epigraphy* 9 (2017), 251-252, fig. 2. Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), 12, 24, 27, fig. 4.

³⁸ Yotov, “Byzantine Weaponry”, op.cit. (n. 37), 155, fig. 4b. Baranov, “Byzantine (Mediterranean) 9th-11th century swords”, op.cit. (n. 37), 252, fig. 4. Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), 16-17, 27, fig. 9.

³⁹ Yotov, “A new Byzantine type”, op.cit. (n. 9), 116, πίν. II,5. Idem, “Byzantine Weaponry”, op.cit. (n. 37), 155, fig. 4a. G. V. Baranov, “A new find of a Byzantine sword-guard and a pommel in Cherkasy Raion, Cherkasy Oblast, Ukraine” (in Russian), *Materials in Archaeology and History of Ancient and Medieval Crimea. Archaeology, History, Numismatics, Sigillography and Epigraphy* 7 (2015), 89, fig. 5. Idem, “Byzantine (Mediterranean) 9th-11th century swords”, op.cit. (n. 37), 252, fig. 3. Idem, “New data on the finding of a Byzantine sword in the Kharkov region” (in Russian),

and Cherkasy⁴⁰, while later additions to the group include a sword from Dinogetia⁴¹ and a Samanid sword dated to the 8th-9th century, from Iran⁴² (Fig. 6). The type could be termed “swords with arc-shaped blade sleeves formed by the bronze hilt”. It is depicted in Byzantine art of the 9th-11th century, in manuscript illuminations, as we shall see below, as well as in mosaics⁴³. They could be considered a subgroup of a more general category of swords with blade sleeves⁴⁴. The scabbard fitted into the gap between the blade and its bronze sleeve. In this way, the opening of the scabbard was covered and protected. At the same time, the blade sleeve offered the wielder the possibility to use the so-called “Italian grip”, whereby the index finger covers and passes in front of the cross-guard, something allows both a better control of the sword and a greater versatility of hits, including stabbing ones⁴⁵.

The main deviation of the Corinth sword from the other specimens of the group seems to be its extremely short arc-shaped blade sleeve. However, as previously mentioned, this sleeve bore signs of damage at the edges, something which indicates that it had been deformed and the responds of the arcs could be restituted as longer (Fig. 5). Furthermore, one jagged protrusion at the

Historia I Świat 8 (2019), 91-98. Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), 16, 27, fig. 8.

⁴⁰ Baranov, “A new find of a Byzantine sword-guard”, op.cit. (n. 39), 87-105, figs 1-4. Yotov, “Byzantine Weaponry”, op.cit. (n. 37), 155, fig. 4c. Baranov, “Byzantine (Mediterranean) 9th-11th century swords”, op.cit. (n. 37), 252-253, figs 6, 7.3, 23.1. Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), 27, fig. 12.4.

⁴¹ M. Husár – S. Oța, “Middle Byzantine period weapons from the collections of the National Museum of Romanian History in Bucharest (also) used in Byzantium”, *Materiale și cercetări arheologice* (Serie nouă) 16 (2020), 229-231, pl. 1.

⁴² B. Mohamed (ed.), *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furuṣiyya Art Foundation Collection*, Milan 2008, 37, no. 8. Yotov, “A new Byzantine type”, op.cit. (n. 9), 117, pl. II.6. Idem, “Byzantine Weaponry”, op.cit. (n. 37), 155, fig. 4d. Baranov, “A new find of a Byzantine sword-guard”, op.cit. (n. 39), 89, fig. 6. Idem, “Byzantine (Mediterranean) 9th-11th century swords”, op.cit. (n. 37), 252, figs 5, 25. Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), fig. 13.

⁴³ Cf. the swords held by the St Bacchus in the mosaics of the katholikon of Daphni Monastery: N. Chatzidakis, *Ελληνική Τέχνη. Βυζαντινά ψηφιδωτά*, Athens 1994, 245, no. 122, fig. 122 (end of the 11th century). Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, op.cit. (n. 3), figs 79a-b.

⁴⁴ Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), fig. 12.

⁴⁵ Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), 10, 26-27.



Fig. 6. Swords with arc-shaped blade sleeves or Type IA / Garabonc swords: (a) Graphic reconstruction of the front side of the hilt with the missing decoration of the sleeve. (b) Cherkasy sword. (c) Hilt pommel from Corinth. (d) Garabonc. (e) Kharkov. (f) Vinitsa. (g) Dinogetia. (h) Iran (Samanid).

center of the arc indicates that part of the integral arc-shaped sleeve has been removed.

The restoration of the truncated form is facilitated by a comparison with the sword from Cherkasy, which also has two different sides, strikingly similar to those of the Zekio sword. On the basis of that, it is possible to represent the original form of the Zekio sword as shown in the drawings in Figs 5, 6a. More specifically, in the Ukrainian parallel (Fig. 6b), the integral blade sleeve was long, and bore on one of the arc-shaped sides a perforated palmette, of the fleur-de-lys type. Between the horizontal and vertical lobes of the motif, a small horizontal joint was inserted, obviously in order to support the motif at the three tapering ends of the lobes. Correspondingly, the Corinth sword preserves on one side arc-shaped blade covering in truncated form, while on the other side the space within the arc was filled by a now missing decorative element (Fig. 5b), joined to the centre of the arc and probably to the two now shortened responds.

It should be noted that the pommels of the Corinth and the Cherkasy swords are identical, and furthermore bear a great resemblance to a pommel discovered in 1938 also in Corinth⁴⁶ (Fig. 6c). Because of its resemblance

with the pommels from Cherkasy and Zekio, the latter should be considered contemporaneous to them.

On the basis of the above, the now fully documented classification of two Corinthian swords (one intact, and one of which only the pommel survives) to the 9th century Garabonc type swords, confirms our earlier conjecture that this sword type originates from Byzantine weapon-smithies. In fact, its considerable geographical spread indicates a production centre connected to all the areas of dispersion. In the 9th-10th centuries, this can only be Constantinople itself. As a result, the contribution of the Corinthian find from Zekio is of key importance for the research on Byzantine weapon production.

The find from Zekio bears traces which indicate that it belongs to a specific variant of the sword with integral blade sleeve type, in which the arc on one side bears a decorative motif, and more specifically a fleur-de-lys. The type of the motif is corroborated not only by the sword from Cherkasy but also by its depiction as a sword decoration in the miniatures of the Emperor Basil I manuscript containing the Homilies of Gregory of

pommel was excavated in the area of the church of Saint John. It is mentioned in conjunction with pottery coins of Justin II, John Tzimiskes, Michael IV etc.

⁴⁶ Davidson, *Minor Objects*, op.cit. (n. 4), 202, no. 1565, pl. 92. The

Nazianzus⁴⁷, created exactly at the time of the manufacture of the sword (879-883) (Fig. 7a and b).

The motif of the three-lobed palmette, later known in heraldry as fleur-de-lys, which decorates some of the instantiations of the Garabonc type, is very popular in Byzantium. It occurs in various art forms of the 9th-10th century, such as sculpture⁴⁸, the minor arts⁴⁹, and pottery⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Ms. Paris. gr. 510. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, folios 137, 215v, H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque nationale du VI^e au XIV^e siècle*, Paris 1929, 20, pl. XXXII (137v), and 23-24, pl. XXXIX (215v). For a comparison of this sword type with the ones represented in these miniatures see Yotov, “A new Byzantine type”, op.cit. (n. 9), 117. Idem, “Byzantine Weaponry”, op.cit. (n. 37), 155, 161, figs 6-9. Baranov, “A new find of a Byzantine sword-guard”, op.cit. (n. 39), 89-90, fig. 7. Idem, “Byzantine (Mediterranean) 9th-11th century swords”, op.cit. (n. 37), 252-253, figs 7, 8. Cf. Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 130.

⁴⁸ I. B. Göktürk, “Bizans Taş Eserlerinde Zambak (Fleur-de-Lis) Motifi: Tipolojik Bir Değerlendirme (The Lily Motif / Fleur-de-Lis) on Byzantine Stone Works: A Typological Assessment”, *SDU Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Journal of Social Sciences* 52 (2021), 163-181. A three lobed palmette can be found in several instances of 9th-11th century sculptures. An indicative list: Saint Gregory Theologian, Thebes (871/72): G. A. Sotiriou, “Ο ἐν Θήβαις βυζαντινὸς ναὸς Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου”, *AE* 1924, 17, 18, figs 27-29, which may have had metal models (M. Panayotidi, *Les monuments de Grèce depuis la fin de la crise iconoclaste jusqu'à l'an mille*, Texte I, unpublished *Thèse de Doctorat de III^e cycle*, Paris 1969, 107). Saint Demetrios, Thessalonike: A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Age I (IV^e-Xe siècle)* (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique de l'institut français d'archéologie d'Istanbul XVII), Paris 1963, pl. XLIII, fig. 2. Virgin of Skripou, Orchomenos (873/74): M. G. Sotiriou, “Ο ναὸς τῆς Σκριποῦς τῆς Βοιωτίας”, *AE* 1931, 147, figs 28, 29, p. 149, fig. 30. Grabar, *Sculptures* op.cit., pl. XL fig. 3, pl. XLI figs 3-5, pl. XLII fig. 9. A. H. S. Megaw, “The Skripou screen”, *BSA* 61 (1966), 29, no. 1, pl. 1b, f, 30, no. 5, pl. 2a, c, 31, no. 22, pl. 3, b, 31, no. 15, pl. 4b. Protaton, Holy Mountain, Bema pier (ca. 1000 AD): Th. N. Pazaras, “Sculpture in Macedonia during the Middle Byzantine Period”, J. Burke – R. Scott (eds), *Byzantine Macedonia. Art Architecture Music and Hagiography. Papers from the Melbourne Conference, July 1995*, Melbourne 2001, 29, fig. 49.

⁴⁹ See instances in the exhibition catalogue: H. C. Evans – W.D. Wixom (eds), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*, New York 1997: a processional cross (late 10th century) from Adrianople, 59 no. 23 (D. G. Katsarelis); the Harbaville ivory triptych (Constantinople), (mid-11th century), 133-134 no. 80 (I. Kalavrezou); panel with the enthroned Virgin and Child, Constantinople (10th-11th century), 140-141 no. 87 (O. Z. Pevny).

⁵⁰ Fleur-de-lys on a 12th century sherd, S. Kalopissi-Verti (ed.),

It also seems to be closely connected to the iconography of the period of the Macedonian Dynasty. For example, we may mention the palmettes of this type on the *loroi* of the emperors Constantine I and Justinian I in the Hagia Sophia mosaic⁵¹, (around 1000), as well as on the tunic of Basil II on the homonymous Venice psalter⁵². The depiction of trefoil palmettes on the back of the throne of Christ in front of which Leo VI the Wise prostrates himself in the mosaic (ca. 912) of the exonarthex in Hagia Sophia⁵³ may be not be accidental, since the image represents a royal throne.

The iconic importance of the motif of the trefoil palmette in imperial iconography continued after the Macedonian dynasty, as evidenced by the palmette decorating the *skaramangion* of Michael VI Doukas (Nikephoros Botaneiates according to the inscription)⁵⁴ as well as by the fleur-de-lys on the royal garment of the Norman Roger II, in the mosaic of Saint Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo (1146-1151), which was executed by a Byzantine workshop⁵⁵. Trefoil palmettes are also depicted in manuscript illuminations of the 10th and 11th centuries, on buildings resembling palaces

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⁵¹ Chatzidakis, *Βυζαντινά Ψηφιδωτά*, op.cit. (n. 43), 233 no. 34, fig. 34. Cf. the trefoil palmettes on the chlamys of St Demetrios and St Sergius in the mosaic paintings (mid 7th century AD) on the Bema pillars of Saint Demetrios in Thessaloniki (G. and M. Sotiriou, *Ἡ βασιλικὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης. Λεύκωμα. Πίνακες Αρχιτεκτονικῆς-Γλυπτικῆς-Ζωγραφικῆς-Εἰδημάτων καὶ Αναστηλώσεως τοῦ μνημείου*, Athens 1952, pl. 65α, β).

⁵² G. Galavaris, *Ελληνική Τέχνη. Ζωγραφικὴ βυζαντινῶν χειρογράφων*, Athens 1995, 225, no. 55, fig. 55 (fol. IIIr, MS gr. 17, ca. 1004. Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana).

⁵³ E. J. W. Hawkins, “Further Observations on the Narthex Mosaic in Saint Sophia at Istanbul”, *DOP* 22 (1968), 159, figs 1, 2.

⁵⁴ Galavaris, *Ζωγραφικὴ βυζαντινῶν χειρογράφων*, op.cit. (n. 52), 232 no. 92, fig. 92 (fol. 2v, MS Coislin 79, Homilies of John Chrysostome, 1074-1078, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale), with previous literature. Cf. the garments of the emperor Nicephorus Botaneiates and of Maria Alane in a miniature of the same manuscript, fol. 2 bis v., *Glory of Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 49), 182, 207, 209, no 143 (H. Maguire).

⁵⁵ E. Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), Washington, D. C. 1990, 189-190, 195, 261-262, 263, 313-316, cat. no. 71, figs XXIII, 120.



Fig. 7. Sword depictions in MS Paris. gr. 510: (a) Folio 137r, and (b) Folio 215v, details.

and royal mansions, or at the corners of miniatures⁵⁶.

More relevant to the discussion is the depiction of a trefoil palmette on the horse tack, and as a shield emblem, of a courtier official behind the emperor in the historical wall-painting on the south wall of Saint

Demetrius in Thessaloniki⁵⁷, which, according to a recent study⁵⁸, must represent the Emperor Leo VI.

In the sword from Cherkasy, as well as on those depicted in Ms. Paris. gr. 510, the prominent use of the fleur-de-lys on a status symbol such as the sword cannot be considered merely decorative, but rather equivalent to a diacritic symbol. The use of the specific type of palmette of the imperial iconography on weapons, such as shields and swords, and especially the faithful representation of this sword type on the miniatures of the imperial Ms. Paris. gr. 510 as described above, indicates a direct connection of the production of these weapons to the imperial smithies and armouries of Constantinople.

To sum up, at the site of Zekio, Ancient Corinth, in the west sector of Byzantine Corinth, excavations revealed an almost intact sword, which presents characteristics allowing its classification as Byzantine, on the basis of

⁵⁶ Cf. Galavaris, *Ζωγραφική βυζαντινών χειρογράφων*, op.cit. (n. 52), 221 no. 33, fig. 33 (fol. 10b, MS 43-Four Gospels, 950-960, Holy Mount Athos, Stavronikitas monastery), 220 no. 28, fig. 28 [fol. 41b, MS Chis. gr. 45 (R.VIII. 54), Prophets, ca. 950, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana]. A. Cutler – N. Patterson Ševčenko, “A recently Discovered Ivory of Saint Ignatios and the lions”, A. Cutler – A. Papaconstantinou (eds), *The Material and the Ideal. Essays in Medieval Art and Archaeology in honour of Jean-Michel Spieser*, Leiden – Boston 2007, 121-122, fig. 4 (Menologion of Basil II, ca. 985, Vat. gr. 1613, fol. 258). St. M. Pelekanidis – P. K. Christou – Ch. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi – S. N. Kadas, *Οἱ θησαυροὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Εἰκονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα. Παραστάσεις – Επίτιλα – Ἀρχικά Γράμματα*, I, Πρωτότον, Μ. Διονυσίου, Μ. Κουτλουμουσίου, Μ. Ξηροποτάμου, Μ. Γρηγορίου, Athens 1973, MS 34, Four Gospels (10th century), 408-409, fig. 80; MS 61, Sixteen Homilies of Gregory the Theologian (11th century), 415, 416, 418, figs 107, 113, 116, 117; MS 587, Lectionary (1059), 434-435, 437, 438, 439, 444, 445, 446, figs 189, 202, 216, 222, 258, 264, 266, 272, 275.

⁵⁷ Sotiriou, *Βασιλικὴ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου*, op.cit. (n. 51), pl. 78.

⁵⁸ A. Mentzos, “Ἡ ἱστορικὴ τοιχογραφία τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου”, *Makedonika* 34/1 (2003-2004), 209-227. The connection of the motif to the Macedonian dynasty may corroborate the hypothesis of the identification of the Emperor depicted in the wall-painting with Leo VI.

parallels, of its location in a Byzantine city but not in a grave, of its dimensions⁵⁹, of the form of the blade, of its materials (iron blade with bronze cross-guard)⁶⁰, as well as of its similarity with swords depicted in Byzantine art, especially in Paris. gr. 510⁶¹.

The sword from Corinth is now the seventh instance of a specific type of swords, known as 1A or Garabonc type. On the basis of the excavation contextual data, the dating of the parallel instances of swords, and its artistic representations (Paris. gr. 510), it can be dated to the second half of the 9th century. Given that an identical pommel had been uncovered in earlier excavations in Corinth, it should be considered that the Peloponnesian city displays two instances of Byzantine swords. Both were discovered in locations unconnected to official spaces or military use (such as the Acrocorinth). It is possible that the Zekio sword was in a workshop awaiting repair, considering the fact that in the same space, apart from workshop installations (impermeable flooring, reservoir, storage pit), one more weapon, a ceramic grenade, was found.

The owner of the sword was most probably a high-ranking military officer in Corinth, one of the most important regional centres of Byzantine administration and of the imperial army⁶², with a key role in the im-

plementation of the policy of control and “γραιώσις” (greecization) of the Slavs of the Peloponnese, a process which was still ongoing during the 10th century⁶³.

The considerable geographic dispersion of the type 1A/Garabonc swords with arc-shaped blade sleeve formed by the hilt safely indicates as their centre of production the city of Constantinople itself. Of the seven swords belonging to the group, two of them, the one from Corinth and that from Cherkasy could form a special sub-category as products of the same workshop, due to their identical form. The decoration of the swords of subtype Corinth/Cherkasy, with the iconic fleur-de-lys, connects the sword to the imperial emblems of the period of the Macedonian dynasty and renders the hypothesis of their attribution to an imperial weapon smithy of Constantinople, in the mid 9th century, very attractive.

⁶³ D. Athanasoulis, “Το έργο της 25ης ΕΒΑ στην Αργαδία (2011-2014)”, *Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο των Εφορειών Αρχαιοτήτων κατά την χρονική περίοδο 2011-2019*, forthcoming.

Illustration credits

Figs 1, 2: Hellenic Ministry of Culture / Ephorate of Antiquities of Corinthia. Figs 3, 4: Photographs by D. Athanasoulis. Fig. 4: Drawings by Maria Mpia and Evangelia Tsaknaridou. Figs 5, 6a: Graphic reconstruction by D. Athanasoulis, Maria Mpia and Evangelia Tsaknaridou. Figs 6b, 6e, 6f: Baranov, “A new find of a Byzantine sword-guard”, op.cit. (n. 39), figs 3, 4, 6. Fig. 6c: Davidson, *Minor objects*, op.cit. (n. 4), pl. 92. Fig. 6d: Szőke, “Karolingerzeitliche Gräberfelder”, op.cit. (n. 37), pl. 63.2. Fig. 6g: Husár – Ota, “Middle Byzantine period weapons”, op.cit. (n. 41), pl. 1a. Fig. 6h: Mohamed, *The Arts of the Muslim Knight*, op.cit. (n. 42), fig. on p. 37. Fig. 7a: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f444.item> (accessed: 5.2.2022). Fig. 7b: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f287.item> (accessed: 5.2.2022).

⁵⁹ Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen*, op.cit. (n. 3), 137. For example, the cross-guard has a length of 0.09 m, similarly to the sword from Cherkasy (0.105 m).

⁶⁰ Haldon, “Some aspects”, op.cit. (n. 11), 73. Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 125, notes the scarcity of finds bearing bronze cross-guards in Europe.

⁶¹ In these representations one may clearly discern the type of the Byzantine spatha, Aleksić, “Some typological features”, op.cit. (n. 15), 130, 131. Cf. Rabovyanov – Velikova, “Medieval Sword”, op.cit. (n. 14), 24, 29, fig. 11, with previous literature.

⁶² Athanasoulis, “Corinth”, op.cit. (n. 7). Athanasoulis, *The Castle of Acrocorinth*, op.cit. (n. 6).

ΜΕΣΟΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΟ ΣΠΑΘΙ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΟ

Τα ατομικά όπλα και ειδικότερα τα αγγέμαχα, όπως τα σπαθιά, είχαν ιδιαίτερη σημασία σε όλες τις προνεωτερικές κοινωνίες και δη τις μεσαιωνικές. Το Βυζάντιο δεν αποτελεί εξαίρεση. Ωστόσο, στον ελλαδικό χώρο και ειδικότερα στην Κόρινθο, τα λείψανα από σπαθιά είναι ολιγάριθμα και σε κακή κατάσταση διατήρησης.

Το 2014, σε σωστική ανασκαφή στην Αρχαία Κόρινθο, στην θέση «Ζέκιο», σε οικόπεδο όπου προβλεπόταν η οικοδόμηση σχολείου (Εικ. 1), ανευρέθηκε ένα ακέραιο βυζαντινό σπαθί. Τα πρωτοβυζαντινά ερείπια πολυτελών κτηρίων που αποκαλύφθηκαν στον χώρο, επαναχρησιμοποιούνται στους επόμενους αιώνες, με προσθήκες, μετασκευές, σφράγισμα ανοιγμάτων, αλλαγές χρήσης κ.λπ. Το μεσαιωνικό, πλέον, συγκρότημα διέθετε και χώρους αποθηκευτικούς, πιθανόν και εργαστηριακούς: στο συγκρότημα στο Ζέκιο τεκμηριώνεται ξανά εντατική χρήση του χώρου τουλάχιστον από τον 9ο αιώνα και εξής.

Το σπαθί ήλθε στο φως σε στρώμα κατάρρευσης-καταστροφής αυτής της μεσοβυζαντινής γειτονιάς, σε χώρο με αποθηκευτική, ενδεχομένως, και εργαστηριακή χρήση (Εικ. 1, 2). Επί του δαπέδου του χώρου, όπου βρέθηκε, εντοπίστηκε φύλλισ του Ρωμανού Α΄ Λακαπηνού, του 931-944 μ.Χ. Σημειώνεται ότι ψηλότερα από το σπαθί είχε ανευρεθεί και ακέραιη κεραμική χειροβομβίδα (Εικ. 2).

Το σπαθί (Εικ. 3, 4) έχει μήκος 0,84 μ. Η σιδερένια λεπίδα του, πλάτους 0,045 μ., είναι αμφίστομη και δεν διαθέτει νεύρωση. Οι κόψεις βαίνουν παράλληλα σε όλο το μήκος της λεπίδας συγκλίνοντας καμπυλούμενες λίγο πριν από την αιχμή, που επίσης παρουσιάζει μικρή καμπυλότητα. Στην λαβή, που αποτελείται από τον συμφυή με την λεπίδα σιδερένιο πυρήνα, έχει προσαρμολοστεί χάλκινος ευθύγραμμος χειροφυλακτήρας με εξάπλευρο δακτύλιο, κοσμημένο στα άκρα με απλές ταινίες και βραχείς, πρισματικής μορφής, οξύληκτους βραχίονες καθώς και συμφυή τοξωτά καλύμματα της γένεσης της λεπίδας. Ο σιδερένιος πυρήνας της λαβής

έφερε ξύλινη επένδυση, η οποία προσηλωνόταν σε αυτόν με δύο πείρους. Το μήλο (ύψος 0,04 μ., Εικ. 4) είναι σφαιρικό, με τριγωνικές εγκοπές στις δύο όψεις. Άλλο ένα παρόμοιο σφαίρωμα είχε εντοπιστεί παλαιότερα, πάλι στην Κόρινθο.

Το ιδιαίτερο χαρακτηριστικό αυτού του τύπου σπαθιού είναι οι συμφυείς τοξωτές επιφάνειες που σχηματίζει η χάλκινη λαβή καλύπτοντας την γένεση της λεπίδας (Εικ. 4, 5). Από την παρατήρηση των φθορών αυτών των επιφανειών προκύπτει ότι το χάλκινο κάλυμμα της λεπίδας ήταν μακρύτερο και κάποια στιγμή κολοβώθηκε.

Με βάση τον φύλλι του Λακαπηνού και τα λοιπά συνευρήματα, το σπαθί μπορεί να ενταχθεί σε στρωματογραφικούς ορίζοντες του πρώτου μισού του 10ου αιώνα. Ωστόσο, έχοντας υπόψη τις φθορές από την μακρά χρήση του, η χρονολογία κατασκευής θα μπορούσε να ανέβει και στο δεύτερο μισό του 9ου αιώνα.

Το σπαθί της Κορίνθου βρίσκει ακριβή παράλληλα από αυτήν την εποχή, καθώς εντάσσεται στον τύπο 1Α των βυζαντινών σπαθιών, όπως έχουν κατηγοριοποιηθεί. Αυτά περιγράφονται και ως «τύπου Garabonc» (Εικ. 6), από το ογγρικό τοπωνύμιο του πρώτου σπαθιού που εντοπίστηκε σε υστεροβαρική νεκρόπολη του δεύτερου μισού του 9ου αιώνα. Άλλες παραλλαγές του τύπου προέρχονται από τις θέσεις Vinitsa, Kharkon και Cherkasy της Ουκρανίας, ενώ στην ίδια ομάδα έχει προστεθεί ένα ξίφος από την Dinogetia κι ένα σαμανιδικό σπαθί, του 8ου-9ου αιώνα, από το Ιράν. Ο τύπος θα μπορούσε να αποκαλείται «σπαθιά με συμφυές στην λαβή τοξωτό κάλυμμα λεπίδας».

Την αποκατάσταση της κολοβωμένης μορφής διευκολύνει το σπαθί από το Cherkasy, που έχει επίσης δύο διαφορετικές όψεις, εντυπωσιακά όμοιες με εκείνες του σπαθιού από το Ζέκιο. Το πρώτο έφερε στην μία τοξωτή πλευρά του διάτρητο ανθέμιο, στον τύπο του κρινάνθεμου. Αντίστοιχα, στο σπαθί της Κορίνθου η μία πλευρά διατηρεί κολοβωμένο το τοξωτό κάλυμμα

λεπίδας, ενώ στην άλλη όψη το κενό εντός του τοξυλλίου πληρωνόταν από ένα στοιχείο που σήμερα έχει αποκρουσθεί και συνδεόταν με το κέντρο του τόξου και προφανώς με τα δύο κολοβωμένα ποδαρικά του. Πανομοιότυπο είναι και το μήλο που έφεραν τα δύο σπαθιά από την Κόρινθο και το Cherkasy.

Ύστερα από τα παραπάνω, η τεκμηριωμένη ένταξη δύο, πλέον, σπαθιών της Κορίνθου –ένα σχεδόν ακέραιο και ένα από το οποίο έχει σωθεί το σφαίρωμα– στην ομάδα ξιφών τύπου Garabonc του 9ου αιώνα επιβεβαιώνει την, απλώς εικαζόμενη μέχρι σήμερα, προέλευση αυτού του τύπου από τα βυζαντινά οπλοουργεία. Μάλιστα, η μεγάλη γεωγραφική του εξάπλωση υποδεικνύει ως κέντρο παραγωγής ένα κομβικό σημείο που συνδέεται με όλες τις περιοχές διασποράς, το οποίο δεν θα μπορούσε να είναι άλλο, τον 10ο αιώνα, από την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Έτσι, η συμβολή του κορινθιακού ευρήματος από το Ζέκιο είναι κομβικής σημασίας για την τεκμηρίωση της βυζαντινής οπλοπαραγωγής.

Στη μία όψη του καλύμματος της λεπίδας του το σπαθί της Κορίνθου έφερε πιθανώς ως διακοσμητικό μοτίβο ένα κρινάνθεμο (Εικ. 6). Αυτό τεκμηριώνεται με το σπαθί από το Cherkasy αλλά και από την απεικόνισή του σε σπαθιά στις υψηλής πιστότητας μικρογραφίες του χειρογράφου του αυτοκράτορα Βασιλείου Α΄ με τις ομιλίες του Γρηγορίου Ναζιανζηνού (Εικ. 7), το οποίο φιλοτεγήθηκε ακριβώς την εποχή κατασκευής του σπαθιού (879-883). Το μοτίβο του τρίφυλλου ανθεμίου –γνωστού από την εραλδική ως κρινάνθεμον, που κοσμεί ορισμένα παραδείγματα του τύπου Garabonc, είναι δημοφιλές στην βυζαντινή τέχνη του 9ου-10ου αιώνα και φαίνεται ότι συνδέεται με την αυτοκρατορική εικονογραφία της Μακεδονικής δυναστείας, καθώς τέτοια ανθέμια κοσμούν τα ενδύματα αυτοκρατόρων σε χειρόγραφα και στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική της περιόδου. Η εμβληματική σημασία που

είχε το μοτίβο του τρίφυλλου ανθεμίου στην αυτοκρατορική εικονογραφία συνεχίστηκε και μετά τη Μακεδονική δυναστεία. Το τρίφυλλο ανθέμιο εικονίζεται ως έμβλημα ασπίδας αυλικού αξιωματούχου πίσω από τον αυτοκράτορα στην ιστορική τοιχογραφία στον νότιο τοίχο του Αγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης, που ίσως μπορεί να ταυτιστεί με τον αυτοκράτορα Λέοντα ΣΤ΄. Η χρήση του συγκεκριμένου τύπου ανθεμίου της αυτοκρατορικής εικονογραφίας επί όπλων, όπως σε ασπίδες και ξίφη, και, κυρίως, η πιστή απεικόνιση αυτού του τύπου σπαθιού στις μικρογραφίες του αυτοκρατορικού χειρογράφου Paris. gr. 510, μπορεί να συνδέσει απευθείας την παραγωγή αυτή με τα αυτοκρατορικά οπλοουργεία της Κωνσταντινούπολης.

Η μεγάλη γεωγραφική διασπορά του τύπου 1Α/ Garabonc/«σπαθιά με συμφυές στην λαβή τοξωτό κάλυμμα λεπίδας» υποδεικνύει με ασφάλεια ως κέντρο παραγωγής τους την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Από αυτά, το σπαθί της Κορίνθου και εκείνο του Cherkasy μπορούν να συγκροτήσουν ειδική υποκατηγορία ως προϊόντα του ίδιου εργαστηρίου. Η διακόσμηση των σπαθιών της υποκατηγορίας Cherkasy/Κόρινθος, με το εμβληματικό κρινάνθεμο, συνδέει το σπαθί με την αυτοκρατορική εικονογραφία της Μακεδονικής δυναστείας και καθιστά δελεαστική την υπόθεση απόδοσής τους σε αυτοκρατορικό οπλοουργείο της Κωνσταντινούπολης του δεύτερου μισού του 9ου αιώνα.

*Δημήτριος Αθανασούλης, Δρ Αρχαιολόγος-Βυζαντινολόγος
Διευθυντής Εφορείας Αρχαιοτήτων Κυκλάδων
dathanasoulis@gmail.com*

*Ελένη Μανωλέσσου, Δρ Αρχαιολόγος-Βυζαντινολόγος
Προϊσταμένη Τμήματος Συλλογής Γλυπτικής,
Έυλογλυπτικής, Κεραμικής, Μικροτεχνίας,
Υφασμάτων και Μουσουλμάδων
Βυζαντινό και Χριστιανικό Μουσείο
emanolessou@culture.gr*