

“From Every Side Armed with a Cross Sign”. A Crusader’s (?) Sword from the Collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest

Arkadiusz MICHALAK*

Keywords: *Crusade period, Swords, Jerusalem Cross, Hungary, Luis the Great*

Abstract

Despite strictly military character of Crusades, surprisingly there are only few swords and its parts which can be connected with this campaigns and its ideology. It is worth mention of a swords found in the Palestine: sword pommel of Pierre de Dreux, Duke of Brittany and two swords found in the waters of Atilit Castle and another at Dor castle as well as connected with Prussian Crusades: Ottokar’s II of Bohemia sword from Santok and swords found in River Tina and Pregoła. Another sword which can be connected with crusades or crusades ideology comes from the collection of Hungarian National Museum in Budapest. According to E. Oakeshott’s classification it represents type XVIa, K, 1. The sword can be dated to the 14th cent. The special issue about it is that it’s the only sword that bears a Jerusalem Cross sign on its blade. This symbol, which has clear crusading indications, was extremely popular among medieval knighthood. Trying to explain the Budapest’ sword riddle we should pay attention to historical events which its production can be connected with: the European journey of king of Cyprus Peter I de Lusignan, Templars, Teutonic Knights and Hospitallers houses in medieval Hungary, crusades organised against the Turks in the Balkans by Louis of Hungary and his claims for the crown of Kingdom of Naples and Jerusalem.

None of the big military campaigns are more associated with the knighthood and its attributes than the Crusades. Started by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095, they were initially a series of religiously sanctioned war expeditions which had the goal to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslim rule in the period between 1095 and 1291¹. Afterwards the term was also used to describe campaigns conducted until the 16th cent. in territories outside Levant (also in Central Europe), usually against pagans, heretics and people under the ban of excommunication². Crusades had far-reaching political, economic and social impacts and also influenced weaponry used at that time³.

Crusading warfare was the result of a mutual Byzantine and Arab-Islamic impact on the Western European military tradition⁴. Considerable changes were especially notable in the use of swords. By the late 11th cent., the use of the sword belt as a way of carrying a sword was very common. However, the baldric or shoulder strap was

* Archaeological Museum of the Odra River Territory in Zielona Góra, Poland (a.michalak@muzeum-swidnica.org).

¹ See: Riley-Smith 1999a; Murray 2006, for previous literature on this subject.

² See: Runciman 1951; Runciman 1952; Runciman 1954, for previous bibliography.

³ Smail 1956; Nicolle 1987; Bouzy 1996; France 1999.

⁴ Nicolle 1999, pp. 7-10.