

Carolingian Swords from Croatia – New Thoughts on an Old Topic

Goran Bilogrivić*

Keywords: *swords, typology, Carolingians, early medieval Croatia, elite identity*

Abstract

A relatively large number of Carolingian swords have been found in Croatia, most of them during the early archaeological excavations of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. These were discussed many times since then, but there is still open space left and opportunity for new insights and conclusions. Some shall be presented in this paper, such as new typological considerations of the swords usually attributed to Petersen's distinctive type I and some thoughts on a finely decorated type K sword which belongs to a small but well defined group of similar finds from different parts of Europe. The possible active role of these objects, in the formation of elite identity in the context of the emerging Croatian dukedom, is shortly discussed, after the debate regarding the typological considerations.

Compared to their size, the territories of present-day Croatia and neighbouring Herzegovina have yielded a considerable number of Carolingian swords, which have been an important factor in discussions of early medieval history and archaeology in Croatia. Most of them were discovered in the pioneering archaeological excavations of the late 19th and early 20th century and thoroughly researched, especially in the second half of the 20th century. The largest part of that research was carried out and published by Zdenko Vinski, whose work is generally well known outside of Croatia, and remains a cornerstone for the research of this material¹. However, several new discoveries concerning these same swords have been made since then and in this paper I shall briefly point out some of those discoveries and emphasize them with some of my own recent research².

* University of Zagreb, Croatia (gbilogri@ffzg.hr).

¹ Cf. Zdenko Vinski, "O nalazima karolinških mačeva u Jugoslaviji," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, Split, s. III 11 (1981); Zdenko Vinski, "Zu karolingischen Schwertfunden aus Jugoslawien," *Jahrbuch RGZM*, 30 (1983); Zdenko Vinski, "Marginalia uz izbor karolinškog oružja u jugoistočnoj Evropi," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, s. III, 15 (1985).

² A large part of this paper is based on two of my previous articles (Goran Bilogrivić, "Karolinški mačevi tipa K [Type K Carolingian Swords]," *Opuscula archaeologica*, 33 (2009); Goran Bilogrivić, "O mačevima posebnog tipa u Hrvatskoj," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, III. s., 38 (2011). As they were both published in Croatia (the latter one only in Croatian), the conference in Sibiu was a good opportunity to introduce a part of the research published there to international scholars of medieval weaponry. This version is also updated with a few newer conclusions and references to a couple of publications which have since come out of press.

Hiltipreht

Croatia and Herzegovina are best known for the high percentage of Petersen's type K swords (13 of the total 24 Carolingian swords in the area). Therefore I shall begin with one of those. The sword from Zadvarje (Poletnica) near Omiš was discovered in 1896 in an amateur excavation of a grave, along with a winged spearhead. The discovery was published only more than 80 years later by Vinski³. He noted within the article the presence of an inlaid silver wire decoration of the hilt, that was well crafted, but nothing out of the ordinary. He dated the sword within the second half of the 9th century, based mostly on the somewhat longer crossguard⁴. A very important discovery was made some 20 years later during the sword's last analysis⁵. A previously invisible incised ornamentation had therefore appeared on the hilt's decorative surface. The decoration consisted of an inlaid silver wire, hammered into a smooth surface (**T.1**). There were also other decorations that became visible at the same time, namely a tendril with grape or trefoil motifs located on the crossguard's sides, two anchor-type crosses (*crucis ancoratae*) located on its lower side and fragments from an inscription, located upon its upper side. The inscription fragment was most probably part of someone's name. The remaining letters are A on the left side and ERTU on the tang's right side⁶.

The decoration and the inscription on the crossguard enable us to connect the sword from Zadvarje with seven other swords from different parts of Europe, which all together form a very distinctive and tightly connected group. These are all type K swords with five lobes on the pommel, richly decorated hilts with inlaid silver wire and incised tendril. Inscriptions are visible on 6 of the total of 8 crossguards..

Two swords have been found in Norway, two more in Ireland and one in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Croatia, namely (**T.2-3**). Some of the swords are more similar to each other, while others have more distinctive characteristics⁷. A recently

³ Zdenko Vinski, "Novi ranokarolinški nalazi u Jugoslaviji," *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu*, Zagreb, 3. ser, X-XI (1977-1978), 172-173. In this and all subsequent publications of Z. Vinski the sword was attributed to the site of Žeževica Donja. Later, however, it has been established that the exact place of discovery was Poletnica near Zadvarje (this is only a matter of microlocation, but since in all newer literature the sword is attributed to Zadvarje, confusions might arise while reading older publications). Cf. Mate Zekan, "K novoj atribuciji nalazišta mačeva karolinškoga obilježja iz Muzeja hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika u Splitu," *Izdanja Hrvatskog arheološkog društva*, Zagreb, 15 (1990 [1992]), 136.

⁴ Vinski, "Novi ranokarolinški nalazi u Jugoslaviji," 172-173.

⁵ Ivo Donelli, "Rekonzervacija i konzervacija karolinškog mača iz Zadvarja," *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku*, Split 94 (2001).

⁶ New discoveries published in detail in Ante Piteša, "Karolinški mač s natpisom iz Zadvarja (Žeževica Donja)," *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku*, Split, 94, (2001); Ante Piteša, *Katalog nalaza iz vremena seobe naroda, srednjeg i novog vijeka u Arheološkome muzeju u Slitu [Catalogue of finds from the Migration Period, Middle Ages and Early Modern Period in the Archaeological Museum in Split]* (Split, 2009), 54-55.

⁷ For a more detailed description of individual swords see Goran Bilogrivić, "Karolinški mačevi tipa K [Type K Carolingian Swords]," *Opuscula archaeologica*, 33 (2009), 136-141, and the older literature cited there.

published type K sword from Denmark (Stårby, Øster Egesborg) has also a hilt decorated with inlaid silver wire and incised tendril ornamentation on crossguard's sides (**T.3: 3**)⁸.

The tendril is executed in a very similar, almost identical manner on most of the hilts. The decoration consists of a grape or trefoil motif and is divided in the middle by a vertical line⁹. The one from Gjersvik is slightly different, having a small trefoil with thin leaves (**T. 3: 1**). The tendril on the crossguard of the sword from Stårby, however, is markedly different and doesn't present any grapes or trefoils¹⁰. The pommels' lobes are decorated identically on the swords from Kilmainham and Ballinderry (**T. 2: 1-2**), and similarly on the one from Elst (**T. 3: 2**), while only the swords from Ballinderry, the Wallace Collection and Zadvarje have incised ornamentation on the crossguard's lower side. The first two exhibit the same motif, sometimes referred to as „rabbit's ears”,¹¹ which in turn is similar to a certain degree to the motif on the outer lobe of the sword from Elst¹². Both swords from Norway, also, have (or had) rivets in the ends of their crossguards, as did the sword from Stårby.

Probably the most important characteristic of this group, however, is the inscribed (personal) name on the crossguard's upper side, that is missing only from the swords from Gjersvik, Elst and Stårby. Altogether, there are two complete names – HILTIPREHT (which appears three times) and HARTOLFR, and two fragments – A...ERTU... and HLI. HLI appears on the sword from the Wallace Collection and is sometimes interpreted as also originally having been HILTIPREHT,¹³ because the inscription on the sword from Gravråk was firstly read HLITHER and much later corrected to HILTIPREHT¹⁴. The inscription on the sword from Zadvarje holds a special place in the group, as it is the only one written in Latin, with the presumed ending – ERTU(S). Still, it is interpreted as a name of Germanic, probably Frankish origin. Other possible examples being considered

⁸ Peter Pentz, “To vikingesværd med karolingisk planteornamentik i Nationalmuseetssamlinger,” *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 2010 [2012], 110-115. Pentz added another sword to the group, one found at the Kilmainham cemetery in Ireland, but brought to Denmark during the middle of the 19th century. This sword is also of type K but single-edged and with a seven-lobed pommel and there is only a very faint hint of a possible part of a tendril on the crossguard's side. Therefore I shall leave it out of this overview. Cf. Pentz, “Tovikingsværdmedkarolingiskplanteornamentiki Nationalmuseetssamlinger,” 115-118.

⁹ The line is absent on the hilts from Zadvarje, Gjersvik and Liepe. For the tendril motif cf. Monika Lennartsson, “Karolingische Metallarbeiten mit Pflanzenornamentik,” *Offa*, 54-55 (1997-1998) [1999], 460-461.

¹⁰ Pentz, „Tovikingsværdmedkarolingiskplanteornamentiki....,” 118, 125-127.

¹¹ Ian Peirce (ed.), *Swords of the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2002), 64.

¹² This motif can be compared with similar decoration on the tongues and loops of gilt silver spur strap sets from the Duesminde hoard, Denmark, although the latter was not incised but cast. Cf. Egon Wamers (ed.), *Die Macht des Silbers. Karolingische Schätze im Norden* (Regensburg, 2005), 133.

¹³ David Edge, Howard Williams, “Some Early Medieval Swords in the Wallace Collection and Elsewhere,” *Gladius*, XXIII (2003), 191. Tobias Capwell (with David Edge and Jeremy Warren), *Masterpieces of European Arms and Armour in the Wallace Collection* (London, 2011), 26 mentions only “lettering along the crossguard”, but adds that “the meaning of the letters is now indecipherable”. According to the same author, the decoration of the hilt was made from a silver-rich copper alloy.

¹⁴ Oluf Rygh, *Norske Oldsager II* (Christiania, 1885 facsimile reprint, Trondheim, 1999), 29. Corrections in Michael Müller-Wille, “Zwei karolingische Schwerter aus Mittelnorwegen,” *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 3 (1982), 114.

those of Dagobertus, Haribertus, Garibertus or Madalbertus¹⁵. As it is the case with ornamentation, the inscriptions also display some similarities. The names on the crossguards from Ballinderry and Liepe are flanked by crosses (only one is preserved on the Liepe crossguard). All of the HILTIPREHT inscriptions have an I, much smaller than the T and P around it. The letter R is very similar on the crossguards from Gravråk and Zadvarje, having the right leg extended horizontally and the proportionally small bowl. The R from Liepe also displays some similarities. The letter A on both Kilmainham and Zadvarje crossguards has a horizontal bar on top, while the letter E is very similar on all crossguards upon which it appears.

Concerning the meaning of the inscriptions on the crossguards, different solutions have been proposed¹⁶. The prevailing opinion is that they are the names of the craftsmen who made the hilts or were somehow otherwise connected with their production (possibly only with the decoration)¹⁷. A bronze crossguard from Exeter, England, dating probably to the 10th century and bearing an inscription EOFRI MEF(ECIT) on its upper side speaks in favor of this view¹⁸. The fact that one name (HILTIPREHT) is found on three crossguards of swords with almost identical ornamentation is also a very strong argument in that direction. The name HILTIPREHT, as well as HARTOLFR, is most probably from the Frankish/High-German area, where the workshop might also have been located¹⁹. For example, it can be found in the earliest confraternity book (*Liber memorialis*) of St. Gallen, which was put together before 817 and lists the names of both living and dead members of the 31 religious communities bound to St. Gallen through confraternity

¹⁵ Ante Piteša, "Karolinški mač s natpisom iz Zadvarja (Žeževica Donja)," *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku*, 94 (2001), 349-352. Contrary to that, Ante Milošević suggests a Langobardic origin of the name [Ante Milošević, "Žeževica, Poletnica," in A. Milošević (ed.), *Hrvati i Karolinzi. Katalog* (Split, 2000), 356-357].

¹⁶ Some scholars see in those names the owners and bearers of the swords. Zdenko Vinski, "O nalazima karolinških mačeva u Jugoslaviji," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, s. III, 11 (1981), 20; Ante Milošević, "Karolinški utjecaji u Hrvatskoj kneževini u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza," in Ante Milošević (ed.), *Hrvati i Karolinzi. Rasprave i vrela*, (Split, 2000), 131; Ante Piteša, *Katalog nalaza iz vremena seobe naroda, srednjeg i novog vijeka u Arheološkome muzeju u Slitu [Catalogue of finds from the Migration Period, Middle Ages and Early Modern Period in the Archaeological Museum in Split]*, (Split, 2009), 55.

¹⁷ Müller-Wille, "Zwei karolingische Schwerter aus Mittelnorwegen," 145; Jaap Ypey, "Een HILTIPREHT-zwaard uit Elst (U.)," *Westerheem*, 31 (1982), 52; Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England. Its Archaeology and Literature* (Oxford, 1962, reprint, Woodbridge, 1998), 82; Edward Oakeshott, "Introduction to the Viking Sword," Ian Peirce (ed.), *Swords of the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2002), 4; Goran Bilogrivić, "Karolinški mačevi tipa K," 139; Ante Milošević, "Novi mač iz Koljana u svjetlu kontakata s nordijskim zemljama u ranom srednjem vijeku," *Histria antiqua*, 21 (2012), 463. L. Marek proposes a slightly different solution, where HILTIPREHT would have been the name of the decorator of the hilts and HARTOLFA the craftsman's name [Lech Marek, *Early Medieval Swords from Central and Eastern Europe. Dilemmas of an Archaeologist and a Student of Arms* (Wrocław, 2005), 56].

¹⁸ Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England. Its Archaeology and Literature*, 80.

¹⁹ Müller-Wille, "Zwei karolingische Schwerter aus Mittelnorwegen," 144-145, n. 92a.

agreements²⁰. The name appears twice, on the right-hand arcade's left side, in the first instance as *Hiltipreht viv.* and then, two lines below, in the form of *Hiltibreht*²¹.

Therefore, both the ornamentation, as well as the inscriptions point to a common origin of these swords, coming most probably from the same workshop somewhere in the Frankish Empire. The tendril with the trefoil motif is a distinctive characteristic of the Carolingian Renaissance art and points to the first half of the 9th century²². At least part of the swords, however, could have rather be dated to the beginning of the century, like the one from Gravråk, with the very archaic pommel's lobes, reminiscent of the swords from the second half of the 8th century²³. The same date can be proposed also for the Zadvarje sword, judging by its context and in the light of similar grave findings from Croatia²⁴. The sword from Stårby, as noted earlier, exhibits a different type of tendril ornamentation, and thus can't be connected with the other swords of this group in the narrowest sense. Still, it is surely of Carolingian origin and the general characteristics of its ornamentation and craftsmanship are alike to those discussed above. Therefore, it can't be excluded that it might have originated from the same workshop, or at least one connected to it. The sword Bb from the boat grave in Haithabu (**T. 3: 4**) is also sometimes considered as originating from the same workshop²⁵. Although it is also decorated with inlaid silver wire and incised tendril ornamentation, its decoration is generally much more elaborate, displaying various animal and interlace motifs, and conceptualised in a different manner²⁶. The crossguard of this sword is also morphologically different, with lobed sides, and the pommel is made from one piece, instead of the usual separate base and crown²⁷. The latter is also a later characteristic which enables the dating of this sword

²⁰ Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2011), 306-307.

²¹ Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, 307, fig. 15. The name appears on several occasions in the same source, sometimes in slightly different forms, such as *Hiltebreht* or *Hiltepreht*. Cf. P. Piper (ed.), *Necrologia – Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Necrologia Germaniae, Supplement: Libri confraternitatum Sancti Galli, Augiensis, Fabariensis* (Berlin, 1884), 11, 23, 40.

²² Cf. Lennartsson, "Karolingische Metallarbeiten mit Pflanzenornamentik".

²³ Müller-Wille, "Zwei karolingische Schwerter aus Mittelnorwegen," 114.

²⁴ Cf. also Milošević, "Žeževica, Poletnica," 358, who proposes an even earlier date, the end of the 8th century.

²⁵ Milošević, "Karolinški utjecaji u Hrvatskoj kneževini u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza," 131; Milošević, "Novi mač iz Koljana u svjetlu kontakata s nordijskim zemljama u ranom srednjem vijeku," 463-465; Pentz, "Tovikingsværdmedkarolingiskplanteornamentiki Nationalmuseetssamlinger," 118, 133.

²⁶ The only tendril-like motifs on the Haithabu sword are located on its pommel's lobes, while its crossguard is divided into seven square fields (the pommel's base into five), each of which is decorated with a separate motif. It does exhibit an anchor-type cross in one of those fields which is similar to the crosses found on the sword from Zadvarje, but this is the only shared motif.

²⁷ The same crossguard's form (but with five instead of seven lobes) and pommel's base is present on the recently found sword from Koljani in Croatia, which A. Milošević (Ante Milošević, "Novi mač iz Koljana u svjetlu kontakata s nordijskim zemljama u ranom srednjem vijeku," 465) attributes to the workshop that made the sword from Haithabu. However, there aren't any incised ornaments at all on the Koljani sword's hilt so the conclusion is at least a bit far reaching. A closer analogy to the Haithabu sword is the one from barrow mound grave 151a of the large Viking Age cemetery in Wiskiauten (today Mokhovoye, Kaliningrad). This sword, most probably also of type K, now lacks the pommel's crown, but has also the lobed crossguard and

to the middle of the 9th century, if not even a few decades later²⁸. Accordingly, the sword from Haithabu is probably best viewed separately from the group that has been described within these pages.

Distinctive type 1

I shall now turn to a group of swords from Croatia which was usually considered to be of Petersen's distinctive type 1 or very close to it, but we shall see, that they are actually quite different²⁹. Jan Petersen has defined 20 distinctive types (1-20) within the frames of his typology, pertaining to swords which could not fit into the 26 basic types (A-Æ). They are usually singular examples, morphologically or chronologically close to certain main types, yet different enough to be viewed separately³⁰. The main characteristics of distinctive type 1 are a tripartite crown (at least in decoration) with the central part being the highest, while the side ones are lower and concave. The pommel's base and the crossguard are relatively thick and display a central ridge on the sides³¹. However, types 1 and 2 subsequently grew in number and became the topic of many separate scientific discussions. Therefore, G. C. Dunning and V. I. Evison proposed a more detailed division and classification of these types, where distinctive type 1 corresponds to their group 1, while based on the crossguard's shape and upon the hilt's decoration, they managed to create further group's subdivisions (a-d)³². It is here, as well as in some later works related to this topic, that the pommel's tripartite crown with the high central part and lower, usually slightly concave sides (reminiscent of animal heads or snouts on earlier hilts) is emphasized as an important characteristic of the distinctive type 1³³.

There are five swords from Croatia which have been attributed to this type – two found near the river Drava (Cirkovljan and Medvedička) (**T. 5**) and three located in the Dalmatian hinterland (two from Orlić and one from Morpolača)³⁴. Once more the credit

the base of the pommel. The latter is also decorated with incised interlace motifs in separate fields. Cf. Bernt von zur Mühlen, *Die Kultur der Wikinger in Ostpreussen* (Bonn, 1975), T. 9/1, T. 36.

²⁸ Alfred Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Neumünster, 1991), 142; Lennartsson, "Karolingische Metallarbeiten mit Pflanzenornamentik," 497.

²⁹ Discussed more thoroughly in Goran Bilogrivić, "O mačevima posebnog tipa u Hrvatskoj," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, III. s., 38 (2011), 83-110.

³⁰ Jan Petersen, *De norske vikingesverd. En typologisk – kronologisk studie over vikingetidens vaaben* (Kristiania, 1919), 54-181.

³¹ Petersen, *De norske vikingesverd. En typologisk – kronologisk studie over vikingetidens vaaben*, 63-65.

³² G. C. Dunning, V. I. Evison, "The Palace of Westminster Sword," *Archaeologia*, 98 (1961), 131-137.

³³ Dunning, Evison, "The Palace of Westminster Sword," 131; Michael Müller-Wille, "Das Bootkammergrab von Haithabu (mit Beiträgen von O. Crumlin-Pedersen und M. Dekowna)," *Berichte über die Ausgrabungen in Haithabu*, 8, 45; Wilfried Menghin, "Neue Inschriftenschwerter aus Süddeutschland und die Chronologie karolingischer Spathen auf dem Kontinent." in: K. Spindler (ed.), *Vorzeit zwischen Main und Donau. Neue archäologische Forschungen und Funde aus Franken und Altbayern* (Erlangen, 1980), 246. Cf. also Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 36-38.

³⁴ These three swords from Dalmatia had also been, just like the sword from Zadvarje, attributed to the wrong sites. In this case, however, it is more than just the microlocation. To avoid confusion, only the new (and correct) site attribution shall be used here (Orlić, grave A – previously Biskupija – Crkvina, "destroyed

lies with Zdenko Vinski, who was the first to discuss these swords. He wrote about them on several occasions and some uncertainty is visible in his papers, but generally he concluded that they are of distinctive type 1. Some of them present a blunt tip of the pommel and generally a transitional character towards type K (Cirkovljan) or type H (Medvedička, Morpolača and both swords from Orlić)³⁵. Vinski's authority in the field has been very respected and his attribution subsequently accepted in practically all of Croatian literature and continues up to present times³⁶. The case is slightly different with foreign scholars, who classified some of these swords as distinctive type 1 while others as various other types. For example, Wilfried Menghin considered the sword from Orlić (grave A) to be one of only two distinctive type 1 swords found in continental Europe, south of Scandinavia, the other one being from the river Maas near Aalburg in the Netherlands. The sword from Medvedička he considered closer to types Immenstedt and Altjührden³⁷. Michael Müller-Wille saw these swords from Croatia as a separate group between distinctive type 1 and type H, which he named „type Biskupija – Medvedička”³⁸. Erik Szameit, on the contrary, considered the sword from Medvedička to be of type H, and the one from Cirkovljan a subtype towards type K³⁹. Alfred Geibig referred only partly in regard of these swords and attributed the sword from Cirkovljan to his combination type 6 (Petersen's type K equivalent), upon which I would completely agree, adding that it is certainly an early example of the type⁴⁰. Geibig considered the sword from Medvedička as being too close to variant I of his combination type 5 (Petersen's type H equivalent) and stressed that it lacks the main characteristic of distinctive type 1,

grave”; Orlić, grave B – previously Vrpolje; Morpolača – Tubića kuće, grave A – previously a pommel from Plavno and a blade with crossguard from Gračac). For more details cf. Mate Zekan, “K novoj atribuciji nalazišta mačeva karolinškoga obilježja iz Muzeja hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika u Splitu,” *Izdanja Hrvatskog arheološkog društva*, Zagreb, 15 (1990 [1992]), 132-134.

³⁵ Vinski, “Novi ranokarolinški nalazi u Jugoslaviji,” 166-176; Vinski, “O nalazima karolinških mačeva u Jugoslaviji,” 12-15; Zdenko Vinski, “Ponovno o karolinškim mačevima u Jugoslaviji,” *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu*, 3. ser, XVI-XVII (1983-1984), 193-195; Zdenko Vinski, “Marginalia uz izbor karolinškog oružja u jugoistočnoj Evropi,” 91-97.

³⁶ To list only a few: Željko Tomičić, “Prilog istraživanju karolinškog oružja u Međimurju i varaždinskoj regiji,” *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, s. III, 14 (1984), 216; Dušan Jelovina, *Mačevi i ostruge karolinškog obilježja u Muzeju hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika [Schwerter und Sporen karolingischer Formgebung in Museum kroatischer archäologischer Denkmäler]* (Split, 1986), 10, 22, 31, 36-38; Milošević, “Karolinški utjecaji u Hrvatskoj kneževini u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza,” 127; Maja Petrinec, *Gräberfelder aus dem 8. bis 11. Jahrhundert im Gebiet des Frühmittelalterlichen kroatischen Staates* (Split, 2009), 163.

³⁷ Wilfried Menghin, “Neue Inschriftenschwerter aus Süddeutschland und die Chronologie karolingischer Spathen auf dem Kontinent,” in K. Spindler (ed.), *Vorzeit zwischen Main und Donau. Neue archäologische Forschungen und Funde aus Franken und Altbayern* (Erlangen, 1980), 246, 264-265.

³⁸ Müller-Wille: “Zwei karolingische Schwerter aus Mittelnorwegen,” 133-135, 152. Five swords of the group are listed: Morpolača, Medvedička, both finds from Orlić and the sword from Nin – Ždrijac, grave 322.

³⁹ Erik Szameit, “Karolingerzeitliche Waffenfunde aus Österreich. Teil I: Die Schwerter,” *Archaeologia Austriaca*, 70 (1986), 392, 394-395.

⁴⁰ Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 46-47; Bilogrivić, “Karolinški mačevi tipa K,” 141.

namely the concave side lobes⁴¹. It should be noted that the sword from Medvedička actually lacks the side lobes themselves, i.e. any sign of the pommel's vertical division into lobes. An analogy, at least in terms of the pommel's form, could be considered the sword from Stare Město, grave 223/51, also of Geibig's combination type 5, variant I⁴².

The swords from Dalmatia are a little more problematic, as they are pretty damaged by corrosion. I consider, that this damage was possibly the main reason that led Vinski to attribute these swords to Petersen's distinctive type 1, based on an allegedly tripartite division of their crowns. The sword from grave B in Orlić (**T. 4: 2**), for instance, has a pommel destroyed by corrosion to such an extent that its tang has become visible through the crown, creating a false sense of three parts. Still, in accordance with Geibig's typology it is positioned closely to variant I of combination type 1 and it also displays certain similarities in the pommel's shape in regard with the sword from grave 65 from the church in Břeclav – Pohansko⁴³. The false sense of the crown's division is present also on the sword from Morpolača (**T. 4: 3**), that has a slight indentation probably created during its use. Other than that, there is no division or decoration visible. This sword is morphologically very close to the one from grave A in Orlić (**T. 4: 1**), decorated with gilt brass plating with incised ornament on the pommel and crossguard. The crown's tripartite division is usually stated to be hinted by the decoration, but even if this view is accepted, that alone is not sufficient for its attribution to distinctive type 1 since the pommel's form is very different. It is my opinion, that it is best to leave behind Petersen's classification in this case and turn to Geibig's, which offers a wider spectre of possibilities. Following this scheme, the swords from Orlić (grave A) and Morpolača can be attributed to combination type 1, variant I⁴⁴.

Concerning the dating, the new attribution does not differ much from the usual, especially with the Pannonian finds. The sword from Medvedička is dated to the second half of the 8th century also on the account of the belt tongue found in the grave, decorated in the Anglo – Carolingian animal style. The grave itself is usually seen in the context of Charlemagne's war against the Avars at the end of the 8th century, just like the one from Cirkovljan⁴⁵. Still, the new attribution does position these swords firmly in the second half of the 8th century. Variant I of combination type 1 is dated from the second quarter of

⁴¹ Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 42-43.

⁴² Vilém Hrubý, *Velkomoravské pohřebiště „NaValách“* (Praha, 1955), T. 80/1, p. 165, fig. 27/1.

⁴³ Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 25-31; Jana Vignatiová, "Karolinské meče z Pohanska u Břeclavi," *Sborníkpráci Filozofické fakulty Brněnské univerzity*, 38 (1993), 105.

⁴⁴ Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 25-31.

⁴⁵ Vinski, "Novi ranokarolinški nalazi u Jugoslaviji," 176-181; Müller-Wille, "Zwei karolingische Schwerter aus Mittelnorwegen," 126-127, 134; Tomičić, "Prilog istraživanju karolinškog oružja u Međimurju i varaždinskoj regiji," 223; „Arheološka slika ranoga srednjeg vijeka na prostoru međurječja Drave, Dunava i Save,” in A. Milošević (ed.), *Hrvati i Karolinzi. Rasprave i vrela* (Split, 2000), 154.

the 8th century to before 800, with the main period of production set during the second half of the 8th century⁴⁶. The same date goes for some of the analogies to the Dalmatian swords, like the ones from Bockhorn and Weismain in Germany, Termonde in Belgium, or the Westminster Palace in London, England⁴⁷. Apart from the typological dating, the context of the Morpolača sword also points to the second half, or more precisely, last quarter of the 8th century. The sword was found in a grave along with an iron spur with oval buckles at the ends (**T. 4: 4**). According to the classification of Krzysztof Wachowski, it is of type VI-A₁ (*Schnallensporn*), that is one of the oldest forms dating back to the last third of the 8th century. These are generally not produced in Western Europe after the year 800⁴⁸. Many spurs with buckle endings known from Croatia are dated to the first half of the 9th century, but they are of a different type though – the so-called “Croatian type Carolingian spurs”, more massive, with rectangular buckles and with the base of the thorn decorated with brass foil with incised triangles⁴⁹. The Morpolača spur, on the contrary, is very thin and light, with ribbed decoration on the base of the thorn, which was common in the last decades of the 8th century, and it is considered to be one of the earliest Carolingian spurs from Croatia⁵⁰. Also, looking at all the known graves from Dalmatia where swords have been found together with spurs, the ones found together with these later “Croatian type” spurs are almost exclusively of type K⁵¹. The only exception is the sword from Nin – Ždrijac,⁵² close to Geibig's combination type 1, but different than the three swords described above. Since the graves with type K swords and “Carolingian spurs of Croatian type” are dated to the very end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th, grave A from Morpolača is surely earlier. Taking all these arguments into consideration, I think it is safe to conclude that the graves with these three swords from Orlić and Morpolača can be dated to the last quarter of the 8th century. They can be seen as a reflection of the first contacts between the Carolingians and the local elite from the Dalmatian hinterland around the time of the Frankish conquest of Istria by 788 if not even earlier, soon after the conquest of the Lombard kingdom in 774.

⁴⁶ Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter. Eine Analyse des Fundmaterials vom ausgehenden 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert aus Sammlungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 140, 151.

⁴⁷ Herbert Westphal, *Franken oder Sachsen? Untersuchungen an frühmittelalterlichen Waffen* (Oldenburg, 2002), 70-71; Wilfried Menghin, “Neue Inschriftenschwerter aus Süddeutschland und die Chronologie karolingischer Spathen auf dem Kontinent,” in: K. Spindler (ed.), *Vorzeit zwischen Main und Donau. Neue archäologische Forschungen und Funde aus Franken und Altbayern* (Erlangen, 1980), 250; G. C. Dunning, V. I. Evison, “The Palace of Westminster Sword,” *Archaeologia*, 98 (1961), 136-137.

⁴⁸ Krzysztof Wachowski, “Merowingische und Karolingische Sporen auf dem Kontinent,” *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters*, 14-15 (1986-1987), 62.

⁴⁹ Defined as such in Ante Milošević, “Karolinški utjecaji u Hrvatskoj kneževini u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza,” 120. Cf. also Ante Jurčević, “Nalazi ranokarolinškog oružja i konjaničke opreme u doba formiranja Hrvatske Kneževine,” *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, III. s., 38 (2011) for a detailed analysis of these spurs, 111-147.

⁵⁰ Petrinec, *Gräberfelder aus dem 8. bis 11. Jahrhundert im Gebiet des Frühmittelalterlichen kroatischen Staates*, 193-194.

⁵¹ Biskupija – Crkvina, graves 1 and 6; Gornji Koljani – Vukovića most; Podgradina – Rešetarica.

⁵² Janko Belošević, “Osvrt na karolinške mačeve tipa H sa šireg područja Dalmatinske Hrvatske,” *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, 24 (2007).

Elite formation

This being said, I would like conclude by adding a few thoughts on the topic of the significance of Carolingian weapons in the process of elite formation in the Dalmatian hinterland, which was followed by the rise of the early medieval Croatian dukedom. This process begins to unfold during the last quarter of the 8th century with the establishment of the local elites' power on larger territories, gaining momentum during the Frankish – Byzantine war in the Adriatic region and the uprising of the Pannonian duke Liudewit in the first quarter of the 9th century and finally culminating during the second half of the 9th century with the establishment of firmer dynastic rule and a separate church organisation⁵³. The Carolingian Empire played a significant, if not decisive, role in all of this, as the identity of the 9th century Croatian elite was based on close connections and relations with the Franks⁵⁴. During the latter part of the century it found its reflection chiefly in church building, liturgy and (probably) court ceremony, while during the beginning of the century it was traceable through grave goods, which also reflect to a certain extent the contemporary ceremony and customs.

The sword had a special place in medieval Europe, not just as a weapon, but also as a symbol of authority, representing fealty, vassal and power relations. Corroborated in many contemporary tales, sagas, biographies, as well as manuscript illuminations, frescoes and so on⁵⁵. It is in this light that we could then view some of the swords from Croatia, especially the luxurious ones (Orlić (grave A), Zadvarje, Biskupija, Koljani and so on), which could have been used in the ceremony of gift giving in order to objectify the said relations and serve as visible signs of Frankish overlordship⁵⁶. In turn, the local elite could have used those same Carolingian artefacts to objectify and strengthen their newly established identity. To secure their position for the future, the swords and spurs were used in funeral ceremonies to show the legitimacy of the heirs of the high-ranking

⁵³ For a general overview of early medieval Croatian history cf. Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250* (Cambridge, 2006), 134-147, and the literature cited therein.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of influences on the court and church see Mladen Ančić, "Lombard and Frankish Influences in the Formation of the Croatian Dukedom," in G. Brogiolo, P. Delogu (eds.), *L'Adriatico dalla tarda antichità all'età carolingia: atti del convegno di studio, Brescia 11-13 ottobre 2001* (Firenze, 2005); a wider overview and separate studies of Carolingian influences and archaeological material in Croatia: C. Bertelli et al. (eds.), *Bizantini, Croati, Carolingi. Alba e tramonto di regni e imperi* (Milano, 2001).

⁵⁵ Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England. Its Archaeology and Literature*; Régine Le Jan, "Frankish giving of Arms and Rituals of Power: Continuity and Change in the Carolingian Period," in F. Theuvs, J. L. Nelson (eds.), *Rituals of Power: from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2000), 286-287; Costambeys, Innes, MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, 278-282; see also Mechthild Schulze-Dörlamm, "Zeugnisse der Selbstdarstellung von weltlichen und geistlichen Eliten der Karolingerzeit (751-911)," in M. Egg, D. Quast (eds.), *Aufstieg und Untergang. Zwischenbilanz des Forschungsschwerpunktes. Studien zu Genese und Struktur von Eliten in vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Gesellschaften* (Mainz, 2009) for a discussion about the usage of material culture in self-representation amongst the Carolingian elite.

⁵⁶ For gift giving in the context of power and social relations cf. Florin Curta, "Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving," *Speculum*, 81 (2006); Le Jan, "Frankish giving of Arms and Rituals of Power: Continuity and Change in the Carolingian Period," 293-294.

families⁵⁷. Of course, some of the Carolingian swords, spurs and spearheads are surely a witness of a primarily military role, corroborated by the fact that they were found on strategic locations along the main communication routes (river crossings, lookout posts, hillforts, etc.)⁵⁸. Nevertheless not all finds can be reduced to their basic utilitarian function. Some of them reflect more strongly the changes in the social structure and political organisation.

Such is the case with central places, where the dukedoms had emerged. Within these structures the local elites set up their permanent seats of power and those sites are reflected by the findings of richly furnished graves, some of them including swords (from one to three per site) and other including Carolingian objects. Such centres were for example Nin on the coast, Livno in the far hinterland and Biskupija and Koljani in the very centre of the rising dukedom⁵⁹. The latter two sites are especially significant. Biskupija was one of the central places of Croatia throughout the early middle ages and the site of Crkvina is the richest site as far as Carolingian artefacts are concerned, with around 30 spurs and three swords of type K⁶⁰. Koljani, on the other hand, had an important strategic role as a crossing over the river Cetina (now the area is under the accumulation lake Peruča), but the site also shows many similarities with Crkvina in Biskupija, with 6 pairs of spurs and also three swords⁶¹. It was thought until recently that only one Carolingian sword came from Koljani (type K from the site of Vukovića most, the very crossing of the river). However, seven years ago, a richly decorated sword also of type K was found on the other side of Cetina by a local resident and sold to the Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments in Split⁶². The third sword is actually an old find that remained unknown until recently. Ther "efore", it became a general reference in Croatian archaeological literature that a sword of type X (thus of a later date

⁵⁷ A common practice throughout early medieval Europe: Janet Nelson, "Carolingian royal funerals," in F. Theuws, J. L. Nelson (eds.), *Rituals of Power: from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 176; Heinrich Härke, "Cemeteries as Places of Power," in M. de Yong, F. Theuws, C. van Rhijn (eds.), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2001), 24-26, 29; Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: a New Cultural History 500-1000* (Oxford, 2005), 119-120, 207. A few more circumstances might be in favor of the thesis that the luxurious swords and spurs were gifts given to the local elite. Carolingian swords from the territory of early medieval Croatia and neighbouring *sklaviniai* are all of only three types, of which Petersen's type K is convincingly prevalent. In the case of trade, war booty, etc. a wider typological range could be expected and especially a larger share of type H, by far the most numerous across Europe (cf. Goran Bilogrivić, "Karolinški mačevi tipa K," 144-148). Also, a large number of spurs, the so-called Carolingian spurs of Croatian type, show visible workshop similarities (cf. Jurčević, "Nalazi ranokarolinškog oružja i konjaničke opreme u doba formiranja Hrvatske Kneževine") and are concentrated exclusively in this area so it can be assumed, with good reason that they had arrived here in a short period of time and under controlled circulation.

⁵⁸ Jurčević, "Nalazi ranokarolinškog oružja i konjaničke opreme u doba formiranja Hrvatske Kneževine," 133-134.

⁵⁹ Petrinec, *Gräberfelder aus dem 8. bis 11. Jahrhundert im Gebiet des Frühmittelalterlichen kroatischen Staates*, 57.

⁶⁰ Ante Milošević (ed.), *Hrvati i Karolinzi. Katalog* (Split, 2000), 209-234.

⁶¹ "Hrvati i Karolinzi. Katalog 2000," 271-275.

⁶² Milošević, "Novi mač iz Koljana u svjetlu kontakata s nordijskim zemljama u ranom srednjem vijeku". The hilt of the sword is decorated with inlaid brass wire, while on one side of the blade there are symbols to be found from the same material also in the fuller (a cross and a trefoil knot). Cf. also n. 27 above.

and usually dubbed post-Carolingian) was found in Koljani, probably at the site of Crkvina, but it has been known only from later drawings. It was presented as a gift to the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie during his visit to Split in 1954⁶³. However, it was recently that an amateur's photo was discovered in the same Museum. The photo was taken whilst the sword was being offered to the emperor⁶⁴. It is not of a special quality, but will suffice to show that the sword in place is not of type X but most probably of type H, since its pommel consists of a separate base and a triangular crown. This new discovery puts Koljani at the top of the Croatian sites with Carolingian swords along with Crkvina in Biskupija. To sum up, both sites have a sword burial phase, followed by one emphasized by means of spurs graves. The two pairs of massive bronze spurs belonging to this phase from Crkvina in Koljani are morphologically almost identical to the luxurious pair of gilt bronze ones found in the sarcophagus grave from Crkvina in Biskupija⁶⁵. A couple of decades after the sword burials, churches were built on both sites, displaying very similar layouts and having been directly influenced (at least in part) by Carolingian architecture⁶⁶. Therefore the next phase of elite identity representation had begun, an identity known through church building and decoration, while the deposition of grave goods was gradually abandoned.

That, however, would lead me too far from the topic of this paper, so I shall end this brief outline of a possible view on the early phase of elite identity formation and its practice, in which Carolingian swords had played their important role.

⁶³ Zdenko Vinski, "Razmatranja o poslijekarolinškim mačevima 10. i 11. stoljeća u Jugoslaviji," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, s. III, 13 (1983), 12, T. III: 1.

⁶⁴ For the information and concession for publishing of the photo, I most sincerely thank Ante Jurčević from the Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments in Split. The photo, shown at the conference in Sibiu, was in the meantime published also in Milošević, "Novi mač iz Koljana u svjetlu kontakata s nordijskim zemljama u ranom srednjem vijeku," 462.

⁶⁵ Cf. "Hrvati i Karolinzi. Katalog 2000," 225, 271-272.

⁶⁶ Ante Jurčević, "Usporedba skulpture i arhitekture s lokaliteta Crkvina u Gornjim Koljanima i Crkvina u Biskupiji kod Knina," *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, III. s., 36 (2009), 55-84.

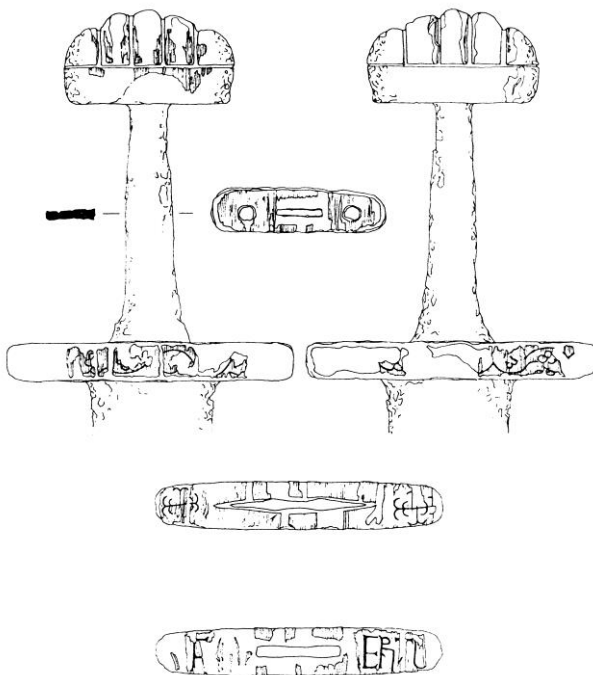
T. 1



1: Zadvarje. The hilt from below (after Milošević 2000b, p. 357).



2: Zadvarje. The hilt from above (after Milošević 2000b, p. 357).

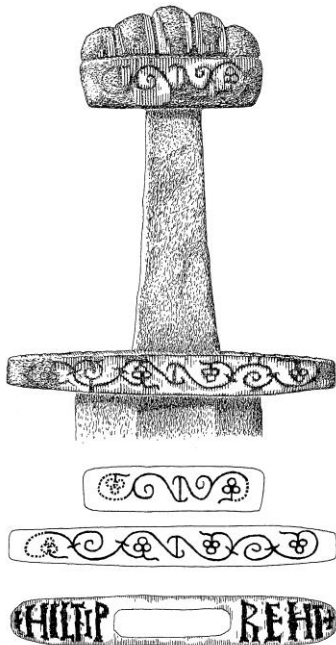


3: Zadvarje. Drawing of the hilt (after Piteša 2001, p. 359).

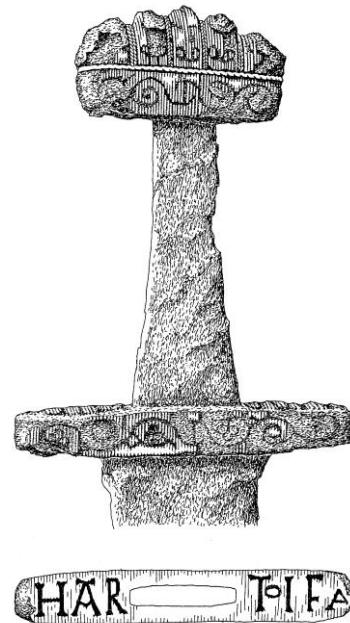


4: Zadvarje. Hilt of the sword (after Milošević 2000b, p. 357).

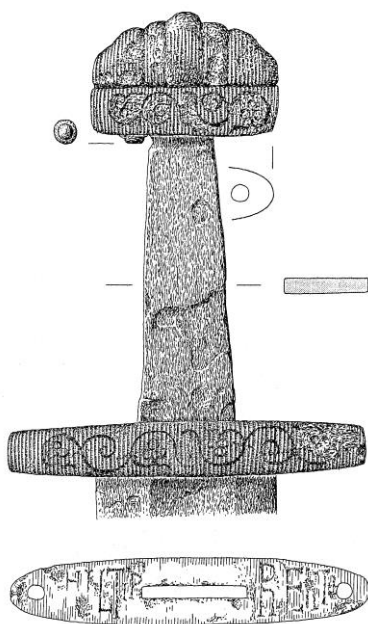
T. 2



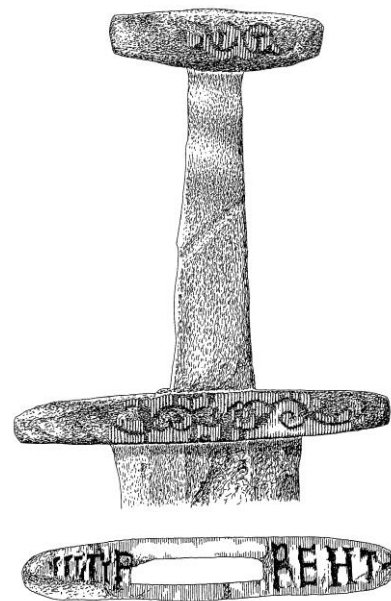
1: Ballinderry. Hilt with decoration and inscription (after Müller Wille 1982, p. 140).



2: Kilmainham. Hilt and inscription (after Müller Wille 1982, 141).

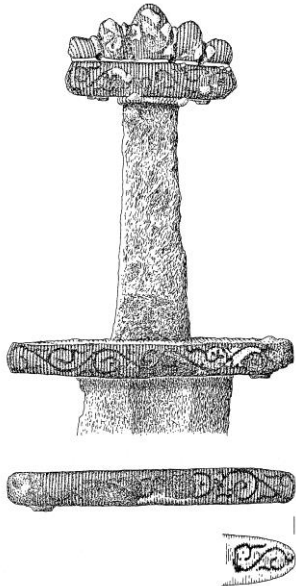


3: Gravråk. Hilt and inscription (after Müller Wille 1982, p. 113).

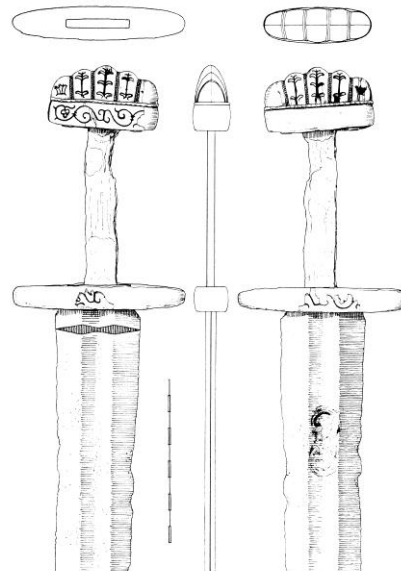


4: Liepe. Hilt and inscription (after Müller Wille 1982, p. 142).

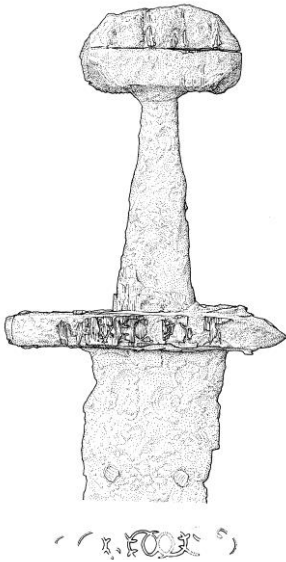
T. 3



1: Gjersvik. Hilt and inscription (after Müller Wille 1982, p. 143).



2: Elst. Drawing of the hilt (after Ypey 1982, p. 49).



3: Stårby. Hilt and decoration (after Pentz 2010, pp. 112, 125).



4: Haithabu. Drawing of the hilt (after Müller Wille 1976, p. 70).

T. 4



1: Orlić, grave A. Hilt of the sword (photo: G. Bilogrivić).



2: Orlić, grave B. Hilt of the sword (photo: G. Bilogrivić)

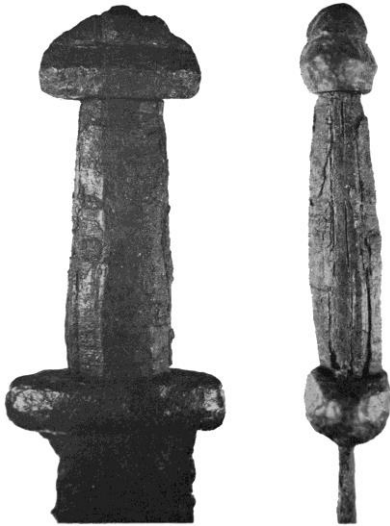


3: Morpolacha. Hilt of the sword (photo: G. Bilogrivić)

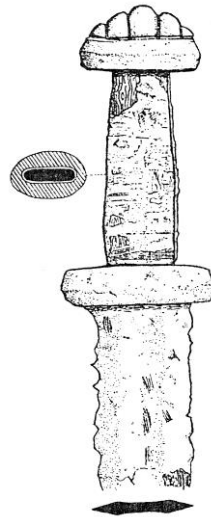


4: Morpolacha. Spur (photo: G. Bilogrivić).

T. 5



1: Cirkovljan. Hilt of the sword (after Tomičić 1984, fig. 3).



2: Cirkovljan. Drawing of the hilt (after Vinski 1981, p. 14).



3: Medvedička. Hilt of the sword (photo: G. Bilogrivić).