

# GLADIUS

ESTUDIOS SOBRE ARMAS ANTIGUAS, ARMAMENTO, ARTE MILITAR  
Y VIDA CULTURAL EN ORIENTE Y OCCIDENTE

Volumen XXVI

enero-diciembre 2006

Madrid (España)

ISSN: 0435-022X



INSTITUTO DE HISTORIA

CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS

central. Pero en una valoración final es obra muy atractiva para el aficionado —que encontrará sin duda sorpresas frente a la corriente de pensamiento principal sobre la mentalidad del

ejército romano— e incluso útil en momentos puntuales al especialista.

Fernando QUESADA SANZ  
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

ALEKSIĆ, Marko (2007): *Mediaeval swords from Southeastern Europe. Material from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century*. Dedraplast, Belgrade. 184 pages. ISBN: 987-86-910905.

The Balkan Peninsula is particularly significant for the study of the history and archaeology of armour and weapons. Its geographical situation as a crossroads meant that the local types were exposed to a very wide band of foreign influences and it was a good platform for their diffusion throughout Continental Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. Its probable role in the production and diffusion through different areas of weapons such as the Macharia or armour such as the Illyrian helmet, although not entirely accepted by the academic world, is a constant point of reference. It is in this context that we can really appreciate the work of Marko Aleksic, which covers the production of medieval swords in this area from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is a really interesting place, since the Balkan Peninsula is a crucial area for the history and archaeology of weapons.

The work is based on a catalogue of 412 swords, most of them chance finds, discovered in an area described as Southeastern Europe, which includes more than just the Balkan Peninsula: the neighbouring regions of the Carpathian basin and the south Alpine regions are included to make the material found more comprehensible. The chronology of the finds begins in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and ends in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but the author warns that these limits are not strictly observed because there are some earlier typological affiliations relevant to this work.

The great advantage of this book is the fact that the explanations of the typology used to classify the finds are not just clear but exhaustive, so even the non-specialist can easily understand how and why the weapons are classified. In addition, the work is not just a compendium of findings, but also a clear and straightforward work of typology. The author does not invent his own classification of types but uses the very well-known standard typology of Ewart Oakeshott, amending it to include special types when needed. The work on typology is very extensi-

ve and includes inscriptions, pommels, blades, tangs, cross-guards and the inscriptions and seals on any part of them.

Other merits of this catalogue are that a large number of visual and contemporary text references are included throughout the work and the author tries to show how fighting techniques influenced typology. This is in strong contrast to works by scholars who are very well versed on typology, but who have no clear knowledge of how the sword was used.

One of the main characteristics of the «Introduction» is the extensive commentaries on the bibliography of earlier works on swords in this area. The swords in the catalogues and works mentioned are included in this work. This part of the work also includes a very important note on the main classifications used in the typology of swords: one-handed, one-and-a-half handed and two-handed. The biomechanical aspect of typology is also reflected in notes on every sword in relation to the point of percussion and the centre of gravity. The importance of the symbolism of the sword is also discussed in the work, drawing data from many sources, including Slavic, Germanic and Viking sagas.

The chapters on typology are quite extensive and clear. In the first («Typology»), the author discusses the main classifications of sword typology. The main classification used is the standard Ewart Oakeshott typology, but he also takes other classifications into account, such as those of authors such as Geibig, Ruttikay and Pinter.

The studies of typology continue in the following chapters with descriptions of forms, taking into account the three main characteristics of the swords: pommels («Description of pommel shapes»), blade shapes («Description of blade shapes») and guard shapes («Description of cross-guard shapes»). They are accompanied by drawings of each shape, which helps to give a clear idea of the subject.

Having established a typology of pommels, cross-guards and blade shapes, the author tries to establish a chronology («Chronology of Pommels», «Chronology of Blades» and «Chronology of Cross-guards»). Both the chronology and the typology are documented with visual material from chapels and other artistic sources and from various archives, especially in Dubrovnik, and based on wills of weaponsmiths and administrative records.

After dealing with the typology and the chronology the author establishes a series of «sword families» basing his classification on groups of traits in pommel, blade and cross-guard typology («Sword families in Southeastern Europe»). With these «sword families» the author tries to find some chronological and geographical patterns in the material as a whole.

Then he gives a short account of single-edged swords, treating them separately because of the shortage of finds (just twelve) and the difficulty implicit in the fact that no other treatise on late medieval swords includes them («Single-edged swords»).

Closing the typology section the author includes a chapter on blade inscriptions, ornaments and other artistic elements («Signs, Ornaments and Inscriptions on Swords»). The subject includes inscriptions on pommels, tangs and blades, with special reference to heraldic motifs.

In concluding the work («Conclusions») the author states that from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century blade length gradually increased, indirectly confirming a trend towards combat techniques using stronger or heavier blows. With regard to the origin of the typology of the swords it can be said that they are specimens displaying different Eastern Mediterranean and Byzantine traits, the latter normally with a significant lack

of fuller, and Western European or descendants of Frankish swords. It can be said, then, that local production was influenced by Mediterranean types including Byzantine and Continental European types. But by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries the swords began to look increasingly like Continental swords. He also concludes that certain types of curved cross-swords were probably of Serbian origin but extended to the Adriatic coast and were clearly designed as a special defence against Turkish sabres.

One of the main advantages of the bibliography section («Literature») is that many of the references from books in languages using Cyrillic script have been translated into English. After that is the catalogue of the 412 swords followed by nearly 40 drawings and 26 photographs («Catalogue»).

To summarise the importance of Marko Aleksic's book, we can say that it is an essential work on the production of late medieval swords in Southeastern Europe, not just because of the comprehensive catalogue of finds, but also because the extensive discussion of typology, the clear definition of terms and comprehensive conclusions taken from difficult data sources make the work easy to consult.

Hipólito SANCHIZ ALVAREZ DE TOLEDO  
Universidad CEU S. Pablo

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- OAKESHOTT, E (1960): *The Archaeology of Weapons*, London-New York.  
OAKESHOTT, E (1981): *The Swords in the Age of Chivalry*, London.  
OAKESHOTT, E (1991): *Records of Medieval Sword*, Woodbridge.

PALAO VICENTE, Juan José (2006): *Legio VII Gemina (Pia) Felix. Estudio de una legión romana*. Salamanca, Ediciones de la Universidad de Salamanca. 508 págs. ISBN: 84-7800-546-3.

El presente libro, que surge la tesis doctoral de su autor, defendida en la Universidad de Salamanca en 2002, pretende abordar de forma completa la historia de la *Legio VII* y su inserción en el que sería su principal acuartelamiento permanente a lo largo de la misma, la futura ciudad de León, y en resto de Hispania. Tras un breve prólogo del Prof. Manuel Salinas de Frías, que

fue en su momento el director de la mencionada tesis doctoral, y un apartado de abreviaturas y de fuentes clásicas, el autor esboza en la Introducción los principales objetivos del trabajo.

En ella hace una pequeña historiografía de los principales estudios dedicados en el pasado a esta unidad militar y aborda los problemas de la documentación, en donde resalta el gran peso que en la misma alcanza la epigrafía, muy por