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FACULTY OF HISTORY

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**MEDIEVAL WEAPONRY IN MOLDOVA FROM
THE FOURTEENTH TO THE FIFTEENTH
CENTURY**

(COLD OFFENSIVE ARMS AND DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT)

THESIS SUMMARY

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Introduction

1. The importance of the theme

The interest attracted by medieval weapons is not a recent phenomenon, especially in those countries whose destiny is closely related to military artifacts; it is evident here, evoking the situation of medieval Moldova, the territorial framework of this study and its soldierly realities. Given that in the collective consciousness, the association between armed conflict and the Middle Ages is constant, the symbolic valorization of weapons has its basis primarily in the desire to represent a glorious past. The concept can be related especially with the exacerbation of nationalism as a result of the birth of modern states.

It may be noted, however, that weapons play a major role in the life and culture of any medieval community. The statement is based on the idea that the availability to obtain and retain power over a territory or group of people is represented, usually, by the capacity to fight. Starting from the previous idea, it can be said that military artifacts reflect the evolution of human society because they illustrate, in all periods of history, peak creations of the technological development.

The analysis of this research domain should consider the construction and technology of these artifacts, whose effect is prominent in the utility of military equipment in battle, of which, quite often, they determine the end result of confrontations. The role of these objects in armed conflict can be directly linked to that of tools in the manufacturing process.

Medieval weapons artifacts discovered in Moldova are still only partially studied in disparate articles which do not pose specific features. To date, there are no archaeological works strictly dedicated to this subject, and the catalogs of museum collections are only illustrative. This state of knowledge of medieval weapons seems much less developed compared to Antiquity. The reason for this is related to the low level of current interest in the study of the archeology of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from Moldova. As a consequence, medieval archeology does not have a wide range of clearly dated artifacts that could become the basis for building a coherent chronology of the Middle Ages. During the past 40 years, Romanian archeology has advanced significantly in the study of certain categories of material culture. However, a coherent picture of medieval weapons, presented in devoted synthetic works, which can concretely explain their evolution has not been achieved yet. All the above statements make it necessary to conduct a coherent study on the chosen research topic.

2. Methodology

One can say that the solicitude for this type of objects was born, at first, from the curiosity and aesthetic sensitivity of amateurs and collectors. The mere act of collecting these weapons led to some early attempts at classification, the premises for true "typologies".

The methods of study are based, in every European country, on well-established historical traditions which contribute with specific elements to the knowledge of medieval weaponry. In the study of the discipline sometimes a delay is visible because many researchers have deprived themselves of some essential methodological tools developed in other disciplines, which will be innovative in this area. Analysis attempts have been difficult for researchers because they had to overcome outdated working methods, sometimes still used in art history, to which weapons studies are often dependent. Following the entry of new methodological tools in recent research on medieval weapons we can observe the preeminence of morphological distinctions in the study and classification of a certain category of weapons, such as their manufacturing technique or mechanical properties.

Archaeology is a very important part in developing this thesis thus the general research frameworks are largely conditioned by state of research of archaeological sites to which we will refer to in the following chapters of the thesis. Setting the *ante* and *post quem* terms is not based on trying to develop a personal interpretation to medieval chronology but rather the desire to follow the evolution of different categories of weapons of Moldovan forces from the beginning of the Moldavian Principality to the end of the age of Stephen the Great. Given the fact that this period marks the most brilliant stage in the evolution of the Romanian medieval principalities, in terms of military campaigns it is possible to highlight the great opportunity to analyze the strategy, tactics, and weapons. Much different than earlier times, the two centuries (XIV-XV) are marked by technological advances, especially noticeable improvements in metallurgy and remote combat weapons.

In the early stage of researching cold offensive arms and defensive equipment we can observe an apparent duality of the artifact database. On the one hand, the researcher builds on the analysis of clearly dated archaeological materials and, on the other hand, it is necessary to include a large number of vaguely dated artifacts stored in museums warehouses. In the meantime, differently from other historical eras, the researcher faces some generic or private collections, accumulated by amateurs that can also be kept in museums. It is thus necessary to develop specific methods for their study. So, along with weapons from museum collections and clearly dated archaeological findings we must take into consideration a significant

number of military artifacts without stratigraphic details or with an unproven provenance. Moreover, the state of knowledge of material culture did not allow the dating of certain pieces from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in much narrower limits than those specified.

The primary sources for the study of medieval military history are quite a few, so the analysis of weaponry from this period can be achieved through a series of connections and comparisons between images and written documents, given that, in descriptive terms, they contribute to the highlighting of some details that are hard to identify through a pure archaeological study. It must be said that this paper is based, to some extent, and the iconography and written sources, which by their very nature seem the only able to develop a close picture to the realities of the Middle Ages. Given the relative scarcity of written sources, they will be regarded as complementary to the research. The use of iconography is based upon the need to create a basis of comparison for archaeological finds of medieval weapons.

These are just some general arguments that impose the need for a systematic and well-defined research of the issues raised by historical weapons. From the wide range of directions of this area an important category, which has caused and still causes a tremendous interest, is that of weapons for fighting at a distance, bow and crossbow. Such pieces can be seen as intermediate between cold weapons and firearms, to which a long coexistence is noticeable, throughout the Middle Ages. The study of this category of artifacts receives additional interest, for the period under consideration, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, because the importance they hold in the Romanian medieval armies was quite high. As is visible from the title, the interest of the present thesis does not focus only on one of the categories of weapons, but the whole panoply of Moldavian troops from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Chapter I. Sources and Historiography

In the attempt to introduce the topics of the chapters in a specific historiographical perspective and to clearly specify the sources used it is necessary to integrate these considerations in the first chapter and not in the introduction. In addition historiographical considerations we will, also, discuss the validity of using these types of sources in comparison with archaeological artifacts.

I.1. Sources

Any attempt to reconstruct the characteristics of medieval weapons from Moldova, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, must employ a wide variety of historical sources. This requirement is based on the fact that all questions related to the study of medieval weapons can be resolved by merging information from all the areas of the given sources. Historical sources of interest to study the problem under consideration are varied both in terms of types (written, iconographic and archaeological) and in terms of the amount of information provided, more or less complete.

I.2. Historiography

Since the early twentieth century military historians have tried to carry out studies of famous battles and to research the tactical role of different types of weapons in medieval Romanian troops. However, these examples, which are based mainly on medieval chronicles, are no longer usable in the evolution of the current historical discipline and can sometimes even be considered obsolete. Still, the major trends reflected by historiography emphasize actually a pretty old curiosity for these artifacts. Early research was based on the idea that only written sources are considered to be suitable for the study of medieval weaponry, which meant a relatively low use of hard data sources represented iconography and archaeological finds. The result of this work was to develop and favor the history of events, a "history of battles".

The preoccupations for researching medieval weapons have created very different interests and methodologies for each area of Europe in part, a situation that seems to be closely related to the amount of discoveries. In recent decades it is possible to observe an augmentation of studies devoted to arms, which, especially for Central and Western Europe, is based on the systematic research of the most important castles and their hinterland. Although there are a number of studies related to the Romanian territories, with either a regional character or papers summarizing the findings from various archaeological sites, still research into this area is far less developed. Addressing the issue raised by medieval weaponry has quite a few gaps the Romanian historiography and it becomes absolute necessity for the archeology from our country.

Chapter II. The terminology of cold offensive weapons and defensive equipment from Moldova in the Middle Ages

For more or less objective reasons, the history of Moldovan weaponry from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has not received due attention from the Romanian historiography and remains an open field for historical exploitation. One of the problems, solved only in part, is the lack of rigor in the use of the terms that refer to various types of military components.

Restoring old names for medieval weapons seems to be the safest way to solve the problems raised by the terminology. The designations of these artifacts from the Middle Ages are considered the basis for the future development of the modern military terms used in recent studies. Their integration in the present study is extremely useful for creating an overview of the whole medieval military system of terminology.

Linguistically we will identify the etymon and its route of infiltration for the words and expressions designating military artifacts. This approach can highlight some details about the origin of the term. The main purpose of Chapter II is a semantic and etymological research on Moldovan military terminology through the use chronicles and chancellery documents.

At a structural level, this section was developed as a glossary of key terms noticed in written sources from the medieval period. The introduction of terms in this instrument will be made based upon the functional classification of medieval weaponry as follows: weapons used at a distance (crossbow, bow, arrow), striking weapons (mace), cutting and thrust weapons (swords, swords, swords); throwing and thrusting weapons (spears); personal defense weapon (shirts of mail, breastplates).

Chapter III. Cold offensive weapons and defensive equipment from the written sources and iconography

III.1. Written Sources

Studying medieval texts of different natures comes as complementary to the research figurative works and, especially, archaeological finds. Moreover, even if written sources are incomplete on the matter of technical issues, their importance lies especially in the possibility

to explain the origin of different types of weapons and the circumstances of their use. It is thus possible to discover rich information about the origin of raw materials or the trading of such items; especially in diplomatic documents we can identify the names of the manufacturers, traders and users of such weapons. It is also necessary to stipulate that such sources can contribute to a more accurate chronology, especially through the occurrence and spread of different artifacts.

III.2. Iconographic sources

The ability to reconstruct the realities expressed by images we must first understand to what life they refer to. It must be said that this study refers less to the ecclesiastical cult, but rather on how it reflects the concrete material culture of medieval Moldova. Thus, this chapter considers the study of contemporary military artifacts represented in Moldovan medieval religious iconography and other image categories from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The objective is therefore evident, because it is about exploring the various categories of the iconographic sources as additional sources of information on the medieval arms of Moldova. Even though the studies thematic about images has a high degree of specificity, as the representations have to contain elements that relate to military realities, however, the amount of images is significant for understanding medieval weapons in general.

This chapter considers figurative representations as additional sources of information in the study of weaponry from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that will be confronted with the findings uncovered in archaeological sites. Also, it can be said that the abundance of medieval illustrations supplements and compensates for the fragmentation related to some archaeological artifacts and the characteristic lack of detail of written documents.

The artists have used a series of stylistic conventions in their works which, by their nature, affect the form and content of the representations. It is well known that some illustrators have used models and iconographic schemes inspired by previous examples and even copied objects without knowing their functionality or significance. We must, however, accept the possibility, emphasized by most researchers in this field, that in a large degree of cases medieval artists have painted with some degree of realism. These scenes referring to the past are updated and given a contemporary look for the characters and their life. Therefore the comparison between these representations with the data from archaeological excavations is often persuasive, because most of the items depicted correspond to a tangible reality.

Chapter IV. Analysis of archaeological finds

Continuing the thesis and the analysis of written and iconographic sources, as an explanation of their method of study, this section refers to the corpus of selected artifacts, medieval weaponry. In the following chapter we will focus on researching the manufacturing techniques, the distribution in space and time and also the various features that help us in understanding their utility. These archaeological artifacts will be, for a better understanding, compared to similar objects in foreign territories (Slovakia, Russia, Poland, etc.) in the idea of presenting a series of analogies. As already mentioned, medieval weapons are an essential part of the metal finds excavated in the medieval sites from Moldova.

The preamble of this research was to record, with the help of informatics resources, various descriptive and metric data. This large amount of information was gathered by means of standardized entry-forms whose model behaves different categories have been defined from the beginning (see catalog discoveries). Once recorded, the data became the findings database that allowed the development of rational studies or multiple criteria sorting, for example, in chronological order. Along with catalog sheets we have included photographs or illustrations for the artifacts that make it much easier to highlight the characteristics of the constituent parts. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, bound to the attempt of rediscovering all the characteristics and properties that define these different sets of manufactured objects.

Conclusions

In the last sequence of the paper we will try to unify all the clues that occur in the utilized historical sources; the need to synthesize results comes from the fact that they deliver in quite a few cases of the same type of information and, especially, about the same social group. Successive comparisons and confrontations between documents, more or less disparate, allowed us to highlight the different forms of weapons that existed in the Middle Ages and establish a precise chronology. The role of archeology, the most important part of this scientific approach, is that of a link between the three types of sources because it has the closest contact with the artifacts themselves. Information from medieval texts, on the other hand, can link the objects discovered in excavations with how they were designated. As

mentioned before, the chronic lack of any kind of archaeological evidence on perishable materials is a crucial issue which can be reconstructed only by images. However, we must not lose sight of the context of developing related to all these documents. The value is thus understood according to the artists or manufacturers, manufacturing techniques used, the conditions to achieve artistic or literary products, and the chronic insecurity that sometimes becomes the triggering factor for the technical development of weapons.

The images from stove tiles, as well as other iconographic sources, adhere to principles derived from various conventions of medieval art; as it is visible for the ones with religious scenes. Given that few people could read and write in the Middle Ages, then it is obvious that picture was the main canvasser of information. Tiles with religious scenes, whose associations are understandable, have a symbolic role of representing the attributes associated with a specific figure or a specific group; therefore St. George will always fight with the dragon. In addition, secular themes from stove tiles that include depictions of jousting, hunting or heraldic demonstrate an attempt, more or less detailed, to reflect contemporary realities. Despite some obvious shortcomings, the illustrations from these tiles are very useful source in the study of medieval cold weapons and defensive equipment from Moldova.

Written sources seem to give the impression of a genuine "bow culture" because, different from the West, the Romanian province from east of the Carpathians has had a tradition that had been implanted for a long time by nomadic populations, that will become more lively after the creation of the new medieval states. However, no one can say that this category of weapons implied professionals, like the English archers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but rather, it an occasional participation, more or less improvised.

From a strategic perspective, archers could be used in most of the fighting formations adopted by the Moldovan princes. In the strategic defense phase, a predominant XIV century that will evolve in subsequent periods, the fights at a distance form the basis of two stages: the permanent harassment and the prosecution the invading troops.

The following military artifacts, in terms of frequency, are the spears and lances. The continuous generalization has integrated, until the end of the XIV century, thrusting weapons in the main offensive weapons of Moldovan forces. A clear distinction between the two categories of weapons, although lacking in terminology, was observed for Moldovan troops in the description of Stephen the Great's visit to Colomeea.

The consistency in using the spear is strictly related to the nature of Moldovan soldiers during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: first they needed light weapons and also

the reduced training that was required. Most likely, significant samples of thrusting military artifacts discovered in Moldova are local products, given the consistency of simple forms that require far less skill to manufacture.

Regarding the types of battle-axes it is difficult to identify clearly defined military artifacts in iconography. Their use by Moldovan troops is confirmed by written sources, but their function seems to be universal, both in battles and in war preparation.

The swords of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries do not pose difficulties in identifying and dating them because of distinct typologies, which retain their general shape constant only with small changes during this period. It is characterized by a certain system of creating the cross-guards and pommels that, at the same time, marks the essential morphological elements useful for dating these weapons. The cross-guard is open, with straight or slightly curved arms, blades of rectangular, circular or vertically flattened sections.

The military power of the medieval Moldovan state has developed through successive additions from ancestors, but also through the consistent initiatives of Stephen the Great, in a harmonious system able to effectively fight back any military aggression.

The successful creation of Moldova state integrity was in congruence with achieving administrative and institutional bodies, and last but not least, military, a phenomenon that will be, as a whole, the basis of the evolutionary process of the Romanian society east Carpathian Mountains. The Moldovan military art had its own specific that constituted an asset for those who have taken upon themselves territorial responsibilities and vocational identities.