

# NINTH TO MID-SIXTEENTH CENTURY SWORDS FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THEIR EUROPEAN CONTEXT

PART I

THE FINDS

Jiří Hošek – Jiří Košta – Petr Žákovský



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## **Ninth to mid-sixteenth century swords from the Czech Republic in their European context**

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## INTRODUCTION

Until the development of firearms, swords (within this study understood as cutting-and-thrusting weapons with long symmetrical double-edged blades; i.e. sabres, seaxes, dussacks, *etc.* are not included) were the most effective and also the most technologically advanced personal weapons. Their importance in combat, complex manufacturing technology and great expense contributed to the sword becoming one of the most prominent attributes of the social elite in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. It was a key artefact which defined males of the higher social classes; it symbolized the highest regal and judicial powers and it was also understood as the physical means for implementing the law (e.g. trial by ordeal) or conquering the heathen. The sword was also a popular weapon for duels. The highest quality swords were undoubtedly the most complex products of the smith – the price of these weapons reflected the difficulty of their production and the use of a substantial amount of steel.

The sword as an attractive object and the most effective medieval personal weapon – one closely tied to the social elite – became from the Early Modern period a subject of collecting passion. Therefore, we encounter them frequently in numerous aristocratic collections. Swords were of professional interest to historians of material culture and archaeologists as early as the 19th century. In the course of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, a number of books and papers were published dealing with sets of swords from individual areas, periods and collections. However, a comprehensive treatment of medieval and Early Renaissance swords from the territory of the Czech Republic has been lacking.

This book is the first part of a two-volume monograph focused on documentation, analysis and interpretation of swords from the turn of the 9th century to the mid-16th century in what is now the Czech Republic, and on their assessment in the context of contemporary European swords. The beginning of the chosen period (the turn of the 9th century) is determined by the real occurrence of sword finds in the Czech Republic – from the second half of the 6th till the late 8th century there is no evidence of swords, and older finds from the late phase of the Migration Period are associated with different cultural contexts. The end of the studied period (mid-16th century) was chosen on the basis of changes in the shape and function of long-bladed weapons.

This volume aims to provide a systematic inventory of medieval and Early Renaissance swords from the territory of today's Czech Republic, and information connected with them. The most essential part is a comprehensive catalogue of 430 swords or sword fragments which are historically linked to the territory of the Czech Republic (the swords were found there, they came from Czech and Moravian collections, items most likely to be of a local origin, or if they are nowadays abroad although they are certainly of Czech or Moravian origin). The authors are aware that this assemblage need not be (and cannot be) entirely complete. To a certain degree, the authors were dependent on information from individual museum workers and on their willingness to cooperate. It is also necessary to accept the fact that some fragments have been incorrectly interpreted in museum collections and were therefore not included in this work, so it cannot be denied that certain institutions could have material that was overlooked. Nevertheless, the authors are confident that they have managed to gather around ninety percent of all material from official collections. However, due to the extensive use and popularity of searching for metal artefacts with metal detectors, it is impossible to estimate the percentage of swords not taken into account from private collections.

When talking about Czech and Moravian medieval swords, one has to keep in mind that two basic groups of finds can be determined by their archaeological context. Specimens from the 9th and 10th centuries are known mainly from graves, while swords from the 11th century onwards are usually either soli-

tary finds or pieces whose find circumstances are not known. This was most likely the reason why in the past scientific attention was paid mainly to early medieval swords, while numerous later medieval and Early Renaissance swords were studied only marginally. For this reason, the investigation of swords from the 9th to mid-11th centuries (89 specimens) could have been more focused on a conservation and technological survey. On the other hand, the later swords (341 specimens) have been primarily listed, and their basic documentation has been performed (more than half of them were heretofore unknown to scholars, and a number of others have been published without photographic documentation or drawings).

The existing scholarly processing of medieval and Early Modern militaria (such as swords) found in the Czech Republic was inadequate and did not permit the accurate evaluation of these items. Therefore, around the year 2000, the authors began to compile an overall inventory of items connected with medieval and Early Modern warfare from national and private collections in this country. A relatively large number of specimens were collected, many of them of major importance, which had heretofore been neglected and remained unstudied in individual museum collections. Some of the results of this basic research were published earlier either as an evaluation of individual museum collections or as studies with a special focus (references are in the catalogue). Thanks to this study, previously unknown medieval and Early Modern swords from Moravia and Bohemia were published. In many cases, information on previously published swords was revised and supplemented.

As mentioned above, the authors have attempted to collect all relevant material from the territory of the Czech Republic today. For that reason, this material also included several specimens now held by foreign museums but which have a verifiable connection to the Czech Republic. In contrast, swords whose foreign origin is verifiable, have not been included in the inventory or analytical part of this work (e.g. Slovak swords). The authors have also not included the relevant long blade weapons from the collections of individual heritage sites – former aristocratic armouries – as these collections typically lack any relationship with the Czech Lands and were brought here from foreign purchases or auctions. This mostly involves material that has not undergone archaeological transformations (i.e. which do not come from archaeological contexts). The Czech origin of the majority of swords that have undergone archaeological transformations is probable. A large number of intact swords have also been included in the work (i.e. swords that remained in some form as part of living culture and therefore did not undergo archaeological transformation), as there is a high degree of probability that they are original magistrates' swords used as insignia during the reading of judgements by the town courts, where they served as a symbol of judicial authority. In the timeframe covered in this study, these swords were closely tied to the development of long swords in general, and the characteristic swords intended for executions most likely appeared at the turn of the 17th century. Also included in the catalogue is the early medieval sword of St Stephen which, although it held no Czech connection at the time it was made, certainly became part of the treasury of St Vitus Cathedral by the 14th century at the latest.

Information is available on many sword finds that have not been preserved and for which not even a sketch is available. For obvious reasons, it is not possible to discuss these swords in detail, and they have therefore been included in the catalogue only when information is available on their deposition in an early medieval grave. The authors are also aware of several medieval sword finds that could not be documented by them for objective reasons (the sword is lost or missing today, *etc.*) In these cases, the authors have attempted to use all available published or archival information for their catalogue entries.

## HISTORY OF COLLECTING DATA ON MEDIEVAL SWORDS FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC

### 1.1. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL DATA OF EARLY MEDIEVAL SWORDS

Interest among Czech researchers in the study of early medieval swords was not especially pronounced during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. This situation was related to the small number of known specimens and the low attractiveness of those that had been discovered. *J. L. Pič* (1909, 106–110) summarised the knowledge of early medieval swords from Bohemia at the turn of the 20th century in his famous book, ‘Starožitnosti země české’ [Antiquities of Bohemia]. However, the study contains numerous inaccuracies.

One particular exception was the sword (preserved without a hilt and a blade point) from a princely grave in Kolín (cat. *ID No 79*), with magnificently decorated sword straps; along with the entire Kolín grave find, these artefacts became the subject of a heated debate in the late 19th century (the subject is comprehensively addressed in *Lutovský 1994; Košta – Lutovský 2014*). Also of interest were two swords preserved in the treasury of St Vitus Cathedral. The first is the sword of St Wenceslaus, the coronation sword of Bohemian kings (cat. *ID No 195*). Although the latest analytical research on this sword confirmed the early medieval origin of the blade, the hilt dates to a later period. The second sword, the St Stephen sword (cat. *ID No 196*), has been preserved in its original form from the second half of the 10th century, but it was brought to Bohemia in the 13th or 14th century. In the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, both sword relics were studied by Czech and foreign scholars,

and the St Stephen sword in particular was ranked among the most important and most cited early medieval weapons thanks to its exceptional condition, hilt decoration and inscription on the blade. Compared to foreign scholars, *J. Schráníl* stands out among Czech scholars with respect to his study of this issue (*Schráníl 1930b*).

*L. Niederle* (1925, 526–537) addressed the occurrence of swords among the early Slavs in a separate chapter of his multi-volume monograph ‘Slovanské starožitnosti’ [Slavic Antiquities] on early Slavic military activities. The relatively short passage is one of the most important European text on early medieval swords of its time. *Niederle* could not pursue a detailed study of such swords, as he lacked a sufficient number of specimens. The importance of the text lies in the author’s broad view and his ability to reach logical conclusions; for example, *Niederle* defined two areas in the Slavic world – one with swords though to be Frankish, the other with swords though to be Northern in origin or in the tradition of their construction.

Not taking into account the princely grave from Kolín, where the sword itself was not the object of greatest scholarly interest, the earliest detailed archaeological works on early medieval swords from Bohemia are those by the Sudeten German scholars *J. Kern* (1935), on the sword from Litoměřice – Staré Šance, and *H. Preidel* (1937; 1938) on the discovery of a grave with a sword in Žatec. A study of a warrior grave found in the Third Courtyard of the Prague Castle was written a few years later but published only after the Second World War (*Borkovský 1946*).

The first scholarly description and evaluation of finds of early medieval swords in Moravia was at-

tempted by I. L. Červinka (1928, 211–213) in his monograph on Great Moravian archaeological artefacts. A first find of the sword from the vast cemetery at Staré Město – Na Valách was published by A. Zelnitius (*Niederle – Zelnitius 1929; Zelnitius 1948*). A more elaborate evaluation of early medieval swords from the Moravian territory was attempted by J. Poulík in his book ‘Staroslovanská Morava’ [Old Slavic Moravia] (*Poulík 1948*, 39–40), prior to the era of the major discoveries at famous Great Moravian archaeological sites. V. Hrubý, an important Moravian archaeologist, wrote about the characteristics of early medieval graves with swords from Moravia in a short article (*Hrubý 1950*) and a few years later produced a more detailed account in connection with his evaluation of the extensive burial ground at Staré Město – Na Valách (*Hrubý 1955*, 163–168). As part of the preliminary evaluation of the newly excavated cemetery at the Second Mikulčice church, information on three swords discovered during the excavation was released to the professional community (*Poulík 1957*).

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Bohemian and Moravian early medieval swords became the subject of several summaries. Firstly, E. Soudská (1954) collected weapons from early medieval graves from Bohemia and Moravia, while M. Kliský attempted to compare early medieval swords from the territory of the former Czechoslovakia with the results of Petersen’s sword typology in a shorter study (*Kliský 1964*). B. Dostál (1966, 67–70) collected data on swords while analysing Moravian cemeteries from the 9th to the mid-10th centuries. The short overview of swords produced by Z. Klanica in an anthology on Great Moravia unfortunately contains numerous inaccuracies (*Klanica 1967a*). The catalogue of early medieval burial grounds from the territory of Central Bohemia by J. Sláma (1977) also contains information on several swords, including as-yet unpublished specimens with uncertain find contexts from Roztoky-Žalov (cat. *ID No 215*) as well as from a collection at Křivoklát Castle (which is today located with great probability to Malé Kyšice, cat. *ID No 117*). The topic of Bohemian and Moravian swords was addressed in detail by R. Krajíc (1978) in his doctoral thesis, but unfortunately this work has never been published.

Several studies containing discussions of various lengths, which aimed at putting individual finds of early medieval swords into a broader context, have been published over the last thirty years of the 20th century. These works include a separate study of a Petersen type Y sword from Rajhradice (*Krajíc 1970*; the study located the sword to the cadastre of neighbouring Rebešovice), which preceded a catalogue publication of the Rajhradice cemetery by several decades (*Staňa 2006*). In connection with an analysis of finds from the Mikulčice-Kostelec (also called Mikulčice-Klášteřisko) cemetery, where a Petersen type X sword was discovered, Z. Klanica (1985a, 515–522) in relative detail addressed the issue of this type of sword in Moravia, including the question of origin. Z. Měřínský and J. Unger built on Klanica’s analysis of type X swords in their evaluation of a sword discovered at the cemetery in Morkůvky (*Měřínský – Unger 1990*, 379–381, 393–395). J. Vignatiová (1993) published a precise analysis of five early medieval swords from Pohansko near Břeclav, in which she utilised the results of radiographic and neutronographic investigations.

Interest in the study of early medieval swords from the territory of the Czech Republic has continued at the beginning of the 21st century; numerous special studies have been published in this period, in which individual swords are evaluated from the archaeological and archaeometallurgical perspective (*Galuška 2001; Selucká – Richtrová – Hložek 2002; Hošek 2003; 2007; Hošek – Mařík – Šilhová 2006; 2008; Hošek – Košta 2006; 2007; 2008; 2011; 2013; Košta – Hošek 2008a; 2008b; 2009; 2012; 2014; Hošek – Košta – Mařík 2012*). A concise overview of early medieval swords found in the territory of the Czech Republic formed part of the master’s degree thesis by J. Košta (2004), of which only the part devoted to the description of early medieval swords from Mikulčice was published (*Košta 2005*). Z. Klanica devoted considerable attention to early medieval swords from Moravia in his study of the cemeteries in Nechvalín and Prušánky, where a total of four swords were found (*Klanica 2006a*, 31–39). In this work, Klanica emphasised the specific nature of the development of swords in the narrower area of Central Europe and warned of the possibility of distortion in attempts to tie local sword finds to a typology created pri-

## CHAPTER 4

# THE CATALOGUE

Each record of the catalogue consists of a set of information relating to a particular sword, which is structured in the following way:

### ■ Title of the record

All records of swords are listed in the catalogue either by the names of municipalities (i.e. cities, towns or villages) or the historical names of individual settlement units (e.g. medieval castles) from which the swords or parts thereof originated. Titles of records are completed by names of related cadastral areas and districts. This system should provide the reader the most comfortable way to work with the catalogue. Because names of both municipalities and settlement units can be dubious, cadastral areas are the smallest territories having a unique name and definite historical boundaries and so they are the crucial units for a reliable geographical description of the swords.

Titles of records starting by characters with diacritical marks (Č, Š, Ž) are listed after identical characters without diacritics (C, S, Z). Titles starting by the 'Ch' character (which has an individual position in the Czech alphabet) are listed according to the English alphabet within titles starting by the character 'C'.

Titles of records are structured as follows:

Municipality<sup>1</sup>-quarter<sup>2</sup>, toponym<sup>3</sup> (cadastral area<sup>4</sup>, district<sup>5</sup>) – further details<sup>6</sup>  
ID No: <sup>7</sup>

or

Settlement unit<sup>1\*</sup> settlement type<sup>2\*</sup> (cadastral area<sup>4</sup>, district<sup>5</sup>) – further details<sup>6</sup>  
ID No: <sup>7</sup>

1 – city, town or village in which the sword was found;

2 – quarter of the city or town;

1\* – settlement unit, the name of which is known from the times when the sword discovered there was still part of a living culture; a closer specification of the settlement (castle, village *etc.*);

2\* – closer specification of the nature of the settlement (castle, village *etc.*);

3 – place name, especially one derived from a topographical feature;

4 – cadastral area;

5 – district;

6 – further details such as numbers of graves *etc.*, which help to identify individual swords comfortably

7 – identification number of the sword (record) within the catalogue.

Following the Czech rules for writing place names we use a hyphen for connecting municipality with quarter/toponym in the case of single-word names, and a dash with spaces in the case of multi-word names (e.g. Mikulčice-Valy; Praha – Nové Město).

Examples:

Kamýk nad Vltavou (Kamýk nad Vltavou cadastral area, Příbram district)

– Sword was discovered at the municipality of Kamýk nad Vltavou, in the cadastral area of Kamýk nad Vltavou, district of Příbram

Brno-Štýřice (Štýřice cadastral area, Brno-město district)

– Sword was discovered in the municipality of Brno, quarter of Štýřice, in the cadastral area of Štýřice, district of Brno-město

Mikulčice-Valy (Mikulčice cadastral area, Hodonín district) – grave 90

– Sword was discovered in the municipality of Mikulčice, at the place called Valy, in the cadastral area of Mikulčice, district of Hodonín, and specifically it comes from grave No 90

Blaník castle (Louňovice pod Blaníkem cadastral area, Benešov district)

– Sword was discovered in the castle of Blaník, in the cadastral area of Louňovice pod Blaníkem, district of Benešov.

## ■ 1 Stored:

Information about places where swords are stored is structured as follows:

Municipality, Name of the institution (Name of the institution in English if assigned), Identification number of the sword.

## ■ 2 Typological determination:

We decided to respect the differences in the traditions of writing typological data for early medieval and later swords, which correspond to the different importance given to the typology of the individual parts of swords. In the case of early medieval swords, the typology of their hilts is of main importance for the typological determination of weapons and the importance of the typology of blades is somewhat less, but in the case of later swords, typologies of the individual parts are of equal importance, and their typological determination traditionally starts with the blade.

The basic classification of early-medieval sword hilts was conducted using Petersen's typology (*Petersen 1919*), which is nowadays the most widespread typological system for swords dating from the late 8th to the turn of the 11th centuries. In the course of recent decades, various shifts have appeared in the descriptions of swords of some of the Petersen's types; therefore we have made an effort to classify swords according to characteristics that are as close as possible to the original Petersen's description. The individual ambiguities in the description of the Petersen types, including the type definitions we use, are described in detail in the chapter on typology in the second volume of this study (*Hošek – Košta – Žákovský in print*). The Petersen's typology is supplemented by the more analytical typology of A. Geibig (*1991*, 20–63), which we present in the standard format: combination type – variant (type of the upper-hilt in the front view – type of the upper-hilt in the side view – type of the upper-hilt in the horizontal view – type of the crossguard in the horizontal view).

Typological description of the early-medieval sword hilts is then finalised by Geibig's construction types of the upper hilt (*Geibig 1991*, 90–100). To classify 9th to 10th century sword blades we have developed our own typological system that is based on a cluster analysis of the length, width and length/width ratio of blades of swords from the Czech Republic (*Košta – Hošek 2014*, 253–261; *Hošek – Košta – Žákovský in print*); using this system we divided the blades into five groups. At the same time, we classify blades of the early medieval swords according to the Geibig's blade typology (*Geibig 1991*, 83–90), even though very good state of preservation of the blades is required, and hence a significant number of blades could not be classified with reasonable accuracy, if at all.

For classification of high- and late-medieval swords we primarily used a widespread typological system of E. Oakeshott (*1960*, 200–238; *1964*; *1991*), which allows separate description of blades, pommels and guards. We also applied some of the amendments to Oakeshott's typology made by M. Głosek (*1984*) and M. Aleksić (*2007*). In addition, we also included into Oakeshott's typology several new types of pommels and their variants (*Fig. 15*), which are based on characteristics observed on swords from the territory of the Czech Republic. It primarily concerns pommels of late-medieval and early-modern long swords, which in many cases reflected a pursuit of originality.

We have also defined several new types and variants of guards (*Fig. 16*), and we added into E. Oakeshott's typological system fully developed basket-shaped guards of relatively late date, which were applied to long swords. We are fully aware that this is a very controversial step, and we hope that it will raise a broader debate on this issue. In a few cases, basket-shaped guards were assigned as variants of those types of guards that could hypothetically develop into basket-like shapes during the first half of the 16th century. Classification of so-called Romanesque swords is supplemented by the A. Geibig's system (*Geibig 1991*). In the case of early-modern swords, however, we did not supplement the classification by the A. Norman system (*Norman 1980*), because it would make typological records very unclear and too complicated for our needs. A comparison of our types with Norman's system will be mentioned in the analytical part of this study.

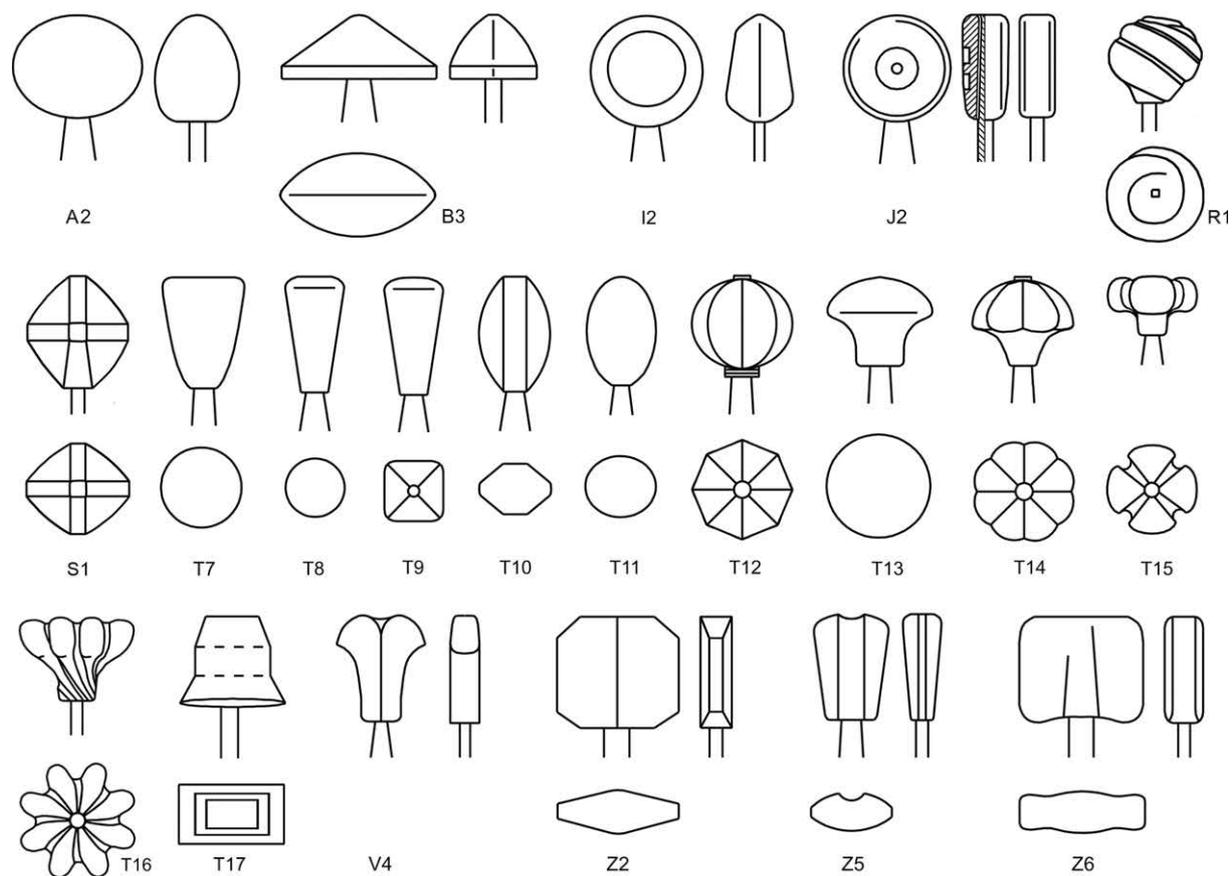


Fig. 15. New types of pommels and their variants, which are based on characteristics observed on swords from the territory of the Czech Republic, and which were included by authors in *Oakeshott's typology*. Drawing by L. Sedláčková.

The typological data are written as follows:

Hilt – [P] ... ; [G] ... ; [G] construction type. Blade – group {..} ([G]...) ... for the early medieval words,  
 Blade – [O]... . Pommel – [O]... . Crossguard – [O] ... for the high medieval and younger swords,  
 Blade – [O]... ([G]...). Pommel – [O]... . Crossguard – [O]... Hilt – [G] ... for the Romanesque swords, which can be classified by Geibig's typology.

The abbreviations of typologies used mean:

[P]... – according to Petersen's typology (*Petersen 1919*),  
 [G]... – according to Geibig's typology (*Geibig 1991*),  
 group {..} – according to the classification introduced by *Košta and Hošek (2014, 253–261)*,  
 [O]... – according to *Oakeshott's (1964; 1991)* typology supplemented by *Głosek (1984)* and *Aleksić (2007)*.

### ■ 3 Dating:

Dating of the sword is based on a combination of both typological dating of individual parts thereof and dating of the related archeological context. When the context is younger, its dating is added in parentheses.

### ■ 4 Circumstances of the find:

Brief information about where, when, how and by whom the sword was found.



NÁRODNÍ  
MUZEUM



MUNI  
ARTS

