

# A MEDIEVAL SWORD DISCOVERED IN MARAMUREȘ

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## O SPADĂ MEDIEVALĂ DESCOPERITĂ ÎN MARAMUREȘ

**REZUMAT:** Granițele de azi ale Maramureșului nu corespund cu realitățile medievale. Timpurile actuale au trunchiat vechiul comitat medieval, teritoriul fiindu-i împărțit între statele naționale România și Ucraina. Spada medievală a fost descoperită în hotarul localității Mara, în vechime Crăcești, în timpul unor exploatări forestiere. După descrierile conjuncturilor în care a fost descoperită, știm că a fost îngropată cu vârful în jos, fără alt context arheologic. Piesa în discuție face parte din categoria spadelor de două

mâini și se încadrează în tipul XIIIa a lui Oakeshott, folosit de către marea majoritate a celor care au studiat și publicat astfel de piese.

**CUVINTE-CHEIE:** Spadă, Maramureș, tip XIIIa, cnezat, Mara.

**KEYWORDS:** Sword, Maramureș, Type XIIIa, knezial, Mara.

Today's Maramureș County's borders do not match with the Medieval ones, simply because of the contemporary politics that fixed the borders. This is based that the old Medieval structure was shared by the new national states of Romania and Ukraine (pl. I/fig. 1,2). In addition to the new Romanian county, there were added new territories that enlarged considerably the chopped old county.

In the High and Late Middle Ages, Maramureș was a very particular territory. The reputed late archaeologist Radu Popa studied this area for years, starting with a doctoral thesis, numerous archaeological expeditions and finishing with some studies published<sup>1</sup>, and the foremost one was the publishing of his doctoral thesis, a book that still is the most consistent study of the Medieval Maramureș<sup>2</sup>. In his work, the author, based on written sources identifies the knezial domains, established on the main river streams of the future county<sup>3</sup>.

The sword that we present here today was discovered in what was the *knezial Domain of Mara*, named surely after the river, and apparently from which the whole county took its name<sup>4</sup>.

The domain had in total 9 villages and lands. Its lords, the Giulești family, loyal vasals of the kingdom, owned the small domain probably from the beginning of the 14th century up to the 15th century<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Popa 1969, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Popa 1997, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Popa 1997, 151–154.

<sup>4</sup> Popa 1969, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Popa 1969, 12.

In the Middle Ages Mara village was called *Crăcești*, probably after the confluence of the 2 streams, a word game that suggests the resemblance of the streams with the human legs, all reasons for the pudic communist leaders to change the name into *Mara*. *Crăcești* comes from *crac* (Rom.), meaning *loin* (Eng.). The first mentioning of the village in written sources was done in the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and we have no evidence that the village even existed before the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The item was discovered in 2004 near today Mara village in the area of Gutin Mountains, in a place called *Piatra Rea* (*Evil Rock*), during some local exploitation in the lumber industry (pl. I/fig. 3). The person who discovered it said that it was buried vertically, with the tip pointing downward. The discovery of the piece was absolutely accidental and the pommel was hooked while dragging the logs, therefore revealing a part of it. Luckily it was not damaged and he sold it to the local Mayor who passed it forward to the Sighet History Museum curator (Alin Pralea).

The sword is relatively well preserved (pl. II/fig. 4–5). It has its pommel, its guard and the blade intact. It is currently preserved on exhibition at the Sighet History Museum.

The blade is 870 mm in length, 48.3 mm wide near the guard, and 17.4 mm towards the tip. The blood groove covers more than a half of the entire length of the blade and in section appears to have a concave shape.

The cross-guard is that of a bow-tie resemblance, square in section, and from frontal view it is wider at the end and narrows down towards the middle. In Oakeshott's typology, this component of the sword is that of *Style 5*<sup>6</sup>.

The grip is 26.6 cm long, and of course it was meant to be used by both hands.

The pommel is circular with two diameters: 7.2cm, and 6.4 cm. It is almost flat and in Oakeshott typology is under the *letter H*. This type of pommels has a fairly long use, from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>.

After examining the components of the piece, we came to the conclusion that the sword is that of *Type XIIIa* in Oakeshott's typology. This type of weapon, called in its time, *THE GREAT SWORD*, was commonly used from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century right to the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

There are several researchers that dedicated their works in studying East-European Medieval swords. The most quoted of them are Anatolij N. Kirpičnikov<sup>8</sup>, Alexander Ruttikay<sup>9</sup>, Karl-Zeno Pinter<sup>10</sup>.

However, other researchers like Marian Głosek completes our spectrum of knowledge with new studies regarding the swords discovered in the area of the former Eastern Germany, Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Marian Głosek, Polish archaeologist and Professor gathered in his work a number of 497 swords from all the areas mentioned above. He concluded the fact that the *Type XIIIa* had a wider range of spreading alongside with the *Type XVIa*, both found exclusively in Hungarian collections, making them more than 50% from the total of sword discoveries<sup>11</sup>. In a nut shell, after analyzing all the *XIIIa* pieces from the above mentioned areas, he came to the conclusion that Oakeshott's dating is incomplete, and this type was used not only up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century but also in the 15<sup>th</sup>. Głosek also added a *Subtype XIIIa1*, after examining the collections from the former Czechoslovakia. This subtype is dated between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Another author with an updated work, Marko Aleksić, gathered all the pieces, from a larger area this time<sup>12</sup>. Like Głosek, Aleksić also used the Oakeshott typology, and he applied it to the pieces of his studied area. In some aspects, Aleksić agrees with Głosek in the matter of the chronology for some pieces which

<sup>6</sup> Oakeshott 1997, 114–115.

<sup>7</sup> Oakeshott 1997, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Kirpičnikov 1986, 1–23.

<sup>9</sup> Ruttikay 1975, 119–216; Ruttikay 1976, 245–395.

<sup>10</sup> Pinter 1999, *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Głosek 1984, 181.

<sup>12</sup> Aleksić 2007, 7–18.

is, in some ways, different in this part of Europe, comparing to some of the pieces from Western Europe analysed and dated by Oakeshott. For instance, the cross-guard of our sword is that of *Type 5* after Aleksić, and it is dated between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>13</sup>, while after Oakeshott it is *Style 5*, and dated between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>14</sup>. Our pommel in Oakeshott is *Type H*, and it is dated largely between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>15</sup>, while Aleksić mentions that this type in Southeast Europe is more frequent between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and later on the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>16</sup>.

For nearby analogies we quote the sword found in Moldovenești<sup>17</sup>, probably 2 pieces from Oradea and maybe one found in Orăștie<sup>18</sup>. Those last two quoted, either have important dating elements missing, or there are in bad condition so a clear resemblance with the sword from Mara could not be established.

The fact that it was not identified in a wider archaeological context, suggests the fact that the sword was deliberately singly buried without any other artefacts put around. Similar cases of Medieval swords were found in: river streams (Moldovenești<sup>19</sup>, Coroi<sup>20</sup>, Jupa<sup>21</sup> – România); in lakes (Osieczna<sup>22</sup>, or the ones found in Lake Zbszynskie<sup>23</sup> – Poland); fountains (Orăștie<sup>24</sup> – România), or buried isolated from any other archaeological context, like the ones found at *Poiana Prisăcii* (România)<sup>25</sup>. The list of these so-called *coincidences* could go on. The burring of the sword discovered near Mara village is doubtfully a case of hiding, more like a medieval custom, especially with all the swords found in similar conditions all across Europe.

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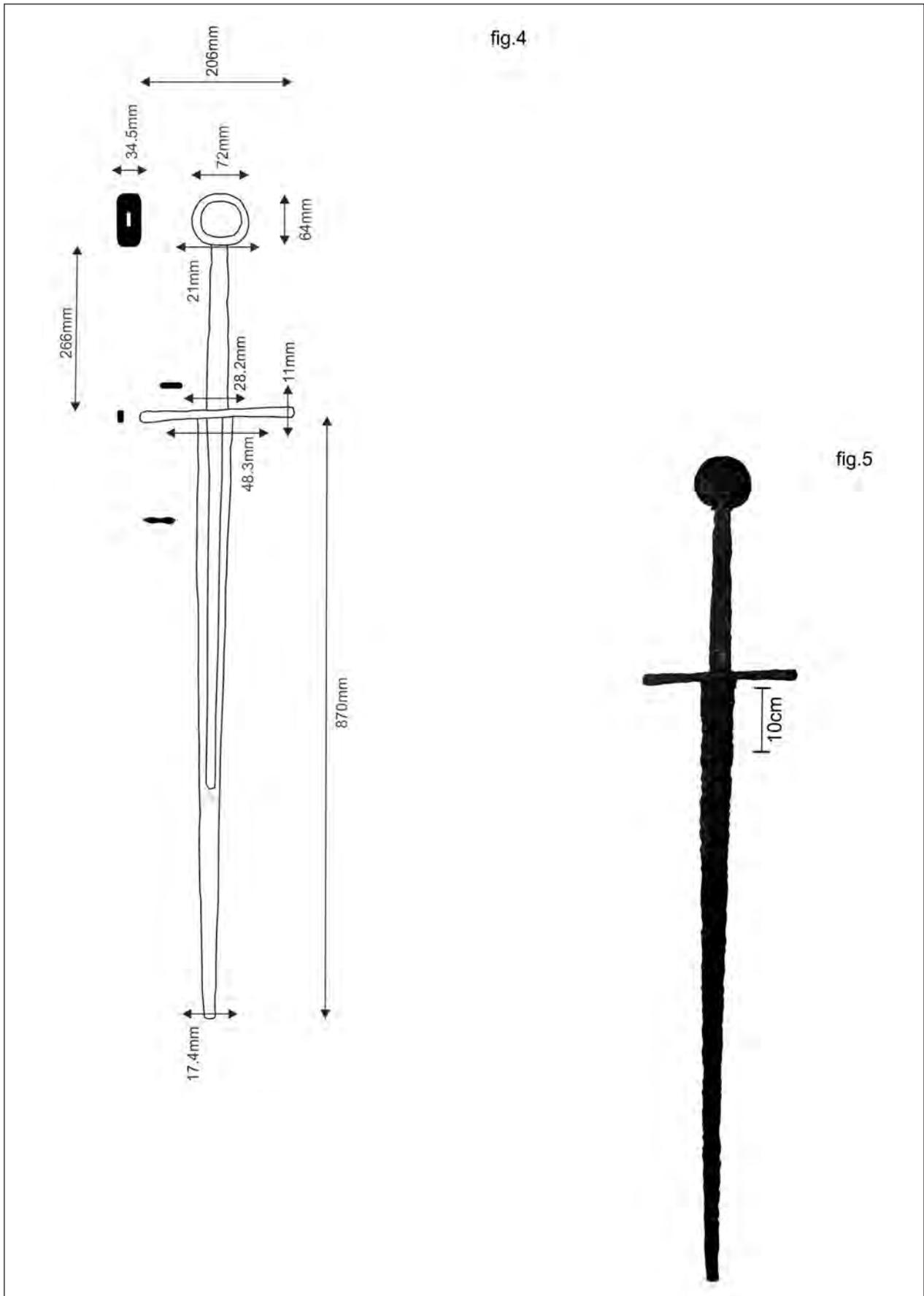
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Pl. II. The sword: drawing (fig. 4) and photo (fig. 5).