

Irakli Bakradze

A RARE TYPE OF FLANGED MACE IN THE COLLECTION OF THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM IN TBILISI

Abstract:

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In the Georgian National Museum (Tbilisi, Georgia) a rare type of flanged mace head is preserved – an iron cylinder with six flanges and an elongated top above the flanged section. Based on archaeological finds and imagery in iconography and frescos author suggests that this should be a specimen of Byzantine military culture dated from the beginning of the 14th to 15th c.

Key words: Flanged mace, Georgia, Georgian National Museum, Byzantium, the 14th-15th c.

The Georgian National Museum, named after a prominent Georgian scholar Simon Janashia, is the successor of the Museum of the Caucasus – the oldest institution of this kind in the entire region. The majority of medieval arms and armour items preserved in the Museum's various collections have not been studied and are thus yet to be made known to foreign academic circles. Currently studied object is a rare type of flanged mace head (Fig. 1) preserved in the GNM's Arms & Armour collection. The author's aim is to bring this item to the attention of international scholars and to determine the dating and the provenance of the artefact.¹

This mace "head" (No. 3877/9 /1113/) looks like an iron cylinder with six thick rectangular "wings" or "flanges" extending radially from its core. The distinctive feature of this mace head is its top part, above the flanged section. This part of the iron cylinder is as long as the lower part below the flanged section. It is sphero-conical in shape and topped with a small round knob, which is purely of a decorative function. In its lower part, the cylinder is open to allow the attachment

of a wooden shaft. Near the edge of the cylinder's socket there is a small hole in a side, through which a nail would be driven to secure a wooden shaft after its insertion into the mace head. The measurements of the head are as follows: length – 175 mm, width – 71 mm, and shaft diameter – 29 mm. Weight – 527 g.

One of the very interesting characteristics of this item is that the mace head seems to be forged from a single piece of iron. Examination of the flanges and the upper part, where the mace head is crowned with the round knob reveals no sign of welding. It is possible to suggest the influence of bronze casting in a single piece. However, forging such a complex shaped piece of iron would require advanced technological skills and formidable experience. We could further assume that this kind of weapon would be made in a region with a long-standing tradition of iron working and weapons production.

Though the GNM's acquisition records provide no information on this mace head's provenance,² it is quite possible to establish its origin. Its most distinctive feature is the prolonged upper part

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² There are no details in the GNM's records of the acquisition of the mace head; however, some assumptions could be made in light of the item's condition. It is well preserved, and there are no signs of the decomposition usually observed in items found or

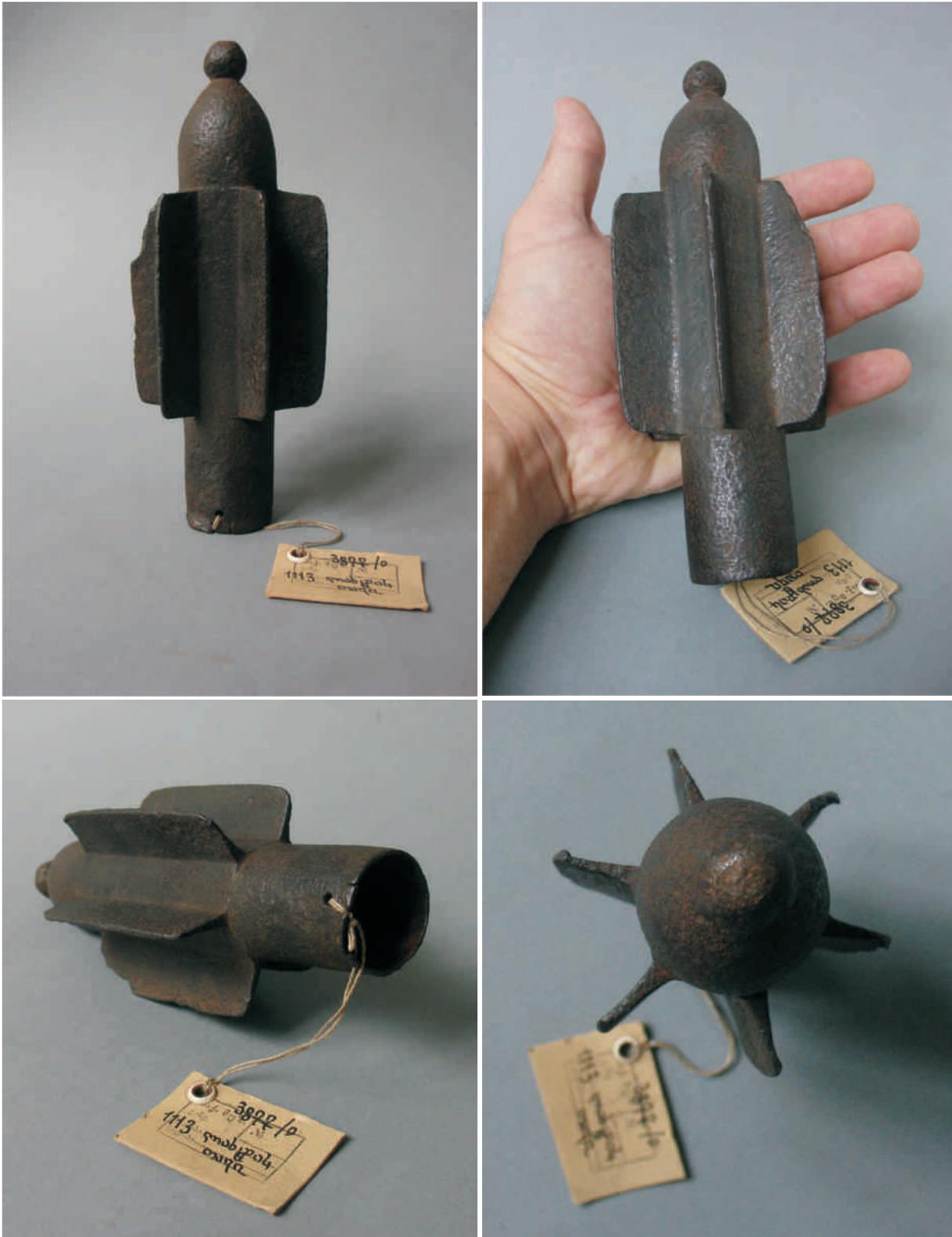


Fig. 1. The flanged mace, Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi. *Photo by I. Bakradze.*

Ryc. 1. Buzdygan ze zbiorów Gruzińskiego Muzeum Narodowego w Tbilisi. *Fot. I. Bakradze.*

excavated from archaeological sites. It is most probable that before the acquisition for the GNM's collection this mace head was held in one of the churches or holy shrines of Georgia as a special donation or oblation. Such tradition of giving weapon away to be kept in temples existed in Georgia up to the 19th c. Indeed, owing to this tradition, many interesting arms and armour items were well preserved until the acquisition for the Museum's collections.

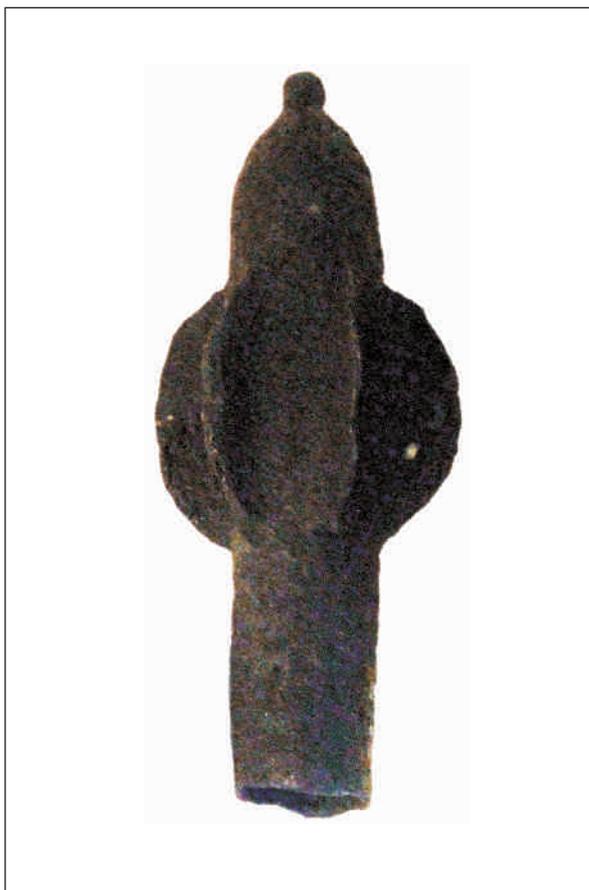


Fig. 2. The flanged mace from Dolishte in Bulgaria, the 14th c. Collection of The Regional Museum of History in Dobrich, Bulgaria (after *D'Amato 2011, Fig. 20*).

Ryc. 2. Buzdygan z Dolishte w Bułgarii, XIV w. Zbiory Regionalnego Muzeum Historycznego w Dobricz, Bułgaria (wg *D'Amato 2011, Fig. 20*).

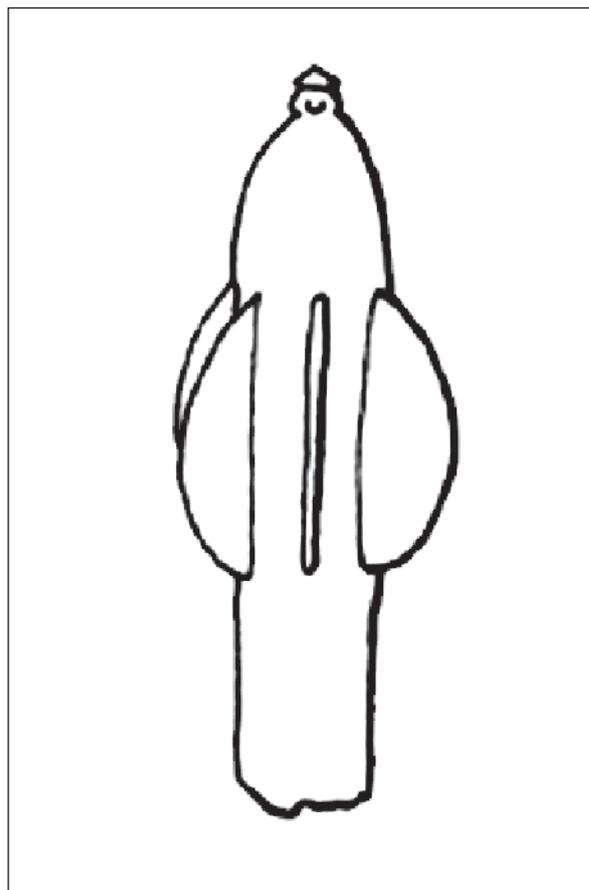


Fig. 3. The flanged mace from Stara Zagora region in Bulgaria, the 14th c. The Museum of History Iskra in Kazanlak, Bulgaria (after *Nicolle 1988, Fig. 8:K*).

Ryc. 3. Buzdygan ze Starej Zagory w Bułgarii, XIV w. Zbiory Muzeum Historycznego Iskra w Kazanlyk, Bułgaria (wg *Nicolle 1988, Fig. 8:K*).

crowned with the small round knob or a sphere. This particular mace head is easily matched to a number of comparable maces – to actual artefacts as well as images, found in frescoes and icons.

The best known maces of the similar form come from Bulgaria. One of them was discovered on the territory of the old fortress near Dolishte, Aksakovo municipality, Bulgaria³ (Fig. 2) and is now kept at the Regional Museum of History in Dobrich, Bulgaria (No. Ac 1545). Among items found alongside the above-mentioned mace head were copper and silver coins, on account of which the mace head was dated to the 14th c. (Парушев 1998, 67, 69-71, Fig. 12). The mace head is made of iron. On its surface there are detectable remains of silver inlay. The small socket in the side of the mace's base was used to fix wooden shaft with a nail. In this way, the mace head from Dolishte is similar to the mace head from the GNM; however,

their flanges differ in shape. Item from the GNM has rectangular flanges, while the Dolishte mace head has flanges in a shape of semi-ellipses. Furthermore, the spherico-conical-shaped upper part of the head is topped by a short rounded spike whereas the Georgian item has a semi-spherical knob. Slight differences are also observed in the measurements. The Dolishte mace is 190 mm long, and 83 mm wide, with the diameter of the shaft's base – 25 mm, and the weight of 692 g. (*ibid.*, 71).

Another interesting mace head from Bulgaria is preserved at the Museum of History in Iskra, Kazanlak municipality, Bulgaria (Fig. 3). Overall, it has a design similar to the above-described mace: it also has semi-elliptical flanges. The Kazanlak Museum's mace head is attributed to the Stara Zagora region and is dated to the 14th c., though no substantial argumentation can

³ Photo available at the Museum's webpage: http://www.dobrichmuseum.bg/images/sampled/01_Archaeology/03_Medieval/03_Kasno%20srednoviekovie/Kasno_srednoviekovie_006.jpg – access 08.09.2016.



Fig. 4. The flanged mace from Danube river valley, Eastern Balkan region. World Museum of Man, Florida, USA (after D'Amato 2011, Fig. 28:3).

Ryc. 4. Buzdygan odkryty w dolinie Dunaju, Wschodnie Bałkany. Zbiory World Museum of Man, Floryda, USA (wg D'Amato 2011, Fig. 28:3).



Fig. 5. The flanged mace. The private collection (photo available at www.otlichnik.tripod.com/medmace3.html).

Ryc. 5. Buzdygan z kolekcji prywatnej (fot. dostępne na www.otlichnik.tripod.com/medmace3.html).

be adduced for this supposition (Парушев 1998, 70; Nicolle 1988, Fig. 8:K; D'Amato 2011, 43).

The third mace head is preserved at the Historical Museum in Popovo, Bulgaria. This specimen is similar in design to the previous two, but unfortunately no images of this mace head have been published yet (Парушев 1998, 71).

Another six maces of similar design are preserved at the Vatevi collection (Popov 2015a, 74-76, 410-416). These specimens vary widely in size, shape of flanges (pentagonal, rectangular or semi-circular) and form of the upper part. None of them can be considered the exact parallel for the GNM specimen, however, all of them have typical elongated proportions.⁴

⁴ V. Popov distinguishes three sub-types of the specified elongated maces. Dividing the specified maces to the sub types and variants is not the aim of the present work, however, in my opinion; such classification should be based mostly on the

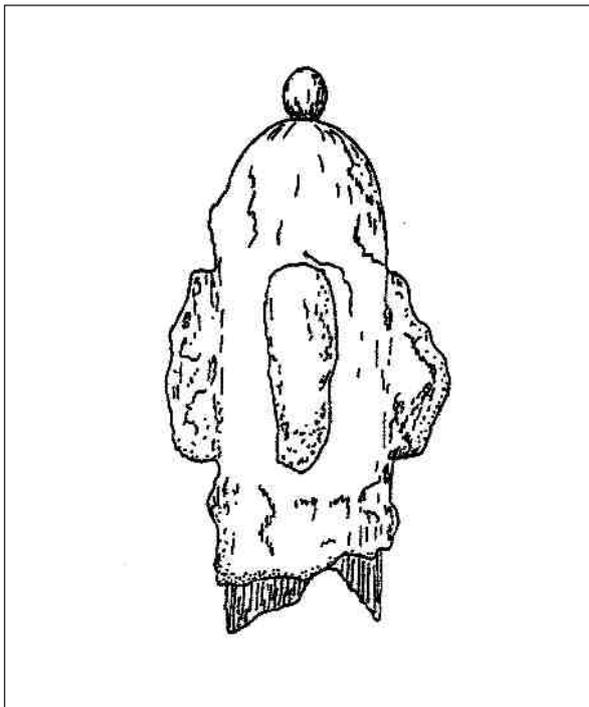


Fig. 6. The flanged mace. The Golden Horde stronghold Angelinskiy Erik in Krasnodar region, Russian Federation, the end of the 13th c. – 1364. The private collection (after Волков 2005, Fig. 6:1).

Ryc. 6. Buzdygan. Złotoordyńskie grodzisko Angelinskij Erik w obwodzie krasnodarskim, Federacja Rosyjska, koniec XIII w. – 1364 r. Kolekcja prywatna (wg Волков 2005, Fig. 6:1).

Another two similar maces are kept at the National Institute of Archaeology with Museum in Sofia (Bulgaria). Both have semi-triangular flanges, and their proportions are quite similar to the GNM specimen, as well as their spherico-conical upper part and the semi-spherical knob on the top (Popov 2015a, 75, Fig. 66; 2015b, 9). Maces from the NIAM are decorated with silver inlay that resembles the Dolishte specimen. S. Popov dates them presumably to the end of the 14th–15th c.

Besides the Bulgarian finds, more specimens are known. Another similar mace head is kept at the World Museum of Man, Florida, USA (Fig. 4). However, there is an interesting variation in the top section. Instead of being crowned with a round knob, the top part of the mace head gradually tapers, ending in a faceted spike of a strongly contoured shape. Little is known about the origins of this item except for its Eastern Balkan provenance, from somewhere along the Danube river valley. Its measurements are: length – 180 mm, width – 70 mm, shaft base diameter – 30 mm. (D'Amato 2011, 43, Fig. 28:3).



Fig. 7. The fresco of St. Demetrios in Monastery of Diskouri, Mylopotamos, Crete, late 14th c. (after D'Amato 2011, Fig. 2).

Ryc. 7. Fresk ze św. Demetriuszem w klasztorze Dioskurów, Mylopotamos, Kreta, koniec XIV w. (wg D'Amato 2011, Fig. 2).

Yet another interesting mace head is kept in a private collection. Photos and a description are available on the website⁵ (Fig. 5). This item is presented as a Byzantine mace dated to the 14th c. Unfortunately, no provenance or evidence is cited to support this supposition, so its origin and dating has yet to be established more precisely. In order to do so, perhaps a closer look should be taken at the shape of the mace flanges. Out of all the items under study this specimen has the most unusually shaped flanges – of semi-hexagonal form. It also should be noted that the edges of “hexagonal” flanges are slightly curved in. One of the oldest known images of hexagonally flanged maces with curved-in edges are found on wall frescoes of 1407-1413 in Kalenić Monastery, Recovac municipality, Serbia (Радојчић 1971, 250-261; D'Amato 2011, Fig. 21). The shape of the mace head from the fresco seems quite developed in comparison to the mentioned specimen. Thus, it could also be assumed that this particular type of mace should be dated prior to the time of the painting of the fresco.

outline of the upper part. This detail is the main distinctive feature of the considered maces, while the shape of the flanges, in most cases, is quite ordinary.

⁵ www.otlichnik.tripod.com/medmace3.html.



Fig. 8. The fresco of St. George in Saviour's Church, Tsalenjikha, Georgia, frescoed in 1384-1396 by Cyrus Emanuel Eugenicus. *Photo by M. Janjalia.*

Рис. 8. Фреска со св. Иеронимом в церкви Збавителя авторства Кириса Емануэля Еугеникуса (1384-1396), Цаленджика, Грузия. *Фот. М. Джалия.*

There is another interesting mace head not exactly the same as the above-mentioned ones but, nonetheless, it falls within the group (Fig. 6). This one was found at the archaeological site of the Golden Horde settlement on Angelinskiy Erik, Krasnodar region, Russian Federation (Волков 2005, 351, Fig. 6:1; Горелик 2008, 168, Fig. 6:19). In the light of ceramic items and coins excavated on the site, the dating for the Angelinskiy Erik settlement was suggested to be from the end of

the 13th c. to 1364 (Волков, Лопан 2009, 44). Unfortunately, this archaeological data cannot be used to establish definite provenance of this particular mace head, since it had been discovered and extracted by an amateur and is kept in a private collection. There is no other image available, except for the drawing that according to the publisher, is rather approximate (Волков 2005, 351). Among all the mace heads presented in this article, this last one is exceptional. The mace has only four flanges, that are thick and rounded, yet narrow, protruding from a central piece by just a bit more than 1 cm. According to the publication, the mace head is significantly smaller and has quite a wide shaft. Its measurements are: length – 100 mm, width – 55 mm, shaft base diameter – 35 mm. The only element that places the mace within the designated group is its generally elongated outline and the sphere-conical upper part with the small knob. It should be noted, that, considering all the features, this mace head looks the most archaic to me.

Hereby, we have fifteen flanged mace heads that despite some differences share a number of distinctive features that allow them to be placed in a specific group of maces. The first of these features is the unusually long upper part of the mace head above the flange section, almost equal in length to the shaft. This gives the studied specimens their typical elongated proportions. The second feature is the material – all of them are forged from iron.

Despite some doubts, four out of fifteen presented specimens are being attributed with varying certainty to a particular century or period. The mace head from the Angelinskiy Erik settlement: between the end of 13th c. and 1364; the mace head from Dolishte: ca. 14th c.; the mace head from Stara Zagora: ca. 14th c.; the mace head from the private collection: before 15th c.

Noteworthy is the fact that the above specimens whose provenance is more or less clear, are being attributed to countries of the Balkan and the Caucasus region (Bulgaria, Serbia and Georgia). These countries historically underwent strong military, secular and religious influence of Byzantine culture *transforming imperial standards to reflect their own traditions (Art and Culture...*



Fig. 9. The Icon of St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki (Dimitri Solunsky), beginning of the 15th c., Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrad, Serbia (after *Ananov 1978, Fig. 12*).

Ryc. 9. Ikona św. Demetriusza z Tesaloniki, początek XV w., Muzeum Sztuki Użytkowej w Belgradzie, Serbia (wg *Ananov 1978, Fig. 12*).

1997, 273-278). Yet, even though these influences were gradually transformed on the native soil into domestic forms and versions, their Byzantine origin still could be recognized in many aspects of national cultures.⁶

Conclusions on Byzantine origin of the studied maces derived from comparative analysis of archaeological findings are further backed up by imagery in Byzantine iconography and the art of fresco painting. Among arms of Saint Warriors depicted in a manner of Greek orthodox painting school, we see maces of the described type, with pronounced upper part topped with the round knob, and the flanges of semi-elliptic or rectangular

⁶ Attribution of one of such mace heads to the Golden Horde territory does not contradict our assumptions. There are evidences that the import of weapon from Italy and Egypt never lost its significance for the Golden Horde (Кулешов 2010; Кулешов, Абызова 2011). The aforementioned Golden Horde settlement was located next to an important overland caravan route that was running up to Tana, an important commercial center of Italy (Волков, Лопан 2009, 44-45). Moreover, the armament for Italian garrisons of the Black Sea trading posts was partly brought from Byzantium (Кулешов 2010, 91). Considering all that, the discovery of a Byzantine mace in the Angelinskiy Erik is quite relevant. On the other hand, it is quite admissible, that mace heads of the similar design could have been produced within the Golden Horde craft centers as well, as replicas of known Byzantium specimens (Нарожный, Чахкиев 2003, 135; Нарожный 2007, 183).



Fig. 10. The bowl fragment. Antioch, early 13th c. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, USA (after *Art and Culture... 1997, Cat. 268*).

Ryc. 10. Fragment misy. Antiochia, początek XIII w. Metropolitan Museum of Art w Nowym Jorku, USA (wg *Art and Culture... 1997, Cat. 268*).

shape in its middle part. Such images are found on the following frescos: the fresco of St. Demetrius at Monastery of Diskouri (Mylopotamos in Crete), late 14th c. (D'Amato 2011, 22, Fig. 2) (Fig. 7); the fresco of St. George at Tsalenjikha, Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior (Tsalenjikha municipality, Georgia), frescoed in 1384-1396 by Cyrus Emanuel Eugenicus, a Byzantine artist from Constantinople (ibid., Fig. 12:2; *Tsalenjikha... 2011*) (Fig. 8); the icon of St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki (Dimitri Solunsky), beginning of the 15th c. (Museum of Applied Arts, Belgrad, Serbia) (Алпатов 1978, 293, Fig. 12) (Fig. 9).

All three mace images are similar in the pronounced character of the upper part above the flange section, though some details differ. First image has the upper part in the form of a large sphere with a knob on the top; second image has the upper part formed out of three smaller spheres, one on top of the other. The upper part

of the third mace looks like a narrow cylinder topped by a small sphere. These differences could be either the reflection of actual different forms of mace head, or the result of the artists' exaggeration or imagination, since such specimens are not known or at least have not been discovered yet. If this is the case, there is an interesting example. On a fragment of a bowl with an image of a horse and a rider from Antioch, early 13th c. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA), the object in the rider's right hand is not an expected falcon lure (Evans 1997, 401, Fig. 268), but a flanged mace – an indicative symbol of rank (Fig. 10).

However, in author's opinion, all the mentioned maces fall within one type and their Byzantine origin is quite evident. For the cavalry of the Byzantine army the maces were the essential element of their offensive armament⁷ (D'Amato 2011). Therefore, it is almost irrefutable to suggest

⁷ Noteworthy that a time (the 12th-13th c.), when flanged maces are coming into existence in the regions of the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Byzantium (Кирпичников 1966, 54, Fig. X:6; Кулешов, Абызова 2011, 92-94, Fig. 1:4; D'Amato 2011, 29-30) the same type of weapon appears in Georgia. According to narrative sources, we could suggest that from the end of the 12th – beginning of the 13th c. flanged mace (Georgian "lakhti") became not only an important part of mounted warrior armament but also an indicative symbol of rank (ბაქრაძე 2014, 240-243).

that the mace head from Georgian National Museum is a specimen of Byzantine military culture or at least an example of its influence in the period from ca. the beginning of the 14th to the 15th c. This medieval military artefact is one more evidence of tight cultural connections

and exchanges existing between the kingdom of Georgia and the Byzantine Empire.

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RZADKI TYP BUZDYGANU ZE ZBIORÓW GRUZIŃSKIEGO MUZEUM NARODOWEGO W TBILISI

Streszczenie

W zbiorach Gruzińskiego Muzeum Narodowego w Tbilisi przechowywany jest rzadki typ głowicy buzdyganu. Zabytek ma kształt żelaznego cylindra z sześcioma piórami i wyodrębnionym zwieńczeniem. Okaz ten zbliżony jest do kilku innych głowic buzdyganów, spotykanych zarówno wśród oryginalnych zabytków, jak i w ikonografii – na ikonach i freskach.

Do tej pory znanych jest 12 zabytków o analogicznej formie pochodzących z Bułgarii i terenów wschodniobałkańskich. Kolejna, przechowywana w prywatnej kolekcji, odkryta została na stanowisku zło-toordyńskim (Federacja Rosyjska). Jeszcze jeden egzemplarz ze zbiorów prywatnych ma nieokreślone miejsce pochodzenia. Większość z nich można datować na początek XIV w.

Interesujący jest fakt, iż większość egzemplarzy mających mniej lub bardziej potwierdzoną lokalizację

pochodzi zapewne z Bałkanów. Historycznie obszar ten był pod silnym wpływem militarnym, świeckim i duchowym kultury bizantyńskiej.

Okaz z terenu zajmowanego przez Złotą Ordeę jest odosobniony, ale może być uznany za bizantyński lub wytworzony w środowisku miejscowym na podstawie bizantyńskich pierwowzorów.

Podsumowując – bizantyńska geneza tej kategorii zabytków, wynikająca z analizy porównawczej znalezisk i ikonografii, wydaje się bezsprzeczna. Przedstawienia takich buław znamy z ikon i fresków datowanych na koniec XIV i początek XV w. Dlatego też okaz ze zbiorów Gruzińskiego Muzeum Narodowego może być z dużym prawdopodobieństwem uznany za element kultury militarnej Bizancjum lub udanym naśladownictwem pochodzącym z XIV-XV w.

Tłumaczył Piotr N. Kotowicz