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Žerotína family spearhead from Bulgaria (first half of 16th century)

Four years ago in an exposition at the Museum of History in the town of Pazardzhik I saw for the first time a spearhead (Fig. 1). That particular spearhead impressed me with its preservation and with the presence of Latin inscriptions on it (Fig. 2).

The spearhead was 50 cm long and dihedral, the sleeve – conical. Spears with such shape are dated from the 16th century and are defined by specialists as „schefflin” type (Fig. 3) (*Müller, Kölling 1984, 82, 84*). From the inscriptions from the upper part of the sleeve three lines out of four are preserved. The alleged place of finding the spear is Belovo region, district Pazardzhik.

As it turns out, this intriguing rare find had drawn the attention of several specialists, but had never been the object of publications.

The inscription and the name WIKTORIN

The restricted by an arc or a cross words are: GIRIK * HRABIE * WIKTORIN * ZER * OTINA * AGICINA (Fig. 2). It isn't hard to read WIKTORIN (one word of the two preserved lines) – commonly used during the late middle ages in Middle and Eastern Europe given and family name. The rest of the lines I couldn't translate. My consultations with epigraph- specialists didn't have any results. Exactly because of the lack of information, for several years I didn't see the point in publishing anything about the find.

By chance a friend of mine, interested in antique and medieval weaponry and ammunition – Vladimir Ovcharov, helped me by offering me to try using one of the most popular internet search engines – Google. I tried searching for different combinations of the unknown words on the spearhead. Surprisingly for me those tries gave answers to a quite a few questions.

ZER OTINA (= Žerotína)

Finally, by joining the syllable ZER from the first line with OTINA (Fig. 2) from the bottom line, I came upon information about something more specific – Žerotína or Žerotínové¹ was the name of one of the famous clans in Northern Moravia. Most of the information is about Karel starší ze Žerotína (1564-1636), called „the uncrowned king of Moravia” – highly educated and well

¹ <http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Žerotínové> [01.02.2010].

versed politician, a friend of the French king Henry IV (1553-1610), a famous diplomat, a patron of John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)².

HRABIE (= Hrabě)

The oldest evidences about the family Žerotína dates from the 13th century. A Forefather is assumed to be Blud from Bludova, for whom is known to have taken a responsible position in 1213-1215 there. The name of the family obviously refers to one of their manors, present-day town Žerotína³. The family gradually expands and family members take on important positions in Moravia. In 1478 they receive the sovereign title – Hrabě, actually lower aristocracy title equivalent of servants to the higher aristocracy (eng. – earl = count, lat. *comes*⁴). This information from Google helped for defining the third word – HRABIE (= Hrabě).

According to the genealogical verifications, the family Žerotínové branches out in three⁵. One of the branches of the family was presented by Jan staršího ze Žerotína (?-1500), also called Starý či Bohatý. In 1469 r. he bought the Fulnek estate. A few years later, in 1475 he also bought the Jičín estate, nowadays the city of Nový Jičín. After the death of Jan starší ze Žerotína in 1500, his legacy was described in the registers and the buyers were his sons Jan, Viktorin, Jiří, Bartoloměj and Bernard ze Žerotína⁶.

GIRIK (= Girzik / Jiří) and GICZINIE (= Jičín)

After the death of Jan starší ze Žerotína (1500), in 1507 r. in Fulnek died one of the sons Jiří z Žerotína. The epitaph was moved to the entrance at the church in Fulnek⁷ and states: LETA OD WYKVPENIE SKRZE NAROZENIE PANA NASSEHO JEZV KRISTA SYNA BOZIEHO TISIECZIEHO PIETISTIEHO SEDMEHO VKONCZIL SWOG ZIWOT ROZLVCZIWSE SE TIMTO SWIETEM GSA (XXXI LETIE) VROZENY PAN PAN GIRZIK Z ZEROTINA A S FVLNEKV A NA GICZINIE TEN VTERY DEN SWATEHO ONDRZEGE KTEREHOZTO TIELO GEST W TOMTO HROBIE A PO (D TIMTO) KAMENEM POCHOWANO GEHOZ DVSSY PAN BUOH WSSEMAHAVCZY RACZ MILOSTIW BYTI). The writing of Jiří as GIRZIK and A NA GICZINIE – Jičín finally clarified the reading of all the words (names of characters, settlements, titles) on the spearhead.

2 http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karel_starší_ze_Žerotína [01.02.2010].

3 [http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Žerotín_\(okres_Olomouc\)](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Žerotín_(okres_Olomouc)) [01.02.2010].

4 <http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hrabě> [01.02.2010].

5 <http://genealogy.euweb.cz/bohemia/zierotin1.html> [01.02.2010].

6 <http://www.muzeum.novy-jicin.cz/prodej/obsah2.html> [01.02.2010].

7 http://www.sedlacek.hrady.cz/wnd_show_text.php?tid=18775 [01.02.2010].

According to the inscription on the spearhead Viktorin ze Žerotína (WIKTORIN ZER OTINA AGICINA) was the owner of AGICINA, also known as Jičín. After the death of Jiří z Žerotína, his brother Bartoloměj inherited him, for whom there is no other information. In the autumn of 1507 a partition of the property was being held and Jičín became a possession of Viktorin ze Žerotína (16. 10. 1474-1529), as far as the youngest brother Bernard ze Žerotína, he received the estate and the fortress Fulnek (according to other information it was in 1512)⁸.

How did the spearhead reach today's Bulgarian lands?

In May 1529 the Turkish sultan Suleiman I the Magnificent (1522-1566) headed a march to Vienna. After several months of siege of the city, the Turkish army was forced to retreat and because of the many victims the retreat turned into a defeat. According to some historians, the success on defense in Vienna in 1529 ended the expansion of the Ottoman Empire to the heart of Europe and placed the beginning of her long sunset as a great military power and is even more significant than the next two-month siege and the battle of 12 September 1683⁹.

In the defence of Vienna 2500 Czech soldiers took part¹⁰. There was military action around the castles of the Žerotínové family – Jičín and Fulnek. It is also known that Bernard ze Žerotína was a military leader (hejtmanem) of the area and takes care of the defense¹¹.

So, I think that probably the tip of the spear was prey to a participant in the march of the Turkish army in 1529. It is completely possible the tip of a spear with a name of the Žerotína family belonged to Viktorin ze Žerotína, for whom it is noted that died in this year. There is no evidence that this had happened on the battlefield, but is quite likely.

Furthermore, the younger brother Bernard ze Žerotína, for whom it is known that was an experienced soldier, it appears there was another active participant in fighting with the Turks in 1529 – the elder brother Viktorin ze Žerotína. In search of parallels to the tip of the spearhead in the museum in Pazardzhik, I was able to learn information about the same type and inscribed tip of a spearhead. It is stored in a museum in Boskovice, Jihomoravský kraj, okres Blansko and published by P. Žákovský¹².

I cannot be completely sure, but the possible hypotheses are two: a) for the knights in the family Žerotína were ordered several spears type schefflin, whose sleeves were further etched personal names, the name of the genus and

8 <http://www.muzeum.novy-jicin.cz/prodej/obsah2.html> [01.02.2010].

9 http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Битка_при_Виена [01.02.2010].

10 http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Обсада_на_Виена; http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obléhání_Vídně [01.02.2010].

11 http://www.sedlacek.hrady.cz/wnd_show_text.php?tid=18775 [01.02.2010].

12 Many thanks to colleagues from Poland and Czech: Arkadiusz Michalak from Museum at Zielona Góra, Zuzana Pančíková, archaeologist in Muzeum Boskovice and Petr Žákovský (see: *Žákovský 2008*) [01.02.2010].

some of the owned castles; b) the famous knight Viktorin ze Žerotína was the guarantor (or had bought) several spearheads, on which except its name, the name of the genus and the castles he had also engraved the name of the patron of the clan –€ St. George.

Anyway, after many decades in the funds and windows of a Bulgarian museum, this interesting monument is, I hope, defined truly. With its publication is filled another interesting touch to the history of the Žerotína / Žerotínové family.

Bibliography

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Fig. 1. Spearhead from Pazardzhik Museum of History.

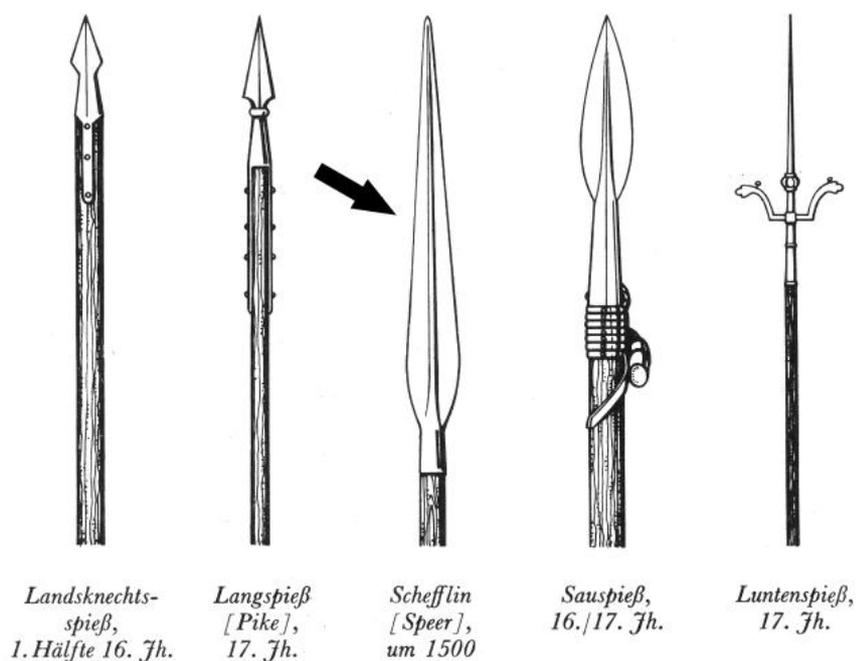


Fig. 2. Schefflin type spearhead – dated from the 16th century.



Fig. 3. Inscription from the upper part of the sleeve of the spearhead.

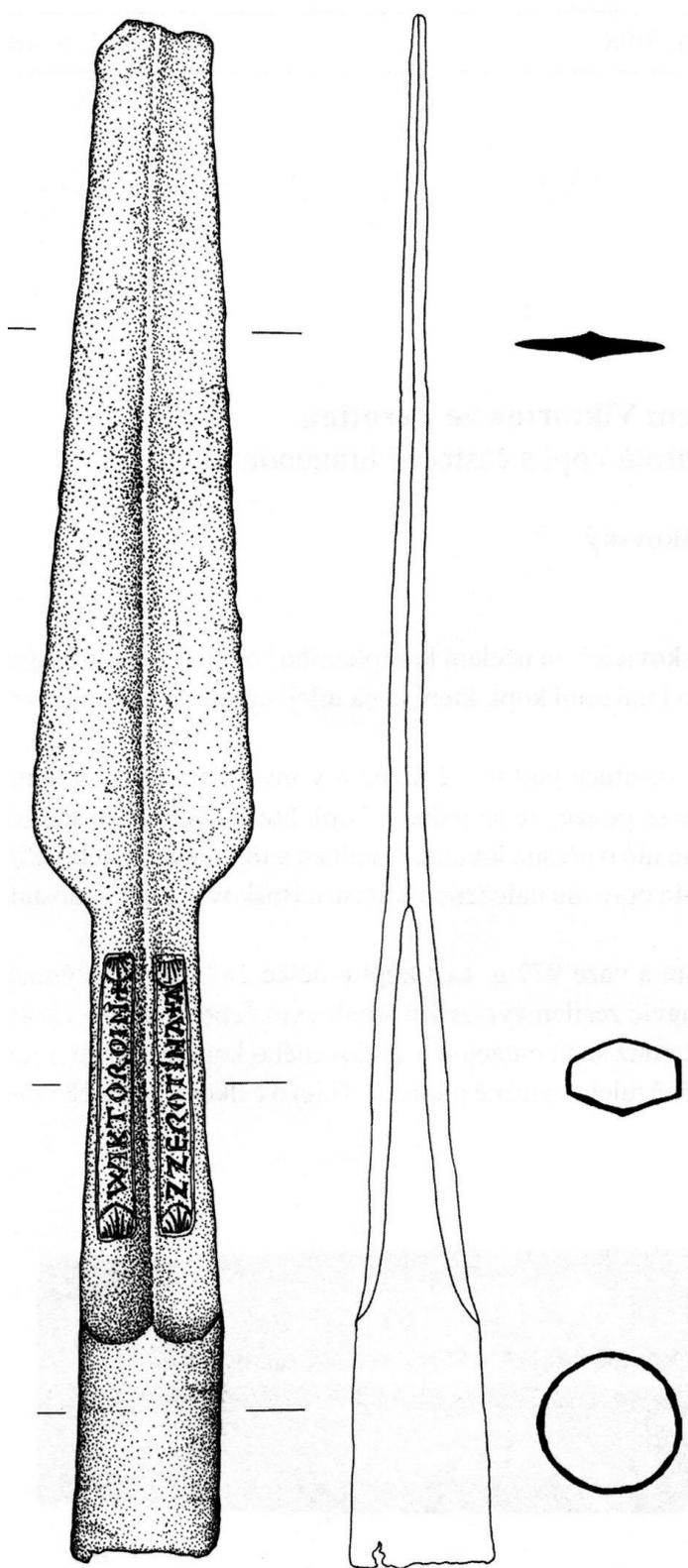


Fig. 4. Spearhead from Museum in Boskovice, Jihomoravský kraj, okres Blansko, published by P. Žákovský.