

<https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6034.29.05>

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A SIGN, A SYMBOL OR A LETTER?
SOME REMARKS ON OMEGA MARKS
INLAID ON EARLY MEDIEVAL SWORD BLADES

Keywords: swords, Early Middle Ages, omega marks on blades

Słowa kluczowe: miecze, wczesne średniowiecze, znak omegi na głowniach

INTRODUCTION

For hundreds of years weapons have underwent treatment to improve its effectiveness and reliability. This has tended to reach for new both technological and construction solutions. Non-utilitarian measures, such as magical formulae, were also in use as part of these efforts early medieval people proceeded in a very similar way (by way of introduction see Bracha 1999). Among other ways, rites of blessing were used for this purpose by means of, e.g., putting the relics of saints in weapons and coloration or decoration of arms in a specific way. Providing weapons with signs or marks was supposed to increase their quality. This could take many forms: from a single pictogram to complex configurations, such as inscriptions, compilations of letters and signs or ornamental motifs which in some cases could have a narrative meaning. This issue concerned offensive (e.g., Chudziak 2006; Kotowicz 2011; [forthcoming]¹) and defensive weapons alike (Dickinson 2005; Grotowski 2011, pp. 295–298), and also equestrian equipment (Oexle 1992; Bialeková 1999). Sword hilts and first of all sword blades from the early medieval period bear signs and inscriptions. For many years the determination of their meaning has been one of the most important research problems (see Kirpičnikov 1966b; 1970; 1992; Głosek 1973; Düwel 1981; Drboglav 1984; Kirpičnikov, Stalsberg 1998). So far analyses have included only selected inscriptions and ornaments (e.g., Głosek, Kajzer 1977; Gorman 1999; Dentschewa 2006; Stalsberg 2008). Individual signs have very seldom been an object of interest (Kurasiński 2006). The state of preservation and hence the readability of symbols is very differential (from clearly visible to almost lost). This situation affects the possibility of recon-

¹ We thank the author for sharing the article before publication.

struction of their primal shape and subsequently their meaning. During the last few years scholars have started to take notice of the technological side of signs and inscriptions (e.g., Moilanen 2009; Rybka 2011). It gives hope that future studies will bring new possibilities of their identifications.

The source base for research on signs and marks on swords are preserved swords or their parts from Europe. There are also written and iconographic sources which can help with the problem. Written sources date back to the 9th and 10th centuries. The Arabic scholar al-Kindi († 870) wrote in his treatise on swords that there were brassy or golden crescents and crosses on weapons used by Franks (Zeki Validi 1936, p. 25; Hoyland, Gilmour 2006, p. 43). On the other hand, another representative of the Muslim world, Ibn an-Nadim, reported in his work from 988 that some of Frankish swords had been inscribed with letters very similar to those used by Greeks (Lewicki 1956, p. 123). Among iconographic sources it is worth mentioning: the portable altar dedicated to St Blaise and St Felix of Aquileia from the Abdinghof Church in Germany, dated to ca. 1100 (Nicolle 1999, fig. 421), the mosaic from Lombardy with presentation of a strife between a Christian and Fel dated to 1148 (Nicolle 1999, fig. 591a) and the stained glass from Saint-Denis in France with a fight scene of the crusaders against Moors dated to ca. 1100 (Gamber 1995, Abb. 11). Very significant are also illuminations from 12th century codices (e.g., Skubiszewski 1995, pl. XVIII:21–22; Pächt, Dodwell, Wormald 1960, pl. 65).

In this paper we would like to pay attention to possible interpretations of the omega-like symbol. The sign was called “omega”, “hook and eye”, “horse-shoe” and “temple ring” in the literature. The present paper is only a contribution to the discussion on this issue.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOURCE BASE

The query of sources provided information about 32 swords with omega-like (W) or similar symbols (see Catalogue). From the territory of Finland came a collection of five specimens (Loppi [cat. no. 9, fig. 1], Padasjoki [cat. no. 10], Sääksmäki [cat. no. 11, fig. 2], and Lempäälä – 2 specimens [cat. nos. 7–8, fig. 3–4]). Another four swords were found in Germany (Brekendorf [cat. no. 13], Deggendorf [cat. no. 14, fig. 5], Dülmen [cat. no. 15, fig. 6], Leer-Ostendorf [cat. no. 16, fig. 7]). Three specimens with omega-like marks came both from Russia and the Netherlands (Gnezdovo [cat. no. 29, fig. 8], Ust'-Rybežna [cat. no. 30, fig. 9], Zaozer'e (?) [cat. no. 31], Aalburg [cat. no. 18], Maarhuizen [cat. no. 19], and Wijk [cat. no. 20]). Two swords

are known from Estonia (Kaersoo [cat. no. 5], Lepna-Taaravainu [cat. no. 6]) and England (the River Lea near Edmonton [cat. no. 3] and the River Thames near Westminster [cat. no. 4]). Single specimens came from Belarus (Grodno [cat. no. 1, fig. 10]), Czech Republic (Mikulčice [cat. no. 2, fig. 11]), France (unknown place [cat. no. 12]), Ireland (Lough Gur [cat. no. 17]), Norway (Stavne [cat. no. 21]) and Slovakia (Detva [cat. no. 32]). So far the most numerous assemblage has been registered in Poland, where seven swords with omega-like symbols were found (vicinity of Elbląg [cat. no. 22, fig. 12], Lipiany [cat. no. 24, fig. 13], Lutówko [cat. no. 25, fig. 14], Lednickie Lake [cat. no. 23, fig. 15], Tarnobrzeg-Machów [cat. no. 26, fig. 16] and single specimens from the collection of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn [cat. no. 27, fig. 17] and the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw [cat. no. 28, fig. 18]).

The above summary shows that specimens with omega-like inlays do not tend to concentrate in one area of Europe. Although they constitute such a small number of items, they spread across a large area of the continent. However, it is clearly visible that most such swords were in use in the northern parts of Europe. They were grouped mostly both around the Baltic and the North Sea (fig. 20). The southern range of their occurrence is marked by finds from Moravian Mikulčice and Slovak Detva. It is noteworthy that almost no specimens were registered in Scandinavia. This can be caused by the insufficient number of publications about swords from this territory².

An attempt at the typological classification of discussed swords according to the typologies of J. Petersen (1919) and A. Nadolski (1954) shows that almost each item represents a different type³. Only in the case of swords classified as types E, H/I, L, S, X and α the letter "W" was identified more than once (type E – Ilomäaki, Gnezdovo and Ust'-Rybežna; type H/I – Lepna-Taaravainu, Machów, Lednickie Lake⁴, Stavne and probably Wijk; type L – Henneri, Lempäälä, the River Thames; type S – Henneri, Lempäälä, Lipiany, Lutówko and Zaozer'e; type X – Brekendorf and Kaersoo; type α (alpha) – Padasjoki and unknown places in France and Poland). Furthermore, special types 1 (Aalburg) and 2 (Maarhuizen and Tarnobrzeg-Machów) were report-

² It is estimated that 3000 swords are known from the territory of Norway (Martens 2003, p. 115; 2004, p. 127; 2006, p. 222). Taking the often insufficient description given in literature and their sheer amount into consideration, it is hard to say that there are no swords marked with an omega letter in such an enormous group with unshakable certainty.

³ In the case of the swords from Sääksmäki and Leer-Ostendorf the typological analysis was impossible because of their condition (Leppäaho 1964, p. 36–37, pl. 16; Westphal 2002, p. 41, fig. 1.1.27).

⁴ In some publications this sword was classified as type M according to J. Petersen (Górecki 2001, pp. 129–130, 167).

ed. Other types were represented by single specimens (type B – Daggendorf; type K – Mikulčice; type Q – Lough Gur; type T – the vicinity of Elbląg; type U – the River Lea; type Y – Grodno). The spatha from Dülmen was classified by H. Westphal as *Kombinationstyp 1 Var. 1* according to A. Geibig (1991, p. 16; Westphal 2002, pp. 41, 282). In J. Petersen's typology this corresponds with type B. In turn, the specimen form Detva is an untypical form. The hilt shape is the most similar to J. Petersen's type K. In the case of the swords from Loppi, Sääksmäki and an unknown place from Poland the bad condition of items thwarts classification efforts. Almost all items belong to the most widespread types. The rarest type of all is represented by the sword form the River Lea, classified as type U.

The above group of swords can be dated from the 8th to the 11th centuries. It is worth to note that most of them belong to the period between the 10th and the first half of the 11th centuries. The earliest are the finds from Dülmen and Leer-Ostendorf (the 8th century), Mikulčice (the first quarter of the 9th century) and Detva (the 9th century). The specimen from an unknown place in France seems to be the latest. According to I.G. Peirce this find should be dated from the half of the 10th to the mid-11th centuries (Peirce 2002, p. 131)⁵. This point of view is a bit controversial. It is known that swords with lenticular pommels (type α according to A. Nadolski) were in use until the mid-13th century (see Kucypera, Kurasiński, Pudło 2011, p. 80). This also applies to the item from the collection of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw. I. G. Peirce dated the sword form Padasjoki to the second half of the 10th century. The specimen was classified as type X according to J. Petersen (Peirce 2002, p. 122). The sword in question has a semicircular pommel with a rounded lower edge. This kind of pommels was mostly used in the period between the 11th and the 13th centuries (cf. Kucypera, Kurasiński, Pudło 2011, p. 79). It is worth to say that from the 12th century onwards iron marks began to be replaced by forms made of non-ferrous metal (Pudło 2012, p. 266).

One can add that omega-like symbols were in use not only in early medieval times. The motif was observed as well on late medieval sword blades (see Głosek 1973, plates XI, XIX:2, XLIV:2). Of course, its shape changed in line with the development of Gothic capital letters and became more angular (fig. 19). The letter in a compilation of A- Ω is also visible on the pommel of the Polish coronation sword *Szczerbiec* (for the epigraphic and symbolic

⁵ It is worth to note that in this particular case there is no certainty of the presence of an omega-like symbol: "This may well precede an inscription and on the same side of the blade, just halfway down there appears to be an 'O' or an omega, but the inlay is missing" (Peirce 2002, p. 131).

analysis see Biborski, Stepiński, Żabiński 2011, pp. 112, 113, 120–121, 137; with further literature).

PATTERNS OF ORNAMENTATION OF BLADES WITH OMEGA-LIKE SYMBOLS

In all discussed cases the “W” mark was placed only on one side of blade. It can occur as an individual (single or dual) motif (Brekendorf, Dülmen, Grodno, Lepna-Taaravainu, Lipiany, Lutówko, specimen from Museum of the Polish Army collection), together with other marks (Leer-Ostendorf, Mikulčice?) or in a line of marks (the vicinity of Deggendorf, Maarhuizen and Tarnobrzeg-Machów). Generally we deal with a composition of two “W” with their ends directed towards each other. Between them there was also another symbol, e.g., a cross (Brekendorf, Detva, Lempäälä, Loppi, Lough Gur, Lednickie Lake, Sääksmäki, Stavne, Ust’-Rybežna/Rubežna?, and the River Lea), a spiral (the River Thames) or vertical strips (Gnezdovo and Kaersoo). In some cases vertical lines flank the omega-like mark (Gnezdovo, Lempäälä, Sääksmäki, and Stavne). There are also more complex arrangements. On the blade of the sword from the vicinity of Elbląg omega-like symbols were demarcated by an overturned “hourglass”, between which Saint Andrew’s cross or a letter X was placed. In turn, the sword from the collection of the Museum of the Polish Army was inlaid with a series of marks (+IIΩIIΩII+).

The symbol in question occurred in a larger number on two specimens. The blade of the sword from Tarnobrzeg-Machów was inscribed with a series of signs which consisted of an overturned “hourglass”, two omega-like marks whose ends were directed towards each other, two vertical lines, another two omega-like marks with ends directed towards each other and two less readable symbols (perhaps vertical lines). A very similar composition was visible on the blades of the swords from Deggendorf and Maarhuizen. It is worth to note that the swords from Maarhuizen and Tarnobrzeg-Machów both belong to the special type 2.

The other side of the blades with omega-like symbols was usually inlaid with other symbols or inscriptions. The most popular composition on the other flat consists of crosses, sometimes together with other motifs, e.g., vertical lines, spirals or circles (Ust’-Rybežna, Lempäälä, Loppi, Lough Gur, Lutówko, and Lednickie Lake). Another frequent element are figures in the shape of a rhombus (Kaersoo, Lempäälä, Lepna-Taaravainu, and Stavne). Sometimes instead of marks the other side of the blade was inscribed with the word VLFBERTH (Gnezdovo and Sääksmäki), INGEFLRCI (vicinity of

Elbląg), INLERURIEITI (Padasjoki) and +IIEIIEI... (specimen from the collection of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw)⁶.

One must note that the state of preservation of several blades affects the readability of marks and letters and thus their interpretation. We cannot exclude that in the case of most corroded blades the reconstruction of marks is only fragmentary and does not give us a primal scheme of letters and symbols. For the same reason it is hard to define the type of material used for inlaying. In the case of the swords from Poland, which are well-known to the authors, marks were made of two types of material: pattern-welded rods (vicinity of Elbląg, Tarnobrzeg-Machów, specimen from the collection of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn) and iron or steel rods (Lutówko and Lednickie Lake) (see Pudło 2012, pp. 279–281).

DISCUSSION

So far the issue of the meaning of omega-like symbols has come to attention of a very few scholars. The mark was variously called, which depends on the researcher's imagination. In the literature one can find the term "temple ring" (Marek 2005, p. 57). This suggestion is, in our opinion, a result of a wrong translation of the term *haarschopfähnlichen Zeichen* used by M. Müller-Wille for symbols on the sword blade from Brückendorf (Müller-Wille 1977, p. 70). The literal translation would be "marks similar to a mop of hair". On the other hand, this term is not justified. Using the "temple ring" term for omega-like symbols seems unfounded, either. Temple rings were typical Slavonic jewellery, while most of sword blades were manufactured outside the Slavonic territory. It is worth to note that temple rings with S-shaped ends (type III d according to H. Kóčka-Krenz) were found only in the vicinity of Prague and in Moravia (see Kóčka-Krenz 1993, p. 57, Map 10).

Some scholars identified omega-like signs as horseshoes, which implied connections with horses (Ruttikay 1975, p. 138; Leppäaho 1964, p. 36; Kirpičnikov 1966a, p. 41; Marek 2005, p. 57). This interpretation cannot find any justification. Also the term "hook and eye" used by L. Marek seems to be wrong (Marek 2005, p. 57). This part of clothing did not appear until the 15th century (Turnau 1999, *passim*).

According to A.N. Kirpičnikov geometrical marks including omega-like ones (Russian *podkovobraznye figury*) served as letterheads or magical sym-

⁶ In his first book M. Głosek suggested that the inscription could be a variant of VLFBERTH. In his other work published in 1984 this author stated that the discussed sword was inscribed with the word SIEHEIE (Głosek 1973, pp. 105–106; 1984, p. 104).

bols (Kirpičnikov 1966a, p. 41). We can exclude the first possibility, as in such a case blades like that should have been more numerous. To be a letterhead, the omega-like sign would have to be placed on blades as a single mark. It is hard to imagine that smiths who worked and lived in early medieval Latin Europe could take a culturally alien Greek letter as a brand mark and – in our opinion – the discussed sign needs to be considered this way. It is worth to add that in a few cases omega-like symbols co-occurred with name inscriptions written in the Latin alphabet. It can be assumed that the execution of the discussed mark was ordered by a person who knew and understood its meaning.

It seems that a better explanation of omega-like symbols would go beyond utilitarian references. Probably we have to do with a semantically powerful symbolic message. Omega has a profound significance in Christian culture. It can mean perfection of all excellence (Forstner 1990, p. 38), formation, persistence and transience (Frutiger 2005, p. 236), and also the end and fulfilment of the world (*Leksykon...*, p. 114). Omega takes its symbolical meaning from the connection with the first letter of the Greek alphabet – alpha (beginning and end). These two letters both symbolised the fullness of God's reign and His power to create. This can be supported by the verses of the Old (e.g., Isaiah 41,4; 48,12) and the New Testament (Revelation 21,6; 22,13) and also in later commentaries of Christian writers and thinkers (see Kłoniecki 1973; Lurker 1989, p. 17; Forstner 1990, pp. 28–29)⁷. Alpha and Omega were the visualisation of Divine presence. They expressed the same intention as a prayer (Bracha 1999, p. 15). In medieval charters the letter was very often used instead of a verbal invocation, e.g., *In Nomine Domini Amen* (Szymański 2005, p. 448). One can interpret omega-like signs on swords in a very similar manner. In the first place it should be considered as a reference to God, a symbolic form of invocation which ought to bring God's grace and protection to the warrior. In this place we must recall that omega-like signs occurred in a twin configuration. The most common were two marks (opening and closing), but sometimes there were four of them. Configurations like those could refer to formation, duration and transience of the warrior's life, which was given under the protection and power of God. Referring to the binominal A-Ω, the final letter, which means the end, is associated with the loss of life. In this particular case it can indicate death in

⁷ Juxtaposition of those two letters appeared in early Christian and medieval funerary art. It was also visible in artistic crafts and on objects of everyday use, e.g., rings, dishes, coins, crosses and book bindings. Starting from the 4th century, symbols appeared together with the monogram of Christ (Cynka 1973; Lurker 1989, pp. 17–18; Forstner 1990, pp. 29–30; Kobieliński 2000, p. 140).

battle, which only benefits the warrior (see Zydorek 2001). The loss of life in the defence of the Christian faith guaranteed temporal glory and post-mortem reward. The best occasion for this was the participation in a crusade.

The sacralisation of war crafts took place in accordance with the requirements of Christian doctrine. This process led to the development of the idea of knighthood. It is worth to emphasize that noticeable changes in this field came in the 11th century, together with the reform of the Church. This resulted in a shorter distance between the propagated model of the *miles sancti Petri* and *militia saecularis*. The process culminated during the times of the Crusades (Cardini 1996; Contamine 1999, passim; Grygiel 2007; Iwańczak 2010; for the reality of the early Piast period see Szymczak 2001; Świdarska 2001). However, even during the Carolingian Age the increasing support of the Church for “legitimated” wars was observed. Although in those days religious motifs were not so exposed (except for expeditions against pagan Saxons), conflicts were an important element of the emerging chivalrous culture (McCormick 1992; Grygiel 2007, pp. 89–90; Iwańczak 2010, p. 20). Doubtless one of the manifestations of this mental evolution was placing invocations and Christian symbols (e.g., omega-like ones) on weapons, especially on swords. To explore this issue we should at first look at signs co-occurring with the omega letter. As we said above, very often configurations of marks on sword blades included signs of the cross (it could be a Greek cross, a hazelnut cross or Saint Andrew’s cross), apart from omega signs. The main reason why this mark was placed on swords was to manifest the religious affiliation of the owner. The mark meant a dedication to the protection of God (Kurasiński 2006). Other symbols, such as spirals and circles, could also be Christian in their nature (see Lurker 1989, pp. 153–154; Forstner 1990, pp. 58–59). The circular marks can be interpret as a symbol of the sun. One can identify the sun with power, might and authority. On the other hand, omega can be a sign which signifies death. Therefore we can assume that this symbols, placed next to the Christian cross, corresponded with medieval knights’ mentality (Kola, Wilke 2000, p. 68).

INSTEAD OF A SUMMARY

The issue is far from a final solution, but the direction of interpretation we have indicated seems to be promising. The rarity of swords with omega-like signs can be only partially explained by an insufficient recognition of the source material. But what if a Christological program of the cross + omega could not be approved? There is such a possibility, because such a sub-

lime message could be confusing to the recipient. Some questions arise here. Who was the inspiration of such a program? How far the sword's owner understood its meaning? The interpretation of the omega-like sign changed depending on into whose hands the sword found its way. The lack of understanding was clearly visible in the case of the Estonian sword from Lepna-Taaravainu. This one was found in a burial grave⁸. Societies where the knowledge of writing and reading was highly limited showed "the sensual particular sensitivity to any signs and symbols and, consequently, to the shape of the letter" (Bracha 1999, p. 9; see also Frutiger 2005). From this idea, there is only one step to the perception of letters and other supporting characters in terms of magical thinking (see Stępnik 2011, p. 77). Undoubtedly, the issue needs to be a subject of an in-depth study aimed to determine what was the impulse to marking sword blades with omega-like symbols. Furthermore, one should identify the historical and cultural circumstances of such a way of marking and the patterns of their further reception.

Translation: Piotr Pudło, Grzegorz Żabiński

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⁸ This is implied by traces of fire patina, remains of charcoal and burned bones observed on the surface of the sword (Selirand 1982, pp. 178–179).

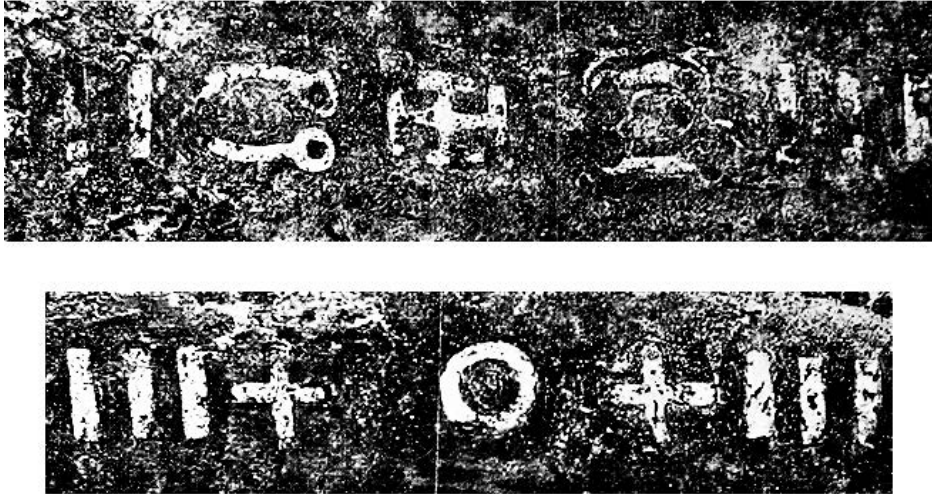


Fig. 1. Marks on the blade of the sword from Loppi, Finland, cat. no. 9 (after Leppäaho 1964, pl. 10:1)



Fig. 2. +VLFBERH+ inscription and marks on the blade of the sword from Sääksmäki, Finland, cat. no. 11 (after Leppäaho 1964, pl. 16)

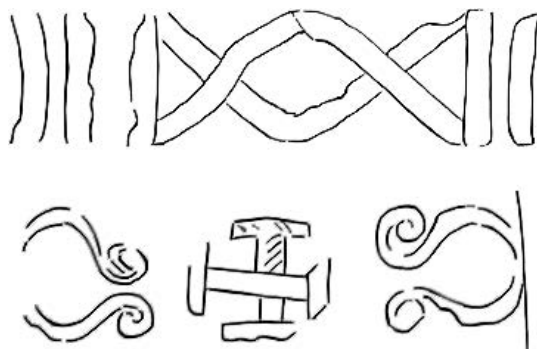


Fig. 3. Marks on the blade of the sword from Lempäälä, Finland, cat. no. 7 (after Leppäaho 1964, pl. 9:4)



Fig. 4. Marks on the blade of the sword from Lempäälä, Finland, cat. no. 8 (after Leppäaho 1964, pl. 10:2)



Fig. 5. Marks on the blade of the sword from the vicinity of Deggendorf, Germany, cat. no. 14 (after Geibig 1991, pl. 2)



Fig. 6. Omega-like mark on the blade of the sword from Dülmen, Germany, cat. no. 15 (after Westphal 2002, fig. 1.1.28)



Fig. 7. Marks on the blade of the sword from Leer-Ostendorf, Germany, cat. no. 16 (after Westphal 2002, fig. 1.1.27)

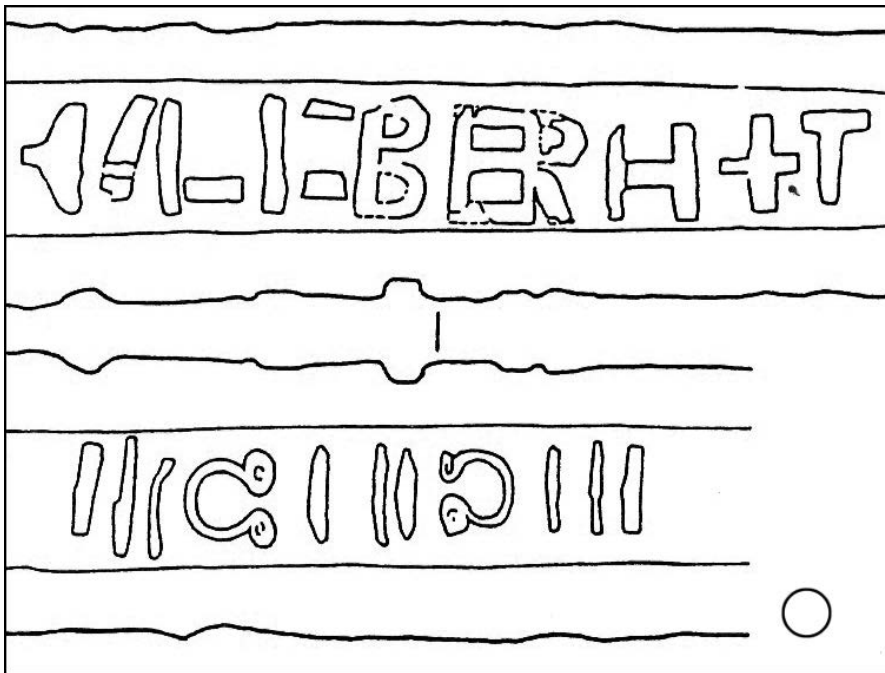


Fig. 8. +VLFBERH+T inscription and marks on the blade of the sword from Gnezdovo, Russia, cat. no. 29 (after Kirpičnikov 1966a, pl. XVI:1)

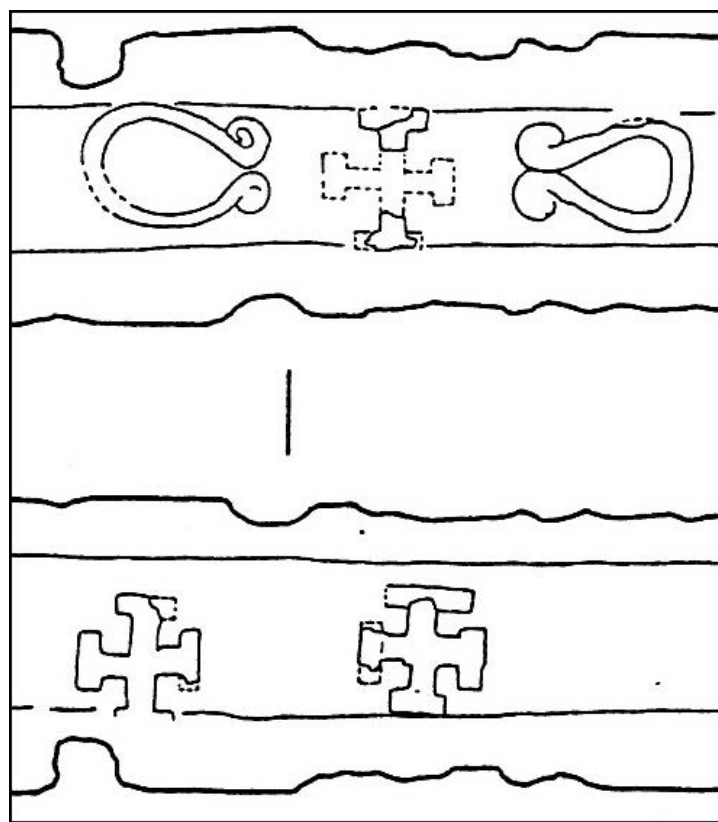


Fig. 9. Omega-like marks and crosses on the blade of the sword from Ust'-Rybežna, Russia, cat. no. 30 (after Kirpičnikov 1966a, pl. XVIII:8)

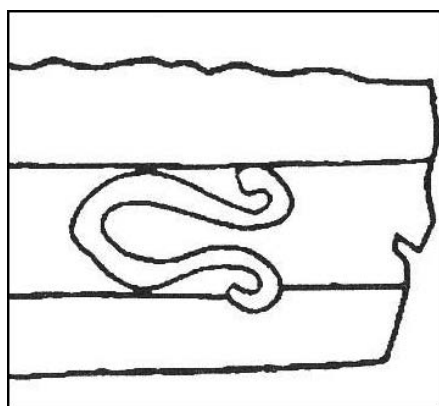


Fig. 10. Omega-like mark on the blade of the sword from Grodno, Belarus, cat. no. 1 (after Plavinski 2009, fig. 9:1)



Fig. 11. Omega-like mark on the blade of the sword from Mikulčice, Czech Republic, cat. no. 2 (after Košta 2005, fig. 1)



Fig. 12. INGEFLRCii inscription and marks on the blade of the sword from the vicinity of Elbląg, Poland, cat. no. 22 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVI:10)



Fig. 13. Omega-like marks on the blade of the sword from Lipiany, Poland, cat. no. 24 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVII:9)



Fig. 14. Omega-like marks on the blade of the sword from Lutówko, Poland, cat. no. 25 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVII:11)

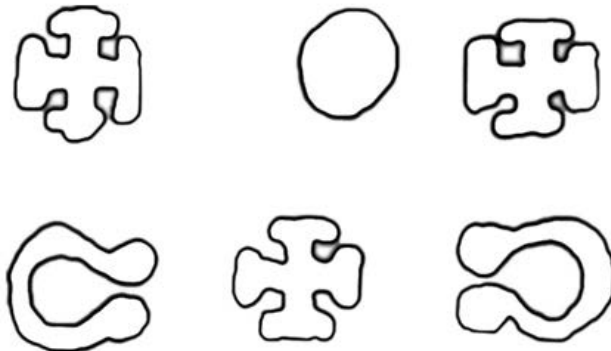


Fig. 15. Marks on the blade of the sword from the Lednickie Lake, Poland, cat. no. 23 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVII:1)



Fig. 16. Marks on the blade of the sword from the Tarnobrzeg-Machów, Poland, cat. no. 26 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVII:16)



Fig. 17. Omega-like marks on the blade of the sword from the collection of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland, cat. no. 27 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVII:4)

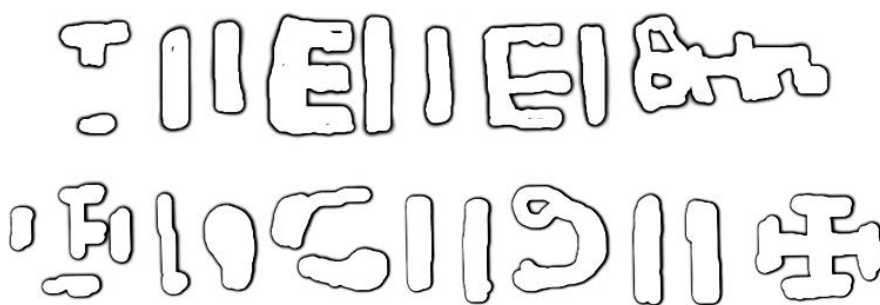


Fig. 18. +IIEIIEI... inscription and marks on the blade of the sword from the collection of the Museum of the Polish Army in Warsaw, Poland, cat. no. 28 (after Pudło 2012, pl. XLVI:5)

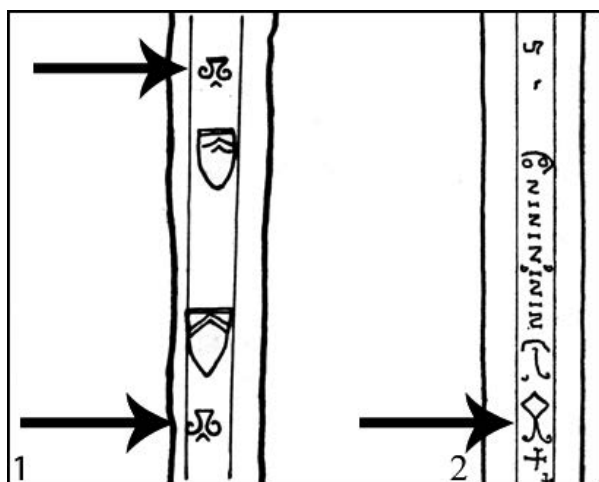


Fig. 19. Gothic capital omega-like letters on late medieval sword blades (after Głosek 1973, pl. XI, XIX supplemented by authors)



Fig. 20. Distribution of swords with omega-like marks (developed by authors)

CATALOGUE OF EUROPEAN SWORDS INSCRIBED WITH AN OMEGA (Ω) SYMBOL						
CAT. NO.	FIND PLACE	HILT TYPE	CHRONOLOGY	COLLECTION	SCHOLARSHIP	ADDITIONAL DATA
1	Grodno, Belarus	Y	9 th -beginning of the 11 th c.	Grodna State Museum of History and Archaeology, inv. no. KP 28786	Plavinski 2009, p. 83, cat. no. 7, fig. 9:1	There is an Ω mark and a part of an inscription on the blade.
2	Mikulčice, Czech Republic	K	1 st quarter of the 9 th c.	?	Dostál 1966, p. 67, 145 Košta 2005, pp. 158–160, fig. 1	There is a single Ω (?) mark on the blade
3	The Lea River near Edmonton England	U	10 th c.	British Museum, London, inv. no. 1915.5–4.1	Davidson 1998, fig. 69 Lang, Ager 1989, fig. 7:9b Peirce 2002, p. 110	There is an Ω + Ω signs combination on the blade.
4	The Thames River near Westminster, England	L	4 th quarter of the 9 th -1 st half of the 10 th c.	?	Wilson 1965, pp. 42–44 Lang, Ager 1989, fig. 7:9a Davidson 1998, fig. 68	There is a spiral between two Ω marks on the blade.
5	Kaersoo, Estonia	X	2 nd half of the 10 th -beginning of the 11 th c.	?	Selirand 1982, pp. 179–181, fig. 3; Mandel 1991, pp. 106–107, 119, cat. no. 26	There is an Ω mark together with some diamond-shaped signs on the blade.
6	Lepna-Taaravainu, Estonia	H	9 th c.	?	Selirand 1982, pp. 178–179, fig. 2; Mandel 1991, pp. 103, 104–105, cat. no. 9	There are two Ω marks on one side of the blade, on the other side some diamond-shaped signs.
7	Lempäälä, Finland	S	10 th c. (?)	National Museum in Helsinki, inv. no. 4254	Leppäaho 1964, p. 22, pl. 9:4	There are visible diamond-shaped signs between vertical lines on one side of the blade, on the other an Ω + Ω set of signs.

8	Lempäälä, Finland	L	4 th quarter of the 9 th –1 st half of the 10 th c. (?)	National Museum in Helsinki inv. no. 1996:73	Leppäaho 1964, p. 24, pl. 10:2	On one side of the blade Ω + Ω combination, on the other spiral sign between two crosses.
9	Loppi, Finland	?	Early Middle Ages	National Museum in Helsinki, inv. no. 2345:1	Leppäaho 1964, p. 24, pl. 10:1	On one side of the blade III Ω + Ω III, on the other III+O+III signs
10	Padasjoki, Finland	X (?)	2 nd half of the 10 th c.	National Museum in Helsinki, inv. no. NM 2033:1	Leppäaho 1964, p. 14, pl. 5:1 Peirce 2002, pp. 122–123	There is a visible INLERURIEIT Ω inscription on one side of the blade and...M... Ω ... inscription on the other.
11	Sääksmäki, near Os, Finland	?	before year 1050	National Museum in Helsinki, inv. no. 2767	Leppäaho 1964, p. 36, pl. 16 Peirce 2002, fig. 2	There is an +VLFBERH+ inscription on one side of the blade, on the other there is a III Ω + Ω III set of marks.
12	unknown, France	α (alfa)	Mid of the 10 th –mid of the 11 th c.	Musée de l'Armée in Paris, inv. no. JPO 2242	Peirce 2002, p. 131	There is + O or Ω on one side of the blade.
13	Brekendorf, Germany	X-later	10 th c.	National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, inv. no 19657	Müller-Wille 1977, p. 70, fig. 13:5	There are two Ω marks on one side of the blade.
14	The vicinity of Deggen- dorf, Germany	B	2 nd half of the 8 th c.	Gäubodenmuseum in Straubing, inv. no. 54045	Geibig 1991, p. 212, cat. no 3, pl. 2	There is a I Ω Ω I Ω I Ω I set of marks on one side of the blade.
15	Dülmen, Germany	B	8 th c.	Private collection	Westphal 2002, p. 41, fig. 1.1.28	There is an Ω -like sign on the blade.
16	Leer-Osten- dorf, Germany	?	End of the 8 th c.	Westfälischen Museum für Archäologie in Münster	Westphal 2002, p. 41, fig. 1.1.27	There is an Ω -like mark together with an X mark on the blade.

17	Lough Gur, Ireland	Q	10 th c.	British Museum, London, inv. no. 1864, 1–27 3	Davidson 1998, fig. 27 Peirce 2002, p. 95	There is a III+O+III set of marks on the blade, on the other there is a set of IIIΩ+ΩIII.
18	Aalburg, Netherland	Special type 1	End of the 8 th –beginning of the 9 th c.	Rijksmuseum van Oudheden at Leiden, inv. no. 1948/12.1	Ypey 1962–1963, pp. 166–169, fig. 22	There are hardly visible sings similar to Ω.
19	Maarhuizen, Netherland	Special type 2	9 th c.	Groninger Museum, inv. no. 1936/XIII	Ypey 1960–1961, p. 378, figs. 12–13	There is a IIΩIIΩII combination of signs on the blade.
20	Wijk, Netherland	H/1 (?)	9 th –10 th c.	Stedelijk Oudheidkundig Museum	Ypey 1960–1961, pp. 382–383, fig. 17	There are hardly visible sings similar to Ω or 8.
21	Stavne, Norway	H	9 th c. (?)	?	Kirpičnikov, Stalsberg 1998, p. 211, fig. 3	There is a IΩ+ΩI set of signs on one side of the blade, on the other there are hourglass-shaped marks together with vertical lines.
22	The vicinity of Elbląg, Poland	T	2 nd half of the 10 th –beginning of the 11 th c.	Muzeum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, nr inv. 84, cat. no. 1551/72	Kazakevičius 1996, p. 102, cat. no. 1 Pudło 2012, cat. no. 45	There is an INGEFLRCII inscription on one side of the blade, on the other side there is a visible X between Ω-signs and hourglass-shaped marks.
23	Lednickie Lake, Poland	H	Half of the 9 th –3 rd quarter of the 10 th c.	Museum of the first Piast, Lednica, inv. no. MPP/A/74 (3/94), cat. no. 005444	Kirpičnikov 1998, p. 24, fig. 4 Kola, Wilke 2000, p. 65, fig. 50d Pudło, Sankiewicz, Żabiński 2011, p. 43, pl. I	There is a spiral sign between crosses on one side of the blade, on the other there is a visible cross between two Ω signs.
24	Lipiany, Poland	S	10 th –beginning of the 11 th c.	Pushin's Museum in Moskow (?)	Nadolski 1954, pp. 150–151, cat. no. 34, fig. 1, pl. III:2 Głosek 1973, p. 86, 140, cat. no. 13 Świątkiewicz 2002, p. 21, cat. no. 9, pl. I:5 Pudło 2012, cat. no. 36	There are visible semicircular sings on the blade.

25	Lutówko, Poland	S	10 th –beginning of the 11 th c.	The Leon Wyczółkowski District Muse- um in Bydgoszcz, inv. no. MOB/A-7786	Zajączkowska, Siwiak 2008, pp. 403–407 Rybka 2009 Pudło 2012, cat. no. 38	There is a visible ΩO(?)Ω combination of signs on one side of the blade, on the other there are some hardly visible marks.
26	Tarnobrzeg- Machów, Poland	Spe- cial type 2	End of 8 th –be- ginning of the 9 th c.	National Museum of Ar- chaeology in Warsaw, inv. no. V/8683	Rauhut, Tworek, Ziencik 1968 Kirpičnikov 2001, pp. 145– 148 Pudło 2012, cat no. 6	The blade was inscribed with a series of signs which consisted of an “hourglass”, two omega- like marks, two vertical lines, another two ome- ga-like marks and two less readable symbols (perhaps vertical lines).
27	unknown, Poland	?	9 th –10 th c. (?)	Muzeum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsz- tyn, inv. no. 204, cat. no. 303/62	Pudło 2012, cat no. 176	There are two omega-like signs on one side of the blade.
28	unknown, Poland	α (alfa)	11 th c.	Museum of the Pol- ish Army in Warasw, inv. no. 121 (53832)	Głosek 1973, pp. 105–106, 159, cat. no. 78, pl. VI:1 Pudło 2012, cat. no. 136.	There is a hardly visible +IIIEIEI... inscription on one side of the blade, on the other there is a +IIΩIIΩII+ set of sign.
29	Gnezdovo, Russia	E	ca. year 900	State Historical Museum in Moscow, inv. no. GIM 12a/1	Kirpičnikov 1966a, pp. 80– 81, cat. no. 45, pl. I:1, XVI:1 Kainov 2008, p. 146, fig. 1:3	There is a visible VLFBERH+T on one side of the blade, on the other there is a IIIΩIIIΩIII combi- nation.

30	Ust'- Rybežna, Russia	E	10 th c.	State Historical Museum in Moscow, inv. no. hp. 12/1	Kirpičnikov 1966a, pp. 78–79, cat. no. 43	There are crosses and omega-like signs on the blade.
31	Zaozer'e, Russia	S	End of the 10 th c.	The State Hermitage, OIPK, inv. no. 700/762	Kirpičnikov 1966a, pp. 76–77, cat. no. 25, pl. XVIII:10	There are marks similar to an Ω-letter on the blade.
32	Detva, Slovakia	K (?)	9 th –mid of the 10 th c.	Slovak National Museum, Department in Martin	Kliský 1964, pp. 107, 114, cat. no. 5 Ruttikay 1975, pp. 136–137, fig. 2:4, 3:1 Idem 1976, pp. 248, 250, 276, 286, figs. 25:2a, 28:3a	There is an X between two semicircles on one side of the blade, on the other there is a +O sign.

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STRESZCZENIE

ZNAK, SYMBOL CZY LITERA? UWAGI NA TEMAT SYGNOWANIA WCZESNOŚREDNIOWIECZNYCH GŁÓWNI MIECZOWYCH

Walory oręża podnosić miało m.in. sygnowanie, przy czym zabieg ten znajdował rozmaite realizacje: od umieszczenia pojedynczego piktogramu do złożonych układów w postaci napisów, ciągów literowo-znakowych lub bardziej złożonych motywów ornamentacyjnych, niekiedy o charakterze narracyjnym. W artykule zwrócono uwagę na możliwości interpretacji umieszczanego na głowniach mie-

czowych symbolu w kształcie “W”, niekiedy określanego w literaturze przedmiotu także jako “omega” “haftka”, “podkowa” czy “kabłączek skroniowy”.

Zebrano informację na temat 32 mieczy, na których zidentyfikowano w sposób mniej lub bardziej pewny znak “W” (Polska – 7 egz., Finlandia – 5 egz., Niemcy – 4 egz., Rosja, Holandia – po 3 egz., Estonia, Anglia – po 2 egz., Białoruś, Czechy, Francja, Irlandia, Norwegia, Słowacja – po 1 egz.). Nie wykazują one tendencji do koncentrowania się w jakimś wybranym rejonie Europy, aczkolwiek większość z nich używana była w pasie północnoeuropejskim, grupując się przede wszystkim wokół wybrzeży Morza Bałtyckiego i Północnego.

Analiza typologiczna wykazała znaczne zróżnicowanie formalne omawianego zbioru. Zwracają również uwagę szerokie ramy czasowe, zamykające się w przedziale VIII–XI w., przy czym większość okazów pochodzi z X–1. poł. XI w.

Znak “W” znajduje się z jednej strony głowni, przy czym występuje on tam jako samodzielny (pojedynczy lub podwojony) motyw, ewentualnie w zestawie z innymi symbolami, bądź też w większej liczbie. Najczęściej mamy do czynienia z układem horyzontalnym dwóch zwróconych ku sobie zakończeniami “W”, pomiędzy którymi znajdować się mógł inny symbol, na ogół krzyż. Zdarzają się też konfiguracje bardziej złożone.

Omega posiada dużą wymowę symboliczną w sferze religijnej, zwłaszcza w kręgu kultury chrześcijańskiej. Wyobrażenie jej na mieczu, zwłaszcza w połączeniu z krzyżem, wolno z dużym prawdopodobieństwem uznać za odnoszącą się do Boga symboliczną formę inwokacji, mającą sprowadzić na walczącego tak sygnowanym mieczem łaskę i ochronę Pańską. Intencją uwidocznienia tej sygnatury na głowni mogła być także chęć zmanifestowania przynależności religijnej posiadacza oręża. Z drugiej jednak strony należy liczyć się z magiczną wymową omawianej sygnatury, niezależną od pierwotnej intencji jej zastosowania. Niewątpliwie więc kwestia interpretacji “W” wymaga dalszych pogłębionych studiów, zmierzających do ustalenia, co stało się impulsem do sygnowania głowni mieczowych właśnie w ten sposób oraz jakie były uwarunkowania historyczno-kulturowe pojawienia się rozpatrywanego znaku na mieczach i dalsza jego recepcja.