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BOAR- AND BEAR-HUNTING IN POST-MEDIEVAL SILESIA. ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The origin of spear-heads with two side-wings projecting from the socket, according to a common view, is Frankish. There is a hypothesis suggesting that lugs or wings developed from rivet heads. These were applied, to secure the spear-head, or to fasten the wire binding and the iron langets to the shaft¹. However, it seems more likely that the investigated weapon derived from antiquity, rather than the early medieval period. The lugged spear was originally used by the Romans for hunting. Such function of the weapon is confirmed by the *Bestiarius* or *Ventator*² - depiction sculpted on a 2nd century grave stone from Parma (Fig. 1: a)³. Yet another winged hafted weapon had been carved in a relief, decorating the Roman sarcophagus kept in the Capitoline Museum in Rome (Fig. 1: b)⁴. Mosaics from the Roman Villa near Piazza Armerina in Sicily, the Villa Borghese gallery in Rome, and the Roman Villa in Merida, Spain, all dated to the 1st half of the 4th century are abundant in hunting scenes⁵. They clearly indicate that the lugged spear was used for hunting big game, such as the wild boar. Therefore, it is more than probable that Merovingian and Carolingian winged spears originated from Roman hunting weapons. In the light of the presented evidence it seems unlikely that Frankish spears are an independent development, exclusively determined by experience gained from battle, as frequently stated in the literature⁶. Several examples of renaissance boar spears are identical to their 9th century Frankish belligerent counterparts. One such exhibit dated to 1500-1540 comes from the Dresden Amory⁷. Miniatures from medieval illuminated manuscripts provide

invaluable information on pig-sticking. The most referred to, is probably the hunting scene from the 14th century Codex Manesse, depicting Hetzbold von Weißensee. One of his retainers has a spear with a cross-guard, which prevented the wounded animal of running down the shaft and attacking the hunter (Fig. 1: c).

In medieval and early modern weapon-inventories, the investigated pole-arms are listed under the names: *Boarspear*, *Sauspiess*, *Saufeder*, *Bärenspiess*, *Schweinspiess*, *Federspiess* or *Fangeisen*⁸. Terms relating to hunting spears suggest, that there was a distinction between weapons engaged against bears and those used for wild-boar hunting.

Medieval and early modern hafted weapons remain still a neglected field of research as compared to our knowledge of other arms. The nomenclature of this branch of the history of arms is extremely confused⁹. According to M. Troso¹⁰, the names encountered in medieval written accounts, such as: *spiedo*, *spetum latum* and *lanzione* might have referred to hunting weapons, as well as military winged spears. There are several discrepancies between the names of weapons listed in old arsenal inventories and the actual content of these arsenals. The term *Sauspiess* (Boar-spear), for instance, often refers to the hunting weapon, as well as partisans and two-handed swords¹¹. These inconsistencies, prove that historical documents are less reliable for arms and armor studies, than extant examples or iconographic sources.

A remarkable medieval hunting spear from ca. 1430 is kept at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. It originally belonged to the Austrian duke Frederic IV of Tyrol (1382-1439)¹². The sturdy iron head consist of a lozenge blade, diamond in cross section, a polygonal socket and an engraved cross piece. The socket bears an inscription,

¹ P. Świątkiewicz, *Uzbrojenie wczesnośredniowieczne z Pomorza Zachodniego*, Acta Archaeologica Lodziensia, No. 48, Łódź 2002, p. 46.

² A gladiator of lower rank engaged in combat against wild animals – the so called *Venatio*.

³ A. Demmin, *Die Kriegswaffen in ihren geschichtlichen Entwicklungen*, Leipzig 1891, p. 252.

⁴ A. Diener-Schönberg, *Knebel an Jagdblankwaffen*, „Zeitschrift für historische Waffen und Kostümkunde”, vol. 3, 1902/05, p. 346.

⁵ M. Troso, *Le Armi in Asta delle Fanterie Europee (1000-1500)*, Novara 1988, p. 51.

⁶ P. Świątkiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

⁷ A Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 347, fig. 5.

⁸ W. Boeheim, *Handbuch der Waffenkunde*, Leipzig 1890, p. 329; Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 345; M. Goliński, R. Żerelik, *Inwentarze zbrojowni i arsenału księcia legnickiego Ludwika IV z lat 1662-1669*, Legnica 1993, p. 66.

⁹ C. Blair, *European & American Arms*, New York 1962, p. 21; M. Troso, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

¹¹ A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

¹² O. Gamber, B. Thomas, *Katalog der Leibrückkammer. I Theil. Der Zeitraum von 500 bis 1530*, Wien 1976, p. 72, fig. 11.



a



b



c

Fig. 1. Hunting spears: a - Bestiarius or Ventator, stone tomb, 2nd cent. A.D. Parma (after Demmin 1891); b - Roman sarcophagus, 2nd cent. A.D. Capitoline Museum Rome (after Diener-Schönberg 1902/05); c - Codex Manesse (after <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/cpg848>).

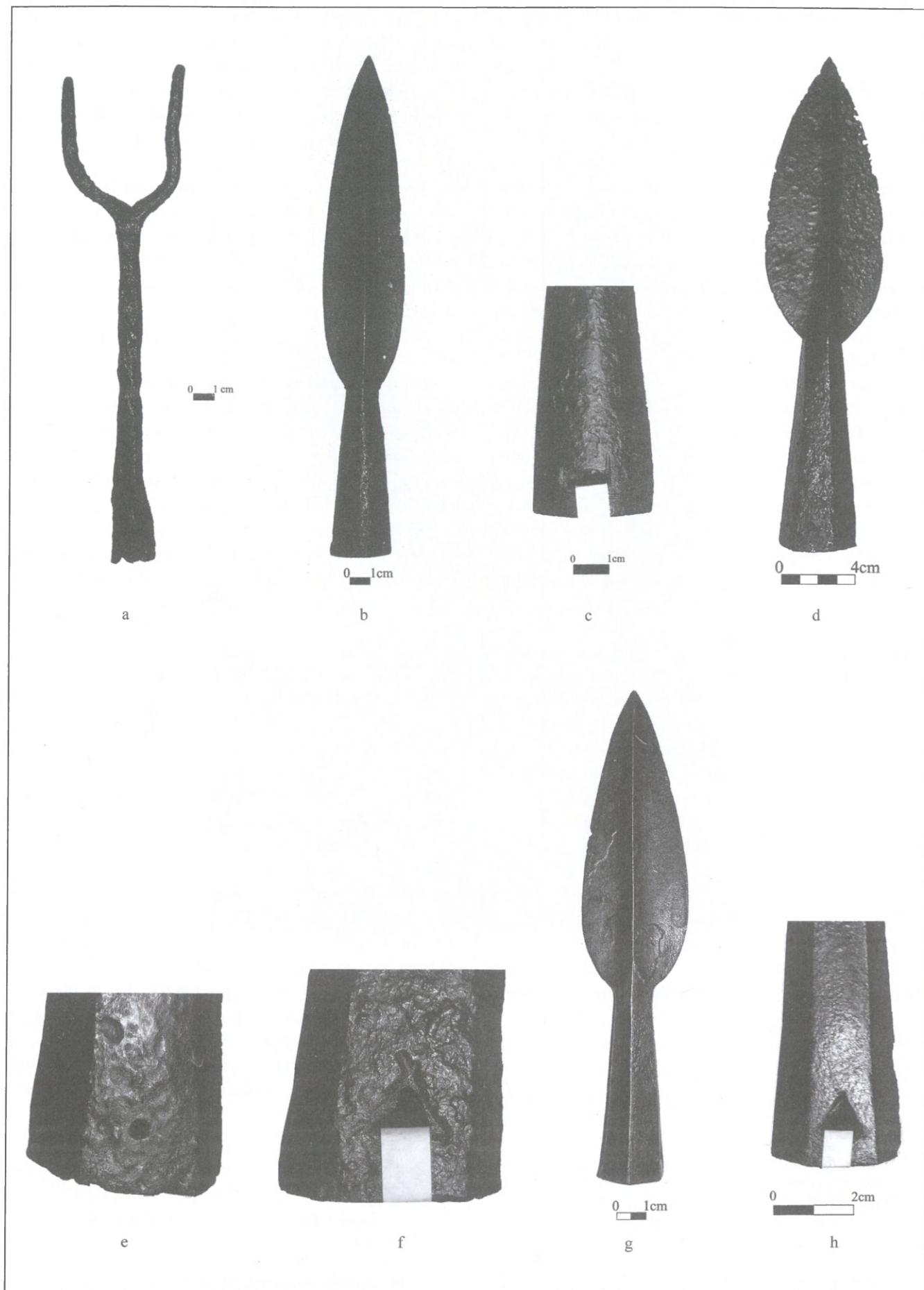


Fig. 2. Hunting equipment from castle Chojnik, 16th/17th cents. Muzeum Karkonoskie in Jelenia Góra: a – hunting pitchfork, Inv. No. 1982/4; b, c – bear spear. Inv. No. 1982/5; d,e,f – bear spear, Inv. No. 1982/6; g,h bear spear, Inv. No. 1982/7.

which reads: FEDERIC (US) and DUX AUSTRIE; one can find a very similar spear in the illustrious book of Hours of Duke Jean de Berry, dated to 1412-1416¹³. Unornamented, purely military examples of the same period are referred to as bohemian-ear-spoons, because they became increasingly popular among the Hussites.

A slightly later boar-spear, which belonged to a celebrated person is kept at the Armory of the Moscow Kremlin. This piece was in possession of the Great Prince of Tver Boris Alexandrovich (1425-1461), as one can read on the silver-gilt inlaid socket, chiseled with human figures and with a floral design¹⁴. The decoration is characteristic for contemporary Russian icon painting¹⁵. Noteworthy, is the lack of a cross piece, that originally might have been detachable.

In the 16th century hunting spears developed into a distinct form, very different from the hafted weapons used for war. They were provided with a massive, extensively broad blade, usually decorated with inlay, etching, gilding and bluing¹⁶.

Shafts were commonly made of yew- or ash-wood, which are resilient, relatively light and resistant to breaking¹⁷. Additionally they were bound with leather thongs to ensure a firm grip and to prevent the wood from warping¹⁸. In several instances, leather straps were replaced by decorative nail-heads or notches covering the entire surface. A different method to ensure a firm grip was to pick a special kind of wood with twisted fibers or knotty wood¹⁹.

To acquire sufficient durability entire young stems were selected for wooden parts of the weapon rather than old ones split into four pieces in the process. Sometimes the living stem was incised to obtain a peculiar pattern of knotty wood on the surface of the shaft²⁰. A French 'bear spear' from the Dresden Armoury, dated to 1590, has a shaft made of a wine stem, which had been incised and shaped while still living. The incisions caused growth distortions, producing a knotty surface effect²¹.

The point of balance is usually at the upper part of the shaft. The latter is tapering towards the lower end²². A cross-guard (German: *Knebel*) in 16th and 17th century examples made of wood, bone antler or iron was fastened

to an opening in the socket by means of a leather thong²³. During combat the cross piece of a military winged spear prevented the opponent's blade from sliding down the shaft. Antonio Manciolino in his fencing manual from 1531 strongly recommends to tie up the opponent's blade with the wings, force it over to the left side, and then thrust into his exposed flank²⁴.

Tassels were frequently fastened, under the iron head of a hunting spear. Most often they were dyed in heraldic colors of the owner and bound with nets made of silver or golden wire. Frequently the shafts were inlaid with bone, coated with fabric or fish skin²⁵. The rich embellishment of such spears suggests that they were luxury weapons - employed in one of the most popular activities of a nobleman - the hunt.

Plain unornamented hunting equipment was found during conservation works in one of the medieval cisterns at Castle Chojnik in Silesia. The collection of these artifacts, kept at Karkonoskie Museum in Jelenia Góra (Fig. 2), consists of three spear heads and one pitchfork, probably used for boar- or bear hunting (Fig. 2: a).

There are numerous Silesian written accounts referring to hunting with a pitchfork. One of them is the duke's Louis IV of Legnica arsenal inventory from 1662. Among other weapons listed in his document one can find: *Gabelspiesse - so auf der Jagt, 29 Schweinspiesse* and *2 Federspiesse*²⁶.

Two of the spear heads from Castle Chojnik (inv. No MJG-AH 1982/6 i /7) have large, robust and leaf shaped blades with strong central ribs (Fig. 2: d-h). Their hexagonal sockets are provided with triangular openings, to hinge a crossbar by means of a leather thong (now lacking) (19,5-20 cm length, 6,9-8,0 cm width). In well preserved examples, crossbars made of bone or wood are highly decorative. They usually bear engraved monograms of their owners. Detachable, hinged crossbars appear with boar or bear- spears at the end of the 16th century²⁷. They were replaced several times, due to intensive wear. A Saxonian bear-spear from the 16th/17th cents. kept in the Dresden Armoury, for instance, is provided with a later crossbar made of bone and engraved with the date 1727 (Fig. 3)²⁸.

Specimens, No 1982/6 and 1982/7, due to the large dimensions, could be regarded as weapons for bear hunting²⁹. The spear head, No MJG - AH - 1982/5, with a socket of a circular cross-section (Fig. 2: b; c) is less robust, than the above mentioned. Therefore, it could be interpreted

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 84

¹⁴ Y. Miller, *Russian Arms and Armour*, Leningrad 1982, pp. 10-11, 175; figs. 2-5.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 10-11, 175; Fig. 2-5.

¹⁶ E. von Koerner, "Französische" *Stangenwaffen in der Dresdener Rüstammer*, "Zeitschrift für historische Waffen und Kostümkunde", vol. 3, 1929, p. 13.

¹⁷ G. Quasigroch, *Sauspieße*, „Niedersächsischer Jäger“, vol. 7, 1978, p. 261.

¹⁸ A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

²⁰ G. Quasigroch, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

²¹ J. Schöbel, *Jagd Waffen*, Berlin, 1990, p. 84, cat. No. 14.

²² G. Quasigroch, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

²³ A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 349; E. von Koerner, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁴ S. Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, New Heaven, London 2000, pp. 159-161.

²⁵ A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

²⁶ M. Goliński, R. Żerelik, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

²⁷ A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-348.

²⁸ J. Schöbel, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁹ See A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

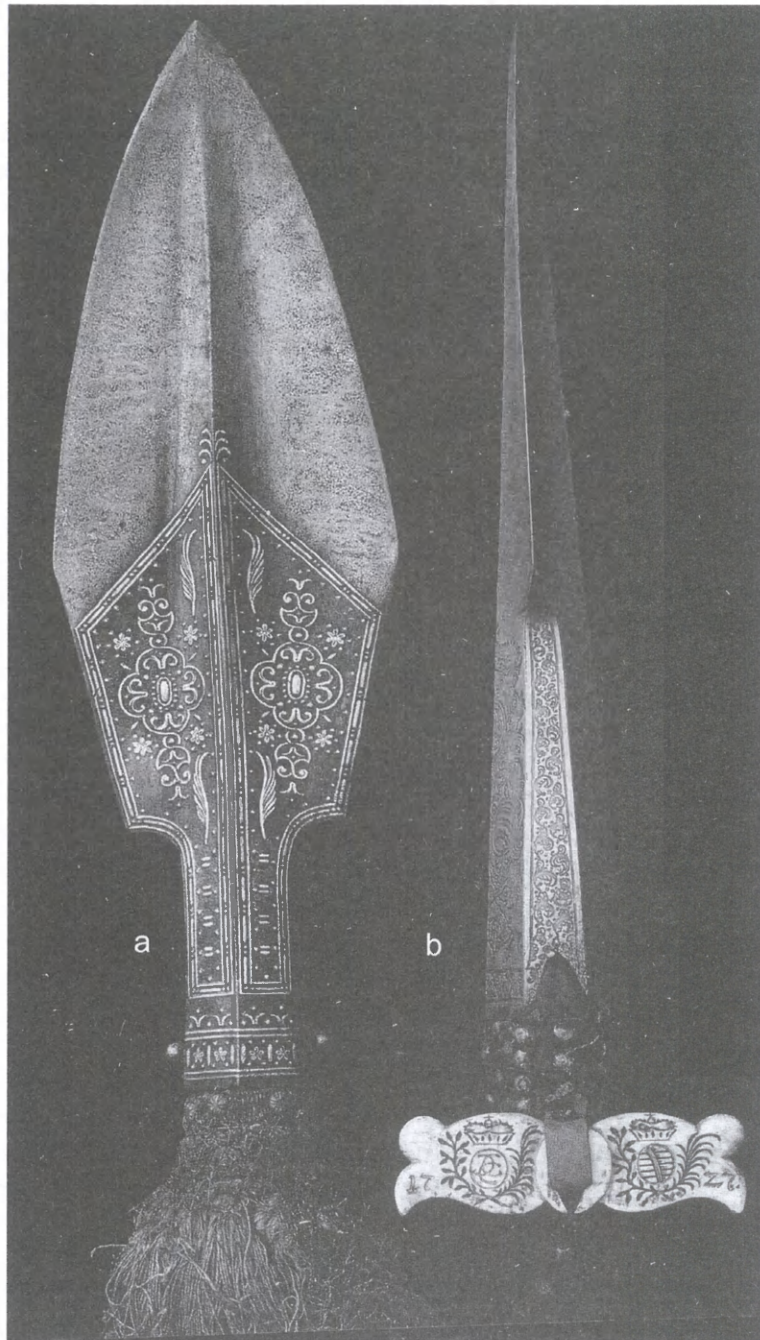


Fig. 3. Hunting spears (after Schöbel 1990).

as a boar-spear (blade - dimensions 5,3 width; 22,5 cm length) (Fig. 2: b; c). Analogous spear heads from Central and Western Europe, are dated to the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries in the literature³⁰. These may be gilded or etched.

Despite of being relatively well preserved, no traces of additional decoration have been identified on the surfaces of the objects found in Chojnik.

On the basis of the archeological context, it is difficult to date artifacts analyzed in this paper. Unfortunately, the conservation works at Castle Chojnik were conducted without the supervision of a professional archeologist³¹. Chronology of the spear heads (end of the 16th – 1st half of the 17th century) is based on analogous specimens known to date. It is more than likely that the excavated pieces found their way into the cistern, after the castle was struck by a lightning

³⁰ J. Mann *European Arms and Armour*, Wallace Collection Catalogues, vol. II, Arms, London 1962, p. 445, cat. No. A935; J. Schöbel, *op. cit.*, p. 46; P. Krenn, *Schwert und Spiess*, Graz 1997, p. 58.

³¹ T. Wrocławski, *Zamek Chojnik w świetle odkryć archeologicznych podczas prac remontowo-budowlanych*, [in:] M. Boguszewicz, A. Boguszewicz, D. Wiśniewska (ed.), *Człowiek i środowisko w Sudetach*, Wrocław 2000, p. 257.

and set afire on 31 August 1675³². The artifacts bear traces of high temperature and are coated with thick fire patina.

The abundance of big game in the vicinity of Chojnik is confirmed by local tradition. One of the written accounts informs us that in 1292 the castle was raised in the place of an earlier hunter's manor³³.

The boar spear, unlike the so-called boar sword used by horsemen, was wielded by dismounted hunters in a battue hunt. The latter always had to be carried out with a pack of hounds to hold and exhaust the game enough, so that the hunter could deliver a final blow to the beast, usually thrusting with the spear from behind to the left side³⁴. On this occasion dogs were equipped with armor consisting of scales and mail with a leather lining. The best known example of such a defense is kept at Real Armeria in Madrid³⁵. In old hunting manuals (quoted by Qasigroch) it is stressed that a single spear-man is no match for the enraged wild boar unless it is held by a pack of hounds. One of the practitioners, described an incident with a wild boar. When hunting armed with spear he had encountered the wild animal; and in the blink of an eye (He 'didn't even have time enough to say amen') had been knocked over and trampled by the beast while lying on his back³⁶.

Due to extensive hunting, the big game became almost extinct at the end of the 18th century. Therefore, the boar spears gradually went out of use. Weapons for bear hunting, even earlier, found their way in the increasingly popular collections of peculiarities of the time³⁷. One of the latest bear spears, known to date is exhibited in the Dresden Armory. Originally it belonged to Augustus II the Strong king of Poland. On the blade there is an etched and gilded monogram of the monarch³⁸. The socket is provided with a triangular opening to take the tong fastening the cross piece (dated: 1725).

Conclusions:

Early modern boar spears from archeological sites are still extremely rare, as compared to the extant well preserved examples in European Museum collections. This disproportion could be explained by the state of art on the subject. The early modern times were never thoroughly studied by archeologists until the mid 60's of the 20th century. Unique finds from Chojnik provide invaluable evidence on activities and lifestyle of nobility in early modern Silesia. Hunting was

strongly recommended to land owners by Niccolo Machiavelli³⁹ in his most celebrated treatise *The Prince*. According to this author hunting gave the lord an invaluable opportunity to study his estate in every detail; knowing well his own land was of great importance in the case of war.

Catalogue of hunting equipment from castle Chojnik; 16th/17th centuries. Muzeum Karkonoskie in Jelenia Góra:

Abbreviations:

TL – total length
 BL – blade length
 BW – blade width
 BT – blade thickness
 SW – socket width (at the top)
 SMD – socket mouth diameter
 SOD – socket opening diameter (at the side of the socket; meant to hinge a cross piece)
 RHD – rivet hole diameter
 (Dimensions in centimeters)

1. Inv. No. MJG-AH 1982/4

Hunting pitchfork:

TL – 33,5; prong's length – 10,5; prong's thickness – 0,9; width – 8
 SW – 2,2;

2. Inv. No. MJG-AH 1982/5

Boar spear:

TL – 33,15; BL – 22,5; BW – 5,3; BT – 1,3; SW – 2,1; SMD – 3,7; SOD – 1,2; RHD – 0,5;

3. Inv. No. MJG-AH 1982/6

Bear spear:

TL – 33; BL – 19,5; BW – 8; BT – 1,7; SW – 2,6; SMD – 4,7; SOD – 1; RHD – 0,4;

4. Inv. No. MJG-AH 1982/7

Bear spear:

TL – 32,3; BL – 20; BW – 6,9; BT – 1,5; SMD – 3,9; SW – 2,6; SOD – 1,3; RHD – 0,4;

³² L. Kajzer, S. Kołodziejewski, J. Salm, *Leksykon zamków w Polsce*, Warszawa 2004, p. 216.

³³ B. Guerquin, *Zamki śląskie*, 1957, Warszawa, p. 41; T. Wrocławski, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

³⁴ See A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

³⁵ G. Quasigroch, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 259.

³⁷ A. Diener-Schönberg, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

³⁸ V. Dolínek, J. Durdík, *Historische Waffen*, Hanau 1995, p. 143.

³⁹ N. Machiavelli, *Książę*, Warszawa 1987, p. 78.

Streszczenie

W czasach nowożytnych włócznie służące do polowania przybrały kształt bardziej wyspecjalizowany niż w średniowieczu, pozwalający na formalne odróżnienie ich od egzemplarzy bojowych. Charakteryzowały się wyjątkowo szerokim żełżcem, często bogatym trawieniem, złoceniami i oksydacją. Poprzeczka (niem. *Knebel*) przy włóczniach myśliwskich była osłoną – jelcem dla polującego – uniemożliwiała szarżującej, rannej zwierzynie zbiegnięcie po drzewcu i zaatakowanie myśliwego. Pozwalała także na łatwiejsze wyjęcie broni po zadaniu ciosu i ponowienie ataku. Przy nowożytnych okazach element ten wykonany z drewna, kości, poroża lub rzadziej stali najczęściej mocowano rzemieniem do okna wyciętego w tulei. Drzewce obijano cienkimi rzemieniami, nie mającymi charakteru dekoracji lecz zapewniającymi dobry chwyt oraz zabezpieczenie przed wykrzywieniem drewna w razie zawilgocenia. Rzemienie zastępowano gęstym nabijaniem, nitami i nacinaniem. Inną metodą na zapewnienie dobrego chwytu broni było wykonanie drzewca z drewna o skręconych śrubowato włóknach lub sękatego.

Interesujące przedmioty związane z uzbrojeniem myśliwskim odkryto podczas oczyszczania cysterny do magazynowania wody na zamku Chojnik. Są to trzy żełżce włóczni oraz widły o tordowanym trzonie, najprawdopodobniej służące także do polowania na „grubego zwierzę”.

Omawiane zabytki przechowywane są obecnie w Muzeum Karkonoskim w Jeleniej Górze. Dwa żełżce (nr inw. MJG-AH 1982/6 i /7) należą do form o masywnych, krępych i obosiecznych grotach oraz wielokątnych tulejach zaopatrzonych z jednej strony w trójkątny otwór służący do przewlekania rzemienia mocującego poprzeczny element, wykonany często z kości i zaopatrzony w monogram właściciela. Ruchoma poprzeczka wiązana na rzemieniu, przy włóczniach myśliwskich pojawiła się na przełomie XVI/XVII w.

