

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *KARABELA* HILT ON SWORDS AND SABERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

### EL DESARROLLO DE EMPUÑADURA DE *KARABELA* DE LAS ESPADAS Y SABLES: UN ESTUDIO COMPARATIVO

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DENIS TOICHKIN\* Y MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI\*\*

#### ABSTRACT - RESUMEN

The *karabela* hilt is described as a hilt with a crossguard and a pommel in the shape of a stylized head of a bird most often similar to a hawk. This type of handle was usually mounted on long cavalry saber blades. In general, *karabelas* were mounted with different types of blades, often those of a wedged-shape, curved blade of a classical Persian *shamshir*. The oldest *karabelas* (of Turkish origin or based on Turkish models) that are preserved in the museums of Poland, generally have blades with a raised back edge called a *yelman*. The main feature of the so-called 'saber of hawk', a characteristic form of a curved pommel resembling the head of a hawk and a cross guard, is closely associated with *karabela*. The main goal of the present article is to do a comparative study on different sources on sabers and swords with a *karabela* hilt and try to establish an origin of this type of hilt.

Se describe la empuñadura de *karabela* como una empuñadura con una guarnición de cruz y un pomo en forma de una cabeza estilizada de un pájaro con más frecuencia similar a un halcón. Se montaba este tipo de empuñadura con largas hojas de sable de caballería. En general se montaba las empuñaduras de *karabela* con con diferentes tipos de hojas, a menudo con una forma de la hoja curvada de un *shamshir* persa clásico. Las *karabelas* más antiguas (de origen turco o basado en modelos turcos) que se conservan en los museos de Polonia, generalmente tienen hojas con un contrafilo llamado *yelman*. El llamado 'sable de halcón' es cercanamente asociado con *karabela* con su característica principal, una forma característica de un pomo curvo parecido a la cabeza de un halcón y una guarnición de cruz. El principal objetivo del presente artículo es hacer un estudio comparativo sobre las diferentes fuentes sobre los sables y espadas con empuñadura *karabela* y tratar de establecer un origen de este tipo de empuñadura.

#### KEYWORDS - PALABRAS CLAVE

*Karabela* hilt; beaked pommel; city of Karbala; Mameluk sword; Persian *shamshir*; Ottoman Turkish sabers; Polish sabers; Omani sword; Imam Hossein shrine; *jineta* sword; Sassanid sword; Byzantium; Sultan Selim I; Shah Abbas I; Sultan Suleyman

Empuñadura de *karabela*; pomo de pico; ciudad de Karbala; espada mameluca; *shamshir* persa; sables turcos otomanos; sables polacos; espada de Omán; santuario del Imam Hussein; espada de *jineta*; espada sasánida; Bizancio; Sultán Selim I; Shah Abbas I; Sultán Suleyman.

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\* The Institute of History of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, denisvt68@gmail.com

\*\* M. Moshtagh Consulting, Frankfurt am Main, manouchehr@moshtaghkhorasani.com

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The origins of the historical term *karabela* and the appearance of this morphological type (in its modern interpretation) in European context have many times become the subject of heated discussions among specialists. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita) the popularity of *karabela* in the course of XVII–XVIII centuries was obviously greater than in other parts of the Old World. Therefore, the question of its origins has at best been researched in Polish historiography. The main polemics among scholars took place concerning the definition of this type of weapon and possible centers of its origin. In this question, some weapons experts have named Turkey (Z. Żygulski Jr., W. Kwaśniewicz, I. Lebedynsky), others Poland (T. Czacki), then Persia (C. Biernacki, Z. Gloger, A. Brückner, S. Meyer, A. Nadolski, Z. Stefanska, O. Pinchot, R. Elgood, M. Khorasani), the Arabian Peninsula (J. Łepkowski) and even Italy (W. Dziewanowski, S. Ledóchowski) as the center of origin for this type of handle. Unfortunately, no historical sources have been found up to now which could provide a definitive answer for the resolution of this problem. It turns out that establishing a hypothesis for resolving this issue is not scientifically founded: sometimes, starting from the history of the name, the scholars gradually come to the search of a single center responsible for the dissemination of this type of weapon in Asia Minor or Central and Eastern Europe. Sometimes in their conclusions the scholars go even further, connecting the circumstances of origin of the name of this type of saber with its morphological peculiarities. In other words, they do so by substituting historical argumentation with polemic etymological hypotheses.

## 2. THE ORIGINS OF KARABELA

Referring to the beaked pommel which resembles the beak of a bird of prey, Pinchot (2002:5) hypothesizes that term *karabela* could be a derivation from Karbala, the holy city of the Shiites that was reconquered by Shah Abbas in 1623 C.E. He further suggests that Shah Abbas might have encountered this type of hilt there and adopted it to commemorate the battle. This theory was already proposed in an earlier publication by Elgood (1994:15). Elgood states that the *karabela* hilt form became popular in Iran in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Shah Abbas is portrayed wearing a *shamshir* with this type of hilt. Elgood (1994:15) further states that this type of sword hilt became extremely popular in Poland where it survived into the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the national hilt due to the close political and trade relationships between Poland and Iran as allies against the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent Polish adoption of Persian culture at court. Elgood notes the occupation of Baghdad by Shah Abbas I, who also took control of the area, including *Karbala*, which was held by Iran for the next 15 years. Elgood (1994:15), like Pinchot, also suggests that it is possible that Shah Abbas adopted this type of hilt form as a memento of this campaign, yet he admits that there is no historical evidence to support this theory. Lebedynsky (1992:71) also states that the *karabela* hilt form was common in Iran in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as it was throughout the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe. However, regarding the origin of this hilt, Lebedynsky (1992:63) is of the opinion that the name "*karabela*" derives from the city of Karabel close to Izmir<sup>1</sup> (although, at the same time, he admits that the name "*karabela*" reminds one of the city of Karbala in Iraq). According to Lebedynsky (1992:63), the *karabela* hilt appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as can be seen on the mounting

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<sup>1</sup> In an earlier publication, Lebedynsky (1990:44) states that the name comes from the city of Karabel, close to Smyrne.

of the saber of Selim the Cruel. This form was very popular on the borders of the Ottoman Empire, especially in Eastern Europe, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In an earlier publication, Lebedynsky (1990:44) states that this hilt form is certainly an oriental form. Various examples of Iranian *karabela* hilts are given by these authors (see Lukonin and Ivanov, 2003:186, 188; Pinchot, 2002:5).

In the charts below we provide the main theories of origin of the term '*karabela*' and the corresponding conclusions, which sometimes researchers draw on the basis of their assumptions.

Explanation of term <i>karabela</i>	Researchers who have offered this theory	The region from which <i>karabela</i> had to be widened.	Peculiarities of morphology, connected with the name and notes
Offered the alternative « <i>arabela</i> » («Arabian»)	Łepkowski <sup>2</sup>	Arabian Peninsula	By statement of the author «from Arabs»
From the half-mythical name <i>Karabel</i> , which offered the first <i>karabela</i> to Polish kings court	Czacki <sup>3</sup>	Poland	This type must be characterized as light and elegant saloon weapons.
From the name of the city <i>Karbala</i> near Baghdad (Iraq)	Biernacki <sup>4</sup>	Persia	Modern theory based on Khorasani's version: the form of pommel reminds of an arch in the shrine of Imam Hossein <sup>5</sup>
From Italian « <i>cara e bella</i> » («precious and beautiful»)	Dziewanowski <sup>6</sup>	Italy	Is characterized as precious decorated sabers regardless of the morphology of hilt and blade
<i>Karabel</i> (Carabelli) / Italian	Ledóchowski <sup>7</sup>		From the 16th century; the name was connected with any precious decorated saber with a cross-guard; from the beginning of the 17th century it was characterized by the typical form of the pommel <sup>8</sup>
From the name of the city <i>Karabel</i> close to Izmir (Turkey)	Żygulski <sup>9</sup>	The Ottoman Empire	—

Also one can find even more suggestions in media and popular books. Thus, the term “*Karabela*” derived from the Latin «*Caravelles*» (*caravel*) —the name of European light ship.

<sup>2</sup> Łepkowski (1857: 66).

<sup>3</sup> Квасневич (2006: 54-55).

<sup>4</sup> Biernacki (1900: 103).

<sup>5</sup> Khorasani (2006: 188-189).

<sup>6</sup> Dziewanowski (1935: 56).

<sup>7</sup> Ledóchowski (1980: 19-30).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, (1980: 28-30).

<sup>9</sup> Żygulski (1978: 20).

So the term should signify lightness and elegance. This version might be connected with accidental change of vowels.

Another idea – the term originated from Turkish «qarā» («black») + Arabic «belā» («curse»). The name should be connected with the color of the grip of early Turkish *karabelas*.

Another explanation connected “*Karabela*” with Arabic «Carab» («weapon»).

### 3. THE MEANING OF KARABELA

We should note, that as of today the researchers have not yet found a common opinion about the historical sense of the term *karabela*. By now it is quite evident that at different times the term *karabela* had certain nuances. For instance, in written sources one can see Damascus, Persian, Turkish, Armenian, Cherkass (or Tatar), Hungarian, and even Chinese *karabelas*. Also we see Krakow and Warszawa *karabelas* and gilded *karabela* from Lviv. Among them one can find gilded («blachmalowa»), gold-inlaid, framed in gold and decorated by big diamonds, *karabelas* of the Old Times («staroświecka»), *karabelas* carried during journeys (for self-defense) and many other types. One person even writes about a special type of saber known as *karabelska*. However, almost nowhere can we find characteristics of *karabela*, connected with the form of its pommel.<sup>10</sup> Precisely this concerns the majority of other historical names of sabers of Middle Ages and the Early Modern Times. However, several researchers insist that there should be a connection between the term *karabela* and its morphological characteristics, dating it to the verge of 16th-17th centuries.<sup>11</sup>

In general it should be noted that although the attempts of an interpretation of historical terms are still proceeding, the specialists had already established a solid base of archaeological typology one century ago. Because of the development of typological classification in the first 20 years of the 20th century<sup>12</sup> it has become possible to distinguish between two different types: saber of hawk and *karabela*.

Despite considerable advantages and convenient solutions to local scientific problems, this approach has its negative sides as well. The artificial limitation of the meaning of *karabela* and saber of hawk types in formal typology considerably narrows the scientific horizons of research and deprives it of its wide historical base, which one has to take into account when the subject matter of the research is of a multiethnic and international scale. Therefore, in our research these types are reviewed together as part and parcel of a large grouping of weapons with animal-headed hilts. It should be taken into consideration that the saber of hawk is only a small peak of an iceberg of long world traditions of decorating weapons (not only blades) by the images of heads of animals and mythical and mythological creatures. Such weapons quite often accompany other types of weapons found by archaeologists in graves of ancient civilizations.

In the cases of sabers used in the regions and periods of dominance of world monotheistic religions, the cultures only followed the ancient mythological traditions, transferred them from the world of pagan gods and used them for purely worldly, socio-political realities. The head of a bird remains the most widely used. Although quite often one can find other types of heads of lions, dogs, dolphins, mythological creatures, etc. Therefore, let us consider western and eastern roots of this tradition, which were revived in pommels of *karabela* and the saber of hawk

<sup>10</sup> Janiak (2007: 17-18).

<sup>11</sup> Ledóchowski (1980:28-30).

<sup>12</sup> See Hartleb (1926:59); Meyer (1934: 68-72); Meyer (1935: 98-105).

of the Modern World. We should bear in mind that the 'bird' form of the pommel was used on blade weapons of peoples of the Mediterranean already from ancient times, as is testified by numerous belongings and iconographic sources of that time.<sup>13</sup>

In the course of the Middle Ages this tradition in Europe slightly went into decline. The pommels of the bladed weapons with images of heads of different creatures, first of all a bird and a lion, started to come back to European countries already in the XV century. That is connected with reanimation of symbolism from ancient Rome on weaponry objects in the Renaissance culture.<sup>14</sup> For a long time animal headed hilts were mounted primarily on the falchions and different types of big battle knife. Both of them were used as civilian weapons and sometimes on battlefields. The varieties of one- and two-handed big battle knives were popular in Europe. It is interesting that the dissemination of battle knives (and their derivatives as well) and «bird» pommels was most actively assisted by countries of Southern Europe – in Italy<sup>15</sup>, Genoa and Venetia.

As we can see, the saber of hawk, which had strong western roots, became one of the main grounds of the Modern Times' *karabela*. Some researchers postulate that the Muslim world of the Early Modern Times got to know these forms as antique heritage, through a Byzantium intermediary.<sup>16</sup> However, one should not forget that bird-like pommels were well-known in the East long before the Byzantium – its spread was connected with the penetration of the Greek machaira due to the conquests of Achaemenids of the huge territory – from Egypt to India and then the conquests of Alexander the Great.<sup>17</sup> 'Bird' pommels brought by the conquerors had to quite organically fit into a developed traditional system of animal-headed elements of bladed weapons of the Ancient East.

Another source of the characteristic pommels of *karabelas* of the Early Modern Times is considered to be architectural forms of religious buildings such as arch vaults and onion domes. One of the first scholars who noted the 'architectural' character of forms of pommel of *karabelas* was the Polish researcher Ledóchowski already in 1976. The researcher analyzed two variants of architectural compositions. Among them: central arc element, the so-called four-centered arc with a reversed curve at the point placed into two half-round arcs in the shape of an arcade, and a sharp-end arc in form of a shamrock. One should note that one can count many other arc forms as well, which were prevalent in the European architecture from the Gothic times. (*Pict. 1 A-C*).

The noted conception was sharply criticized by a well-known expert on Polish arms and armor Żygulski Junior, who considered this direction of search to be «a wrong approach».<sup>18</sup> Despite this criticism in his work Ledóchowski developed this argument further, noting the common character of researched forms also for other forms of subjects of Polish military equipment, in particular hussar stirrups of the end of 16th and the beginning of 17th centuries. He opines that in spite of all its popularity in European architecture, the analyzed plastic forms have, above all, an 'eastern origin'.<sup>19</sup> In reality, the sharp shamrock arc is one of the main decorative motives in Islamic architecture and decorative arts.

The theory of Ledóchowski had to considerably strengthen the positions of proponents of Eastern origin of *karabela*, however it did not find any further development in historical

<sup>13</sup> See Żygulski (1978: pl. 3); Snodgrass (1967: pl. 50); Сокольский (1954: 131).

<sup>14</sup> Pyhrr *et alii* (1998: 7-15).

<sup>15</sup> Бехайм (1995: 199, 204).

<sup>16</sup> Nadolski (1984: 98).

<sup>17</sup> See Носов (2011: 175).

<sup>18</sup> Żygulski (1978: 32).

<sup>19</sup> Ledóchowski (1980: 30-32).



research for many years. Only recently in a fundamental historical study of Persian weapons a further step in this direction has been made. Iranian weapons scholar Khorasani has persuasively demonstrated that the characteristic form of the pommel of *karabelas* is connected closely with the crypt of the shrine of Imam Hossein, situated in Karbala<sup>20</sup>. A study of the doors of the shrine of Imam Hossein in Karbala, which consists of grilles, reveals a stylistic feature that is peculiar to this shrine. The top of these grilles end in a sharp point, and there are two other angles on the right and left sides of this sharp point on the top. This is exactly the shape of the top of a *karabela* hilt, which is seen on Iranian *sabers*, as can be clearly seen, for example, by a comparison of the grilles with the *karabela* hilt of a *shamshir* attributed to Shah Safi kept in the Military Museum of Tehran (museum inventory number 372).

A comparison of the shrine of Imam Hossein with the top of grilled doors of other shrines reveals this feature to be unique. The tops of other grilled doors are dome shaped, rectangular, or triangular. None resemble the top of the shrine of Imam Hossein's grilled door or a *karabela* hilt. The same feature of the top of the grilled doors of Hossein's shrine can also be seen on the windows of the minarets of Hossein's mosque in Karbala. Final speculations regarding the character of similarities of the pommels of weapons with architectural forms and accidental character of this coincidence can be dismissed by remembering the ways of development of Western blade weapons in Medieval times. First of all, it should be noted that variations of this type of pommel, similar to the shamrock and arc construction at the same time (similar to type L according to Oakeshott's typology), spread in the 13th century foremost in the countries that carried the main burden of war against the Muslim World. In the border zones of Europe, where for centuries cultural influences of the East and the West —such as Spain and Byzantium— existed together and mixed, this influence is more visible. In our opinion, a striking example is a famous sword of Ferdinand III (1223 - 1253), *Pict. 2-C*. As of today, this sword represents nearly a single example of such a type of sword with such a pommel from Christian Spain as this type is not typical of European weapon traditions.<sup>21</sup> Iconographic sources also testify its Spanish roots and great popularity on the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>22</sup>

During the 14-15 centuries<sup>23</sup> in Muslim Spain the so-called swords in the *jineta* style (swords of Boabdil<sup>24</sup>) were in wide-spread use, which often had a characteristic onion-shape pommel (onion dome). The weapon experts have noted its similarity with eastern architectural forms.<sup>25</sup> At the other front of war with Muslims, in the Byzantine Empire, the hilts with an onion-domed pommel appeared even earlier in the second half of the 11th century (*Pict. 2-A*).<sup>26</sup> We need to stress that investigations of the form hardly can be connected with any specific ethnographic background although swords with an onion-domed pommel are sometimes viewed as Persian or Arabian origin.<sup>27</sup> With certain local features, this type of pommel can be seen on swords from different countries of the Middle East and Central Asia —from classical forms on the swords of Eastern Turkistan of the 9th-10th centuries<sup>28</sup>— to almost circle domes on the hilts of Mameluk weapons of the end of 15th century (*Pict. 2-D*).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Khorasani (2006: 188-189).

<sup>21</sup> Nicolle (1999: 163); Bruhn de Hoffmeyer (1961: 50).

<sup>22</sup> Oakeshott (1998: 96-97).

<sup>23</sup> Nicolle (1999: 165).

<sup>24</sup> Other names of this weapon are Hispano-Moresque sword or *Espadas á la jineta*.

<sup>25</sup> Bruhn de Hoffmeyer (1966: 96); Khorasani (2006: 188-189); Лайбле (2008: 78).

<sup>26</sup> Bruhn de Hoffmeyer (1966: 96, Fig. 16).

<sup>27</sup> Elgood (1994: 17).

<sup>28</sup> Горелик (2004: 96, II. 1, 1-2).

<sup>29</sup> Yücel (2001: 85, 102).

Despite various modifications, pommels with an onion dome shape appeared and were preserved in several historical and cultural regions during many centuries. For instance, on Omani swords from the Arabian Peninsula —*katarras*— such pommel can be found even on examples from the 18th century (*Pict. 2-E*)<sup>30</sup>. In Iran already at the age of Qajars a classical Persian straight swords were produced which were a continuous tradition of straight swords already made in the Safavid and even earlier periods (*Pict. 3-D*).<sup>31</sup> In Central Europe (first of all – in Hungary) fashion for costume weapons with onion dome pommels, judging from works of painting, remained already at the beginning of the 18th century (*Pict. 2-F*). In general, the establishment of “architectural forms” on European weapons is definitely connected both with the Eastern as well as with the Western Renaissance art traditions. Having been fully developed in swords of “sculpture design” of late Renaissance, this tradition went a long way and was again revived in the 19th century.

As it has been already shown, the shape of *karabela* became a direct follower of former tendencies of both Islamic and European weapon making traditions. It is obvious that at the end of the 15th century, along with the early stylization of a bird head, a hybrid variation was formed, which looked like their cross-combination with shapes of a dome onion and a shamrock. Many researches compared this form with a crest or a crown, even sometimes with a stylized tulip flower.<sup>32</sup> In fact, it looks like a “two-sided” *karabela* pommel (*Pict. 3-A – 3-C*). Such forms almost simultaneously became spread both on the Western battle knives and falchions and on the eastern swords and *pallasches*. However, on early western types it looked more as a stylization of a bird head, than on eastern examples where the emphasis is placed on a sharpened arch or cupola. Soon the pommel had gotten accomplished features.

In the Middle East, weapons with such characteristic features had been produced for at least two centuries already, which is reflected in preserved material and iconographic sources. Finally, it should be stressed again that although many researchers often accept the eastern origin of *karabela* as an axiom<sup>33</sup>, it seems that in its characteristic form its pommel shows both western and eastern cultural influences. There are also certain regional changes which should be separately discussed in detail. We have mentioned above that in its following “comeback” at the end of the 15th century the pommel with a stylized head of the bird is nothing principally new. It still seems that it was precisely the Ottomans who used the new wave of its world popularity, first of all as heirs of cultures of the East and the West, who with their huge conquests have created a peculiar cultural conglomerate on their conquered territory. Thus, the process of formation and development of classical Ottoman *karabela*, in its turn, is based on a powerful international and cultural exchange. This topic has still not yet been properly researched.

One of the oldest known *karabela* is preserved and shown in the Topkapı Palace Museum (Istanbul). It is dated to the period of rule of Selim I (ruled from 1512 to 1520 C.E.), *Pict. 4*. In western historiography, one assumes that this saber belonged personally to the sultan<sup>34</sup>, although, according to the information of Turkish scholars, the name of the smith inscribed on the blade —Ahmad al-Tūqāti, is not mentioned in any of palace documents known as of today.<sup>35</sup> In the study of the hilt of this example, the historians cannot reach a shared opinion— for example, the period of the manufacture of this sword is determined by the time period from 15th to 18th centuries. For instance, the Turkish researcher Yücel noted «delicate gold Seljuk

<sup>30</sup> Elgood (1994: plates 2.13, 2.15).

<sup>31</sup> Khorasani, (2008) and Khorasani and Szántó (2012).

<sup>32</sup> See Chodyński (2000: 155, № 101).

<sup>33</sup> Ledóchowski (1980: 32); Lebedynsky (1990: 44).

<sup>34</sup> See North (1986: 25); Yücel (2012: 57).

<sup>35</sup> Yücel (2001: 167).

motifs» in decoration of pommel and cross-guard.<sup>36</sup> Another Turkish scholar Aydin notes the European style of decoration of the hilt dating it to the 18th century.<sup>37</sup> In our opinion, the pommel and the guard of this *karabela* are really decorated under a strong European influence, but considerably of an earlier period which can be dated to the end of the High Renaissance period (1500–1527 C.E.). The centrally symmetrical composition that is inherent in the Renaissance art with its conception of equilibration but this feature does not appear in later Baroque and Rococo styles. A mild irrational drawing is typical of a Venetian style, as well the tightness and fullness of ornamentation and the shape of mussel fish (shellfish). Thus, taking all these factors into consideration it is possible to date the sword to the period of the 16th century.

Probably, after the conquest of Byzantium, precisely the new capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, became the place where Eastern and Western weaponry traditions gave birth to the Ottoman *karabela*. Ornamental motives of decoration on one of the first well-known Ottoman *karabelas* testify to that (*Pict. 4*). Finally, one can state that at the beginning of the 16th century, a long blade type of Ottoman weapons came into being with a pommel that reminds simultaneously of a stylized head of a hawk and an arch vault. In weapon historiography, one can find different approaches about the period of its formation<sup>38</sup>, however, existing material sources testify the appearance of first examples already in the first quarter of the 16th century. One should also note the rare cases of classical sabers of hawk grips among the Ottomans, which finally can be traced back to strict Sunnite religious limitations for depiction of living creatures.

Later, backs of *karabela* grips became broader in the direction of the pommel and precisely pommels became more similar to an arc or a cone dome rather than the head of a bird (*Pict. 5-A*). The Ottomans also have the above-mentioned “two-sided” *karabela* (*Pict. 3-A – 3-C*). It is interesting to see that its form at *Pict. 3-B* reminds of the pommel of many later *yatagans* when one divides the ears in different sides. On this occasion it is also worth mentioning that bird-like pommel of one of the oldest Ottoman *yatagan* of Sultan Suleyman I (*Pict. 5-C*) resembles the *karabela* hilt of the saber of his father Sultan Selim I (*Pict. 5-B*, *Pict. 4*) rather than later classical examples. Obviously, the process of formation of Ottoman *yatagan* took place under the influence of *karabela*. Although some researchers point out the similarity of ear-lobed bronze swords of Luristan to Ottoman *yatagan* hilts. Certainly, we are providing some facts to demonstrate a huge influence of tradition of bird-shaped pommels in Ottoman weaponry, but in no way we are attempting to deny a respectful tradition of appearance and development of *yatagan* pommels, which in its turn, existed for many centuries and is a heritage of many ancient cultures, re-born in Ottoman period.<sup>39</sup>

The problem of appearance and development of *karabela*-hilted swords in Persia – is not a simple topic as it is connected with the history of an ancient culture enriched by various outside influences of later times. In such a cultural sphere, an ancient and mighty ground of tradition of making pommels of weapons in the shape of architectural forms existed already in pre-Islamic eras (*Pict. 6-B*). Weapons with depictions of the naturalistic and stylized head of a bird known both at the time of the Achaemenid dynasty and at the time of Arab conquest, have an even mightier national and religious base: for example feather ornamentation showing different motifs of feathers combined with a pommel in the form of a stylized hawk head of Wargaran<sup>40</sup> were spread in Sassanid army (*Pict. 6-A*). The archaeological examples of Sassa-

<sup>36</sup> Yücel (2001: 156).

<sup>37</sup> Aydin (2012: 57).

<sup>38</sup> See Tarassuk & Blair (1982: 63).

<sup>39</sup> See Введенский (2003: 96-99).

<sup>40</sup> This is one of personifications of Wretraghna, a zoroastrian god of military achievement and victory.



mid swords have narrow blades, curved hilts and these swords have very small guards or none at all. Almost all of these swords are decorated with a feather pattern, and the same pattern can be seen on other Sassanid decorative art as well.<sup>41</sup> The feather pattern is interpreted as a symbol of the Wargaran bird<sup>42</sup>, one of the shapes of Verethragna, the Zoroastrian deity of victory.<sup>43</sup> Sassanid warriors used the feather pattern on their swords and armor to protect themselves against their enemies. This feature can be seen on scabbard mountings and jewelry from the late Hunnish period in Hungary. There is also an example that has minuscule triangles formed from small gold balls soldered to the surface alongside this pattern. This is also a Hunnish practice that can be seen on one piece in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>44</sup> Taking the whole symbolism of a bird presentation, it is logical to assume that the handle of the Sassanid swords also should have represented the beak of a bird. Harper (1961:95-96) emphasizes the importance of the symbol of the bird Simorgh (Senmurv) in the Sassanid art, which could be seen as a lion-griffin. But Harper stresses the close relationship between the Middle Eastern lion-and-bird conglomerate and the Sassanid dog-and-bird combination and also points out that the translations of Senmurv as the griffin-bird. Harper also explains that there are minor features differentiating Senmurv from a griffin-bird. These features include a series of parallel wrinkles or ridges or vertical lines along the horizontal upper surface of the nose of Senmurv. These parallel ridges are in contrast to the curving back lines on the wrinkled noses of lions. Harper (1961:96) states that these parallel ridges neither represent a dog nor a lion but is an attribute of a serpent dragon. Taking this into consideration and also the feather patterns on the Sassanid swords with P-shaped scabbard attachments and helmets one can also safely assume that the special indentations on the Sassanid swords of this type also represent the beak of Simorgh. The Simorgh is also mentioned in the *Shahname (Book of Kings)* by Ferdowsi, which describes ancient Iranian tales. The occurrence of these two creatures together as decorative elements, namely the Simorgh and the dragon combating each other can be found on the blades of some straight swords from Timurid-period Iran. Four examples of this type of swords are kept in Vienna, Munich, and Dresden. All of these swords are straight and double-edged, depicting the motif of a dragon and a *Simorgh* in combat.<sup>45</sup> Allan (2003:224) is of the opinion that this motif combines two Chinese creatures, the dragon and the phoenix, which were introduced into Persian art through the Mongol Conquests in the 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E. However, one should note that both dragons and the legendary *simorgh* are featured in the *Shahname*. Taking into consideration the fact that Ferdowsi based his *Shahname* on ancient Iranian myths, it is clear that both creatures had existed in Persian mythology long before their possible adaptation from the Chinese culture into Persian art. Nevertheless, Allan (2003:224) himself stresses that the idea of these two creatures in combat is foreign to Chinese culture and admits that this combination is probably based on the more ominous nature of the dragon and *Simorgh* as portrayed in the *Shahname*. For example, Allan refers to the legend of Fereydun, disguised as a dragon, testing his sons' fighting skills so that they learn how to fight against dangerous dragons. The Iranian heroes, such as Sam, Rostam, and Goshtasp, all slew dragons, and there is

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<sup>41</sup> See Masia (2000: 218).

<sup>42</sup> See Harper (1978: 84).

<sup>43</sup> Soudavar (2003: 25) explains that among the Zarathushti deities, Verethragna is often associated with *khvarnah* (the Divine Glory) and, in the *Avesta*, Verethragna boasts that he possesses the most *khvarnah*. However, Soudavar stresses that Verethragna is only in possession of the *khvarnah*, whereas Mithra not only gives *khvarnah* and power as offering but can also take it away. Since Verethragna only receives *khvarnah*, Verethragna has a position subordinate to that of Mithra. It is for this reason that in "Mehr Yasht" (Mih Yasht) Verethragna runs in front of Mithra, opening a path and striking at opponents. Also see Farrokh (2005: 13) and Harper (1978: 84).

<sup>44</sup> See Masia (2000: 218).

<sup>45</sup> See Allan (2003: 224),

also the epic legend of Esfandiyar slaying not only a *Simorgh* but also a dragon, revealing the dangerous nature of dragons (in Iranian legends), which needed to be slain. Allan (2003:226) concludes that, most likely, these images primarily served as battle symbols. Another interesting feature of these swords is the frequent presence of dragon heads or stylized dragon heads at the end of quillons. One could also conclude that the straight swords from the Qajar period with the top of the handle resembling a bird's beak and quillons ending in dragon heads also portray a stylized version of this combat.

The majority of researchers tend to think that the first *karabelas* in Persia appeared at the end of the 16th century — at the beginning of the 17th century. At least Persian miniatures testify that by showing the weapons of the famous Persian king, Shah Abbas Safavid I (ruled from 1587 to 1629).<sup>46</sup> Simultaneously the depictions of sabers of hawk appeared.

At *Pict. 6* we give an example of pommels Persian sabers of the 17th-18th centuries. One can see that already at the times of Safavids along with the classical form of the arc of sharpened dome (*Picture. 6-C*) there existed another, slightly simplified shape, namely a massive end (butt) made in two planes, situated under almost a direct angle (*Pict. 6-D*). Anotherommel shape similar to this style but with a different reduced width also existed, bearing a slight resemblance to a classical *karabela* (*Pict. 6-E*).

A brilliant example of a Persian *karabela* of the above-mentioned type is preserved in the National Museum of Ukraine. The characteristic notching and inscriptions testify that at least its decoration was already made in the 18th century. The saber has a classical, obviously an older blade, made from wavy damask (bulat), decorated with a medallion with depictions of birds and animals, and also a traditional sign of quality for eastern weapons – the inscription 'The work of Assad[ollāh] Isfāhāni'. One of the chiseled medallions shows a hunting dog with a turned head and the other shows a hawking scene (*Pict. 7*).

There was also another form of Persian *karabela* which was not that widely used (*Picture. 6-F*). The origins of this morphological sub-type have not been specially researched in scientific (historical) literature. Only Chodyński noted "Turkmenian" motives in the form of an example which was analyzed by him. However, he does not offer any further detailed explanations.<sup>47</sup> While studying this question, it makes sense to analyze Sassanid weaponry traditions (one should note the similarity of forms at *Pict. 6-B* and *6-F*). Of course, it is impossible without solid grounds to determine direct connections among these types of weapons separated by almost a thousand years of mighty social, military and religious upheavals. However, in this case there are enough reasons to believe that in the period of the 17th-18th centuries, when all these examples were made (dated), shahs of Safavid dynasty started a process of active 'revival' of ancient symbols of an empire which was once invincible.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time one cannot exclude the reverse Ottoman and European influences. For example, in the second half of the 18th century in Poland, *karabelas* of similar morphology became popular with massive, widened upper part pommels. Echoes of this tendency are sometimes found even in the form of weapons of countries of Central and Eastern Europe of the mentioned period, in particular on Austrian military hangers and dirks.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, a culture's own ancient traditions multiplied by outer influences finally led to its formation in Persia of Early Modern Times of two main elements in decorating of a blade weapons: first, pommels in the form of architectural elements and second, the bird's head. Among these two types, a lot of intermediate forms appeared. These are not always subject to a single interpretation.

<sup>46</sup> Elgood (1994: 15).

<sup>47</sup> Chodyński (2000: 165, № 138).

<sup>48</sup> Khorasani (2006: 189, 496-497, 500); Chodyński (2000: 165, 303).

<sup>49</sup> See Уизерс (2011: 204); Кулинский (2003: 374, pl. 359; 377, pl. 366).

Sometimes the prototype is hard to recognize. In many cases this image is quite understandable (*Pict. 6-G*).<sup>50</sup> These traditions were preserved in later periods until the period of decay of the Iranian weaponry in the 19th century.

Considerable difficulties appear when attempting to trace to the appearance of *karabela* in Poland. Of course, there are no considerable reasons to doubt that the oldest Polish *karabelas* (known from the first half of the 17th century) are represented by Turkish combat and ceremonial examples. Probably, because of that in Polish historiography there is a prevailing theory that *karabelas* appeared in Poland thanks to the Ottomans. This theory was first advocated by Żygulski Junior.

Due to a lack of corresponding material sources, nowadays it is hardly possible to determine the original shape of Polish sabers called *karabelas* and from whence they originated. The first time historical sources mention this term can be traced back to the 15th century. But one should note that Turkish examples flooded the country only in the second period of 'real orientalisation'<sup>51</sup> of Poland. It is possible that the subject matter was about a certain costume, luxuriously decorated weapons or one of the variations of battle knives. Therefore, the first stylizations of a bird head, which became known in Rzeczpospolita at the end of the 15th century, obviously are connected closely with popular and naturalistic forms of hilts of short- and long-bladed weapons.<sup>52</sup>

From the beginning of the 16th century, the sabers of hawk with blades of European origin started to spread in Rzeczpospolita. According to the morphology, they are typical Hungarian examples (of Polish-Hungarian type II in Kwaśniewicz's classification) of that period<sup>53</sup> with the only one difference: instead of an almond-shaped pommel on them the cast hawk head is mounted (*Pict. 8*). In the 17th century the popularity of hawk pommel sabers was constantly growing being connected already as a symbol of status and state—one can see them even in the portraits of the king's family—Jan Kazimir and Jan III Sobieski. At that time, first Turkish *karabelas* gained popularity, and then those of the local production.

At present day, classical *karabelas* of Rzeczpospolita are well researched and systematized. The first researcher who suggested a detailed, scientifically grounded classification already 30 years ago was Żygulski. It is still being used practically without any changes. Researchers single out three groups of the oldest foreign *karabelas* and five groups of the Polish ones, putting them in a chronological order.<sup>54</sup> Coming back to the problems of formal typology, one should note that the attempts of historical analysis of 'hawk' weapons reveal the difficulty of research of this type as this is a truly international shape which requires a simultaneous attention to many geographically and culturally distinct areas and cultural spheres. There arises another purely typological classification, which is to a certain extent an artificial problem, namely to search a single criterion for distinguishing 'bird's hilt' into *karabelas* and the sabers of hawk without any hesitation. Therefore, while analyzing the illustrations of the hilt of the Shah Abbas' weapon (*Pict. 6-G*), a logical question arises: shall we review it as the oldest well-known depiction of the *karabela* or still to determine it as the saber of hawk? Where, in fact, is the borderline of stylization to strictly divide the above-mentioned? When does this division become necessary on general types? It is quite obvious, that answers to these questions are determined by scientific expediency. The problem can be solved successfully by traditional typological analysis

<sup>50</sup> Chodyński (2000: fig. 38).

<sup>51</sup> Dziewulski (2007).

<sup>52</sup> Żygulski (1978: 23).

<sup>53</sup> The above-mentioned fact gave Kwaśniewicz grounds to classify the saber of hawk to the group of Polish-Hungarian sabres, having separated them into a separate subtype. See Квасневич (2006: 28).

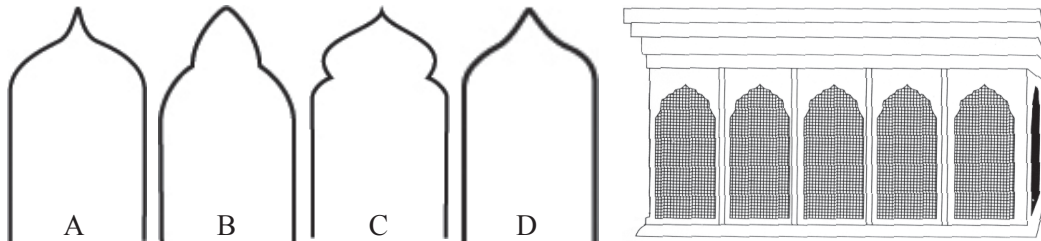
<sup>54</sup> See Żygulski (1978: 28-31).

«splitting» of geographical limits and chronological limits of the study based on a number of research tasks. For instance, while studying the evolution of the pommel of Persian *karabelas* of the 17th-18th centuries and taking into account the current research in this field, it makes sense to establish their forms by bringing them in order from «birds head» to «architectural shape». For Turkish weapons the naturalistic depiction of a hawk head is rather seldom, also the Turkish *karabelas* can hardly be divided according to these criteria. At the same time, by studying the *karabelas* of Poland, it is not only possible, but seems obviously desirable to divide two separate types — extremely popular among Szlachta the sabers of hawk with hilts of local origin, where the head of the hawk reminds of the state symbolism, and *karabelas* – foreign and Polish sabers with stylized pommels.

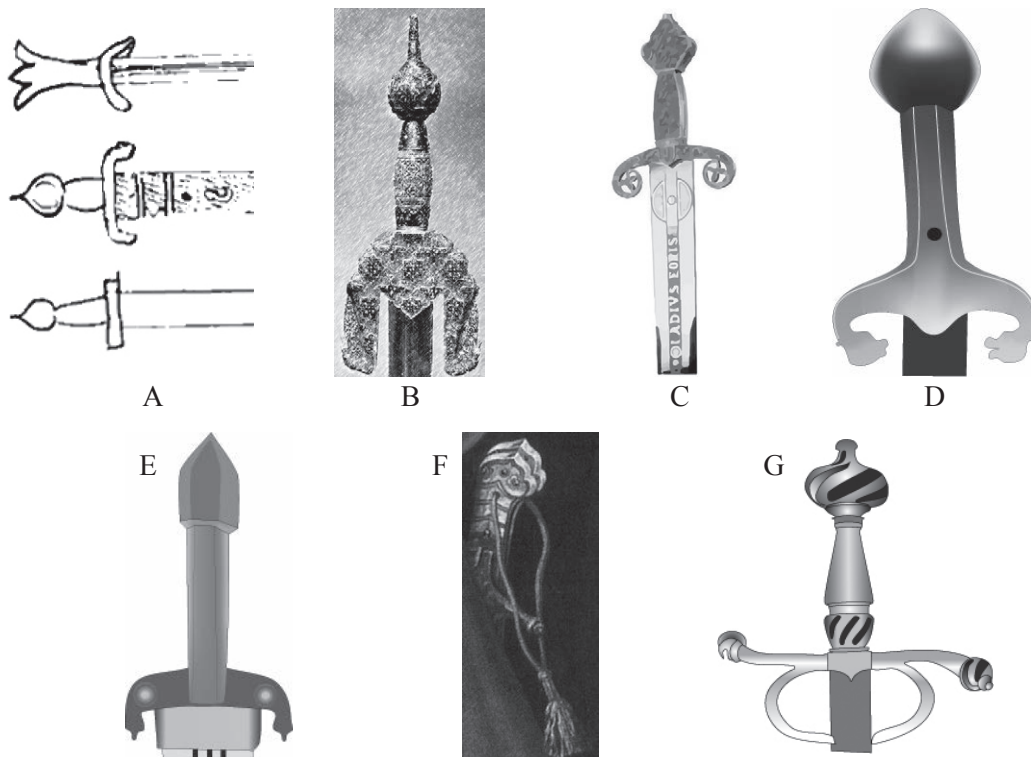
#### 4. CONCLUSION

Having reviewed the appearance of the saber of hawk and *karabela*, we can conclude that at the current stage of development of historical science, it is hardly possible to find a single center of origin for the `hawk` pommel (using the terminology of Żygulski). Besides that, such a search, in our opinion, is not scientifically justified, since it helps little to single out the development of these types of sabers in regions using above-mentioned weapons. We consider a cross-cultural character with its universality of the East and the West as the main feature of a *karabela* hilted sword or saber.

## EXPLANATIONS OF PICTURES

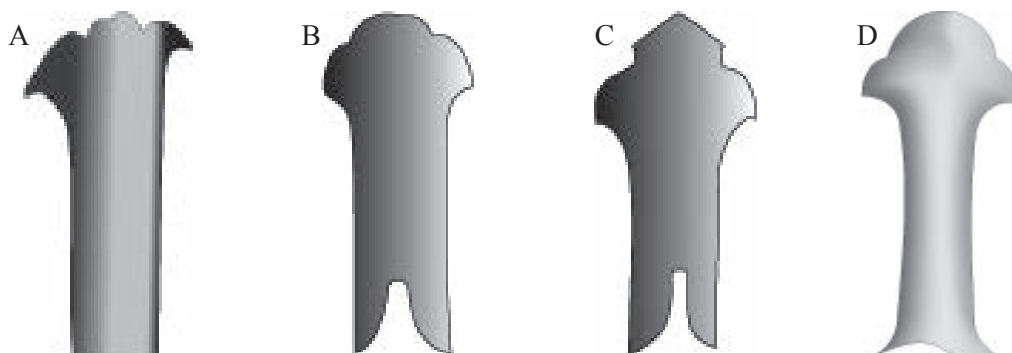


*Pict. 1.* Forms of architectural constructions that could be considered as source of characteristic pommel of *karabelas* of the Early Modern Times: A) arch with reversed curve at point; B) pointed trefoil arch; C) torch-shaped arch in Eastern style (with reversed curve at the point); D) vault of doors of shrine of Imam Hossein in Karbala, Iraq (Khorasani, 2006: 189)



*Pict. 2.* Pommels with shapes of onion dome and shamrock: A) on Byzantine swords of the 16th century (images from the manuscript of J. Scyltizer (b. 1040 – d. 1101) in National Library of Madrid [Bruhn de Hoffmeyer A. *Military Equipment...*, fig. 16]; B) on the Boabdil's sword. Drawings from photo from National Museum of Prado, Madrid, Spain; C) on a copy of a sword of King Ferdinand III (18th century) from the armory of Royal Palace Museum (Madrid, Spain); D) on the Mameluk sword of the 15th century in the collection of Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul, Turkey; E) on Omani *kattaras* 17th-18th centuries in the collection of British Museum, London, GB; F) on the portrait of Samuel Kalnoki, vice-chancellor of Transilvania (1703) in the collection of the National Museum of Hungary, Budapest; G) On the Italian sword of second half of the 16th century in the collection of Dresden Historical Museum, Germany.

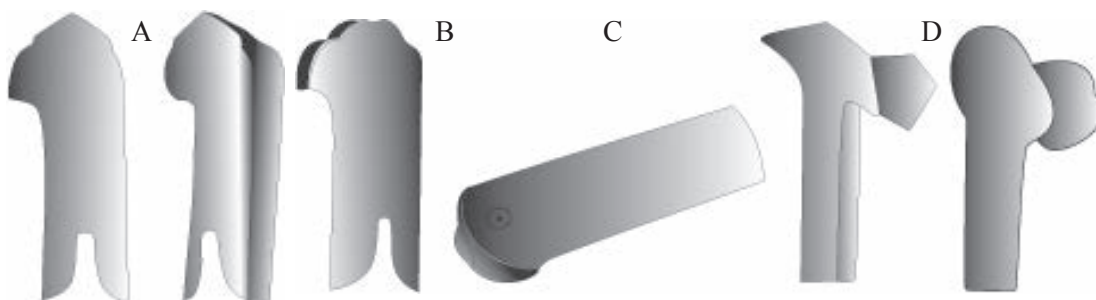




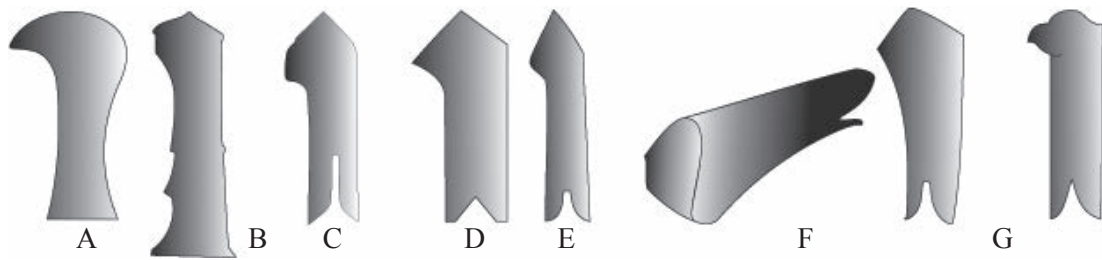
*Pict. 3.* Examples of “two-sided” *karabela* pommels: A) on German battle knife of the middle of the 15th century; B)-C) on Ottoman pallasches of 17-18 centuries; D) on a Persian straight sword of the 18th century.



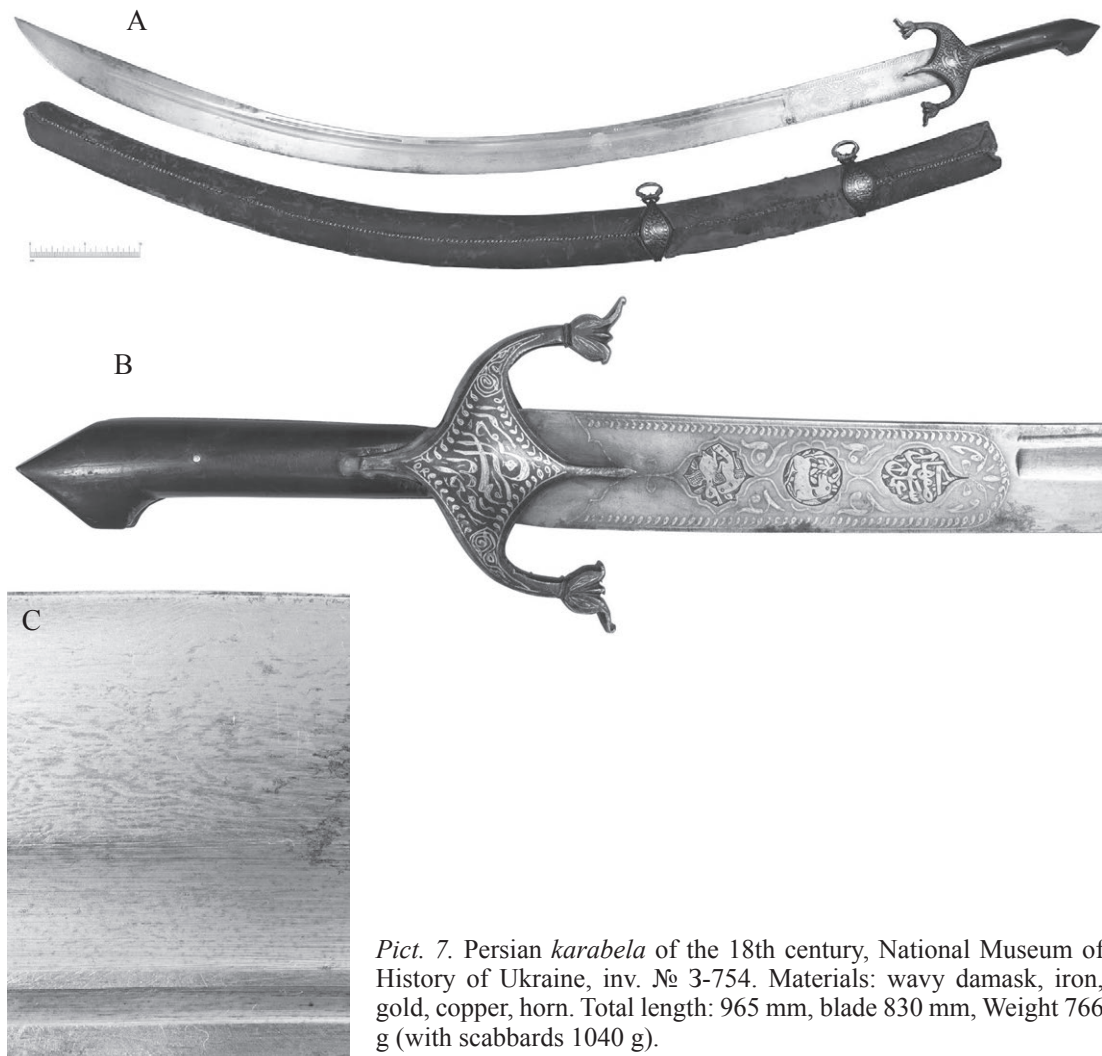
*Pict. 4.* Hilt of *karabela* of Ottoman Sultan Selim I. Palace-Museum Topkapi, Istanbul, Turkey, inv. № 1/94 (according to another sources, inv. № 1/311 [Yucel, 2001:167]).



*Pict. 5.* A) Grip with a pommel of an Ottoman *karabela* of the 17th century from the collection of the State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia; B) Grip with the pommel of a *karabela* of Ottoman Sultan Selim I. Palace-Museum Topkapi, Istanbul, Turkey (see also pict. 4); C) hilt of a *yatagan* of the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I, Palace Museum Topkapi, Istanbul, Turkey; D) Ottoman *yatagan* hilts of the 18th century from the collection of the State Historical Museum, Moscow, Russia.



*Pict. 6.* Grips with pommels of Persian long-bladed weapons; A)-B) From the period of the late Sassanid empire (6th-8th centuries), National Museum of Iran, Tehran; C) *karabela* of the period of Shah Safi Safavid (dates of rule: 1629-1642 C.E.), Military Museum of Iran, Tehran; D) image from the portrait of Shah Safi Safavid, 1633, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia; E) *karabela* from period of Nader-shah Afsharid (date of rule: 1737-1747 C.E.), Museum Nadari, Mashad, Iran; F) *karabela* of Zand period (1750-1794 C.E.), Military Museum of Iran, Tehran; G) from the portrait of Shah Abbas I by Bihzad, British Museum, London, UK.



*Pict. 7.* Persian *karabela* of the 18th century, National Museum of History of Ukraine, inv. № 3-754. Materials: wavy damask, iron, gold, copper, horn. Total length: 965 mm, blade 830 mm, Weight 766 g (with scabbards 1040 g).



Pict. 8. Early saber of hawk, Poland, blade – Western Europe, second half of XVI c. Collection of Museum of Polish Army, inv. № 33573. Length; overall 925 mm, blade 780 mm, weight 1130 g [Nadolski A. *Polska broń...*, p. 109, ryc. 60; Żygulski Z. Jun. *Stara broń w polskich zbiorach*, Gdańsk, Warszawa 1984., p. 44–45; Żygulski Z. Jun. *Karabela i szabla orla...* ill. 12.]

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