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BYZANTINE WEAPONRY AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT

IN THE HOMILIES OF ST GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS (PARIS, GR. 510)

Abstract: The author discusses illustrations presenting weaponry and military equipment in the famous manuscript of „The Homilies of St Gregory of Nazianzus” (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Gr. 510), completed in Constantinople in 879-882. Shields are usually of round or oval shapes. Basically, they are painted in red and much more rarely in blue. They are outlined by golden or blue stripes. Their decoration is difficult to determine but some geometric forms and simple wavy lines or vine branches can be seen. Shields of infantry soldiers are larger, with a diameter of about 1.00 m, while these of cavalry are smaller – about 0.50 m. With regard to swords, the author concludes that in some miniatures in the *Homilies* there are close parallels to already established type of Byzantine swords named „Garabonc Type” (five examples, dated to the 2nd half of the 9th c.). As regards images of stirrups in the *Homilies*, the author assumes that stirrups of a triangular shape – so-called Magyar stirrups, were familiar to masters of Byzantine miniatures. Additionally, arms and military equipment depicted in the *Homilies* offer support in determining some finds of weaponry which have been discovered either during regular excavations or incidentally.

Keywords: *Homilies* of St Gregory of Nazianzus, Byzantine manuscripts, Byzantine weaponry and military equipment, shields, stirrups

The famous manuscript of „The Homilies of St Gregory of Nazianzus” („Homilies of Gregory the Theologian” = Paris, Gr. 510) was completed in Constantinople in 879-882. The manuscript consists of 465 folios, with forty six full-page illustrations (miniatures), thus showing a total of over two hundred scenes. There are many studies of this manuscript. As Leslie Brubaker points out in the Introduction to her book (*Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*):... *the Paris Homilies has been cited more often than any other Byzantine manuscript (and probably more often than any Byzantine monument except Hagia Sophia)*³.

Among thousands of pages of discussion on the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus, only a few authors paid attention to characteristics of weapons and armour depicted there. This observation applies in fact not only to the *Homilies* but to most research on Byzantine art. Attention of art historians is usually focused on the modelling of the figures shown and their postures, clothing, landscape,

architecture and so on. The analysis is mostly devoted to features that allow the researchers to compare different objects and thus define their chronology.

Generally speaking, while looking at scenes or figures of Byzantine art, authors – in pursuit of their specific tasks – are content to note with regard to arms and armour that there is: *a red shield with gold border; behind the emperor there are two guards with swords; sword in the hands of the angel is blue in color; blue sword in hand*; and so on. In practical terms, I must underline that no weapons and armour in Byzantine manuscripts were subject to any detailed analysis.

The new electronic reality

Although there was enough archaeological material available, in the past it was quite difficult to compare it with similar artefacts depicted in Byzantine art of the discussed period: wall paintings, mosaics, sculptures, manuscripts, etc. This was because the access to most of these works of art was almost impossible. For instance, until the World War II a good part of the Byzantine manuscripts was known only to a small group of scholars (mostly art historians) and available publications were provided with black and white photos, often of rather poor quality. It was only within the last

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³ Brubaker 1999, 1.

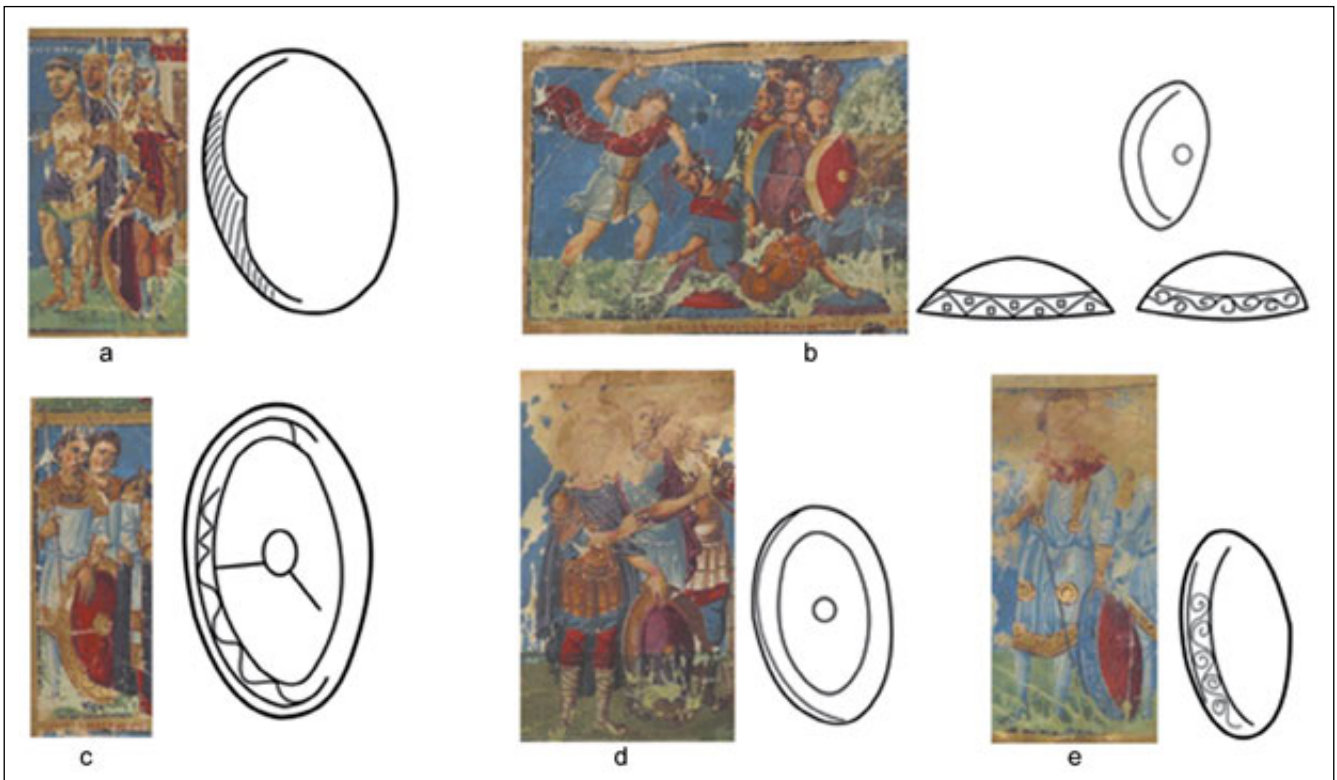


Fig. 1. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: a – healing of the centurion's servant (170r); b – scene from the life of Samson (347v); c – scene from the life of Julian the Apostate (374v); d – fall of Jericho (424v); e – scene from the lives of Constantine and Helena (440r).

decade that a number of Byzantine manuscripts became accessible, due to highly advanced digital technologies. For example, the *Homilies* of St Gregory of Nazianzus were made available on-line on 21 October 2006 and since then the manuscript has been accessible to everyone interested in it.

The *Homilies* in specialist research

It was only recently that in a few studies some attention has been paid to weapons and military equipment depicted in the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus.

In his book „Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints. Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261)” Piotr Ł. Grotowski paid attention to all scenes showing weapons and military equipment in the *Homilies*. He noted: *As with other items of military equipment, when analysing depictions of the sword in Byzantine art problems are raised by the lack of comparative archaeological material*².

In his paper devoted to the „East-Roman Helmets from the 9th to the 12th Centuries” Raffaele D'Amato (who is very well informed on Byzantine art) also gave a lot of examples from the *Homilies*. However, many of these examples were rather freely interpreted³.

Recently, thanks to the information exchanged with the author of the present paper, two articles on medieval

swords were published by Gennady Baranov. This scholar also made use of analogies offered by works of art⁴.

I would like to note again that already 30 years ago T. G. Kolias suggested that: *...you must approach with extreme caution information about weaponry in artistic images*⁵.

Weaponry and military equipment are depicted in twelve miniatures in the *Homilies* (30v; 137r; 170r; 215v; 226v; 239r; 264v; 332v; 374v; 409v; 424v; 440r), some of them with two scenes. Most of them represent shields and swords, while some other – helmets, bows, axes, etc. In two miniatures (409v; 440r) stirrups, saddles and other elements of equestrian equipment can be seen.

Images of weapons and military equipment depicted in some miniatures are not very well preserved (e.g., folio 30v and others), which does not allow for their detailed analysis. Many other images merely offer very simplified information – for example, spears are usually shown as long straight lines with no other details.

Shields

The shields are depicted in seven miniatures (170r; 264v; 347v; 374v; 424v; 409v; 440r: Figs 1-2). They are usually round or oval. Basically, they are painted in red and much more rarely in blue. They are outlined by a golden or

² Grotowski 2010.

³ D'Amato 2015.

⁴ Baranov 2015, 87-105; Baranov 2017, 171-177.

⁵ Kolias 1988, 33.



Fig. 2. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: a – crossing of the Red Sea (264v); b – scene from the life of Julian the Apostate (409v).

blue stripe. Their decoration is difficult to determine, but in some cases it is possible to discern geometric forms, simple wavy lines or vine branches.

Shields of infantry soldiers (Fig. 1) are larger, with a diameter of about 1.00 m, while these of cavalry (Fig. 2) are smaller – about 0.50 m.

Swords

Swords of „Garabonc Type” and their analogies in the *Homilies*

One of already established types of Byzantine swords, named by me „Garabonc Type”⁶, is based on a very well dated sword (Fig. 3), found in Grave 55 in the Late Avar necropolis in Garabonc in Hungary. The excavator B. M. Szöke dated the necropolis to the second half of 9th century and stated that the sword was a Byzantine one⁷.

I enlarged the group and proposed a typology by adding four other similar swords (Fig. 4-5), which are also well dated: three of them were discovered in Ukraine (unknown sites near Kharkov, Vinitsa and Cherkassy)⁸ and one from Iran (a find from an unknown site, dated to the Samanid Dynasty period, i. e., 8th-9th centuries). This sword has been recently published in an exhibition catalogue⁹.

All five swords of „Garabonc Type” have analogies in examples depicted in the *Homilies*. Swords which are similar to the „Garabonc Type” are shown in four folios:

- 137r (Fig. 6): in the scene of „Massacre of the innocents”¹⁰;
- 215v (Fig. 7): in the scene of „Solomon’s judgement”¹¹;
- 226v (Fig. 8): in the scene of „Joshua (= Jesús Navín) meets the angel”¹²;
- 332v (Fig. 9): in the scene of „Life of Cyprian”¹³.

In two scenes (Fig. 6-7) of the miniatures there was depicted a sword-guard identical to the one discovered in Cherkassy (Ukraine). Swords in another two scenes (Fig. 8-9) are generally similar to „Garabonc Type” swords. In some cases, there is even a perfect match between the swords from the miniatures and the discussed type. It is also important to note that this manuscript is dated to ca. 880, which is approximately the date of the Grave 55 with the sword inside from the Garabonc necropolis.

There is no doubt that this sword type may definitely be determined as Byzantine. This has also been proved by some other works of art, although dated to a later period (9th-10th centuries). These are: the „Menologion” of Basil II (979-989) and some wall paintings of this period.

Other swords in the *Homilies*

Some other types of swords are also depicted in the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus. For example, they can be seen in: folio 239r (Fig. 10), in the scene of „Gregory and Emperor Theodosios”¹⁴ and in folio 440r (Fig. 11) in one of the scenes from the „Lives of Constantine and

⁶ Yotov 2011, 116-117.

⁷ Szöke 1992, 92-96, Tab. 18; 20: 63; Szöke 1994, 251-317; *Catalogue* 2010, 293.

⁸ Baranov 2015, 87-105; Baranov 2017, 171-177.

⁹ *Catalogue* 2008, 37, cat. No. 8.

¹⁰ Brubaker 1999, 62.

¹¹ Brubaker 1999, 356.

¹² Brubaker 1999, 194.

¹³ Brubaker 1999, 141.

¹⁴ Brubaker 1999, 132-134.

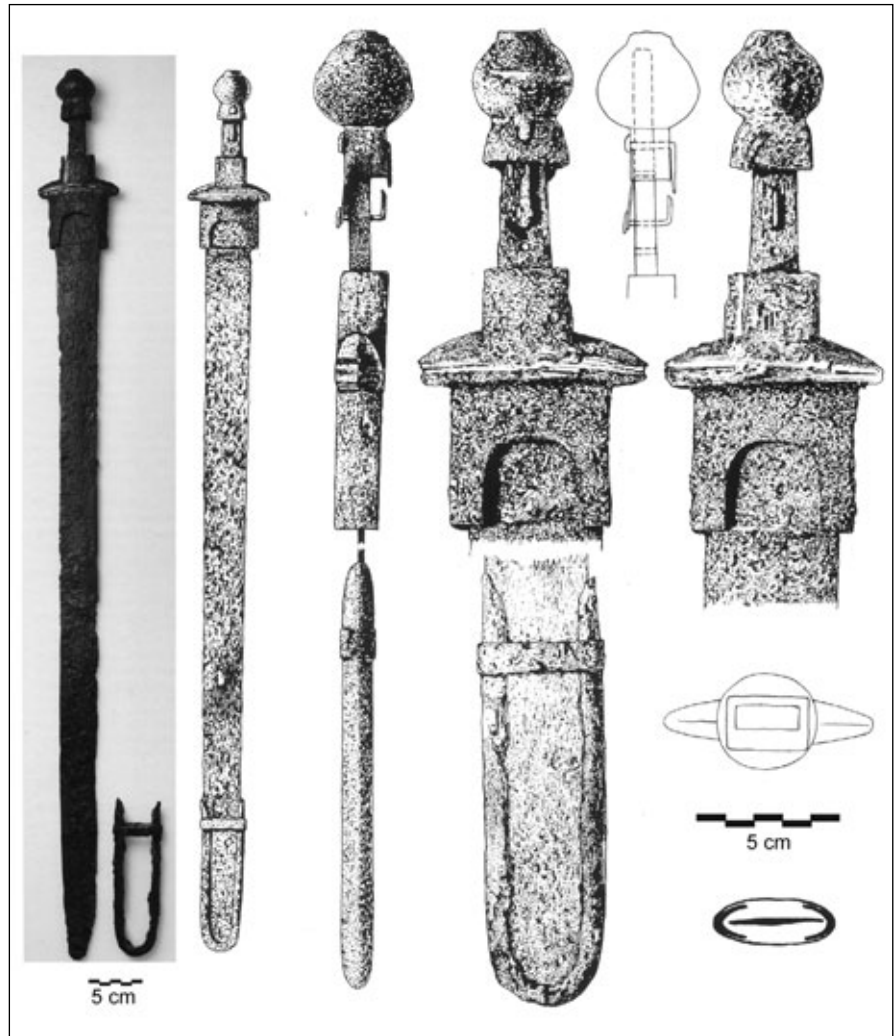


Fig. 3. Sword found in Grave 55, 2nd half of the 9th c. Late Avar necropolis in Garabonc, Hungary.



Fig. 4. Other „Garabonc Type” swords: a – near Kharkov, Ukraine; b – near Vinitsa, Ukraine; c – near Cherkassy, Ukraine; d – Iran.

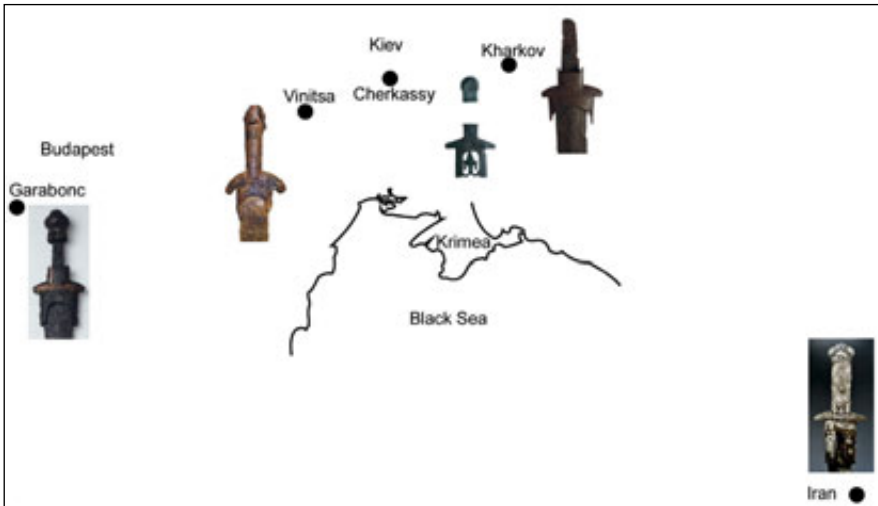


Fig. 5. Find places of Byzantine swords of „Garabonc Type” (2nd half of the 9th c.).



Fig. 6. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: 137r – scene of „Massacre of the innocents”.

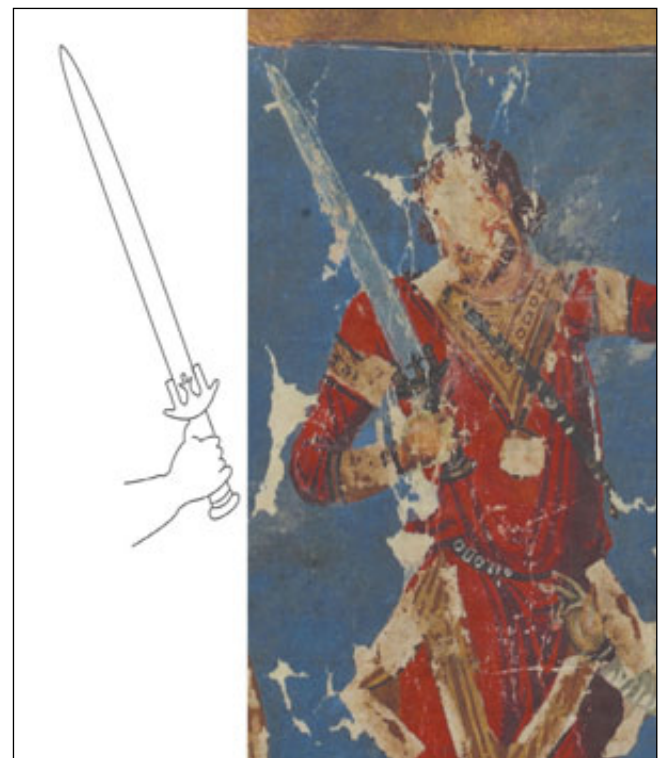


Fig. 7. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: 215v – scene of „Solomon’s judgement”.

Helena¹⁵. For the time being, I have no answer to the question whether painters of these scenes had in view contemporary (9th century) original swords, or they followed prototypes depicted in earlier manuscripts, sculpture, etc.

Stirrups

The stirrups are triangular – they are presented in three scenes in two folia (Fig. 12): „The Life of Julian the Apostate” (f. 409v; Fig. 12: a-b)¹⁶ and „The Lives of Constantine and Helena” (f. 440r; Fig 12: c)¹⁷.

¹⁵ Brubaker 1999, 163-169.

¹⁶ Brubaker 1999, 232-235.

¹⁷ Brubaker 1999, 163-169.

Triangular stirrups

When M. Schulze-Dörrlamm identified one group of stirrups (Fig. 13) of triangular shape as „birnenförmige” (i. e.,- pear-shaped; practically a triangle with oval bows), she noted that *it is impossible to say for sure, but we can assume that they are of Scandinavian, Khazar, or possibly Byzantine origin*¹⁸.

In one of my previous papers I commented on and redated a stirrup hoard (Fig. 14) from the fortress of Strejevo (near Bitola, modern Republic of Macedonia). All 18 stirrups have such triangular shapes. A correct chronology of this

¹⁸ Schulze-Dörrlamm 1988, 422-423, Fig. 47, Liste 23.



Fig. 8. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: 226v
– scene of „Joshua (=Jesús Navín) meets the angel”.

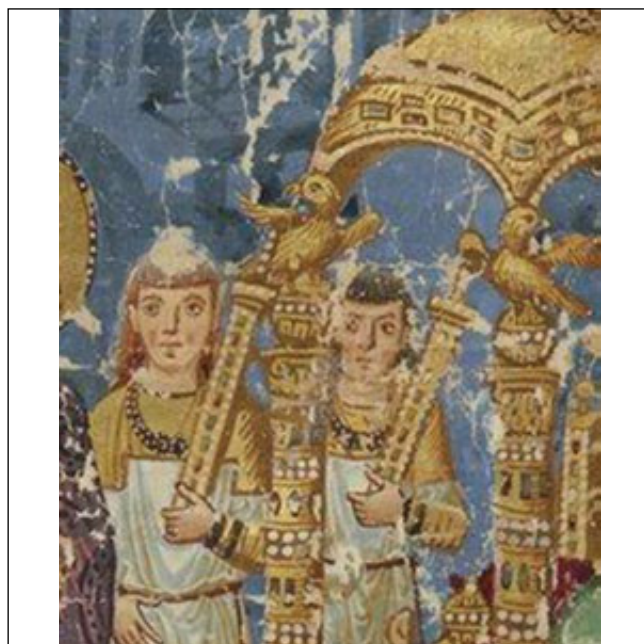


Fig. 10. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: 239r
– Gregory and Emperor Theodosios.

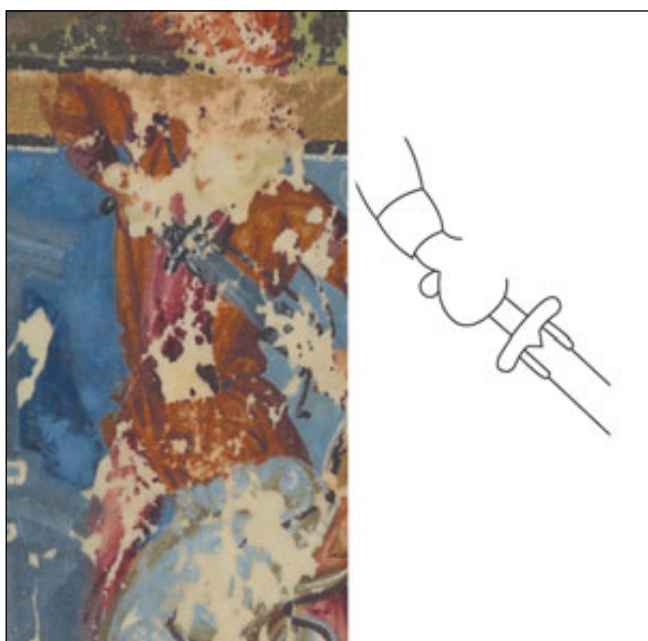


Fig. 9. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: 332v – scene of „Life of Cyprian”.

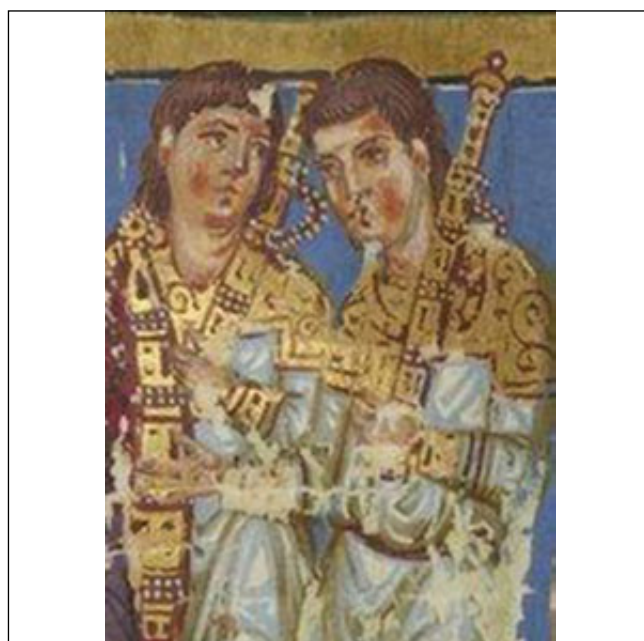


Fig. 11. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: 440r
– scene of the lives of Constantine and Helena.

assemblage is the 2nd half of the 10th – the beginning of the 11th century¹⁹.

Comparing images of stirrups in folio 409 and folio 440 of the *Homilies*, it can be assumed that the triangular shape of stirrups was familiar to masters of Byzantine miniatures.

This does not mean that stirrups of triangular shape are of Byzantine origin. As a matter of fact, they can be defined

as a Hungarian type. However, they were rather common and familiar in the Byzantine Empire and beyond.

For instance, in *The Taktika* of Leo VI, as regards the description of arms and military equipment of the late 9th - early 10th centuries, the emperor often mentioned the „Turks” (this is how he called the Hungarians/ Magyars as bearers of a specific war culture) with regard to description of arms and military equipment. He stated: ... *because they are horsemen and they do not get off their horses: for them it is difficult even to stay at their feet, because since their childhood they have learned to ride, and then... And when at the beginning*

¹⁹ Yotov 2007, 171-180.

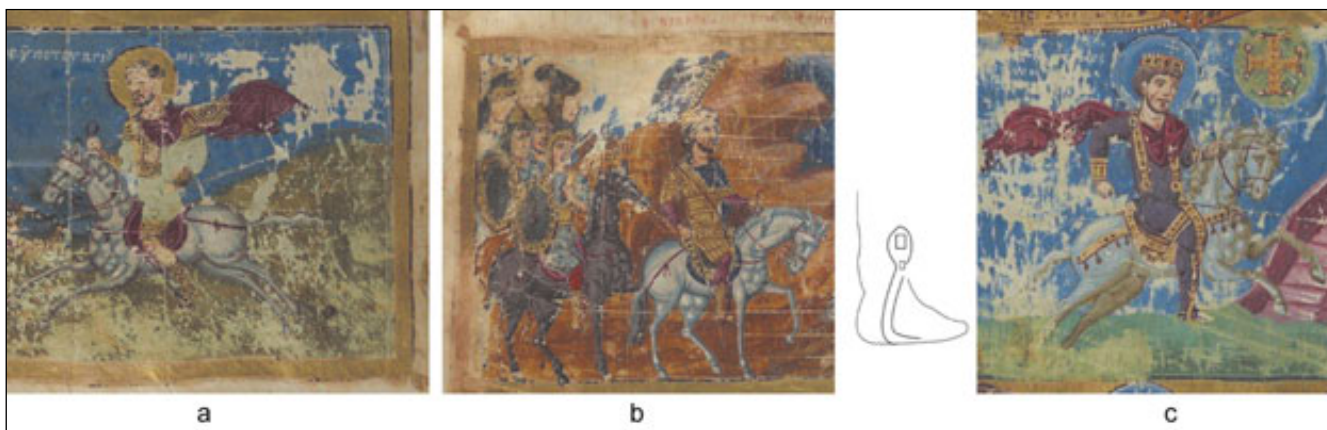


Fig. 12. *Homilies* Paris, Gr. 510: a-b – scenes from the life of Julian the Apostate (409v); c – scene of the lives of Constantine and Helena (440r).

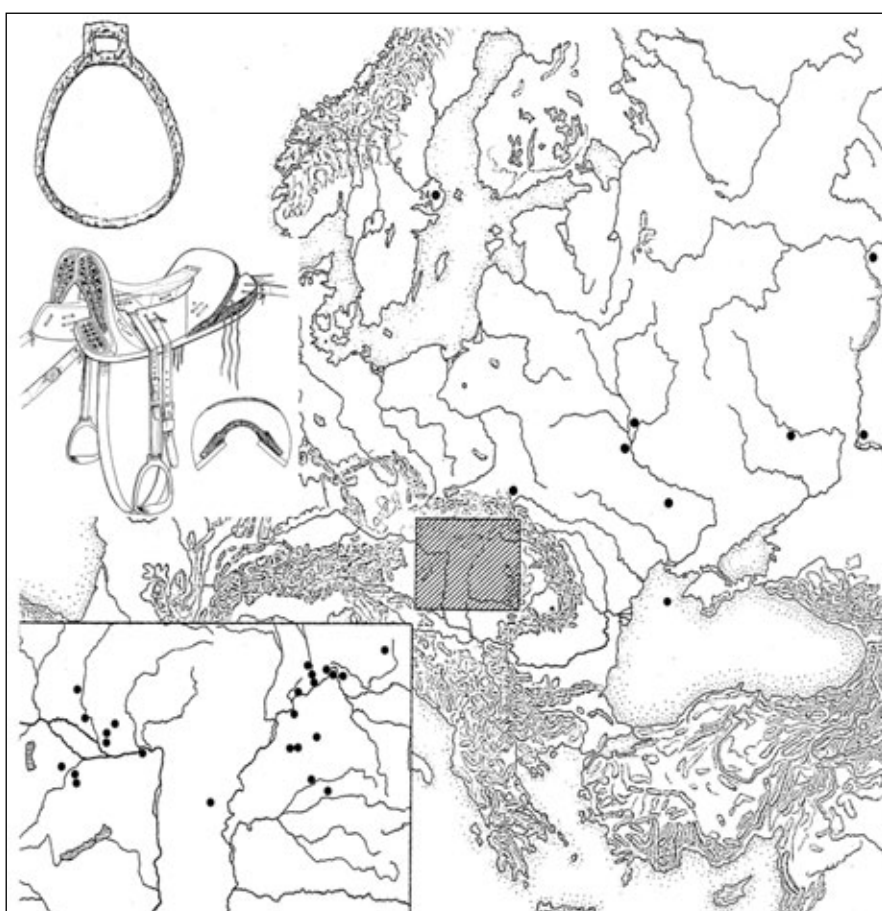


Fig. 13. Map of distribution of so-called Hungarian (Byzantine) stirrups, 10th-11th c. in Europe. After M. Schulze-Dörrlamm 1988.

*some of them came as refugees to us and were welcomed favourably, their example was followed by many more*²⁰.

Such migrants are mentioned in some historical sources as „Vardariotes-Turks”. In the 2nd half of 10th c. they settled in the region around the River Vardar (in modern Republic of Macedonia), from which their name originated. There, they adopted the Christian religion and were used by the Byzantines as soldiers. At the beginning of 11th c. the „Turks/ Magyars vardariotes” were allies to the Byzantine

Empire during the wars of Basil II against the Bulgarians²¹. One detachment of „Turks from Okhrid” under the command of Emperor Alexios Komnenos (1081–1118) took part in the battle near Dyrrachium in 1081²². Therefore, we must admit that the so-called „Hungarian” stirrups were familiar enough to the Byzantines.

There is another example that confirms this opinion. In 2013 a pair of stirrups (Fig. 15) with same triangular

²⁰ *Tactica* Leo XVIII, 63; 67.

²¹ Dimitrov 1998, 82-83.

²² Anna Komnina 1996, 145, footnote 435.

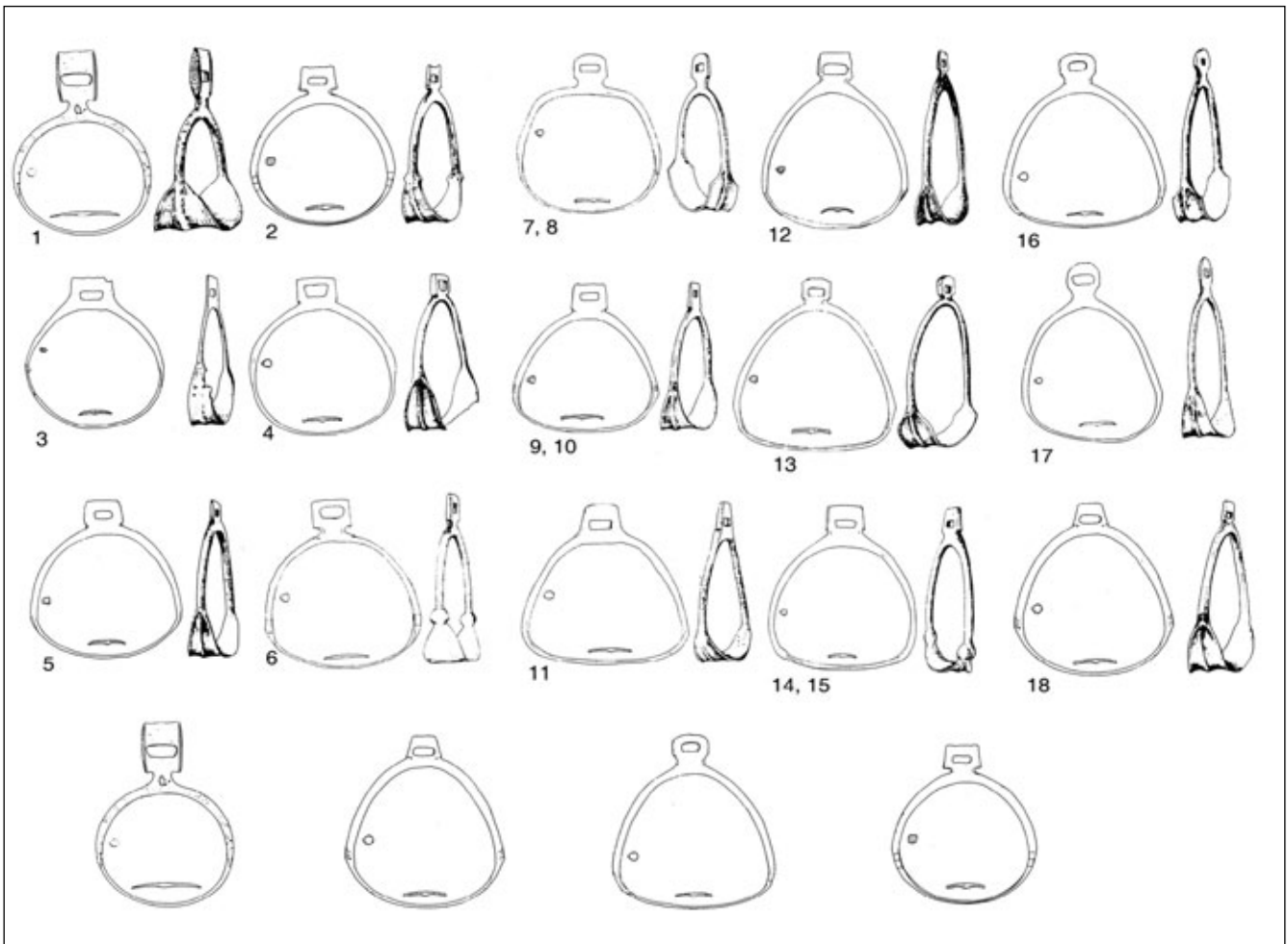


Fig. 14. Strejevo fortress, near Bitola, modern Republic of Macedonia – hoard of stirrups (2nd half of the 10th – beginning of the 11th c.).



Fig. 15. Pair of stirrups of triangular shape. Found in a Magyar necropolis, dated to the 2nd half of the 10th c. The stirrups are ornamented with depictions of fish and stirrups. After Langó and Siklósi 2013.

shape was published. It was found in a Magyar necropolis in Hungary dated to the second half of the 10th century²³. These stirrups are ornamented with depictions of fish and stirrups (!). In my opinion, this find confirms the hypothesis which I propose here. Of course, we cannot be certain that in this case the fish appeared as a Christian symbol but this is not impossible.

Conclusion

In the opinion of Leslie Brubaker, the *Homilies*: ... it is not in fact a simple manuscript. It is arguably the most complex and internally sophisticated illustrated manuscript ever produced in Byzantium²⁴.

Having this in mind, as well as considering the fact that in Byzantine monuments of art weapons and military equipment are usually depicted in a rather stylised manner, it must be said that their detailed representations in the *Homilies* is an exception to the rule.

Finally, it must be said that arms and military equipment which are depicted in the *Homilies* can be of use in determining finds of weaponry which have been discovered either during regular excavations or incidentally.

Translated by Alexander Minchev

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²³ Langó and Siklósi 2013, 147; Fig. 12.

²⁴ Brubaker 1999, XVII.

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Streszczenie

Bizantyjskie uzbrojenie i wyposażenie wojskowe w „Kazaniach św. Grzegorza z Nazjanzu” (Paris, Gr. 510)

Autor omawia ilustracje przedstawiające uzbrojenie i wyposażenie wojskowe w słynnym rękopisie „Kazania św. Grzegorza z Nazjanzu” (Paris, Gr. 510), powstałym w Konstantynopolu w latach 879-882. Przedstawione w nim tarcze są z reguły okrągłe lub owalne. Są one malowane przeważnie na czerwono, znacznie rzadziej na niebiesko. Otoczone są złotymi lub niebieskimi obwódkami. Trudno jest określić ich dekorację, aczkolwiek można dostrzec pewne formy geometryczne, linie faliste lub gałęzie winorośli. Tarcze żołnierzy piechoty są większe, o średnicy ok. 1 m, podczas gdy tarcze jazdy są mniejsze, o średnicy ok. 0.5 m. W kwestii mieczy, autor uważa, iż na niektórych miniaturach *Kazań* widnieją bliskie analogie do wcześniej wyróżnionego typu mieczy bizantyjskich, określonego jako „Garabonc” (pięć znalezisk, datowanych na drugą połowę IX w.). Odnośnie przedstawień strzemion w *Kazaniach*, autor zakłada, iż akcesoria te o formie trójkątnej, tzw. strzemiona madziarskie, były znane twórcom miniatur bizantyjskich. Ponadto, broń i wyposażenie wojskowe przedstawione w *Kazaniach* stanowią uzupełnienie wiedzy o znaleziskach uzbrojenia ujawnionych archeologicznie.