



Recensiones

Рецензии

УДК 94(4), 355/4; ББК 63.3(4)5+68.35; DOI <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu19.2021.211>

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ABOUT THE ARMAMENT OF THE POLISH KNIGHTS ONCE AGAIN

Between 2016–2018 in Poland, a three-volume work was published by the DiG Publishing House in Warsaw under the collective title «The knight at war, on a journey, and in an apartment»¹, each volume bearing a separate subtitle that tells its content. The author of this trilogy is Jan Szymczak, an historian, medievalist, and retired professor for years associated with the University of Łódź. It is worth noting that after World War II, Łódź became an important center of research on medieval militaries. Archaeologists and historians associated with the University of Łódź and the Polish Academy of Sciences created works that are still basic studies in the field of military studies, especially weapons science. One of these scholars is

¹ Jan Szymczak. Rycerz w hełmie w zbroi i z tarczą: V 3 t. Warszawa: DiG, 2016–2018. T. 1: Rycerz w hełmie w zbroi i z tarczą. 2016. 224 c. ISBN 978-83-7181-953-7; T. 2: Rycerz z bronią zaczepną. 2017. 328 c. ISBN 978-83-7181-954-4; T. 3: Rycerz i jego konie. 2018. 313 c. ISBN 979-10-9562751-7.

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J. Szymczak. Research on this issue has been successfully conducted in Łódź to this day by his students. J. Szymczak devoted a lot of space in his research to the history of medieval Polish military, especially weapons. This is evidenced by his rich scientific achievements; he is the author and co-author of several monographs on this subject. Among them, the most important are books on the production and prices of weapons in the 13th–15th centuries and a monograph on the beginnings of firearms in Poland². He also belonged to the team that prepared the basic work on armaments in medieval Poland. Moreover, J. Szymczak wrote several dozen articles on medieval military issues. The author also dealt with the history of the lands of central Poland, he also took up issues related to the auxiliary sciences of history, mainly palaeography. Undoubtedly, the author of the work «Knight» is therefore a competent scholar, with vast achievements appreciated in the world of Polish researchers of medieval history. This alone makes the trilogy worth paying attention to.

The chronological range of individual volumes covers the period from the second half of the 10th century to the 16th century. As the author himself explains, the lower caesura was determined by the account of Ibrahim ibn Jakub, who, among the observations written during his trip around Europe, also included a handful of information about the state of the Piast prince Mieszko I and his armed forces. This justification does not raise any objections, especially as Mieszko was the ruler who adopted Christianity (in year 966), thus linking his country with the world of Latin culture, which in the long run also influenced the development of the Polish military. Writing about the upper chronological caesura, the author writes that in his work he deals with the period «up to the works of Jan Długosz and his successors from the 16th century, inclusive». Therefore, it is not clearly defined. Only reading will we realize that the final turning point is marked by the reign of King Sigismund II Augustus, the last representative of the Jagiellonian dynasty on the Polish throne (died 1572). It should be noted, however, that the records from the 16th century are rather supplementary to the information on medieval equipment.

The first volume of the series is titled «The Knight Wearing a Helmet, Armor, and With a Shield» and, as the title suggests, is devoted to protective equipment. It consists of introduction, three chapters, and conclusions. The first chapter discusses the helmets used by Polish warriors. The reader will find information about the different types of helmets used in Poland. The design of each is described in detail, the parameters of the preserved items (dimensions, weight) are given, as well as the prices of these weapons. In the case of helmets, the author drew attention to their cultural role — they appear in heraldry, they were a prop used in funeral ceremonies, the names influenced onomastics, etc.

The second chapter contains information on the elements of armor that protects the torso, arms and legs. Various types of torso protection are presented, from those made of leather, through mails, lamellar armor, to plate armors. Their features and structure have been discussed, so we can find information about the thickness of the armor plates or the size of the links in chain mail, we will learn about the advantages and disadvantages of each of them. In addition to information about the war equipment, in this part we will also find a large fragment about tournament armor.

² *Szymczak J.* 1) *Produkcja i koszty uzbrojenia rycerskiego w Polsce XIII–XV w.* Łódź, 1989. S. 337; 2) *Początki broni palnej w Polsce (1383–1533).* Łódź, 2004. S. 424.

The third chapter is devoted to shields. As in the previous chapters, one finds information about different types of shields and details about their construction. The latter, however, are much smaller than in the first two parts of the book. However, more information can be found about the production of shields, in which, as it turns out, the painters decorating them were also involved. The symbolism of the shield has been discussed rather extensively.

In each part, the author also devotes much attention to terminology. Its correct interpretation is essential for understanding historical sources. Related to this issue is the etymology of the names of individual elements of the weapon. In the case of Polish, those were often borrowed from foreign languages: Latin, German, and especially Czech.

The second volume of the series is «The Knight with Offensive Weapons». Its main part consists of six chapters devoted to various types of weapons. The first two are devoted to blade weapon, of which the first one discusses the sword. Among the swords that went down in Polish history, undoubtedly the most valuable is «Szczerbiec» (the Jagged Sword), a ceremonial sword used in the coronations of Polish kings. It is understandable that J. Szymczak devoted a little more attention to it³.

In the later pages of this book, the author discusses estocs and single-edged blade weapon: sabers, dussacks, falchions, and messers. As usual, the terminology of blade weapon has been thoroughly discussed, which is often ambiguous in Polish sources. An interesting fragment is devoted to the symbolism of the sword used during the accolade, and — less known — its breaking during the knight's funeral ceremony. There was also a part devoted to the production of blade weapons. The fact that the differences between the various types of these weapons were not obvious even to people living in the Middle Ages. This is evidenced by the competence disputes between the guilds of artisans for the exclusive right to produce a specific type of weapon. A separate chapter is devoted to daggers, basilards, misericorde. In this part, the author gives examples of the use of this weapon, which was used not only in battle, but also for assassinations.

The fourth chapter deals with the pole arms. J. Szymczak discusses the evolution of this weapon from early-century spears and javelins, through lances used by heavily armed knights, to the more popular at the turn of the Middle Ages and modern times, lighter versions of this weapon, the *sulice*. In this chapter, the author also deals with the pole arms used by townspeople, such as halberds, glaives etc. There was also information on pole arms used in tournament competitions. An interesting fragment concerns the materials from which this weapon was made. J. Szymczak compiled data on various tree species (fir, oak, ash) used in the production of spars, citing data on their fracture resistance. Blunt weapons are the topic of the next chapter. Knights eagerly used axes, and much less used war hammers. The author also writes about plebeians who used axes, clubs and flails.

The last chapter is devoted to ranged weapons. The most space is devoted to bows. Their types, materials used in production, prices were discussed, the mentions in the chronicles were analyzed in detail. Further, the author analyzes information about the crossbow, which has been present in Poland since the mid-13th century. Much space has been devoted to the names

³ Many researchers wrote about «Szczerbiec». There is no article in the literature used by J. Szymczak: *Biborski M., Stepiński J., Żabiński G. Szczerbiec (The Jagged Sword) — The Coronation Sword of the Kings of Poland // Gladius. Estudios sobre armas antiguas, armamento, arte militar y vida cultural en Oriente y Occidente. 2011. Vol. XXXI. P. 93–147.*

of individual elements of this weapon, projectiles, and spanning mechanisms in the sources. There was also information about the manufacturers of crossbows. As noted by the author, at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, this craft fell into decline due to the growing importance of small arms that washed out crossbows.

J. Szymczak titled the third volume «The Knight and his Horse». The reader will find much information about the terms for horses that appear in the sources about them. There are many examples of prices that show their wide range which corresponds to the variety of horses used in the Middle Ages. There are many examples showing the role of the horse in battles, tournaments, but also in the funeral ceremonies of rulers and knights. The author also cites many examples of the speed at which horses traveled, both during wars and long journeys. The second chapter is devoted to the horse tack and riding gear. We find a rich catalog of elements that make up this equipment. There was also information about the producers of horse tack and the prices of their products. An important element of the rider's equipment, which were spurs, is discussed in the third chapter. It includes a typology of spurs and their prices. Another piece of equipment discussed in this volume is the armor for horses. The author has collected references to caparisons, chanfrons, peytrals, etc., but it should be noted that they appear in Polish sources quite rarely⁴. In the last chapter, the author deals with the issue of horse breeding. In Poland it was well developed, and the rulers attached great importance to it. Next there is a description of the treatments that the horses were subjected to in breeding: shoeing, treatment and nutrition.

J. Szymczak intends to continue the series. At the end of the third volume, the author announces that in the next he will deal with a knight on his journey, and he will explain what the preparations for a war expedition looked like, and what and whom he took with him⁵.

The title of the series in question suggests that it is dedicated to a knight's weapons. However, *de facto*, the issues discussed in it are wider. The information contained in the work about weapons used by knights — the elite of the medieval army, but J. Szymczak also devoted much to equipment used by other social groups. The pages of the book contain much information about the weapons used by townspeople, peasants and mercenary soldiers. Although the content of the books does not exactly match the title, the reader should not be disappointed. One will learn even more about the armaments in Poland. In the volumes discussed, one can notice a disproportion in the treatment of the issues raised by the author. In general, the period up to the end of the 15th century has been elaborated on in more detail, information from the 16th century is provided more selectively. In Szymczak's works, we can find many references to ancient culture or medieval European literature, both from the West and the East of the continent. It could not be otherwise, since Poland lay at the junction of Latin and Eastern European cultures, which left a strong mark on military history as well. The author eagerly quotes information from countries neighboring with medieval Poland: Czechia, Hungary and Teutonic Order State. They complement the information taken from Polish sources. The title of the trilogy announces that the author will want to show various aspects of a knight's functioning in war or on a journey. In his works, J. Szymczak shows these issues mainly through the prism of the equipment with which the knights set off on

⁴ Unfortunately, the author did not use the work: Pyhrr S. W., LaRocca D. J., Breiding D. H. *The Armored Horse in Europe, 1480–1620*. New York, 2005. S. 80.

⁵ Szymczak J. *Rycerz i jego koń...* S. 263.

a war expedition. The author, however, does not stop at presenting weapons as a tool used in combat. He shows it many times as an essential element of court and religious ceremonies.

All volumes contain footnotes, and at the end of each there is a bibliography divided into sources (archives and source publications) and literature. The source basis is very varied — written sources dominate, not only of Polish provenance. It must be admitted that the literature used by the author is very rich and it is difficult to indicate Polish-language scientific works that were not taken into account by the author. Iconography and monuments of material culture were also used. The illustrations included in the books are well-chosen and constitute a valuable supplement to the text. One can only regret that they are only black and white, sometimes small, not always of the best quality.

J. Szymczak's books are undoubtedly scholarly in nature, as indicated by footnotes, bibliography and, above all, the richness of their content. Thanks to this, the three volumes that were written by J. Szymczak will be a valuable reading for scientists — archaeologists, military historians, but also philologists and cultural scientists. On the other hand, the author tries to write in an accessible language, entangled in his story with anecdotes, and diversifies it with quotes. As a result, these books should also interest enthusiasts of Polish history and old weapons.

Информация о статье

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Заголовок: About the armament of the Polish knights once again [Еще раз о вооружении польских рыцарей]

Резюме: В 2016–2018 гг. в Польше был издан трехтомный труд «Рыцарь на войне, в путешествии и на квартире». Автор этой трилогии — Ян Шимчак, историк, заслуженный профессор Лодзинского университета. В первых двух томах обсуждается вооружение и снаряжение рыцарей в средневековой Польше с X по XVI в. Первый том автор посвятил защитному оружию, второй — наступательному. Также большое внимание уделяется вопросу терминологии, связанной с оружием. В своей работе Я. Шимчак дает обзор номенклатуры, фигурирующей в источниках, и объяснение происхождения польских названий оружия. В данных книгах много места отведено вопросам, связанным с производством и ценами на оружие. В третьем томе автор делает акцент на лошадях и конном снаряжении, однако на страницах книги мы находим информацию не только об экипировке рыцаря, но и об оружии, используемом горожанами, крестьянами и наемными солдатами. Помимо этого в данном исследовании читателю предоставляется много сведений о польской армии, а также об армиях других стран средневековой Европы. На страницах произведений Я. Шимчака описаны не только параметры оружия и примеры его использования в бою — оно рассматривается и как важный элемент придворных и религиозных церемоний. Несмотря на то, что работа посвящена польскому рыцарству, в ней присутствуют ссылки на древнюю культуру и средневековую европейскую литературу. Работа содержит очень богатую библиографию, включая рукописные и печатные источники, и предлагает большой выбор литературы для изучения данного вопроса.

Ключевые слова: Польша, Средневековье, рыцари, доспехи, оружие, историография

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Title: About the armament of the Polish knights once again

Summary: In the years 2016–2018, a three-volume work «Knight in war, travel and the accomodation» was published in Poland. The author of this trilogy is Jan Szymczak, Professor Emeritus at the University of Lodz (Poland). In the first two volumes, he discussed the armament and equipment of knights in medieval Poland from the 10th to the 16th century. In the first volume, the author deals with defensive weapons, in the second — offensive. The author paid much attention to the issue of terminology related to weapons. He tries to explain the nomenclature that appears in the sources, to explain the origin of the names of weapons that appeared in Polish. In the discussed books, a lot of space is devoted to issues related to the production and prices of weapons. In the third volume, the author also deals with horses and riding gear. However, on the pages of the book we find not only information about the knight's equipment, but also a lot of space is devoted to weapons used by citizens, peasants and mercenary soldiers. The reader will also find in this study a lot of information not only about Polish army, but also about armies of other countries of medieval Europe. On the pages of J. Szymczak's works, we find not only the parameters of weapons and examples of their use in battles, but he also shows them as an important element of court and religious ceremonies. Although the work is dedicated to the Polish knighthood, in it there are references to ancient cultures or medieval European literature. The work contains a very rich bibliography, including handwritten and printed sources, as well as a very large selection of literature.

Keywords: Poland, Middle Ages, knights, armour, weapon, historiography, military history

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