

POLISH ARMS *Side-Arms*

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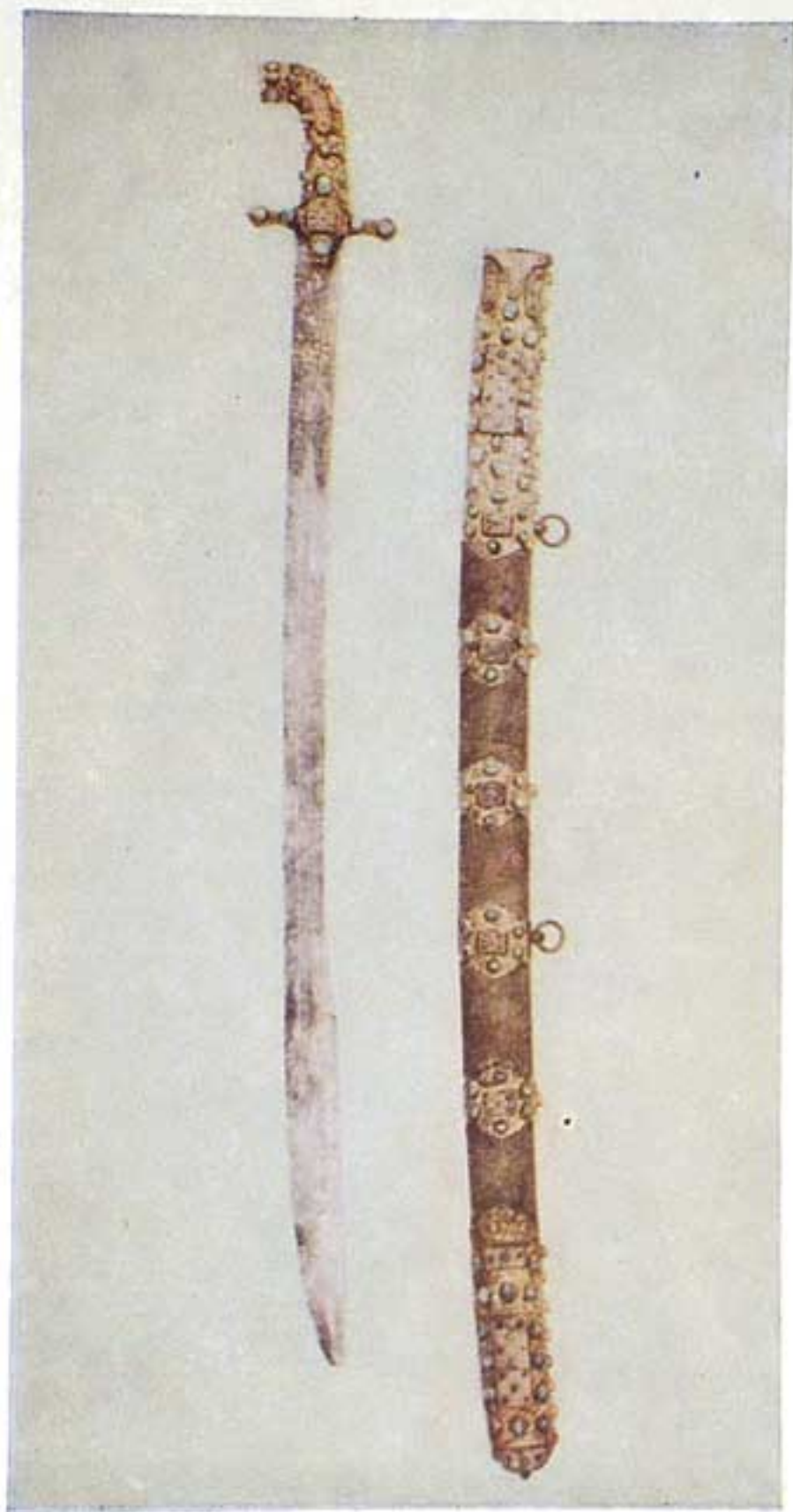
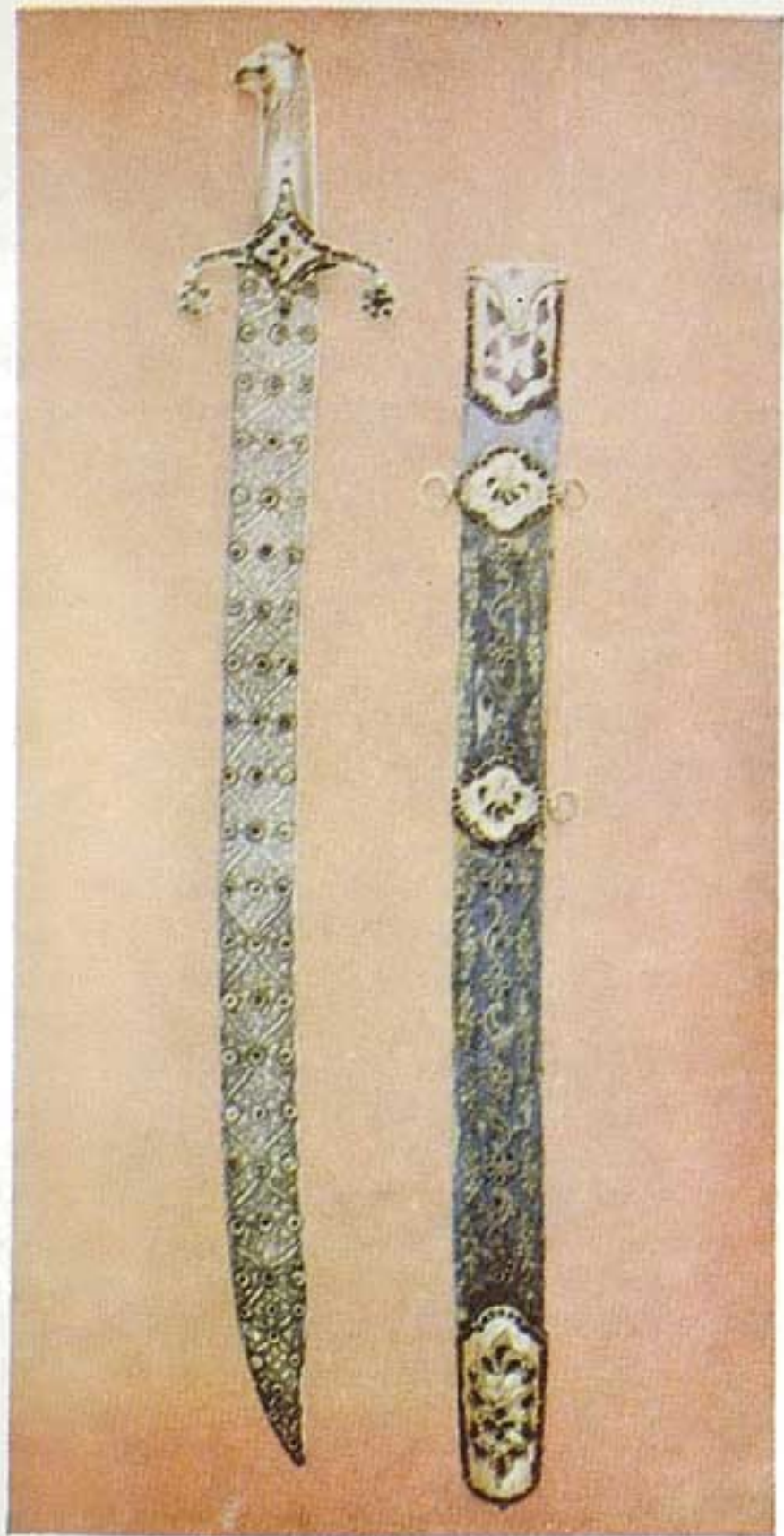
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Kraków • Gdańsk
Zakład Narodowy
imienia Ossolińskich
Wydawnictwo
1974*

*"Show the connoisseur the arms of a people
and he will tell you about its culture"*
(Joseph Lepkowski, 1857)

INTRODUCTION

The state of knowledge of Polish historical arms and armour leaves much to be desired. The relevant literature is scanty. The earlier writings dating from before World War II, sometimes of great value, were more often than not penned by amateur-collectors rather than by expert-museologists and as such fall below the required standards. The more recent works usually deal with selected problems only and do not aspire to embrace the whole vast subject. This unsatisfactory state of things is to a considerable extent due to circumstances quite beyond the control of Polish scholars. The long years that followed the partitions, the policy of the invaders, insurrections and destructive wars—all this had created a climate particularly hostile for collections of arms and armour and for research into this subject. Because of the lack of modern weapons during the struggles for independence many a specimen of ancient arms, instead of lying in the showcases of a museum, served on a battle field or was confiscated. Each successive invader destroyed with particular zeal all things reminiscent of Polish military tradition. Nor was the situation reversed during the Nazi occupation which caused particularly heavy losses both in historical collections and among the few historians of arms and armour who were educated in 1918—1939. It was not until recent years that these losses have been made up for—at least to some extent and with extreme effort.

This situation in Polish science is partly responsible for the fact why we are so little known abroad. This ignorance is nearly absolute. In numerous publications devoted to European arms and armour Poland is usually passed over in silence. Even if more recent books include some mentions of Polish arms, they usually are very brief and as often as not, incorrect. Moreover they seem to suggest that in matters of arms and armour Poland lacked originality, being utterly dependent on foreign models and even foreign production. Such a view, however, would be extremely unjust, since Poland can boast of a fine historic tradition of over a thousand years and of a varied and original culture. As in other countries, arms—the implements of war that served to destroy the enemy and to protect the owner's life—were an important component of culture. Since his own life and that of his nearest are the most precious things for a man,



*"I took Tsars prisoners, I fought at Byczyna,
the free Pole is famous in Sweden and Vienna"¹
(inscription on a Polish sabre of the 17th—18th centuries)*

BETWEEN
EAST
AND WEST.
GREAT
PERIOD
OF POLISH
SIDE-ARMS
16th—18th centuries

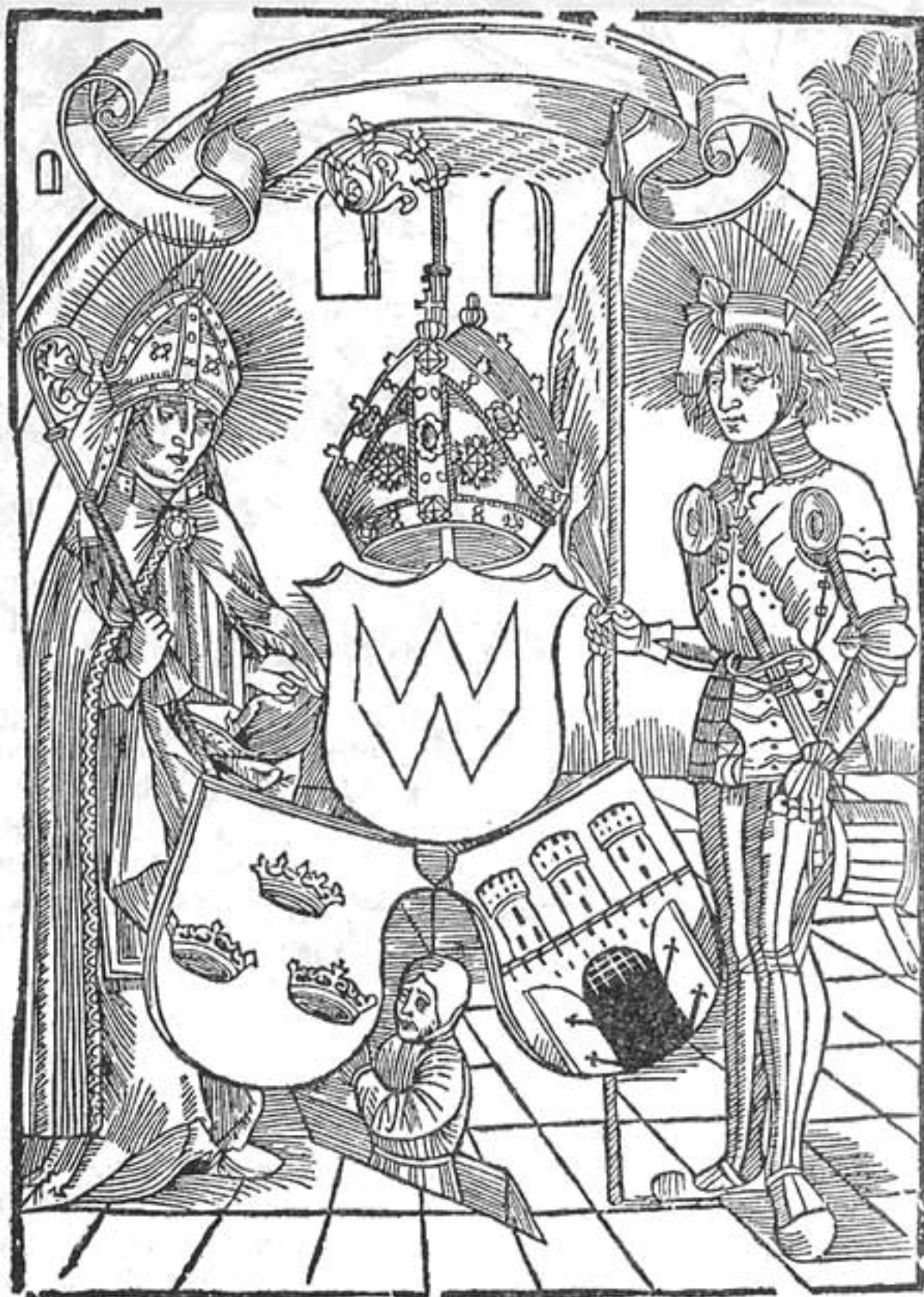
The records of the city of Cracow from 1503 contain a statement concerning the guild of the hilt-makers who complain that their products do not sell well since now "... long knives or sabres are universally used, and swords are unpopular..." This is a good illustration of the changes in Polish armament which took place at the close of the medieval period and which have been described in the foregoing chapter.

The replacement of swords by a one-edged weapon could have taken place unaided by external influences. As a matter of fact, weapons of this type such as cutlasses or falchions were not unknown in Latin Europe of the medieval period, though their position was only secondary to that occupied by the privileged sword. Moreover, the text, quoted above, shows that the people of early Renaissance Cracow were not at all sure whether the real rival of the sword were the long "knives" (i.e. cutlasses) or true sabres derived from the Oriental cultures. Under these circumstances the Polish iconographical sources from the close of the 15th and early 16th century are of particular importance. They show, and quite often at that, weapons whose Oriental character cannot be doubted. This is indicated by the size and curves of the one-edged blades, the asymmetrical hilt bent forward in order to facilitate the movements of the swords-man's hand, the mounts rivetted across the tang, and last but not least, by the shape of the sheath and the way in which it was strapped to the owner's side. The Eastern sabre of this type is shown by numerous late Gothic or early Renaissance paintings and sculptures which either intentionally or accidentally depict the everyday life of the inhabitants of the contemporary Polish towns and villages. Moreover, it occurs in battle scenes at the sides of light cavalrymen who together with the heavy-armed lancers of the traditional Western type were part of the Polish army.

Fig. 34

Fig. 32, 33

How did it happen that by the end of the 15th century the sabre became rooted in Poland which had for so long resisted the impact of the not distant East? Of primary importance was here the neighbourhood of the Hungarians who for a hundred years were subject to the political and cultural influences of the formidable and powerful Turkish empire. It is astonishing that the military



15. St. Florian on a
Cracow wood-engraving
from 1507—1508;
the Saint has at his side
a sword with an S-shaped
cross-guard

17th century and was connected with the long-lasting and finally victorious wars with Turkey. The great victories won over the Turks at the battles of Chocim (1673), Vienna and Parkany (1683) brought into Poland plenty of magnificent loot which left an indelible mark on the palaces of the magnates and the manors of the gentry and even on the richer townsmen's houses, and provided models and stimuli for native production. Not without significance in this respect was the attitude of John Sobieski who, first as the Great Hetman and later King John III, became the hero of the Turkish wars and at the same time the representative of the best characteristic of Sarmatism (today regarded as a rather harmful trend). This excellent commander and outstanding statesman, thoroughly educated, who maintained lively contacts with the France of Louis XIV and founded the magnificent Baroque palace at Wilanów, at the same time supported the Armenian merchants and artisans who settled in Poland and traded in Eastern imports or their imitations, mass produced on the spot. He himself noted and willingly imitated any change that took place in the military fashion of the Turks, Persians, Tartars and even Circassians.

It would be wrong to assume that the Eastern influences on Polish arms and armour were limited to Turkey only. Not without significance here were the models that infiltrated into Poland through the agency of the Tartars and originated on the steppes of Central Asia where in the past the first true sabres of the Eastern type came into being.² Also of considerable importance was the influence exerted by Persia which was linked to Poland by various commercial and diplomatic contacts and in which the achievements of Islam in various fields of technique and art, the production of arms included, were developed to a high pitch. Suffice to mention the specimens of the famous "damask" steel, also called crystalline damask that were predominantly a Persian speciality. It should be added that the natural or crystalline damask differs essentially from the artificial or hammered one which was made by welding a twisted bunch of iron and steel rods of varying degrees of hardness. The hammered damask, which for that matter had excellent technical properties, was long known to European craftsmen. The Eastern crystalline damask, however, cannot be properly imitated even now.

Saying farewell to the East, we shall now look to the West, the characteristics of which, fostered by the long-lasting and durable links of our country with the Latin European culture area, also infiltrated into "Sarmatian" Poland. It

Fig. 46

Fig. 41, 42, III

Fig. IV, 43-45

(Hungary, Saxony, Russia) as well as from their original Oriental homeland, from where they were exported to European markets. Also of Eastern origin is the last in the group of more important varieties of sabre with the open hilt, used in Poland in the period under discussion. These are the so-called "smyczki" or "ordynki", incorrectly called „ormianki". These sabres with a characteristic slim outline and specific details of the mount are linked, *via* the Tartars, to the very old forms typical of the nomads of the vast Eurasian steppe.

The most interesting version of Polish side-arms since the 17th century are sabres with a closed hilt. The evolution of this type of hilt is not quite clear. Its mature form appeared already in the first half of the 17th century, though certain scholars assign it only to the second half and even to the close of this century. Its grip, usually though not always rivetted across, is of wood, covered with leather or shagreen and terminates in a flat, almond-shaped, small metal pommel passing into an elongated mounting of the hilt-back. The cross has langets and a bow bent upwards at a slightly obtuse angle and touching the pommel but usually not joined to it. Perhaps the bow developed from the chain which in the sabres of the Polish-Hungarian type of the 17th century occasionally linked the pommel to the cross. Certain sabres with the closed hilt (rather from the end of the 17th century) have moreover side-rings or the hilt has a basket-like form reminiscent of the Schaviona hilt. The metal parts of the hilt and sheath mounts of the Polish sabres with the closed hilt are usually of steel, occasionally inlaid with silver or brass. Examples with silver-gilt and engraved mounts are only occasional. All sabres of this type were solidly made and had blades of high quality. They were magnificent battle weapons that harmoniously united the elements of the East (the curve of the blade, langets, the bent hilt) with those of the West (bow, thumb-ring). There is no exaggeration in the view that in that period they were the best cutting weapons in Europe and the Near East.

Moreover, these sabres are an exclusively Polish type. Only in Hungary was a similar sabre developed. It often lacked the thumb-ring and its bow issued from the hilt at a right angle rather than an obtuse one, and joined the pommel. The Hungarian sabre with the closed hilt did not spread until the close of the 17th century, but then it immediately gained wide popularity. This was associated with the introduction into the European armies of hussars, light cavalry dressed and armed in the Hungarian fashion.

Fig. 79-80, IX, X, 81-92

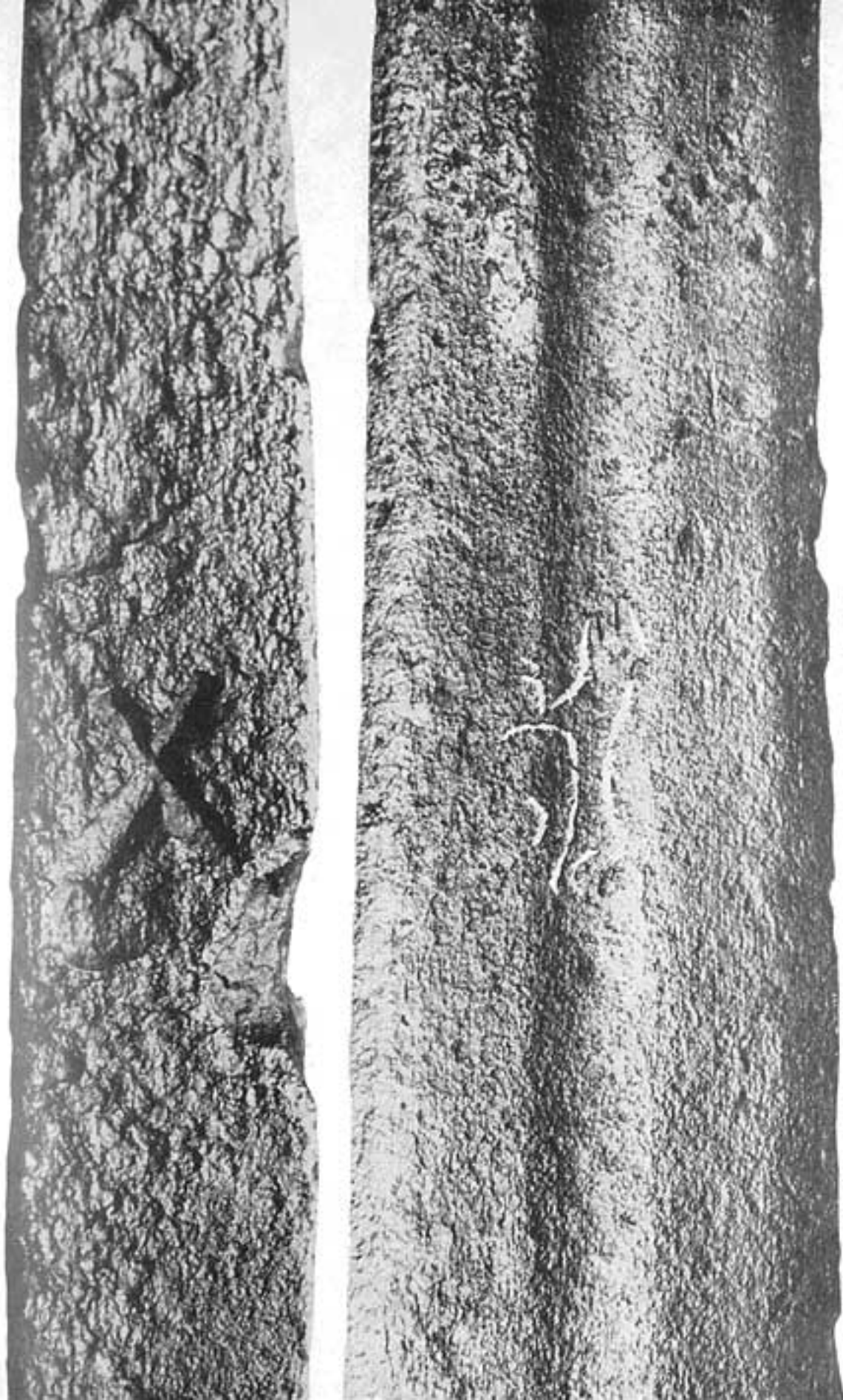


18. More frequent sections of Polish sabre blades of the 16th (1—2), 17th (3—9) and 18th (10—12) centuries; after S. Meyer

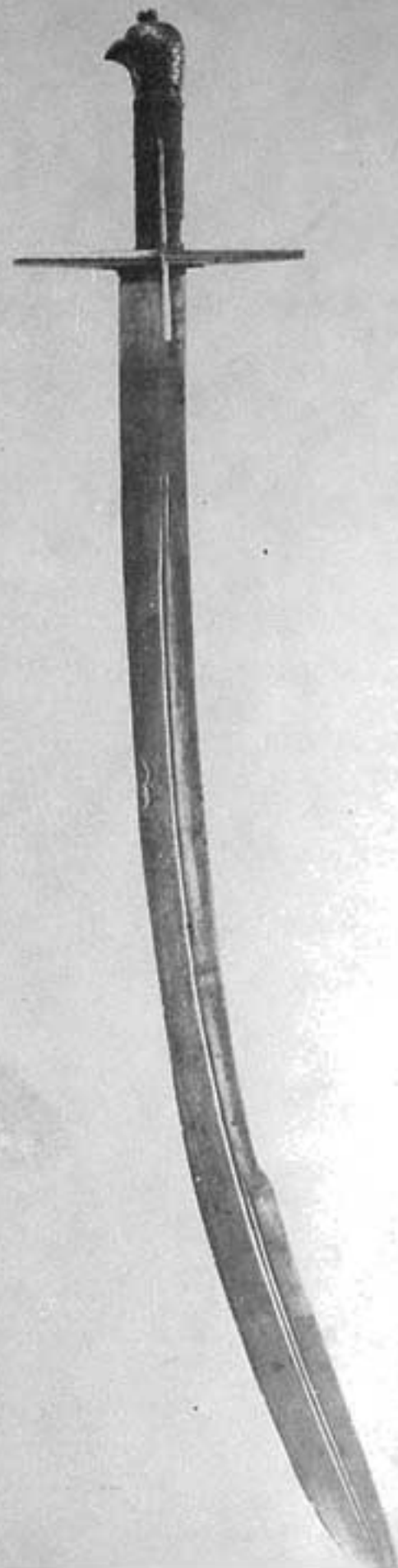
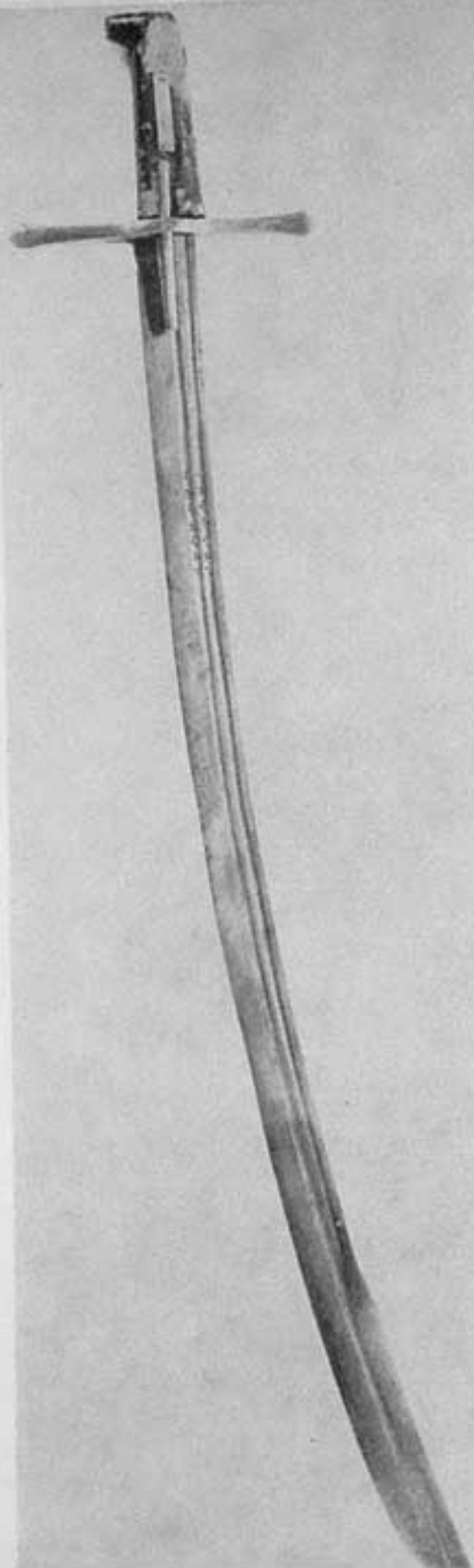
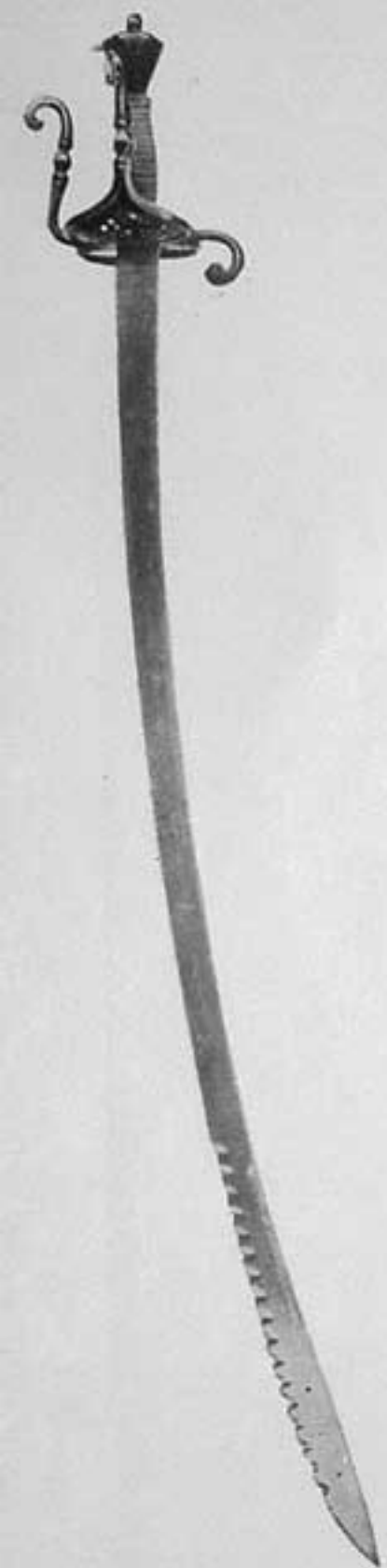


12. King Ladislas Jagiello, d. 1434; tomb from around 1435—1440 in the Wawel cathedral; showing an ornamented belt and a sword wrapped in a second belt
13. Scene from the "Silesian Legend", a miniature of the mid-14th century; the prince and courtiers with swords held in hand or upon the shoulder
14. Sword of the 12th century, type XI, found in Masovia; MWP
15. Sword from the second half of the 12th century, type XI, found at Konin; MWP
16. Sword of the 13th/14th centuries, type XIIIa, found at Morzysław, distr. of Konin; collection of Z. Pieczyński, Poznań
17. Sword of the 13th/14th centuries, type XIII, found at Piolunów, distr. of Radziejów Kujawski, MWP
18. Sword of the 13th century, type XII, found in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains; MWP
19. Sword from the first half of the 14th century, type XIa, found at Dąbrowa, distr. of Ciechanów; MW
20. Hilt of the "Jagged Sword"; W
21. Hilt of the "Jagged Sword"; the other side
22. Sword from the first half of the 14th century, type XVIa, found in Gdańsk; the point is missing; IHKM
23. Sword from the mid-14th century, type XVIa, found at Łuzki, distr. of Sokółów Podlaski; MWP
24. Sword from the second half of the 14th century, type XVIa, found at Michrów, distr. of Grójec, MNK
25. Sword of the 14th/15th centuries, type XVII, found at Wolbórz, distr. of Piotrków; Muzeum at Piotrków
26. Dagger of basilard type, second half of the 14th century, found at Orzeszyn, distr. of Grójec; collection of A. Nadolski, Łódź
27. Cutlass of the 15th century (?), found at Czersk near Warsaw; MWP
28. Hilt-maker's mark (two arrows) on the sword blade from Michrów shown on fig. 24
29. Smith's mark on the hilt tang of the sword from Michrów shown on fig. 24
30. The running wolf of Passau inlaid with yellow metal on the blade of the sword from Gdańsk shown on fig. 22
31. Falchion of the 15th century (?) found at Dąbrowno, distr. of Ostróda; MWP
32. Heavy-armed Polish lancer in the battle of Orsza of 1514; after a contemporary painting
33. Polish hussars—"Rac" in the battle of Orsza of 1514; after a contemporary painting
34. Workshop of a Cracow hilt-maker; miniature in the Behem's Codex, early 16th century
35. Hilt and upper part of the scabbard of King Sigismund Augustus's sword, ritually broken at his burial in 1572; the mount was made by Melchior Baier of Nurnberg after the design of Peter Flötner; the treasury of the Wawel cathedral
36. Sword of King Sigismund I, fragments; on the chappe the Eagle with letter "S" is visible; the scabbard bears the inscription "Sigismundus rex iustus"
37. Speaker in tribunal, drawn by J. P. Norblin
38. Dignitaries in Polish and foreign dress; in the middle, Hetman Stanislas Koniecpolski with

193. Commemorative sabre given to General Francis Morawski by the Factory of Side-Arms at Marymont in 1831; MWP
194. Sabre-palache presented to General Henry Dembiński by his subordinates after the retreat from Lithuania, next owned by the Russian Field-Marshal Paskiewicz; probably from the workshop of E. Collette; the blade on forte bears an inscription in Polish, and the face, in Russian; MWP
195. General H. Dembiński; a post-insurrection lithography; the artist wanted to represent the General with the commemorative sabre, lost in Warsaw and shown on fig. 194
196. Small sword of a Militia officer of the Cracow Republic; MWP
197. "Karabela" from the workshop of Ignatius Höfelmajer of Cracow; MNK
198. "Karabela" of the 19th century with a "romantic" decoration; MNK
199. Fragment of the blade of the "karabela" shown on fig. 198 bearing the likeness of Hetman John Tarnowski and an inscription in his honour
200. Hilt of the blade of the "karabela" shown on fig. 202
201. Mount of the scabbard mouth of the "karabela" shown on fig. 202
202. "Karabela" with hilt of traditional type; the inscription on the blade reads: "To Captain Alex. Jaźwiński my aide de camp and friend from General Bem Vienna 848 Belvedere"; MWP
203. Sabre of Sigismund Sierakowski, military commander of the Kovno voivodship in 1863; imitation of former Polish sabres with open hilt; MWP
204. Sabre of Marian Langiewicz, dictator of 1863; MWP
205. Austrian cavalry sabre of major Charles "Rębajło"—Kalita from 1863—1864; the forte bears the image of Thaddeus Kościuszko and inscription in his honour; MWP
206. Likeness of Thaddeus Kościuszko on the sabre shown on fig. 205
207. Hilt of the sabre shown on fig. 205
208. Bayonet of a Russian piston carbine, model 1852; used by Polish insurgent detachments in 1863—1864; MWP
209. Group of insurgents from 1863—1864; the first on left is armed with a Belgian carbine with a characteristic broad bayonet
210. Austrian sabre used by Polish military units in 1914—1920; MWP
211. Russian sabre used by Polish military units in 1914—1920; MWP
212. Polish officer's sabre, cavalry model 1917; MWP
213. Hilt of the sabre shown on fig. 212
214. Polish officer's sabre, infantry model 1917; MWP
215. Hilt of the sabre shown on fig. 214
216. Prussian palache decorated with Polish Eagle and used in the Great Polish rising of 1918—1919; MWP
217. Polish bayonet, model 24, for the Mauser carbine; MWP
218. Bayonet of a French carbine, used in the September campaign of 1939 by some Polish infantry units; MWP
219. Polish soldier's sabre, model 1921; MWP
220. Polish soldier's sabre, model 1934; MWP



*Fig. 31. Falchion of the 15th century (?)
found at Dąbrowno, distr. of Ostróda;
MWP*



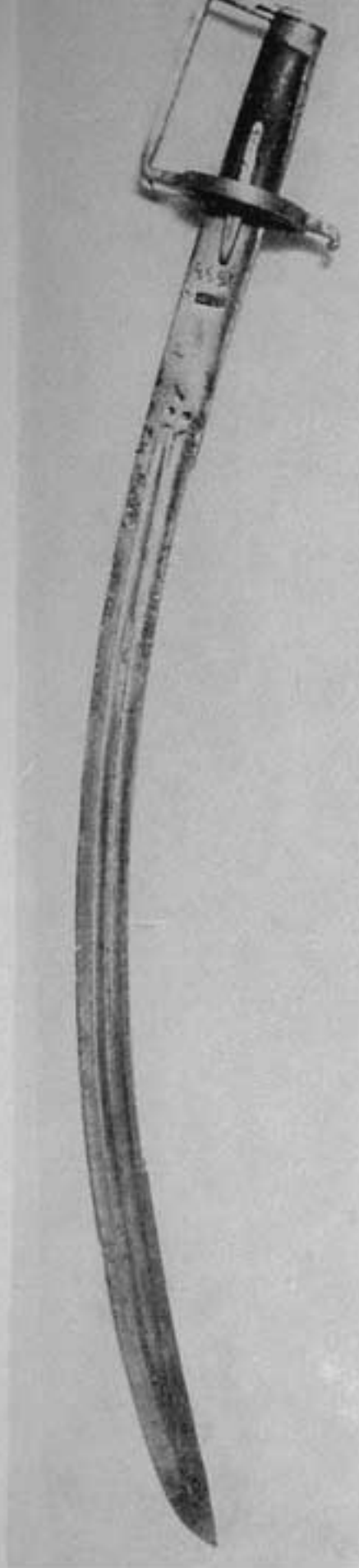


Fig. 64. Sabre of General Joseph Kopeć, member of the Kościuszko Insurrection; blade from the 17th century with the mark "IPZD"; hilt from the 18th century; Cz
Fig. 65. Mark "IPZD" on the sabre shown of fig. 64

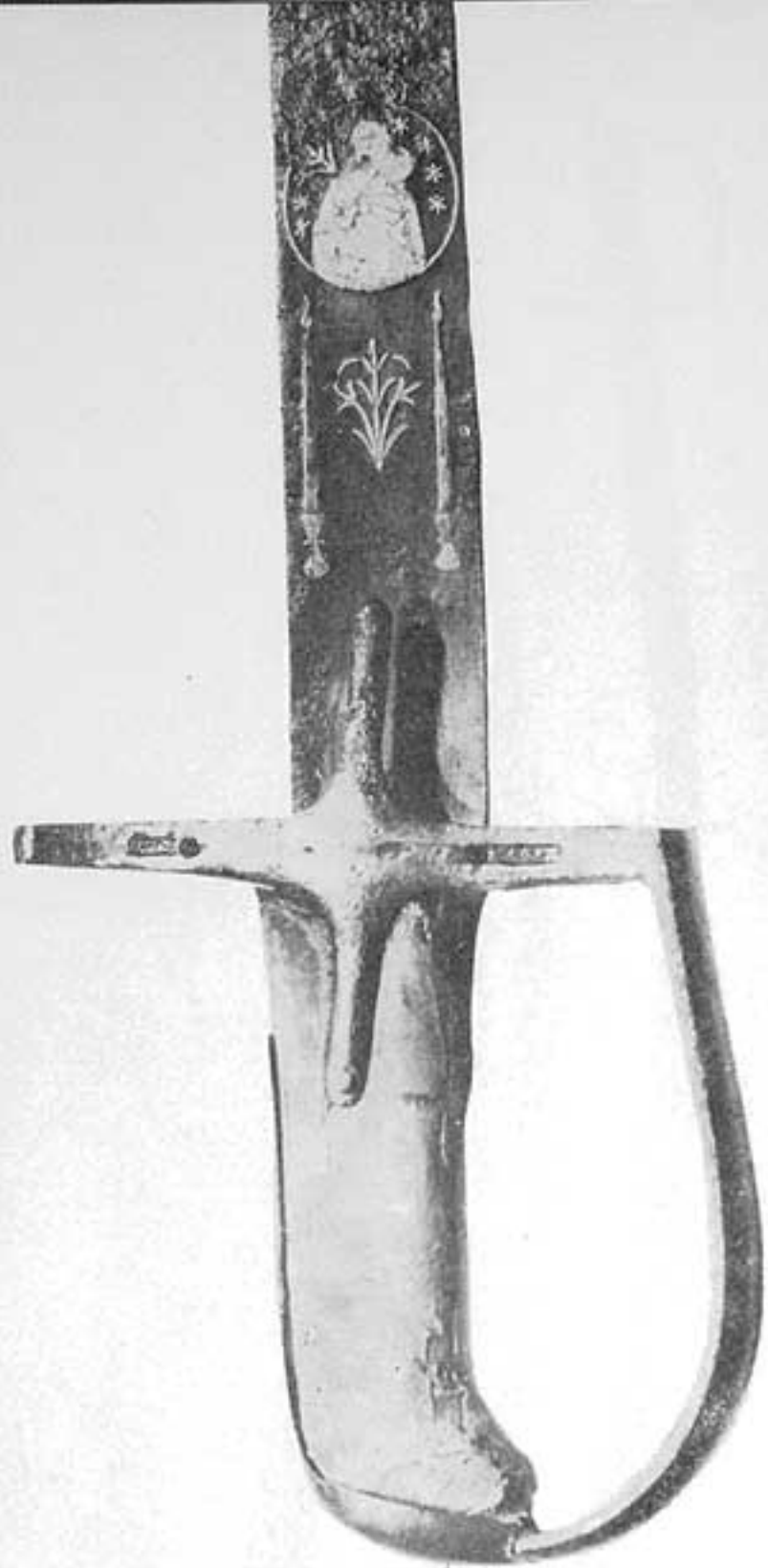


Fig. 112. Sabre of Radziwill's clients, 18th century; MNK
Fig. 113. Inscription on the forte of the sabre shown on fig. 112

Fig. 114. Sabre with blade "batorówka" and monogram "SAR"; MWP

Fig. 115. Hilt and forte of a Polish battle sabre, end of the 18th century; the hilt bears monogram "SAR" and inscription in honour of the Constitution of the Third of May; MWP

Fig. 116. Sabre with open hilt, second half of the 18th century; on the hilt an officer's sword-knot; on the blade the inscription "Vivat the National Cavalry"; MWP

Fig. 117. Inscriptions and ornaments on the blade of the sabre shown on fig. 116

Fig. 118. Sabre with closed hilt, end of the 18th century; the mount from a Warsaw manufactory; the blade with a characteristic representation and inscription in honour of the hussars; MNK

Fig. 119. Representations and inscriptions on the blade of the sabre shown on fig. 118

Fig. 120. Parade "karabela" of the 18th century; Oriental blade; MNK



