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A Story of Reconstruction - Part I

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1. General Information About the Reichsschwert

The *Reichsschwert*, the sword of St. Maurice (see Oakshott, 1991:56), is kept in Weltliche Schatzkammer in Vienna, Austria. In German literature, this sword is known as the *Reichsschwert* (The Sword of Empire or, freely translated, the Coronation Sword) (see Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995; although it should be noted that Seitz, 1965:140-141 also calls this sword the sword of Saint Maurice). In the following article, I will adhere to the German term *Reichsschwert* and use it consistently. Oakshott (1991:56) classifies the *Reichsschwert* in his classification as Type XI with a pommel type B and a long, slender cross. Additionally, he adds that the blade is 95.3 cm and dates it to 1040-1120 A.D.

2. The Blade

The blade is made of steel, has a total length of 110 cm, and is 95.3 cm long. There are fullers on both sides of the blade. The length of the fullers on both sides is 69.8 cm and is 0.9 cm wide (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:19). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:19) points out that the blade is a Type 12 (*Klingentyp 12*) blade based on Geibig's classification. According to Geibig, this blade type appeared around the end of the 12th century. Geibig proved that similar, narrow fullers of 1 cm width appeared around the 12th century A.D. (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:19). This type of blade can be differentiated from older types of swords of the 11th and mid-12th century that had wider and flatter fullers, often decorated with inlaid inscriptions. Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:19) points out that the *Reichsschwert* has two silver-inlaid maker's mark of a simple cross crosslet in a sunwheel (*Krückenkreuz*), one on each side in the fullers.

3. The Handle Type

Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:23) states that the handle design corresponds to the Construction Type III (*Konstruktionstyp III*) by Geibig. In the following based on Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995), each part of the handle type will be described in detail.

3.a Pommel

The mushroom-shaped pommel is made of gilded silver with curved, lower edges (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:23). Contrary to the assumption of Oakshott (1991:56) and North (1994:37), the pommel and crossguard of this sword are not made of iron but of silver as Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:23) rightly states. Additionally, in an email to Mr. Würkner on July 8, 2003, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna confirmed that the pommel and the handguard were not attracted to a magnet, ruling out that they were made of iron. A close look at the ends of the crossguard shows the silver underneath as the gilding is worn off partially in some parts. It should be noted that the gilding is now very faint. However, a colored copperplate engraving, made in 1750 A.D. and published in 1790 A.D. (see Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995: plate 2), clearly shows a very strong gilded pommel and crossguard that have the same color as the golden panels of the scabbard. Unfortunately, in



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many books that depict *Reichsschwert*, either the pictures are black and white or the color pictures do not show the gilding very well (for examples, see the color depiction of *Reichsschwert* in North, 1994:37; for black-and-white pictures, see Seitz, 1965:140-141, and Oakshott, 1997: plate 5B; 1991:56). One exception is the color picture showed by Leimsidor (1999:268) in the book *Les Grandes Trésors* (the original title in Italian is *I Grandi Tesori*). There, the color picture clearly shows the gilding (see Leimsidor, 268). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:23) points out that the shape of this type of pommel had been in use for a long time and even appeared in the 11th century. She further assumes that the early appearance of this type of pommel could be the reason for Oakshott's assumption that Otto IV could have his coat of arms engraved on an older pommel. The engraved coat of arms (or personal arms) of Otto IV (1198-1218 A.D.) of a demi eagle and three leopards on one side is upside down, meaning that it would have been in the right position when the sword bearer carried the sword with its tip pointing up in front of the emperor. On the other hand, the other side with the engraved coat of arms of the *Reichsadler* (Eagle of the Empire) or Arms of the Empire was in the right direction when the sword was carried in its belt on the waist or when the point of the sword was pointing to the ground (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:25; see also Oakshott, 1991:56). The engraved inscriptions on the pommel on both sides are coronation liturgy and taken from Psalm 144 (Vulgate number 143) and read as the following (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:25):



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BENEDICTVS . Do(minv)S . DE(v)S . QVI . DOCET . MANV(s) +
[Be] Praised [my] Lord [and] God, who teaches [my] hands [to
fight]

3.b Crossguard

Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:25) states that the inscriptions on the pommel and on the crossguard resemble each other and should have been produced at the same time. Further, Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:26) explains that the slender crossguard is made of gilded silver, is 19.7 cm wide, and narrows slightly towards its ends. Following Schulze-Dörrlamm, in the first view, the crossguard alone cannot be used for dating purposes as this type of crossguard can be observed on many swords from the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. However, as the crossguard extends 7.4 cm from the blade on each side, the crossguard should be from the late development stage of this typology and should have been made, at the earliest, during the 12th century. The upper side and the bottom side of the crossguard of the *Reichsschwert* are engraved with parallel lines close to the edges of the crossguard. Additionally, there are nielloed tendrillar ornamentations on the sides of the opening for the tang of the blade. Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:27) emphasizes that she has not seen similar ornamentations on the crossguard of other swords of the same type and adds that the research done by Geibig shows that the majority of crossguards and pommels of the swords from the 10th to the 12th centuries do not have any decorations. On the front and back of the crossguard of the *Reichsschwert*, there is an engraved verse of the lauds, the tripartite canticles, which were used to render homage to the newly crowned monarch. If one holds the *Reichsschwert* with its tip of the blade pointing up, the following inscription is visible on the back of the crossguard (note that there are periods between the words) (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:27):

+ CRISTVS . VINCIT . CRISTVS . REIGNAT . CRIST'(vs) : INPERAT
[Christus triumphs – Chrisus reigns – Christus rules].

Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:27) explains that the better theological translation of the Latin lauds above would be the following: Christus the Victor, Christus the King, Christus the Ruler. If the tip of the *Reichsschwert* points to the ground, a shortened form of the lauds can be read on the front side of the crossguard (note that there are colons between the words)



First

Next

(Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:27):

CRISTVS : VINCIT : CRISTVS : REINAT

[Christus triumphs – Chrisus reigns].

The handwriting on the handguard resembles the inscriptions on the pommel. Therefore, both should have been engraved in the same time period (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:27). The tripartite canticles for Christ on the sword that were also used for religious and secular leaders should have been created during the second half of the 8th century in France, and they should have been used in coronation liturgy for the first time during Easter of 774 A.D. after Charlemagne conquered the Empire of Lombards or Longobards (Latin Langobardi) (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:27). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:27) adds that this Frankish-Roman type of lauds remained in use in the coronation ceremonies of kings until 1209 A.D. Then, Pope Innocent III introduced another coronation liturgy for the coronation of Otto IV. The coronation liturgy did not include the above-mentioned lauds anymore. Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:27) explains that the reasons for the engraving of the coronation liturgy in the *Reichsschwert* could be to protect the king from harm and mischief as the liturgy includes a war cry against all evil powers in nature and the world. Schulze-Dörrlamm adds that people in medieval times believed in the apotropaic effect of this "spell" as the same inscription was engraved on bells, coins, and weapons. Further, Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:27) quotes von Schlosser, who explains that the inscriptions on the crossguard with the words REINAT and REIGNAT are a linguistic peculiarity that points to the southern [European] origin of the weapon. Based on this, Weixlgärtner concludes that the sword should have an Italian origin (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:27). However, Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:28) points out that Professor Max Pfister, Professor in Ordinary for Romance languages and literature in the University of

Saarbrücken, explains that the way of writing distinguishes the way a Romance-speaking person from the north as well as the south of France should have used Medieval Latin. The form REIGNAT and REINAT point out that the writer pronounced regnat in a Romance language as (renat) and writes the grapheme n once as ign and once as in (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:28).

Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:28) quotes Spender, who, based on the shape of the letters and the whole appearance, dates the inscriptions on the crossguard to the 11th century. Spender bases his assumption on the similarity of the inscriptions on the crossguard of the *Reichsschwert* to the inscriptions on the *Reichskreuz* (Empire Cross) of Conrad II and the inscriptions on the silver sheet of the Holy Lance that were ordered to be engraved by Henry IV. On the other hand, Schulze-Dörrlamm states that Fillitz suggests that the split ends of the letters and the clear tendency towards broken forms (especially C, R, V, and E) justify a later dating to the era of Otto IV.

3.c Handle

The handle of the *Reichsschwert* is wrapped with a twisted silver wire. At both extreme ends of the handle, an extra twisted, gilded silver wire is wrapped around the handle. Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:28) states that Fillitz and Schramm, and Mütherich suggested that the silver wrapping should have originated from the 16th or 17th century. However, Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:28) explains that similar wire wrappings could be seen in many medieval swords, such as a sword that was excavated from the Rhein River in Mainz (see Geibig, 1991: plate 76), the swords excavated from two Hungarian warrior graves from Beszterec-Gyalaptana of the late 10th century, the sword of Saint Stephan kept in the Treasury of Cathedral of Prague, the Viking swords from the 10th century from locations in Busdorf, Vesterhaug, and London, or with the sword with a round pommel from the late 12th century in Musée de l'Armée in Paris (see Seitz, 1965: plate 133). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:28) quotes Geibig, who is of the opinion that medieval swords with handles wrapped in silver wires were mainly used for ceremonial purposes. Schulze-Dörrlamm points out that possibly only an aristocrat could have afforded a sword with silver wire wrapping on the handle.

4. The Dating and Origin of the Sword

Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:28) states that a detailed analysis of *Reichsschwert* shows that all parts of this weapon were made at the same time, meaning the end of 12th century, and the assumption that a new handle was added to a sword from the 11th century is not correct. Schulze-Dörrlamm adds that the sword is a typical weapon from the 12th century that is surely dated with the coat of arms of Otto IV (1198-1218). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:29) proposes that the *Reichsschwert* was possibly used in the coronation of Otto IV in place of the other coronation sword from the Salian period. The *Reichsschwert* belongs to the group of Combination Type 18 (see Geibig, 1991: Cat.10) that appeared during the 12th century and remained in use until the 13th century. Following Geibig, as far as today's Germany is concerned, swords of this type were limited to the southern parts of the country; however, similar types were found in many other European countries (Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:29-30)). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:30) explains that the *Reichsschwert*, with its steel blade, gilded silver crossguard, and pommel with engraved inscriptions and nielloed tendrillar ornamentations, stands out when compared to other Romanesque swords from

Southern Germany of Germany as the crossguard and the pommel of latter swords were at best decorated with silver and brass inlaying or covered with a silver plate as is the case with the sword from Sallentin, Kr. Pyritz (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:30, plate 9). However, it is surprising to see that the *Reichsschwert* that was used for coronations of German kings and emperors of the Holy Roman Empire is kept with simple ornamentation when compared to the coronation sword of the French kings (the so-called *Joyeuse*) that has a pommel, handle, and crossguard made of pure gold, decorated with elaborate and ornated reliefs (Schulze-Dörrlamm, 1995:30). Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:30) explains that as no other swords with similar maker's mark were found, the question of where the sword was made cannot be answered with certainty. However, the sword could not have been made in Saxony, the area of origin of Otto IV, as the Romanesque Middle Latin inscribed on the crossguard makes likely France as the country of origin. Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:30) stresses that it is important to take into consideration that Otto IV, who was born as the second son of Henry the Lion in 1177 A.D., spent his youth in the court of his uncle, the King of England, who had nominated Otto IV as the Earl of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine four years before he became the German king. Schulze-Dörrlamm (1995:30) proposes the possibility that Otto IV could have brought the sword from France that was later used for his coronation in Aachen in 1198 A.D.

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