

The Insignia of the Princes of Transylvania

Introduction

The fate of the Principality of Transylvania, which was formed in the eastern territories of the Kingdom of Hungary in the 16th century after many difficulties, was dependent on the balance of power between the Habsburg Empire and its Ottoman counterpart. However, from time to time princes of Transylvania managed to take advantage of the weaknesses of these two powers and extended the bounds of the principality's sovereignty. Thus they succeeded in making their country a factor in the European balance of power by joining the anti-Habsburg struggles of other European powers (Köpeczi 1994; Makkai and Mócsy 2001). As a result, posterity has been inclined to regard Transylvania almost as an independent state, one that many have regarded as the bastion of Protestantism, Hungarian culture and independent Hungarian statehood in the face of the Catholic Habsburgs. This was one of the reasons why research into the insignia of the princes of Transylvania began in the 1850s.¹ My first articles revising the earlier views with respect to this issue were published in the 1990s. However, collection of additional material and wider analysis regarding the handing over of the insignia have enabled me to develop the earlier documentary base and to make my conclusions more precise (B. Szabó 1994; B. Szabó 1996).²

The insignia

Although the Ottoman Porte permitted the Transylvanian Estates to appoint a ruler in Transylvania by election, his power became legitimate only when the sultan confirmed it by sending a document of appointment together with insignia. In accordance with Hungarian linguistic usage in the 16th and 17th centuries, the term *ahdname* is employed in Hungarian academic writing to refer to the various Ottoman documents issued on these occasions.³ Since no full set of princely insignia has survived, any reconstruction of one must rely primarily on written sources. As a result of my own data collection, I have already managed to eliminate some terminological confusion arising from translation and thus compile a more exact list of insignia, one that has since been confirmed by the original Ottoman documents translated by Sándor Papp.

1. THE BANNER

According to the description given by Farkas Bethlen, the first Ottoman insigne banner was red and the top of the pole was adorned with a golden heart, 'which expressed that the emperor's heart was compliant and gracious towards his vassal' (Bethlen 2002: 199).

The Porte sent this type of banner to an appointee as a symbol of its power over a vassal-state (*Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* 1878: 368–369). Within any one territorial unit no two persons could possess banners of identical value. This is shown by what happened when István Báthori departed for Poland in 1576 following his election as king of that country. The Porte confirmed his brother, Kristóf, as voivode in his place, but demanded the return of the finial (*ser'-alem*) on the pole bearing the banner given to István Báthori, as though the last mentioned were a sanjakbey (governor of a sanjak) relieved of his post.⁴ Officials such as sanjakbeys and beylerbeys in charge of administrative units of various sizes within the empire received banners on the occasion of their appointment. Of these, a beylerbey (governor of a province) probably received a red taffeta banner similar to those given to princes of Transylvania.⁵

2. THE CEREMONIAL ROBE

Ceremonial robes are often mentioned in Turkish sources, which are sometimes accompanied by Hungarian translations. Moreover, the Hungarian translation of István Bocskai's *adhname* of 1604 presents the robe as being equal in significance to the *hudyet*, i.e. to the document of confirmation.⁶ The ceremonial robe is most often called a *kaf-tan*, but Evlia Çelebi called the robe sent to Mihály Apafi I in 1661 a 'kapaniche'. Unlike the *kaftan*, the ceremonial robe with a sable lining could be worn only by rather high Ottoman dignitaries.⁷ (The appointment of officials in the Ottoman Empire, too, involved granting them ceremonial robes corresponding to their office [Pakalın 1946: 134].)

3. THE GOLD-EMBEDDED, PLUME-ADORNED HIGH CAP

This item of the insignia has given rise to the most misunderstandings. It was called simply a high cap; a hat; a *skófum*, on account of its embellishment with gold and silver thread (*skófum*) (Bethlen Gábor levelei 1980: 202); a *kornyéta*, from the Latin *corneta*, on account of its shape (Mikó 1860: 195); and a crown on account of its function. Moreover, the present author believes that the word 'diadem' also denotes this artefact (Szalay 1862: 20). The Turkish names (*üsküf*, *kuka*) suggest that it resembled a type of cap worn by janissary officers, one that was adorned with a broom-shaped plume. This is corroborated by the fact that it was from the janissaries that these artefacts were sent to the princes (Fodor 1989: 119, 126; Orhonlu 1970, No. 78, Karácson 1916: 406). However, it is still not clear what differences the two names *üsküf* and *kuka* denote with respect to such caps.

4. THE ORNAMENTED MACE

The artefact often called 'baton' in 16th- and 17th-century Hungarian also occurs among the insignia used in the Ottoman Empire. In miniatures it can generally be seen in the hands of high-ranking personages such as *beylerbeys*; *sirdars* in charge of military campaigns; and sometimes sultans (Fehér 1982: Ills. 7, 18, 57, 85a–b, 111–112). In these cases it was an accessory carried by a rider on a caparisoned horse in splendid equestrian processions. (Such use was not prescribed by Hungarian customs).⁸ The substantial

similarity of the mace of Mihály Apafi II, prince of Transylvania, and that of Kara Mustafa, Ottoman grand vizier, shows the rank-denoting function of the maces sent to princes of Transylvania.⁹

5, 6. THE SWORD AND THE CAPARISONED HORSE

According to Turkish documents, the sultan sent one of his own swords to Bocskai in 1604. This most probably symbolised the source of the prince's power. However, another datum refers to the fact that the sword, similarly to the cap, could have been connected with the janissaries.¹⁰ Detailed descriptions of the caparisoned horses have not yet been found.

Parallels with the Transylvanian princely insignia

In the light of what has been said above, we can say that the majority of insignia carried a definite meaning within the Ottoman power hierarchy. If we include the neighbours of Transylvania in our analysis, it becomes clear that the above set of insignia cannot be regarded as merely a Transylvanian or Hungarian feature. The fact that the Porte delivered such insignia to Imre Thököly, ruler of the 'Principality of Upper Hungary' brought into being in 1682 on the territory of today's Slovakia, can be explained as a continuation of the insignia given to Hungarian rulers. However, the similar insignia sent to the two neighbouring Romanian voivodates cannot be so explained (Angyal 1888: 37). Sporadic data in the Hungarian sources, Dimitre Cantemir's *Descriptio Moldaviae* and recent Romanian historiography have all made it clear that the same set of insignia was in use in Wallachia and Moldavia and that the banner and the Ottoman ceremonial robe were the most important princely insignia (Corina 1977; Pippidi 1983: 40–51; Zach 1992: 111–115; B. Szabó and Erdősi 2001: 91–105). On the basis of the above, we can say that the Porte sent the same insignia to all its Christian vassals. Therefore, we should not see the insignia sent to the princes of Transylvania as being supplementary to the Hungarian royal insignia, as was thought by Imre Mikó in the 19th century. In view of the similarity of the princes' insignia and those used in the empire more generally, we can already find parallels in the Ottoman power hierarchy.

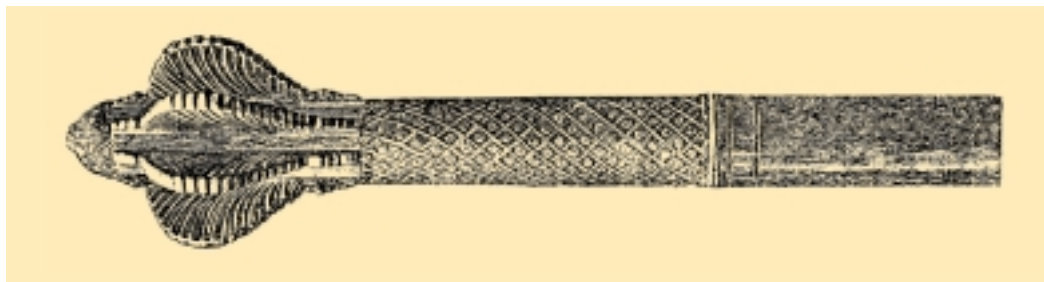
According to Ottoman legal thinking, from 1526 onwards, as a result of conquest, the whole territory of Hungary belonged to the sultans. They could exercise their power as they pleased, either directly or indirectly. Following the capture of Buda in 1541, Sultan Süleyman incorporated the unoccupied territories of the country into his empire by means of an interesting legal fiction. The sultan declared the eastern part of the country, which was under the authority of the Szapolyai party, to be his own, dividing it into three virtual sanjaks in accordance with the administrative structure of the empire. These sanjaks he gave to his Hungarian followers, confirming their appointments by sending them banners due to Turkish officials (Inalcik 1973: 35–37, 104; Fodor 1991). Thus Süleyman I adopted the institution of hereditary sanjaks, used for decades to integrate nomadic tribes in the eastern parts of the empire, for the eastern parts of Hungary, too. Earlier ruling families were able to keep and pass on power in these 'legal-virtual

sanjaks'. Their internal affairs were left untouched in return for taxes and military service due to the sultans (Ágoston 2002: 36–40; Fodor 1991).

One of these sanjaks was actually occupied by the Ottomans in 1551, and the other two were finally 'passed on' to John Sigismund in 1556. By then the last mentioned must have occupied a position in the hierarchy of the empire above that of an ordinary sanjakbey and on a par with that of a governor of a vilayet (i.e. province). This accords perfectly with the well-known and accepted concept in the foreign academic writing on Ottoman administrative history, namely that a Christian vassal-state formally enjoyed in the administration of the empire the status of a province under the authority of a beglerbey (Dávid 2002: 111–119; Birken 1976: 25; Zach 1992: 111–114; B. Szabó 1996: 97–100).

The analogy of Moldavia, the Romanian vassal-state next to Transylvania, gives a picture regarding the office in the Ottoman Empire to which the rank of prince of Transylvania corresponded. Moldavian rulers received two *tugs* in addition to a banner around the turn of the 18th century. Ottoman viziers, who were above them in rank, would receive three *tugs* and a banner, although they took their insignia without any ceremony. Thus, according to their insignia, in the Ottoman hierarchy the Moldavian rulers were on the same level as beglerbeys (i.e. governors of provinces) and below that of viziers (Cantemir 1973: 98).

Although Ottoman historiography sometimes does so, the Hungarian sources never mention *tugs* as being among the insignia of the princes of Transylvania (Uzunçarşılı 1945: 267). Other considerations, however, permit us to draw conclusions concerning the relationship between Transylvania and Moldavia, and thus Transylvania's position in the hierarchy of the empire. In Ottoman ceremonies, rulers of vassal-states themselves had a precisely defined role that well reflected their ranking in the hierarchy. Having studied this issue, Georg Müller and Vencel Bíró concluded that the rank of the princes of Transylvania was higher than that of the voivodes of Moldavia and Wallachia and was equal to that of the Buda beglerbeys (Müller 1923: 44–45; Bíró 1923: 87). This view is supported by a Turkish document from the end of the 16th century. It reveals that even the packaging of the documents sent to a prince of Transylvania indicated that the sultan regarded him as being of a higher rank than the two voivodes. Although princes of Transylvania were denied the honour, paid to sovereign monarchs, of receiving letters from the sultan in a gold-woven bag accompanied by a gold box containing the authenticating seal (Istanbul, Bayezid Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin Ef. 1970, fol. 3a–3b),¹¹ they did receive them in a silk atlas bag accompanied by a silver seal. This signified that they were of a higher rank than the voivodes of Moldavia and Wallachia, whose documents came in a woollen or flaxen bag with no authenticating seal. On the basis of this, we may assume that the insignia sent to princes of Transylvania denoted a status equal to that of beglerbeys of vizier rank, and thus that the princes were even connected to the corps of janissaries (Cantemir 1973: 94–95).



The origins and use of the insignia of the princes of Transylvania

Although from the Ottoman point of view the banner and the ceremonial robe were, after the *ahdname*, the most important signs of endorsement, in a new environment these insignia already possessed a different significance. In Transylvania, too, the banner was regarded as an important artefact. When in 1556 Queen Isabella returned to Transylvania with her son John Sigismund, as an acknowledgement of Ottoman suzerainty she had her soldiers carry the sultan's banner that had been sent to the boy. In 1594, Zsigmond Báthori, prince of Transylvania renounced the Turkish connection. To symbolise this, he sent the banner he had received from the sultan to Emperor Rudolf in Prague (Bethlen 2002: 199; Siklóssy 1919: 139). And when a century later, in 1701, the dignity of prince passed to the Habsburgs with the abdication of Mihály Apafi II, the outgoing ruler had to confirm his standing down by means of a ceremonial handing over of his Turkish insignia, including the banner (Siklóssy 1919: 185, 186).¹² The sources tell us, however, that in this period the banner from the Porte had only a secondary role within Transylvania. The gold-embellished standard of Transylvania enjoyed priority at state ceremonies and in war in the Apafi age. The Turkish banner appeared only when the presence of the empire's representatives required it (Bethlen 1980: 728–729; *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* 1894: 8, 361; Czegei Vass 1896: 39).

Ottoman ceremonial robes lost their significance even more. Turkish kaftans, which were valuable, were rarely used as such; most were made into other things. Some were used to make quilts or lining for *dolmány*s (László 1986: 35–36, 76, 314–315). Of course, a prince always had an intact example deep in one of his chests but we do not know whether it was ever worn (Bethlen Gábor levelei 1980: 205–206). The fate of the cap may have been similar, although in Transylvania the wearing of a broom-shaped plume was a privilege of the ruler (Apor 1987: 32).

Of the Turkish insignia, after the banner it was the mace and the sword that were most connected to the office of prince. The banner and ornamented mace were emphasised as 'signs and emblems of the confirmation of the princes of Transylvania' (Cserei 1983: 158). Although the princely insignia played a limited role when a prince was elected or inaugurated, the mace and sword were nearly always present in a prince's surroundings.¹³

It is not surprising that princes presented their relatives and followers with several imposing 'batons' (Bethlen 1878: 34, 50, 53),¹⁴ although it is impossible to find out

which of the surviving examples, if any, were received on the occasion of confirmation. This question is raised in connection with the three ornamented maces in the Hungarian National Museum that tradition regards as belonging among to the insignia of the princes of Transylvania. Only one of these can be viewed as being the work of a Turkish craftsman.¹⁵ However, by themselves place or origin and style do not provide a clear answer, because princes of Transylvania tended to purchase artefacts from Istanbul craftsmen.¹⁶ Besides, a number of ornamented maces of Hungarian origin feature in the surviving inventories of the onetime treasuries of the princes.¹⁷

It is not particularly surprising that these entries find their counterparts in inventories drawn up by very wealthy aristocratic families in Royal Hungary, since maces counted as important accessories to Hungarian noble attire in the 16th and 17th centuries (Szabó 1993: 37–41). Nevertheless, the Museum maces may have been belonged among those owned by the princes. This is indicated by a surviving portrait of György Rákóczi I that depicts the prince with a mace of typically Central European, and not Turkish, origin.¹⁸

My investigations in the 1990s concluded that while the legitimising role of the insignia sent by the Porte was acknowledged, the order of importance of the individual items changed. Those pieces that fitted in with the Hungarian system of insignia (i.e. the banner, the mace and the sabre) lost their intended significance and came to symbolise the power of the prince (B. Szabó 1996: 104–105). At that time I could provide no explanation for this. However, subsequent research into the insignia of the Romanian voivodes drew my attention to the significance of the period prior to the time of Ottoman rule.

The use of insignia by Hungarian officials in the Middle Ages has not yet been fully researched. Thus, it is not surprising that when writing about the appointment of voivodes of Transylvania even Zsigmond Jakó could only make a supposition. He wrote that after taking their oath to the king, ‘like other high dignitaries, voivodes, too, probably received a banner from the monarch, as a sign to an illiterate society’ (Jakó 1992). Jakó’s thinking receives full support in György Szerémi’s chronicle. According to this, Péter Perényi, who was appointed voivode of Transylvania by King John Szapolyai in 1527, sent his army against Cherni Jovan with the gold banner ‘that the king had given him in Székesfehérvár when making him voivode of Transylvania’ (Szerémi 1857: 162). Since the office of voivode of Transylvania was among the highest baronial dignities in the mediaeval Kingdom of Hungary, we are – on the basis of 15th-century parallels – fully entitled to regard its holder as a banneret who took his troops to war under the banner of his own office (Engel 2003: 228–230). In the 15th and 16th centuries, the *bans* (i.e. governors) of Croatia enjoyed such a status, later on likewise receiving a banner from the king on their appointment to this office (they also received a sceptre) (Borošak-Marijanović 1993: 23–27; Šercer 1993: 31–37).

It is an important fact that the *bans*’ sceptres from the 19th century are, with regard to their shape, ornamented maces. In this case the name ‘sceptre’ denotes the function rather than the form. This is not a unique phenomenon in the Hungarian tradition, since as early as 1613 Keeper of the Holy Crown of Hungary Péter Révay referred to the

Hungarian Coronation Sceptre as a ‘Hungarian-style, spherically-headed’ ornamented mace, a ‘weapon used only by leaders of the Hungarians’ (Révay 1979: 347). Endre Tóth has revealed that in the 11th century, the time when the Hungarian Coronation Sceptre was made, spherically-headed, mace-like sceptres were not rare even in Western Europe (Tóth 2000: 111–151). The shape of the royal sceptre may have exerted an influence on the insignia of officials. The oldest surviving *ban*’s seal belonged to Opoj, *ban* of Slovenia, and is from 1239. Unlike other surviving knight’s seals from the 13th century, it does not depict a knight in armour but a figure in ‘civilian’ attire holding a mace with a spherical head (Kumorovitz 1993: 60; Kovács 1986: 278–279).

A lack of relics and written sources makes it very difficult to show a direct connection between the insignia of kings and the insignia of officials. This is because even in the case of the relatively well researched Hungarian royal insignia it is not always clear what else belonged among the artefacts that have come down to us, and how strong the belonging of any missing pieces was (Bak 2001).

Adding to our earlier conclusions, we can say that even in their now-fragmentary state the sources indicate that that Ottoman insignia symbolising the Sublime Porte’s confirmation in office of rulers of Transylvania probably took the place of insignia associated with the office of voivode in the mediaeval Kingdom of Hungary. Thus, it is no coincidence that in the area of princely display outstanding significance attached to precisely those types of insignia that were, we assume, used by the voivodes of Transylvania earlier on.

NOTES

- 1 For example, Vajda 1891; Mikó 1860; Rácz 1992: 65–81; Papp 2003: 78, 82, 115, 174–175, 210–214, 229, 253–254, 261–263.
- 2 For the ceremony of the handing over of the insignia and its context, see B. Szabó and Erdősi 2001; B. Szabó, János and Péter Erdősi, ‘Ceremonies Marking the Transfer of Power in the Principality of Transylvania in an East European Context’, *Majestas* 11 (2003), pp. 111–160.
- 3 Vajda 1891: 1–48, 56–58; Rácz 1992: 37–56. The general meaning of *ahdname* was a contractual letter serving as an alliance treaty with non-Muslims outside the Islamic state. There were several types of Ottoman document connected to the appointment and inauguration of Transylvanian princes: *hüküm-i hümayîn* – the emperor’s magnificent order, *berüt* – the emperor’s inauguration document, ‘*ahd-nüme-i hümayîn*’ – the emperor’s magnificent contract. Papp 2003: 11–25.
- 4 Papp 2003: 89–90. For the finial on the top of the flagpole see Szalay 1862: 273. Records were kept in Istanbul of the handing out and return of finials on the appointment and dismissal respectively of Ottoman sanjakbeys (*sançak beyis*). Papp 2003: 82.
- 5 For the sanjak (the basic military and administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire) and the sanjakbey see Bosworth, E. et al. (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. 8, Leiden, 1995, pp. 11–13. There is a copper engraving showing a Turkish banners captured at the siege of Esztergom in 1595 which include a beglerbey’s ‘sanjak’, a red taffeta banner fastened to a white pole without a finial. Hungarian National Museum, Historical Picture Gallery, inv. no. 2520.
- 6 See *Magyar Történeti Tár* XVII (1871), p. 49; Karácson 1916: 351, 406, 408; Karácson, Imre and Pál Fodor, *Evlia Cselebi török világgutató magyarországi utazásai, 1660–1664* [Evlia Çelebi’s Travels in Hungary], Budapest, 1985, p. 180; *Török-magyarokori történelmi emlékek III. Török-Magyarokori Államok-*

- mánytár [Historical Documents from the Turkish Period in Hungary, III. State Documents from the Turkish Period], Pest, 1868, p. 46; Gerelyes, Ibolya, 'Török viseletek és textilek 16–17. századi magyar hagyatéki leltárak tükrében' [Turkish Attire and Textiles as Reflected in 16th- and 17th-century Probate Inventories], *Folia Historica* XVIII (1993), p. 75.
- 7 Helpful oral communication from Pál Fodor. Cf.; Gerelyes, op. cit., p. 77; The sources mention such an item as being among the attire of István Báthori, prince of Transylvania. Radvánszky, Béla, *Magyar családélet és háztartás a XVI. és XVII. században* [Hungarian Family Life and Housekeeping in the 16th and 17th Centuries], vol. 3, Budapest, 1879, p. 225.
 - 8 The voivodes of Moldavia were handed the mace together with a caparisoned horse at the so-called *topuzlik*. Cantemir 1973: 96.
 - 9 Mihály Apafi II's mace: Wien, Waffensammlung des Kunsthistorischen Museums, Inv. Nr. C. 128; Kara Mustafa's mace: Wien, Waffensammlung des Kunsthistorischen Museums, Inv. Nr. C. 0161; Kovács S., Tibor, 'Török díszbuzogány a Károlyi-gyűjteményből. (A 17. század második felének méltóságjelvénye az oszmán-török birodalomban)' [An Ottoman Ornamented Mace in the Károlyi Collection. An Insigne of Office in the Ottoman Empire from the Second Half of the 17th Century], *Folia Historica* XIX (1994–1995), pp. 187–196.
 - 10 Similar in meaning is a speech given in Farkas Bethlen's history of Transylvania (vol. 6, Cibinii, 1793, p. 175). For the relevant part of Bocskai's document of appointment (*bermet*), see Papp 2003: 262–263. Istvánffy records that among the sultan's gifts to John Sigismund in 1566 there was a belt with sabre and dagger of the type worn by janissary commanders. Istvánffy, Miklós (ed.), *A magyarok történetéből* [From the History of the Hungarians], Budapest, 1962, p. 322.
 - 11 I should like to thank Pál Fodor for allowing me to use his Hungarian translation of this source.
 - 12 The banner, sword and mace are today in the armoury of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Inv. Nr. C 71., C 127., C 128.
 - 13 Angered, Mihály Apafi I allegedly hit representatives of the Saxon towns on several occasions in 1665 with the iron mace lying on his table. Bethlen, János, *Erdély története 1629–1673* [A History of Transylvania, 1629–1673], Budapest, 1993, p. 274. According to a plan assumedly made in 1705, the sword and the mace would have been on the table of the prince in the 'Audience Room' in the palace at Gyulafehérvár for the inauguration ceremony of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Hungarian National Archives, Archives of the Rákóczi War of Independence, National Political Data, V. 1. a = G 27. 74. cs. Fol. 29–30; B. Szabó 1996: 102–105.
 - 14 For István Bethlen's mace see Radvánszky, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 290.
 - 15 'Mace of István Báthori', Hungarian National Museum, inv. no. 55.3373, 'Mace of Zsigmond Báthori', Hungarian National Museum, inv. no. 55.3372, 'Mace of György Rákóczi II', Hungarian National Museum, inv. no. 55.3374. See also Kovács S., Tibor, 'Török hatás a magyar fegyvereken a 15–17. században' [Turkish Influences on Hungarian Weapons in the 15th and 16th Centuries], *Folia Archaeologica* XLIV (1995), p. 222; 226–227.
 - 16 For example, Borsos, Tamás, *Vásárhelytől a Fényes Portáig* [From Vásárhely to the Sublime Porte], ed. by László Kócziány, Bukarest, 1972, p. 168.
 - 17 See for example 'II. Apafi Mihályné, Bethlen Kata hagyatéka' [The Probate Inventory of Kata Bethlen, Consort of Prince Mihály Apafi II of Transylvania], *Századok* [XVII] (1883), p. 790; *Történelmi Társulat* 1881, p. 771.
 - 18 See B. Szabó, János, 'Uralkodóábrázolás az Erdélyi Fejedelemségben: I. Rákóczi György fejedelmi portréja a Történelmi Képcsarnokban' [The Depiction of Rulers in the Principality of Transylvania: the Portrait of Prince György Rákóczi I in the Historical Picture Gallery], in Basics, Beatrix (ed.), *Tanulmányok Rózsa György tiszteletére* [Studies in Honour of György Rózsa], Budapest, 2005, pp. 47–49. For the rarity and the different Hungarian and Transylvanian adaptations of ornamented weapons of Turkish origin, see Gerelyes, Ibolya, 'A török díszfegyverek elterjedése és használata Magyarországon a XVI–XVII. században' [The Spread and Use of Turkish Ornamented Weapons in 16th-century and 17th-century Hungary], *Folia Archaeologica* XLII (1991), pp. 219–234.

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