

Lech Marek

## MEDIAEVAL ARMS AND ARMOUR IN LATIN EUROPE AS *ARS EMBLEMATICA*

### SUMMARY

Due to an enormous abundance of source data, which has steadily increased in the course of writing this text, I mainly attempted at showing examples of the most complete manifestation of an emblem or an inscription on weaponry in given categories. This may provoke a sense of dissatisfaction among readers who would expect a complete catalogue of artefacts. A compilation of a full list of such objects in the future could perhaps lead to discoveries of other emblematic trends in weaponry ornaments which were omitted here. However, trends which could be observed provide us with unique opportunities of interpretation of individual motifs belonging to the sphere of power symbolism or chivalric customs. We are even able to illustrate changes taking place in old societies. They render it possible to make an attempt at investigating the mentality of medieval man and allow to learn about sources of his behaviours, which resulted from his cultural background. It was an extremely interesting task to make an attempt at decoding the network of motifs which formed this rich cultural background and at defining their origin.

On the basis of discussed finds of weaponry it is possible to say that the Early Middle Ages was a period of forming and consolidation of the most important rituals and customs related to power symbolism, warriors' initiation and the hierarchy of the medieval society.

A perception of the spear as a symbol of a free man and a ruler is rooted in Antiquity. It is difficult here to separate barbarian and Late Roman symbolisms. It seems, however, that a popularity of hunting spears with wings and spearheads ornamented with images of wild beasts is to be considered as part of *Bar-*

*baricum* traditions. Hunting for dangerous game was a sort of initiation after which a young hunter commenced to be perceived as a full member of a given community. A hunting weapon, which was not very valued in the Roman world, became a symbol of the rank of a warrior and a ruler in the Middle Ages. The winged spear may have also been related to the formation of an image of an ideal monarch. Such a monarch was a benefactor and host, who invites to feast at the common table. Functions fulfilled in the court by the highest dignitaries of the kingdom in the time of peace were exactly reflected in respect they enjoyed in the army during military expeditions. Interestingly, the cup-bearer and the pantler were often the most trusted confidants of rulers (cf. Banaszkiewicz 1987, p. 13-19). This combination of a high military rank and a role at the monarch's table is manifested, among others, in verses of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. *Song of the Nibelungs* (1995, p. 28).<sup>314</sup>

The rite of spear throwing as a prelude to an armed encounter was present in Roman military habits and was also in use in the Middle Ages. This is demonstrated by spectacular finds, such as, e.g., the mentioned shaft of the spear from Kragehul and by much later narratives, such as a story from the Chronicle of Wincenty Kadłubek concerning fights for Nakło. In my opinion, throwing axes (commonly called *franciscas*) which can be found in Merovingian graves can also be related to the ritual prelude to combat.

---

<sup>314</sup> (...) Rumold, a fine kitchen master, an excellent companion  
(...) Sinold was a cup-bearer and an excellent companion  
(*Pieśń o Nibelungach* 1995, p.28).

Talismans on medieval spears are a clear reminiscence of an ancient Mediterranean tradition. Such talismans were made on the basis of ancient magical “characters” or all letters of the alphabet could be used. In Late Medieval texts recipes for “spears of victory” contained names of battles of the ancient world in which famous commanders won their glory.

The medieval symbolism of the spear is remarkable for its syncretism of motifs taken from the Classical and the barbarian culture. It is closely related to initiation and rites of power. Christianity did not fight these traditions, but skilfully combined the old idea of *lancea victorifera* with the tool of passion of Christ and His victory over death. A very important Christian adjustment was also an association of the shape of the head of the insignia spear (which was itself of hunting origin) with the shape of the cross. A habit of taking an oath on the blade of a shafted weapon was in use, as mentioned above, at least until the Early Modern Period.

Throughout the entire Middle Ages the spear was a sacred weapon, in spite of the fact that from Carolingian times the sword was clearly growing in significance. As early as the Merovingian Period it was an award received from the ruler for faithful service or it was a symbol of pertinence to the most elite retinue, which was closely related to the ruler. In early medieval literature we find numerous mentions of dignitaries who handed over spears, shields and sword to those who decided to join their retinues (Keen 2014, p. 98). In the very beginning the word *vassal* meant an armed follower in the service of his Lord, and not necessarily a land tenant, as it was the case in the already formed feudal system (cf. Keen 2014, p. 99). Luxurious Merovingian Period sword were provided with rings standing for an oath of fidelity or with inscriptions which were analogous to the following one: *So that Danil remembers the benefit*. Such swords were handed over by kings and dukes to their followers. At the same time they meant an obligation for unconditional loyalty and defending one's lord. The discussed gifts fit into an ancient initiation habit of handing over weapons, which later became part of the ceremony of knighting. Retinue members armed by their monarchs can also be seen as forerunners of knights associated in late medieval secular monarch orders.

A manifoldness of early medieval emblematics manifests itself in the case of helmets. Royalist-type inscriptions which can be seen on finds from Val di Nievole and Coppergate in York fit into a similar tradition as it is the case with the afore-mentioned swords with rings at their pommels. They are a manifestation of processes leading to consolidation of dependency

between the monarch and the retinue member, and – as a consequence – between the lord and the vassal.

Baldenheim type strap helmets, being of Byzantine origin, are ornamented with apotropaic symbols and inscriptions which can already be found on early Christian talismans. Furthermore, there are amulets and rank signs which are characteristic for the Roman world. A barbarian element in the decoration of such helmets are hunting scenes and images of wild beasts.

In the case of comb helmets the most conspicuous motif is an image of the wild boar, which was to protect their owners against misfortune. Sometimes a figurine of this animal ornamented the skull of the helmet. Such a position of a zoomorphic motif on the helmet can be noted as early as the Iron Age. On the other hand, the emblem of the wild boar, identified with a perfect warrior and perceived as an amulet, is rooted at least in the Bronze Age. However, I would not tend to consider it as an archetype or a topos which is embedded in general human subconsciousness. I rather relate it to a primeval uninterrupted tradition which is very clearly marked in the use of wild boar emblems on early medieval helmets. Thanks to Arthurian literature, it lasted at least to the end of the Late Middle Ages.

While searching for a common significance for images of animal figures on ancient and early medieval helmets, as well as for crests on late medieval helmets, we must point to apotropaism.

In many cases a crest which was initially an apotropaion became a kin emblem in the course of time. It did not always repeat an image of the charge painted on the shield. The nature of the late medieval heraldic crest, whose shape was strongly inspired with folk beliefs and not with principles of heraldry may imply its relation to early medieval or even earlier emblems which ornamented helmets. It is not an easy task to identify rules in the occurrence of ornamental motifs on medieval shields and helmets. However, the mentioned examples allow to classify discussed finds on the basis of frequency of occurrence of given categories of emblems, depending on the type of weaponry.

Kin charges are the most exposed motifs on the obverse of knights' war shields. With regard to their size, they dominate over small apotropaic motifs of pagan origin. The latter emblems were “smuggled” by means of embossing them on the heraldic figure or its background. The reverse of such a shield was less formal in its nature. We can find painted or fastened talismans there – these were usually images of saint patrons. It was believed that the knight or man-at-arms secured a protection against danger by means of looking at such talismans.

Shields of peace are first of all related to chivalric expeditions in search for glory and adventures. They may be called travel shields. On their official sides they usually commemorate deeds thanks to which the owner deserved to be called a knight.

Other signs which occur on shields can be referred to as symbols of fidelity to the sovereign or of membership in a given association. Therefore, these emblems are less individual than personal chivalric signs. Their role is similar to that of so-called *livery badges*. Symbols and mottos of medieval chivalric associations and monograms of rulers or cities could be classified into this category. Affinity to signs of fidelity to the sovereign can be seen in emblems referring to courtly love, brooches, parts of dress and other gifts from ladyloves, which were attached by knights to helmet crests or to shields. This was due to the fact that the relation between the lady and the knight in the Middle Ages mirrored the dependency between the sovereign and the vassal.

Love emblematics is usually related to weaponry for tournament, which can be seen as a fight for ladies' favours. Tournament shields often have symbols or personifications of love on their official sides. The knight sometimes ordered an image of his lady of the heart to be painted on the internal side of the shield. The lady's portrait was placed on the left side, so that the owner steadily had it in front of his eyes while charging with the lance. The reverse of the tournament shield is sometimes ornamented with an amulet or a talisman borrowed from battle shields. The image of St Christopher which can be seen on some surviving artefacts reminds us on the risk related to participation in the tournament. In paintings on tournament shields we can see much more liberty than in ornaments of war shields, as the latter were guided by strict principles of heraldry. The coat of arms was painted on them in whole, with the helmet, the lambrequin and the crest. Sometimes the official side of the heraldic shield is additionally ornamented with animals from the bestiary of love or individual chivalric mottos. The latter are of provocative nature and are a challenge for adversaries fighting for a favourable verdict of the "tribunal of love" composed of ladies. A habit of placing such ornaments on shields can be in simple terms called "spreading a peacock's tail" in front of ladies' audience.

A very broad category are apotropaic emblems of no individual nature, which only protect a given community or group of people. The cross which ornaments shields of monks-knights and of all *milites Christi* who fight against pagans and heretics is the most important symbol in this group. Official apotropaism chiefly

manifests itself on infantry pavises from the 15<sup>th</sup> c. Characters occurring on them are patrons of knights and men-at-arms, saint supporters who were popular in the Middle Ages, and protectors of kingdoms, cities or guilds. They were all supposed to protect the entire community and not only the owner of the shield against misfortune. On the other hand, the shield owner could be saved from death by talismans painted on the reverse of the pavise. Such talismans were borrowed from chivalric emblematics. Among them there is the image of St Christopher or the IHS monogram written on the Host.

Other emblems on shields, which consolidated ties within a given community, were a kind of a manifesto, a claim or a discourse with adversaries. We find them first of all on Hussite artefacts. A chalice which stood for the Eucharist in two kinds was often painted on them. Other elements included Old Testament motifs, which were of didactic, moralising and state-building nature. Hussite emblematics can be seen as avant-garde, as it is based on motifs which are recurrent in weaponry ornaments on a broader scale first during the Reformation.

On other parts of protective armament which are dealt with in this work we can find emblems and inscriptions which are related to the idea of spiritual armour, described in the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians. These are manifestations of apotropaism with a philosophical background, which radically differs from a belief in the power of amulets, images of saints, magical formulae or words of power. This belief manifests itself much more often on medieval plate armours and other body defences.

Fragments of popular prayers which occur on protective armament were rarely considered as actual pleas for the intercession of God, Christ and saints. They were rather treated as spells. One can even take a risk and say that in many discussed cases the Christian religion only enriched the art of writing talismans, which was developing since Antiquity. Words of power, which were a magical strengthening of protective armament, included, e.g., the names of the Magi, Hebrew words or acronyms referring to God: *Adonay*, *Agla*, *Emanuel*, or the *Tetragrammaton*. A Biblical invocation of Hosanna is known to me only from the mentioned example of a 15<sup>th</sup> c. armour from Churburg Castle in Tirol. In the Middle Ages, talismans written in Hebrew were believed to be the most effective. This was because it was believed that God Himself used this language. The second "magical language" was Greek, which can be seen in, among others, talismans on shields which occur in panel painting. The discussed spells which

can be found on weaponry contained Hebrew words written with Greek letters and Greek names of God written in Latin. Latin was only in the third place in the hierarchy of magical languages. Eventually, there are examples of magical script which was already used on ancient talismans from the Mediterranean cultural sphere – so-called *charakteres*.

Images of the bear and the lion which were recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> c. weaponry fulfilled non-heraldic functions. They may be seen as a reminiscence of pagan apotropaism. In the former case it was rather related to barbarian mythology, while in the latter one – to beliefs of the Classical world. The ancient cult of the lion was very early incorporated into the sphere of Christian symbols. A myth of the Nemean lion being defeated by Heracles, who made an impenetrable armour from the beast's hide was known in the Middle Ages thanks to erudition of Christian scholars. It manifests itself in the emblematics of late medieval protective armament and firearms.

On the basis of numerous sources it was possible to prove a relation between talismans and amulets on weaponry and medieval jewellery, which was a sort of magical armour. Dress accessories were often gifts of love, venerated personal souvenirs which were attached to the armour as a sign of loyalty to the courtly ladylove. It was very early that these were seen as artefacts with strong apotropaic traits, which was in my opinion due to psychological reasons. Emblems of love, which can be found on armours as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> c., were to remind the knight of the oath of fidelity he made to his lady.

Fidelity in love was in the Middle Ages treated analogously to fidelity of a vassal to his lord. Emblems of secular chivalric associations, testifying to loyalty to the sovereign were often displayed on protective armament. Such emblems differed from love fidelity signs with the lack of apotropaic traits. Various kinds of armour often fulfilled a role of a men's official war garment with which appropriate accessories were carried, including badges of chivalric secular orders. Statutes of such associations often obliged their members to display signs of monarch associations on civilian clothes and their war counterparts in visible places. Examples of royal protective armament from the territory of Latin Europe demonstrate that such armament was also perceived as sort of official garment of the monarch. It was ornamented with emblems bearing political and propaganda significance and with personal mottos of the ruler.

In the emblematic hierarchy of protective armament there is a clear dominance of the shield. Con-

cerning offensive arms, the sword goes first. Although in the beginning of the Early Middle Ages this weapon was slightly less significant than the spear with regard to its symbolic meaning, it soon commenced to strongly prevail in terms of its load with ideological contents. It was probably caused by a more personal relation between the owner and his sword than it was the case with the shafted weapon, which was carried and used less often. Due to its association with the shape of the cross, the sword perhaps sooner became an attribute of the Christian warrior than any other kind of weapon did. It does not mean that the sphere of pagan beliefs did not leave its mark on the emblematics of the sword. Wherever possible, promoters of Christendom attempted at avoiding an open confrontation with old beliefs in an extremely well-considered manner. They were making use of a method of accommodation. Such a manner of proceeding manifests itself in ornaments and legends on swords. It must be stressed, however, that in this case Christian symbolism overwhelmingly dominates over contents with pagan roots. For instance, stone amulets carried with ancient and early medieval swords were believed to have healing powers, be a remedy for wounds and some kinds of them were believed to protect against heat. The knowledge on such properties of stones was a derivate of barbarian folk beliefs and of pieces of information from lapidaries compiled by erudites of the Classical world. In the Late Middle Ages such amulets were replaced with sword pommels which were chiefly made from two kinds of stone: jasper and rock crystal. The sphere of pagan symbolism related to these stones was enriched with a mystical dimension, making use of relevant quotations from the Bible. Rock crystal was identified with the body of Christ and jasper with the rock on which the walls of heavenly Jerusalem were built. A symbolic language of materials which were used for the manufacture of weapons and of their forms is most completely manifested in the case of the sword granted by Sigismund of Luxembourg to Frederick I the Belligerent and of the so-called unicorn sword. Both were weapons of justice and *par excellence* an attribute of the Christian knight.

A rosette-like shape of sword pommels and their aureate colour is in my opinion directly related to Christological and crusade symbolism. Analogous symbolism can be seen in the case of rosette-shaped emblems and accompanying inscriptions on parts of horse harness. It is worth noting that a 15<sup>th</sup> c. gilded bronze capsule for a wax *Agnus Dei* amulet which is stored in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin (inv. No. F 1571) is ornamented with an identical motif of a rosette. It is provided with an inscription: *Agnus Dei mi-*



*serere mei*. On the basis of arguments which were stated in the discussion I would tend to associate the rosette-like shape of sword pommels from the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c. with the rose as a symbol of resurrection and an attribute of Christian warriors fighting against pagans.

The art of writing talismans on swords is of ancient Mediterranean origin. In this case, an attempt was made at encoding the magical formula in such a way that it had a personal nature and could not be read by undesirable persons. Greek, Hebrew and Latin words of power were combined with each other in such talismans. A 15<sup>th</sup> c. sword stored in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich is provided with a spell against wounds. It is compiled in an identical manner and is based upon analogous words of power as in the case of a 1000 years earlier talisman which was discovered near a Roman fort in Britain (sic!). It seems that the knowledge on ancient *defixiones* possessed by copyists who worked in medieval scriptoria contributed to the development of the art of making talismans. There is evidence for the use of medieval *defixiones* which were written with runes, but which contained Christian or Hebrew formulae. For instance, the Angelic Salutation was written with runes on the pommel of one of swords. Sometimes the magical power of a talisman on the sword was supposed to be reinforced with a ring-shaped arrangement of inscriptions. This was probably borrowed from the arrangement of legends on medieval rings and brooches. Solely on the basis of inscriptions which can be found on swords it is difficult to decide whether they were treated as actual pleas to God and saints for intercession or as spells. Concerning the magical aspect, I would tend to relate to it first of all any inscriptions which were encrypted with the use of a commonly unknown alphabet, abbreviations, intentional inversion of letters or those containing foreign words written with the Latin alphabet. All these procedures were supposed to turn the inscription into a spell which would be known only to the sword owner. Furthermore, there was a fear that the inscription would be read by an undesirable person and they would be able to make use of the magical armour provided by the talisman on the weapon. A general conclusion from the analysis of inscriptions and emblems on swords, but also on other items of weaponry which were discussed here, is that there is a need to verify a common opinion concerning illiteracy and lack of education of their makers. Although it must be taken into consideration that many craftsmen were not very literate, there was also a quite numerous group of erudite masters. Such masters were able to produce the most complicated talismans with the use of various alphabets. It is enough to men-

tion the example of apotheosis of the chivalric virtue of *magnanimitas*, which appears on a 15<sup>th</sup> c. tournament axe as a rebus. On a crossbow of Ulrich V of Württemberg it is expressed with a Yiddish inscription, written with Hebrew letters. Therefore, it would be enormously anachronistic to classify every inscription which we are not able to read as a work of an illiterate.

Amulets, analogously to talismans, were of ancient origin in the Middle Ages. A belief in apotropaic power of the pentagram which appears on pommels of medieval swords and falchions was deeply rooted in antique Mediterranean tradition. It seems that some symbols which are considered in scholarship as marks of swordmaking centres directly derive from ancient amulets. The sing of the goddess Venus, which has already been discussed, could serve as an example. Signs of the cross and images of *Agnus Dei* are to be classified as Christian apotropaions and they also occur on other categories of weaponry.

A semantic multidimensionality, which was characteristic for the world of medieval ideological contents, clearly manifests itself in the case of a quotation from Psalm 143 (144). As we tried to demonstrate, this psalm was part of coronation liturgy and knighting liturgy. An old barbarian ritual of handing over the weapon was combined with an ecclesiastical ceremony probably in the Carolingian Period. From this time there is archaeological evidence for the existence of a liturgical procedure which was incorporated into texts of blessings of arms which can be found in later pontificals. Formulae related to the ritual of blessing were first reserved for royal weapons only, and only later they were also applied for chivalric weapons. These formulae enable us to illustrate social changes which led to the formation of the knightly class in the territory of Europe. A decreasing number of knighting ceremonies in the late 13<sup>th</sup> c. can also be seen in a decreasing popularity of quotations from the liturgy of accolade among inscriptions on swords.

An idea of the sword of secular power, given with consent of God to a monarch or knight, is also reflected in inscriptions on swords. St Peter and his vicar on Earth, that is, the pope, were trustees of the weapon of secular power. In the Carolingian Period it came to a consolidation of a ritual of girding a sword to the emperor by the pope "with consent of St Peter", as it was said in surviving charters from that time. A privilege of jurisdiction over people was enjoyed not only by representatives of power elites, but also (although to a more limited extent) by knights. It seems that a majority of inscriptions on swords which start with the words *Sanctus* (Scs) Petrus is related to the idea of the

sword of secular power. These are probably an abbreviation of an inscription which in the most complete form (to my knowledge) of *Scs Petrus benedicat ius* (St Peter blesses the law) can be seen on a 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c. sword from Lake Søberg in Zeeland.

It is probable that a certain kind of medieval idolatry is related to the idea that the sword of earthly justice comes from the hands of the saint – that is, an ambassador of God on Earth. According to its rules, it was the figure of the saint that carried out a ceremonial investiture of a monarch. For instance, rulers of Castile received the sword from the image of St James the Greater in Compostela. On the other hand, Alfonso X the Wise received the sword from the hands of the sculpture of Ferdinand III the Saint in Seville. By means of this, the gathered people assumed that the predecessor accepted his successor. The sword of St George from the collegiate church in Cologne was also used for arming the figure of the patron of chivalry. The figure took part in ceremonial processions; however, in this case we have no mentions on the use of this sword during the ceremony of investiture.

Already in the Middle Ages some especially venerated swords were believed to be related to personages of distinguished kings, saints or heroes of chivalric romances and poems. This provided these swords with exceptional splendour. Among such swords one can mention the famous sword of St Maurice which was used in the coronation of the German emperors; the so-called sword of Charlemagne, used in the sacra of the kings of France; and the weapon from the cathedral treasury in Essen, which was believed to have been used in the decapitation of St Cosmas and Damian – saint patrons of the city. By means of relation to the person of the saint, analogously to other holy relics, the weapon acquired healing powers in the eyes of people. This was the case with the so-called sword of St Maurice, which is now kept in the armoury in Turin. It is probable that the *Szczerbiec* (Jagged Sword) was also of legendary origin in the eyes of medieval people. The program of inscriptions and signs on the hilt of this sword may have been inspired by the description of the sword belonging to Roland. A sword stuck into a rock fissure in the sanctuary in Rocamadour is believed to be related to the same hero. However, the sword comes from as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> c. It seems that it may have replaced an earlier original in this place. On the other hand, the mentioned sword of Galgano Gudotti is an original 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> c. weapon. It is embedded into the rock and fulfils a role of a personal crucifix. It is a proof for a very early reception of motifs from Arthurian tales in the territory of the Apennine Peninsula.

Swords with badges of secular chivalric orders are related to the ceremony of admission to an elite society, the ceremonial investiture and fidelity to the sovereign. Such badges can also be found on many other categories of weapons which are discussed here. Inscriptions and emblems associated with courtly love or fidelity generally fit into the same trend, as they are an apotheosis of loyalty in its general sense.

*Gladius iustitiae*, carried in front of the emperor and king as a guarantor of peaceful order, in the Late Middle Ages became an attribute of burgomasters of Western European urban centres which were especially favoured by the king. It seems that granting an actually imperial privilege to the highest representative of the urban commune testifies to a far-reaching emancipation of the burgher class in Western European kingdoms.

Within the framework of *fin amor* customs, daggers (as the most personal weapon and a garment accessory) were gifts from a lady to her beloved more often than it was the case with swords. I would believe that first of all 14<sup>th</sup> c. daggers with bone mounts ornamented with reliefs should be seen as *par excellence* gifts of love. The language of materials as well as images which can be seen on surviving artefacts are related to love symbolism. It is probable that scenes on handles and sheaths of such daggers were inspired with chivalric literature. The discussed artefacts are rather to be related to courtly spheres.

A personal nature of daggers is manifested in individual mottos and inscriptions which were to justify impetuosity of the weapon's owner. I would place such mottos in the adventure emblematic trend. Christological and Marian apotropaism and the cult of saint supporters manifests itself on daggers in a similar way to weapons belonging to other categories. An analogous situation also takes place in the case of badges of secular chivalric associations, which were carried on daggers in order to express one's loyalty to the sovereign.

A role of weapons as insignia can be seen based on the example of enlarged and lavishly ornamented arrowheads, which have been discussed here. Such arrowheads are characteristic for the 15<sup>th</sup> c. In my opinion their emblematics mainly concerns courtly love and fidelity to the lady of the heart, and they should be related to tournament customs. A hypothesis on their relation to attributes of tournament judges and heralds seems to be the most probable. It sometimes occurred that the role of tournament judges who could have "arrows of love" as insignia of their power were ladies sitting in the so-called court of love (cf. Witkowski 2002, p. 4).

Apart from the sword, which obtained a chief role as an attribute of the just judge in the Middle Ages, one must also mention the mace (including the flanged mace) and a peculiar burgher variant of the judge's insignia, that is, fist-like fighting picks. The latter became widespread in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. in the territory of the Netherlands, where it very early came to considerable emancipation of the burgher class from the superior authority.

A minor number of ornamented firearms from the Middle Ages does not entitle us to draw far-reaching conclusions on the emblematics of this category of weapons. With regard to decorations of known artefacts, two apotropaic trends can be isolated. One was inspired with Christian religiosity while the other was probably of still pagan origin. An explanation of architectural motifs in shapes and ornaments of barrels requires a further discussion. In the present work it was proposed that the architectural shape of these weapons was supposed to underline a strict relation (which was itself of ancient origin) between the knowledge of building fortifications and constructing of siege engines, used for demolishing the former.

Motifs from the *fin amor* sphere clearly dominate in the case of ornamented spurs and saddles with bone fittings. Spurs with love inscriptions or *spurs of loving memory* known from the treatise of René d'Anjou were probably handed over by ladies-sovereigns to their chosen ones-vassals as a token of admission to the so-called love service (*Germ. Minnedienst*). Such a ceremony would therefore constitute a direct analogy to the ceremony of knighting.

A popularity of the S letter on spurs and other discussed finds of weaponry seems to be especially interesting. According to the proposed hypothesis, this emblem refers to loyalty in its general sense and to fidelity in love in specific. A relation of this letter to ancient amulets was demonstrated. In the case of these amulets, S letters (which were treated identically and sometimes were even multiplied) referred to the Egyptian cult of fertility deities. It was widespread in the Graeco-Roman world and it was in all probability transplanted by Christianity into the territories to the north of the Alps.

Egyptian traditions could also manifest themselves in some scenes which can be found on 15<sup>th</sup> c. Arthurian tournament saddles with bone fittings. A lady with a slipper on one of such saddles can be a reference to the myth of the Egyptian queen of Nubia, which was the prototype of the Modern Period fable of Cinderella.

Luxurious saddles were abundant in love scenes and inscriptions which were inspired by Arthurian literature. Some of these images were clearly of mora-

lising nature. Emblematics of these elegant artefacts expresses an apotheosis of fidelity and noble acts in love to the lady. As already stated for many times, this was a direct analogy to loyalty to the sovereign. The Arthurian nature of luxurious saddles, which were in all probability granted by the sovereign to barons – members of an elite chivalric monarchist association, corresponded to the Arthurian idea of the Knights of the Round Table. Clientelism-type organisations of such kind were formed by rulers in relation to this idea.

Apotropaism in the emblematics of parts of horse harness first of all concerns harness mounts (*Germ. Pferdegeschirranhänger*). Apart from Christian apotropaions which are known from other categories of weaponry, there also occur ancient lunar amulets which were supposed to protect the horse and its owner against the so-called evil eye.

Emblematics of weaponry and its significance depending on the context of occurrence is best illustrated by customs related to the chivalric funeral. The Christian burial ceremony absorbed numerous pagan customs. One of these was in all probability the act of offering of weaponry on the altar – *pro salute animae*. It seems not to be far from true to assume that weapons offered after the knight's death were nothing else than the mentioned *hergewet* – an assemblage of arms which – according to Germanic customs – returned to the ruler after the death of the vassal whom the ruler armed. Weapons handed over to the knight during the ceremony of knighting returned to his sovereign after the knight's death. According to liturgical texts, this occurred out of the will of God Himself. It was also a symbolic act of *commendatio animae*, in which weaponry stood out as the sign of individual parts of spiritual armour. God provided this armour to the Christian knight for the purpose of the most important fight for the knight, i.e., Psychomachy. A principal difference between Germanic inheritance laws and offering of knightly weapons on the altar *pro salute animae* in Christian times was the fact that God and not the secular ruler was recognised as the supreme sovereign.

An arrangement of the burial, an alignment of the body of the dead and kinds of weaponry deposited into the grave seem to be related to customs known from Antiquity. All these elements formed a non-verbal message, which first of all informed about the life and nature of death of the buried. It is plausible that sepulchral sculpture became a medium which was to some extent to replace grave goods. By means of it such contents were expressed which were (apart from few exceptional cases) impossible to communicate with the use of grave furnishings. Furthermore, sepulchral sculpture was more

durable and more accessible to those paying a visit to the place of rest of the knight. Therefore, it was able not only – in accordance with the Christian spirit – incline passers-by to a prayer for the soul of the dead, but also to inform them about the deeds of the commemorated knight, about his biography and circumstances of his death. I tend to relate this aspect to a biographical role of tombstones, which was typical for the ancient world. This care for a good memory in the future often appears in chivalric literature which is based upon earlier tales of heroes. When Siegfried from *The Song of the Nibelungs* (1995, p. 68, Stanza 344) set out on a journey with King Gunther to the land of Brunhild, he was believed to say: *So shall we rich apparel before the lady wear/ That we have not dishonour where men the tale hereafter hear*. The afore-mentioned fragments of epitaphs of the Knights of the Round Table – known from Arthurian literature – are an expression of care to immortalise heroic deeds of the dead, their dignity and circumstances of their death.

Due to a mutual intermingling and overlapping of numerous different ideological contents, it is not an easy task to generally characterise medieval emblematics on the basis of the discussed sources. Apotropaism is a very important trend in emblematics in the case of weaponry, which is comprehensible in the context of artefacts which were in use when lives were at stake. Within the framework of it one can isolate manifestations of magical behaviours with pre-Christian roots, including a pagan way of treatment of Christian symbols, words and fragments of prayer. Another aspect is devotion, that is, faith in the power of invocations which was to incline God, Christ, the Mother of God or saints to provide help.

The next sphere of ideological contents concerns fidelity. In this sphere the idea of loyalty to the sovereign is analogous to devotion in love. Secular emblems of fidelity, however, are generally deprived of apotropaic properties, which can sometimes be one of traits of gifts, amulets and love talismans. The lion's share of ideological contents in ornaments on weaponry are love emblems. This category encompasses the notion of ideal love, that is, unfortunate love, in accordance with the concept of *fin amor*. Such love did not necessarily remain unfulfilled. It very often occurred, as we are told by chivalric literature, that it transformed into illegal love. However, it always remained unfortunate and became seeds of evil. Eroticism also held a very prominent place within the framework of medieval love. It was probably related to a pagan tradition, according to which physical love was a sort of holy mystery. *Fin Amor* and blunt eroticism intertwine in the famous Roman of the Rose, which has been quoted here for many times. A close relation between the sphere of love and warfare manifes-

ts itself not only in military analogies to efforts of the bachelor who attempts at winning the inaccessible lady. Even during the most ferocious clash in a war, knights attempted at impressing their ladyloves. Ladies mourning the fallen bachelors are often part of narratives of war events in chivalric literature. In *The Song of the Nibelungs* (1995, p. 54), after a fierce clash of the Burgundians and Siegfried with the Saxons, Kriemhild asked the messenger: *Who wrought most deeds of valour? — That shalt thou let me know*. Then, there goes a story of warlike deeds of Siegfried and it is said that *And weep aloud must women for friends by his strong arm laid low. There, too, the knight she loved full many a maid must lose* (ibid.).

The last of the main trends of ideological contents, related to initiation and power, is of the most sacral nature. A combination of earlier ceremonies of handing over insignia weapons with the Christian liturgy can be clearly seen in it. The medieval rite of knighting is a clear reflection of the royal sacra. Christian formulae of blessing of arms, whose fragments were identified on surviving swords, were analogous in both cases. The sword of secular justice, which was proper for an earthly monarch, was not only an attribute of the emperor but of every knight who had the power to judge other people. It was believed that this weapon came from St Peter. The idea of spiritual armour is also related to initiation and power. Such armour was helpful in the fight of virtues and vices for the human soul. It stands out as the sign of moral standards which should be followed by a good ruler and knight.

It seems that the last of the mentioned main emblematic trends, although it was also based upon a tradition which was still pagan, was under the strongest influence of Christian philosophy.

An extraordinary lavishness of contents in the ornamentation of medieval weaponry of Latin Europe inclines us to a debate on the level of education of its creators and users. A multidimensionality of meanings of individual emblems and inscriptions was actually played around with. Complex allusions were used, just to mention the mentioned inscription on a dagger, which referred to the motto of the Order of the Garter. It seems therefore that a good point of departure for a further discussion on emblematics of weaponry would be an assumption that people of the Middle Ages were not illiterates. On the contrary, they were masters in their field and were able to skilfully juggle with signs, symbols, and words. Striving for an understanding of this enormously rich medieval emblematics language teaches humility to researchers at every stage of examinations.