

Relations of Silesia to Flanders in the Middle Ages. Archaeological Evidence

Schlesisch-flämische Beziehungen im Mittelalter. Archäologische Evidenz

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Abstract

Im Beitrag werden zwei Kategorien von Artefakten diskutiert, die sich auf flämische Traditionen in Schlesien beziehen. Die ältesten Spuren gehen ins 13./14. Jh. zurück und können als Belege einer physischen Anwesenheit von romanisch sprechenden Ansiedlern in Schlesien zur Zeit der sog. Ostsiedlung interpretiert werden. Das Vorkommen von anderen flämischen Einflüssen in der Region ist schwieriger zu erklären. Diese Artefakte, die ins 14./15. Jh. datiert werden, fanden die Weg nach Schlesien zusammen mit flämischer Bewaffnung und Tafelgeschirr, die sich dorthin vom böhmischen Hof her ausbreiteten.

Schlüsselwörter

Flandern – Schlesien – Bewaffnung – Harnisch – Tafelgeschirr

Key words

Flemish – Silesia – arms – armor – table ware

*Naer Oostland willen wj rijden
Naer Oostland willen wj meê
Al over de groene heiden
Al over de heiden
Daer isser en betere steê¹*

Historical background

Bishop Walter of Malo was most probably the one, who introduced Flemish and Walloon people into Silesia as early as in the 12th century (*Schilling 1938*, 50). Some historians stated that the Canons Regular of the Lateran were the first Romance settlers brought from Arronaise to Ślęza and afterwards to Wrocław – Piaskowa Island by Piotr Włostowic in 1142–1145. In Wrocław, the Flemish settlement near St. Maurice's Church, probably following the tradition of the diocese of Louvain/Leuven, can be dated to the 12th century (*Zientara 1975a*, 353, 356). In the records dating back to the turn of the 13th century, the Walloon settlement situated in this area was referred to as *Platea Romanorum or Gallicorum* (*Zientara 1975a*, 353).

¹ *To the Eastern land we ride
To the Eastern land all together
All to the green meadows
We shall find our welfare there* (Medieval Flemish song – after *Zientara 1975b*)

The earliest tax collected in the medieval quarter of Wrocław, called Walońska (Walloon) Street, recorded as *inter gallicos*, was levied before the year 1302 (*CDS III*, 9–10, 23). The most prominent among the mentioned settlers was the weavers guild. Therefore the area is often referred to in written accounts as settlement of Walloon weavers.

In the time of Henry the Bearded, colonists arriving in the region enjoyed freedom and privileges, according to the charters issued by the duke. They were only obliged to develop settlement structures in the previously uninhabited land, pay the rent and provide the duke with military contingents (*Żientara 1975b*, 131). The Flemish settlers never failed to meet the latter requirement, which was scrupulously recorded in *The Chronicle of the Polish Dukes*. In 1312, during Władysław of Legnica's armed raid through the Brzeg district, the Romance speaking villagers of Wierzbno and Janików defeated the invading force and captured Władysław. He and his twenty knights were subsequently handed over by the colonists to Bolesław, Duke of Brzeg (*Żientara 1975a*, 360). The cultural separation of the Flemish settlers was a short-term phenomenon in Silesia and soon all the newcomers were thought of as Germans, who were the most numerous group (*Żientara 1975b*, 131, 174, 192.). Around the second half of the 14th century, in Wrocław, Romance speaking craftsmen were, to a large extent, Germanized and the Walloon weaver guild as a separate association ceased to exist between 1422 and 1430 (*Żientara 1975a*, 356). Several towns in Silesia acquired their municipal laws at the beginning of the 13th century according to Flemish charters. It has been asserted that the attachment of the newcomers to their own laws and tradition was an ephemeral phenomenon. Soon the Flemings and Walloons dissolved among the more numerous German speaking colonists. Subsequently the Flemish towns were reorganized in Silesia according to the Magdeburg laws.

Archaeological record

Despite the fact that there is enough evidence in written accounts for the settlement of Flemish and Walloon colonists in Silesia, still it is difficult to find archeological record to confirm their presence in the region. There are however a few late medieval finds that could be interpreted as Flemish. They can be grouped in two chronologically diverse assemblages. First is dated to the 13th/early 14th century when we could assume the physical presence of Romance speaking inhabitants in Silesia. The second assemblage comes from the late 14th and 15th centuries. At this time it is rather unlikely that Flemish settlers attached to their own, original culture remained in the region as a distinct group. A hypothesis that such late finds are traces of a long living tradition of the foreign colonists in Silesia would be far fetched.

When analyzing the aforementioned archeological data in general, several questions could be raised. The most important among them concerns the possibility of distinguishing the face of foreign colonization in Silesia on the basis of such evidence.

Significant for the further discussion on the matter is a stone cross found in Niwnice Lwówek Ślą. County (Fig. 1b). Such monuments are referred to as crosses of reconciliation in the most recent literature (*Nocuń 2004*, 31). The specimen remained unknown before World War II and was discovered by Artur Kwasniewski, Wrocław, on August 7th 1986 (*Scheer 1986*, 6). It is to be found in the outer wall of St. Hedwig's Church in Niwnice, first mentioned in written records in 1300 (*Kozaczewski 1995*, 18). The village of present-day Niwnice is comprised of two neighboring villages mentioned in fourteenth century records: Newelande (Niwice) and Cunczisdorf (Bartniki) with the church in question. Both, situated in the vicinity of Lwówek Śląski, lied in the region of the most isolated thirteenth century German and Flemish settlements in Silesia (*Żientara 1975b*, 179). According to F. Schilling, only the villages in the vicinity of Bartniki (Cunzendorf unter dem Walde) could be considered early German Settlements in the area. The settlement of this region might go back to the thirteenth Century (*Schilling 1938*). Sculpted on the outer surface of the cross (Fig. 1b) is a representation of the *goedendag* – a traditional Flemish weapon used mainly in the 14th century (Fig. 1a).

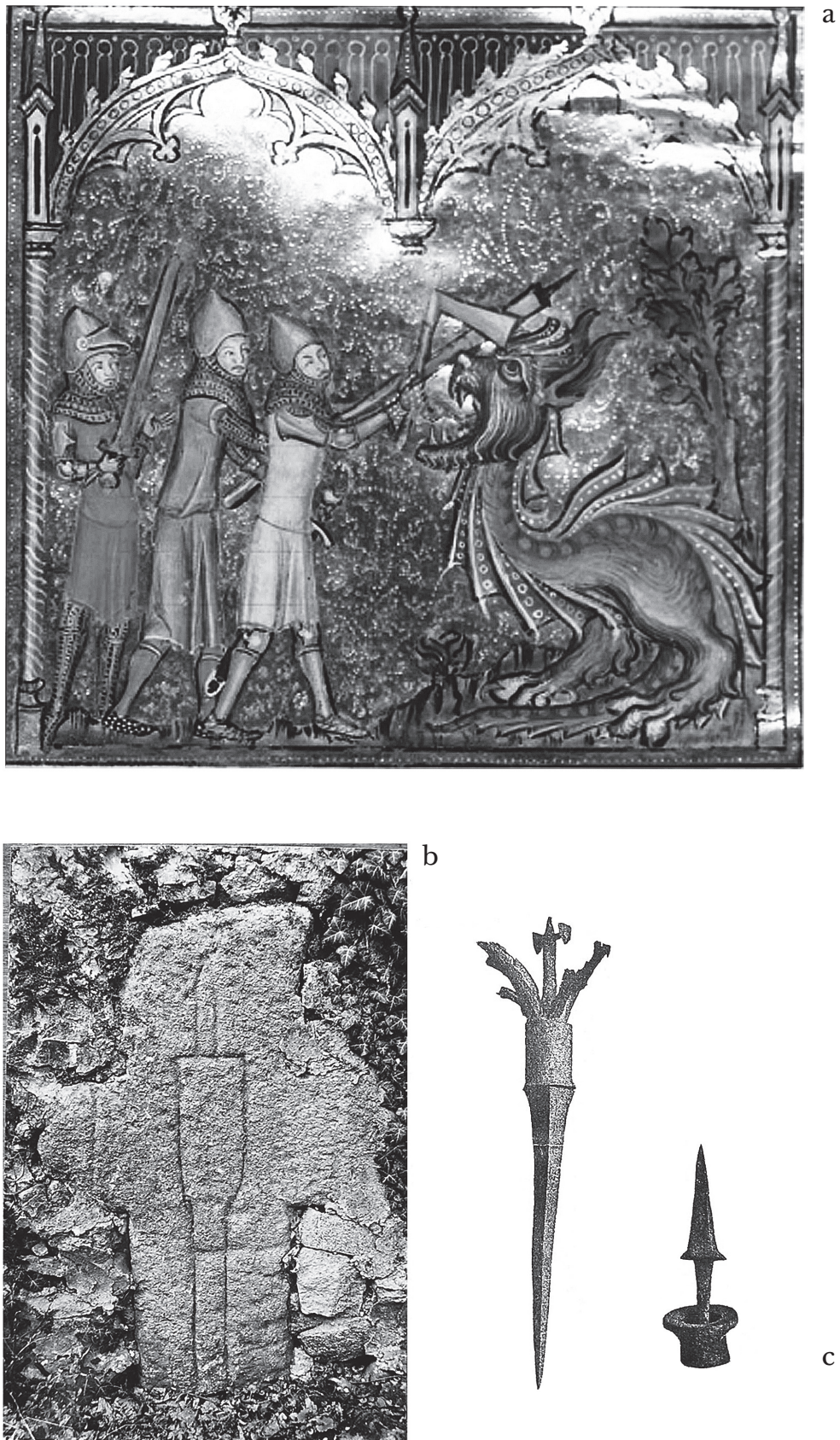


Fig. 1 The *goendags* – 14th cent. Flemish infantry weapons: a – *The Romance of Alexander* (after MS. Bodl. 264, Bodleian Library, Oxford); b – stone cross, Niwnice, Lwówek Śl. County (photo by D. Wojtucki); c – two specimens excavated at Termonde (after Moens 1900).

The relief shows a widening club with a spike on the end. Despite the schematic character of the drawing, the representation contains a single detail indicating the weapon's Flemish origin: the border between the steel strengthening ferrule and the wooden shaft. The proportions of particular parts of the weapon depicted correspond to those of surviving *goedendags*. The head of the weapon from Niwnice is 19 cm in length and its measurements resemble those of the original specimen found in Termonde (Fig. 1c). Regrettably, the cross is damaged at the base and the entire length of the object remains unknown. The size of the shaft, which is 6 cm in diameter at the base, resembles that of the other finds.

In the rhymed chronicle *Branche des royaux lignages* composed by Guillaume Guiart, who served in the army led by Philip IV the Fair as a crossbowman and fought against the Flemings in the Battle of Mons en Pevele in 1304 (*de Vries 2000*, 33) one can find a detailed description of the *goedendag*. Guiart's relation reads (a free translation), "With great heavy ironed staves, having a long sharp iron projecting, they (The Flemish) go to meet the French, such a staff, which they carry in war, is named Godendac in their country. Godendac that is to say Good-day, if one would express it in French. This staff is long and well contrived, made for striking with two hands. And when it is used for a crushing stroke, if he who strikes understands it and knows how to work well therewith, quickly he may recover his blow and strike, without any jest, with the projecting end forward, stabbing his enemy in the belly; and the iron is sharp that enters easily and straight forward into all places in which it may be thrust, if armour does not resist it" (*Moens 1900*, 5). This record has already been noticed by J. Moens, who in his study on the arms in question argues that the *goedendag* is a massive weapon held in both hands and used by warriors of great physical strength while *plançon á picot* is smaller. They are both wooden clubs equipped with an iron head and a strengthening ferrule (*Moens 1900*, 7).

J. Moens' description of *goedendags* and *plançon á picotes* is of great interest to students of arms. The weapon found near Termonde during works conducted on the flood defences on the Escaut River exactly corresponds to the definition offered by Guillaume Guiart. The find is a 40 cm long piece of a large, heavy steel-mounted club (Fig. 1c). It has a massive ferrule, 6 cm long and 4.5 cm in diameter at the top of the shaft, which is 15 cm in length and 3.7 cm in diameter. The steel spike fixed inside the ferrule is 24.8 cm long without the tang. It was attached to the shaft by a rivet. However, the edges of this tetragonal in cross-section, were not sharp enough to be used for striking cutting blows (*Moens 1900*, 7) while according to some arms and armour re-searchers, the *goedendag* could be used in this way (see the full discussion in: *Marek – Wojtucki 2007*).

A very similar *goedendag* was found outside Flanders in Hammerberg near Kr. Lahn-Dill, Hessen (*Striffler 1998*, 502). This weapon slightly differs from the specimen discussed above. It consists of a long steel head, triangular in diameter, securely fixed to the shaft by a tang with a notched and grinded surface. The spike is placed in a separate socket, in which the organic remains of a wooden shaft are still to be found. The entire length of the weapon is 50.2 cm.² J. Moens mentions another example of a related weapon, Coming from Termonde. It is, however, smaller than the Hammerberg find (Fig. 1c). The entire length of the object is 19 cm. The ferrule is 3.5 cm long and 5.8 cm in diameter at the base of the head.³ Nonetheless, the distinction between the larger *goedendags* and smaller *plançon á picotes* made by J. Moens seems to be rather artificial and the close structural similarities suggest that these terms may be used interchangeably.

Advances in the study of archaeological and law-related late medieval relics have resulted in the identification of numerous reliefs made in stone crosses which exactly correspond to some surviving contemporary tools and weapons (*Azzola 2005*, 66). The measurements of the arms represented in the reliefs are strikingly similar to the proportions of the related archaeological finds, which can be observed, for example, in the case of crosses from Milików, near Nowogrodziec and Mściszew, near Lwówek Śląski.

² <http://www.suehnekreuz.de/polen/n Schles/neuland.htm#lit%23lit>

³ <http://www.suehnekreuz.de/polen/n Schles/neuland.htm#lit%23lit>

The obligation of Flemings to defend their new land as well as the settlers' great attachment to their traditional weaponry⁴ could have resulted in the appearance of *goedendags* in Silesia. It could be argued very plausibly that the relief visible on the monument at Niwnice represents a fatal weapon and the erection of the cross was a consequence of the commission of a crime. However, the relief may also symbolize a representative of the Flemish community.

Iconographic representations of the weapon in question as well as the finds themselves are scarce, which would suggest that the arms were in use for a short period of time in a limited area and were never popular. *K. de Vries* (2000, 12–13) is also in favor of this hypothesis. The researcher argues that *goedendags* must have been used only in Flanders. D. Nicolle quotes an example of a representation of such a weapon in an illuminated 14th century codex held at the British Library (*Nicolle, 1998, 84, fig. 219*). This author provides another illustration of a *goedendag*, coming from the Flemish handwritten copy of 1321 with the title *Grands Chroniques de la France* (*Nicolle, 1998, 198, fig. 534.d*). However, neither illuminated manuscripts nor ancient table paintings can be considered convincing evidence of the use of a given type of weapon in a certain area. For instance, a Flemish artist could have employed the traditional convention while working abroad. Unlike most of the depictions known to date the one coming from Silesia seems to be a more reliable source of information as it is neither artistic nor decorative in character.

Apart from the 13th/14th century finds that confirm military duties of the foreign settlers in Silesia there are those connected with the most common, everyday situations. Such a find recorded during excavations in a medieval well in the Racibórz Old Town (*Stosik 2007, 274, rys. 122*) was a distinct type of Flemish or northern European pitcher of the 13th/14th century, decorated with red glaze (Fig. 2a). It is interesting to note that Racibórz, as many other Silesian cities, received a Flemish law charter, when it became a town in 1211–17. Specialist analysis of the clay used for the pitcher indicate that it is a local product inspired by Flemish forms rather than an import (*Stosik 2007*). Similar vessels are known from excavations in towns located along the Baltic sea coast (*Mandel 2001, 105*). These are most probably original, Northern European products, as it was easier to transport them on ships even to remote destinations on ships along the sea-coast than via land transport. The Racibórz find can be explained by the presence of Flemish and Walloon settlers in the city and the long lasting tradition of trade relations between Silesia and Flanders in the Middle Ages (*Stosik 2007, 274*).

Another find from Racibórz, which could be interpreted as Flemish comes most probably from the 15th century. It is a gothic fist war-hammer that has been excavated there (Fig. 3d), in the 19th century. This extremely unique type of weapon is known only from a hand-full of finds. It usually consists of a bronze head, cast in the shape of a human fist and fixed to a shaft of hard wood. The metal hand is armed with an iron pick, quadrangular in cross-section and resembling a dagger blade. The blade is fitted most commonly, with hexagonal guard and pommel, characteristic for the 15th century roundel daggers (*Marek 2008, 23, figs. 6, 7*). The fist and dagger fittings are cast in bronze, and drilled through to take the tang of the blade. At the top of the hexagonal, bronze pommel the tang is hammered into a knob forming the blunt part of the war-hammer. The lower part of the bronze fist extends to a hollow wristband – a socket used to fix the head to the shaft.

The Silesian artifact according to archeological reports, was kept in the Royal Prussian Gymnasium in Racibórz (then Ratibor) in a collection of the local finds (FA Ratibor, 8–18). A great number of these specimens, stored in wooden chests in the school's cellar, had been excavated at three archeological sites – Modzurów, Racibórz – ducal castle, Racibórz Długosz Square. Regrettably, the precise location of the bronze fist war-hammer head was unknown. Most probably it had been found near the ducal castle in Racibórz, however we cannot rule out the possibility that it came from the Długosz square, along with other medieval military objects. Ascribing this particular find to Modzurów, the third site, seems unlikely, for the lack of late medieval evidence there.

⁴ It is alleged that after the Battle of Courtrai, the Flemish were so proud of themselves for defeating the enemy that one Flemish warrior armed with a *goedendag* would duel two French mounted soldiers (*de Vries 2000, 10*).

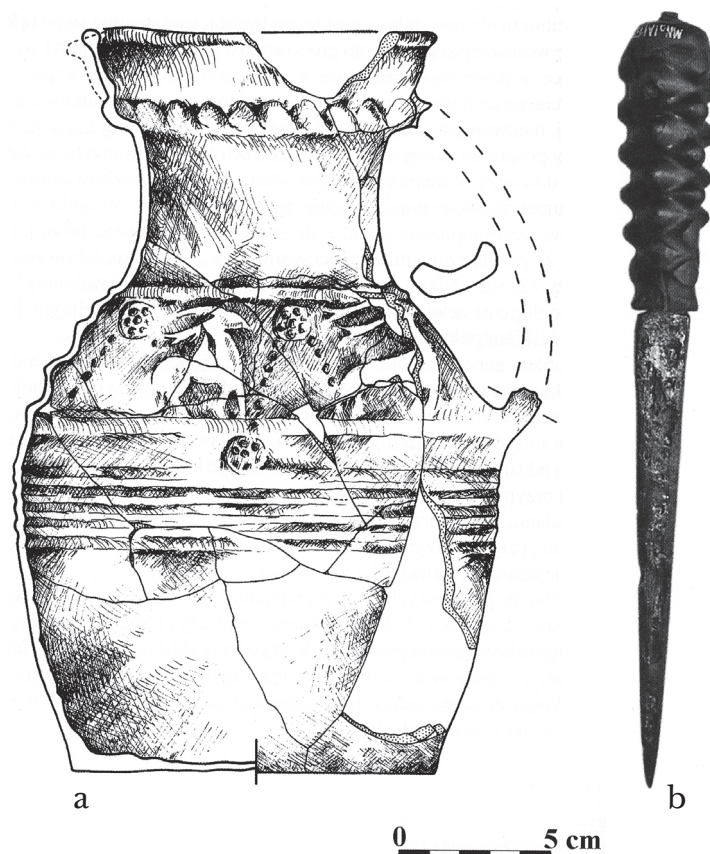


Fig. 2 Forms of Flemish origin: a – pitcher of the 13th/14th cent., Racibórz Old Town (after Stoksik); b – dagger end of the 15th cent., Nysa (after Marek 2008).

Despite the extensive research undertaken by the author in the archives and in the Silesian museum – collections it was impossible to trace any data on the whereabouts of the artifact in question. The 19th century drawing and a short note represent the only available information on the weapon, which was erroneously interpreted by the early researchers as a door handle (FA Ratibor, 11,18, fig. 3). The piece consisted of a bronze fist with a damaged hollow wristband. The latter was decorated with a row of small studs along the rim (Fig. 3d). There were no traces of wooden shaft. According to the description the fist was holding an iron bar, square in a cross section. The pick of the war-hammer was broken off, probably when used for the last time.

Similar weapons are known from the territory of Flanders and the Rhine region in Germany where the bronze casting industry flourished in the medieval times (Forrer 1909–11, 83). The combination of brass, latten or bronze with iron seems to be the main characteristic of the medieval Northern-European war-hammers (de Cosson 1923, 191).

One of the first scholarly investigated fist war-hammers was excavated in Grassendorf, Alsace (Fig. 3c). Another bronze fist war-hammer is known from the Gimbel collection catalogue (Forrer 1909–11, 82). It was found at the battlefield of Worringen, where, in 1288, an army led by John of Brabant defeated Siegfried – the Archbishop of Cologne. However, it is a matter for dispute whether the weapon was used in the 13th century battle or it was rather lost on any occasion afterwards which seems more likely.

There is one more item known from North-Western Germany, found in Münster, Westfalen (Ullmann 1962, 35).

At the auction catalogue of the Gimbel collection (Lepke 1904, 111, cat. No. 581, plate XV), yet another and quite different specimen with an original shaft, 45 cm long, tapering towards the

head was published. It is noteworthy that this item was probably purchased by the Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer in Wrocław (then Breslau), because it is mentioned in the old inventories kept at The National Museum in Wrocław (ABTH C u E, No. 463:27).

Two other examples of the fist war-hammers are known from the territory of Switzerland. One, with its original shaft made of ash wood, still preserved, comes from an old collection of arms acquired in 1892 by the Landesmuseum in Zurich (*Geßler 1926–28*, 287–288). In the 19th century museum records it is described as the *Schwurstab* – a symbol of judicial power in the court. As stated by *Geßler (1926–28, 287)*, this interpretation originates from the fact that in the 17th century Switzerland, war-hammers and maces were indeed used at court as ceremonial judicial insignia. In the 18th century there was even a special form of cane with pommel cast in metal to form a hand with two raised fingers⁵. There is no convincing evidence, however that these canes developed from the late medieval war-hammers in Switzerland (*Geßler 1940–42, 27*).

The second example (Fig. 3b) was found during air defense works in 1937 in the attic of the one of Zurich private houses (*Geßler 1940–42, 25*). *Geßler (1926–28, 288)* stressed that fist war-hammers should be regarded as weapons imported to Switzerland from abroad. They never gained popularity among the Swiss combatants – the so called “oath brothers” (*Eidgenossen*).

An extremely interesting find, due to its precise dating based on the archeological context is the fist war-hammer head from Lihula, Tallin St., in Estonia (*Mandel 2001, 104–105, fig. 5:3*). The site (No. 3) is located in the vicinity of the 13th century bishopric castle. During the excavations in a medieval building from the turn of the 15th/16th century, a bronze fist was brought to light. It differs slightly from the artifacts already described by having a circular guard around the wrist-band (*Mandel 2001, fig. 5:3*).

The distribution pattern of all these finds suggests that the fist war-hammers were used predominantly in Flanders and in the Rhine region (*Oakeshott 2000, 71*), but also in these parts of Europe which had economic relations with the territories. Perhaps it is not a mere coincidence, that in the Silisian town Nysa, located not far from Racibórz and also chartered under Flemish law, a Flemish or Burgundian 15th century dagger (Fig. 2b) was excavated (*Marek 2008, 20–22, fig. 4.a*). Most probably, at this time, the aforementioned towns lying close to the heart of Bohemia became influenced by novelties in the field of arms and armor that pervaded from the Bohemian court. French and Flemish trends in military technology of the 14th and 15th centuries. most probably reached Silesia via the Luxemburg Dynasty’s contacts with France and Flanders.

Several interesting problems are related to the chronology of bronze fist war-hammers. Judging from the dagger – type wielded by the bronze fist, *R. Forrer (1909–11, 80)* dated the find from Grassendorf to the 14th and 15th century. During his research, he became increasingly convinced that earlier chronology of such weapons, referred to in the German literature as *Dolchstreitkolben* is highly unlikely. He supported this statement by quoting iconographic examples, dated to the latter half of the 15th century (*Forrer 1909–11, 81*). The most realistic depictions of these weapons known to date come from late 15th century altarpieces painted by Derick Baegert (*Ullmann 1962, 35, figs. 34–35*). Such chronology is confirmed both by the archeological and the iconographic data (for further discussion on fist war hammers see *Marek 2009*). Similar conclusions concerning the period of time when the researched arm was used have been drawn by *Geßler (1926–28, 288, 1942, 25)*, and most recently by *Oakeshott (2000, 71)*. There are still no convincing arguments to support earlier dating to 1280–1480 as stated in the literature (*Forrer 1909–11, 82*). Nevertheless, the judicial insignia of 14th century could be treated as predecessors of fist war hammers.

It is interesting to note that metal fists mounted on wooden shafts were used in the 14th century Netherlands (Fig. 3a) as symbols of judicial authority by the *schout*s (*Schrickx et al. 2007, 30, fig. 2*). These were local officials appointed to carry out administrative, law enforcement and prosecutorial tasks in towns (*Schrickx et al. 2007, 30*). A leaden fist with a wooden shaft has been found by the archeologists in a cesspit in Hoorn, Netherlands, recently (*Schrickx et al. 2007, 29*). Most probably

⁵ Such canes, mounted with a hand with two stretched fingers were held by kings as symbols of their judicial power. They were even named “hands of justice” in medieval accounts (*Maisel 1989, 245, fig. 209*).

it belonged to the *schout* of Hoorn: Claes de Wael, who had been active there at the turn of the 15th century (*Schrickx et al. 2007*, 31). According to the Dutch scholars, analogous finds are known only from two other archeological sites in the Netherlands. A leaden fist comes from Haarlem, and another specimen, cast in bronze was found in the monastery of Zwijndrecht (*Schrickx et al. 2007*, 30).

In gothic art there are many representations of the fist war-hammers in the scenes where justice is served, for instance in the trial of Jan Hus (Fig. 4b) or in the judicial combat from the Talhofers manual (*Marek 2009*, fig. 3). In the hand of Jan Žižka of Trocnov (Fig. 4b). The investigated weapon could also symbolize his judicial power as a military leader. The fist could be interpreted as the hand of God (*Manus Dei*), which brings punishment upon the people, as often referred to in the Bible. It was strongly believed in the medieval times that the power to rule or to judge in the lay world was always granted to the individuals by God.

Probably the “judicial context” in which the fist war-hammers have been depicted brought H. Nickel to a highly speculative conclusion that the weapon was used exclusively by the guards and the police force rather than by the soldiers (*Nickel 1974*, 210). On the other hand, in a few instances the fist war-hammers are weapons used by villains and mercenaries, especially in the scenes showing the Passion of Christ. Therefore, according to the present state of art the exact meaning of the fist-motive used in the decoration of war-hammers is unclear.

The Racibórz find is an extremely valuable and very rare piece of archeological evidence. Imported probably from Flanders or the Rhineland the fist war-hammer found its way into Silesia, as a trade good or was brought here as a part of an individual military equipment and lost by a foreigner. Along with other artifacts it confirms the multiethnic and multicultural character of the region during the medieval period, with its Polish, German, Czech, Hungarian and Flemish influences.

Being inclined to ignore all the pitfalls of iconography influenced by the origin of an artist, his imagination or the ability to copy the weapons in detail we always should keep in mind that 14th and 15th century Bohemia had strong cultural and political relations with western Europe and especially with France, Flanders and the Holy German Empire. Therefore is not surprising to find Flemish or Burgundian weapons in vogue among the late medieval Bohemian warriors.

Conclusions

Summarising the presented evidence we are able to confirm two chronologically diverse assemblages of archeological data recording the relations between Silesia and Flanders in the middle ages.

The first group of artifacts coming from the 13th/14th century could be interpreted as evidence for the physical presence of Romance speaking settlers in Silesia during the so called great colonization movement. Although such finds are very seldom, in my opinion this scarcity only makes the presented hypothesis more plausible, for the isolation of Flemish and Walloon inhabitants in Silesia was a short living phenomenon.

The presence of other Flemish influences in the region is more difficult to explain. These artifacts are dated to the 14th/15th centuries and most probably found there way into Silesia via vogue for Flemish armament and table ware, that pervaded from the Bohemian court. Their connection with Flemish settlers is disputable.

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