

HAFTED WEAPONS IN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE EUROPE

HISTORY OF WARFARE

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HAFTED WEAPONS IN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE EUROPE

The Evolution of European Staff Weapons between 1200 and 1650

BY
JOHN WALDMAN



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On the cover: The Kornmarktbrunnen, a potable water fountain in Basel, Switzerland. Moved from its original place near the old marketplace to its present location, and commemorating a local Swiss captain active at the end of the 15th century. It dates from ca. 1525.

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Fig. 94. This purely ceremonial glaive was meant mostly to *impress* and is also Venetian. It was a type used by palace guards of such important figures as the Doge, has lost its thrusting function and can merely cut. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 04.3.102.

Fig. 95a. Roman *securis* or *roncola*, with a tang instead of the usual socket which was open on one side (see fig. 95b). Other forms had a small upward-facing rear hook. The shortest of these were purely tools and worn tucked into the belt. Private collection.

Fig. 95b. A Roman *Securis* recently excavated near Jerusalem, from between the end of first to the fourth century A.D. The inside of the socket contains fragmentary remnants of the short wooden shaft and its securing nail. This grip was probably no longer than ca. 12 cm. (4.5") Private collection.

Fig. 96. The Italian type of *Roncola arma* pictured here is also found in Merovingian graves in the North. The actual weapon shown here is probably much younger, by virtue of the marks. The original forms were made, more or less unchanged, until the 15th century. Private collection.

Fig. 97. The *Ronca*, a much more refined weapon than the preceding *Roncola arma*, is fully capable of both cut and thrust action and is widespread throughout Europe. It still shows the presence of an open-throated socket for its shaft. Private collection.

Fig. 98. A Welsh bill which is described as a weapon, but appears to be too delicate and frail to be successful as such. Its function is more likely to have been a symbol of authority in the hands of a constable or watchman. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 14.25.155.

Fig. 99a. A fully developed *Roncone* of early 16th century Italy, similar to the contemporary *Rossschinder* of the Germans. This Italian specimen has typical “eyelash” marks along the lower rear blade. Private collection.

Fig. 99b. Closeup of another roncone’s “eyelash” marks. Private collection.

Fig. 100. An English bill of ca. 1500. Note the typically open socket which is a folded triangle, the weld marks of the beak joints, as well as the “grain” of the blade steel at the bifurcation of the spike and the bill hook. This last indicates that the smith split the blade down to the bifurcation to separate the hook and the spike. Courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Armouries, inv. no. VII-1493.

Fig. 101. Late 15th century spear with a heavy and elaborately worked head, resembling a partizan. Courtesy of the Museums of the City of Vienna, inv. no. 686, from the old city arsenal.

Fig. 102. 15th century Italian partizan stamped with a Gothic “4” and without langets. The base of the blade is drawn in towards the socket at approximately 90°. The blade is 55 cm. long and 10 cm. wide. Private collection.

Fig. 103. Early 16th century partizan with small side wings at the base of the blade and a strong central rib. The blade, without socket, is 78 cm. long; the width without the wings is 11 cm. Private collection.

Fig. 104. Partizan or *lingua di bue*, ca. 1500, probably Venetian. Two round brass inlays with seven perforations are present on the blade. The socket is hexagonal, and the tassels are probably a later addition. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 1425.119.

Fig. 105. *Spiedi da guerra*, probably Bolognese, end of 15th century. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 04.3.76.

Fig. 106. The emperor Maximilian I, asleep in his chamber, about to be attacked by soldiers bearing various staff weapons. In this largely fictionalized book, his life guards who were said to carry Austrian partizans, are not present. From the 5th edition of “Theuerdank”, M. Schultes, 1679. Private collection.

Fig. 107. Austrian partizan, end of the 15th century, said to have been carried by the bodyguard of Maximilian I. Note the solid construction and the ogival arch-like upper end of the blade point, which it has in common with the Venetian types. This example has a simple socket in the manner of an early ronca, but others in this group have carefully constructed hexagonal sockets. None have langets. The shafts, which are not original, have a hexagonal shape. Courtesy of the Hofjagt- und Rüstkammer of the Historisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. A117.

Fig. 108. Partizan of the second half of the 16th century, whose socket shows a “nodus” between it and the base of the blade. Private collection.

Fig. 109. Partizan or “*Langue de bœuf*”, 17th century, appearing to have been altered by drawing in the top of the blade (the slight asymmetry would suggest a post-manufacture alteration). The weapon has a width-to-length ratio of 1 to 5.5. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 14.25.90.

Fig. 110. Sponton or “spontoon” from Brunswick, Germany, 17–18th century. The weapon is still clearly a short partizan with basal wings and added lower portions. Although its primary function is rank associated, it could still be used as a weapon. Private collection.

Fig. 111. Sponton-halberd. This late weapon, a combination of a short partizan (sponton) and a small halberd, is highly decorated. Although it was either a parade weapon or associated with military rank, it could still have been used as a weapon. Courtesy of the Museums of the City of Vienna.

Fig. 112a. Detail of the front carving on the Courtrai Chest showing the Flemish burgers carrying their staff weapons, *Godentacs* or *Plançons à Picot*, with which they defeated the French chivalry. Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford and Bridgeman Art Library International.

Fig. 112b. *Morgenstern* from the arsenal of the City of Vienna, probably mid-16th century, now in the depot. Courtesy of the Museums of the City of Vienna, inv. no. 126.207.

Fig. 113. This all-steel headed *Morgenstern* is from the arsenal of the City of Vienna. The craftsmanship is striking and the weapon is well balanced. Courtesy of the Museums of the City of Vienna.

Fig. 114. Detail of the *Morgenstern* in fig. 113 showing the intricate smithwork used to produce a relatively light but stable and strong steel head.

Fig. 115. An all-steel headed *morgenstern* in the hands of a fleeing soldier in Ariovistus’s army (Julius Caesar is the mounted knight in the upper left corner, spearing an opponent). Detail from the Caesar Tapestries of Charles the Bold. Courtesy of the Historisches Museum Bern, inv. no. 8.

Fig. 116. Holy-water sprinkler, probably English, early 16th century. This type of weapon was very popular in England and was certainly made by expert smiths, probably in large series. Courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Armouries, inv. no. VII-1642.

Fig. 117. *Morgenstern*, 15th–16th century, probably Swiss. The shaft is pine. A weapon such as this could have been made by a blacksmith. Private collection.

Fig. 118. A carefully constructed “*kettenmorgenstern*” probably 15th–16th century, German or Swiss. The pole, of ash, is worn between the top retaining band and the lower part of the langets, which is the area that can be touched by the spikes. Private collection.

Fig. 119. A *Kettenmorgenstern* and a regular *morgenstern*, from a line drawing of a 15th century polyptych fragment, possibly Czech. Note the similarity of the *kettenmorgenstern* to the one in fig. 118.

Fig. 120. The knight “Debile” in mortal combat with Philippe of Burgundy. Detail from an anonymous woodcut of about 1485 in the poem “Le Chevalier Délibéré” by Olivier de la Marche (Chiswick Press, 1898, London). Note that the knight has, slung over his left shoulder, two *Morgensterns*, one almost identical to the one in fig. 118 and the other like in fig. 119. Note also that he is about to strike with a dart. Private collection.

Fig. 121. Detail of a woodcut out of the “Nuremberg Chronicle” of Hartman Schedel, 1493, German edition, showing the Pharaoh’s army being covered by the Red Sea. Note, among the many and interesting staff weapons, the military flail. Private collection.

Figs. 122a and b. Two *ahlspiesse*, probably Austrian, second half of the 15th century. Three marks are stamped into one flat at the base of the spike, which is the usual place for marks. The spike is usually longer than one meter and is stiff (rigid). The rounded contour langets are rough and unpolished. The presence of the roundel guard and its seating grooves distinguish the *ahlspiess* from the breach pike or “*breschspiess*” (see text). Fig. 122a. Courtesy the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 14.25.396. Fig. 122b. Courtesy of the Hofjagd- und Rüstkammer, of the Historisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. A85.

Fig. 123. Detail of the roundel guard of an *Ahlspiess* set into the special grooves at the base of the spike. Courtesy of the Museums of the City of Vienna.

Fig. 124. Top view of the roundel guard of an *Ahlspiess*. Courtesy of the Museums of the City of Vienna, one of a large unnumbered lot.

Fig. 125. 15th century pollaxe with inlaid brass punched and chiseled decorations. The rear facing hammer head has a central steel quadrangular beak. The head is fastened to the staff by laterally screwed in side lugs. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 14.25.288.

Fig. 126. Gilt and etched early 16th century pollaxe. The axe-hammer head is fastened underneath the carefully constructed langets with pyramidal side lugs. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 25.135.21.

Fig. 127. Anonymous German woodcut of ca. 1460–70 showing a long shafted “*mordaxt*”. A roundel guard is present a short distance below the blade. Private collection.

Fig. 128. Detail of the Caesar Tapestry in the Historical Museum of Bern adjacent to the *morgenstern* in fig. 114. The knight swings a “*mordaxt*” bearing a roundel guard which does not appear to be steel (leather?). Courtesy of the Historisches Museum, Bern, inv. no. 8.

Fig. 129. Detail of the woodcut “Dorneck 1499” showing a veteran Swiss soldier swinging a short version of a “*fussstreitaxt*”. It cannot properly be called a “*fussstreitaxt*” even though it has a hammer in back of the blade, because of its length, which appears to be only a meter (39 in.) or so. Courtesy of the Kupferstichkabinett, Basel.

Fig. 130. Late 16th century “*fussstreitaxt*” by the Swiss weaponsmith Lerchli. The weapon is part of a series delivered to the Zurich arsenal between 1585 and 1591. Note that the

only difference between this axe and the one in fig. 127 is its length (ca. 1.5 m.) and the presence of langets. Courtesy of Landesmuseum, Zurich, inv. no. K2-1263.

Fig. 131. A differently shaped “fussstreitaxt” also of the same time period as the previous one and in the Zurich arsenal. Courtesy of Landesmuseum, Zurich, inv. no. K2-601.

Fig. 132. Bec-de-corbin or Lucerne hammer with a massive beak measuring 13 cm. in length. End of the 15th century or 1500. The shaft is oak and is an ovalized octagon. Private collection.

Fig. 133. Italian “Martello d’arme” or “Fussstreitaxt” ca. 1500. Note the three-pronged hammer with the single prong on top. The solid langets fit over the central hammer and beak portion, which is slotted to receive them. Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 14.25.465.

Fig. 134. The classic Lucerne hammer which persists without much change from the early 16th century into the 17th century. Note the “L” on its side on the base of the spike. Private collection.

Fig. 135. A very large Russian guisarme of 1530, whose blade alone is more than a meter in length. It is fastened to the shaft by an elaborate system of nails which are themselves decorated. Courtesy of the Tøjhusmuseets, Copenhagen, inv. no. C50 (45).

Fig. 136. A near Eastern or Russian guisarme with a thrusting point and geometric partially gilt decoration. Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 04.3.100.

Fig. 137. A somewhat smaller but still massive guisarme on what is likely the original staff and showing a complex pattern of geometrically arranged marks (see text). The upper point of the blade is broken off. Courtesy of the Kung. Livrustkammeren, Stockholm, inv. no. 691020.

Fig. 138. A guisarme, Swedish or Russian, 15th century or earlier. Weapons similar to this one are seen in illuminations as old as the 13th century. Courtesy of the Kung. Livrustkammeren, Stockholm, inv. no. LRK GN 2403.

Fig. 139. Excavated guisarme blade with a variant of a rear-facing hammer and langets. The inferior blade point is broken off but appears to have reconnected with the shaft in the standard manner of a guisarme. Courtesy of the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.

Fig. 140. Variant of a guisarme-like weapon with a long flattened top spike. Courtesy of the Kung. Livrustkammeren, Stockholm, inv. no. LRK GN 06:12.

Fig. 141. A Russian bardiche, possibly on the original staff and fastened to it by means of the front blade extension and leather thongs. Rear perforations, almost a hallmark of this weapon, are present. Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 14.25.463.

Fig. 142a. A 15th century cut and thrust weapon without a name and appearing to be unique, it may or may not be related to the roncone, or an equally nameless weapon in