

## **Medieval bone appliquéés for a quiver from the Trapezitsa hill in Veliko Tarnovo (Abstract)**

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The article discusses four bone carved artifacts, found in the course of the excavations of the Southern Sector of the Trapezitsa hill and identified as appliquéés for a quiver. Five more similar finds are known from Bulgaria, all of which, however, have an uncertain context.

Appliqué No. 1 has an irregular rectangular shape with multiple chips along the sides. It is slightly convex in profile and its back is covered with shallow scratches to facilitate gluing (Fig. 1, No. 1273). It is decorated with a carved geometrical ornament (Fig. 2, No. 1273), above which the appliqué is polished. Its dimensions are: length 7.2 cm, width 2.7 cm, and thickness 0.11 cm.

Appliqué No. 2 is restored to two fragments with irregular trapezoidal shape. They are both slightly convex in profile and their back is scratched (Fig. 1, No. 1572 a, b). The ornament of the first fragment No. 1572a (Fig. 2, No. 1572a) is almost identical to the one mentioned above. The decoration is completely preserved on the second fragment (Fig. 2, No. 1572b). The first fragment is 7.5 cm long, 3.5 cm wide and 0.14 cm thick. The second fragment is 4.5 cm long, 4.1 cm wide and 0.13 cm thick.

Appliqué No. 3 is the largest, with an elongated rectangular shape (Fig. 1, No. 1534). It is strongly convex in profile and its back is covered with shallow scratches. The surface is polished and decorated with intricate geometric ornaments (Fig. 2, No. 1534), identical to the above-mentioned appliquéés. Its dimensions are: length 15.8 cm, width 3.6 cm, thickness 0.11-0.15 cm.

In both technical and stylistic terms, the three appliquéés could be treated as a group.

The best preserved appliqué (Fig. 1, No. 1608) is strongly convex in profile with a smoothed back. On one of its long sides,

there is a small opening for a wedge that served to attach the appliqué to the base of quiver. Its surface is polished and densely filled with geometric decoration made by engraving and carving (Fig. 2, No. 1608). The decoration is cruder. The dimensions of the appliqué is: length 8.6 cm, width 2.9 cm, thickness 0.13 cm.

Even before the Middle Ages, the Eurasian nomads and their sedentary neighbours, among which mounted archers played a major role in warfare, used a specific type of quiver. Regardless of its shape, it widens towards the base. Thus the feathers of the arrows placed head-up were not damaged. The quiver was attached to a belt with straps and became a characteristic attribute of mounted warriors in Eurasia.

The quivers are divided into two groups according to the shape of the opening at their upper end (Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6). Sometimes, the base made of birch bark or leather was covered with narrow bone plaques that have both a supporting and decorative function.

After the middle of the 13th and throughout the 14th century AD, the Mongols, who exerted political and military domination over the Eurasian steppe and its peripheries, introduced a so far unknown element. The entire width of the quivers was covered with decorated bone plaques. Unlike earlier plaques, they are much wider and form complex decorative patterns (Fig. 6).

The specifics of the bone plaques from Medieval Trapezitsa identify them as appliquéés for a quiver.

Appliqué No. 1608 (Fig. 1, No. 1608) is a lateral one and the ornament is not indicative of its position along the vertical axis of the quiver.

The manner of execution and the character of the ornamentation of the

remaining three plaques clearly attest that all of them belong to the same quiver.

The size and the characteristic ornament of plaque No. 1534 suggest that this is a lateral appliqué placed to the right of the upper register (Fig. 8). The ornament is designed to be seen in combination with identical plaque, placed mirror-like on the left side. A support for such identification is its pronounced semi-circular profile that was to fit the narrow upper part of the quiver.

Plaques Nos. 1273 и 1572 are interrelated (Fig. 1, Nos. 1273, 1572). The net-like border in the lower part of No. 1572 forms the base for the whole row of appliqués. The appliqué was placed on the lower left part of the quiver. The main ornament continues in a vertical direction in plaque No. 1273, which fact places it directly above appliqué No. 1572. Thus, appliqué No. 1273 was a lateral one and was placed to the left of the middle register of the quiver (Fig. 8). The missing central plaques prevent a full reconstruction of the decoration covering the bone applications.

So far, ten bone appliqués have been found in Bulgaria. Plaques Nos. 1273, 1534 and 1572 that belong to the same quiver were found in two adjacent pits whose fill could be dated to the 1320s-1330s. The single appliqué No. 1608 is also dated to the 1330s. The date of the remaining Bulgarian examples corresponds to that of the examples found in the Eurasian steppes (second half of the 13th – 14th centuries AD).

A characteristic feature is that the bone appliqués are only found in towns and fortresses – mostly in the centres of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, situated to the north of Stara Planina. Five are found in the capital Tarnovgrad, two in the important town centre of Cherven, and two more in smaller forts and settlements – one at Madara and one at ‘Gradishteto’ near Pleven. Only one appliqué was found to the south of Stara Planina, at Krasen near Panagyurishte, and is dated to the final

period of the fortress occupation, when the site was a Bulgarian military centre.

The concentration of quiver appliqués reflects the allocation of military resources in the central lands of the Kingdom and could be related to the employment of huge contingents of nomads by the Bulgarian rulers – namely Tatars, but also Alans (Asi), in the 14th c. AD. Although the political and military presence of the Golden Horde in the Balkans significantly diminished, it did not disappear into the second half of the 14th c. AD. Thus the military fashion of the steppes not only reached Bulgaria, but was widely adopted in the Balkans, becoming visible even in religious wall-paintings (Fig. 4). The change is reflected also in the Byzantine religious art. Depictions of warrior saints lack quivers of the type discussed here before the middle of the 13th century AD. They appear for the first time on icons from Sinai (Fig. 5), dated to the 1260s.

The presence of Tatar influence in the warfare after the 1250s raises the question about the origin of the bone quiver appliqués found in Bulgaria. A possible answer could be found in ornamentation. The first group includes the two plaques from Cherven (Fig. 9 2), the plaque from Site 40 at Tsarevets (Fig. 9 4), plaque No. 1608 from Trapezitsa (Fig. 1, No. 1608), and the plaque from the excavation of Madara (Fig. 9 1).

The second group consists of plaques Nos. 1273, 1534, and 1572 from Trapezitsa (Fig. 1, Nos. 1273, 1534, 1572; Fig. 7), and the plaque from Krassen (Fig. 9 5). The appliqués from both groups were made in Bulgaria by a bone-engraver whose use of borrowed motifs showed that he was familiar with the decoration of the steppe quivers. However, the local motifs are slightly changed and completed with new ideas.

The third group contains only the central plaque found near Pleven (Fig. 9 3), which has numerous parallels among the quivers from the Eurasian steppes (Figs. 7 2, 7 4, 10 4-7). There is no doubt that it

was made in a centre of the Golden Horde and has arrived in Bulgaria as an import.

Ten appliquéés outside the Eurasian steppe is a significant group. They reflect not only the taste of the steppe warriors serving in the Bulgarian army, but indicate the adoption of Mongol military fashion in the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. A steppe influence is also detectable in the narrow bone appliquéés (Fig. 11), which cannot, however, be indisputably linked to the

above-discussed quivers. Objects of this type create an eclectic image of weaponry from the time of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. At the same time, they constitute evidence for the existence of specialized bonecarving workshops and masters in the Medieval Bulgarian towns that were manufacturing technologically complex products which distinguished them from the standard craft workshops.