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#### ON THE FOUR-POINTED POMMEL OF THE MEDIEVAL MACE FOUND IN CHECHNYA

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#### *Abstract*

In the autumn of 1888, Countess P.S. Uvarova, who headed the Imperial Moscow Archeological Society arrived in Grozny, because she heard about the discovery of precious objects in the mounds of Chechnya that encouraged local people to search for precious objects. Among the objects was an iron pommel of the strike weapon found near Atag. However, in the report “The Burial Grounds and Barrows of the Caucasus” delivered by P.S. Uvarova in 1888, this object was not mentioned. The iron pommel was mentioned among the objects found in the mound "similar to five mounds" dug on the left bank of the Sunzhi River near Grozny. For a long time, this discovery did not attract attention. In 1966, A.N. Kirpichnikov did not mention it as an analogy of ancient Russian strike weapons. The pommel was not mentioned in the reports about the medieval weapons of the North Caucasus (including Chechnya and Ingushetia) which encouraged us to describe the weapon and the history of its discovery. It was established that in contrast to the vast majority of previously published strike weapons, the weapon belongs to a group of spiny maces of the second half of the XI- the first half of the XIII centuries, i.e. of the Pre-Mongolian era.

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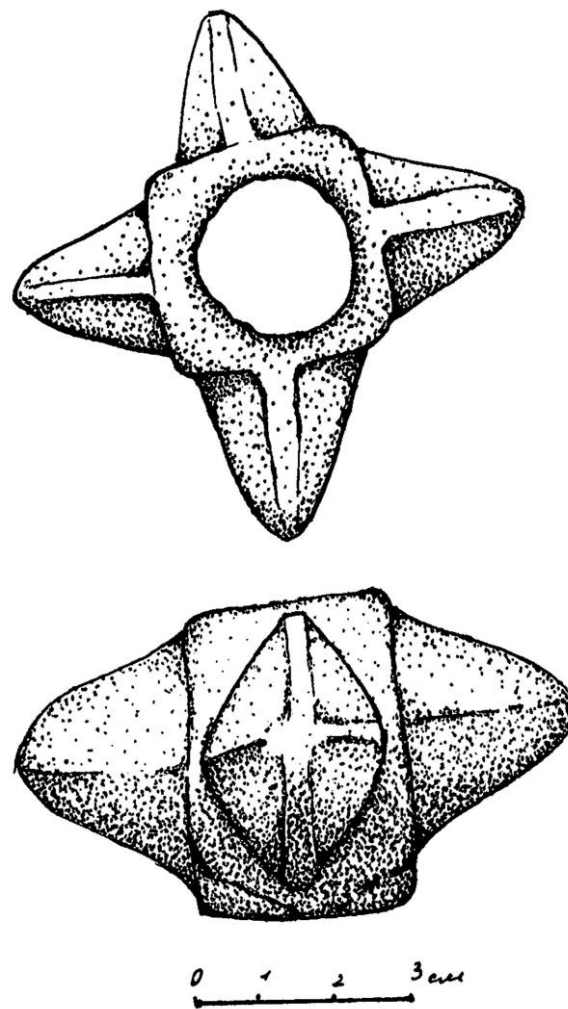
**Keywords:** Mace, Chechnya, P.S. Uvarova, the Middle Ages.



## 1. Introduction

In the autumn of 1888, Countess P.S. Uvarova, who headed the Imperial Moscow Archeological Society, arrived in Grozny (following the head of the Imperial Archaeological Commission Count A. Bobrinsky) due to rumors of "treasures" found in the mounds of Chechnya which triggered a surge of treasure hunting epidemic (Gapurov & Mamaev, 2009). She bought archeological artifacts from local residents (Mamaev & Mamaev, 2011, 2015) and presented them at the exhibition of the VIII Archaeological Congress held in Moscow in 1890 (On the all-Russian Archaeological congresses and exhibitions (Serykh, 2014)).

An iron pommel of the strike weapon found in the Sunji Valley, near Atag was bought by Uvarova.



**Figure 01.** Iron club pommel found in Chechnya (collection of P.S. Uvarova)

## 2. Problem Statement

The artifact discovered in the late XIX century and mentioned in publications has not yet been introduced into the scientific circulation. Although there are several works on medieval weapons found in the North Caucasus.

### **3. Research Questions**

The article discusses an old little-known archaeological find – an iron pommel of the medieval mace bought by the head of the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society Countess P.S. Uvarova during her stay in Chechnya in 1888.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to publish the pommel of the mace in the context of the little-known pages of the history of the archaeological study of Chechnya determining the type of find according to existing classifications and its dating.

### **5. Research Methods**

Typological, comparative historical, and source study methods were used.

### **6. Findings**

The report “The Burial Grounds and Barrows of the Caucasus” presented by Uvarova in 1889 did not mention the object found in Atag (Old Atagi) (Uvarova, 1894). When specifying the location of the Atag mound, Uvarova (1894) was guided by their location relative to Grozny and the Sunzhi valley. Vinogradov and Markovin (1966) “transferred” the location of the Uvarova’s finds to the right bank of the Sunzhi river. The proof is the inscription “On the old tablet P.S. Uvarova wrote: ... Terek region, the Sunzhi right bank valley, near Aul Atag ... no. 420-426 ” made by Krupnov on one of the tablets (12/13a). However, on the map of the catalog to this tablet, instead of the name “Sunzhi”, the name “Argun” was written. This specification might have caused the confusion.

At the same time, “the iron tip, a pernach with four sharp bulges with edges” was mentioned in the text among the items that were “found from local residents, they were found in a mound similar to 5 mounds” (Uvarova, 1894, p. 79) excavated before this by the head of the Institute on the left bank of the Sunzhi river near Grozny (Mamaev & Mamaev, 2011). The location “near Grozny” (Uvarova, 1894) is an indication of the four-verst distance to one of the excavated embankments in the Exhibition Catalog.

In this case, the pommel was not found in Atag (sellers of the finds usually tried to hide the places of their extraction).

The materials of P.S. Uvarova about the 1888 excavations in Chechnya were given to the State Historical Museum in 1917 as part of the Porechye collection (Strizhova, 1998) without primary inventory, on tablets of the 1890 exhibition. Although on the catalog card to the tablet 30 / 27a, there was an inscription “Aul Atag in the Sunzhi valley, finds”, other artifacts have matches only in the items listed by P.S. Uvarova without mentioning Atag. It can be due to careless preparation of the exhibition catalog.

The finds named “Stanitsa Atag” and “Aul Atag” are in three different places of the “Catalog”; in the first fragment, there are objects from the Transcaucasus; Zmeyskaya from North Ossetia was referred to the Sunzhi valley. The erroneous “relocation” of the finds bought by Uvarova in Atag is probable. Although this does not change the archaeological context of the pommel.

The initial definition of the pommel also raised doubts. In 1885, studying the origin of maces, Count Uvarov (1885) noted that when the pommel “has transverse elevations in the form of iron pieces instead of a smooth surface, it is a *pernach*” (p. 5). From this point of view, the iron pommel was not a *pernach* being a typical example of the mace pommel.

This subject did not attract attention of researchers. In 1966, the famous Soviet expert Kirpichnikov (1966) did not mention it as an analogy of ancient Russian strike weapons. It was not mentioned in the reports about the medieval weapons of the North Caucasus (including Chechnya and Ingushetia) (Chakhkiev, Golovanova, & Narozhny, 1986; Chakhkiev & Narozhny, 2002; Narozhny & Chakhkiev, 2003). Perhaps this is due to ideas about the loss of finds of the XIX century (Narozhny & Chakhkiev, 2003). Although one of the previous articles (Chakhkiev et al., 1986) contains a reference to that page of A.P. Kirpichnikov’s work where the mace was mentioned (Kirpichnikov, 1966). In both cases they considered later samples. In one of the above publications (Chakhkiev & Narozhny, 2002), the pommel found during the excavations of the Belorechensky burial ground in 1906 was taken into account twice - with reference to Veselovsky’s work and as a mace found by Kirpichnikov in the State Historical Museum.

The iron pommel is cuboid (assimetric), has 4 large diamond-shaped spikes on the side faces 3 cm in width and a round through hole 2 cm in diameter for the handle. One of the spikes is larger than the other ones (2.6 cm versus 2,2 cm). The height is 4.2 cm, the maximum width (taking into account the length of the larger spike) is 7.8 cm, and the weight is 280 g (Fig. 1).

The faces of the spikes form clear corners only from the sides, while the upper and lower joints are flattened. Therefore, the width of the faces varies from 0.2 to 0.4 cm. It might be an attempt to give the spikes a greater penetrating ability or consequences of the prolonged use of the mace.

Kirpichnikov (1966) included this find in the group of analogies of the Old Russian maces of the IX-XI centuries. They were characterized by pyramidal thorns. These samples were used until the XI century in burial complexes, as well as in the Sarkel cultural layer, where morphologically similar (but bronze) finishes were found in the early XI century (Pletneva, 2006).

Later, the existence of cubical specimens with cross-shaped spikes from the territory of Ancient Russia was attributed to the XI century (Kirpichnikov & Medvedev, 1985). VIA and VIIB maces (cubic tips with four spikes) found in Bulgaria and collected in the recent report by Popov (2015) are the most similar to the specimen under study. It makes it possible to attribute the sample found in Chechnya to the second half of the XI - the first half of the XIII century.

## **7. Conclusion**

The described Middle-Aged mace with pyramidal spines found in the North Caucasus (e.g., (Mamaev & Mamaev, 2016; Mamaev, 2017)) is still one of the few four-pointed samples of this kind of strike weapons which could be attributed to the pre-Mongolian time. If all other known maces found in the plain part of Chechnya mark the events of the medieval military-political history (e.g., Narozhny & Chakhkiev (2003)), this specimen is part of the burial complex destroyed by treasure hunters of the 19th century.

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