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SACRED SWORD IN THE GERMANIC TRIBES AND GERMANIC LANGUAGES

СВЯЩЕННИЙ МЕЧ У ГЕРМАНСЬКИХ ПЛЕМЕН ТА ГЕРМАНСЬКИХ МОВАХ

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Special attention is paid to the notion of sword in the Germanic tribes and the Germanic languages. It was also a sacred object that was used both at war and in various rituals. Sacred inscriptions were written on swords to attract God's defence during the battle. The following inscriptions should be taken into consideration as GICELIN ME FECIT, OMINEDOMINI, IN NOMINE SANCTI DOMINI, AINANIA. It is stated that the importance of the sword is marked by its receiving the name. In Early, High and Late Middle Ages inscriptions often used not only one or several words, but also an abbreviated notation or acronym or even the entire psalms of the Bible. The reference to God is seen practically in all inscriptions which means that knights and warriors of that time referred to God all the time to find His protection and help. The evolutional model of semantics 'cut, pierce' → 'sword' was singled out. It is stated that Old English *sweord*, *swyrd* Proto-Germanic **swertha*- 'cutting weapon', Proto-Germanic **swerdam* <PIE **swer-* 'to cut, pierce'. Several word combinations with Old English *sweord* are singled out, e.g., *Sweorda gelāc* 'the play of swords', 'battle', *Sweorda lāfe* 'those whom the sword had spared' and some other ones. The importance of the sword is marked by its receiving the name. Such names of swords are pointed out as the following: *Hrunting*, *Palmunc*, *kvernbitr*, *Naðr*, *Colada* and *Tizona*. The poetical lexemes with the meaning 'sword' both in Old English (*heoru*) and Icelandic (*hjörr*) are singled out as well. It is stated that these words are used mostly in compounds, e.g., *heoru-cumbul*, *heoru-dolg*, *heoru-gǫfre*, *heoru-serce*. The most well-known historical, mythological and literary swords are mentioned, for instance, *Excalibur*, *Dáinsleif*, *Durandal*, *Hrunting*, *The Sword of Saint Peter*, *The Sword of Saints Cosmas and Damian*, and of course *Gurthang*, the sword of *Túrin Turambar* in Tolkien's *Legendarium*. A short history of swords is mentioned, which began from *The Ulfbehrt* swords. Some idioms with the lexeme *sword* are singled out as well to point out that the word is widely used in the idiomatic language, for example, *cross swords* (with someone), *Damocles' sword*, *fall on (one's) sword*, *a double-edged sword*.

Key words: sword, Old English, Proto-Germanic, Proto-Indo-European, sacred, history.

Особливу увагу приділено поняттю меча в германських племенах і германських мовах. Це був священний предмет, який використовувався як на війні, так і в різних ритуалах. Священні написи були зроблені на мечах, щоб залучити захист Бога під час битви. Слід взяти до уваги такі написи, як GICELIN ME FECIT, OMINEDOMINI, IN NOMINE SANCTI DOMINI, AINANIA. Зазначається, що важливість меча відзначена його назвою. У ранньому, високому та пізньому середньовіччі написи часто використовували не лише одне або кілька слів, але і скорочений запис чи акронім або навіть цілі псалми Біблії. Згадка про Бога проглядається практично у всіх написах, а це означає, що лицарі та воїни того часу постійно зверталися до Бога, щоб знайти Його захист і допомогу. Виокремлено еволюційну модель семантики 'різати, проколювати' → 'меч'. Зазначається, що давньоанглійське *sweord*, *swyrd* утворене від прагерманського **swertha* – 'ріжуча зброя', прагерманське **swerdam* <PIE **swer* – 'різати'. Виділяють кілька словосполучень із давньоанглійським *sweord*, наприклад, *sweorda gelāc* 'гра мечів', 'битва', *sweorda lāfe* 'ті, кого пощадив меч' та деякі інші. Важливість меча відзначена його назвою. Вказуються такі назви мечів: *Hrunting*, *Palmunc*, *kvernbitr*, *Naðr*, *Colada* і *Tizona*. Виокремлено також поетичні лексеми зі значенням «меч» як у давньоанглійській (*heoru*), так і в ісландській (*hjörr*). Зазначається, що ці слова в основному є складними, наприклад, *heoru-cumbul*, *heoru-dolg*, *heoru-gǫfre*, *heoru-serce*. Згадуються найвідоміші історичні, міфологічні та літературні мечі, наприклад, *Екскалібур*, *Дайнслейф*, *Дюрандаль*, *Хрунтінг*, *Меч Святого Петра*, *Меч Святих Косми та Даміана* і, звичайно, *Гуртанг*, меч *Туріна Турамбара* в *Легендаріумі Толкіна*. Згадується коротка історія мечів, яка почалася з мечів *Ulfbehrt*. Виокремлюються також деякі ідіоми з лексемою меч, щоб вказати на широковживаність

цього слова в ідіоматичній мові, наприклад, *cross swords* (with someone), *Damocles' sword*, *fall on* (one's) sword, a double-edged sword.

Ключові слова: меч, давньоанглійська мова, прагерманська мова, протоіндоєвропейський, сакральний, історія.

Formulation of the problem. A sword played a crucial role in the lives of different nations. It was not only an object that was used in war time, but it was also a sacred object that was used both at war and in various rituals.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Some recent researches can be mentioned here, which have been taken into consideration and referred to while writing this scientific article. These are the following: Marek Lech [5], Ced Yong [7], Hayden Chakra [4], Adrian Baschung [2], Svysch Yuliia [1]. Their works were focused on the insights into legendary swords from mythology, folklore, and fiction, the history of swords, inscriptions on the swords, symbolic and sacred meanings of swords. But I decided to get deeper into the linguistic problem of sacredness of swords in the history of the Germanic tribes and Germanic languages.

The aim of the study. In this article a special attention will be paid to the sacred meanings of swords and their inscriptions, their linguistic interpretation together with the investigation of the etymological evolution of semantics connected with the word *sword*.

Presenting main material. Starting our discussion today let's start from the above-mentioned inscriptions, which were used evidently to attract God's defence during the battle, for instance. The next inscription should be taken into consideration, e.g., GICELIN ME FECIT (*Gicelin made me*) [1]. Another example of a sacred inscription is: + SESBENEDICA + AS (on the one side of a sword, which was found at the site of the battle of Fornhem (Suffolk), which happened in 1173; BENEDICTUS 'blessed'), and + IN OMINEDOMINI + on the other [1]. As it is mentioned by Adrian Baschung, a historian and director of the Museum Altes Zeughaus in Solothurn: "The systematic study of symbols and inscriptions on sword blades is traced back to Swiss historian and director of the Bern Historical Museum Rudolf Wegeli (1877–1956). Using numerous examples from the early Middle Ages to the early modern period, Wegeli attempted to work out a system of classification and decipherment" [2]. In Early, High and Late Middle Ages inscriptions often used not only one or several words, but also an abbreviated notation or acronym, also entire psalms of the Bible, a motto or an appeal to God tooled into the blade were used [2]. For example, one well-known acronym was used as an inscription that is INRI, which stands for 'Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum' (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) [2]. The inscriptions were worked into a groove. A. Baschung mentions that "the letters were first gouged out with a graver, and then inlaid with iron. This technique is also known as damascening" [2]. The next example of the inscription is the following: + I N I O M I I N D I I +. "This is an acronym made up of capital letters from the Latin invocation IN NOMINE DOMINI (In the name of the Lord)" [2]. Another inscription is: + N N S D +. This inscription has several interpretations, which are: with SANCTUS as an adjective: IN NOMINE SANCTI DOMINI (In the name of the Holy Lord) or IN NOMINE SANCTI DEI (In the name of the Holy Spirit); With SALVATOR: IN NOMINE SALVATORIS DOMINI (In the name of the Saviour and Lord) or NOMINE SALVATORIS DOMINI (A. Baschung). These incantations are probably different invocations which were used to appeal to God, to Jesus Christ. One more example is AINANIA. It is a palindrome. A. Baschung explains its meaning: "The word AINANIA represents, probably for the purpose of the palindrome, a corruption of the Hebrew phrase 'God is merciful'. This was used in the Bible as a male personal name 'Hananja' or 'Anania'. It consists of the verb *hnn* 'to be merciful/ show oneself to be merciful' (third person singular perfect) and of the short form of the name for God JHWH as the subject in the second place, thus 'Jah(weh) is merciful (has been merciful)" [2]. The reference to God is seen practically in all these examples, which means that knights and warriors of that time referred to God all the time to find His protection and help. Earlier it was mentioned that psalms from the Bible were

used as inscriptions on the swords to inspire warriors for the battle. And Marek Lech states that: “The best example of such an inspiration is psalm 143 (144) which appears on swords from the 8–13 c. This text was recited during medieval sword girding ceremonies, such as, initially, the coronation and afterwards, the accolade” [5].

If to refer to the etymological dictionaries we can trace back the etymology of the word *sword* back. In this case the following evolutional model of semantics can be singled out:

‘Cut, pierce’ → ‘sword’

Old English *sweord*, *swyrd* (West Saxon), sword (Northumbrian) ‘sword’, Old English *brad swurd* ‘sword with a broad blade’, Old English *sweordfætels* ‘sword-belt’, Old Frisian *swerd*, Old Norse *sverð*, Swedish *svärd*, Middle Dutch *swaert*, Dutch *zwaard*, Old High German *swert*, Old High German *sweran* ‘to hurt, to pain’, German *Schwert* ‘sword’ ~ Old High German *sweran* ‘hurt’ < Proto-Germanic **swertha-* ‘cutting weapon’, Proto-Germanic **swerdam* < PIE **swer-* ‘to cut, pierce’. It is etymologically close to Slav. **svьrdьbь* ‘drill’ [6].

It’s interesting to pay attention to the word combinations, where Old English *sweord* is used. For example, *Sweorda gelāc* ‘the play of swords’, ‘battle’, *Sweorda lāfe* ‘those whom the sword had spared’ [3, p. 949]. The high esteem in which good swords were held in old times is marked in many ways. Their forging is in many legends said to be the work of other than human hands, so the sword which Beowulf seizes in Grendel’s home is *eald sweord eotenisc*, *enta ærgeweorc* is applied to the workmanship of a sword. Also, we should pay attention to the forging of Sigurd’s sword in the Völsunga Saga. There are precious heirlooms handed down through many years (epithet *eald*). Byrhtnoth tells the Danes who demand tribute of him, that the tribute will take the form of *ealde swurd*, used with unpleasant effect upon the invaders. The same point may be illustrated from other than poetical sources. Thus, in Alfred’s will it is said that he leaves *Æþerēde ealdormenn ān sweord on hundte ↔ ntigum mancusum*. The sword is often mentioned in wills indeed [3, p. 949–950].

The importance of the sword is marked by its receiving the name. The sword with which Beowulf is armed for its attack on Grendel’s mother is named *Hrunting*. In the Nibelungenlied we can read *daz Nibelunges swert ... Palmunc was genant*. In Scandinavian story there’s Hākon’s sword *kvernbitr*, which king Athelstan gave him, and Egill has his sword that he called *Naðr*. Let’s remember the story of the Cid and the two swords, *Colada* and *Tizona*, which he gave to his sons-in-law, the Infantes of Carrion, and which he claimed from them after their unworthy treatment of their wives. Beowulf lays aside his *hyrsted sweord*, *irena cyst*, also he gives a sword *bunden golde*. His own sword is *fāh* and *fæted*. Byrhtnoth’s sword is *fealohilte* [3, p. 949–950].

There is another Old English name of a sword, which is the following Old Saxon *heoru*, *heoro*, *hioro*, Gothic *hairus* ‘a sword’. The word is a poetical one both in English and Icelandic (*hjör*), and in these dialects, as in Old Saxon, is mostly used in compounds, e.g.: *heoru-cumbul* ‘a warlike ensign’, *heoru-dolg* ‘a sword-wound, deadly wound’, *heoru-dre* ↔ *r* ‘blood coming from wounds made by the sword, gore’, *heoru-dryne* ‘the sword’s drink, blood flowing from a wound’, *heoru-fædm* ‘a deadly, hostile grasp’, *heoru-gīfre* ‘greedy, eager to destroy’, *heoru-grim* ‘very fierce or cruel, savage’, *heoru-serce* ‘a war-shit, coat of mail’ [3, p. 531].

If we are speaking about swords and their meaning in the history of mankind, the most well-known historical and mythological swords should be mentioned here as well. Let’s remember, e.g., *Excalibur*, which is the most famous mythological sword of all. King Arthur’s legendary blade could be capable of imbuing its master with supernatural abilities too. *Dáinsleif*: the legendary sword of King Högni’s in Norse mythology. Capable of inflicting wounds that will never heal. Like many other weapons in Norse mythology, it was forged by dwarves. *Durandal*: the indestructible sword of Roland, legendary paladin of Charlemagne in classic French literature. A replica is embedded in a cliff wall at Rocamadour. *Galatine*: the sword Gawain received from the Lady of the Lake. *Hrunting*: The sword given by Unferth to Beowulf to slay the Grendel’s mother. Unfortunately, it proved to be ineffective against the monster. *Nægling*: Given by Hrothgar to Beowulf after the latter killed the

Grendel. Though repeatedly described as a magnificent sword, it broke from Beowulf's strength during his final encounter with the dragon. The breaking of Nægling, and its predecessor Hrunting, is said to contain much metaphorical meaning. *Skofnung*: The famed sword of legendary Danish king Hrólfr Kraki. Supernaturally tough and imbued with the spirits of the king's twelve berserkers. *The Sword of Saint Peter*: a relic in the Poznań Archdiocesan Museum said to be the very sword Saint Peter used to cut off the right ear of the high priest, during Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane [7]. *The Sword of Saints Cosmas and Damian* (10th century), thought to have been a gift by Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor to the Essen Abbey, should be mentioned as well. And if we mention some mythological and legendary swords, why not remember *Gurthang*? In Tolkien's *Legendarium*, *Gurthang* was the sword of Túrin Turambar. Made of meteorite and reforged from the sword Anglachel. In most cases swords go, so to say, together with legends, and these legends are set in cement with the evolution of the mankind.

Delving back into the history of swords, The *Ulfbehrt swords* can be remembered, those ones, which were of the early Medieval period, were the most basic and simple sword that people used in the dark ages. They have a sharp double edge for slashing against their low armored opponent. These swords were used until the 10th–11th century. Up to the late Medieval period knights were the strongest war units, so they used longer swords, so the technology of creating swords developed. Around the 15th century swords began to decline in use. In the 16th and 17th centuries, a Rapier was a type of sword with a sharp-pointed two-edged blade that was popular in Western Europe, both for civilian and military use. Swords were still widely used up until WW1 [4]. This short retreat in the history of swords gives us a slight opportunity to understand the importance of the usage of swords throughout history.

The lexeme *sword* is used in many idioms and sayings, e.g.: *cross swords* (with someone) 'fight, either verbally or physically'; *Damocles' sword* 'any imminent, impending, or eventual trouble, danger, or disaster. In Greek mythology, the courtier Damocles was forced to sit beneath a sword suspended by a single hair to emphasize the instability of a king's fortunes'; *fall on (one's) sword* 'to accept the responsibility or blame for a problem or mistake', *a double-edged sword* 'something that can be both beneficial and problematic'; proverb *the pen is mightier than the sword* 'strong, eloquent, or well-crafted speech or writing is more influential on a greater number of people than force or violence'.

Conclusions. The notion of sword in the Germanic tribes and the Germanic languages was analyzed in this scientific article. The inscriptions used on the swords were taken into consideration while analyzing the notion of sword. I have drawn the conclusion that the reference to God is seen practically in all inscriptions which means that knights and warriors of that time referred to God all the time to find His protection and help. The evolutionary model of semantics 'cut, pierce' → 'sword' was singled out, but the attention should be paid to the possibility of the search and investigation of other evolutionary models of semantics, which refer to the notion of sword in the Germanic languages and other languages from the Indo-European family of languages (and not only) as well. A separate investigation of the names of swords should be undertaken as well in the future investigations, because lots of interesting linguistic facts can be driven from these names. Additionally, the investigation of the idiomatic language using the lexeme *sword* or the notion of sword should be undertaken to find more linguistic nuances.

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