CHAPTER FOUR
WEAPONS IN THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE WARRIOR SAINTS

An integral part of the image of the warrior saints is their weapons. When depicted in parade attire, the sword is the most visible sign of their martial profession; together with the lance it forms the basic weaponry of the military saints, which it is not possible to overlook in any analysis of their iconography. These two items not only complete the image of the warrior, but also carry symbolic meaning. We begin by examining the lance, the weapon shown most frequently in the iconography of the warrior saints, and which carries ideological content that had already taken root in antiquity.

The Lance or Spear of the Warrior Saint

Pole arms have been known since the Stone Age, and were still in use in the first half of the twentieth century. Many varieties were in widespread use in Byzantium. On depictions of warrior saints the most common form is a short type of spear that reaches just above the head. Spear shafts (ἁστιλίον—from Lat. *hasta*) are normally

2 Geometres, 302 [LXXXVII] (= MPG, 106:933):

Otherwise
A wide sword is good in the field, but on the walls,
The bow always dominates, so declares Ares

3 See Gambr 1978, 412; Hoffmeyer 1966, 116–17, also on its spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and the Near East.
4 Maurice (Strat., p. 452–42 [XIIB 17] = [LT, vol. A’, p. 332 [XIV 79]]) uses this term, advising that before an attack fileclosers should quieten the soldiers by prodding them with the shafts of their spears: μετὰ τῶν ἀστιλίων τῶν κονταρίων; see also Mihăescu 1968, 491. On the Roman *hasta* see O. Fiebiger & F. Klingmüller, “Hasta” in PR, 14/2 (1912), 2501–08.
depicted schematically. In painted works they are often rendered with just a single line. An example of such a sparing form is the lance of St George in the church of Lilies (Sümüllü Kilise) in the Ihlara valley (fig. 35a).\(^5\) The butt of the lance is always blunt. We can assume that Byzantine lances were indeed terminated this way since references to spiked spear butts (σαυωτήρ, στύραξ, οὐρίαχος) are few and mainly refer to the ancient period.\(^6\) In painted works the shaft is as a rule depicted in ochre or brown (figs. 25c–d, 30a–f, 31, 32, 37–39, 45, 46b, 48a–c, 70)\(^7\) imitating the colour of wood,\(^8\) although it is occasionally shown in other colours. The lance of St George Tropaiophoros on an enamelled panel from the Pala d’Oro is blue.\(^9\) A blue spear (βένετον κοντάριν) is used by Digenes Akritas, and also by the son of the domes-

\(^5\) See above, n. 66 on p. 141.

\(^6\) Cf. Kolias (1988, 199) who by analogy with the butt spikes known in antiquity, which served to plant the spear in the ground, and if the spearhead broke off could also be used for combat, considers that the οὐρίαχος was also used in the medieval Byzantine army. See also Suda, 4:33022–4 [949–950]; 44721–4 [1261] οὐρίαχος· τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ σιδήρου· ἢ τὸ ὀρούειν καὶ τὸ ἱάχω· τὸ ὀπίσθεν μέρος τοῦ δόρατος, ἢ καὶ σαυρωτὴρ καλεῖται· ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀρούειν καὶ τοῦ ἱάχω· τοῦτο δὲ παρά τὸ ἱα, διαμαινὲι τὴν φωνήν· ἢ καὶ οὐρίαχος· ὁ σαυρωτήρ καλούμενος· ἡ τοῦ δόρατος ἀρχὴ, ἐφ’ ἥ στηρίζεται. Hesychios, 4:14 σαυρωτήρ· τὸ ἐσχατὸν σιδήριον τοῦ δόρατος. δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ στάθμην κεστόν; Hesychios, 4:88: Στυράξ· [...] σαυρωτήρ. [... ] ἡ τοῦ δόρατος ἀρχὴ, ἐφ’ ἥ στηρίζεται. Hesychios, 4:88: Στυράξ· [...] σαυρωτήρ τοῦ δόρατος, καὶ λόγχη, καὶ δένδρον ὀμωνύμως. καὶ θυμίαμα. On the ancient sauroter see Eust. II, 3:332–35; F. Lammert, “Σαυρωτήρ” in PR, 2/1: 265–6. Exceptionally the term also appears in Leo the Deacon, p. 414–5 [III 4].


\(^8\) Spear shafts were made from wood, as is indicated by references in the Praecepta, pp. 1802–03 [I 9], 28121–3 [II 11] (= TNU [MG], pp. 94106–06 [LV 9], 104147–8 [LVII 13]) when speaking of the splintering of infantry spears by cataphracts: ὁς ἐν ἐκ τούτων τὰς κοντάρια τῶν ὀπλιτῶν συνθλασθῶσιν; and also Kinnamos, pp. 14320–1441 [IV], 27312–13 [VI]. On the varieties of wood employed in making lances see below, pp. 321 and 328. See also Kolias (1988, 193, 202) who besides cornel mentions ash (μελία) and even cane. The cane lances (διοικία ἐκ καλλάχων) employed by the Turks are mentioned by Choniates, p. 295. Without taking into account the character of the painting techniques employed, Parani (2003, 139–40, figs. 111, 116) interprets depictions of the lance in Cappadocian art as indeed depicting cane shafts. She explains their appearance as reflecting the impact of Arab techniques of arms production in the frontier region.

\(^9\) See Hahnloser/Polacco 1994, fig. 142. The Pala d’Oro is not a unique example—remnants of blue pigment also appear on St George’s lance on a wooden relief-work icon in the National Museum in Kiev (fig. 27), see Glory of Byzantium, no. 202.