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CITIES AND WARFARE IN THE ANGEVIN ERA (1301–1387) IN HUNGARY

Summary. The period between 1301–1387 is known in Hungarian history as the age of the Angevin dynasty. The first part of this era can be characterised by internal wars between royal power and feudal lords as a result of which King Charles I managed to stabilise his power, in which cities played an important role. From 1324 onwards internal peace enabled the king to focus on his foreign policy. Charles himself, too, but his son, Louis I led several campaigns abroad, some of which were important from the viewpoint of European power politics, especially the ones he led in the Kingdom of Naples. These wars displayed the differences, which can be observed between contemporary western European warfare and that of a central European army, the most important of them being the predominance of light cavalry and an almost total lack of infantry. Cities in Hungary and Dalmatia were crucial for providing the army with weapons and war materiel as well as serving as pools for recruiting soldiers.

Keywords: Angevin kings, cities, warfare, chivalry, charters, Hungary, 14th century

The Angevin Era in Hungary means most of the 14th century. The new dynasty originating from the Kingdom of Naples claimed the Hungarian throne on the pretext of having family relations with the Árpád dynasty on the female line of succession. Though two other dynasties (the Premyslid and the Wittelsbach) had as good as a basis for their respective claims, too, it was eventually the Angevin dynasty, which emerged victorious from the power struggle with a substantial aid of the papacy. The dynasty gave three rulers to the realm, Charles I (1301–1342), his son, Louis I (the Great) (1342–1382), who was also king of Poland from 1370 till his death in 1382, and Mary, the daughter of Louis I, who subsequently was married to King Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387–1437), which marked the beginning of a new era.¹

¹ For an overview of the general events *vide*: B. HÓMAN, *Geschichte des ungarischen Mittelalters*, vol. 1: *Von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Ende des XII. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1940; P. ENGEL, *The Realm of Saint Stephen. A History of Medieval Hungary*, London–New York 2001.

The territory of the medieval kingdom of Hungary is now a large Central European region comprising no less than 8 countries (or 9, if we count Bosnia-Herzegovina as well), so when one deals with the history of medieval Hungary and its surrounding areas, the topic may draw the attention of historians from all these countries. My study will cover those events, too, which took place outside this area, but may be in relation with the theme mentioned in the title.

According to our current knowledge, there are approximately 300 000 medieval charters, which survived the stormy centuries of history, and shed light on the medieval history of this realm, which is entitled to be called ‘The Realm of Saint Stephen’, because it was him, who laid the foundation stone of this state in the year of 1000. Among these 300 000 charters there are about 80 000, which contain the sources relating to the Angevin era. Up to the beginning of the 1990s the huge majority of these charters were unpublished, only a handful of scattered documents saw the light of the day in different source publication series, the most important of them being published in the 19th century.² However, this source publication could not contain all the important documents of the Angevin dynasty, as the number of surviving charters is so high, and it published the documents *in extenso*, which rendered it impossible to make all the charters available, and the series stopped at the year of 1359 due to lack of funds.

Another ambitious source publication series was initiated at the end of the 1980s by Gyula Kristó, professor of history at the University of Szeged.³ This new series aims at the publication of the entire archival source material preserved in different archives dating from the Angevin era. Up to now more than 40 volumes have been published in this series, which contains Hungarian language excerpts of the charters surviving from this period. Once the series is completed, it will be possible to analyse the history of the 14th century on the basis of all the information preserved in these documents.

As far as the narrative sources are concerned, the two most important ones are the 14th century chronicle composition,⁴ one of its manuscripts being the

² *Anjou-kori okmánytár*, vol. 1–7, ed. I. NAGY, G. TASNÁDI NAGY, Budapest 1878–1920.

³ *Anjou-kori oklevéltár. Documenta res Hungaricas tempore regum Andegavensium illustrantia*, Budapest–Szeged 1990.

⁴ *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum*, ed. I. SZENTPÉTERY, Budapest 1937, pp. 217–506.

so-called *Picture Chronicle*, the other is the *Chronicle on the Life of King Louis* written by his chaplain, John of Küküllő.⁵

The next thing to be considered is how far the process of urbanisation got in Hungary by the beginning of the 14th century. According to an unknown eyewitness from western Europe, Hungary was a huge country, and a traveller needed 40 days to cross it from west to east, or from south to north. Despite, this big area was almost empty, to a great extent lacking inhabitants.⁶ To this, we must add that this is only true to somebody coming from western Europe, because these travellers were accustomed to the density of population in western Europe, and to them the scarcity of population still common in central and eastern Europe was strange.

The process of urbanisation in Hungary started at the turn of the 12–13th centuries, and by the 14th century basically two types of settlements emerged, the so-called ‘real towns’ or *civitates* in Latin, and ‘market towns’, or *oppida*. The former usually came into being in royal, while the latter in archiepiscopal, episcopal or feudal centres. In the case of market towns predominantly, but very often in the case of the former, too, trade played a key role.⁷

At the end of the former period, the Árpád Era, the dissociation of Hungary was almost complete. After the Mongol invasion (1241–1242), King Béla IV changed his former policy and he himself donated huge estates to feudal lords on condition that they should build stone castles to provide the population with shelters in the event of a second Mongol invasion. However, by the end of the 13th century, the descendants of the formerly faithful lords of King Béla IV became in most of the cases oligarchs, who had the power to defy the king’s

⁵ JOHANNES DE THURO CZ, *Chronica Hungarorum*, vol. 1, Budapest 1985, pp. 160–188. The whole chronicle in English: JÁNOS THURÓ CZY, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*; transl. F. MANTELLO, foreword and notes by P. ENGEL, Bloomington 1991.

⁶ *Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis*, eds. T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, V. PETROVIĆ, A. UZELAC, Beograd 2013, pp. 136, 139.

⁷ A. KUBINYI, *Város*, [in:] *Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon*, chief ed. G. KRISTÓ, eds. P. ENGEL, F. MAKK, Budapest 1994, pp. 716–718. For a more diversified view *vide*: I. PETROVICS, *The Cities and Towns of Medieval Hungary as Economic and Cultural Centres and Places of Coexistence. The Case of Pécs*, “Colloquia. Journal for Central European History” 2011, vol. 18, pp. 5–26; I. PETROVICS, *From Misunderstanding to Appropriate Interpretation: Market Towns in Medieval Hungary with Special Reference to the Great Hungarian Plain*, “Offene Landschaften. Siedlungsforschung. Archäologie–Geschichte–Geographie” 2014, vol. 31, pp. 271–296.

will, and the most powerful of them had their own court, which imitated the royal court, the pursued independent foreign policy, and of course, their conduct in internal policy depended entirely on their ever-changing interests.⁸

This situation placed the towns and market places (*oppida*) in a precarious situation. The landlords, ecclesiastical and secular either, had no far-reaching plans in mind in connection with towns and their inhabitants, they considered them only a possible source of income, and in several cases blackmailed the cities and towns for protection money, which led to a general decay in the process urbanisation. This was parallel to the decay of trade, too, because of unsafe travel, merchants – Hungarian and foreign alike – began to avoid trading in unsafe areas of the kingdom, which resulted in a general decay of economic activity.

The history of the role played by cities and towns in warfare in the Angevin period can be divided into two parts. The first phase can be characterised by the alliance of royal power and the cities in order to crush the oligarchs and create stability in the realm. This is roughly the first part of King Charles I's rule. The second phase begins after the stabilisation of royal power and the creation of law and order, when cities could play an active part in the king's warfare abroad, which period lasted until the end of Louis I's rule.

The future King Charles I arrived in Hungary in the summer of 1300, when the last king of the former dynasty, Andrew III was still alive. However, in January, 1301, Andrew died, and the long struggle for the succession started between Charles, Venceslas, the son of the king of Bohemia, and later Otto Wittelsbach also joined the power struggle, at the end of which Charles I emerged as legitimate and lawfully crowned king of Hungary in 1310. But this did not mean that his power was a stable and consolidated one, as the most powerful oligarchs were still in a position to defy his power if they deemed it necessary. The most powerful of them was Matthew Csák of Trencsén (Trenčín, Slovakia), who had huge territories at his disposal, practically the western half of present-day Slovakia was under his rule, and he did not acknowledge the rule of Charles I as a legitimate one.⁹ He played an important role in the first set

⁸ G. KRISTÓ, *A feudális széttagolódás Magyarországon*, Budapest 1979; J. SZÜCS, *Az utolsó Árpádok*, Budapest 2002.

⁹ G. KRISTÓ, *Csák Máté tartományúri hatalma*, Budapest 1973.

of events which I should like to refer to in this paper, when a town contributed to the king's successful military efforts against the oligarchs.

In 1311 a conflict evolved between the Aba family, a powerful baronial family, whose estates lay in the north-eastern parts of medieval Hungary, and the citizens of Kassa (Košice, Slovakia). During the conflict citizens of Kassa killed Amadé Aba, head of the family, and a trial started over the event in the royal court. The Aba family had been a supporter of Charles I, so they hoped that the king would decide in their favour and against the citizens. However, the sentence favoured the city, which led to the breakdown of relations between the Aba family and Charles I. The ensuing situation led to open warfare, in the course of which the Aba family asked for the aid of Matthew Csák, their former opponent and rival, against the king. In 1312 a huge battle was fought in Rozgony (Rozhanovce, Slovakia), in which the king supported the citizens of Kassa, while Matthew Csák sent 1200 armoured soldiers to aid the Aba family, but it was all in vain. According to narrative sources, this was the biggest battle in Hungary since the time of the Mongol invasion. The king managed to defeat the oligarchs' forces and won a big victory.¹⁰ The success was also a symbolic one: royal power took sides with town dwelling citizens to defy the oligarchs even at the cost of losing a former supporter. This fact clearly showed what direction royal policy would take in the future. However, there was still a long way to go in the process of stabilising royal power. Matthew Csák continued to defy the king's will and even attempted to capture Charles I. That is why in 1316 the king decided to transfer his seat to Temesvár (Timișoara, Romania), a good and safe distance from the territories under the control of Matthew Csák. Temesvár remained the residence of the king for seven years, and Charles I decided to return to Visegrad only in 1323, two years after the death of Matthew Csák. The fact that Temesvár was the place of royal residence for seven years contributed a great deal towards its becoming one of the most important political, economic and military centres in the south of Hungary, which would play a strategic role in the coming centuries of anti-Ottoman warfare.

To sum up Charles I's policy in the wars against the oligarchs, we can come to the conclusion, that in opposition to that of the oligarchs, Charles had a far-reaching view for the cities in his policy and he even confronted his formerly

¹⁰ G. KRISTÓ, *A rozgonyi csata*, Budapest 1978.

faithful supporters, when they were in conflict with an important city, with which the king wanted to establish a long-lasting, working relationship for the interests of his realm. In other words, we can speak about a political alliance of royal power, loyal supporters of the king and the cities, whose interests coincided with that of the king to establish law and order within the realm.

In the second half of his realm (from about 1324) Charles I could concentrate on his economic reforms¹¹ and active foreign policy, which concern our paper only from that viewpoint that cities and towns contributed to warfare in the same way as they did during the rule of Louis I, who inherited an economically and politically stabilised kingdom from his father. In the course of his reign the realm was powerful enough to lead an active foreign policy, which meant that the king several times participated in campaigns abroad, in Dalmatia, Italy, Lithuania, in the Balkan peninsula to name a few.

To answer the question about the cities' and towns' contribution towards these campaigns one has to perform a careful and close analysis of the sources, which is now becoming more and more accessible as a result of thorough research into the archival sources of the period.

In the second half of the 14th century substantial economic development can be observed in Hungary. Foreign and internal trade thrives and this gives rise to the economic importance of cities, making it possible that towns and cities contribute to the military efforts of the realm predominantly in two ways. In order to evaluate the situation objectively, we need to focus on the composition of contemporary Hungarian army and the way it fought in different campaigns.

The beginnings of chivalry in Hungary can be traced back to the 12th century, but in the Árpád era the Hungarian army did not fully comply with the composition of western European armies. The two main differences were the following. On the one hand, the number of knights in heavy armour was lower, which resulted in a greater role played by light cavalry in campaigns throughout the 13th century, a phenomenon, which continued in the next century as well according to eyewitnesses, though the number of knights evidently rose in the Angevin period.¹² On the other hand, one can observe the almost total lack of infantry, which may be due to several reasons. One might be the Hungarian

¹¹ B. HÓMAN, *Károly Róbert gazdaságpolitikája*, Budapest 1921.

¹² G. KRISTÓ, *Az Anjou-kor háborúi*, Budapest 1988; Nagy Képes *Milleniumi Hadtörténet*, ed. A. RÁCZ, Budapest 2000, pp. 51–59.

equestrian tradition, because of which members of the Hungarian lesser nobility considered fighting on foot a warfare characteristic of peasants, something derogatory for themselves. Another reason might be the fact that as compared with western Europe, in central-eastern Europe the distances to be covered by armies were much longer, the road system much worse, the network of settlements, which could provide all the necessities for an army much scarce, so armies simply needed a higher level of mobility, than armies in western Europe. As we will see, this is not true in all the cases, because warfare in certain areas of central Europe still made it necessary to deploy infantry as well.

The army of the Angevin period began to follow the example of western European models more closely in composition, the way campaigns were fought and in the use of weapons, too. The number of knights grew, members of the royal household and high-ranking families fought in a knight's armour, on similar stallions as their western counterparts and with the same weapons. Their sergeants also followed the examples set by western armies. But the Hungarian army still retained a substantial element of light cavalry, which in the 14th century were mostly made up by Cumans settled in Hungary in the former century, and Szeklers (*Siculi*), who had joined the Hungarians before the occupation of the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century, and still retained some of their archaic features, including their light cavalry warfare.

The composition of the army depended on the direction of the campaign is question and the way the enemy fought. King Louis I led two campaigns in Italy (1347–1348 and 1350), where his army consisted of Hungarian heavy and light cavalry, but he also heavily relied on German mercenaries, who were well-versed in contemporary western European warfare. What struck the eyes of Italian observers was the role of Hungarian light cavalry and its way of fighting, which they were unaccustomed to.¹³

In the case of the Balkan campaigns King Louis I (1343, 1350, 1354, 1358, 1359, 1361, 1378 against Serbia, 1365, 1368, 1375 against Wallachia) employed infantry, too, who were recruited from town and village dwellers, who were much poorly equipped, than members of the lesser nobility. However, they were needed in the mountainous areas of the peninsula, where cavalry was less appropriate to fight the opponent.

¹³ Nagy Képes Milleniumi Hadtörténet, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

The king kept a close eye on the military developments elsewhere in Europe. The Hundred Years' War gave rise to the employment of English archers equipped by the deadly longbow to devastating effect. Louis drew the necessary conclusion from this development and he himself hired English archers to garrison one of his castles in Transylvania, Töröcsvár (Bran, Romania).¹⁴

As I mentioned, cities and towns in Hungary went through a substantial degree of economic development in the 14th century, which led to a rise and differentiation of their output. Guilds appeared not only in walled cities, but in market towns as well, producing almost everything, which was needed for warfare, ranging from bows and arrows, hand weapons, saddles and other necessities for equestrian warfare. The Dalmatian cities also contributed to the military efforts of King Louis I. In 1360 he requested Ragusa (Dubrovnik, Croatia) to build three galleys for his fleet on the Adriatic sea and to provide them with docks in their port.¹⁵ Ragusa was also the first city to provide the king with fire-arms, in 1358 they cast the first guns in Hungarian military history.¹⁶ The cities and towns did not only provide the army with the necessary equipment, but also everything needed in connection with horses. The only exception may be plate armour, which was predominantly obtained from abroad, but this was used only by knights, whose number was still relatively low, although it was increasing rapidly in the second half of the 14th century. From this period we also have evidence about Hungarian soldiers employed in Italy as mercenaries, the best known examples are Nicholas Toldi, who made a fortune by serving in Italy, and the mercenary company known as *Magna Societas Hungarorum*.¹⁷ We do not have the direct evidence yet, but on the basis of 15th and 16th century parallels, we can fairly safely conclude that the cities and towns also served as a pool for mercenaries to be recruited from, while positive evidence shows that members of the nobility did serve as mercenaries. Further research into this issue may throw new light on these developments.

¹⁴ JOHANNES DE THURO CZ, *Chronica...*, vol. 1, p. 182.

¹⁵ J. GELCICH, L. THALÓCZY, *Raguza és Magyarország összeköttetései nek oklevéltára*, Budapest 1887, p. 16 (document No. 12).

¹⁶ G. KRISTÓ, *Az Anjou-kor...*, p. 237.

¹⁷ S.L. TÓTH, *Zsoldosság*, [in:] *Korai Magyar Történeti...*, pp. 752–753.

To sum it up we can draw the conclusion that in the first part of the 14th century royal power and town dwellers both realised their overlapping interests in crushing the tyranny of the oligarchs, and after a considerable time Charles I with the help of the papacy, his loyal lords, followers, who later became the pool of the new aristocracy of the Angevin era, and with the aid of cities and towns managed to stabilise his power and initiate an economic and cultural upsurge in the history of Hungary. In the second half of the century internal stability provided the cities and towns with an almost unprecedented opportunity to develop economically and culturally. This led to the fact that cities and towns in Hungary proper, but also in Dalmatia could substantially contribute to the equipment and modernisation of Hungarian army as well as serving as a pool for manpower for military campaigns. However, the low level of urbanisation as compared to that of western Europe had several consequences, one of them being that the rise of well-organised and equipped infantry, which can clearly be observed in western European battlefields (and due to Ottoman invasion soon in central Europe, too) still did not materialise in east-central Europe. This may be one of the causes of successful Ottoman onslaught in the next century.

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