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‘HARCE’, OR SINGLE COMBAT BEFORE THE BATTLE

Summary. *Harce* or *harc* (Hungarian: *harcz*; Italian: *arciere*; Russian: *стычка/стычка*) are single combat skirmishes between individual warriors fought before a battle in front of both enemy armies. Sometimes it was a duel between the commanders of the army or the best warriors delegated by the opposing sides, which would decide the outcome of the battle without it being fought.

The first place on the list of knights who won fame for the Polish army belongs to the Silesian prince Boleslav I the Tall, who defeated an opponent of enormous stature during the Italian expedition of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1162 near Milan.

In the 13th–16th centuries in Poland, *harce* were popular in battles fought on an open field and during sieges of fortified structures. Both heavy knights and light cavalymen participated in them.

Harce or single combat is a custom known since ancient times. It was popular in the era of knightly cavalry in the Middle Ages and persisted into early modern times.

Keywords: Poland 10th–16th century, war, solo duels, skirmishers, knightly ethos

The volume *Before the Battle* in the *Faces of War* series would be incomplete without a paper on *harce* (single combat)¹ and *harcownicy* (skirmishers) who, by solo duels with their opponents often initiated the main fight between military units or even entire armies from antiquity to the modern era.

¹ *Vide:* J. SZYM CZAK, *Pojedynki i harce, turnieje i gonitwy. Walki o życie, cześć, sławę i pieniądze w Polsce Piastów i Jagiellonów*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 70–83.

According to various dictionaries and lexicons,² *harce* or *harc* (Hungarian: *harcz*; Italian: *arriere*; Russian: *стычка/стычка*) is the beginning of a battle, a *mêlée*, a duel before a battle, or a fight between single warriors in front of both enemy armies. Sometimes the definition also states that these were fights between ‘lightly armed warriors,’³ which, after all, must be confronted with the collected source material in relation to the pre-16th century period for which – but only for it and the following centuries – such a definition seems adequate. It is also important to note that *harcować* (to skirmish) also meant to jump, to chase on horseback, or to show off one’s dexterity in the art of chivalry.⁴ *Harc* is furthermore ‘*initium vel pro ludium pugnae = pro cursio ante aciem = poiedynek* (duel),’ while *harcownik* is a *prouocator* ‘*qui unus unum provocat hostem*’ – as we read in Grzegorz Knapski’s 17th-century dictionary.⁵ Thus, if one is to believe the quote stating that *harce* were ‘*imaginariae bellorum pro lusiones*,’ they were a rehearsal, a prelude, an apparent or symbolic introduction, usually acted out by cavalymen (to cover the full set of meanings), to the battle proper.⁶

Although this prelude did not always take the form of *harc* (single combat, i.e., a solo cavalry duel before a battle), it constituted an introduction to the battle proper – sometimes meant as a provocation [*sic*].⁷ After all, David and Goliath were skirmishers representing the Israelites and the Philistines, respectively.

There is an interesting entry on the topic of *harce* in the Polish chronicle written by Jan Długosz (*Johannes Longinus*), who based his *Annales* on the earlier account of the battle between the armies of Boleslav I the Brave and

² S.B. LINDE, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 2: *G–L*, ed. 3, Warszawa 1951, p. 172; *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 1: *A–K*, ed. M. SZYM CZAK, Warszawa 1978, p. 725; *Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. 8, ed. M.R. MAYENOWA, Wrocław *et al.* 1974, pp. 304–305, 307; *vide*: I. SZLESIŃSKI, *Słownictwo wojskowe w wybranych tekstach literackich i historycznych XVII wieku*, Wrocław *et al.* 1985, pp. 30–31.

³ *Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. 8, p. 304.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

⁵ G. KNAPSKI, *Thesaurus Polono-latino-graecus seu Promptuarium Linguae Latinae et Graecae, Polonorum usui accomodatam*, Kraków [1621], p. 225.

⁶ *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 1, ed. M. SZYM CZAK, p. 725.

⁷ *Vide*: M. STRICKLAND, *Provoking or Avoiding Battle? Challenge, Judicial Duel, and Single Combat in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Warfare*, [in:] *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France. Proceedings of the 1995 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. M. STRICKLAND, Harlaxton Medieval Studies VII, Stamford 1998, pp. 317–343.

Prince Jaroslav on the Bug River in 1018 written by Gallus Anonymus,⁸ noted (under the year 1008) that both armies, standing for several days on opposite banks of the river engaged in '*excursiones et (certaminis mutua) preludia*' [emphasis – J.S.]. However, there could not be typical skirmishing, as the two armies were separated by a river [*sic*]. Finally, "in the end, clods of mud were thrown, there were mutual insults and a major confrontation, and small deeds, as it happens, led to a battle between both sides."⁹ The Latin expressions used by the chronicler do indeed allude to preliminary fights, except that in this case, I would translate *excursio* as an 'excursion' rather than a skirmish, which is more in line with Długosz's intention, who treated the words in brackets (originally written in the margins of his work) as an explanation of the expression used in the text itself. This does not change the fact that this is how the chronicler imagined the beginning of the Polish-Rus' clash, although he did not read it in Gallus Anonymus' account.

Harce was often equated with a duel, in the same way that a battle itself was a duel but fought between two armies rather than two single combatants. This is most clearly evidenced by this 16th-century record: "Duellum, sive Duellium; Woyná / bitwá miedzi dwiémá ftronómá / álbo dwiémá porfonómá / yáko, gdy rycérze ná hárc wyeżdżą" (*Duellum, or Duellium; a war / a combat between two parties / or two individuals / when the knights ride out to hárc*).¹⁰

According to Wincenty Kadłubek, a master champion of such *singulares conflictus* was the legendary ruler of Poland known as Lestek, who challenged his enemies to duels and, having won, seized their lands/kingdoms.¹¹ However, this phenomenon was different from *harce*, being rather a *duellum*, although also not exactly a duel either, as the prince was more an example of an 'obsessive duellist,' focused on seizing the wealth of defeated opponents rather than fighting in the name of a higher cause. But perhaps, for him, such 'higher cause' was the expansion of the boundaries of his dominion.

⁸ *Galli Anonymi Cronicae et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, ed. K. MAŁECZYŃSKI, [in:] *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* (hereinafter: MPH), Series nova (hereinafter: GALLUS), vol. 2, Kraków 1952, pp. 23–25.

⁹ J. DŁUGOSZ, *Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, book 1–2, Warszawa 1964 (hereinafter: DŁUGOSZ), p. 260.

¹⁰ J. MAŁCZYŃSKI, *Lexicon latino-polonicum ex optimis Latinae Linguae scriptoribus concinnatum*, [Königsberg] 1564, p. 97; *vide*: *Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. 8, p. 305.

¹¹ J. BANASZKIEWICZ, *Polskie dzieje bajeczne Mistrza Wincentego Kadłubka*, Wrocław 1998, pp. 187–192.

* * *

Harce was played out in front of two battle-ready armies. They, therefore, took place on an open field or near the fortifications of the besieged defensive structure. For obvious reasons, they could not be performed during an unexpected attack, a planned ambush, or a plundering raid with no other purpose than to demonstrate one's military superiority.

When describing the siege of Budziszyn (German: *Bautzen*) in 1004, Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg, noted that both sides – German and Polish – suffered significant losses.

“On our side, Hemuzo, a warrior noble in lineage and vigorous in manner, had repeatedly provoked the occupants to battle and pursued them almost to the walls, but he was killed when half of a millstone struck his helmeted head. The jeering enemy dragged his corpse into the burg” – wrote the chronicler.¹² Thus, Hemuzo was going out to perform *harce/certamine*, or a duel (martial, not judicial), but instead died simply in battle.

In 1109, German troops passing by the fortified and unconquerable Bytom Odrzański (German: *Beuthen an der Oder*) stopped and “some of his [Henry V's] more famous knights strayed towards the stronghold, wishing to show their chivalrous virtue in Poland and test the strength and courage of the Poles. And the inhabitants of the stronghold, having opened the gates, came out with drawn swords, fearing neither the great number of various troops nor the belligerence of the Germans, (...) men without protective armour fought with bare swords against shield bearers, and shield bearers against armoured men, rushing eagerly into battle as if for a feast. (...) It was there that the Emperor first experienced the courage of the Poles, since not all his knights survived the battle unscathed.” Jacek Banaszkiwicz rightly commented that this was no ordinary armed confrontation, but “heightened its participants' awareness that by going out to the enemy and facing him eye to eye they were tempting fate.”¹³

Plenty of such duels took place during the long and usually monotonous sieges of strongholds, castles, towns, and other fortified sites in the following

¹² Translation of the *Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* after DAVID A. WARNER, *Ottoman Germany. The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, Manchester 2001, pp. 247–248, Polish translation in *Kronika Thietmara*, ed. M.Z. JEDLIŃSKI, Poznań 1953, pp. 334–337.

¹³ GALLUS, p. 131. *Vide*: J. BANASZKIEWICZ, „Nadzy wojownicy” – o średniowiecznych pogłoskach dawnego rytu wojskowego (*Prokopiusz z Cezarei, Paweł Diakon, Girard z Walii, Sakso Gramatyk i Gall Anonim*), [in:] IDEM, *Takie sobie średniowieczne bajeczki*, Kraków 2013, p. 385.

centuries. It is sometimes difficult to categorise them into the appropriate type of warfare, as in the case of the so-called 'counter-fortresses,' i.e., makeshift fortresses built in the vicinity of a besieged stronghold. In the last years of the 11th century, the Pomeranians erected their stronghold opposite the fortified settlement in Santok (German: *Zantoch*), which was manned by a Polish garrison. According to Gallus Anonymus' vivid description, this 'counter-fortress' was "so close to the Christians that the pagans could see and hear everything that was being said or was happening in Santok."¹⁴ The crews of both fortresses undoubtedly fought each other, but since written records are silent on this matter, we do not know the nature of these skirmishes. In 1244, a new small fortress appeared next to the above-mentioned stronghold of Santok, this time erected by Barnim I, Duke of Western Pomerania.¹⁵ In such cases, crews manning the 'counter-fortresses' were a substitute for much larger military forces that normally would be required to lay siege to the fortified site in question. The task of the knights stationed in these makeshift fortresses was to obstruct the supply of food and weapons to the opposing side and prevent the besieged crew from carrying out any offensive actions.¹⁶

The role of counter-fortresses was particularly stressed by the Greater Polish sources when reporting on the events at Nakło (German: *Nakel*) from September 1255 to July 1256. Both crews – the Pomeranian troops of Swietopelk II, Duke of Pomerania and the Greater Poland units of Przemysł I – often provoked and challenged each other to fight and then clashed (*sepius se provocabant et inter se pungnabant*) in order to take over the initiative.¹⁷ However, the actions described in the written records are more typical of siege battles than of *harce*, which were characterised by different rules. Therefore, while we point out this problem, we will not here continue the discussion on counter-fortresses.

¹⁴ GALLUS, p. 84.

¹⁵ *Rocznik kapitulu gnieźnieńskiej*, [in:] *Roczniki wielkopolskie*, ed. B. KÜRBIS, MPH, SN, vol. 6, Warszawa 1962, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Vide*: J. SZYM CZAK, *Sposoby zdobywania i obrony grodów w Polsce w okresie rozbitcia dzielnicowego*, "Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości" 1979, vol. 22, p. 36; B. ŚLIWIŃSKI, *Wojna o Nakło między księciem wschodniopomorskim Świętopelkiem a księciem poznańskim Przemysłem I i o okolicznościach zawarcia pokoju w Kcyni z lipca 1256 r.*, [in:] *In tempore belli et pacis. Ludzie – miejsca – przedmioty. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana prof. dr. hab. Janowi Szymczakowi w 65-lecie urodzin i 40-lecie pracy naukowo-dydaktycznej*, eds T. GRABARCZYK, A. KOWALSKA-PIETRZAK, T. NOWAK, Warszawa 2011, pp. 485–494.

¹⁷ *Rocznik kapitulu poznańskiej*, [in:] *Roczniki wielkopolskie*, p. 35.

Duels fought between individuals were the most prestigious and spectacular. During the siege of Tillières, Count Robert forbade his Norman warriors to accept the challenges thrown daily by a menacing-looking French knight. On hearing this, Serlon, son of Tancred, who was in Brittany at the time, unable to bear the ignominy of his fellow countrymen's failure to take up the gauntlet, went to Tillières, challenged the French knight to a duel and defeated him.¹⁸ This 11th-century episode shows the duel as both a knight's fight 'for honour' and a prediction as to the fate of the entire war.

Indeed, such skirmishes had a symbolic character, since a 'win' was supposed to herald victory for the side represented by the triumphant warrior. However, above all, it was a personal victory, as such fortunate knights were rewarded with worldly goods and immortalised in literature and tales of bravery, while others – who perhaps fought no less effectively but anonymously with the entire battle crowd – were ignored. According to one legend, the *Topór* ('axe') coat of arms was awarded to a knight who, in single combat with a pagan, having lost his weapon [sword?], reached for an axe and cleaved his opponent and his horse with it.¹⁹ In the legend of the *Strzemię* ('stirrup') coat of arms, that family's ancestor – allegedly in Boleslav I the Brave's times – was taking part in a duel with the Rus' troops when his horse collapsed and his leg remained caught in the stirrups. He then, powered by fear, yanked his leg and "tore it from the stirrup (...) unable to reach the sword (...) holding the stirrup leather with his left hand bravely hit the knight and cut him on the face" and later, having captured the Rus' warrior he brought him to the king. The yellow stirrup in a red field supposedly commemorates this feat.²⁰

One of the oldest forms of settling armed conflicts was a duel between the commanders of the armies played out according to Germanic custom in front of assembled troops, which would decide the outcome of the battle. In fact, this custom was not limited to the Germanic world.²¹ According to Hungarian sources, when the Pomeranians refused to pay tribute to Mieszko II in 1033 (or possibly

¹⁸ J. FLORI, *Rycerze i rycerstwo w średniowieczu*, transl. E. TROJAŃSKA, Poznań 2003, p. 111.

¹⁹ M. CETWIŃSKI, *Nie samym mieczem: broń heraldycznych bohaterów*, [in:] *Non sensistis gladios. Studia ofiarowane Marianowi Głowskiemu w 70. rocznicę urodzin*, eds O. ŁAWRYNOWICZ, J. MAIK, P.A. NOWAKOWSKI, Łódź 2011, p. 79.

²⁰ B. PAPROCKI, *Gniazdo cnoty*, Kraków 1578, p. 48; *vide*: M. CETWIŃSKI, *Nie samym mieczem...*, p. 80; J. SZYMCZAK, *Rycerz i jego konie*, Bellerive-sur-Allier 2018, p. 167.

²¹ P. CONTAMINE, *Wojna w średniowieczu*, transl. M. CZAJKA, Warszawa 1999, pp. 269–270.

later, during the reign of Casimir the Restorer, according to other sources) and when the Polish and Pomeranian armies stood facing each other, Prince Béla stepped forward on behalf of the Polish kingdom and its ruler. He threw a Pomeranian warrior off his horse with a spear and pierced him with a sword. Recognising the outcome of this trial by combat, the Pomeranians agreed to pay the tribute.²² Jan Długosz was familiar with this event, as he recorded that Béla distinguished himself in a battle with the Pomeranians in 1032, but at the same time the chronicler noted that according to other [sources], “the Hungarian prince Béla fought a battle with the Pomeranian ruler and conquered him in a duel (*congressum singulari illum certamine vicisse*), for which the king [Mieszko II] awarded him by choosing him as his son-in-law.”²³

However, the first place on the list of knights who won fame for the Polish army belongs to Boleslav I the Tall. After a disappointment with Emperor Frederick Barbarossa's expedition to Poland in 1157, when his father Władysław II the Exile's hopes of returning to Poland and seizing the throne of Kraków failed, Boleslav I the Tall set off with the emperor on an expedition to Italy (1158–1162). According to later legend, during that expedition, Boleslav distinguished himself by his bravery, especially during the siege of Milan, where in 1162 he defeated a warrior of gigantic stature (*virum giganteum*), as reported in the 13th-century Polish source *Chronicon Polono-Silesiacum* (also known as the *Polish-Silesian Chronicle*).²⁴ However, as is often the case, more information on the matter is provided in another Silesian chronicle, *Chronica principum Poloniae* (the *Chronicle of the Princes of Poland*), according to which Prince Boleslav was at the time confronted by a Milanese knight, a *vir giganteus*. The mighty Italian knight, confident in his strength, challenged the emperor's knights to a duel, but for many days no one – lacking courage, according to some, or for prudence, according to others – accepted his challenge. This *certamen singulare* demonstrated the superiority of the Polish prince's martial training, as Boleslav defeated the Milanese in single combat – almost like David conquered Goliath – in front of the besiegers and besieged and the emperor himself.²⁵ However, the

²² G. LABUDA, *Mieszko II król Polski (1025–1034). Czasy przelomu w dziejach państwa polskiego*, Kraków 1992, pp. 175–176, 183.

²³ DŁUGOSZ, p. 307; *vide*: A. SEMKOWICZ, *Krytyczny rozbiór Dziejów polskich Jana Długosza (do roku 1384)*, Kraków 1887, p. 107.

²⁴ *Kronika polska*, ed. L. ĆWIKLIŃSKI, MPH, vol. 3, Lviv 1878, p. 637.

²⁵ *Kronika książąt polskich*, ed. Z. WĘCLEWSKI, MPH, vol. 3, p. 481: “paratus in prelium clam solus cum solo congregitur et favente deo hostem prosternit in humum, tamquam alterque David

most detailed description of this event can be found in Jan Długosz's chronicle under the year 1161. "In the greatest rush of the horses they clash first with their lances, but when the blow of the Milanese knight missed, and Boleslav, prince of Poland, struck him so with his lance and shook him [so hard] that the giant, having received a fatal wound, fell from his horse to the ground to die. And Boleslav, not hesitating, for he was a very vigorous man, also jumped down from his horse. He killed the lying giant and left his naked dead body stripped of armour in the middle of the square."²⁶ As we can see, our famous chronicler seems to be the best-informed person, which supports the observation made earlier in this paper that an account of an event becomes more and more detailed with the passing of time. In fact, Jan Długosz did not provide any new information over what was already known from earlier sources but served it differently dressed.

An especially grotesque and bizarre challenge was that supposedly issued by Casimir the Great to the blind king of Bohemia, John of Luxembourg, who was besieging Kraków in 1345. Casimir proposed the duel to decide victory and spare the lives and health of many people. However, in response, John of Luxembourg suggested that his opponent should gouge his eyes out in order to even the odds,²⁷ a proposal that we will leave without further comment.

The Bohemian King George of Poděbrady also wanted to pit his strength against the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus in person, whom he challenged in 1470 *ad duellum* or *ad universalem dimicationem*, i.e., to a duel or to an ordinary fight, and this *pugna privata* witnessed by the assembled Czech and Hungarian armies was to decide the outcome of the war. Jan Długosz devoted a separate chapter to this challenge although he did not include in it anything interesting apart from the vocabulary itself.²⁸ The meeting never took place, so the outcome of the dispute depended on the military prowess of the mercenaries – and not the national troops – sent against the Hungarian king's Silesian allies.

In the spirit of armed confrontation between commanders, Prince Władysław the White demanded a single combat with lances against Bartosz Wezenborg

Goliath superans illum, amputans eius capite, victor redit ad castra". *Vide*: B. ZIENTARA, *Bolesław Wysoki – tułacz, repatriant, malkontent. Przyczynek do dziejów politycznych Polski XII wieku*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1971, vol. 62 (3), p. 373.

²⁶ DŁUGOSZ, book 5–6, Warszawa 1973, p. 71.

²⁷ W. IWAŃCZAK, *Tropem rycerskiej przygody. Wzorzec rycerski w piśmiennictwie czeskim XIV wieku*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 78–79.

²⁸ DŁUGOSZ, book 12/2, Kraków 2005, p. 255.

while he was handing the castle in Złotoria over to him in 1376. "The latter agreed to this and, behold, charging their horses, the prince with his lance against Bartosz and Bartosz against the prince, they rushed at each other with great force and the prince received from Bartosz a rather serious wound in his right arm," as we read in the chronicle of Jan of Czarnków.²⁹ Therefore, it was a symbolic and honourable fight fought by two individuals to avoid an outbreak of an armed conflict or a siege of the castle. Furthermore, since Władysław the White surrendered the castle without a fight and did not try to defend the fortress – which would cause him great embarrassment – the duel with Bartosz Wezenborg provided the prince with an alibi that allowed him to save his knightly honour. It had the character of a classic 'juste á outrance' race but in this case, it did not take place in normal circumstances – as a part of a tournament – but on the field in front of the stronghold that was the subject of the dispute. Jan Długosz summarised it in one sentence, stating that "as he was leaving the castle, he [Władysław the White] came to a spear fight against Bartosz of Wezenborg" and "he was severely wounded by Bartosz."³⁰ The whole lusus nature of that skirmish was thus omitted. I also do not think that the lexicon requirement concerning the combat between 'lightly armed warriors' was fulfilled in such a duel.³¹

An excursion of a single knight against an opponent selected from the enemy ranks had a similar nature. Such individual encounters, i.e., *Stich ze rechten tjust* of Dypold von Kökeritz against Władysław II Jagiełło and Dobiesław of Oleśnica against the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights Ulrich von Jungingen were observed in the final stage of the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, when the Grand Master threw the last 16 of his banners into the attack.³²

Jan Długosz left us the following account of these events:

Meanwhile, a knight of German origin, Dypold von Kockritz of Eeber from Lusatia, detached himself from the Prussian army on a red horse, wearing a golden belt and a white tunic, which in Polish we call 'jaka,' and in full armour. Thus, he charged from the ranks of the larger Prussian banner located between the

²⁹ *Joannis de Czarnkow Chronicon Polonorum*, ed. J. SZLACHTOWSKI, MPH, vol. 2, Lviv 1872, p. 660.

³⁰ DŁUGOSZ, book 10, Warszawa 1985, p. 46: "acutis hastis Barthossium de Vizsemburg ludere secum optinens".

³¹ *Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. 8, p. 304.

³² A. NADOLSKI, *Grunwald. Problemy wybrane*, Olsztyn 1990, pp. 33, 91, 176, 178; D. PIROWARCZYK, *Poczet rycerzy polskich XIV i XV wieku*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 211–212.

other sixteen up to where the king was standing, and brandishing a lance, in front of the entire sixteen banners of the Prussian army, he intended, it seems, to attack the king. When the Polish king, Władysław, tried to fight him off, wielding his own lance, the king's secretary, Zbigniew Oleśnicki, who was unarmoured and unarmed and only had a half-broken lance, clashed with the German, stuck him in the side and knocked him off his horse to the ground. While he was lying on his back seized by convulsions, King Władysław aimed his lance at the German's forehead – which was exposed as his visor opened up – and left him unharmed. However, the German was immediately killed by the knights protecting the King and the footsoldiers stripped him of his armour and his spoils.³³

Soon after this incident, Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen, who was commanding the Teutonic Knights' reserves, directed the troops against the royal banners. Because his men carried light spears called *sulica*, some of the Polish knights thought that they were a Lithuanian unit and did not attack them. Wishing to put an end to the uncertainty in the Polish ranks, Dobiesław of Oleśnica "with his lance raised, [he alone] spurred his horse and charged towards the enemy. A Teutonic Knight, a commander of the banner and the troops [or perhaps the Grand Master himself?³⁴] jumped out of the Prussian cavalry at him and, blocking the attacking Dobiesław's way with an agile move of his lance, bounced Dobiesław's outstretched lance up and threw it over his head. Dobiesław Oleśnicki pulled out his lance. The Teutonic Knight, by slightly tilting and lowering his head, having bounced the lance upwards, dodged it and thwarted Dobiesław's blow as he was trying to strike him. Dobiesław, seeing clearly that his blow missed, deeming it too risky and unwise to fight the entire unit, returned quickly to his own troops. The Teutonic Knight, who chased after him, stabbing his horse with spurs and also dangerously striking Dobiesław with his lance, only wounded Dobiesław's horse in the loins – through the cloth we call caparison so that the wound was not fatal – and quickly re-joined his own men, lest the Polish knights seize him."³⁵

³³ DEUGOSZ, book 10–11, Warszawa 1997, p. 111; *vide*: A. NOWAKOWSKI, *O pewnym grunwaldzkim epizodzie*, [in:] *Arma et ollae. Studia dedykowane Profesorowi Andrzejowi Nadolskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin i 45 rocznicę pracy naukowej. Sesja naukowa, Łódź, 7–8 maja 1992 r.*, Łódź 1992, p. 137; J. SZYMCZAK, *Z otwartą przyłbicą. Wojskowa i kulturowa rola hełmu w średniowieczu*, "Gdańskie Studia z Dziejów Średniowiecza" 1995, no. 2, pp. 190–191; IDEM, *Rycerz w hełmie, w zbroi i z tarczą*, Warszawa–Bellerive-sur-Allier 2016, p. 69.

³⁴ A. NADOLSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁵ DEUGOSZ, book 10–11, pp. 112–113.

In both cases, the knights attacked with pole weapons: lance, or *sulica*, i.e., a light spear. The situation was similar a few months later, when, on 10 October 1410 at Koronowo, the Silesian knight Konrad von Nimptsch (d. 1446) from Szczepanów near Świdnica challenged his opponents to a duel (*privatum* (...) *certamen*) in front of the battle-ready armies. The challenge was accepted by Jan Szczycki from Szczyty of the Doliwa coat of arms, who knocked him off his horse and trampled him. Jan Długosz briefly dealt with the incident, and commented on its outcome as an omen as to “how the fate of both armies would unfold.”³⁶

* * *

Harce soon turned out to be a regular element of battles and skirmishes (though we likely do not know about many such earlier single combats). Jan Długosz, when describing the events preceding the Battle of Grunwald, noted that Władysław Jagiełło did not order the attack, although both armies had already been prepared and stood against each other on the battlefield, and there were initial, single combats between them (*preludia quoque cencertacionum inter illos per singularia certamina fierunt* [emphasis – J.S.]).³⁷

We also find references to single combat in the chronicles written after the times of Jan Długosz. Thus, we know that single combat also preceded the Battle of Orsha in 1514, when before the battle Jan Amor Tarnowski of the Leliwa coat of arms “rode out to *harc*, challenging one of the enemies to a duel” and was rebuked by Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski.³⁸ This event was not mentioned by Marcin Bielski who only recorded that “some men from both sides were riding out to *harc*.”³⁹ This was put into a better literary form by the poet Andrzej Krzycki (1482–1537), who in his *Song of the victory over the Muscovites won on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1514* (Polish: *Pieśń o zwycięstwie nad Moskalami odniesionym w dniu Narodzin Panny Marii 1514 roku*) wrote:

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

³⁸ S. ORZECHOWSKI, *Żywot i śmierć Jana Tarnowskiego, kasztelana krakowskiego i hetmana wielkiego koronnego*, ed. K.J. TUROWSKI, Sanok 1855, pp. 45–46.

³⁹ M. BIELSKI, *Kronika polska*, ed. K.J. TUROWSKI, Sanok 1856 (hereinafter: BIELSKI), p. 975.

When the dawn breaks
 on the holy day of the Birth of the Virgin Mary
 from the darkness of the night

and further:

*Pauce pugnae faciebant
 Cum hoste praeludia*

which the poet translates as:

And before the battle, they started
 riding out for initial *harc*.⁴⁰

During the autumn expedition to Silesia in 1474, after the Poles had set camp near Wrocław, “there were some skirmishes between the besiegers and the besieged” (*certamina, que harcze vocamus*).⁴¹

In the entry from 1524, chronicler Marcin Bielski wrote that at Rohatyn besieged by the Turks “one Turkish invader, having ridden out to *harc*, lured our knights; one willing man stepped out to face him: Prince Mikołaj Zamoyski, son of Florian from Skokówka, of the Jelita coat of arms, got ahead of him and knocked the Turk off his horse and won.”⁴² This account vividly matches the adventures of the protagonist Colonel Michał Wołodyjowski described by Henryk Sienkiewicz on the pages of his historical novel *With Fire and Sword* (Polish: *Ogniem i mieczem*).

During the Battle of Obertyn on 22 August 1531, the approaching Moldavian army of the hospodar Petru Rareș came under fire from the Polish cannons in the war wagon. ‘One young Moldavian,’ writes a reporter of the battle, “rode closer and, shouting for the Poles to leave the camp, insulted the hetman [Jan Tarnowski] calling him a coward. A Polish infantryman knocked him off his horse with a shot from a handgunne.”⁴³ This probably was not the only episode during the skirmish with the Moldavian scouts in front of the southern wall

⁴⁰ A. KRZYCKI, *Carmina*, ed. K. MORAWSKI, Kraków 1888, book 2: *Carmina regalia*, p. 47; IDEM, *Poezje*, transl. E. JEŃDRKIEWICZ, ed. A. JELICZ, Warszawa 1962, p. 47.

⁴¹ DEUGOSZ, book 12/2, p. 341.

⁴² BIELSKI, p. 1027.

⁴³ Z. SPIERAŁSKI, *Kampania obertyńska 1531 roku*, Warszawa 1962, p. 181.

of the war wagon, but a more serious confrontation did not take place as the hetman forbade the horsemen to leave the camp, because the Moldavians “surrounded the Polish camp and began to attack and invade the camp luring our people out to harc and used our customs against us,” as recorded Marcin Bielski, who participated in the battle.⁴⁴

In the same chronicle, Marcin Bielski wrote under the year 1568, that Filon Kmita, having gathered about 4000 men, set off for Smolensk, from where “a large number of Muscovites rode out outside the town to harc, but he crushed them and captured several of them so they no longer dared to leave.”⁴⁵

* * *

As we conclude this discussion of the various types of single combat or *harce*, let us also note the tasks of the *gończa* banner, which probably served as vanguard and was intended for initiating combat, to perform *harc*.⁴⁶ Its name, derived from Polish words *gonitwa* (a chase/hunt), *gonić* (to chase/hunt), and *goniec* (pursuer/hunter) comes from the now forgotten word ‘*gon*’, which in Old Polish variably meant a chase, a rush, a run, also a hunt and pursuit, a competition and a tournament, but also a measure of the length of land [for such a *gon*], i.e., *zagon* (a strip of farmland).⁴⁷ Grzegorz Knapski, in his dictionary from 1621, recorded that *gonitwá* was *zbiianie się* [fighting], *igrzysko* żołnierskie [military game], *ludicrum certamen*, *militia imaginaria*.⁴⁸

Although single combat was an almost permanent feature of battles, we do not know of any deed or document laying down its rules, if indeed any such document existed. Quoting a passage from the so-called ‘Hussite regulations’ concerning single combat (with horses) by Jan Hájek of Hodětín: “If anyone should

⁴⁴ BIELSKI, p. 1051.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1165.

⁴⁶ A. NADOLSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ F. SŁAWSKI, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, vol. 1: A–J, Kraków 1952–1956, pp. 316–318; *Słownik staropolski*, vol. 2, Wrocław–Kraków–Warszawa 1958, pp. 453–455; *Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku*, vol. 7, ed. M.R. MAYENOWA, Wrocław *et al.* 1973, pp. 534, 540; *Wyrazy polskie w słowniku polsko-lacińskim Jana Mączyńskiego*, part 1: A–O, ed. W. KURASZKIEWICZ, Wrocław 1962, p. 116; *vide*: A. SAMSONOWICZ, *Łowiectwo w Polsce Piastów i Jagiellonów*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1991, pp. 23–24.

⁴⁸ G. KNAPSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

knock an enemy off his horse during harc, to him the horse is to be given as a prize; and whoever should catch the horse, to him 60 groschen should be given from the one who knocked off the opponent, if he wants to have that horse.⁴⁹

Summarising the events presented above and their interpretations, I think that *harce* went through two stages as duels initiating a battle. Initially, *harce* was a duel between knights, often noble lords, in their normal combat gear, usually so-called ‘heavy armed’ cavalry (in full armour). After the 15th century *harce* evolved into *mêlées* of so-called ‘light armed’ warriors intended for reconnaissance tasks, taken over from the pursuit banner, but still carried out in single combat, that is, in duels: one-on-one, as in *duellum* – although these = may also have been collective confrontations [*sic*].

This text only hints at and, as it were, opens a page – so far, still unwritten – in the history of single combat and the exploits of distinguished skirmishers in Poland in modern times, whom we should consider as perpetuating old, mainly medieval, military customs.

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JOANNIS DE CZARNKOW, *Chronicon Polonorum*, ed. J. SZLACHTOWSKI, [in:] *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 2, Lviv 1872.

⁴⁹ “Jestliže by kto zbold nepřitele na harci, tomu má ten kuoň býti dán; a ktož by ten kuoň lapil, tomu jedna kopa grošow dána býti má od toho, ktož onoho zboldl, ač chce a bude chtieti ten kuoň jmieti,” *Staročeské vojenské řády: Hájek – Vlček – Žižka*, ed. F. SVEJKOVSKÝ, introduction by J. DURDÍK, Praha 1952, p. 38. I would like to thank my colleague Tadeusz Grabarczyk from the Department of Medieval History at the University of Lodz, for pointing out this source.

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Jan Szymczak

HARCE, CZYLI SOLOWA WALKA PRZED BITWĄ

Streszczenie. Harce (węg.: *harcz*; wł.: *arciere*; ros.: стычка) to walki przed bitwą pojedynczych wojowników na oczach obu nieprzyjacielskich wojsk. Niekiedy był to pojedynek pomiędzy wodzami armii lub delegowanymi z niej najlepszymi wojownikami, który miał zadecydować o wyniku bitwy bez jej podjęcia.

Pierwsze miejsce na liście rycerzy rozstawiających sławę oręża polskiego zajmuje książę śląski Bolesław Wysoki, który w trakcie wyprawy włoskiej cesarza Fryderyka Barbarossy pokonał pod Mediolanem w 1162 r. przeciwnika olbrzymiego wzrostu. W XIII–XVI w. w Polsce harce były popularne w bitwach na otwartych polach i podczas oblężeń obiektów ufortyfikowanych. Uczestniczyli w nich zarówno ciężkozbrojni rycerze, jak i lekkozbrojni kawalerzyści.

Harce to zwyczaj znany od czasów starożytnych. Był popularny w epoce kawalerii rycerskiej w średniowieczu i utrzymał się w czasach nowożytnych.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska X–XVI w., wojna, solowe pojedynki, harcownicy, etos rycerski

Ян Шимчак

HARCE – «ХАРЦЭ», ИЛИ ПОЕДИНКИ ПЕРЕД БОЕМ

Аннотация. Старопольские *harce* – «харцэ» (венг.: *harcz*; ит.: *arciere*; укр.: герць; руск.: поединок) это вооруженная борьба отдельных воинов перед битвой на глазах вражеских армий. Иногда это был поединок между военачальниками или делегированными лучшими воинами, который должен был решить исход битвы, не вступая в нее.

Первое место в списке рыцарей, прославивших польское войско, занимает сilesский князь Болеслав Высокий, который во время итальянского похода императора Фридриха Барбароссы победил под Миланом в 1162 году противника огромного роста.

В XIII–XVI веках в Польше были популярны поединки перед сражениями в чистом поле и при осадах укрепленных объектов. В нем участвовали как тяжеловооруженные рыцари, так и легковооруженные кавалеристы.

Поединок – обычай, известный с древних времен. Он был популярен в эпоху рыцарской кавалерии в средние века, перешел он и в Новое время.

Ключевые слова: Польша X–XVI вв., война, одиночные поединки, поединщики, рыцарский этос