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THE ARMS AND ARMOUR OF THE MUNICIPAL WAR WAGON ESCORT IN 1521

From the thirteenth century onwards cities and the townspeople were burdened with the duty to dispatch wagons and horses on war expeditions. The wagons usually had to be well equipped and carried provisions. As such practices were very expensive, it was only rich and big cities that were obligated to provide this service. A few small towns would collect the money to equip one common wagon. Some towns paid a fee to the king instead of furnishing a wagon¹.

The duty to provide a means of transport was frequently connected with the obligation to arm the escort. According to a document of 1329, for example, the inhabitants of Szydłowiec would send a wagon with four horses and a bowman on each war expedition². Besides, in the source there is information that the same custom was adopted in the District of Sandomierz. The above mentions are probably the first traces of an armed escort, because other documents list only wagons and horses. An entry in the council book of the city of Kazimierz dating from the year 1391 reads, "pro curru ad regalem expeditionem Mathie dedimus III ½ fert."³ This seems to suggest that the city assigned the task of preparing a wagon to one of the townspeople and refunded him the cost. It is not clear, however, whether the man himself took part in the expedition or not and what function he might have performed.

From the middle of the fifteenth century onwards the mobile wagon laager modelled on the Hussite one started to play a major role in the Polish art of war.

¹ W. Szczygielski, *Obowiązki i powinności wojskowe miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce od XIII do połowy XV wieku (The Military Duties and Obligations of Towns and the Townspeople in Poland from the 13th to the Middle of the 15th Century)*, „Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości”, vol. V, 1960, pp. 442-444.

² *Kodeks dyplomatyczny Małopolski (The Diplomatic Code of Little Poland)*, ed. F. Piekoskiński, vol. II, Cracow 1886, no. 597: „vnum currum cum quatuor equis (et) sagitarium ad quamlibet expeditionem secundum consuetudinem terre tenebuntur mittere.”

³ *Księgi radzieckie kazimierskie 1369-1381 i 1385-1402 (The Council Books of Kazimierz 1369-1381 and 1385-1402)*, ed. A. Chmiel, Cracow 1932, p. 263.

It not only became an important point of resistance in the final stage of defence but also a new means of fighting, facilitating cooperation between the artillery and the cavalry. This might have been the first step towards the promotion of the infantry and its role in warfare. However, in accordance with the Polish war tradition, the mounted army was still used as the main striking force and the footmen were considered only secondary troops⁴.

On December 8th, 1456 at the convocation in Koło a decree was passed specifying how many and what sorts of armed men, arms and pieces of armour were to be provided by some of the castles, towns and monasteries of the District of Cracow. In the document there are only four mentions of city contingents. Nonetheless, one can get quite a clear picture of the military duties with which those and probably other cities were burdened at that time. They were obligated to send a wagon and 2 (Skawina) or 4 (Będzin, Miechów, Olkusz) footmen armed with crossbows as well as to provide two firearms (“pixides”)⁵.

In 1458 a register was made of the infantrymen sent by the cities of the province of Great Poland on the Malbork expedition. According to this

⁴ *Zarys dziejów wojskowości polskiej do roku 1864 (An Outline of the History of the Polish Military Science to the Year 1864)*, scientific ed. J. Sikorski, vol. I: *Do roku 1648 (To the Year 1648)*, Warsaw 1965, pp. 286-287; K. Olejnik, *Rozwój polskiej myśli wojskowej do końca XVII wieku (The Development of Polish Military Thought to the End of the 17th Century)*, Poznań 1976, pp. 37, 39; M. Biskup, *Trzynastoletnia wojna z Zakonem krzyżackim 1454-1466 (The Thirteen Years' War with the Teutonic Order 1454-1466)*, Warsaw 1967, p. 721; by the same author, „*Wojna Pruska*” czyli wojna Polski z zakonem krzyżackim z lat 1519-1521. *U źródeł sekularyzacji Prus Krzyżackich część II* (“The Prussian War”: that is, Poland's War with the Teutonic Order of the Years 1519-1521. Sources of the Secularization of Teutonic Prussia Part II), Olsztyn 1991, p. 41.

⁵ M. Kunz, *Przyczynek do badań nad historią wojskowości w Polsce (A Contribution to Researches into the History of the Military Science in Poland)*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny”, XLIV, 1930, vol. I, pp. 45-50.

document, 204 towns provided 1436 armed men, that is to say, 7 persons a town⁶. Unfortunately, only the number of men in each contingent is mentioned and no information about their arms and armour can be found here.

The issue of the city infantry was dealt with in the war statute passed by the general convocation in Piotrków on March 28th, 1477. By article 6, royal and church cities were to send as many footmen as they were obligated to provide on the basis of an estimation of their potential. Besides, each of the infantrymen had to be equipped with “balistam [vel bombardam ac gladium] et galeam, cyrotecas alias pluchowicze [gauntlets], scutum et pectorale alias bliachi [a breastplate]” - that is - a crossbow [or a handgun and a sword], a helmet, gauntlets, a shield and a breastplate. The next article ordered that each wagon be accompanied not only by the driver and his helpers but also a footman “cum balista vel pixide manuali”, i.e., with a crossbow or handgun⁷.

In the light of the Poznań council acts dating from the early years of the sixteenth century, the city dispatched wagons, “ad quemlibet currum duos peditos armatos cum balistis constituendo⁸.” Thus, each wagon would set off escorted by 2 footmen carrying crossbows.

A lot of highly relevant material can be found in *Rejestr wozów skarbnych od miast i miasteczek Rzeczypospolitej koronnych na wyprawę wojenną roku 1521 dostarczonych* (*The Register of the Treasury Wagons Dispatched by the Crown Cities and Small Towns of the Polish Commonwealth on the War Expedition of 1521*), published by C. Biernacki over a hundred years ago⁹.

This document seems to be especially valuable, because it contains comprehensive data concerning 84 cities: that is, the majority of Crown towns. It has not yet been analysed from the angle of the wagoner's and the escort's arms and armour.

We shall begin by discussing the arms and armour of the drivers of 92 wagons, coming from 81 towns. Relevant information can be found in the source material.

84 of the wagoners were carrying side-arms. 51 men were bearing a “framea”. The term is not unambiguous as it was used to denote a sabre in 1477, a knife called a thylecz in 1481, a sword in 1504 and a falchion in 1537¹⁰. Because in the register in question a sword and a falchion are mentioned by name and a thylecz is called a dagger, which was not a suitable arm for a wagoner, the term “framea” must have denoted a sabre, which was first mentioned in Poland in 1464¹¹. Some mentions dating back to the first half of the sixteenth century seem to support this supposition. During his stay in his brother Vladislav's house in Buda, Prince Sigismund Jagiellon had at his disposal a “framea thureczka”; a “framea Tartarica” was mentioned in the inventory of Alexander Jagiellon's treasury of 1506 and “framee kozzackie” were used in 1548¹². This rich collection of arms referred to as Turkish, Tartar and Cossack “framee” can be associated with the sabre and its numerous types.

29 wagoners were armed with side-arms. They were bearing “gladii”: that is, swords. Unfortunately, the very general character of the above term does not allow the researcher to establish the kind of sword

⁶ *Kodeks dyplomatyczny Wielkiej Polski (The Diplomatic Code of Great Poland)*, ed. E. Raczynski, Poznań 1840, no. 129; J. Wiesiołowski, *Sieć miejska w Wielkopolsce w XIII-XVI wieku. Przestrzeń i społeczeństwo (The Urban Network of Great Poland in the 13th-16th Centuries. Space and Society)*, „Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej”, XXVIII, 1980, no. 3, pp. 396-398.

⁷ S. Kutrzeba, *Polskie ustawy i artykuły wojskowe od XV do XVIII wieku (Polish Military Laws and Articles from the 15th to the 18th Century)*, Cracow 1937, no. 4, p. 26. All the additions and differences in the wording of the law, according to *Volumina legum*, ed. J. Ochrzyżko, vol. I, Petersburg 1859, no. 104 are highlighted in brackets. Cf. J. Friedberg, *Pospolite ruszenie w Wielkopolsce w drugiej połowie XV wieku (Levy in Mass in Great Poland in the Second Half of the 15th Century)*, Lwów 1900, pp. 28-29.

⁸ *Akta radzieckie poznańskie (The Council Acts of Poznań)*, ed. K. Kaczmarski, vol. III: 1501-1506, Poznań 1948, no. 2287.

⁹ „Archiwum Komisji Historycznej”, vol. III, 1886, pp. 473-499. Cf. M. Biskup („Wojna pruska”... [“The Prussian War”...], p. 337 Ref. 143), according to which the register must date back to the year 1520.

¹⁰ *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie z czasów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Archiwum tak zwanego bernardyńskiego we Lwowie (Municipal and Land Acts Dating back to the Times of the Polish Commonwealth from the So-called Bernardine Archive in Lvov)*, ed. K. Liske, vol. XVII, Lvov 1901, no. 1321; *Acta capitulorum nec non iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum selecta*, ed. B. Ulanowski, vol. II, Cracow 1902, no. 1418; *Acta rectoralia Almae Universitatis Studii Cracoviensis inde ab anno MCCCCLXIX*, ed. W. Wisłocki, vol. I, Cracow 1893-1897, no. 1978; *Cracovia artificum*, ed. J. Ptasnik, vol. II: 1501-1550, [in:] *Źródła do historii sztuki i cywilizacji w Polsce (Sources for the History of Art and Civilization in Poland)*, vol. V, Cracow 1936, no. 920.

¹¹ J. Szymczak, *Produkcja i koszty uzbrojenia rycerskiego w Polsce XIII-XV w. (The Production and Costs of Knight Arms and Armour in Poland in the 13th-15th Centuries)*, Łódź 1989, pp. 72-73.

¹² *Zsigmond Lengyel herceg budai számadásai (1500-1502, 1505)*, ed. A. Divék, Budapest 1914, pp. 96, 136; *Akta Aleksandra króla polskiego, wielkiego księcia litewskiego itd. [1501-1506] (The Acts of Alexander, King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania etc. [1501-1506])*, ed. F. Papée, Cracow 1927, no. 329; *Cracovia artificum*, vol. II, no. 1194.

meant in the source. The majority of the drivers (27 men) used swords as the only weapon. Three of them used *sharshoons*, a sort of large sword (one mention says, “cum gladio alias s arsunem”). It might have been a long, heavy sword, recorded as early as 1444 (“gladium alias scharschan”). In 1484 it was “gladius militalis alias Sarson”. Such a “gladius [...] alias szarszun” cost 1 florin¹³. It should be remembered that this kind of sword was considered a knight weapon. Only one wagoner had a “thasak” (a falchion), a popular arm in the Middle Ages, which was used both in everyday life and during a journey. It was also called a little sword, because it was shorter than a normal one and characterized by a single-edged, straight or slightly curved blade, sometimes broadening at the point¹⁴.

The register also lists some pole arms, such as a “lancea” and a “rohatina”. The term “lancea”, which is used twice in the document, usually denoted a spear. This fact seems to result from the character of the group of armed men discussed here, as a spear was generally the weapon of a lancer. Consequently, the term could not have denoted a cavalry lance, which was normally called a “hasta”. The word “lancea” frequently meant a weapon similar to a spear, for instance, a *rohatina* spear, which is evidenced by a mention dating back to 1502 reading, “lancea alias rohatina¹⁵.” The latter is only mentioned in the register once. The identification is correct because when characterizing the arms and armour of the light cavalry in *Sprawa rycerska (The Knightly Matter)*, Marcin Bielski says that they had “rohatyna” spears, “które uwiązawszy u łęku, przy koniu włóczyli i przeto je włócznią zwali (“which they called spears for after having tied the weapons to the saddle-tree, they dragged them by the horse”¹⁶). That is also the case with “sulice” spears. According to the Polish annalist Jan Długosz, not only Lithuanian infantrymen but Teutonic mounted knights as well were

armed with this type of arm, which resulted in a serious misunderstanding in the Polish rows in the Battle of Grunwald. In 1410. The chronicler used the expression “lancea alias sulicze”¹⁷ and arms researchers identify a “sulica” with a light and short spear¹⁸.

The next four items on the list can be found in the expressions “cum tribulo”, “tribula ferrea” and “cum tribulis ferreis”. The identification appears difficult as the word *tribula* denoted a flail, which is a kind of crushing weapon, while the expression *tribulus ferrerus* meant an iron weapon the point of which was the shape of a thistle¹⁹: that is to say, a guisarme or more probably a partizan (both the weapons are pole arms with multiple heads). However, no other names, such as, for example, a glaive, are used in the register to describe this sort of weapon and therefore it can be assumed that the term *tribula* denoted a flail, which was also listed as “czepi ferrei” once.

Three of the wagoners had a hatchet (“securis”) at their disposal, which was their only weapon in two cases. As this was the way hatchets belonging to the technical equipment were listed, the arms mentioned here cannot be identified as berdiches. Besides, it is certain that “securis” were considered arms in the Middle Ages. In 1498 in Płock, Tomasz Januszkiewicz was sentenced for entering the house of Jakub, the pewterer, by force, using a sharp tool, namely a hatchet (“cum acutis armis videlicet securi”²⁰). Such weapons were not exclusively plebeian arms. When discussing the Battle of Grunwald, Jan Długosz says that after having broken their cavalry lances, the knights fought with swords and hatchets fixed to long shafts (“securibus longius ligno extensis”²¹). There are numerous examples of knights using hatchets²². In addition, the register lists two wagoner

¹³ *Starodawne prawa polskiego pomniki (Ancient Monuments of the Polish Law)* vol. II, Cracow 1870, no. 3211: Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie, Metryka Koronna (The Main Archive of Old Acts in Warsaw, The Crown Register), book 14, p. 40; *Acta officii consistorialis Leopoliensis antiquissima*, ed. W. R o l n y, vol. II, Lvov 1930, no. 1528; see *Słownik staropolski (Old Polish Dictionary)*, ed. S. U r b a Ń c z y k, vol. VIII, Wrocław 1977, p. 535.

¹⁴ J. S z y m c z a k, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72; A. N o w a k o w s k i, *Uzbrojenie średniowieczne w Polsce [na tle środkowoeuropejskim] (Medieval Arms and Armour in Poland [Against a Background of Central European Weaponry])*, Toruń 1991, pp. 61-62.

¹⁵ *Starodawne prawa polskiego pomniki (Ancient Monuments of the Polish Law)*, vol. II, no. 4541.

¹⁶ M. B i e l s k i, *Sprawa rycerska (The Knightly Matter)*, Cracow 1569, part VII.

¹⁷ J. D ł u g o s z, *Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, vol. IV, [in:] *Opera omnia*, vol. XI, Cracow 1877, p. 59; see A. N o w a k o w s k i, *Uzbrojenie wojsk krzyżackich w Prusach w XIV w. i na początku XV w. (The Arms and Armour of the Teutonic Forces in Prussia in the 14th and at the Beginning of the 15th Century)*, Łódź 1980, p. 118.

¹⁸ See A. N a d o l s k i, *Grunwald. Problemy wybrane (Grunwald. Selected Problems)*, Olsztyn 1990, p. 55.

¹⁹ See *Słownik łacińsko-polski Bartłomieja z Bydgoszczy podług rękopisu z roku 1532 (The Latin-Polish Dictionary by Bartłomiej of Bydgoszcz after the Handwritten Copy Dating from 1532)*, ed. B. E r z e p k i, Poznań 1900, p. 108.

²⁰ *Księga ławnicza miasta Płocka 1489-1517 (The Councilor Book of the City of Płock 1489-1517)*, ed. D. P o p p e, Warsaw 1995, no. 99.

²¹ J. D ł u g o s z, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 54.

²² M. G ł o s e k, *Późnośredniowieczna broń obuchowa w zbiorach polskich (Late Medieval Crushing Weapons in Polish Collections)*, Warsaw-Łódź 1996, pp. 24-25.

“cum bipenni”: that is, with battleaxes. However, those arms might have been knobbed battleaxes²³.

Only one wagoner had a *krzoska*, i.e. a hand firearm with a modern wheel lock. This arm was the only projectile-throwing weapon mentioned in the document. The interesting thing is that the wagon drivers did not have any crossbows.

As far as defensive arms are concerned, the register lists one “galea”, but the term cannot be associated with any particular type of helm. It can only be assumed that the head-covering meant here was an open helmet. However, it was not a kettle-hat as the Kalisz record mentions both a “galea” and a kettle-hat.

In summary, it must be stressed that the majority of the wagoners were armed with very basic offensive weapons, mostly side arms. Thus their military role was rather limited and consisted in assisting in the defence of the wagons. The wagoner from Chełm had a sword and a hatchet. The second wagon from Kalisz was carrying a sabre and an iron flail. The wagon from Kościan was equipped with both a sword and a wheel-lock gun. The wagon driver from Stawiszyn was armed with a sabre and a *rohatoryna* spear. The wagoner from Śrem had a sabre and a helmet and the one from Żydaczów was bearing a spear and an axe. The interesting thing is that there was no difference between the arms and armour of wagoners from various parts of the country. However, it should be noted that mules pulled only one wagon, from Dolina in Russia. The rest were drawn by horses.

The second group of armed men was the escort. 83 cities provided their wagons with escorts. Only the wagon from Powidz was not additionally guarded. A wagon was usually accompanied by one (23 cities) or two (49 cities) armed men. In six cases, there were 4 men, in two cases, the cities sent 3 men and in three cases, they provided as many as 5 persons. Thus, the escorts consisted of 166 men altogether. Most of them were infantrymen (154 soldiers). Besides them there were 12 men on horseback, mostly chief officers of groups of villages. One of the mounted guards was a steward and one of them was a commandant of city defence forces.

Besides provisions and equipment 5 wagons were carrying the following additional arms: 8 *plachownice*, identified as gauntlets, 8 vambraces or oversleeves, mentioned as *mice*, 4 javelins, 4 helmets (3 *galeae* and a kettle-hat), 3 flails, 2 hook-guns

with hooks, the gunpowder and balls and one glaive.

The personal arms of the escorts were mainly side arms (137 cases). They had 14 swords, referred to as “gladii” (the term does not allow the researcher to more precisely define the type of weapon used by the warriors); 23 sabres, called “frameae”, like in the case of the wagoners; 1 *estoc*, mentioned as an angular sword and belonging to the group of spiked arms.

Some of the wagoners had firearms at their disposal. The document lists 66 handguns. 60 of them are referred to as *bombardas*. The term is very ambiguous, as it is usually associated with a large gun. The expression “cum bombardis alias s rvszniczami”²⁴, describing a group of attackers, seems to suggest that the *bombardas* mentioned here were undoubtedly hand firearms. An escort member from Nowy Sącz was armed with “*bombarda parva alias krzoska*”, while the warrior from Mstów had both a wheel-lock gun (*krzoska*) and a *bombarda*. Anyway it was a hand firearm, most probably a handgun. Other infantrymen were equipped with 5 wheel-lock guns and a “*pixis*”, which must have been a hand weapon as it was one of a footman, just like the *bombardas*. Was it an old type of *pizschäl*?

Many arms brought by the escorts were shafted weapons. Among them were 45 pole arms. The register also lists 23 spears (“*lancea*”), 9 halberds, 6 glaives, 4 *sulica* spears as well as 3 javelins. It should be noted that some of the weapons had multiple heads.

Crushing weapons were also in use. On the list there are 7 flails, mentioned as “*tribulae*” and 16 hatchets: that is, 23 weapons altogether.

As far as defensive arms are concerned, the register provides information about 12 helmets (“*galeae*”), 12 shields (11 “*clipei*” and an “*ambo*”?), 3 pairs of “*plachownice*”, i.e. gauntlets, 12 plates (in six cases, only the front one), 6 vambraces, 4 cuirasses, listed as “*plachi*”, and 3 coats of mail (“*lorica*”).

Like the wagoners, the escort members did not have any neuroballistic projectile-throwing weapons. One can only find information about a bow (“*arcus*”), being the weapon of the armed man from Dolina in Russia, mentioned above. Consequently, it seems that firearms had replaced bows and crossbows. In addition, the firearms were technological novelties, like, for example, the above-cited wheel-lock guns.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁴ *Akta grodzkie i ziemskie... (Municipal and Land Acts...)*, vol. XVII, no. 3298.

The infantrymen from Łęczycza seem to have been well armed and equipped. Each of them had a suit of armour a sword, a glaive and a shield. Similarly, the men from Śrem were wearing helmets, 2 plates (the front and the back ones) and vambraces and carrying a sabre and a spear. The men from Kalisz were very well equipped too. The escort members of the Kościan wagon were wearing helmets, breastplates and vambraces. They all had swords. Two of them were additionally armed with wheel-lock guns and two others were bearing halberds. The armed men from Sieradz were very well equipped as well. One of them had a helmet, 2 plates: that is to say, a breastplate and a back plate, and gauntlets. He was also carrying a sword, a spear and a bombardarda.

Among the warriors there were twelve men on horseback. Their equipment did not differ a lot from the arms of the escorts. They had 8 swords, 3 spears, 2 handguns, 2 sabres, 1 cavalry lance, 1 *sulica* spear, 1 hatchet, as well as a cuirass, a sleeved vest, a helmet and a shield. It should be noted that among the mounted warriors there was only one man armed with so-called typical lancer equipment. He was sent by the chief officer of the group of villages of Koło and had at his disposal a cavalry lance, a sword and a shield. This warrior was wearing a cuirass, but at the same time the man on horseback from Sandomierz turned up in "kabaczie [a sleeved vest] de luteo" and had a helmet and a sword.

To sum up: The 258 wagoners and wagon escort members from 84 towns, including both the infantrymen and the mounted men, had at their disposal 152 swords, 3 *sharshoons* included, 76 sabres, a chopper and an estoc: that is to say, 230 side and spiked arms altogether. They were also carrying 72 projectile-throwing weapons, mainly firearms (71 specimens). The register lists 61 handguns, 7 wheel-lock guns, 2 handguns with hooks, a pizschäl and a bow. As far as pole arms are concerned, in the document one can find information about 28 spears, 9 halberds, 7 glaives, 7 javelins, 5 *sulice* spears, a cavalry lance and a *rohatina* spear: that is, about 58 weapons altogether. In addition, there were 37 crushing weapons: 20 hatchets, 15 battle flails and 2 battleaxes. The group of defensive arms was comprised of 18 helmets, 14 vambraces, 13 shields, 12 plates, 11 gauntlets, 5 cuirasses, 3 coats of mail and one sleeved vest: that is, 77 weapons altogether.

The arms were mainly accessories which were in widespread use in the second half of the fifteenth century. Moreover, some of them appeared only at the close of the century. But a few of the weapons were about a hundred years old and could

be considered as outdated. The interesting thing is that crossbows were completely replaced by firearms. An analysis of the arms and armour of the enlisted infantry at that time seems to support this view. This phenomenon was observed in the Prussian War of 1519-1521²⁵.

The cities equipped their armed men with 474 weapons. 83.75 per cent of the total number of specimens were offensive arms. The warriors were carrying side and spiked arms (48.52%): swords (32.06%) and sabres (16.03%). 15.18 per cent of the arms were projectile-throwing weapons, mainly firearms. 12.23 per cent of the items were pole arms: spears (5.90%), halberds (1.89), glaives (1.47%), javelins (1.47%), *sulica* spears (1.05%), lances (0.21%) and *rohatina* spears (0.21%). Crushing weapons constituted 7.80 per cent of the items. The armed men had hatchets (4.21%), battle flails (3.16) and axes (0.42%). Only 16.25 per cent of the specimens were defensive arms, namely helms (3.79%), vambraces (2.95%), shields (2.74%), plates (2.53%), gauntlets (2.32%), coats of mail (0.63%) and sleeved vests (0.21%). Although the weapons discussed above were provided by 84 of the 686 Crown towns at the beginning of the sixteenth century²⁶: i.e. by one eighth of the towns, it may be assumed that this tentative analysis allows a more general application of the picture obtained, which becomes a comprehensive description of the weaponry of the wagoners and war wagon escorts.

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

²⁵ M. Biskup, „Wojna pruska”... (”The Prussian War”...), p. 467.

²⁶ M. Bogucka, H. Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej (The History of Towns and the Townspeople in Pre-partitions Poland)*, Wrocław 1986, p. 332.

