

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE:
BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC

OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

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The University of Debrecen
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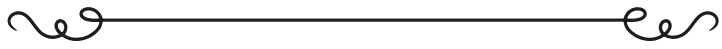
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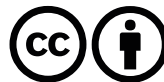
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The *Wagenburg*-warfare in the Army of King Matthias

ABSTRACT

This article re-examines the adoption of Hussite *Wagenburg*-warfare in the army of King Matthias of Hungary. While Hungarian historiography traditionally assumes the transfer of both war wagons and their associated tactical system, this study argues that only the device, not the method, was adopted. By analysing key engagements from the eras of John Hunyadi and Matthias – including the Battle of Varna (1444), Kosovo Polje (1448), Baia (1467), and the Breslau campaign (1474) – it demonstrates that wagon forts consistently played a secondary, primarily defensive role. Rather than functioning as an integrated tactical framework, they served as mobile fortifications. The presence of experienced mercenary commanders further suggests that this limited adoption cannot be explained by a lack of technical knowledge.

Keywords: Hussites, *Wagenburg*-warfare, Kingdom of Hungary, John Hunyadi, Matthias Corvinus

Introduction

According to the conviction living in the Hungarian scientific literature, during the reign of King Matthias (1458–1490), the Hungarian army adapted the war wagons (the device) developed by the Hussite rebels with the manner of setting up and fighting with wagon forts (the method). However, I put forward a hypothesis that the *device* was indeed adapted, but the *method* was not!

The main purpose of that article is to try to prove the statement above. The so-called *Wagenburg*-warfare will be described briefly, then its adoption will be analysed by the Hungarian army in the era of Mathias' father, John Hunyadi. The reason is to provide a basis for comparison through three of his battles fought against the Ottoman forces. In the following part, the adoption of the discussed warfare will be examined in the era of Matthias. In the closing part of that work, the mercenary captains will be discussed, who were present in Upper Hungary in the second half of the fifteenth century and who were presumably familiar with the disputed warfare.

The *Wagenburg*-warfare

During the examined period, significant differences emerged between the various methods of using wagon forts. The first was a practice that had existed throughout Europe and Asia since ancient times, which involved placing the transport vehicles accompanying the army around the military camp as a mobile wooden palisade.

Another, more advanced version of the wagon fort had existed on the battlefields of Central and Eastern Europe since the classic phase of the Hussite Wars (1419–1434/36). This practice took specific form among the rebels, and it was much more than a simple reinforced military camp. It functioned not only as a mobile fortress combined with fire- and other long-range weapons, that its users were able to relocate within a short period of time, but as an organisational framework, too. The name of the method in the modern scientific literature is: *Wagenburg-warfare* or *tactics* – derived from the German name of wagon fort (= *Wagenburg*).

The two most important criteria of choosing a campsite were the defensibility and sufficient water for both people and horses, even if they were only staying for a few days. The wagons were set up in a “wheel upon wheel” (*kolo na kolo*) manner, which meant tying the left front wheel of the vehicle behind to the right rear wheel of the one in front. The security provided by the wagon wall was further enhanced by ditches and earth ramparts erected around the camp. The firearms of the time were integrated into the defensive system.¹ The rebels were able to concentrate a large number of long-range weapons in a short section, which provided enough firepower to stop the attack of the enemy’s heavy cavalry. This element played a key role in the tactics employed by the Hussites.²

Defence was an initial part of the *Wagenburg* tactics. The defenders slowed down or halted the enemy’s attack with crossbows and firearms. Those who

¹ Kudrnáč, Jaroslav, “Vojenský tábor z doby husitských válek v Klučově”, = *Památky Archeologické* 64:1, 1973, 105–142. 126. About the estimated firepower see: Tóth Dominik, “A huszita harci szekér”, = *Haditechnika* 58:4, 2024, 59–63. 63.

² See more about the method of setting up a wagon fortress: B. Szabó János, “A huszita hadviselés hatása és adaptációja Kelet-Közép-Európában”, In. Bárány Attila – Pósnán László (eds.), “*Causa unionis, causa fidei, causa reformationis in capite et membris.*” *Tanulmányok a konstanzi zsinat 600. évfordulója alkalmából.* Debrecen, 2014. 435–436. 432–441. Újabbán: Turcsányi Károly – Tóth Dominik, “A huszita harci szekerek harci tulajdonságainak értelmezése, a szekérvár mobilitásának vizsgálata”, = *Katonai Logisztika* 31:1–2, 2023, 221–235. 226–228.

still managed to get close to the wagon fort were incapacitated with polearms. In favourable cases, the battle formation of the attackers broke down, and panic began to prevail. The walls of the wagon fort were opened on the sides, and, if possible, attacks were launched against the enemy lines from both sides. At this point, the small number of cavalymen among the rebels played the leading role. By this time, the enemy's morale had been broken, and they tried to flee, leaving "only" the task of scattering the fleeing troops.

The fundamental difference between the Hussite and the general wagon fort was that the *Wagenburg* played a significant part in combat. This required vehicles converted for military use according to certain criteria. The product of this process was the Hussite war wagon, a device equipped with firearms, converted and equipped for military purposes, which was used as part of a wagon fortress for defensive purposes, or to provide support on the battlefield. Of course, the armies did not deploy them individually, but as part of a wagon wall/column consisting of several hundred vehicles.³

The *Wagenburg*-warfare in the Army of the Hungarian Kingdom – The Era of John Hunyadi

The use of Hussite mercenaries and the adaptation of their war wagons and wagon fortresses in the Hungarian army during the reign of János Hunyadi has long been a fact in secondary literature.⁴ Widely known that from the 1440s onwards, as voevode of Transylvania, he sought to exploit the advantages offered by these devices in his battles against the Ottoman troops. In this chapter, the answer is sought to the following question: whether war wagons and the wagon forts were used in the same way as the Hussites had done earlier.

³ Durdík, Jan, *Husitské vojenství*. Praha, 1954. 141–142.

⁴ For example: Tóth Zoltán, "A huszita eredetű szekérvár", = *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 17:1, 1916, 265–311.; Tóth Zoltán, "A huszita szekérvár a magyar hadviselésben", = *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 19:1–2, 1918, 1–32., 159–185.; Jefferson, John, *The Holy Wars of King Wladislas and Sultan Murad: The Ottoman-Christian Conflict from 1438–1444*. Leiden–Boston, 2012. 206–208.; B. Szabó, *A huszita hadviselés*, 2014. 432–441.; Pálosfalvi Tamás, *From Nicopolis to Mohács. A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare, 1389–1526*. Leiden–Boston. 2018. 48–49.; Todika, Raul-Alexandru, "A few considerations concerning the presence of Hussite-style war wagons as part of John Hunyadi's army", = *Acta Musei Napocensis* 56:2, 2019, 9–25.

Battle at Ialomița River, 1442.

The clash that took place on the Ialomița River in September 1442 was the first battle in which a detailed description has been preserved of the use of Hussite war wagons as part of the Hungarian Kingdom's army. Şehabeddin, the beylerbey of Rumelia, had two main objectives in the area: to avenge Hunyadi's earlier victory over Mezid Bey and the execution of the Ottoman governor installed as a ruler of Wallachia,⁵ and then to lead a punitive expedition into southern Transylvania. John Hunyadi had already approached Şehabeddin's troops in Wallachia, but did not attack at the first opportunity. Remained in the step of the Ottoman army and waited for the right moment.

According to the description of Antonio Bonfini, the battle itself started early morning. The beylerbey wanted to win with his reserved forces, but Hunyadi waited for that very moment:

“(...) he allows them to be suppressed for a while, then he gives the order to advance the group of war wagons, and he instructs the drivers to surround all the Turks unnoticed, and then he takes up the fight with renewed strength. The scramble flares up, and although the Turks have suffered tremendous damage everywhere, they hold out thanks to their vast numbers. However, when they notice that the wagons⁶ have surrounded them on the right wing, and they shoot them from behind with flame arrows and catapults, they become uncertain, slow down, and because they are afraid of their backs, they stop fighting at the front.”⁷

After the collapse of the wing, panic spread throughout the entire Ottoman army. They abandoned the battlefield, so the clash ended with a Hungarian victory. According to the latter part of the source, the voevode's troops were only able to encircle the right wing of the Ottomans with their wagons, but no other details are revealed, neither about the vehicles nor about the exact location of the forces on the field.

⁵ Cîmpeanu, Liviu, “Relațiile lui Iancu de Hunedoara cu Țara Românească și Moldova, 1442–1456. O reevaluare (I)”, = *Analele Putnei* 15:2, 2019, 7–20. I would like to thank the reviewer for drawing my attention to this article.

⁶ „Qui a curribus pugnabant (...) hostes circumvallent”. *Antonius de Bonfinis: Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*. Főgel József – Iványi Béla – Juhász László – Pirnát Antal – Kulcsár Margit – Kulcsár Péter. I–IV. Lipcse–Budapest, 1936–1976. [hereinafter *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*] III. 124.

⁷ *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades* III. 124.

It should be noted that the reality of the relevant part of the chronicle is questioned by several circumstances.⁸ Bonfini liked to borrow motifs from contemporary and older authors. A good example of this is the passage about horses frightened by the smell of camels in connection with the Battle of Varna,⁹ which can also be found in Herodotus.¹⁰ The credibility of the source passage also seems to be undermined by two another fact. Firstly, a similar passage appears in the Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's *Historia Bohemica*. In Chapter 47, within the description of the preferred fighting method of the *Orebites*, the motif of a column of moving wagons encircling the enemy is presented.¹¹ Secondly, there is no evidence in the Hungarian context for using war wagons in any battle or clash where this manoeuvre would have been repeated.

Battle of Varna, 1444.

Encouraged by the success of the Long Campaign (1443–1444), Christian forces led by King Vladislaus I, John Hunyadi, and Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini marched against the Ottoman Empire again in 1444. Their goal was presumably to capture Edirne and end Ottoman rule over the Balkan Peninsula.

The opposing sides fought a battle near Varna on the 30 November. The clash began in the morning with an Ottoman attack against the Christian right wing. The fight lasted all day without any significant results,¹² but by the afternoon, it seemed that the Ottomans' strength had weakened, so Ulászló decided to attack the sultan's camp.¹³ The action failed, and the entire entourage was lost along with the king. The Christian army was essentially left without a leader, and it was no longer possible to organise the ranks of the army,

⁸ Székely Ottokár, "Hunyadi János első török hadjáratai (1441–1444)", = *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 20–22, 1919–1921, 1–64, 22. Pálosfalvi, From Nicopolis, 2018. 103.

⁹ *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades* III. 151.

¹⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*. Transl. Holland, Tom, New York, 2013. 69.

¹¹ „Ubi congregari tempus visum, aurigae qui cornua ducerent, ad imperatoris signum, comprehensa sensim, qua voluerunt, hostium parte, ordines quadrigarum contrahere, intercepti hostes, quibus sui sub venire non possent partim gladio a peditatu, partim missilibus ab his, qui errant in carris, viris, ac mulieribus necari.” Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *Historia Bohemica*. In. *Aeneae Sylvii Piccolominei postea Pii II. papae Historia Bohemica*. Supt. Sustermann, Johann Melchior. Helmstadt, 1699. 72. In my previous article this part of the cited source was inaccurately connected to the battle of Lipany. Tóth Dominik, “Szekerek és tüzfegyverek. Székérvár-harcmodor Hunyadi János seregében”, = *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 137:4, 2024, 881–902. 893.

¹² Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 2012. 460–468.

¹³ Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 2012. 466. Pálosfalvi, From Nicopolis, 2018. 139.

which was scattered over a large area. Many, including Hunyadi, pursued the fleeing Ottoman left wing, while others fled themselves.¹⁴ The survivors who remained at the scene retreated to the wagon fort, which had formed a closed formation. Many more fugitives returned during the night, but it soon became clear that the king had fallen and that they would hear no news about Hunyadi. In the morning, the Ottoman troops approached in battle formation, and when they saw that there was no significant defence, they stormed and captured the camp.¹⁵

The sources are unclear about the *Wagenburg*, so there are two interpretations in the literature regarding its use. According to older works, the camp was set up behind the army on the right wing, in a traditional closed formation, as was indeed discussed in the council of war prior to the battle.¹⁶ However, according to a newer idea associated with John Jefferson, this formation was set up only in the evening, after the battle, while during the day they were lined up behind the army as a second line. This was perhaps to protect the forces from a possible attack from behind, and also to provide cover if necessary.¹⁷ If the latter scenario had come to pass, it would have resembled the tactics employed by the Flemish infantry against the French heavy cavalry at Mons-en-Pévèle in 1304. “They protected the back of their long battle array with their wagons. The carts were securely fastened together, and one wheel of each was removed. There were narrow passages left between the ranks of waggons, and soldiers guarded the waggons.”¹⁸

Battle of Kosovo Polje, 1448.

In 1448, John Hunyadi organised another large-scale campaign against the Ottoman Empire. He and his troops advanced deep into the Balkan Peninsula and finally fought a battle against the Ottoman forces on the 18 October at Kosovo Polje, near the Sitnica River.

The battle proceeded similarly to the one at Varna. Hunyadi unsuccessfully attacked the centre of the Sultan’s army, and the assault collapsed. The cavalry

¹⁴ Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis*, 2018. 140.

¹⁵ Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 2012. 466. Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis*, 2018. 140.

¹⁶ Rónai Horváth Jenő, “A várnai csata (2nd part)”, = *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 1:1, 1888, 268–305. 294. Bánlaky József, *A magyar nemzet hadtörténelme* (10th part, I.). Budapest, 1936. Appendix 6a.

¹⁷ Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 2012. 460.

¹⁸ Verbruggen, Jan Frans, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe During the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge, 1998. 198.

slowly withdrew from the battlefield and fled, leaving behind the wagon fort and its defenders as well. Although Hungarian literature traditionally estimates the length of the battle at 2–3 days, Tamás Pálosfalvi concluded that the decisive battle essentially took place on the 18 October and ended with the victory of the Ottoman side.¹⁹ His opinion seems to be supported by a contemporary ambassadorial report found and published by Henrik Marczali in the French National Library in Paris, which also indicated the 18 October as the date of the battle.²⁰

The *Wagenburg* had only a supporting role, although contemporary descriptions reveal more details than in the previous cases. John Hunyadi set up camp behind the Hungarian army, then “(...) reinforced the guard with wagons (*curribus munitiobusque*) and machines.”²¹ There is no information about the movement of the vehicles on the battlefield during the fight, but it seems plausible that the infantrymen assigned to them “(...) were well equipped with *canons and coulevres*, (thus) they were able to cause enormous damage to the Turks.”²² A lesser-known fact is that John Hunyadi continued to make use of the wagons after the battle: “The next day, before sunrise, the White Knight (resp. Hunyadi) woke up the members of his artillery and set off with their carts until they arrived in Belgrade.”²³

	Long-range weapons	Cavalry-support	<i>Wagenburg</i> fallen	How?	<i>Wagenburg</i> -tactics
<i>Várna (1444)</i>	Y	Y	Y	Famish/ successful infantry attack	N
<i>Rigómező (1448)</i>	Y	Y	Y	Famish/ successful infantry attack	N

Table 1: Battles fought by the army of the Kingdom of Hungary using Hussite *Wagenburg* under János Hunyadi.

¹⁹ Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis*, 2018. 162.

²⁰ [Marczali Henrik], “A rigómezei csata leírása. Közlemények a párisi nemzeti könyvtárból”, = *Magyar Történelmi Tár* 2:11, 1877, 89–92. 90.

²¹ *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades* III. 162.

²² Marczali, *A rigómezei csata*, 1877. 90.

²³ Marczali, *A rigómezei csata*, 1877. 91.

The table above shows that the Hussite war wagons and wagon forts at Varna and Kosovo Polje, Hunyadi intended to have only a secondary role. In both cases, these devices were used to cover the rear of the battle line, and only after the primary battle plan had failed, did the defence rely on the wagon fort.

The explanation for this phenomenon could be the traditional warfare based on cavalry (and at that time, almost exclusively the cavalry). It is also conceivable that on the days of the two battles, there were not enough war wagons available with the necessary number of trained crews.²⁴

The *Wagenburg*-warfare in the Army of the Hungarian Kingdom – The Era of King Matthias

Battle of Baia, 1467

Following the suppression of the Transylvanian uprising of 1467, King Matthias led an army against Stephen III, Voevode of Moldavia. The aim was to secure the loyalty of Voevode Stephen and to capture Suceava. The latter was unsuccessful; on the night of 15 December 1467, approximately 30 km south of the city, he fought a battle with the voevode's troops at Baia. The battle ended with a close victory of the Hungarian army, and the voivode himself was captured, too.

There are no reliable data on the number and inner structure of troops on either side. It is certain that Matthias' forces hardly reached ten thousand; Stephen's forces had the upper hand with more than ten thousand men.²⁵ The core of the army that invaded Moldavia consisted of a few banderia of the barons and the mercenaries of the former Hussite commander Jan Jiskra z Brandýsa. They were joined by Székely hussars and infantrymen, units from Brassó (German Kronstadt, today: Braşov) and Barcaság (German Burzenland, today: Țara Bârsei) and troops from Máramaros, Beszterce, and Radna (today: Maramureş, Bistriţa and Rodna).²⁶

²⁴ Contemporary sources connected to military preparations suggest that there was an intention to use these weapons. Tóth, *Szekerek és tüzfegyverek*, 2024. 895–896.

²⁵ Szokola László, "Mátyás király 1467. évi moldvai hadjárata", = *Orpheus Noster* 8:1, 2016, 29–43. 34–35. On the number of participants see also: Antoche, Emanuel-Constantin, "L'expédition du roi Mathias Corvin en Moldavie, 1467", = *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire* 83, 2003, 133–166. 139–140.

²⁶ Antoche, *L'expédition*, 2003. 139–140. Szokola, *Mátyás király*, 2016. 33–34.

According to Bonfini, Matthias learned of the Moldavians' impending attack from a traveller, thus allowing him to prepare for battle.²⁷ During the time available, Baia was unsuitable for the construction of regular defensive structures due to the layout of the settlement. The only exception was the centre, where the market square and the church were located. Two paved streets converged here, surrounding the buildings. There were some stone houses in the centre, but most of the buildings were made of wood, and even the town's defences consisted of a poorly constructed wooden palisade. This was complemented by a swamp to the north and dense forest everywhere else.²⁸ Jan Długosz, a contemporary Polish chronicler, mentioned that the Hungarian defence consisted of ramparts, walls and wagons (*vallis, fossatis atque quadrigis*).²⁹

The Hungarian military command was set up in the market square, while the hussars were assigned to four points in the town and the Szekler infantry to the roads. The town's defences were reinforced with a wall of wagons, which housed a significant portion of Jiskra's mercenaries. During the night, Voevode Stephen attacked Matthias' troops from three directions. The Székely troops were put to flight and retreated to the market square. The attackers set fire to the wooden buildings and then advanced to the town centre, where fierce hand-to-hand combat ensued. At this point, there was a betrayal on the Moldavian side, presumably by boyars supporting Peter III Aaron, who sabotaged the attack on the northern positions. Matthias took advantage of this pause and launched a successful counterattack: the better-equipped Hungarian infantry gained the upper hand over the Moldavians, and in the end, the king's forces became victorious. Whether the victory was Pyrrhic is another question.³⁰

There is only a low amount of reliable information about the role played by the wagon fort in battle, as narrative sources reveal little. For example, Bonfini wrote nothing about the wagons nor the defence of the settlement. Długosz mentioned it, but briefly: Matthias, concerned about an enemy's sudden attack, surrounded the town with ramparts, walls, and wagons.³¹ Narrative

²⁷ *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades* IV. 16.

²⁸ Antoche, *L'expédition*, 2003. 149–151. Szokola, *Mátyás király*, 2016. 35–36.

²⁹ *Ioannis Longini Canonici Cracouiens[is] Historiae Polonicae*. Liber XII. Tomus III. Sign. 1576 V a Rkps. p. 516. Online: <https://dlibra.mnk.pl/dlibra/publication/17724/edition/17463/content> (Accessed on 13th of October, 2025.) [hereinafter *Historiae Polonicae*]

³⁰ Antoche: *L'expédition*, 2003. 149–151. Szokola: *Mátyás király*, 2016. 35–36.

³¹ "...Rex (...) devenisset et vallis, fossatis, atque quadrigis oppidum cirruptionem enim hostilem verebatur." *Historiae Polonicae*, 516.

sources of Moldavian origin, such as the *Letopisețul Anonim al Moldovei* (*Anonymous Annals of Moldavia*), the *Letopisețul de la Putna Nr. 1-2. (First and Second Annals of Putna)*, or the *Cronica Moldo-Polona (Moldavo-Polonian Chronicle)*, contain only a brief description of the ominous night, without providing any details about the clash at the settlement.³² So, although it seems that he reinforced the city's defences with a wall of wagons where necessary, the *Wagenburg* did not appear in its classic role here either.

The Breslau Campaign, 1474

In the autumn of 1474, King Casimir IV of Poland and King Władysław II of Bohemia organised a campaign to capture Breslau (today: Wrocław, Poland) in Silesia. The Hungarian army of Matthias was heavily outnumbered by the Czech-Polish forces, which had approximately eight times more soldiers. Yet in the first days of November, the aggressors were those who asked for peace from the besieged side.

Casimir's and Władysław's goal was to recapture Silesia, which had previously fallen into the hands of Matthias. According to the preliminary plan, they would have arrived at the battlefield from two directions to force a decisive battle. Their army was about eight times larger than the forces of Matthias.³³ The Hungarian king, therefore, concentrated on defending towns and castles and resorted to a scorched earth policy. His men collected or destroyed food supplies everywhere, and even the inhabitants of villages were forced to move to the cities.³⁴ He himself settled in one of the suburbs of Breslau, called Svätý Mořic and prepared for defence.³⁵ His goal was to weaken the Czech-Polish forces through constant harassment and raids, and to break them up if

³² *Letopisețul Anonim al Moldovei*. In. *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV–XVI*. Publ. Bogdan, Ion. București, 1959. [hereinafter *Cronicile slavo-române*] 1–23. *Letopisețul de la Putna Nr. 1*. In. *Cronicile* 41–52. *Letopisețul de la Putna Nr. 2*. In. *Cronicile...* 53–66. *Cronica Moldo-Polona*. In. *Cronicile...* 164–187. Only certain events are highlighted such as Voevode Stephen's night attack or King Matthias' injury. *Cronicile*, 16, 49, 62, 169.

³³ Despite the favourable number of sources, it is difficult to give exact numbers. Jenő Gyalókey wrote about 60,000 Polish, 20,000 Czech soldiers. According to Frankenberger, the Polish force counted 16,000 men. The consensus of the Hungarian historians regarding the forces of Matthias is about 8–10,000 mercenaries. Gyalókey Jenő, "A boroszlói hadjárat 1474-ben", = *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 41:1, 1940, 1–19. 18. Frankenberger, Otakar, *Husitské válečnictví po Lipanech*. Praha, 1960. 124–126. *Magyarország hadtörténete I. A kezdetektől 1526-ig*. Ed. Veszprémy László. Budapest, 2017. 294.

³⁴ Pálosfalvi, From Nicopolis, 2018. 239.

³⁵ *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades* IV. 50. Veszprémy, Magyarország, 2017. 294.

possible. He was right to expect this, as he was aware that although the attackers had a considerable advantage in numbers, the vast majority of their forces consisted of poorly equipped and ineptly led noble rebels. For this reason, they were much less effective in battle than Matthias' mercenary troops. For the latter, staying in the camp was not a necessity but a way of life.

In the fall of 1474, there was no battle fought between the two sides. A series of low-intensity clashes took place across a theatre of war covering approximately 45,000 km², concentrated along the attackers' routes of advance.³⁶ On the 26 September, Casimir reached the border of Silesia at Krappitz (today: Krapkowice, Poland) and began his march towards Oppeln (today: Opole, Poland). After several unsuccessful sieges and lost battles, the Polish king reached Ohlau (today: Oława, Poland) around the 24 October via Oppeln, Brieg, and Schwanowitz (today: Brzeg, Zwanowice, Poland), where the Polish forces were joined by the equally battered Czech troops. At this point, they were about 25 km from Breslau, but the army's strength had further diminished. Due to the faltering supply situation, both horses and men were weakened, and an epidemic broke out.³⁷

Based on spies' reports, Matthias expected a direct attack around 27–28 October, but it never happened. After changing campsites several times, the attacking forces completely disintegrated and headed home, while Casimir and Władysław were forced to sue for peace. The truce was finally signed on 8 December.

It is very difficult to examine the role of the wagon fort in the context of the Breslau campaign. Although King Matthias set up his headquarters in a *Wagenburg* built around the aforementioned suburb,³⁸ it still functioned as a 'traditional' military camp. As for the Polish, Czech, and Hungarian wagon fortresses moving around other areas of Silesia, since they did not take part in the decisive battle, their role can be assessed at most as mobile fortifications covering the armies.³⁹

³⁶ For further reading about the military operations see: Tóth Zoltán, *Mátyás király idegen zsoldosserege*. Budapest, 1925. 163–174. Frankenberger, Husitské, 1960. 122–127.

³⁷ Frankenberger, Husitské, 1960. 123–124. Veszprémy, Magyarország, 2017. 294.

³⁸ Tóth, Mátyás király, 1925. 167.

³⁹ About the possibilities and advantages of use of the wagon fortresses on open field in the second half of fifteenth century, see: Beňa, Samuel, "Jedna udalosť, dva naratívy: stredoveká bitka pri Thomaswaldau (Tomaszów Bolesławiecki) z roku 1488 v československej a maďarskej historiografii" = *Historie a vojenství* 70:2, 2021, 4–19.

	Long-range weapons	Cavalry- support	<i>Wagenburg</i> fallen	How?	<i>Wagenburg</i> - tactics
<i>Baia (1467)</i>	Y	Y	N	X	N
<i>Breslau (1474)</i>	Y	Y	N	X	N

Table 2: Battles fought by the army of the Kingdom of Hungary using Hussite *Wagenburg* under King Matthias.

It can be concluded that both at Baia and during the Breslau campaign, the *Wagenburg* served “only” as a mobile fortress. Therefore, this method of use can hardly be considered an adaptation of the Hussite method.

The Representatives of the ‘Know-How’

From the 1440s until the end of the century, dozens of mercenary leaders were present in the northern areas of the country, who, due to their past, were familiar with the nature of *Wagenburg*-warfare.⁴⁰ Their “operations” sometimes took place in collaboration with the royal court, sometimes in opposition to it. During the sixty years in question, which includes the entire reign of King Matthias, the commanders who appeared here can be divided into several groups.⁴¹ Some of them came at the king’s call. These include, for example, Jan Čapek ze Sán, who appeared under Vladislaus I, a veteran of

⁴⁰ About the difficulties, proposed new methods, and their first results regarding the military history of the Upper Parts in the second half of the fifteenth century see: Novák Ádám, “Opportunities and challenges in researching the political and military history of the Upper Regions”, In. Bárány Attila (ed.), *Mercenaries and Crusaders*. Debrecen, 2024. 301–315.

⁴¹ There is a group of mercenary captains serving under Matthias who had no proven Hussite affiliations, but may have been familiar with *Wagenburg*-warfare thanks to their military experience gained during the king’s Bohemian wars. As an example, see two members of Podmanicki family: László and Balázs. Véber Zoltán, “Podmanicki László (podmanini, besztercei, brumowai)”, In. *Életrajzi lexikon* (draft). Véber Zoltán, “Podmanicki Balázs (podmanini, hliniki)”, In. *Életrajzi lexikon* (draft).

the Hussite Wars⁴² and a participant in the Long Campaign of 1443–1444,⁴³ traces of whom can also be found in Hungarian contemporary sources.⁴⁴ Some of the vehicles he used had to be made locally, in Brassó, according to the instructions of John Hunyadi, based on the guidance of an unnamed Czech craftsman.⁴⁵

At the invitation of the ruler arrived to the kingdom Václav “Vlček” z Čenova, as well. He joined King Vladislaus II’s company from the service of the Poděbrad family. Václav is the author of the following military science writing: *Naučení o šikování jízdních, pěších i vozů* (‘Instruction on the Arrangement of Cavalry, Infantry, and Wagons’).⁴⁶ According to one of the last biographical details, King Louis II appointed him in 1521, despite his age of 80(!), to lead the army organised to relieve the besieged Belgrade.⁴⁷

The Polack Lenard Gnoiński (Gnojeński) served the king for a long time alongside his brother Lampert. It was Lenard who arrived at the military camp in Mohács with 1,500 Polish mercenaries, and, as is well known, he proposed the construction and use of the wagon fort during the battle.⁴⁸

The next group consisted of mercenary captains who opposed the royal court and were themselves familiar with the discussed warfare.⁴⁹ Their pres-

⁴² Dolejší, Josef – Křížek, Leonid, *Husité. Vrchol válečného umění v Čechách*. Praha, 2009. 110–111.; Cermanová, Pavlína – Novotný, Robert – Soukup, Pavel (eds.), *Husitské století*. Praha, 2014. 49.

⁴³ See the letter of Cardinal Guliano Cesarini written on 23 June, 1443. to Frederick Habsburg, in which he discussed a salary of *Chapchonis et suorum pedestriorum. Materialien zur österreichischen Geschichte*. Ed. Chmel, Josef. (Aus Archiven und Bibliotheken, 2.) Wien, 1837. 114. Further reading: Pálosfalvi, From Nicopolis, 2018. 111.; Shirogov, Vladimir, *War on the Eve of Nations: Conflicts and Militaries in Eastern Europe, 1450–1500*. New York–London, 2021. 38–39. For a summary of the presence of Hussite mercenaries in János Hunyadi’s army, see: Todika, A few considerations, 2019. 9–25.

⁴⁴ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest [hereinafter MNL OL], Diplomataikai Fényképgyűjtemény [hereinafter DF], 13694.; DF 102828.

⁴⁵ *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, Band V. Ed. Gündisch, Gustav. Köln, 1975. 2461.

⁴⁶ “Naučení o šikování jízdních, pěší i vozů”, In: Svejkovský, František (ed.), *Staročeské vojenské řády*. Praha, 1952. 43–53.

⁴⁷ Tresp, Uwe, *Söldner aus Böhmen*. Paderborn–München–Wien–Zürich, 2004. 108–109.; Pálosfalvi, From Nicopolis, 2018. 390.; Beňa, Samuel, “Naučení o šikování jízdních, pěších i vozů z pera českého rytiera Václava Vlčka z Čenova (cca 1440 – 1500) ako vzácny prameň pre skúmanie taktiky jazdeckých oddielov na sklonku stredoeurópskeho stredoveku”, = *Vojenská história* 24:3, 2020, 19–32. 20–21,

⁴⁸ B. Szabó János, *Mohács. Régi kérdések – új válaszok*. Budapest, 2015. 24–25.

⁴⁹ This part of the question requires further examination.

ence is often confirmed in a peculiar way by their activities in issuing charts. There is almost no reliable historical information available about Blažek z Borotína, who occupied Nagyszombat (today: Trnava, Slovakia) in 1432.⁵⁰ Although he had no connection to the Hungarian royal court, this did not prevent him from referring to himself as an *assessor* in Nagyszombat and a *resident* in Veszele (today: Oravské Veselé, Slovakia) in the following years.⁵¹

Jan Jiskra z Brandýsa (in Hungarian: Brandeisi Giskra János) appeared in the Hungarian Kingdom during the period of civil war following the death of Albert of Habsburg in 1441, serving Queen Elizabeth and her infant son, Ladislaus V. On 28 January 1442, Elizabeth appointed him captain of the mining towns and Zólyom (today: Zvolen, Slovakia). This gave him a power base that he only gave up after reaching an agreement with Matthias.⁵² Several of his mercenary captains were also given official positions. Jan Talafús z Ostrova, for example, appears in the documents as captain of Rihνό (today: Richnava, Slovakia),⁵³ and Petr Aksamit as “captain-general” (*supremus capitaneus*).⁵⁴ A certain Mikuláš Brcal appears as captain of Szepes,⁵⁵ and Jindřich Šmikúský ze Žďáru appears once as captain of Győr.⁵⁶

In the northern part of the kingdom, there were present figures who had no connection to Jiskra, or at least none that could be proven. Ján z Olešnice, presumably of Polish origin, appears in domestic documents as captain of Lubló (1453)⁵⁷ (today: Stará Ľubovňa, Slovakia) and captain of Podolín, Lubló, and Szepes (1453)⁵⁸ (today: Podolín, Spiš). A declaration of war in the Polish

⁵⁰ Pál Tóth-Szabó referred to him as captain of Árva. Tóth-Szabó Pál, *A cseh-huszita mozgalmak és uralom története Magyarországon*. Budapest, 1917. 113. According to recent research, even his Czech origins are not entirely certain. Lysý, Miroslav, *Husitská revolúcia a Uhorsko*. Bratislava, 2016. 105.

⁵¹ MNL OL DF 240918.; MNL OL Diplomatiikai Levéltár [hereinafter DL] 43999.

⁵² Pálosfalvi, From Nicopolis, 2018. 203. About the detailed operations of the discussed mercenary captain see: Pálosfalvi Tamás, “Jan Jiskra és a felvidéki városok”, In: Dangl, Vojtech – Varga J., János (eds.): *Hadsereg, város, társadalom a 15. századtól 1918-ig*. Bratislava/Pozsony, 2002. 31–41.

⁵³ For example, MNL OL DF 213268., DF 213982., DF 271369., DF 271394., DF 213465.

⁵⁴ MNL OL DL 44793.

⁵⁵ MNL OL DF 271388., DF 271402.

⁵⁶ MNL OL DF 287176., DF 241827.

⁵⁷ *Bártfa szabad királyi város levéltára*. 1319–1526. Ed. Iványi Béla, Budapest, 1910. [hereinafter Bártfa] Nr. 683. MNL OL DF 213379.

⁵⁸ Bártfa, nr. 687. MNL OL DF 213383.

language sent to the town of Bártfa⁵⁹ (today: Bardejov, Slovakia) indicates his opposition to the royal court in Buda. A certain Gyurko Jano appears in a document dated the 1 February, 1453, in Pozsony (today: Bratislava, Slovakia) in connection with Hrussó castle (today: Hrušov, Slovakia). Kelemen of Kistapolcsány purchased the discussed fortress from him at the request of the counties of Nyitra and Bars.⁶⁰ In the summer of 1456, he reappeared once again in the context of Bars County and György Simonyi, the *vicecomes* of the mentioned county.⁶¹

Gyurko is not the only one about whom little information is available. Jan Kerka z Brzezan appears in only one document⁶² issued in Nagyszombat in 1460. The situation is similar to Mikuláš z Camberku, mentioned in a single document⁶³ issued at the same time and place, and Jakub Kopitko, who appeared in a source from 1453.⁶⁴

There are also individuals who continued their careers in the service of Matthias after their days as robbers. On March 18, 1458, the king ordered the town council of Bártfa to:

“(...) allow Herthwythowycz Barthus (Bartoš z Hertvitovíc) and Magyar Balázs, who had been sent to exterminate the robbers, to enter their town with their army and to provide them with food at a reasonable price.”⁶⁵

In July 1460, Bartoš and the aforementioned Mikuláš Brcal wrote a letter to the people of Bártfa from Kassa (today: Košice, Slovakia) stating that the king had given them the thirtieth customs (*tricesima*), so it should be passed on to their people.⁶⁶ The scepticism of the town councillors seemed understandable: three years later, on September 16, 1463, in a letter written in Késmárk, István Szapolyai, captain of the Upper Parts,

⁵⁹ Kniezsa, Štefan (red.), *Stredoveké české listiny = Középkori cseh oklevelek*. (Magyarországi szláv nyelvemlékek 1.) Budapest, 1952. Nr. 3. MNL OL DL 44660.

⁶⁰ Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. nr. XLIX., MNL OL DL 14613.

⁶¹ MNL OL DL 15093

⁶² Kniezsa, Stredoveké, 1952. nr. 5.

⁶³ Kniezsa, Stredoveké, 1952. nr. 5.

⁶⁴ Kniezsa, Stredoveké, 1952. nr. 3.

⁶⁵ Source of citation: Bártfa, nr. 1000.

⁶⁶ Bártfa, nr. 1219. MNL OL DF 213913.

“(…) informs the people of Bártfa about the hostile intentions of Péter Komorovszki, (Peter Komorowský) Barthos Hertwitowicz, (Bartoš z Hertvitovic) and other mercenary captains; they should be ready for war and send two councillors to the negotiations to be held in Lőcse (today: Levoča, Slovakia) on this matter.”⁶⁷

A person named Rucsko (*Ruczki, Ruszko*) appears in a document declaring war on Bártfa in the winter of 1453.⁶⁸ This may be simply a coincidence, given the considerable time gap, but in 1480 he appears twice in Pozsony as one of Matthias' men, and on one occasion even as the king's "wagon fortress master" (*Wagenpurgmaister*).⁶⁹

After the agreement concluded with Matthias in May 1462, the former Hussite mercenaries were incorporated into the king's standing army. For this reason, the preservation of knowledge of the *Wagenburg tactics* in Hungary was theoretically guaranteed. As this has been thoroughly discussed in both domestic and international literature, I do not wish to deal with this period, especially since I have already discussed the two battles in which the wagon fort played a significant role.

The discussed method was not forgotten, even after the falling apart of the "Black Army", thanks to the mercenary commanders brought into the country by Kings Vladislaus II and Louis II. The third category is made up of those who arrived in the country in the service of Prince John Albert, the future king of Poland, during his invasion of the upper parts of Hungary in 1491. Their names were often preserved in the mercenary contracts they signed. On the 3rd of September, 1491, the prince's army grew by several hundred men. Jan Zalyczky, near Krosno (today: Poland), entered the service of the prince with three hundred foot soldiers.⁷⁰ At the same place and at the same time, Mikolas Lyacheta,⁷¹ Waczlaw de Kyschnya, and Jan Jurziczky⁷² joined with their entire entourage, as did Pyotr z Chodza.⁷³ A week later, still in Krosno, Matzej Jankowsky joined with fifty footsoldiers,⁷⁴ and four days

⁶⁷ Source of citation: Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. nr. LXXXVII.

⁶⁸ Bártfa, nr. 686.; Kniezsa, Stredoveké, 1952. nr. 3., MNL OL DL 44660.

⁶⁹ Teleki, József, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon. Oklevéltár XII*. Pest. 1853. nr. DCXLI. and DCXLVI., MNL OL DF 270432., DF 240644.

⁷⁰ Bártfa, nr. 2953. MNL OL DF 215728.

⁷¹ Bártfa, nr. 2954. MNL OL DF 215727.

⁷² Bártfa, nr. 2956. MNL OL DF 215724.

⁷³ Bártfa, nr. 2957. MNL OL DF 215725.

⁷⁴ Bártfa, nr. 2960. MNL OL DF 215731.

later, at the camp near Sztropkó, (today: Stropkov, Slovakia) Petr Safranecz Spiesskovsky and Jan Roznowsky joined with more than three dozen companions,⁷⁵ as well as Stanislaw Safranecz with forty men.⁷⁶

It is worth paying special attention to a certain Peter Kmytha. He appears in the service of John Albert a year earlier in 1490, as a member of the prince's army until at least November 26, 1491.⁷⁷ Based on the sources, it seems that he had already been in the country earlier, as he served as captain of Lubló and Podolin between 1476 and 1480, as captain of Szepes in 1484, and alternately as captain of Lubló and Sącz (today: Stary Sącz, Poland), Podolin, Lubló and Sącz, or Szepes and Sącz.⁷⁸ The year 1490 – that is, the period of John Albert's activity in Upper Hungary – is the exception, when he appears only as captain of Szepes.⁷⁹ Between 1502 and 1505, he continued to “correspond” with the town councils of Bártfa and Kassa, and a new title appears: palatine of Krakow and marshal of Poland.⁸⁰ Further research is needed to prove that this is one and the same person, but given that Václav “Vlček” was still entrusted with an army at the age of 80, a three-decade military career cannot be unimaginable.

The list of mercenaries residing in the Hungarian Kingdom in the fifteenth century could be expanded further. I believe it is already clear from this that the lack of adaptation of the *Wagenburg tactic* was not due to a lack of skilled professionals.

Summary

The main purpose of this article was to demonstrate that although the Hungarian army during the reign of King Matthias (1458–1490) adopted the Hussite war wagons, it did not adopt the so-called Wagenburg tactic.

In the era of John Hunyadi, as seen at the Battles of Varna (1444) and Kosovo Polje (1448), the Hussite war wagons and wagon forts played only

⁷⁵ Bártfa, nr. 2962. MNL OL DF 215732.

⁷⁶ Bártfa, nr. 2961. MNL OL DF 215734.

⁷⁷ Bártfa, nr. 2895. MNL OL DF 215668., nr. 2942. DF 215714., nr. 2977. DF 215750., nr. 2994. DF 215766.

⁷⁸ MNL OL DF 215350., DF 215375., DF 215379., DF 215432., DF 215477., DF 215825.

⁷⁹ MNL OL DF 215537.

⁸⁰ MNL OL DF 216550., DF 216593., DF 271550., DF 216659., DF 270874., DF 216728., DF 270875., DF 216742.

a secondary role (see Table 1). In both cases, these structures were used to protect the rear of the battle line, and only after the primary battle plan had failed was the defence based on the wagon fort.

About two decades later, King Matthias fought two major battles in which the Wagenburg – according to traditional opinion – played a significant role: the Battle of Baia (1467) and the Breslau Campaign (1474). It can be concluded, however, that in both cases the fortresses served merely as mobile defensive positions.

Therefore, what can be observed in the aforementioned battles can hardly be considered an adaptation of the Hussite method. In the final part of the article, 28 mercenary captains are listed whose presence can be detected in the northern parts of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1432 and 1526, although this list can be further expanded. Further research is needed to determine the reason for this phenomenon, but it is certain that the lack of available professional (ex-Hussite) mercenaries cannot be the cause.

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

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The East Central Europe: Between the Baltic and the Adriatic (ECE) is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Institute of History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. As its title suggests, the journal focuses on the history of Central Europe, covering the region between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This region was for centuries a crossroads and meeting point where diverse ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and political entities interacted in unique ways. In addition to studies directly examining the history of the region, the editors welcome methodologically and/or theoretically relevant contributions for the analysis of historical processes.

The journal seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform to facilitate dialogue and disseminate new research on the region, whose findings are often limited in international scholarship due to language barriers and the influence of national narratives. To support this goal, ECE is an open-access journal, published at least once annually, available in both print and online formats.

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Ostmitteleuropa: Zwischen Ostsee und Adria (ECE) ist eine begutachtete wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die vom Historischen Institut der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Debrecen herausgegeben wird. Wie der Titel schon andeutet, konzentriert sich die Zeitschrift auf die Geschichte Mitteleuropas, insbesondere auf das Gebiet zwischen Ostsee und Adria. Diese Region war über Jahrhunderte ein Schnittpunkt und Begegnungsraum, in dem unterschiedliche ethnische Gruppen, Religionen, Traditionen und politische Einheiten auf einzigartige Weise interagierten. Neben Studien, die Geschichte der Region direkt untersuchen, erwarten die Herausgeber methodisch und/oder theoretisch relevante Beiträge zur Analyse historischer Prozesse.

Die Zeitschrift möchte eine interdisziplinäre Plattform schaffen, um den Dialog zu fördern und neue Forschungsergebnisse über die Region zu verbreiten, deren Ergebnisse aufgrund von Sprachbarrieren und der Prägung durch nationale Narrative international nur begrenzt bekannt sind. Zur Unterstützung dieses Ziels ist ECE eine Open-Access-Zeitschrift, die mindestens einmal jährlich erscheint und sowohl in gedruckter als auch in digitaler Form verfügbar ist.

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