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THE ARMS AND ARMOUR OF THE BARDIÓW FORCE IN 1493

Bardiów, today known as Slovakian Bardejov, called Bartfa in Hungarian in the Middle Ages, referred to as Bartfeld in German, is a medium size town with a population of about thirty thousand people, situated in eastern Slovakia, approximately 15 kms away from the Polish border, 30 kms away from Presov and 70 kms away from Kosice. In the Middle Ages, the town was one of the major economic and political centres of the kingdom of Hungary. The first settlers arrived in Bardiów from Germany in the thirteenth century and the town received municipal rights in 1376. It developed thanks to commerce between Poland and Hungary. The trade in woolen cloth and wine trade flourished[1].

Today the slender silhouette of St Giles' Cathedral and the impressive town hall, standing in the large market square, remind the visitor of the former glory of the town. Its importance is also visible in the well preserved powerful fortifications. The town wall, 8 m high and 2 m in thickness, with four gates and numerous flanking towers as well as the 24 m wide and 10 m deep moat surrounding Bardiów many a time saved both the inhabitants' lives and their possessions[2]. The townspeople had their own artillery and would hire gunners to defend the city and if necessary participate in wars fought even in the most remote parts of the kingdom of Hungary[3]. For reasons of security besides the constantly enlarged fortifications the town maintained a military unit, responsible not only for direct defence of the place but also for military interventions outside the city walls[4]. For example, in 1454 the warriors from Bardiów set out on an expedition against a group of armed bandits ravaging the neighbourhood and captured 46 thieves. In the years 1458–1465, the town organized several raids on marauders who had left troops commanded by John Jiskra[5]. Further, in 1472 Bardiów, Kosice, Levoch and Presov are known to have sent 400 footmen against the Polish army led by Prince Casimir Jagiellonian and operating in Upper Hungary at that time[6].

The town realized its full military potential during the fights of 1490–1492, started in Upper Hungary by Prince John Albert (Polish Jan Olbracht), planning to succeed to the throne after Maciej Korwin's death.

Despite John Albert's attempts to make Bardiów change sides, the town supported Vladislas, king of Bohemia, and actively fought against the Jagiellonian army in this war. Its inhabitants provided military equipment, collected secret information, prepared intelligence reports and, above all, sent their own troops[7].

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[1] F. Kiryk, *Związki handlowe i kulturalne Małopolski ze Słowacją w XV i XVI stuleciu* (*Trade and Cultural Relations between Little Poland and Slovakia in the 15th and the 16th Centuries*), 'Historycke Studie' 2000, vol. 41, pp. 10–17; Encyklopedia Slovenska, vol. I, Bratislava 1977, p. 173.

[2] *Dejiny Bardejova*, Bardejov 1975, pp. 92–96.

[3] On sending heavy guns against the Turkish army in 1472 see: Statny Okresny Archiv Levoca SOAB 1888, mentions of bombardiers: Pobocka Bardejov (dalej SOAB) 1975, 2359, 2361, 2534.

[4] For further information on the range of activities undertaken by city forces see: M. Goliński, *Uzbrojenie mieszczańskie na Śląsku od połowy XIV do końca XV wieku* (*The Arms and Armour of Townspeople in Silesia from the mid-14th to the end of the 15th Century*) Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości" 1990, vol. XXXIII.

[5] *Dejiny Bardejova*, p. 54.

[6] F. Ulicny, *Polske vojenske vpady na Slovensko v druhej polovici 15. starocia*, 'Historicke Studie' 1970, vol. XV, p. 256.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 259.

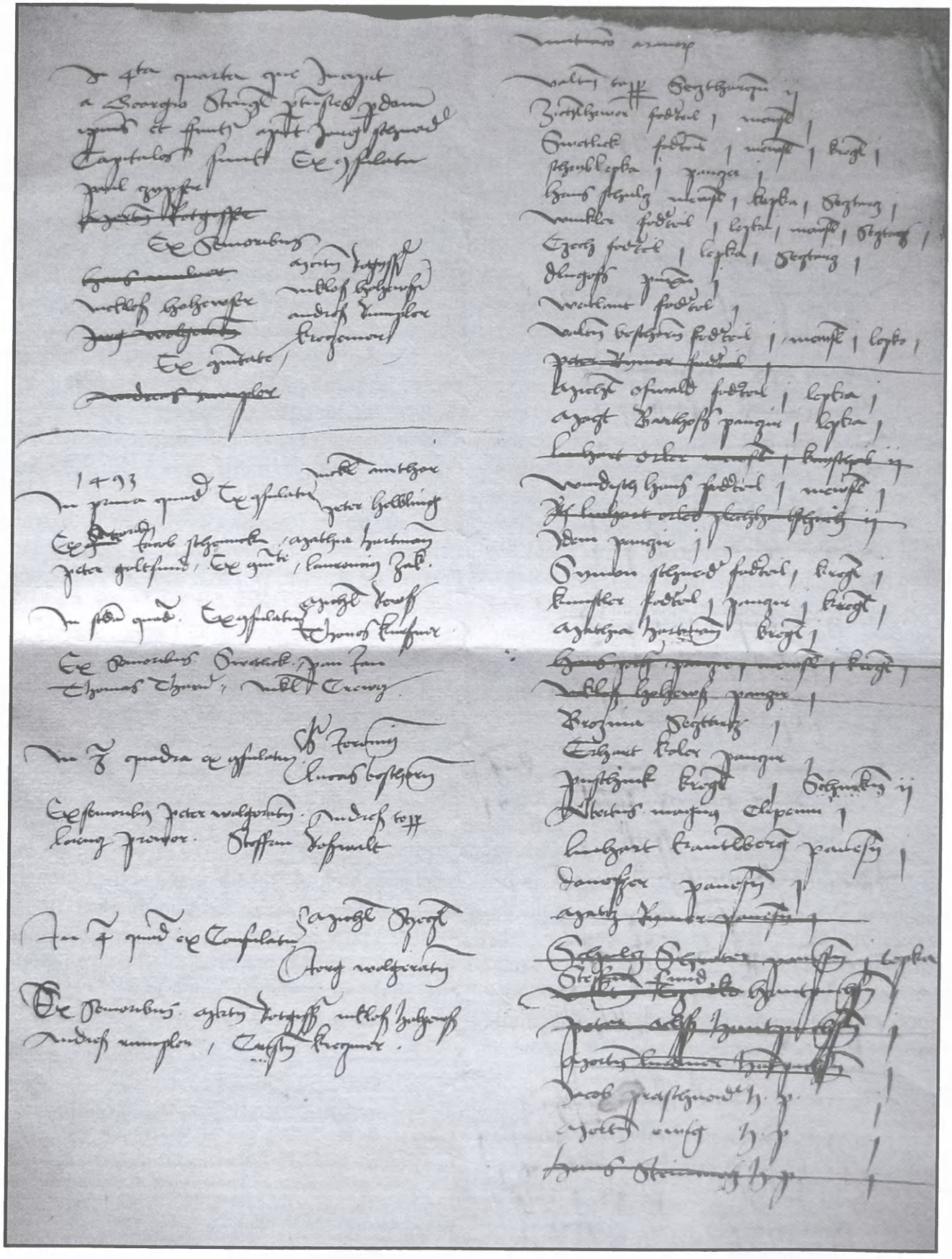

Fig. 1. Extract from the register of the Bardiów force (pp. 2–3).

The people of Bardiów's sympathies lied firmly with the king of Bohemia. When in 1491, Polish forces laid siege to the castle in Spiš, the town sent reinforcements to assist the defenders[8]. Later, a group of warriors sent from Bardiów helped to defend the castle at Stropkov, which was also besieged by Polish troops[9]. Seeking revenge, John Albert's army attempted to seize Bardiów twice[10]. However, those plans fell through and it was only the suburbs and the immediate vicinity of the town that were destroyed on that occasion[11].

Source

A document containing a description of the military unit maintained by the town and providing information about the equipment possessed by the inhabitants in the 1490s has survived in the archives of Bardiów. The Register, called *Ordinatio civitatis pro defensione et armis anno 1489*[12], is composed of six pages in a one-column format and it consists of two parts. Section 1 is a list of municipal council representatives delegated to go into the service in 1489. Section 2 refers to the year 1493, and besides a similar series of names, it also includes a record of inhabitants enlisted into the force and their weaponry. This equipment is the subject of the present paper (Fig. 1).

Many words in the register had been crossed out and the document contains numerous corrections, which renders the text difficult to read and sometimes makes it impossible for the researcher to interpret the record unequivocally. For the purpose of the study of arms and armour mentioned in the text, the crossed out sections were also taken into consideration. The author is of the opinion that the reason, such as death or leaving the force, for removing an item from the list, is irrelevant to the case, while information on the weaponry possessed by the combatant can enrich our knowledge of the subject. The interesting thing is that, for example, two spears, two harquebuses with hooks or two sallets were recorded next to a soldier's name. This might mean that the arms listed in the register are all the weapons owned by a warrior throughout the period of service and not only the ones he had at his disposal on joining up.

The organization of the force

The register suggests that the town was divided into four parts. Each quarter (*quarta*), was obliged to provide soldiers[13]. Most probably, this system corresponded to that employed in order to elect the municipal authorities and collect taxes. Therefore the town may have been comprised of three parts and the suburbs[14].

In 1493, the quarters provided two councilors (*ex consulate*) each and four further soldiers came from the council of elders (*ex senioribus*), also referred to as the council of a hundred. Quarter 1, which designated only three elders to join the force, was an exception. This quarter provided yet another warrior described as *ex quintate*, which brought the total number of armed men to 24. The rest must have been inhabitants of Bardiów and strangers hired by those who preferred not to go

[8] According to the surviving documents, at the beginning of February 1491, Paweł Durholz, the commander of the defence of Spisky Hrad, repeatedly approached the town council of Bardiów about sending their infantrymen and heavy guns to Spiš, SOAB 2893, 2898, 2903.

[9] In his letter of December 1, 1490, Matias Czeselsky, the commander of the defence of Stropkov, among other things, thanks the town council of Bardiów for sending their infantrymen and coming to his assistance. SOAB 2853.

[10] F. Ulicny, *op. cit.*, p. 259; K. Baczkowski, *Walka o Węgry w latach 1490–1492. Z dziejów rywalizacji habsbursko-jagiellońskiej w basenie środkowego Dunaju* (*The Fight for Hungary in the Years 1490–1492. From the History of the Habsburg-Jagiellonian Rivalry in the Central Danube Basin*), Kraków 1995, pp. 94–95, 130–131.

[11] The destruction of the suburbs is recorded in the tax registers. While in 1487, 365 homes and 451 taxpayers were listed in the documents, in 1497 there were only 236 houses with 281 taxpayers, *Dejiny Bardejova*, p. 55.

[12] SAOB 2748.

[13] The organization of military forces in Czech towns was similar. They were also divided into four parts, F. Hoffman, *Ceske město v sredoveku*, pp. 147–148; Also see: Z. Malý, *Vojenská hotovost města Slaného v době poděbradské*, 'Sborník Národního Muzea v Praze 1961, parts 4–5, p. 144. Setting off on an expedition of 1470 against Maciej Korwin, the troops commanded by Slany were mobilized from the four 'quarters' of the city and its four suburbs, *ibidem*, p. 164. A similar solution in Stribre, R. Nový, *Stribske vojenstvi v dobe predhusitske. Studie k dejinam mestskeho predhusitskeho vojenstvi*, 'Historie a vojenství 1963, fascicle 3, p. 415.

[14] They were as follows: the Market Square, Klaštorna Street, Oburnička Street, and the suburbs, *Dejiny Bardejova*, pp. 55–56.

into the service personally[15]. Thus the record of 1493 mentions 123 names altogether.

No information about the commander of the force can be found in the register of 1493. *Augustinus Stenczel* is mentioned in the heading of the part of the text referring to year 1489. Therefore it may be assumed that he was in command at Bardiów at that time. In 1493, the commander of the force may have been a representative of the municipal authorities, whose members traditionally became non-commissioned and commissioned officers in the formation[16]. The social composition of the force was not homogenous. It was comprised of both wealthy and poor citizens.

Arms and Armour

Two hundred weapons and pieces of defensive armour are listed in the register.

The inhabitants possessed eighteen helmets: The footmen had at their disposal seventeen sallets (*lepka*) and one kettle-hat (*cappalin*).

Among the body defences, there were twenty-two breastplates and eight backplates, referred to as *foderteile* and *hinderteile* respectively[17].

Eight soldiers wore chain mail. In addition, three of them had gorgets and one warrior had shoulder plate defences.

Further, thirteen men were equipped gorgets, called *kragen* in the register. They were either their only defences or constituted an additional part of armour.

Eighteen soldiers wore plate shoulder defences. The expression 2 *mewseyen* mentioned in the register might mean that the warrior either had a pair of arm defences or used two sets while in the force.

Nine soldiers wore gauntlets. Seven of them had metal hand defences (*blechhantschuchen, plechhantschuchen*), one man used only one gauntlet and two warriors wore ordinary gauntlets (*hantschuchen*). The term *schynki*, denoting leg defences[18], is mentioned thrice[19].

The register mentions one soldier equipped with *knypuchen*[20]. The term corresponds to the name *knypockel*, poleyns, found in Teutonic records[21]. Most probably, the expression *knyscheib*, which is mentioned twice in the record, also refers to polyens[22]. Iconographic sources are evidence of the fact that polyens appeared in different forms. Hence the variety of terms used in the register. The term *Knyscheib* matches representations of polyens with additional lames fixed to the front side of the knee joint and dating back to the second half of the fifteenth century[23].

Finally, the register mentions *pedalia II*. Most probably, the term denoted metal boots[24].

Shields were considered additional defensive equipment. Five different terms were used to identify various types of shield. The register mentions twelve pavises and two small pavises. Five footmen carried large pavises, referred to as *seztarcze*, which are also mentioned in Teutonic records[25]. The soldiers had also one *tarcz* and one *clipeum*.

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[15] Such instances are known in Bohemia, V.V. Tomanek, *Dějepis města Prahy, díl VIII*, Prague 1891, pp. 371–373; Z. Malý, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 163, 196. A letter written by a Moric Lanchut in the mid–15th century may be evidence of the practice of hiring strangers to avoid service. The man asks the town council of Bardiów to be in their pay, SOAB 1990. For further information on replacing inhabitants of Bardiów with soldiers mobilized by the town at the beginning of the 16th century see: *Dejiny Bardejova*, p. 110. Most probably, the names crossed out from the register and replaced with others are traces of this phenomenon.

[16] That was the case with the town of Slane, where the commanders were councillors. It may also be noted that a force was frequently commanded by two 'hetmans', Z. Malý, *op. cit.*, pp. 201–202.

[17] The same terminology was used in Teutonic records, see: A. Nowakowski, *Arms and Armour in the Medieval Teutonic Order's State in Prussia*, Łódź 1994, pp. 71–72.

[18] SOAB 2748, p. 6.

[19] Recently, the term *schynka* was discussed by J. Szymczak, who is of the opinion that it denoted a thigh guard, see: J. Szymczak, *Zasoby broni w zamkach polskich w końcu XV I na początku XVI w.* (*Arms and Armour Supplies in Polish Castles at the End of the 15th and the Beginning of the 16th Centuries*), [in:] *Z dziejów wojen i wojskowości. Księga pamiątkowa poświęcona prof Dr hab. Tadeuszowi Rawskiemu z okazji 55-lecia podjęcia pracy naukowej* (*From the History of War and Military Science. Book in Honour of Professor Tadeusz Rawski on the Occasion of the 55th Anniversary of the Innitiation of his Academic Career*), ed. P. Matusak, Łowicz 2001, p. 18.

[20] SOAB 2748, p. 6.

[21] A. Nowakowski, *Arms and armour...*, p. 76.

[22] SOAB 2748, pp. 3, 5.

[23] A. Nowakowski, *Uzbrojenie ochronne* (*Defensive Arms*), [in:] *Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 1450–1500* (*Arms and Armour in Medieval Poland 1450–1500*), ed. A. Nowakowski, Toruń 1998, p. 97, where the iconography.

[24] In *Słownik łacińsko-polski* (*A Polish-Latin Dictionary*), ed. M. Plezia, the term is translated as sandals.

[25] A. Nowakowski, *Arms and armour...*, p. 82; by the same autor, *Wojskowość w średniowiecznej Polsce* (*Military Science in Medieval Poland*), Malbork 2005, p. 118.

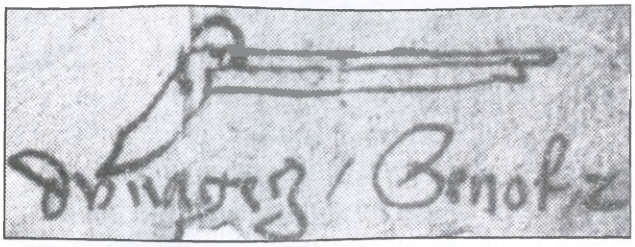

Fig. 2. Drawing of a early harquebus (rusznica) from a letter sent to the municipal council of Bardiów by the bandits in 1493.

As far as offensive arms are concerned, the register mentions only pole weapons and firearms. Twenty-six combatants had at their disposal spears (Polish *spisy*).

The firearms listed in the register were much more varied. Four soldiers bore old-fashioned guns (*pixidum*). Two of them were referred to as handguns. In my opinion, however, the only difference lied in the size of the weapons. Six infantrymen were equipped with harquebuses with hooks (*hakenbuchsen*) and three further soldiers had half hooks (*halbhaken*). The harquebuses were the most numerous group: twenty-three men possessed weapons of this type. This brought the total number of soldiers armed with firearms to thirty-six. (Fig. 2)

Like other lists of this type, the register in question does not mention any side arms. Nonetheless, it may be assumed that the soldiers were equipped with such weapons.

Categories of soldiers

On the basis of the arms and armour they had at their disposal, the soldiers from Bardiów fall into four categories: 25 spearmen (armed with *spisy*), including two soldiers armed with both spears and pavises; 19 (21) men with pavises and 40 other warriors. The categories differed widely in respect of the defensive armour they wore.

The first group was comprised of thirty-six men. Only one of them, a Hans Szulc, is known to have possessed a sallet[26].

The second group consisted of 24 infantrymen armed with spears (*spisy*). They were referred to as lancers in fifteenth century written records. Surprisingly, only two of them wore defensive armour and their equipment differed considerably from that of the other warriors[27]. A man called Paul Casper had a sallet, a breastplate, a backplate, a gorget (*crage*), arm defences (*mewse*), probably only one gauntlet and a spear. Another man by the name of Mikołaj Mithor possessed a breastplate, a backplate, shoulder plate defences, a pair of metal gauntlets and a spear (*spisa*)[28]. Thanks to this equipment the two warriors were among the best armed inhabitants of Bardiów. It should also be noted that both the warriors are listed in the section dealing with the citizens who joined the force *ex consulate*. Therefore neither Paul Casper nor Mikołaj Mithor was a common soldier and their relatively rich equipment reflected their high social status in the hierarchy of the force. Consequently, they must not be considered typical spearmen, who according to the source, did not wear any defensive armour.

Nineteen soldiers armed with shields (pavises) belonged to the third category. In comparison with the other groups, these warriors seem to have been well protected against injury. However, nine of them had at their disposal fifteen pieces of armour, which means that not all the shielded warriors were equally well protected. Thirteen men wore no defensive armour while a Winkler, the best armoured shielded soldier, had a breastplate, a pair of arm defences and a sallet[29]. Noticeably, sallets appear to have been the most popular type of defensive armour with the shielded inhabitants of Bardiów. The register mentions five helmets of this type.

On the basis of their weaponry, the remaining forty soldiers do not fall into any of the above categories. In their case, no offensive arms are listed in the register. It may only be noted that although they constituted approximately 1/3 of the force, these soldiers had at their disposal about 2/3 of all the pieces of defensive armour available. Therefore they may be described as heavily armoured infantrymen, undoubtedly superior to the others in this respect. Every single member of this group wore a piece of defensive armour. Breastplates and shoulder plate defences seem to have been the

[26] SOAB 2748, p. 6.

[27] No number is written next to the word gauntlet. In most registers, the Roman numerals II can be found.

[28] Paulus Casper handteil I voderteil I crage I mewse I lepka II hantschuch Idem Spysz I, p. 6; Nicolaus Mithorr hinderteil I federteil I Mewse II plechhantsch II spysz I, SOAB 2748, p. 6.

[29] SOAB 2748, p. 3.

most popular kinds of protective clothing. Several infantrymen were clad in chain mail and sometimes also breastplates. However, the equipment varied considerably from person to person. Some of the warriors had only arm defences while others, for example a Seidelman, were protected by a sallet, a breastplate, a backplate, a pair of shoulder plate defences, metal gauntlets and the above-mentioned *pedalia*[30]. No information about the types of offensive arms used by the soldiers can be found in the register. It should, however, be borne in mind that side-arms are simply not included in the list. Weapons of this type are never mentioned next to the names of force members, though they must have possessed such equipment. Thus it may be assumed that the infantrymen in question were relatively well armoured soldiers bearing side-arms. Possible analogues seem to be German *lanzknechte*, called Doppelsoldner, who were armed mainly with two-handed swords. Of course this is not to suggest that the 'heavily armoured' infantrymen of Bardiów used two-handed swords themselves. It may only be noted that the term *sharshun* was used in contemporary Poland and neighbouring Bohemia to denote a large, heavy sword. The inhabitants of Bardiów could have been armed with weapons of this type[31].

Any remarks regarding similarities between the 'heavily armoured' men listed in the register and German *lanzknechte* or Doppelsoldner are hypothetical in character. Hopefully, this issue will be dealt with satisfactorily in the future.

Two soldiers cannot be classified as belonging to any of the aforementioned categories. Their equipment consisted of spears and pavises[32], which might mean that they saw service as both shielded warriors and spearmen. Therefore, their defensive armour would have been part of a set of equipment characteristic of a shielded warrior rather than of a spearman. Finally, no arms are listed next to the name Hieronim Henslin.

In conclusion, a careful study of the register of the arms and armour of the inhabitants of Bardiów produces a vivid picture of a well equipped, modern force. For example, the soldiers had at their disposal harquebuses. Further, their equipment was homogenous, which allows for classifying the warriors into four mutually complementary categories. Assuming the register provides a reliable picture of the army of Bardiów at the time of John Albert's campaigns in Slovakia, contemporary Polish enlisted soldiers faced a truly worthy enemy[33].

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

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[30] SOAB 2748, p. 6.

[31] T. Grabarczyk, *Piechota zaciężna Królestwa Polskiego w XV wieku* (*The Enlisted Infantry of the Polish Kingdom in the 15th Century*), Łódź 2000, pp. 117–120; *Masarykův slovník naučný lidová encyklopedie všeobecných vědomostí*, vol. VII, Prague 1939, p. 15.

[32] Augustinus hantschuch II Idem spysz I pavesen I; Stenczel Tisth eidem pavesen I spysz I, SOAB 2748, p. 6.

[33] For further information on the forces of Bardejov see: T. Grabarczyk, *Uzbrojenie mieszczan bardiovskich w świetle spisów z lat 1493, 1521 i 1536 (The Arms and Armour of the People of Bardiejow in the Light of Records of 1493, 1521 and 1536)*, "Archeologia Historica", vol. 32, forth coming.