

Review of Jan Kypta, Jiří Marounek, *Teréní stopy obléhání hradů w husitském století (Terrain Traces of the Besiegers' Activities in the Vicinity of Czech and Moravia Castles in the Late Middle Ages)*. Praha 2022, pp. 295, published by Národní Památkový Ústav
Author: Piotr Strzyż

PL ISSN 0860-0007; e-ISSN: 2719-7069

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23858/FAH37/2024.010>

<https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/publication/281148>

Jak cytować:

Strzyż, P. (2024). Review of Jan Kypta, Jiří Marounek, Teréní stopy obléhání hradů w husitském století (Terrain Traces of the Besiegers' Activities in the Vicinity of Czech and Moravia Castles in the Late Middle Ages). Praha 2022, pp. 295, published by Národní Památkový Ústav. Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae, 37, 149–152. <https://doi.org/10.23858/FAH37/2024.010>

PIOTR STRZYŻ*

REVIEW OF JAN KYPTA, JIŘÍ MAROUNEK, *TERÉNNÍ STOPY OBLÉHÁNÍ HRADŮ V HUSITSKÉM STOLETÍ* (TERRAIN TRACES OF THE BESIEGERS' ACTIVITIES IN THE VICINITY OF CZECH AND MORAVIA CASTLES IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES). PRAHA 2022, PP. 295, PUBLISHED BY NÁRODNÍ PAMÁTKOVÝ ÚSTAV / NATIONAL HERITAGE INSTITUTE

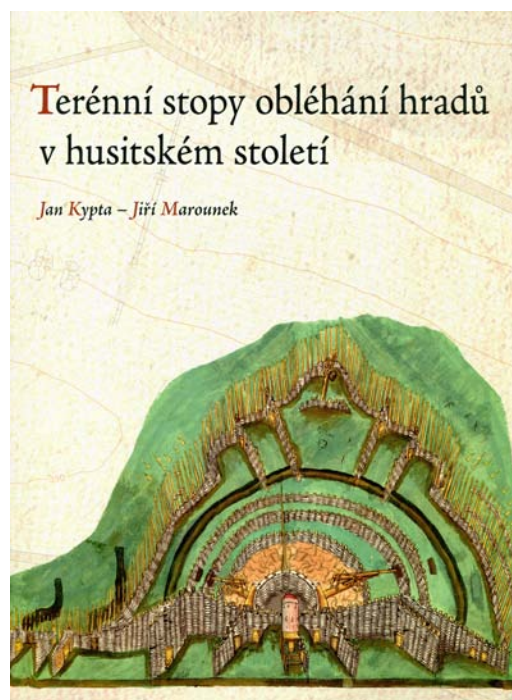
Received: 10.12.2024 Accepted: 17.12.2024

Citation: Strzyż P. 2024. *Review of Jan Kypta, Jiří Marounek, Terénní stopy obléhání hradů v husitském století (Terrain Traces of the Besiegers' Activities in the Vicinity of Czech and Moravia Castles in the Late Middle Ages). Praha 2022, pp. 295, published by Národní Památkový Ústav / National Heritage Institute. "Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae" 37, 149-152, DOI 10.23858/FAH37.2024.010*


The development of the art of siege warfare in medieval Europe is an extremely important issue that has been the subject of many studies – both comprehensive and partial. In the Middle Ages, along with the development of technology, new solutions gradually emerged, including those drawn from war expeditions to hitherto unknown territories, for instance, the Crusades to the Holy Land.¹ The real breakthrough, however, came with the invention of gunpowder and its first use in combat in the early 14th century.² It was then that the art of conquering fortified sites took a new path.

In Europe, the state of research on historic siege techniques varies from one area to another. While scholars in Western Europe have numerous accounts from written records and a wide selection of iconographic representations, Central Europe has a limited range of such sources.

In the case of the Kingdom of Poland, we have a small stock of written records and very few remains of such siege activities preserved in the field. In addition to the flagship examples, such as the actions at



Bolesławiec nad Prosną in 1396³ or Malbork in 1410,⁴ we can name, for example, the more recent discoveries of siege sites in Barwałd – Góra Żar from 1477.⁵

* Institute of Archaeology, University of Łódź,  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6846-159X>; piotr.strzyz@uni.lodz.pl

¹ E.g., von Zabern 2004.

² E.g., DeVries and Smith 2012.

³ E.g., Strzyż 2011, 77-85, table XL; Strzyż 2012; Strzyż 2014, 189-190, fig. 24.

⁴ Strzyż 2011, 88-92, table XXXIII.

⁵ Wojenka 2019.

KEYWORDS

- late Middle Ages
- siege warfare
- the Hussite Revolution
- Bohemia
- archaeology of conflict



The situation in the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia was quite different from the specifics of Poland or Western Europe. This part of Central Europe, already in the Middle Ages, characterised by a high degree of social and economic development and wealth, in the years 1419-1434, became the arena of great armed struggles that were part of the Hussite Revolution. Without going into detail, it should be noted that during the 15 or so years of the revolution, at least several dozen battles were fought, and probably several hundred smaller and larger sieges were laid. These ranged from short sieges of small fortifications – knights' residences and castles – to long-term blockades and military actions lasting many months around large cities, such as Pilsen in 1433-1434.⁶ Despite the slow dying out of the Hussite Revolution after the Battle of Lipany in 1434, these ideas were not lost and, over time, became the source of new conflicts. What stands out here is the war waged by the 'Hussite king' George of Poděbrady – first against internal Catholic opposition and then against his Hungarian opponent, King Matthias Corvinus, fought between 1468 and 1471. Also, during this period, there were numerous armed clashes in the field and even more siege actions.⁷ Thus, researchers studying the issue of engineering warfare in medieval Bohemia have relatively well-represented traces of such activities *in situ*, as well as a fairly large corpus of written sources from that period.

The achievements of Czech archaeology to date in this field have been collected by Jan Kypta and Jiří Marounek in a comprehensive monograph published by the National Heritage Institute in Prague in 2022. It has its roots in the documentary and archaeological studies of such sites carried out as early as the 19th century. Examples include recording work around the castles of Lichnice (besieged 1429-1428)⁸ or Lopata (besieged 1432-1433).⁹ Post-war research has led to the study of the castle at Nový Hrad near Kunratice, which was conquered in 1419/1420 and has become the canon of Czech literature.¹⁰ From the 1980s, many such remains of military camps have been discovered and recorded by Tomáš Durdík.¹¹ However, the real breakthrough and a clear revival of research on siege warfare took place at the beginning of the 21st century, when traces of war activities around several Czech castles were thoroughly investigated

and recorded, for instance, at Bechyně,¹² Sión,¹³ and Grabštejn.¹⁴

The monumental work by Jan Kypta and Jiří Marounek is divided into two parts – the analytical study and the catalogue. In the chapter 'Hranice perspektivy' (p. 11), the authors rightly state that the current number of sites with preserved remains of sieges is only a small fraction of the actual number of sieges that took place during the Hussite Revolution and in the following decades. Nevertheless, the obtained results provide a body of first-rate information on Czech siege art in the late Middle Ages.

The main part of the analytical study consists of six unnumbered chapters devoted to the various forms of military activity in the field. The 'Polní tábory' (pp. 16-19), i.e., traces of *ad hoc* military camps established in the field, which were associated, for example, with the marching of the troops, are modestly represented in this study. This is due to the fact that these were temporary structures, surrounded by makeshift wood and earth fortifications, which in later centuries were easily destroyed by ploughing or buildings. The next chapter covers the larger 'Tábory' (pp. 19-39), i.e., the remains of large camps established during sieges of castles or towns. These include sites such as the already-mentioned Bechyně, Sión, or Nový Hrad near Kunratice. In total, there are several well-documented sites that allow their detailed analysis. 'Pevňůvky' (pp. 40-65), i.e., small defensive positions (e.g., for riflemen, artillery, etc.) co-existed with the aforementioned Tábory, which were intended to protect the main 'Tábor' – the fortified camp – from attacks (excursions) by the besieged crew or forces sent to the besiegers as support. They could also have been advanced defensive structures protecting the main camp or headquarters (e.g., a castle) from an unexpected enemy attack.

The next chapter, 'Ohrazení' (pp. 66-77), characterises the structures that surrounded the camps, i.e., all kinds of ramparts and walls made of earth, wood, stone, etc. There were also various wooden structures, which were equipped with raised shields to protect, for example, the cannons and the people manning them when firing. Since traces of such structures are very poorly preserved in the field, researchers often use iconography to reconstruct them (e.g., Fig. 51-57). The chapter 'Aktivní oblehání' (pp. 78-85), on the other hand, deals with positions intended for weapons enabling direct firing at the target – positions for propelling machines

⁶ Sokol 2013.

⁷ Cf. Frankenberger 1960.

⁸ Cf. Teplý 2007.

⁹ See Novobilský 2008, 15-16, figs. 8 and 9.

¹⁰ Drobná 1953.

¹¹ Durdík 1980; Durdík 2011.

¹² Kypta and Richterová 2004a.

¹³ Koscelník et al. 2013.

¹⁴ Kypta and Richterová 2004b.

and artillery. These traces rarely survive *in situ* and, moreover, pose problems in terms of their interpretation and association with the specific siege engines they were intended for.

Finally, the last analytical chapter is 'Blokace' (pp. 86-94), which characterises the sites related to blockades of besieged locations in order to cut them off from food supplies, external aid or access to water.

The illustrative side of the book is a significant addition. Each of the above chapters is richly illustrated, both with plans of structures at individual sites and with relevant analogies from medieval iconography – military codices, plans of camps, etc.

The most comprehensive part of the monograph is the 'Catalogue' (pp. 95-289), which contains the characteristics of all sites recognised by Jan Kypta and Jiří Marounek as remains of siege activities from the Kingdom of Bohemia during the Hussite Revolution and several decades after its end. As both the degree of recognition of the individual sites in the field and their current state of preservation vary considerably, they have been divided into three parts. Part A compiles information on the best-recognised sites and is well documented in the light of accounts from written sources, which have been subjects of systematic field studies. This part contains 19 sites, which have been thoroughly recorded and investigated using archaeological methods by various research teams. Part B contains only three sites that were hypothesised to contain field remains of siege activity. The largest group of sites, as many as 34, is listed in section C, which is dedicated to known locations of past fortification or siege activity, but of which there are only residual traces in the field or where no systematic archaeological investigations have been carried out.

However, these sites have great research potential and may provide valuable new data in the future, as Kypta and Marounek demonstrate in their book using the example of the Skály castle (Žďár on the Sázava River district).

In the same year 2022, Ludvík Belcredi published a paper summarising the archaeological and historical-architectural research carried out in this castle in the years 1994-2014, which not only allowed scholars to discover the castle's history but also provided a rich collection of finds representing the material culture of its inhabitants.

However, in this case, from the perspective of studies on siege art, the most important was the detailed publication of the results of research carried out on the hills surrounding the castle, where archaeologists discovered remains of well-preserved positions related to the siege laid in 1440, which ultimately led to the destruction of the fortress.¹⁵ Jan Kypta and Jiří Marounek certainly do not consider the topic to be closed and constantly publish new research results, as exemplified by the results of the latest field survey concerning the siege of Zvíkov castle (Písek district).¹⁶

In conclusion, we should certainly appreciate the scientific effort of the authors gathered around Jan Kypta and Jiří Marounek and their exceptional results. It is an excellent example of cooperation between archaeologists and historians and the use of the latest technological advances (especially non-invasive methods) in recording and documenting an archaeological site in the field. The result is a monumental work that, without question, adds invaluable information to our knowledge of siege technology in medieval Bohemia or, more broadly, Central Europe. It is to be hoped that one day we will also see a similar synthesis in Poland.

REFERENCES

- Belcredi L. 2022. *Hrad Skály. Svědek let 1380-1440 vydal své tajemství. Archeologický výzkum hradu Skály 1994-2014*. Brno.
- DeVries K., Smith R. D. 2012. *Medieval Military Technology*. Toronto.
- Drobná Z. 1953. *Husitský polní tábor u Kunratic*. "Historie a vojenství" 2, 197-200.
- Durdík T. 1980. *Povrchový průzkum zaniklého středověkého sídlištního komplexu Stará Dubá*. "Sborník vlastivědných prací z Podblanicka" 21, 141-168.
- Durdík T. 2011. *Obležení hradu Zlenice*. In: O. Ławrynowicz, P. A. Nowakowski, J. Maik (eds.), *Non sensitus gladios! Studia ofiarowane prof. Marianowi Głowskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*. Łódź, 565-574.
- Frankenberger O. 1960. *Husitské válečnictví po Lipanech*. Praha.
- Koscelník P., Kypta J., Savková J. 2013. *Dobývání hradu Siónu roku 1437. Povrchový průzkum palabných postavení obláhatelů*. "Archeologické rozhledy" 65(3), 574-598.

¹⁵ Belcredi 2022, 193-212, figs. 219-232.

¹⁶ Kypta et al. 2022.

- Kypta J., Richterová J. 2004a. *Tábor obláhatelů z doby husitských válek u Bechyně*. Dějiny staveb. Sborník příspěvků z konference Dějiny staveb 2003. Plzeň, 177-192.
- Kypta J., Richterová J. 2004b. *Opevněné postavení obláhatelů hradu Grabštejna*. "Castellologica bohemica" 9, 285-290.
- Kypta J., Marounek J., Milítka L. 2022. *Nové poznatky o obláhání hradu Zvíkova*. "Archeologie ve Středních Čechách" 26, 453-459.
- Novobilský M. 2008. *Obláhání hradu Lopaty. Rekonstrukce obláhání hradu z roku 1432-1433*. Plzeň.
- Sokol P. 2013. *Husité před branami. K topografii obležení Plzně v letech 1433 až 1434*. In: J. Stočes, E. Mušková (eds.), *Tenkrát na západě (Čech). Kapitoly z dějin kultury a každodennosti Plzně a Plzeňského kraje*. Plzeň, 25-48.
- Strzyż P. 2011. *Średniowieczna broń palna w Polsce. Studium archeologiczne*. Łódź.
- Strzyż P. 2012. *Artyleria w działaniach zbrojnych pod Wieluniem i Bolesławcem nad Prosną w latach 1391-1396*. "Rocznik Wieluński" 12, 89-107.
- Strzyż P. 2014. *Broń palna w Europie Środkowej w XIV-XV wieku*. Łódź.
- Teplý J. 2007. *Obležení hradu Lichnice 1428-1429. Dnešní stav po obláhacím okruchu*. In: M. Drda, Z. Vybíral (eds.), *Jan Žižka z Trocnova a husitské vojenství v evropských dějinách. VI. Mezinárodní husitologické symposium, Tábor 12-14. října 2004*. Husitský Tábor – Supplementum 3. Tábor, 463-489.
- Wojenka M. 2019. *Czy grodzisko w Bugaju na górze Żar to pamiątka po oblężeniu zamku Barwald w 1477 roku?* In: P. Lasek, P. Sypczuk (eds.), *Residentiae tempore belli et pacis. Materiały do badań i ochrony założeń rezydencjonalnych i obronnych*. Warszawa, 252-280.
- von Zabern P. 2004. *Die Kreuzzüge. Kein Krieg ist heilig*. Mainz.