

Ádám Novák\*

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN RESEARCHING THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY HISTORY OF THE UPPER REGIONS

### *Introduction*

For the events of the 1440–1450s, contemporaries used the phrase “tempora distorbiorum”. Translated and used as “troubled times”, the adjective referred primarily to the unpredictable legal system. This could have developed in the absence of a solid, legitimate royal power. There was no force that would hold the subjects accountable to the text of the law. It was not the first time this happened in Hungarian history. After the extinction of the House of Árpád, the first decade and a half of the fourteenth century was like this until the victory of Charles I at Rozhanovce. The death of Louis I, but even more so the period following the assassination of King Charles II. Such was the period of the uprisings against Sigismund in 1401 and 1403. The problem was triggered by the premature death of King Albert without a living male heir in 1439, and then deepened by the dual king election, which raised the question of legitimacy. The minority of Ladislaus V, the guardianship of King Frederick of Germany, and the death of Władysław I at Varna led to an unresolvable crisis. The situation was not facilitated by the ambition and lust for power of more influential lords such as János Hunyadi, Ulrik Cillei, Miklós Újlaki or László Garai, nor by the advance of the Ottoman Empire. This period was finally brought to an end by the sudden death of the legitimate and already of age László V, and the accession and the early years of the reign of the extremely talented Mátyás Hunyadi.

### *Problem statement*

Researchers of today may feel that the historiography of the last two centuries has been of no use at all in understanding the period and dispelling the “confusion”. For centuries, the publication of a small number of important, but often misinterpreted or superficially studied, sources provided those concerned with the history of the period with irrefutable cornerstones. The documentary archives of the publishers of mainly political historical sources, such as István Katona,<sup>1</sup> György

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\* The author is a member of the HUN–REN–DE: “The Military History of Medieval Hungary and Central Europe” Research Group. This project has received funding from the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Network. It was also funded by the University of Debrecen Thematic Excellence Program, Project no. TKP2021-NKTA-34, provided by the Ministry of Culture and Innovation of Hungary under the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

<sup>1</sup> Katona, Stephanus, *Historia regum stirpis mixtae*. Tom. VI. Ord. XIII. 1440–1457. Pest, 1790.

Pray,<sup>2</sup> Károly Wagner,<sup>3</sup> József Teleki,<sup>4</sup> František Palacký,<sup>5</sup> and Joseph Chmel,<sup>6</sup> have satisfied many researchers and have been used as a basis for exploring a wide range of social historical, and even more so military historical issues. The chronological exploration of sources, such as the Charter Archive of the Sigismund period, was avoided. The case was not helped by the work of national romantic and nationalist historiographers either.<sup>7</sup> They often interpreted the sources in a biased, distorted and often incorrect way. On top of this lay the Marxist ideology-driven research, which approached the issue from the perspective of class struggle.<sup>8</sup> New studies and monographs were published in the last decades, but the results of individual workshops were rarely synthesised. At least, we do not see the complementarity of works written in the national languages of the Carpathian Basin, and the results in Slovak, Czech, Serbian, Romanian, Croatian are rarely incorporated into studies in Hungarian, and vice versa. I believe that this is a mistake, and we need to channel the achievements of historians from different nations to create a more coherent picture.

This phenomenon is particularly striking when the researcher examines the military history of the Upper Regions (*partes superiores*) in the 1440s and 1450s. There is a centuries-old tradition of examining Husitism through the lenses of religious history, theology and ethnogenesis, from the emergence of Jan Hus until the 1470s. Slovak historiography pointed out that this approach neglects the periodization and interpretation of the Hussite movements.<sup>9</sup> For a long time, the military events in the Moravian territories were examined as part of the same permanent process as the history of the Upper Regions 20–30 years later. The stories of Jan Žižka, a Taborite fight for religious freedom and independence,

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<sup>2</sup> Georgius, Pray, *Annales regum Hungariae ab anno Christi CMXCVII ad annum MDLXIV*, Pars III. Vindobonae, 1766.

<sup>3</sup> Wagner, Carl, *Analecta Scepusii sacri et profani*, Pars I–V. Vienna, 1774–1778.; Wagner, Carl, *Diplomatarium comitatus Srosiensis. Posenii–Cassoviae*, 1780.

<sup>4</sup> Teleki, József, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon. Okmánytár X*. Pest, 1853.

<sup>5</sup> Palacký, František, *Archiv český čili staré písemné památky české i moravské*, Vols I–VI. Praze, 1840–1872.

<sup>6</sup> Chmel, Joseph, *Materialien zur österreichischen Geschichte: aus Archiven und Bibliotheken*, Vols I–II. Linz–Wien, 1832–1838.

<sup>7</sup> As an example from the Hungarian side we can perhaps mention Szerémi, József – Ernyei, József, *A Majthényiak és a Felvidék*. Budapest, 1912.; And on the Slovak side Špirko, Jozef, *Husiti, jiskrovci a bratřici v dejinách Spiša (1431–1462)*. Levoča, 1937.

<sup>8</sup> Relevant examples from Slovak literature can be found in Matúš Kučera's historiographical introduction: Kučera, Matúš, "Slovenská historiografia o otázkach husitstva a husitizmu", In: Kaczarová, Iveta (ed.), *Husiti na Slovensku. Zborník referátov z konferencie [6.9.2001] pri príležitosti 550. výročia bitky pri Lučenci*. Lučenec, 2004. 6–27. [hereinafter *Husiti na Slovensku*]; Such as, for example: Macek, Josef, *Husitské revoluční hnutí*. Praha, 1952.; Varsik, Branislav, *Husitské revolučné hnutie a Slovensko*. Bratislava, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> Matúš Kučera also drew attention to this: Kučera, Slovenská historiografia, 2004. 19–23.

and Jan Jiškra and his fellow soldiers living off the sword cannot be treated as similar movements.

During the 1440s the country was divided into two political parties, along the support of László V and Władysław I. Later, the civil war was prolonged and, following the deaths of the parties' leaders – first Queen Elizabeth and then King Władysław I – it became a series of politically-clothed atrocities.<sup>10</sup> Not exclusively, but a significant role in this was played by mercenaries, *bratři*/brothers, companies of Czech and Polish origin operating in the Upper Regions.<sup>11</sup> We tend to see the power of both Jiškra and other mercenaries as continuous and solid throughout the entire period. This, however, was far from the case, as balance of power and the network of relations were constantly changing. Earlier historiography wrongly placed both the Hungarian sovereigns and the foreign mercenaries in the same party, in the same league, on the same side.<sup>12</sup> This theory is contradicted, however, by the fact that mercenary leaders were hardly moved by loyalty to Protestant religion, or to any king or lord. In most cases, they are people who put their swords on the market, seeking their own prosperity, who, although they share a common language and origin, have worked for their own success.<sup>13</sup> Thus we cannot speak of a Bohemian Hussite mass, nor of a unified mercenary army.<sup>14</sup>

In the early twentieth century, historians addressing the problem, such as József Ernyei, József Szerémi,<sup>15</sup> Pál Tóth-Szabó,<sup>16</sup> Jozef Špirko<sup>17</sup> or Václav Chaloupecký,<sup>18</sup> ignored this. They wrote their works on the basis of a rich and extensive source base, but their approach was not suited to providing an objective picture of the history of the period. They often contain erroneous conclusions and represent biased views. In my view, in order to get a more accurate picture of the history of the period, these works need to be deconstructed, we need to go deep down to the

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<sup>10</sup> Tringli, István, *Az újkor hajnala*. Budapest, 2003. 13.

<sup>11</sup> János Thuróczy, in chapter 244 of his work, specifically discusses them. Thuróczy, János, *A magyarok krónikája*. Eds. Bellus, Ibolya – Kristó, Gyula, Budapest, 2001. 299–300.

<sup>12</sup> On the criticism of the league system: Pálosfalvi, Tamás, “Tettes vagy áldozat? Hunyadi László halála”, = *Századok* 149, 2015, 383–441. 385–386.

<sup>13</sup> As the chronicler put it in describing the circumstances of the period: “And those who did not have enough domestic troops to deploy against the enemy took foreign mercenaries”. Bellus – Kristó, Thuróczy, 2001. 272.

<sup>14</sup> István Tringli interpreted the activities of the mercenaries in his review. Tringli, István, “Novák Ádám: A terebesi Perényi család története a 15. század közepéig”, = *Turul* 94, 2021, 190–191. 191.

<sup>15</sup> Szerémi – Ernyei, *A Majthényiak*, 1912.

<sup>16</sup> Tóth-Szabó, Pál, *A cseh-huszinga mozgalmak és uralom története Magyarországon*. Budapest, 1917.; Despite the fact that it is more than a hundred years old, it is still referred to as basic literature in Hungarian. As far as we know today, it contains many errors, its structure is confusing, and although it has provided a lot of new data, its sources are often no longer traceable.

<sup>17</sup> Špirko, Husiti, jiskrovci, 1937.

<sup>18</sup> Chaloupecký, Václav, *Středověké Listy ze Slovenska*. Bratislava–Praha, 1937.

level of the sources. As regards the narrative sources, the works of Jan Długosz,<sup>19</sup> János Thuróczy<sup>20</sup> and Antonio Bonfini<sup>21</sup> should be treated with thorough criticism. Owing thanks to the work of Béla Iványi, the archives of the cities of Bardejov and Prešov contain references to relevant sources in several places,<sup>22</sup> and for thematic research we should turn to minor urban materials such as Sabinov,<sup>23</sup> Levoča, Kežmarok, Kremnica, Banská Štiavnica, but the archives of Košice also contain previously unpublished documents and letters.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, it is also worth processing the *narratio* material of the royal donation charters, where further data fragments can be found in connection to the event and military history. It would also be desirable to process the documents of the curia, conventions, and the chapters, but it is unlikely that this will be accomplished within the framework of a comprehensive project. In the last decades, István Tringli,<sup>25</sup> Tamás Pálosfalvi<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Its latest Latin edition: *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*. Ed. Dabrowski, Jan, Vol. XI–XII., Varsavie, 2001–2003.; Its latest Polish edition: *Jana Długosza Roczniki czyli Kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego*. Ks. 11(1431–1444)–12(1445–1461). Eds. Gawęda, Stanisław et al., Warszawa, 2009. [hereinafter Jana Długosza Ks. 11–12.]; The Polish chronicler gives a detailed account of the events in the Upper Regions Ks. 12. 93–95. (Hunyadi’s campaign against Jiškra in 1449); 135–136. (Hunyadi’s campaign against Jiškra in 1451, the Battle of Lučenec).

<sup>20</sup> The events of the Upper Regions are discussed by Thuróczy in chapters 229, 243–244 and partly in 259. Bellus – Kristó, Thuróczy, 2001. 274–275, 297–300, 326–327.; Its Latin edition: Galántai, Elisabeth – Kristó, Julius, *Johannes de Thurocz: Chronica Hungarorum*. I. Textus. (Bibliotheca scriptorum medii recentisque aevorum. Series nova, 7.) Budapest, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Latin edition: *Antonius de Bonifinis: Rerum Ungaricarum decades*. Ed. Fögel, József – Iványi, Béla – Juhász, László, Vols VI., Lipsiae – Budapestini, 1936–1941. Decas III. Liber IV. 328–342.; Liber V. 1–15, 91–119, 143–153.; Liber VII. 193–224.; Liber X. 204–251.; Hungarian edition: *Antonio Bonfini: Magyar történelem tizedei*, trans. Kulcsár, Péter, ed. S. Varga, Katalin, Budapest, 1995. III. Tom. IV. 325–345.; Tom. V. 1–20, 90–120, 140–155., Tom. VII. 195–225.; Tom. X. 205–255.

<sup>22</sup> Iványi, Béla, *Bártfa szabad királyi város levéltára 1319–1526*. Budapest, 1910.; Iványi, Béla: *Eperjes szabad királyi város levéltára 1245–1526*. Szeged, 1931.

<sup>23</sup> As it became known through the research of Tünde Veres, only fragments of the medieval material of the archives of the city of Sabinov were included in the Diplomatic Photo Collection, and no charter publication or registers were produced from them. Veres, Tünde, “Kisszeben szabad királyi város Chramer György bíraskodása idején (1446–1447)”, = *Történeti Tanulmányok* 26, 2018, 113–126. 114.

<sup>24</sup> And it would also be desirable to prepare a repertory of the diplomas already published.

<sup>25</sup> Tringli, *Az újkor hajnala*, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Pálosfalvi, Tamás, “Ján Jiškra és a felvidéki városok”, In: Dangl, Vojtech – Varga, J. János (eds.), *Armáda, mesto, spoločnosť od 15. storočia do roku 1918. Vojenské, politické, hospodárske aspekty a súvislosti. Hadsereg, város, társadalom a 15. századtól 1918-ig. Katonai, politikai, gazdasági aspektusok és összefüggések*. Bratislava, 2002. 31–41.; Pálosfalvi, Tamás, “A Rozgonyiak és a polgárháború”, = *Századok* 137, 2003, 897–928.; Pálosfalvi, Tettes vagy áldozat, 2015.; Pálosfalvi, Tamás, “Koronázástól koronázásig:

and Dominik Tóth<sup>27</sup> have made a number of pioneering contributions in Hungarian regarding this period, while František Oslanský,<sup>28</sup> Martin Rady,<sup>29</sup> Jiří Jurok,<sup>30</sup> David Papajík,<sup>31</sup> Daniela Dvořáková,<sup>32</sup> and Michal Faist<sup>33</sup> have done likewise in Czech, Slovak or English.<sup>34</sup> I have also attempted to do so in my monograph on the career of János Perényi, and in my studies examining some of the conflicts of the “troubled times”<sup>35</sup>

In my opinion, it is better if the subject of the study is not a movement, an army or a party – and certainly not an ideology – but individuals. A better way to reconstruct the military history of the period is to compile a prosopographical data set built up from small fragments of information on the key figures. Such prosopographical descriptions are founded on archontology and itineraries. The

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A korona elrablása és hazatérése (1440–1464)”, In. Pálffy, Géza (ed.), *A Szent Korona hazatér: A magyar korona tizenegy külföldi útja (1205–1978)*. Budapest, 2018. 125–166.

<sup>27</sup> Tóth, Dominik, “A huszita típusú szekérvár gazdasági szempontú vizsgálata a 15. századi Magyar Királyságban”, = *Katonai Logisztika* 30, 2022, 244–267.; Turcsányi, Károly – Tóth, Dominik, “A huszita harci szekerek harci tulajdonságainak értelmezése, a szekérvár mobilitásának vizsgálata”, = *Katonai Logisztika* 31, 2023, 221–235.

<sup>28</sup> Oslanský, František, “Ján Jiškra z Brandýsa a Slovensko”, = *Historické štúdie* 36, 1995, 49–67.; Oslanský, František, “The Role of John Jiškra in the History of Slovakia”, = *Human Affairs* 6, 1996, 19–33.; Oslanský, František, “Portrét Jána Jiškru z Brandýsa”, In. *Husiti na Slovensku*, 79–88.

<sup>29</sup> Rady, Martyn, “Jiškra, Hussitism and Slovakia”, In. Doležalová, Eva – Pánek, Jaroslav (eds.), *Confession and nation in the era of reformations. Central Europe in comparative perspective*. Prague, 2010. 59–77.

<sup>30</sup> Jurok, Jiří, “Čeští Husité a Antihusité z Moravy v Polsku ve 14.-15. Století”, = *Średniowiecze Polskie i Powszechnie* 3, 2004, 209–229.; Jurok, Jiří, “Čeští Husitští a Katoličtí Kondotiéri z Moravy Na Slovensku v 15. Století (Období Husitství)”, = *Vojenská Historiá. Časopis Pre Vojenskú Históriu, Múzejníctvo a Archívniectvo* 9:3, 2005, 3–25.; Jurok, Jiří, “Čeští Husitští a Katoličtí Kondotiéri z Moravy Na Slovensku v 15. Století (Období Bratříku)”, = *Vojenská Historiá. Časopis Pre Vojenskú Históriu, Múzejníctvo a Archívniectvo* 9:4, 2005, 3–15.

<sup>31</sup> Papajík, David, “Jan Čapek Ze Sán cseh nemes és szerepe a magyar koronáért folytatott harcban (1440–1443)”, = *Aetas* 28, 2013, 128–136.; Papajík, David, *Jan Čapek ze Sán: jezdec na konec světa: vojevůdce, kondotiér a zbohatlík 15. století*. (Edice Osobnosti českých a moravských dějin, 10.). České Budějovice, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Dvořáková, Daniela, “Alžbeta Luxemburská, Žigmundova dcéra, v rokoch 1438–1442”, = *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* 3, 2011, 143–159.; Dvořáková, Daniela, *Pod vládou ženy. Rytíř bez krále. I. část, (1437–1442) Pánkrác zo Sv. Mikuláša a jeho doba*. Budmerice, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Faist, Michal, “Jan Jiškra z Brandýsa: zachránce uherského trůnu Ladislava Pohrobka 1440–1445”, = *Historica – Sborník Prací Historických* 36, 2014, 13–38.; Faist, Michal, “Jan Jiškra z Brandýsa na vrcholu moci 1445–1451”, = *Historica – Sborník Prací Historických* 38, 2015, 43–67.

<sup>34</sup> See also: *Husiti a bratříci na Slovensku*. Ed. Žarnovský, Peter, Červený Kláštor–Kežmarok–Stará Lubovňa, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Novák, Ádám, *A terebesi Perényi család története a 15. század közepéig*. Debrecen, 2020.; Novák, Ádám, “Hadi események és résztvevői a felső részeken 1440 és 1445 között – Azok a bizonyos ‘zavaros idők’”, In. Pószán, László – Veszprémy, László (eds.), *Elfeledett háborúk. Középkori csaták és várostromok (6–16. század)*. Budapest, 2016. 310–330.

necessity of this is perfectly illustrated by one – by no means singular – flaw in Pál Tóth-Szabó's paper, which is considered a fundamental work. In one place he writes that after the successful defence of Košice in 1441, Jan Jiškra marched with his troops towards Rožňava, despite the fact that the sources clearly point in the direction of Spiš, where the cities of Levoča and Kežmarok were taken by his mercenaries.<sup>36</sup> Although Tóth-Szabó refers to the Polish historian Długosz, the contemporary chronicler also puts the military action in Gemer to another year.<sup>37</sup> Without a clear record of the whereabouts of the greatest and best-documented mercenary, Jan Jiškra, it is difficult to estimate the number of his forces, the mercenaries accompanying him, as well as his objectives.

And Jan Jiškra is the person regarding whom we have the most sources of all. Even the contemporary Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini wrote about him in his *De viris illustribus*<sup>38</sup> A number of charters about him have been preserved in the treasurer cities of the Upper Regions, and also in Austrian and Czech archives. It is therefore no wonder that several works have been published about his life recently.<sup>39</sup> We nevertheless know that many of the soldiers who first arrived with him, served him, and later became active on their own, played a decisive role in shaping the events. Among the most famous are Jan Talafús z Ostrova, Martin Valgatha, Petr Aksamit, Petr Komorovszky and Mikuláš Brcála z Dobré. Alongside them we find many soldiers and even financiers in the sources about whom little is known in our historiography. There is also a serious problem in navigating the literature, and the inexperienced reader is greatly misled by the inconsistent spelling of the names. István Tringli has already pointed out that the name of Jan Jiškra is referred to as “Giskra” in Hungarian historiography, mainly following the Latin model of Pál Tóth-Szabó, although the correct transcription of the name of the Moravian mercenary would be “Jiškra”.<sup>40</sup> The same phenomenon can be observed with regard to the names of most mercenaries. In my opinion, Hungarianising their names based on turn-of-the-century traditions

<sup>36</sup> Tóth-Szabó, *A cseh huszita*, 1917. 192.

<sup>37</sup> Jana Długosza Ks. 11., 300.

<sup>38</sup> Its Latin and English edition: Cotta-Schönberg, Michael von, *De Viris Illustribus and other biographical writings of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*. Ed. and trans. Cotta-Schönberg, Michael von. Generis, s. l. [Chişinău], 2021. Jan Jiškra: 513–521. (269–275).

<sup>39</sup> Kwiatkowski, Saturnin, *Jan Giskra z Brandysu: rys biograficzny z XV. wieku*. Lwów, 1886.; Vach, Miloslav, “Jan Jiškra z Brandýsa a Jeho Předkové”, = *Časopis Společnosti Prátele Starožitnosti* 57, 1949, 175–184.; Vach, Miloslav, “Jan Jiškra z Brandýsa a Politický Zápas Habsburků s Jagellovcí o Uhry v Letech 1440–1442”, = *Historické Štúdie* 3, 1957, 172–227.; Jurok, Čeští Husitští, 2005B, 3–9.; Faist, Jan Jiškra z Brandýsa, 2014.; Faist, Jan Jiškra z Brandýsa, 2015, 43–67.; Oslanský, Ján Jiškra, 2015.; A modern adaptation of these works has not yet been made in Hungarian, and the 1903 work of Pál Tóth-Szabó is still often cited: Tóth-Szabó, Pál, “Giskra, Különös Tekintettel Abaujmegyére”, = *Értekezések a Történeti Tudományok Köréből*, 19, 1900–1903, 305–372.

<sup>40</sup> Tringli, *Az újkor hajnala*, 2003. 44.



is a harmful habit. Therefore, we need to develop a unified, comprehensive and consistent approach to naming.

The purpose of this paper, in addition to the problem outlined in the paragraphs above, is to sketch a literary overview, which is presented in the footnotes above. In addition, in the remaining two subsections of this paper, I will give two examples of what can be achieved by the research challenges outlined above. The first is the material for a thematic source study, which lists a specific type of charter, from which a wide range of public-, military-, economic historical and prosopographical data can be extracted. The so-called poly-sigillic charters that I have been researching are a very characteristic and valuable source type of the period. A number of charters and letters have survived documenting the activities of Jiškra and his associates, testifying to various pledges, peace terms and commitments. I was able to list 19 such documents that are in their original form. These are kept in the archives of Budapest, Sopron, Kremnica, Levoča, Košice, and Bardejov. I provide a brief list of their descriptions and publication data. In the second subsection, I will present the biography of a lesser-known mercenary general, Mikuláš Brcála z Dobré, and point out what the collection of data on a single individual can add to the overall picture.

#### *Poly-sigillic charters*

One of the values of the poly-sigillic charters, in addition to what they contain, is the mere fact that the actors mentioned were negotiating together at a given place and time. The quality and quantity of the cash flows recorded in these transactions may be an interesting addition. Alongside the negotiating and deal-making parties, guarantors have also appeared in most cases, which enables us to obtain more information about them. Many of these have been preserved in their original form and also bear a seal, which allows us to attach “faces” to the persons.<sup>41</sup> In the list below I give the location and archival reference number of the original charters. I also refer to the medieval digital database of the Hungarian National Archives (*Collectio Diplomatica Hungarica*),<sup>42</sup> where I give references to the Diplomatic Photo Collection (DF) or the Diplomatic Archives (DL). The photos and seals of the latter are also available in the online Hungaricana database.<sup>43</sup> All but one (Sopron Archives) of the dip-

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that many sources of this type survived not in the original form, but as transcriptions or copies. The collection and registration of these is no less an important area of research, although of course no seals survived on these. Two examples: 30 November 1444, Košice. Jan Jiškra and his companions conclude a peace treaty with the Polish envoys for two years. *Monumenta medii aevi historica res gestas Poloniae illustrantia. Pomniki dziejowe wieków srednich do objasnienia rzeczy polskich sluzace*. Tom. I–XIX. Cracoviae, 1874–1927. II. Pars altera, Nr. 2. 1–4.; 28 March 1450 Mezőkövesd. János Hunyadi and the lords conclude a truce with Jiškra. DF 252 476. folio 8r-9v.

<sup>42</sup> <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/dldf> (Accessed on 31 August 2023)

<sup>43</sup> <https://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/> (Accessed on 31 August 2023)

lomatic documents recorded in the Diplomatic Photo Collection can be studied only on microfilm format, so I have registered and provided the record number of the photos of the diplomatic documents kept in Kremnica, Košice, Levoča, and Bardejov in the Monumenta Militaria Hungariae (MMH) database.<sup>44</sup> I also attempted to locate the in extenso publications of the charters, and when successful, I included the details of their publication, and in some cases provided additional literary references.

**Around 3 July 1441** – *No place of issue.* László Cseh Lévai, the *ispán* (*comes*) of Bars county, and his companions, mentioned by name, make a deal with the captain of Zvolen and Kremnica, Haskó Schellendorf, to free Imre Simonyi. The left side of the Latin language charter, in the form of a patent, is slightly damaged, making it impossible to determine the date and place of issue, and several of the underpressed seals have also been lost permanently. The charter is authenticated with at least sixteen seals, most of which are worn away.<sup>45</sup>

**9 October 1441** – *Szécsény.* László Szécsényi, *ispán* of Nógrád and Hont and his named companions conclude a truce with Haskó Schellendorf, captain of Zvolen and Kremnica, and his companions until the day of St George (24 April 1442). A total of twelve seals, which are now heavily worn, were pressed in two rows under the text of the Latin-language patent.<sup>46</sup>

**17 September 1442** – *Hollókő.* The nobility of the counties of Nógrád and Hont, and their representatives, listed by name, conclude a truce with Jan Jiškra and his companions until the day of St George (24 April 1443). A total of five seals were pressed in two rows under the text of the Latin-language patent, which are now heavily worn.<sup>47</sup>

**25 August 1443** – *Camp under Spišská Nová Ves.* Simon Rozgonyi, bishop of Eger, and his companions give a letter of asylum to the judges of the city of Levoča. The charter is badly damaged and torn. Originally, at least nine seals were pressed in two rows under the text of the Latin-language patent.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://monumenta.militaria-hungaria.hu/monumenta-web/> (Accessed on 31 August 2023)

<sup>45</sup> DL 13 633. Cited by: Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. 194.

<sup>46</sup> Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pracovisko Archív Kremnica, Magistrát mesta Kremnice, Vol. I. Fons 26. Fasc. 1. Nr. 12A.; DF 249 795. Published by: Botka, Tivadar, *Bars vármegye hajdan és most. I. Regesták és okmányok. II. osztály. Latin okmányok.* Pest, 1868. 94–95.; Cited by: Szerémi – Ernyei, A Majthényiak, 1912. 404–405.; For a list of names see Novák, Hadi események, 2016. 321–322.; See also Becaniová, Kristína – Ezrová, Adriana – Malovcová, Božena, “Regesty listín Jána Jiskru z Brandýsa”, In: Husiti na Slovensku, 141–152. Nr. 9.; Images: MMH 30001–30014.

<sup>47</sup> Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pracovisko Archív Kremnica, Magistrát mesta Kremnice, Tom. I. Fons 26. Fasc. 1. Nr. 14/15C.; DF 249 997. Published by: Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. 378–380. Cited by: Szerémi – Ernyei, A Majthényiak, 1912. 405–406.; For a list of names see Novák, Hadi események, 2016. 321–322.; See also Becaniová – Ezrová – Malovcová, Regesty listín, 2001. Nr. 11.; Images: MMH 30015–30017.



Traces of eight seals can be seen in the first row. The sealing order is specific in this case. From the red wax seal of Rozgonyi, the seals move outwards in a concentric circle according to the order of the *intitulatio*.<sup>48</sup>

**17 November 1444 – Košice.** The agreement between Jan Jiškra, the ispán of Šariš, and the commissioners of the cities of the Upper Regions on reparations for the damage caused by the fighting. The charter was written in German, issued in a privileged form, with the seals of Jiškra and his mercenary commanders, as well as those of the city commissioners.<sup>49</sup>

**7 January 1445 – No place of issue.** János Csaholyi and his fellow noblemen from Szabolcs County conclude a treaty to avert the threat from János Perényi and Jan Jiškra and elect János Lőkös Kállai and Bereck Pazonyi as their representatives. Latin language charter in the form of a patent with five fragmentary seals in natural wax at the bottom.<sup>50</sup>

**8 July 1445 – Seňa.** The captains of the Upper Regions, represented by Jan Jiškra, and a number of regional magnates, county and city delegates pass resolutions to restore order. All of the twenty-two seals pressed under the text of the Latin-language charter, issued in the form of a patent, are worn away.<sup>51</sup>

**2 December 1445 – Zvolen.** Jan Jiškra's letter of pledge to Jan Makovec z Senic regarding a debt of three horses and two hundred forints, which he promises to repay by Pentecost. There are four seals, two fragmentary and two intact, at the bottom of the document, which was issued in Czech and in a privileged form.<sup>52</sup>

**4 May 1449 – Kremnica.** Jan Jiškra, captain of King Ladislaus V, makes peace with Pongráč Szentmiklósi on behalf of his companions and the cities allied to him. Originally there were five seals in a row at the bottom of the charter – today four are intact – which was issued in Czech, in a privileged form.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Spišský archív v Levoči, Lőcse város levéltára, Lőcse város tanácsa: Oklevelek II.1. Nr. 1; DF 282 582. Cited by: Novák, Hadi események, 2016. 324.; Images: MMH 30018–30019.

<sup>49</sup> Archív mesta Košice, Supplementum Schramianum Nr. 19178.; DF 271 267. The diploma and its seals are to be published soon in a separate publication.; Images: MMH 30020–30027.

<sup>50</sup> DL 55 295.

<sup>51</sup> Archív mesta Košice, Collectio Schwartzenbachiana Nr. 235.; DF 270 275. Published by: Teleki, Hunyadiak kora, 1853. 164–169.; Images: MMH 30028–30029.

<sup>52</sup> Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pracovisko Archív Kremnica, Magistrát mesta Kremnice, Tom. I. Fons 37. Fasc. 1. Nr. 8.; DF 250 168. Published by: Chaloupecký, Středověké Listy, 1937. 23–24. Cited by: Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. 216–217.; See also Becaniová – Ezrová – Malovcová, Regesty listín, 2001. Nr. 14.; Images: MMH 30030–30034.

<sup>53</sup> Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pracovisko Archív Kremnica, Magistrát mesta Kremnice, Tom. I. Fons 26. Fasc. 1. Nr. 15C.; DF 250 001. Published by: Chaloupecký, Středověké Listy, 1937. 32–34.; Cited by: Szerémi – Ernyei, A Majthényiak, 1912. 419–

**28 March 1450** – *Mezőkövesd*. János Hunyadi and the lords order Nógrád County to collect the extraordinary tax. Nine seals were originally pressed under the text of the document, which was written in Latin and in the form of a patent, but all of them are now completely worn away.<sup>54</sup>

**31 March 1450** – *Košice*. Jan Jiškra, captain of King Ladislaus V, confirms the peace treaty with the lords. Four seals were affixed to the bottom of the document, which was written in Latin and in a privileged form, the first of which was torn off, and the others are severely damaged and broken.<sup>55</sup>

**5 October 1450** – *Košice*. Jan Jiškra, captain of King Ladislaus V., and Pál Modrák conclude a pledge agreement for the estates of Velká Ida, Szikszó and Abaújvár. At the bottom of the document, issued in Latin in privileged form, there were once eleven seals hanging from addressed parchment strips, today five of these can be analysed in smaller or larger details.<sup>56</sup>

**20 September 1451** – *near Szentlőrinc*. The lords call on the city council of Bardejov not to cooperate with Jiškra. There were once five seals impressed on closure of the Latin missilis, but all of them are now worn away.<sup>57</sup>

**27 September 1451** – *Buda*. Letter from the lords of the country to the councils of the cities of Košice, Levoča, Bardejov and Prešov, informing them of Jiškra's movements and asking them not to cooperate with him. Eight seals were pressed in two rows on the closure of the Latin missilis, which are heavily worn and damaged.<sup>58</sup>

**27 October 1451** – *Krupina*. The lords of the country elevate Jodok of Kassó, ancestor of the Justh family of Necpaly, to the peerage of the country. Four seals were affixed to the bottom of the charter, which was issued in Latin in a privileged form.<sup>59</sup>

**24 August 1452** – *Kremnica*. János Hunyadi and his fellow vow-takers conclude a peace treaty with Jiškra. Originally, there were seven seals at the

420.; See also Becaniová – Ezrová – Malovcová, *Regesty listín*, 2001. Nr. 19.; Images: MMH 30035–30041.

<sup>54</sup> DL 73 005. Published by: Jászay, Pál, “Hunyadi János kormányzó levele Nógrád vármegyéhez”, = *Tudománytár* 10, 1841, 128–129.; Hungarian translation: Schneider, Miklós, *Nógrádi évszázadok. Olvasókönyv a megye történetéhez*. Salgótarján, 1976. 18–19.

<sup>55</sup> Archív mesta Košice, *Collectio Schwartzembachiana* Nr. 294.; DF 270 290. Published by: Teleki, Hunyadiak kora, 1853. 256–258.; Images: MMH 30042–30046.

<sup>56</sup> DL 14 405.

<sup>57</sup> Štátny archív v Prešove, pracovisko Archív Bardejov, Bártfa szabad királyi város levéltára Nr. 661.; DF 213 347. Published by: Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. 394–395.; Images: MMH 30047–30048.

<sup>58</sup> Štátny archív v Prešove, pracovisko Archív Bardejov, Bártfa szabad királyi város levéltára Nr. 662. DF 213 348. Published by: Tóth-Szabó, A cseh-huszita, 1917. 395–396.; Images: MMH 30049–30051.

<sup>59</sup> DL 63 157. Published by: Borsa, Iván, *A Justh család levéltára 1274–1525*. (Magyar Országos Levéltár kiadványai, II. Forráskiadványok 20.). Budapest, 1991. 152.

bottom of the document, which was issued in Latin in a privileged form, but today only two remain intact.<sup>60</sup>

**6 December 1452** – *Kremnica*. Peter Jung, debtor, citizen of Kremnica, and Pál Korlow, guarantor, oblige themselves and their heirs to pay their debt of 30 marks of fine silver to Jodok Kassó, captain of Víglaš, by the day of St. George (24 April 1453). The German-language patent was authenticated with three seals below the text, all of which are still intact.<sup>61</sup>

**22 November 1454** – *Trebišov*. The orders of the Upper Regions levy an extraordinary war tax of a quarter forint per parcel to protect the region, and elect Osvát Rozgonyi as captain. Eight seals were pressed in a single row under the Latin-language patent, all of which have now worn away.<sup>62</sup>

**22 June 1455** – *Zvolen*. In exchange for his debts, Jan Jiškra, ispán of Šariš, gives Jan Stanz the income from the Sopron thirtieth. Three seals were once affixed to the bottom of the German-language charter written in a privileged form, two of which are still intact, including the seal of Herman von Zwierzetiz, who appears several times beside Jiškra.<sup>63</sup>

**15 July 1456** – *Zemplín*. The treaty of the lords of the upper regions with Košice and Jan Talafús z Ostrova. Seven seals were pressed in a single row under the text of the Latin-language patent, most of which are still intact.<sup>64</sup>

*Deputy to Jiškra, captain of Kežmarok: Mikuláš Brcál z Dobré*

In the sources and in the literature, a person often appears who presumably arrived with Jiškra in 1440 to the Upper Regions and acted as a leading mercenary commander, especially in the region of Spiš. Jan Długoss referred to him as Berczal when describing the Battle of Lučenec.<sup>65</sup> Wagner already pointed out that the Polish chronicler mentions a false first name, in his list he was listed as Nicolaus V Berchal de Dobra.<sup>66</sup> József Teleki translated the name in

<sup>60</sup> Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pracovisko Archív Banská Štiavnica, Selmečbánya város levéltára: Selmečbánya város tanácsa: Az Országos Levéltár által visszaadott oklevelek és iratok, Fasc. 2. Nr. 959.; DF 235 587. Published by: Szitnyai, József, "A körmöczbányai békekötés 1452-ben", = *Magyar Történelmi Tár* 32, 1884, 594–612.; The copy issued by the Hunyadi survived in its original form, and Jiškra's version survived as a copy, which was also published by Szitnyai.; Images MMH 30052–30054.

<sup>61</sup> DL 63 160. Published by: Borsa, A Justh család, 1991. 155.

<sup>62</sup> DL 31 664. Published by: Ipolyi, Arnold – Nagy, Imre – Végely, Dezső, *Hazai okmánytár. Codex diplomaticus patrius VII*. Budapest, 1880. 470–475.

<sup>63</sup> Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Győr-Moson-Sopron Vármegye Soproni Levéltára, Sopron város (Diplomatarium) Nr. 1393.; DF 203 028. Published by: Házi, Jenő, *Sopron szabad királyi város története. I. rész, 4. kötet, Oklevelek és levelek 1453-tól 1459-ig*. Sopron, 1925. 72–73.

<sup>64</sup> Archív mesta Košice, Collectio Schwartzbachiana Nr. 279.; DF 270 319. Published by: Teleki, Hunyadiak kora, 1853. 528–529.; Images: MMH 30055–30063.

<sup>65</sup> In the Latin original, in the recent Polish edition Jana Długosza Ks. 12., 136.

<sup>66</sup> Wagner, *Analecta Scepusii, Pars III, 1778*. 217.

the Latin source as Miklós Dobrai Barczal.<sup>67</sup> Pál Tóth-Szabó gives the name as Miklós Dobrai Bertsal,<sup>68</sup> and later as Miklós Dobrai Brcsal.<sup>69</sup> In Czech and Slovak literature the name is found as Brcál,<sup>70</sup> and Brcal.<sup>71</sup> Following Jiří Jurok, I prefer to give the name as Mikuláš Brcál z Dobré,<sup>72</sup> and in the following I will give a prosopographical description.

Brcál,<sup>73</sup> who was of Silesian origin, first appeared in the sources in 1440, when, according to the account book of the city of Košice, several payments were made to the mercenary commander (*hauptmann*), sometimes in connection with the castle of Šariš, other times in connection with Rožňava, then in connection with Kežmarok.<sup>74</sup> Brcál was Jiškra's guarantor on 17 November 1444, when he negotiated the amount of the pledge with his creditors in Košice.<sup>75</sup> Presumably, one of the seals could be associated with him. Although the circumscription of the circular seal, approximately 25 mm in diameter, is uncertain, but the circular seal field shows a shield with a multi-spoked wagon wheel. In this agreement, he is only listed as a guarantor and without an office. A week later, however, during the negotiations with the Polish and Hungarian lords, he was already the captain of Kežmarok.<sup>76</sup> Kežmarok, an important city within Spiš, was acquired by Jiškra from Miklós Perényi in October 1441. This allowed him to control the two most important cities in Spiš in addition to Levoča. In 1443, the mercenaries took control of the castles of Richnava and Spiš, bringing the whole of Spiš under the influence of Jiškra, and from the end of 1444 under the authority of Brcál.

In 1445, Brcál negotiated at Seňa on behalf of Jiškra, the newly elected captain-general, acting quasi as the deputy to the captain.<sup>77</sup> Scattered records from 1445 and 1447 show that he was in Spiš.<sup>78</sup> He joined Jiškra in 1449, when he concluded the peace treaty with Pongrác Szentmiklósi.<sup>79</sup> On 5 Octo-

<sup>67</sup> Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora*, 1853. 169.

<sup>68</sup> Tóth-Szabó, *Giskra*, 1903. 312, 334, 342.

<sup>69</sup> Tóth-Szabó, *A cseh huszita*, 1917. 183, 205, 214, 234, 239, 249, 316, 326.

<sup>70</sup> Chaloupecký, *Středověké*, 1937. 45, 54, 55.

<sup>71</sup> Špirko, *Husiti, jiskrovci*, 1937. 43, 52, 59, 60, 62.

<sup>72</sup> Jurok, *Čeští Husitští*, 2005B. 12.

<sup>73</sup> Jurok, *Čeští Husitští*, 2005B. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Kemény, Lajos, *Kassa város régi számadáskönyvei 1431–1533*. Kassa, 1892. 23.: "Nicclao/Nicclos/Nicclas Berzal".

<sup>75</sup> See above the already mentioned poly-sigillic charter dated 17 November 1444. His seal is in the appendix (Nr. 1.). See also Kemény, *Kassa város*, 1982. 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Monumenta medii aevi historica res gestas Poloniae illustrantia. Pomniki dziejowe wieków srednich do objasnienia rzeczy polskich sluzace*, Tom. I–XIX. Cracoviae, 1874–1927. II. Pars altera, Nr. 2. 1–4.

<sup>77</sup> See above the already mentioned poly-sigillic charter dated 8 July 1445. Unfortunately, his seal was also lost along with the others.

<sup>78</sup> 9 October 1445, Kežmarok. DF 213 121. Published by: Iványi, Bártfa, 1910. 431.; 6 December 1447, Spišský hrad. DF 250 019.

<sup>79</sup> See above the already mentioned poly-sigillic charter of 4 May 1449. Unfortunately his seal is lost.

ber 1450, he was already writing his letters as captain of Spiš.<sup>80</sup> In 1451 János Hunyadi again marched with an army against Jiškra.<sup>81</sup> Jiškra asked Brcál for help, but he did not stand by Jiškra.<sup>82</sup> Even so, Jiškra was victorious at the Battle of Lučenec on 7 September 1451.<sup>83</sup> It seems that from this point on Brcál acted independently of Jiškra, and continued to sign his letters as captain of Spiš, his last such letter dates from September 1453.<sup>84</sup> After that the name Brcál does not appear in the sources for a long time. In 1460, however, Martin Brcál, together with Bartošem z Hertvíkovic, dated several letters as captains of Kežmarok.<sup>85</sup> The two persons are often mentioned as one in the literature, although I am convinced that they are two separate persons. According to Chaloupecký, Martin could have been the brother of Mikuláš, while Jurok thinks the two are the same. In my opinion, the former is more likely to be right. If we examine the seals of the two captains' charters issued on 8 June 1460, we can see that they also show the same coat of arms (a wagon wheel with spokes in a shield), but in a quatrefoil seal field as a complete coat of arms (escutcheon, helmet, crest, mantling), with a circumscription on both sides of the seal field.<sup>86</sup> I believe that we are not dealing with a change of seal, but with the seal of another person. This is confirmed by the consistent use of the names; up to 1453 Mikuláš was always referred to as "Nicolaus", while Martin's name was always used the same way.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, we can observe that the Silesian mercenary Mikuláš Brcál z Dobré arrived in the Upper Regions in the company of Jiškra, rose steadily in the ranks until he disappeared from the sources as the captain of Spiš after 1453, and transferred the captaincy of Kežmarok to his relative Martin, who later served King Matthias.<sup>88</sup>

### Summary

In my paper, I endeavoured to point out that the military and event history of the Upper Regions is not as well researched as it might seem at first glance. A comprehensive, modern synthesis of the history of events has not been made, there is no chronological aid, no charter repository, neither is there a charter

<sup>80</sup> DF 213 309. Published by: Chaloupecký, *Středověké Listy*, 1937. 55.

<sup>81</sup> Tóth-Szabó, *A cseh-huszita*, 1917. 249–253.

<sup>82</sup> Chaloupecký, *Středověké Listy*, 1937. 54–55.

<sup>83</sup> Drenko, Jozef, "Kláštor a bitka pri Lučenci r. 1451", In: *Husiti na Slovensku*, 89–101.; Klinda, Jozef, *Jan Jiskra z Brandýsa a Bitka pri Lučenci*. Lučenec, 2018.

<sup>84</sup> DL 14 576.; DF 271 388–89.; DF 271 402.

<sup>85</sup> Chaloupecký, *Středověké Listy*, 1937. 45–46.; Iványi, Bártfa, 1910. 619–620.; DF 281 747.

<sup>86</sup> Štátny archív v Prešove – pracovisko Archív Poprad, Késmárk város levéltára, Késmárk város tanácsa, Pergamen oklevelek Nr. 57.; DF 281 747. See it in the appendix. Nr. 2. belong to Bartošem z Hertvíkovic, Nr. 3. belong to Mikuláš Brcál z Dobré.

<sup>87</sup> For Mikuláš, see the references above. For Martin see: Tóth-Szabó, *A cseh-huszita*, 1917. 439–440.; Furthermore, Martin's wife Katalin made a will in 1495: DL 62 619.

<sup>88</sup> Tóth-Szabó, *A cseh-huszita*, 1917. 323.; Iványi, Bártfa, 1910. 1217.; DF 213 909.



archive. In order to learn more about the mercenaries and military events that took place in the Upper Regions in the 1440s–50s, it is first necessary to compile these aids. In this study, I listed the relevant poly-sigillic charters, and made available the photos of those not found in the Hungaricana online system in the database run by our Research Group, making them available to anyone for research. In the future, I intend to continue the fundamental research along these lines, and compile a prosopographical description of most mercenary captains in Hungarian and English. I also set myself the goal of compiling a comprehensive chronology of the events between 1440 and 1462, centred on the military history of the Upper Regions.

*Appendix*



*Nr. 1. Seal of Mikuláš Brcál z Dobré form 1444.*





*Nr. 2. Seal of Bartošem z Hertvíkovic from 1460.*



*Nr. 3. Seal of Martin Brcál z Dobré from 1460.*