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PEASANTS' ARMS AND ARMOUR IN THE LIGHT OF THE SILESIANS' MILITARY DUTIES IN THE 15TH-16TH CENTURIES

A military breakthrough observed from the second part of the 14th century onwards which manifested itself, among other things, in the appearance on the battlefield of serried ranks of infantry troops opened up new possibilities of strengthening rulers' military potentials. The assumption that the potential did not consist of mounted knights exclusively made them employ enlisted soldiers as well as "revive" a longforgotten, early medieval idea of common defence through full-scale mobilization including land owners and users, as well as the owners of city plots. The conception of exploiting the military potential of the peasant masses, who constituted the majority of contemporary society, was, of course, only sporadically put into practice. The very idea, however, recurred over and over again and was finally seriously considered when the crisis of traditional mobilization solutions became more and more acute. In Silesia the problem arose probably in connection with the Hussite menace. An example was set by the enemy "plebeian" Taborite army itself. Besides, it was well known that the only means of balancing the Czechs' constant advantage over Silesian forces was to arouse the resistance of all the Catholic people. The conception was discussed by the Silesian regional council in Grodkow. The resolution of 18th November 1421 provided, among other things, that the dukes, lands and towns would mobilize all their forces and resist the heretics' attacks. This general statement was followed by some more precise instructions. Every ten gebawer were to take a wagon equipped with arms and food for three months, as well as a chain (for tying a wagon laager) and "sapper" tools. Every soldier was to bear his best arms, that is spisse, armbroste vnd suste (?) so er beste mag1. As we know, no full-scale mobilization was held and the Hussite pro-

The very idea, however, was never abandoned. The peasants of the lands of Nysa and Otmuchow, belonging to the bishopric of Wroclaw, were burdened with military duties in unknown circumstances at one time. The problem remains an absolute mystery for

¹ Geschichtsquellen der Hussitenkriege, hrsg. v. C. Grün-

blem was successfully solved in quite a different way.

historiography. It is only certain that the tenant peasantry of a village having the "German law" were to pay a levy in the form of corn – two bushels per fief - pro custodia terrae. The bishopric profited handsomely from this (2600 bushels a year)². Meanwhile the oldest inspection register of the abovementioned properties, known from the copy found in the book Muster Register des Bischtvmbs Breslaw of 15933, remains practically unused. The register was completed in the year 1503. Its contents, including the types of arms and armour mentioned, suggest even that it was based on a slightly older model, most probably dating from the second part of the 15th century. A source coming from the district of Cheb may be its geographically closest analogue. This register, however, dates back to the year 1395 (the next one, which survived in fragments, to the year 1500)4. Thus the possibility that the direct model of the solutions employed in the Silesian southern borderlands was the military organization of one of the nearer territories of Bohemia and Moravia cannot be excluded. We are not in a position here to analyse all the aspects (i.e. the settlement-related, demographic and economic ones) connected with the origin and contents of this unique, in Silesia, source. For us the most important thing is that, besides some knightly and village administrative duties, the register specifies the services which were to be provided by the village communes, listed according to

² W. Schulte, Quellen zur Geschichte der Besitzverhältnisse des Bistums Breslau, Breslau 1907, p. 209; idem, Die Landesverteidigung des Neisser Fürstentums, "Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens", Bd. 45 (1911), pp. 284, 285.

³ A handwritten copy of 9th August 1889 by Alfons Heyer is used in the article. The State Archive in Wroclaw, Records of the City of Wroclaw, B 20, pp. 11-28. The book was familiar to W. Schulte, who, however, did not use the source.

⁴ K. S i e g l, Das Musterungsbuch der Egerländer Bauernschaft vom Jahre 1395, "Unser Egerland", 22 (1918), pp. 1n, 11n, 23n, 29n, 39n, 44n. The quotation after: R. Nový, Střibrské vojenství v době předhusitské, "Historie a vojenství", R. 1963, p. 413, reference 5; ibidem, Městské knihy v Čechách a na Moravě 1310 a 1526, Prague 1963, the archive book register in Cheb.

h a g e n, Scriptores Rerum Silesiacarum, Bd. 6, Breslau 1871, No. 17, p. 11.

the administrative order of the bishopric duchy (see Tables 1 a-c)⁵. The register contains names of all the villages of particular districts. It is not clear whether the number of their "inhabitants" (Einwohner) mentioned in the document refers only to the owners of kmethon holdings or includes the cottagers as well (the numbers are large enough to suggest that the list comprises all kinds of farms). Information about the number of wagons and armed men that were to be provided by a village can also be found in the register. All the warriors were foot soldiers (*Fueßknechte*) and were divided into three groups, depending on the arms they bore: warriors in armour with a pike (im Harnisch mit Spiessen), bow-men with arbalests (mit Armbrosten) and shielded warriors armed with shields (Schyldt /Paweze). The so-called free yeomen (Freye) were not burdened with such village duties. According to relevant literature, they were rather connected with knightly duties⁶. Thus the reasons for which they were listed in the document remain unclear (in some cases they seem to have been included on the basis of commune taxes they paid). The Nysa Lower Quarter, where no "free" yeomen were listed, has the biggest average number of village inhabitants, which might suggest that they were here "concealed" among the "inhabitants".

The Nysa-Otmuchow properties, which were the subject of the inspection, constituted one military organism divided into four quarters. Each of the district-area comprised two such quarters. The border between the upper and the lower quarters was the Nysa Klodzka River (see map). On the map the above-mentioned villages form a compact complex 35 km square. The distance between particular settlements and the towns of Nysa and Otmuchow was not longer than 16 km. Only in some cases the villages were situated 20-25 km away from the cities. All the distances could be covered in a day. Therefore the real time-span of mobilization depended mainly on the system of communication and spreading the news, as well as the very readiness of the peasantry for combat. The distance from the troop concentration sites seemed to be of secondary importance in this respect. The book discussed here contains information referring to 86 villages of three quarters, inhabited by about 1484 peasants burdened with military duty (the "free" yeomen and village administrators were not included). This can be compared with the Cheb register, which lists 1293 armed peasants coming from 133 parishes. An inventory of the Upper Nysa Quarter is lacking in the source, but its military

obligation may be estimated at about 13 wagons and 146 foot soldiers. The number of "inhabitants" and the number of armed men that were to be provided by a village were directly related, but their mutual relationship cannot be clearly defined at the moment as the way in which military duty was allocated to particular villages was highly inconsistent (cf.: Table 2). The arithmetical average in the three quarters is 4,29 "inhabitants" per one armed man. Thus in the villages of the three quarters listed there were about 626 armed men and in the whole land over 2.000 soldiers.

The authors of the system discussed here did not only want the villages to provide a given number of armed men. Particular villages, or more often groups of villages composed of up to 5 settlements, were to secure whole sub-units (parties) equipped with their own wagon. The sub-units were organized according to a common organizational pattern: one shieldedwarrior, 3-6 bow-men and the same number of soldiers bearing pikes - "pike-men" (the name is, of course, anachronistic, it is, however, used here because it precisely renders the tasks of this part of the infantry)7. A situation where the shielded warrior was accompanied by an odd number of soldiers was usually advantageous for the crossbow-men, because an additional archer was needed in this configuration. The composition most frequently mentioned in the source (8 times) was a arty of seven (1+3+3) or ten (1+5+4)men. Groups of nine (1+4+4) soldiers were also frequent (6 times). On the basis of this data it may be assumed that an arrangement where a shielded warrior was preceded by three or four pike-men and followed by three to five crossbow-men was considered the best solution. Sub-units smaller than those described here were sporadic and their composition may have been enriched by armed men who did not have their own wagon and could not form an independent unit. If a village (or group of villages) provided 14-15 warriors (there were three such cases), they could be divided into two parties and each of them had its own shielded warrior. This, however, happened only once. It seems that training an additional man to bear a shield proved to be too complicated. The situation may have been similar in the case of wagons as there was only one wagon in each unit. One in every five wagons were roofed, most probably used for transporting provisions. It must be remembered that although only wagons are mentioned in the register, they must have been accompanied by at least two horses and a driver, another peasant serving in the army.

⁵ The State Archive ..., B 20, pp. 19-28.

⁶ W. S c h u 1 t e, Quellen..., p. 209; idem, Die Landesverteidigung..., pp. 283, 284; W. D z i e w u 1 s k i, Zaludnienie Śląska w końcu XVI i na początku XVII wieku (The Population Distribution of Silesia at the End of the 16th and the Beginning of the 17th Century), "Przegląd Zachodni", T. III (1952), p. 424 table 1, p. 427.

⁷ The only alternative is the source term "spearmen". Cf.: J. W i m m e r, Historia piechoty polskiej do roku 1864 (The History of the Polish Infantry to the Year 1864), Warsaw 1978, p. 90; A. N o w a k o w s k i, Uzbrojenie indywidualne (The Individual Arms and Armour) [in:] Polska technika wojskowa do 1500 roku (Polish War Technology to the Year 1500), ed. A. Nadolski, Warsaw 1994, pp. 210, 211.

TABLE 1.

MILITARY DUTIES OF VILAGES IN THE BISHOPRIC DUCHY ACCORDING TO THE REGISTER OF 1503

a. The Lower Quarter of the Nysa District (Nieder Virtel im Neißischen Gebitte)

NAME OF VILLAGE SOURE-PRESENT	NUMBER OF INHABI- TANTS		NUMBER	INCLUDING			
		WAGON	OF FOOT SOL- DIERS	IN ARM OUR WITH PIKE	WITH CROSS- BOW	WITH SHIELD	
Mockowicz - Makowice	30	х	7	3	3	1	
Waltdorff- Prusinowice	31	х	7	1-10			
Römeryczheide - Rusocin	27	x	5				
Brysen - Brzeziny Geltendorff - Giełczyce	18 12	х	7				
Strowicz - Strobice Reglycz - Regulice Hanβdorff - Hanuszów	13 14 12	x*	10	4	5	1	
Nowag - Nawaki Schmolicz - Smolice	26 7	х	7	3	3	1	
Botdmanβdorff - Bogdanów Beymischdorff - Pakosławice?	26 17	x	11	5	5	1	
Haynersdorff - Sidzina Lässet - Lasocice Ober Gewtricz	29 14 9	х	14	6	6	2	
Frydewalde - Skoroszyce Petyrßheide - Czarnolas Schönheide - Wielochów	22 14 3	x*	9	4	4	1	
Hermβdorff - Jesienica Dln. Bauschwicz - Budziszowice	29 5	х	7	3	3	1	
Steffensdorf - Radzikowice	38	x	9	4 .	4	1	
Neudorff - Złotogłowice Wessenberg - Madroszów	58 7	x*	15	7	6!	1!	
Hayderβdorff - Jędrzychów Glompenaw - Głębinów	35 7	х	10	4	5	1	
Woyticz - Wójcice	29	-	6				
Reyman - Rzymiany	[~13]	-	3				
TOTAL	[C. 545]	13	125 [127]				

^{*} wagon roofed with a red cloth (mit ruth gedackt / mit ruthen gewende gedackt).

b. The Upper Quarter of the Otmuchow District (Ober Virtel Ottmuchauischen Gebitte)

	NUMBER	NUMBER OF FREE YEOMEN	WAGON	NUMBER OF FOOT SOL- DIERS	INCLUDING		
NAME OF VILLAGE SOURE-PRESENT	OF INHABI- TANTS				IN ARM OUR WITH PIKE	WITH CROSS- BOW	WITH SHIELD
Heynersdorf - Dziewiętlice Schwammelwicz - Trzeboszowice	20 30	4 -	x*	12	5	6	1
Bertelsdorff - Bernartice Buchelsdorff - Buková	30 13	-	х	10	4	5	1
Hermßdorff - Horni Heř manice/Jesienica Grn. Kalcke - Kałków	13 23	* 5 2	х	10	4	5	1
Gros Kroβ - Velká Voda Jungferdorf - Kobyla	28 10	-	x*	9	4**	4	1
Ruttewasser - Červená Voda Arnβdorff - Jarnoltów Wiesse - Łaka Sawpβdorff - Supikovice	10 11 8 7	2 2 5	х*	8	3**	4	1
Cunczendorff - Sławniowice Borkendorff - Burgrabice	20 14	2	х	8	3	4	1
Nickelsdorff - Mikulovice Endirsdorff - Ondřejovice	16 [~26]	-	х	10	4**	5	1
Weyspach - Bilý Potok Kamnicz - Kamienica	28 14	-	х	9	3**	5	1
Koppernigk - Kopernik	37	-		9			
Jawernickh - Javornik	60	-	х	14	6**	7	1
Petirwicz - Piotrowice Nyskie Raczmansdorff - Ratnowice Crackwicz - Krakówkowice Betlerdorff - Michowice	20 15 5 [~3]	-	х	10	4	5	1
Alden Patschkaw - St. Paczków	39	-	х	9	4**	4	1
Bischoffswalde - Biskupów Gierczdorff - Gierałcice	24 11	-	х	7	3**	3	1
Bawcke - Buków Tanneberg - Jodłów Neygβdorff - Nadziejów Wyrben - Wierzbno	13 11 7 6	-	х	9	4**	4	1
Brünschewicz - Broniszowice Meißen - Meszno Brysen - Brzezina Polska	6 24 7	-	х	8	3**	4	1
Mure - Morów Ayle - Iława Marckwirβdorff - Łączki Grune - Siestrzechowice	12 14 12 13	-	х	12	5**	6	1
1TOTAL	[c. 654]		[.22]	15	145¹ <i>[154]</i>		

^{**} Pikes are not mentioned.

¹ According to a not made by A. Hayer, 9 armed men from Koperniki had not been included.

c. The Lower Quarter of the Otmuchow District (Nieder Virtel des Othmuchauischen Gebitte)

NAME OF VILLAGE SOURE-PRESENT	144 (DED	NUMBER OF FREE YEOMEN	WAGON	NUMBER OF FOOT SOL- DIERS	INCLUDING		
	NUMBER OF INHABI- TANTS				IN ARM OUR WITH PIKE	WITH CROSS- BOW	WITH SHIELD
Pomβdorff - Pomianów Dln. Herbβdorff - Rostków Golnow - Goleniów S 1. Liebnaw - Lubnów Gollendorff - Golina	7 11 7 18 5	-	x*	12	5	6	1
Lindenaw - Lipniki	36	-	x	7	3**	3	1
Láßwicz - Lasowice Gawers - Gaworowice	20 12	2 4	х	7	3**	3	1
Lobdaw - Lubiatów Elgott - Ligota Wlk. Sarlowicz - Sarnowice	22 24 7	2	х	132	5!**	4!	1
Camnick - Kamiennik Glodebog - Kłodobock Gleserdorff - Szklary	20 8 18	5	х	10	4**	5	1
Weidicht - Pasieki Laschwicz - Laskowice? Czedlicz - Siedlec vel Siedlee Graschkewicz - Goraszowice Tscharschkowicz - Suszkowice	6 3 9 4 6	-	x	6	2	3	1
Herczigißwalde Brockensten - Mrokocin	[~42]		х	10			
TOTAL	[c. 285]	[.13]	7	56 [65]			
TOTAL IN 4 QUARTERS	[c. 2025]		48				

² Including 5 men from Lubiatów.

TABLE 2.

CORRESPONDING NUMBERS OF VILLAGE "INHABITANTS" AND THE ARMED MEN PROVIDED

NUMBER OF ARMED MEN	NUMBER OF "INHABITANTS"	NUMBER OF ARMED MEN	NUMBER OF "INHABITANTS"
5	27	11	43
6	28-29	12	48, 50-51
7	30-36	13	53
8	36-37	14	52, 60
9	37-39, 42	15	65
10	39, 42-43, 46		

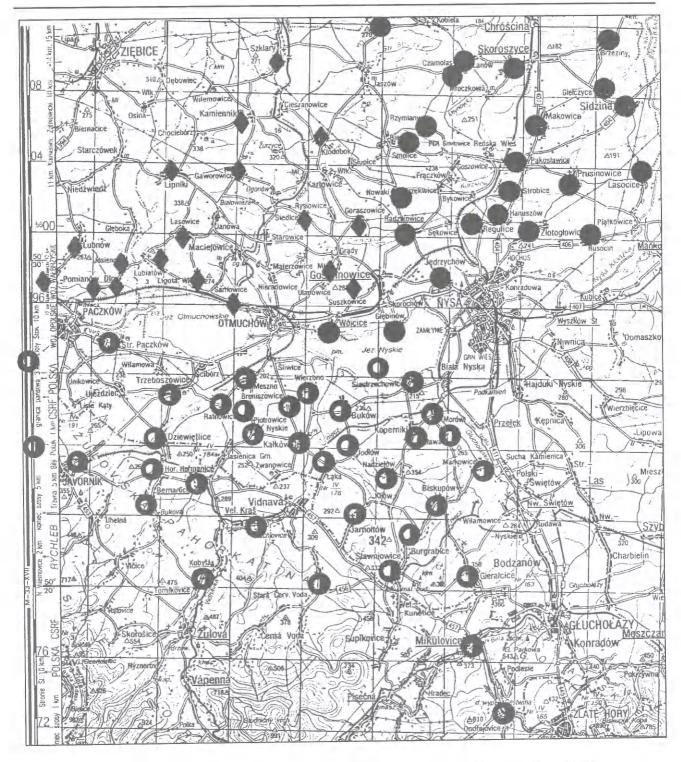
The composition of the contemporary infantry had to fulfil the norms established for enlisted troops. The crossbow-men were no longer dominant, in accordance with the tendencies of forthcoming years. The number of warriors armed with long shafted weapons was more or less the same. It should be remembered that a resolution of the Silesian regional council passed on 28th October 1529, that is 25 years later, provided that a full-time infantry sub-unit contributed by the States was 16 strong: there were eight men armed with harquebuses (Handröhren), six with flails (!), one man who looked after the fire (in case the lock fuse went out), and one prophos⁸. The organization and weaponry of the Silesian infantry placed it somewhere between the models adopted in Germany and Poland. The presence of 48 peasant wagons in the bishop's army meant that there were roughly the same number of sub-units. Thus in a group of 472 soldiers (called a rotha), composed of four smaller but unequal quarter troops (companies, banner units), there would be about fifty shielded warriors and about two hundred - two hundred and twenty archers and pike-men. Their battle array can easily be imagined: 50 columns, each composed of 9 foot soldiers - the first four rows in armour and armed with shafted weapons, a row of warriors with large shields behind them and 4-5 rows of crossbow-men at the rear. Behind the soldiers, there was a numerous wagon laager (one wagon per about 10 active warriors). The above-mentioned resolution of 1529 required one wagon per 16 foot soldiers. The fact that two districts of the bishopric duchy (the area they covered corresponded to about 2/3 of the later Nysa

canton and about 1/3 of the Grodkow canton) provided, besides knights on horseback, almost 500 armed men would have been a unique achievement at that time. The adoption of the Nysa-Otmuchow model, where 45 peasant holdings had to provide one soldier, on the whole Silesian territory would have secured a huge army, several thousand strong. The idea was only developed in 1577, when a council order obliged every seven villagers to provide one mounted bowman⁹. Unfortunately, we do not know now whether these mobilization plans could be realized or not. Lack of any direct military menace as well as the pacification of home affairs in the province resulted in a situation where, in the 16th century, no need for full-scale mobilization arose.

The basic problem connected with providing the above-described type of infantry was the necessity to train a given number of peasant soldiers. Shooting practice appeared to be the easiest kind of training, because the skill could be mastered individually. Training of would-be shielded warriors and pike-men was much more difficult as it always required group activities and practicing a skill in serried ranks. In order to organize such a unit and provide a suitable coach, armed men from a number of villages or even the whole quarter had to be gathered together, which was far beyond the Silesian people's organizational capacity. This must have been kept in mind. The type of mobilization discussed here was to be introduced in case of war and it was only then that adequate training was to be done. For the time being, the author of the plan wanted to prepare a suitable organizational structure, where each village would be aware of its obligations and would secure all the necessary arms

⁸H. Pal m, Schlesiens Landesdefension im XV., XVI. und XVII. Jahrhundert, an offprint, Breslau 1868, pp. 11-13.

⁹ Ibidem, pp. 17, 18.



Map. 1. Location of the villages identified in both the Otmuchow quarters and the Lower Nysa Quarter.

and armour (the weaponry did not have to be very expensive). On average over thirty peasants were to collect the money to buy one wooden shield (such a shield was worth about 7-12 grossi; the cost of painting the weapon was not included), three arbalests (48 grossi each), a certain number of butts (three score butts cost up to over a dozen grossi; a substitute for a real quiver could be made by the peasants themselves), three pikes (6 grossi each) and three suits of "armour" (those were probably breastplates – 24 gros-

si a piece – and the simplest helms: Kettle-hats – 15-30 grossi per piece). The above-mentioned arms and armour were worth about 7 marks¹⁰. Thus one villager was to pay about 10 grossi. The expense might have been bigger if we include the cost of other

¹⁰ The prices after: J. S z y m c z a k, Produkcja i koszty uzbrojenia rycerskiego w Polsce XIII-XV w. (The Production and Cost of Knight Arms and Armour in Poland the 13th-15th Centuries), Lodz 1989, pp. 88, 134, 265, 266 table 21.

elements of infantry armour (such as the backplate, the collar, the arms defence, and the gauntlets), which has not been mentioned here. The example of the Polish infantry of the beginning of the 16th century shows that in front of the shielded warriors there were only well-armed "spearmen"11. There, however, the number of such warriors was small, while in our case it was proportionally too big to make the armaments cost rocket. As far the cost of wagons and horses is concerned, farm equipment and animals could successfully be used¹². The interesting thing is that there were no firearms, which (in the year 1503!) were still replaced by crossbows. This phenomenon can be explained in two ways: the ancient methods might have been automatically repeated or the skill of using firearms was thought to be too difficult to be mastered by masses of untrained peasants, who were not familiar with technical innovations. During the next few decades the situation had radically changed in this respect. The resolution of 1577 mentioned above required that a peasant soldier was equipped with a good gelding (gutten verschnitten Klepper), a petrinal (langen Pirschrohre), a burgonet (Sturmhaube), a breastplate and a backplate (Vorder- und Hintertheile), side arms (Seitengewehr) or two pistols (Feuerbchsen)13. The plan could be put into practice, because perfected firearms, including the particular types listed above, were in widespread use at that time. This has recently been confirmed by the example of the people of Klodzk¹⁴.

The weapons enumerated in the inventory of 1503 cannot be termed "plebeian" even in the most general sense of the word. They were not "knightly" weapons, either, but could be considered usual weapons typical of contemporary enlisted troops recruited from ordinary, plebeian citizens. In the register no other elements of peasant infantry armour are listed. If a shield-man or crossbow-man possessed any pieces of armour or a helmet, he would wear them anyway. Moreover, side arms, which seem to have been decisive as far as the additional worth of a unit was concerned, are not mentioned, either. The situation was similar in the case of inventories dealing with the military potential of medieval townspeople¹⁵.

The possession of personal side arms with pointed blades or battle-axes must have been so common that it did not have to be mentioned. The order of 1529 required that every foot soldier had a good weapon and some mysterious Wurfhaken (a kind of caltrop scattered in front of horsemen?¹⁶). Thus the Bishop of Wroclaw was quite sure that his peasant subjects would report with battle axes, swords, choppers and cutlasses or, at least, long peasant knives fixed to the belts. It is among those arms that their favourite, typically "plebeian", weapons are to be found. Unfortunately, in order to recognize them, one would have to have at his disposal an inventory made "in nature". Such lists appeared only in the second half of the 16th century, when an attempt was made to inspect the way in which the Silesians fulfil their common military duty introduced in the face of the Turkish menace in the time of the Habsburgs.

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

¹¹ Cf.: the painting "The Battle of Orsza" (1514).

¹² Cf.: A. Nowakowski, Sprzęt taborowy, obozowy i przeprawowy (The Wagon Lagger, Camp and Crossing Equipment) [in:] Polska technika..., pp. 254, 255.

¹³ H. Palm, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁴ Cf.: M. Goliński, R. Żerelik, Uzbrojenie mieszczan Kłodzka w świetle spisu z drugiej połowy XVI wieku (The Arms and Armour of the People of Kłodzk in the Light of an Inventory of the Second Half of the 16th Century, [in:] Ustrój, Kościół, militaria (The Political System, Church and Military Accessories), ed. K. Bobowski, Wrocław 1993, pp. 114-116.

¹⁵ Cf.: A. S w a r y c z e w s k i, Platnerze krakowscy (The Armourers of Cracow), Warsaw-Cracow 1987, pp. 77-150; J. S z y m c z a k, Zasoby uzbrojenia (The Arms and Armour Supplies), [in:] Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 1350-1450 (Arms and Armour in Medieval Poland 1350-1450),

ed. A. Nadolski, Lodz 1990, pp. 389-402; M. Goliński, Uzbrojenie mieszczańskie na Śląsku od połowy XIV do końca XV w. (The Arms and Armour of the Townspeople of Silesia from the Middle of the 14th to the End of the 15th Century), "Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości", T. XXXIII (1990), pp. 35-47.

¹⁶Cf.: H. Palm, op. cit., p. 13.