

Historians and Politics: Hussite Warfare (1419–1434) in Czech Historiography (1850–1960)

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Abstract: The article outlines the historiographical context of the now-standard narrative regarding the genesis of Hussite warfare. František Palacký (1798-1876), the founding father of Czech historiography, formed the core of this narrative by focusing on the role of Jan Žižka of Trocnov (ca. 1360–1424), a genius military commander of the radical Taborite faction of Hussites. Žižka allegedly created an unprecedented way of war based on wagons and early firearms, advancing the art of war. Within the context of this narrative, Palacký also created a dichotomy between the military forces of the progressive Hussites and the conservative “feudal” crusaders. The paper further stresses the role of Czechoslovak Marxist historians of the 1950s, in particular Jan Durdík. The latter evolved Palacký’s thesis by stretching the dichotomy between crusaders and Hussites even further, in accordance with the political convictions of the day. Žižka’s army and other Hussite forces, whose military culture exhibited many commonalities with their enemies, were transformed into heralds of proto-communist ideals. The paper thus concludes that while the traditional narrative on Hussite warfare has its merits, it’s flawed by the politico-ideological motivations of its creators. Concomitantly, a holistic reevaluation of Hussite wars from an unbiased military-historical perspective is still a desideratum.

Keywords: Hussites, Medieval Warfare, Historiography, Political Convictions.

Rezumat: Articolul prezintă contextul istoriografic al narațiunii standard actuale privind geneza războiului hussit. František Palacký (1798-1876), părintele fondator al istoriografiei cehe a constituit nucleul acestei narațiuni, concentrându-se asupra rolului lui Jan Žižka din Trocnov (c. 1360–1424), un comandant militar al facțiunii radicale taborite a husiților. Žižka ar fi creat o modalitate de război fără precedent,

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bazată pe căruțe și arme de foc primitive, contribuind la progresul artei războiului. În contextul acestei narațiuni, Palacký a creat, de asemenea, o dihotomie între forțele militare ale husiților progresiști și cruciații conservatori „feudali”. Lucrarea subliniază în continuare rolul istoricilor marxiști cehoslovaci din anii 1950, în special al lui Jan Durdík. Acesta din urmă a dezvoltat teza lui Palacký, extinzând și mai mult dihotomia dintre cruciați și husiți, în conformitate cu convingerile politice ale vremii. Armata lui Žižka și alte forțe hussite, a căror cultură militară prezenta multe similitudini cu cea a inamicilor lor, au fost transformate în vestitori ai idealurilor proto-comuniste. Lucrarea concluzionează astfel că, deși narațiunea tradițională despre războaiele hussite are meritele sale, ea este viciată de motivațiile politico-ideologice ale creatorilor săi. În același timp, o reevaluare holistică a războaielor husite dintr-o perspectivă militar-istorică imparțială rămâne în continuare un deziderat.

Cuvinte cheie: condamnări politice; husiți; istoriografie; război mondial.

Introduction: The Traditional Narrative of the Hussite Warfare

The Hussite movement is primarily remembered for its pivotal role in the religious affairs of Europe. It emerged in the early fifteenth century in the Kingdom of Bohemia, primarily as a response to perceived corruption and doctrinal issues within the Catholic Church. Jan Hus (1370-1415), a prominent Czech scholar and preacher, played a crucial role in this process by advocating for church reform, especially secular intervention in church affairs plagued by simony. Following Hus' execution for heresy in 1415, his followers, known as Hussites, intensified their demands for religious reform. The conflict escalated into the so-called Hussite Wars in 1419, marked by a series of military conflicts between various Hussite factions and Catholic forces (1419-1434).

The principles of Hussite beliefs are most clearly articulated in the so-called Four Articles of Prague, proclaimed in 1420. The first called for the freedom to preach the word of God, the second for communion in both kinds, the third prohibited a life of luxury and secular power for religious institutions, and the fourth demanded just punishment for all sinners, regardless of their social status. Despite these underlying principles, the Hussites were not a monolithic movement. The various groupings are

conventionally divided into three main factions: 1) moderate forces around the kingdom's capital of Prague, 2) a heterogeneous collection of nobility and towns in eastern Bohemia known as the Orebiters, and 3) a socially and religiously radical group – the Taborites.¹

It was the latter group that established an egalitarian commune on the hill of Tábor in southern Bohemia, named after its biblical counterpart. Taborites sought a more radical reform of the Church and society, advocating for a return to apostolic poverty and communal property ownership. In addition to these radical social and religious reforms, the military forces of the Taborites are conventionally acknowledged by many as innovators of warfare.

At the heart of the story about the genesis of Hussite warfare is the Taborite military captain, Jan Žižka of Trocnov (ca. 1360–1424).² When Pope Martin V (1369–1431) declared a crusade against the Hussites in 1420, Žižka had under his command only amateur forces composed of farmers and urban poor, mostly fighting on foot. Standing against them were the heavily equipped and well-mounted nobility of Catholic Bohemia, as well as international crusading forces. Consequently, Žižka's people and many other Hussite groups of similar backgrounds stood little chance in an open-field battle, where the crusaders could effortlessly shatter and overrun the heretics.

To level the odds, the renowned captain conceived an ingenious plan. He proposed reinforcing the humble peasant wagons—a mainstay of armies since ancient times—with additional wooden and metallic elements, transforming them into a kind of defensive battle platform. Furthermore, by chaining these wagons together, the Taborites created a structure resembling a fortified city, a so-called wagon-fort. Unlike a castle or a fortress, the wagon-fort had the option of strategic mobility, as it could be disassembled and moved to a different place.

¹ Recent summary listing foundational literature on the topic may be found in: František Šmahel, 'The Hussite Revolution (1419–1471)', in Jaroslav Pánek et al (eds), *A History of the Czech Lands* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2018), pp.159–183.

² The following narrative on the genesis and main features of Hussite warfare can be found in many authoritative textbooks on medieval military history, with one of the most succinct descriptions available in Clifford J. Rogers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Medieval Warfare* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), pp. 193–199.

Within the security of a wagon-fort, the Taborites no longer feared the overwhelming numbers of the crusaders or the might of their heavy cavalry forces. Fighting from atop these fortified vehicles, they could effectively use weapons converted from farming tools, such as the threshing flail—an instrument familiar to Žižka's fighters throughout their lives. Moreover, the town-dwellers, who constituted a significant portion of the Taborite forces, were accustomed to early firearms. The wagon-fort, much like the towers and walls of their native towns, provided a similar combat environment for them. The defensive power of the wagon-fort was thus capable of significantly impeding any determined attack, whether on foot or on horseback.

The outcome of Žižka's military experiment was a remarkable string of victories. The rest of the Hussite factions soon followed the trend and adopted the wagon-based warfare championed by the Taborites and their captain. While the crusaders managed to secure a few minor victories, in most major battles spanning from 1420 until 1431, the Hussites almost always emerged victorious. A pinnacle of the crusaders' defeat was the Battle of Domažlice in 1431, during which the crusading army fled in panic before even engaging with the heretics.

The traditional narrative thus concludes that the Hussite conflict was a turning point in the art of war itself. The domination of the so-called feudal-chivalric style of warfare, centered on deploying cavalry forces, was over, at least in Central Europe. Instead, even the foremost adversaries of the Hussites, such as the German princes and the Hungarian kingdom, adopted the heretics' progressive combat methods, incorporating war-wagons into their own forces, which were militarily valuable in parts of Europe at least until the late seventeenth century.³

³ For the use of wagon-forts during periods following the Hussite wars (1419–1434) see (among others): Brian Davies, 'Guliai-Gorod, Wagenburg, and Tabor Tactics in 16th–17th Century Muscovy and Eastern Europe', in Brian Davies (ed.), *Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1500–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 93–108; Dominik Tóth, '„...Isten irgalma sajnos tovaszállt.” Szekérvár alkalmazása Győr mellett?' [...The Mercy of God Unfortunately Flew Away." The Application of Wagon Fort at Győr?], *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 134/1 (2021): 229–246.

The Genesis of the Traditional Narrative: The Nationalist Period of Czech Historiography (1850s)

It's crucial to emphasize the scholarly context in which the traditional narrative surrounding the uniqueness of Hussite warfare originated and evolved throughout professional historiography. František Palacký (1798-1876) was the one who initially articulated the concept of Hussite military innovation, along with the contrast between the progressive Hussite forces and the conservative "feudal-chivalric" forces of the Crusaders. The founding father of Czech historiography argued that the Hussites represented a radical departure from the brute force approach of "medieval feudal combat," aligning more with the "scientific forms" of warfare present in classical antiquity. In fact, the combined arms of infantry, cavalry, and war-wagons that the Taborites under Žižka's leadership pioneered (and later Hussite forces perfected) heralded the more rational patterns of early-modern warfare.

Starting almost with nothing, the legendary captain slowly built up his humble field army to eventually defeat all the major surrounding powers of Christendom that greatly outnumbered his forces. Moreover, it was largely through Žižka's natural military talent and his sacrifices that he transformed the small and obscure Czech nation into one of the most bellicose actors in late medieval Europe. Writing from a nationalist perspective and basing his argument on the poor state of knowledge (as well as the assessment of) medieval warfare, Palacký attributed the military success of the Hussite movement to the technological innovations and genius of Jan Žižka of Trocnov. The father of Czech historiography, thus, laid the foundational narrative on the genesis of Hussite warfare.⁴

⁴ František Palacký, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě. Dílu III. částka I.* [The History of the Czech nation in Bohemia and Moravia. First half of Part 3] (Prague: České Museum, 1850), pp. 536-542. On the foundational role of Palacký with regards to Hussite history see Petr Čornej, *Husitství a husité* [Hussitism and Hussites] (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2019), pp. 441-455. On the state of knowledge and poor reputation of medieval warfare within nineteenth century scholarship see: Malte Prietzel, 'Veränderungen in der spätmittelalterlichen Kriegführung', in Werner Paravicini et al (eds.), *Tannenberg – Grunwald – Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im Späten Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), pp.103-109.

Hussite Warfare and the Czechoslovak Marxist Historiography (1950s)

Palacký's thesis on the progressiveness of Hussite warfare was accepted by subsequent Czech scholarship and spread among other European historians. However, it was the Marxist historians of 1950s Czechoslovakia who emphasized the dichotomy between the Crusaders and the Hussites in a strongly ideologically-driven narrative. A leading role in this respect was played by Jan Durdík's work, "*Husitské vojenství*" [The Hussite Art of War], published in 1953.⁵ Despite the vague nature of Czech primary sources, Durdík and other historians of this period clearly understood the principle behind the Hussites' resounding military victories. While acknowledging the innovative use of technology and military tactics, the primary factor contributing to the Hussite movement's success lay elsewhere. According to Czechoslovak Marxist historiography, it was the distinct class structure of the opposing forces that played the most pivotal role.

According to Marxist historians, the crusader forces were primarily composed of mercenaries and conscripted peasants, under the command of influential feudal landowners. Consequently, morale and military discipline in the "feudal-chivalric" armies often hinged on the prospects of plunder, financial incentives, and the fear of punishment. On the other hand, the Hussites were led by lower nobility, with the majority of their forces comprised of poor urban and rural volunteers, essentially the proletariat. They fought a virtuous dual struggle: one against domestic feudal oppressors and another in defense of their homeland against foreign invaders. Unlike their morally bankrupt enemies—the Catholic Church, oppressive feudal regimes, and their servants—the field armies of the Hussites fought out of patriotic duty and for a vision of a future classless society. Czechoslovak Marxist historians thus perceived the Hussite forces as a medieval equivalent of a national communist army.⁶

⁵ Jan Durdík, *Husitské vojenství. Druhé vydání*. [The Hussite Art of War. Second Edition] (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1954). Durdík's monograph had a widely read German language version published in 1962: Jan Durdík, *Husitisches Heerwesen* (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1961).

⁶ Durdík, *Husitské vojenství*, p. 14-44, 190-198. See also František Graus' (1921-1989) perspective on the matter in his review of Durdík's book. Due to his experience with the Second World War, Graus was a deeply committed Marxist at the time of the review: František Graus, 'Recense: *Husitské vojenství*' [Review of Hussite Art of War], *Historie a vojenství*, 4 (1953): 211-214. The review comments on the first edition of *Husitské vojenství* published in 1953.

Within the Soviet bloc, Czech historians were not alone in such perception of history. In neighbouring socialist Hungary, the 1973 work by Antal Fekete Nagy and Gábor Barta framed the so-called revolt of György Dózsa (ca. 1470-1514), taking place in 1514 within the Kingdom of Hungary, in a similar light.⁷ A part of the crusading forces, originally assembled for an anti-Ottoman enterprise orchestrated by Archbishop Tamás Bakócz (1442-1521), rebelled against the order to demobilize and cancel the original war-plan. Led by Dózsa, probably a lower-ranking cavalry captain at that time, the rebels managed to score a few military victories but were ultimately defeated by royal forces by mid-July of 1514. Nagy and Barta conceptualized the rebels' motivation as stemming from the economic exploitation of peasants by greedy Hungarian nobility. Concomitantly, the armed struggle of Dózsa and his followers was lauded as a heroic, yet tragic instance of early class-conscious struggle.

The Traditional Hussite-Crusader Dichotomy and Recent Revisionist Perspectives

The traditional narrative surrounding the genesis of Hussite warfare is thus largely rooted in the foundational work of the nationalist-era historian František Palacký and further elaborated by Jan Durdík's Marxist perspective. It is from the synthesis of these two authorities that we derive the now-standard dichotomy between the crusading forces and the Hussite warriors.⁸

⁷ Barta Gábor – Fekete Nagy Antal, *Parasztháború 1514-ben* [The Peasant War of 1514] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1973).

⁸ Since a significant portion of the source evidence was written in medieval Czech—an obscure source language for most of the international academia—the German version of Jan Durdík's monograph has been and still is of great interest to military historians abroad. Indeed, *Hussitisches Heerwesen* can be found among major military history monographs well into the 2000s. See, for example, the multiple references in the following works: Bert S. Hall, *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe: Gunpowder, Technology, and Tactics* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 248-249. Uwe Tresp, *Söldner aus Böhmen* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), pp. 22-31. János B. Szabó, 'A huszita hadviselés hatása és adaptációja Kelet-Közép-Európában' [The Impact and Adaptation of Hussite Warfare in East-Central Europe] in Attila Bárány – László Pószán (eds), „Causa unionis, causa fidei, causa

This dichotomy is based on three main premises:

1) The Hussite forces employed innovative military technology and methods of warfare, whereas the Catholics and Crusaders were more conservative and, by extension, ineffective.

2) The opposing forces had radically different social compositions and, consequently, military organizations.

3) The opposing camps were driven by divergent ideological imperatives, which, in turn, shaped the quality of morale among the respective adversaries.

However, recent research in the Czech Republic and elsewhere is gradually starting to deconstruct these three fundamental pillars of the dichotomy.

War-wagons, Wagon-forts and Early Firearms

First and foremost, the primary role of Jan Žižka of Trocnov and the innovative approach to warfare based on war-wagons cannot be solely attributed to Žižka's military genius nor to the unique social conditions of the Taborite faction. Reinforced wagons used for defensive battles, manned by warriors armed with early firearms as well as traditional missile and hand-to-hand weapons, can be found in various military cultures across Latin Christendom, predating the Hussite wars.

At the Battle of Crécy in 1346, Edward III (1312–1377), King of England, deployed a defensive formation resembling a horseshoe for the English forces. The English army's wagons, along with additional carts captured during their campaign in France, formed a barricade protecting the flanks and rear of the army, leaving only a narrow front open. Each wagon, bound together by iron chains, was manned by archers. The wagons were reinforced with strong cloth to resist enemy crossbow quarrels. The English men-at-arms, engaging in hand-to-hand combat on foot, were positioned on the open narrow front facing the enemy. When the French attacked, these men-at-arms were supported by archers shooting from the wagons, and an

reformationis in capite et membris" *Tanulmányok a konstanzi zsinat 600. évfordulója alkalmából* [Studies on the Occasion of the 600th Anniversary of the Council of Constance] (Debrecen: Printart-Press Kft, 2014), pp. 432.

additional unit of archers hidden in a nearby wheat field sprang into action after the battle commenced. Matteo Villani (1283–1363), a chronicler of the period, even reported the English using a cannon (*bombarde*) to shoot into the French ranks and terrify their horses.⁹

By the end of the fourteenth century, primary sources increasingly describe the use of firearms mounted on wagons or specially designed carts. According to Jean Froissart (ca. 1337–1405), during the Battle of Beverhoudsveld in 1382, the army of Ghent deployed, among more traditional troops, “three or four small cannons, pointing forward, mounted on high carts ... with two or four wheels.”¹⁰ The ensuing barrage from these wagon-mounted cannons caused havoc among the forces of Bruges and Count Louis of Male (1330–1384). In Italy, similar developments were occurring, albeit with regional variations. At the Battle of Castagnaro in 1387, the *Cronaca Carrarese* reports that a Veronese army deployed three very large carts (each cart allegedly holding 144 small guns) against their Paduan foes.¹¹ It thus appears that well before the outbreak of the Hussite wars, a series of military experiments involving wagons and firearms were already taking place.

However, the most important conflict to mention in the context of pre-Hussite warfare is the “Great War” (1409–1411) between the Polish-Lithuanian alliance and the Order of the Teutonic Knights. It is this war that formed the principal experience of large-scale military operations for warriors who would subsequently form the building blocks of both Hussite and Catholic forces. Mercenaries from Bohemia, in fact, took part on both sides of the conflict. According to the most credible Polish source – *Cronica conflictus* – the Battle of Grunwald (1410) was initiated by the forces of the Teutonic Order by firing salvoes from their cannons (*pixides*). In addition, once the majority of fighting was done and the Order’s forces started to retreat from the battlefield, they made “a rampart out of their wagons” (*ex curribus quoddam propugnaculum facientes*). The Czech units that partook

⁹ Maurizio Campanelli, ‘The Anonimo Romano at his Desk: Recounting The Battle of Crécy in Fourteenth-Century Italy’, *The Medieval Chronicle* 9 (2014): 33–77. Campanelli’s study makes use of newly found Italian eye-witness reports on the battle and reconciles them with the well-known narratives from English and French sources.

¹⁰ Hall, *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe*, p. 49.

¹¹ Ibid. 47.

during this battle had thus gained ample combat experience with both artillery fire and a wagon-fort.¹²

Last but not least, Czech scholars Alena Černá and Petr Čornej, who worked on Czech manuscripts since the 1980s, have proven that the primary source evidence of Žižka's early battles such as Nekmír (1419) and Sudoměř (1420), from which the foundational historiography reconstructed Žižka's novel tactics, were written long after the Hussite wars during the reign of Jagellonian kings of Bohemia (1471-1526). The intention of the anonymous author (who finished his work in the closing years of the fifteenth century at the earliest) was to create a series of didactic texts on warfare during his own time period rather than compile a factual chronicle on the Hussite wars.

The texts are, in principle, fictive accounts of Žižka's military encounters that borrow elements from older traditions but ultimately serve as a kind of "best practices" for Czech military commanders of the Jagellonian period. Rather than speaking from an ego-perspective, the anonymous created a pseudo-historical narrative that lends itself credibility through the authority of Jan Žižka, who was – in the collective memory of that time – considered not only a legendary military commander but also a religious saint.

Furthermore, it appears that instead of being a desperate invention of badly equipped Taborites, war-wagons (and concomitantly wagon-forts) were likely present in the Bohemian royal army during the rule of King Wenceslas IV of Luxembourg (1361–1419). Peter Čornej provides a strong argument in this regard, highlighting the work of Konrad of Kyeser (1366-1405) in particular. An inventor with clear connections to the Bohemian court, Kyeser depicted two types of war-wagons in his illustrated work *Belifortis* (1410). The first type is a depiction of an open fighting platform for infantry.

¹² Sven Ekdahl, 'Quellenaussagen über die Taktik in der Tannenberg Schlacht', in Werner Paravicini et al (eds.), *Tannenberg – Grunwald – Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im Späten Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), p. 290 note 30, p. 297 note 69. On presence of warriors from Bohemia in the "Great War" see Uwe Tresp, 'Söldner aus den Ländern der Böhmisches Krone in den Kriegen zwischen dem Deutschen Orden und PolenLitauen zu Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts', in Werner Paravicini et al (eds.), *Tannenberg – Grunwald – Žalgiris 1410: Krieg und Frieden im Späten Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), pp. 135–158.

The second represents an enclosed fortified vehicle with internally installed cannons.¹³

Thus, the traditional argument that the Taborites, under Žižka's leadership, invented a whole new approach to warfare *de novo* cannot be sustained based on period evidence. Most probably, some innovations in warfare and incremental improvements in military technology took place during the Hussite wars. Yet, the extent of this evolution remains obscure due to the paucity of primary sources. At best, one could conclude that the Hussite coalition forces used wagons and firearms in defensively styled encounters. However, they were neither the first nor the only military culture to do so. Additionally, Hussites were not limited to defensive wagon-based tactics, as there is sporadic but credible evidence of offensive action by the heretics' infantry and cavalry units alike.¹⁴

Knights, Cavalry Forces and the Issue of Social Composition

The second premise of the dichotomy between Hussite and Crusading forces is connected to the differing social compositions of the respective armies and, consequently, troop composition. The stereotypical image of Hussite forces painted by formative historians, such as Palacký and Durdík, is that of farmers and urban poor who fought mostly on foot with sub-optimal equipment and military experience. In contrast, the crusaders enjoyed superiority in both the numbers and quality of their cavalry forces.

¹³ Petr Čornej, *Jan Žižka: život a doba husitského válečníka* [Jan Žižka: The Life and The Times of a Hussite Warrior] (Praha: Paseka, 2019), especially pp. 106-110, 181-189, 199-219, 535-541. On *Belifortis* and related manuscripts depicting period war-machines see: Rainer Leng, *Ars belli. Deutsche taktische und kriegstechnische Bilderhandschriften und Traktate im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002). While the two-wheeled field artillery made the "gun-wagons" somewhat redundant by the end of the fifteenth century, they still appear in visual and written sources of Central European origin, at least until the beginning of the early sixteenth century. Compare: Hall, *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe*, pp. 105-133, 157-200.

¹⁴ See a summary of source evidence in: Konrad Ziółkowski, *Husyckie wojska polne. Kształt i organizacja armii* [The standing armies of the Hussites: their structure and organization] PhD Dissertation, Adam Mickiewicz University. Poznań, 2015, pp. 193-223 (<http://hdl.handle.net/10593/13944>)

However, the retinues of Czech Hussite barons and their knights played a significant role in numerous military engagements against the Crusader forces. The cavalry units, particularly those of the lords of Kunštát and Poděbrady, fought alongside Žižka and other Hussite forces on many occasions. These noble cavalymen and their followers often bore resemblances to their Catholic counterparts in several respects. The Hussite nobility and their followers were organized in a modified form of classic feudo-vassallic ties. They also engaged in traditional “chivalric” combat, being well-armoured and mounted, wielding lances and swords from horseback.¹⁵ However, this represented a method of combat and military organization that was derided by both Palacký and Durdík as archaic, further challenging the overarching narrative of socially progressive and militarily innovative Hussites.

Ideological Imperatives

The final pillar of the dichotomy relates to the ideological imperatives that influenced the morale of the opposing forces. Palacký perceived the entire Hussite movement as a proto-democratic force, breaking away from the “medieval” dogmas that plagued the Catholic forces. According to Palacký, the Czech Hussites possessed unparalleled *élan*, born from their struggle for socio-political emancipation. From his perspective, it was only logical that an army of national volunteers would defeat the forces of individualistic feudal knights and conscripted peasants on almost every occasion.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 23-96, 168-192. In connection with the battle of Kutná Hora (1421), the Chronicle of Lawrence of Březová (composed around the late 1430s) mentions that the Prague urban militia and Žižka's own forces fought side by side with other Czech barons, lords, and knights – see Thomas A. Fudge, *Origins of the Hussite Uprising The Chronicle of Lawrence of Březová (1414–1421)* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp.253-254. As evidence from later period shows, cavalry units – both mobile light cavalry and more heavily armored men-at-arms alike, could easily be integrated in a wagon-based system of warfare. See Samuel Beňa, ‘Naučení o šikování jízdních, pěších i vozů z pera českého rytiera Václava Vlčka z Čenova (cca 1440 – 1500) ako vzácny prameň pre skúmanie taktiky jazdeckých oddielov na sklonku stredoeurópskeho stredoveku’ [„Instructions on the battle order of cavalry, infantry and battle wagons“ written by the Czech Knight, Václav Vlček from Čenov, as a rare source for exploring the tactics of the cavalry units in late medieval Central Europe.] *Vojenská história*, 3 (2020): 19-32.

Similarly, Durdík and other Marxist historians of the 1950s argued for the moral superiority of the Hussites over their opponents. Fighting as liberators of the oppressed, the Hussites continually sacrificed their lives and limbs for a vision of a classless society. This, in turn, helped them exhibit extraordinary courage. On the contrary, the timid and less cohesive armies of the crusaders were ruled by greedy privileged classes, and within the Catholic forces, military discipline and cohesion were not voluntarily self-imposed but rather coerced through the fear of punishment.¹⁶

However, these explanations fall apart when confronted with credible primary sources. Leading scholars on Hussite mentalities reveal that both groups primarily saw themselves as *milites Christi* – that is, God’s warriors. The issue of religious reform and life-after-death took the forefront in the Hussite manifestoes and founding charters of their military-political unions. The secular agenda of social justice and an egalitarian community, while present in sources pertaining to some of the radical factions, always took a secondary place.

While both the Hussites and the Catholics regarded themselves as God’s warriors, there were also marked differences. The Hussites saw their struggle as an effort to form an ideal Christian community that would please the eye of God and thus ultimately lead to the salvation of Christian souls. In contrast, the Catholic forces legitimized their crusades on the basis of the unity of the Church and the protection of believers from heresy – a spiritual danger that would lead to eternal damnation.¹⁷

¹⁶ Palacký, *Dějiny národu českého* III, pp. 536-542; Durdík, *Husitské vojenství*, pp. 63-69; Graus, ‘Recense: Husitské vojenství’, p. 212.

¹⁷ For a state of the art on this issue see Zdeněk Beran, ‘Válka a násilí jako sociální kód české pozdně středověké šlechty’ [Warfare and Violence as a Social Code amongst the Bohemian Late Medieval Nobility] *The Czech Historical Review* 2 (2017): 319-345. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the “peasant revolt” of the crusading leader György Dózsa (1514), mentioned earlier. As recent Hungarian historiography points out, the rebellion was motivated by religious convictions hand-in-hand with disaffection with noble political leadership, rather than economic exploitation and class struggle. See Norbert C. Tóth – Tibor Neumann (eds.), *Keresztesekből lázadók. Tanulmányok 1514 Magyarországról* [From Crusaders to Rebels: Studies on Kingdom of Hungary in 1514] (Budapest, MTA BTK, 2015).

Conclusion

The traditional narrative surrounding the uniqueness of Hussite art of war has been significantly influenced not only by the available primary source material but also by the political and ideological inclinations of foundational historians. While acknowledging the enduring value in the works of both František Palacký and Jan Durdík for contemporary scholarship, it is crucial to recognize the impact of their political convictions on the semi-historical narrative they constructed about the origin of Hussite warfare. This influence, coupled with their efforts, contributed to the creation of an exaggerated dichotomy between the allegedly progressive Hussite military forces and the conservative Catholic powers.

Looking back, one might be inclined to dismiss these foundational works as reflective of their respective historical contexts. However, the enduring influence of their narratives is apparent in the fact that elements of the traditional story regarding the genesis of Hussite warfare, featuring war-wagons, Jan Žižka of Trocnov, and the Taborites, endured for almost a century and a half with some variations. In fact, although recent scholarship has eroded and re-contextualized some of the elements of the traditional narrative, military historians and medievalists alike still need to reevaluate the Hussite wars from an unbiased, holistic perspective.