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**THE HUNGARIAN VIEW OF THE BATTLE OF MUHI (APRIL 11, 1241):
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Abstract: The victory of Batu's army in 1241 has been regarded by both Hungarian and foreign historians as a textbook example of flawed preparation and a badly-fought battle. This is where we run into a question that historians constantly return to: whether the Hungarian defeat was due to the decline of the light cavalry and the one-sided western-style tactics, or possibly the weakness of the heavy cavalry.

We know well enough from existing research, however, that the causes of the Hungarian defeat are not to be sought in the Hungarians' tactical inflexibility. Indeed, a new interpretation of sources containing accounts of the battle reveals signs of attempts to adapt combat tactics to the circumstances. The execution of the tactics on each side, however, were decisively influenced by differences in military technology, morale and quality of leadership. The Mongol commanders were able to order their disciplined troops to carry on the struggle even after incurring serious losses from Hungarian charges, and in the later phase of the battle, they had rested units at their disposal, while the Hungarian knights started to ignore the commands and withdraw from the battle as their combat position deteriorated, and the deployable troops of the Hungarian army gradually dwindled. It was therefore primarily the Mongols' discipline, experience and smoothly-running command system that put them ahead of the Hungarians, whose commanders lacked coordination and were not able to keep a firm grip on their troops. Consequently, when the position became critical, the potential for coherent action faded.

Keywords: Mongol Invasion, Medieval Hungarian Kingdom, battle of Muhi, wagon fort, eastern warfare, historiography of military history

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The victory of Batu's army in 1241 has been regarded by both Hungarian and foreign historians as a textbook example of flawed preparation and a badly-fought battle. This proved to be decisive in the further development of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, so Hungarian historians have always displayed a keen interest in the Mongol invasion in Hungary. But the results of their research remained rather unknown to international scientific literature because of the language barrier of Hungarian. The aim of this paper is a brief summary of the events leading up to the battle, to present the rich Hungarian military history literature on the subject after, and finally to analyze its findings with the help of the parallels and newer results.

One of the main targets of the European Mongol Invasion: the Kingdom of Hungary

In 1235, the sons of the great conqueror Chinggis Khan gathered together with other high leaders of the Great Mongol Empire at a council (*kurultai*) under Great Khan Ögödei in Karakorum, Mongolia. The *kurultai* resolved to send the Mongol armies to attack the peoples of Europe [38, p. 268–279]. The expedition was led by Chinggis Khan's grandson Batu, and his army was one of the largest in the world at that time, probably the best-equipped, and certainly the most experienced and disciplined [44, p. 31–53]. One of its main targets was Hungary, whose king, Béla IV, had extended his power, under the title “king of *Cumania*”, to the people who lived in the westernmost corner of the steppe. This had displeased the great khan: under the “legal interpretation” of the steppe, Ögödei had already conquered Cumans and regarded them as his servants¹.

Messages demanding the surrender by the Kingdom of Hungary fell on deaf ears, and there could be no doubt that Béla IV would elect to resist the Mongols. He was unshaken by the threats, and in 1239, even accepted the submission of Köten Khan, the highest leader of the Cumans of the Dnieper lands, who subsequently moved with his people into Hungary [35; 8; 32, p. 54–67]. For a brief period, Béla's court became a refuge for Central and Eastern European monarchs fleeing the Mongols. They clearly did not come to Hungary alone, but brought troops with combat experience.

Despite internal turmoil, Hungary's kings ruled with an iron hand throughout the first half of the thirteenth century, and disputes among their subjects did not substantially diminish their will to fight or sap the kingdom's military strength. This is strikingly reflected by the more than twenty foreign campaigns, including a crusade to the Holy Land, embarked on by the Hungarian army during the reigns of Emeric and Andrew II, a period of less than forty years [61; 60; 62; 29; 54].

The capture of Kiev in 1240 was the starting point for a new Mongol campaign, this time with Hungary as the objective. Batu's army took one town after another in the Kingdom of Galicia–Volhynia. The fall of Vladimir, the city at the centre of the circle, did not bring the winter campaign to an end. In Halych, the commander divided his army five ways and set the ambitious war aim of surrounding the Carpathian Basin. He sent Qadan, Büri and Böček to sweep through Hungarian-dominated *Cumania*, at western periphery of huge Cuman's lands in the

¹ The Great Khan's letter to Béla IV has survived in Julianus' report on his second journey, from 1237/1238 [50, p. 125; 7, p. 148–160].

area east and south of the Carpathians, now part of Romania, and to take its spiritual centre, the Cuman bishopric of Milkó (Mîlcoşul, Romania). Batu's brother Orda commanded the army sent into Poland [24; 40, p. 112–113], and the commander himself set off for Hungary through the Verecke Pass.

The bleak crags of the Carpathians, however, functioned as enormous castle walls defending the Kingdom of Hungary, and effectively held the Mongols up for several months in the winter of 1240–1241². The Mongols preferred to conduct their operations in the winter months, when the swamps and rivers that crisscrossed the lands of Central Europe were frozen over and thus passable. After taking Kiev in December 1240, however, they took four months to reach Hungary. Some historians have viewed the truly “ecological” defensive system that had functioned well for several centuries on Hungary's eastern and northern borders as being “outdated” by that time. Nevertheless, it was the main reason why the Mongols, despite their experience in winter warfare, were delayed for so long.

The invasion starts

In mid-February 1241, Béla IV, in council with the high nobles of the land, spent Lenten time in Óbuda, which by the first half of the thirteenth century had become a major royal residence [39, p. 29–41]. In early March, a messenger arrived from the border, sent by Palatine Dénes (Denis) of the Tomaj clan, and reported that the Mongols had reached the “Russian Gate” (the Verecke Pass) and torn down the barriers. The palatine's own force were unable to put up resistance, and only Dénes and a few of his knights managed to return to the king [6, p. 160–161].

Béla immediately sent the bishops and *ispáns*³ home to muster their forces and return. He took the soldiers that could be assembled from Esztergom and Székesfehérvár and marched to Pest, one of the main crossings of the Danube, to await the assembly of his forces on the left bank. Hardly three days after the first major encounter at Verecke, troops led by Shiban, the younger brother of the Mongol commander, reached the line of the Danube. Mongol raiders started appearing all over the Pest area, but the king – who seems to have had a good knowledge of the decoy tactics of steppe horsemen – prohibited his soldiers from making sorties from the town to pursue them [45, p. 88]. Having assembled his troops, Béla set off towards the Verecke Pass, but on April 11, 1241, the main army under his command suffered a decisive defeat at the River Sajó by the army of the leader of the Mongol Invasion, Batu [31; 59; 28, p. 269–310; 45, p. 87–92; 44, p. 123–141; 57].

² The blocking of the mountain passes remained a living tradition in later centuries. In 1621, for example, Gabriel Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania considered that the Crimean Tatars heading for Transylvania “certainly cannot come through [the passes], because they are blocked up, and when covered in snow, it is impossible for anyone to clear them until the next spring” [53, p. 339].

³ *Ispán* (Latin *comes*) was the leader of a castle district (a fortress and the royal lands attached to it) in medieval Hungary.

Traditional attempts to interpret the Battle of Muhi in the light of Hungarian strategic options

The victory of Batu's army in 1241 has been regarded by both Hungarian and foreign historians as a textbook example of flawed preparation and a badly-fought battle. Although opinions are divided on the reasons for the defeat, the authors of both early and recent historical accounts put the chief blame on inadequate leadership. In the traditional Hungarian view, the commanders were unable to break from the norms of Western-style warfare with armoured knights and adapt effectively to the Mongols' unfamiliar tactics, based on light cavalry. There have been repeated claims that at the Battle of Muhi, in the same way as at the Battle of Zimony of 1167 [46, p. 150–154], the Hungarians suffered from having abandoned the traditions of their ancestors [33; 9; 26, p. 470, 472; 42, p. 15–17]. Some historians have even called into doubt the existence of the wagon fort, of key importance in the account of Thomas of Split, and others repeatedly condemn this “Western” novelty that allegedly prevented the traditional – and highly esteemed – Hungarian cavalry from making an impact in the battle [13]⁴. The wagon fort could indeed be considered a “Western influence”: as László Veszprémy – after Köhler – has convincingly demonstrated, it was very widely used in Europe at this time [56, p. 390]⁵.

Did the Hungarian generals really make no attempt to adapt? In a 1981 essay, Csaba Csorba showed that Béla IV and those around him sensed the magnitude of the Mongol threat in good time, and did not stand idly by until 1241. There were major political and strategic initiatives, and although most of these came to nothing, the Mongol incursion did not find the country completely unprepared. It is also fairly certain that the Hungarian generals had a good knowledge of combat among the people of the steppe, although we do not know their opinions of it [15]. Despite these insights, Csorba, like his predecessors, took the view that the Hungarians did not attempt to make use of this knowledge in the battle by the Sajó. Several details given in the sources, however, contradict this traditional view⁶.

First of all, the Hungarians showed a remarkably consistent level of caution, as László Veszprémy has pointed out. When the Mongols were raiding around Pest, Béla prohibited sorties. The good sense of this command is underlined by the fate of the troops of Archbishop Ugrin of Kalocsa, and the king must have known that the weak groups of enemy horsemen appearing within range of the city were employing the typical steppe cavalry tactic of acting as bait for a trap [56, p. 389].

⁴ There was an entrenched view in nineteenth-century Hungarian historiography that when fighting the Byzantines at Zimony (now Zemun, Serbia) in the twelfth century, the Hungarians – as they did against the Mongols at Muhi in 1241 – came off worse because their leaders no longer made proper use of traditional light cavalry [45, p. 87–90].

⁵ The Western origins of the wagon fort, put forward by Ferenc Salamon, were disputed by József Thúry [52, p. 591].

⁶ The two most detailed accounts of the battle are the work of clergy – Master Roger of Nagyvárad (Oradea, Romania) and Archdeacon Thomas of Split, who could hardly be expected to be highly sophisticated in military affairs. They no doubt got their information from a non-clerical person or persons who had taken part in the battle, but their source was certainly not one of the main decision-makers. Evidence of this is, for example, that their accounts include many details of the mood and morale of the army, but very little on the intentions of the high command.

The Hungarian army was described by many as highly self-confident and attack-oriented. Several researchers of the battle have concluded, however, that subsequently, on the bank of the Sajó, they spent several days face-to-face with the Mongols without even trying to attack, just waiting within the protection of the wagon fort built around their camp⁷. According to the contemporary explanation for employing the wagon fort, the king did not allow his troops to pitch their tents undefended, in loose groups. This also indicates that Béla saw the possibility of a surprise attack, challenging the almost unanimous view of historians, following Master Roger, that the Hungarians did not believe that the river could be crossed anywhere except over the bridge. Further support for this is that the allegedly “un-suspecting” Hungarian commanders put a thousand soldiers on guard over the camp every night [6, p. 180–185].

Given the Mongol tactics, these precautionary measures seem to have been fully warranted, and prove that the king and his advisers were well aware of some of their enemy’s tactics. But why did the Hungarian army wait passively for several days? Lajos Négyesi considers that after pursuing the Mongols, the Hungarian army simply used the time at Muhi to rest after the long forced march and waited for their slow baggage train, because they had no idea that Batu’s army was very near [28, p. 298–303]. In my view, this waiting tactic is consistent with – besides the use of the wagon train – the mustering of a medieval army: the late medieval Polish historian Jan Długosz interpreted this to mean – as was also the later custom – that the troops arriving from the vicinity were waiting beside the Tisza, and the royal army also started out from Pest towards a pre-designated place; this is confirmed by the manoeuvres of the Bishop of Várad [20, p. 222; 47, p. 23–27].

Thomas of Split wrote that at the council of war on the eve of the Mongol Invasion, the Hungarian nobles were divided on how to organize resistance and could not agree whether to remain in passive defence in forts or make demonstrative displays of force. One side argued that they should retreat to the forts and leave the enemy to plunder and pillage [51, p. 252–257]. His account, however, leaves out what might have been the best reason for this view: the light horsemen of the steppe are only highly mobile until they acquire their booty. On their way home, weighed down with prisoners and looted animals, they are much more vulnerable. Centuries later, at the time of attacks by the Crimean Tatars, this was a widely-known experience in both Poland and Russia [14]. There are sources relating how the Hungarians themselves made use of this weakness to defeat the Pechenegs (Uzians?) in 1068 and the Nogai Tatars in 1285 [23; 49, p. 20–28]. In 1241, however, the Mongol threat was expected to be somewhat more a large plundering raid, and this tactic was unlikely to be effective. According to Thomas of Split, the other idea was to concentrate the country’s military strength, a demonstration of force that would in itself create alarm in the enemy. In its presently-known form, however, this viewpoint also seems incomplete, because it does not tell us what the Hungarians would have done if the Mongols did not react in the desired way.

There is no doubt that Béla attempted to gather the country’s forces at Pest and set off with the available troops in pursuit of the elusive Mongol forces. There is

⁷ Although Csorba challenged the credibility of the source concerning the wagon fort, not every point of his argument stands up, because the defensive wagon fort was not the invention of the Hussites, and is mentioned in more than one source for the Battle of Muhi [15, p. 59]. On the use of the wagon fort [31, p. 390].

every sign, therefore, that the council of war effectively decided on action similar to the second proposal. The king deliberately sought an encounter with the main enemy forces, and must therefore have had some plan for how to face up to Batu's warriors when this took place.

Costs and benefits

This is where we run into a question that historians constantly return to: whether the Hungarian defeat was due – apart from the possibly equal numbers on each side, or with slight one-sided numerical superiority,⁸ – to the decline of the light cavalry and the tactics based on it, or possibly the weakness of the heavy cavalry. One viewpoint is that the Hungarians had increasingly adjusted their tactics and weapons to European customs, and these were inapplicable to fighting the Mongols. In addition, the departure of the Cumans had deprived Béla IV's army of the only force capable of facing the enemy with its own methods. The other viewpoint is that it was the incomplete military reorganization and the resulting lack of heavy cavalry that lay behind the failure of the Hungarian army⁹.

We now know with some certainty that the county forces that made up the bulk of the Hungarian army still largely comprised mounted archers, and despite having them on his side, Béla IV was still unable to prevail against the Mongols [43]¹⁰. The Cuman auxiliaries would undoubtedly have improved the balance of numbers¹¹, but whether their tactics would have enabled them – in combination with the other light cavalry of the Hungarian army – to stand up to the army of Batu in Hungary does not seem at all certain. Historians who blame the lack of light-cavalry manoeuvring tactics seem to forget that Béla's forces on the Muhi battlefield were facing the greatest army of Eurasia at the time. The Mongols were masters of all light cavalry manoeuvres and ploys, and certainly outstripped their enemy in the matter of discipline. By 1241, all of the peoples of the steppe had bowed to them. A Hungarian decision to seek open battle against the Mongols with cavalry that was probably of lower strength and certainly of lower combat value could hardly have been taken in full confidence of victory.

The light-cavalry-based Mongol tactics also hindered the use of Western-type heavy cavalry. Although the Mongols also had heavily-armed units, these were

⁸ Our present knowledge casts serious doubt on the figures in the medieval chronicles of several tens of thousands or even a hundred thousand for the two sides. We thus cannot be sure that the independent figures given by chronicler on the Mongol side – who exaggerated the greatness of Batu's victory – and by Thomas of Split – who was decidedly antagonistic towards Béla IV – give an accurate picture of Hungarian numerical superiority in the battle [36, p. 54–55; 44, p. 69–72, 123, 126].

⁹ Veszprémy's insights into this old dispute [56, p. 387].

¹⁰ A brief account of the Styrian-Hungarian war of 1233 puts a new angle on the foreign reports that started to proliferate in the second half of the thirteenth century, describing the Hungarian armies as consisting of mounted archers [41, p. 491]. Several Western European sources also mention the Hungarian light cavalry in the first half of the 13th century [12 p. 139, n. 57].

¹¹ András Pálóczi Horváth has used data on lifestyle and settlements to challenge the credibility of Master Roger' claim that the incoming Cumans consisted of 40,000 families [32, p. 52–53]. But his calculations perhaps do not take proper account of the Cumans' stay in the Balkans between 1241 and 1246. In 1241, the Nicean Empire alone took 10,000 Cuman families into service [4, p. 188].

presumably lower in strength than their Hungarian counterparts and employed different tactics. In close combat, they could hardly have withstood the superiority of the heavily armoured European fighters. But the Mongols were extremely mobile and expertly-led, and how could they be forced into close combat with a European army if they sensed the circumstances for entering battle to be unfavourable? The view that a large heavy cavalry would in itself have been sufficient to decide the battle in the Hungarians' favour thus seems unwarranted. The claim that the superiority of West European heavy cavalry would have been proved on the battlefield is simply erroneous. There was only one such significant encounter during the Mongol Invasion: the Silesian forces consisted of heavily armoured knights to a much greater extent than the Hungarian army, but at Wahlstatt¹² in April 1241, a detachment of Mongols dealt them a devastating defeat [10; 11].

For the Hungarians to have a hope of a successful encounter, they had to take up a position which the Mongols were highly likely to attack.

The sources record that the Hungarians set up their camp near the Sajó so that they could keep control of the only nearby bridge over the river. There is no sign, however, that they wanted to prevent the enemy crossing at all costs. The Sajó was in flood following the spring rains, or the flood had only recently subsided, and even lightly-armed horsemen could not swim their horses across the river on the lower stretch. There were negotiable fords on the upper stretch, however, even in this period. It is unlikely that knowledge of these was confined to the Mongols, with their lack of local knowledge, although it is possible that the Hungarians did not think that there was a usable ford within one or two days' march. Neither side attempted to demolish the bridge, although I do not think this necessarily reflects a mutual intention to attack. On the contrary, an attack by either side would have to the advantage of the other, and both may have attempted to encourage the other side to cross.

The Hungarians could have forced the attacking Mongols into close combat while crossing, and if the enemy did become established on the right bank, the battle would have been fought on the area around the Hungarian camp. With the river at their backs, the Mongols would not have had the space to employ their favourite tactic of feigned retreat followed by counter-attack, and could not have prepared ambushes in the area controlled by the Hungarians.

The well-chosen battlefield did not in itself relieve the Hungarian commanders of their troubles, because neither the tactics they had previously employed against the Germans and the Bohemians nor those they had employed against the Byzantines could have been effective against the Mongols [45, p. 82–87]. Encirclement manoeuvres performed by a mobile and versatile enemy demanded above all a strong rearguard that could provide sufficient defence even when the combat forces were surrounded. This could have been provided by the wagon fort set up around the Hungarian camp. In addition to providing protection against surprise night attacks, the chained-up wagons could have served as a secure base if the combat units fighting in the vicinity did not venture too far away [46, p. 146–150]. They could also have provided troops exhausted from combat a secure place to replenish and reorganize their lines before a new sortie. Even in case of defeat, they could have served as a refuge. In 1223, the army of the prince of Kiev successfully de-

¹² Also known as Liegnitz, now Legnica, Poland.

fended themselves for three days against the Mongols in a similarly fortified camp at the Battle of Kalka¹³.

Surrounding a camp with wagons – contrary to popular belief [55, p. 69–70] – provided an excellent fortified position in open battle even for the mounted archers of the steppe. In the middle of the eleventh century, the Pechenegs, for example, frequently fought from a wagon-fort base: “As the Pechenegs awaited the Byzantine attack, making a wall around them with their wagons, some Byzantine columns went at speed and with loud cries towards the barbarian camp. The barbarian archers, inflicting wounds with their arrows, threw the horses of their enemies [the Byzantines – *JBSz*] into panic and forced the Byzantines to flee in humiliation. [...] There was another encounter when the Byzantines suffered a similar defeat: the Byzantines fled and the Pechenegs persistently pursued them” [22, p. 103]. The Pechenegs repeated these tactics later – in 1087 and 1091 against Emperor Alexios I and, finally, against Emperor Ioannes II in 1122. The Byzantines fought in a similar way to the Pechenegs, mainly with cavalry, and probably had the advantage in close combat, but they could not easily reach the archers who were shooting from behind the improvised defensive line. Ioannes II only managed to break through the line of wagons by deploying the Varangian Guard infantry [5; 21, p. 15–16]. The Cumans also used wagon forts in their defensive battles against the Russians, and the use of this improvised defence was customary among the Turks of Asia Minor during their appearances in Europe in the fourteenth century [30, p. 164; 17, p. 98]. It is also clear from some later examples that the wagon fort did not limit the mobility of the cavalry in every case¹⁴.

Furthermore, we can infer from sources on steppe warfare the possibility that the defences around the Hungarian camp at Muhi consisted of more than just an improvised wagon fort. Thomas of Split wrote, “they were therefore arranged as if they were all in a confined pen, with their wagons and shields set up all around, as it were to defend the camp” [51, p. 261–263]. A description by the Persian author Gardízi records that the tenth-century Khazars also surrounded their camp with shields, fixed with poles that belonged to some of the soldiers’ equipment. They could set up such a wall of shields very quickly, in less than one hour [18, p. 168]¹⁵. The same method, using lances driven into the ground around the camp, was employed in the Byzantine – and perhaps the Russian – armies, and somewhat similarly, the Ottoman Turks set up shields to fortify their camps in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries [27, p. 350–354]¹⁶.

Perhaps most surprisingly, considering the stereotyped views of the Battle of Muhi, is that the Mongols themselves used temporary camp fortifications in some of their battles. When one division of the Mongol army intent on conquering the Near East besieged the castle of al-Nira (Birecik, Turkey) on the upper course of

¹³ Its successful use against the Mongols has been pointed out by Olchváry [31, p. 510–511].

¹⁴ An excellent example of this is Polish military art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [47, p. 88–89].

¹⁵ It may have been a similar temporary Hun camp fortification that Jordanes described in connection with the Battle of Catalunum [19, p. 83–84]. For further examples [34, p. 198–199].

¹⁶ The Russian example: “The Russians the great fields / enclosed with their red shields” [16, p. 12]. The Ottomans probably used a similar defensive arrangement in the Battle of Mohács of 1526 [47, p. 100–101].

the Euphrates in 1272, one 5000-strong Mongol detachment dismounted to build a palisade (*sibe* in Mongol) to fortify their position near the only nearby ford across the river and prevent the numerically-superior Egyptian Mamluk army – which was marching to relieve the castle – from crossing the Euphrates [3, p. 129–131].

The tactical advantages of the wagon fort, however, only took effect in the appropriate combat situation. On the bank of the Sajó, Béla does not seem to have learned of the enemy's strategic encirclement manoeuvres and thus did not worry about the pressure of time. If he had known that his country was surrounded, he would no doubt have urged the clash with the main forces of the enemy and would not have waited for days in the camp. The left wing of the Mongols had only broken through to Transylvania in the east at the end of March, however, about the same time the royal army set off from Pest, and their right wing must have been in Silesia at the time of the battle. Béla was therefore not necessarily obliged to engage in a decisive battle with the Mongols in order to arrest their advance, while Batu had to fight Béla's army if he was to reach his objective of conquering the country.

As events showed, the Mongols did not lack the requisite flexibility, and Batu's experienced commanders used these few days to find a way of preventing the Hungarian army from going into action. The sources, however, do not permit a confident reconstruction of every detail, although they do make clear that the Mongols planned surprise encircling manoeuvres to surround the Hungarian army camped for the night behind their fortified enclosure. To dampen Hungarian vigilance, the first Mongol units started across the bridge in the middle of night; these were easily repulsed by a few well-equipped Hungarian units [51, p. 262–263].

That a fleeing Russian prisoner revealed the plan of attack to the Hungarians hardly implies that they were not keeping a close eye on the vicinity of the bridge in any case or that without this escapee they would not have learned in good time of the crossing by the Mongol troops. (Neither can we exclude the possibility that Mongols sent the Russian escapee to Béla's camp to prepare the Hungarians for an early success by informing them of the night action, thus boosting their sense of security before the decisive dawn attack.) [51, p. 262–263].

At dawn, the best time for surprise attacks, the main Mongol forces started out over the bridge and along the lower and upper stretches of the Sajó. They made a serious miscalculation, however, because the difficulties of crossing the lower stretch of the river caused the right wing, under the command of the author of the plan, Subutai, to arrive on the battlefield late, putting Batu's other forces in a very difficult position.

The Hungarian guard and the armoured unit held in readiness for night defence of the camp could no longer – because of the deployment of Mongol mangonels – stop the troops coming over the bridge, but they slowed their advance, winning time for the preparation and deployment of the rest of the army. By seven o'clock, the Mongols had put a ring around the Hungarian camp, but could not prevent a breakout by the Hungarians, who were thus able to deploy increasing numbers of troops. Béla's knights fought very hard, and seem to have forced their enemy into close combat, inflicting unusually severe losses on the heavily-armoured elite troops that the Mongols used for frontal penetration. Batu was considering a general retreat, but Subutai doggedly held out for fulfilment of his original plan [1, p. 33; 44, p. 37]. The left wing did eventually arrive during the morning, and either

because its attack was unexpected or simply because its rested troops provided a boost on the Mongol side, Hungarian resistance broke around midday. Béla's knights started to leave the field, and eventually the king and his commanders also fled [44, p. 135–141].

The survivors of the battle no doubt sought the reasons for the defeat and the persons responsible. The obvious scapegoat was the king himself, whose unusual orders could – in the words put into the mouth of the enemy commander – be blamed for the defeat. “Rejoice, comrades, because although there are very many of these people, they do not escape from us, because they are governed by short-sighted counsel. I have seen that they are crowded like sheep into a pen”, is what Thomas of Split claimed were the words of Batu Khan, standing on a hill – never since found – on the left bank of the Sajó [51, p. 262–263; 31, p. 505, n. 1; 28, p. 302].

The balance sheet of the battle

Historians have naturally, given the deficiencies of the sources, produced varying reconstructions of the events. The chronological order outlined here is also no more than a hypothesis, because there is insufficient information available to place events in precise order [28]. There are serious discrepancies even between the location given in contemporary accounts and that proposed in reconstructions. The Hungarians' camp may have lain in a place other than that previously identified by historians [57, p. 72–75; 58, p. 138–140]. Remarkably, two new translations of the Chinese biography of Subutai, the author of the Mongol battle plan, have been published recently. Both have attempted to interpret the name of the river – Kuoning/Huoning – given as the site of the battle. According to the joint work by Stephen Pow and Jing-jing Liao, the old reading of the Chinese characters that stand for the name of the river corresponds to the Hernád, which runs into the Sajó nearby [37 p. 65, n. 142], while Sándor P. Szabó argues for a stream called Kerengő between the Sajó and the Hejő [48, p. 270–275]. (It is difficult to say more on the location before the completion of new investigations involving a historical-topographic study, which started in autumn 2018 [25].)

We know well enough from existing research, however, that the causes of the Hungarian defeat are not to be sought in the Hungarians' tactical inflexibility. Indeed, a new interpretation of sources containing accounts of the battle reveals signs of attempts to adapt combat tactics to the circumstances. The execution of the tactics on each side, however, were decisively influenced by differences in military technology, morale and quality of leadership. The Mongol commanders were able to order their disciplined troops to carry on the struggle even after incurring serious losses from Hungarian charges, and in the later phase of the battle, they had rested units at their disposal, while the Hungarian knights started to ignore the commands and withdraw from the battle as their combat position deteriorated, and the deployable troops of the Hungarian army gradually dwindled. It was therefore primarily the Mongols' discipline, experience and smoothly-running command system that put them ahead of the Hungarians, whose commanders lacked coordination and were not able to keep a firm grip on their troops. Consequently, when the position became critical, the potential for coherent action faded.

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ВЕНГЕРСКИЙ ВЗГЛЯД НА БИТВУ ПРИ МОХИ (11 АПРЕЛЯ 1241 Г.): НОВОЕ ВИДЕНИЕ ИСТОРИОГРАФИЧЕСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ

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Аннотация: Венгерские и зарубежные историки считают победу армии Бату в 1241 году примером недостаточно подготовленной и плохо проведенной битвы, словно сошедшим со страниц учебников. И мы вновь сталкиваемся с вопросом, к которому постоянно возвращаются историки: было ли поражение Венгрии связано с упадком легкой кавалерии и односторонней тактикой западного стиля или же слабостью тяжелой кавалерии.

Существующие исследования подтверждают, что причина не кроется в отсутствии у венгров тактической гибкости. Основываясь на новой интерпретации источников, содержащих описание битвы, можно сказать об их попытках адаптировать тактику боя к сложившимся обстоятельствам. Однако выполнение избранной тактики каждой из сторон зависело от различий в военной технике, морального духа и каче-

ства руководства. Монгольские командиры могли приказать своим дисциплинированным войскам продолжить борьбу даже после того, как понесли серьезные потери от венгерских войск, а на более позднем этапе битвы они сохранили контроль над войсками, в то время как венгерские рыцари начали игнорировать команды и бежали с поля битвы, когда положение дел ухудшилось, в результате чего развертываемые войска венгерской армии постепенно сокращались. Именно монгольская дисциплина, опыт и отлаженная система командования позволили им превзойти венгров, командование которых не имело координации и не могло надежно контролировать свои войска. Следовательно, когда ситуация стала критической, не осталось возможности действовать согласованно.

Ключевые слова: монгольское нашествие, средневековое Венгерское королевство, битва при Мохи, вагенбург, восточное военное дело, историография военной истории

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