

King Matthias and the Towns of the Realm

In this paper, after a short introductory survey of urban development in medieval Hungary, I will focus on the urban policy of King Matthias Hunyadi, who reigned between 1458 and 1490.

I. General features of urban development in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary:

By the mid-fifteenth century, when Matthias became king of Hungary, the towns of the realm had a past reaching back several hundred years. However, it should be stressed already at this point that in the history of urban settlements two special phases can be distinguished: the period that preceded, and the one that followed the beginning of the thirteenth century. Urban-type settlements in Hungary functioned as important economic centres already before the beginning of the thirteenth century, but they did not enjoy real legal autonomy. This is why these settlements are referred to in recent scholarly literature as *pre-urban* or *proto-urban towns*. Among them were royal seats: Esztergom, Fehérvár, Óbuda, seats of archbishoprics and bishoprics: Esztergom, Kalocsa, Pécs, Eger, Csanád (present-day Cenad, Romania), Várad (present-day Oradea, Romania) etc., and comital castles: Csongrád, Bács (present-day Bač, Serbia), Vasvár etc. where the royal officials of the counties (the *comites*) had their seats. (Fügedi, 1981: 238-335; Gerevich, 1990; Szűcs, 1993: 50-61, 223-76; Kubinyi, 1996: 36-46.)

It should also be noted that such pre-urban towns frequently had *hospes* and/or *Ishmaelite and Jewish* communities. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the *hospites*, i.e. the foreign guests, came primarily from Flanders, North-France (Walloons), Lorraine and Lombardy. Since they were, except the Flemish settlers, Romance speaking people, the Hungarian sources in the Latin language referred to them as *Latini*, *Gallici* and *Italici*. They were followed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Germans (*Teutonici* and *Saxones*). From the second part of the thirteenth century German ascendancy became obvious in most of the towns of the Hungarian Kingdom. The presence of the Latin guests, however, cautions us that town laws in

Hungary should not be treated as a pure German law, and in the evolution of Hungarian urban liberties and laws a mixed foreign impact can be traced. (Fügedi, 1981: 398-418; Györffy, 1972: 37-44; Székely, 1972: 45-72; Kubinyi, 1975: 527-66; Petrovics, 1993: 267-71; Engel, 2001: 112.)

It follows from the facts presented above that one particular and characteristic feature of medieval Hungarian urban development is that foreign ethnic groups, mostly *hospites*, i.e. the guests, contributed to a great extent to the creation of towns, once the necessary level of economic and social development was reached. Their presence in Hungarian pre-urban and real towns is sometimes testified by direct evidence, i.e. information provided by royal charters and narrative sources, while in other cases we have only indirect evidence, such as toponyms. Walloon settlers seem to have favoured, besides Esztergom and Fehérvár, that is the early royal seats and most important economic centres of the realm, episcopal residences e.g. Pécs, Eger and Várad/Oradea. The best examples of such pre-urban towns where the Latin settlers lived in a separate suburb or street named *vicus* or *civitas Latinorum* are provided by Esztergom, Fehérvár, Eger and Várad/Oradea. It also has to be stressed that the Latin community had a great role in the integration and to some extent in the assimilation of new settlers. The Latin settlers of Fehérvár, possibly at some time during the reign of István III (1162-1172), were granted extensive privileges which were confirmed by Béla IV in 1237. One of the liberties of the settlers of Fehérvár laid down: ...'whichever *hospites* would like to move over to them and live with them, should be given forever the same liberties which those enjoy'. (Kubinyi, 1997: 29-30; Petrovics, 2009.)

In contrast with the Latin guests, the immigration of the Germans, in the long run, turned out to be much more significant. In Transylvania and in the Spiš (Szepes, Zips) region, located in the north-eastern part of the realm, where they were invariably called Saxons, their settlements formed large and contiguous blocks. Besides these regions, the towns of the western borderland, for example, Pozsony (Pressburg, Bratislava), Nagyszombat (Tyrnau, Trnava) and Sopron (Ödenburg), just to mention the most important ones, the mining towns and, of course, Buda, the medieval capital of the realm, were also places where Germans lived in large numbers in the Late Middle Ages. (Engel, 2001: 61, 113-15, 256-7, 260-2; Petrovics, 2009.)

The thirteenth century, primarily the years following the Mongol invasion of 1241/2, brought several serious changes in the socio-political and economic life of the kingdom. This is the time when Hungary, parallel with the decline of the trading contacts with Kiev and Constantinople, became an integral part of the western European economy. Links tying Hungary to Germany and Italy had become ever closer. Surprisingly enough, after the Mongol invasion only the German

immigration continued. Numerous waves of Germans arrived from the region of the Rhine and the Mosel rivers, who, in Hungary, were also named Saxons. (Szűcs, 1993: 223-41; Szende, 1999: 446.; Engel, 2001: 112-15; Petrovics, 2009.)

It should also be noted that from the thirteenth century onwards the term *hospes* primarily referred not to foreign immigrants, but to such persons who during the process of colonization had acquired a special legal status, but were not necessarily of foreign origin. This fundamental change meant that anybody enjoying that special legal status – regardless of ethnic origins – could be referred to as a *hospes*. Thus, in addition to the Latins and the Germans, Hungarians, Armenians and Slavic people were also among the *hospites*. The dominant impact of guests in the evolution of the burghesses is demonstrated, among others, by the fact that the most commonly used phrase of the charters referring to burghers was: *cives et hospites*. Nevertheless, the term *civis* was at first used in a narrower sense, alluding solely to the most influential group of urban society, that is, primarily to the *iurati cives* (members of the town councils). (Petrovics, 1999: 528)

It is also a sign of changes that conscious royal policy aiming at fostering urban development in Hungary dates from the 1230s. It was King Béla IV (1235-1270) who issued the first charters securing urban privileges to localities in Hungary: Fehérvár: 1237, Nagyszombat (present-day Trnava, Slovakia): 1238. The consequences of the Mongol invasion accelerated this royal policy, as a result of which real towns, that is settlements which enjoyed wide-ranging legal autonomy, came into being. However, the primary aim of Béla IV in fostering urban development was rather to give shelter to the population in the event of a new Mongol attack, than to strengthen the towns in the economic sense. King Béla's successors, including even the ill-fated Ladislas IV or Ladislas the Cuman (1272-1290) also followed this policy, but to a lesser degree. It was the fourteenth century, to be more precise the period between 1323 and 1382, that is the consolidated reign of Charles I and Louis I, when the number of charters containing urban privileges increased significantly again. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries some 50 settlements were granted a royal charter in Hungary. This number refers, on the one hand, only to those localities which were situated in Hungary proper, that is north of the River Drava (in other words Dalmatian and Slavonian towns are not included in this number), and, on the other hand, which were not ecclesiastical centres ("episcopal towns"). (Szűcs, 1993: 50-61; Petrovics, 1997: 40-43; Engel, 2001: 111-113; Petrovics, 2009a.) At this point it should be stressed that the privileges granted by the king could not compensate for the lack of a favourable geographical location. Consequently, many royal foundations turned out later to be poorly situated economically, and were unable to develop despite their extended privileges. In other words: these localities – sooner or later – dropped out of the network of Hungarian towns.

Another particular and characteristic feature of town development is that the nature of urbanisation in mediaeval Hungary was determined by two factors: one of them being the production and export of gold and the other the import of luxury goods. The network of towns that came to life in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was essentially created by these economic circumstances. The most important towns emerged at places where consumption was concentrated: in the middle of the kingdom where the royal court resided, along the frontier where merchants from abroad entered the kingdom, and in the mining regions where precious metals were produced. Consequently, Hungary's urban network had a strange, semicircular shape, which more or less followed the ranges of the Carpathian mountains. It is very conspicuous, but in the light of the above facts not surprising, that within this semicircle in the southern part of Transdanubia, on the Great Hungarian Plain, and in the Temes region, towns can hardly be found. (Szűcs, 1993: 266-76; Petrovics, 1999: 529; Kubinyi, 2000: 11; Engel, 2001: 247-53.) There are only two localities in this area which were towns of outstanding importance: Szeged and Pécs, the latter being, in fact, an episcopal seat. (Kubinyi, 2000: 85-86; Kubinyi 2001: 43-52.) However, the case of Pécs, or rather that of Nagyvárád/Oradea shows that an economic upswing did not necessarily depend upon the granting of a privilege. Despite the fact that Nagyvárád/Oradea had neither walls, nor real self government, and its inhabitants were not cives, but, in fact, the tenants of the bishop and the chapter residing in the town, thanks to its favourable geographical location, it, nevertheless, became one of the most important trade centres of the realm. It had the right to hold 9 annual fairs, plus one in Olaszi and another in Vadkert, which makes altogether 11 annual fairs in the agglomeration of Várád/Oradea. (Kubinyi 2000: 92.)

The urban network of fifteenth century Hungary was constituted, above all, by 30 localities which were regarded as royal free towns. Among them were the mining towns: Selmec-, Körmöc-, Besztercebánya, Új-, Baka-, Béla-, Libetbánya (present-day Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica, Banská Bystrica, Nová Baňa, Pukanec, Banská Belá, L'ubietová - all in Slovakia), and Nagybánya (present-day Baia Mare, Romania), and the towns of the Transylvanian Saxons: Nagyszeben, Brassó, Beszterce, Medgyes, Szászsebes, Szászváros, Segesvár (present-day Sibiu, Braşov, Mediaş, Bistriţa, Sebeş, Oraştie, Sighişoara - all in Romania). However, the most illustrious group of the royal free towns was formed by the so called free royal or tavernical towns, represented by the 8 walled localities that came under the jurisdiction of the tavernical bench, headed by the *magister tavernicorum*: Buda, Sopron, Pozsony/Bratislava, Nagyszombat/Trnava, Kassa, Bártfa, Eperjes (present-day Košice, Bardejov, Prešov - all in Slovakia). Pest, the eighth town, due to its rapid development, could join this group, in all probability, in 1481, *i.e.* during King

Matthias' reign. Another group was formed by those towns which could appeal to the court of the *personalis*, i.e. to the *sedes personalita*: Esztergom, Székesfehérvár, Lőcse, Szakolca, Kiszseben (present-day Levoča, Skalica, Sabinov – all in Slovakia), and Szeged. (Engel, 2001: 254-5; Kubinyi, 2005: 9-10.)

Besides the ones, mentioned above, there were many other towns in the realm, but these had already passed under private lordship, their inhabitants were not, therefore, considered free burghers. Some of these towns were fortified, as were Kőszeg, Kismarton, Szalónak (present-day Eisenstadt and Stadtschlaining, Austria), Trencsén, Beckó, Kézsmárk (present-day Trenčín, Beckov, Kežmarok – all in Slovakia), Siklós, or episcopal towns, therefore they were referred to as *civitates*, though, in fact, they were not free towns. However, the overwhelming majority of the towns belonged to the category of *oppida*, i.e. they were unwalled localities and were subject to seignorial jurisdiction. Some of them were under the seigneurie of the king: Komárom (present-day Komárno, Szlovákia), Tata, Nagymaros, or the queen: Óbuda, Ráckeve, Miskolc, Beregszász (present-day Beregove, Ukraine), and the 5 towns of Máramaros (present-day Maramureş, Romania) salt-region, others were subjected to secular or ecclesiastical lords. (Engel, 2001: 254-5.)

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from the facts presented above is that the town in the legal sense of the word should not be confused with the more general idea of the town as a commercial centre, or to be more precise as a central place. It was András Kubinyi who made the concept of central places fit Hungarian circumstances, and with the help of his research results it can easily be established how urbanized a certain settlement was. It seems that there were altogether 1200 central places in fifteenth century Hungary, of which only 180 to 200 can be regarded as urban type localities. However, the overwhelming majority of these places, approximately 150 settlements can be regarded as a town only in the economic sense of the world. To put it another way: central places can be ranked into seven categories, of which only the localities belonging to the first four categories can be regarded – functionally – as towns. In order to demonstrate Kubinyi's research results we are going to mention a few examples for the four categories. The numbers in brackets are the numbers that a locality could gain as a central place:

Category I: Towns of primary importance:

Buda (55); Pozsony/Bratislava (49); Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca (45); Kassa/Košice (43); Székesfehérvár (43); Szeged (42); Pest (41); Sopron (41); Várad/Oradea (41).

Category II: Towns of secondary importance:

Pécs (39); Esztergom (38); Bártfa/Bardejov (33), Eperjes/Prešov (32).

Category III: Towns of minor importance and oppida with major urban functions:
Nagybánya/Baia Mare (29); Lippa/Lipova (28); Debrecen (28);
Kismarton/Eisenstadt (22)

Category IV: Oppida with medium urban functions:
Kőszeg (19); Visegrád (17); Kiszeben/Sabinov (16) (Kubinyi, 2000: 7-94; Kubinyi, 2005: 17-31.)¹

II. The towns of the Hungarian Kingdom in the fifteenth century

After this short survey of the history of towns in medieval Hungary, it is possible now to proceed to fifteenth century developments, particularly to those which occurred during the reign of King Matthias.

It is, obviously, a fifteenth century phenomenon that a group of towns lying close beside each other, or having the same sort of economy, formed alliances. Among them the most important were the union of the tavernical towns (Buda, Pest, Sopron, Pozsony/Bratislava, Nagyszombat/Trnava, Kassa/Košice, Bártfa/Bardejov, Eperjes/Prešov), the union of the seven Lower-Hungarian mining towns: Selmec-, Körmöc-, Beszterce-, Új-, Baka-, Béla-, Libetbánya (present-day Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica, Banská Bystrica, Nová Baňa, Pukanec, Banská Belá, L'ubietová – all in Slovakia), the league of five north-east Hungarian towns (Kassa/Košice, Lőcse/Levoča, Eperjes/Prešov, Bártfa/Bardejov, Kiszeben/Sabinov), and the Saxon towns of Transylvania: Nagyszeben, Brassó, Beszterce, Medgyes, Szászsebes, Szászváros, Segesvár (present-day Sibiu, Braşov, Mediaş, Bistriţa, Sebeş, Oraştie, Sighişoara - all in Romania). The towns belonging to the different alliances brought into accord their legal systems and their decisions in response to royal demands, but they tended to put their own interests in front of the common causes when economic matters were concerned. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, the different alliances of towns did not co-operate with each other, and the pre-eminence of royal free towns meant the discrimination against and legal inferiority of others.

King Matthias fostered mostly the development of the tavernical towns, but he also promoted the formation of regional alliances of towns. He played a decisive role e.g. in the emergence of the 'University of the Saxons' (*Universitas Saxonum*), the process of which had been accomplished by 1486. The formal league of the five north-east Hungarian towns, as well as that of the seven Lower-Hungarian mining

¹ The complete list of central places is on page 30.

towns also came into being during the reign of King Matthias. (Kubinyi, 1979: 10-11, 20-21; Mályusz, 1984: 169-73; Szende, 1999: 447.)

Concerning the appearance of towns in political life, scholars usually refer to the so-called urban decree of King Sigismund from 1405, which, as later research has pointed out, was issued, in fact, not at a diet, but at a meeting initiated by the king as the chief overlord of the towns. (DRMH Series I, vol. 2: 35-45, 188-93; Kubinyi, 1979: 9.) The regular attendance of towns at the sessions of the realm's supreme legislative organ can be proved from 7 May 1445, and it can be demonstrated with some gaps until 1526.² King Matthias invited the towns to the diets regularly only until 1464, that is until the consolidation of royal authority, but between 1464 and 1490 he did it only once, in 1475.

As King of Hungary, Matthias convened his first diet on 28 May 1458, since he wanted to issue his inaugural decree, which clearly demonstrates the struggle for power between him and his uncle, Michael Szilágyi, Regent of Hungary. The towns were invited to, but not obliged to appear in this diet. Royal favour towards the towns is clearly demonstrated by the 33rd article of the decree issued then, which ordered that those cities (*civitates*) and market towns (*oppida*) which previously had belonged to the Holy Crown, but had unlawfully been alienated, should be returned to the Crown.³

In late 1458 King Matthias called another diet in order to discuss primarily the defence of the realm, since the fortress of Golubac on the Lower Danube (Serbia) had fallen into Ottoman hands and the monarch had not been able to relieve it with his summer campaign. This was, perhaps, the first time that the towns were not only invited to the diet, but also requested to send their seals with their deputies. The reason for this was, probably, that Matthias wanted the deputies of the towns to confirm an agreement on subsidies. Despite the fact that several invitations to cities have survived, surprisingly enough, the decree of the diet does not mention the deputies of the cities. It refers, in the usual manner, only to the prelates, the barons and the deputies of the counties. (DRMH Series I, vol. 3: 9-14; Kubinyi 1979: 22.)

² DRMH Series I, vol. 2: 106-11, 225-28. Surprisingly enough, the towns are referred to in the law of 1445 as '*civitatenses*' i.e. '*townsmen*'; Kubinyi, 1979: 21-6; Engel 2001: 288. Recently András Kubinyi has debated with József Gerics on the representation of towns at the sessions of the diets. See Gerics, 2005: 353-66, and Kubinyi, 2007: 471-492.

³ "Then, that all castles, cities, market towns or rights of whatever kind, that is, the thirtieth, tolls, the fiftieth, the chamber's profit, the *mardurina* and any other proprietary rights that were unjustly and unlawfully alienated from the holy royal crown after the death of the said King Albert, be they in anyone's hands by any title, should be remitted, surrendered, and restored to the king's hands under the same penalty of perpetual high treason by the above set date of the coming feast of Saint Michael the Archangel." DRMH Series I, vol. 3: 6.

It seems that King Matthias, especially after 1464, did not invite the towns to the diet, but negotiated with them separately. Despite his efforts aiming at establishing an independent chamber for the royal free towns that would have decided in the matter of tax-paying, due to lack of co-operation from the part of the towns, King Matthias failed to realize his plan. (Kubinyi, 1979: 16-9, 21-6; Kubinyi, 2008: 123.)

It is undeniable, however, that some resolutions of the diet, as well as some royal charters refer to the towns as *membra regni*, that is members of the kingdom, which together with the fact that their deputies, even if not regularly, attended the sessions of the diet, prove the emergence of the towns as a political estate, constituted only by the 30 royal free towns. (Kubinyi, 1979: 21-6.) Nevertheless, the towns themselves considered the invitation to the diet rather a burden than a privilege, due to the high costs of accommodation and travel expenses, and because they could not really influence the work of the supreme legislative organ. It was also characteristic of the townsmen's attitude that their deputies avoided taking side in political debates, and even the most conscious elements, the citizens of the tavernical towns, did not form a clearly definable interest-group in the diets. (Szende, 1999: 449.) In these circumstances the estates were primarily represented by the barons and by the deputies of the county nobility at the sessions of the diet, and almost all decisions were the result of negotiations between these groups and the monarch.

Besides tradition, the regular convocation of the diet can be explained by the necessity of obtaining the estates' consent to extraordinary taxation. It is incontestable that the extraordinary taxation of the peasantry was the most effective means of increasing the revenue of the treasury. This type of tax, which was levied 43 times in the course of Matthias' reign, amounted to as much as a florin a year. The subsidy (*subsidium*) was evidently much higher than the 20 pence hitherto paid as the *lucrum camerae*, and sometimes collected twice within the same year. Though the towns were regarded as *membra regni* from 1445 onwards, the estates frequently made attempts to force them to pay the extraordinary tax in the way as the peasants did, that is per *portae*. This also happened, more than once, during the reign of Matthias, and the situation became especially critical after the financial reforms the king introduced in 1467. It should be stressed that in this conflict King Matthias supported the struggle of the towns against the estates. One example may suffice here: in 1474 the 1st article of the decree ordered the payment of the subsidy.⁴ In this

⁴ "First, that for the defense of the said kingdom of Hungary against the Turks one golden florin of subsidy is to be given from every *porta* in the entire realm in the following way: That we and the gentlemen of the realm agreed upon and decided that it is to be paid without exception from the estates of our lord king and the lady, his mother, as well as from our

case it is important to stress that the decree was, in fact, a resolution of the estates, later approved by the monarch. King Matthias called the diet that assembled on or around 21 September 1474 in Buda from the Silasian town of Troppau (present-day Opava, Czech Republic), but, surrounded by Polish troops while being in Breslau (present-day Wrocław, Poland), he was unable to attend its session. Nevertheless, the prelates, the barons and the county nobles felt empowered to pass decrees and issue them in the king's name. Although, Matthias was reported to have been "shocked" by this deed of the estates, the diet was finally legitimized by him. Nevertheless, the towns, that were evidently not represented at the diet, protested against this infringement of their liberty. Due to this protest Matthias later granted many of them exemption from the extraordinary tax, as it is proved by the case of Kassa/Košice.⁵

To give an idea of the amount of money paid by the royal cities to the treasury, we have to refer to the report of the Neapolitan envoy, Fontana from 1476. This important source attests that, in addition to the portal tax, that amounted to 400 000 florins, 250 000 florins were collected by the treasurer in an average year from the monopoly of salt (80 000), from coinage (60 000) from the thirtieth (50 000) and from the towns (47 000, including the tax of the Transylvanian Saxons). Consequently, Matthias' entire annual revenues must have fluctuated at around 650 000 florins, of which 400 000 florins were paid by the peasants. For the sake of comparison it is worth mentioning that in 1475 the annual income of the Ottoman Emperor amounted to 1 800 000 florins.⁶

estates and other exempted men of property, and by the royal cities, and no one should be exempt from payment. However, if any exempted men did not pay it, then the others should not be obliged to pay either."DRMH Series I, vol. 3: 29, 98-9.

⁵ King Matthias still stayed in Breslau/Wrocław, when, on 12 December 1474, he issued the following charter to the burghers of Kassa/Košice: "...Accepimus querelas vestras quibus proponeratis vos preter antiquam consuetudinem et libertatem vestram nimium gravari, quod in Taxa, que ex institutione et Decreto fidelium nostrorum Prelatorum, Baronumque ad subsidium contra Turcos generaliter ab omnibus exigitur more villanorum dicaremini hostiatim. Sciatis itaque, quod nos libertates vestras antiquas et consuetudines, in quibus hactenus perstitistis in nullo violare intendimus, sed potius manutenere fidelitates vestras in eisdem. Quapropter mandauimus Compatri nostro Magnifico Johanni Ernsth in alijs litteris nostris ut vos de consuetudinibus et libertatibus vestris non excipiat, neque ad inconsuetam Taxe solutionem vos hostiatim compelli permittat." Teleki, vol. 11: 519-20. See also Kubinyi, 1979: 16, 36.

⁶ Engel, 2001: 311. For Matthias's annual income see also the estimation by András Kubinyi (Kubinyi, 1990: 104-116) and Erik Fügedi (Fügedi, 1990: 41-61). Their estimation slightly differs from that of Engel. It is also important to stress, that according to them the towns paid

The tax of the towns from 1491-14927

TOWN	TAX
Bártfa/Bardejov	700
Buda	4 000
Esztergom	400
Eperjes/Prešov	500
Fehérvár	1 000
Kassa/Košice	2 000
Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca	200
Kövi	300
Lőcse/Levoča	300
Nagybánya/Baia Mare	3 000
Nagyszombat/Trnava	400
Pest	2 000
Pozsony/Bratislava	400
Sopron	400
Szeged	2 000
(Kis)Szeben/Sabinov	100
Torda/Turda	600
Zágráb/Zagreb	130
Mining towns of Lower Hungary	3 000
Total	21 430 florins

Unfortunately, only a few, and what is more, incomplete lists have survived from the Middle Ages which enumerate the towns of the Kingdom of Hungary with the amounts they paid as a tax to the king. Surprisingly enough, the 'budget' of Osvát Tuz de Lak⁸, Treasurer of the realm has come down to us from 1491-92 (see

20 to 22 000 florins annually to the treasury, while the the tax of the Saxons varied between 25 000 and 22 000 florins.

⁷ Fügedi, 1990: 50. The tax paid by Lőcse/Levoča and Torda/Turda is missing from the original document. Fügedi 'borrowed' his data from the 'pipe-rolls' of Sigismund Ernuszt, who was Treasurer between 1494-96.

⁸ Kubinyi, 1957: 31. He acted as Treasurer between 1490 and 1492.

above). It is striking, at first sight, that the amounts are relatively low. It should be stressed, however, that these numbers show only the ordinary tax of the towns, and in many cases the sums of previous loans are deducted from the amount of the tax. Nevertheless, the total amount of the ordinary and the extraordinary tax, in the case of each individual town, no doubt, was fairly high.

Matthias also relied on the towns for military subsidies, which had several forms ranging from loans to recruiting mercenaries. It was also the task of the towns to provide the royal army with food, cannons and other siege weapons and gunpowder. It also happened quite frequently that the towns had to send craftsmen to the service of the king. In many cases, especially in war years, these types of military contribution were more important for the king than the ordinary taxes, so Matthias was ready to reduce the latter in favour of the military expenses. The role of towns in military technology is often documented in charters, but the resolutions of the diets also contain decrees in connection with them. These may be further military burdens or, on the contrary, exemptions.⁹

Modern research has pointed out that it was the support of his prelates and barons that helped Matthias through the first, most difficult years of his reign. It was their fidelity that counted most; to the towns, which he regarded as his natural allies, he paid relatively little attention, but he did try to check the political ambitions of the nobility. It also happened that Matthias, especially in the first period of his reign, donated towns to his political supporters: Kisszeben/Sabinov was granted to the Rozgonyis in 1461, or Kézsmárk/Kežmarok was given to the Szapolyais, to whom Trencsén/Trenčín also had been pledged. However, from the 1470s onwards Matthias gave up this policy. On the other hand, and especially after the 1470s, he tried to regain such royal towns which had previously been donated or put in pawn. (Kubinyi, 1979: 13.) In this respect, the case of Sopron probably serves as the most instructive example.

This important town had been pledged by queen Elizabeth, already in 1441, to Emperor Frederick III, and was returned to King Matthias, together with the Holy Crown, only in 1463. In order to promote its development, the king bestowed the

⁹ 5 January 1459. Article 1: "It was ordered that the most serene prince, lord King Matthias, by the grace of God king of Hungary, our most gracious lord, shall levy his *banderia* for the protection of his own person and for the defense of his realm to the best of his abilities; and all the royal market towns, estates and provinces, located anywhere within the realm - with the exception only of those royal cities and towns that take part in the burdens of warfare with their military skills - shall be enumerated in the manner described below, for every tenant peasants, and the royal majesty shall have the right to assign them to *banderia* as soldiers wherever he wishes." DRMH Series I, vol. 3: 9.

privilege of holding two annual fairs in Sopron, and allowed its council to use red wax for sealing documents. Without entering into details concerning the situation when 'captains' were appointed as heads of the Hungarian towns, we refer only briefly to the fact that in 1471 Sopron was pledged by Matthias to Sigismund von Weispriach, captain of Sopron for 10 400 golden florins. What is more, the king absolved the citizenry of the town from the oath of loyalty they had sworn to him. At the same time Matthias empowered Sigismund von Weispriach to collect and use all revenues of Sopron.¹⁰ Soon afterwards Sigismund von Weispriach confirmed the 'the ancient liberty' of Sopron as lord of the town, a fact, together with the above mentioned ones, proving that some of the 'captains' not only defended the towns, which had been entrusted to them, but behaved as their real 'owners'. Nevertheless, in 1473, when Sigismund von Weispriach wanted to hand over Sopron to Emperor Frederick III, Matthias ousted him. Surprisingly enough, two years later a compromise was concluded between Matthias and the Weispriachs, as a consequence of which the ordinary tax of Sopron was paid to the latter. Despite the fact that Matthias took Sopron out of pledge, the system, under which the town was subject to captains, survived, albeit the rights of later captains were much narrower than those of Sigismund von Weispriach. (Házi, I/5, 1926: 306, 318-9, 330-1; Kubinyi, 1979: 14.)

Another way of promoting the development of the towns of the realm was the confirmation of their ancient privileges and the donation of new ones by the king, which, sometimes, went hand in hand. A good example for this is the case of Szeged, for the town of which Matthias issued 15 charters containing different prerogatives. (The charters are issued in Reizner, 1900: 52-87) Other, less known examples can also be referred to: in late 1482 the Hungarian troops reoccupied the town of Kőszeg, which had been kept by Emperor Frederick III since 1445. Soon afterwards, King Matthias confirmed the ancient privileges of Kőszeg and secured its citizenry exemption from paying tolls for five years. The king also renounced his right of collecting taxes from Kőszeg for five years, but decreed that with the help of this money the burghers should fortify their town. It should also be stressed that King Matthias confirmed the ancient privileges and in several cases granted new ones to towns which were located in foreign lands he had occupied (e.g. Moravia, Silesia, Lausitz, Lower Austria). There is documentary evidence proving that Iglau (present-day Jihlava, Czech Republic) received a grant of privileges from Matthias on 10 August 1479 and a document survived from 1488 in which the monarch, three years after its occupation, confirmed the ancient privileges of the town of Wien. In

¹⁰ Házi, I/5, 1926: 303, "...de illo autem iuramento per vos nobis prestituto vigore presencium litterarum nostrarum vos absolvimus." See also Kubinyi, 1979: 14,

contrast with Wien, the citizenry of Wiener Neustadt were more lucky: their town fell on 17 August 1487, and King Matthias issued his letter of privileges to the burghers of Wiener Neustadt already on 7 September, i.e. within a month. Earlier in this year, on 2 February King Matthias, due to bad yields and war damage, exempted the burghers of Wien from paying the tithe on their wine for three years. Last, but not least, it is worth mentioning that in 1485 King Matthias exempted the burghers of Hainburg from paying the “thirtieth” and other tolls.¹¹

The case of Beszterce, an important Saxon town in Transylvania (present-day Bistrița, Romania) provides a special example for the urban policy of the monarch. When John Hunyadi relinquished his regentship in early 1453, he, by the grace of King Ladislaus V, became the perpetual count of Beszterce/Bistrița. In 1459 King Matthias donated Beszterce/Bistrița to his uncle, Michael Szilágyi, then Regent of the realm. Nevertheless, in 1464 the monarch returned the castle of the town to its burghers, who were allowed a year later to demolish the castle and fortify the town itself. In 1465, as a next step, King Matthias restored the full autonomy of Beszterce/Bistrița. Despite the exceptional royal favour, in 1467 Beszterce/Bistrița, together with Nagyszében/Sibiu and Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca participated in the conspiracy against King Matthias. Although the attitude of the citizenry of Beszterce/Bistrița and Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca shocked Matthias, the monarch forgave them in early 1468. What is more, Matthias confirmed the ancient privileges of these towns, and also granted them new ones. (Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2007: 190-92.)

Matthias also promoted in many ways the development of Buda, which, by the second half of the fifteenth century, had become the capital of the realm. Matthias had his royal seat here, and after the monarch’s judicial, administrative and economic reforms, Buda housed the different ‘central royal offices’ (law courts, treasury), the court judge of Budavár, which ran the royal estates, and he frequently summoned the diets to Buda.¹² Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that Buda was simply an administrative seat, since it was also a thriving economic centre. Its

¹¹ Schrauf, 1884: 124-5; Kubinyi, 1992: 112; Szende, 2008: 382. In connection with Hungarian rule over Wien it should be noted that King Matthias supported the trading activity of the burghers of Buda in Wien. A certain part of the citizenry of Wien, namely those who had trading contacts with Hungary, also profited from this situation.

¹² Kubinyi, 2008: 73-93. The implementation of the reforms began right after his coronation in 1464. From the point of view of its economic and social consequences the tax reform, introduced by the 1467 law, proved to be of outstanding importance. The regular tax (*lucrum camerae*) was abolished, but, to replace it, the “tax of the royal treasury” was re-established at once. The same thing happened to the “thirtieth” (*tricesima*), a royal tax imposed on foreign trade, which was renamed the “crown tax”. Concerning the ancient taxes, exemptions, having been granted by earlier kings, immediately lost their validity.

German and Hungarian citizenry had a decisive role in both foreign and domestic trade, and it was a place, where handicraft industry had reached the highest level in the country. It greatly profited from the Austrian monetary crisis of the late fifteenth century, as a result of which both Sopron and Pozsony/Bratislava were heavily affected, since in 1483 King Matthias, by revoking the Viennese and Pozsony/Bratislava staples, reopened a direct route between Buda and the towns of southern Germany. This step of the king improved the commercial position of Buda to a great extent within the realm. (Rady, 1985: 112.) While Buda was mostly engaged in distributing all over the the county the products circulating in foreign trade, its “sister town”, Pest, which became independent from Buda only around 1481, organized the cattle and wine trade. Mostly Buda and Pest were interested in the formation of a “national market”, the emergence of which in the late fifteenth century is proved by the fact that together with Buda and Pest many other towns of the realm formed a kind of alliance and attacked the right of the chapter house of Várad/Oradea to collect exceptionally high tolls on the fairs of Várad/Oradea. It is equally important to point out that, in this conflict, King Matthias took a stand against the chapter house of Várad/Oradea and supported the towns.¹³

There is documentary evidence proving that King Matthias ordered the towns to rebuild and restore old, dilapidated houses, or repair their ramparts. Sometimes, but not always, the monarch, in order to enable the towns to achieve these aims, renounced his right to collect taxes for several years from these towns (e.g. 1478: Korpona/Krupina). In other cases, as the charter issued to the town of Buda on 7 March 1478 proves, Matthias threatened those who did not repair their houses (i.e. disobeyed his decree), that he would confiscate these buildings and donate them to people who deserve such a royal favour. (Csánki, 1904: 297-412. The charter is published on pages 408-10.) The case of Visegrád is also very interesting. Visegrád, located on the right bank of the river in the Danube Bend – i.e. where the river abandons its easterly course for a southerly tack - was a royal residence between 1323 and the early 1400s, but suffered great damage in the late 1440s and early 50s, in the “*tempora disturbiorum*” as contemporaries called this period. King Matthias’ reign meant a turning point in the process of decline, since from the mid-1470s the monarch began a large scale reconstruction here. He managed to revive Visegrád, to

¹³ Kubinyi, 1963: 189-224. The towns that participated in the law suit concerning the toll of the chapter house of Várad/Oradea: are as follows: Buda, Pest, Fehérvár, Ráckeve, Nagyszeben/Sibiu, Brassó/Braşov, Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, Beszterce/Bistriţa, Torda/Turda, Szászváros/Oraştie, Gyulafehérvár/Alba Iulia, Enyed/Aiud, Medgyes/Mediaş, Pozsony/Bratislava, Nagyszombat/Trnava, Kassa/ Košice, Bártfa/ Bardejov, Eperjes/Prešov.

create a “paradise here on earth”, though his intention was to build here rather a country residence than a royal seat. The monarch also tried to revive the town of Visegrád. In 1474 he invited Saxon settlers from Transylvania here, then, he tried to entice people from the different parts of the realm to Visegrád. Even those who had committed a murder or who had been in debt, were promised to be pardoned by the royal privileges, if they came to and settled in Visegrád. (Petrovics, 1997: 39-65; Végh, 2004: 71-6.)

As to the economy, attention should be called to the profound changes occurring in the structure of commerce in the fifteenth century: imported cheap mass products became dominant, while most exports consisted of domestic raw materials, cattle and wine. As a consequence, the growth of towns in the western part of the realm came to a halt, for example in Sopron and Pozsony/Bratislava. This was, however, counterbalanced by the spectacular development of the towns of Buda and Pest, and of the market towns (*oppida*) located in the eastern part of the realm. The urban policy of King Matthias undeniably contributed to the flourishing of these market towns. (See, among others, Bácskai, 1965: passim; Blazovich, 2002: passim; Petrovics, 2008:451-4; Petrovics 2009b.)

Conclusions

We are well aware of the fact that it is impossible to discuss in a short paper all aspects of the urban policy of King Matthias. Consequently, the aim of this paper was rather to focus only on a limited number of problems. Nevertheless, even these limited investigations prove that during his reign King Matthias considerably promoted the development of both the *civitates* and the *oppida*, although the ordinary and extraordinary taxes, together with other types of military subsidies meant a great burden on the towns and increased the difficulties in the process of their development. It also can be stated with a high degree of probability that the towns of the realm were important for the monarch basically from an economic, especially from a financial point of view. In other words: Matthias did not consider the towns as his real political allies.

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