



Death of King John | Smrt krále Jana

Text Information

Author | Anonymous
Language | Czech
Period | 14th Century
Genre | Poem
Source |
Collection |
URL |

Translation by Matouš Turek, Sarah Gráfová, and Jan Čermák.

Introduction to the Text

This anonymous poem, often referred to by historians as *The Poem on the Battle of Crécy*, is a remarkable testimony to the historical memory of the Battle of Crécy in 1346. Its main theme is the loyalty of the Bohemian knights to King John of Bohemia in the moments before his death at the battle in battle. For this reason, several literary critics quite fittingly refer to the poem as *The Death of King John*, the title that is used here.

Introduction to the Source

The poem was preserved only as an insert in the *History of Emperor Charles the Fourth* (*Historie o císaři Karlovi, toho jména Čtvrtém*), written in Czech by Bohemian historian Prokop Lupáč of Hlavačov (1530–1587) and printed in Prague in 1584 by Jiří Černý (alias Nigrin) of Černý Most. Six copies have come down to us (see the Database Knihopis, no. K05060, section Further reading).

The text itself is something of a riddle. Linguistically, Jan Gebauer and others suggest its origins may be dated to the 14th century, most likely to its last quarter, but, given the text's later preservation a more exact dating is problematic. It is also unclear whether the poem was preserved in full; this may be just a fragment from a much longer poem on the Battle.

About this Edition

The Death of King John attracted the attention of philologists and literary scholars particularly in the 19th century, when it was published three times in its entirety, albeit, with very differing editorial approaches (see the section Existing editions). The transcription by Andrea Svobodová was prepared on the basis of principles for critical editions (the exemplar stored in the National Library of the Czech Republic in Prague under shelf-mark 54 K 15.192 being the one that was used).

Further Reading

Biederman, Jan and Žůrek, Václav, editors, Turek, Matouš, translator. "The Death of King John". *The Battle of Crécy: A Casebook*, edited by Michael Livingston and Kelly DeVries. Liverpool University Press, 2015, pp. 240–247, 385–388.

- *This is a historical analysis of the poem accompanied by a semi-diplomatic transcription and English translation of the text.*

Jakobson, Roman. "Old Czech Verse". *Medieval Slavic Studies*, 1934, pp. 417–465.

- *This is an essay on medieval Czech poetry.*

Knihopis: KPS – Databáze Knihopis. <http://www.knihopis.cz/>. Retrieved on February 19, 2021.

- *This is a database of the incunables between 1476–1500 and old prints between 1501–1800 printed in Bohemia*



Death of King John" | "Smrt krále Jana"

„Klimberče mladý, praviť krátce,
pomni, [žes]¹ doplněno Lupáčem
jehož nikto zlým nevinil
a mnoho dobrého činil.
A sáms také rytíř smělý,
mladý, dobrý druh dospělý,
"vědě², že mne neodvedeš,
než úfámť, že mne dovedeš,
kdež pokuši svého meče."
K králi vece: „Nemiež péče.
Tvé slovo, jakš řekl, zuostane

a se tak líbost tvá stane.
Popros Boha za svou duši,
boď oř, v ten čas sobě tuš
tam, kdež se již, jako známy,
jeliž v soudný den shledámy."
Jakž to vece, tak se zdrže³,
pan Henrich se po něm zdviže
S ním šel⁴ na harc podlé toho
ctné dobré družiny mnoho,
jeho hesla volající,
v srdci tuto mysl majíce,
žeť nelze podlé své hospody
dojítí smrtné škody.
Nepřítelé sobě stesku,
když Supovo křídle blesku,
pod němaž ten rytíř drahý
křičieše své heslo: „Z Prahy!"
I hna v nepřátelský hluk
bez rozpači jako kluk,
přeprudce rozmáchav ony
přežádúcie zlaté⁵ zvony,
jimaž oř upomínáše,
na němžto se vzpodjímáše,
dělaje rytířské skutky
svým nepřátelům pro smutky,
dávaje jim hrozně rány

"Young Klimberg¹, I tell you briefly,
Remember that you had a good father
Who was by none accused of wrong
And did much good
5 And you too are yourself a brave knight,
A young, good, grown fellow.
I know that you will not lead me away,
But hope that you will lead me there
Where I can try my sword."
10 To the King he says: "Do not worry!
Your word shall stand just as you have said it,

And your will shall thus become deed.
"Pray to God for your soul!
Spur on the horse! Now hope for that place
15 Where, as is known to us,
Only on Judgement Day shall we meet again."
As he said that, he halted briefly.
Lord Heinrich² rose after him,
And with him there went into the fray
20 A good, large, valorous retinue
Calling out his battle cries,
Having in their hearts the thought
That in the company of their lord
They shall come not to deathly harm.
25 The foe lamented
As the Vulture's wings³
And below them the beloved knight
Cried out his battle cry "From Prague!"⁴
And rushed forth into the enemy host
30 Without hesitation, like a bolt,
Wildly flourishing those
Exquisite golden spurs
With which he urged the steed⁵
Upon whose back he rose,
35 Doing knightly deeds
To bring torment to the foe,
Landing terrible blows on them



skrže tvrdé, husté brány,
čině ořem i sám sebú,
nelituje rukú obú,
jimaž zabyle kvapieše,
což kde jima polapieše,
to všecko bylo zkaženo,
sečeno i rozraženo.
Jeho dobrodrustva zřiece,
snažiechu se tu vždy viece
ty všecky, ktož podlé něho
byli hlédající jeho,
srazichu se s nepřátely
svými rytieřskými diely,
obcházejíc se uctivě,
noži, meči pamětlivě
sekúc, bodúc ze vší síly,
z ořóv ostrohami žíly
derúce, bodúce na ně,
chtíc sobě dobyti pláne
a k lepší se bráti spíše.
Tu Červená ruože ktvieše,
majíc rubínovo stkvěnie.
Jádro její podlé chtění
z arabského zlatta stkvieše,
pod nížto rytíř se držieše,
husté cesty v nepřátelech čině

– toť náleží ctné hrdině –
i nevyhybujíc se nikomu,
vždy se bera k místu tomu,
kde by ten skutek ukázal,
ač by o něm kdo otáزال,
by to bylo u paměti
i to mohli pověděti
dobří lidé bez přiroka
na každý čas, rok od roka
až ta Róže tak osvětlá,
jakž při Lvu vždy věrně květla.
Tu svietieše Zlaté⁶ kolo,

Through hard, thick mail.
Busying both his warhorse and himself
40 Not averse to using both his hands,
Wildly did he flail them,
And whatsoever they did catch
Was all undone,
Cut and cast asunder.
45 As they saw his feats,
They tried ever harder,
All those who around him were
And watching him.
They clashed with their enemies,
50 In their knightly deeds,
Comporting themselves with honour,
With their daggers and swords intently
Hewing and stabbing with all their might,
Tearing out their warhorses' veins
55 As they pierced them with their spurs,
Striving to gain control of the battlefield
And keen to gain the upper hand.
There the Red ROSE⁶ bloomed
With the refulgence of a ruby;
60 Its centre, as bespoke,
Gleamed with Arabian gold.
Below it the steadfast knight,
Clearing many a path through the enemy –

As befits the valorous hero! –
65 And avoiding none,
He always made for that place
Where he might perform that deed,
That, if any should enquire
It would remain in the memory
70 And might be related
By good folk without shame
At any time in years to come,
And that the ROSE⁷ aglow with light
Should bloom ever faithful by the Lion's side.
75 There shone the Golden Wheel⁸



pod nímž nebieše úpolo
mladému dobrému druhu
zpodjėti tak práci tuhú:
Klimberkovi šlechtnému,
v svém životě udatnému,
jenž nedbaje nic o škodě,
věrně sloužil své hospodě,
pomně na otce, na děda,
nepřátelóm bieše běda;
každýho, kam se obrátil,
bil, sekl, buodl, v hlavy mlátil.
A pan Valkún z Bořešína
věda, že boj ctná novina,
dá nejednu prudkú ránu,

vždy se boda po svém pánu.
Z Rožďalovic Ješek mladý
podlé své rytířské vnady
v dobrých činech nemeškáše,
vždy se po svém pánu bráše;
dvoje křídle podlé vuole
půl zlaté a půl sokolé,
pod těma dva vlastná bratry
tu též fleminkové chatry
porazišta velmi mnoho.
Také nezameška toho
v také bitvě že pan Vilém
na svém oři prudkém, čilém
řka: „Neželím smutku vina!⁸“
Tu též pan Závíš z Jimlína
a z Kozojed pan Dalibor
hnašta v nepřátelský sbor
mužně beze všeho strachu,
s nímaž dobří mnozí hnachu:
Friček, Tyč, pan⁹ Benešek, Lyšek,
sahajíce chvalných výšek,
z Pavlovic pan Kunart mužný,
Johan, syn jeho sestry družný:

- Below which it was not difficult
For a young, good fellow
To undertake a task so arduous,
For a noble Klimberg
80 Valiant in his life's doings
Who, heedless of injury,
Faithfully served his lord,
Remembering his father and grandfather.
Woe befell his enemies.
85 Every man to whom he turned
He smote, severed, pierced, struck their heads.
Lord Valkún of Pořešín⁹,
Knowing that a fight is a matter of valor,
Dealt many a fierce blow
90 And kept striking from alongside his lord¹⁰.
The young Ješek of Rožďalovice¹¹,
As was his knightly custom,
Never tarried in brave deeds
And always followed his lord.
95 A pair of wings¹², as bespoke,
Half gold and half falcon,
And below them two blood brothers
Who did that Flemish rabble¹³.
Fell in great number.
100 Neither did this go unheard
In the battle by Lord Vilém¹⁴
On his horse agile and swift,
Who said: "I pity not those who brought woe upon us."¹⁵
And now, too, Lord Závíš of Jimlín¹⁶
105 And Lord Dalibor of Kozojedy¹⁷
Dashed into the enemy's throng,
Masterful, without a trace of fear.
With them hurried many other brave ones:
Friček, Tyč, Lord Benešek, Lyšek¹⁸,
110 Who all have attained praiseworthy heights.
The manly Lord Kunart of Pavlovice¹⁹,
Johan²⁰, the companionable son of his sister



ijedné chvíle neždáše,
každý tam pospěšně hnáše.
Arberkér¹⁰ se ctně vzpomenu,

po svém pánu jako vzplanu.
Pan Tegl z Řieda jako Turka,
syn Hertvíkóv z Tegenburka,
pan z Malvelzada, dobré plémě,
Fricendorl z rakouské země,
jeden z plodu mužné vnady,
z Bavor Tušek, rytíř mladý,
všichni hnachu v houf protivný,
druh nad druhu více silný,
nelitujíc smrtedlné škody,
stojíc podlé své hospody,
děláš ríťské činy.
Křiče Miličín: „Na ně, hrdiny!
Z Vlašimě Člun polovičný,
ctný pan Bolek¹¹, rytíř sličný,
nesmúti Róže ani Člunu,
nemeškaje po ních lun
svým nepřátelóm na škodu.
Pomně svou dobrou úrodu,
že měl otce šlechtetného,
jenž podlé rytířstvie svého
činil dobrodružsky všady
v silných bojích i jinady,
jakž mu byla ctná mysl dána,
až pod korúhvi svého pána
zabit u boji před Lavú,
pod túž rytířskou postavú.

They waited not a single moment,
All rushed there in great haste,
115 Arberkér²¹ found presence of mind,

Like a blaze he ran after his lord.
Lord Tegl of Ried²² as well as Turka,
The son of Hertvík of Tegenburg²³,
Lord of Malvelzad²⁴, of fine pedigree,
120 Fricendorl²⁵ from the land of Austria,
One of the fruits of manliness,
The young knight Tušek from Bavaria²⁶,
They all rushed into the opposing throng,
Each stronger than the next,
125 Heedless of deathly danger,
Standing by their lord,
Each did knightly deeds.
Miličín²⁷ cried: "Go at them, heroes!",
The Half-Boat of Vlašim²⁸,
130 he honourable Lord Bolek²⁹, a seasoned knight,
Grieved neither Rose nor Boat³⁰,
And ran after them without tarrying
To bring harm on his enemies,
Mindful of his noble ancestry,
135 That he had an honourable father
Who, in keeping with his knightly status,
Behaved valiantly wherever he went,
Both in the thick of battle and elsewhere,
As he was of noble mind.
140 Until below the banner of his lord³¹
He was killed in the Battle of Laa,
In the very same knightly manner.



Critical Notes

Translation

- 1 Henry of Klingenberg was a member of a noble family originally from Swabia that settled in Bohemia approximately in the 13th century. The name is probably related to the castle of Klingenberg in Austria rather than to the German name for the Czech royal castle of Zvíkov (Klingenberk). Henry's father, John of Klingenberg, actively supported King John of Luxembourg in both his political and his military interests; in addition, he joined the King in the crusade against the Prussians between 1336 and 1337 (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", pp. 229–30).
- 2 Lord Heinrich is probably Henry the Monk of Basel, who appears in other sources as a close adviser to the King of Bohemia and thence to Philippe VI.
- 3 The poet here alludes to the black vulture's wings traditionally depicted on the coat of arms of Bohemian rulers from the Přemyslid dynasty. John of Luxembourg accepted them as a symbol of continuity linking him to the original Bohemian royal dynasty from which his first wife, Elizabeth of Bohemia, was descended. The vulture's wing on the crest of the helmet is clearly visible in illuminations depicting the Přemyslid kings Wenceslas I, Přemysl Otakar II, and John of Luxembourg in the Codex of Jan of Gelnhausen written at the turn of the 15th century. The same coat of arms is present also in the illumination depicting the Přemyslid King Wenceslas II in the Manesse Codex. Such facts challenge the legend that the Black Prince took three peacock feathers from the crest of John of Luxembourg upon finding his body and symbolically subsumed them into the badge of the Prince of Wales along with the Bohemian King's purported motto "Ich diene" (in its shortened form, Ich dien). According to one unverified theory, John's motto may have been confused with the Welsh expression "Eich Dyn" [your man], which was supposed to reflect the positive relationship between the Prince and the Welsh soldiers (Vlček, Jak zemřeli, p. 78).
- 4 It was a medieval tradition to use as a war cry the name of the country, county, or town with which the fighting side was associated. In this way, the war cry not only fortified the soldiers themselves but also served to identify their allegiance. The Czech war cry of "Prague!" mentioned in the poem was customary in Bohemia. It was used, for instance, by the Bohemian armies in the Battle on the Marchfeld on 26 August 1278.
- 5 The Czech word "oř" commonly means a horse, but in this context it surely means a warhorse or destrier.
- 6 The heraldic reference is intended to evoke the coat of arms of Henry II of Rosenberg, who participated in the battle. Henry was the son of Peter I of Rosenberg, lord chamberlain of Bohemia. The House of Rosenberg was an old Bohemian noble family holding dominion in southern Bohemia. The family went back to the noble Witikonid (Vítkovci) dynasty of the 12th to 13th centuries, which traditionally ranked among those influential Czech noble families associated with royalty and high politics (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 234).
- 7 An allusion to the coats of arms of the noble family of Rosenberg and the Bohemian kings, symbolizing here the family's loyalty to the king.
- 8 An allusion to the coat of arms of the noble family of Klingenberg.
- 9 Valkún of Pořešín was a member of the gentry from southern Bohemia (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", pp. 234–35).
- 10 The meaning of the Czech verb bósti se is not entirely clear: another potential reading could be 'Striking wherever his lord had first struck.
- 11 Ješek of Rožďalovice was probably a member of the gentry, whose family held the village of Rožďalovice near the town of Nymburk on the boundary of central and eastern Bohemia. Between 1340 and 1346 King John of Luxembourg promoted the village of Rožďalovice to a town in return for Ješek's loyal service (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", pp. 234–35).
- 12 An allusion to the coat of arms of the noble family of Rožďalovice.



- 13 Given the strong Bohemian interests in the Low Countries – the forces of John of Luxemburg had only weeks earlier been turned back by the Liègeois at Vottem – it is hardly surprising that the poet was well aware of the close alliance between the English and the Flemish at the time. Though it is not known that any Flemings directly participated in the Battle of Crécy, a combined Anglo-Flemish force had only days earlier abandoned its siege of nearby Béthune.
- 14 Vilém has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 15 The meaning of the Czech phrase *Neželím smutku vína* is not entirely clear: another potential reading could be *Neželím smutku vína*, i. e. 'I do not regret being sad in the matter of wine.'
- 16 Závíš of Jimlín has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 235).
- 17 Dalibor of Kozojedy has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 235–36).
- 18 Friček has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236). Tyč has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236). Benešek has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236). Lyšek has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 19 Kunart of Pavlovice has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 20 Johan, like his uncle Kunart of Pavlovice, has not been otherwise identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 21 Arberkěj has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 22 Tegl of Ried has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236). Turka has not been identified.
- 23 The son of Hertvík of Tegenburg has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 24 Lord of Malvelzad has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 25 Fricendorl, an Austrian nobleman, has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 26 The young knight Tušek from Bavaria has not been identified (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 27 This is probably Heřman the Younger of Miličín, son of Heřman the Elder, former lord steward of the court of John of Luxembourg (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", pp. 234–36).
- 28 An allusion to the coat of arms of the noble family of Vlašim, which takes the form of a boat. Which of the family fought in the Battle of Crécy is not clear, though it may have been Hron, the son of Jaroš of Vlašim, or Bolek (Boleslav), the son of Maršík of Vlašim (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).
- 29 Lord Bolek has not been identified.
- 30 An allusion to the coats of arms of the families of Rosenberg and of Vlašim.
- 31 Maršík of Vlašim, probably the father of the lord of Vlašim who fought in the Battle of Crécy, was killed in 1332 at the Battle of Laa in Austria (Žalud, "Několik poznámek", p. 236).

Translation

- 1 doplněno Lupáčem