
John of Luxembourg (part 2)

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The settlement at the assembly in Domažlice was crucial for further John's reign in Bohemia. He reached a partial agreement with a part of the aristocracy, led by Henry of Lipá – an exchange of castles and towns was agreed on, and Henry moved to Moravia. However, John's wife Elisabeth wasn't happy with the compromise, as she refused to give up the strong royal position of her ancestors. She therefore sided with William of Waldeck, and together they took over Prague for some time. John of Luxembourg saw Elisabeth's efforts as an attempt at removing him from the throne (Elisabeth would rule as a regent for Prince Wenceslas), so he took action, conquered Prague and forced Elisabeth to leave for Mělník. The pretender Wenceslas was separated from his mother and later raised in Paris in the household of John's sister Mary, wife of the French King Charles IV.



The relationship of John and Elisabeth tried many times later on. They became closer in 1321, after John had been hurt at a tournament, but this harmonic period, during which son John Henry and twin daughters Elisabeth and Anna were born, ended up in yet another surge of disputes. Elisabeth never accepted that John had started using the services of Henry of Lipá, and accepted his position of the most powerful man in the kingdom. Another source of disputes was Henry's partner and former queen Elisabeth Richeza. The most serious, however, was the accusation that Elisabeth, together with her stepbrother John Volek, was preparing a coup against the king. After Volek had been arrested and interrogated violently, Elisabeth fled to Bavaria to her daughter Margaret, and left her husband finally. Even though Volek was eventually cleared of all charges and Elisabeth had to return in 1325, she never returned to her husband, refrained from political and social activities, and died in 1330.

When John of Luxembourg left the country and Elisabeth of Bohemia withdrew from public life, the situation in the country settled a bit – people around Henry of Lipá took over crucial land offices and seized most of the royal property. John used Henry's influence and services and focused on foreign policy. However, since the early 1330s, the dissatisfaction of some aristocrats and clergyman with uncontrolled power of Henry and other lords increased. The solution was to involve the king's oldest son Wenceslas-Charles; a special legation required his return to the country in 1333. At the time, Charles ruled over the core house domain of Luxembourg, and also protected John's interests in the northern Italy.

The year 1333 was the beginning of a successful effort to improve the situation in the Czech lands that had long suffered by John's absence and thus also by the absence of strong royal power. Prague townsmen offered Charles a loan for the initial reconstruction, and then the aristocracy allowed him to collect the land tax that enabled him to pay off part of the pawned royal property. In 1334, Charles received the title of the Murgrave of Moravia from his father, which was the necessary legal framework for Charles's actions in the Bohemian territory. A lot of attention was paid to the arrival of Charles's wife Blanche of Valois and her party, which improved the prestige and the social influence of the court.



The politics of Murgrave Charles developed hopefully, only to reach its limits when John returned to the country (August 1335). Apparently, part of the aristocracy accused Charles of too independent actions, stating he wanted to usurp power for himself. Also the difficult relationships between Charles's wife Blanche and the second wife of John of Luxembourg, Beatrix of Bourbon, whom John married in 1334, were causing tension. Since August 1336, Charles stopped using the seal of the Murgrave of Moravia and left for Tyrol to protect the interests of his younger brother John Henry. The estrangement between father and son reached its top when John's youngest son Wenceslas was born (1337), which could compromise Charles's right to the throne.

Charles's position was restored when John left the country. Charles returned to Moravia and father and son reconciled. All John's monarchial activities were gradually limited by his damaged sight, traditional illness of the Luxembourg house.

In the 14th century, no treatment for any damages of this kind were known; highly appreciated were the influences of Arabian medicine, practiced mainly at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Montpellier in southern France. In his autobiography, Charles IV states that in the early 1340s, "...my father, who had already lost one eye and started suffering with the other, left in secrecy for Montpellier to meet the doctors there, yet he went completely blind." This was one of the reasons why John pressed Charles's right to the Bohemian throne (as the "Junior King") at the land assembly in June 1341. At the same time, the conflict between the Luxembourg and Wittelsbach house broke out (the dispute with Louis of Bavaria), so both Luxembourgian kings continued to coordinate their motions.

The final years of John's life were dedicated to the struggle to ensure the power for his house. In accordance with the papal interests, he accepted Charles's candidacy for the Roman-German throne, agreed during the visit of both Luxembourgian kings in Avignon in 1344. During the same visit, the establishment of the Prague archiepiscopate was negotiated. In June 1346, Charles was elected the Roman-German King. John reaped the benefits of his skillful diplomacy; he managed to bring the Luxembourgian house back to the pinnacle of power. Yet he didn't live long enough to see the ceremonial coronation of his son. When the Hundred Years' War broke out, he joined the campaign as faithful ally of France. On August 26, 1346, John took part in his last battle of Crecy, where the French army was completely defeated. According to the chronicler Jean Froissart, both Luxembourgian kings entered the fray alongside other French noblemen, but John soon got lost. The details of the king's death are unknown. After his relics were moved many times between several places, John of Luxembourg was buried in Virgin Mary's Cathedral in Luxembourg.

The image of John of Luxembourg in the Czech historiography, from František Palacký via Josef Šusta to Jiří Spěváček, is that of the wayward knight king, a "foreigner" who didn't really care about what happened in the Kingdom of Bohemia. But this is not really true. This brief outline of his diplomatic activities clearly indicates that this aging "bohemocentric" view should be revised. John was one of a few monarchs that managed to make the Kingdom of Bohemia a regular part of politics in Central and Western Europe, and thus prepared the way for his son Charles IV.

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