



700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WEDDING
OF JOHN OF LUXEMBOURG
AND ELISABETH OF PREMYSLIDES



2010
JOHN OF LUXEMBOURG
KING OF BOHEMIA

On the occasion of the issue of a silver coin commemorating the 700th anniversary of the royal marriage of John of Luxembourg and Elisabeth of Premyslides and the accession of the Luxembourg dynasty to the Czech throne, the Czech National Bank has issued 500 copies of these brochures.

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Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII of Luxembourg

The year 2010 is the 700th anniversary of the accession of the Luxembourg dynasty to the throne of Bohemia; their members, each in their different way, but definitively, inscribed themselves into the history of the Czech kingdom.

The ancient, though at first not so significant, family of Luxembourg traced its origin from Siegfried, who lived in the 10th century, and who in 963 secured from the monastery St. Maximin de Trèves (Trier), ownership of the castle of Luxembourg. Despite dynastic problems, when the Luxembourg heritage was passed down through the female line, they worked their way up in European politics, and in 1308, thanks also to the influence of the French court, Henry VII of Luxembourg (1274–1313) was elected as King of the Romans, and in 1312 crowned as Holy Roman Emperor.

After the death of the last member of the ruling family of Premyslides Wenceslas III († 1306) the Bohemian parliament met to decide on a new king. The session of the parliament respected dynastic relationships and inheritance law of the Premyslides in the female line. The daughters of Wenceslas II – Anna, Elisabeth and Margaret from Wenceslas's first marriage with Judith (Guta) Habsburg, but also Anežka (Agnes of Bohemia), daughter of Elisabeth Richeza of Poland (Eliška Rejčka) – were principally entitled to lay claim to the succession. In this period the only unmarried one, except for the one-year old Anežka, was Elisabeth. However the Czech crown could also be passed to the widowed queens.

The Czech Estates negotiated in this spirit, and decided that the new Bohemian king would



John of Luxembourg

become Rudolf of Habsburg (1281–1307) alongside the queen Elisabeth Richeza, his new wife and the widow of Wenceslas II. The reign of Rudolf of Habsburg, nicknamed “král kaše – king porridge”, lasted only a few months.

His successor became Henry VI of Carinthia (1265–1335), former Bailiff and husband of Anna of Premyslides, the eldest daughter of Wenceslas II. Henry was crowned in 1307 by the Břevnov abbot Bavor of Nečtiny, but not even his reign succeeded in stabilising the situation in Bohemia. The not too capable Henry did not endear himself or achieve great popularity in the Czech lands. In December 1310 Henry of Carinthia and his wife Anna were obliged to leave Prague castle, and even Bohemia, whence they never returned. However, despite the early death of Anna of Premyslides in 1313 and their childless marriage he continued to use the title of King of Bohemia until his death.

The situation in Europe in this period was not very straightforward. In 1308 the King of the Romans Albrecht of Habsburg had been murdered, and the new king be-

came Henry VII of Luxembourg, with close contacts to the French king Philip the Fair. Henry has several siblings, one of which, Balduin (1285–1354), achieved a great ecclesiastical career as Archbishop of Trier, and one of the Electors who decided the vote on the King of the Romans. The wife of Henry VII of Luxembourg became Margaret of Brabant, with whom he had five children. Their daughters were betrothed to significant European rulers; the eldest Beatrix became the wife of the Hungarian king Robert of d’Anjou; another daughter Marie became the French queen (with whom Charles IV was later raised).

In this uncertain atmosphere, culminating in an uprising by Prague patricians against the nobility with the aim of sharing power in the country, the idea germinated to offer the Czech royal crown to the Luxembourgs. The son of the King of the Romans Henry VII – John of Luxembourg – seemed to be a suitable candidate.

The first born son of Henry VII of Luxembourg and Margaret of Brabant John of Luxembourg (1296–1346) was raised at the

French royal court; in Paris he visited the university there and received an all-round education. Church officials, especially from Cistercian monasteries, were the primary pillar for the election of a Czech king. The Abbot of the Zbraslav monastery Konrád was also able to convince Elisabeth of Premyslides (1292–1330), daughter of the Czech king Wenceslas II and Judith (Guta) of Habsburg, in this period practically the only potential wife for the future king, to consider a Luxembourg candidature. Abbot Konrád then became the main person involved in negotiating on her behalf.

A delegation of Czech prelates set out for the court of Henry VII of Luxembourg, who was supposedly at first surprised by the Czech suggestions. He did not consider it advantageous to push for the removal of Henry of Carinthia from the Czech throne, and furthermore he was concentrating on his own enthronement to the Imperial crown, which would elevate his personal majesty. With regard to Bohemia, an extinct fiefdom, he had no interest in acknowledging its right to the election of their own leader, and also he did not want to

send his only son John to a country, which had internal divisions. He tried to suggest another member of the Luxembourg family as bridegroom for the inheritance of Elisabeth of Premyslides, for example his brother Waleram, in his time somewhat notorious for his libertine lifestyle. This idea did not go down well with the Czech legation.

At the beginning of the year 1310 the Czech side, fortified this time also with representatives of the nobility, led further part of the negotiations with Henry VII of Luxembourg. Konrád, the Abbot of Zbraslav and Heidenreich, the Abbot of Sedlec prepared the meeting; however the participation and viewpoint of the Czech nobility was important. Jindřich of Rožmberg, Albrecht of Žeberg and Fridrich of Šumburg were present on their behalf. A record of the meeting has been preserved, documented in a deed from 31 January 1310.

When Henry of Carinthia found out about this meeting he called military reinforcements from Carinthia to Bohemia, and occupied Prague castle and further strategic

sites. He even had diplomats from the King of the Romans, including Peter of Aspelt, the Archbishop of Mainz, who were sojourning in Bohemia, captured. However this interference provoked a definitive rupture between Henry VII of Luxembourg and Henry of Carinthia. Further Czech nobles gradually came over to Henry VII of Luxembourg's side. In Prague open military clashes between the supporters of Henry of Carinthia and squads of Bohemian nobility eventually developed, during which the Carinthian side was defeated.

On 29 June 1310 a provincial assembly was called, to which Elisabeth of Premyslides was also famously brought; she had to secretly escape from Prague beforehand. The main aim of the assembly's negotiations was the deposition of Henry of Carinthia from the Czech throne. However even at this point the Bohemian nobility was not in unison, and the King of the Romans, Henry VII of Luxembourg, still wavered with his agreement to the alliance of Elisabeth of Premyslides with his son John. Further negotiations continued. The assembly despatched a 12-member

delegation headed again by the Cistercian abbots, but above all by the important nobles Jan of Vartemberg, Bohuslav of Švamberk and others, to the seat of Empire; rich patricians were also represented. The legation arrived in Frankfurt am Main in June 1310, where at the time a general Imperial parliament was taking place.

The legation was given a friendly welcome, because as the chronicler Peter von Zittau noted, the King of the Romans was well aware of the reason for their arrival. A magnificent feast was organised, which lasted the whole day, and only afterwards did they get down to the negotiations at hand. Once again Henry offered his brother Waleram as a candidate for the Czech throne and husband for Elisabeth. Perhaps he was overly apprehensive about his only son John, who was but 14 years old, had a soft French upbringing and didn't speak Czech. Henry was also nervous about the insecure Czech environment, the disunity of the nobles there, and thus wavered.

However the Czech delegation negotiated consistently and diplomatically. Peter of Aspelt, who had

already previously served under King Wenceslas II, undoubtedly played a significant role. Thanks to his endeavours and diplomatic procedure the alliance of John of Luxembourg and Elisabeth of Premyslides was finally arranged. The path to the Czech throne was thus opened to the Luxembourgs, just as the persisting weak and unpopular reign of Henry of Carinthia was practically at an end. However alongside other conditions Henry VII of Luxembourg specified a request to personally see the Czech princess and for the wedding to be arranged at the latest by 1 September of the same year.

The legation returned satisfied to Bohemia. It was time to prepare the bridal journey of Elisabeth to the court of the King of the Romans.

Princess Elisabeth was dispatched from Prague on 14 August 1310. During the journey Bishop Jan of Dražic presented her with a wonderful white horse and silver drinking cups decorated with gold. In the princess's entourage were representatives of the nobility who had been members of the previous delegation, with the ad-

dition of Hynek Krušina of Lichtenburg and Markvart of Zvířetice.

On 25 August 1310 Elisabeth of Premyslides was finally introduced to Henry VII of Luxembourg in the Johannite monastery of Heimbach near Speyer. The attractive, physically and spiritually advanced Elisabeth, dressed in costly robes, seemed even older beside John, four years younger and looking like a child, so together they affected a very unequal impression. Perhaps that is why Henry once again tried to suggest Waleram for the Czech throne and Elisabeth. However the Czech nobility insisted on their offer. Henry called a court parliament and declared in front of all present, that in his own name and according to the wish of the Holy Roman Empire he was granting the Czech kingdom to his son John. And so this claim would be "more secure", John would take as his wife the heir to the Czech lands, Princess Elisabeth.

The difficult negotiations about the succession of the Luxembourg dynasty to the Czech throne were finalised on 31 August and 1 September in the Cathedral of

Speyer with the wedding of Elisabeth and John, which was consecrated by the Archbishops of Mainz and Cologne.

The wedding of John of Luxembourg and Elisabeth of Premyslides was described in a chronicle from the period of Charles IV – by Franz of Prague – in chapter XXII "How the Emperor famously arranged a wedding feast for his son and the damsel Elisabeth in Speyer" roughly as follows:

Because the Holy Roman Emperor ceremoniously organised his first born son a magnificent wedding, he invited many counts, princes and lords, who came with pleasure to Speyer. The King commanded that everything should be prepared, as befitted a royal majesty; the Cathedral in Speyer was covered with lawn and crimson.

During this event a great feast was arranged, where one merrily banqueted with the bride and her bridesmaids. At about 9 o'clock the king began to speak to the princes, and in his speech he promised to entrust the Czech kingdom to his son John, and for greater entitlement he would give him as his

wife, as everyone advised, the heir of that kingdom. Righteousness thus entailed that this kingdom adopted from the Empire in fief also the title and name.

The king, clad in festive vestments, with a sceptre in his hand and a gold crown on his head, sat on the throne at the church in Speyer. Then came his son John with a procession with pennants from the Czech kingdom, after which princes of the Holy Empire, according to tradition, made an oath. John, the Archbishop of Cologne performed the wedding service and joined John and Elisabeth in matrimony. The following day Peter the Archbishop of Mainz celebrated holy mass.

Apparently before lunch there was a slight spat between the archbishops about who should sit on the king's right, but the king wisely calmed the quarrel.

During the celebrations the tables were laden with various food dishes to the accompaniment of trumpets, horns and drums. The weaponry of chivalry was also here, protecting the festivities. In the centre of the banquet, in front of

the royal table a pennant with the symbol of the Czech kingdom was raised. The wedding was lavish and flamboyant, "as had not been seen for many a year at the court of the Roman king". After the feast various entertainments took place; varied dances and chivalric games. Apparently the whole of Speyer echoed with exuberant joy, merriment and jubilation. The bravery of the Czechs was appreciated; no one dared to fight with them in a head-on joust on horseback and if they were not careful it happened that each would receive a large wound from the lance, or fell from the horse, or their lance would shatter into small pieces. This they did for the fame and honour of the new bride.

"By evening after the previous blessings the bridegroom and bride were conjoined in bed." On the second day everyone rose and continued in rejoicing, as on the following days.

However the magnificent wedding and succession to the Czech throne did not stabilise political conditions in Bohemia. It was necessary to definitively deal with Henry of Carinthia and negoti-

ate with the Czech nobility about future arrangements. The nobles wanted above all to retain their powerful position, while thanks to his upbringing John espoused by contrast the sovereignty of the monarch. The couple, who were crowned in Prague in February 1311, were to have a future full of problems, both political and personal. However they finally gave the Kingdom of Bohemia its most significant leader, their son Wenceslas, the future Charles IV, "Father of the Nation".



Elisabeth of Premyslides