

Čornej, Petr: *Lipanská křižovatka. Příčiny, průběh a historický význam jedné bitvy* [Am Kreuzweg von Lipany. Ursachen, Verlauf und historische Bedeutung einer Schlacht].

Panorama, Praha 1992, 277S.

Čornej portrays the 30 May 1434 battle of Lipany, fought between the standing field armies of the radicals and a coalition of Hussite and Catholics not as one that ended the revolution but one that marked a change in its direction. Henceforth the moderate's agenda to live at peace with the Catholics prevailed. The radical hope for a Bohemia uniformly Hussite ceased being a realistic option. This is an important book because it portrays the rivalry and negotiations leading to the battle within the context of the long years of strife and material hardship, while at the same time describing the nature of revolutionary military life within the radical brotherhoods.

In Čornej's book, the effects on events of the harsh realities of life, of military power and material and natural forces are more important than are ideas and ideology. He does not however eliminate the power of beliefs nor of individual choice. In an opening chapter he presents a summary of the causes, the mentality and the goals of the Hussite revolution. He concludes that the decisive motive for joining the revolution was each person's internal conviction and his understanding of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the author does not resist gratuitous critiques of people such as Peter Chelčický, who is said to have fled from reality and whose kingdom was not of this world. In fact he and his followers very much remained in this world, even if their ideas were not popular.

In reminding the reader of the decisive role of battles in determining events, the author offers much more than a mere military history. He describes the difficult

economic times, the result of human actions (the European trade embargo) and of natural catastrophes. As a consequence we get a look at how common men, but not women, experienced the revolution and at their role in the important battle of Lipany.

The permanent field armies, in which the infantry outnumbered the cavalry ten to one, were built on the effective use of the wagon fortress which made it possible for them to overcome the more heavily armed knight's of Europe. On the march the line of wagons protected the foot soldiers. In battle or when stationary, bound with chains from wheel to wheel, they formed a defensive circle. From the vantage of the wagons the warriors, armed with flails and halberds, met the armoured knights into whose midst other soldiers fired primitive cannons. Each wagon was drawn by four horses with one rider per pair. A train of 100 wagons stretched over two kilometres and it took great skill to control the horse on a march. While effective against the heavily armoured German and Austrian knights, the less heavily armoured Hungarian troops, striking quickly, repeatedly and unexpectedly, succeeded in breaking down the Hussite defenses.

Although the exact composition is unclear, Čornej assumes that the standing armies were recruited from the have-nots of society; cadet peasant sons, with little hope of inheriting and urban day labourers. The found life on the campaign, without house or roof pleasing and the resulting military culture replaced earlier revolutionary idealism. They were noted for their personal courage, protected by the thin armour of rough linen or burlap and fighting with only a sword or dagger. Their often foolhardy style of combat was emulated even by some nobles and inspired fear among the enemies. These swaggering ruffians or *Kasaličtí*, (named for the belted, *Pod kasany*, garments they wore) have not received much attention from historians.

The permanent armies were costly and drained the economy of between 8,500 to 15,000 kilograms of silver a year, beyond the capacity of the mines at Kutná Hora. The peasant's ability and desire to supply the army through tribute soon disappeared and so the military leadership decided on the so-called grand raids abroad. Čornej rightly stresses that the primary goal of these raids was not to spread the revolution's political agenda, but to provision the armies.

Čornej is also right in drawing our attention to the importance of weather, food shortages and morality. Not only did frost, rain and heat destroy crops but people saw natural events as signs of God's approval or disapproval. Thus the harsh winter of 1431-1432, the floods which followed the rapid thaw of that spring and the drought of the summer led to a number of raids abroad some of which ended disastrously for the Czechs and put pressure on the Hussites to negotiate with the Council of Basel. In 1433 the radicals decided to take the well fortified Catholic city of Plzeň, the most important obstacle to a unified Hussite Bohemia. The heavy rains of July 1433 ruined crops, and winter deprived the market stalls of fish, small birds and animals so that the poor were reduced to eating spoiled food and flour made from acorns. Many soldiers and civilians died. The public grew increasingly disillusioned with the armies and within their ranks, divisive tensions surfaced. Their failure to take Plzeň was fundamentally important. Had the radicals succeeded the battle at Lipany would likely not have occurred.

The standing field armies posed a real dilemma for the revolution. By the late twenties a military lifestyle and its material security and hopes for upward social mobility had replaced the simple Hussite belief that the Bible provided the principles needed to organize society. Peace meant there was no place for the common soldiers who had given the revolution its greatest triumphs and success on the European diplomatic stage. With increasing pressure to negotiate, the common soldier and the captains feared for their future. Although he admits the sources do not describe the mood of the common soldier before Plzeň, Čornej argues that it is absurd to leave his way of life and change into a peaceful and orderly individual pursuing artisan or agricultural livelihoods. It seems to me the author exaggerates the warrior's devotion to military life. Life in town or farm may not have seemed absurd to the 10,000 men besieging Plzeň at Christmas 1433 who had seen 4–5,000 of their comrades die since October.

Before the siege of Plzeň a coalition had emerged with the goal of negotiating with the Council of Basel and to suppress the field armies and the radicals if need be. It was made up of Catholics and Hussites, nobles and towns and included some former allies of the radicals. The author avoids judgmental invectives and sensitively shows that these were not traitors as has been argued by nationalists of the nineteenth century, the liberal democrat, F. M. Bartoš, and by the Marxists. Přibík of Klenové, a former ally of the radicals, was not a traitor when he supplied the Catholic city of Plzeň, but simply a man who represented the shift in public opinion which by 1433 saw the field armies as a constitutional encounter between two visions of reform as expressed since 1419. One group saw a land in which faiths lived together. The other wanted a land unified as Hussite. The issue had to be settled by a contest of military power.

The coalition's military success Lipany owed much to the skills and experience of men who had once served in the armies of the radicals. Thus John of Černín, knowing it was useless to attack the wagon trains of the radicals, lured them to desert their defenses with a tightly disciplined feigned retreat of his own wagons and routed them.

Čornej's book is meant for the uninitiated reader so he defines terms such as the church schism and councils. Unfortunately publishers seem to think such readers do not want footnotes or citations. The reader who wishes to know more about the interpretations and claims made by the author must go to the extensive bibliography where he or she can locate works that promise to answer some of these questions. Because of its readability the book is an excellent place for the non-Czech to discover the fruits of recent Czech scholarship and the author's own interesting and compelling explanations.

Although published in 1992, the text was completed in October 1989, just before the "Velvet revolution" so it is not an example of the direction Hussite scholarship will take in the new Czech republic.