



The Black Prince and the Terrors of Chivalry

David Green

dgreen@harlaxton.ac.uk

Chandos Herald, *Life of the Black Prince*

I wish to set my intent on writing and recording the life of the most valiant prince of this world...that ever was since the days of Clarus, Julius Caesar, or Arthur, as you shall hear...: it is of a noble Prince of Aquitaine, who was son of the noble and valorous King Edward & of Queen Philippa...the perfect root of all honour & nobleness, of wisdom, valour, & bounty.

This noble Prince...from the day of his birth cherished no thought but loyalty, nobleness, valour, and goodness, and was imbued with prowess. Of such nobleness was the Prince that he wished all the days of his life to set his whole intent on maintaining justice and right, and therein was he nurtured from his childhood up; from his generous and noble disposition he drew the doctrine of bounty, for gaiety and nobleness were in his heart perfectly from the first beginnings of his life and youth. Now, is it full time that I address myself to carrying forward my matter, how he was so noble, bold, and valiant, so courteous and so sage, and how he loved so well the holy Church with his whole heart, and, above all, the most lofty Trinity; its festival and solemnity he began to celebrate from the first days of his youth and upheld it all his life zealously, without evil thought.



A Perfect Gentle Knight?

Edward of Woodstock

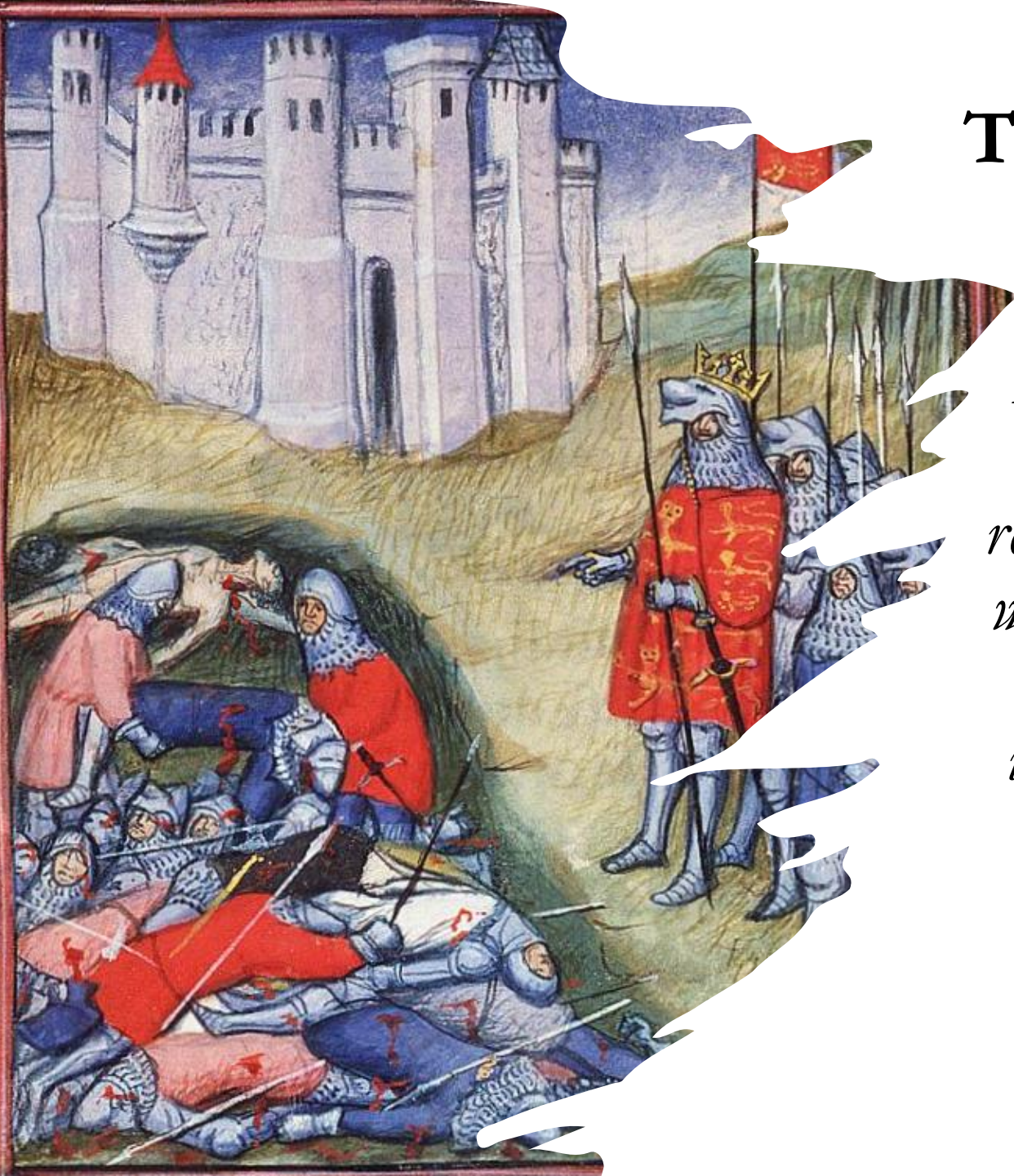
The Black Prince

Earl of Chester, duke of
Cornwall, Prince of Wales and
Aquitaine

(1330-1376)

The Crécy Campaign (1346)

The English army arrived, and when he was about to disembark the King knighted the Prince, the Earl of March also, and the Earl of Salisbury, John of Montagu, his brother, and others...And know well, the Marshal Bertrand, who was of great valour and hardihood, was there, and thought...to keep them from landing. But the English landed by force. **There were achieved so many feats of arms that one might have compared Roland, and Oliver, and the very courteous Ogier the Dane. There might one behold men of prowess, valour, and hardihood. There was the fair and noble Prince, who made a right goodly beginning. All the Cotentin he overrode and wholly burnt and laid waste, La Hogue, Barfleur, Carentan, Saint-Lô, Bayeux, and up to Caen...and there they fought mightily; by force they took the town, and the Count of Tancarville and the Count of Eu were taken there. There the noble Prince gained renown, for he was eager to acquit himself well, and was but 18 years old.**



The *Grande Chevauchée* (1355)

For the countryside and towns which have been destroyed in this raid produced more revenue for the king of France in aid of his wars than half his kingdom; ... as I could prove from authentic documents found in various towns in the tax collectors' houses.

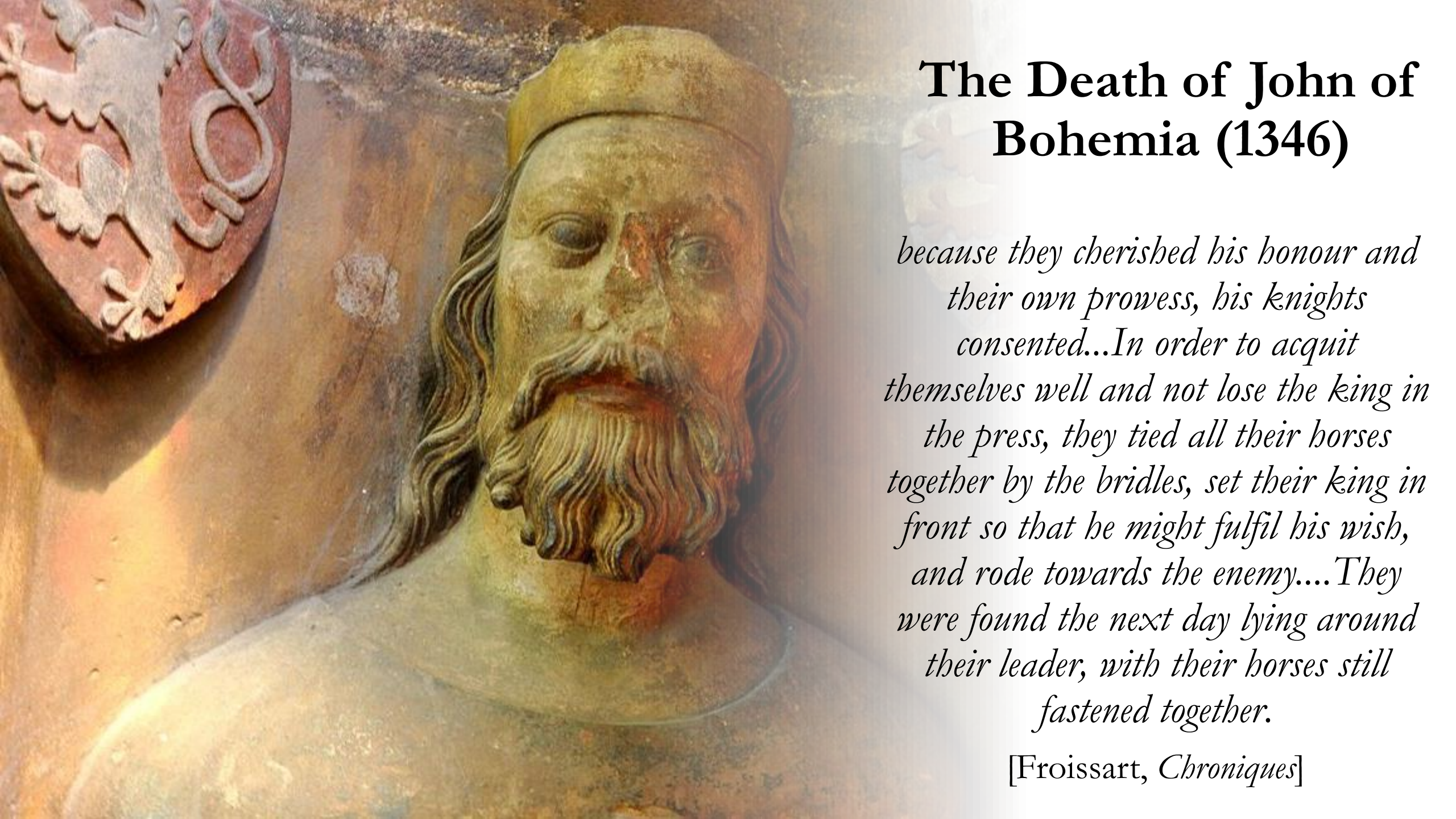
[Sir John Wingfield, letter written in 1355]

The Capture of King Jean II (1356)

The same day of the battle at night the prince made a supper in his lodging for the French king and for the most part of the great lords that were prisoners . . . and always the prince served before the king as humbly as he could, and would not sit at the king's board for any desire the king could make, but he said he was not sufficient to sit at the table with so great a prince.

[Froissart, *Chroniques*]





The Death of John of Bohemia (1346)

because they cherished his honour and their own prowess, his knights consented...In order to acquit themselves well and not lose the king in the press, they tied all their horses together by the bridles, set their king in front so that he might fulfil his wish, and rode towards the enemy....They were found the next day lying around their leader, with their horses still fastened together.

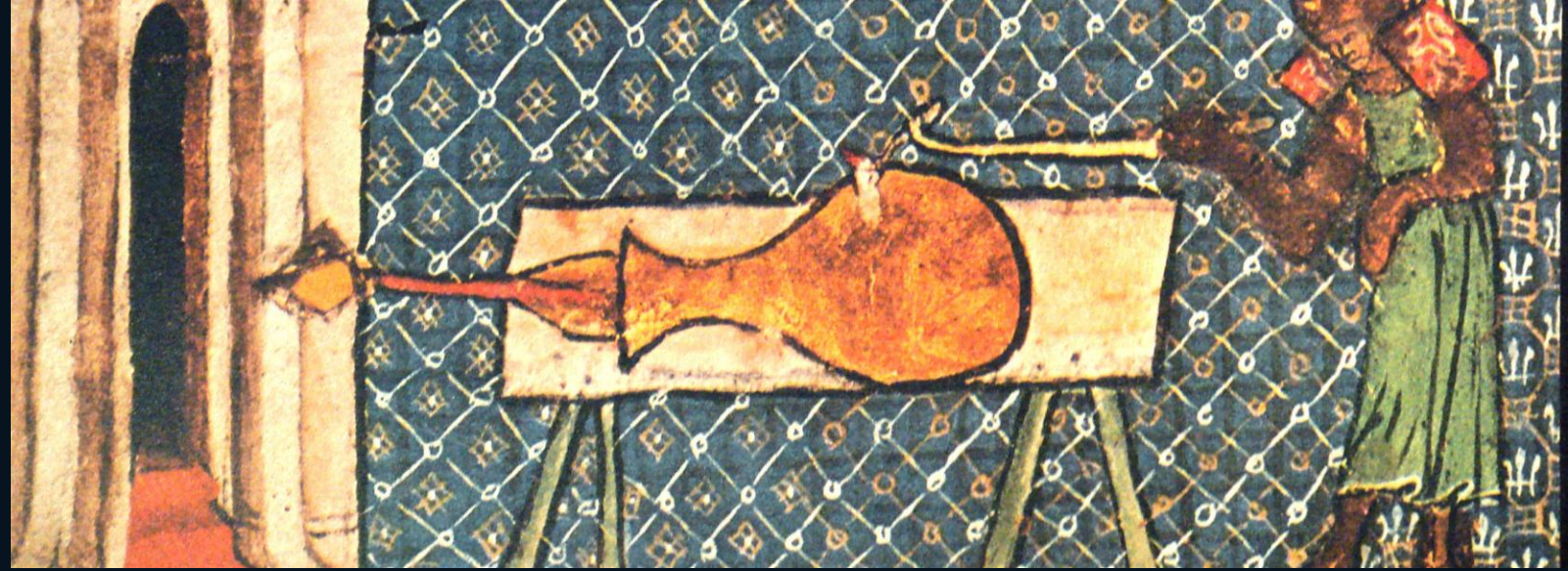
[Froissart, *Chroniques*]

A Military Revolution?



- Infantry & cavalry
- Longbows & artillery
- Professionalism

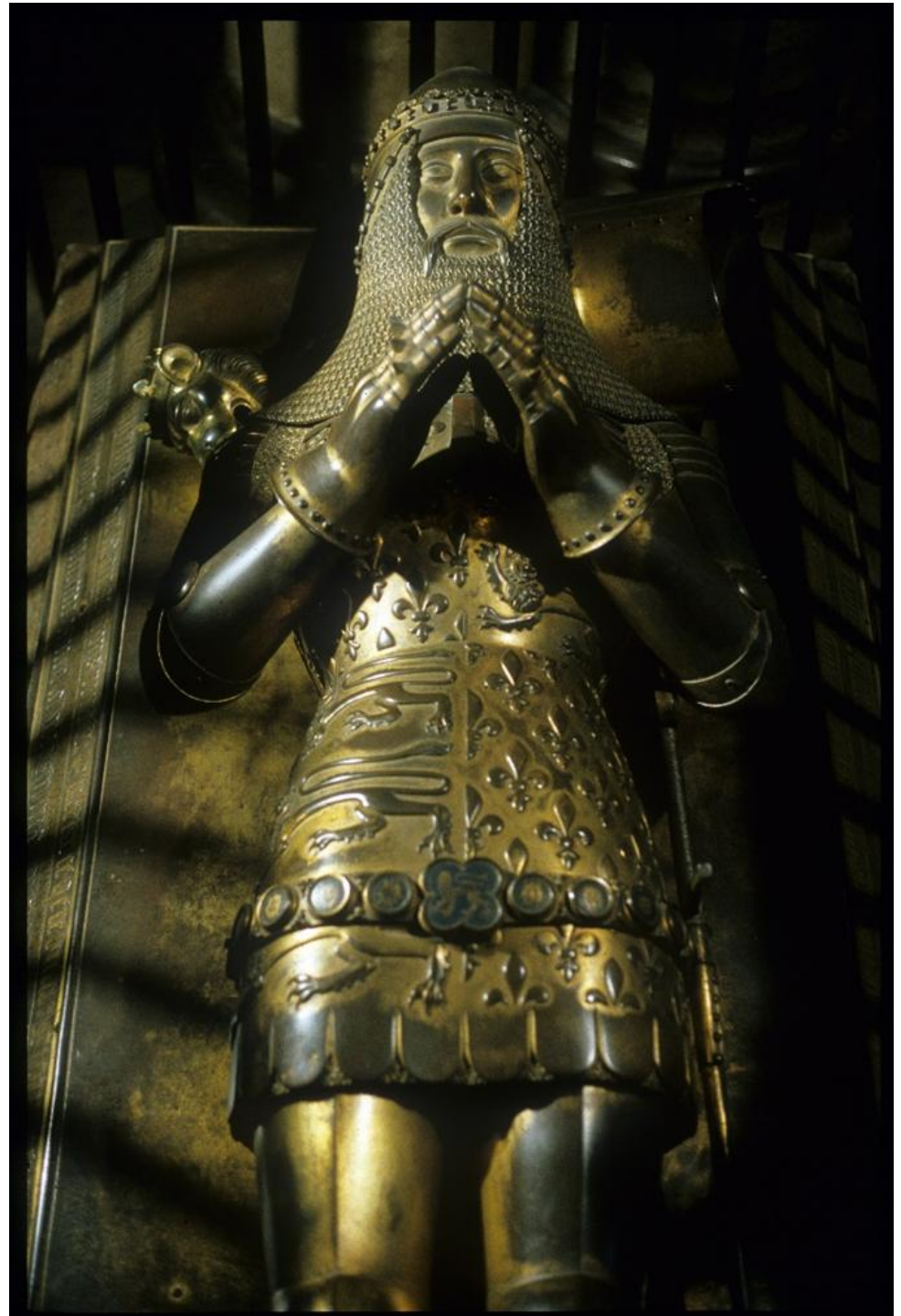
Gunpowder Artillery and the Decline of Chivalry?



Blessed be those happy ages that were strangers to the dreadful fury of these devilish instruments of artillery, whose inventor I am satisfied is now in Hell, receiving the reward for his cursed invention, which is the cause that very often a cowardly base hand takes away the life of the bravest gentleman; and that in the midst of that vigour and resolution, which animates and inflames the bold, a chance bullet (shot perhaps by one who fled.. .) coming nobody knows how, or from where, in a moment puts an end to the brave designs and the life of one who deserved to have survived many years.

Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605)

GRANDEUR OR HUMILITY? RELIGIOUS LIFE AFTER THE BLACK DEATH





The Black Prince's Epitaph

You who pass silently by here where my body rests, listen to what I would say to you if I were able to speak.

Such as you are, I used to be: you will become such as I am.

I did not ponder on the idea of death whilst I was alive.

On Earth I possessed great wealth with which I kept high state: lands, houses and great treasure, rich furnishings, horses, silver and gold.

But now I am poor and wretched as I lie here in the dust.

All my fine appearance is gone, my flesh is quite decayed.

I inhabit a meagre and narrow house.

You would not credit that it is I if you were to see me now. You would fancy this could never have been any man, so utterly changed am I.

A Good Life or a Bad Death?

For more than five years “almost every month he suffered a discharge of both semen and blood [which] rendered him so weak on many an occasion that his attendants very often thought he had died.”

[Thomas Walsingham, *St Alban's Chronicle* (c.1390)]

