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The funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous: Between the profane and the sacred

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Abstract

NODL, Martin. The funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous: Between the profane and the sacred.

The present study is devoted to both sacred and profane elements of late medieval royal funerals in the Bohemian kingdom, using the funeral of Bohemian and Hungarian King Ladislaus the Posthumous as an example. The ceremony took place in Prague on 25 November 1457, two days after his unexpected death. Like royal coronations, the funeral of a monarch was one of the most important rituals of monarchical power, though unlike coronations, no normative source on the proceedings—an *Ordo exsequiarum*—was ever written in the Kingdom of Bohemia or anywhere else in Christian Europe. This study emphasizes the elements of a profane nature, manifested in the breaking and destruction of emblems of monarchical power (the crown, sceptre, imperial apple, seal, flags and banners). An analysis of the sources preserved in relation to this funeral, as well as the funerals of other Czech kings of the 14th and 15th centuries, reveals that the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous was not exclusively a sacral affair; secular elements played a significant role and in some aspects, even dominated over the sacred elements.

Keywords

Ladislaus the Posthumous, funeral ceremony, sacrality, secular culture, Bohemian kingdom

DOI

10.31577/forhist.2023.17.1.6

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Cite

NODL, Martin. The funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous: Between the profane and the sacred. In *Forum Historiae*, 2023, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 76–88, doi: 10.31577/forhist.2023.17.1.6

Like coronation ceremonies, the funeral of a sovereign was one of the most significant rituals of monarchic power in the 15th century. Though contrary to coronations, no normative source (*Ordo exsequiarum*) existed that laid out the details and obligations of a royal funeral like the coronation order (*Ordo ad coronandum*) did.¹ This was the case not just in the Kingdom of Bohemia, but also in the wider Empire² and also in neighbouring Hungary and Poland,³

This work is the result of a project of the Czech Science Foundation “Pagans and Christians: Christianisation in the Bohemian and Polish Kingdoms in the Middle Ages” (GAČR 22-18972K), researched at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague.

- 1 The legal order for burials was recorded during the funeral of Polish King Sigismund I the Old in 1548 after the canons of the Kraków cathedral attempted to find an older funereal order but were unsuccessful. They thus called on Kraków Bishop Samuel Maciejowski to create a funeral order. The author is considered to be Bishop and Hofmarschall Piotr Kmita. The order was approved by Sigismund II Augustus and was used for his funeral and that of Stephen Báthory. Cf. GOŁAB, Julian. Pogrzeb króla Zygmunta Starego. In *Sprawozdanie dyrekcji szkolne C.K. II. Wyższej realnej szkoły w Krakowie*, 1916, pp. 3–48. Edition *Ordo pompe funebris serenissimi Sigismundi regis Poloniae* on pp. 13–26.
- 2 Cf. MEYER, Rudolf. *Königs- und Kaiserbegräbnisse im Spätmittelalter. Von Rudolf von Habsburg bis zu Friedrich III.* Köln; Weimar; Wien : Böhlau, 2000.
- 3 From Polish research, cf. especially: SNIEŻYŃSKA-STOLOT, Ewa. Dworski ceremoniał pogrzebowy królów polskich w XIV wieku. In SKUBISZEWSKI, Piotr

which were dynastically interconnected in the late medieval period. Each royal funeral was a singular ritual act where sacred and profane elements were combined. Examples of secular elements include the breaking and destruction of the symbols of sovereign power (the crown, sceptre, imperial orb, seal, and standard). Some of these elements, such as the breaking of the sword, the sacrifice of horses and the sacrifice of a knight symbolizing the king could have been based on pre-Christian customs, without the 14th and 15th century participants ever being aware of the pagan origin or seeing the custom as pagan.

Present day knowledge of the details of Ladislaus the Posthumous's funeral is exceptional to a certain respect thanks to a document called the "Order for Burying King Ladislaus." Almost nothing is known about the funerals of most Czech kings despite an excellent study authored by František Šmahel, whose research into funeral rituals in the Czech environment and interpretations form the basis of the ideas presented here.⁴ This scarcity of knowledge is also true for the funerals of Ottokar I of Bohemia, Wenceslas I, Wenceslas III and George of Poděbrady, and in the case of some Czech kings, not even skeletal remains exist.⁵ The issue is complicated by the fact there was not a single royal necropolis in Bohemia in the 13th – 15th centuries and so kings, their wives, and children were often buried in different places (St. Vitus Cathedral, the Convent of St. Agnes – Na Františku, the Zbraslav Monastery and the Cathedral of St. Wenceslas in Olomouc). The 13th century can rightfully be called a period of seeking a Přemyslid necropolis. The search was ended in 1373 by Charles IV with the construction of a royal crypt in the St. Vitus Cathedral, which was adorned with exquisite sculptures in the tradition of Peter Parler. Charles IV built the crypt primarily for himself, his wives and children, but it was also

(ed.) *Sztuka i ideologia XIV wieku*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1975, pp. 89–100; BORKOWSKA, Urszula. The Funeral Ceremonies of the Polish Kings from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries. In *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 1985, vol. 36, pp. 513–534; BORKOWSKA, Urszula. Ceremoniał pogrzebowy królów polskich w XIV – XVIII w. In SKARBK, Jan – ZIÓŁEK, Jan (eds.) *Państwo. Kościół. Niepodległość*. Lublin : Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1986, pp. 133–160; BORKOWSKA, Urszula. *Dynastia Jagiellonów w Polsce*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2011, pp. 235–241; SKOWRON, Ryszard. Ceremonial, Etiquette, Residence. Europeanism and Own Traditions at the COURT of the Polish Kings 1370 – 1648. In PARAVICINI, Werner (ed.) *La cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe. Le rayonnement et les limites d'un modèle culturel*. Ostfildern : Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2013, pp. 773–784; CZUPRYNIAK, Greta. Ryt pogrzebowy w Polsce w XVI wieku. Część 1. Pogrzeby królewskie, Krzysztoforzy. In *Krzysztoforzy. Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa*, 2011, vol. 29, pp. 119–168. On Hungarian customs, see: PETNEKI, Aron. *Exequiae regis*. Die Begräbniszeremonie des Königs Matthias Corvinus vor ihrem ungarischen Hintergrund. In KOLMER, Lothar (ed.) *Der Tod des Mächtigen. Kult und Kultur des Todes spätmittelalterlicher Herrscher*. Paderborn; München; Wien; Zürich : Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 1997, pp. 113–124. For Corvinus' funeral also, see: KALOUS, Antonín. *Matyáš Korvín (1443 – 1490). Uherský a český král*. České Budějovice : Veduta 2009, pp. 331–333.

- 4 Cf. URBÁNEK, Rudolf. *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*. Praha : Česká akademie věd a umění, 1924; MACEK, Josef. Smrt Ladislava Pohrobka. In *Československý časopis historický*, 1966, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 766–775; PAPAJÍK, David. *Ladislav Pohrobek (1400 – 1457). Uherský a český král*. České Budějovice : Veduta, 2016, pp. 209–211, is a pure retelling of the sources and brings nothing new.
- 5 A rudimentary study on the problem of the burials of Czech kings is presented by: ŠMAHEL, František. Poslední chvíle, pohřby a hroby českých králů. In NODL, Martin – ŠMAHEL, František (eds.) *Slavnosti, ceremonie a rituály v pozdním středověku*. Praha : Argo, 2014, pp. 123–197. Šmahel's research is completely dependent on: BLÁHOVÁ, Marie. Die königlichen Begräbniszeremonien im spätmittelalterlichen Böhmen. In KOLMER, Lothar (ed.) *Der Tod des Mächtigen. Kult und Kultur des Todes spätmittelalterlicher Herrscher*. Paderborn; München; Wien; Zürich : Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 1997, pp. 89–112.

constructed in the spirit of Přemyslid traditions, with six Czech kings and princes eventually being laid to rest in the royal crypt (Bretislav I, Spytihněv II, Břetislav II, Bořivoj II, Ottokar I of Bohemia, and Ottokar II of Bohemia).⁶

This study aims to show the blending of the sacred and profane using the funeral of Czech and Hungarian King Ladislaus the Posthumous which took place in Prague on 25 November 1457, just two days after his death puzzled contemporaries and gave rise to various legends.⁷ Because of the suddenness and the series of doubts associated with Ladislaus's death, most chronicles debate whether he died of natural causes or was poisoned by his "protector" and administrator of the kingdom, George of Poděbrady. Unfortunately, contemporary sources say little about the funeral itself with a few exceptions. Such silence is nothing unusual, as complete omission or a simple statement of facts accompanies almost all royal funerals in the Kingdom of Bohemia in the late Middle Ages. The most significant exception is a short chapter from the *Old Czech Annals*, the Wrocław manuscript, which includes the "Order for Burying King Ladislaus." However, the word "order" here has been exaggerated. In reality, the chronicler did not record an order *ordo* of the events, but only a simple—and unfortunately rather brief—description of Ladislaus's funeral.

Charles's intention to make St. Vitus Cathedral the representative and grandiose necropolis of Czech kings ended after his death. His son, Czech and German King Wenceslas IV rejected the idea, possibly because he refused to be buried in the same place as his father or his first wife, Joanna of Bavaria. Wenceslas was buried without spectacle in the Zbraslav Monastery after his death in 1419, during a time of revolutionary chaos. His last request to lie in the Cistercian monastery was fulfilled only briefly, as five years later his body was ceremonially transferred to St. Vitus⁸ where he was laid alongside his brother John of Görlitz. Relocating Wenceslas's body was part of an attempt to legitimise the power of Sigismund Korybut, who as "the requested king" desired recognition for his quasi-royal authority.⁹

The absence of a binding funereal rite for Czech kings was hindered by another fact besides the lack of a single necropolis: no royal funeral took place in Bohemia between the death of Wenceslas II in 1305 and the death of Charles IV. After Charles's death in 1378, it would be another 50 years before his son was buried, and another 40 years passed before the funeral of our hero, Ladislaus the Posthumous. More experience would be needed to create an *Ordo exsequiarum*, in this case a collective memory that may have been used to

6 Overview for individual kings, see: BRAVERMANOVÁ, Milena – LUTOVSKÝ, Michal. *Hroby, hrobky a pohřebiště českých knížat a králů*. Praha : Libri, 2001; BRAVERMANOVÁ, Milena. Hroby králů a jejich příbuzných na Pražském hradě. In *Castrum Pragense*, 2005, vol. 7, pp. 53–88. On the textiles preserved in the tombs of Czech kings, see: cf. BAŽANTOVÁ, Nina. *Pohřební roucha českých králů*. Praha : Koniasch Latin Press, 1993.

7 ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 135–137.

8 ŠMAHEL, František. Blasfemie rituálu? Tři pohřby krále Václava IV. In SOUKUP, Ladislav (ed.) *Pocta prof. JUDr. Karlu Malému, DrSc., k 65. narozeninám*. Praha : Karolinum, 1995, pp. 133–143.

9 NODL, Martin. Král požádaný. Symbolická komunikace Zikmunda Korybutoviče. In HLAVÁČKOVÁ, Miriam (ed.) *Od symbolu k slovu. Podoby stredovekej komunikácie*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2016, pp. 209–210.

compose a possible funeral order. However, there was no collective memory of royal funerals in the Czech environment, and as descriptions of royal funerals cannot be found in domestic chronicles, Ladislaus the Posthumous's contemporaries had nothing to reference. The only fleeting comparison of royal funerals can be found in the Wrocław manuscript and the manuscript of the Monastery of the Knights of the Cross of *Old Czech Annals*, which compares Ladislaus the Posthumous's funeral with that of Charles IV, "And the same wailing and crying was present as when the old Emperor Charles passed, and the cities of Prague cried greatly."¹⁰

Although no general rite for burying Czech kings existed, elements that were common to the funerals that something is known about can be observed, though these aspects may not be of Czech origin. Often, such components are ritual and ceremonial acts that were used generally throughout Christian Europe, like lying in state, a procession with the body, destruction of the funeral insignias, the breaking of swords, sacrificing horses, a symbolic burial without the sovereign's body, etc. Surviving sources do not testify to the general traditions and differing actions in specific cases altered under influence from the times, innovations from abroad (Poland, Hungary), or attempts to introduce new elements into the ritual that would underline the singularity of the specific ruler.

Today's knowledge of Ladislaus the Posthumous's funeral is based on the description in the *Old Czech Annals*. Independent of that, Peter Eschenloer briefly described the funeral in the Latin and German versions of his Wrocław chronicle.¹¹ A short mention can also be found in the works of Enea Silvio Piccolomini¹² and in a contemporary song about King Ladislaus's death.¹³ Some details have come from archaeology; the burial clothes and the contents of the grave, which create problems for and relativize the fragmented records in the chronicles.

Five specific aspects of Ladislaus's funeral where the sacred and irreverent become intertwined will be addressed, five aspects of this supremely religious act which transform it into something solely secular. The Christian aspect of these deeds are either strongly suppressed or not present at all. The funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous is not exceptional in any way, meaning these features were not outside the norms of the time. In this respect, the funeral

10 *Staré letopisy české z vratislavského rukopisu novočeským pravopisem*. Prameny a texty k dějinám československým 1. Edited and translated František Šimek. Praha : Historický spolek a společnost Husova muzea, 1937, p. 225; *Starí letopisové čeští. Od roku 1378 do 1527 čili pokračování v kronikách Přibíka Pulkavy a Beneše z Hořovic z rukopisů starých vydané*. Dílo Františka Palackého, svazek druhý. Edited by Jaroslav Charvát. Praha : L. Mazáč, 1941, p. 152, no. 514.

11 ESCHENLOER, Peter. *Historia Wratislaviensis et que post mortem regis Ladislai sub Electo Georgio de Podiebrat Bohemorum rege illi acciderant prospera et adversa*. Scriptorum rerum Silesiacarum VII. Edited by Hermann Markgraf. Breslau : Josef Max et Comp, 1872, pp. 14–15; ESCHENLOER, Peter. *Geschichten der Stadt Breslau 1: Chronik bis 1466*. Edited and translated by Gunhild Roth. Münster; New York; München; Berlin : Waxmann, 2003, pp. 197–199.

12 *Aeneae Silvii Historia Bohemica: Enea Silvio Historie česka*. Edited and translated by Dana Martínková, Alena Hadravová and Jiří Matl. Praha : Koniasch Latin Press, 1998, pp. 252–253.

13 *Die historischen Volksliedern der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert 1*. Edited by Richus von Liliencron. Leipzig : Vogel, 1865, pp. 492–496, no. 106a-b.

is fundamentally different from a coronation in the fact that secular elements specific to a single environment can be found in all coronation rituals in the Central European space (Bohemia, Poland, Hungary).

The Breaking of Insignia

In the 13th century, kings were placed in the royal crypt with royal insignia that were made of precious metals, mostly gilded silver as seen in the grave of Ottokar II of Bohemia, Wenceslas II and Rudolf I of Germany.¹⁴ A change came in the 14th century when the insignia were made of gilded wood, as is the case of Charles IV. Why did the material used in the funeral insignia change? We know of gilded insignia made of wood and silver from the Holy Roman Empire during the 13th and 14th centuries. František Šmahel presented a hypothesis that the gilded wooden insignia were a sufficient representation of royal majesty for the contemporaries of the time.¹⁵ It is also possible the shift to wooden insignia was associated with the ritual of breaking them at the end of the funeral, which is also described in the funerals of Polish kings in the 15th and 16th centuries.¹⁶ On the contrary, insignia were not broken during the funerals of German kings. In Bohemia, the breaking of insignia is documented for the first (and last) time during the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous and during the symbolic funeral of Vladislaus II of Hungary. Meanwhile, there is no mention of the practise during the funeral of Charles IV, which is in line with imperial traditions.

Unfortunately, the description of Ladislaus the Posthumous's funeral in the *Old Czech Annals* is rather terse:

And after all the masses, they broke the royal seal and majesty. The sharp sword carried before the dead king pointed downwards, and it took a long time to break. They also broke, destroyed, and despoiled the imperial orb, sceptre, and spear. The banner with the Czech coat of arms was taken by the administrator and walked around the grave three times before it was thrown on the ground and torn apart. He then tore apart the banner of other royal lands with their coats of arms, stomping them down with his feet.¹⁷

The chronicler added only that the Germans who watched these events were saddened and cried.

The text of the *Old Czech Annals* names the individual that tore apart and destroyed the banners as George of Poděbrady. As its administrator, he was the actual head of the kingdom and performed the ritual act that symbolised the end of the former king's reign. Whether George specifically broke the sword, sceptre, orb, seal or other items is unknown. There are two interesting points to note about the chronicler's description. Primarily, no one mentions the crown or its destruction, which could have a simple explanation; the chronicler could have simply forgotten about it in his description.¹⁸ The second is

14 BRAVERMANOVÁ – LUTOVSKÝ 2001, pp. 176, 182–183.

15 ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 127.

16 BORKOWSKA 1986, p. 157; BORKOWSKA 2011, pp. 239–240; CZUPRYNIAK 2011, pp. 40, 50.

17 *Staré letopisy české*, p. 225; *Starí letopisové čeští*, p. 152, no. 514.

18 A German song from the time said Ladislaus had a golden crown on his head during the proces-

the sword. It evidently wasn't made of wood as it was not broken. This begs the question of what among the insignia was an imitation made of wood and what was real and original? The answer is not simple. The remains of wooden insignia survived in the grave of Ladislaus the Posthumous and the same is true of the graves of Charles IV, Wenceslas IV and George of Poděbrady. However, the surviving sources only speak to the breaking and destruction of insignia during the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous, and the representative funeral of Vladislaus II of Hungary was organized by Prague's cities. In these cases, however, the royal sword was made of wood,¹⁹ possibly to avoid issues with it breaking as happened during the funeral of Ladislaus.²⁰ It should also be noted that the sword in Vladislaus of Hungary's funeral was broken by the Old Town's burgomaster as the representative of royal power in the city.

As the royal sword was not carried by a knight dressed in black—meant to represent the dead king—during the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous, it is unknown who finally broke the sword at the grave. The *Old Czech Annals* only mentions that the sword was carried before the king's body during the procession. However, Wrocław chronicler Peter Eschenloer claimed the insignia, crown, imperial orb, sceptre, seal and sword were carried by Czech lords.²¹ Eschenloer also mentions 10 youths that rode 10 black-clad horses.²² Both reports show that the sword did not maintain any special importance during Ladislaus's funeral nor did it matter who carried it, as was the case in Poland. Like the funeral of Charles IV,²³ the rider(s) represented the king²⁴ and the sword was meant to symbolise royal power and the king's chivalry. However, the sword lost its privileged position in Prague by 1457 and fell to the level of other insignia.

In the case of funerals of Ladislaus the Posthumous and Vladislaus of Hungary, the *Old Czech Annals* speak of breaking the insignia, which was also the case in the 14th and 15th century Polish environment. However, there is a disagreement with testimony from archaeology. When the graves of Ladislaus the Posthumous and George of Poděbrady were opened in 1743, those who recorded the event wrote that Ladislaus's grave included a complete wooden crown covered in gold and George's had an intact imperial orb;²⁵ an unbroken orb and an unbroken crown. This begs the question of whether there were

sion, but we do not know if this was only a gilded wooden imitation. Cf. *Die historischen Volksliedern der Deutschen 1*, p. 494, no. 106a, v. 12, no. 106b, v. 13.

19 *Starí letopisové čeští*, p. 332, no. 968.

20 *Staré letopisy české*, p. 225; *Starí letopisové čeští*, p. 152, no. 514.

21 ESCHENLOER, *Geschichten der Stadt Breslau 1*, p. 198: "Die heren aws Během, des meisten teils keczerre, trugen die konigliche regalia, das swert, die cron, den appil, ceptir, sigil etc." It's not clear whether John II of Rosenberg and Prokop of Rabstein were among those who carried the insignia. We should note the Latin version does not include this passage. Burghers who organized the funeral carried the insignia during the funeral of Vladislaus II of Hungary in 1516. *Starí letopisové čeští*, p. 332, no. 968.

22 ESCHENLOER, *Geschichten der Stadt Breslau 1*, p. 198: "...czehen jungen vff vordackten czehen pferden mit swarczem sammot worden vorgeczogen." The ten sacrificed horses also know, see: *Die historischen Volksliedern der Deutschen 1*, p. 494, no. 106b, v. 15.

23 ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 146–148.

24 To the substitute knights, see: BRÜCKNER, Wolfgang. *Bildnis und Brauch. Studien zur Bildfunktion der Effigies*. Berlin : Schmidt Verlag, 1966.

25 BRAVERMANOVÁ – LUTOVSKÝ 2001, pp. 54–56.

more symbolic wooded insignia. Were some broken in front of the public while others were placed in the grave? It is known from the funeral of Charles IV that an unbroken wooden insignia was placed in his grave.²⁶ That was part of the imperial tradition, and there was no older precedent in the Czech tradition. There are also reports that three genuine crowns were carried during Charles's funeral: the Czech, Holy Roman, and Langobard, which were not imitations that were then broken. The question is when these crowns were exchanged for wooden insignia that, in the end, were placed unbroken into the grave. The same is true of the insignia positioned in the graves of Ladislaus the Posthumous and George of Poděbrady. There is no clear answer to this question except if the author of the *Old Czech Annals* was correct in leaving out the crown in his report. The truth is the *Ordo pompe funebris serenissimi Sigismundi regis Poloniae* also does not mention a crown and only speaks of a spear, shield, sword and helmet.²⁷

Banners

Although banners were not included among the royal insignia, they did carry a special significance in the world of feudal relations. The transfer of banners from lord to vassal was a tangible symbol of feudal relations in Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, such as when the Czech king gave the Silesian princedoms to his vassals where the presentation of banners was a ritual act that testified to the transfer of power.²⁸ The same was true for the Holy Roman Emperor presenting a fief to the Czech king.²⁹

The role of the banner in funerals was not always the same. In the case of the funeral of Charles IV, 26 knights carried 26 banners and were sacrificed together at the main altar of St. Vitus Cathedral. The symbol of the state was also sacrificed with the banners. On the contrary, banners were not sacrificed during the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous but instead were broken, torn apart and trampled at the grave. George of Poděbrady also took similar action with the coats of arms of individual territories. It is worthy to mention a note in the *Old Czech Annals* that George of Poděbrady circled the body lying in state with the banner three times before it was destroyed, in the spirit of medieval Christian symbolism.³⁰ Banners were similarly destroyed during the

26 ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 138. The author doubts that cheap wooden insignia were used during the funeral of Charles IV.

27 GOŁAB 1916, p. 39; BORKOWSKA 2011, pp. 239–240.

28 NOWACKI, Bronisław. *Czeskie rozszczenia do korony w Polsce w latach 1290 – 1335*. Poznań : Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1987, pp. 95–112; NODL, Martin. Korona Polska jako instrument polityki Jana Luksemburskiego. In FAŁKOWSKI, Wojciech – TYSZKA, Paweł (eds.) *Władztwo Władysława Łokietka. 700-lecie koronacji królewskiej*. Warszawa : Arx Regia – Wydawnictwo Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie 2022, pp. 184–186.

29 See, the synthetic work on the feudal relationship between the Czech king and the Holy Roman Emperor by: BEGERT, Alexander. *Böhmen, die böhmische Kur und das Reich vom Hochmittelalter bis zum Ende des Altern Reiches. Studien zur Kurwürde und zur staatsrechtlichen Stellung Böhmens*. Hussum : Matthiesen Verlag, 2003. In detail, for example, see: ALTHOFF, Gerd. Rudolf von Habsburg und Ottokar von Böhmen: Formen der Konfliktaustragung und -beilegung im 13. Jahrhundert. In ALTHOFF, Gerd. *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde*. Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997, pp. 85–98.

30 *Staré letopisy české*, p. 225; *Staří letopisové čeští*, p. 152, no. 514 (manuscripts H, K, O): “A pochován

funeral of Casimir III the Great³¹ in the presence of Louis I of Hungary, the successor to the throne. Chronicler Jan of Czarnków wrote that this was the tradition “*ut moris est in talibus observari*,”³² and if he is to be believed, the first funeral took place without any ritual acts (sacrificing horses, knights as a symbolic a representative of the king, etc.)

The funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous is known for one fundamental discrepancy. If you believe one layer of the *Old Czech Annals* manuscript,³³ how do we interpret the comment that up to the day the account was written (in the 16th century), the banners of Ladislaus’s territories hung over his grave in St. Vitus Cathedral, without any mention whether the banners were torn. They certainly symbolized the sovereign’s rule and their destruction could have evoked his death. The question is: were visitors to the cathedral in the 16th century aware of this, and did they see the damaged banners as the defamation of majesty? Were the banners exchanged for new ones to represent the territories Ladislaus the Posthumous now ruled?³⁴ Were the banners treated like the crowns, with one set being torn and trampled and the undamaged collection hung over his grave? If this was the case, when did the exchange take place, immediately after the funeral or after several years or even decades? Just as in the case of breaking the insignia, it is not known. One case of hanging banners around the sovereign’s grave can be found from the 15th century. Banners were not destroyed during the funeral of Friedrich III in Vienna but only sacrificed, similar to the funeral of Charles IV. According to contemporary testimony, the banners were hung within St. Stephan’s Cathedral, and they can be seen on a contemporary wood carving with banner bearers beside the bier with the heads of horses appearing behind them.³⁵

Body and Heart

The heart and body were separated for some royal funerals due to symbolic reasons, though it is not known exactly whether the body and heart of Ladislaus the Posthumous were interred in one place. The daughter of Ottokar II of Bohemia, Agnes, was buried in Zbraslav but her heart was interred in the

v hrobě děda svého, císaře Karla, v kostele sv. Víta v kuoře Matky boží, kdežto i podnes korúhve jeho zemí nad jeho hrobem visí.” [“And he is buried in the grave of his grandfather, the Emperor Charles in the church of St. Vitus in the choir loft of the Mother of God where today his banners still hang above his grave.”]

- 31 On the double funeral of King Casimir, see: FAŁKOWSKI, Wojciech. Dwa pogrzeby Kazimierza Wielkiego – znaczenie rytuału. In *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 2009, vol. 116, no. 1, pp. 55–74.
- 32 JOANNIS DE CZARNKOW. *Chronicon Polonorum*. Monumenta Poloniae Historica II. Edited by Jan Szlachtowski. Warszawa : Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1961, (1st edition, Lwów : Nakładem własnym, 1872), pp. 646–647.
- 33 *Starí letopisové čeští*, p. 152, no. 514.
- 34 The exchange of the real insignia for wooden was mentioned in the *Ordo pompe funebris serenissimi Sigismundi regis Poloniae*. Cf. BORKOWSKA 2011, pp. 237.
- 35 ZELFEL, Hans Peter. *Ableben und Begräbnis Friedrichs III*. Wien : Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1974, pp. 113–117; MEYER 2000, illustration no. 86. Baroque depictions showed banners around the grave of Holy Roman Emperor Louis IV in Munich (image 41) and Albert I in the abbey in Wettingen (image 20). Cf. HERTLEIN, Edgar. Das Grabmal Kaiser Friedrichs III. im Lichte der Tradition. In KOLMER, Lothar (ed.) *Der Tod des Mächtigen. Kult und Kultur des Todes spätmittelalterlicher Herrscher*. Paderborn; München; Wien; Zürich : Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 1997, pp. 137–164.

Convent of St. Agnes – Na Františku, which she founded. The heart Ottokar II of Bohemia ended up in Vienna and the king's body was eventually buried in Prague after many travails.³⁶ The funeral of George of Poděbrady took on ritual aspects. His body was buried in the Catholic St. Vitus cathedral, while the heart went to the Utraquist Church St. Mary Our Lady before Týn.³⁷ In this case, the double burial of the body and heart was probably an expression of the Bohemian kingdom's dual confessions. As a king of two peoples, both had the right to the dead ruler's body. Incidentally, George's body did lie in state in both churches during his funeral.

Ladislaus the Posthumous's kingdom had two religions, but the young Ladislaus did not show any liking for the Utraquists so there was no reason to bury the body and heart separately. The choice of a single location was also likely because of the poor state of the body (as is now known, the sovereign died of leukaemia).³⁸ For this reason and out of a fear of an epidemic (contemporary testimonies say it was the reason for Ladislaus's death), the king's body was not put on display in Old Town or New Town churches, and thus the dual confessional nature of the city could not be expressed properly.³⁹

The Successor

In the case of Ladislaus the Posthumous's funeral, the “designated” successor, the kingdom's administrator George of Poděbrady, participated. As administrator, George was the highest-ranking person in the kingdom until the election of the new king and his role during the funeral was significant. Little is known about the cases of other kings in the Czech environment that left behind children. Wenceslas III and Wenceslas IV demonstrably took part in the funerals of their fathers, but they are only listed as participants in the funeral during the church portion, and it cannot be said whether they walked behind the casket during the procession of the body through Prague (this ceremonial act is known in detail from the case of Charles IV).⁴⁰ Detailed accounts of Charles's funeral seem to testify that the king's oldest son, the crowned Czech King Wenceslas IV, appeared only for the last phase, during the requiem.

If that was the case, the participation of sons in the funeral was highly symbolic. They were invisible and not present during the funeral processions because the *pompa funebris* was only meant for the dead king. He was the one being carried on the bier through the city and was put on display in individual

36 BRAVERMANOVÁ – LUTOVSKÝ 2001, pp. 170–179.

37 On burials of hearts including George of Poděbrady, see: cf. ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 130–134, 165; MEYER 2000, pp. 210–213.

38 Ladislaus's remains were examined in detail by: VLČEK, Emanuel. *Čeští králové II. Atlas kosterních pozůstatků českých králů Ladislava Pohrobka, Jiřího z Poděbrad a Habsburků pohřbených v Praze s podrobným komentářem a historickými poznámkami*. Praha: Vesmír, 2000. No further knowledge was added by: PAPAJÍK 2016, pp. 219–232.

39 On the religions in 15th century Prague, see: cf. NODL, Martin. Konfessionalisierung und religiöse (In)Toleranz in Prag in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts. In *Bohemia. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder*, 2018, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 286–309.

40 ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 145–148.

churches so his subjects could see the king was dead. The successor did not have any role in this spectacle, only making an appearance at the last moment when the soul of the diseased leader was presented to God and his body put into the ground. Only at this moment was the king dead and a new, living king appeared.

The chronicle's account on the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous is too brief to determine whether administrator George of Poděbrady took part in the most ostentatious part: the procession. Although it was much less grand and pompous in comparison to that of Charles IV for various reasons—including the threat of plague—the dead king was shown to the people in the city's streets with his face displayed so everyone could see him. George of Poděbrady, however, did not appear as the next king but only as the territory's administrator. That is why it can be said, with a certain amount of reservation, that he took part in the procession that carried the king's body from the Old Town to Malá Strana and then to the Castle. A mention in the *Old Czech Annals* is important regarding the procession. The author writes that the king's body was carried by burghers under a baldachin (like the funeral of Charles IV), while members of the lordly class walked next to the bier. Wrocław chronicler Peter Eschenloer claimed Czech lords carried the royal insignia. However, George of Poděbrady walked behind them according to his account.⁴¹ The answer to this question thus seems simple.

One detail that could suggest George of Poděbrady did not take part in the procession with the king's body should give us pause. The author of the *Old Czech Annals* spoke generally of the lords that walked beside the bier. If we assume they carried the insignia, George of Poděbrady certainly would not have wanted to be just one of many holding insignias. That would demote him from administrator to the level of a regular member of the nobility. The truth is the chronicler does not mention that George of Poděbrady had an exclusive position, like John Rokycana who walked alone in the procession behind tradesmen, university masters and Prague's clerics.⁴² Rokycana was at the back of the section of the procession of those who pray. In front of him were the black-clad knights, who with the lords surrounding the bier, represented the ruling class. In this respect, the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous was ordered in the spirit of three orders or three estates: those who work—represented by tradespeople; those who pray—represented by the clergy; and university masters and those who rule, i.e. the lords and knights.⁴³ But there was no room in this order for the administrator. It is possible he only joined during the last act in the cathedral, destroying the banners and breaking the royal insignia. Eschenloer also could have reported inaccurate information as

41 ESCHENLOER, *Geschichten der Stadt Breslau* 1, p. 198: "...und folgete Girsik mit allen keczeren zu Prage, die fremden geste auch." The Latin version does not mention George's presence. On George's participation in the funeral, compare with: URBÁNEK 1924, p. 139, that fully believes Eschenloer's version.

42 *Staré letopisy české*, p. 225; *Starí letopisové čeští*, p. 152, no. 514.

43 About the three estates in the Czech late medieval environment, see: cf. IWAŃCZAK, Wojciech. *Lidé meče, modlitby a práce*. Praha : Argo, 2011. Iwańczak does not reflect this case of sorting society into three orders, however.

he was not at the funeral himself and his account lacks any mention of insignia or banners being destroyed or horses being sacrificed.

Sacrificing Horses

Horses played a specific role in the funeral of Charles IV.⁴⁴ Regarding the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous, the most important question is the sacrificing of horses during the requiem. Ten black-clad horses walked behind the masters and students in the funeral procession led by armour-bearers dressed in black. The author of the *Old Czech Annals* did not explain why there were 10, nor why the horses were led among the students and Prague's clerics—among those who pray. Many more horses rode in the procession with Charles IV's body—26 in total were sacrificed.⁴⁵ Horses also followed the clerics during the funeral of Günther of Schwarzburg organized in Mainz by Charles IV in 1349, where there is evidence that five horses were sacrificed.⁴⁶ In the funeral of Charles IV, horses were led to the altar and sacrificed. The same is true for the Polish environment in the 14th and 15th centuries.⁴⁷

The 10 horses covered in black caused a commotion during the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous. According to the author of the *Old Czech Annals*, it was the miserly canons of St. Vitus that decided the horses would be brought to the altar. The Czech lords were against it because they considered bringing animals into a church as a desecration of the sacrament, and thus of Christ himself. However, no one seems to remember the fact that horses were brought into the church and sacrificed during the funeral of Charles IV. The lords claimed it was unheard of to bring horses into a house of God, but the canons won out. The chronicler does not mention whether the horses were sacrificed, unfortunately, probably because he simply was not familiar with this ancient tradition that was practiced for centuries and is testified to throughout Christian Europe, apart from France.⁴⁸ He thought bringing horses into the church was a whim of the St. Vitus canons. On the other hand, the resistance to the presence of horses in the church was interpreted as Utraquist fears of desecrating Christ, unfortunately, who was present in the sacrament and who should be the sole recipient of respect. The sacrifice of the horses was considered “unseemly” and “unheard of” by the chronicler, specifically by the nobility, though he did not label it as pagan. For rigid Utraquists, it was simply something unacceptable and unchristian.

There was one aspect where the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous significantly differed from Charles IV and the Polish kings of the 14th and 15th centuries. A single knight dressed in black rode behind the horses to be sacrificed, carrying a sword turned upside down. This knight with the sword turned downwards represented the dead ruler whose earthly life had come

44 ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 153–154.

45 ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 153.

46 MEYER 2000, pp. 88–99.

47 BORKOWSKA 1986, pp. 147–148.

48 ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 153–154.

to an end.⁴⁹ Both the knight and his horse were symbolically sacrificed in the church as well. In the funeral ceremonies of Polish kings, such as Casimir III the Great and Casimir IV, this knight fell from his horse in the church (the fall from the horse is documented in the *Ordo pompe funebris serenissimi Sigismundi regis Poloniae*), which symbolised the death of the king and his leaving this world. In the case of Ladislaus the Posthumous's funeral, the chronicler does not mention the knight nor his sacrifice. It is difficult to say why this symbolic act was not performed in Utraquist Prague. The representative death of a sacrificed knight either disappeared from the collective memory and that of the St. Vitus canons, or it was considered complete and pure blasphemy in the Utraquist environment. Sacrificing a person, even symbolically, was sacrilegious in Utraquist eyes. The only sacrifices were to be to God, but not human sacrifices, which were only attributed to pagans in the late Middle Ages. It is noteworthy that we have no reports of sacrificing a knight in place of the dead king from the symbolic funeral of Vladislaus II of Hungary. However, as this was only a representative funeral held by the city, it should not be considered significant.

Conclusion

The funeral of a sovereign was in the Middle Ages was conducted as a ritual with sacred aspects. The last act took place in a church, a sacred place and space, with the participation of many clerics and was associated with an obituary and a funeral sermon. In the case of Ladislaus the Posthumous, the sermon was given by elected Archbishop and Utraquist John Rokycana, to the displeasure of the St. Vitus canons.⁵⁰ The placing of the body into the grave was also accompanied by a number of religious acts and prayers, but that was the end of everything sacred in the funeral.

Other ritual acts as part of the funeral ceremony were exclusively profane in nature and performed exclusively by secular individuals. The clergy could only look on, but they did not sacralise the actions of secular authorities. The badges of secular power—the insignia and sword—were carried by representatives of the kingdom—nobility and burghers. The bier with the king's body was carried by secular individuals and the symbols of secular power, of the king's earthly reign, were destroyed by secular authorities and not the clergy. The destruction of the symbols of royal power, including banners and other territorial symbols, certainly had an archaic and possibly pre-Christian origin with the profane character of this act reflecting a situation where sovereign power had not yet been sacralised by the active participation of the clergy. Placing the royal insignia into the grave was also a reflection of the secular world, regardless of whether they were broken or not. As we know from the Czech environment, specifically from the grave of Ladislaus the Posthumous,

49 On the knight representing the king, see: cf. BRÜCKNER, Wolfgang. Roß und Reiter im Leichenzeremoniell. Deutungsversuch eines historischen Rechtsbrauches. In *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, 1964 – 1965, vol. 15–16, pp. 144–209.

50 On Rokycana's sermon and the ending of the funeral sermon by St. Vitus's canons, see: cf. URBÁNEK 1924, p. 140, footnote 4.

unbroken wooden insignia were probably placed into the grave. A riding shield and imperial military banner were put into the grave of Charles IV along with the insignia.⁵¹ Placing the insignia recalled marshal power and the physical rule of the sovereign. The king remained the king after death, and he had a special place in the afterlife corresponding to his position on Earth. Nevertheless, these acts had nothing to do with Christianity, although contemporary observers probably didn't equate them to the ancient grave treasuries of pagan warriors.

The sacrifice of horses also held a symbolic character. Modern researchers are of the opinion that such sacrifice documented from the 13th century was a continuation of the German tradition of burying horses with a warrior's body.⁵² In reality, it was an expression of Christian chivalric behaviour and a knight's military service, which was part of the image of an ideal ruler and sovereign.⁵³ The horses were also a symbol of secular power, but their sacrifice in the church upset the religious feelings of the Czech Utraquist nobility, which considered animals in the church as something entirely inappropriate.

In comparison with the coronation rituals practiced in the Czech kingdom, none of the purely secular elements of royal funerals in the late Middle Ages evoked images of the pagan origins of sovereign power in contemporary observers. This is probably because no original, ancient pagan items were associated with the funeral, as was the case with the Přemyslid's pouch and slippers. However, the people of the 15th century knew just as little of the funerals of Czech princes, both pagan and Christian. Despite that, it is impossible to ignore the significantly profane character of the secular elements of the funeral ceremony that competed with the sacred. What is known of the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous clearly shows a royal funeral from the 15th century was certainly not a wholly sacred phenomenon and but secular elements played a very significant role, and even dominated over the sacred in some respects.

51 ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 127.

52 Cf. BRÜCKNER 1964–1965, pp. 163–168, who proved the sacrifice of horses did not have a Germanic origin.

53 ANTONÍN, Robert. *Ideální panovník českého středověku*. Praha : NLN, 2013.