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Funerals and funeral ceremonies of the Hungarian nobility in the Late Middle Ages

Tomáš Homola

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Author

Tomáš Homola
Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie
vied, v.v.i.
Klemensova 19, P. O. Box 198
814 99 Bratislava
Slovakia
Email: tomashml@gmail.com
ORCID: [0000-0002-6694-865X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6694-865X)

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Abstract

HOMOLA, Tomáš. Funerals and funeral ceremonies of the Hungarian nobility in the Late Middle Ages.

Funeral ceremonies of the Hungarian nobility in the late medieval Kingdom of Hungary are the central focus of this study. Due to the relative lack of reports preserved from the Hungarian environment, the current paper is centred on three specific noble funerals that took place in late medieval Hungary. The funeral ceremonies of John Pongrác of Dengeleg, Ulrich of Cilli and Hedwig of Cieszyn were duly reported by contemporary authors and therefore comprise the knowledge base for this text. The aim of this study is to investigate the course of funeral ceremonies, the symbolic level of mourning towards the nobility and observe any common and varying elements. The current paper also discusses the purpose of several customary features of the burials (processions, clothes, colours etc.), as well as how they were prepared and organised. Moreover, the idea of what a proper nobleman's funeral should look like according to contemporaries as well as the intentions of the scribes as to how to inform about the death or burial of the members of Hungarian nobility are also presented.

The Middle Ages are often characterised as a period fascinated by death, full of myths, stories and ideas surrounding the phenomenon. For medieval society, dying was connected to everyday life much more than it is today, as is documented by a well-known quote from Dutch historian Johan Huizinga: “No other epoch has laid so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death. An everlasting call of *memento mori* resounds through life.”¹ In *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga pointed out that late medieval people were constantly reminded of the presence of death and the transience of all things through sermons and the liturgy. Ideas about the fragility of earthly glory emerged mainly from the Christian tradition—death represented punishment for the original, inherited sin of Adam and Eve, who plucked and ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The central point of the Christian thesis on redemption was the crucifixion

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1 HUIZINGA, Johan H. *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. London : Penguin Books, 1990, p. 134.

of Christ and his resurrection, through which he triumphed over death and led his followers to eternal salvation. Such emphasis on Christ's death and resurrection, and its core position in the liturgy shows that death and remembrance held a prominent role in Christian teaching.²

Death itself represents only one point in the complex system of relations between earthly life and the next world, that is, between the living and the dead. It marks the start of mourning and funeral ceremonies, whose purpose is to preserve the memory of those lost and strengthen the bonds between the earthly world and the afterlife.³ Christian burials were fully regulated and maintained a host of customs and rules, which were a part of daily life for people in the Middle Ages. Several conciliar decrees confirmed or emphasised normative canons on the institutions that had the right to conduct a burial, while respecting testamentary agreements on the free choice of burial site.⁴ Buda's municipal law defined who could be buried in a church: "burial in churches should not be common for all, but only for priests and nobles, as well as to special donors of the clergy and the church."⁵ This means that only representatives of the highest social classes found their final place of rest in churches, and they were generally buried in parish cemeteries.⁶ Nearly everyone had the right to a funeral after death, though the preparation of a ceremony for a high-ranking person could take several weeks or even months. The body had to be transported to the permanent resting place, which could have been hundreds of kilometres away from the place of death.⁷ Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg, for example, was taken on a long journey from Znojmo to Oradea, and Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus was moved from Vienna to Székesfehérvár. Several studies or monographs have been published on the subject of funeral ceremonies in which the authors focused mainly on the mourning ceremonies associated with the deaths of ruling elites, i.e. kings or princes.⁸ The bulk of information on funeral ceremonies in the Kingdom of

2 BOOTH, Philip – TINGLE, Elizabeth. Introduction: Dying, Death, and Commemoration, 1350 – 1700. In BOOTH, Philip – TINGLE, Elizabeth (eds.) *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300 – 1700*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2020, p. 1.

3 LAUWERS, Michel. Smrt a mrtví. In LE GOFF, Jacques – SCHMITT, Jean-Claude (eds.) *Encyklopedie středověku*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2014, p. 677.

4 MAJOROSSY, Judit. 'I wish my body to hallowed ground': Testamentary Orders of the Burghers of Late Medieval Pressburg about their own burial. In KRÖTZL, Christian – MUSTAKALLIO, Katariina (eds.) *On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Turnhout : Brepols, 2011, p. 90.

5 *Das Ofner Stadtrecht: eine deutschsprachige Rechtssammlung des XV. Jahrhunderts aus Ungarn*. Monumenta historica Budapestinensia 1. Edited by Karl Mollay. Budapest : Akademiai Kiadó, 1959, p. 144, no. 250. Judit Majorossy also states this: MAJOROSSY 2011, p. 96.

6 MAJOROSSY 2011, p. 96.

7 GRAY, Madeleine. Deathbed and Burial Rituals in Late Medieval Catholic Europe. In BOOTH – TINGLE 2020, p. 113.

8 See, for example: 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. 121–166; ŠMAHEL, František. Smuteční ceremonie a rituály při pohřbu císaře Karla IV. In ŠMAHEL, František. *Mezi středověkem a renesancí*. Praha : Argo, 2002, pp. 133–160; PETNEKI, Áron. *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; Munich; Vienna; Zürich : Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997, pp. 113–123; BLÁHOVÁ, Marie. Die königlichen Begräbniszeremonien im

Hungary comes from narrative sources, and only minimal specific mentions appear in charters or testaments. As Hungarian historian Judit Majorossy has shown in research on such testaments in late medieval Bratislava, during the 15th century, there were few reports in wills about funerals and even fewer on the notions of the actual course of mourning ceremonies. Only at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries did the authors of wills begin to deal with their own burials, though they most often limited themselves to simply a wish to be buried “according to the order and principles of the Christian Church,” or to a specification of the final resting place.⁹ For the most part, writers did not list the fine details of the funeral rites, not out of indifference to the way the funeral was to be conducted, but because they considered their funeral more a matter of the decision and consideration of the surviving relatives. This is clear from the wording used, in which they wish for a dignified burial but leave the preparation to the wife because they trust her. Thus, it seems that seeing to the funeral was considered to be a duty of the family or the church community, and the makers of wills were not expected to dictate the details of the process in writing.¹⁰ For more detailed information on the course of funeral ceremonies, we are therefore dependent on reports from narrative sources, chronicles or different reports of participants in funeral ceremonies. Relatively few of these have been preserved from the Hungarian environment, and those that exist today provide information mainly related to the death and burials of monarchs (*exequiae regis*). Even in these cases, they are often truncated reports with limited narrative value, sometimes containing only a report on the death of a monarch or an important secular or spiritual person without further details about the cause or the funeral festivities that followed.

In the case of the death of kings, funeral ceremonies included a cycle of public presentation of the royal dignity (*dignitas*) to a noble audience.¹¹ The funeral ceremonies of monarchs, much like coronations, entrances to cities, tributes and feudal oaths, were among the events in which the *maiestas* was most prominently displayed, attesting to their extremely important function in the public life of medieval society.¹² As with other official occasions that followed a fixed set of rules, the burials of monarchs likely developed a relatively predetermined script that was decided by church rites as well as local customs and traditions.¹³

spätmittelalterlichen Böhmen. In KOLMER 1997, pp. 89–111; BOYTSOV, Mikhail A. Ghostly Knights: Kings’ Funerals in Fourteenth-Century Europe. In ROLLO-KOSTER, Joëlle (ed.) *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*. New York; London : Routledge, 2017, pp. 149–163; BORKOWSKA, Urszula. The Funeral Ceremonies of the Polish Kings from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries. In *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 1985, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 513–534; MEYER, Rudolf. Überlegungen zum Begräbnis Kaiser Sigismunds in Wardein im Jahre 1437. In KOLMER 1997, pp. 321–331; GIESEY, Ralph. *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France*. Geneva : Librairie Droz, 1960; CZERNY, Helga. *Der Tod der bayerischen Herzöge im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit 1347 – 1579*. Munich : Beck, 2005.

9 MAJOROSSY 2011, pp. 98–104.

10 MAJOROSSY 2011, pp. 107–108.

11 Unlike most other court ceremonies in which the monarchs personally participated, only their deceased body played a major role. ŠMAHEL 2002, p. 133.

12 The study of this issue is especially important in particular for the late Middle Ages period when the burials of rulers were closely related to the widely developed state ideology and reflected the ruler’s idea of power and status. BLÁHOVÁ 1997, p. 89.

13 BLÁHOVÁ 1997, pp. 89–90.

Research on royal burials in the late Middle Ages shows that burial practices were becoming more elaborate, more formalised and more costly. Ceremonies could last up to several weeks and include a variety of ritualistic elements: processions, heraldic elements, requiem masses, almsgiving, gift giving and feasts. Royal and noble funeral iconography took on a symbolic function and served to legitimise power. Although funeral rites could differ regionally, the role of funerals remained the same—to dramatize the current power and legitimise the succession.¹⁴ Funeral ceremonies of the Hungarian nobility in the late medieval Kingdom of Hungary form the central topic of this study, with a focus on the course of the services and the symbolic level of mourning by the nobility. Commonalities and variants between the examples presented are also noted.

A burial during wedding festivities

The reporting of noble funeral ceremonies begins, paradoxically, at the wedding of Matthias Corvinus in December 1476, an important event that had a major impact on the further development of the Kingdom of Hungary. Matthias took Beatrice of Aragon, the daughter of King Ferdinand I of Naples, as his wife. More than a decade after the death of his first wife, Catherine of Poděbrady, the Hungarian ruler managed to agree on and carry out a second marriage,¹⁵ from which he promised the birth of an heir to the throne. The entire affair—the wedding itself, the ceremonies associated with it, the coronation of the new queen and the wedding festivities—went on from 10 December 1476 to January 1477.¹⁶ Both the coronation and wedding were accompanied by ostentatious festivities, chivalric duels and tournaments, ceremonies and the traditional rites associated with such an important event. An element of the rich merrymaking was the sumptuous clothing of the participants as well as exceedingly profuse, even majestic feasts full of a wide variety of food and drinks.¹⁷

The celebratory atmosphere in Buda was interrupted, however, by a tragic event on Sunday, 29 December, when the king's cousin, Duke of Transylvania John Pongrác of Dengeleg, died suddenly.¹⁸ John was an important baron in

14 BOOTH – TINGLE 2020, pp. 14–15.

15 Between the years 1464 – 1474, Matthias attempted to find a bride in several royal courts. HOMOLA, Tomáš. *Nezrealizované sobášne zámery Mateja Korvína*. In BENKOVÁ, Eva – PŮČIK, Marek (eds.) *Ingenii laus: Zborník štúdií venovaný jubilujúcemu prof. PhDr. Jánovi Lukačkovi*, CSc., Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2017, pp. 233–245.

16 Literature focused on the royal wedding: HONEMANN, Volker. *The Marriage of Matthias Corvinus to Beatrice of Aragon (1476) in Urban and Court Historiography*. In GOSMAN, Martin – MACDONALD, Alasdair – VANDERJAGT, Arjo (eds.) *Princes and Princely Culture 1450 – 1650, Volume Two*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2005, pp. 213–226; KALOUS, Antonín. *Matyáš Korvín (1443 – 1490). Uherský a český král*. České Budějovice : Veduta, 2009, pp. 293–296.

17 Bavarian envoy Hans Seybold described the great New Year's royal feast and the specific courses. BORSA, Béla. *Reneszánszkori ünnepek Budán*. In NÉMETHY, Károly – BUDÓ, Jusztin (eds.) *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából Budapest 10*. Budapest : Budapest Székesfőváros Kiadása, 1943, pp. 50–51.

18 The date of death is stated by both Hans Seybold and Wrocław chronicler Peter Eschenloer. BORSA 1943, pp. 49–50; ESCHENLOER, Peter. *Geschichte der Stadt Breslau, Teilband II*. Edited and Translated by Gunhild Roth. Münster; New York; München; Berlin : Waxmann, 2003, p. 1000.

the kingdom and one of the closest collaborators of King Matthias. He had been a part of a ceremonial procession of about 600 members heading to Naples in early September 1476, the aim of which was to conclude the wedding with Beatrice and escort the new royal bride to Hungary. John was even the main actor of the marriage recital (*per procuram*), representing the Hungarian monarch himself.¹⁹ Corvinus's trust in Pongrác is documented in the fact that after the Transylvanian rebellion against the king in 1467, it was Pongrác whom the king appointed to the position of Duke of Transylvania.²⁰ He likewise supported Matthias Corvinus during the anti-royal conspiracy and the Polish invasion of Hungary in 1471 – 1472.²¹ It is specifically due to the death of John Pongrác that a relatively detailed record of the funeral ceremonies in Buda survived, recorded by Hans Seybold, a member of the Bavarian wedding delegation.²²

Seybold describes how after Sunday's death, songs were sung in all the Buda churches and monasteries until Monday in honour of the deceased Pongrác. On that day, a funeral procession (*pompa funebris*) was also held. The body of the deceased nobleman, dressed in black clothes richly decorated with gold and pearls, was loaded onto a wagon covered in black damask cloth. The wagon was drawn by six large black horses, two monks were seated in the front and two more in the back, and all the fixtures of the wagon were covered in black velvet. More than a 100 people walked in front of and behind the carriage, escorting it to the city gate. The procession continued to the church of the Virgin Mary, where the lords of estates (*lanndtherren*) and the townspeople of Buda also came. They were all dressed in black and walked at the front of the procession, followed by two male pupils, each of whom bore a red wax candle in his hand with a hundred Hungarian gold florins inserted. They were followed by 16 more boys, and each of them also carried two candles filled with gold florins (25 gold florins were said to be into each of them). In total, there were apparently 1000 gold florins in total, which were then offered to the parish priest as a cash donation for the collection.²³ Behind the boys walked two more pupils carrying silver bowls filled with 100 gold florins. The next part of the procession brought more than 100 candles, a precious gilded coat-of-arms and a black flagpole (likely with a flag). Four men carried the funeral bier with the body of the deceased to the chapel, where the *Requiem* and

19 KALOUS 2009, pp. 293–294.

20 KORDÉ, Zoltán. Dengelegi Pongrác János harmadik vajdai ciklusa Erdélyben (1475 – 1476). In BÁRÁNY, Attila – DRESKA, Gábor – SZOVÁK, Kornél (eds.) *Arcana Tabularii: Tanulmányok Solymosi László tiszteletére, II. kötet*. Budapest; Debrecen : Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 2014, p. 570.

21 Regarding the conspiracy against the king and the subsequent Polish invasion of Hungary, see: HOMOLA, Tomáš. S kráľom alebo proti kráľovi: Sprisahanie voči Matejovi Korvínovi v roku 1471. In *Historický časopis*, 2020, vol. 68, no. 2, pp. 221–247; BACZKOWSKI Krzysztof. *Walka Jagiellonów z Maciejem Korwinem o koronę czeską w latach 1471 – 1479*. Kraków : Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1980, pp. 48–58.

22 Seybold wrote his description of the events of December 1476, several years after the wedding at the behest of the Bavarian nobleman Thoman Jud of Bruckberg. BORSA 1943, p. 13 (the description of the ceremony is on p. 50).

23 Seybold adds that the Hungarians were said to have stolen fifteen florins from the collected money. BORSA 1943, p. 50.

Kyrie eleison were then sung. They also brought a candle with 100 gold florins to King Matthias, who took part in the funeral mass along with the queen's brother,²⁴ the papal legate, lords of the estates and craftsmen, who carried more candles containing 25 florins each. Again there was singing, this time the *Offertorium* and the king was brought more candles with 100 gold florins as an offering. One of the participants in the ceremony drew his sword and broke Pongrác's flagpole with three strikes, tossing the pieces onto the ground next to the funeral bier. Still more candles holding containing gold florins were donated to the church, and the rest of the money was given to the poor. Hans Seybold concludes his description of the burial by stating that the king departed for the castle on a sleigh.²⁵ His account is complemented by Wrocław chronicler Peter Eschenloer who, although reporting on Pongrác's death only briefly, adds that after his death, John's body was taken to Székesfehérvár for burial.²⁶ Particularly interesting about the whole thing is that the grave of John Pongrác can be found in the Transylvanian village of Teiuş, where an inscription on a tombstone in a local church refers to it.²⁷ Hungarian historian Zoltán Kordé believes that Pongrác's death may have been caused by a stroke or heart attack, which could have been aided by the long and tiring journey to Naples he had made in the months before the wedding.²⁸ Kordé's hypothesis, however, cannot be confirmed or refuted, since no source indicates the cause of death. An interesting fact is that the reports on Pongrác's death and burial did not come from the pen of the court chroniclers. Antonio Bonfini, for example, does not mention that this important Hungarian nobleman and close friend of the monarch died during the wedding festivities at all. Although Bonfini does not pay much attention to the details of the wedding or the celebrations in Buda, rather focusing on a detailed description of the trip of the Hungarian delegation to Naples and the subsequent journey of the bride from the Apennine Peninsula to Hungary,²⁹ it is surprising that the king's court chronicler did not so much as mention the death of such an important magnate, as King Matthias Corvinus himself paid special attention to it and evidently spared no expense in preparing the most pompous of funeral ceremonies.³⁰

Seybold's report is exceedingly interesting, because its detailed description differs from other contemporary reports on the deaths of nobles. Yet it is not comprehensive; we have no idea what caused Pongrác's death or any more detailed information about what happened to his body, i.e. whether it was

24 Neither Seybold nor Eschenloer mentions the name, both write only of the queen's brother. It can therefore only be assumed which of Queen Beatrice's four brothers it could have been. Since he appears hierarchically together with the Hungarian king Matthias, it may have been the eldest brother Alfonso, the heir to the royal throne in Naples.

25 BORSA 1943, p. 50.

26 ESCHENLOER, *Geschichte der Stadt Breslau*, p. 1000.

27 "Hic est sepultura nobilis quondam magnifici Johannis [...]1477." <http://mek.oszk.hu/04600/04684/html/931.html> (18 May 2022).

28 KORDÉ 2014, p. 579.

29 BONFINI, Antonio. *Rerum Ungaricarum decades, tomus IV*. Edited by József Fögel, Béla Iványi and László Juhász. Budapest : Egyetemi Nyomda, 1941, pp. 67–69, V. 39–47, 51–61.

30 Volker Honemann explains the chronicler's lack of interest in the wedding details by saying that Bonfini interpreted Matthias's marriage as part of the Hungarian monarch's broader foreign policy activities. HONEMANN 2005, p. 224.

specially prepared or embalmed for burial. Thanks to the freezing weather (Seybold mentions the frozen Danube), they certainly did not have to hurry to prepare the body.³¹ The fact is that immediately on the day of his death, songs were sung in Buda's churches and monasteries in Pongrác's honour, while funeral ceremonies took place and a mass was celebrated for the deceased the day after his death. The report, however, lacks additional information for a more comprehensive and complete picture of the ceremonies that took place after the death of this important nobleman. It is not even known whether a feast was held in his honour, a tradition which dates back to pre-Christian times and symbolises the fellowship of the survivors. This symbolism lies in the fact that the survivors met at the deathbed of the deceased, by the body, and at a service held in his or her honour, at the funeral itself, as well as during the subsequent common feast. The feasting maintained a hierarchical arrangement and recognized crucial legal changes in the social status of the survivors—the wife became a widow, minor children became half-orphan, and someone else, usually the eldest son, could become the head of the family.³² Are such details provided in the case of other deaths and funerals? Is Seybold's report unique and if so, to what extent? Or is this a common description of funeral ceremonies in the Hungarian environment?

The murder and burial of Ulrich II of Cilli

There is another report available from the Hungarian noble environment in the 15th century on the death and subsequent burial of a prominent nobleman, this time Ulrich II of Cilli (Celje), a representative of the Cilli magnate, which ranked among the most important noble families in late medieval Hungary. The Cillis had properties in Croatia and Slavonia, but also in the Habsburg dependencies of Carinthia, Carniola and Styria. In the early 15th century, the family rose among the highest aristocracy through marriage. In 1402, Anna of Cilli became the wife of Polish King Władysław II Jagiełło, and her cousin Barbara married the Holy Roman Emperor and Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg.³³ The last male member of the family, Ulrich II, was an extremely influential and powerful baron who had significant influence on events in Hungary after the death of Sigismund of Luxembourg. He was one of the supporters of Ladislaus V the Posthumous for the Hungarian throne and from 1452, was also the young Hungarian monarch's tutor and regent. Ulrich of Cilli was the arch-rival of the Hunyadi family, a mutual antagonism that turned fatal for him in November 1456. In August of that year, King Ladislaus organised an army for an expedition against the Ottoman Empire and set off with forces from Vienna through Hungarian territory

31 In countries in the south of Europe or in case of great heat, a dead body was buried as soon as possible, often on the day of death. In areas where the decomposition process did not take place so quickly, the dead person was left lying on a bier until the next day. OHLER, Norbert. *Umírání a smrt ve středověku*. Jihlava : H & H, 2001, p. 97.

32 OHLER 2001, pp. 107–108.

33 For the importance of the Cilli family in Hungary, see: DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela. *Barbora Celjská: Čierna kráľovná: Životný príbeh uhorskej, rímsko-nemeckej a českej kráľovnej*. Budmerice : Rak, 2017, pp. 27–49.

to Belgrade.³⁴ At Belgrade castle, then controlled by the Hunyadi family, a violent argument took place between Ulrich and Ladislaus Hunyadi (the son of John Hunyadi), which resulted in Cilli's death.³⁵ Although Ulrich's military units were also present in Belgrade, they could only be transported along the Danube from Belgrade to nearby Zemun six days after the tragedy. The body of Count Ulrich probably left the castle with the army and papal legate Juan Carvajal was said to have wept over the coffin at the sight of the deceased.³⁶

The body of the deceased was then transported to the family seat in Celje, where, in the words of the author of the *Chronicle of the Cillis*: "they dressed out a funeral worthy of a prince."³⁷ Ulrich was buried in a sarcophagus in the monastery church in Celje, in the presence of his wife Catherine—daughter of the Serbian despot George Branković—his knights, squires and servants. Funeral festivities lasted for an entire month. The final ceremony is described in more detail by the *Chronicle of the Cillis* author; In the centre of the church was a special burial place, which was overlain and covered by a rare black cloth. Around the grave were a great many burning candles that shone brightly. The tomb was surrounded by 12 armed men dressed in expensive black clothing holding wax candles. In front of the grave stood an altar where various songs were sung. When the *Offertorium* was sung, Ulrich's wife Catherine placed her alms on the altar. Then the knights and squires lined up and carried five flags (banners), four of which belonged to the areas under Ulrich's rule (Celje, Ortnek, Žovnek and Zagorje ob Savi), the fifth was a black mourning banner. Each banner was accompanied by a shield and a gilded helmet, which the knights and squires brought to the tomb and the altar. There were also 12 richly decorated horses dressed in black on which sat boys, also dressed in rich black clothing. They then went to the grave and altar, with a man wearing armour walking before them. When the banners, shields, helmets, and horses had been offered, the man-at-arms lay down on the ground, another member of the procession stood over him, and three times in a mighty voice called out into the silence of the church: "Today still the princes of Cilli and then never more." He then tore apart the banner of Cilli, after which such a mournful cry of those present echoed through the church that "no one can write it down."³⁸

Cilli's funeral ceremony is recorded in relative detail, in contrast to Pongráč's, and we also know the cause of the magnate's death due to the fact that Ulrich's

34 The king's intention, however, is questionable, because a month before, John Hunyadi had defeated the Ottomans near Belgrade, so there was no need to intervene against the invaders. One explanation is that after the death of Hunyadi (who died after the victory over the Ottomans), the king attempted to strengthen his own position in Hungary with the help of the army at the expense of the Hunyadi family. PAPAJÍK, David. *Ladislav Pohrobek (1440 – 1457). Uherský a český král*. České Budějovice : Veduta, 2016, p. 178.

35 Regarding the circumstances leading to the murder and subsequent events, see: PAPAJÍK 2016, pp. 167–195 (the murder itself is on p. 181); URBÁNEK, Rudolf. *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*. Praha : Česká akademie věd a umění, 1924, pp. 57–74. Regarding the political situation in 1456 – 1457, also see: PÁLOSFALVI, Tamás. *Tettes vagy áldozat? Hunyadi László halála*. In *Századok*, 2015, vol. 149, no. 2, pp. 383–441.

36 *Die Cillier Chronik*. Die Freien von Saneck und ihre Chronik als Grafen von Cilli: Zweiter Theil. Edited by Franz Krones Graz : Leuschner & Lubensky, 1883, p. 127, c. 32; URBÁNEK 1924, p. 71.

37 *Die Cillier Chronik*, p. 128, c. 33.

38 *Die Cillier Chronik*, pp. 127–129, c. 33.

murder was a principle moment for the further development of events in the Kingdom of Hungary, as it led to the execution of Ladislaus Hunyadi and an escalation of tensions in the country.³⁹ Despite the particulars of the description, not even the author of the *Chronicle of the Cillis* provides us with more details, about how they cared for Ulrich's body for example, which remained in the Belgrade fortress five days after the incident. It is not known how the body was treated, how they preserved it or whether it was embalmed so that it could withstand the transport that followed. As with the burial of John Pongrác, we do not have exact information in this case either, though it is highly probable that the body was cared for in an appropriate manner.⁴⁰ Also of interest is the mention of the month-long festivities, which symbolically ended with a final requiem mass at the end of which Ulrich's insignias were torn and sacrificed. As in the case of John Pongrác, there was a demonstrative destruction of banners, which symbolised the end of Ulrich's rule in the concerned territories, and possibly the end of the family itself since he was the last male member of the family. This is very similar to what occurred at King Matthias Corvinus' funeral, where 12 heavy (armoured) riders dressed in purple carried the badges of royal power that symbolised his triumphs (*regalia signa tot clara triumphis*), as well the royal sword.⁴¹ The same occurred in Prague after masses and ceremonies following the death of Ladislaus the Posthumous. The emblems of the former ruler—the seal, sword, apple, sceptre (crutch) and flag poles with the flags of individual countries—were broken. The Bohemian governor, George of Poděbrady, was even supposed to take up the banners of the countries and the Bohemian coat-of-arms, walk around the king's tomb three times and then demonstratively tear them up, throw them on the ground and trample them.⁴² Numerical symbolism is also conspicuous in Ulrich's case; exactly 12 knights and horses took part in the funeral, similar to the burial of Matthias Corvinus. In medieval symbolism the number 12 represented wholeness or completeness, and so in this case, it could give the impression of the completeness of funeral rituals or full participation in the mourning ceremony.⁴³

Knights in armour and horses played an important role at Ulrich's funeral. They were part of the symbolic offering of shields and helmets, and even the horses themselves served as alms as they were likely donated to the monastic

39 Regarding this, see: PÁLOSFALVI 2015, pp. 383–441.

40 Taking care of the body could be complicated by the fact that Ulrich's head had been cut off by Hunyadi's supporters during the fight. Though the head was to be handed over to Cilli's servants at the same time as the body. PAPAJÍK 2016, p. 181.

41 The chronicler Bonfini describes how, after arriving at the Basilica of the Virgin Mary in Székesfehérvár, the riders placed the body of the monarch in the centre of the altar then demonstratively threw all badges (*signa*) and coat-of-arms to the ground. This was meant to symbolise the king's death, "as if with the fall of the ruler all his trophies, flags, and gains of kingdoms would also fall." BONFINI, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades IV*, p. 165, VIII. 238.

42 *Staré letopisy české z vřatislavského rukopisu novočeským pravopisem*. Prameny a texty k dějinám československým 1. Edited and translated František Šimek. Praha : Historický spolek a společnost Husova muzea, 1937, pp. 121–122. In this regard, see also: ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 165.

43 BRTÁŇOVÁ, Erika. *Úvod do kultúry stredoveku*. Trnava : Filozofická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity, 2013, pp. 66–67. The number was also associated with the number of apostles or months in the year. LE GOFF, Jacques. Introduction: Medieval Man. In LE GOFF, Jacques. *The Medieval World: The History of European Society*. London : Parkgate Books, 1997, p. 31.

community. The burials of medieval nobles also included a horse leading the funeral procession, which was usually delivered to the church where the noble was buried. Hungarian historian András Kubinyi states that the horse played an important role in the burial of aristocrats, prestigious nobles and leading families in Hungary.⁴⁴ Horses were a traditional part of the mourning ceremonies of the Hungarian rulers. For example, during the funeral of Charles I Robert, “three beautiful horses of the lord the king,” adorned in purple blankets, stood before the church gate with knights sitting on them. One was in the king’s own armour, another had his spear, and the third was equipped and armed as if for battle. They had badges on their helmets depicting an ostrich with a golden crown, worn by the king’s retinue. The horses were subsequently donated to the monastery in Székesfehérvár along with other royal gifts (a gilded carriage, precious stones, gilded silver).⁴⁵ A specific feature was that all three horses were richly adorned “with regard to the person and dignity of the king,” which indicates that the riders were meant to symbolise the presence of the dead ruler.⁴⁶ At the funeral of Ladislaus the Posthumous, horses stood in the church near the tomb, similarly to Cilli’s funeral, and did so despite opposition from part of the nobles who considered the participation of horses in church to be an unheard of proceeding.⁴⁷ As we see in other examples, however, such an act was neither exceptional nor reprehensible. When bringing up numerous analogies with royal funerals, it is worthwhile observing that the words of the author of the *Chronicle of the Cillis* in regard to Ulrich’s last farewell as a worthy prince were not exaggerated at all. In this context, Cilli’s funeral ceremony functioned like a knight’s funeral, similar to the case of the aforementioned kings.

Another common feature of Pongrác’s and Cilli’s funerals is that the report on Ulrich’s death and mourning ceremony is given by the *Chronicle of the Cillis*, the aim of which was to justify the relatively rapid rise of this previously lower noble family.⁴⁸ Again, like the case of John Pongrác, this is not a work written by a royal court or official historiographer.

44 Kubinyi cites several examples from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries where the writers of wills wished for horses to be included in their processions. For example, in his will from 1492, Stephen Csupor requests that his large black horse be led in front of him in the funeral procession and then be handed over to the monastery chosen as the place of burial. He also orders that the funeral procession be led by another black horse, which he is leaving to the community of parish priests (*communitati plebanorum*) “for the salvation of his soul.” KUBINYI, András. Főúri és nemesi végrendeletek a jagelló-korban. In *Soproni szemle*, 1999, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 336–337. Csupor’s testament, see: MÁLYUSZ, Elemér. A Pálos kolostrok középkori oklevelei. In *Levéltári Közlemények*, 1930, vol. 8, no. 1–2, pp. 253–255, no. 449 (specific wording on p. 254).

45 The metal equipment of the riders and horses was made of gilded silver and the fabrics were woven from silk, which according to the chroniclers, was appropriate for the dignity of the royal majesty. THURÓCZ, Johannes de. *Chronica Hungarorum. Vol. I. Textus*. Edited by Elisabeth Galántai and Julius Kristó. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985, pp. 156–157, c. 128.

46 Chroniclers at the funerals of Roman King Günther of Schwarzburg in 1349, as well as of Bohemian monarch Charles IV in 1378 also describe such symbolism. BOYTISOV 2017, p. 156.

47 *Staré letopisy české*, p. 121.

48 The work was probably written by a minorite from the Franciscan church in Cilli on the order of Count Herman II of Cilli. This is a chronicle written in an early humanistic style, the purpose of which was to record the deeds of the Cilli family. PATZE, Hans. Mäzene der Landesgeschichtsschreibung. In *Vorträge und Forschungen*, 1987, vol. 31, pp. 363–365.

Funeral procession in Levoča

A similar situation to the above account occurs in the case of the final report considered for this study. In the chronicle of Conrad Sperfogel, Levoča burgher and mayor, a description of the funeral procession (*pompa funebris*) of princess Hedwig of Cieszyn, which passed through Levoča on its way to Spišská Kapitula in 1521, has been preserved.⁴⁹ Hedwig ranked among the highest aristocracy in the Kingdom of Hungary, coming from the Cieszyn branch of the Polish royal Piast family. At the end of 1486, she married Stephen Zápolya,⁵⁰ one of the most influential Hungarian magnates from the then dynamically developing noble Zápolya family.⁵¹ Hedwig was the mother of future Hungarian king John as well as the daughter of Barbara, who in 1512, married the Polish king Sigismund I the Old.⁵² She died on 16 April 1521 in Trenčín and was taken to the ancestral tomb of the Zápolya family at Spišská Kapitula to be buried next to her husband Stephen. Conrad Sperfogel recorded the transport of the princess and the funeral itself in his chronicle.

When the funeral procession approached Levoča on 8 May, the townspeople came out to meet it “three or four *stadia*” from the city walls, i.e. approximately more than half a kilometre.⁵³ The entourage was first met by about 30 people from Levoča on horseback and dressed in black, who joined the funeral procession at Spišský Štvrtok. The group, including then mayor Paul Oesterreicher and several members of the town council, took the lead of the procession. Four additional members of the town council remained with clergy, students, monks and other people in the church leper hospital, which was located outside the town walls awaiting the arrival of the procession. Only when the *pompa funebris* approached did the others join. Eight black horses pulled a black hearse, on which sat four people who continuously read from a psalm book. Five men walked along on both sides of the carriage carrying burning torches and George Zápolya, the youngest son of the deceased Hedwig, rode behind it on a white horse. Some 30 other nobles walked behind George. Behind the procession and in front of the hearse walked her three advisers (namely Rossa, Vavrinec, Heyncko). According to Sperfogel, there could have been 60 or “slightly more” riders. The whole procession comprised of 15 wagons, followed by 24 Hungarian hussars. Several wagons bore women and young maidens who were crying. The chronicler also tells us that the plan of the Levoča councillors was that all brotherhoods, guilds and craftsmen

49 *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska: Stredoveké Slovensko očami kráľovských a mestských kronikárov*. Translated by Július Sopko. Budmerice : Rak, 1995, pp. 229–230.

50 KUCHARSKÁ, Veronika. *Ducissa: Život kňažnej Hedvivy v časoch Jagelovcov*. Bratislava : Post Scriptum, 2014, pp. 37–39.

51 Regarding the Zápolya family, see: FODOR, Pál – VARGA, Szabolcs (eds.) *A Forgotten Hungarian Royal Dynasty: The Szapolyais*. Budapest : Research Centre for the Humanities, 2020.

52 KUCHARSKÁ 2014, pp. 101–102.

53 This was a common procedure for welcoming visitors to the city, one stadion is 186.2 metres. *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska*, p. 350, footnote 11. Eight stadia correspond to just under 1500 m, or just shy of one mile. Even when welcoming important delegations, city representatives walked towards the guests and chroniclers often state a distance of half a mile. HOMOLA, Tomáš. *Diplomatická komunikácia medzi panovníckymi dvormi v čase vlády Mateja Korvína*. In HLA-VÁČKOVÁ, Miriam et al. (ed.) *Od symbolu k slovu. Podoby stredovekej komunikácie*. Bratislava : Veda, 2016, pp. 29–51.

should go abreast of the procession in a crowd with their emblems. Rainy weather disrupted the march, which made the road muddy and slippery, particularly at the city gate, which was so wet that many people were afraid of slipping or falling. Sperfogel stated: “If the day had been clear, the procession would have been much more solemn and beautiful.” He also added that the people of Levoča did everything they could to show the deceased Hedwig the appropriate respect.⁵⁴ The funeral parade passed by the leper hospital to the upper gate, where it then divided. People stood on both sides, while the procession with riders and wagons passed through the middle, through the upper gate, then continued into the city to the church of St. James. At that point, the townspeople no longer continued and headed home. The bells of the city’s churches rang continuously as the procession moved through. Hedwig’s son George Zápolya, through his servants, gave four gold florins to each of the priests and monks and one gold florin to the teachers and students. The funeral itself took place on 12 May 1521 at Spišská Kapitula in the presence of representatives of Košice, Levoča, Bardejov, Prešov, Sabinov, Smolník and Gelnica,⁵⁵ and the mayors of 13 towns in the Spiš region as well as Nitra bishop Stephen Podmaniczky and almost 400 priests and monks. At the end, the Levoča chronicler states: “Everyone who served the mass was given 15 *denarii* and a torch, i.e. ‘ein Fackel’, eight small candles and lunch. May she rest in holy peace. Amen.”⁵⁶ Of interest is that Hedwig’s older son, John Zápolya, probably did not attend the funeral. The chronicler describes the course of the mourning procession and the funeral itself in great detail, also mentioning many important participants by name. He had not the slightest reason to leave out Hedwig’s older son and the most important Hungarian nobleman of the period. Evidently, John was not at the funeral and was probably in Buda at the time.⁵⁷

As Sperfogel describes it, the funeral and burial of Hedwig really did have a spectacular character; the procession comprised 15 wagons and more than 60 horsemen, with the last wagon followed by 24 hussars. If we also consider that 400 clergy took part in the funeral in addition to representatives from more than 20 towns, the number of nobles and participants in the funeral and the mourning procession itself can be counted in the thousands. Thus, Hedwig’s funeral celebration retained a genuinely royal touch and demonstrated the enormous power and financial possibilities of the Zápolya family. Only an exceedingly wealthy aristocratic family could have financed such a huge procession and ostentatious funeral. Donations to priests, monks and teachers with

54 *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska*, p. 230.

55 The representatives of the town were able to attend the funeral because Hedwig’s sons had already informed Košice about their mother’s death on 29 April and requested that town representatives attend the upcoming funeral as friends of the family. *A Szapolyai család okleveltára I. Levelek és oklevelek (1458 – 1526)* (SzaOkl). Edited by Tibor Neumann. Budapest : MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont; Történettudományi Intézet, 2012, p. 452, no. 532. Representatives of Prešov and Bardejov also communicated with each other in connection with organising the funeral. They resolved practical questions about the arrival in Spišské Podhradie and the provision of accommodation on site. KUCHARSKÁ 2014, p. 179.

56 *Kroniky stredovekého Slovenska*, p. 230.

57 John issued a charter in Buda on 10 May 1521. SzaOkl I, pp. 452–453, no. 533.

pupils and payments to those who served mass show that the Zápolyas did not hesitate to spend any amount they deemed appropriate to demonstrate Hedwig's majesty.

What is more, her funeral had to be exceptionally well prepared and organised in terms of logistics, not only because a large number of people took part, but also due to the transport of the body and subsequent burial in Spišská Kapitula, which took place almost a month after the noblewoman's death. Since this was not during winter, the body had to be embalmed in a certain way. Neither Sperfogel nor any other source gives us the details, but for a high-ranking or propertied person, embalming was not only essential, it was also a sign of social status and wealth. For embalming procedures, body openings were filled with preservers and the body was smeared with balsams, spices and herbs and then tightly wrapped in a shroud and veil. If there were concerns about the longevity of the body *post mortem*, the viscera were removed. If the deceased were to be on display for four or more days, a balsam was also applied to the face.⁵⁸ Before and after death, incense smoke was used on the human body, which was effective in drowning out the stench of human excrement or the odour of a decomposing human body. A person was also honoured with frankincense in such a way that before Christianity, pertained only to the gods and in the Christian worship, to an image of the Crucified, the sacrificial gift, the Evangelist, a priest who performed the liturgical acts and the entire community that participated in the service.⁵⁹

Features and characteristics of the funerals

Hedwig's funeral had the most pompous character among the examples illustrated here, and similarly as in the cases of John Pongrác or Ulrich of Cilli, the description was recorded by a scribe who did not work in the service of a monarch or write his chronicle on the order of a royal court. It is interesting, however, that Sperfogel is the only one to report that during the passage of the procession through Levoča, city church bells rang continuously. Seybold does not mention this occurring in Buda, which does not exclude it from happening as it was done during funerals in other European locations in order to ward off evil spirits. Bells were often rung softly in churches and monasteries during funeral processions. For example, in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, a bell cast in 1486 is on display with the inscription: "I summon the living. I mourn the dead. I break the lightning." A similar inscription is also on the bell in the cathedral in Strasbourg: "I announce [...] a mournful death."⁶⁰

The descriptions of the funeral ceremonies presented herein have several common features. All three events took an extravagant course involving a relatively large number of participants. One consistent element among them

58 These are examples from the English or French environment, though similar procedures can also be assumed in Hungary. DUCH, Anna M. "Do This in Remembrance of Me": Offerings, Identity, and Bills in the Medieval English Royal Funeral. In BOOTH – TINGLE 2020, pp. 135–136.

59 OHLER 2001, p. 97.

60 OHLER 2001, p. 101.

all was black clothing, often made of rare materials such as silk or velvet, and horses were also dressed in black fabrics. The only exception is George Zápolya, who followed his mother's hearse on a white horse.⁶¹ In the Christian liturgy, colours had special meanings. Black was one of the three basic shades (along with white and red), and while it was generally associated with sorrow and penance, it was used for the celebration of masses for the dead (chantries), also during Advent, the Feast of the Innocents and from Septuagesima Sunday after Easter.⁶² It needs to be noted, however, that during the 14th and 15th centuries, black became a plentifully used, worthy and fashionable colour. The demand for new shades of black arose from Italian cities, where dyers produced rich and attractive dyes for wealthy townspeople and merchants. Representatives of the highest social classes throughout the whole European continent, including rulers, gradually adopted the new fashion.⁶³ The high social status and the importance of the colour black at funerals are evidenced by the words of a certain Sicilian herald from the 15th century:

Even if the colour black seems sad, it is of high standing and great virtue. This is why merchants and rich bourgeois, men as well as women, are dressed and adorn in it [...] Black is not more base nor scorned than the other beautiful colours that dyers make [...] One sometimes even finds black fabrics of a price equal to that of precious scarlets.⁶⁴ And even though black might be prized only for its uses for funerals that would be enough to put it in the ranks of honor among the colours, because the mourning of princes and high ladies is done in black.⁶⁵

Along with black, the use of a large number of candles in various stages of funeral processions as well as the funerals themselves was also characteristic for such ceremonies. The light of the flame symbolised the belief in the after-life and the resurrection of the deceased. What is more, the lit candles were also supposed to—like the ringing of bells—drive away evil spirits.⁶⁶ From a practical point of view, providing light for the departed was also considered necessary with the number of candles indicating the social status of the deceased; more candles usually meant a higher social status.⁶⁷ In Pongráč's case, candles were also associated with a large amount of money, which Hans

61 It could also have had its own symbolism, since the colour white was a sign of purity and was used during various Christian holidays. PASTOUREAU, Michel. *Dějiny symbolů v kultuře středověkého západu*. Praha : Argo, 2018, p. 135.

62 PASTOUREAU 2018, pp. 135–136.

63 PASTOUREAU, Michel. *Black: The History of a Color*. Oxford; Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 95–103.

64 The colour red was generally highly valued. It was perceived as the colour of power and prestige and symbolised martyrdom, courage and royal blood. The medieval view of red was influenced by Jewish tradition as well as by the Romans and Greeks, who considered it the colour of the gods. The shade of scarlet was a sign of authority and wealth, as only high-ranking persons could afford expensive scarlet clothes. BUTLER GREENFIELD, Amy. *Perfect Red. Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire*. London : Harper Collins, 2005, pp. 19–25. Red is an archetypal colour, the first to be adopted, manufactured, imitated and divided into different shades by humans, first in paintings, later in dyes. PASTOUREAU, Michel. *Red: The History of a Color*. Oxford; Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 7.

65 PASTOUREAU 2008, p. 100.

66 SALTAMACCHIA, Martina. A Funeral Procession from Venice to Milan: Meanings of a Late-Medieval Merchant's Death Rituals. In TOMAINI, Thea (ed.) *Dealing with The Dead: Mortality and Community in the Middle Ages*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2018, p. 216; OHLER 2001, p. 97.

67 DUCH 2020, p. 140.

Seybold, a participant in the ceremony, describes in some detail. The sources mention several symbolic moments. For example, during the funerals of Pongrác and Ulrich, their insignias were demonstratively destroyed. John's flagpole was broken with a sword and the pieces were then thrown to the ground next to the bier with the body. In Ulrich's case, a banner was torn up, and banners, shields and helmets were brought as an offering. Like the necessity of embalming in Hedwig's death, in Ulrich's case, the deceased was transported only a few days after the death, which legitimises the assumption that the dead body had to be properly cared for. In contrast, the funeral ceremony for John Pongrác took place the day after he passed away, which, in connection with the freezing December weather, suggests that the complex steps involved in preparing the body for burial were not perhaps needed. Also of interest is that the ceremonies associated with Ulrich's funeral lasted a whole month. We do not know how often celebrations or funeral masses were held during the month, but given the financial possibilities of the Cillis, it cannot at all be excluded that they took place every day.

Ideas about death and dying

It needs to be added that reports available on funeral ceremonies are rare in the Hungarian environment, even in cases of death of persons from the highest social strata. Aside from a few royal funerals, we have no specific information about the course of the mourning festivities of the Hungarian nobility. Most reports on the deaths of important people are limited to the date and the specific place of burial. In some cases, chroniclers of the time speculate about whether the person in question was poisoned or otherwise "escorted" to the other world.⁶⁸ Even with such an important person as Governor John Hunyadi, for example, whose heroic death after the successful defence of Belgrade is widely described by chroniclers,⁶⁹ we have no information about his funeral

68 For example, Polish chronicler Długosz blamed the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus or Bohemian ruler George of Poděbrady for poisoning Ladislaus the Posthumous. The authors of the so-called *Old Bohemian chroniclers*, in turn, speculated whether the cause of the death of Corvinus's first wife, Catherine, was "from God or from evil people." *Staří 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. 172, c. 568; DŁUGOSZ, Joannis. *Historiae Polonicae, Libri XII, T. 4.* Joannis Długossii Senioris Canonici Cracoviensis Opera omnia. Edited by Alexander Przewdziecki. Cracoviae : Ex Typographia Ephemeridum "Czas", 1877, p. 265. For a Polish version of the chronicle, see: DŁUGOSZ, Jan. *Roczniki czyli Kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego, Księga 12 (1445 – 1461)*. Translated by Krzysztof Baczkowski. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2004, p. 337. However, similar reports appeared relatively often, since poisons were used quite frequently in the Middle Ages, see: DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela. *Pod vládou ženy: Rytier bez krále, I. část (1437 – 1442)*. Budmerice : Rak, 2021, pp. 314–323.

69 John Thuróczy compares Hunyadi with important men of antiquity, while his death was "announced even by the stars in the sky, because an unusual comet appeared." At the news of his death, even Sultan Mehmed II was said to have bowed his head and remained silent. THURÓCZY, *Chronica Hungarorum I*, p. 272, c. 251. For an English version of the chronicle, see: THURÓCZY, János. *Chronicle of the Hungarians, Volume II*. Translated by Frank Mantello. Bloomington : Indiana University, 1991, p. 183, c. 251. Bonfini writes about Hunyadi's virtues and the speech he gave to John Capistrano before his death. BONFINI, Antonio. *Rerum Ungaricarum decades, tomus III*. Edited by József Főgel, Béla Iványi and László Juhász. Lipsia : B. G. Teubner, 1936, pp. 188–189, VIII. 116–131.

ceremonies. Antonio Bonfini says only that the ailing John was taken to the church only after the victorious battle, where he breathed for the last time after receiving the Eucharist. His body was then subsequently transported to Alba Iulia in Transylvania, where a grandiose funeral was to be arranged for him.⁷⁰ Bonfini focuses more on a description of the grief that predominated after the death, his final words delivered on his deathbed and in particular, praise for the Hungarian magnate's virtues. Chronicler John Thuróczy likewise mentions the transfer of Hunyadi's body to Alba Iulia, where "he was respectfully buried." For the chronicler, this is again mainly a declaration of the excellent reputation and glory of Hunyadi who died a heroic death.⁷¹ In the case of John Hunyadi, it is clear that for the chroniclers of the time, the heroic death of the governor and his positive personality traits and worthy deeds were more worth recording than the funeral itself and the ceremonies connected with it. In their view, Hunyadi died as a heroic defender of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Christian world, which he protected against their arch enemy, the Ottomans.

This is reminiscent of the idealistic descriptions of the final moments of some rulers, whom chroniclers highlighted as being perfect examples of the behaviour of a Christian ruler in expectation of his impending demise on his deathbed. Prior to his death, Ladislaus the Posthumous was said to have made a request of George of Poděbrady: "...before he died, he begged Lord George, with a good mind and memory, bequeathing to him the Bohemian land and giving him rule, saying that the entire Bohemian Kingdom is in your hands. And he also beseeched him to most help the orphans and widows of the truth and not permit them to do wrong and defend them."⁷²

The stylised and theatrical description of the dying of Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg, recorded by court chronicler Eberhard Windeck, has a similar spirit.⁷³ In this context, it is appropriate here to ask whether the previously mentioned chroniclers did not aim to depict the death of the rulers and important representatives of the nobility in line with contemporary ideas about a good way to die. In the 15th century, texts examining the art of dying (*ars moriendi*) were published, originally intended as aids for priests but were soon translated into vernacular languages and visualised on woodcuts so that they could also serve the needs of the wider classes.⁷⁴ The aim of the *ars moriendi* texts was to prepare the dying person for his or her own passing and to guide those who were caring for a dying person. A good death by those who had lived a Christian life and sinners who had repented was appreciated.⁷⁵

70 BONFINI, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades III*, p. 190, VIII. 133–136.

71 THURÓCZ, *Chronica Hungarorum I*, p. 272, c. 251; THURÓCZY, *Chronicle of the Hungarians II*, pp. 183–184, c. 251.

72 *Staré letopisy české*, pp. 120–121.

73 DVOŘÁKOVÁ 2021, pp. 50–52; ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 167.

74 The texts distinguished between good dying and bad dying., see: DINZELBACHER, Peter. Die Präsenz des Todes in der spätmittelalterlichen Mentalität. In KOLMER 1997, p. 35.

75 DUCLOW, Donald F. Dying Well: The *Ars moriendi* and the Dormition of the Virgin. In DUBRUCK, Edelgard E. – GUSICK, Barbara I. (eds.) *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages*. New York : Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 379–382.

Handbooks on how to “die properly” were relatively popular. The literature abounded with stories of the dead and art was filled with scenes associated with death. As such, the late Middle Ages is often mentioned as a period that was obsessed with death and dying.⁷⁶ *Memento mori*, i.e. the consciousness of human mortality, was presented to medieval people in liturgy and sermons.⁷⁷ This ever-present emphasis of the inevitability of death, which applies to everyone, is also demonstrated in the wording from the Hungarian chronicle of John Thuróczy, who explains that the reason for death is the culpability of the “first parents.” He adds that: “no one can complain to the Creator about the inevitable and insufferable fact of death [...] but rather one must patiently endure the fate of annihilation, because the Lord takes only what He has given, and man will rise from the dead on that last day thanks to Him.”⁷⁸

Funerals were frequently linked with a request for a specific final resting place. For example, Stephen Zápolya wished to be buried in the Cathedral of St. Martin at Spišská Kapitula, while Helena of Frankopan, on the other hand, asked to be buried next to her husband Sigismund in the Franciscan church in Senj on the coast of the Adriatic Sea in what is today Croatia.⁷⁹ It is evident that Stephen Csupor also thought ahead of his final parting, as he set aside 700 florins for his funeral in his will and bequeathed 20 florins to the monks of the monastery to pray for his soul before God.⁸⁰ It is clear that a relatively stable knowledge of funeral ceremonies existed, even though in Hungary this can be documented by only one mention in the testament of Nicholas Barcskai, son of Jacob, from 1364.⁸¹ Nicholas included in his last will the usual instructions regarding the ownership of family property, providing for his daughter or the redistribution of clothing and household accessories. However, he also gives some details relating to the instructions for his own funeral. The testator asked that he be buried in the Franciscan Monastery of the Virgin Mary in Esztergom, and that the funeral procession be accompanied by three horses of different colours in addition to a horse that he regularly rode himself. He further desired that during the ceremony, two bowls or chalices and two lights (lamps) be carried in which 20 florins were to be placed. He also mentions the wish that the participants bring Nicholas’s weapons and robe, probably in the sense that he be buried together with the weapons and in a specific burial garment. Even though we do not know whether the survivors ultimately fulfilled Nicholas’s wishes, it is interesting to observe the thinking of the writer of the will about what his funeral should look like. Although he devoted only a brief passage from the whole text to the mourning ceremony, this is still a rare mention in the Hungarian environment of presenting the ideas of a nobleman

76 BATES, Stephen. Preparations for a Christian Death: The Later Middle Ages. In BOOTH – TINGLE 2020, p. 72.

77 BATES 2020, p. 74.

78 THURÓCZ, *Chronica Hungarorum* I, p. 158, c. 128.

79 SzaOkI, p. 256, no. 288; *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon XII*. Edited by József Teleki. Pest : Emich Gusztáv, 1857, p. 473, no. 796.

80 MÁLYUSZ, Elemér. A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban (XI. közl.). In *Levéltári Közlemények*, 1935, vol. 13, p. 253, no. 449.

81 *Hazai oklevéltár 1234 – 1536*. Edited by Imre Nagy, Farkas Deák and Gyula Nagy. Budapest : Knoll Károly Akad. Könyvtár Bizománya, 1879, pp. 276–277, no. 257.

of the period regarding the way he left the world.⁸² In Nicholas's case, this is certainly a reflection of the information and examples available to him. He was perhaps inspired by knowledge of the funeral procession of King Charles Robert, which is presented in John Thuróczy as the funeral of a chivalric king. It is similarly possible that Nicholas also planned that the horse he rode during his life would symbolise his presence at the funeral. Alternatively, this could have been a fairly widely rooted idea of what a proper nobleman's funeral should look like. However, few incorporated this initiative into their wills.

Conclusion

The people of the late Middle Ages evidently thought about what their departure from the world should look like, though it is possible that they took funeral ceremonies for granted as being too commonplace to be specifically recorded in wills, deeds or chronicles. Wills mainly focused on practical matters related to inheritance, the handling of property, providing for wives or children and the like. However, several descriptions of Hungarian noble funeral ceremonies are preserved in late medieval chronicles. All of the aforementioned examples came from works that were not written by official historiographers in service of the royal court but rather the matter of a detailed account of a wedding (Seybold's testimony), an urban chronicle describing various events in the town (Sperfogel's chronicle), or a chronicle (*Chronicle of the Cillis*) the aim of which was to justify the rise of originally lower noble family. Descriptions of the funeral ceremonies discussed in the present study have several common features. First, all three events exhibited a pompous course involving a relatively large number of participants. This means that funerals had to be exceptionally well prepared in terms of organisation and logistics, and only exceedingly wealthy aristocratic families could finance such a huge processions and ostentatious funerals. A consistent element among the ceremonies was black clothing, often made of rare materials such as silk or velvet, and horses also dressed in black fabrics. Colours retained special meaning in the Christian liturgy and horses were a traditional part of mourning ceremonies too. A characteristic feature of the funeral processions and the funerals themselves was also the use of a large number of candles. The light of the flame symbolised the belief in the afterlife and the resurrection of the deceased. Symbolic elements were another part of aristocratic funerals, for example, the insignias and emblems of the noblemen were demonstratively destroyed, an activity that was very similar to symbolic acts that occurred at the funerals of Hungarian Kings (Matthias Corvinus, Ladislaus the Posthumous). Like royal funerals, the mourning ceremonies of the Hungarian nobility were intended to demonstrate the greatness of the deceased as well as the power and wealth of his/her noble family. It is also possible that the funeral ceremonies of aristocrats were organized in chivalric spirit, in order to show deceased persons as right and virtuous knights.

82 Áron Petneki even states that this is the only Hungarian medieval reference of this kind. PETNEKI 1997, p. 117.