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Royal funeral ceremonies in fourteenth-century Central Europe

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Abstract

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Death and dying were a ubiquitous reality of the world of medieval society, with lasting effects on the living from all social groups in equal measure. However, for the rulers of the day, the process of dying and the subsequent burial was an important social, political and cultural event. Over time, special funerary ceremonial complexes developed that included a variety of rituals and symbols which indicated the status and importance of the medieval monarchs. This paper compares the funerary rituals and symbols of power on display during the processions of three Central European kings: King Charles I Robert of Hungary (1342) in Visegrád, Buda and Székesfehérvár, Polish King Casimir III the Great (1370) in Kraków and Bohemian King and Roman Emperor Charles IV (1378) in Prague. Each of these monumental events included a number of common motifs and ritual sequences, though at the same time, local flavour or innovations always came into play. The common denominator of these three ceremonies was that in the spirit of the political theology of the time, all referenced the immortality of the sovereign power and its timeless essence, which sprung from a sacred character sanctioned by God's grace.

“Because the existing law of death is universal and unchangeable and, therefore, it applies to all of human posterity, the Almighty did not even spare his own Son of God, but delivered him to death for all of us. And so, nobody can complain to the Creator about the unavoidable and unbearable reality of death. It is not wise, therefore, to oppose the Lord, but one has to endure patiently the doomed fate. Because the Lord only takes what he has given and, on the very last day, man will be resurrected by his grace.”¹

The life cycle of every human being begins with birth and inevitably ends in death, an anthropological constant observed among all civilisations across time and space. People around world

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- 1 *Chronicon Dubnicense*. *Historiae Hungaricae fontes domestici* 1/3. Edited by Matyás Florián. Lipsiae: F. A. Brockhaus, 1884, pp. 134–135: “Nam in omnem posteritatem moriendi legem condidisse videtur generalem et incommutabilem, adeo ut altissimus proprio filio suo, licet deitate vestito parcere noluit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum. Non igitur quisque indignando creatori, propter factum mortis ineuitabile et incommutabile, potest obuiare; et quod non est sapiencia necque prudencia, necque fortitudo necque consilium contra dominum, et potius ferendus est grauis euentus necis pacienter, quia quod donauerat dominus accepit et in die illa surrecturum in ipso.”

have invented and designed a host of rites of passage to symbolically mark or explain shared benchmarks of life in society, including birth, circumcision, baptism, initiation rituals, weddings, enthronement and other inaugural rites, and last but not least, ceremonies accompanying death.² When considering death and funeral rituals in Medieval Europe, the specificities of each individual civilisation should be taken into account. The Christianisation of the late Antique society and its continuation into the Early and High Middle Ages produced a unique and very specific society on the European continent and in the Mediterranean region.³ Deep cultural, spiritual and religious changes affected the perception of death and dying. In Christian the belief, death was not the final stop of one's journey but merely a transition from the temporary world to the eternal (i.e. the real one).⁴ This paper examines the use, meaning and influence of funeral rituals in the late medieval society of Central Europe in the fourteenth century, building on previous research which demonstrated that Christian monarchic rituals played an important part in the exercise of power with rulers and their entourage using numerous symbols and ceremonies to express ideas, ideals and messages to the outside world.⁵ In this way, the funeral rituals of medieval monarchs offer an ideal opportunity to examine the traditional rites of passage vested with monarchic and Christian symbols. Following is a comparative examination of three such cases from fourteenth century Hungary, Poland and Bohemia: the funerals of Charles Robert (1342), Casimir III (1370) and Charles IV (1378).

Charles Robert (1342)

Charles Robert of Anjou (King of Hungary 1301 – 1342) was one of the most important rulers of late medieval Central Europe. He rose to a powerful and influential position within his kingdom, but also among the context of regional diplomacy and international politics. Robert maintained good relations with all of his neighbours and usually acted as an intermediary in cases of disputes and conflicts among other rulers of the region. Possibly the most splendid occasion in this respect was the well-known Visegrád meeting of the three kings in November 1335. Charles Robert hosted Casimir III of Poland and John of Luxembourg of Bohemia, who was accompanied by his son and

- 2 RAPPAPORT, Roy. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 138ff; GENNEP, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. Oxford; New York : Routledge, 2010, pp. 1–13, 15–25; ELIADE, Mircea. *Initiations, rites, sociétés secrètes. Naissance mystiques. Essai sur quelques types d'initiation*. Paris : Gallimard, 1959, pp. 14–15, 133–180.
- 3 For methodological attitudes and conceptual framework, see especially: BINSKI, Paul. *Medieval Death. Ritual and Representation*. London : British Museum Press, 1996; JARNUT, Jörg – WEMHOFF, Matthias (eds.) *Erinnerungskultur im Bestattungsritual. Archäologisch-Historisches Forum*. München : Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003; OHLER, Norbert. *Umíraní a smrt ve středověku*. Jinočany : H&H, 2001.
- 4 PAXTON, Frederick S. *Christianizing Death. The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe*. New York : Cornell University Press, 1996.
- 5 ZUPKA, Dušan. *Ritual and Symbolic Communication in Medieval Hungary under the Árpád Dynasty, 1000 – 1301*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2016; ALTHOFF, Gerd. *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*. Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003. Most recently for Central Europe, see: ŠMAHEL, František – NODL, Martin – ŽŮREK, Václav (eds.) *Festivities, Ceremonies and Rituals in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown in the Late Middle Ages*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2022.

future king and emperor, Charles IV. The event was marked by ostentatious symbolism, ceremonies of power and symbolism of rule.⁶ A strong emphasis on the ritualised representation of monarchic power and the special status of the anointed king in medieval society would be witnessed even more profoundly during the last of the political events connected to Charles Robert—his funeral festivities.

The most detailed description of Charles's final farewell is preserved in *The Chronicon Dubnicense*,⁷ where the anonymous author expresses his sadness and grief over the loss of such an illustrious ruler. Every single detail in the long process of the king's ceremonial funeral is then enumerated.⁸ Charles Robert died on 16 July 1342 in his residence at the Visegrád castle. The author opens his account with an expressive description of the of the queen widow Elisabeth, the royal heir Louis and his brother Stephen and other members of the court mourning the king's passing. To be sure, the king's death was lamented by his magnates, knights, prelates and ordinary people as well.⁹

The funeral ceremonies were directed under the supervision of Queen Elisabeth. The day after Robert's death (17 July), religious rites were performed by archbishops, bishops, prelates, priests, monks and clerics, accompanied by the country barons. Together they entered the royal residence in a solemn procession. According to Hungarian custom, the golden royal crown was placed on the king's head. His body was vested in a purple tunic and his feet decorated with shoes ornamented with precious stones and golden spurs. The funeral cortege then left the castle and brought the body to the parochial church of Virgin Mary in the town of Visegrád located beneath the fortress where a huge crowd of burghers took part in weeping and grieving. Prelates present in the church then performed a prescribed solemn mass and the first part of the funerary liturgical rites.¹⁰

After the first set of ceremonies was complete, the king was loaded onto a ship and began a journey on the Danube River from Visegrád to Buda accompanied by a cortege led by royal standard bearer Lawrence Slavus of the Csák

6 RÁCZ, György. The Congress of Visegrád in 1355. In *Central European Papers*, 2015, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 8–19; ENGEL, Pál. *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary 895 – 1526*. London; New York : Tauris, 2005, pp. 136–138.

7 The standard edition is: *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. II–III, 1–207. For modern Slovak translation, see: *Kronika uhorských kráľov zvaná Dubnická*. Translated by Július Sopko. Budmerice : RAK, 2004. The *Chronicon Dubnicense* contains a much more complete version of the traditional narrative preserved in *The Fourteenth Century Chronicle Composition*. Cf. *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*. Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum I. Edited by Alexander Domanovszky. Budapest : Academia Litter. Hungarica atque Societate Histor. Hungarica, 1937, pp. 239–505.

8 For the rich symbolism of funerary rituals of medieval rulers, see especially: BERTELLI, Sergio. *The King's Body. Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Philadelphia : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001, pp. 214–252.

9 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 130–131.

10 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 131–132: “Tandemque duie sequenti ob preceptum dicte domine regine archieposcopis episcopis prelatibus baronibus presbiteris fratribus clericis, omnibus simul conuenientibus lacrimabiliter processiuè pergentibus, quorum preexcellens multitudo lacrimarum ut dictum est amarificata, ad dictum castrum aduentes et preciosissimum caput ipius iuxta decenciam regni sui honoris corona aurea, corpusque ipsius splendidissimum tunica scarletina, ac eciam caligis sotularibus gemmis preciosissimis contextis, et desuper calcaria aurea, pulcherrimis pedibus sue excellencie anectendo induentes...”

kindred. After reaching Buda, a ceremonial welcoming by the local citizens followed. Charles's body was received on the river bank by local clerics, priests and townspeople clad in mournful clothes. Throughout the night, funeral orations, clamours and psalms were sung to the Lord, as was the custom.¹¹

On the third day, prescribed liturgical rites and solemn masses were performed. These were coupled with peculiar local Hungarian funerary customs. On the church's footsteps, Charles's three splendid horses, draped with purple blankets, were waiting with three mounted knights. The first one bore the king's armour, the second held the lance used by Charles Robert during knightly tournaments and the last knight wore full armour and was equipped with weapons as if ready to enter battle immediately. All three riders were adorned with signs picturing an ostrich with a golden crown, something prescribed by the king for all his elite troops. Each piece of armour was lavishly decorated and all equipment was covered by gilded silver manufactured with great care and professionalism. The attention paid to even the slightest detail was obvious as even the stirrups and snaffles were richly decorated and all clothes were made from silk. Precious stones, pearls and the colour purple could be seen in every space, adding more splendour and majesty to the royal funeral. According to the author of the source, these signs and symbols were meant to remind subjects of the great benefits the late king had provided them. This rendered the funerary atmosphere even more emotional.¹²

After completing the ecclesiastic liturgical rites and solemn masses, it was time for the next phase of the festivities. As mentioned in the sources, the ceremony was supposed to follow the traditional customs of the late venerable kings of the realm, a statement which is another hint towards a presupposed royal funeral ordo. The lack of other supporting evidence hinders any far-reaching conclusions about its real existence, content or form. The only detail provided by the *Chronicon Dubnicense* is that different sections from the Bible were used during these rites. Whatever the nature of these ceremonies was, the monarch's body was put on display for a certain amount of time, uncovered, in order to be clearly visible for the mourning visitors who came to say their final farewells.

The king's body was then ready to be transferred to Székesfehérvár for final entombment. On the way, crowds of mourners paid homage to the deceased ruler and expressed grief upon his loss. According to the chronicler, a great number of priests, prelates, clerics and lay people accompanied the body until it reached the gates of Székesfehérvár. The local Church of the Virgin Mary was the traditional coronation location for Hungarian rulers since the first king, Stephen I (1000 – 1038).¹³ Most of the Arpáidian kings and queens are

11 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, p. 132.

12 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 132–133. For the symbolism of horses in monarchic rituals, see: BERTELLI 2001, pp. 97–98. For the importance of horses in funerals, see also: DVORÁKOVÁ, Daniela. *Kôň a človek v stredoveku. K spolužitiu človeka a koňa v Uhorskom kráľovstve*. Budemrice : RAK, 2007, pp. 62–63.

13 The precise location of Stephen's coronation cannot be determined because of a lack of sources. Generally, authors tend to place it in Esztergom. Subsequent kings were crowned in Székesfehérvár.

buried in this church, which in the context of political theology, made it one of the most sacral and political centres of the entire kingdom.¹⁴ Together with Buda, Esztergom and Visegrád, it formed the centre of the realm—the *medium regni*—which was the most politically important part of the monarchy.¹⁵ Székesfehérvár lost some importance in favour of Buda and Visegrád in the later period, but its symbolic significance as the resting place of St. Stephen was still considerable. By burying the first king of the new dynasty, the Angevins made another important political and symbolic step towards stabilizing their rule and strengthening legitimacy as true successors of the Arpadian holy kings.¹⁶

This is also one of the reasons for such an ostentatious funeral ceremony provided for Charles Robert. The rich details of the event which are preserved in the anonymous account deserve to be quoted in its entirety:

When they brought him to the town the priests and clerics chanted orations and psalms to God all night long. At the dawn, the liturgical rites and solemn masses were performed. The masses continued throughout the day, while the three aforementioned horses covered by purple blankets and mounted by three robust knights in full armour, as one could expect, remained waiting before the gate of the monastery all the time. After completing all the solemn masses, the archbishops, bishops, prelates and the abbots buried him clad in royal raiment in the abbatial church next to the main altar. It was the same monastery where the most holy bodies of king saint Stephen and his son prince Emeric happily rest in the Lord...¹⁷

The source concluded this phase with a vivid description of the mourning and weeping people, rich and poor, their great sadness and their tears covering the tomb. Csanád Telegdi, the Archbishop of Esztergom, then delivered a funerary oration, which provided some comfort to the grieving people. When the ceremonies ended, religious institutions in the town were given precious gifts, with the monastery even receiving the three richly decorated

TÓTH, Endre. *The Hungarian Holy Crown and the Coronation Regalia*. Budapest : Országgház Könyvkiadó, 2021, p. 59.

- 14 For the concept of political theology, see: KANTOROWICZ, Ernst H. *The King's Two Bodies: Studies in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1957. For the political and symbolic importance of Székesfehérvár, see: BAK, János M. – PÁLFFY, Géza. *Crown and Coronation in Hungary (1000 – 1916 AD)*. Budapest : Hungarian National Museum, 2020, pp. 47–51; ENGEL, Pál. Temetkezések a középkori Székesfehérvári bazilikában. Függelék: A székesfehérvári koronázások. In *Századok*, 1987, vol. 121, no. 4, pp. 613–637.
- 15 HUDÁČEK, Pavol. Ostrihom, Stoličný Belehrad a Starý Budín. *Medium regni a iter regis*. In BYSTRICKÝ, Peter – HUDÁČEK, Pavol (eds.) *Gestá, symboly, ceremónie a rituály v stredoveku*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2019, pp. 137–154.
- 16 KLANICZAY, Gábor. *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 295–326; LUCHERINI, Vinni. The Irruption of the Sacred in to the History of Hungarian Kings in the Mirror of the Angevin Illuminated Chronicle (around 1358). In ZUPKA, Dušan – VERCAMER, Grischa (eds.) *Rulership in Medieval East Central Europe. Power, Ritual and Legitimacy in Bohemia, Hungary and Poland*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2021, pp. 217–246.
- 17 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 133–134: “Illi quoque sacerdotes et clerici per totam noctem ympnos et psalmos deo decantantes, in vigilyis pausando deduxerunt noctis prolixitatem. Dieque lucescente inceptis diuinis et missarum solemnitatibus, quosque diuina misteria incepta, et missarum solemnitates more debito eodem die peragerentur, antedicti trini dextrary ipsius domini regis, modo premissis falerati, purpureisque coperimentis decorati, super quos prefati milites strenui arma eiusdem domini regis induentes, ante fores ipsius monastery, ut est premissum steterunt perdurantes. Et demum eisdem digne completis consumatisque in eodem die celebrari debentibus, in sumpno monasterio, ubi sanctissimi regis Stephani et Emerici ducis filij sui sanctissima corpora...in domino feliciter requiescunt.”

horses and royal funeral carriage.¹⁸ While the ceremonies were performed a few days after Charles Robert's death, some of the symbolic festivities, including the burial proper, continued at a later time in accordance with ecclesiastical prescriptions. When the court was back in Visegrád, it welcomed two special guests who came to pay homage to the deceased king, Casimir III, king of Poland (1333 – 1370) and Charles, the Margrave of Moravia and future king of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor (1346 – 1378).¹⁹ Almost a month later, in mid-August, according to contemporary custom prescribed by the church, another solemn procession took place, led by the new king, Louis I the Great (1342 – 1382, crowned 21 July), and his mother, Queen Elisabeth, accompanied by prelates and magnates of the realm. They headed to Székesfehérvár to commemorate the late king in another set of religious ceremonies, liturgical rites and solemn masses. Only after this, the king's body could be finally buried in the sarcophagus. The chronicler assures that similar rites were performed throughout the kingdom. The ultimate goal was to pray for the soul of the first Angevin king of Hungary and to make a symbolic bond between him and his heavenly patrons, the Arpáadian king-saints Stephen and Ladislaus. This served as yet another way to legitimize and cement the royal authority of the Angevins in Hungary.²⁰

Casimir III (1370)

Charles Robert's funeral rituals can be compared to those performed at the burial of two of the mourning guests mentioned above: Casimir III of Poland and Charles IV of Bohemia. Casimir III was the last male Piast king of Poland. He died on 5 November 1370 and his funeral ceremonies were recorded in an account by his royal deputy chancellor and archdeacon of Gniezno, Jan of Czarnków (1320 – 1387), and reproduced later by the most important medieval Polish historian, the cleric of Kraków, Jan Długosz (1415 – 1480).²¹ Older historiography denounced the burial of Casimir as hasty and unprepared, an idea no longer supported after more recent research. The funeral took place on the third day after King Casimir's death, on November 7. Rites were performed in a solemn way, appropriate to the status of the deceased ruler (*solemniter*).²² As Polish historian Urszula Borkowska pointed out, Casimir's funeral festivities already included “the characteristic division between the act of burying the king's body and the ceremonial exequies – processions were

18 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 134–135.

19 It is not clear precisely when Casimir and Charles arrived in Hungary, so it cannot be said which parts of the festivities they attended.

20 *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 135–136. For the legitimation of Angevin rule through ceremonies and symbols see: footnote 15.

21 Source editions: JOANNIS DE CZARNKOW. *Chronicon Polonorum*. Monumenta Poloniae Historica 2. Edited by Jan Szlachtowski. Lwów : Nakładem własnym, 1872, pp. 631–648; DŁUGOSZ, Joannis. *Historiae Polonicae, Libri XII, T. 4*. Joannis Długossii Senioris Canonici Cracoviensis Opera omnia. Edited by Alexander Przezdziecki. Cracoviae : Ex Typographia Ephemeridum “Czas”, 1877. This paper quotes from the English edition: *The Annals of Jan Długosz*. Translated by Maurice Michael. Chichester : IM Publications, 1997.

22 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, p. 515. doi:10.1017/S0022046900043980, with additional references to older scholarship.

made round the churches of Cracow and offerings made for the salvation of, and in the name of, the dead king.”²³

Solemn liturgical rites were performed in one of the most sacred places in the Polish kingdom, the Kraków cathedral. This church became the spiritual, religious, political and national centre of the Polish kingdom in the high and late Middle Ages. As coronation site and burial place of Polish kings after the unification of the country in 1320, it was also the symbolic centre of the realm.²⁴ Jarosław of Skotniki, the Archbishop of Gniezno, presided over the ceremonies, aided by fellow prelates Florian, Bishop of Kraków, and Peter, Bishop of Lubusz, with other church dignitaries of Poland. The church was packed with important clerics, prelates, magnates of the kingdom, and well as ordinary people and townsmen. Solemn ceremonies were performed with all due veneration and with an emphasis on mourning and weeping, as was the case in prior similar events.²⁵ A second informant, Jan Długosz, even provided some details on the last moments of Casimir’s life just before his passing and explained the location of his final resting place:

Having attended to all this, the King receives the viaticum, is anointed after making several confessions, and so, in the huge, low hall on the south side of Kraków cathedral, he breathes his last on the Wednesday nearest to St. Leonard’s Day, November 5. He was sixty. He is buried not in the family sarcophagus, but in a separate place on the right-hand side near the great altar, for everyone agrees that he deserves a special tomb, which is ornamented, little by little, and at the King’s expense, with tablets and marble representations of King Casimir as he looked during his life-time.²⁶

The November 7 funeral was not the only spectacle performed after Casimir’s death. His designated successor, King Louis of Hungary, hurried to Kraków after the news of his uncle’s death reached him. The local citizens, prelates and barons of the kingdom welcomed their new ruler in a splendidly organized *adventus regis* ritual, meticulously recorded by Jan of Czarnków.²⁷ The coronation was slightly delayed as the issue of whether Kraków

23 BORKOWSKA 1985, p. 515.

24 For more details, especially in connection to monarchic and funeral rituals, see: ZUPKA, Dušan. The Cathedral as a Venue for Monarchic and Episcopal Rituals in Late Medieval East-Central Europe (14th – 16th Centuries). In LUCHERINI, Vinni – VARELA BOTO, Gerardo (eds.) *La cattedrale nella città medievale: i rituali*. Roma : Viella, 2020, pp. 145–149; DALEWSKI, Zbigniew. Monarchic Ceremonial in Late Medieval Cracow. In DMITRIEVA, Marina – LAMBRECHT, Karen (eds.) *Krakau, Prag, und Wien. Funktionen von Metropolen im frühmodernen Staat*. Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000, pp. 145–154.

25 JOANNIS DE CZARNKOW, *Chronicon Polonorum*, p. 636: “Post cujus obitum exequiis solemniter celebratis, feria quinta proxima, quae fuit dies septima mensis praedicti, in dextra parte chori ecclesiae Cracoviensis per fideles suos extitit tumulatus, Jaroslao sanctae Gneznensis ecclesiae archiepiscopo, Floriano Cracoviensi, Petro Lubucensi episcopis tum praesentibus. Quantus enim clamor, quantus flectus, quanta vociferatio procerum et nobilium, praelatorum, canonicorum et ecclesiasticorum virorum atque popularium in sua depositione extitit, lingua humana non facile posset enarrare.”

26 *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, p. 322.

27 JOANNIS DE CZARNKOW, *Chronicon Polonorum*, pp. 636–637: “Anno igitur mense dieque praedictis Lodovico rege Ungariae praefato Cracoviam veniente primo proceres terrae et natu majores regni Poloniae in Sandecz et ultra occurrerunt, ipsum honorifice susceptum versus Cracoviam deduxerunt. Qui cum Cracoviam intraret, civitatenses Cracovitae cum vexillis purpureis extra civitatem ad montem Lassotae obviam venerunt, ordinaverunt etenim quod com-

or Gniezno should be the coronation site was debated. King Louis did not want to break the tradition of royal coronations in Kraków (as was the case of Władysław Łokietek and Casimir), though he also did not want to offend the Archbishop of Gniezno either. In the end, a fine compromise was reached; Louis was crowned by the same three prelates who lead the funeral rites of king Casimir in the Kraków cathedral and subsequently travelled to Gniezno where he arrived in his coronation robes and crown to honour the Gniezno Church.²⁸

After a solemn coronation as the new Polish king, Louis took part in the second round of funeral rites performed in honour of the last Piast ruler of Poland (19 November). Immediately after his return to Kraków, the new king, the Polish magnates, prelates and most important townsmen performed funeral liturgical rites in every church in the town. Again, the vivid chronicler's account needs no further explanation:

This starts at dawn on Tuesday, November 19, with processions from all the churches and monasteries in the city of Kraków; then come four carriages each covered with a pall and driven by a coachman in black, and behind them forty mounted knights in full armour, their horses draped with purple cloths. Then come eleven standards representing the eleven duchies of Poland, each having its emblem embroidered on it. These are followed by a twelfth and larger standard bearing a white eagle, the emblem of the dead King. Behind it rides a knight dressed in the most splendid royal robes, pearls and fine purple interwoven with gold, representing the dead king, and riding a magnificent horse itself with a purple cover. Behind these, two by two, come 600 acolytes, each holding a lighted candle of unusual size (two of them weigh the same as a stone of wax) next come mourners bearing palls of interwoven gold, silver and purple cloth, which is later distributed among the churches and their servants. These mourners are surrounded by more than a thousand knights, in funeral dress. There is weeping, wailing and discordant singing that reduce almost every mortal to tears. Ahead of the mourners rides a knight scattering to either side handfuls of broad Prague grosses, thus making way for the procession behind him, for every road is thronged. Behind all this walks King Louis accompanied by the Archbishop of Gniezno and the Bishops of Kraków and Lubusz, then the Polish and Hungarian nobles and behind them a countless throng. They enter the churches of St. Francis, the Virgin Mary and the Holy Trinity, in each of which they hear mass and give alms (in each church, during the service, two platters are placed beside each mourner filled with broad Prague grosses and from which anyone may take what he pleases and lay it on the altar; when empty each is replenished with more coin); then they go to the cathedral, where mass is said at the High Altar by the Bishop of Kraków and at all the other altars by chaplains; double gifts being laid on each altar. In the cathedral soldiers have to clear a passage to the altars, otherwise none would have reached them. The late King's officials lay gifts in keeping with their rank on the main altar, the treasurer and the Chamberlain giving the King's

munitas consulum vexillum, in quo arma civitatis et claves fuerunt designata et unaquaeque mechanicorum in sua turma incedens sua vexilla signis propriis ac clavibus designata portabant, eaque omnes regi ad mantis offerebant, sicque ipsum cum magno honore processionibus cleri praecedentibus usque ad ecclesiam majorem castrum deduxerunt." See also: MARZEC, Andrzej. Hungarians and Hungarians in the Chronicle of Jan of Czarnkow. In BAGI, Dániel et al. (eds.) *Hungary and Hungarians in Central and East European Narrative Sources (10th – 17th Centuries)*. Pécs : UP, 2019, pp. 125–137.

- 28 *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, p. 324. For the complicated context, see: FLEMMIG, Stephan. Die Entwicklung des polnischen Königskrönungszeremoniells im 14. Jahrhundert zwischen polnischer Tradition und europäischem Einfluss. In NODL, Martin – ŠMAHEL, František (eds.) *Rituály, ceremonie a festivity ve střední Evropě 14. a 15. století*. Praha : Filosofia, 2009, pp. 79–80; DALEWSKI, Zbigniew. Przeszłość zrytualizowana: tradycja królewskich koronacji. In MANIKOWSKA, Halina (ed.) *Przeszłość w kulturze średniowiecznej Polski*. Warszawa : Neriton, 2018, pp. 29–57.

silver platters, towels and tablecloths; the Master of the Pantry and the Carver give four large silver goblets; the two cup-bearers give cups and bowls, and the Marshal a splendid charger. Finally, after the twelve standards, comes the knight representing the late King, astride a horse. When this horse has been presented by the Second Master of the Horse, the knights break all twelve standards, the signal for one and all, nobles and ordinary people, old and young, to weep and wail.²⁹

There are several key elements in the depiction that would become a firm part of Polish royal funeral ceremonies and be put in writing for the 1548 funeral of King Sigismund the Old (1506 – 1548), an *ordo* that became official for centuries to come.³⁰ On the other hand, some similarities with the funeral festivities performed for Charles Robert of Hungary in 1342 are observable too. This is not surprising, because Louis himself was present both at his father's and his uncle's funerals. The influence of Queen Elisabeth, who was Casimir's sister, Charles Robert's wife and Louis's mother should not go unmentioned. Her significant sway over on her son is well known.³¹ Alongside the usual liturgical rites performed by the prelates and the clergy, the presence of horses and mounted knights in both funerals should be noted. This was undoubtedly connected to the wave of knightly enthusiasm and knightly culture that marked the reign and ceremonial life of Central European monarchs in the fourteenth century.³² What is also noteworthy is the emphasis laid on the symbolic representation of the royal and dynastic coat of arms, which depicted the white eagle of the Piasts. The funeral description of Charles Robert, on the other hand, only mentions the ostrich sign adopted by the king and spread among his troops. One last point appears in both funerals; in Visegrád in 1342, just like in Kraków in 1370, a knight mounted on a horse symbolically represented the deceased king himself, appearing as a kind of an allegorical personification.

Charles IV (1378)

The final royal ceremonial funeral for comparison is that of Charles IV, King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor (1346 – 1378). Charles IV's funeral was probably the most lavish, most crafted and symbolically most elaborate ceremony of the late medieval period. It has been pointed out previously that he programmatically and systematically prepared himself for his final farewell, unlike many of his contemporaries and predecessors.³³ It is no surprise,

29 *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, pp. 324–325. Compare with: JOANNIS DE CZARNKOW, *Chronicon Polonorum*, pp. 646–647. This description of the funeral of Casimir diverts from the other two ceremonies under study in two main respects: the distribution of coins (silver Prague grosses) and the breaking of the royal banners. These two gestures are not explicitly mentioned by the sources, but it can be reasonably assumed that they could have occurred in 1342 (the funeral of Charles Robert) and in 1378 (the funeral of Charles IV) too.

30 BORKOWSKA 1985, p. 515.

31 ENGEL 2005, pp. 170–173.

32 The best treatment of this phenomenon thus far was proposed by: VESZPRÉMY, László. *Lovagvilág Magyarországon*. Budapest : Argumentum, 2008; KURCZ, Ágnes. *Lovagi kultúra Magyarországon a 13. – 14. században*. Budapest : Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988; ŠIMŮNEK, Robert. Rituals, Ceremonies, and Symbolic Communication in the Lives of the Bohemian Nobility in the Late Middle Ages. In ŠMAHEL, František – NODL, Martin – ŽŮREK, Václav (eds.) *Festivities, Ceremonies and Rituals in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown in the Late Middle Ages*. Leiden; Boston : Brill, pp. 218–257; IWAŃCZAK, Wojciech. *Po stopách rytířských příběhů*. Praha : Argo, 2001.

33 ŠMAHEL, František. Smuteční ceremonie a rituály při pohřbu císaře Karla IV. In ŠMAHEL, František. *Mezi středověkem a renesancí*. Praha : Argo, 2002, p. 133.

as Charles was the one of the medieval monarchs who paid significant attention to the ritualised and symbolic representation of his majesty.³⁴ The funeral ceremonies performed in 1378 provide another example of this approach. In fact, as King of Bohemia and Roman Emperor, Charles began a program directed at commemoration of his close and distant relatives and ancestors much earlier, starting with the consecration of St. Wenceslas chapel in the Cathedral of St. Vitus at the Prague Castle in 1367, and later by the reorganization of tombs of Czech kings and dukes in a symbolic manner, giving precedence to his (currently ruling) Luxembourg dynasty over the indigenous Přemyslid dynasty.³⁵ Charles's mausoleum did not survive until today, so we are only left with vague descriptions of eyewitnesses and the words of the epitaph, which were incorporated into the funerary oration of Jan Očko of Vlašim, the Archbishop of Prague, as is described later. Despite the doubtless predilection in the royal ceremonial, there is no proof that Charles left an *ordo* for his own funeral. It was most likely crafted in the days following his death.³⁶

Despite of the absence of a written *ordo*, one might presume that Charles and his advisors could find inspiration in the abovementioned funeral ceremonies of Charles Robert in 1342, which Charles IV attended and could have witnessed at least a part of the festivities. He was definitely present at the funeral of his arch rival for the imperial crown, Günther of Schwarzburg, who was buried in 1349 under Charles's personal supervision. On this occasion, the presence of horses and mounted knights is seen again, with one of the knights personifying the deceased himself. Another source of inspiration could be reports from funerals of the French kings Philippe VI and John II, but the most prominent inspiration presumably came from Kraków. Some of the rites and symbols present at Casimir's funeral in 1370 were again reflected in the performance of the 1378 ceremonial.³⁷

Charles IV died on 29 November 1378 and his body underwent a quick embalment process according to contemporary custom. The court, the prelates, townspeople and ordinary people then began preparations for the final farewell for their beloved emperor which took eleven days to get everything ready, attesting to the scale of the preparations for this event. The colour black was meant to be a unifying element for the mourners and grievers. In the meantime, the corpse of the king was displayed in the Prague Castle for a general audience, clad in precious clothes, gold and purple, and resting on a decorated bier. While the imperial crown was placed above his head, the Bohemian

34 KAVKA, František. *Život na dvoře Karla IV.* Praha : Apeiron, 1993; ANTONÍN, Robert. *Ideální panovník českého středověku.* Praha : NLN, 2013, pp. 389–399; ŽŮREK, Václav. Korunovace českých králů a královen. In NODL, Martin – ŠMAHEL, František (eds.) *Slavnosti, ceremonie a rituály v pozdním středověku.* Praha : Argo 2014, pp. 20–26. Several important contributions are assembled in the collective volume: BOBKOVÁ, Lenka – HOLÁ, Mlada (eds.) *Lesk královského majestátu ve středověku.* Praha; Litomyšl : Paseka, 2005.

35 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, p. 135.

36 ŠMAHEL 2002, pp. 133–135.

37 ŠMAHEL 2014, pp. 141–144. In the same spirit, compare: ŽEMLIČKA, Josef. Král jak ubohý hříšník svých poklesků litoval v pláči. Václav II., Zbraslav a svatý Ludvík. In ŽEMLIČKA, Josef. *Návraty do krajiny českého středověku. Výbor z díla.* Praha : NLN, 2016, p. 206.

crown laid on the left side and the Lombard crown on the right side, and his imperial sceptre, orb and sword were placed next to the deceased monarch.³⁸ According to František Šmahel, the first phase called *ostensio corporis*, and was followed by a second phase, the *pompa funebris*.³⁹ This funeral procession began on 11 December and lasted for four days with the route of the cortege explicitly chosen to include all the places important in royal Bohemian ideology and Prague urban identity. Starting at the royal palace, the procession continued over the stone bridge, passed the Dominican convent of St. Clement, the Town Hall of New Town Prague and the Town Hall of Old Town Prague, then through St. Gallus Square to the New Town. One of the most important stops was the Monastery on Emmaus (*Na Slovanech*), from which the cortege went to the Church St. Peter and St. Paul on Vyšehrad.⁴⁰

The bier was carried and accompanied throughout the entire route by elected townspeople and noblemen. They were divided into groups of thirty and clad in all black. In addition, 360 representatives of Prague town guilds and 150 selected craftsmen joined the funeral parade.⁴¹ Our primary source for Charles's funeral, the *Augsburg Chronicle*, provides some extraordinary details on the rites performed and the number of people involved in the festivities.⁴² The head of the cortège was preceded by no less than 564 black-clad candle bearers, supplied by the Prague guilds, Prague town councils and by the new king Wenceslas IV (1378 – 1419). These were followed by representatives of the clergy, university professors and students from Prague University. The next group was composed of numerous standard bearers carrying the banners and coat of arms of all the regions under the rule of Emperor Charles. The most prominent place was reserved for the standard of the Bohemian kingdom and the black eagle on golden background of the imperial standard. Inevitably,

38 *Augsburger Chronik von 1386 – 1406*. Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte 3, Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte von 14 bis 16 Jahrhundert 4. Edited by Ferdinand Frensdorff. Leipzig : S. Hirzel, 1865, p. 60: “Danach wisset, dass er auf der Bahre lag auf goldenen Tüchern und auf goldenen Polstern in seiner ganzen Majestät und zu seinem Haupte lagen drei Kronen: zur rechten Seite als erstes die Krone von Mailand, zu Häupten die Krone des römischen Reichs, zur linken Seite die Krone des böhmischen Königreichs und zu seiner Linken der Reichsapfel mit dem Kreuz und ein blankes Schwert dabei, und zur Rechten lag das Reichszepter. Und er hatte weiße Handschuhe und Fingerringe an den Händen und trug golddurchwirkte Purpurpurhosen und einen Mantel und die Krone seiner Majestät hatte er auf seinem Haupt; und ihrer Zwölf trugen einen goldenen Himmel über ihm und über der Bahre. Hinterdrein fuhren die Kaiserin und die Königin und die Markgräfin in zwanzig schwarz staffierten Wagen. Dahinter fuhren Bürgerinnen in sechsundzwanzig Wagen. Dahinter fuhren Bürgerinnen in sechsundzwanzig Wagen.” (Quotation provided in the modern German rendition published in: FAJT, Jiří – HÖRSCH, Markus (eds.) *Kaiser Karl IV. (1316 – 2016). Erste Bayerisch-Tschechische Landesausstellung. Ausstellungskatalog*. Praha; Nürnberg : Nationalgalerie Prag; Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, 2016, pp. 604–606).

39 ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 145.

40 For the importance of Vyšehrad and its church for the funerals of Bohemian rulers in the previous centuries, see: BRAVERMANNOVÁ, Milena – ŽEMLIČKA, Josef. Pohřby knížat a králů. In SOMMER, Dušan – TŘEŠTÍK, Dušan – ŽEMLIČKA, Josef (eds.) *Přemyslovci. Budování českého státu*. Praha : NLN, 2009, pp. 348–350.

41 ANTONÍN, Robert. The Ritual Practice of Power in Bohemia during the 14th Century. In ZUPKA, Dušan – VERCAMER, Grischa (eds.) *Rulership in Medieval East Central Europe. Power, Ritual and Legitimacy in Bohemia, Hungary and Poland*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021, p. 174.

42 *Augsburger Chronik*, pp. 59–63. A shorter concise version of the narration is also preserved in a manuscript conserved at the University Library in Olomouc. Cf. *Annotationes o Pohřbech císaře Karla IV. a královny Johanny Bavorské, manželky Václava IV.* (Univerzitní knihovna Olomouc, rukopis M II 15, f. 3v –4a), reprinted in: ŠMAHEL 2002, pp. 148–149.

a group of mounted knights took part in the procession, carrying a helmet with the golden crown, unsheathed sword, banner of the Holy Roman Empire, sign of a black shiny eagle and a yellow knightly banner.⁴³ The final part of the procession consisted of the royal bier with the king's body in an open coffin carried by knights under a golden canopy. Behind it, mourners from the royal family followed their deceased king and emperor. Quite astonishingly, the source does not mention the presence of Charles's son and heir, king Wenceslas, but it may be assumed that he was there as this was the traditional custom in every royal funeral all over Europe (and his presence is proven for the later part of the ceremonial). Finally, the queen, relatives and members of the family and the court marched with the funeral procession.

In the following days the king's body was put on display in several important churches and urban locations to enable citizens and ordinary people to pay tribute to their lord. The ultimate farewell took place again in the political and religious centre of the Bohemian realm, St. Vitus Cathedral, on 15 December.⁴⁴ Here the primate, Archbishop of Prague Jan Očko of Vlašim, delivered the aforementioned funerary oration and celebrated a pontifical requiem mass.⁴⁵ On the next day, the emperor was dressed in the simple cloths of a Minorite monk and moved to a pewter coffin with a wooden crown placed on his head.⁴⁶ The coffin was then buried in the central part of St. Vitus Cathedral next to previous Bohemian kings and the deceased relatives of Charles, including his three wives.⁴⁷ The short report from the funeral, the *Annotationes* of the Olomouc University Library, specifies that the religious ceremonies were presided over by the Archbishop of Prague with the pontiffs of Bamberg, Meissen, Regensburg, Olomouc and Litomyšl, joined by other dignitaries and abbots.⁴⁸ The final sections of the funeral ceremonies also included offerings and perhaps symbolical acts such as the breaking of the royal seal, the sword or banners of the deceased king, that symbolized the end of his reign and the beginning of the rule of his successor Wenceslas IV, whose presence in this part of the festivities is well proven.⁴⁹

43 ANTONÍN 2021, pp. 174–175; ŠMAHEL 2002, pp. 149–150.

44 Prague and St. Vitus Cathedral played a similar role in the political and religious life of Bohemia as Kraków and Wawel did for Poland. Cf. KUTHAN, Jiří – ROYT, Jan. *Katedrála sv. Víta, Václava a Vojtěcha. Svatyně českých patronů a králů*. Praha : NLN, 2011; ZUPKA 2020, pp. 141–142.

45 *Řeči, jež měli při pohřbu císaře Karla IV. Jan Očko, arcibiskup pražský, a Vojtěch Raňkův z Ericinia*. *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum* 3. Edited by Josef Emler. Praha : Gregé and Dattel, 1882, pp. 423–441. According to some scholars, the oration was composed and delivered by Jan of Jenštejn, not Jan Očko. This debate is far from over.

46 *Augsburger Chronik*, p. 62.

47 KAVKA 1993, pp. 85–87; ANTONÍN 2021, pp. 176–177.

48 *Annotationes*, cited according to: ŠMAHEL 2002, p. 148.

49 *Augsburger Chronik*, p. 62: “Danach am Mittwoch in der Zeit vor Weihnachten bahrte man ihn auf im höchsten Dom zu Prag in aller seiner Majestät, wie man ihn vorher getragen hatte, und über ihm wurde ein Himmel aus wohl fünfhundert Kerzen errichtet. Und am selben Tag wollte man ihn begraben, und ehe man ihn begrub, da las ihn der Erzbischof eine Seelenmesse und zwölf infulierte Chorherren und Bischöfe - manchmal mehr, manchrnrl weniger - dienten demselben Erzbischof am Altar. Und da opferte man ihm zunächst die zuvor genannten Paniere mit sechsundzwanzig verhängten großen Rossen und mit dem letzten Ross opferte man seinen Schild, den zwei Edelleute trugen; danach opferte man seinen Helm, der mit einer goldenen Krone gekrönt war und den der Markgraf Jobst von Mähren und der Markgraf von Meissen trugen. Und auf dem zuvor erwähnten letzten Ross ritt ein ehersamer Ritter, von Kopf

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, unfortunately the tomb of Charles IV did not survive to modern times. However, at least a short but important inscription from the tomb has been preserved; the funerary oration by Jan Očko of Vlašim, who used it on the occasion:

In the year one thousand three hundred and seventy-eight, on the 29 November. Lo! Me, Charles IV, once terror of the whole world, emperor, who did not know defeat, only death could overcome me. I am buried in this tomb and I pray to God that my soul raises to the stars. Let everyone pray for me, those I left in death and cherished during my lifetime with favour. And so, let his soul rest in heavenly peace.⁵⁰

Conclusions

The present study of prestigious royal funeral ceremonies of 1342, 1370 and 1378 enables an examination of the monarchic rituals and royal symbolism of the late medieval rulers of Central Europe. Preserved contemporary sources provide sufficient details to propose a comparative study of the festivities in question. While each was specific and unique in its performance and choice of individual gestures, some common features, rituals and symbolic expressions could be spotted in all of them. All three cases under examination included a first stage, comprised of an emotional bemoaning of the deceased rulers and the public exhibition of the body. This was followed by a second phase; a ceremonial procession accompanied by liturgical rites, solemn masses and an expression of loyalty and respect from the most important echelons of the society as well as by townspeople and ordinary people. The final part of the funeral rituals took place in the main cathedral of the royal seat in the case of Bohemia and Poland (Prague and Kraków), or in the traditional burial and coronation church in case of Hungary (Székesfehérvár). There, the prelates performed final solemn masses and buried the body in a lavishly decorated tomb.

In some cases, funerary orations are confirmed, followed by offerings to the church and church institutions, and then last farewells performed by the relatives and closest members of the court took place. In the case of Charles Robert and Charles IV, a hint of the observation of the ecclesiastical period of 30 days of waiting before the final entombment is seen as well. Some of the most spectacular rites were connected to the royal or imperial office of the Hungarian, Polish and Czech ruler. These were symbolically expressed in the public display of banners, standards, swords, crowns, and other regalia, displaying the power and authority of the deceased monarch over the territories under his rule.⁵¹ Another striking feature of all three funerals is the presence

bis Fuß in Rüstung, und selbiger Ritter ritt unter dem goldenen Himmel, unter dem man zuvor den Kaiser getragen hatte, und opferte sich mitsamt dem Ross, und die gesamte Opfergaben wurden rund um dem Kaiser aufgestellt." (Quotation according to: FAJT – HÖRSCH 2016, pp. 604–606).

50 *Řeči, jež měli při pohřbu císaře Karla IV.*, p. 429. Cf. FAJT – HÖRSCH 2016, pp. 604–606.

51 The best work up to today remains: SCHRAMM, Percy E. *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik. Beiträge zu ihren Geschichte vom 3. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert. I. – III.* Stuttgart : Hiersemann Verlag, 1954 – 1957. On the royal banners, see: PASTOUREAU, Michel. *Dějiny symbolů v kultuře středověkého západu.* Praha : Argo, 2018, pp. 217–234.

of mounted armed knights, who rode horses equipped with proper armour, often the one used by the monarch himself during his lifetime. This symbolized the military function of the king/emperor as the highest commander, but also his Christian duty to protect his subjects and the church from all enemies. A clear connection to the overwhelming popularity of knightly culture present in the realms of late medieval Central Europe is undoubtedly visible.⁵² There is no space in this study, but a comparison of the royal funeral ceremonies with rituals of inauguration and coronations *ordines* of their successors would be highly intriguing. The analysed ceremonies form a united block that symbolically expressed the political ideology of the medieval Latin Christendom, the political theology.⁵³ The period between death and the funeral of the late monarch and the coronation and inauguration of his successor was a very sensitive and special one. Key players on the political chessboard made sure the transition of power would be effectuated in a fluent and in a minimally disruptive manner so that the idea of kingship, the office of the king and the rule of the dynasty were not threatened or questioned.⁵⁴ The natural body of the individual king was dead, but the supranatural body of his office and dignity (body politics) was immortal. Elaborate, festive ceremonies performed during the funerals of Charles Robert, Casimir III and Charles IV attest to the declaration coined by Ernst H. Kantorowicz: the king never dies.⁵⁵

- 52 KURCZ 1988; IWAŃCZAK, Wojciech. Höfische Kultur und ritterliche Lebensformen in Polen vor dem Hintergrund der europäischen Entwicklung. In PATSCHOVSKY, Alexander – WÜNSCH, Thomas (eds.) *Das Reich und Polen. Parallelen, Interaktionen und Formen der Akkulturation im hohen und späten Mittelalter*. Ostfildern : Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2003, pp. 277–300; SZYM CZAK, Jan. Knightly Tournaments in Medieval Poland. In *Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae*, 1995, vol. 8, pp. 9–28.
- 53 For the broad possibilities of application of this concept see: AL-AZMEH, Aziz – BAK, János M. *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*. Budapest : CEU Press, 2004; ERKENS, Franz-Reiner. *Herrschersakralität im Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Investiturstreit*. Stuttgart : Kohlhammer, 2006; SCHMITT, Carl. *Politická theologie*. Praha : Oikomenh, 2012.
- 54 Several studies recently engaged with these issues in great detail, see: WEILER, Björn. *Paths to Kingship in Medieval Latin Europe, c. 950 – 1200*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2021; BARTLETT, Robert. *Blood Royal. Dynastic Politics in Medieval Europe*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- 55 KANTOROWICZ 1957, pp. 314–450.