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Corpus more regio curatum. When a king dies: Medieval post-mortem care of the body

Daniela Dvořáková

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Author

Daniela Dvořáková
Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie
vied, v.v.i.
Klemensova 19, P. O. Box 198
814 99 Bratislava
Slovakia
Email: mail@danieladvorakova.sk
ORCID: 0000-0002-1684-158X

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Abstract

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The present study deals with how the bodies of deceased medieval kings and other significant persons were treated after death. The body of a monarch still represented royal majesty, which, according to the beliefs of the time, had been entrusted to him by God himself. Because royal majesty was seen as immortal, complex rites of passage were necessary for the burial of kings. One element of such rites throughout the whole Middle Ages was the preservation of the body of a deceased monarch through conservation methods and embalming, at the least enough to endure the forthcoming extensive funeral ceremonies. Embalming a body after death was originally only a privilege of kings. It began to spread around Europe throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, when the radius of engagement elites expanded as monarchs set off on far away military expeditions, crusades or long-distance pilgrimages. At the end of the High Middle Ages, roughly from the 14th century, embalming became not only a practical matter, but also a social privilege and a matter of prestige. In addition to kings and popes, the bodies of princes, bishops and members of the highest aristocracy were also embalmed. This study discusses individual types of embalming and conservation techniques as well as the funeral rituals carried out for social elites.

“In this book, the happy end of lives and delightful dying in the Lord is presented.” So begins the medieval necrology (*Book of the Dead*, German *Todtenbuch*) of Czech provenance, in which lists of deceased persons were recorded, in this case, important members of the League of Lords from its foundation in 1467 until 1606.¹

Few today would describe death with the words “happy end” or “delightful dying.” Medieval people, however, had a completely different relationship with death, not only because they were Christians and believed in life after death, but also due to the fact that they were in much closer contact with death than we are today.

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1 *Todtenbuch der Geistlichkeit der böhmischen Brüder*. Fontes rerum Austriacarum 1/5. Edited by Joseph Fiedler. Wien : Staatsdruckerei, 1863, p. 218: “W této Knjžce pokládá se sšastné skonánj žiwotów a rozkossne zesnutj w Pánu...”

Death was encountered daily, and the probability of living into old age was relatively low. While death is marginalised in modern culture, in the Middle Ages it was accepted with serenity and was ritually arranged as a collective experience.² Although the people of that time also undoubtedly felt a fear of death, in principle, it was viewed positively as a transition; the peak moment of life. Preparation for the moment was ongoing for their entire earthly lives with the goal of passing into eternal life as smoothly as possible. “Dying well” was considered an art that a person could master through lifelong work on themselves, though good deeds and thorough preparation.³ A good death was always considered joyful.⁴ What is thought of as an ideal death today—a sudden, quick and painless death—was misfortune for a medieval person, because according to the ideas of the time, a person in such a case went to the next world without receiving the sacraments, that is, without any protection. Confession, repentance, penitence and subsequent absolution, a final anointing and Holy Communion were all required before death.⁵ Unlike today, when people predominately die anonymous in hospitals, very few people in the Middle Ages died alone and without spiritual care. Dying was a social affair, with expiring persons dying a good death surrounded by family and friends who prayed, accompanied and supported them.⁶

In the case of monarchs, death was a grandiose spectacle.⁷ A monarch was expected to die peacefully and fully conscious. Charlemagne reportedly died such an ideal death, as did his son Louis the Pious. The dying Charlemagne received anointing and the Eucharist in the evening and on the morning of his day of death, he motioned the cross on his forehead, chest and body, closed

2 BATES, Stephen. Preparations for a Christian Death: The later Middle Ages. In BOOTH, Philip – TINGLE, Elizabeth (eds.) *A Companion to Death, Burial and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300 – 1700*. Leiden : Brill, 2020, pp. 72–105, here p. 75.

3 On death in the Middle Ages, see: OHLER, Norbert. *Sterben und Tod im Mittelalter*. Düsseldorf : Patmos, 1990; BORST, Arno et al. (eds.) *Tod im Mittelalter*. Konstanz : UVK, 1993; WENNINGER, Markus J. (ed.) *Du guoter tôt: Sterben im Mittelalter – Ideal und Realität*. Klagenfurt : Wiesen Verlag, 1998; HAMETER, Wolfgang – NIEDERKORN-BRUCK, Meta – SCHEUTZ, Martin (eds.) *Freund Hein? Tod und Ritual*. Innsbruck; Wien; Bozen : Studien Verlag, 2007; KOLMER, Lothar (ed.) *Der Tod des Mächtigen. Kult und Kultur des Todes spätmittelalterlicher Herrscher*. Paderborn; München; Wien; Zürich : Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997; ROLLO-KOSTER, Joelle (ed.) *Death in Medieval Europe. Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*. London; New York : Routledge, 2017.

4 BATES 2020, p. 104.

5 SCHALLER, Hans Martin. Der Kaiser stirbt. In BORST 1993, pp. 59–75, here p. 61; BATES 2020, p. 96.

6 GRAY, Madeleine. Deathbed and Burial Rituals in Late Medieval Catholic Europe. In BOOTH – TINGLE 2020, pp. 106–131, here p. 108.

7 On funerals of important persons in the Middle Ages, see: HEPP, Frieder – PELTZER, Jörg (eds.) *Die Grablegen der Wittelsbacher in Heidelberg. Tod und Gedächtnis im späten Mittelalter*. Heidelberg : Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2013; BOOTH – TINGLE 2020; CHATENET, Monique – GAUDE-FERRAGU, Murielle – SABATIER, Gérard (eds.) *Princely Funerals in Europe 1400 – 1700. Commemoration, Diplomacy and Political Propaganda*. Turnhout : Brepols, 2021; MARKIEWICZ, Marius – SKOWRON, Ryszard (eds.) *Theatrum ceremoniale na dworze ksiąząt i królów polskich*. Kraków : Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, 1999; MEYER, Rudolf J. *Königs- und Kaiserbegräbnisse im spätmittelalter. Von Rudolf von Habsburg bis Friedrich III*. Köln : Böhlau, 2000; HENGERER, Mark et al. (eds.) *Macht und Memoria. Begräbniskultur europäischer Oberschichten in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Köln : Böhlau, 2005; GIESEY, Ralph E. *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France*. Geneva : Librairie E. Droz, 1960; BERTELLI, Sergio. *The King's Body*. Translated by Robert Burr Lichfield. University Park, PA : The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

his eyes, sang the psalm “*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*” and peacefully passed away.⁸ The image is a beautiful one, but it was often very far from reality.

A deceased monarch represented the royal majesty entrusted to him by God Himself, and since the royal majesty was understood to be immortal, complex rites of passage were associated with the burial of kings. Throughout the Middle Ages, these included preserving the remains of a deceased ruler by means of conservation and embalming, at minimum to hold up through the long funeral ceremonies.⁹ The political “body” of a monarch remained alive, however, and in this sense, the king could not die. In the ideal case, funeral rites lead directly to the inauguration of the new king. Thus, the traditional, high-flown cry: “The king is dead! Long live the king!” The grandiose funeral pomp, which was meant to remain in the collective memory for a considerable time, was also a celebration of the life of the late monarch. It was desirable that the body, which was present in funeral rituals that sometimes lasted weeks, would maintain its form as long as possible and not succumb to natural decay. This was accomplished through embalming and preservation techniques that were known throughout medieval Europe.

The embalming of the body after death was originally the privilege of kings, and only exceptionally were the bodies of rulers not treated and preserved after death. The practice of embalming began to spread in Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries, when the reach by physical presence of the elites expanded as monarchs went on distant military expeditions, crusades or long-distance pilgrimages. Many died far away from home, so it became necessary to transport the remains from the site of death to the final resting place. At the end of the High Middle Ages, roughly from the 14th century, embalming became not only a practical matter, but also a social privilege and a matter of prestige. Aside from kings and popes, the bodies of princes, bishops and members of the highest aristocracy were also embalmed. On exception, it is possible to come across the preservation of the dead bodies of burghers or the bourgeoisie in a simplified manner, but such cases can be considered marginal.¹⁰ Restricting the practice of embalming to the upper classes of society was logical, especially for economic reasons. The exotic substances used (myrrh, frankincense and the like) were very expensive and only the richest had the means to acquire them. In addition, the transport of an embalmed body was also expensive. The hagiographic ideal of a fragrant dead body that did not decompose—as was allegedly the case found when opening the graves of some saints—likewise played a role in the popularity of posthumous embalming. Particularly in the first centuries after Christ, bodies were embalmed by wrapping them in linen strips impregnated with either resin, wax or aromatic oils and no invasive preservation techniques, in which the body was opened, were

8 SCHALLER 1993, p. 62.

9 According to medieval professional writings, it was necessary to bury the body of a deceased person who was not embalmed within three days in summer and four in winter. MEYER 2000, p. 205. Royal funerals, however, lasted for many days, weeks and in some cases, even months.

10 MEYER 2000, p. 202.

used. Such an embalming process was not necessarily a one-time act either, and was repeated on the occasional opening of the grave.¹¹

Invasive conservation techniques reached Europe during Carolingian times due to the expansion of the empire and the growing popularity of dynastic or family burial sites, as the bodies of the deceased sometimes had to be carried to them over long distances. Although we often come across the view in the literature that medieval conservation methods were relatively backward, German historian Romedio Schmitz-Esser, who published a monumental work on corpses and their treatment in the Middle Ages, disputes this opinion, saying that the embalming techniques of the Middle Ages were comparable to those of ancient Egypt, and in both cases, preservation of the body was invasive and the body's integrity was violated by removing the viscera and sometimes the brain. Medieval conservation methods brought good results, albeit for a limited time, but in Schmitz-Esser's opinion, they should not be discounted.¹²

The fundamental step in embalming a dead body in the Middle Ages was the removal of the entrails, regardless of the method of preservation to be used. Since embalming initially only applied to kings, evisceration was referred to as "treatment of the body in a royal way" (*corpus more regio curatum*), a designation that became synonymous with evisceration in general.¹³ From the 11th century, the number of mentions in the sources increases not only regarding the opening of the abdominal cavity, but also of the chest in order to carefully remove the heart, which was often buried separately and sometimes in a different location than the body. How the heart was removed is not entirely clear, as surgical treatises do not provide any details until the 15th century. It could have been done in two ways; a laparotomy, by which they reached the heart through the abdominal cavity and diaphragm, or by a thoracotomy, in which the sternum was cut and the chest opened. The problem with cutting the sternum was supposedly that after the procedure, the chest was difficult to close in such a way as to restore the body to its original form. Schmitz-Esser thinks that even though the heart was usually damaged when removing it through the abdominal cavity, this method predominated and thoracotomy is a matter of the later period. In his view, it was only performed in the early modern period.¹⁴ This can be disputed, however, as research on the remains of some medieval monarchs shows that a thoracotomy was in fact done. For example, among Bohemian rulers, Ottokar II's sternum was severed transversely with a "cut to the heart."¹⁵ The same occurred in the case of Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg's embalming. His sternum, too, was cut transversely, the incision made with great force and a sharp instrument. After removal of the heart, the sternum was not reconnected in any way and the body was closed by suturing

11 SCHMITZ-ESSER, Romedio. *Der Leichnam im Mittelalter. Einbalsamierung, Verbrennung und die kulturelle Konstruktion des toten Körpers*. Ostfildern : Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014, p. 307.

12 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 167.

13 GIESEY 1960, p. 20.

14 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, pp. 286–287.

15 VLČEK, Emanuel. *Jak zemřeli. Významné osobnosti českých dějin z pohledu antropologie a lékařství*. Praha : Academia, 1993, pp. 67–68.

the subcutaneous tissue and skin. Evidence of the embalming of Charles IV's body also comes from the large embalming sponge that was found in his abdominal cavity during research on the remains in the 1980s. According to estimates, it could have held up to three pounds of embalming oil.¹⁶ None of the studied Bohemian kings whose remains were preserved had an open skull, although from the 12th century, it was common to remove the brain during preservation of the dead in order to eliminate such rapidly putrefying moist matter and thus extend the time of decomposition.¹⁷

Despite the removal of the entrails and subsequent treatment of the body being "royal" practices and essentially a privilege, it still evoked horror among some contemporaries. As we know from the previous telling, the body of Bohemian King Ottokar II was embalmed after death and performed, paradoxically, on the command of his enemy and slayer.¹⁸ As is well-known, the Bohemian king fell in battle against Austrian Prince Rudolph of Habsburg on the Moravian Field in 1278. Rudolph had Ottokar's body embalmed and displayed in Vienna so that everyone would be convinced that the Bohemian king was indeed dead. Viennese burgomaster Paltram Vatz, who informed about the event, did not conceal his horror. In his opinion, Ottokar's body was "cut up like cattle and gutted like a fish" when the intestines were separated from the body, and so the poor, murdered king suffered a horrible second death.¹⁹

Who knows whether or not the Viennese burgher employed such a comparison only to emphasise the tragic fate of the Bohemian king or if the embalming process really did evoke such feelings in him. What is certain is that the removal of the entrails was a completely common practice for kings, church dignitaries as well as other personages. For example, the body of Trier Archbishop Albero de Montreuil, who died in Koblenz in 1152, was similarly treated. The autopsy was done by the archbishop's "very experienced" doctor, who predicted his patient's death based on a urine analysis three days before it actually occurred. The entrails were removed and buried together with the heart, and the body was filled with myrrh and other aromatic substances. The archbishop was then ceremoniously dressed and taken to his final resting place in Trier.²⁰ Opening the body and removing the entrails was the first step

16 VLČEK 1993, pp. 113–114. See also: ŠMAHEL, František. *Poslední chvíle, pohřby a hroby českých králů*. In NODL, Martin – ŠMAHEL, František (eds.) *Slavnosti, ceremonie a rituály v pozdním středověku*. Praha : Argo, 2014, pp. 123–197, here p. 137.

17 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 232.

18 This was not an entirely isolated case. The body of the deceased Bohemian King John of Luxembourg was also left to be "treated" by his enemy. English King Edward III, after the battle near Crécy, ordered John's body to be surgically treated. The entrails of the slain king were removed, sewn into a leather bag and buried in the monastery of Valloires. The heart and the embalmed body were given to John's son, Charles IV. See: ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 130.

19 *Historia annorum 1264 – 1279*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica (MGH), Scriptores in Folio 9. Edited by Georgius Henricus Pertz. Hannoverae : Impensis Bibliopolii Avlici Hahniani, 1851, pp. 653–654: "Occisus Wiennam ducitur, ibique cunctis miserie spectaculum efficitur, et quod dictum est horridum, iumentino more scinditur, adinstar piscis exenteratur, et ipsa exta inollantur et separantur a corpore. Et cum etiam acerbissima dampnatorum mors sit corporis et anime separatio, iste Otacharus nove mortis exitio per viscerum et membrorum discrimen crudeliter morte secundaria permultatur."

20 Cited according to: SCHÄFER, Dietmar. *Mittelalterlicher Brauch bei der Überführung von Leichen*. In *Sitzungsberichte der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1920, pp. 478–498,

of any further embalming, whether successful or unsuccessful, primitive or more professional. When the Frankish King and Emperor Charles the Bald died in the French Alps on his return journey from an Italian campaign in 877, his body was subjected to embalming so that it could be transported to the royal burial place at Saint-Denis. The Bertinian chronicler Hincmar of Rheims left a detailed account of it in his *Annales Bertiniani*. The body of the deceased king was opened, the entrails removed, the abdominal cavity was washed with wine and perfumes and only after this treatment, transported began. The stench from the dead body was unbearable, however, so they put the king in a barrel smeared with pitch and covered it with leather. But even this measure did not help much and due to the unbearable odour, the king's body had to be buried along the way. Only later was the body exhumed and the bones taken to their final resting place in Saint-Denis.²¹ Hincmar's description, however, may very well be both real and symbolic as bodily odour referred to a tyrant, in accordance with the Old Testament view of God's punishment.²²

The motif of stench as a symbol of a bad life also appears in other reports. One English chronicler, Benedictine monk Orderic Vitalis, described the death and burial of William the Conqueror in detail, describing what was done with the body of the deceased monarch who died during a military campaign in Normandy, miles away from the ideal of a dignified royal burial. According to the chronicler, no one noticed that the king had taken his last breath, and so the body lay abandoned all night. When the courtiers found out that the king had died, they scattered back to their holdings, leaving only those of lower rank, who then robbed the king of what they could. Thus, the dead king's body lay naked on the ground, desecrated, in a strange house, until a certain knight undertook the duty to transport it to Caen where the king wanted to be buried. The funeral itself was full of complications as a fire broke out in the city during the procession, so everyone fled. Next, when the body was ready to be placed in the prepared sarcophagus, they discovered that it was too small. The obese king did not fit, and when they tried to squeeze him in by force, the body burst, releasing a terrible stench. Despite the use of censers, the smell was so unbearable that the funeral was rapidly brought to a close. Even in this case, the horrific chronicler's telling is more of an image than reality. Alexander Patschovsky claims the report is obvious fiction. The image of the once powerful king naked, abandoned and malodorous, represents the literary motif of vanity (*vanitas*), and the stench is an indication of a bad life.²³

here p. 486: "...corpus vero myrra et aloe et aromatibus conditum a medico suo peritissimo Philippo Lonbardo, qui et urinae suae inspectione mortem ejus tribus diebus ante predixerat."

21 *Annales Bertiniani*. MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicorum in usum scholarum separatim editi* 5. Edited by Georg Waitz. Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1883, p. 137: "Quem aperientes qui cum eo erant, ablatis interaneis, et infusum vino ac aromatibus quibus poterant et impositum locello, coeperunt ferre versus monasterium Sancti Dyonisii, ubi sepeliri se postulaverat. Quem pro foetore non valentes portare, miserunt eum in tonna interius exteriusque picata quam coriis involuerunt, quod nihil ad foetorem tollendum profecit. Unde ad cellam quandam monachorum Lugdunensis episcopii quae Nantoadiis dicitur vix pervenientes, illud corpus cum ipsa tonna terrae mandaverunt."

22 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 196.

23 PATSCHOVSKY, Alexander. Tod im Mittelalter. Eine Einführung. In BORST 1993, pp. 9–24, here pp. 1–16.

Although medieval chroniclers used the image of a foetid dead body as a form of symbolism, the smell of a decomposing corpse was certainly a reality not an invention and medieval authors included it in narratives. A simple washing with wine and perfumed oils, as with Charles the Bald, could not prevent the natural decay and associated odour. Since bad air and stench were considered life-threatening phenomena in the Middle Ages, it is also believable that the procession refused to carry its appalling cargo any further.

In the times of Charles the Bald, a more effective but much more drastic method of preserving the dead was known, which the sources refer to as the “German method.”²⁴ We would certainly label the German method of preserving dead bodies as barbaric and disgusting by today’s standards, but it also evoked squeamishness in some contemporaries. Since people in the first centuries of the Middle Ages did not know how to preserve the “meat” of a dead body with the means they had available, they really did treat it like meat. The body was cut and cleaved into pieces and then boiled in cauldrons or pots until the flesh separated from the bones. This was not a method for the faint of heart, but it was exceptionally practical and efficient for transporting bodily remains, especially from warm countries and over long distances.²⁵ One of the many whose bodily remains were so treated was Gerdag, Bishop of Hildesheim, who died in Como, Italy, on his way back from Rome in 992. The bishop’s body was chopped into pieces and the individual parts transported in two boxes to Hildesheim where they were buried.²⁶

The labelling of this drastic method as a “German custom” (*mos Teutonicus*) first appeared in the chronicle of Richard, a notary from the town of San Germano near the famous Monte Cassino abbey, in a description of the death of Leopold VI, Duke of Austria and Styria, who died there in 1230. In the chronicler’s telling, the bones of the deceased duke were carried to Germany (*more Teutonico in Teutonium*) according to German custom and his flesh buried with all respect in Monte Cassino.²⁷ The professional literature often states that the name “German custom” for this method of handling bodily remains is related to the fact that they were usually important people from the German Empire, i.e. “Germans.”²⁸ Schmitz-Esser contests this opinion. In his view, the designation “German” is related to the prejudices of Italians towards Germans, who seemed rough and brutal to them. One medieval Italian author, Boncompagno da Signa, in the *Antiqua Rhetorica* from the early 13th century, described the customs of the Germans as follows: “The Germans disembowel all those highborn people who die abroad and then boil their bodily remains in cauldrons until the flesh, cartilage and nerves are separated from the bones. They then wash these in fragrant wine and daub them with pigment and bring them home.”²⁹

24 Regarding the German way of preserving the dead, among others, see: SCHÄFER 1920, p. 488; GRAY 2020, pp. 113–114; BERTELLI 1995, p. 52.

25 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 233; SCHÄFER 1920, p. 486.

26 Cited according to: SCHÄFER 1920, p. 486: “...corpus ejusdem per singula divisum membra in scriniis duobus ad monasterium suimet a consociis lugibriter delatum est.”

27 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 234.

28 For example, see: MEYER 2000, p. 203.

29 Cited according to: SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 235, note 331: “Teutonici autem eviscerant corpo-

Boncompagno described this “German” practice in contrast to the noble and successful embalming methods of the ancient Romans, whose results could be seen up to his time in Rome and Naples. In fact, dismembering and boiling the dead was not an exclusively German custom. Another 13th century Italian author, Bishop Saba Malaspina, calls this method of preservation French. He writes that the bones of Isabella of Aragon, who died in 1271 in premature childbirth after falling from a horse in the Calabrian city of Cosenza, were cleaned and stripped of flesh and transported to Saint-Denis where they were buried.³⁰ Dismembering and boiling the body of the young Queen Isabella must have been difficult, even for those of a sturdy nature, so logically the question arises: who carried out such “preservation?”

Physicians were only rarely engaged in caring for the dead, although the above-mentioned case of Albergo de Montreuil, Archbishop of Trier, testifies to exceptions. Doctors were often not present at the time of death. Their role was to make a diagnosis, prescribe treatment and give a prognosis. If a patient’s condition was hopeless, the doctor’s duty ended. In the case of prominent persons, it was also safer for a doctor to leave the court in sufficient time to avoid any accusations of improper treatment, and since most doctors were clergymen, by participating in the patient dying, they would additionally be committing so-called *irregularitatis*, a violation of canonical regulations. The relationship of medicine to the dead body did not change until around 1300 with a growing interest in autopsies and professional embalming.³¹ From a detailed eyewitness report of Austrian Prince Albert VI dying in 1463, we know that a doctor was with the patient until his last breath, and in the final moments of agony, he attempted to revive him with rose water, which failed. When a few drops were put into the eyes of the prince and Albert did not react, the doctor saw that it was over. As was once common in such cases, anger then turned against the doctor, who was forced to flee.³² Remaining with a prominent patient until his last breath in these days could be downright dangerous for a doctor.

Caring for the dead was mainly the work of barbers, surgeons and in the case of more advanced embalming, even pharmacists. When treating a corpse in the “German way,” a skilled craftsman who was adept at preserving meat in the kitchen or a devoted familiar was sufficient. For example, King Baldwin I of Jerusalem entrusted his cook to embalm his own body. Baldwin fell ill

ra excellentium virorum qui moriuntur in provinciis alienis, et reliqua membra tam diu in caldariiis faciunt dequoqui, donec tota caro, nerui et cartilagines ab ossibus separentur, et postmodum eadem ossa in odorifero uino lota et aspersa pigmentis ad patriam suam deportant.”

30 *Die Chronik des Saba Malaspina*. Edited by Walter Koller and August Nitschke. Hannover: Hahn-sche Buchhandlung 1999, p. 231: “Ossa tamen elissa prius et qualibet carnositate mundata more maiorum in Franciam, relictis in tumulo putribilibus, que servando seruari non poterant, demandantur.” Regarding this, see: SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, pp. 235–236.

31 ZIEMANN, Antje. Zwischen Sterbewache und Bestattung - Leichenwäsche in venezianischen Bruderschaften des Spätmittelalters. In MEYER, Andreas - SCHULZ-GROBERT, Jürgen (eds.) *Gesund und krank im Mittelalter. Marburger Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Medizin*. Leipzig: Eudora Verlag, 2007, pp. 319–336, here p. 110.

32 HAYER, Gerold. Krankheit, Sterben und Tod eines Fürsten. Ein Augenzeugenbericht über die letzten Lebenstage Herzog Albrechts VI. von Österreich. In WENNIGER 1998, pp. 31–50, here pp. 46–47.

during a military campaign in Egypt near al-Arisch in 1118. Desiring to be buried in Jerusalem and aware of the problem of transportation in a hot climate, he asked his cook Adda to gut him, salt the inside, wrap him in a skin or carpet and thus prepare him for transport.³³ Pickling in salt was the most widespread medieval technique for preserving meat, so in this case, the cook really was the most qualified person. Like the “German method” of preserving the human body, when necessary, the body was disassembled into parts for cooking.

The final service to one’s master in the form of treating the bodily remains did not have to be done only by a cook or someone skilled in handling the human body, such as a barber or surgeon. It could also be performed by a favourite courtier. In the case of Archbishop Wichmann of Magdeburg, who died in August 1192 in Könnern, it was an *igris* (a travelling singer or minstrel) who was staying at his court who dismembered the body of the dead archbishop (who was allegedly very obese) with a knife like a butcher, removed the entrails—which were buried on the spot—and then put the body in salt. The archbishop’s remains, thus treated, were transported to Magdeburg where they were buried.³⁴ The boiling of the corpses of important persons culminated in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Although boiling the body and transporting the bones of the deceased was very practical, fast and cheap, it sparked outrage in the Church. In 1299, Pope Boniface VIII prohibited such handling of human bodies under threat of excommunication. With the bull *Detestandae feritatis abusum*, he ordered that from that point on, the bodies of deceased persons should be transported straight away in an undamaged state to the place chosen by the deceased as a place of burial or be buried where they had died. Only after a certain period of time had passed, when the body had begun decomposition, was it possible to exhume and transport the remains to the chosen final resting place.³⁵ The direct impetus for issuing this papal bull from 1299 was a dispute between two monasteries over the heart of the French king. In 1285, King Philip III died in southern France. His son, Philip IV, wanted to satisfy his father’s wish and bury him in Saint-Denis. He had the body boiled, the meat and entrails buried in Narbonne and the bones carried to and buried in Saint-Denis. A dispute over the late king’s heart broke out between the Dominican monastery in Paris and the Abbey of Saint-Denis, which grew into an intense theological debate over the handling of human remains and resulted in the above-mentioned papal

33 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, pp. 222, 258.

34 Cited according to: SCHÄFER 1920, pp. 486–487: “Mortuo autem eo, cum presentibus, ut exenterari debuisset, visum esset, quia crassus erat, ille histrio in corpore eius carnificis officio functus est ventremque ejus cultro aperuit et intestina eiecit, que in predicta possessione humata sunt. Corpus autem salem infusum, ne estu corrumperetur, Magdeburg adductum est.”

35 SCHÄFER 1920, p. 496. Permission was also necessary for exhumation. On 19 April 1303, Pope Boniface VIII issued permission for Guy of Harcourt to exhume and transport the remains of his brother, who died in December 1302 and was buried with the Dominicans in Siena, but only on the condition that his body be already decomposed and not boiled, burned or chopped up. Regarding this, see: SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, pp. 252–253.

bull and a complete ban on boiling dead bodies.³⁶ Anyone who so inhumanely treated a body was excommunicated and could no longer have a church burial. Although exceptions were still granted for some time as the customary practice was so widely used that enforcement of the ban faced problems, the “German method” gradually began to be seen as barbaric—although the bodies of several saints were preserved in this way—and this method of embalming disappeared from the sources.³⁷

The ban on such a primitive method of preserving a body led to the improvement of other embalming techniques and the establishment of more professional methods of handling dead bodies. Exact regulations on how to treat corpses began to develop. For example in the case of popes, individual processes were set to the smallest detail.³⁸ In a ceremonial book of a papal curia from around 1400 written by Pierre d’Ameil, the specific method of handling the body of the deceased pope, including embalming, is described. The bodies of popes were to be embalmed using non-invasive methods. The deceased was first to be washed with warm water and good herbs, which were prepared by valets, then a barber shaved the dead man’s head and beard. The embalming itself was done by a pharmacist working with the monks.³⁹ All the deceased pope’s body openings were blocked with fustian or burl cloth soaked in sage oil, or aloe if available. The body was then bathed again, this time in warmed quality white wine with herbs. The throat of the dead pope was closed with a cloth soaked in aromatic substances and other spices and his nostrils plugged with more cloth soaked in musk. Finally, a good balm was rubbed all over the body and especially into the hands for a long time.⁴⁰

Embalming served mainly to keep the body preserved during long funeral rituals. Surgeon Pietro d’Argellata boasted that the body of Alexander V he embalmed, who died in 1405 in Bologna, lasted for up to eight days.⁴¹ Some embalming techniques as well as the specific circumstances of the given environment were so favourable that the body remained intact for a very long time.

36 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, pp. 251–252.

37 SCHÄFER 1920, p. 496; SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, p. 253.

38 On the pope’s burial, see: PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, Agostino. *The Pope’s Body*. Translated by David S. Peterson. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2000; PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, Agostino. *The Funerary Rite of the Papacy at the End of the Middle Age*. In CHATENET – GAUDE-FERRAGU – SABATIER 2021, pp. 47–56; PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, Agostino. *Der Leib des Papstes. Eine Theologie der Hinfälligkeit*. München : Beck, 1997.

39 PARAVICINI BAGLIANI 2021, p. 49, states that the posthumous care of the pope’s body was carried out by the Cistercians. They are mentioned in Pierre d’Ameil’s ceremonial book as *fratres de bulla*. BOJCOV, Michail A. Der Tote Papst im Sessel und andere Gespenster. In SCHMIDT, Hans-Joachim – RHODE, Martin (eds.) *Papst Johannes XXII. Konzepte und Verfahren seines Pontifikats*. Berlin; Boston : De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 501–533, here p. 509.

40 Cited according to: BOJCOV 2014, p. 109: “Et interim cum illis fratribus de bulla, si fuerint, vel de Pignota cum aqua calida cum bonis herbis, quam cubicularii parare debeant, lavent corpus bene, et barbitonsor radat sibi caput et barbam. Eo sic loto, apothecarius et dicti fratres de bulla obturent sibi bene omnia foramina cum bumbasio vel stupa, anum, os, aures, nares, cum myrra, thure et aloe, si possit haberi. Laventur etiam corpus cum bono vino albo et calefacto cum herbis odoriferis, et cum bona vernagia, que cubicularii vel buticularii pape debent dictis lavatoribus administrare. Guttur vero impletur de aromatibus et speciebus cum bumbasio et etiam nares cum musqueto. Ultimo etiam totum corpus multum fricetur et ungatur cum balsamo bono, et etiam manus.”

41 PARAVICINI BAGLIANI 2021, p. 49.

When the tomb of Pope Boniface VIII, who died in 1303, was opened in 1605, the body was said to be completely preserved,⁴² and reports on the opening of the grave of Pope John XXII in 1759 also tell of a well-preserved body.⁴³

In the case of popes, funeral rites lasted nine days (*novena*), during which time the body was to be on display. However, at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern age, the remains of the pope were put into the grave on the third day and the *novena* continued with an empty hearse, where as part of the ritual, two servants even drove away non-existent flies by waving black flags.⁴⁴

Just as in the case of kings, in the description of the posthumous fates of some popes, the motif of the indignant treatment of the remains appears; the body was left alone, naked, robbed, did not fit on the catafalque and so on. The bodily remains of Pope Alexander VI for instance, who died in 1503, were reportedly treated with complete dishonour. Six vulgar men hauled him to the burial site, mocking him, cursing him and making jokes about him along the way. The carpenters had made his hearse too short and narrow so that the corpse hung over the edges and remained so all night, without candles and without a single soul to watch by his side.⁴⁵ Since Alexander VI, a member of the House of Borgia, was one of the most controversial popes ever—and not only because of mistresses and illegitimate children—the narration of chroniclers telling of the undignified end of his earthly life fits into the symbolism of his “bad life,” as is seen in the case of certain kings. The pope’s corpse was as abominable as his life. Chronicler Johann Burchard, who was an eyewitness to the funeral ceremonies, wrote that as soon as the deceased Pope was placed in the hearse, his face turned black and when he saw the body of the pope 33 hours after his death, the pope’s face had been transformed into a black mask. He wrote that the dead man looked like a black man, that he had a damp black face, a swollen nose and lips and his swollen tongue was falling out of his mouth. Another chronicler, Bernardo Giustinian, wrote that the corpse of Pope Alexander VI bore little resemblance to a human being, saying it “was the most disgusting, monstrous and terrifying corpse I had ever seen.” The envoy of Mantua, Giovanni Lucido Cattaneo, who was also present, expressed similar sentiments as well.⁴⁶

An important element to caring for a dead body even before embalming was washing. Most of the details about washing a body shortly after death we have from the monastic environment or from the so-called brotherhoods—lay associations that were established at some churches. Historian Antje Ziemann processed the statutes of Venetian medieval brotherhoods, which enabled a reconstruction of the procedure with precision.⁴⁷ The members of the brotherhood established an obligation to take care of the bodies of their deceased

42 PARAVICINI BAGLIANI 2021, p. 49.

43 BOJCOV 2014, p. 508.

44 PARAVICINI BAGLIANI 2021, p. 50.

45 PARAVICINI BAGLIANI 2021, p. 52.

46 BERTELLI 1995, pp. 39–40.

47 ZIEMANN 2007, pp. 319–336.

immediately after death, which meant closing the eyes and mouth, undressing the body, washing it, possibly embalming it and then clothing it in a dress or shroud.⁴⁸ The dead person was meant to go to the other world “cleansed,” but the Church had a problem with this to certain extent, because the dying person was anointed with consecrated oil before death and this was supposed to have cleansed him. Nevertheless, the dead were commonly washed, as is detailed in the regulations for treating the bodies of deceased popes. In fact, in the folk environment, the water used to wash corpses was even considered a magical aid. Burchard, Bishop of Worms, criticised the superstitious, foolish women who used the water from the washing of the dead to clean their dwellings and protect them from evil spirits.⁴⁹ According to the statutes of the Venetian brotherhoods, the dead were to be washed with warm water containing herbs or with vinegar. In comparison with other funeral services, washing the dead was a relatively expensive detail,⁵⁰ yet incomparable with the high costs of embalming.

As mentioned previously, after the banning of the “German method” in 1299, other techniques began to improve and develop. In the 14th century, two important surgical treatises were written in France by Guy de Chauliac and Henri de Mondeville, which dealt with, among other things, embalming the dead. Henri de Mondeville, the court surgeon of King Philip IV and King Louis X, identified three basic types of embalming. The simplest, which required almost no preparation, allowed the body to be kept for three days in summer and four days in winter and was suitable for poorer people who were destined for a quick burial. In the case of a more important deceased person, Mondeville distinguished between those whose faces could be covered (knights and barons) and those who were to be displayed (kings and queens, popes, prelates). He describes the individual recipes and processes in detail, and does so even in the case of kings who had to be transported or exhibited for a long time, sometimes more than a month.⁵¹ Despite such specific instructions, embalming was not always successful. Another surgeon to the kings of France, Ambroise Paré (1510 – 1590), who substantially improved such embalming techniques, criticised his colleagues “in the profession” and asked how it was possible that the stink that emanated from the bodies of dead kings, princes and aristocrats, despite having been eviscerated, soaked in brandy and vinegar, sprinkled with aromatic herbs and no expense spared in embalming, is so unbearable on the fifth or sixth day that no one can endure them and the bodies must be buried in leaden coffins.⁵² According to Ralph E. Gieseey, embalming techniques achieved a level that can be considered effective only at the end of the 16th century, as the exhumations of French kings have shown.⁵³

48 Most people were buried in a shroud in the Middle Ages, as clothes were too expensive and rare. Only important persons went to the next world dressed in clothing. More, see: DUCH, Anna M. Do this in remembrance of me. In BOOTH –TINGLE 2020, pp. 132–155, here p. 135.

49 ZIEMANN 2007, p. 324.

50 ZIEMANN 2007, p. 329.

51 SCHMITZ-ESSER 2014, pp. 271–284.

52 GIESEY 1960, p. 27.

53 GIESEY 1960, p. 27.

Since embalming was not always successful, if a funeral were conducted a longer time after death, in some countries, the dead body was represented by a so-called effigy. They were typically wax or wooden figures that depicted the deceased (this was also one reason for the popularity of death masks from the 15th century). Such mannequins dressed in royal majesty were part of funeral ceremonies in place of the deceased particularly in England and France.⁵⁴ At the French royal court, effigies were used in funerals as of 1422, from the funeral of Charles VI, who was buried three weeks after his death. Allowing the king's image to be publicly displayed for such a long time, the court painter made a wax replica of the monarch's face and hands, even putting hair on the figure and gloves on the hands.⁵⁵ We do not come across this practice in Central and Eastern Europe, where living persons dressed in royal robes or armour represented a deceased monarch. Another important element of the funeral ceremony was also the display or wearing of a sword with the blade turned downwards, a shield with a coat-of-arms, a flag, a helmet and other representative objects. In the Kingdom of Hungary, the participation of knights representing the king appears in the report on the burial of King Charles Robert in 1342, where three knights appeared "*in persona et spiritu domini Regis*."⁵⁶ The funeral procession was seen as a manifestation and celebration of the deeds of the deceased. What is interesting is that the body and face of the dead king were uncovered. Since Charles Robert died in the mid-summer (16 July) and the funeral rites lasted at least five to seven days, his body must have been embalmed. The first funeral ceremonies took place at Visegrád Castle, where the king died. He was exhibited in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Visegrád and from there taken by boat to Buda. On the third day after his death, liturgical ceremonies and funeral masses began in Buda, after which a procession with the king's body slowly moved to the capital of Székesfehérvár, where an additional two days of ceremonies were conducted. Unfortunately, the chronicler made no mention of the post-mortem treatment of the body.⁵⁷

In Poland, this ritual act of a "represented king" appeared for the first time in 1370 on the occasion of the funeral of Casimir III the Great. In this case, a single knight wearing royal gold-woven clothing and sitting on the king's most beautiful riding horse represented the monarch himself.⁵⁸

54 CHATENET – GAUDE-FERRAGU – SABATIER 2021, p. 39; KUCIA, Dariusz. *Repraesentator a Kiryśnik*. Idea wyobrażenia zmarłego władcy w ceremoniale pogrzebowym królów Polski od XIV do XVII wieku na tle ceremonii Europy chrześcijańskiej. In MARKIEWICZ – SKOWRON 1999, pp. 87–99, here p. 87; BERTELLI 1995, p. 51.

55 GAUDE-FERRAGU, Murielle. The Body of the Prince Royal and Princely Funerals in Fifteenth Century France. In CHATENET – GAUDE-FERRAGU – SABATIER 2021, pp. 57–72, here pp. 57–59.

56 *Chronicon Dubnicense*. *Historiae Hungaricae fontes domestici* 1/3. Edited by Matyás Florián. Lipsiae : F. A. Brockhaus, 1884, p. 133.

57 For details, see the study of Dušan Zupka, Royal funeral ceremonies in fourteenth-century Central Europe in this issue of *Forum Historiae*. The description of the burial was preserved in the so-called *Chronicon Dubnicense*, pp. 132–133, in the Slovak translation, see: *Kronika uhorských kráľov zvaná Dubnická*. Translated by Július Sopko. Budmerice : RAK, 2004, pp. 108–112.

58 The description of King Casimir's funeral with references to sources in Zupka's chapter Royal funeral ceremonies in fourteenth-century Central Europe in this issue of *Forum Historiae*. See also: KUCIA 1999, pp. 87–99.

Reports also appeared in the 15th century on the unusual practice of exhibiting the deceased in a sitting position, displaying the body of a monarch in full majesty, or of bishops and popes in solemn liturgical vestments. In the case of popes, this was supposedly a prescribed and customary practice.

Among the rulers who were reportedly exhibited after death in a sitting position was King of Hungary and Bohemia and Roman-German Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg. According to chronicler Eberhard Windeck, a merchant from Mainz who resided for a while at Sigismund's court, the king spectacularly staged his death, conceiving it in an impressive, theatrical style. On the day when he knew he was to depart this world, he ordered that he be dressed in the ceremonial vestment in the morning, which he wore when reading the Gospel at a Christmas mass, and then had the imperial crown placed on his head as he listened to the rest of the mass. After the service, at his wish he was stripped of his ceremonial clothes and dressed in funeral clothing. Prepared to die, he asked to be placed on the throne where he finally passed away. Before his death, he further expressed the desire that even after his death, he be left exposed in a sitting position on the throne for two or three days.⁵⁹ Windeck's entire story is evidently fiction, as shown by other sources and testimonies of contemporaries.⁶⁰ With the start of the Renaissance, the popularity of describing the passing and burial of a monarch in the spirit of ancient ideals, where the motif of the deceased emperor wearing a vestment and sitting on the throne supposedly appeared, penetrated into literature. We also come across such a description of the death of Emperor Frederick III from an author writing in the first half of the 16th century. The exhibition of the seated dead body of Emperor Frederick III is unlikely and no contemporary source mentions it. Historians thus dismiss it as literary fiction from a later period.⁶¹

Historians have long believed that this method of presenting a dead body occurred only among the clergy, especially in the case of popes, who were exhibited sitting in a cathedra, a symbol of their office, because the deceased popes received absolution from the cardinals in this position.⁶² Michail A. Bojcov convincingly deciphered the origin of this belief and pointed out the improbability of such a practice.⁶³ In claiming that popes were exhibited in a sitting position on the papal chair, historians based their opinion on a single source, the so-called *Ordo Romanus* from 1401, where a pope being displayed in a sitting position is supposedly mentioned. The *Ordo Romanus* is in fact the above-mentioned ceremonial book of Pierre d'Ameil, which dealt in detail with the embalming of dead popes. From an analysis of the text, it follows that in the case of the "sitting dead pope," this is more about dressing the body of

59 WINDECKE, Eberhard. *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigismunds*. Edited by Wilhelm Altmann. Berlin : R. Gaertners Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1893, p. 447, c. 368.

60 DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela. Smrt císaře Žigmunda Luxemburského a nástup Albrechta Habsburského na uhorský trón. In *Historický časopis*, 2021, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 27–47, here pp. 30–33.

61 In this sense, see: MEYER 2000, p. 177.

62 MEYER, Rudolf J. Überlegungen zum Begräbnis Kaiser Sigismunds in Wardein im Jahre 1437. In KOLMER 1997, pp. 321–331, here pp. 323–324.

63 BOJCOV 2014, pp. 501–533.

the dead pope during which he is supposed to sit. The clothed body should then be laid on a sedan/couch with a pillow under his head.⁶⁴

Although the exhibition of deceased medieval popes or emperors in a sitting position is not likely, it should be said that locally this practice did exist, demonstrably in Würzburg from the 15th century until 1617. For three or four days after embalming, deceased bishops were transported in a seated position in a chair on a hearse to the individual important churches in the city where the body was put on display. Ensuring that the dead body remained upright was not easy, however, so it was impaled on a massive stake that extended up to the neck. The oldest servant of the deceased bishop was then tasked with standing on the catafalque behind the chair with the deceased and, with both hands wrapped in a white scarf, holding the bishop's head, which was adorned with a mitre, so that it would not shift during the transfer.

The catafalque carrying the chair was ceremoniously decorated with insignia, possibly even a sword or a bishop's staff, and was borne by fourteen young nobles in a solemn procession. They also carried the bishop's heart in a special container, usually made of glass, and when the body was exhibited, the heart was placed at his feet. The bishops in Würzburg always had three graves; in one were the entrails removed during embalming, probably buried more modestly without special ceremonies, in another the heart and in a third the body. Only after the body was buried did they ceremoniously transport the heart to the Cistercian convent in Ebrach, 50 km away. Transport of the heart was usually entrusted to the oldest servant of the deceased bishop, the same who had held the bishop's head during public processions. After this task was completed and the bishop's heart was delivered to Ebrach, the servant could then remain in the abbey where the monks looked after him for the rest of his life.⁶⁵

A similar funeral ceremony in which the deceased was exhibited or buried in a sitting position also took place on exception in other places, most often in Italy. In the 15th century, the body of Pier Maria II de' Rossi, the ruler of the mini city-state in Po Valley, a territory subjugated to Parma, was displayed in this way. His corpse, evidently embalmed, was dressed in gold and seated in a special room called the Camera d'Oro. Rossi's sitting mummy could be seen through the opening leading into the room for the next 13 years. Additionally, the ruler of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga, expressly wished in his will of 3 February 1612 to be buried in the collegiate church of Sant'Andrea in Mantua seated on a throne. At the beginning of the 18th century, Tuscany Archduke

64 Cited according to: BOJCOV 2014, pp. 515: "Demum dicti penitentiarii induant ipsum bracas, camisiam, caligas et tunicam. Tunc quasi sedendo erigant eum dicti penitentiarii, et induant ipsum totaliter sacris vestibus rubei coloris: primo sandaliis albis, cinctorio et subscinctorio, fano, stola, tunicella, manipulo, dalmatica, cirothecis, planeta, pallio de corpore Petro sumpto, et placent fanum super caput, et circa scapulas circumdent, ac si deberet celebrare, et ponant in capite eius biretam albam cum mitra alba sine perlis et sine auro. Ipso vero sic parato, dicti penitentiarii ponant eum super feretrum novum vel lectica..."

65 BOYTSOV, Mikhail. Death and Funerals of German Emperors, Kings, and Princes in the Fifteenth Century. In CHATENET – GAUDE-FERRAGU – SABATIER 2021, pp. 107–122, here pp. 109–112.

Cosimo III de' Medici was exhibited for three days in a sitting position in the "room of condolence."⁶⁶ The question of displaying the bodily remains of some kings or popes in a seated position thus remains unanswered. Although it is impossible to be completely ruled out, such an exhibition is improbable and was more likely a local idiosyncrasy. In the case of rulers, it is more literary fiction with an eschatological subject.

Whether deceased monarchs were seated or reclining, whether put on display or not, their bodies were almost always embalmed, though there were exceptions to this rule as well. Emperor Maximilian I, who died in 1519, expressly wished not to be dissected and embalmed after his death. Some chroniclers list the reason for this decision as the emperor's extreme shyness, while others refer to his Christian humility. The emperor desired that immediately after his death, his hair would be cut off, all his teeth broken out and that these would be buried together in the cemetery together with red-hot coals. The emperor's corpse, toothless and hairless, was to be flogged after death, covered with ashes and lime, wrapped in a sack made of coarse linen and displayed in this way so that all could see the vanity of earthly glory. The posthumous scourging of Maximilian's body was likely carried out, as indicated by the canes found in the emperor's tomb.⁶⁷

Embalming was also not performed if there were any suspicion of an infectious disease, particularly the plague. This was the case with the Austrian prince, Albert VI, whose death was mentioned above. Because the exact cause of death was unknown, and not only poisoning but also plague were considered, the physician called in did not recommend burying Albert in the manner usual for princes, which included opening the body, embalming and placing it in a raised sarcophagus. Instead, he ordered that the clothes of the deceased be burned, the body sprinkled with lime and buried as deep as possible in the ground.⁶⁸ For the same reason, the body of the late Hungarian and Bohemian King Ladislaus V the Posthumous was not embalmed and probably not even washed. Here, too, there were fears of the plague due to the course of his illness, during which there was a noticeable swelling of the lymph nodes. Funeral ceremonies began on the second day after the king's death, 24 November 1457, when the dead king was put on display in the great hall of the royal court in the Old Town of Prague. The body was covered with a purple brocaded blanket, which was intended to cover his significantly distended belly. The young monarch's face was left uncovered so that his beautiful long, golden hair could be seen, but the disease had left his tongue and the whites of his eyes black. The ceremonies were very short and he was buried on 25 November, just two days after his death.⁶⁹ As Enea Silvio Piccolomini

66 BERTELLI 1995, p. 50. For additional cases of exhibiting the dead in a sitting position, see: BOJCOV 2014, p. 520 ff.

67 DINZELBACHER, Peter. Die Präsenz des Todes in der spätmittelalterlichen Mentalität. In KOLMER 1997, pp. 27–58, here p. 54. Regarding this topic, see also: SRBIK, Robert Ritter von. Maximilian I. und Gregor Reisch. In *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*, 1961, vol. 122, no. 2, pp. 229–340, here 299 ff.

68 HAYER 1998, p. 49.

69 BLÁHOVÁ, Marie. Die Königliche Begräbniszeremonien in spätmittelalterlichen Böhmen. In

tells it, the dying king wanted to have his beautiful golden locks cut off before death to rid him of any sign of vanity, but his servants refused and concocted a reason for not doing it.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Ladislaus the Posthumous is the only Hungarian king about whom we have information in regard to embalming or not. Written sources on the possible embalming of Hungarian kings are completely deficient and no documented royal accounts, royal testaments or instructions and regulations about burials exist. Archaeological findings are also lacking. The only preserved and identified medieval Hungarian royal grave was found in Székesfehérvár in 1848—the grave of Béla III and his wife Agnes of Antioch.⁷¹ All the other graves of medieval Hungarian rulers, with the exception of Ladislaus the Posthumous who was buried in Prague, are irretrievably lost and only written chronicles with very scant data are left to us. Despite the lack of information about embalming, it is clear that transporting the remains of deceased monarchs over long distances certainly required some treatment. Medieval royal funeral rituals, including embalming, were very similar across Europe in principle and therefore it can be assumed that the bodies of deceased Hungarian kings were treated comparably as in other royal courts. Based on the testimony of Hartvik's legend about King Stephen I from the beginning of the 12th century, when the king's tomb was opened 45 years after his death (that is, in 1083), those present smelled a delicate aroma and found the tomb full of liquid mixed with reddish oil. Amidst this liquid balm were the precious bones of the king. As this is only a legend, the credibility of this claim cannot be verified, but the intoxicating smell of the remains, whether the result of embalming with perfumed oils or not, fits the eschatological idea of a good king, a good life, as well as a good death, as anywhere else in Christian Europe.

KOLMER 1997, pp. 89–111; ŠMAHEL 2014, p. 162.

70 SRBIK 1961, p. 299, footnote 147.

71 PETNEKI, Áron. *Exequiae Regis*. Die Begräbniszeremonie des Königs Matthias Corvinus vor ihrem ungarischen Hintergrund. In KOLMER 1997, pp. 113–123, here pp. 115–116.