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Somber Celebrations:
Funeral Processions and Civic Community
in 17th century Vilnius

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Abstract:

The present article examines the political significance of funeral processions in a multifaith environment. Seventeenth century Vilnius presents a rich case study for such research as it was home to five Christian denominations, whose coexistence was not always peaceful. Religious disagreements were often brought forward by public ritual action and prior historiography tends to view ritual as a liability. This article argues that under certain conditions funeral processions furthered civic belonging. In order to do so, the article begins with exploring occasions of religious violence in 17th century Vilnius and describes the interdenominational relationship among the inhabitants of the city. It continues by reconstructing the form of funeral processions by analyzing last wills and post-mortem registers. Lastly, these occasions are interpreted through the lens of semiotic anthropology, showing the binding potential of funeral processions on the civic community of 17th century Vilnius.

Introduction

The mid-17th century is a period popularly known as the Deluge in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Swedish and Russian military forces flooded its territory, causing damage incomparable to any prior experiences of the polity. It was then that Vilnius, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was occupied for the first time

in its long history. On that occasion the city was honored by the presence of royalty: in 1655, the Russian tsar, Aleksey Mikhailovich, entered the city in the full triumphant splendor of a victorious force. In 1661, the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Jan II Kazimierz Waza, came to witness the consequences of the occupation. By then, the last remaining Muscovite troops were barricaded in the fortress of Vilnius, enduring a siege that lasted for over a year until their supplies were eventually depleted and the garrison was exhausted. On December 4, 1661, the Muscovite troops rebelled against their superiors and laid down their arms. This day marked the complete liberation of the city from of its first occupation. Four decades passed and on April 16, 1702, the city fell under Swedish rule.

The Muscovite occupation inflicted serious wounds on both the individual and communal level. Many citizens lost their lives during the invasion, which also caused a fire that raged for 17 days. According to Maria Łowmianska, roughly 17,000 Vilnans died during the occupation, which amounted to over half the urban population (Šapoka 2008, 466).[1] The more fortunate ones were able to flee and, as Irina Gerasimova estimates, over 1600 Vilnans relocated to Königsberg (Gerasimova 2009, 455). While individual citizens met different fates, the occupation dealt a heavy blow to the communities of Vilnius. Its impact varied from bad to worse, with some urban communities affected especially strongly: Elmantas Meilus estimates that up to 75% of Vilnan Jews either fled or died (Meilus 2009, 57–58). The wide scale violence dissolved the network of interdependent communities.

Vilnius was not able to recover from this blow in demographic or economic respects for at least a century, but once the political situation stabilized, its social body began to heal. Survivors took up their respective trades again, while some fortunate exiles returned to the city in search of their loved ones, or in hopes of retrieving a fraction of their lost wealth, among a plentitude of other reasons (Meilus 2004, 241). Once back, they had to reintegrate into the extant corporations and reestablish ties with the survivors.

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[1] This number is often contested, however, there has been no final conclusion to this problem.

Ritual action was a means to fulfill both aims, but it also had potential to sow dissent, because of its religious character. 17th century Vilnius was home to no less than five Christian denominations and religious belonging was by far the most divisive demographic trait. These differences could provoke a violent response, particularly because the occupation undermined settled practices of religious toleration.

David Kaplan names funerals among the most dangerous events throughout early modern Europe because they incited an extraordinary number of religious riots (Kaplan 2010, 78, 93–96). One of the reasons for this volatility was that funeral processions escorting the deceased to the place of their final rest made religious rituals highly visible. As a public ritual act, the procession laid claim to otherwise shared public space and exposed the bereaved to nonparticipants. Despite its clear-cut religious significance, funerals were not exclusively a religious ceremony. They were also rituals of honor, an occasion for individuals and communities to gather, pay respect, and bid farewell to a fellow member of society. The dual nature of funerals leads to a question: did they hold the potential to act as an integrating factor, strengthening civic ties, or were they a social liability that incited religious violence and disrupted them?

To consider this question, the present article focuses on the most public part of the funerary ritual in Vilnius—the procession. Aiming to consider its political significance, the article begins with examples of denominational strife in Vilnius related to funerary practices. It continues by reconstructing the materials used at a funeral procession, based on the analysis of testaments and postmortem registers. The article ends with an interpretation of these findings through the lens of semiotic anthropology, showing the integrating potential of funeral processions in late 17th century Vilnius.

Strained Coexistence

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is often celebrated as a haven of tolerance in early modern Europe (Tazbir 1973), however, quotidian religious coexistence was far from consistently peaceful. The Warsaw Confederation Act of 1572 protected the freedom of conscience and religious practice in its many forms. Nevertheless, public

religious ceremonies did sometimes lead to conflict in Vilnius and its history of religious violence has grown into a considerable field of inquiry. Henryk Wisner argued that Catholic zealots were responsible for the most cases of interdenominational violence in the mid-17th century Vilnius and Poland-Lithuania in general (Wisner 1993, 89–102), while Urszula Augustyniak emphasized the decisive role Jesuit students played in inciting it (2006, 169–190). Building on their contributions, Tomasz Kempa recently authored the most extensive analysis of religious strife in early modern Vilnius to date (Kempa 2016).[2] His work narrates the history of religious coexistence and the danger religious difference posed to public peace in the city. Religious disturbances were a cause for concern, but, as David Frick has argued, overlapping communal belonging often subdued violence (Frick 2013). These works emphasized the potentially divisive effect of ritual action, whereas the present study urges the reader to consider the opposite. Aspects of funereal culture have also been studied previously. For instance, art historian Mindaugas Paknys analyzed the funerary customs of the noble elite of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, although their urban iterations mostly eluded the scope of his study (Paknys 2008). Aivas Ragauskas (2002) examined the mortuary culture of the Vilnius ruling elite and David Frick (2013) addressed that of the ordinary burghers, but their work rarely considered the binding potential of ritual. Overall, when the aforementioned studies addressed the importance of ritual action, they often treated it as a potential threat to the public peace in the city. Although this article aims to present a contrasting view, there has been significant historical precedent to treat ritual as a liability.

When religious tensions peaked, acts of violence followed. The triggers for violent eruption were manifold but it is important to note that religious processions were among the most common. In her study of religious violence in 16th century France, Natalie Zemon Davis (1973) gives a useful definition of religious riots as "any violent action, with words or weapons, undertaken against religious targets by people who are not acting *officially and formally* as agents of political and ecclesiastical authority" (52). This definition accommodates insulting or blasphemous words as well as desecration of

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[2] For the most recent anglophone summary of religious coexistence in the early modern Vilnius, see Kempa 2020.

corpses under the broad category of violence. By emphasizing that the people inciting violence were not acting in their professional capacity, the definition excludes examples of violence brought upon by soldiers or mercenaries, inquisitors, as well as representatives of the law. Therefore, applying Zemon Davis's definition allows us to focus on acts of violence incited by citizens or urban communities, informing us of popular responses to religious differences.

Peaceful religious coexistence relied on the affinity of the dominant confessional group, settled practices of toleration, and governance strategies. In the second half of the 17th century, Vilnius was dominated by Catholics, who were the largest confessional group in the city and exerted most influence over its public life. The Catholic faithful regarded Vilnius as their own; therefore, once the governing structures failed in their duties to exemplify that, the Catholic crowd felt entitled to enforce it by means of mass violence (Davis 1973, 61, 70). Opportunities for interdenominational strife were many, since Vilnius was home to five Christian denominations as well as Judaic and Islamic minorities. The religious composition of the urban society is well reflected by its sacral architecture: in the early 17th century, Vilnius had 23 Catholic and 9 Greek Catholic churches, while Calvinist, Lutheran, and Orthodox communities had one church each (Łowmiańska in Witkowski, 2005, 227). The Orthodox constituted the second largest confessional community in Vilnius, while Lutherans and Calvinists were significantly fewer in number; however, their presence was far from inconsequential to urban life (Kempa 2016, 447).

The relationship between the Vilnan Orthodox and Catholic communities is a good example of religious coexistence based on settled practices of deeply engrained mutual toleration. During the early modern period their relationship was most significantly undermined by the Union of Brest (1596) and the Muscovite occupation (1655–1661). The Union of Brest aimed to bring the Orthodox faithful under the authority of the Roman Pontificate. According to its provision, the Orthodox would retain the Eastern rite but were to become a part of the Roman Catholic Church, thus creating a Greek Catholic creed. Jesuits and the ruling Catholic elite of the

Commonwealth championed the Union and so the Vilnan Orthodox churches were handed over to Greek Catholics (Sharipova 2015). However, the Orthodox faithful were largely reluctant to follow suit. In 1597 the Orthodox brotherhood of the Holy Trinity funded a wooden church of the Holy Ghost to meet the spiritual needs of those disapproving of the Union. A monastery and a primary school, bearing a lofty title of collegium, were founded shortly after. During the Orthodox Easter of 1598 students of the Jesuit academy attacked the Orthodox complex in what was the only large scale religiously motivated attack against Vilnius' Orthodox faithful for more than a century. The complex survived and grew to become the stronghold of Orthodox anti-union thought in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Kempa 2010). From there, penned by people such as Meletij Smotryc'kyj, religious polemics against Greek Catholics soared throughout the first half of the 17th century (Frick 1995). The most important intellectual and spiritual center for Greek Catholics stood just across the street from the monastery of the Holy Ghost. Such territorial proximity led to unrest among the faithful in the first decades of the 17th century (Kempa 2017b). Smotryc'kyj's career may be indicative of the Orthodox fate in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At first a staunch Orthodox and author of passionate polemics in favour of their cause, later in life he turned to support the Union and took the office of Greek Catholic Archbishop in Polotsk.

By the time of the Muscovite occupation the Orthodox did not pose a threat to Catholic religious domination in Vilnius. Their religious fervor waned, and the Vilnan Orthodox community was neither as strong nor as active as it had been at the turn of the century (Kempa 2016, 181–182).[3] Moreover, following the Muscovite occupation the Orthodox were treated with increased suspicion, because they were seen as receiving special treatment from their occupying co-religionists (Frick 2009). The suspicions were confirmed by the fact that while many churches in Vilnius were desecrated, the Orthodox church of the Holy Ghost was left unscathed (Kempa 2016, 465; Mironowicz 2007). Furthermore, the church grew richer at the expense of Greek Catholics, who were

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[3] Tomasz Kempa names the lack of adequate education that could prepare the Orthodox to dispute the Catholic and Protestant faithful as a major factor that led to the demise of their influence.

deprived of churches, priests, and political rights by the Muscovite government. In 1657 Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich issued an order to banish all Greek Catholics from Vilnius and other cities, unless they recanted their faith. The Palatine of occupied Vilnius, Prince Mikhail Semionovich Shakhovskoi, duly carried out the order in 1658, when he gathered some eighty Vilnan Greek Catholics to the town hall and presented them with the ultimatum of either converting to Orthodoxy or leaving the city. All of them complied to convert (Meilus 2015, 346–348). The years of Muscovite occupation saw the attempt to turn Vilnius into a city of the Eastern rite (Frick 2013, 316–317). But once Vilnius was liberated, Orthodox influence declined as fast as it had previously surged.

In contrast to the Orthodox case, neither settled practices of toleration nor the law could stop tensions from building between Vilnan Catholic and Calvinist communities. Peaceful coexistence was made impossible by the religious fervor of both sides and their animosity caused the most devastating religious riots in the history of Vilnius. Disagreements grew sharper after the arrival of the Jesuit fathers. In fact, the first significant outburst took place in 1581, when the newly appointed Bishop of Vilnius, himself a convert from Calvinism, Jerzy Radziwiłł, ordered the evangelical books to be confiscated, brought to the place where traitors were executed, and set ablaze (Kempa 2016, 139).[4] This must have come as a shock, for such actions directly contravened the Warsaw Confederation. Both Calvinists and Lutherans recognized the significance of the event and sent a united complaint to King Stefan Báthory, listing the many faults they were already suffering at Catholic hands. Although the complaint did not survive, the King's response hints at its content:

> The Catholics interfere with escorting and singing alongside the bodies of the deceased to the place of their burial, especially through the streets near the church of St. Johns, by abusing, shaming, and shouting publicly, and are incited do all that by the Catholic preachers. For this reason, the students of the Jesuit academy and people from other neighborhoods nearly stoned two ministers returning from the funeral. Furthermore,

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[4] However, there are indications that the burning was initiated by the Bernardines, whose church and convent were closest to the Calvinist center. See Machaj 2017, 394.

they threaten to burn and tear down the [Calvinist] church (Łukaszewicz 1843, 115).[5]

The funeral procession mentioned in the King's response was escorting a Calvinist senator, Maciej Sawicki (d. 1581). In the wake of this clash, Catholics aimed to implement a complete ban of Protestant funeral processions passing by the church of St. Johns. The King's response showed support to the Calvinist cause, as he wished to maintain the city's already-fragile religious balance. He reprimanded the Bishop and prohibited any further actions of this sort, ruling that the Protestants could pass by the Jesuit church of St. Johns and the Vilnius Bishop's Palace if it was the shortest path to their cemetery (Kempa 2016, 145; 2017). As this was in practice the only route leading to the extramural Calvinist cemetery, this condition did little to quell growing tensions between the groups. A decade later, on the night of June 9, 1591, students of the Jesuit academy carried out the threats of their predecessors by setting the Calvinist church on fire. It would burn thrice more throughout the 17th century and thrice again it would be rebuilt.

Hostilities between Catholics and Calvinists reached a tipping point in 1639 and resulted in a riot and the relocation of Calvinist communal institutions outside the city walls. The event that sparked the riot took place on October 4, 1639, when two Calvinist boys armed with a bow aimed their arrows at the jackdaws sitting on the roof of the Calvinist church. Some of the arrows missed their targets and flew straight over the edge of the roof, landing in the territory of Vilnius' Bernardine convent. Whereas a broken window and a frightened nun might have been dismissed as minor misdemeanors, one of the arrows struck the leg of St. Michael—the polychromic image on the façade of the homonym church (Niedźwiedź 2012a). This sacrilege triggered the riot, whereby a crowd attacked the Calvinist school and hospice, and then set fire to the church. Once the military intervention put an end to it, a long judicial process commenced.

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[5] "ciała zmarłych ludzi ku pogrzebu do miejsc ich, gdzie się chowają, przez ulicę, zwłaszcza mimo kościół świętego Jana nosić i spiewać przy ciele zmarłego, katholicy zakazują, lżąc, sromocąc i wolając za nimi na ulicy, a toby snać z poduszczenia kaznodzieji katholickich czynić mieli. Zaczem i dwóch ministrów żacy z szkoły ś. Jana i inszy gmin na ulicy z pogrzebu idączch, mało nieukamienowali. A nadto przegrożki czynią, jakoby zbory spustoszyć y zburzyć gwałtem chcieli."

The trial lasted until 1640 and ruled that Calvinist communal institutions should be relocated near their extramural cemetery (Kempa 2016, 429). The expulsion also prohibited Calvinists from practicing their faith inside the city walls because it was now deemed a threat to the public peace. In 1646 King Władysław Waza lifted this ban and allowed the ministers to visit the sick and conduct funeral processions, albeit "in silence and without singing" (Wisner 1993, 101; Kempa 2016, 439). As the last and most violent attack against Vilnan Calvinists confirms, such measures could only solve the problem in the short term. The attack took place in 1682 and, once again, caught Calvinists by surprise. Several thousand people assaulted the church and the adjacent institutions in a coordinated effort, looted them, and desecrated the cemetery by exhuming and defiling corpses. Riots lasted for two days and more than 80 assailants were jailed in their wake; ultimately none of them were punished.

Vilnan Protestants were also prone to religious violence and interference with rituals. In 1588 an Arian nobleman from the Polotsk district, Ezajasz Jesman, rode into the Franciscan church of the Most Holy Virgin Mary on horseback, struck the altar with a sword and attacked the gathered faithful, eventually driving everyone out of the church (Kempa 2016, 159–160). During the Easter mass of 1599 Calvinists locked part of the Catholic congregation, including the Bishop of Samogitia, in the Vilnius Cathedral (Ragauskienė and Glemža 2012, 213–214). In 1611 a young zealous Italian Calvinist, Franco de Franco, intercepted the Corpus Christi procession attended by Queen Constance, Princes Władysław and Kazimierz Waza, and select senators (Kempa 2016, 305).[6] Standing on the steps of a temporary altar in a central square and holding an unsheathed sword, de Franco addressed the participants of the procession: "you are committing the greatest idolatry—the bread that you are carrying is not God but only an empty sign, one must seek Christ our God in heaven sitting at the right hand of God the Father" (Merczyng 1901, 329; Wisner, 1989, 41).[7] Bernardine nuns often complained

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[6] Later that day, he was imprisoned in the dungeon of the city hall. See Wisner 1989, 41.
[7] He was swiftly imprisoned and sentenced to capital punishment four weeks later. Religious riots broke out soon after. Most historians agree about the causality between de Franco's sentence and the riot. For a contrasting view see Wisner 1989.

about Calvinists interfering with their religious ceremonies. The nuns were targeted more often because their convent was nearby the Calvinist church. Repeated interference warranted a royal decree of 1620 prohibiting Calvinist funeral processions to walk past the church of St. Bernard and St. Francis of Assisi (Wisner 1993, 96; Augustyniak 2006, 169–190). During the 1639–1640 Calvinist expulsion, Catholics claimed that riots broke out because a brick was thrown at Mikołaj Giedrojc, the Bernardine brother carrying the cross at a funeral procession (Kempa 2016, 408; Wisner 1993, 92).

Protestant funerals turned violent on more than one occasion. A procession escorting Jakub Gibel (d. 1637), a well-known and long serving Lutheran Burgomaster of Vilnius, was attacked. In the funeral oration addressed to Gibel, a prominent Lutheran preacher Andrzej Schonflissius lamented: "It was a pitiful sight, when your body, as it was carried to the grave, was wrenched and flayed, when your coffin was cast into the gutter, stones cast against it, and—what was more pathetic—when your face was hideously wounded by a stone" (Frick 2013, 379; Kosman 1972b, 104). Another attack took place during the height of the Calvinist expulsion and was directed at the funeral procession escorting prominent nobleman Aleksander Przypkowski. Just as the procession escorting Sawicki, it had to pass by the church of St. Johns, where the students of the Jesuit academy met the bereaved by pelting stones. The cortege continued past the Catholic church of the Holy Spirit, where a Dominican sacristan, Matiasz Karwowski, met the bereaved blurting out curses. Another round of stones followed, this time coming from the church of the Holy Ghost and wounding the participants of the procession. This occasioned a reaction from the military cohort of Krzysztof Radziwiłł (Wisner 1993, 96; Łukaszewicz 1842, 210–215). In the subsequent trial, Catholic Bishop Abraham Woyna claimed that the Calvinists provoked this clash by willingly organizing the funeral procession on a day holy to Catholics. He affirmed that they had been singing and drumming since the morning mass, therefore disturbing the most holy part of the service and provoking the students by clamoring in front of the church of St. Johns (Frick 2013, 385–386; Kempa 2016, 420–421).

There were several reasons that made public funeral processions a threat to public peace. First, the proximity of warring religious communities heightened the likelihood of violent reactions. Royal decrees aimed to solve this issue by barring the Calvinists from approaching some of the most predominantly Catholic parts of the city and by prohibiting Calvinist funeral processions to pass by certain Catholic churches as of 1581. These prohibitions were increased in 1620 and reached its heights in 1640–1646 when practice of Calvinist faith was prohibited inside the city walls. After the ban was lifted, however, their funeral processions were to be conducted in silence (Koslofsky 2000, 102).[8] Second, funeral processions demonstrated fraternal solidarity among a competing religious community. The final rites bore denominational differences and a procession of lamenters winding down the narrow streets could be taken for a statement of power, strengthening communal ties among the participants but perceived by the onlookers of other denominations as a challenge to their faith. Lastly, a procession was a dynamic act, therefore its significance mutated throughout its duration. This plays out most significantly in terms of space: while passing through the neighborhood of their coreligionists, the procession is predominantly a sign of unity, but outside its boundaries the participants were exposed to danger, especially while passing by the sacral architecture of the city.

Much like in 16th century France, nearly all outbursts of religious violence were incited by students (Davis 1973, 87). Although their motivations were manifold and majority of them remain unclear, it is clear that incentives were not purely religious. Urszula Augustyniak demonstrates that students grew to rely on the economic benefits of interdenominational strife (2006, 180). Looting and pillaging churches was a lucrative business, especially since the students were rarely punished for such actions. They were only answerable to the courts of the Academy and the Jesuit fathers protected this exemption as a part of the royal privilege to the Academy, thus keeping the students from facing legal responsibility in the courts of the city or the state that would have met

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[8] Koslofsky shows that among the Calvinist faithful of early modern Germany only social deviants were escorted without bells and songs, silence serving as a sign of exclusion.

interconfessional violence with strict punishments. Students were often easier to convince carrying out violent action, because they were often newcomers to the city and were rarely involved in local networks of urban society and its institutions. Instead, students owed allegiance to the Jesuit Academy. Due to this positioning, Catholic students may have been more readily able to view the deceased as a heretic, rather than a neighbor, colleague, or a fellow citizen.

In contrast to students, the citizens of Vilnius were embedded in the social fabric of the city. They were united by their citizenship – a shared legal status that outlined their place in the hierarchical society and entailed subordination to municipal government and courts. Legal standing was complemented by ethnic, neighborly, and professional networks. Strong social ties superseded religious differences and encouraged thinking beyond denominational lines. For example, some citizens ascribed their final bequests to hospices ran by and for adherents of other denominations (LVIA f. SA, no. 5333, 319–322; Frick 2010, 107–122).[9] Others ascribed a sum to be donated to the poor of all faiths begging for money in the streets (LVIA f. SA, no. 5333, 422).[10] Moreover, marriage across denominational lines was a common phenomenon in Vilnius, even among the bitterly divided Orthodox and Greek Catholic faithful. This also applied to practices of godparenthood: Lutheran Jan Buchner became a godparent to five Catholic babies in 1674 alone (Frick 2007, 213). Ties of neighborliness and kinship encouraged Vilnans to see each other in terms other than just adherents to a competing faith and this, in turn, thwarted religious violence. Varied social allegiances, or the lack thereof, contributed to the way a funeral procession was interpreted. All in all, just as in other parts of early modern Europe, funeral processions occasionally provoked unrest in Vilnius. Nevertheless, most funeral ceremonies remained peaceful despite some of them morphing into a noticeable spectacle. Bernard Connor (1666–1698), an English royal physician to King Jan Sobieski and an astute observer of local customs, remarked that

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[9] Lutheran armorer Melchior Illis (d. 1663) donated 10 złoty to all Christian Hospices both inside and outside the city walls. See Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas, Senųjų Aktų fondas [Lithuanian State Historical Archive, the Old Acts fond], henceforth LVIA f. SA, no. 5333, 319–322. See David Frick (2010) for an analyses of the denominational pieties.
[10] For example, Catholic royal secretary Józef Antoniewicz Proniewski, LVIA f. SA, no. 5333, p. 422.

"[t]he Ceremonies of Burial in Poland are usually celebrated with so great Pomp and Magnificence, that one would rather take them for Triumphs than Interments" (Connor 1698, 206–207). This was equally true of the capital city of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where at times grief engulfed the city for more than a day.

Elements of a Mournful Procession

Testaments and postmortem wealth registers offer a glimpse into the visual splendor of a Baroque funerary procession in 17th century Vilnius. An exhaustive testament was a constitutive part of a good Christian death and after allotting their worldly belongings to their surviving relatives, testators voiced their concerns about a proper burial. Usually, those were brief: the instructions were limited to a plea for a burial "according the Christian rite" or "fittingly, according to the customs." The form of "a fitting funeral" would remain oblique if not for a minority of meticulous testators who listed the desired funereal adornments and their prices. These inscriptions are the main source for reconstructing how burgher funeral processions may have looked. Although there are no sources that could attest whether those wishes were fulfilled to a proper degree (if at all), the dispositions themselves present an informative source for a case study, which illuminates the cultural atmosphere of Vilnius and provides a sketch of the desirable form of final rites. For the purposes of this analysis, 97 testaments and post-mortem wealth registers were studied. The majority of them are inscribed in the archival books of the Magistrate bench, kept at the Lithuanian State Historical Archive, while others were published in scholarly editions.[11] The overwhelming majority of these documents inform us on Catholic funerals, whereas sources on other denominations pale in comparison. Of the 97 primary documents studied, 60 wills were drawn up by Catholics, 7 by Greek Catholics, 15 by Protestants, and 15 by Orthodox.

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[11] Акты издаваемые Виленскою археографическою комиссиею для разбора древних актов [Acts issued by the Vilnius archeographic commission for analysis of the old acts.] Том IX. Акты Виленского земского суда. Edited by Головицкий, Яковъ. Вильна: Типография А. Гz. Сыркина, 1878. Henceforth: AVAK.

The "proper" final rites testators demanded did not bear strong denominational differences. Wioletta Zielecka has shown that the Vilnan Orthodox and Greek Catholic funerals were very similar to the Catholic ones (Zielecka 2011, 168; 2014).[12] Moreover, at the beginning of the 17th century the protestant funerary customs of the funeral sermon caught on among the Vilnan Catholics, as a means to ensure the lasting memory and solidify the honor of the deceased (Frick 2013, 384–385; Niedźwiedź 2012b, 331–333; 337–343). Funerals in Vilnius shared traits of all denominations and were further shaped by the participation of local communities. Therefore, one can speak of a shared funerary culture among Vilnan burghers: a set of expectations that had to be met for a ritual to be deemed a fitting escort of a deceased Vilnan.

The cost of a proper funeral began at 10 złoty, which was the smallest amount of money ascribed specifically to the ceremony and might have been its base cost (LVIA f. SA, no. 5334, 79, 1252; no. 5334, 1577). Orthodox Anna Daniłówna (d. 1664) states in her will that her sinful body was to be buried properly, with various festivities and diverse almsgiving, which she binds the Orthodox fathers to carry out during the funeral procession by ascribing 120 złoty for their services (LVIA f. SA, no. 5334, 606).[13] Pompous funeral ceremonies could cost much more; for example, the Orthodox Teodora Czarniawska (d. 1695) ascribed 1500 złoty for her escort (LVIA f. SA, no. 5342, 395). Even more exorbitant, in 1691 the Catholic royal Secretary Józef Antoniewicz Proniewski funded a lavish funeral costing 8000 złoty (Ragauskas 2002, 395).[14] Some, however, had to take difficult measures in order to assure a proper ceremony: Stanisław Czubakowski (d. 1663) ascribed his house to the order of the Discalced Carmelites to pay for a fitting ceremony (LVIA f. SA, no. 5342, 395)

The analyzed sources suggest that surrounding the ceremony by candlelight was perceived as a cultural norm in the Old Vilnius. Illumination took central importance in

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[12] Studies have shown that religious belonging did not completely determine the form of funeral rite: the Orthodox and Greek Catholic nobility adopted the cultural norms set by the Catholic nobles. The only religiously motivated difference were the pleas to hold Panikhidas.

[13] She indicates giving 200 shocks of groats, which amounts to 120 złoty.

[14] Ragauskas approximated the overall sum, however, Proniewski's will does not mention it. It ascribes 500 złoty for the funeral and another 2000 for the masses to be held in his memory, see LVIA f. SA, no. 5333, 422.

the funeral procession and most testators asked to be escorted in candlelight, and, therefore, candles were some of the most often mentioned materials in the wills.[15] Moreover, guilds collected a separate tax to provide for candles to be carried during a funeral procession, while the guild members who failed to participate in religious ceremonies had to repay in wax (Jovaiša 2001, 109).

Funeral portraits were a distinctive part of the funereal culture of the Polish nobility, but did not take a prominent place in Vilnius (Chrościcki 1974, 67–72; Paknys 2008, 85). The image of the deceased would be placed on the narrow part of the coffin, facing the participants of the procession (Łyczak 2011). Although this tradition was not as popular in Vilnius, Catholic weaver Jan Jodkiewicz (d. 1666) did ask for his funeral portrait to be carried alongside the coffin (LVIA f. SA, no. 5335, 220). Though the sources do not mention them often, such portraits were occasionally used in civic funerals. Rūta Janonienė states that the portraits used in funeral processions were later hung on the interior wall of the receiving church, thus memorializing the deceased. However, only the church patrons were granted this privilege (Janonienė 2001).[16]

The testators had their say about the preferred appearance of the body. Archeological findings affirm that burial in coffins was by far the most conventional practice, but exceptions did exist (Montvilaitė 2003).[17] For instance, Catholic coachman Stanisław Kulesz (d. 1663) asked to bury his body wrapped in a black cloth as a sign of humility (LVIA f. SA, no. 5334, 101). A more extreme example was recorded in the will of a wealthy Orthodox merchant, Jan Radkiewicz (d. 1691), who wished to avoid any unnecessary pomp and to have his body placed on a bier and buried in the ground just as it was (AVAK 1878, 504). The practice of humbling oneself was a manifestation of

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[15] The importance of illumination in the funeral ceremonies, especially the lighting of the catafalque and *castrum doloris*, was previously explored by art historians. See Balaišytė 2008.

[16] In certain cases, the memorialization also took form of a sculpture, and although this practice is quite marginal among the burghers, it is traced back to the 16th century.

[17] This was not necessarily the case elsewhere, since the 16-17th century German Lutherans were often buried in a bier. See Koslofsky 2000, 97. These wills describe the appearance of the coffin which is to be carried in the procession: LVIA f. SA, no. 5334, p. 102; no. 5337, p. 9.

Baroque theatricality that emphasized humility over splendor, but was nonetheless a dramatic alternative.

Sound supplemented the visual spectacle and constituted an important part of the ceremonial pomp. The most grandiose part of the aural background were the tolling bells. Usually reserved to one church, chanting sometimes extended to several city churches, and in exceptional cases even several cities. As a later example attests, Semion Gukovich (d. 1778) willed that his body would be escorted while the bells tolled in Vilnius as well as in the city of his birth, Mogilev (AVAK 1878, 547). Bells could have been supplemented with music; for instance, drumming was a part of Alexander Przypkowski's (d. 1640) funeral, while Aleksandra Kwincina (d. 1658) asked to be escorted with lamentations, trumpets, and bells, allotting for it 740 złoty (LVIA f. SA, no. 5334, 1590). Catholic processions were often followed by lamenters, wailing and crying for the deceased.

An inquiry into Protestant funeral rites presents a different picture from the Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Orthodox Vilnans. Protestant faithful met death with calm and submission, ending their life as a candle in the wind. They treated their funeral procession with silence, therefore the wills of Protestant Vilnans bear little clues, except for often repeated plea to be buried in the usual place according to their customs. Although wills of Vilnan Protestants remain largely silent about their funeral processions, they were likely not very different from those of their coreligionists in other countries: led by a cross and a minister, followed by the coffin borne by the bereaved, surrounded by the sound of tolling bells and funeral hymns (Koslofsky 2000, 85–115; Karant-Nunn 1997, 163–171). However, the royal limitations silenced Calvinist funerals simultaneously making them less noticeable and more univocal.

Funeral ritual, and especially the procession, was a field of competition for religious and secular interpretations. The way onlookers saw processions varied from a public proclamation of religious difference, to an occasion honouring the secular achievements of the deceased. Moreover, since the procession is an act unfolding over time and space, its significance changed throughout its duration. In cases when religious

meaning overcame the honorific one, violent responses became more likely due to the pronounced religious divisions in early modern Vilnius. However, participation of citizens and urban communities encouraged an honorific interpretation of the procession. Guilds were particularly effective at altering the way ritual was perceived, because many artisans of all Christian denominations were obliged to participate in the procession. Historically, guilds derived from religious confraternities—communities aiming to inculcate deeper religiosity into everyday life (Jovaiša 2001, 109). The earliest Vilnan religious confraternities were also open only to a specific trade and ethnicity. Eventually, in some cases the importance of trade outweighed faith and this process led to the formation of guilds. However, guilds retained some religious traits: they funded altars, committed acts of Christian piety, and cared for their dead (Łowmianska in Witkowski 2005, 229).

Guilds were multiconfessional corporations with expressed religious leanings and as such they harbored internal religious tensions that manifested in guild statutes. Since the 17th century Vilnius had been dominated by Catholics and so were the guilds; therefore, their ritual practice adhered to Catholic norms (Chodnycki 1925). For example, participation in the Corpus Christi procession was made mandatory for the tailors and bricklayers of Vilnius (Baronas 2017). Similarly, tailors, bricklayers, and butchers were obliged to attend Requiem masses held for the souls of their deceased aides (ACW 2006, 55, no. 48: §4; 111, no. 92: §22; 119, no. 95: §28).[18] These obligations directly contradicted Protestant, Orthodox, and Greek Catholic religious practice. Some guilds presented their religious dissident members with an option to pay a fee and be relieved of the duty to attend masses (Kosman 1972a, 10).[19] However, this was not universal practice: the statute of the saddlers' guild obliged all members to participate in Catholic mass irrespective of their denomination (Meilus 2015, 473).[20]

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[18] *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759* [Acts of the Vilnius Guilds]. Edited by H. Łowmiański, M. Łowmiańska, S. Kościałkowski. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006. Henceforth: ACW.
[19] This right was granted by Władysław IV Waza in 1638.
[20] According to their guild statute reconfirmed in 1658, but this clause was inscribed earlier.

Nevertheless, every guild member was expected to escort deceased journeymen or members of their immediate family. It was considered an act of Christian charity, yet some guilds turned the expectation to a duty by inscribing it into their statutes. Since 1579, the weaver's guild obliged its members not only to participate in funeral processions but commanded six weavers to carry the coffin and fined those failing to attend (ACW, 2006, 76, no. 60: §33). Twenty-seven guilds functioned in Vilnius throughout the 16–18ᵗʰ centuries (Kaladžinskaitė 2004, 112). Every one of them had a distinct symbolic representation that was displayed in funeral processions, thus paying homage to the deceased and representing the people rallying under the banner.

Guild participation in funeral processions was generally peaceful but could lead to friction. This was the case during the funeral procession escorting Mikołaj Kliczewski (d. 1667), a Catholic Burgomaster of Vilnius. As a befitting ceremony required, the former head of the city was escorted with extensive funereal pomp. Therefore, a number of guilds attended, but the somber occasion could not supersede the animosity between the guilds of tailors and salt merchants, and they started competing for a position closer to the coffin. Soon their competition turned to conflict and deteriorated into a scuffle. As the people involved claimed in the subsequent trial, their intention was to honor the deceased by bearing candles alongside the coffin and both parties put blame on the commercial strife as the cause of unrest, rather than disagreements pertaining to religion (Frick 2013, 386).

Concurrent religious and secular meanings made the funeral procession into a site of semiotic tension. In order to be deemed fitting, the ritual had to represent the deceased as both a citizen and a faithful. This was to be done by adhering to the cultural expectations shared among the citizens of Old Vilnius and the denominational dogma of one's creed. These could be conflicting and if a ritual does not strike a balance between them, the risk of violent reaction increases. It was further complicated by the dynamic nature of the procession, which destabilized the perceived meaning further, as the cortege winded down the city streets. A way to track if the balance was attained or if one interpretation took precedence over another is to look at the signs processions

employed. In turn, their interpretation informs our understanding of the political significance of a funeral procession.

Civic Significance of the Ultimate Rites

Ritual was a widespread governance strategy throughout early modern Europe that served as means to solidify group identity alongside a variety of other goals (Muir 2005, 229–62). The features that made ritual action useful were the same ones that turned it into a threat, namely, the solidifying effect it had upon the people involved. Funeral processions were no exception in this sense, as the whole funeral ritual was devised to overcome death and pacify a community reminded of its temporality. However, public funeral processions were directed at specific communities to whom they communicated the allegiance of the deceased through the signs it employed. Following the aforementioned ideal types of funeral processions enacted in Vilnius, these communities were either united by their denomination or their civic belonging.

Semiotic anthropology theory helps to explain the possible meaning derivation processes at work and offers a key to understanding the binding potential funerals held in a multiconfessional environment (Keane 2003; 2005; 2014). Developed by Webb Keane, this theory relies on Peircean semiotics and aims to restore social and historical dimensions of cultural analysis through interrogation of material objects (Keane 2005, 186). Material analysis holds that while the meaning derivation is individual, the sign itself carries an inherent and limited significance. The range of its possible meanings depend on the physical qualities of the sign and its placement in the representational economy, constituted by the context-dependent material, social, religious, historical circumstances. Keane divides the representational economy by introducing the concept of semiotic ideologies. He describes them as

> the basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world. It determines, for instance, what people will consider the role that intentions play in signification to be, what kinds of possible agent (humans only? Animals? Spirits?) exist to which acts of signification

might be imputed, whether signs are arbitrary or necessarily linked to their objects, and so forth (2005, 419).

Therefore, the whole totality of meanings existing in the representational economy is filtered through adopted assumptions about signs.

Different semiotic ideologies coexist and compete for dominance. In the multiconfessional environment of 17th century Vilnius, these differences pertinently manifested themselves through a conflicting perspective towards material objects, informed by denominational dogma. Catholic and Calvinist beliefs were completely opposite in this regard. While Catholics believed in the efficacy of matter to achieve salvation, Calvinists dismissed it as superstition. Changing views towards materiality directly altered funeral rites: some of the early Protestant communities rejected any need of ritual and buried their dead without any procession, song, or funeral sermon (Koslofsky 2000, 92). This difference was also reflected in the patterns of violent responses. Calvinist crowds were given to destroying material signs and symbols, so aiming to disprove Catholic beliefs in the agency of objects. In contrast, Catholics directed their actions at the perceived heretics and even their remains (Davis 1973, 76–77).

Furthermore, the clash of semiotic ideologies extends to the most fundamental presumptions of subject-object relations: the efficacy of matter to mediate or embody supernatural power. This conflict is well reflected in the agency ascribed to saints. While Catholic funerals made wide use of insignia to plead for interception and care, the Protestant faithful were more likely to deem such adoration as idolatry. Other examples of this sort were Franco de Franco's challenge that disturbed the Corpus Christi procession of 1611 or Catholic complaints that Protestants directed their stones at the priest carrying the Host. This did lead to violence directed at the funeral processions in Vilnius, as exemplified by the bricks thrown at the Bernardine monk bearing the cross, as well as the many complaints by Bernardine nuns.

Semiotic ideologies compete for predominance in the attribution of sign meaning and their competition is made possible by the individual meaning derivation and capacity

of material objects to house simultaneously conflicting significations. In our case, the body of the deceased could be interpreted as a deceased religious dissident and a member of civic community. However, signs function in constellation with other signs and their meaning is processual, i.e. the process of signification is unending and final meaning is never fixed. Therefore, those already derived interpretations could be altered by putting emphasis on either of the signs of communal identity. That is to say, the impermanence of meaning allows for temporality to emerge: one sign placed along another will necessitate a reconsideration of both. Therefore, passing through the city streets provided the procession with various shades of meaning. For instance, the Calvinist procession beginning in their neighborhood was seen as a ritual of fraternal solidarity, while passing by the Catholic churches on their way to the cemetery held the danger of recontextualizing the ritual as a challenge to the dominant creed. Therefore, the multivalence of signs could exert a pacifying and uniting effect in one context and lead to physical violence in another.

All funeral processions shared the most important components and signs. It was always directed by a priest and attended by communities and the grieving family. Nevertheless, their importance paled before the central figure of the rite: the inanimate body of the deceased. The black clad coffin was the central figure of the ritual. The rite was enacted for the body and according to its will, despite the lack of individual agency. According to Keane's theory, powerful signs are able to assimilate and override the contradictory significations, and in any funeral procession the most valent sign was the corpse. The meaning projected onto it was a deciding factor in the interpretation of the whole ritual. In the case of funeral processions, the onlookers could interpret the deceased as either a member of a Church or a citizen of Vilnius. It was primarily decided by the personal history of the deceased, but a clear-cut interpretation was rarely possible due to the multiple affiliations Vilnans held. Therefore, the signs borne alongside the coffin had significant influence over establishing the predominance of either interpretation.

For example, the violence that broke out during the abovementioned funeral procession of the Catholic burgomaster Mikołaj Kliczewski (d. 1667) was triggered by the ambition to get closer to the body and benefit from its significance. The deceased burgomaster was an influential person in the Vilnan urban community and, therefore, the city-dwellers and guilds gathered to pay respects. Aiming to honor his memory, the guilds of tailors and salt merchants started competing for precedence. The ritual and their close proximity provided an occasion for old disagreements to resurface. This was not an example of clashing semiotic ideologies, but one of competition within the bounds of a shared one. Kliczewski's body was seen as the remains of an influential citizen, whose political importance could add to the prestige of the guild. In this case, the civic significance of the ceremony prevailed over the potentially divisive religious interpretation. Civic meaning took primacy due to Kliczewski's distinguished municipal career and the attendance of many urban communities, who came to honor him. Confraternities and guilds rallied under their banners, thus surrounding the body and the cortege with signs of primarily social meaning. The procession escorted Kliczewski to the church of St. Theresa, the necropolis of the Vilnan Catholic elite, but was not challenged by attendant religious dissidents.

In contrast, the funerals invoking primarily religious meaning more often kindled conflicts of semiotic ideologies. Processions that escorted the deceased surrounded by the clergy, candlelight, religious songs, and black-clad coreligionists reminded the onlookers of the denominational strife in Vilnius. Moreover, if we were to follow the interpretation of violence as means for purification and protection of the sacred, as suggested by Natalie Zemon Davis (1973, 59), these were exactly the kind of rites that threatened violence, especially once they traversed the centers of sacral topography of another denomination. Such processions were not necessarily prescribed by denominational dogma—pious Catholics were just as likely to be escorted in such form as the Orthodox, but the Protestant communities were more limited in this regard due to their differing view of materiality. Since complaints about the disturbances of funeral

processions came from both Catholic and Calvinist sides, rites enacted with exclusively denominational signification were more problematic.

As there are only a few descriptions of the funerals that attracted violence, it is useful to return to the analysis of Alexander Przypkowski's escort. Like Kliczewski, the deceased was a political figure, having served as the royal Secretary. As such, his funeral attracted the participation of notable guests, including the Calvinist patron, magnate Krzysztof Radziwiłł. Unlike Kliczewski, Przypkowski was of Arian creed and, same as Maciej Sawicki, whose funeral was attacked in 1581, was a nobleman. Both Przypkowski and Sawicki had little to no connection to the urban community. Although the funeral procession was interconfessional, surrounded the body with various signs, and Catholics described it as pompous, it sowed dissent. Pestering started once the escort passed by the Catholic churches of St. Johns, where it was attacked by the students, and at the church of the Holy Ghost, a Dominican father denigrated the lamenters. The most oft mentioned aggravating circumstance was that the funeral was allegedly very loud. Catholic complaints mention singing, drumming, and firing rifles in front of their churches (Łukaszewicz 1843, 208). This gave precedent for the subsequent silencing of Calvinist rituals. Violence broke out because Przypkowski, like Sawicki, was not imbedded in the society of Vilnius. Therefore, the ritual in his honor failed to establish ties with its onlookers and relied on few signs that bore civic meaning; instead, the funeral emphasized differences of faith.

An increased number of worldly signs encouraged a honorific interpretation, which represented the deceased as a social figure and framed them as a part of the community of citizens, as opposed to a member of a certain church. Making use of socially relevant and recognizable signs, such as a portrait, guild flag, or the sigil of the family, surrounded the dead body with signs carrying hefty honorific meaning and, therefore, emphasized a social interpretation over a religious one. In turn, the religious ceremonies bereft of secular signs were more problematic because they failed to present the deceased as a part of the multiconfessional civic community.

As Robert Hertz has long since argued in his classic anthropological study, the community stricken with death is facing more than the loss of one of its units. Death deprives it of everything that was socially invested in the deceased and, by extent, the way of life one embodied and the community leads. This is the cause for dread that extends throughout the community. Death puts the social equilibrium out of balance and strikes the very core of the community by reminding it of its own mortality (Hertz 1960). Funeral rites are invested with the power to pacify the community, making death a part of communal life. As such, they have inherent political importance. Enactment of shared cultural symbols ensured that individual death would be overcome and life in the community would emerge victorious. In Vilnius that meant making use of the signs capable to establish a connection with the multiconfessional citizenry of the city. In turn, the use of these signs represented the deceased as a part of the civic community and strengthened the group solidarity of Vilnans, as opposed to the faithful of a denomination. Perceived in this manned, although somber, funeral processions were a celebration of communal triumph over death.

Conclusion

The multiconfessional community of 17th century Vilnius was one beset by interdenominational strife and traumatized by a recent occupation. Ritual action could bring back the balance to a community unsettled by death. Funeral rituals were one of the means to do so. However, processions also harbored divisive potential due to the differences implied by denominational dogma. Nonetheless, in time, a local funereal culture developed which drew upon the final rites of all Christian denominations. Therefore, adhering to the locally prevalent norms strengthened Vilnan civic belonging. While most funerals aimed to strike a balance between denominational dogma and civic traditions, some took more divisive forms. Religious funerals were inclined to adhere to the denominational dogma and enact rituals that communicated a predominantly religious meaning, thus representing the deceased as a faithful member of a denominational community. The other type of funerals celebrated the deceased's

worldly achievements and emphasized their belonging to civic communities, transforming a funeral into a ritual of honor. The honorific and religious funerals did not strictly align with denominational norms, since some Catholic and Orthodox funerals were modest, while Protestant rites accommodated local ritual traditions. However, the sacred and secular dimensions were closely intertwined, therefore no purely religious or purely civic funerals were possible.

Nevertheless, the predominance of one meaning over the other was possible and often had a direct bearing on the intended audience and the effect a funeral ritual had. One method to analyze the significance of funeral processions is to interpret the material signs that were used. Following the theory of semiotic anthropology this article has shown that the signs employed in funeral processions had a direct bearing on deciding the overall meaning of the ritual. The predominance of religious signs and the lack of those placing the deceased into the social networks of the city could result in religious unrest, whereas the enactment of publicly recognizable social signs turned a funeral procession into a civic rite strengthening the shared belonging to the city.

Acknowledgments

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