

Abstract: Maladies, dying and the death of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague

According to the testimony of the personal doctors of Rudolf II, the fatally ill emperor remained fully conscious until his death in Prague Castle on 20 January 1612 between six and seven o'clock in the morning. The contents of the autopsy report suggest that neither an advanced infectious, probably syphilitic disease, nor tuberculosis, as was claimed both in older and more recent specialized literature, could have been the only cause of Rudolf II's death. While the health of the emperor was also affected by respiratory and digestive diseases, his death may have been accelerated by heart disease. After the autopsy, embalment and dressing of Rudolf II's dead body, it was publicly exposed in the audience hall on the second floor of Prague Castle South Wing on 21 January. During the night before 6 February the corpse was carried through the Vladislav Hall to the All Saints' Church in Prague Castle where it was temporarily shown in an open coffin. The celebrations of the immortality of the deceased emperor's social body culminated in Catholic funeral services in Antwerp, Brussels, Florence, Madrid, Prague and cities of the Holy Roman Empire. Each of these last farewells to Rudolf II differed in timing, expense, attendance of funeral guests and dramaturgy of symbolical ceremonies. From the display of his corpse until the requiems, Rudolf II entered the collective memory of contemporaries as a virtuous monarch, Christian knight and a fighter for the Catholic confession, who by the grace of God took over the sovereign efforts of his famous ancestors from the Habsburg dynasty.

Keywords: Rudolf II of Habsburg; illnesses; death; autopsy; causes of death; dead corpse display; funeral ceremony; celebration of immortal social body

Schlagworte: Rudolf II. von Habsburg; Krankheiten; Tod; Autopsie; Todesursachen; Aufbahrung des Leichnams; Begräbniszeremonien; Glorifizierung des sozialen Körpers