

# A Century of Funeral Change in Burial Practices: From Church Burial to Cremation Without a Ceremony

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## Abstract

The changes in funeral practices in Czech society which occurred during the 20th century were more significant than those that took place during the whole of the second millennium. Traditional Roman Catholic Christian funerals which were performed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries are described as a starting point from which the focus moves to a study of the major changes which took place from the onwards. The first half of the 20th century was specific in the emergence of cremation. The Communist era (1948–1989) was characterized by a huge expansion in the popularity of cremation (the cremation rate in Czechoslovakia had reached 55% by 1988) as well as by a significant increase in the proportion of secular funerals which, by the end of the 1980s, were being conducted for around three-fifths of the deceased. Contemporary Czech funeral practices can be seen as a direct continuation of those of previous generations and are noteworthy in terms both of having one of the highest cremation rates in Europe (80%) and, even more strikingly, the extraordinarily high rate of cases (around one quarter to one third) in which no funeral ceremony is held at all for the deceased.

## Key words

last rites, funerals, cremation, Czech Republic, 20th century

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During the 20th century, more changes happened in Czech society<sup>1</sup> with regard to how the dead are buried than had occurred since the year 1000. These transformations were related to the socioeconomic consequences of the transitions from societies that were traditional to ones that were modern and then postmodern. Due to the interplay of many circumstances, such changes in the Czech lands were more extensive and happened faster than they did in most other developed countries. In concrete terms this concerns, for example, the majority transition from interments to cremations, from religious funerals to secular ones, and the massive spread of cremations without any kind of ceremony (Nešpor – Nešporová 2011; Nešporová 2011).

Cultural transformations in the treatment of death in (Western) Europe were described by the French historian Ariès (2000) and further elaborated into three ideal types by the English sociologist Walter, according to whom the approach to death changes as societies transform from traditional to modern and then from modern to neomodern or postmodern (Walter 1999; 2002). In societies that are traditional, religion holds the sovereign authority over death. Communities respond as a whole, dealing with death through the prayers and rituals serving that purpose and aided by clergy, family and neighbours. In parallel with the arrival of industrialization, people have begun living longer in modern societies and death has become hidden from view more and more. Authority over death was taken up by the medical profession, and both dying and mourning became matters that are more private. Allegedly, the approach to death in postmodern society has again restored it to the public sphere in western countries. The private has become public again, personal experiences are celebrated and communicated publicly, and the highest authority in the area of death becomes the self. Any authority considered common or sovereign is therefore missing from the picture (Walter 2002).

These approaches to death have also been reflected in funeral practices as they have transformed. While in societies that are traditional such practices were being influenced by religious significance and rituals, an approach to death and burial was introduced by modern societies that was more reserved on that front. The approach postmodern societies use is expressive, or narrative, and in burial practices this is reflected through so-called *personalized funerals* (Walter 1999). These have abundantly spread in recent decades in western societies, and not just as funerals of a secular nature (Schäfer 2007; Walter 1990), but also as religious ones (Garces-Foley – Holcomb

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1 I am using the terms “Czech society”, “Czech environment”, etc., in their most general sense to refer to the majority society or to the environment on the territory of the Czech Republic as it currently exists irrespective of any further specification.

2006; Quartier 2009; Vandendorpe 2000). These are more adapted to the deceased individual's personality, they are *tailor-made funerals* (Howarth 1996). Such ceremonies involve symbols and words reminiscent of the deceased individual's opinions and personal preferences.

There are two aims to this study. The first is to supplement and unify the apparatus for conceptually describing these phenomena and the established terminology in use. The second is to illustrate what the content is of these given terms by describing the primary transformations in burial practices that happened in the Czech environment during the 20th century. The awareness that language reflects the socially-constructed reality of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1999) has led me to attempt to imagine the issue of burial practices through the terminology used during each era.

## Methodology

When describing these transformations in funeral practices, I have taken advantage of concepts used by elites, not by lay people. Such elites, for my purposes, were ethnographers, whether of their own cultures or of exotic ones, and experts in the field of burial. I used different materials as sources, the nature of which varied according to the period under study. I reflect their diversity here; it was not possible to use identical kinds of sources for the information sought throughout the entire period under review, for the simple reason that they did not exist.

Many significant transformations in burial practices had already been prefigured in the Czech environment at the end of the 19th century, while others were not established as valid until the present, i.e., the beginning of the 21st century, and attention is also therefore paid to practices that overlap each other. For the earliest period, the close of the 19th century through the mid-20th century, I chiefly used the ethnographic literature<sup>2</sup> by ethnographers studying their own culture, as well as the cremation movement's materials for promoting that practice, which were popularizing and/or professional.<sup>3</sup> For the subsequent period defined by the communist policy of the state (1948–1989) I worked with similar sources. I began chiefly from pro-cremation literature<sup>4</sup> and methodological materials published to promote civil funerals, augmenting those with the academic literature.<sup>5</sup> For

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2 Articles from the journal *Český lid / Czech Ethnological Journal*.

3 The books issued by *Volná myšlenka* [Free Thinking Association] from the Crematorium association and the Society for the Burning of the Dead (*Společnosti pro spalování mrtvol*), articles from the journals *Krematorium* and later, *Žeh*.

4 Articles published in the journals *Přátelství* and *Žeh*.

5 Articles published in the journals *Český lid* and *Ateizmus*.

this most recent period of time, beginning in 1989 and ending as of this writing, I again used scholarly publications,<sup>6</sup> which of course I significantly supplemented with other sources of text, including funeral home websites and their written communications. I also used sources that were originally oral for this most recent period only, transcriptions of interviews with funeral home staff that were undertaken during my qualitative field research in several selected regions of the Czech Republic in 2011.<sup>7</sup> I conducted 16 non-standardized interviews with the staff of nine selected funeral institutions.<sup>8</sup> The interviews focused, in terms of subject matter, on common contemporary funeral practices in the regions that were surveyed.

I am applying an approach that is *etic* in this research, i.e., I am doing my best from an external vantage point to find the concepts that clearly describe the given situation. My starting point may be the actors' own denominations for this phenomenon, but I am not primarily concerned with capturing the *emic* level.<sup>9</sup> Given the available sample, that would not even have been possible. I am attempting terminological unification, not describing differences that are local in the use of certain words. At the *etic* level, what aided me above all was the academic literature, and this is associated with another characteristic of my chosen approach: Despite being aware of big differences regionally, I am not attempting to capture distinctions that are local. I seek the common phenomena, I am describing developments generally and synthesizing them. In this paper there is not room to concentrate on the variability of burial customs on the basis of individual localities or parts thereof. What is described, therefore, are above all the most common, widespread burial formats. In the area of religion, the funerals are Roman Catholic and the funeral customs of other faiths are not mentioned. The final important point of this applied approach is the fact that when

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6 Studies published in *Český lid, Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Journal* and *Sociální studia / Social Studies*.

7 This research is still underway and will be completed in 2013.

8 The localities were selected in order to represent areas with different degrees of religiosity and the upholding of traditions. This concerned funeral services in the following regions: Central Bohemian (1 funeral institution), Plzeň (2), Liberec (1), Vysočina (1), South Moravia (1), Zlín (2), Olomouc (1). An audio recording and full transcription was performed of five interviews; the other respondents did not agree with being recorded so the interviews were just recorded in writing in field notes.

9 I comprehend the terms *emic* and *etic* as describing two different approaches, and the disparity between them is emphasized by social anthropology. *Emic* is the perspective from within, the actor's own view, which indirectly also involves using the actor's nomenclature. In contrast, *etic* is the perspective from without, the researcher's view that does its best to find clear, neutral denominations for what is being researched (see, e.g., Creswell 2006: 90–96).

following this development, what is accented are especially those elements that were new at one point and that then abundantly spread.

Because changes in burial practices were reflected in language, the conceptual terminology of the matters being researched forms the backbone of this paper. For ease of understanding, I will italicize characteristic terms. First I present traditional Christian burials during the late 19th and early 20th century, followed by a section on how cremation came into circulation gradually during the first half of the 20th century, and then I describe funeral practices during the communist regime, when civil funerals increased massively. That is followed by a comprehensive description of developments after the Velvet Revolution and the contemporary state of affairs (1989–2012). In closing, I describe the development as part of a broader context and recall several structural elements that facilitated these transformations. This study strives to answer the question: What were the main transformations to Czech funeral practices during the 20th century?

### Traditional burial in the late 19th and early 20th century

Although differences did exist that were regional, traditional (Christian) funerals in the Czech lands all followed the same pattern. The *burial* (*pohřeb*) consisted of interring the body of the deceased in the earth or, more precisely, in a *grave/burial site* (*hrob/rov*) or a crypt (*hrobka*)<sup>10</sup> in a cemetery, accompanied by ceremonies that were religious and conducted in the presence of the bereaved. Of course, other customs preceded the burial in the immediate aftermath of the death of the person that were, in certain circumstances, legally regulated by the state (see Bednář 1929; Pohřbívání [Burials] 1903). While this legislation chiefly regulated public health matters, it also addressed certain concerns that were generally prevalent, e.g., the fear of being buried alive (Navrátilová 2004). When burying the bodies of the dead, therefore, already in the late 19th and early 20th centuries many binding legal regulations had to be upheld – it was compulsory, for example, that a doctor examine the dead body.<sup>11</sup> Burial could be allowed 48 hours after death at the earliest, and it was also legislated that a priest was not permitted to bury a body without a medical examination certificate. Before a funeral, the body of the deceased, for public health reasons, was to be kept in a room that was specialized, and if one was not available,

10 “Crypts are graves that are bricked up, hermetically sealed, where corruption begins after air enters.” (Pohřbívání [Burials] 1903: 4)

11 Compulsory medical inspection of dead bodies had been introduced by a decree of the Office of the Court of Empress Maria Theresa as early as 1770 (Pohřbívání 1903).

then the body was to be transported to a *mortuary chamber* (*umrlčí komora*),<sup>12</sup> which as a rule was located at a cemetery or a hospital. It is not surprising that in cities, abundant use was made of morgues.

Burials had clearly-determined customary rules that the bereaved took care to follow as a demonstration of respect for the deceased and as a way to arrange for his or her smooth fate in the afterlife, by which they also “insured” that the spirit would not harm the living after death. The ethnographic literature of the day written by scholars describing their own cultures follows folk customs and superstitions tied to death, above all in village environments (Domorázek 1895; Nerad 1895; Procházka 1903; Šolta 1895; Žipek 1895). These authors unfortunately neglected to describe what such affairs involved in cities and just paid attention to such matters in the context of history (e.g., Horský 1914).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the bereaved and their neighbours in villages actively contributed to preparing the deceased for burial and to the funeral itself. The appropriate ceremonies of a religious nature were then provided by a priest. After somebody dies, “they say a window must be opened so the soul of the deceased has free access to Heaven” (Domorázek 1895: 242). The deceased’s eyes are closed by the family’s oldest member and the body is washed with lukewarm water by an older woman who is designated to do so in the village (she does not have to be related to the deceased). The body was either wrapped in a white *shroud* (*rubáš*), which was an older custom, or attired in clothes that are festive (e.g., the traditional local costume for women – a white head covering, a jacket, a black skirt and an apron) (Domorázek 1895; Procházka 1903; Šolta 1895). After that, the body was placed on a board and then into a coffin, next to the head a candle was lit like those used during *Candlemas* (*hromnice*), and the body was exhibited in the person’s home. In the presence of the dead body, people prayed for the deceased person’s soul and also prayed when they heard the bell toll its *death knell* (*umíráček*) announcing the death (Domorázek 1895; Žipek 1895).

On the day of the funeral, people assembled at the *house of mourning* (*dům smutku*) i.e., the deceased’s dwelling, to pray by the body, which was placed in an open coffin on a bench or on a *bier* (*máry*). Friends and relatives were served a small treat there, e.g., bread and liquor (Žipek 1895). The coffin with the corpse was sprinkled with holy water by the priest, then picked up and taken outside (to a bier or vehicle). When carrying the deceased from the home, it was the custom to touch the coffin three times on the thresh-

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12 According to a bylaw issued by the Interior Ministry on 17 July 1885 (Pohřbívání 1903).

old, expressing either farewell or regret (Domorázek 1895; Žipek 1985). After that, the coffin was carried or transported by a team of horses to the church, where the *requiem mass* (*zádušní mše*) was held. The body, however, did not always have to be present in the church for that mass, which could be held independently of the funeral. Sometimes the body of the deceased was brought from the *house of mourning* straight to the cemetery.

During the *funeral procession* (*pohřební průvod*) people prayed, and the prayer could be conducted as a call and response by a cantor (including inside the *house of mourning*; Žipek 1895). If the cemetery was in another village, the cantor would halt the *funeral procession* either when it reached the limits of the village or after passing beyond them at any of the wayside crosses, where those present prayed for the soul of the deceased (reciting the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary three times each) and performed the *people's forgiveness* (*odprošení lidu*). During this, the cantor or another person present

*“says in a loud voice: ‘Neighbours, brothers and sisters, if the deceased harmed you in life, I beg of you, for God and for all the saints, for a first, second and third time, forgive him (her)!’ Those assembled then answer: ‘May the Lord God forgive him (her).’ Part of the procession (children, the elderly and others) then returned to the village while the rest continued on to the cemetery singing ‘Rest in peace, faithful souls’ (Odpočivejte v pokoji, věrné dušičky)”* (ibid.: 534).

If the cemetery was in the village, then the *people's forgiveness*, with the participation of all in the procession, did not happen until “the earth is scattered over the coffin in the grave” (ibid.: 534). After lowering the coffin into the grave, each person present threw three handfuls of earth onto the coffin (Domorázek 1985). The entire course of this (Roman Catholic) funeral was conducted in a religious spirit; the deceased as an individual was neglected (although her/his social status was not), and the funeral emphasized the relationship with God and, through prayers, the bereaved did their best to ask the Lord's mercy for the deceased. What was accented was the aspect of fellowship, not individuality. “May the souls of all the dead faithful rest in peace through God's mercy.” (Zavadil 1919: 11) The aim was the Christian saving of the soul, and those participating did their best to arrange that for the deceased through the ceremonies during the funeral and through the performed prayers.

The funeral concluded with the bereaved (acquaintances, friends and relatives) gathering, either in a pub or in the *house of mourning*, where the deceased's family would treat everybody to “beer, liquor, coffee, bread, cake

and meat” (ibid.). Alms were distributed to the poor (e.g., small loaves of bread; Procházka 1903). The *funeral banquet* (*pohřební hostina*), in Moravia usually called a *wake* (*trachta*) (Ludvíková 1971), was considered a component essential to the funeral. The holding such a banquet was a matter of prestige and would be omitted only at the funerals of those who were poor (Žipek 1985: 534) and those of new-borns, nursing infants or babies (Ludvíková 1971). Funerals confirm the deceased person’s status in society and therefore differed according to her/his social significance and according to the age at which the person died. The funerals of those of greater social significance were more ostentatious, featuring costlier banquets and decorations and a higher number of persons attending. Children’s funerals and those of young people who never married were specific and used a different symbolism, e.g., the colour white was more abundantly used (at the time still considered a colour of mourning generally in some places; Hochová-Brožiková 1930), as were flowers and symbols associated with weddings (Navrátilová 2004: 241–244; Žipek 1985: 534).

### The arrival of cremation

This new burial method, consisting of *incinerating corpses* (*spalování mrtvol*) and then depositing their remains, introduced significant changes to the ceremonies of funerals. Cremation (and its associated ceremonies) as an innovation affected a small segment of mostly urban, high-status members of society during the first half of the 20th century, and ethnographers writing about their own cultures did not pay attention to it. Its introduction, however, is crucial to the transformations of many different aspects of burial practices, as well as to how they were conceived of overall, and therefore it cannot be neglected.

Cremation was, in the late 19th century, abundantly promoted by the Society for the Burning of the Dead (*Společnost pro spalování mrtvol*),<sup>13</sup> the *Krematorium* (Crematorium) association,<sup>14</sup> and the Freethinkers’ movement (*Volná myšlenka*). The promoters of *burial by fire/cremation* (*pohřeb ohněm/kremace*) wrote about it as funeral “reform” (Mencl 1922; Milde 1932). Prob-

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13 The Society for the Burning of the Dead (*Společnost pro spalování mrtvol*) was active in Prague from 1899–1922; the main task it set itself was to promote the idea of cremation.

14 The Crematorium association (*Krematorium*) was established in 1909. In addition to promoting cremation, it actually arranged funeral services involving incineration for its members. It is active to this day: From 1955–1966 it was called the Association for the Friends of Incineration (*Spolek přátel žehu*) and later the Society of the Friends of Incineration (*Společnost přátel žehu*; 2009).



ably the biggest change connected with cremation was the fact that the funeral ceremonies associated with it were quite frequently civil/secular (the Roman Catholic Church refused cremation until 1963). Instead of Roman Catholic (or some other) eschatology and declarations of hope for the salvation of the soul, during cremations what was at the forefront of interest was the deceased's own personality. Religious ceremonies and preaching by a priest were replaced with a eulogy (*proslov*). Paying last respects to the body of the deceased before its cremation was also dislocated in time from the definitive depositing of the remains, i.e., the ashes in an urn, which also required special treatment. The final burial was not arranged until after the cremated remains were deposited in the urn, which is reminiscent of the concept of what are called "secondary burials" as described by the French anthropologist Hertz at the beginning of the 20th century (Hertz 1960: 27–86). Unlike the Dayaks of the Pacific, however, Czechs considered the funeral ceremony preceding the cremation to be the more important, more ostentatious, and more "public" one. The depositing of the urn usually happened as a private gathering of several of the bereaved – it could be arranged by the Crematorium association, but it did not have to be. However, in the early stages, if the cremation of a person had to be conducted abroad, the main funeral ceremony could still then be performed in the home country of the deceased during the depositing of the *container of ashes* (*popelnice*), as in the case of A. Braunerová (†1890 in Paris, France see Lenderová 2001; Společnost přátel žehu... 2009: 33).

The term *cremation* comes from the Latin *cremare*, i.e., to burn. In the late 19th and early 20th century (and again during the nationalist passions in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War) there was an attempt to favour Czech-language expressions, and therefore the promoters (and opponents) of this burial method spoke most frequently in Czech of *spalování mrtvol* (*burning of the dead*), which was gradually replaced by the term *kremace* (*cremation*), which was easier to use. Roughly from the 1930s the Czech term *žeh* was also more abundantly used; instead of the older phrase *pohřeb ohněm*, what was more frequently used was *pohřeb žehem* (*burial by cremation* instead of *burial by fire*; the journals *Krematorium* and *Žeh*). In the case of crematoria (*krematoria*) i.e., the places where the dead body was incinerated and the funeral ceremony held, no Czech-language term ever became popular, although proposals for one did appear, e.g., *žárov* (Mencl 1939). On the other hand, the Czech term *popelnice* (a decorative receptacle for cremated remains) was abundantly used at the beginning of the 20th century, probably more frequently than the synonymous Latin term *urna* (*urn*).

Despite this promotion of the practice, the cremation of dead bodies was not allowed until Austria-Hungary collapsed. It became possible with

the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic, when it was legally officially permitted in 1919.<sup>15</sup> The number of cremations and crematoria grew gradually during the first half of the 20th century (Nešpor – Nešporová 2011). Across the equivalent of the present-day Czech Republic's entire territory there were a total of 13 crematoria<sup>16</sup> in 1940 and roughly 6% of the deceased were buried by incineration<sup>17</sup> (Mottl 1940/41).

Despite their considerable differentiation and innovation, it is apparent that these burials by incineration were based on the previous practices of (Roman Catholic) church funerals, which also distinctly manifested itself in the terminology used for them. The *ceremonial hall* (*obřadní síň*) of a crematorium was frequently called its *chapel* (*kaple*) and included a *gallery* (*kůr*) (for choral singers) and an *organ* (*varhany*), as there would be in a church (Krematorium 1946; Mencl 1922; Nozar 1931). Naturally there was a *catafalque* (*katafalk*), based on what originally had been “funeral scaffolding used during religious services for the soul of the departed” (Katafalk 1899) on which the coffin was exhibited. The *morgue* (*márnice*) was built into the crematorium, as was the *incinerator* (*žárověšť*). On the other hand, however, when promoting and performing cremations, a conscious attempt was made to define such burials as the opposite of the faith and practices of the Roman Catholic Church: Many crematoria were constructed like (pre-Christian) temples or used new architectural styles (cubism, purism, functionalism) that contraposed them to “classic” churches. For example, the architectural design of the crematorium in Pardubice (completed according to a design by the architect Janák in 1923) was comparable to a Slavonic shrine and has also been described as drawing on temples from antiquity (Hnídková 2011). Similarly, inspiration from the architecture of the ancient east (in my opinion, Assyrian and Babylonian) is also apparent in the case of a crematorium in Brno, completed in 1929 according to a design by the architect Wiesner, or the “temple of progress” in Most, where the (old) crematorium from 1924 was designed by the architect Kirstein (see Nešpor – Nešporová 2011; Svobodová 2009). It was considered indisputable “that the appearance of a crematorium must be serious, but divergent from that of a church” (Krematorium 1946: 3).

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15 This was the so-called “Lex Kvapil” (after the founder and chair of the Crematorium association, the famous dramatist Jaroslav Kvapil). It was further specified by Act No. 464, Coll., issued 7 December 1921, on burial by fire (see Bednář 1929: 830–837; Mencl 1922: 30–31).

16 Three of them were on Sudeten territories annexed by Germany in 1938.

17 In Prague, roughly every fifth deceased person was buried by incineration (22% in 1940).

What were the non-church funeral services accompanying a cremation like, then?<sup>18</sup> In many aspects they attempted to differentiate themselves from Roman Catholic ceremonies. Their introduction and stabilization was distinctly the contribution of the Crematorium association, which arranged them for its members. The ideological ingredients were drawn in large part from the perspective held by the adherents of the Freethinkers, having a “public and ceremonial” character, and were relatively highly attended by the bereaved (*ibid.*: 3). The entire funeral service, in comparison with church funerals, was simplified, lasting roughly half an hour, and there was an attempt to perform the entire ceremony in one place so no funeral procession had to take place. The ideal space to hold it was the *ceremonial hall of the crematorium*, but it could also be held elsewhere, e.g. at a train station prior to sending the body to the crematorium. The course of the services was meant to be simple but dignified and “beautiful” (Milde 1932: 4). Musically they were accompanied by organ playing and sometimes also choral singing. The repertoire was classical music – favourite pieces of the deceased, as long as they were not cheerful. One popular piece was, for example, the patriotic song *Žasviť mi ty slunko zlaté* [Shine for Me You Little Golden Sun] (Pohřby – jaké jsou 1939: 121). The *eulogy* (*pohřební proslov*) was comprised of two basic components: On the one hand, it included a more general, “modern” reflection touching on life and death, and on the other hand it was meant to commemorate and celebrate the life of the deceased. Eulogies were given most frequently by representatives of the associations and corporations of which the deceased had been a member, by friends of the deceased, or as necessary by a representative of the Crematorium association.

In the eulogies, the emphasis was on life, not death. Death was not presented as the definitive end of life, and there was relatively frequent reference to an existence after the death of the body. The infinite nature of the universe was often recalled, “where all is transformed but nothing ever dies” (Nozar 1931: 15), as was the alternation of forms of life, which was considered an eternal process (*Pohřební proslovy* 1930). The personality of the deceased was recalled along with his or her life, as was the fact that the departed symbolically survives in the actions and the work he or she did for others, and in reality also through his or her descendants (*ibid.*; *Kunstovný* undated). The Crematorium association attempted to deliver the same funeral services for all of its members irrespective of their

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18 Cremations could also be accompanied by ecclesiastical ceremonies, which were held most frequently according to the rite of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church or the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren, which had approved of cremations as early as the interwar period.

differences in social status, and this democratization of funerals was also something it promoted. In practice, however, differences did occur in some above-standard ceremonial elements or services (costlier flower arrangements, choral singers, the urn for the box of ashes and the location where it was deposited, ceremonies that lasted a longer time, etc.), although the bereaved had to arrange for those themselves, of course, above and beyond the funeral arranged by the association for its members (Milde 1932: 29; Nepostrádatelný rádce 1926: 110–111; Nozar 1931: 8). After the ceremony, funeral banquets apparently also took place, but the pro-cremation literature does not mention those.

The incinerated physical *remains/relics* (*ostatky/pozůstatky*)<sup>19</sup> were deposited in *containers of ashes/urns* (*popelnice/urny*)<sup>20</sup> that were later placed in *burial grounds for containers of ashes/urns* (*popelnicové/urnové pohřebiště*), either as part of what were called “*groves of urns*” (*urnové háje*) or *columbaria* (*kolumbária*)<sup>21</sup> (e.g., Kremace v Republice 1930: 6; Nepostrádatelný rádce 1926: 114). Urns containing the *ashes* (*popel*), however, could be interred at any cemetery in the family’s grave plot or even stored in the home of the bereaved (Nepostrádatelný rádce 1926: 114), and some authors disapproved of the latter practice for pious reasons (Záhoř – Čížek 1916: 27). It was forbidden to scatter ashes on lawns or anywhere else (Hendrych 1939).

### The communist era and the civil funeral

After the Second World War, with the birth of the communist government, funeral services were gradually transformed in an absolutely programmatic way. The number of church ceremonies significantly declined during those 40 years, while the number of *civil ceremonies* (*občanské obřady*) increased greatly, cremation numbers distinctly increased, and the number of interments also fell. Cremations in Czechoslovakia were profusely promoted during socialism, as ideologically they conformed to many of the communist regime’s aims and concepts. By boosting *cremations with civil funeral services* (*kremace s občanskými pohřebními obřady*), the influence

19 There was no difference in meaning systematized yet in Czech between *ostatky* and *pozůstatky*.

20 Both terms – *popelnice* and *urna* – were used in parallel during the first half of the 20th century, but the word *popelnice* was gradually replaced by the word *urna*. The word *popelnice* also meant “ash can/dust bin”, which is its sole meaning nowadays.

21 On the gradual growth in the number of burial grounds for urns and columbaria see Nešpor – Nešporová 2011: 572.

of churches and religion in society was meant to be weakened (Loukotka 1979: 252–257; Sošková 1984).

In 1955, the government instituted several measures that affected burial practices. First, “cremation was made the equivalent of interment”, which in practice meant the significant simplification of the administrative burden for those requesting cremation. Furthermore, burial grounds were confiscated from churches and handed over to Local Administrative Committees, i.e. to municipalities and the state (Projevy... 1976). Another important transformation followed in 1958, when according to directives it was possible to “*proceed to the scattering of cremated remains as the most advanced format for depositing the deceased’s remains*” (italicized and emphasised by monospacing in the original; *ibid.*: 3). The scattering of ashes was done at the *scattering garden* (*rozptylový palouček*) designated for that purpose inside cemeteries, exclusively municipal ones in practice. Interest in them was comparatively low. The close of the 1960s brought another burial innovation, the introduction of what was called *digging in of the ashes under a piece of lawn* (*vsyp*). Unlike the *scattering of ashes* (*rozptyl popela*) over the surface of a lawn, here the ashes were deposited deep in the ground, which did not require that they be adapted beforehand in any way, nor did it require an apparatus for scattering them. The *digging in of the ashes under a piece of lawn* also better facilitated the designation of a specific site, e.g., one owned by a family, where more than one relative’s ashes could be interred (Svoboda 1970). Digging in of the ashes under a piece of lawn or scattering of ashes, nevertheless, applied to a minority of cremated remains; most were deposited in urns that were then placed into graves or in columbaria.

The overall proportion of church funerals fell, such that while in 1955 three-quarters (75%) of all funerals in the Czech lands were held according to the Roman Catholic rite, by 1987 just two-fifths were (39%) (Babička 2005: 479–480). The proportion of church ceremonies of other faiths, given their low representation in society as a whole, was quite low, a maximum of 2%. Civil funeral services were most widespread in the Central Bohemian Region and Prague where, at the close of the 1980s, they accompanied the burials of the vast majority of the deceased (circa 80%).<sup>22</sup> The advancement of cremations was even more distinct. While in 1948 every tenth dead person underwent cremation in what was then the Czechoslovak Republic, 40 years later burial by incineration was performed for more than half of the dead (55% in 1988) (Davies – Mates

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<sup>22</sup> Deduced from the data on the numbers of Roman Catholic funerals (Babička 2005: 480).

2005: 446, 453). The proportion of cremations was significantly higher in the Czech lands compared to Slovakia.<sup>23</sup> Cremation was frequently linked with a civil funeral service, although from the 1960s it could also be accompanied by Roman Catholic funeral rites, which was slowly taken advantage of more and more. A church paying of last respects to the deceased could, according to the official instructions of the Roman Catholic Church, also be held in a crematorium ceremony hall or other spaces in accordance with local customs as of 1969 (Kotrly 2011: 142). The clergy, of course, was deprived of the opportunity to fully direct the course of such ceremonies and had to adapt to the circumstances customary for holding a funeral in such spaces (Bartošek 1982).

The innovation of this period was the mass spread of *civil funeral services* (*občanské pohřební obřady*) accompanying cremations/incineration (*kremace/žeh*). Such services perpetuated the previous non-church funeral services that had been held in crematoria on the one hand, and on the other hand copied the civil funeral model from Russia (Merridale 2000: 336–337, 351–354). The “democratic nature” of funerals continued to be supported in socialist society. The First Republic emphasis on aesthetics receded, however, and services were meant to be functional first and foremost.<sup>24</sup> In the beginning this was not easy – such funerals were frequently held at Local Administrative Committee offices, in the armouries of fire stations, at train stations or in the buildings of churches that had been deconsecrated, as no other community buildings existed (Navrátilová 1989). Gradually (and on a massive scale from the close of the 1960s) the secular, stand-alone *ceremonial halls* (*smuteční síně*) were built in cities and served all but exclusively for holding funerals (Kadeřábek – Hilgert 1968). In areas where civil funerals did not manage to catch on (especially South Bohemia and Moravia), an attempt was made to augment church funerals at least with civilian speakers giving eulogies (representatives of collectives in workplaces, Local Administrative Committees, committees for civil issues, etc.), which followed the close of the religious services. In such cases the label of *mixed funeral* (*smíšený pohřeb*) was used because, according to the optimistic assessments of the promoters of civil funerals,

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23 Disaggregated data are unfortunately not available. The Prague archive of the Society of the Friends of Incineration (*Společnost přátel žehu*) was destroyed in 2002 by the flood and the society refuses to provide more detailed data about cremations in any event.

24 The central requirement for the “functionality” of the new funeral services was later revised, as people were not interested in it, especially in areas that were more religiously traditional in the North Moravian, South Moravian and South Bohemian Regions (Babička 2005; Bartošek 1982; Škvarka 1975).

“in addition to civil methods the acts of church ritual are also applied” (Bartošek 1982: 17).

In the dissemination of *civil funeral services* (*občanské pohřební obřady*) an important institutional role was played by the *committees for civil issues* (*sbory pro občanské záležitosti*), local organizational units created throughout the entire territory of the Czech (Socialist) Republic as a component of local administrations functioning in collaboration with Local Administrative Committees. These arose gradually beginning in the 1950s, and their main purpose was exactly to put into circulation the civil organization of ceremonies and festivities (Beneš 1983).<sup>25</sup> In terms of rituals of transitions in life, with the aid of these entities, the secular services for welcoming new-borns, bestowing civil identification documents, and marriages (introduced from the 1950s) spread on a massive scale (i.e., civil, non-church analogues of baptism and confirmation), as did the introduction of secular funerals, the realization of which was not compulsory (unlike being given one’s identification or civil weddings). The performance of civil funerals was perceived as one of the most arduous tasks such an entity could undertake (Navrátilová 1989). Even their partial participation in a funeral service, for example, by including certain secular components (the recitation of excerpts from literature, a speech) was considered a success. The committee for civil issues staff had to actively announce their availability for participation in funerals because the interest in their services among the bereaved was low for the most part (Bartošek 1982).<sup>26</sup>

Civil funeral services could, according to local customs, comprise either *paying last respects in one phase* (*jednofázové rozloučení*) at the coffin (most frequently in the secular funeral hall or graveside, as the case might be), or *paying last respects in two phases* (*dvoufázové rozloučení*, the first phase in the secular funeral hall/at the workplace/in the house of mourning and the second phase graveside; *ibid.*: 11). *Paying last respects in two phases*

25 A significant task for the civil issues bodies was the celebration of community members’ jubilees (e.g., 70th, 75th and 80th birthdays or “golden weddings” for the 50th anniversary of a marriage). In some communities these bodies work as part of local administrations to this day, and most of their main activity is exactly this kind of anniversary celebration of individual jubilees for senior citizens and the collective welcoming of newborns.

26 The same was confirmed in an interview (23 November 2011) with a staffer of a funeral home who had worked in a civil issues body during communism. In his experience, active attendance by members of that body during funerals was not very frequent (in West Bohemia). They had funeral scripts that they were meant to memorize, but they were able to speak during funeral services only from time to time. The enterprise where the deceased had worked was represented most often during these occasions.

was associated with a funeral procession from the secular funeral hall to the cemetery, where the coffin was placed into the grave. *Paying last respects in one phase in the secular funeral hall* (or graveside) was public and usually involved three components: music, a speech, and the recitation of a poem. It was attended by the deceased's relatives, colleagues from work, friends, neighbours, and representatives of the social organizations to which the deceased had belonged while alive. It lasted roughly 15–30 minutes (Metodické pokyny 1980). The ceremony usually began by listening to a musical piece, followed by a recitation of an excerpt of literature, followed by another musical piece (most frequently sung), and then the main speaker gave the eulogy. After that, shorter speeches could be made by others. To close the ceremony another musical piece was heard, during which the coffin disappeared from view (a curtain was drawn or it was conveyed mechanically into another room). The main content of the civil *eulogies/funeral speeches* (*pohřební/smuteční projevy*) was commemoration of the deceased's life, her/his accomplishments and work, which were broadly contextualized within the socialist world view. The deceased's work, therefore, had to have aided with the building of socialist society above all (Kopčan 1965; Metodické pokyny 1980). If a political agent or party member died, his/her merits were highlighted in the form of his/her "active work in the Czechoslovak Communist Party", which "prepared a better, more just lot in life for himself/herself and for his/her children", and his/her struggle for a "new social order" was similarly mentioned, as was his/her "contribution to the prosperity of our beautiful socialist homeland" (Občanské obřady 1978: 11–12). The working-class origin of the deceased was also mentioned, and especially for women, the raising of children. An emphasis on commemorating the life and the accomplishments of the deceased can be considered an element of personalization in these funeral services, although just some of the individual's activities and aspects were highlighted in particular, in accordance with the convictions of the day. This personal element was not specifically just for civil or mixed funeral services, but gradually permeated church ceremonies as well.

The ideal civil funeral service was meant to also fulfil an educational function, exactly through the speeches which, in addition to providing information about the deceased's life, contained more general thoughts about a worldview based on a materialistic, Marxist perspective. Poetry or at least excerpts of literary works that conformed to communist ideas were read (Škvarka 1975: 357), for which handbooks of "appropriate" quotations were compiled (Občanské obřady [Civil Ceremonies] 1978; Občanské pohřby [Civil Funerals] 1975; Projevy na rozloučenou



[Speeches of Last Respects] 1976). Death was perceived as the absolute end, and reflections about an existence after the death of the body disappeared from these speeches. Live music performances were slowly replaced by the playing of recorded music. It was also possible to hold a similar *paying of last respects* over an urn (in the ceremonial hall, at the burial ground for incinerated remains, at a family tomb) (Bartošek 1982), but such cases were rare.

In the handbooks of that time about the organization of civil funerals, the terms introduced during the interwar period by the Crematorium society were mostly used, of course with the proviso that some concepts of earlier date were no longer used, such as *container of ashes* (*popelnice*), *burial by fire* (*pohřeb ohněm*), or *incinerating corpses* (*spalování mrtvol*). Instead, more modern expressions took their place – *urn* (*urna*), *burial by cremation* (*pohřeb žehem*), and *cremation* (*kremace*). Socialist *funeral services* (*smuteční obřady*) ideally were held in secular *funeral halls* (*smuteční síně*) and had two components of the utmost importance – the music and the *funeral speeches* (*smuteční projevy*) (Bartošek 1982; Metodické pokyny 1980). Another innovation was the above-mentioned legalization of *digging in of the ashes under a piece of lawn* (*rozptyl*), which introduced a new way to lay the ashes to rest.

### Mixed practices after the Velvet Revolution in 1989

The political overthrow of 1989 introduced economic and social transformations, and the area of burials was touched by these as well. Of course, these changes were more gradual and fully continued the practices of the previous period. Many of the state-owned funeral services may have been privatized, but the same people were still working in them, and the bereaved themselves did not change overnight either. An expansion of what was offered by such services may have gradually taken place, but it never drastically exceeded the framework of common customs locally. What is apparent is a certain fragmentation and lack of clarity in the terminology used, both by undertakers and the general public. This was caused by changes in the customs whereby commonly-used words no longer precisely corresponded to the content of what was being referenced, but those new meanings had not yet been established in general awareness and usage.

The most frequent place to hold funeral services remained the same – the already-built or even newly-built *ceremonial funeral halls* (*obřadní smuteční síně*), from which symbols such as the hammer and sickle disappeared and to which a crucifix might be added. The proportion of church to civil ceremonies apparently remained roughly the same, with church funeral

services being held for between a quarter and a third of the deceased.<sup>27</sup> Numbers of cremations, on the other hand, continued to grow, so that in 2010 as much as 81% of human remains were being incinerated.<sup>28</sup>

The biggest change in the most recent period has been the distinct growth in what are called *funerals without a ceremony* (*pohřby bez obřadu*) or *burials without a ceremony* (*pohřbívání bez obřadu*). This involves arranging for a cremation to be performed without any funeral service being organized for the bereaved. It is exactly in these cases that it would be appropriate to refine the terminology. The concept in use of the *funeral without a ceremony* (*pohřeb bez obřadu*), or a *ceremoniless funeral* (*bezobřadný pohřeb*) is, given the previous use of the word *funeral*, a contradiction in terms. *Funeral* (*pohřeb*) to date has been used to designate a public or at least a collective ceremonial paying of last respects to the dead, followed by a burial or cremation. In cases where a collective ceremony is lacking and the bodily remains are not being laid to rest, the word *funeral* (*pohřeb*) should not be used. On the other hand, it is not a problem to speak of a *burial without a ceremony* (*pohřbení/pohřbívání bez obřadu*), i.e., the mere act of disposing of a dead body (whether by direct burial underground or cremation). In the vast majority of cases, these are *incinerations/cremations without a ceremony* (*zpopelnění/kremaci bez obřadu*). Kotrlý (2011: 151) has also pointed out this deficiency of terminology in association with the unauthorized exploitation of lawful claims to a day off of work on the day that a funeral is held. *Burial without a ceremony* (*pohřbívání bez obřadu*) is most profusely practiced in Central, North and West Bohemia, where as many as half of the deceased may be cremated without any kind of ceremony. The proportion of such burials is distinctly lower in the other areas of Bohemia and in Moravia, where in some regions of South Moravia, according to the local owners of mortuaries, *funerals without a ceremony* (*pohřby bez obřadu*) are never held.

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27 Data that would be exact do not exist. According to the Czech Bishops' Conference, in 1995 there were a total of 27,871 Roman Catholic funerals on the territory of the Czech Republic, while in 2002 there were 25,586 such funerals (more recent data have not been published; ([http://www.snem.cirkev.cz/download/Duchovni\\_sprava\\_1995.htm](http://www.snem.cirkev.cz/download/Duchovni_sprava_1995.htm); [http://www.snem.cirkev.cz/download/Duchovni\\_sprava\\_2002.htm](http://www.snem.cirkev.cz/download/Duchovni_sprava_2002.htm); accessed 1 April 2012). If we correlate these numbers to the number of deaths for those years (Zeměli 2005: 22), we can conclude that a Roman Catholic funeral was held for roughly one-quarter of all those who passed away (24%). There is also the assumption that these data are underestimates; some Roman Catholic ceremonies were not recorded by churches, as they were held with cremations (Kotrlý 2011: 127).

28 Data according to The Cremation Society of Great Britain (<http://www.srgw.demon.co.uk/CremSoc5/Stats/Interntl/2010/StatsIF.html>; accessed 1 April 2012).

However, there are differences everywhere when comparing urban and village environments. While it is more common to hold some form of funeral service in villages, in cities a higher proportion of the bereaved decide not to hold any ceremony at all.<sup>29</sup>

In recent years, the practice of holding a *funeral service/paying of last respects* (*smuteční obřad/poslední rozloučení*) just for the most intimate circle of the bereaved and friends of the deceased, i.e., excluding the broader public, has begun. On the *funeral announcement/obituary* (*smuteční oznámení/parte*) this variation is called a *paying of last respects with the immediate family* (*poslední rozloučení v úzkém kruhu rodinném*) and usually lists at least the location where the last respects can be paid, and sometimes also the date and time.<sup>30</sup> This paying of last respects is usually held in a funeral hall and is organized by an undertaker, although it does not have to be. It can be of a character that is purely private and takes place either in the house/apartment/garden of the deceased or the bereaved, at a restaurant, or at the cemetery. The body of the deceased is not there, although the cremated remains might be present. Overall such funeral ceremonies tend to be simpler, less formal, and involve fewer ceremonial components, whether they are organized by undertakers or by the bereaved. From the perspective of social anthropology, the holding of such events is important, as bidding a collective (albeit non-public) farewell to the deceased has a broader psychosocial significance (Friedman 1982; Van Gennep 1997; Malinowski 1954; Špatenková 2008). From interviews with funeral professionals it came to light that some actors (bereaved persons ordering funerals and funeral professionals) currently also use the term *without a ceremony* (*bez obřadu*) to designate cases where a funeral service of paying last respects is being held and is being organized by the undertaker, but has been simplified to a certain extent. This most frequently has to do with the service not being public, i.e., it is held just

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29 I have managed to acquire exact statistics just from three Czech funeral homes. In this case, “without a ceremony” means that the ceremony was not ordered from that particular undertaker. Whether the bereaved themselves then organized a substitute ceremony or not is unknown. The proportions of *burials without a ceremony* (*pohřbení bez obřadu*) were: 45% at a business in West Bohemia (of a total of 142 deceased in 2011), 54% at a private undertaker in Central Bohemia (of 265 deceased in 2010) and 21% at an undertaker in the area of the Vysočina Region near the border with Moravia (of 206 deceased in 2010).

30 These same words (...we will be/have been paying our last respects with the immediate family – ...*se rozloučíme/rozloučili v úzkém kruhu rodinném*) are very often used on funeral announcements in cases where no funeral service is ever held. In that case, no place, date or time are listed.

for the immediate family and closest invited friends, or the ceremony is simplified, for example, by not including a eulogy or music.<sup>31</sup>

*Eulogies* (smuteční proslovy) in recent years have been reduced to a minimum, and therefore today the main component of secular funeral services is music, most frequently recordings.<sup>32</sup> The most favourite compositions are classical ones such as *Ave Maria* (Schubert or Gounod), *Poem* (Fibich), *Nabucco – Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves* (Verdi), or the Czech popular song *Tam u nebeských bran* [There at the Gates of Heaven] (Maiello 2005). The eulogy is given by a professional speaker and commemorates the life of the deceased, frequently in very broad strokes, mentioning the dates of birth and death, while the person's profession and other characteristics are just mentioned sporadically (the speaker frequently draws the information just from the obituary). Currently most non-church eulogies are not anchored in any explicit ideology, because those attending the ceremonies are not defined by a congruent worldview to be made use of by the speaker. The eulogy, therefore, rarely lasts longer than five minutes and sometimes just comprises a nominal remembrance of the deceased and an expression of gratitude to those in attendance. The number of ceremonies without eulogies is increasing, and as such they involve just listening to four or five musical pieces; it is, therefore, left exclusively to those present what they are thinking about during that time (privately, in silence; *ibid.*). This variation is more frequently selected if it is a *ceremony of paying last respects with the immediate family* (*obřad smutečního rozloučení v úzkém kruhu rodinném*).

After 1989, changes were made to legislation that had an impact on the area of burials. Above all, the options for how to handle human remains that had been incinerated were relaxed. The law on how to handle them no longer stipulates that they have to be interred at a burial ground of some kind. While no aggregate inventory exists, it is apparent that cremated remains are more and more frequently ending up somewhere besides in

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31 In previous research during interviews about death and burials with informants of middle age, it seemed the words *ceremony* (*obřad*) and *ritual* (*rituál*) were perceived by many of them as too formal, as associated with religion or with antiquated customs, and they defined themselves as against such procedures. Those are unequivocally external (*etic*) labels, those involved in these procedures prefer the general, less formal term paying last respects (*rozloučení*). Misunderstandings can therefore easily arise in cases where the bereaved do not want a *ceremony* but do want to *pay their last respects* in the funeral hall.

32 Recorded music is more common in Bohemia than in Moravia, where in recent years it has been gaining ground, but where in many ceremonial halls the norm remains live music played by an organ. During funeral processions and ceremonies at the graveside, live music is used all but exclusively.

cemeteries. The new Act on Funerals (no. 256/2001) has defined some of the basic concepts involved with precision. First, it differentiates between *human remains* (*lidské pozůstatky*), defined as “a dead human body, in whole or in part, or an aborted foetus for burial”, and *processed remains* (*lidské ostatky*), defined as “human remains after burial” (including ashes after cremation). While the handling of *human remains* is regulated strictly by many bylaws, the handling of *processed remains* is much less regulated. *Burial* (*pohřbení*) is defined as “depositing human remains in a crypt or grave at a public burial ground or incinerating them at a crematorium” (Act No. 256/2001 Coll.). Many rules are established governing the operation of funerary services, crematoria, and public burial grounds, including advertising limitations. If nobody can be found to arrange the burial of a dead body, the law requires the local municipality where it is located to arrange that.<sup>33</sup> In this context, the term *social funeral* (*sociální pohřeb*) is commonly used today (Haškovcová 2000: 94–95; Kotrlý 2012). This indicates a case where the burial is ordered from the funeral company and paid for by a municipal department or municipality. However, no public funeral is in fact held – what is arranged is just the handling of the dead body, its incineration in a crematorium and subsequently (at the earliest, within one year), the depositing of the ashes in an urn in a mass grave at the cemetery.<sup>34</sup> The number of cases in which burials are organized by a municipality has seen a steep increase in recent years (Kotrlý 2012).

Cremated remains (*zpopelněné ostatky*) are usually deposited in cemeteries (mostly in graves, columbaria or “groves of urns”),<sup>35</sup> but alternatives are appearing more and more frequently. Ashes in an urn can be kept in an apartment (Heřmanský 2003), deposited in a garden, or scattered in nature, in a river, etc., according to the wishes of the deceased or the bereaved. It is possible to hold a funeral service in association with depositing cremated remains, but this is just done in a very few cases. Some mortuaries hold an annual or an even more frequent *collective ceremony/commemorative ceremony* (*kolektivní obřad/pietní akt*) for laying such remains to rest *en masse* through

33 The municipality, of course, also has the right to ask the heirs of the deceased to subsequently cover the burial costs.

34 The municipality also has the option of transferring cadavers to a medical facility to be used in research or teaching. If the human remains have not yet been identified, they have to be deposited in a grave, as do the corpses of foreign nationals.

35 It is not possible to perform the scattering or the digging in of the ashes under a piece of lawn at all cemeteries, as that requires a special space, called the scattering or digging in garden (*rozptylová* or *vsypová loučka*; Stejskal – Šejvl 2011: 75–104). Cemeteries frequently facilitate just one of those options, but sometimes do not make either possible.

the format of *digging in the ashes under a piece of lawn*, to which the bereaved can invite guests. Elsewhere, the depositing of the ashes is more of a technical affair arranged by those administering the cemetery.

Despite the fact that the range of what mortuaries offer has expanded due to their privatization, the variety mainly concerns their material aspects. There is no doubt that the choices of kinds of coffins, urns, floral arrangements, formats for obituaries, etc., have multiplied. However, how ceremonies take place has practically not changed, and the bereaved most frequently keep requesting the same kinds of services. Even if some mortuaries have attempted to introduce new customs or to expand the range of their services (for example, by copying practices from abroad), for the time being it seems there is no interest in them. One example is a funeral company in West Bohemia offering what it calls on its website an *English funeral (anglický pohřeb/quiet funeral)*, which means the organization of a discreet funeral service (church or civil) from which the public is excluded, the arranging of a funeral banquet, transportation and accommodation of the funeral guests, and floral decorations. Six months on from the advertising of this option, nobody had ordered it. The same firm also offers a funeral service called a *paying of last respects with the urn of the deceased (rozloučení s urnou zesnulého)* in a ceremonial hall for bereaved persons who, for example, were on a business trip, or on vacation, or were abroad or were otherwise indisposed and unable to arrange for a funeral service to be held before the cremation of the deceased. Such a *paying of last respects with the urn* has been ordered just three times in recent years, according to the funeral home owner (who arranges approximately 150 burials per year). The importation of customs from abroad (e.g., American books of condolence, embalming, personalized funerals, etc.) into the Czech environment, where there is rather a tendency to minimize funeral services, appears to have not been very successful today. Moreover, most funeral companies do not even attempt to introduce innovations.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that the changes in the area of burials and the funeral services associated with them have been ground-breaking during the last 120 years in the Czech lands, a clear continuity in this area is also apparent. That continuity is often reflected exactly in the language, especially in the language as it is commonly used (*emically*), and can manifest in two different ways. Either this involves an acceptance and establishment of older traditions that is unconscious, stemming from the fact that the actors are unable to imagine anything else, or the actors explicitly define what will

take place with reference to past customs and do their best to respond to them by doing the opposite. However, even that kind of approach can be considered a continuity at a general level, or rather the continuation of an older practice. For the most part, after all, there are never just two options, and a definitive way of responding critically to certain customs or ideologies is therefore a direct (antithetical) link to a past state of affairs. While the outliers invent new customs and ideas and use new terms for new practices, it takes a certain amount of time for other actors – ordinary people – to begin to use these new words, and some of them never catch on at all.

During the course of the 20th century, changes in burial practices were based to a significant degree on ideology, whereby the religious (Christian) worldview of death and an existence after death was pushed into the background during the first half of the 20th century and replaced by medical and public health principles; this is also associated with the freethinking, progressive worldview promoting this transformation in burials from being Christian interments as traditionally undertaken to being cremations. The high degree of Czech society's secularization during the first half of the 20th century, in association with the anti-church focus of a not insignificant part of the population (Gollová 1984; Kudláč 2005; Nešpor 2010) prepared the way for burial practices to rapidly transform.

With the birth of the communist regime, another basic ideological shift transpired: The materialistic perspective was promoted on the basis of Marxist philosophy, supporting atheist ideas and denying any existence after the death of the body. These changes gradually permeated burial methods when, during the second half of the 20th century, interest in cremations distinctly grew in the Czech Republic (expressly promoted because they conformed to the ideology of socialism). As a consequence, the Czech Republic in the year 2000 found itself the number one country in Europe when it came to cremations (Davies – Mates 2005: 455). Similarly, during the communist regime, the practice of *civil funerals* instead of *church funerals* managed to spread. The centralized government and political situation clearly endeavoured to transform burials, playing an important role at that time and contributing distinctly to the transformations in funeral services and burials that have lasted until the present.

After the collapse of the communist regime, the anticipated return to indigenous religious traditions did not happen, and therefore *secular funerals* are extant in the present-day Czech Republic to a degree that has practically no equal elsewhere in the world. A comparably high proportion of non-church funeral services today probably just exists on the territory of the former East Germany (Schlott 2011; Schulz 2005) and in New Zealand

where, unlike in the Czech Republic, even the holders of secular services frequently involve components of religion in the funeral services, for example, in the form of Christian prayers (Schäfer 2007). The current era is characterized by the absence of any basis for a common ideology (corresponding to notions of postmodern societies), which clearly manifests itself precisely in Czech burial practices. This state of affairs, unlike those in other also highly-secularized countries (e.g., the Netherlands; Venbrux – Peelen – Altena 2009), however, did not result in the Czech case from turning to the “I” as the highest authority and the holding of funerals that are personalized, but has led to the mass cancellation of funeral services altogether. In the Czech case, after all, ceremonies concentrating on the individual’s life had been abundantly promoted and realized under the communist regime, which is to say, earlier than in comparison with global trends. After the political overthrow, what happened was rather the negation of that approach. Currently, in the average funeral service, personalization is not applied much,<sup>36</sup> services mostly are held according to the same scenarios without highlighting the personality of the deceased. Instead of happening during funerals, personalization can be found apart from them, in mourning rituals that are new, such as the building and maintaining of small private memorials to the victims of traffic accidents along roadsides (see Nešporová 2008). The current massive spread in the Czech Republic of cremations without any ceremony (*zpopelňování bez obřadu*) during a time of peace and prosperity is new and probably unique in the world.

In these changes to burial practices, an important role has also been played by the professionalization of this field, whereby the competences once exercised by the bereaved and the clergy gradually were transferred to cemetery and mortuary staff. In the Czech environment, because of the political transformations of the 20th century, the owning and operating of cemeteries and mortuaries was transformed more than once, and there is no doubt that this also contributed to this more distinct transformation in burial practices. Municipally-run or privately-run funeral homes, municipally-run crematoria, and church-run cemeteries, for the most part, were transferred into the administration of the state during communist rule, which facilitated the across-the-board implementation of basic changes to burials. After 1989, many mortuaries passed into private hands, but many of them, as well as most cemeteries and crematoria, continue to be administered by municipalities or municipal departments (Eliáš – Kotrlý et. al. 2006). The existing model for Czech funeral services is therefore

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36 Numerous exceptions can be found, but they are not the majority-society practice.



influenced to a significant degree by the fact that they are subject in part to business practices and in part to the state administration. If we apply Walter's findings (Walter 2005), we can confirm that in the Czech environment at the present time there are features typically associated with each form of mortuary ownership. On the one hand, there is the critique of the commercialized approach and the making of money on burials by private firms, on the other hand a critique of the smaller range of choices, monopoly on prices, and secular approach in the case of the state (municipal)-owned mortuary facilities. The unequivocal general trend of the last few decades in Czech burial practices has been the simplification of funeral services, their minimization, and their privatization.

For easier orientation, the table below contains the terms referencing burial practices during the last century. Despite having been gradually introduced, most of them can also be used today. In conclusion, it is necessary to recall several of the findings that could lead to greater precision and unification of the terminology describing the current state of affairs. Above all, the term *funeral* (*pohřeb*) should just be used in cases where the deceased is buried with an accompanying funeral service. In the absence of any kind of collective funeral service, it would be more appropriate to use the simple term *burial* (*pohřbení*), which indicates the culturally acceptable disposal of a dead body (whether by cremation, interment, or some other way). Many *social funerals* (*sociální pohřby*) arranged by municipalities, therefore, are just social burials (*sociální pohřbení*) and not funerals. In the Czech language it also seems important to me to differentiate between *human remains* and *processed remains* (*pozůstatky* and *ostatky*), in accordance with Hertz's universally applicable concept (Hertz 1960). The *human remains* are the dead body in whole or in part, while the *processed remains* are what remains after the burial process, i.e., bones without soft tissue or ashes. I would like to dedicate a final note to the term *funeral service* (*smuteční obřad*) or *burial ceremony* (*pohřební obřad*). These phrases clearly indicate actions that the actors sometimes deliberately, intentionally obscure by using the more general expression *paying of last respects* (*poslední rozloučení*). To make it clear whether a collective burial/funeral ceremony/service is actually being held or not, it would be good to prefer the use of those terms in the academic literature.

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## Table

Terms used to describe burial practices from the close of the 19th century to the present:

	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> and early 20 <sup>th</sup> century	First half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Communist era (1948–1989)	The present (1990–2012)
<b>POHŘEBNÍ BURIAL</b>	<i>do země</i> in the earth	<i>ohněm/žehem/kremace</i> by fire/incineration/cremation	<i>kremace/žeh</i> cremation/incineration	<i>kremace/zpopelnění</i> cremation/incineration
	<i>rob/hrob</i> burial site/grave	<i>popel/zpopelněné tělesné pozůstatky</i> ashes/incinerated bodily remains	<i>popel</i> ashes	<i>sociální pohřbení / „sociální pohřeb“</i> social burial/“social funeral”
	<i>hrobka</i> crypt	<i>popelnice/urna</i> → <i>kolumbárium</i> container for ashes/urn → <i>columbarium</i> →	<i>rozptyl</i> → <i>rozptylový palouček</i> scattering → scattering garden	<i>tělesné pozůstatky</i> → <i>ostatky</i> bodily/human/ physical remains → processed remains
		→ <i>urnový háj</i> → “grove of urns”	<i>vsyp</i> → <i>vsypová loučka</i> digging in of the ashes under a piece of lawn → digging in garden	
<b>POHŘEBNÍ OBŘADY</b>	<i>církevní church</i>		<i>sekulární/občanské</i> secular/civil	
<b>BURIAL CEREMONIES</b>	<i>umíráček</i> death knell	<i>pohřební proslov</i> eulogy	<i>smlíšené</i> mixed	<i>smuteční obřad/„poslední rozloučení“</i> funeral service/“paying last respects”
	<i>zádušní mše</i> Requiem Mass		<i>jednofázové rozloučení</i> paying last respects in one phase	<i>obřad smutečního rozloučení v úzkém kruhu rodinném</i> ceremony of paying last respects for the immediate family
	<i>pohřební průvod</i> funeral procession		<i>dvoufázové rozloučení</i> paying last respects in two phases	<i>smuteční proslov</i> eulogy
	<i>odprošení lidu</i> the people's forgiveness		<i>smuteční projev</i> eulogy	<i>kolektivní obřad/piětní akt</i> collective ceremony/ commemorative ceremony
	<i>pohřební hostina/trachta</i> funeral banquet/wake			
<b>MATERIÁLNÍ ZAJIŠTĚNÍ</b>	<i>umířiči komora/márnice</i> mortuary chamber/morgue	<i>krematorium</i> crematorium		<i>smuteční oznámení/partie</i> funeral announcement/obituary
<b>MATERIAL ARRANGEMENTS</b>	<i>katafalk</i> catafalque	<i>žárověš</i> incinerator	<i>smuteční síň</i> secular funeral hall	
		<i>obřadní síň</i> ceremonial hall		

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