



*British Royal and State Funerals,
Music and Ceremonial since
Elizabeth I,*

Mattias Range

(Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016).

Review by: Ondřej Stolička

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Royal funerals are amongst the most interesting, and also important, ceremonial occasions in a nation's history. When the natural body of the king dies, the king's spiritual body transitions into a symbol of his office with the divine right to rule. German scholar Matthias Range's latest book is the first to offer a systematic study of the ceremony of, and the music performed at, British royal and state funerals over the past 400 years, beginning with Queen Elizabeth I, and continuing until Baroness Thatcher's in 2013. His subject has an important place due to its uniqueness. Music reminds historians that people perceive ceremonies and events with all five senses. Music and other sounds also had very important roles during court rituals, and they completed the picture of a festive atmosphere. Without Range's research into the role of music, this aspect of ceremonial events may have fallen silent.

Range has structured his work chronologically, and has presented the funerals from the early modern period through to the present day. His *longue durée* approach allows him to demonstrate the differences and changes that occurred over several centuries. However, certain ceremonial acts appear to have overwhelmed the author. He resorted to short descriptions of some of the funerals, and also ignored some ceremonies, including the funerals of Anne of Denmark in 1619 and James I in 1625 (56-61). While one could reproach Range, arguing that he could have given more attention to other aspects of ceremonial events, or that he could have chosen a shorter time period to explore, this would be a mistake. Range presented all aspects of funerals, and music remained the focus of his attention throughout his research. For this reason, chapter eight of his book is the most seminal. In this chapter the author analyses funeral ceremonies from the twentieth century, and connects this period with traditions and rituals from the early modern period. Range's conclusion is that: "in terms of music, the aspect of 'invented traditions' seems a lot weaker. Even though the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the reinforcement, rediscovery and even 'invention' of some traditions, especially at royal occasions, an elaborate musical programme at funerals was not reintroduced" (329).

While the first chapter, which includes ceremonial acts from the seventeenth century, may appear out of place, it is actually an accomplished analysis of the subject. An example of this dichotomy can be found in a short section describing the funeral of the Duke of Rothes in 1681. Range resorted to speculation due to a lack of quality sources, noting "nothing seems to be

known about the music at the actual funeral which may after all have been rather simple and not have included much music, at least probably no choral music” (76). Range demonstrated the difficulty in determining the music present by discussing an illustration that shows only one trumpeter on horseback, which may either indicate the presence of at least one musician at the funeral, or that one was not present at the ceremony and was only added as a symbolic, token figure by the painter. Thus, like many scholars, Range has focused on royal ceremonies, rather than other elite funerals like the aforementioned Duke of Rothes, due to the plethora of quality sources available for extensive research. Modern state and royal funerals were especially interesting occasions, with their specific rituals, music, and pageantry, which Range described in detail in chapters seven and eight.

However, Range understands how to deal with the gaps in source material due to his extensive experience. His speculations, where necessary, do not disadvantage the reader in any sense. The author offered logical and interesting possibilities, which could be quite close to the reality of these ceremonies. Overall, Range has presented an interesting theme, and has fulfilled what he promised at the outset of the work. He offered a quality analysis of music and its role during British royal and state funerals from the early modern period through the present day. One interesting aspect was the slow change from public funerals to private and back again to public today, an idea also championed by Paul S. Fritz in “From ‘Public’ to ‘Private’: The Royal Funeral in England, 1500-1830” (in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley, 1981, 61-79). Range also introduces various historical texts and songs important in ceremonial funerals to the reader. The last chapter clearly shows the historical evolution from the anonymous medieval trumpeter to the modern-day music of Elton John. Range also points out that while both music and other sounds had important roles during royal and state British funerals, silence holds an important place at these occasions as well. “Through the centuries, plain silence has been a strong and meaningful ingredient within the different funeral ceremonies [such as] ... during the lying-in-state, where it is one of the main characteristics of the performance of the ceremony” (320). Finally, the appendix gives a complete and systematic overview of the music used during all the funerals that Range researched for this work.

In conclusion, this book presents new and interesting ideas that can support future research. It also offers historians different points of view on traditional fields of study—such as ceremonies—which are not usually explored through music, sounds, or even through silence. For the above-

mentioned reasons, it is possible to recommend the presented book by Matthias Range to all types of readers.

ONDREJ STOLICKA

University Autónoma of Madrid