



78 Ilaria del Caretto of Lucca is commemorated by one of the tenderest of early Renaissance tombs, by Jacopo della Quercia

was placed above the doorway of Sta Maria Antica in Verona, but in such a way that its upper storey and its rider were free-standing. Most Italian tombs are, unlike the shrines, placed against church walls, but they share with the shrines the Gothic gabled canopy, the sarcophagus and the supporting caryatids or pillars. The tomb of

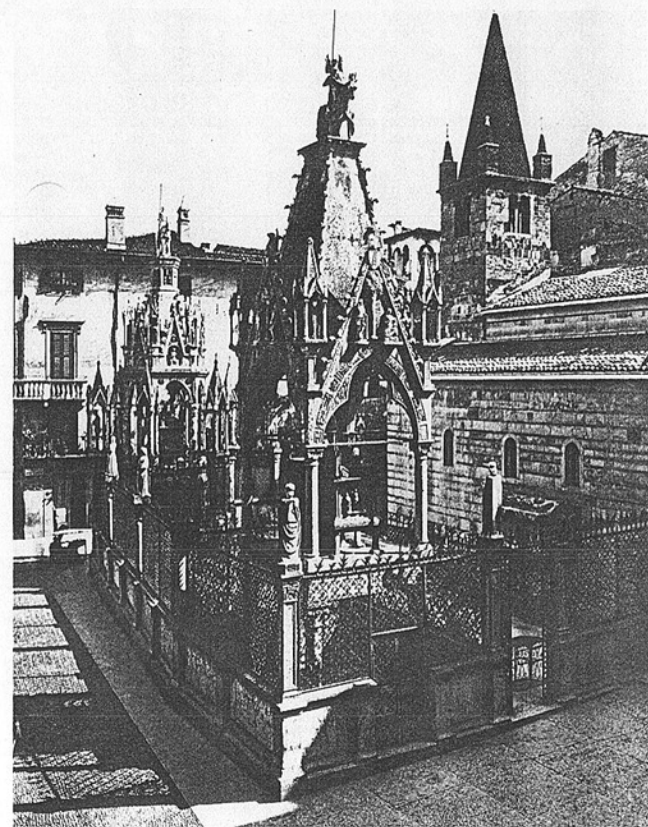
79 Robert of Anjou in Sta Chiara in Naples, partially destroyed in the Second World War, was one of the most lavish examples of the style, and included, as well as three representations of the king, figures of all the Neapolitan royal family. Free-standing chest tombs with recumbent effigies, normal north of the Alps, were rare

78 in Italy; and the reassembled tomb of Ilaria del Caretto, that for Ruskin 'altered the course of my life', and whose effigy might pass for the diluted essence of all those figures that lie on Gothic tomb-chests, probably lacks a superstructure of a more Italian and, in all likelihood, distracting kind. Ilaria lies with her eyes closed in death. Beneath the horsemen of the Scaliger tombs lie effigies of the dead. Popes and cardinals sleep their last sleep soundly under Gothic as under Renaissance canopies: Robert of Naples, surrounded by virtues and relatives, enthroned in the highest niche, is still an old and wearied corpse. But if there is a quiet realism about the Italian approach, realism of a grimmer nature was to be found in the North in the later Middle Ages.

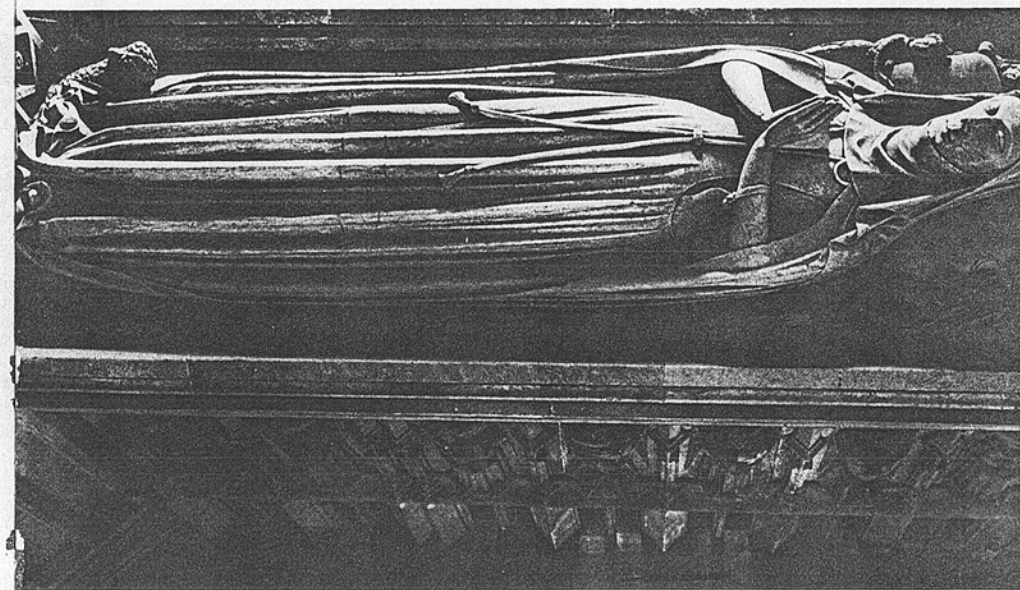


79 Robert of Anjou's tomb at Naples (*above*) belongs to a type popular in fourteenth-century Italy, with angels drawing a curtain revealing the dead King

80 *Right*: tombs of the Scaliger family, rulers of Verona in the later Middle Ages. The one in the foreground is of Mastino II, who died in 1351, that behind of Cansignorio della Scala, 1375



On one of the most beautiful Gothic tombs in England, that of the Duchess of Suffolk at Ewelme, the Duchess lies in prayer, her finely-drawn, aging features almost certainly a portrait; above is a choir of angels while on the sarcophagus other angels hold armorial shields; but below, through a tracery panel, can be seen a decomposing corpse, carved with infinite detail despite the obscurity of its position, stretched on its shroud, the long hair still falling from the skull. The Duchess died in 1475. She was a granddaughter of the poet Chaucer, and was twice married; her second husband, William de la Pole, the supposed lover of Margaret of Anjou, was murdered in 1450. She had had reason to think upon the mutabilities of life. More and more, the physical side of death was gripping men's imaginations. Beyond wars and violence, plague had always



81, 82 With the later fifteenth century came a concentration on the physical side of death. *Left*: detail from the tomb of Bishop Becket, Wells Cathedral. *Above*: tomb of the Duchess of Suffolk, at Ewelme. Beneath this stately effigy lies the grim cadaver

been the most dread adversary, but the Black Death of the fourteenth century had been unprecedented in the scale of mortality and an inescapable warning of how speedily men might be called to their account. 'Having to begin our treatise by recounting the extermination of the human race . . . my mind is stupefied as it applies itself to write the sentence that divine justice in its great pity sent on mankind, worthy by corruption of sin of the final judgment.' Thus wrote Matteo Villani when he undertook to continue the chronicle of his brother, dead of the plague in 1348. It was a new and abiding terror in men's minds, a judgment that implied their sinfulness and therefore the threat of Hell. When the Limbourg brothers painted in the early fifteenth century the *Très Riches Heures*, they drew in much detail the scene of Pope Gregory the Great staying the plague in Rome, leading the procession through the town in 590, the year of his election to the papacy, when on the summit of Hadrian's mausoleum the Archangel Michael appeared, sheathing his sword in sign that the time of trial was over. Already in another work they, or painters of their school, had drawn the same scene, and closely following it, a procession of penitents, scourging themselves as they went, so that, by pain suffered willingly on earth, the rigours of Purgatory could be lessened.

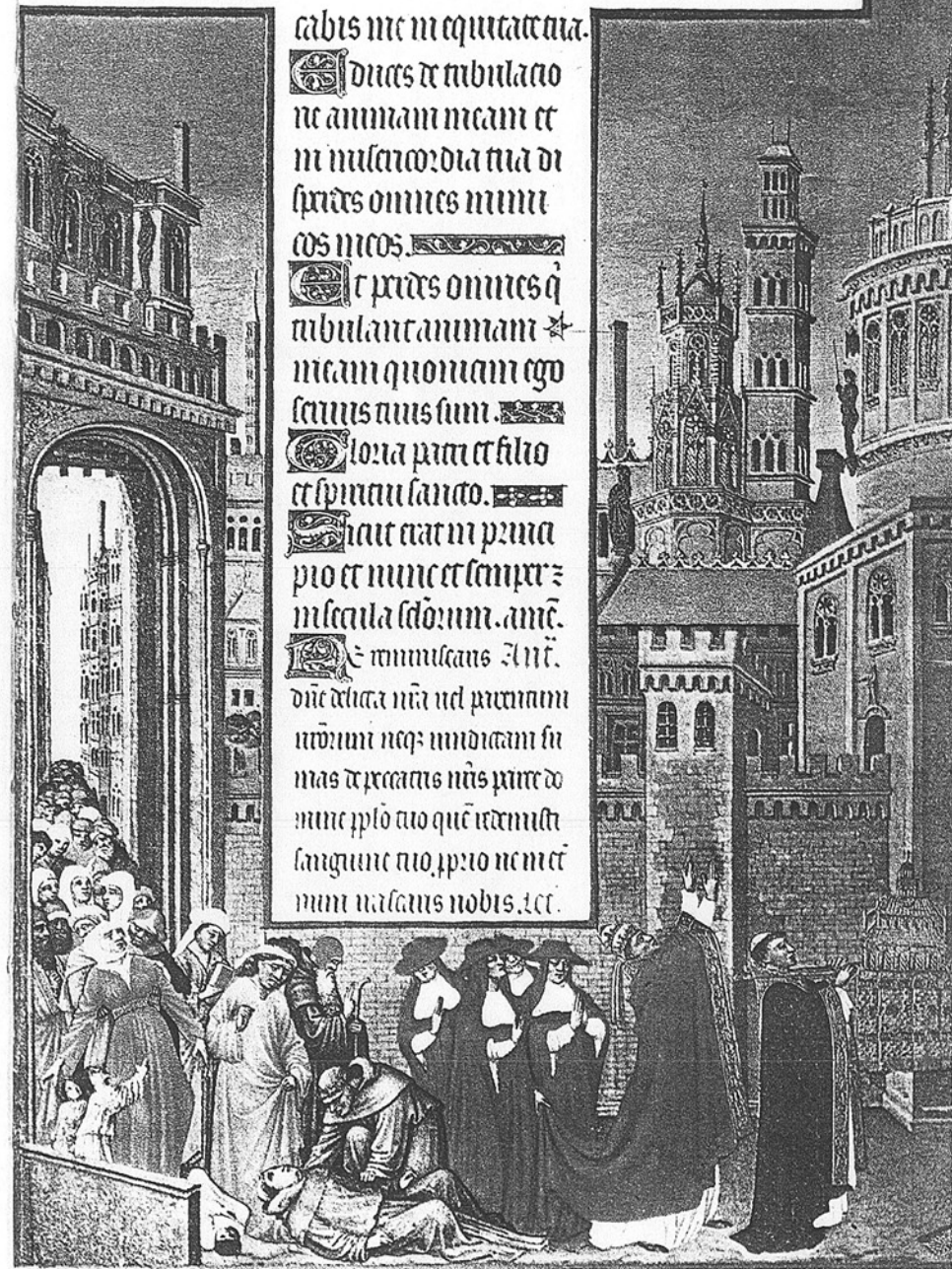
Since for the Death reſeifd is none
 Best is that we for Death diſponç
 After our death that live may we
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

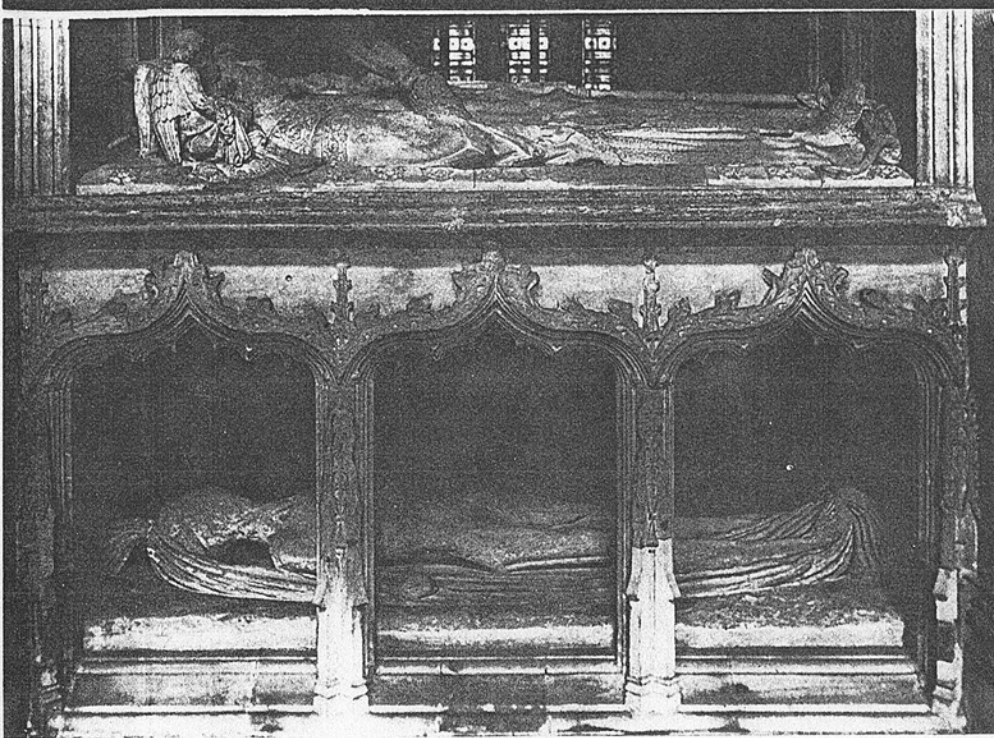
Much earlier than Dunbar the tomb of the Black Prince at Canterbury, dead while the memory of the Black Death was still vivid in England, was inscribed with a metrical exhortation in French, thus Englished by John Weever:

Such as thou art, sometime was I,
 Such as I am, such shalt thou be.
 I little thought on th'oure of death,
 So long as I enjoyed breath.

But now a ^{misereable} caitife poore am I,
 Deepe in the ground, lo here I lie,
 My beautie great is all quite gone,
 My flesh is wasted to the bone.

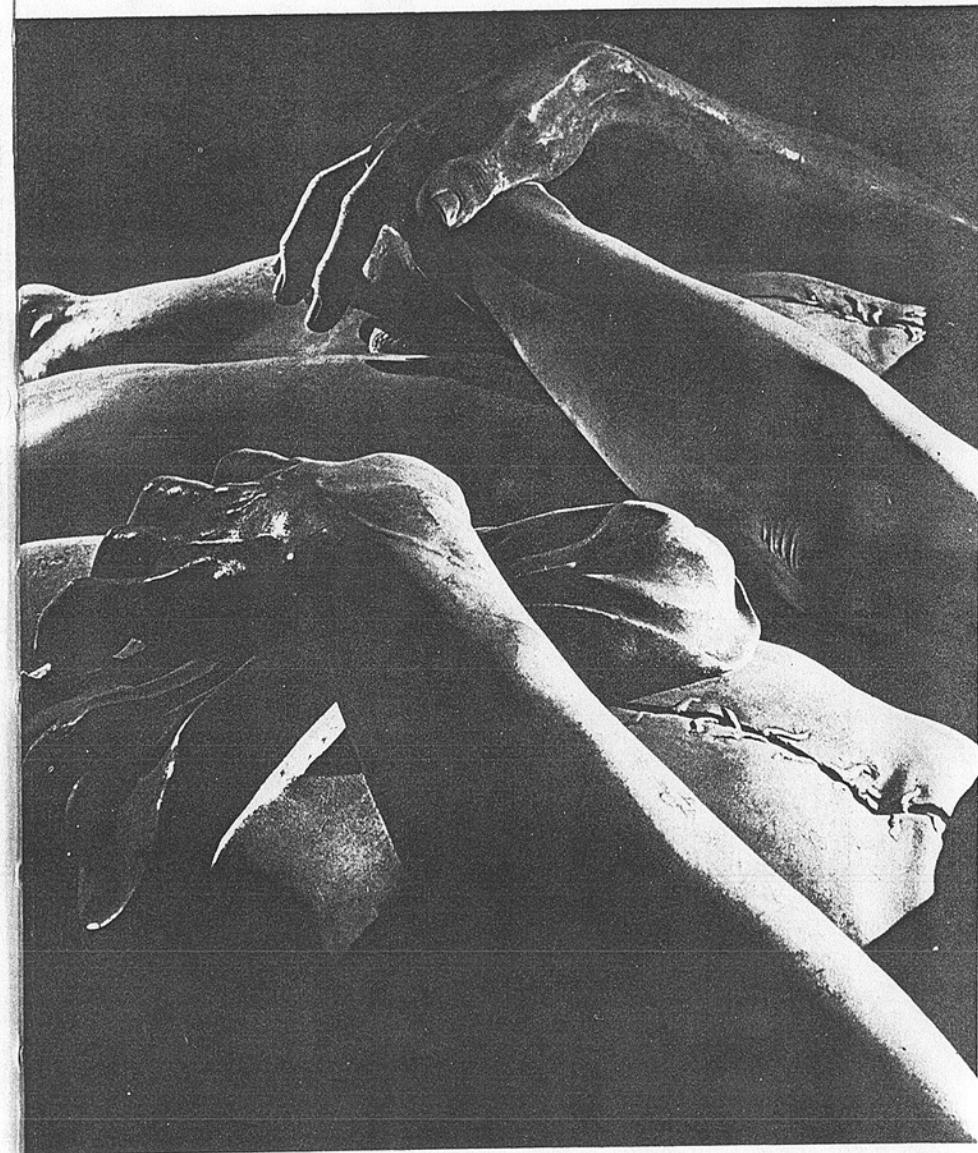
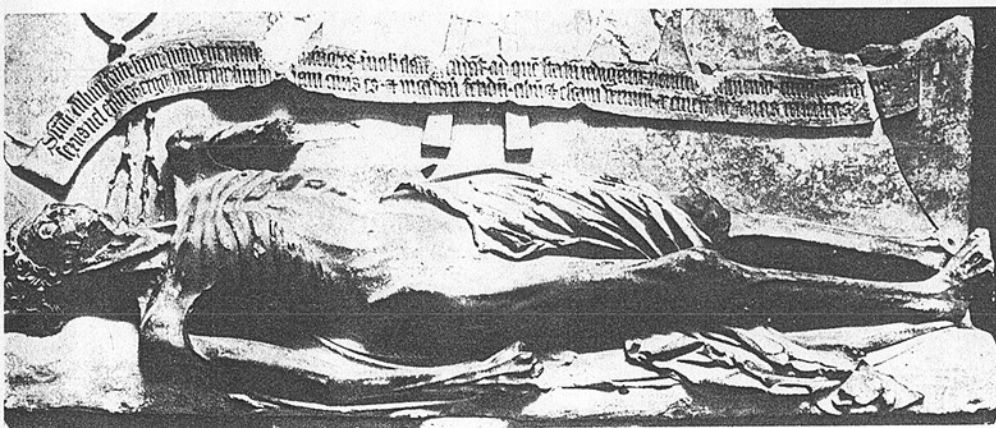
83 Pope Gregory the Great leads a procession to pray for the cessation of the plague: a fifteenth-century miniature. A monk and a child fall dying by the road





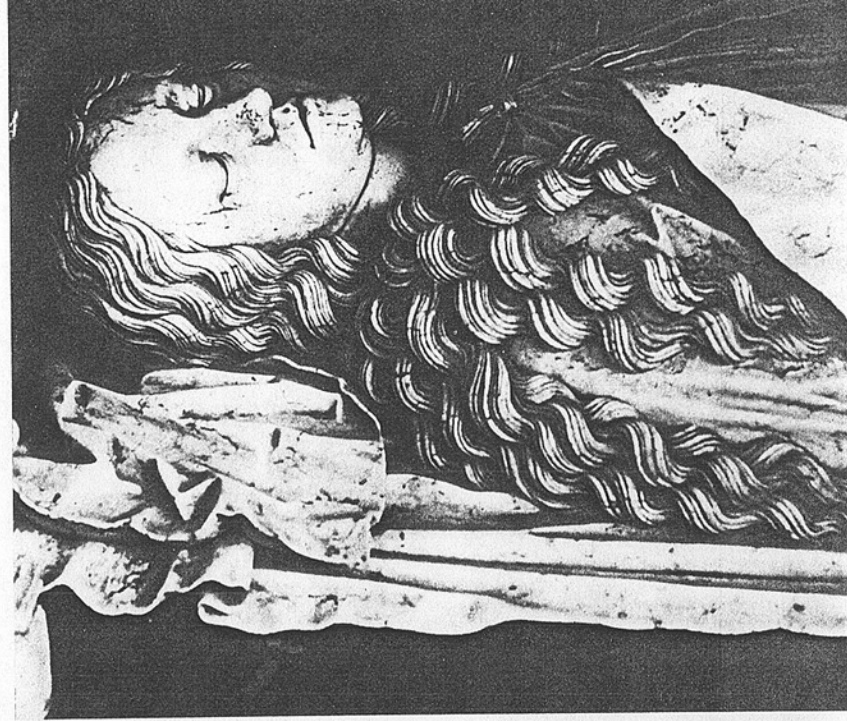
84 The contrast between earthly splendour and the grimness of death is emphasized in the tomb of Bishop Fleming in Lincoln Cathedral

85 *Below*: tomb of Cardinal Lagrange, died 1402. In his will he ordered that his body was to be 'boned', the skeleton buried at Avignon, the flesh at Amiens



86 Louis XII and his queen lie together in the abbey church of Saint-Denis, the stitches of the embalmers reproduced with gruesome realism

Beneath the recumbent effigies in their robes lie the skeletons, with little of the grisly details of decomposition spared, under the elaborate tracery of Bishop Richard Fleming's chantry at Lincoln (c. 1430), or that of Bishop Thomas Beckingham at Wells (1465), or, a hundred years later, on the tomb of William Parkhouse at Exeter. At Tewkesbury the tomb of John Wakeman (d. 1549), who adroitly succeeded in being the last Abbot of Tewkesbury and the first Bishop of Gloucester, shows a mouse, snakes and snails preying upon the corpse. In France there was the same lingering on decay. In the Museum at Laon is the sculptured cadaver of Guillaume de Harcigny (d. 1393), physician of Charles VI; in the Musée Calvet at Avignon is that of Cardinal Jean de Lagrange (d. 1402), Bishop of Avignon and a great patron of the arts; another cardinal, Pierre d'Ailly (d. 1412), is similarly shown at Cambrai. Even in the magnificent elaboration of the tombs of Philibert-le-Beau and Margaret of Austria at the church of Brou naked, half-shrouded bodies, though not yet marred by putrefaction, lie under the royally clothed effigies. The corpses of Louis XII and Anne of Brittany, beneath their kneeling figures, have not yet decomposed, but along their bellies can be seen the stitches of the embalmers. As late as 1544 René de Châlons, mortally wounded, ordered that he should be shown on his tomb 'as he would be three years after his death' and Ligier Richier carved a standing skeleton, stretching up his hand, holding his heart, to Heaven. Here appetite for repulsion is almost sated, and by then this cult of the charnel house was on the wane, though the cadaver that lies beneath the effigy of Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, in Maximilian Colt's stately Renaissance tomb at Hatfield, is as uncompromising as any of its predecessors. On the whole, however, the seventeenth century preferred the decency of shrouded figures to too accurate renderings of corruption.



87 Above: detail from the tomb of Margaret of Austria at Brou, by Conrad Meit. The tomb follows the pattern of that of Bishop Fleming, the magnificently clothed figures above, the naked corpse below



88 The same convention continued into the seventeenth century. Right: the lower part of Maximilian Colt's monument to Sir Robert Cecil. The upper part is supported by kneeling figures of the virtues



89 The Dance of Death was a macabre idea which became strangely popular in fourteenth-century painting. The fresco at La Chaise-Dieu (above) is one of the best preserved

Dance of Death

One of the strangest manifestations of this morbid interest had been the Dance of Death. It originated in a late thirteenth-century poem, *Le Dit des trois morts et des trois vifs*, a subject carved on the façade of the Church of the Innocents in Paris at the orders of Jean de Berry, a man much concerned with death to judge by the elaborate arrangements for his own burial chapel. The same theme recurs on one of the pages of the *Très Riches Heures*. It spread rapidly throughout Europe, penetrating even Italy, where such macabre thoughts (the word 'macabre' itself first appeared in France c. 1376) were less congenial, and was painted, with many additional details, on the walls of the Campo Santo in Pisa. In England it can still be seen on the walls of village churches, such as Widford in Oxfordshire; and in the pages of manuscripts such as the Lisle Psalter, as early as the first quarter of the fourteenth century. There is a naive but vigorous rendering of it, typical of the hold it had on popular art, in the church of Skiby in Denmark. The Dance of Death itself was sometimes performed as a masque, as for instance at Paris in 1422 and at Bruges in 1449, when men dressed as skeletons danced with figures representing the various grades of society; and a great wall painting of it decorated the cloister of the Holy Innocents in Paris, above rows of charnel houses where actual bones were exposed, a dismal décor which did not prevent these cloisters from being one of the popular rendezvous of Paris. The wall paintings at La Chaise-Dieu and at Kermaria Nesquit in Brittany are the best surviving representations of the subject. Woodcuts gave even



90 Three young men out hunting come suddenly upon the three corpses of – themselves! A detail from the fresco in the Campo Santo at Pisa

wider circulation to the theme, such as those of Guyot Marchant published in 1485 or the far greater series by Holbein. Villon and other poets share in this obsession.

*La mort le fait fremir, pallir,
Le nez courber, les vaines tendre
Le col enfler, la chair mollir
Jointes et nerfs croistre et estendre.*

(‘Death makes him shudder and grow pale, his nose curve, his veins stretch, his neck swell, his flesh soften, his joints and tendons grow and strain.’)

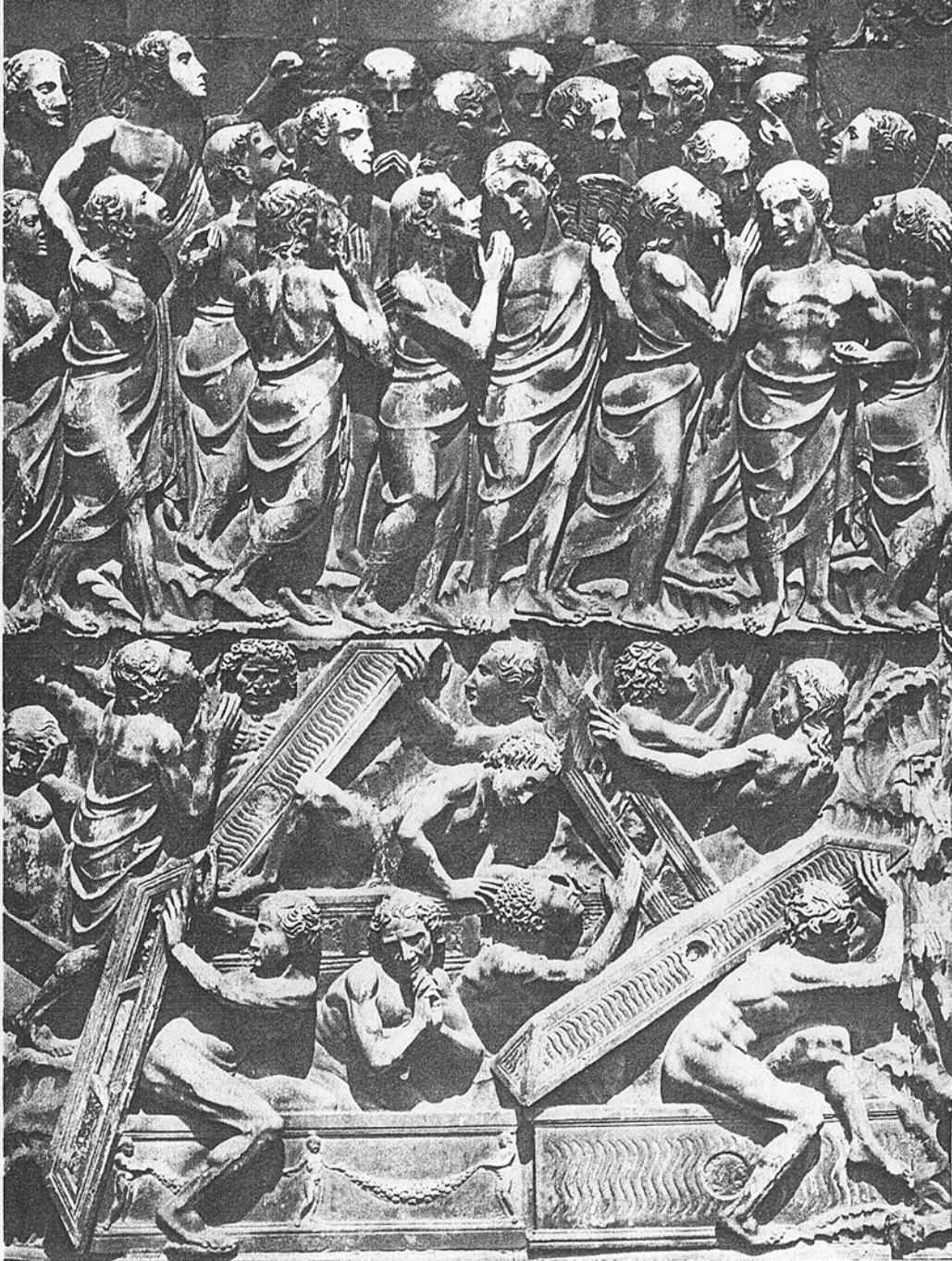
It is a strange preoccupation with putrefaction. The Church had preached the transience of mortal things, but there was in the fifteenth century in northern Europe a morbid indulgence in disgust which answered some need now hard to understand. The earlier Middle Ages had their fill of the horrors of damnation, and gradually the image lost its potency. The mind must in the end have developed resistance to such gruesome forebodings, and if it was still too dangerous to question orthodox teaching, there must have been many who rejected its crudity and substituted for its detailed realism the less immediate awesomeness of the unknown. A more luxurious and sophisticated society concentrated on the physical corruption of their being. In a Book of Hours made for Mary of Burgundy and her husband, Maximilian, and probably only completed after her death in 1482, one page shows a terrible skeleton, his shroud falling from him, brandishing a spear and carrying a coffin. On another page three skeletons pursue a hunting party of a lady and two men, a version of *Les trois vifs*, but here surely with a reference to the hunting accident in which Mary lost her life. The

91 scene has been copied in a later Book of Hours with opposite it an elaborate funeral-procession, and in the borders skulls in niches, a motif also taken from the Master of Mary of Burgundy and one that was visible in actuality in many places such as the cloisters of the Innocents in Paris. In a painting in a Book of Hours of the liturgy in use at Bourges, from the second half of the fifteenth century, skulls are shown displayed in a gallery above a portico, in front of which death spears a young nobleman; below is depicted a graveyard.

South of the Alps there was, as has been said, less brooding on mortality; and even the Day of Judgment, until Signorelli’s and

91 The hunters
hunted . . . by
death: a page from
the Book of Hours
of Mary of
Burgundy, painted
after her death in a
hunting accident in
1482



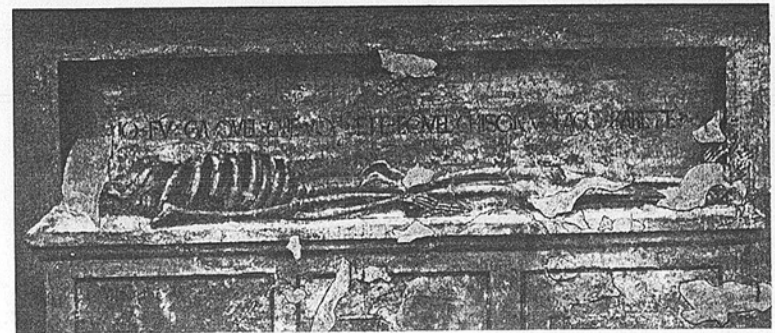


92 'For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised': a detail from the west front of Orvieto Cathedral. In the upper section the blessed are clothed by angels

Michelangelo's frescoes, is handled with far less conviction than in the great tympana of north-west Europe. On the east end of the Arena chapel in Padua, Giotto's Hell, with its small, insect-like figures, has none of the solid reality that he gives to his procession of the elect. On the façade of Orvieto Cathedral the rising dead and the newly-clad blessed have a sensitive nobility that distracts the eye from the less skilful torments of the damned. A hundred years later, Fra Angelico (or some pupil working on his design) is much more entranced by the joys of his heavenly garden than awestruck by the various circles of Hell. There were of course popular movements and excesses in Italy as elsewhere, but the clear, clean sanity of Renaissance art is on the whole untroubled by the ferocity of northern nightmares. It is all the more striking, therefore, when we find in one of the great key pieces of *quattrocento* genius a direct example of Gothic moralizing. In Masaccio's fresco in Sta Maria Novella in Florence, God the Father supports the crucified Christ, between the Virgin and St John and two kneeling donors; behind him stretches the famous perspective of a chapel roof, the fullest realization hitherto achieved of the new scientific approach to representation; but below, painted most accurately, lies a skeleton in a tomb, with the inscription, *Io fu ga quel che voi siete e quel che son voi aco sarete* ('I was that which you are and what I am that will you be'). It is the very phrase of the Black Prince's tomb in Canterbury.

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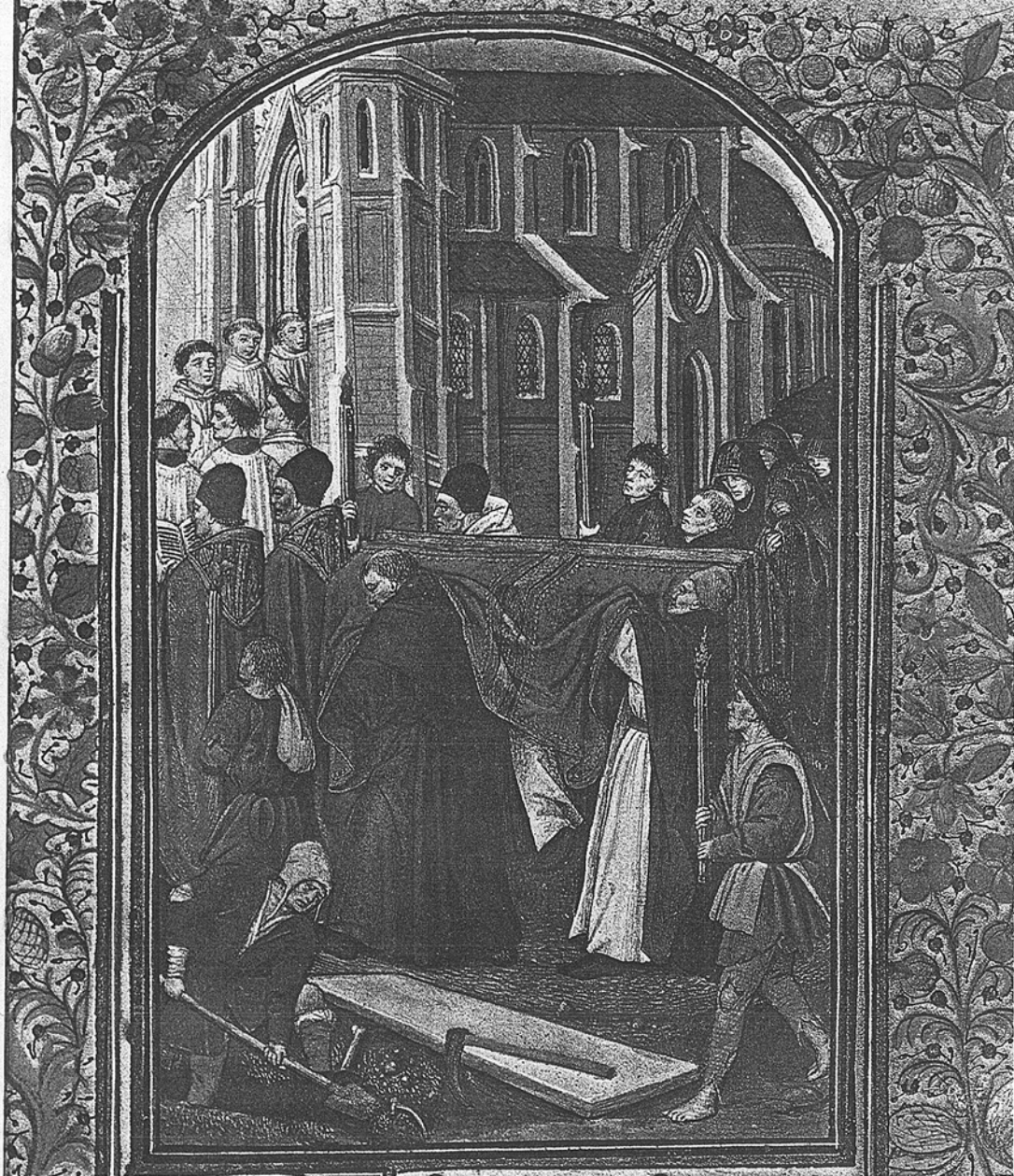


93 Above: Masaccio's famous fresco of the Trinity in Sta Maria Novella, Florence, includes this realistically painted skeleton at the base, which was only comparatively recently rediscovered

Body's Sepulchre

Burial was in the ground or in vaults. The body was wrapped in a shroud, knotted at head and feet. In many cases it was laid directly in the grave, but from an early date stone, wooden or lead chests were employed. In representations of the raising of Lazarus, where for a time there was some dispute with the Eastern traditions of emergence from a cave, the lid of the tomb-chest is generally being prised open by workmen, as in the well-known Chichester relief. The Gospels of Pembroke College, Cambridge, probably to be dated about 1125–35, shows Lazarus coming forth from a tomb cut in the rock. The burial of Judas Maccabaeus from the Winchester Bible, where the shrouded corpse is being placed in a coffin, may be taken as an example of the common twelfth-century procedure, at least for men of note. In a splendid page from the York Psalter (c. 1170) in the Hunterian Library at Glasgow, the Virgin is shown completely swathed in grave-cloths, while the angels carrying her

94, 95 Two miniatures from twelfth-century English manuscripts show the shroud in which the body was wrapped. *Left*: the Virgin rising from her tomb, with angels unwinding the outer layer. *Right*: the burial of Judas Maccabaeus

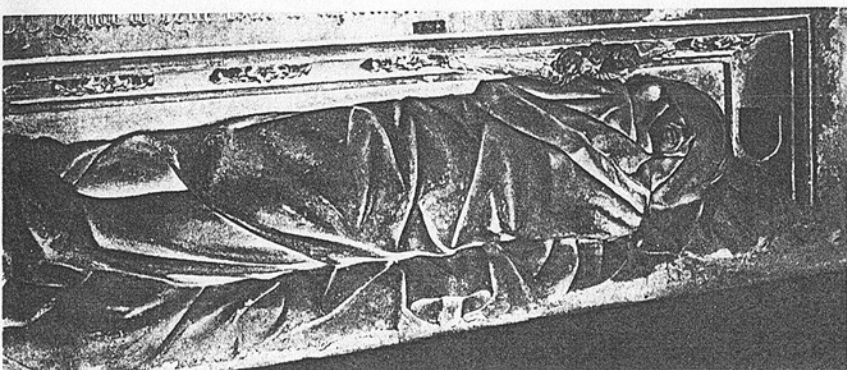


96 As the coffin is borne to the requiem a gravedigger unearths bones from previous burials. A French fifteenth-century Book of Hours



97 Above: the corpse is washed, covered with a shroud and placed in a coffin. The widow sits apart

98 Below: Jacques Germain of Cluny, wrapped in his voluminous shroud



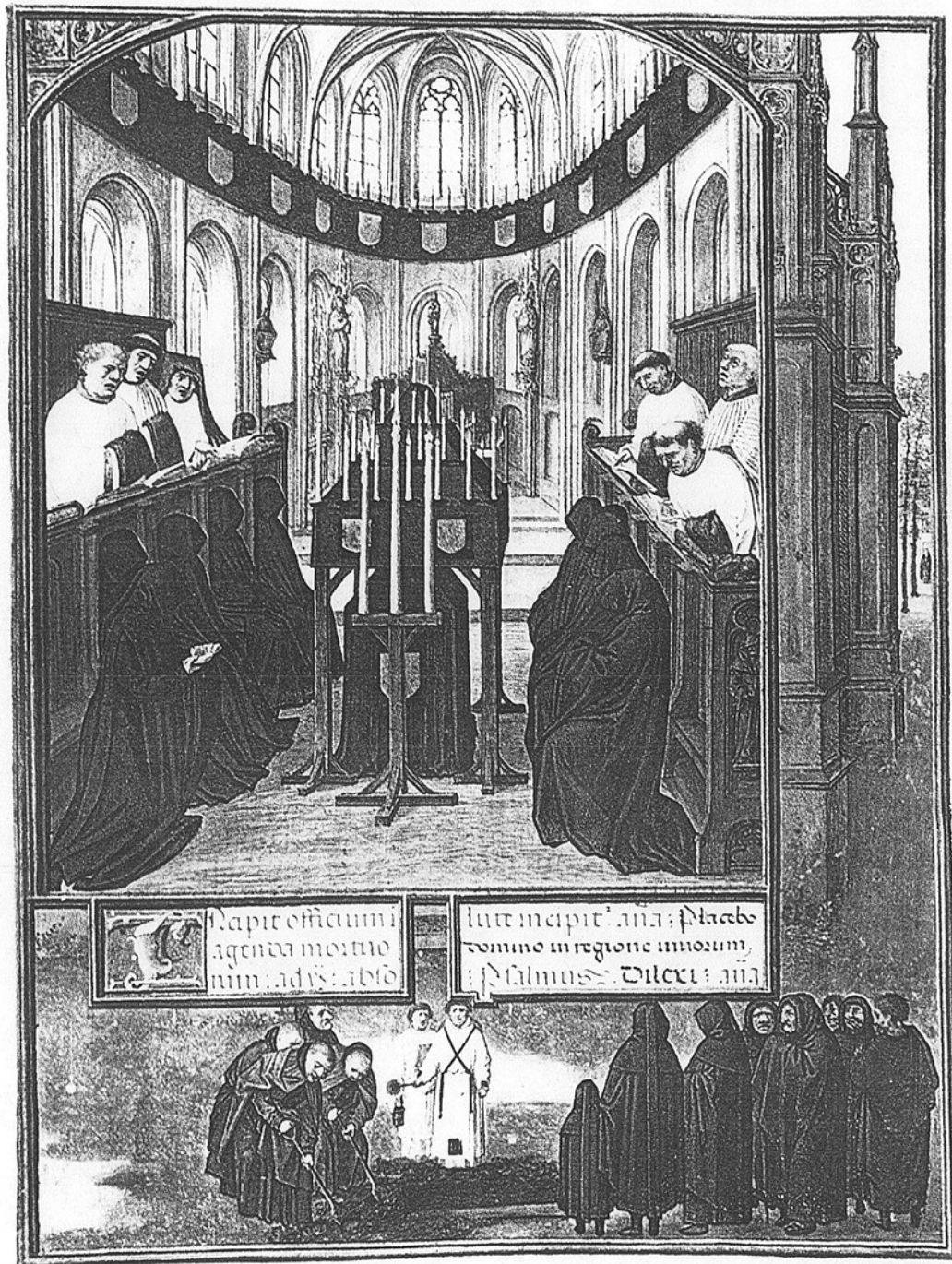
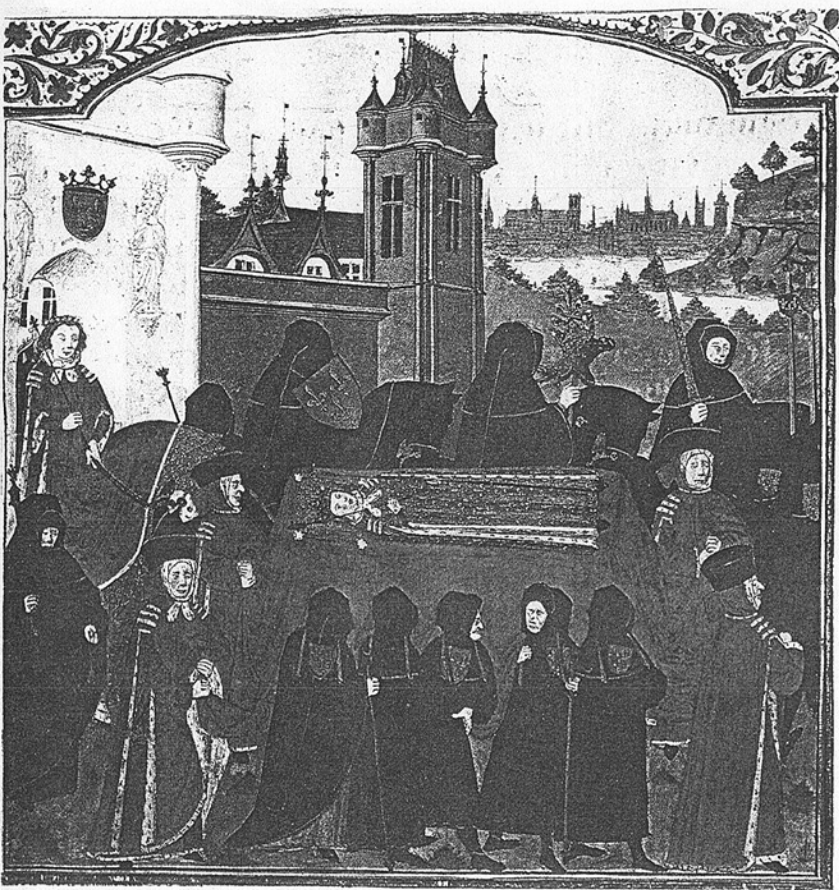
aloft from her stone tomb draw back the outer shroud as a means to support this corporeal assumption. Here was another theme, much debated from the second half of the twelfth century onwards, which provided many instances of burial illustration. From a later date a page from the Book of Hours of Philip the Good shows a more domestic scene, the interior of a bedchamber with the corpse being swathed while the widow sits mourning. The tomb of Jacques Germain (d. 1424), a bourgeois of Cluny, in the museum at Dijon shows him completely covered by a voluminous shroud.

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Much importance was attached to the place of burial. Where land and status were so closely linked, it was natural to seek a grave in one's own territory, there to await the final resurrection. But this very desire caused a conflict. The corpses of great men dying far from their homes were sometimes dismembered, the flesh cleaned from the bones by boiling and the latter brought back to the native soil, while the other remains were buried at the place of death. Sometimes also the heart was buried separately from the body, as for instance was that of Aymer de Valence (d. 1261) in its shrine at Winchester. Here no doubt the wish to have some relic of a great man or benefactor played some part, but the theologians looked askance at this partition, which in an age so accustomed to visual representations of figures rising from their tombs raised obvious problems. Pope Boniface VIII felt it a sufficient abuse to require legislation against it. Embalming was also practised, but required skilled practitioners, and prolonged transits of the corpse could lead to ugly happenings. When Henry I of England died at Lyons-la-Forêt, near Rouen, in 1135, his entrails, brains and eyes were buried at Rouen and the body was embalmed in order to be taken to Reading, the abbey that Henry had founded 'for the salvation of his soul'. Such was the state of the body, however, when the embalming was carried out, that the surgeon died of an infection, 'the last of many', says the chronicler, 'whom Henry destroyed'. The body was carried to Caen, sewn in a bull's hide, and laid before the tomb of the Conqueror, where despite all precautions its noisome state was still apparent. It was well, Roger of Wendover remarks, that it was in the cold of winter that, some four weeks later, it finally reached Reading. In the margin of one manuscript is written: 'Note the vileness of human flesh. It gives cause for humility.'

Funeral Masses were occasions of great solemnity and are often shown on the appropriate pages of breviaries. The coffin covered by a great black cloth stood in the centre of the nave surrounded by mourners in black cloaks. Above it, for those of great estate, was an elaborate framework of wood or metal fitted with prickets for candles, which recalled the teeth of a harrow and so was known as the 'hearse'.

99, 100 Funeral Mass – the Office of the Dead – was moving and impressive, especially when private grief was combined with state pageantry. *Below*: the funeral of Charles VI in 1422. An effigy lies on the coffin. Members of the Parlement of Paris wear red instead of black. *Right*: funeral and burial scene from the *Grimani Breviary*, 1480–1520



When John of Gaunt, 'time-honoured Lancaster', died in 1399, he directed in his will that round his hearse there should be ten great candles for the Ten Commandments that he had broken, seven for the Seven Works of Mercy in which he had been negligent, seven for the Seven Deadly Sins, and five for the Five Wounds of Christ. Departure from this world and the passage to the next did indeed require forethought and precaution.

When in 1503 in Rhodes, Pierre d'Aubusson, the Grand Master, died and the coffin stood in the church of St John, there were on one side his vestments as a cardinal, on the other the hacked and battered armour he had worn in the defence of the island. On a Spanish tomb of the early fourteenth century from the monastery of Las Avellanas, now in the Cloisters, New York, the soul of the defunct, Armengol VII, Count of Urgel, is being carried aloft by angels, while on a long carved relief the funeral Mass is shown in progress. Funeral processions were also occasions of considerable display. In royal or episcopal funerals the corpse might be carried exposed in robes of office on a bier, but more often it was already in a coffin with a wax or wooden effigy lying upon the lid; more normally the coffin was draped in the pall, which varied from a plain black cloth, marked with a cross, to costly fabrics of velvet embroidered with cloth of gold. The pall used in commemoration services for Henry VII in the University Church is still preserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and is a very splendid piece of work. A page in the Hours of Amadée de Saluces from the second half of the fifteenth century, nicely distinguishes the heedlessness of the choristers preceding the bier and the grief of the mourners following. Below, a gravedigger throws out bones with his spade, 'how the knave jowls them to the ground'. A strange and moving painting in a Book of Hours belonging to Philip the Fair while Archduke of Austria, illustrating the Vespers of the Dead, shows a naked corpse stretched on a tomb-chest in a church with mourners sitting below, a fantasy rather than an actual event. In two roundels on the border, skeletons seize a knight and a lady. It is curiously evocative of the emotions of the time.

