“The dead body of king Robert of Anjou (1343)”

By crossing the historiographical research by Ernst Kantorowicz with Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical hypotheses, relatively recently sociology have interpreted the sovereign or ruling body as a social construct. According to the definition given by Enrico Pozzi, the leader’s body constitutes a single, active sum of the representation of the political bond and the consent to this bond within the relationship between leader and group which establishes society, and, somehow, it comes to firmly reduce the social complexity of that relationship. In other words, the leader’s body embodies and, at the same time, symbolizes all those aspects, functions and dynamics – which may totally conflict with each other – characterizing the power relations (and the leadership itself) of a particular society. By so doing, it comes to play a fundamental stabilizing role within the complex political and social balance characteristic of the relationship between the group and its leader.

Insofar as it is a genuine symbol of the social bond that somehow makes the formation of a group possible and real, for every holder of power it is an element of absolute importance to manage the visibility of his body in society, namely its public manifestation through the leader’s actual participation in public ceremonies and rituals. In this sense, paradoxically, also the leader’s dead body plays a fundamental role. This presentation aims to analysing this subject focusing on Robert of Anjou (king of Naples between 1309 and 1343). In particular, it would like to verify if his funeral (celebrated in Naples on January 21st, 1343) was a public event and managed the visibility of his dead body in order to achieve some specific political purposes.