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***Saltus Mortis* in Valvasor's *Theatrum Mortis Humanae Tripartitum*  
A Copy of Holbein's *Dance of Death*?**

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*Theatrum mortis humanae tripartitum* (1682) by Johann Weichard Valvasor is an illustrated moralizing book on the vanity of human life in three parts. The one hundred and twenty-one copper plate engravings represent an important contribution to the iconography of Death in the 17<sup>th</sup> century art and literature. The engravings were made by Andreas Trost (1643-1708), who worked for Valvasor in his printing workshop at the Bogenšperk (Wagensperg) Castle for many years. Engravings in the first part of the book – *Saltus mortis* – follow the famous *Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein the Younger, more precisely its descendant, *Imagines mortis* by Arnold Birckmann published in Cologne in 1555. The engravings of the second and the third part of *Theatrum mortis* are executed after the original drawings by Slovenian painter Joannes Koch (1650-1715). The whole-page introductory illustration showing the Triumph of Death deserves a special interest because it was designed by Valvasor himself. The fifty-four engravings of *Saltus mortis* are often unjustly designated as copies of the *Dance of Death* by Holbein (first edition in 1538) although they are actually modeled on the woodcuts in *Imagines mortis* by Arnold Birckmann. The comparative analysis of Valvasor, Birckmann, and Holbein reveals that the engravings of *Saltus mortis* introduce significant changes in the iconography of the *Dance macabre*. Among the most obvious formal differences between Valvasor and Birckmann is the new order of the illustrations. While in the arrangement of motifs Birckmann follows Holbein, Valvasor introduces an original sequence based on strict criteria of the ecclesiastic and secular, of gender and social hierarchy. From the iconographic point of view the comparison of Valvasor and Birckmann shows that Trost deliberately changed the composition of some of the motifs or at least slightly transformed them. The *Canon* in Valvasor's *Saltus mortis* for example might look almost the same as in Birckmann but a close look reveals that Trost eliminated the characteristic donkey's ears from the cap of the person on the left, thus transforming a fool into an ordinary man.

Iconographic analysis of Valvasor's *Dance of Death* proves that the changes in regard to Holbein and Birckmann are the result of integration of the *Dance of Death* into the new context of *Theatrum mortis humanae tripartitum*. Valvasor uses all the available means to make his vision of the terrifying might and invincibility of Death palpably alive. While in Holbein's and in Birckmann's *Dance of Death* the social criticism, irony, and a fine satire play an important role, Valvasor concentrates on the phenomenon of inevitability and omnipotence of Death that rules the world unhindered by any power, human or divine.