Funeral orations, as a literary genre on the boundary between written and verbal communication, experienced a resurrection in the Czech Republic during the 1990s as part of a reawakening of interest in Czech Baroque literature and culture and associated literary genres pertaining to the subject of death.

In seeking the origins of this literary form one must go much farther back than the beginning of the modern era. Literary tributes to the dead have deep roots in European culture, originating already during ancient times. The textual construction of funeral orations in the early modern era was based on the classical form known from the ancient orators Menander and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

During the period around 1500 the development of this homiletic genre was influenced by two factors. The first was the invention of printing, which already in the late fifteenth century led to publication and dissemination of speeches, and thus of course to a rise in their level of dignity and their didactic function. At the same time, with the arrival of the Lutheran reformation came a new manner of perceiving life after death, the fundamental change lying in a different conception of salvation, purgatory, and the associated activities of those surviving the deceased.

The purpose of this study is above all to contribute to incipient research in the field of Catholic funeral speeches based on the example of the work of Georg Barthold Pontanus de Breitenberg. A special section is focused on categorizing Pontanus’s funeral orations from the standpoints of the language used, the structure of the text, the persons who commissioned prints, and above all their particular content. The orations are listed in a catalogue summarizing his work from 1590 to 1612.