

## RELIGIOUSNESS AND MEDICINE IN LATE MEDIEVAL VALENCIA: THE DISCOVERY OF THE INCORRUPT BODY OF ANGELINA BERTRAN (1447)<sup>1</sup>

**Carmel Ferragud**

Institut López Piñero - Universitat de València

e-mail: carmel.ferragud@uv.es

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### Resum

En abril de 1447, va ser trobat casualment al cementiri de la parròquia de Sant Llorenç de la ciutat de València, el cos incorrupte d'una jove anomenada Angelina Bertran. Per discernir si el fet era sobrenatural o no, fou nomenada una comissió de metges. Malgrat la seva perplexitat i impossibilitat de donar una explicació raonada, i la ràpida creença popular que es tractava d'un cas digne de veneració, els fets no portaren a considerar que Angelina merescués pujar als altars. No obstant, l'esdeveniment va passar a ser relatat en nombroses ocasions pels historiadors locals.

**Paraules clau:** santedat, peritatge mèdic, religiositat, cos incorrupte

### Abstract

In April 1447, the incorrupt body of a young woman named Angelina Bertran was accidentally found at the cemetery of the parish of St. Lawrence in the city of Valencia. To determine whether the cause was supernatural or not, a committee of physicians was appointed. Despite their confusion and inability to give a reasoned explanation, and although popular opinion quickly spread that it was a case worthy of veneration, facts did not lead to believe that Angelina deserved canonization. However, the event was to be repeatedly reported by local historians.

**Key Words:** sanctity, medical examination, religiosity, incorrupt body

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of the vast documentary legacy of the Valencian doctor and historian Josep Rodrigo Pertegàs (1864-1930)<sup>2</sup> involves diving into a wide sea of all kinds of sources for the analysis of Valencian medieval society, especially for topics related to health, illness, and medicine. Among those materials we find several references to the discovery of the incorrupt body of Angelina Bertran, dated 1447. In one of his notes, Rodrigo Pertegàs wrote: *Informe de Jaime Roig y otros médicos valencianos sobre el hecho de hallarse incorrupto el cadáver de Angelina Beltran, enterrada en el cementerio de San Lorenzo de Valencia. Tengo copia sacada del archivo de San Lorenzo*. I unsuccessfully tried to locate this document in the collection of published materials from the personal archive of Rodrigo Pertegàs. I had no better luck in finding the original, for the Archive of Sant Llorenç was destroyed during the Spanish Civil War. For a while I thought the Valencian scholar had discovered an interesting report. Undoubtedly the case exhibited a remarkable relevance to the study of religion in medieval times, and to the analysis of the presence of physicians as experts in cases of possible miracles, especially in processes of canonization.

Unfortunately, the attempts to locate this document among the known materials of the Valencian physician have failed. We must understand that the dispersion of Rodrigo Pertegàs's archive was great, not only during the months after his death, but also in later decades. The work of rebuilding his archive took me, in collaboration with Mariluz López Terrada, to the Valencia Library, the Historical Library of the University of Valencia, and the Library of Catalonia, where, in addition to the fonds already known and published by the Historical-medical Library of the López Piñero Institute, other abundant documents and books belonging to the late scholar are also kept. In none of these libraries was I able to find a trace of this alleged expert report. No more successful were the searches in the Archive of the Kingdom of Valencia or in the Valencian Diocesan Archive, where no records of collations for 1447 are preserved, and the immediate subsequent years (1450-1453) do not offer further details on the case.

However, the review of the accounts of the case from the Modern period to the present day has allowed me to conclude that Rodrigo Pertegàs had access to a document preserved within the holdings of the *Governació* [Governorate], in the Archive of the Kingdom of Valencia, the only document that brings clarity to the facts. This document was copied in a volume of the Archive of the Parish of Sant Llorenç, which would serve as the single source for the rest of historians who have dealt with the case, and which was commented and edited by Jaume Castillo (1995: 283-287, 353-359).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Part of the documentary heritage preserved in the Historical Medical Library of the Institute of History of Medicine and Science López Piñero is available in a collection of 8 CD-ROMs, published by several authors. The news we refer to here can be found in LÓPEZ, CATALÀ GORGUES, FRESQUET 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Arxiu del Regne de València, Governació (Lletres), reg. 2807, mà 2, ff. 24r-v. Given the theme of the dissertation of Castillo the document was used as an example of the desired behaviour of a young woman raised in a home in the city of Valencia, and not in the sense that I will use it here.

At this point, I am convinced that the document transcribed by Rodrigo Pertegàs was none other than the one preserved in the records of the Governorate of Valencia. If there ever was a written report of the physicians who participated in the expert report on the incorrupt body of Angelina Bertran, this was not the document preserved in the Municipal Archives of Sant Llorenç, and therefore the one that the scholar of the *Renaixença* copied. However, what we know about the case is fascinating due to the light it sheds on the culture and popular religiosity of Valencia in the late Middle Ages, and the role attributed to physicians in an already medicalized society (McVAUGH 1993).

### A TIMELY DISCOVERY

On 21 April 1447, the lieutenant governor of the Kingdom of Valencia, Pere de Cabanyelles, wrote a letter to Queen Maria, wife of King Alfons V, called the Magnanimous, to explain something that had happened in the city. A tailor named Montroig had died two days earlier. When the undertaker was sent to open the tomb owned by the tailor and located in the cloister of the convent of Sant Francesc, he made a mistake and went to the parish of Sant Llorenç instead, thinking that it was the place where the funeral was to be celebrated. This already seems strange, because although the former convent was located south of the city, near the parish church of Sant Martí and the portal of the Boatella, Sant Llorenç was on the other side, just to the north (SANCHIS GUARNER 1997: 93). Maybe this was already a first indication of something extraordinary. However, the city was strewn with cemeteries everywhere. Each parish, church and hospital had their own space intended to bury their dead. Cemeteries were open, without walls, anyone could transit through them and gravediggers did not always care to do their job properly (SANCHIS SIVERA 1993: 44-45). Whether through the intervention of Providence or due to the attitude of a clumsy worker, the fact is that this man got the wrong site.

The gravedigger began his task, but stopped when he discovered the body of a person “que·s mostrava quasi éntregua [=íntegra]” [almost complete]. It was too late. The body had already taken several blows. The man rushed to dig it up. The vision should have left him absolutely stunned, because the body was almost uncorrupted: “vist del cap fins als peus quasi tot sancer e no podrit” [from head to toes almost complete and not decayed]. Well, as stated, the blows had actually damaged the skull and the hands “quasi totes descarnades” [had almost no flesh on them]. Cabanyelles then gave a fairly accurate description of the state of the corpse:

per inspecció com per tocament realment fet en e sobre lo dit cors, ossos e ab carn, axí en los pits o mamelles com en lo ventre, que·s mostra tenir dins son compliment, e en les cuxes, jatsia la dita carn mostrant quaucom ésser mortificada e ruada e pansida e les mamelles no mostrant la vera forma de mamelles [...] en alguns lochs del dit cors, per los colps ja rebuts al traure de la fossa són stats vist, e huy en dia se poden veure així vermelles e macats, que para que de molt fresch era stat soterrat lo dit cors. E encara és stat trobat lo dit cors en lo cap ab molts cabells,

molt rossos, e en la una orella ab un fil mostrant ésser d'argent, lo qual s'acostuma posar a les dones que se foraden les orelles, e stà axí fort com si aquell dia vinent lo dit cors lo·y haguessen mès [...] és stat atrobat lo dit cors en les parts vergonyoses ab pèls qaucom larchs [...] a après de la sepultura del dit cors li foren mèsos e posats altres cosos los quals tots són stats atrobats consumits, trobant solament los ossos de aquells, lo qual cors, senyora, és axí exempt de tota fetor e pudor de aquell; olent-lo no·n hix sinó bona odor [...] les juntures del dit cors, axí en los braços e cames com en e per tot lo cors fan axí lavor e lavoren movent-lo hom com si l'esperit hi fos.

The description of the state of tissues, flesh and bones, and internal organs surprises due to their good condition, even though, obviously, they were wrinkled and withered, and although there is no talk of colouring, the remains probably had a brownish hue. The surprises continued with those blond hairs, repeatedly mentioned in subsequent accounts, and the overgrown pubic hair that would never be mentioned again. Also surprising is the fact that the body was not stiff but fully articulated, and even more, the blows received had caused leakage and the appearance of bruises. It must be noted that all these features were present in many incorrupt bodies of saints that were venerated, as well as in some not so saintly corpses. The fact that the corpse was fresh, whole, with red blood, without any sign of corruption, the flesh intact, flexible, emitting a sweet fragrance, somehow expressing its presence because it is not happy in the grave, are all signs that can be found more or less explicitly in the discovery of incorrupted bodies of saints, and are also present in the case of Angelina. The men and women of the medieval world were well used to dealing with death, and the discovery had to be very special to surprise them (BOUVIER 1983: 199; CARROLL CRUZ 1974).

Even the detail of the earrings the deceased was wearing did not go unnoticed to the observer. Such were the Valencian women of the time, so given to ornaments that they enraged the angry preachers (SANCHIS SIVERA 1993: 65-66; HAUF 1995: 113-114). Although this detail about the customs of the era did not surprise or bothered anyone at the time, except for some clerics, this would change significantly in subsequent centuries.

A supernatural detail that should be noted was the smell given off by the body. Indeed, the vision of the corpse, far from unpleasant, moved the audience, and one of the elements contributing to this was the alleged scented smell. The expression “dead in the odour of sanctity,” today used metaphorically to speak of the death of someone who has led a saintly life, must be taken in its literal sense here, that of a post-mortem fragrance. There were numerous cases of saints, which, according to witnesses, expelled an always pleasant, characteristic smell of flowers after being exhumed; particularly those who were believed to have died with the stigmata of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Current explanations to this common phenomenon are quite diverse. In many cases, the embalmed bodies were treated with a variety of aromatic substances that could be to blame for this alleged odour of sanctity (CHARLIER et al. 2013: 4-5). The source could also be some pathophysiological occurrences, like the smell of acetone or acetic acid, caused by the ketosis

arising from starvation by fasting. For others, it is a pathological phenomenon associated with certain diseases that a person suffered in life.

Indeed, internal organs may emanate very characteristic odours as a consequence of certain diseases. However, showing that the saints used to suffer from these diseases is quite daring; but how to explain that these scents were preserved for years? Camporesi (1994: 11) has spoken of a concrete presence fuelled by collective hallucinations that encouraged those perceptions.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, the ability of scents to become an instrument of communication between men and the supernatural world is a universal phenomenon. Thus, olfactory moral qualities are assigned to the beings that are considered to have a contact with the divine, as are the saints, and the perfume becomes an interactive dimension in the dialogue with God. Therefore, smell usually plays an important role in the ritual practices of religions (LARREA 1997: 40-42). Necessarily, the odour of sanctity had to depart from the pestilential stench that caused diseases, characteristic of mortal bodies and unhealthy urban spaces. Medical Galenism always associated bad odours with corruption and disease (CORBIN 1982: 45-54).

The symbolic dimension of perfume associated with God and his son Jesus Christ, already present in the Bible, was also extended to those who were devoted to them. God had chosen them to share His aromatic dimension (GUIANCE 2009: 135-139), and this was already clear in the early Middle Ages. Gregory the Great spoke about it in his *Dialogues* (593-594) when he referred to the fragrance expelled by the corpses of two figures he glossed in Book IV, Servul and Romula (MAGNO 2010: 227, 229). All this leads us to suspect that our narrator, Cabanyelles, had already loaded the extraordinary discovery of the body with a strong mystical sense, as we will see later. It is during the Middle Ages, that “the odour of sanctity” had become a way for church authorities to accept the eventual veneration of a saint in the absence of knowledge about their life.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, bewilderment and admiration in front of inexplicable events like these led to think of divine intervention. In a pit where many corpses of plague victims were buried, there was no explanation for the fact that only one of them was uncorrupted. If current Forensic Science comes often to a dead end when establishing ratios of decay, what should not happen in past times?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Gli odori del paradiso, ritrasmessi dai beati, erano avvertiti come reali da una emotività impressionabile ed eccitata pronta a captare... il sentore del soprannaturale, l’effluvio dell’uranico, il sapore dell’ineffabile.”

<sup>5</sup> Although the Church today accepts incorruptibility as an inexplicable sign, it does not consider it as a miracle in canonization processes (WOODWARD 1996: 83-84).

<sup>6</sup> Currently it is clear that ratios of decay must necessarily be related to the combination of endogenous factors, such as disease or food, and exogenous elements, such as temperature, precipitation, pH, oxygen concentration, soil characteristics, and insect communities and plants. The rhythms and forms of the decomposition of a corpse are very diverse. Even if several corpses are buried together in the same conditions it has been observed that nature does not act equally on all of them; the variability is extremely large (FERREIRA, CUNHA 2013). On the natural causes of incorruptibility, see also CHAMBERLAIN, PARKER 2001: 18-24.

Angelina's case had all the ingredients to turn her into a saint/relic, really precious at that time. Since the Late Antiquity and, especially, in medieval times, society demanded the presence of great men and women who acted as intermediaries with God (BROWN 1980). While it is true that only God is holy and everything else is human, some people touched by the spirit could access holiness. Society needed these heroes, exemplary close or distant figures on whom to project the dreams of perfection. In relation to this, and not without some hard discussions, the Catholic Church allowed since its inception (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c.) the dissemination of the cult of the relics of the bodies of the saints, a practice that technically required the use of methods of dissection not very different from those used in the anatomical exploration of corpses (CANETTI 1999: 117). Dismemberment allowed the spread and influence of the grace of the saint, which held great healing powers.

From the ninth century onwards and throughout the late Middle Ages, there was a massive increase in the cult and trade of relics, which sometimes led to pillaging and fostered a truly international traffic (GEARY 1978: 129-134). In fact, all consecrated altars had to have one. It is striking how instead of prohibiting the seizing of relics, it was at times stimulated, and buyers showed no interest in checking out their authenticity. At the end of the Middle Ages, the multiplication of relics and bodies of the saints was extraordinary, as well as the disputes related to them (BOUZA 1990: 26-28).

Acquiring a relic was a passion that crossed all social borders and was pursued with all the available resources. The kings of the Crown of Aragon were a good example of the obsession with collecting relics. Thus, King Pere IV of Aragon, called the Ceremonious, moved by his devotion to Sant George, moved heaven and earth, sending his officers to search and acquire parts of the saint's body wherever these could be found. Thus, he gathered an arm, one finger, and the head of the saint. Later, he commissioned lavishly ornamented reliquaries to safekeep the remains of the saint from prestigious Valencian silversmiths. Saint George was a particularly significant saint for Valencians, for his character as a warrior his relations to the triumphs of King Jaume I against the infidels (NARBONA 2003: 55, 65-68). Therefore, King Pere agreed to donate such a coveted treasure "I. os dels dits de la mà [...] ab son reliquiari d'argent que n havem fet fer" to his vassals of Valencia.<sup>7</sup> These relics were commonly used in festivals and processions in honor of the saint.

Later monarchs—Martí I, called the Humane, Ferran d'Antequera, Alfons V, called the Magnanimous—maintained or reinforced this attitude. The relics played a versatile role for them,

<sup>7</sup> Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Cancelleria reial, reg. 1077, f. 220 (20-10-1366). Ibid., reg. 1344, f. 98 (6-6-1367). Ibid., reg. 1084, f. 112v (16-6-1370). Ibid., reg. 1276, f. 9v (24-7-1381). On silversmiths and reliquaries, see *ibid.*, reg. 1765, f. 4v (26-7-1376). Ibid., reg. 1745, f. 59 (14-3-1378). On the donation, see *ibid.*, reg. 1238, ff. 13r-v (21-5-1373). King Pere IV also tried to recover the bodies of saints in the hands of infidels, such as Saint Barbara, whose corpse was in the hands of the sultan of Cairo. Ibid., reg. 1089, ff. 153v-154 (9-9-1373).

since they both served to strengthen the sacredness of the monarchy and its ties with its subjects, and become the guarantee for monetary loans (MARTÍN LLORIS 2010: 108-116, 128-134). Kings knew well the popular passion relics unleashed; these objects were constantly displayed with great prominence in the processions held in the city. The tradition of donating them as gifts continued, and King Alfons V offered the relics of Saint Louis to the city of the Valencia in 1423. Relics also granted prestige to cities and towns, and were therefore of great importance for them (FREEMAN 2013: 156-168).<sup>8</sup>

Saints were instruments of a particular pedagogy and a strong cohesive element for any group—a city or a smaller group, like a brotherhood or a guild—that progressively modulated their meaning and role over time (PIETRI 1991). Relics could act as symbols of prestige for many different interests, also depending on the group that owned them, and they could even be an asset to confront the ecclesiastical institution, as has already been discussed. At this point the mendicant orders played an important role, especially when fighting against falsehood and deception, or when it was needed to separate the miracle and the saint from sorcery, which was always a complex matter (BENVENUTI 1991: 485-486).

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the fortuitous discovery of a corpse in good condition could give birth to a new devotion. However, according to Vauchez (1981: 505), these events were exceptional and very poorly documented cases. So much so that the author, a pioneer in the study of medieval saints and miracles, only cited the case of Poitiers, where a provincial synod confirmed that these findings were quite common in the region. As we have seen in the case of Angelina, the discovery of the body itself immediately drew the attention and the eagerness of the residents of the city. They went to the church of Sant Llorenç, where it was deposited, to see the wonder, touch it and even steal a hair—according to the lieutenant—from the head or elsewhere in the body, for the hair had grown considerably in the private parts of the woman, as we have seen. Actually, in the Mediterranean world, these explosions of popular devotion, with long spontaneous queues around the church where the revered saint or individual rested, were common. As Vauchez claimed (1981: 272-275), when someone famous for his piety died, people quickly launched to seek sanctification when the body was still warm. Scenes of disorder and violence to preserve a memento, such as hair or nails, ensued. These objects became true talismans of great power, allies against the Devil. After all, in incorruptibility Christians saw eternal life, the resurrection of body and soul promised by God (ANGENENT 2002: 32).

This popular fervour could sometimes generate conflicts. However, we note that far from seeking confrontation, the clergy tried hard to provide the “invented” body with a conventional identity and biography, turning it into an edifying character, establishing a link between its supposed perfection and supernatural phenomena surrounding the remains. And so it was with Angelina.

<sup>8</sup> The town of Castelló de la Plana had the head of Saint Christine. In July 1470 they strived to hold a festivity that suited the solemnity of the relic, for this festivity usually fell on a working day and the procession was rather lacklustre. Arxiu Municipal de Castelló de la Plana, Llibre de Consells (22-7-1470).

Cabanyelles asked the vicar general of the bishop to find out whose corpse was that, how had been her life and when she had died. The information provided by the vicar determined that this was a young girl who had died on 14 July 1439 during the plague or *glànola* [bubo] that Valencia suffered from May to September (RUBIO VELA 1994-95: 1200-1201). Melcior Miralles describes it in his *Dietari* as the “huytena mortaldat” [eighth mortality], which according to him was especially virulent. Although contemporary sources vary, there was talk of 11,000 dead in five months. The situation was quite chaotic and many fled the capital, starting with the leaders and the wealthy for the farthest reaches of the kingdom; the economic aftermath was also notable. The virulence with which plague attacked the population was terrifying.

According to the document, Angelina was sick for 24 hours, died just halfway through the pestilential onslaught, and was buried in a mass grave, a sign of the extreme gravity of the situation. It is surprising, however, that her corpse did not present traces of the characteristic buboes or *glànoles*, or at least, the lieutenant did not recorded them. The body of the ill-fated girl showed no sign of the unpleasant death of a plague victim.

The facts became even more relevant when the identity of Angelina’s father and the details of her life were found out. She was the daughter of Domingo Bertran, a wool comber who wore a cilice— “en sa mort trobat ab silici que vestia”. It was, therefore, one of those Christ’s athletes that mortified their flesh with a cilice or a scourge until they bled. He was a follower of the practices stimulated during the first decade of the century by the famous Dominican friar Vicenç Ferrer. He and his followers carried out these penances that were part of the performance of the preacher in each place he visited, greatly stirring up the faithful (ESPONERA 2007: 228-232). This was not a superfluous detail: like father, like daughter. The story would be nicely wrapped up if the deceased had led an irreproachable life.

### A VIRTUOUS YOUNG GIRL

Angelina’s father, despite having a good job, was impoverished and had decided to leave her daughter with a fisherman named Fuster. Her life became the life that was common among the young girls of Valencia at that time (LIGHTFOOT 2013: 116-120; CASTILLO 1995: 60-84). The family, through a notarial contract, established their son or daughter in *afermament*, that is, they sent them to work—girls usually as domestic servants—for a fixed period of variable duration, at the end of which young girls could get some money that would be the basis of their dowry; here began the misfortunes of Angelina. Once the fisherman’s wife died, he wanted to take sexual advantage of the maid, but she didn’t want to lose her virtue—“havent molt poca voluntat en vicar son cors”—and escaped. She did not explain anything to her mother and brothers and went to see the sister of the fisherman, and told her everything. The woman welcomed her for a while, and in the meantime the fisherman died and left her 10 *lliures* to find a husband (“per a marit”). It was then that Angelina returned home where she died a virgin (“verge e puncella”).



In the end, the story about the strength of a young girl from humble means but full of virtues who resists to surrender herself to carnal intercourse with her a man who tries to force her is one of the models of female holiness that became successful in late medieval urban areas; even friar Vicenç Ferrer used such an example in one of his sermons (CASTILLO 1995: 285, nota 291). But it is more than that. The model has survived in time and just a few decades ago it was still used, as in the case of a virtuous girl who, like Angelina, preferred to give her life in martyrdom than allowing the corruption of her body.<sup>9</sup>

In this period, the number of women—particularly of humble origin—that reached sanctity proliferated considerably, largely stimulated by the story of the mendicant orders (WEINSTEIN, BELL 1982: 176; VAUCHEZ 1981: 245-246). But in the case of the incorrupt Angelina it was even more important, for one of the conditions for the preservation of the body was virginity; abstinence rising meat incorruptibility (ANGENENT 2002: 31). In fact, there are many stories that associated virginity and incorruptibility. The second is often set as a consequence of the first, and is also a feature that extends to later female saints as Teresa of Avila and Joanna of Arc (BOUVIER 1987: 203). This ascetic defence of the purity of the body started in Late Antiquity; during the fourth century discourses on virginity were common and opposed the ideal and eternal beauty of the young girl to the mediocrity of married life. It was certainly a powerful legacy to the medieval Western world that used it to control body and sexuality with the repression of passions (ROUSSELLE 1989: 153-167).

It may have been the Divine Providence, but it was really opportune that just a month after the terrible crime of Paiporta and the terrifying ensuing fire in the city of Valencia, with fatalities and many buildings burned in the *Fusteria*, such a divine sign followed. The city was undergoing a sorrowful period; at a farmhouse of Paiporta, Genís Ferrer, a former juror of Valencia, along with some companions, had cruelly murdered several members of the neighbouring family, including the children. The shock of the Valencians was huge and within days the justice settled the matter with the exemplary punishment of Genís' wife and four of the culprits who had been captured in the city market. The fire started the next night, and some people accused the vengeful husband (CARRÉ 2012: 101-102).<sup>10</sup> In this difficult time, Valencia needed a turning point. Each city had its medieval penitent saint, its miraculous healer, protector, and intercessor. All sought help in times

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<sup>9</sup> This is the case of Josefina Vilaseca Alsina, a girl who lived in a house in Manresa and was stabbed and later died following an attempted rape in which she resisted, it occurred on 4 December 1952. In the midst of a atmosphere of religious fervour propitiated by national-catholicism, the event caused real shock. Her resistance to rape appealing to the desire to maintain her purity enabled her as a candidate for beatification (ENTERRAMENT 2015). Just two years earlier, the young Maria Goretti, born in Corinaldo, and dead in 1902 in similar circumstances had been canonized. These rapes, resistance as a role model to preserve virtue, and the attitude of the Church in these cases have been interpreted by anthropologists as mechanisms of control and maintenance of a certain social order (FERNÁNDEZ MARTORELL 2005: 115-116); the same could be said about the medieval case, where virginity was highly valued before marriage.

<sup>10</sup> See FERRAGUD, MARSILLA 2015.

of complications, hunger, or illness, with the need to atone for the sins and help the helpless to please God. Saints played a decisive role in all these conflicts and a novelty such as the discovery of Angelina's body came as a sign from heaven.

The testimonies of the fisherman's sister and other relatives of Angelina helped generate an aura of "holiness" around the deceased. They stated that "era molt bona fadrina, de bona condició e qualitat, molt vergonyosa, ben dejunadora e oracionera, e ben devota de Nostra Dona, hoc que per ço com aquella cantava molt bé, en son cantar àls no cantava sinó cançons de la Verge Maria" [she was a very good girl, of good nature and attitude, very shy, who fasted and prayed and was a devout of Our Lady, and since she was a very good singer, she only sang songs to the Virgin Mary]. A young girl so dedicated to the first example for the Christian, the Virgin, who strictly complied with the obligations of fasting and prayer, against those who were rebuked by the preachers due to their wickedness and lack of doctrinal compliance had to be a very special person, as evidenced by her incorrupt body. From that moment onwards, the body was placed "en una tomba en la secrestia de la dita església de Sent Llorenç" [in a tomb at the sacristy of the said church of Sant Llorenç.]

For God to manifest what had really happened to the body, Masses were celebrated in all parishes and monasteries, inside and outside the city, and a special prayer was said for "nostre Senyor Déu ho vulla revelar per consolació nostra." Cabanyelles asked the Queen to foster prayers with that same purpose. The lieutenant requested a definite confirmation from the highest authority, for, in Valencia, it was already clear: "fins ací àls no se'n creu sinó que és cors sant e per special do e gràcia volgut manifestar per nostre Senyor Déu en aquesta ciutat."

But her virtuous life was not enough, and her peculiar condition had to be contrasted against the expertise of medical science. Cabanyelles called on the six probably most reputable physicians in the city of Valencia: Miquel Climent, Jaume Roig, Ramon de Falcs, Joan Vallseguer, Jaume Radio, and Bartomeu Martí. They examined the corpse and said that, according to their knowledge, it appeared to be "sobrenatural e quasi divinal remetent-ho a nostre Senyor Déu" [supernatural and almost divine, and referred it to Our Lord God]. The lieutenant concluded that the body would stay in Sant Llorenç until physicians could examine it again. Here there is a significant point. The authorities were not satisfied with simply accepting that they were before a miraculous event: if science did not confirm it, and on more than one occasion, they could not take the final step, for the expert testimony of physicians in a variety of circumstances was usual in the Valencia from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards (FERRAGUD 2011).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This would not be the only time that physicians intervened to confirm or contrast an allegedly miraculous event in Valencia. Frauds easily captured the attention of the benevolent and committed parishioners. In 1420, the barber Arnau Ferragut was sent to check the authenticity of a miraculous event happened in Murla, where blood oozed from an image of Sant John the Baptist painted on an altarpiece that had a nail stuck in his belly. The blood turned out to be a fraud, for the barber indicated that it was the result of throwing a piece of meat at the nail in the altarpiece (ROCA TRAVER 1983: 71).

## AN ILLUSTRIOUS COMMISSION

Popular piety tended to consider the signs of external bodies as infallible indicators of holiness. When facing unexplainable situations, like the discovery of an incorrupt body, which presented difficulties in discerning the true facts and getting some answers, Valencians were used to appeal to physicians and surgeons. The constitution of the medical commission fostered by Cabanyelles was the most reasonable step before accepting a miracle.

Discussing in depth the figures of the physicians who participated in the examination of the body of Angelina Bertran involves reconstructing the biography of the most prominent physicians of the moment in the city of Valencia, well documented in Valencian archives, and some of them even quite renowned, as in the case of Jaume Roig.<sup>12</sup> All these physicians held the title of masters of Arts and Medicine, which meant they were among the few healers in Valencia who had been trained at a university. However, it is impossible to pinpoint the *studium generale* where they were trained as physicians; we can only note that Valencians had a strong presence in the *studium generale* of Lleida in the first decades of the fifteenth century and that it was only in the last quarter of the century when they frequented Italian centres (GAYA MASSOT 1950; ARRIZABALAGA et al. 1989). Some of them, as for instance Radio, were also trained surgeons. The worth of these figures, as well as their cause of death, was enough for Melchor Miralles, the chaplain of King Alfons the Magnanimous, to include in his chronicle the accidental demise of Martí and Roig. The former died on 7 July 1472, at the age of 80, after falling through a hatch when he went to visit the nuns of the Saïdia, and the latter in 1478 following an accidental fall when he was riding a mule to examine the dams of the canals that irrigated his fields (MIRALLES 2011: 450, 316).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The research work and the compilation of extraordinary news of Rodrigo Pertegás is fundamental to understanding the biographies and medical work of those six figures. The most complete biography of Jaume Roig was authored by Carré (ROIG 2014: 11-58). Currently, along with this author, I'm preparing a study on the relationship between Jaume Roig and Queen Maria.

<sup>13</sup> They were the physicians of noblemen and kings (Jaume Roig and Jaume Radio had a professional relationship with Queen Maria, the wife of King Alfons V of Aragon el Magnànim, and Roig was also King Joan II's physician; Vallseguer worked for the noble families of Galvany de Villena and Jofre de Tous; Climent was also the physician of the Tous, an possibly, of the Boïls; and Martí was the physician of Isabel de Borja); nunneries and friaries (Roig was the physician of the Dominican friary and of the nunnery of the Trinitat; Vallseguer was the physician at the convent of the Magdalenes; and Martí at the Saïdia); hospitals (Jaume Roig was related to the three bourgeois and lay hospitals of València: the Hospital d'En Clapers, the Hospital dels Innocents, and the l'Hospital d'en Bou; Vallseguer, Falcs, and Radio worked as physicians at the Hospital de la Reina; and Falcs at the Hospital d'En Clapers); municipal examiners of physicians (Roig acted as examiner at least 12 times, and in 1436 he was part of the commission the city created to select the first boards in charge of examining farriers; Vallseguer and Martí acted as examiners 10 times; and Climent and Falcs three times); experts for the court of criminal justice in *dessospitacions* of wounded people (Falcs was appointed by King Alfons V as official *dessospitador*—medical expert on wounded people—in 1435, and carried out numerous expert reports—19 only in 1449, the year before his death; Roig, briefly acted in this capacity in 1449) and poisonings (Climent participated in two medical commissions in charge of solving two alleged poisonings in 1422 and 1441; Martí did the same in 1441); as well as in the court of civil justice examining sick slaves (Roig, in 1449; Vallseguer in 1438, 1443, 1446, and 1447; Martí in 1443).

We could add their role in the municipal government, and their economic status, considerably wealthy. Finally, it should be said that these physicians maintained a close professional relationship, for they belonged to the same commissions, with other physicians and surgeons, and also maintained partnership, business, and friendship ties. What could they contribute to the clarification of the events involving those famous people?

During the Middle Ages, the rules for canonization that would appear later were not yet established. However, during the late medieval period, the traits shared by the saints were supernatural grace, penitential asceticism, charitable work, the power of speech, and evangelical activity—although the range of candidates for sanctification narrowed from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In the seventeenth century, Pope Urban VIII first established the three defining traits for the consideration of a candidate, that is, doctrinal purity, excellence in virtues, and the miracles attributed after death (WEINSTEIN, BELL 1982:141, 179; WOODWARD 1996: 69). However, while these principles came into force, it has been argued that it was *vox populi*, that is, popular reactions and church influences that were inextricably linked to the proclamation of a saint. In fact, when there was no popular recognition, the candidates were not even considered despite the eventual official proclamation (PERNOUD 1984, p. 265; KLEINBERG 1992: 30-31). Although there was an agreement between the ecclesiastical authorities that the preservation of the body and its fragrance were not evidence of holiness, they sometimes had to yield to the “popular canonization;” certainly, papal canonization was a luxury reserved for a few saints and the Holy Father was careful not to intervene in local cults (KLEINBERG 1992: 35, 37). At any rate, the presence of a group of physicians in determining an alleged supernatural event, a miracle so to speak, as it happened in Valencia, corroborates the opinion of Ziegler (1999: 192-194) that this idea of canonization by *vox populi*, deserves to be considered further. Indeed, through the study of the processes of canonization of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this author has found that the presence of physicians was quite common, and that the community and civil and ecclesiastical authorities waited for the information provided by medical practitioners to formally recognize a new saint. This mistrust must therefore be considered as the valorization of the miraculous phenomenon. If there was no natural explanation to the facts, there was only the supernatural, namely, God’s hand (BOUVIER 1983: 201).

The lack of documentary sources has deprived us of knowing in detail what happened as a result of the following presumable medical examination of the body of Angelina, or what information they transmitted to the authorities. The truth is that the initial optimism seems to have faded quickly, as not even the chronicles record it; we do not have news either that Queen Maria gave special relevance to the finding of the body of Angelina. The piety of the Queen was well known and as a great benefactor of religious orders who ensured compliance with the monastic rule (SOLDEVILA 1928: 274-275), she probably did not credit the worth of a young girl, about whom she only knew what her relatives and acquaintances might argue.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On 14 April 1485, in an ancient tomb in Rome, some workmen discovered the body of a young girl, about 15 or 16 years old, with her eyes wide open and flexible limbs, as if they had life in them. The miracle quickly caught

## A LONG TRADITION: THE DISCOVERY IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It is indeed revealing that the news of the appearance of the incorrupt body of Angelina Bertran did not appear in the works published a few years after the discovery. Thus, Melchor Miralles, the chaplain of King Alfons V, did not record the event on his *Dietari*. This catches the eye because it contrasts with the interest of the diarist in keeping track of curious events, such as the sale of an expensive horse, the observation of a comet, or gruesome episodes, such as killings like the so-called crime of Paiporta and disasters as the fire at the *Fusteria*, which occurred in February and March, respectively, only a few months before the appearance of Angelina (MIRALLES 2011: 226-227, 389, 394, 404). Jaume Roig, who also bore witness to the crime of Paiporta and the fire at the *Fusteria* in his *Espill*, offered no clue about the discovery of the body. This is rather surprising given that he was among the experts summoned to assess the case and he did report other events in which he was called on as an expert.<sup>15</sup>

Notaries also reported events deemed relevant. Some of them also recorded both episodes, the crime and the fire, but none dedicated a single line to Angelina's case (RODRIGO PERTEGÀS 1930: 196; CARRÉ 2012: 98-103). Therefore, everything seems to suggest that, after all, the discovery of the body of Angelina Bertran was not considered worthy of receiving special attention, at least among the individuals that belonged to the social and cultural elites who safeguarded the collective memory. In fact, the first historian who reported the case was the rector of Sant Esteve and official chronicler of the Kingdom of Valencia, Gaspar Escolano, who in the early seventeenth century wrote in his *Década primera*:

A veynte de Abril de mil quatrocientos quarenta y seys... acaeció que haviendo llamado no saben quien, al enterrador de dicha parrochia para abrir una sepultura en otra Iglesia, no entendiendolo bien, por permisión de Dios la abrio en el cimiterio de San Lorenço, y ahondando con el açadon, descubrio un cuerpo fresco de una hermosa donzella, con su cabellera esparzida por las espaldas, y guirnalda en la cabeça, como si entonces acabara de morir, y entera la cabeça a pies sin faltarle cosa. Quedo suspenso el hombre, por haver largo tiempo que en aquel puesto no se havia tocado, a efecto de enterrar, y concurriendo el vulgo en tal novedad, fue averiguado, que havia dos años... que havia sido enterrada una buena donzella, llamada Angelina Beltran, devotissima de la Virgen, y que havia padecido grandes trabajos por guardar la virginidad que en su nombre sustentava. Por orden de la Reyna, el Governador que entonces lo era desta ciudad, hizo junta de Medicos, en que se hallo el sobredicho Poeta y medico Jayme Roig, para averiguar si podia estar un cuerpo entero y fresco naturalmente, dos años en un cimiterio, o mas, entre tierra humeda y sin ataud. Y resueltos que no, confessando la maravilla del cielo, fue desenterrado el cuerpo por los clérigos, y reservado en lugar decente (ESCOLANO 1610, pp. 923-924).<sup>16</sup>

the attention of people who went on pilgrimage by the thousands. The enthusiastic madness of people, prompted Pope Innocent VIII, who was quite restless about it, to seized the body of the girl at night and bury it in a place where nobody could find it (BOUVIER 1983: 205). The case bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Angelina, and suggests a similar outcome. While the body was not hidden, no actions were taken to promote the popular cult and the exaltation by Church authorities.

<sup>15</sup> Some lines of Roig's *Espill* (ll. 3426-99) could refer to this activity as an expert, recounting the case of the prisoner who dodges a death sentence by claiming continued pregnancy and ends with an autopsy revealing the fruit of her womb. Lines 3482-84 read "bé sé per qui / lo ventre hubert, / pus clar e çert."

<sup>16</sup> The citations maintain the original punctuation, spelling, and diacritical marks.

Escolano's source is unknown, but the shortcomings and errors in the text are clear. The body was found indeed by a fortuitous mistake, but on the 19th and not on 20 April, and it had been buried eight years before, not two. What really interested Escolano was evidence related to Angelina's virginal virtuosity and devotion to the Virgin Mary. In this period, the Baroque atmosphere of religious exaltation and exacerbation of the cult of local figures dead in odour of sanctity was simply extraordinary (GÉLIS 2005: 83-101). In fact, the most notable expression of the atmosphere of religious exaltation that followed the Council of Trent was the passion for the relics of the saints, with a boundless fondness that crossed all social groups, from the monarchy to the common people. This resulted in a revival of collecting—with the creation of extraordinary *lipsanotecas*, like the one owned by King Philip II—and international traffic. The death of certain saints and monks of the sixteenth century made people rush to get their clothes, beard, and even pieces of their body. It was also common to wear belts carrying relics, or wear them hanging (BOUZA 1990: 33-38). In Valencia, this climate was experienced with special fervor (CALLADO 2000).

Another addition was a garland on the head of Angelina, which replaced her earrings, something mundane and unbecoming of a servant of God. In fact, this detail would be repeated in later versions. He was also mistaken about the medical commission being the doing of Queen Maria, as the general lieutenant of the governor ordered it. Escolano, though, wanted to rescue the presence of Jaume Roig, unlike the other distinguished albeit already forgotten physicians, a well-known figure.

In mid-eighteenth century, Francesc Vidal i Micó, a Dominican friar of the friary of Valencia, included revealing news of what had happened to the body of Angelina in his biography of Saint Lluís Bertran. In his time no one knew what had become of the remains. In fact, the Dominican gives a clear reference to the document copied by Rodrigo Pertegàs in the early twentieth century, drawing on a *capbreu* kept in the archives of the parish of Sant Llorenç, which contained the details of the case and he probably consulted. Despite his desire to further emphasize the faith and virtuosity of this purported ancestor of Sant Lluís Bertran, the account of Vidal i Micó provided more accurate data than the one offered by Escolano:

Por los años de 1430 vivia en Valencia una hermosisima, y honestisima Doncella, llamada Angelina Bertran. Consagró la flor de su virginidad a su esposo Jesús, en obsequio de su Purísima Madre. Procuró conservarla con asperas penitencias, y continuos ayunos. Tentó, y procuró com muchas persecuciones, y violencias un atrevido lobo carnicero ajar la candida flor de su pureza. Ella constante como una roca, sufriendo persecuciones, y trabajos, quedó siempre vitoriosa. Murió de edad de dies y seis años, en el de 1439, à 14 de julio. Fue enterrada en el Cementerio de la Parroquial de San Lorenço. Después por los años de 1446, abriendo alli mesmo una sepultura por equivocación del Enterrador, cavando sobre el Cuerpo de la V. Angelina, le descubrieron fresco, hermoso, y entero, esparcidos los rubios cabellos de su cabeza, y fresca la guirnalda de las flores, que sobre ella tenia. Una copia se halló en la Parroquia en el tomo tercero de Cabreos,

hecha por Mosen Pablo Abella su Archivero, al folio quarenta nueve, dize, que el Cuerpo fue descubierto el año de 1447, en 19 de abril, aviendo ella muerto en el de 1439 y que asseguraron los Medicos ser milagro al conservarse incorrupto el Cuerpo en aquel lugar, donde se hallaron deshechos otros cuerpos, que sobre ella avian ya sepultado. Pusieronla en la Sacristia, en un Sepulcro en el pavimento de ella. Y que el año 1543, descubierto otra vez, hallaron los cabellos rubios, y se tenían por dichosos, los que podian tomar alguno de ellos. Sus huesos les colocó Mosen Domingo Sarmiento, entre sus reliquias. Hasta aqui relacion. Oy dizen los Clerigos, que no saben donde pararon (VIDAL I MICÓ 1743: 24).

The Dominican friar gave data on the age and exact date of the death of Angelina and her discovery. However, he couldn't help providing details about the garland she wore on her blond hair, a symbol of her virginity. Finally, he offered a new, very interesting piece of information: the corpse was again exhumed in the mid-sixteenth century, but it seems that although the hair was still there, a reminder of its early incorruptibility, only bones survived, which were treated as relics. In fact, it seems that Escolano did not see anything, either: the presence of Angelina only remained in books.

We owe the most extensive and accurate description of the case to friar Josep Teixidor, who made it in 1767, a few years after that of the Franciscan, in his *Antigüedades de Valencia*. Following Vidal Micó, he made Angelina a relative of Saint Lluís Bertran; but except for this completely spurious detail, Teixidor entirely based his account on the aforementioned document of the Governorate, and was much more meticulous than the previous scholar. He also mentioned the third volume of *capbreus* where the archivist Father Pau Abella, on folio 49, explains how the lieutenant of the governor of Valencia sent a letter on the matter to Queen Maria. All the details appear, point by point, in the same way as in the document of the Governorate, with a couple of convenient modifications. One of this is the garland on Angelina's head, replacing the prosaic earring, and the other one, that it was the Queen who promoted the intervention of the medical commission, which was indeed organized at the behest of the lieutenant. Teixidor gives the names of the members of the commission, although translated and adapted: "Miguel Clemente, Jaime Roig, Ramon de Fals, Juan Vallseguer i Jaime Raio." He also mentioned the rediscovery of the body, already decayed, that was made in 1543: "lo encontraron dissuelto, i Mosen Domingo Sarmiento colocó los huessos entre las reliquias, que en el dia no saben los Clerigos donde paran" (TEIXIDOR 1767: 368-369).

In the nineteenth century, two historians also recounted the event. The first to retell the story at the beginning of that century was friar Bartomeu Ribelles in his *Compendio histórico de las epidemias padecidas en Valencia* (RIBELLES 1804: 423). Ribelles summarized the case for a study that was related to the plague, to which Angelina fell victim. That was his interest in these facts. Later, the friar became the source for historians who dealt with the event, in this case in relation to the role played by Jaume Roig, for this episode was recounted as in the editions of the renowned *Espill*. The second nineteenth-century historian interested in Angelina's case was the Marquis

of Cruïlles in its *Guia urbana de Valencia* (1876: 128). He recounted the facts drawing straight from Escolano (“dedúcese su antigüedad [de Sant Llorenç] del suceso que minuciosamente relata Escolano”). He added that the body was exhumed by clerics and that it was the Divine Providence (“por permission de Dios”), which caused the gravedigger’s mistake.

Finally, Ribelles was the source for twentieth-century historians. This is the case of Roc Chabas in his study on the *Espill* (ROIG 1905: 423) and Ramon Miquel i Planas (MIQUEL I PLANAS 1929-50: 14-15). But back then, the discovery of Angelina’s body was a mere historical curiosity.

## CONCLUSIONS

There was probably no consensus between the people, the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the elites of the city about the cult and canonization of Angelina Bertran, even though the enticing possibility of a new saint in the city, particularly after everything that happened that year, was not easy to dismiss. Despite the initial public enthusiasm, the literates of the time did not see fit to dedicate a single mention to the case. After all, Angelina was but a young teenager victim of the plague that nobody knew. She was not religious—a needed characteristic among the canonized—and that hindered her admission to the court of the blessed. Anyway, the only trace Angelina left were a few lines in later chronicles, which were already loaded with another tone, more typical of times of religious exaltation.

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