

2017

# Coroporis Incorrupti Inspectio: The Remains of Fernando III and the Science of Confirming Sanctity in Seventeenth Century Sevilla

Kyle C. Lincoln  
*Kalamazoo College*, [kyle.lincoln@kzoo.edu](mailto:kyle.lincoln@kzoo.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), [History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons](#), [Medieval History Commons](#), and the [Medieval Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Lincoln, Kyle C. (2017) "Coroporis Incorrupti Inspectio: The Remains of Fernando III and the Science of Confirming Sanctity in Seventeenth Century Sevilla," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.  
<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1248>  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol42/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact [jesus@udel.edu](mailto:jesus@udel.edu).

## ***Coroporis incorrupti inspectio: The Remains of Fernando III and the Science of Confirming Sanctity in Seventeenth Century Seville***

**Kyle C. Lincoln**

Narrating his death on May 30, 1252, the *Estoria de Espanna* praised Fernando III of Castile-León with a rhetorical question, asking: “Who can say anything more about the marvels of the great laments which were had for this saintly and noble and blessed king Don Fernando which were made in Seville, where his end was met and where his holy body lies, and those [laments] made in all of Castile and Leon?”<sup>1</sup> On that hot summer’s night in Seville, Fernando slipped the surly bonds of earth as crusader and king. It was not to be until 1671 that Pope Clement X would end a process that lasted more than four centuries, leading to Fernando’s canonization with the bull *Gloriosissimos Caelestis*.<sup>2</sup> The bull itself lists Fernando’s incorrupt remains, the antiquity of a popular cult, and reports of miracles at his cult site— none of which are extraordinary for an early modern canonization. What is remarkable is the investigation of Fernando’s remains that led to *Gloriosissimos Caelestis*’s issuance. In the three reports of the 1668 examinations of Fernando’s remains, we have a vital insight into the nature of an early modern “hagiopsy,”<sup>3</sup>—an examination of the remains of those Peter Brown called “the very special dead”<sup>4</sup>— exposing the medical, scientific, and spiritual backgrounds of those responsible for demonstrating that Fernando III’s remains were preserved miraculously, rather than by any peculiar natural circumstance or human artifice. The examination, despite its scientific procedure, served to confirm and reinforce the pre-existing notions about Fernando’s identity as a saint and to use him as a buoy for the sinking reputation of Carlos II.

This paper examines the hagiopsy conducted on Fernando’s remains to better understand the approach of scientifically learned men to supernatural phenomena. In doing so, it will tease out the medical observations and spiritual

---

<sup>1</sup>“¿Qui podrie dezir nin contar la marauilla de los grandes llantos que por este sancto et noble et bienauenturado rey don Fernando fueron fechos por Seuilla, o el su finamiento fue et do el su sancto cuerpo yaze, et por todos los reynos de Castiella et de León?”, Alfonso X of León and Castile; Sancho IV of León and Castile, *Primera Crónica General de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y se continuaba bajo Sancho IV en 1289* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1955), 773.

<sup>2</sup>Laerzio Cherubini, ed. *Magnum Bullarium Romanum* (Lyons: Petri Borde, Joannis & Petri Arnaud, 1692), 5:560-1.

<sup>3</sup> Although this is a term of my own invention, its derivation is clear enough to warrant only a brief comment here, to be followed up by methodological conclusions. By a hagiopsy, I mean specifically: “the examination of the remains of the very special dead, either a prospective or actual saint.”

<sup>4</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 69-86.

assumptions implicit in the examination of holy remains. Therefore, the paper will navigate the blurry middle ground between the sacred and the mundane, as understood by those very men who examined Fernando's remains in 1668. As the key miracle that secured his sanctity, Fernando's incorrupt remains required authentication by the available scientific knowledge of the day. By necessity, this paper will investigate each of the three examining parties who handled and observed Fernando's remains, and will supplement these accounts with relevant secondary scholarship in order to best fill in the background data already present at the time of the 1668 hagiopsy. Having done so, the paper interrogates the ways in which Fernando's remains were used as a kind of material primary source to support the case for his canonization and validate the miracle of his life as a proof of his sanctity. Although similar investigations were performed on other potential saints, the importance of the examination of the remains suggests that they were an especially-important marker for a prospective saint who did not have a record of posthumous miracles. Put briefly: What did Fernando's uncorrupted remains look like to seventeenth century examiners and what impact did that have on their testimony to the Roman Curia about his sanctity?

## Introduction

The canonization of Fernando III was not the first effort at an early modern canonization of a member of the Castilian monarchy. In the early seventeenth century, the court of Philip II made a considerable effort to effect the canonization of Fernando III's grandfather, Alfonso VIII of Castile (r.1158-1214). The drive for canonization produced a considerable corpus, directed by the abbess of Las Huelgas in Burgos, the powerful Maria Ana of Austria.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for the abbess of Las Huelgas and her royal kin, the process was unsuccessful, and, although Alfonso VIII is still held in high regard, no canonization occurred.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The volume produced by Maria Ana of Austria has not been edited, but was cited as *Información de la vida y milagros del bienaventurado señor rey don Alfonso VIII* (A. H. N., Códices, traslado de 1771, proc. de Consejos), by Julio González, *El reino de castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Escuela de Estudios Medievales, 1960), 1:16. On the role of the abbesses of Las Huelgas as major power-players in Old Castile: Andrea Gayoso, "The Lady of Las Huelgas—A Royal Abbey and its Patronage," *Cîteaux: comentarii cistercienses*, 51, (2000): 91-115. Although the connection between the royal family and the abbey of Las Huelgas remained strong, the role of the *infantas de Las Huelgas* faded by the fourteenth century: Carlos Reglero de la Fuente, "Las "señoras" de las Huelgas de Burgos: infantas, monjas y encomenderas" *e-Spania*, 24 (2016): <https://e-spania.revues.org/25542>. Last updated 15 June 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Amaia Arizaleta and Stéphanie Jean-Marie, "En el umbral de santidad: Alfonso VIII de Castilla," in *Pratiques Hagiographiques dans l'Espagne du moyen âge et du siècle d'or*, ed. et al. Amaia Arizaleta (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2006), 2:573-83. Maria Ana of Austria was a daughter of Don Juan de Austria, one of the victorious commanders of Lepanto: Adelaida Sagarra Gamazo, "Semblanza de doña Ana de Austria, Abadesa de Las Huelgas de Burgos," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González*, 73, no. 209 (1994): 341-52.

There are no known reports of exactly *why* the canonization efforts for Alfonso VIII failed, but, given Philip II's sometimes rocky relationship with the Papacy, it seems that politics may well be to blame.<sup>7</sup>

The difference between Alfonso VIII and Fernando III, with regard to their prospects at canonization, appears rather to lie in the differences between Philip II of Spain and his grandson Philip IV. Both Philip II and Philip IV were often-embroiled in the complicated politics of the Reformation and the ensuing Roman response, demonstrably pious men, deeply involved in the devotional practices of the day.<sup>8</sup> The distinction most likely lies in the complicated social and cultural changes influenced by the Thirty Year's War and its impact on the Spanish crown. Even though the canonization took place in the earliest years of the reign of Carlos II, it seems unlikely that the process did not begin much earlier and is not more a product of the last years of Philip IV's reign than of his misfortunate son.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately by the early modern period, the calendar of the saints had few names to represent Iberia, and one scholar has noted that "the lack of official saints constituted a failure on the part of the Iberian monarchies and church was [a fact] not lost on Philip II...in this area Philip was a tenacious driving force."<sup>10</sup> Certainly, it was this momentum, generated earlier, that came to fruition in the canonization drive for Fernando III. Indeed, where Spanish influence in Rome had waned in the earlier half of the seventeenth century, the Spanish faction of cardinals played a decisive role in the elections of Clement IX (r. 1667-9) and Clement X (r. 1670-6) and worked to secure the spiritual and temporal interests of Spaniards at Rome during this period.<sup>11</sup> That this period coincides with the investigations of Fernando's remains is no twist of fate and certainly owes its incidence to the influence of the Spanish cardinals. The difference seems most likely to be found in the Habsburg monarchs of the seventeenth century, rather than the Bourbons of the thirteenth. The question of the cause of Alfonso VIII, Philip II, and Philip IV is a different question for a different paper.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Geoffrey Parker, *Philip II*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2002), 53-8.

<sup>8</sup> R.A. Stradling, *Philip IV and the Government of Spain 1621-1665* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 342-53.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the reign of Carlos II has received less study than his father or great-grandfather, although the piety of his court does not stand in too sharp of relief from that of Philip IV: Stradling, *op. cit.*; Luis Ribot, *Carlos II: el rey y su entorno*, (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Dandeleet, *Spanish Rome, 1500-1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 171.

<sup>11</sup> Dandeleet, *op. cit.*, 211.

<sup>12</sup> The only treatment of this interaction is the short paper, mentioned above in n.6, by Arizaleta and Jean-Marie, which, though informative, is far from being an exhaustive treatment. Arizaleta and Jean-Marie, *op. cit.*

Of course, the cause of a ruler's sanctity was not a new one in the seventeenth century, and indeed more than twenty royals are numbered among the saints in the Roman Church from the thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> All of these rulers, however, were "canonized"—an anachronistic designation, admittedly—long before formal rules, processes, and regulations were laid out by the Roman Curia. Beginning with the papacy of Gregory IX (r.1227-41), the requirements for counting a Catholic among the saints were developed into a more restrained form by evidentiary "burdens of proof."<sup>14</sup> Between Gregory IX and Benedict XIV—whose massive treatise on the subject of the saints set the standard until the First Vatican Council—the process by which one was made a saint was much in flux. If the saint had incorrupt remains, it was strong evidence of potential sanctity, and the incorrupt nature of a saint's remains was an influential precedent for sanctity by Benedict XIV when he treated the subject at length in the following century:

Up to now, about the natural and artificial causes, on account of which a Body is able to persist being incorrupt just short of a miracle, and about which things a serious judgment must be carried out and also after having carried out a favorable judgment concerning the [person's] Virtues, before the incorruption is ascribed to be a Miracle. But, as incorruption is reckoned to be among the miracles, it is not only necessary to sort out those which are natural and artificial from incorruption, but indeed it is absolutely necessary, so that the very same quality of incorruption should be seriously attended to: for it is able to be, so that a certain cadaver be incorrupt, that incorruption not appear from some natural or artificial

---

<sup>13</sup>Michael Goodich compiled an extensive list of saints from the thirteenth century. Although his list is in need of considerable correction—it includes Fernando III as a canonized saint! —, it nevertheless includes the following categorized as being of "royal descent": Agnes of Bohemia I, Agnes of Bohemia II, Alexandry of Foigny, Angela of Bohemia, Berengaria of Leon, Cunegunda of Hungary, Elizabeth of Hungary, Elizabeth of Portugal, Erik Ploughpenny, Ferdinand of Aragon, Hedwig, Isabella of France, Louis IX of France, Mafalda of Portugal, Louis of Toulouse, Margaret of Hungary, Mary of Brabant, Matilda of Lappion, Salome of Poland, Sancha Carillo, Cancho of Cellas, Teresa of Portugal. Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 25, Monographien Zur Geschichte Des Mittelalters (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1982), 213-41. The work of Bell and Weinstein has shown that royal figures did receive the attention of cult worship, but the statistics paper over the meaningful distinctions of space and place: Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 135-7.

<sup>14</sup>An example of the more formal investigations required during Gregory IX's pontificate can be found in the materials produced at Toulouse and Bologna for the canonization of St. Dominic of Osma: "Acta Canonizationis Sancti Dominici," ed. R. P. Angeli-Walz, *Monumenta Ordinis Praedicatorum Historica* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1935), 123-94. Finucane presents the most thorough approximation of this procedure in his 2011 volume: Ronald C. Finucane, *Contested Canonizations: The Last Medieval Saints, 1482-1523* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 24-32.

cause, and because, with this things barely standing in the way, incorruption ought to be not ascribed to be a miracle.<sup>15</sup>

Benedict XIV's testimony underscores the urgency to demonstrate that the prospective saint in question had not physically deteriorated following their physical death. The Congregation of the Sacred Rites was established by Sixtus V in 1588 to determine precisely which canonizations were valid and to ensure that the most worthy candidates received canonization.<sup>16</sup> Medical knowledge about exactly how a saint's body was made uncorrupted was unnecessary: saints were, by definition, miraculous individuals; "[m]iracles made the saints' interior, or spiritual, characters outwardly apparent"; therefore, saint's remains were incorrupt because the virtue of the saints miraculously preserved them as an example to the faithful.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Benedict's summation of the proper procedures for canonization reflects the collected wisdom of a later generation than that which produced Fernando's canonization and was certainly influenced by the canonization of Fernando. Likewise, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell have located in Teresa of Ávila's trial in 1617 the beginnings of the "truly detailed and precedent-setting examination of heroic virtue."<sup>18</sup> That the bull for Teresa of Ávila's canonization, *Omnipotens sermo Dei*, said little about the state of her remains, but made an intricate account of her virtues, demonstrates the importance of a careful notation of all the special and miraculous qualities she possessed.<sup>19</sup> "As a theologian working on Bonaventure's process wrote: 'Not everyone holy is worthy of canonization.'"<sup>20</sup> Detailed histories and accounts of Fernando's virtues and

---

<sup>15</sup> "Hactenus de causis naturalibus & artificialibus, ob quas citra Miraculum potest Cadaver incorruptum persistere, & de quibus serio agendum est etiam post latum de Virtutibus favorable iudicium, antquam incorruption Miraculo adscribatur. At, ut incorruptio inter Miracula recenseatur, non solum oportet, causas quascumque naturales, & artificiales ab incorruptione avertere, sed etiam absolute necessarium est, ut ipsa qualitas incorruptionis serio attendatur : potest enim esse, ut aliquod Cadaver sit incorruptum, quod incorruptio non processerit ab aliqua causa naturali, vel artificiali, & quod, hisce minime obstantibus, incorruptio non sit Miraculo adscribenda." Prospero Lambertini (Pope Benedict XIV), *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione Et Beatorum Canonizatione* (Bologna: Formis Longhi excursoris archiepiscopalis, 1734-8), 4.1:415.

<sup>16</sup> Finucane, *Contested Canonizations: The Last Medieval Saints, 1482-1523*, 5; Dandele, *Spanish Rome, 1500-1700*, 256, n.51.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, ed. J.C. Holt, vol. 14, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 103.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 142.

<sup>19</sup> Cherubini, *Magnum Bullarium Romanum*, 3:414-8.

<sup>20</sup> Finucane, *Contested Canonizations: The Last Medieval Saints, 1482-1523*, 241.

holiness were legion, as a survey of his entry in the *Acta Sanctorum* attests.<sup>21</sup> The success of Teresa's canonization was part of a larger effort of Spanish canonizations, as noted above, but the type of investigation undertaken for her case specifically seems to have influenced the approach adopted for Fernando's later case.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup>Eire has already noted that the evidence of Teresa's own canonization was likely responding socially to the tensions of the contemporary Spanish Empire. Therefore, by examining the case of Fernando's 1668 hagiopsy, we can better understand the importance of uncorrupted remains to seventeenth century thinkers' understanding of the link between virtue and corporeal remains. In doing so, Fernando's canonization demonstrates the ways in which sacred and scientific examinations reified the memory of Fernando *qua* saint using the medical science available in its day.

### The Sources

The seventeenth century historian Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga preserves the earliest and most credible mentions of the final examination that resulted in Fernando's 1671 canonization in his 1677 *Annales Eclesiásticos y Seculares de la muy Noble y muy Leal Ciudad de Sevilla, Metrópoli de Andalucía*.<sup>24</sup> The final May volume of the *Acta Sanctorum* translated (into Latin) much of the material preserved in Ortiz de Zúñiga's volume as the reports of "the inspection of the incorrupt body in the year 1668 and the judgment of the doctors about it".<sup>25</sup> The reports from this inspection are varied in their length and descriptive detail, but nevertheless provide an adequate portrayal of the inspection of Fernando's remains. The reports tell us that among the examiners were Don Antonio Payno Osorio, archbishop of Sevilla; the leading men of the city, referred to as *Capellani*, whose report was given by Don Christopher Bañez; and, a commission of two doctors and two surgeons, whose findings were reported by Don Dr. Gaspar Caldéra de Herédia. These reports, taken together, represent the best witnesses of the findings that confirmed that Fernando's remains were incorrupt and likely sealed his canonization.

---

<sup>21</sup> Societe des Bollandistes, *Acta Sanctorum*, 5, no. 7, (1688): 280A-392E.

<sup>22</sup> That Juan de Pineda's *Memorial* for Fernando III dates to 1627, a mere four years after Teresa of Ávila's canonization, suggests that he was influenced by the success of Teresa's canonization drive in the crafting of his similarly-oriented text for Fernando: Juan de Pineda, *Memorial de la excelente santidad y heroicas virtudes del señor rey don Fernando, tercero de este nombre, primero de Castilla y de León. Eficaz motivo a la magestad católica de Filipo III, nuestro señor, para que afectuosamente mande solicitar con la sede apostolica la debida y breve canonización del rey santo, su XIII progenitor* (Seville: En la Oficina de Mattias Clauio, 1627).

<sup>23</sup> Aire, op cit., 502-10.

<sup>24</sup> Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga, *Anales eclesiásticos y seculares de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Sevilla, metrópoli de la Andalucía* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1677).

<sup>25</sup> Bollandistes, *Acta Sanctorum*, May, vol. 7, 381E-85E.

The first report is from the most prominent witness among the sources. Antonio Payno Osorio had been archbishop of Sevilla for nearly five years by the time of Fernando's hagiopsy, serving from June of 1663 until his death in May of 1669. Don Antonio had previously served as bishop of Orense, bishop of Zamora, archbishop of Burgos, and lastly as archbishop of Sevilla. His education at Salamanca in arts and theology, as well as his surname, demonstrate that he belonged to the ranks of the peninsular nobility.<sup>26</sup> The testimony Don Antonio offers is short, compared with that offered by other parties, but did contain a history of the process's progress in the seventeenth century, which was sent directly to Rome; along with his testimony, Don Antonio also noted that he sent his findings enclosed "with a relic [*cum reliquo*]" to the Curia.

The second account found in Zúñiga's *Anales* records the observations of Fernando's remains by *Capellani*, whose report was compiled by Doctor Christobal Bañez de Salcedo.<sup>27</sup> Bañez was assisted, Zúñiga reports, by nine of his fellow chaplains: two priests, Antonio de Torres Valderrama and Sebastian de Vera Ferrer; a judge from the city of Sevilla, Diego de Escobar y Castro; Joseph Argote de Molia, a *licenciado*, most likely in theology; Francisco Fernandez Marmolejo, a Knight of Santiago and Alcaide of the royal shipyards and fortifications; Fr. Juan de San Agustín, an Augustinian friar; Joseph Maldonado de Saabedra y Davila, "[Zúñiga's] uncle, whose papers were cited in many places in [Zúñiga's] *Anales*"; Juan Marquez de Cuenca, "Advocate of the Royal Audience, and Advocate and Relator of the same."<sup>28</sup> The four clerics (two priests, the Augustinian friar, and the theologian) ensured that the examination demonstrated intricate knowledge of the divine. A Knight of Santiago was a major member of the chivalric class in Spain, and that the same knight is listed as an Alcaide—a sort of local elected magistrate—of two important districts.<sup>29</sup> Zúñiga's uncle was a prominent author in his own right, and as an advocate in Philip II's Royal Audience were among the top lawyers in Spain. As a result, the list of examiners represented by Bañez' report was comprised of educated laity and clerics, all of good standing in the city. In other words, to Zúñiga—and to the modern historian—they were reliable witnesses.

---

<sup>26</sup> Zúñiga preserves Don Antonio's memorial inscription (Ortiz de Zúñiga, *Anales Eclesiásticos*, 790) and scholars have since corroborated these basic details: J.S. Herrero, *Historia de las Diócesis Españolas: Iglesias de Sevilla, Huelva, Jerez, Cádiz Y Ceuta*, vol. 10, Historia De Las Diócesis Españolas (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2002), 506; Conrad Eubel, ed. *Hierarchia Catholica Medii et Recentioris Aevi, sive Summarum Pontificum, S.R.E. Cardinalium Ecclesiarum Antistitum Series* (Münster: Sumptibus Librariae Regensbergianae, 1898), 4:104, 4:24, 4:204, 4:376.

<sup>27</sup> Ortiz de Zúñiga, *op. cit.*, 785-7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 784-5.

<sup>29</sup> That Don Francisco was the Alcalde of the Royal Shipyards and Fortifications ("Reales Alcazares y Atarazanas") speaks to his special ranking among the city's elite: *Ibid.*, 785.

The third testimony from the *Anales* is a report of several doctors, led by Doctor Gaspar Caldéra de Herédia, assisted by Doctor Pedro de Herrera, and the surgeons Diego de Olivera and Fernando Soriano.<sup>30</sup> Gaspar was, along with being a Doctor, a professor of medicine and the author of at least two treatises, both published in the Low Countries during the reign of Philip IV.<sup>31</sup> The University of Sevilla was, in the seventeenth century, an established scholarly community with a history of advanced scientific knowledge.<sup>32</sup> That Gaspar was assisted by three other medical professionals suggests that they could boast considerable medical knowledge. As a result, Gaspar Caldeira de Heredia and his report are a reliable witness and his narrative in the *Anales* is an important insight into the understanding of the supernatural by medical scientists.

Although several investigations of Fernando's remains had taken place long before the 1668 hagiopsy, the examination in 1668 was the last.<sup>33</sup> These three reports were arguably the most important, examination of the remains of King Fernando present the scholar with important insights for medical practitioners' understanding of the divine. While there are many instances of medical examinations from the early modern period, few present the curious cross-currents of the canonization examinations performed on Fernando III. The pressures from their Habsburg sovereigns, an eager Sevillian population desiring to see their cherished local patron honored, and an archiepiscopate eager to reap the windfall of the canonization of a legendary Spanish monarch interred in the metropolitan cathedral.

### **The Examination of Fernando's Remains**

The reports from the investigations of the remains of King Fernando III of León-Castile proceeds through roughly the same order. First came the careful removal of Fernando's remains from their resting place in the Capilla Real. Second,

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, 787-9.

<sup>31</sup> Gaspar Caldeira de Heredia, *Tribunal Medico-Magicum & Politicum* (Leiden: Joannem Elzevirum, 1658); *De facile parabilibus, e veterum & recentiorum observatione comprobatis & ex arcanis naturae chymico artificio, & artis magisterio eductis* (Antwerp: Jacobum Meursium, 1663).

<sup>32</sup> Cándido María Ajo González de Rapriegos y Sainz de Zúñiga, *Historia de las Universidades Hispánicas: Orígenes y desarrollo desde su aparición hasta nuestros días* (Ávila: CSIC, 1957), 2:61-8.

<sup>33</sup> Ana Rodríguez López, "Fernando III el Santo (1217-1252). Evolución historiográfica, canonización y utilización política", en *Miscellània en homenatge al P. Agustí Altisent*, (Tarragona: Diputació de Tarragona, 1991), 579-81. There were several late medieval chronicles, but none of them appears to have preserved the examinations of the remains sufficiently to provide comment on the qualities of Fernando's remains. Even Juan de Pineda's well-researched 1627 account failed to provide any account of Fernando's physical state, which suggests that his account was one that was rooted in the memory of Fernando rather than any new evidence: Pineda, *op. cit.*.

Fernando's head and face were examined and close attention was paid by the examiners to those details which would have stood out to those familiar with the old king *ante mortem*. Third, the exposed portions of the upper body, mostly the hands, were examined; fourth, the visible sections of his lower body. Finally, the sub-cutaneous tissues of Fernando's remains were examined to discover if any of those parts had witnessed any significant decay. Taken together, the methodical procedure adopted by the examiners is a valuable witness to what exactly "incorrupt" remains meant in the context of the mid-seventeenth century, and can be used as a barometer for the intersection of medico-scientific and theological understandings of the super-natural in that era.

The removal of Fernando's remains was according to all accounts dutiful and ceremonial. The reliquary which contained Fernando's remains was a complex container, composed of at least three parts of walnut, worked silver, gold, white marble, red and blue velvet, and crimson taffeta.<sup>34</sup> Archbishop Osorio noted that he approached the handling of Fernando's remains "with the proper reverence, and veneration."<sup>35</sup> Dr. Caldéra de Herédia likewise noted that he approached the examination "with religious veneration, and a singular caution."<sup>36</sup> Although the men's "reverence," "caution," and "veneration" would mean little in a modern medical context, the care with which they approached the work of Fernando's hagiopsy is significant. The importance of the work, as attested by their "devotion" to it, was meant to assure the readers of the account that the men had exhibited due caution and diligence, rather than rushing through an examination out of some misappropriated zeal. It is important to maintain, within a modern reading, the contiguity of both the scientific and spiritual sincerity of the examiners in order to better preserve the integrity of the *mentalités* preserved in the textual evidence.

Having exposed the remains from Fernando's sepulcher, the examiners noted that he was well-dressed, holding a silver crucifix, and resting in a comfortably outfitted casket.<sup>37</sup> cursory examinations of the remains caused Archbishop Payno to comment that "upon finding him intact, whole in his members, the experts came together, and individually saw [Fernando] and taken things with all their attention and with all distinction, investigating the parts and joints, working their own art and science [to do so]."<sup>38</sup> The *Capellani's* testimony adds "when the tomb was opened first, a sweet order commenced to be known, as

---

<sup>34</sup>Ortiz de Zúñiga, *op. cit.*, 785-7.

<sup>35</sup>"con la devida reverencia, y veneracion." *Ibid.*, 784.

<sup>36</sup>"con religiosa veneracion, y singular cuidado." *Ibid.*, 787.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 785.

<sup>38</sup> "y hallandole al parecer unido, y entero en sus miembros, llegaron los peritos juntos, y cada uno de por si, y le vieron, y tocaron con toda atencion, y distincion, por diversas partes, y conyunturas de él, haziendo conforme á su ciencia, y Arte." *Ibid.*, 784.

of an aromatic type unknown.”<sup>39</sup> Dr. Caldéra de Herédia observed at the beginning of the examination “[I] say, and declare under my oath, that having examined with clear and distinct light on the body, that it was intact, with skin from the head to the feet.”<sup>40</sup> The preliminary analysis of the remains appears to have demonstrated to the examiners that the remains possessed the miraculous quality of being intact and, also, possessing the *odor sanctitatis* known to have accompanied holy relics and bodies.<sup>41</sup> Especially in the earlier case of Teresa of Ávila, this odor was a powerful precursory marker of the holy power of a potential saint.<sup>42</sup> As a marker of holiness, the *odor sanctitatis* was just the first in a list of miraculous signs.

Examinations of the royal head offer the first major clues as to the medical state of Fernando’s remains. Unfortunately, the most prestigious of our witnesses, the Sevillian archbishop, provides no specific notation about the state of individual parts of Fernando’s remains, noting only that the other witnesses, having examined the body, were “warned to tell only the truth in such a serious matter, ratifying [the truth] in their oaths.”<sup>43</sup> Although this is something of a setback for any investigation with regard to providing detail, archbishop Antonio’s notation that he personally supervised the inspection lends further credence to the testimony of the *Capellani* and Dr. Gaspar. In both cases, the witnesses describe Fernando’s face in considerable detail. The detailed testimony of the *Capellani* is worth quoting in full:

The whole body was still together at its joints, and it was determined that the body had not been embalmed. Because I saw the tongue sticking out from the jaw and the lower teeth, and it did not have sawing, nor have any sign of [embalming] on the forehead, and it was not tied, as in those bodies which are embalmed, nor did the medics find any sign in the intestines that he was embalmed. It had the whole face intact, and it was not consumed [with age] but in fact rather bulky, and the color was red like a man before he had died, and as if it had just had some dust dropped on it. The eyes were not very sunken, but with a certain concavity, and more obscure in their color, being better able to receive more of the dust.

---

<sup>39</sup> “Desde que se abrió la tumba primera, se començó á reconocer un odor suave, como de especia aromatica no conocida.” Ibid, 785.

<sup>40</sup> “digo, y declaro debaxo de mi juramento, que aveiendose manifestado con clara, y distinta luz el dicho cuerpo, hallo estar entero, y de la cabeça a los pies continuada la cutisvera.” Ibid, 787.

<sup>41</sup> This holy odor is well attested in late medieval Latin hagiography: Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 428.

<sup>42</sup> Carlos Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 427-31.

<sup>43</sup> “advertidos de dezir la verdad en materia tan grave, ratificandose en sus juramentos.” Ortiz de Zúñiga, *op. cit.*, 784.

He had no beard, an open mouth, and in the upper part all the wisdom teeth were seen, and in the lower part on the one hand the tops of his teeth could be seen, and in the middle of the mouth his tongue was visible, and the [lower] lip covered the rest. The bones of the temples showed themselves through the skin to be rather thick, as of a robust man. The neck which was seen, all the way up to the part covered by the clothing, was intact with its cutis of the same color as the face.<sup>44</sup>

The examination reports of the *Capellani* are understandably colourful (even gruesome), but do present interesting details. It was particularly important to the witnesses that the body be established as having no markers of embalming in any fashion, thereby eliminating any question of the remains' authenticity as being preserved by holiness rather than science. Dr. Gaspar noted similarly that:

The face was that of a dead man, covered completely, both in the front and the top, with its skin and some hair [was intact] and the eyelids were intact. The mouth was open with its lips, still attached, and dry, and a great part of his teeth [were] in [the mouth].<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Gaspar then noted that the head was a little off-kilter from the neck, but discounted this as being caused by the movement of the casket from the sepulcher, and thereafter noted that the color of the face was not beautiful, but with a pale color.<sup>46</sup> In general, the accounts of the *Capellani* and of Dr. Gaspar demonstrate adequately that the examiners were convinced that a slightly abnormal color, intact cutis layer, and only minor degradation of the major facial features—slightly misshapen eyes, mildly exposed temples, and a dried out mouth—constituted an excellent start for the remains. That all of the witnesses

---

<sup>44</sup> “Esta todo el cuerpo unido, y trabado por sus coyunturas, y se reconoce, que no está embalsamado, porque yo le vide la lengua arrimada a la quixada, y dientes inferiores, y no tiene asserradura, ni señal de ella en la frente, ni fue liado, como los cuerpos que se embalsaman, ni en los intestinos hallaron los Medicos cosa de que no se arguia, que no fue embalsamado. Tiene el rostro entero, y no consumido, sino abultado, y de la color que un hombre roxo queda despues de muerto y como si a este tal la huuiera caido algun polvo encina. Los ojos no muy hundidos, sino con alguna concabidad, y mas obscuro aquel sitio de color, como parte que ha podido recibir mejor el polvo. No tiene barba alguna, tiene la boca abierta, y en la parte superior se le ven todos los dientes cabales y en la inferior por un lado se reconocen las extremidades de los dientes, y por en medio dentro de la boca se ve la lengua, y lo demas cubre el labio. Los huessos de las siene, se le señalan por el cuties bien guessos, como de hombre robusto. El cuello que se ve, hasta lo que cubre la ropa, esta entero con su cutis de la misma color que el rostro.” Ibid, 785-6.

<sup>45</sup> “La cabeça está como de un hombre muerto, cubierta toda, y la frente, y alto de ella con su cutis, y algunos pelos en ella, y los parpados de los ojos enteros. La boca abierta con sus labios, aunque enjunto, y secos, y mucha parte de sus dientes en ella.” Ibid, 788.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

had noted the *odor sanctitatis* upon opening the casket in the first place likely influenced the witnesses, but the detail provided by the *Capellani* allows readers of their account to imagine relatively well-preserved remains.

The examiners proceeded directly from the head to the exposed parts of the upper body. The *Capellani* noted that the arms and hands of Fernando were covered up to his knuckles, but that the fingers themselves were of the same color as his face.<sup>47</sup> Dr. Gaspar noted that the arms were both intact, despite being covered up, and that they both were attached to their proper shoulders. At the end of his description of the arms, Dr. Gaspar again noted that the remains were “without any sign of needlework, nor had they been embalmed.”<sup>48</sup> The *Capellani* noted that the hands had many silver rings and this caused some concern, given the poor preservation of the hands and the lack of skin, but the doctors noted that the witnesses had not seen the bones, but instead that that part of the remains which resembled dried meat (“*como de carne seca*”) was, in fact, the *cutis vera*, i.e. the dermis.<sup>49</sup> The state of the hands was, therefore, determined to be commensurate with the state of the head, and therefore, no contrary evidence had been found for Fernando’s remains being incorrupt. In a manner similar to his upper body, only a small portion of Fernando’s lower-half was exposed in a fashion permitting formal examination. Only the *Capellani* describe this section of Fernando’s body. They noted that the skin of Fernando’s feet was pale and that his shoes were “well made, but small for such stature.”<sup>50</sup> Despite the curiosity involved in Fernando’s “well-made shoes”, little further detail about specific sections of Fernando’s remains stands apart from the testimony, and much more interesting detail can be found concerning the whole of Fernando’s body.

Intact skin was an impressive accomplishment for a king dead more than three centuries, but intact—and functioning— sub-dermal tissue was a league apart. Both Dr. Gaspar and the *Capellani* note that the nerves, tendons, ligaments, and muscles were present in Fernando’s remains and were well-functioning, like a sign that they retained their flexibility.<sup>51</sup> The *Capellani* further note that it was the surgeons on Gaspar’s—Diego de Olivera and Fernando Soriano— team that manipulated these parts of the remains to produce the necessary effect confirming these tissue’s function.<sup>52</sup> By any estimate, the preservation of Fernando’s remains was considerable after more than four centuries.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 786.

<sup>48</sup>“sin señal de costura, ni de aver sido embalsamado.” Ibid, 788.

<sup>49</sup> This description is so odd and grammatically complex that it bears being transcribed. “[Pero] lo que se ve en los dedos, no es el hueso, sino unas fibras de color pardo, que mira a plateado, como de carne seca, y dizen los Medicos, que es la cutisvera.” Ibid, 786.

<sup>50</sup> “los pies que se vian dentro de los çapatos, son bien hechos, pequeños para aquella estatura.” Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 786, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 786.

Fernando's remains were much more well-preserved than the usual remains of a four-hundred-year-old human. That both Dr. Gaspar Caldéra de Herédia and the *Capellani* noted, in detail, that his body was intact, that the *odor sanctitatis* was present, and that there were numerous examiners present at the hagiopsy demonstrated the viability of the case for the canonization of Fernando III. As a whole, there was considerable evidence to recommend Fernando's sanctity to the Roman Curia and the Congregation of the Sacred Rite. Having demonstrated the state of the remains, we can turn to the reception of that testimony by the Papacy.

### **The Papal Bulls for Fernando III**

Clement X, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 1671, issued the bull *Gloriosissimos caelestis* to corroborate the results of the investigation of Fernando's remains.<sup>53</sup> Although Clement had been in the curia for most of his life (as a cardinal), the aging pontiff was a compromise choice among the cardinals in the conclave of his election.<sup>54</sup> The business conducted early on was almost certainly handling the most pressing matters first. It seems likely that canonizations were handled in a series of sessions at the Curia in the late winter and early spring of 1671, given that as many as six canonizations dated to February, March and April of that year.<sup>55</sup> Effectively, the bull confirmed the antiquity of Fernando's cult and assured the believers of the authenticity of his relics and sanctity.

What is interesting, for our purposes here, is not what the bull says about official services performed in cult-worship for Fernando, but rather, the way the Curia reported Fernando's remains and their condition. Clement's bull notes that the matter had been referred to the Congregation of the Sacred Rite in 1655 to examine the case for Fernando's sanctity, a matter confirmed by Antonio Payno's testimony about his role in the examination.<sup>56</sup> It is at this point that the relationship between Antonio Payno's witness text and *Gloriosissimos caelestis* becomes too close to describe in brief; a side-by-side comparison makes the connection between the two texts striking:

Antonio Payno's Account, c. 1668  
 Censuit **constare de casu excepto ex cultu ad hibito per immemoriam**

*Gloriosissimos caelestis*, 1671  
 confecto super **casu excepto**  
 declaravit, de illo **constare ex cultu exhibito** servo Dei Ferdinando III

<sup>53</sup> Cherubini, *Magnum Bullarium Romanum*, 5:514.

<sup>54</sup> J. N. D. Kelly and M.J. Walsh, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. "Clement X", 289.

<sup>55</sup> Along with Fernando's canonization in February, Clement X also canonized five more saints in April of 1671: St. Rosa of Lima, St. Cajetan of Thiene, St. Philip Benizi, and St. Louis Beltran. Cherubini, *op. cit.*, 5:533-46.

<sup>56</sup> Cherubini, *op. cit.*, 5:515; Ortiz de Zúñiga, *op. cit.*, 782.

**temporis cursum metam centum  
annorum excedentem.**<sup>57</sup>

Regi Castellae, & Legionis  
cognomento Sancto **per  
immemorabilem temporis cursum  
excedentem metam censum  
annorum**<sup>58</sup>

The similarity in just this passage alone, describing the calling of the Congregation for the Sacred Rite in 1655, suggests that Curial scribes may have lifted whole passages from Archbishop Antonio's letter. This is noteworthy because it demonstrates that Don Antonio's words had been influential to the pope, should be influential to the reader of the bull, and therefore should be preserved. Therefore, it seems most likely that Antonio's opinion, coupled with the narratives of Dr. Gaspar and the *Capellani*, may have been enough to assure Clement X and the Curia that Fernando's cult was well-deserved. Unfortunately, *Gloriosissimos caelestis* provides no "smoking gun" for the canonization case, and we are left only able to assume that the incorrupt state of the remains put Fernando's case over the top.

### **Conclusion: Hagiopsy as Scientific Confirmation of Holiness**

To an external observer, the examination of Fernando III's remains seems more related to a police procedural drama than the kind of work overseen by an institution called the Congregation of the Sacred Rite. However, the examination of the remains of the very special dead fit into a category of scientific and religious knowledge that blurred the lines between both disciplines. Effectively, a hagiopsy was important to both medical and theological doctors because it combined the expertise of both. Medical science could not explain the miraculous preservation of the remains, and therefore theologians had to do so; theologians lacked the ability to determine whether the remains had been subtly altered to affect an appearance of incorruptibility, so medical doctors had to take on that role. The confluence of both examining parties allows us to better understand both what Fernando's remains looked like and what information they provided observers in the late seventeenth century.

To begin with, our evidence is understandably limited in what it might tell us, and unless any previously-lost artistic depictions of Fernando's remains *circa* 1668 surface—none are known to have existed—then it seems unlikely that we could ever have close approximation of what Fernando's corpse looked like in the coffin on that warm day in 1668. What we do have is the trio of reports from the witnesses called to examine Fernando's corpse: each of the examiners was an upstanding citizen, many were university educated, and at least four had formal

---

<sup>57</sup> Ortiz de Zúñiga, *op. cit.*, 782.

<sup>58</sup> Cherubini, *op. cit.*, 5:515.

medical training. In medieval usages, the term seems to mean what its English cognate means in modern usage: “uncorrupted,” “unpolluted,” “intact,” “having a purity of composition,” but for Benedict XIV the crucial question was whether the incorrupt state of remains was due to the virtue of the dead or the expertise of human artifice.<sup>59</sup>

While the acclamation of Fernando’s remains as being “incorruptus” is noteworthy itself, the eyewitness reports themselves contain much interesting detail. Both Dr. Gaspar and Christopher Bañez’s accounts note that the skin was discolored, but was nevertheless in good shape. Both accounts noted that his face, lips, teeth, and tongue seemed in good order. The hands were in poorer condition, they reported, but the doctors noted the presence of the *cutisvera*, and Bañez only negative comment was that the old king’s hands looked rather like beef jerky instead of royal fingers. The royal feet were well preserved enough, if having less coloration than the hands or face—evidence perhaps of the royal tunic’s length in the latter years of Fernando’s reign. The muscles, ligaments, and tendons were all intact, and all of the joints connected their various parts in good order. On several occasions, the witnesses noted that the remains did not show any signs of being embalmed—this is a key point. If the remains were preserved artificially by an embalmer, then they could not also be miraculously preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit to become evidence of Fernando’s virtuous life in support of his canonization. That the panel of doctors and surgeons noted more than a dozen times that the remains were not embalmed is a telling emphasis: not being embalmed, the remains had to have been miraculously preserved.<sup>60</sup> Incorrupt remains were only valid evidence of sanctity if there was an excellent case disproving any embalming.

The hagiopsy performed on the remains of Fernando III of Castile-Leon, therefore, is a special window into the ways medical, religious, and lay authorities understood the role of the sacred in an ever-increasingly scientifically-permeated world. While so much of the European and Christian worlds were suffused with a considerable tension over matters holy and scientific, the reaction to the remain of Fernando III served to underline that holiness was present in the body of one dead Spanish king, during a time where Spanish kingship was under considerable

---

<sup>59</sup> Albert Sleumer and Joseph Schmid, *Kirchenlateinisches Wörterbuch* (Hildesheim: Limburg a. d. Lahn, 1926), s.v. "Incorruptus"; Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), s.v. "Incorruptus"; Franciscus Arnaldi and Paschalis Smiraglia, *Latinitatis Italicae Medii Aevi Lexicon (Saec. V Ex.-Saec. XII In.)* (Firenze: Edizioni del Galluzzo/SISMEL, 2001), s.v. "Incorruptus"; Brian Merrilees and William Edwards, eds., *Firmini Verris Dictionarius: Dictionnaire Latin-Français de Firmin le Ver 1440* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 1994), s.v. "Incorruptus". Cf., the remarks of Benedict XIV on the differences between naturally and artificially uncorrupted remains, *supra* p.5, n. 14.

<sup>60</sup> See the accounts of Dr. Gaspar, *supra* p. 12, n. 41.

stress.<sup>61</sup> Fundamentally, there is no question that the remains of the “very special dead” occupied a transitional place in the sacred hierarchy, acting as a conduit for divine power to be channelled into the world. But as to how that power should be understood in a scientific context is—and was—a matter of some debate. Instead, the real question was whether some human artifice had interfered to make Fernando’s remains appear different than they actually were. In an age of increasingly methodical canonization investigations supervised by the Office of the Sacred Rite, the method (i.e. using experts in the necessary fields) was a crucial endorsement of the results (confirming the remains to have been incorrupt).<sup>62</sup> The incorrupt nature of the remains was the key miracle that put Fernando’s canonization over the top and secured his place among the choir of saints.

This point is the one that provides our greatest insight into the nature of the scientific knowledge regarding the divine. As a case study, we have determined what incorrupt remains meant, how Fernando’s remains fit that definition, and how the remains were used by the Curia to give final approval for the cause of Fernando’s canonization. That more than forty other miracles—and we should not mistake incorrupt remains as belonging to any category save the miraculous—were reported to have been performed by Fernando after his death further contextualizes Fernando’s sanctity.<sup>63</sup> These active miracles, coupled with the static but transcendent miracle of his incorrupt remains, and the antiquity of his cult were enough to convince the curia and drive Clement X to issue *Gloriosissimos caelestis*. The examiners of the king’s remains used scientific knowledge to confirm what contemporary Sevillanos and Spanish subjects already recognized in the reputation of the dead Fernando III. In the case of the court of Carlos II, these confirmations were crucial for reinforcing the connections between a faltering dynasty and its capable and well-respected descendants.

---

<sup>61</sup> Eire makes a similar point about this tension in the case of Teresa of Ávila: Eire, *op. cit.*, 446-55.

<sup>62</sup> The canonization of Teresa of Ávila is a good example of the changing nature of canonizations in the period, *cf. supra*, p. 6-7.

<sup>63</sup> Bollandistes, *op. cit.*, May, vol. 7, 366D-77D.