



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The martyrdom of St. Zoilus, a urological issue. History and development of the tradition[☆]



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History of urology;
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Abstract

Objectives: To highlight, for its urological importance, the martyrdom of St. Zoilus. To elaborate on the tradition of invocation and worship of the saint and to establish their historical bases.

Material and methods: We conducted a study of the images of the martyrdom of St. Zoilus, with a detailed review of the history and tradition of the saint and performed a comparative study of the various saints known as patrons of kidney pain and disease.

Result: We found three paintings in different churches and locations depicting the kidney extraction of St. Zoilus. In addition to these three pieces, a preserved chest at the National Archaeological Museum and 2 tapestries in the sacristy of the church of the monastery of St. Zoilus in the Palencian town of Carrion de los Condes provided abundant information on the circumstances in which they were made. By analysing the style, we can deduce its affiliation to a specific artistic milieu and thereby propose a timeframe.

Conclusion: Without meaning to dethrone St. Liborius as the patron saint of urologists, an office claimed earlier by colleagues from various European countries, the martyrdom of St. Zoilus is, in light of the tradition and images provided, an unquestionable urological issue. The tradition is vindicated from a new viewpoint 1712 years later.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Historia de la urología;
San Zoilo;
Martirio urológico

El martirio de San Zoilo, una cuestión urológica. Historia y desarrollo de su tradición

Resumen

Objetivos: Poner de manifiesto, por su interés urológico, el martirio de San Zoilo. Desarrollar la tradición sobre la advocación y culto al Santo y sentar la base histórica de la misma.

Material y métodos: Estudio de la iconografía encontrada sobre el martirio de San Zoilo, repaso pormenorizado de la historia y tradición del mismo y estudio comparativo de los distintos santos reconocidos como abogados del dolor o males de los riñones.

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Resultado: Encontramos 3 cuadros en distintas iglesias y localidades en los que se representa la extracción de los riñones a San Zoilo. Además el hallazgo de 3 piezas, una arqueta conservada en el Museo Arqueológico Nacional y 2 telares conservados en la sacristía de la Iglesia del Monasterio de San Zoilo, en la localidad palentina de Carrión de los Condes, proporcionan abundante información sobre las circunstancias en que fueron realizadas. De su análisis estilístico podemos deducir su filiación a un ambiente artístico concreto y proponer, en consecuencia, un marco cronológico.

Conclusión: Sin intención de destronar a San Liborio como patrón de los urólogos, cargo reivindicado con anterioridad por compañeros desde distintos países europeos, el martirio de San Zoilo es a la luz de la tradición e iconografía aportada indudablemente una cuestión urológica. Reivindicada queda la tradición desde un nuevo punto de vista 1.712 años después.

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Introduction

The veneration of saints plays an important role in the tradition of the Christian religion, which can sometimes behave as "intercessors" to advocate for different diseases or symptoms, and possibly even cure disease. The number of saints based on ancient traditions is invoked in diseases of men and animals which is very abundant, being born by direct analogy with the kind of martyrdom of the saint in question, such as pulling teeth (Saint Apollonia), eyes (Saint Lucia), breasts (Saint Agatha) or kidneys, as in the case at hand: Saint Zoilus.

According to the *Acts of the Martyrdom of Saint Zoilus*,¹ Zoilus was a young Cordovan from a wealthy family who continually showed his beliefs publicly against the Roman law. Zoilus and 20 companions were accused of *superstitione christianitatis* in 304, which led to his arrest, trial, and death sentence. Previously, because of its significance, he was tortured "opening him in the back and extracting the kidneys", despite which "he did not die being the Dacian, a perfect Roman of the IV century whose head is cut".

The study of the iconography found in the martyrdom of this Saint in the 16th century on renal manipulation through different lumbar, thoracic, or abdominal incisions can show what could be the first pictorial representations of a nephrectomy.

In addition to highlighting, for its urological interest, the martyrdom of Saint Zoilus, narrative myth makes it possible to develop the tradition of the dedication and worship of the Saint, and describe the historical basis of it, aim proposed by the author in carrying out the study.

Material and methods

The study of the iconography found on the martyrdom of Saint Zoilus, 3 frames in different churches, where the removal of the kidneys is represented during the holy martyrdom.

A detailed review of the history and tradition of this can be seen through literature, iconography, and oral tradition.

For the exhibition of the martyrdom of the saint we consulted:

Martyrologium Romanum cum notationibus Baronii by cardinal Baronius, published in Rome in 1586.

Valerio of scholastic stories Title 3, Chapter 5, published in 1462, by Diego Rodriguez de Almela (1426–1489), arch-priest of Murcia.

Volume II of *The Golden Legend for each day of the year: lives of all the saints who venerate the Church: work that contains all the "improved and expanded Ribadeneira" ... work necessary for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful who yearn to know the circumstances of the life and virtues of their masters, and parish priests in order to know the names that can accept at the baptismal font*, published in 1853, which includes all other written references to the saint as:

Liber peristephanon by Prudentius (348–410), in his hymn IV.

Memoriale sanctorum, Book 2, ch. 6 (856), by Saint Eulogius of Córdoba bishop of Toledo.

Martyrology (870), by Usuard, a Benedictine monk of the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, from whom the remaining versions come.

Martyrology (872), by Adon bishop of Vienna.

Martyrology of Pedro Valeriano, published in 1578.

Saint Zoilus is also quoted by the Benedictine monk Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731) and the *Toledo Breviary* among other works.

Results

The iconography found supports in the popular tradition and confirms that if Saint Zoilus was tortured by having the kidneys extracted, it could be the first pictorial representation of a nephrectomy.

We found 3 frames in churches that represent different populations. In the sacristy of Magdalene Church of Saint Zoilus monastery in Carrión de los Condes (Palencia), in the altarpiece of the Old Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción (Our Lady of the (Immaculate) Conception) in the Cathedral of Córdoba, and in the altarpiece of the church of Saint Nicholas of Plasencia. In the 3 canvases, according to the images, the backchannel as "approach" is used for the incision, this being done through the spine in the case of Córdoba and lumbar or subcostal in Carrión and Plasencia.

The painting of the sacristy of the Monastery of Carrion (Fig. 1) by an anonymous author is an oil on canvas that has been dated to the last quarter of the 16th century. It depicts

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