

VALOR DISCURSIVO  
DEL CUERPO  
EN EL BARROCO HISPÁNICO



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RAFAEL GARCÍA MAHÍQUES, SERGI DOMÉNECH GARCÍA, EDS.

UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

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# DEVOTIONAL DRESSED SCULPTURES OF THE VIRGIN: DECORUM AND INTIMACY ISSUES

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**In** Christian terms, the devotional dressed sculpture appears to date back to the Late Middle Ages, wherein the *Virgen de los Reyes* from Seville Cathedral, dating from the thirteenth century, is the oldest known work.

Despite being an ancient practice with roots in Greek civilization (Arquillo Torres, 1989: 30), the tradition of dressing sacred sculptures reached maximum splendour in the Baroque era, with a strong diffusion in Mediterranean countries and undoubtedly achieving enormous popularity in the Iberian Peninsula.

Their importance as art objects that embody several techniques in themselves is indisputable. However, while in Spain the art historiography has been focused in their study for quite some time, in Portugal we don't observe the same effort. What has emerged is an almost total absence of their study and understanding as artworks of historical, artistic and devotional value, persisting a lack of knowledge and a certain prejudice (Pereira, 2014, 44-49).

It is unclear whether it was the believer's devotion or the need to resemble more as human forms in the theatrical processions and liturgical celebrations that initiated the practice of dressing sacred sculptures. But it is certain that this tradition flourished during the Baroque period, bringing the devotees closer to the reproductions of their deities.

Above all Saints and Jesus Christ, even as a Child, the sculptures of the Virgin were (and are) the leads of this phenomenon, the origin of which is probably in Marian devotion itself.

## THE ROYAL AFFECTION

According to Campa Carmona,<sup>1</sup> the garments of the Marian image contribute to highlight the identity and the character of the Virgin through specific shapes,

1. <<http://congresos.um.es/imagenyapariencia/imagenyapariencia2008/schedConf/presentations>> 23-08-2015.

colours and materials. Therefore, the tunic symbolizes her virginity, the cloak embodies authority, power and protection and the geometric motifs of the circle and the rhombus evoke divinity and the connection between heaven and earth. The golden embroidery refers to her royalty and glory, as well as the crown her sculptures usually wear.

According to Valeria Genovese, the miraculous nature of the sculptures, which sometimes seem to cry or move, emphasizes their corporeal presence within the communities of believers (Genovese, 2009: 6). This sacred aura, together with the adoration of the devotees, led to the establishment of the practice of sculpture dressing that followed a tradition of offers, given in appreciation for miracles. These offers are usually placed in the statue itself and assert its importance and power. Nevertheless, Cornejo Vega recalls that History tells us how civilizations sought to empower sculptures with living attributes, such as movement and human characteristics (Cornejo Vega, 1996: 239-240), so the tradition of sculpture dressing can also be a consequence of that aspiration.

Genovese states that the tradition of devotional sculpture dressing comes not only of the eagerness of giving them real life attributes. There are other factors like the display of wealth, the devotee's detachment from material objects at the time of death, the declaration of true faith, political propaganda, theatrical liturgy needs or the exuberant aesthetic trend of covering precious objects with other equally rich materials (Genovese, 2009: 6).

It is, it seems, a phenomenon originated among royalty and aristocracy.

The aforementioned *Virgen de los Reyes*, whose origin is shrouded in legends, was planned from the outset to be dressed and offered to the Cathedral of Seville by Fernando III, *el Santo* (1201-1252) during the conquest of the city from the Muslims. It is believed that both this sculpture and the will of the king are responsible for the emergence of devotional dressed sculptures of the Virgin in Seville (Andalucia), a recognized centre of sculpture dressing still in our days.

In the *Cantigas de Santa María*, from his descendant Alfonso X, *el Sábio* (1221-1284), it is noteworthy how Fernando III favoured dressed sculptures of the Virgin, changing their clothes for richer ones at the time of celebrations (Webster, 2004: 271).

Hernandez Diaz imputes other examples of dressed sculptures in Seville to the years of King Fernando III, like the *Virgen de las Aguas* of the Collegiate of *Salvador*, the *Virgen de los Reyes* of the Convent of *San Clemente* or the one from San Ildefonso's parish with the same invocation (Arquillo Torres, 1989: 31-32).

The miraculous power of the *Virgen de los Reyes* (according to the legend created by angels disguised of pilgrims), that became the emblem of the city of Seville and maintained close ties to the Spanish monarchy over the centuries, (which continually presented it with rich robes and jewellery), is not a unique case.

In Portugal there were also several miraculous statues of the Virgin, worthy of the attention and affection of kings and queens.



One of the oldest sculptures is the one of *Santa Maria de Guimarães*, later *Nossa Senhora da Oliveira* (due to the miracle of the greening of an olive tree) which King Afonso Henriques (c.1109–1185) relied on to win the Battle of Ourique (1139).

Unlike the *Virgen de los Reyes*, the oldest known sculpture of *Santa Maria de Guimarães*, dating from the thirteenth century, was not articulated or dressed. It was a Virgin in Majesty, enthroned with the Child on her lap. Later, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sculpture was mutilated and the crown removed, along with the arms, part of the chair and the Child, in order to be fully dressed (Pereira, 2014:74) [Fig. 1]. Later, it was replaced by a *roca*<sup>2</sup> sculpture, that is still worshiped today.

In fact, the *Santuário Mariano*, written by Fr. Agostinho de Santa Maria (1707–1723), states several cases where sculptures were mutilated in order to be dressed by the devotees. See, for example, the missing image of *Nossa Senhora de Belém* of the ancient Convent of *Santa Clara* of Lisbon (destroyed by the Earthquake of 1755), discovered by a cleric in the sixteenth century:



Fig. 1. *Santa Maria de Guimarães*, 13<sup>th</sup> century. Museum of Alberto Sampaio (Guimarães). Inv. n.º MAS E 1.

The sculpture of the Lady, by its weight, seems to be made of stone or clay [...]: it is exquisitely carved and oil painted, as the old sculptures normally are. It is sitting in a little chair with the Child in the lap, who is taking her breast in his mouth. Its height is around one and a half handbreadth. In order to dress the sculpture, the old nuns have cut the hands of the chair. The crown, made in the same material as the body of the Lady, was removed and in its place it was set a wig beneath a silver crown was set on (Maria, 1707, t. I: 161–164).

2. One of the most common types of devotional dressed sculpture is the *roca*. This type of sculpture is not totally carved, usually displaying a kind of frame or cage instead of the figures' legs. That frame is normally formed by several wooden sticks or laths in a pyramidal structure. They are also called sculptures of *bastidor* or *candeleiro*.

However, descriptions of sculptures in upholstered and polychrome wood, or stone, dressed by the devotees but without any amputations, are also common in the volumes of the *Santuário Mariano*, whether belonging to monastic institutions or parishes.

An archetypal example is the *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* of Vila Viçosa, proclaimed Patroness and Queen of Portugal in 1646 by King João IV (1604–1656), in the aftermath of the Restoration of Independence (1640) as a way of legitimizing his government, continuing the tradition of Marian devotion shared by the Portuguese monarchs since the early days of nationality (Sobral, 1996: 147–149).

The sculpture, carved in limestone and offered by Nuno Álvares Pereira (1360–1431) –which attributed his victories in battle to the intercession of the Virgin and founded several churches for her– was deeply venerated by the House of Bragança long before the proclamation of 1646 [Fig. 2].

The duchess Leonor de Gusmão (c.1480–1512), wife of Jaime I, 4<sup>th</sup> duke of Bragança (1479–1532), and Luísa de Gusmão (1613–1666), wife of King João IV, made recurrent visits. When prince Teodósio (1634–1653) and Queen Maria I (1734–1816) became ill in 1653 and 1792 respectively, the sculpture was taken to the royal chapel in order to cure them (Araújo, 2001: 128).

The queens and duchesses of Bragança used to offer it dresses and jewellery, most traditionally those of their weddings (Dodds, 1997: 35), and they were in charge of dressing and adorn the sculpture.

But its trousseau was also enriched with numerous offers of other believers, many of privileged social classes, such as: Luís da Silva Teles, Évora's Archbishop, who offered two silver crowns to the Virgin and Child; the Alva Countess, Constança Luísa Paim, who donated a pearl bouquet and another gold ornament with emeralds; or the Galveias family, who offered two golden crowns and an adornment with diamonds and rubies (Câmara, 1996: 72).



Fig. 2. *Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Vila Viçosa*, 15<sup>th</sup> century. Sanctuary of *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* of Vila Viçosa (Évora).

Jesusa Vega claims that the tradition of dressing sacred sculptures was originated at the private oratories or chapels of noble people, and then reached the Confraternities and the processions (Vega, 1994: 247–249). This meets, in certain aspects, Susan Webster's suggestion that the example of the *Virgen de los Reyes*, sumptuously dressed and ornamented with rich offers by the royalty and the high clergy, led the Confraternities to dress their sculptures in the same way, with equal pomp and opulence (Webster, 2004: 260–271).

This author denotes that, if initially the *Virgen de los Reyes*, as the royalty's favorite sculpture, was the only one to be dressed showing its splendor, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a democratization of that sumptuousness, which spread to sculptures of other institutions of Andalucía.

In Portugal, the devotion amongst royalty and aristocracy towards the Virgin and her sculptures was usual since the beginnings of nationality and, as we previously learned, those figures would become reservoirs to treasures and trousseaus presented by monarchs, especially queens and princesses.

One of the most ancient examples is the one of *Nossa Senhora da Silva* of Porto's Cathedral. As the *Santuário Mariano* describes, the sculpture was probably found at the time of the cathedral's works by Queen Mafalda (1125–1157/8), Afonso Henriques' wife:

They placed it with a lot of celebration and devotion on an altar, where it soon started to work many wonders, which made it famous and known in all that Province; the Kings were more distinguished with their services and favors, especially the same Queen Mafalda, whose love for the sculpture was so big and hearty that besides enriching [...] that Church with many and vast donations; by her death she appointed the sculpture as heir to all her jewels and rich gowns found in her closet [...]. The Lady has the Child over the left arm, he has a pomegranate in the right hand made of the same matter [stone]: the Lady and the Child have rich, big and imperial silver-gilt crowns, and of very rich figure; they are also adorned with rich mantles [...] (Maria, 1716, t.V: 5–8).

The ancient dressed sculpture of *Nossa Senhora de Belém* or *dos Reis* (from the Monastery of *Santa Maria de Belém*, Lisbon), which according to Fr. Agostinho was ordered by Maria de Aragão (1482–1517), second wife of King Manuel I, was also the reservoir of precious dresses offered by queens and princesses. According to the same author, even by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the ladies of court were still donating their wedding gowns to said image (Maria, 1707, t. I: 115–116).

But, this practice was carried on mostly, it seems, by the duchesses and queens of the House and Dynasty of Bragança, far beyond *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* of Vila Viçosa.

It is said the Convent of *Nossa Senhora da Luz* (Order of Saint Paul), located in Borba, near Vila Viçosa, was presented with the sculpture of Our Lady (with the same title of *Luz* or *Light*) by the dukes of Bragança.

Fr. Agostinho de Santa Maria describes not only the possible origin of the sculpture, but also its connection with the duchesses of Bragança, who held a special commitment towards it:

[...] it is tradition, that the Ladies of this House ordered the Sculpture of Our Lady of Light, and that they gave it to that Convent; and it is said [...], that consequently the Duchess of Bragança and her daughters had the custom of dressing the Holy Sculpture, or order someone to dress it in those occasions they could not do it themselves. And so they used to give the dresses with which they dressed it, which are still preserved and very precious today.

[...] It might be that it was ordered by Lady Leonor de Gusmão, Duke Jaymes wife. After being placed in that convent, that Sovereign light started to shine in great wonders, and miracles [...]. The Most Serene Queen Luíza de Gusmão, as Duchess of Bragança, looked for it many times and had for this Lady a special devotion, and dressed it sometimes, and after the Proclamation, already settled in Lisbon, she continued to care for the Lady: and it is also known tradition [...] that she recommended to two maids that stayed at the Palace of Vila Viçosa, to take care of the Lady, just like she used to before (Maria, 1718, t.VI: 194-196).

Fr. Agostinho also tells that when duke Jaime killed his wife Leonor de Gusmão, suspecting of her infidelity, he placed her coffin on a mule that, without anyone guiding it, went to the Convent of *Nossa Senhora da Luz*. Leonor stayed buried there, until her innocence was known and her body transferred to the Convent of *Chagas* of Vila Viçosa (Maria, 1718, t.VI: 194-196).

Granddaughter of Jaime and Leonor and grandmother of King João IV, the duchess Catarina (1540-1614) was managing the House of Bragança at the time the Convent of *Padres Eremitas de São Paulo*, dedicated to *Nossa Senhora do Amparo*, moved to Vila Viçosa (1590). According to Fr. Agostinho, knowing of the arriving of the sculpture (of *roca*) of Our Lady «the Most Peaceful Lady Catarina [...] took the responsibility of dressing *Senhora do Amparo*, because she wanted to take part in such great work. And so she did, with a rich cloth» (Maria, 1718, t.VI: 208).

The abovementioned Luísa de Gusmão, first consort Queen of Bragança's Dynasty and born in Huelva (Andalucía), offered her own sculpture of the Virgin to the Convent of *Nossa Senhora das Mercês*, which she helped found in Évora. Fr. Agostinho states the following about this donation:

The small Sculpture of *Senhora das Mercês*, has little more than one and a half handbreadth, and is of such Sovereign Majesty, and of such elegant beauty, that it seems to have been made by Angels. This Holy Sculpture was from the Most Serene Queen Luiza, Founder of the Discalced [Augustinians], she cherished it as a very expensive jewel. It is of dresses and *roca*, and used to serve her in *Presepios* [Nativity scenes], and doubtlessly, when in the queen's power it used to have the same title of *Presepio* (Maria, 1718, t.VI: 35-39).

Finally, let's address Maria Bárbara de Bragança (1711-1758), daughter of King João V (1689-1750) and consort Queen of Spain by her wedding with King Fernando VI, who left in her will:

[...] a diamonds bouquet to the Virgin of the Lisbon convent of *Madre de Deus*, another of diamonds and rubies and one of her most expensive dresses to the sculpture of the *Virgen del Patrocinio* that is worshiped in *El Escorial*, other dresses to the Virgins of *Atocha* and *Guadalupe*, six silver chandeliers to the *Cristo of El Pardo* (Vega, 1994: p. 247).

As we have learned, the donation of clothing and jewelry by queens, princesses and duchesses was quite common, so it is not surprising to see profane clothes inspired by the fashion styles followed by them, in the dressing of sacred sculptures.

We don't know for sure, if the expanded use of profane clothes in sacred sculptures, especially the ones of the Virgin and the Infant Jesus, had its origins in those offerings particularly. What we do know, with certainty, that it was common throughout Baroque, and it created controversy among the clergy and the intellectuals of the time.

## THE DECORUM AND THE DECENCY

The Baroque period promoted an emotional religion, which, at the same time, was rather unsuccessfully managed and regulated. The processions –didactic, propagandist and channeling elements of devotion– and the devotional dressed sculptures are blatant examples of that (Martinez-Burgos Garcia, 1989: 85).

Being the processions' main focus, the dressed figures stirred up concerns among the clergy due to the custom of adorning them profanely, the fear of idolatry and the Protestant criticisms.

Therefore, even before the Council of Trent's deliberations that appealed for the honesty and sainthood of images (1563), but especially after, the Synod Constitutions, both in Spain and Portugal tried, though unsuccessfully, to control the rooted custom of dressing sculptures, requesting decorum and decency, mainly in what the Virgin's images was concerned.

Toledo's ordinations (1536), seem to have been the first ones to command it:

[...] if the sculptures you find are not honest or decently dressed, especially the ones in the altars, or the ones that go out in processions, make them decently, and when opportune, order them all sculpted in a way they can be without any other clothing (quoted in Martinez-Burgos Garcia, 1989: 88).

After Toledo the recommendations and admonitions continued with the synods and constitutions of Santiago de Compostela (1565), Cartagena (1583), Porto (1585), Segovia (1586), Cadiz and Coimbra (1591), Ciudad Rodrigo (1592) and Seville (1604).

All of them asked for the use of the sculptures own attire, forbidding the usage of clothing worn by secular women, such as other accessories, coiffures or wigs. They

also prevented those statues to leave the church to be taken to private houses (Arquillo Torres, 1989: 33-34; Martínez-Burgos García, 1989: 88-89; Rocha, 1996: 187-197).

By 1600, Orihuela's Bishop was still stating the following:

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One must lament the fact that in the churches, while processions are celebrated [...], sculptures of the saints and especially the most Blessed Virgin, are adorned with such shameless beauty and such worldly splendor [...] and that they are outfitted with such adornments and coiffures, with silk dresses according to the custom of profane women, which induce in the souls of the spectators, not the piety, but the lasciviousness and the lust. Therefore we order that from this time forward the sculptures may not be dressed in this manner [...] with garments loaned by profane women, nor dressed in secular clothing (quoted in Martínez-Burgos García, 1989: 89 and Webster, 2004: 241).

In spite of the echo of such orientations continuously throughout the sixteenth century, the following seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' Synod Constitutions would still have those reiterated bans. Therefore, we may state that those did not reached the desired effect in most cases.

In 1640, the issue was broached at the Inquisitional Court through an edict from the Spanish inquisitorial council to the Sicilian one, which demanded in a more vehement manner the prohibition of the use of profane clothes in sculptures of the Virgin and of the Child, as is reiterated in the document:

And for this [...] not to be a subject of profanity, an occasion to mistakes or a motif of irreverence, we order and command that any sort of abuse that can lead to superstition, sensuality or that is repugnant to their sainthood, life and actions, is withdraw, such as petticoats, farthingale, pompadour, locks, leagues, rosette and other similar misuses with which the indiscreet piety usually dresses and makes up (quoted in Torquemada Sánchez and Alejandro García, 2001: 259-260).

The involvement of the Inquisition did not seem to take more effect than the Synod Constitutions, which in the end of the seventeenth century in Portugal, demanded directly that the sculptures made from that moment forward, were to have their clothes carved in the same material of the rest of the figure, intending to make the use of real clothing obsolete, as is the case of Braga's Synod Constitutions (1697):

[...] that no person of any kind at all, dress, or consent the dressing of the sculptures of our Lady, or of the Saints, with borrowed dresses from secular people, to whom they shall return to be used. Nor dress them with revealing dresses, or of colors that may observe any indecency. And that the sculptures made from scratch are made dressed with the same substance of the rest of the figure (quoted in Rocha, 1996: 197).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, in 1719, the same demands are repeated by the Bahia's Constitutions (Brazil), where the phenomenon of devotional dressed sculpture had also reached a huge acceptance through the Portuguese heritage:

And we order that the Sculptures are made from this moment onwards of entire painted bodies and ornamented in a manner that exempts the dresses, because this is a more convenient and decent way. And the ancient ones that are usually dressed, we order that it must be in such a way that is impossible to observe indecency in the faces, clothing or coiffures: which will be noticed with much more care in the Sculptures of the Virgin our Lady [...]. And the Sculptures will not be removed from the churches and taken to private houses to be dressed, nor will be dressed with lent clothes or ornaments, that would later serve again in profane uses (*Constituições*, 1719: 269).

The persistence on banning the act of dressing the sculptures «with borrowed dresses from secular people, to whom they shall return to be used» or «that would later serve again in profane uses», suggests that it was a recurring practice to lend ornaments or clothes to the sculptures, that would later return to the owner.

That indicates that, besides the proximity provided by these sculptures due to their realism, the use of clothing offered directly by devotees and the act of dressing itself, there were even cases in which secular people would re-own clothes or adornments worn by the sculpture. It is not difficult to imagine those would later be proudly kept as a kind of relic or displayed as a treasure.

Regardless of the regulatory effort, the norms remained theory because the Church itself favored, or just ignored, the practices it condemned, as it knew it was counterproductive to suppress the religious festivity that inspired so many (Martínez-Burgos García, 1989: 91) and that was approved by royalty and the upper classes.

One of the most significant examples of the predilection to dress sculptures in a profane manner still in the eighteenth century, was sponsored by the Portuguese royal family and the clergy. It is the *Sagrada Família* (Holy Family), offered to the late Convent of *Madre de Deus* of Guimarães by King João V's chaplain, Luís António da Costa Pego, in 1748. The king offered the crown to the figure of Our Lady, prince José (1714-1777) offered the diadem to Saint Joseph, and the princesses embroidered the clothes of the three sculptures (Moraes, 2004: 25-27).

The style of the dress offered to the sculpture of the Virgin, replicated in its extensive trousseau formed throughout centuries, follows the eighteenth century Portuguese court fashion and her brown-gold wig falls free in curled ringlets [Fig. 3]. Everything was differing from the synod orientations.

Nevertheless, in *Santuário Mariano*, we find some scarce examples of sculptures of the Virgin that were once dressed, but were later transformed or replaced to avoid the use of real clothes.

Such is the case of the ancient sculptures of *Nossa Senhora das Mercês* (place of Passos, São Victor parish), of *Nossa Senhora da Consolação* (São Romão parish) and *Nossa Senhora*



Fig. 3. Sculpture of the Virgin of the *Sagrada Família* from the ancient Convent of *Madre de Deus*, 1748. Church of *Nossa Senhora da Consolação e dos Passos* (Guimarães).

da *Guadalupe* (Braga), that were once of *roca* and dresses, but due to Braga's Archbishop instructions, Rodrigo de Moura Telles, were remade freestanding and complete «to avoid indecencies, and profanities that were introduced on the Holy Images» or to «avoid indecencies that the women's indiscreet devotion profits from» (Maria, 1712 t. IV: 293, 294, 298).

### CLOSER TO THE DIVINE

The devotional dressed sculptures hold, therefore, important «affective and experiential advantages» (Webster, 2004: 254) with conflicting results.

On the one hand, their proximity to a more human level through several ploys that would instill movement, emotion and realism on them (besides the real

garments), made them more understandable, but on the other hand, the sumptuousness and richness of their clothes and ornaments placed them in a superior and celestial level.

This ambivalence is also noticed by Valeria Genovese when she considers the act of dressing the sculptures itself. While this allows an enormous intimacy with the sacred, experienced by the devotee who saw the representation of the deity «naked» (Genovese, 2010: 22) without the separation of the processional carriage or the altar, it also ritually emphasizes the sacred nature of the sculpture.

This happens because, and let's not forget, this intimacy was a privilege of a small minority, normally women or priests. In the case of the Virgin's sculptures, the act of dressing was (and still is) a hierarchical ceremony in which several maids join, led by one of higher status (Albert-Llorca, 1995: 2-9). Many sculptures of Our Lady were dressed as Queens, from the undergarments to the jewelry, which emphasized their importance as representations of a divine being, contradicting a possible closer connection with the devotee.

Besides witnessing an apparition, we may say that the ultimate intimacy experience with the sacred was allowed by the direct contact with the sculptures' garments and the fruition of a miracle. Being covered with the cloak of a miraculous sculpture of the Virgin for instance, was quite common.

Most of Marian onomastic refers to the thaumaturgical power of the Virgin and her images, especially related to the cure of physical or mental diseases (Castillo de Lucas, 1995: 119-126).



It is clear how the cult to Our Lady multiplied itself countless, and how the Virgin became the great Intercessor near Christ replacing, in many cases, other saints that in the Middle Ages were the main mediators in certain afflictions.

The Virgin's cloak bears great significance, as we saw earlier, symbolizing the authority and power of the Celestial Queen, but also the protection of her believers as the Church's Mother.

The iconography of Our Lady of Mercy, whose mantle symbolizes shelter to all of her disciples, is a paradigm of this symbolism. Crucial in many records of miracles, it is believed that a fragment of the Virgin's real Mantle<sup>3</sup> truly exists as a relic –the *sancta camisia*– kept in Chartres Cathedral and that, according to the legend, it was worn by Mary when she gave birth to Jesus Christ, being in contact with both (Kugler, 2013: 22–23).

There are other textile relics considered sacred by contact. They are called *brandea*, pieces of clothing or just fabric that when in contact with the remains of a saint, inherit their sacred quality (Goehring, 2010: 740).

According to what was deliberated in the Trent's Council, one should offer veneration to the images of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints:

[...] not because it is believed that there is any divinity or virtue in them, for which they need veneration for, or that we ought to ask them anything [...]; but because the honor given to them, refers to the originals they represent (Reycend, 1781, t. II: 355).

Then, the clothes of Our Lady's sculptures –even if it was through them that the Virgin performed her miracles–, could not be considered sacred, much less relics. Still, popular religiosity believed in the power of the sculptures' mantles, because they represented a (more) direct way of contact with Mary and God.

Therefore, there are countless cases of people asking for the mantle of a sculpture for the cure of a certain disease, a practice that was perpetrated not only by the most common citizen, but by the royalty as well.

That is the case of the mantles of the previously mentioned *Nossa Senhora da Oliveira* of Guimarães. Two of them were requested by the Portuguese court to Lisbon, to cure King Afonso V (1432–1481) because of their healing properties. Only one returned to Guimarães.

Later, in 1742, it would be João V needing its powers due to paralysis. Quickly «a mantle and a dress of *Nossa Senhora da Oliveira*» were sent «to wrap and heal» the king (quoted in Moraes, 1998: 206–207). In order to express his gratitude, the king offered a mantle to Our Lady's sculpture and the Confraternity made a dress to complete the set (Oliveira, 2007: 417).

3. Initially it was not specifically described as a fragment of a mantle, but as a piece of a garment. The term «mantle» was probably first applied only in the tenth century (Kugler, 2013, 23).

The sculpture of *Nossa Senhora do Bom Despacho* of the former College of *Santo Agostinho* (Lisbon) also helped King Afonso VI (1643-1683) in 1658 with its mantle. According to accounts, he was nearly dead when his mother, the devout Luísa de Gusmão, decided to ask for the cloak and cast it over his body, which immediately showed rapid improvements (Maria, 1707, t. I: 299).

Besides being used for the cure of apparently uncured diseases, or even at what looked like the time of death, the Virgin was often requested in a particularly dangerous occasion for women: the childbirth. The ancient sculpture of *Nossa Senhora do Pranto* (Salto's parish, Montalegre) worked many miracles, especially with risky child-births:

For this effect she has two silk mantles, which are asked for in those occasions and guarantee success when used on the unwell. The same Priest, who made us this description, says one day at midnight someone rushed in asking for one to deliver to a woman who was in grave danger. He quickly carried it and the Lady was served, and in the same spot where the cloak was placed, the woman successfully gave birth (Maria, 1712, t. IV: 150-154).

Let us finally remember the concern of the Synod Constitutions to prevent, under any circumstances, the carrying of the sculptures to private houses. The recurrence of this norm throughout the centuries shows us the endurance of this practice, and as we can assume, even when the sculptures couldn't leave the church, the obstacles were evaded and the mantles were taken in their place.

These cases illustrate how the closeness between the sculptures of Our Lady (or their clothes) and the devotees was regular, which states the enormous intimacy, as well as promiscuity, between sacred and profane in the Baroque period.

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