**Bodies that do not matter? A reflection on the Rocamora case**

When the Spanish Inquisition heard the case of Francisco Rocamora in 1734, his alleged hermaphroditism was noted only in passing, as I have discussed in an earlier post and as the surviving documents (available here in transcription) clearly show. It appeared in the first page of the alegación as a fact supposedly sustained by one student and corroborated by others, but it was the only reference to the matter. Besides this declaration, the inquisitors had not paid further attention to it, nor did Rocamora use it as a potential argument in his favour, as he did not comment it, nor was he asked about it. This apparent disinterest leads the question what was of interest -and what not- for the Spanish Inquisition in the 1730s in matters of (controlling) sexuality, and on the position of hermaphroditism within it.

The detailed description of Rocamora's sexual practices with his different partners shows that sodomy mattered for the Inquisition, and that the gravity of the committed offences depended on the details, being thus fundamental to know them. Likewise, that all the involved persons declared their ignorance on sodomy as being a felonious sexual practice which had to be denounced to the Inquisition's Court in Valencia, but acknowledged they had been informed on its criminal nature after the famous – for the time – Father Calatayud's misiones¹ had taken place, provides some additional hints on the matter. Had sodomy been considered as relatively unimportant, it would have not been included it among the issues the misiones informed about. This stands in open contrast with the limited interest in hermaphroditism. The inquisitors recorded Rocamora's supposed hermaphrodite condition, but did not make further enquires on it, not even the one which seems easier from nowadays’ perspective, a physical exploration of the accused's body. An easy question emerges: why?

At first glance, it could have to do with the inquisitors views on hermaphroditism, which are still not well known, but which for sure were not constructed around medical approaches and interests like those of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Otherwise they would probably had insisted on inspecting Rocamora's body and would have dealt with the whole case in a different way. Quite possibly, the inquisitors followed the established views on the matter and, albeit this could mean to consider Rocamora's hermaphroditism a wonder or a prodigy (in the early modern sense), it meant that hermaphroditism was none of their business, for it was neither illegal nor a deviation 'per se' which should be prosecuted. Notwithstanding what the inquisitors views might have been, the question of why did they not try to confirm if Rocamora was a hermaphrodite remains open, for, albeit hermaphroditism was not a 'problem', it was its “use and abuse” – as it was written in the alegación – which had enabled sodomitic practices. Moreover, in legal terms, part of the case seemed to depend on determining if Rocamora was a hermaphrodite using his 'second nature' for sexual intercourse or not. As stated in the alegación, Rocamora habitually played a “passive role” in intercourse; if he had done this by using his supposed feminine genitalia, the accusation on sodomy over him and all those who had had intercourse with him in such way would have been difficult to sustain. They might have committed other offences or minor transgressions of the established rules, but these transgressions would not probably be sodomitic ones. However, if he was not a hermaphrodite, the case was clear and simple.

¹ A campaign to deepen the knowledge on Catholicism among the population. See Antonio Peñafiel Ramón, “Misiones y captación de masas en la España del Antiguo Régimen: Predicación en Murcia del Padre Calatayud,” Homenaje al profesor Juan Torres Fontes, Vol. 2, Murcia 1987, 1263-1271.
Why then was Rocamora not inspected? An answer based on solid factual information cannot be given, but two speculative answers seem plausible and can at least be enunciated in order to be discussed. First, Rocamora may have informed voluntarily the Inquisition on his sexual practices and in his declaration he did not make any comment on his supposed condition as hermaphrodite. If had he done so, the inquisitor who was in charge of the case would presumably have shown further interest on the matter. Second, Rocamora was the cathedral's dean and belonged to one of Orihuela's most distinguished families, which had hold control or at least significant influence over the city since the early seventeenth century. In short, he was well connected and certainly aware of his social status, and to force him to get inspected would not have been easy and would have probably landed in a scandal. A hint on his social position is provided by the rather mild punishment he received; it is improbable that a man belonging to the commoners who admitted having slept with 114 different men between 1694 and 1732, as Rocamora did, would have been condemned to only six months reclusion in a monastery near Valencia, unless sodomy was a minor delict, which did not seem to be the case, taking the efforts made during the misiones to inform the population on the need to denounce such activities.

In sum, Francisco Rocamora's value as a case of early eighteenth century hermaphroditism is limited if the focus is primarily put on the hermaphrodite condition, as in the documents under discussion here not a single comment on it was made; nonetheless, the case allows at least to pose a set of basic questions. Besides the ones here briefly commented, it can also for instance be asked why the students affirmed Rocamora was a hermaphrodite; did they do it because he actually was one and Rocamora did say nothing about it because he did not need it as part of his defence, or did the students make such affirmation because they knew hermaphroditism was an attenuating circumstance? If they were aware of the value of hermaphroditism as legal argument, they were then probably aware of the criminal consideration their sexual practices had before the Inquisition's eyes and, were it the case, Rocamora's affair would be a case of “collective denial”, for all those interviewed by the inquisitors declared their ignorance precisely on this aspect. The alegación does not provide any kind of answer to these enquiries, but enables to make them and impel to search for more information.