

Preserving the Pontiff: an Account of the Body Preservation Methods Used by the Roman Catholic Church

*Nikola Tomov**

Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

* Corresponding author e-mail: tomovmd@gmail.com

Incorruptibility is an important topic in the major Christian denominations. If a body or its parts do not undergo the normal process of decay, it is sometimes considered a sign of sanctity, attributed to divine intervention. Even though body preservation and incorruptibility are seen as distinct, bodily remains of saints are objects of veneration.

Historically, many of the bodies of deceased Roman popes were artificially preserved, buried in conditions enhancing the probability of natural preservation, or both. These circumstances have created a number of bodily relics of popes, subsequently canonized as saints, even without claims for incorruptibility.

The present report summarizes some of the recorded methods used for preservation of the bodies of the Roman popes.

Key words: body preservation, embalming, pope, relics