

Joëlle Rollo-Koster

Position Paper. Smelling authority and the sacred, musk at the medieval papal court.

This discussion is part of a larger, ongoing project aimed at constructing a sensory history of the papacy. In this case, I will focus on the sense of smell. Did the Middle Ages witness the development of an olfactive perception of power? What insights can the use of musk provide into the processes of cultural dialectics in the Mediterranean? This discussion will shed light on the employment of an essence or perfume, musk, a widely utilized product across the Mediterranean region that transcended geographical, religious, and political boundaries, to define power and authority.

In 2017, Anya H. King published *Scents from the Garden of Paradise: Musk and the Medieval Islamic World* with Brill. The prophet's favorite perfume originated from a secretion that journeyed from Asia (specifically Tibet), making it a product of exchange and communication. Its use signified high social status and masculinity, symbolizing both royalty and holiness. In medieval Latin Christianity, starting from approximately the 11th century, the pope annually bestowed the Golden Rose to a champion of his cause. The earliest ceremonial, typically referred to as Ordo Romanus XI (1140/1143), mentions the presence of musk in the rose during its benediction at the Roman Church of Santa Croce in Jerusalem on the last Sunday of Lent. The Ordo Romanus XII of 1192 adds that the Rose was perfumed with musk and balsam, another essential product in liturgy. Jacopo Stefaneschi's ceremonial (1262–1341) references musk during descriptions of the Roman papal elevation ceremonies. While seated in front of the Lateran's portico, the pope received the Lateran keys and the papal ferula. He then returned them to the prior of St. Laurence outside the Walls and sat in another chair, while the prior fastened a belt of red silk around the pope's waist. Hanging from this belt was a purple purse containing twelve seals made of precious stones and musk. Even in death, the pope was associated with musk. During the embalming process, the pope's throat was filled with cotton and spices, and his nostrils were filled with musk. Musk was attached to pivotal moments of the papacy that defined the pope's authority, in life and death. Why musk? And what was the influence of Middle Eastern and Asian practices on the West.

I will suggest the use of this perfume in a sensorial definition of political authority throughout the Mediterranean...and further.