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## The Enigma Christina of Sweden (1626 – 1689): sexuality, power and some medical- psychological hypotheses

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### ABSTRACT

The controversial figure of Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) has been the subject of a wide historical literature, particularly in relation to her strong choices, such as the abdication from the throne of Sweden and the conversion to Roman Catholicism. Certain historians wanted to identify the reasons for these choices in her sexual ambiguity - a presumed homosexuality - and congenital sexual anomalies, such as hermaphroditism and hyperandrogenism.

The article analyses psychological and medical theories on the Queen's sexuality in the essays, published from the Nineteenth century up to now, integrating research with unpublished archival documentation - letters by court doctors, private correspondence and the Queen's autobiography. The aim of the article is to restore the truth about the Queen's sexual orientation. The anthropological examination, carried out on the Queen's skeleton, confirms typical female features, just as the analysis of the recently discovered archival documentation shows a heterosexual orientation. Christina had a masculine attitude more because of the male education she received, the virile role she assumed as a sovereign, her proud nature as a lover of freedom, her adherence to libertine thought and, above all, the male language of power during the modern age rather than for presumed sexual anomalies.

**Key words:** Queen Christina of Sweden - Hermaphroditism - Hyperandrogenism - Homosexuality

## **1. Introduction**

The controversial figure of Queen Christina of Sweden (Stockholm, 1626 - Rome, 1689) has been the subject of a wide literature by historians over the centuries. Her choices, as the abdication from the throne of Sweden in 1654 and the conversion from the Lutheran religion to the Roman Catholic one in 1655, made her the protagonist of the European political-cultural scene during the Counter-Reformation.

Like in a baroque portrait, the Queen's face reflects not only the lights, but also the shadows of a complex biographical story: the reasons, which led her to abdicate from the throne and to repudiate Lutheranism for Roman Catholicism, have been never entirely clear. On this regard, historians formulated the most disparate hypotheses, investigating the origins of these strong and ground-breaking choices in political, religious and philosophical-cultural reasons and, last but not least, also bringing up the Queen's sexuality. Many medical and psychological theories between the late Nineteenth century and the first half of the Twentieth century focused on this aspect: from the psychoanalytic hypothesis of an escape from femininity to sexual neurosis, homosexuality, intersexuality, pseudo-hermaphroditism and at last hyperandrogenism.

The second half of the Twentieth century was marked by medical-anthropological studies on the figure of the Queen with her corpse's exhumation from the burial in the Vatican Grottoes, always with the underlying motivation of proving or refuting the Queen's presumed sexual abnormality through the analysis of her remains.

The article intends to investigate the medical-psychological literature, published between the late Nineteenth century and the Twentieth century, analysing the main theories formulated on the Queen's presumed sexual abnormality, with the aim of providing a critical review.

The study of new sources, which have been identified through archival research, allowed us to focus our attention on the Queen's real sexual identity, providing a balanced vision and contextualising her figure and choices in the language of power during the Baroque age instead of sexual anomalies.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The research methodology integrated the bibliographical analysis of scientific literature published on the topic of the Queen's psycho-sexual identity, with biographical and autobiographical literature and the evidence shown by new archival documentation. The examined literature includes the works published about the topic of the Queen's sexuality between the late Nineteenth century and the second half of the Twentieth century: starting from 1892, with the first psychological essay by the alienist doctor Francesco De Sarlo and the work by the doctor and gynaecologist Essen-Möller (1937) up to the essay by the Swedish anatomist and anthropologist Carl-Herman Hjortsjö (1967).

The formulated hypotheses were verified using the following archival sources: fifty-four letters, written by the Queen's personal doctor, Cesare Macchiati from Fermo, between 1660 and 1668, during the two trips to Sweden with Christina, kept partly at the Riksarkivet in Stockholm and partly at the Azzolino collection at the civic library in Jesi; a series of short letters and love notes, which the Cardinal Azzolino and the Queen Christina exchanged in Rome several times a day between 1679 and 1681 preserved at the Riksarkivet in Stockholm; the autopsy report of the Queen's remains by the court surgeon Alessio Spalla, kept in a private archive<sup>1</sup>.

The contemporary Seventeenth-century printed literature - pamphlets and libels - was also investigated, as well as the main biographies published about the Queen - Johan Arckenholtz<sup>2</sup> (1751-1760), Carl Bildt<sup>3</sup> (1899), Sven Stolpe<sup>4</sup> (1959-1961), Marie Louise Rodén<sup>5</sup> (2001) Last but not least, the Queen's autobiography was analysed in the Italian edition - Maria Conforti<sup>6</sup> (1998) - and in the version by Jean François de Raymonde<sup>7</sup> (1994) based on the original manuscript preserved in Montpellier. The wide genre-varied literature allowed us to critically compare published and unpublished sources with the aim of reconstructing the question of the Queen's sexual identity.

### 3. Results

The analysis of the main published studies on the Queen allowed the following results:

- rereading the complex biographical story and, in particular, those aspects as education which contributed to build the image of her sexual ambiguity;
- an examination of the main psychological and medical theories on her sexual identity, which have been formulated from the late Nineteenth century up to now;
- the attestation of her sexual normality at an organic level, in the light of the anatomical-anthropological investigations carried out on her remains and of the archival research results.

The hypotheses, which were formulated on the Queen's sexual identity, are articulated from two perspectives: a rejection of femininity and an escape from it as a sexual neurosis from a psychological point of view; a pseudo or real hermaphroditism and hormonal imbalances, such as hyperandrogenism from a medical point of view. But all the theories on the Queen's sexual identity have to deal with a first fixed point, which was established by research: the result of the investigation of Christina's corpse, which was carried out by the Swedish anatomist and anthropologist Carl-Herman Hjortsjö in 1966.

A brief analysis of Queen's biography focusing on her education and strong choices is the necessary premise to the examination of medical theories on her sexual identity.

### **3.1. A male education for a virile role**

Christina Vasa was born in the Royal Castle in Stockholm on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1626, and her parents were King Gustavus Adolphus (1594-1632) and Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg (1599-1655). Her father Gustav II Adolphus, loved the daughter so much that he ensured her succession to the throne in the absence of male heirs and was always admired and venerated by her<sup>8</sup>.

Instead, Christina's relationship with her mother was constantly conflictual. Eleonora of Brandenburg was a beautiful woman, but fragile and weak-willed. Unfortunately, Gustav II Adolphus died in battle at Lützen, Germany, on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1632, and Christina, who was not six years old yet, found herself inheriting the crown under the regency of the Government until she came of age.

Her mother, Eleonora of Brandenburg, who was already mentally unstable, was unable to overcome her husband's death, withdrawing into a sort of eternal mourning so that in 1636, the Council of Regency decided to separate Christina from her mother both to safeguard her mental balance and to exercise direct control over the young monarch. The very young Queen's education was entrusted to a group of statesmen, who were led by Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna. Christina was educated as a young crown prince in literature, arts, philosophy, science, law, military art and political strategy, everything which could be necessary for her to reign well.

### **3.2. Sexual ambiguity: a gender paradox**

According to the historian M.L. Rodén<sup>5</sup>, Christina made choices, which would not only revolutionise her life and kingdom, but they would also mark an important moment in Europe during the Counter-Reformation between 1644 and 1650: the abdication from the throne in 1654 and the conversion to Roman Catholicism with an official ceremony in Innsbruck in 1655. After her abdication, Christina left Sweden for the Netherlands, escaping on horseback with a small retinue, while she was dressed like a man. Wearing men's clothes while travelling was a common custom for women: in addition to reasons of comfort, there were safety reasons to avoid risks. Having shoulder-length hair, wearing men's clothes and carrying a sword, as Christina did on the Swedish border, were not unusual habits for women, who were about to ride a horse on a long journey to foreign countries.

A denigrating pamphlet published after her abdication reports the opinions on her gender identity, which were expressed by the Jesuits: Christina sometimes appeared dressed as a man, sometimes as a woman, to the point of generating uncertainty about her sexual identity, just as there was uncertainty about her religion and, not by chance, the pamphlet even goes as far as to advance the hypothesis of the Queen's hermaphroditism<sup>9</sup>. In the eyes of the Jesuits, the ambivalence in attitudes and ways of dressing was combined with the ambivalence in religious matters before conversion.

But which link the topic of hermaphroditism to the queen's adherence to erudite libertinism? How could libertine philosophy have influenced the Queen's sexual dimension?

In libertine thought, the figure of the free thinker is associated with the cancellation of sexual difference through the features of hermaphrodites. Rational soul is asexual and opens the possibility of becoming a man or a woman regardless of sexual features. The figure of the libertine already bears in himself/herself the traces of gender ambiguity, which is the counterpart of ideological ambiguity characterising him/her. Beyond her adherence to erudite libertinism, her way of dressing was in truth a code that Christina skilfully used to express the language of power. In the 17th century, the necessary requirements to aspire to power – and Christina firmly wanted to maintain her status as a monarch by divine right even after her abdication – were exclusively male. This transvestism was functional to political power, without being questioned or damaged by the weakness of feminine attitudes<sup>10</sup>. Despite her acknowledged weakness as a woman, even though she abdicated from the throne, she has still tried to maintain the role of a landless monarch, reaffirming it through her attitudes and ways of dressing and, therefore, continuing to use the male prerogatives of the language of power<sup>11</sup> in Sweden and also in Rome<sup>12</sup>. But Christina is a gender paradox: with the abdication her femininity, perceived by herself as irreducible, re-emerged in the face of the male education she received<sup>13</sup> although she continued to escape from it.

### **3.3. Christina's Psychology before Freud: hysteria as escape from Femininity**

In 1892, Francesco De Sarlo (1864-1937), a psychiatrist at S. Lazzaro Hospital in Reggio Emilia, published the essay "Sulla psicologia di Cristina di Svezia"<sup>14</sup>. This is one of the first essays on the subject. The source De Sarlo used for the analysis of the historical figure of the Queen is the biography by Gaudenzio Claretta, which was published in the same year<sup>15</sup>.

The essay by De Sarlo was ahead of its time and anticipated the psychodynamic theories Freud would have soon systematized, as Antonio Libutti writes<sup>16</sup>.

The psychiatrist places Christina in the intermediate zone between the healthy and the sick - a borderline in modern terms -, identifying her pathology as hysteria, a morbid form characterized by a complex of various phenomena: selfishness, vanity, contradictoriness, moral instability, frivolity and weakness of will. This hysteria was not only hereditary – genetic, we would say today –, but it occurred as a result of several specific causes.

According to the psychiatrist, hysteria was not the fundamental fact, which determined the course of events in Christina's life, but it was only the external expression of deep internal factors. The role her parental figures played on her is behind Christina's psychic training: the oedipal model - to put it in Freudian terms - structures

the young sovereign's personality, who is unable to identify with the maternal figure and the feminine roles to the point of manifesting an accentuated sexual uncertainty. The imposition of a male education determines her ambivalent psycho-sexual training. The interpretative model is a constant escape from femininity. Christina's hysteria was becoming intelligible and De Sarlo had understood its underlying dynamics with an extraordinary modernity, even without having a Freudian theoretical horizon yet.

### 3.4. Sexual neurosis

In 1947, Sven Stolpe (1905-1996), a literary critic, translator and professor *honoris causa*, became interested in Christina after his conversion to Catholicism. In 1959, he obtained his PhD in Literature at the University of Uppsala, discussing a thesis on Christina's French maxims, "Från stoicism till mystik. Studier i drottning Kristinas maximer"<sup>17</sup>. The biography *Drottning Kristina*, which Stolpe published in two volumes between 1960 and 1961, was enormously popular and translated into English, German, Finnish and Polish.

In the following decades, the two works by Stolpe, contributed significantly to create the figure of a neurotic and pseudo-hermaphroditic Christina in the collective imagination.

This theory goes back to the tradition of French scandal pamphlets, which were contemporary to Christina<sup>18</sup>. According to Stolpe, Christina's antipathy to physically unite with the opposite revealed her homosexuality as well as her neurotic pseudo-hermaphroditism. Her sexual neurosis would have prevented her from getting married and giving an heir to the Vasa dynasty so this made it impossible for her to keep on reigning on the Swedish throne.

Stolpe's thesis of the Queen's pseudo-hermaphroditism, was a popular reworking, very close to the thesis of the Swedish gynaecologist Essen-Möller (1937).

### 3.5. A case of pseudo-hermaphroditism?

Elis Essen-Möller (1870-1956), a full professor of gynaecology and obstetrics at the University of Lund published in 1937 the first medical study on Christina of Sweden was the essay "Drottning Kristina – En människostudie ur läkaresynpunkt"<sup>19</sup>.

In the essay, Essen-Möller analyses the literary, iconographic and historical materials on Christina and argues that the Queen's contradictoriness could be explained on the physiological basis of hormonal disorders due to pseudo-hermaphroditism or intersexuality. The assumptions on which the Swedish gynaecologist based his theory were different:

- the story of the ladies at court during her birth, who had believed that a male baby had been born due to the baby's strong voice and hairiness;

- the asymmetry of Christina's body, which can be found in subjects with intersexual anomalies, according to him. Essen-Möller supports this statement with a case, which had been studied by the German pathologist Rudolf Virchow, who had linked the asymmetric part of a woman's body with her intersexuality;
- the involuntary oscillations in the tone of her voice from feminine to masculine, which is typical of children in their puberty and intersexual people. Christina did not get dressed in a feminine way and did not have the manners, which were typical of this sex at that time. In fact, she was not interested in female manual activities or aesthetic care. Instead, the Queen loved equestrian and men's sports;
- Christina's misogyny;
- her wilful refusal to get married and to be a mother;
- The Queen could have inherited the mental illnesses of her mother and the German House of Brandenburg at a genetic level. Therefore, he cites the well-known cases of mental illnesses in her family, concluding that Christina was also psychotic or schizophrenic, in addition to being sexually abnormal.

Firstly, the Swedish physical anatomist and anthropologist Carl- Herman Hjortsjö refuted Essen Moller's judgements regarding Christina's physical appearance, as well as her manners deduced by the Queen's contemporaries testimonies and the description in her autobiography. Hjortsjö collected all these testimonies and arranged them in a somatic scheme, demonstrating how often they are subjective and conflicting with each other. Hjortsjö says that it cannot be excluded that various witnesses may have influenced each other in their observations, by reading or hearing about the Queen before meeting her and, therefore, these descriptions do not have much relevance in the debate on Christina's possible intersexuality. Hjortsjö concludes that it can be perhaps stated that the Queen was unfeminine in her physical appearance, but the descriptions mostly reflect the Queen's traits. Finally, he rightly wrote in 1967 that no doctor would now make a diagnosis of intersexuality based on physical appearance, ways of dressing and behaving, reactions, voice and its tone and the deviation from the normal pattern of sexual behaviour<sup>20</sup>.

The assumptions on which Essen-Möller bases his theory are all refutable, as demonstrated firstly by Hjortsjö and recently by other scholars<sup>21</sup>.

### **3.6. The medical-anthropological investigation of the Queen's remains: an undisputed female gender**

In 1966 the Swedish National Museum entrusted Carl-Herman Hjortsjö (1914-1978) - a renowned Swedish anatomist and anthropologist from the University of Lund - with

the important and delicate task of managing the Queen's exhumation works by the Vatican Grottoes and carrying out the scientific examination of the remains. Hjortsjö wrote a large report on this exhumation, accompanied by a rich photographic documentation, published in 1967 and preceded by other smaller articles in 1966<sup>22</sup>.

But why was the Swedish state so interested in examining Christina's remains?

Hjortsjö states that there were no specific reasons for examining Christina's corpse since historical sources had already given many answers about the Queen's illnesses and the malformations of her skeleton. Hjortsjö argues that a more important reason from an anthropological point of view could have been to compare the Queen's skeleton with the ones belonging to other members of the Vasa dynasty, which had been already previously examined. Furthermore, the examination of her skull could lead to indicate which "portraits of Queen Christina" could be considered similar.

Finally, Hjortsjö writes that there could have been an interest in examining her skeleton to see if her bones had any male features after many academic hypotheses on Christina's somatic traits and unfeminine behaviours, as well as her possible intersexuality.

The historian Rodén precisely focuses her attention on this last reason, affirming that the decision to exhume the Queen's remains may have been influenced by all the theories on a hermaphroditic Christina, which had been luxuriantly spreading in those last years following the biography, which was written by Stolpe<sup>23</sup>.

Hjortsjö's essay, which follows the examination of her remains, is decidedly complete and exhaustive, not only because it analyses all the traces of illnesses and the reasons for the Queen's death in historical sources, trying to make diagnoses, but also because it analyses Essen-Möller and Stolpe's theories on her possible intersexuality, which Hjortsjö refutes through the results of its investigation.

It is important to focus on the conclusions Hjortsjö drew at the end of the chapter "Antropologisk undersökning" (Anthropological analysis) in his report, based on a careful methodical anthropological and histological examination of the Queen's remains where he states that:

- Queen Christina's skeleton was small, with the exception of her femurs; the bones of her lower limbs appeared relatively short; the length of her remains, which was measured in her sarcophagus, was 150 cm;
- the bones of her skeleton showed typically female features, especially the bones of her shoulder girdle and pelvis, which are significant in this sense;
- no asymmetry, which did not fall within the limits of full normality between left and right bones of her lower limbs, was found. It was not possible to investigate whether there was an asymmetry or a deformation of her rib cage: the central part of her rib cage could not be examined due to its precarious



state; therefore, it was not even possible to check whether the other right ribs were smaller than the left ones;

- no signs of any kind referring to morbid alterations or fractures to her skeleton, which could be occurred during her life, were pointed out.
- In the chapter of the report, “Drottning Christinas sexuella konstitution” (Queen Christina’s sexuality), Hjortsjö critically analyses Essen-Möller and Stolpe’s theses on Christina’s intersexuality, after having discussed the definition of intersexuality and the real or pseudo-hermaphroditism in medical terms. Hjortsjö’s main conclusions opposing Essen-Möller and Stolpe’s theses are:
- Queen Christina menstruated and all the doctors, who visited her, have always considered her a woman, as reported by historical documentary sources. Therefore, if we had been faced with a case of intersexuality, Christina would have been either a real hermaphrodite with female *habitus* or a female pseudo-hermaphrodite; both of the cases are very rare. However, it is not possible to take into account so many variants of intersexuality due to hormonal disorders or tumours, for example.
- female and male sex hormones influence the creation of the skeleton, but the Queen’s bones are female and, above all, the shape of her pelvis did not create an obstacle to childbirth;
- he is sceptical about Essen-Möller’s theory, which indicates the asymmetry of the body as a symptom of intersexuality referring to a study by Virchow, because the asymmetry is not mentioned in Overzier’s wide monograph, which was devoted to the topic<sup>24</sup>;
- in none of the historical sources, there is even the slightest hint of a congenital abnormality in the Queen’s external genitalia, nor a description of this abnormality.

Finally, Hjortsjö concludes that if Essen-Möller and Stolpe’s theses, which are very questionable according to him, had been sustainable, male peculiarities should have been found in the Queen’s remains, but it did not happen because both her skeleton and skull were found to be typically female upon analysis.

### **3.7. The recent endocrinological hypothesis: a case of hyperandrogenism**

As a medical justification for Christina’s physical and sexual features, a recent thesis has advanced the hypothesis that the Queen was affected by hyperandrogenism due to a congenital adrenal pathology, probably a 21-hydroxylase deficiency<sup>25</sup>.

According to this medical hypothesis, this would explain several aspects of the Queen:

- At her birth, Christina was declared by midwives to be a male, having a clitoral hypertrophy, which was not slight;

- the fact that Christina was genetically female is what can be deduced from the examination, which was carried out on her remains in 1965 by the Swedish anthropologist Carl-Herman Hjortsjö, who found no traces of the Queen's intersexuality, that is, she had both male and female genitalia. Her female sex could have been also deduced from the fact that Christina menstruated, even if it is not known how regular it was but, at least, the flow of her menstrual blood was poor and very painful on some occasions. The hypothesis is that her wilful refusal to get married could have been also determined by the awareness of her genital anomaly: she could have been affected by a hematocolpos or even a hematometra due to the reduced patency of her vaginal canal;
- her high androgenic tone may certainly have influenced her psychosexual orientation, inducing her aggressive character and masculine ways of dressing, walking and speaking;
- her hormonal imbalance also had an effect on her short stature (she was 150 cm tall), which contrasts with her German mother's normal stature and her father Gustav Adolphus' tall stature;
- even her deep and harsh voice could be the effect of hyperandrogenism;
- 21-hydroxylase deficiency is accompanied by salt wasting. Despite her physical strength, Christina suffered from episodes of deep asthenia in her childhood and youth, especially during fevers, fainting fits, states of deep prostration and a series of very stressful events for her at an emotional level. All this may suggest that adrenal compensation may have been insufficient in particularly stressful and prolonged situations.

## **Discussion**

The scientific weakness of Essen-Möller and Stolpe's hypothesis has in common their starting point, that is, the limited published and unpublished sources analysed to elaborate their theories.

It is known to all the scholars, who deal with the figure of Christina, that outlining an overall picture of published literature and even more unpublished documentation relating to the Queen is particularly complex.

The fragmentary nature of the sources about Queen Christina and their difficult retrieval represent the first obstacle for those who study the figure of the Queen, making research data more frequently subject to continuous revisions. From the point of view of archival resources, the motivation is clear: Christina died on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1689, naming in her will Cardinal Decio Azzolino the Younger as her universal heir, who, in turn, died suddenly on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1689<sup>26</sup>. The two inheritances joined without being able

to draw a clear distinction, especially in the archival documentation, between what comes from the Queen's archive and what pertains to the Cardinal's archive in the Azzolino collection. Christina's library at Palazzo Riario in Rome suffered the same fate: her handwritten collections are dispersed across several institutions<sup>27</sup>.

An exemplary case is offered by a relevant source, which has been frequently used - even by Essen-Möller and Stolpe - in studies on the Queen: the autobiography that Cristina wrote in several stages, leaving it incomplete. The secretaries made copies from the Queen's autograph manuscript, so there are various printed and handwritten versions of her autobiography in circulation. Therefore, in the case of Christina's autobiography, the difficulty is represented not only by various existing handwritten versions, but also by the interpretation of the content at a philological level. It is objectively evident the difficulty of finding a scientific validation of the theories on the Queen's intersexuality and pseudo-hermaphroditism, exclusively based on the published literary sources, without paying attention to philological aspects and taking into account the huge archival documentation.

This essential scientific weakness has been also evident in the most recent medical theories. Mannelli hypothesizes the Queen's hyperandrogenism, which is – according to him- evident from her birth with a clitoral hypertrophy, but it is not clear on which basis. The description of her birth episode when Christina's sex was confused is only in the Swedish version of the autobiography the Queen narrated in order to intentionally surround her birth with an aura of exceptionality and sensationalism and to highlight the strong expectations for the birth of a male heir at court. But deducing features of the newborn Queen's sexual hyperandrogenism from this single episode seems rather hasty. Among the examined studies, only the report of the Swedish anthropologist Carl-Herman Hjortsjö establishes a firm point. The examination of Christina's remains puts an end to some hypotheses on her sexuality, at least at an organic level: her skeleton and skull are typically female in their size and shape. At this point, it is difficult to even hypothesize pronounced hormonal imbalances, such as hyperandrogenism, which should have left marks on the bones of her skeleton.

The court physicians<sup>28</sup> testimonies -Hjortsjö did not cite them since they were not known at a documentary level at that time yet-, supported the hypothesis of a regular female sexuality at an organic level. Reference is particularly made to the letters, which the court physician Cesare Macchiati weekly wrote during the two trips to Sweden with Queen Christina between 1660 and 1668, addressed to Cardinal Azzolino in Rome<sup>29</sup>. The collection consists of forty-four letters, which are preserved at the Riksarkivet in Stockholm and at the civic library in Jesi: its complete edition is currently being carried out by the authors of this article. The letters testify that the Queen regularly menstruated (letters dated on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1666, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1666, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1667, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1668)<sup>30</sup>. Macchiati leaves the written testimony of a prolapsed uterus as further evidence in his letters.

If the Queen's sexuality leaves no doubt, the question of her sexual orientation remains to be discussed. But documentary evidence supports even on this point. If her youthful love towards her cousin, Charles X Gustav, and then, perhaps, her favourite diplomat Magnus Gabriel de La Gardie is mentioned, her relationship with Cardinal Decio Azzolino the Younger has marked her emotional world forever. Christina met Azzolino in Rome in December 1655: he had been chosen by the pope Alexander VII both because of his age - he was almost the same age as the Queen - and his diplomatic ability to introduce the Queen into the Roman context. Christina shared political, cultural, artistic and scientific interests with Azzolino. It was a human fellowship, which was interrupted only by the Queen's death in April 1689 but also the Cardinal died a few months later, in June. As the scholar M.L. Rodén states<sup>5</sup>, Christina's - widely requited - love for Azzolino can be attested by various documentary sources: a series of letters, which she wrote to him during her stay in Hamburg between 1666 and 1668 and were discovered and published by Baron Bildt in 1899; a series of short letters and love notes<sup>31</sup>, dated between 1679 and 1681, which the Cardinal and the Queen have exchanged in Rome several times a day. In the letters Bildt published, we read declarations of love from the Queen to the Cardinal and the letter dated January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1667, where Christina swears eternal love to him, is particularly explicit in this sense. But it was a feeling, which was requited by Azzolino. A short letter from the cardinal, which is preserved together with love notes, is particularly explicit: his first thought would have been always addressed to Christina in the morning as at night<sup>32</sup>.

The anthropological analysis of Christina's remains and the archival evidence contribute to define Christina's sexual identity: she was sexually a woman and behaved like a woman in the emotional and amorous sphere.

Christina's masculine attitude can be traced back both to the virile education she received - she was educated as a crown prince - and the language of power, which was exclusively masculine in the Seventeenth century. Christina's desire to "live" like a man was not linked to her presumed homosexuality, but to her deep need for freedom and independence<sup>33</sup> and the awareness that only a man could be really free at that time. She was a woman, but she was aware that her gender could be a limit to carry out her role in government so she abdicated from the throne, but she did not renounce her royalty, which she continued to freely express, demonstrating modernity in self-determining as a woman in a world, which was dominated by male rules.

## **Conclusion**

The international scholars are preparing to celebrate in 2026 the four hundredth anniversary of Queen Christina's birth (Stockholm, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1626). Archival and handwritten documentation about the Queen, which is preserved in libraries and archives not only in Italy, is still awaiting examination to provide new historical truths on this complex character.

From a historical-medical perspective, the hope could be to use modern techniques for new paleopathological investigations on the Queen's remains, which are preserved in the tomb at the Vatican Grottoes, and even on other available remains of the Vasa dynasty in the context of a wider bilateral Italian-Swedish collaboration, with the aim of reconstructing genetic profiles and diseases from which they were affected.

Regarding her masculine attitudes, the question of the Queen must be reformulated and placed not at a level of organic sexuality, but in gender dynamics between masculine and feminine languages of power in the modern age as early modern studies suggested<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, the figure of Queen Christina must be historically reread in the light of new research, purified from the scientifically unfounded hypotheses of her sexual anomaly and understood in all her extraordinary modernity instead.

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