

# Minstrels in High Places: the reception of the relic of St Isidore the Farm-Labourer in Barcelona (1623)

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## Abstract

Major urban festivities, whether celebrated as part of the annual liturgical cycle or as one-off ceremonies, filled the city with sounds and musics of all kinds. In this event, the parish church of Santa Maria del Pi in Barcelona became a kind of sonic beacon on the occasion of the translation of a relic of St Isidore the Farm-Labourer donated to the church by an important figure in the city, Guerau de Guardiola. The procession accompanying the relic from outside the city to the church, and the services held there in its honour, involved instrumental music and the singing of motets. These musics not only represented the significance and prestige of the event for the church, but also communicated it to the rest of the city.

## Keywords

compline , recruitment of musicians , translation of relic , feast of Corpus Christi , vespers , mass , music in towers and balconies , motet , dances , procession , Saint Isidore the Farm-Labourer , Guerau de Guardiola (royal deputy financial controller of Catalonia) , Joan Ferrer (mossen: rector of Santa Maria del Pi (Barcelona) , Antonio Casanovas i Tordera (wind-player) , Saint Teresa of Avila , St Raymon de Penyafort , wind players , trumpeter , drum player , music chapel

The festive ceremonies held to receive a relic of St Isidore the Farm-Labourer in Barcelona took place over three days: 17, 18 and 19 October 1623. Isidore had been canonised the previous year, and the relic, destined for the parish church of Santa Maria del Pi, was donated by Guerau de Guardiola, royal deputy financial controller (*racional*) of Catalonia, and a parishioner of that church. The relic reached Barcelona from Madrid, and, as was customary in the Catalan capital on such occasions, was housed initially at the Cistercian convent of Valldonzella outside the city walls before being translated to Santa Maria del Pi, where it was to be received by the rector, Mossen Joan Ferrer.

On 17 October 1623, the rector and clergy left Santa Maria del Pi at about 3pm and processed, together with twenty beneficed-priests from the cathedral, to collect the relic from Valldonzella and return it to the church, accompanied by ten confraternities with their banners and lighted candles, the city councillors, and other visual and sonic elements that characterised major feasts such as Corpus Christi: 'the Eagle of the City processed along with the [dancing] horses of the guild of cotton-workers, the mule and the dragon and many wind-bands' ('també anaven l'àliga de la Ciutat, los cavalls cotoners, la mulassa y lo drach y moltes cobles de menestrils'). The presence of these popular elements from the processional bestiary as well as the large number of wind-players reflect the significance of the occasion.

The relic was received at Santa Maria del Pi with due solemnity: the rector presented the relic to all the nobles gathered for the occasion, and they donated jewels in its honour, while motets were sung which, according to the account, pleased all those present ('... cantaren molts motets ab gran content de tot lo poble').

Another musical aspect of note was the participation of trumpeters, drummers and wind-players throughout the three days of the festivities. Five trumpeters and three drummers were involved in the procession and, on two occasions, some of them played from the bell-tower. As regards the five members of the wind-band (*ministrers*) – who probably played shawms, sackbut and dulcian – payments were made to the 'music' Antoni Casanovas i Tordera on behalf of the confraternity of instrumentalists (founded in 1599) the day after the festivities ended 'for going in the procession, for two *vetlles* [performances] in the bell-tower on the Tuesday and Wednesday, and two more in the church on the same days, and for the Mass, Vespers, Compline and the procession in the church on the Thursday ('...que hana en la professó, per les dues vetlles al campanar dimarts i dimecres, dues vetlles a la Iglesia los mateixos dies, i per lo ofici, vesprer, completes i professó dins la iglesia lo dijous').

From descriptions of other major ceremonies, such as the beatification of St Teresa of Avila and St Raymon de Penyafort, the instrumental repertory heard during the festivities would have included motets, madrigals and 'batallons' (battle pieces).

This striking sonic feature, heard from on high and inside the church, added to the solemnity of the event and located Santa Maria del Pi as the sound source, thereby increasing its prestige and granting its new relic due recognition in the urban context.

## Source:

Arxiu Parroquial de Santa Maria del Pi, B361 Deliberacions, llibre E (1623-1639); APSMP-B381 Procura d'Herències. Rebuts, octubre 1623.

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## Resources



Basilica of Santa Maria del Pi. Anton van der Wyngaerde (1563)

[External link](#)



The bell-tower of Santa Maria del Pi, Barcelona

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/9uRkkFJKiW8?iv\\_load\\_policy=3&fs=1&origin=https://www.historicalsoundscapes.com](https://www.youtube.com/embed/9uRkkFJKiW8?iv_load_policy=3&fs=1&origin=https://www.historicalsoundscapes.com)

*O quam super terram.* Francisco Guerrero

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