

Heart defect likely killed 13th-century teen saint: study

June 10 2010

A teenage saint whose 750-year-old mummified body lay for centuries in a church in central Italy probably died of a congenital heart defect, scientists said Thursday.

The mummy of Santa Rosa of Viterbo, the patron saint of people in exile, is venerated by devout Roman Catholics and celebrated in a festive procession through the town centre every September.

Earlier analysis of her exceptionally well-preserved remains suggested that the 18- or 19-year old died in 1251 of tuberculosis.

"But when we analysed samples from tissue from the lungs, we didn't find any evidence of DNA of mirco-bacterial origin," said Ruggero D'Anastasio, a professor at State University G d'Annunzio in Chieti, Italy and lead author of the study published in the [British medical journal](#) The Lancet.

A low-intensity radiograph of the heart, however, revealed a structural defect inside the [left ventricle](#) consistent with a rare condition called Cantrell's syndrome, which likewise causes malformations of the diaphragm, lower sternum and abdominal wall.

The X-ray also showed signs of a thrombus, or blockage, in the heart. "This is the most probable cause of death," D'Anastasio said by phone.

According to legend, Rosa was already performing miracles and

preaching penance as a small child in her native town of Viterbo, then under the control of a Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, frequently in conflict with the pope.

Viterbo was restored to papal power shortly after Rosa correctly predicted the Emperor's death in 1250. She died a year later, and was canonised in 1457.

"We were entrusted by the church with the preservation of the mummy body in 1995," D'Anastasio said.

Many faithful believe her body is uncorrupted by the passage of time.

(c) 2010 AFP

Citation: Heart defect likely killed 13th-century teen saint: study (2010, June 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-06-heart-defect-13th-century-teen-saint.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--