

EUROPA PERIODICA

Studies on Periodicals and Newspapers



Domenico Cecere/Alessandro Tuccillo (eds)

Communication and Politics in the Hispanic Monarchy

Managing Times of Emergency

RELACION DEL EXEMPLAR CASTIGO QUE EMBIO DIOS a la Ciudad de Lima, Cabeça del Perú, y a fu Costa de Barlovento, con los espantofos Temblores del dia 20. de Octubre del año de 1687.

La curiosidad de los distantes, y la fina correspondencia de los auferentes han introducido entre vnos. y otros Relaciones de los accidères mas graves, y exaratorios, que se padecen en las Ciudades, y Provincias, que esta, por la materia que refiere, y por el tiempo en que se publica, firma mas para defpender a todo el mundo que a solo uno de sus habitantes.

In times of emergency, communication plays a crucial yet problematic role. While this may seem obvious nowadays, even before the emergence of modern media, the methods of gathering, elaborating and transmitting information had a significant influence on the perception of risk and decision-making processes. The book examines how government bodies and different social actors handled emergencies in the Hispanic Monarchy, from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. It features case studies from the Hispanic Monarchy's European, American and Asian territories, exploring the narrative strategies used in news-sheets and gazettes, the impact of disasters on information networks, how they interacted with political and social dynamics, and the effect of conflicting interpretations of extreme events.

GACETA DE MADRID

DEL MARTES 22. DE MAYO DE 1764.



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Communication and Politics in the Hispanic Monarchy:
Managing Times of Emergency

EUROPA PERIODICA
STUDIES ON PERIODICALS AND NEWSPAPERS

Edited by
Patrizia Delpiano, Fabio Forner, Giovanni Iamartino,
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BAND 3

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Domenico Cecere and Alessandro Tuccillo

Times of emergency: Managing communication and politics in the aftermath of a disaster*

1. *Fate presto*

Fate presto [make haste] was the headline of the Naples daily *Il Mattino* on 26 November 1980, three days after the earthquake that devastated Irpinia and Basilicata. The headline conveys the gravity of a disaster that killed almost 3,000 people, injured about 9,000 more and left 400,000 without a roof over their heads. It is emblematic of the role that certain channels of information took on in a crisis, summoning the authorities to swift and effective action in the areas affected to rescue those trapped under the rubble and alleviate the suffering of those who had survived. This was not just a generic call to action. It called out the inadequate response that was aggravating the situation, as government bodies and national information channels had initially tended to underestimate the scale and impact of the earthquake. Rescue efforts had been tardy and the measures deployed were not up to the task. Indeed, over the years, the sluggishness and incompetence of the authorities have featured prominently in public criticism of how the emergency was handled. The inadequate response to some extent shaped how the measures deployed in Irpinia were judged, given the overwhelming delay and inefficiency in how reconstruction funds were managed, as well as the corruption and the meddling of organised crime, both well documented¹.

* This work was supported by the DisComPoSE project, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 759829).

1 This view, which is deeply rooted in collective memory and often compared with the apparent effectiveness of the measures taken after the Friuli earthquake of

Also on 26 November, Italy's head of state, President Sandro Pertini, harshly criticised the handling of the disaster, issuing a heartfelt appeal for immediate assistance to be provided to the victims. The headline on the front page of the Naples daily went straight to the heart of what needed to be done. *Fate presto* and the sub-headline *Per salvare chi è ancora vivo, per aiutare chi non ha più nulla* [to rescue those left alive, to assist those left with nothing] raised public awareness domestically and internationally about the emergency, encouraging individuals and organisations to volunteer their services and accelerating the provision of assistance from surrounding areas, from other parts of Italy and from abroad².

A more recent disaster has revealed other aspects of the essential yet problematic role of communication in times of emergency. The earthquake that struck L'Aquila and parts of Abruzzo on 6 April 2009 received notable attention internationally not only because of the 309 fatalities and the destruction of several residential areas, but also because of the decision taken by then premier Silvio Berlusconi to host a G8 meeting in L'Aquila. The communicative impact of this decision served many purposes, most of which were related to domestic politics. However, the international reverberations of the L'Aquila earthquake over the following months and years were fuelled not only by the decision of a head of government who was also a communications entrepreneur, but also by the subsequent trial of the members of the *Commissione Nazionale per la Previsione e*

1976, has been questioned by historians, sociologists and other experts who have researched the earthquake. See Gabriella Gribaudo, and Anna Maria Zaccaria, eds, *Terremoti: Storia, memorie, narrazioni* (Verona: Cierre Edizioni, 2013); Gabriella Gribaudo, *La memoria, i traumi, la storia. La guerra e le catastrofi del Novecento* (Rome: Viella, 2020), 217–77; Gabriele I. Moscaritolo, 'The Memory of the 1980 Earthquake and Its Aftermath in Irpinia (Southern Italy): Two Case-Studies', *Global Environment*, 11 (2018), 434–55; Stefano Ventura, *Storia di una ricostruzione. L'Irpinia dopo il terremoto* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2020); Gabriella Gribaudo, Francesco Mastroberti, and Francesco Senatore, eds, *Il terremoto del 23 novembre 1980: luoghi e memorie* (Naples: Editoriale scientifica, 2021).

2 *Il Mattino* (26 November 1980). This front page has become very well-known and was reproduced by Andy Warhol for the *Terrae motus* collection curated by Lucio Amelio (<https://www.reggiadicaseritaunofficial.it/collezioni/terrae-motus/>, last accessed 31 March 2023).

Prevenzione dei Grandi Rischi [National Committee for the Forecasting and Prevention of Significant Dangers]. The scientists and officials on the committee were accused of providing, just a few days before the earthquake struck, misleading and contradictory information about the likelihood of a powerful earthquake and about what precautions should be taken, if any. The frequent minor tremors felt over the preceding weeks had generated extensive public debate in the local and national press, with contributions from local mayors, government officials, members of authoritative scientific institutes, experts expressing their personal opinions and so on. The communications landscape became crowded and noisy, polarising public opinion into an alarmist camp and an unconcerned camp. Following the disaster of 6 April, media pressure shifted the debate to understanding the causes of the disaster and to ascribing responsibility so that guilty parties could be identified³.

These observations on the 1980 and 2009 earthquakes illustrate some of the main communicative, societal and political dynamics that emerge when modern-day societies are hit by a disaster with natural causes, or when disasters of this kind threaten. The volume of information and images disseminated, and the speed with which they spread, depends on the available communications technology. The extraordinary tragic news swiftly reaches a broad public, often at some distance from the epicentre. The media will swoop on almost any news whose sensationally catastrophic nature makes it fit to print as they compete to shape public opinion, which is nowadays forced to come to terms swiftly with other people's grief. There is no time to fully assimilate the information as the next news item is already grabbing the public's attention⁴.

On the other hand, the potentially global coverage that events of this kind receive in the mass media, at least initially, bestows great power on

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- 3 On the trial of the members of the committee, see Antonello Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza. Il terremoto dell'Aquila e la Commissione Grandi Rischi. Un'analisi antropologica* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2013); David E. Alexander, 'Communicating Earthquake Risk to the Public: the Trial of the "L'Aquila Seven"', *Natural Hazards*, 72 (2014), 1159–73; Alessandro Amato, Andrea Cerase, and Fabrizio Galadini, eds, *Terremoti, comunicazione, diritto. Riflessioni sul processo alla "Commissione Grandi Rischi"* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015).
- 4 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

the communication of disasters. How the information is gathered, elaborated and transmitted influences governments in the decisions they make about how to handle emergencies⁵.

Accounts of disasters also reveal many other related issues, providing food for thought about the central role of information in times of emergency, in particular about the role of periodicals and the complex relationship between communication and the perception of risk. An important aspect of understanding how disasters, whether environmental, biological or anthropic, are framed in mass communication is the raised tolerance threshold of contemporary society. Unlike earlier societies, contemporary societies see themselves as taking a calculated approach to anticipated risk⁶, as being able to elaborate knowledge and apply technologies to prevent risks or mitigate their effects, often based on a precautionary principle expressed as laws, prescriptions or procedures. It goes without saying that assuming that an acceptable risk threshold can be defined objectively and that neutral parameters can be defined to guarantee public safety comes up against the issue of whether risk is in fact a social construct, on which there has been substantial consensus in the social sciences over recent decades⁷. Risk is not simply an intrinsic property of natural phenomena or a physical property of the environment, but is also the result of collective subjective perception and assessment. It cannot therefore be ascribed to a theory of rational choice, but can only be understood relative to the social and moral norms of the specific societies concerned, and the technological capacities of these societies. Individuals, groups and societies are selective in their approach to threats, defining hierarchies of risk not only on the

5 Rossella Savarese, ed., *Comunicazione e crisi: media, conflitti e società* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002).

6 See Michela Barbot, and Federica Favino, 'Premessa', *Quaderni storici*, 52/3 (2017), 643–53, a rich introduction to the journal's thematic section entitled *Prevedere*.

7 Mary Douglas, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), part I; Ute Luig, ed., *Negotiating Disasters: Politics, Representation, Meanings* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012).

basis of the available technology to identify and monitor risks, but also on the basis of prevailing value systems and power relationships within societies. The dynamics of communication are central to the processes of the selection, prioritisation and social perception of risk. The tolerance levels of threats to public safety are therefore determined by those who wield the power to gather and manage information.

These considerations reveal the difficult and potentially conflictual nature of the relationship between science, communications and politics in times of emergency. They also shed light on another issue. In the past, the causes of disasters were sought outside societies – in the stars, in divine plans, in the actions of fringe groups and so on. Today, the causes tend to be sought within societies⁸. The desire to control nature and therefore mitigate any risk leads to seeking the causes of these tragedies in errors, failings, omissions, underestimations and so on, whether real or presumed. The role of the mass media is once again crucial to attributing responsibility, as it can meet society's expectation that it can identify errors or omissions. Laying blame immediately and definitively, on a scapegoat if necessary, is a characteristic of many media narratives in the face of imminent risk or in the aftermath of a catastrophe.

2. Communicating disasters

The scale of the political import of information is made even clearer by the rapid and disruptive developments in communications technology in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These developments have led to the almost global reach of media networks, as well as transmission speeds that provide news almost in real time and ever-increasing access to news thanks to the all-pervasive proliferation of devices that can deliver it.

Nevertheless, communications in times of emergency were no less important even before these game-changing developments. Communicating emergencies has always been a delicate and problematic matter. As noted

8 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992, originally publ. Frankfurt 1986); Jeffrey Wimmer, and Thorsten Quandt, 'Living in the Risk Society. An Interview with Ulrich Beck', *Journalism Studies*, 7/2 (2006), 336–47; François Walter, *Catastrophes. Une histoire culturelle, XVI^e–XXI^e siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 225–46.

by Luc Boltanski, the introduction of pity into politics and the spectator's dilemma are not some automatic consequences of modern media⁹. Boltanski points out that some of the processes that introduced these elements emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western societies and the large areas of the world they dominated. As the early modern period was drawing to a close, the development of pamphlets, novels and literary criticism introduced a range of new topics and three in particular, which he terms 'the topic of denunciation', 'the topic of sentiment' and 'the aesthetic topic'. Changes in how individual and collective suffering was portrayed publicly in the second half of the eighteenth century significantly altered sensitivities and therefore mores, and transformed the politics of contemporary societies.

Whether or not one agrees with Boltanski's account of these sociocultural processes and their periodisation, it is clear that some of the significant changes in the political agendas of governments are not simply a consequence of the evolution of information technology. Indeed, they are above all due to changes in the reporting of the impact of wars, disasters and other collective traumas affecting larger or smaller groups of people. They can also be attributed to the authorities beginning to recognise, from the second half of the eighteenth century, that they needed to demonstrate solidarity with the victims of disasters. This new sensitivity meant that it became the norm for authorities to take victims into account as a matter of course, thus highlighting the political nature of public measures in the face of emergencies¹⁰.

9 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering. Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, originally publ. Paris 1993).

10 For key works on these processes in contemporary society, see Didier Fassin, *La raison humanitaire. Une histoire morale du temps présent* (Paris: Seuil-Gallimard, 2010); Id., 'De l'invention du traumatisme à la reconnaissance des victimes. Genèse et transformations d'une condition morale', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 123/3 (2014), 161–71. For a historical perspective, see Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, and Chantal Thomas, eds, *L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII^e siècle. Du châtement divin au désastre naturel* (Geneva: Droz, 2008); Thomas Labbé, 'Aux origines des politiques compassionnelles. Émergence de la sensibilité envers les victimes de catastrophes à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Annales HSS*, 74/1 (2019), 45–71; Id., 'La catastrophe comme objet de gouvernement: le développement de la notion de "calamité publique" dans la pensée politique

This phase, usually seen as the incubation phase or first emergence of these sociocultural processes, is the *terminus ad quem* of this volume, which brings together methodological considerations and interpretative analyses based on case studies of the vast and diverse political and cultural stage of the territories that constituted the Hispanic Monarchy from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Research into the politics of communication in the early modern period and the contemporary period, and into the cultural history of catastrophes, suggests that the analysis of these phenomena can be extended to much broader timescales. There is general recognition of the fundamental importance of research into the emergence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of a public opinion that was informed by a press that was less constrained by censorship and could reach an increasingly literate audience. However, communication dynamics of this kind in fact emerged around the start of the seventeenth century or even earlier, albeit limited to a narrower audience. A vast amount of printed and manuscript literature (*avvisi*, reports, *relaciones*, short accounts in prose and in verse) contributed to the growth of information networks that needed to satisfy the requirements of a direct and indirect readership keen to know what was happening not only in their own cities and areas but also in foreign countries and the remotest parts of the globe. These decades also saw the emergence and proliferation of periodicals, which in time changed not only how news was elaborated and transmitted but also reading habits in general. Periodicals did not take off easily. In some areas, like the Iberian Peninsula and other Hispanic Monarchy territories, initial experiments were a failure, and it was only many decades later that periodicals as such started to appear at regular intervals. Nonetheless, they fostered the news habit in their readership: ‘great events would still unleash a storm of pamphlets, full of engaged advocacy, but in quieter times readers came to value the steady miscellany of information that arrived with the newspaper’¹¹.

en France et en Italie (XV^e–XVI^e siècle)’, *Laboratoire italien*, [Online], 29 (2022), <http://journals.openedition.org/laboratoireitalien/9200>, last accessed 17 March 2023.

11 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014), ch. 9 (ePub version). On the invention of the Spanish gazette, see Carmen Espejo-Cala,

The papers in this volume examine, from a range of different perspectives, the communication strategies of ancien régime societies during emergencies caused by environmental, climatic and biological events, as well as by wars and social unrest, including how such events were reported and explained, and how communications influenced responses to the emergencies. The decision to lump together crises caused by natural events and those created by human beings, like wars or rebellions, may at first glance appear questionable. In fact, maintaining a clear distinction between disasters that have environmental, biological or political causes is a difficult task¹². It is abundantly clear that events commonly labelled ‘natural disasters’ in fact have a distinct socio-cultural dimension. Moreover, crises with very different causes can create emergencies with comparable socio-political scope, and their consequences for communication can also be very similar.

The idea of focusing on communication is based on the need to link representations with social and official responses. This requires an interdisciplinary approach that covers textual critique, stylistic and linguistic analysis, and the socio-political history of the organs of government. It is also based on the fact that emergencies triggered by extraordinary tragic events generated a widespread demand for information and the sharing of experiences and opinions in preindustrial societies, albeit not on the same scale as today, and in different forms.

This observation is supported by empirical data and by research in various fields on recent and less recent cases, despite what common sense might suggest. It could be claimed that calamities disrupt communication and weaken social interaction, increasing taciturnity and isolation¹³. In

‘The Invention of the Gazette. Design standardization in Spanish Newspapers, 1600–1650’, *Media History*, 22 (2016), 296–316.

12 This decision is based on the seminal work of John Dickie, John M. Foot, and Frank M. Snowden, eds, *Disastro! Disasters in Italy since 1860: Culture, Politics, Society* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

13 In terms of literary theory, a position of this kind is held by Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore – London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), based on the assumption that a traumatic experience cannot be elaborated, and therefore cannot be endowed with meaning or described (see in part. 91–2). For a different approach on sociological and constructivist lines, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, Elizabeth Butler Breese, and Ron Eyreman, eds, *Narrating Trauma. On the Impact of Collective*

addition, calamities damage or even destroy infrastructure, leaving individuals bewildered, confused and uncommunicative, and they disrupt the network of relationships that people depend on, forcing them to focus instead on ensuring their own survival. Nevertheless, research shows that social interaction is in fact reinforced after a disaster. Those who survive feel a need to share their experience and their memories. The act of recounting itself, gathering information and comparing one's memories with those of others, is one of the main ways in which individuals respond to shock. In addition, collective activities like commemorations and scientific or legal investigations help to rebuild the social relationships that were disrupted¹⁴.

This does not mean that communication undergoes no changes during and after a calamity. How communities respond to an unexpected threat depends on a series of relatively complex processes: cognitive at the level of the individual, and communicative, social and political at an interpersonal level. These range from how the threat is perceived to elaborating information and taking decisions, processes that require time and need to follow certain procedures. Time is short when emergencies strike, and elaborating strategies or following procedures becomes more difficult, so these processes unfold differently than under normal circumstances. It would, however, be simplistic to suggest that responses and actions are necessarily determined by the panic caused by the unfathomable chaos.

There is a widespread view that disasters swiftly lead to mass panic. In the first half of the twentieth century, this position was advanced by the irrationalist school of crowd psychology, based on the assumption that, when individuals are massed together, emotions overwhelm rational thinking, emulation gets the better of discernment or compliance with norms, and selfish behaviour prevails. A cursory perusal of a large part of

Suffering (Boulder – London: Paradigm Publishers, 2011). For a general overview, see Angela Stock, and Cornelia Stott, eds, *Representing the Unimaginable. Narratives of Disaster* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007).

14 Gaëlle Clavandier, *La mort collective. Pour une sociologie des catastrophes* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2004); Erika Kuijpers, 'The Creation and Development of Social Memories of Traumatic Events', in Michael Linden, and Krzysztof Rutkowski, eds, *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting* (London – Waltham: Elsevier, 2013), 191–201.

the accounts of the disasters of the early modern period supports this view, in particular in narrative accounts written shortly after the event. These accounts often emphasise the emotional response of the people directly affected, describing their overwhelming anguish, panic and irrational fear. The anguish and the fear are only alleviated by prayer, processions and other collective acts of penance.

It is clear that these descriptions are partial, distorted and based on the impressions and preconceptions of those who wrote them. To address these issues appropriately, we would have to shift to the slippery ground of the neurobiology of decision making in individuals beset by uncertainty, which is beyond the scope of this volume and our expertise. However, research has shown that mass panic occurs only under certain conditions, is short-lived and affects only a minority of those present. In fact, detailed analysis of how people behave in the face of danger paints a picture that diverges from the accepted view. While some may act selfishly, most behave in an orderly manner, comply with social norms and tend to help one another. Most researchers agree that experiencing a shared disaster or threat can induce a sense of community, enhanced cooperation and mutual support¹⁵. In most cases, the initial disorientation is swiftly followed by a return to social interaction, and coordinated activity is restored after a relatively brief period of fragmentation.

However, re-establishing social cohesion does not always mean a return to how things were before. Emergencies are disruptive, at least in the short term, which reinforces the preconceptions of many observers about the disorder and the chaos. Emergencies create informal communication networks that are very different from those that operate under normal circumstances¹⁶. Similarly, decision making also works differently. Decisions are made on the basis of rapidly gathered information that is often incomplete, fragmentary, poorly elaborated and sometimes contradictory. There is a focus on a few salient pieces of information and less

15 Eric L. Quarantelli, 'Panic, Sociology of', in Paul B. Baltes, and Neil J. Smelser, eds, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (New York: Pergamon Press, 2001), 11020–3.

16 Hendrik Vollmer, *The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

important ones are disregarded, with preference given to what appears to be more useful and reliable. Indeed, emergencies often produce too much information. In short, emergencies modify or reshape information networks and how communication is effected, disrupting some channels and creating new ones, or activating new nodes.

At the same time, gathering and reformulating information is even more valuable in times of emergency than in normal times. Information and authoritative opinions allow the authorities to formulate and deploy appropriate political and practical short-term and long-term responses. Moreover, who controls information has the power to validate descriptions and interpretations of events, and thus to shape the assessment of the effectiveness of decisions made about how an emergency was managed, which highlights the political nature of controlling information.

3. The dynamics of news flow in early modern societies

Over recent decades, historiography, working in close collaboration with the social sciences, has significantly augmented and innovated the methodology of research into communication. Narrative texts are no longer seen just as a source of information but have themselves become the object of research. Historians are no longer interested only in the messages conveyed in gazettes, *occasionnels*, official despatches and private letters, but also in how these are delivered and who the various people involved in producing them are¹⁷. Moreover, the media are no longer simply seen as virtual mirrors on reality, but rather as an integral factor in how social reality is constructed¹⁸.

17 For an overview of the recent historiography of communication, see Massimo Rospocher, 'Beyond the Public Sphere: A Historiographical Transition', in Massimo Rospocher, ed., *Beyond the Public Sphere: Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe* (Bologna – Berlin: il Mulino – Duncker & Humblot, 2012), 9–30; Id., 'Per una storia della comunicazione nella prima età moderna. Un bilancio storiografico', *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, 44/1 (2018), 37–62; Fernando Bouza, 'Entre archivos, despachos y noticias: (d) escribir la información en la edad moderna', *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 44 (2019), 229–40.

18 Giovanni Bernardini, and Christopher Cornelissen, eds, *La medialità della storia. Nuovi studi sulla rappresentazione della politica e della società* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2019).

The social history of reading and information has been based on models elaborated in the sociology of communication and in semiology. This has sharpened the focus on the social and psychological aspects of the recipients of the texts, on their perceptions and on their liberal interpretations. Historians have stepped away from the traditional notion of communication as a linear process of transferring information and opinions from an official or authoritative source to a passive audience, placing increasing importance on the agency of the recipient and on a range of subjective social, psychological and cognitive variables, and on contextual factors that may influence a response. In the first place, consideration is given to the complex nature of the landscape of communication, where the influence of the many parties involved cannot be assumed in a perfunctory fashion. Moreover, awareness of frequent interference, of mismatched codes and of the central role of personal relationships has led historians to see communication as a bidirectional process of senders and recipients negotiating the meanings derived from interpretations of messages that may or may not coincide with what the sender had anticipated or hoped for.

The questions thrown up by relatively recent emergencies and the evidence provided by research into the resulting social and communicative dynamics also suggest fruitful lines of research into the societies of the early modern period, in particular in the territories dominated by the Hispanic Monarchy. Applying the interpretative methods used in the study of contemporary societies to early-modern societies must, however, be validated against their primary characteristics to avoid falling into the twofold trap of assuming that their social dynamics were either totally different or fairly similar to our own. A range of different characteristics need to be considered, including a society's avidity for sensational news, people's need to share the dramatic events they went through and to find explanations for them, a tendency for the authorities and dominant social forces to provide subjective accounts shaped by their own views, different social and political actors competing to find ways to promote their own interests and so on. Dynamics of this kind are not exclusive to modern mass societies but have long been part of the history of humanity. They are very evident in the period from the end of the sixteenth century to the

start of the nineteenth century¹⁹, which covers the case studies analysed in this volume.

Nevertheless, some aspects of how ancien régime societies and those who governed them operated warrant examining the differences between the recent past and the less recent past while focusing on the early-modern origins of the contemporary social and communicative processes noted above. These include key issues like the relationship between confidentiality and disclosure, controls imposed on publication and interpretation, freedom of speech and of the press, the speed with which information is communicated and disseminated, and the role of the authorities in emergencies: in such domains, although some elements are common to both the early modern period and the contemporary period, similarities are vastly outweighed by the differences. Moreover, the emergence and spread of printed matter shaped the interests, tastes and expectations of the general public over the course of the early modern period, and periodicals made readers familiar with the idea that knowledge could grow and be enriched over time.

Early modern societies often saw information gathered through official channels as *arcanum imperii*, or state secrets, in accordance with the secretiveness of ancien régime procedures, so most of this information remained inaccessible by the general public. Acquiring expert information, data and opinions, a fundamental aspect of governance, was effected through confidential official channels accessible, at least in principle, only by the monarch, the monarch's most trusted advisors and some top officials. Even opinions about certain natural phenomena provided to the authorities by specialists such as philosophers, naturalists or doctors were usually only circulated in official circles and then archived without being circulated more widely in print²⁰.

19 Pettegree, *The Invention of News*; Giulia Delogu, and Pasquale Palmieri, 'Chi ha paura del potere? Politica e comunicazione negli studi sull'età moderna', *Studi storici*, 63/2 (2022), 373–406.

20 Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation. Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); María M. Portuondo, *Secret Science. Spanish Cosmography and the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Antonio Castillo Gómez, 'The New Culture of Archives in Early Modern Spain', *European History*

Maintaining tight control over communication and keeping sensitive information confidential was already difficult for church and state authorities in normal times. However, when confusion and fear prevailed, as in times of war, invasion, rebellion, epidemic, disputed succession and other calamities, there was a greater propensity for information to be leaked and then shared by a potentially vast audience through informal networks operating at different scales. At a local scale, especially in towns and cities, the potential commercial or non-commercial market for news encouraged sharing. News travelled swiftly through the streets, piazzas and marketplaces, or when people gathered for church services. It travelled in writing or by word of mouth, as manuscripts or in print, whether the news was official or mere rumour, and texts and images were combined to the point of confusion²¹. In addition, cities were also often hubs for international networks where news travelled informally in the private correspondence of ambassadors, politicians, merchants, aristocrats, the clergy and men of letters. This multitude of actors in or close to official channels

Quarterly, 46/3 (2016), 545–67; Arndt Brendecke, ‘Knowledge, Oblivion and Concealment in Early Modern Spain: The Ambiguous Agenda of the Archive of Simancas’, in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, eds, *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 131–50.

- 21 On how different media interacted, in particular in towns and cities, see Fernando Bouza, *Imagen y propaganda: capítulos de historia cultural del reinado de Felipe II* (Madrid: Akal, 1998); Filippo de Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri. Politica e comunicazione a Venezia nella prima età moderna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012); John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities. Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Rosa Salzberg, ‘The Word on the Street: Street Performers and Devotional Texts in Italian Renaissance Cities’, *The Italianist*, 34/3 (2014), 336–48; Antonio Castillo Gómez, *Entre la pluma y la pared. Una historia social de la escritura en los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid: Akal, 2006); Stefano Dall’Aglio, Brian Richardson, and Massimo Rospoche, eds, *Voices and Texts in Early Modern Italian Society* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Daniel Bellingradt, and Massimo Rospoche, ‘The Intermediality of Early Modern Communication. An Introduction’, *Cheiron*, 2 (2021), 5–29; Chiara De Caprio, ‘A Linguistic Perspective on Intermediality in Early Modern Italy. Media Flows in the Early Modern Regno (1494–1632)’, *Cheiron*, 2 (2021), 69–85.

transmitted information from one area to another and sometimes from one continent to another, spreading knowledge and shaping opinion²².

Research into information is a field that lends itself to large-scale investigation, covering the intensified dissemination of news across great distances and in different parts of the globe. However, there is ample evidence of the risks associated with providing a top-down history of information that focuses on sources such as gazettes or pamphlets, thus potentially masking local differences and asymmetries and providing a homogenised vision that fails to recognise the fragmentation or semi-independence of different spheres of communication²³. Indeed, information subnetworks were to a certain extent independent of one another, yet connected in some ways. Researching times of emergency, when some channels of communication were disrupted and new ones emerged, reveals the diverse and asymmetric nature of communication and the obstacles and opportunities created by the distances that information needed to cover and the slow pace at which news travelled, especially in the early modern period.

Unexpected extreme events therefore stimulated an appetite for news and explanations, expanding how and where information was communicated and fostering multiple interpretations which were at times contradictory and even potentially dangerous. This was another reason why there was rivalry between church authorities, state authorities and other influential groups over the control of the flow of information. They entered the fray, directly or indirectly, to assert their own interpretation of extreme events in order to maintain or increase their influence and to attack or weaken their adversaries. This rivalry was most evident in matters of information and communication, as controlling news and

22 Joad Raymond, and Noah Moxham, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016); Francisco Bethencourt, and Florike Egmond, eds, *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

23 Filippo de Vivo, 'Microhistories of Long-Distance Information: Space, Movement and Agency in the Early Modern News', *Past and Present*, Suppl. 14 (2019), 179–214; Massimo Rospocher, 'L'invenzione delle notizie? Informazione e comunicazione nell'Europa moderna', *Storica*, 64 (2016), 95–116.

opinion had, then as now, a crucial role in crises that affected large numbers of people²⁴.

As noted above, over recent decades historiography has emphasised the need to examine how different channels interact and to consider the written word as part of a more complex system of diverse forms of media. However, recognising the intermedial nature of communication and the diversity of the media used, as well as the importance of oral communication, images and non-verbal communication does not mean ignoring the growing importance of the written word over the course of the early modern period, and the printed word in particular, and its crucial role in determining power relationships²⁵. Indeed, focusing on the interaction of different media, as exemplified by many of the papers in this volume, can help to bridge the gap between cultural history's usual focus on the production and diffusion of books, words and images, and a history of institutions that until recently devoted little attention to the social aspects of official documents, to the social history of knowledge or to the mindsets that shaped how government bodies operated²⁶.

24 Françoise Lavocat, 'Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints', *Poetics Today*, 33/3–4 (2012), 253–99; Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018); Domenico Cecere, 'Dall'informazione alla gestione dell'emergenza. Una proposta per lo studio dei disastri in età moderna', *Storica*, 77 (2020), 9–40. There is an interesting case study in Beatriz Álvarez García, "La voz visible de Dios". Estrategias comunicativas y ritualidad desde el púlpito en torno a las catástrofes de origen natural en el sur de Andalucía (1678–1684)', *Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro*, 10/2 (2022), 651–69.

25 Arthur Weststeijn, 'Empire in Fragments: Transatlantic News and Print Media in the Iberian World, ca. 1600–40', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 74/2 (2021), 528–70.

26 For some key works on this aspect, see Filippo de Vivo, 'How to Read Venetian *Relazioni*', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 34/1–2 (2011), 25–59; Id., 'Coeur de l'Etat, lieu de tension. Le tournant archivistique vu de Venise (XV^e–XVII^e siècle)', *Annales HSS*, 68/3 (2013), 699–728; Filippo de Vivo, Andrea Guidi, and Alessandro Silvestri, 'Archival Transformations in Early Modern European History', *European History Quarterly*, 46/3 (2016), 421–34; See also the works in Corens, Peters, and Walsham, eds, *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World*.

4. Manuscripts, printed texts and periodicals in times of emergency

Important recent work on the relationship between information, the development of knowledge and how sovereignty was exercised in the Hispanic Monarchy builds on Arndt Brendecke's monograph on the first centuries of the expansion of Spanish rule²⁷. His research addresses the emergence of modern states, government at a distance and the politics of knowledge from the perspective of the history of archives and information, of clientelism and of the interplay between local knowledge and the heart of the empire. He questions the commonplace that equates colonial power with extensive, detailed and confirmed intelligence. The assumption that the extensive use of writing by the imperial authorities was a feature peculiar to the Hispanic Monarchy has been emphasised by historians as well as by contemporaries²⁸. Brendecke questions the Crown's supposed omniscience and omnipotence in its dominions. Despite measures to acquire extensive objective knowledge (*entera noticia*) of its new territories, the accounts received were substantially shaped by the specific interests and culture of those providing the information, reflecting the expansion of patronage networks in the overseas territories.

Work of this kind is also of fundamental importance to the papers in this volume. The first section (*Controlling the flow of news*) addresses the issues of interpretation and methodology raised by research on communication. The three papers deal with questions relating to the confidentiality and disclosure of information, to the use of information in times of emergency and to the political and material dynamics of disseminating news.

Tamar Herzog's contribution raises the fundamental question of whether the impressive collections of petitions, *relaciones*, trial records and so on stored in Hispanic Monarchy archives were regularly consulted and used to improve knowledge about the new territories, and whether

27 Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información. Funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español* (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2012).

28 See, for instance, John H. Elliott's classic work, *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (London: Penguin Books, 2002, originally publ. 1966).

consulting them was actually a prerequisite for making decisions. Herzog shows that, although the Council of the Indies had access to a plethora of records, most petitions that reached Madrid were treated without reference to earlier petitions, and the councillors appear to have been unaware of any pertinent precedents. Herzog sheds light on how archives were built and used, and argues that they were relatively insignificant elements of the history of knowledge in the early modern period. Fernando Bouza's paper, on the other hand, offers an apparently different interpretation of the use of knowledge that was compiled during a crisis, but his work is based on a different corpus of documents and adopts a different analytic perspective. Bouza analyses the dissemination of news about outbreaks of plague and extreme environmental phenomena in Portugal and Spain by considering not only printed texts and manuscripts, but also images, processions, *ex-votos* and the increasingly powerful murmur of the streets. Indeed, while calamities triggered the expression of authorised views, they also led to other views being expressed, thus adding to the complexity of the multifaceted public debate. Bouza shows how a corpus of knowledge about plagues was created based on an archive that could be used when the emergency re-emerged. Virginia García-Acosta's contribution on the Viceroyalty of New Spain addresses extreme weather events during the final phase of the colonial period, focusing on how local bodies responded to information received. The events caused agricultural disasters, which in turn produced discontent, dissatisfaction and anger in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Using archival information, printed texts and newspapers, García-Acosta analyses how the Bourbon authorities responded to unexpected crises and argues that their weak, slow and inefficient response contributed to the growing popular discontent.

The second section (*From relaciones to periodicals*) contains contributions that differ in focus, analytic perspective and the nature of the sources used, but are linked by the issue of the impact of the pre-periodical press (e.g. broadsheets, pamphlets, *relaciones*, *relazioni*) and periodicals (e.g. gazettes, newspapers, *journaux savants*). As Carmen Espejo-Cala noted a few years ago in a paper reviewing recent research on communication and the press in modern Europe, 'We must bear in mind that the birth of journalism occurred in times of turmoil, with political, religious and

communicative tensions²⁹. This observation not only highlights, in general terms, that research on times of emergency can advance our understanding of the dynamics of information in ancien régime societies, but also that the urgency and turmoil generated by emergencies produce styles and methods of communication that over time become stable and lasting. Seeing the history of print exclusively in terms of a radical paradigm shift or a revolution is no longer a tenable point of view³⁰. However, it is important not to lose sight of the changes that technological or logistical innovation brings about at the heart of information systems, such as the consolidation of postal networks or transport³¹, or the emergence of new media and their impact on communication³², which did not lead to the disappearance or decline of existing media, but triggered some repositioning³³.

Over the course of the early modern period, the appetite for news of extraordinary tragic events grew, creating a news fever that became very evident in the early seventeenth century, in particular with the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War³⁴. The authorities were forced to admit that they could not suppress people's curiosity about such events or keep them secret, so they resorted to applying increasingly detailed filters and controls to written accounts, in particular those appearing in the press. As in the case of book censorship, as recent key works have shown³⁵,

29 Carmen Espejo-Cala, 'European Communication Networks in the Early Modern Age', *Media History*, 17/2 (2011), 189–202: 198.

30 Wolfgang Behringer, 'Communications Revolutions: A Historiographical Concept', *German History*, 24/3 (2006), 333–74.

31 Nikolaus Schobesberger et al., 'European Postal Networks', in Raymond, and Moxham, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, 19–63.

32 Weststeijn, 'Empire in Fragments'.

33 Repositioning was very clear in the case of manuscripts. The rise of the printing press meant that the use of manuscripts shifted to specialised functions that clearly differentiated between handwritten texts and printed texts. See Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito. Una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001).

34 Espejo-Cala, 'European Communication Networks'; Henry Ettinghausen, *How the Press Began. The Pre-Periodical Printed News in Early Modern Europe* (A Coruña: SIELAE – Universidade da Coruña, 2015); Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang), 2021.

35 Giorgio Caravale, *Libri pericolosi. Censura e cultura italiana in età moderna* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2022), 194–7, 366–77.

both church and state authorities always recommended alternative reading material to replace what was forbidden even at the height of censorship, as simply banning certain texts would not have been effective. Secrecy was partially sacrificed to the need to satisfy popular demand³⁶.

Three of the papers in this section analyse the stylistic devices and narrative strategies used in newssheets and gazettes, exploring the relationships between information networks and communication strategies in times of emergency. Annachiara Monaco examines a corpus of *relazioni* in Italian that recount disasters that struck the Hispanic Monarchy in the seventeenth century, from the 1609 Seville floods to the 1693 Eastern Sicily earthquake. The analysis of syntactic, rhetorical and lexical devices shows how the authors and their patrons used these printed texts to achieve their communicative objectives of providing information, stirring emotions and shaping opinion. The paper highlights the stylistic and narrative devices used to provide assurances about the reliability and accuracy of the information, such as extensive details about the cadavers and the rubble, hyperbole, images that evoked monstrous infernal beings and the like. The aim was to generate awe in readers, and to convince them that the communities affected could be helped through penitence and prayer under the guidance of those in authority. Printed *relazioni* are also the subject of Valentina Sferragatta's analysis, which focuses on one of the most destructive eruptions of Mount Etna, that of 1669. The study of the linguistic and rhetorical devices used in these texts provides valuable insights about how the eruption was portrayed, and reveals how the descriptions shifted according to the author's views and objectives. A close comparison of the printed version of one account with the manuscript on which it is putatively based suggests that the writers of printed material that was authorised and promoted by the city's religious and political bodies adopted specific strategies to promote specific images of Catania and its institutions. Vincenzo Leonardi's paper on the 1661 Malaga flood compares manuscripts, pre-periodical newssheets (*relaciones*) and gazettes produced just as periodicals were becoming established in Spain despite the rise of the notices and pamphlets that furnished gazettes with content. Leonardi's investigation of intertextual relations and significant shifts in

36 Espejo-Cala, 'European Communication Networks'.

textual structure reveals that the narrative patterns used in newspapers underwent substantial structural changes to adapt to the world of serial information.

The other papers in the second section focus on the impact of the emergence of periodicals on communication and politics. Enrico De Prisco's paper examines the balance between keeping information confidential and publishing it, comparing the manuscript *avvisi* produced by Medici agents in Naples with the *Gazzetta di Napoli*, which was published by a printer who had the full trust of the Viceroy. These documents were produced during the 1690–2 Conversano plague, and divulging information about it could discredit the government and fuel mistrust and discontent in the people of Naples. Being able to exert direct influence on the city's only authorised periodical was therefore a valuable tool that the government could use to disseminate news that would reduce social tensions.

The benefits of being able to control the press are also central to the paper by José Daniel Lozano Díaz and Antonio Manuel Berná Ortigosa, which compares how news of earthquakes was reported in two official gazettes towards the end of the eighteenth century, the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político*. The analysis reveals a large number of inconsistencies in what was reported. While some might simply be errors, others can be attributed to a deliberate commercial strategy that leveraged the appeal of sensational news about natural events to differentiate the two periodicals.

The third section (*The logistics of communication*) addresses how different channels of communication interact and how they are linked to political and social dynamics. The papers in this section address the obstacles and opportunities that stem from the distances involved and the resulting slowness and complexity of the Hispanic Monarchy's official channels of communication, in particular with its overseas territories. Distance and delay could affect how swiftly and effectively the authorities could respond to an emergency. Officials in Spain were aware that the long distances made some degree of independent governance necessary and, as Sylvia Sellers-García puts it, documents were used 'to overcome distance. Yet [...] documents did not always overcome distance well. They could get lost, they could be ignored, and they could be interpreted in

unpredictable ways'; in times of emergency 'they were simply too slow'³⁷. However, as emergencies of different kinds were not infrequent, over time measures were developed to mitigate the potential risk of communication breakdowns. Official information from distant lands was not restricted to a single channel based on hierarchical lines of authority, but was also routed via secondary channels such as local agents, the clergy and merchants, whose importance increased in troubled times³⁸.

The problems associated with distance and delay in times of emergency are particularly evident in communications with the Philippines, which went through Mexico. Guillaume Gaudin's paper focuses on the Sanglely Rebellion in Manila at the start of the seventeenth century and its ferocious suppression by the Spanish, and describes the slow, tortuous and bumpy route that news had to take to reach Madrid. The usual channels were supplemented by non-standard alternatives in vain attempts to shorten delivery times and above all to reduce the haphazard nature of communications between Madrid and Manila. When news of the rebellion reached Madrid three years after the event, the matter was of secondary concern as Madrid's focus in the Pacific was on territorial competition with the Dutch. Paulina Machuca's paper on the 1645 Manila earthquake also addresses how news was transmitted and the use of unofficial channels. The news only reached New Spain and then Madrid three years later, making the instructions issued by the Council of the Indies obsolete and useless. However, the huge distances gave the King's local secular and religious representatives a significant degree of autonomy.

Domenico Cecere's paper focuses on official communications produced following a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century disasters in Peru and raises the question of whether the role of government bodies in handling emergencies influenced how disasters were reported and explained.

37 Sylvia Sellers-García, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire's Periphery* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 16.

38 Rocío Moreno-Cabanillas, *Comunicación e Imperio. Proyectos y reformas del correo en Cartagena de Indias, 1707–1777* (Madrid: Sílex, 2022); Guillaume Gaudin, and Roberta Stumpf, eds, *Las distancias en el gobierno de los imperios ibéricos: concepciones, experiencias y vínculos* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2022).

He compares government channels with other channels, such as those used by the Church, and how things were done in different periods, and notes that initially disasters were tended to be addressed in a partial and fragmentary manner, and that patterns of communication changed noticeably over the course of the seventeenth century. Cecere argues that this change is linked both to the prominence disasters acquired in the pre-periodical and periodical press, and to the fact that the handling of emergencies was increasingly seen by royal officials as a significant political issue.

The paper by Rocío Moreno-Cabanillas observes that, while in times of war smoothly flowing communications were essential as governments needed information from the battlefield to adopt appropriate strategies, wars often tended to disrupt both maritime and overland communication networks. Moreno-Cabanillas examines attempts to improve the efficiency of the postal system in eighteenth-century Cartagena de Indias and the official and unofficial channels and actors involved. The postal system consisted of multiple competing and highly politicised networks. Even the official regulations allowed for the wartime creation of a large number of regional postal systems that were flexible enough to adapt to local conditions and autonomous postal nodes that nevertheless remained subject to central oversight and directives.

The political and social aspects of disasters, which several of the papers in the first three sections refer to, are central to the final section (*Putting a spin on disasters*). The analyses are principally based on the link between communication and conflicting interpretations. As noted above, extraordinary and unfathomable events often produced divergent interpretations by opposing parties, as the disruption caused by an emergency opened up new avenues for the promotion of specific points of view. The three papers in this section confirm that, then as now, conflicting interpretations cannot be attributed simply to the differences between a religious perspective and a scientific one.

Alessandro Tuccillo's paper focuses on the political implications of the interpretations of disasters in ancien régime societies and in more recent times. His case study examines earthquakes that struck Naples at the end of the seventeenth century. How emergencies were handled clearly depended on the interpretation of their causes as natural or divine. The providentialist account of disasters prevailed at this time, but Tuccillo

shows that there was, nevertheless, a lively debate that was heavily influenced by the Church in Naples against the backdrop of the politics of the Hispanic Monarchy. In particular, the interpretation of earthquakes and how they were managed is intricately linked to the famous trial of the atheists by the Roman Inquisition (1688–1697). He takes as his vantage point the internal communications of the Church and the Papal States. Indeed, the correspondence between the bishops and Apostolic Nuncios and the Secretary of State of the Holy See on the 1688 and 1694 earthquakes constitutes a corpus of reference material for the investigation of the struggle between the Church, new scientific paradigms and the Spanish authorities.

Armando Alberola's paper analyses the diary entries of Antonio Despuig y Dameto, a Spanish clergyman who witnessed the 1783 Calabria and Messina earthquake, and compares them to the few printed accounts published in Spanish on the event. These first-hand *Observaciones* provide important information that complements the news that appeared in print. The entries reveal the author's scientific rigour in recording anything that could potentially contribute to a better understanding of the natural world, as well as observations and subjective remarks on the emotions of those who survived and the measures taken by the authorities and the clergy to manage the disaster.

Luis A. Arrijo's paper investigates the response of the Crown and its local representatives to a series of adversities that struck Guatemala in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In particular, a plague of locusts from 1797 to 1807 led to the elaboration of a plan based on physiocratic ideas and agrarian mercantilism. In order to shed light on how physiocratic ideas were adapted to local conditions and used to reverse the misfortunes of rural areas, Arrijo examines the *Instruction* issued by the Government in 1804 and how it was circulated and reformulated in publications distributed in indigenous areas, such as the *Diario de los literatos*, the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Semanario de agricultura y artes dirigido a los párrocos*.

The four sections of this book thus reveal the importance of researching communication in times of an abrupt disruption of social order. Indeed, deepening our knowledge in the field of disaster studies must not neglect

to pay careful attention to communication, whose dynamics are of fundamental importance to understanding key aspects of how information spreads as well as of the discord between conflicting forces and world views in ancien régime societies. This ongoing work has already produced encouraging results and there is significant scope for further research.

Section I: Controlling the flow of news

Tamar Herzog

Early modern information: Collecting and knowing in Spain and its Empire

Historians of the Spanish empire have described it often as a political formation that was held together by chains of papers¹. If the Portuguese controlled sea routes, the English took possession of the land, and the French traded with natives, what Spaniards did best was to develop an efficient and powerful administration². This portrait, though presenting Spain as a highly exceptional case, was nonetheless based also on observing the larger developments brought about by the emergence and consolidation of European states. With the expansion of horizons in the late Middle Ages, the gradual establishment of polities that encompassed many different units, and with states intervening in numerous new areas, came a greater need for information. To govern, indeed to ‘see’, the early modern state required data, which it proceeded to accumulate³. This need was particularly evident as Europe embarked on a colonial endeavour, which had merchants, royal officials, and missionaries, to mention but a few stakeholders, attempt to comprehend the new territories, as well as their peoples⁴. Colonial success depended on such practices, which enabled the colonial state to function.

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- 1 John H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (New York: Mentor Books, 1966), 167 and 174.
 - 2 Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
 - 3 James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Conditions Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) and, more recently, Randolph C. Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
 - 4 Christopher A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications*

In what follows, I question these premises and ask whether the impressive collections that were amassed during the early modern period indeed served to improve governance the way these narratives assumed. In the Spanish case, we have plenty of evidence that written petitions sent to the different imperial authorities were discussed⁵. We also have some evidence that history-writing sometimes depended on archival documentation⁶. But we still lack proof that documents were systematically consulted, that consulting them was a prerequisite for decision making, or that the information accumulated in the archives led to improved knowledge of the territory and its peoples. If the House of Trade in Seville was indeed a ‘store of knowledge’, was its shop ever open? Did it have customers?⁷

I divide my analysis into several parts, interrogating the evidence of whether the collection of information led to knowledge, what other explanations, except for bureaucratic expediency, we may conjure as to why documents were produced and kept, and what was the role of archives in that long-gone universe.

and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763 (Montreal: McGill – Queen’s University Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance’, *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 87–109; Randolph C. Head, ‘Empire at Home. European Chancellery Practices and the Challenges of Record Keeping for Early Modern Colonial Enterprises’, in Maria Pia Donato, and Anne Saada, eds, *Pratiques d’archives à l’époque moderne. Europe, mondes coloniaux* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 249–69. For the case of Spain, see, for example, Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City*, John Charles Chasteen trans. and ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); and Arndt Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire. Spanish Colonial Rule and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016).

- 5 Francisco Fernández López, ‘La Casa de la Contratación de Indias: gestión, expedición y control documental (siglos XVI–XVII)’, *Relaciones*, 144 (2015), 169–93, 178–88; and Caroline Cunill, ‘Margins of Documents, Center of Power: A Case Study on the *Consejo de Indias*’ Annotated Paperwork and the Construction of Legality in an Imperial Archive’, *Archival Science*, 20/4 (2020), 381–400.
- 6 Diego Navarro Bonilla, *La imagen del archivo. Representación y funciones en España (siglos XVI y XVII)* (Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2003), 123–4.
- 7 Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

1. A wealth of information?

An emblematic example of the difficulties in tying the accumulation of information to the production of knowledge are the inquests sent by Spanish royal officials throughout the empire in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Identified by the generic term of *relaciones geográficas*, most famous among them were the questionnaires sent to the Americas in the 1570s and 1580s⁸. Including requests for information about innumerable aspects of life and the natural environment, some 191 perhaps as many as 208 responses, of which 167 survive to date, arrived at Madrid.

It is generally assumed that ‘these surveys were reported back to Spain’s King Phillip II and allowed the Spanish Monarchy to have better control over the people and the politics in New Spain’, with ‘the scientific process of data collection and statistics essentially building a bridge between two continents’⁹. Yet, thus far, we have absolutely no proof that such was the case. If the intention of the kings and their advisors was indeed that this material would be processed at the court, for example, by the Council of Indies or by the *Cronista Mayor de Indias* who was charged with writing the official narrative of the Spanish empire, this rarely happened. While traces of the *relaciones* are evident in works such as Antonio de Herrera y

8 Marcos Jiménez de la Espada, *Relaciones geográficas de Indias* (Madrid: Tip. De M.G. Hernández, 1881–97); Francisco Solano, and Pilar Ponce, eds, *Cuestionarios para la formación de las relaciones geográficas de Indias: siglos XVI–XIX* (Madrid: CSIC, 1988). María M. Portuondo, *Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 103–40, 210–23 and 292–5; and Felipe E. Ruan, ‘Cosmographic Description, Law, and Fact Making: Juan López de Velasco’s American and Peninsular Questionnaires’, *Colonial Latin American Review*, 28/4 (2019), 450–77; describe the logics and extent of some of these campaigns.

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relaciones_geogr%C3%A1ficas consulted on December 20, 2018. Most historians who study the *relaciones* center on what was asked and what was answered, not on how the information was used. Many argue that it is ‘impossible to deny’ their importance as an instrument for governing, for example, Guillaume Gaudin, and Margarita Gómez Gómez, ‘Les archives impériales espagnoles. Nouveaux acteurs et nouvelles pratiques de gouvernement au Conseil des Indes (XVIe–XVIIe s.)’, in Donato, and Saada, *Pratiques d’archives*, 299–322, 301 and 305–6.

Tordesillas (1549–1625), *Historia General de los hechos de los castellanos* (1601–1615), or Antonio de León Pinelo's (1590–1660), *Epítome de la biblioteca oriental y occidental* (1629), hardly any contemporary record made direct reference to them or could be directly linked to the data they contained¹⁰. As far as we can tell, the Council of the Indies did not integrate the responses in its deliberations and neither did the person charged with their accumulation and conservation¹¹. Peninsular *relaciones*, traces of which can be found in Diego Pérez de la Mesa's *Grandezas y cosas memorables de España*, but which, overall, remained mainly unread, suffered the same faith¹². Paradoxically, it was only from the mid-nineteenth century and into the present, that the *relaciones* obtained their notoriety and began being extensively employed. While they presently have an enormous value and are cited by historians, art historians, geographers, archaeologists, and anthropologists, it is not at all clear what they had accomplished in the early modern period.

The Council of the Indies could have access to the *relaciones* as well as to a plethora of other records. Yet, in most cases, each time petitions arrived at the court they were treated anew¹³. Councillors often seemed surprised, unaware of the antecedents, and mostly confessing their ignorance. When previous cases were recalled, and previous documentation was consulted, it was mostly because of the presence of a specific individual, usually a secretary, a notary, or a *relator*, sometimes a counsellor,

10 Manuel Carrera Stampa, 'Relaciones geográficas de Nueva España, siglos XVI y XVIII', *Estudios de historia novohispana*, 2 (1968), 1–31; and Howard F. Cline, 'The Relaciones Geográficas of the Spanish Indies, 1577–1586', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 44/3 (1964), 341–74; Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire*, 236 mentions that Juan López de Velasco did not use the *relaciones* to compose his *Geografía y descripción de las Indias*.

11 Portuondo, *Secret Science*, 220–1.

12 Fernando Arroyo Ilera, 'Las relaciones geográficas y el conocimiento del territorio en tiempos de Felipe II', *Estudios Geográficos*, 59/231 (1998), 169–200, 190 and 194.

13 These observations are based on over 30 years of research in colonial documentation. On this point also see Arndt Brendecke, 'Arca, archivillo, archivo: The Keeping, Use and Status of Historical Documents about the Spanish *Conquista*', *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), 267–83, 272 and 275, and Gaudin, and Gómez Gómez, 'Les archives impériales espagnoles', 307, 309 and 320–1.

who remembered what had transpired and knew that certain people or documents could be consulted. This reality was obvious to contemporaries who complained that royal ministers constantly redeliberated on what had already been decided¹⁴.

The systematic failure to look for precedents might have happened because the Council considered previous information as lacking in currency or irrelevant because each case was different, but as important might have been the general attitude towards written information. During the early modern period, written records operated alongside many other sources of information that were often considered substantially more trustworthy. Throughout Europe as well as in Spain, the reconstruction of historical narratives, for example, mostly relied on chronicles and old charters, not recent administrative documentation¹⁵. The facts, some contemporaries argued, could obscure rather than enlighten what had transpired because what was needed was not their enumeration but instead their interpretation by knowledgeable people. Whereby interpretation was reliable, administrative and judicial records, on the contrary, were ‘non-probative’ in the sense that they could not of themselves testify for their trustworthiness. In this respect, they were inferior in status to other documents, such as charters, which enjoyed the protection of stable and widely shared assumptions about their authority and their capacity to provide testimony and which indeed were widely used by contemporaries as a trustworthy source of information¹⁶.

14 Santiago Agustín Riol, ‘Informe que hizo a su majestad en 16 de junio de 1726 de su real orden... sobre la creación, erección e institución de los consejos...’, in Antonio Valladares de Sotomayor, ed., *Semanario erudito que comprehende varias obras inéditas críticas, morales...* (Madrid: Blas Roman, 1787), vol. 3, 73–234, reproducing on 121–2 complaints dated 1622 regarding the functioning of the Council of Castile. The tendency to ignore precedents was also described by Mariana Moranchel Pocater, ‘El Consejo de Indias y su relación con la vía reservada en el reinado de Felipe V’, PhD diss., Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2012, 398.

15 On what happened elsewhere see, for example, Michael Riordan, ‘The State Papers and the Writing of History in Early Seventeenth Century England’, and Maria Pia Donato, ‘La fabrique des faits historiques. Comment utiliser les archives à l’époque de Napoléon?’, both in Donato, and Saada, eds, *Pratiques d’archives*, 69–93 and 95–113.

16 Head, ‘Empire at Home’, 255.

Following such convictions, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *cronista mayor de Indias*, could argue in the early seventeenth century that documents found in the royal archives of Simancas were not good evidence for what had transpired and that, instead, other sources such as previous historical narratives were more reliable¹⁷. Juan López de Velasco (1530–1598), who was responsible for collecting data at the court, viewed the writing of history as a judicial process, in which a judicial inquiry and sworn testimonies should play a central role¹⁸. He and others like him preferred to use the work of previous scholars, or first-hand eyewitness accounts than integrate into their histories documents produced by royal officials.

What was true of history writing was also true of decision-making. In 1726, Santiago Agustín de Riol observed that the archives of the Council of Castille were extremely modest and mostly contained current documentation¹⁹. This did not bother councilmen, he said, because their decisions were habitually founded on the wisdom of a few knowledgeable ministers and were governed by the rules of law and by information obtained from juridical and historical narratives, as well as oral reports. Indeed, councilmen were convinced that to reach a good decision, it was unnecessary to consult ‘papers’ (*papeles*).

Reflecting as well as enforcing such attitudes, the archives of decision-makers mostly included documentation requiring immediate deliberation. All other documents that had ‘already received destination’ (*ya estuviere dado paradero*) and were ‘finished’ (*fencidos*) were classified as ‘unnecessary’ (*cosa inútil*), even ‘dead’ to a degree that they could not be ‘resuscitated’ (*papeles muertos... que ningún accidente puede rescucitarlos*)²⁰. Because of such convictions, from as early as 1544, documents no longer requiring resolution were sent from the Council of the Indies to the royal archives, some 200 km away²¹. As a result of such practices, by the early

17 Brendecke, ‘*Arca, archivillo, archivo*’, 281.

18 Portuondo, *Secret Science*, 61–77, 159–61 and 303–1.

19 Riol, ‘Informe que hizo a su majestad’, 86, 117–8, 128, 161, 226, 229 and 234.

20 Navarro Bonilla, *La imagen del archivo*, 132 citing the 1619 words of Lope de Vega.

21 This was the usual practice in all royal councils: Antonio Castillo Gómez, ‘Archivi e ordine dei documenti nella Castiglia della prima età moderna’, in Maria Guercio, Maria Gioia Tavoni, Paolo Tinti, and Paola Vecchi Galli, eds,

seventeenth century, the *Sala de Indias* of Simancas had seventeen chests with some 400 documents; meanwhile, in 1709 the archives of the Council itself only consisted of three chests with a few bulls, briefs, and other random documents. In 1715, ‘the archive of the Council of the Indies only existed in name, reduced as it was to the guarding of a few papers and bulls’²².

If the relatively minor evidentiary value given to administrative and judicial records was important, and if most records ended up in a remote location, equally problematic was the absence of techniques allowing contemporaries to process information and make sense of what it contained. If Philip II indeed personally handled even a small portion of the 1,250 to 3,500 petitions a month, he was reputed to have examined²³, what did he remember? What did he understand? How did he connect the different pieces of information? Did he govern the world through chains of paper, or was he buried under mountains of information he could not organize, let alone climb?

As part of his daily routine, Philip read countless documents and expressed his opinion either orally or by glossing or annotating them²⁴. Yet in 1573 he complained that there were too many papers and that many of them were unnecessary. What was needed according to him was the creation of summaries followed by the destruction of the original documents. Philip described the multiple desks where papers were amassed and objected to their dispersal²⁵. He asked how the different pieces of information were

Disciplinare la memoria. Strumenti e pratiche nella cultura scritta, secoli XVI–XVIII (Bologna: Pàtron editore, 2014), 123–41, 129.

22 Margarita Gómez Gómez, and Isabel González Ferrín, ‘El archivo secreto del Consejo de Indias y sus fondos bibliográficos’, *Historia, Instituciones, Documentos*, 19 (1992), 187–214, 191–5, citation on 192. Riol, ‘Informe que hizo a su majestad’, 163–4 describes the holdings at Simancas.

23 Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire*, 17–8.

24 Fernando Bouza Álvarez, ‘La majestad de Felipe II. Construcción del mito real’, in José Martínez Millán, ed., *La corte de Felipe II* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994), 37–72, on 59–66. On overload elsewhere see Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

25 Philip II to Mateo Vázquez, 25 October 1573 cited in José Antonio Escudero, *Felipe II: El rey en el despacho* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2002), 105–18.

tied together, confessing his ignorance when things seemed both too identical and yet too distinct. Philip's closest collaborators were so concerned with royal overload that they sometimes described the king as a martyr and his day as a passage through a complex labyrinth. They reported on the fatigue that reading and writing provoked in him and explained that he confessed that he 'no longer had eyes or head to read these letters' (*no tengo ya ojos ni cabeza para leer las cartas*)²⁶. If this description was genuine, then it is not surprising that at least some contemporaries described the monarch not as a formidably informed ruler but as a blind man guided by others.

Philip was not the only one suffering from the martyrdom of papers. Members of committees appointed to discuss the border between Spain and Portugal often felt the same²⁷. In their quest to understand who was where, doing what, since when, they proceeded to collect as much information as they could. Forces were sent to verify reports about the whereabouts of rivals and contemporaries resorted to the routine interrogation of ecclesiastics, merchants, settlers, natives, soldiers, deserters, slaves, and criminals. Contemporaries also studied history books, read eyewitness reports, and collected maps. Yet, despite these efforts, most concluded that they knew and understood nothing. Although they blamed the great distances, the inaccessibility of the terrain, the insufficient familiarity with it, and the bad communications and although they explained that the information they sought to obtain was by nature secret and was thus hard to come by, the records clarify that two other factors greatly contributed to their confusion. First, the information they collected often led to contradictory conclusions and there was wide disagreement as to how to solve such contradictions. Some interlocutors argued that the best proof for entitlement was a Portuguese admitting the rights of Spain or vice versa; others sustained that authors belonging to neutral parties, were more reliable. For some, older information was more accurate than newer. Others believed that modern measuring and recording techniques produced better results. Also debated was the question of whether repetition could be used

26 Bouza Álvarez, 'La majestad de Felipe II', 62–4.

27 Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession. Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 27–33.

as an indication that the information was trustworthy or was it simply the consequence of the tendency for authors to copy one another. Should one adopt the opinion of the majority or the solution that found less resistance? The nature of the appropriate expertise was also at stake. Should the opinion of geographers, who were theoreticians be preferred to the advice of pilots who knew how to navigate?

Whereby the first problem was how to settle contradictions, the second was the inability to process the information. By the eighteenth century, besides oral testimonies, committee members had to consult twenty large boxes, dozens of books, and over thirty maps. This explosion of information led Viceroy Nicolás Arredondo to protest in 1795 that he was forced to consult ‘an infinite number of papers’²⁸. In Mato Grosso, the Portuguese authorities did the same, suggesting that there was simply too much to consider. Contemporaries thus struggled not only with the need to obtain information but also with how to summarize and process it, compare its various components, settle contradictions, and translate the pieces into a single coherent vision²⁹.

Thus, although we know that by the mid-fifteenth century some Europeans had already developed new methods for storing, retrieving, disseminating, annotating, stockpiling and indexing information, it is unclear how widely spread these were and how deep they penetrated³⁰. In Spain, at least, the tying of different documents together to create *expedientes*, that is, files connecting various pieces, had been practiced from as early as the fifteenth century, but its use was still uncommon in the sixteenth,

28 Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*, 30.

29 Also see Iris Kantor, ‘Cartografia e diplomacia: usos geopolíticos da informação toponímica (1750–1850)’, *Anais do museu paulista*, 17/2 (2009), 39–61, on 39–41 and 49–50; Nuria Valverde, and Antonio Lafuente, ‘Space Production and Spanish Imperial Geopolitics’, in Daniela Bleichmar, Paula de Vox, Kristin Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan, eds, *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 189–215, 189 and 210.

30 Ann Blair, and Peter Stallybrass, ‘Mediating Information, 1450–1800’, in Clifford Siskin, and William Warner, eds, *This Is Enlightenment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 139–63, 134 and 149, and Blair, *Too Much to Know*.

seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries³¹. More typical of this period was document segregation, not document accumulation, with different records going in different directions, to different authorities and archives. As a result, though in certain cases we can trace how reports from the New World led to certain decisions, and how parallel requests were read together and answered collectively, this was mostly true when a concrete decision had to be reached³². As such, it tells us very little about how information was routinely managed, and it sheds no light on the question of whether the plethora of previous cases was consulted and how. Contemporary petitioners were conscious of the inability to trust record keeping or its habitual consultation. To ensure a decision to their liking, most backed their requests by copies of the relevant documentation and precedents, even when these originated in the decision-makers themselves and, in theory, should have been known and available to them.

In such a setting, even individuals who set in the right place and obsessively collected information left no indication that they translated potential knowledge into actual knowledge. Many of them became gatekeepers, not gate openers. In other words, we still lack proof that in the early modern period archives occupied anything other than a marginal space in the history of knowledge. On the contrary, what we do have is contemporary criticism that viewed depositing documents in them as a method for forgetting rather than remembering, removing rather than making accessible, with the saying ‘like writing in an archive’ meaning dropping the case and doing nothing³³.

2. Documents as peoples and events

If documents were not necessarily nor always used for modern, bureaucratic, decision making, or history writing, what was the purpose of their making and conservation?

31 José Luis Rodríguez de Diego, ‘Evolución histórica del expediente’, *Anuario de historia del derecho español*, 60/8 (1998), 475–90; and Gaudin, and Gómez Gómez, ‘Les archives impériales espagnoles’, 311–5.

32 Cunill, ‘Margins of Documents’.

33 This saying is attributed to Lope de Vega: Brendecke, ‘*Arca, archivillo, archivo*’, 267–8.

One response would be that, during the early modern period, records had an important material dimension that we have tended to forget. Rather than mere aids for recollection, documents incarnated and stood for the person who issued them. Orders bearing the royal seal, for example, were received as if the king himself was present³⁴. They were kissed (as royal feet would) and placed over the head (to reproduce a physical subjection such as bowing to the king). So powerful was this ceremony that it could be recollected as the placing of a golden crown on the head of the person who read the decree because, while the ceremony lasted, he too became the king. Or, as the resolutions of the church council of Lima stated in 1585, the kissing of royal decrees and their placing over the head was justified not because they were made of wax or paper, but because they were the king. A similar attitude was displayed towards signatures, which could be comprehended not as texts but as pictorial portraits that could be venerated as objects, even relics. Signatures could be ‘disembodied from the sense of the written word and take on the materiality of the body’ by no longer merely testifying to the authenticity of the document, but instead visually manifesting ‘the presence of someone who cannot be physically present, but whose trace transcends time and space’.

Because royal letters stood for the body of the king, they were not supposed to circulate widely as ‘having all hands touch them was against decency and good respect’³⁵. And, because they incarnated the monarch, royal seals received by American *audiencias* were to be treated as if ‘our royal person were entering’³⁶. Magistrates and the urban authorities were to welcome the seal outside the city, as they would have had the king arrived, and ensure that it entered the jurisdiction on a horse, or mule, appropriately decorated and accompanied by the most senior magistrates (the president and the dean) with ‘all the veneration that is required and is accustomed’. Thereafter, the seal would have to be safeguarded with the ‘authority and decency’ it merited. Because the written orders of the

34 Joanne Rappaport, and Tom Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City. Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 193–218. See, most particularly, 202, 208, 209 and 218. Citations are on 208.

35 Bouza Álvarez, ‘La majestad de Felipe II’, 59.

36 *Recopilación de Indias*, book II, title 21, laws 1 and 2.

king replaced both his presence and his voice and supplemented meeting him in person, contemporaries commented that they allowed the monarch to hide³⁷. Documents, they argued, could capture, even replace, the voices of courtiers, a reality they criticized, yet they also admitted that documents had the advantage that they spoke only when asked and that their responses were always relevant, a reality they cherished³⁸.

If records could stand for the person that authorized them, they could also stand for the act, which they registered. Considered a symbolic yet essential replica of what had transpired, a monument for what had happened, they replaced, incarnated, and stood for the occasion that led to their formation, with the act of recording sometimes being more significant than the record itself³⁹. The act of recording was performative because it constituted a new reality, rather than memorized it. It distributed (and redistributed) power and established legitimacy. The ability of record-producing to award jurisdiction, for example, was evident in criminal proceedings, where it was essential to control the records because by possessing them the person who physically held to them also obtained jurisdiction⁴⁰.

These practices, which transformed the records into peoples and objects did not centre on recollection. Indeed, replacing the missing documents with the memory of those who witnessed their making was insufficient because at stake was not the memory of what had been done, but its material relics, its tangible persistence. Such was the emphasis on materiality that in 1620–Quito a convicted felon who had already served his sentence could not defend himself against double jeopardy (that is, a new trial) because he could not produce the original records of the hearing and

37 Fernando Bouza Álvarez, 'Escritura, propaganda y despacho de Gobierno', in Antonio Castillo Gómez, ed., *Escribir y leer en el siglo de Cervantes* (Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 1999), 85–109, 100 and 103.

38 Brendecke, 'Arca, archivillo, archive', 269.

39 James M. O'Toole, 'Cortes' Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records', *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), 45–61, 48; Also see Heather MacNeil, 'From the Memory of the Act to the Act Itself. The Evolution of Written Records as Proof of Jural Acts in England, 11th to 17th Century', *Archival Science*, 6 (2006), 313–28, 314–5.

40 Tamar Herzog, *Upholding Justice. Society, State, and the Penal System in Quito, 1650–1750* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 31–2 and 50.

because the declarations of witnesses, who knew that the trial had taken place and saw him comply with the punishment, were judged insufficient because inadequate⁴¹. The insistence of Spaniards who invaded the New World to record their deeds on paper, therefore, should be considered not as necessarily expressing the wish to produce evidence, but as a means by which to obtain jurisdiction. The same was true of the foundation of new cities that often came into existence on paper long before the first cornerstone was laid out⁴². Not only could jurisdiction be obtained by producing papers, but continued registration confirmed its persistence. This explained the records of town councils such as Marvão in Portugal, which only included information on the coming and going of councilmen⁴³. Confirming who met when, these records contained absolutely nothing as to what was discussed and voted. Municipal acts such as these did not record what the council did; they were not sources of information; they recorded that the council existed, a verification that was essential because a village without self-government was not a village at all. Hence, to confirm that Marvão existed it was vital to show that its council assembled, not what it discussed.

While documents were material objects and their elaboration might have answered needs other than information or recollection, during the early modern age, ‘knowing’ had multiple meanings. For example, when asked in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century whether they ‘knew’ the viceroy of Peru, respondents residing in the territory of the Audiencia de Quito (present-day Ecuador) were divided among those who ‘knew’ the viceroy *de oídas*, *de vista*, *de comunicación* and *de trato*⁴⁴.

41 Herzog, *Upholding Justice*, 50. On these issues also see Tamar Herzog, *Mediación, archivos y ejercicio: los escribanos de Quito, siglo XVII–XVIII* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), 19–21.

42 Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations. Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 43.

43 Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*, 184–6 summarizes what I found at the archives of Valencia de Alcántara, though does not mention specifically the reduced nature of the archives in the neighboring Marvão.

44 Tamar Herzog, ‘La presencia ausente: El virrey desde la perspectiva de las élites locales (Audiencia de Quito, 1670–1747)’, in Pablo Fernández Albadalejo, ed., *Monarquía, Imperio y Pueblos en la España Moderna, Actas de la IV Reunión*

Those who knew him *de oídas* [by hearing] have only heard about him; those who knew him *de vista* [by seeing] had seen him; those who knew him *de comunicación* [by communicating] had spoken to him; those who knew him *de trato* [by treatment] had some degree of a personal relationship with him. All these interactions were classified by the witnesses as ‘knowing’ (*conocer*) yet, in this context, ‘knowing’ mostly included a recognition that the viceroy was there, and that they were subjected to him. This knowledge was highly ritualistic and depended on performance aimed at confirming status, not possessing data.

Historians have thus suggested that, although the *relaciones geográficas* might have not been used by the Council of the Indies in its decision-making process, and though they certainly did not lead to the elaboration of a great synthesis, they might have allowed the council to ‘know’ what the different territories were like⁴⁵. That knowing ensured the subjection of these territories to its authority was also confirmed by the sixteenth-century reforms at the Council, which unleashed campaigns for information gathering but also featured the appointment of a know-all, a cosmographer-chronicler, who could advise the Council on how to proceed⁴⁶. Instead of depending on multiple witnesses and informers, there would now be a single person who perhaps would not produce much but would have the final authority to censor or correct others, and judge polemics.

3. The longer history of archives

This logic – the materiality of records, their symbolic nature, and the type of knowledge they produced – was often at work in the foundation of archives. The *Archivo General de Simancas* was established in 1540 as a depository meant to secure emperor Charles V’s titles and prerogatives⁴⁷.

Científica de la Asociación Española de Historia Moderna, Alicante 27–30 de mayo de 1996 (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 1997), 819–26, 821–3.

45 Portuondo, *Secret Science*, 222.

46 Felipe E. Ruan, ‘Prudent Deferment: Cosmographer-Chronicler Juan López de Velasco and the Historiography of the Indies’, *The Americas*, 74/1 (2017), 27–55, 33–8 and 43–5.

47 José Luis Rodríguez de Diego, and Julia T. Rodríguez de Diego, ‘Un archivo no solo para el rey. Significado social del proyecto simanquino en el siglo XVI’,

Rather than a public record office, or a place that could potentially cater for visitors, it was a fortress that was also used as a maximum-security prison and a safe deposit box for cash and jewellery. Protecting both what was helpful as well as what was menacing, the archive was imagined as including people or weapons that could defend or attack the king. The vault-room where documents were kept was in a particularly inaccessible location and its exact situation within the structure was (in theory) secret⁴⁸. Access to the documentation was greatly restricted throughout the early modern period when even a royal order could be insufficient to guarantee that it could be seen⁴⁹. When permission to consult the records was granted, often, before they could be read, royal officials had to review their contents and approve the consultation. The documents themselves were treated as if they were dignified and important prisoners. The opening and closing of the chamber, which had bars on the door, as well as the loaning and depositing of documents were a highly ritual affair that assimilated the entry and departure of dignitaries⁵⁰. The archive itself was to be both strong and beautiful⁵¹.

in José Martínez Millán, ed., *Felipe II (1527–1598), Europa y la Monarquía Católica* (Madrid: Editorial Parteluz, 1998), vol. 4, 463–76, 465; Laura Fernández-González, ‘The Architecture of the Treasure-Archive: The Archive at Simancas Fortress 1540–1569’, in Bernardo J. García García, and Vanessa de Cruz Medina, eds, *Lazos familiares, cultura política y mecenazgo artístico entre las cortes de los Habsburgo* (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2016), 1–44; Antonio Castillo Gómez, ‘The New Culture of Archives in Early Modern Spain’, *European History Quarterly*, 46/3 (2016), 545–67.

48 According to Riol, disorganized papers, though they had no body, and their danger was hidden, were nonetheless a ‘ferocious monster’ and an ‘implacable enemy’ that could bring about the inversion of the order and offend both royal privileges and royal honor: Riol, ‘Informe que hizo a su majestad’, 77–8.

49 Navarro Bonilla, *La imagen del archivo*, 100–1 and 186–9.

50 From that perspective, Simancas was similar to royal archives elsewhere in Europe: Yann Potin, ‘L’État et son trésor. La science des archives à la fin du Moyen Âge’, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 133 (2000), 48–52, 50–2; and Simon Teuscher, ‘Document Collections, Mobilized Regulations, and the Making of Customary law at the End of the Middle Ages’, *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), 211–29, 215. On documents as menacing also see Peter Burke, ‘Commentary’, *Archival Science*, 7 (2007), 391–7, 293–4.

51 Riol, ‘Informe que hizo a su majestad’, 204–6 describes Simancas as *hermoso*, *admirable*, *fino*, *simétrico*, *maravilloso* but also *fuerte*, and *capaz*.

Reforms at Simancas were mostly directed at ensuring that the rights and privileges of the crown and his vassals would be better guarded and secured⁵². This was important, contemporaries argued even in the eighteenth century, because the kingdoms of Spain consisted of an assembly of different units, the monarch having a distinct set of rights and obligations in each. Of particular significance were also the privileges of the king vis-à-vis the church. The aim of record-keeping was thus to guarantee that the king would neither renounce his faculties and rights nor infringe on those that belonged to others. Because, typically, the archives were consulted when the authenticity or contents of a particular privilege was debated, archivists, by giving one party but not the other access to the records, could greatly affect the outcome⁵³.

If archives were meant to secure treasures or enemies and ensure that they would be inaccessible, they were also a means to produce certain images. What was kept and how it was kept were influenced by these needs⁵⁴. The wish to control which past would be remembered also led to the appointment of official history tellers, the royal historiographers, who were to write the history of the empire. The 1726 *Diccionario de Autoridades* captured this logic when it defined archives as a ‘public space where original documents and instruments containing the rights of the prince and particulars are guarded’⁵⁵. The dictionary also stated that, metaphorically, archive was a term that designated a man, a breast or a heart that guarded the secrets that were confided in them. With the same token, a secretary was a person who knew one’s secrets but did not reveal them⁵⁶.

52 These aims were expressed in 1726, when the King ordered an inspection of Simancas: Riol, ‘Informe que hizo a su majestad’, 75–6. On why this was important see 113–7 and 223.

53 In 1630 the archivist of Simancas was accused of giving unequal access to the parties to a conflict: Navarro Bonilla, *La imagen del archivo*, 196–7.

54 Fabien Montcher, ‘Archives and Empire: Scholarly Archival Practices, Royal Historiographers, and Historical Writing across the Iberian Empire (Late 16th and Early 17th Century)’, *Storia della Storiografia*, 68/2 (2015), 21–35, 24–9.

55 Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (Madrid: Francisco del Hierro, 1726), vol. 1, 379.

56 Luis Martínez García, ‘El archivo de Simancas en el Antiguo Régimen: secreto, patrimonio, justificación y legitimidad real’, *Boletín de la ANABAD*, 49/2 (1999), 77–116, 80.

While Simancas had the real and symbolic function of incarnating the king and not only – perhaps not even mainly – facilitating the work of the royal bureaucracy, the *Archivo General de Indias*, founded in Seville in the 1780s, had a radically different mission. Here, the task was to establish a clear division between Spanish (and European) history and Spanish American (and colonial) history⁵⁷. The foundation of the archive called upon contemporaries to distinguish in a plethora of existing deposits which material was colonial, and which was not. After the archive was constituted, it became easier to image the Americas as a separate political space, indeed, a colony. The new archive also conveyed pride in what had been achieved overseas and an opportunity for Spaniards to display it.

Historians who have studied these issues thus concluded that the constitution of archives was not necessarily directed at facilitating access to information. Instead, archives were mainly built to keep documents safe and away from readers⁵⁸. They ensured that important records would be both controlled and made inaccessible and they obeyed a logic dictated mainly at patrimonial, cultural, and historiographical needs, not governance. It is therefore not surprising that, although contemporaries argued that written reports were essential to ensuring good government, in practice, almost all petitions to read or copy documents held at Simancas were motivated by the desire to confirm the privileges of kings, corporations, and individuals, not obtain administrative or judicial information, and that most such requests proceeded from private individuals, not royal officials⁵⁹.

57 David F. Slade, 'Imagining from Within: Archives, History and Ibero-American Enlightened Discourse', in Tristan Coignard, Peggy Davis, and Alicia C. Montoya, eds, *Lumières et histoire* (Paris: Éditions Champion, 2010), 195–213; and Byron Hamann, *The Invention of the Colonial Americas: Data, Architecture, and the Archives of the Indies (1781–1844)* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2022).

58 *Instrucción para el gobierno del archivo de Simancas, año 1588* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1989) and *Ordenanzas para el Archivo General de Indias* (Madrid: Imprenta de la viuda de Ibarra, 1790).

59 José Luis Rodríguez de Diego, 'Archivos del poder, archivos de la administración, archivos de la historia (s. XVI–XVII)', in Juan Jose Generelo, and Ángeles Moreno López, eds, *Historia de los archivos y de la archivística en España* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1998), 29–42, 37–9. Also see Brendecke, 'Arca, archivillo, archivo', 270.

The literature on family and municipal archives has equally insisted that the formation of archives was mostly tied on the one hand, to the protection of privileges and, on the other, to a project of memory and identity building⁶⁰. Like royal archives, family and municipal archives were to secure the rights of families and communities, as well as establish a narrative as to who and what they were. Archives facilitated the defence of rights and privileges, but they also formed a material heritage, with important immaterial and symbolic functions. If they belonged to families and municipalities, they also produced them, as in the case of Marvão, mentioned above. Precisely for that reason, they could easily become sites of contestation because of conflicting ideas regarding what they should contain, and who should control them⁶¹. As a result of these struggles, archives could be seized or destroyed, and documents could be conserved, stolen, or falsified. Because archives were historical constructs, not places where information was kept, we must ask why they came into existence, what purposes they served, and how this changed over time.

4. Who is looking

But even if we believed that the information collected was meant to be used and that contemporaries developed methods to process it, we would still have to account for what they knew versus what we as historians know. Let me finish with the following example.

60 Fernando Bouza Álvarez, *Corre manuscrito. Una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001), 241–88; Eric Ketelaar, ‘Records Out and Archives In: Early Modern Cities as Creator of Records and as Communities of Archive’, *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), 201–10; Castillo Gómez, ‘Archivi e ordine dei documenti’, 130–3; Judit Gutiérrez-de-Armas, ‘Archival Practices in Early Modern Spain: Transformation, Destruction and (Re)construction of Family Archives in the Canary Islands’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, 48/1 (2020), 5–24.

61 Randolph C. Head, ‘Early Modern European Archivality: Organised Records, Information, and State Power around 1500’, in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, eds, *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World. Proceedings of the British Academy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29–51. On the destruction of archives see Navarro Bonilla, *La imagen del archivo*, 159–68.

Many years ago, the editors of a volume on globalization asked me to write an essay describing the early modern period⁶². They were particularly keen on knowing whether early modern Colonialism could be portrayed as the point of departure for a global movement of people, goods, ideas, practices, and institutions. My answer was that the early modern period saw a huge surge in global connections. It led to the ‘Columbian Exchange:’ the transfer of flora and fauna – including germs – from one side of the Ocean to the other⁶³. In the economic sphere, a ‘World System’ might have come into existence, with a division of labour – persisting to date, according to many – that allowed some to benefit from global trade more than others⁶⁴. Mixture was also on the rise: old practices were combined with new ones, creating hybrid forms (and peoples) that were from nowhere and from everywhere at the very same time⁶⁵. The question, however, was who was witnessing these developments and how.

When I wrote my response in 2009, I argued that when one moved from a bird’s eye to the ground level, from what historians know to what contemporaries believed, things become much murkier. Some contemporaries were aware of the existence of a wider world. Among them were the members of the Sephardic merchant diaspora who experienced the multiple (and important) connections between Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas⁶⁶. So did bureaucrats who moved from one part of the globe to the other, or the residents of Mazagão, a Portuguese city which was evacuated from Africa, sent to Lisbon, and then transferred to

62 Tamar Herzog, ‘The Meeting of Worlds: Did Early Modern Expansion lead to Globalization?’, in Benjamin Z. Kedar, ed., *New Ventures in Comparative History* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2009), 85–104.

63 Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1972).

64 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

65 Serge Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

66 Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal’s Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Brazil⁶⁷. Nevertheless, for most contemporaries, the wider horizons rarely materialized or, even if they loomed large, they were at best hazy, unclear and confusing⁶⁸.

Of course, as historians, we can analyse all these processes from above and from the present and affirm the existence, indeed the intensification if not the absolute predominance, of worldwide connections. We can do so because we have at our disposal many records of different nature and provenance. We can hop from one place to the next, compare one period to the other, and develop a plausible, logical argument about what had transpired. This is as long as we remember that our vision is radically different than that of contemporaries who surely knew some things better than us, but others less so.

Back to the accumulation and management of information: not only do historians use analytical categories that are often foreign to the past, not only are they supposed to be neutral observers – when contemporaries never were –, but historians also have the advantage (or disadvantage) of being able to accumulate, account for, describe, analyse and organize information that contemporaries might have not had, might have not used, or might have used differently. When we write, whose vision should we reproduce? Which interpretations should we follow? Are we, or are past actors, better suited to propose a more accurate image of the past?

67 Renata Malcher de Araújo, *As cidades da Amazônia no séc. XVIII. Belém, Macapá e Mazagão* (Porto: Universidade do Porto, 1998), 265–90 and Laurent Vidal, *Magazão, la ville qui traverse l'Atlantique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).

68 Nancy E. Van Deusen, *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 169–91.

Fernando Bouza

Calamities, communication and public space between manuscript and print (Spain and Portugal, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries): From prayers to news^{*}

In July 1648, Francisca de Castro Pinós, Duchess of Híjar, received the news of the deaths that had begun to occur in Albalate del Arzobispo¹, a town in Aragon that was among this Spanish aristocratic family's domains. The news, or 'notice', was sent to the Duchess so that 'como aquí es el lugar donde primero se a de declarar [la peste] parece que Vuestra Excelencia deue ser la primera que ha de hacer diligencia' [as this is the first place where (the plague) will be declared, it seems that Your Excellency should be the first to make the report], beginning by deciding 'si quiere hacer recado al Reyno' [whether you want to send a message to the Royal authorities]. Indeed, she did so, writing directly to King Philip IV².

Then it would be up to doctors and government officials to organize sanitary measures aimed at confirming that the contagious disease was indeed the plague. However, it is important to stress that this whole process began

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- 1 Jesús Maíso, *La peste aragonesa de 1648 a 1654* (Zaragoza: Departamento de Historia Moderna de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 1982), 49.
- 2 Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Barcelona (henceforth ACA), *Consejo de Aragón*, leg. 96, 35. Francisco Viñao de Escatrón to the Duchess of Híjar, Belchite. July 25, 1648.

as a result of a written ‘notice’ received by Doña Francisca and sent by her to the ruler of what, as we will see below, was an empire of quills.

The famous Father António Vieira (1608–1697) said that the word ‘calamidad derivase de cálamo, que quiere decir pluma’ [calamity derives from calamus, which means quill]. By proposing this dramatic etymology, the Luso-Brazilian Jesuit was only seeking to capture the attention of his listeners, or readers, because shortly before he had ruled that ‘the health or ruin of the Monarchy is in the quills of the kings’ secretaries³.

A member of the religious order that probably created more paperwork than any other⁴, Vieira dealt extensively with the relationship between quill pens and health or calamities in a Lenten sermon preached in the royal chapel in Lisbon in 1655, concerning a passage from the prophet Malachi. There, reworking the ancient solar myth of the Iberian Monarchies⁵, he paints a picture of a sun king who is, of course, Portuguese, and whose rays are the quills with which his secretaries write:

llama plumas a los rayos del sol porque así como el sol por medio de sus rayos alumbrá, calienta y vivifica toda la tierra, así el rey [...] por medio de las plumas que tiene cerca de sí da luz, da calor y da vida a tanta Monarquía, aunque esta sea extendida, fuera de ambos trópicos, como la del sol de nuestra Monarquía⁶.

[he calls the sun’s rays quills because, just as the sun, by means of its rays, lights, heats and gives life to the whole earth, so the king (...) by means of the quills he has close to him gives light, gives heat and life to so much Monarchy, extending beyond both tropics, as if he were the sun of our Monarchy].

This bears eloquent witness to the extensive Iberian use of writing in the imperial office and government, both in the Portuguese and Hispanic

3 António Vieira, *Sermones*, IV (Madrid: Juan García Infanzón, 1680), 190.

4 Markus Friedrich, *Der lange Arm Roms? Globale Verwaltung und Kommunikation im Jesuitenorden 1540–1773* (Frankfurt – New York: Campus Verlag, 2011); Annick Delfosse, ‘La correspondance jésuite: communication, union et mémoire. Les enjeux de la *Formula scribendi*’, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique*, 104 (2009), 71–114; Paul Nelles, ‘Cosas y cartas: Scribal Production and Material Pathways in Jesuit Global Communication (1547–1573)’, *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 2 (2015), 421–50.

5 Víctor Mínguez, *Los reyes solares. Iconografía astral de la Monarquía hispánica* (Castellón de la Plana: Universitat Jaume I, 2001).

6 Vieira, *Sermones*, IV, 190.

monarchies, which became so-called ink or paper-and-ink empires⁷. This use of writing was even greater when it came to managing catastrophes and other calamities.

Emergency management is a particularly appropriate situation for reflection on forms of communication, ranging between narrative⁸ and politically motivated accounts. With its study of the hurricanes that have regularly struck the Caribbean and its area of influence, *Sea of Storms* by Stuart B. Schwartz offers a magnificent example of their supposed causes, as well as the measures adopted to alleviate their effects and the attribution of hypothetical responsibilities, from Providence to political corruption⁹.

The extraordinary conditions imposed by the emergency made it necessary to develop general resources to combat the effects of fatality, generally through the imposition of fiscal or economic measures, such as embargoes. At the same time, emergencies brought the circulation of orders or warrants at different jurisdictional levels, from the municipal or Royal authorities, without forgetting the purely domestic, family or seigneurial spheres.

In other words, the *necessitas* that characterizes of emergencies is the basis for the legitimate claim of *auxilium* – the obligation to cooperate, with material resources, in measures seeking to alleviate devastating and unexpected effects. But, at the same time, it also gives rise to the expression

7 Leila M. Algranti, and Ana P. Torres Megiani, eds, *O Império por escrito. Formas de transmissão da cultura letrada no mundo ibérico, séc. XVI–XIX* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2009); Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información. Funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español* (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana-Vervuet, 2012); Guillaume Gaudin, *El imperio de papel de Juan Díez de la Calle. Pensar y gobernar el Nuevo Mundo en el siglo XVII* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica España, 2017); Giulia Grata, *Des lettres pour gouverner. Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle et l'Italie de Charles-Quint dans les Manuscrits Trumbull de Besançon* (Besançon: Presses Universitaires du Franche-Comté, 2014).

8 Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster narratives in early modern Naples. Politics, communication and culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018); Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro español. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

9 Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sea of Storms: A History of the Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

of the *consilium* of authorized voices, who are called on to advise those who govern in accordance with their loyal understanding. Throughout the Early Modern Age, emergencies also helped new voices emerge to add to the public debate, offering a kind of mediation in the face of disaster, calamity or hardship¹⁰.

This was clearly expressed by an Andalusian cleric named Pedro de Zamora Hurtado before the plague suffered by the city of Malaga in 1637. He addressed Philip IV to inform him that, ‘deseando la salud de esta república y el bien universal de estos reinos’ [desiring the health of this republic and the universal good of these kingdoms], he had decided to ‘tomar la pluma para representar [...] el mísero estado en que se halla esta ciudad con la peste y contagio que totalmente la va arruinando u asolando’ [take up my pen to portray (...) the miserable state of this city with the plague and contagion that is totally ruining and devastating it]¹¹.

In the same way, the calamity also served to bring out criticism clearly from the community, some of it openly satirical. Catastrophes are undoubtedly a good scenario for criticism, such as the *Sátira del terremoto* [Satire of the Earthquake] in which Philip III’s Portuguese ministers are startled by the earth tremors and, as a result, portrayed as ridiculous¹².

This paper focuses on pandemics and other calamities, and its aim is not, therefore, to study the hypothetical origins of public health policy (establishment of cordons, creation of health districts, etc.)¹³. Instead, the aim is to glean all possible information about the state of necessity as a way of galvanizing the public space. This can be done either by considering how those who governed obtained information, disseminated it

10 Fernando Bouza, ‘Access to Printing in the Political Communication of the Spanish Baroque and its Effects on the Production of Political *Arbitrios* and *Avisos*’, in Sina Raischenbach, and Christian Windler, eds, *Reforming early Modern Monarchies. The Castilian Arbitrismo in Comparative European Perspectives* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 43–61.

11 Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (henceforth AHN), *Consejos suprimidos*, leg. 40613.

12 Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (henceforth BNE), Mss. 9087, ff. 143r–50v.

13 Ruth MacKay, *Life in a Time of Pestilence: The Great Castilian Plague of 1596–1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

in printed or handwritten copies, or managed measures, or the way the governed wanted their opinion to be known and took up their pens, as the cleric from Malaga said in 1637.

Three main perspectives could offer resources for an approach to the communication management of emergencies in the Iberian Early Modern Age. Firstly, publication policies; secondly, the creation of individual or collective memories; and, thirdly, the creation of specific knowledge about emergencies.

Publication policies can include not only a history of printed publication, but also the process by which accounts were made public in the Ancien Regime, in the double sense of being made known and being made to belong to the community. This implies, of course, studying how rumours, gossip and chatter were generated, about a plague, for example – what Pero Roiz Soares described as ‘ruge do povo’ [the muffled roar of the people] regarding the great plague of Lisbon 1569¹⁴.

In short, how the news of its development and current situation circulated or the measures that were adopted at different jurisdictional levels, from council or seigneurial agreements to proclamations and edicts, which were also printed or handwritten. Also, afterwards, how the epidemic was publicly considered to be over, such as the ritual of raising the flag of health, held in Lisbon.

Secondly, we propose looking more closely at the creation of memory or memories of the disaster or emergency. In other words, how the individual and community memory of catastrophes, plagues or pandemics, which might be oral, visual or written, was constructed, identifying records, places or practices to demonstrate a desire to create or maintain that particular memory of the calamity.

Thirdly and finally, a perspective that had to do with manufacturing knowledge of or about the emergency. In other words, how a corpus of knowledge related to plagues was generated, starting from the creation of an archival memory, allowing decisions to be made when the emergency had to be faced again in the future.

14 Pero Roiz Soares, *Memorial*, Manuel Lopes de Almeida, ed. (Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1953), 19.

From the communication point of view, it is important to emphasize that attention must be paid not only to what is written (by hand or in print), but also to spoken and visual aspects. This would include both the continuous and increasingly powerful murmur of the voices in the streets of Lisbon in the early days of the plague of 1569 – the ‘ruge’ mentioned by Soares – and the solemn visual ceremony organized in Lisbon to ‘aleuantar bandeira de saude e dar a cidade por desempedida’ [raise the flag of health and declare the city free of the epidemic]¹⁵.

This urban ritual (August 29, 1599) consisted of a colourful procession of doctors and municipal officials who paraded through the main streets and squares of Lisbon. It ended at the wharfs on the Tagus ‘domde se aruorou hum mastro todo emramado e com outra bandeira emsima branca e com a naoo da sidade de huma banda e as quinas reas da outra’ [where a rammed pole was hoisted, with another white flag on top, showing the ship of the city on one side and the royal *quinas* on the other]¹⁶.

Sometimes, a graphic account of the pandemic is presented as an ex-voto painted to give thanks for some miraculous intervention¹⁷. However, these ex-votos always have some self-documenting testimony, as can be seen in a painting representing the plague that devastated Antequera (near Malaga) in 1679, which is supposed to have been ended through the intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary. The Marian procession is a major part of the visual story, but so are the various interventions by local surgeon Juan Bautista Napolitano, who, moreover, paid for the painting¹⁸.

A plague or epidemic can also become a reference for a community, worthy of being remembered to the point where it becomes a differentiating

15 Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisboa (henceforth BNP), SA 4166//3V. Bound manuscript with various prints by Luis Lobera de Ávila (1480–1551).

16 *Ibidem*.

17 Milagros León Vegas, ‘Religiosidad popular y exvoto pictórico: simbiosis de arte, cultura y devoción’, in Juan J. Iglesias, Rafael Pérez, and Manuel Fernández, eds, *Comercio y cultura en la España moderna: actas de la XIII reunión de la FEHM*, 2015 (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2015), vol. 2, 2141–58.

18 The painting can be seen today in the convent church of Santo Domingo de Antequera, see Milagros León Vegas, ‘Arte y peste: desde el Medievo al Ochocientos. De la mitología a la realidad local’, *Boletín de Arte*, 30–31 (2009–2010), 223–38: 235–38.

and characteristic element, for example, in the memory of a convent. This takes place in an illuminated miniature representing the vision Sister Francisca de Jesus had in a ‘sonho’ [dream] in her cell in the Lisbon monastery of Salvador das Donas, or da Mata, during the great plague of 1569.

The scene refers to the moment when the Dominican nun saw Saint Vincent, patron saint of the Portuguese capital, and the Angel of the Plague, both dramatically perched on the top of the palm tree – the eponymous ‘mata’ of the monastery – which, until 1604, stood in the main cloister of the community. The miniature has been attached to a much older document at an unknown date. This is the *Compromisso do Mosteiro de S. Salvador das Donas, da cidade de Lisboa, pertencente à ordem de São Domingos, de 29 de Novembro de 1396*: no less than the monastery’s original founding document on parchment¹⁹.

In her *Livro da fundação do mosteiro do Salvador* [Book of the Founding of the Monastery of the Saviour], Soror Maria do Baptista explains how the recent history of the community was closely linked to its status as a place preserved by Divine mercy from the plague. In fact, she offers a detailed account of how the community was preserved from the great pandemics of 1569, 1580 and the one that began in 1598. In the case of the ‘sonho’ of Francisca de Jesus, the vision is referred to as follows:

Neste tempo [1569] quando o mal andaua com mayor furia, estando dormindo a Madre Sor Francisca de Iesus [...] representolhe em hum sonho hum Anjo sobre a palmeira que está na crasta, & leuando o braço direito pera dar golpe sobre o Mosteiro, com huma espada nua toda ensangoentada, que tinha na mão. O glorioso são Vicente Martyr [...] pegou do braço do Anjo, pera que não descarregase com o golpe, dizendolhe: Ta, aquí não, que pedem misericordia; & e o Anjo se virou pera a parte da portaria da banda de fora, aonde se recolhiao as molheres que seruião das portas a fora, & dizendo, aquí não se escusa, deu cinco golpes com a espada nua.

[At that time when the sickness spread with greater fury, while Mother Francisca de Jesus was asleep (...) an Angel appeared to her in a dream on the palm tree that is in the cloister, raising its right arm to unleash a blow against the Monastery, with a fully drawn and bloody sword it was holding in its hand. The glorious martyr Saint Vincent (...) hit the Angel’s arm so that it could not discharge the blow, saying: Stop! Not here, they are asking for mercy! And the Angel headed towards the outer gateway, where the serving women from outside

19 BNP, IL. 150. There is a reproduction at <https://purl.pt/31547>.

gathered, saying there is no excuse here. And it gave five blows with its bare sword]²⁰.

The next day, it was found that five of these servants were infected, and they died within a few days. In the opinion of Soror Maria do Baptista, this was the proof ensuring that the memory of the Salvador das Donas Monastery as a community preserved from the infection of the plague.

In the case of individual memories, there are many testimonies of pandemics and natural disasters and they marked the memory of diarists and local chroniclers, such as, among others, the Catalan Parets²¹, who deserves particular attention, the Portuguese Roiz Soares²² and the Castilians Escudero de Cobeña²³ and Antolínez de Burgos. However, they were publicizing events that occurred in very different places – the first talks about Barcelona between 1626 and 1660; the second Lisbon from 1565 to *circa* 1628; the third collects, in particular, Spanish events and ‘some things that happened in the land of the author [Alcarria]’ from 1453 to 1593²⁴, and the fourth events in Valladolid from 1583 to 1591. None of the four was printed at the time of its composition, but today only the *Relaciones de sucesos ocurridos durante el s. XVI, ordenados por años*²⁵ by the last of the four is preserved in manuscript form.

20 Maria do Baptista, *Livro da fundação do mosteiro do Salvador da cidade de Lisboa e de alguns casos dignos de memoria que nelle acontecerão* (Lisbon: Pedro Craesbeeck, 1618), 87.

21 Miquel Parets, *A journal of the plague year: the diary of Barcelona tanner Miquel Parets*, James Amelang, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

22 Roiz Soares, *Memorial*.

23 Matías Escudero de Cobeña, *Relación de casos notables ocurridos en la Alcarria y otros lugares en el siglo XVI*, Francisco Fernández Izquierdo, ed. (Almonacid de Zurita: Ayuntamiento de Almonacid de Zurita, 1982).

24 Biblioteca de Castilla-La Mancha, Toledo, Mss. 64/64bis, *Relación de casos notables que an sucedido en diversas partes de la christiandad especialmente en España con los nacimientos y muertes de algunos príncipes y elecciones de sumos Pontífices Romanos y las guerras que an sucedido assí en la mar como en la tierra desde que el emperador Constantino [Paleólogo] perdió el ynperio de Constantinopla hasta nuestros tiempos con algunas cosas que suçedieron en la tierra del author escripto por Mathías Escudero*.

25 Biblioteca de la Real Academia Española, Madrid (henceforth RAE), Ms/10.

The events Antolínez collects refer to meteorological phenomena, recording news about droughts, floods, frosts, snowfalls or great gales, without forgetting notice of plague and other diseases. Some accounts are moving, such as the one of the pandemic of 1591, giving the news that ‘mi hijo [...] miércoles en la noche y allóse con calentura a jueves por la mañana 31 de octubre [1591]’ [my son (...) became ill on Wednesday night and had a fever on Thursday morning, October 31 (1591)]²⁶.

News about pandemics is also frequent in letters²⁷. The letters from privileged groups, from aristocrats to jurists or businessmen, are well known which is why the letters collected in the *Post scriptum* data bank are of great interest, as this consists of an extensive epistolary corpus from ‘ordinary people’ living in what are now Spain and Portugal²⁸.

So, in 1569, a certain Manuel Fialho announced events in Rome, including the fact that ‘ouve qua este veram e inda dura grande mortindade em mininos de bexigas e serampão de maneira que em são Lourenço em Lucina ha dez ou doze dias que eram emterrados 3200’ [many children have died and continue to die this summer from blisters and measles, so much so that in Santo Lorenzo in Lucina 10 or 12 days ago they buried 3,200]²⁹. Ten years later, the merchant Vicente Francés wrote:

de Barcelona siempre se dice que hay grande mal, anoche nos dixeron por aquí que habían desembarcado muchos turcos y que los de Barcelona les habían dado brava vatería. También se diçe que tienen presos 4 hombres de françia que la inglesa [Isabel I Tudor] los havia imbiado a poner la peste en Barcelona³⁰.

26 *Ibidem*, f. 275r.

27 Carmen Espejo, ‘El origen epistolar de las relaciones de sucesos de la Edad Moderna’, in Carlos Sáez, and Antonio Castillo, eds, *Actas del VI Congreso internacional de Historia de la cultura escrita. La correspondencia en la historia: modelos y prácticas de escritura epistolar*, I (Madrid: Calambur, 2002), 157–68.

28 *Post scriptum. A Digital Archive of Ordinary People (Early Modern Portugal and Spain)* [PSCR]. <http://teitok.clul.ul.pt/postscriptum/index.php?action=home>.

29 Manuel Fialho to Manuel de Couto, Rome, 12 August 1569, PSCR 1182, http://teitok.clul.ul.pt/postscriptum/index.php?action=file&cid=Revistas/ModernizadasTeitok/neotag_PT/PSCR1182.xml&jmp=w-341.

30 Vicente Francés to Juan Maurán de León, merchant, Serós, 29 September 1589, PSCR 6144, http://teitok.clul.ul.pt/postscriptum/index.php?action=file&cid=Revistas/ModernizadasTeitok/neotag_ES/PSCR6144.xml&jmp=w-491.

[of Barcelona it is always said that there is great sickness. Last night they told us here that many Turks had disembarked and that the men of Barcelona had put up a good fight. It is also said that they have imprisoned four men from France that the English (Elizabeth I) had sent to spread the plague in Barcelona.]

In these monarchies of a sun whose rays are quills, to return to Vieira's rhetorical figure, there are plenty of sources available for studying management in the face of catastrophic need. In the Hispanic case, in addition to local records, which should always be better attended to, as Ruth MacKay has recently done³¹, the study of the royal archives is obviously essential.

On one hand, they make it possible to analyse the relationships between different councils, especially the territorial ones, such as those of Castile, Aragon or Portugal. These relationships were crucial when it came to managing health alerts that required close communication between the different component parts of a composite monarchy like that of the Spanish Habsburgs, even beyond the jurisdictional borders that separated them³². In the case of Castile, it is possible to access the correspondence sent by the Council of Castile to the governors in series of documents that testify to a continuous coming and going of news and royal orders between the local districts and the court institutions³³.

However, perhaps the most interesting element corresponds to the creation of a particular memory of pandemics within what is known as the Old Archive of the Council of Castile, which dates from 1717 and includes documents from the 16th to the eighteenth century³⁴. The information in that archive about epidemics³⁵ testifies to a fully conscious policy of collecting, accumulating and organizing documents, especially about waves of plague and the measures that should be adopted before they

31 MacKay, *Life in a Time of Pestilence*.

32 See, for example, the Monarchy's response to the plague in Milan in 1630, with evidence of the cross-circulation of news for Castile and Navarre, Aragon, Valencia and also Portugal, then under the sovereignty of the Spanish Habsburgs. ACA, *Consejo de Aragón*, leg. 96 [*Negocios notables. Peste en la Corona de Aragón en varios años*].

33 See different examples from the reign of Philip IV (1621–1665), AHN, *Consejos Suprimidos*, leg. 40613, 46234, 46235, 47662, 49813, 49814.

34 Eva Bernal, 'El Archivo Antiguo del Consejo de Castilla', *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 45/2 (2020), 717–34.

35 Bernal, 'El Archivo Antiguo', 724.

break out. In this policy, testimony of how the Council authorities had historically faced pandemics seem to be providing the perfect background for the adoption of new decisions, in a kind of intentionally fabricated epidemiological knowledge.

Apart from royal orders, the Monarchy established a special epistolary network with the kingdoms, which it kept informed of the main developments. It did so through what in Castile were known as ‘general letters’, whose models, were collected in the ‘missive books’ – somewhere between the compilation of royal commands, the collections of documents regarding the appointment of officials, and the production of news that had to be disseminated³⁶.

The recipients of the letters were, above all, nobles, prelates, councils or city and town authorities, who were promptly informed of matters as diverse as the death of princes, the enthronement of new sovereigns, their trips and marriages, the signing of truces and treaties, the intentions of the monarchs and, of course, epidemics. In general, aid and prayers are requested so that Providence protects the Monarchy and its interests.

In order to understand the ultimate meaning of these ‘general letters’, it is important to stress that, on one hand, the intention is to ensure maximum dissemination. For this reason, the participation of preachers is even requested so that from the pulpits they ‘persuadan al pueblo para que cada uno particularmente haga oración’ [persuade the people so that each one individually prays] about the council meeting in Trent. Confessors with their penitents were also asked to do this³⁷. Similarly, there is no doubt about the use of these letters to deny contradictory news that would have been spread by the enemies of the Monarchy. Such is the case of the important general letter sent in the name of Charles ‘quando lo de Roma, a las ciudades del reyno’ [at the time of the events in Rome, to the cities of the kingdom] in 1527³⁸.

In the first place, it is reported that because of the wars in Italy, ‘no han venido de muchos días a esta parte correos ni personas con quien

36 As an example, we take RAE, Ms/33 [*Documentos reales del siglo XVI*].

37 RAE, Ms/33, f. 213r-v, ‘Otras cartas generales para que continúen las oraciones por la unión de la Cristiandad y que se comience el concilio (de Trento) y acabe’.

38 RAE, Ms/33, f. 214r-v.

como se acostumbra se scriua a todas partes la verdad de lo que pasa' [no couriers or people have come to these parts for many days, nor people with whom it is the custom to write the truth of what goes on for all parts]. This has meant that 'algunos de los de fuera de nuestros reynos que no desean nuestro servicio han sembrado en ellos las nuevas que les ha plazido en special de lo de la entrada de Roma muy al revés de lo que ello ha sido' [some of those outside our kingdoms who do not want our service have planted in them whatever news they wanted, especially about the entry into Rome, saying quite the opposite of the way it has been]. As a result, the emperor announces that 'por certificaros de la verdad [...] he querido scriuiros lo qué en estos postreros días ha subcedido y cuál ha sido mi intención y desseo' [to certify you the truth (...) I wanted to write to you about what has happened in these last days and what has been my intention and desire]. In this way, Charles V wanted to offer his vassals in Castile an account of his behaviour in what was known as the Sack of Rome, replacing news that had been in circulation with another account he himself had produced.

The transition to the use of printing in the relationship between monarchs and kingdoms was not long in coming, and the general campaign of prayers of 1574 for concord between Christian princes and the reform of customs was made, taking full advantage of the machinery of printing³⁹. The same happened with the commands and proclamations relating to contagious epidemics, in which a form of hybridization between manuscript and print is observed⁴⁰. Meanwhile, it was very common for notices – *avvisi* in the Italian tradition – newsletters, accounts of events and other handwritten papers to be bound together in miscellaneous volumes,

39 Fernando Bouza, 'Monarchie en lettres d'imprimerie. Typographie et propagande au temps de Philippe II', *Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 41/2 (1994), 206–330.

40 For example, in 1630, Fernando de Borja, viceroy of Aragon, had the 'notice' sent by Philip IV about the plague in Milan printed stating 'que se han diuidido diferentes personas por las partes de Europa, con intento, de que en todas ellas cunda la Peste, sembrando Poluos, y Ungüentos pestilentes, y mortíferos' [that different people have spread throughout the different parts of Europe, with the intention of spreading the plague in all of them, sowing deadly, pestilential dust and ointments], (SI [Zaragoza?]: s.n., [1630]).

such as the volumes Jerónimo de Mascarenhas compiled in the middle of the seventeenth century⁴¹.

Another hybridization between manuscripts and printed matter is found in the dissemination of handwritten copies of a printed work. For example, the *Horden breve familiar contra la peste*⁴² turns out to be a transfer of the printed document *Regimiento contra la peste* by Fernando Álvarez, which came off the Hans Gysser presses in Salamanca in about 1507. Similarly, there are numerous testimonies of dual circulation of handwritten and printed copies, as in the case of a very particular type of remedy against the plague that was disseminated in the form of an account of events by Francisco Salazar, Bishop of Salamina, in Spain and Portugal during the 16th and 17th centuries.

According to this Franciscan friar, the remedy had come from Antioch and had been brought to Trent, besieged by the plague in 1546, by a Greek prelate, who took part in the conciliar meetings. It consisted of a prayer written on parchment from which protection was obtained simply by wearing a ‘manilha’ – in other words a bracelet – on the left wrist bearing a strange mixture of crosses and capital letters: ‘†.Z.†.D.I.A.†.B.I.Z.†.S.A.B.†.Z†.H.G.F.†.B.F.R.S.’⁴³. The preventive virtues of the manuscript were transferred, however, to printed versions, whose publication seemed to follow the waves of pandemic, starting in 1582 and lasting until at least 1648, and including 1620, 1624 and 1630⁴⁴.

On other occasions, authors whose work had already been printed made at least partially divergent versions for specific uses. This was the case with the *Modo facile et ispedito da conservarsi sano ne tempi pericolosi della*

41 Julián Paz, *Catálogo de “Tomos de Varios”* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, 1938).

42 Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, Colección Salazar y Castro, M-142, ff. 2r–5v.

43 BNP, Ms. Pombaline 68, ff. 17r–19r. *Relação verdadeira de Dom Francisco Salazar, bispo de Salamanca (sic), do remedio que no anno 1546 se teue contra a peste em Terento no tempo do Concilio.*

44 Valladolid: Juan Godínez de Millis, 1582; Córdoba: Salvador de Cea, 1620; Palermo: Angelo Orlandi, 1624 [Italian]; Madrid: Viuda de Alonso Martín, 1630; Madrid: Alonso de Paredes, 1648, forming part of Juan Núñez de Castro, *Tratado universal en que se declara qué sea la peste*, 29–32.

pestilenza by the doctor Pietro Nati⁴⁵. Its author, Pietro Nati da Bibbiena, composed a ‘picciol trattato’⁴⁶, associated with his printed booklet of 1576, which he delivered handwritten to Carlo Pitti in 1579⁴⁷.

As Nati recounts in the dedication, the powerful *accoppiatore* of the Grand Duke of Tuscany⁴⁸ conversing with him ‘sopra questi romori della peste’ [regarding these rumours of the plague] he had told him ‘che sarebbe molto grato hauer qualche rimedio’ [that he would be very grateful to receive any remedy] and ‘sapere che cose s’habbino a provedere per chi uolessi ritirarsi in qualche luogo appartato’ [to receive information about what should be provided for those who want to withdraw to a secluded place]⁴⁹. To satisfy Pitti’s interest, ‘non solo le diedi il libretto da me piu tempo ha sopra cio publicato [*Modo facile et ispedito da conservarsi sano ne tempi pericolosi della pestilenza*] ma ancora mi auinsi a mettere in carta con la breuita mia solita et con la diligenza a me possibile quelle cose che mi sono parse le piu secur et le piu facili a prouedersi’ [not only did I give him the booklet I published on this subject some time ago (*An easy and quick method to stay healthy in dangerous times of pestilence*) I also resolved to put down on paper, with my usual conciseness and as diligently as I could, the things I consider surest and easiest to obtain]⁵⁰.

In fact, the manuscript in Madrid today does not coincide exactly with the Florentine printed version, with innovations in its four chapters devoted, respectively, to where to stay, how to eat, and what clothing and medical remedies should be provided in times of plague⁵¹. Furthermore,

45 Pietro Nati da Bibbiena, *Modo facile et ispedito da conservarsi sano ne tempi pericolosi della pestilenza. Con altri tratatti* (Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, 1576).

46 Paul O. Kristeller, *Iter italicum. Volume IV (Alia itinera) Great Britain to Spain* (London – Leiden: Warburg Institute – Brill, 1989), 575.

47 BNE, Mss. 17910, *Disertación sobre los medios de prevenir la peste*. Signed dedication [Piero Nati] dated Banco della Zecca, 26 November 1579.

48 Ippolita Morgese, *Nessuno sa de lui. Carlo Pitti, il vero artefice del ghetto ebraico di Firenze* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2018).

49 BNE, Mss. 17910, f. 1r.

50 *Ibidem*.

51 BNE, Mss. 17910, ‘Che luogo si debba eleggere per habitare ne i tempi sospetti di peste’ [On the subject of the place to choose as residence when there is a risk of plague], ff. 2r–4r; ‘Delle provisioni da farsi per il vitto’ [About food supplies], ff. 4v–6v; ‘Delle vestimenta’ [About clothes], ff. 6v–7r; ‘Delle cose medicinali’ [About medicines], ff. 7r–13r.

it seems designed to follow a specific path of scribal publication, as its author is well aware ‘che essendo questo mio picciol trattato, qualumque egli si sia, nelle mane sue [de Carlo Pitti] sara da non pochi et ueduto et considerato’ [that since my short treatise, whatever it is, is in his [Carlo Pitti’s] hands, it will be observed and considered by more than a few people]⁵².

One of the advantages of the manuscript circulation of texts in the lands of the Hispanic Monarchy was that there was no established prior censorship procedure, although, of course, the possession of manuscripts was not exempt from *a posteriori* control through reports to the Inquisition. On the other hand, for the dissemination of print, a whole system of regulations was gradually perfected from the end of the fifteenth century which required obtaining a printing licence, as well as various prior approvals and censorships⁵³.

However, the demands of the emergency speeded up the procedures prior to the circulation of works that were considered essential to stop the advances of the epidemics. For this reason, in 1599, the printing and dissemination of a work by Luis de Mercado, royal physician, were allowed without the required licence.

This was the *Libro en que se trata con claridad la naturaleza, causas, prouidencia, y verdadera orden y modo de curar la enfermedad vulgar, y peste que en estos años se ha diuulgado por toda España*, [Book Dealing Clearly with the Nature, Causes, Origin and True Order and Method of Curing the Vulgar Disease and Plague that has been Spreading All Over Spain in Recent Years], printed in Madrid by Pedro Várez de Castro in the aforementioned year of 1599. In addition, printing and binding expenses were paid by the Council of Castile, culminating in the process by which all local governors were sent a copy of Dr Mercado’s *Libro*⁵⁴.

52 BNE, Mss. 17910, f. 1v.

53 Fermín de los Reyes, *El libro en España y América. Legislación y censura, siglos XV–XVIII*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Arco/Libros, 2000).

54 Fernando Bouza, *Dásele licencia y privilegio. Don Quijote y la aprobación de libros en el Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Akal, 2012), 35–6, 54.

In short, the *scribal publication* of news is at the foundations of what Mario Infelise has called ‘origini della pubblica informazione’⁵⁵. However, handwritten news should not be considered solely as predating *How the Press Began*⁵⁶ – a kind of primary or deficient way of publicizing events until printing imposed itself in all its glory. As well as having coincided in time and having coexisted in forms of hybridization with print, much informative contents of various kinds entered circulation in handwritten form, and there was also a circuit of handwritten news, which seems to have been flexible and periodical, available for purchase.

The interesting correspondence that Pedro García Dovalle maintained with the ambassador Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count of Gondomar, throughout 1617 and 1618, contains plenty of detailed news of events at the Madrid court⁵⁷. The content includes news of the latest comedies and princely parties, but also the most gruesome and scandalous cases, such as unexpected deaths or poisonings. For example, in March 1618, there was the death in the palace of Rose de Cardaillac Lacapelle, lady in waiting of Elisabeth of France, who ‘got sick from eating a few pieces of wax candles’. And the same notice reported that ‘the [Marquise] de Falces [Ana de Peralta] has tried to poison her husband [Jacques de Croy] and the son she had had’.

There are also frequent references to a gazetteer, unfortunately anonymous, who composed handwritten gazettes, some of which have fortunately been preserved in this correspondence. Ovalle writes ‘porque el [correo] ordinario de Flandes no se baya sin gaçeta ago esto ymbiándola’ [‘I make this and send it so that the ordinary (post) of Flanders does not go without a gazette] (Madrid, 11 April 1618); ‘aquí ymbió Gaçeta para que V.S^a se entretenga un poco’ [I send a gazette herewith so that Your Excellency may have a little entertainment] (Madrid, 11 May 1618); ‘no ymbió a V.S^a gaçetas porque lo huno son mentiras y enbustes lo que diçen,

55 Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione, secoli XVI–XVII* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2002).

56 Henry Ettinghausen, *How the Press Began. The Pre-Periodical Printed News in Early Modern Europe* (A Coruña: SIELAE, 2015).

57 AHN, *Diversos, Títulos y familias*, leg. 2627–31. All references in the text below refer to this note.

lo otro el que las acá feneció' (Madrid, 19 de enero de 1618) [I did not send Your Excellency's gazettes because one is mostly lies and falsehoods, and the man who wrote the other one is dying] (Madrid, January 19, 1618), although shortly afterwards he announced that 'resucitó el de las gaçetas, ésta me dio plegue a dios que entretenga' [the gazette man recovered. I prayed to God for him to survive] (Madrid, 23 January 1618).

The spread of rumours and fake news through letters and handwritten *avvisi* was so common that it was already arousing tremendous suspicion at the time. For example, in his notes to Philippe de Commines in 1643, Juan de Vitrián points out how the use of couriers or messengers had become widespread 'que cada semana salen y bueluen a la corte de todas las Provincias de España' [that every week leave and return to the court from all the Provinces of Spain], so that 'a menos costa se tienen frescos avisos' [fresh notices are cheaper to obtain]. However, this continuous coming and going of news 'es malo por los chismes y menudencias que escriben los malsines, inquietando los ánimos, y metiendo la autoridad del Rey en cada niñería' [is bad because of the gossip and nonsense that the tattletales write, disturbing the spirit, and introducing the King's authority into every trifle]⁵⁸.

The production of news in order to contradict other reports was a great challenge for royal propaganda and the reputation of the monarchies. For example, the *Novas de Castela* [News from Castile] Rui Lopes 'mandou da corte' [sent from court] in around 1591, painted a bleak picture of the figure of Philip II and his numerous crimes. This news from the Portuguese doctor who supported the royal claims of Antonio, Prior do Crato, reported that Francisco Zapata, Count of Barajas, had been fatally poisoned by order of the king, while various members of the nobility had been strangled and their bones secretly burned, while the secretary Mateo Vázquez de Lecca and other courtiers had had to flee Madrid⁵⁹.

58 Philippe de Commines, and Juan de Vitrián, *Las memorias de los hechos y los hechos de Luis Undécimo y Carlos Octavo* (Antwerp: Jan van Meurs, 1643), 413.

59 Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisboa, Arquivo de D. António e seus descendentes, doc. 341.

Six decades earlier, as has been seen, fully aware that it was necessary to respond to the accusations that were circulating against Charles V for the Sack of Rome of 1527, it was considered necessary for the Emperor to write a 'general letter' in order to counteract the effects of the bad image created by the assault on the papal city and the imprisonment of Pope Clement VII. Here, the manuscript is not only a source of information for those who govern, but a way of developing the public sphere thanks to the handwritten dissemination not only of news but also what its correct interpretation should be.

As the management of emergencies shows, when dealing with epidemics or natural disasters the quill was an essential instrument, and the printing press was also gradually incorporated alongside it. But manuscripts were also used by private individuals for critical discussion of the cause of the calamities. That is what Pero Roiz Soares did in his aforementioned *Memorial* concerning the plague that devastated Lisbon in 1569.

In one of his chapters 'onde muito copiosamente conta o sucesso da peste' [in which he very copiously recounts the events of the plague] 'vistos pelos olhos' [seen with his own eyes]⁶⁰, Lisbon appears transformed into the ship *Boalis*, abandoned by the Royal court and by the municipal authorities, which are portrayed as the pilot and master of the ship.

The causes of the plague are not merely natural. Instead, as the commonplace of the time requires, it turns out to be divine punishment for sins committed in the Portuguese court⁶¹: the pride of the great over the small, the misuse of the alms collected to build churches, the excessive consumption of luxury products, public cohabitation and adultery, the tax impositions that impoverish the population, and so on. In short, the pandemic becomes an occasion for political criticism, without it being possible to hide the fact that behind the story of the Boalis-Lisbon ship is the courtly faction of the Dukes of Aveiro, headed by João de Lencastre.

60 Roiz Soares, *Memorial*, 23–38.

61 Rodrigo Franco da Costa, 'Entre a peste e o rei: posições de colaboração e de conflito da Câmara de Lisboa e a monarquia na segunda metade do século XVI e nos primeiros anos do século XVII', *Revista Espacialidades*, 17/1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.21680/1984-817X.2021v17n1ID22888> (accessed 31 December 2021), 71–72.

What Pero Roiz Soares asks for is deeply political and allows us to draw the conclusion that not only was the Monarchy made of ink and paper, but that the community, and even the individual – as well as the public sphere that they produced in their mutual interaction – were too.

Virginia García-Acosta

Decide, apply and communicate: The colonial administration in Mexico faced with extreme weather episodes*

1. Introduction

The responses to extreme geological or weather episodes, both in the past and in the present, develop from decisions, actions and communications. This is the focus of this paper, which sets out some ideas related to their effects on the socio-political complex that made up the Hispanic Monarchy. With this, I intend to contribute to constructing methodological models for broader application to societies characterized as forming part of the ancien régime – in this case in territories that were part of the Bourbon administration.

The scope of the factual basis used is New Spain during the final phase of the Mexican colonial period: the end of the eighteenth century and

* This paper is the result of reflections we made during two international multidisciplinary research projects: the APURIS Project ('Les administrations publiques face aux risques naturels dans les monarchies bourbonniennes, XVIII^e-début du XIX^e siècle', coord. Armando Alberola, Domenico Cecere and Jean-Philippe Luis) and CRICATEPH ('Climate, risk, catastrophe and crisis on both sides of the Atlantic during the Little Ice Age', coord. Armando Alberola), as well as in the Seminars that supported them held in Alicante in 2019 (Fourteenth International Seminar on History and Climate and Second Seminar of the APURIS Programme) and in Naples in 2020 (*Comunicazione, politica e gestione dell'emergenza nella Monarchia ispanica, secoli XVI–XVIII*). Its translation has been possible thanks to the DisComPoSE (*Disasters, Communication and Politics in Southwestern Europe*) project, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No. 759829). I thank the two anonymous readers for their very positive opinions, as well as for their specific suggestions that undoubtedly enriched this text.

beginning of the nineteenth century. The Viceroyalty of New Spain then extended from New Mexico and Alta California in the north to the borders of the Kingdom of Guatemala in the south (Map 1).

The information used in our analysis relates to the functioning of New Spain’s administration in the event of hurricanes and excessive rain that caused floods, or a scarcity of rainfall leading to droughts, resulting both in what we call extreme weather episodes.



Map 1. Extent and boundaries of the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

The paper focuses on identifying and analysing the responses and specific actions of the Bourbon administration to these episodes, which caused what we have identified as agricultural disasters, as their effects were felt particularly in the agricultural sector. Although the origins of these agricultural disasters were directly related to some natural hazard, they were closely linked to the social, economic and sometimes even political and

cultural conditions of the region studied, that is, with the vulnerability of the context in which they appeared¹.

I begin with a still preliminary hypothesis, which is based on the assumption that the responses of local civil authorities to such episodes were increasingly weak, slow and inefficient. This was an important element that added to those that led to the outbreak of the War of Independence². As Brian Hamnett rightly points out, a variety of structural problems and circumstances of all kinds must be considered to understand the flare-up of a war like the Mexican one at the beginning of the nineteenth century³. Among them, he mentions precisely those of an environmental nature. In this case I would add one more factor: the prolonged scarcity and lack of food for basic consumption, which began with the agricultural crisis of 1785–1786⁴, and exacerbated the poverty of a large part of the population, in some cases reaching levels of true desperation. Added to this were other factors, such as the scarcity of rural granaries to provide supplies in cases of emergency⁵. Discontent, hopelessness, growing dissatisfaction,

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- 1 See Virginia García-Acosta, Juan Manuel Pérez Zevallos, and América Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México. Catálogo histórico*, vol. I: *Épocas prehispánica y colonial, 958–1822* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica – CIESAS, 2003), 12.
 - 2 With different emphases, authors such as Susan L. Swan and Enrique Florescano have referred to this association between agricultural crises and the beginning of the War of Independence in Mexico. But I believe it still requires not only more factual information to support it, but also an approach based on the perspective of the historical-social study of disasters. With this paper, I intend to contribute to that information. See Susan L. Swan, 'Drought and Mexico's Struggle for Independence', *Environmental Review*, 6/1 (1982), 54–62; and Enrique Florescano, and Susan L. Swan, *Breve Historia de la Sequía en México* (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1995).
 - 3 Brian Hamnett, *Roots of Insurgency: Mexican Regions, 1750–1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
 - 4 There are multiple descriptions of it. A summary is as follows: after years of good harvests, weather phenomena characterized as 'unusual' in New Spain's climatic and agricultural cycles occurred in 1785, particularly in the Valley of Mexico: serious drought and frost leading to an unprecedented maize shortage and a subsequent lack not only of that grain but of basic foods in general.
 - 5 See Hamnett, *Roots of Insurgency*; Georgina H. Endfield, *Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico. A Study in Vulnerability* (New York: Blackwell, 2008), 76. On this matter, Georgina H. Endfield expressly mentions the cases of Chihuahua,

and anger built up throughout the final decades of the eighteenth century. The last straw was the agricultural disaster of 1809–1810, which was not as great as the previous one, but happened at a critical moment for both the Viceroyalty and the Empire. An analysis of all the information that follows makes it possible to unpack this hypothesis. It consists of a series of examples selected from databases, mainly from primary sources⁶.

2. The criteria and the questions

When a disaster happens, the actions, responses or strategies adopted play a crucial role. They are closely related to the historical and cultural context in which it occurs. However, their effects on broader processes are little known and even less considered, specifically including the historical perspective.

Sources offer information related to these actions, responses or strategies that would make it possible to classify them. There would undoubtedly be various ways of classifying those actions, responses or strategies, which I shall refer hereinafter generically as ‘measures’. In this analysis I intend to shed light on three selected variables related to them: sector, time frame and character to which I shall refer later.

One of the main purposes of this paper is to study specific cases in strictly defined contexts with a central theme, related to the measures taken by a specific sector when disasters happened in a space and time within the Bourbon Monarchy, specifically New Spain during the eighteenth century. I am interested in focusing on the ‘what’, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of the measures adopted and, based on this, analysing their consequences, the results achieved and the various outcomes we have been able to identify from the documents we have worked on.

Oaxaca and Guanajuato, which she has studied in detail and has published on in various articles. A compilation of that wealth of information appeared in Endfield, *Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico*.

6 For examples of episodes of extreme weather, we use García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*; Virginia García-Acosta, and Raymundo Padilla Lozoya, *Historia y memoria de los huracanes en México. Cinco siglos* (Mexico: CIESAS – Universidad de Colima – Universidad Veracruzana, 2021).

The three variables or criteria selected were the following:

The *sector* from which the measures came. It may include basically three big groups: civil authorities, ecclesiastical authorities and the civil population. For the purposes of this publication, I chose to explore the information existing for one of these three sectors: civil authorities in the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

Within what I have called the civil authorities, I include those whose opinions, decisions, mandates, orders, judgements and even opinions are related to the events analysed. On one hand, the King and the *Consejo de Indias*, as authorities that made pronouncements from the metropolis that were always, or almost always, of a general nature. On the other hand, the New Spain authorities which, at various times and under different circumstances, took the appropriate action, as seen in the documents consulted. These include the ones appearing in Table 1. These are not all the authorities or the only authorities, and furthermore, not all of them were present throughout the Bourbon administration, but they are the ones that at some point emerged in documents relating to a disaster event⁷.

Table 1. Civil authorities in New Spain (in alphabetical order)⁸

Alcalde (Alcalde mayor, Teniente alcalde mayor)	Gobernador
<i>Alfêrez real</i>	<i>Intendente (Intendente general, Intendente-corregidor, Intendente interino, Superintendente)</i>
<i>Alguacil mayor</i>	<i>Oidor</i>

(continued)

7 So far, we have not found references to the metropolis sending specific persons/authorities to New Spain expressly appointed to deal with the emergency caused by the presence of an extreme natural hazard, as did occur in other places belonging to the Hispanic Monarchy that were geographically close to the metropolis itself. See Domenico Cecere's paper on an epidemic in the Kingdom of Naples in 1743: Domenico Cecere, 'Poteri pubblici e società di fronte alle emergenze nel Regno di Napoli: la peste in Calabria nel 1743', in Armando Alberola Romá, and Domenico Cecere, eds, *Rischio, catastrofe e gestione dell'emergenza nel Mediterraneo occidentale in Ispanoamerica in età moderna. Omaggio a Jean-Philippe Luis* (Naples – Alicante: Università di Napoli Federico II – Universidad de Alicante, 2022), 89–100.

8 To avoid confusions, most of the names or titles of the New Spanish civil authorities have been left in Spanish, as they appear in this table.

Table 1. Continued

Alcalde (Alcalde mayor, Teniente alcalde mayor)	Gobernador
<i>Audiencia real</i> (Mexico and Guadalajara)	<i>Procurador</i>
<i>Cabildo municipal, Ayuntamiento or Concejo</i> (<i>Cabildos ordinarios</i> / <i>abiertos</i>)	<i>Regidor</i>
<i>Corregidor</i>	<i>Virrey</i>
<i>Fiel ejecutor</i> (<i>Tribunal de la fiel ejecutoría</i>)	

The case of the *intendentes* or provincial governors is interesting and needs to be highlighted⁹. They appeared in 1786 as part of the many Bourbon reforms carried out, which in this case divided the Kingdom into twelve Intendencias or provinces with the aim of streamlining its administration. So they obviously do not appear in the information before that date. This is an interesting case to scrutinize in future, because as the viceroy's supposed 'right arms' in the provincial territories, it would be worth asking whether the *intendentes* had any particular administrative powers in the event of disaster. Some of their duties certainly had to do with the matter, as is clear from the following quotation corresponding precisely to the critical years of 1786 and 1809. The first is of a general nature, applicable to the entire Viceroyalty and relating to the obligation to report on the state of crops. The second one comes from Hidalgo and shows the authority *intendentes* had on matters of tax exemption:

Copia de las Ordenanzas para intendentes, dirigidas por el rey en 1786, apartado causa de policía, artículo 71: Cada cuatro meses darán los intendentes-corregidores, cuenta respectivamente al virrey o al comandante general de las fronteras y al intendente general de ejército, de la escasez o abundancia de frutos que hubiere en sus provincias, y de sus respectivos precios corrientes, para que con la noticia individual del estado de ellas en esta parte, y combinando los objetos de mi servicio y causa pública que están a cargo cada uno, providencien de acuerdo y en tiempo oportuno, socorro de sus necesidades o al beneficio y comercio (que siempre ha de ser libre) de sus frutos sobrantes, a fin de que

9 I thank the anonymous reader for the suggestion of investigating the role of this controversial political figure in relation to the matter we are concerned with here.

animados los labradores con la ventaja de los precios, no aminoren las siembras, ni se retraigan de sus útiles trabajos¹⁰.

[Copy of the Ordinances for provincial governors, issued by the King in 1786, section on government, article 71: Every four months, the *corregidores* will give an account to the viceroy or to the commanding General of borders and the General commanding the army, of the scarcity or abundance of fruits in their provinces and of their respective current prices, so that, with the individual news of the status in this respect and combining the purposes of service to me and public duty incumbent on each one, they can provide the appropriate relief for their needs in a timely manner, or for profit and trade (which must always be free) in surplus fruits, so that the farmers are encouraged by the beneficial prices and do not reduce their crops, or withdraw from their useful work].

La miseria y suma escasez de semillas y frutos que aflige a esta jurisdicción cuyas consecuencias han hecho no sólo el que no se hayan colectado los intereses de sus majestades, sino salir a los indios de sus pueblos [...] por esta causa representaron al señor intendente de esta provincia a fin de que se les exonerasen de la pensión de tributos, haciendo ver sus calamidades, cuya determinación fue que el subdelegado interino [...] cobrase con [la] suavidad que ofrecen las circunstancias del día¹¹.

[The poverty and extreme shortage of seeds and fruits that afflicts this jurisdiction, the consequences of which have not only been that the interests of Your Majesties have not been collected, but also the Indians leaving their villages [...] For this reason they petitioned the governor of this province to be exempt from the payment of taxes, citing the calamities affecting them. The decision was that the temporary sub-officer [...] should collect them as gently as required by the circumstances of the day].

This, like many other matters, will require a specific search for information and careful analysis to determine the difference civil authorities made in cases of extreme episodes and their relationship with the events that occurred in the first decade of the nineteenth century in New Spain.

The second criterion to consider was *temporal* factors. Based on this, I found three variants in the measures adopted:

- (a) Immediate. Specifically related to responding to the emergency. For example, the issue of edicts, most of which dictated measures to control scarcity (forms of rapid supply) and the consequent shortage of basic foods; supplying corn exchanges where they existed; price control

10 García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 282, year 1786.

11 *Ibidem*, file 129, year 1809.

on construction materials. The organisation of charity boards. A very frequent one (in the case of a municipal authority) was to declare itself a ‘permanent council’ to attend to urgent matters, among others.

- (b) Medium term. This included the establishment of corn exchanges and stores in places where they did not exist. The use of tax funds for reconstruction, particularly focusing on affected infrastructure works, such as roads or bridges. Grants of tax exemption, which always turned out to be differentiated.
- (c) Long term. This is the least common type, but there are cases in the documents that could fit within it, such as proposals for moving towns, few of which came to fruition¹². These are, in fact, preventive measures, although there are few of them.

The third classification criterion I chose was the *nature* of the measures, based on which three types were identified:

- (a) Mandatory. This would include the supply of basic products (including those specifically for indigenous people), price control of food and construction materials, and community work, particularly that of indigenous people.
- (b) Voluntary. For example, donations and the foundation of charity boards, the latter especially during the nineteenth century.
- (c) Extraordinary. These would include the authorization and use of the *reales novenos* [royal ninths]¹³.

This is an arbitrary classification, as all classifications usually are, but in principle it gives us a kind of matrix in order to organize and understand the forms adopted by the civil authorities in response to the events I have mentioned. It also allows future comparisons with what happened in similar situations in other parts of the Hispanic Monarchy.

12 See, for example, Alain Musset, *Ciudades nómadas del nuevo mundo* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011); Rogelio Altez, *Historia de la vulnerabilidad en Venezuela: siglos XVI–XIX* (Seville: CSIC – Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 2018).

13 The *reales novenos* referred to the ninth of the ecclesiastical tithes that were ceded to the Crown of Castile by the Church itself. Often this amount was used for extraordinary expenses, among which damage due to the presence of natural hazards was the most common cause.

With the set of cases in the area studied, it has been possible to begin to answer some more general questions, such as the ones that come below. Concerning disasters associated with natural hazards:

- How homogeneous were the measures adopted by the viceregal authorities in New Spain and within the scope of the Bourbon Monarchy?
- Is it possible to identify patterns in them?
- How much did they adapt to the norm dictated from the metropolis and how much did they respond to the conditions in the local context?
- Were these behaviours and practices modified within the period studied?

Along the same lines, I have ventured into reflections around the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the forms adopted by the metropolitan authorities to communicate decisions, with respect to how to act in the face of the effects and impacts of natural hazards and disaster processes. How were these decisions ‘translated’ by the viceregal authorities in each of the colonial areas and, in this case, is it possible to identify patterns in these forms of communication? We are interested in investigating whether the results achieved depended on these ways of communicating, transmitting and ‘translating’ the decisions made in the metropolis, or whether they were the product of another set of elements¹⁴.

My intention with questions like those above is to move forward in understanding other broader questions that have to do with the international politics of the time that concerns us. At the same time, it should help us to find out the breadth of the field of knowledge that allowed the metropolitan authorities to control and govern their territories at critical

14 See in this respect the excellent work by Guillaume Gaudin who, focusing on the seventeenth century, studies a member of the Council of the Indies and the ways in which his ‘management’ of the documents that passed through his hands accounts for the forms of communication forming part of government practice within the Hispanic Monarchy. As Thomas Calvo says in his *Preface* to Gaudin’s book, it presents a snapshot of the entire public, civil, military and religious function within the framework of the Indies, around 1645–1656, a period before the one we are considering in this paper, which nevertheless leads to wide-ranging conclusions. See Guillaume Gaudin, *El imperio de papel de Juan Díez de la Calle. Pensar y gobernar el Nuevo Mundo en el siglo XVII* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2017).

moments. In some cases, this means understanding the link between the responses made and the actions undertaken for other major events, such as the outbreak of wars of independence in the territories under the control of the Hispanic Monarchy.

The search for historical information was also related to identifying elements linked to the content, time or appropriateness the responses of the metropolitan authorities had. How homogeneous or heterogeneous were they? Were they timely or late in issuing them? And, finally, how accurate and effective did they turn out to be? The above is related both to the responses and actions undertaken by the metropolitan authorities, but also to their communication to the viceregal authorities – in this case, in New Spain – and their implementation in the colonial territories. And, if it is possible to speak of positive, relevant, effective results, or negative, inappropriate or inadequate results, it would be worth asking for whom they were positive or negative?

The existence of possible coincidences or concurrences to these answers, in their communication and in their implementation, would help us to identify patterns and the way in which those patterns were configured. The recurring hazards, such as hurricanes, in New Spain may have had some formative impact on political decisions and their institutionalization. Some documented cases for Europe seem to show this. Such is the case of the river floods in Strasbourg and Florence in the Renaissance, which led to learning and professionalization processes¹⁵, or the recurring droughts around Valencia during the eighteenth century, which make it possible to identify and classify the measures implemented¹⁶. The local and/or regional differences or continuities in these ‘patterns’ could make it possible, at the time, to speak of a kind of ‘New Spanish pattern’: a distinctive ‘colonial pattern’ within the Hispanic Monarchy.

15 Gerrit Jasper Schenk, ‘Managing Natural Hazards: Environment, Society, and Politics in the Upper Rhine Valley and Tuscany in the Renaissance (ca. 1270–1570)’, in Andrea Janku, Gerrit J. Schenk, and Franz Mauelshagen, eds, *Historical Disasters in Context: Science, Religion and Politics* (New York – London: Routledge, 2011), 227–60.

16 Adrián García Torres, *Riesgo natural, extremismo climático y desastre en tierras meridionales valencianas durante el siglo XVIII* (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 2018).

The crises associated with disasters and the presence of natural hazards affected the various territories making up the Hispanic Monarchy in an important and differential way on either side of the Atlantic. Hence the importance of the way both local and metropolitan authorities managed these disaster events. As I mentioned before, until now, despite its importance, this topic has been ignored. How did decision-making in the face of extreme geological or climatic episodes – in risk and disaster management – influence political processes that affected the entire Bourbon Monarchy?

The formulation of these types of questions and questioning are part of our interest in deconstructing the problems raised for the case of New Spain.

3. The findings

I should point out that in this paper I focus on specific measures, which is why I do not delve into one of the most outstanding adopted by the New Spain authorities in relation to the occurrence of disasters, specifically associated with floods. I refer to the construction of Mexico City's great drain: the Huehuetoca Drain. This involved drying up the lakes that surrounded the city from its origins as Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire, to prevent the constant flooding it suffered and that continued during the viceroyalty period. This monumental engineering project, which lasted several centuries which by the way was not completed during the colonial period, has been studied by various authors at different times¹⁷.

The material available to document the measures taken by civil authorities is abundant in the sources consulted. It was therefore not easy to select the cases that would allow us to illustrate most clearly the discussion I am presenting. The selection of the three classification criteria – sector, time frame and character – was undoubtedly very useful. I will show the results following these criteria and combining them in the examples below.

17 Undoubtedly the most complete study to date is the one carried out by the historian Vera S. Candiani, as it addresses the various social processes associated with this colossal work in a very original way. See Vera S. Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land. Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

The highest authorities generally made statements only in very extreme situations. This was the case of the viceroy, for whom we will see two examples. The first of these, from 1749 had to be complied within Mexico City, while the second (1786) was applicable throughout the Viceroyalty:

Carestía de maíz, mandamiento del virrey conde de Revillagigedo en averiguación de los altos precios del maíz a pesar de haber sido las cosechas abundantes. El motivo fue el de haberse introducido en todas las haciendas y ranchos que siempre fueron de maíz, la práctica de hacer siembras de trigo. Ordena que las tierras que eran de maíz no siembren otra cosa que no sea maíz, bajo pena de multa de 500 pesos que impone al que contraviniere esa orden manda se publique por *bando*¹⁸.

[Shortage of maize, order of the viceroy, the count of Revillagigedo, to investigate the high price of maize despite abundant harvests. The reason was that the practice of sowing wheat had been introduced in all the *haciendas* and *ranchos* that had always had maize. He orders that the lands that always grew maize should not sow anything other than maize, under penalty of a 500 *pesos* fine imposed on anyone who breaches that order, which must be published by *edict*].

El virrey de Gálvez, ordena a todas las jurisdicciones del reino, informen a los labradores y hacendados la necesidad de semillas, para que cuanto antes adelanten sus cosechas y presenten una relación de maíz, por la especulación y carestía que se produce¹⁹.

[Viceroy Gálvez orders all jurisdictions of the kingdom to inform farmers and *hacendados* of the need for seeds, so that they can bring their harvests forward as much as possible and present an account of the maize they have, due to the speculation and scarcity that is occurring].

In fact, edicts signed by the viceroy himself were issued. Below are three examples referring, like the previous one, to the year of the great agricultural crisis of 1785–1786²⁰, in which the

18 García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 363, 5 May 1749.

19 *Ibidem*, file 441, year 1786.

20 See Enrique Florescano, *Precios del maíz y crisis agrícolas en México (1708–1810)* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1969); Enrique Florescano, and Rodolfo Pastor, *Fuentes para la historia de la crisis agrícola de 1785–1786*, 2 vols. (Mexico: Archivo General de la Nación, 1981); Virginia García-Acosta, ‘La prensa novohispana y sus aportes para el estudio histórico-social de los desastres en México’, in Luis Alberto Arrijoja, and Armando Alberola, eds, *Clima, desastres y convulsiones sociales en España e Hispanoamérica, siglos XVII-XX* (Zamora – Alicante: El Colegio de Michoacán – Universidad de Alicante, 2016), 61–80; Adrián García Torres, ‘Sequías y heladas en la ciudad de México en el

corresponding edict refers to matters such as scarcity and extraordinary crops²¹:

*Bando del virrey sobre limosnas y mendicidad ante la escasez. Abril de 1786*²².

[Viceroy's *edict* on alms and begging in the face of scarcity].

*Bando del virrey que permite el uso libre de la pesca en los ríos y lagunas interiores para facilitar el abasto de los pueblos en la escasez de maíz. Enero de 1786*²³.

[Viceroy's *edict* allowing free fishing in the rivers and inland lagoons to facilitate supply to the towns during the maize shortage. January 1786].

*Bando que el Virrey conde de Gálvez manda a los gobernadores, corregidores, alcaldes, tenientes generales de todas las jurisdicciones, explicando la orden circular del 12 de octubre de 1785, que se promuevan las siembras ordinarias y que este año deben sembrar aún más para que se subsane la escasez de maíz y trigo*²⁴.

[*Edict* from the Viceroy, the Count of Gálvez to *gobernadores, corregidores, alcaldes* and tenientes generales of all jurisdictions, explaining the circular order of 12 October 1785, that ordinary planting be promoted and that this year even more should be planted to remedy the shortage of maize and wheat].

siglo XVIII: episodios de mayor impacto socioeconómico', in Armando Alberola Romá, ed., *Riesgo, desastre y miedo en la península Ibérica y México durante la Edad Moderna* (Alicante-Zamora: Universidad de Alicante – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2018), 183–208; Adrián García Torres, '“Este país ya no es la Nueva España, aquella que conquistó Cortés”: meteorología adversa y crisis agrícolas en el Valle de México (1760–1800)', *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2021), 189–217.

- 21 We can find most of the edicts in the municipal archives, in the section corresponding to town council minutes, but also in sections of the Archivo General de la Nación de México (henceforth AGNM) as *Alcaldes Mayores, Alhóndigas, Comercio, Impresos Oficiales* and even in the few newspapers that circulated in New Spain during the eighteenth century.
- 22 García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 356, April 1786.
- 23 *Ibidem*, file 284, January 1786.
- 24 *Ibidem*, file 321, 22–27 February 1786.



Map 2. Current political division of the Mexican Republic²⁵.

Created by: Jorge Luis Angel, 2022.

The edicts issued and identified with these events were mandatory and were related to actions which, as in two of the previous examples, basically had to do with price control and ensuring supply. Below are the reasons for issuing an edict at the capital of Zacatlán de las Manzanas, Puebla, by order of the *alcaldes mayores*, signed in 1781:

Certificamos en cuanto podemos, debemos y el derecho nos permite que por cuanto nos consta, la escasez de granos en toda esta jurisdicción de Zacatlán, proveniente así de la antecedente epidemia, en la que perecieron muchos indios, que en gran parte auxiliaban al público con sus siembras, como también de los fuertes hielos que se han experimentado [...] no se extrajesen granos algunos, mandándolo por *bando* y con multa al arbitrio del excelentísimo señor virrey

25 I have decided to include this map to make it easier for readers to locate the examples, as the current political division by states of the Mexican Republic has been used in the information that appears both in García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, and in this paper.

de esta Nueva España [...] que los granos se vendan en la plaza pública, para el abasto del público y consuelo de los pobres, todo lo que por ser verdad y a pedimento de dicho caballero corregidor damos la presente certificación que firmamos en este pueblo de cabecera de Zacatlán de las Manzanas, a dos de enero de mil setecientos ochenta y un años²⁶.

[We certify, in as far as we may, must and are permitted to do in law, that, as far as we know, the shortage of grain in this entire jurisdiction of Zacatlán, originating from the previous epidemic, in which many Indians perished, who helped the public to a great extent with the crops they sowed, as well as the severe frosts experienced [...], that no grains should be taken elsewhere. We order this by *edict*, backed by a fine at the discretion of His Excellency the Viceroy of New Spain, [...] that the grain must be sold in the public square to supply the public and console the poor. All this being true, and at the request of the *corregidor*, we issue this certificate, which we sign in this town of Zacatlán de las Manzanas, on 2 January 1781].

Issued based on the meetings of the Town Council and frequently included in the council's minutes, these form the majority of the edicts found. They generally refer to times when extreme weather episodes occurred as a result of disaster processes or translated into disastrous events, reflected in scarcity and extreme shortage. This is the case for the following examples, some of which correspond to periods prior to the great agricultural crisis of 1785–1786, which I have already mentioned and which refer to the supply of basic products such as wheat bread and meat. They are documents found for Guadalajara, Jalisco (1750) and Saltillo, Coahuila (1783):

En ocasión a la escasez de alimentos en la ciudad de Guadalajara a dieciocho de febrero de mil setecientos y cincuenta años, se reunió el cabildo para signar precios a los géneros comestibles y por tanto hacer visitas a las tiendas, y los precios serán puestos por los señores don José Frago, José de Salazar, y don Alejandro Contreras (vecinos y mercaderes de la ciudad de Guadalajara). A continuación, se presenta el producto y su precio. Se les informó a los mercaderes no excedan de las posturas y se tenga cuidado de que no haya regatones de géneros comestibles, y ocurran al señor fiel ejecutor para el sello y reconocimiento de balanzas, pesas y medidas. Todo lo anterior se mandó que se pregone por *bando* y se fijen edictos en las partes públicas²⁷.

26 García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 725, year 1781.

27 *Ibidem*, file 379, year 1750.

[Due to the shortage of food in the city of Guadalajara, on 18 February 1750 the council met to set prices for edible goods and therefore make visits to stores. Prices will be set by Mr. José Fragoso, Mr. José de Salazar and Mr. Alejandro Contreras (residents and merchants of the city of Guadalajara). The products and prices are presented below. Merchants were informed not to exceed the positions and to be careful that there is no dealing in edible goods, and that they go to the Loyal Executor for the seal and for recognition of scales, weights and measures. All of the above was ordered to be proclaimed by *edict* posted in public spaces].

Moreover, in July 1783 an *edict* was issued regarding the amount that bakers must produce due to the ‘epidemic’ that damaged wheat occurring this year. The *edict* determined that each baker had to give thirty-six ounces of baked bread for one real and eighteen ounces for half a real; and for *semita* bread, fifty-six ounces for one real and twenty-eight ounces for half. The bread was understood to be properly made and cooked, and fines were imposed on those who selling bread short for the first time, and also for a second offence. The shortage of meat of both species subject the obligation was mentioned, together with the introduction of dead animal carcasses²⁸.

We have already mentioned that the consumption of wheat, mainly in the form of bread, was already quite widespread by the second half of the eighteenth century²⁹. Although consumption was differentiated³⁰, the growing of the cereal had extended to the degree that the proclamation of 1749 mentioned earlier referred to it replacing maize in land previously used for growing the latter crop, leading to a threatened shortage of this basic grain. The wheat crisis of 1770–1771, which we have worked on elsewhere³¹ and which resulted in a disastrous event of considerable magnitude at the time, also appeared in a series of edicts aimed at preventing a

28 *Ibidem*, file 17, July 1783.

29 Virginia García-Acosta, ‘El pan de maíz y el pan de trigo: una lucha por el dominio del panorama alimentario urbano colonial’, in Janet Long, ed., *Conquista y comida. Consecuencias del encuentro de dos mundos* (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la UNAM, 1996), 265–82.

30 Virginia García-Acosta, ‘La alimentación en la ciudad de México: el consumo de pan en el siglo XVIII’, *Historias*, 19 (1998), 73–80.

31 Virginia García-Acosta, ‘Gestión y manejo de la crisis agrícola triguera de 1770–1771 en Nueva España’, in Alberola Romá, and Cecere, ed., *Rischio, catastrofe e gestione dell'emergenza*, 65–87.

shortage of it beyond the confines of Mexico City. This is despite the fact that some still maintain that wheat bread consumption was concentrated exclusively in the capital. Here, I present two examples of edicts found in the Morelia Municipal Archive and issued in that very year of 1770, both from Morelia, Michoacán. The municipal council's concern about the matter is clear:

Se confirió sobre el actual precio de las harinas y pan que se está vendiendo y se acordó se eche *bando* por el señor presidente para que por ahora, y hasta nueva providencia, se den 15 onzas por medio real bien cocido y que el señor fiel ejecutor cele su cumplimiento como corresponde a su empleo³².

[There was a discussion on the current price of the flour and bread being sold and it was agreed that the chairman should issue *an edict* so that, from now on until further notice, 15 ounces of well-baked bread are given for half a real and that the *fiel ejecutor* will do his duty to ensure compliance with this].

Se tiene presente el actual precio a que se vende la harina, que es el de trece pesos cuatro reales y que en lo futuro puede alterarse, por ser el tiempo en que los labradores se hayan ocupados, unos en la siembra de trigo y otros en la cosecha del maíz, con cuyo motivo embarazados para la trilla de dicho trigo o para la conducción de harinas, no entrará para su expendio en esta ciudad y escaseándose dichas harinas no sólo en esta dicha ciudad sino en las demás partes y lugares de esta jurisdicción y provincia y por consiguiente puede subir más de precio la harina y trigo y acaece lo mismo en otras jurisdicciones y proporcionarse en ellas a los mencionados labradores alguna utilidad o mejor venta y por lograrla extraerán de esta jurisdicción para expender en las otras los insinuados efectos, resultando de su escasez o alteración de precio conocido daño y notorio perjuicio del abastecimiento público de esta ciudad y provincia; para evitar las insinuadas resultas, acordaron dichos señores se publique por *bando* en esta ciudad que ninguno de los nominados labradores con ningún pretexto, razón o motivo, saque a vender trigo o harina de esta Jurisdicción a otra distinta y pidieron así se ejecute ... y para que ninguno alegue ignorancia se despache por cordillera el insinuado *bando*, para que cada uno de sus lugartenientes según el derrotero que se ponga al margen, lo publiquen en la cabecera de sus respectivos partidos de esta provincia, pasando de uno a otro conforme a dicho derrotero y devolviéndose del último a esta ciudad, imponiendo para el cumplimiento de lo así determinado las más severas penas, que sean de su arbitrio y suficientes para contener la extracción de harina o trigo y evitar la transgresión de lo acordado³³.

32 Minutes of the meeting of 6 June 1770. See García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 574.

33 Minutes of the Council Meeting of 13 November 1770. *Ibidem*, file 58.

[The current price at which flour is sold, which is thirteen pesos four *reales* is kept in mind, although in the future this can be altered, as it is the time when the farmers have been busy, some sowing of wheat and others with the maize harvest, which means they are threshing the wheat or making flour and will not enter this city to sell them. Such flour is scarce not only in this city but in the other parts and places of this jurisdiction and province, and therefore the price of flour and wheat can rise. The same thing is happening in other jurisdictions and there the farmers are provided with some profit or better prices, and to achieve these they will take it from this jurisdiction to sell it in others, leading to the effects suggested. The results are a shortage, or changes to the normal price, damaging the public supply in this city and province. To prevent these results, these gentlemen resolve to publish by *edict* in this city that none of the named farmers, will sell wheat or flour from this jurisdiction in a different one under any pretext, reason or motive, and they as that this order be carried out... And so that no one can claim ignorance, this *edict* is dispatched throughout the mountains, so that each lieutenant shall publish it in the headquarters of their respective divisions of this province, in accordance with the route set out in the margin and then returning to this city. The most severe penalties are imposed to ensure compliance with what has been determined, which are at their discretion and sufficient to contain the removal of flour or wheat and prevent breach of the resolution].

The establishment of public granaries, such as *pósitos* (places to store grain), or *alhóndigas* (places destined for the controlled sale in quantity and price by the authorities), was frequent in times of scarcity and high prices of basic grains, as was demand for them in places where they did not exist. As I mentioned before, it is considered that the insufficiency of this type of warehouse and sale spaces in the countryside was one more element that added to the discontent in the years before the independence revolt. Three examples of this, which reflect quite a frequent form of ‘social storage’³⁴, are shown below. They come from spaces far away from one another and are related to extreme events that occurred in Chihuahua (1720–1730s) and Oaxaca (late 1920s), recorded by Endfield:

The corn exchange in San Felipe del Real de Chihuahua, for example, was founded in the early 1730s after a period of worrying harvest failures in the middle 1720s. The harvests of 1724 had been thin and maize shortages and scarcity of wheat flour were recorded around this time. Council officials had already begun to ration bread, and special arrangements had been made to slaughter extra livestock to feed the poor [...]. Despite such measures, however, some of the poorest sectors of society resorted to begging for food from house to house,

34 Endfield, *Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico*, 76.

and a public granary was deemed essential in an effort to avoid such hardship form being repeated³⁵.

Similarly, in Oaxaca in 1729, preceding a period of grain scarcity that would affect the whole of the region in the early 1730s, requests were made to build an *alhóndiga* 'like those they have in all the cities'. The lack of a public granary hitherto had meant that there was 'almost always scarcity experienced in the city (including the current year [1729] when prices have risen to 12 pesos per load'. The fundamental need for a public grain store would, it was hoped, bring an end to the 'hardships that the poor people suffer'³⁶.

Although it was considered to be 'the only remedy to contain the price increases that happen [...] with the scarcity of rain or extemporaneous frosts', many towns lacked them, as shown by a note dated 1744 in Guanajuato³⁷.

This situation was changing very slowly and little by little granaries were built in different parts of the Viceroyalty. For example, by the middle of the eighteenth century there was already a royal granary at the city of Chihuahua and in 1774 a grain store was established in Guanajuato³⁸.

One of the most commonly recurring issues when an extreme episode occurred related to the taxes to be paid by the population living in the Viceroyalty. It occurs throughout the period chosen for this study, but also in previous centuries. I am referring expressly to requests for exemption from paying taxes, sales taxes, and so on³⁹. Sometimes these requests

35 *Ibidem*.

36 *Ibidem*, 78. In all cases, the information Endfield presents comes from directly consulted primary sources: Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (AGEO), Archivo Histórico del Estado de Guanajuato (AHEG), Archivo Histórico Municipal de Chihuahua (AHMCH), Archivo Histórico Municipal de León Guanajuato (AHML) and Archivo Histórico Municipal de Oaxaca (AHMO).

37 *Ibidem*, 79.

38 This is a subject that undoubtedly requires further research: how many corn exchanges and public granaries had been established in New Spain by the second half of the eighteenth century? Where were they? Did they really operate at critical points as warehouses and controlled markets for basic grains?

39 Most of the documents relating to taxes can be found at AGNM in the sections *Tributos*, and also in *Reales cédulas originales*, *Tierras*, *Alcaldes Mayores*. Others come from the Biblioteca Pública del Estado de Jalisco (BPEJ), Archivo de la Real Audiencia de Guadalajara (ARAG), section *Civil*, AGEO, section *Tesorería principal de Oaxaca*, Archivo Judicial del Estado de Puebla (AJEP), Archivo Histórico del Estado de Zacatecas (AHEZ), section *Ayuntamiento*, Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología (AHMINAH), sections

are part of genuinely rich accounts, allowing the disastrous events to be reconstructed in considerable detail. The following two references are examples of this. Although they are somewhat long, they concern exactly the point I have been mentioning. They come from various towns in two adjacent spaces. The first three (Puebla) mention Chiautla de la Sal, Santa Ana, Teotlalco and Xolalpan, and the fourth, from the same year, is from Tenango (located in what is now known as Estado de México). The Puebla one talks about a lack of rain, scarcity and shortage of maize, a ‘plague of fevers’, hunger, mortality ‘and other calamities’. The Oaxaca one refers to the presence of a hurricane with strong winds and fire, death of cattle, shortages and scarcity of corn. It mentions ‘muchos desastres’ [many disasters], an uncommon term in documentation from this time, as the usual term is ‘calamidad’ [calamity]:

Don Cristóbal de Paz y Pinzón, alcalde mayor de esta jurisdicción de Chiautla de la Sal y su agregado de Teotlalco y Xolapa [*sic*], con el debido respeto hará presente a la superior de vuestra excelencia que con motivo de las penurias de la hambre, peste, mortandad y otras calamidades que los han acosado a los indios de dicho Xolalpa [*sic*], como parece de la adjunta carta [...] sobre la cabecera de la concepción y la certificación sobre el barrio de Santa Ana [...] no he podido conseguir hasta la presente el total cobro del tiempo de agosto y parte que restan desde abril, aunque he practicado las más eficaces diligencias por lo que y lastimado [al] ver el estado de estos miserables, he determinado manifestar a la piedad de vuestra excelencia [...] para en vista se sirva vuestra excelencia mandar lo que de su superior agrado que como siempre será lo mejor⁴⁰.

[Don Cristóbal de Paz y Pinzón, *alcalde mayor* of this jurisdiction of Chiautla de la Sal and its attached towns of Teotlalco and Xolapa [*sic*], will, with due respect, present to your excellency that due to the hardships of hunger, plague, mortality and other calamities that have afflicted the Indians of Xolalpa [*sic*], as appears from the attached letter (...) concerning the capital of La Concepción and the certification about the *barrio* of Santa Ana (...) Until now I have not been able to achieve full payment for the time in August or the remainder since April, although I have worked as diligently as possible, so that, and full of pity for the condition of those wretched people, I have decided to show Your Excellency’s

León, Oaxaca, Tlaxcala, Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, Coahuila (AMS), section *Presidencia municipal*, Archivo Histórico Municipal de Morelia, Michoacán (AHMM), section *Gobierno*, and other places.

40 García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 75, Puebla 27 October 1789.

mercy (...) so that Your Excellency may order whatever you see fit at your superior level, which is always the best decision].

Certifico en debida forma, que desde el mes de enero de este presente año hasta el presente octubre han padecido los hijos del pueblo de Santa Ana, de esta dicha doctrina, una continua peste de fiebres, en cuyo tiempo han muerto hasta el día de hoy 51 y de éstos han sido solamente tributarios 35, y los restantes párvulos y doncellas, cuya peste ha sido tan rigurosa que se han visto y están experimentando hasta la presente las más casas del relacionado pueblo, contagiadas, padeciendo al mismo tiempo sus familias, tantas miserias y hambre a causa de la notoria escasez de maíces que han resentido, por la pérdida de cosechas que tuvieron el año pasado; cual me ha sido tan constante, como haber yo mismo piadosamente socorrido en la manera en que he podido, valiéndome de varias industrias, hasta mandar traer maíz a otros distantes pueblos para que dichos mis feligreses, particularmente los que han padecido las calamidades y peste referidas no carecieran de aquel alimento preciso [...]. El señor don Antonio Martínez, cura, párroco, vicario y juez eclesiástico de esta doctrina de Santa María Xolalpan [...]. Dijo que es cierto, que el maíz se ha visto a seis pesos el año pasado y en este presente al propio precio y en la cosecha que estamos actualmente en ella a 3 pesos no tan sólo en aquel pueblo, sino en toda la jurisdicción, respecto a haberse perdido más de la mitad de la cosecha por la escasez de las aguas y por lo que dice de la enfermedad, que han padecido los de Xolalpan, son como 90 los tributarios que han fallecido⁴¹.

[I duly certify that from the month of January of this year until this October the people of the town of Santa Ana suffered, as stated, from a continuous plague of fevers. During this time, 51 of them have died, although only 35 were taxpayers – the rest were bachelors and maids. The plague has been so severe that the most houses in town have been or are still infected and at the same time the families have suffered such poverty and hunger because of the well-known shortage of corn that they have suffered due to the loss of crops last year. This has been so clear to me that I myself have piously helped in any way I could by means of various works, even sending for maize from other distant towns so that my parishioners, particularly those who have suffered the aforementioned calamities and plague, would not lack that food (...). Mr. Antonio Martínez, parish priest, vicar and ecclesiastical judge of this *doctrina* of Santa María Xolalpan (...). He said that it was true, that corn was been seen at six pesos last year and at the moment, and although we are currently in the harvest period, it stands at 3 pesos not only in that town, but in the entire jurisdiction, considering that more than half of the harvest has been lost due to lack of water and because of what he says about the disease, which those of Xolalpan have suffered. There, about 90 taxpayers have died].

41 *Ibidem*.

Cumpliendo con la superior orden de vuestra excelencia de 4 de noviembre último, en que se sirvió acompañarme una representación del alcalde mayor de Chiautla de la Sal, y otros documentos dirigidos todos a solicitar exención de tributos, comisioné para la oportuna averiguación al administrador de Tabasco de aquel partido, el cual lo firmó y remitió a vuestra excelencia. De ella aparece ser cierta la miseria que los indios representaron, la mortandad de ellos y carestía de maíz, pero también convence el abuso que tienen de gastar y empeñarse en las fiestas de sus pueblos, imposibilitándose con éstas de satisfacer el tributo... En consulta del alcalde mayor se menciona no haber acabado de pagar los naturales de dicho Xolalpan barrio de Santa Ana, el tercio de agosto y que le restaban parte del de abril de 89 a causa de la peste y mortandad de contribuyentes que había acaecido de sus resultas y la carestía de maíz que se experimentaba entonces y todo se halla justificado con la carta y certificación del cura y declaraciones de los testigos, pero el citado alcalde mayor no expresa lo que restaban del tercio de abril⁴².

[In accordance with Your Excellency's superior order of last 4 November, in which a representative of the *alcalde mayor* of Chiautla de la Sal accompanied me, and other documents all requesting exemption from taxes, I commissioned the administrator of Tabasco in that area, who signed it and sent it to You Excellency. From it, the poverty claimed by the Indians, their mortality and the lack of maize, appears to be true, but it also provides convincing evidence of their spending on the festivals in their towns, making it impossible to pay their taxes... In consultation with the *alcalde mayor*, it was mentioned that the people of the Santa Ana *barrio* of Xolalpan had not finished paying the third of August and that part of April 1789's money had been deducted due to the plague and death of taxpayers that had occurred as a result of this and the shortage of maize that was experienced then. Everything is justified with the letter and certification of the priest and statements of the witnesses, although the *alcalde mayor* does not state what was deducted from the 'third' of April].

Con el motivo de un fuerte aire a modo de huracán, que se experimentó en estos contornos desde el día 19 de enero, próximo pasado hasta el 22 del dicho, se incendiaron todos los montes y llegó la lumbre hasta los más pueblos de esta jurisdicción causando en todos ellos muchos desastres, quemando muchas casas y derribando el aire otras, entre ellos el que más padeció fue el de Tenango, que dista de esta cabecera como cinco leguas, en el que sólo quedaron cinco jacalillos, habiendo arrasado el fuego a la iglesia y todas las demás casas con los bienes que tenían, en tal extremo que los dejó sin abrigo alguno, porque hasta los animales padecieron [...] de la quemazón del pueblo de Tenango y pretensión de sus indios, y a que éstos se han vuelto a presentar ante mí diciendo que ya se va llegando el tiempo en que deben entregar lo perteneciente al primer tercio, y que totalmente tienen de donde verificar pues ni aún para comer alcanza por la carestía del maíz

42 *Ibidem*, Puebla, 5 November 1789.

que se halla a cuatro pesos carga; suplico a vuestra señoría rendidamente se sirva decirme lo que debo hacer en el particular [...] Dijo que le consta haber visto todas las casas de los indios de Tenango, quemadas que hasta la iglesia peligró en este incendio, no habiendo escapado más de cuatro casillas por estar retiradas del pueblo, que fue tan furioso el huracán que hizo, que no quedó monte que no se abrazara en donde tenían sus sementeras y con este incendio quedaron los miserables indios aún perecer, y que las más familias, se han retirado del pueblo buscando la manutención en varios lugares por verse los maíces y demás semillas muy escasos⁴³.

[Due to strong hurricane-like wind, which was experienced in these areas from 19 January until the 22nd, all the mountains were set on fire, which reached the most towns in this jurisdiction, causing many disasters in all of them, burning many houses, while others were blown down by the wind. Among those that suffered the most was Tenango, which is about five leagues away from this capital, in which only five hovels remained, the fire having devastated the church and all the other houses with the goods they had in them, to such an extent that it left no shelter, because even the animals suffered (...) from the burning of the town of Tenango. Its Indians, have returned to petition me saying that the time is coming when they must deliver the first 'third', and that they can absolutely verify that they do not even have enough to eat due to the high cost of maize, which is four pesos a load. I beg your lordship to please tell me what I should do in these circumstances (...) He said that he knows that he has seen all the houses of the Tenango Indians burned so that even the church was in danger in this fire, and no more than four little houses escaped because they were outside the village, and that the hurricane it made was so furious that it covered all the hills where they had their sown fields and with this fire the wretched Indians were still left to perish, as most families have withdrawn from the town looking for food in various places because they saw maize and other seeds very scarce].

Information in this respect can also be as general, as in the following requests from Guadalajara and Querétaro, both for the year 1787, following the widespread agricultural crisis:

El ayuntamiento de Guadalajara solicita dispensa de alcabala para las harinas que introduce con destino a vender a los pobres al menudeo, con el fin de remediar la escasez que se padece⁴⁴.

[Guadalajara City Council requests a waiver of sales tax on flour brought in to retail to the poor in order to remedy the shortage being suffered.]

El corregidor de Querétaro sobre que se releve a los indios de contribuir el real y medio para las arcas de comunidades⁴⁵.

43 *Ibidem*, file 63, Mexico 1789.

44 *Ibidem*, file 442, year 1787.

45 *Ibidem*, file 444, year 1787.

[The *corregidor* of Querétaro on the exemption for indigenous people on their one-and-a-half real contribution to the community fund.]

Sometimes the dates of exemption requests in some areas correspond to the revocation of exemptions in others. In the following example, from San José de Toluca in the *Estado de México*, in the same year that the exemption was being requested in Guadalajara and Querétaro, as in the previous examples, the following ruling was made by the ‘adviser to the *superintendente subdelegado* of the Royal Treasury’:

Por despacho fechado en México el 21 de septiembre de 1787, el fiscal de Real Hacienda resolvió (según órdenes giradas por la dirección general de aduanas foráneas el 15 y 16 de diciembre de 1786 a sus administradores), ‘que la libertad e indultos de alcabala concedidos antes, con motivo de escasez de semillas, no debía continuar en el año presente’. El asesor del superintendente subdelegado de Real Hacienda, dictaminó lo mismo que el fiscal y está de acuerdo en que corresponde resolver legítimamente este asunto a la dirección general de aduanas foráneas⁴⁶.

[By dispatch dated in Mexico on 21 September 1787, the Royal Treasury *fiscal* resolved (according to orders issued by the general directorate of foreign customers) on 15 and 16 December 1786 to its administrators), ‘that the freedom and exemption from sales tax granted before, due to scarcity of seeds, should not continue in the present year (1787)’. The adviser to the *superintendente subdelegado* of the Royal Treasury ruled the same as the *fiscal* and agrees that it is up to the general directorate of foreign customs to legitimately resolve this matter].

The authorities that used to request these exemptions were generally not those whose scope of action was the region or the Viceroyalty but rather local authorities: municipal or town councils, the *alcalde mayor*, the *regidor* and the *corregidor*. A large number of these requests refer to indigenous people who were unable to pay their taxes and, not receiving a tax exemption, made requests such as the following, which is from Zacatecas and also involves the priest of the town of Tabasco:

El fiscal de lo civil dice que vuestra excelencia, puede servirse de remitir la antecedente representación de don José Ignacio Tello de Lomas, cura del pueblo de Tabasco jurisdicción de Nochistlán, al teniente letrado encargado de la intendencia de Zacatecas, para que informe lo que se le ofrezca en razón de la solicitud de dicho párroco de que *se permita a los indios de aquel pueblo pagar los tributos con los fondos de su arca de comunidad, que se suspenda la exacción*

46 *Ibidem*, file 446, year 1787.

*del real y medio mi entras dure la calamidad que padecen, y que se les ministre el sobrante para sembrar sus terrenos y con las resultas se pase al señor fiscal*⁴⁷.

[The *fiscal de lo civil* says that Your Excellency may be interested in the foregoing representation of José Ignacio Tello de Lomas, priest of the town of Tabasco, jurisdiction of Nochistlán, to the *teniente letrado* responsible for the Zacatecas intendency, so that he can report what can be *offered considering the request of this parish priest that the Indians of that town be allowed to pay their taxes with community funds, that the levying of the one-and-a-half reals be suspended while the calamity they are suffering lasts, and that the surplus should be supplied so that they can sow their land*, and with the results it is passed to the *fiscal*.]

Or else the indigenous population, to avoid paying taxes they were unable to afford given the shortage and high cost of food, ‘fled’ or ‘escaped’, as the documents put it. But they were pursued and, if found, forced to pay. Those from San Jerónimo Aculco

dijeron que es constante la suma pobreza de los indios de este partido y la necesidad que han padecido por la escasez de las semillas y caros precios, pues en dos años que no se ha cogido han experimentado grandes miserias y por esto *se huyeron muchos indios (que) hasta la presente no han vuelto* (;) *de los presentes, hará que paguen, y de los que andan ausentes luego que vengan así mismo hará que paguen en cumplimiento*⁴⁸.

[They said that the extreme poverty of the indians of this district is constant, as is the need they have suffered due to the scarcity of seeds and expensive prices, because in two years that they have not harvested they have experienced great poverty. Because of this, *many Indians have fled and until now have not returned* (;) *he will make those present pay, and he will also make those who are absent pay in compliance after they come*].

Although all the above information is essential to document the issue – in other words, to find out the explicit, documented and detailed requests that supported the exemption – in order to know who were the civil authorities making or endorsing them or the sectors of the population they mostly involved, the emphasis I have given in the reflections of this paper leads us to wonder about the response of the civil authorities to such requests.

The review of the documents found shows that, although the evidence of requests for exemption from tax payments as a result of a disaster is

47 *Ibidem*, file 201, 28 February 1810 (italics mine).

48 *Ibidem*, file 375, year 1750 (italics mine).

quite extensive, there are few references giving greater detail about how and how quickly a response was given. Although such responses were undoubtedly mandatory, as there is no tax that can be classified as voluntary (the Spanish word for tax is ‘impuesto’, literally meaning ‘imposed’), we do not currently have enough data to allow us to document in greater detail issues relating to the effectiveness these responses might have had.

The information we do have reveals astonishing slowness in responding to such requests, an immediate refusal of them or, in the best of cases, permission to delay compliance with the tax obligation for just a few months. I will now give several examples of this. This one corresponds to the first type mentioned: astonishingly slow responses. The request was made by the indigenous people of the town of Tierra Nueva, San Luis Potosí in 1788, and the answer was received in 1792:

Aprueba el rey la espera acordada en junta superior de hacienda sobre pagos de tributos, en igual de la relevación de ellos que solicitaron los indios del pueblo de Tierra Nueva en la jurisdicción de San Luis de Potosí, pertenecientes a los años de 1788 y 1789 en atención a las calamidades que han padecido. 24 de marzo de 1792⁴⁹.

[The King approves the wait for tax payments agreed in the Higher Finance Committee, as well as the relief from them that the Indians of the town of Tierra Nueva in the jurisdiction of San Luis de Potosí requested for the years 1788 and 1789, considering the calamities they have suffered. 24 March 1792].

The following case accounts for an exemption that we might describe as ‘almost not approved’, as it reveals the extension of the payment period for a maximum of one month – absolutely insufficient for the situation on which the request is based considering the reason for non-compliance given was the loss of crops. This is from an earlier date than most of the previous ones – 1726 – from Acatzingo, Jalisco, presented by the *alcalde mayor* of that town, and claiming drought.

El alcalde Santiago de la Cruz y principales del pueblo de Acatzingo decimos que, por la falta de aguas del año pasado se perdieron nuestras sementeras quedando aún perecer con nuestras pobres familias, lo cual representamos ante vuestra alteza con informaciones que en su prueba dimos, en cuya vista se sirvió la benignidad de vuestra alteza relevarnos la paga del recudimiento de maíz, es constante que faltando el maíz, no tan solamente carecemos de él para sustentarnos sino que

49 *Ibidem*, file 47 (italics mine).

como no hay cosechas que levantar, ni dónde trabajar por no tener los amos de las haciendas maíz para raciones...Piden al corregidor, los espere cuatro meses para pagar los reales tributos. *Sólo se les concedió un mes de espera*⁵⁰.

[The *alcalde* Santiago de la Cruz, and the principal residents of the town of Acatzingo say that, due to the lack of water last year, our crops were lost, and we and our poor families are still left to perish. We present this before Your Highness with information to prove it. In view of this, the benign nature of Your Highness served to relieve us of the payment on the maize harvest. It is clear that, lacking maize, not only do we not have sufficient to sustain ourselves, but, also, because there are no crops to raise, there is nowhere to work because the owners of the *haciendas* do not have maize for rations...] They ask the *corregidor* to wait for four months for them to pay the royal taxes. *They were given only a month to pay*].

The third and last one I present as part of this discussion refers to the towns of San Pedro and San Pablo Teposcolula in Oaxaca, and corresponds precisely to one of the two years of the widely documented agricultural crisis of 1809–1810⁵¹.

En el pueblo de San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula, cabecera de este partido a 29 de abril del corriente año de mil ochocientos nueve. Yo don Mateo de la Portilla administrador de rentas reales y encargado de justicia de él por superior de nombramiento del señor corregidor, intendente interino de la provincia [...] Dije que en atención a las dificultades que se han expresado en el año anterior para el cobro de los reales tributos, por la notoria general carestía de maíz que experimentan los naturales, y que a pesar de las más activas diligencias y providencias que se practicaron, como consta del expediente de la materia que existe en este archivo, no pudieron evitar su retardo. [Debido...] a que subsisten las mismas causas en el presente, líbrense oportunamente las cordilleras correspondientes por todos los pueblos del partido, a fin de que *se les estreche a sus repúblicas a las más pronta recaudación y entrega dentro del próximo mes de mayo*, por lo respectivo al tercio de abril como está mandado, tomándose en caso necesario las demás providencias que se estimen conducentes y consultando sus resultas⁵².

[In the town of San Pedro and San Pablo Teposcolula, the capital of this area on 29 April this year 1809, I, Mateo de la Portilla, administrator of royal revenues

50 *Ibidem*, file 98, year 1726 (italics mine).

51 Enrique Florescano, and Victoria San Vicente, *Fuentes para la historia de la crisis agrícola, 1809–1811* (Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985); García-Acosta, ‘La prensa novohispana’.

52 García-Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, *Desastres agrícolas en México*, file 123, year 1809 (italics mine).

and responsible for justice by appointment of the *señor corregidor, intendente interino* of the province [...] I said that considering the difficulties expressed last year for the collection of royal taxes, due to the notorious general shortage of corn experienced by the natives, and despite the most active diligences and orders that were carried out, as evidenced by the file on the matter lying in this archive, delay could not be avoided. [Due...] to the fact that the same causes continue at the present and let the corresponding *cordilleras* (a system to transmit and distribute correspondence and information) throughout all the towns of the district, so that their people are bound to pay and deliver their taxes as quickly as possible, next May. Regarding the mandatory 'third' for April, taking other measures deemed appropriate, if necessary, and consulting their results.]

The brief duration of the exemptions, which made it impossible to recover from the critical situation in order to be able to pay the tax debts, led in the medium term, to greater poverty, anger and discontent in a year when a new agricultural crisis occurred, adding to the serious situation that began in the often mentioned critical period of 1785–1786 running until the year preceding the outbreak of the War of Independence: 1810.

4. The future

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned that what I chose to call 'measures' adopted in the event of an extreme weather episode leading to a disaster are the product of the historical, political, economic and cultural context in which they arise. As I have repeatedly said, such episodes trigger or reveal pre-existing critical situations. They constitute the thread with which we can weave stories that would otherwise be invisible for certain themes, issues and problems⁵³.

In this case I have focused on some of the responses, actions and strategies of the civil authorities. The cases found and presented here, which are just an example of how much evidence exists, account for two elements

53 The first time I mentioned this idea was two decades ago now: Virginia García-Acosta, 'Historical Disaster Research', in Susanna M. Hoffman, and Anthony Oliver-Smith, eds, *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster* (Santa Fe - Oxford: School of American Research Press/James Currey Ltd., 2002), 49-66.

mentioned by the historian Quinn O. Dauer in his recently published illuminating article⁵⁴:

- (a) ‘The state’s ability to carry out an efficient and satisfactory relief effort [...]’. Or not...
- (b) ‘To solidify or strengthen governance or leadership’. Or not...

Dauer rightly mentions that some decisions made when these episodes occur lead to vulnerability to what he calls the geological, meteorological or climatic ‘forces’ that generate them. But decisions can also lead to vulnerability in decision-making capacity, in governance and in the control of the sectors affected.

The examples I have presented, based on a primary classification that would allow them to be understood and located by sector, timescale, and criteria, do not seem to show those abilities, that efficiency, that adequate and timely response, which, in the long term, would solidify or reinforce authority, particularly in the time and space we review in this paper. A good summary of the above is given by Altez, when he tells us that they were ‘pragmatic, basically reactive decisions’. For this reason he does not accept calling them measures or strategies, as they did not seek to ‘transcend generations’. In essence, they were

formal provisions, some circumstantial and others more considered, [that] did not always reach the level of jurisprudence; [...] palliative or contingency resolutions [...] repairs, reconstructions, rearrangements [...] Although they may have anticipated problems, such as the clean-up or diversion of rivers, they were not a matter of custom, but rather specific, one-off, even local, and sometimes in

54 See Quinn Dauer, ‘State and societal responses to natural disasters in Latina American and Caribbean history’, *History Compass*, 18/4 (2020), 1–12: 3. This article (despite the fact that even in its title it speaks of ‘natural disasters’, a term discarded many years ago in both anthropological and historical research on the subject) is particularly interesting and illuminating as it manages to bring together recent bibliography from different European and Latin American spaces, which is rarely analysed together: G. Bankoff, B. Fagan, V. García-Acosta, S. Johnson, A. Palacios, S. Schwartz, and C. Walker. However, fundamental authors on the subject, such as A. Alberola, R. Altez, D. Cecere, A. García Torres, F. Mauelshagen, E. Rohland and G. Schenk are missing, some of them perhaps because they have been published only in Spanish.

disagreement with general legal frameworks, or rather behind the backs of the metropolis⁵⁵.

It is undeniable that there were more appropriate responses in terms of type and time, such as some Dauer himself mentions in the case of New Spain in the seventeenth century and in the Caribbean⁵⁶. Adrián García Torres, in his account of the emergency policies in the face of the 1797 earthquake in Ecuador, even states that the ‘correspondence with the higher authorities of the Crown was fluid’⁵⁷. This seems not to have been so common within the Bourbon Monarchy, despite the fact that events of this nature could affect the stability of the regime. This is where comparative studies can provide a wealth of material⁵⁸.

In the case that we are reviewing in this paper, attention was focused on those that would make it possible to respond to the preliminary hypothesis that formulates and documents an increasingly weak, slow, and inefficient response by local civil authorities to extreme weather events. As we have pointed out, this, together with many other factors, constituted an element that added to those leading led to the outbreak of the Mexican War of Independence. These elements accumulated during the final decades of colonial rule, but it is still necessary to study in greater depth with

55 ‘Disposiciones formales, a veces circunstanciales y otras más sopesadas [que] no siempre alcanzaron la jurisprudencia; [...] paliativos o resoluciones de contingencias [...] refacciones, reconstrucciones, reordenamiento [...] Si acaso anticiparon problemas, como la limpieza o el desvío de ríos, no fueron consuetudinarias, sino específicas, puntuales, incluso locales, y a veces en discordancia con marcos jurídicos generales, o bien a espaldas de la metrópoli’. See Rogelio Altez, *A duras penas. Sociedad y naturaleza en Venezuela durante el periodo colonial* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2022), 61.

56 For these, he cites the excellent studies of Sherry Johnson and Stuart Schwartz on hurricanes in the region, to which one should add the recent work of Eleonora Rohland, particularly her latest book. See Eleonora Rohland, *Changes in the Air. Hurricanes in New Orleans from 1718 to the Present* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019).

57 Adrián García Torres, ‘Las políticas de emergencia de la administración borbónica en Ecuador frente al terremoto de 1797’, in Armando Alberola Romá, and Domenico Cecere, ed., *Rischio, catastrofe e gestione dell’emergenza*, 185–210: 209.

58 Also those that have been developed within the projects mentioned in note 1.

more information concerning whether such mandates were fulfilled or not; whether they were effective; whether communication was rapid enough, and so on. We are only beginning to explore these issues.

What we have are the results of events associated with extreme episodes which, in the case of the so-called agricultural crisis of 1785–86, would lead to a constant increase in prices and inflation during the following years of a kind never experienced before. This has been analysed on several occasions⁵⁹ as the ‘breeding ground’ which, among many other elements, led to the outbreak in 1810 of the war that would later declare the independence of Mexico.

We could link the big question related to how decision-making in disaster risk management influenced political processes that affected the Hispanic Monarchy as a whole to the specific issue of independence.

We must accept that ‘joint studies on independence in Latin America have been undergoing an exceptional boom in recent times’⁶⁰. Few make them like Brian Hamnett⁶¹, who takes a parallel look at historical processes both in the colonies as in the metropolises⁶². This is one of the purposes of this paper which I hope will contribute on the topic.

I mention this considering and accepting that it is undeniable that what is described as the ‘debacle’ of Spanish rule is not the exclusive product of internal conflicts in the colonies, such as those associated with, or caused by, events resulting from extreme geological or weather episodes. But the

59 Virginia García-Acosta, ‘Comparación entre el movimiento en los precios del trigo y del maíz y el alza generalizada de precios a fines de la época colonial’, in Virginia García-Acosta, ed., *Los precios de alimentos y manufacturas novohispanos* (Mexico: Instituto Mora – Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la UNAM, 1995), 173–92; Richard L. Garner, and Virginia García-Acosta, ‘En torno al debate sobre la inflación en México durante el siglo XVIII’, in Jorge Silva Riquer, Juan Carlos Grosso, and Carmen Yuste, eds, *Circuitos mercantiles y Mercados en Latinoamérica. Siglos XVIII–XIX* (Mexico: Instituto Mora – Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la UNAM, 1995), 161–78; Susan L. Swan, ‘Drought and Mexico’s Struggle for Independence’.

60 Sergio Serulnikov, Review to Brian Hamnett, *The End of Iberian Rule on the American Continent, 1770–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), *Historia Mexicana*, 272/1 (2019), 370–75: 370.

61 Hamnett, *The End of Iberian Rule on the American Continent*.

62 Serulnikov, Review to Brian Hamnett, 371.

capacity of the civil authorities, whether metropolitan or viceregal, to respond to them at different levels, is relevant. The response capacity was shown in those decision-making mechanisms, in the actions applied and in the ways of communicating them, some of which have been reviewed in this paper.

However, these are only sketches in this respect, and in-depth studies will have to be carried out in future.

Section II: From *relaciones* to periodicals

Annachiara Monaco

A linguistic perspective on the reporting of seventeenth-century natural disasters*

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen renewed interest in a written genre that was widespread in the early modern period: the *relazione*¹. These are short or

* This work is based on *La circolazione delle notizie e le relazioni: una prospettiva linguistica* presented with Chiara De Caprio at *Comunicazione, politica e gestione dell'emergenza nella Monarchia ispanica. Secoli XVI–XVIII* (Naples, 7–8 June 2021), an output of the DisComPoSE project (Disasters, Communication and Politics in Southwestern Europe), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 759829). The aims and structure of this paper derive from my collaboration with Chiara De Caprio, to whom I extend my profound and heartfelt thanks for everything that she has taught me. Any errors or omissions are mine alone.

1 In Italian research, *relazioni* are also known as *avvisi a stampa*. In other languages, they are known as *relaciones de sucesos*, *canards*, *news books*, *Flugschriften*, etc. See Henry Ettighausen, *How the Press Began. The Pre-Periodical Printed News in Early Modern Europe* (A Coruña: SIELAE, 2015), 251. Italian research on *relazioni* is not as extensive as, for example, Spanish research, which includes works such as Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021). Research into Italian *relazioni* is based on works such as Tullio Bulgarelli, *Gli avvisi a stampa in Roma nel Cinquecento* (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1967); Tullio Bulgarelli, and Sandro Bulgarelli, *Il giornalismo a Roma nel Seicento. Avvisi a stampa e periodici italiani conservati nelle biblioteche romane* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1988). For a historical perspective, see Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2002), 122–40. For a literary perspective, see Alberto Natale, *Gli specchi della paura. Il sensazionale e il prodigioso nella letteratura di consumo, secoli XVII–XVIII* (Rome: Carocci, 2008). For a historical linguistics perspective, see Raymund Wilhelm, *Italienische Flugschriften Des Cinquecento (1500–1550). Gattungsgeschichte und Sprachgeschichte* (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1996); Laura Ricci, 'La lingua degli avvisi a stampa (secolo XVI)', in Nadia Cannata, and Maria Antonietta Grignani, eds, *Scrivere il volgare tra Medioevo*

medium-length small-format publications that invigorated European publishing and piazzas from the first half of the sixteenth century with news of current events such as wars, coronations, beatifications, miracles, natural disasters and so on. Research into *relazioni* involves several different disciplines, from the history of communication to the history of books, from cultural history to historical linguistics, and is driven by two main features of the genre. Firstly, *relazioni* were very popular with a vast range of readers from different socio-cultural backgrounds, providing frequent access to local and less local news². Secondly, they served secular and

e Rinascimento (Pisa: Pacini, 2009), 97–114; Laura Ricci, *Paraletteratura. Lingua e stile dei generi di consumo* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), 35–9. For an interdisciplinary perspective, see Gabriel Andrés, ed., *Proto-giornalismo e letteratura. Avvisi a stampa, relaciones de sucesos* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013); Giovanni Ciappelli, and Valentina Nider, eds, *La invención de las noticias. Las relaciones de sucesos entre la literatura y la información, siglos XVI-XVIII* (Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017). See also the following works in historical linguistics on *relazioni* covering natural disasters in Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018): Chiara De Caprio, ‘Narrating Disasters: Writers and Texts Between Historical Experience and Narrative Discourse’, 19–40; Rita Fresu, ‘“The Water Ran with Such Force”. The Representation of Floods in the Early Modern Era: Textual Configurations, Conceptual Models, Linguistic Aspects’, 73–89; Francesco Montuori, ‘Voices of the “totale eccidio”: On the Lexicon of Earthquakes in the Kingdom (1456–1784)’, 41–72. On *relazioni* dealing with natural disasters, see also Annachiara Monaco, ‘People, Institutions and Saints: A Linguistic Analysis of Relazioni on the 1631 Eruption of Vesuvius’, in Milena Viceconte, Gennaro Schiano, and Domenico Cecere, eds, *Heroes in Dark Times. Saints and Officials Tackling Disasters, 16th-17th Centuries* (Rome: Viella, 2023), 21–40; Ead., *Forme testuali e stili narrativi delle relazioni a stampa sull'eruzione del Vesuvio del 1631* (in preparation).

- 2 In some research, the extensive spread of *relazioni* is seen as the foundation of the emergence of modern journalism. However, the existence of a link of this kind remains the subject of much debate. For an overview, see Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe*, 38–40 and the bibliography cited therein. There is a particularly large bibliography on the dissemination of news in early-modern Europe. See, for example, Brendan Dooley, ed., *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of the News. How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014); Joad

religious bodies as a propaganda tool to exert control over their diverse communities, especially in times of crisis such as wars, famine, revolts, natural catastrophes and so on, when it was harder for the authorities to control the huge amount of information being circulated³. More generally, *relazioni* were a flexible and heterogeneous genre that served different yet closely linked objectives⁴. They provided the general public with detailed accounts of given events and at the same time engaged readers emotionally through a skilful combination of ‘the rhetoric of entertainment and the rhetoric of manipulation’, that is, strategies whose objective was to sensationalize events by promoting a particular interpretation of the facts⁵.

This paper analyses the stylistic devices and narrative strategies used in *relazioni* about natural disasters. Disasters are particularly valuable in this kind of research as they highlight the relationship between early modern information networks and communication strategies in times of emergency⁶. Natural disasters could compromise a community’s socio-political structures not only through death and destruction but also by generating ‘expectations and fears’ in the general public⁷. Expectations and fears not only created a need for information and explanations, but also stimulated lively exchanges across social strata, engaging people who would not normally have access to information channels restricted to public bodies and

Raymond, and Noah Moxham, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016).

- 3 This led to the emergence of what historians have recently called the ‘contingent public sphere’. See Massimo Rospoche, ed., *Beyond the Public Sphere: Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2012), which contains further references to works on the link between forms of communication and power in the early modern period.
- 4 De Caprio, ‘Narrating Disasters’, 38.
- 5 Ricci, ‘La lingua degli avvisi a stampa’, 107. See also Natale, *Gli specchi della paura*, 19 for more on the ‘explicit pedagogical and indoctrinational goals’ of *relazioni* that recount miracles and gore, linking them to the ‘medieval tradition of religious and moralising *exempla*’.
- 6 On the links between texts and natural disasters, see Cecere, De Caprio, Gianfrancesco, and Palmieri, *Disaster Narratives*, which is a cornerstone of this paper.
- 7 Domenico Cecere, ‘Moralising Pamphlets: Calamities, Information and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Naples’, in Cecere, De Caprio, Gianfrancesco, and Palmieri, *Disaster Narratives*, 129–45, in particular 131.

the local elite⁸. This fostered the emergence of different and often conflicting perspectives⁹, potentially leading to discontent and political dissent that was difficult to contain simply through ‘coercion and repression’¹⁰. Public bodies therefore took great pains to manipulate words and opinions through mass information campaigns in which *relazioni* played a particularly valuable role.

We will examine twenty-five *relazioni* published following catastrophic events in the territories of the Spanish Crown in the seventeenth century, when natural disasters assumed an ever greater socio-political importance¹¹. The corpus consists of *relazioni* published between 1609 (the Seville floods) and 1693 (the Val di Noto earthquake) in various Italian cities including Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and Palermo. They cover three types of natural disaster: floods (5 *relazioni*), earthquakes (11 *relazioni*) and volcanic eruptions (9 *relazioni*). The extensive timeframe and geography covered by the corpus, and the range of different types

8 Domenico Cecere, ‘Informare e stupire. Racconti di calamità nella Napoli del XVII secolo’, in Alfonso Tortora, Domenico Cassano, and Sean Cocco, eds, *L’Europa moderna e l’antico Vesuvio. Sull’identità scientifica italiana tra i secoli XVII e XVIII* (Battipaglia: Laveglia & Carlone, 2017), 63–78; Cecere, ‘Moralising Pamphlets’.

9 Françoise Lavocat, ‘Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints’, *Poetics Today*, 33/3–4 (2012), 253–99.

10 Cecere, ‘Informare e stupire’, 64.

11 De Caprio, ‘Narrating Disasters’; Lavocat, ‘Narratives of Catastrophe’. The *relazioni* in our corpus are listed in the ‘Sources’ section. Valentina Sferragatta produced the first versions of the transcriptions, except for those on Mount Vesuvius which I transcribed for my doctoral thesis. I extend my thanks to her for sharing much of the corpus of *relazioni* she collected during her own doctoral research. See Valentina Sferragatta, *Testualità e sintassi nelle scritture del disastro: il caso delle relazioni a stampa del XVII sec.*, PhD diss., Naples, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, 2022. The following transcription conventions have been used: ampersand is always transcribed as *e* [and], abbreviations are expanded, and the following have been normalized in line with modern usage: upper/lower case, accents, apostrophes, punctuation and the *u/v* alternation. The page references to the passages analysed start from the frontispiece, whether or not page numbers were used in the original.

of catastrophe described, allows for a sound analysis of the linguistic formulations used in this genre to recount disasters.

We will apply syntactic, rhetorical, lexical and textual analysis to demonstrate how certain devices serve specific communicative purposes in *relazioni*: to provide information (Section 2), and to stir emotions and shape opinion (Section 3).

2. Providing the facts

2.1. Truth and accuracy

A useful starting point is to analyse the passages where the authors of the *relazioni* strive to assert the veracity and credibility of their accounts. This is particularly apparent in the opening and closing parts of some of the *relazioni*, where the reader's attention is caught more easily¹². See examples (1) and (2), the opening and the epilogue of two different *relazioni*:

1. Dovevo molto prima dare alla stampa lo spaventoso successo dell'horribile terremoto che li 30 del mese di luglio 1627 in venardì afflisce quasi tutta la Puglia, ma *la moltitudine de' casi occorsi et la varietà degli avvisi mi haveva talmente confuso che non sapevo né dove mi dare principio né a chi mi dovessi credere*, onde ero risoluto di non ci fare altro. Ma molti miei amici havendomi portate *lettere sopra di ciò secure e vere* mi hanno sforzato a dare in luce questo horribile caso. (Villa De Poardi 1627, 3)
2. E di tutto questo non si è stato a relatione d'altri, havendo di quelle cose lontane havuto avviso da *persone degne di fede*, ma di queste la maggior parte *vidi et tetigi*. (Oliva 1632, 8)

It is clear that *relazioni* are based on a compendium of different sources and material. The communicative ferment triggered by the disaster sparks intensive production and dissemination of news that is often confused and inconsistent, as noted in example (1). Being able to 'dare in luce' [bring to light] an event implies a careful selection of news that is truthful and

12 Bice Mortara Garavelli, *Manuale di retorica* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014), 62–6 and 102–3. On the emotive and moralising role of the opening and closing parts of a *relazione*, see Section 3.1.

accurate, either because it comes from reliable witnesses or intermediaries, or because it is an account of a first-hand experience and based on where the chronicler was relative to the event¹³. This is evident in example (2). The chronicler uses the anaphoric encapsulator ‘tutto questo’ [all this] to refer to the account of the catastrophe that he has just written¹⁴, so he is careful to point out that he has not simply put his faith in ‘relazione d’altri’ [hearsay]. With respect to events that happened near and far, which are referenced using the deictics ‘queste’ [these] and ‘quelle cose’ [those things]¹⁵, the author can rely on his own direct knowledge (‘vidi et tetigi’ [I saw and touched]) and on information provided by ‘persone degne di fede’ [trustworthy persons].

Attention to the truth of the facts recounted is also evident in the body of the *relazioni*, where the authors sometimes state openly that they do not want to dwell further on some aspect because of a lack of sufficient information or confirmed news:

3. Non me pare doverme trattenere in narrare come le diversità de’ travagli di colpi e ferite di quelli che sono stati cavati vivi etc. *sì perché*

13 The care devoted to identifying sources and citing verification measures in historiography has been noted in work from different disciplines. Approaches using historical linguistics include Davide Colussi, ‘Cronaca e storia’, in Giuseppe Antonelli, Matteo Motolese, and Lorenzo Tomasin, eds, *Storia dell’italiano scritto*, 6 vols., vol. II, *Prosa letteraria* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), 119–52, in particular 141–52; Chiara De Caprio, ‘Intertestualità’, in Giuseppe Antonelli, Matteo Motolese, and Lorenzo Tomasin, eds, *Storia dell’italiano scritto*, 6 vols., vol. V, *Testualità* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), 87–118; Chiara De Caprio, *Scrivere la storia a Napoli tra medioevo e prima età moderna* (Rome: Salerno, 2012), 87–138; Elisa De Roberto, ‘Dinamiche enunciative nel discorso storico medievale. Il caso delle strategie evidenziali’, in Massimo Palermo, ed., *Sul filo del testo. In equilibrio tra enunciato ed enunciazione* (Pisa: Pacini, 2015), 65–88; Francesco Rustici, *La lingua della storiografia italiana delle origini* (Strasbourg: ÉLiPhi, 2020), 147–51.

14 Anaphoric encapsulators refer back to ‘the contents of a whole utterance or sequence of utterances’ present earlier in the text. See Angela Ferrari, *Linguistica del testo. Principi, fenomeni, strutture* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), 205.

15 Deictics are a heterogeneous category of linguistic forms whose interpretation depends on elements in the context. Ferrari, *Linguistica*, 247–52.

non ve n'è tanta certezza sì perché mi stenderei in cose troppo minute (*Vera rel.* 1627a, 3)

4. In ordine a questo, altri raccontano varie cose, parte precedute all'incendio e parte seguite in esso e dopoi, ma *perché non sono tanto autentiche a posta le tralasso*. (Braccini 1631, 35)
5. Il danno che alla città di Catania il fuoco apportò *non posso darne veridico computo perché anco non si ha calculato*. (Squillaci 1669, 7)

The veracity and accuracy of the information thus appear to be fundamental aspects that 'enable the text to function as a *document*; that is, to provide the account of an event that actually occurred'¹⁶. In formal terms, this objectivity is primarily realized by using indirect speech and lexical choices that signal the link between the news and its source, which in turn determines the overall structure of the document (Section 2.2). We also find a large number of compositional and stylistic elements characteristic of documents designed to convey information, such as spatio-temporal indicators, lists and referential terms, which serve to contextualize the catastrophe and alert the reader to its consequences in as precise and detailed a way as possible (Section 2.3.). The following sections address these two aspects.

2.2. News networks and text structure

How the news from disaster areas was gathered by the chroniclers is constantly noted in the *relazioni*. This is often reported using indirect speech¹⁷, which is introduced using a vast array of expressions. There is frequent use of reporting verbs ('dire' [say], 'riferire' [tell, report]), as in examples (1–3). It is worth noting the use of the first-person form 'mi hanno riferito' [told me] in example (3), which the chronicler uses to signal his own role as news gatherer, and the insertion of 'che si dice per cosa certa che' [which is said to be certain] in example (1) to indicate the reliability of the information:

¹⁶ De Caprio, 'Narrating Disasters', 39.

¹⁷ For a formal definition of reported speech, see Emilia Calaresu, *Testuali parole. La dimensione pragmatica e testuale del discorso riportato* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2004).

1. Dal campanile della chiesa di San Isidoro cascò una campana che *si dice per cosa certa* che si ficcò più di due stature di huomo sottoterra. (*Rel.* 1609, 5)
2. et in detto luogho in cambio dell'acqua era tutto olio, e *dicono che* la perdita dell'olio sia più di ventimila barili (*Vera rel.* 1626, 5)
3. si sentì scuotere la terra [...], qual moto durò per lo spatio d'un pater noster detto velocemente, *secondo mi hanno riferito le persone* ch'ebbero campo di stare più attente. (*Vera, fedele e distintissima rel.* 1688, 15–16)

There is also extensive use of the lexicon of information such as the noun 'avviso + che' [news + that] in examples (4) and (5) or the verb 'avvisare + che/come' [notify + that] in example (6). In particular, the references in examples (5) and (6) specify how the news was received: carried by a 'corriero' [courier] or in the form of 'lettere' [letters].

4. la sera *venne avviso che* il torrente di Malpasso, doppo havere divorata quella terra, precipitava a divorare le due terre di Campo Rotondo e di San Pietro (*Vera e nuova rel.* 1669, 5)
5. Nel dopopranzo *un corriero* di Benevento, città papale in questo Regno, distante da qui trenta miglia, *porta avviso che* la città tutta sia diroccata (*Vera e distinta rel.* 1688, 3)
6. Da Palermo *si avvisa per lettere come* li terremoti hanno danneggiato alcuni palazzi e case senza danno di veruna persona (*Distinto ragguaglio* 1693, 4)

Analysing the passages that are linked to information networks allows us to highlight 'the documentary purpose' of *relazioni* and also to shed light on the methods and strategies used by different chroniclers to structure their accounts¹⁸. Indeed, the use of indirect speech not only introduces certain information into the text but also in many cases determines its structure. This is evident in example (7), which is the closing part of Giovanni Villa De Poardi's *Nuova relatione*, produced on the occasion of the earthquake that struck the province of Capitanata in 1627. The

18 Sergio Bozzola, *Retorica e narrazione del viaggio. Diari, relazioni, itinerari fra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Rome: Salerno, 2020), 73.

author reports a series of extraordinary ‘casi’ [successes] achieved after the disaster. Each success has its own concise paragraph starting with the conjunction ‘che’ [that], which serves to introduce reported speech. The presence of certain elements gives sentences whose paragraphs start with ‘che’ the force of citations: the framing expression ‘si diceva che’ [it was said that], the indefinite pronoun ‘altri’ [others] and the adverbial ‘di più’ [moreover] with the verbs ‘scrivono’ [they write] at the start and end of the passage. In short, the text written by the chronicler is structured around what was said or written by others¹⁹:

7. In queste rovine sono successi molti casi degni di considerazione e maraviglia insieme, de’ quali ne scriverò alcuni che non patiscono dubbio alcuno.

Che il lago di Lesina era stato molte hore senza acqua et *che* si erano trovati molti pesci lontano dal lago, per il che si diceva che il furore del terremoto havesse alzato due volte il fondo del lago; altri scrivono che con voragine habbia assorbito la città di Lesina contigua a esso lago.

Che la montagna di Civitate si era divisa in tre parti da tre voragini horribili.

Che a Rosetto si era aperta la terra con voragine longa 12 miglia.

[...] *Che* un chierico essendo sopra il campanile d’una chiesa rimase in un cantone del campanile, essendo rovinato il resto, et non potendo essere aiutato in capo a tre giorni morì.

Che un canonico, essendogli rovinata la facciata della sua casa, rimase sopra una rovinosa volta, dove non potendo essere aiutato, passati due giorni, morì. Di più scrivono che a Chieuti il terremoto habbia disradicato un intiero bosco, quantunque grandissimo, senza restarvi pure un albero. (Villa De Poardi 1627, 6–8)

In some cases, the link between the dissemination of news and the form of the *relazione* may be related to a further element, namely, the narrative strategies used by different chroniclers to structure their account. An example is *Verissima e distinta relatione* produced on the occasion of the 1693 Val di Noto earthquake. As stated by the narrator in the

19 For further details of the link between reported speech and the structure of *relazioni*, see Sferragatta, *Testualità e sintassi*, ch. IV.

introduction, the whole *relazione* is built around the statements of one Marco Calapai, who witnessed the damage caused. The first part is structured around a voyage Calapai took, sailing north along Sicily's eastern coastline, arriving in Syracuse on 9 January, then setting off for Augusta the same evening, reaching Catania on 11 January, then sailing north at some later point. On the various legs of his journey, Calapai saw the earthquake's aftermath with his own eyes and gathered information about the damage in the area ('trovò che' [he found that], 'vidde che' [he saw that], 'sentì dire' [he heard that]). The *relazione* continues this narrative structure noting the arrival of two monks in Messina on 18 January, who in turn provided information about the damage sustained elsewhere. The description of their arrival in Messina contains an ellipsis in the narrative²⁰, with Calapai's own arrival there omitted as he adopts the role of transmitter of information provided by the monks and by others who remain unidentified. Indeed, the final four paragraphs of the *relazione* are structured thematically, each describing in turn the impact of the earthquake in Messina, Palermo and southern Calabria, as illustrated in example (8):

8. *Il giorno 9 del medesimo mese che fu venerdì arrivò detto padrone a Siracusa e trovò che il terremoto di quella notte atterrò quattro case [...]. E di là partì per Augusta alle otto della notte et ivi fece giorno, e vidde che il primo terremoto haveva buttato in terra mezza città [...]. Di dove fece partenza verso Catania e vi arrivò li 11 del medesimo, e vidde che alle 20 hore e mezza all'improvviso cascò tutta la città con perdita di più di 16 milla persone [...]. Di là fece partenza per Onera lontano tre miglia, dove sentì dire essersi saputo di certo che [...]. Il giorno delli 18 arrivò in Messina un frate laico di Maria e Giesù che venne di Catania e riferì che [...]*

Lo stesso giorno delli 18 la notte arrivò a Messina il padre Giovanni Mangano da Sicaro e riferì che [...]

La Città di Messina dal primo terremoto non ricevè danno alcuno, ma con quello delli 11 restò tutta conquassata [...]

20 Gérard Genette, *Figure III. Discorso del racconto* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 155–8.

Il non esser caduta *Messina* [...] è stato un miracolo della Santissima Vergine della Lettera [...]

La Calabria Bassa si trova nella medesima forma [...]

A Palermo ha il terremoto gettati a terra molti palazzi e case (*Verissima e distinta rel.* 1693)

2.3. Confirming accuracy

In general, *relazioni* contained accurate and detailed information. This is reflected in the extensive use of temporal and spatial expressions. The opening lines often focus on the start of the event, specifying the date, the time of day or the precise moment when it occurred, and sometimes also its duration. The location is also specified, if it has not been noted in the frontispiece or the introduction:

1. *Nella città di Barcellona, capo di Catalogna vicino al mare Mediterraneo*, venne una pioggia che durò più d'un mese, continua e giorno e notte, cominciando il giorno di santo Michele (*Vera rel.* 1618, 3)
2. Deve dunque saper V.S. Illustrissima che sotto li 11 di questo mese di marzo dopo un grandissimo rimbombo di tuoni (*Vera rel.* 1669, 2)
3. *Sabbato a' sei del presente mese di giugno ad hore ventitré* incominciò l'ira del cielo (*Nuova rel.* 1682, 3)

While temporal and spatial expressions frequently occur in the opening lines that contextualize the disaster, they do not appear with the same frequency in all of the *relazioni* in the corpus. In particular, how temporal and spatial expressions are used in different *relazioni* appears to be closely linked to the duration of the event, to how large an area it affected and, as noted above (Section 2.2.), to how the writers came by the information²¹. These aspects, combined in different ways, are reflected in the

21 The analysis of the linguistic representation of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions in Montuori ('Voices', 44) emphasizes that 'the symptoms of these phenomena were often similar, and it was not always easy for the populations to distinguish between the two, both at the time of the event and upon reflection afterwards. Besides, due to its duration and spectacular nature, an eruption can be represented much more successfully than an earthquake: it is quite common to find texts that talk about earthquakes using images of eruptions. Of the various catastrophic events, earthquakes are among the hardest to describe: they

macro-textual structure of the *relazioni* and in how the aftermath of a disaster is presented. Some examples follow.

In the *relazioni* examined here, where the calamitous activity lasts for some time, the account consists of blocks of text structured temporally, with each block addressing a different phase. This happens particularly frequently in *relazioni* describing floods and, above all, volcanic eruptions. For example, the *Vera relatione* written by Franciscan monk Giacomo Milesio, published in Naples following the 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius, is a paradigm of accuracy and order with respect to the events that took place in the aftermath, which lasted for weeks. Milesio's *relazione* is structured as a diary and covers the evolution of the event over its first week. This is made clear in the frontispiece, where the reader is advised that the *relazione* is a meticulous account of the first week of the catastrophe (16–23 December 1631), with information provided 'giorno per giorno et hora per hora' [by the day and by the hour]:

4. *Vera relatione del miserabile et memorando caso successo nella falda della nominatissima Montagna di Somma [...]. Dal martedì 16 del mese di dicembre 1631 al seguente martedì 23 dell'istesso mese, giorno per giorno et hora per ora* distintamente descritta (Milesio 1631)

The body of the text then contains an endless succession of explicit temporal markers that cover the whole week, with paragraphs structured accordingly:

5. *Martedì mattina* due hore avanti giorno che fu li 16 del presente mese di dicembre 1631 della luna 21 la calenda 16, nella parte che sguarda la marina del sudetto monte, giusto nel mezzo della salita s'apri la terra [...] *Mercordì la mattina* non si vedeva il monte per la grande nebbia che v'haveva causato il fumo [...]

last a few dozen seconds and cause uneven damage on areas that are potentially very large. The modern catalogues of earthquakes have descriptive parameters (location, epicentral intensity, various types of magnitude) that were impossible to measure or calculate up until a few decades ago. Thus, in the pre-scientific era, before the nineteenth century, the description of an earthquake consisted of its duration and of the account of its effects, especially the destruction caused to the region'.

Giovedì mattina il monte si fe' veder un poco gratioso [...]

Venerdì mattino per tutto era chiaro senza nebbia né nubbe (Milesio 1631, 2–5)

As noted earlier, some of the *relazioni* use a combination of temporal structure and spatial structure. On one hand, this is because the events described happened at some distance from one another in terms of both time and space. On the other, it appears to be linked to how the information was gathered and organized. For example, the *relazione* on the Barcelona floods of 1617 (*Vera rel.* 1618) is primarily built on information gathered over several days in locations bordering the city by a certain Michele Valdeosero, who, as noted in the frontispiece, was a courier for the King of Spain.

In other *relazioni*, temporal indicators are limited to marking the onset of the disaster. In such cases, the contents are usually organized by location, examining each on the basis of the information that the chroniclers received and compiled. Overall, this approach is adopted primarily in *relazioni* on earthquakes. For example, *Vera relatione delli danni* on the 1627 Capitanata earthquake opens with the usual contextualization of the disaster in terms of its position with respect to Naples and the surrounding areas, which were left untouched, and then its position with respect to Puglia, which suffered huge damage. The rest of the *relazione* is a list of information about the different locations affected by the earthquake, with a separate short paragraph devoted to each location in which more or less the same aspects are described: the earthquake's intensity, the condition of the buildings affected, the number of fatalities and anecdotal accounts of people attempting to flee or extracting bodies from the rubble. The following example is the contextualization of the event and the first few words of subsequent paragraphs about the locations of Sansevero, Termoli and Lesina:

6. *Venerdì passato 30 luglio a hore 16 fu il terremoto in Napoli et per tutto il convicino*, quale durò per lo spatio di un credo senza fare danno alcuno, Dio gratia. Però *nel medesimo tempo in altre parti, et in particolare in Puglia*, dove ruinò affatto le terre e città intiere, con segni prodigiosi, et durò tre hore interpollatamente.

La città di Sansevero cascò tutta [...]

La città de Termoli è destrutta in parte [...]

La città di Lesina ha sentito il medemo (*Vera rel.* 1627b, 3–4)

Apart from serving to establish an overall structure for the accounts, lists are the most frequent device used to provide as much information and detail as possible about a disaster. Enumerative series of different length are often used in combination with a referential lexicon that avoids connotative expressions, both in factually descriptive sequences, as in example (7), and in narrative sequences, as in example (8), that aim to provide an exhaustive account of the aftermath:

7. Saranno molti li morti, ma sin hora non se ne sono scoperti che *11 al Giesù, 19 a San Paolo, 8 al seggio di Nido, 3 all'Arcivescato, 3 in una strada con un cavaliere di Malta e un servitore* l[à] in calesso, e altri in varii luoghi. (*Succinto racconto* [1688], 2–3)
8. la Cattedrale di detta città, ove stava la maggior parte del popolo in tempo che un sacerdote dava al medemo la beneditione col Santissimo Sacramento alla mano, precipitò seppellendo tutto il popolo in quelle ruine, restando intatto *il detto sacerdote e le due cappelle collaterali all'altare maggiore, ove è l'immagine della Santissima Vergine della Lettera e della Grazia, il coro, et il tabernacolo della gloriosa sant'Agata*, con quella parte del popolo che stava nelle sudette cappelle. (*Distinto ragguaglio* 1693, 2)

3. Stirring the soul

3.1. It felt like the last judgement

We now turn to the formal strategies adopted by chroniclers to generate awe and steer the reader towards a certain interpretation of the events described. Although *relazioni* come in many different forms, they contain a recurrent moralising paradigm: earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions are portrayed as yet another manifestation of a long series of catastrophes inflicted by God using nature's volatile forces to punish mankind for its sins²². Framing a disaster this way is evident in the opening and

22 On the perception and representation of natural disasters as divine retribution in the early modern period, see Elaine Fulton, 'Acts of God: The Confessionalization of Disaster in Reformation Europe', in Andrea Janku, Gerrit Schenk, and Franz Mauelshagen, eds, *Historical Disasters in Context. Science, Religion and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2012), 54–74.

closing parts of some of the *relazioni* when the narrator's voice emerges to point out the divine nature of the catastrophe, as in example (1), encouraging the reader to repent and emphasizing that the account of the disaster should serve as a warning for 'tutto il mondo' [the whole world], as in example (2):

1. *Servirono sempremai (benignissimi lettori) le creature di Dio per ambasciatrici de' suoi divini gastighi, come la chiusa del cielo ai Campi Palestini, la pioggia delle ceneri all'Egitto e la mano scrivente a Baldassarro. E però non fia meraviglia a voi s'a' tempi nostri s'è publicato predicatore di vera penitenza il Monte Vesuvio, affinché da quella tirati a ricovrirci sotto 'l scudo della misericordia affrancassimo i colpi del divin furore, ramentandoci insieme il modo come sa gastigare quella mano onnipotente per mezo de spaventosi portenti simili a questi c'habbiamo visti e giornalmente vediamo, poichè il dì sereno e chiaro delli 15 di dicembre (Tregliotta 1632, 5–6)*
2. *Questa è l'infelice e lagrimosa tragedia di quelle percosse provincie, il danno delle quali e lo spavento sono uguali et infiniti, dovendo servire per essemplio a tutto il mondo. (Verissima e distinta rel. 1693, 4)*

Similarly, there is constant reference to the Last Judgement to portray the devastating impact of catastrophes directed by the hand of God, as in examples (3–5), where the expression 'parere X' [to seem X, to feel like X] is used to emphasize the perspective and emotional engagement of those with first-hand experience of the disaster:

3. *arrivato il detto corriero alla città di Lerida li pareva di vedere il Giudicio Finale (Vera rel. 1618, 6)*
4. *a tutti pareva di avere la morte avanti gli occhi e che fusse loro stato intimato il giorno del Giudizio Universale (Braccini 1631, 13)*
5. *tremorno non solo tutte dette terre ma di altri lontani paesi che pareaci Giorno del Giudicio (Vera e distinta rel. 1669, 2)*

The purpose of these stylistic devices and narrative strategies is to produce fear, compassion and contrition in the reader. The strategies emerge clearly in passages where the narrator's emotional response to the events is emphasized. In particular, pointing out the extraordinary nature of the event is often couched in terms of inexpressibility: the chronicler is

faced with the problem of how to construct an expression to describe the disaster without adequate tools to do so, as what happened went well beyond what could be expressed. In example (6) we see the use of *'tale che non si può dir più'* [such that no more can be said] to describe the chaos that reigned and in example (7) *'più tosto da immaginarsi che da descriversi'* [more easily imagined than described] for the consternation of the survivors:

6. *La confusione* di quella notte congiunta con i gridi di quelli che si annegavano [...] *era tale che non si può dir più* (Rel. 1629, 6)
7. *La costernazione che è in que' che sono restati vivi è più tosto da immaginarsi che da descriversi*, mentre sentendosi di continuo crollare il terreno sotto i piedi s'aspettano di momento in momento la morte (Sincera ed esatta rel. 1693, 3)

Producing a written account of a disaster therefore requires the chronicler to seek out ways to raise the dramatic tension in order to capture the emotional charge and exceptional nature of the event. In general, a lexicon based on the semantic field of fear, damage and penitence appears throughout the *relazioni*, with brisk insistent syntactic structures that render the speed and confusion of details and situations. We see the use of rhetorical figures 'of wonder' (intensifiers, hyperbole, comparison, etc.) and rhetorical figures 'of plurality' (repetition and enumeration)²³, primarily in narrative passages designed to transport the reader to the scene of the disaster²⁴. The stereotypical nature of this approach can be evidenced by considering two themes well-suited to demonstrating the emotive and moralising aspect of accounts of disasters: the impact of natural phenomena (Section 3.2.) and how the communities affected reacted (Section 3.3.).

3.2. The force of nature and its impact

The descriptions of natural phenomena in *relazioni* that recount disasters are laced with a broad range of formal devices that note their intensity and the horror they generate. As shown in examples (1–3), there

23 Bozzola, *Retorica e narrazione del viaggio*.

24 Fresu, 'The Water Ran', 86. The term used by Fresu is 'hyper-descriptivism'.

is frequent use of forms such as ‘tanto X che Y’ [such X that Y], as in examples (1–2), and adjectives associated with fear (‘terribile’ [terrible], ‘furioso’ [furious, wild]), as in example (3), to heighten the dramatic tension:

1. la gran forza dell’acqua roppe la Porta dell’Arenale *entrando con tanta furia e gran quantità che* a l’otto hore restorno annegate de le quattro parte tre della città (*Vera rel.* 1626, 4)
2. Il lago di Lesina si perse, che per molte hore non si vidde, e poi uscì *con tanto impeto che* rovinò tutte le case de’ pescatori e si allargò più di tre miglia di quello (*Vera rel.* 1627c, 4)
3. Il giorno de’ 9 di gennaio prossimo passato nell’isola di Sicilia si sentì improvvisamente un terremoto *terribile* [...], e nel medesimo tempo il mare si ritirò alquanto [...], e poi ingrossato ritornò come un torrente *furioso* (*Sincera ed esatta rel.* 1693, 2)

There are also lexical and rhetorical devices that render the impact of the catastrophe even more forcefully. Example (4) is from *Relatione* by Antonio Gerardi, secretary of the Congregazione dei Riti, which was published following the 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius. It describes the initial phases of the disaster:

4. l’incendio s’accrebbe et *il mugito, che non vi è urlo che possa simigliarlo. Ruggiva tutta quella montagna dalle vastissime fauci* che haveva aperto il fuoco. E questo fu lo spavento che ha di gran lunga avanzato tutti gli altri, perché s’udiva rimbombar per tutto il cielo *un suono infernale con schioppi più di qualunque smisurato cannone* (Gerardi 1631, 4)

The extract contains a double hyperbole about it being impossible to find anything to compare the event against. The first notes the absolutely extraordinary nature of the roar produced by the volcano, making it impossible to find an ‘urlo che possa simigliarlo’ [a scream that might resemble it]. The second hyperbole uses the fanciful image of the roar having a greater force than ‘qualunque smisurato cannone’ [some enormous cannon]. Moreover, the use of the nouns ‘muggito’ [bellow] and ‘urlo’ [scream], and the adjective ‘infernale’ [infernal] adds a note of the monstrous and the bestial, reinforced by the sentence in which the volcano

is depicted as a ferocious animal ('Ruggiva tutta quella montagna dalle vastissime fauci') [the whole mountain roared from its gigantic maw]²⁵.

While in the cases noted above the description of natural phenomena uses connotation to intensify impact, in some *relazioni* imagery that evokes the monstrous appears in the narrative, turning the natural phenomena into infernal beings. Example (5), taken from the anonymous *Relatione della gran tempesta e diluvio d'acqua*, published following the 1609 Seville floods, describes the start of the event:

5. seguì un potentissimo soffio de venti che scotendo le nuvole mandò giù una diluviosa pioggia d'acqua *con grandini, pietre et infocate saette*. Et nel mezzo di così furiosa tempesta si sentirno spaventosi *gridi et horribili voci di demonii*, che a schiera a schiera andavano gridando et dicevano: 'Muora questa peccatrice gente che a briglia sciolta have offeso Iddio!'. Et detto questo fu la misera città furiosamente assalita da demonii, non perdonando *né a chiese, né a croci, né a qualunque cosa buona* che vi fosse, che il tutto *svelsero, distrussero et messero a terra*, castigando poi senza pietà li ostinati peccatori in quella abitanti (*Rel.* 1609, 3–4)

The storm that bore down on the city is described as an assault by demons ready to castigate 'senza pietà gli ostinati peccatori' [persistent sinners mercilessly]²⁶. Note the use of direct speech for the words of the demons: 'Muora questa peccatrice gente...' [death to these sinners...]. This marks the climax of the scene depicted, the moment just before the disaster breaks. The storm's violence is then intensified by using sequences of two or three expressions ('gridi et horribili voci' [screams and terrifying voices], 'svelsero, distrussero et messero a terra' [uprooted, destroyed and brought to the ground], etc.). Here, unlike in the case of providing information analysed above, the use of conjoined terms and direct speech does

25 The use of the word *muggito* [bellow] for the reverberating rumbling of the volcano is noted in Rosa Casapullo, 'Note sull'italiano della vulcanologia tra Seicento e Settecento', in Rosa Casapullo, and Lorenza Gianfrancesco, eds, *Napoli e il Gigante. Il Vesuvio tra immagine, scrittura e memoria* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2014), 13–53, in particular 41.

26 On the use of the infernal and the divine together in descriptions of disasters, see Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe*, 63–5.

not serve simply to provide additional detail but sharpens the dramatic tone of the narrative.

A further point that emerges from our analysis is that accounts of the consequences of a disaster emphasize the extraordinary amount of damage and injury caused, and, as in example (7), the fact that it was the most vulnerable who suffered most: ‘donne, figliuoli, vecchi’ [women, children, the elderly]. The accumulation of details about the cadavers and the rubble, especially through the use of enumeration and hyperbole (‘mille’ [a thousand], ‘infinita’ [infinite]), helps to render a scene of death and destruction:

6. et per le strade v'erano mille montoni di travi, mattoni grandi et altre infinite scaglie di legnami tra quali si trovorno *persone distese et morte, in piedi, con teste, braccia e gambe rotte e fracassate* (Rel. 1609, 5)
7. La città di Sansevero cascò tutta senza restare in piedi altro che una sola casa, nella quale vi era *una grotta grande, cisterna et pozzo, con mortalità infinita di donne, figliuoli, vecchi et altre persone civili* che in quell'ora si trovavano in casa (Vera rel. 1627b, 3)

3.3. How people reacted

To portray a disaster as divine retribution, particular attention is paid to how the local community reacted, using a set narrative format. The descriptions cover the actions of the local population, usually treated as an amorphous mass, and the measures undertaken by authorities to mitigate the damage caused²⁷.

With respect to the local population, ample space is devoted to describing the fear that assails the residents of the areas affected and their flight in search of a safe haven, as in examples (1–3):

1. Un popolo intiero è fuggito a Napoli a branchi e quasi tutti nudi: *chi* con il viso abbrugiato, *chi* con un braccio meno, *chi* con una gamba. Era spettacolo da intenerire li selci a vederli et udire i gemiti e schiamazzi: *chi* cercando il padre, *chi* il figlio, *chi* la madre, e come non gli trovavano, avvedendosi ch'erano rimasi nell'incendio, alzavano

²⁷ Monaco, ‘People, Institutions and Saints’.

- le strida alle stelle e cagionavano compassione inesplicabile. (Gerardi 1631, 6)
2. Perloch  i poveri abitanti, tutti per scampar la vita, si posero alla fuga incaminandonose verso la citt  di Catania invocandono sempre l'aggiuto di Dio [...], che al rumor facean per strada se sariano mosse a compassion l'istesse pietre: *chi* se portava i figli in cuollo, *chi* i padri et madri vecchie, *chi* ammalati, *chi* donne figliate, *chi* robbe in cuollo, e *chi* spaventati et atterriti del successo, sempre per strada piangendo et strillando (*Vera e distinta rel.* 1669, 2)
 3. Per  per pi  non tediario fo fine, ma solo li dico di quelle povere genti che restarono stanno disperse per tutte queste montagne, che in vederne qualche d'uno ci mettiamo a piangere, per vederli nudi et afflitti, et in quel misero stato ridotti. (*Nuova rel.* 1682, 4)

These examples share a number of features, including a focus on the precarious physical condition of the survivors, their laborious search for loved ones and their displacement across the areas affected. These features are rendered by the extensive use of adjectives from the semantic field of fear and destruction, such as 'spaventati et atterriti' [shocked and terrified] in example (2) and 'nudi et afflitti' [naked and distressed] in example (3), and by the use of repetition and enumeration, above all with the pronoun 'chi' [lit. 'who', but used here in the sense of 'some'], such as 'chi cercando il padre, chi il figlio, chi la madre' [some searching for a father, some for a son, some for a mother] in example (1), and 'chi se portava i figli in cuollo, chi i padri et madri vecchie, chi ammalati, chi donne figliate' [some carrying children on their backs, some their elderly fathers and mothers, some the sick, some women and their offspring] in example (2). The narrator's voice again emphasized the tenderness and compassion evoked by the sound of the steps and the wailing of the 'poveri abitanti' [poor residents] gripped by terror, a compassion expressed hyperbolically as felt even by the rocks beneath their feet, as in examples (1–2).

Moreover, there are many passages that emphasize the large numbers of people taking part in prayer and collective expiation such as processions, and their faith and contrition, with the objective of depicting the whole community's penitence, as in examples (4–5):

4. si ritornò di nuovo a far processioni *molto battendonose con pietre in petto, molte dalle lingue fandonose uscir sangue, e per tutta lor persona et da faccia*, in grandissimo numero. Molti de' quali per le tante battiture et percosse datesi *cadivan quasi morti in terra* per debolezza del sangue da loro volontariamente sparso (*Vera e distinta rel.* 1669, 3)
5. Moveva a pietà veder le donne e huomini processionalmente, *quelle scapigliate e coronate di spine, e questi con corde e sassi al collo e cenere sul capo*, battendosi, e tra gl'altri un religioso *battersi e flagellarsi con catena di ferro che faceva horrore*, vedendosi notte e giorni processioni col clero *scalzo, vestito con sacco* per la città recitando varie orationi (*Succinto Racconto* [1688], 3)

We see here the use of visually powerful imagery, focused primarily on the violent self-inflicted scourging. The instruments of penitence figure prominently ('pietre' [rocks], 'catene di ferro' [iron chains], 'corde' [ropes], etc.) as do constant references to corporal suffering, such as bleeding from self-inflicted wounds, as in example (4) where the processioners flay their chests, tongues and entire bodies.

We now turn to how the authorities are described in the aftermath of a disaster. The devices used to describe the impact of a disaster on the local people are in general very different from those used to describe the actions of secular or religious bodies. Indeed, while the residents of the areas affected are described as gripped by fear and distress, the authorities are portrayed as guiding lights set on safeguarding the community in both spiritual and material terms²⁸. As shown in examples (6–8), the most evident aspects include the care and concern for the physical and mental condition of the population and the determination to stand by them in the face of the catastrophe, in particular in example (7):

6. piacque a Dio benedetto mandare una tempesta [...] che fu forzato il reverendissimo don Luis Sans, vescovo di quella città, raccomandandar *con caldo effetto* a tutto il clero et a' religiosi facessero oratione (*Vera rel.* 1618, 3)

²⁸ For some exceptions, see Monaco, 'People, Institutions and Saints', 32–33.

7. E sì come quasi la metà degli abitanti di Napoli per il timore andarono per molti giorni ad albergar fuori della città, tutta a fatto spopolata rimasta sarebbe se l'Eccellenza Sua, che *invigila al bisogno del pubblico coll'andar girando per la città a riconoscerne le rovine, non avesse confortato colla presenza sua gli animi de' timorosi.* (*Vera fedele e distintissima rel.* 1688, 13–14)
8. Da questa capitale *la prudenza* del'ecellentissimo signor Viceré *ha dati gli ordini opportuni per riparare a tante rovine* (Burgos [1693], 8)

4. Conclusion

This paper examines the stylistic and narrative devices used in early-modern *relazioni* on natural disasters in order to shed light on the relationship between information networks and communication strategies in times of emergency. The focus on *relazioni* reflects the fact that the genre was an extremely widespread way of recounting current events and disseminating information in the early modern period. At the same time, *relazioni* stirred their readers by providing a particular interpretation of the facts described. The heterogeneity of their communicative ends made *relazioni* a valuable tool for shaping public opinion and attitudes, especially in times of crisis such as natural disasters, where the extraordinary repercussions created a widespread demand for information and explanations, thereby extending the reach of communication networks.

Our analysis examined a corpus of twenty-five *relazioni* produced following disasters in the territories of the Spanish Crown in the seventeenth century, focusing on the genre's two main characteristics: providing information and engaging the reader's emotions to provide a moral compass via a particular interpretation of the event. Devices that point out the reliability of the sources and their reports occur frequently, as do those that confirm the accuracy of the information provided and assure the reader of their veracity. The interplay between these two strategies shape and define the compositional and narrative structure of the *relazioni*. Further devices convey the idea that disasters are punishments inflicted by God. This intensifies the depictions of nature's extraordinary violence and the material and psychological effects on the communities affected, who can be helped through penitence and prayer under the guidance of those in authority.

This linguistic analysis of *relazioni* that recount disasters demonstrates that their goals are to inform, to stir and to persuade, providing descriptions of the event and the key people involved that might serve as beacons of morality.

4.1. Sources (categorized by type of disaster and in chronological order)

4.1.1. Floods

Rel. 1609 = Relatione della gran tempesta e diluvio d'acqua, grandini, pietre e saette di fuoco che vennero sopra la città di Siviglia a' 22 di marzo di questo anno 1609, dove si tratta della morte di molte persone et le molte disgrazie che succedettero in questa occasione. Tradotta nuovamente dalla lingua spagnola all'italiana (Padua: Lorenzo Pasquato, 1609).

Vera rel. 1618 = Vera relatione del compassionevol diluvio seguito nel mese di novembre dell'anno 1617 nella città di Barcellona et in altri luoghi, con la perdita de' monasteri, morte di molta gente et altri casi miracolosi, come in detta relatione si dichiara, portata da Michele Valdeosero, corriere di Sua Maestà Catholica (Milan: Marco Tullio Malatesta, 1618).

Vera rel. 1626 = Vera relatione della inondazione e diluvio seguito in Spagna nella città di Siviglia il dì XXIV di gennaio MDCXXVI dal fiume Guadalquivir, dove s'intende la morte di molte migliaia di persone, perdita di gran roba, monasteri sommersi e rovine di detta città (Florence: Pietro Cecconcelli, 1626).

Rel. 1629 = Relatione dell'inondatione della città di Malaga cagionata dal fiume Guadalmedina, nella quale s'intende la grandissima rovina di case, magazeni, monasteri, et la morte di molte persone, et il numero infinito d'animali annegati, con il danno di più di due milioni d'oro. Tradotta di spagnolo in italiano (Verona: Emanuel Lerma, 1629).

Nuova rel. 1682 = Nuova relatione dell'inondatione successa nell'afflitta città di Tortorice sabbato ad hore 23 a' 6 del presente mese di giugno 1682 (Naples: Giacomo Piro, 1682).

4.1.2. Earthquakes

Villa De Poardi 1627 = Villa De Poardi, Giovanni, Nuova relatione del grande et spaventoso terremoto successo nel Regno di Napoli nella

provincia di Puglia in venerdì alli 30 di luglio 1627, dove s'intende la desolatione d'alcune città, castelli et luoghi, con la morte di più di 17 mila persone, et d'altri successi di gran stupore (Rome: Ludovico Grignani, 1627).

Vera rel. 1627a = Vera relatione del pietoso caso successo nelle terre contenute della provincia di Puglia e Regno di Napoli, cioè del terremoto sentito in questo presente anno 1627. Cavata da relationi come si giudica autentiche e vere (Naples: Egidio Longo, 1627).

Vera rel. 1627b = Vera relatione delli danni fatti dal terremoto nel Regno di Napoli con l'estirpatione di molte città et luoghi et mortalità grandissima di gente (Milan: Giovan Battista Malatesta, 1627).

Vera rel. 1627c = Vera relatione dell'horribile terremoto occorso in Puglia li 16 luglio del presente anno 1627, dove si intende la sommersione di diverse città, terre e luochi della detta provincia, con la morte di molte migliaia di persone (Genoa: Giuseppe Pavoni, 1627).

Succinto racconto [1688] = Succinto racconto dell'horrendo terremoto seguito a Napoli et nella vicinaza alli 5 di giugno MDCLXXXVIII ([Naples]: s.n., [1688]).

Vera e distinta rel. 1688 = Vera e distinta relazione dello spaventoso terremoto occorso nelle città di Napoli, Benevento e Salerno, con sua castelli e terre circonvicine, seguito il dì 5, 6 e 7 giugno 1688 (Florence: S.A.S. alla Condotta, 1688).

Vera, fedele e distintissima rel. 1688 = Vera, fedele e distintissima relazione di tutti i danni, così delle fabbriche come delle persone morte per cagione dell'occorso terremoto accaduto alli 5 di giugno 1688 tanto in questa città di Napoli quanto nel suo Regno (Naples: Domenico Antonio Parrino, and Camillo Cavallo, 1688).

Distinto ragguaglio 1693 = Distinto ragguaglio del spaventevole terremoto accaduto nel Regno della Sicilia li 9 et 11 del mese di gennaio 1693 (Rome: Giovan Battista Molo, 1693).

Verissima e distinta rel. 1693 = Verissima e distinta relazione del terribile e spaventoso terremoto seguito in Siracusa, Augusta, Cattania, Messina et altre città e luoghi della Calabria, principato alli 9 di genaro 1693, con il danno di molti milioni e morte di più di cento mille persone (Bergamo: Fratelli Rossi, 1693).

Sincera ed esatta rel. 1693 = Sincera ed esatta relazione dell'orribile terremoto seguito nell'isola di Sicilia il dì 11 di gennaio 1693. Colla nota

delle città e terre sprofondate, de' morti e luoghi che hanno patito, e con tutte le particolarità più degne da essere registrate. Aggiuntovi l'orazione contro il terremoto (Rome: Giovan Francesco Buagni, 1693).

Burgos [1693] = Burgos, Alessandro, *Lettera del padre Alessandro Burgos scritta ad un suo amico, che contiene le notizie finora avute de' danni cagionati in Sicilia da tremuoti a' 9 et 11 gennaio 1693* (s.n.: s.n. [1693]).

4.1.3. Eruptions

Braccini 1631 = Braccini, Giulio Cesare, *Relazione dell'incendio fattosi nel Vesuvio alli 16 di dicembre 1631, scritta dal signor abbate Giulio Cesare Braccini da Gioviano di Lucca in una lettera diretta all'eminentissimo e reverendissimo signore il signor cardinale Girolamo Colonna* (Naples: Secondino Roncagliolo, 1631).

Gerardi 1631 = Gerardi, Antonio, *Relatione dell'horribil caso et incendio occorso per l'esalatione del Monte di Somma, detto Vesuvio, vicino alla città di Napoli, sommariamente descritta et estratta da diverse lettere di religiosi e particolari venute da Napoli* (Rome: Ludovico Grignani, 1631).

Milesio 1631 = Milesio, Giacomo, *Vera relatione del miserabile et memorando caso successo nella falda della nominatissima Montagna di Somma, altrimenti detto Mons Visuvii, circa sei miglia distante dalla nobilissima et gentilissima città di Napoli. Dal martedì 16 del mese di dicembre 1631 al seguente martedì 23 dell'istesso mese, giorno per giorno et hora per ora distintamente descritta dal reverendo padre frate Giacomo Milesio [...]* (Naples: Ottavio Beltrano, 1631).

Oliva 1632 = Oliva, Nicolò Maria, *Lettera del signor Nicolò Maria Oliva, scritta all'illustrissimo signor abbate don Flavio Ruffo, nella quale dà vera et minuta relatione delli segni, terremoti et incendio del Monte Vesuvio, cominciando dalli 10 del mese di dicembre 1631 per insito alli 5 di gennaio* (Naples: Lazzaro Scoriggio, 1632).

Tregliotta 1632 = Tregliotta, Ludovico, *Descrittione dell'incendio del Monte Vesuvio e suoi maravigliosi effetti, principiato la notte delli 15 di dicembre MDCXXXI* (Naples: Lazzaro Scoriggio, 1632).

Squillaci 1669 = Squillaci, Pietro, *Terza relatione per tutti li 16 d'aprile 1669 del fuoco di Mongibello e di quel che seguì* (Naples: Colicchia, 1669).

Vera e distinta rel. 1669 = Vera e distinta relatione dell'horribilissimo e spaventevole caso socceduto a' 7 di marzo 1669 nell'isola di Sicilia, de' gran fuoco ch'è uscito dalla Montagna di Mongibello con distrusione di dodeci terre et altri notabili danni fatti in detto circuito (Naples: Luca Antonio di Fusco, 1669).

Vera e nuova rel. 1669 = Vera e nuova relatione venuta da Catania de' grandi incendii e desolationsi fatte dal Monte Etna, overo Mongibello, dagli undeci sino alli 30 marzo del presente anno 1669 (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1669).

Vera rel. 1669 = Vera relatione del novo incendio della Montagna di Mongibello, cavata da una lettera scritta da Tauromina ad un signore dimorante in Roma (Rome: Giacomo Dragonelli, 1669).

Vincenzo Leonardi

The rhetoric of disaster between the pre-periodical and the periodical press: The Guadalmedina flood (1661) and the case of the *Gazeta Nueva**

1. Disasters and news innovation in the mid-seventeenth century

The history of Malaga is directly and inevitably associated with that of the river Guadalmedina. If it is true that space tells us about the reality of society, its evolution and its memory throughout its existence¹, then it should be acknowledged that the river in this province played a significant role in the Modern Age. Its floods caused quite serious damage between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries: the water flooded a large number of peripheral orchards, streets and buildings, even ruining products stored for public sale, and ultimately causing socioeconomic crises that were not without controversy².

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The titles and texts of the forms have been transcribed using minimal modernization criteria: resolution of abbreviations, accenting, regularization of upper- and lower-case letters and replacement of consonantal *u* with *v* and *j* with *s*.

- 1 On this subject, see Patrizia Violi, *Paesaggi della memoria. Il trauma, lo spazio, la storia* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014).
- 2 As Francisco Guillén Robles, *Historia de Málaga y sus provincias* (Malaga: Imprenta de Rubio y Cano, 1874), 469, stressed, ‘the city had an enemy in that torrent, which, turbulent, wild and swollen with the winter rains, frequently brought it to the point of ruin’. However, despite the fact that floods were one of the greatest scourges suffered by the city throughout its history, and the fact that the Crown intervened several times, especially in the 17th century, the problem was not definitively resolved.

The destructive force of these floods, like that of any other natural calamity, is confirmed by official handwritten sources and printed information, which provide us with a snapshot of both the damage and the reactions to it³. In this sense, the flood that occurred in Malaga in 1661, as well as being one of the most catastrophic in the city's entire history, could be important in helping us gain a better understanding of the state of news literature in the middle of the Spanish Golden Age.

First of all, what actually happened? The events took place on the morning of 22 September, although how everything started differs considerably depending on the documents consulted⁴. It is known that a very severe storm brought such a great flood of mud and debris down the course of the Guadalmedina from the mountains that in a short time it washed away the bridges that linked the eastern and western parts of the city and ended up affecting the entire urban centre. The time of year when the flood occurred must also be taken into account. September is the time of the *vendeja*, the most important time for trade and agriculture in Malaga. Much of the merchandise ended up in the sea, leaving many families of very different social classes ruined.

3 See Armando Alberola Romá, 'La huella de la catástrofe en la España moderna', in María Dolores Lorenzo, Miguel Rodríguez, and David Marcihacy, eds, *Historiar las catástrofes* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de México – Sorbonne Université, 2020), 67–92.

4 Concerning this event, there are two letters and a brief handwritten pamphlet found in a miscellany of historical and political papers kept in the Biblioteca Nacional de España (henceforth BNE), Mss. 9397. The first is signed by the municipal governor, the Count of Toreno, dated 25 September and is addressed directly to Philip IV, referring to the damage caused by the river overflowing (ff. 30r–31r). The second dates from 27 September and was written by the Bishop of Malaga, Antonio de Piñahermosa, also addressing the king (ff. 32r–35r). This is a significant document because, despite the pressure of the time, it refers to the facts with great objectivity and in plenty of detail, denouncing the lack of measures to prevent particularly foreseeable disaster. The third, as has already been said, is a very brief pamphlet that lacks a signature and date, but whose contents are just as even-handed as those of the letters (ff. 36r–36v). Both the letter from the Count of Toreno and the report state that it began to rain at eight in the morning, while the letter written by Piñahermosa states that the rain began at nine.

The balance of both human and material losses was considerable. Here, too, the data varies greatly depending on the sources of reference: for example, the number of people said to have been drowned in the flood ranges from 400 to 2,000⁵. However, the variation in the figures is probably due to the fact that many people died from injuries or various diseases as a result of the weather disaster.

Beyond the historically difficult period for Philip IV's domestic policy during which the event occurred⁶, it is important for analysing a type of representation and literary communication associated with natural disasters. Although the event in question is limited to a very specific context – Malaga – it is well known that it was part of a larger set of calamities including floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and epidemics that have also been studied in the field of disaster literature⁷. It has been possible to find news pamphlets produced in a wide variety of forms, from the use of highly administrative prose⁸ to the publication of verse pamphlets that used the patterns of popular poetry to highlight the sentimental,

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- 5 This can be confirmed by comparing the documents of that time: the pamphlets already mentioned by Piñahermosa and the Count of Toreno tell us of 400 and 600 victims respectively. On the other hand, the *Relación verdadera, donde se da cuenta de la inundación de la ciudad de Málaga, el día 22 de septiembre de este año de 1661* gives us the figure of 1,200 drowned (BNE, Mss. 9149, f. 321r), while another report states that around a thousand people died (BNE, Mss. 9397, f. 36r). Finally, the figures in the *Gazeta Nueva* of Madrid (Boletín Oficial del Estado, Colección Histórica) and the publication of the same name from Seville (Biblioteca Colombina, signature 61-5-8), exceed 2,000 deaths.
- 6 On the historical aspect of disasters, see María Isabel Pérez de Colosía Rodríguez, 'La crisis de Málaga en 1661 según los fondos documentales de la Biblioteca Nacional', *Baética. Estudios de Arte, Geografía e Historia*, 1 (1978), 336–57.
- 7 On accounts of natural disasters in news pamphlets, see particularly Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).
- 8 Henry Ettinghausen, 'La prensa preperiódica española y el Barroco', in Pedro Cátedra García, and María Eugenia Díaz Tena, eds, *Géneros editoriales y relaciones de sucesos en la edad moderna* (Salamanca: Sociedad Internacional para el Estudio de las Relaciones de Sucesos, Seminario de Estudios Medievales y Renacentistas, 2013), 95.

sensational, and moralizing aspects of the event⁹. The religious component implicitly or clearly present in this type of text, as well as the manipulation of the facts depending on the type of testimony¹⁰, is an aspect essential for textual exegesis and is often concealed behind what appears to be a pamphlet merely presenting news of the event.

It is precisely in the news literature on disasters where the context becomes more complex in Spain from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. Despite the rise of notices and pamphlets, the status of the periodical press and, specifically, gazettes, began to become established¹¹. It is clear that notices and printed pamphlets were the first manifestations which, as Ettinghausen recalls, had already become ‘raw

9 On the distinctive features of news pamphlets, see María Sánchez Pérez, ‘Panorámica sobre las Relaciones de sucesos en pliegos sueltos poéticos (siglo XVI)’, *eHumanista*, 21 (2012), 336–68.

10 The fact that various examples of the same pamphlet circulated can sometimes imply variations in the text and its content. A handwritten transmission and a printed one take into account factors that condition not only rhetorical strategies, but also the type of content that can or cannot be published for sociopolitical reasons. On this philological approach, see a very useful case study by Gennaro Schiano, ‘Catástrofes, agentes locales y noticias globales: una aproximación filológica’, *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 97–118.

11 Here the term ‘become established’ is explicitly used, as the second half of the 17th century is not when gazettes began on the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, the embryonic phase of this type of news text, as well as the serial nature of the information, goes back to the twenties, with the *Gazeta de Roma*. On this newspaper and its history, see Carmen Espejo-Cala, ‘El mercado de las noticias en España. La Gazeta de Roma (1619)’, in Gabriel Andrés, ed., *Proto-giornalismo e letteratura. Avvisi a stampa, relazioni de sucesos* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013), 25–53; Carmen Espejo-Cala, Javier Díaz Noci, and Rafael Soto Escobar, eds, *Gaceta de Roma (Valencia, Felipe Mey, 1618–1620): estudio y edición crítica del primer periódico español* (A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña – SIELAE, 2020). In addition, if the critical approach is extended to the context of non-Spanish-speaking Iberian peninsular periodical production, it can be seen that in 1641 in Barcelona Jaume Romeu made another ‘attempt’ to publish a newspaper in Spain with his own *Gazeta* in Catalan. For a more in-depth look at the Catalan press, see Jaume Guillamet, ‘La formació de la periodicitat durant els segles XVII i XVIII, a través de la premsa de Barcelona’, *Treballs de comunicació*, 13/14 (2000), 113–36.

material for a mechanized, mass-producing industry'¹². However, it has also been shown that, at that time, the news items used in this mass production found a further communication tool thanks to a product capable of reaching an even wider reading public¹³. This was a very useful flow of information for kings and rulers: grouping different textual sources into a single mould so that news could be given not only of what was happening within the country itself, but also – and above all – what was happening internationally. So, notices and pamphlets represented excellent sources for information in gazettes through 'préstamos literarios' [literary loans]¹⁴. The gazette became a 'textual development' of notices and pamphlets and drew on some of their content, either through allusion and paraphrasing, or by partially or fully reproducing a pamphlet¹⁵.

Considering the theoretical data available about the periodical press and gazettes in Spain, the flood that occurred in Malaga in 1661 would be an opportunity to approach a subject that is still largely ignored in the field of disaster literature: the narrative and news process concerning natural disasters via this new genre. The year of the flood establishes a new starting point. Along with the distribution of handwritten and printed pamphlets¹⁶,

12 Henry Ettinghausen, *How The Press Began. The Pre-periodical Printed News in Early Modern Europe* (A Coruna: SIELAE, 2015), 15.

13 See Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione, secoli XVI e XVII* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2002).

14 Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito. Una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001), 100.

15 On the diachronic panorama affecting the rise of periodical gazettes in the 17th century, see Carmen Espejo-Cala, 'Gacetas y relaciones de sucesos en la segunda mitad del XVII: una comparativa europea', in Pedro Cátedra García, and María Eugenia Díaz Tena, eds, *Géneros editoriales y relaciones de sucesos en la edad moderna* (Salamanca: SIER, 2013), 71–88.

16 There are three surviving printed pamphlets: (1) *Relación verdadera, donde se da cuenta de la inundación de la ciudad de Málaga el día 22 de septiembre de este años de 1661*. This pamphlet, printed in Madrid by Julián de Paredes, is found not only in a volume of miscellanies kept in the BNE, Mss. 9149, ff. 321r–322v, but also in another volume of the BNE (VE/59/69), without any variant. There is even a handwritten version of this pamphlet (*Relación donde se da cuenta de la inundación de la ciudad de Málaga, el día 22 de septiembre de este año de [1]661*) which says at the end 'Madrid y octubre de 1661' (f. 60r) kept at the Real Academia de la Historia, Colección Jesuitas, 9/3746(13), ff. 59r–60r; (2) *Breve copia del estrago lastimoso que hizo en la ciudad de*

the news also reached readers through correspondence from Malaga that appeared in the eleventh issue of two gazettes which, although they were published in two different cities – Madrid and Seville – both began in 1661 and even had the same title: *Gazeta Nueva*.

The narrative strategies used, as well as the *topoi* and rhetoric, mean these two issues begin a new exegetical journey through the status of disaster literature that needs to be studied. Due to these circumstances, the coexistence between pamphlets and gazettes is such an irrefutable fact that it is necessary to investigate the way in which information about disasters changed when passing from one genre to another. What kind of ‘inheritance’ and formal distinction is established between the two?

At the same time, the study of natural disasters must also be considered from a comparative position that, in general, takes into account the approach adopted depending on the number of gazettes talking about the event. The important differences between news items in Madrid and Seville constitute an interesting case study and raise all kinds of different questions related to the circulation of news and the type of audience the gazette is aimed at. However, it must be added that only one of the several consequences of the contact between pamphlets and gazettes is being shown when it comes to telling the story of a natural disaster. This contribution must, therefore, remain a suggestion left for future research.

2. A *Gazeta Nueva* between Madrid and Seville

It is particularly interesting to study the Malaga flood when we find news of the event published in the periodical gazettes. The case becomes even more curious if another fact is taken into account: the newspapers in which the flood is reported – called the *Gazeta Nueva* in both Madrid

Málaga la inundación del río Guadalmedina, en veinte y dos de setiembre de este año de 1661. This consists of three loosely folded folio sheets, printed in Malaga by Mateo López Hidalgo and kept at the Biblioteca Universitaria Hospital Real de la Universidad de Granada, BHR/A-031-130 (69), ff. 354r-355r; (3) *Relación verdadera, del diluvio y la ruina de la ciudad de Málaga. Enviada al Excelentísimo Señor Duque de Medina Sidonia, a Valladolid.* This copy – two folio sheets without specific numbering printed in Zaragoza by Juan de Ybar – is kept in the Archivo Municipal de Málaga, BM 24/85.

and Seville – not only publicize information about a natural disaster using a news formula then not so common in disaster literature, they also both share almost the same content and structures to tell the story of the event. Almost but not quite: a comparison of the news items, although it gives very similar results, reveals a series of significant changes in the use of the narrative strategies and motifs used by the two gazettes.

Investigating the mechanisms of homology and divergence established between the two of them also requires a brief digression concerning the sociocultural superstructure from which these journalistic texts were actually born. The fact that they have the same name and that, perhaps, there is a ‘mannerism’ in terms of the news formula is not surprising, as on various occasions a news item can be the result of a translation or even partial reproduction of a text that has already been published¹⁷. The problems relating the flood of the Guadalmedina with the *Gazeta Nueva* in Madrid and Seville arise as a result of a raft of considerations concerning the status of these newspapers as information providers. Of course, the periodical press set itself the task of reporting what we might call unexpected events¹⁸. However, it was also possible for a merely diatopic factor to affect the way in which the extraordinary nature of a piece of news tended to be highlighted or concealed. Because whether we are considering the newspaper from Madrid or the one from Seville and regardless of the fact that they have the same title, the question is always the same: when we think about the *Gazeta Nueva*, what are we really talking about?

17 As pointed out by Espejo-Cala, ‘Gacetas y relaciones de sucesos en la segunda mitad del XVII’, 83, Jaume Romeu’s *Gazette* drew a great deal on the material and the news production of the *Gazette* and its pages were practically translations of the French newspaper. As for the status of the *Gazeta Nueva*, the newspapers published in Madrid and Seville were not isolated cases: the title *Gazeta Nueva* was also used for replicas printed in Valencia, Zaragoza and Mexico. In other words, this was a general title for this type of publication regardless of the central and peripheral circulation areas of the newspaper in question. However, it should be noted that the other titles we mention did not share the news published in the Madrid and Seville gazettes, to such an extent that they offer us no information at all about the 1661 flood.

18 On this aspect, see Jose Daniel Lozano Díaz, ‘Aportes de la *Gaceta de Madrid* como fuente para el estudio del clima y los desastres “naturales”: una aproximación inicial’, *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2021), 135–59.

The newspaper founded in Madrid in the mid-seventeenth century seemed to be an important step in the history of the Spanish press, as, to take up some of Díaz Noci's considerations, until then the news context of the Iberian peninsula had been based on the production of individual reports and occasional news items¹⁹. The Madrid *Gazeta Nueva*, already studied in the 1960s by Varela Hervías²⁰, represents the first stage of an evolutionary journey of the newspaper which, with various periods of interruption, led to the *Gaceta de Madrid* of 1697²¹. Initially the *Gazeta Nueva* from Madrid was monthly rather than weekly, and in its first period it was published for only three years: from 1661 to 1663.

The newspaper was founded in the second part of the reign of Philip IV which, as already explained at the beginning of this study, was the period of the greatest political, military and diplomatic difficulty both outside and inside the country. It was precisely in this scenario, full of struggles, interests and ambitions, when words were found to be an effective combat weapon to justify 'la ragion delle parti' [the arguments of the parties]²² and valued as such. Perhaps the illegitimate son of Philip IV, John Joseph of Austria, realized this advantage, promoting the development of the

19 See Javier Díaz Noci, 'La circulación de la noticia en la España del Barroco', in Roger Chartier, and Carmen Espejo-Cala, eds, *La aparición del periodismo en Europa. Comunicación y propaganda en el Barroco* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2012), 207–42.

20 See Eugenio Varela Hervías, *Gazeta Nueva, 1661–1663. Notas sobre la historia del periodismo español en la segunda mitad del siglo XVII* (Madrid: CSIC, 1960).

21 Its second appearance, under the title of *Gaceta ordinaria de Madrid*, came in 1676, but in 1680 an order was issued prohibiting the printed circulation of all types of gazettes, pamphlets and notices. This "official" silence was maintained until 1684, when the gazette was published once again under the title of *Gaceta general del Norte, Italia y otras partes*. It continued to be published until 1690, when the title changed to *Noticias ordinarias*. It kept this name until 1697, the year when it finally acquired the name *Gaceta de Madrid*, which it retained until well into the 20th century. See the section devoted to this phase in Sara Núñez de Prado, 'De la *Gaceta de Madrid* al Boletín Oficial del Estado', *Historia y Comunicación Social* (2002), 147–60.

22 Caterino Bellegno, 'Relazione di Spagna (1670)', in Niccolò Barozzi, and Guglielmo Berchet, eds, *Relazioni degli stati europei lette al Senato dagli ambasciatori veneti nel secolo decimosettimo* (Venice: Pietro Naratovich ed., 1860), 363.

new news model by hiring François Faivre de Bremondans (also known in Spanish as Francisco Fabro de Bremundán) as his secretary and historiographer²³. This man, who began his career between Venice and Milan before joining the service of the son of the King and *La Calderona*, developed his idea of newspaper production inspired by the Italian model²⁴. From this referential context, with the initiative of the Habsburgs, the French chronicler began the serial writing of the Madrid newspaper, printed by Julián de Paredes, whose first title was *Relación o Gazeta de algunos casos particulares, así políticos, como militares, sucedidos en la mayor parte del mundo, hasta fin de diciembre de 1660*²⁵.

23 According to Eugenio Varela Hervías, *Gazeta Nueva, 1661–1663. Notas sobre la historia del periodismo español en la segunda mitad del siglo XVII*, XXIX, he was a very prominent personality both in literature and in the Spanish political administration. He is also considered to be one of the first journalists on the Spanish news scene, capable of producing works and texts with such outstanding care that he achieved the appreciation of his contemporaries.

24 In this sense, Fernando Bouza, ‘El pueblo desea las noticias. Relaciones de sucesos y gacetas entre propaganda y esfera pública en la España de los Austrias’, *Hemeroteca Municipal*, 1 (2018), 111–43: 138, recalls how the figure of Luca Assarino reconciled the multiple interests of news production at that time. Not only was he a publisher of gazettes, but he had also come to play an important role in the Republic of Letters as an epistolographer and, above all, as a contemporary historian, taking an active part in the ‘war of pens’ fought between the monarchies of Spain and France. It is probable, from this point of view, that Bremundán was initially inspired by references such as this.

25 It took the title of *Gazeta Nueva* only from the third edition onwards. However, as readers may notice, the title, which is the same as that of the first issue of the gazette from Seville, illustrates the publisher’s inability to discern the features distinguishing a pamphlet from a gazette. Although this may seem banal, it is actually a very interesting piece of information for the reference period. While, as has already been said, gazettes used pamphlets as excellent sources of information, it is also true that they were also “hybrids” between an austere tone and a rhetoric closer to the extraordinary depending on the news item, and, above all, its compositional basis (notice, pamphlet, etc.). On this approach, see Gilles Feyel, ‘Discussion’, in *Le journalisme d’Ancien Régime. Questions et propositions* (Lyon: Lyon University Press, 1982). This hybridism was a constant of Renaudot’s *Gazette*, at least in the first 40 years of its existence. He maintained a neutral tone when the news came from a notice, while using rhetorical strategies more in the style of a pamphlet when reporting important events. In relation to this, it may be that the initial coexistence of the title *Gazeta o Relación* is due

The most remarkable thing about the Madrid *Gazeta Nueva* lies in the dissemination of the model throughout the country. There has been talk of ‘replicas in the provinces’²⁶ due to a process of ‘influence’ the Madrid model could exert as a reference. We have already seen that replicas of its structure are known in Valencia, Zaragoza, Mexico and Seville. In fact, what is curious is precisely the case of the gazette published in the Sevillian territory. Thanks to a careful analysis carried out by Carmen Espejo in this regard, we know that the *Gazeta Nueva* in Seville was founded by a figure who not only handled correspondence from other countries just as well as Bremundán, but had also spent decades publishing information and news, whether this meant war reports or involved fantasy and religion: Juan Gómez de Blas²⁷.

His presence amplified the prestige of a city – Seville – which, between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, was already the main centre from which news was disseminated²⁸. Gómez de Blas, the city’s Chief Printer, stood out in particular for having enjoyed important official recognition: among many printers, he was an absolute leader on the Sevillian publishing scene and inherited his trade from a great tradition established in the city for many decades²⁹. His

not only to an initial confusion between the two genres (*Relación* in this context means pamphlet), but also to the simultaneous nature of the journalistic discourse and the interpretative discourse of a pamphlet. All the issues of the newspaper are currently available in the Colección Histórica del Boletín Oficial del Estado (online: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/gazeta.php>).

- 26 Espejo-Cala, ‘Gacetas y relaciones de sucesos en la segunda mitad del XVII’, 83.
- 27 To find out more about his biography, see Pilar González Fandos, ‘Gómez de Blas, impresor en Sevilla. De su vida y testamento’, *RIHC: Revista Internacional de Historia de la Comunicación*, 10 (2018), 175–98.
- 28 There were early pioneers of journalism in Seville, such as Rodrigo Cabrera and Juan Serrano de Vargas, who were establishing the tools for news production in line with the first journalistic criteria. See Carmen Espejo-Cala, ‘Los inicios del periodismo en Sevilla: desde las cartas de aviso a las relaciones de sucesos’, in Carmen Espejo-Cala, Eduardo Peñalver Gómez, and María Dolores Rodríguez Brito, eds, *Relaciones de sucesos en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Sevilla* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2009), 26–37.
- 29 See Carmen Espejo-Cala, ‘El impresor sevillano Juan Gómez de Blas y los orígenes de la prensa periódica. La *Gazeta Nueva* de Sevilla (1661–1667)’, *Zer*, 13/25 (2008), 243–67.

dedication to news production corresponded to a desire to be a publisher of information products: loose sheets already had a very prolific market throughout Europe and his desire to stand out in this area led the printer to specialize in this type of production³⁰.

The fact that he wanted to restrict himself to the role of journalistic publisher was confirmed when, in 1661, he founded his own *Gazeta Nueva* (1661–1667), starting what was, in effect, an ‘enterprise’ that went beyond the mere publication of the specific news items that characterized news pamphlets. At the last count, there were 30 issues preserved between the Hemeroteca Municipal and the Biblioteca Nacional de España, on one hand, and, on the other, the Biblioteca Colombina and the Biblioteca Universitaria de Sevilla.

Even this rather small number is enough to show that this gazette is not exactly a faithful reproduction of Bremundán’s newspaper. The Sevillian did not limit himself to imitating the model of the Madrid gazette. His newspaper may have been published under the same name and with the same frequency, but Seville’s *Gazeta Nueva* used to add, delete or recast news from other countries that the Madrid publisher was unaware of. This is apparently due to the fact that it was necessary to develop a news product specifically adapted to the expectation horizon of the local audience. It is not necessary to set out all the variants that arise between the *Gazeta Nueva* of Madrid and the publication of the same title in Seville, as this has already been well examined by the aforementioned studies by Varela Hervías and Carmen Espejo. However, these contributions have focused only on structure and, in a broader sense, on content. A study of

30 It should also be borne in mind that throughout the 17th century Seville was an important, not to say impressive, centre producing reports of events. It is enough to give a few figures to get an idea of how crucial the Andalusian city was in this sense: within a repertoire of more than 4,000 printed documents, 1,150 works fit into the genre of news pamphlets – 25 % of all printed production in Seville. These important figures are offered to us by Eduardo Peñalver Gómez, who rightly states that news pamphlets are the most important element of Seville’s publishing industry, particularly between 1610 and 1650. For a deeper understanding of the publishing scene in Seville of that time, see Eduardo Peñalver Gómez, *La imprenta en Sevilla en el siglo XVII*, PhD diss., Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2019.

the textual infrastructure will confirm that the variations in content are directly proportional to the implementation of certain narrative and rhetorical strategies based on the communicative aim. As will be seen below, the news of the Guadalmedina flood is possibly a strong example of this.

3. The Guadalmedina flood and the point of view in the *Gazeta Nueva*, taking into account rhetoric and treatment

There is no doubt that, when talking about a disaster, a gazette has the same aim as a pamphlet or a notice: to represent chaos³¹. The *Gazeta Nueva* in Madrid and Seville did not stray from this aim when reporting on the flood in Malaga, regardless of the forms they used. For this specific case, we are not talking about serialized news items: both the Madrid newspaper and the one in Seville tell the story of the event only once through correspondence from Malaga which appears in number XI of both the gazettes published in October 1661. In other words, the reader sees a ‘simple’ news item in both situations, the content of which expires on the very day it is circulated.

The news of the flood fits into an assumption well rooted in the features of modern journalism. The critical-literary exegesis of the texts must take into account the fact that a newspaper begins with a well-defined desire. For the *Gazeta* in Madrid and Seville, the reflections of Anna Maria Lorusso and Patrizia Violi about the relativist perspective of modern newspapers are relevant. When we speak of a newspaper, we are referring to an autonomous news genre; in other words, each newspaper constructs its way of telling the story of a unique event depending on the sensitivity of its readers³².

The direction of a news item is organized according to a system that reflects the way the action develops, based on the narrative approach. This pattern is based on a subject carrying out an established programme. For

31 See Christophe Cave, ‘Bienfaisance et discours de presse’, in Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, and Chantal Thomas, eds, *L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII^e siècle. Du châtimeur divin au désastre naturel* (Geneva: Droz, 2008), 157–82.

32 See Anna Maria Lorusso, and Patrizia Violi, *Semiotica del testo giornalistico* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2004).

example, in the case of Malaga, speaking of a flood, the subject represents the programme of an environmental agent that is going to damage a certain geographical area. The programme also has an aim, intermediate phases and a result that the subject organizes based on a certain value system. There are therefore three phases: firstly, a phase of upsetting the balance; secondly, a phase of developing the action with a series of tests that the individual faces to resolve the upset balance; thirdly, there is a phase in which a new order is constructed as a result of what has happened³³. But there is more. The discursive path is specified in the textual surface thanks to a series of Greimasian-type procedures³⁴ illustrated below:

1. Actorialization: the actant – that is, the entity participating in a narrative process (which in this case is the flooding of the Guadalmedina) – determines the semantic organisation of the story;
2. Spatialization: a programme of action is contextualized in a specific space (the Guadalmedina river floods and destroys the buildings and ports of Malaga);
3. Temporalization: a specific temporality is attributed to the event, either by placing it at a particular historical moment, or by attributing it a specific rhythm and duration (the Guadalmedina river overflowed its banks on 22 September 1661 as a result of a storm that lasted from seven o'clock/half past eight in the morning until three in the afternoon);
4. Thematization: the event is recounted insisting on 'interpretative values' associated with a specific axiological axis (the Guadalmedina flood could thematize, for example, divine punishment for committed sins);
5. Figuration: a figure or aspect designates a perceptual dimension familiar to readers (the flood is associated paradigmatically with Noah's Flood from Holy Scriptures).

Of the five procedures, the most interesting for unravelling the variants of content between the news published in the Madrid *Gazeta* and the news

33 As Lorusso and Violi themselves have suggested, we are not that far from the pattern with which the Formalists – particularly Propp – have studied the corpus of Russian fables.

34 See Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Del senso 2. Narrative, modalità, passioni* (Milan: Bompiani, 1984).

published in the Seville *Gazeta* are thematization and figuration. These become the true keys to opening the door of a change in perspective, which at the same time coincides with a change in the narrative programme. Covering the news of the flood exegetically means taking into account that the story is the sum of two paths taken: on the one hand, that of the subject; on the other, that of the anti-subject compared with the first³⁵. If we add to this the fact that Juan Gómez's *Gazeta Nueva* was not created to be a mere replica of Bremundán's newspaper of the same name, then the task will be to show the extent to which the Sevillian wanted to stand out in telling the story of that terrible flood. A careful reading of the two accounts allows us to break the analysis down into two macro areas in which the texts are structured: the announcement of the event and the illustration of the details.

3.1. Announcing the disaster

A first element that must be mentioned concerns the way in which the storm – and, as a consequence, the flooding of the river – is announced. In number XI of the *Gazeta Nueva* in Madrid is a correspondence 'De Málaga' without an exact date but getting straight to the point:

Jueves 22 de setiembre de este año, entre las siete, y ocho de la mañana, se obscureció el cielo con tan densas. y denegridas nubes, que cubriendo por toda la circunferencia el Horizonte de la ciudad de Málaga, daban indicios de la ruina que la amenazaba. A las nueve dieron principio truenos, y relámpagos, y comenzó a llover con tanto ímpitu que ni los tejados podían encaminar las aguas por sus canales, ni las calles desaguar los raudales que las ocupaban. Esto duró hasta más de las doce del día, a cuya hora crecieron demasíadamente los arroyos que bajan del cerro de Gibraltar.

[On Thursday 22 September this year between seven and eight in the morning, the sky darkened with such dense, black clouds, covering the entire circumference of the horizon of the city of Malaga, that they gave indications of the ruin that threatened it. At nine o'clock, thunder and lightning began and it began to rain so hard that not even the roofs could direct the waters through their channels, nor could the streets drain the torrents that occupied them. This lasted until after twelve o'clock, at which time the streams that descend from the hill of Gibraltar grew excessively]. (*GNM*, XI)³⁶

35 Lorusso and Violi, *Semiotica del testo giornalistico*, 81.

36 From here onwards, the acronyms *GNM* and *GNS* will be used to indicate the *Gazeta Nueva* de Madrid and the *Gazeta Nueva* de Sevilla respectively.

Suddenly a very specific temporal topicalization of the event becomes clear ('Jueves 22 de setiembre de este año' [Thursday, September 22 of this year]) and the times emphasize the details that gradually return an increasingly distressing image of what is going to happen ('between seven and eight in the morning', 'at nine', 'it lasted until after twelve o'clock, at which time'). The action appears as a disturbing element of the *hic et nunc* through the times, which establish a caesura between the past and the present of the affected geographical area. Although it represents only the beginning, its merely informative nature projects the story into a development where the narrator, in addition to being extra-diegetic, attends to certain criteria of order and clarity. This, although it may be banal, helps to differentiate the type of eloquence in recounting the disaster conceived between a gazette and a news pamphlet. Díaz Noci, recovering the reflections present in *Del secretario* (1620) by Panfilo Persico, reminds us that in the seventeenth century there was a fairly clear idea of what the rhetoric of a printed news item should be. The aim was very simple: to express, represent and tell the story 'in some detail and in a clear, meaningful, well-ordered manner, mainly considering characters and circumstances'³⁷. This is reflected not only in the 'introduction' to the event, but, in general, throughout the text: the narrative is usually linear, indirect, neutral and circumscribed to an objective description, so that everything is reduced to the substance of the facts. This explains the lack of narrative strategies such as beginnings *in medias res*, digressions of different kinds and initial preambles which, if we think of news pamphlets, involved a biblical reflection to create a universal, mnemonic paradigm of the event.

What Juan Gómez de Blas offers readers in this regard is the desire to produce a significant, extraordinary alteration. In fact, the change is already made clear at the end of the previous correspondence 'From Venice' in which, unlike the Madrid gazette, the Sevillian editor writes a small paragraph as a warning of what is coming next: 'Déjase para la relación siguiente, el proseguir los sucesos de los reinos y provincias extranjeras, por pasar a referir la inundación de la ciudad de Málaga,

37 Javier Díaz Noci, 'Narrative strategies in the origin of journalism an analysis of the first Spanish-language gazettes', *Anàlisi: Quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, 56 (2017), 28.

que por portentosa merecía relación particular’ [Leaving events in foreign kingdoms and provinces for the next report, to go on to speak of the flood in the city of Malaga, which is so portentous it deserves a separate account]. Leaving the concept of ‘report’ aside for now, the adjective ‘portentous’ used for the flood shows quite a clear stylistic configuration. Juan Gómez seems to have no intention of being neutral; he uses a style worthy of the serious damage caused by the Guadalmedina and, from the very first, he subtly suggests to the reader the type of position that the news item is going to take³⁸.

The premise is the prelude to the news from Malaga, for which the correspondence does have an exact date: 27 September³⁹. However, it is significant to note that Juan Gómez decides to start the news item on the disaster by first expressing himself in this tone:

Más para traer a la memoria un dibujo del lamentable castigo, que por sus secretos juicios ha enviado la poderosa mano de Dios sobre la populosa y rica ciudad de Málaga, que para curiosidad y diversión de los lectores y oyentes, escribo la relación del mayor estrago, y de la inundación más inaudita, que ha padecido población alguna de nuestra Europa desde el universal Diluvio hasta los tiempos calamitosos que experimentamos: pues no se hallará escrito en Anales, ni humanas Historias, que en solas seis horas de tiempo (siendo de día, y estando la ciudad de Málaga tan prevenida de reparos para desaguar las corrientes que bajan de los vecinos montes) pereciese un tan copioso número de personas, se arruinasen tantos y tan hermosos edificios y se perdiesen haciendas tan cuantiosas, con confusión tan grande de sus habitantes, que parece que excede su

38 As is well known, news of a natural disaster is a matter of perspective, and it became a constant in gazettes throughout the eighteenth century. See in particular Anne Marie Mercier-Faivre, ‘Le pouvoir d’“intéresser”: le tremblement de terre de Messine, 1783’, in Mercier-Faivre, and Thomas, eds, *L’invention de la catastrophe au XVIII^e siècle*, 231–52 (particularly 236–8). Although her approaches are based on the 1783 Messina earthquake, she has pointed out that some gazettes might have been more prudent in handling information and others, by contrast, used more sensationalist adjectives as a result of a stylistic choice appropriate for the seriousness of the phenomenon.

39 The only testimony about the flood that has that same date is found in the letter we have already mentioned from Bishop Piñahermosa. However, no correspondence can be found between its content and that of the Sevillian gazette. As will be shown at the end of the comment, the editor may have drawn from different pamphlets, so it is not known to what extent the date of 27 September might correspond to a single source.

ponderación a todo lo que pretendiere discurrir el discurso más ingenioso, y el ingenio más discursivo.

Jueves, que se contaron 22 de setiembre de este año de 1661, entre las siete y ocho de la mañana, se obscureció el cielo [...].

[More to bring to mind a picture of the lamentable punishment that the powerful hand of God has sent to the populous and rich city of Malaga through his secret judgements than for the curiosity and amusement of readers and listeners, I write the account of the greatest havoc, and of the most unprecedented flood that any town of in our continent of Europe has suffered since the universal Flood until these calamitous times. Because it will not be found written in Annals or human Histories, that in only six hours of time (during the day, and the city of Malaga being provided with means to drain the streams that come down from the neighbouring mountains) that such a large number of people perished, so many and such beautiful buildings were ruined, and such large properties were lost, with such great confusion of its inhabitants, and it seems to escape the most ingenious discourse, and the most discursive ingenuity. Thursday, they says that on 22 September of this year of 1661, between seven and eight in the morning, the sky darkened (...)]. (GNS, XI)⁴⁰

Unlike the news published in *GNM*, the Sevillian gazette gives an account of the flood based on an introductory preamble – a stylistic and formal resource which, as has already been explained, is typical of news pamphlets⁴¹. If that part of the text is analysed, it will be noted that the

40 The variants of content that Juan Gómez includes in the news item in his gazette are put in bold, while those parts of the *Bremundán* gazette that the Sevillian reproduces literally, without alteration, are left in normal type.

41 Thematically and formally, this is confirmed if, as a simple exemplary reference, one reads the beginning of the *Relación verdadera, donde se da cuenta de la inundación de la ciudad de Málaga*, mentioned before, where this paradigmatic introduction can be read before an account of what really happened in Malaga: ‘De ordinario parece ser dilatado el elemento de las aguas, y tenerle el cielo por el vengador de sus agravios. Pronuncian esto con admiración grande el excidio y calamidades que por ellas padecieron todos los mortales en los tiempos de Noe, como lo dicen las Sagradas Escrituras: afirmanlo también las letras profanas, que sucedió lo mismo en la Grecia en los tiempos de Deucalión, y esto es muy sabido, y en nuestros tiempos próximo pasados, contestan esta verdad los trabajos y miserias que padecieron nuestras Naos el año pasado de mil seiscientos y sesenta, en la Bahía de Cádiz, donde se perdió tanto en aquellos lamentables naufragios si bien afirman muchos, que fue esta pérdida común en casi todas las costas de la Europa, ocasionándolas ciertas constelaciones fortísimas, y malévolas, no conocidas, ni entendidas de los astrólogos, hasta que fue hecho el daño. En conformidad de este discurso se escribe el naufragio y calamidades lamentables que ha padecido la ciudad de Málaga (ilustre por

thematization and figuration of the news item are developed in at least three points: (1) the flood as a divine lesson; (2) classification as a disaster to create empathy between narrator, victim and reader; (3) material damage and damage to victims as a dramatic consequence of the calamity.

It must always be remembered that the borders of the audience to which the Sevillian gazette is addressed were those of the province itself. People were therefore used to approaching the news in line with the narrative patterns of pamphlets. It can safely be stated that Juan Gómez was building his own news product based on the sociocultural coordinates of a population which, most likely, had no other way of finding out about the events other than through the sensationalist content that filled the pamphlets⁴². This is even an attractive explanation for this because the editor, above all, emphasizes his account as an act of remembrance of the phenomenon ('Más para traer a la memoria [...], que para curiosidad de Lectores y Oyentes' [More for the memory [...], than for the curiosity of Readers and Listeners]) in order to fix it well in readers' collective memory. Although this is a news item published in a newspaper, Juan Gómez makes use of storytelling mechanisms present in 'disaster' pamphlets. The result is a narrative construction that 'is linked to a perception and an interpretation

muchos títulos) de las lluvias y avenidas de sus ríos en los últimos de septiembre de este año' [The ordinary element of water seems to be dilated, and the sky seems to use it to avenge its grievances. Great admiration is pronounced at the excision and calamities suffered by all mortals in the times of Noah, as told in Holy Scripture. Profane writings also affirm this, that the same thing happened in Greece in the times of Deucalion, and this is well known. And in our more recent past, this truth is testified by the travails and miseries our ships suffered last year, 1660, in the Bay of Cádiz, where so much was lost in those unfortunate shipwrecks, although many state that this loss was common to almost all the coasts of Europe, caused by certain very strong and malevolent constellations, not known or understood by astrologers until the damage had been done. In accordance with this we write of the wreckage and unfortunate calamities suffered by the city of Malaga (illustrious holder of many titles) from the rains and floods of its rivers in late September of this year] (f. 321r).

42 As well as being further evidence of how information about disasters was popular in the periodical gazettes, this sensationalism brings with it another example of how the popular press could be deployed at that time. On this point, see Henry Ettinghausen, 'Prensa amarilla y Barroco español', in Chartier, and Espejo-Cala, eds, *La aparición del periodismo en Europa*, 127–58.

of the disaster as a historical event, as can best be seen in tales aiming to fix the catastrophe in history⁴³. Thus, this first narrative pattern expresses the desire to memorialize the disastrous flood to insert it into the history of a community.

The mnemonic reconstruction of the Guadalmedina tragedy reinforces the conception of an event which, above all else, embodies the most radical action of extremely violent providentialism. In fact, the Sevillian editor's report does not bring up the mere memory of a disaster, but 'un dibujo del lamentable *castigo*' [a picture of the lamentable *punishment*]⁴⁴. It is no coincidence that the word 'castigo' occupies an initial or, at least, principal position in the text: it constitutes the *focus* – that is, the information element to which the recipient's attention is to be drawn and the constituent of the written discourse is to be emphasized. But the punishment does not reach Malaga in its full purity; it is a condemnation that 'por sus secretos juicios ha enviado la poderosa mano de Dios sobre la populosa y rica ciudad de Málaga' [by His secret judgement the powerful Hand of God has sent over the rich and populous city of Malaga]. In these lines, the full importance of the religious aspect of the event emerges. God is an active subject who sentences and sends a 'lamentable punishment'. In addition, the first line of the news item proposes a specific approach: while in the GNM punishment was never mentioned, here the term is presented. The divine punishment and the flood merge into a single act, in such a way that the disaster constitutes the incarnation of an *allegoria in factis*⁴⁵. In other words, the news reported by Juan Gómez is declined in a very specific way: the punishment introduced in the first part of the item suggests the narrative function of a reciprocation for a moment of dysphoria⁴⁶. From

43 Françoise Lavocat, 'Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints', *Poetics Today*, 3/4 (2013), 257.

44 The bold types are ours.

45 In this regard, see Armand Strubel, '*Allegoria in factis et Allegoria in verbis*', *Poétique*, 23 (1975), 242–57.

46 The Christian concept of a reciprocal gift in linear literature has been particularly studied by Patrick Bégrand, *Signes et Châtiments, Monstres et Merveilles. Stratégies discursives dans les "relaciones de milagros" publiées en Espagne au XVIIIe siècle* (Besançon: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, 2004).

a rhetorical point of view, moreover, the natural and the divine merge in an attitude of searching for causality. The allegory is a declension of the analogy whose space radiates images and sensations via a man who is the centre of the interpenetration of the elements.

The religious ‘cloth’ wrapping the news item shows that the author, as some have pointed out⁴⁷, wants to provide a first-person interpretation of the events. The intention is clear from the beginning: *‘escribo la relación del mayor estrago, y de la inundación más inaudita’* [*I am writing the account of the greatest havoc, and of the most unprecedented flood*]. Despite the fact that it is not possible to speak of a narrator as a ‘witness’, it is true that there are intradiegetic interventions in which the narrator provides a ‘subjective projection’⁴⁸ on the view and understanding of the event. What can be read in this introduction is only the first of several situations where the author interprets the facts in the first person, either singular or plural. See the following passages from the Sevillian news item:

anegaron las casas que hay en las calles de sus corrientes las cuales, juntándose con las de Guadalmedina [...] **que venía en esta ocasión tan arrogante, que pudiera competir con el caudaloso Guadalquivir de nuestra provincia bética.**

[they flooded the houses in the streets with their flow which, joining that of the Guadalmedina [...] **which on this occasion were so bold they could compete with the mighty Guadalquivir in our province of Betis**]. (*GNS*, XI)

cobraron las aguas tanto vigor y fuerza, que rompieron el puente, con sus dos Torres, y muros, y la llevaron al mar: el cual, con la tempestad que entonces corría, estaba tan embravecido, que levantando sus furiosas olas a la región primera del aire, parece que pretendían dar agua a manos a las nubes, para que no les faltase material con que ejecutar el asombro y prodigio **que vamos refiriendo.**

[...the waters gained such vigour and force that they broke the bridge, with its two towers, and walls, and took it to the sea, which, with the storm that was then running, was raging so greatly that, raising its furious waves to the first region of the air, it seemed that it intended to give water to the clouds so that they would not lack material with which to perform the astonishing wonder we refer to] (*GNS*, XI).

47 Carmen Espejo-Cala, ‘El impresor sevillano Juan Gómez de Blas y los orígenes de la prensa periódica’, 258.

48 Patrick Bégrand, ‘De lo natural a lo sobrenatural: discurso reformador y discurso de cruzada en las relaciones de catástrofes naturales’, in Patrick Bégrand, ed., *Las relaciones de sucesos: relatos fácticos, oficiales y extraordinarios* (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2006), 118.

No pasaré en silencio el referir, como muchas de las personas de aquella Ciudad
 [I will not remain silent when referring, like many of the people of that City]
 (GNS, XI).

As an announcement, the act of providing news maintains the marks of the ‘announcer’ and the knowledge brought into play always remains relative, subjective or, as Lorusso and Violi imply, particular⁴⁹. In this context, then, it is not so surprising that the author uses the concept of ‘report’ to refer to the news item published. From this point of view, a question arises that is formally quite complicated. While on the one hand the gazettes used an existing report to corroborate a fact, on the other, as in this case, the account is reduced to a concept – that is, it ceases to be a brief news pamphlet to make room for a universal semantic value. So the report becomes a simple act of referring to something, regardless of the *medium* used (‘que vamos refiriendo’, ‘No pasaré en silencio el referir’ [what we are referring to, I will not fail to refer...])⁵⁰.

49 Lorusso and Violi, *Semiotica del testo giornalistico*, 106.

50 At the beginning of this study, mention was made, albeit very much in passing because of the abundance of bibliographical references in this regard, to the thematic attributes present in news pamphlets. A “formal” digression concerning genre has been postponed until now so that the reduction of the account to a mere act of ‘referring to something’ in the gazettes can be better explained to the reader. There is more than sufficient evidence that news pamphlets had a long discursive tradition. When Victor Infantes, ‘¿Qué es una relación? (Divagaciones varias sobre una sola divagación)’, in María Cruz García de Enterría, Henry Ettinghausen, Henry, and Víctor Infantes, eds, *Las Relaciones de sucesos en España (1500–1750). Actas del primer coloquio internacional* (Alcalá de Henares, 8, 9 and 10 June 1995) (Alcalá de Henares: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alcalá – Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 211, defines the pamphlet as a brief informative printed or handwritten text that has not yet achieved the status of a periodical, at the same time, he offered a clear idea of what the structural identity of this type of text might be. However, such consideration ends up being particularly reductive as the news pamphlet begins a dialogue with broader textual macrostructures. The act of “referring to something” was part of an oral tradition so deeply rooted in pamphlets that it even found its way into plays. For example, in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, Lope de Vega recommended turning to romances to refer to the contents of pamphlets (v. 309). In other words, he recommended resorting to the poetic form par excellence of the oral tradition to refer to the content of pamphlets during productions. From this perspective, if everything that has just been written is

The author's involvement is also clear in the act of designating the type of event. In fact, he is going to refer to 'the greatest havoc' and 'the most unprecedented flood'. As this is not a pamphlet in the sense of an individually printed item, it has no title, which would function as a micro-story capable of presenting the theme⁵¹. However, by using superlatives and a large number of adjectives in his account of cause-and-effect ('large number of people', 'beautiful buildings', 'such large estates') the narrator underscores the sensational element to draw the reader's attention.

In this rhetorical elaboration, the already mentioned *allegoria in factis* sets the event on a clearly interpretative track, because the flood is presented as the 'most unprecedented that any town on our continent of Europe has suffered since the Universal Flood'. The event is interpreted in relation to other natural disasters, either in a mythological past, or in the present, or, finally, in an 'apocalyptic future'⁵². As it is a flood, the paradigmatic reference can only be Noah's Flood. The calamitous event of the Old Testament highlights divine wrath against sinners, in such a way that it becomes a paradigmatic example for the collective memory of a people and configures the disaster in a fairly broad spectrum of representative possibilities. Ultimately, the paradigm unites the emotional aspect with the descriptive aspect of the flood so that it fits into a chain of episodes capable of making sense of this 'so great confusion'.

3.2. Detailing the catastrophe

These clues mean it is safe to state that the way the flood is announced 'affects' the middle and the outcome of the story. So, if the *GNS* story is crafted for the purpose of focusing on a sensationalist and religious dimension, the editor will not be content to set out the events objectively. To

true, when studying the account of the disaster in the periodical gazettes, one has the feeling that news pamphlets can be declined in different ways and coexist with other narrative and discursive containers. As a result, the gazettes seem to confirm that the news pamphlet is, above all, a fluid genre that loses or recovers its status depending on whether more importance is given the autonomy of the text itself or to its interdependence with other literary and informative forms.

51 As Bégrand, *Signes et Châtiments, Monstres et Merveilles*, 30, reminds us, this is a distinctive feature of news pamphlets.

52 Lavocat, 'Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period', 261.

better clarify this aspect, we should start with the news of the flood as it appears in the Bremundán gazette. Observe the following passage:

Esto duró hasta más de las doce del día, a cuya hora crecieron demasíadamente los arroyos que bajan del cerro de Gibraltar, y anegaron las casas que ay en las calles de sus corrientes las cuales juntándose con las de Guadalmedina, que baja de los cerros de casa Bermeja, y cuesta de Zambra, rompieron el puente de madera, que estaba en frente de la Puerta Nueva, la llevaron y atravesaron en el ojo mayor del puente de piedra (fábrica de los Fenices sus riquísimos fundadores) y haciendo allí alguna represa cobraron las aguas tanto vigor y fuerza, que rompieron el puente, con sus dos torres y muros, y la llevaron al mar [...]. Por la parte de las huertas de las monjas entraron las aguas, y derribaron las casas que hay hasta el barrio de las Ollerías, y anegaron la calle de la Victoria, del Conde de Puerto-Llano, el barrio de la Merced, las calles de los Álamos, de Granada, y de Santa María, los barrios de la Goleta Carretera, y los Mármoles, el Perchel alto, y el Convento, y barrio de San Andrés.

[This lasted until after twelve o'clock, at which time the streams that descend from the hill of Gibraltar swelled excessively and flooded the houses in the streets with their flows, which joined those of Guadalmedina, which descends from the hills of Casa Bermeja, and Cuesta de Zambra. They broke the wooden bridge that was in front of the New Gate. They took it and it crossed the main eye of the stone bridge (made by the Phoenicians, the city's wealthy founders), and as it made a dam, the waters collected there were so vigorous and strong that they broke the bridge, with its two towers and walls, and carried it into the sea (...). The waters entered the nuns' orchards and demolished the houses as far as the Las Ollerías district, and flooded Calle de la Victoria, Calle del Conde de Puerto-Llano, the La Merced district, the streets of Los Álamos, Granada, and Santa María, the districts of Goleta Carretera, and Los Mármoles, El Perchel Alto, and the Convent, and the district of San Andrés]. (*GNM*, XI).

It can be seen that the news item on the storm continues to progress in a highly informative way in terms of both structure and style. 'Narrative' techniques belong to archetypal forms of discourse: the present indicative ('que bajan', 'que bajan', 'que hay') – to give a more immediate development of the action⁵³ – and the indefinite past tense ('crecieron', 'anegaron', 'rompieron', 'entraron', 'derribaron', etc.) – to give greater di-gegetic fluidity – are distributed throughout a text dominated by insistent parallelisms. Consequently, in the *GNM*, just like a chronicle, 'a tendency

53 Lorusso and Violi, *Semiotica del testo giornalistico*, 139.

to list' prevails⁵⁴ – a syntactic-textual propensity to set out the damage that is occurring.

Juan Gómez de Blas's news item does pick up this informative account from *GNM*, but it integrates it with some variants that follow the sensationalist and religious perception of the disaster:

Esto duró hasta más de las doce del día: [...] cobraron las aguas tanto vigor y fuerza, que rompieron el Puente, con sus dos torres y muros, y la llevaron al mar: el cual, con la tempestad que entonces corría, estaba tan embravecido, que levantando sus furiosas olas a la región primera del aire, parece que pretendían dar agua a manos a las nubes, para que no les faltase material con que ejecutar el asombro, y prodigio que vamos refiriendo'.

[This lasted until after twelve o'clock: (...) the waters gained such vigour and strength that they broke the Bridge, with its two towers and walls, and carried it into the sea: which, with the storm that was then raging, was so wild that it raised its furious waves to the lowest regions of the air, and it seemed that it intended to hand back the water to the clouds so that they would not lack material with which to perform the prodigious wonder we are referring to]. (*GNS*, XI)

Saying that the storm-lashed sea engenders high, furious waves is another example of how disaster takes on quite a strong analogy. A correct iconological reading of the passage makes it possible to consolidate the close involvement of the natural and divine elements. Nature, represented by the sea, puts itself at the service of the clouds in order to teach the population their lesson. Once again, the furious action of the sea is designed to hint to the reader that Nature is carrying out a task for another (hence the verb 'ejecutar' [to perform]). This variant could clearly illustrate the function of the analogy so that the event acquires an impressive evocative and visual dimension. Punishment and disaster are fixed in the eyes of a man who, as Foucault said, is the privileged point of every act of *translatio*⁵⁵. With this vision, the 'clouds' seem to play a theophanic role and, in particular, could be focused on the scope of an indirect primary theophany in which God

54 See Chiara DeCaprio, 'Narrating Disasters: Writers and Texts Between Historical Experience and Narrative Discourse', in Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Pasquale Palmieri, and Lorenza Gianfrancesco, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018), 19–40.

55 See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

manifests himself in the form of natural elements (clouds, columns of fire, rain, and so on).

Even the list of material damages seems to show substantial differences in the Sevillian news item:

Por la parte de las Huertas de las Monjas entraron las aguas, y derribaron las casas que ay hasta el barrio de la Ollerías, y anegaron la calle de la Victoria, la del Conde de Puerto-Llano, el barrio de la Merced, las calles de los Álamos, de Granada, y de Santa María, los barrios de la Goleta, Carretería, y los Mármoles, el Perchel alto, el Convento, y barrio de San Andrés, **que es de Religioso Carmelitas Descalzos. El Convento de Nuestro Padre San Francisco ha quedado tan lastimado, que los edificios que con esta inundación no se arruinaron, no es posible habitarse, si nuevamente no se fabrican. Y no es menor daño el que recibió el Convento de Nuestro Padre Santo Domingo: porque como está fundado a los márgenes de Guadalmedina, y por ello más expuesto al peligro, padeció general inundación, así en su Iglesia y Claustros, como en las demás oficinas de su clausura: rompió las tres puertas del compás, las paredes de su cerca, y se llevó las casas que amparaban la primera nave de las capillas colaterales de la iglesia. Y si los edificios del convento no se hubieran fabricado con tanta fortaleza y robustez, es sin duda que en esta ocasión quedarán todos arruinados, y demolidos, cuya fábrica ha sido dispuesta por la industria del Ilustrísimo, y Reverendísimo señor Don Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás Provincial del Orden de Predicadores del Andalucía, y Obispo Electo de Osma, que en esta ocasión se hallaba en el dicho convento de donde sacó a su Señoría Ilustrísima (en medio del referido conflicto) una Falva de la Galera Capitana, que para este efecto le envió el Excelentísimo señor Duque de Tursi (que se hallaba con las de su cargo surto en el muelle) y le llevó al Convento de Nuestro Padre San Agustín, que por estar en lo más alto de la ciudad se libró de la penalidad referida.**

[The waters entered via Huertas de las Monjas and demolished the houses up to the Ollerías district, and flooded Calle de la Victoria, Calle del Conde de Puerto-Llano, the Merced district, Calle Los Álamos, Calle Granada, and Calle Santa María, the districts of La Goleta, Carretería, and Los Mármoles, El Perchel Alto, the Convent, and the San Andrés district, **which belonged the Barefoot Carmelite order. Nuestro Padre San Francisco Friary has been so damaged that it is impossible to live in the buildings that have not been ruined by the flood unless they are rebuilt. And the damage suffered by the Friary of Nuestro Padre Santo Domingo is no less, because as it was founded on the banks of the Guadalmedina, and therefore more exposed to danger. It suffered a general flood throughout its Church and Cloisters, as well as in the other rooms of the closed area. The three gates on the different sides and the enclosure wall were broken and the houses sheltered by the first nave of the collateral chapels of the church were swept away. And if the friary buildings had not been made so strong and robust there is no doubt that on this occasion they would all be ruined and demolished. These were built by the most Illustrious and Reverend Lord Fray Alonso de Santo**

Tomás, Provincial leader of the Order of Preachers in Andalusia and Bishop Elect of Osma, who on this occasion was in this friary. His Illustrious Lordship was rescued on this occasion by a tender of the Flagship Galley which was sent for the purpose by the Most Excellent Lord Duke of Tursi (who was on the quay with those in his charge) and taken to the Friary of Nuestro Padre San Agustín Convent, which, being in the highest part of the city, was spared the punishment we have mentioned]. (GNS, XI).

The religious buildings mentioned are the Friary of San Andrés, the Friary of Nuestro Padre de San Francisco and that of Nuestro Padre Santo Domingo. Interestingly, a comparison carried out previously shows that there is a certain intertextual correspondence between this passage and that of the *Breve copia del estrago lastimoso* – one of the pamphlets mentioned at the beginning. Notice the similarities:

GNS (XI)	Breve copia del estrago lastimoso
Y no es menor daño el que recibí el Convento de Nuestro Padre Santo Domingo: porque como está fundado a los márgenes de Guadalmedina, y por ello más expuesto al peligro, padeció general inundación, así en su Iglesia y Claustros, como en las demás oficinas de su clausura: rompió las tres puertas del compás, las paredes de su cerca, y se llevó las casas que amparaban la primera nave de las capillas colaterales de la iglesia. Y si los edificios del convento no se hubieran fabricado con tanta fortaleza y robustez, es sin duda que en esta ocasión quedarán todos arruinados, y demolidos, cuya fábrica ha sido dispuesta por la industria del Ilustrísimo, y Reverendísimo señor Don Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás Provincial del Orden de Predicadores del Andalucía, y Obispo Electo de Osma	Y si el desbarate en este Santo Monasterio, con estar tan alto (respeto del de Santo Domingo) fue tan grande, ya se infiere cuál habrá sido el destrozo de dicho convento de Santo Domingo, que está más bajo, más cercano, e inmediato a las intempestuosas corrientes. Llevo las tres puertas de su entrada al compás, con todas las paredes de su cerca, y entrándose las furiosas aguas por muchas partes, inundó iglesia y claustros de un crecido estado en alto. Y a la iglesia que está más cercana a la corriente, le iba casi royendo los cimientos de la capilla mayor, y primera nave de las capillas colaterales, las cuales estaban amparadas de una hermosa hilera de casas, valientes en su edificio y bellas en su hermosura, y hoy están dichas capillas inmediatas al río con grave peligro a la repetición de otro golpe. Y a no ser los edificios del convento que combatieron las aguas tan nuevos, y hechos de industria, por la del Reverendísimo Padre la religión Dominica y Ilustrísimo señor Don Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás, provincial de la religión Dominica y Obispo electo de Osma (que Dios guarde) con tan esforzados y robustos fundamentos y paredes, a no disponer otra casa la misericordia divina, atrasarán las aguas con su fiera todo el Convento.

The issue becomes even more striking as the text moves on. After recounting the damage caused by the Guadalmedina, both the Madrid and Seville gazettes show a final count of material damage and victims. In this respect, the Bremundán gazette sticks very closely to essentials, so much so that it dedicates very little space to this part:

Cesó la tormenta a las 3 de la tarde, y a las 5 se desaguaron las calles: y se repartieron muchas limosnas por parte del Obispo de aquella ciudad, y del Conde de Toreno su Gobernador, a los pobres que se hallaron vivos en las casas inundadas, y se dio principio a sepultar los difuntos, a limpiar el tarquín de los templos, plazas, y calles, y a sacar la leña, y árboles que en ellas había dejado la inundación. Quedaron con esta tormenta más de 1600 casas arruinadas, y otras 3 mil tan atormentadas, que casi todas están amenazando ruina. Los muertos pasan de 2 mil. Y las haciendas que se han perdido, se valúan en más de tres millones. N. Señor nos dé buena muerte, y perdone los difuntos. Amen.

[The storm stopped at 3 in the afternoon, and at 5 o'clock the streets were drained: and many alms were distributed by the Bishop of that city, and the Count of Toreno, its Governor, to the poor who were found alive in the flooded houses. They began to bury the deceased, to clean the mud from the churches, squares and streets, and to remove the wood and trees that the flood had left in them. This storm left more than 1,600 houses ruined and another 3,000 so badly damaged that almost all of threaten to become ruins. There were more than 2,000 dead. And the properties that have been lost are valued at more than three million. May Our Lord grant us a good death, and forgive those who have died. Amen]. (GNM, XI).

As can be seen, only absolutely essential data is offered. Beyond the act of distributing alms, burying the dead and cleaning the city, the quantitative balance of material and human losses is presented almost telegraphically. This, however, is not what we see in Juan Gómez, who extends himself to the point of emphasizing it in a pathetic and alarmist tone:

Cesó la tormenta a las tres de la tarde, y a las cinco se desaguaron las calles, y a esta hora se repartieron muchas limosnas (por parte del Ilustrísimo señor D. Antonio de Piñahermosa, Obispo de aquella Ciudad, y del señor Conde de Toreno, Gobernador) a los pobres que se hallaron vivos en las casas inundadas, y se dio principio a sepultar los difuntos, a limpiar el tarquín de los templos, plazas, y calles, y a sacar la leña, y árboles que en ellas había dejado la inundación. Quedaron con esta tormenta más de mil y seiscientas casas arruinadas, y otras tres mil tan atormentadas, que casi todas están amenazando ruina. Los muertos pasan de dos mil. Y las haciendas, así de dinero, como de casas, heredamientos, mercaderías, frutos, y otras cosas que se han perdido, se valúan en más de tres millones. El ganado mayor y menor que se ha ahogado, es tan numeroso, que ha faltado, y

muchos días no se pesa carne en las carnicerías. Caballos y demás cabalgaduras son muy pocas las que escaparon de la tormenta. Y finalmente los llantos, desdichas y compasiones que hay en la ciudad de Málaga son tantos, que no se pueden reducir a número, por estar comprendida en ellos toda la ciudad, porque a las personas que no alcanzó la ruina en sus propias personas, o en las casas de su habitación, les tocó en sus haciendas o en sus esclavos, ganados o cabalgaduras ahogadas, con que los más ricos quedaron tan pobres, que andan pidiendo limosna, y la mayor parte de los edificios de la ciudad arruinados, sin esperanza de medios para su reedificación. Castigo que envió Dios a aquella ciudad, para escarmiento de las personas que en ella quedaron vivas, y ejemplar de las demás, a cuya noticia llegare este suceso tan espantoso como lamentable. Su divina Majestad nos dé buena muerte, y perdone las animas de los fieles difuntos. Amen.

[The storm stopped at three in the afternoon, and at five the streets were drained, and at this time many alms were distributed (by the Most Illustrious Lord Antonio de Piñahermosa, Bishop of that City, and the Lord Count of Toreno, Governor) to the poor who were found alive in the flooded houses, and they began to bury the dead, to clean the mud from the churches, squares, and streets, and to remove the wood and trees that the flood had left in them. This storm left more than 1,600 houses ruined, and another 3,000 so damaged that almost all of them threaten to become ruins. There are more than 2,000 dead. And the properties, as well as money, houses, inheritances, merchandise, fruits, and other things that have been lost, are valued at more than three million. The large and small livestock that have drowned are so numerous that there have been shortages, and many there has been no meat to weigh in the butcher shops for many days. Very few horses and other mounts escaped the storm. And finally, the tears, misfortunes and pity there are in the city of Malaga are so great that they cannot be reduced to a figure, as the entire city is included in them, because the people who were not ruined themselves or did not lose their houses did lose properties or slaves, livestock or horses, with which the richest were left so poor that they go around begging for alms, and most of the buildings in the city are ruined, without the hope of means to rebuild them. It was a punishment that God sent to that city as a lesson for the people left alive in it and an example to others, to whom news of this event, as frightful as it is lamentable, will arrive. May his Divine Majesty grant us a good death, and forgive the souls of the faithful departed. Amen]. (*GNS*, XI).

The amount of damage is directly proportional to the consequences suffered by survivors. The losses are not reduced to an insignificant figure, but there is a cause and effect relationship in which the suffering continues even after the flood. This is noticeable at two points: firstly, when emphasis is placed on the lack of food products to sustain the population ('El ganado mayor y menor que se ha ahogado, es tan numeroso, que ha faltado, y muchos días no se pesa carne en las carnicerías'); and secondly,

when the survivors remain truly empty-handed. Here, the religious aspect of the news item once again plays a central role. Within the narrative process, the narrator becomes the subject operating a manipulation to guide the horizon of expectation towards repentance. For this reason, the final ‘llantos’ [tears] seems to open up the population to understanding of sin or, rather, error⁵⁶. The city of Malaga is already the daughter of a true *mundus inversus*: the social order is completely overturned and the richest are left so poor that they even have to beg. The change configures a revolution resulting from the divine punishment and it is not surprising that the term ‘castigo’ [punishment] appears again at the end of the story. The notion of it is inseparable from ‘signo’ [signal], both from the representative and semantic point of view. The point of this is to state that the editor resorts to the perspective of punishment so that the disastrous event performs a socially emblematic function for the readers, as if religious penance were the most effective way of transmitting the weight of the tragedy⁵⁷.

Finally, this passage underlines a further intertextual correspondence with the relationship illustrated above, albeit with some variations:

56 Bégrand, *Signes et Châtiments, Monstres et Merveilles*, 297.

57 Given the importance that the religious element acquires in the Sevillian news item, a further and perhaps more general and difficult question should be asked: if it is taken for granted that disaster and faith are the dichotomous elements of this type of account, could the religious facet be superstructural element to convey a more “earthly” critique? We are unable to answer this question. However, reading the letter from Piñahermosa mentioned in note 6 of this study, and considering the criticism of the ruling class of Malaga for not having done anything to prevent an avoidable disaster, it is difficult to think that the religious aspect performs only a sensationalist function.

GNS (XI)	Breve copia del estrago lastimoso
<p>Y finalmente los llantos, desdichas y compasiones que hay en la ciudad de Málaga son tantos, que no se pueden reducir a número, por estar comprendida en ellos toda la ciudad, porque a las personas que no alcanzó la ruina en sus propias personas, o en las casas de su habitación, les tocó en sus haciendas o en sus esclavos, ganados o cabalgaduras ahogadas, con que los más ricos quedaron tan pobres, que andan pidiendo limosna, y la mayor parte de los edificios de la ciudad arruinados, sin esperanza de medios para su reedificación. Castigo que envió Dios a aquella ciudad, para escarmiento de las personas que en ella quedaron vivas, y ejemplar de las demás, a cuya noticia llegare este suceso tan espantoso como lamentable</p>	<p>Las lástimas, los llantos, las desdichas y compasiones que hubo ha habido y hay en esta ciudad no se pueden numerar, por ser tantos, ni contar por comprenderse en ellos toda la ciudad, porque a los vecinos que no alcanzó la ruina en sus personas o propias habitaciones, les tocó en sus haciendas, así de frutos cogidos y embodegados como por coger en los campos, en casas arrendadas, en esclavos, y cabalgaduras ahogadas cuyo número es grande, con que los más quedaron de ricos pobres. y muchos pidiendo limosna, y Málaga hecha lamentable espectáculo de la adversa fortuna. Azote que nuestro Señor por sus actos e inescrutables juicios ha sido servido enviar o permitir a las causas naturales le hiciesen, sobre los demás padecidos en esta ciudad.</p>

The author of the pamphlet paints the seriousness of the moment with words and does so by giving direct testimony of what had happened. In this sense, the presence of deictics of proximity ('en *esta* ciudad') contrasts with the geographical distance of the Sevillian news ('en *aquella* ciudad', 'en la ciudad de Málaga'). If, along with these changes, it is considered that the above text was printed in Malaga, this would suggest that the Seville editor probably relied on various different sources that Bremundán perhaps did not have for his Madrid newspaper. This is a mere hypothesis which could, however, if confirmed, reinforce Carmen Espejo's thesis which we have already mentioned, according to which Juan Gómez de Blas published his own *Gazeta* to include and highlight news at local level⁵⁸.

58 It is well known that Seville was one of the hubs of news from America. For that, see Joad Raymond, and Noah Moxham, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016). However, it is unlikely that the well-known central role of the Andalusian province is limited to collecting this type of item. Due to the publishing role it played, the Andalusian province might perhaps have been an important centre through which news printed in the other cities of the same region would also pass.

5. Conclusions

With the arrival of the printed gazettes, the information on natural disasters reached an even more developed narrative branch. The prospective dichotomy in the *Gazeta Nueva* newspapers in Madrid and Seville about the Guadalmedina flooding offers evidence of the independent management and transmission of the news in the two cities. On the one hand, Juan Gómez de Blas's news item takes on a more providential side partially and intertextually adapted from the content of a pamphlet printed in Malaga⁵⁹. On the other, the news item on the flood in Francisco Fabro de Bremundán's newspaper is just as important, as it reveals a different narrative form: more objective, more impersonal and oriented towards a purely informative tone.

As a result of this awareness, the news pamphlet not only becomes a primary textual reference for the gazette, but also 'lends' its own rhetorical skills to a genre where the news is suitable for a more diverse audience. To this end, the Malaga flood reveals the capacity with which a periodical gazette used this type of textual inheritance to report a catastrophic event. La *Gazeta Nueva* in Seville acts as if was reformulating news items which, perhaps, were circulated in other territories only in other formats. It is not possible to discern how close the relationship between the two newspapers was, and the extent to which geographical distance allowed Juan Gómez de Blas to deal with certain with some degree of freedom is unknown. The analysis of the disaster in Malaga – as well as that of the entire issue of the gazette – does not provide sufficient evidence to reconstruct the genealogy of the news between the Madrid and Seville.

Despite this, the same study does establish a dual and irrefutable relationship for the status of natural disasters in the gazettes. The Guadalmedina flood proves that the contact between pamphlets and the periodical press makes the concept of 'report', as such, condense into the act of referring to something. This, in other words, its identity undergoes a significant structural change to the extent that its narrative potential is exploited to

59 This would corroborate the 'communicative infrastructure' referred to by Espejo-Cala, 'El impresor sevillano Juan Gómez de Blas', 265, within which the peripheral enclave of the gazette would carve out its own news network and, finally, an autonomous journalistic approach.

accommodate it to the world of serial information. The change not only concerns the level of interconnection between the gazette and the pamphlet. For this reason, and ultimately, the work thus outlined opens the way for more content analysis and comparison of two or more newspapers reporting the same disaster.

Valentina Sferragatta

Communicative strategies in *relazioni* on the 1669 eruption of Mount Etna*

1. Introduction

After days of portents of intense seismic activity, Mount Etna launched one of its most destructive eruptions on 11 March 1669. It only came to an end four months later. The huge lava flow along the south-eastern slopes of the volcano was devastating and destroyed many homesteads, even threatening Catania¹. The news spread far and wide, as one might expect at a time when there was great interest in unusual events. Indeed, this particular disaster produced a significant body of literature on nature, as well as a vast array of *relazioni* printed in different languages².

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1 For a broad-ranging examination of the eruption, see Emanuela Guidoboni, Cecilia Ciuccarelli, Dante Mariotti, Alberto Comastri, and Maria Giovanna Bianchi, eds, *L'Etna nella storia. Catalogo delle eruzioni dall'antichità alla fine del XVII secolo* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2014).

2 For further details about the distribution and provenance of editions printed and reprinted by different publishing houses in Italy, across Europe and beyond, see Raffaele Azzaro, and Viviana Castelli, *L'eruzione etnea del 1669 nelle relazioni giornalistiche contemporanee* (Catania: Le Nove Muse, 2013). The corpus addressed in our work consists of nine sources, which are listed below together with expansions of the abbreviations used in this paper.

In Italian *relazioni*, the narrative followed the standard editorial style of the genre³. The content described the singular violence of the eruption and of the earthquakes that had preceded it, the looting in some areas, the measures taken by the authorities to counter the looting and to address other aspects of the aftermath, and the processions held in veneration of St Agatha to quell an eruption that most people saw as divine retribution. The *relazioni* used the disaster narrative stereotypes of the early modern period, such as references to the veracity of the facts reported and their extraordinary nature, to its unspeakable causes described using superlatives, comparisons and hyperbolic reiterations, and a lexicon that drew on the semantic field of grief and ruin with parallels that evoked the Last Judgement⁴.

However, closer examination of these *relazioni* reveals that this veneer of apparent homogeneity masks differences that have specific communicative ends. Indeed, all narratives have a complex relationship with reality and can be manipulated in order to present facts in a certain light. Moreover, it has often been noted that the post-medieval explosion of news and information about natural disasters, such as the *relazioni* examined here, fostered the emergence of different perspectives on the same events. In particular, in the early modern period it was mainly the authorities tasked with responding to emergencies that exploited the ability to impose a particular view of how catastrophes were handled through how they were recounted⁵.

3 Numerous works on the characteristics of this early-modern genre are now available, including, on *relazioni* printed in Italian, Annachiara Monaco (this volume), which contains a rich bibliography. For a comprehensive overview of publications in Spanish, see Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

4 It goes without saying that, despite the many similarities across different *relazioni*, structural and compositional differences also exist. For example, epistolary formats might be used to a greater or lesser extent, content might be structured chronologically or thematically, etc.

5 See, for example, Françoise Lavocat, 'Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints', *Poetics Today*, 33/3–4 (2012), 253–99. These aspects are examined in further depth in Monaco (this volume).

The account of the 1669 eruption of Mount Etna gets a propaganda makeover in the version published in Catania, where at the time mass-circulation publishing was a rarity⁶. The two key actors in the initial response were Bishop Michelangelo Bonadies and the city's Senate. The eruption provided them with an opportunity to promote and exalt their own activities while disparaging the role played by others. Indeed, a closer reading reveals that the *relazioni* examined here fall into two categories. There are those that carry the imprimatur of Catania's official bodies, which clearly display a common approach in terms of communicative intent, and there are all the others: the unofficial versions⁷.

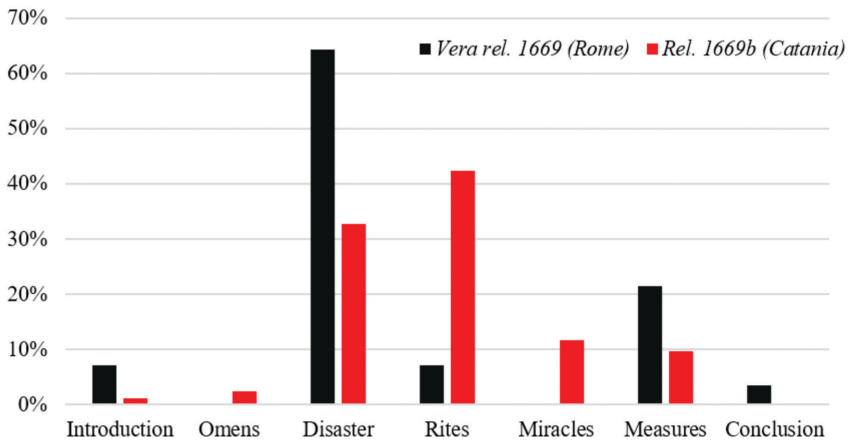
To highlight these aspects, we will use a method that has been tried and tested in the study of medieval and early-modern narratives, examining the direct or indirect ways in which the author's ideology is discretely implanted into the text⁸. In particular, we will apply this method to a range of key characteristics. Firstly, we will address the contents of each *relazione* to highlight not only gaps in the narrative but also pertinent temporal leaps and shifts (Section 1). Secondly, we will examine the sometimes veiled role of the narrator, a particularly significant element of our analysis (Section 2). Thirdly, we will consider how the natural disaster is portrayed in order to demonstrate how the descriptions shift according

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- 6 It is worth noting that early-modern Sicily did not have an extensive sensationalist press of the kind under consideration here. Moreover, the only printing works operating in Catania at the time of the eruption was Bonaventura La Rocca, the Senate's *stampatore camerale*, where printing was limited to official or religious documents in Latin. See Enea, *Emergenza e strategie di intervento*, 81 and the references contained therein.
- 7 The Catania *relazioni* are *Rel. 1669b*, *Rel. 1670* and *Squillaci 1669*. In fact, these are documents at least first printed in Catania. Indeed, it has proved impossible to obtain the *editio princeps* of *Squillaci 1669* or *Rel. 1670*, but information about where each *editio princeps* was printed is contained in the frontispiece.
- 8 See Alberto Vårvaro, *La tragédie de l'Histoire. La dernière oeuvre di Jean Froissart* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), 79–80; and Chiara De Caprio, 'Architettura spaziale, organizzazione narrativa e postura ideologica nella Cronica di Napoli di Notar Iacobo', in Fulvio Delle Donne, and Antonietta Iacono, eds, *Linguaggi e ideologie del Rinascimento monarchico aragonese (1442–1503). Forme della legittimazione e sistemi di governo* (Naples: FedOA Federico II University Press, 2018), 83–100.

to the author's objectives (Section 3). Fourthly, we extend our research to a comparison of the printed version of one of the Catania *relazioni* with the manuscript on which it is putatively based (Section 4). Taking these parameters into account will demonstrate what makes the *relazioni* published in Catania stand out in the corpus that we have examined.

2. Selecting, structuring and stretching content

In terms of the selection of which facts to recount and how much space to devote to each, the first point that emerges is that the *relazioni* produced in Catania are much longer⁹. In particular, there is a significant difference in the length of sections that cover the disaster itself and human activities or supernatural events, such as processions or miracles attributed to St Agatha. This can be seen clearly in the following graph comparing a *relazione* printed in Rome with one printed in Catania¹⁰:



A visual comparison of the contents of *Vera Rel. 1669* and *Rel. 1669b*.

The following two accounts of devotional practices show this difference in length clearly:

9 The modern transcriptions of the three Catania *relazioni* have an average length of 25 pages, compared with 4.5 pages for the others.

10 The percentages are based on the number of lines in the modern transcription.

1. [...] non può dirsi quanto sia il timore e lo spavento di tutta l'isola; si ricorre perciò in ogni parte alla divina misericordia, **si fanno processioni e digiuni e non si tralascia atto alcuno di pietà e devozione christiana.** (*Vera Rel.* 1669, 4)¹¹
2. [...] **si giudicò dall'illustrissimi Vescovo e Senato di** mandare il velo santissimo di s. Agata (arma sicurissima e più volte provata contra un tal mostro). Sì che la mattina a buon hora **uscì con una solennissima processione** portato dall'illustrissimo Monsignor Vescovo **coronato di spine, pendente da un'hasta d'argento, come è solito portarsi** a vista di tutti **sotto un baldacchino di color cremesino, accompagnato da tutti sei senatori, Capitano e Patrizio, che portavan l'haste coronati pure di spine;** e **arrivato che fu alla chiesa della Madonna della Concordia,** fuori della città men d'un quarto di miglio, fatta la benedizione fu riposto in un cassetto foderato tutto di broccato e stelleggiato con tacci d'oro, e **accompagnato da gran moltitudine di gente d'ogni età, stato e condizione, e da una confusa processione di confrati, religiosi, canonici e preti, e da tre senatori e Capitano; tra quali eran dodici gesuiti** che andavano avvivando la devozione e la fede de' popoli, tutti a piedi, si drizzarono verso il fuoco dove occorsero maraviglie. (*Rel.* 1669b, 6–7)

The first passage is from the Rome *relazione*. The eruption is described exhaustively but the descriptions of the processions and acts of penance are cursory. In the Catania *relazione*, on the other hand, they are described in great detail, including precise information about those in charge, the participants, the routes and the vestments. There appear to be two factors motivating the focus on acts of veneration in the Catania *relazione*. On one hand, explicitly identifying those who took an active part in organising the processions was a way of highlighting their good deeds. On the other, it emphasises the role of these practices as safeguards against the terrible effects of the eruption, as the penitents who invoked St Agatha were the

11 The following transcription conventions have been adopted for citations: the ampersand is rendered as 'e' [and], abbreviations are expanded, and the following have been normalised in line with modern-day usage: punctuation, upper/lower case, accents and the alternation of *u/v* and *j/i*. Bold is used to emphasise passages relevant to the commentary.

only ones to benefit from divine intercession and miracles, the only source of salvation.

The miracles attributed to St Agatha are also described differently in the Catania *relazioni* than in those produced elsewhere. In the unofficial *relazioni*, miracles are either ignored (as in *Vera rel.* 1669 above), explicitly refuted (example 3) or doubted (example 4), but they increase in number and importance in the *relazioni* printed by Bonaventura La Rocca (example 5):

3. Tuttavia, **benché una sì santa radunanza s'incamminasse** contro del fuoco con tali istromenti per esso, **non fu possibile a farli ostacolo**, anzi raccontano che le fiamme alla presenza del Velo più minaccianti si dimostrassero [...] tuttavia, dà gran spavento in vedere che **in dieci giorni ha fatto tanto progresso, senza fermarsi per mezza hora**, la di cui voracità veramente dimostra essere fuoco infernale. (*Rel.* 1669a)
4. [...] e dopo, finitase di celebrar detta messa, maldisse detto fuoco e si vidde detta lingua di fuoco qual veniva verso detta città **che si fermò e fin hoggi non ha passato più innanzi**, [...] **con tutto che da detta gloriosa santa Agata s'abbi, come se spera, ottenuta la grazia** vedendono che il fuoco tuttavia camina e fa oltraggio. (*Vera e distinta rel.* 1669, 3 and 4)
5. [...] la gente eccitando la fede di ciascheduno a confidar nel patrocinio della santa e di quel glorioso vessillo, il quale, arrivato al destinato luogo dell'incendio, **operò l'istesso miracolo raffreddando le fiamme e allentandole il corso**. [...] Nel che occorse che, havendo alcuni buttato **su le vive fiamme pezzetti di bambaggia toccata al sacro Velo, fu veduta da tutti starsene ad longum tempus illesa senza bruggiarsi**; la quale poi ripigliata dagli astanti fu conservata come preziosa reliquia, e ciò venne confermato da' padri gesuiti e specialmente dal Padre Rettore che vi fu presente, né potea raccontarlo senza lacrime di tenerezza. Fu osservato di più che havendo il fuoco buttato a terra non so qual chiesa o casa, **lasciò in piedi e illeso un muro dove stava dipinta l'immagine della gloriosa vergine e martire S. AGATA**¹²; **e un albero**, che attualmente era

12 This citation preserves the original use of upper case for the saint's name to mark her central role.

mezzo bruggiato dal fuoco, fu lasciato così alla vista del sacro Velo, senza che gli potesse operar più la fiamma. L'istesso occorre ad una cisterna d'una povera casa nel casal S. Giovanni di Galermo che io ho veduto, della quale, mentre il fuoco ne havea ripieno e consumato la metà, lasciò l'altra metà intatta al primo apparir di quella sacra insegna.

E giaché siamo nel racconto di questi somiglianti prodigii, ne dirò un altro occorso nel territorio delle Plache alla vigna di un tal per nome Giovanni Maria Rapicauli, [...] che però andato a trovare un picciolo quadretto col'immagine della santa e l'affisse ad un albero di caccamo che stava vicino alla siepe di detta vigna; e o prodigio! Quel fuoco, che suole buttare a terra muraglie assai ben munite e gagliarde, arrivato al muro, che era di sole pietre a secco, lo lascia illeso senza che ne movesse pur una; ma diviso la cinse e, seccato da una parte, scorse altrove dall'altra. (*Rel.* 1669b, 8–10)

The final passage cited above is a particularly clear example of how miracles were handled in the Catania *relazioni*. It contains a string of descriptions of various miraculous events attributed to the saint, such as the halting of the lava flow, the fabric that had come into contact with a relic and then remained undamaged when tossed into the flames, and the house that was spared. The attention paid to the role of the patron saint and to the processions cannot be seen as insignificant.

It is well-known that promoting the veneration of specific saints was linked to the dynamics of political power in the early modern period¹³. In addition, the case of St Agatha took on a particular importance as it involved a dispute with Palermo about the saint's origins. Emphasising her role as the protector of Catania served to bolster the city's claim about her identity¹⁴. The terms used to describe the saint in the *relazioni* produced in Catania are also of interest in this respect, such as 'sua gran padrona e concittadina' [the city's great patron saint and fellow citizen] (*Rel.* 1670, 30), or 'liberatrice del catanese stuolo, come quello, ch'è suo e per cuna e

13 See Enea, *Emergenza e strategie di intervento*, 64 and 67–9.

14 *Ibidem*.

per tomba' [liberator of the people of Catania, as hers from the cradle to the grave] (Squillaci 1669, 6)¹⁵.

Ideologically driven content selection is also evident in the last Catania *relazione*, with respect to measures taken by Stefano Riggio, Prince of Campofranco and Vicar General¹⁶. The passages about Riggio appear to have been designed to belittle his role in the handling of the emergency, thereby boosting that of local secular and religious bodies. Indeed, the space devoted to him is minimal, and there is only an imprecise reference to the 6,000 ducats he brought from the Duke of Albuquerque for reconstruction work, yet there is ample discussion of a misunderstanding he suffered, recounted not without a good dose of undisguised irony¹⁷:

6. **A' 18, che fu in quest'anno il Giovedì Santo, venne in Catania il doppio pranso Don Stefano Riggio, prencipe di Campofranco e mastro razionale del Real Patrimonio, mandato dall'eccellentissimo Duca d'Abuquerque Vicerè con patente di general vicario di tutto il Regno e con l'alterego per aiuto e sollievo della città, e per dar gl'ordini opportuni ove richiedesse il bisogno, portando seco buona somma di danari a riparo de' danni fatti dal fuoco e per soccorso alle necessità del pubblico; ma perché s'era sparso (non senza qualche probabile fondamento) che i palermitani volevano tra gl'eccidii della città rubbar s. Agata, [...] si era appreso ciò nel primo senso; per il che se ne parlava di mala forma, fremendo ciascheduno in sé stesso e barbottando con l'altro tanto che una tal diceria, o falsa, o vera, servì quasi mantice che**

15 Indeed, the frontispiece of *Rel. 1670* includes a rather elaborate engraving of St Agatha. Moreover, a more modest engraving of the saint with the palm of martyrdom also appears in a Naples reprint that minimally updates the 1669 Squillaci edition: Pietro Squillaci, *Terza relazione per tutti li 16 d'aprile. Del fuoco di Mongibello, e di quel che seguì* (Catania – Naples: Colicchia, [1669]).

16 *Rel. 1670*, the only *relazione* whose timeframe extends beyond the first half of April 1669, and which therefore also covers 18 April, the date on which Riggio reached Catania, see Enea, *Emergenza e strategie di intervento*, 133–4.

17 In particular, Riggio was tasked with addressing a range of issues, including attending to those who had been displaced, tax concessions, reinstating maritime links, safeguarding archives, preventing looting and the significant funding of a project to alter the course of the lava flow, see Guidoboni *et al.*, eds, *L'Etna nella storia*, 636–7.

accese un altro gran fuoco, benché ancor coperto sotto cenere. Onde al primo apparir della numerosa cavalleria, che ascendeva al numero di quattrocento, portata dal prencipe per decoro della sua persona, ecco in un batter d'occhio scoperte le fiamme e il popolo tutto in arme, non già per offendere, ma per difesa del suo; si serra pertanto la porta per dove dovea farsi la solenne entrata e si proibisce l'ingresso a soldati, a quali dal prudentissimo Prencipe, che di ciò nulla sapeva, informato che ne fu si diede subito licenza, entrandosene egli con sua sola famiglia e accogliendo con amorevolezza tutti, alli quali assicurava della sua buona volontà e patrocinio. (*Rel.* 1670, 30–1)

Indeed, the passage notes that Riggio's arrival was initially construed as an attempt to remove the remains of St Agatha to Palermo against the wishes of the people of Catania. However, this may in fact reflect Catania's resentment of the impositions that could be exacted by Palermo, Sicily's most important viceregal city, thus eroding the prerogatives of local bodies who would have preferred to report directly to Madrid¹⁸.

Moreover, time speeds up in the section about Riggio. Indeed, apart from this passage about his ill-fated arrival in Catania, the vicar general only reappears much later in the *relazione*, when a leap in time takes the reader to his departure. However, again there is no mention at this point of the fact that on his departure he left the Bishop more than half of the sum he had brought with him to address the crisis but emphasis is placed on Riggio's intervention being less significant than St Agatha's, acknowledged as the true saviour of the people of Catania by Riggio himself, as evidenced by the chandelier he commissioned in her honour¹⁹:

7. [...] per il che il giovedì 23 fece buttare un solenissimo bando col quale s'ordinava che dovendosi per la domenica seguente cantare il *Te Deum laudamus* alla presenza del corpo sacratissimo della gloriosa s. Agata, [...] come infatti seguì con giubilo universale e con singolar devozione,

18 On these issues and other disputes between Catania and Palermo, see Enea, *Emergenza e strategie di intervento*, 83, who also cites Francesco Benigno, 'La questione della capitale: lotta politica e rappresentanza degli interessi nella Sicilia del Seicento', *Società e storia*, 47 (1990), 28 and 36–9.

19 Riggio left behind 3,300 of the 6,000 ducats he had brought. See Guidoboni *et al.*, eds, *L'Etna nella storia*, 638.

essendosi il giorno prima partito il Prencipe Vicario, stimando di non haver più che fare. Per così chiari e manifesti prodigii operati dalla gran padrona, protettrice, e concittadina s. Agata a pro della sua cara patria (informato che ne fu l'eccellentissimo Duca di Albuquerque Vicerè e Capitan Generale di questo Regno) intenerito insieme, e attonito, ordinò che subito si fondesse un lampiero di finissimo argento di valuta di 500 scudi, e altri cencinquanta ne mandò per capitale della spesa per l'oglio necessario da consumarsi di e notte dinanzi alla santa. Memoria che durerà per sempre ne' secoli futuri in testimonio del segnalato patrocinio dall'invitta amazone e della gran pietà e liberalità di sì gran prencipe. (*Rel.* 1670, 39)

The different ways that *relazioni* select and elaborate content is matched by discrepancies between factual chronology and how sequences of events are presented, leading to temporal stretching and compression. For example, the two *relazioni* printed in Rome condense the information provided about the first ten days or even two weeks of the eruption into a mere handful of words:

8. [...] in Catania, come città più capace e alquanto più lontana e difesa dalla vergine sant'Agata [...] tuttavia dà gran spavento in vedere che **in dieci giorni ha fatto tanto progresso**, senza fermarsi per mezza hora, la di cui voracità veramente dimostra essere fuoco infernale. (*Rel.* 1669a, 4)
9. **Passato il dì delli 13 di detto e sopragionto il 14 del detto mese** vedendovo che il fuoco non cessava a viva forza di far stragge, ma maggiormente moltiplicava e oltregiava per tutto, si ritornò di nuovo processionalmente portandose il velo de detta gloriosa santa Agata [...]. Il camino che fa il detto fuoco è di due miglia il giorno. Lascio in considerazione del lettore l'allegrezza de quei popoli di tal grazia. [...] **Sin hoggi 28 del corrente mese di marzo ha caminato il detto fuoco** miglia quaranta intorno. (*Vera e distinta rel.* 1669, 3 e 4)

In contrast, the Catania *relazioni* provide an almost daily account of the first half of March, evidently to provide details of every procession organised in that timeframe, as exemplified by the following extracts from *Relatione del fuoco di Mongibello* (Squillaci 1669), though *Rel.* 1669b displays the same approach:

10. Hor volendo col suo naturale compiere, **giovedì 7** del corrente marzo 1669 sino lunedì a mezzo giorno si scuoté [...]
 [...] finalmente stabilirono i più pratici che il Monte Etna, ne fosse l'origine, sicome in effetto guari non passò che lunedì 11 di detto mese ad hore 22 se ne vidde la prova, aprendosi il seno in tre buchi, poco lontano l'uno dell'altro. [...]
Martedì 12 di detto ad hore 23 uscì il santissimo braccio della catanese amazone Agata [...]
Mercordì ad hore 12 e 13 di detto vedendo le cose andare alla peggio uscì il santissimo velo di Agata [...]
 Giovedì 14 di detto a buon'hora si portò il santissimo Velo nelle terre di S. Pietro e Camporotondo, come [...]
Venerdì 15 di detto si fece una comunione generale, né si trovò persona di qualsivoglia età, che [...].
Sabbato la sera tornò il santissimo Velo dopo d'havere operato tante evidenti miracoli, e pernottò nella chiesa di S. Maria di Giesù, l'illustrissimo Vescovo e Senato; **lunedì** ad hore 15 e 18 di detto andarono [...]Dall'hore 20 di detto giorno a 24 non mai cessorono le compagnie così d'huomini, come di donne, e conventi di far demonstrazioni del suo spirito abbassando alla chiesa madre con varie invenzioni assai compuntive.[...] quando **mercordì 20** di detto dall'hore 20 fino alli 18 del giovedì s'aprirono i catarratti [...]
Venerdì 22 di detto questo monte si annichilì, e aperse la strada verso Malpasso. (Squillaci 1669, 2, 3, 4 and 6)

Rel. 1670, the longest of the *relazioni*, adopts this day-by-day approach up to the end of April, when details begin to be provided more sparsely, omitting some of the measures introduced by Riggio and updates on the progress of the lava:

11. [...] come fece il **sabbato 18** di maggio, veduta già la fermezza, e la fede osservata [...]
 [...] per il che il **giovedì 23** fece buttare un solenissimo bando [...]
 Occorse tutto ciò alli **9 di giugno** giorno della Pentecoste e il martedì 11 si uscì il sacro Velo [...]
 [...] come occorse **venerdì 14** a canto la chiesa detta del Tindaro, dove [...]

[...] e a guisa di disperato precipitatosi in mare; ove, doppo di haver continuata la crudel batteria contro quei superbi cavalloni di onde fluttuanti sino all'11 di luglio, 4 mesi doppo la crepatura del monte. (*Rel.* 1670, 38, 39, 42 and 45)

Space, like time, is also treated differently in different *relazioni*. While all of them focus mainly on Catania, the largest city in the area, this is more evident in the *relazioni* published in that city. This is because the events recounted are being observed from Catania and also because prominence is given to the processions, which always start there as instructed by the Bishop and the Senate of Catania.

2. The narrator

As well as the strategies noted above (selection, expansion, compression), it is important to consider how selective perception might influence the narrative. There are clear differences between the *relazioni* produced in Catania and all of the others when the narrator's first-person voice emerges, when the effect can be observed more clearly²⁰.

In some, like *Vera Rel.*, 1669 and *Terza Rel.* 1669, the narrator's voice is absent. In others, it is barely discernible:

12. Per sodisfare in parte al mio debito, ho stimato bene di non tralasciare di dar ragguaglio a Vostra Signoria. (*Rel.* 1669a)
13. Lascio in considerazione del lettore l'allegrezza de quei popoli di tal grazia. (*Vera E Distinta Rel.* 1669, 4)

20 It has often been observed that the use of the first person in primarily informative texts such as these, together with other signals of historical accuracy, is designed to enhance their credibility. Indeed, the narrator is often portrayed as an eyewitness and therefore a reliable source, and also introduces 'an emotional layer of the text that serves to highlight its pitiful aspects' (page 39 of Chiara De Caprio, 'Narrating Disasters: Writers and Texts between Historical Experience and Narrative Discourse', in Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018), 19–40; See also Chiara De Caprio, 'A Linguistic Perspective on Intermediality in Early Modern Italy. Media Flows in the Early Modern Regno (1494–1632)', *Cheiron*, 2/2021 (2022), 69–85.

In *Vera E Nuova Rel.* 1669, the narrator becomes an eyewitness and the vantage point that underpins the whole text:

14. **Devo con questa partecipare** a Vostra Signoria illustrissima la comune e gran calamità [...]. **Io ch'ero un di questi**, m'appressai a meno d'un tiro di moschetto e, considerato brevemente il tutto, tornai addietro cacciato dalla continua pioggia di sassi che sbalzati dalle bocche del fuoco volavano per tutto. [...] **Doppo che io osservai** il fuoco nelle sudette bocche, **mi voltai** verso li Nicolosi e **viddi** tutte le case dirupate. (*Vera E Nuova Rel.* 1669, 2 and 3)

The narrator's voice is fairly muted in the unofficial *relazioni* but is felt clearly in those produced in Catania. Indeed, it not only appears frequently but plays a range of different roles. First and foremost, it is used to structure the text, as, for example, in 'E giaché siamo nel racconto di questi somiglianti prodigii, **ne dirò un altro**' [And as we are recounting these similar miracles, **I will mention** another] (*Rel.* 1669b, 9) and 'Anzi **dirò** cosa di non poca considerazione, cioè che [...]' [Indeed, **I will state** a matter of some importance, namely that (...)] (*Rel.* 1670, 43).

There are also explicit asides that indicate the narrator's position on the saint's protective role, on Riggio's true intentions or on the fraternal relationship between Catania and Messina in their tussle with Palermo:

15. [...] il velo santissimo di s. Agata (**arma sicurissima e più volte provata contra un tal mostro**) sì che la mattina a buon hora uscì. (*Rel.* 1669b, 6)
16. [...] le due braccia rinovate sopra S. Pietro e Camporotondo si van ragirando su l'antico letto e torcendo sempre al ponente, lasciando senza timore alcuno la città. **Effetti chiari e manifesti della presentanea e miracolosa protezione della santa.** (*Rel.* 1669b, 18)
17. [...] con fare esporre nell'altar maggiore della Catedrale, accompagnato dalla beata mammella di s. Agata, il quadro della sua sacra lettera a' messinesi, **dono più che pregiato mandato da quell'illustrississimo Senato alla città di Catania in pegno del reciproco amore** col quale queste due città, come carissime sorelle, si vogliono l'un l'altra e reciprocamente si compiscano. (*Rel.* 1670, 21)
18. [...] ma perché s'era sparso (**non senza qualche probabile fondamento**) che i palermitani volevano tra gl'eccidii della città rubbar s. Agata,

impresa per altro che haverebbe havuto dell'impossibile e come tale da non imprendersi, havendo più del verisimile che detto havessero che in caso di total rovina della città volentieri sarebbero stati fidi custodi del glorioso corpo e pretiose reliquie della santa (**desiderio per altro più da compatirsi, che da incolparsi**) però dal popolo catanese, quanto devoto e tenero verso la sua gran padrona e concittadina. (*Rel.* 1670, 30)

There are also rhetorical questions that establish a kind of dialogue with the reader, adding a touch of pathos to the descriptions of the exceptional nature of the events:

19. Et in vero, **qual prodigio maggiore** che veder scendere da più rilevati poggi a montagne le fiamme e precipitarsi a guisa di affamati leoni a vista della preda per devorar le mura, alle quali poi avvicinate, vedeansi come tanti cagniuolini lambir l'orlo di quelle? **Qual più degno e portentoso spettacolo** che veder circondata mezza città da più fiumi di vivo fuoco, i quali incatastati l'un l'altro venivano in molte parti a superar le più alte muraglie e fortezze di essa, e pure ossequiosi e riverenti non osar di offenderle un tanto, né di introdurvi il piede? (*Rel.* 1670, 28)

However, the most common use of the first person is to bear witness to the truth of the account: 'se non vogliam dire, con più verità' [or should we say, closer to the truth] (*Rel.* 1670, 26). On one hand, this device allows the narrator to claim to be an eyewitness or to cite authoritative figures as confirmation of the account, especially when it comes to miracles. On the other hand, the reader is sometimes excluded from the selection of which events to include, leaving room for reflections on the veracity of what can or cannot be recounted, or at least printed:

20. [...] la quale poi **ripigliata dagli astanti** fu conservata come preziosa reliquia, e ciò venne confermato da padri gesuiti e specialmente dal **Padre Rettore che vi fu presente**, né potea raccontarlo senza lacrime di tenerezza. [...]

L'istesso occorre ad una cisterna d'una povera casa nel casal S. Giovanni di Galermo **che io ho veduto**, della quale, mentre il fuoco ne havea ripieno e consumato la metà, lasciò l'altra metà intatta al primo apparir di quella sacra insegna. (*Rel.* 1669b, 9)

Lascio molte altre cose che si raccontano circa questo particolare occorse in questi giorni per non esser così certe e autentiche, e solo aggiungo che per questi e altri santi esercitii privati e pubblici, che non si possono describer tutti, e per l'aiuti spirituali di altre città, le quali, o atterrite anch'esse da tremuoti, o mosse a compassione dalle soprastanti miserie di questa città, han fatto appresso. (*Rel.* 1669b, 12)

21. Corrono per ultimo in così fatti garbugli molti dicerie da persone che paion timorate, con le quali si minacciano da parte di Dio castighi e si promettono anche delle cose buone. Si raccontano di più da altri varji successi occorsi in varie parti che dimostrano haver del miracoloso, e finalmente si scrivono da remoti paesi avvisi, come da Dio comunicati ad anime sante, avvertendo questa e altre città di Sicilia a voler placare l'ira del sommo giudice, per divertire i castighi che ci minaccia; però, come che non hanno quel sodo fondamento di verità che si ricerca per esser degne da publicarsi nelle storie, si lascia la fede e la credenza di esse appresso gl'autori e il luogo di scriverle a chi ne haverà piena contezza. (*Rel.* 1670, 44–5)

It is clear that a prominent voice that intervenes to structure, comment on and bear witness to the facts described renders the account more persuasive. Indeed, the more extraordinary the events, the more reliable the text strives to be by exploiting these strategies. At the end of the day, these methods serve to corroborate the underlying themes of the Catania *relazioni*, thus conveying a very precise account of the disaster and its aftermath.

3. Framing the disaster: Foreground and background

The use of the devices noted above is above all pertinent to how the eruption itself is framed. Indeed, while the disaster is the pivotal theme in some of the *relazioni*, the official ones often relegate the eruption and its aftermath to the background.

In the first of the *relazioni* printed in Rome, for example, it is the lava flow splitting into three branches that determines the structure of the *relazione*:

22. Fece subito **tre braccia** l'uno più spaventoso dell'altro e si portò col **primo** sulle terre dell'Annunciata di Monpileri, di S. Pietro, di Masca Lucia, e l'abbruciò con tanto impeto che [...]

Il **secondo braccio** tirò per dritto al casale chiamato la Guardia di Putielli e la Torre di Malpasso e di Campo Ritondo, che rimasero miserabilmente distrutte [...]

Il **terzo braccio** non meno furioso delli sopradetti si piegò verso Malcorrente e la piana della sopranominata città di Catania, di maniera che [...] (*Vera Rel.*, 1669, 2–3)

The principal topic of this passage ('tre braccia' [three branches]) supports the three secondary topics ('il primo braccio', 'il secondo braccio', 'il terzo braccio' [the first/second/third branch]) introduced to structure the different sections in line with the structure of the branching lava flow²¹. The disaster is the semantic centre of gravity here, around which the whole *relazione* revolves. In contrast, the Catania *relazioni* often place the disaster in the background, with the narrative structured as if the disaster was merely a pretext for describing the processions organised by the Bishop and the Senate, and the resulting miracles. This shifting between foreground and background is also achieved through a precise alternation of different verb tenses and moods²².

For example, the unofficial *relazioni* use the *passato remoto* [simple past] to describe the disaster, thus placing it in the foreground, whereas the Catania *relazioni* use the *imperfetto* [imperfect], a form that relegates it to the background²³. The official *relazioni* thus reduce the eruption to little more than a backdrop against which other actions can be presented using the *passato remoto*. Unsurprisingly, these are the actions of the Bishop, the Senate and St Agatha:

21 These aspects pertain to the referential structure of the text. See, for example, Angela Ferrari, *Linguistica del testo. Principi, fenomeni, strutture* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), 179–232.

22 A classic work on these aspects is Harald Weinrich, *Tempus. Besprochene und erzählte Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964) [it. transl. Harald Weinrich, *Tempus. Le funzioni dei tempi nel testo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1978)]. The following pages refer in particular to the contents of chapter IV: *Il rilievo narrativo*, 125–46.

23 There are, of course, also sections in which the disaster is the action recounted using the *passato remoto*: 'Arrivato il lunedì 11 circa hore 22 s'apri il Monte con gagliarde scosse e cominciò da due bocche a vomitar fuori fiamme con tanta furia [...]' [on Monday 11 at about 10pm, the volcano **opened** with violent tremors and **began** to spew forth flames with such fury (...)] (*Rel.* 1669b, 4).

23. Il mercordì 13 perché il fuoco con gran furia scendeva sopra cinque altri casali, cioè San Pietro, Mosterbianco e Camporotondo dalla parte di ponente e dal levante un altro fiume s'avanzava per distruggere la Mascalucia e le Plache, d'onde poi facilmente si sarebbe precipitato verso Catania, si giudicò dall'illustrissimi Vescovo e Senato di mandare il velo santissimo di s. Agata (arma sicurissima e più volte provata contra un tal mostro), sì che la mattina a buon hora uscì con una solennissima processione. (*Rel.* 1669b, 6)
24. Venuto il venerdì che furono li 15 venne avviso al Senato che, sopravvenuto il fuoco con un nuovo braccio e unito a quel primo che era stato estinto dal sacro velo nella Mascalucia, si drizzava a veloce corso a S. Giovanni di Galermo, casale de' più vicini a Catania, e che faceva gran progressi, essendovi già entrato dentro: che però furono costretti con il consenso dell'illustrissimo Monsignor Vescovo, ad uscir di nuovo il sacro Velo, come si fece. (*Rel.* 1669b, 8)
25. Mercordì ad hore 12 e 13 di detto vedendo le cose andare alla peggio uscì il santissimo velo di Agata santa conducendolo Monsignor illustrississimo coronato di spine, con la presenza dell'illustrissimo Senato anco coronato di spine. (Squillaci 1669, 3)
26. Ritorna in tanto vittoriosa l'amazzone divina al suo consueto stanzino; però perché l'infido nemico fatto già padrone della campagna non lascia di scorrere altrove bruggiando e depredando, non cessa dall'altra parte la vigilanza dell'illustrissimi prelado e senatori di adoperarsi al possibile per intercedere appresso l'altissimo e impetrarne misericordia; che però si dà dipiglio alle più devote e preziose imagini e reliquie di quei santi e sante, de' quali si trovava ricca la città, acciò per mezzo della loro intercessione e patrocinio si rintuzzasse affatto l'orgoglio d'un così horrendo e portentoso mostro; per tanto il mercordì, che furono li 3 d'aprile, si fe' ricorso alla regina e signora di tutti i santi la Vergine Santissima Madre di Dio Maria, con fare esporre nell'altar maggiore della Catedrale accompagnato dalla beata mammella di s. Agata. (*Rel.* 1670, 20–21)
27. Ma che? Se muore qui obedendo, risorge altrove con nuovo ardire infuriando, e se da questa parte cede, tradisce poi dell'altra e insulta; come si vidde il martedì 9 nella sudetta contrada della Porcaria da lui prima abandonata, ove, ripigliato l'ardire, alza di nuovo superbo

il capo e **affretta** il passo alla volta della città, unico scuopo delle sue sfrenate voglie. **Al che subito s'opposero i reverendi padri** francescani con la spina santissima, che conservano della corona di Cristo. (*Rel.* 1670, 26)

The long and detailed sections describing the processions derive from the account of the disaster, and even appear to be justified by it. For example, in the last Catania *relazione*, a brief summary of the evolution of the eruption, described atemporally in the present tense, is followed by the appeal to the saint in the *passato remoto*. This suggests that the actions of the Bishop and the Senate were the decisive factor, with relatively undisguised emphasis on the causal relation through the use of semantically charged connectives, as also seen in other passages ('perché' [because], 'per tanto' [therefore], 'al che' [at which point], 'però' [but] used in the sense of 'perciò' [hence])²⁴.

Once again, we see here the additional devices available to those writing the official *relazioni*, and used by them to paint a precise picture of the eruption and to promote the actions of the local authorities.

4. A further confirmation: from manuscript to print

The deployment of specific techniques by the writers of the official *relazioni* becomes even clearer when *Rel.* 1669b is compared with a letter identified as one of its hypotexts, namely, a letter sent by Valentino Bonadies, Vicar General of Catania and the Archbishop's grandson, to his counterpart in Agrigento, Francesco Babilonia²⁵.

The differences between the two are clear from the incipit. Whereas the vicar general's missive is a private letter written to inform his addressee about the event, the *relazione* addresses all Christians, urging them to call

24 About the connectives in Italian see Davide Mastrantonio, 'Connettivi', in Giuseppe Antonelli, Matteo Motolese, and Lorenzo Tomasin, eds, *Storia dell'italiano scritto*, 6 vols., vol. V, *Testualità* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), 221–58, in particular 224–9.

25 The letter is held at Palermo's Biblioteca Comunale, Qq E 16, cc. 118r–119v, and a transcription can be found in Guidoboni *et al.*, eds, *L'Etna nella storia*, 692–4. This transcription is the source of the citations provided here. On the relationship between the two texts, see Azzaro, and Castelli, *L'eruzione etnea del 1669*, 27 and Enea, *Emergenza e strategie di intervento*, 68 and 81.

on God to bring to an end a disaster seen, as usual in this genre, as divine punishment:

28)

Haverà precorso a Vostra Signoria reverendissima prima di **questo mio rapporto** la fama de' spaventevoli incendi del nostro squarciato Mongibello, portata costì per l'aria a volo dal lungo tratto delle sue copiosissime ceneri. Tuttavia **devo parteciparvela per sodisfar le parti di buon servitore non dovendo star in silenzio** in tempo, che per l'apertura di così formidabile bocca, tutte le bocche per tramandarne intiera notizia si snodano. (Bonadies 1669, 692)

Le gravissime angustie e insolite afflizioni nelle quali si ritrova hoggidi la città di Catania con i suoi casali **devono muovere ogni buon cuor cristiano ad intercedere** con la maggior caldezza appresso a Dio Nostro Signore acciò, ricordevole delle sue consuete misericordie, ritiri il braccio della Giustizia col quale mostra minacciare a quella l'ultimo estermínio. (*Rel.* 1669b, 3)

Apart from the differences in the introduction due to the different audience and channel, turning the letter into the printed *relazione* reveals a reformulation designed to emphasise the part played by the local authority and the patron saint. In particular, the use of the devices noted above expands the text of the *relazione*. Events not mentioned in the letter are added, such as the miracles that occurred on Friday 15 March. Bonadies only mentions the fabric failing to catch fire, whereas the *relazione* mentions many others. Moreover, the printed version goes into great detail about the processions organised by the Bishop and the Senate. This is particularly evident if one compares the parts that describe the events of Wednesday 13 March:

29)

Giunse così grande calamità **all'orecchio del prelato, come anco de' senatori**, onde **per sodisfare al timore della città** uscirono nel dì seguente il braccio della gloriosa s. Agata processionalmente, sino al piano di San Domenico fuor delle mura, dove con lacrime s'implorò l'aiuto della nostra protettrice; ma perché non cessava il foco con danni notabili, deliberò di nuovo **Monsignor** mercoledì a' 13 di portarseli incontro **processionalmente il sacro Velo**, che dalla Chiesa Catedrale **fu portato da Monsignor coronato di spine, con paramenti sacri vestito**. Viddeci anco il Senato e Capitolo con volto penitente, coronati pure di spine; et hormai la città tutta con strane guise di mortificationi si portò il Velo da Monsignore ad **una chiesa distante dalla città**, e da lì fu consegnato al tesoriero accompagnato da tre senatori, Capitano e molti canonici del fuoco, scorso sino al casale Mascalucia.

Il mercoledì 13 perché il fuoco con gran furia scendeva sopra **cinque altri casali**, cioè San Pietro, Mosterbianco e Camporotondo dalla parte di ponente e dal levante **un altro fiume s'avanzava per distruggere la Mascalucia e le Plache**, d'onde poi facilmente si sarebbe precipitato verso Catania, si giudicò dall'**illustrissimi Vescovo e Senato di mandare il velo santissimo di s. Agata (arma sicurissima e più volte provata contra un tal mostro)**, sì che la mattina a buon hora uscì con **una solennissima processione portato dall'illustrissimo Monsignor Vescovo coronato di spine, pendente da un'hasta d'argento, come è solito portarsi, a vista di tutti, sotto un baldacchino di color cremesino**, accompagnato da da tutti sei senatori, Capitano e Patritio, che portavan l'haste coronati pure di spine; e arrivato che fu alla **chiesa della Madonna della Concordia fuori della città men d'un quarto di miglio**, fatta la beneditione, fu riposto in un cassetto foderato tutto di broccato e stelleggiato con tacci d'oro, e accompagnato da gran moltitudine di gente d'ogni età, stato e condizione e da una confusa processione di confrati, religiosi, canonici e preti, e da tre senatori e Capitano; tra quali eran dodeci gesuiti, che andavano avvivando la devotione e la fede de' popoli, tutti a piedi, si drizzarono verso il fuoco dove occorsero maraviglie; po' che arrivati a vista di quel braccio, che era entrato già nella

Nel partirsi che fece il Velo animato il popolo da **un breve e divoto sermone, che con fervore di spirito fece Monsignore Vescovo**, si compromesse la grazia, né fu vana la fede, poiché appena ivi arrivato e dettasi la messa vicino al fuoco che, con stupore degli astanti vociferanti: ‘Misericordia’, viddesi nell’istesso punto che s’inalberò il Velo **il fuoco non passar più innanti**.

L’istesso prodigio occorre all’altri tre casali, S. Pietro, Camporotondo e Misterbianco [...] (Bonadies 1669, 693)

Mascalucia, subito che si inalberò il Velo santissimo (il che si fece prima di cominciarsi la messa) su l’altare ivi eretto a questo fine in mezzo alla campagna **cominciò il fuoco a perdere la violenza e velocità nel corso**; e dopo la **benedizione, che vi si fece al fin della predica recitata con gran fervore e sentimento dal Padre Cirillo Cassia della compagnia di Giesù, attual predicatore di questo illustrissimo Senato**, rivolse altrove il corso lasciando sicura questa parte.

L’istesso prodigio occorre all’altri tre Casali: S. Pietro, Camporotondo e Mosterbianco. (*Rel.* 1669b, 6–7)

Note that the adjectives used to describe the Bishop and the Senate are far from neutral. Unlike in the private letter, in the *relazione* they are always described as ‘*illustrissimi*’ [most illustrious]. This can also be seen in other passages, such as in the section on the procession of Saturday 16 March in honour of the ‘*santissimo chiodo di Christo*’ [Most Holy Nail of Christ]:

30)

il santissimo Chiodo **processionalmente accompagnato** da infinito numero di persone mortificate con l’intervento del prelato (Bonadies 1669, 693)

[...] vi si fece **dall’illustrissimo Monsignor Vescovo che accompagnava la reliquia, il solito esorcismo, vestito in pontificale, presente il Senato illustrissimo**, che portava l’haste del baldacchino, ed una gran parte di nobiltà e popoli senza numero [...] (*Rel.* 1669b, 11)

Moreover, the *relazione* is more prone to introduce a note of sensationalism. This is very evident in the sections immediately following the ones just cited, where the printed version is more faithful to the manuscript, thus allowing the changes to be seen more clearly. In particular, the changes mainly add hyperbole to the description of the events through the use of correlative conjunctions like ‘non solo ... ma anche ...’ [not only... but also...]:

31)

[...] dove **in ogni chiesa sacramentale s'espose** per tutta la mattina il Santissimo;

[...] venivano in habito di penitenza **con meravigliose mortificazioni** ad implorare il divino aiuto [...]

[...] **andavano a migliaia** gridando: 'Misericordia!'. (Bonadies 1669, 693)

Dove in questi due sudetti giorni **non si stette mica in otio, ma si espose in ogni chiesa sacramentale** per tutta la mattina il Santissimo [...]

[...] venivano ad implorare il divino aiuto in habito di penitenza, **con mortificazioni così horrende che non si potean vedere senza lacrime** [...]

[...] **non già a centinaia, ma a migliaia** andavanogirandoe gridando: 'Misericordia!'. (Rel. 1669b, 7 and 8)

The changes introduced in the *relazione* also reflect a clear awareness of how widely it would be distributed. For example, locations are described in greater detail, which would probably have been unnecessary for the addressee of the private letter:

32)

[...] **una chiesa distante** dalla città [...]

[...] più vicini alla città [...]

[...] la piena furibonda che in spazio di poche hore fe' **rovina di tre casali**, fuggendo sbigottiti i loro terrazzani, lasciando in preda le loro suppellettili, alla ferocia delle fiamme e dei ladroni, Corse con tanta violenza che stimossi in un giorno haver caminato più di sette miglia. (Bonadies 1669, 692)

alla Chiesa della Madonna della Concordia **fuori della Città men d'un quarto di miglio** [...]

più vicini a **Catania** [...]

E le sudette aperture creparono, non già come altre volte, nell'umbilico del monte o circumcirca, ma nella falda in mezzo a' casali, che però tra lo spazio di poche hore mandò fuori tanta materia **che bruggiò e ricoperse affatto tre Casali: la Guardia, Mompelieri e Malpasso**, oltre altre picciole habitationi di minor consideratione, havendo camminato tra il corso di un intiero giorno più di sette miglia. (Rel. 1669b, 6, 8 and 5)

The closing part of the *relazione* also reveals clear decisions about other changes. Unlike the private manuscript, the printed version contains an account of the events of 29 March, probably merging the letter with other *avvisi*:

33)

Quindi passò al Bastione detto degl'Infetti, dove stava un altro altare in mezzo alla campagna di rimpetto al fuoco, e qui vi si celebrò **la messa votiva della santa**, doppo la quale predicò il predicator del Senato [...] e ciò fatto fu introdotta **la sacra imagine** per la sudetta porta e, ricondotta alla Catredale, fu riposta nel suo camerino aspettando **ogn'uno con fede vivissima di sperimentar gl'effetti propizii del suo gran patrocino, con liberare affatto questa sua città dall'incendio** cotanto vicino e da altri danni che le sovrastano. (*Rel.* 1669b, 21–2)

The text thus ends with a wholehearted affirmation of blind faith in St Agatha, portrayed as the only person capable of ending the suffering of Catania, the city placed in her charge. In contrast, the closing parts of the private letter announce a procession to be held on 1 April in honour of the saint, in whom all hope of salvation is placed: ‘ancorché speramo nella gloriosa s. Agata, che ce ne libererà, come s'è disposto per dimani primo d'aprile portarsi la santa col stendardo del suo velo in mano’ [yet we place our hopes in glorious St Agatha to liberate us, as tomorrow, 1 April, the saint will be carried in procession with the standard of her Veil in her hand] (Bonadies 1669, 694), followed by a ‘doppo scritto’ [postscript] (*ibidem*), which adds details of the increasingly more serious effects of the eruption. Indeed, the letter closes on a less optimistic note, no longer invoking the saint but God directly: ‘Il caso è tanto lacrimabile, che non può né esplicarsi, né pensarsi. **Siamo nelle mani di Dio**; e quanto s'è scritto, s'è fatto con lagrime. Vostra Signoria reverendissima ci aggiuti con le orationi; e per fine le bacio le mani’ [The situation is wretched, inexplicable, unthinkable. **We are in God's hands**; what I have written, I have written in tears. I trust that Your Grace will join us in prayer]. (Bonadies 1669, 695).

This difference may be due to the author of the *relazione* basing it on a version of the letter before the postscript was added. However, there may have been a different motive for truncating the account. Including the menacing reprise of the volcanic activity would have emphasised the inefficacy of St Agatha's intervention, whereas it was important to demonstrate the benefits her actions had brought to Catania, thereby enhancing the image of the saint as the protector of Catania rather than of Palermo²⁶.

26 Enea, *Emergenza e strategie di intervento*, 68. In the letter written by Bonadies, ‘gloriosa s. Agata’ [glorious St Agatha] (Bonadies 1669, pp. 693 and 694) is

The aspects noted above with respect to *Rel.* 1669b are even more evident in *Rel.* 1670, its sequel. Indeed, *Rel.* 1670 was produced by the same printing works and incorporates the text of *Rel.* 1669b, preserving the original stylistic elements and extending the timeframe to 11 June. While no information is provided about the authors, there is no doubt that they came from the same milieu, centred on the Senate, which is also always described as ‘*illustrissimo*’ [most illustrious] in *Rel.* 1670. Moreover, as noted above, *Rel.* 1670 exhibits the same tendential twisting of the account as *Rel.* 1669b, including the noteworthy use of specific adjectives when referring to St Agatha and the portrayal of Riggio’s activities in ways that belittle Palermo²⁷.

5. Conclusion

To summarise, accounts of disasters, and more specifically the form and content used in widely distributed printed matter, could be exploited for political motives. In particular, our analysis of material about the 1669 eruption of Mount Etna shows that the writers of printed material that was authorised and promoted by Catania’s main religious and political bodies might receive precise requests and adopt specific strategies to fulfil them. The structure of this material is therefore of particular significance, given its objective of promoting a specific image of Catania and above all of its institutions. Indeed, this was yet another way in which the spreading of news could be used and abused.

Sources

Bonadies 1669 = Valentino Bonadies, letter to Francesco Babilonia (Palermo: Biblioteca Comunale, Qq E 16, 118r–119v) transcribed in Guidoboni *et al.*, eds, *L’Etna nella storia*, 692–4.

acclaimed as a ‘*concittadina e liberatrice*’ [fellow citizen and liberator] (Bonadies 1669, 693). However, *Rel.* 1669b is more effusive about her veil: ‘*il Sacro Velo*’ [the Holy Veil] (Bonadies 1669, 693) becomes ‘*il velo santissimo di s. Agata (arma sicurissima, e più volte provata contra un tal mostro)*’ [the most holy Veil of St Agatha (a most reliable weapon, frequently tried and tested against a monster of this nature)] (*Rel.* 1669b, 6).

27 See Section 2.

- Rel. 1669a = Relatione del grande incendio e desolazione fatta dal Monte Etna, ovvero Mongibello in Sicilia alli 8 di marzo del 1669* (Rome: Filippo M. Mancini, commissioned by Giuseppe Elmi, 1669).
- Rel. 1669b = Relatione del nuovo incendio fatto da Mongibello, con rovina di molti casali della città di Catania e de' miracoli e prodigii operati dal Sacro Velo dell'invittissima vergine e martire catanese sant'Agata a' di 11 del mese di marzo del presente anno 1669* (Catania: Bonaventura La Rocca Stampator Camerale, d'ordine dell'illustrissimo Monsignor Vescovo e dell'illustrissimo Senato, 1669).
- Rel. 1670 = Relatione del nuovo incendio fatto da Mongibello, con rovina di molti casali della città di Catania e de' miracoli e prodigi operati dal Sacro Velo dell'invittissima vergine e martire catanese sant'Agata, a' di 11 del mese di marzo del presente anno 1669 sino all'11 di luglio del medesimo anno quando terminò l'incendio* (Catania-Messina: Bonaventura La Rocca, d'ordine dell'illustrissimo Monsignor Vescovo e dell'illustrissimo Senato and Giuseppe Bisagni, 1670).
- Squillaci 1669 = Pietro Squillaci, Relatione del fuoco di Mongibello e di quel che seguì del sacerdotte dottor don Pietro Squillaci catanese dedicata da Carlo Giannino al molto illustre e molto reverendo signore il signore Fulvio Servantio maestro di cerimonie di nostro Signore* (Catania-Messina-Rome: Dragonelli, 1669).
- Terza Rel. 1669 = Terza relatione dell'incendio di Mongibello ed de' mirabili successi nella città di Catania e altri luoghi circonvicini. Cavata da una lettera scritta a Roma da un personaggio qualificato sotto li 27 aprile 1669 della medesima città* (Rome: Michel'Hercole, 1669).
- Vera e distinta rel. 1669 = Vera e distinta relatione dell'horribilissimo e spaventevole caso socceduto a 7 di marzo 1669 nell'isola di Sicilia del gran fuoco ch'è uscito dalla Montagna di Mongibello con distruzione di dodeci terre e altri notabili danni fatti in detto circuito* (Naples: Luc'Antonio Di Fusco, 1669).
- Vera e distinta rel. 1669 = Vera e nuova relatione venuta da Catania de' grandi incendi e desolazioni fatte dal Monte Etna, ovvero Mongibello da gli undeci, fino alli 30 marzo del presente anno 1669* (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1669).
- Vera Rel. 1669 = Vera relatione del novo incendio della montagna di Mongibello cavata da una lettera scritta da Tauromina ad un signore dimorante in Roma* (Rome: Giacomo Dragonelli, 1669).

Enrico De Prisco

Countering the spread of contagion. Plague and the media: A close relationship, the case of Conversano (1690–1692)

1. Introduction

Plague outbreaks influenced the politics, religion, economy, art and social culture of early modern societies. As Voltaire wrote in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, plague could be considered one of the three main ingredients of the world, along with war and famine¹. The aim of modern historiography has always been to historicise the plague, to go beyond the stability of literary *topoi* that narrated plagues as fixed myths. Plague epidemics have therefore always attracted the attention of historians for their disruptive qualities. In order to return to a coherent and appropriate reconstruction, far removed from stereotypical narratives, early modern historians have always sought to examine the plague in all its aspects.

This paper adopts the paradigms of media studies and its methodologies in order to study the Conversano outbreak (1690–1692) from a different point of view. The main objective is to examine the relevance of the role played by information during the first weeks of the plague outbreak in Apulia. To this end, in the first part of the text I have analysed how the news of the plague appeared in the different types of media published in the Kingdom of Naples during those years. Then, in the second part, I have highlighted how a single episode resulting from an oversight illustrates the urgency for the authorities to control the spread of information along with the spread of the contagion. Before doing so, it seemed appropriate to briefly outline the reference historiography that followed.

1 Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (London: s.n., 1764). At the entry *Guerre* it is written ‘La famine, la peste & la guerre sont les trois ingrédients les plus fameux de ce bas monde’, 30.

Since it is impossible to mention all the studies on the history of epidemics, even the most important ones, I will limit myself to recalling those that seemed to me to be the most functional for the discourse developed in the following pages.

2. New research perspectives in the field of epidemics

In the 1970s, Carlo M. Cipolla paved the way for a new historiographical approach to the history of epidemics². The interdisciplinary methods used in his scientific production made his work a point of departure for many other scholars in the years that followed. Among the prosecutors of the line traced by Cipolla, the works of Giovanni Assereto³ on the sanitary defences of the Genoese and the last book of John Henderson⁴ certainly stand out in the field of epidemiological studies for early modern Italy. In addition, there are two collective works, one by Irene Fosi⁵ on the Roman plague of 1656 and the more recent one edited by Calcagno and Palermo⁶. For the Neapolitan area, there is the essay by Brigitte Marin on the Neapolitan sanitary magistracy of the Deputazione della Salute⁷ and the works by Idamaria Fusco⁸ on the impact of the sanitary emergencies on the institutions and, more generally, on the society of the Neapolitan

2 The Cipolla's essays were collected in the volume Carlo M. Cipolla, *Contro un nemico invisibile. Epidemie e strutture sanitarie nell'Italia del Rinascimento* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1986).

3 Giovanni Assereto, "Per la comune salvezza dal morbo contagioso". *I controlli di sanità nella Repubblica di Genova* (Novi Ligure: Città del Silenzio edizioni, 2011).

4 John Henderson, *Florence Under Siege. Surviving Plague in an Early Modern City* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2019).

5 Irene Fosi, ed., *La peste a Roma, 1656–1657* (Rome: Università Roma Tre – CROMA, 2007).

6 Paolo Calcagno, and Daniele Palermo, eds, *La quotidiana emergenza. I molteplici impieghi delle istituzioni sanitarie nel Mediterraneo moderno* (Palermo: New Digital Frontiers, 2017).

7 Brigitte Marin, 'Magistrature de santé, médecins et politiques sanitaire à Naples au XVIII^e siècle: de la lutte contre les épidémies aux mesures d'hygiène publique', *Cahiers du Centre d'Histoire*, 14 (2001).

8 Idamaria Fusco, *Potere e corpi sociali di fronte all'emergenza nella Napoli spagnola* (Naples: Guida Editori, 2017).

kingdom. The proponents of this line of Italian epidemic studies, concentrated mainly on the political and administrative aspects linked to the management and the capabilities demonstrated by the different Italian state system to face the sanitary emergencies.

Other historians, on the other hand, have preferred to focus their efforts on specific perspectives of analysis. For this type of research, we must mention the fundamental work of Giulia Calvi⁹, who, since the 1980s, has worked to give epidemiological studies a social perspective. More recently, Guido Alfani¹⁰ has opened up new ways of looking at the waves of plague in the sixteenth century and their long-term impact on Italian demography and the economy. Finally, in the field of medical-historical analysis of the plague, Samuel K. Cohn Jr.'s prominent work *Cultures of Plague*¹¹ is the reference point.

It seems obvious that several historical works have been inspired by the severity of the Italian plague outbreaks of the seventeenth century and their catastrophic effects. However, the wealth of research and debate on these topics has left the dynamics of communication and information partly unexplored. The renewal that has taken place in Italian historiography¹² over the last twenty years, and the recent proposals for further innovation in this historical field¹³, could provide a significant opportunity to look at the outbreak of epidemics in a new way. The adoption of the interpretive paradigms offered by the historiography of communication should open up new ways of analysing these historical phenomena.

This paper comes alive with the urge to overcome this feeling of emptiness, and that is why I am beginning to question the past in a different

9 Giulia Calvi, *Storie di un anno di peste. Comportamenti sociali e immaginario nella Firenze barocca* (Milan: Bompiani, 1984).

10 Guido Alfani, 'Plague in the Seventeenth Century Europe and the Decline of Italy: an Epidemiological Hypothesis', *European Review of Economic History*, 17/4 (2013), 408–30.

11 Samuel K. Cohn Jr, *Cultures of Plague. Medical Thinking at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

12 Massimo Rospoche, 'What Is the History of Communication? An Early Modernist Perspective', *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte*, 20 (2018), 9–15.

13 Giulia Delogu, and Pasquale Palmieri, 'Chi ha paura del potere? Politica e comunicazione negli studi sull'età moderna', *Studi Storici*, 63/2 (2022), 373–406.

way¹⁴. While historiography has said enough about the relationship between epidemics and political decision-making, scholars have rarely examined how the circulation of news influenced the political management of epidemics.

Undoubtedly, the plague-control network formed by the Italian princedoms relied mainly on correspondence and the exchange of information. Reading Cipolla's¹⁵ pages is a good way of understanding the importance of this communicative dimension in this system. In particular, the northern Italian states based their capacity on their competence in sanitary matters, controlling the circulation of people and goods. The health authorities of Venice, Milan, Florence, Genoa, Parma, Turin and Lucca had established a system of cooperation based on the constant exchange of information.

During the sixteenth century, southern Italy suffered two outbreaks of plague: in 1656–1658 and in 1690–1692. The first outbreak was a terrible tragedy: the plague ravaged Naples and the whole of southern Italy, decimating the population. This tragedy marked the memories of the inhabitants of the Kingdom and tarnished the reputation of the Neapolitan authorities in the eyes of the other Italian governments. The book by Fusco¹⁶ and the essays by Giulia Calvi¹⁷, Silvana D'Alessio and David Gentilcore¹⁸ give a good account of these tragic events.

The second epidemic at the end of the century, called the Conversano plague after the town where it originated, ravaged the only province in Puglia, Terra di Bari, from December 1690 to the spring of 1692. The main inspiration for this work has been the assumption of the exception

14 Giulia Calvi's reply to Grendi on the use of new sources in the studies on the epidemics, also inspired the idea of this work. Giulia Calvi, 'A proposito di *Storie di un anno di peste*', *Quaderni storici*, 63/3 (1986), 1009–18.

15 Carlo M. Cipolla, *Il pestifero e contagioso morbo. Combattere la peste nell'Italia del Seicento* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2012).

16 Idamaria Fusco, *La grande epidemia. Potere e corpi sociali di fronte all'emergenza nella Napoli spagnola* (Naples: Guida Editori, 2017).

17 Giulia Calvi, 'L'oro, il fuoco, le forche: la peste napoletana del 1656', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 139/3 (1981), 405–58.

18 David Gentilcore, 'Tempi sì calamitosi: Epidemic Disease and Public Health', in Tommaso Astarita, ed., *A Companion to Early Modern Naples* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013), 281–308.

represented by the Conversano plague, despite the most famous Neapolitan plague of 1656 and in comparison with the other Italian epidemic events of the sixteenth century. Recently, some articles by Idamaria Fusco¹⁹ have shed light on this event, describing how the government successfully managed this peripheral outbreak of plague in Apulia, containing the spread of contagion in the only infected area, Terra di Bari.

At the current state of the art, this paper aims to open up new perspectives that reveal a broader scenario, analysing how the news of the plague influenced information in Naples and what strategies were adopted by the various subjects involved in information gathering. It is necessary to examine if and how the plague affected the dynamics of news circulation and what measures the Neapolitan authorities took to contain this phenomenon.

3. Narrating an epidemic: The case of the Conversano plague, a comparison between printed and manuscript news

The narratives of plague epidemics in pre-industrial societies often followed well-defined and repetitive patterns, elaborating general *topoi* that provided the reader with stereotypical images of epidemic outbreaks for centuries. These narratives tended to be written mainly after the fact, and have often been characterized as artificial ex-post chronicles²⁰.

While we know a great deal about this type of publication, more needs to be said about periodical media narratives, whether manuscript or printed. In contrast to the ex-post narratives, the weekly reports recorded on contemporary news sheets can present an ever-expanding scenario of the plague outbreak.

In this section, I will begin my analysis of plague narratives by exploring this issue through a comparison of two different periodical media published

19 Idamaria Fusco, 'Il Regno di Napoli nelle emergenze sanitarie del XVII secolo. Istituzioni, politiche e controllo dello spazio marittimo e terrestre', *Storia Urbana*, 147 (2015), 55–74; Ead., 'The Importance of Prevention and Institutions. Governing the Emergency in the 1690–92 Plague Epidemic in the Kingdom of Naples', *Annales de démographie historique*, 134/2 (2017), 95–123.

20 Calvi, 'L'oro, il fuoco, le forche', 407–12.

in the kingdom: the manuscript *avvisi* and the printed gazette. I will use the *Gazzetta da Napoli*, printed by Domenico Antonio Parrino, and the manuscript *avvisi*, written by the Medici agent in Naples, Giovanni Berardi, and now preserved in the *Mediceo del Principato* collection. The aim is to show how the two sources differ in their communicative methods and strategies during the first weeks of the Conversano plague. At first glance, it seems that the common weekly publication of the selected media sources better highlights the existing dyscrasia between Parrino's and Berardi's narratives of the epidemic.

3.1. Printed news. The *Gazzetta di Napoli* and its editor Domenico Antonio Parrino

Parrino was one of the most important and well-known printers in Naples in the last decades of the seventeenth century²¹, along with the French-born publisher Antonio Bulifon²², his main rival in business.

Despite the best efforts of historians, Parrino's figure and his successful career in the Neapolitan publishing world remain shrouded in mystery, due to his previous life as an actor at the Estense court in Modena. It is known that the publisher owed his fortune to the approval of the Neapolitan authorities, who preferred him to other printers for their official commissions. One of the most remarkable episodes occurred in 1690, when Parrino snatched an important commission to write the historical chronicles of the Spanish domination in Naples from his rival Bulifon, who was writing a work of the same genre²³. Thus, thanks to

21 For more on the figure of Antonio Parrino, see Annastella Carrino, 'Parrino, Domenico Antonio', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2014), vol. 81, *ad vocem*; Giovanni Lombardi, 'L'attività carto-libraria a Napoli tra fine '600 e primo '700', in Anna Maria Rao, ed., *Editoria e cultura a Napoli nel XVIII secolo* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1998), 75–96; Anna Maria Rao, 'Mercato e privilegi: la stampa periodica', *ibidem*, 173–9, and also Pasquale Pironti, *Bulifon – Raillard – Gravier. Editori francesi in Napoli* (Naples: Lucio Pironti editore, 1982).

22 For a general knowledge of the character, see Gaspare De Caro, 'Bulifon, Antonio', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1972), vol. 15, *ad vocem*.

23 The Bulifon's book was entitled *Cronicamerone, ovvero Annali e giornali storici di tutte le cose notabili accadute nella città e regno di Napoli dalla Natività*

his connections with political power, Parrino obtained the exclusive right to write his chronicle of the Kingdom, the *Teatro eroico, e politico de' governi de' viceré del Regno di Napoli dal tempo del re Ferdinando il Cattolico fin'all'anno 1683*.

This explains why, in the introduction to the volume, Parrino expressed his gratitude to the authorities for once again favouring him at the expense of other publishers. Indeed, in the first pages of the book, Parrino mentions the Viceroy of Santisteban, Francisco de Benavides Dávila y Corella, as the initiator of the historic treaty. In the section 'Warnings from the author to readers', the 'Eccellentissimo Signor Conte di Santo Stefano Viceré e Capitan Generale di questo Regno' [Most Excellent Count of Santo Stefano Viceroy and Captain General of this Kingdom] is credited not only with having commissioned the historiographical book, but also with having inspired Parrino as a true patron 'mosso da un eroico sentimento' [moved by a heroic feeling]²⁴.

Throughout his production, Parrino was always anxious to win the devotion of the Spanish authorities. As a result, the publisher, who had already obtained the privilege of printing the Naples Gazette in 1680, regained the exclusive right in 1693 when another printer, Camillo Cavallo, joined his company. In this way, Parrino obtained the *jus prohibendi* [government licence], once again beating Bulifon, who was also interested in obtaining this privilege for his printing house. From then on, until 1702, Parrino and his partner Cavallo printed the only authorised gazette in the Kingdom of Naples.

del nostro Salvatore Giesù Cristo fino al presente anno 1690. In this occasion authorities obliged Bulifon to stop his historical work at the beginning of the Spanish domination in Naples.

24 Domenico Antonio Parrino, *Teatro eroico, e politico de' governi de' viceré del Regno di Napoli dal tempo del re Ferdinando il Cattolico fin'all'anno 1683*, vol. 1 (Naples: Francesco Ricciardo, 1730, originally publ. 1692–1694).

3.2. The handwritten *avvisi* of the Medicean agent: Father Giovanni Berardi a Jesuit in the service of Cosimo III

The Jesuit father Giovanni Berardi became the head of the Medici's network of informers in Naples in the October of 1671²⁵, when he received a letter of appointment from Abbott Apollonio Bassetti, the Secretary of the Cifra in Florence. His duties included coordinating the activities of all the informers in the Kingdom and keeping the Florentine ministers informed of Neapolitan's affairs. This latter was properly Berardi's main task: indeed, the priest was the only Tuscan agent equipped with the cypher code.

Berardi's role in the Medici's network was very complex and crucial, precisely because of his unofficial position²⁶. We know that the semi-official delegate of Medicean government in the Kingdom was the Prince of Medici di Ottaiano by virtue of his status as a member of the cadet branch of the Medici family. The Ottaiano Prince had the chance to dialogue with the Viceroy, Neapolitan ministers, and noblemen, thanks to his Kingdom nobility membership. Differently, Berardi had the problematic tasks of collecting both the voices circulating in the ministerial offices and the rumours heard in the streets, in order to guarantee the Grand Ducal's ministers an overall view of the Neapolitan situation²⁷.

To this end, the Jesuit corresponded with Bassetti on a weekly basis, informing the Tuscan government of the political situation in the kingdom. During his long activity as an informer for the Medici – from 1671 to 1694 – Berardi produced two different types of documents: letters and *avvisi*. The first type, the letters, consisted of relations, mostly on political matters, written in his own hand and addressed to Apollonio Bassetti. The

25 Archivio di Stato di Firenze (from now on ASFi), *Mediceo del Principato*, 1595, document not numbered.

26 Francesco Martelli clarified the unofficial role of the Medicean agents in Naples during the seventeenth century in the Introduction to the second volume of Francesco Martelli, and Cristina Galasso, eds, *Istruzioni agli ambasciatori e inviati medicei in Spagna e nell' "Italia spagnola" (1536–1648)* (Rome: Direzione Generale per gli Archivi – MIBAC, 2007).

27 On the redrafting ambition of the Medici's diplomacy, see Alessandra Contini, 'Aspects of Medicean Diplomacy in the Sixteenth Century', in Daniela Frigo, ed., *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy. The structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49–94.

handwritten *avvisi*, on the other hand, were probably mainly addressed to Cosimo III and his court, and their composition was entrusted to a professional scribe due to Berardi's illegible handwriting. Like other series of *avvisi* analysed by historians²⁸, Berardi's series has the character of a newspaper, reporting various news from the kingdom, not necessarily of a political nature. The extreme importance of information at the Florentine court is well known: the members of the Medici family felt an absolute pleasure in reading the *avvisi*, which went beyond a simple interest in political information. Since the time of Cosimo I, the Grand Dukes of Tuscany had always asked their agents and diplomats abroad to send them *avvisi* containing news and curiosities from all over the world²⁹. In the series of *Avvisi da Napoli* we read news about the nobility and their social life, feasts, theatrical performances, religious processions, crime and piracy, weather and agriculture.

As we shall see in the next section, Berardi devoted much space in the letters and *avvisi* to the Conversano plague, in order to keep the Tuscan government informed of this alarming news that threatened the health of Italy.

3.3. Narrating the plague: Differences and similarities between manuscript and printed media

The relationship between printed and manuscript news sheets has often been based on a correlation between the secrecy and publicity of news³⁰. Early modern printed gazettes were intended for a supposedly wide

28 For a brief historiography of handwritten *avvisi* Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione, secoli XVI e XVII* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2002); Brendan Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore – London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

29 Sheila Barker, ‘“Secret and Uncertain”: A History of *Avvisi* at the Court of the Medici Grand Dukes’, in Joad Raymond, and Noah Moxham, eds, *News Network in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016), 716–38.

30 On the concept of secrecy and publicity of information in the early modern period, see Mario Infelise, ‘Scrivere gli *avvisi*: autori ignoti e autori di fama’, in Giovanni Ciappelli, and Valentina Nider, eds, *La invención de las noticias. Las relaciones de sucesos entre la leteratura y la información, siglos XVI–XVIII* (Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017), 19–30.

audience and had to adhere to a certain register in order to pass censorship. Handwritten *avvisi*, on the other hand, because of their different nature, easily escaped any form of pre-established control and were more tolerated by the authorities because of their limited audience. These particular characteristics distinguished the way in which news was reported and allowed the author of the *avvisi* greater freedom of expression. The case study analysed here essentially follows this codified pattern, well known in historiography³¹.

It has been noted that the first measures taken by Santisteban against the spread of the plague in Apulia do not seem to have been recorded until the last days of December 1690, during the Collaterale Council sessions³². However, despite the lack of official registration of the Conversano outbreak in the Collaterale registers, we know that the rumour of a dangerous contagion in Apulia had been spreading through the streets of the capital at least since 26 December.

We can be sure of this because in the *avviso* of 26 December, in which Berardi reports the news of a worrying disease registered for the first time in Conversano and Monopoli, we read ‘Pervenuta la notizia da molte lettere al Magistrato della Sanità, che in Terra di Bari, regnassero molte infirmità contagiose, con moltiplicarsi nella città di Monopoli e Conversano giornalmente’ [Many letters to the Magistrate of Health reported that many contagious infirmities reigned in the Land of Bari, multiplying daily in the towns of Monopoli and Conversano]³³. The manuscript also states that the Viceroy of Santisteban immediately warned him to send a courier to the governor of the province to inform him of the situation. Berardi then informed the Tuscan government of the Apulian emergency on 26 December, despite the curious silence of government sources. The

31 Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, 96.

32 Archivio di Stato di Napoli (from now on ASNa), *Notamenti del Collaterale*, n. 76, 88–92. During the viceregal period, the *Consiglio Collaterale* was the highest judicial, administrative and political body. Its primary duty was to assist the viceroy in governing the Kingdom and to ensure the enforcement of laws and regulations. It was usually chaired by the viceroy himself, and consisted of a group of counselors, partly members of the aristocracy and partly doctors of Law.

33 ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 1600, document not numbered.

alarming news circulating in Naples did not go unnoticed by the experienced Medicean agent, who immediately informed his Florentine masters that the contagious disease appeared to be ‘male di morbo pestifero’ [plague].

What was the editorial line of Parrino’s paper? The last number of the *Gazzetta di Napoli* was printed in 1690, dated 20 December³⁴: too early for the publication of news about the plague. Therefore, the news of Conversano disease appeared for the first time on 3 January 1691, in the first number of the year of Parrino’s Gazette. However, when the experienced printer announced the outbreak of an epidemic, he was more circumspect than Berardi about the true nature of the disease. In fact, during the first weeks of the epidemic, several sources attributed the disease to the scarce or even rotten food eaten by the poor people of Conversano.

In his printed bulletin, the gazetteer seemed confident in reporting this interpretation of events: ‘una certa influenza epidemica d’infermità nelle persone di bassa condizione a cagion de patimenti nel nutrirsi sofferti per la povertà loro di cibi di pessima condizione’ [A certain epidemic influence of infirmity in persons of low condition on account of the suffering in feeding themselves due to their poverty of food of poor condition]³⁵. It is likely that the printer had a ministerial recommendation as to the line to be followed on this particular occasion.

The Collaterale Council could not have tolerated an autonomous direction and a confusing spread of wild news about such a dispute. The Neapolitan authorities were extremely alarmed at the spread of indiscriminate rumours about the plague, as these voices could endanger the already precarious situation in the kingdom. The shadow of the trade embargo darkened the future, and the ministers were afraid of an economic and social catastrophe. The ministers of the Collaterale were so hesitant that, during the meeting of 30 December, some of them expressed their doubts about the true nature of the disease, judging the resolution proposed by Santisteban to be extremely harsh.

34 Biblioteca della Società Napoletana di Storia Patria (hereafter BSNP), *Gazzetta di Napoli*, 1690, n. 71.

35 BSNP, *Gazzetta di Napoli*, 1691, n. 1.

Onde a tal notizia dissero tutti li signori del Collaterale che doveva starsi con avvertenza di non scandalizzare al mondo con palesare dette voci senza verace fondamento, e senza la ricognizione di più esperti.

Replicò Sua Eccellenza che questo male o è vero, o non è vero; se vero non giova questo rimedio, dovendosi dare remedi più profittevoli ed efficaci, se non vero ogn'opera è vana, ma bensì che dovrebbe darsi rimedio per riparare alle voci che corrono per la città³⁶.

[Hence all the gentlemen of the Collaterale said that they should be careful not to scandalise the world by revealing these rumours without a true basis, and without the knowledge of more experts.

His Excellency replied that this evil is either true or it is not true; if true, this remedy is of no use, since more profitable and effective remedies should be provided; if not true, all work is in vain, but rather that a remedy should be provided to remedy the rumours that are circulating in the city].

The *editorial line* adopted by Parrino changed in the following issue of 10 January 1691, probably because of the sudden scenario caused by the spread in the city of the reports of Brancaccio, the Santisteban's extraordinary envoy in Apulia. The meeting of 31 December 1690³⁷ ended with the disquiet of the ministers of the Collaterale at the arrival of information from Apulia confirming the worst possible scenario: doctors identified the epidemic disease ravaging Conversano as the plague.

Viceroy Santisteban, with the support of the health deputies, immediately imposed a ban on the infected area and set up controls – with the construction of *Rastelli* at the gates and access points to Naples. The role of the Official Gazette was therefore to announce the ban and the measures taken by the government. Thus, on 10 January 1691, the second issue of the 'official' Gazette was published:

Relazioni di Conversano, di dove fu l'altro giorno scritto dall'accennato Giudice di Vicaria sig. Francesco Sterlich, che il male, che colà corre sia veramente stimato morbo pestilenziale, e che nello spazio di 52 giorni ne fussero morti 210 ma che molti ne guarivano, essendo la maggior parte de morti persone della plebe³⁸.

[Reports from Conversano, where it was written the other day by the aforementioned Judge of the Vicaria, Mr Francesco Sterlich, that the disease that is being carried out there is truly considered a pestilential disease, and that 210

36 ASNa, *Notamenti del Collaterale*, v. 76, ff. 88–91.

37 ASNa, *Notamenti del Collaterale*, v. 76, f. 92.

38 BSNP, *Gazzetta di Napoli*, 1691, n. 2.

people died in 52 days, but that many were cured, since most of the dead were members of the common people].

Another example of this discrepancy between the two sources can be found in Berardi's *avviso* of 9 January. In it, the Jesuit priest described a scene that could never have been published in Parrino's gazette. The *avviso* reported on the panic that broke out in the capital after the news of the discovery of the plague in Conversano had been spread, giving a view of the facts that would otherwise have remained unknown to the readers of the Neapolitan Gazette. In this *avviso*, which in a way recalls the tragic events of 1656³⁹, the author recorded the flight from Naples of the nobles and the richest families, frightened by the spread of the contagious disease.

Partono per diversi luoghi del Regno da questa città tutti coloro, che possono, e sono moltissimi per abbondare in cautela, essendo più facile guardarsi dal pericolo di peste nel Regno, che in questa Dominante popolatissima e praticano il medesimo i signori Baroni⁴⁰.

[All those who can, and there are many of them, depart from this city for various places in the Kingdom to abound in caution, since it is easier to guard against the danger of plague in the Kingdom than in this densely populated Dominant, and the Barons practise the same.]

Once again, the records of the Nuncio Casoni provide us with a reliable witness who confirms the chaotic situation lived in Naples at that time, as described in Berardi's *avvisi*. In fact, on 2 January 1691, Casoni informed Rome: 'Sui sospetti, e timori, che corrono questa mattina si sono incaminati molti alla volta di Roma con speranza di poter entrare nello Stato Ecclesiastico prima che si chiudino i passi' [On the suspicions, and fears, that ran this morning, many set off for Rome in the hope of being able to enter the Ecclesiastical State before the passes closed]⁴¹.

These scenes were still vivid in the Neapolitan imagination and continued to tarnish the reputation of the Neapolitan authorities in the eyes of the other Italian princedoms. Such a report could therefore be unpleasant for the ministers of the Collaterale if published in a printed newspaper.

39 Fusco, *La grande epidemia*, 31–8.

40 ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 1601, not numbered document.

41 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (from now on AAV), *Segreteria di Stato*, Naples, 108, f. 15r.

Throughout this handwritten *avviso*, we have noticed a more critical reading of events and an engaging description of the feelings of contemporaries. Parrino's Gazette, on the other hand, confined itself to reporting the facts, with no particular emphasis on the panic or other emotions that arose during those chaotic and dramatic days.

It is also true that, beyond these differences, textual analysis has allowed us to register a certain deep affinity in the rhetorical constructions of the two sources studied with other narratives produced in times of emergency. It has been shown that, from the sixteenth century onwards, natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions aroused the curiosity of a large European public. These catastrophes generated a wide circulation of news through the European news network, even across linguistic borders⁴². Recent research on the seventeenth century has highlighted the codified *topoi* that guided the compilers of pamphlets on natural disasters in the Kingdom of Naples⁴³.

For example, accounts of natural disasters often emphasise that the lay authorities were determined and well prepared to face natural disasters. In this scheme, the figure of the viceroy, often portrayed as a wise and diligent ruler, was given great importance.

In this case study, Berardi's *avvisi* and Parrino's Gazette converge on this point. Indeed, both texts praise the Santisteban administration for its prudence and wisdom since the early period of the Conversano emergency. The two narrators fully adhere to the rhetorical narratives usually used for disaster narratives. There are several examples in their texts of this behaviour on the part of the two gazetteers. For example, in the third number of the printed gazettes, we can mention this passage written by Parrino on 16 January.

42 Carlos H. Caracciolo, 'Natural Disasters and the European Printed News Network', in Moxham, and Raymond, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe, 756–78*.

43 Domenico Cecere, 'Moralising Pamphlets: Calamities, Information and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Naples', in Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018), 129–46.

In tanto qui si fanno da Sua Eccellenza continuare con vigilantissima osservanza non solo le scritte, ma tutte le altre cautele diligenze, che può somministrare ad un saggio Principe l'humana providenza, con haver Sua Eccellenza conceduto autorità a questa Deputazione della Salute di far praticare tutte le prevenzioni imaginabili, per preservare da ogni ombra di sospetto questa Capitale, dove per la Dio gratia, si gode perfetta salute⁴⁴.

[Therefore, His Excellency continues with the utmost vigilance not only the writings, but all the other cautious diligences that human providence can give to a wise prince, with His Excellency having granted authority to this Deputation of Health to practise all imaginable precautions to preserve this capital, where by the grace of God, perfect health is enjoyed, from every shadow of suspicion].

If the elegiac tone of Parrino's newspaper does not surprise us, it is strange to read similar content in Berardi's text. Even if the *Gazzetta di Napoli* is more prone to lavish praise of the Viceroy, Berardi's reports were not short of compliments when describing the actions of Viceroy Santisteban. For example, in another passage of the aforementioned *avviso* of 9 January, we read

Sperimentiamo qui nel medesimo tempo gl'effetti della divina giustizia e della misericordia; poiché ci minaccia il castigo de nostri peccati col flagello della peste, et insieme ci ha provveduto del vigilantissimo signor Viceré, che con somma prudenza, e pietà procura di tenerlo lontano da questa Città, e Provincie non sospette con i più rigorosi ordini⁴⁵.

[We are experiencing here, at the same time, the effects of divine justice and mercy; since the punishment of our sins threatens us with the scourge of the plague, and at the same time we have been provided with the most vigilant Lord Viceroy, who, with the greatest prudence and mercy, is trying to keep it away from this city and unsuspecting provinces with the strictest orders].

Nevertheless, it can be said that the *Gazzetta di Napoli* adhered more closely to the aforementioned narrative pattern of recounting catastrophes. Parrino was one of the most important printers in Naples and had already published texts on natural disasters in the Kingdom. Moreover, the relationship between Parrino and the Neapolitan authorities made him willing to embellish the facts if necessary. On the contrary, Berardi's text, especially in the first weeks of the epidemic narrative, is less tied to a predetermined

44 BSNSP, *Gazzetta di Napoli*, 1691, n. 3.

45 ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 1601, not numbered document.

narrative scheme; this more open narrative gives the *avvisi* narrative a different value compared to the text of the *Gazzetta*.

In conclusion, we can say that the text of the *avvisi*, which was ideally intended for a limited audience – the secretary Bassetti and the Grand Ducal Court – emerges as the one without obvious narrative constraints and less influenced by the official version of events. The narrative of the *Gazzetta di Napoli*, on the other hand, due to its wider audience and its official nature, proves to be more fixed in its determining parameters, resulting in a more stereotypical narrative.

4. Controlling the contagion of news

4.1. The theatre of information during the Conversano plague

One of the main responsibilities of ancien régime governments was to maintain the health and integrity of their vassals and subjects⁴⁶. The plague was therefore a major threat to the stability of the state. In times of plague, the spectre of death, economic disaster and social unrest loomed over the future of the community. Rulers had only one tool at their disposal to keep these devastating diseases out of their territories: quarantine⁴⁷, which had been generally accepted since the fifteenth century as an effective means of containing the spread of plague. The health measure of quarantine was a regular practice of Italian commercial and economic life during the seventeenth century, applied in everyday life at the key point of the Principalities, especially in the maritime ports⁴⁸. However, it could become a punitive measure when an epidemic began to spread. Indeed, when a city or province was suspected of being infected, the other Italian states were used to impose a trade blockade. The trade blockade was a disaster for the

46 Idamaria Fusco, ‘Il governo “dispotico” dell’emergenza. Don Marco Garofalo e la peste pugliese di fine Seicento’, *Società e Storia*, 163/1 (2019), 24–56, 25.

47 Fusco, *La grande epidemia*, 18–23.

48 Daniele Andreozzi, ‘“L’anima del commercio è la salute”. Sanità, traffici, rischio e dominio sul mare in area alto adriatica (1700–1750)’, in Raffaella Salvemini, ed., *Istituzioni e traffici nel Mediterraneo tra Età Antica e crescita moderna* (Naples: CNR-ISSM, 2009), 225–45.

realms. It threatened the economy and supply systems of the states, with all the problems that could result, such as famine and social unrest⁴⁹.

It is clear that communication played a crucial role in this system⁵⁰ for two main reasons. Firstly, the acquisition of information was essential for controlling and protecting the country from external threats. Secondly, monitoring the spread of news was the only way to avoid the spread of panic among the population and the emergence of speculative events, with the consequent unhappiness of the population or even rebellion. Therefore, the spread of wild news was as terrible a danger as the spread of contagion, and controlling both was the only way for governments to guarantee the internal stability of the state.

Times of disaster could represent an exceptional moment in the regular functioning of the news network⁵¹. In the early modern period, the highest political, religious and cultural hierarchies ensured the flow of information to the lower social classes. Information gathering was by its very nature a vertical system, in which news circulated from the top to the bottom of the social scale. However, in times of crisis, this consolidated dynamic tended to expand its boundaries, distorting the information paradigms provided by the leading groups⁵². Then, emergencies, whether natural or political,

49 Guillaume Calafat, 'La contagion des rumeurs. Information consulaire, santé et rivalité commerciale des ports francs (Livourne, Marseille et Gênes, 1670–1690)', in Silvia Marzagalli, ed., *Les Consuls en Méditerranée, agents d'information. XVI^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), 99–119; Giulia Delogu, 'Notizie vere, notizie false: la questione sanitaria nell'Adriatico austriaco e nella Carniola del XVIII secolo tra commercio, politica e "polizia medica"', *Acta Histriae*, 28/2 (2020), 311–26.

50 Paolo Preto, 'Lo spionaggio sanitario', in Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, ed., *Rotte mediterranee e baluardi di sanità: Venezia e i lazzaretti mediterranei* (Milan: Skyra, 2004), 69–73. On the importance of news circulation for commerce, see also: Mario Infelise, 'La circolazione dell'informazione commerciale', in Franco Franceschi, Richard A. Goldthwaite, and Reinhold C. Mueller, eds, *Commercio e cultura mercantile* (Treviso: Angelo Colla Editore, 2007), 499–522.

51 Domenico Cecere, "'Subterranea conspiración". Terremoti, comunicazione e politica nella Monarchia di Carlo II', *Studi Storici* 60/4 (2019), 811–43, 817.

52 Davide Boerio, 'Information Gathering and Communication Crises from an Early Modern Media Perspective', *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, 45/2 (2019), 129–54.

stressed the system by introducing a multitude of new voices that were completely excluded from the usual routine of the information networks.

The ruling classes were well aware of the mechanism of the system and its inherent risks. Thus, if times of crisis generated a greater demand for information among the lower classes, these peculiar moments could also force the hegemonic class to intervene with stricter rules on the circulation of news.

De Vivo spoke of the risk of overestimating, on the one hand, the ability and resources of the ancien régime's censorship and ruling classes to control communication. At the same time, however, he warned against underestimating the ability of these entities to restrict and control the flow of information. De Vivo's work has reaffirmed the importance of the rulers' secrecy of information – the *arcana imperii* – and restored a more coherent reconstruction of political communication paradigms for the early modern period⁵³.

In the case of the Conversano epidemic, we cannot point to a clear plan for controlling and censoring news. Rather, we can see that the Neapolitan authorities tried a series of confused and confusing measures to prevent the overwhelming flood of dangerous and uncontrolled information. During this epidemic crisis, the main objective of the authorities was to keep the plague out of Naples in order to avoid a demographic and economic catastrophe. In the first months of 1691, the Neapolitan government had to defend itself against both the disease and the spread of news. An important episode in January 1691 illustrates the efforts made by the authorities. This episode had the printer Domenico Antonio Parrino as one of its main characters.

4.2. 'He deserves to be humiliated': An unforgivable oversight

There is no doubt that Parrino's Gazette was, by its very nature, strictly loyal to the government: as the only authorised printed newspaper, the *Gazzetta di Napoli* was a kind of semi-official gazette of the kingdom. For this reason, the Neapolitan government probably supervised this

53 Filippo De Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri: politica e comunicazione a Venezia nella prima Età Moderna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012), 15–34.

publication, albeit mildly, especially over the folio section dedicated to Naples and the Kingdom. This kind of control over the printed press did not only characterize the Neapolitan editorial world. Mario Infelise has described the fluidity with which the authorities and printers interacted in the early modern period, when time constraints and unscrupulous competition made it impossible for the authorities to apply the same efficiency that they employed with printed books⁵⁴.

It is likely, therefore, that in a period of extreme confusion and general uncertainty, a single passage in the Gazette could pass unnoticed, and even a slight oversight by the author could have serious consequences. Such was the case in January 1691, when an oversight by both the censor and the printer threatened to further jeopardise the already precarious situation in the kingdom.

With the fourth issue of the *Gazzetta di Napoli*, dated 23 January 1691, Parrino's probably astonished the viceroy Santisteban and the entire Collaterale Council. With this issue of his gazette, the Neapolitan printer lost face with the authorities and incurred the blame of the highest ministers of the government. In the 23 January issue of the Gazette, Parrino reported on the good health of the city of Naples and the viceroy's efforts to maintain security⁵⁵. However, he chose an unfortunate sentence to confirm his previous statement about the health of Naples: 'in questa Capitale, che fa circa 500 mila anime, si è saputo, che in tutto non vi sono, che da 75 persone ammalate' [In this capital city, which has about 500,000 souls, it has been reported, that in all there are only 75 sick people].

This phrase could be taken out of context and misused in any way, especially given the turbulent times. In particular, it was written after the report of the plague epidemic in the Apulian provinces. In fact, the Marquis of Crespano, Don Diego Soria, one of the ministers of the Collaterale, immediately noticed Parrino's fatal error during the Council of 24 January 1691.

Disse da principio il signor Marchese di Crespano, che Parrino ne suoi avvisi avea poste notizie molto pregiudizievoli al commercio di questo Regno, ponendo in

54 Infelise, *Prima dei Giornali*, 81, 167–8.

55 BSNSP, *Gazzetta di Napoli*, 1691, n. 4. Parrino wrote: 'ed in tanto qui [Napoli] godiamo per la Dio gratia ottima sanità' [meanwhile, here (Naples) we are keeping safe thanks to the mercy of God].

essi che in questa città [Napoli] erano morte 70 persone, senza però dichiarare, che queste non erano morte di mal contagioso⁵⁶.

[At first the Marquis of Crespano said that Parrino in his notices had posted news that was very prejudicial to the trade of this Kingdom, stating that 70 people had died in this city [Naples], without however stating that these had not died of contagious diseases].

When the other members of the Collaterale heard Crespano's announcement, they were probably outraged by the error of their trusted printer. The news that seventy people had died of an infection in the capital would jeopardise the Neapolitan government's strenuous efforts to limit the effects of the trade blockade imposed by the other countries. The insight of the Marquis of Crespano in reporting Parrino's accused text is significant. In fact, as we can see from the two different texts reported in this paper, Parrino had never written about dead people, since he only spoke of '75 sick people'. In the end, all the ministers agreed with Crespano on Parrino's inexcusable mistake 'E diè questo molta meraviglia [tra i reggenti del Collaterale], stimandosi che fosse meritevole [Parrino] di una buona mortificazione' [and this caused much amazement (among the regents of the Collaterale), estimating that he (Parrino) was deserving of a good mortification]⁵⁷.

The Marquis of Crespano's inadvertent falsification of Parrino's writings – '75 dead' instead of '70 sick' – was a good example of the possible misuse and confusion caused by this single and apparently insignificant sentence in the gazette.

This episode underlined the fears of the Neapolitan rulers, who were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea: the overflow of the plague throughout the kingdom and its catastrophic additional threats of famine and social unrest.

56 ASNa, *Notamenti del Collaterale*, v. 77, f. 39.

57 *Ibidem*.

4.3. Governing the frightened city: The contagion of rumours and the spread of sedition

In 1691 we have seen how the authorities claimed their success in containing the epidemic in the only province of Terra di Bari⁵⁸, assuring both the subjects of the kingdom and the Italian principedoms of the inflexible management of the epidemic. The authorities were extremely anxious to contain the plague in the province of Bari in order to avoid an irreparable disaster: the plague at the gates of the city and the people in revolt.

It is well documented how this concern troubled the Viceroy Santisteban in his attempts to prevent social unrest and popular uprisings in Naples. The overcrowded city, with its ‘wasteful and idle’ population and ‘without any means of subsistence for the lost trade’⁵⁹, became an absolute nightmare for the Spanish viceroy. During the meeting of 27 January 1691, Santisteban expressed his deep concern to the ministers, informing them of the rumours of rebellion that were spreading throughout the city. For this reason, Santisteban proposed that the Council of State be convened immediately to prevent these seditious intentions: ‘Similmente diè notizia Sua Eccellenza delle sediziose voci che per la città si sentivano, e propose se per tal causa dovesse chiamarsi il Consiglio di Stato e tutti li Signori’ [Similarly, His Excellency gave notice of the seditious rumours that were being heard in the city, and proposed whether the Council of State and all the Lords should be called for such a cause]⁶⁰.

The Nuncio, Monsignor Casoni, in his letters to Cardinal Ottoboni, Secretary of State in Rome, well described the disorder that reigned in Naples. In one of these letters, dated 30 January 1691, a few days after Santisteban’s declaration in the Collaterale Council, Casoni noted that:

Il timore più grande che si abbia da questo Governo è di qualche improvvisa sollevazione del popolo sommamente irritato [...] per veder l’interrompimento del commercio cresciuto il prezzo delle vettovaglia ,e mancato in gran parte l’industria, che gli dava modo di sussistere [12r] supponendosi che i mercanti della seta col sospendere i soliti lavori abbiano levato il pane a più di 40 mila

58 Idamaria Fusco, ‘Il governo “dispotico” dell’emergenza. Don Marco Garofalo e la peste pugliese di fine Seicento’, *Società e Storia*, 163 (2019), 24–56.

59 ASNa, *Notamenti del Collaterale*, v. 76, f. 136.

60 *Ibidem*.

persone, che vi travagliavano, e che i marinari che restano senza poter fare alcun de soliti guadagni siano più di 20 mila⁶¹.

[The greatest fear that this government has is that of some improvised uprising of the people, who are extremely irritated [...] to see the interruption of commerce, the price of foodstuffs has risen and industry, which gave them the means to subsist, has largely failed [12r] supposing that the silk merchants, by suspending the usual work, have taken the bread away from more than 40,000 people, who were labouring there, and that the sailors who remain without being able to make any of their usual earnings are more than 20,000].

Casoni's report then largely agreed with the gloomy situation described by the Spanish viceroy. In addition, the Nuncio reported a conspiracy theory circulating among the plebs, accusing Santisteban of inventing the state of emergency in order to prolong his last term in office.

Si sono trovati molti cartelli seditiosi attaccati in diversi luoghi della città e tra la plebe si discorre con gran libertà, che la peste di Conversano sia una cosa inventata dal Viceré per stabilirsi in questo Governo⁶².

[Many seditious placards have been found stuck up in various places in the city, and among the plebs there is much free talk that the plague of Conversano was invented by the Viceroy in order to establish himself in this government.]

These conspiracy theories were common in times of plague⁶³, and in the Neapolitan case are well documented the rumours of conspiracy and the hunt for the *untori* during the previous plague of 1656⁶⁴. If this episode recalls the belief that the Spaniards were blamed for introducing the great plague in Naples in order to punish the city for the Masaniello⁶⁵ rebellion, the rumours of 1691 seem to be somewhat different. In fact, this time the popular arguments were mainly directed against the viceroy and were linked to the weak and undefined position of the Spanish viceroys in Naples⁶⁶.

61 AAV, *Segreteria di Stato, Napoli*, 130D, ff. 11v–12r.

62 AAV, *Segreteria di Stato, Napoli*, 130D, f. 12r.

63 Paolo Preto, *Epidemia, paura e politica nell'Italia moderna* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 1988).

64 Calvi, 'L'oro, il fuoco, le forche', 421–30; Silvana D'Alessio, 'On the Neapolitan Plague of 1656. Expedients and Remedies', in Cecere, De Caprio, Gianfrancesco, and Palmieri, *Disaster Narratives*, 187–204: 188–9.

65 *Ibidem*.

66 On the figure of Spanish viceroys in Naples see Gabriel Guarino, *Representing the King's Splendour. Communication and Reception of Symbolic Forms of*

Santisteban's fears were not entirely unfounded, therefore, when the papal Nuncio described the same situation of danger and uncertainty in Naples. However, even if Santisteban considered the city to be so dangerous that he had to take extraordinary measures, his decision was still subject to the final approval of the ministers of the Collaterale.

In the end, we read that the ministers persuaded the viceroy to adopt a more cautious approach and to entrust the task of suppressing the rebellious voices to the minister of the Vicaria.

‘Li Signori Reggenti risposero che non doveva farsi tal dimostrazione, bastando che il Reggente della Vicaria stia con vigilanza per castigarsi severamente qualunque motore di dette voci’⁶⁷.

[The Regents replied that there was no need to make such a demonstration, it being sufficient for the Regent of the Vicaria to be vigilant in order to severely chastise any engine of such rumours].

Again, according to the reports of Nuncio Casoni, the government took less drastic measures to prevent an uprising, ‘reinforcing the guards in the most crowded places of the city’ or using some tricks to win the favour of the population, even calling on the archbishop to help the poor with charity⁶⁸.

These discussions during the meeting of the Collaterale Council well represent the fears of seditions that the Spanish rulers had to face in Naples during the second half of the seventeenth century. In fact, once again the spectre of Masaniello's revolt hovered in the minds of the viceroy and his ministers, as it always did when rumours of plebeian unrest spread in the faithful city⁶⁹.

5. Conclusions

Finally, it is clear how important information was during the epidemic crisis of 1691, so much so that it prompted the Neapolitan authorities to intervene by using their control over it.

Power in Viceregal Naples (Manchester – New York: Manchester University Press, 2014).

67 ASNa, *Notamenti del Collaterale*, v. 76, f. 136.

68 AAV, *Segreteria di Stato, Napoli*, 130D, f. 12r.

69 Cecere, ‘Moralising Pamphlets’, 134–40.

The authorities' attempts to conceal or minimise the seriousness of the situation in Puglia had two complementary aims: to avoid an economic crisis and to maintain social peace. The government's efforts were aimed at normalising the situation and preventing the rage of the mob from igniting. The rumours of conspiracies behind the outbreak of the plague, which spread throughout the city, threatened to inflame the atavistic fears of the plebs and to present the authorities with the spectre of an uprising.

To this end, the efforts of the Viceroy of Santisteban and the ministers of Collaterale were directed at containing the spread of information and rumours in the city. This manipulative behaviour did not go unnoticed by a keen observer of the realities of the kingdom, such as Nuncio Casoni, who wrote: 'ho gran luogo di argomentare che il suddetto male stia assai maggiore di quello che vogliono far credere' [I have great cause to argue that the aforementioned evil is far greater than they would have us believe]⁷⁰.

What was written, or rather unwritten, in the only regular newspaper published in the kingdom confirmed the Nuncio's suspicions. The lack of in-depth passages in Parrino's narrative of the plague, which emerges from a comparison of the printed gazette and the Florentine *avvisi*, sheds light on the concerns of the Neapolitan rulers. In my analysis, I have noted a significant discrepancy between the two media sources. The most obvious episode is probably Berardi's account of widespread panic in the city. This event, which is also confirmed in the letters of Nuncio Casoni, is completely 'neglected' by Parrino. This absence in the printed bulletin aptly demonstrates that the narrative strategies adopted by Parrino were aimed at smoothing out the story by omitting its most insidious aspects.

After all, it would be impossible to control the rumours in the streets without the help of the printed and semi-official periodical media of the kingdom. The aforementioned episode of oversight, a genuine misunderstanding between Parrino and the Marquis of Crespano, caught my attention because it is revealing. What emerges from the sources could be described as a system in which the absence of prior censorship for the printed newspaper was offset by a kind of authorial self-censorship, in

70 AAV, *Segreteria di Stato, Napoli*, 130D, f. 9r.

which trust and the sharing of interests governed the relationship between the authority and the ‘servant’ publisher⁷¹.

In conclusion, the plague was a workshop in which the Neapolitan rulers experimented with the periodic media, even if only in a rudimentary way. During the Conversano plague, the government’s communication strategy was probably less obvious but more successful than in 1656. In fact, this time the government was able to maintain a relatively peaceful situation in the city, without being drawn into the turmoil of street rumours⁷².

In those first months of 1691, however, the authorities did not seem to be so deeply concerned about the possibilities offered by the systematic censorship of periodical information. Before we see the real logic of the control and direction of the media, we will have to wait, at least for the Kingdom of Naples, for the arrival of Tanucci and his management of the serious crisis that hit Southern Italy with the famine and epidemic of 1764⁷³.

71 The concept of self-censoring is not new, but it is usually applied to literatus and intellectual authors who used to self-censoring their works to avoid trouble with the Inquisition. See Giorgio Caravale, *Libri pericolosi. Censura e cultura italiana in età moderna* (Rome –Bari: Laterza, 2022), 280-301.

72 Idamaria Fusco, ‘The “Government” of News in a Time of Plague: Naples in 1656 Between Myths and Truth’ in Vincenzo Caputo, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Tales of Two Cities. News, Stories and Media Events in Early Modern Florence and Naples* (Rome: Viella, 2023), 123–39.

73 Pasquale Palmieri, *L’eroe criminale. Giustizia, politica e comunicazione nel XVIII secolo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2022).

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A comparative analysis of earthquakes as reported in the official Spanish press (1770–9): A commercial strategy?*

1. Introduction

The attention that the official Spanish press – *Gaceta de Madrid* and *Mercurio Histórico y Político* – paid in the decade that began in 1770 to news of seismic activity is extremely useful, as a complementary source, for historic seismology studies of the *Little Ice Age*¹ by identifying the different phases of the earthquake and providing a list of the aftershocks; and also, because they tend to quantify the damage caused and subsequent management of the disaster. This is a theme of growing interest for prevention policies given the occurrence of earthquakes today, such as those that rocked Granada early in 2021.

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1 Armando Alberola Romá, *Los cambios climáticos: La Pequeña Edad del Hielo en España* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2014); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Historie du climat depuis l'an mil* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983).

For these reasons, historiography has made specific use of the *Gaceta de Madrid* in the reconstruction and recurrence of historical earthquakes² – in the Lisbon disaster of 1755³, or the seismic sequence of Calabria and Messina in 1783; and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* in ‘natural’ geological disasters⁴. Furthermore, the Spanish provincial and Madrid press have also been extremely useful in climate and meteorology studies of the reign of Charles IV of Spain⁵. In addition, certain authors have taken an interest in discovering the different strategies employed to communicate these extraordinary events, including the press⁶. However, in recent years, a new perspective has sought to discover the impact of earthquakes and learn how historic societies dealt with these catastrophes. In Europe, projects such as Apuris, DisComPoSE (Disasters, Communication and Politics in Southwestern Europe) and Clima, riesgo, catástrofe y crisis a ambos lados del Atlántico durante la *Pequeña Edad del Hielo* [Climate, risk, catastrophe and crisis on both sides of the Atlantic during the *Little Ice Age*], have been carried out under the auspices of the Universities of Clermont Ferrand, Federico II in Naples, and Alicante, respectively.

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- 2 José Daniel Lozano Díaz, ‘Aportes de la *Gaceta de Madrid* como fuente para el estudio del clima y los desastres “naturales”: una aproximación inicial’, *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2021), 135–59.
 - 3 Armando Alberola Romá, ‘El terremoto de Lisboa en el contexto del catastrofismo natural en la España de la primera mitad del siglo XVIII’, *Cuadernos Dieciochistas*, 6 (2005), 19–42.
 - 4 Antonio Manuel Berná Ortigosa, ‘Prensa y “desastres” en el *Mercurio Histórico y Político* (1738–1783)’, *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 37 (2019), 276–315.
 - 5 Armando Alberola Romá, ‘Tiempo, clima y enfermedad en la prensa española de la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII. Diarios meteorológicos y crónicas de desastres en el *Memorial Literario*’, *El Argonauta Español*, 12 (2015), 1–23; Cayetano Mas Galvañ, ‘Clima y meteorología en la prensa provincial española del reinado de Carlos IV (1792–1808)’, in Luis Alberto Arrijoa Díaz Viruell, and Armando Alberola Romá, eds, *Clima, desastres y convulsiones sociales en España e Hispanoamérica, siglos XVII-XX* (Alicante – Zamora: Publicacions de la Universitat d’Alacant – El Colegio de Michoacán), 2016, 179–202.
 - 6 Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018).

Despite this literature, there is a notable absence of comparative studies on the official Spanish press. The only study of this kind harks back to 1957 in a work by Enciso Recio, which intentionally dispenses with comparison and review of its content and is confined to a study of the economic and organisational structure of the official press⁷. For this reason, we propose a comparative analysis of news reports on seismic activity that appeared in the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político*, from 1770–1779 and throughout their geographical scope⁸.

The results showed that some news reports on seismic activity coincided, facilitating their comparison between both titles, while conversely, others did not. This circumstance could have been due to periodicity, to the different European sources used, or to a possible distribution of content following a geographic criterion and the influence of the management. Thus, we propose a hypothesis that the management or the Royal authorities may have employed a commercial strategy to maintain, and possibly increase, the sales of both official newspapers, based on their different content and the foregoing arguments.

2. Materials and methodology

By identifying the different phases of an earthquake, its location and time, and by providing the list of aftershocks in addition to concerns for quantifying their damage or management, the material from the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* provides qualitative information – garnered from the perceptions of those affected by the event. For this reason, there is ample recourse to rhetoric, such as adjectives and adverbs, to highlight the intensity of the

7 Luis Miguel Enciso Recio, *La Gaceta de Madrid y el Mercurio Histórico y Político, 1756–1781* (Valladolid – Madrid: Universidad de Valladolid – Escuela de Historia Moderna del CSIC, 1957).

8 Published weekly without interruption from 1690, although publication dates back to 1661. The *Mercurio*, a monthly format was first published in 1738. Both became official periodicals in 1761 and 1756 respectively. These journals were consulted through the historic collection of the *Gazette* on the official webpage of the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* [Official State Gazette] and the *Hemeroteca Digital* de la Biblioteca Nacional de España [Digital Newspaper Library of the Spanish National Library] in the case of the *Mercurio*.

earthquake, and recollection of past earthquakes to draw attention to its unprecedented nature. Although it is nevertheless true that the nature of the gazettes and mercuries was ostensibly intended to inform on political and bellicose themes.

As a result, the method proposed was based on a comparative analysis of the content of the earthquakes as reported in both official publications. Our aim was therefore to find all the evidence that could explain this discrepancy in content. Thus, out of 130 cases reported in the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* only eight were actually comparable (Figure 1). This discrepancy led to the following hypothesis: Could there be a commercial strategy behind the apparent differentiation of news reports in these journals in order to maintain sales of issues and possibly increase them? It was found that this different content responds to a geographic template: the earthquakes in western Europe and America were found in the pages of the *Gazette*, whereas the earthquakes of the ottoman Mediterranean, Africa and Italy were more widely reported in the monthly *Mercurio*. This is an unprecedented aspect of historiography.

We sought to explain this geography of the earthquake through other channels. Following the basic hypothesis, we argued that this differentiation in content by geographical zone was partially cemented in the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* by their use of different European journals as sources for their foreign earthquake news. This was demonstrated by the fact that the *Gaceta* made use of the *Gazette de France* in order to report on earthquakes in western Europe and America, and that the *Mercurio* compiled information from the mercuries of The Hague and Brussels; as well as sporadic use of the same French gazette, when reporting on earthquakes in the ottoman Empire and the Italian states.

Finding all the arguments or evidence to explain this disparity of content led to the consideration of possible interference by the manager – at that time Manuel de Mena; and that, given his profile as a businessman we suggest that he may have encouraged this commercial tactic. We also attempted to find proof of this sales practice in periodicity – weekly and monthly. However, and despite these formats, the geography of the earthquake was respected. These arguments will be examined in detail below to demonstrate the basic hypothesis.

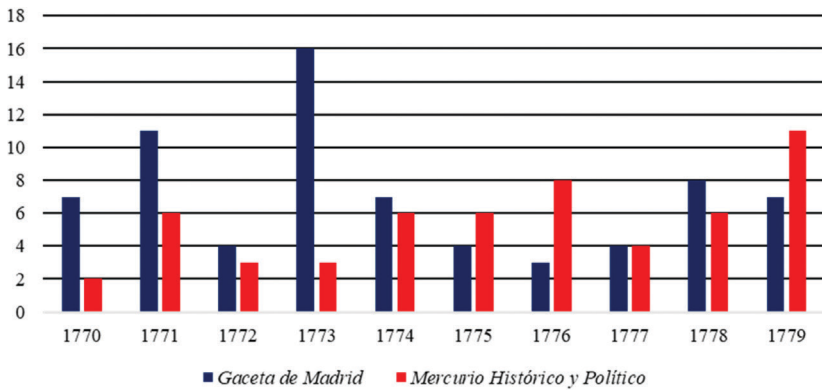


Figure 1. Number of reports recovered on seismic activity from the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político*, 130 issues during the period 1770–9. Author's own compilation.

3. Results and arguments

3.1. Comparable earthquakes

The official press reported a whole bevy of comparable earthquakes from 1770 to 1779 in both periodicals, given the considerable intensity and the damage that they inflicted. These were not completely similar texts but rather they reported complementary details. The *Gaceta* tended to inform in the short term, whereas the *Mercurio* added a monthly balance with the latest update of the damage caused (Figure 2).

The first comparable case was the earthquake and the aftershocks that rocked Reggio, in Calabria, on 18 and 19 June 1770. Reported by the *Gaceta* as a ‘espantoso espectáculo’ [horrific spectacle] due to the number of damaged houses, but which ended after three consecutive months⁹. This information was also reported by the *Mercurio*, adding that others had also occurred in Sicily and Sora¹⁰.

9 *Gaceta de Madrid* (hereinafter *GM*), number 32, 7-VIII-1770 (Rome, 18-VII-1770), 271.

10 *Mercurio Histórico y Político* (hereinafter *MHP*), number 4, Rome, VIII-1770, 288–9.

Conversely, both newspapers offered the same report of several upheavals in Upper Saxony – from 25 September to 1 November 1770¹¹– and the island of Malta – in July 1776, a quake lasting lasted one minute and occurring at 00:15. Here the dome of the old cathedral was split asunder as had occurred and was reported in 1742. It did not cause any damage or mishap throughout the island¹². Two earth tremors were also noted in Pau, on 17 October 1772 at 10:45, identically reported. No victims were reported but many were injured, because when the earthquake hit a crush ensued as people clamoured to escape from the churches where mass was being held¹³. The origin of the upheaval was attributed to one of the mountains in the south where it was felt with more violence than in Gan and Araidy.

Given all these cases, news of an earthquake that occurred in November 1778 in Granada was not comparable, but it was complementary. Whereas the *Gaceta* provided a full report, the *Mercurio* confined its account to a few lines only. This violent earthquake began in Guadix on the 7 at 20:30 hours. It did not cause any damage, although there were several aftershocks in Granada: two on 13 – at 08:35 and at 15:00, although with less intensity – and fifteen on the 14 and 15, when several houses were destroyed¹⁴. The *Mercurio* merely commented that the earth tremors continued to occur in the city and that the strongest had occurred on 18 around 16:00, for which purpose prayers continued with increased fervour¹⁵.

However, when an earthquake struck the Turkish city of Smyrna, in July 1778, the *Mercurio* dedicated more space to the event. It reported that after a week of five or six tremors, on 3 July, an earthquake struck at 01:00 and rocked the whole city. In addition to most of the houses, all the chimneys and four mosques also fell, and from the ruins of one forty people were rescued alive from the rubble, along with three public baths also destroyed. From the 16 June to 2 July, the *Gaceta* announced that

11 *MHP*, 1, Berlin, I-1771, 62.

12 *GM*, 18, 30-IV-1776 (Malta, 4-III-1776), 159; *MHP*, 4, IV-1776, 318.

13 *MHP*, 3, Berlin, XI-1772, 184.

14 *GM*, 57, 20-XI-1778 (Guadix, 11-XI-1778), 560; *GM*, 58, 24-XI-1778 (Granada, 18-XI-1778), 571; *MHP*, 1, Granada, V-1779, 91.

15 *MHP*, 4, Granada, XII-1778, 408.

one of the more violent quakes had destroyed all the minarets, the main Mosque, and caused the collapse of enormous numbers of buildings and the death of many of the city's inhabitants¹⁶.

The list of aftershocks recounted twenty-eight from the morning of day 3 until the following day, although the most catastrophic of these occurred on 5. Nine extremely violent tremors from 01:30 to 08:00 hours destroyed the walls and the few homes that were still standing. Ten further tremors occurred from 8 to 14 July, and there were at least five aftershocks from 19 to the 21. The loss to the city estimated at twenty million *pesos fuertes* – fifteen according to the *Gaceta* – was deemed irreparable, and added to which the burning and destruction of wheat, barley rice and coffee warehouses led to more losses. The threat of pestilence engendered by the death of a merchant from plague caused greater consternation together with the fact that a company of sick people was about to enter the city. Similarly, in August there were strong aftershocks on 1, 3, 15, 27 and 30¹⁷.

In the series of seismic shocks in Bologna (1779), the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* offered the same dynamic as in the case of Granada. The former reported that several earthquakes had damaged churches, roads and palaces on 1 June with a more violent quake occurring on the 4. Until 9 November there were no further shocks, which was the only fact reported by the *Mercurio*. On the night of the 23, there were five tremors, three of which were very strong and ruined three furnaces. This event proved to be even more newsworthy in the press, as there had been a lunar eclipse and a thick fog which, when it cleared, covered the sky with clouds, a fierce wind and copious rainfall which, in the space of a few hours led to an agglomeration of 'cuantos meteoros acontecían en todo un año' [as many meteors as could be counted in a whole year]¹⁸.

16 *GM*, 42, 29-IX-1778 (Smyrna, 29-VII-1778), 421; *GM*, 44, 6-X-1778 (Constantinople, 3-VIII-1778), 438–9; *GM*, 46, 13-X-1778 (Constantinople, 17-VIII-1778), 457.

17 *MHP*, 1, Constantinople, IX-1778, 6–9; *MHP*, 2, Constantinople, X-1778, 111–12; *MHP*, 3, Constantinople, XI-1778, 213; *MHP*, 4, Constantinople, XII-1778, 324.

18 *GM*, 104, 24-XII-1779 (Bologna, 1-XII-1779), 921–2; *MHP*, 4, XII-1779, 383.

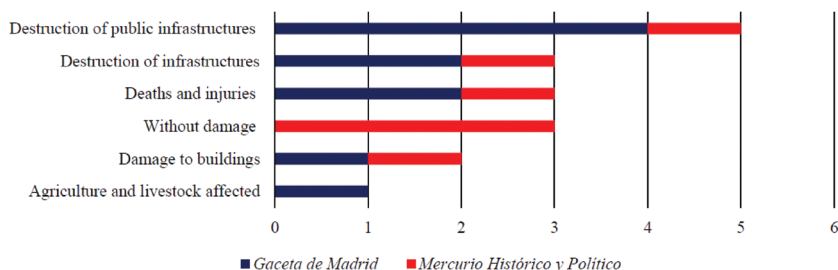


Figure 2. Number of news reports with impacts registered in those seismic events in which *Gaceta* and *Mercurio* were comparable (1770–9). Author’s own compilation.

The newspapers also reported on how the catastrophe was managed in these comparable earthquakes, but the *Gaceta* dedicated more space to these measures than the *Mercurio*. The most immediate response was abandonment of the cities, with people fleeing and taking refuge in the countryside – as occurred in Reggio and Bologna – and resorting to supplicating divine mercy. In Reggio, the image of ‘Nuestra Señora del Consuelo’ [Our lady of Consolation] was brought to the ‘Convento Superior de Padres Capuchinos’ [Superior Convent of the Capuchin Fathers] accompanied by three days of candle and torch lit processions¹⁹. In Granada, the archbishop ordered public prayer ceremonies in 1778 attended, according to the press report, by the City Council, the Royal Accord and the most devout notables, adding that ‘el Cielo nos ha librado hasta ahora de todo daño’ [the Heavens have so far saved us from any mishap]. Even so, the continued aftershocks prolonged the religious ceremonies according to the *Mercurio*²⁰ (Figure 3).

In particular, an article by Ibarburu Antón details the popular beliefs that sought to explain the earthquake that struck Granada in 1778. Several such explanations alluded to closure of a well-known central chasm – the Airon well – as the cause of the seismic activity. As a result, the local

19 *GM*, 32, 7-VIII-1770 (Rome, 18-VII-1770), 271; *GM*, 45, 6-XI-1770, (Naples, 16-X-1770), 378–9; *MHP*, 4, Rome, VIII-1770, 288–9.

20 *GM*, 60, 1-XII-1778 (Granada, 20-XI-1778), 587; *MHP*, 4, Granada, XII-1778, 408.

authorities decided to contact the ‘Real Sociedad de Amigos del País de Granada’ [Royal Society for Friends of the Country of Granada] to have the well opened again²¹.

In the ottoman world, in Smyrna, the immediate response also mentioned how the inhabitants took refuge in the countryside. Soldiers patrolled the streets on the orders of the Musselim to prevent any disturbances. The *Gaceta* reported that part of the governing cabinet and foreign ambassadors took refuge in gardens or on boats. The threat of a plague infestation was managed by sending victims to the ‘Hostal de los Padres Franciscanos’ [Hostal of the Discalced Franciscan Fathers]²².

In response to this view of a divine scourge, and only reported by the *Gaceta*, in the Bologna earthquake, physicists created a machine which indicated when the air was impregnated with sulphurous particles, which meant that the earth was still unstable at that moment. Furthermore, as part of the disaster management, they recovered data from the 1705 cataclysm when a seismic phase lasted forty days and destroyed some churches, bell towers and houses²³.

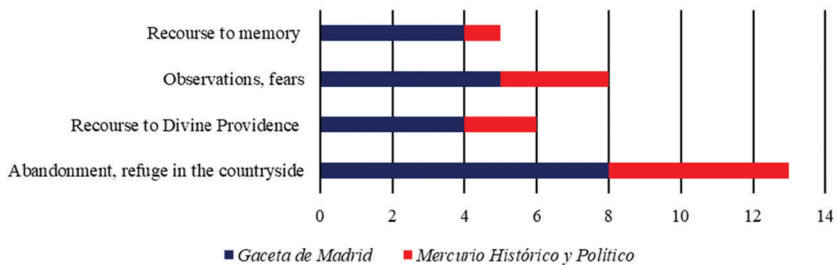


Figure 3. Types of measures according to how the disaster was managed offered by the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* in their comparable earthquakes (1770–9). Author’s own compilation.

21 Julen Ibarburu Antón, ‘El Pozo Airón de Granada: conflictividad bajo las luces de la ilustración granadina’, *Revista del CEHGR*, 32 (2020), 135–53.

22 *MHP*, 1, Constantinople, IX-1778, 6–9; *GM*, 42, 29-IX-1778 (Smyrna, 29-VII-1778), 421; *GM*, 44, 6-X-1778 (Constantinople, 3-VIII-1778), 438–9; *GM*, 46, 13-X-1778 (Constantinople, 17-VIII-1778), 457.

23 *GM*, 54, 6-VII-1779 (Constantinople, 8-VI-1779), 481.

3.2. Geographical distribution of earthquakes between the *Gaceta* and *Mercurio* and European sources

We have compared several swarms of earthquakes in the official press due to their enormous magnitude, but what happens with the earthquakes where they did not coincide? According to our hypothesis there was a commercial strategy behind these different contents either to maintain or increase sales.

The most striking argument for corroborating this discrepancy – resulting from the hypothesis – was the geography involved. It was found that earthquake geography responded to a particular distribution: the earthquakes in western Europe and America were found only in the pages of the *Gaceta*, whereas the earthquakes of the ottoman Mediterranean, Africa and Italy appeared in the pages of the monthly *Mercurio* (Figure 4). This leads to a basic hypothesis.

1770-1779	Western Europe	Italian states	Ottoman Empire	North Africa	America	Total
<i>Gaceta</i>	38	9	7	2	7	63
<i>Mercurio</i>	12	27	12	3	0	54
Western Europe	France	Germany	Portugal	Spain	United Kingdom	Scandinavian Peninsula
<i>Gaceta</i>	13	9	1	4	2	7
<i>Mercurio</i>	4	3	1	2	1	2

Figure 4. The location of news on seismic events reported in the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio*, according to the region and the country (1770–9). Author’s own compilation.

The reason for this earthquake geography was largely due to the sources from which the *Gaceta* and *Mercurio* translated their news on foreign earthquakes. These circulated in Europe in the form of letters, notifications from cities and shipping vessels, correspondents etc., comprising the main gazettes and mercuries of Europe.

This study found that the main European source of the *Gaceta de Madrid* during the decade of 1770 – whilst ruling out any other undiscovered to

date – was the *Gazette de France* which reached the peninsula by way of the ‘Correo General’ [General Mail]²⁴. From this periodical, thirty-eight news items were translated on earthquakes in Western and Northern Europe, nine in Italian states, seven in the ottoman world (four on the Smyrna earthquake), four in the Caribbean – on the British and French islands – and two in North Africa. There were also reports on two quakes from Spanish America and four from peninsular Spain contained in the Madrid paper in the national news section.

On the other hand, this information reached the *Gazette de France* editors through French postal routes. It was sufficient to check that much of the news about Western Europe was sent by letters to the *Gazette* – letters from Lyons, Dijon, Baugé, Bourg en Bresse, Clansayes and the Swiss frontiers – cities that also acted as hubs for the postal network that connected them with Paris, where the *Gazette* was published, as shown by the map of posts in 1756 drawn up by the Royal Geographer, George-Louis Le Rouge²⁵. The sources of information from Italy, Scandinavia or Turkey do not appear, however, to come from letters. This would suggest the possibility that the *Gazette* would use other European newspapers as intermediaries in order to access news from those regions.

The *Mercurio Histórico y Político* translated news items on twelve earthquakes in Western Europe sporadically, whereas it maintained its predominance of news from Italian states, with twenty-seven, and twelve from the ottoman world, whilst it reported three in Africa and did not mention any in America. Among the sources – as indicated in its own front page – The Hague *Mercure Historique et Politique* predominated at the beginning of the decade, with the *Journal Politique de Bruxelles* – the future *Mercure de Bruxelles*, prevailing towards the end of the decade – and the *Gazette de France*, for certain reasons.

24 Enciso Recio, *La Gaceta de Madrid y el Mercurio Histórico y Político*, 32.

25 George-Louis Le Rouge, *Atlas Nouveau portatif à l'usage des militaires et du voyageur*, vol. I (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1756).

3.2.1. Analysis of cases according to geographic distribution: *Gaceta de Madrid*

A review of these earthquakes helps to gain a better understanding of this particular geographic distribution, as well as the strategies for their management (Figure 5). As a result, it was seen that the earthquakes reported in greater depth were simply those occurring in France as these were written at first hand by the *Gazette* editors. The later translation in Madrid would thus contain the same quality of detail. See, for example, the list of aftershocks based on the ‘frecuentes y violentos’ [frequent and violent] earthquakes that struck Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and Clansayes on 18 January 1773 and thereafter, at 08:10 and 09:20. Although the earthquake that occurred on 23 at 16:00 and 19:40 was the strongest, given that part of the city walls of Clansayes collapsed, along with the façade of the bell tower of the local parish church. The reverberations were felt at the same time in the Saint-Paul clock and in Pierre Late.

The sequence of aftershocks did not end there, as on the 24, at 05:55, 30 and 31, at 06:00, there were movements from east to west for three seconds. In the vicinity of Saint Paul, moreover dull rumblings could be heard continually from the 1 to 7 February, until finally. On the last day a more violent and longer earthquake struck at 01:45²⁶.

The *Gazette de France* also added an item on an earthquake that hit the islands of Guernsey and Jersey on 15 April 1773 at 13:45, although more places were affected. On the same day, two earthquakes shook the cities of Pléneuf and Saint-Malo at 14:00; and there were aftershocks in Jersey on the 16; and two more on 23; the last one was so violent that many abandoned their homes²⁷. The same happened with the three tremors that occurred within a space of thirty seconds, and which wrecked Dijon in 1770, Bourg-en-Bresse and Lyon²⁸.

26 GM, 9, 2-III-1773 (Paris, 15-II-1773), 70; GM, 10, 9-III-1773 (Paris, 22-II-1773), 78.

27 GM, 21, 25-V-1773 (London, 28-IV-1773), 178; GM, 21, 25-V-1773 (Paris, 10-V-1773), 178; GM, 21, 15-VI-1773 (London, 15-V-1773), 209.

28 GM, 36, 4-IX-1770 (Paris, 20-VIII-1770), 305–6.

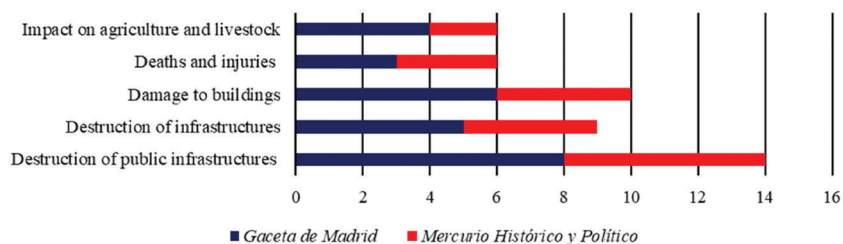


Figure 5. Number of references according to type of impact of earthquakes where the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* failed to coincide, period 1779–9. Author’s own compilation.

From the Swiss frontier in Altdorf, the *Gaceta* reported briefly on several earthquakes on 10 and 11 September 1774. Not only did this ruin several churches and many other buildings, but there were also landslides that reached the lake of the four cantons²⁹. Such was ‘la fuerza y ardor del ambiente’ [the force and ardour of the atmosphere] that residents did not dare illuminate their homes recalling a fire in April 1693 that had reduced seventy-five buildings to ashes³⁰.

The Scandinavian peninsula was also given a space in this geographical circuit of earthquakes reported on by the *Gaceta*. The news reported a horrendous hurricane accompanied by earthquakes in Vänersborg, Sweden, on 31 December 1772, which caused the waters of lake Wener and lake Vänern to rise alarmingly, stranding several ships on the coasts and which ravaged the harbour and destroyed a stone bridge with 700 spans in Dahlbo. The violence of the earthquakes was such that several

29 GM, 49, 6-XII-1774 (From the Swiss frontiers, 24-X-1774), 432–3.

30 Regarding aftershocks, an article on the historical seismic activity in central Switzerland indicated that its effects continued until 18 September within a 20 km radius of Altdorf and a degree of damage of 3 EMS 98; and so, it was considered that the maximum observed intensity (IMAX) is assigned with VIII at Altdorf. As only one data point with an intensity value of VIII is given, epicentre intensity (I0) is set to the second highest observed value VII (uncertainty ≤ 1). Epicentre intensity is thus downgraded one degree compared to former catalogs. Moment magnitude (MW) is 5.9 with an uncertainty of ≤ 0.5 ”. See Monika Gisler, Donat Fäh, and Philip Kästli, ‘Historical seismicity in Central Switzerland’, *Eclogae geologicae Helvetiae*, 97 (2004), 221–36.

chimneys were destroyed. The force of the waters tore up paving stones on the roads and the lower part of the city was flooded. The damage was repaired with tonnes of gold, but it would have been less if the currents had not affected the Brinkebergskulles that opened up, giving way to the waters³¹.

In Kongsberg, Norway, an earthquake that lasted one and a half minutes was reported in the news of 29 November 1775 at 14:00, with no apparent damage³²; also reported was that which shook the province of Hardanger with some violence on 29 October 1774 at 15:00 for a few seconds. In Bergen and other parts of the Kingdom, other slight tremors were felt at the same time, along with a fierce east wind which was followed by an excessively cold spell and tremendous snowfall, which the report said had no counterpart in that country, particularly in Bergen, where it always rained copiously during the months of October and November³³.

From Vienna there were reports in the *Gaceta*, among other seismic events, of a slight earthquake on 8 November 1773, with the brunt of it affecting Luxembourg, although it did not cause any damage³⁴.

Despite the paucity of earthquakes in the Italian states, nevertheless the pages of the *Gaceta* recorded some in the territory of Parma through dynastic ties. Several small earthquakes were recorded at the end of February in 1774. These rocked all the buildings and fixtures. Society responded with a solemn triduum at Saint Francisco Solano in the church of the 'Anunciación de Padres Menores Observantes' [Annunciation of the Order of Observant Friars Minor] in order to implore the Omnipotent through the intercession of the Saint, invoked against earthquakes, to preserve them from 'tan terrible azote' [such a terrible scourge]. But on the 21 of the same month, there was a new earthquake after midnight lasting two seconds, and followed by others of scant consideration³⁵.

31 GM, 8, 23-II-1773 (Stockholm, 12-I-1773), 59–60; GM, 9, 2-III-1773 (Stockholm, 12-I-1773), 66–7.

32 GM, 3, 17-I-1775 (Copenhagen, 10-XII-1775), 18.

33 GM, 10, 7-III-1775 (Bergen, 20-XII-1774), 97.

34 GM, 37, 14-IX-1773 (Vienna, 11-VIII-1773), 324.

35 GM, 13, 29-III-1774 (Parma, 8-III-1774), 118–19; GM, 16, 19-IV-1774 (Parma, 29-III-1774), 147.

The measures for mitigating the disaster caused by these earthquakes consisted mainly of imploring divine assistance (Figure 6). In Altdorf the inhabitants immediately held processions and public rogations to beg for heaven's clemency, but the earth continued to shudder and shake, and so the inhabitants fled to the countryside. Another practice was to invoke saints to intercede with the Almighty against earthquakes in Parma.

The parish of Clansayes helped assistance and consolation while taking the providential action of building a number of cabins in the bare countryside so that the inhabitants would have somewhere safe for their possessions. However, the most immediate measure was to abandon the city, as had occurred in Clansayes, Jersey and Altdorf.

The most extraordinary action taken in this case was to demolish or prop up houses that were likely to collapse in the buildings affected in Clansayes by order of the provincial sub delegate as a temporary auxiliary measure.

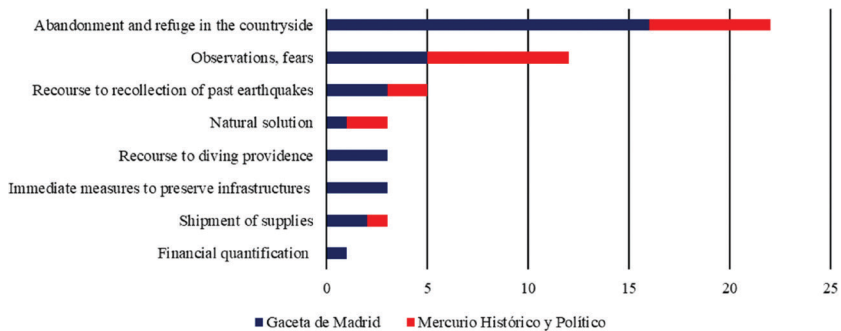


Figure 6. Number of references with measures to mitigate or manage the disaster in those earthquakes where the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* failed to coincide, period 1779-9. Author's own compilation.

3.2.2. Analysis of cases in America: *Gaceta de Madrid*

The particular way in which earthquake geography was addressed in the *Gaceta* not only led to reporting earthquakes occurring in western Europe, but it also applied the same dynamic to those that happened in America. This absorption of news early in the decade of 1770 originated from the newspapers of London or France, depending on which country had governance of the islands or affected territories.

More specifically, in Port au Prince, Leogane and Petit Goave, all the buildings were damaged, burying over sixty-four people in their ruins because of a violent earthquake on 3 June 1779. The first wave was stronger and lasted almost three minutes in an east west direction at 19:30; the rest, although less violent, struck without a break. Livestock did not suffer and the harvests were only delayed by a month. However, the volcano was opened up in the Rapion, a mountain in the vicinity of Petit Goave³⁶.

It was also assumed that an earthquake occurred in Jamaica at around 08:00 on 3 September 1771, preceded by a dull roar. In the practically thirty seconds that it lasted no one was killed, but it was felt by the ships in the harbour, and so the press considered that it had been general throughout the island³⁷. Letters from Martinique – a French possession – also reported an earthquake that damaged the Fort of San Pedro, in Fuerte Real and its various rooms.

In close association, the *Gaceta* reported news of earthquakes in the Spanish Americas – especially from 1778 onwards – with a view to satisfying Europe's curiosity and to provide both news of domestic Spain and the Indies, coinciding with the announcement that the publication would be published twice weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays. On 8 September 1778, the newspaper announced (Figure 7).

GM, 36, 8-IX-1778 (Madrid, 8-IX-1778), p. 376.

Para mayor ilustración del público, y que disfrute más copiosas y recientes noticias, sobre todo en las circunstancias actuales, en que la situación de Europa ofrece vasto campo a la curiosidad y abundantes materiales propios a satisfacerla, ha resuelto S.M. salga 2ª Gazeta con fecha de los viernes de cada semana [...] proporcionará al mismo tiempo cabida para insertar algunos documentos a la letra, y las noticias interiores así de España como de las Indias, que merezcan publicarse; a cuyo efecto se ha encargado ya a personas fidedignas

[For greater entertainment of the public, and so that they may enjoy ample and more recent news, especially in the current circumstances in which the situation in Europe offers a vast field to fuel curiosity and abundant material to satisfy it, HM has ordered that a 2nd Gazette shall be issued on Fridays every week [...] and at the same time will provide room for inserting literal documents and domestic news of Spain and the Indies, worthy of publication; to which effect, the appropriate persons have undertaken this task].

Figure 7. Announcement of 8 September 1778 from the *Gaceta de Madrid*.

36 *GM*, 34, 21-VIII-1770 (Port au Prince, 5-VI-1770), 290.

37 *GM*, 49, 3-XII-1771 (London, 6-XII-1771), 418–19.

In subsequent gazettes, a violent earthquake was reported that had struck Caracas – 25 January 1779 at 17:40 – which, despite being short lived, affected many buildings and some houses collapsed; three hours later another aftershock reverberated with the same force, but was shorter in duration than the first. The effects were not generalised throughout the province. A news item was also included, recounting that the same year in the town of Orizaba, at 52 leagues from Veracruz, a mild earthquake was felt on the 5 February, although there was no major damage. Earthquakes were frequent occurrences, according to the news report, due to the volcano at the top of mountain of Orizaba, and the town was located on its slopes³⁸.

3.2.3. Analysis of cases *Mercurio Histórico y Político*

The geographic observation of the earthquakes suggested that the area of western Europe and America were almost exclusively addressed in the pages of the *Gaceta*, while the areas of Italy, north Africa and the eastern – ottoman – Mediterranean were the province of the monthly *Mercurio*; the idea also arose that the circuit of earthquake news from Italy and the Orient could have been linked to the Dutch trading routes in the Mediterranean, which originated in Amsterdam and The Hague³⁹ – one of the main sources for the *Mercurio*, as the newspaper acknowledges on its front page.

Comparison of the list of earthquakes reported by the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* with the Dutch trade routes in market areas of the Mediterranean, resulted in a number of coincidences emerging. We note that many capital cities and trading hubs on these routes brought news of earthquakes. However, according to Ana Crespo Solana's research, wars had considerably reduced Dutch trade with the Berber coasts and Asia Minor during the eighteenth century. The expansion of Dutch consular institutions in the eastern Mediterranean, which were initially installed in Livorno (1612) followed by Aleppo (1613), Venice (1614), Genoa

38 GM, 36, 4-V-1779 (Caracas, 2-II-1779), 306; GM, 83, 12-X-1779 (Veracruz, 1-VI-1779), 735–6.

39 Officially titled *Mercurio Historique et Politique*, but also known in Spain under another name.

(1615), Algiers (1616), Smyrna and Alexandria and later, Cádiz (1648), was now a thing of the past. Business trips to Tunis and Safi had become scarce. It was, however, the distant ports of Smyrna and Aleppo followed by the Italian cities of Livorno, mainly and Genoa with whom they still maintained exchanges with northern Europe through this route which was under threat from Berber pirates⁴⁰. We suggest that these routes carried cargoes that included letters and news of earthquakes that had occurred in these trading areas, capital cities or their vicinity, which the *Mercure de La Haye* would later report in its pages – and by extension appeared in translation in the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* in Spain.

In this way we noted that many of the earthquakes reported coincide with the trading hubs on these Mediterranean routes. Thus, the *Mercurio* – published in Spain – with respect to the eastern Mediterranean published an extensive report of the Smyrna earthquake in 1778 and several in Constantinople, its archipelagos, including the island of Santorini, and also Tunis in 1774, Algiers in 1775 and Fez in 1776. Meanwhile, it reported twenty-seven incidents in Italian States, the main focus of its news. More sporadically, on twelve occasions, earthquakes were reported in London and Lisbon.

From the ottoman world came news in greater detail, reported by a vessel from the Aegean in Tunis, of an earthquake that had struck the island of Santorini on 10 January 1773 emitting a dull and continuous rumble along with clouds of smoke and flames⁴¹.

Constantinople was a capital city that featured frequently in reports of seismic activities. In the quakes such as those of 5 October 1774 at 22:15 and 1 November 1771, the cause was attributed to closure of the mines at Nymphis. As to the year of earthquakes in Smyrna, on 16 May two were felt in the ottoman capital at 04:10; the second was so strong that it awoke and panicked the population although they were unhurt⁴².

40 Ana Crespo Solana, 'El comercio marítimo entre Ámsterdam y Cádiz (1713–1778)', *Estudios de historia económica*, 40 (2000), 7–162, in particular 31–3 and 107–8.

41 *MHP*, 4, Tunisia, IV-1773, 311.

42 *MHP*, 2, Constantinople, X-1774, 92; *MHP*, 3, Constantinople, XI-1771, 276–7; *MHP*, 2, Constantinople, VI-1779, 116–7.

In the north African circuit, the *Mercurio* recorded several tremors in Tunis on 28 April 1773. Here English, French and Venetian ships were dashed to pieces against the coast. Letters also revealed that there was a violent tremor in Fez which destroyed many homes, burying a considerable number of inhabitants in the rubble⁴³.

The distribution of news on Italian earthquakes in the mercurial press reported several more intense incidents. From Sora came written reports, at the end of July 1777, that a fairly strong earthquake had struck that was also felt, although more mildly in the Vatican and Veroli with copious damage to the seminar. While in Forli three extremely violent tremors damaged several buildings, the church and the convent of the Mission Fathers on 12 June 1778. Its effects were also felt throughout Romagna and Tuscany⁴⁴. Along with these reports, news was shared of how a third of the city of Corfu was ruined following a tremor in 1773, which also caused considerable damage to the rest of the island⁴⁵.

The *Mercurio* reported sporadically on seismic events in France and England. The news of 7 January 1772 mentioned three consecutive commotions in London which appeared to be caused by an earth tremor. In Enfield, furniture and fittings, and many doors and windows were damaged. More space was given to the news of a violent tremor that lasted two minutes on 5 April in Lisbon. Preceded by the howling of dogs and cockerels crowing, a noise was heard coming from beneath the earth. The force of the surface tremor disrupted homes and when people fled into the streets, it was repeated with greater force⁴⁶.

3.3. Hydrometeorology

The argument of geographic randomness on the pages of the official press, which enabled us to compile lists of the frequency with which one or another region appeared, had revealed that the western world – in particular – was featured in the *Gaceta de Madrid*; and Italy and the ottoman

43 *MHP*, 3, Tunis, III-1774, 212; *MHP*, 2, Constantinople, X-1774, 92.

44 *MHP*, 3, Rome, VII-1778, 213–14.

45 *MHP*, 3, Venice, III-1771, 209–10; *MHP*, 4, Tunis, IV-1773, 311; *MHP*, 3, Livorno, VII-1773, 226. See more examples of the Italian States in figures 11 to 13.

46 *MHP*, 1, London, I-1772, 38–9; *MHP*, 4, Lisbon, IV-1772, 326–7.

Mediterranean were addressed in particular in the *Mercurio Histórico y Político*. However, in an effort to avoid falling into the trap of determinism in respect of this geographic distribution of content, we analysed other hydrometeorological variables and volcanic eruptions in order to verify the appropriateness of this geographic template.

Most of the information confirmed our hypothesis and, as may be seen in Figure 8, this geographical distribution of content is repeated in reports of other adverse natural phenomena. Verifying this fact lends greater credence to our theory that geography was the ‘driving force’ behind the differentiated content reported by the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* in this commercial strategy. In this way hydrometeorological news in western and northern Europe, along with America and Spain came under the aegis of the weekly *Gaceta*, while news of events in the Italian states and the ottoman world were to be found in the pages of the *Mercurio* along with north African news. However, it is important to highlight the hydro-meteorological predominance of Africa in the *Gaceta*, which could be seen as an exception, possibly given its proximity to the Iberian Peninsula.

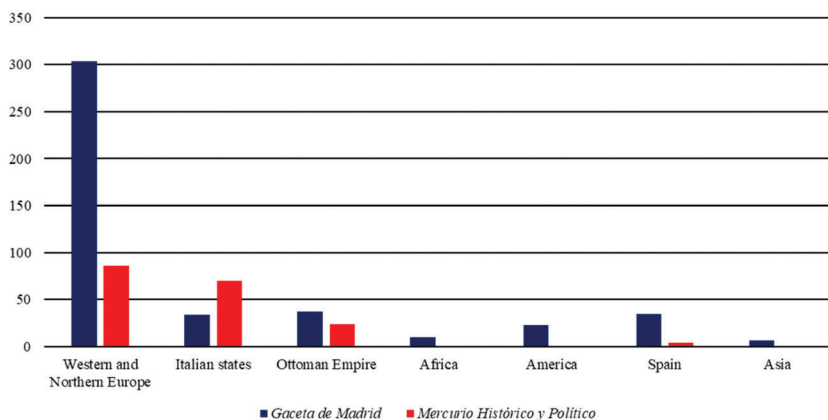


Figure 8. Number of news reports on hydrometeorology and volcanic activity, in the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio*, during the period 1770–1779 based on geographical regions that provided information. Author’s own compilation.

3.4. European sources: The news circuit

The geographical randomness of the news on seismic activity in either of these official Spanish journals was largely marked by the European sources that were used in their foreign news reports. The reason for comparison and review was based on the hypothesis proposed in this paper⁴⁷. More so, given that Enciso Recio – in his comparative study of *Gaceta y Mercurio* renounced – comparison and review of texts from a literary perspective having considered that it was beyond the confines of his work (Figure 9).

Regarding this balance of European newspapers which they used as sources for their news, this study found that the *Gaceta de Madrid* translated fifty-three news items from the *Gazette de France*, as was the case with the extensive reports from Clansayes or Altdorf⁴⁸. Thus, it became clear that news reports did not stray far from western and Northern Europe – for example, Bergen – and the Anglo-French islands in America⁴⁹. The news from Spain and its dominions in America presuppose untranslated and exclusive material from the Madrid paper particularly from 1778 onwards.

47 Enciso Recio, *La Gaceta de Madrid y el Mercurio Histórico y Político*, 33.

48 Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereinafter BNF), *Gazette de France* (hereinafter *GF*), number 16, Paris, 22-II-1773 (Paris, 22-II-1773), 68; *GF*, 92, 18-XI-1774 (From the Swiss frontiers, 24-X-1774), 400–1.

49 *GM*, 104, 30-XII-1774 (Copenhagen, 6-XII-1774), 463.

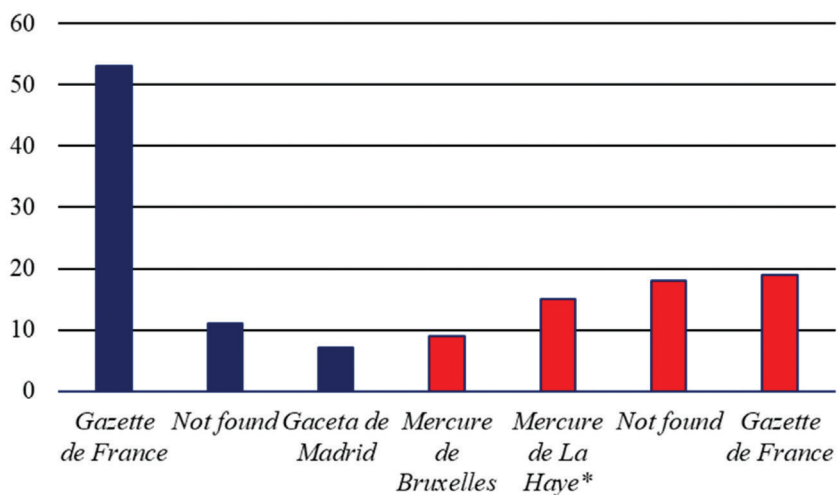


Figure 9. European newspapers used by the editors of the *Gaceta de Madrid* (in blue) and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* (in red) during the period 1770–9. *Review of the *Mercure Historique et Politique* (The Hague) was interrupted in 1773, due to scarcity of copies conserved.

This transcription to Spanish of the foreign news on seismic activity was, in practice, almost literal. We cite as an example the frequent and violent earthquakes that early in 1773, hit Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux (Figure 10). The *Gaceta* translated from its French periodical of the same name:

Gaceta de Madrid, 9, 02-III-1773.

Paris, 15-II-1773, p. 70.

Desde el día 18 del mes último se han experimentado frecuentes y violentos terremotos en todas las cercanías de San Pablo de los tres Castillos, en el Delfinado; y el 24 hubo uno tan fuerte en Clansayes, que amedrentados los habitantes abandonaron precipitadamente sus casas para refugiarse en S. Pablo. Esperamos nuevos avisos sobre este acaecimiento, bien que no parece ha tenido malas resultas.

Gazette de France, 15, 15-II-1773.

Paris, 15-II-1773, p. 60.

On mande de Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, en Dauphiné, que depuis le 18 du mois dernier, on a éprouvé dans tous les environs de fréquentes et violentes secousses de tremblement de terre; que le 24 il y en eut une si forte, à Clansayes, que les habitans effrayés abandonnerent précipitamment leurs maisons pour se réfugier à Saint-Paul-Trois Châteaux. On attend de nouveaux détails sur cet événement qui ne paroît pas avoir eu de suites fâcheuses.

Figure 10. Comparison of the translation of the news report on Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux by the GM with its European Source.

Translated by the *Gaceta de Madrid* from its French namesake, we find the transcription of the earthquake that shook Hardanger and Bergen in October 1774 as well as the earthquakes that, while no damage was reported, were felt in Vienna and Neustadt in January 1774 (Figures 11 and 12).

Mercurio Histórico y Político, 1, IX-1775
Roma, IX-1775, p. 17.

Avisan de Montepulciano que en la noche del 20 al 21 del mes de julio se sintió allí un fuerte temblor de tierra, que despertó a todos los habitantes, y les puso en la mayor consternación; pero que no ha causado ningún estrago.

Gazette de France, 61, 31-VII-1775
Civita-vecchia, 1-VII-1775, p. 270.

On apprend de Monte-Pulciano que, dans la nuit du 20 au 21 du mois dernier, on y a refait une forte secousse de tremblement de terre, qui a réveillé tous les habitans et qui les a jettés dans la plus grande consternation, sans leur avoir néanmoins causé aucun dommage.

Figure 11. Comparison of the news reported in the GM on Hardanger and Bergen with its European source.

Mercurio Histórico y Político, 4, XII-1778
Esmirna, XII-1778, p. 342.

El día primero del mes de diciembre a la una de la tarde se volvieron a sentir aquí dos temblores muy violentos, a que siguieron, hasta las nueve de la noche, otros ocho menos fuertes, bien que todos han causado muchos estragos, principalmente en las casas que habían quedado maltratas con los terremotos del mes de julio de este año. Muchas personas han perdido la vida en este nuevo desastre. El día 3 se sintió otro temblor bastante fuerte; pero desde entonces se mantiene la tierra tranquila.

Journal Politique de Bruxelles, XII-1778
Constantinople, XII-1778, p. 194.

Les lettres de Smyrne portent que les tremblements de terre ont renouvelé les alarmes des habitans de cette ville; le premier décembre, à une heure après-midi, in y ressentit deux violentes secousses, qui furent suivies de huit autres, moins violentes, jusqu'à neuf heures du soir. Les édifices qui avoient déjà souffert des secousses du 3 juillet, et qu'on n'avoit pu réparer, ont été fort endommagés: deux mosquées se son écroulées, et plusieurs personnes ont péri sous leur ruine. Le 3 la terre a tremblé de nouveau; quoiqu' elle ait paru raffermie depuis ce jour jusqu' au huit, date de ces lettres, on n'est pas encore sans inquiétude.

Figure 12. Comparison of the GM's translation of the news on Vienna with its European Source.

The balance of sources used by the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* was conversely, more complex. It is true that the *Mercure Historique et Politique de La Haye* acted as the main news provider – on up to eleven occasions. News from Santorini⁵⁰, Constantinople⁵¹ and Reggio are thus confirmed with a literal translation of this last city (Figure 13).

50 University of California (hereinafter UCLA), *Mercure Historique et Politique*, The Hague (hereinafter *MHP-Hague*), number 174, Tunis, IV-1773, 311.

51 UCLA, *MHP-Hague*, 171, Constantinople, XI-1771, 519.

Mercurio Histórico y Político, 4, VIII-1770
 Novedades de Roma, VIII-1770, pp. 288-9.

Los habitantes de Mesina, en Sicilia, y los de Regio en Calabria, se han visto precisados a abandonar los domicilios, y salirse al campo, por causa de los grandes y frecuentes terremotos que se experimentaron en aquellas dos ciudades.

Mercure Historique et Politique (La Haye), 169
 Liorna, VII-1770, p. 146.

Les villes de Messine en Sicile, et de Reggio en Calabre, ont souffert des dommages considérables par différentes secousses de tremblement de terre qu'on y a ressenties, et qui ont obligé les habitants de se retirer à la campagne.

Figure 13. Comparison of *MHP*'s translation of the news on Reggio with its European Source.

However, corroborating this Dutch source was interrupted from mid-1773 due, it seems to a lack of preserved copies of the paper for the remainder of the decade. Notwithstanding, this was not the only European source used by the official *Mercurio* as there were other sources 'Diarios, Mercurios, Gazetas de todos los países, y sacados de otros documentos y noticias originales' [Dailies, Mercuries, Gazettes from all countries and taken from other documents and original news] with the arrival of Clavijo and Fajardo in 1773. Some news of earthquakes was extracted from the *Journal Politique et de Littérature* or *Journal Politique de Bruxelles* for its stories on Smyrna or Tunis⁵², which followed the same literal tone in their translation (Figure 14).

Similarly, the *Gazette de France* was also used, on about twenty occasions as is attested in its consultation of news from Malta, Sora or Montepulciano⁵³. However, always keeping in line with geographical distribution in respect of the *Gaceta*. The literal translation of the earthquake in this last city bears witness to this fact (Figure 15).

52 Harvard University (hereinafter H.U.), *Journal Politique de Bruxelles*, Constantinople, IX-1778, 333-6; Constantinople, X-1778, 193; Constantinople, XI-1778, 338; and Constantinople, XII-1778, 194.

53 BNF, *GF*, 12-IV-1776 (Malta, 4-III-1776), 142; BNF, *GF*, 19-IX-1777 (Rome, 22-VIII-1777), 374.

Mercurio Histórico y Político, 1, IX-1775
Roma, IX-1775, p. 17.

Avisan de Montepulciano que en la noche del 20 al 21 del mes de julio se sintió allí un fuerte temblor de tierra, que despertó a todos los habitantes, y les puso en la mayor consternación; pero que no ha causado ningún estrago.

Gazette de France, 61, 31-VII-1775
Civita-vecchia, 1-VII-1775, p. 270.

On apprend de Monte-Pulciano que, dans la nuit du 20 au 21 du mois dernier, on y a refait une forte secousse de tremblement de terre, qui a réveillé tous les habitans et qui les a jetés dans la plus grande consternation, sans leur avoir néanmoins causé aucun dommage.

Figure 14. Comparison of the *MHP*'s translation of the news on Montepulciano with its European Source.

Mercurio Histórico y Político, 4, XII-1778
Esmirna, XII-1778, p. 342.

El día primero del mes de diciembre a la una de la tarde se volvieron a sentir aquí dos temblores muy violentos, a que siguieron, hasta las nueve de la noche, otros ocho menos fuertes, bien que todos han causado muchos estragos, principalmente en las casas que habían quedado maltratas con los terremotos del mes de julio de este año. Muchas personas han perdido la vida en este nuevo desastre. El día 3 se sintió otro temblor bastante fuerte; pero desde entonces se mantiene la tierra tranquila.

Journal Politique de Bruxelles, XII-1778
Constantinopla, XII-1778, p. 194.

Les lettres de Smyrne portent que les tremblements de terre ont renouvelé les alarmes des habitans de cette ville; le premier décembre, à une heure après-midi, in y ressentit deux violentes secousses, qui furent suivies de huit autres, moins violentes, jusqu'à neuf heures du soir. Les édifices qui avoient déjà souffert des secousses du 3 juillet, et qu'on n'avoit pu réparer, ont été fort endommagés: deux mosquées se son écroulées, et plusieurs personnes ont péri sous leur ruine. Le 3 la terre a tremblé de nouveau; quoiqu' elle ait paru raffermie depuis ce jour jusqu'au huit, date de ces lettres, on n'est pas encore sans inquiétude.

Figure 15. Comparison of the *MHP*'s translation of the news on Smyrna with its European source.

However, there was a problem with this balance of sources. Why did the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* use the *Gazette de France*? We suggest on one hand that the editors of the *Mercurio* only used the *Gazette* to publish seismic news items in Italy, north Africa and the ottoman Near East⁵⁴. These were not published in the *Gaceta de Madrid* as they did not come within the geographical scope of its content, despite the fact that the *Gazette* was the main source of its namesake in Madrid. This would explain the low rate of coincidences and the geographic distribution of the contents, probably in order to guarantee sales or increase them.

54 The earthquakes of the eastern Mediterranean were a case apart as information on these could have arrived via Dutch commercial sea routes.

We do not rule out however, that the editorial team of *Mercure de La Haye* had directly accessed the content of the weekly *Gazette*. If this were true, the number of earthquake reports that coincided in the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* would have been greater. Conversely, on scrutiny or comparison of the *Mercure*'s content found in the *Gazette*, the only records found pertain to Italy, Africa and the Near East, possibly due to their commercial or political links. Finding new copies – not preserved – of the *Mercure* would contribute to further confirmation of this hypothesis in future. Irrespective of whether the *Mercure* accessed the contents of the *Gazette*, albeit directly or indirectly, in Madrid, the earthquakes were subsequently distributed geographically between the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio*.

3.5. The editorial team

To further our hypothesis, it was decided to investigate the role of management and the editors in this – possible – commercial strategy. In principle, this idea failed to yield results, as both newspapers had different editors and reviewers; but in the years under study in this paper they had only one editor, Francisco Manuel de Mena (Figure 17).

Mena was one of the most perceptive business men in the world of books and newspaper printing. Antonio Mestre's research noted the prestige that Mena enjoyed, becoming the most popular book seller preferred by illustrious Spaniards, with one important connection being Gregorio Mayans, who introduced him to European booksellers such as the Genevans Cramer and Tournes. He also made a fortune with the purchase and sale of private and convent libraries. As member and driving force behind the *Compañía de Mercaderes de Libros* he led protests against the prohibition on importing foreign books⁵⁵. Even so, by mid-century there were influences such as those of Ricardo Wall, and at Court he exercised the role of 'furriera' [keeper of the house] of Fernando VI and Carlos III. His role as a printer did not come about until 1762 when he took charge of printing the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio*.

55 Antonio Mestre Sanchis, 'Francisco Manuel de Mena: La ascensión social de un mercader de libros proveedor de la élite ilustrada', *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 4 (1984), 47–72, in particular 59–60.

This biography of a businessman suggests that Mena's emergence in the world of printing could have been behind the commercial strategy that differentiated between the contents of the two journals in order to maintain sales of both; so that the interest of the reading public did not wane with reading the same news in duplicate. This could have been one of the factors to explain why the profits of the *Gaceta* doubled in this decade, especially from 1778 – onwards when the print run increased and they began to include domestic news reports from both Spain and the Indies – at a rate that increased the shipment of copies to America. The *Mercurio* maintained its profits and print runs with a few ups and downs which is why there may have been a decision to distinguish between content and thus revive sales (Figure 16).

Print run - number of copies	1770-1	Newspaper	1779-80
		441.000	<i>GM</i>
	45-47.000	<i>MHP</i>	ca. 61.000
Profits	150-160.000 rs.	<i>GM</i>	ca. 350.000 rs.
	45.000 rs.	<i>MHP</i>	ca. 40.000 rs.
Shipments to America	23.000	<i>GM</i>	57.000
	2.800	<i>MHP</i>	4.800

Figure 16. Number of copies of the print run profits and shipments to America of the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* in the period 1770–1 and 1779–80, based on data taken from the work of Enciso Recio⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Enciso Recio, *La Gaceta de Madrid y el Mercurio Histórico y Político*, 68–73.

Gaceta de Madrid

The first editor of the *Gaceta* was Juan Antonio de Eguilondo in late 1762, who had also been a translator for Goyeneche; the reviewer was Miguel de San Martín y Cueto; the second translator, Jacinto Ventura Melendreras, was also responsible for the composition of the *Gaceta*, until his replacement in 1771 by Ramón de Guevara de Vasconcelos, member of the Academy of the Spanish language who remained in the post until 1790. When the *Gaceta* began to be published twice weekly in September 1778 it coincided with the reign of the reviewer Llaguno y Amirola, and as a result new funds were assigned to Guevara, and Felipe David Otero served as scribe or translating assistant. The post of printing and administration was delegated to Francisco Manuel de Mena in 1762, a year after the privilege of printing the Gazette had come under the aegis of the Crown.

Mercurio Histórico y Político

The editors of the *Mercurio* during the decade of 1770, were Santiago Pombo de la Torre (1767-72), Tomás de Iriarte (1772-3) and José Clavijo y Fajardo (1773-99). In contrast, there were several reviewers and Enciso Recio was unable to identify them personally. They acted under the technical and administrative direction of Francisco Manuel de Mena, assisted by several translators and supervised by the State Secretariat from 1756 and until his death in 1780, although he did not take charge of printing until January 1762.

Figure 17. The editorial teams of the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* between 1770 and 1779, based on data taken from the work of Enciso Recio. In Enciso Recio, *La Gaceta de Madrid y el Mercurio Histórico y Político*, 30–1, 40–2 and 48.

3.6. Format

The final argument to be considered was the format of the official press in Spain. The weekly print run of the *Gaceta*, at least until 1778 offered the public information on the aforementioned geographic zones in the event of a notably intense earthquake otherwise it became a single press item without further text or detail. Whereas the *Mercurio* tended to provide a monthly balance of certain news reports of tremors within its geographical scope – Italy, the ottoman world and Africa –, incorporating the most recent information of the event on a date close to publication of the print run. See, for example, the extensive report on the earthquake that shook Smyrna in 1778.

Thus, eight mild earthquakes were recorded in the *Gaceta* and nine in the pages of the *Mercurio* in line with their distribution of content based on geography, despite the fact that they obtained most of their information from the same source.

From Baugé the *Gaceta* translated three earthquakes that struck that place on 9 January 1772, from 08:00–09:00, and at around 13:00 and from 19:00–20:00 in the evening. Although these events successively increased, they did not wreak havoc⁵⁷. In Le Havre a slight tremor was felt which lasted five seconds on 30 December 1775 at 10:43⁵⁸.

Various news reports indicated that on 29 November 1775 a violent earthquake struck Manheim, Wormes, Spira and the outskirts of Maguncia, without damage⁵⁹. Similar events occurred in Temeswar and Peterswaradin in 1777⁶⁰.

Following the criterion of geography and the idea of compiling information on mild earthquakes, the *Mercurio* concentrated on publishing news from the Mediterranean zone. Some mild tremors in Algiers, on 20 December 1772; two without damage in Genoa, on 4 January 1773⁶¹; a violent one in the outskirts of Spezia on the night of 5 and 6 March 1777; another similar incident in Trieste on 16 November 1778⁶²; and others on the 1 September in Cesena, Imola and Castro Prieto⁶³.

4. Final considerations

The comparison of news on seismic activity in the *Gaceta* and the *Mercurio* has shown how they paid attention to the phases of the earthquake and their aftershocks, consequences and subsequent handling of the catastrophe. However, the geographical coverage of their news differed in the case of over a hundred news items, and several arguments led us to suggest the hypothesis of a commercial strategy employed by the Royal administration or the management in order to differentiate their contents and to either maintain or increase sales, hitherto an unprecedented idea for historiography.

57 *GM*, 7, 18-II-1772 (Paris, 5-II-1772), 55.

58 *GM*, 5, 30-I-1776 (Paris, 12-I-1776), 43.

59 *GM*, 4, 28-I-1777 (Petersburg, 17-XII-1776), 29–30.

60 *GM*, 22, 27-V-1777 (Vienna, 7-V-1777), 211.

61 *MHP*, 3, Algiers, III-1775, 212; *MHP*, 3, Genoa, III-1775, 220.

62 *MHP*, 1, Rome, I-1779, 35.

63 *MHP*, 1, Naples, IX-1779, 20–1.

As suggested, given the geography of the earthquakes, we are inclined towards this view, given the scarcity of earthquakes that we were able to compare in terms of magnitude and damage. We found that the *Gaceta* was more concerned with the regions of western Europe and America with reports extracted from their European source, the *Gazette de France*; in addition to adding news reports from the Spanish and the Indies, as their own Spanish possessions. In contrast, the *Mercurio* reported on earthquakes in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean: it would appear through *Mercur de La Haye* – with reports compiled on the basis of commercial trade routes –, the *Gazette de France* and the *Journal de Bruxelles*. To these arguments we can add a possible interference on the part of the management in this venture in order to differentiate the content of the two official Spanish journals. This would be explained by the profile of the businessman embodied in Manuel de Mena. The weekly or monthly format of each of the newspapers also helped to determine – following the geographical criterion – the distribution of news.

The hypothesis suggested, and its arguments are in any case confined to seismic threats, supported by the geographical distribution of meteorological news during the period from 1770–9. Whether or not this theory is applicable to other decades or themes is a subject for future research. What is clear is that the official press may be used both for classic currents of historical seismology, which seeks to carry out the reconstruction and recurrence of earthquakes, and also for new lines of research focused on analysing the capacity of resilience of eighteenth-century societies.

Section III: The logistics of communication

Guillaume Gaudin

Crisis as a measure of communicative capacity in the Spanish Empire: Letters, messengers and news informing Spain of the Sangley uprising in Manila (1603–1608)*

In around 1600 Manila found itself both at the periphery of the Spanish Empire and at the centre of a cosmopolitan South-East Asian world that was criss-crossed by human and economic traffic. This illustrates something of a contradiction between, on the one hand, the difficulty of travelling between the Philippines and the centres of empire and, on the other hand, a certain amount of fluidity of mobility at various other levels (ocean-going, sub-continental, regional and local).

By around 1580 (about fifteen years after the beginnings of the conquest) the Spanish in the Philippines had an almost normalised communication system with Mexico City and Madrid available to them. This combined, long-distance written communication with oral communication (co-presence facilitated by the mobility of agents). These two means of communication (which sometimes competed with each other) were integrated within a structure based on recommendation and trust between senders and recipients who, both together and separately, formulated Hispanic Monarchy governance. Parties often made decisions in uncertain situations while still waiting for a response, but they sought to reduce this uncertainty to a minimum. Consequently, a study of correspondence makes no sense unless it includes other documents and forms of communication, such as the journeys of representatives from Manila to the king's court via the viceroyalty of New Spain. By the same token, information acquired a public dimension in printed documents or even orally, and this can be seen in fainter traces in the sources. This latter point demonstrates

* English translation by Rebecca Siân Mynett.

the existence of a kind of public space within the empire that noticed sensational events that were both exotic and part of a discourse that rested on providentialism¹.

The heuristic value of events is beyond doubt². Times of crisis produce intense flurries of communication that allow us to see the maximum communication capacity of a community³. A particularly interesting example of this is the revolt of inhabitants of Manila of Chinese origin – known by the Spanish as *Sangleyes* – which was followed by a ferocious repression in October and November 1603⁴. This event was of great magnitude and led to the death of 20,000 people! The causes of the revolt and the ferocious repression are multiple: the numerous vexations (notably fiscal) imposed by the Hispanics on the Hokkien diaspora settled in the Manila region; the arrival of a Chinese diplomatic delegation in Manila in May-June 1603 in search of a mythical mountain of silver aroused fears of invasion on the Spanish side. Apart from those triggers, only an in-depth study of the social relations in Manila can explain the causes and consequences of this

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- 1 Thomas Calvo, ‘La construcción de una cultura imperial: Zaragoza, Valladolid de Michoacán, Lima y Manila lloran al príncipe Baltasar Carlos (1647–1648)’, in Lilia V. Oliver Sánchez, ed., *Convergencias y divergencias: México y Perú, siglos XVI–XIX* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2006), 101–28. On the issue of knowledge and information of the government of the Spanish empire: Emilio Sola Castaño, *Los que van y vienen. Información y fronteras en el Mediterráneo clásico del siglo XVI* (Alcalá de Henares: Editorial Universidad de Alcalá, 2005); Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información: funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español*, (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana, 2012); Guillaume Gaudin, *El imperio de papel de Juan Díez de la Calle. Pensar y gobernar el Nuevo Mundo en el siglo XVII* (Madrid – Zamora: Fondo de Cultura Económica – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2017).
 - 2 Michel Bertrand, ‘“Penser l’événement” en histoire: mise en perspective d’un retour en grâce’, in Michel Grossetti, ed., *Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l’événement* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 36–50.
 - 3 Domenico Cecere, ‘Estrategias de comunicación y de intervención frente a desastres en la Monarquía Hispánica bajo Carlos II’, *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2021), 9–10.
 - 4 On the causes and unfolding of this event, see José Eugenio Borao, ‘The massacre of 1603: Chinese perception of the Spaniards in the Philippines’, *Itinerario*, 22/1 (1998), 22–40; Juan Gil, *Los chinos en Manila, siglos XVI y XVII* (Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macao, 2011), 467–91.

event. In December 1603 an unprecedented number of letters were sent from the Philippines to Spain via Goa, and several messengers were also sent to Spain, where the news did not arrive until May 1606. The printing of two *relaciones de sucesos* [accounts of events] in Seville, announcing the news even before it had arrived in Madrid, was also unprecedented. This event allows us to study two aspects: firstly, the information that circulated between government agents; and secondly, the news that travelled from Peking to Seville via Mexico City. The dissemination of news via *relaciones de sucesos* has been the subject of various studies, but research into the interplay between correspondence with other means of communication, particularly governmental, is less commonly undertaken⁵. The dissemination of both secret and public information was dependent on the same, limited, extremely long and perilous routes that were taken by few individuals.

1. Uncertainty as the norm: Communication systems and strategies to and from the Philippines (1580–1610)

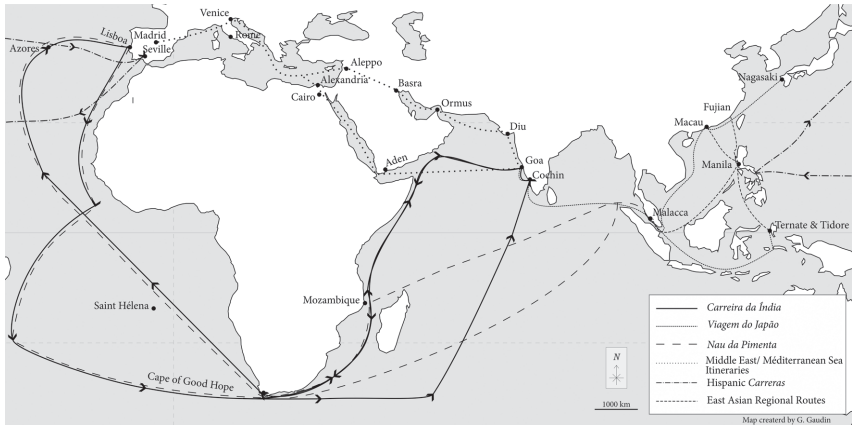
First we must describe the ‘usual’ means of communication between the Philippines and the rest of the Spanish Empire. The question that preoccupied the Spanish authorities was as follows: how frequently could correspondents hope to write?⁶ The logical response must have been once a year, to coincide with the sailings of the Manila Galleon. Also known as the *Nao de Acapulco* or *Nao de China*, this took the *Carrera del Poniente* or the *Carrera de España* (from Manila to Acapulco). Once a year, two vessels (sometimes three or four) followed this route. They left Cavite (the deep-water port in the bay of Manila) at the end of June in order to arrive

5 Andrew Pettegree, *The invention of news: how the world came to know about itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014), 139–62; Jorge Mojarro, ‘Relaciones de sucesos en la Filipinas del siglo XVIII’, *Titivillus*, 4 (2018), 93–125.

6 A question that Ian Steele has asked in respect of the English North Atlantic: ‘How often could transatlantic correspondents hope to write each other?’, Ian Kenneth Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675–1740. An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10.

in November. Going the other way, the ships cast off from Acapulco in around February or March to arrive the following June.

A more precise answer regarding the timing of imperial communication to and from Manila must, however, take into account the immense uncertainty surrounding navigation in the Pacific. The Manila Galleon was far from being a precision instrument. Shipwrecks, forced layovers (*arribadas*) and delays were frequent occurrences, and periods of complete communication breakdown between the Philippines and New Spain were all too real. However, the Spanish could resort to oriental routes – or rather occidental routes, seen from Manila – as alternatives for sending news, letters and messengers. From 1582, after the Iberian Union, duplicates or triplicates of letters were sent from the Philippines at the end of the autumn. They went via the Indian route (also known as the Goa or Malacca route) which crossed two oceans, with carracks leaving Malacca at the beginning of January, and Goa at the beginning of April to arrive finally in Lisbon.



Map 1. Routes linking the Philippines to the rest of the Spanish Empire.

Nonetheless, the *Carrera del Poniente* was the main communication link with the rest of the Spanish world. However, a message arriving in Acapulco was not at the end of its journey; it then had to travel along the land and sea routes that linked the Pacific port to Mexico City, then to Veracruz, Havana, Seville, Madrid or Valladolid or secondarily Lima or Panama. Major infrastructure was constructed in Mexico with the creation of the *caminos reales* [Royal roads] to facilitate this, but even so, things did not always run smoothly. In the Philippines, we know that the galleon could not leave Cavite without having loaded Chinese merchandise brought by junks coming from Fujian. In Manila, between the end of June and the beginning of July, the governor – under pressure from various vested interests – would also delay authorising the departure of the galleon before the arrival of ships from Acapulco. Ships often passed each other in the San Bernardino Strait (the entrance and exit to the Philippine archipelago). Therefore, the main issue was synchronization – or rather a lack of synchronization – as divergent economic, political and environmental factors often constrained the timing of voyages. The same problem occurred at the Isthmus of Panama for the connection between the fleet arriving at Panama from Callao and the *Carrera de Indias* fleet that landed at Porto Belo. This constraint was on top of the inherent uncertainty that characterized the crossing of the Pacific – would the ships arrive safely and how soon?

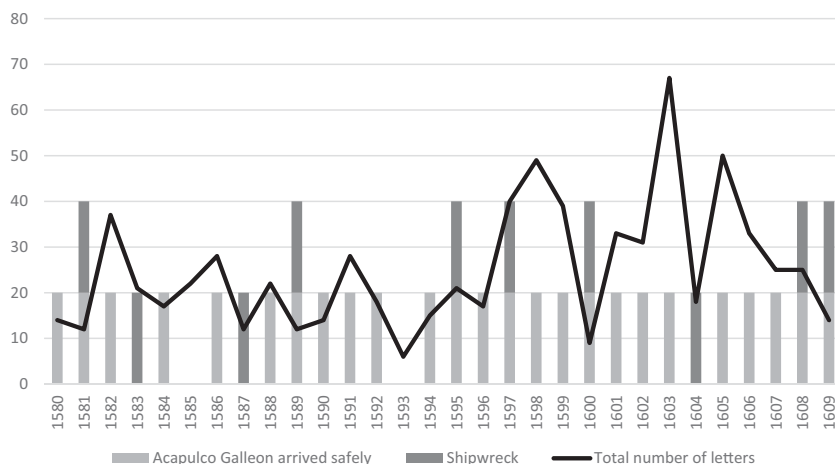
The overall flow of correspondence from the Philippines to destinations outside the Philippines between 1580 and 1609 amounted to 750 letters. Around nine out of ten letters were sent to Madrid, and one in ten to Mexico City; a few (mainly written by Jesuits) were sent to Rome. The corpus is thus made up of the correspondence of the Imperial Government, because it mostly consists of the Archivo General de Indias in Seville with some documents from the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City. This corpus is fairly comprehensive, as far as the documents sent by the highest-ranking Philippine political authorities to the king and the Council of the Indies are concerned. However, it only gives an indication of the correspondence between members of religious orders and from the city of Manila, which is incomplete. Unfortunately, the loss of the local archives makes it impossible to consult the minutes, registers or accounts of the city council. Even more seriously, passive correspondence is completely

missing, other than the *Reales cédulas* [Royal charters] sent from Spain and indications of the exchange of letters contained in the letters that have survived⁷. Similarly, private correspondence only appears very sporadically.

In the following graph I have laid a curve showing the number of letters sent from the Philippines over the years when the Acapulco Galleon arrived safely, those when there was no sailing and those when there was a shipwreck. Although there is clearly a correlation between a low number of letters and a lack of sailings in 1587, 1593, 1600⁸ and 1604, it is notable that no year dips below six letters and that the governor succeeds in sending a letter to Mexico City or Madrid every year. In 1585, despite there being no galleon, the number of letters remains relatively high: the Portuguese route via the East Indies plays its role as backup and some letters dated 1585 were probably sent in 1586. We also note that a higher number of letters were sent in 1605, which corresponds to a catch-up phenomenon from the previous year.

7 Edgar B. Wickberg, 'Spanish Records in the Philippine National Archives', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 35/1 (1955), 77–89.

8 In 1600 just one private vessel reached Acapulco as two royal galleons were shipwrecked and the letters lost with them. The following year, the treasury officials attested that their letters were on board these two galleons. Letter from the treasury officials in Manila to the Council of the Indies, Manila, 20 July 1601, Archivo General de Indias (henceforth AGI), *Filipinas*, 29, n. 67.



Graph 1. Letters sent from the Philippines and successful landings of the Acapulco Galleon (1580–1609).

The graph above shows the irregularity of correspondence, the writing of which largely depended on the personality and willingness of the main government officials. In general, events drove correspondence: in 1582, a new Bishop was installed and he, along with others, did not hesitate to criticize the governor. The impact of sending a *procurador general*⁹ to court is also evident: after the departure of the Jesuit Father Alonso Sánchez for Madrid in 1586, there seems to have been less need to write: they waited for replies, and correspondence dropped to just twelve letters. But the following year, the lack of a response generated impatience and stimulated correspondence. The Nagasaki martyrdom of 1597 and the arrival of

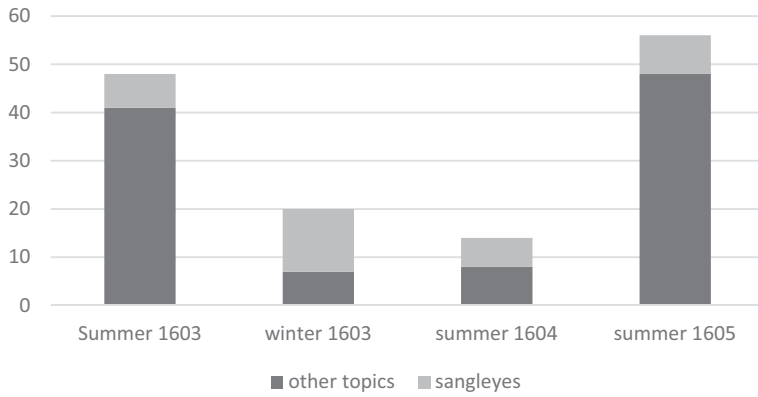
9 *Procuradores generales* were people nominated by Spanish cities to represent them at Court. They were empowered to present petitions in the form of memorials. Guillaume Gaudin, 'Un acercamiento a las figuras de agentes de negocios y procuradores de Indias en la Corte', *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, (2017), <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/71390>; Thomas Calvo, and Guillaume Gaudin, 'Manila and their agents in the court: long-distance political communication and imperial configuration in the seventeenth-century Spanish monarchy', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 30/4 (2023), 624-44.

members of the new *audiencia* and the first archbishop of the Philippines in 1598 stimulated the sending of numerous letters: new power arrangements between the three great monarchical institutions – governor, *audiencia* and archbishop – required numerous reports and complaints to the king, totalling thirty-three letters out of forty-eight sent in that year. The tragic episode of the revolt followed by a massacre in October–November set pens scribbling away and show the heightened capacity for communication in the Philippines. On the other hand, the year 1604 marked a ‘relapse’ with the loss of the Acapulco Galleon.

2. Means of communication to announce unusual events: The Sangleys’ uprising of October 1603

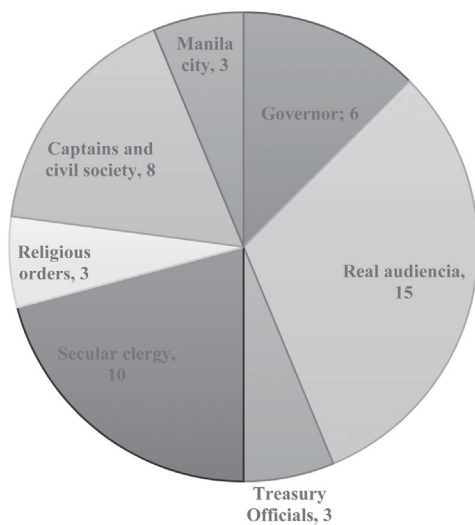
The period from summer 1603 to autumn 1606 covers the time it took for news of the Chinese uprising in Manila to reach Valladolid (where the court of Philip III was resident). Firstly, the mail of summer 1603 – comprising forty-eight letters – notified the king as much of the concerns raised by the diplomatic mission of ‘three mandarins’ from Fujian to Manila, as it did of the many affairs to be dealt with by the royal authorities. Secondly, the mail sent in summer 1605 would effectively arrive in the Iberian peninsula in spring 1606 with the news of the uprising. Meanwhile, neither the backup mail sent via the Portuguese route in December 1603, nor the 1604 mail (lost at sea) succeeded in reaching Spain.

The 1603 peak in mail certainly shows a heightened capacity for communication in times of crisis, but also vulnerability to the dangers of navigation and the long and complex Asian routes that linked the Philippines to Europe. A close examination of these documents will answer several questions: who was corresponding, how, on what topics and on what timescales?

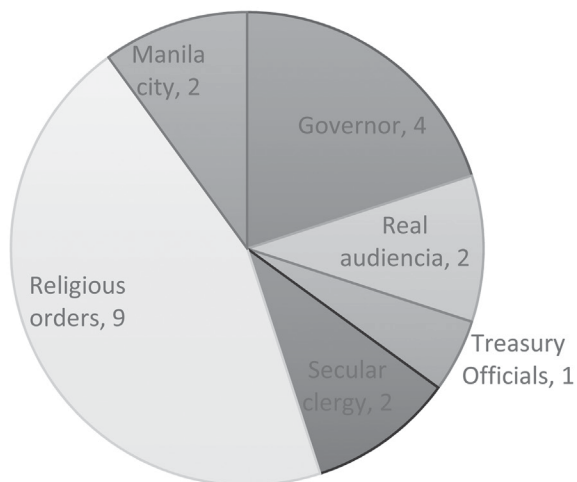


Graph 2. Number of letters sent from the Philippines (1603–1605) showing how many mentioned the Sangleys.

Summer 1603



Winter 1603



Graph 3. Authors and number of letters sent in the summer and winter of 1603.

The mail – made up of twenty letters – of winter 1603 sent via India is unusual for various reasons. The letters were written in December, mostly by members of religious orders. A messenger, a *procurador* of the Augustinian Order was entrusted with giving them to the king and the Council of the Indies. We also note that Governor Acuña sent a letter to the Duke of Lerma (1553–1625), Philip III's favourite¹⁰.

The *Real audiencia* explains that their decision to write new letters in December was due to exceptional circumstances: 'aunque estaba muy incierta por ser por vía de la India de Portugal ha parecido darlo de lo que de nuevo se ha ofrecido por ser de tanta importancia'¹¹ [Although sending mail via India to Portugal is very unreliable, it seems necessary and very important to send this news]. The magistrate, Antonio de Ribera Maldonado, also states in his letter of seven December that: 'Y aunque esta va muy a la ventura, me pareció darlo ahora de un suceso grave y de mucha consideración que ha habido en estas islas'¹² [And although this sets off on an adventure, it now seems necessary to tell you [the story] of a serious and very important event that has taken place in these isles]. However, this was not the first time people had resorted to this alternative means of sending news of an event that had taken place after the Acapulco Galleon had set off in June–July. Just after the death of Governor Pérez Dasmariñas on 26 October 1593, the *licenciado*, Pedro de Rojas, immediately sent a frigate to Malacca with letters for the king, including four

10 Letter from Pedro de Acuña to Duke of Lerma, Manila 7 July 1605, received 11 May 1606, Archivo Ducal de Alba, Caja 142, n. 21: 'Luego que sucedió el alzamiento de los sangleyes lo avise a vuestra excelencia por vía de la India, sería posible que hubiese llegado de que yo holgaría mucho' [As soon as the Sangleyes uprising took place, I informed your excellency via the Indian route and it has probably arrived, for which I am very glad]. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

11 Letter from the *Real audiencia* to Philip III, Manila, 12 December 1603, examined by the Council of the Indies, 26 September 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 19 r.4, n. 73(1).

12 Letter from Antonio de Ribera Maldonado to Council of the Indies, Manilla, 7 December 1603, examined by the Council of the Indies, 26 November 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 19 r.4, 73(2).

copies of a letter explaining the situation¹³. Outside these few extraordinary occasions, the Portuguese route was used to send duplicates and not new letters.

Similarly, the sending of a *procurador* by the Augustinian Order in the person of Fray Diego de Guevara resulted from extraordinary circumstances:

Ha habido en pocos meses tantas adversidades y tan varios sucesos que ha sido forzoso señalar nueva persona que vaya a besar los reales pies de Vuestra Majestad y a darle entera y verdadera relación de cosas de por acá, y para esto escogimos al padre predicador fr. Diego de Guevara (...) y para que informe de muchas materias que nosotros y a estas provincias importan¹⁴.

[In the past few months there have been so many adversities and so many events that it has been necessary to nominate a new person to go to kiss the royal feet of Your Majesty and give a complete and accurate account of things here. For this we have chosen the father Fray Diego de Guevara (...) so that he can report on the many events that are important for us and for these provinces].

Fray Diego de Guevara was entrusted not only with representing his order at court, but also all the political institutions of Manilla whose *cartas de creencias* (or *credencia*) he was given. These letters qualified the bearer as a trustworthy person able to do business on the sender's behalf¹⁵. This was not the first time a member of a religious order was commissioned to represent the Spanish population of the Philippines in Spain. I have already mentioned the significant powers granted by a *junta general* of the Philippines to Fr. Alonso Sánchez in 1586¹⁶.

13 Anonymous, '*Relación de cosas que han sucedido en estas islas desde 24 de septiembre que fue el día que surgió la nao de su Majestad Santiago en el puerto de Cavite*', 1594, AGI, *México*, 22, n. 153b.

14 Letter from the Augustinians of Manilla to Philip III, Manilla, 14 December 1603, examined by the Council of the Indies, 30 October 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 103.

15 Letter from Fray Pedro de Arceo, Provincial of the Augustinians, giving credibility to Fray Diego de Guevara, Manila, 17 December 1603, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 124; letter from the Dominicans giving credibility to Fray Diego de Guevara, Manila, 15 December 1603, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 121; letter from Fray Juan de Garrovillas giving credibility to Fray Diego de Guevara, Manila, 15 December 1603, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 123.

16 Memorial of all the States of the Isles of the Philippines on all matters concerning them for His Majesty, Manila, 20 April 1586, Manila AGI, *Patronato*, 24,

Furthermore, religious orders took it upon themselves to get involved in questions of government, and nine letters out of nineteen were sent by members of regular clergy. Fray Juan de Garrovillas, guardian of the Franciscan friary in Manila, explained that he wrote because:

en la ocasión presente pareció conveniente y aun necesario escribir a Vuestra Majestad estos reglones, no tanto por darle aviso [damaged] que ha pasado del alzamiento de los chinas o sangleyes. Pues otros muchos hacen esto muy por [damaged], sino por suplicar con los demás a Vuestra Majestad el remedio conveniente en esto porque [damaged] suerte multiplicados los testimonios y suplicaciones harán más fuerza en el real pecho [damaged] Vuestra Majestad para que con mayor fuerza y eficacia mande a su gobernador y oidores¹⁷.

[on this occasion, it has seemed practical, even necessary, to write these lines to Your Majesty, not so much as to inform you of what has happened during the uprising of the Chinese or Sangleys, because many others have done so, but to plead with them to Your Majesty for an appropriate remedy. And that because the many witness statements and supplications will have more force in the royal breast of Your Majesty so that he may with more force and effectiveness command his governor and his *oidores*].

Here again, the religious orders felt that the circumstances justified them in addressing the king directly on questions of government. The Jesuit Gregorio López used practically the same argument as Garrovillas¹⁸. We also note that Garrovillas employed a rhetoric of number to convince the king to act: more letters gave more weight to their demands. It seems that the city authorities, all the religious orders, the archbishop (a Dominican) and the cathedral chapter came together to sing from the same hymn sheet and declare that they thought that the cause of the *Sangleys* uprising was the failure to apply a *Reales cédulas* that required the governor and the *audiencia* not to host too many Chinese and to proceed with the deportation of some of them. The letters from the religious orders are relatively

ramo 66, ff. 46–55; Manel Ollé, *La empresa de China. De la Armada invencible al Galeón de Manila* (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2002).

17 Letter from Fray Juan de Garrovillas to Philip III, Manila, 14 December 1603, examined by the Council of the Indies, 14 October 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 122.

18 Letter from Father Gregorio López to Philip III, Manila, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 117.

brief (as is that from the cathedral chapter¹⁹) and do not go into detail about how the uprising and repression of the Sangleys unfolded. They appear to be more like letters of denunciation and supplication and all finish by giving Fray Diego de Guevara credibility and the power to report the facts precisely. The *Real audiencia* also trusted this messenger ‘se mandara informar de las cosas de aqueste y aquel reyno de que dará entera noticia por tenerla de todo muy grande’²⁰ [who will be sent to inform you about this kingdom [of the Philippines] of which he will give complete news, because he has great knowledge of it.] There is thus unanimity: all recognise ‘the religion, virtue, learning and great prudence’ of Fray Diego.

In addition, there is a long description of the uprising by the Jesuit Gregorio López, preserved in Spanish and Latin in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu²¹. This document testifies – if proof were needed – to the importance of information in the functioning of the Society of Jesus²².

The letters from the royal authorities and the city council also give a precise account of events. The king’s agents take the opportunity to highlight their duty to inform the king and to claim credit for enlightening him as to the truth of the situation²³. The governor and the treasury official, Juan de Bustamente, give the longest descriptions. The longest serving magistrate on the *Real audiencia*, Antonio de Ribera Maldonado, describes the course of events, but also touches on other subjects, including the Mindanao attack, a request for money from the exchequer in Acapulco to compensate

19 Letter from the Cathedral Chapter of Manila, Manila, 11 December 1603, examined by the Council of the Indies, 4 October 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 118.

20 Letter from the *Real audiencia* to Philip III, Manila, 12 December 1603, AGI, *Filipinas*, 19, n. 117.

21 Copy of a letter from Father Gregorio López written to Father Gregorio García, vice provincial of the Philippines about the uprising and end of the Sangleys, probably 1604, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Philippinae Historia*, t. 10, ff. 127–40.

22 Markus Friedrich, ‘Government and Information-Management in Early Modern Europe: The Case of the Society of Jesus (1540–1773)’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 12/6 (2008), 539–63.

23 See, for example, the letter from treasury official Juan de Bustamente, Manila, 18 December, AGI, *Filipinas*, 35, n. 68 (f. 1065).

for the loss of customs duties from Chinese junks, and criticism of the military officers in the Philippines.

In short, descriptions of events were left to the authorities, while identifications of the causes were given by other actors in Spanish political life in Manila.

In 1604 and 1605, the issue of maintaining correspondence naturally remained, but in a fairly limited way. Of the fourteen missives to the Council of the Indies dated July 1604, only four returned at length to the subject of the Sangley Uprising. In several other letters, the event is mentioned to highlight a direct or indirect consequence, such as the city's loss of revenue from the Parian. The letter from the *audiencia* dated 12 July 1604 is a duplicate of that sent in December 1603 with a few additions dating from the first half of 1604, such as the arrival of thirteen Chinese merchant junks in the spring²⁴. The governor's letter is full of news – mainly about the administration of goods belonging to deceased Sangley merchants²⁵. The two letters from treasury officials and the new Bishop of Nueva Segovia give alarming news about the state of the royal finances and the over-issuing of licences to the Sangleys, and demand the suppression of the *audiencia*²⁶. Finally, in July 1604 the events of October

24 Letter from the *Real audiencia* to Philip III, Manilla, 12 July 1604, examined by the Council of the Indies, 17 January 1607, AGI, *Filipinas*, 19, n. 76.

25 Letter from the governor, Pedro Bravo de Acuña, to the Council of the Indies (and particularly to the secretary, Juan de Ibarra), Manilla, 15 July 1604, examined by the Council of the Indies, 27 July 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 7, r.1, n. 18.

26 Letter from Diego de Soria to the Council of the Indies, Manilla, 8 July 1604, examined by the Council of the Indies, 12 February 1607, AGI, *Filipinas*, 76, n. 53; letter from the treasury officials to the Council of the Indies, Manilla, 15 July 1604, examined by the Council of the Indies, 20 September 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 28, n. 78 (ff. 509 et seq.). In another letter of July 1604, the governor appears to have been converted by the archipelago's religious orders to the idea of abolishing the *audiencia*. He writes: Pedro Bravo de Acuña to the Council of the Indies (particularly to Secretary Juan de Ibarra), Manila, 15 July 1604, accompanied by a long document entitled, "las causas que a don Pedro de Acuña se le ofrecen para que no haya audiencia en las islas *Filipinas* y que se quite la que en ellas hay", examined by the Council of the Indies, 20 July 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 7, r. 1, n. 20.

1603 are no longer the main issue and the correspondence covers many other concerns.

The mail of July 1604 was loaded onto two galleons bound for Acapulco that never arrived²⁷. What survives today in the Archivo General de Indias is a sequence of duplicates that was probably transported on the 1605 galleon and read by the Council of the Indies between July 1606 and February 1607. News of the Sangley uprising thus only arrived in Spain with the July 1605 letters in summer 1606. Among these – which numbered 56 – only eight directly addressed the subject of the uprising. With the unprecedented arrival of 850 soldiers recruited in New Spain to lead an offensive against the Dutch, who had come to seize the Moluccas, the uprising faded into the background²⁸. Only the Dominican, Bernardo de Santa Catalina, as Commissary of the Holy Office, again denounced those responsible for the uprising²⁹. Most importantly, the governor and other authorities counted on sending the *procurador general*, Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, along with a Dominican and a Franciscan to Valladolid to inform the king and his council³⁰. So, as far as this affair is concerned, they relied – as in December 1603 – on an oral report entrusted to three experienced personages. We should add that both Fray Guevara, who was sent in 1603 and Ríos Coronel (sent in 1605) were not just informers or messengers; they were given authority to present requests to the Council of the Indies on behalf of individuals and collective bodies.

27 The *Nuestra señora de los Remedios* returned to Cavite after four months at sea and the *San Antonio* was lost: letter from Pedro Bravo de Acuña to the Council of the Indies, Manila, 8 July 1605, AGI, *Filipinas*, 7, r. 1, n. 26.

28 Stephanie J. Mawson, 'Convicts or Conquistadores? Spanish Soldiers in the Seventeenth-Century Pacific', *Past & Present*, 232/1 (2016), 87–125.

29 Letter from Bernardo de Santa Catalina in Manila to the Council of the Indies, Manila, 20 June 1605, AGI, *Filipinas*, 84, n. 136.

30 Letter from Pedro Bravo de Acuña to the Council of the Indies, Manila, 10 July 1605, examined by the Council of the Indies, 21 July 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 7, r. 1, n. 27.

3. Mobility and co-presence as means of communication: Multiple journeys to Spain

Above, we saw the unusual nature of sending a messenger to Spain in the person of Fray Diego de Guevara³¹, accompanied by Fray Diego de Uribe, in December 1603 via the so-called India route³². This consisted of travelling to Malacca (a regular connection provided by Portuguese or Asian boats that sailed along the coast of Borneo) and from there, travelling either via Goa or by taking the *nau da pimenta* that sailed directly to Lisbon. However, the second option was not possible in 1603 as no carracks had left Malacca since 1592. Guevara did as best he could and succeeded in reaching Goa, where he was detained for some time waiting – in vain – for a sailing of the *Carreira da Índia*. Eventually, he decided to take the old route that crossed the Arabian Peninsula by first travelling to Hormuz. This dangerous and long route was also very expensive, as the soldier Miguel de Jaque, who found himself in Goa in 1597, testified: he explains that Venetian guides charged 500 *ashrafis* (Persian gold coins weighing 3.5 grammes) to take someone from Hormuz to Venice or Cyprus, with no guarantee that they would not be captured en route³³.

The Augustinians of Basra advised Fray Diego to dress as an Armenian merchant before venturing into the desert, as the Armenians were the ‘nación que va más segura por aquellas regiones, por no ejercer otro oficio que la mercancia’ [the nation that lived most safely in these countries as

31 Brother of the famous writer Don Luis Vélez de Guevara, he arrived in the Philippines in 1593 and was sent to Madrid as procurator for his order on the galleon San Felipe, which was shipwrecked in Japan in 1596. He was present at the ‘martyrdom of Nagasaki’ in 1597. Facts about Fray Diego de Guevara and his voyage are taken from an article currently being written with Thomas Calvo for the *European Review of History* entitled ‘Manila and their agents at Court: long-distance political communication in the seventeenth-century Spanish Empire’.

32 Dejanirah Couto, ‘All Roads Lead to Goa: Messengers, Interpreters, Jewish and New Christian Informants in the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century’, in Shalva Weil, ed., *The Jews of Goa* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2020), 200–137.

33 Miguel de Jaque de los Ríos de Manzanedo, *Viaje de las Indias orientales y occidentales. Año 1606* (Sevilla: Espuela de Plata, 2008), 174.

they had no other profession than commerce]³⁴. The deserts of Arabia, Mesopotamia and others eventually led him to Aleppo, where he found a Venetian ship that took him to Candia (Heraklion). From there, he went on to Livorno and then to Rome, where he was unexpectedly able to meet several times with the Pope and the Augustinian superior, despite the fact that royal patronage precluded members of religious orders from visiting Rome without authorisation from the Council of the Indies. Furthermore, Fray Diego had put his religious mission before his political one of informing the court. Finally, after three years of adventures, he reached Madrid. At which point he discovered a sad truth: ‘llegando a la Corte, halló que eran ya tan antiguas las nuevas que traía, que hacía casi dos años que habían llegado por la Nueva España’³⁵ [arriving at court, he learnt that the news he brought was out of date because it was nearly two years since it had arrived via New Spain]. Here, the Augustinians’ chronicler, Gaspar de San Agustín – who was writing at the end of the seventeenth century – has exaggerated the delay because a petition from Diego de Guevara was lodged at the Council of the Indies in January 1607, which was six months after news of the 1603 uprising had arrived in June 1606³⁶. Apparently, the news had simultaneously arrived in Mexico City in December 1605 and a *navío de aviso* had probably left Veracruz at the end of February to arrive in Seville at the end of April³⁷. Nevertheless, the Council announced that there would not be time to respond before the departure of an *aviso* (the *Carrera de Indias* fleet set sail from Cadiz in July 1606)³⁸. During the summer of 1606, the Council of the Indies began to deal with a veritable avalanche of letters; firstly ten from Governor Pedro de Acuña dated December 1603, July 1604 and July 1605.

34 Gaspar de San Agustín, *Conquistas de las islas Filipinas, Parte segunda*, ed. Casimiro Díaz (Valladolid: Luis de Gaviria, 1890), 127.

35 *Ibidem*, 128.

36 Memorial by Fray Diego de Guevara to the Council of the Indies, Madrid, 30 January 1607, AGI, *Filipinas*, 79, n. 76.

37 The Council of the Indies examined letters from the Viceroy of New Spain written in January and early February at the end of June.

38 *Real cédula* of Philip III to the governor of the Philippines Don Pedro de Acuña, El Escorial, 19 August 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 329, L. 2, f. 7r.

Meanwhile, Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, who was appointed *procurador general* of the Philippines in July 1605, arrived in Sanlúcar with the *Carrera de Indias* fleet on 8 October 1606³⁹. Luckily for him, he had not embarked on the first leg of his voyage from Cavite to Acapulco on board the *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* which had taken eight months to cross the Pacific and lost seventy-three souls⁴⁰. Ríos Coronel and his two companions – Fray Pedro de San Vicente and Fray Pedro Matias – arrived in Acapulco on board the *Espíritu Santo* on 5 December. They brought the news to Mexico City⁴¹. Fray Pedro Matias and Ríos Coronel met the viceroy; Matias wanted to obtain permission for the Franciscans to evangelise Japan⁴², while Ríos Coronel sought to defend Spanish interests in the Philippines⁴³. Ríos Coronel also met with the Jesuit Juan Sánchez to work on cosmographic questions (Sánchez held the papers of Jaime Juan, an official cosmographer who had been sent to the Philippines in 1584 to take astronomical measurements)⁴⁴. The stay in Mexico City enabled the

39 Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, a skilled navigator, mathematician and cosmographer, took care to write a log of his voyage from Cavite to Spain, Biblioteca Nacional de España (henceforth BNE), MS 3212, ff. 73r.-83r: he left from San Juan de Ulloa on 17 June 1606 on board the *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*, and crossed Cap Saint-Vincent (the south-western tip of Portugal) on 27 September. See also John Newsome Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos Coronel and the Spanish Philippines in the golden age* (Farnham – Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 74.

40 Letter from the viceroy of New Spain, Juan de Mendoza y Luna, Marquis of Montesclaros, to the Council of the Indies, Mexico, 26 February 1606, AGI, *Mexico*, 125, r. 1.

41 Letter from the viceroy of New Spain to the Council of the Indies, Mexico, 6 January 1606, AGI, *Mexico*, 26, n. 75.

42 Letter from the viceroy of New Spain to the Council of the Indies, Mexico, 21 January 1606, examined by the Council of the Indies, 16 September 1606, AGI, *Mexico*, 26, n. 76. Fray Pedro Matias had a letter of support from the city of Manila dated 5 July 1605 (AGI, *Filipinas*, 25, n. 55) and another from the cathedral chapter in Manila dated 2 July 1605 (AGI, *Filipinas*, 77, n. 19).

43 Letter of recommendation from Juan de Mendoza y Luna commending Ríos Coronel to the Council of the Indies dated 26 May 1606, examined in Madrid on 6 January 1607, AGI, *Mexico*, 26, n. 87; letter from Hernando de los Ríos Coronel to Philip III, Mexico, 26 January 1606, examined by the Council of the Indies on 5 September 1606, AGI, *México*, 125, r. 1.

44 Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos Coronel*, 71.

messengers from the Philippines to prepare the ground and obtain the support of the viceroy. On 17 June 1606, Ríos Coronel left Mexico from San Juan de Ulloa on board the *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*, arriving in Spain at the beginning of October. He then went to Madrid where he was able to present letters of recommendation to the king, particularly that from the governor of the Philippines:

Recibióse vuestra carta de 10 de julio del año [de 1605] pasado en que avisáis de la venida a estos reinos de algunos religiosos como son Hernando de los Ríos Coronel y fray Pedro de San Francisco y otros que saben muchas particularidades y circunstancias que hubo en el alzamiento de los sangleyes del año de 1603, de quienes podría mandar informarme largamente de todo por ser personas de aprobación y crédito y he holgado de que me hayáis este aviso, porque a su tiempo, mandaré hacer con ellos las diligencias que parecieren convenientes⁴⁵.

[I [Felipe III] have received your [the Governor's] letter of July 10 of last year [1605], in which you informed me of the coming to these realms of some religious, among them Hernando de los Ríos Coronel and Fray Pedro de San Francisco and others, who were acquainted with many details and circumstances of the uprising of the Sangleys in the year 1603. From them, as you suggested, I commanded that full information be given me concerning the whole matter, since they were persons of approved reputation and to be trusted. I am pleased that you have sent me this information, since in due course I shall command the proper actions to be taken with reference to these persons].

The presence of representatives at court enabled those in power to take time to listen to reliable witnesses recommended by the local community in Manila. In fact, on 4 November 1606 the first royal decisions were in response to letters sent by the governor in December 1603 concerning the governance of the Parian and the *Sangleyes*. Later, Ríos Coronel deposited a long report with the Council of the Indies making fifty requests to the benefit of the city and *vecinos* of Manila⁴⁶. It was the president of the Council of the Indies himself, the Count of Lemos, nephew of *Privado* Lerma, who examined the report and responded to it, which proves the highest level of interest among the royal authorities towards the affairs of

45 *Real cédula* of Philip III to the governor of the Philippines Don Pedro de Acuña, Ventosilla, 4 November 1606, AGI, *Filipinas*, 329, L.2, f.30r. Partially cited in Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos Coronel*, 76.

46 Three *Reales cédulas*, two for the governor, the other for the *Real Audiencia*, Ventosilla, 4 November 1606 AGI, *Filipinas*, 329, L.2, ff. 26 and 28r.

the Philippines⁴⁷. Lemos proved to be generally receptive to the petitions presented by Ríos Coronel and the king adopted a series of measures in favour of the city in 1608. In total, thirty-seven *Reales cédulas* were taken by Philip III ‘a instancias’ [at the request] or ‘sobre lo que ha expuesto’ [on what has been proposed] or ‘según informa el procurador general de esas islas Hernando de los Ríos Coronel’ [as reported by the procurator general of the isles]⁴⁸.

4. Spreading the news to the wider public: Printed and handwritten evidence from Peking to Saragossa

News of the Sangley uprising of 1603 also spread outside official correspondence⁴⁹. News spread within Spanish imperial circles in Mexico City, Seville and Madrid, but the shock wave of the massacre also spread through China before entering the chronicles and official histories.

It would be worth studying how this news spread within China⁵⁰. We note only that Governor Bravo de Acuña – mindful of the harm done to trade with merchants from Fujian by the massacre – corresponded with the Chinese authorities in Zhangzhou and dispatched a diplomatic mission to Canton and Macau to inform the Portuguese⁵¹. The news of the massacre reached Haicheng – an important port in Fukien that sent a large number of merchants to Manila – in early 1604. According to the *Haicheng Wiangzhi* (*Gazetteer of Haicheng County*, 1634), the county magistrate Yao Zhilan immediately held a traditional mourning ritual to

47 Memorial by Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, no place given, undated (after November 1606) with responses in the margins initialled by the Count of Lemos, AGI, *Filipinas*, 27, n. 51.

48 37 *reales cédulas* addressed to the governor and the *Real audiencia* dated 3 and 17 March, 1st May, 23 June, 16 and 30 August 1608, AGI, *Filipinas*, 340, L.3.

49 About rumors and spreading news, see the many works of Antonio Castillo Gómez, Filippo de Vivo, Massimo Rospocher or Gennaro Varriale.

50 Albert Chan, ‘Chinese-Philippine Relations in the Late Sixteenth Century and to 1603’, *Philippine Studies* 26/1–2 (1978), 51–82; Cao Jin, ‘From Ricci’s World Map to Schall’s Translation of *De Re Metallica*: Western Learning and China’s Search for Silver in the Late Ming Period (1583–1644)’, *Crossroads*, 17/18 (2018), 107–11.

51 Borao, ‘The Massacre of 1603’, 31–2.

solace the spirits of the deceased and console the grief of the living⁵². When the news reached Peking it incited the ire of the emperor and worried the Jesuits who were concerned for their mission, as can be seen in a letter of May 1605 from Matteo Ricci to Ludovico Maselli:

Non so se là nova di quello che fecero gli Spagnuoli che stanno negli Luzzoni o Filippine, che fu ammazare da ventimila mercanti che erano iti là a mercanteggiare, per disposizione di qualche tradimento: che fu cosa di che si parlò molto in questa corte et avessimo paura che si facesse qualche male, anorchè noi sempre ci guardiamo di darci a cognoscere per amici di quelli, etiando inanzi a questo successo⁵³.

[I do not know if you have heard what the Spanish, who are at Luzon or the Philippines, have done. That is to say, they have killed twenty thousand merchants who had gone there to trade, in the name of a certain treason. This thing is much talked about at this court and we have been afraid that some harm has been done, even though we always avoid appearing to be friendly with them [the Spanish], and we were afraid that that would happen].

Matteo Ricci and his Chinese co-religionists hid their closeness to the Spanish by using the Portuguese *Deus* instead of *Dios* in their missionary work. However, the official chronicles of the Ming dynasty, the *Ming Shi* and the *Ming Shi Lu* mention the event, as do some volumes such as the *Dong-Xi Yang Kao* (An Examination of Countries in the East-West Ocean) published in 1617 by a scholar from Zhangzhou, Zhang Xie (1574–1640)⁵⁴.

In around November-December, on the other side of the Pacific in Mexico City, people were anxiously awaiting the next Manila Galleon. This expectation was all the stronger as no ships had arrived in Acapulco in 1604. The authorities were usually informed of the approach of the galleons by a *gentilhombre* dispatched post-haste from Colima. At the

52 Pin-tsun Chang, 'American Silver and Widow Chastity: Cause and Consequence of the Manila Massacre in 1603', in Congmin Wu, ed., *Proceedings of a Symposium in Honour of Prof. Zhang Hanyu* (張漢裕教授紀念研討會論文集) (Taipei: National Taiwan University Economics Research Foundation, 2001), 205–34.

53 Letter from Matteo Ricci to Ludovico Maselli, Beijing, 12 May 1605, Matteo Ricci, *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci*, II, *Le Lettere della Cina*, ed. Pietro Tacchi Venturi (Macerata: tip. di F. Giorgetti, 1913), 253–4.

54 Borao, 'The massacre of 1603', note 6.

announcement, ‘all the bells [in Mexico City] were rung in a sign of rejoicing’⁵⁵. In late 1605-early 1606, the printer Heinrich Martin (1550–1632), who came from Hamburg and was known as Enrico Martínez, was busy finishing his *Repertorio de los tiempos e historia natural de la Nueva España*, a composite work for a general audience made up primarily of astrological and astronomical annals, which was printed in Mexico City in 1606. He included several pages on the Sangley uprising, ‘segun e oydo a personas mas fidedignas que se hallaron entonces en Manila’⁵⁶ [according to what I learned from reliable people who were in Manila at the time]. In that very year, 1606, in the indigenous suburb of Xoloco, Domingo Chimalpahín, who was employed by the church of San Antonio Abad, began to write his *Diario* in Nahuatl. More than a personal diary, it was a daily account of events he witnessed in Mexico City between 1577 and 1615. Chimalpahín, inspired by reading Heinrich Martin’s *Repertorio*⁵⁷, was moved – like everyone else in Mexico City – by the news from Asia and did not omit mention of the ‘battle’ during which ‘murieron muchos naturales de aquellas tierras llamados sangleyes’⁵⁸ [many natives of those lands, known as *Sangleys*, perished]. The events of 1603 acquired a historiographical dimension in Mexico City with the account of Antonio de Morga (a magistrate who left the Philippines in summer 1603 to take up a post at the *Real audiencia* in Mexico) in his *Sucesos de Filipinas*, which was printed in Mexico City in 1609⁵⁹.

In Spain – in Seville, gateway to the Indies, to be precise – news of the uprising was immediately broadcast through the powerful means of two *relaciones de sucesos* of 1606, printed in Seville by Alonso Rodríguez and Clemente Hidalgo respectively: the *Relación del levantamiento de los*

55 Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, *Le Mexique à la fin du XVII^e siècle vu par un voyageur italien Gemelli Careri*, ed. Jean-Pierre Berthe (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1968), 73.

56 Henrico Martínez, *Reportorio de los tiempos, y Historia natural desta Nueva España, Mexico*, en la Emprinta del mesmo autor, 1606, 254–5.

57 Rodrigo Martínez Baracs, ‘El diario de Chimalpahín’, *Estudios de cultura Náhuatl*, 38 (2007), 290–91.

58 Domingo Chimalpahín, *Diario* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes – Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro, 2000), 105.

59 Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas* (Mexico: Jerónimo Balli, 1609).

Sangleyes, nación Gentil, habitantes en las Islas Filipinas (...) y de la vitoria que dellos hubo: y castigo que se les dio. Vino esta nueva a México a 5 de diciembre de 1605 y a España a 1 de mayo de 1606, and the *Relación verdadera del levantamiento de los Sangleyes en las Filipinas, y el milagroso castigo de su rebelión: con otros sucesos de aquellas Islas. Escrita a estos reinos por un soldado que se halló en ellas, recopilado por Miguel Rodríguez Maldonado*. These *relaciones*, with broadly similar contents, presented an apologia from Governor Pedro de Acuña, which was full of Castilian providentialism and set up a sort of monument to the dead with a list of Spanish ‘victims’ of the confrontation. The number of these newsletters (which were either handwritten or printed) exploded at the end of the sixteenth century and generally announced events in a seemingly neutral fashion. To do this, authors highlighted a number of credible points, such as in this case a source (a soldier who had been in Manila in 1603) and the chronology of how the news had travelled (how far it had reached by 5 December, 1 May, etc.).

Once it had reached Spain, news of the event was also rapidly included in the official historiography of the monarchy and the religious orders, with accounts appearing in the works of Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, Marcos de Guadalajara y Xavier, Fray Diego de Aduarte and Fray Gaspar de San Agustín⁶⁰.

In short, once the news traversed the narrow and uncertain communication channel of the Manila Galleon, it spread and acquired an undeniable public dimension⁶¹.

60 Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, *Conquista de las Molucas* (Madrid: Alonso Martin, 1609); Marcos de Guadalajara y Xavier, *Historia pontifical y católica. Quarta impression* (Zaragoza: Juan de Lanaja y Quartaner, 1612); Diego de Aduarte, *Historia de la provincia del Sancto Rosario, de la orden de Predicadores, en Philippinas, Japon y China* (Manila: Luis Beltrán, 1640); Gaspar de San Agustín, *Conquistas de las islas Philipinas: la temporal por las armas del Señor Don Phelipe Segundo El Prudente; y la espiritual, por los religiosos del Orden de San Agustín [1697]* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas – Instituto Enrique Florez, 1975).

61 Arthur Weststeijn, ‘Empire in Fragments: Transatlantic News and Print Media in the Iberian World, ca. 1600–40’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 74/2 (2021), 528–70.

5. Conclusion

The uprising, followed by the terrifying massacre of 20,000 *Sangleys*, was an opportunity for the Spanish authorities in Manila to deploy a major communications operation. The incident was communicated to the king via an unprecedented dispatch entrusted to Fray Diego de Guevara in December 1603 which travelled via Goa, Hormuz, Basra, Aleppo and Rome before arriving in Madrid in 1607. Throughout all these years, no one in Manila knew if the news had reached the ears of King Philip III. This uncertainty was mitigated by the dispatch of ‘ordinary’ mail via Acapulco, Mexico City, Veracruz and Seville, but in 1604 the Acapulco Galleon did not succeed in crossing the Pacific. It was not until 1606 that Madrid was finally informed, first by a series of letters, then by the arrival of a *procurador general* from Manila in the person of Hernando de los Ríos Coronel. The arrival at court of this very important news was thus delayed by several years, despite the unprecedented efforts made by the Spanish in the Philippines. After this long delay, the uprising had become a secondary issue, both in Spain and the Philippines, and an armada to recapture the Moluccas from the Dutch became a more pressing concern. However, it is highly likely that Fray Diego de Guevara’s long voyage was driven by his desire to visit Rome – for reasons connected to the affairs of the Augustinians in the Philippines – before going to Madrid. The workings of missionary organisations, although closely linked to the workings of imperial communications, often had different aims and rationales from those of the Monarchy.

By 1606, there were in the end few decisions to be taken – either by the Council of the Indies or the king – in regard to this matter. Nevertheless, the causes of the uprising identified by a number of authorities in the Spanish Philippines enabled Ríos Coronel to advance the interests of the city at court. The *procurador general*’s memorial and the favourable responses given in it, show that royal decisions often rested on requests that had come from local communities.

Finally, the matter took on a public dimension; it is quite remarkable that it features in Chimalpahín’s journal and, thanks to printing, in the major cities of the Monarchy it was included in a providentialist and martial discourse that incorporated China within the Spanish imperial sphere.

Paulina Machuca

The 1645 Manila earthquake: The distance-time problem during emergencies*

In an ‘empire of paper’ like the Hispanic Monarchy, control of information played a fundamental role¹. News about uprisings, enemy attacks and disasters resulting from natural phenomena sought the fastest channels for transmission to the Metropolis, as their urgent nature raised issues of governance and required rapid decision-making. Earthquakes and other disasters in particular became topics of great interest to the Habsburg monarchy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as their empire controlled a considerable number of territories with high levels of seismic activity, including Naples, Lima and Manila².

Recent historiography has emphasized the role played by imperial communication in decision-making at times of crisis, as well as the various

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- 1 On the concept of the ‘empire of paper’, we refer to the work of Guillaume Gaudin, *El imperio de papel de Juan Díez de la Calle. Pensar y gobernar el Nuevo Mundo en el siglo XVII* (Madrid – Zamora: Fondo de Cultura Económica – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2017).
- 2 Gennaro Varriale carried out an interesting study of the transmission mechanisms for news relating to earthquakes in the Spanish monarchy of the 16th and 17th centuries, with emphasis on the internal workings of the administration. He observed that, towards the middle of the 17th century, increasingly robust and well-documented files began to be prepared on the earth movements occurring in the various Habsburg domains, while the audience avid for news about disasters expanded; Gennaro Varriale, ‘Quando trema l’impero. L’informazione sui terremoti nella Monarchia Ispanica (secoli XVI–XVII)’, *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 152–80.

formal and informal, oral and written channels through which news of disastrous events was transmitted³. Behind this there were various factors, such as the state of maritime technology, the time-distances on the land and sea routes, with the clockwork mechanisms this involved, and, in general, the Crown's ability to oversee all these aspects⁴. We are therefore interested in inserting the Philippines into this debate within the Hispanic context, from the circulation of the news of the Saint Andrew's Day (*Día de San Andrés*) earthquake in Manila, an event that occurred on 30 November 1645 at 8 pm and is considered one of the most devastating earthquakes during the period of Spanish colonization of the archipelago. Between 400 and 600 people lost their lives, and around 150 Spanish people's houses and more than 20 public buildings, were destroyed or damaged⁵.

But although information about an earthquake in Naples could reach Madrid in just over a week because it was an extreme situation, in the case of the Philippine islands, which were on the other side of the world and whose dispatches first had to pass through the filter of New Spain, the circulation of news could take years rather than months, especially if the 'fortune of the sea' – loss of ships, aborted trips (*arribadas*) and enemy

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- 3 To mention a few examples: Lonna Atkeson, and Cherie D. Maestas, *Catastrophic Politics. How Extraordinary Events Redefine Perceptions of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014); Domenico Cecere, 'Estrategias de comunicación y de intervención frente a desastres en la monarquía hispánica bajo Carlos II', *Revista de historia moderna*, 39 (2021), 8–43; and Varriale's study that we have already mentioned, 'Quando trema l'impero. L'informazione sui terremoti nella Monarchia Ispanica (secoli XVI–XVII)', 152–80.
- 4 Guillaume Gaudin, and Roberta Stumpf, eds, *Las distancias en el gobierno de los imperios ibéricos: concepciones, experiencias y vínculos* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2022).
- 5 Much of our knowledge of the tragedy that occurred after the Manila earthquake of 1645 is due to the chronicle of the Mercedarian friar Joseph Fayol, *Relación de varios sucesos de mar y tierra en las Islas Filipinas en estos últimos años hasta el temblor y ruina del día de San Andrés en 645, y las peleas y victorias navales contra el holandés en 646* (Manila: Imprenta de la Compañía de Jesús, 1647). I thank Jorge Mojarro for providing me with a copy of this pamphlet. This text is derived from an ongoing book entitled *Sociedad y desastre en las Filipinas del siglo XVII: el temblor de San Andrés de 1645*.

attacks – extended the ordinary period. That was exactly what happened after the Manila earthquake of 1645, which meant the tragic event was not known about in Madrid or Mexico City until *three years afterwards*. The emphasis is necessary because a tragedy of such magnitude as the partial collapse of the city in 1645 could not possibly have had a quick, and still less an expeditious, response from the central authorities.

The slow spread of the news of the Manila earthquake is undoubtedly a reflection of the fragility of the binding ties that linked the archipelago with the rest of the Hispanic monarchy. But perhaps for that reason it also shows the responsibility of the local civil and religious actors in dealing with adversities. At the same time, it leads us to wonder about the degree of autonomy these agents had in the face of these unexpected emergencies. As we will see, after the state of calamity, an attempt was made to spread the news of the earthquake through both official and unofficial channels. This shows us that in times of crisis it was possible to mobilize various agents at an individual and collective level. It is precisely these factors – distance and the communication of the disaster – that the following pages will deal with⁶.

1. The Philippines, a far-off ‘Third World’

Towards the end of the sixteenth century and for a good part of the seventeenth century, the remoteness of the Philippine islands within the political geography of the Hispanic monarchy was becoming something of a cliché. This was a view from the metropolis that considered the Asian enclave as the ‘Third World’ or ‘Third New World’, placing it, in hierarchical order, below Europe and America. The idea of the Philippines as a ‘Third World’ was perhaps expressed for the first time by an unusual soldier in the Cambodian campaigns in 1596: Miguel de Jaque de los Ríos

6 In this text we will focus solely on analysing how the news of the Manila earthquake of 1645 first became known. However, we must point out that after the details of the tragedy were revealed, there was extensive communication in letters between Manila, Mexico and Madrid, with a view to reconstructing the buildings. We address this topic in Machuca, *Sociedad y desastre en las Filipinas del siglo XVII*.

de Manzanedo⁷. Half a century later, on 27 July 1650, after experiencing an eventful voyage between Acapulco and Manila, Dr. Francisco de Samaniego did not hesitate to write a letter to the King to tell him ‘los muchos trabajos que se pasan antes y después de haber llegado a este tercer mundo’ [the many travails that occur before and after having arrived in this third world]: that is, the Philippines⁸. With this, he was referring to a set of geographical, political and social elements that made the archipelago a place very far from the central authorities, both on the Iberian Peninsula and in New Spain.

We are not here to recount Samaniego’s misfortunes in detail, but his example is highly illustrative of what could happen in extreme communication situations on the Manila-Mexico-Madrid axis. Having been rapporteur in the Criminal Division (*Sala del Crimen*) of the Audiencia de México for two decades, in October 1645 Samaniego was promoted to prosecutor of the Audiencia de Manila. But although the notification was received in Mexico at the end of January 1646, he did not manage to reach Manila until 21 September 1649 – four years after his appointment was dispatched from Madrid. All kinds of things happened during those years of waiting, particularly a shortage of galleons on the Pacific route due to the war with the Dutch, which we will refer to later. But even when he was able to leave from Acapulco, the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* in which he sailed had a very rough voyage, taking almost twice as long as the regular sailing time – six months instead of three. And instead of arriving at Cavite he landed on the east coast of Mindanao, so he had to resume his journey from there to Manila on karakoas and sampans. For

7 Paulina Machuca, ‘El sueño de un gran Pacífico en el “tercer y Nuevo Mundo”: la Jornada de Camboya de 1596’, in Carmen Yuste, and Guadalupe Pinzón, eds, *500 años del hallazgo del Pacífico* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016), 163–88.

8 Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, *Diversos-Colecciones*, 27, N. 15, f. 1v. This letter and its introductory study were published by Jean-Pierre Berthe, ‘Las islas Filipinas “Tercer Mundo”, según don Francisco de Samaniego’, in Jean-Pierre Berthe, ed., *Estudios de historia de la Nueva España. De Sevilla a Manila* (Mexico City: Universidad de Guadalajara – CEMCA, 1994), 297–318. A previous version of this text appeared as Jean-Pierre Berthe, and María Fernanda G. de los Arcos, ‘Les Îles Philippines, “Troisième Monde” selon D. Francisco de Samaniego (1650)’, *Archipel*, 44 (1992), 141–52.

him, the worst misfortune was that he lost his luggage, including with 24 boxes of books – that is, ‘one thousand three hundred works that surely made up one of the best personal libraries in New Spain’, as mentioned by Jean-Pierre Berthe⁹.

This is just a snapshot of how difficult contact could be between the various worlds involved in a colonial system which had the Illustrious and Always Loyal City of Manila precisely on the other side of the globe. Other people, in other circumstances, saw the Philippines as ‘the “cape”’ (cabo) of the world’. According to Sebastián de Covarrubias’s dictionary of 1611, this word meant ‘the end of everything, from which the Spanish verb “acabar” (to finish) was formed...’¹⁰. This was said by Domingo Rodríguez, from Seville, who was arrested in Manila in 1592 at the request of the Holy Office of the Inquisition of Mexico, and who had thought that by being ‘at the end of the world’ he would escape the fearsome inquisitorial judges¹¹. Phrases of this nature were repeated throughout the seventeenth century, claiming the spatial and temporal remoteness of the Philippines with respect to the entire Hispanic monarchy. But this situation was not unique to the archipelago: various agents and subjects of the King of Spain, from Santiago de Compostela to Santiago de Chile, used this remote rhetoric to complain and make clear different types of unhappiness with the situation¹².

9 Berthe, *Estudios de historia de la Nueva España*, 304.

10 *Thesoro de la Lengua castellana, o española, compuesto por el Licenciado Don Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco...* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez impresor del Rey N.S., 1611), 164.

11 This character is dealt with by Miguel Rodrigues Lourenço, “En el cabo del mundo”: ¿un ciclo de represión inquisitorial contra cristianos nuevos en las Filipinas a fines del siglo XVI?, in Guillaume Gaudin, and Paulina Machuca, eds, *Las Filipinas, ¿una periferia global? Gobernar y vivir en los confines del imperio hispano* (Zamora – Toulouse: El Colegio de Michoacán – Presses universitaires du Midi, 2022), 135–52.

12 José Araneda Riquelme analyses how, in the Captaincy General of Chile, in the midst of Bourbon reformism, a variety of agents, such as soldiers or trusted indigenous people, were employed to make the postal system work. Given the marginal nature of the captaincy and the geographical challenges, this represented an alternative form of communication. See his book *Un gobierno de papel. El correo y sus rutas de comunicación en tiempos de la reforma imperial en*

2. Communication times and sailing cycles

At dawn on 1 December, a day after the earthquake, with the city in ruins, the civil and religious authorities must have pondered for a long time on how they should inform Mexico City and Madrid about the disaster that had just occurred. They had good reason to be pessimistic: the ship *San Luis* had left for Acapulco barely three months before, between 14 and 15 August 1645¹³, so it was necessary to wait a whole year for a ship to cross the immense Pacific Ocean again with dispatches and reports from the governor, the secular clergy and the different religious orders.

The route from India to Portugal, on which official Spanish correspondence had once circulated via the Cape of Good Hope, could no longer be used because in 1640 the Union of the Two Crowns had been dissolved¹⁴. There were even special occasions when urgent news was sent on the Dutch route via Batavia (now Jakarta), although on this occasion this route could not be used due to clashes with the Dutch. There were also other cases of emergency, such as in the 1680s, when the serious state of the Philippine islands forced the governor to send reports via the Coromandel coast, ‘so that they may be directed from there to pass through Flanders, Holland or England’¹⁵, that is, avoiding the New Spain route.

Chile (1764–1796) (Santiago: Centro de Investigaciones Diego Barros Arana – Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2020).

13 According to Cruikshank’s [online] database, there are two versions of the departure of the ship *San Luis*: one indicates that it left the port of Cavite on 14 August 1645, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (henceforth AGI), *Filipinas*, N. 31, and the other that it left the port of Lampón on 15 August that year (AGI, *Contaduría*, 905B).

14 Guillaume Gaudin points out that, from 1582 onwards, duplicates or triplicates of official correspondence were sent to Madrid on the Malacca-Goa route, leaving the Philippines towards the end of autumn, and leaving Malacca at the beginning of January, as the boats that left Goa for Lisbon were due to set off in around April. Guillaume Gaudin, ‘Crisis as a measure of communicative capacity in the Spanish Empire: letters, messengers and news informing Spain and the Sanglay uprising in Manila (1603–1608)’, in this volume.

15 AGI, *Filipinas*, 13, R. 1, N. 7, f. 1.

Normally the Pacific galleons set sail from Cavite – and sometimes around those dates from Lampón¹⁶ – for Acapulco during June–July to take advantage of the favourable strong west-east monsoon winds¹⁷. We must not forget that in the whole of southeast Asia, sailing was dependent on the monsoon season. Failing to leave within a certain period therefore meant waiting a year or more¹⁸. However, for the authorities in Manila, it was a long time to wait until the following summer. The problem was not only waiting for the May–June winds to be able to send the Acapulco Galleon, or at least, a warning ship, which was not unknown in times of crisis¹⁹. The real and perhaps most decisive problem was the Dutch blockade of the Philippine seas.

Since February 1646 it had been known in Manila, via the Macassar route, southwest of the island of Celebes, that a Dutch fleet was preparing to blockade the Philippine seas and capture any ship travelling to or from the capital of the archipelago. That included the Acapulco Galleon and the China trade ships²⁰. According to Joseph Fayol, the plan hatched in Batavia, the capital of Dutch rule in Asia, consisted of encircling the coasts of Pangasinan and Ilocos with five ships to capture the sampans from Fujian, which would take advantage of those strong June winds. These were fairly extensive deployments with notable resources: seven ships

16 María Baudot analyses the use of Lampón, in central-eastern Luzon, as a substitute port for Cavite in the mid-17th century. María Baudot Monroy, ‘Lampón, puerto alternativo a Cavite para el Galeón de Manila’, *Vegueta. Anuario de la Facultad de Geografía e Historia*, 20 (2020), 21–48.

17 Thomas Calvo carried out a detailed analysis of the winds used by the galleons in this area of the western Pacific. Thomas Calvo, *Espacios, climas y aventuras: el galeón de Filipinas y la fragata de las Marianas en el Pacífico occidental, 1680–1700* (San Luis Potosí: El Colegio de San Luis, 2016).

18 On the role of winds in sailing, see Greg Bankoff, ‘Aeolian Empires: the Influence of Winds and Currents on European Maritime Expansion in the Days of Sail’, *Environment and History*, 23 (2017), 163–96.

19 On the use of pataches as warning ships on the transpacific route, see Ostwald Sales-Colín Kortajarena, *El movimiento portuario de Acapulco. El protagonismo de Nueva España en la relación con Filipinas, 1587–1648* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés Editores, 2000), 103–9.

20 We know these details thanks to Fayol, *Relación de varios sucesos de mar y tierra en las Islas Filipinas*.

would be stationed in the San Bernardino strait to seize the booty from Acapulco which had to come in before the strong winds in the middle of the year and another six would wait on the coasts of Mindanao to attack the boats that linked the archipelago with Terrenate and Macassar. In other words, the plan was designed to isolate Manila and control all ways in and out.

The plan was put into practice: the first proper battle by the Spanish against the Dutch occurred in March 1646 on the east coast of Luzón. Immediately afterwards, the ships *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* and *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* received the order to now go to the San Bernardino strait to await the ship *San Luis*, which was due to arrive from Acapulco in July. This movement was crucial to safeguard the *socorro* (relief) coming from New Spain, and to be able to give an economic respite to the difficult situation in which Manila found itself after the earthquake, as the long-awaited *socorro* or wages were due to arrive on the ship. But the galleon never arrived.

Faced with the urgency of sending news, not only of the earthquake but also of the Dutch blockade, he considered sending the galleon *San Diego* – recently built according to Fayol – to New Spain that same summer, ‘taking it for granted that the coasts were clear of enemies’²¹. But it made two unsuccessful attempts to leave, as the coasts were infested with Dutchmen. Later it was learned that the *San Luis*, the ship the Spaniards had waited for in vain at the San Bernardino strait, had been diverted due to bad storms and ended up on the coast of Cagayan, in northern Luzón, in July 1646. Fortunately, the *socorro* from New Spain and part of the artillery could be recovered, which was some relief for the government coffers and the munition shortage of the time.

But the communication problem with Mexico and Madrid persisted, as 1646 ended without it being possible to send notifications. No galleons left in 1647 either, as the Dutch blockade persisted. But in 1648, as soon as the winds were favourable for sailing to Acapulco and the waters were safe, the galleon *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación*, repaired after clashes with the Dutch, set out from Manila. It set sail on 6 May, arriving at the

21 Fayol, *Relación de varios sucesos de mar y tierra en las Islas Filipinas*.

port of Acapulco on 12 December after a seven-month voyage. At the same time, without knowing that *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* had left Manila in May 1648, the Count of Salvatierra, Viceroy of New Spain, sent the patache *El Buen Jesús* to the Philippines to find out what was happening there. In fact, *El Buen Jesús* had arrived in Acapulco from Panama to take the Count to Peru, where his position as the new Viceroy of that kingdom awaited him, but he decided to use it on a matter he considered more pressing²². The year 1648 was therefore crucial for the flow of news between Manila, Mexico and Madrid, and we can see this in detail in the following chronology. In the pages that follow, we will try to answer *roughly* who found out what first, and how they did.

Table 1. Chronology of the spread of the news of the 1645 earthquake in Manila

Date	Event
30 November 1645	Saint Andrew's Day earthquake in Manila.
September 1646	The galleon <i>San Diego</i> attempts to leave for Acapulco but fails due to the Dutch blockade.
1647	No galleons leave due to the Dutch blockade.
October 1647	Diego de Hinojosa Villavicencio goes into exile to Terrenate and from there he travels to Madrid via Batavia to report on the 1645 earthquake and enemy attacks. His journey takes a year.
8 April 1648	The patache <i>El Buen Jesús</i> leaves Acapulco for Manila.
7 May 1648	The galleon <i>Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación</i> leaves the port of Cavite for Acapulco.
July 1648.	The patache <i>El Buen Jesús</i> arrives in Cavite with aid of 97,000 pesos and the news of the death of Prince Balthasar Charles. What happened in the 1645 earthquake is still not known in New Spain or on the Iberian Peninsula.
18 November 1648	Don Diego Hinojosa Villavicencio arrives at the court in Madrid, by way of Batavia, to report on the state of the Philippine islands. The information includes the earthquake that occurred in 1645 and the blockade by the Dutch in 1646 and 1647.

(continued)

22 Gregorio M. de Guijo, *Diario, 1648–1664. Vol. 1* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1953), 3; Berthe, *Estudios de historia de la Nueva España*, 301.

Table 1. Continued

Date	Event
12 December 1648	The galleon <i>Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación</i> arrives in Acapulco from Cavite with information about the earthquake in 1645 and the blockade by the Dutch in 1646 and 1647.
24 December 1648	The King sends a royal decree to the Viceroy of New Spain notifying him of the news he received about the earthquake that occurred in Manila in ‘1646’, although in fact it had happened in 1645.
31 March 1649	The galleon <i>Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación</i> leaves Acapulco heading for the Philippines.
17 April 1649	From Acapulco, the castellan of the port of Acapulco, Sabiniano Manrique de Lara, together with the other royal officials, denounced before the Council of the Indies the lack of support from the Bishop and Governor of New Spain, Marcos de Torres y Rueda, who cut the aid to the Philippines. Mention is made of the havoc caused by the 1645 earthquake and the Dutch blockade during 1646 and 1647.
31 July 1649	Diego Fajardo, Governor of the Philippines, complains about the scant <i>socorro</i> reaching the archipelago in 1648 via the patache <i>El Buen Jesús</i> . Meanwhile, he awaits the 1649 galleon from Acapulco.
October 1649	The galleon <i>Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación</i> makes port in the province of Caraga, 180 leagues from Manila, with insufficient <i>socorro</i> for the maintenance of the islands.
17 November 1649	The letter from the Castellan of Acapulco, Sabiniano Manrique de Lara, and other royal officials, is seen at the Council of the Indies.
January 1650	Diego Fajardo, Governor of the Philippines, laments the lack of support from the Viceroy of New Spain and the scant <i>socorro</i> that arrived in 1649.

Source: AGI, *Filipinas*, 31, N. 16; AGI, *Filipinas*, 9, R. 1, N. 6; AGI, *Filipinas*, 9, R. 1, N. 9; AGN, *Reales cédulas originales*, vol. 3, exp. 56, f. 105–106; Blair & Robertson, 1906, vols. 35 and 36; Guijo, 1953; Sales-Colín, 2000; Baudot, 2020; Cruikshank, 2021.

2.1. From Madrid to Manila, via Mexico: July 1648

Manila was not the only location eager to inform the rest of the Spanish monarchy about its tragedies: on 9 October 1646, aged just 16, Prince Balthasar Charles, son of Philip IV and heir to the throne, died in Zaragoza. The announcement of the prince’s death was a shock in the empire, and,

precisely for this reason the authorities wanted to ensure it circulated everywhere, even in Mexico, Lima and, of course, Manila²³. But Manila was still isolated by the Dutch blockade and had not even been able to report on its own disaster. Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson suggest that rumours of the prince's demise reached the islands in mid-December 1647, thanks to a Flemish pamphlet carried by the Dutch besieging Manila²⁴. Incredulous, and perhaps suspecting that it was *fake news* intended to further destabilize the colonial administration, the authorities in Manila had to wait for official news of the unfortunate event, which arrived in Manila in July 1648 with *El Buen Jesús*. This was almost two years late, when what had happened was more of a fading memory²⁵. Rumours were a sensitive matter for the good governance of the Spanish monarchy. We should not forget that, just a few decades before, news had spread throughout much of Europe that the invincible Armada had defeated the English fleet, which in fact turned out to be a rumour based on wishful thinking rather than hard facts²⁶.

If we make a comparison of how the news of the death of the Crown Prince circulated, we see that it arrived in Mexico in June 1647 (eight months), in Lima in September 1647 (11 months) and in Manila in July 1648 (21 months). It is possible that, as in Manila, the news reached Lima about three months earlier through unofficial channels²⁷, with merchant

23 On the circulation of the news of the death of Balthasar Charles, see Thomas Calvo, 'The Construction of an Imperial Culture: Zaragoza, Valladolid de Michoacán, Lima and Manila mourn Prince Baltasar Carlos (1647–1648)', in Lilia V. Oliver Sánchez, ed., *Convergencias y divergencias: México y Perú, siglos XVI–XVII* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2006), 101–28.

24 Emma H. Blair, and James Alexander Robertson, eds, *The Philippine Islands (1493–1898)* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), vol. 36, 24.

25 Something similar happened with news of the Sangley Rebellion in Manila, which occurred in December 1603. By the time the official correspondence arrived in Madrid in May 1606, some Mexican publications had already incorporated this terrible event into their narratives; see Gaudin, 'Crisis as a measure of communicative capacity', in this volume.

26 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014), 3.

27 Calvo, 'La construcción de una cultura imperial', 112.

ships, religious orders and family ties playing a leading role in spreading it. But, overall, these dates are a good parameter of the distance-time separating the metropolis from its colonies.

Another element to take into account is that, both in Mexico and in Lima, funeral respects were paid to the Prince a month after the news arrived, while in Manila this took as long as four months, with a ceremony held on 10 November 1648. Were the authorities and society as a whole living in a kind of lethargy after the trauma of the earthquake and the Dutch attack? Father Francisco Colín, the orator who celebrated the funeral, said: ‘We have seen the earth tremble in Manila and its islands for many months, with ruins and destruction of its buildings’²⁸. In other words, the memory of the earthquake was still very much in the memory of the people of Manila, and the death of the Crown Prince was further, added grief. Did the city need all that time to gather some of the strength it had lacked for three years and commemorate the prince? Was it essential so that they could escape one nightmare and prepare to deal with another²⁹? The patache *El Buen Jesús* that arrived in Cavite in July 1648 carried not only the fatal news, it also bore memorial fragments linking Spain, New Spain and Peru. In martyred Manila, these took on another significance.

5.2. From Manila to Madrid, via Batavia: November 1648

As we have seen throughout this chapter, communication between Manila and New Spain was blocked from the spring of 1646 and throughout 1647. With the impossibility of sending galleons to Acapulco to report on the Saint Andrew’s Day earthquake, a peculiar character named Diego

28 *Ibidem*, 113.

29 During the waiting period, not everything would have been negative: in his sermon, Father Colín mentioned ‘the letter relating to his death, written in Zaragoza’, and on two occasions he quoted the Mexican funeral oration. Over years and distance, the news was more than a bare notice, it had been enriched, multiplied and diversified. There is also another notable circumstance: the author of Mexico’s funeral sermon was probably Fray Buenaventura de Salinas y Córdoba, a Creole and chronicler from Lima, who spent the last years of his life in New Spain; see Thomas Calvo, ‘La construcción de una cultura imperial’, 113–114.

de Hinojosa Villavicencio, Captain General of the Real Campo de Manila infantry, emerged on the scene. On his own initiative, he embarked for Madrid in October 1647, passing directly through the lions' den.

Diego de Hinojosa, from Jerez de la Frontera, was well known in Manila. He had served on the islands for 27 years, holding positions such as lieutenant, galley corporal, magistrate and castellan of the forces in Caraga. But his mistake was making an enemy of Governor Fajardo's protégé, the 'great and powerful' Manuel Estacio Venegas, whom Hinojosa accused of 'having made him [the Governor] incapable of governing with drinks and poisonous herbs'³⁰. He fell into disgrace when he stated that it was Venegas and not the governor who was ruling the Philippines and, after this, he was exiled to Terrenate, in the Moluccas. From there, he went to Tidore, where he embarked on a Danish-flagged ship to Batavia, and from there to Europe.

It may seem strange for a Spaniard to be peacefully travelling along the Dutch route in East Asia, bearing in mind that Spain's relations with its rival the United Provinces was not the friendliest at this point. But it is also true that in that part of the world there was a degree of geopolitical autonomy in relation to the rest of Europe: for example, the Twelve-Years Truce between the United Provinces and the Spanish Empire (1609–1621) did not take effect in East Asia, where hostilities continued. In other words, there could be war in Europe while calm reigned in East Asia, and vice versa³¹.

30 AGI, *Philippines*, 43, R. 1, N. 7, f. 8.

31 Thomas Calvo points out how, during the Twelve-Years Truce with the United Provinces (1609–1621), a Dutch army faced one led by the governor of the Philippines in 1610, and other events occurred in the South Seas in the same context. Thomas Calvo, *Espadas y plumas en la monarquía hispana. Alonso de Contreras y otras vidas de soldados, 1600–1650* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2019), 85.



Map 2. The Journey of Diego de Hinojosa (1647–1648).

Thus, after a nine-month journey, Diego de Hinojosa Villavicencio arrived at the port of Flushing, in the Netherlands. It took him three months to reach the Madrid court, on 13 November 1647, where he was received with some surprise and his quality was evaluated. Hinojosa was not, by a long way, an official voice representing the interests of the colonial administration in the islands, and we do not rule out the possibility that he may have been taken for a spy in the service of the Dutch, hence his careful testimony stating that he had travelled on ships with the flag of Denmark, even though there are later documents mentioning that he travelled on ‘vessels from Holland’, as we will see in Philip IV’s royal decree addressed to the interim Viceroy of New Spain. When someone arrived at the court in Madrid, the first step was to evaluate the messenger: who he was, why he had come and how he had got there. Unfortunately for our research purposes, Hinojosa’s statements about the Saint Andrew’s Day earthquake were not only poor, they were also inaccurate. He devoted only three lines to it compared to much more extensive writings denouncing the unstable political state of the archipelago and the misdeeds of Venegas:

El año de 46 (sic) sobrevino un terremoto tan grande que no dejó templo ni edificio en pie, y de más de 300 vecinos que había en Manila no han quedado 25 porque los demás algunos dellos se retiraron por el terror de tal suceso nunca visto en aquellas partes, y los restantes los tienen en las prisiones de dichas galeras sin que haya valido para ello los fueron militares ni de nobleza³².

[In the year '46 (sic) there was an earthquake so great that it left no church or building standing, and, of the more than 300 residents there were in Manila, only 25 remained because, of the others, some withdrew because of their terror at such an event never before seen in these parts and the others were held in the galley prisons without even checking whether they were soldiers or nobles].

How should we interpret this lack of interest in the Saint Andrew's Day earthquake, as well as the lack of accuracy in the information? It is not difficult to guess that Hinojosa was, first and foremost, a soldier, and that his concerns were focused on defence of the Philippines against the Dutch enemy. Whatever his reasons, it was this brief testimony that Philip IV used to issue a royal decree to the then interim Viceroy of New Spain and Bishop of Yucatán, Don Marcos de Torres y Rueda (1648–1649), informing him, in turn, of what happened in the archipelago. Here we reproduce an extract:

Sabido que don Diego de Hinojosa Villavicencio, capitán general de infantería en el campo de la ciudad de Manila de las islas Filipinas ha llegado a esta corte por la vía de Holanda y respecto del gran cuidado con que se estaba en mi Consejo Real de las Indias por el mucho tiempo que ha que no se sabía en el estado en que se hallaban las dichas islas se le tomó declaración de lo que sabía y por la que hizo en dieciocho de noviembre deste año y por diferentes memoriales que dio en el dicho mi Consejo parece que hallándose en aquellas islas *el año de seiscientos y cuarenta y seis* sobrevino en ellas un terremoto tan grande que no dejó templo ni edificio en pie en la ciudad de Manila y *que demás de trescientos vecinos que había en ella no quedaron veinticinco* por el estrago que hizo y terror que les causó y por la poca suavidad del gobierno de don Diego Fajardo y que estando para salir las naos del puerto de Cavite para el de Acapulco el dicho año de cuarenta y seis le salió al encuentro las armadas del holandés con que se hubieron de descargar y armar y salir contra él de que resultó echar al holandés en la batalla tres naves a pique y quedar las demás muy mal paradas, y habiéndose vuelto a rehacer el holandés acometió con más de mil y quinientos hombres la Pampanga e hizo allá algunas hostilidades y muertes con que imposibilitó el salir las naos de aquellas islas el año de cuarenta y siete y que éste de cuarenta y ocho presumía no podrían hacer su viaje a Acapulco por haber entendido que cuando él salió de aquellas

32 AGI, *Filipinas*, 43, R. 1, N. 7, f. 8.

islas se hallaba el holandés con mucha fuerza en las bocas de los puertos y que habiendo él pasado de Manila a la isla de Terrenate y reconocido el apretado estado en que están aquellas islas y que en el dicho mi Consejo no podría hacer noticia de ello por las causas referidas, movido del amor que tiene a mi servicio y deseando su conservación y socorro, se determinó por octubre de seiscientos cuarenta y siete a venir a estos reinos a darme cuenta dello como lo hizo en bajeles de Holanda tardando en su viaje un año y que me daba cuenta de lo referido para que proveyese del remedio conveniente y habiéndose visto por los de mi Consejo Real de las Indias y reconocido de que aunque avisasteis que por abril deste año se envió socorro de dinero y gente a las dichas islas en las cartas que ahora han llegado y otras que vinieron en el aviso que dio fondo en Sanlúcar en 26 de octubre no decís que hubiese habido noticia hasta el día en que le despachaste del estado en que se hallaban las dichas islas, me ha parecido avisaros de las que acá han llegado para que os halléis enterado dellas, y de las que allá hubiere me haréis hacer en todas ocasiones y en ello me serviréis³³.

[Knowing that Don Diego de Hinojosa Villavicencio, Captain General of infantry in the field of the city of Manila in the Philippine islands has arrived at this court by way of Holland, and regarding the great concern of my Royal Council of the Indies because the state of these islands has not been known for a long time, a statement of what he knew was taken from him on 18 November this year. From different reports he gave to my Council, it seems that while he was on those islands *in the year 1646*, an earthquake occurred on them so great that it left no church or building standing in the city of Manila and *that, of the 300 residents there, only 25 remained* due to the devastation and the terror it caused them and because of the lack of sensitivity of the government of Don Diego Fajardo. And that when the ships were about to leave the port of Cavite for Acapulco that year of '46, it met the Dutch navy, and so had to unload and arm and go out against it, which resulted in the Dutchman sinking three ships in battle and leaving the rest in very poor condition. And, having refitted, the Dutchman attacked Pampanga with more than 1,500 men and, due to the hostilities and deaths there, it was impossible for the ships to leave those islands in '47 and '48, assuming that they could not make their trip to Acapulco because they understood that when they left those islands the Dutch would be there in great force at the mouths of the ports. Having travelled from Manila to the island of Terrenate and recognized the pressed state of those islands and that it could not be reported to my Council for the aforementioned reasons, and moved by the love he has for my service and desiring their preservation and aid, he determined in October of 1647 to come to these kingdoms to give me an account of it, doing so *on ships from Holland* and taking a year on his voyage so that I would be aware of the situation and could provide appropriate remedy. And, my Royal Council of the Indies having seen

33 Archivo General de la Nación, México, *Reales cédulas originales*, vol. 3, exp. 56, f. 105–106, from Madrid, 24 December 1648. The italics are ours.

him and recognized that, although you gave notice that in April of this year that relief money and people were sent to those islands in the letters that have now arrived, and others that came in the notice that arrived in Sanlúcar on October 26, you do not say that there was news of the state of these islands, it seems to me advisable that I should notify you of his (Hinojosa's) arrival here so that you are aware of this, and I trust you will advise me of everything you do in future in this respect. In this way you will do me service].

It is worth taking a closer look at the information contained in the decree. It is clear that what is reported there comes from the statements that Hinojosa provided to the Council of the Indies, and, while only three lines are given over to the Saint Andrew's Day earthquake, the rest of the account is devoted to the attack by the Dutch and Hinojosa's adventures in reaching the Madrid court for reasons already stated. It is interesting to observe that, at Christmas 1648, the monarch is not sure whether this news is known in New Spain, as he mentions that, in the notice that arrived to the court from Veracruz in October the same year, 'you do not say that there had been news of the state of these islands until the day you dispatched it', and as a result, 'it seems to me advisable that I should notify you of what has arrived here so that you are aware of this and I trust you will advise me of everything you do in future in this respect and in this way you will serve me'.

It is also worth reflecting on the fragility of communication routes in that space and at that particular time: it is clear that the Portugal route is no longer available after 1640 – at least not in this case – and that the Madrid court has to rely on a dubious character travelling without official credentials to find out what is happening in the King's own domains in Asia. What they did not know in Madrid is that, as we will see below, precisely at the same time Hinojosa arrived at the court, a galleon had finally crossed the Pacific from Manila and arrived at the port of Acapulco.

5.3. From Manila to Mexico: December 1648

The last to find out about the catastrophe that occurred in Manila were the central authorities of Mexico. The ship *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* arrived at the port of Acapulco on 12 December 1648. However, according to information from the diarist Gregorio Martín de Guijo, on 9 December at 11 in the morning, urgent mail arrived in Mexico City, carried by a

gentleman (*gentilhombre*) who had jumped ashore from the galleon either in the port of Navidad or at Salagua (now Manzanillo, Colima), with details of what had happened in the Philippines in the three years it had remained incommunicado³⁴. Obviously, among the important news was that of the 1645 Saint Andrew's Day earthquake, as well as the details of the Dutch blockade. With this, the main support centre for the reconstruction of the Manila capital received the news three years late. And the uproar caused by the news of the arrival of the galleon in the capital of New Spain was such that Guijo summed it up as follows:

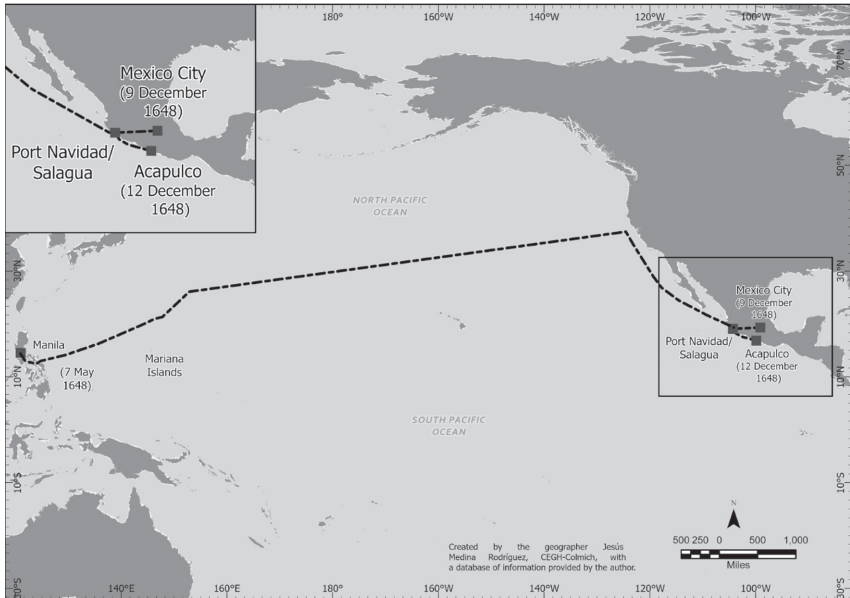
Miércoles 9 de diciembre, llegó correo a esta ciudad a las once del día, de haber visto una vela en la carrera de Filipinas, y haber saltado el gentilhombre en tierra: fue grande la alegría, y se regocijó con repique general de campanas por haber dos años que no se sabía de las Filipinas. Llegando el gentilhombre a esta ciudad, *se supo por relaciones*, haber habido en dichas islas un grande temblor de tierra el día del señor San Andrés, patrón de dichas islas, a 30 de noviembre de 1645, a las ocho de la noche, que asoló y arruinó la mayor parte de la ciudad y algunos pueblos extramuros, con muerte de más de cuatrocientas cincuenta personas³⁵.

[Wednesday 9 December, the mail arrived in this city at eleven o'clock, after a sail was seen on the Philippine route, and a gentleman jumped ashore. The joy was great and it was celebrated with the general ringing of bells because there had been no news of the Philippines for two years. When the gentleman arrived in the city, *it was learned from reports* that there had been a great earthquake on those islands on the day of Saint Andrew, patron saint of the islands, 30 November 1645, at eight o'clock at night. This devastated and ruined most of the city and some towns outside the walls, and killed more than four hundred and fifty people].

34 Taking the example of how the news of the arrival of the Manila galleon circulated in 1650, according to other information provided by Guijo himself, we see that the mail sent by the mayor of Colima to Mexico City was very fast for this type of event, because in that year the galleon was sighted off the coast of Colima on 21 February and by 25–26 February the news was already known in the capital of the viceroyalty. On 2 March, the viceroy received the mail in which he was notified that the ship was already off Acapulco, which means it arrived at the port before that date. The galleon must therefore have travelled between Salagua (Manzanillo) and Acapulco in less than a week. See Guijo, *Diario, 1648–1664*, 84–5.

35 Guijo, *Diario, 1648–1664*, 25. The italics are ours.

But although news of the earthquake reached Madrid a month before it came to Mexico City, more details of what had happened in Manila were known in New Spain. The gentleman must have brought with him a copy of Joseph Fayol's pamphlet, printed in Manila in 1647 under the seal of the Jesuits, as we will analyse later.



Map 3. Route of the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* (1648).

5.4. From Mexico to Manila: July 1648

We have one final journey to analyse: curiously, at the same time that *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* was crossing the Pacific towards Acapulco along the *kuroshio* current, a patache was sailing in the opposite direction via the equatorial current. Thus, *El Buen Jesús*, which had left Acapulco on Sunday 8 April, arrived in Manila in July 1648, with a *socorro* of 97 thousand pesos and the news of the death of Prince Balthasar Charles, as we saw previously. This meagre aid was not viewed favourably by the governor, Don Diego Fajardo, who wrote a letter to the King on 31 July 1649 in a tone of despair informing him of 'las grandes necesidades que

hoy se halla la Caja de V. Majestad en estas islas' [the great needs of Your Majesty's coffers in these islands]³⁶. That is to say that, even in the summer of 1649 the Governor of the Philippines was not certain that Madrid had yet found out about the tragedy that occurred almost four years earlier, although he insisted that he had sent the dispatches for the years 1646 and 1647 'por la vía del reino de Macasar, que ya habrán llegado a sus reales manos' [by way of the kingdom of Macassar, which will have already reached his royal hands]³⁷.

Which dispatches is Fajardo referring to? Because the only news about the state of the Philippine islands at the Madrid court, at least until November 1648, was that provided by Diego de Hinojosa Villavicencio, and his account was not at all favourable to the governor. But this confirms that, at very least, an attempt was made to send information by alternative channels to New Spain, and that the Macassar route, with whose local chiefs there was a treaty of friendship in the period that concerns us, was a conduit used by the Spanish colonial administration, at least during the first half of the seventeenth century³⁸.

However, Fajardo found he received nothing like the support he expected to deal with the crisis following the disaster, saying that the patache *El Buen Jesús* sent by the Viceroy Count Salvatierra in 1648, 'fue más su despacho por ver el estado de estas islas si estaban por parte de V. Majestad o del holandés, que socorrerlas, porque no remitió más de cien mil pesos en reales' [was more of a dispatch to see whether these islands were on the side of Your Majesty or the Dutchmen, than to help them, because sent no more than one hundred thousand pesos in reales], along with 107 marines and soldiers and some ammunition clearly insufficient to maintain the administration in the archipelago.

Don Diego Fajardo was also not satisfied with the aid received in October 1649, after a rough return trip from the galleon *Nuestra Señora*

36 AGI, *Filipinas*, 9, R. 1, N. 6.

37 AGI, *Filipinas*, 9, R. 1, N. 6.

38 For an overall look at the strategic role of the Moluccas in the first half of the 17th century, see Íñigo Valpuesta Villa, 'El papel de las islas Molucas durante el reinado de Felipe III: evolución y configuración de un escenario bélico en el sudeste asiático', *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 46/1 (2021), 31–52.

de la Encarnación, which due to bad storms had to make port in the province of Caraga, 180 leagues from Manila, with insufficient support for the maintenance of the islands. For this reason, more out of tenacity than hope, Fajardo wrote a new letter to His Majesty on 24 January 1650, in which he stated that:

aunque las grandes necesidades con que estas islas se hallan por mal socorridas de los virreyes de Nueva España, que parece tienen orden de V. Majestad para que no las asistan con la abundancia que tiene ordenado, he manifestado en mis despachos, me obligan viéndolas señor al presente con muchos mayores de las que eran, volverlas a representar pues no hallo otro recurso para mi consuelo que esta forma (...) (Los) vecinos vasallos de V. Majestad en estas partes [...] *están muy arruinados por los terremotos que ha habido y malas correspondencias que han tenido de Nueva España*, que se hallan hoy tan pobres que todos están a expensas de V. Majestad³⁹.

[despite the great needs with which these islands find themselves, they are poorly supported by the Viceroys of New Spain, who seem to have an order from Your Majesty not to assist them with the abundance that you have ordered, as I have shown in my dispatches. I am obliged, Sir, seeing that they are now much greater than they were, I am obliged to set them out again, as I find no other resource to console me than this one (...) (The) resident vassals of Your Majesty in these parts (...) *are very much ruined by the earthquakes that there have been and the disappointing correspondence that they have had from New Spain*, that they are today so poor that they are all a cost to Your Majesty].

And, after recounting the economic hardships the islands were going through, he denounced the Viceroy, the Count of Salvatierra (1642–1648) and his successor, the interim governor and Bishop of Yucatán, Marcos de Torres y Rueda (1648–1649), from whom he expected nothing. The latter sent meagre aid of 110,000 pesos in reals and ‘150 muchachos, que son más para la escuela que para manejar armas’ [150 boys, who are more fit for school than for handling weapons], according to Fajardo, for which the archipelago was in a situation of widespread economic and military vulnerability. At that time, there was an open conflict between Manila and the Viceroy in Mexico, as the former accused the latter of delaying tactics and not complying with the provisions of royal decrees to aid the Philippines and the favours and alms they were being granted.

39 AGI, *Filipinas*, 9, R. 1, N. 9. The italics are ours.

But the Governor of the Philippines was not the only one to complain about the disappointing response from New Spain. Others involved in the galleon trade, such as Sabiniano Manrique de Lara, castellan of the port of Acapulco in 1649, sent the Council of the Indies a letter dated 17 April 1649, signed by him and by other royal officials at the port, in which they expressed their concern about what had happened in the archipelago after reading the latest news: ‘Habiendo [...] *sobrevenido en Manila y toda aquella comarca tan terrible temblor y terremoto que dejó demolidos y casi de todo punto acabados los edificios*, viniendo con esto tan maravillados y afligidos, que con sus relaciones nos lastimaron, asistiéndoles por nuestra parte en lo que fue posible a su consuelo’ [As *such a terrible tremor and earthquake that left the buildings demolished and almost completely destroyed* had happened in the region, we are so astonished and afflicted by their reports, assisting them on our own account to console them as far as possible]⁴⁰.

The background of the letter is one of marked discontent with the management of the disaster by the interim governor of New Spain, Marcos de Torres y Rueda, due to his lack of consideration towards the hardships experienced by the members of the Real Campo de Manila⁴¹. For his part, Sabiniano Manrique de Lara was rewarded for his intervention: on 20 June 1651, he received the title of Governor of the Philippines, a position he effectively held between 1653 and 1663. This was not bad for a knight of the order of Calatrava who served as castellan of the Acapulco fort⁴².

3. The circulation of the news and the pamphlet by Fray Joseph Fayol

In these comings and goings of ships, crossing the Indian Ocean, the Pacific and the Atlantic at different times, there is an important element in the issue of imperial communication of the disaster: the circulation of the pamphlet by the Mercedarian friar Joseph Fayol on the earthquake

40 AGI, Filipinas, 31, N. 16. The italics are ours.

41 AGI, Filipinas, 31, N. 16, f. 11.

42 Ana María Prieto Lucena, *Filipinas durante el gobierno de Manrique de Lara, 1653–1663* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1984), 9.

of 1645⁴³. Although there were doubts about when this news pamphlet reached New Spain and Madrid, we are convinced that it first arrived in Mexico on the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación* in December 1648. Gregorio M. de Guijo is the key, as it was he who revealed that the earthquake that occurred in Manila ‘was known through reports’. The devil is in the detail, and Guijo’s information is very precise: the date of the quake, the time, the number of people killed. Guijo must have had Fayol’s pamphlet in his hands – or at least have seen it in passing.

If we compare Guijo’s testimony in Mexico City with that of Diego Hinojosa Villavicencio in Madrid, there is an abysmal difference, as the latter not only erroneously placed the earthquake in the year 1646, but also stated that out of 300 residents of Manila only 25 had remained, a completely unfounded detail. Guijo, on the other hand, said that the earthquake had occurred on the day of Saint Andrew, patron saint of the islands, at eight o’clock at night, that the greatest damage had been in the city but that there were also losses in the surrounding towns, and that, in addition, 450 people had died⁴⁴. All this is contained in Fayol’s pamphlet.

In fact, as soon as this report was received in Mexico City, it was immediately reprinted in the workshops of the widow of Bernardo Calderón. We should not forget that the disaster, seen as a monstrous event, was a good and effective opportunity for the popular press. The rapid reprinting of the event in the capital of New Spain reminds us of the success of this type of sensationalist literature, in which tragedies derived from natural phenomena were dramatized: what recent historiography has called ‘disaster writing’ or ‘disaster narratives’⁴⁵.

The doubt remains, however, as to whether it was printed in Mexico at the end of 1648, or beginning of 1649⁴⁶. What we do know is that,

43 See Jorge Mojarro Romero, ‘Relaciones de sucesos en la Filipinas del siglo XVIII’, *Titivillus*, 4, no. 38 (2018), 103.

44 Guijo, *Diario, 1648–1664*, 25.

45 See the recent works of Domenico Cecere, ‘Scrittura del disastro e istanze di riforma nel Regno di Napoli (1783). Alle origini delle politiche dell’emergenza’, *Studi storici*, 58/1 (2017), 187–214; Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018).

46 A copy can be found in the institutional repository of the Universidad de Granada, under the title ‘Armada del Olandés contra Manila’; however, the

precisely in 1649, Fayol's account was printed but anonymously, in the workshops of Alonso de Paredes in Madrid, where it would have arrived via the Veracruz fleet from New Spain. It is very unlikely that Diego de Hinojosa Villavicencio carried the Mercedarian's account with him on the Batavia route. As we mentioned before, Hinojosa not only made a mistake in dating the earthquake – 1646 instead of 1645 – he also gave very few details of the catastrophe when offering his testimony in court.

The tragedy of the earthquake was undoubtedly overshadowed by the Dutch blockade, which came to occupy a more important place in the concerns of the Spanish monarchy, both in Madrid and in Mexico City. After all, the Dutch threat was a major problem in the geopolitics of the region, while the earthquake was seen as a more domestic problem that had to be resolved among the people of Manila themselves. This displacement in the focus of importance is observed in Joseph Fayol himself, who devotes seven-and-a-half pages to the account of 'The Army of the Dutch against Manila', and just three pages to the 'Tremors' and 'Ruin of the city' of Manila. And this is a trend we observed in official correspondence, except for letters from clergy begging for economic aid to rebuild their churches, which would be worth a separate study.

4. Conclusion

Is the slow circulation of the news of the Saint Andrew's Day earthquake an extreme case? Let us be specific: in ordinary times, a letter sent in Manila around the month of July could take between five and seven months to reach Mexico City – that is, it would arrive in around December-January. Then it was necessary to wait for the fleets of the Indies route to leave Veracruz to send the communication from Seville to Madrid. In other words, it took about a year under normal conditions. It would then be

first two pages, devoted to news of the earthquake, do not appear. Instead, the document begins on page 3, with the final part of the narrative alluding to the tremor, and continues with the narrative of the confrontation with Dutch. Toribio Medina records 'Relación de varios sucesos de mar y tierra...', printed in Manila in 1647 por la Compañía de Jesús; José Toribio Medina, *La imprenta en Manila. Desde sus orígenes hasta 1810* (Santiago de Chile: Printed by the author, 1896), 44–5. See Mojarro Romero, 'Relaciones de sucesos en la Filipinas del siglo XVIII'.

necessary to count another year to have the answer on the return trip. But if the Manila Galleon failed to connect with the departure of the fleets in Veracruz, which often happened because they also set sail in December-January, it could take up to four years to get a response to a request made in the Philippine capital. To those times we should, as we have already said, add the ‘fortune of the sea’.

There were certainly other points in the seventeenth century when there were experiences similar to the one we are dealing with in this chapter: after the 1603 Sanglely Rebellion and massacre by the Spanish in Manila, many letters were urgently written to the court in Madrid, but they did not arrive until May 1606. As Guillaume Gaudin put it, ‘the vulnerability and dangers of sailing and the length and complexity of the Asian routes that linked the Philippines with Europe’⁴⁷, acted against the prompt and expeditious dissemination of that event. Neither the support sent at the end of 1603 on the Portuguese route, nor the mail dispatched in the Manila Galleon in 1604 and lost at sea, reached its destination. It was necessary to wait for the departure of the Acapulco Galleon in 1605 for the news to arrive in Madrid in mid-1606 – that is, two-and-a-half years late.

Another example, at the end of the 1600s, is the social and economic crisis that Governor Gabriel de Curuzelaegui (1684–1689) wanted to inform Charles II about. For this reason, in January 1688 he had sent notices by the Coromandel route notifying him of the unfortunate state in which the Philippine islands were due to ‘distintas plagas que se han experimentado en esta ciudad e islas, como son repetidas enfermedades, recios temblores y mucha abundancia de langosta, que hasta hoy permanece extendida por todas partes’ [various plagues that have been experienced in this city and islands, such as repeated illnesses, strong tremors, and a great abundance of locusts, which until today remain widespread everywhere]⁴⁸. Indeed, during the 1680s there were three earthquakes in the years 1683, 1687 and 1688, which mainly affected Manila and its surroundings. To the biological and geological hardships described by Curuzelaegui, others were added, such as an uprising of Sangleys and the visit of enemy frigates.

47 Gaudin, ‘Crisis as a measure of communicative capacity’, in this volume.

48 AGI, *Filipinas*, 13, R. 1, N. 7, f. 2v.

Are these examples representative for drawing general conclusions about communication to and from Manila? Perhaps not, because beyond these conjunctions of circumstances communication worked with a certain regularity within the technical and geographical limits of sailing. But these extreme cases do show us the fragile ties that united the Philippines with the rest of the Spanish monarchy, which at its most critical moments could end in crisis. This was known to Governor Diego Fajardo, who, faced with the impossibility of sending the Galleon to Acapulco due to the Dutch blockade of 1646, and an impasse in communication with New Spain for two consecutive years, hoped his pleas would reach Mexico and Madrid, as reflected in his desperate words: ‘porque la multiplicidad de casos y circunstancias que se han agregado son bien notables y tales, que nos han dado a entender bastantemente el justo enojo de Dios por nuestros pecados’ [because the multiplicity of cases and circumstances that have been added are quite notable, to the point where they have sufficiently given us to understand the just anger of God for our sins]⁴⁹.

We can extract several reflections from the circulation of the news of the Manila earthquake of 1645: firstly, there is the existence of other means of communication open to Manila during the seventeenth century, beyond the Pacific Galleon. At different times we see the letters of the Governor of the Philippines circulating along the Dutch Macassar and Batavia route, and, at some point, via Portuguese India. Somehow, the Spanish in Manila knew how to make use of European connections beyond Madrid’s sphere of influence. Secondly, the case of Diego de Hinojosa shows us that the information circuits went beyond a well-established State mechanism, and that adventurers, merchants and other itinerant agents were central to the spread of news. Specifically, our case sheds clear light on what Arndt Brendecke writes in the conclusions of his book *Imperio e información*: ‘it is not the “spider”’ [Philip II] in the Escorial who must be taken into

49 AGI, *Filipinas*, 13, R. 1, N. 7, f. 1. Divine punishment as an explanation for the calamities suffered by the Philippine islands, whether earthquakes or epidemics, enemy attacks or uprisings by the population, was one of the responses of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Although this topic is beyond the scope of this text, we return to it in Machuca, *Sociedad y desastre en las Filipinas del siglo XVII*.

account, but his position in a network that was not made up of ‘wires’ transmitting information, but by the alliances of people from the court and their branches extending to the peripheral areas of the empire⁵⁰. And, thirdly, we must emphasize the variety of means of communication via the Hispanic Monarchy, whether through letters, pamphlets or personal travel, each with a different communicative profile.

The fact is that the way the colonial institutions obtained news was a crucial element allowing us to evaluate disaster management at different levels. As Domenico Cecere emphasized in his study on communication strategies after the 1687 Lima and 1688 Sannio earthquakes, we must understand that the collection, processing and dissemination of news associated with disasters are fundamental to understanding the logic under which the emergency was managed by the different agents of the colonial administration⁵¹. The Saint Andrew’s Day earthquake in Manila earthquake is a good example of this.

50 Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información; funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español* (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012).

51 Cecere, ‘Estrategias de comunicación y de intervención’, 10.

Domenico Cecere

Standing on shaky ground: The politics of disasters in early modern Peru*

1. The sound of gunfire, the silence of the volcano

In May 1600, Luis de Velasco, Viceroy of Peru, wrote a long report for the Council of the Indies on privateer activity along the western coast of South America over the previous months. In some of his documents, he referred to the privateers as English, but this was in fact a corsair fleet under the command of the Dutch pirate Olivier Van Noort. The fleet had passed through the Strait of Magellan and then set about raiding parts of Peru, often clashing with Spanish ships, before heading for the Philippines¹. The Viceroy's highly detailed report records everything about the privateers' movements and raids, based on almost daily information from lookouts positioned along the coast since December 1599. The flow of information was interrupted in late February, however, with the Viceroy reporting a loud din coming from afar, which was initially interpreted as gunfire: 'A los 19, 20, 21 de Hebrero se oyeron disparar cantidad de tiros por la costa arriba donde estava la Armada esperando los enemigos y todos afirmavan que eran de artillería y que devían de estar peleando con ellos que causo mucho contento' [On 19, 20 and 21 February much gunfire could be heard along the coast where the Armada was awaiting the enemy and everyone confirmed that it was artillery fire and that they must have engaged in

* This work was supported by the DisComPoSE project, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 759829).

1 On the raids of Olivier Van Noort's fleet along the Pacific coast, see Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire. Piracy in the Americas, 1500–1750* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 75–9; Peter T. Bradley, *Spain and the Defence of Peru. Royal Reluctance and Colonial Self-Reliance* (London: Lulu, 2009), 29–33.

battle, which led to great joy]². The truth only emerged days later. There had been no battle between the Armada and the corsairs. News arrived from the south that led to a completely different interpretation of the din:

Después tuve carta de 24 de Hebrero del general del Armada en que no tratava nada de esto y a los 5 de Marzo tuve aviso de como en las Provincias de Camaná y sus Valles había caydo y llovido tanta zeniza que casi cegava la gente y que no se veían unos a otros con la escuridad grande que había y se oyeron tantos tiros en distancia de 90 y 100 leguas la costa arriva y abaxo en un mismo tiempo que ha causado mucha admiración y escriben que debe de proceder de haver reventado un Volcán que está junto a la Ciudad de Arequipa de donde se aguarda la nueva cierta de lo que ha subcedido³.

[I then received a letter dated 24 February from the commander of the Armada which made no mention of this and on 5 March I received a report that so much ash had fallen in the Province of Camaná and its valleys that people were almost blinded and could not see one another because of the great darkness and much gunfire was heard at a distance of 90–100 leagues up and down the coast at the same time, which caused much confusion and they write that it must have come from the eruption of a volcano located near the city of Arequipa, from which we await news of what has happened].

After briefly noting this extraordinary and unprecedented event, the Viceroy's long report continued detailing the movements of the corsair ships along the coast in March and April. The Viceroy did not return to the eruption of Huaynaputina or its aftermath in this report or in other official despatches sent that year, nor did he mention it in the report he wrote at the end of his mandate⁴. The usual channels of communication between the Council of the Indies and the King's most senior representative in South America thus gave little weight to one of the last millennium's most powerful volcanic eruptions and the long-term impact across a vast

2 Archivo General de Indias, Seville (henceforth AGI), *Lima*, 34, *Cartas y expedientes de virreyes de Perú*, exp. 6, Callao, 5 May 1600. The report was published in the early 1920s in *Gobernantes del Perú: cartas y papeles del siglo XVI*, vol. XIV, *El virrey Luis de Velasco 1596–1600*, Roberto Levillier, ed. (Madrid: Imprenta de J. Peyo, 1925), 218–30. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

3 AGI, *Lima*, 34, exp. 6, Callao, 5 May 1600.

4 Lewis Hanke, ed., *Los virreyes españoles en América durante el gobierno de la Casa de Austria. Perú*, vol. II (Madrid: Atlas, 1978), 46–66.

area of the gas and fine ash that it threw up into the atmosphere⁵. The event and its consequences for the people of the region appear to have been downgraded to matters of local concern that were unworthy of mention in correspondence with the King or of deliberation in Royal Councils.

To clarify, the paucity of information noted above pertains only to the official correspondence of the senior government officials of Peru. There are many other sources that provide detailed descriptions, and they will be considered below. They include the letters and petitions sent to the Viceroy and the King by the *cabildo* [city council] of Arequipa, the area's main city, located at a distance of 70 km from the volcano, as well as the many accounts produced mainly by clerics and missionaries in the months and years after the eruption. Volcanological and historical research, as well as seismicity catalogues, rely heavily on sources of this kind⁶. The important

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- 5 The 1600 eruption had a Volcanic Explosivity Index of 6 and is considered to be the largest ever eruption in the Andes. Its geophysics and its impact on the ground and in the atmosphere have been the subject of much research in historical volcanology and climatology, including Jean-Claude Thouret *et al.*, 'Reconstruction of the AD 1600 Huaynaputina eruption based on the correlation of geologic evidence with early Spanish chronicles', *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, 115 (2002), 529–70; Jean-Marie Prival *et al.*, 'New Insights into Eruption Source Parameters of the 1600 CE Huaynaputina Plinian Eruption, Peru', *Bulletin of Volcanology*, 82/1 (2020), 7; Sam White *et al.*, 'The 1600 CE Huaynaputina Eruption as a Possible Trigger for Persistent Cooling in the North Atlantic Region', *Climate in the Past*, 18 (2022), 739–57.
- 6 Bernard Lavallé, 'Miedos terrenales, angustias escatológicas y pánicos en tiempos de terremotos en el Perú a comienzos del siglo XVII', *e-Spania* [Online], 12 December 2011, last accessed 17 March 2020, <http://e-spania.revues.org/20822>; Jaime Lara, 'Francis Alive and Aloft: Franciscan Apocalypticism in the Colonial Andes', *The Americas*, 70/2 (2013), 139–63; Lina Scalisi, *Per riparar l'incendio. Le politiche dell'emergenza dal Perù al Mediterraneo* (Catania: Sanfilippo, 2013), 24–31; María Eugenia Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda, 'Miedo y respuesta social en Arequipa: la erupción de 1600 del volcán Huaynaputina (Perú)', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 25 (2016), 67–94; Fernando Iwasaki, *¡Aplaca, Señor, tu ira! Lo maravilloso y lo imaginario en Lima colonial* (Lima: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018), 70–3. Many of the documents used in this paper are published or referenced in the valuable catalogue of Lizardo Seiner Lizárraga, *Historia de los sismos en el Perú. Catálogo: Siglos XV–XVII* (Lima: Fondo Editorial Universidad de Lima, 2017), in Alfredo Palacios Roa, ed., *Fuentes para la historia sísmica de Chile (1570–1906). Estudio preliminar, selección, transcripción y notas* (Santiago de

point here is that the Viceroy's normal communications and those of other major government bodies like the *Audiencia* contain very little information, omitting many details that a twenty-first-century observer would deem essential, details that would almost always be provided in official reports in the second half of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century⁷. This aspect of official communications is not an exception or peculiar to Viceroy Velasco, but appears to be fairly common practice in the decades before and after the turn of the seventeenth century, as we will see below.

How communications and political measures influence one another becomes more evident in times of emergency. Our preliminary observations therefore highlight how the flow of information influenced the measures adopted to address crises and was in turn influenced by them, and the role of government bodies in handling emergencies caused by the unleashing of the forces of nature.

The first issue raises the question of how and why a disaster gets reported and explained, and thus of the social and political processes by which first-hand descriptions become official accounts and reach decision-makers. This pertains not only to communications but also more broadly to politics. In times of emergency, the process of gathering, elaborating and spreading information is fundamental to allowing the different players involved in the crisis to formulate short-term and long-term responses, and the political import of such measures becomes more evident⁸.

Chile: Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2016), and in Pedro Peralta Casani, *Desastres naturales en el Sur de Perú y Norte de Chile. Una historia de terremotos, erupciones volcánicas, inundaciones y epidemias, 1582–1714* (Moquegua: Universidad Nacional de Moquegua, 2021). The sources consulted are the original ones unless otherwise indicated.

- 7 Some of the archive sources used in this paper are not mentioned in the main catalogues, such as Seiner Lizárraga, *Historia de los sismos en el Perú*, or in the sources compiled in Peralta Casani, *Desastres naturales*. In some cases, the documents are much later, collated into folders that addressed a single subject and therefore absent from the main channels of communication between the Council of the Indies and the Spanish officials in Peru.
- 8 Domenico Cecere, 'Dall'informazione alla gestione dell'emergenza. Una proposta per lo studio dei disastri in età moderna', *Storica*, 77 (2020), 9–40.

This leads to the second issue, namely, the responsibilities and remit that public bodies felt they had with respect to communities afflicted by calamities⁹. Who was responsible for ensuring the safety of the populace? Which search and rescue efforts should be prioritised? Was it acceptable to bend the rules in order to ensure people's safety and wellbeing?

Recent research has examined the link between catastrophes, narratives and politics in the early modern period as well as in times closer to our own¹⁰. This work has shown that under the ancien régime, just as today, extraordinary and tragic natural events could throw open the scope for political action in an unprecedented manner and raise the prospect of destabilising politics and social order. This is why politicians and social forces were keen to intervene in the aftermath of a catastrophe. When uncertainty, confusion, a shaky infrastructure and social instability disrupt the political status quo, the possibility emerges of changing it to one's own advantage and at the expense of one's opponents.

Power struggles of this kind often played out over the issue of who controlled communications. As disasters were extraordinary events that were hard to explain to the men and women of pre-industrial societies, were often spectacular and had tragic consequences, they had the power to grab the attention of a relatively large audience. Indeed, news of calamities increasingly featured in the information channels of the early modern period, especially in the periodicals that were beginning to emerge, as the improving European and global communications network made conveying news easier, faster and more regular¹¹.

9 Antonio Manuel Hespanha, 'Paradigmes de légitimation, aires de gouvernement, traitement administratif et agents de l'administration', in Robert Descimon, Jean-Frédéric Schaub, and Bernard Vincent, eds, *Les Figures de l'administrateur. Institutions, réseaux, pouvoirs en Espagne, en France et au Portugal, XVI^e–XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1997), 19–28.

10 Lonna R. Atkeson, and Cherie D. Maestas, *Catastrophic Politics. How Extraordinary Events Redefine Perceptions of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mark D. Anderson, *Disaster Writing. The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2011).

11 Anne Saada, 'Le désir d'informer: le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne, 1755', and Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, 'Le pouvoir d'"intéresser": le tremblement de terre de Messine, 1783', both in Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, and Chantal

Françoise Lavocat's work on sixteenth-century chronicles and literary works across Europe provides an in-depth analysis of how narrating and interpreting disasters has changed from the Late Renaissance onwards, and has perceptively suggested a link between these changes and the increasing involvement of a range of different government bodies in the handling of emergencies¹².

The view that disasters might generate narratives or, more broadly, cultural works, and that they might be interpreted differently by different organisations or communities, has provided fertile ground for much of our research¹³. The documentation on a number of South American events in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries provide pertinent details to address this issue from a different perspective, raising questions about how and why news of disasters was disseminated, and about the official and unofficial channels through which information from the epicentre reached decision makers. I will address these questions by period

Thomas, eds, *L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII^e siècle. Du bâtiment divin au désastre naturel* (Geneva: Droz, 2008), 209–30 and 231–49; Carlos H. Caracciolo, *Natural Disasters and the European Printed News Network*, in Joad Raymond, and Noah Moxham, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016), 756–78; Henry Ettinghausen, *How the Press Began. The Pre-Periodical Printed News in Early Modern Europe* (A Coruña: SILAE, 2015), 173–207; Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014), ch. 9.

- 12 Françoise Lavocat, 'Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints', *Poetics Today*, 33/3–4 (2012), 253–99.
- 13 Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018); Gaia Bruno, 'Fronteggiare l'emergenza: le reazioni delle istituzioni del Regno di Napoli di fronte ai sismi del XVII secolo', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 119–50; Alessandro Tuccillo, 'Abolire il gioco per placare l'ira divina. La diplomazia pontificia e il terremoto del 1688 a Napoli', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 181–206; Gennaro Varriale, 'Quando trema l'Impero. L'informazione sui terremoti nella Monarchia ispanica (secoli XVI–XVII)', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 151–80; Domenico Cecere, 'Estrategias de comunicación y de intervención frente a desastres en la Monarquía Hispánica bajo Carlos II', *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2021), 1–36.

and by geopolitical situation. In general, the approach taken by a range of different bodies appears to shift significantly over the course of the seventeenth century. It is also worth considering the issue in terms of the political, military, economic and symbolic importance of the localities struck, as well as their population density, their social makeup and their position in the information networks of the Hispanic Monarchy. I will focus on official communications produced following a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century disasters in Peru, drawing comparisons with other information channels and with official communications in other periods, and will avoid adopting teleological progressive concepts such as the state-building process or outdated binary contrasts such as central/peripheral or European/colonial.

2. 'Les parecía que era ya llegado el fin del mundo, y juicio final'

'Trataré de castigos que del Cielo / parece nuestro Dios nos ha enviado: / temblores, terremotos y señales / que bien pueden juzgarse por finales' [I will speak of punishment that from Heaven above / it appears that our God has sent us: / tremors, quakes and signs / that could well be seen as final]¹⁴. Martín del Barco Centenera's epic poem *La Argentina* juxtaposes earthquakes and eruptions with the defeats inflicted by the Mapuche on the Spanish in Chile and to the raids by English and Dutch privateers, which became ever more frequent after Francis Drake's first raid in 1579¹⁵, giving a sinister and almost apocalyptic air to the years around the turn of the century.

Indeed, in Peru the years between 1582 and 1615 were marked by a series of major disasters that were much more frequent and destructive than those of the first half-century of Spanish rule in the Andes. They

14 Martín del Barco Centenera, *La Argentina* (1602), I, 45–8.

15 In the lines immediately preceding the ones cited, he refers to Francis Drake: 'También diré de aquel duro flagelo / que Dios al mundo dio por su pecado, / el Drake que cubrió con crudo duelo / al un polo y al otro en sumo grado' [I will also speak of the harsh scourge / that God gave the earth for its sinning, / Drake, who left unbridled bitter grief / from one end of the earth to the other], del Barco Centenera, *La Argentina*, I, 41–4.

included earthquakes in the south (Arequipa 1582, Arica 1604 and 1615), the eruption of Huaynaputina (1600) and two powerful earthquakes that struck Lima (1586 and 1609). In addition, waves of epidemics hit the main cities of the Viceroyalty of Peru over the last fifteen years of the sixteenth century, from Cuzco to Santa Fe, from Lima to Arequipa, with the indigenous population suffering most of the fatalities¹⁶. These extreme events are described carefully and in abundant detail in the aforementioned Martín del Barco's epic poem, as well as in Diego Mexía de Fernangil's *Ecloga al dio Pan*, in private letters and in the reports and travel notes of monks and missionaries, in some cases re-elaborated as *Crónicas* or *Historias*. The communities affected retained vivid memories of these events, or at least of the most destructive ones, so even those who visited the area years later could hear accounts of the dramatic events that had scarred the landscape from people who had lived through them, and in some cases make copies of their notes. The Hieronymite monk Diego de Ocaña visited Arequipa in 1603. After providing minute details of the eruption of three years earlier based on the testimonies of local people whom he described as 'honradas y fidedignas' [honest and reliable], he adds: 'Lo que yo puedo decir de esta ciudad es que tiene vestigios de haber sido una de las mejores del Perú [...] en todos los días que allí estuve nunca vi el sol, sino la luna muy colorada [...]. Y es la ceniza tan sutil que en haciendo un poco de viento la levanta en tanta abundancia que oscurece el sol' [What I can say of this city is that it retains vestiges of having once been one of the best in Peru [...] in all the days that I spent there, I never saw the sun, only the very red moon [...]. And the ash was so fine that the slightest gust of wind was enough to raise so much of it that they sky went dark]¹⁷. Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, a

16 Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del Perú*, I, *Virreinato, 1550–1600* (Buenos Aires: 1949), 341–60; Noble David Cook, *La catástrofe demográfica andina. Perú 1520–1620* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2010, originally publ. 1981), 224–36.

17 Diego de Ocaña, *Viaje por el Nuevo Mundo: de Guadalupe a Potosí, 1599–1605*, Blanca López de Mariscal, Abraham Madroñal, and Alejandra Soria, eds (Madrid – Frankfurt: Universidad de Navarra – Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2010), 453–61. His personal impressions also include: 'y agora no alcanzan un poco de maíz; pero trigo se coge y se da lo que es menester; las viñas no llevan fruto, todo se les va en rama y no madura la uva por la falta del calor del sol; [...] y a las dos de la tarde ya es noche, y es menester encender velas. Y me decían

Discalced Carmelite monk, spent years travelling across the Viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain. On his return to Europe, he wrote his *Descripción de las Indias* around 1628, with the aim of submitting it to the Council of the Indies. In Arequipa, he learned that ‘con los temblores que duraron siete días y la espesura de la ceniza hecha fuego, que llouvia, les parecia que era ya llegado el fin del mundo, y juicio final’ [with the tremors that lasted seven days and the thickness of the flaming ash that rained down, it felt like the end of the world, and the Last Judgement]¹⁸. The Jesuit Bernabé Cobo, who had arrived in the Indies as a very young man at the end of the sixteenth century and had witnessed some of these disasters with his own eyes, also wrote about them decades later in his *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, completed in 1653 and left in manuscript form for centuries. He noted that the eruption ‘causó tan grande ruina y destroço en todo el Perú, con más o menos daño en diversas provincias conforme su distancia, que no se sabe, de quantas tormentas deste género refieren las historias antiguas y modernas, que aya sucedido en todo el orbe otra más braba y espantosa’ [caused so much damage and destruction across the whole of Peru, with the amount of damage in different provinces depending on their distance, that we cannot say, of all the storms of this kind that have been recorded in ancient and modern history, whether there has even been one more ferocious and horrendous]¹⁹.

It was also through sources such as these that news of the main disasters in Peru reached Spain and the rest of Europe, sometimes several years after the event, thereby contributing to knowledge of what the New World

a mí, viéndome afligido, que aquéllos eran días de gloria para ellos. [...] Dios los remedie y se compadezca dellos’ [now they can no longer harvest any corn, though grain is gathered and distributed as needed; the vineyards produce no fruit, everything is ruined and the grapes do not ripen for lack of warmth from the sun; [...] and it gets dark at two o’clock in the afternoon, and candles must be lit. And they told me, seeing my suffering, that for them these were splendid days. [...] God help them and may He have mercy on them], 461.

18 Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, *Compendio y descripción de las Indias occidentales*, Charles Upson Clark, ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1948), 1396. Vázquez de Espinosa’s description includes a report written by Pedro de Vivar, a soldier who witnessed the eruption.

19 Bernabé Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, Francisco Mateos, ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1964), vol. I, 95.

was like and marking the whole period as rather sinister. The first one was the powerful 1582 earthquake that struck Arequipa, the principal city of southern Peru. Arequipa was founded in the early 1540s by forces deployed by Pizarro and Almagro in an area that was strategically important for the southward advance of the conquistadors and as a crossroads for the mining activities in Potosí. Its *cabildo* was therefore given special powers and privileges²⁰. However, Arequipa was not autonomous in terms of Church hierarchies as it came under the vast Cuzco diocese. Construction of the main public buildings, like the *Iglesia Mayor* [principal church] and the *Casa del Cabildo* [town hall], started as soon as the city was founded, and the main religious orders arrived in the area shortly afterwards: Dominicans, Mercedarians, Franciscans, Augustinians, and later Jesuits, whose first college was founded in 1570 by José de Acosta. Several convents were also founded, and two hospitals: Nuestra Señora de los Remedios and San Juan de Dios.

The earthquake of 22 January 1582 razed most of the public buildings to the ground, as well as many private houses and some of the infrastructure. There are abundant contemporary sources that describe the earthquake, including the documentation of the *cabildo*, its correspondence with the Viceroy, some Jesuit reports and excerpts from the Viceroy's reports to Philip II, which, despite their brevity, paint an initial picture of the disaster. Two months after the quake, the Viceroy, Martín Enríquez de Almansa y Ulloa, wrote to the Council of the Indies stating that the earthquake 'arruynó toda la ciudad sin dejar casa ni templo que no derribase o quedase de manera que fuera forzoso derribarlo' [destroyed the whole city leaving no house or church standing or not in need of demolition], except for the church of San Francisco de la Merced. He also noted that thirty-six or thirty-seven people had died under the rubble, of whom three were Spanish 'y los más eran negros y yndios' [and most were black or indigenous]. He assures the King that rebuilding the houses 'así placiendo a Dios se remediará con brevedad porque los vecinos todos [...] acuden a ello como a cosa que tanto les toca' [will, God willing, be accomplished swiftly as all

20 On the city's first half-century, see Maximo Neira Avendaño *et al.*, *Historia general de Arequipa* (Arequipa: Fundación M. J. Bustamante de la Fuente, 1990), 215–337.

of the residents of the city (...) are devoting themselves to this task which is close to their hearts]. However, he notes that rebuilding the churches will be more difficult, and therefore requests the King's assistance: 'Las iglesias [...] habrá de ir más despacio pretenden suplicar a Vuestra Magestad les haga alguna merced tengo relación que han acudido al servicio de Vuestra Magestad siempre con gran voluntad y qualquiera que Vuestra Magestad les haga será bien empleada' [rebuilding the churches will take longer, and the populace requests Your Majesty to grant them an act of compassion; I know from the reports in my possession that they have always served Your Majesty diligently, and any gift that Your Majesty might make will always be put to good use]²¹.

The accounts of some of the Jesuits are much fuller. In two lengthy pieces, the anonymous author of the 1600 chronicle, who probably witnessed the event or had good information from first-hand sources, produced a detailed report of the earthquake and how it had affected buildings and people, and in particular indigenous people terrified that the nearby Misti volcano was about to erupt²². He also included the disaster in his history of the Jesuits in southern Peru, celebrating the care with which they provided material and spiritual support both to indigenous people and to the Spanish²³.

21 AGI, *Lima 30, Cartas y expedientes de virreyes de Perú*, exp. 5, Lima, March 23, 1582; the whole despatch is also available in *Gobernantes del Perú*, vol. IX, 76–91.

22 On the beliefs held by the indigenous people about volcanoes, see Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes. Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 42, 55–63, 225–40, and, for a more systematic account, María Eugenia Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda, *Naturaleza y desastres en Hispanoamérica. La visión de los indígenas* (Madrid: Sílex, 2006), 39–64; Virginia García-Acosta, 'Divinidad y desastres. Interpretaciones, manifestaciones y respuestas', *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 35 (2017), 46–82.

23 *Historia general de la Compañía de Jesus en la provincia del Perú: crónica anónima de 1600*, ed. Francisco Mateos (Madrid: CSIC, 1944), vol. II, 187–93 and 194–7. Another Arequipa Jesuit, Diego de Zúñiga, also sent a detailed account of the earthquake to the Rector of the College of Lima, Juan de Atienza. See *Monumenta Peruana*, vol. III, 1581–1585 (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1961), 28 January 1583 [1582], 242–9. There is also a reference to the earthquake in José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590), Fermín del Pino-Díaz, ed. (Madrid: CSIC, 2008), book III, ch. XXVI, 93.

A range of other information is provided in the documents of the Arequipa *cabildo* and its correspondence with the Viceroy and the King. They paint a fairly detailed picture of the measures taken by the authorities at various levels, from the initial response to the immediate emergency to the debates and decisions regarding reconstruction work over the following months and years. Inspectors were immediately sent to the nearby provinces of Condesuyo, Collasuyo and Collaguas, and to coastal areas, to recruit indigenous people for the reconstruction work²⁴. A few weeks later, officials were sent to gather information for the Viceroy and the King, and in May a memorandum was sent to the Bishop of Cuzco to ask how masses and sacraments should be administered²⁵. Responsibility for supervising the reconstruction of government buildings and for other public works was given to the poet and *alcalde ordinario* Diego Martínez de Ribera²⁶.

The Viceroy convened an enlarged meeting of the *cabildo* that also included clerics and senior residents (*cabildo abierto*) to consider whether the city should be relocated to an area that was less prone to earthquakes. However, the committee tasked with making the decision concluded, with the support of the clerics, that the current location was the best one, and therefore that the city should be rebuilt there²⁷. In addition, in August Enríquez de Almansa conceded to the city the right to retain a certain part of the tax revenues due to the Crown for a period of three years to provide funds for the reconstruction of the *Iglesia Mayor*²⁸.

24 Archivo Municipal de Arequipa, Lib. 7 de Cabildos, f. 155v, 1 February 1582. The *cabildo* documents can be found in Victor M. Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa, 1582–1868. Documentos de los Archivos de Arequipa y de Sevilla* (Arequipa: La Colmena, 1951), which is the document I consulted, 6.

25 Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 10, 13 March 1582; 24, 25 May 1582.

26 Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 23, 21 May 1582, and 28; 28 September 1582.

27 Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 7–9, 19 February 1582; 20–1, 14 April 1582; 22, 11 May 1582.

28 Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 15, 7 August 1582. The part retained was the ‘*novenos de los diezmos*’, one-tenth of the tax that Pope Alexander VI had allowed the Catholic Monarchs to collect in American territories since 1501, thus providing the churches and dioceses of the Indies with the money they required to support themselves.

The city also made a direct request to the King through the Council of the Indies. In February 1583, Alonso de Osorio, after pointing out that he was unable to describe adequately the suffering of the people of Arequipa, declared that, despite everything that the Viceroy had already done, the buildings ‘bien quedan tan asoladas y destruidas que no podrán en muchos años restaurarse’ [are so badly damaged that many years will pass before they can be rebuilt], and therefore that, given the loyalty that the residents of Arequipa had shown to the King, they ‘merecen se les haga merced mandando a vuestro Visorrey que los favorezca y ayude en la reedificación que se va haciendo y en sus necesidades’ [deserve the gracious act of your Viceroy being instructed to assist with the ongoing reconstruction work and their needs]²⁹.

Sebastián de Mosquera, a treasury official in Arequipa, wrote to the Council to request that, once the officer in charge had been relieved of his commission of keeping the accounts of Peru, the said commission be entrusted to him, as the city of Arequipa had been destroyed and he was unable to carry out his duties³⁰. Some months later, he addressed the Council again adding that the Viceroy, who had since died, had underestimated the impact of the earthquake and the tax exemptions conceded to Arequipa were insufficient, to the point that reconstruction work had barely started ‘y así no hallamos aquí casa donde meternos ni donde poner las cajas de V.M. con la decencia y seguridad necesaria’ [and thus we can find no suitable accommodation here or any appropriately decorous and safe location for Your Majesty’s coffers]³¹. In 1588, Philip II issued a note granting the city a five-year extension of the tax exemption, and in 1589 the Viceroy, the Count of Villar, adopted various measures to provide the city with hundreds of additional indigenous people for the reconstruction work³².

29 AGI, *Lima*, 116, *Cartas y expedientes de Arequipa*, February 1583.

30 AGI, *Panama*, 42, n. 40, ff. 1122r-3v, 15 September 1582. I am grateful to Matteo Lazzari for bringing this document to my attention.

31 AGI, *Lima*, 116, *Cartas y expedientes de Arequipa*, 11 April 1584.

32 Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 31, 15 January 1588; 32, 11 March 1589; 37, 13 June 1589. The caciques of the province of Collaguas complained about the burden of using indigenous people in the reconstruction of Arequipa and other cities over these decades in a petition to the King, AGI, *Lima*, 144, *Cartas y expedientes: personas seculares*, 5 March 1614; see also Noble David

However, some thirteen years after the earthquake, the city again lamented its miserable state to the King and asked for further assistance³³. As the lack of resources had so far prevented the *Iglesia Mayor* being rebuilt ‘y así tienen al Santísimo Sacramento con muy gran indecencia’ [and they therefore keep the Holy Sacrament in piteous conditions], they requested, among other things, the right to use the forced labour of additional indigenous people and to receive from the King ‘alguna buena cantidad de pesos porque con esto los vezinos se animaran también a ayudar a la dicha fabrica’ [a substantial amount of pesos as this will also encourage the residents to help in the said reconstruction work]. The Viceroy approved the second point, seeing the King’s support of the reconstruction of the church as an appropriate measure, but disapproved the first one, noting that it would have meant additional oppression of the indigenous people.

3. Requests for assistance following the ‘juicio final’

Reconstruction work was far from completed when, from 18 February 1600, the city first fell victim to ever more powerful and more frequent earthquakes, and then to ash from Huaynaputina³⁴. Numerous pertinent sources are available, even from the first weeks after the disaster. The *cabildo* convened in early March to consider a range of requests, and sent details of the ‘ruina y calamidad’ [destruction and calamity] to the Viceroy and the King via its official representatives Luis de León and

Cook, *People of the Volcano. Andean Counterpoint in the Colca Valley of Peru* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2007), 222–36.

- 33 The undated document on which the information cited is based is a 12-point memorandum of the Arequipa *cabildo*, with notes in the margins by Viceroy García Hurtado de Mendoza, Marquess of Cañete. The memorandum notes that the earthquake struck ‘habrá trece años’ [thirteen years ago], AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cartas y expedientes de varios cabildos seculares, Memorial de las cosas en que la Ciudad de Arequipa suplica se le haga merced*, n.d. [1595]. The King replied the following year, requesting information about progress on rebuilding the church and on the tithes paid by the city. See Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 51, 12 February 1596.
- 34 The phases of the seismic activity and how people responded are analysed in detail in Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda, ‘Miedo y respuesta social’.

Agustín Hernan de Santa Cruz³⁵. The memoranda to be sent were collated by the *corregidor* Juan Hurtado de Mendoza using a procedure that was common in the ancien régime. The memoranda were modelled on juridical documents and based on testimonies provided by individuals deemed to be reliable, in this case the clergy of the city's various religious bodies. The objective was to obtain 'alguna merced de socorro' [some compassionate assistance]. Despite being very similar to one another and sometimes close copies, the memoranda are interesting. Almost all of them first describe the earthquakes, the darkening of the sky and the raining down of ash, then recount the disastrous consequences for the buildings of the city, many of which collapsed, and for rural areas, with crops ruined and livestock killed. They describe the fear of further eruptions and famine that had induced almost all of the indigenous people and many of the Spaniards to flee the city. Most memoranda close with a foreboding of the imminent 'total extinción y destrucción desta Ciudad si Su Excelencia no acude al remedio della, ayudando en todas las cosas necesarias' [total destruction of this City unless Your Excellence addresses reconstruction work, providing all the necessary assistance]³⁶.

Over the following months and years, the city sent numerous memoranda to the Viceroy, and above all to the King, requesting relief and assistance. Documents were written by the *cabildo*, by *procuradores* and by others, pointing out that the city could not recover from 'una calamidad y prodigio tan extraordinario' [such an extraordinary calamitous event]³⁷, given the persistent impact of the ash on the land and the haemorrhaging of manpower (indigens) and *vecinos* (Spanish residents). They also hoped to obtain significant long-term tax relief that was more generous than the Viceroy's two-year suspension of the *alcabalas*, a form of sales tax. It is noteworthy that the requests were not supported by references to the gravity of the earthquake's impact. Indeed, the earthquake and its

35 Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 55, 1 March 1600; 57–9 and 78–81, 6 March 1600.

36 The testimonies, dated 1–2 March 1600, were submitted to the *Audiencia* of Lima and are contained in AGI, Lima, 111, *Cartas y expedientes de varios cabildos seculares, La Ciudad de Arequipa a Lima*, n.d., and published in Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 60–77.

37 AGI, *Patronato*, 191, R. 23, 18 March 1602.

aftermath are described in somewhat generic and formulaic terms. The requests are justified by evoking the spectre of a deserted city, and by pointing out the deserving residents' unswerving loyalty, service and devotion to the Crown over many years³⁸.

In one of the memoranda sent to the King, consisting as usual of a series of depositions by authoritative *vecinos* and clerics gathered a year and a half after the disaster, the request for assistance was not for the city as such. The depositions, as well as being similar to one another, are extremely bland and devoid of detail, with the recurrent theme being the role of the *corregidor* Juan Hurtado de Mendoza. With the eruption in full swing, he had spared neither effort nor money to bring indigenous people to the city to clear the houses and the streets of ash, as well as organising processions and securing provisions. The depositions closed with appreciations of Hurtado's achievements in the 'servicio a Dios nuestro Señor y a Su Magestad' [service of the Lord our God and His Majesty] and a request for him to be recompensed by the King for his exemplary actions and his costs³⁹.

The memoranda were sent along with folders of requests from various individuals, ratified by the *cabildo*, or from institutions requesting assistance, relief and specific benefits given the special services they provided or the losses they had sustained. For example, Martín Abad de Usunsolo, a parish priest, requested remuneration for the services he had provided over 24 years, having been unable to receive what he was due from the coffers of the city as its resources had been devastated and were unproductive⁴⁰. The Dominican nuns of the convent of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in Arequipa had been housed by the Bishop in Cuzco after the eruption had damaged the convent and the properties that generated revenues. In 1607, they asked the King for assistance, and received, on the recommendation of the *Consejo*, a donation of 1,500 ducats from the *repartimientos de indios*⁴¹.

38 AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cabildos seculares*, 22 December 1603.

39 AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cabildos seculares*, 18 September 1601.

40 AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cabildos seculares*, 30 March 1602.

41 AGI, *Lima*, 2, *Audiencia de Lima*, n. 449, 10 July 1608. See also a similar request made to the King by the Cuzco *cabildo*, in AGI, *Lima*, 324, *Cartas y expedientes de personas eclesiásticas*, 23 October 1606.

Years later, a different request from the city took centre stage: how the Church was organised. In 1606, seizing on the death of Antonio de la Raya, Bishop of Cuzco, the *cabildo* asked the King to make the diocese truly independent of Cuzco:

cuantas veces emos acudido a V. Real Servicio en todas las ocasiones que se an ofrecidos y las calamidades y terremotos, volcanes, avenidas de los ríos que emos padescido llevandonos nuestras haciendas derribando las casas, atentas las quales causas es justo se le haga a esta tierra alguna merced y la que mas estimaremos para consuelo spiritual y temporal, es que V.M. se sirva de que se divida este Obispado del Cuzco⁴².

[On so many occasions have we complied with service to Your Majesty whenever an opportunity to do so arose and the calamities, earthquakes, volcanoes, floods that we have suffered, which took away our farms and destroyed our houses, and for these reasons it is just that some benefits be granted to this land, and what we would consider to be most valuable to provide spiritual and temporal relief is that Your Majesty agree to separate this diocese from Cuzco].

In spiritual terms, this would allow for greater attention to be paid to the city's religious activities, which, according to the *cabildo*, the Bishop had neglected for decades. In material terms, being able to retain revenues and alms would allow the cathedral to be rebuilt and encourage residents not to leave the city, thereby avoiding the risk of Arequipa becoming a ghost city⁴³. Over the following fifteen years, the city authorities sent the King many other memoranda on splitting away from the Cuzco diocese, often adding requests for help with rebuilding the church. Many of the petitions also mentioned calamities suffered in previous decades, whose impact could still be felt⁴⁴.

In the meantime, the city's misfortunes had not come to an end. The earthquake of 24 November 1604, whose epicentre was off the coast of

42 AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cabildos seculares*, 15 September 1606.

43 *Ibidem*. The autonomous diocese of Arequipa was formally approved by papal bull in 1577, but remained on hold. In 1609, Pope Paul V authorised its creation and in 1614 Viceroy Montesclaros fixed its boundary. Its first actual bishop was Pedro de Perea Díaz in 1617.

44 AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cabildos seculares*. See, for examples, the ones dated 8 March 1614, 17 April 1621, 21 February 1622.

Arica, was a heavy blow⁴⁵. Some years later, the *Audiencia* of Lima and the Viceroy, the Count of Monterrey, were asked by the Council of the Indies to summarise what had been done in response to the requests for assistance from Arica, Arequipa and Camaná. They confirmed that the Viceroy had first gathered information from the cities that had been affected. He then consulted ‘soldados y personas inteligentes y de experiencia’ [soldiers and people who were intelligent and experienced] and sent indigenous people to repair the houses and do whatever else was required. It sounds like a comprehensive response to the emergency, but the rest of the document reveals its limitations. The Viceroy had timber and other materials sent to Arica to rebuild the church, the fortress and the royal warehouse ‘por ser tanto necesario para recibir y guardar las azogues que allí se desembarcan para Potossi’ [as it is so important to import and store the mercury that is unloaded there for Potosí]. Receiving indigenous manpower and fiscal aid helped the residents of Arequipa and Camaná to get urban reconstruction underway⁴⁶.

Let us summarise some key aspects of the official communications produced after the three disasters that hit Arequipa and its region. The documents indicate that the local authorities were capable of providing an immediate response to an emergency, limiting damage to the extent that was possible and ensuring adequate supplies⁴⁷. They started a yearslong correspondence with the Viceroy and the King to counter long-term effects, to stem the flight of indigens and Spaniards and to get reconstruction work underway. There were essentially three arguments that Arequipa used to obtain fiscal relief and help with the reconstruction of the church. The

45 Part of the documentation on this earthquake is in Seiner Lizárraga, *Historia de los sismos en el Perú*, 215–27. On its consequences for Arequipa, see AGI, *Lima*, 111, *Cabildos seculares*, memorandum by Juan de Alvarado Bracamonte, 1605; Barriga, *Los terremotos en Arequipa*, 187, 28 November 1604.

46 AGI, *Lima*, 95, *Presidente y Oidores de la Audiencia*, 31 January 1608. The mercury was required for the process of extracting silver. The King appreciated the Viceroy’s endeavours ‘para que no desemparen sino que vuelban a reedificar’ [to ensure they do not flee but get back to reconstruction work], Biblioteca Nacional de España, ms 2989, *Provisiones reales para el gobierno de Indias*, f. 362.

47 This issue is evidenced well in Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda, ‘Miedo y respuesta social’.

first was the recognition due for what the city had done for the King and for the Catholic faith over preceding decades, and its unswaying support and loyalty in the conquest of South America. The second was the need to prevent the city becoming deserted, an issue that the authorities were particularly sensitive to for its fiscal consequences, as well as for reasons related to the spread of new urban models and new visions of the role of cities in the prosperity and power of states⁴⁸. The third was what particular individuals deserved or needed given their specific condition or the privileges they enjoyed.

The documentation also confirms that official communications from distant lands were not restricted to a single channel based on hierarchical lines of authority, that is, via the *Correo Mayor de Indias*. Information was also delivered via agents who submitted memoranda and petitions to the King on behalf of the city⁴⁹. Moreover, in times of trouble or strife, it was even more likely for secondary channels already operational in what is known as ‘the vigilant triangle’ to take on a greater importance. This meant that a large number of agents were involved in the information networks of the Hispanic Monarchy, even at the lowest levels, so that no shortage of messengers or disruption to the flow of news would

48 Francesco Senatore, *Survivors’ Voices: Coping with the Plague of 1478–1480 in Southern Italian Rural Communities*, in *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples*, 109–26. On the spread of novel urban models in colonial Peru, see Alejandra B. Osorio, *Inventing Lima. Baroque Modernity in Peru’s South Sea Metropolis* (New York – Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5–12.

49 On the range of different channels of official information in the seventeenth century, see Rocío Moreno-Cabanillas, *Comunicación e Imperio. Proyectos y reformas del correo en Cartagena de Indias, 1707–1777* (Madrid: Sílex, 2022), 39–49. On *procuradores* and other intermediaries, see Guillaume Gaudin, ‘Un acercamiento a las figuras de agentes de negocios y procuradores de Indias en la Corte’, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [Online], *Débats*, last accessed 22 February 2022, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/71390>; and Caroline Cunill, and Francisco Quijano, ‘Los procuradores de las Indias en el Imperio hispánico: reflexiones en torno a procesos de mediación, negociación y representación’, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [Online], *Débats*, last accessed 22 February 2022, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/79934>.

compromise the ability of the Council of the Indies to keep an eye on the King's various dominions⁵⁰.

The impact of disasters is only mentioned occasionally in the normal correspondence between the top Spanish authorities in Peru and the Council of the Indies, and any descriptions are fragmentary. Such events were of marginal interest with respect to the other matters that usually filled the pages of the Viceroy's reports or those of the *Consejo*. In contrast, the descriptions produced by monks and missionaries provide good detail on a range of different aspects, such as natural phenomena, the impact on people and society, the response of the civil and religious authorities, and sometimes beliefs, opinions and so on. In 1600, the Viceroy only mentions the Huaynaputina eruption in his report on the Dutch privateers. In another report of the same date that summarises the 'desgracias sucedidas en este Reyno de algunos meses a esta parte' [the adversities that have befallen this part of the Kingdom over recent months], the Viceroy essentially mentions only the privateer raids, the need to send reinforcements to Chile to suppress the indigenous uprising and the collapse of the Potosí mines; that is, events that damaged 'la real hacienda de Vuestra Maestad' [Your Majesty's royal treasury]⁵¹. At the end of 1601, the Viceroy asked the King to confirm and extend the provisional two-year tax exemption granted to Arequipa in recognition of the city's services to the Crown and to stem the flow of people leaving the city for good⁵². The replies to the requests arriving from Arequipa from 1582 use different channels and are

50 Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información. Funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español* (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012), 253–66. On how news about the 1598 Mapuche uprising in Chile was sent, see José Araneda Riquelme, 'Comunicando un desastre. Un mapa, diversos mensajeros y las noticias imperiales de una sublevación indígena (Arauco, 1598–1610)', *Razón Crítica*, 10 (2021), 121–46.

51 AGI, Lima, 34, *Cartas y expedientes de virreyes de Perú*, exp. 2, Callao, 5 May 1600, also in *Gobernantes del Perú*, vol. XIV, 250. On the difficulties of controlling the Chilean border over these decades, see Manfredi Merluzzi, 'Circolazione di uomini, imprese militari alle frontiere del Regno del Perù', *Cheiron*, 1–2 (2020), 94–120.

52 AGI, Lima, 2, *Audiencia de Lima*, n. 283. The Viceroy's despatches are dated 28 December 1601 and 1 March 1602. The Council's deliberation is dated 25 September 1604.

less frequent. In essence, the Council only asked the Viceroy to confirm the details provided by the city and the validity of its requests. This interplay of replies, opinions and requests for verification says a lot about the difficulties that the distance between Madrid and Peru created for communication and the introduction of specific measures⁵³. However, above all it highlights the fact that the form and content of the information and its importance relative to other official news was dependent on the nature of the link between the King and his subjects, whether as individuals or as members of bodies that enjoyed certain privileges. The key factors were a relationship based on taxation and defence requirements, and the very nature of the particular relationships between the King and a range of different individuals and groups.

4. Amid the ruins of the City of the Kings

How these relationships between the King and his subjects influenced the content of accounts of disasters emerges clearly in the extensive documentation of the two main earthquakes that hit Lima. For obvious reasons, the 1586 and 1609 events are mentioned more frequently in the documents of the highest echelons of the Viceroyalty than the other disasters addressed above, not least because the activities of these officials were severely disrupted by the destruction of the buildings in which they worked.

On 9 July 1586, the City of Kings – as Lima was known at the time – was struck by a powerful earthquake, and the resulting tsunami flooded coastal areas. Many buildings were destroyed and others were severely damaged, remaining uninhabitable for months because of the powerful aftershocks. There were twelve fatalities in Lima and a further twelve in the nearby port town of Callao.

The Viceroy, the Count of Villar, detailed the events in a long report, citing his own direct experience and information that he gathered later⁵⁴.

53 Sylvia Sellers-García, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire's Periphery* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Guillaume Gaudin, and Roberta Stumpf, eds, *Las distancias en el gobierno de los imperios ibéricos. Concepciones, experiencias y vínculos* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2022); the issue is also prominent in Brendecke, *Imperio e información*.

54 AGI, *Lima*, 31, *Cartas y expedientes de virreyes de Perú*, 3 November 1586; also in *Gobernantes del Perú*, vol. X, 171–81.

The first powerful tremor caught him unawares while he was in Callao, which was overwhelmed by the tsunami. Messengers arrived, sent by the *corregidor* Francisco de Quiñones, to inform him of the damage in Lima. He reached the capital a few days later and was able to see for himself the damage ‘que fue cosa de gran lastima y dolor para mi ver como la alle, cuya rehedificacion dicen muchos que no se hará en diez años ni con dos millones’ [which caused me much pain and displeasure to see, and many say that reconstruction work will require more than ten years and more than two million]. Most of the residents had found refuge in the suburbs and in *chácaras* [farm buildings], and the Viceroy himself had to move into a Franciscan monastery, where he and other functionaries continued to perform their official duties. Apart from describing what had been done to ensure the availability of places where taxes could be collected and justice delivered, the Viceroy devoted just a few concise sentences to his own activities, and spoke even less of what any future reconstruction work might require. He ended his report with a note about a procession set for 13 July.

In other reports, the Viceroy returned to the aftermath of the earthquake, to reconstruction issues, to the diseases resulting from the precarious living conditions and so on, but did not address these issues systematically. In the report he produced at the end of his mandate he noted that the earthquakes had destroyed the buildings of many cities and *pueblos* [towns and villages], and that he had ensured ‘que se reedificasen y reparasen ayudando con indios y con todo lo que fue de mi parte’ [that they would be rebuilt and repaired, providing help with indigens and with everything that was in my power]. However, the next part of his report is about the temporary accommodation that had been provided for himself and the other organs of government, and was essentially a financial statement⁵⁵. The *Consejo* was also sent copies of the agreements that the Viceroy and other Lima authorities had reached with various people to rebuild the viceregal palace, the *Audiencia* and other public buildings, as well as the living quarters and defences of the port of Callao⁵⁶. A few years

55 Hanke, ed., *Los virreyes españoles en América*, vol. I, n.d. [1592–1593], 219–20.

56 AGI, Lima, 108, *Cabildo secular de Lima, Testimonios del acuerdo general y otros que se hizieron en la Ciudad de los Reyes*, 10 September 1586.

later, the Lima *cabildo* asked the King for fiscal relief, which was seen as necessary for the reconstruction of a number of public buildings⁵⁷.

In 1586 and 1587, the news also reached the royal court and the Council of the Indies through other channels. General Álvaro Flores de Quiñones, whose ships were in the area at the time, reported on the state of his fleet and added that a tsunami had destroyed not only the goods stored in the warehouses of Callao but also the ships that had sailed there from New Spain⁵⁸. The same news, again focused on the Callao tsunami and the ruined goods, with Lima relegated to the background, reached Madrid from the Panama authorities, carried on a ship that had sailed on 25 July⁵⁹. Over the following years, some long-standing issues occasionally appeared in the Viceroy's correspondence with the *Consejo*, such as the reconstruction of the convent of the Encarnación, where 105 nuns lived, 'y muchas de ellas hijas nietas de descubridores de aquellas provincias, y de Antiguos pobladores' [many of whom were the daughters or nieces of explorers or early pioneers]. Given that the work was 'tan importante y del servicio de nuestro Señor' [very important and in the service of Our Lord], the Council of the Indies informed the Viceroy that the request would be granted in the form of a ten-year income from vacant properties, which would allow the nuns to maintain themselves and to repair the convent⁶⁰.

Rebuilding properties owned by individuals with direct or indirect links to the King were also a significant part of the correspondence on the earthquake that struck Lima on 19 October 1609. The earthquake is described in good detail in many of these very diverse documents. However, once again there is little sign in the official documents of a comprehensive approach to the emergency, which is described and addressed in a partial and fragmentary manner, at least to our eyes. For example, there is a brief description of the damage caused to the city in a report sent by the Lima inquisitors to the Grand Inquisitor in Spain. The report opens with some

57 AGI, Lima, 108, *Cabildo secular de Lima, Memorial de lo que pide y suplica la Ciudad de los Reyes al Rey N. Señor*, 10 May 1589.

58 AGI, *Patronato*, 255, N. 3, G. 3, R. 4, 4 December 1586.

59 AGI, *Patronato*, 191, R. 6, 13 September 1586. Those on board reported that the date of the earthquake was 7 July.

60 AGI, Lima, 1, *Audiencia de Lima*, exp. 132, 8 July 1595.

rather general information, noting that the earthquake ‘arruynó gran parte de los edificios della, que ninguno quedó sin recevir daño’ [reduced many of the buildings to ruins, leaving none undamaged], but it then focuses on the damage sustained by the seat of the Inquisition Tribunal, which is described in great detail. The report closes with a plea to the Grand Inquisitor that he should ask the King to make ‘alguna merced a esta Inquisición’ [some donation to this Inquisition]⁶¹.

Even more interesting is the description of the earthquake provided by the Bishop of Lima, Bartolomé Lobo Guerrero, who had taken charge of the new diocese just two weeks before the earthquake⁶². His report to the King recounts his arrival in the city, his first contact with its secular authorities and its clergy, and the problems that arose during his first months as its Bishop. The earthquake is also mentioned, but the account remains very generic about the impact on the city of the ‘gran temblor que la dejó muy arruinada y padexieron nuevo daño los edificios, assí de particulares como de Iglesias y monasterios’ [great tremor that left much in ruins and the buildings suffered further damage, including important buildings and churches]. The Bishop mentions the damage to the cathedral and some of the sacred buildings⁶³, and the significant resources required for repairs, but says nothing about fatalities or injuries, or about the conditions in which the people found themselves. He does, however, pay notable attention to the damage sustained by the convents of the Encarnación and of the Concepción ‘que son celebres y de gran summa de Religiosas de lo mejor y mas principal del Pirú, hijas, y nietas de Conquistadores y Pobladores’ [which are famous and have many nuns from the best and most important families of Peru, the daughters and nieces of conquistadors and pioneers]. As repairs to the convents needed a donation from the King, the Bishop

61 Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, *Inquisición*, 4797, exp. 8, 27 March 1610. The 1609 earthquake was also the topic of a poem by the *criollo* poet Pedro de Oña, *Temblor de Lima año de 1609* (Lima: por Francisco del Canto, 1609), dedicated to the Viceroy Marqués de Montesclaros, see Sarissa Carneiro Araujo, *Temblor de Lima y otros poemas al marqués de Montesclaros, virrey del Perú, 1607–1615* (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2018).

62 AGI, Lima, 301, *Cartas y expedientes de arzobispos de Lima*, 15 March 1610.

63 On the destruction and reconstruction of the cathedral of Lima, see Osorio, *Inventing Lima*, 19.

entreated him to be generous ‘pues en ellos V.M. tiene tantas Religiosas de Sancta Vida que le encomiendan a Dios y ruegan por su Vida y Salud’ [as in these convents Your Majesty has so many nuns who are leading a holy life and who commend him to God and offer prayers for his life and his health].

In short, disasters featured more prominently in communications with the Council of the Indies if the buildings or people affected came under the direct protection of the King, such as the Inquisition, the cathedral and other churches, convents whose nuns were the daughters or nieces of *conquistadores* and *pobladores* whose deeds had earned them the recognition of the Crown and the Church. Similarly, apart from tax exemptions for a number of years to assist the communities affected, which by long-standing tradition was the duty of the monarch, requests were only made to the King or his officials for those who in some way enjoyed royal protection.

As noted in our analysis of the Arequipa earthquake, it was the nature of the relationship between the King and his subjects, including the monarch’s responsibilities towards certain individuals, that determined the quality, quantity and completeness of the information that to our eyes appears thin, fragmentary and selective.

5. Disasters in the eyes of early modern rulers

Official correspondence on emergencies changed significantly in the second half of the seventeenth century, not to mention the eighteenth century. The documentation produced following a disaster, especially if it struck a densely populated area, an important city or a capital, was extensive and detailed, and focused on the destructive event, on its impact on people and buildings, on the response of the authorities and on any requests made of higher authorities. As in the case of printed news media, we see increasing attention paid to the aftermath of a disaster, to the material damage and the fatalities, with facts supported by enumeration, lists and so on⁶⁴. Moreover, the correspondence contains a broad range of different narratives, often offering divergent or even conflicting descriptions

64 Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021); Rosa Anna Paradiso, “‘Chi potrebbe esplicitare il lessico dei disastri nelle relazioni di età moderna tra scarti e

or interpretations of the event. For those who wrote or inspired the accounts, they were an opportunity for self-promotion, for enhancing one's influence or for discrediting adversaries, tactics that we tend to associate with twenty-first-century men and women.

A prime example of this are the communicative and political dynamics triggered by the earthquake that struck Lima and central Peru in 1687. A brief overview of the event will provide a valuable comparison with the cases examined above⁶⁵.

The destructive series of shocks on 20 October 1687 was one of the most powerful of the whole colonial period. The immediate response to the crisis was handled above all by the Viceroy, Melchor de Navarra y Rocafull, Duke of Palata. The Archbishop of Lima, Melchor de Liñán y Cisneros, was unable to exercise his authority over those first weeks, having been seriously injured in the collapse of his house and by the tsunami caused by the earthquake. Numerous accounts of the disaster were sent to Madrid, mainly produced by the Viceroy, the Bishop and other clerics. Most emphasised the anguish and disorientation of those who had survived, who were now living in shacks and makeshift accommodation in *Plaza Mayor* or on the outskirts of the city. The second point that these accounts emphasised was that Viceroy, together with clerics and preachers, had organised almost daily processions and acts of penitence to alleviate the disorientation of the people. The Viceroy's reports expressed initially implicit then gradually more explicit disapproval of the actions of the diocesan authorities. They were portrayed as sluggish and faltering, in contrast to the highly active Jesuits and Franciscans, who looked after the

continuità', *Laboratoire italien* [Online], 29 (2022), last accessed 17 March 2023, <http://journals.openedition.org/laboratoireitalien/9565>.

65 For a more detailed analysis of this event and how it was recounted by different individuals, see Cecere, 'Dall'informazione alla gestione dell'emergenza'; Yasmina Rocío Ben Yessef Garfía, 'Los dos cuchillos pontificio y regio: un difícil equilibrio en tiempos de calamidad en el Perú virreinal (segunda mitad del siglo XVII)', *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [Online], *Débats*, last accessed 24 October 2022, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/88653>; and Flavia Tudini, 'Narrating the 1687 Lima Earthquake: Institutions and Devotions in the Face of Catastrophe', in Milena Viceconte, Gennaro Schiano, and Domenico Cecere, eds, *Heroes in Dark Times. Saints and Officials Tackling Disaster, 16th–17th Centuries* (Rome: Viella, 2023), 259–85.

fleeing and bewildered populace over the weeks following the earthquake, and were able to channel their anguish into masses, processions and public acts of penitence. Indeed, the handling of the emergency rekindled a harsh conflict, initially based on a dispute about jurisdiction, that had set the Archbishop and the cathedral chapter against the Viceroy, who enjoyed the support of the local Jesuit and Franciscan monks.

Similarly, it is noteworthy that the accounts are filled with passages apparently designed to establish clearly that there was great need of assistance, to emphasise the danger of social order potentially collapsing and to warn that chaos might overwhelm the city, the aim being to justify the royal authorities' use of exceptional measures and the extension of their powers. In addition, the large amount of space devoted by the Viceroy and the clerics to descriptions of public acts of veneration and penitence is neither a cliché nor necessarily an objective account of events, but was designed to reassure Madrid about the ability of the Lima authorities to maintain control of the population and to keep their religious fervour alive. Given the general disorder and the social disintegration, the Viceroy and his allies wanted to ensure that the King could rest assured that their actions and the attention they paid to the people's spiritual needs had neutralised the risk of social order being subverted, a risk that any calamity introduced, and that society was gradually returning to normal.

The differences between how emergencies caused by natural phenomena were recounted and handled at the end of the sixteenth century and the second half of the seventeenth century are clear. The fact that the official documentation was partial, piecemeal and selective cannot be attributed to any lack of interest on the part of Madrid in natural phenomena on the other side of the Atlantic, or to some inability of the colonial governing bodies to cover the territory. From the 1550s, the network of city authorities in Peru was developed enough to ensure that control was maintained, that channels of communication were efficient and that natural resources and mining were being exploited effectively⁶⁶. Moreover, the long administration led by Francisco de Toledo from 1569 to 1581 oversaw a significant

66 Manuel Lucena Salmoral, ed., *Historia de Iberoamérica* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2008), vol. II, 473–514; Manuel Lucena Giraldo, *A los cuatro vientos. Las ciudades de la América Hispánica* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006), 61–95; Oscar Mazín, and José Javier Ruiz Ibañez, eds, *Las Indias Occidentales. Procesos*

consolidation of the dominion of the area. Cities were founded, fortresses were built, infrastructure was developed for defence and for territorial expansion, and much was done to control and exploit natural resources⁶⁷. From the earliest decades of the *Conquista*, the Royal Court organised and encouraged the gathering of information about lands inhabited by indigenous people, culminating in the development of a systematic and continuous programme of information gathering that all officials and clerics in the Indies had to contribute to. This huge and ambitious programme, established under Juan de Ovando in the *ordenanzas* of 1573, was founded on the principle that the government had to operate on the basis of full knowledge of the indigenous people and their natural environment, and therefore had to get ‘entera noticia de las cossas’ [all of the news about things]⁶⁸.

The main reason for the apparently marginal place that extreme natural phenomena and their consequences have in official correspondence lies rather in the duties assigned to the Hispanic Monarchy’s representatives, in the priorities that these duties demanded and in how they felt the duties should be executed. The communications reflect these conceptions of power, of the relationship between the monarch and his subjects. The duties of Hispanic Monarchy officials, especially in transoceanic

de incorporación territorial a las Monarquías Ibéricas (Mexico: Colegio de México – Red Columnaria, 2012).

67 Manfredi Merluzzi, *Gobernando los Andes: Francisco de Toledo virrey del Perú, 1569–1581* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2014), 296–305.

68 Brendecke, *Imperio e información*, 358–66 and 376–411. On natural phenomena in print news sheet and in official correspondence, see Rogelio Altez, ‘Impresos sobre terremotos en la Hispanoamérica del siglo XVII. Relaciones de sucesos entre la verdad y la fe’, in María Dolores Lorenzo, Miguel Rodríguez, and David Marcilhacy, eds, *Historiar las catástrofes* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas – UNAM, 2019), 35–65. See also Raquel Álvarez Peláez, ‘Felipe II, la ciencia y el Nuevo Mundo’, *Revista de Indias*, LIX/215 (1999), 9–30; Jesús Bustamante, ‘El conocimiento como necesidad de Estado: las encuestas oficiales sobre Nueva España durante el reinado de Carlos V’, *Revista de Indias*, LX/218 (2000), 33–55; Victoria Ríos Castaño, ‘The Empire in Their Hands: Topographical and Geographical Questionnaires under Charles V and Philip II’, in Aaron Kahn, ed., *On Wolves and Sheep: Exploring the Expression of Political Thought in Golden Age Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 213–32.

possessions, primarily involved fiscal and military matters, and, in Peru, the mining of large quantities of precious metals. Moreover, they were required to comply with directives from Madrid about the privileges enjoyed by specific individuals, organisations and government bodies in line with a common approach to jurisdiction, as well as to supervise important aspects of Church governance, which, given the *Patronato Real*, was largely the responsibility of the Catholic Monarchs⁶⁹.

There is a further element to consider, not unrelated to the previous elements. In the late modern period and the contemporary period, it is taken for granted that the responsibility for handling a disaster lies with the relevant authorities, and in particular the state, and that the authorities have the necessary tools to manage the situation, from immediate search and rescue operations to medical attention, and to reconstruction in the longer term. In the early modern period, this was far from being the prevalent view. In most cases, the monarch was merely morally obliged to suspend the taxation of the stricken communities for a number of years, in accordance with convention and political models handed down from classical times⁷⁰. The patchy nature of the information provided about a disaster was essentially the result of the fact that the monarch's officials

69 Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, *La edad de oro de los virreyes. El virreinato en la Monarquía Hispánica durante los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Akal, 2011), 203–19; Pedro Cardim, and Joan-Lluís Palos, eds, *El mundo de los virreyes en las monarquías de España y Portugal* (Madrid – Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012); Alejandro Cañeque, ‘Governance (Spanish America)’, in Evonne Levy, and Kenneth Mills, eds, *Lexikon of the Hispanic Baroque: Transatlantic Exchange and Transformation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 145–9; Id., ‘The Political and Institutional History of Colonial Spanish America’, *History Compass*, 11 (2013), 280–91. For a recent work on the role of the Bishops of Lima in governance, see Flavia Tudini, ‘Conoscenza del territorio e pratiche di governo. La partecipazione dell’arcivescovo di Lima nel processo decisionale della Monarquía Hispánica (1580–1606)’, *Cheiron*, 1–2 (2020), 161–86.

70 Bruno, ‘Fronteggiare l’emergenza’. On how these political issues are reflected in the evolution of chronicles from medieval times to the modern period, see Gerrit J. Schenk, and Thomas Labbé, ‘Introduction: une histoire de la perception des victimes de catastrophes’, in Gerrit J. Schenk, and Thomas Labbé, eds, *Une histoire du sensible: la perception des victimes de catastrophes du XII^e au XVIII^e siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 7–30.

were solely or primarily obliged to act in certain contexts, such as tax exemption, and to ensure the safety of the people, buildings and infrastructure that were of particular interest to the sovereign or to which the monarch owed some form of special protection, such as defensive installations, premises where precious metals were stored and convents of nuns whose forbears were conquistadors.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, the consolidation, codification and spread of a specific informative genre, the *relaciones de desastres*⁷¹, and later the emergence of periodicals, probably not only influenced how disasters were interpreted and recounted but also helped to turn them into events worthy of being recounted per se rather than just in terms of their consequences. It is also important to consider the changes that took place over those decades in how territories were governed, in the concept of statehood, and in the relationship between power and where it is exercised⁷². In addition, it is important not to ignore the emergence of new notions and practices of governance based on the view that the ability to ensure the survival and wellbeing of one's subjects could be an important element in legitimising power⁷³.

71 Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro*; on the impact of the rise of printed news media on transatlantic communication and on institutional dynamics, see also Arthur Weststeijn, 'Empire in Fragments: Transatlantic News and Print Media in the Iberian World, ca. 1600–40', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 74/2 (2021), 528–70. For an overview of the flow of information in the New World, see Renate Pieper, 'News from the New World: Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century', in Raymond, and Moxham, eds, *News networks in Early Modern Europe*, 495–511. On the interplay of different forms and channels of communication, see Fernando Bouza, 'Cultures and communication across the Iberian world (fifteenth–seventeenth centuries)', in Fernando Bouza, Pedro Cardim, and Antonio Feros, eds, *The Iberian Worlds, 1492–1820* (London – New York: Routledge, 2020), 211–44.

72 Charles S. Maier, *Once Within Borders. Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 72–81.

73 Thomas Labbé, 'Aux origines des politiques compassionnelles. Émergence de la sensibilité envers les victimes de catastrophes à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Annales HSS*, 74/1 (2019), 45–71.

This is why the royal officials of the second half of the seventeenth century saw the handling of emergencies as a chance to gain honours or titles, as a factor to exploit in the pursuit of political influence, as an opportunity to demonstrate that all one's responsibilities had been fulfilled.

Rocío Moreno-Cabanillas

Mechanisms and strategies for communication in time of war during the eighteenth century*

1. Introduction

The postal system played a crucial role for government, as it was the link between the Iberian Peninsula and Spanish America, the means to convey knowledge and take decisions across different imperial spaces. In times of war, fluent communications were essential; governments needed information about events at the front, so that the right strategies could be adopted. However, wars, in general, tend to disrupt both maritime and overland communication networks. In this context, empires were compelled to use a multiplicity of networks formed by interacting agents that used different strategies to collect information in difficult conditions.

This work analyses the strategic and military value of information in the eighteenth century, using the postal administration in Cartagena de Indias as case study. This post office was at the centre of a wide constellation of

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mechanisms, actors and negotiations involved in the complex operation of postal communication in times of war, within the multi-layered and polycentric political structure of the Spanish Monarchy. I shall examine the techniques used to keep information circulating in wartime, the speed at which it did so, the means and infrastructures deployed to increase the efficiency of the postal system, and the channels and actors involved both within and beyond the boundaries of the institutional postal system.

2. The challenge of distance for colonial empires

During the early modern age, letters were the main means of communication. Letters were the expression of both presence and absence (multiplied by distance). Letters were an instrument of government and a tool for political, economic, social and cultural communication, and the importance of postal services can hardly be overstated¹.

In this context, colonial empires with distant possessions overseas rightly regarded the post as a central element for the political, economic, social and cultural development of their territories. In this way, European states with possessions in America were compelled to find ways to keep both shores of the Atlantic connected. Information sailed the seas and ran along river and overland routes, bringing information and ideas, holding families and personal relationships together, expressing feelings and experiences, and managing and transmitting news.

Overcoming the distance that separated different imperial spaces became a primary aim of governments². Distance hampered communication and

1 For more on written culture in the early modern age see Roger Chartier, *Entre el poder y placer: cultura escrita y literatura en la Edad Moderna* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000); Fernando Bouza Álvarez, *Communication, Knowledge, and Memory in Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Antonio Castillo Gómez, ed., *Culturas del escrito en el mundo Occidental del Renacimiento a la Contemporaneidad* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2015), among others.

2 Research group 'Vencer la distancia. Actores y prácticas del gobierno de los imperios español y portugués', coordinated by Guillaume Gaudin, analyses the role of distance in the operation of the Iberian empires. See Guillaume Gaudin, Antonio Castillo Gómez, Margarita Gómez Gómez, and Roberta Stumpf, 'Vencer la distancia: Actores y prácticas del gobierno de los imperios español

interrupted information flows. Fernand Braudel regarded distance as a hard-to-tame structural element and the main foe of governments, which were forced to find ways to bridge it³. Geoffrey Parker, however, has challenged some of Braudel's premises; in his opinion, news travelled rapidly and frequently (for the period), and early modern rulers acted with abundant information at their disposal⁴.

Following Ant3nio Manuel Hespanha, for whom the materiality of writing made the preservation of such disperse and extensive imperial political spaces possible⁵, we could say that these were veritable paper empires. For power spheres and strategies, the postal service was the human and material tool that connected imperial spaces, both a strength and a weakness in the global imperial strategies.

The organisation of postal services in the early modern age constituted a revolution in communication, with the implementation of fixed agents and routes⁶. From the sixteenth century onwards, European states worked to establish efficient postal systems with which to reap political and economic benefits⁷. To achieve this end, they effectively implemented changes in the coordination and organisation of the circulation of information, which progressively crystallised into a public service in the eighteenth century. In the Spanish Monarchy, the institutionalisation of the post came with the Bourbons and their reforms. The organisation of the postal apparatus responded to the need to facilitate short-, mid- and long-range communication and to establish connection networks between different agents, including rulers, merchants, diplomats, soldiers, churchmen, etc. It was necessary to create a reliable postal system, so that political and economic

y portugu3s', *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.71453>, accessed 12 November 2021.

3 Fernand Braudel, *El Mediterr3neo y el mundo mediterr3neo en la 3poca de Felipe II* (Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Econ3mica, 2016), 313–43.

4 Geoffrey Parker, *La gran estrategia de Felipe II* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998), 103–44.

5 Ant3nio Manuel Hespanha, *As v3speras do Leviathan: institui33es e poder pol3tico. Portugal s3c. XVII* (Coimbra: Almedina, 1994), 291.

6 Wolfgang Behringer, 'Communications Revolutions: A Historiographical Concept', *German History*, 3/24 (2006), 364.

7 Joad Raymond, and Noah Moxham, eds, *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016).

exchange could be guaranteed. The improvements introduced in the postal service resulted in the acceleration and densification of news, giving actors a true global perspective⁸.

In the early modern age, therefore, postal systems were characterized by the coexistence of multiple, competing and strongly politicised postal networks, a reflection of the power associated with the possession of information. This resulted in multifarious routes and a wide variety of agents forming the links and channels between Europe and America.

3. The Caribbean as central axis of information during wartime

During the eighteenth century, the Atlantic, especially the Caribbean, was at the centre of political, economic and communicational European rivalries, and the region played a central role in geopolitical and commercial strategies, as the gateway into America and a nodal hub of communication between peoples and regions. The Caribbean thus played a central and hegemonic part in the complex spatial projection of overseas empires. The Atlantic and the Caribbean city of Cartagena de Indias were the cornerstone of connection during wartime in the eighteenth century. As such, Cartagena de Indias stood as the foundation of the Spanish domination of the Caribbean, as well as its main harbour, the hinge that linked the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada with the rest of South America, the Iberian Peninsula and other imperial powers with presence in the Caribbean region, a focal point of global interaction⁹.

The Atlantic was a tempestuous and dangerous place which was already a communication channel before it was conceived as a single geographical entity between Europe, Africa and America¹⁰. War in the Atlantic seriously

8 Karel Davids, *Global Ocean of Knowledge 1660–1860. Globalization and Maritime Knowledge in the Atlantic World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 55

9 Mariselle Meléndez, ‘Negotiating Subjectivities on the Fringes of the Empire: The Port City of Cartagena de Indias as Site of Social and Political Convergence’, in Elizabeth Franklin Lewis, Mónica Bolufer Peruga, and Catherine M. Jaffe, eds, *The Routledge Companion to the Hispanic Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2020), 142–56.

10 Davids, *Global Ocean of Knowledge 1660–1860*, 11.

undermined the Bourbon's efforts to keep information flows between the different nodes of the Spanish empire. The following Figure 1 illustrates that, during the War of Jenkin's Ear¹¹, few packet-boats were dispatched to America from Spain, with a single ship being sent in 1746 and none in 1747. It also shows that in 1741 and between 1744 and 1747 no packet-boats were sent to Tierra Firme, the main harbour of which was Cartagena de Indias, because the city was one of the hotspots of the conflict. This led to the collapse of the *Proyecto para Galeones, y Flotas de el Perú, y Nueva España, y para navíos de registros y avisos, que navegaren a ambos reynos* (1720), which the Crown had designed along with the Consulate of the Indies. This project planned the frequent dispatch of one of eight packet-boats to America 'con frecuencia, sin que por la mala dirección en el avío de ellos se retarde la puntual expedición de su salida, y retorno a los tiempos preñidos' [so that no bad planning should delay their expeditious dispatch and return at their appointed times]¹².

SPANISH AMERICA-BOUND PACKET-BOATS

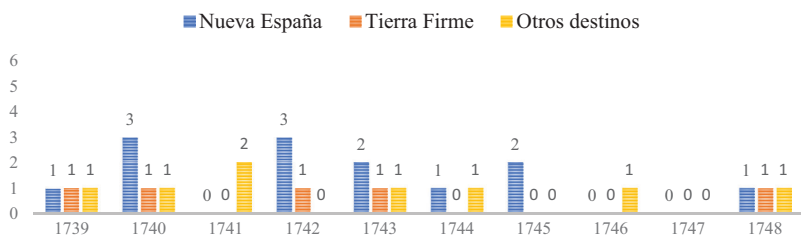


Figure 1. Spanish America-bound packet-boats from 1739 to 1748. Author's own. Source: Archivo General de Indias, *Casa de la Contratación*, 2902 A.

Something similar occurred during the Seven Years' War, in which maritime postal communications was also irregular because of the conflict. In 1761, six packet-boats left the Iberian Peninsula for America; five in 1758, 1760, 1762 and 1763; four in 1757; three in 1754, 1756 and 1759; and,

11 Jorge Cerdá Crespo, *La guerra de la Oreja de Jenkins: un conflicto colonial (1739–1748)*, PhD diss., Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 2008.

12 Archivo General de Indias (henceforth AGI), *Indiferente General*, 1586.

two in 1755. Despite the irregular nature of these voyages, the Figure 2 shows a growing trend over time, reflecting that more information arrived in America in the final years of the war. It is, however, significant, that in 1755, 1757, 1759 and 1760 not a single official packet-boat arrived in Tierra Firme, that is, Cartagena de Indias.

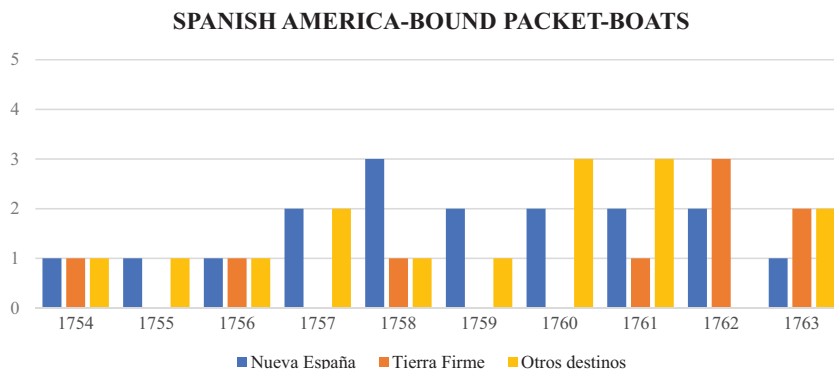


Figure 2. Spanish America-bound packet-boats from 1754 to 1763. Author's own. Source: Archivo General de Indias, *Casa de la Contratación*, 2902 A.

The Seven Years' War was one of the main conflicts of the eighteenth century. It is regarded as one of the first global wars, as it took place simultaneously in Europe and overseas (America, Africa and India). What was at stake was, first, supremacy in Europe, with Austria, Prussia and Russia as main contenders; and, second, the race for colonial domination between Great Britain and France¹³.

Spain became directly affected by the war when, in 1760, the conflict reached its American colonies, specifically the Caribbean, which was one of the Monarchy's most valuable regions. Great Britain had always shown great interest in the Spanish American possessions, trying to gain

13 For the global nature of the Seven Years' War from a regional perspective see Mark H. Danley, and Patrick Speelman, *The Seven Year's War: Global Views* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013).

direct access to their markets and resources¹⁴. In August 1762, the British navy took Havana¹⁵, in what was a body blow for Spain, which lost a key stronghold in the region and, with it, supremacy in the Caribbean, which had hitherto remained uncontested. The loss of Havana short-circuited the economic, political and communicational channels of the empire, and can be regarded as one of the greatest military disasters of the eighteenth century and even of the whole colonial period.

Historiography has argued that the loss of Havana galvanised and accelerated the programme of reforms implemented by the Bourbons. Although these reforms had begun in the early decades of the century, during the reign of Charles III they became a good deal more urgent, because the Monarchy became finally aware of the strategic importance of the American colonies, especially the Caribbean. Foreign threats crystallised in loss of political control, contraband and military exposure, and this led to a series of comprehensive institutional reforms that aimed to turn Spain into a global power capable of competing with the British¹⁶.

At critical periods, the need for information was even greater. Communication became an essential condition for agents to act and respond according to their interests¹⁷. In critical contexts, governments doubled their efforts to control communication channels and guarantee the circulation of information.

In 1762, Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, best known as Count of Campomanes, said that ‘las guerras debían de servir de estímulo para establecer los correos entre España e Indias, puesto que tener las noticias

14 Gabriel Paquette, ‘Visiones británicas del Mundo Atlántico español, c. 1740–1830’, *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 10 (2011), 145–54, 50.

15 For the British occupation of Havana during the Seven Years’ War see Sigfrido Vázquez Cienfuegos, ‘La Habana Británica: once meses claves en la historia de Cuba’, in María Emelina Martín Acosta, Celia María Parcero Torre, and Adelaida Sagarra Gamazo, eds, *Metodología y nuevas líneas de investigación de la Historia de América* (Burgos: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Burgos, 2001), 131–47.

16 Luis Navarro García, *Hispanoamérica en el siglo XVIII* (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2012), 187.

17 Domenico Cecere, ‘Estrategias de comunicación y de intervención frente a desastres en la Monarquía Hispánica bajo Carlos II’, *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39/10 (2021), 8–43.

a tiempo dependía la conservación de algunos de aquellos dominios' [war must become the stimulus to set up the postal system between Spain and the Indies, because the preservation of some of those dominions depends on news arriving on time]¹⁸. This clearly expresses the central role played by fluent communications in time of war; governments must know what was happening at the front, so that the right strategic decisions could be adopted. However, in practice, what wars did was to bring to the fore the structural limitations of postal systems¹⁹, which were interdicted by captures, threats, delays and interruptions that often led to a total break down of communication between the Iberian Peninsula and America.

America, and especially the Caribbean, became the axis of reform, with the improvement of postal communication as one of the programme's cornerstones. Although the reorganisation of postal communication in the American colonies had begun earlier, it finally crystallised in 1764 with the publication of the *Reglamento Provisional del Correo Marítimo de España a sus Indias Occidentales*, the set of regulations that were to govern maritime postal communication²⁰. These regulations created a regular maritime postal service, including the dispatch of a packet-boat from La Coruña to Havana on the first day of every month (the route was known as *Carrera de La Habana*)²¹. From Havana, two ships were to bring the mail to Veracruz and Cartagena de Indias, in the Viceroyalties of New Spain and New Granada, respectively. Later, in 1767, a new route was created, for a ship to depart on the fifteenth day of alternate months from La Coruña to Montevideo and Buenos Aires, whence the mail was to

18 AGI, *Correos*, 462 B. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

19 David González Cruz, 'La circulación de la información entre España y América en los períodos de guerra del siglo XVIII', in Miguel Ángel Melón Jiménez *et al.*, eds, *Dinámicas de las fronteras en periodos de conflicto. El imperio español, 1640–1815* (Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 2019), 173–94: 85.

20 AGI, *Estado*, 86 A, n. 6, ff. 2r–3r.

21 The packet-boats were the ships used to carry the post, but they could also convey passengers and freight. These ships originate in the seventeenth century, with a ship that carried news from Calais (France) to Dover (England). The name *Packet-Boat*, which denotes the ship's postal nature, was in Spain turned to *Paquebote*. Francisco Garay Unibaso, *Correos Marítimos* (Bilbao: Mensajero, 1987), 57.

be redistributed to the interior of the Viceroyalty of Río de La Plata, Chile and Perú (this route was known as *Carrera de Buenos Aires*).

One of the most important decisions to be made concerned the selection of the harbours around which the system was to revolve. Therefore, the decision responded to geographical and political reasons. The administrative base of the maritime mail in Spain was set in La Coruña, specifically at La Palloza, outside the city walls. This office was independent from the administration of the mail within the Iberian Peninsula. The staff in La Coruña included the general manager, appointed for its administrative skills and experience in the postal administration; one accountant; four clerks; and an office-boy. They supervised the arrival, dispatch, loading, and unloading of packet-boats, as well as their equipment, repairs, and ledgers²². This arsenal not only housed the post office, but also the infrastructure required for the maintenance, repair, and supply of mail boats.

After setting up the main routes and hubs, they decided on the packet-boat – a small ship with a small crew, eminently suitable to operate as a mail ship – as the standard means of transport. According to these regulations, the *Real Hacienda* was responsible for funding post offices, although they should try to raise revenue with postal fees and organising the transport of goods and passengers. Although the main function of packet-boats was to carry the mail, the *Reglamento Provisional* authorised the transport of passengers and merchandise in both directions, within certain limits: the goods brought to America must be Spanish-made, and the goods brought to Spain could not include forbidden foreign merchandise; the owners of the goods must pay a postal fee and custom duties; the weight of the goods transported could not exceed a maximum (half the ship's haulage capacity) and must be registered; passengers must be in possession of a travel license and pay a fee; the *Real Hacienda* could send supplies, munitions, troops, bulls, stamped paper, tobacco, and other goods free of charge²³. Packet-boats, therefore, were loaded with goods owned by the slipper, the pilot, the administrator of the mail in La Coruña, and private agents²⁴. Some

22 AGI, *Correos*, 484 A.

23 Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia (AGNC), Colonia, Correos, Cundinamarca, tomo 1, documento 65.

24 The record attests to the transport of Catalonian wine; flour; Asturian walnuts; stockings; hats; olives; hemp; glass cups; shows; boots; tableware; iron, and

merchants tried to smuggle goods in private ships in order not to have to pay the postal fees²⁵. The link between trade and the post is an essential variable for the socio-political and economic dynamics of the Spanish Empire. Promoting the use of the packet-boats as agents of trade was a constant concern for the postal institutions because the Crown intended these ships to compete against Cádiz-based merchants. The crews of the packet boats were responsible for the safekeeping of the mail and other cargo²⁶.

Then government's main concern was to establish a regular and reliable postal system, as well as to increase the speed of circulation of information. However, the monthly system set out in the *Reglamento Provisional* was rarely followed, owing to meteorological or human factors, as well as wars, which caused delays and even the loss of the post²⁷.

4. Measures implemented to improve the circulation of information in the Atlantic during wartime in the late eighteenth century

From the earliest attempts at reform, the navy and the *Correos Marítimos* had been forced to work closely, but not without the navy having some reservations, because they feared that the packet-boats would deprive them of the best captains and crews, owing to the 'cebo de las ventajas que logran en viajes a América; de modo, que, sobre ser marineros conocidos, y enteramente seguros, se precave este medio de debilitar un cuerpo tan útil a la Monarquía' [advantages that they obtain in America, and this can

many others, while the packet-boats sailing back from America brought mahogany; cacao from Guayaquil; Campeche dyes; hides; tobacco; and sugar. AGI, *Indiferente*, 1586.

25 For instance, the *Compañía de los Lonjistas*; on 22 January 1768, Manuel de Zulueta and Juan Ángel de Olavarrieta signed a contract with the revenue of the post, to send a certain amount to flour to Havana with each monthly ship. However, they did not hold their end of the bargain, and began sending flour in privately organised ships AGI, *Correos*, 429–A.

26 *Instrucción que deben observar los patrones-pilotos de los paquebotes destinados al correo mensual entre España y las Indias Occidentales* defined the responsibilities of packet-boat crews. AGI, *Estado*, 86–A.

27 AGI, *Indiferente General*, 1587.

deprive such an important body for the Monarchy of reliable men]²⁸. This is clearly expressed by the navy representative in Ferrol, Antonio Perea, best known as Marquis of Monteverde, who argued that the forced understanding between the navy and the postal administrators concerning the dispatch of the mail ‘no dejará de producir tropiezos con la Marina’ [will surely cause conflict with the navy]²⁹. For their part, the administrators in charge of the postal structure, like the Marquis of Grimaldi and Campomanes, insisted that the system was jurisdictionally autonomous from the navy³⁰.

Although the main mission of the *Correos Marítimos* was to channel correspondence, the *Reglamento Provisional* allowed, with some limitations, the transport of passengers and freight between Spain and America. As such, the packet-boats carried goods owned by the captain, the pilot, the postmaster of La Coruña and private merchants, who had to pay a transport fee³¹. However, the King ordered that no freight, money (including the postal revenue), or anything that was not strictly necessary for a safe voyage was to be put aboard these ships during wartime³². In this way, the postal revenue that pertained to American postal offices, mainly the revenue raised by postal fees, which was in normal circumstances regularly dispatched to America, was kept for the duration of the conflict in the Spanish postal offices³³.

For Spain, the late eighteenth century was coloured by conflict with the British and French empires, in which the Atlantic was the main theatre of operations. These wars tested the efficacy, regularity and reliability of the postal system, which was gravely threatened by war at sea. As such, the

28 Archivo Museo Naval (AMN), *Manuscritos*, 1333/3.

29 AMN, *Manuscritos*, 1333/3.

30 Archivo Conde de Campomanes (ACC), 47–21.

31 The documents consulted for America-bound ships list such merchandise as Catalonian wine, flour, nuts from Asturias, stockings, hats, olives, hemp, glass vessels, shoes, boots, tableware, iron and many more; meanwhile, Spain-bound ships carried mahogany, cocoa from Guayaquil, dyes from Campeche, hides, tobacco and sugar. AGI, *Indiferente General*, 1586.

32 AGI, *Correos*, 358 A.

33 AGI, *Correos*, 70 A.

managers of the postal system were forced to look for solutions to ensure that communication was conveyed as securely and efficiently as possible.

One usual measure was to change the maritime routes followed by the mail boats; ship captains were often forced to find alternative routes to avoid the enemy, especially in the Caribbean, which was one of the main war fronts. On 24 July 1779, the managers of the General Post Office in Madrid, informed the postmaster in Cartagena de Indias, José Flores Longoria, that the war with Great Britain posed a severe threat to the post dispatched from La Coruña to Havana, ordering him for the mail to be channelled through Caracas, Cumaná and Trinidad, and not through Puerto Rico, as was usual.³⁴ Ships bound for Puerto Rico ran the risk of meeting enemy vessels, so the mail was to be sent to Jagua and later to Cartagena de Indias, in the Viceroyalty of New Granada, ‘el acierto y más probable seguridad del giro de la correspondencia’ [making the delivery of the correspondence as safe as possible]³⁵.

Similar measures were adopted during the Spanish-British war (1796–1802), when the administrator of the post office in Cartagena de Indias, Sebastián Agüera Bustamante, sought ways to increase the safety of the postal route to Havana

por el grande riesgo que debe recelar en la navegación, que tienen que hacer mostrando el cabo de San Antonio, e impuesto de la práctica observada en la guerra anterior con dicha nación, de ir de aquí al puerto de Trinidad de la misma isla, desde la qual se conducía por tierra a la ciudad de la Havana³⁶.

[owing to the great risks for navigation, especially around Cape San Antonio, and following the measures implemented in the past war with that nation, [for the mail] to go from here to the port of Trinidad, in the same island [Cuba], whence it should go to Havana overland].

Departure times were also affected by the war.

Las correspondencias que salen del departamento general de La Coruña se han reducido a una expedición cada dos meses en lugar de la mensual anterior, que puede proceder del cuidado de precaver los mayores riesgos, y poder sostener los costos en un tiempo en que por la misma situación de guerra son mucho menores los que produce la renta³⁷.

34 *Ibidem*.

35 AGI, *Correos*, 358 A.

36 AGI, *Correos*, 71 A.

37 *Ibidem*.

[the mail is now leaving the central office in La Coruña every two months instead of one, as this makes it easier to avoid risk and keep the costs low, especially now that the war is reducing revenue].

The periodicity of deliveries was suffering greatly, as expressed by the postmaster in Havana, José Fuertes, in a document dated to 4 November 1798: ‘han sido pocas las ocasiones en que han salido en esta guerra, ni de La Coruña, ni de aquí mensualmente las correspondencias’ [since the beginning of the war the mail has rarely been dispatched timely from both here and La Coruña]³⁸. Barely a few days later, on 14 November, he wrote: ‘estamos aún sin correspondencia de Europa, ni noticia que hayan llegado las de junio, julio y agosto que nos faltan a ningún puerto de la ysla’ [we are still waiting for news from Europe, and no mail has arrived to the island in June, July and August]³⁹. The postmaster in Panamá, Manuel García Paredes, expressed the seriousness of the situation on 28 September 1802: ‘que interceptando la mayor parte de los buques correos, nos hizo carecer de las correspondencias de esa península por más de dos años, con imponderable atraso de la renta’ [most mail ships are intercepted, and we have lacked any news from the Iberian Peninsula for two years, imposing great delays]⁴⁰.

This was to a large extent a result of the British strategy, which included keeping a close watch on the main Spanish postal harbours, such as La Coruña and Havana, in a deliberate attempt to interdict the enemy’s communications. The postmaster in La Coruña reported that the British blockade of the Galician ports, especially Ferrol, was stopping the packet-boats from setting sail to America in time: ‘apenas ha pasado día en que no se me haya traído un parte de haber embarcaciones sospechosas a la vista’ [barely a single day goes by without reports of suspicious ships on sight]⁴¹. The same applies to Havana, where the postal administrator claimed that ‘aunque a distancia, estamos rodeados de enemigos’ [even if they are far, we are surrounded by enemies]⁴².

38 *Ibidem.*

39 *Ibidem.*

40 *Ibidem.*

41 AGI, *Correos*, 385 A.

42 AGI, *Correos*, 71 A.

Another measure was to increase the ordinance and munitions aboard packet-boats and the ships sailing between Veracruz and Cartagena de Indias, to improve their odds in case they were intercepted⁴³. The number of guns, weapons and munitions to be loaded on each boat were established, ‘exigían las circunstancias para la defensa de la correspondencia y del buque en algún encuentro con enemigo de igual o menor fuerza’ [as demanded by the circumstances, so that the mail can be defended in an encounter with an enemy ship of equal or lesser strength]⁴⁴. These inventories list the guns, projectiles, crossbars, muskets, blunderbusses, sabres and shrapnel with which the packet-boats and the ships distributing the mail within the Caribbean were to defend themselves⁴⁵.

It was also important for the ships to carry a competent crew, as the King had ordered that ‘los departamentos de Marina auxilien y subministren a los correos quanto puedan necesitar, que siento de tanta importancia el servicio que estos hacen no debe interrumpirse su pronta expedición’ [the navy departments are to help and supply the packet-boats in all that they require for their role is of the utmost importance and their timely departure must not be interrupted]⁴⁶. Despite these orders, the postmaster in Havana, Raimundo de Onís, informed the managers of the General Post Office in Madrid that ordinance for the packet-boats deployed in America could not be found, because ‘está todo destituido de medios y acaso quando haya los suficientes para la plaza y cuerpo de Marina se niegan a proporcionarlos para otro destino’ [there is none to be found anywhere, and when it becomes available to the navy units, they refuse to let it go]⁴⁷, also reporting that competent crews were in short supply.

5. Interdiction as a war strategy

The threat posed by other European powers, of which the postal officials were well aware, led for alternative ways to send the post, either from La Coruña or Cádiz, to be sought. Often, letters bear the expressions

43 AGI, *Correos*, 358 A.

44 AGI, *Correos*, 71 A.

45 AGI, *Correos*, 378 B.

46 AGI, *Correos*, 70 A.

47 AGI, *Correos*, 358 A.

‘duplicate’, ‘triplicate’ or ‘quadruplicate’, and postmaster of Cartagena de Indias, Antonio Calderón, says that ‘duplico todas las cartas que en ella escribía a vuestras señorías a efecto de que no se atrasen las noticias’ [I duplicate all letters I send to your honours, so that news are not delayed]⁴⁸.

Similarly, instructions were issued establishing that ‘los frecuentes correos, y avisos que se despachan a aquellos dominios con la precisión de duplicar en tiempo de paz, y de quaduplicar en el de guerra todas las providencias que se dirigen a ellos’ [the letters and news that are dispatched to those dominions are to be sent in duplicate in time of peace and in quadruplicate in time of war]⁴⁹.

This became the norm as early as the sixteenth century, when the *Ordenanzas del Consejo de Indias* published in 1571 commanded that

De todas las provisiones, cédulas, cartas y otros despachos nuestros, que de officio se libraren y despacharen en el Consejo de Indias y se uvieren de embiar a aquellas partes se embien duplicados en diversos navíos, encaminándolos por donde más convenga con buen recaudo⁵⁰.

[All orders, letters and other official dispatches issued by the Council of the Indies and to be sent overseas, are to be sent in duplicate and in different ships, using the safest possible route].

These orders were emphasised in time of conflict, for instance during the war with France, when it was ordered that ‘mientras durase, se dupliquen todas las correspondencias, por las contingencias que puedan ocurrir a los correos en sus viages’ [while the war lasts, all letters are to be sent in duplicate owing to the risk of the mail being lost during the voyages]⁵¹. This reveals that, as early as the sixteenth century, the authorities were awake to the importance of the mail reaching its destination by whatever means.

During war, European governments tried to intercept the enemy communications and thus discover their tactical and strategic planning⁵².

48 AGI, *Correos*, 69 A.

49 British Library (BL), *General Reference Collection*, 9770.k.3 (23).

50 *Recopilación de Leyes de los Reinos de Indias*. Libro III, título XVI, ley XXXVI, ‘Que todos los despachos para las Indias se envíen duplicados’ (Madrid, 1681).

51 AGI, *Correos*, 71 A.

52 Jay Caplan, *Postal Culture in Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016), 29. Intercepting enemy correspondence was, in any case, hardly a new practice, as this has played a central role in military strategy throughout

Capturing enemy letters was a constant in military practice and even in peace negotiations, and the information so acquired could play a central strategic role⁵³. Conversely, the governments implemented measures to ensure the safety and confidentiality of information, and to dodge the espionage and vigilance networks put in place by enemy powers⁵⁴, for instance the use of ciphers⁵⁵ or orders to throw the mail overboard when an enemy ship was sighted.

The instruction to throw the mail into the sea in case of enemy threat, common to all belligerents⁵⁶, existed in Spain even before the rules for the packet-boats were published, being included in the *Instrucción que deben observar los patrones-pilotos de los paquebotes destinados al correo mensual entre España y las Indias Occidentales*:

Si llegase el caso no esperado de ser apresado de enemigos el Paquebot, y no poder salvar la correspondencia en tierras de los Dominios del Rey, o de Potencia amiga, o neutral, deberá echar a la mar los caxones de cartas con las precauciones regulares para que vayan a fondo, y no las reconozca el enemigo⁵⁷.

[Should the unexpected occur, and the packet-boat to fear capture, if no possibility exist of delivering the mail safely to land in the King's dominions, those of his allies, or a neutral nation, the letter boxes are to be thrown overboard with enough ballast for them to go to the bottom, and thus avoid the enemy laying hands on them].

During war, the authorities in the Iberian Peninsula repeatedly issued this order to the postal administrators overseas, the captains and the crews, emphasising the importance of avoiding private and public letters to fall in enemy hands. Many reports exist of captains following this order: for instance, the packet-boat *Postillón* from Mexico left Havana for Spain on 2 June 1779, and was captured near Cape Finisterre by British corsairs, but the captain had time to throw the mail boxes that he was

history, for example, the interception of French letters by the Spanish during the Peninsular War. Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), *Estado*, 3181.

53 David González Cruz, *Propaganda e información en tiempos de guerra. España y América, 1700–1714* (Madrid: Sílex, 2009), 188–90.

54 González Cruz, *Propaganda e información en tiempos de guerra*, 197.

55 Some encrypted letters are found in AHN, *Estado*, 2991.

56 AGNC, Colonia, Correos, Cundinamarca, Tomo 3, doc. 20, 1779.

57 AGI, *Estado*, 86 A, n. 6.

carrying into the sea⁵⁸; and, the mail frigate *El Colón* set sail from La Coruña for America on 4 June 1779, and four days later ran into a British corsair frigate that carried more guns and crew; after the fight, the British frigate took the cargo, but not the mail, which the Spanish skipper had had thrown overboard during the fight⁵⁹.

It sometime happened that non-hostile ships were mistaken for the enemy, and by the time the error was realised it was already too late, as the mail had already been disposed of. This happened, for instance, to the frigate *El Rey*, which sent sixteen crates full of official and private letters to the bottom on 7 June 1780 during her return trip from Havana to La Coruña, after sighting a French frigate and a British sloop. They feared that the British ship may be a corsair, but then discovered that the sloop had been in fact captured by the French frigate⁶⁰. In other occasions, the instructions were not followed, for instance with the schooner *Guayreña*, which left Havana for La Coruña with seven crates of private letters⁶¹.

Therefore, the packet-boats that went on the transatlantic voyage not always had a good ending. For instance, the mail brig *Cuervo*, which left La Coruña for Havana on 7 February 1798, was shot entering Cumaná and one cannon ball ‘de cuias resultas falleció el capitán de la expedición que trahia el vergantín cuervo don Ygnasio Pérez, sufrió bastante el buque, y salieron heridos, y contusos otros individuos de la tripulación’ [killed the captain of the brig, Don Ygnasio Pérez; the ship suffered a fair amount of damage and some other members of the crew were injured]⁶².

Despite the instructions, many mail ships ended up in enemy hands. For instance, the mail brig *El Galgo* was captured on 1 June 1798, six days after leaving Trinidad for Cartagena de Indias, and was taken to Kinston, in Jamaica⁶³. This also happened with the ships running the *Carrera de Buenos Aires*, for instance with the brig *Magallanes*, sailing between La Coruña and Montevideo with the December and February

58 AGI, *Correos*, 378 A.

59 AGI, *Correos*, 358 A.

60 AGI, *Correos*, 379 B.

61 AGI, *Correos*, 71 A.

62 AGI, *Correos*, 264 A.

63 AGI, *Correos*, 264 A.

mail dispatches; the ship was taken on the night of 12–13 March 1797 by the British Navy frigate *Dover* after a 14-hour chase, giving the captain had time to throw the mail overboard. The captain himself, Jacinto de Vargas Machuca, described the events to the postal managers in Madrid in a report written in Hambledon; the captain reports that, after being captured, the British took him, his crew and his passengers to England, where he met the skippers of other captured Spanish mail ships, who were waiting to be liberated and return to Spain:

El 26 del mismo anclamos en Postmouth, el 28 y 29 nos llevaron a tierra a tomar las acostumbradas declaraciones, y el 29 mismo nos volvieron a bordo del Magallanes presos sin comunicación hasta el 4 del corriente que por haber venido orden de la corte para que el Magallanes pasase a Londres, nos enviaron a la prisión de Gosport donde nos dieron orden y pasaporte a un pasajero y a mi con mi hijo don Antonio para pasar a una villa distancia de allí 12 millas nombrada Hambledon baxo de palabra donde se hallaba el capitán D. Silvestre Zavala de la fragata correo la Princesa y su theniente d. Eugenio Loño, aunque ya no los hallamos aquí por haber pasado a Londres a tratar con D. Manuel de la Torre sobre el embarque de todos los prisioneros españoles que se hallan en Ynglaterra para remitir a España, cuya noticia nos fue de mucho consuelo, y así esperamos por instantes la orden para pasar a Postmouth a embarcarnos allí para España⁶⁴.

[On the 26th we anchored at Postmouth, and on the 28th and the 29th they took us to land for the usual interrogations. On the 29th they took us back as prisoners to the *Magallanes*, and were left without communication until the 4th of this month, when orders arrived for the *Magallanes* to be sent to London, whereby we were sent to the prison of Gosport, where I and my son Don Antonio were provided with safe-conducts to go to a town called Hambledon, which is 12 miles away. There I found Captain D. Silvestre Zavala, of the mail frigate *Princesa*, and his lieutenant d. Eugenio Loño, but they are here no longer, as they left for London to discuss with D. Manuel de la Torre about the embarkation of all the Spanish prisoners in England for Spain, which was a great consolation to us; we are waiting orders to go to Postmouth and thence sail to Spain].

In other occasions, the enemy could lay their hands on the mail being conveyed by packet-boats. The National Archives of Great Britain hold a number of letters captured from Spanish mail ships⁶⁵, demonstrating the

64 AGI, *Correos*, 385 A.

65 The National Archives (TNA), *High Court of Admiralty (HCA)*, 30/276.

great interest and strategic importance of the information being delivered by these packet-boats⁶⁶.

These archival holdings include letters captured to a variety of enemy powers, including France and Spain⁶⁷, showing again that this practice played a central role in British strategic thinking⁶⁸. In this regard, Great Britain clearly had the upper hand; the copious information intercepted allowed it to be readily informed about the enemy's intentions, helping it to achieve important military victories in the eighteenth century⁶⁹. In short, in the Atlantic, the interdiction of enemy communications was an everyday occurrence during wartime⁷⁰.

6. State and private communication networks

As a rule, wars interrupted state-run communication networks to some extent, so the governments resorted to other networks to remain informed⁷¹. In this, merchants played a crucial role, exchanging up-to-date

66 The letters intercepted are generally private documents concerned with trade. Xabier Lamikiz has analysed these records, focusing on the example posed by the Spanish merchant frigate *San Francisco Xavier*, also known as 'La Perla'. See Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society – Boydell Press, 2010).

67 TNA, *HCA*, 30/256; and TNA, *HCA*, 30/264.

68 This strategy was deployed by Great Britain in all the major wars of the period. For instance, we also have records for the capture of a Spanish ship by a British one during the War of Jenkins' Ear. TNA, *HCA*, 30/250.

69 Capturing enemy correspondence was not an exclusive feature of naval warfare. This is beautifully illustrated by a letter addressed to Ricardo Wall during the Seven Years' War in Europe: 'This week, when letters were impatiently awaited, we have received none. Those from Austria, France, Spain and all of those that go through Vienna have been intercepted by the Prussians, who have just invaded Upper Silesia again'. AHN, *Estado*, 4758, exp. 3.

70 González Cruz, 'La circulación de la información entre España y América en los períodos de guerra del siglo XVIII', 186.

71 An example of the complexity of communication systems in times of war is framed by the Yamasee War, during which dynamic communication networks were created by merchants and native Americans. See Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Informed Power: Communication in the Early American South* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 159–83.

news to serve their commercial interests and forming networks that, to a degree, made up for the shortcomings of the official mail and reduced its costs.

Often, the postal officials themselves used merchant ships to send their letters, especially during times of war in which official mail ships were in short supply. There were even official orders to bring this about, for instance by Pedro de Mendinueta, viceroy of New Granada, who on 19 June 1797 ordered that, because of the war, the postal officials were to use merchant ships if no official mail vessels were available:

Considerando quien las actuales circunstancias de guerra puede hacer mucha falta qualquiera de los guardacostas que está muy expuesto a extraviarse en la comicion de llevar la correspondencia a uno de los puertos del sur de la Ysla de Cuba, según lo dispuse por orden de diez y nueve de abril, he tenido por conveniente reformar esta proviencía, y en su consecuencia prevengo con esta fecha al administrador de correos que en adelante quando no haya buque de la renta, o de algún particular que haga viaje, flete alguna embarcación mercante que conduca la correspondencia ya lo aviso a vuestra señoría para su inteligencia⁷².

[Considering that in the current circumstances there is a great chance for the ships that carry the mail to the harbours in southern Cuba to be diverted to coast-guarding duties, I have decided to change my order of 19 April, and command the postal administrator, when no mail ship is available, to use a merchant ship to send said mail].

Some postal administrators, however, were reluctant to do so, for instance, the postal administrator in Havana, José Fuertes, who on 25 September 1798 stated that 'este suceso acredita lo poco que hay que fiar en los buques mercantes' [these events show that merchant ships are not to be trusted]⁷³.

The need that different agents had to exchange news multiplied communication networks that ran parallel to the official ones, especially in wartime. Postal administrators used all the means at their disposal to gather news and send them to the relevant authorities. For instance, the postmaster in Havana reported the capture of several Spanish ships by the English, as published in the London *Gazette* on 11 September 1798, which he translated personally⁷⁴.

72 AGI, *Correos*, 71 A.

73 AGI, *Correos*, 264 A.

74 AGI, *Correos*, 264 A.

These events upset the operation of the postal system, which was irreparably damaged thereafter. The final crisis was triggered by the war with Britain between 1797 and 1801, which resulted in the destruction of some of the postal infrastructures and most mail ships, leading to the incorporation of *Correos Marítimos* into the structure of the *Real Armada* in 1802.

On 6 April 1802, Manuel Godoy, who was General Manager of the Mail, signed (as 'Prince of Peace') the *Reglas, bajo las cuales, según ha determinado S.M. han de quedar reunidas a la Real Armada*. The assets and duties of the *Correos Marítimos* were assumed by the navy, which led to important changes in the management of the mail overseas; from that point onwards, the institution responsible for supplying and arming mail ships (from those serving in the *Real Armada*), and ensuring that the post was delivered to America was the Ministry of the Navy, instead of the Ministry of State.

The incorporation of the postal system to the *Real Armada* aimed to keep communication lines between Spain and its colonies open and to ensure that news were delivered promptly, using the ships supplied by the Ministry of the Navy.

7. Conclusions

The postal needs of European empires in the early modern age have led me to examine the complex organisation of postal services in time of war. Colonial empires needed communication to be fast, reliable and efficient to be able to control their possessions. A solid infrastructure was a necessary to gather news and information, gain a better understanding of overseas territories, send and enforce instructions, and keep commercial flows open, especially in wartime.

In time of war, even the official postal regulations opened the possibility of creating a multiplicity of regional postal systems which, although following the directives imposed from the top, were flexible enough to adapt to local conditions and establish highly autonomous postal nodes. In this context, a wide variety of actors used different strategies and practices to exchange information, leading to the rearticulation and the decentralisation of power spheres. The Atlantic, especially the Caribbean, became a hub of geopolitical and geoeconomics dynamics in which the European colonial empires overlapped.

Postal systems, both official and extraofficial, became a veritable agent of change, by reinforcing the political authority of States. In times of war, the postal system was threatened by a series of factors that seriously undermined their regularity and efficacy. In order to overcome this, different measures were implemented with the participation of multiple agents. As such, especially in times of crisis, the postal system formed a multi-layered structure in which numerous networks inter-crossed at the global, imperial, regional and local scales.

Section IV: Putting a spin on disasters

Alessandro Tuccillo

Divine intervention? The politics of interpreting disasters*

1. Catastrophes and their causes

In November and December 1908, the ground shook across southern Calabria and eastern Sicily. This was a prelude to the earthquake of 28 December, whose magnitude of 7,1 Mw (Moment Magnitude Scale) made it one of the most powerful ever experienced in Italy. It destroyed major cities such as Reggio Calabria and Messina, where damage was estimated at level X and XI on the Mercalli-Cancani-Sieberg scale (MCS). Responding to the catastrophe was a major challenge for the Kingdom of Italy, which was still consolidating its political processes and governance following the 1861 unification. A shared compassion for the victims helped to establish an Italian national identity¹. The earthquake also widened the Church/State rift that had emerged with the end of the temporal power of the papacy in 1870 and the secularisation of government and society by the Kingdom of Italy in the decades following its foundation. The Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* railed against freemasons, Protestants, public bodies and newspapers that exploited the tragedy to ‘make the

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1 See John Dickie, ‘Timing, Memory and Disaster: Patriotic Narratives in the Aftermath of the Messina-Reggio Calabria Earthquake, 28 December 1908’, *Modern Italy*, 11/2 (2006), 147–66; Id., *Una catastrofe patriottica. 1908: il terremoto di Messina* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2008). For a multidisciplinary analysis of this devastating earthquake, see Guido Bertolaso, Enzo Boschi, Emanuela Guidoboni, and Gianluca Valensise, eds, *Il terremoto e il maremoto del 28 dicembre 1908. Analisi sismologica, impatto, prospettive* (Rome – Bologna: INGV – SGA, 2008).

Italian people rebel against God'. In particular, this was an attack on the liberal anticlerical press and government bodies that had suppressed 'the sacred name of God in all of the many solemn acts organised by the secular authorities to address the earthquake'².

The polemics were rekindled by the Roman Count Orazio Mazzella, Archbishop of Rossano Calabro and assistant at the Pontifical Throne, in a punchy booklet entitled *La Provvidenza di Dio, l'efficacia della preghiera, la carità cattolica ed il terremoto del 28 di dicembre. Cenni apologetici* (1909). He compared the looting that took place after the earthquake to 'the past and present moral exploitation of the enormous tragedy by atheists and secularists looting faith and charity'. He saw excising God from the interpretation of the earthquake, denouncing acts of veneration as ineffective and the non-religious organisations competing with the clergy on providing aid to the populace as 'a much graver catastrophe than the one that struck Calabria and Sicily by the hand of God'³. He claimed that the press had prolonged the tragedy and spread it to areas beyond those that had been struck: 'the earthquake killed bodies, the disbelieving propaganda kills souls: the earthquake caused a massacre in a few seconds and then stopped, the propaganda potentially persists in memory and continues to function'⁴. The 'lack of faith' had painted the catastrophe as 'the outcome of a *primordial necessity of nature, of blind fate*', of a universe seen as '*chaos*'. It was essential to reaffirm that the laws of physics were '*determined by God's ordering mind, wise and good, and by his powerful hand*'⁵. The Archbishop's affirmation of faith encapsulated centuries of debate on the relationship between the existence of a God that ruled the universe and the suffering that environmental calamities could inflict on the innocent. Mazzella refuted the 'unbelievers' who were prepared to use logic to conclude that a 'blind and tyrannical God' was the only

2 'Sfruttamento settario della sventura', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 60/1408 (1909), 385–98. The English translations of these citations and of the others drawn from Italian or Spanish sources are mine.

3 Orazio Mazzella, *La Provvidenza di Dio, l'efficacia della preghiera, la carità cattolica ed il terremoto del 28 di dicembre. Cenni apologetici* (Rome: Desclée, 1909), 6–7.

4 *Ibidem*, 10.

5 *Ibidem*, 14. The italics are Mazzella's.

alternative to the inexistence of God. He argued that God had not shown any clear punitive intent in launching the Messina earthquake. It was therefore impossible to state with certainty that it was divine retribution, but this could not be excluded. God might have punished Messina for the atheist propaganda of anticlerical circles, but the earthquake might also have been unleashed for some 'more general' physical or moral benefit, or simply for 'a purpose of which we are unaware'. Ultimately, the innocent victims of the catastrophe were a 'harsh necessity' within God's 'wise plan for creation', which was, by definition, correct⁶.

La Civiltà Cattolica and Archbishop Mazzella's *Cenni apologetici* raise questions that go beyond the 1908 earthquake. Recent work in the historiography of disasters caused by natural events has examined a hypothesis that marked a radical change in how such events were interpreted from the eighteenth century onwards. It had long been accepted that the Enlightenment had undermined the providentialist view of environmental calamities as an expression of God's punitive power, postulating instead a paradigm based on reason and nature according to which the causes of earthquakes, eruptions, floods and tsunamis are not metaphysical, but are to be investigated using the tools of the natural sciences. In fact, research in the cultural history of catastrophes has evidenced the persistence to this day of symbolic, religious or irrational elements in how disasters caused by natural events are interpreted. It is clear that the question has not been resolved, with different interpretative paradigms continuing to coexist, overlap and clash⁷.

The issue is not about how disruptive the Enlightenment was in this field of knowledge. It is about the discrepancy between facts and intellectual development. The coexistence of different paradigms, and the conflict between them, emerged from an examination of how Catholic circles in Italy reacted at the start of the twentieth century when the naturalistic

6 *Ibidem*, 26–9.

7 See François Walter, *Catastrophes. Une histoire culturelle, XVI^e–XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Jens Ivo Engels, and Gerrit Jasper Schenk, eds, *Historical Disaster Research. Concepts, Methods and Case Studies, Historical Social Research*, 121 (2007); Andrea Janku, Gerrit Jasper Schenk, and Franz Mauelshagen, eds, *Historical Disasters in Context: Science, Religion, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2012).

interpretation of earthquakes was already firmly established. *La Civiltà Cattolica* and Mazzella framed their arguments as a clash with positivist secularism and the liberal Italian State. The situation appeared in many ways very different in ancien régime times, but even then there were conflicting interpretations. The dominance of providentialism did not stifle discussion of the causes of earthquakes, as there were plenty of critical voices attributing disasters to natural phenomena.

Debate on whether divine intervention causes earthquakes therefore serves as a valuable vantage point from which to examine the long-term dynamics of political, religious and social history. The 1908 earthquake deepened existing wounds. Similarly, the events examined in the case studies presented here reflected inflamed tensions. The earthquakes that struck the Kingdom of Naples towards the end of the seventeenth century, when southern Italy and Sicily were part of the Hispanic Monarchy, were a chapter in the ongoing struggle between the Church, new scientific paradigms and the Spanish authorities. The aftermath of any disaster provided an opportunity for the Church to intervene in order to reinforce and amplify its presence in society, on which its prerogatives were based. In the pursuit of these primarily political activities, the Church operated at various levels, from Apostolic Nuncios to Inquisition tribunals, from dioceses to parishes. The starting point for our investigation of these activities will be the correspondence of the Apostolic Nuncios and bishops with the Secretary of State of the Holy See.

2. Two late-seventeenth-century earthquakes

On 8 September 1694, a powerful earthquake struck inland areas of the Kingdom of Naples. A number of villages along the Apennine mountain range, in the old provinces of Principato Ultra and Basilicata, were completely destroyed and many others suffered serious damage. The city of Potenza was hit more severely than others, but the earthquake was also felt in Avellino, Salerno and Naples. The first accounts of the disaster are from the capital. On 10 September, the Apostolic Nuncio Lorenzo Casoni sent a batch of *avvisi* to Rome addressed to Cardinal Fabrizio Spada, Secretary of State to Pope Innocent XII. They emphasised the force of the tremors of two days earlier, at shortly before '18 ore' Italic time (around

11:40 GMT), which continued for ‘the length of a *Miserere*’ (Psalm 51). The tone was almost reassuring, as no fatalities had been confirmed, nor any major damage to churches or houses. Elsewhere, the situation appeared to be much more serious. The *avvisi* noted that ‘travellers’ had reported that the earthquake had spread out from Naples, causing enormous damage in more remote locations, explicitly mentioning ‘Puglia’, ‘Capitanata’, ‘Principato’ and ‘Calabria’⁸.

Casoni sent additional details later, but he was not the Secretary of State’s only source of information. Cardinal Giacomo Cantelmo, Archbishop of Naples, had written to him on the same day, 10 September, also noting that the fear sparked by the earthquake was mitigated by the fact that ‘for the moment the damage is estimated as not particularly noteworthy’⁹. Over the following days, however, the situation turned grimmer. As usual, when emergencies struck the Kingdom of Naples information from across the hinterland flowed into the capital and was the basis on which accounts were elaborated in secular and clerical official channels, and in broader channels¹⁰. The earthquake had initially seemed an event

8 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV), *Segreteria di Stato (SS)*, *Napoli*, 118, batch of *avvisi*, Casoni to Spada, Naples, 10 September 1694, cc. 163r–164v. Transcriptions of these and other letters from the correspondence of Secretary of State Spada are available on the website ‘Terremoto Irpinia-Basilicata 1694’, in Emanuela Guidoboni, Graziano Ferrari, Dante Mariotti, Alberto Comastri, Gabriele Tarabusi, Giulia Sgattoni, and Gianluca Valensise, eds, *Catalogo dei Forti Terremoti in Italia (461 a.C.–1997) e nell’area Mediterranea (760 a.C.–1500) – CFTI5Med* (Rome: The National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV), 2018), <https://storing.ingv.it/cfti/cfti5/quake.php?01166IT>. For technical details, sources and the literature on the ‘Terremoto Irpinia-Basilicata 1694’, and on all other Italian earthquakes, the *Catalogo dei Forti terremoti in Italia* is an invaluable albeit not exhaustive reference. The originals of all of the documents analysed here were consulted for this paper, but not all of them have been transcribed and referenced in the *Catalogo*.

9 AAV, SS, *Cardinali*, 59, Cantelmo to Spada, Naples 10 September 1694, ff. 232r–v.

10 The dynamics of this process with respect to the 1688 Sannio earthquake are addressed in Alessandro Tuccillo, ‘Troubling News Travels Fast: The Sannio Earthquake ripples through the Spanish Monarchy’, forthcoming in Brendan Dooley and Sandy Wilkinson, eds, *Exciting News! Event, Narration and Impact from Past to Present*. The politics of information have for some years been central issues in the historiography of the early modern period. See, for example,

of limited destructive force centred on the city of Naples, but, as the days passed, in September it became clear that it was mainly other areas that had been affected. Indeed, recent studies have estimated its intensity in Naples at level VII on the MCS scale, but its actual destructive force was greater in other areas, reaching level VIII in Potenza and level X in villages closer to the epicentre such as Cairano, Calitri or Pescopagano¹¹.

The catastrophe generated widespread awe, which created a potential readership eager to buy publications that went into greater or lesser detail: *vere relazioni*, poems and accounts, sometimes just a few pages long, about earthquakes, floods, eruptions and so on. These works found a natural home in seventeenth-century Naples. Writers, poets and naturalists could wield their pens whenever the frequent environmental disasters struck. The most dramatic was the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1631. There were also epidemics such as the plague of 1656, socio-political events seen as catastrophic such as the Masaniello revolution, and the more general upheavals of 1647–1648¹². Periodicals were then

Brendan Dooley, and Sabrina A. Baron, eds, *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London – New York: Routledge, 2001); Brendan Dooley, ed., *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014); Massimo Rospocher, ‘Per una storia della comunicazione nella prima età moderna. Un bilancio storiografico’, *Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, 44 (2018), 37–62.

- 11 Estimates of the levels reached on the MCS scale in the different areas affected are available on the ‘Terremoto Irpinia-Basilicata 1694’ page in the *Catalogo dei forti terremoti in Italia*.
- 12 See Giancarlo Alfano, Marcello Barbato, and Andrea Mazzucchi, eds, *Tre catastrofi. Eruzioni, rivolta e peste nella poesia del Seicento napoletano* (Naples: Cronopio, 2000); Giancarlo Alfano, ‘La città delle catastrofi’, in Sergio Luzzatto, and Gabriele Pedullà, eds, *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, vol. II, Erminia Irace, ed., *Dalla Controriforma alla Restaurazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 527–33; Id., *The Portrait of Catastrophe: The Image of the City in Seventeenth-century Neapolitan Culture*, in Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples. Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018), 147–56. For a linguistic analysis of texts on disasters in the Kingdom of Naples over a longer period of time, see Chiara De Caprio, ‘Narrating Disasters: Writers and Texts Between Historical Experience and Narrative

beginning to emerge across Europe, and the news they provided was based on these publications, as well as on printed or manuscript *avvisi*. Although the narrative style and rhetorical devices they used did not always match their intended readership, it is worth noting that periodicals were emerging just as processes of overlap, contamination and specialisation were being elaborated, processes that led to the definition of the literary, scientific and political periodical¹³.

The providentialist account was the undisputed basis on which disasters were handled by religious and political authorities, and by society as a whole. Chronicles and even more so literary works that described the awe produced by disasters reflected the widespread conviction of governing bodies and those they governed that preventing such natural dangers required penitence, and religious and moral regeneration. In the case of

Discourse', and Francesco Montuori, 'Voices of the "totale eccidio": On the Lexicon of Earthquakes in the Kingdom (1456–1784)', *ibidem*, 19–40, 41–72.

13 See, in this volume, Vincenzo Leonardi, 'The rhetoric of disasters between the pre-periodical and the periodical press: the Guadalmedina flood (1661) and the case of the *Gazeta Nueva*'. For a general overview of the issue, see Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione, secoli XVI e XVII* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2022, originally publ. 2002); Roger Chartier, and Carmen Espejo-Cala, eds, *La aparición del periodismo en Europa. Comunicación y propaganda en el Barroco* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2012); Mario Infelise, *Gazzetta. Storia di una parola* (Venice: Marsilio, 2017). On the relationship between oral communication, manuscripts and printed matter in the large-scale dissemination of news in Italy and Iberia, see Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Alberto Natale, *Gli specchi della paura. Il sensazionale e il prodigioso nella letteratura di consumo, secoli XVII-XVIII* (Rome: Carocci, 2008); Carmen Espejo-Cala, 'Gacetas y relaciones de sucesos en la segunda mitad del XVII: una comparativa europea', in Pedro Manuel Cátedra García, and María Eugenia Díaz Tena, eds, *Géneros editoriales y relaciones de sucesos en la Edad Moderna* (Salamanca: Semyr, 2013), 71–88; Pasquale Palmieri, 'Interactions between Orality, Manuscript and Print Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Recent Historiographical Trends', *Storia della Storiografia*, 73/1 (2018), 135–48; Fernando Bouza, 'Entre archivos, despachos y noticias: (d)escribir la información en la edad moderna', *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*, 44/1 (2019), 229–40; with reference to disasters in particular, Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

earthquakes that had already struck, the threat was that further tremors might occur or that the suffering of the people might increase. Managing catastrophes could therefore not ignore the need for processions, acts of devotion to the Madonna and the saints, confession, individual and collective penitence, as well as government measures designed to limit or suppress any practices or attitudes deemed to be heretical or likely to instigate divine indignation. Responses to disasters might therefore look similar across the different socio-political contexts that made up the Hispanic Monarchy¹⁴. This shared frame of reference did not, however, absolve the political and religious authorities of other responsibilities, as they clearly had to provide immediate material assistance to victims and undertake reconstruction work as swiftly as possible. Although catastrophes were framed as providential events, they also had to be addressed using the worldly tools at the disposal of the authorities, and taking appropriate public communication measures. Political and religious authorities paid particular attention to the publications on disasters over which they had some control¹⁵. Measures providing assistance and reconstruction works were therefore described as appropriate and appreciated by a populace that channelled its suffering into support for the activities of the State and the Church, with society portrayed as united in the face of adversity.

Controlling communication was critical in times of emergency. It was essential domestically, to consolidate acceptance and reduce the danger of

14 See Armando Alberola Romá, and Jorge Olcina Cantos, eds, *Desastre natural, vida cotidiana y religiosidad popular en la España moderna y contemporánea* (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante 2009); María Eugenia Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda, 'Religiosidad y rituales hispanos en América ante los desastres (siglos XVI–XVII): las procesiones', *Revista de Historia Moderna. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 35 (2017), 83–115.

15 See Françoise Lavocat, 'Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints', *Poetics Today*, 33 (2012), 253–99. For the case of Naples, see Domenico Cecere, 'Moralising Pamphlets: Calamities, Information and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Naples', in Cecere, De Caprio, Gianfrancesco, and Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples*, 129–45. See also Lonna Atkeson, and Cherie D. Maestas, *Catastrophic Politics. How Extraordinary Events Redefine Perceptions of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

a catastrophe provoking social disorder, and internationally, to demonstrate to foreign friends and foes the authorities' ability to handle crises. Handling emergencies caused by natural events was therefore a complex matter that was based on information from the areas affected, on expert opinion derived from earlier experience of similar situations, on the validation of existing risk reduction measures, and on the management of official communications. This complexity differs from the traditional representation of ancien régime societies, long considered ill-equipped to handle emergencies of this kind, and essentially paralysed by the fatalism of the interpretation of disasters as a manifestation of divine will. Recent research has revealed that the situation was in fact variable and nonuniform¹⁶. The Hispanic Monarchy stretched across a broad range of different climatic and environmental contexts¹⁷, and the response to disaster emergencies was not limited to tax exemption, charitable works and religious rites¹⁸.

16 Domenico Cecere, 'Dall'informazione alla gestione dell'emergenza. Una proposta per lo studio dei disastri ambientali in età moderna', *Storica*, 77 (2020), 9–40.

17 See Armando Alberola Romá, ed., *Clima, naturaleza y desastre. España e Hispanoamérica durante la Edad Moderna* (Valencia: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Valencia, 2013); Armando Alberola Romá, and Luis A. Arrijoa Díaz Viruell, eds, *Clima, desastres y convulsiones sociales en España e Hispanoamérica, siglos XVII–XX* (Alicante – Zamora: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2016); Armando Alberola Romá, ed., *Riesgo, desastre y miedo en la península Ibérica y México durante la Edad Moderna* (Alicante – Zamora: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante – El Colegio de Michoacán, 2017); Armando Alberola Romá, and Virginia García-Acosta, eds, *La Pequeña Edad del Hielo a ambos lados del Atlántico. Episodios climáticos extremos, terremotos, erupciones volcánicas y crisis* (Alicante: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2021).

18 See the case studies in Domenico Cecere, ed., 'Disastri naturali e informazione negli imperi di età moderna', *Studi storici*, 60/4 (2019), 773–874; Id., ed., 'Calamità ambientali e risposte politiche nella Monarchia ispanica (secc. XVII–XVIII)', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 63–206; Armando Alberola Romá, and Domenico Cecere, eds, *Rischio, catastrofe e gestione dell'emergenza nel Mediterraneo occidentale e in Ispanoamerica in età moderna. Omaggio a Jean-Philippe Luis* (Naples – Alicante: FedOA Federico II University Press – Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2022); Yasmina Rocío Ben Yessef Garfia, ed., 'Desastres en la América hispánica: circulación de saberes y noticias (siglos XVI–XVIII)', *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [Online], *Débats*, last accessed 31 January 2023, <https://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/86758>. See also Domenico Cecere, 'Estrategias de comunicación y de intervención frente

The authorities of the Kingdom of Naples went into action at various levels following the earthquake of 8 September 1694, from the *università* representing local communities to the *Regia Camera della Sommaria* (the central body in charge of public finances and an administrative court), the Viceroy and the *Consiglio Collaterale* (council with political and juridical powers that supported the work of the viceroy). The gathering of information followed standard practice, with the central authorities requesting and reviewing detailed accounts from the communities affected and using them to formulate rescue and reconstruction measures. This was a well-honed practice given the frequency of seismic activity in the Kingdom of Naples¹⁹.

The last earthquake that had struck Naples served as a special reference point for the 1694 disaster. Archbishop Cantelmo, in the letter to Secretary of State Spada cited above, described the earthquake as ‘felt very clearly’ but ‘not as great as that of 1688’²⁰. He reminded Spada of the Sannio earthquake of 5 June 1688, whose force has been estimated as at level VIII on the MCS scale, greater than the 1694 earthquake²¹. The *avvisi* transcribed by Apostolic Nuncio Casoni do not mention earlier events, but on 21 September he sent a printed document to Rome which contained a clear reference to 1688: the *Vera e distinta relatione dello spaventoso e funesto terremoto accaduto in Napoli e parte del suo Regno il giorno 8 settembre 1694*. This eight-page account had been put together in a matter of days by Domenico Antonio Parrino and Camillo Cavallo. It provided something of an official version of the disaster, painstakingly outlining many of the responses of the secular and clerical authorities to the emergency. This was characteristic of publications of this nature intended to be circulated widely. Moreover, Parrino was seen as trustworthy

a desastres en la Monarquía Hispánica bajo Carlos II’, *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 39 (2021), 1–36.

19 See Gaia Bruno, ‘Fronteggiare l’emergenza: le reazioni delle istituzioni del regno di Napoli di fronte ai sismi del XVII secolo’, *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 119–50.

20 AAV, SS, *Cardinali*, 59, Cantelmo to Spada, Naples 10 September 1694.

21 On the 1688 Sannio earthquake, see the relevant page of *Catalogo dei Forti Terremoti in Italia*. <http://storing.ingv.it/cfti/cfti5/quake.php?01108IT#>

by the viceregal authorities as he was the official printer of *avvisi* and *relazioni*²².

The *Vera e distinta relatione* described the earthquake of 8 September 1694 almost as an unexpected event. Indeed, the common view was that two other calamities that had struck just a few years earlier had ‘liberated the nation of the misfortune of such terrible punishment’. There were references to the ‘the most tragic earthquake that struck this City of Naples on 5 June 1688’ and the ‘recent extraordinary and astounding eruption of our neighbour Mount Vesuvius, which generated universal awe’, namely the eruption of April 1694²³. It is worth noting that the Mount Vesuvius eruption, like the earlier one of December 1689, was not noted as particularly destructive. Casoni’s correspondence contains *avvisi* that stress that people surveyed ‘such a spectacle fearlessly’ once the initial terror had passed. This feeling of safety was due to the measures introduced by Francisco de Benavides Dávila y Corella, Count of Santisteban, who was Viceroy of Naples from 1688 to 1696. He had ordered excavation work to divert the lava flow to the sea to avoid it reaching the surrounding farmland²⁴. Research work in disaster studies has demonstrated that whether a natural event takes on the air of a disaster depends on the material and social impact it has on the community affected²⁵. In this case, the danger turned into a ‘spectacle’, and the Viceroy’s measures meant that the trauma was overcome. In contrast, the 1688 earthquake had huge social impact that served as a baseline for the traumatic situation of September 1694. It

22 See Anna Maria Rao, ‘Mercato e privilegi: la stampa periodica’, in Ead., ed., *Editoria e cultura a Napoli nel XVIII secolo* (Naples: Liguori 1998), 173–99. See also Giovanni Lombardi, ‘L’attività carto-libreria a Napoli tra fine ’600 e primo ’700’, *ibidem*, 75–96 and Annastella Carrino, ‘Parrino Domenico Antonio’, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2014), vol. 81, *ad vocem*.

23 *Vera e distinta relatione dello spaventoso e funesto terremoto accaduto in Napoli e parte del suo Regno il giorno 8 settembre 1694* (Naples: Domenico Antonio Parrino, Camillo Cavallo, 1694), (*Vera e distinta relatione 1694* henceforth).

24 AAV, SS, *Napoli*, 117, batch of *avvisi*, Casoni to Spada, Naples, 20 April 1694, ff. 301v–2r.

25 See Ronald W. Perry, and Enrico L. Quarantelli, eds, *What Is a Disaster? New Answers to Old Questions* (Bloomington: International Research Committee on Disasters, 2005); Walter, *Catastrophes*.

was ‘divine goodness’ that turned ‘a similar misfortune’ into an event that was ‘much less destructive’. Only divine intervention, deemed to be the cause of the earthquake, could attenuate its force, thus confuting ‘human beliefs’ and the blindness of ‘its philosophies’ that held any repetition of the event as improbable²⁶. Parrino’s *relazione* on the 1688 earthquake went into greater depth on theological and moral issue than that of 1694. The vibrant description of the ‘catastrophe’ that threatened the city with ‘final extermination’ in his *Vera e distinta relatione dell’horribile, e spaventoso terremoto accaduto in Napoli, & in più parti del Regno il giorno 5 giugno 1688* saw the ‘secrets of divine judgement’ as unfathomable by ‘human intellect’, and blamed mankind for the ‘tragedy representing divine justice served on this Kingdom’²⁷.

Seeing the tragedy as a manifestation of divine ire was, as one might expect, the interpretative framework offered in the two official *relazioni*. Nevertheless, these documents reveal a striking line of argumentation. Even in ancien régime societies, the naturalistic interpretation of the earthquake and of any environmental calamity was a threat to those who wielded power, and in particular to Church authorities. The socio-political situation in late seventeenth-century Naples provides food for thought in the investigation of this conflict, whose relevance is not limited to eighteenth-century societies. Divine ire in the form of an earthquake could be used as a powerful tool to exert political and diplomatic pressure in the defence of the prerogatives of the Church against the power of the secular authorities of Madrid and Naples. It could also be used to denounce and deter the spread of new scientific ideas that undermined religious orthodoxy and authority.

3. A dispute in verse

Before going into the details of the Church’s tactics, it is worth considering what was at stake in the dispute over the cause of the earthquake. The words of an early seventeenth-century poet from Friuli are particularly

²⁶ *Vera e distinta relatione 1694*.

²⁷ *Vera e distinta relatione dell’horribile e spaventoso terremoto accaduto in Napoli & in più parti del Regno il giorno 5 giugno 1688* (Naples: Domenico Antonio Parrino, 1688).

useful here: *Ciro di Pers*. His name refers to the village of Pers, near Udine, where he was born in 1599. He died in 1663, and his poetry has principally been handed down in posthumous collections, starting with the *Poesie* published in Florence and Vicenza in 1666. He was long considered a minor poet until his work attracted the increasing interest of scholars of Italian Baroque poetry in the twentieth century²⁸. A decisive moment in the rediscovery of his work was the publication in 1978 of the only modern edition of his verses available in print, edited by Michele Rak²⁹. Two of his sonnets are about the earthquake: *Con moto spaventoso ecco tremanti* and *Deh, qual possente man con forze ignote*, poems 97 and 98 in Rak's publication. The disaster adds significant dramatic tension to the negativity and anguish that characterises his work, a tension that merges into religious tension. In sonnet 97, the *moto spaventoso* [fearsome motion] is portrayed as a compassionate manifestation of divine will. As thunder and lightning had failed to rouse the *umana mente* [human mind], the ground was shaken by *pietoso Dio* [merciful God] to rebuke mankind for its *gravi colpe* [grave faults]³⁰. Sonnet 98 reaffirms the traditional providentialist interpretation of the earthquake, rejecting any naturalistic explanation. For *Ciro di Pers*, the *man possente* [powerful hand] that made the ground shake was not driven by *forze ignote* [unknown forces] but by the will of God. The earth shook under the burden of the weight of sinners, swallowing up their bodies to fill its empty bowels³¹. In both sonnets, the earthquake served to chastise sinners more effectively than divine manifestations hurled down from the heavens: *tuono* [thunder],

28 Benedetto Croce included a selection of poems by *Ciro di Pers* in the anthology *Lirici marinisti* (Bari: Laterza, 1910), 363–406.

29 *Ciro di Pers, Poesie*, Michele Rak, ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1978). Apart from the introduction in the Rak edition of the *Poesie*, a brief biography of *Ciro di Pers* and notes on his poetry can be found in Lorenzo Carpanè, 'Pers, *Ciro di*', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2015), vol. 82, *ad vocem*, which provides updated information on available sources and on the literature.

30 'Ah, ch'! pietoso Dio, già che non puote / svegliarsi al suon del ciel l'umana mente, / perché più non dormiamo ecco ne scuote', *Ciro di Pers, Poesie*, sonnet 97 'Terremoto', 99.

31 'Certo la terra si risente e scuote / perché del peccator l'aggrava il piede / e i nostri corpi impaziente chiede', *ibidem*, sonnet 98 'Terremoto', 100.

fulmine [lightning], *baleno* [thunderbolts]³². In the closing tercet of sonnet 98, *Ciro di Pers* emphasises that God made the ground shake so that his voice would be heard by *uomo ch'esser vuol tutto terreno* [mankind that wants to be solely of the earth], thus addressing modern philosophy's investigation of nature – and of human nature itself – and excluding divine will and divine intervention. When the earthquake struck a mankind that was *tutto terreno* [solely of the earth] and failed to heed the *cielo* [heavens], people could at least be encouraged by the *parlar della terra* [speaking of the earth]³³. The closing tercet thus harks back to the opening quatrain, which challenges the theories that identify the cause of earthquakes as mere processes of nature, in particular as steam trapped underground (*chiuso vapor*) as proposed by Aristotle³⁴. Poetry thus echoed old debates that were still raging in the first decades of the seventeenth century.

The notion that earthquakes were caused by divine forces was widespread well beyond the Judeo-Christian world. With respect to the metaphysical beliefs of other peoples of the ancient Near East, the peculiarity of the Old Testament was the interpretation of earthquakes as a manifestation of Yahweh, one of the ways in which the chosen people of Israel were shown God's ire or simply his presence. It was also normal for earthquakes to be associated with divine ire or punishment in Graeco-Roman societies. Ancient Rome saw earthquakes as disruption of the equilibrium between the natural world of man and the supernatural world of the gods. The violent shaking of the ground was an omen that sinning needed to be expiated in rites and festivities in honour of Tellus and other divinities. Poseidon, who was already recognised as a god in Mycenaean times, was noted in Homer as the lord of the sea and the shaker of the earth. Even when he mutated into Neptune in Roman times, he was linked to environmental calamities at sea and on dry land for centuries. Images of the god

32 'È il linguaggio del ciel che ne riprende / il turbo il tuono il fulmine il baleno, or parla anco la terra in note orrende: *ibidem*.

33 'Perché l'uom, ch'esse vuol tutto terreno / né del cielo il parlar straniero intende, / il parlar della terra intenda al meno', *ibidem*.

34 'Non è chiuso vapor, come altri crede', *ibidem*.

breaking up the ground with his trident to trigger an earthquake was also a common topos in Christian times³⁵.

Ciro di Pers entered the fray of the long-standing debate using this topos to reject the notion that the earthquake was caused by the *sognato tridente* [imaginary trident] striking the ground³⁶. The metaphysical explanation of earthquakes and other disasters, like tsunamis when it came to Poseidon, had also come in for criticism in ancient times. Aristotle's *Meteorologica* set the scene for the naturalist interpretation. It held that the sun heating the earth produced *soffio vitale* [breath of life], the pneuma that generates winds. Its accumulation underground eventually reached a level of saturation that made the ground shake. This naturalist explanation of the cause of earthquakes created an unavoidable problem for Christianity, which wavered between rejection and acceptance. This clash with classical culture made the apologists of primitive Christianity see any naturalist theory that went against the providentialist paradigm of the Bible as heretical. It was Thomas Aquinas who elaborated a compromise, framing Aristotle's theory of winds within orthodox Christianity by affirming that the 'breath of life' had a divine origin, with material forces deriving from this first cause, i.e. God. This interpretation of earthquakes and other disasters caused by natural events dominated the early modern period. The providentialist paradigm thus welcomed the Aristotelian phenomenology of earthquakes, but without ceasing to see natural disasters as the *flagellum dei* inflicted on mankind to punish their sinning and to warn of the consequences of earthly perdition. However, environmental calamities could also be the work of the Devil, or a tool in the hands of God to produce beneficial effects beyond the immediate catastrophic impacts. The destruction of a city and the suffering of its residents could produce benefits such as, for example, the creation of mountains after an earthquake or the increased fertility of farmland following a volcanic eruption.

35 See Emanuela Guidoboni, and Jean-Paul Poirier, *Quand la terre tremblait* (Paris: Jacob, 2004) and the more recent enlarged version in Italian *Storia culturale del terremoto dal mondo antico a oggi* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2019), 41–57.

36 'Né sognato tridente il suol percuote', *Ciro di Pers, Poesie*, sonnet 98, 'Terremoto', 100.

More generally, catastrophes retained the primordial aura of an unfathomable phenomenon that transcended the limits of human reason, and could therefore only be understood by God³⁷. The divine origin of earthquakes was a concept that remained set in stone. Indeed, the question was still the subject of fiery debate following the 1908 Messina earthquake.

In his two sonnets on the earthquake, *Ciro di Pers* adopted a widely held conservative position. Although modern scientific philosophy was certainly not alien to Christianity in the seventeenth century, it was eating away at the traditional view of the Creator's cosmos at various levels. The compromise proposed by Thomas Aquinas might even seem rather feeble in the face of these implicit and explicit attacks. The sonnets expressed a radical view consonant with the line promoted by the Church that not only attributed the unleashing of the punishment to God but also placed little trust in the Aristotelian phenomenology of earthquakes, denying that the cause could be trapped steam. The Kingdom of Naples produced a vast amount of poetry supporting the providentialist interpretation of earthquakes and other disasters, whether natural or political³⁸. The decision to focus on the works of *Ciro di Pers*, who had no significant links with southern Italy, may therefore seem incongruous. Yet it was his verses that were brought into play in the *Vera e distinta relatione* on the 1694 earthquake. There was no explicit reference to *Ciro di Pers*, but its closing lines included a veiled allusion to wise and elegant poetry, followed by a transcription of sonnet 98, *Deh, qual possente man con forze*³⁹.

37 See Guidoboni, and Poirier, *Storia culturale del terremoto*, and Christian Rohr, 'Writing a Catastrophe: Describing and Constructing Disaster Perception in Narrative Sources from the Late Middle Ages', *Historical Social Research*, 32, 3 (2007), 88–102; Gerrit Jasper Schenk, *Dis-astri. Modelli interpretativi delle calamità naturali dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, in Michael Matheus, Gabriella Piccinni, Giuliano Pinto, and Gian Maria Varanini, eds, *Le calamità ambientali nel tardo Medioevo europeo. Realtà, percezioni, reazioni* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2010), 23–75.

38 See Antonio Perrone, *Poesie d'amore e d'altri disastri. Antologia di liriche del Meridione barocco* (Rome: Carocci, 2021); Carolina Borrelli, and Antonio Perrone, eds, *Scelta di poesie nell'incendio del Vesuvio di Urbano Giorgi* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2021); Antonio Perrone, *Il palinsesto della catastrofe. La metafora tra lirica e scienza nel Barocco meridionale* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2023).

39 *Vera e distinta relatione 1694*.

Naples was familiar with the poetry of *Ciro di Pers*. Seventeenth-century editions of his work include one published in Naples in 1669 by Giovanni Francesco Paci, which contains sonnets 97 and 98⁴⁰. It therefore comes as no surprise that his defence of the providentialist paradigm was used as a seal of approval for Parrino's interpretation. His *relazione* notes that when tremors occurred 'a fresh wind could be felt'. This was to counter the 'opinion of many philosophers' who asserted that earthquakes were produced by warm winds 'concentrated in the bowels of the Earth', adding that a theory of this kind 'like a hundred other philosophical causes must be seen as a fantasy, a fairy tale'. The only cause of 'these and other punishments' was 'the omnipotence of He who governs everything', who acted 'either to castigate, or to call on blasphemers to mend their ways'⁴¹.

Sonnet 98 had thus become a poetic channel for the defence of the traditional view against positions that questioned the divine nature of the cause of earthquakes, positions that were seen as a threat to political and religious order.

4. Earthquakes in the defence of the Church's prerogatives

The claim that postulating natural causes for earthquakes might jeopardise social order may today seem somewhat generic, but this was not the case in Naples in 1694. Some three years earlier, the Inquisition had reopened its proceedings against a group of people accused of atomism, a philosophical doctrine seen as a prelude to atheism.

On 21 March 1688, Giuseppe Nicola Giberti, Bishop of Teano and the Inquisition's minister delegate for the Kingdom of Naples, received a document accusing a group of jurists, scientists and men of letters of heresy for being supporters of the 'atomistic philosophy'. The accusation was made by one who frequented these circles. The accusations referred to concepts derived from the works of classical thinkers such as Lucretius

40 *Poesie del cavaliere fra Ciro di Pers dedicate all' Illustriss. & Eccellentiss. Signora D. Leonora Loffredo principessa di Valle* (Naples: Giovanni Francesco Paci – Cosimo Fioravanti, 1669). On the publications and manuscripts of the poetry of *Ciro di Pers*, see Lorenzo Carpanè, *La tradizione manoscritta e a stampa delle poesie di Ciro di Pers* (Milan: Guerini 1997).

41 *Vera e distinta relatione 1694*.

and modern philosophers such as Bacon, Descartes, Galileo and Gassendi. The winds of change had been gusting through Naples for a number of decades, gradually replacing the rigidity of Thomism with *libertas philosophandi* [freedom of thought]. Its main promoters were the *ceto civile*, members of the legal profession to whom the viceregal authorities had assigned governance responsibilities in order to dilute the power of the feudal nobility. The atomists, known as *novatores*, congregated to propound their ideas in academies such as the *Accademia degli Investiganti*, founded in 1663 on the model of the English Royal Society. Studying the corpuscles on which life is based, thus eroding the concept of the divine as the first cause, also undermined the temporal power of the Church. The accusations received by Giberti led to an inquisition trial that lasted some ten years, concluding with relatively moderate consequences for those accused. This trial of atheists is well known in historiography⁴², which has

42 See the reference works by Luciano Osbat, *L'Inquisizione a Napoli. Il processo agli ateisti. 1688–1697* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1974); and Giuseppe Galasso, *Napoli spagnola dopo Masaniello. Politica, cultura, società* (Florence: Sansoni, 1982), 443–73. See also the recent paper by Vittoria Fiorelli, ‘“Experiences Are Not Successful Accompaniments to Knowledge of the Truth”. The Trial of the Atheists in Late Seventeenth-Century Naples’, in Andreea Badea, Bruno Boute, Marco Cavarzere, and Steven Broecke, eds, *Making Truth in Early Modern Catholicism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021) 263–78. On religious life in Naples, see the classic volume by Romeo De Maio, *Società e vita religiosa a Napoli nell’età moderna (1656–1799)* (Naples: Esi, 1971). On the intellectual circles of Naples and the repercussions of the trial, see Vittor Ivo Comparato, *Giuseppe Valletta. Un intellettuale napoletano della fine del Seicento* (Naples: Istituto italiano per gli Studi storici, 1970); Biagio De Giovanni, ‘La vita intellettuale a Napoli tra la metà del ‘600 e la restaurazione del Regno’, in *Storia di Napoli* (Naples: Società editrice ‘Storia di Napoli’, 1970), VI, 403–534; Vincenzo Ferrone, *Scienza natura religione. Mondo newtoniano e cultura italiana nel primo Settecento* (Naples: Jovene, 1982); Anna Maria Rao, ‘Fra amministrazione e politica. Gli ambienti intellettuali napoletani’, in Jean Boutier, Brigitte Marin, and Antonella Romano, eds, *Naples, Rome, Florence. Une histoire comparée des milieux intellectuels italiens (XVII–XVIIIe siècles)* (Rome: Publications de l’École française de Rome, 2005), 35–88. For the period under Viceroy Santisteban, see also Paola Setaro, ‘Una città in fermento. Gli intellettuali napoletani e il ruolo del viceré Francisco de Benavides, IX conte di Santisteban (1688–1696)’, *Pedralbes*, 41 (2021), 255–98, and in particular the appendix containing transcriptions of noteworthy documents.

examined this complex state of affairs by analysing the disputes that cut across sectors like the Church, the Spanish authorities, the aristocracy, viceregal powers and the new ruling classes. Without going into the details of the trials that followed the 1688 and 1694 earthquakes here, the information that is available makes it clear that the Church saw them as part of the social and political dispute with the Naples intelligentsia, the viceregal government and, more generally, the Hispanic Monarchy. The correspondence between the Holy See's Secretary of State, the Apostolic Nuncios and the Bishop of Naples is therefore a crucial source for the examination of the dispute.

Just as Giberti appeared to be on the point of acting on the instructions of the Roman curia, the imminent arrest of those accused of heresy was stymied by the earthquake of 5 June 1688. In fact, the emergency was not the only reason why the trial was postponed. Giberti appeared wary of applying the repressive measures ordered by Rome. He was, quite correctly, fearful of how the city, its Viceroy and its ministers might react. Suspending the trial allowed the accused to prepare their defence, and members of the legal profession as well as government bodies at all levels were able to take note of a matter that might have involved key figures. The stakes would have been very different if, for example, a powerful judge such as Francesco D'Andrea had been put on trial.

The Church's post-earthquake political activities thus took a different route from the atheism trial, both in terms of diplomatic manoeuvring and of assistance to the earthquake's victims. The Apostolic Nuncio Giovanni Muti Papazzurri, Casoni's predecessor from 1682 to 1690, played a significant role. Firstly, he provided support and assistance to Archbishop Antonio Pignatelli, who became Pope Innocent XII in 1691, to show the Church's commitment to the suffering of the populace. Secondly, he exerted relentless diplomatic pressure on the viceregal authorities to safeguard the prerogatives of the Church. As early as 26 June 1688, Cardinal Alderano Cybo, Spada's predecessor as Secretary of State from 1676 to 1689, advised Muti that Pope Innocent XI had allocated the considerable sum of 50,000 ducats to the victims of the earthquake⁴³. The Apostolic

43 AAV, *Segreteria di Stato, Napoli*, 340, Cybo to Muti, Rome, 26 June 1688, ff. 125r-v.

Nuncio delivered the funds to Archbishop Pignatelli, who was charged with distributing them to the victims on the basis of reports describing the damage sustained by each community. The political import of this allocation of resources and their distribution is clear. The Church was publicly assuming the role of providing material assistance alongside that of the Viceroy. Muti, along with Cardinal Marcello Durazzo, Apostolic Nuncio to Madrid, was prominent in the curious motion that led to the suspension and subsequent abolition of the *Beneficiata* game, a precursor to the lottery that was seen as a significant factor in the unleashing of divine ire in the form of an earthquake⁴⁴.

The providentialist interpretation was therefore a powerful tool with which the Church could exert political pressure to increase its influence in Naples. However, the Naples and Madrid Nuncios failed to benefit in any other way from the 1688 earthquake, despite the forceful insinuation that it was linked to other catastrophes that had afflicted the Hispanic Monarchy shortly earlier, like the Catalonia revolt, corsair raids in the Caribbean, the Barbary threat in the Mediterranean and the Lima earthquake. Rome saw the divine ire as the consequence of the harm done to the Church's prerogatives. The deepest resentment was about the work of the Inquisition and the royal prerogative to appoint bishops and other senior clergy. To placate this divine ire, and as a form of compensation, the Church asked Charles II to abolish the *Tribunale di Regia Monarchia* in the Kingdom of Sicily⁴⁵, which wielded an ancient right of jurisdiction conceded by the Pope to the King of Sicily. This court was particularly disliked, as it could re-examine trials initially held by Church courts and suspend or annul their sentences and excommunications. Despite the strong links between the Church and the Spanish Habsburg dynasty, and the abundant presence of clerics in the governing bodies of the state, the specific circumstances in Sicily created permanent strife over jurisdiction⁴⁶,

44 See Alessandro Tuccillo, 'Abolire il gioco per placare l'ira divina. La diplomazia pontificia e il terremoto del 1688 a Napoli', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 51 (2021), 181–206.

45 AAV, SS, *Spagna*, 357, Cybo to Durazzo, Rome, 13 June 1688, ff. 343v–4v and Rome, 5 September 1688, ff. 382v–3v.

46 See Maria Teresa Napoli, *La Regia Monarchia di Sicilia. "Ponere falcem in alienam messem"* (Naples: Jovene, 2012); Fabrizio D'Avenia, *La Chiesa del re.*

and was a significant issue in the long history of convergence and conflict between the Holy See and the Hispanic Monarchy⁴⁷. The Sannio earthquake had shifted the balance of power in favour of the Holy See but did not affect this issue. Charles II's ministers limited themselves to generic commitments to respect the Church and the clergy⁴⁸. The *Tribunale di Regia Monarchia* continued to operate in Sicily for a long time despite the negotiating strength that the providentialist paradigm gave the Apostolic Nuncios.

Disputes over the prerogatives of the Church in the Kingdom of Naples and in the Hispanic Monarchy as a whole were not limited to the aftermath of the 1688 earthquake. In 1690, Giuseppe Nicola Giberti was replaced as the Inquisition's minister delegate by Giovan Battista Giberti, Bishop of Cava de' Tirreni. The trial of the atheists resumed about a year later. Several people were arrested, the Inquisition's prisons were reopened and teams of agents were formed to gather information covertly. This led to a forceful response by the some of the governing bodies of Naples – the six *Piazze* – who came together to request the Viceroy to transfer the prisoners from the prisons of the Inquisition to those of the diocese, and to banish Giberti from the Kingdom. The complaint targeted the structure of the Inquisition in the Kingdom of Naples, which consisted of bishops and archbishops coordinated by the minister delegate appointed by the Pope. This was a compromise that differed from the situation in other Italian states, where the tribunal was established as a formal body. The tribunal had become entrenched in Naples over the second half of the sixteenth century after the city's ruling bodies had, in 1510 and 1547, vehemently opposed the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition. The

Monarchia e papato nella Sicilia spagnola, secc. XVI–XVII (Rome: Carocci, 2015); Daniele Palermo, 'Nel gioco delle giurisdizioni: il Tribunale della Regia Monarchia di Sicilia nel XVII secolo', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 50 (2020), 697–716. On the role of clerics in the institutions of Spanish Italy, see Elisa Novi Chavarría, ed., 'Ecclesiastici al servizio del Re tra Italia e Spagna (secc. XVI–XVII)', *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, 2 (2015).

47 See Maria Antonietta Visceglia, 'Convergencias y conflictos. La Monarquía católica y la Santa sede (siglos XVI–XVIII)', *Studia historica. Historia moderna*, 26 (2004), 155–90.

48 AAV, SS, *Spagna*, 167, Durazzo to Cybo, Madrid, 19 August 1688, ff. 532r–3r.

minister delegate and the bishops reported directly to the Roman curia on Inquisition matters, which led to frequent conflicts over responsibilities with respect to secular and normal ecclesiastic courts. The Inquisition was a secretive institution. Prosecutors were anonymous, the accused were not made aware of the accusations against them and were imprisoned without being able to prepare a defence. They were also often tortured into providing false confessions. Procedures of this kind were not unknown under the ancien régime, but the Inquisition's interference in the civil, religious and political affairs of the Kingdom of Naples created a permanent state of tension between State and Church which was only partially resolved over the course of the eighteenth century when Charles of Bourbon tried to proscribe the institution⁴⁹.

The requests made by the Naples *Piazze* to banish Giberti and to have religious trials heard by diocesan courts, thereby giving the accused greater rights, not only enjoyed popular support but also felt like a direct attack on the Church. Viceroy Santisteban acceded to these requests without waiting for a response from Madrid, despite the protestations of Archbishop Cantelmo, pressure from the Nuncios and the threat of a papal interdict being laid on the city by Innocent XII. With Giberti banished, Rome assigned the coordination of Inquisition activities to Archbishop Cantelmo. Although this looked like a victory for the *Piazze*, the Archbishop zealously proceeded with the trial of the atheists, including the use of harsh interrogations and public abjuration, and imposing the first prison sentences. Moreover, in conjunction with pressure from the Apostolic Nuncio Casoni, he urged Santisteban to suppress the spread of the 'doctrine of the atoms' and in particular to re-establish the authority of the Inquisition and its minister delegate.

49 On the Inquisition in the Kingdom of Naples, see Luigi Amabile, *Il Santo Ufficio dell'Inquisizione in Napoli. Narrazione con molti documenti inediti* (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1892), 2 vols.; Giovanni Romeo, 'Una città, due inquisizioni. L'anomalia del Sant'Ufficio a Napoli nel tardo '500', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 24 (1988), 42–67; Elisa Novi Chavarria, 'Procedure inquisitoriali e potere politico a Napoli (1550–1640)', in *I primi Lincei e il Sant'Ufficio: questioni di scienza e di fede* (Rome: Bardi, 2005), 31–46; Pasquale Palmieri, 'Il lento tramonto del Sant'Ufficio. La giustizia ecclesiastica nel Regno di Napoli durante il secolo XVIII', *Rivista storica italiana*, 123 (2011), 26–60.

It was against the backdrop of this bitter political and jurisdictional conflict that the earthquake of 8 September 1694 struck. Once again, the providentialist paradigm provided the Church with a forceful argument to demand the preservation of its prerogatives in the Kingdom of Naples. The widespread view that divine intervention had triggered the earthquake made it easy to insinuate that the causes could be found in the spread of modern philosophical notions and the unprecedented opposition to the Inquisition. Archbishop Cantelmo raised these matters with Viceroy Santisteban on 20 September. Cantelmo himself reports this in an important letter sent to Secretary of State Spada to notify him that the annual miracle of the liquefaction of San Gennaro's blood had taken place⁵⁰, adding with some satisfaction that the Viceroy shared his aversion to the 'doctrine of the atoms', and that he was therefore considering closing the 'the private schools where this pernicious seed is being cultivated'. The harmony was shattered, however, when the Archbishop suggested that the spread of atomism could be stemmed by 'reinstating the Inquisition and its minister'. The Viceroy apparently adopted a non-committal attitude to this suggestion⁵¹.

Although the outcome was therefore far from what Cantelmo had been hoping for, the substance of the conversation was noted with some interest in the correspondence between Rome and Madrid. As soon as he received the letter from Naples, Secretary of State Spada wrote to Archbishop Fabrizio Caccia, the Apostolic Nuncio to the court of Charles II. He expressed his astonishment at the Viceroy's approach. He saw the idea of 'banning the private schools' as an inadequate measure to contain

50 San Gennaro (St Januarius) was a patron saint of Naples and venerated as the city's protector against disasters, in particular the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius. He is famous for the recurrent miracle of the liquefaction of his blood, conserved in a vial in the Cathedral of Naples. The event is seen as a good omen. There is a vast body of literature on the subject. See, for example, Francesco Paolo de Ceglia, *Il segreto di san Gennaro. Storia naturale di un miracolo napoletano* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016). On the relationship between saints, veneration and the handling of disasters in the early modern period, see Milena Viceconte, Gennaro Schiano, and Domenico Cecere, eds, *Heroes in Dark Times. Saints and Officials Tackling Disaster, 16th–17th Centuries* (Rome: Viella, 2023).

51 AAV, SS, *Cardinali*, 59, Cantelmo to Spada, Naples, 21 September 1694, ff. 239r–v.

the spread of the ‘evil seed’ of the ‘doctrine of the atoms’. The only ‘essential remedy’ was ‘to reinstate the Holy Office’. This would have the added advantage of preventing further manifestations of divine ire after the earthquake of 8 September: ‘it is to be believed that God, justifiably enraged, made this Kingdom tremble with [...] yet another punishment’. The letter closed with an exhortation to the Nuncio to strive to convince Charles II and his ministers of the need for the ‘immediate reintegration of the Holy Tribunal into this Kingdom’⁵².

5. In defence of ‘God’s ordering wisdom’

At the end of the day, the earthquake threat served as an argument of political pressure for the Church. However, it would be misleading to reduce the issue simply to a means to an end. The providentialist paradigm was truly dominant and reiterated by all sides in communications at all levels.

Cantelmo replied to Spada in a letter dated 28 September 1694, informing him that he had received the document pertaining to the plenary indulgence granted by Pope Innocent XII to allow the people of Naples to mend their ways and ‘placate the divine indignation manifested by the last earthquake’. His view, however, was that avoiding a ‘repetition of divine punishment’ could not be taken for granted. The ‘only valid way’ to counter the ‘evil’ of the atomist heresy was ‘to reinstate the Holy Office and its minister’⁵³. This request remained a bone of contention between the Church and the representatives of the Hispanic Monarchy, but trepidation about the spread of the novel concepts was shared by the viceregal authorities. This can be seen in the conversation between Cantelmo and Santisteban, and also in Parrino’s official *relazione*. The *relazione* was intended for wide distribution, and its attack on naturalistic explanations of the earthquake, an attack validated by the poetry of Ciro di Pers, reiterated a line of argumentation designed to resolve the issue of the cause of earthquakes as divine intervention. Even in the socio-political context of late seventeenth-century Naples where the providentialist paradigm was

52 AAV, SS, *Spagna*, 358, Spada to Caccia, Rome, 26 September 1694, ff. 150v–1r.

53 AAV, SS, *Cardinali*, 59, Cantelmo to Spada, Naples, 28 September 1694, f. 241r.

dominant, debate on the origins and causes of earthquakes revealed conflicting interpretations and became the locus of socio-political conflict.

It should be emphasised that this conflict was not based simply on the antagonism of two opposing camps. There was continuous mediation. Moreover, the Thomist compromise between the Aristotelian account of the naturalist interpretation of earthquakes and the divine origin of natural events allowed Christianity to come to terms with even the most groundbreaking aspects of scientific inquiry. Parrino himself had published Domenico Bottone's *Pyrologia topographica* in 1692, with a dedication to Viceroy Santisteban⁵⁴. This treatise on fire did not fail to cite the theories of Giovanni Alfonso Borelli, a scientist of the Galilean school, and the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher, who integrated the Aristotelian and Thomist accounts of earthquakes by reducing them to conflagrations and explosions of combustible matter located underground or in the deep bowels of the earth. However, when the socio-political strife became acute, especially when this happened in public view, positions became polarised and the providentialist paradigm became a useful way to extend and safeguard the prerogatives of the Church.

For a historian, the conflict provides exceptionally fertile ground for research. The role of the providentialist paradigm is central to the friction between the Church and scientific, philosophical and political doctrines that might challenge its role in society. In the seventeenth century, this battle was waged from a dominant position that allowed any hypothesis of a naturalistic interpretation to be repudiated. By the early twentieth century, however, divine intervention could only be considered the 'first cause' that triggered the mechanisms of nature. This explains the coherence of *La Civiltà Cattolica* informing its readers about the latest developments in seismology⁵⁵ in one article and lauding 'God's ordering wisdom' in another on the 1908 earthquake:

Queste forze e queste leggi sono uscite dalla onnipotenza e dalla sapienza ordinatrice di Dio, che ne è sempre il sovrano e le domina, e le governa, e le

54 Domenico Bottone, *Pyrologia topographica. Id est dissertatio de igne iuxta loca cum eorum descriptione* (Naples: Domenico Antonio Parrino – Michele Aloisio Muzio, 1692).

55 'Un po' di sismologia', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 60/1406 (1909), 218–27.

indirizza a fini eccelsi di ordine morale. Questa è la sola vera filosofia delle umane calamità⁵⁶.

[These forces and these laws derive from God's omnipotence and his ordering wisdom, which He always rules and dominates, and governs, and directs towards sublime ends of moral order. This is the only true philosophy of human calamities].

As in the seventeenth century, what was at stake was the fear that God might be excised from human society, which could only lead to the gradual reduction of the importance of the Church's role. The issue of what causes earthquakes reveals a much broader conflict, one that has quite clearly not been resolved to this day.

56 'Sfruttamento settario della sventura', 398.

Armando Alberola Romá

Disaster and personal perception: The Calabria and Messina earthquakes (1783) according to the account by the Spanish clergyman Antonio Despuig y Dameto*

*To Valentina, who has arrived while I was
completing this study*

1. Introduction

Between 5 February and 28 March 1783, a year when there were many disasters with different causes and catastrophic consequences in Europe¹, the Calabrian plain and the northeast of the island of Sicily suffered successive earthquakes of great destructive power that ruined a large number of towns and villages, causing considerable material and human losses, deep geophysical modification of the affected territories, great scientific and media impact on the European continent and a process of economic,

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1 Armando Alberola Romá, ‘Un “mal año” en la España del siglo XVIII: clima, desastre y crisis en 1783’, in Xavier Huetz de Lemps, and Jean-Philippe Luis, eds, *Sortir du labyrinthe. Études d’Histoire Contemporaine de l’Espagne en Hommage á Gérard Chastagnaret* (Madrid: Collection Casa de Velázquez, 2012), 325–45.

urban and social reconstruction in which the Neapolitan political leaders took unprecedented measures².

Despite the fact that in Spain the *Gazeta de Madrid* and the *Mercurio Histórico y Político* – the official newspapers answerable to the first Secretary of State – reported the effects of these earthquakes throughout 1783, practically no printed outlets took account of this strong seismic sequence, unlike the reports of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755³. There are just a couple of translations of pamphlets from Naples and Messina, printed in Barcelona and Girona⁴, which describe the catastrophe that

- 2 There are many studies of these earthquakes. The following is a list of references, without any claim to be exhaustive: Michele Sarconi, *Istoria de' Fenomeni del Tremoto avvenuto nelle Calabrie, e nel Valdemone nell'anno 1783 posta in luce dalla Reale Accademia delle Scienze, e delle Belle Lettere di Napoli, Atlante Iconografico, in Napoli 1784* (Napoli: Giuseppe Campo Impressore, della Reale Accademia, 1784); Giovanni Vivenzio, *Istoria de' Tremuoti Avvenuti nella Provincia della Calabria ulteriore [...]*, MDCCLXXXVIII, edizione facsimile, premessa, saggio introduttivo e schede di Gregorio E. Rubino e in appendice *Corso di Architettura Civile* di Vincenzo Ferrarese (Casoria: Mario Giuditta Editore, 1993); Mario Baratta, *I terremoti d'Italia: saggio di storia, geografia e bibliografia sismica italiana* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1901); Augusto Placanica, *Iliade Funesta. Storia del terremoto calabro-messinese del 1783. Corrispondenza e relazioni della Corte, del Governo e degli Ambasciatori* (Rome: Casa del Libro, 1982); Augusto Placanica, *Il filosofo e la catastrofe. Un terremoto del Settecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985); Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Pasquale Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples Politics, Communication and Culture* (Rome: Viella, 2018), 221–41; Domenico Cecere, 'Scritture del disastro e istanze di riforma nel Regno di Napoli (1783). Alle origini delle politiche dell'emergenza', *Studi storici*, 58/1 (2017), 187–214; Id., '“Questa popolazione è divisa d'animi, come lo è di abitazione”. Note sui conflitti legati alla ricostruzione post-sismica in Calabria dopo il 1783', *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca Storica*, 2 (2013), 193–224; Id., 'Dall'informazione alla gestione dell'emergenza. Una proposta per lo studio dei disastri in età moderna', *Storica*, 77/XXVI (2020), 9–40.
- 3 Armando Alberola Romá, 'La información post desastre en el siglo XVIII: los terremotos de Calabria y Mesina (1783) en la prensa oficial española', in Armando Alberola Romá, and Domenico Cecere, eds, *Rischio, catastrofe e gestione dell'emergenza nel Mediterraneo occidentale e in Ispanoamerica in età moderna. Omaggio a Jean-Philippe Luis* (Naples – Alicante: FedOA Federico II University Press – Universidad de Alicante, 2022), 101–33.
- 4 *Relación exacta de las últimas noticias que se han recibido de la corte de Nápoles del horroroso daño que han hecho los Terremotos en la Calabria*

occurred in those territories. To these are added the four pages of the translation of an individual news item from Italy printed in Palma, kept in the Archive of the Kingdom of Mallorca⁵ and, of course, the text that is the subject of this study. In this, the author, Antonio Despuig y Dameto, a distinguished clergyman whose life and professional career are well known, a lover of antiquities and art and a patron of culture, left personal testimony of the impact caused by the Calabrian-Sicilian seismic disaster.

Despuig was an eyewitness to the events. In what he himself called ‘his diary’, he wrote down everything he witnessed, his personal perceptions, the vicissitudes he had to overcome and the observations he made⁶. As mentioned above, the interest of his text derives from the scarcity of printed accounts – apart from news in the official press – prepared by Spaniards to increase the information reaching the Iberian Peninsula.

Ulterior, Mesina, y otras Ciudades, y Pueblos de aquel Reyno, sacadas de un Impreso Italiano, que ha traído el Extraordinario, y son con fecha de 11 del mes de marzo de este presente año 1783. And reprinted in Girona by Joseph Bró, Impresor del Rey Ntro.Sr. à las quatro Esquinas (1783), Biblioteca de Catalunya, *Folletos Bonsoms*, no. 1, 104. *Relación histórico-física de los terremotos acaecidos en Messina, en el corriente año de 1783. Traducida fielmente de la que en Idioma Italiano se ha impreso en aquella Ciudad*, en Barcelona, en la Imprenta de Raymunda Altés, viuda, en la calle de la Librería [1783], Biblioteca de Catalunya, *Folletos Bonsoms*, no. 3, 233.

- 5 *Individual noticia de la desgracia acaecida en Messina, Calabria y otras Ciudades y Lugares del Reyno de Nápoles y Sicilia, según las noticias que se han adquirido hasta el día presente. Traducido del impreso que vino de Italia* (Palma: Salvador Savall, 1783), in the Arxiu del Regne de Mallorca, Arxiu Marqués de la Torre, section Cardinal Despuig, IV, folder 6 bis; cited in Pedro de Montaner, and Magdalena Rosselló, eds, *El cardenal Despuig, ilustrat mallorquí. Palma, 1745-Lucca, 1813. Segon centenari de la seva mort* (Palma: Ajuntament de Palma – Catedral de Mallorca, 2014), 155–6.
- 6 Antonio Despuig y Dameto, ‘Varias observaciones hechas en el terremoto acaecido en la Calabria ulterior, año de 1783’, in Ferruccio Ramondino, ed., *La peste di Messina del 1743. Il terremoto di Calabria del 1783. La Sicilia, Napoli e Roma, in tre relazioni inedite spagnole del Settecento* (Palma di Maiorca: Imprenta Mossén Alcover, 1945), 49–67.

2. Antonio Despuig y Dameto: The mallorcan clergyman who became a cardinal

Antonio Despuig y Dameto (Palma de Mallorca, 30–3–1745, Lucca, 2–5–1813) was born into the important Mallorcan family of the Counts of Montenegro and Montoro and enjoyed a long, brilliant and eventful life and career that his contemporary, the priest José Barberí, was responsible for publicising in a hagiographic pamphlet published in 1813, the year of his death⁷. He was educated in the San Martín and Montesión schools run by the Jesuits in the city of Palma. Later, he went to the Universidad Literaria de Mallorca, where he was awarded a doctorate in civil and canon law in 1774, the year when he was also ordained a subdeacon⁸. At the end of March the same year, he obtained a post as a Canon of Palma cathedral⁹ while he was in France on the classic *Grand Tour* that also took him to the Netherlands, England and Italy. On his return to Mallorca in 1777, he was appointed a knight and apostolic vicar of the Order of Malta, an institution with which the Despuig family had maintained ties for centuries. When the Sociedad Económica Mallorquina de Amigos del País (Mallorcan Economic Society of Friends of the Country) was set up at

7 José Barberí, *Sucinta relación del distinguido mérito del Eminentísimo y Excelentísimo señor don Antonio Despuig y Dameto Cardenal de la santa iglesia romana* (Palma: en la imprenta de Felipe Guasp, 1813).

8 Miguel Batllori, *Vuit segles de cultura catalana a Europa: assaigs dispersos* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1958), 141–42; Jaime Salvá, *El cardenal Despuig* (Palma, Imp. de Mossén Alcover, 1964), 25–ff.

9 He was 9th Presbyteral Canon until 1792, which, between 1786 and 1791, he combined with the position of Precentor (Francisco José García Pérez, ‘El cabildo mallorquín en la época de la Ilustración (1750–1800)’, *Historia Instituciones Documentos*, 45 (2018), 61–87). The bibliography on Antonio Despuig is abundant, but the most recent references are provided by Maximiliano Barrio Gozalo, *El Real Patronato de los obispos españoles del Antiguo Régimen, 1556–1834* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2004). In addition: Miguel Batllori, *El cardenal Despuig y su tiempo* (Inca: Imp. Vich, 1948); María Carbonell i Buades, *El cardenal Despuig. Col·leccionisme, grand tour i cultura il·lustrada* (Palma de Mallorca: Consell de Mallorca, 2013); Jaime Salvá, *El cardenal Despuig* (Palma, Imp. de Mossén Alcover, 1964); Bruno Cherubini, *Il cardinale Antonio Despuig y Dameto a Bagni di Lucca* (Lucca: Tip. Artigianelli, 1966).

the end of 1778, Antonio Despuig took part in its foundation, joined it as a member and was part of its first Board of Directors as the first censor¹⁰.

In 1781 Despuig travelled to Madrid with a letter of recommendation for José Moñino, Count Floridablanca and first Secretary of State. His stay was a fruitful one: he met the count, took an active part in court circles, became friends with important characters in Spanish political life who would later be of great use to him, and was elected honorary academician of the Real de Bellas Artes de San Fernando on 5 May 1782. When he left for Rome a month later, the feeling he left behind in Madrid was that he was more than capable of developing a brilliant *cursus honorum*¹¹.

We know about the course of these trips, and those he made later, thanks to the passports and diaries surviving in the archives of the Marquis de la Torre, Cardinal Despuig section, in the Arxiu del Regne de Mallorca. The passports, running from 5 June 1781 to 10 May 1804, contain interesting and detailed information on the routes followed, accompanied by engravings and drawings – many of these by Despuig himself – that significantly enrich them¹².

On 23 May 1782, Despuig left Madrid for Genoa. After passing through Alcalá de Henares, he headed north-northeast towards the Pyrenees, which he crossed via Benasque to reach Bagnères-de-Luchon¹³. From there, he went to Toulouse to continue via Narbonne, Nîmes, Tarascon, Marseille, Toulon, Cannes and Antibes, where he embarked to Nice to resume his journey by coach along the coast. Among other towns, he passed through Menton, Ventimiglia and San Remo, reaching Genoa on 15 July¹⁴. There, Juan Cornejo Zabalza, Spanish plenipotentiary minister in the Genoese

10 Isabel Moll Blanes, 'Despuig i la Il·lustració a Mallorca', in Pedro De Montaner, and Magdalena Rosselló, eds, *El cardenal Despuig, il·lustrat mallorquí*, 165–73; Salvá, *El cardenal Despuig*, 39–42.

11 Salvá, *El cardenal Despuig*, 42–ff.

12 Magdalena Rosselló Pons, 'Despuig viatger', in Pedro de Montaner, and Magdalena Rosselló Pons, eds, *El cardenal Despuig, il·lustrat mallorquí. Palma, 1745-Lucca, 1813*, 151–63.

13 Passage over the Pyrenees was extremely difficult at that time, see Rafael Olaechea, *Viajeros españoles del XVIII en los balnearios del alto Pirineo francés* (Zaragoza: Publicaciones del Colegio Universitario de La Rioja, 1985).

14 Rosselló Pons, 'Despuig viatger', 152.

republic, issued him a new passport on the 30th that authorised him to continue his journey to Parma, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Naples¹⁵.

The young Canon from the cathedral of Palma de Mallorca arrived in the Eternal City on 20 September for a stay that would later turn out to be highly beneficial to his interests¹⁶. He was a visitor to the Sapienza university and soon immersed himself in the intellectual and political microcosm that permeated the great Catholic city. He did not allow the chance to use his skill and opportunism to approach the ecclesiastical elite, including the Pope, to slip by. In time, this would see him granted the enjoyment of the highest offices of the Church: auditor of the Roman Rota (1785), Bishop of Orihuela (1791), Archbishop of Valencia (1795) and, in the same year, of Seville, Patriarch of Antioch (1798) and, in 1803, Cardinal of San Calixto.

3. Antonio Despuig and his *Varias observaciones hechas en el terremoto acaecido en la Calabria Ulterior, año 1783*

From Rome, Despuig went to Naples to resolve family matters. On 1 February 1783, he left the port there in a Maltese *esperonara* bound for Sicily, to travel from there to Malta. In Sicily he apparently tried to resolve matters concerning an inheritance. He was particularly keen to visit Malta, though, as different members of the Despuig family had, at various times, held important positions in the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta, better known as the Order of Malta or the Hospitallers. The last of these, Frey Ramón Despuig, was Grand Master until his death in 1741. Canon Despuig had been named a knight of the order of Saint John in 1777 and, years later, took the post of Judge Conservator. Despuig undertook his journey south from Naples confident that the head of the order would offer him some more prebends. During his passage he was taken by surprise by the beginning of the violent earthquakes that shook Upper Calabria and the northeast of the island of Sicily between 5 February and 28 March 1783, forcing him to stop off at the town of Tropea on the coast. They prevented

15 Rosselló Pons, 'Despuig viatger', 153.

16 Salvá, *El cardenal Despuig*, 35–37.

him continuing his journey and made him an involuntary witness to the disaster. He wrote about the incidents of the event in the form of a diary in a notebook that he titled *Varias observaciones hechas en el terremoto acaecido en la Calabria ulterior, año de 1783*.

It was 1945 before Ferruccio Ramondino transcribed, annotated and printed the manuscript of these *Varias Observaciones* for the first time in the workshop run by Mossen Alcover in the city of Palma de Mallorca, together with two other 'relaciones inéditas españolas del Setecientos' [unpublished Spanish accounts from the seventeen hundreds]: *La peste de Messina de 1743* and *Viaje a la Sicilia, Napoli e Roma* by Don Antonio Desbrull y Boil, knight of the habit of Saint John, between 1789–1790¹⁷. The publisher included three engravings in Despuig's text: a view of Messina by Antonino Bova, a map of Calabria from Jansonius' *Atlas* published in Amsterdam in 1653, and a portrait of Antonio Despuig himself, from an original by Tofanelli¹⁸.

Ramondino did a good job, as he did not limit himself to transcribing the 15-page manuscript preserved in the Despuig collection of the Archive of the Marquis de la Torre, which is kept by the Arxiu del Regne de Mallorca; he also carefully annotated it and wrote a tight *Introduction*, in which he noted that the text was a copy, as the handwriting did not correspond to that of the future cardinal. He also produced an excellent bibliographical list in which, apart from referring to the main works dealing with these earthquakes down to the 1940s, he provided very accurate comments on their content. He even drew attention to certain contemporary prints of the events barely studied at all at the time, or even today. He considered Despuig's annotations to be of great value and pointed out that they could be very useful for historical seismologists. The Canon of Palma, with his investigative spirit and reasonable intellectual training – I have already mentioned that he studied with the Jesuits in Palma and obtained a doctorate in both forms of law from the Real Universidad de Mallorca – gave a detailed picture in these *Observaciones* of the incidents on his journey along the southwestern coast of the Italian peninsula and

17 Ramondino, ed., *La peste di Messina del 1743. Il terremoto di Calabria del 1783*.

18 Next to pages 48, 56 and 64 of the book respectively, made by Ferruccio Ramondino mentioned above.

the inland territory between the coastal city of Tropea and the southern foothills of the Apennines. In a simple style and easy-to-read prose, the author describes the natural and urban landscapes he contemplated, conveys the sensation that the fury of the earthquake caused him, recounts all the circumstances surrounding its occurrence and, of course, its dramatic consequences, which he was able to see in person.

This desire to collect as much information as possible was not a new one. Antonio Despuig used to meticulously write about the day-to-day events of his journeys in his diaries as well as the means of transport used, the variety of landscapes he travelled through and enjoyed, the description of the monuments in the places visited, the people he met and with whom he exchanged opinions, the authorities who received him and with whom he conversed, his expenses, the religious or civil ceremonies he attended, and so on. He also drew everything he saw and used to acquire plans and views of the cities he visited for his private collection. Although Despuig is not considered a high-level man of the Enlightenment, his academic training was more than acceptable. Over the years he became tremendously cultured and professed a true devotion to archaeology, to the point where he acquired a good collection of Roman antiquities and promoted excavations around Rome¹⁹. He also put together a magnificent library, some of which came from that of the enlightened Valencian Canon Juan Bautista Hermán, who named him executor of his will, making express mention that he should take ‘de su librería los libros que le gustase para su uso’ [from his library the books he liked for his use]. In such a case he would, ‘en caso necesario’ [if necessary], make him a ‘especial legado’ [special bequest] of them²⁰. His scientific concerns led him to take part

19 María Carbonell i Buades, *El cardenal Despuig. Col·leccionisme, grand tour i cultura il·lustrada* (Palma de Mallorca: Consell de Mallorca, 2013).

20 All the details are in Vicente León Navarro, ‘Juan Bautista Hermán: una víctima del poder político y eclesiástico. Su amistad con los hermanos Mayans’, Preliminary study in *Epistolario XIX. Correspondencia de los hermanos Mayans con el canónigo Juan Bautista Hermán*, 2 (Valencia: Publicaciones del Ayuntamiento de Oliva, 2002), 43.

between 1784 and 1785 in drawing up the map of Mallorca, one of the cartographic works of reference of the Spanish eighteenth century²¹.

Therefore, like the rest of his diaries, he cannot have written these *Observaciones* with a view to having them printed but rather in order to properly preserve what it seems highly probable that he considered an event worthy to ‘guardar en la memoria’ [keep in the memory], in line with the tradition of the best diarists and in tune with what were known as ‘news pamphlets’. Ultimately, the disaster became a social event thanks to the accounts of it and its survival in printed form²². These ‘disasters on paper’, as Gennaro Schiano aptly put it²³, form an essential source not only for finding out details of the event but also for assessing the level of education of the author of the story, the interest that guided him when writing his description, and its impact.

Given Antonio Despuig’s painstaking nature, it is more than likely that he subsequently improved the content of his *Varias observaciones*, particularly to provide updated, accurate quantitative data concerning the destroyed or affected towns and villages and victims, disappeared and dead. The story draws on what the future cardinal saw and experienced at first hand, everything he was told, and even the contents of a letter he received from the city of Reggio. This is worth highlighting considering the circumstances of the time, although it is in line with the letter-writing customs of the society of the period. Added to this is the description of the ‘excursion’ he made as a journey to survey the area from the coast to the southern foothills of the Apennines. He decided to embark on this adventure after hearing alarming but scientifically very interesting news about

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- 21 Antoni Ginard Bujosa, ‘Antoni Despuig i Dameto, el mapa de Mallorca (1784–1785) i la Societat d’Amics del País’, *Cuadernos de Geografía*, 86 (2009), 241–60; Climent Picornell, Joana M. Seguí, and Antoni Ginard, ‘El mapa de Mallorca d’Antoni Despuig (1785)’, *Treballs de Geografia*, 40 (1988), 23–40.
- 22 François Walter, *Catastrophes. Une histoire Culturelle, XVI^e–XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Françoise Lavocat, ‘Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints’, *Poetics Today*, 3–4 (2012), 253–300; Cecere, De Caprio, Gianfrancesco, and Palmieri, eds, *Disaster Narratives*.
- 23 Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 21.

the state in which that territory and the towns and villages settled in it had been left: the latter ruined and the former not only destroyed, but also with its geophysical features seriously altered.

In the background and the form of the diary, traits of a scholar interested in the natural world around him are noticeable, together with his scientific eagerness to take careful note of anything that could be useful for achieving a better knowledge of reality. He observes everything and records it all in a precise, well-written form. He accurately records the meteorological and environmental circumstances surrounding the seismic movements at all times, such as the state of the atmosphere and the sea, the wind system, the presence or absence of fog, the traces left by the earthquake on the surface of the earth and the aftershocks, using a very elementary pendulum he made himself, and so on. He also refers to the consequences of the tremors and their aftershocks, which he quantifies, providing their chronology to a very great extent. Finally, he describes the furrows and indentations left in the ground by the violent shocks. All this covers a very specific geographical area – the town of Tropea, its beach and its surroundings, as well as the aforementioned inland area.

The diary also incorporates more subjective elements, such as the impact caused by the panic with which residents abandoned their homes (or what was left of them) and fled the devastated towns in search of safety. Also the construction of provisional housing – ‘barracas’ or huts – in open fields and outdoors; the scourge of rain and cold weather – we must not forget that it was the beginning of February; his state of mind, vividly describing fear turning to horror and, ultimately, terror; the feeling of absolute precariousness and helplessness; insecurity in the face of constant aftershocks; hope for the arrival of aid and confidence that the Almighty would solve their problems. This is the reason for the pious allusions to the celebration of masses and general processions requesting divine protection and help. Destruction and death dominate the entire story, together with references to the actions carried out by the political authorities to help the victims and provide them with food and protection.

The account of Despuig’s journey by land to visit the devastated towns and survey the land is heartbreaking: terrified people; thousands of deaths; references to the destruction of Messina, which he did not see but was told about; contact with disoriented, panic-stricken victims wandering about;

and the destruction of churches, chapels, monasteries and convents. All this was inevitably imbued with the providential spirit so typical of the time, although on this occasion it is relatively restrained. However, in the midst of the disaster, there is the interest of an Enlightenment man to make his observations scientific; to find out the condition of the historical ruins and ancient monuments, such the Temple of Mars (church of Saint George) in Tropea and the monasteries of Santo Stefano del Bosco, near Serra San Bruno, and San Domenico in Soriano.

Although, as has already been said, Ferruccio Ramondino published Antonio Despuig's *Varias observaciones* on the 1783 earthquakes in 1947, they have been rarely used, despite the interesting information they provide. It is true that in Italy they have almost always appeared in the bibliography lists referring to these earthquakes, but their contents did not appear in studies until 1978²⁴. In 1985 Carlo Carlino translated them into Italian preceded by a commentary²⁵ and, more recently, Tito Puntillo has cited them for his studies on the impact of these Calabrian earthquakes in Bagnara and the Strait of Messina²⁶.

4. The Calabrese earthquakes of 1783: Experiences and testimonies of an occasional spectator

Antonio Despuig's *Observaciones* represent an unusual example of an account of an event with catastrophic consequences in which the author

24 Pasquale Russo, *Appunti per una ricerca di storia demografica sociale ed economica su Tropea e il suo territorio nel Settecento*, <http://www.tropeamagazine.it/storiademograficacasalipasqualerusso/>.

25 Carlo Carlino, 'Le osservazioni di Antonio Despuig sul terremoto calabrese del 1783', *Incontri Meridionali. Rivista di storia e cultura*, 1 (1985), 69–79. See also *Relazione sul terremoto calabrese del 1783*, in <http://www.tropeamagazine.it/terremoto/antoniodespuig/>.

26 'Il 1783 in Calabria in generale e a Bagnara in particolare. Il terremoto e i terremoti. (Parte seconda: l'Apocalisse e i Terremoti)', *Quaderni Bagnarensi*, 1/3 (2015) (https://www.academia.edu/15209295/Il_Terremoto_del_1783_in_Calabria). By the same author, 'Lo stretto di Messina e Bagnara dopo il terremoto del 1783. Aspetti geografici-sociali-economici della ricostruzione (1793–1796)', *Quaderni Bagnarensi* (2015), (https://www.academia.edu/32879186/Bagnara_e_lo_Stretto_di_Messina_dal_1793_al_1796_pdf).

participates actively, albeit involuntarily, from the very beginning, suffers its consequences and feels fully identified with the circumstances surrounding him. His perception of the disaster is therefore identical to that of the people whose misfortunes he refers to, but with one difference: he has the ability to make scientific observations even at the risk of exposing himself to the worst, and to write them down, with the corresponding reflections, at moments of tension and danger. The following year, and in a very different situation, we find Antonio Despuig immersed in another scientific exercise: the tasks of drawing up the map of the Balearic Islands²⁷.

Also inevitably present in the story given the clerical status of its author, is the providentialism that always emerges in circumstances that are difficult or impossible to explain immediately after an earthquake. This inevitably leads to the highlighting of the capacities of the Almighty in this type of situation. Hence the references to the different religious ceremonies organised immediately to request divine mercy for a return to normality. However, Antonio Despuig does not forget to praise the behaviour of the authorities in quickly dealing with the complex situation generated after a disaster of this kind.

He begins his account with his departure from Naples, on 1 February 1783, in a Maltese *esperonara* ‘con ánimo de ver las islas de Sicilia y Malta’ [with the intention of seeing the islands of Sicily and Malta]. On the night of the fourth, it anchored on the beach at Tropea, sheltered by the rock that protects the town. The weather was fine and the sea was calm. At dawn the next day the boat set sail in the direction of Punta Faro, in the northeast of Sicily, hoping to reach Messina without too many problems. However, shortly after passing Formicole, the crew was able to see the ‘inconstancia de las aguas’ [inconstancy of the waters] which, after rounding Cape Vaticano (‘Punta Vaticana’) and between the gulfs of Nepetino or Sant’Eufemia and Gioia Tauro, were considerably agitated as a result of the contrary currents of the Strait of Messina and an unfavourable strong wind. There was no choice but to return to Tropea, in between the two gulfs, whose latitude and longitude with respect to the Tenerife

27 Ginard, ‘Antoni Despuig i Dameto’, 241–60; Picornell, Seguí, and Ginard, ‘El mapa de Mallorca d’Antoni Despuig (1785)’, 23–40.

meridian is specified by Despuig²⁸, either because he knew them in advance or because he had the appropriate instruments to make the observation.

With the boat safe, and while waiting for the weather to improve, Despuig decided to visit the town to see if there were any remains of the old Temple of Mars – the Church of Saint George at that time – or some other historical ruin. From one of the towers he contemplated a sea battered by the sirocco: the strong wind from the southeast which, coming from the Sahara, usually triggers storms in the Mediterranean. At 11am it began to rain and he had to take refuge in a church, although, after half an hour, the shower stopped. At noon the rain returned and, given the unstable weather, he chose to return to the boat to, as was his custom, ‘continue the diary’²⁹.

In that task he was surprised, at around 12:45, by ‘uno de los más terribles y espantosos terremotos que quizá no habrán visto nuestras edades’ [one of the most terrible and frightening earthquakes that perhaps our ages have not seen], a rhetorical phrase normally used to refer to an extraordinary event with catastrophic consequences. From that moment on, Despuig becomes an excellent reporter of everything that happened, in the style of the best modern journalists sent to war or disaster zones. With a direct and precise style, he describes the first tremor lasting ‘poco menos de un minuto’ [a little less than a minute] with great realism. He perceived it as

un rumor subterráneo, semejante al desprenderse una multitud de piedras de una montaña, acompañaba aquel funesto movimiento, que fue como de dos golpes impulsivos y perpendiculares; pero dejando presto esta dirección, continuó con un movimiento vertical dirigiéndose del poniente al levante (...), y, aunque su causa no fuese manifiesta, se conocía sensiblemente que su dirección guiaba de mediodía al norte³⁰.

[An underground rumble, similar to a multitude of stones falling from a mountain, accompanied that fatal movement, which was like two impulsive, perpendicular blows. Quickly leaving this direction, it continued with a vertical movement heading from west to east (...) and, although its cause was not clear, it was obvious that its direction led from south to north].

28 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 51.

29 *Ibidem*, 52.

30 *Ibidem*.

After two minutes of calm, the earth trembled again ‘con la misma fuerza y violencia [...], pero con un ruido distinto y semejante a muchos cañonazos disparados a distancias de dos millas’ [with the same force and violence (...), but with a different noise similar to many cannon shots fired at a distance of two miles]. After a brief period of time ‘tomó la misma dirección vertical que el anterior, y duró por espacio de cuatro minutos’ [it took the same vertical direction as the previous one, and lasted for four minutes]. Then, the confusion began, with the arrival on the beach of those leaving Tropea as houses collapsed and the nearby town of Parghelia was completely destroyed. Antonio Despuig was stunned and confesses that at times he put aside his observations to give way ‘en aquel fatal momento a los sentimientos de religión’ [at that fatal moment to feelings of religion], while in less than ten ‘funesto’ [dismal] minutes ‘aquella hermosa provincia’ [that beautiful province] was devastated³¹.

31 *Ibidem*, 53.



Figure 1. Map of Tropea and its surroundings (by Eliseo della Concezione, *Carta chorografica della Calabria Ulteriore*, 1783).

In the figure, the state in which Tropea and the surrounding towns were left can be seen, as shown on the map prepared by the Teresian priest Father Eliseo della Concezione during the scientific expedition that the Reale Accademia delle Scienze e delle Belle Lettere of Naples in Naples sent to Calabria in early April 1783 to check the extent of the damage caused by the earthquakes. Prepared using a theodolite, it clearly and precisely shows the existing situation and distinguishes the degree of destruction of the territory and populations using a system of asterisks: three

mean complete destruction, two partial destruction and one represents partial damage³².

After taking in what was happening, the future cardinal devoted himself to preparing a true chronicle of the earthquake with the value of trying to reflect its real scope by compiling all the aftershocks that took place between 5 and 22 February (see Table 1), their intensity, the degree of impact on the towns and villages and the territory, and the general behaviour of the atmosphere and the sea. On many occasions, he speculates about the 'depth' of the earthquake or the significance of the 'openings' that dotted the beach of Tropea in all directions, trying to find reasons for the 'gran movimiento que hacían nuestros cuerpos sin que nos causase vahído, indisposición ni deliquio [sic] alguno' [great movement that our bodies made without causing us any dizziness, indisposition or delusion]; a circumstance he considered 'accidente propio de los grandes terremotos cuyas materias son muy subterráneas' [an accident typical of great earthquakes whose materials are very deep down]. Despuig recorded up to six aftershocks that day, while the direction of the wind changed to the west, the sky was covered in clouds and all the inhabitants of Tropea left the city heading for the beach at the request of the authorities. At the same time, a crowd began to arrive there from the nearby affected urban centres, escaping the chaos and destruction there³³.

With no time to build shelters, the night was long, dark, and cold as the sirocco blew again. The bonfires they lit provided just a little heat and some light, as the moon 'se hallaba en el día cinco de su creciente' [was in the fifth day of its crescent] and the fog persisted. This was why that day he had not been able to see the flashes that the Stromboli volcano, just 60 miles from the coast at Tropea, has been sending into the atmosphere since time immemorial. On that endless, painful night, Despuig confesses that the time he spent helping and comforting people, just as other clergymen did, prevented him observing the constant tremors in detail. However, he

32 I would like to express my gratitude to Professor José Miguel Delgado Barrado, who has generously provided me with the images of the *Carta Chorográfica de la Calabria Ulterior*.

33 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 53.

eventually did write them down, highlighting those felt at 2.30 and 4am and at dawn, which he describes as ‘sensibilísimos’ [very notable].

The 6th dawned ‘entre lágrimas y sollozos’ [among tears and sobs], with eyes turned to heaven and spirits ready for the holding of religious ceremonies to demand divine mercy. Despuig recorded up to seven aftershocks in his diary that morning, although without major consequences, under a dense sky, with a persistent sirocco and a calmer sea. Six more shocks took place at night³⁴. The clergyman acknowledges that ‘su turbado espíritu (necesitaba) algún descanso’ [his troubled spirit (needed some rest) and he decided to start walking along the road to Reggio looking for some peace of mind. He did not find it. He ran into two friars of the order of Saint Francis of Paola – Minims – who gave him disturbing news. They came from the south, from the remote town of Seminara, where their friary had been destroyed and 38 of their companions lay buried under its remains. The town was in ruins and they speculated that 4,000 of its inhabitants could have died. In their flight northwards, the friars had crossed *La Piana di Gióia* and they confirmed it was totally devastated. That was enough for Despuig, who decided to return to his *esperonara* on the Tropea beach, where he thought he might be useful to the ‘inmenso pueblo’ [immense number of people] gathered there awaiting material and spiritual help. The former was to be dealt with by the civil authorities, but the latter was his responsibility, together with the other priests taking shelter there. While the aftershocks continued to be felt, the information from a variety of far-off places confirmed his worst expectations.

At nightfall on the 6th, news circulated that there were 50 dead in Tropea and that Casal Novo (Cittanova) and Ópido (Oppido Mamertina) had been devastated. However, the fate of Naples, the capital of the kingdom, was unknown. The arrival of a gentleman from the north who assured him that the earthquake had not been felt in Lower Calabria and that the court was, for the moment, ‘exenta de tantas calamidades’ [free of so many calamities], calmed things down somewhat³⁵. Almost two months later,

34 *Ibidem*, 54–6.

35 Despuig alludes to a certain ‘caballero de Giovanni [...] llegado de Paula a Tropea’ [knight of Saint John (...) arrived in Tropea from Paula]; Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 57.

in the late afternoon of 28 March, the earth shook violently in Naples, causing its inhabitants a ‘gran consternación’ [great consternation]. The vast majority fled into the nearby fields to spend the night³⁶.

The passengers on a *felucca* coming from Bagnara, a town near the Strait of Messina, reported its complete destruction and the death of a good number of its residents. They also noted that the area between Bagnara and Melicuccà had been altered so much it was unrecognisable³⁷. The night brought six new aftershocks; one of them ‘considerable’ at about twelve o’clock and another similar one at dawn on the 7th. This day was consecrated to God but, in the middle of mass, a new, violent earthquake forced the suspension of all scheduled religious services. According to Despuig’s notes, it was the 23rd aftershock since the earth had shaken for the first time two days before.

On 7 February, while the sirocco wind was blowing strongly and the sea was rough, a small skiff that came from the town of Scilla, at the entrance to the Strait of Messina, anchored and two sobbing sailors described the horror there vividly. The first earthquake surprised them in the town’s castle, but, fearing for their safety, they went down to the beach seeking refuge, accompanied by the Count of Sinopoli, who was in the city³⁸. They built a hut while the count installed himself on a *felucca* he owned. Then ‘el mar (salió) de sus límites y entrando furiosamente en aquella playa se llevó a este señor y a más de 800 personas que le acompañaban’ [the sea (left) its limits, and, entering that beach with fury, took that Lord and more than 800 people who accompanied him]³⁹. The witnesses said they swam among corpses until they found the boat, which took them to Tropea. Undoubtedly, these sailors were referring to the tsunami that affected the Strait of Messina on the night of 5–6 February⁴⁰.

36 An account of all this is in the *Mercurio Histórico y Político*, April 1783, 284–91 and 294–7.

37 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 56.

38 The town of Sinopoli is inland, near Sant’Eufemia d’Aspromonte, and about 15 km from Scilla.

39 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 56.

40 Laura Graziani, Alessandra Maramai, and Stefano Tinti, ‘A Revision of the 1783–84 Calabrian (Southern Italy) Tsunamis’, *Natural Hazards Earth System Sciences*, 6 (2006), 1053–60.

Alerted by the news from Scilla, Despuig and those sheltering on the beach at Tropea observed, at mid-morning that day, that the sea became wild and the water was coming up the sand. Many people fled hastily. Those who remained took precautions, including our clergyman, who speculated that the last earthquake had left 'la tierra en movimiento' [the earth in motion]. However, he was cautious enough not to rule out the possibility that this was his own projection 'lo forjaba mi alterada fantasía' [forged by my disturbed fantasy] despite the fact that the sea was strongly battering the coast. And it is was at this point when the meticulous observer Despuig decided to construct a rudimentary pendulum to check how many times the earth could shake:

formé en mi esperonara un péndulo, cuya simple máquina se componía de dos anillos eslabonados, de quien pendiente un plomo daba la superficie de un vaso: no me permitía mi situación valerme de otra máquina más compuesta; sin embargo, experimenté con esta el continuo movimiento de aquel plomo. Finalizada esta máquina, y colocándola en mi cabeza, me puse en observación: era mi objeto notar las veces que temblaría la tierra en toda aquella noche⁴¹.

[In my esperonara I made a pendulum: a simple machine was made up of two linked rings, from which a lead pendant gave the surface of a glass (sic): my situation did not allow me to avail myself of another more complex machine. However, with this I experienced the continuous movement of that lead. When this machine was finished I placed it on my head and put myself under observation: my aim was to note the times that the earth would shake throughout that night].

After the experiment, he recorded in the diary that 'por un fenómeno muy raro podré decir que fueron pocos los instantes que la tierra no estuvo en movimiento' [due to a very rare phenomenon I can say that there were few moments that the earth was not in motion]. That night the sky was cloudy and the sea increasingly disturbed and he noted that the 'gran cansancio' [great tiredness] he was suffering, or having breathed air 'lleno de sensibilísimos átomos de azufre' [full of very notable sulphur atoms], plunged him into a deep sleep. And it was during these moments of lethargy that the sea pushed violently up the sand, flooding everything, including his boat. Despuig barely noticed arms rescuing him and leading him safely to the nearby promontory. From there, he contemplated the

41 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 59.

beach ‘convertida en mar’ [turned into the sea] and how the waters were hitting with such force that they even went over the top of the great rock that protected it.

At mid-morning on the eighth, with the sea already calmer and the sky clear, some fishermen gave him a letter addressed to him by name from someone who had escaped from Tropea after the first earthquake. This circumstance is striking: letters were circulating despite the continuous aftershocks and the virtual destruction of communications. According to Despuig’s friend who had fled, it was not he writing the letter, but rather his pen guided by ‘el horror y el temor’ [horror and fear]. He gave a graphic account of his adventures and described the dangers he had encountered on the long road that from Tropea which had led him ‘de precipicio en precipicio’ [from precipice to precipice] to Reggio. He had found no standing building and had contemplated only death and desolation. ‘Le supongo bien instruido de la destrucción de este país’ [I suppose you are well informed about the destruction of this country] he commented to Despuig, letting him know that his family was fine, although his home no longer existed and he had lost many friends and relatives. Regarding Messina, the cleric’s destination, he warned him that only rubble remained and recommended that he act prudently⁴².

At this point, the future cardinal reports in his diary that he felt the need to know exactly the state Messina was in. To do this, he went to one of the many fishing boat skippers who crowded the beach with the intention of finding out if he would venture south and deliver a letter answering his correspondent. He found one well disposed to do so, but the arrival of a new skiff coming from Messina with first-hand news of its destruction made him reconsider his plans because, with the city devastated, it was highly probable that those who should have been there to welcome him would have died.

Antonio Despuig estimated that the risks of starting a trip, either southwards, in the direction of Messina and Malta, or to the north to return to Naples, were great because ‘el mar era terrible con sus tormentas y la tierra mal segura por sus continuos terremotos’ [the sea was terrible with

42 *Ibidem*, 60.

its storms and the land was not safe due to its continuous earthquakes]. For this reason, in the midst of that ‘tribulation’, he decided to remain on the sands at Tropea, where he was a well-known person and was confident that he could be assured of help if he needed it. And there he remained until the 12th, when, after accumulating plenty of information not only about the seismic disaster but also a real geological mutation of the entire region, he decided to travel inland in order to confirm this.

Knowing the true extent of earthquakes was very important to Despuig and to the authorities. Four days after the first tremors, the news that reached Tropea ‘aún en lo más distante de la provincia’ [even from the most distant part of the province] was so abundant and, at times, so contradictory that it forced him to be sceptical – ‘su variedad me hacía sospechar en creerlas’ [its variety made me suspicious of believing it]⁴³. At that critical time, and in tune with his empiricist spirit, Despuig tried to clarify all the data he accumulated to avoid becoming carried away by false impressions. For example, on the 8th he noted in his diary that, according to different sources, the number of deaths in Calabria up to that moment had reached the figure of 60,000. He added this was a: ‘número que al parecer no podía creerse, pero que después hemos visto confirmado’ [number that seemed unbelievable, but that we have later seen confirmed]⁴⁴.

The 9th dawned very clear and cloudless, with a few tremors that had no major consequences. Despuig spent the morning checking whether the comments circulating about the emergence of a volcano two miles from Tropea were true. He travelled there accompanied by a guide because he believed that such a phenomenon was possible. However, he did not find any trace of a crater even though his guide insisted otherwise. He noted in the diary that the earth emitted heat and that he found ‘espatosa’ (sic) [dreadful] ashen lava, very similar to that which could be found on Vesuvius, but he concluded that, ultimately, it could come from a previous opening of the earth. And, regarding the high temperature coming

43 *Ibidem*, 61.

44 *Ibidem*. This comment and the subsequent verification of the figures that he claims to have carried out confirms that Antonio Despuig later revised his *Varias Observaciones* even though, in all probability, he never thought of publishing them.

from the ground, he confirmed that, not far from there, there was a spring that ‘desde antiquísimo tiempo servía de baños termales’ [since ancient times served as thermal baths]⁴⁵. This was not the only news of that kind circulating. In mid-May, for example, the *Gazeta de Madrid* informed its readers of the apparent formation, at the end of March, of a volcano between the Calabrian towns of Oppido Mamertina and Santa Cristina d’Aspromonte⁴⁶.

On the 9th, a great deal of news was received regarding the degree of destruction of the territory and the state of towns, villages and their people. The weather was good in general, with a *tramontana* wind and a calm sea. Although Despuig wrote in his diary that he did not expect earthquakes, the fact is that there were three or four aftershocks at night. The next day the sky darkened again, the wind changed to sirocco and the earth trembled four times. The clergyman accurately recorded the times of all these incidents (see Table 1) but, from this moment on, and unlike the previous days, the notes are more in the form of summaries, although this makes them no less precise. On the 11th, the sirocco continued, there was a shower; the sea was rough and four new tremors were felt. In mid-morning a general procession was held carrying the image of Saint Dominica, protector of Tropea, to request divine mercy.

On the 12th, on the basis of the news I have already mentioned speaking insistently of the great geophysical modifications that had taken place in Calabria, Antonio Despuig finally decided to leave the beach and head inland, on horseback, to check the scope of the phenomenon *in situ*⁴⁷.

45 *Ibidem*.

46 Alberola Romá, ‘Un “mal año” en la España del siglo XVIII’, 121.

47 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 62.

Table 1. Aftershocks of the 1783 earthquakes, according to Antonio Despuig

Day	Time	Location	Earthquake and aftershocks	Duration
5 – 2 – 1783	12:45 12:47 15:00 15:30 17:00 20:30 00:00	Tropea	Start of earthquake: very violent 1st aftershock ('cannon – shots') 2nd aftershock ('not so strong') 3rd aftershock 4th aftershock 5th aftershock 6th aftershock	Less than 1 minute 4 minutes – – – –
6–2– 1783	1:30 2:30 4:00 Rest of the day At night	Tropea	7th aftershock 8th aftershock 9th aftershock ('quite important') 7 more aftershocks (16 – aftershocks) 6 more aftershocks (22 aftershocks)	– – – –
7–2– 1783	10:00 At night	Tropea	23rd aftershock (very strong) Tsunami at night	The earth moved all day
8–2– 1783		Tropea	Aftershocks continued	
9–2– 1783	I n the day At night	Tropea	Several aftershocks 3 or 4 aftershocks	
10–2– 1783	6:30 13:00 17:00 00:00	Tropea	1 aftershock 1 aftershock 4 aftershocks 1 aftershock	
11–2– 1783		Tropea	Slight aftershocks	
12–2– 1783	At night	Palmi	3 aftershocks	
13–2– 1783	At night	Monteleone	3 aftershocks	
14/16– 2–1783	At night	S a n t o Stefano del Bosco	Several strong aftershocks	
18/22– 2–1783	At night	Pizzo	3 or 4 aftershocks/night = 20 aftershocks.	

Source: Despuig, A.: *Varias observaciones (...)*. Self-created.

4. Between destruction, death and chaos: Material and spiritual aid

Antonio Despuig's description of the human drama after the earthquakes of 5 February is detailed and convincing. From the beach of Tropea, 'abierta en todas las direcciones' [open in all directions], watching the wandering of terrified people, far from their destroyed homes and with no other aim in those terrible moments immediately after the event than to escape the disaster by any means, made a deep impression on him. After all, Despuig was still one of all those who arrived 'fugitivos de su propia casa y como perseguidos por el terror' [fleeing their own home and as if persecuted by terror]⁴⁸. Because from the nearby towns and villages there was an immediate and 'general desertion' of all residents, who burst into where he had been sheltered since the day before 'a modo de enjambre de abejas a quien han destruido su colmena, [y] buscaban todos su recobro, pero este era difícil' [like a swarm of bees whose hive has been destroyed [and] all seeking recovery, although that was difficult]. His status as a clergyman was, in all probability, immediately known to those fleeing. This would have led them to seek spiritual comfort, asylum and protection in him as a man of God. In the following days, Despuig devoted himself to this task, while his *esperonara* was surrounded by 'un inmenso pueblo que, como forastero, quería consultar conmigo su necesidad y el medio que tomaría para conservar su vida' [an immense crowd who wanted to consult with me, as an outsider, about their needs and what they could do to preserve their lives]⁴⁹.

The shores of Tropea hosted people of all walks of life from Pergalía (Parghelia), Zabroni (Zambrone), Dápeia (Drapia), Prispáno, Cáller (Callea), Britario (Brattirò), Cerandina (Ciamariti) and Santa Domenica who, 'entre gritos y lágrimas' [among cries and tears], reported their destruction and lamented the loss of relatives and property⁵⁰ (Figure 1). Despuig mentions that he perceived in all of them a feeling of solidarity, which he described as a 'tender spectacle'. They assumed their misfortune

48 *Ibidem*, 52–4.

49 *Ibidem*, 56.

50 *Ibidem*, 53.

was ‘common’, they forgot enmities and discrepancies, and they established mutual aid and protection strategies. It is a feeling that becomes predominant in this type of extreme situation and Despuig himself confesses to having participated it, with emotion, immediately as ‘la humanidad me enseñó a repartir con ellos el consejo y aquellas cortas provisiones que tenía, uniéndome desde aquel punto a su buena o mala suerte’ [humanity taught me to share with them the advice and those scarce provisions that I had. From that point on my fortune was joined to theirs]. Feeling part of this common destiny, he confesses that it ‘rewarded’ him personally and that, while the situation persisted, he always perceived a solidarity that made him feel looked after, as both the authorities and ‘hasta el último de aquellas gentes me suministraron, luego que tuvieron facultad para ello, todo lo necesario con la mayor generosidad’ [every last one of those people, and later those who had the power to do so, provided me with everything I needed, with the greatest generosity]⁵¹.

The information provided by those who had abandoned their towns allowed Despuig to outline the state in which they had been left; which he would later complete with his journeys on the ground (see Table 2). He mentions that Parghelia was devastated ‘en un instante’ [in an instant] after the first earthquake⁵² and that, on the 6th, 50 deaths were recorded in Tropea and its surroundings⁵³. He learned that distant Seminara had been left in ruins and its 4,000 inhabitants had died from the information provided to him – as already indicated – by Friars Minims of ‘pálido aspecto y turbado exterior’ [pale and troubled appearance], whose friary had been reduced to rubble under which 38 of their companions lay buried⁵⁴.

Casal Novo (Cittanova) and Ópido (Oppido Mamertina) also disappeared from the map. In the first case, the dead numbered 8,000, including the Princess of Gerace, its lady. In the second, the mountain on which the town centre stood gave way and the buildings collapsed into the valley. 3,900 residents died⁵⁵. The crew members of two boats coming

51 *Ibidem*, 56.

52 *Ibidem*, 54.

53 *Ibidem*, 56.

54 *Ibidem*, 55.

55 *Ibidem*, 57.

from Bagnara and Scilla, close to the Strait of Messina, reported that the former no longer existed and that the dead numbered 3,000. In Scilla, the earthquake on 5 February and the tsunami that occurred two days later caused the deaths of more than 800 people, including the Count of Sinopoli⁵⁶. Despuig found out about the destruction of Reggio thanks to the aforementioned letter dated the 6th that a ‘friend’ who had fled from Tropea sent him via the skipper of a boat two days later. In it, he also informed the clergyman that Messina had been ‘reducida a un montón de piedras’ [reduced to a heap of stones]⁵⁷.

On his journey inland into Calabria, Despuig saw the razing of Palmi, the destruction of Mileto and Francica, the practical demolition of the ‘beautiful town’ of Monteleone and the dilapidated state of the town of Soriano⁵⁸. Although he does not list the names of all the towns he passed through on his route towards the Apennines, he does state that they were ‘all destroyed’ (Table 2). He found the coastal town of Pizzo, his return point for this inland journey and from where he intended to return by sea to Naples, ‘abierta por todas sus partes’ [open on all sides] and its residents camped on the beach⁵⁹.

56 *Ibidem*, 57–8.

57 *Ibidem*, 60.

58 *Ibidem*, 62–4. In his *Carta Corografica della Calabria Ulteriore*, Father Eliseo della Concezione indicates Soriano with three asterisks; that is, as a totally destroyed town. Concerning Mileto, see José Miguel Delgado Barrado, ‘Ciudades destruidas, ciudades trasladadas. La gestión del terremoto de Mesina-Calabria de 1783 en Mileto’, in Cecere, and Alberola Romá, *Rischio, catastrofe e gestione dell'emergenza*, 135–57.

59 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 65.

Table 2. Number of deaths and degree of destruction in some populations after the earthquakes of 1783, according to A. Despuig

Location	State after the earthquake	Number of deaths
Parghelia	'Destroyed in an Instant'	–
Tropea	Ruined Violent entry of the sea on the beach on the night of 7 February	50
Zambrone	Destroyed	–
Drapia	Destroyed	–
Prispano	Destroyed	–
Callea	Destroyed	–
Brattirò	Destroyed	–
Ciaramiti	Destroyed	–
Santa Domenica	Destroyed	–
Seminara	Ruined Minim Friary destroyed	+ than 4,000 38 friars
Casal Novo (Cittanova)	Destroyed	8,000 Death of the Princess of Gerace
Oppido Mamertina	'Buried'	3,900
Bagnara	Destroyed	+ than 3,000
Scilla	Tsunami in its harbour on the night of 5–6 February	+ than 800 Death of the Count of Sinopoli
Reggio	Destroyed	–
Messina	Destroyed	–
Palmi	Devastated	
Mileto	Destroyed	
Francica	Ruined	11
Monteleone (Vibo Valentia)	Half ruined	–
Soriano	Ruined	
Pizzo	'Open on all sides'	–
ALL CALABRIA	Devastated	60,000

Source: Despuig, A.: *Varias observaciones (...)*. Self-created.

The moments immediately after the earthquake of 5 February 1783 were dramatic and Antonio Despuig, on the beach at Tropea, promptly collected in his notebook the elements that characterize this type of

situation: catastrophe and destruction, death and abandonment of populations, fear, temporary arrangements and defenselessness, as well as civil and religious aid and assistance. The image after an earthquake is that of an uneducated, sacralised society, suddenly destructured and terrified by an awful, unexpected and inexplicable blow. In those first moments he perceives a selfish, unsupportive tendency among the victims, as, driven by fear, they seek personal and family salvation above all else. However, after a short time, this feeling gives way to a solidarity 'in misfortune' which promotes a return to social cohesion reinforced by collective religious ceremonies and also the emergency material aid established by the civil authorities together with the first measures to care for the victims, clear debris, assess damage and maintain order.

The first decision of those responsible for the government of the city of Tropea consisted of ordering its evacuation and prohibiting the return of its inhabitants until further notice. In the two days immediately following the earthquake, there were up to 22 aftershocks, absolute chaos, and no food could be provided to those who had gathered on the beach. Despuig described the atmosphere that prevailed on 6 February with metaphorical accuracy: 'los sacrificios, ayunos, ofrendas y ruegos [fueron] el pan que con lágrimas comieron todo aquel día; olvidándose totalmente de cualquier sustento corporal' [the sacrifices, fasting, offerings and prayers (were) the bread that they ate amid the tears all that day; totally forgetting any bodily support]⁶⁰. But this situation was hardly sustainable, as those fleeing Tropea were joined by those from neighbouring towns who, as the hours went on, began to request their 'natural subsistencia' [natural subsistence]. This came thanks to the authorities requisitioning and then distributing all the food carried by the boats that had been stranded on the beaches, mainly 'frutas secas y pastas' [dried fruits and pasta], which served as frugal food supplies. Despuig did not miss the opportunity to point out that it was 'Providence' that 'ofreció en la desgracia, un medio para subsistir' [offered in misfortune, a means of survival]; although, he immediately acknowledges that the following day 'un método para todo lo necesario a la vida' [a method for everything necessary for life] had

60 *Ibidem*, 55.

already been established by the governor and the trustees of Tropea who, ‘sacrificando su quietud, no olvidaban diligencia alguna que pudiese contribuir al alivio de aquel desgraciado pueblo’ [gave up their peace and quiet, not forgetting any diligence that could contribute to the relief of that unfortunate town]. In this sense, the Spanish cleric wrote:

tomaron [las autoridades] las más oportunas providencias, dignas a la verdad de llegar a los oídos del soberano: mandaron desde luego las barcas de pescar, que volvieron cargadas de peces; pusieron en venta pública todas las frutas secas que había en las embarcaciones, construyeron provisionalmente hornos para cocer el pan, tanto en la Marina como en el campo de la Anunciata, y no olvidando particularmente en aquel momento crítico el servicio al rey y de la patria, lograron al cuarto día quedase el pueblo asistido de todo lo necesario⁶¹.

[(the authorities) took the most opportune measures, truly worthy of reaching the sovereign’s ears: they immediately sent out the fishing boats, which returned loaded with fish; they put up for public sale all the dried fruits that were on the boats; they built temporary ovens to bake bread, both in the Harbour and in the Campo de la Anunciata; and not forgetting particularly at that critical moment their duty to king and country, by the fourth day they managed to ensure that the people were cared for with everything they needed].

All this was while political leaders and the people in general devoted themselves to building provisional shelters – ‘tristes y mal compuestas barracas y débiles tiendas’ [sad and poorly composed huts and feeble tents] – or to adapting the boats that had been stranded on the sand so that they could fight the February cold, the rain and the wind and not have to spend their nights in the open. The governor determined that those who could reach the beach fleeing the disaster from very distant towns should be provided with what they needed despite the precarious situation in which those gathered there found themselves. This was the case of two sailors who managed to reach Tropea from Scilla ‘half alive’ in a small boat. The authorities of the Neapolitan kingdom took some time to launch the aid machinery in the vast Calabrian territory and on the island of Sicily. This is why the references Despuig provides, however laconic they may be, are so important, as they show that the, albeit modest, initiatives taken by the local authorities provided vital support to residents until the aid established from Naples began to be distributed.

61 *Ibidem*, 56.

Alongside the application of this material aid, Despuig refers to that of a spiritual nature put into operation immediately, even before material assistance. I must stress that, contrary to what we might expect, the Mallorcan Canon does not overplay the providentialist reflections and sayings impregnated with fatalism so common in these cases. Obviously, he transmits the convictions he holds deeply as a man of the church, but he makes them compatible with his scientific observations, his descriptions of the marine and terrestrial environment, and his speculative interest. In his diary he wrote down all the circumstances surrounding the earthquake and its subsequent aftershocks as accurately as he could, given the circumstances, and he confesses that his ‘sentimientos de religión’ [feelings of religion] did not surface until the ‘fatal momento’ [fatal moment] when he contemplated the collapse of the main buildings of Tropea, the confused and tumultuous arrival of its residents on the beach and the almost instantaneous destruction of the neighbouring town of Parghelia⁶².

In line with this, Antonio Despuig wrote that after the ‘general desertion’ of the people and the desperate search for safety in the face of the unpredictable consequences of the earthquake and the violent aftershocks, ‘solo el Dios de las misericordias podía asistirles en aquel tiempo tan calamitoso’ [Only the God of mercies could assist them in that calamitous time] which was why, from that point on

se dio lugar a los actos más serios de nuestra sagrada religión: empezamos a levantar mal seguras barracas donde se erigieron altares al Señor, celebróse en ellos el santo sacrificio, supliendo la necesidad de algunos ornamentos sacros que quedaban sepultados en las ruinas, y aquel pueblo recibió devotamente la comunión⁶³.

[the most serious acts of our sacred religion were carried out: we began to erect poorly secured huts where altars to the Lord were put up and the holy sacrifice was celebrated on them, replacements were found for some sacred ornaments that remained buried in the ruins, and people devoutly received communion].

This is what usually happens in such cases, when disaster and panic encourage the development of religious rituals intended to unite human groups through the deployment of collective practices whose ultimate goal

62 *Ibidem*, 52.

63 *Ibidem*, 54–5.

is to mitigate the feeling of guilt that inevitably arises when a misfortune on the scale of an earthquake has occurred. It is true that in Despuig's *Observaciones* there are no explicit allusions to the behaviour of a righteous God who intends to correct human conduct, in this case through a terrible earthquake. Rather, he seems to resort to religious feeling to soften his dramatic comments and, of course, extol the attitude displayed by secular and regular clergy in their duty of aid. These are always presented by Despuig as going out of their way for residents who have lost everything, giving them comfort and food while they built flimsy shelters – 'tristes habitaciones' (sad rooms) – or buried their dead, as he was able to see on his way through Palmi. All of them, affirms the Spanish cleric, shared an 'ingrata armonía' [unwanted harmony] resulting from 'sus lágrimas y suspiros' [their tears and sighs]⁶⁴. But this care was also given by religious people to those who, escaping from their devastated towns and villages, appeared in their precarious residences. This was the case of the monks of Santo Stefano del Bosco and the friars of Santo Domingo in Soriano, as Despuig himself confirmed when he travelled to the foothills of the Apennines to check the changes in the territory after the earthquakes.

Collective rituals, so characteristic of popular religiosity in difficult times, were held in the days after the earthquake, despite the risk they might entail. Thus, on 7 February, after more than a few hardships and with increasingly alarming news of the extent of the catastrophe throughout Calabria coming in, it was decided to consecrate the day entirely to God. But at 10am, while the archdeacon of the cathedral was celebrating mass, there was a new and violent earthquake that, at the moment of consecration, forced the priest to protect the host and chalice with his hands to prevent the worst happening. According to Despuig, the mass was successfully completed but the subsequent events were cancelled⁶⁵. The last reference to collective acts is the one corresponding to 12 February, the day when a general procession was held in Tropea with the participation of the residents of all the nearby towns to 'implorar la misericordia del Señor' [implore the Lord's mercy], which was very common in this type of circumstances. On this occasion the intercessor was the image of Santa

64 *Ibidem*, 62.

65 *Ibidem*, 58.

Domenica, virgin and martyr, protector of the town⁶⁶. Despuig does not provide further details in this respect, nor does he refer to similar ceremonies in the rest of his diary.

5. Antonio Despuig's journey to inland Calabria: Surveying a destroyed region

Of all the details the Mallorcan Canon compiled in his Tropea beach refuge from the impact of the long seismic sequence, he was particularly struck by those referring to the great morphological changes that occurred throughout the Calabrian territory, particularly in the southern Apennines. It was said of these mountains that ‘*todos se habían abierto, que se habían trasladado países enteros y otras muchas particularidades a que mi experiencia en aquellos días no podía creer*’ [they had all opened up; that entire region had moved; and many other peculiarities that, with my experience in those days, I could not believe]⁶⁷. This increased his interest in checking for himself. In time, surveys and studies carried out throughout the geography of Calabria would show that rivers had had their courses altered and even disappeared, mountains and valleys had undergone noticeable changes and that many lakes and lagoons had emerged⁶⁸. This evidence would arouse unprecedented interest in Europe that the press of the time would be happy to encourage by circulating descriptions of the state in which the affected regions had been left, publicising the results of the surveys carried out *in situ*, highlighting the scientific news resulting from the study of these Calabro-Sicilian earthquakes and fueling the arguments that arose between naturalists, philosophers, doctors, enlightened people, scholars and even ordinary people⁶⁹.

66 *Ibidem*, 61.

67 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 62.

68 Alessandro Guerricchio, ‘Deformazioni gravitative di versante e frane da liquefazione indotte nel territorio di Polistena-Cinquefrondi dal terremoto delle Calabrie del 1783’, *Memorie Descrittive della Carta Geologica d’Italia*, 78 (2008), 127–44; Francesco De Pascale, ‘I terremoti calabro-messinesi del 1783. Evoluzione dei Segni del paesaggio e morfogenesi del territorio’, in Caterina Barilaro, José Gambino, and Corradina Polto, eds, *La Sicilia nell’assetto dello spazio euromediterraneo* (Rome: EDAS, 2016), 199–205.

69 Anne Marie Mercier-Faivre, ‘Le pouvoir d’“intéresser”: le tremblement de terre de Messine, 1783’, in Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, and Chantal Thomas, eds,

Returning to Despuig, the continuous comments received from different places at his refuge in Tropea made him consider exploring the ‘mil desastres acaecidos en lo más alto de las montañas de los Apeninos superiores’ [thousand disasters that occurred at the top of the upper Apennines]⁷⁰. Of course, he was not a naturalist. Neither did he have specific training to scientifically assess the geophysical alterations that were said to have taken place. However, he made the decision to travel into the extensive and broken surface of Calabria, despite the risks that the adventure entailed, guided by his innate curiosity and, as he states in his diary, by his intention to find out first-hand about an unusual phenomenon that ‘tal vez no tendría ocasión de ver en mis días’ [perhaps I would otherwise not have the opportunity to see in my days]. This decision made him a true pioneer when it came to developing an observation of these characteristics on the ground, as he was a month and a half ahead of the *peregrinazione letteraria* which, organised by the Reale Accademia delle Scienze e delle Belle Lettere of Naples, was led by Michele Sarconi between April and September of that year, 1783⁷¹. He was also ahead of the scientific route followed during May by the renowned Scottish naturalist and volcanologist William Hamilton⁷², observing, describing and analysing what Sarconi described as *orrenda rivoluzione física*. During February and March of the following year, Déodat de Dolomieu, mineralogist, member of the Paris Academy of Sciences and precursor of modern geology, surveyed the area again. Putting forward very attractive hypotheses, he prepared a highly

L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII^e siècle. Du châtement divin au désastre naturel (Genève: Droz, 2008), 231–52; Alberola Romá, ‘La información post desastre en el siglo XVIII’, 101–33.

70 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 62.

71 Michele Sarconi, *Istoria de' Fenomeni del Tremoto avvenuto nelle Calabrie; Placanica, Iliade Funesta*.

72 William Hamilton, ‘An Account of the Earthquakes Which Happened in Italy, from February to May 1783. By Sir William Hamilton, Knight of the Bath, F. R. S.; in a Letter to Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. P. R. S.’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 73 (1783), 169–208. See also: Placanica, *Il filosofo e la catastrofe*, 71–2; Jan Blanc, ‘La Calabre, terre sublime? Sir William Hamilton et les séismes de Calabre de 1783–1784’, in Lorenz Baumer, Patricia Birchler Emery, and Matteo Campagnolo, eds, *Le Voyage à Crotona: découvrir la Calabre de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 89–98.

innovative analysis of the consequences of the catastrophe in which he laid the foundations for future research in the field of seismology⁷³.

The decision to ‘atropellar cualquier dificultad’ [overcome any difficulty] to go see what they were talking about was made by Despuig, as already indicated, on 12 February. That day, when there was to be a general procession in Tropea, he began the journey on horseback, with ‘limited’ luggage and the essential tools. Although he does not mention companions, it can be assumed that he would have been accompanied by a guide⁷⁴. The route to reach the Apennines that he notes in his diary is somewhat confusing, at least at the beginning, and was perhaps forced on him by the road layout at the time (Figure 2). It indicates that he headed south through Panaia, that he reached Nicotera and that, after crossing the River Metramo and then Rosarno, he reached Palmi, on the coast. He does not hide the pain that the spectacle he beheld caused him: a town that had formerly been ‘rica y comerciante’ [rich and trading] was devastated, corpses appeared everywhere among the ruins, and the residents who had escaped misfortune were wandering around, confused and terrified, as they buried their neighbours’ bodies. He noted that it was ‘the most melancholy day I have ever experienced’. However, he also stated that this was the tragedy that he had found in all the towns and villages. It was a tragedy barely mitigated by the attitude of secular and regular clergy, who went out of their way to care for the survivors without neglecting the shack that, as in other places, had been built to celebrate religious ceremonies and preserve objects of worship.

That night, which he spent in the open in an unspecified place, seemed ‘eternal’ to him as the earth trembled three times under a clear sky and sirocco wind. At dawn on the 13th, he took his horses to escape what he defined as a ‘situación melancólica’ [melancholy situation], by heading towards Mileto, although he did not reach it, thinking ‘tampoco hallaría en esta ciudad lo necesario’ [I would not find what I needed in this city

73 Déodat de Dolomieu, *Mémoire sur les tremblements de terre de la Calabre pendant l'année 1783, par le commandeur* (Rome: Chez Antoine Fulgoni, 1784). See also: Simone Messina, ‘Le naturaliste et la catastrophe: Dolomieu en Calabre, 1784’, in Mercier-Faivre, and Thomas, eds, *L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII^e siècle*, 285–303; Placanica, *Il filosofo e la catastrofe*, 73–5.

74 Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 62.

either]⁷⁵. He headed towards Francica, ‘feudo del duque del Infantado’ [feud of the Duke of Infantado] to the east of Mileto, which he found in ruins, with eleven of its residents dead, and, from there, he went to Monteleone – modern Vibo Valentia – some three miles away. In this ‘hermoso pueblo medio arruinado’ [beautiful half-ruined town], where Field Marshal Francesco Pignatelli would settle after being appointed Vicar General by Ferdinand IV of Naples to assess the damage, help the victims and maintain order in Calabria, Despuig was welcomed by Capuchin friars, and he spent the night in their shelter. According to his custom, he noted that the sky ‘estaba algo sereno, aunque más cubierto’ [was quite calm, although more covered], that the wind was from the north wind and blew ‘algo más fresco’ [somewhat cooler] and that he perceived three new aftershocks⁷⁶.



Figure 2. Territory covered by Antonio Despuig on his journey to the Apennines (by Eliseo della Concezione, *Carta chorografica della Calabria Ulteriore*, 1783).

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 63. Mileto was completely destroyed and was rebuilt in the vicinity of its previous location, see Delgado Barrado, ‘Ciudades destruidas, ciudades trasladadas’, 146–54.

⁷⁶ Despuig, *Varias observaciones*, 63.

At dawn on the 14th, he left Monteleone ready to fulfil his goal of ‘observar las grandes aberturas que se habían hecho en los Apeninos’ [observing the great openings that had been made in the Apennines]; but also to satisfy his cultural inclinations and visit the monastery of Santo Stefano del Bosco, near Serra San Bruno, and the Dominican friary of Santo Domenico in Soriano. He was aware that the trip entailed great risk because, days before, in Tropea, he had heard some sailors who had from Bagnara telling of a tragedy caused by the unstable nature of the ground after the earthquakes. They said that, while five local residents were walking along the road from Bagnara to Melicuccà with horses loaded with pasta, there was a sudden landslide of earth and rocks in the narrows formed by two hills which buried all except one of them, who, as he was behind, survived to tell the tale⁷⁷.

From Monteleone, Despuig headed east, passing through several towns whose names he does not give ‘todas destruidas’ [all destroyed], crossed the River Mesima and began to climb the ‘alta sierra’ [high mountains]. He confesses that it caused him ‘horror’

ver las grandes aberturas que se habían hecho en aquellas montañas: particularmente antes de llegar a un olivar de Soriano se había desprendido tal cantidad de tierra, que formaba una abertura de más de 300 varas y hacía difícil la subida⁷⁸.

[to see the large openings that had been made in those mountains: particularly before reaching an olive grove in Soriano, which such an quantity of earth had become detached that it formed an opening measuring more than 300 *varas* and made it difficult to climb].

However, after confirming that the entire landslide consisted of ‘a mass of loose earth without any stones’ he somewhat corrected his initial shocked impression. However, immediately afterwards, he noted something in his diary that did impress him:

a una cierta subida inmediata al crucero de los dos caminos, que se dividen uno por Monteleón, otro por Soriano, reparé un pedazo de tierra a modo de círculo, cuyo diámetro sería de 30 pasos, que había hecho una especie de zambulladura [sic], pues se veían las raíces en lo alto de todos los árboles y aún las plantas más pequeñas⁷⁹.

77 *Ibidem*, 57.

78 *Ibidem*, 63.

79 *Ibidem*.

[At a certain sharp ascent to the crossing of the two roads, which divide, one going via Monteleon, the other via Soriano, I noticed a circular piece of ground with a diameter of about 30 paces, which had somewhat collapsed, as roots and even the smallest plants could be seen above the trees].

This ‘turning’ of the landscape and the circular shape adopted were one of the most common geophysical modifications which, in some places, led to the emergence of lakes or lagoons, as shown in the magnificent illustrations that make up *Atlante iconográfico*, mostly made by Pompeo Schiarantelli, with prints by Antonio Zaballi, which accompanies the aforementioned *Istoria de’ Fenomeni del Tremoto avvenuto nelle Calabrie* by Michele Sarconi. When Despuig reached the top, he was able to contemplate, on an ‘alta eminencia’ [high eminence], the remains of the ‘suntuosa fábrica de San Esteban del Bosque’ [sumptuous building of Santo Stefano del Bosco] built in the last decade of the 11th eleventh century on the initiative of Saint Bruno of Cologne, founder of the Carthusian order. The monks welcomed him for two days, housing him in a hut that they had built to protect the relics of their founder, the tabernacle and themselves. The weather was ‘cargado de nieblas’ [very foggy] and there were several aftershocks which, given the height he was at, seemed much stronger than at the bottom of the mountain⁸⁰. Despuig considered that the many ‘feudos y países’ [fiefs and regions] held by the Carthusians were totally ruined and he understood why, at the height where he was, the tears and lamentations were identical to those in Tropea.

On the 17th, he said a ‘tender’ goodbye to the congregation that had given him refuge and shared their meagre food with him, and headed back to Soriano to visit the monastery of Santo Domenico. He deduced the monumental size of the building, which during the 16th and 17th centuries had been a great cultural and economic centre, from the ‘montaña de piedras’ [mountain of stones] to which the earthquakes had reduced it. Despuig wrote in his diary that ‘era común la desgracia’ [the misfortune was common] to the sacred enclosure and the town. The inconsolable survivors had lost family and property and all around them were death, tears and destruction.

80 *Ibidem*, 64.

When trying to return to the previous day's path to continue his journey, he found that the earthquakes during the night had made it impassable. He chose to take a path that led him to the coastal town of Pizzo, where he arrived at nightfall. He noted in his notebook that the town was 'abierta por todas sus partes' [open in all parts] with its residents camped on the beach, where he also found his *esperonara*, which had managed to arrive from Tropea. He spent the night there and stayed there for five days waiting for the sea to calm to allow him to return to Naples. During that time the human contingent congregated on the beach increased and, every night, he counted three or four earthquakes of normal intensity, which did not cause damage⁸¹.

Finally, on the 22nd, the weather seemed to improve and the *esperonara* was able to sail north towards the Neapolitan court. However, just beyond the nearby town of Sant'Eufemia (Sant'Eufemia Lamezia), the sea was rough and they had to disembark on an 'arenal despoblado' [uninhabited sandbank], four miles from Nocera Terinese, which Despuig calls Pietra la Nave where he indicates that he spent four days with the crew. It cannot have been exactly like that, though, because next he states that they left the place on the 23rd, with the sea calmer, with the intention of spending the night in Fuscaldo and, the next day, reaching the Gulf of Policastro. Once again, bad weather allowed them only to reach Cape Bonifati, where they were able to disembark thanks to the help given them by the many people on the beach. On its sands, about 25 miles from Cosenza, they remained until 11 March, suffering earthquakes and 'horrible tempestad' [horrible storms] at night capable of 'intimidating' those who, unlike Despuig, 'no hubiera estado hecho a padecer' [had not been made to suffer] because:

a un mismo tiempo veíamos entrar hacia nosotros el mar, repetir los terremotos, caer diluvios de agua con truenos y centellas, un viento furioso y, para hacer más espantosa esta escena, nos ofrecía el Estrómboli inmensas montañas de fuego⁸².

[At the same time we saw the sea coming towards us, with the earthquakes repeating themselves, deluges of water falling with thunder and lightning and a furious wind. To make this scene more terrifying, Stromboli offered us immense mountains of fire].

81 *Ibidem*, 65.

82 *Ibidem*, 66.

On 13 March, the vessel weighed anchor and was able to reach the Gulf of Policastro in the middle of another fierce storm that Despuig attributed to a probable earthquake. From there, and not without risk, they reached the harbour at Lenfresco (Porto degli Infreschi) where the Spanish clergyman took refuge in an inn on a promontory on the beach and watched as it was battered by the sea ‘con tal soberbia cual jamás le había visto’ [with audacity I had never seen before]⁸³. That was enough for the future cardinal who, ‘cansado ya de tantas tribulaciones y riesgos que había pasado por el mar’ [already tired of all the tribulations and risks I had been through at sea], left the bulk of his luggage in the boat and, shouldering only the essentials, walked the six miles that separated the beach from the village of Camarota. Here, together with his adventurous companions⁸⁴, he took the royal road that led to Naples, where, according to his diary, he arrived, ‘happily’, on 16 March, after a very intense month and a half, full of upsets and excitement, risks and uncertainty, sadness and discomfort, but also packed with experiences and discoveries. It was a time when Antonio Despuig was a privileged witness to the worst earthquakes that shook the Italian peninsula during the eighteenth century, visited many towns and villages on his journeys by sea and land (see Table 3), contemplated the terrible effects of the earthquakes on the territory and its people and, ultimately, had the good sense to write down all the incidents in his travel journal simply, accurately, and with more than a little critical spirit.

83 *Ibidem*, 67.

84 Despuig refers to them as ‘su pobre familia, compañera fiel en mis tribulaciones’ [its poor family, faithful companion in my tribulations], *ibidem*.

Table 3. Place names mentioned by Antonio Despuig

Route towards Sicily and Malta	Inland route	Return to Naples
Tropea	Upper Apennines	Pizzo
Formicole (Fornicole)	Pannania (Panaia)	Sant'Eufemia
Golfo di Gioia	Nicotera	Pietra la Nave (near
Golfo Epetuio (de Santa Eufemia or Nepetino)	River Medrani (Metramo)	Nocera Terinese)
Punta Vaticana (Cape Vaticano)	Rosano (Rosarno)	Nocera
Pergalía (Parghelia)	Palmi	Foscaudo (Fuscaldo)
Zabroni (Zambrone)	Mileto	Capo di Bonifacio
Dápeia (Drapia)	Francica	Golfo di Policastro
Prispano	Monteleone (Vibo Valentia)	Lenfresco (Porto degli
Cáller (Callea)	River Mésuma (Mesima)	Infreschi)
Britario (Brattirò)	River Madama (?)	C a m a r o t a
Cerandine (Ciaramiti)	Soriano	(Camerota): from here,
Santa Domenica	Pizzo	to Naples by land
Stromboli (volcano)		
Seminara		
La Piana (Pianura de Gioia or de Rosarno)		
Casal Novo (Cittanova)		
Gierasí (Gerace)		
Ópido (Oppido Mamertina)		
River Metauro		
Bagnara		
Melicuccà		
Silla (Scilla)		
Muro de Fiumara (Fiumara)		

Source: Despuig, A.: *Varias observaciones (...)*. Own creation.

6. Final reflections

The *Varias observaciones* that Antonio Despuig i Dameto devoted to the earthquakes that devastated Calabria and Messina in February 1783 constitute an interesting and very useful account that contributes to a better understanding of the impact caused – in the initial period and in a specific geographical area – by what are considered to have been the worst earthquakes suffered in the Italian peninsula during the century of enlightenment. The Canon of Palma de Mallorca, as he was at the time, who

had become a privileged spectator of the event, made the most of the circumstances to write down, as was his custom, not only everything he witnessed, but also everything that reached his ears. With a clear, direct style, he recorded in his notebook, probably without any intention to publish them, the observations he made with tremendous curiosity and scientific interest, from the moment the first terrible tremor was felt.

The detailed study of the content of his *Observaciones* has taken 77 years: the time between its transcription being published by a Mallorcan printing press and the present day. I believe that it was not only appropriate to carry it out, it was also no more than Despuig deserved. Firstly, because, little more than 16 printed pages, Despuig's notes provide important information to complement the so-called 'news items', 'letters', 'accounts', 'stories' and the like that contemporaries who suffered the consequences of this large-scale seismic sequence prepared and published. Secondly, because of what it implies in terms of recognition for the career of an unusual character, both in political-ecclesiastical terms and on his merely personal side, particularly his cultural interests, his archaeological and artistic hobbies and his patronage.

Antonio Despuig bequeathed us an eyewitness account of the scope of the violent earthquakes, from the first tremor on the beach at Tropea, the place destiny reserved for him. His story exudes the freshness of a chronicle of an emergency which, like the accounts of the best diarists, seeks to 'save memory' so as to be able, in the future, to recall the events he refers to and, where appropriate, take advantage of the experience acquired in dealing with them⁸⁵. Despuig counted each and every one of the immediate aftershocks following the first great midday tremor on 5 February 1783, indicating, where possible, the exact time and the violence with which he perceived them. To this he added constant observations concerning the state of the atmosphere, the sea and the strength and direction of the wind, which he combined with descriptions of the state of the territory and the nearest towns, and even much more distant ones thanks to the eyewitness accounts provided by those who went to the beach of

85 Armando Alberola Romá, 'Clima, desastre y religiosidad en los dietaristas valencianos de los siglos XVI y XVII', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 25 (2016), 41–66.

Tropea seeking help and protection. The initiatives taken by the authorities to deal with the disaster also attracted Despuig's attention, as did those adopted by the clergy. In the first case, he includes the orders issued to protect the personal safety of residents, guarantee social order, quickly attend to vital needs and restore normality. To these material remedies were added those of a spiritual nature provided by the Mallorcan Canon and the other clergy gathered there. To the assistance and consolation procured personally, always invoking divine goodness and mercy, was added the erection of huts where images could be displayed with a certain dignity, sacred ornaments kept and collective ceremonies held in order to promote 'solidaridad en la desgracia' [solidarity in misfortune] making it possible to prevent conflicts between people. In this sense, Despuig refers to the celebration of masses, collective communion and a general procession in Tropea carrying the image of Santa Domenica as an intercessor before the Almighty. It is the only allusion to a saint made by Despuig. On no other page of his *Varias observaciones*, and unlike the more common styles in accounts of natural disasters, do we find any mention of intermediaries against earthquakes. Nor is there any mention of the cause of the earthquake, an issue that deeply affected the victims, as, after an extraordinary event with disastrous consequences, secular and regular clergy tended to dust off their old discourse of a righteous God determined to punish men and women for their impious behaviour. Such providentialism, so typical of the time, is very muted in Despuig and his passing references to it can be justified by the fact that he was, after all, a man of God. His interest in observing nature and his scientific curiosity in confirming the scope of the geophysical alterations caused by earthquakes is important, however. A magnificent example of the latter is the journey from the coast that led him to the foothills of the Apennines in inland Calabria, a clear precedent for the surveys carried out by well-known scientists just over two months later.

Luis Alberto Arrijoja Díaz Viruell

Between the brilliant light and the shadow of the insects: The instruction on the plague of locusts ordered by the Government of Guatemala in 1804*

1. Introduction

A review of the historiography devoted to the eighteenth century shows that physiocracy was by far the most important of the great contributions of the Enlightenment. This was a current of economic thought that, among other things, prioritized the rational exploitation of nature, the promotion of agricultural activities, the technological transformation of the countryside, the dissociation of corporate property, the commodification of farming and the well-being of the public economy. The trend is known to have been deeply rooted among ministers and intellectual circles of the Spanish monarchy, either because of the materials it provided for dealing with economic problems or, above all, because of the horizons it opened for implementing the Bourbons' reformist agenda¹. It is

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1 Gonzalo Anes, 'El informe sobre la Ley agraria y la Real Sociedad Económica Matritense de Amigos del País', in *Economía e ilustración en la España del siglo XVIII* (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1969), 97–136; Ernest Lluch, and Lluís Argemí i D'Abadal, 'La fisiocracia en España, 1750–1820', in Ernest Lluch, and Lluís Argemí i D'Abadal, eds, *Agronomía y fisiocracia en España, 1750–1820* (Valencia: Institución Alfonso El Magnanimo, 1985), 45–100; Enrique Martínez Ruiz, and Magdalena de Pazzis Pi Corrales, 'Introducción: ilustración, ciencia y técnica', in Enrique Martínez Ruiz, and Magdalena de Pazzis Pi Corrales, eds, *Ilustración, ciencia y técnica en el siglo XVIII español* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2008), 13–22; Gabriel Paquette, 'Carlos III: la ilustración entre

therefore not surprising that a good part of the actions inspired by physiocracy stood out being broadly utilitarian. This was undoubtedly because utilitarianism was a current based on the assumption that the prosperity of nations depended on the progress of agriculture and the use of natural resources, as these elements were ‘una fuente de la riqueza particular’ [a source of private wealth], ‘manantial de abundancias’ [wellspring of abundance], a ‘recurso que asegura los abastos de la población’ [resource that ensures supplies for the population] and a ‘medio que hace florecer los Estados’ [means to make States flourish]². Under these premises, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos himself stated in his Agrarian Law of 1795 that:

un Estado sin agricultura será siempre precario, penderá siempre de aquellos pueblos de quienes recibe sus materias y en quienes consume sus productos [...]; la agricultura puede levantar un Estado, su solidez y su grandeza [...]; debemos protegerla de toda amenaza [...], porque este es el más seguro, más directo y

España y Ultramar’, in Antonino de Francesco, Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, and Raffaele Nocera, eds, *Entre Mediterráneo y Atlántico. Circulaciones, conexiones y miradas, 1756–1867* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014), 73–92; Armando Alberola Romá, ‘Agricultura, clima y superstición en la España del siglo XVIII: algunas reflexiones del padre Feijoo’, in Inmaculada Urzainqui, and Rodrigo Olay Valdés, eds, *Con la razón y la experiencia. Feijoo 250 años después* (Oviedo: Instituto Feijoo de Estudios del siglo XVIII – Universidad de Oviedo – Ediciones Trea, 2016), 21–42; Thomas Calvo, ‘Ciencia, cultura y políticas ilustradas (Nueva España y otras partes)’, in Clara García Ayluardo, ed., *Las reformas borbónicas, 1750–1808* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica – Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica – Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia – Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2010), 96.

- 2 Pedro Rodríguez Campomanes, *Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1775); Joseph del Campillo y Cossío, *Nuevo sistema de gobierno económico para la América: Con los males y daños que le causa el que hoy tiene, de los que participa copiosamente España; y remedios universales para que la primera tenga considerables ventajas, y la segunda mayores intereses. Por el señor Don Joseph del Campillo y Cossío* (Madrid: Benito Cano, 1789); Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, *Informe de la Sociedad Económica de esta Corte al Real y Supremo Consejo de Castilla en el expediente de la Ley Agraria, extendido por su individuo de número el Señor Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, a nombre de la Junta encargada de su formación y con arreglo a sus opiniones* (Madrid: en la imprenta de Sancha, impreso de la Real Sociedad, 1795).

más breve medio de criar una poderosa industria y un comercio opulento [...]; defendámosla y liberémosla de los estorbos físicos o derivados de la naturaleza³.

[a State without agriculture will always be precarious; it will always depend on those peoples from whom it receives its materials and in which its products are consumed (...) Agriculture can build a State, its solidity and its greatness (...); we must protect it from all threats (...), because this is the surest, most direct and quickest means of raising powerful industry and opulent commerce (...); let us defend it and free it from physical hindrances or those deriving from Nature].

The influence of the physiocracy in the Hispanic world was the result of two processes. Firstly, its main exponents – such as Pedro Campomanes Rodríguez, José del Campillo y Cossio, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, Pablo de Olavide, Antonio de Capmany and Francisco Cabarrús – were part of the higher bureaucracy and enjoyed the freedom to implement these ideas in all areas. Secondly, there was a symbiosis between the reformist agenda of the Bourbons and physiocracy, especially in dealing with the problems of the agrarian economy during the second half of the eighteenth century, either due to the population increase and the rising demand for land, the continuing use of structures that amortized property, the stagnation in production levels or the presence of natural threats affecting agriculture⁴.

3 ‘Informe de la Real Sociedad Económica de Madrid al real y Supremo Consejo de Castilla en el expediente de Ley agraria extendido por el autor a nombre de la junta encargada de su formación, (1795)’, 29–185, in Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, *Obras del excelentísimo señor don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos. Ilustradas con numerosas notas y dispuestas por orden de materias en un plan claro, vario y ameno, aumentadas además con un considerable caudal de escritos del autor, dignos de la luz pública e impresos ahora colectivamente por primera vez, con la vida de Jovellanos, retratos y viñetas, por don Uenceslao Linares y Pacheco*, vol. VII (Barcelona: Francisco Oliva, 1840).

4 Gonzalo Anes, *El siglo de las luces* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990); Armando Alberola Romá, *Catástrofe, economía y acción política en la Valencia del siglo XVIII* (Valencia: Instituto Alfons el Magnanim, 1999); Id., *Los cambios climáticos. La Pequeña Edad de Hielo en España* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2014); Antonio Mestre Sanchis, *Apología y crítica de España en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2003); Carla Almanza-Gálvez, ‘From Reformist to Utopia? Pablo de Olavide’s Socio-Economic Project in *El Evangelio en Triunfo* (1790)’, *Dieciocho. Hispanic Enlightenment*, 38/2 (2015), 197–218.

In the face of these adversities, the Crown did not hesitate to use the fundamental bases of physiocracy to resolve the situation in the countryside. There were clear actions in the field of natural and biological threats alone. For example, when faced with the plague of locusts that invaded Extremadura between 1754 and 1758, officials warned that these events were real ‘obstáculos para la agricultura’ [obstacles to agriculture], which was why it was necessary to implement measures to eradicate the insects, promote agricultural activities, care for farmland and contain food shortages. When the plague advanced on La Mancha, Valencia and Andalusia, these measures were even extended to the entire peninsula and were reviewed with a view to reinforcing them⁵. Something very similar happened with the floods and droughts that afflicted the Mediterranean side of the country between 1760 and 1789. These events devastated many agricultural areas and caused problems in the provincial economies. The Crown therefore drew up orders, decrees and plans to alleviate the threats, restore agricultural work and re-establish farming⁶.

It should be noted that these government actions had a great impact in the native American territories and even inspired initiatives to take on the ‘natural obstacles’, ‘physical hindrances’ and ‘chance impediments’ suffered by agriculture. There are numerous examples from the Captaincy General of Guatemala, aimed at remedying the havoc caused by the Santa Marta earthquake of 1773 in the city of Santiago de los Caballeros and in the agricultural areas around it; the damage caused by the volcanic eruptions of Pacaya and Izalco in 1775, 1783 and 1797 and their effects on agricultural land; as well as the problems caused by the droughts of

5 Anes, *Economía e ilustración en la España del siglo XVIII*, 97–136; Armando Alberola Romá, ‘Plagas de langosta y clima en la España del siglo XVIII’, *Relaciones. Estudios de historia y sociedad*, 129 (2012), 21–50; Alberola Romá, *Los cambios climáticos*, 179–248.

6 Lluch, and Argemí i D’Abadal, ‘La fisiocracia en España, 1750–1820’, 75–77; Armando Alberola Romá, Eduardo Bueno Vergara, y Adrián García Torres, ‘Sequías y rogativas en tierras meridionales valencianas durante el siglo XVIII’, in Luis Alberto Arrijoa Díaz Viruell, and Armando Alberola Romá, eds, *Clima, desastres y convulsiones sociales en España e Hispanoamérica, siglos XVII–XX* (Mexico – Alicante: El Colegio de Michoacán – Universidad de Alicante, 2016), 123–56.

1768–1769, 1784–1785 and 1796–1797 and the locust plagues of 1768–1772 and 1798–1807 in all provinces of the Captaincy General. It should be stressed that many of these palliative actions took the form of regulations, ordinances, edicts, articles of the *Real Ordenanza de Intendentes*, instructions from the Governing Board of the Royal Treasury and mandates from the Real Audiencia of Guatemala. These initiatives show, firstly, the habit of seeking the interests of the monarchy and its subjects, and, on the other, the physiocratic ideas that sought, at all costs, to promote the exploitation of the countryside, the development of agriculture, the decoupling of land ownership and the commodification of agricultural activities⁷. Throughout this chapter I examine the way in which a plague of locusts that invaded the Captaincy General of Guatemala between 1797 and 1807 led to the creation of a plan focusing on physiocratic ideas and agrarian mercantilism. Among other things, this plan makes it possible to demonstrate three important processes: firstly, the climatic anomalies that were experienced in Central America during the second half of the eighteenth century; secondly, the domestic and commercial problems faced by agriculture while suffering from biological threats; and, thirdly, the way in which physiocratic ideas were adapted to local conditions and used to reverse the misfortunes in the countryside. To do this, I am using as a basis the *Instrucción sobre la plaga de langosta, medios de exterminarla o de disminuir sus efectos, y de recaber la escasez de comestibles. Dispuesta por orden del superior Gobierno de Guatemala, por el licenciado don José de Valle, abogado de esta Real Audiencia* (1804), an initiative that called on the *novatores* of the Central American Enlightenment. It was circulated widely in the Captaincy General and was referred to in some publications that were distributed in indigenous areas, such as the *Diario de los literatos*, the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Semanario de agricultura y artes dirigido a los párrocos*.

7 Rodolfo Pastor, 'Introducción', in Enrique Florescano, comp., *Fuentes para la historia de la crisis agrícola de 1785–1786* (Mexico: Archivo General de la Nación, 1981), 48–9.

2. The background to the *Instrucción*

For some decades, the colonial historiography of Guatemala has stated that the policies from the eighteenth century laid a foundation for reforming the means of control, organisation, administration and exploitation of colonial areas. They also offered a way of rationalizing patterns of life in cities, towns and villages, always under the premise of public utility. It was therefore no coincidence that, throughout the eighteenth century, royal officials took on the task of implementing numerous measures to see that the indigenous territories were protected by reason, order and the common good, and to expand the presence of monarchical power, the influence of public finance and government participation in daily life. As if this were not enough, they also took care to discourage all elements that threatened social order and economic development. Although it is true that these measures gained greater influence at the time the *Real Ordenanza de Intendentes* was published, it is also true that they were complemented by ancien régime practices that exalted the moral, charitable and utilitarian conduct of officials with respect to the Crown's subjects⁸.

Perfect examples of these events can be seen at times when natural phenomena occurred in the Central American provinces, causing damage to agricultural, livestock and trade. Faced with these threats, officials had the obligation to repair the material damage, restore economic order and seek the well-being of royal subjects. To do this, they made use of

8 For the case of Central America, see: Carlos Meléndez Chaverri, *La Ilustración en el antiguo reino de Guatemala* (Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1974); Miles Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America, 1680–1840* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Francisco de Solano, *Tierra y sociedad en el reino de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1977); Juan Carlos Solorzano Fonseca, 'Los años finales de la dominación española (1750–1821)', in Héctor Pérez Brignoli, ed., *Historia general de Centroamérica*, vol. III, *De la Ilustración al liberalismo* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario-Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1993), 13–71; Bernabe Fernández Hernández, *El gobierno del intendente Anguiano en Honduras, 1796–1812* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1997); Christophe Belaubre, *Église et Lumières au Guatemala: la dimension atlantique, 1779–1808* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015). Richmond F. Brown, *Juan Fermín de Aycinena. Central American Colonial Entrepreneur, 1729–1796* (Norman – London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

numerous measures and practices. Some of these, called general measures, were modelled on legislation relating to public order and the common good. Others, classified as particular, arose while dealing with natural phenomena. It should be noted that both general and particular measures were implemented at a time when societies were in deep chaos⁹. By the way, this last perspective corresponds to classical thought on the relationship between humans and Nature. One of the reasons for the existence of humanity was to suffer from its surroundings and then adapt them, even at times when the natural world acted aggressively towards the human species¹⁰.

Focusing attention on general measures, it can be said that, during the eighteenth century, the Guatemalan authorities relied on three legal *corpora* to deal with natural and biological threats: the *Recopilación de Leyes de Indias*; *La política para corregidores y señores de vasallos* by Jerónimo Castillo de Bobadilla; and the *Real ordenanza de intendentes*. The content taken from these works clearly showed officials as guarantors of the public good. It is no coincidence, then, that they implemented initiatives to collect resources and exterminate certain animals harmful to agriculture and work in the fields, such as pigeons, sparrows, wolves, caterpillars, locusts, flies, ants, snails, beetles and others¹¹. They also promoted actions to acquire, transport and distribute seeds, which would help contain hunger

9 América Molina del Villar, 'El papel del gobierno y la sociedad en la prevención de desastres del México actual', in Elizabeth Mansilla, ed., *Desastres. Modelos para armar. Colección de piezas de un rompecabezas social* (Lima: La Red, 1996), 299–308; Jesús Manuel González Beltrán, 'Respuesta política frente a las adversidades naturales en el sector agrícola durante el siglo XVIII', *Revista de Historia Moderna. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 23 (2005), 359–90.

10 Clive Pointing, *A New Green History of the World. The Environment and the Collapse of the Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 118–9.

11 *Recopilación de leyes de los reinos de las Indias. Mandada imprimir y publicar por la Magestad Católica del Rey don Carlos II, Nuestro Señor. Va dividida en cuatro tomos, con el índice general y al principio de cada tomo el especial de los títulos que contiene. Tomo Primero, Quinta Edición, Con aprobación de la Regencia Provisional del Reino, corregida y aprobada por la Sala de Indias del Tribunal Supremo de Justicia* (Madrid, Boix Editor, 1841), Book III, Title XV, Law V, 129.

and social demands¹². Similarly, they made use of ordinances related to the supply, provision, purchase and sale, and distribution of grain. They also implemented mandates to register all the crops in their provinces, confirm the grain used for tithes, and punish all those guilty of speculation and hoarding¹³.

At the same time, the officials relied on the measures proposed by Jerónimo Castillo de Bobadilla in *La Política para Corregidores y Señores de Vasallos*, especially those that involved actions to benefit royal subjects. It was therefore hardly surprising that they assumed responsibility for providing grain to the towns and villages and, above all, ensuring subjects did not face evictions (Volume I, Book II, Chapter I, 98). Similarly, they had powers to force the population to clean up, till and plough their fields after the passage of storms, plagues and phenomena that damaged the surface (Volume II, Book III, Chapter VI, 138)¹⁴.

Other actions consisted of collecting resources, moving towns and villages, promoting public works, petitions to distribute seeds, and organizing the division of labour in the fields. Taking this same horizon, the *Real Ordenanza de Intendentes* even provided mitigation against the force of Nature. Only aspects related to the section on justice compelled officials to periodically check on towns and villages own goods, revenues and assets (Articles 26–28, 32), oversee the administration of labour and farmland (Article 44), prevent grain shortage and monopolies in the towns (Articles 37–38), and promote the use of resources accumulated in community funds to cover necessities and emergencies (Article 47). With regard to the section on government, the powers took the form of promoting ordinary

12 *Recopilación de leyes de los reinos de las Indias*, Book I, Title XIV, Law LXXX, 85; Book III, Title V, Act I, 177–8; Book VI, Title V, Law XXII, 243.

13 *Recopilación de leyes de los reinos de las Indias*, Book IV, Title XV, Law XIII, 108; Book VIII, Title XIII, Law XIX, 73; Book I, Title XVI, Law X, 99; Book IV, Title VII, Law XXVI.

14 Jerónimo Castillo de Bobadilla, *La Política para Corregidores y Señores de Vasallos, en tiempo de paz, y de guerra. Y para jueces eclesiásticos y seglares y de sacas, aduanas y de residencias y sus oficiales; y para regidores y abogados y del valor de los corregimientos y gobiernos realengos y de las órdenes, de Jerónimo Castillo de Bobadilla, del Consejo del rey don Felipe III, nuestro señor y su fiscal en la Real Chancillería de Valladolid* (Antwerp: Juan Bautista Verdussen, 1704).

and extraordinary crops (Articles 61–63), and, particularly, ensuring that people had food and seeds available to ensure subsistence (Articles 71–73). Meanwhile, the finance section allowed officials to investigate precisely the factors that caused problems in agriculture (Articles 123–124), the consequences of this for the public finances, and the strategies that should be considered to deal with such adversities (Article 141)¹⁵.

Although these measures revealed the way in which the Monarchy used secular resources to cope with the natural events, they also provide evidence of the link that existed between public affairs and thought about Nature. In this sense, the predominance of reaction to events should be underlined. In other words, the perception of natural threats emerged at the time when societies suffered from the likes of torrential rains, hurricanes, droughts, plagues or earthquakes. To deal with them, officials made use of royal mandates, physical and secular actions and religious prayers. At the same time as implementing ordinances, they also summoned the population to repent their sinful behaviour, acknowledge divine punishment and implore Heavenly forgiveness. They immediately urged religious ministers to officiate at masses, holding processions, novenas and prayers to invoke the intermediation of the Heavenly court. These actions undoubtedly reveal the way in which Guatemalan officials fought against extreme natural phenomena: firstly, with criteria specific to Hispanic legislation and, secondly, with attitudes related to providentialism¹⁶.

Turning to the particular measures, it should be said that these corresponded to the characteristics of the phenomena that erupted in the Central American countryside. An overall view of the history of the climate in the Guatemalan Captaincy General during the eighteenth century highlights the constant presence of four extreme phenomena: volcanic

15 *Real ordenanza para el establecimiento e instrucción de intendentes de ejército y provincia en el reino de la Nueva España. Edición anotada de la Audiencia de la Nueva Galicia*, Edited and including studies by Marina Mantilla Trolle, Rafael Diego-Fernández Sotelo, and Agustín Moreno Torres (Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara-El Colegio de Michoacán-El Colegio de Sonora, 2008).

16 A small example of this influx can be seen in Luis Alberto Arrijo Díaz Viruell, 'Guatemala y Nueva España: historia de una plaga compartida, 1798–1807', *Revista de Historia Moderna. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 33 (2015), 309–23; Belaubre, *Église et Lumières au Guatemala*.

eruptions, seismic movements, droughts and plagues of locusts. As the specialized historiography has pointed out, these phenomena must be viewed in the light of the geological, climatic and biological processes involved in the *Little Ice Age* (LIA) or the *Little Glacial Age* (LGA) and, specifically, the oscillations making up the climatic sequences of the period 1740–1815 that were characterized by causing thermal irregularities in the northern portion of the hemisphere. These included sudden atypical drops in temperatures, the appearance of summer droughts and intense heatwaves, and the arrival of hydrometeors and swarms of insects that affected the vegetation cover¹⁷. It can be said that swarms of locusts were the most commonly recurring threats, devastating a good part of the agricultural land, the rangeland and the vegetation cover of a territory stretching from the Gulf of Nicoya, in the Governorate of Costa Rica, to the province of Yucatan in the Viceroyalty of New Spain¹⁸.

The most serious of these plagues were those that occurred in 1768–1772 and 1798–1807. However, the latter was important because of its prolonged activity, large area affected and very broad spectrum of repercussions. Given the importance of these phenomena, it is not surprising that the Guatemalan authorities used numerous resources to investigate, contain, and eradicate them. We must add that this was a favourable time for physiocracy to feed reflections on the risks involved in agriculture, the economic backwardness of the countryside and the influence of Nature on agrarian structures. A review of the measures deployed against these pests highlights the existence of 85 initiatives, which were embodied in five edicts of good governance, 35 circulars, four proceedings, one instruction,

17 Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age. How Climate made History, 1300–1850* (London: Basic Books, 2001); John L. Brooke, *Climate Change and the Course of the Global History. A Rough Journey* (New York – London: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Alberola Romá, *Los cambios climáticos*. For the specific case of Guatemala, see Arrijoa Díaz Viruell, ‘Guatemala y Nueva España’, 309–23; Luis Alberto Arrijoa Díaz Viruell, ‘Clima, plagas y desolación en la provincia de Chiapa, 1768–1772’, in Arrijoa Díaz Viruell, and Alberola Romá, eds, *Clima, desastres y convulsiones sociales*, 295–322.

18 There is reference to these pests throughout the kingdom of Guatemala during the following periods: 1705–1706, 1723–1728, 1748–1751, 1768–1772, 1798–1807.

one ordinance, 30 rulings and nine royal orders. These measures should undoubtedly be read as palliative resources and, above all, perspectives on the risks of the natural world.

A detailed analysis highlights that the edicts of good government were prepared by the president of the Real Audiencia of Guatemala and, a couple of them, by the governor of Costa Rica between 1774 and 1804. These edicts were intended to eradicate the locust plagues and contain the food shortages that these phenomena caused in the towns. To do this, they urged the authorities and settlers to encourage extraordinary crops, count the existing seeds in each town and village, persecute usury and restrict free trade in grain¹⁹. By contrast, circulars were instruments developed within various government institutions and hierarchies: town councils, mayoralties, ecclesiastical councils, small towns, bishoprics, parishes, and subdelegations. They covered a broad period of time – from 1765 to 1804 – and were characterized by having very diverse purposes: giving notice of the appearance of plagues; reporting on the material damage caused by arthropods; requesting human intermediation to solve these problems; informing of the existence of techniques and tools to combat the insects; raising funds and private contributions to face the scourge; promoting supplications, prayers, processions and rogations; and encouraging communal efforts to destroy the creatures' nesting sites²⁰.

The proceedings were mandates issued by the mayors and chief magistrates to the towns to break the biological cycle of pests and reverse the damage caused to agriculture. In this way, the proceedings compelled residents to promote agricultural and livestock activities; pursue and annihilate swarms of insects; clear and burn the land infested with insects; drive away the swarms marauding on farmland using musical instruments, rockets and lights, and take all necessary measures to stop the advance of

19 Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica (hereafter ANCR), *Cartago*, exp. 615. 'Bando del capitán general (19 July 1802)', *Gaceta de Guatemala*, 268. ANCR, *Guatemala*, exp. 4,965; Archivo General de Centroamérica (hereafter AGCA), A1.22, leg. 6,091, exp. 55,306.

20 A brief example can be found in: ANCR, *Cartago*, exp. 344. AGCA, A1.2, leg. 2,820, exp. 24,984. AGCA, A1.1.17–4,306, leg. 36. Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereinafter AGI), *Guatemala*, 648. AGCA, A1, leg. 6,106, exp. 55,874.

the acridids. Towns that complied with these orders even gained prizes and rewards²¹.

Meanwhile, the instructions were drawn up by the monarchy and distributed in the territories that suffered from the ravages of the locusts. In the case of the Guatemalan Captaincy General, one instrument is known to have circulated widely: the *Instrucción formada, sobre la experiencia y práctica de varios años, para conocer y extinguir la langosta en sus tres estados de ovación, feto o mosquito, y adulta, con el modo de repartir, y prorratearles gastos, que se hicieren en este trabajo, y aprobada por el Consejo el año de mil setecientos y cincuenta y cinco*²². This was a resource prepared by the Council of Castile to contain a plague that affected the Mediterranean side and central portion of Spain. It should be noted that this *Instruction* was not appropriate for the plagues and problems suffered in the Central American countryside. However, it served to provide biological knowledge about insects and techniques to combat them. It can undoubtedly be said that this *Instrucción* was a reference to inspire other resources listed below.

Proof of this influence was the *Ordenanza para exterminar la plaga de langosta* [Ordinance to exterminate the locust plague] drawn up by the ordinary mayor and temporary chief magistrate of the province of San Salvador, Ventura Calera, in 1801. A document which, in general terms, set out 12 articles to deal with and resolve ‘un mal que es irremediable y que cunde y se propaga por todas partes’ [an evil that cannot be remedied and that is spreading and propagating itself everywhere]²³. Thus, the first part of the *Ordinance* was intended to prevent a widespread famine in San Salvador, hence the villages being obliged to plant tubers (yucca, sweet potato, yam, jicama and potato), keep grain in barns and warehouses, protect seeds from other small pests (weevils and aphids) and promote crops in cold land. The second part served to show the biological development

21 AGCA, A1.1, leg. 5,369, exp. 45,407. AGCA, A1.1, leg. 36, exp. 4,305. AGCA, A1-22-8, leg. 36, exp. 4,310.

22 Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter BNE), *Reales cédulas, órdenes promulgadas sobre asuntos de gobierno*, Signature R / 37083. Some references to this *Instrucción* can be found in ANCR, *Cartago*, exp. 1,092.

23 ‘Economía civil (15 de junio de 1801)’, in *Gaceta de Guatemala*, no. 208.

of the insects, the forms they took on when moving and migrating, the techniques for exterminating them (using hoes, boxes, or poultry (as natural predators) and the corresponding measures to regulate damage to agriculture.

Other documents that repeatedly mentioned the *Instrucción* of 1755 and encouraged its adaptation to the situation in the Americas were the royal orders distributed between 1771 and 1804; mandates which, among other things, were intended for the population to understand the development of insects with a view to exterminating them before they reached their endemic migratory stage; orders aimed at excusing towns and villages that had suffered from the plague of locusts from the payment of taxes; mandates for certain agricultural products and natural dyes to be exempt from taxes, tithes, and tolls; provisions to physically relocate towns and villages where these biological threats were proliferating; and numerous measures aimed at preserving the public economy and the well-being of the royal subjects²⁴.

Another influence of the *Instrucción* of 1755 took the form of 30 rulings drawn up between 1771 and 1804. These were issued by the provincial and local governments and were intended to alleviate the misfortunes caused by the plague. Unsurprisingly, these measures were aimed at curbing three problems. Firstly, everything related to the health of the population. In this sense, the measures proposed actions to collect the insects scattered in the fields and aquifers to prevent sources of contamination. At the same time, there were stipulations to build pits and bonfires where the collected bugs were deposited. Cordons sanitaires were also established in agricultural and livestock areas so products contaminated with acridid faeces did not circulate to other provinces. Strategies and actions to finance the extermination of pests were also outlined. To do this, they requested forced loans from towns' community funds, promoted divisions of costs among landowners and ranchers, coordinated collections among the indigo growers, and gave bounties to people for collecting insects. Thirdly, penalties were established for individuals and officials who refused to participate in

24 AGCA, A1.23, leg. 1,530, folio 136. AGCA, AI, leg. 4,629, exp. 39,582, folios 53v-55v. AGCA, A1.22.5, leg. 2,594, exp. 21,2337. AGCA, A1.1, leg. 23, exp. 668.

eradicating the pests. These ranged from the collection of fines and the application of corporal punishment, to seizures of goods²⁵.

Along with these resources, a series of books, pamphlets, and newspapers – mostly produced in Spain – provided insights, observations and perspectives on plagues and ways to contain them. I am referring to the *Introducción a la historia natural y a la geografía física de España* (1775) by the naturalist Guillermo Bowles; the *Discurso sobre la langosta y medios de exterminarla* (1785) by Ignacio de Asso y del Río; *Agricultura metódica, acomodada a la práctica del país* (1791) by Juan Antonio Zepeda y Vivero, as well as the reflections published in the *Mercurio de España*, the *Gaceta de Madrid* and the *Diario curio, erudito, económico y comercial* during the second half of the eighteenth century.

It is clear that during the early decades of the nineteenth century the Guatemalan authorities had extremely diverse and complex instruments for dealing with insect pests. Be that as it may, between 1798 and 1807 the plague that invaded the kingdom of Guatemala was perceived institutionally as an extreme phenomenon; a disturbance linked to the climate issue; an obstacle to the development of agriculture; and, therefore, a factor that paralysed the economy. Considering this, it was hardly surprising that, in the spring of 1804, the Audiencia de Guatemala published and distributed an instruction aimed at containing the ravages of this threat, putting right the damage caused to agriculture, promoting the development of the economy and, above all, systemizing the knowledge that had been accumulated on these biological phenomena.

3. The *Instrucción* and its content

Judging from the Council of the Indies, the *Instrucción sobre la plaga de langosta* prepared and distributed by the Audiencia of Guatemala in 1804 was an instrument that sought, on one hand, to demonstrate the biological threat the entire Captaincy General had suffered from since 1797 and, on the other, to make available to officials and subjects a series of resources

25 A brief example can be found in: AGCA, A1.2, leg. 2,820, exp. 24,983. AGCA, A1.1, leg. 8, exp. 186. AGCA, A1-22-8, leg. 1,977, exp. 13,473. ‘Modo de conservar (8 de octubre de 1801)’, in *Gazeta de Guatemala*, no. 229. AGCA, A1.1.17, leg. 36, exp. 4,311. AGCA, A1.1, leg. 36, exp. 4,323.

to ‘exterminar [...], disminuir efectos [...], evitar la escasez y carestía de comestibles [...], y facilitar la prorrata de gastos que ocasiona la expresada plaga’ [exterminate (...), reduce effects (...), prevent shortages and scarcity of foodstuffs (...), and provide a proportion of the costs generated by this plague]²⁶. As far as can be discerned, this *Instrucción* was the most elaborate compendium of the mitigating measures drawn up over eight decades so that officials could understand, deal with and eradicate these threats. It is known that the author of the work was José [Cecilio] de[l] Valle (1777–1834), a lawyer for the Real Audiencia, while the printer was Ignacio Beteta, publisher of the *Gazeta de Guatemala*. The best evidence indicates that the work was written and approved during 1803, while printing and distribution took place in the first months of 1804.

Before referring to its contents, it is appropriate to say something about its form in order to give an understanding of its scope and limitations. Although it is true that the *Instrucción* was created by Valle, it is also true that his initial proposal underwent amendments when it passed through the hands of the Real Audiencia and the Public Prosecutor’s department. Judging by the sources, these corrections were made with the intention of incorporating various rulings issued in 1803 that were beyond the scope of the author’s research, and an appendix with data on population and agricultural land. Thus, after several revisions, the *Instrucción* was finally issued in January 1804 in booklet format with 32 pages, and an internal structure that grouped the licences, articles and appendices²⁷.

Another distinctive feature had to do with the author and the associations that appear in the text. In this respect, it should be said that Valle was one of the *novatores* who spread Enlightenment ideas in Central America and adapted them to the local conditions. From Choluteca (Intendancy of Honduras), he took his bachelor’s degree at the University of San Carlos. He was an official of the Real Audiencia and a scholar of the work of Georges

26 AGI, *Estado*, 49, 133.

27 See AGCA, A1. leg. 6,091, exp. 55,306. There are original versions of this instruction in libraries in North America and Spain. However, those kept at the Latin American Library at Tulane University, at the Netie Lee Benson Latin American Collection Library at the University of Texas in Austin, and at the Biblioteca Nacional in Spain lack the general table of Spaniards and Ladinos living in the kingdom of Guatemala.

Louis Leclerc (Count of Buffon), Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Hobbes, Alexander von Humboldt, Melchor Gaspar de Jovellanos, John Locke, Isaac Newton, Pedro Rodríguez Campomanes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and others. It should be emphasized that the *Instrucción* is an example of this man's erudition and intellectual potential at the beginning of the nineteenth century²⁸. It is also proof of the way utilitarianism, mercantilism, physiocracy and economic liberalism were discussed and spread in Central America. Valle's biographers even claim that the writing of this work and its acceptance at the highest levels of power formed a platform for the career he followed between 1803 and 1818 in the judicial and political milieu of the Captaincy General. As if this were not enough, the *Instrucción* is also proof of the ties Valle had with a series of men who enriched and spread Enlightenment thought in the region, such as José Rossi y Rubí, Ventura Calera, Jacobo de Villa Urrutia, Alexandro Ramirez and Jose Antonio Goicochea²⁹.

An examination of the contents of the *Instrucción* reveals that it is a document which, firstly, exhorts royal officials to show probity and loyalty in dealing with 'the universal misery with which the locusts threaten the provinces'. Secondly, it provides them with a series of techniques, strategies and resources to 'remove the public evils that threaten [...] and prevent the extermination of the locust and the halting of its disastrous effects'³⁰. In general terms, the work is made up of a 'Higher Approval', a 'Preliminary Approval', three sections containing a total of 84 articles, a 'Notes' section and a 'statistical table'.

28 Mario García Laguardia, 'José del Valle. Ilustración y liberalismo en Centroamérica', *Obra escogida*, vol. I (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 2011), 7–77; *El pensamiento vivo de José Cecilio del Valle* (Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1971), 14–6; *El pensamiento económico de José Cecilio del Valle* (Tegucigalpa: Publicaciones del Banco Central de Honduras, 1958). AGCA, A1.47-1, leg. 2818, exp. 24,915.

29 Catherine Poupene Hart, 'Entre Gaceta y "espectador": avatares de la prensa antigua en América Central', *Cuadernos de Ilustración y Romanticismo. Revista Digital del Grupo de Estudios del Siglo XVIII*, 16 (2010), 13–15; Sophie Brockmann, 'Patriotic Rhetoric and Scientific Information Networks in Central America, c. 1790–1810', *Modern History Notebooks*, XI (2012), 165–84.

30 AGCA, A1. leg. 6091, exp. 55,306, ff. 1, 3.

The ‘Higher Approval’ is a legal instrument in which the Captain General of the kingdom and president of the Real Audiencia of Guatemala – Antonio González Mollinedo y Saravia (1743–1812) – commissions Valle to access the public information available on locust plagues with the purpose of drafting the *Instrucción*. It is also a resource that reveals the Audiencia’s role as censor regarding Valle’s handwritten proposal. In this same order, the ‘Approval’ announces the ways the document should be published and distributed:

Imprimase en competente numero de ejemplares para circularla en la forma de estilo [...]. Y a fin de facilitar el reintegro de las cantidades suplidas para el exterminio de la langosta, y el repartimiento de los gastos que ocasione en lo sucesivo, con arreglo al artículo IV part I, de la misma Instrucción [...], y con reserva de providencias lo conveniente, concluida que sera la impresión, para que tenga efecto el expresado reintegro; dándose entonces cuenta a este fin con todos los antecedentes del asunto³¹.

[Print an appropriate number of copies to circulate it in the usual form (...). And in order to facilitate the reimbursement of the sums supplied for the extermination of the locust, and the division of the resulting costs in future, in accordance with article IV part I, of the same Instrucción (...), and subject to appropriate provisions, let the aforementioned reimbursement take effect once the printing has been completed, taking account for this purpose of all the background of the matter].

The ‘Preliminary Approval’ is a prelude setting out the desire to exterminate an endemic plague affecting the Central American provinces. It notes the need to recover knowledge about destroying the maelstrom of insects, the damage they cause in agriculture and the disruption they cause to the economy in order to do so. It goes on to say that ‘descubrimientos de los unos, y el resultado de las operaciones del otro, adelantará los pensamientos, rectificarán las equivocaciones, y a los que nos sucedan se ofrecerá aumentada la masa de ideas, cuando reproducidas las circunstancias amenace a nuestros nietos la plaga que aflige a la generación presente’ [the discoveries of some, and the result of the operations of the other, will advance thoughts and correct mistakes, offering an increased mass of ideas to those who come after us, when the circumstances recur, and the plague that afflicts the present generation

31 AGCA, A1. leg. 6091, exp. 55,306, f. 1v.

threatens our grandchildren³². These arguments provide evidence of the way in which biological and climatic threats were conceived. From the liberal perspective, anything that disturbs the natural order is a source of problems for the economy and society. Meanwhile, from a physiocratic view, setbacks to agriculture cause hunger, poverty and disease.

There is then a section entitled 'Instruction' with five articles reiterating the officers' obligation to ensure public order, protect communal goods and counteract any threat to the interests of the Crown. They also highlight the attitudes that must be adopted if the order is not adhered to:

Quando amenaza a las sociedades una grande calamidad, el sentimiento que produce la perspectiva de la miseria es el primero que nace en un magistrado digno del empleo que sirve. Los tormentos de la compasión, la memoria de sus deberes, las esperanzas del público le empeñan después en especulaciones prolijas. Persuadido de la correspondencia que debe haber entre el mal y su remedio, primero considera la naturaleza de aquel, y después entra en la investigación de éste. El placer del descubrimiento, o la convicción de que no es posible hacer más de lo que piensa ejecutar, premia sus fatigas; y continúa arbitrando medios de ejecución [...]. Pero desconfiado siempre de estas, extiende su atención al mal que sobrevendría, si los medios de destruirle no correspondiesen a su esperanza: medita arbitrios que prevengan sus efectos, y no cesa de obrar hasta que no asegure la tranquilidad de los pueblos.

[When a great calamity threatens societies, the first feeling produced in a magistrate worthy of his office is that prompted by the prospect of misery. The torments of compassion, the memory of his duties, the expectations of the public later engage him in lengthy speculations. Persuaded of the correspondence that there must be between the evil and its remedy, he first considers the nature of the former, and then enters into the investigation of the latter. The pleasure of discovery, or the conviction that it is not possible to do more than what he intends to do, reward his efforts, and he continues considering means of implementation (...) But, always distrustful of these, he extends his attention to the evil that would occur if the means of destroying it did not correspond to his expectations. He meditates on means of preventing their effects, and does not cease to act until he ensures peace of mind among the peoples (Article 1)]

Then follows a section entitled 'Part One' which includes four chapters entitled 'Means', 'Instruments', 'Operatives' and 'Funds', together containing 44 articles. The chapter called 'Means' shows the biological cycle of insects and recognizes the developmental stages when they can be

32 AGCA, A1. leg. 6,091, exp. 55,306, folio 1v.

fought more easily. It also refers to techniques and knowledge to destroy eggs, larvae, hoppers and adult insects. At the same time, it establishes measures for farmers and authorities to collect, kill and bury the ‘mangas de insectos’ [insect swarms]. It should be stressed that these notes were taken verbatim from documents circulating in the Captaincy General during the eighteenth century, and particularly from the works: *Instrucción formada, sobre la experiencia y práctica de varios años, para conocer y extinguir la langosta en sus tres estados de ovación, feto o mosquito, y adulta, con el modo de repartir, y prorratearles gastos, que se hicieren en este trabajo, y aprobada por el Consejo el año de mil setecientos y cincuenta y cinco*; and *Introducción a la historia natural y a la geografía física de España* (1775) by the naturalist Guillermo Bowles.

The chapter entitled ‘Instruments’ suggests a series of tools to combat insects. To do this, the use of ‘macanas’ [clubs] and ‘azadas de América’ [American hoes] is recommended, equipment that ‘acelera[n] el trabajo [...] y evita[n] la molestia de bajarse para servirse de ella[s]’ [speeds up the work and avoids the inconvenience of having to get down to use it] (Article 19). By the way, these ideas are taken from the *Instrucción formada, sobre la experiencia y práctica de varios años*, and meet the needs of the Central American provinces.

Meanwhile, the chapter named ‘Operatives’ consists of nine articles and deals with the ways officials must transfer all measures for containing the plague into the hands of the subjects of the Crown. This is a chapter in which human work is seen as a resource to eradicate biological threats and ‘exterminar la ociosidad que ha sido uno de los principales objetos de nuestra legislación’ [exterminate idleness, which has been one of the main aims of our legislation] (Article 23). Hence, the need to employ, first, vagrants and vagabonds, and then residents of towns and villages. This approach is undoubtedly a result of the Enlightenment and, particularly, of the ways in which the world of work is perceived:

Entre la multitud de oficios que nacieron de la división necesaria del trabajo, unos solo exigen brazos y consumidores, otros necesitan del auxilio inmediato de la naturaleza. Aquellos pueden ejercerse en cualquier tiempo, y su interrupción no es de perjuicio irreparable; estos deben practicarse en la estación que los auxilia, y si se pierde el momento útil será necesario sujetarse a males de mucha trascendencia. Este pensamiento y el espíritu de las leyes fijan la graduación de operarios.

[Among the multitude of trades that began with the necessary division of labour, some require only hands and consumers; others require the immediate help of nature. Those can be exercised at any time, and their interruption does not cause irreparable damage; they must be practiced in the season that assists them, and if the useful moment is missed it will be necessary to be subject to much greater evils. These thoughts and the spirit of the laws establish the rank of operatives] (Article 24).

As if this were not enough, the chapter also touches on the issue of the funds that must be used to combat the plague. As proposed in some 18th-century instruments, it is stipulated that the resources used for the workers' wages should come from the 'arcas de comunidades y el Monte (Pío de Cosecheros de Añil) con calidad de reintegro' [coffers of the communities and the mutual fund of the indigo harvesters as reimbursement] (Article 28). As can be seen, this argument closely corresponds to the measures emanating from enlightened reformism, in which civic corporations were responsible for funding cleaning, security and decoration work in rural and urban areas, as well as paying the crews who helped with repairs in towns and villages when there was any extraordinary incident.

The chapter called 'Funds' outlines a detailed reflection in 21 articles on the origin and use of resources to destroy the plague. Along these lines, it states that the threat must always be fought with public and private resources, as these investments 'puede legitimizar su establecimiento [...] [y] proveer el numerario que exige la destrucción de la langosta' [can legitimize their establishment (...) (and) provide the cash required for the destruction of the locusts] (Article 29). If these resources are not enough, they must come via donations from 'pudientes y acaudalados' [the well to do and wealthy], landowners and merchants, and 'reverendos obispos y cabildos eclesiásticos' [reverend bishops and ecclesiastical councils]. Along the same lines, it is recommended to carry out population counts to detect sectors likely to provide resources, help with tasks and provide land for cultivation. This initiative undoubtedly reveals a change in the way of dealing with rural problems. In other words, in contrast to the tradition that governments paid for the relief of agriculture, the Enlightenment proposed a series of bailouts using public funds and resources accumulated by corporations and individuals. Organizing aid tasks in this way was an important innovation for the time.

This chapter also refers to the need to free the prices of corn and wheat depending on supply and demand in the markets – an attitude closely related to mercantilism. Along the same lines, it recommends monitoring fluctuations of trade in order to prevent usurious practices. It points out that, in view of the scarcity of seeds, a collection plan should be implemented to collect ‘una décima parte a los interesados en la gruesa de diezmos, seis a los poseedores de tierras con cualquier destino que las tengan, y tres a los comerciantes, artesanos y demás vecinos. Y la cuota correspondiente a cada uno de estas clases se ha de distribuir entre los individuos que las forman con proporción a sus facultades’ [one tenth from all those due to pay tithes; six from landowners, whatever their land is used for; and three from merchants, craftspeople and other residents. And the share corresponding to each one of these classes must be distributed among the individuals making up each class in proportion to their faculties] (Article 41). An analysis of these articles reveals the authorities’ interest in setting a fair price for grain in times of adversity. From the institutional position, this price would balance the movement of the markets and regulate the conduct of individuals.

Moreover, these articles were the embodiment of physiocratic thought, either instructing officials to promote crops, encourage the construction of granaries and barns, or foster reforms to agrarian property. These properties were generally ‘cortad[as] de montañas inaccesibles [...], valles que las separan [que] se hallan incultos, y el calor del clima auxilia a la reproducción de la langosta’ [cut off by inaccessible mountains (...) the valleys separating them [that] are uncultivated and the heat of the climate helps locusts reproduce] (Article 49).

The ‘Part two’ of the *Instrucción* comprises four chapters entitled ‘Multiplication’, ‘Conservation’, ‘Domestic Trade’ and ‘Food’, and together there are 34 articles. This ‘Part two’ begins with a reflection on the agricultural and economic implications of plagues, as well as the outbreaks of discontent this leads to in the places where they occur. In an effort to counteract the disorder, the articles suggest agriculture as a way of restoring the economy and containing social unrest. Tasks are set to ‘multiplicar los granos, conservar los que ofrezca ésta multiplicación, extenderla de una provincia á otra, y [...] servirse de aquella economía que alimenta un pueblo numeroso con los frutos escasos de una cosecha

mezquina' [multiply the grain, preserve that offered by such multiplication, extend it from one province to another, and (...) make use of the economy to feed many people with the scarce fruits of a meagre harvest] (Article 51).

Thus, the chapter called 'Multiplication' begins with an article modeled on Jovellanos's Agrarian Law: 'Los granos se multiplican aumentando las siembras, y la extensión del cultivo exige tierras, fondos, y brazos. Estas tres cosas que separadas son inútiles en cualquiera país, reunidas por el interés y auxiliadas por los gobiernos producen la abundancia, a que es consiguiente la felicidad pública' [Grain is multiplied by increasing planting, and extending cultivation requires land, funds, and muscle. These three things separately are useless in any country, but brought together by interest and aided by governments produce abundance, on which public happiness depends] (Article 52). Immediately afterwards, it is planned to distribute unused lands and authorize resources so that indigenous people and Ladinos can be employed in agricultural work. The owners of large tracts of land are recommended to allocate the parts they do not cultivate so that Native Americans and Ladinos can access them through leases to promote agriculture. A careful analysis reveals that these articles are based on physiocracy and were intended to stimulate three notable changes in the agricultural sector: firstly, converting farmland into objects that could be traded and transferred from hand to hand; secondly, linking agricultural production with the demands of urban and rural markets; and thirdly, encouraging the transformation of farmers into individual owners and tenants. Alongside these measures, the chapter insists on promoting crops that are not appetizing to the insects and meet the demands of the population: sweet cassava, potatoes and rice. It also invites the officials to make the royal subjects aware that 'un Reino que debe a la naturaleza tantas ventajas para el cultivo, solo la decidia puede dar lugar a el hambre que amenaza. Si esta aflige en efecto a los pueblos, siempre creerá que no se ha dado a sus órdenes el cumplimiento que exige su objeto' [in a Kingdom that has so many natural advantages for farming, only stubbornness can lead to the famine that threatens. If it does indeed afflict the people, there will always be a belief that its orders have not been fulfilled as required by their purpose] (Article 60).

The chapter called 'Preservation' outlines a series of techniques to protect grain and keep it in good condition. For this, it suggests using public and private resources to build spaces that prevent the 'corrupción de las sustancias animales y vegetales [...] (e) impidan la acción del aire atmosférico' [corruption of animal and vegetable substances (...) (and) prevent the action of the atmospheric air]. That was why it was necessary to invest in the construction of silos, barns, granaries and *cuscumates*. As well as disseminating techniques and strategies to allow farmers to dry their seeds, protect them and 'conservar la virtud germinativa en las [...] que se han de transportar a países remotos' [preserve the capacity to germinate in those (...) that have to be transported to far-off countries] (Article 66).

The chapter called 'Domestic Trade' is made up of ten articles that clearly and succinctly set out the benefits of *laissez faire* policies for rural markets in general and agriculture in particular. Faced with an agricultural sector collapsing because of the plague, this chapter suggests that the 'distribución proporcional de la abundancia entre todas las provincias es efecto que solo puede deberse a la libertad mercantil' [proportional distribution of abundance among all the provinces is an effect that can only be achieved by commercial freedom] (Article 68), and for this it recommends promoting the circulation of goods inside and outside the Captaincy General, trade in grain between provinces and the flow of resources between towns and villages. Even though the articles do not explicitly cite the work of Adam Smith, in fact they are close to the basic postulates of mercantilism. Proof of this is the following paragraph:

La langosta se ha ido propagando en dirección recta por las provincias meridionales, de suerte que cuando infesta a unas ya han cesado tal vez los males de otras. Si se cortan las relaciones mercantiles embarazando la circulación de granos, se hace a todas un daño difícil de resarcirse. Perecen las del Sur: las del Norte se privan del aumento de riquezas que les procuraría la extracción: las demás no resarcan con el tráfico los quebrantos que les haya causado la langosta; y la agricultura, pobre antes que esta amenazase al Reino, y reducida a la mayor decadencia cuando llegó a afligir a los pueblos, permanecerá casi en el mismo estado, si el aumento de consumos no le da el impulso que necesita.

[The locust has been spreading straight through the southern provinces, so that when it infests some, its evils have perhaps already ceased for others. If trade relations are cut off, impeding the circulation of grain, damage is done to everyone, which is difficult to remedy. Those of the South perish: those of the

North are deprived of the increase in wealth that extraction would procure for them; and agriculture, poor before the threat to the Kingdom and reduced to the most serious decline when the plague came to afflict the people, will remain almost in the same state if the increase in consumption does not give it the fillip it needs] (Article 72).

Similarly, measures are proposed to combat monopolies and persecute interests that may arise from agricultural ruin. Orders are even included which, as well as punishing these behaviours, urge the authorities to help the most deprived people. Regarding the latter, measures are listed to strengthen trade relations with New Spain and Peru. In the same way, there is an attempt to position agriculture as a vector of the economy, while domestic trade is envisioned as a segment helping the Captaincy General reach ‘el punto de poder y abundancia que le prometen sus felices proporciones’ [the point of power and abundance that its happy proportions promise] (Article 77).

The last chapter is called ‘Food’ and is characterized by providing strategies to get the most from the supplies existing in the towns and villages, preventing hunger. This view considers that the ‘arte de condimentar debe ser en tiempos de escasez el principal que socorra las necesidades’ [art of adding condiment should be the principal one in times of scarcity to alleviate need] (Article 79). In this particular case, it recommends maximizing foods prepared with maize as this is a grain that, ‘después de haberlo molido hasta reducirlo a harina’ [after having ground it until it is reduced to flour], is prepared in boiling water to ‘dar consistencia a los puches [...] [y] cada libra de harina condimentada de este modo, a más de dar un plato regalado [...], tiene la ventaja de producir dos libras y trece onzas de puches’ [thicken gruel (...) (and) each pound of flour seasoned in this way, as well as giving a bonus dish (...), has the advantage of producing two pounds and thirteen ounces of gruel] (Article 81). Judging from the articles, the use of maize for protein must be accompanied by activities to promote family farming, crop rotation and grain storage. These practices had been beneficial in other latitudes and had filled the pages of the *Semanario de agricultura dirigido a los párrocos*, the *Diario económico* and the essays of Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753–1814), Jean Baptiste François Rozier (1734–1793), Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744–1811) and José Antonio Alzate y Ramírez (1737–1799).

The last section is entitled 'Notes' and consists of comments, observations and, above all, numerous legal instruments such as orders, ordinances, edicts and laws, that support the contents of the *Instrucción*. Together with this, a statistical table is attached with data on the Spanish and Ladino population living in the provinces of the Captaincy General. Information on land available for agriculture is also incorporated. In general, this table is a guide for officials to see the possible sources for imposing tax burdens, raising resources, promoting crops, distributing agricultural land and having available human energy to counteract the effects of the plague of locusts. It should be noted that this table contains partial and relative information for various provinces. The cases of Ciudad Real and San Salvador stand out. These municipalities experienced the worst ravages of the plague for seven years. Although it is true that the presence of insects caused hunger and disease in the villages, it is also true that it caused many farmers to leave their villages and not be recorded in the registers. These means registers appear with significant reductions in their number of taxpayers.

It should be pointed out that the *Instrucción* ends with an article that shows, on one hand, the Real Audiencia's aim of systemizing in a single text all the necessary knowledge to avoid and eradicate plagues of locusts, and, on the other, the intention of stimulating the ideas that envisioned agriculture as the core of the economy and the engine allowing nations to grow.

4. Conclusions

Throughout the chapter I have tried to examine the circumstances that led the Real Audiencia of Guatemala to explore, write and distribute the *Instrucción sobre la plaga de langosta* of 1804. With this in mind, I have argued that this initiative arose as a response to a recurrent, long-lasting and destructive biological threat in the Central American countryside. A meticulous analysis of the *Instrucción* allows us to show that, during the eighteenth century, all the provinces included in the Captaincy General of Guatemala experienced the presence of extreme climatic phenomena allowing the formation and development of these plagues. As has been pointed out, these phenomena must be understood as part of the climatic,

physical and biological manifestations that formed part of the *Little Ice Age* (LIA) and, specifically, the climatic sequence of 1740–1815, which caused thermal irregularities throughout the hemisphere. Undoubtedly, the extreme weather that occurred throughout the Captaincy General was likely to allow the plague of locusts to spread from the governorship of Costa Rica to the municipality of Ciudad Real and remain in its endemic migratory phase during the period 1798–1807.

Closely related to this, the *Instruction* allows us to observe that, for more than eight decades, the Real Audiencia of Guatemala accumulated many resources aimed at understanding the nature of plagues, the voracious behaviour of insects, the damage they caused in agriculture, the disturbances they generated in the agricultural markets and the fears aroused among the population. These resources enabled royal officials and institutions to accumulate knowledge to combat these phenomena. Other details that can be drawn from the *Instrucción* have to do with the royal officials and their responsibilities in the face of these threats. Their posts defined them as guarantors of public order, protectors of the common good and defenders of real interests, as well as the agents responsible for resolving the agricultural, economic and social crisis generated by the plague of insects.

It should be noted that the *Instrucción* also reveals a series of horizons where initiatives emanating from Bourbon reformism and the physiocratic thought of the time came together. From the former it is easy to see that it is an instrument that grouped, organized and systemized the legal corpus created over eight decades regarding plagues of locusts and disseminated in terms of officials, functions, responsibilities and resources. It is also a resource empowering middle-ranking authorities to contain misfortune and promote prosperity in provinces and towns. As if this were not enough, it also embodies three resources typical of reformism: promoting assistance using public and private funds; exchanging alms and relief for groups affected for tasks that encouraged the investment of private resources and the hiring of ‘vagrants and rogues’; and registering the population and the funds they had built up in order to detect sources of money for meeting immediate needs.

The *Instrucción* also takes many elements from physiocratic thought. This influence has to do directly with the author of the work, a man who

was brought some of these ideas to Central America: José Cecilio del Valle. It was undoubtedly Valle who warned that plagues should be understood as obstacles to the development of agriculture and the economic prosperity of towns, as well as natural phenomena that altered the lives of institutions, the order of societies and the balance of economies. As if this were not enough, Valle's approach used plagues to show a series of problems that existed in the Central American countryside, such as the predominance of traditional agriculture, the use of archaic techniques and tools, the lack of public and private investment, the lack of monetized economies and the pre-eminence of agrarian structures based on amortization and privilege. Faithful to these ideas, Valle even suggested in the *Instrucción* the need to open up farmland to the indigenous and Ladino population and promote commercial agriculture and individual ownership among these sectors. According to physiocracy, it was this type of ownership that guaranteed access to farmland, fostered the development of agriculture and served as a shelter against threats from nature.

Hand in hand with these ideas, Valle's manuscript advocates reducing the effects of the plague with measures anchored in mercantilism; in other words, promoting free trade in grain throughout the Captaincy General of Guatemala, trade between provinces and the establishment of agricultural markets. Along these lines, the *Instrucción* states that the more freedom there is in agriculture and trade, the greater the possibility of facing misfortune and compensating for the damage caused to the economy. Finally, it can be said that this work is a faithful reflection of the way in which the societies of the Ancien Regime perceived and understood extreme climatic phenomena. It also shows the way physiocratic thought promoted these views on the natural world, and the options it provided to deal with it and adapt to the Central American situation. This was a time when plagues and the damage they caused to agriculture meant chaos and total ruin, while the actions carried out to compensate for these threats and restore the fields provided proof of usefulness, benefits and development.

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