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## Calamities, communication and public space between manuscript and print (Spain and Portugal, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries): From prayers to news<sup>\*</sup>

In July 1648, Francisca de Castro Pinós, Duchess of Híjar, received the news of the deaths that had begun to occur in Albalate del Arzobispo<sup>1</sup>, 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 IV<sup>2</sup>.

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’ secretaries<sup>3</sup>.

A member of the religious order that probably created more paperwork than any other<sup>4</sup>, 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 Monarchies<sup>5</sup>, 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 Monarquía<sup>6</sup>.

[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 empires<sup>7</sup>. 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 narrative<sup>8</sup> 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 corruption<sup>9</sup>.

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

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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 hardship<sup>10</sup>.

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]<sup>11</sup>.

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 ridiculous<sup>12</sup>.

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.)<sup>13</sup>. 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 1569<sup>14</sup>.

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.

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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]<sup>15</sup>.

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]<sup>16</sup>.

Sometimes, a graphic account of the pandemic is presented as an ex-voto painted to give thanks for some miraculous intervention<sup>17</sup>. 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 painting<sup>18</sup>.

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 parchment<sup>19</sup>.

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

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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]<sup>20</sup>.

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 Parets<sup>21</sup>, who deserves particular attention, the Portuguese Roiz Soares<sup>22</sup> and the Castilians Escudero de Cobeña<sup>23</sup> 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 1593<sup>24</sup>, 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*<sup>25</sup> by the last of the four is preserved in manuscript form.

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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)]<sup>26</sup>.

News about pandemics is also frequent in letters<sup>27</sup>. 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 Portugal<sup>28</sup>.

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]<sup>29</sup>. 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 Barcelona<sup>30</sup>.

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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](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](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 done<sup>31</sup>, 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 them<sup>32</sup>. 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 institutions<sup>33</sup>.

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 century<sup>34</sup>. The information in that archive about epidemics<sup>35</sup> 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

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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 disseminated<sup>36</sup>.

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 this<sup>37</sup>. 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 1527<sup>38</sup>.

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

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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 printing<sup>39</sup>. The same happened with the commands and proclamations relating to contagious epidemics, in which a form of hybridization between manuscript and print is observed<sup>40</sup>. 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,

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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 century<sup>41</sup>.

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*<sup>42</sup> 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.’<sup>43</sup>. 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 1630<sup>44</sup>.

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 Nati<sup>45</sup>. Its author, Pietro Nati da Bibbiena, composed a ‘picciol trattato’<sup>46</sup>, associated with his printed booklet of 1576, which he delivered handwritten to Carlo Pitti in 1579<sup>47</sup>.

As Nati recounts in the dedication, the powerful *accoppiatore* of the Grand Duke of Tuscany<sup>48</sup> 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]<sup>49</sup>. 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 diligencia 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]<sup>50</sup>.

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 plague<sup>51</sup>. Furthermore,

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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]<sup>52</sup>.

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 censorships<sup>53</sup>.

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*<sup>54</sup>.

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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’<sup>55</sup>. However, handwritten news should not be considered solely as predating *How the Press Began*<sup>56</sup> – 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 court<sup>57</sup>. 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<sup>a</sup> 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<sup>a</sup> gaçetas porque lo huno son mentiras y enbustes lo que diçen,

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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]<sup>58</sup>.

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 Madrid<sup>59</sup>.

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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]<sup>60</sup>, 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 court<sup>61</sup>: 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.

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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.