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*Pro serenitate* Public Prayers During the Floods  
of the Guadalquivir in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century:  
A Study Using *Relaciones de Sucesos*

1. *Floods in Seville during the 17<sup>th</sup> century: a public order problem  
and the emergence of a flood management culture*

In 1684, a *relación de sucesos* printed in Madrid reported the following news from Seville:

Amigo y señor mío, no puedo dejar de participar a v.m. las calamidades y trabajos que Dios ha sido servido de embiarnos, assí en esta Ciudad, como en toda la Andalucía, causados de las continuas y repetidas aguas por el discurso de tres meses, que en esta Ciudad creímos quería la Magestad de Dios con otro general diluvio, en pena de nuestros graves pecados, assolarnos.<sup>1</sup>

The author made reference to the important floods that the city of Seville suffered that year. The fact is that, in the early modern era, the population of Seville had to deal with many floods that affected the city's social, political, cultural, religious and, of course, economic life, as the hub of trade with the Indies. This unique characteristic turned the floods in Seville into a major problem, in political and economic terms as well as from a health perspective. Over time, it characterised and modified the

1. Abbreviations used: Biblioteca da Ajuda [BA], Biblioteca Nacional de España [BNE], English Short Title Catalogue [ESTC], Herzog August Bibliothek [HAB]. BNE, VE/100/15, "Relación verdadera y copia de carta escrita por un Cavallero de Sevilla a un amigo suyo en esta Corte, en que le dà quenta de la inundación que ha padecido esta Ciudad este Invierno, por discurso de tres meses, los Conventos, e Iglesias que se han anegado, y caído; casas, y gente que ha perecido, y la forma con que han sido socorridos con barcos que andavan por las calles, a los que no podían salir de sus casas; y de la Processión que su Ilustre Cabildo hizo a la Santa Iglesia Mayor para pedir a Dios cessasse su enojo, con otras particularidades sucedidas este año de 1684", Madrid, 1684.

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relationship between the city and its river, which was simultaneously a source of wealth and destruction.

The period known as the Little Ice Age, which lasted between approximately 1550 and 1850, was a phase of climatic cooling that manifested in strong meteorological variability. One of the most characteristic expressions of this period was the increase in the frequency of torrential rain, which was reflected in an increase in catastrophic flooding, as the rain was also often accompanied by long periods of drought. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, the most important intervals of rainfall occurred between 1580 and 1620 and between 1840 and 1870.<sup>2</sup> The Guadalquivir basin, together with certain parts of the Duero basin and the Levante, were those that suffered the most intense effects of these floods throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, floods occurred with a frequency of at least one per decade, as shown by the historical flood distribution series created by Benito, Machado and Pérez-González.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the city of Seville suffered these events with notorious severity due to its particular geographical position, which was very beneficial from a commercial point of view, but vulnerable in climatic terms. It was not the only locality affected: Cordoba and Écija, on the upper course of the Guadalquivir, also felt the effects of the floods.<sup>4</sup>

2. Mariano Barriendos, Javier Martín Vide, “Secular Climatic Oscillations as Indicated by Catastrophic Floods in the Spanish Mediterranean Coastal Area (14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries)”, *Climatic Change*, 38 (1998), pp. 473-491. An updated review based on historical documents regarding the Mediterranean basin can be found in Mariano Barriendo, Salvador Gil-Guirado, David Pino, Jordi Tuset, Alfredo Pérez-Morales, Armando Alberola, Joan Costa, Josep Carles Balasch, Xavier Castellort, Jordi Mazón, Josep Lluís Ruiz-Bellet, “Climatic and Social Factors Behind the Spanish Mediterranean Flood Event Chronologies from Documentary Sources (14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries)”, *Global and Planetary Change*, 182 (2019), online, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloplacha.2019.102997>.

3. See the graphs and maps of historical flood distribution in Spain between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Gerardo Benito, María José Machado, Alfredo Pérez-González, “Climate Change and Flood Sensitivity in Spain”, in *Global Continental Changes: The Context of Palaeohydrology*. Geological Society of London Special Publication, 115 (1996), pp. 85-98, specifically Fig. 3 (p. 92) and Fig. 6 (p. 94). Juan Ignacio Carmona gives a brief overview of the characteristics of the different floods that devastated Seville between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: Juan Ignacio Carmona, *Crónica urbana del malvivir: insalubridad, desamparo y hambre en la Sevilla de los siglos XVI y XVII*, Seville, Athenaica, 2018, pp. 107-149.

4. Manuel Peña Díaz, “El río como amenaza”, in *Guadalquivir. Mapas y relatos de un río. Imagen y mirada*, ed. by José Peral López, Seville, Universidad de Sevilla, 2017, pp. 46-61: 50-51.

The city of Seville is located at the point where the fluvial plain left by the river widens. This comes as it passes between two mountain ranges, the Sierra Morena and the Betic System, the origin of many tributaries. This geographical location encourages flooding, not only at times of heavy rainfall, but also as a result of the melting of winter snows, which is why many floods occur between January and April. Over time, this problem has been corrected with the construction of reservoirs, but in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was a real worry for the people of Seville due to its effects on the city's road infrastructure, the stagnation of the water and the consequent spread of diseases.<sup>5</sup> The fact that these catastrophic events recurred did, however, allow for preventive urban planning measures to be taken to correct their worst effects and to protect the city from their consequences. For this purpose, a drainage system was devised using gates and drains to prevent the city from flooding during torrential rains. Other urban elements, such as the walls, were also used to contain the flooding of the river. The city council discussed various projects to prevent the continuing damage caused by flooding. It did so after the floods of 1603, when the Italian engineer Tiburcio Spannochi presented a project to reinforce the drains and channel the Tagarete stream that ran along the east side of the walls.<sup>6</sup> Projects were also undertaken after the floods of 1618 and relaunched after the great flood of 1626. It was then that the proposal to make the floating bridge that linked Seville with Triana into a stone one was taken up again, although it was not carried out in the end.

The persistence and continuity of floods in Seville, of which there were many over the centuries, led to the emergence of guidelines for action to manage such catastrophes, which, as Zamora has already pointed out, allows us to speak of a “culture of flood management”, an expression coined by Rohr for the case of the Danube<sup>7</sup> and which appeared in various

5. Carmona, *Crónica urbana*, p. 107.

6. BNE, VE/31/12, “Parecer que dio el Comendador Tiburcio Spanoqui, Cavallero del Ábito de San Iuan, ingeniero mayor de Su Magestad y Gentilhombre de Su Casa. A la Muy noble y Muy leal Ciudad de Sevilla sobre los Reparos que convienen para la inundación del Río Guadalquivir”. Francisco Pérez, Seville, 1604. See also Carmona, *Crónica urbana*, p. 134; Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *La Sevilla del siglo XVII*, Seville, Universidad de Sevilla, 1984, p. 61.

7. Fernando Zamora Rodríguez, “‘Quando el agua llegare aquí Sevilla...’. La avenida del río Guadalquivir en 1626 según un documento de la Biblioteca da Ajuda (Portugal)”, *Historia. Instituciones. Documentos*, 41 (2014), pp. 407-431: 409; Christian Rohr, “Floods

different areas. In addition to the urban planning considerations mentioned above, the recurrence of floods gave rise to disaster management planning, with an organised system based on the hierarchy and distribution of tasks between the city's *asistente* and a series of *veinticuatro*s (members of the city council) appointed for this purpose. The pattern was repeated over decades. In the same way, what might be called the religious management of the catastrophe went through a process of development and systemisation, a long way from the improvisation shown in some of the contemporary sources, like *relaciones de sucesos*. A comparative and diachronic analysis of testimonies of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century floods offers, by contrast, a pattern of collective religious behaviour that was repeated, with small variations, over the years. This was part of what François Walter has called a “coherent trauma management system”.<sup>8</sup>

The study of religious responses to catastrophes has often focused on studying religious, apocalyptic, prophetic and hagiographical texts in order to observe and analyse the reactions of the population and of the regular and secular sectors of the clergy. Although we have numerous testimonies of the floods in Seville, as the studies of González de Caldas, among others, have shown, the purpose of this article is to analyse their presence in *relaciones* throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, we pay special attention to the religious phenomenon and its manifestation as a means of reflecting and shaping a collective culture of Christian piety and as an explanatory framework conducive to the repetition of certain behaviours and to the legitimisation of civil and ecclesiastical authorities. *Relaciones* on disasters make up a separate subgenre within the genre of *relaciones* in general.<sup>9</sup> They usually deal with a single event in a narrative with a tendency towards sensationalism,<sup>10</sup> and they contain broad similarities

of the Upper Danube River and Its Tributaries and Their Impact on Urban Economies (c. 1350-1600): The Examples of the Towns of Krems/Stein and Wels (Austria)”, *Environment and History*, 19/2 (2013), pp. 133-148.

8. François Walter, *Catastrophes. Une histoire culturelle. XVI<sup>e</sup>- XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 2008.

9. Henry Ettinghausen, *Noticias del siglo XVII: relaciones españolas de sucesos naturales y sobrenaturales*, Barcelona, Puvill, 1995.

10. Manuel Bernal Rodríguez, Carmen Espejo Cala, “Tres relaciones de sucesos del siglo XVII. Propuesta de recuperación de textos preperiodísticos”, *IC Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación*, 1 (2003), pp. 133-176: 136; Abel Iglesias Castellano, “La interpretación de las catástrofes naturales en el siglo XVII”, *Ab Initio*, 8 (2013), pp. 87-120: 98-103.

in terms of the themes, anecdotes and structures addressed, as Soon has pointed out for the case of the Seville floods.<sup>11</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were at least twelve floods of considerable magnitude that saw the river burst its banks as it passed through Seville: in 1603-1604, 1608, 1618, 1626, 1627, 1633, 1642, 1649, 1683-1684, 1691, 1692 and 1697.<sup>12</sup> The flood in 1626 was by far the largest. That year was known in the Iberian Peninsula as the “year of the flood”, a name that already contained clear biblical echoes that later appeared in the accounts and religious manifestations observed in the days that followed. That same year, there were also significant floods in other cities, such as Salamanca and Malaga.<sup>13</sup> The importance of the flood in Seville in 1626 went beyond the limits of the most immediate news to appear in comedies and other plays. This reminds us of the undoubted value of dramaturgy in the Spanish Golden Age as news, as well as its capacity to establish points of reference in the collective memory. This was the case of *La respuesta está en la mano*, a comedy that publicised the Seville floods of 1626, and *La huerta de Juan Fernández*, by Tirso de Molina.<sup>14</sup>

The flood had a great impact in contemporary news reports. It was a true publishing phenomenon, giving rise to many *relaciones* that told, in varying degrees of detail, of the overflowing of the river, the material and human damage caused to the city, the civil and spiritual governments’ management of the situation and the religious rituals to ask for an end to

11. Alan Soon, “Una relación de la riada del Guadalquivir de 1618, botón de muestra de los impresos sobre desastres”, *Archivo Hispalense*, 75/228 (1992), pp. 31-40: 31.

12. See the compilation of floods made by Francisco de Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas o grandes avenidas del Guadalquivir en Sevilla desde su Reconquista hasta nuestros días*, 2 vols, Seville, Francisco Álvarez y compañía, 1878.

13. Carlota Fernández Travieso, “Las crecientes del Guadalquivir en Sevilla y Triana y la avenida del Tormes en Salamanca en 1626”, in *Malas noticias y noticias falsas. Estudio y edición de relaciones de sucesos (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, ed. by Valentina Nider and Nieves Pena Sueiro, Trento, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2019, pp. 89-110; Gennaro Schiano, “Las relaciones de desastres naturales entre género y texto. El caso de la riada de San Policarpo (Salamanca, 1626)”, *Cuadernos AISPI*, 15 (2020), pp. 209-226; Gennaro Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe en el Siglo de Oro. Entre noticia y narración*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2021. See also the contribution by the same author in this volume.

14. Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas*, p. 230; Carlos Santos Fernández, “Sevilla anegada. Once relaciones de sucesos sobre las inundaciones que asolaron Sevilla en 1626”, *Archivo hispalense*, 303-5/100 (2017), pp. 271-298: 273.

the floods.<sup>15</sup> The latter are part of one of the three religious manifestations Alberola identified as a reaction to extreme hydrological phenomena, divided into public prayers *pro pluvia*, aimed at requesting rain and an end to droughts, masses of thanksgiving and public prayers *pro serenitate*, intended to put an end to torrential rains.<sup>16</sup>

The authors of these reports sometimes also ventured to put forward hypotheses to explain the floods or to apportion blame and offer remedies. The following quote from the first pages of a discourse by Gerónimo de Contreras in 1626, on the prevention of diseases caused by floods, is a particularly good example. In it, the author alludes to the sanitary and urban planning measures to take to prevent the spread of future diseases, including the purification and renewal of the air in houses and enclosed spaces. But, before dealing with those issues, he points out that:

en todo assí supuesto en este tiempo que ay antes que vengan enfermedades, roguemos a Dios que no pase adelante con su castigo, entrenando la fuerza de los aspectos de las estrellas que causan el año tan destemplado: y para que seamos oydos será bien reconciliarnos con Su Magestad divina, y procurar santo que nos apadrine suplicándoselo, haziéndole ofertas y fiestas para más obligarle. Hecho esto con el afecto que se deve, tratemos de los remedios humanos, fuera de los referidos que se dijeron en la junta, que esos se harán.<sup>17</sup>

In this text, Gerónimo de Contreras presents a plan of action in which religious devotion, in line with the performative and collective Christian piety promoted by the Catholic Church since the Counter-Reformation, is divided into two phases. In the first, an end to the disaster (in this case, a flood) is requested, and, in the second, thanks are given to God for that purpose through offerings, commemorative processions and other pious

15. A compilation of eleven *relaciones de sucesos* on this theme can be found in Santos Fernández, “Sevilla anegada”. See also other transcriptions of *relaciones de sucesos* in Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas*; Soon, “Una relación de la riada del Guadalquivir de 1618”; Ettinghausen, *Noticias del siglo XVII*; Bernal Rodríguez-Espejo Cala, “Tres relaciones de sucesos”; Zamora Rodríguez, “Quando el agua llegare”; Fernández Travieso, “Las crecientes del Guadalquivir”; Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe*.

16. Armando Alberola Romá, “Clima, desastre y religiosidad en los diaristas valencianos de los siglos XVI y XVII”, *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 25 (2016), pp. 41-66: 45.

17. BNE, VE/197/32, “Discurso y apuntamientos en razón de los que denotan los temporales, y inundación, y otras causas de enfermedades que a avido en Sevilla, y remedios para su preservación: dirigido a los Señores Regente, y Oydores, y Alcaldes de la Real Audiencia de la dicha Ciudad por el Dotor Gerónimo de Contreras”, [1626?].

manifestations. Petit-Breuilh has identified this dual pattern of religious management of disasters through public *pro serenitate* prayers, observed in the management of floods in Seville, for the whole of Spanish America.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. *Public pro serenitate prayers: the invocation of the Blessed Sacrament and the mediation of Saints Justa and Rufina, patrons of the city*

One of the fundamental characteristics of the paradigm shift in disaster writing at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is precisely the emphasis on the action in the face of catastrophe of public authorities, whose agents are presented as heroes of the story.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in the *relaciones* about the floods, we can see the construction of a double heroism: on one hand, the civil authorities, represented by the *asistente* and some of the most important secular figures in the city, and, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, whose mediation before God is essential to ensure the protection of the city and to ask for an end to the rains. Although the aim here is to analyse the ritual manifestations and the construction of the heroic image related to the religious sphere, civil authorities were also referred to as true heroes with almost miraculous attributes. To take one example: “Su Señoría [conde de Salvatierra] visitó por su persona muy a menudo todos los puestos de peligro, sin reparar en las incomodidades del tiempo, y de las aguas”.<sup>20</sup> However, not all authorities enjoyed the same positive publicity. In the great flood of 1626, the *asistente* Fernando Ramírez Fariñas was widely criticised. Peña Díaz includes one of the sonnets that circulated about the ineffectiveness of the municipal government:

¿Cómo, Betis soberbio, así violaste  
 Las leyes de tu margen? ¿Cómo osado  
 La ciudad más insigne has inundado  
 Que a tus locos cristales hace engaste?

18. 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), pp. 83-115: 87.

19. Françoise Lavocat, “Narratives of Catastrophe in the Early Modern Period: Awareness of Historicity and Emergence of Interpretative Viewpoints”, *Poetics Today*, 33/3-4 (2012), pp. 253-299: 271.

20. BNE, VE/170/32, “Relación de lo sucedido en la inundación y avenida del Río de Sevilla, por enero de este año de 1642”. Seville, Francisco de Lira, 1642, f. 6v.

¿Acaso mi Asistencia aquí ignoraste?  
 -No tal: antes de largo iba enfadado,  
 Y abierta vi la puerta, y heme entrado,  
 Y no he vuelto a salir porque cerraste.<sup>21</sup>

As a reaction, a few months later a *relación de sucesos* was published in Seville by Francisco de Lira entitled *Enundación de Sevilla por la creciente de su río Guadalquivir. Prevenciones antes del daño y remedios para su reparo*, which Palomo considered to be “official” because of its intention to highlight the figure of the *asistente* and to refute the criticisms made against him.<sup>22</sup> However, this did not prevent riots in the Feria neighbourhood.

Religious rituals appear in the *relaciones* accompanied by a degree of improvisation, arising from the will of the citizens and of the clergy themselves. This, however, does not correspond to the repeated patterns observed over time. On the contrary, there was a series of elements shared by the processions and rogations that provided a type of structure, which meant that they had to be planned and organised as a pattern of behaviour: a pre-established calendar (which, in the case of public prayers during and after disasters, is, of course, impossible), some rules, a space, some myths and rituals, and some ornaments or material elements.<sup>23</sup>

For the flood of 1626, we have, among other documents, valuable testimony from a letter sent by the antiquarian Rodrigo Caro to Francisco de Quevedo on 10 February 1626 and transcribed by Palomo in his work on the floods in Seville. What began as light rain between 17 and 19 January soon became a downpour, a situation which, together with the thaw in the nearby mountains, caused the Guadalquivir to rise and overflow on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the day it reached the city walls. *Asistente* Fernando Ramírez Fariñas summoned the city council on the 19<sup>th</sup> and appointed people in charge of overseeing the city’s gates and drains. Although the drains, which in less calamitous circumstances allowed water out of the city, were quickly plugged and caulked, it was not enough to stop the force of the water. The

21. Peña Díaz, “El río como amenaza”, p. 52.

22. Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas*, p. 249; Schiano, *Relatar la catástrofe*, p. 86. This is the *relación de sucesos* published by Bernal Rodríguez-Espejo Cala, “Tres relaciones de sucesos”.

23. Virginia García Acosta, “Divinidad y desastres. Interpretaciones, manifestaciones y respuestas”, *Revista de Historia Moderna. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 35 (2017), pp. 46-82: 60.

Arenal gate was the first to fall, and the water flooded the entire area from the Jerez gate to the Macarena, where it stopped thanks to the precautions of the residents, who had had the time to properly caulk the gate. It did enter, however, through the New Gate, although this could have been closed shortly thereafter. The Feria, Duque, Alameda, Arenal, San Julián, San Martín, San Andrés and Santa Lucía districts were flooded. The flood was, in fact, a double flood, because there were two phases. After an initial fall in the water level in early February, the increase in rainfall around the 12<sup>th</sup> caused the river to rise again, and the level did not drop until 20 February.<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Seville had about 100,000 inhabitants, according to the most recent estimates made by Jiménez Montes and Castillo Rubio, based on the “Padrón de las casas y vecinos que hay en la ciudad de Sevilla”, carried out in 1561, adding the regular and secular clergy, who were excluded from that official register.<sup>25</sup> In 1548, when the cosmographer Pedro de Medina wrote his *Libro de las grandezas y cosas memorables de España*, there were 25 parishes, 32 monasteries and 110 hospitals in the city.<sup>26</sup> Many of them were not saved from the onslaught of the waters, as is recorded in many reports. At least nine churches and 27 seminaries, convents and religious hospitals were flooded, along with an estimated 11,000 homes, according to Caro’s letter. If we take into account the assiduity with which the accounts of the catastrophe relate the miraculous way that religious buildings were saved from a tragic fate,<sup>27</sup> the long list of sacred places destroyed by the flooding of Seville is striking. Fernández Travieso has identified this narrative strategy with a propagandistic intention in an attempt to give the story greater credibility.<sup>28</sup> In Geraldo da Vinha’s *relacion*, printed in Lisbon in 1626, a whole page

24. Carmona, *Crónica urbana*, p. 132.

25. Germán Jiménez Montes, Juan Manuel Castillo Rubio, “La construcción de un entrepôt: organización urbana de los mercaderes extranjeros en Sevilla en la segunda mitad del siglo XVI”, in *Monarquías en conflicto. Linajes y noblezas en la articulación de la Monarquía Hispánica*, ed. by José Ignacio Fortea Pérez, Juan E. Gelabert, Roberto López Vela and Elena Postigo Castellanos, Santander, Fundación Española de Historia Moderna, 2018, pp. 325-335: 326.

26. Quoted in María Dolores Cabra Loredó, Elena María Santiago Páez, *Iconografía de Sevilla. Tomo 1: 1400-1650*, Madrid, El Viso, 1988, p. 17.

27. Schiano, “Las relaciones de desastres”, p. 213.

28. Fernández Travieso, “Las crecientes del Guadalquivir”, p. 99.

is devoted to this purpose, while in the *relación* published by Salvador de Cea in Cordoba, a long and detailed list occupying two handwritten pages is attached and includes the friaries, convents, churches and hospitals flooded in Triana and Seville, as well as those that were saved.<sup>29</sup> Despite the sensationalism characteristic of *relaciones de sucesos*, scholars agree that the flood was genuinely destructive and estimate that about two-thirds of the city was under water.

Among the ecclesiastical institutions most affected was the castle of San Jorge, seat of the Inquisition tribunal. González de Caldas used the testimonies preserved in the inquisitorial documentation to analyse the impact of the floods on this structure.<sup>30</sup> It stood on the banks of the river in the Triana district and near the floating bridge that linked the neighbourhood with the rest of the city of Seville. This area suffered very badly over the century from the onslaught of the waters. However, this fact appears very rarely in the *relaciones*, and this silence concerning one of the worst affected structures is significant. The 1642 *relacion*, by contrast, expressly mentions the fact that it was saved, associating this with divine intervention:

Anegó a Triana y queriendo subir [el agua] al Tribunal del Santo Oficio, el respeto le detuvo en los últimos escalones que están antes de entrar en la antesala del Secreto, igualándose empero con lo más alto del Altar de San Jorge, e inundando todo el quarto de el señor don Iuan Ortiz, y del señor don Agustín de Villavicencio, que constantes no quisieron desampararle, aunque se lo pidieron, juzgando que su falta la haría a los ánimos de los demás moradores del Castillo.<sup>31</sup>

29. BNE, VC/224/40, “Relaçam verdadeira do lastimoso successo de Sevilha, com as enchentes das agoas neste mez de Ianeiro de 1626”, Lisbon, Geraldo da Vinha, 1626; BNE, VE/107/10, “Traslado de una carta que un vecino de la ciudad de Sevilla embió a un su amigo a la ciudad de Córdoba, en que le da cuenta del diluvio y ruyna que el Río Guadalquivir ha hecho en la dicha ciudad de Sevilla y Triana, rompiendo la puerta del Arenal, y destruyendo y anegando las dos partes de la ciudad, derribando casas, ahogando personas y vestias, destruyendo haziendas, dexando a muchos pobres, llevándose del Arenal toda la mayor parte de las mercaderias que vinieron de Indias. Y como la santa Iglesia de Sevilla sacò en processión el Lignum Cruzis y grandes rogativas a N. Señora de los Reyes. Empeçò en Sevilla la creciente domingo 25. de Enero deste año de 1626 a las dos de la mañana”, Córdoba, Salvador de Cea, 1626.

30. María Victoria González de Caldas Méndez, “El Santo Oficio en Sevilla”, *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 27/2 (1991), pp. 59-114.

31. BNE, VE/170/32, “Relación de lo sucedido...”, 1642.

Nor was the floating bridge that linked Triana with Seville, and the only crossing point between the two shores, spared by the waters. Formed by 17 boats tied together to form a passage between Triana and the Arenal, it was repeatedly destroyed by the river's floods. After the disaster of 1626, *asistente* Diego Hurtado de Mendoza promoted a new plan in 1630 to transform it into a stone bridge capable of withstanding the floods of the river. However, the design, by Andrés de Oviedo, of which several drawings are preserved, was abandoned before being carried out.<sup>32</sup> The city was, therefore, partially cut off from its surroundings, making the arrival of goods and food difficult. The documents generated as a result of the loss of goods in the port show the destruction caused by the rising water. The economic losses were considerable due to the destruction of the docks, the Arenal and the Customs area. This is shown in a contemporary *relación* written by Bishop Juan de la Sal:

La pérdida de mercancías, alhajas y hacienda de caydas y menoscabos de casas forçosamente a de ser de inestimable valor. Nunca el arenal de Sevilla con la venida reciente de la flota se vio tan rico como en aquesta ocasión. Desde la Torre del Oro hasta la puente [de Triana], que es un grandíssimo trecho, no avía sino montes de palo de Brasil, de caxas de açúcar, de infinidad de corambre y de otras mil cosas de valor.<sup>33</sup>

Rodrigo Caro's story shows scenes of fear and desperation, with terrified citizens trying to escape the waters amid cries and lamentations. Religious and apocalyptic references are woven into the account:

Sonaba el viento furiosamente y el agua, y las campanas delas parroquias, que tocaban llamando socorro o plegarias; y redoblando el viento los alaridos de tanta gente que padecía, en la oscuridad y tristeza de la noche, todo junto formaba un espantoso y confuso sonido, que parecía una prevención del juicio final.<sup>34</sup>

This explanatory image is common in accounts of disasters. In the case of Seville, we find another example in a verse *relación* of the flood

32. Cabra Loredó, Santiago Páez, *Iconografía de Sevilla*, pp. 160-166; Marcos Pacheco Morales-Padrón, "Consideraciones sobre la sustitución del puente de barcas de Triana: un proyecto de puente de piedra (1631)", *Atrio. Revista de Historia del Arte*, 24 (2018), pp. 42-57.

33. BA, 54-XI-24 n°13, "La avenida de Sevilla en 25 de Enero de 1626, domingo día de la Conversión de San Pablo". Quoted in Zamora Rodríguez, "Quando el agua llegare", p. 422.

34. Quoted in Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas*, p. 240.

of 1608. During this flood, known as the flood of San Benito because it happened on Saint Benedict's Day, a clergyman from Campo de Calatrava, who claimed to have been an eyewitness to the events, wrote a *relación* in which he explained the events based on references to the Last Judgment:

poco más de media noche,  
entre doce y una era,  
comenzaron dos mil truenos  
y relámpagos la tierra  
  
cubrir y atemorizar,  
que parece que ya llega  
la fin del mundo y comienza  
el juicio que el hombre espera.<sup>35</sup>

The *relación* ends with a plea for God's clemency, asking Him to intercede on behalf of the city and to show mercy. The typical sensationalist nature of these *relaciones de sucesos* can be seen in the painstaking way they sometimes describe the scenes of panic and fear, the citizens perched on the roofs of houses to escape the water, the people hanging out of windows and the boatmen who, in an image reminiscent of biblical times, came to save those who were trapped. There is, however, no lack of cases of corruption and criticism: some demanded money for saving people from the waters in the boats, and the price of bread increased as a result of shortages in the days following the disaster.

The first devotional measure identified in the reports was the uncovering of the Blessed Sacrament in all churches and convents not reached by water. This divine protection in the form of the Eucharist was very common in the Hispanic context due to the link between the Habsburg

35. Diego de Brizuela Corcuera, "Relación muy verdadera de la tempestad, huracanes y temblores de tierra que sucedieron en esta ciudad de Sevilla, día del señor san Benito, que se contaron veinte y uno de marzo deste año de 1608. Compuesta por el maestro Diego de Brizuela Corcuera, cura propio de la villa de los Pozuelos, en el campo de Calatrava por su Majestad, estante este día en Sevilla. Con un romance a la postre del glorioso san Benito, compuesto por el mismo autor, en cuyo día acaeció", 1608. Library of the Heirs of the Duke of T'Serclaes. Quoted by Rosario Consuelo Gonzalo García, "Noticias sobre las crecidas del Guadalquivir en Sevilla en la primera década del siglo XVII. Edición de una relación en verso de la 'avenida de san Benito' en 1608", *Studia Aurea*, 13 (2019), pp. 261-296.

dynasty and the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Negredo's studies show the close relationship that was forged over time between the cult of the Blessed Sacrament, as one of the main orthodox principles of Trent, and the House of Austria.<sup>36</sup> Making the Eucharist the protector of the dynasty automatically extended this protection to the entire Habsburg territories and polity, as a dynastic cult. The unveiling of the Blessed Sacrament as the first measure of spiritual management of a disaster therefore appears repeatedly in the *relaciones*, inserted in a broader context of religious invocation and dynastic legitimacy.

In addition to the Blessed Sacrament, two appeals for intercession are particularly important for the analysis of the public *pro serenitate* prayers: an appeal to Saints Justa and Rufina, patron saints of Seville, exemplified in the procession with their relics around the convent of the Trinitarians, where they were kept,<sup>37</sup> and the ascent to the Giralda with the Lignum Crucis: the relics of the cross kept in the cathedral. The cult of Saints Justa and Rufina dates back to medieval times, with two phases of major importance: the high medieval and the early modern in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the devotion reached its greatest extent. They had already acted as mediators at times of tragedy in the city, during the plague epidemics of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Similarly, Ortiz de Zúñiga, in his *Anales eclesiasticos y seculares*, traced their conversion into patron saints of the city to their protection of the Giralda during a storm in 1396. Their cult via public *pro serenitate* prayers is already documented in the floods of 1485, when votive masses were held in the convent of the Trinitarians.<sup>38</sup> In fact, it was the earthquake of 1504 that made them the patron saints of the city, as the miracle of the survival of the Giralda, which remained standing during the quake, was attributed to their intercession. In this way, the iconography of Saints

36. Fernando Negredo del Cerro, "La palabra de Dios al servicio del Rey. La legitimación de la Casa de Austria en los sermones del siglo XVII", *Criticón*, 84-85 (2002), pp. 295-311.

37. According to tradition, the friary stands on the site of the prison where the saints were incarcerated. See Carlos José Romero Mensaque, "Culto y devoción a las santas Justa y Rufina en Sevilla durante los siglos XVI al XVII", in *San Rafael y el patronazgo de los santos mártires en Andalucía. Historia, arte y espiritualidad*, ed. by Juan Aranda Doncel and Julián Hurtado de Molina Delgado, Córdoba, Hermandad de San Rafael, Ilustre Sociedad Andaluza de Estudios Histórico-Jurídicos, 2016, pp. 147-167: 151.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Justa and Rufina adopted the image of the protection of the Giralda as an analogy of the protection of the city as a whole. The fact that in 1602 the supposed relics of the saints – the head of St Rufina and a bone of St Justa – were transferred to the city from a parish in Witillaer, in the Empire, provided considerable support for the establishment of their cult.<sup>39</sup> This was reinforced by the inscription that a canon of the cathedral, Pedro de Mendoza, added to the *Regla Vieja* of the choir:

¡O Santísimas y bienaventuradas Vírgenes Justa y Rufina que a esta hora fuisteis vistas (según por testimonios de muchos se mostró) tener en ambas, una de parte y otra de otra abrazadas la torre por que no pudiese caer! Y hecha muy grande suplicación, cesó aquella tempestad, habiendo la torre tres veces amenazada cayda.<sup>40</sup>

From the beginning, the devotion to the saints was particularly linked to their protection against disasters of natural origin. So, every time a tragedy of this kind occurred, both civil and religious authorities resorted to their mediation. In the following letter to Francisco de Quevedo, Rodrigo Caro gives an account of some of the first religious manifestations observed in the city:

Salieron los frailes de la Santísima Trinidad en procesión con el Santísimo Sacramento temiendo que se anegaba todo el mundo; y refieren los religiosos que respetó el agua á su Autor y no entró en el convento.<sup>41</sup>

Francisco de Rueda, the father superior of the Trinitarian friary, was in charge of the public prayers. First, he said a mass asking for an end to the rains. The community then took the Holy Sacrament in procession in order to protect the convent, together with the relics of Saints Justa and Rufina, who were, at the time, the patron saints of Seville. Contemporary observers say the procession went to the edge of the platform on which the friary stood, where Friar Francisco de Rueda raised the host before the water, with the other friars behind him. The water came close to the friar's habit, but did not wet him. As the narrator put it:

39. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

40. Quoted in Peter Cherry, "Santas Justa y Rufina: una nota iconográfica", in *En torno a Santa Rufina. Velázquez de lo íntimo a lo cortesano*, ed. by Benito Navarrete Prieto, Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, Peter Cherry and Carmen Garrido, Seville, Fundación Focus Abengoa, 2008, pp. 49-65: 57.

41. Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas*, p. 241.

Mostró el Santísimo Sacramento á las aguas, y luego se detuvieron creciendo en alto, y sobreponiéndose unas á otras, renovándose el milagro del Jordán a vista del maná verdadero, con grande admiración y espanto de los presentes.<sup>42</sup>

After this, the procession withdrew and the river water again approached the convent, but without going beyond the limits marked by the chains. The following day, the Holy Sacrament was again taken out in procession, at exactly the same time when the river had begun to flood the day before, and this was repeated every day over the following weeks.

The friary of the Santísima Trinidad held relics of the city's patron saints, Justa and Rufina, and, according to tradition, its basement was where they had been imprisoned. It is mentioned in practically all the *relaciones*, although the relics are not always referred to. However, in one way or another it is usually linked to miraculous events, in which the friary's hierarchy always plays a mediating role to achieve the intercession of the patron saints. After the end of the floods, a procession to the friary was held to give thanks for the conclusion of the disaster.<sup>43</sup>

As Palmieri has emphasised, a disaster of natural origin was a crucial moment when the ability of a saint or a specific invocation to protect its people, its believers, its territory or, in this case, its community was called into question.<sup>44</sup> This success is demonstrated in the *relaciones* with various strategies: public prayers in the form of processions, miracles around the convent or even, when it was not possible to appeal for direct intervention, the transposition of the myth of the patron saint onto other characters, making them into heroic figures as *alter egos* of the saint.

In the *relación* written by Melchor de León Garabito and published by Antonio Vázquez in Salamanca, the Trinitarian friary became the scene of a miracle.<sup>45</sup> It tells how three customs officers took refuge within the walls of the church as the water rose. When they got there, they heard a woman calling for help for her drowning son and went to alert the friars.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

43. Cherry, "Santas Justa y Rufina", p. 64.

44. Pasquale Palmieri, "Protecting the Faithful City: Disasters and the Cult of the Saints (Naples, 1573-1587)", in *Disaster Narratives in Early Modern Naples: Politics, Communication and Culture*, ed. by Domenico Cecere, Chiara De Caprio, Lorenza Gianfrancesco and Pasquale Palmieri, Rome, Viella, 2018, pp. 207-220.

45. BNE, VE/59/80, "Melchor de León Garabito, Discurso trágico de el grande Diluvio y portentosas avenidas sucedidas en la muy noble ciudad de Sevilla desde 25 de enero hasta 16 de febrero de 1626", Salamanca, Antonio Vázquez, 1626.

They took the Blessed Sacrament out in procession and the water gradually receded, but when they went to look for the woman, they found no trace of her. What, on the face of it, could be seen as a dramatic event – the death of a woman and her child – is reinterpreted from a devotional point of view as a miracle. It was presented as “a warning from heaven, a prodigy” which had allowed the clerics to save both themselves and the conventual dependencies.

A different strategy can be seen in the 1608 *relación de sucesos*, mentioned above. It specifies the damage caused by the water in several churches and convents, including that of Saints Justa and Rufina. However, in the account, the saints are transposed into a miracle that happened to two sisters from Seville, who died during the flood. In this way, the mediation of the patronesses continued to be effective, if not from a material point of view, then from a spiritual perspective.

### 3. *Material mediation and the city as a collective setting for a miracle: the procession of the Lignum Crucis*

The holding of a public procession also encouraged the population to identify with the miracle and made the whole population not only spectators, but also active agents of this mediation through their presence. On 6 February 1626, the Church took the Virgin of the Kings in procession, together with the Lignum Crucis, the relic that was kept in Seville’s cathedral. The latter was taken to the top of the Giralda tower, from where public prayers for the cessation of rain were made in a two-stage rite.

Llévose en procesión a la torre Mayor el precioso Lignun Crucis, y se mostró en las cuatro ventanas de la torre; y esto ha sido por dos veces: en la primera cesó el aire que furiosamente corría, y bajó el río mas de dos varas, y por luego serenó el tiempo: en la segunda vez que le sacaron a la misma torre, fue cosa también maravillosa, que estando en una ventana exorcizando la tempestad según el ritual romano antiguo, llegando el Preste a decir aquellas palabras *Appareat arcus tuus in nubibus coeli*, al punto pareció el arco en el cielo a la misma parte del exorcismo, y por luego serenó.<sup>46</sup>

The reaction was not long in coming:

46. Quoted in Borja Palomo, *Historia crítica de las riadas*, pp. 245-246.

Fue tan eficaz esta acción cristiana que permitió nuestro señor que al punto amaynase el voraz viento y que las nubes no ocasionassen más temores, alentáronse las gentes, aclamavan al cielo reconociendo tan portentoso beneficio, agora podemos dezir lustrose el campo, mirándose el Sol en el cristal derramado por sus márgenes.<sup>47</sup>

A few months later, on 3 May 1626, the Lignum Crucis again went out in procession, this time accompanied by the Virgin of the Waters, in line with the worship and prayers being held for the end of the flooding of the river and with the masses of thanksgiving following the catastrophes.<sup>48</sup>

The procession of the Lignum Crucis was repeated over the years, with variations. Research by scholars like Petit-Breuilh in Latin America has highlighted the fact that the behavioural model adopted for public prayer during and after catastrophes was similar to the processional and penitential model of Holy Week.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, religious manifestations evolved towards more baroque forms of piety over the years. For the flood of 1684, the biggest flood of the century after that of 1626, we find a more detailed description offering a view of a more Baroque ritual:

El Ilustrísimo Cabildo ordenó salir en Proceßion General, acompañado de las demás Religiones, a la Iglesia Mayor, pidiendo a Dios misericordia, para que templasse su enojo. Iban cantando la Letanía de N. S. con mucha devoción, llevando los pies descalços, y por asylo y protección el Estandarte de nuestra Redempción, la Santísima Cruz, adornada de rica pedrería, y en el cuerpo della un pedazo del Santísimo Lignum Crucis. Después de aver hecho oración a N. S. de los Reyes y a san Fernando, Tutelares y Patronos de Sevilla, y pedido con mucho fervor intercediessen con nuestro Señor, que suspendiesse su ira y embaynasse el estoque de su justicia, y se apiadasse de aquel afligido Pueblo en la misma forma de Proceßion subieron a la Torre, hasta llegar a la Giralda, donde postrados de rodillas por el suelo, y enarbolado el precioso Madero de la Santa Cruz conjuraron las nubes: Cosa maravillosa! Prodigio inaudito! Al mismo tiempo empezó a serenarse el Cielo, y ahuyentarse las nubes: quedaron todos maravillados del portento y con la misma orden y devoción baxaron a la Iglesia a dar gracias a nuestra Señora y San Fernando, por los beneficios recibidos por interceßion suya [...].<sup>50</sup>

47. BNE, VE/59/80, "Discurso trágico...", 1626.

48. Quoted in Zamora Rodríguez, "Quando el agua llegare", p. 420.

49. Petit-Breuilh Sepúlveda, "Religiosidad y rituales", pp. 85-86.

50. BNE, VE/100/15, "Relación verdadera...", 1684.

Afterwards, the relic was taken to the main altar while chants of invocation to Saints Justa and Rufina were sung again.<sup>51</sup> As can be seen in this list, by now the procession was perfectly organised and structured. The improvisation that seemed to be present at the beginning of the century had gone. It now necessarily required the civil and ecclesiastical authorities to work together for it to operate properly, as Alberola has pointed out.<sup>52</sup> It did not differ too much from the descriptions of processions praying for the end of other contemporary events, such as the invocations made to end the plague.

#### 4. *The feast of Corpus Christi: an instrument for the iconography and memory of the floods*

The study of the Corpus Christi festivities, with large processions and ephemeral decorations, can make a contribution to the analysis of religious mediation in the face of disasters and the construction of their memory and management. On the feast of Corpus Christi in Seville on 11 June 1626, an *auto sacramental* was performed, entitled *El socorro de Cádiz* and written by Juan Pérez de Montalbán. Referring to the Anglo-Dutch attack on the city of Cadiz in November of the previous year, it is an early example of a religious play (*auto sacramental*) described as “de circunstancias”, with a historical and allegorical theme.<sup>53</sup> The attack on Cadiz served as a temporal reference providing a story for some *relaciones de sucesos*, while at the same time framing a series of tragic and catastrophic events in the same explanatory framework that had divine punishment as its ultimate reference.<sup>54</sup> This is demonstrated in the following extract from a *relación*:

51. Cherry, “Santas Justa y Rufina”, p. 65.

52. Armando Alberola Romá, “Procesiones, rogativas, conjuros y exorcismos: el campo valenciano ante la plaga de langosta de 1756”, *Revista de Historia Moderna. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 21 (2003), pp. 7-75.

53. Teresa Ferrer Valls, “El auto sacramental y la alegorización de la Historia: *El socorro de Cádiz* de Juan Pérez de Montalbán”, *Studia Aurea*, 6 (2012), pp. 99-116. A modern edition of the *auto sacramental* is published by Ferrer Valls in *Cádiz 1625. El ataque angloholandés en las noticias y el teatro*, ed. by Beatriz Álvarez García and Teresa Ferrer Valls, Madrid, Doce Calles, 2021, pp. 269-312.

54. The explanatory interweaving of political events and disasters is an issue already highlighted for the case of Naples by Domenico Cecere, “Moralising Pamphlets: Calamities,

El caso es (para que no andemos por las ramas) que Dios ha días que está resuelto en castigarnos. Ha puesto en diferentes manos el azote. Ya en las de los herejes olandeses, ya en las de la Armada de Ingalaterra deve de aver echado de ver que estos verdugos no se dan buena maña en açotarnos i ha encomendado el castigo al río de Sevilla que le va obedeciendo puntualmente como criatura suya que a ojos cerrados executa las órdenes que le da.<sup>55</sup>

At the end of the play, the Church appears on the scene via the well-known iconography of the Eucharistic ship which comes to save its people. Although the play refers to the defence of Cadiz against the English navy, the description and narration of the appearance on the scene of the ship of the Eucharist contains many similarities with the actions of the ecclesiastical chapter during the floods, and could also serve as a reference for this image. The iconography of the ship of the Church, the ship of the Eucharist or the Eucharistic ship was especially popular in the post-Tridentine Catholic world as a symbol of the Church's triumph over its enemies and its function as a guide. In the scene from the religious play, the character of the Infanta tells of the arrival of the Church portrayed as a galley, with Saints Isidore, Laureano, Justa and Rufina painted on its banner. These form part of the distinguished group of saints who, at one time or another, were considered patrons of the city of Seville. This image cannot have been strange, as the panoramic view of Seville made in 1617 and published by Joannes Janssonius also shows a tender decorated with pennants showing three Sevillian saints.<sup>56</sup> Thus, although the narrative of the religious play refers to the attack on Cadiz, the mention of the ship of the Church referenced an event geographically closer to the audience of the performance and a memory of the continuous mediation of the saints on behalf of their city.

The galley was decorated with the arms of the Church and city and was loaded with bread, a Eucharistic symbol but also a reference to the Church's work of sustenance during disasters. This image, which also refers to the conjunction of civil and religious authorities, is not unlike those we find in *relaciones* of floods and undoubtedly would not have seemed very different to spectators:

Information and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Naples", in *Disaster Narratives*, pp. 129-146.

55. Quoted in Zamora Rodríguez, "Quando el agua llegare", p. 425

56. Cabra Loredó-Santiago Páez, *Iconografía de Sevilla*, pp. 132-140.

No se olvidó la Santa Iglesia desta ciudad, su Cabildo, y Prebendados de usar en esta ocasión de su acostumbrada grandeza y liberalidad: mandó que cada día se repartiessen dos mil hogaças entre los pobres, compradas a subidos precios, llevándolas algunos de sus capitulares en barcos a Triana, a los Humeros, la Carreteria, Alameda y otras partes.<sup>57</sup>

As appeared in other *relaciones de sucesos* reporting disruptive events in the Seville area, the Church took the initiative by distributing provisions. This image is therefore not specific to the management of disasters of natural origin, but rather to the management of disasters of all kinds. This is, after all, an eminently Christian trait, like aiding the defenceless.

##### 5. *The Church hierarchy as heroes of disaster: political management, urban management and spiritual management*

The reports on the floods in Seville were circulated widely in Europe, showing an interconnected publishing market and a thirst for news across borders. This is also, undoubtedly, a reflection of the important international and commercial dimension of the Andalusian city. Santos Fernández has compiled reports written in Portuguese and French, to which others in English and German at least should be added, entirely devoted to the floods in Seville.<sup>58</sup> This international circulation reflects the interest in such narratives, in which the miraculous dimension is often included as a sensational element, as evidenced by the German account. This one,

57. BNE, VE/170/32, “Relación de lo sucedido...”, 1642.

58. BNE, VC/224/40, “Relaçam verdadeira...”, 1626; “Recit veritable de l’espouventable desastre arrivé en Sivile, l’une des principales villes d’Espagne, le 25 Janvier de la presente année 1626. Iouxte la coppie imprimée à Cordova. Paris, Jean du Hamel, 1626”. Both are compiled in Santos Fernández, “Sevilla anegada”. HAB, Gi 274, “Warhafft neue Zeittung, welcher gestalt ein schreckliche Wasserfluth im Königreich Hispanien an unterschiedlichen Orten, sonderlich zu Sivilien und Salamanca, an Gut, Land un Leuthen uberauß grossen Schaden gethan. Neben etlich Mirackel oder Wunderwercken”, [s.i.], [s.i.], 1626. See also ESTC, no. S126711, “Sivill in Spayne. Or, A true report of a most strange and wonderfull inundation, or prodigious floud, which hapned at Sivill in Spayne, with the exceeding great ouer-flowings of the River Wadalkier, and the great hurt that it did in the city of Sivill, Triana, and other villages round about: being first penned in Spanish verse, by Thomas de Mesa, inhabitant within the sayd city of Sivill, and imprinted in the city of S. James in Spayne, with licence from the Ordinary, in the house of Lewes de Paz”, London, Simon Stafford, 16[04?].

which claims to be a copy (though not a verbatim one) of the one printed in Córdoba by Salvador de Cea, alludes directly to the miraculous events in its title: the “miracles or marvellous events”. A more in-depth study of the representation of the religious element in these *relaciones* would make it possible to analyse possible variations, interpolations, modifications or deletions as markers of a process through which the interpretation of disasters became more religious.<sup>59</sup>

All of the spiritual strategies recorded in the *relaciones* and all of the religious manifestations that took place during the floods and in the days that followed have one characteristic in common: the necessary mediation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as the point of confluence between God and the earth. In this way, their action is as fundamental as that of the saintly heroes and, through mediating action, they become the architects of the successful spiritual management of the catastrophe. The ecclesiastical authorities are represented as leading figures and guarantors of the return to order.<sup>60</sup>

In memory of the miracle, the community of the Trinitarians established a celebration on its anniversary, in which the Blessed Sacrament was unveiled to commemorate the salvation of the convent. The conjunction of activities and place, represented by the procession, the invocations by the clergy and the protection of the Church as the location of the miracle, was, in the eyes of contemporary witnesses and the writers of these *relaciones*, what finally ensured divine intervention and the protection of those who were there. These same elements also appear in the case of the procession of the Lignum Crucis, the other fundamental element in the *pro serenitate* public prayers in Seville during the Golden Age.

The continuous presence over time of the convent of the Santísima Trinidad, the relics of Saints Justa and Rufina as mediators and protectors of the city and the ascent of the Lignum Crucis to the tower of the Giralda are shown as accepted guidelines for the spiritual management of the disaster, thus accepting what Gerónimo de Contreras had already pointed out in his discourse. It is also a reflection of Baroque piety, linked to

59. Elaine Fulton, “Acts of God: The Confessionalization of Disaster in Reformation Europe”, in *Historical Disasters in Context: Science, Religion and Politics*, ed. by Andrea Janku, Gerrit J. Schenk and Franz Mauelshagen, New York-London, Routledge, 2012, pp. 54-74.

60. Bernal Rodríguez-Espejo Cala, “Tres relaciones de sucesos”, p. 143.

ephemeral displays, here in the form of processions and exacerbated over time, as we can see in the *relaciones* from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The establishment and maintenance of subsequent commemorative ceremonies, in addition to reinforcing the pious sense of prevention, helped form a collective memory of the events.<sup>61</sup> This was fundamental in establishing community resilience<sup>62</sup> and prevented those who had been fundamental in successfully combatting the disaster from being forgotten. In the end, this meant reinforcing the secular and religious authorities. These events were not lacking in moral considerations, the reinforcement of Christian thought and behavioural patterns, or the legitimisation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as mediators before divine intervention.

The *relaciones de sucesos* thus reflect a heroic duality between civil and ecclesiastical authorities, as seen in the combination of noble and religious initiatives that went to make up emergency management, both of which were necessary for its success. This pattern, present in the *relaciones*, with an important emphasis on the actions of political and religious authorities, is part of the process of narrativisation of disaster writing and the conceptualisation of the disaster as a historic event, as identified by Lavocat.<sup>63</sup> The measures taken by assistants and members of the municipal government of Seville, as well as those adopted by the ecclesiastical authorities, mediators for the intercession of the saints, are set out individually in the *relaciones*. Those carrying them out reveal themselves to be the specific, identifiable heroes that led the population of Seville to return to social order after the floods. Their heroic nature is further reinforced by morally deplorable surrounding situations (the blackmail of certain boatmen, bread price inflation), whose anonymous actors behave as true anti-heroes of the catastrophe. The *relaciones de sucesos* were, therefore, a vehicle for the transmission of behavioural guidelines in the face of catastrophe, the construction of collective memory and the reinforcement of political and religious authorities.

61. Lavocat, "Narratives of Catastrophe", p. 277.

62. Raymundo Padilla Lozoya, "La estrategia simbólica ante amenazas naturales y desastres entre España y México", *Revista de Historia Moderna. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante*, 35 (2017), pp. 116-148.

63. Lavocat, "Narratives of Catastrophe", p. 271.